

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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हेयं दुःखमनागतम् ॥ १६ ॥

16. heyamduḥkhamanāgatam

duḥkha – difficulties, problems, suffering.

heya – to dissolve, to destroy

anāgatam – not (yet) come, future

Eliminate the causes of future suffering.

or:

You can prevent future suffering.

By this Patanjali means: be attentive and be careful at every moment not to let anything enter your consciousness that could cause you problems or worries in the future. The problems of the past are over, and there is no point in dwelling on them now. What has happened cannot be changed, so do not waste your energy brooding over the past. Now, in this moment, you are building your future! So, focus your attention on the present moment, learn from the problems of the past and present, and consider how you can influence your future in a favourable way.

But how can we ever avoid everything from which future suffering arises? After all, we are ignorant of our future and mostly cannot foresee which thoughts and actions may cause problems later on.

Patanjali does not get lost in such details – he gets to the root of the problem to

eliminate it once and for all, as is evident in the next sūtra.

द्रष्टृदृश्ययोः संयोगोहेयहेतुः ॥ १७ ॥

17. draṣṭṛ-dṛśyayoḥsaṁyogoheya-hetuḥ

draṣṭṛ – seeing, witness, observer.

dṛśya – what is seen.

saṁyoga – connection

heya – to overwhelm, to annihilate

hetu – reason, cause

By removing the cause, namely the identification of the seer with what is seen.

Two principles are to be distinguished here:

1. DRASHTĀ("the seer"), knower, observer, self.
2. DRISHYA("the seen"), object, person, nature

Who sees and recognises an object? Not the eyes, as they are only a tool. The **ātma** is the knower and observer of everything. It knows the past and future, our conscious, subconscious and unconscious. It is the unchanging witness in waking, sleeping and dreaming. As long as we falsely identify with the body and the "person" we think we are, we are one with our vrittis– as Patanjali already explained in the Samādhi-Pāda, sūtras3-4. In this attachment we are subject to impermanence and suffering.

The solution to eliminating future suffering lies in freeing oneself from the illusion of a detached "I" and recognising oneself as **ātma**, unchanging and eternal divine consciousness – until finally, at the end of the path, the "seer" (**ātma**) and the "seen" (jīvātma) become one. The world is like a dream. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, and the present is but a fleeting moment. Every moment we experience sinks into the past and exists afterwards only as a memory.

The mighty king Janaka once had a dream:

Enemy armies invaded his country. At the head of his army, he defended his kingdom,

but he lost to the superior forces. He had to flee and hid in the woods. Narrowly escaping death on the battlefield, he now lived a miserable life in the jungle, close to starvation. Hunger finally won out over his fear of being discovered and drove him to a settlement where he begged a piece of bread from a farmer. With the bread in hand, the king went to the nearby river to wash. On the way, however, a stray dog attacked him, snatched the bread from him and ran away.

Sad and despondent, King Janaka sat down by the wayside and bitterly lamented his fate: "Once I was powerful and rich. Hundreds dined at my table. Now I am the most miserable of men, friendless, homeless, persecuted, deprived and near starvation. Even a dog can rob me without my being able to defend myself."

Pain and weakness deprived the king of his senses. Fainting, he sank down and in falling injured himself on a stone. From this dreamed pain he awoke – and found himself in the bedchamber of his royal palace.

Under the impression of this dream King Janaka sank into deep thought and asked himself, "In the world of dream the waking world disappears and the dream becomes real. In the waking world, on the other hand, the dream world fades away, and only that world appears real. But what is reality now?"

The king could not find a solution and questioned his master. The master asked him, "How do you know that you have been dreaming?"

Janaka replied, "I just know. I can describe exactly all that I dreamed, so clearly is the dream before me."

"Did you also know in your dream that you were king?"

"Of course, I knew. I felt everything just as I do now."

Then the Master said, "Neither in dreams nor in waking does reality show itself. Real is only the 'seer' who is the observer of all these appearances."

We say, 'I have thoughts, I have emotions, I have a body ...' So basically, we are aware that body, mind, thoughts, emotions, etc. are attributes of us and not ourselves. Yet we identify with what is going on in our body and mind. As a result, we get entangled in innumerable errors and problems, which also trouble us in the future. But if we take the

neutral position of an observer and witness, we come into contact with the divine part in us, which is untouched by all burdens and suffering.

The knower says: MANOMĀTRAJAGAT– The whole world is the product of the mind. It follows: BRAHMASATYAM, JAGATMITHYĀ– God is reality, the world is unreality.

In the desert a mirage sometimes appears– the image of a lake or an oasis. Animals, tormented by thirst, run towards such a mirage and perish miserably. So too man, in his urge for happiness and fulfilment, chases after the pretences of the māyā without ever attaining it, for it is unreality. Just as we never find water in the mirage of the mirage, so we do not attain fulfilment in the world. The animals are unable to comprehend this. But as human beings, with the power of reason (viveka), we can realise this truth.

प्रकाशक्रियास्थितिशीलं भूतेन्द्रियात्मकं भोगापवर्गार्थं दृश्यम् ॥ १८ ॥

18. prakāśa-kriyā-sthiti-śīlaṃbhūta-indriya-ātmakaṃbhoga-apavarga-arthaṃdrśyam

prakāśa – to become visible, to appear, to shine

kriyā – deed, action

sthiti – existing, permanent, firm

śīla – nature, character

bhūta – here: Elements

indriya – sense organs

ātmaka – belonging, characterised

bhoga – joy, pleasure

apavarga – fulfilment, salvation

artha – goal, purpose

drśya – visible, seen

The visible nature with the qualities of clarity, activity and inertia, consisting of the perceptions of the sense organs and the elements, exists for the purpose of experience and attaining liberation.

In other words, the existence of the universe and the "play" of the gunas – sattva, rajas

and tamas – have only one purpose, that we gain experience and subsequently realise our true Self. An explanation of the manifestations of the gunas follows in the next sūtra.

The body is also meant by "visible nature". It is our main problem and at the same time the main tool on the path to liberation. Only in earthly life can we unfold and develop consciousness. Gathering experiences, however, does not at all mean that we should cling to them and lose ourselves in them. Rather, experiences should lead us to knowledge and realisation of our true being. Only in the body can we attain self-knowledge and self-realisation. Therefore, we should not waste the precious time of life, but turn our senses, thoughts, feelings, and intellect away from the māyā and toward the Self.

विशेषाविशेषलिङ्गमात्रालिङ्गानि गुणपर्वाणि ॥ १९ ॥

19. viśeṣa-aviśeṣa-liṅgamātra-aliṅgānigūṇa-parvāṇi.

viśeṣa – distinguishable, objects, elements.

aviśeṣa – non-distinctible, subtle

liṅgamātra – with characteristic

liṅga – designation, characteristic

aliṅga – without designation, non-distinctible

gūṇa – characteristic, quality,

parvāṇa – part, limb

The manifestations of nature (gunas) include the gross, the subtle, the spiritual and the featureless.

The three GUNAS and their sixteen manifestations form our earthly shape. If there is harmony between the elements (tattvas) and gunas, the body and mind are healthy. If there is an imbalance between them, disease or mental disorder arises.

The characteristics of the three gunas are:

- sattva positive: purity, clarity, joy, harmony
 negative: illusion, self-deception
- rajas positive: activity, movement, creativity
 negative: aggression, quarrel, anger

- tamas positive: strength, stability
 negative: laziness, ignorance

The 16 manifestations of gunas are:

- the five mahābhūtas (earth, water, fire, air, ether/space)
- the five karma indriyas (hands, legs, mouth, sexual and excretory organs)
- the five gyānaindriyas (nose, eyes, ears, tongue, skin)
- and manas (mind)

VISHESHA, "the distinguishable," includes matter, the gross elements (mahābhūtas), and the sense organs (indriyas).

AVISHESHA, "the indistinguishable", includes the so-called "subtle" elements (tanmātras), form, smell, sound, taste, radiance. The tanmātra can be perceived only by the subtle sense organs (sūkshmaindriyas). The functions of the sense organs, such as feeling, seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting, also belong to this realm; these are called tanmātra karma indriyas.

The gunas exert a determining influence on our life, health and destiny. They shape our character and thereby also our attitude of mind and karmas. But we are not helplessly at their mercy. Through self-enquiry and analysis, we can understand the influence of the gunas and transform it by consciously directing and changing our vrittis – Patanjali will explain this in more detail later, from sūtra 34 onwards.

To give an example: parents who prepare to conceive a child with pure thoughts (sattva vrittis) and a spiritual way of life will give birth to a highly evolved, holy soul. From rājasvrittishuman consciousness is begotten, and from tamas vrittislow, animal consciousness is born. So, our endeavour should be to infuse all the spheres of life with sattva vrittis.

In the next sūtras Patanjali explains the following terms:

- drashtā – the seeing,
- **ātma** – the Self
- drishya – the seen, the visible world, the external objects

