

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

Mahamandleshwar Paramhans
Swami Maheshwaranandapuri

समाधिभावनार्थः क्लेशतनूकरणार्थश्च ॥ २ ॥

2. samādhi-bhāvanā-arthaḥkleśa-tanūkaraṇa-ārthaś ca

samādhi – highest consciousness

bhāvanā – attitude, state

artha – reason, goal

kleśa – dispute, conflict, disturbance

tanūkaraṇa – weakening

(Kriyā-yoga) weakens the disturbances and leads to samādhi.

The exercises referred to in the first *sūtra* reduce the inner conflicts and the "waves" in the mind (*vṛittis*) caused by them. This does not mean that these disturbances are already overcome, but a first step has been taken towards achieving the goal – *samādhi*.

In the following, Patanjali lists the five *kleśas* that cause restlessness and tension in the mind:

अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः क्लेशाः ॥ ३ ॥

3. avidyā-asmitā-rāga-dveṣa-abhiniveśāḥkleśāḥ

avidyā – ignorance

asmitā – ego

rāga – attachment

dveṣa – aversion, hatred

abhiniveśa – fear of death

kleśa – disturbance, obstacle, cause of suffering

Ignorance, self-centeredness, attachment and aversion, and fear of death are the causes of all suffering.

There are five main types of *kleshas*:

AVIDYĀ(ignorance)

Due to lack of knowledge of the consequences of our actions, we often choose something that brings us pleasure and comfort at the moment, and do not consider whether it may create disappointment, suffering and illness later on. So we get into problems and turbulence again and again because of our *karmas*.

ASMITĀ(ego, ego attachment)

The ego is our greatest illusion, and the one that is most deeply and strongly anchored in consciousness. The fundamental fallacy consists of the false identification with the body, characteristics, habits, thoughts and feelings.

The following three *vrittis* result from *asmitā*:

RĀGA (attachment, possessiveness)

Being attached is the desire to possess, to hold on. Yet this very attitude creates suffering and fear. We suffer because we cannot have something we desire and are afraid of losing things or people we are attached to.

From *rāga* inevitably arises the next disturbance:

DVESHA(aversion, jealousy, envy)

Unfulfilled desires arouse envy and anger towards others. Fear of loss brings jealousy and discord. We want to have and hold on to pleasant things – even if they are harmful to us, the environment or other living beings. Unpleasant things, on the other hand, we try to avoid, even if they are healthy and beneficial.

ABHINIVESHA(fear of non-existence)

Fear of death, of non-existence, is the primordial fear, the "root of fear", which expresses itself in many different fears: fear of change, fear of loss, fear of the future, etc. The life-support instinct is the strongest instinct and the fear of death the most deeply rooted fear in all living beings.

In the following *sūtras* Patanjali explains the five *kleshas* in detail.

अविद्या क्षेत्रमुत्तरषोऽप्रसुप्ततनुविच्छिन्नोदाराणाम् ४ ॥

4. avidyākṣetramuttareṣāṃprasupta-tanu-vicchinnaudārāṇām

avidyā – ignorance
kṣetra – field, nutrient medium
uttara – following later
prasupta – dormant, inactive, latent
tanu – small, weak
vicchinna – interrupted, suppressed
udārā – active, on top

Ignorance is the breeding ground of all other (disorders), may they be dormant, weak, suppressed or active.

Ignorance is the cause of all our problems. If knowledge is missing as a connecting link between the knower and the object, we make mistakes again and again, from which we have to suffer as a consequence. If we could assess and see through all the consequences of our actions in advance, we would certainly avoid many mistakes. But as long as we are in ignorance, we will keep committing new errors that will cause us problems. We live as if in a dark room, wandering blindly in search of the exit, always bumping and hurting ourselves. Only the light of knowledge saves us from further pain by showing us the way to freedom.

अनित्याशुचिदुःखानात्मसुनित्यशुचिसुखात्मरव्यातिरविद्या ॥ ५ ॥

5. anitya-aśuci-duḥkha-anātmasunitya-śuci-sukha-ātmakhyātir-avidyā.

anitya – transient, impermanent
aśuci – impure
duḥkha – sadness, suffering
anātma(su) – non-self
nitya – eternal, constant
śuci – pure
sukha – joy, happiness
ātma – self
khyāti – to name
avidyā – ignorance

To take the perishable for unchangeable, the impure for pure, the suffering for auspicious, and the non-self for the true self, is ignorance.

Patanjali therefore says: "The pleasures of this world are not permanent. Be aware that one day you will have to part with them. Therefore, free yourself from that inner attachment which causes you to suffer on separation. But it is best not to waste any time at all on the transitory, but to turn exclusively to that which is eternal and unchangeable – God.

Most of the time we let ourselves be too influenced by sensory impressions, momentary feelings and changing thoughts. In itself, there is nothing wrong with wanting to enjoy something beautiful. However, because we are deeply aware of its transience, worldly enjoyment is always fraught with ambivalent feelings. When we look at a flower and enjoy its beauty, we are deeply aware that it will soon wither – that we will soon have to part with it. This certainty touches the deep inner fear of loss, farewell and death and at the same time evokes melancholy and sadness in us.

Everything beautiful and pleasant very quickly leads to attachment (*rāga*), and this is always linked with worry and fear. Many of the unfortunate circumstances we suffer from are caused by our own ignorance. We recognise our mistakes from the painful results and learn to do better next time.

Certainly, it would be nice to be able to live an undisturbed life without difficulties. But even if we "bump our heads", this has a good side. For what would we be without such opportunities to strengthen the will and stamina, to deepen knowledge and insight, to get to know and examine ourselves?

We can face the problems we encounter in life in one of two attitudes: by accepting them as a karmic task that we have to overcome, or by perceiving them as a mere burden that pushes us down.

The first attitude turns problems into challenges that we can grow from. In the second case, we miss the opportunity to learn and develop.

