

Article

What I Think about Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

Consciousness is a property of Akashic space to the extent that it has no boundaries. The apprehension of a memory is normally limited to the experience of the individual, and I believe this is a function of Ahamkara, the self-identity of the individual. We are all a memory address code. Memory, in the general sense, is generated by mind and in turn memory influences mind. There is more to it. Memory begins with an event or experience being observed by buddhi. In Yoga Sutra Patanjali describes two kinds of memory. The first is the general kind of memory in which the object of apprehension is primary. The second kind of memory is one in which the instrument and process of apprehension are primary. These distinctions allow me to discriminate between my experience of Samapatti and that of the subject.

Key Words: consciousness, memory, Akashic, Ahamkara, Yoga Sutras, Patanjali

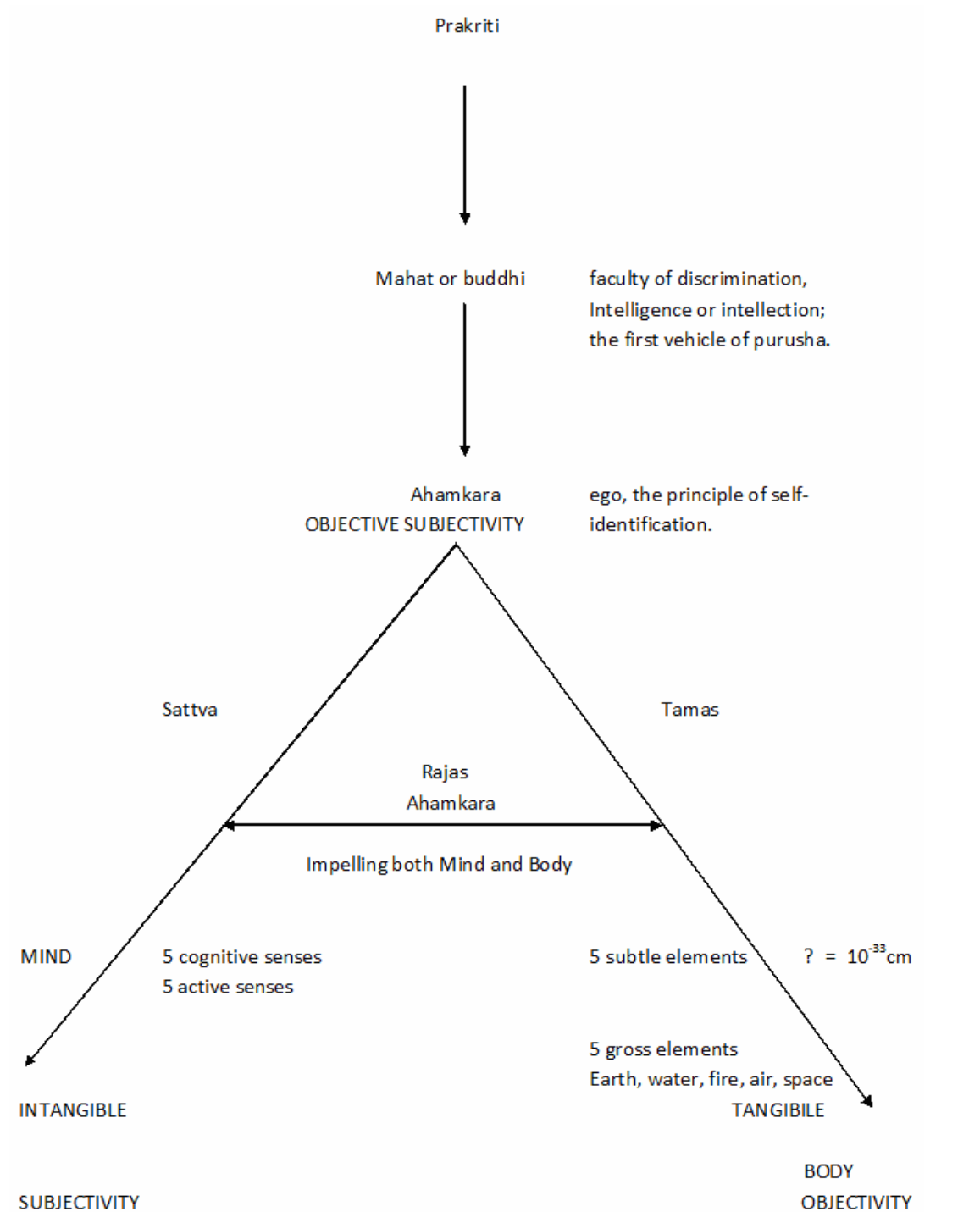
1. Introduction

My previous article in JCER (Oliver, 2010) carried a diagram from a Yoga teacher, describing the entry of consciousness into physical reality, and in particular, into living entities. In making that submission I had made a decision to simplify the diagram to some extent and in retrospect that may have been unwise. On the other hand, it is likely that someone coming to see that model for the first time may have had a degree of culture shock to deal with, so my decision to simplify might have lessened that impact. The diagram contains a number of Sanskrit words, and although they may sound foreign at first, we should realize that Sanskrit is a scientific language developed to achieve descriptions of non-physical events unable to be described within the existing language of the time. Many laypersons find much of current science language a bit foreign, and it is true that if science used everyday language to describe their work it would progress very slowly indeed.

What I omitted in that diagram was to say that AHAMKARA, EGO or I AM is also present on the line marked RAJAS. I will explain how that word relates to our understanding of consciousness a little later. The second part of the diagram I should have explained is SATTVA, which, at first glance would be interpreted to apply only to the sloping line on the left leading to Mind. The third omission lies at the end of the sloping line marked TAMAS and leading to Body. At the end of that line I should have included the five basic evolutes of matter; namely, earth, air, fire water and space. While most are familiar with the first four traditional names of these evolutes, the reader may be surprised to find mention of the last on the list. Here the word, space, is called Akasha, and is given the title MAHAT, which means the greatest teacher. That word, MAHAT, also appears at the high section of the diagram and that too will be explained as we go. Patanjali explains that AKASHA/ space is not the same as physical space; science was not the first to notice the idea of non-local or pre spacetime space. Indeed, the earliest Yoga masters described the smallest particle as being merely a point without mass!

In its original form, the diagram also placed Subjectivity at the end of the SATTVA line and Objectivity at the end of the TAMAS. If one wanted to go deeply into the Yoga Sutras they would obviously find even more detailed diagrams and explanations. For the purpose of understanding what I have to say about consciousness I prefer to stay with those aspects of Yoga that are directly related to what I have to say on that account.

In my description of the diagram I emphasize this is my understanding of it, and that it might differ from a Yoga scholar's perspective. Having said that, I am confident my assertion that Yoga and modern science are describing the same reality in much the same way is a valid one. I guess the main difference is that Yoga starts from a model of wholeness while modern science is edging its way towards wholeness via a THEORY OF EVERYTHING.



2. Yoga Model

Yoga says that reality begins with the first disequilibrium (Big Bang). Prior to that event, the three attributes of unmanifest prakriti, which are in equilibrium before the creation of the evolutes whose disequilibrium constitutes the process of creation. All material entities (evolutes) including the mind are composites of the three Gunas: purity and illumination (Sattva); activity (Rajas); inertia (Tamas). They are the seats of pleasure, pain and delusion.

The illumination within Sattva is pure consciousness reflected on prakriti and therefore we need to note that the diagram described Sattva's presence across all of the levels on the diagram. Rajas and Tamas operate on the lower part of the diagram and influence whatever is created through the process of evolving from energy into matter. Also note that since Mahat appears at the earlier level of the diagram as well as at the bottom, there will be attributes of Mahat at every level. As the greatest teacher, the presence of Mahat implies consciousness with the ability to inform exists at every level of the diagram from Mahat downwards. This is why I say I would agree with the late David Bohm in saying the "all matter contains all information". However, for this to be practical there has to be some way of making sense of ALL of the information in respect of an individual conscious entity. So we arrive at the first appearance of Mahat. This represents the first vehicle of purusha. It is the first appearance of buddhi, the faculty of intelligence, intellection and discrimination.

Next we find Ahamkara, which is ego, the principle of self-identification. I like to say this is our I Amness; the cognition of an individual existence or being. And I would say in this context, being is a verb rather than a noun. At this point the duality implicit in the model contained the shared potentials to know and to be. I call this point of divergence Objective Subjectivity and I'll explain why later. Now these potentials diverge into the distinction between Mind and Matter. This has been called The Great Illusion, or Maya, and I believe it is easier to understand if we consider this part of the diagram piece by piece. On the left we have MIND, which has five cognitive senses and five active senses. These may be a clue to resolving the Hard Problem; what the diagram is inferring (from my perspective) is a relationship between the five physical senses and the Mind's awareness of them, with its ability to make distinctions about itself and the body's experiences. I would call this end point Subjectivity.

On the other side of the diagram we have the evolutes of material reality which, in traditional cultures, have been called earth, water, fire, air and space. As mentioned earlier, space in this context is called Akasha, and refers to a dimensionless space containing information as a potential for the manifestation of matter. I would call this end point Objectivity because this is where reality is regarded as real and measurable. The arrow between the two divergent lines represents Rajas, which is action. It also represents Ahamkara, the Mind's perspective of I AM, which impels both Mind and Body to act in the sense that Mind will think and Body will move in response to its opposite based upon who I AM. We could go into a whole library of discussions and opinions about this last statement but I will leave that to the philosophers, who of course are influenced by the Ahamkara of their school, their own thoughts or their culture. In Yoga these influences are called modifications of the mind.

I offer some of my experiences, not to say something about me but to note their relevance to the diagram and to their capacity for understanding a whole reality. In conversations with psychologists and philosophers about these experiences I was told they would be classified as 'anomalies'. In a conversation with a man who practiced Raja Yoga, I was told that it was impossible for someone to enter Samapatti without having spent years of study under an accredited teacher. Nonetheless, he didn't offer any explanation how I could have had the experiences. Before I narrate the experiences, let me say that I lack the ability to imagine anything in the form of mental images. This too will become a part of the discussion on consciousness.

3. Some Experiences

The boundaries of where I end and someone else begins have become extremely indistinct for me through my relationship with others. In one instance I was helping a lady whose fractured leg refused to knit. During the course of the healing I felt inclined to mentally remove the energy of the

bone marrow and replace it with fresh energy. I did this silently and without any movement. I did not visualize this happening, I felt it was needed and knew it had happened. What surprised me was that she described exactly what I knew had been done; she said she saw it being done. The interesting point here is that she saw something I mentally narrated; we couldn't have shared the same image because I didn't have an image in my mind. A week later she had the leg x-rayed in preparation for a bone graft; the x-ray showed new bone growth at the fracture site.

On another occasion I had been asked to help a mentally disturbed cat. The owner told me this cat was antisocial, flighty, and hadn't washed itself in a long time. It smelled pretty awful so I believed what she had said. I put the cat on my lap and held my hand on its head. It fell asleep and I had images of number simultaneous scenes, all of which were very chaotic. After some time the chaos vanished, to be replaced by a garden scene. I had the experience of moving through this garden. I felt something was out of the ordinary and at first I couldn't fathom what was amiss. While there was a sense of something being different, I felt I was somewhere that was comfortable and familiar. The plants appeared to be much bigger than they should, as if I was seeing them through the eyes of the cat rather than through my own eyes. Even stranger were the colors; although I could recognize grass and plants they had no blue or green color. Everything was in shades of yellows, reds and browns.

Now, even if I could imagine a garden from the cat's eye level, I doubt if or I, anyone else, could specifically imagine from within the cat's visual range, at the infra red end of the color spectrum while also imagining the landscape as it may appear to a cat. Sensing the task was complete, I looked at the cat and it began to stir. After a bit of stretching it began to wash itself. My friend was impressed; I was too, but kept that to myself because the significance of what had happened seemed to be far more important than the experience itself.

On another occasion I was asked to help a man who suffered from Huntington's chorea. Once again, I found that by being focused on him while being in my state of stillness his involuntary movements ceased for the time I held my focus. This was typically 45 minutes at a time. The sessions gave him the confidence that he could have some control and that is what I suggested would be the case through practice. Over a period of around six months of one session per week and practice by himself he was able to leave the residential care facility where had lived. He moved in with a friend and was able to take on paid work. I gave up doing this because I wanted to know how it worked, although I continued to see a friend who had breast cancer.

My search led me to *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, by Pandit Usharbuddh Arya. There is discovered Yoga Sutra 1.41, which described the process called Samapatti, in which two minds can coalesce. For this to happen, the mind of the seer must be under control. What that means is that all experience which would normally influence who I think I AM must have no input at all. Essentially the mind becomes empty and individuality is set aside. Not an easy task, except for one who happens to have been born that way. The difficulty for me was the notion of being a seer by default.

I had spoken of these events with Dr. Bevan Reid, a cancer researcher who had become my mentor. He told me of his experiments at the University of Sydney; he had found the apparent capacity for the laboratory space to retain information. He had found that cell cultures grown in the presence of a mass of lead had a shorter life span that was the norm. He also found that with the lead removed from the laboratory space, fresh cell cultures also died at this accelerated rate. The effect lasted for weeks and involved fresh cell cultures when they were introduced. Other experiments involving the electrical capacitance of water, he found this measured value changed with changes in atmospheric pressure, and also in response to chemical reactions nearby. Theorizing these effects were 'action-at-a-distance', he coated a microscope slide with a polystyrene solution and examined it as it dried. He saw specks on the surface which, under greater magnification were seen to be small vortices. One of these coated slides had the image of a cell, together with staining (Gram stain) on the cell's image. He was able to capture this same image on newly coated slides over a few weeks. His conclusion was that the cell's experience of the stain was retained in the space, and that on recreating the same contextual arrangement the cell's memory of that event was recalled.

4. Conclusion

By observation, consciousness is a property of Akashic space to the extent that it has no boundaries. The apprehension of a memory is normally limited to the experience of the individual, and I believe this is a function of Ahamkara, the self-identity of the individual. We are all a memory address code. Memory, in the general sense, is generated by mind and in turn memory influences mind. There is more to it. Memory begins with an event or experience being observed by buddhi. In Yoga Sutra 1.11 Patanjali describes two kinds of memory. The first is the general kind of memory in which the object of apprehension is primary. The second kind of memory is one in which the instrument and process of apprehension are primary. These distinctions allow me to discriminate between my experience of Samapatti and that of the subject.

Samapatti is described in the Yoga Sutra 1.41 in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, which states that when the mind of the seer is free of disturbances it will coalesce with the mind of another person who the seer is focused upon. In the process each mind takes on the content of the other. What was of particular interest to me (as the seer) was the fact that while I was aware of the other person's pain for example, I was aware that it was not my pain. On the other hand, the other person became aware they were very calm, (my calmness) and retained that experience of distraction from pain for some time afterwards. In each case they did not know they felt my calmness; they just knew the pain had stopped for the duration of the coalescence.

In Patanjali's description of the process of Samapatti he uses the terms, object or subject being apprehended (by buddhi), the instrument of apprehension and the process of apprehension. For the subject, the experience of my stillness is real and generates a memory which, when recalled can produce that sense of calmness or distraction from pain. When I recall the Samapatti experience I have no experience of the subject's pain, just the observation that it happened; in other words, my memory is only a narrative or observation of the event. Obviously, the fact that the two minds coalesced is fairly straightforward. What merits some examination is the second kind of memory and the attendant implications.

This observation includes the object of apprehension, together with the impact the experience has on the individual. The object of apprehension means the sensory perception of the object or event as well as what this cognition means to us. Thus, it can, and indeed will, influence what we think about that object and how the experience adds to or subtracts from our personal definition. Think about how you feel when you win in contrast to when you lose anything, be that a game, a debate or a theory. However, in Samapatti the seer has the pain of the subject as the object of apprehension but the subsequent memory of that event will only contain buddhi's observation of it as a narrative. You cannot "read" another's mind in Samapatti. It is also obvious that how one receives the information from another will be interpreted by the mind of the receiver. The cat experienced my stillness as a comfortable dream; the man with Huntington's did much the same since these sufferers do not have shakes during sleep. The lady with the leg fracture interpreted my imageless thought visually. The process of Samapatti has been described as the effect of 'being in the presence of'. Thus, the mind in the presence of consciousness becomes conscious.

Mind on the other hand is the servant of consciousness and, as in meditation, mind can be brought to rest and yet one is conscious. This can be a surprise the first time you experience the mind being still and yet you are aware that I remains. It is the first experience of the duality rather than the illusion, which I call Objective Subjectivity.

From these observations I conclude that consciousness is external to the body and interacts with the body's processes such as the neurological systems because the neurological systems and their processes have consciousness within their tissue. This interaction is a two-way communication giving rise to the impression of consciousness we call mind. It also is the means by which information from memory informs all of the body when we remember, which is why that most people have sensory as well as cognitive responses to a memory.

The capture of the image of a cell over a few weeks suggests that every cell in a body has a self-identity which, collectively, is the whole-of-person identity. The Mind, so far as our conscious

awareness is concerned, is predominantly focused on the whole person. Over time, this identity becomes the person we believe ourselves to be. Beyond our conscious awareness the individual cells are conscious of their immediate environment and they carry on their functions without that level of consciousness entering our (conscious) thoughts.

In meditation the focus of consciousness is directed toward an external object and mind becomes silent and still. In that state consciousness becomes aware of itself, and experiences bliss. Ten years ago I fell into a state of bliss while sitting at the bedside of my daughter who was in a coma, her body having rejected a heart/lung transplant. As I looked at her I went into that bliss state and it remained with me for weeks afterwards. She died a few hours after I had sat there and I realized I had experienced the state she was in. Other grieving family members were upset by my lack of grief. While one can remember having been in that state of bliss, in my case the memory of the state, no matter how personally significant does not evoke the state of bliss. Thus there are (for consciousness) two kinds of memory. The first kind is that experienced by mind, in which the object or event being remembered is primary. The second kind of memory is that of consciousness, in which the fact that an event happened is recalled as a statement of the fact; the event itself is not re-experienced.

Finally, whether consciousness is external or a biological process arising in brain tissue, the awareness we call consciousness will be aware in either model. There are numerous reports of near-death experiences, in which the person has a memory of having been outside of their body. In many, the person was on the operating table during surgery, and on waking gives an account of some part of the procedure, at times even including conversations between members of the surgical team. In others the person has a memory of seeing her/himself on the operating table, sometimes from high above. Whether it is an effect of the anesthetic or other drugs causing the absence of bodily sensory perception I cannot say. What I can say is there is a possibility that the instrument and process of apprehension are still active during 'unconsciousness' and in these instances have laid down a memory. Those with an active imagination will 'fill in the gaps' of what was probably only a momentary flash of awareness, in much the same way as a ZIP message can be extrapolated into the full picture.

Of course, we will never know if we persist with the view that the mind is of the brain. Many 'spiritual' systems of belief talk about the need to be 'in the world but not of the world' and such a view is generally acceptable. A Buddhist teacher would say the mind is sometimes IN the brain but not OF the brain. We can accept that too, provided he/she is not talking about matters neurological.

In the end, what it all comes down to is what we have to give up, to be capable of believing something novel. Yoga talks about five aspects of the modifications of the mind. They are: ignorance of the illusion, I-am-ness, attraction, repulsion and fear of death. Through ignorance we fear the end of who we think ourselves to be. We struggle to maintain a status quo through maintaining what we like and avoiding what we dislike. Our decisions are based on that same status quo, which might be the pursuit of a more meaningful and rewarding role in life, our public image as well as our self image; the list is almost endless. These modify and determine the way we think, which, in turn determines what we can think, and more crucially what we are prepared to think. Politics is a good example of decisions based on personal needs, party needs and lobbyist's needs and, on occasion, the public good. In daily life we make decisions based on immediate self-needs and 'commonsense' is very thin on the ground. But this is not about how others think. The point is that Ahamkara determines actions of both the mind and the body, whether that be an individual body or mind, or a body politic or a body corporate.

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