

# YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

## A Guide to Self-knowledge

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### INTRODUCTION

Rishi Patanjali, often referred to as the "Father of Yoga", is the author of the Yoga Sūtras and founder of the of the Rāja school of yoga. It is Patanjali's great merit is that he made available the rich treasure of yoga's philosophy and epistemology, structured, and divided into sections.

Patanjali was not the "inventor" of the teachings he expounded, but he was the first to put in writing the knowledge and teachings of the great masters and yogis of the past, which had been passed on orally for thousands of years. With the Yoga Sūtras Patanjali founded the systematic science of yoga.

The philosophical background of the Yoga Sūtras is formed on the one hand by the Vedas and Upanishads and on the other hand the six Darshanas, the classical Indian philosophical systems (Mīmāṃsā, Vaisheshika, Nyāya, Sankhya, Yoga and Vedānta), formulated by eminent rishis based on the Vedas and Upanishads and summarized in the form of sūtras.

A sūtra contains the essence of the teaching or lecture of a rishi or master. At the end of his discourse the master summarized the main points of his lecture in a mnemonic sentence. The students could easily remember this short sentence and thus recall the whole lecture back into their memory. Therefore, the sūtras, taken on their own, are often difficult to understand and require explanation by a knower, a master. There are many translations and

interpretations, but the explanations of a realized master awaken in the disciple the living knowledge that was transmitted at that time.

The 196 sūtras of Patanjali are divided into four chapters:

1. SAMĀDHI-PĀDA samādhi - highest consciousness.
2. SĀDHANA-PĀDA sādhanā - spiritual practice.
3. VIBHŪTI-PĀDA vibhūti - strength, power, miraculous power (siddhi).
4. KAIVALYA-PĀDA kaivalya - oneness, union with the Absolute

### **PART 1: SAMĀDHI-PĀDA (51 sūtras)**

Before deciding on a path, one wants to know the goal of that path. Therefore, in the first part of his sūtras, Patanjali discusses the highest goal of yoga: SAMĀDHI, as the level of consciousness, the highest perfection of which knowledge, the knower and the object are united or in which the union of ĀTMA and PARAM ĀTMA (the individual self with the cosmic self) is fulfilled. Through yoga exercises and meditation, a person can attain the highest samādhi, the perfect and permanent unity of his individual consciousness with the cosmic self - its origin.

### **PART 1, SUTRAS 1-2**

1. atha yoga-anuśāsanam

atha – now

yoga – Yoga

anuśāsanam – instruction, discipline

Now the principles of yoga are explained.

2. yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ

yoga – Yoga

citta – consciousness, mind

vṛtti – change, movement, function, activity

nirodha – control, calming, putting to rest

This sūtra can be interpreted in two ways:

(a) Yoga begins when the activities of consciousness (thoughts and emotions) are under control and at rest.

or

b) Through yoga, the ability to keep thoughts and emotions under control and calm is attained.

Each person reveals himself not only through the physical body, but beyond that through invisible, subtle vibrations, impulses, and "waves" in consciousness, which also radiate outward.

Those functions of the psyche, through which the personality expresses itself are called ANTAHKARANA in Sanskrit: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkāra (mind, intellect, consciousness, and sense of self). Until these four are purified, no progress on the spiritual path is possible.

Chitta here means consciousness in the sense of waking consciousness.

Patanjali distinguishes five states of consciousness: unconscious, subconscious, conscious, supreme consciousness, and cosmic consciousness. The content of our consciousness is formed by vrittis ("waves"), which are the carriers of all our inner stirrings, thoughts, feelings, desires, sense impressions, and so on.

Chitta-vrittis are our biggest problem. We occupy ourselves with so many unnecessary thoughts, with past events that we cannot change, with worries about the future that may not happen. Especially when we are relaxing, going to sleep, during leisure time on vacation, etc. such thoughts or issues resurface from the subconscious.

Every thought is a disturbance of concentration. There is a very apt image: Consciousness is like a lake. Is a calm and clear, without waves, you can see all the way to the bottom. Now someone comes, takes a stone and throws it into the water. What happens? Many waves are created, the water is churned up so that you can't see what's on the bottom, what is at the bottom. The same thing happens when we are meditating, when we are in a calm and relaxed state, and suddenly a restless thought appears. This is like a stone thrown into the lake, and the concentration is over.

As long as vrittis are floating around in the consciousness, they cover up the true self within us. Only when the mind is calm can we gain the realization, "I am not my thoughts, I am the ātma, the Self!"

The vrittis, of course, always have a cause. If we do not know and do not resolve their cause, vrittis will appear again and again. Ask yourself: What are you thinking, why do you think this way, what should you think and why should you think this way? By examining and analysing why we think the way we think, we can make a difference.

What makes us feel anxious and worried? Possibly it is about family, job, partner, health, the financial situation, etc. If you let your thoughts run wild, you will eventually lose control at some point. Our thoughts are just like a car that is idling down a hill gaining more and more speed, so that at some point it is no longer in control and an accident occurs.

Whether we progress or regress on the spiritual path depends on our feelings and desires, which in turn are caused by our thoughts. How many chapters in life have we started since we existed as an individual? They are all present in the memory of our mind. We are only aware of the memories from the recent past, but all other impressions are still not lost. Everything is recorded and stored in the subconscious mind. Purifying and controlling the vrittis is a task that we must work on until the last stage of our development and until the last moment of our life. The vrittis haunt us not only in this life, but through several lives. Hidden

in the unconscious and subconscious, they go along through several lifetimes and emerge from time to time in consciousness.

Dying does not mean that all problems are solved. When one needs to leave the body without having attained God-realization, this causes further complications and problems. Why? Death does not mean that everything is over; on the contrary, it means that all kinds of unpredictable things begin. The self must look for a body again, and it is uncertain what circumstances we will be born into. It is not even certain whether we will receive a human life again. Therefore, we should strive to achieve the spiritual goal in this life.

Do not try to stop the mind - vrittis are necessary in life, to learn, to have experiences, to be creative. But train and control your mind. The mind is the guardian at the gate between subconsciousness and consciousness, and it depends on what thoughts it allows to pass. That's why what Patanjali tells us in the 2nd sūtra is so important: Control your mind and purify it especially from all negative thoughts and feelings.

Negative vrittis can be purified or "reversed" by positive vrittis. Finally, however, positive vrittis must also be overcome and dissolved. Here is an example: Wood contains, so to speak "unconsciously", fire. If one rubs a piece of wood against another, this "dormant" fire is ignited and burns first the piece of wood and finally also the second wood, that helped to make the fire. Thus we should first awaken positive vrittis, in order to purify or burn the negative vrittis with them. After that, however, we must also dissolve the positive vrittis.

Only when all waves in consciousness have come to rest, the self reaches the realization of its true existence.

### Reference:

Die Yoga Sutras Des Patanjali, Mahamandaleshwar Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda. Ibero Verlag, Vienna Austria, 2020