

KLESHAS (afflictions of mind) according to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

Prepared according to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and article by Sarasvati Buhman: "Leaving Depression Behind-the Yogic Way Out", Yoga International, February / March 27, 1998.

From the perspective of Yoga it is important to understand that emotional pain and its varied expressions, such as depression, stem from the desire, attachment, fear and certain unconscious universal constructs, existing in all unliberated human minds. These constructs form a basis on which all other more individualized neuroses are woven and re-woven through a complex association of desires, attachments, and experiences. If they can be removed through yoga practices, all of the individual neuroses which they support will crumble away. Called Kleshas (or afflictions), these five constructs or crystallized thought-forms are described by Patanjali at the beginning of Book 2 of the Yoga Sutra (1, 2, 4).

Once they are seen in a clear light they will disappear. The intellectual mind is not enough for this. Yama, Niyama,

Asana, Pranayama, Prathyara, Dharana, Dhyana will lead the mind toward the necessary purification. But every road starts with the first step. Here the Kleshas are to quench the desire of the intellect.

- **AVIDYA:** is the primal ignorance which pervades all of the creation. This ignorance is experiential, not conceptual, in nature. To individuals, avidya means that while the nondual source of all existence and awareness is pure, all pervasive, immanent, and transcendent, radiating from the core of our being, we do not automatically perceive that this is the case. Our individualized and unpurified sensory mind and the sense organs, because they are relatively crude instruments compared to the subtlety of pure awareness, are incapable of directly perceiving it. Our mind's higher nature (buddhi) is capable of perceiving the radiant and blissful reflection of the Divine Self, but only when it has been sufficiently purified through persistent practice. For most of us, such purification requires many years of meditation practice, as well as the help of our teachers.
- **ASMITA:** As individuals, we also have what is called ahamkara or "I-maker" (ego). It is a single

vritti\, or thought form, the idea of individualized existence. This single thought of a limited self is enormously convincing because it pervades the entire body-mind complex. It is the nature of this individual "I-am" sense, or ego, to identify with something and become attached to it. And because we do not easily perceive the existence of the Self, the ahamkara identifies with some sort of a limited self-concept, usually our body-mind complex, our social identity, our individual attributes of personality or experience, etc. We are born into this world knowing only one thing: This body is mine. But we don't even know who is the one who is claiming the body. The result of this ignorance of our true nature is thus our misidentification with some aspect of limited existence, which is inherently painful because it is incomplete. Once this misidentification occurs, our whole perception of reality is altered, so that the entire universe is divided into "me" versus "not-me" and the objects of our experience are divided into "mine" and "not-mine". This is asmita, or "I-ness", the second klesha.

- **RAGA:** However, because the identification of ahamkara was false to begin with, and because what is "me" is relatively small compared to the large surrounding universe mostly composed on "not me",

a sort of existential terror and insecurity results. We don't want to face the overwhelming feeling of terror, do we develop various strategies for distracting ourselves from it - for enlarging "me" and for buttressing and preserving our individual and continually threatened small existence. This leads to the third klesha, raga, attraction, which creates in us a pattern of acquisition: we began to pursue human relationships, knowledge, wealth, status, power-anything which might be capable of enlarging and protecting our fragile individualized existence. But because change is the nature of creation, all objects within it are impermanent, and thus subject to loss at any moment.

- **DVESHA:** In experiencing an object which gives us pleasure, we become attached to that pleasure, and desire to experience it again. When the experience becomes unavailable to us, we feel pain. Our spouse or partner whom we loved and enjoyed leaves us for another. We try to persuade her or him to return, or we try to find another like her or him. If after repeated efforts we are not successful, but our attachment remains strong, our pain and anger turns to depression, helplessness, and finally hatred of ourselves and the world. This is the fourth klesha,

called dvesha, "the hate which follows after experiencing the pain."

- **ABHINIVESHHA:** Because of raga and dvesha, a tremendous, continual, and habitual outflowing of our energy and attention through our senses to the objects of external world has been created. This outflow of all our attention and energy can only increase our identification with our physical existence, making it even harder for us to perceive or identify with our spiritual nature. Not only do we fear death because it represents an ending of our ability to fulfill our desires, but we also emotionally identified with our body-mind complex and thus (at least subconsciously, if not consciously) dear that our existence will terminate with the death of our physical body. This is the fifth klesha, abhinivesha, the clinging to life, which "dominates even the wise." The kleshas are imprinted on chitta, the individual consciousness, from time immemorial and create and perpetuate the illusions that existence is limited to the mind-body complex. Even after death the chitta retains the kleshas in seed form and they sprout to full fruition in the next incarnation. As long as the individual thinks that consciousness is limited to the bodily existence, he is forever in the mercy of forces beyond his control, snatching a little happiness here

and there but always aware, even if it is on a subconscious level, that sooner or later the body will die and the vehicle of experience will be no more.

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