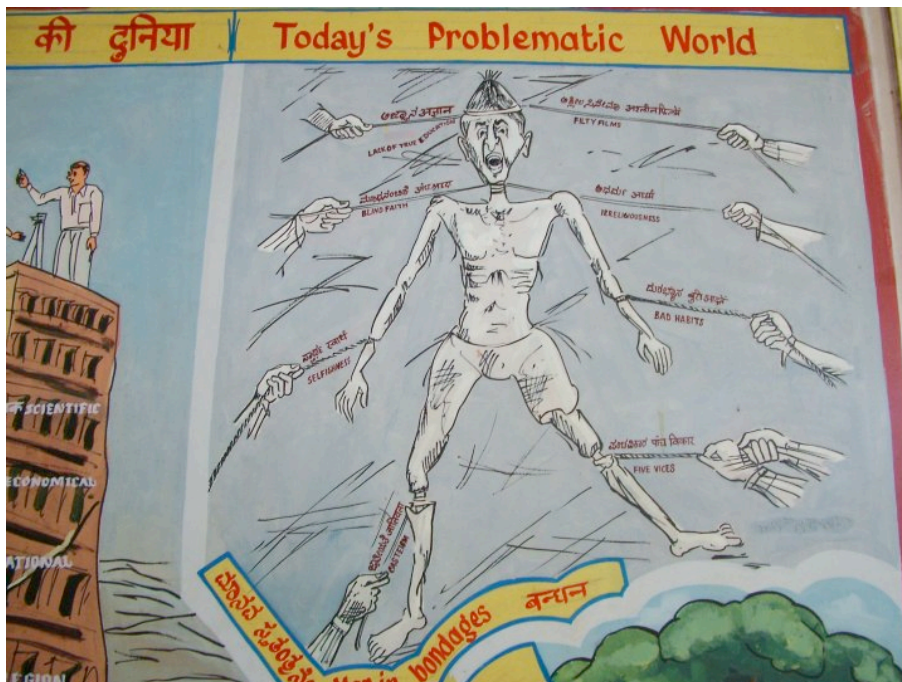


Remember what the kleshas were?

Just check the October 12, 2012 YOGABOG post, or simply continue reading.



Right after the Yoga Sutra describes Kriya Yoga, it explains the five reasons we are bound. These troubles, or afflictions, are known as the kleshas: ignorance (avidya), ego (asmita), attachment (raga), aversion (dvesa) and fear (abhinivesah).

These five afflictions are often depicted as a tree. Avidya is the trunk of the tree, and the other four kleshas sprout from it. The Samkhya's emphasis on viveka, knowing the real nature of the universe, is echoed in Classical Yoga's emphasis on avidya, or ignorance, as the chief affliction we suffer. Destroy avidya and all the other troubles go away.

What is avidya?

'Vidya' means spiritual knowledge, the prefix 'a' means without, the absence of something. Avidya means the absence of self knowledge. It means identification with name and form, instead of those beyond name and form. It is the fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of reality – thus, means darkness, ignorance, or delusion. Its personified figure is represented under the foot of the cosmic dancer, Shiva Nataraja.

What is asmita?

Asmita, 'I-am-ness', is the identification of ourselves with our ego. We create a self-image of ourselves that we believe is us, but it is not us. Asmita is labeling 'I am', 'you are', 'they are' and so forth. We hold so tightly to those labels of ourselves and others resulting in a 'small picture' instead of having a 'large picture', a larger plan, a larger perspective along with a better view. Plus, it is a non-humble state that often comes with taking things personally.

The problem with ego is not the fact that we have one; it is useful and even necessary to have an ego in order to function and live. The problem arises when the ego believes it is the Self. If all we do is in service of the ego, our life will be sorrowful and liberation becomes impossible. Egoism keeps you limited, therefore start to renounce wholeheartedly all selfish desires and expectations.

What is raga?

Raga is wanting, craving, passionate attachment to beings and things, including pleasure as well as to negative emotions.

What is dvesa?

Dvesa is the emotion of aversion, mostly aversion to pain. It is 'I don't want', and it is 'I don't want to be bothered'. It is an uncomfortable, irritated state of mind. Remember: Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.

Yoga is especially good at giving us time to practice watching raga and dvesa. As we hold the poses, as we remain outside our comfort zone, aversion arises. We resolve not to move, and instead we simply watch the aversion come... and eventually go. It goes away only to be replaced by some new aversion. As we finally release the pose we are flooded with pleasant sensations. The joy of coming out of a pose can create attachment. We want to stay and linger in this wonderful feeling. But, we again simply watch the pleasure, without reacting, and move on to the next pose.

The practice we do on our yoga mats prepares us to face challenges at other times. We begin to recognize our inner habits. We notice and remark to ourselves, 'Ow... this is aversion!' We notice, saying, 'Ahhh... this is attachment!' Knowing that these afflictions, or hindrances, are constantly arising, we can consciously choose to not react to them... or perhaps to react to them, if that is appropriate. But now, because we are aware, the choice is consciously made. Our reactions are no longer automatic.

What is abhinivesah?

It is fear. The final klesha, abhinivesah, is said to be the most difficult to overcome. This is the thirst for life, or clinging to life. Even the most advanced yogis may fail to let go of this affliction. If at the time of death there is the slightest hint of the thought, 'No! I don't want to go...' that person is doomed to return and try again, they say. You know, as a river goes to the sea: It has to go.

Kleshas are a chain of suffering, that's clear. So...

'Pratipaksha bhavanam'

One of Patanjali's solutions is pratipaksha: reversing directions. Patanjali uses the word twice in the Yoga Sutra. One sutra [2.33] says, 'Vitarkabadhane pratipaksha bhavanam.' That's a very simple sentence. It means that when we have afflicted thinking, then 'Pratipaksha bhavanam': Contemplate and take another view – look at the situation from another perspective. In another sutra [2.34] Patanjali says if you have negative thinking that comes from anger, greed, or delusion, whether you're actively in it or just thinking about it, the fruit will be unending suffering and ignorance. Therefore, 'Pratipaksha bhavanam': Take another view, reframe your perspective on the situation.

Pratipaksha bhavanam is a method that helps us catch these destructive and distracting thoughts, and redirect our minds back toward the yogic path. This is done by actively cultivating thoughts of the opposite nature when a destructive thought arises. It can even be as simple as formulating the opposite thought.

Pratipaksha Bhavana opens the doors for us. By creating the opposite thought and reflecting on the possible consequences of our thoughts, words, and deeds... we are instantly given more options for thinking, feeling, and behaving. We move from reacting to choosing.