

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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21. *tīvra-saṃvegānām-āsannaḥ*

tīvra – faster

saṃvegānām – on the way, consequently

āsanna – near, achieved, attained

Who resolutely follows the spiritual path attains the goal faster.

The one who regularly and consistently performs his exercises, who is firmly rooted in the state of *vairāgya*, who overcomes inner and outer obstacles, and fully concentrates on the spiritual path, that one reaches the goal very quickly.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* it is written (chapter 4, verse 39): "He who, with firm faith, immerses himself in the supreme wisdom and keeps his senses in check, reaches the highest peace very quickly."

The path to God is a path of love, for it is the same as all other goals: With love we can reach and realize them, our goals, more quickly.

Three things belong together inseparably: Practitioner, practice, and technique.

Without practice and effort the best technique is useless. But if the right technique is missing even the most diligent practice will not be successful. Nowadays many alleged "schools" and "techniques" have been heavily promoted, but they are often only fashionable trends. Rather, stick to the safe and proven ways, which are pointed out by the Rishis and divine incarnations. Some students begin yoga enthusiastically but soon slacken their efforts and finally give up their path. Do not start too fast, don't rush-but remain steady and consistent in your striving.

22. mṛdu-madhya-adhi-mātra-tvāt tato`pi viśeṣaḥ

mṛdu – light

madhya – medium

adhi – string, intense

mātra – measure

tato`pi – therefore

viśeṣa – various, different

Therefore, there are three distinct degrees to one's practice: weak, moderate, and intense.

Depending on the intensity of the practice, one reaches the goal faster or slower. By practice is meant, here in particular, the observance of the main principles of the yoga path outlined earlier: non-attachment (*vairāgya*), practicing the correct technique (*abhyāsa*), firm faith (*shraddhā*) and right discernment (*viveka*). Those who do not observe and practice these principles, or practice them only superficially, will require more time to reach the goal.

Vairāgya is again the first one and can be manifested in two ways. One is the inner

torment one feels regarding one's own mistakes and errors in countless past lives and in the present life. This suffering is a sign of intense longing for spiritual fulfilment. The closest analogy to this kind of longing is the feeling of homesickness.

Those who are homesick are ready to give up everything just to be able to return to their home country, even if they have led a life of prosperity and luxury in a foreign land. Such "homesickness" is also felt by those who long for reality. They have little regard for the things of this world, and their desire is directed only to their beloved God. Those who feel this painful longing in themselves don't waste time, but use every moment to come closer to God.

The second type of *vairāgya* is non-attachment to worldly things. Certainly (Of course) a yogi also enjoys material comforts when they come to him. But a yogi does not suffer when he must give them up.

Find out where you are really at home. In this world we are only guests - always be aware of that. Live in the world with *viveka* and *vairāgya*. This attitude helps to overcome all difficulties more easily. Obstacles and problems tempt us to think about them, brood over them, and complain about them. But this is precisely how we become attached to them and remain stuck to (in) them.

One who has *vairāgya* thinks of life's difficulties in this way: "This is the nature of *samsāra* (world) and *māyā* (illusion). I however, am on a different path."

Thank God for worldly disappointments, for through them your *vairāgya* gets stronger and your sorrow becomes a milestone on the path to God. Every problem that strengthens the aspiration to reality helps us to progress faster. This is the right attitude towards worldly things.

At this point Patanjali again reminds us of our limitations. No matter how strong our *vairāgya*, how much experience and wisdom we have, human power and knowledge are tiny compared to God. Therefore, Patanjali says in the next *sūtra*:

23. Īśvara-praṇidhānād-vā*īśvara – God**praṇidhānād – through devotion, submission**vā – or*

Samādhi is also attained through devotion to God.

ĪSHVARA PRANIDHĀNA means: Keep your mind always focused on God. Accept everything as His will, be it pleasant or painful, auspicious or sorrowful, and trust that His blessing is at work in everything. Be sure that you are never alone and that God will protect you. Even if a misfortune befalls you, think positively - after all, the word "misfortune" also contains the word "fortune", and sometimes a stroke of fate forms the basis for later benefit.

For example, an operation or dental treatment is painful, and in this sense "bad". Afterwards, however, when all the sick tissue has been removed, it is "good". What we see as bad, therefore, often also has something good in it. We cannot judge this because we are not able to see behind things. The doctor knows that things will get better. In the same way, only God knows what is good for us. Believe that by God's grace and protection nothing can harm your soul. Return to God step by step by turning your thoughts and feelings to Him and laying your life at His feet.

Which "god" is meant here? There are countless religious views, and basically every person has their own idea of God.

ĪSHVARA is a designation for the omnipresent, all-conscious and eternal God who is without form and without name. He has brought forth the entire universe as the "supreme will" and permeates every atom. Through Īshvara's energy the world is created and sustained. This knowledge was transmitted to mankind by the Rishis.

Mahārishi Patanjali is not bound to any particular religion. He never speaks of any particular religion or a specific "God", always only of prānī, the omnipotent and omnipresent God-consciousness that fills the entire universe. God cannot be seen, touched and cannot be comprehended. Only in meditation, in samādhi can the universal, divine Self be experienced. In the highest stage of samādhi the yogi detaches from all ideas and forms, and unites with the pure divine light. From this awareness, AdīShankarācharya says in a bhajan:

NAIVA MATA, NA PITA, NA BANDHUR, NA GURU, NA śIṢYA CIDĀNANDA
RŪPA, śIVO'HAM, śIVO'HAM.

I have no mother, no father, no relatives, no friends, no guru, and no disciples. My form is Consciousness and Bliss. I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

The most important quality to achieve this goal is Devotion (bhakti). All the holy, liberated and realized souls were filled with infinite devotion to God.

Some people do not want to accept that God can be embodied in a person. They recognize Krishna, Rāma, Buddha or Jesus as holy incarnations, but not as God Himself. These people worship only Īshvara, the formless divine power.

Those who believe in a personal God should not deny Īshvara, and vice versa. The spiritual aspirant follows that master and that divine incarnation to which they feel spiritually close and connected, but nevertheless meet all religious beliefs with openness and respect. Those who have experienced God see Him everywhere equally: They bow to Allah in the mosque, to Christ in the church, and in the temple, they bow to the deity to whom the temple is dedicated, be it Shiva, Rāma, Krishna or Buddha.

Some even worship God in a stone and pray before it. Now is this stone important for the success of their prayers? No! What is important is the faith, trust and inner clarity of the person praying. Through each symbol which you faithfully respect can your inner

guide and master, your inner self, be awakened within you. Finally, in the highest state of consciousness, samādhi, the longed-for union with the object of worship takes place.

Until then, your karmas are clinging to your heels - you can't see them, but you will feel their effects in your destiny. The consequences of karma you experience as happiness and unhappiness, as beautiful and sorrowful events in your life. Karmas direct your inner feelings and thoughts so that your destiny can suddenly take a turn. In retrospect, you are often surprised how your views have changed in the course of your life. This is also guided by your karmas. You call it coincidence or fate - but it is the effects of the deeds you have done in this or previous lives.

In this sutra Patanjali points to bhakti-yoga. If we operate with love, devotion and selfless thoughts, everything we do will be a help on our path.

The four yoga paths, Bhakti-yoga, Karma-yoga, Gyāna-yoga and Rāja-yoga, are inseparable from each other:

- Any work or activity that we do with love and with thoughts of God is karma yoga.
- If we follow philosophical thoughts in our activities and train our discernment we are also Gyāna yogis.
- In practice and meditation we are Rāja-yogis,
- and if we do all this in the name of God and with devotion to Him we are practicing bhakti-yoga.

Next follows the definition of Īshvara:

