

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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ततः क्षीयते प्रकाशावरणम् ॥ ५२ ॥

52. tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśa-āvaraṇam

tata – from there

kṣīyate – is removed, comes off

prakāśa – shine, light

āvaraṇa – veil

As a result, the veil that covers the light is lifted.

Through the complete turning of the consciousness towards the Supreme Self, the accumulated *karmas* and *samskāras* (imprints) are gradually dissolved. This lifts the veil of ignorance that has veiled the light of the *ātma*. The darkness of ignorance, which lies like a thick, impenetrable curtain over our consciousness, is the cause of all our sufferings, problems and misguidedness. When this curtain is lifted, we realise the divine radiance within that shines like millions of suns. In this process of enlightenment, we behold and receive the light of divine knowledge.

धारणासु च योग्यता मनसः ॥ ५३ ॥

53. dhāraṇāsu ca योग्यता manasaḥ

dhāraṇā – concentration

ca – and

yogya – capable, fit

manas – mind

Then the mind becomes capable of concentration.

DHĀRANĀ – concentration means directing thoughts and feelings to only one object for a long time. To keep the consciousness at the level of *dhāraṇā* is not easy. To focus on one object for three or five seconds already requires great power of concentration and is beyond the capacity of most people. Even trying to focus the mind on one object raises countless *vrittis* and "inner dialogues" that disturb and distract us.

One of the most effective techniques for developing the ability to concentrate is TRATAKA (dot or candle meditation).

In the *Hatha* yoga technique, *Trātaka*, one gazes for 2-3 minutes at a black dot or into a candle flame and then, with closed eyes, observes the image of the object appearing inside behind the forehead. This is a very good way to test your ability to concentrate: how many seconds or minutes can you visualise the dot or the candle flame with closed eyes? That is how long you are able to concentrate.

Another technique is SAHAJA SHVĀSA. This is observing one's own natural breathing process without influencing it: "I know I am breathing in – I know I am breathing out. I feel the body expanding during inhalation and contracting during exhalation."

Breath practice is the best method to develop or increase the ability to concentrate. Since the breath and the mind are closely connected and interact, by controlling and regulating the breath we gradually gain more and more control over the mind. This enables us to concentrate on a specific goal or object at any time we wish.

The various techniques of imagination and the images used in concentration and meditation exercises are mainly for the purpose of distracting the mind from restless thoughts and worries and making it positive and calm. Therefore, we choose beautiful and soothing images – a tree, a lake or a flower, the sunrise or sunset, etc. But these visualisations are not yet concentration and meditation; they only serve to occupy the mind.

What does a mother do when her child is restless and cries? She gives the child a toy to keep them quiet so that she can work in peace. Thus, we give the mind various images and ideas as "toys" to calm the stream of thoughts. But once the state of true concentration and meditation is reached, we no longer need such means.

स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगे चित्तस्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणां प्रत्याहारः ॥ ५४ ॥

54. **sva-viṣaya-asamprayoge cittasya-svarūpa-anukāra iva-indriyāṇāṃ pratyāhārah**

sva – self, own

viṣaya – object, subject

asamprayoga – separation

citta – consciousness

svarūpa – true form, being

anukāra – alignment

iva – in a sense, as if

indriya – senses

pratyāhāra – withdrawal

When the sense organs withdraw from external objects and turn inward, this is called *pratyāhāra*.

PRATYĀHĀRA means to eliminate external and internal disturbances and the wandering of thoughts by withdrawing the senses. Once the sensory impressions in the mind no longer cause restlessness and distraction, the consciousness can detach from the external world and center in the inner self. *Pratyāhāra* is the ability to gather oneself inwardly at any time and instantaneously and to shut oneself off from the outer world.

ततः परमा वश्यतेन्द्रियाणाम् ॥ ५५ ॥

55. tataḥ paramā vaśyatendriyāṇām

tata – from there

paramā – highest(r)

vaśyatā – obedience, being under control

indriya – senses

Thus, the complete mastery of the senses is attained.

By being able to turn the senses and mind outward or withdraw them inward at will – just as a turtle can retract its head and limbs under its shell or extend them outward at any time – the yogi has brought them under their control and is no longer dominated and controlled by them.

These described exercises of body, breath and mind control are to be practiced daily. Each stage requires the practice and mastery of the previous one. Without regular yoga-body exercises, the deep and calm breathing of "yoga-full-breathing", which is the preparation for the yoga-breathing exercise (*prānāyāma*), is not established. If we neglect *prānāyāma*, we cannot reach the stage of control of the senses and mind (*pratyāhāra*). If we cannot turn the mind inward, concentration on an object (*dhāranā*) cannot succeed, and neither can meditation (*dhyāna*).

Therefore, it is recommended that in the daily practice session, āsanas, *prānāyāma* and relaxation should always be done first, followed by concentration and meditation techniques. However, if you practice in the morning, shortly after getting up, you can also start with meditation, because the mind is still calm from the relaxation of sleep.

Through the principles and exercises that Patanjali explains in the *Sādhana-Pāda*, the mind is purified and strengthened – provided, of course, that they have been observed and practiced. Now the consciousness can further unfold to the higher and highest consciousness. In time and with continued practice, the yogi will reap the fruits of their *sādhana*, which Patanjali describes in the next chapters of the *Yoga Sūtras – Vibhūti-Pāda* and *Kaivalya-Pāda*.