

# YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

## A Guide to Self-knowledge

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तदभावात् संयोगाभावोहानंतद्दृशेःकैवल्यम् ॥ २५ ॥

### 25. tad-abhāvātsamyoga-abhāvohānam tad-dr̥ṣeḥkaivalyam

*tad – this*

*abhāva – non-existence, annihilation*

*samyoga – coming together*

*hāna – to overcome, to leave behind*

*dr̥ṣeḥ – for the observer, sighted one*

*kaivalya – absolute oneness*

**Once the ignorance is removed, the connection dissolves and the "seer" is liberated.**

There are two kinds of seeing: external and internal. In order to "see" the *ātma*, we must look within, because everything we perceive outside is *māyā*. However, the divine part within us (*ātma*) is hidden deep within us and must be explored with much patience in the introspection of meditation. However, once we have experienced our true Self, we instantly experience the fulfilment of all our desires and will never seek it externally again.

The *ātma* is always one, always pure and always conscious. However, veiled and obscured by the layers of *koshas*, *samskāras* and *gunas*, they identify with matter and think themselves inseparable from it. If this error is overcome by knowledge, they regain the true state of their being: *kaivalya* – oneness with the self.

It denotes pure consciousness, detached from all objects and attributes. No singular thing can be said to be "only" that thing. Everything consists of several components and possesses certain properties and characteristics: spatial extent, colour, weight, etc. Nor can any human being say of themselves, "I am *only* I." Everyone is afflicted with characteristics, thoughts, memories, feelings, etc., and therefore is not "only" pure consciousness.

Often, we do not even know what all exists in our consciousness and think we are already accomplished. But as long as the smallest "seed" of desires is still hidden in us, *kaivalya* is not realised. This does not mean that we should kill all our feelings. We can and should live in the world and experience it – but with mindfulness and wisdom.

The first step of spiritual development is to become aware of one's purpose and to realise what "life" means. A flame is always a flame, regardless of whether it is large or small. Light is always light, whether it is with the power of the sun or a candle. So also "life" is always life. Spiritual knowledge means to recognise the divine light and the divine love in oneself and in all living beings.

This knowledge, which is essential for attaining self-knowledge and self-realisation, is what Patanjali tries to impart to his disciples. The divine self remains hidden from our eyes – and yet lives within us all. By allowing ourselves to be deceived by the *māyā*, we have forgotten our own Self. The point of yoga practice is to recognise and connect with our true self.

When consciousness changes, the whole of "reality" changes. As long as we identify with the world, we suffer. That is why Patanjali says: do not identify with the external objects. We are connected to the body, but we are not the body. From this insight we learn to distinguish the unchanging reality (*purusha*) from the impermanent unreality (*prakriti*).

विवेकख्यातिरविप्लवाहानोपायः ॥ २६ ॥

## 26. viveka-khyātiraviplavāhāna-upāyah

*viveka – discernment*

*khyāti – knowledge, experience*

*aviplavā – constantly, unceasingly*

*hāna – to destroy, to kill*

*upāya – means, way*

### **Constant exercise in correct discernment is the means of overcoming ignorance.**

*Viveka* is possessed by one who can discriminate between the real and the unreal. This discernment can only be attained through spiritual knowledge and wisdom (*para vidyā*). Whoever possesses this supreme knowledge, the world "disappears" for them, as has been explained in the previous *sūtras*, or – in other words – the worldly desires become meaningless and irrelevant.

Everything that we can see with our eyes belongs to nature (*prakriti*). Nature is constantly changing, and as the seasons close, so does the circle of human life. Corresponding to the four seasons in nature, four stages are distinguished in human life:

- BRAHMACHĀRYAĀSHRAM: youth and school years, time of preparation; outwardly largely invisible, development proceeds inwardly ("winter").
- GRIHASTAĀSHRAM: household and family life, a time of blossoming and unfolding ("spring").
- VĀNPRASTHAĀSHRAM: climax of life in which growth is completed and fruits ripen ("summer").
- SANNYĀSA ĀSHRAM: completion, harvest and renunciation ("autumn"); a symbol of *sannyāsa* (renunciation of all worldly things) is the colour orange – the colour of falling leaves in autumn; withdrawal from the world and transition to another plane of being, to "winter", to death and new beginnings.

Just like nature, the body, thoughts and feelings change. How do we best deal with this constant change? How does the attitude of a sage who has discernment (*viveka*) differ from that of an ignorant person?

Suppose you eat an orange for the first time in your life. It tastes delicious, so you eat two more. But your craving for oranges is still not satisfied, so you buy a whole kilo and

greedily devour it in one sitting. Afterwards, however, oranges are, metaphorically speaking, "up to your neck", and you would prefer not to see any more. You still have an appetite, however, and now look for something else to satisfy your gusto. You taste a pear and find it quite delicious. You enthusiastically eat kilos of pears – until the moment when you have also overeaten them and can no longer even hear the word "pear" without feeling sick. Again, you look for a new taste and this time you try peaches ... So, the "game" starts all over again.

It's always the same: you're looking for something to enjoy. In the beginning you eagerly reach out for it – but in the end you turn away from it with reluctance. It is a sign of ignorance if we do not recognise or do not want to accept the connection between desire and disappointment and continue to strive for impermanent enjoyment. By running after the *māyā*(worldly illusion), we get deeper and deeper into its web.

The wise man, on the other hand, quickly sees through this law and draws the correct conclusion from it. At the beginning he is like the others: he eats an orange, finds pleasure in it and eats more and more of it until he feels weariness. But unlike the ignorant man, he now begins to think and analyse the process. He realises that every worldly pleasure is intensely and pleasantly felt at the beginning, but this feeling gradually weakens, and finally even turns into the opposite.

Through reflection and insight (*viveka* and *gyāna*) the sage finally frees themselves from this cycle of disappointments. From the insight gained through *viveka*, they draw the conclusion and henceforth no longer allows themselves to be governed by their desires, the impermanence of which they now know.

In order to seek the unchanging, imperishable and permanent, they turn to the spiritual path. Although they continue to live in the world like everyone else, they no longer allow themselves to be captured by it. Their reflection and conclusion on the impermanence of objects and feelings create in them an inner distance from worldly things and the fluctuating feelings of pleasure and displeasure (*rāga* and *dvesha*) associated with them. Unlike the "ignorant man", whose mind is constantly reeling between these two opposing sensations, the sage lives in contentment and inner peace. By withdrawing from the short-lived

pleasures of this world, they at the same time keeps their problems away from themselves.

तस्यसप्तधाप्रान्तभूमिःप्रज्ञा ॥ २७ ॥

## 27. tasyasaptadhāprāntabhūmi-prajñā.

*tasya – whose*

*saptadhātu – sevenfold, consisting of seven parts.*

*prānta-bhūmi – limit, end point, goal*

*prajñā – discrimination, knowledge, wisdom*

### Wisdom consists of sevenfold knowledge.

When the aspirant is established in renouncing worldly pleasures (*vairāgya*), so that worldly desires no longer arise from their subconscious mind, the veils of ignorance are lifted from their consciousness, and the inner knowledge is revealed to them.

The yogi has to master these seven realisations and experiences:

1. "All that is to be done, I have done."  
All duties are accomplished and the *vrittis* are *at rest*.
2. "I have mastered all that is to be overcome."  
No *karma* is left; even the seeds of *karma* are burnt.
3. "I have come to know everything worth knowing."  
All desires are fulfilled; all stages of *samādhi* are mastered; supreme knowledge is attained.
4. "All that is to be attained I have attained."  
The quest is over; the goal has been reached.
5. "My consciousness rests in *Brahman*."  
Nothing more can disturb and distract the mind; it remains untouched by any allurements of worldly and astral forces.
6. "I am *sat-chid-ānanda*"  
Consciousness (*chitta*) detaches from the *gunas* and becomes one with its true

nature: *sat-chid-ānanda*– pure truth, pure consciousness and pure bliss.

7. As the highest stage, the yogi attains *ātma*-sthiti, the firm and permanent anchorage in the Self. Now they are completely freed from the bondage of *karmas* and *gunas* and eternally united in *paramānanda* (supreme bliss) with the divine Self.

One who has realised these seven stages is called *jīvanmūkta* – liberated while alive.

Achieving this goal requires a lifetime of effort, discipline and work on oneself and certainly cannot be achieved in a "crash course" of a few weeks.

योगाङ्गानुष्ठानादशुद्धिक्षये ज्ञानदीप्तिराविवेकख्यातेः ॥ २८ ॥

## 28. *yoga-aṅga-anuṣṭhānādaśuddhi-kṣayejñāna-dīptirāviveka-khyāteḥ*

*yoga-aṅga* – "yoga limbs"

*anuṣṭhāna* -intensive spiritual practice

*aśuddhi* – impurity

*kṣaye* – purify

*jñāna-dīptir* – light and clarity of knowledge

*viveka* – discrimination

*khyāti* – uninterrupted, continuous

**By removing the impurities of the mind through yoga practice, the light of knowledge and discrimination shines.**

When the intellect is free from impurity, the mind becomes calm and the consciousness clear like the motionless, crystal waters of a mountain lake. Then we can look into the depths of our soul and gain insight into reality.

After first discussing the goal and then the obstacles that arise on the spiritual path, Patanjali now explains the path itself. In the next *sūtra*, Patanjali enumerates the "eight limbs" or eight stages of the *Rāja-yoga path* that the aspirant must master.