

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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34. **pracchardana-vidhāraṇābhyāṃ vā prāṇasya**

pracchardana – to expel, to exhale

vidhāraṇābhyāṃ – regulation, control, expansion

vā – or

prāṇasya – of the breath

Also (calming the mind) by controlled exhalation and holding the breath.

Especially by repeated exhalation (such as *Kapālabhāti Prāṇāyāma*) and by holding the breath in an exhaled state (*bāhya kumbhaka*), the mind is calmed. This breathing technique purifies the *nādis*. The *nādis* form a subtle network in the body through which *prāna*, cosmic energy, flows. They can be compared to electrical wires. If the circuit is broken, there is no current, and no energy flowing. Through *prāṇāyāma*, the *nādis* are cleansed and blockages are removed so that energy can flow freely again. This triggers very pleasant and liberating sensations in the body and mind.

Yogis and yoga practitioners often develop strong sensitivity and sometimes react very sensitively or even violently. But such feelings and thoughts only act as a slap in the face in their minds. The reaction may be very intense at the moment, but the waves quickly subside and soon return to equilibrium.

For others, emotional reactions have a much more lasting effect – as if engraved in stone, they remain in the consciousness (e.g., feelings of revenge, anger, hatred) and sometimes even impair the clarity of the mind for life.

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35. viṣayavatī vā pravṛttir-utpannā manasaḥ sthiti-nibandhanī

viṣaya – realm, sphere, sense object, goal.

vā – or

pravṛtiti – progress, appearance, activity

utpanna – awakened, emerged

manas – mind

sthiti – state, stability

bandhanī – tie, bind, hold

The mind also stabilises through inner experiences.

In meditation, where all the *vrittis* are concentrated on one point, the aspirant gradually begins to have spiritual experiences. These strengthen the confidence in the yoga path and give security. This makes the practice more intense and effective.

Then begins the stage of ĀTMA- CHINTANA, or contemplation on the *ātma*. In contemplation of the *ātma*, the answer to the question, "Who am I?" is now found. And that answer is, "I am the *ātma*, and everything that happens around me is *māyā*. The world is impermanent – my Self, on the other hand, is imperishable and indestructible."

Many aspirants run from one teacher to another, accumulating much theoretical knowledge. In the end, however, they are empty-handed and have acquired nothing except some ideas and conceptions which exist only in their mind, i.e., are imitation and spurious. Intellectual knowledge is artificial knowledge, learned and not awakened in one's own inner being. Certainly, we have had many experiences through the intellect, but the true knowledge of reality and unreality is imparted to us by *viveka*. We come to know it through

MANANA, SVADHYĀYA and ĀTMA CHINTANA.

- *Manana* means to ponder over the meaning of BRAHMA SATYAM JAGAT MITHYĀ – God is the reality, and the world is a delusion.
- *Svadhyāya* says to read such scriptures that convey reality to us.
- *Ātma chintana*, or *ātma vicharana*, means to continually concentrate on this thought: "I am the *ātma*, supreme reality, absolute consciousness and eternal bliss."

You are the *ātma* – but at present you are not aware of it. You have heard it or read it, but you have not yet experienced it yourself. As long as the knowledge is only intellectual and theoretical, the inner desire remains unsatisfied, and the call of the *ātma* is not yet heard.

Those who hear and read many things gather many impressions, but as we know, every idea, encounter and impression cause ripples (*vruttis*) in the consciousness. In concentration and meditation, when we immerse ourselves in our inner being, the accumulated theoretical knowledge acts as an obstacle, creating confusion. When the intellect is strong and *viveka* is weak, our inner self finds no satisfaction.

Practice makes perfect! It is not easy to recognise the truth within. Many have fallen, lost their way, fallen into doubt and lost their way. Many years, perhaps even many lifetimes of continuous practice with patience and perseverance are needed until you realise this.

Be prepared that disturbances will always come that try to pull you away from the *ātma*-chintana. Do not be distracted by them; they only affect the body, not the *ātma*.

When your mind is completely purified and your consciousness is firmly established in *ātma*-chintana, the divine experiences and visions begin. Then, and only then, is *ātma*-chintana realised.

But do not stop there, and do not let the beautiful feelings and heavenly visions stop you in meditation. Always remain in the attitude of witness and observer – because all these experiences are only *vruttis*, not yourself. You receive the *vruttis* from those planes where your mind is at the moment.

Patanjali now describes various techniques through which spiritual development progresses.

ivzaeka va Jyaiet:mtI . 36.

36. viśokā vā jyotiṣmatī

viśoka – free from worry and sorrow

vā – or

jyotiṣmatī – concentration on the inner light.

Or by focusing on the inner light beyond sorrow and suffering.

All doubts, disappointments and lack of enthusiasm are removed at one stroke by the appearance of the light in meditation.

There are two types of light: *saguna jyoti* and *nirguna jyoti*. The former is the external, visible light, such as that of the sun, a candle, or fire. The latter is *ātma jyoti* – the light of life, the light of God that shines in all living beings. The form of the divine Self is light – the "Living Light".

OM *Dīp jyoti parabrahmadīpam*
sarve mohanamdīpanam
sajate sarvam sandhyā dīpam sarva satyam
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

OM is the light of the Highest.
 This light dispels the darkness of ignorance.
 Only this light dispels the darkness.
 It is the light of reality and truth.
 OM Peace, Peace, Peace.

When this light appears in meditation, the mind instantly calms. It means that the

consciousness is now at the threshold and beginning to detach from the material world and rise to a higher stage of consciousness. Now *chitta-vritti-nirodhah* truly begins. In the waking and dream states you receive divine visions and messages to guide, direct and strengthen you on your path. Then you can meditate without disturbance until your consciousness gradually dissolves in your personal God like sugar in milk – the sweetness remains but the form (ego) disappears.

vItragiv;y< va icÄm! . 37.

37. vīta-rāga-viṣayam vā cittam

vīta – without, free from

rāga – attachment, bondage.

viṣayam – sense objects

vā – or

cittam – on consciousness

Or (by concentrating) on a realiser who is free from attachment to sense objects.

Choose a meaningful symbol to calm your *chitta-vrittis*. Hold it in your mind until you unite with it through continuous meditation, or it dissolves in you. God will appear to you in the form or shape you meditate upon.

In the consciousness of a Realised One, tendencies or states (*bhāvas*) such as affection and aversion (*rāga* and *dvesha*) no longer exist. Likewise, they have left the three *gunas* behind themselves. Even *sattva guna*, which is very pure, has to be overcome to attain the highest consciousness (*samādhi*). Brahmā, Vishnu and Mahesh, the divine trinity of creator, sustainer and destroyer, is still associated with the *gunas*. The principle of the Guru, however, is above the *gunas* – this is the goal we want to realise.

In the meditation posture we express this through *chin mudrā*. The closed circle formed by the thumb and index finger symbolises "yoga" – the unity of *ātma* and

Paramātma, individual soul and Supreme Self. The three remaining fingers, stretched away, represent the three *gunas* to be overcome. This symbolises the Guru principle (*Guru-tattva*), which is above the *gunas*.

My master, Paramhans Swāmi Mādhavānandajī, whom his disciples called Holy Gurujī, wrote in a *bhajan* to his master Srī Mahāprabhujī:

O Lord, I ask only one thing:
 Let me be your *bhakta* in every life.
 Let me serve you in every form.
 If I am not worthy to serve thee myself,
 let me be the servant of thy servant,
 and ask you to accept my love and
 devotion for you through this service.

These are the petitions and prayers of a Realised One. They do not pray for money, fame, healing of disease, or other worldly things. Holy Gurujī had so far realised by his unconditional surrender to Srī Mahāprabhujī that he stayed in *nirbīja-samādhi* for twenty-four hours. Outwardly he was living like any other person, eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, walking, etc. But within, he was always in the divine light and divine state of consciousness (*divya bhāva*). Although he had realised all that a person can spiritually attain in this life, he continued to perform his practices, prayers and meditations. Srī Mahāprabhujī was always the goal of his meditation.

Follow the example of the realised and the saints. Find your divine symbol of worship and meditation, and remain faithful to it without doubting and wavering. When you have found it and joined yourself to it, consecrate to it all your exercises, meditation and prayers. Wherever you are, in church, in the āshram, at home, in nature, before whatever altar or image of God you are praying or meditating, place your symbol on your inner altar and direct your prayers and concentration there.

