

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगेचित्तस्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणांप्रत्याहारः ॥ ५४ ॥

54. sva-viṣaya-asamprayogecittasya-svarūpa-anukāraiva-indriyāṅampratyāhārah

sva – self, own

viṣaya – object, subject

asamprayoga – separation

citta – consciousness

svarūpa – true form, being

anukāra – alignment

iva – in a sense, as if

indriya – senses

pratyāhāra – withdrawal

When the sense organs withdraw from external objects and turn inward, this is called *pratyāhāra*.

PRATYĀHĀRA means to eliminate external and internal disturbances and the wandering of thoughts by withdrawing the senses. Once the sensory impressions in the mind no longer cause restlessness and distraction, the consciousness can detach from the external world and center in the inner self. *Pratyāhāra* is the ability to gather oneself inwardly at any time and instantaneously and to shut oneself off from the outer world.

ततःपरमावश्यतेन्द्रियाणाम् ॥ ५५ ॥

55. tataḥparamāvaśyatendriyāṅām

tata – from there

paramā – highest(r)

vaśyatā – obedience, being under control

indriya – senses

Thus, the complete mastery of the senses is attained.

By being able to turn the senses and mind outward or withdraw them inward at will – just as a turtle can retract its head and limbs under its shell or extend them outward at any time – the yogi has brought them under their control and is no longer dominated and controlled by them.

These described exercises of body, breath and mind control are to be practiced daily. Each stage requires the practice and mastery of the previous one. Without regular yoga-body exercises, the deep and calm breathing of "yoga-full-breathing", which is the preparation for the yoga-breathing exercise (*prānāyāma*), is not established. If we neglect *prānāyāma*, we cannot reach the stage of control of the senses and mind (*pratyāhāra*). If we cannot turn the mind inward, concentration on an object (*dhāranā*) cannot succeed, and neither can meditation (*dhyāna*).

Therefore, it is recommended that in the daily practice session, āsanas, *prānāyāma* and relaxation should always be done first, followed by concentration and meditation techniques. However, if you practice in the morning, shortly after getting up, you can also start with meditation, because the mind is still calm from the relaxation of sleep.

Through the principles and exercises that Patanjali explains in the *Sādhana-Pāda*, the mind is purified and strengthened – provided, of course, that they have been observed and practiced. Now the consciousness can further unfold to the higher and highest consciousness. In time and with continued practice, the yogi will reap the fruits of their *sādhana*, which Patanjali describes in the next chapters of the *Yoga Sūtras-Vibhūti-Pāda* and *Kaivalya-Pāda*.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TO THE SĀDHANA-PĀDA

Question: Do I have to master all the other principles of *Rāja-yoga* before I can meditate?

Answer: The first seven stages of *Rāja-yoga* should be performed daily. In the course of your daily life, you perform various activities every day: you get up, wash yourself, do your exercises, prepare your breakfast, go to work, have lunch, go back to work, go home, and so on. It doesn't occur to you to say, "For a month I just eat breakfast and do nothing else." You do one thing after another every day.

The rules of *yama* and *niyama* are comparable to the Christian ten commandments, which should form the basis of every action. Likewise, it is important to practice *āsanas* and *prānāyāma* daily. *Pratyāhāra* and *dhārāna* are also to be practiced daily, as are prayer and meditation (*dhyāna*). These principles and techniques intertwine. They are all to be practiced simultaneously and gradually perfected. The eighth point (*samādhi*) cannot be reached immediately, but you will certainly reach this stage one day.

Question: Patanjali says that through *Rāja-yoga* one can attain *samādhi* and *moksha*. But you said that *Rāja-yoga* alone is not enough, we also need *Bhakti-yoga* and *Karma-yoga*. How is that to be understood?

Answer: I would like to answer with a comparison: wheat contains all the necessary nutrients, and it would be possible to get enough nutrition from wheat alone. But chewing only wheat every day soon becomes boring.

All yoga paths form a unity. The discipline and self-control of *Rāja-yoga* is a basis and necessary prerequisite, but without love (*bhakti*) one cannot progress in life and also in Yoga. It is likewise the same in regard to knowledge (*gyāna*), reason (*viveka*) and action (*karma*). A spiritual aspirant should have all the qualities in them. They should be at once a *Rāja-yogi*, a *Bhakti-yogi*, a *Karma-yogi* and a *Gyāna-yogi*.

Question: When is the best time to meditate and concentrate on the *chakras*?

Answer: Śrī Mahāprabhuji once said, "For good things time is always good, and for bad things time is always bad." However, there are certain constellations that are supportive. The best time to meditate is *brahma muhūrta*, the "hour of Brahman," about 1 1/2 hours before sunrise. But if you cannot get up at that time – perhaps because you went to sleep too late – meditate at the time when it is possible for you. The hour before and after sunset is also a good time for meditation.

Question: It is said that when a person attains cosmic consciousness, they no longer exist as an individual. How can they then incarnate again as a master and helper of humanity?

Answer: If we compare the cosmic consciousness to a lake, the incarnation of a divine soul is like a canal branching off from that lake to irrigate the fields and bring help to the people.

Question: How can one learn to deal with the suffering and death of close people?

Answer: What we see is the suffering and dying of the body and therefore not reality. The soul never suffers. As long as it identifies with the body in its ignorance, it suffers with the body, but only in the way we suffer when we see a sad film. The Realised One, however, no longer falls into the illusion of suffering. For them, their body is only the shadow of existence. But it is, of course, our human duty to help a suffering person and to do everything possible to alleviate their pain and preserve their life.

Question: How can you change *karma* through yoga?

Answer: If you are driving a car on an icy road and you skid, you can avoid an accident by a skilful steering manoeuvre. In this way, reason and discrimination can save you from negative *karma*. But if you remain inactive, just close your eyes and think, "This is my *karma*, there's nothing I can do about it," then nothing will change.

We are to avoid, as far as we are able, an unfavourable development of fate through caution and mindfulness. Sometimes, however, we do not know whether something will turn out well or badly. We usually judge and react only according to the present point of view and knowledge. Reality, however, can often only be seen from a higher level.

A wise man does not react immediately and emotionally, but waits, considers, meditates and only then decides. The ignorant, on the other hand, jumps off immediately like a firebrand. Take your time in making decisions. Consider not only your own good, but also the good of others and possible future developments (or entanglements). The best way to protect yourself from negative people or events is to avoid them in advance. This way we can avoid arguments, unpleasant emotions and reactions.

Question: How is an intrinsically bad deed to be judged if it initially leads to a negative result, but subsequently leads to something good? Specifically, I mean by this: if Judas had not betrayed Jesus, he would not have been able to redeem mankind on the cross.

Answer: First of all, I am quite sure that Jesus would have redeemed mankind just as well if he had not been crucified. Therefore, Judas' betrayal was – from my point of view – neither a necessary nor an excusable act.

Jesus probably could have avoided his death on the cross, but in his humility and surrender to God's will he accepted this fate. It is said that Jesus was also in India and was able to raise his consciousness to the level of *samādhi*, in which he no longer identified with the body and also suffered no pain.

To know how it really happened, we would have to attain the highest consciousness ourselves. The truth may be quite different from what we believe.

Once Arjuna met God Krishna at prayer. Astonished, he said that Krishna, being God Himself, certainly did not need prayer. Krishna replied, "I do this because the small imitate the actions of the great." That is, the masters and saints do not act for their own sake, but to be an example to people.

So Jesus, too, with his life and death, gave people a model not to give up the spiritual path, even if it costs their lives. The apostles and martyrs followed this example and are still outstanding examples of faithfulness and steadfastness today.

Question: Why is rebirth not mentioned in the holy scriptures of the Jews and Christians?

Answer: This teaching was originally present, but was later removed. In the Bible there are several unclear passages about resurrection, heaven and hell, which can be explained under the aspect of reincarnation.

Question: How can God, who is infinite, absolute, eternal, and without form, be born as a person?

Answer: God has two aspects, *nirguna* (without form) and *saguna* (with form). On the one hand, God is formless, eternal and infinite. He exists in all living beings, and all exist in Him – "One in All and All in One," my master, Holy Gurujī, used to say. The essence (*ātma*) of all living entities is God. The second mode of appearance of God is the holy incarnations. In this form, God incarnates in a body, as a saint and realised master.

*** OM SHĀNTIḤ SHĀNTIḤSHĀNTIḤ ***