

How the Mind Works: Sutras 1.5-1.11

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Please read my first post in this series, before continuing.

Covered in this article: Sutras 1.5-1.11. These Sutras give a brief overview of how the mind works, and the 5 types of Vritti (streams of consciousness).

Sutra 1.5

वृत्तयः पञ्चतयः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः
vr̥ttayaḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ

There are 5 types of fluctuations of the mind. They either cause misery and pain, or the opposite of misery and pain (happiness and pleasure).

or,

The 5 types of mental modifications can cause anguish, or the opposite of anguish.

Here, Patanjali tells us that the thoughts we have tend towards the negative, or the positive. Patanjali believes that joy is the natural state of the purified soul and self-mastered mind, and it is through mental anguish, pain, and misery that we lose sight of this. As I stated in my previous article, the purpose of this entire work is to guide us to liberate our mind and soul.

A part of the misery and anguish people suffer from is a result of an undisciplined mind, ruminating on negativity, believing in lies, or imagining various scenarios, quite often malefic and stress-inducing. If we are able to understand this and prevent the anguish, we free up our mental energy and are able to put our minds toward better use.

These 5 types of Vritti are described in the following Sutra:

Sutra 1.6

प्रमाणं विपर्ययं विकल्पं निद्रा स्मृतयः
pramāṇaṁ viparyayaṁ vikalpaṁ nidrā smṛtayaḥ

Correct knowledge, misconception (false idea), imagination (fictitious idea), sleep, memory.

These are:

1. Correct knowledge which is studied and verified, evidence, proof, experienced knowledge
2. Misconception, false idea, knowledge that is inverted or contrary to the truth
3. Imagination (with the negative connotation, this is not referring to creative imagination), delusion, fictitious idea, daydreaming
4. Deep dreamless sleep, emptiness
5. Memory

Each of these 5 types are explained in the following Sutras, in order.

Sutra 1.7
प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमा प्रमाणानि
pratyakṣa anumāna āgamāḥ pramāṇāni

Correct knowledge is understood by direct perception from the senses and intuition; logical reasoning and inference; and trustworthy testimony or competent evidence such as from someone experienced in the matter or from written texts.

Here, Patanjali advises us to use these three reliable methods to determine Truth.

1. “Correct knowledge is understood by direct perception from the senses or intuition.” Use your own experience with the subject, see how you feel about it, think it over, find evidence and proof, and use intuition to help guide you.
2. “Logical reasoning and inference.” Use logic and reasoning of facts and evidence to work it out and arrive at a conclusion.
3. “Trustworthy testimony or competent evidence such as from someone experienced in the matter or from written texts.” Ask someone you trust for their testimony or evidence, such as a parent, teacher, someone you consider to be wise, or an expert in the field. Read articles written by experts, study textbooks, or look to ancient wisdom given by great minds.

These methods are to be combined, to find the Truth regarding anything. You need to be able to trust in your knowledge for a firm foundation for your personal growth. Your understanding of life is built on a foundation of knowledge that you gain over your lifetime; that knowledge can only be trusted and lead you to Enlightenment if it is correct knowledge.

Sutra 1.8
विपर्ययो मिथ्याज्ञानमतद्रूप प्रतिष्ठम्
viparyayo mithyājñānam-atadrūpa pratiṣṭham

Misconception is the false knowledge that differs from reality.
or,
False perceptions occur when knowledge of something is not based on its true form.

This comes from having false knowledge that is not a fact based in reality. This is especially relevant in modern days with the Internet. Anyone can be lead astray by reading and believing lies, exaggerations, delusions, or made-up content online. Anything you read online, you must remain skeptical and look to reality or ask someone you trust. Read actual articles by experts, not summaries by misinformed or lazy content creators, for example.

This also relates to my first article in this series about clearing your mind from distorted perceptions. If something is not true, then you will be negatively affected by believing in it. Having a corrupted or twisted mindset will prevent you from seeing and understanding Truth. This will then cause mental anguish and misery (Sutra 1.5).

Sutra 1.9

शब्दज्ञानानुपाती वस्तुशून्यो विकल्प
śabdajñāna anupātī vastu-śūnyo vikalpaḥ

Imagination/delusion is based on knowledge given in sound [words] but there is no object [no real situation]

or,

Imagination, delusion, fictitious idea, happens when we hear about something and the mind creates an image based on someone's words, not on reality.

Knowledge that is based on verbal communication from someone without an external object or subject to perceive yourself, is conceptualization. Is it real?

If someone lies to us, for example someone tells us something terrible happened to them, we tend to sympathize and spend time thinking over the matter and worrying about the person. To find out it was all a lie, is indeed mental anguish for us. It was a waste of time, a waste of mental effort, and a manipulation of our emotions. Anger and frustration likely occur after this sort of situation. Remember Sutra 1.5 in regards to anguish, pain, misery.

Another meaning for this Sutra: We often jump to conclusions when we hear certain words or phrases, and we do not stop to hear the simplicity of the meaning for clarity. Some words trigger certain reactions in some people, and those meanings are often not intended at all by the person saying those words. Did you clearly comprehend what the other person meant, or did you allow your own preconditioned beliefs color the meaning of their words?

Another meaning for this Sutra: Many people spend their time lost in imagination. Creative imagination is perfectly fine and has benefits, but malefic imagination that wastes time that could be better spent is not in our best interests. Many people get lost in worries and anxiety of things someone said that are not even true nor happening now, which causes mental anguish that could easily have been prevented altogether.

People also often imagine someone's reaction to something they will soon hear about, and spend time thinking about how badly the person will respond, for example. This is also a waste of your mental energy and causes unnecessary misery to yourself.

Sutra 1.10

अभावप्रत्ययालम्बना तमोवृत्तिर्निद्रा
abhāva pratyaya-ālambanā tāmōvṛttir nidra

There is a lack of impressions and mental chatter which allow us to be supported when we are in dreamless sleep.

or,

Dreamless sleep brings an absence of awareness which helps support our mind.

When we are in deep dreamless sleep, all other Vrittis are suspended. This refreshes us upon waking. Deep sleep nourishes and rejuvenates the mind as well as the body.

As well, during sleep we are not limited by our waking left-brain logic, allowing for new ideas, solutions, or revelations upon waking.

The fact that Patanjali mentions sleep as one of the 5 types of Vritti shows that he considers it important and that we should master our sleep. For those interested in this, I highly recommend the Mastering Sleep Divine Ritual in the Hall of Osiris, it will enhance your life as it did mine.

Sutra 1.11

अनुभूतविषयासंप्रमोष स्मृति
anubhūta viṣaya-asampramoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ

Memory is the recollection of words and experience not faded or disappeared [when what was previously perceived comes back into consciousness].

Memory is the only one of the 5 Vrittis that pertains to the past. All others are the present or future. Without memory of past experiences, we cannot learn from experience.

The mind often likes to dwell in the past, replaying memories both happy and upsetting. If some of those memories were formed from false knowledge, then our present can be negatively impacted. If we learned something that was in fact wrong, we remember having learned it, and believe it to be correct. This impedes our growth and enlightenment.

When you remember something, are you remembering the *unbiased truth and fact* of an object or subject, or are you remembering *your perception of* the object or subject? You can contemplate that and even journal about it, to help you sort out your mind and determine what false information you are continuing to believe in solely because it is in your memory.

Covered in the next article: Sutras 1.12 – 1.16. These Sutras pertain to the balance of the mind between doing and allowing.