



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Self & Self #9

Perception & Action

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Yoga says we have ten senses, not merely the five about which I learned in 7th grade science class. Your senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste are called the j~nanendriyas in Sanskrit. They are modes of perception. Your senses reach out to explore the world. Your mind follows them and you try to construct a sense of self out there. Unfortunately, you have lost your core being, what yoga calls your capital-S Self.

You have five more ways of getting lost, all of them mesmerizing capacities. These are the five modes of action, called karmendriyas: locomotion, handling, speaking, sexuality and excretion. They take up a tremendous amount of mind-space, especially if you're having trouble in any of these areas in life.

Yoga says that you are the perceiver, not what you perceive. Whatever you are seeing or hearing, as well as what you are doing, you are the one who is experiencing it. You are the experiencer, not the experience. You are the doer, not the action or its results. Know who you are, even while you are perceiving and acting, and you are free. This is yoga's promise.

I was sitting on a balcony one day, overlooking a beautiful river view, when I heard the sounds of a flute being played. The long haunting notes floating through the air were completely entrancing. I reveled in the beauty of the view and the sounds, enjoying the senses of sight and hearing.

Some meditative systems guide you into getting lost in the sound, like you're floating through space, lighter than air. Instead, yoga tells you to stay in your body and let the sounds come to you. There's no need to reach for them, no reason to chase them. They will arrive. In this way, you enjoy being embodied Consciousness instead of trying to become a musical note that lasts only as long as somebody's breath. You are the perceiver, not what you perceive. You are your own Self.

The theory is easy to grasp but it can take a while to sort this out experientially. Yoga helps you with this by teaching you how to manage your body, breath, mind and senses more effectively than most people do. You progress to distinguishing between your perceptions and who you are as the perceiver. This makes you more able to live in Self-Knowingness all the time.

K.siina-v.rtter abhijaatasyeva ma.ner grahiit.r-graha.na-graahye.su tatstha-
tada~n-janataa samaapatti.h. - Yoga Sutras 1.41

...Your experience is fusion of perceiver, perception and perceived, as a crystal
takes on the color of the cloth on which it sits.

A clear crystal looks blue if it is placed on a blue cloth. When you move it to a red cloth, the stone itself looks like it is red. Your mind takes on coloration in the same way. This is not a problem. It is simply a description of how your mind works. It works this way with external objects, like a cupcake or a sunset. It also works this way with internal objects, like an emotion, memory or desire.

The problem arises when you confuse the perception with the perceiver. For example, when you say, "I am angry," you have lost track of who is feeling the feeling. The perceiver got lost in the perceived. It's like the crystal saying, "I am red." But it is a clear crystal, simply sitting on a red cloth. This is what the sutra calls fusion. This fusion is what causes all your pain.

In ancient times, yogis withdrew from mainstream society in order to get free from their senses. They eliminated the objects of perception. With nothing to perceive, only the perceiver remained. You do the same thing when you take a time out. I used to do it by getting depressed and needing a lot of private time. In that interior space, I would somehow find my own sense of personhood again. I found my Self. Then I'd be ready to face the world for a while.

Meditation made me able to bring my Self with me. I can now use my mind without getting lost in its coloration. I am the perceiver, even enjoying the coloration my mind is taking on. I use the power of perception to engage with whatever I choose, but without being lassoed and hogtied by it. I use the powers of action to make a difference in the world.

Yoga makes you better at being you. You don't get lost because you know you are not your mind. You can use your mind without it taking over. In other words, you are not your mind. You have a mind, but you are the one who has it. The goal is to know the Self that you are, the you that has a mind but is not the mind.

Tad-uparaaga-apek.sitvaac-cittasya vastu j~naata-aj~naatam.

— Yoga Sutras 4.17

An object must color the mind for the object's existence to be known, or else it is not known.

Your mind is filled by what you are focusing on. When you know who you are, you can use your senses to choose your focus. As you continue your one-pointed focus, your mind becomes a powerful tool for accomplishing your objective. Then, when you're ready, you can turn your mind toward another object.

Your mind is always hungry for objects. It chases after things to fill it. This is why it loves social media, a steady stream of ever-changing content that keeps your mind ever-moving. Your mind loves memories and worries for the same reason. But you only relax when your mind stops. That's why I always loved camping under the giant sequoia trees. I could feel their antiquity. It stopped my mind. It's called "peace and quiet." People look for an outer environment to trigger this inner experience of stillness. This is why they love nature.

The sage Patanjali defines the word "yoga" as "the stilling of your mind."¹ Everything yogis do is to calm, soothe, quiet, settle and still their mind. Something amazing happens when your mind becomes still. You experience the deeper dimension of your own being, your own Self. You discover that you are not your mind.

Yet this is proven to you every night. In order to sleep, you have to set aside your worries, fears, memories and desires. Deep sleep gives your mind deep rest along with your body. Your body continues its vital functions, but you're not aware of them. While your mind is asleep, you don't cease to exist. Where are you?

You're deep inside, the sages tell us. You have settled deep within, close to your own Self. It's the closest that most people get on a regular basis. Yet the inner curtain of unknowingness is still drawn, so your experience is one of deep, dark quiet, not Self-knowingness. It's restful and peaceful, but not expansive and blissful.

The purpose of meditation is to consciously enter deeper within. You discover the eternal, infinite, blissful reality within, which is your own Self, who you really are. Being based in your own Self, you can turn your mind toward the external world. You use your mind without getting trapped in it. In other words, your mind doesn't know your own Self. Your own Self knows and uses your mind.

The trick is to consciously deepen within. Sleep brings you close to Self but not experiencing Self. It's the inner curtain of unknowingness that gets in the way. Like a room-darkening curtain it hides the light of your own Divine Essence from you. Shaktipat shreds the curtain. This yogic initiation makes you able to explore who you are consciously. You find your own essence and settle in.

Then you can use your mind and senses. Perceiving the world and acting in it, your essence is unscathed. The light of your own Self shines through your mind and into the world, so all your actions are based in love and generosity. It's the only way to really live. Do more yoga.

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¹ Yoga Sutras 1.2