

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

Mahamandleshwar Paramhans
Swami Maheshwaranandapuri

10. abhāva-pratyaya-ālambanāvṛttir-nidrā

abhāva – Absence, emptiness, non-existence

pratyaya – Perception, imagination

ālambana – Base, foundation

vṛtti – Thought, sensation

nidrā – Sleep

Sleep is the vritti which is characterized by the absence of any perception.

Although without perception, sleep is also a vritti - how else would you know when you wake up whether you slept well or not?

The vritti of sleep is also divided into favourable and unfavourable.

Unfavourable is the dull, unconscious sleep, which is characterized by laziness and inertia (tamas-guna). It is the sleep of a crocodile that does not even wake up if you climb on it or roll it to the side. Such lazy sleep is very unfavourable, both for physical well-being and for spiritual sādhana. If the awakening is accompanied by fatigue, bad temper, and the feeling of being shattered, this is a sign that we are in a klishtanidrā. From a favourable sleep, on the other hand, we arise refreshed and begin the day with vigour and joy.

The strength of tamas-guna in us is largely determined by the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the society in which we move. If we do not eat too much and too luxuriantly in the evening and if we eat our evening meal before sunset (at the latest one hour after sunset), this supports a good, restful sleep, so that we wake up in the morning rested and refreshed. Late drinking of alcohol and eating sumptuous meals, on the other hand, promotes sluggishness and dull sleep.

11. anubhūta-viṣaya-asampramoṣaḥsmṛtiḥ

anubhūta – Experience

viṣaya – Topic, subject

asampramoṣa – not forgotten

smṛti – Memory

Memories are preserved past experiences.

Smṛiti, the vṛtti of memory, is connected with the brain and memory. The self (ātma) is the knower, the observer, to whom nothing escapes. However, since we are currently in the individual consciousness, the connection to the ātma is broken and we cannot access the unlimited knowledge of the divine self. Only in the level of super-consciousness (samādhi) we can see all three times - past, present, and future.

As with the other types of vṛttis, there are unfavourable and favourable memories. The former cause the spiritual aspiration, while the latter are obstacles to the path of yoga.

Often, we are not even aware of smṛitis that exist within us and that can rise into our consciousness. We often think that we have overcome and solved a trait or memory, but it has only disappeared from our consciousness. At the smallest occasion, however, from the subconscious the former thoughts and feelings break through.

So far, we have talked about the basics of yoga and the various properties of the vṛttis. Now Patanjali explains, how we can overcome these vṛttis, so that we are no longer bothered and confused by them, and how we can be free from their influence in the future.

12. abhyāsa-vairāgya-abhyāṃ tan-nirodhaḥ

abhyāsa – practice, repetition, regular execution, habit

vairāgyabhyām – through renunciation, non-attachment

tan – these

nirodha – Standstill, control

Through practice and non-attachment, the vrittis are brought under control.

To overcome the vrittis, two things are necessary: continuous practice (abhyāsa) and detachment, non-attachment, renunciation (vairāgya) - see also the commentary on sūtra 5. The whirlpool of thought waves, which is constantly spinning in our consciousness, is continuously transformed by the force of habit and past impressions, and it is continually drawn to worldly things. To regulate and control the flow of vrittis, we need the counterforce of vairāgya.

Our path through life is determined by complex dependencies and multiple attachments to the māyā (worldly illusion). As soon as we have detached ourselves from an attachment to a person or thing, we usually immediately tie ourselves to another.

How often do we imagine heaven on earth in our dreams, expectations, and feelings - and yet we always land in the lowlands of disillusionment and disappointment. Attachment to worldly things finally leads to fear, separation, sadness, disappointment, pain, jealousy, and greed.

In the nature of every living being there is a desire to be connected with something or someone. Everyone is looking for a warm nest, a shoulder to lean on, a person to lean on for warmth and person with whom he feels warmth and trust. Unfortunately, human closeness is not permanent.

In Europe, America and Australia I have experienced countless human problems, how people live in prosperity and in comfort and yet are unhappy and dissatisfied. Many of them suffer from the deceptions caused by incomprehension and lack of relationship. The same person who yesterday declared his eternal love for you, may not even open the door today when you ask for help, where are the vows of love? Such an experience is undoubtedly painful, and yet it is our own error and attachment from which we suffer. We had inaccurate

expectations, and we cling to them.

There are two mistakes we should try to avoid: firstly, cherishing false hopes, and second, clinging to our mistakes. Whoever refrains from these two mistakes lives happily, because he will not be disappointed. As soon as we realise that we have fallen into a false expectation, we can set ourselves free from it through meditation and right thinking. In the Yoga Sūtras, there are numerous instructions that can lead us out of this blind alley.

If we are already suffering due to our own error, we should not feel guilty. Self-accusations act like a creeping poison that numbs and eventually destroys us. Only in the expansion and liberation of consciousness do we recognise and experience our true self as the essence of the Supreme Self.

As a part of the divine consciousness, you are also divine - A gram of gold is as real gold as a kilogram of it. The difference is only in the form and the quantity. The quality, the essence, however, is the same. To remove or terminate the separation of the individual consciousness from the divine consciousness, is the most beautiful experience a human being can have! As long as this is only theoretical knowledge, we have to do only abhyāsa (practice and striving).

However, Vairāgya does not mean that we should now separate ourselves from our fellow human beings and that we should no longer love them. On the contrary, we will love more than we have done up to now. Only when we have experienced God will we know what true love is. Love only wants to make the other person happy and never cause pain.

The first exercise in which we should perfect ourselves is VIVEKA - right discernment and decisiveness. Viveka is the best and purest part of the mind and can also be called reason or conscience. Viveka enables us to distinguish between right and wrong. Based on this knowledge, we know which decision to make or which action to take or avoid.

To overcome emotional weaknesses and psychological instability, we also need willpower. By lability I do not mean a mental disorder, but rather the fickleness that is very common among spiritual seekers. They follow one teaching and then another, which means that their thoughts are subject to constant change. A true aspirant remains loyal to the path and the master he has chosen for life. The words of a spiritual teacher guide us from darkness

to light, from sadness to happiness, and from ignorance to knowledge. However, this is only the case when the student truly strives and is willing to follow.

Viveka leads us to the knowledge doctrine of the Vedānta. This is the teaching that transcends mind and consciousness by proclaiming: "SO HAM" - "I am That" - a part of God. This Unity we can feel only when viveka is formed. The human intellect may be very advanced and impressive, but only viveka leads to oneness.

A core sentence of the Vedānta philosophy is:

BRAHMA SATYAM JAGAT MITHYĀ - God is truth, the World is unreality.

Brahma (or Brahman) - the formless, all-embracing the universal self - is not to be confused with Brahmā, the personified creator god of the Hindu mythology. Brahman (also called as Paramātmā or Īshvara) is the highest cosmic self, the one origin of the universe and all divine manifestations and incarnations.

Satya is truth, reality, jagata means world, and mithyā means unreality or illusion.

Once we have gained the insight through viveka that everything that surrounds us in the world is "unreal," i.e., transient, and changeable, and that we are, as in a dream state, the next question immediately arises: How can we recognize the reality behind it?

Through such thought processes and reflections, we distance ourselves from the things to which we are attached. For each of us, the day comes when a gold bar and a pebble have the same value, namely none at all. At the hour of death, even the largest diamond is worthless, because we can't buy a single second of life with it, and we can't take it with us to the other world.

As we search for spiritual values and experiences, material things gradually lose their significance for us. The great philosopher and scholar, ĀdiShankarāchārya (ca. 788-820 CE), said: "Perfect vairāgya is possessed by him for whom all the pleasures of earth and heaven are but 'bird droppings.'"

In order to reach the peak of the highest knowledge, we need two "wings": practice (abhyāsa) and non-attachment (vairāgya). First, Patanjali explains the characteristics of abhyāsa.