

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

Mahamandleshwar Paramhans
Swami Maheshwaranandapuri

कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयात् तपसः ॥ ४३ ॥

43. kāyendriya-siddhir-aśuddhi-kṣayāt-tapasah

kāya – body

indriya – senses

siddhi – extraordinary powers

aśuddhi – impurity

kṣaya – reduction, elimination

tapas – asceticism, discipline, restraint

Self-mastery dissolves the impurities of the body and senses and bestows extraordinary powers.

Tapas acts like a purifying fire. It purifies our inner being by clearing and taming the antahkarana – mind, intellect, consciousness and ego. Tapas consists not only in physical asceticism but also in mental self-mastery. It means persevering and not giving up when the path becomes difficult and hard.

Do not be discouraged by anything, remain strong and steadfast in your decision. Accept the circumstances which fate has prepared for you, and use them as a basis for your work on spiritual development.

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासंप्रयोगः ॥ ४४ ॥

44. svādhyāyādiṣṭa-devatā-saṁprayogaḥ

svādhyāya – repetition, study, self-analysis

iṣṭa-devatā – personally worshipped god

saṁprayoga – contact, connection, union

Through study of the self, one becomes one with the personally worshipped deity.

The svādhyāyahs already been discussed at length – see sūtras 1 and 32. At this point, the study of one's own self is meant in particular.

Consciousness always directs itself where the mind, that is, thinking and feeling, directs it. The pure and divine vibration of the Guru-mantra forms a "direct line" to God. In the mantra practice, the consciousness is connected to that deity which we have accepted as our personally worshipped deity. God appears to us in the form in which we imagine Him and in which we believe in Him. By directing and concentrating consciousness and mind on Him, we feel and experience our connection with God.

समाधिसिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् ॥ ४५ ॥

45. samādhi-siddhir-īśvarapraṇidhānāt.

samādhi – highest consciousness

siddhi – ability, perfection

īśvarapraṇidhāna – devotion to God

The ability to attain the highest consciousness arises through devotion to God.

Īshvara-pranidhānahas also already been explained in the sūtras 1 and 32. In the highest stage of meditation, the mind gives up its own separate existence and dissolves into God. A prerequisite for this, however, is the control of the vrittis. As long as the mind wanders, meditation is not possible.

In meditation you can relax deeply and detach yourself from the stress of everyday life. Surrender all your worries to the deity you worship and feel free and protected. Of course, your problems are still there, and they may not be solved immediately. But wait with patience and trust for the solution. Be sure that it will come.

In relaxation and meditation, don't try to imagine a particular outcome. Let go and think like this: "I am sheltered in His hands. He is everywhere – inside and outside of me." Then you will be filled with a feeling of complete peace, deep peace, and inner harmony.

However, the thoughts do not calm down as quickly as we would like. Only slowly do the fears and worries of the past leave our consciousness. But one day we will gain certainty about God's everlasting love. God protects us at all times. Whether we feel His love or not – the ātma knows about it. So let us confidently place our destiny in God's hands, let us fix our minds on Him, let us meditate on Him – let us dissolve in Him.

Patanjali thus concludes his explanation of the meaning and effect of yama and niyama, and turns to the next principles of Rāja-yoga.

स्थिरसुखमसनम् ॥ ४६ ॥

46. **sthira-sukham-āsanam**

sthira – firm, immovable

sukha – pleasant, comfortable

āsana – seat, posture

Āsanais an immobile, comfortable sitting posture.

Or

The sitting posture should be immobile and comfortable at the same time.

The original meaning of ĀSANA is seat or sitting posture. The yoga body exercises for which the term "āsana" has become common are correctly called "yogavyāyāma" (yoga exercise, yoga training). An āsana in the actual sense is the immobile persistence in a yoga position. It should be stable and controlled, yet relaxed and pain-free.

For Patanjali, āsana means to take a comfortable seat and meditate. In order to be able to meditate for a longer period of time, the yoga exercises serve as training. Even after one or one and a half hours of meditation, one should not feel stiff and cramped, but still loose and relaxed.

Of course, it is also possible to meditate sitting on an armchair. But the traditional meditation posture has its purpose. In the body there are different chakras and energy pathways, some of which are positive, others negative. In the legs, from the Mūlādhāra chakra at the bottom of the spine down to the toes, there are so-called "animal" chakras, whose radiance is blocked by the lotus position. Human and divine energy flows in the chakras from the Mūlādhāra chakra upwards. These are to be awakened. Therefore, the upper body should be upright and relaxed so as not to interrupt the flow of energy in this area.

According to the Vedas, there are 72,000 nādis, nerves and subtle energy pathways in the body through which life energy (prāna) flows. Each nādi has its own name in Sanskrit, has a specific function in the body, and is associated with certain elements, levels, and properties. In meditation, one can perceive the energy flowing through the nādis as streams of light. Just as in a photograph of a road at night the headlights of the moving cars become visible as white and red streaks of light, so too do the emanations of the nādis appear as fine streams of light in the body.

This knowledge has been handed down by the rishis. To one who has never studied meditation and astral energy and has only knowledge of bodily anatomy, these processes may seem fantastic and implausible, since they are not visible to the eye and cannot be measured with technical instruments. Nevertheless, they are just as real as the processes in the body that have been researched and recognised by today's medicine.

प्रयत्नशैथिल्यानन्तसमापत्तिभ्याम् ॥ ४७ ॥

47. prayatna-śaithilya-ānantya-samāpattibhyām

prayatna – effort, endeavour

śaithilya – by diminution, relaxation

ananta – the infinite, the eternal
samāpattibhyām – (by) immersion, union, meditation

This is achieved through complete relaxation and immersion in the infinite.

Patanjali does not prescribe any particular sitting posture. It is up to each person to decide which posture they find comfortable and pleasant – the only important thing is to remain motionless in this posture for a long period of time. For meditation it is essential to sit upright, relaxed, painless and motionless, so that the mind can focus on God without falling asleep or being distracted by bodily and sensory impressions. Body and mind are connected – when the body moves, the mind moves.

The following example illustrates this: imagine a glass filled with water. If you move the glass, the water in the glass moves as well. If you move it a lot, you may even spill the water. Likewise, the mind cannot remain still when the body is moving. After all, physical restlessness always has a reason: pain in the hips or knees, in the back or neck, legs "falling asleep," and more. These sensations create vrittis, "waves" in the mind, and that is already the end of meditation. Through yoga body exercises we can train the body, strengthen and stretch the muscles, so that the meditation seat is no longer painful and can be kept immobile for longer.

It should be noted that Patanjali explains that a good sitting posture is achieved by reducing tension – in other words, not at all by torturing ourselves and struggling. Only by letting go, relaxing and directing the consciousness to the infinite, does the right posture arise physically and mentally.

