

# YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

## A Guide to Self-knowledge

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ततोद्वन्द्वानभिघातः ॥ ४८ ॥

### 48. tato dvandva-anabhighātaḥ

*tato – from there*

*dvandva – opposites, duality*

*anabhighāta – not coming close, moving away, disappearing*

**By mastering the sitting posture, the opposites of the sensations disappear.**

Once we have achieved complete relaxation and calming of physical and mental activities in the meditation posture and have attained deep contemplation, external influences such as heat, cold, noise, smells, etc. can no longer distract and disturb us.

First, through constant practice, master the body, second the mind, and third the consciousness. Then the light of the ātma can unfold freely.

Next, Patanjali describes the control over the breathing process, PRĀNĀYĀMA.

तस्मिन्सतिश्वासप्रश्वासयोर्गतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ॥ ४९ ॥

### 49. tasmin sati śvāsa-praśvāsayor-gati-vicchedaḥprāṇāyāmaḥ

*tasmin sati – afterwards*  
*śvāsa – to breathe out*  
*praśvāsa – inhale*  
*gati – process, movement*  
*viccheda – to interrupt, to stop*  
*prānāyāma – control of the breath*

**This is followed by prānāyāma, the regulation of inhalation and exhalation.**

PRĀNĀYĀMA is composed of the words: prāna(life energy) and āyāma (expansion, extension) and therefore literally means expansion of the life energy or vital force. Prāna is the universal life energy. Life is prāna, and prāna is life.

Five manifestations or forms of cosmic prāna operate in the human body: prāna, apāna, vyāna, udāna and samāna.

- PRĀNA flows from the nose to the level of the heart and supplies the body with oxygen and vital energy.
- APĀNA acts from the abdomen to the soles of the feet and regulates elimination.
- VYĀNA flows throughout the body and affects the nervous system and circulation.
- UDĀNA is an ascending energy that flows from the heart to the brain and connects with the astral body.
- SAMĀNA regulates the distribution of food in the body.

A detailed explanation of the prānās is given in the VibhūtiPāda, in the commentary on the sūtra 40.

In Rāja yoga, three prānāyāmas are described: inhalation (pūraka), exhalation (rechaka), and holding the breath (kumbhaka). The various techniques of breath control through which we can harmonise and balance the five prānas are prāna-vyāyāma, breathing exercises. These create the control and volitional management of the breathing process.

In mythology, it is said that every living being is allotted a certain number of breaths at birth, and so by lengthening the breathing cycles and reducing the number of breaths through breath holding, we can prolong life. This is the basic idea of yoga breathing exercises. As in

any discipline, proper instruction and building training is important and overdoing it is harmful. The duration of pūraka, rechakaand kumbhakamust be properly measured so that there is no discomfort or even shortness of breath at any stage of the breathing exercise. In the system of "Yoga in Daily Life" the breathing exercises are practiced in stages, so that if the instructions are properly followed, the optimum effect is obtained.

This sūtraalso emphasises that prānāyāmafollowsafter the correct sitting posture (āsana) has been mastered. During the breathing exercise, an upright and relaxed seat is especially important so that the chest and lungs are not compressed. Otherwise the practice of prānāyāma will be ineffective, or may even be harmful to the lungs or heart.

बाह्याभ्यन्तरस्तम्भवृत्तिर्देशकालसंख्याभिःपरिदृष्टोदीर्घसूक्ष्मः ॥ ५० ॥

## 50. bāhya-ābhyantara-stambha-vṛttiḥdeśa-kālasaṃkhyābhiḥparidṛṣṭodīrgha-sūkṣmaḥ

*bāhya – outer*

*ābhyantara – inner*

*stambha – motionless, stopped*

*vṛtti – movement*

*deśa – place*

*kāla – time*

*saṃkhyābhi – number, calculation, sum*

*paridṛṣṭa – seen, observed, measured*

*dīrgha – long, deep*

*sūkṣma – subtle, fine*

The regulation of the breath is done by inhaling, exhaling and holding the breath, is controlled by position, duration and number, and is progressively lengthened and refined.

As explained in the previous sūtra, in Rājā-yoga inhalation, exhalation, and holding the breath form the three types of prānāyāma. These three components of breathing are related to each other in each breathing technique.

For example, in an advanced technique of alternate breathing (anuloma-viloma-prānāyāma), we inhale for 4 seconds, hold the inhaled breath for 16 seconds, and then exhale for 8 seconds. After a few weeks of regular training in this breathing technique, the sequence can be gradually increased to the ratio 8:32:16.

- It should be noted that under no circumstances should this prānāyāmatechnique be started without having practiced the preparatory breathing exercises as described in stages 1-3 of "Yoga in Daily Life – The System" daily for three months at a time.

Regular breathing practice deepens the breathing process, the body feels light and relaxed, and the vrittis are calmed.

बाह्याभ्यन्तरविषयाक्षेपीचतुर्थः ॥ ५१ ॥

### 51. **bāhya-ābhyantara-viṣaya-ākṣepīcaturthaḥ**

*bāhya – outer*

*ābhyantara – inner*

*viṣaya – area, sphere, also: sense object*

*ākṣepa – to give up, to remove*

*caturtha – fourth(r)*

**The fourth type of prānāyāmagoes beyond inner and outer perceptions.**

The fourth type of prānāyāmais also called kaivalya kumbhaka. In very deep meditation and samādhi, without conscious regulation of the breathing process, there can be a spontaneous deepening and extreme slowing of the breathing, so that to an observer it seems like a cessation of breathing.

In this state, the body and mind are in complete tranquillity, detached from external sensory perceptions and also from internal sensations, thoughts and feelings. The consciousness is directed in undivided concentration towards the ātma.

ततः क्षीयतेप्रकाशावरणम् ॥ ५२ ॥

### 52. tataḥkṣīyateprakāśa-āvaraṇam

*tata – from there*

*kṣīyate – is removed, comes off*

*prakāśa – shine, light*

*āvaraṇa – veil*

**As a result, the veil that covers the light is lifted.**

Through the complete turning of the consciousness towards the Supreme Self, the accumulated karmas and samskāras(imprints) are gradually dissolved. This lifts the veil of ignorance that has veiled the light of the ātma. The darkness of ignorance, which lies like a thick, impenetrable curtain over our consciousness, is the cause of all our sufferings, problems and misguidedness. When this curtain is lifted, we realise the divine radiance within that shines like millions of suns. In this process of enlightenment, we behold and receive the light of divine knowledge.

धारणासु च योग्यतामनसः ॥ ५३ ॥

### 53. dhāraṇāsu ca yogyatāmanasaḥ

*dhāraṇā – concentration*

*ca – and*

*yogya – capable, fit*

*manas – mind*

**Then the mind becomes capable of concentration.**

DHĀRANĀ – concentration means directing thoughts and feelings to only one object for a long time. To keep the consciousness at the level of dhāraṇā is not easy. To focus on one object for three or five seconds already requires great power of concentration and is beyond the capacity of most people. Even trying to focus the mind on one object raises countless vrittis and "inner dialogues" that disturb and distract us.

One of the most effective techniques for developing the ability to concentrate is TRATAKA (dot or candle meditation).

In the Hatha yoga technique, Trātaka, one gazes for 2-3 minutes at a black dot or into a candle flame and then, with closed eyes, observes the image of the object appearing inside behind the forehead. This is a very good way to test your ability to concentrate: how many seconds or minutes can you visualise the dot or the candle flame with closed eyes? That is how long you are able to concentrate.

Another technique is SAHAJA SHVĀSA. This is observing one's own natural breathing process without influencing it: "I know I am breathing in – I know I am breathing out. I feel the body expanding during inhalation and contracting during exhalation."

Breath practice is the best method to develop or increase the ability to concentrate. Since the breath and the mind are closely connected and interact, by controlling and regulating the breath we gradually gain more and more control over the mind. This enables us to concentrate on a specific goal or object at any time we wish.

The various techniques of imagination and the images used in concentration and meditation exercises are mainly for the purpose of distracting the mind from restless thoughts and worries and making it positive and calm. Therefore, we choose beautiful and soothing images – a tree, a lake or a flower, the sunrise or sunset, etc. But these visualisations are not yet concentration and meditation; they only serve to occupy the mind.

What does a mother do when her child is restless and cries? She gives the child a toy to keep them quiet so that she can work in peace. Thus, we give the mind various images and ideas as "toys" to calm the stream of thoughts. But once the state of true concentration and meditation is reached, we no longer need such means.

