

Article

Body-Independence of Consciousness & Retained Information

Alan J. Oliver & Syamala Hari*

ABSTRACT

We present experiences of one of the authors (Oliver's), of a conscious but thoughtless state called Samapatti, as examples to support the view that consciousness is not produced by the body. Oliver got into the Samapatti state whenever he focussed his mind on a human or animal subject; in that state, his mind became still and then he became aware of some physical or psychological conditions of his subject. The experiences show that one can be conscious without the usual in-and-out thought flow and be aware of something external to one's own body and mind without any physical or sensory connection. We point out that these apparently 'anomalous', experiences are possible realities described in the traditional sources of Hindu Philosophy. In ancient times, Hindu philosophy thoroughly analysed consciousness, mind, body, and their relations to one another. The philosophy proposes that consciousness is not produced by the body or brain and that it is independent of both body and mind. It asserts that mind is a memory which keeps accumulating experiences, desires, aversion, emotions, etc. of the living being as life goes on. Unlike consciousness, clearly, some contents of the mind are not completely independent of the body because for example, sensory experiences require the interaction of the body with the environment. Yet, the so called principle of reincarnation proposes that some subtlest aspects of the mind, the latent impressions of past experiences and desires called *vasanas* survive the death of the physical body and that they are carried over into another body in a new life, and get another chance for expression. These proposals of Hindu philosophy, namely, body independence of consciousness and survival of bodily death by the mind's information content, allow for the possibility of near-death experiences and recollection of past life experiences.

Keywords: Consciousness, body, mind, Samadhi, Samapatti, Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Sutras, Patanjali, reincarnation, near death experiences.

1. Introduction

Why do living beings seem to have conscious experience and lifeless matter does not appear to know anything? How does a person's ability to have conscious experience disappear all of a sudden, which has been there until the moment of death? What happens to the memories of all those life experiences, which one broods over when alive, after one's death? Are they all erased at once, as if by a delete command like the one entered into a computer? Of course, the answer to these questions by some reductionist scientists of today is that our brains (bodies in the case of other living beings which exhibit signs of consciousness) create consciousness and that after

*Correspondence: Syamala Hari, retired as Distinguished Member of Technical Staff from Lucent Technologies, USA.
<http://mind-and-tachyons.blogspot.com> E-mail: murty_hari@yahoo.com

death, brains can no longer do so and all memories are also erased immediately. Questions such as above, occupied the minds of prominent thinkers of all civilizations ever since ancient times and interest in their exploration continues even today as seen from the growing literature on reincarnation, near-death experiences (NDEs), out-of-body-experiences (OBEs), and other paranormal phenomena. In this article, we present personal experiences of one of the authors (Oliver's), of a conscious state called Samapatti, which is without thought flow; the experiences seem to support the view that consciousness is not produced by the body. Samapatti is one kind of *Samadhi* which is discussed elaborately in the traditional sources of Hindu philosophy such as Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Interestingly, today's researches in NDEs, OBEs, and reincarnation also seem to agree with Hindu philosophy's propositions that consciousness is not produced by the body or brain and that some mental contents survive bodily death (as implied by the so called principle of reincarnation).

Real information (RI), the content of a conscious experience: In our lives, we have many conscious experiences. In any such experience, there is awareness of something, which may be an emotion, a desire, a thought etc., or awareness of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling an external object accessed by one's senses. We may call this something information. There seems to be a subject, which we report as 'I' and there is ability to be aware, which seems to be available when we are awake but not in deep sleep; in dream sleep, there is ability to be aware of some imaginations but not of the sensory contacts with the outside world. Hence a conscious experience has three components to it: 1) the 'I', 2) some 'real information', (why we add the qualifier, 'real' will be explained in the following paragraphs), and 3) the act of knowing or being aware.

In the case of a sensory experience, for example, seeing an apple, this information is different from both the apple and its biological/neural map created in the brain/body of the human (living) being. It is useful to note this difference because according to modern neuroscience, every subjective (conscious) state such as a conscious intention or conscious emotion, or perception of an external object, occurs only if a required and correlated neural process takes place. Each conscious state has its associated neural correlates of consciousness: one for seeing a red patch, another one for seeing grandmother, yet a third one for hearing a siren, etc. (Mormann and Koch 2007). Interestingly, one is never aware of the existence of the neural correlate (NC) in one's own brain. One is only aware of the NC's 'meaning', which must have been created along with the NC. In contrast, a neuroscientist monitoring the brain can see an image of the NC on the monitor but does not directly know the NC's 'meaning' (namely, what the owner of the brain is aware of). The neuroscientist will have to accept whatever the brain's owner reports as his/her experience.

Information is different from matter. We (human beings) can report our conscious experiences to others, if we wish to do so. When we do, we use a language and any of several means: sounds, electrical signals, write on a paper, and so on. Every means of communication requires human (living) beings to ASSIGN¹ meaning or information that is in our heads, to structures of matter or material energy. These structures carry a mapping of the RI; the structures

¹ To begin with, a word in any language is not identical with its meaning because the same meaning may be conveyed by different words in different languages. A language is a mapping of PI into words (symbols) which become sound energy when pronounced, particles of matter when written on paper, and become electrical energy when transmitted over a telephone line, and so on.

themselves are not identical with the RI. Yet, in our daily lives, we do not distinguish between RI and the means we use to communicate or store it outside our heads. For example, we say “the book has good information about the city”, whereas the book only has words whose meanings exist in our heads but not in the book. Hence hereafter, *we may call the information content of any of our experiences as ‘real’ information (RI), to emphasize that it is different from the language or energy signals used for its storage and communication or the corresponding neural/biological activity in the body.*

Fortunately for us, no means of communication, or information storage device, or a computer ever creates or assigns any new RI overwriting what we intended it to carry! Hence, we may assume that lifeless matter does not create RI all by itself. On the other hand, as long as we are awake, we experience more and more, thereby keep on accumulating more RI in our memory and this memory has two components: biological and mental. The mental component consists of RI; the biological component is what a monitoring instrument can convey physically/scientifically. We have to infer that the living matter in brain/body not only creates a biophysical map of a material object accessed by its senses but also creates a ‘meaning’ of the map, i.e., the associated RI.

RI is subjective. It is our everyday experience that one’s thoughts cannot be seen, heard, etc., by others, i.e., by their senses, nor can they be accessed by any material instruments; one’s thoughts are not known to others unless one conveys them verbally or by other physical means (making it very tempting to lie!). We call this inaccessibility of the mind by senses and material devices subjectivity.

RI is different from consciousness. One may ask “are information (RI) and the ability to know different, or is consciousness a property of the former?” Many Western philosophers (for example, Descartes) do not see a distinction between the mind and consciousness whereas in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies, mind (an accumulation of RI) is said to be not conscious just like lifeless matter is not; RI is what one is aware/conscious of, and therefore, it is the object of consciousness. Since even in the West, Leibniz, Helmholtz, Kant, and psychologists including William James, Sigmund Freud, and many others discussed existence of unconscious thought at length (Kihlstrom 1994), it is possible that RI is not conscious by itself and different from consciousness, the ability to know.

Now, from the point of view of physics, the body of a living being is made of the same fundamental particles of which lifeless matter is made. While lifeless matter outside any living body does not seem to create RI, every human body seems to be creating more and more experiences and accumulating RI in the wakeful and dream states. The question, “why do living beings seem to have conscious experience and lifeless matter does not appear to know anything?” is indeed called the “hard problem” of consciousness by today’s scientific researchers and not solved yet. The “hard problem” is difficult to address by scientific means because both RI and consciousness are subjective. Some scientists simply assume that matter exists in two kinds of states: one living and the other lifeless, and that RI and consciousness are properties of matter in the living state and therefore those properties disappear with change of state by death. Yet, it is only an assumption so far and not yet proved by any scientific means. On the contrary, in our opinion, modern research on NDE, and OBE seem to imply the possibility that consciousness is not produced by the body or brain, and therefore consciousness is not affected by bodily death. This is not merely possibility but a reality according to Hindu Philosophy,

which emphasizes that consciousness is beyond both body and mind. Since the topic of consciousness inevitably includes what one is aware of, we also discuss whether (as implied by the reincarnation principle of Eastern philosophies), it is possible that the information content of experiences accumulated during life, survives death as well.

2. Body-independence and immortality of Consciousness

2.1. Body, mind, and Consciousness interactions according to Vedanta – computer analogy

Today's scientific theories implicitly assume that matter is real and every phenomenon in the universe is a phenomenon only of matter. (This position is called material realism.) Instead, to explain proximity in space, succession of time, and cause-effect relations observed in nature, Vedanta postulates that an all-pervading, ever-existing, blissful, merciful, free willed consciousness exists as the unchanging source, sustainer, and absorber of all creation, and ruler of all bodies, minds, and beings in the universe. This Universal Consciousness is said to manifest Itself by Its own will, as all the various beings in the universe and to be present in the hearts of all living beings as the Self (Atma). No scientific theory can predict the existence of Consciousness, nor can Consciousness be detected by scientific experiments (Kenopanishad). Hereafter, It is denoted by Consciousness with a big C in front, to distinguish It from the fragmented consciousness of living beings which exists only in wakeful and dreaming states and knows only one thing at a time; one individual does not know the conscious experience of another whereas Consciousness knows everything everywhere all the time!

Body-mind interactions described by Vedanta can be summarized in the following analogy: The physical body of a living being is like a piece of hardware. It is made up of matter. Every living being, human or animal, or any living organism (possibly excluding some primitive forms of life), has an accumulation of experiences, desires, aversion, emotions, etc., and therefore an accumulation of information, in other words a memory, which is called mind in this paper. In this sense, mind is like a computer memory containing data and programs. Just like a computer's hardware and software do not know what they are doing, their own existence, and the meaning of their memory contents, both the body and the mind of a living being also do not really know anything but there is a certain Consciousness (apart from the mind mentioned above) that "knows". Consciousness is like the computer operator, as it were, and the one who "really knows" everything that is part of the living being's activity. The ability to think (logical reasoning), and the ability to make decisions based on existing contents are similar to computer programs in that they can exist in an active or a passive state. They create new information (what one is aware of in a new experience) by being active; after new information is created they remain in the memory in a passive state until they are called upon for action again.

The mind and the body are both not conscious just like the hardware and software of a computer. Only Consciousness and soul really know and have control over all that happens in an individual's life. Mind is subtle and its magic is visible only when it is working with the body similar to the way the capabilities of software (also subtle) are visible only when it is loaded into the computer and activated.

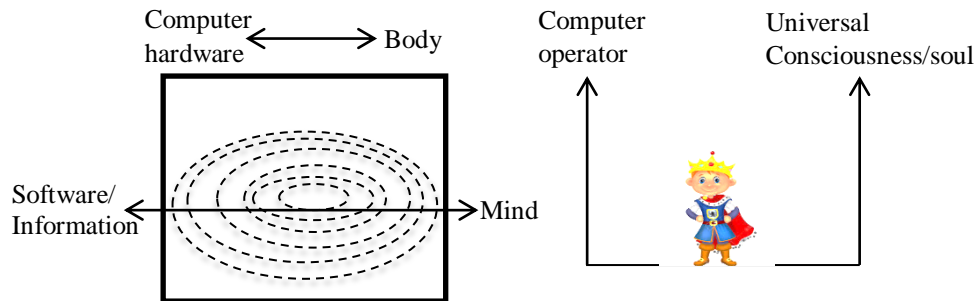


Figure 1. Computer analogy of Consciousness, Mind, and Body Relations in Vedanta

2.2. Oliver's Samapatti experiences suggest that consciousness is independent of the body and the mind

Samapatti is a conscious state, where there are no thoughts flowing in and out. In the Patanjali's Yoga tradition², Samapatti would be classified as a Siddhi, a capability gained through the application of *Samadhi*, a state of consciousness which is attained through meditation and which lies beyond waking, dreaming, or deep sleep. *Samadhi* may be attained by single-pointed concentration that slows down mental activity to a complete stop. When Oliver focused his mind on a human or animal subject, he entered the Samapatti state and became aware of some physical and psychological conditions of the subject. All his subjects experienced peace as their anxieties gradually cleared during the session. In that state, Oliver could see and know beyond our normal experience of seeing and knowing; he did not need a physical connection to the subject to know the subject's state of mind. After reading the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali he found a description of *Samadhi*, in Yoga Sutra 1.41 and that his state of mind in his healing sessions would be called Samapatti (one kind of *Samadhi*) according to the Sutras. Let us now recall some of Oliver's Samapatti experiences (Oliver 2010). In a later section, we will see that they match the description of *Samadhi* by the Yoga Sutras.

In one instance, Oliver's subject was a disturbed cat which was antisocial and hadn't washed itself for more than a year. As he focused on it with closed eyes, his mind became still. He became aware that the cat went to sleep and had chaotic visual images, a bit like multiple auras of migraine. He then felt that the chaos cleared to become a garden scene viewed from cat eye-level, with very large plants and shades of brown, yellow and red colors. At the same time, he

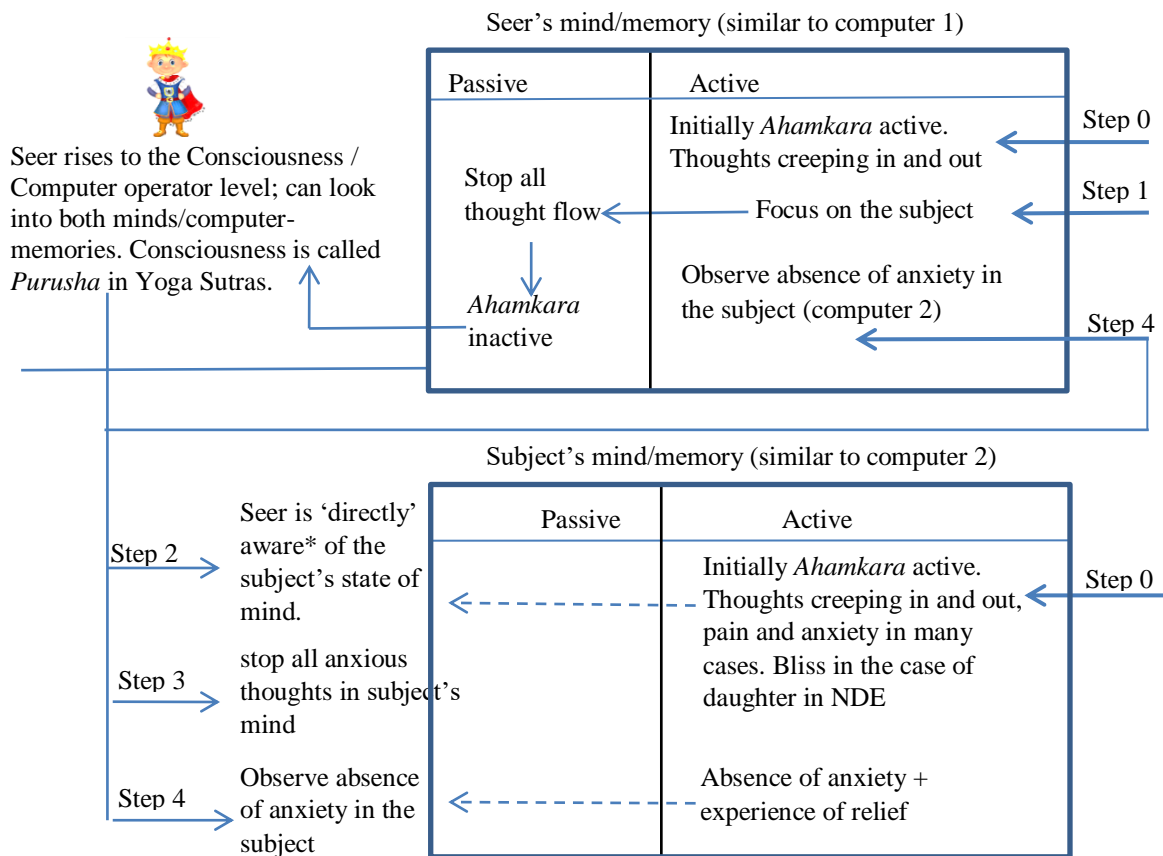
² Oliver's quest for understanding his own experiences led him to a branch of the Hindu philosophy because most Western philosophies do not see a distinction between thought and consciousness whereas in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies, the mind is said to be not conscious just like lifeless matter.

was also aware that he had never seen the garden before and that the images were not in his own mind but that he watched the cat's dream. After a while, when Oliver felt that the cat would wake up, it woke up and began to wash itself suggesting that the disturbances in its mind subsided during the Samapatti session. In another instance, Oliver fixed his mind on the fractured leg of a lady waiting for a bone graft. Once again his mind attained stillness and he became aware of the physical distress within the bone. He silently wished to replace the distress which he felt was dark, with something bright and vibrant like gold. When he opened his eyes, she told him with excitement that she visualized bright gold energy replacing some black stuff in the bone. 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. There is an interesting point here: Normally (if not in Sampatti), Oliver is unable to visualize anything. That the lady visualized the wish of Oliver while he was in Sampatti, and reported the visualization to him after the session, supported his earlier hunch that in the case of the session with the cat, the garden scene was the dream of the cat and not his visualization or hallucination.

One common aspect of all Sampatti experiences of Oliver is that while he was in the state of stillness, those anxieties, disturbances, perturbations, etc., that were there earlier in his subject's mind gradually cleared and the subject's mind also became still. For instance, he worked over some years with a lady called Emma, who had breast cancer and helped her to come to terms with whatever the outcome might be. Samapatti sessions were her favourites because when he went into stillness her pain and her concern for herself stopped as she too became still and thereby peaceful. Another person who suffered from Huntington's chorea was helped by Oliver using Samapatti. His uncontrollable movements ceased for the duration of the session, typically around 45 minutes. Since the random movements ceased while he was asleep, as is the nature of the disease, obviously during the Sampatti session this person's mind and brain also calmed down similar enough to mimic sleep, although he was awake.

Oliver himself never did any of his Samapatti sessions in a laboratory and put himself and his subject under neuroscientific experimental tests. Yet, interestingly, the following experiment mentioned by Laszlo (2004) in a study of transpersonal contact between individuals, seems to support Oliver's Samapatti experiences except that the experimenters were probably not even aware that there exists such a thing called Samapatti: Gunther Haffelder, head of the Institute for Communication and Brain research of Stuttgart, measured the EEG patterns of Maria Sagi, a trained psychologist and gifted natural healer, and those of a young man, the subject to be healed. The young man and the healer remained in separate rooms while both were wired with electrodes, and their EEG patterns were projected onto a large screen which everyone could see. The healer attempted to diagnose and then heal the health problems experienced by the subject, who sat with closed eyes in a light meditative state. During the time the healer was concentrating on her task, her EEG waves dipped into the deep Delta region (between 0 and 3 Hz per second), with a few sudden eruptions of wave amplitude. This was surprising in itself, because when someone's brain waves descend into the Delta region, he or she is usually asleep. But the healer was fully awake, even if in a deeply relaxed state. Even more surprising was that the test subject exhibited the same Delta wave pattern - it showed up in his EEG display about two seconds after it appeared in the EEG of the healer. Yet they had no sensory contact with each other.

In all his Samapatti sessions, Oliver was aware of his own state of mind as well as that of his subject's, and was able to know which was his own and which was the subject's. The common aspects of Oliver's Samapatti sessions and the sequence of events in a typical session are presented pictorially in Figure 2.



* Seer is like a piece of crystal before flowers; the crystal becomes almost identified with flowers. If the flower is red, the crystal looks red, or if the flower is blue, the crystal looks blue. It is the beyond-sensory perception of *Samadhi* that grasps the true nature of an object in reality, absolutely free from the distortions of our imagination. *Samadhi* is, in fact, much more than perception; it is direct knowledge.

Figure 2. A pictorial representation of sequence of events in Samapatti

The explanation from Hindu philosophy for this experience is as follows (Hari and Oliver 2015): Once the seer discontinues his/her identification with his/her body by focusing on the subject, he/she is in the thoughtless state with no *ahamkara* and raises to the level of Consciousness in Figure 1, the operator of all computers. Just as a computer operator can see the contents of two computers, Consciousness can see the memory contents of both individuals, the seer and the subject, and know that anxiety is in the subject's memory but not in the seer's memory. Again like the computer operator, Consciousness can enter this fact into the seer's memory; Consciousness could also remove anxious thoughts and hyperactivity in the subject's minds and make them peaceful during the session. Ordinary living beings who cannot break their

identification with the body and mind cannot exchange their memory contents without using senses just like computers cannot communicate without a material connection.

Experiences such as above suggest that one can remain conscious although the usual thought flow in one's mind has stopped. They also show that one (the seer) could know another's mind without requiring a physical connection, which ability is beyond our normal knowing experience. They make one wonder whether real Consciousness is distinct from what we usually see and call consciousness in living beings. *These seemingly impossible events suggest that Consciousness must be something quite distinct from the brain and its memory/mind and that the latter do not create Consciousness.*

2.3. Near-Death Experiences (NDE) indicate that consciousness and mind exist independently of the body

Nowadays, there is growing interest among scientists in NDE research as they hear reports from hospitals that patients who have been declared clinically dead exhibited various mental capabilities such as cognition, perception, and memory with enhanced mental clarity under cerebral impairment conditions such as cardiac arrest and general anaesthesia, when such mental activity cannot be associated with normal brain function. An example of enhanced mental functioning during an NDE is a rapid revival with exceptional clarity of memories that extends over the person's entire life. Researchers call one type of experience as veridical NDE, in which experiencers acquire verifiable information that they could not have obtained by any normal means. For example, some experiencers reported seeing events going on at some distant location, such as another room of the hospital while they are unconscious. Some reported visions of deceased persons, including those not previously known to be deceased, and it was found later that the demises had actually happened.

A common feature of near-death or after death experiences is the remarkable clarity of their reports surpassing those of normal waking state. In some NDE, the experiencers even acquired information which they could not have obtained by any normal means but which was indeed verified to be true later on. Greyson (2011) argues that if the mind is solely dependent on the brain for its existence, clarity of mental activity should be diminishing in clinical death conditions, and knowledge of events without the required sensory inputs would be impossible. In his view, these features of NDEs indicate that mind may only be dependent on the brain much as a radio transmission is dependent upon a receiver and broadcast unit but mind is not dependent on the brain to the extent that it cannot exist or function when the brain cannot function. Greyson thinks that *the observed correlation between brain states and mind states is compatible with the theory that mind is produced by the brain, but it is also compatible with the theory that the brain may be a vehicle which receives, transports, and transmits, but is not synonymous with the mind.*

Greyson's view of the brain-mind relationship is compatible with our view of it, namely, that the relation is similar to the hardware-software relationship in a computer (Hari 2015). We think that the brain plays the role of hardware and the mind plays the role of the software in creating new experience/information. Information stored in a computer is of two kinds: data and programs. The former are passive. Any program is of the latter kind; it is passive until it is activated. Once activated, the program runs and creates outputs which are new records/information in the

memory. To do even the simple task of creating a record of any input, the computer needs to have a "WRITE" instruction, a program, already in its memory. The input activates the stored program, which then runs in the hardware (i.e., the hardware goes through a dynamic process) and creates passive records. After the activity is over, the program goes back to its passive state. The point to note is that hardware does not produce new records all by itself; it takes both hardware and software to do so. Similarly, to produce a new experience, an interaction of already existing thoughts with the biological matter, needs to take place in the brain. New mental records are produced as a result of the process. The activity may be initiated by a desire/purpose (thoughts), or by sensory inputs, the soul or by Consciousness. Similar to a computer program, at the end of a thinking activity which involves both body and mind, those mental contents which participated in the activity still remain passively in the memory³. Again, the main point to note here is that the brain does not create new information all by itself; it needs to interact with already stored information/mind to produce the new information. Like hardware and software in a computer, brain and mind are not identical. The brain serves as the receiver of sensory inputs for creating sensory experience and as the broadcast unit for communicating its mind (stored information) to others.

Thus, like Samapatti experiences, NDEs also indicate that both consciousness and mind exist independent of the body and therefore suggest the possibility of their survival after bodily death.

3. Retained Information and Reincarnation

According to Hindu philosophy, life originates when an infinitesimal spark from Consciousness called *Jiva* (translated as soul) who is therefore conscious and eternal as well, draws to itself the body, the senses, and the mind that are constituents of *prakriti*, the insentient nature; life continues as long as interaction between the body and the mind proceeds. In the computer analogy, this interaction is similar to execution of software in the hardware. At death, the body is no longer able to support the interaction (just like a computer with defective hardware does not support software execution). The philosophy proposes that some accumulated latent impressions of all past experiences, and desires called *vasanas* or *samskaras* survive the death of the physical body and carried by the immortal *Jiva* into a new life⁴ if the *Jiva* is not yet detached from them and therefore not liberated but bound to experience consequences of actions in previous lives. The new life gives *vasanas* another chance for expression. This is the principle of reincarnation believed in Hindu and other Eastern philosophies and religions and not found in Western philosophies and religions. This principle does not appear too unreasonable because it is similar to the scenario in which a computer with broken hardware cannot run a piece of software but the same software, if saved on a storage device, can be entered into another computer and made to run again!

³ For example, a violinist has the ability to play violin but he/she does not play violin all the time. The ability to play violin is stored in the musician's memory in a passive state and he/she activates it to perform. He/she enjoys the music while playing violin and remembers the experience even afterwards. After the performance is done, the ability to play violin is still there and no one else knows about the musician's talent unless he/she performs.

⁴ In Aphorism 2.9, Patanjali says that the desire to cling to life is inherent both in the ignorant and in the learned. This is because the mind retains impressions of the death experience from many previous incarnations; after all, how could we fear death so much if we had never previously experienced it?

Today, reincarnation is the subject of recent investigations by many parapsychologists, psychics, and even psychiatrists. Belief in the reality of reincarnation is gaining support even from scientists such as Carr (a physicist) and Smythies (a neuroscientist). Stevenson, a former Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia compiled and studied voluminous data to investigate the reality of reincarnation. In one of his books (Stevenson 1967), he argues why reincarnation is the only viable explanation that fits the facts of his study, for example for his twenty cases of young children who were spontaneously able to describe events in a previous life as soon as they learned to talk, and that alternative explanations are not viable. Of course, there are sceptics who do not think that Stevenson's investigations are based on facts.

If information about past lives is remembered by someone then in the time interval between any two of that someone's lives, the information must exist somewhere and not be destroyed. Where it is stored must be a non-physical medium because in that interval, it is not accessible to other living beings with normal sensory capabilities.

3.1. Where the information surviving death is retained

We said mind is a store of RI. During life, one's mind is obviously intimately linked with one's body because any ailments or impairments of the body are necessarily accompanied by corresponding defects in one's memory and ability to experience. So, once the body dies and is no longer able to report any piece of information, the assumption that information is not destroyed but remains, raises the question "where is the surviving information retained?" Patanjali's Yoga Sutras seem to have an answer for this question. The Sutras also say who is able to find/read/know that retained information.

Figure 3 illustrates cosmology according to the *Sankhya* and Yoga philosophies. The universe is said to evolve from two sources: consciousness or *Purusha* and the unconscious nature or *Prakriti*; *Purusha* is the real Self, *Atman* in Sanskrit and *Prakriti* is pure creative power. *Prakriti* consists of the three fundamental and physio-psychological forces: *tamas*, inertia and ignorance; *rajas*, momentum and desire; and *sattva*, balance, luminosity, and knowledge. When undifferentiated *Prakriti* is illuminated by the spiritual light of a *Purusha*, at first, *Mahat*, "the great cause" evolves from it. *Mahat* is universal intelligence, and each human mind is a part of that cosmic intelligence. From *Mahat* evolve individual minds. Each mind consists of *buddhi* (the discriminating faculty), *ahamkara* (the individual ego-sense) emerging from *buddhi*, and three other components emerging from *ahamkara*. The three components are *manas* (the recording faculty), the five cognitive senses and the five active senses (tongue, feet, hands and the organs of evacuation and procreation), and the five *tanmatras* which are the subtle inner essences of sound, feelings, aspect, flavor and odor. These subtle *tanmatras*, combining and recombining, are then said to produce the five gross elements of which the external universe is composed: earth, water, fire, air including breath (*Prana*), and space (*Akasha*).

Purushas/Jivas/souls are infinite in number and similar but separate, none superior to any other. *Purusha* is not the doer but the witness. Experience arises because of a certain association of *Purusha* with nature. The mind seems to be intelligent and conscious whereas it has only a borrowed intelligence. Knowledge or perception is a thought-wave (*vriddhi*) in the mind. Since the mind is not the seer, but only an instrument of knowledge, it is also an object of perception like

the outside world. The *Atman* is the real seer. Thus, to summarize, creation is described as an evolution outward, from undifferentiated into differentiated consciousness, from cosmic mind into universe. Pure consciousness is, as it were, gradually covered by successive layers of ignorance and differentiation, each layer being grosser and thicker than the one below it, until the process ends on the outer physical surface of the visible and tangible world (Swami Prabhvaananda).

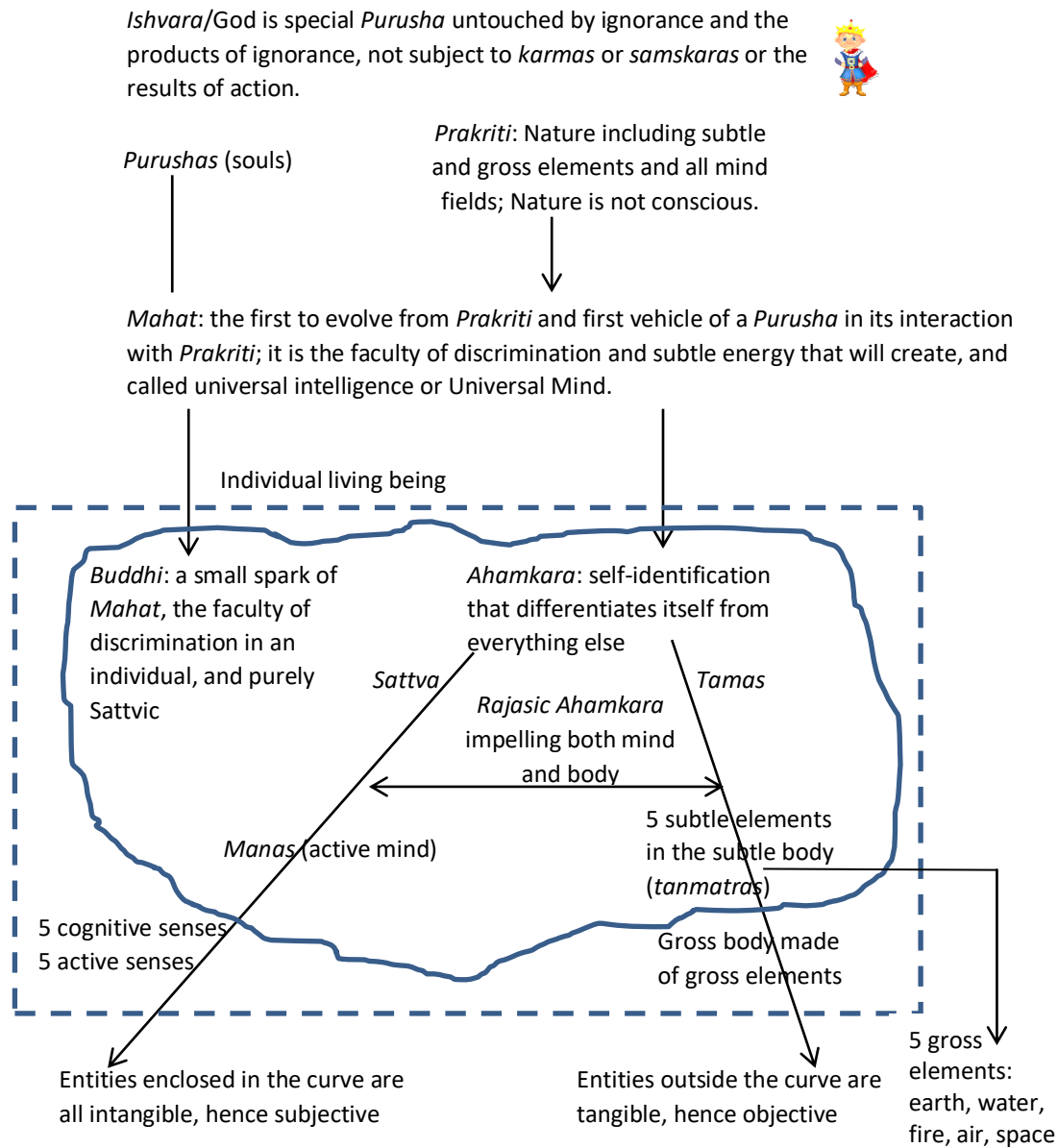


Figure 3. The Yoga perspective of creation

Hindu philosophy believes in cycles of creation. The whole universe is composed of two materials, *Akasha* and *Prana*. *Akasha* is the omnipresent, all-penetrating existence. Everything

that has form is evolved out of this *Akasha*. All force, whether gravitation, attraction or repulsion, or life, is the outcome of one primal force called *Prana*. *Prana* acting on *Akasha* creates or projects the universe. At the beginning of a cycle, there is only this *Akasha* and it is motionless and unmanifested. Then *Prana* begins to act, more and more, creating grosser and grosser forms out of *Akasha*: plants, animals, humans, stars, and so on. At the end of the cycle, all contents of the universe melt into the *Akasha* again, and the next creation similarly proceeds out of this *Akasha*. Both *Akasha* and *Prana* are incorporated into *Mahat* (Swami Vivekananda). *Mahat* which is the Cosmic Mind, one may say, is the Cosmic Computer that stores memories and impressions as well as governs the many senses and limbs, in other words, the machinery of the Cosmos. Whatever happens or has occurred in the past is stored in *Mahat*, in a manner that we may back-up files onto a computer and place them away. Only when we open or access them, do we have knowledge of them. This is the same basic way that *Mahat* also works (Lingham 2013).

Parts of Chapter 3 (Vibhuti Pada) of Yoga Sutras are used by Alice Bailey as proof of existence of *Akashic* Records (Trine 2010). Bailey wrote in her book *Light of the Soul on The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali – Book 3* (Bailey 1927): “The *Akashic* record is like an immense photographic film, registering all the desires and earth experiences of our planet. Those who perceive it will see pictured thereon: The life experiences of every human being since time began, the reactions to experience of the entire animal kingdom, the aggregation of the thought-forms of a karmic nature (based on desire) of every human unit throughout time.”

Ervin Laszlo (2004) proposes that a subtle but entirely fundamental coherence- and correlation-creating information field is at the heart of the universe and takes its place among the fundamental fields of the universe, science's G-field (the gravitational field), EM-field (the electromagnetic field), and the various nuclear and quantum fields. He calls it the *Akashic Field* or the A-field. Laszlo thinks that all the connections and correlations which come to light in the physical and the life sciences, and the transpersonal ties that emerge in experimental parapsychology and consciousness research, have one and the same root, the A-field. He says, “Nothing in this world is evanescent; all things continue to exist through the traces they leave in the cosmic information field. We humans, too, create an *Akashic* record of our lifetime experiences, a record that can be retrieved by others. Our individual experience is not limited to ourselves and to our individual lifetime. It can be re-experienced and thus relived at any time and at any place, today and at all times in the future.” However, Laszlo does not relate A-field to *Mahat*.⁵

Oliver was ‘born that way’: As said earlier, in all his experiences in the state of *Samapatti*, Oliver was aware of his own state of mind as well as that of his subject’s, and was able to know which was his own and which was that of the subject. This led to him asking himself where this ability came from since he had not received any specific training in that regard. Oliver found from Yoga Sutras that there are only two ways to become established in *Samadhi*.

⁵ Laszlo does not seem to distinguish between Consciousness and the cosmic information field, the A-field. Hindu philosophy indeed says that Consciousness not only pervades all matter and information and but all kinds of matter and information are made of Consciousness, similarly to various pieces of jewellery are all made of the same gold. However, the philosophy clearly distinguishes between matter that is accessible to senses, and information that is not accessible to senses and faster than matter, Consciousness being inaccessible to both matter and information.

1. A lifetime of study and meditation with an accredited teacher, or
2. To be 'born that way'.

The Samapatti experiences of Oliver raise a significant point in relation to the retention of information after death. If one is born that way (with ability to be established in Samadhi), it means that the ability to get into *Samadhi* must be arising from the experience and skill acquired in an earlier life. That is to say, the *Samadhi* was a skill and a *samskara* that is retained at the level of *Mahat*.

3.2. Who is capable of knowing the retained information?

Purusha, the Self, the pure Consciousness is the seer. What is seen? The whole of nature, beginning with the mind, down to gross matter.

In Chapter 3, Patanjali describes a capability called *Samyama*, which is the inclusive term for three progressive states of attention: concentration, meditation, and absorption (*Samadhi*).

Various psychic powers (called *siddhis*) are acquired and manifested by directing *Samyama* on specific objects, thoughts, or phenomena. For example, *Samyama* on the navel *chakra* yields knowledge of the body's constitution; *samyama* on the spiritual heart (*hrdaya*), the center of our being yields knowledge of the nature of consciousness⁶ (Trine 2010). Some individuals may be endowed with *siddhis* by birth. When someone is born with a *siddhi*, it is because of the *samskaras* that someone developed in a previous birth. In this birth he is born, as it were, to enjoy the fruits of them.

After reading the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Oliver found a description of Samapatti (one kind of *Samadhi*), in Yoga Sutra 1.41. He also found that one enters this state when all fluctuations of the mind are brought under control. Sutra 1.41 says the following: The Yogi whose Vrttis (thoughts) have become powerless (controlled) obtains concentration and sameness in the observer, observing, and the observed, like the crystal (before different coloured objects.) What results from this constant meditation? In a previous aphorism Patanjali went into the various states of meditation, and how the first will be the gross, and the second the fine objects, and from them the advance is to still finer objects of meditation. By practice, the Yogi gets established in all these meditations. Whenever he meditates he can keep out all other thought; he becomes identified with that which he mediates upon; when he meditates he is like a piece of crystal before flowers; the crystal becomes almost identified with flowers. If the flower is red, the crystal looks red, or if the flower is blue, the crystal looks blue. In chapter 3 of Yoga Sutras, it is said that it is only in the beyond-sensory perception of *Samadhi* that we see an object in the truth of its own nature, absolutely free from the distortions of our imagination. *Samadhi is, in fact, much more than perception; it is direct knowledge.*

One of Oliver's Samapatti experiences which provides an example of the above scenario is as follows: He had been called to the hospital bedside of his daughter who was in a coma, having rejected an earlier heart and lungs transplant. As he sat looking at her he went into a state of intense bliss, hardly the response one would expect from a father looking at his dying daughter. As in other Samapatti examples mentioned earlier, by meditating upon the state of mind of his

⁶ In this chapter, Patanjali enumerates several possibilities and potential powers such as moving through *Akasha*, clairvoyance, and clairaudience. He says that the yogi acquires mastery of *Prakriti* in other words, control of Nature.

daughter, Oliver, the seer became aware of the state of his subject's/daughter's mind; the seer was also aware that the subject's mind was in that state but not Oliver's. Oliver is sure that he experienced her state of mind by merging his mind with hers because Oliver never experienced the same bliss when he remembered and reported that event to others later in life. She must have been in a state of bliss at that time; she might have been in an NDE since NDEs usually have feelings of love, joy, peace, and/or bliss. Moreover, since one aspect of *Samadhi* is absence of grief, its absence in the above situation is another indication of being in the *Samadhi* state. We may say that in this Samapatti experience, while the seer is *Purusha* (Oliver being in the state of *Purusha* because he is the conscious being), the object of knowledge, the state of bliss of his daughter in coma is in *Mahat*.

Yoga Sutra 4.1 alerts the readers that *Samadhi* is not the only means one to acquire psychic powers but one can acquire such powers also by birth, by means of drugs, by blessings from others, or by the practice of austerities. Hence one may be able to know past life experiences of oneself or others without attaining *Samadhi*. For example, using clairvoyance, astrology, palmistry, and numerology, Claire Barry (2016) could tell her client whether those close to that person in this life had been associated with or related to him/her in previous lives. In many cases, Barry's conclusions were verified using the information she provided about the culture, the landscape, and geography in such minute detail that the client could find the exact place, and exact house he/she needed to reach. The point is that the information content of experiences in any life is not lost and can be read by those who have the appropriate skills.

4. Conclusion

We have presented personal experiences of one of the authors (Oliver's), of a conscious but thoughtless state called Samapatti, as examples to support the view that consciousness is independent of the body. Oliver got into the Samapatti state whenever he focussed his mind on a human or animal subject; in that state, his mind became still and then he became aware of some physical or psychological conditions of the subject. Hence these experiences showed one can be conscious without the usual in-and-out thought flow and be aware of something external to one's own body and mind without any physical or sensory connection. Thus, they show that consciousness (the ability to know) is not produced by the body or brain in agreement with Hindu Philosophy. Today's research in NDE seems to support this view.

This philosophy says that mind/information is not conscious by itself but it is the object of consciousness. It also says that the information content of experiences in any life is not lost and can be read by those who have the appropriate skills to find it. Patanjali yoga Sutras have considered the question of where this information is retained. Many Eastern philosophies believe in the existence of a soul (a spark of Consciousness) in each living being, which does not end with the death of the body but can take another life; the soul carries with it some subtlest contents of the mind, the latent impressions of past experiences and desires called *vasanas* or *samskaras*, which survive bodily death as well, into the new life. Again, today's research in reincarnation seems to be consistent with these views.

References

- Bailey Alice. *The Light of the Soul: Its Science and Effect: a Paraphrase of the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*. Lucis, 1927. <http://www.think-downloads.com/download/Spiritual/Light%20of%20the%20Soul%20-%20Alice%20Bailey.pdf>
- Barry Claire. *Godlet- From the Other Side of the Mirror*. S.A. Design & Print. Port Elliot South Australia 5212. 2016.
- Carr Bernard. Ian Stevenson and His Impact on Foreign Shores. *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 2008; 22(1): 87–92.
- Greyson Bruce. *Cosmological Implications of Near-Death Experiences*. *Journal of Cosmology*, 2011; 14.
- Hari S. How Vedanta Explains Conscious Subjective Experience. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research* 2015; 6(4): 209 – 221.
- Hari S, Oliver Alan J. Explaining Samapatti & Knowing without Mind by Vedanta. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research* 2015; 6(12):1001 -1014.
- Kihlstrom John F. The rediscovery of the unconscious. In H. Morowitz & J. L. Singer (Eds.). *The mind, the brain, and complex adaptive systems*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, Inc. 1994; 123-143. <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrm/rediscovery.htm>
- László Ervin. *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything*, Inner Traditions International, 2004.
- Lingham. Durgadas (Rodney). *Secrets of the Mahat: The Cosmic Intelligence*. Lulu.com. 2013.
- Mormann Florian and Koch Christof. *Scholarpedia* 2007; 2(12):1740.
- Mukherjee B D. *The Essence of Bhagavad Gita*. Academic Publishers 2002; Kolkata.
- Oliver A J. What I Think about Consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research* 2010; 1 (2): 153-158.
- Smythies John R. *Consciousness and Higher Dimensions of Space*. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2012; 19(11–12): 224–232.
- Stevenson Ian. *Twenty Cases Isherwood Suggestive of Reincarnation*. University of Virginia Press, 1980. <https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/>
- Swami Prabhvaananda and Christopher. *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*. 1953. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, India. <http://www.estudentavedanta.net/Yoga-Aphorisms-of-Patanjali.pdf>
- Swami Shraavananda. *Kenopanishad*. The Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 1920.
- Swami Vivekananda. *Raja Yoga*. Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Company, Limited, 1893. <http://hinduonline.co/DigitalLibrary/SmallBooks/PatanjaliYogaSutraSwamiVivekanandaSanEng.pdf>
- Swami Vivekananda. *The Vedanta Philosophy*. The Vivekanada Foundation. <http://web.csulb.edu/~wweinste/vedanta.html>
- http://shardsofconsciousness.com/user/sites/shardsofconsciousness.com/files/ebooks/RajaYoga_Vivekananda.pdf
- Trine Cheryl. *The New Akashic Records: Knowing, Healing & Spiritual Practice*. Essential Knowing Press. 2010.