

Yoga as a View, Practice and Tool

Part One – Yoga as a View

Rāja Yoga – Yoga and Samādhi



Yoga as a Process

– The View, Path and Goal towards Samādhi as in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra

It is interesting these days that as a Yoga teacher the question I am more likely to be asked is ‘What kind of Yoga do you do?’ rather than ‘What is Yoga?’. It’s either that we think we know what Yoga is or, more likely, that the view is becoming lost within the myriad of ways in which Yoga is offered.

These days there seems to be little apparent clarity around what Yoga is, or if there is a view, it is not very apparent.

This view may also be coloured by religious influences such as Hinduism, Sikhism or even bodywork paradigms such as physical culture, body building, gymnastics and even wrestling.

In the Yoga world today in the West it seems as if many teachers are teaching without a clear ‘view’ of what Yoga is and how we might realize this view.

Look for example at how we appear not to even know or use the Yoga name for meditation. Here the often used phrase is Āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Meditation.

Or saying I am going to do Yoga which invariably refers to getting the sticky rather than the zafu out. One can even come across websites and Yoga writings that refer to Yoga and Meditation as if they are different. How about a reframe into Yoga is meditation?

In terms of what is presented as Yoga today where is the view? We need to have a view, we need to know how to access it and we need to know how to stabilise and sustain it.

In Yoga the View is explored most eloquently in the Yoga Sūtra and its main focus is the relationship between two aspects that constantly interact in sustaining our sense of being and individuality.

The two aspects are that of the perpetual activity of the mind or Citta and the ever present quality of stillness inherent within the awareness of Cit.

When the Citta dominates, we are more in the past than the present and when Cit dominates we are more in the present than the past.

The premise of the Yoga Sūtra is that when the past takes over we are more liable to act and interact unskillfully. Even within different aspects of our Yoga practice when a disturbance arises it is because the past has taken over, a memory has arisen.

However if there was no past there would be no Citta. Citta is like a vault full of past memories. Within this ever active process we want to create a space between impulse and reaction.

So looking at many Yoga classes today what is the View that we are trying to guide the group towards? Yoga would argue that ultimately we want to enable the student to have the ability to sit and to be able to experience a quality of stillness.

If the teacher does not have a 'view' to inspire and guide them whilst accommodating the many vagaries of Yoga classes today then we are more likely to be looking at the view dissolving into the many nuances of postural performance.

A Yoga view would be that a group class moves from the starting point of physicality towards some point of stillness, giving students an experience of 'sitting' and experiencing the potential of stillness at some point along the way.

The priority in terms of what we are trying to teach is 'stillness' or an experience of 'Cit'. Can I be present within the activities of the mind? The longer I can be present, the more awareness that can emerge.

When people touch that stillness something happens – a wanting to move away from the dominance of the activities of the Citta.

The more that we go back in time with Yoga the more we see that the goal was the achievement of the ability to sit and experience stillness. The more forward we move in time with Yoga the more we see the movement towards increased physicality.

The View primarily comes down to the relationship or yoking of activity (citta) with stillness (cit), in order to facilitate the emergence of stillness within the landscape of the mind.

Images such as the emergence of the sun (clarity) as the cloud (confusion) recedes may help to convey a sense of the process.

When a student reaches the end of the practice something touches them. It's about the settling of the mind into stillness. The flux of the Citta settling within the presence of the Cit.

Is it not the Yoga teachers responsibility to guide students towards this experience and empower them to realize they can touch this sacred space for themselves outside of the class or guided practice environment?

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