

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टावङ्गानि ॥ २९ ॥

29. yama-niyama-āsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyāhāra-dhāraṇādhyāna-samādhayo'ṣṭāv-aṅgāni

yama-niyama – rules of ethical conduct of life

āsana – seat, posture

prāṇāyāma – breath control

pratyāhāra – withdrawal of the senses

dhāraṇā – concentration

dhyāna – meditation

samādhi – supreme consciousness

aṣṭa – eight

aṅgāni – limbs

The precepts of external and internal ethics, harmony with the body, control of the breath, withdrawal of the senses, concentration, meditation, and supreme consciousness are the eight limbs of Rāja yoga.

The first requirement for the spiritual path is to follow the ten ethical principles of YAMA and NIYAMA.

YAMA, the rules of moral conduct, consist of the following five principles.

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहायमाः ॥ ३० ॥

30. ahimsā-satya-asteya-brahmacarya-aparigrahā-yamāḥ

ahimsā – non-harming, non-killing

satya – truthfulness

asteya – non-stealing

brahmacarya – abstemious living, directing the mind towards God

aparigrahā – non-collecting

Non-injuring, truthfulness, non-stealing, restraining the senses, and non-gathering are the principles of ethical living.

AHIMSĀ – Not to injure anyone in thought, word or deed – be it a human being, an animal or nature – is the supreme commandment and highest principle in human life. All other commandments derive from this and are always to be obeyed in observance of *ahimsā*. No one should be hurt by us, because others feel the pain quite as much as we do. This does not only mean physical violence, but also harsh and aggressive words, ruthlessness, manipulation, coercion, insult or bad mouthing.

A sage, a saint, a realiser, who lives according to the thought: "God, make me an instrument of Your love and Your divine light," sees God in all beings. They feel at one with all living beings and does not inflict pain on anyone because that would cause suffering to themselves.

SATYA – Truthfulness. With everything that the sense organs and the mind, the most powerful of our senses, transmit to us, we must carefully weigh and judge what is true and what may be error or deception. *Satya* enjoins us not to lie, but in the spirit of *ahimsā* we should always be careful not to offend even by words.

SrīMahāprabhujī said, "Tell the truth—but not as with a knife."

Communicating the truth in a hurtful way is not a virtue, but generates as bad *karma* as a lie.

There are two things we should keep in mind in all undertakings – deeds as well as words: the right place and the right time ("*desha&kāla*"). We should not lie, but instead

strive to convey the truth according to place and time in a way that does not offend or hurt. For what is the use of truth if others are harmed by it?

ASTEYA – Non-Stealing. Theft means both the stealing of material possessions and the misappropriation and unauthorised use of another's intellectual property, thoughts, ideas, or knowledge. Imitation is also a type of theft. *Asteya* means not only not taking anything from anyone unlawfully, but also not even thinking, "I want that!"

What is written in the book of destiny comes to us even if we try to run away from it. But what is not in our *karma*, we try to obtain in vain. So let us be content with what is allotted to us, otherwise we may miss our destiny in life.

BRAHMACHARYA (*brahma* – God, *charya* – move) *Brahmacharya* is usually explained unilaterally as sexual abstinence, but it means much more than that. *Brahmacharya* consists generally of restraint of the senses from worldly pleasures. This means any addiction or passion, for example, including excessive eating and drinking. In its comprehensive meaning, *brahmacharya* refers to the attitude of turning away from sense pleasures and focusing one's life and aspirations entirely on God.

APARIGRAHA – Non-Collecting. This principle means that we should not collect material or spiritual possessions (for example, knowledge or power) for the sake of selfish ends.

Trust that God will give you what you need and do not carry unnecessary baggage with you. This does not mean that we should not work and live idly through the day. According to our *dharma*, we should provide for our livelihood and sustenance.

The world today is ruled by money. Every step costs something. Nature is fenced off and concreted over, and at every turn we encounter laws and regulations that limit us.

In order not to be a burden to others, it is necessary that we provide for our existence. Some things we need to live: food, clothing, a home, some measure of comfort and convenience, etc. Like everywhere else, we should only not overdo it by fearfully and greedily accumulating possessions that eventually become a burden to us and hinder spiritual development.

Also, we should strive not to selfishly provide only for our own pleasure and comfort,

but also do or donate something for others. There is a saying that happiness is the only thing that doubles when it is shared. The joy that comes out of it works back on us as good *karma*. Thus, a selfless act benefits us more than if we are only concerned about our own welfare. Money in itself is not bad at all. It just depends on how it is used. Used for good and selfless purposes, money helps ourselves and many other people.

एते जातिदेशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाःसार्वभौमामहाव्रतम् ॥ ३१ ॥

31. etejāti-deśa-kāla-samaya-anavacchinnāḥsārvabhaumāmahāvratam

ete – this

jāti – birth, state

deśa – place

kāla – time

samaya – circumstance, location

anavacchinnā – unbound, without distinction

sārvabhaumā – over the whole earth

mahāvratam – fundamental, sacred duty

These principles are fundamental and sacred duties, universal and independent of birth, place, time and other circumstances.

The *yamas* and *niyamas* are universal rules that describe a person's *dharma*. They are therefore not only to be followed from time to time, but throughout life. They apply worldwide and at all times, regardless of nationality, gender, religion or social status.

Now Patanjali explains the five principles of *NIYAMA* – the rules of inner morality.

शौचसन्तोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानिनियमाः ॥ ३२ ॥

32. śauca-santoṣa-tapaḥ-svādhyāya-īśvara-praṇidhānāniniyamāḥ

śauca – purity

saṁtoṣa – contentment

tapas – asceticism, discipline, self-control

svādhyāya – study, self-analysis

īśvaraprāṇidhāna – devotion to God

The principles of inner morality are: purity, contentment, self-mastery, self-study, and devotion to God.

SAUCHA – Purity

Outwardly, we can cleanse ourselves simply with soap and water. Inner purity, however, is difficult to achieve and takes a long time.

In a *bhajan* it is said: your inner shawl can be purified only with the water of devotion (*bhakti*), the stone of knowledge (*gyāna*), the soap of renunciation (*vairāgya*) and the baton of discrimination (*viveka*). The consciousness of such a yogi is free from all impurity and the veils of ignorance are removed.

SANTOSHA – Contentment

Contentment is an essential basis of spirituality. The hallmark of this contentment is to accept your place in life and the circumstances that have been assigned to you by destiny with equanimity, without envy and resentment towards others. Each person can draw only as much water from the river as their vessel can hold. One comes with a bucket and one with a cup, one has a bottle, and another draws only with their hands. All have been to the same river, but each returns with a different amount of water. It is the same in life: our capacity is limited. If we try to fill more than our capacity, the vessel will overflow, and various problems will result.

In spirituality we can expand our "vessel" to infinity. Then we can take in not only a few litres of water, but a whole river and even the whole ocean – and still there will be room. Such an unlimited vessel is the mind of the person who has attained contentment. On the other hand, those who are unsatisfied always remains unfulfilled. Their hunger is insatiable, for all that they receive is devoured by their insatiable spirit and percolates away like water in the desert.

Mahātma Gandhi said, "Renounce and enjoy." – Renounce and be happy. Better yet, one could say, "Renounce to be happy."

By "creating" something for ourselves, we create fear at the same time, because as soon as we possess something, we fear losing it again. Those who do not cling to things fear nothing. Happiness and unhappiness, joy and sadness are connected like the two sides of a coin. they play their interplay in earthly life incessantly. We cannot have one side alone and negate the other. Only by not clinging to anything are we free and content.

Contentment means renouncing envy, greed and possessiveness and not despairing of circumstances that cannot be changed. However, it does not mean falling into idle fatalism in adverse life situations. On the contrary, it is precisely there that purposeful work with deliberation and reason (*viveka*) is needed. In *sūtra*16 it was said: future suffering can be avoided. Past suffering cannot be changed, but through prudence, diligence, creative and wise thought and action, we can improve both the present and future situation in life.

For the three following *niyamas* see also the explanation in the introduction.

TAPAS – literally "heat", asceticism, strict discipline

Discipline and self-control are important so that we can continue and persevere in our *sādhana*. Through *tapas* we can train and strengthen these qualities. In the embers of *tapas*, the will is steeled-as the saying goes, "Forge the iron while it is hot."

SVĀDHYĀYA – Self-study, *sva*=self, *adhyāya*=study

"Yoga in Daily Life – The System" offers the step-by-step method of "Self-Inquiry Meditation" for this purpose. With this technique we get to know our good and bad qualities and explore our fears and complexes. We can only find the truth about ourselves within ourselves and not outside.

A young lad once observed a woman intensively searching the ground in front of her house for something. He approached her and asked what she was looking for.

"I am looking for my sewing needle," the woman replied. The lad helped her search, but without success. Then he asked her to show him the exact spot where the needle had fallen.

The woman replied, "Inside, in the house." The boy asked in amazement why she was looking for the needle outside the house. The woman replied that it was too dark to look

for it inside the house. Without further ado, the helper went into the house, lit a candle and soon found the needle, which he handed over to the grateful woman.

This story sounds like a joke, but aren't we basically doing the same thing as this woman? Instead of searching within, we seek happiness and knowledge in the outer world and lament our fate when we cannot find it there. The needle is the *ātma* we seek. The woman represents the misguided mind (*buddhi*) that follows wrong ideas. The house is the body, and the helper is the master who shows us the way within with the light of knowledge.

ISHVARA-PRANIDHĀNA – Devotion to God

In India there is a custom of placing a coin on the altar or in front of a statue in the temple. This gesture does not represent a monetary donation, nor a request for money, but has a deep symbolic meaning. Through this sign, the believer says to God, "*Samarpana*," which means, "I give myself entirely to You."

A life without love for God is like a withered tree without leaves, without blossoms and fruit. In devotion to God we pray, "I am all yours, Lord, whatever may happen. To You I entrust my body, my possessions, my mind and my soul."

When you go to sleep at night and let the events of the day pass in your mind, do not become entangled in them again, but let them go. Pray to God: "Lord, all that I have accomplished this day through my body, mind, and intellect, whether good or bad, I place in Your hands. Let me fall asleep in peace and protect my sleep with Your divine light." Then worry, loneliness, fear, anger and jealousy will depart from you.

When you get up in the morning, pray: "Lord, whatever I have done or thought in my sleep and in my dreams, consciously or unconsciously, I surrender to You. Guide me also today in Your hands as Your instrument. Act through me. It is not I who act. Let me be Your instrument and medium."

With this attitude of mind, you will advance safely and quickly on your path, and all obstacles and dangers will be kept away from you.

