

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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SvBinÔa}analMbn< va . 38.

38. svapna-nidrā-jñāna-ālambanaṃ vā

svapna – dream nidrā – sleep
jñāna – knowledge, realisation
ālambana – refuge, help
vā – or

Or through meditation on knowledge gained in sleep or dream.

For the practitioner, mental experiences are very important, whether they take place in waking consciousness or in dreams. By contemplating and meditating on them, their mind becomes calm and still.

ywai-mtXyanaÖa. 39.

39. yatha-abhimata-dhyānād-vā

yatha – also, likewise
abhimata – desired, longed for, dear
dhyāna – meditation
vā – or

Or about meditating on something you love.

As explained in the previous *sūtras*, it is important that you choose and maintain a fixed object for meditation. Just "meditating along" in empty space will lead nowhere, and the mind and senses will eventually run away with you like wild horses. *Vrittis* arise and prevent you from inner collection. Therefore, to filter and purify the *vrittis*, choose a divine symbol to focus your concentration and meditation on. The best "object" is your ISHTA-DEVATĀ, the deity you believe in and worship. Then the restlessness of your mind will subside.

It is not easy and needs much practice and many attempts until those three become one: knower, knowledge and object. At the moment this is our situation: the "knower" does not yet know who they are – they do not even know what they actually want to know.

Patanjali shows us different ways and solutions to overcome problems in the four previous *sūtras*. There are two types of difficulties. One is the external disturbances (*vikshepa*) already explained in *sūtra* 30, problems concerning, for example, one's job, health, interpersonal relationships, financial situation, and so on. The other type are the so-called *kleshas*, inner problems, which in turn are often caused by *vikshepas* when the life problems and outer disturbances enter the conscious and subconscious mind. The *kleshas* are described in detail in Part 2, *Sādhana-Pāda*.

As long as *vrittis* (thought waves) arise in you – no matter of what kind and quality – it means that individuality exists, and you are not yet one with God.

At the beginning of the spiritual path, you will experience that your thoughts, instead of coming to rest, increase abruptly and flood the mind like a tidal wave. The explanation for this is that many problems have been waiting inside you to rise up into consciousness. As soon as you close your eyes and sink into your inner self, inner burdens and conflicts that you thought you had forgotten or overcome flood into your mind and cause unrest and disturbances. As long as we live on this earth and in this body, difficulties will always arise that we have to face and resolve. Through yoga practice we should be able to consciously eliminate thoughts of them during concentration and meditation.

One of the ways to achieve this has already been mentioned by Patanjali – concentration on a symbol or ideal. A symbol, of course, also means dualism – nevertheless, it helps us to progress on the path to unity, because this symbol represents our goal. The experiences and visions we have in the course of the exercises are not yet the goal. But they help us to continue to persevere and strengthen us on our path.

Once you have decided on a path, two things are important: confidence and enthusiasm for your exercises. Doubts and negative thoughts are great obstacles and block any progress. Enthusiasm is present at the beginning, but there is usually a lack of continuity and patience. That is why the holy scriptures say that the disciple needs a master whom they trust and whose spirit can always "inspire" them anew. If the enthusiasm dwindles, laziness soon creeps in. The practice time becomes shorter and shorter and is postponed more and more until it finally stops altogether. This is the result of lack of enthusiasm. Therefore, always pray to God to keep your faith. For faith and enthusiasm go hand in hand. I do not mean here faith in a religion or in dogmas, but your deep inner conviction and trust in your path and your personal Godhead.

prma[uprmmhÅvaNtae=Sy vzIkar>. 40.

40. parama-aṇu-parama-mahattva-anto`syā vaśikāraḥ

parama – highest, outermost

aṇu – smallest

mahattva – greatest, infinite

anta – end

vaśikāra – under control, subdued

Thus, the yogi masters all levels, from the smallest to the greatest.

When the meditator has such experiences and visions, they begin to expand their consciousness from the tiny atom to the infinite universe. This does not happen immediately, but gradually and incrementally.

In the beginning, states of consciousness may occur that can be frightening. It can be

that the body feelings change. You may suddenly feel your body to be very heavy or very light. This is a sign that consciousness is beginning to leave the body.

If the body feels heavy, the consciousness is drawn inwards, into the "inner space" (*chidākāsha*). Such sensations occur more often when lying down during relaxation or in the deep relaxation of *Yoga-Nidrā*. Feelings of anxiety may arise, as you are, so to speak, diving into unknown abysses of your inner world. The consciousness penetrates back into the past and must push through hard resistances, as if it were digging through a mountain range. Far-away memories, even those from previous lives, can rise up. The *asmitā vritti*, the ego's self-protection mechanism, however, immediately brings back into waking consciousness those who become afraid and cannot control or overcome their fear.

It can also be the opposite, that your body feels light as a feather, or that you lose your sense of direction and no longer know which way you are facing. Your arms and legs may suddenly seem metres long, and you can't feel where they are placed. You seem to lose contact with the ground and feel like you are floating. Eventually you no longer know where you are – in your room or in the forest, outdoors or in another room ... You see your body as if in a mirror and you see your astral form. Sometimes you have the feeling of being in your inner space. Sometimes it seems as if your inner space is inside you. It can even happen that you suddenly find yourself next to your body and see it from the outside.

At this point I would like to tell you all: never be afraid, no matter what experiences come. Meditation experiences are similar to dreams. Be sure, at the end you will always return to normal daytime consciousness. Fear, however, can lead to a tightening that makes these experiences truly frightening. No one needs to fear being suddenly and unprepared attacked by such experiences. Just as a fruit ripens slowly, so do experiences ripen in accordance with the development of consciousness.

Some may think that such meditation experiences are mental illness signs or hallucinations, but they are fundamentally different. Certainly, there are mental disorders which at first sight resemble genuine spiritual experiences. But the difference is that the meditator is in full possession of their consciousness and intellect. Their intellect is even particularly clear and keen, which distinguishes them clearly and beyond doubt from the

clouded and unsteady consciousness of the mentally disturbed. At a spiritually advanced stage, a yogi is able to "switch" their consciousness in a matter of seconds – from the active, extraverted state to deep relaxation, absorption and meditation, and vice versa as well.

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41. kṣīṇa-vṛtter-abhijātasyeva maṇer-grahīṭṛ-grahaṇagrāhyeṣu tatstha-tadañjanatā samāpattiḥ

kṣīṇa – diminished, ended
vṛtti – thoughts, waves in consciousness
abhijātasya – purified, transparent
maṇi – jewel, crystal
grahīṭṛ – receiver, perceiver
grahaṇa – received, obtained
grāhyeṣu – the received, perceived
tatstha – united, identical
añjanatā – colored, adorned
samāpatti – to come together

When the *vrittis* in the mind are quieted, knowledge, knower and object of knowledge are reflected in it as in a pure, clear crystal.

SAMĀPATTI means union, unification. This term is used by Patanjali for the first, "lower" stages of *samādhi*.

When the *vrittis* come to a standstill, this is the first sign of success. As long as the mind wanders uncontrollably, it has not yet been mastered. Through *mantra* and *prānāyāma*, practice of *ātma chintana* and deep meditation, it has finally succeeded in centring the consciousness. The aspirant can now stop or disengage from the *vrittis* at will at any time – just as the person who has mastered driving can steer or stop their car at will.

In *samādhi* the meditator does not "know" who God is. Rather, they are one with God. If you put a piece of sugar in a glass of milk, it dissolves completely in it – likewise, your feelings, thoughts, experiences, your entire existence dissolves in God. When sugar

dissolves in milk, although the form of sugar is no more visible, the qualities of sugar – the sweetness – is still there. This union is therefore not perfect. Unity exists when milk dissolves in milk, water dissolves in water. So first the individual – in our example the "sugar" – must give up its individual qualities. Only when the mind is as clear and transparent as a flawless diamond or rock crystal can it reflect the highest consciousness.

Ādi Shankarāchārya said, "As the first stage of realisation, you behold the light of God in every living being. God-realisation means realising in all living beings."

When you realise and experience – and not only know in theory – that the divine light within you is the same as the light of the soul of every other living being, human and animal, then you have reached the first stage of the realisation of divine consciousness. For example, if you look at an ant and realise: she is *ātma*, she *is* me – then you know what God is!

As mentioned in the introduction, there are several stages of *samādhi*. The two main types are *sabīja* and *nirbījasamādhi*. *Sabīja* means "with seed." This means that in one of the five levels of consciousness (unconscious, subconscious, conscious, superconscious, cosmic conscious) traces of *vrittis* still exist.

Even if you have realised yourself on the path of yoga up to the Supreme Consciousness, but you still have this thought: "I know that I am now one with God", then you have not yet reached the perfect *samādhi*. The "ego" – the "sugar" of our example – is still there in a very subtle way. There are still *vrittis* or seeds of *vrittis* existing in you.

You thought you had already achieved perfect inner purity through your practices and pure living, and had carefully dug up all the "weeds" by the roots from your consciousness – but to your surprise, the next time it "rains", sprouts begin to grow again, because there were still seeds hidden in them.

The *antahkarana* (*manas* – mind, *buddhi* – intellect, *chitta* – consciousness and *ahamkāra* – ego-consciousness) are very difficult to purify and keep under control. As long as these functions of the psyche are not mastered, disturbances will always come upon you from outside or rise from within.