

YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

A Guide to Self-knowledge

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20. draṣṭādr̥śi-mātraḥśuddho'pipratyaya-anupaśyaḥ

draṣṭā – seer

dr̥śi – to see, ability to see

mātra – measure

śuddha – pure, clear, perfect

api – although

pratyaya – understanding, belief, conviction

anupaśya – receiving, seeing

The seer (*ātma*), who is themselves pure and perfect consciousness, perceives everything filtered through the ideas of the mind.

Although the *ātma* is perfect, divine, and pure in their essence, because they are connected with nature in earthly life, they see the world coloured through the glasses of mind and intellect.

As long as inclinations and attachment bind us to the appearances of the outer world, the *ātma* is also in the grip of the *māyā*. They are not free, but caught in the interplay of happiness and suffering.

Our task and goal is to cut these fetters and, by freeing ourselves from all illusion, to reach the higher state of consciousness of oneness (*kaivalya*) and finally liberation (*moksha*).

तदर्थैव दृश्यस्यात्मा ॥ २१ ॥

21. tad-arthaevadr̥śyasya-ātmā.

tad – this

artha – goal

eva – only, alone, truly

dr̥śyasyaātma – being of the visible

Only for the sake of this goal (liberation and union with the *ātma*) does the visible world exist.

Patanjali reiterates here that the world exists only for perception and experience by the *ātma*. By detaching themselves from identification with nature and the body – meaning not only the material body but also the subtle "sheaths" (*koshas*) of psyche, mind, intellect, desires and aspirations – the yogi simultaneously frees themselves from the illusion of the *māyā* and attains the clear vision of reality. The aspirant achieves this by gradually giving up attachment to worldly things and finally detaching themselves completely from them. This, however, does not yet mean union with God, but is only the starting point on the path to becoming one with the divine Self. By detaching themselves from the erroneous identifications with nature, the Yogi comes closer and closer to the light until they finally detach themselves completely in the divine self.

However, as long as the highest and permanent realisation in the *nirbījasamādhi* is not achieved – through external influences and the "seeds" of the *karmas* that still exist in them and can become active – the aspirant can sink back again from this higher state of consciousness, with which the influence of the *gunas* also begins to work again.

Passion is often so powerful that it takes hold in the mind like a hungry bear attacking us in the wild. Hunger, thirst, anger, greed, passion and jealousy are like "predators" that devour us when we fall into their grip. In every life they pursue us, growing stronger instead of weaker. Satisfying a passion only curbs it for the moment. Soon it flares up again and attacks anew.

As spiritual aspirants and yogis, we should be observers and face both the phenomena of the outer and inner world (thoughts, feelings, desires and cravings) as objective witnesses and not let them stop us on the spiritual path.

SrīMahāprabhujī says in a *bhajan*:

Brother *Manas*, go slowly.
You must climb to the House of Heaven.
The night is dark, the path narrow and slippery.
Just beside it there is a precipice
which, if you fall, will swallow you up.
Indriyas and *tattvas* caress you with bewitching song,
so that you stop and forget to go on.
They lead you astray and distract you from the right path.

"Brother *Manas*" is our spirit. Step by step, steadily and with firm determination, we should go forward and not be distracted by anything. Whatever may happen, we remain on the path once chosen and take care that we do not fall. "Night" is the darkness of ignorance that surrounds us. The "narrow way" symbolises our limited knowledge. "Slippery" and slippery is the path made by doubt, and the "abyss" into which we are in danger of falling is the wheel of rebirth. The appearances of the *māyā* beguile the mind, which, enraptured by the pretences, is all too easily distracted from the goal.

The *bhajan* goes on to say:
He who tries to go this way without right knowledge,
who tries to follow this path without proper knowledge.
The Sadguru guides you.
Without him you cannot reach the goal.
Mahāprabhūjī says:
SrīDevpurijī, my master,
showed me where to turn.

कृतार्थं प्रतिनष्टमप्यनष्टं तदन्यसाधारणत्वात् ॥ २२ ॥

22. kṛtārthampratiṅṅamapy-anaṅṅam tad-anyasādhāraṅṅatvāt

kṛtārtha – one who has attained their goal.

prati – although, though

naṅṅam – destroyed, disappeared, dissolved

api – however

anaṅṅam – existing, existent

tad – this

anya – the others

sādhāraṅṅa – in general

Even though the one who has reached the goal detaches themselves from nature, it remains unchanged for all others.

To one who has detached themselves from the world of appearances and is anchored in the higher consciousness, the world appears unreal like a dream. If this one has succeeded in freeing themselves from the conditionality of nature, this does not mean that nature itself disappears. For everyone else, it is still there. The illusion of the *māyā* dissolves only for that "seeing one" who has recognised and seen through it. For the others, the *māyā* continues to exist unchanged and binds them tightly.

स्वस्वामिशक्तयोःस्वरूपोपलब्धिहेतुः संयोगः ॥ २३ ॥

23. sva-svāmi-śaktyoḥ svarūpo'palabdhi-hetuḥ saṅgyogaḥ

sva – self

svāmi – lord

śakti – energy, power

svarūpa – true form, being

upalabdhi – understanding, knowledge

hetu – cause, reason

saṅgyoga – connection

The reason for the connection of the self with nature is to gain understanding of the

true nature of both.

I am often asked by students for what reason and purpose the self (*purusha*) and nature (*prakriti*) link together. The purpose of this link is so that the self can experience nature through the senses, mind and intellect, but not to be overwhelmed and enslaved by it. The connection of the self with the physical body has only the purpose of experiencing, enjoying and then letting go of the world.

Only in the body can we do something. But our actions can bind us as *karma* only if we see them as "personal" deeds and do them for our own gain or pleasure. By renouncing the fruits, we simultaneously free ourselves from the effect of *karma*. One who sees their life as a prayer and performs all actions as *pūjā* (offerings) is not bound by *karma*.

As long as the self identifies with nature, it is bound to it and has to suffer the problems that arise from this connection (see *sūtras* 12-15). If, however, the aspirant can free themselves from this mistaken identification through knowledge (*gyāna*) and realises their true nature, they attain "Self-realisation."

If you do your duty in the name of God and in selfless service to others, then this *karma* does not stick to you. But if you think "I am doing this", "I want to do this, experience this, enjoy this, feel this...", then you connect yourself with your deeds and they bind you.

How does *karma* work? How can actions follow us into the next life? The *karma* follows as a vibration. This vibration can support our development or stand in our way as an obstacle. A negative vibration causes unhappiness, illness or an accident. A positive vibration leads to happy circumstances, health and harmony. Each individual sends out specific vibrations and these guide their life. In this way *karma* is to be understood as an impulse that directs destiny, just as the wind directs the course of a sailing ship. This energy cannot age or perish or be destroyed. It can, however, be purged and thereby changed by turning to the good. A Chinese proverb says: "We cannot change the wind, but we can set the sails differently".

The reason of the connection of *purusha* and *prakriti* has hereby been stated by Patanjali. But what is the cause of the erroneous identification of the *drashtā* (seer,

subject) with the *drishya* (seen, object)?

तस्यहेतुरविद्या ॥ २४ ॥

24. tasyahetur-avidyā

tasya- whose

hetu – cause

avidyā – ignorance

The cause of this is ignorance.

We are all in search of knowledge (*gyāna* or *vidyā*). As stated in the introduction, there are two types of knowledge: *para vidyā* and *aparavidyā* – spiritual and worldly knowledge.

In daily life we need *aparavidyā*, knowledge and skills that we can acquire through learning and training. This includes the practical things of life such as cooking, writing, reading, sewing, driving, as well as intellectual knowledge such as science, languages, and so on. *Apara vidyā* is always "imperfect" knowledge, that is, it is limited and fragmentary and consequently always associated with ignorance (*avidyā*). Therefore, we always commit errors and mistakes, the consequences of which we often painfully feel.

Para vidyā, on the other hand, is knowledge about God and cosmic laws, about the meaning of life, life after death, about *tattvas*, *gunas*, *prakriti*, *purusha*.... This knowledge cannot be learned. It can only be explored in meditation and transmitted by a realised master.

