

## **Addressing the Hard Problem**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This problem (as I understand it) is essentially the difficulty we have in explaining how consciousness arises in the brain. Science has developed technology which has enabled researchers to relate brain activity to electrical and chemical events within the brain, and through carefully designed experiments these events have been shown some consistency with the theory of how the brain works. That consciousness is real is obvious enough, and we don't need a theory to prove its existence. Moreover, the activity mentioned above is easily related to the brain having fairly predictable responses to external inputs (sensory) and internal activity co-incident with thought. The fact that we personally have no conscious awareness of the external world during periods of anaesthesia or head trauma seems to validate the view that consciousness is a process in the brain. In a paper appearing in this issue and entitled "The Principle of Existence", the authors submit a model which I believed was similar to that given in The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali by Pandit Ushar Buddh Arya. I have appended the Yoga Model of the entry of consciousness into matter (Fig.1). The reason I found their paper similar to the Yoga Model was that both seemed to progress through the same or similar steps in a journey from prespacetime to the everyday reality in which we and the Hard Problem exist.

**Key Words:** consciousness, hard problem, Yoga Sutras, Patanjali

### **1. Introduction**

While I don't expect to provide a silver bullet for this problem, I can at least provide another viewpoint not easily explored by many in this field. My reason for offering an opinion is that this information has existed for millennia; the reason it has not been embraced is probably due to the amount of discipline required to access and validate it. Science is very aware of savants and people with other cognitive 'gifts' and perhaps I fall into some obscure category in the scientific 'too hard' basket. With an apparent lack of the ability to imagine as other do, I have used this deficit to examine an aspect of mind by comparing my experiences against those who are 'normal.'

My experiences have all occurred during periods of one pointed concentration on another. In Yoga this is called Samapatti where two minds coalesce. An analogy is that of placing a red ruby alongside of a clear glass; the glass can appear to be red. It takes on some of the attributes of the ruby. That coalescence ceases

when the ruby is removed. Yoga uses the term, 'being in the presence of' throughout its description of the process shown by the Yoga Model (Fig.1), and it is central to an alternative view of consciousness.

### **2. An Alternative View of Consciousness**

We are mostly aware of both our inner and external environment during our waking life, and the universal view is that our consciousness is in our mind. By that we take as a given that our mind is in our brain, a view which is strengthened through our science and technology. What can be equally true, without having to refute any of the science and technology, is the notion that whatever is conscious can be conscious without having its origins in the brain. I accept this is a leap of some magnitude for some and shall endeavor to use my deficit to explain my reasoning, with some help from the Yoga diagram.

That two minds can coalesce is supported by both my experiences and by the evidence given by Patanjali and others for millennia. The difficulty for someone wishing to

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prove this lies in the effort needed to achieve the state of consciousness necessary for Samapatti. In my case I appear to have been born that way, for whatever reason. Having this has made life difficult for others around me as well as for myself and it has taken a long time to come to terms with, mainly through sustained searching to a description of the condition. The Yoga Model shows consciousness spread across the whole figure, acquiring different attributes at every level.

Yoga also gave me a description of two kinds of memory which allowed me to pin down why I cannot imagine or recreate a memory to revisit past feelings. As I explained in my book (Oliver, 2006), in October 2000 I felt intense bliss as I sat at the bedside of my dying daughter and afterward I could only have that memory as a narrative. This is not a recent development. In 1957 while traveling in a military aircraft, I happened to stand on a hatch in the floor. It dropped suddenly about 2 millimeters and I had quite a fright. When I reached the pilot he remarked that I was as white as a sheet. When I spoke to colleagues the following day the memory was just a narrative that 'this happened and I got a fright'.

The more common form of memory is that in which the object of the memory is primary and the instrument and process of apprehension are less obvious in our awareness. With that kind of memory I would have obviously recreated the experience of fright. Both Samapatti and the less usual kind of memory have one thing in common, and that is the instrument and process of apprehension. The instrument of apprehension is the sensory input to the brain, while the process of apprehension is the body/brain 'being in the presence of' the mind. In my case, what is missing from both is the sense of self, or Ego, as it is shown on the Yoga diagram. This lack of ego is the state Yogis seek through discipline to reach the states of Samadhi and Samapatti. It explains why my mind is mostly empty and why most people think I am calm and serene.

The point I want to make is that my deficit is actually the result of having been born with a different ratio of I-Am-ness for whatever reason. I do not think of myself as anything, and find it difficult to believe I am any different at all.

What I think it shows is the pivotal role played by just where our being is placed the Yoga. For most people I-AM means this body, person, role, my assets, beliefs and so on; not necessarily in a conscious way, it is more a ground of being.

### 3. The Hard Problem

Getting back to the Hard Problem, it does not have to be hard at all when we can relate consciousness to the Yoga diagram. Since two minds can coalesce then it is likely that consciousness is spread across the whole Model; as David Bohm said it 'all matter contains all information'. How we personalize this information is through self-identity, as demonstrated when the seer sets aside his/her identity and identifies on the subject, causing the two minds to coalesce.

If all information is in all matter, then all living tissue has consciousness within it. What creates the impression of individuality is the self-identity which differentiates one entity's experience from another. At the level of body tissue this self-identified consciousness (Mind) initiates psychophysical responses through 'being in the presence of' while *in utero* and continues afterwards, aided by mother and the whole family/social/culture. Of course what is in the genes has a lot to do with setting up the receiver to respond to imaginary inputs and I won't attempt to guess what or how it all works.

If we read the work of practitioners exploring treatments for stroke victims based on the apparent brain plasticity it is clear that the stroke victim can re-educate the brain to recover some of their lost motor abilities. I would suspect that part of the input to the brain in these cases is the conscious effort to move the disabled limb, as well as the therapist moving that limb through some external assistance. Thus, it is probably not just the case of the neural network being plastic in the sense of transposing motor function to another part of the brain. It is likely that the mind too has to recognize the availability of the whole brain at its disposal to achieve the result.

In the womb the brain of the fetus is in the presence of the mother's nervous system and the fetus' movements can respond the information in whose presence it is growing and being educated. During gestation the fetus is

connected to the mother to the extent I suggest it would be reasonable to say it is the same organism. If this suggestion is a valid one, then the movements of the fetus are really driven by the mother's mind (from the level of Mahat). Of course she is not always aware of this because most of her awareness (as distinct from her consciousness) is distributed across the tasks in hand at any particular time. Taking this notion of fetus as part of mother a little further, it can explain how mothers know intuitively when the new infant is distressed while out of her sight, and why 'mothers just know' when a child is doing something unacceptable. It is hardly surprising then that women, mothers in particular, are so intuitive. The same situation applies to the documented awareness an identical twin can have of its twin, even when they are thousands of miles apart.

#### 4. Conclusion

In a paper appearing in this issue and entitled "The Principle of Existence" (Hu & Wu, 2010), the authors submit a model which I believe is similar to that given in The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali by Pandit Ushar Buddh Arya. I have appended the Yoga Model of the entry of consciousness into matter. The reason I found their paper similar to the Yoga Model (Fig.1) was that both seemed to progress through the same

or similar steps in a journey from pre-Space/time to the everyday reality in which we and the Hard Problem exist.

My conclusion therefore is offered as an opinion on the Hard Problem, with the following observation. Scientists and philosophers have set themselves a difficult task in this because they generally search for the answer within a context which says it must conform to a fairly narrow set of parameters. If the only acceptable answer to the Hard Problem must involve Mind as being a product of brain activity, then it will remain a problem. We can recognise the process of setting parameters of where an answer must be found; it is called AHAMKARA on the diagram, and I guess it is a risk to step outside the boundaries of what everyone in the science fraternity holds dear. The Hindu tradition has a parable about a man looking for his house keys on a dark night. He is on the ground crawling around on hands and knees beneath a street lamp. Some passers by ask if they can help and he says no ; the keys are over there somewhere. The others ask why he is looking where he is looking and he replies that the light is here.

#### References

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**A model of consciousness based on Yoga can be related to a scientific viewpoint**

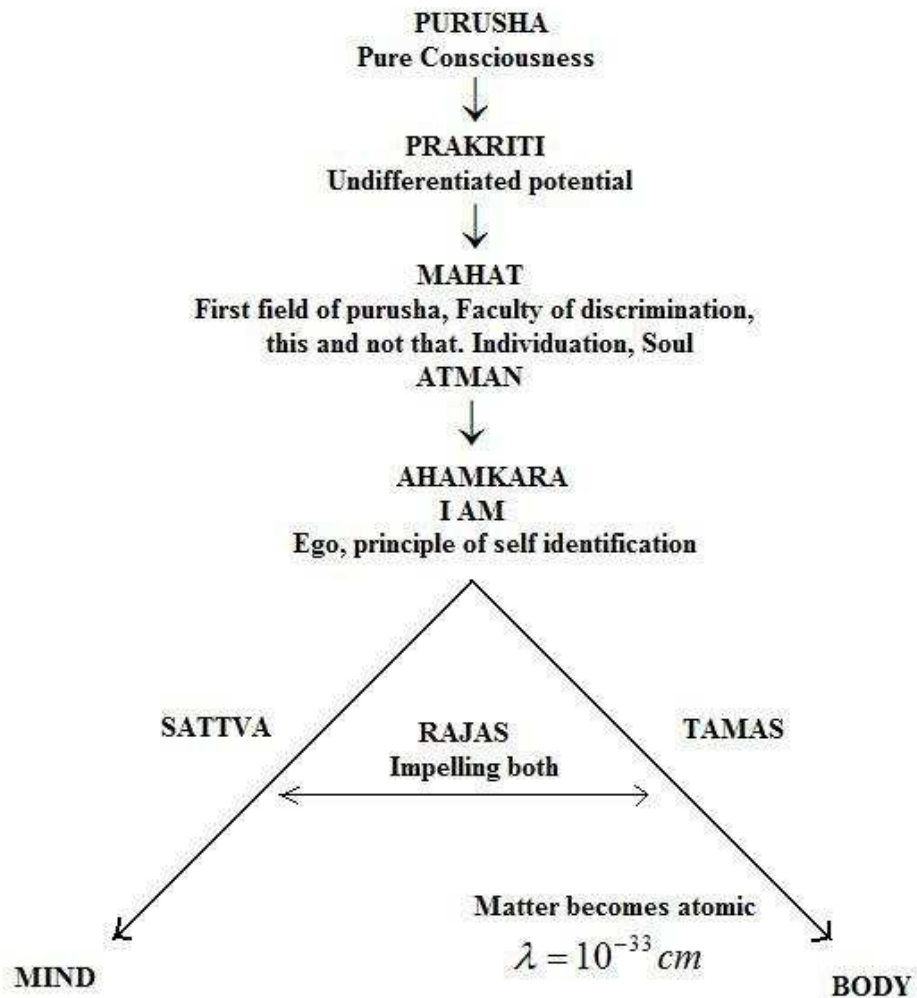


Fig.1 Yoga Model