

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

Mahamandleshwar Paramhans
Swami Maheshwaranandapuri

विभूति पादः
VIBHŪTI-PĀDAḤ

देशबन्धश्चित्तस्यधारणा ॥ १ ॥

1. deśa-bandhaś-cittasyadhāraṇā.

deśa – point, place, location

bandha – holding

citta – consciousness

dhāraṇā – concentration

Concentration is the fixing of the consciousness on one point.

Dhāraṇā has already been briefly discussed in the previous part, Sādhana-Pāda. Now this concept will be explored in more depth. Dhāraṇā means concentration. As long as the feelings and thoughts (vrittis) keep striving outward and we have to make an effort to remain inwardly oriented, we are unfocused. Disturbances can be caused externally, but also internally: by physical pain, hunger and thirst as well as by sorrow, worries, restless thoughts and desires.

Kabīr das said in a poem, "Hunger is like a dog. When a dog is hungry, it is troublesome, barking and disturbing." That means "feed your dog first," then you can meditate peacefully.

Concentration means having the mind under control in such a way that it remains focused and fixed on a single point for several minutes without wandering off for even a fraction of a

second. Normally we are not able to do this for even half a minute. The mind is always on the move, looking for something new to do.

So, to satisfy the mind, we choose an object as an aid to concentration: a flame, a flower, the moon, an image of God, a mantra, etc., to anchor the mind to. Closing our eyes, we visualise this object – for example, a candle flame. The next step is to image the object in the inner space and observe and hold it contemplatively for a longer time without being distracted by external or internal disturbances (vikshepasand kleshas).

To repeat: vikshepasare external or physical disturbances, such as sounds, smells, cold or heat, or hunger, thirst, pain, and so on. These cause kleshas – inner tensions, restless thoughts, unpleasant feelings, or anger. As long as vikshepasand kleshas affect the mind, we cannot build up concentration because the mind is constantly wandering outwards.

But these are only preliminary exercises in concentration. Dhāranāis more than mere mental centring on a randomly chosen object. Literally, dhri (dhāranā) means "to accept," to accept and absorb. To "accept" something means to be fully attuned to it and to direct one's entire being – body, mind, and spirit – toward the chosen goal.

In the Indian epic Mahābhārata, there is a story about Guru Dronāchārya and young Eklavya that illustrates what devotion, practice and concentration can do.

Guru Dronāchārya was the teacher of the Pāndavas, the sons of kings at the court of Hastinapūr in northern India. He ran a gurukūla (master school) there, admitting only disciples from royal families. Guru Dronāchārya was a consummate master of archery and instructed his disciples in this art.

One day a boy came to him who was descended from the Bhīl, a tribe in the mountains. His name was Eklavya.

He requested of Guru Dronāchārya, "Master, I want to learn the art of archery from you!" With one look, Guru Dronāchārya recognised this boy's great desire and potential, and inwardly he blessed him.

Outwardly, however, he said, "This is not possible. This school is accessible only to kshatriyas, warriors. Therefore, I am sorry to have to turn you away; you cannot study here."

But Eklavya was a true bhakta and felt the mercy of the master. The bond of master and disciple is exceedingly fine and deep, comparable to the relationship between mother and child. So, aware of the Guru's blessings, Eklavya went back to the mountains, determined to carry out his practices with full concentration. In a clearing in the forest, he erected a small statue of his master Dronāchārya out of clay and meditated before it every day. Then he took a bow and arrow and practiced. Many hours a day he practiced archery.

When he missed the target, he would come before the image of his master and ask, "Master, forgive me! Give me the strength to get it right next time."

In this way Eklavya practiced for several years. Finally, he attained such perfection in archery that he hit the target always and at all times. But still he continued to practice. Hitting a target does not mean perfection. If one shoots a hundred arrows from a distance of a hundred yards, and all the hundred hit exactly the point marked by the point of a needle in the centre of the target, that too is not perfection. Eklavya practiced, practiced and practiced some more.

One day Guru Dronāchārya went to the forest with his disciples, among whom were several princes, to hold an examination. Of all his disciples, Arjuna was the best shot. They also had some hunting dogs with them. One of them scented Eklavya and ran to the clearing where the latter was practising archery. The dog started barking, which disturbed Eklavya. He ordered the dog to leave, but it did not follow and continued barking.

What did Eklavya do? He took his arrows and shot at the dog, so fast and so perfectly that he completely filled the dog's mouth with arrows. However, without hurting it! Not a single drop of blood was spilled! Eklavya's goal was only to stop the dog from barking. Whimpering softly, the dog now ran back to Guru Dronāchārya with its mouth filled with arrows.

Seeing the dog, Guru Dronāchārya exclaimed in amazement, "Who is this person who can shoot the arrows so perfectly?"

But jealousy seized the princes, and Arjuna said reproachfully, "Apparently you have given your knowledge not only to us but also to another?"

Guru Dronāchārya replied, "Let us see who it is!" So, they went to the place where Eklavya was practicing. When Eklavya saw his master coming, he ran up to him and greeted him reverently.

The Guru asked, "Eklavya, did you do this?"

"Yes, master! Forgive me, but I felt disturbed during my practice," replied the boy.

"Who taught you like that?" asked Dronāchārya.

Eklavya laughed and said, "Who else could it be but you? By your grace I have learned it!"

Then the master said, "When I have transmitted this knowledge to you, you shall also give me a guru dakshinā." Guru dakshinā means to give a gift or donation to the master in gratitude for his teaching. Eklavya bowed and replied, "Everything I have is yours!"

Guru Dronāchārya said, "Good, then give me the thumb of your right hand."

Without a second's hesitation, Eklavya cut off his thumb with a knife and presented it to Guru Dronāchārya.

This happened because Guru Dronāchārya had promised Arjuna that he would be the best archer in archery. Now that Eklavya had sacrificed his thumb, he was not as perfect as this. Thus, Eklavya proved perfect devotion to his master and thereby attained immortal fame.

Thereafter, Guru Dronāchārya also tested Arjuna and asked him to shoot a bird from the branch of a tree. Arjuna concentrated and drew the bow.

Guru Dronāchārya asked, "Can you see the tree and the bird? Do you see the branch on which it is sitting?"

Arjuna replied, "Master, I do not see any tree, nor any branch. I see only the eye of the bird and wait for your command to shoot."

At this the Guru said with satisfaction, "Good! Enough! You have passed the test."

Arjuna had not yet shot at the bird, but the Master said, "Good! Enough!" This is how real concentration works. Dhāranā begins when the mind is fixed exclusively on the target. It doesn't matter what object is chosen – only that is seen, and everything else fades from consciousness. The mind deeply absorbs the object to which it directs its concentration until it fills it entirely and it finally unites with it completely. This then introduces the next stage: Meditation.

तत्रप्रत्ययैकतानताध्यानम् ॥ २ ॥

2. tatrapratyaya-ikatānatādhyānam

tatra – there, thither

pratyaya – conviction, firm belief, conception, also: consciousness

ekatānatā – fixed on a single object, flowing as one

dhyāna – meditation

Meditation is the continuous flow of consciousness to a single object.

Centring the mind and consciousness on an object for a long time and without interruption is meditation (dhyāna). This object can be inside or outside the body. For example, one can concentrate on the breath, or on a chakra, or on an external object, as mentioned in the previous sūtra.

Just as water or electricity flows continuously through a pipe, so in meditation consciousness or attention flows without interruption or distraction to the object of concentration. In this way, concentration (dhāranā) gradually flows into meditation (dhyāna). As stated in the last sūtra, dhri (dhāranā) means to accept, to acknowledge. Dhyāna means becoming one with that object or symbol in consciousness. Finally, the mind "forgets" its existence. The "I-feeling" no longer exists. How does this happen? For example, when sugar dissolves in milk, both have united. And so, the meditator unites with the object of their meditation. They do not perceive anything else and dissolve in it.

My master, Holy Gurujī, said in a prayer:

Oh God, wherever I look,
everywhere there is only You!

Without form and in a form – always I see only You.

Wherever I look, You are, O Lord.

When the union in meditation is so far advanced, samādhi follows. The divine flame appears in the inner self and fills the whole existence with light. Wherever you turn, everywhere and in everything you behold the divine light.

तदेवार्थमात्रनिर्भासभ स्वरूपशून्यमिवसमाधिः ॥ ३ ॥

3. tad eva-ārtha-mātra-nirbhāsaṁsvarūpa-śūnyamivasamādhiḥ

tad – so eva – only, alone

ārtha – object, sense

mātra – elementary, only

nirbhāsa – clear, luminous, also: without conception, without imagination

svarūpa – true form

śūnya – empty

iva – as it were

samādhi – deep absorption, highest consciousness

When only the pure form of the object appears in consciousness, empty, as it were, of all conception, this is samādhi.

In samādhi, consciousness (chitta) changes into a completely different state than in waking or sleeping. In samādhi a new, fundamentally different quality of consciousness opens up. Even the consciousness of "I exist, I live, I experience, I feel" disappears. The form of existence, ego consciousness, becomes shūnya, or empty.

What does it mean, and how can we imagine it? Shūnya means that there is no feeling of "I am" anymore. When the dentist gives an injection, after a few minutes that part of the jaw becomes "shūnya," numb. Although the nerve is still there, we no longer feel anything at that point. Something similar happens after long practice and practice of concentration and meditation. Consciousness unites with the object of meditation, and this new quality of consciousness is called samādhi.

In samādhi these three aspects unite and become one: Knowledge – Knower – Object.

As long as the awareness of one's own existence is there, that is, as long as the duality of "I" and "That" exists, the consciousness is not in the state of samādhi. In union it becomes SOHAM – I am That.

The way there is long! First, concentration must be realised.

The important thing is: decide on one object or one symbol and stick to it! Do not switch between different objects. A spirit that jumps around a lot and searches around is called a "monkey spirit" in India. A monkey stays still only for a short while and then jumps from tree to tree. Every one of us knows this: today we concentrate on one thing, tomorrow on something else and the day after tomorrow we try something new again – and every day we find ourselves right back where we started. The important thing is to find a symbol, a goal, and to work with it constantly. All thinking and feeling, all actions and deeds, the words, the work, the relationships, the sleep – the whole being should be directed towards this goal.

Just as a child naturally runs to its mother when it is in trouble or frightened, so the thinking and feeling of a spiritual seeker, a bhakta, goes to their ISHTA DEVATĀ, the personal God-figure with whom they feel connected.

God has two aspects. One is the formless, universal God (nirguna). The formless God cannot be grasped by the senses, He can only be felt inwardly. The second is God in a form, as a divine incarnation (saguna).

Be sure of your goal. Think carefully about what you are looking for. When you have found your point of concentration – your personal symbol or image of God – ask yourself again if this is what you are really looking for, what you want to connect with! I wonder if it might not change in a few weeks, months, years? The mind is always looking for change – we search, find, search again, find again – yet search again for something new That is how it goes throughout life. Even married couples who have been married for 20 or 30 years get divorced and look for new partners, although they were so sure in the beginning that they had found their companion for their whole life. Vrittis, vikshepas, kleshas, doshas, all kinds of conditions affect us from outside and inside and distract the mind. To reach the goal, there must be no doubt, no dualism, no other thought, no restlessness and distraction in the consciousness.

The great saint Mīrā was a royal princess. According to tradition, her parents arranged her marriage with King Rāna. But Mīrā refused to marry.

She said, "I am married to God Krishna. In me only Krishna exists. My whole existence is filled with Krishna. There is no more part of Mīrā to be associated with King Rāna."

There is another telling story about Hanumān, the bhakta of God Rāma.

Once Rāma, his wife Sītā and Hanumān were sitting together. Rāma, however, had no eyes for his beautiful wife, but kept looking at Hanumān.

Then Sītā became jealous and asked her consort, "Why do you look only at Hanumān and do not dignify me with a single glance?" Instead of an answer, Rāma bent towards Hanumān and plucked out a hair. Then he held the hair to Sītā's ear. And what did she hear? From Hanumān's hair was heard quite clearly the sound RĀM, RĀM, RĀM.

"Do you hear that?" asked Rāma, "His whole being is filled with the vibration of the divine name. That is why I am inexorably drawn to him."

Holy Gurujī, our revered sadguru, was also filled with the name of Sri Mahāprabhuḥjī in every fiber of his body, in every drop of his blood: Guru Deep, Guru Deep, Guru Deep. Deep (dīpa) means flame, light. In other words, Holy Gurujī was filled with divine light. He had completely united with the ātma.

When the whole existence, mind and consciousness, are completely filled with the object-the inner image of God-the realisation of oneness takes place in samādhi.

