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# Achieving Freedom from Suffering through the Practice of Meditative Yoga: A Comparative Investigation of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga

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Achieving Freedom from Suffering through the Practice of Meditative Yoga:

A Comparative Investigation of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga

“Suffering confers neither privileges nor rights. It all depends on how you use it. If you use it to increase the anguish of yourself or others, you are degrading, even betraying it. Yet the day will come when we shall understand that suffering can also elevate human beings.”

-- Elie Wiesel

“If we can learn to understand [our] suffering and open to the reality of it, then instead of simply being overwhelmed by it, we can investigate its causes and begin to let them go.”

-- Joseph Goldstein

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With gratitude:

for my parents, for their generosity.

for Chip Hartranft, for his humor, wit, insight, and passion.

for Melissa Jean and Nancy Waring, for their encouragement, patience, and support.

**Abstract**

This paper explores the relationship between the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga. Specifically, it looks at how the two traditions respond to the predicament of human suffering (*dukkha*). Though the two situate *dukkha* within their respective systems of metaphysics, resulting in divergent understandings of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress and different rationales for practicing, the two employ nearly identical practical yoga methodologies to overcome this ubiquitous phenomenon. Each tradition situates meditative yoga within an eight-part wise and ethical framework. Through this practice one is able to harness the power of concentration in a way that makes it possible to witness the flowering of a momentary experience. The arising and passing away of what to the untrained mind congeals into an experience structure is seen as it is. This yields liberating insight, leading to freedom from *dukkha*.

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### Sanskrit & Pali Pronunciation Guide

Sanskrit's breadth of expression comes in part from using the entire mouth for pronunciation, and from elongating accented vowels. With an alphabet of 49 letters, it has several different versions of familiar sounds such as 'n' and 's', each issuing from a different part of the mouth. For this reason, diacritical marks are generally used to indicate how and where a consonant or vowel should be sounded.

These sounds are not found in Pali: ṛ, ś, ṣ

<i>a</i>	short - pronounced like 'u' in <i>hut</i>
<i>ā</i>	long - pronounced like 'a' in <i>ah</i>
<i>i</i>	short - pronounced like 'i' in <i>in</i>
<i>ī</i>	long - pronounced like 'ee' in <i>see</i>
<i>u</i>	short - pronounced like 'u' in <i>pull</i>
<i>ū</i>	long - pronounced like 'u' in <i>dude</i>
<i>e</i>	long - pronounced like 'e' in <i>grey</i>
<i>ai, ay</i>	long - pronounced like 'ai' in <i>aisle</i>
<i>o</i>	long - pronounced like 'o' in <i>over</i>
<i>au</i>	long - pronounced like 'au' in <i>Audi</i>
<i>ṛ</i>	<i>cerebral</i> , pronounced like 'r' in Scots <i>rip, hurt</i>
<i>ṁ</i>	nasalized like 'n' in <i>uncle</i>
<i>ḥ</i>	a soft echo of the preceding vowel, like 'aha'
<i>k, kh, g, gh, ṅ</i>	<i>gutturals</i> , arising from the throat
<i>c, ch, j, jh, ṅ</i>	<i>palatals</i> , arising from the back of the palate
<i>ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ</i>	<i>cerebrals</i> , with tongue touching the roof of the mouth
<i>t, th, d, dh, n</i>	<i>dentals</i> , with tongue touching the back of the teeth
<i>p, ph, b, bh, m</i>	<i>labials</i> , arising from the lips
<i>c</i>	<i>palatal</i> pronounced like 'ch' in <i>chutney</i>
<i>v</i>	<i>labial</i> pronounced at start of a word like 'v' in <i>volcano</i>
<i>v</i>	<i>labial</i> may be pronounced in middle of a word like 'w' in <i>won</i>
<i>ś</i>	<i>palatal</i> , pronounced like 'sh' in <i>shutter</i>
<i>ṣ</i>	<i>cerebral</i> , pronounced like 'sh' in <i>rimshot</i>
<i>ñ</i>	pronounced like 'ni' in <i>onion</i>
<i>jñ</i>	pronounced like 'gn' in <i>igneous</i>
<i>kṣ</i>	pronounced like 'ksh' in <i>buckshot</i>



### **Language**

Most of the terminology and concepts attributed to the Buddha will be presented here in the Pali language while most yogic terms will be presented in Sanskrit. Words that have achieved common usage in English (e.g., *dharma*) are rendered in the conventional way.

## Terminology

### **Buddhadharma**

Because present-day knowledge of what Siddhattha Gotama taught is based only on relevant extant literature and because that literature is based entirely on the memory and understanding of his immediate successors, the phrase ‘Buddhadharma’ will be used to refer to what is regarded as the closest approximation of what he taught and how he viewed reality. ‘Buddhadharma’ is thus intended to acknowledge the influence of these successors while at the same time remaining Gotama-centered. Furthermore, this phrase is meant to distinguish itself from the term ‘Buddhism’, which lends itself to an application more closely aligned with a particular identity based on some interpretation of the Buddhadharma; for example, Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, or Zen Buddhism.

### **Pātañjala-Yoga**

The term ‘yoga’ has a long and storied past. Its original etymological derivation lies with the verbal root *yuj*, meaning ‘to yoke or join or fasten or harness’ (Boccio, 2005; Hartranft, 2003b; Whicher, 1998). Whicher (1998) points out that yoga can have countless connotations and furthermore that *yuj* possesses myriad other significant meanings, especially in the context of Patañjali’s yoga. Boccio (2005) contends that because of its vast scope, ‘yoga’ can ultimately be seen as a generic term referring to the equally vast body of spiritual teachings and techniques -- including those of Buddhist origin -- that flourished in ancient India. In order to distinguish the yoga of Patañjali from yoga in its more generalized sense, the phrase ‘Pātañjala-yoga’ will be used.

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Born to the same mother -- the spiritually innovative landscape of ancient India -- the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga are like twins separated at birth. Each domain is concerned with liberation -- that is, the human attainment of freedom from *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') -- and employs meditative yoga to that end. There are striking similarities between the practical yoga methodology attributed to the Buddha and that described by Patañjali. At the same time, their rationales for practicing yoga differ substantially, primarily owing to their divergent understandings of *dukkha*, which relate to their dissimilar metaphysics.

First, the shared history of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga is considered. Following this, there is a brief overview of the core principles of each tradition. Finally, the two are analyzed in juxtaposition to one another: beginning with their divergent understandings of *dukkha* situated within their dissimilar metaphysics, followed by their strikingly similar methodologies employed to achieve freedom from suffering through the practice of meditative yoga.

### **Historical Origins of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-Yoga**

The contributions of the spiritually robust landscape of ancient India are considered in the context of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga. The interplay of various spiritual traditions is considered, including the *brāhmaṇical*, renouncer, yogic, and Buddhist traditions. Siddhattha Gotama's path to buddhahood is explored. The controversy surrounding Patañjali's identity is touched upon.

### **A Robust Spiritual Landscape**

The shared mother of both the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga, what is now the modern-day Indian subcontinent was at the time of both Siddhattha Gotama (the Buddha) and

Patañjali a veritable wellspring of spiritual innovation. Various spiritual world-views flourished at this time; for example, the *brāhmaṇical*, renouncer, yogic, and Buddhist cultures all thrived here to varying degrees. In general, these cultures aspired to the highest goal of salvation -- freedom from suffering -- but each tradition pursued this goal somewhat differently. In fact, in pursuing the common goal of salvation, a great deal of borrowing took place from one tradition to another.

The spiritual giants of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga were thus birthed out of a cultural milieu in which the borders distinguishing one spiritual tradition from another were especially malleable.

**The Indus Valley civilization.** The earliest roots of the innovative and spiritually rich landscape from which the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga emerged can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization located in what is now the northwest region of India. Reaching maturity somewhere between 3100 and 1900 BCE, the people of the Indus Valley were members of a complex and highly advanced civilization (Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft, 2017b). In fact, according to Boccio (2005) and Mu Soeng (2010) the Indus Valley people even practiced a rudimentary form of yoga. The beginning of the second millennium BCE saw an accelerating influx of nomadic tribal people who called themselves *Ārya* ('noble'). With their growing cultural dominance, the spirituality of this region appears to have increasingly oriented itself toward the veneration and worship of gods (Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2010).

**Brāhmaṇism.** According to the *Āryan* tradition, ancient seers (*ṛṣis*) heard (*śruti*) the voices of the gods and compiled their instructions in the *Ṛg Veda* ('hymns of praise') between 1700 and 1000 BCE (Boccio, 2005; Carr & Mahalingam, 2002; Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft 2017b). The first of four eventual *vedas* ('collections of knowledge'), the *Ṛg Veda* called upon priests to perform rituals to maintain cosmic order, and both define and enforce notions of purity

(Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft, 2017b; Mu Soeng, 2010). Coupled with the disruption and dislocation of the older indigenous civilization, whose populations had shifted east to the fertile banks of the Ganges River, the growing influence of the *vedas* and their emphasis on ritualization and purity to be maintained by the priestly (*brāhmaṇa*) class led to the development of *brāhmaṇism* (Boccio, 2005; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a). Aptly named, *brāhmaṇism* exalted those who belonged to an elite group of priests (*brāhmaṇas*) responsible for upholding the highly ritualized practices of the Vedic tradition (Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a). Prioritizing purity above all else, not only in relationship to complex systems of ritual and sacrifice but also in relationship to the structure of society at large, the *brāhmaṇas* were revered above all others, including the *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, and *śūdras*, referring to warriors and chiefs, tradespeople and farmers, and common laborers and servants, respectively (Boccio, 2005; Carr & Mahalingam, 2002; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a).

**The renouncer tradition.** Although quite unlike *brāhmaṇism*, another tradition flourished around the same time as its ritualistic counterpart. The *saṃnyāsīn* ('renouncer') tradition was both widespread and varied (Gethin, 1998). Despite their substantial diversity, the sages (*munis*) of the renouncer tradition shared in common that they had all chosen to go forth from the household life into homelessness, supported entirely by alms (Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft 2017b). Moreover, the sages tied themselves to varying degrees to three activities: (1) the practice of austerities; (2) the attainment of states of deep concentration; and (3) the development of philosophical views corresponding to certain practices (Gethin, 1998). The second activity attributed to this tradition largely sets it apart from *brāhmaṇism*. In fact, unlike the *brāhmaṇas*, who claimed the revealed -- more literally, heard (*śruti*) -- wisdom of the gods as their source of authority, the *munis* claimed wisdom for themselves almost exclusively through the development of concentration (Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft 2017b).

The first 'school' of the renouncer tradition to gain a wide audience, *Sāṃkhya* ('enumeration') is an atheistic system that can be divided into two parts: *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, empty awareness and the material world (including humanity), respectively (Carr & Mahalingam, 2002; Hartranft, 2017b; White, 2014). *Sāṃkhyakas* based their enumeration on both inference and meditative insight, emphasizing the vital contribution of the latter in the process of discerning and even mastering reality (Hartranft 2017b). Like *Sāṃkhya*, both the Buddhadharmā and Pātañjala-yoga highlight the significance of attaining meditative insight. In fact, both traditions were influenced to some degree by the teachings of this early renouncer tradition. The first two teachers of the Buddha, for example, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, were themselves *sāṃkhyaka* (Thanissaro, 2004b; Boccio, 2005; Boccio, 2010; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft 2017b). Additionally, the first commentary of Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*, Vyāsa's *Yoga Bhāṣya*, rests heavily on the assertions of the *Sāṃkhya* tradition.

Belonging to the vibrant ascetic counterculture of the time, traditions like *Sāṃkhya* grew increasingly popular as an alternative to *brāhmaṇism*. One of the most notable distinctions between the two cultures was accessibility. In fact, this is what made the counterculture so appealing. The traditions of the ascetic counterculture offered what *brāhmaṇism* could not -- a spiritual path to emancipation accessible to anyone regardless of race, class, or gender. In place of esoteric practices of external sacrifice known only to a select few, ascetics offered an alternative practice of sacrifice accessible to anyone who was interested; namely, 'the inner sacrifice', which could range from practices of rigorous austerity (e.g., remaining naked regardless of any changes in the weather) to the attainment of euphoric states of concentration (e.g., achieving altered states of consciousness) (Boccio, 2005; Boccio, 2010; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2010).

With the sphere of influence of the counterculture steadily growing, both indirectly and directly the ideas of the ascetics began to penetrate the larger *brāhmaṇical* culture. At the same time, certain ideas being developed by ascetics were largely influenced by *brāhmaṇical* culture. The relationship between these two cultures was both dynamic and complex. Gethin (1998) states, “In part we can see the *brāhmaṇical* vision of society and that of the wandering ascetics as opposed to each other; in part we can see the two as complementing each other” (pp. 12-13). From the *brāhmaṇas*’ perspective, their authority is built into the structure of the universe and is therefore entirely beyond dispute. By promoting different viewpoints on the nature of society, the self, and the world, ascetics challenged the very foundation of *brāhmaṇical* authority. Despite their disagreements, the two traditions continued to borrow from one another. For example, a number of particularly esoteric *brāhmaṇical* world-views drew upon the ideas being developed among certain groups of wandering ascetics. Furthermore, ascetics, tending to recruit from *brāhmaṇical* circles, incorporated aspects of the tradition into their own developing world-views (Gethin, 1998).

**The inner-sacrifice.** Arising out of the continual exchange of ideas occurring between the *brāhmaṇical* and ascetic traditions, ‘the inner sacrifice’ came to assert itself as a powerful agent of transformation. This spiritual innovation garnered acceptance across both cultures. Concerned more with self-knowledge than the veneration of gods, the inner sacrifice easily found support in ascetic circles. Perhaps more surprisingly, it even led to the development of a new genre of *brāhmaṇical* teachings known as the *Upaniṣads*. (Hartranft, 2017b). Mu Soeng (2010, p. 118) writes,

These new thinkers thought it more proper to think that [the heat generated through ascetic practices] will burn away the ego structures and prepare the ascetic, through

surrender and concentration, for merging with the universal consciousness and thus gain liberation.

In many ways, the inner sacrifice unseated the external sacrifice from its throne of preeminence. In place of god-veneration, spiritual seekers found themselves increasingly compelled to look inward. This brought about a gradual shift in spirituality, which paved the way for the emergence of the spiritual giants of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga. Although the Buddhadharma came first and Pātañjala-yoga came second, both emerged at a time when the borders distinguishing one spiritual tradition (e.g., *brāhmaṇism*) from another (e.g., asceticism) were quite nebulous. With the search for salvation shifting from external to internal and a continual exchange of ideas and technologies taking place between spiritual traditions, the cultural milieu in which the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga matured was poised for invention.

### **The Buddha**

Although the precise dates of the Buddha's life are uncertain, recent evidence suggests that Siddhattha Gotama lived and died from about 485-405 BCE (Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft, 2017b). Born into the *kṣatriya* class as the son of a *Sakyan* chief, Gotama led a privileged life up until about age twenty-nine. Disillusioned by a perpetual sense of malaise despite his opulent wealth, young Gotama left home to become a *śramaṇa*, a wandering ascetic (Boccio, 2005; Carr & Mahalingam, 2002; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft, 2017b; Rahula, 2007). Gethin (1998) writes, "Despite his luxurious lifestyle, the young [Siddhattha] felt discontented. Knowing that life was ephemeral, that he was subject to old age, sickness, and death, he could not rest easy in his mind" (pp. 15-16). Gotama turned to asceticism as the solution to the unmoored dissatisfaction that he felt.



Faced with the reality of the suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress (*dukkha*) brought about by old age, sickness, and death, Gotama took decisive action, joining the ranks of the *śramaṇas* ('strivers') who sought liberation through the conquering of the body and its needs (Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft, 2017b; Mu Soeng, 2010; Rahula, 2007). Under the tutelage of the most renowned *śramaṇas* of the time, the Buddha practiced extreme forms of austerities for six years, eventually surpassing his teachers (Boccio, 2005; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft 2017a; Mu Soeng, 2010). Despite his proficiency, he found that he was no closer to achieving the solution to *dukkha*; instead he felt haggard and weak. In a rare autobiographical entry, the Buddha reflects,

My body became extremely emaciated. Simply from my eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems...My backside became like a camel's hoof...My spine stood out like a string of beads...My ribs jutted out like the jutting rafters of an old, run-down barn...The gleam of my eyes appeared to be sunk deep in my eye sockets like the gleam of water deep in a well...My scalp shriveled & withered like a green bitter gourd, shriveled & withered in the heat & the wind...The skin of my belly became so stuck to my spine that when I thought of touching my belly, I grabbed hold of my spine as well; and when I thought of touching my spine, I grabbed hold of the skin of my belly as well...If I urinated or defecated, I fell over on my face right there...Simply from my eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair -- rotted at its roots -- fell from my body as I rubbed, simply from eating so little (Thanissaro, 2008).

Having directly experienced the failure of both harsh *śramaṇic* asceticism and the heedless sense indulgence of his upbringing to bring about an end to human suffering (*dukkha*), Gotama rejected both extremes in favor of what he called the middle way (Thanissaro, 1993b).

Taking up residence outside of the village of Gaya, eating food and returning to health, Gotama began an intensive practice of meditation, developing progressive states of concentrative absorption (*jhāna*) resulting in experiences of non-ordinary clarity and non-reactivity. Gotama later described how sitting quietly beneath a tree he finally came face to face with the reality of *dukkha*, its cause, cessation (*nirodha*), and the way leading to its cessation (Thanissaro, 1993b; Boccio, 2005; Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a; Rahula, 2007). Henceforth referring to himself as the tathāgata (‘thus-gone’ or ‘truth-arrived’), the Buddha delivered his first sermon to a group of five ascetics from his *śramaṇa* days at a deer park near Benares. For the next forty-five years of his life, until his death at age eighty, Gotama continued to teach the *dharma* to all who sought to understand the causes and conditions of both *dukkha* and its cessation (Gethin, 1998; Hartranft, 2017a; Rahula, 2007).

### **Patañjali**

Unlike Gotama, Patañjali does not appear to have brought a new set of teachings into the world. Although he may not have been an original author, he was a pioneering compiler and commentator, stringing together a pithy series of 196 aphorisms<sup>1</sup>, likely around the second and fourth centuries CE (Hartranft 2003b). Patañjali is largely responsible for codifying yoga, weaving together the myriad strands of the preexisting yoga traditions of ancient India<sup>2</sup> (Pflueger, 2010; Stoler-Miller, 2009; Tandon, 1995; White, 2014). In fact, Pflueger (2010) suggests, “The disjointed nature of the [*Yoga-Sūtra*] looks to many scholars like an effort to amalgamate early traditions of yogic practice from disparate sources with an underlying [*Sāṃkhya*] theory” (p. 70).

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<sup>1</sup> The *Yoga-Sūtra* contains a mere total of 677 words, only four of which are verbs (Tandon, 1995; White, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> To cite just one example, Hartranft (2017b) points out that familiar yogic concepts abound in a subdivision of the *Mahābhārata* known as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, including *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, and *dhāraṇā*.

Patañjali synthesized and condensed a collection of yogic teachings into a single comprehensive text -- the *Yoga-Sūtra*. Hartranft (2003b) describes this text as one which “expresses the truths of the human condition with great eloquence: how we know what we know, why we suffer, and how we can discover the way out of suffering” (locs. 26-33). Despite their eloquence, the *sūtras*, White (2014) argues, “are so compact and obscure as to be incomprehensible without accompanying explanation” (p. 9). Because of the overwhelmingly elliptical style of the text, a key is necessary.

It is possible that the first of many commentators, Vyāsa -- whose name can be aptly translated as ‘editor’ -- wrote the *Yoga-Bhaṣya* shortly after the *Yoga-Sūtra*’s completion or perhaps assembled the surviving version of the text himself (Stoler-Miller, 2009; Whicher, 1998; White, 2014). Because all subsequent commentaries draw upon Vyāsa’s first commentary, it is possible that they are actually sub-commentaries. In fact, in place of an interpretation of the text itself, it is possible that sub-commentators merely offer various interpretations of Vyāsa’s original explication of the *Yoga-Sūtra* (Whicher, 1998; White, 2014). Vyāsa’s commentary rests heavily on the assertions of the *Sāṃkhya* tradition; as a result, ensuing sub-commentaries continue to articulate an understanding of Pātañjala-yoga that is largely filtered through a *Sāṃkhya* world-view (White, 2014). To this end, Pflueger (2010) and Stoler-Miller (2009) -- echoing the Bhagavad Gītā -- claim that Pātañjala-yoga and *Sāṃkhya* are like practice and theory, respectively.

While it is widely acknowledged that Vyāsa is responsible for the first commentary of the *Yoga-Sūtra* and furthermore that Patañjali is responsible for its codification, the precise identity of these historical figures remains ambiguous. It is unknown whether Vyāsa and Patañjali are the same as or different from other well-known mythical and historical figures of the time. The names of both Vyāsa and Patañjali have been attributed to on the one hand several individuals

throughout history and on the other hand a single individual in either case who lived for thousands of years (Carr & Mahalingam, 2002; Hartranft, 2017b; Stoler-Miller, 2009; White, 2014). Even more confounding is the supposition that Vyāsa and Patañjali are actually one and the same (White, 2014).

### **A Shared Wellspring of Spiritual Ideas and Technologies**

Despite the lack of clarity surrounding the timelines of both the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga, there is enough historical evidence to suggest that these traditions arose in a similar context, borrowing from not only the cultural zeitgeist of the time but also specifically from one another (Feuerstein, 2006a). Gethin (1998), for example, notes that although the various spiritual traditions of the time differ somewhat in the way that they pursue salvation, they ultimately share a common foundation<sup>3</sup>, perhaps as a result of their highly dynamic exchange of ideas and technologies. In fact, in their development of theory and practice, both the Buddha and Patañjali drew upon -- and contributed to -- the flourishing wellspring of philosophical and psychological ideas circulating throughout ancient India.

Situating the traditions of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga in their broader historical contexts, it becomes apparent that the two share substantial common ground. White (2014), for example, highlights the shared language of the two traditions, most clearly evident in Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* in the form of 'Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit'. "We must acknowledge the presence of a twelve-thousand-pound elephant in the room," White (2104) advises,

the room being the *Yoga-Sūtra* and the elephant Buddhist philosophy which dominated the Indian philosophical arena throughout the first five hundred years of

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<sup>3</sup> *Dharma* is a well-established concept that spans the entire range of Indian philosophical, religious, social, and political thought. Gethin (1998) writes, "According to Indian thought *dharma* is that which is the basis of things, the underlying nature of things, the way things are; in short, it is the truth about things, the truth about the world. More than this, *dharma* is the way we should act, for if we are to avoid bringing harm to both ourselves and others we should strive to act in a way that is true to the way things are, that accords with the underlying truth of things. Ultimately the only true way to act is in conformity with the *dharma*" (p. 35).

the Common Era. The Buddhists of the period were quick to contest viewpoints that conflicted with their own, yet they are nearly entirely silent with regard to the *Yoga-Sūtra* ... A possible explanation is that the Buddhists found the *sūtras* to be commensurate with their doctrines (pp. 229-230).

Taking this assertion one step further, Tandon (1995) suggests that in order to reliably understand the *Yoga-Sūtra*, one must decipher the text with the support of the Buddha's expositions. In the end, it is Hartranft (2010, p. 5) who offers the least controversial and most straightforward description of the relationship between the two:

One might say that the techniques of Buddhist and yogic meditation form a single braid. The oldest strands -- those that predate the Buddha... are woven into both the fifth-century BCE Buddha's teachings and also the second-century CE *Yoga-Sūtra*, where they are in some cases augmented, modified, or refined by later yogic or Buddhist understandings.

As history indicates, there is much overlap between the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga. Despite their similarities, however, the two easily retain their status as distinct spiritual traditions. In fact, the extent to which these spiritual giants appear to resemble one another is largely dependent on the hermeneutics of each system. That is to say, how one interprets certain tenets associated with each tradition is vastly influential in how one formulates arguments concerning any similarities or differences between the two. Even a brief survey of the main tenets associated with each tradition yields insight into the ways in which their shared womb shaped the development of both their unique and shared contributions to Indian soteriology.

### **An Overview of the Buddhadharma**

The middle way of the Buddha is explored. Major tenets like the four noble truths and the three characteristics are discussed. The Buddha's perspective on reality is summarized: the

simultaneous convergence of three points of contact, five clinging-aggregates, six sense spheres, and the twelve-link chain of dependent origination. Craving -- the source of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress -- is situated within this framework. *Nibbāna* ('unbinding', 'extinguishing'), is described. The noble eightfold path leading to *nibbāna* is outlined.

### **The Middle Way**

The Buddha famously insisted, "Both formerly and now, monks, I declare only stress and the cessation of stress" (Thanissaro, 2004a). *Dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') is the thread that weaves the four noble truths together. Realized directly by Siddhattha Gotama at the age of thirty-five, the four noble truths consist of *dukkha*, its cause (*samudaya*), cessation (*nirodha*), and the way leading to its cessation (*magga*). In fact, in his first sermon, the Buddha declares,

- (1) Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.
- (2) And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming -- accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there -- i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.
- (3) And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.
- (4) And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path -- right view, right resolve, right speech,

right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration  
(Thanissaro, 1993b).

Together the four noble truths describe the middle way of the Buddha. This is the way between harsh asceticism and heedless sense indulgence. Furthermore, this is the way between eternalism and annihilationism, or the views that on the one hand one is in some way an indestructible, immortal soul and on the other hand that one is a soul-less smorgasbord of matter obliterated at death. ‘Thus-gone’ or ‘truth-arrived’, the tathāgata, in carefully traversing the path between these extremes, identifies three fundamental characteristics of the Buddhadharma: (1) *anicca*, impermanence; (2) *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness; and (3) *anatta*, not-self.

**The three characteristics.** The three characteristics are themselves inseparable; knowledge of one leads to knowledge of all. This fact is most clearly illustrated beginning with impermanence (*anicca*), which extends without exception to all phenomena whatsoever. Inherently inconstant and unreliable as a result of its ceaseless change, the radical transience of phenomena carries with it an all-pervasive current of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress (*dukkha*) (Thanissaro, 1993c; Thanissaro 1997c). In fact, Gethin (1998) insists, “Try as we might to find something in the world that is permanent and stable, which we can hold on to and thereby find lasting happiness, we must always fail” (p. 74).

Perhaps the most controversial of the three characteristics is *anatta*, not-self. Like unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), *anatta* is built into the structure of *anicca*, impermanence. Olendzki (2010, p. 4) explains,

What is unique to the Buddhist view is the radical extension of change to all phenomena whatsoever. We are used to hearing that some things change, or even that most things change, but it is profoundly challenging to hear that all things change. There is no unchanging essence underlying the effervescent bubbling of our minds

and bodies; no unmoved mover standing outside the matrix of cause and effect; no fixed point upon which one can find firm footing; no refuge from the relentless onslaught of aging, illness, and death. We can of course conjure up a concept or an idea of such a stable essence but we cannot, says the Buddha, ever discover it in carefully examined lived experience.

In articulating the not-self doctrine, the Buddha is highlighting one of the most salient characteristics of the Buddhadharmā: its displacement of ratiocination by direct experience. One can get lost in what the Buddha calls a ‘wilderness of views’ in which one loses oneself in a tangled web of conceptualization (Thanissaro, 1997a; Thanissaro, 1997h). Regarding any notions of the presence or absence of an enduring self, the Buddha remains unconcerned. In fact, he outright rejects the terms in which questions like ‘Is there a self?’ are couched, in summary claiming, “To define yourself in any way is to limit yourself and...the question ‘What am I?’ is best ignored” (Thanissaro, 2002b). In place of senseless conjecture, the Buddha resolutely chooses to emphasize the urgency of *nirodha*, cessation (Thanissaro, 2002b; Gethin, 1998; Olendzki, 2016).

**Cessation.** *Nirodha*, cessation, is often used as a synonym for its more popular counterpart, *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* can be translated in many ways but is perhaps most accurately translated as ‘unbinding’ or ‘extinguishing’ according to Thanissaro (1999) and Hartranft (2017), respectively. In fact, Thanissaro (1999) describes *nibbāna* like this: “freedom in the present life from agitation, dependency, & clinging; and freedom after death from even the most basic concepts or limitations -- such as existence, non-existence, both, or neither -- that make up the describable universe” (p. 11). In fact, *nibbāna* ultimately defies categorization. While it can be realized directly, it cannot be verbalized. “Language,” Rahula (2007) asserts “is created and used by masses of human beings to express things and ideas experienced by their sense organs and



their mind. A supramundane experience like that of [*nibbāna*] is not of such a category. Therefore there cannot be words to express that experience” (p. 35). *Nibbāna* slips through the cracks of language. In the same way that the fish, accustomed only to water, has no words in its vocabulary for dry land, humanity has no words in its vocabulary for the supramundane experience of *nibbāna* (Silācāra, 2010).

**Attending to the nature of emergence.** Unable to be understood through ratiocination, *nibbāna* (‘unbinding’, ‘extinguishing’) can only be realized directly. By ‘placing attention on the source of life’ or ‘attending to the nature of emergence’ (*yoniso manasikāra*), one cultivates penetrating insight leading to the direct realization of *nibbāna* (Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft 2017b). In fact, the *Dhammapada* states:

And better than a hundred years  
lived without seeing  
arising & passing away, is  
one day  
lived seeing  
arising and passing away (Thanissaro, 11997i).

In attending to the nature of emergence, one directly realizes the three characteristics: impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*). In fact, one recognizes that any sense of continuity is built upon pillars of shifting sands. Experience is known for what it is: a flux of interdependent causes and conditions. Gethin (1998) asserts, “However one looks at it, reality is a process; analyze reality down to its smallest possible components or constituents, and what one finds are not static building blocks, but dynamic processes” (p. 155). From the Buddha’s perspective, reality is the simultaneous convergence of three points of contact, five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*), six sense spheres, and the twelve-

link chain of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) (Thanissaro, 1997d; Thanissaro, 1997e; Thanissaro, 1997g; Thanissaro, 2001b; Thanissaro 2001c; Thanissaro, 2002a; Hartranft, 2017a; Hartranft 2017b; Gethin, 1998; Olendzki, 2010). These various frameworks are simply different ways to analyze, group, and view the particular causally-connected phenomena that comprise reality.

**Contact.** According to the Buddha, any given moment of experience arises with the convergence of contact, which takes place in relationship to the six sense spheres, each of which involves three factors: form, organ, and organ consciousness (figure I) (Gethin, 1998; Hartranft 2017a).

Figure I. Three Points of Contact and Six Sense Spheres

<b>form</b>	sights	sounds	smells	tastes	sensations	mental objects
<b>organ</b>	eye	ear	nose	tongue	body	mind
<b>consciousness</b>	visual	auditory	olfactory	gustatory	tactile	mental

Hartranft (2017a) contends, “Like the legs of a stool, which needs all three to stand, each instant of experience represents a contact -- that is, a convergence of form, a perceiving organ, and their dedicated sphere of consciousness.” Experience, predicated on this rapidly unfolding cascade of contacts, requires the presence of all three elements. Should even one element be absent, experience must accordingly cease to take place. This is true because all three elements are contingent upon one another: sense consciousness cannot perceive form in the absence of a sense organ through which to operate; a sense organ with no corresponding sense consciousness has no way to perceive form; and further a sense organ paired with its sense consciousness has nothing to perceive without form. Each aspect of this process is therefore crucial. In conjunction with its

related object (form), each sense organ must have a consciousness through which to sense its object.

***The five clinging-aggregates.*** Like the tripartite contact between form, sense organ, and sense consciousness, the five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*) present a framework through which to analyze, view, and group reality's constituent parts (Thanissaro, 2002a; Hartranft 2017a). These 'heaps of fuel' correspond to (1) form (*rūpa*), (2) feeling (*vedanā*), (3) apperception (*saññā*), (4) formation (*sankhāra*), and (5) consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and are best understood not as objects but as processes (Thanissaro, 2002a; Hartranft, 2017a; Gethin, 1998). Nevertheless, form can be thought of as the five kinds of sensory 'images' that contact consciousness; feeling as the three felt qualities attached to experience (i.e., pleasant, unpleasant, or neither); apperception as the labels and concepts associated with sensorimotor events; formation as the actions and reactivity to form, feeling, apperceptions, and formations; and finally, consciousness as the six distinct spheres of knowing (i.e., seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing, cognizing) (Hartranft, 2017a).

The five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*) exist in constant motion. The flux of these aggregates takes place at such a rapid speed, however, that their movement takes place outside of awareness, resulting in the misapprehension of reality as a cohesive whole. For example, one recognizes (*saññā*) the form (*rūpa*) of an attractive flower through the convergence of flower, eye, and eye-consciousness (*viññāṇa*), feeling that this encounter is pleasant as opposed to unpleasant or neither (*vedanā*) and reacting (*sankhāra*) with a desire to prolong the enjoyment of the flower by picking it and putting it in a vase. In this way, what one initially views as a smooth experience can be broken down into its constituent parts, revealing its compound nature.

In encountering the constantly unfolding process of the *khandhās* ('clinging-aggregates') one comes face to face with the conditioned nature of all experience. Although one may be

fooled into thinking that the self is the only permanent entity in an otherwise impermanent world, one is as impermanent as the world itself; the two are intimately connected. Gethin (1998) suggests, “Language and the fact that experiences are somehow connected fools us into thinking that there is an I apart from and behind changing experiences — apart from the fact of experiences being connected; there is only their connectedness” (p. 139). It is not only through the *khandhās* that the Buddha illuminates this truth, but also through his radical delineation of causality: *paṭicca-samuppāda*, contingent arising, more popularly known as dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).

***Dependent origination.*** From cause to effect, the Buddha describes the twelve-link chain of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*):

And what is dependent co-arising? From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form. From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering (Thanissaro, 1997g).

Although this particular exposition of dependent origination lists twelve links, elsewhere it is suggested that there are only ten links; ignorance and fabrications are excluded (Hartranft, 2017a). In this latter case, mutually dependent, consciousness and name-and-form are like two

sheaves of reeds leaning against one another; if one were to pull away one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would surely fall (Thanissaro, 2000b).

In Gethin's (1998, p. 141) words:

The occurrence of physical and mental events is not just arbitrary or random; on the contrary there is a deep and real relationship of causal connectedness between events or phenomena. And it is the concern with the nature of this causal connectedness that lies at the heart of Buddhist philosophy and which is seen as validating all Buddhist practice.

Like Gethin, Bodhi (1995) points to dependent origination as the central principle of the Buddhadharma, contending that it “[constitutes] both the objective content of its liberating insight and the germinative source for its vast network of doctrines and disciplines.” Bodhi (1995) continues, “As the frame behind the four noble truths, the key to the perspective of the middle way, and the conduit to the realization of selflessness, it is the unifying theme running through the teaching's multifarious expressions, binding them together as diversified formulations of a single coherent vision.” Dependent origination not only describes causal connectedness, but also exposes when and where intervention is possible. In fact, *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) can only be overcome through the apprehension of the causes and conditions that produce it. The twelve-fold application of dependent origination highlights these causes and conditions.

**Craving.** The path leading to *nirodha* (‘cessation’) systematically addresses the causes and conditions underlying suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress (*dukkha*). The Buddha identifies *taṇhā*, ‘craving’ -- more literally, ‘thirst’ -- as the pillar upon which *dukkha* rests. Spreading its toxins through desire, passion, and ill-will, *taṇhā* is a poisoned arrow (Thanissaro, 1998a). Despite its repeated strikes, one often does not register its impact; yet one is left infected

with an insatiable thirst. Arising in dependence upon feeling (*vedanā*) and manifesting as love, lust, and greed on the one hand and irritation, hatred, and anger on the other, *taṇhā* leads one to compulsively seek gratification from that which is pleasant and escape from that which is unpleasant.

*Taṇhā*, ‘craving’, causes one to reject impermanence. One is thus burdened with an insatiable thirst. “There are these six cravings,” the Buddha asserts, “craving for forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for tactile sensations, craving for ideas” (Thanissaro, 2008b). Not seeing the inherent instability of either oneself or the world, one mistakenly seeks eternal happiness through the continual gratification of the six sense spheres. However, even in the simple act of breathing in one can observe that events inevitably “arise, build, and crest, before diminishing and eventually evaporating, only to arise again, as conditions shift and reconfigure” (Powers, 2010, p. 94). Powers (2010) further illustrates this point:

As we take a breath in, it feels good, particularly when it is a fresh, oxygenated breath. As we inhale, the body feels a natural relief. Then as the breath continues to come in, we usually take it for granted. After pleasure at the beginning of the in-breath, we are now feeling more indifferent. As we get to the end of the inhale, the longer we go without breathing out, the more uncomfortable it gets. It was great in the beginning, we didn’t really care so much in the middle, and now we really want it to end and something else to occur (p. 98).

Like the breath, experience is constantly changing. What arises inevitably passes away. The realization dawns: a clenched fist cannot grasp running water. It is futile to yearn for stability in an ultimately unstable world.

**Nibbāna.** From the perspective of the Buddhadharma, the understanding of craving (*taṇhā*) must take place not only logically but also in direct confrontation with one’s own lived

experience. The knowledge shared by the Buddha is meant to be directly applied to the pursuit of *nibbāna* ('unbinding', 'extinguishing'), the cessation (*nirodha*) of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'). *Nibbāna* cannot be articulated; it is a supramundane experience that can only be realized directly. Yet understanding takes place gradually. In fact, one's understanding of *dukkha* along with its causes and conditions first takes place at the level of ratiocination. One must be careful, however, not to fall prey to the mind's predilection toward the formation of views, conceptual proliferation, and the manufacture of conceptual constructs (Gethin, 1998). In the end, all forms of conceptualization must be abandoned if one is to realize *nibbāna* -- that which is unoriginated, unmade, and non-conditioned (Thanissaro, 2012).

Thanissaro (2002a) writes,

The Buddha's Awakening gave him, among other things, a new perspective on the uses and limitations of words. He had discovered a reality -- the Deathless -- that no words could describe. At the same time, he discovered that the path to Awakening could be described, although it involved a new way of seeing and conceptualizing the problem of suffering and stress.

Acknowledging the limitations of words, which are firmly rooted in the realm of conceptualization, the Buddha nevertheless uses conceptual frameworks to portray some of his best ideas. Using skillful means, the Buddha describes the noble eightfold path, which leads to the graduated understanding and realization of *nibbāna*.

**The noble eightfold path.** It is the noble eightfold path that ultimately brings the Buddha's teaching to life. "The path," Bodhi (1999) asserts, "translates the [*dharma*] from a collection of abstract formulas into a continually unfolding disclosure of truth. It gives an outlet from the problem of suffering with which the teaching starts. And it makes the teaching's goal,

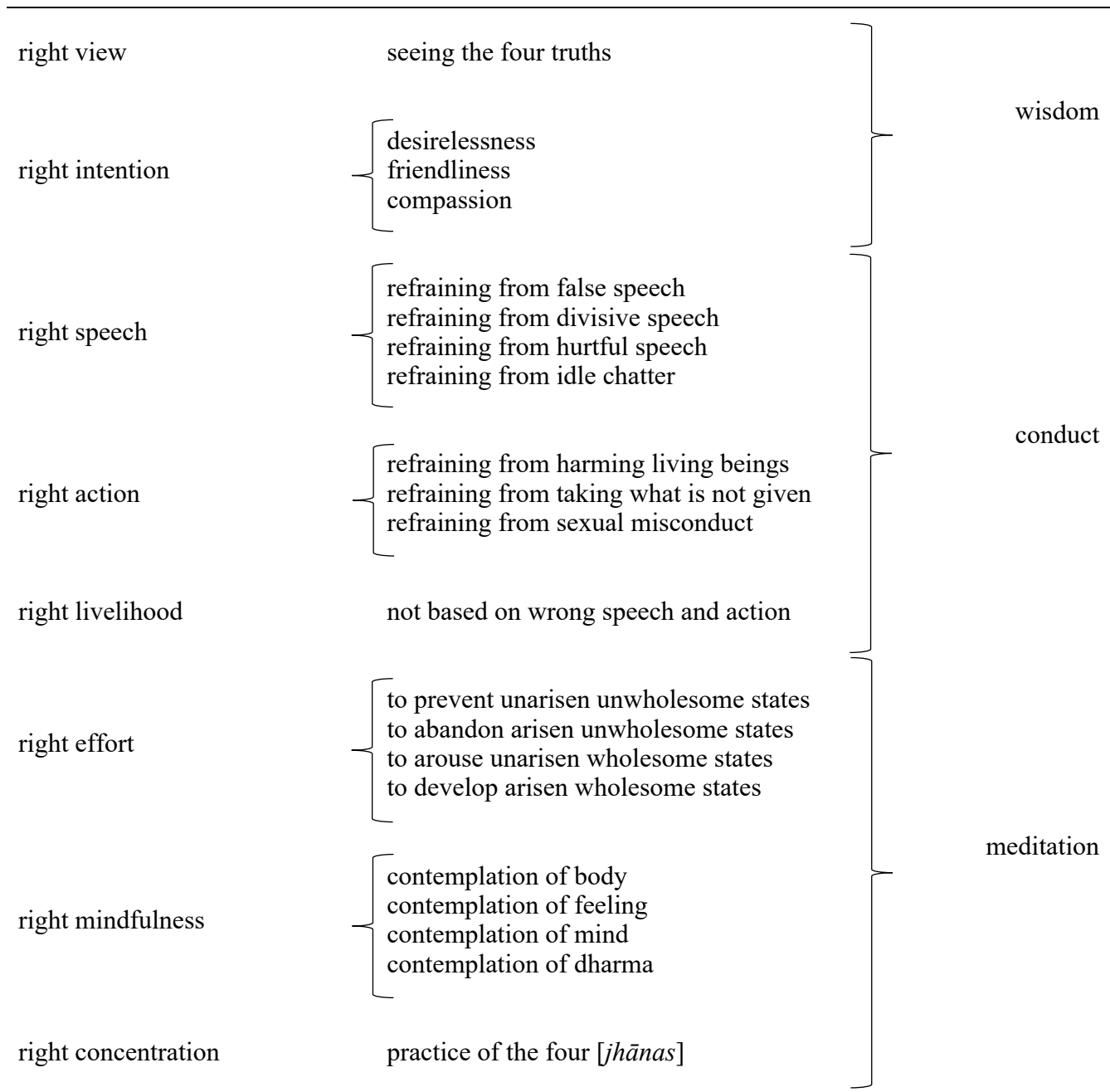
liberation from suffering, accessible to us in our own experience, where alone it takes on authentic meaning.” The Buddha states,

I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, traveled by the Rightly Self-awakened Ones of former times. And what is that ancient path...? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right [intention], right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration...I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of aging & death, direct knowledge of the origination of aging & death, direct knowledge of the cessation of aging & death, direct knowledge of the path leading to the cessation of aging & death. I followed that path. Following it, I came to direct knowledge of birth...becoming...clinging...craving...feeling...contact...the six sense media...name-&-form...consciousness...fabrications. Knowing that directly, I have revealed it to monks, nuns, male lay followers & female lay followers, so that this holy life has become powerful, rich, detailed, well-populated, wide-spread, proclaimed among celestial & human beings (Thanissaro, 1997f).

Placing *nibbāna* (‘unbinding’, ‘extinguishing’) in reach of all, the noble eightfold path is comprised of (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration (figure II) (Gethin, 1998). Each path factor is broken down into its constituent parts and grouped into one of three categories: wisdom (*paññā*); conduct (*sīla*); or meditation (*samādhi*).



Figure II. The Noble Eightfold Path



**Conduct.** Right speech, right action, and right livelihood collectively form the first division of the noble eightfold path: conduct (*sīla*). Right speech includes refraining from false, divisive, and hurtful speech, as well as idle chatter. Right action includes refraining from harming living beings, taking what is not given, and sexual misconduct. Right livelihood is making a living in alignment with these restraints. One who practices right speech, right action, and right livelihood no longer engages in behavior that generates suffering (*dukkha*) at either the individual or collective levels. Rahula (2007) writes, “Conduct is built on the vast conception of universal love and compassion for all living beings” (p. 46). Yet Bodhi (1999) points out that “The observance of *sīla* leads to harmony at several levels -- social, psychological, [*karmic*: ‘action’], and contemplative.” In fact, one who upholds the values of this division of the path is not only benefiting others but also oneself; through the cultivation of moral discipline, one develops the virtue necessary to achieve cessation (*nirodha*).

**Meditation.** The second division of the noble eightfold path, meditation (*samādhi*), includes right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The objective of right effort is fourfold: (1) to prevent unarisen unwholesome states; (2) to abandon arisen unwholesome states; (3) to arouse unarisen wholesome states; and (4) to develop arisen wholesome states. This objective can only be achieved in the present moment. Thanissaro (2000a) states, “[the role of mindfulness] is to keep the mind properly grounded in the present moment in a way that will keep it on the path.” Right mindfulness includes the contemplation of body, feeling, mind, and *dharma*. Regardless of the object of contemplation one selects, one remains focused on it ‘in and of itself’, whether internally, externally, or both internally and externally, or in regard to arising, passing away, or both arising and passing away. The Buddha states, “[One’s] mindfulness that ‘There is [an object of contemplation: body, feeling, mind, or *dharma*]’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging

to) anything in the world” (Thanissaro 2000a). This practice supports the development of concentration. “Right concentration,” Bodhi (1999) states, “represents an intensification of a mental factor present in every state of consciousness...The factor of one-pointedness unifies the mind and other concomitants in the task of cognizing the object, while it simultaneously exercises the function of centering all the constituents of the cognitive act on the object.” The intensification of right concentration takes place through a progression of four *jhānas* (‘absorptions’) (Thanissaro, 1997j). Rahula (2007) explains,

In the first stage of [*jhāna*], passionate desires and certain unwholesome thoughts like sensuous lust, ill-will, languor, worry, restlessness, and [skeptical] doubt are discarded, and feelings of joy and happiness are maintained, along with certain mental activities. In the second stage, all intellectual activities are suppressed, tranquility and 'one-pointedness' of mind developed, and the feelings of joy and happiness are still retained. In the third stage, the feeling of joy, which is an active sensation, also disappears, while the disposition of happiness still remains in addition to mindful equanimity. In the fourth stage of [*jhāna*], all sensations, even of happiness and unhappiness, of joy and sorrow, disappear, only pure equanimity and awareness remaining.

The development of the *jhānas* results in the cultivation of a mind that is at once “concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability” (Thanissaro, 1997k). As a result one may develop supranormal powers like clairaudience or mind-reading. More importantly, however, one will attain insight into the three characteristics, culminating in *nirodha* (‘cessation’) (Thanissaro, 1997k).

**Wisdom.** Wisdom (*paññā*), the third division of the noble eightfold path, is comprised of two path factors, right view and right intention. Right view is simply seeing the four noble truths.

“The eightfold path,” Bodhi (1999) writes, “starts with a conceptual understanding of the four noble truths apprehended only obscurely through the media of thought and reflection.” He continues, “It reaches its climax in a direct intuition of those same truths, penetrated with a clarity tantamount to enlightenment” (Bodhi, 1999). Right view is thus both the beginning and the end of the noble eightfold path. In fact, Bodhi (1999) contends that it is equal in scope to the range of the entire Buddhadharma. What begins as knowledge, culminates in wisdom. Right view informs the content of right intention: desirelessness, friendliness, and compassion. “True wisdom,” Rahula (2007) claims, “is endowed with these noble qualities, and...all thoughts of selfish desire, ill-will, hatred, and violence are the result of a lack of wisdom” (p. 49).

***Simultaneous progression.*** Despite its presentation, the noble eightfold path does not progress sequentially. It is not an eight-rung ladder; one does not begin with rung one and then proceed to rung two, three, four, etcetera. In fact, one does not master one path factor at a time but develops each path factor simultaneously. “[The path factors] are all linked together,” Rahula (2007) insists, “and each helps the cultivation of the others” (p. 46). This is because like one’s lived experience, the path is highly dynamic.

**The dawning of realization.** Like children too spellbound by their toys and games to notice that they are trapped in a burning house, humanity remains enraptured by the world known and sought after by the six sense spheres, not realizing that the world is aflame with the fires of greed, anger, and delusion: *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) (Thanissaro, 1993a). Recognizing this, the Buddha developed a framework flexible enough to be presented to humanity in a way that is both pertinent and sensitive to the needs of each individual. He called this framework the noble eightfold path. When practiced with urgency and diligence, this path offers many fruits. Most notably, conditioned existence is known for what it is: *anicca* (‘impermanence’), *dukkha* (‘unsatisfactoriness’), and *anatta* (‘not-self’). One directly

realizes the four noble truths, three points of contact, five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*), six sense spheres, and the twelve-link chain of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). In other words, one recognizes that what appears to be a fixed reality is a dynamic process congealing into an experience structure. Further, one recognizes that all “compounded things are subject to vanish” (Vajira & Story, 1998). Knowing this, one responds to the predicament of human suffering with the solution offered by the Buddha, which is as simple as it is radical: let go. In doing so, one extinguishes the flames that fuel suffering, attaining the highest realization, *nibbāna* (‘unbinding’, ‘extinguishing’). Olendzki (2010, p. 14) quotes the Buddha:

Indeed the sage who’s fully quenched  
 Rests at ease in every way;  
 No sense desire adheres to him  
 Whose fires have cooled, deprived of fuel.  
 All attachments have been severed,  
 The heart’s been led away from pain;  
 Tranquil, he rests with utmost ease,  
 The mind has found its way to peace.

### **An Overview of Pātañjala-Yoga**

The yoga of Patañjali is explored. The relationship between *puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) and *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’ — including consciousness) is examined. The inborn conflation of the two that takes place through ‘not seeing’ is identified as the cause of *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, and ‘stress’). The network of cause and effect that veils the aloneness (*kaivalya*) of pure awareness is described. The eight limbs of yoga are presented as a way to overcome this tragic misidentification.

## **Yoga**

Codifying yoga in the seminal text, the *Yoga-Sūtra*, Patañjali begins by defining yoga. “Now,” Patañjali writes, “the teachings of yoga” (YS 1.1). He continues, “Yoga is to still the patterning of consciousness [YS 1.2]. Then pure awareness can abide in its very nature [YS 1.3]. Otherwise awareness takes itself to be the patterns of consciousness [YS 1.4]” (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 2; Hartranft, 2017b). In these four concise statements, Patañjali lays the foundation for his entire system. According to him, there is an inborn conflation (*saṃyoga*) of pure awareness, *puruṣa*, and the patterning of consciousness, *citta-vṛtti*, which belongs to the realm of *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’). Through the practice of yoga, one stills the patterning of consciousness thereby allowing pure awareness to abide in its very nature -- separate from the realm of *prakṛti*. Hartranft (2003b) asserts, “The practice of yoga is meant to rein in the tendency of consciousness to gravitate toward external things, to identify with them and try to locate happiness in them. Steady practice at ‘yoking’ teaches consciousness how to turn inward toward itself and realize the true nature of its underlying awareness” (locs. 109-116). In short, Pātañjala-yoga is a way to overcome the congenital misidentification of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* by stilling the patterning of consciousness causing the apparent fusion of the two.

**Puruṣa.** Unchanging, contentless, and pure, *puruṣa*, pure awareness, ‘exists’ apart from *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’). ‘It’ is intangible, impersonal, and inconceivable. However, for the sake of convention, it is often characterized as the immanent ‘seer’ that witnesses the realm of the ‘seeable’, *prakṛti* (Whicher, 1998). It is also characterized as the ‘knower’ while its counterpart (*prakṛti*) is characterized as the ‘known’ (Whicher, 1998). In both cases, Hartranft (2017b) contends that *puruṣa* is best conceptualized as a verb and not a noun -- ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’, respectively. This is because a verb is less likely to take on the characteristics of a distinct entity possessing both form and agency, none of which applies to *puruṣa*, which lies beyond the scope of conceptualization. In fact, Olendzki (2016, loc. 1739) points out that

Indo-European languages are largely built around nouns that take on modifiers and are subject to the action of verbs. This yields a habit of mind that is accustomed to construing the world as an edifice of persons, places, and things that exist, each with a defining essence, and to which can be attributed various qualities.

Olendzki (2016) goes on to suggest that nouns are useful in terms of communicating ideas at the conventional level, but they fall short when it comes to looking closely at reality itself. In the end, all words -- no matter what form they take -- fail to capture that which Hartranft (2010) aptly describes as “timeless, subjectless, and unconditioned awareness...lying beyond the reach of the mind and its insistence on location, orientation, temporality, and attributes” (p. 6). *Puruṣa* defies language entirely.

**Prakṛti.** *Prakṛti*, *puruṣa*'s ('pure awareness') counterpart, is its antithesis. Based on the classical *Sāṃkhya* enumeration of reality, Pātañjala-yoga divides the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*), into seven evolutes: sensing (*manas*), thinking (*buddhi*), selfing (*ahaṃkāra*), organs of action, sense organs, subtle sense properties (*tanmātras*), and elements (Carr & Mahalingam, 2002; Hartranft, 2017b; Whicher, 1998). Broken down even further into its smallest constituent parts, *prakṛti* is comprised of three force-constituents known as the *guṇas*. “The three *guṇas*,” Whicher (1998) writes, “the basic ‘constituents’ of *prakṛti*, compose all cosmological as well as physical and psychological principles” (p. 62). Consisting of *sattva* ('luminosity', 'brilliance'), *rajas* ('activity'), and *tamas* ('fixity', 'inertia'), the flux of this tripartite process extends without exception to the entire phenomenal world (Hartranft, 2003b; Whicher, 1998). As a result, *prakṛti* is subject to constant change. Hartranft (2003b, loc. 153) insists,

All the contents of creation that Patañjali can observe—including his body, senses, and mind—appear volatile. No matter what aspect of [the phenomenal world] he selects as an object of contemplation, he notices before long that the object's

fundamental properties -- light, mass, motion<sup>4</sup> -- are actually a sequence of transformations and changing proportions. By calmly and patiently observing the play of sensation, thought, and feeling as he trains attention on some kind of object, he has come to the conclusion that this play includes both the things of the world and his consciousness of them, and never stops.

Because the dynamic unfolding of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* exists in an uninterrupted state of unrest, *prakṛti* -- however it is divided -- is built upon pillars of shifting sands.

**Citta.** Comprised of three of the seven evolutes of *prakṛti* -- sensing (*manas*), thinking (*buddhi*), and selfing (*ahaṃkāra*) -- consciousness, *citta*, is constantly churning. This is because *citta* belongs to the realm of *prakṛti*, the phenomenal world, which is characterized by perpetual change. In fact, according to *sūtras* 1.5-1.11, consciousness repeatedly shifts between five identifiable patterns (*vṛttis*): (1) valid cognition/right perception (*pramaṇa*); (2) error/misperception (*viparyaya*); (3) conceptualization (*vikalpa*); (4) sleep (*nidrā*); and (5) memory (*smṛti*) (Hartranft, 2003b; Whicher, 1998). In one who sees a rope as a rope, consciousness takes the form of valid cognition/right perception (*pramaṇa*). However, in one who confuses the rope for a snake, consciousness takes the form of error/misperception (*viparyaya*). The consciousness that imagines this entire scenario concerning the rope and the snake takes the form of conceptualization (*vikalpa*). Later recollecting this scenario, consciousness takes the form of memory (*smṛti*). Finally, the consciousness that takes the form of sleep (*nidrā*) is like a television set that is turned off -- a situation in which the television remains plugged in despite its blank display.

**The inborn conflation of puruṣa and prakṛti.** Whatever form it takes, *citta-vṛtti*, the patterning of consciousness, reifies one's sense of empirical selfhood, that is, one's sense of

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<sup>4</sup> These fundamental properties correspond to the tripartite flux of *sattva*, *tamas*, and *rajas*, respectively.



belonging to the realm of *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world') "The five types of *vṛttis*," Whicher (1998) explains,

comprise the normal range of human functioning...Each of these states is related directly to a sense of self or subject who appropriates and lays claim to experience. The experience of discrete objects or mental content or thoughts are filtered through and referenced to an afflicted identity of self that permeates the mind. When this happens, *puruṣa*, the pure witness or knower of *vṛtti*, is forgotten (p. 119).

*Citta-vṛtti*'s unbroken current of eddies and whirls continually gives rise to the inborn conflation (*saṃyoga*) of *puruṣa* ('pure awareness') and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world'). A tragic misidentification takes place. "*Puruṣa*," Whicher (1998) asserts, "as if" conforms to an identity extrinsic to itself and takes on the appearance of a changing, finite, psychophysical being, rather than abiding in its true nature as pure [awareness]" (p. 120). One's true identity -- pure awareness -- is veiled by empirical selfhood, an afflicted identity based on the patterning of consciousness, an evolute of the highly dynamic realm of *prakṛti*.

According to Patañjali, that which incessantly changes inherently yields *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'). Because *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world') itself is characterized by rapid and unpredictable change, any identification with it must also be characterized by both change and concomitant unsatisfactoriness. "Our sense of self," Whicher (1998) explains, "irrevocably confined to the force-constituents or qualities (*guṇas*) of nature and existence (*prakṛti*) as we normally know it to be, is constantly undergoing change and sets itself up for inevitable pain and dissatisfaction (*dukkha*)" (p. 21). *Sattva* ('luminosity', 'brilliance'), *rajas* ('activity'), and *tamas* ('fixity', 'inertia'), the fundamental properties of the phenomenal world, are constantly combining in different ratios and coming apart just as quickly as they come together. Itself an evolute of the phenomenal world, *citta* ('consciousness') deludes itself into

thinking it exists apart from this process, like *puruṣa*, pure awareness. In this way empirical identity veils one's true identity. Amidst this confusion -- remaining ignorant of one's true nature -- one clings to an existence marked by *dukkha*.

Although one's empirical identity, belonging to the realm of *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world'), is subject to both change and unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), one's true identity, *puruṣa*, ('pure awareness') remains immutable and free, untouched by *prakṛti*. "This is a mind-boggling, mad, paradoxical dualism," Pflueger (2010) writes, "where everything appears to be its opposite and real suffering for unreal actors constantly spoils experience and traps the unreal actors in the realm of suffering, like so many sad bubbles trapped under water" (p. 74). Pflueger (2010) continues, "But what is a bubble, but the absence, the antithesis, of water? What harm can come to it? Beneath the ocean can it be drowned or made wet" (pp. 74-75)? *Puruṣa* -- separate from *prakṛti* -- has always been liberated. *Puruṣa* cannot be tarnished by *dukkha*. In fact, *dukkha* is a unique characteristic of *prakṛti* alone.

*Citta-vṛtti* ('the patterning of consciousness'), under the grip of ignorance, misidentifies itself as pure awareness (*puruṣa*). Whicher (1998, p. 86) explains,

The *puruṣa*'s proximity to the highly evolved human organism 'solicits' the phenomenon of consciousness. The 'connection' between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is made possible because at the finest, most subtle level of *prakṛti* is found a predominance of the *sattva* component (*guṇa*) wherein *prakṛti*, in the form of the mind (*citta*), is transparent enough to 'reflect' the 'light' of *puruṣa* and create the appearance of sentience as well as an autonomous sense of intelligence in its evolutes or manifestations.

The locus of misidentification is situated within the mind (*citta*). Through the practice of Pātañjala-yoga one is able to bring awareness to the play of shadow and light that characterizes

the patterning of consciousness; one clarifies the mind so that the inborn conflation (*saṃyoga*) of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world') can finally be overcome -- the 'aloneness' (*kaivalya*) of *puruṣa* realized directly.

***The corollary causes of suffering.*** Unable to see things as they are, the darkening mind - that is, the mind marked by a dearth of *sattva* ('luminosity', 'brilliance') -- mistakes *prakṛti*, the phenomenal world, for *puruṣa*, pure awareness. As a result, suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress (*dukkha*) color one's experience. Patañjali writes,

The causes of suffering are not seeing things as they are, the sense of 'I', attachment, aversion, and clinging to life [YS 2.3]. Not seeing things as they are [*avidyā*] is the field where the other causes of suffering germinate, whether dormant, activated, intercepted, or weakened. [YS 2.4]. Lacking this wisdom, one mistakes that which is impermanent, impure, distressing, or empty of self for permanence, purity, happiness, and self [YS 2.5] (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 22).

*Avidyā*, ignorance -- more literally, 'not seeing' -- is the root cause of *dukkha*. Extending its insidious tendrils in all directions, *avidyā* propagates in numerous ways. In fact, from this foundation, four secondary causes unfold, namely, the sense of 'I', attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. Together these causes (*kleśas*) lead one to misidentify with that which is "impermanent, impure, distressing, [and] empty of self" -- the phenomenal world (YS 2.5; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 22).

Patañjali asserts, "The sense of 'I' ascribes selfhood to pure awareness by identifying it with the senses [YS 2.6]. Attachment is a residue of pleasant experience [YS 2.7]. Aversion is a residue of suffering [YS 2.8]. Clinging to life is instinctive and self-perpetuating, even for the wise [YS 2.9]" (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 22). In short, "the more we cling to 'I', the more real it feels; the more real it feels, the more we cling to it" (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 22). Protective and

fearful, one compulsively avoids what is unpleasant and pursues what is pleasant in a futile attempt to reify this false and afflicted sense of self.

*A network of cause and effect.* Not seeing, the sense of ‘I’, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life fuel one’s lived experiences. In fact, Patañjali claims, “The causes of suffering are the root source of actions; each action deposits latent impressions [*saṃskāras*] deep in the mind, to be activated and experienced later in this birth or to lie hidden, awaiting a future one” (YS 2.12). He continues, “So long as this root source exists, its content will ripen into a birth, a life, and experience [YS 2.13]. This life will be marked by delight or anguish, in proportion to those good or bad actions that created its store of latent impressions [YS 2.14].” Finally, he concludes, “The wise see suffering in all experience, whether from the anguish of impermanence or from latent impressions laden with suffering or from incessant conflict as the fundamental qualities of [the phenomenal world] vie for ascendancy [YS 2.15]” (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 25).

In the network of cause and effect described by Patañjali, the actions (*karma*) of thought, word, and deed are deeply conditioned. Tucked away in the mind is a store of latent impressions, *saṃskāras*. Like seeds, when sown these impressions condition present and future outcomes. These outcomes result in the accumulation of additional latent impressions, maintaining the cycle of cause and effect. Because most actions are colored by *avidyā* (‘ignorance’), their concomitant *saṃskāras* (‘latent impressions’) take on the hue of one of the four corollary causes of suffering: the sense of ‘I’, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. The wise recognize this. *Dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) establishes itself in equal parts in not only that which is unpleasant but also that which is pleasant. This is because lasting happiness cannot be found in that which is by nature transient and insubstantial.

In the model of cause and effect outlined in *sūtras* 2.12-2.15, *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) is ubiquitous. Yet, in *sūtra* 2.16 Patañjali decisively states, “But

suffering that has not yet arisen can be prevented” (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 25). By carefully investigating the root source of *dukkha* -- *avidyā* (‘ignorance’) -- one is able to recognize that it is only a realization that ‘separates’ one from liberation. One’s true identity -- *puruṣa*, pure awareness -- is already free, untarnished by *prakṛti*, the phenomenal world.

**Bondage and liberation.** “The preventable cause of all this suffering,” Patañjali insists, “is the apparent indivisibility [*saṃyoga*] of pure awareness and what it regards” (YS 2.17; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). In other words, the congenital misidentification of *puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) and *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’) is the hallmark of *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’). Not seeing (*avidyā*) the infinite separateness between the two, one desperately clings to what Hartranft (2003b) describes as “the vibrant representational pageant of the phenomenal world that forms in consciousness” (p. 28). “What awareness regards,” Patañjali continues, “namely the phenomenal world, embodies the qualities of luminosity [*sattva*], activity [*rajas*], and inertia [*tamas*]; it includes oneself, composed of both elements and the senses; and it is the ground for both sensual experience and liberation” (YS 2.18; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). It is only in the mind (*citta*) that *avidyā* gives rise to *saṃyoga* (‘the inborn conflation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*’). For this reason, bondage and liberation take place exclusively in the realm of *prakṛti*. *Citta-vṛtti* (‘the patterning of consciousness’) tragically misidentifies itself as pure awareness -- untarnished, immutable, and free. Therefore, it is the patterning of consciousness that must be stilled if *saṃyoga* is to be seen for what it truly is: a hallucination stirred up by the churning mind.

**Practice and nonreaction.** According to Patañjali, “Both practice and nonreaction are required to still the patterning of consciousness” (YS 1.12). He continues,

Practice is the sustained effort to rest in that stillness [YS 1.13]. This practice becomes firmly rooted when it is cultivated skillfully and continuously for a long

time [YS 1.14]. As for nonreaction, one can recognize that it has been fully achieved when no attachment arises in regard to anything at all, whether perceived directly or learned [YS 1.15]. When the ultimate level of nonreaction has been reached, pure awareness can clearly see itself as independent from the fundamental qualities of [the phenomenal world] [YS 1.16] (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 5).

Together practice (*abhyāsa*) and nonreaction (*vairāgya*) transform consciousness. Once caught in its own current of eddies and whirls, through practice and nonreaction consciousness is able to illuminate the distinction between itself and pure awareness (*puruṣa*) while at the same time abandoning any compulsive need to react to its own shifting field of sensation, thought, and feeling. The natural result of the cultivation of practice and nonreaction is *viveka*, discrimination. *Viveka* is the consummate yogic skill. In fact, Patañjali suggests, “The apparent indivisibility of seeing [*puruṣa*] and the seen [*prakṛti*] can be eradicated by cultivating uninterrupted discrimination between [pure awareness] and what it regards [the phenomenal world]” (YS 2.26; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). The culmination of practice and nonreaction, *viveka*, scissions the perceived fusion of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*.

**The eight limbs of yoga.** Requiring the utmost commitment to both practice and nonreaction, the eight limbs of yoga, lead directly to *viveka*, discrimination. The eight limbs include: (1) *yamas*, external disciplines; (2) *niyamas*, internal disciplines; (3) *āsana*, sitting posture; (4) *prāṇāyāma*, breath elongation; (5) *pratyāhāra*, withdrawal of the senses; (6) *dhāraṇā*, concentration; (7) *dhyāna*, absorption; (8) and *samādhi*, collectedness (Hartranft, 2003b; Hartranft, 2017b).

“Through the practices involved in *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*,” Whicher (1998) concludes, “there results the destruction of impurity and an increasing light of knowledge up to the discriminative discernment between [seeing] and the seeable” (p. 190). Whicher (1998) continues, “All actions,

intentions, volitions, and thoughts are scrutinized and subjected to a purification...in which all attachment and aversion toward initially the grosser and later on the subtler manifestations of and identifications with *prakṛti* are discarded” (p. 190). The eight limbs are a way of sublimating one’s energy in an effort to realize the aloneness (*kaivalya*) of pure awareness (*‘puruṣa’*).

***Yamas and niyamas.*** Comprising the first of the eight limbs, *yamas*, the five external disciplines, include not harming (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), and not being acquisitive (*aparigrahā*). “These universals,” Patañjali upholds, “transcending birth, place, era, or circumstance, constitute the great vow of yoga” (YS 2.31). He continues,

Being firmly grounded in nonviolence creates an atmosphere in which others can let go of their hostility [YS 2.35]. For those grounded in truthfulness, every action and its consequences are imbued with truth [YS 2.36]. For those who have no inclination to steal, the truly precious is at hand [YS 2.37]. The chaste acquire vitality [YS 2.38]. Freedom from wanting unlocks the real purpose of existence [YS 2.39] (Hartranft, 2003b, pp. 32-34; Hartranft, 2017b).

The fruit borne from the practice of the *yamas* benefits both the individual and the world. By practicing the ‘great vow of yoga’ one refrains from actions (*karma*) that generate negative latent impressions (*‘saṃskāras’*). In this way one not only reinforces one’s propensity for discrimination (*viveka*) but also forestalls the seeds of *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) from propagating at the individual and collective levels.

The second limb, *niyamas*, includes the five internal disciplines: purification (*śauca*); contentment (*santoṣa*); intense discipline (*tapas*); self-study (*svādhyāya*); and dedication to the ideal of pure awareness (*īśvara-praṇidhānā*). Patañjali explains,

With purification, one’s body ceases to be compelling, likewise contact with others

[YS 2.40]. Purification also brings about clarity, happiness, concentration, mastery of the senses, and capacity for self-awareness [YS 2.41]. Contentment brings unsurpassed joy [YS 2.42]. As intense discipline burns up impurities, the body and its senses become supremely refined [YS 2.43]. Self-study deepens communion with one's personal deity [2.44]. Through orientation toward the ideal of pure awareness, one can achieve [collectedness] [YS 2.45] (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 35; Hartranft, 2017b). Applicable at the levels of both body and mind, the *niyamas* are the nexus between one's personal sphere and the unfolding process of realization brought about by yoga. Collectively these practices instill in one a steadfast will to renounce all attachment to the changing realm of *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world').

The first two limbs of yoga, *yamas* and *niyamas* ('external' and 'internal disciplines', respectively) are founded on Patañjali's observations regarding cause and effect. "Unwholesome thoughts," he contends,

can be neutralized by cultivating wholesome ones [YS 2.33]. We ourselves may act upon unwholesome thoughts, such as wanting to harm someone, or we may cause or condone them in others; unwholesome thoughts may arise from greed, anger, or delusion; they may be mild, moderate, or extreme; but they never cease to ripen into ignorance and suffering. This is why one must cultivate wholesome thoughts [YS 2.34] (Hartranft, 2003b, pp. 32-33).

Issuing forth from some combination of greed, anger, and delusion, unwholesome impressions (*saṃskāras*) become unwholesome thoughts, words, and deeds. Whether at the level of thought, word, or deed, that which is unwholesome leads to an outgrowth of *avidyā* ('ignorance') and *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'). That which is unwholesome sows the seeds of future unwholesome actions (*karma*). These seeds are stored as latent impressions (*saṃskāras*)



until they flower into *avidyā* and *dukkha* once more. If *viveka* ('discrimination') is to be cultivated, this cycle of cause and effect needs to be broken. That which is wholesome must supplant that which is unwholesome.

Observing the *yamas* ('external disciplines') and *niyamas* ('internal disciplines') sows wholesome seeds. So too, do the practices of friendliness (*metta*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) "which imply a gradual eradication of other attitudes that are the companions of a disturbed state of mind enveloped in a state of affliction" (YS 1.33, Hartranft, 2003b; Whicher, 1998, p. 191). At both the personal and relational levels, these practices bring one's thoughts, words, and deeds into concert with the ultimate goal of yoga -- realization of the aloneness (*kaivalya*) of pure awareness (*puruṣa*). Unwholesome seeds cease to ripen into *avidyā* ('ignorance') and *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'); one is able to see more clearly the division between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world'). Together these practices cultivate fertile ground for the flowering of *viveka*, discernment.

*Āsana.* *Āsana*, the third limb of yoga, highlights the importance of one's sitting posture. "The postures of meditation," Patañjali insists, "should embody steadiness and ease" (YS 2.46). He continues, "This occurs as all effort relaxes and coalescence arises, revealing that the body and the infinite universe are indivisible [YS 2.47]. Then one is no longer disturbed by the play of opposites [YS 2.48]" (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 37; Hartranft, 2017b). At once alert and relaxed, one transcends the boundaries of pleasure, pain, and neutrality. In fact, one relinquishes these labels in favor of direct sensation, rising above perceptions of duality. Hartranft (2003b) explains, "The body and the external world, which usually feel like different things owing to the way the self-sense sets the body apart from the rest of the universe, are seen as appearances arising from the same phenomenal stuff" (p. 38). In short, one begins to see one's empirical identity as

inseparable from the flux of the three *guṇas* ('qualities'): *sattva* ('luminosity', 'brilliance'), *rajas* ('activity'), and *tamas* ('fixity', 'inertia').

***Prāṇāyāma.*** The fourth limb of yoga is *prāṇāyāma*, breath energy elongation. Patañjali writes,

With effort relaxing, the flow of inhalation and exhalation can be brought to a standstill; this is called [breath energy elongation] [YS 2.49]. As the movement patterns of each breath -- inhalation, exhalation, lull -- are observed as to duration, number, and area of focus, breath becomes spacious and subtle [YS 2.50]. As realization dawns, the distinction between breathing in and out falls away [YS 2.51]. Then the veil lifts from the mind's luminosity [YS 2.52.]. And the mind is now fit for concentration [YS 2.53] (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 40; Hartranft, 2017b).

By gently resting awareness on the changing qualities of one's breath, one makes the unconscious conscious. As a result of sustained mindfulness, breathing itself becomes effortless. Just as the sustained observation of one's sitting posture brought about the transcendence of duality, the sustained observation of one's breath equalizes the breath's qualities. Inhalation, exhalation, and lull become indistinguishable. Undisturbed by the conditioned movements of body and breath, "the mind is now fit for concentration" (YS 2.53; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 40) The *sattva* ('luminosity', 'brilliance') quality of the mind is now concentrated enough to illuminate the distinction between *puruṣa* ('pure awareness') and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world').

***Pratyāhāra.*** Withdrawal of the senses, *pratyāhāra*, the fifth of the eight limbs, orients the senses in the direction of realization. Patañjali states, "When consciousness interiorizes by uncoupling from external objects, the senses do likewise; this is called withdrawal of the senses [YS 2.54]. Then the senses reside utterly in the service of realization [YS 2.55]" (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 42; Hartranft, 2017b). The senses are the medium through which consciousness (*citta*)

identifies itself with the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*). Under ordinary circumstances, the senses pull one's attention outward in myriad directions, making it nearly impossible for one to turn inward. By focusing on the indivisible field of sensation brought about by stilling the body and breath, however, one crosses the "threshold of interiorization" (Hartranft, 2003b). The senses, now disjoined from their associated objects, settle in their source, assuming the nature of the mind itself.

***The Perfect Discipline of Consciousness.*** The sixth, seventh, and eighth limbs of yoga correspond respectively to *dhāraṇā* ('concentration'), *dhyāna* ('absorption'), and *samādhi* ('collectedness'). "Concentration," Patañjali writes, "locks consciousness on a single area" (YS 3.1). "In meditative absorption," he continues, "the entire perceptual flow is aligned with that object" (YS 3.2). Finally, he concludes, "When only the essential nature of the object shines forth, as if formless, [collectedness] has arisen" (YS 3.3; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 45; Hartranft, 2017b). Together the last three limbs transform consciousness (*citta*). Beginning with *dhāraṇā* and maturing in *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, the mind's typical modes of dispersiveness are replaced with unprecedented focus: one-pointedness. During concentration, one's attention -- now settled on a particular object -- becomes immovable. In the process of absorption, one's attention flows uninterruptedly to the object at hand. Now collected, one's attention takes on the luminous quality of a precious jewel, equally reflecting knower, known, and knowing itself. *Samādhi* offers "clear insight into the object as it is without any violation or forcing from the [yogi] for, at the moment of the *samādhi* experience of knowing, the observer as separate from the object does not come into play" (Whicher, 1998, p. 195). The illusory distinction between knower, known, and knowing dissolves. The restless waters of consciousness, which maintain this false distinction, finally still. In this unitive state of awareness, the water has returned to its natural state of clarity; its surface is placid and glassy -- transparent enough to reflect equally all that lies

before it.

**Discernment.** Collectively known as *saṁyama*, the perfect discipline of consciousness, the last three limbs of yoga lead to the development of supranormal powers like invisibility, mind-reading, and discernment (*viveka*). Of all of the supranormal powers one can develop as a result of the perfect discipline of consciousness, Patañjali is concerned with only one -- discernment. This is because discernment -- unlike the other supranormal powers -- is capable of discriminating between *puruṣa* ('pure awareness') and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world'). Whereas the other supranormal powers further enmesh one in the shifting matrix of the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*), *viveka* brings one closer to realization: *kaivalya*, the aloneness of pure awareness. Patañjali writes,

Once one just sees the distinction between pure awareness and the luminous aspect of the phenomenal world, all conditions are known and mastered [YS 3.50]. When one is unattached even to this omniscience and mastery, the seeds of suffering wither and awareness knows it stands alone [3.51]. Even if the exalted beckon, one must avoid attachment and pride, or suffering will recur [3.52] (Hartranft, 2003b, pp. 57-58).

However lofty the supranormal powers may seem, they keep one firmly rooted in the changing realm of the phenomenal world. It is pure awareness alone that must be realized if one is to realize one's true identity. It is only through discernment that this can be achieved.

Through the practice of the eight limbs of yoga -- culminating in the experience of *samādhi* ('collectedness') -- all wave-making activity stills. The waters of consciousness are now as transparent as a precious jewel, unclouded by the causes and conditions that sustain the inborn conflation (*saṁyoga*) of *puruṣa* ('pure awareness') and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world'). Freedom is now at hand. Patañjali claims, "Once the luminosity and transparency of consciousness have become as distilled as pure awareness, they can reflect the freedom of

awareness back to itself” (YS 3.56; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 58). Patañjali describes the unfolding of this process:

One who regards even the most exalted states disinterestedly, discriminating continuously between pure awareness and the phenomenal world, enters the final stage of [collectedness], in which [the phenomenal world] is seen to be a cloud of irreducible experiential forms [YS 4.29]. This realization extinguishes both the causes of suffering and the cycle of cause and effect [YS 4.30]. Once all the layers and imperfections concealing truth have been washed away, insight is boundless, with little left to know [YS 4.31]. Then the seamless flow of reality, its transformations colored by the fundamental qualities, begins to break down, fulfilling the true mission of consciousness [4.32]. One can see that the flow is actually a series of discrete events, each corresponding to the merest instant of time, in which one form becomes another [YS 4.33]. Freedom is at hand when the fundamental qualities of [the phenomenal world], each of their transformations witnessed at the moment of its inception, are recognized as irrelevant to pure awareness; it stands alone, grounded in its very nature, the power of pure seeing. That is all (Hartranft, 2003b, pp. 69-70; Hartranft, 2017b).

**True identity.** Illuminating the infinite separateness of *puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) and *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’), *viveka* (‘discrimination’) is the consummate yogic skill. With temporal and spatial distinctions having fallen away in *samādhi* (‘collectedness’), *viveka* exposes the composite nature of *prakṛti*, comprised of a constant flux of three force-constituents (*guṇas*) arising and passing away at intervals of the briefest instants (*kṣaṇas*). “Thus,” Hartranft contends (2003b), “consciousness transparently reflects the unfolding of phenomena as they are at the most granular level, unclouded by any constructive or organizing mental activity whatsoever” (p.

70). *Prakṛti* -- now completely deconstructed -- ceases to compel. In the same way that a rain shower reaches the ground raindrop by raindrop, *dharmas* -- “the briefest constituent [phenomena] of consciousness that awareness can observe directly” -- rise to the surface of consciousness *kṣaṇa* by *kṣaṇa* (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 71). However, because its intervals are so brief, a rain shower is not experienced raindrop by raindrop; it is experienced all at once, as a composite of raindrops -- a rain shower. “Though the untrained hear nothing but the continuous rush of water, the realized perceive all arrivals distinctly” (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 71). *Neti, neti* -- ‘not this, not this’ -- pure awareness can now be distinguished from its changing counterpart. This is the realization of true identity: *kaivalya* -- the aloneness of pure awareness.

### **A Comparative Investigation of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-Yoga**

The predicament of human suffering (*dukkha*) is defined. It is situated within the metaphysical frameworks of the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga. Their divergent understandings of *dukkha* and its source are investigated. In juxtaposition to their dissimilar metaphysics and divergent understandings of *dukkha*, their strikingly similar methodologies employed to overcome the predicament of human suffering are mapped out. Their nearly identical progressions from an existence mired in *dukkha* and its causes to the attainment of complete realization through the practice of meditative yoga situated within an eight-part wise and ethical framework is explored.

### **The Predicament of Human Suffering**

With shared roots in the spiritually innovative landscape of ancient India, the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga share much in common. Both traditions clearly acknowledge that the human condition is marked by *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’). Furthermore, each tradition employs its own version of meditative yoga in an effort to achieve freedom from the seeming inevitability of *dukkha*. With their shared interest in not only

understanding *dukkha* but also eradicating its identifiable causes and conditions, both the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga can be seen as a response to the predicament of human suffering.

The hallmark of the human condition, *dukkha* is the pervasive sense that all the conditions that comprise one's life are off-center. In fact, Whicher (1998) explains,

The term *dukkha* (i.e., suffering, dissatisfaction, pain, sorrow) is comprised of *du* meaning: difficult, bad, doing wrong, plus *kha* meaning: axle hole, cavity, cave, space and can literally mean 'having a bad axle-hole'. Such a wheel is unable to function properly or smoothly leading to an unsteady ride or journey in life, perhaps even disabling completely the vehicle (the body-mind) it is helping to propel (p. 76).

Hartranft (2017a) builds upon this etymology, suggesting that the wheel whose axle is off-center causes different kinds of stress in each turn: wanting pulls one forward, not wanting pulls one backward, selfing pulls one up, and misperceiving pulls one down. Mistakenly laying claim to experience as "I, me, and mine," -- almost always without even realizing it -- one finds oneself leaning away from that which is unpleasant and toward that which is pleasant, tugged first this way and then that -- consistently off-center, and never quite able to achieve equilibrium.

### **The Causes and Conditions of Suffering**

Although both the Buddha and Patañjali agree to the reality of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'), they disagree as to what causes it. In both cases, *dukkha* is situated within the broader context of the respective metaphysics of each tradition. Because the Buddha and Patañjali developed dissimilar systems of metaphysics, they attribute the source of *dukkha* to different sets of causes and conditions. From the Buddha's perspective, *dukkha* is caused by *taṇhā* ('craving'), and from Patañjali's perspective, *dukkha* is caused by *saṃyoga*, the inborn conflation of *puruṣa* ('pure awareness') and *prakṛti* (the phenomenal world).

### According to the Buddha.

**The first noble truth.** In the first noble truth the Buddha defines *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'):

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful (Thanissaro, 1993b).

The Buddha proceeds from gross to subtle. He begins by presenting the most obvious manifestations of *dukkha*: birth, aging, and death accompanied by sorrow, lamentation, pain, and distress. He then introduces more subtle manifestations of *dukkha*, including association with the unloved, separation from the loved, and not getting what is wanted. Finally, he concludes by highlighting the subtlest manifestation of *dukkha*: the five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*). By unpacking *dukkha* in this way, the Buddha is able to emphasize the deeply penetrative nature of unsatisfactoriness. He makes it clear that *dukkha* includes not only the aches and pains of senescence and the disappointment of unfulfilled desires but also the entire range of one's experience. Because it penetrates even the smallest moving parts of one's experience (i.e., the aggregates), unsatisfactoriness ultimately penetrates all layers of experience. This is the Buddha's most comprehensive observation of *dukkha*.

**Taṇhā.** In the second noble truth the Buddha builds upon his definition of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') by specifying its cause:

And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming -- accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now



there -- i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

The source of *dukkha*, according to the Buddha, is *taṇhā*, ‘craving’. Specifically, he points to craving for sensual pleasure, becoming, and non-becoming as the origin of unsatisfactoriness just as the east (*samudaya*) is the origin of the dawn. In fact, *taṇhā* is the *sine qua non* of one’s relentless search for gratification through the six sense spheres. Further, in causing one to pursue an identity spanning past and future, *taṇhā* is behind the continual reification of self. Lastly, when being itself seems unbearably painful, *taṇhā* births the desire to stop being altogether. Yearning for a self in one moment, eager to discard it in the next, all the while doing everything possible to gratify the senses, one finds oneself unwittingly perpetuating *dukkha* through the pursuit of an unstable and ultimately insatiable thirst.

It is through *taṇhā* that the person takes up the burden of the five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*). On the one hand, one who clings to this burden with an iron grip may find oneself buckling under its weight. On the other hand, by ungrasping the clenched fist of the mind, one can cast aside one’s obsession with craving (*taṇhā*), freeing oneself from both *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) and its web of causes and conditions. In fact, the Buddha suggests,

A burden indeed  
are the five aggregates,  
and the carrier of the burden  
is the person.

Taking up the burden in the world  
is stressful.

Casting off the burden

is bliss.

Having cast off the heavy burden

and not taking on another,

pulling up craving,

along with its root,

one is free from hunger,

totally unbound (Thanissaro, 2001a).

In order to address the problem of human suffering, the Buddha contends that one must relinquish the burden of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') *vis-à-vis* the five aggregates by pulling up craving, along with its root. To do this, one must first understand craving. The how and why of craving as the cause of *dukkha* can only be fully understood when its role is considered within the broader framework of Buddhist metaphysics.

***Psychophysical existence.*** "Much of the Buddha's teaching," Brasington (2002) upholds, is like viewing something from different perspectives: if you view it up close, you get dependent origination, if you view it from a distance, then you get the aggregates. Both of these very important teachings are just different ways of looking at our psycho-physical existence. All of these views are useful. No one view enables us to gain, easily, the understanding that's necessary. So we look at things in various different ways.

Knowing that "no one view enables us to gain, easily, the understanding that's necessary," the Buddha chooses to utilize skillful means by describing the same reality from different points of view. "The *dharma* that I have attained," the Buddha asserts, "is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise" (Thanissaro, 1997b). In order to teach what is subtle and hard to see, the Buddha chooses to

articulate one's psychophysical existence in different ways. As a result, according to the Buddha's analyses, one may effectively examine one's lived experience through the lens of either the clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*) or dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).

***The five clinging-aggregates.*** Together the five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*) give rise to a compelling illusion: the singular person. Consisting of (1) form, (2) feeling, (3) apperception, (4) formation, and (5) consciousness, the clinging-aggregates are the activities and functions that engender the sense of 'me' and 'mine' (Thanissaro, 2001b; Thanissaro, 2002). Emphasizing the dynamic nature of these activities, Thanissaro describes the five clinging-aggregates as follows:

Form -- which covers physical phenomena of all sorts, both within and without the body -- wears down or "de-forms." Feeling feels pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain. [Apperception] labels or identifies objects. Consciousness cognizes the six senses (counting the intellect as the sixth) along with their objects. Of the five *khandhās*, fabrication is the most complex...It includes a wide variety of activities such as attention, evaluation, and all the active processes of the mind. It is also the most fundamental *khandhā*, for its intentional activity underlies the experience of form, feeling, etc. in the present moment (2002a).

It is the inability to see the aggregates as dynamic processes instead of a unity that gives the impression of an experiencer behind experience itself. Although they appear to take the shape of a static, unchanging entity, the clinging-aggregates themselves are just another aspect of conditioned existence -- inconstant and insubstantial.

***Dependent origination.*** Together the clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*) and dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) constitute experience. What one typically takes to be oneself is actually comprised of the instantaneous and nearly imperceptible densification of activities and

functions; that is, the clinging-aggregates. Moment by moment, it is the twelve-link chain of dependent origination that enables the birth of the ‘person’ comprised of the aggregates. In other words, one’s experiential sense of self is predicated on a specific set of causes and conditions -- dependent origination.

Dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) is the teaching that: “This being, that exists; through the arising of this that arises. This not being, that does not exist; through the ceasing of this that ceases” (Bodhi, 1995). It is comprised of twelve links, with each link conditioning the next in an endless cycle of rebirth: (1) ignorance; (2) fabrications; (3) consciousness; (4) name-and-form; (5) six sense spheres; (6) contact; (7) feeling; (8) craving; (9) clinging/sustenance; (10) becoming; (11) birth; (12) aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress and despair (Thanissaro, 1997g). Here, ignorance of the four noble truths leads to one’s involvement in all kinds of actions at the levels of body, speech, and mind -- motivated by some combination of wholesome and unwholesome mental factors. The karmic force of these actions gives rise to consciousness, which is like the sprouting of the seed of the previous link, fabrications. From consciousness arises name-and-form, including the body-mind: thus all elements of matter plus the factors of mind. Name-and-form enables the arising of the six sense spheres consisting of the six sense organs with their associated sense consciousness. Through the convergence of the six sense spheres and their appropriate objects, contact takes place. In response to contact, feeling -- pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral -- occurs. From feeling arises craving; one yearns to achieve lasting happiness through the fulfillment of the six sense spheres, continually reifying oneself through greed (desire for what is pleasant), anger (hatred for what is unpleasant), and delusion. This in turn gives rise to clinging/sustenance: the fuel for further becoming. As a result of the continual actions of becoming, there is birth. Because of birth, there is aging and death along with concomitant experiences of sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress and despair. Together these

links seem to congeal into a cohesive experience structure; this is what one encounters under ordinary circumstances. However, what this analysis of dependent origination makes clear is that what seems like a fixed reality is actually a highly dynamic process unfolding moment by moment.

*A world compounded of unstable and unreliable conditions.* Whether viewed through the lens of the aggregates (*khandhās*) or dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), reality is a river. It flows. In fact, Watts (2011) contends,

You cannot understand life and its mysteries as long as you try to grasp it. Indeed, you cannot grasp it, just as you cannot walk off with a river in a bucket. If you try to capture running water in a bucket, it is clear that you do not understand it and that you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket the water does not run. To ‘have’ running water you must let go of it and let it run.

Craving (*taṇhā*) is the force that compels one to try to capture running water in a bucket. In the end, it is an overwhelmingly futile pursuit: the conditioned processes that converge to produce reality cannot be stilled.

Because one’s satiety depends upon an ever-shifting constellation of causes and conditions, one’s thirst can never be fully satisfied. Nevertheless, one persists in one’s vain attempt to establish lasting happiness in “a world [including oneself] compounded of unstable and unreliable conditions, a world in which pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering, are in all sorts of ways bound up together” (Gethin, 1998, p. 61). Arising in dependence upon feeling, *taṇhā* (‘craving’) elicits the compulsive and often desperate effort to prolong the enjoyment of that which is pleasant while putting an end to that which is unpleasant. Craving is the factor that underlies all *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’). Gethin (1998) writes,

Since any pleasant experience, whatever its basis, is ultimately unreliable and subject to loss, if we rest our hopes of final happiness on it we are bound to be disappointed...When we are enjoying something, or even when there is nothing that is causing us particular unhappiness, things are always liable to change: what we were enjoying may be removed from us or something unpleasant may manifest itself...The world becomes a place of uncertainty in which we can never be sure what is going to happen next, a place of shifting and unstable conditions (p. 61).

A pleasant experience cannot last forever because the reality it is embedded in is in constant flux -- an endless cycle of birth and death. *Taṇhā* conceals this, obscuring the moving parts of the process to which it belongs. Yet it is a key link in the moment to moment unfolding of experience. In its role as the eighth link in the chain of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), it is almost exclusively responsible for the arising of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'). "In one who keeps focusing on the allure of clingable phenomena," the Buddha explains,

craving develops. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origin of this entire mass of suffering & stress. Just as if a great mass of fire of ten, twenty, thirty, or forty cartloads of timber were burning, and into it a man would time & again throw dried grass, dried cow dung, & dried timber, so that the great mass of fire -- thus nourished, thus sustained -- would burn for a long, long time (Thanissaro, 1998b).

In response to changing conditions, craving (*taṇhā*) triggers a search for fulfillment through the sense spheres, becoming, and non-becoming. Craving enables the sticking together of the five aggregates (*khandhās*), yielding what feels like a unitary entity laying claim to experience as ‘me, mine, and myself’, on whose behalf burn the fires of greed, anger, and delusion. This provides fuel for the fire of *dukkha*. It is for this reason that the Buddha states:

From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging, illness & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering & stress.

Denied its fuel, the fire goes out.

#### **According to Patañjali.**

*A case of mistaken identity.* While the Buddha suggests that *taṇhā* (‘craving’) is behind ‘this entire mass of suffering and stress’, Patañjali argues otherwise, situating *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) within the broader context of *puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) and *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’). According to Patañjali, the wise see *dukkha* in all experience. The unwise, however, “mistake that which is impermanent, impure, distressing, or empty of self for permanence, purity, happiness, and self” (YS 2.5; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 22). That is to say, the latter mistake *prakṛti* for *puruṣa*. Patañjali reveals that the inborn conflation (*saṃyoga*) of the two is the source of *dukkha*.

In accord with the *Sāṃkhya* (‘enumeration’) metaphysics, Patañjali suggests that reality consists of two fundamental aspects: *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. According to this system of analysis *puruṣa* is the ‘knower’ -- or perhaps more accurately, identity-free ‘knowing’ itself -- that is aware the realm of *prakṛti*, the ‘known’. In other words, *puruṣa* is the pure awareness that ‘sees’

*prakṛti*, the phenomenal world. The two remain separate. However, under ordinary circumstances one fails to see this distinction, mistaking the one for the other.

**Puruṣa.** *Puruṣa* ('pure awareness') can be a difficult concept to grasp. This is because it is not a concept at all. In fact, "lying beyond the reach of the mind and its insistence on location, temporality, and attributes," 'it' exists far beyond the reach of ratiocination alone, ultimately defying logic and language altogether" (Hartranft, 2010, p. 6). Pure awareness possesses no locus in space, no mass or movement, no temporality, and no features; transcending all worldly orientation, it is simply the witnessing of *prakṛti*.

**Prakṛti.** *Puruṣa's* ('pure awareness') counterpart, the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*), encapsulates the entirety of worldly existence, including one's empirical sense of self. Patañjali explains, "What awareness regards, namely the phenomenal world, embodies the qualities of luminosity, activity, and inertia; it includes oneself, composed of both elements and the senses; and it is the ground for both sensual experience and liberation" (YS 2.18; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). *Prakṛti* encompasses all aspects of experience; subtle and gross. In addition to discrete objects and mental content, it even extends to one's experience of being the experiencer behind the experience. The composite of sensing (*manas*), thinking (*buddhi*), and selfing (*ahaṃkāra*), *citta*, consciousness, believes it is separate from experience. Yet, the consciousness that one identifies with is as insubstantial as the rest of worldly existence. Comprised of the tripartite flux of *sattva* ('luminosity', 'brilliance'), *rajas* ('activity'), and *tamas* ('fixity', 'inertia'), the phenomenal world is constantly changing. This change penetrates all layers of reality, including consciousness. Thus, to identify with consciousness is to identify with a process that by nature cannot yield any sense of lasting happiness.

**Citta.** Under ordinary circumstances, *citta* ('consciousness') is never still. In fact, it is constantly repatterning itself. Implying an experiencer who lays claim to experience, the endless



‘turnings’ of consciousness (*citta-vṛtti*) reinforce one’s identification with the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*). As a result, each new pattern of consciousness is referenced back to an afflicted identity rooted in the changing realm of *prakṛti*.

For all its whirling, *citta* (‘consciousness’), like the rest of the phenomenal world, is insentient. Despite its compelling pageantry, it remains unaware and just as insubstantial as the rest of worldly existence, in the same way a television cannot watch its own programs. What is unique about consciousness is its ‘proximity’ to pure awareness (*puruṣa*). Because a predominance of *sattva* (‘luminosity’, ‘brilliance’) is found at the finest level of consciousness, its luminosity seems to be the locus of awareness -- a case of mistaken identity. This gives rise to a false sense of autonomy apparently derived from *citta*, the most compelling evolute of the phenomenal world. This is how one’s true identity -- pure awareness -- is veiled by the changing tides of consciousness.

***Samyoga.*** Patañjali writes, “Pure awareness is just seeing itself; although pure, it usually appears to operate through the perceiving mind” (YS 2.20; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). One’s true identity -- pure awareness -- is at all times separate from the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*). *Puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) is beyond worldly existence, completely unaffected by the flux of the phenomenal world; ‘it’ is already free. However, beguiled by the patterning of consciousness (*citta-vṛtti*) one has no easy way to discern this intrinsic freedom. In fact, obscured by the veil of empirical selfhood, *puruṣa* is generally unknowable. At this point “*puruṣa* ‘as if’ conforms to an identity extrinsic to itself and takes on the appearance of a changing, finite, psychophysical being, rather than abiding in its true nature as pure [awareness]” (Whicher, 1998, p. 120). This tragic misidentification continually yields *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’).

***Avidyā.*** Patañjali states, “It is by virtue of the apparent indivisibility of [pure awareness] and the phenomenal world that the latter seems to possess the former’s powers” (YS 2.23). He

goes on to suggest, “Not seeing things as they are is the cause of this phenomenon (YS 2.24; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). *Avidyā*, not seeing, is a congenital blindness to the infinite separateness of *puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) and *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’). “Not seeing things as they are,” Patañjali contends, “is the field where the other causes of suffering germinate, whether dormant, activated, intercepted, or weakened (YS 2.5; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 22). *Avidyā* gives rise to four additional causes (*kleśas*) of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress (*dukkha*): the sense of ‘I’, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. Unable to see the distinction between pure awareness and the phenomenal world, one situates one’s identity within the limited context of consciousness (*citta*). Laying claim to experience in this way, one is tossed about in a maelstrom of changing causes and conditions as the force-constituents of the phenomenal world continually vie for ascendancy. The ‘owner’ of experience -- the sense of ‘I’ -- lusts after what is pleasant and resists what is unpleasant; in this way one finds oneself habitually enslaved by a set of conditioned reactions. By continually responding to changing causes and conditions with either attachment or aversion, one unconsciously reifies one’s empirical sense of self. Willing to preserve this false sense of ‘I’ at any cost, one desperately clings to life, further reinforcing one’s misidentification with *citta*.

***Karma.*** Together the *kleśas* (‘causes’) give rise to action (*karma*) founded on the mistaken belief that one’s identity belongs to the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*). Based on a tragically misinformed identity, these actions yield *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’). Patañjali suggests, “The causes of suffering are the root source of actions; each action deposits latent impressions deep in the mind, to be activated and experienced later in this birth or to lie hidden awaiting a future one” (YS 2.12; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 25). He continues, “So long as this root source exists, its contents will ripen into a birth, a life, and experience [YS 2.13]. This life will be marked by delight or anguish, in proportion to those good or bad actions that created

its store of latent impressions [YS 2.14]” (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 25). The root source of action, the *kleśas* yield birth, life, and experience. Unfolding according to the caliber of one’s actions, the experience birthed by the *kleśas* manifests relative to the quality of the actions that comprise one’s store of latent impressions (*saṃskāras*). Because actions are almost always operating under a cloud of *avidyā* (‘ignorance’), their latent impressions ripen into one of the four corollary causes of unsatisfactoriness: the sense of ‘I’, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. *Dukkha* is thus built into a circular cycle of cause and effect in which action begets impression begets action, ad infinitum.

***Mistaking the transient for the immutable.*** Patañjali contends, “The preventable cause of all this suffering is the apparent indivisibility of pure awareness and what it regards” (YS 2.17; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 26). Together the *kleśas* (‘causes’) perpetuate *saṃyoga*, the inborn conflation of *puruṣa* (pure awareness) and *prakṛti* (the phenomenal world). Although one’s true identity remains immutable, one misguidedly identifies with a transient world in which no lasting happiness can be found. Not seeing, the sense of ‘I’, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life continually reify one’s empirical sense of self. Actions (*karma*) issuing forth from this tragically misinformed sense of self further manifest *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) through the unfolding of experience embedded in a circular cycle of cause and effect in which actions (*karma*) and impressions (*saṃskāras*) endlessly condition one another. Whicher (1998) concludes, “What we call worldly existence including our ordinary human identity is due to the conjunction (*saṃyoga*) between the "seer" (*puruṣa*) and the "seeable" (*prakṛti*). That conjunction, which is the cause of suffering and dissatisfaction, is to be undermined through yogic praxis until the *puruṣa* shines forth in its original and untainted glory” (p. 78). It is only by cultivating uninterrupted discrimination between pure awareness and the phenomenal world that

one can realize the infinite separateness of the two: ‘retrieving’ one’s true identity and liberating oneself from the empirical-self-imposed bondage of *saṃyoga*.

### **Dukkha in Context**

Both the Buddha and Patañjali recognize that *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) permeates the totality of conditioned existence. Because experience is dependent upon a shifting matrix of causes and conditions, nothing lasts. In fact, the entirety of one’s experience -- including oneself -- is as ephemeral as mist in the morning sun. In this context, lasting happiness is nothing more than an elusive ideal. Yet one foolishly persists in one’s desperate and futile attempt to locate the changeless in what is constantly changing.

Both the Buddha and Patañjali acknowledge the ubiquity of *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’); yet they situate this understanding within the larger framework of their respective systems of metaphysics. Suffering is thus understood within the overall context of each tradition. When appropriated accordingly, *dukkha* takes on the unique shape of the tradition to which it belongs. The Buddha situates *dukkha* within the context of the twelve-link chain of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), together with the five clinging-aggregates (*khandhās*). Patañjali situates *dukkha* within the context of the *Sāṃkhya* enumeration of reality, emphasizing the division between *puruṣa* (‘pure awareness’) and *prakṛti* (‘the phenomenal world’). For this reason, the same predicament -- human suffering -- confronted by both traditions is attributed to different sources. According to the Buddhadharma, *taṇhā* (‘craving’) -- the eighth link in the chain of dependent origination -- is the underlying cause to be addressed. According to Pātañjala-yoga, it is *saṃyoga* (the inborn conflation of *puruṣa* and the *prakṛti*). Thus, the Buddha’s solution to all this is to pull up craving along with its root -- relinquishing the compulsive need to make experience conform to craving -- while Patañjali’s solution is to

overcome the inborn conflation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* -- realizing that pure awareness remains untouched by the tripartite flux of worldly existence.

### **The Way to Liberation: The Practical Yoga Methodologies of the Buddha and Patañjali**

Despite attributing *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') to different sources, both the Buddha and Patañjali insist that it must be overcome. In fact, liberation is the chief concern shared by the two; both the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga exclusively address the predicament of human suffering. To this end, each tradition offers its own solution. Drawing upon the popular ideas and technologies of the time, both traditions turn to meditative yoga to achieve this goal. For this reason, although they craft their practices in accordance with their own unique perspectives, the practical yoga methodologies developed by the Buddha and Patañjali share the same overall trajectory, with the two traditions emphasizing almost identical progressions from an existence mired in *dukkha* and its causes to the attainment of complete freedom.

**Emergence.** Alignment is a fundamental aspect of meditative yoga: one achieves radical stillness of mind by yoking or connecting to an object or field. This sustained alignment is understood as *samādhi*, the cohering of concentration, which coheres in the same way light does to form a laser. One orients the mind to a single point or object and observes at a single frequency the rate of arising and passing away. When attention is no longer fluctuating, the subtle arising and passing away of its contents can be seen. One is able to direct attention toward the inception of experience, the dissolution of experience, and both the inception and dissolution of experience.

The process of 'knowing and seeing how things have arisen' (*yatha-bhuta nāṇa-dassanaṃ*) is shared by both traditions: exposing the seemingly continuous flow of reality as a cascade of distinct momentary events. By attending to the features of emergence -- arising,

passing away, or arising and passing away -- one is able to see both *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') and its proximate causes. This liberating insight makes it possible for one to see these causes without having to react. Whether one later conceptualizes it as having let go of craving (*taṇhā*) or having transcended the apparent bondage of *saṃyoga* (the inborn conflation of *puruṣa* and '*prakṛti*'), one achieves liberation. This is the culmination of the practice of meditative yoga, wherein one witnesses the flowering of a momentary experience.

**Right View.** When undertaking the practice of meditative yoga, one begins with a conceptual understanding of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'). One realizes that because experience is inconstant and insubstantial, it is also unsatisfactory. That is to say, one realizes that any attempt to locate lasting happiness in a fleeting world must ultimately fail. Although one understands this conceptually, one does not yet recognize *dukkha* in every conditioned experience. It is an abstract idea as opposed to a direct experience. Nevertheless, one can begin to systematically address the underlying causes and conditions responsible for perpetuating suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress. The Buddha calls this 'right view' and it is the first step of the noble eightfold path. In this context, specifically, it is the understanding of the four noble truths: *dukkha*, its cause, cessation (*nirodha*), and the way leading to its cessation (Thanissaro, 1993b). Patañjali does not assign a limb to this particular understanding, but instead builds it into the entire structure of the eight limbs of yoga. Throughout the *Yoga-Sūtra*, Patañjali, like the Buddha, describes suffering, identifies its cause, illustrates its cessation, and defines the way leading to its cessation.

**Orienting consciousness.** Bodhi (1999) points out:

Emotional predilections influence views, and views determine predilections. Thus a penetrating view of the nature of existence, gained through deep reflection and

validated through investigation, brings with it a restructuring of values which sets the mind moving towards goals commensurate with the new vision.

When applied at both the personal and collective levels, knowledge of the four noble truths inspires desirelessness, friendliness, and compassion. This is right intention, the second step of the noble eightfold path. One aspires to abandon craving (*taṇhā*) while at the same time extending the sincere wish for all to be content, peaceful and free from suffering (*dukkha*). Right intention is the bridge between one's views and one's actions. This is because "the mind's intentional function forms the crucial link connecting our cognitive perspective with our modes of active engagement in the world" (Bodhi, 1999). Like right view, right intention is not granted its own limb in Pātañjala-yoga. However, in *sūtra* 1.33 Patañjali writes: "Consciousness settles as one radiates friendliness, compassion, delight, and equanimity toward all things, whether pleasant or painful, good or bad" (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 13). Both the Buddha and Patañjali highlight the importance of friendliness, compassion, and desirelessness, which is tantamount to equanimity. By cultivating these qualities one ensures that one's volitional actions orient consciousness to cessation (*nirodha*) by aligning one's 'modes of active engagement in the world' with one's understanding of *dukkha* along with its causes and conditions.

**Moral discipline.** Systematically aligning one's volitional actions with one's understanding of *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') involves a process of gradual interiorization, beginning with one's relationship to the world. Steps three through five of the noble eightfold path -- right speech, right action, and right livelihood -- are chiefly concerned with the development of one's moral character. The same holds true for the first of the eight limbs of yoga -- the external disciplines. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are the pillars upon which the possibility of insight rests. In fact, the Buddha suggests that it is only when one's "virtue is well purified and [one's] view is straight, based upon virtue, established

upon virtue” that one may begin to refine one’s concentration (Bodhi, 2000). Whicher (1998) -- referencing Pātañjala-yoga -- writes, “Without the cultivation of higher virtues, one-pointedness or concentration of mind cannot be sustained leaving one unprepared to undergo further refining processes of purification and illumination and the arising of discriminative discernment” (p. 192).

*The good become wise.* To both the Buddha and Patañjali, moral discipline is a vital precursor to mental purification. For one to be wise, one must first be good. In other words, if one is to achieve the one-pointedness that leads to liberating insight, one must first root out all the thoughts, words, and deeds that engender suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress. Whicher (1998) explains,

In yoga the social dimension involving our emotive and ethical natures is seen in the background and attitudes of the [yogi] and includes an interpersonal context. The cultivation of positive, virtuous attitudes such as friendliness, compassion, and nonviolence imply a gradual eradication of other attitudes that are the companions of a disturbed state of mind enveloped in affliction (p. 191).

Whether upholding the values of right speech, right action, and right livelihood or the external disciplines, one is purposefully choosing to act with integrity. One no longer engages in behavior that propagates suffering either for oneself or others. This behavior is both altruistic and practical; the cultivation of virtue is mutually beneficial to both oneself and the world. Whicher (1998) writes,

Cultivating the moral attributes in yoga, one develops a transformed personality in which one’s *sattvic* [‘luminous’] nature has increased resulting in a greater propensity toward purer, nonafflicted, and nonselfish attitudes and activity. One generates morally and cognitively purer virtues, including responsible, nonharmful, and creative



mental activities that replace the more afflicted or painful and stagnated types of [mental activities]. Due to its destructive and delusive nature, identification with the afflicted [states of mind] conceals or frustrates the potential within human nature for an enriched cognitive and moral development, individually and collectively (p. 187).

Not only in the context of Pātañjala-yoga, but also in the context of the Buddhadharma, the development of moral discipline leads not only to the betterment of society, but also to the betterment of the individual, furthering one's spiritual development while improving the state of the world.

***Moral discipline in practice.*** The Buddha and Patañjali offer nearly identical descriptions of moral discipline. The Buddha's articulations of right speech, right action, and right livelihood correspond to the external disciplines of Pātañjala-yoga, consisting of not harming (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), and not being acquisitive (*aparigrahā*). Right speech, for example, in its most basic form, is comprised of four parts: (1) refraining from false speech; (2) refraining from divisive speech; (3) refraining from hurtful speech; and (4) refraining from idle chatter. Elements of right speech can be seen in the external disciplines truthfulness and not harming, with refraining from false speech corresponding to the former, refraining from divisive and hurtful speech corresponding to the latter, and refraining from idle chatter corresponding to both. Comprised of three restraints -- (1) refraining from harming living beings; (2) refraining from taking what is not given; and (3) refraining from sexual misconduct -- right action also closely parallels the external disciplines. Specifically, refraining from harming living beings parallels not harming, refraining from taking what is not given parallels both not being acquisitive and not stealing, and refraining from sexual misconduct parallels celibacy. Because it is based on right speech and right action, right livelihood closely aligns with all five of the external disciplines of Pātañjala-yoga.

**The internal disciplines and the noble eightfold path.** Unlike their external counterparts, the internal disciplines described by Patañjali find more of an indirect expression through the noble eightfold path. Consisting of purification (*śauca*), contentment (*santoṣa*), intense discipline (*tapas*), self-study (*svādhyāya*), and dedication to the ideal of pure awareness (*īśvara-praṇidhānā*), the internal disciplines foster the cultivation of an inner environment conducive to the pursuit of freedom from suffering (*dukkha*). Like right intention, dedication to the ideal of pure awareness ensures that one orients one's volitional actions to cessation (*nirodha*). To this end, intense discipline enables one to cultivate and maintain the energy necessary to engage in self-study, that is, it enables one to apply the wisdom of the eight limbs directly to one's life. To both Patañjali and the Buddha, insight cannot be achieved through ratiocination alone; it must be realized directly. Intense discipline and self-study emphasize this point and prevent one from merely intellectualizing the teachings and getting caught in what the Buddha calls a 'wilderness of views' (Thanissaro, 1997h). Together with intense discipline and self-study, purification most closely aligns with the sixth step of the Buddha's noble eightfold path: right effort. Extending "both to the corporeal sphere of proper diet and cleanliness, on the one hand, and to mental purity cultivated by replacing the unwholesome with the wholesome," purification makes it possible for one to achieve states of deep concentration (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 35). As both the Buddha and Patañjali make clear, this is important because it is the cultivation of the wholesome that makes liberation possible. Purifying one's body-mind is part of applying the wisdom of the eight limbs to one's life, wherein one systematically replaces what is unwholesome with what is wholesome. The Buddha articulates this through his description of right effort, which has a fourfold aim: (1) the prevention of unarisen unwholesome states; (2) the abandoning of arisen unwholesome states; (3) the arousing of unarisen wholesome states; and (4) the development of arisen wholesome states. Arising in concurrence with the cultivation of what

is wholesome is the experience of genuine contentment as one increasingly lets go of what is inconstant and insubstantial.

**Wholesome and unwholesome.** Both the Buddha and Patañjali agree that the wholesome must replace the unwholesome if one is to achieve liberation. Patañjali acknowledges,

We ourselves may act upon unwholesome thoughts, such as wanting to harm someone, or we may cause or condone them in others; unwholesome thoughts may arise from greed, anger, or delusion; they may be mild, moderate, or extreme; but they never cease to ripen into ignorance and suffering. This is why one must cultivate wholesome thoughts (YS 2.34; Hartranft, 2003b, p. 33).

Unwholesome thoughts, words, and deeds inevitably perpetuate *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress'). If one is to attain freedom from suffering, it follows that one must purposefully cultivate what is wholesome; that is, one must purposefully cultivate that which brings one's volitional actions into concert with one's understanding of *dukkha* and its causes as well as the way leading to its cessation (*nirodha*). Within and without, the cultivation of what is wholesome allows one to foster the environmental conditions necessary to transform consciousness. By systematically replacing what is unwholesome with what is wholesome, one progressively orients both the social and personal spheres of one's life to the highest goal of salvation -- freedom from *dukkha*. Although the Buddha's noble eightfold path and Pātañjali's eight limbs of yoga emphasize different aspects of this process, both traditions intend for one to cultivate what is wholesome in place of what is unwholesome by thinking, speaking, and acting in a way that is conducive to liberation; that is, in a way that prepares one to achieve progressively deeper states of concentration, so that one can witness the inception of experience.

Unwholesome causes and conditions generate *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness' 'stress') while wholesome causes and conditions yield freedom. Both the Buddha and Patañjali

recognize this. Thus, their respective practices of meditative yoga systematically address *dukkha*'s unwholesome roots. In place of what is unwholesome, one deliberately cultivates what is wholesome, that is, one deliberately cultivates that which enlarges one's understanding of *dukkha*, its cause, cessation (*nirodha*), and the way leading to its cessation. In an unfolding process of interiorization, one gradually replaces the unwholesome with the wholesome. Even at the conceptual level, knowledge of *dukkha* inspires one to take action by fostering the causes and conditions that result in cessation. The first two steps of the noble eightfold path -- right view and right intention -- highlight this important point in the same way the structure of the eight limbs of yoga does. Taking action by thinking, speaking, and acting in a wholesome way -- either by practicing the Buddha's right speech, right action, right livelihood, and right effort or Patañjali's external and internal disciplines -- brings one closer to salvation.

**Turning inward through the practice of meditative yoga.** Having cultivated a foundation of wholesome thoughts, words, and deeds, one is able to begin focusing one's efforts on purifying the mind, orienting even the most interiorized aspects of one's experience to cessation (*nirodha*). One begins by arranging oneself in a physical posture that allows one to maintain composure as one steadily refines one's concentration. Patañjali highlights this as the third limb of yoga, which he calls 'sitting posture'. Sitting effortlessly, one is able to direct one's attention to the breath. This is breath elongation, the fourth limb of yoga. Breath elongation involves the sustained observation and relaxation of all aspects of breathing. The Buddha, like Patañjali, emphasizes body and breath:

There is the case where a monk -- having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building -- sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out (Thanissaro, 2000a).

The Buddha continues,

"Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

This is right mindfulness, the seventh step of the noble eightfold path. In addition to contemplation of the body and breath, right mindfulness includes contemplation of feeling and contemplation of dharma. However, of these four spheres of objective contemplation, Thanissaro (2000a) singles out the breath as the most important. He writes,

At first glance, the four frames of reference for *satipaṭṭhāna* [mindfulness] practice sound like four different meditation exercises, but...they can all center on a single practice: keeping the breath in mind. When the mind is with the breath, all four frames of reference are right there. The difference lies simply in the subtlety of one's focus. It's like learning to play the piano. As you get more proficient at playing, you also become sensitive in listening to ever more subtle levels in the music. This allows you to play even more skillfully. In the same way, as a meditator gets more skilled in staying with the breath, the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* gives greater sensitivity in peeling away ever more subtle layers of participation in the present moment until nothing is left standing in the way of total release (Thanissaro, 2000a).

Both Patañjali's sitting posture and breath elongation and the Buddha's right mindfulness orient the mind to *samādhi* ('the cohering of concentration'). In fact, Bodhi (1999) contends, "...the primary chore of mindfulness is to keep the mind on the object, free from straying.

Mindfulness serves as the guard charged with the responsibility of making sure that the mind does not slip away from the object to lose itself in random undirected thoughts.” The simple act of sitting and attending to the breath makes the attainment of states of deep concentration possible. Hartranft (2003b) writes,

Once body-mind stillness has deepened sufficiently, Patañjali observes, an unprecedented fixity of attention becomes possible. This is because steady observation of the body sitting and breathing is itself powerfully concentrative, and one of its primary effects is to reveal the stunning distractibility afflicting the usual modes of consciousness (p. 46).

Dwelling in the body as it sits and breathes, one turns one’s attention inward, bringing about what Patañjali calls ‘withdrawal of the senses’, the fifth limb of yoga. When this occurs, “the senses no longer pull one’s attention to distracting sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or contacts; [the mind] can stay with internal experience, even in regard to an external object, and begin to see it more accurately” (Hartranft, 2003b, p. 42). No longer compelled to unconsciously react to external stimuli, one is able to sharpen one’s focus to the point where one is able to discern the qualities of objects with impeccable precision, gradually bringing their fundamental characteristics to light. “Consciousness,” Hartranft (2003b) suggests, “begins to grow calmer and more refined in its perception, and capable of noticing the ordinarily invisible movements of consciousness itself” (p. 13). As one continues to practice, attention gradually shifts from the qualities of the objects to the process of objective contemplation itself.

***One-pointedness.*** With the mind composed and collected, one can now begin cultivating the states of deep concentration necessary to bring about salvation through penetrating insight. Through the Buddha’s practice of right concentration and Patañjali’s practice of *samyama* -- the ‘perfect discipline’ of concentration, meditative absorption, and collectedness -- one is able to

still the mind by unifying it with unprecedented focus on an object of contemplation. Bodhi (1999) explains,

The mind untrained in concentration moves in a scattered manner which the Buddha compares to the flapping about of a fish taken from the water and thrown onto dry land. It cannot stay fixed but rushes from idea to idea, from thought to thought, without inner control. Such a distracted mind is also a deluded mind. Overwhelmed by worries and concerns....it sees things only in fragments, distorted by the ripples of random thoughts. But the mind that has been trained in concentration, in contrast, can remain focused on its object without distraction. This freedom from distraction further induces a softness and serenity which make the mind an effective instrument for penetration. Like a lake unruffled by any breeze, the concentrated mind is a faithful reflector that mirrors whatever is placed before it exactly as it is.

To both the Buddha and Patañjali, the development of concentration yields one-pointedness, wherein the perceptual flow of one's mind is unified with the object of contemplation. In fact, Hartranft (2003b) writes, "One-pointedness is the channel to [collectedness], involving both concentration [*dhāraṇā*], which locks on to a field, and absorption [*dhyāna*], as only mental formations related to the object now arise" (p.49). With diligent practice, one-pointedness steadily intensifies to the point where the mind is completely reflective of its contemplative object: subject, object, and perceiving coalesce.

***Stages of concentration.*** Progressively expressing a deeper and clearer understanding of oneself and the world, concentration, for both the Buddha and Patañjali, develops in stages, as one attains increasingly subtle levels of insight. The Buddha's right concentration, for example, consists of the practice of the four *jhānas* ('absorptions'). Moving through these four stages of absorption, one systematically cultivates and discards specific mental factors: initial application

of mind (*vitakka*); sustained application of mind (*vicāra*), rapture (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*), and one-pointedness (*ekaggata*) (Cousins, 1992, pp. 151-153; Bodhi, 1999; Thanissaro, 1997j).

Patañjali's practice of *saṃyama* -- the last three limbs of yoga -- follows a similar progression; in this context, one cultivates and gradually discards analysis (*vitarka*), evaluation (*vicāra*), bliss (*ānanda*), and selfing (*asmitā*) (Cousins, 1992, pp. 148-151; Hartranft, 2017b).

For both the Buddha and Patañjali, the development of concentration follows a similar trajectory. In each case one begins with directed thought and progresses to complete absorption. Present in both the practice of the four *jhānas* and the perfect discipline of consciousness (*saṃyama*), *vitakka* ('initial application of mind') and *vicāra* ('sustained application of mind') are like a bird taking flight; *vitakka* is the bird as it initially strives to take flight and *vicāra* is the bird as it spreads its wings, sustaining its flight. Cousins (1992) writes, "[When] strongly developed, [*vitakka*] is the ability to apply the mind to something and to fix it upon a (meditative) object. [When] highly developed [*vicāra*] is the ability to explore and examine an object" (p. 153). One thus begins the practice of concentrative absorption by way of directed thought and examination. This naturally gives rise to feelings of ecstasy. The Buddha describes this as rapture (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*). Patañjali describes it as bliss (*ānanda*). In both cases, one experiences intense pleasure throughout the entire body-mind. As concentration deepens, the exuberance of this pleasure matures and it begins to soften into a subtle yet profound sense of contentment. Eventually the mind becomes so concentrated that only one-pointedness remains (*ekaggata*); one is completely immersed in one's object of contemplation. According to Patañjali, at this point, one can now begin to see into the complexities of 'selfing' (*asmitā*). Witnessing the unfolding of the subtlest aspects of *prakṛti* attenuates any remaining attachment to one's empirical sense of self.



***The union of subject, object, and perceiving.*** Whicher (1998) explains, “Prior to *samādhi* [collectedness] the mind received the impressions of the objects through the senses and imposed its own habit patterns...upon the objects. In *samādhi* the mind progressively acts as the arena or medium through which there is no subjective or egoic center of consciousness that can introduce any distortion of the object” (p. 194). He continues, “Thus, the insight (*prajñā*) obtained in...*samādhi* is not a mental projection, is not a self-referenced, indulgent (i.e., emotive, affective, wishful/imaginative, cognitive) projection onto the object. It is not individual (i.e., "my") knowledge, nor is it subjective. It refers wholly and exclusively to the object” (Whicher, 1998, p. 195). Having achieved this level of absorption, the subject-object dichotomy no longer comes into play. In fact, this state of absorption has entirely transcended self-reflective mental activity, moving one into the realm of tacit realization. Liberating insight cannot be manufactured by the thinking mind; it must be realized directly. Because it yields clear insight into the object before it is obscured by conceptualization the ‘centripetalization’ of consciousness is what makes liberation possible.

**Insight yields liberation.** Whicher (1998) clarifies: “Contemplation on and unification with the objects of experience is not for its own sake but provides insight (*prajñā*) that leads to liberation” (p. 204). The culmination of meditative yoga is not the cohering of concentration (*samādhi*), but the dawning of wisdom (i.e., penetrating insight leading to liberation). “Wisdom,” Bodhi (1999) writes, “is the primary tool for deliverance, but the penetrating vision it yields can only open up when the mind has been composed and collected.” One has achieved a great feat of concentration and possibly developed supranormal powers<sup>5</sup> as a result, but the chief concern of the practice remains as one-pointed as the concentration it fosters. For both the Buddha and

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<sup>5</sup> See Thanissaro 1997: the *Samaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of the Contemplative Life*. See also: chapter 2 of the *Yoga-Sūtra*.

Patañjali, the practice of meditative yoga has only one purpose: to make possible the human attainment of freedom from suffering (*dukkha*).

Insight is made possible by the ‘centripetalization’ of consciousness. Bodhi (1999) claims,

The attainment of concentration makes the mind still and steady, unifies its concomitants, opens vast vistas of bliss, serenity, and power. But by itself it does not suffice to reach the highest accomplishment, release from the bonds of suffering. To reach the end of suffering demands that the [noble eightfold path] be turned into an instrument of discovery, that it be used to generate the insights unveiling the ultimate truth of things.

The possibility of wisdom may rest upon one-pointedness, but one-pointedness itself requires the full mobilization of the practical framework it is built into. Just as *dukkha* (‘suffering’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘stress’) arises in dependence upon certain causes and conditions, liberating insight arises through the cohering of concentration (*samadhi*). Both right concentration and *sam̐yama* (‘the perfect discipline of consciousness’) require a virtuous foundation; thought, word, and deed must be thoroughly oriented to the cessation of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress (*dukkha*). Wisdom is thus the result of refined concentration together with the wise and ethical framework to which it belongs.

The human attainment of freedom from suffering is the culmination of a set of purposefully cultivated causes and conditions. The Buddha outlines these causes and conditions in the noble eightfold path: right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Patanjali outlines them in the eight limbs of yoga: external disciplines, internal disciplines, sitting posture, breath elongation, withdrawal of the senses, concentration, absorption, and collectedness. Through the practices of right

concentration and *saṃyama* (concentration, absorption, and collectedness) one harnesses the power of one-pointedness and directs it to the flowering of a momentary experience. At this point the Buddha's noble eightfold path comes full circle. Although one began with a conceptual understanding of the four noble truths, one now realizes these truths directly. Whether attaining liberating insight through the Buddha's noble eightfold path or Patañjali's eight limbs of yoga, one realizes that reality is inherently inconstant, insubstantial, and as a result, unsatisfactory. For the Buddha, this realization -- 'knowing and seeing how things have arisen' (*yatha-bhuta ñāṇa-dassanaṃ*) -- is enough; one recognizes that experience is *anicca* ('impermanence'), *dukkha* ('unsatisfactoriness'), and *anatta* ('not-self'). For Patañjali, this realization enables one to overcome misidentification through the 'retrieval' of one's true identity. One ceases to identify with the consciousness (*citta*) of a changing world (*prakṛti*) and instead sees that one is and always has been the immutable *puruṣa* ('pure awareness'). No matter how it is conceptualized, *dukkha* is overcome.

### Conclusion

Like twins separated at birth, the Buddhadharma and Pātañjala-yoga both concern themselves with the human attainment of freedom from *dukkha* ('suffering', 'unsatisfactoriness', 'stress') through the practice of meditative yoga, while at the same time situating their practical yoga methodologies within their dissimilar systems of metaphysics, resulting in divergent understandings of *dukkha* and substantially different rationales for practicing. The meditative roots of each tradition can be traced back to their shared mother: ancient India. Gestating in the same womb, the two grew up immersed in a thriving spiritual landscape at a time when innovation was at its peak. As spirituality and society shifted away from the complex and esoteric rituals of the elitist *brāhmaṇas* ('priests'), the 'inner sacrifice' pioneered by the renouncer (*saṃnyāsin*) counterculture grew in popularity. Like the sages (*munis*) before them,

the Buddha and Patañjali found themselves turning inward in response to the predicament of human suffering. To this end, the two augmented, modified, and refined the popular ideas, techniques, and technologies of the time; turning inward through the practice of meditative yoga, the two expose and systematically eradicate the causes and conditions that produce suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress. As a result of their divergent understandings of *dukkha*, however, these spiritual giants address two very different sets of causes and conditions, owing to their dissimilar metaphysics. The Buddha situates *dukkha* within the frameworks of dependent origination and the aggregates, insisting that craving -- the proximate cause of *dukkha* -- needs to be pulled up along with its root. Patañjali situates *dukkha* within the framework of *puruṣa* ('pure awareness') and *prakṛti* ('the phenomenal world'), insisting that the inborn conflation (*samyoga*) of the two must be overcome. Despite attributing *dukkha* to different sources, the two outline the way leading to its eradication in nearly identical ways. Both situate meditative yoga within an eight-part wise and ethical framework that orients one's thoughts, words, and deeds to the cessation (*nirodha*) of *dukkha*. The Buddha calls his framework the noble eightfold path, consisting of (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration. Patañjali calls his framework the eight limbs of yoga, consisting of (1) external disciplines, (2) internal disciplines, (3) sitting posture, (4) breath elongation, (5) withdrawal of the senses, (6) concentration, (7) absorption, and (8) collectedness. Both the noble eightfold path and the eight limbs of yoga make one-pointedness possible. With the mind oriented to a single point at a single frequency, one is able to witness the flowering of a momentary experience. Harnessing the power of concentration through the practices of right concentration and *samyama* (concentration, absorption, collectedness) leads to penetrating insight through which one can become aware of the subtle arising and passing away of what to the untrained mind congeals into an experience structure.

Although they attribute *dukkha* to different sources, both traditions address the predicament of human suffering through the practice of meditative yoga situated within a wise and ethical framework, culminating in realization leading to liberation.

**Glossary****Abhyāsa**

Sanskrit. practice

**Ahaṃkāra**

Sanskrit. selfing

**Ānanda**

Sanskrit. bliss

**Anatta**

Pali. not-self

**Anicca**

Pali. impermanence; change

**Āsana**

Sanskrit. sitting posture

**Asmitā**

Sanskrit. selfing

**Avidyā**

Sanskrit. not seeing; ignorance

**Buddhi**

Sanskrit. thinking

**Citta**

Sanskrit. consciousness, mind

**Citta-Vṛtti**

Sanskrit. patterning of consciousness; whirling; turning

**Dhāraṇā**

Sanskrit. concentration

### **Dharma**

Sanskrit. (Pali: dhamma) see f.n. 3

### **Dhyāna**

Sanskrit. (Pali: jhāna) meditative absorption

### **Dukkha**

Pali. (Sanskrit: duḥkha) suffering; unsatisfactoriness; stress

### **Ekaggata**

Pali. (Sanskrit: ekāgratā) one-pointedness

### **Guṇas**

Sanskrit. force-constituents; qualities

### **Īśvara-Praṇidhānā**

Sanskrit. dedication to the ideal of pure awareness

### **Jhāna**

Pali. (Sanskrit: dhyāna) meditative absorption

### **Kaivalya**

Sanskrit. aloneness of pure awareness

### **Karma**

Sanskrit. (Pali: kamma) action

### **Khandhā**

Pali. heap of fuel; aggregate

### **Kṣaṇa**

Sanskrit. briefest instant

### **Magga**

Pali. (Sanskrit: marga) path

**Manas**

Sanskrit. sensing

**Nibbāna**

Pali. (Sanskrit: nirvāṇa) extinguishing; unbinding

**Nidrā**

Sanskrit. sleep

**Nirodha**

Pali. (Sanskrit: nirodhaḥ) cessation

**Niyamas**

Sanskrit. internal disciplines

**Paññā**

Pali. (Sanskrit: prajñā) wisdom

**Paṭicca-Samuppāda**

Pali. dependent origination

**Pīti**

Pali. rapture

**Prakṛti**

Sanskrit. the phenomenal world; seen; known

**Pramaṇa**

Sanskrit. perception

**Prāṇāyāma**

Sanskrit. breath elongation

**Pratyāhāra**



Sanskrit. withdrawal of the senses

### **Puruṣa**

Sanskrit. pure awareness; seer; seeing; knower; knowing

### **Rajas**

Sanskrit. activity

### **Rūpa**

Pali. form

### **Samādhi**

Sanskrit. meditation, collectedness, cohering of concentration

### **Samskāra**

Sanskrit. (Pali: sankhāra) latent impression

### **Samudaya**

Pali. origin

### **Samyama**

Sanskrit. perfect discipline of consciousness; concentration, absorption, and collectedness

### **Samyoga**

Sanskrit. inborn conflation of pure awareness and the phenomenal world;

misidentification

### **Sankhāra**

Pali. (Sanskrit: saṃskāra) formation

### **Saññā**

Pali. apperception

### **Santoṣa**

Sanskrit. contentment

**Sattva**

Sanskrit. luminosity; brilliance

**Śauca**

Sanskrit. purity

**Sīla**

Pali. (Sanskrit: śīla) conduct

**Smṛti**

Sanskrit. (Pali: sati) memory; mindfulness

**Sukha**

Pali & Sanskrit. happiness

**Sūtra**

Sanskrit. thread

**Svādhyāya**

Sanskrit. self-study

**Tamas**

Sanskrit. fixity; inertia

**Taṇhā**

Pali. (Sanskrit: tṛṣṇa) thirst; craving

**Tanmātras**

Sanskrit. subtle sense properties

**Tapas**

Sanskrit. intense discipline

**Vairāgya**

Sanskrit. nonreaction

**Vedanā**

Pali. feeling

**Vicāra**

Pali & Sanskrit. sustained application of mind

**Vikalpa**

Sanskrit. conceptualization

**Viññāṇa**

Pali. consciousness

**Viparyaya**

Sanskrit. error; misperception

**Vitakka**

Pali. (Sanskrit: vitarka) initial application of mind

**Viveka**

Sanskrit. discrimination

**Vṛtti**

Sanskrit. patterning; whirling; turning

**Yamas**

Sanskrit. internal disciplines

**Yoga**

Sanskrit. yoke

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