

# Regarding Patanjali and Vedanta's Take on the Supernatural

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**Shane:** Hi, Ted. I hope everything is going well for you.

**Ted:** Thank you. Everything is wonderful.

**Shane:** I was wondering, have you ever heard of Patanjali?

**Ted:** Yes, he is credited with composing the *Yoga Sutras* and systematizing the system of *ashtanga yoga*, or the “eight-limbed path,” which is a means to *moksa* (i.e. liberation) and consists of the *yamas* and *niyamas* (i.e. ethical observances and avoidances, or things you should do and should not do in order to cultivate a *sattvic* mind), *asana* and *pranayama* (i.e. physical postures and breathing exercises that keep the body fit and mind calm for meditation), *pratyahara* (i.e. withdrawal or discipline of the senses that allows one to decrease one's outer focus and increase one's inner focus), *dharana* (i.e. concentration techniques that focus one's attention on objective representations of the self and serve the purpose of enabling one to maintain one's focus on a particular object and ultimately on the non-objectifiable awareness that is the substrate of all objects for an extended period of time), *dhyana* (i.e. formal seated meditation in which one is immersed in the object of one's attention) and *samadhi* (i.e. single-pointedness of mind when one totally merges with the object of one's attention and realizes the non-dual nature of reality).

**Shane:** There were many such persons with this name. To avoid confusing you, I'm referring to a man I believe by the name of Patanjali. Evidently he was an Eastern, probably Indian, philosopher/*swami* of Samkhya, who developed a system or the explanation of how the mind cannot think outside of space and time...

**Ted:** No doubt there are many persons who have gone by the name Patanjali, but the only Patanjali I am familiar with is the sage who promulgated the system of *ashtanga yoga*.

**Shane:** I understand the concept, but I'd hoped to find some type of writing that I could refer to when discussing this topic with other people; this way I can refer to some kind of writing instead of just saying “it's my belief...”

**Ted:** I don't know exactly how Patanjali explains that the mind cannot think outside of time and space, but his system of spiritual practice is explained in the *Yoga Sutras*. It is true, however, that the mind cannot think outside of time and space due to the fact that all objects that can be

perceived or conceived of, including the mind itself, only exist within the realm of time and space. Thus all mental activity necessarily falls within the parameters of time and space.

**Shane:** I'm not sure if you've ever heard of Swami Krishnananda, of The Divine Life Society; not many people have, but I'll give you a link to one of his videos in which he mentions Patanjali. His videos are a little rough audio-visually, but the wisdom is incredible; you might find it interesting... anyway I just thought I'd share that. Here's one video: ([link](#)).

If you could pass along any scriptures or informative reading (and the source of where to get it if it's not common, if you know), I'd really appreciate it.

**Ted:** My recommendation regarding Patanjali would be to read *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* by Swami Satchitananda, which includes the verses of the scripture rendered in English and Swami Satchitananda's commentary. Also, check out the teachings section of Swami Tadatmananda's website, [www.ArshaBodha.org](http://www.ArshaBodha.org), where you will find Swami Tadatmananda's series of lectures on the text that unfold the verses in the light of the teachings of traditional Vedanta.

**Shane:** Also, when you get the time, could you help me to understand how Vedanta explains the supernatural, i.e. ghosts, spirits, mediumship, etc? According to Vedanta, is it all a projection of imagination? In your belief, is there an "in between" or limbo? And again, if you could point me to some scriptures that would be helpful. If not, no worries...

**Ted:** I don't know of any scriptures that specifically address the issue, but traditional Vedanta accepts the existence of disembodied spirits within the context of the apparent reality. Anything perceivable and conceivable does exist to some degree. According to Vedanta, however, while such phenomena do exist and are experienced, they are not real in the sense that they are only apparently real (i.e. their existence is entirely dependent on the more fundamental substrate of limitless conscious existence, which is the only reality).

**Shane:** I understand that we all have an individual experience. I was wondering, do you have other beliefs or philosophies that you kind of synthesize into your understanding of existence and consciousness? If so, please feel free to share. According to your blog you seem pretty hard-core Vedanta. I too have found that Vedanta seems to answer all or most of the questions...

**Ted:** I have no other beliefs or philosophies. I spent 25 years weeding through various beliefs and philosophies, and the only system I found that laid to rest all my questions was Vedanta. This is not to say that other beliefs and philosophies are wrong, only that Vedanta is a comprehensive means of knowledge that needs no complementary teaching.

**Shane:** Thank you in advance for your wisdom...

~ *Namaste*, Shane

**Ted:** All the best.

~ Ted