

Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali

Constant, reverential repetition of the *pranava āum*, with contemplation on its meaning and the feeling it evokes, helps the seer to reach the highest state in yoga.

Words, meaning and feeling are interwoven. As words are eternal, so are meaning and feeling. Meaning and feeling change according to one's intellectual calibre and understanding. This sūtra conveys the devotional aspects of the seed *mantra āum*.

Japa is repetition of the *mantra*, with reverence and realization of its meaning. Practice of *japa* unites the perceiver, the instruments of perception, and the perceived: God. The *mantra āum* is considered to be *Śabda Brahman* (Word of God, or Universal Sound) to be known with the organs of perception and action, mind, intelligence and consciousness (see I.23, 41 and II.1).

ततः प्रत्यक्षेतनाधिगमोऽप्यन्तरायाभावश्च ।२९।

I.29 tataḥ pratyakcetana adhigamah api
antarāya abhāvah ca

<i>tataḥ</i>	then
<i>pratyakcetana</i>	individual soul, introspective mind
<i>adhigamah</i>	to find, discover, accomplish, acquire mastery
<i>api</i>	also, too
<i>antarāya</i>	intervention, interference, impediment, hindrance, obstacle
<i>abhāvah</i>	absence
<i>ca</i>	and

Meditation on God with the repetition of āum removes obstacles to the mastery of the inner self.

The repetition of the *pranava mantra* with feeling and understanding of its meaning leads to the discovery of the Self, and helps to remove impediments to Self-Realization (for impediments, see I.30 and 31).

When experience, the instruments of experience and the object experienced are interwoven, the soul manifests itself without the intervention of any impediments.

व्याधिस्त्वानसंशयप्रमादालस्याविरतिग्रान्तिदर्शनालभ्य-
भूमिकत्वानवस्थितत्वानि चित्तविक्षेपास्तेऽन्तरायाः १३०।

I.30 *vyādhi styāna saṁsaya pramāda ālasya avirati bhrāntidarsana alabdhabhūmikatva anavasthitatvāni cittavikṣepaḥ te antarāyāḥ*

<i>vyādhi</i>	disease
<i>styāna</i>	lack of perseverance, lack of interest, sluggishness, mental laziness
<i>saṁsaya</i>	doubt, indecision
<i>pramāda</i>	intoxication, carelessness, negligence, inattentiveness, inadvertence
<i>ālasya</i>	idleness, physical laziness
<i>avirati</i>	incontinence, lacking in moderation or control, sensual gratification
<i>bhrāntidarsana</i>	living under illusion, mistaken notion
<i>alabdhabhūmikatva</i>	missing the point, inability to hold on to what is achieved, disappointment in one's desired object
<i>anavasthitatvāni</i>	an unsettled state, inability to maintain the achieved progress
<i>cittavikṣepaḥ</i>	a scattered or oscillating mind causing distraction in the consciousness
<i>te</i>	these
<i>antarāyāḥ</i>	obstacles, impediments

These obstacles are disease, inertia, doubt, heedlessness, laziness, indiscipline of the senses, erroneous views, lack of perseverance, and backsliding.

This sūtra describes the nine obstacles or impediments which obstruct progress and distract the aspirant's consciousness.

These obstacles can be divided into physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual:

a disease		physical
b lack of interest or sluggishness		
c lingering doubt		mental
d pride or carelessness		
e idleness		
f sense gratification		

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g living in a world of delusion	intellectual
h lack of perseverance or not being able to hold on to what has been undertaken	spiritual
i inability to maintain the progress attained due to pride or stagnation in practices	

In I.29, Patañjali indicates that Self-Realization is possible only when consciousness is free from impediments.

दुःखदीर्घनर्याद्भेजयत्वस्वात्सप्रस्वाता विक्षेपत्तहभुवः १३१

I.31 duḥkha daurmanasya aṅgamejayatva
 śvāsaprasvāsāḥ vikṣepa sahabhuvaḥ

duḥkha	sorrow, pain, grief, distress, unhappiness
daurmanasya	mental pain, affliction, dejection, despair
aṅgamejayatva	unsteadiness of the body
śvāsaprasvāsāḥ	inspiration and expiration
vikṣepa	scattered, causing distraction
sahabhuvaḥ	existing at the same time, side by side, accompanying, concurrent

Sorrow, despair, unsteadiness of the body and irregular breathing further distract the citta.

Besides the obstacles mentioned in I.30, there are four more causes of distraction: sorrow, despair or evil disposition, tremor of the body and irregular or laboured breathing. (Possibly, laboured breathing shakes the body, creating instability, which in turn brings mental distress.) These cause further distractions which agitate the mind and consciousness.

These impediments are of three types: self-inflicted (*ādhyātmika*), imbalances of elements in the body (*ādhibhautika*) and problems brought about by fate, e.g. genetic defects (*ādhidaivika*). They need to be fought and conquered through yogic disciplines (see I.6; II.3, 17, 34).

तत्प्रतिषेधार्थमेकतत्त्वाभ्यातः ३२।

I.32 tatpratiṣedhārtham eka tattva abhyāsaḥ

<i>tatpratiṣedhārtham</i>	for their prevention
<i>eka</i>	one, single
<i>tattva</i>	a real state, reality, truth, essential nature, the very essence, a principle, a doctrine
<i>abhyāsaḥ</i>	practice

Adherence to single-minded effort prevents these impediments.

To remove the thirteen impediments and prevent their recurrence, several specific methods have been described.

Though most commentators have concluded that *ekatattva* is devotion and surrender to God, it is beyond the average person's comprehension that surrender to God is the cure for all maladies. If surrender to God were possible for everyone, and could by itself eradicate all impediments, Patañjali need not have elaborated on all the other means of reaching the divine state. Only a few outstanding personalities like Rāmaṇa Māhārṣi, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahārīsa, Mahātmā Gāndhi, Jāda Bhārata and the great *ācāryas* of the past could surrender wholeheartedly to God, as they were angels in human form, highly evolved souls whose subliminal impressions from previous lives enabled them to assume their final human form in order to clear up the residues.

But total surrender to God is beyond the abilities of most ordinary men and women, who are still caught up in pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, success and failure. Meditation undoubtedly helps to minimize the mental agitations of such persons, but to conquer all the obstacles to Self-Realization, all the eight stages of yoga must be followed.

Only when body, mind and intelligence are fully purified is it possible to surrender totally to God, without expecting any return. This is a surrender of the highest order, beyond the capacity of the average individual.