

THE YOGA SŪTRAS OF PATAÑJALI

THE OXFORD CENTRE FOR HINDU STUDIES GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION



THIS short book provides a detailed consideration of what is perhaps the best known, but least well understood, of all the texts of Indian philosophy, the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. This is not a particularly easy text to study, nor one where the meaning can be easily understood. The *Yoga Sūtras* exists within the context of early Indian philosophy, which is in itself a highly complex and at times obscure area of study, and the comprehension of its principal tenets becomes even more problematic without some knowledge of that wider context.

I would certainly not try to discourage anyone from taking up such a study, however, and I do believe that an understanding of Patañjali's work at any level is a prerequisite for acquiring a proper insight into the philosophy of Yoga. I do feel, however, that too much is written and said about the *Yoga Sūtras* that is not based on a thorough reading of the text, and as a result tends to be misleading. Hence in writing a study guide to the *Yoga Sūtras*, one inevitably encounters a tension between on the one hand making the ideas accessible to as many readers as possible, and, on the other, doing full justice to the complexity of the ideas encountered. Whether or not I have the balance right is for others to judge, but I do hope the reader will appreciate the difficulties involved in introducing this text as an area of study.

Taking a more positive note, I would certainly say that anyone who goes through this study guide will emerge both

enriched and enlightened, and with a much deeper understanding of the Yoga tradition. That is not to say that I expect everyone to immediately understand every part of the *Sūtras*, as that would be highly unlikely, merely that even a partial or imperfect comprehension will be of enormous benefit in gaining an understanding of the philosophy of Yoga.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE YOGA SŪTRAS

Although he does not name himself in the text, the identity of a certain Patañjali as the author of the *Yoga Sūtras* is well attested. Despite legends about his birth and identity, we can say little for certain about who he was or indeed about when he lived. According to popular accounts, Patañjali is supposed to be a manifestation of the divine serpent Ananta who acts as the bed of Viṣṇu. Ananta appeared on earth to disseminate knowledge of Yoga and because he fell (*pata*) into the hands of his mother whilst they were formed into the position of prayer (*añjali*), he was given the name of Patañjali.

In more historical terms, the debate over the dating of the text rests substantially on whether the author of the *Yoga Sūtras* is to be identified as the grammarian named Patañjali, who probably lived in the 2nd century BC. Indian traditions seem to take this identity for granted but most modern scholars are more sceptical, and suggest that our Patañjali probably lived some time in the 2nd or 3rd centuries AD. It is virtually impossible to be certain on this matter, but it does appear that the *Yoga Sūtras* has an awareness of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and on this basis alone the later date is perhaps more likely. I would also tentatively suggest that the *Yoga Sūtras* should be regarded as being later than the passages from the *Mahābhārata* which focus on Yoga practice and the philosophy of Yoga.

THE STATUS OF THE YOGA SŪTRAS

Hindu religious thought recognises six *darśanas*, or philosophical systems, as orthodox. These six, Vedānta, Mīmāṃsa,

Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya, Sāṃkhya and Yoga, are declared to be orthodox, or *āstika*, because they accept the Vedic revelation as authoritative. Those systems that do not accept the authority of the Veda are said to be *na āstika*, or *nāstika*, and are frequently condemned in Hindu texts; these would include Buddhists, Jains, and Ājīvikas, as well as the more overtly atheist philosophies such as the Cārvākas and Lokāyatas. Each of the *āstika* systems has a defining text, which purports to establish its fundamental principles. Most of these are written in the *sūtra* style of pithy aphorisms, which generally require a commentary or verbal explanation for the full meaning to become clear; the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* is the one exception to this rule.

With regard to the Yoga *darśana*, Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* holds the position of being the seminal work that defines the system, and for this reason alone it appears to have always been held in high regard; even today, when Yoga has progressed considerably from the teachings of Patañjali, it is still usually referred to as the principal work on Yoga with authoritative status. Over the centuries a number of important commentaries have been written, which seek to explain and extrapolate the full meaning of the *sūtras*. The earliest of these commentaries is that of Vyasa, who is sometimes identified with the legendary author of the *Mahābhārata* and compiler of the Veda, although this seems highly unlikely, and most scholars suggest a date some time between the 5th and 8th centuries AD. Other important writers on the *Yoga Sūtras* include the great Vedāntist, Vācaspati Miśra (10th century), Bhoja the philosopher king of Malwa in central India (11th century), and Vijñānabhikṣu (16th century), who challenged Śaṅkarācārya's philosophy of Advaita Vedānta.

It would require a great deal of study to look in detail at the commentarial tradition, but the fact that these different works exist shows again the high regard in which the *Yoga Sūtras* was held. In the modern era, that status has been maintained and possibly expanded, with contemporary teachers

all emphasising the importance of Patañjali's work, and new translations appearing with quite startling regularity. In the 1990s, Barbara Stoler Miller produced a new translation and commentary, which is highly recommended, in 2001 T.S. Rukmani provided a valuable edition that includes a translation of Vyasa's commentary, and as recently as 2008 a new Penguin Classics edition appeared in which Shyam Ranganathan sought to demonstrate that Patañjali's primary concern was with moral philosophy.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE YOGA SŪTRAS

One of the main problems confronting anyone seeking to get an insight into the teachings of the *Yoga Sūtras* is that English translations vary so dramatically from one another, to the extent where it can be very difficult to properly determine exactly what Patañjali does and does not say. There will, of course, always be differences in translations of any work, as different translators see different meanings, and in some cases bring their own preconceptions to bear. This is certainly true of some English editions of the *Yoga Sūtras*, such as the Penguin Classics version in which Shyam Ranganathan holds to a rather unusual reading. Beyond these issues, however, there are particular difficulties involved with Patañjali's writing due to the highly technical vocabulary he employs, and the extremely dense *sūtra* style adopted. It seems certain that this and other similar works were composed in *sūtras* so that the meaning could be conveyed in the fewest words possible, and the whole of the text could be more easily committed to memory. In the *Yoga Sūtras*, we find that virtually no verbs are employed, and it is left to the reader to fill in the implicit meaning, which is deemed to be self-evident. The problem is of course that to the modern reader the meaning is often by no means self-evident, and the teaching of particular passages is therefore rendered obscure.

The translation included here is original, but must be regarded as just one amongst many, and by no means a

definitive version. As far as possible I have tried to preserve the original sense of the text without imposition of meaning, but it is often necessary to unpack the language in order to convey the intended sense of the words; if words were to be omitted, as they are in the Sanskrit, then in many cases the English translation would be without meaning. I have also tended to leave much of the technical language untranslated, partly because there are very often no real equivalents in English, and partly because the text itself frequently presents a word or idea, and then proceeds to explain what this means. In such circumstances, there seems little point in using an English approximation that can never fully capture the true sense of the Sanskrit original.

THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE YOGA SŪTRAS

There are four chapters or sections to our text, which are named respectively as the *Samādhi-pāda*, the *Sādhana-pāda*, the *Vibhūti-pāda*, and the *Kaivalya-pāda*, with the title of each section being broadly approximate to the content. Each of the first three parts is of almost the same length, including 51, 55 and 56 *sūtras* respectively. The *Kaivalya-pāda* is a little shorter with only 34 *sūtras*, yielding a total of 196 *sūtras* for the entire work.

It must be recognised that in spite of the title, Patañjali did not set out to compile a manual of Yoga practice that the aspirant could take home and use for him or herself. There is in fact very little to be found within the *sūtras* that can be regarded as direct instruction as to how the aspiring *yogin* should conduct himself in order to achieve the designated goals. Rather the *Yoga Sūtras* should properly be seen as a text delineating the philosophy of Yoga, explaining why it is necessary, what it can achieve, how it can be efficacious, and the type of practice that is to be undertaken. There is, however, a big distinction to be drawn between outlining the type of practice and giving step by step directions as to how this is to be undertaken. Patañjali certainly completes

the former of these tasks, but seems to leave the latter to the teachers who will lead their followers through the minutiae of daily ritual. And this factor in turn has allowed teachers of different types of Yoga to refer to Patañjali as their basic authority, even where the practices they advocate have very little to do with the explicit content of the *Yoga Sūtras*.

Broadly speaking, it does seem that Patañjali accepts the fundamental premises of the *Sāṃkhya* view of the world. Essentially, the *puruṣa*, or true self, is entangled within the domain of matter, and as a result of this entanglement it must experience misery and misfortune. The root cause of this situation is ignorance, *avidyā*, which covers the *puruṣa*, and conceals its own true identity. In place of the truth, it identifies instead with external movements of the mind, as it roams through the world gathering up mental impressions, which then become attached to the *puruṣa*, and carry it forward as it transmigrates from body to body. Patañjali therefore advocates the suspension of this external mental focus, so that the impressions gathered cease to attach themselves to the *puruṣa*, and the veil of *avidyā* can be lifted through intense introspective activity.

This might be called the philosophy of Yoga, its *raison d'être*, which is set out in the opening *Samādhi-pāda*. The *Sādhana-pāda* then provides us with more details of the actual practice to be undertaken, and it is here that we encounter the notion of the eight limbs, *aṣṭa aṅga*, of Yoga. The first five of these are delineated in the second chapter, but these are declared to be external or preparatory to the final flowering of the practice, which is achieved through the final three limbs, collectively designated as the *saṃyama*. It is the discussion of *saṃyama* that forms the main theme of the opening section of the *Vibhūti-pāda*, and this in turn leads into a consideration of the wondrous results that can be achieved through the diligent practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

These results are of two differing types. Firstly, magical and supernatural powers arise, so that the adept is able to

transcend the laws of nature by flying through the air, or reading the minds of others. Above and beyond such amazing feats, however, the *yogin* can also achieve the highest spiritual goal, which, as in the *Sāṃkhya darśana*, is defined as *kaivalya*, literally the separation of the *puruṣa* from its entanglement with matter, the latter referred to by the term *prakṛti*, or occasionally *pradhāna*. It is this idea of *mokṣa*, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, which is presented as the ultimate goal of Yoga practice, and which forms the main subject for discussion in the fourth and final section. And in this we can see what Yoga actually was in this early period, namely the techniques through which the adept could attain the level of realisation required for the soul to break free of its bondage in matter.

THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE YOGA SŪTRAS

In the earlier discussion of the dating of the *Yoga Sūtras*, it was suggested that this work is very probably later than the *Mahābhārata*'s Yoga treatises, and the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and may very well have made use of these earlier works on Yoga. Whether or not this was the case, it is clear that the type of Yoga practice advocated within the *Yoga Sūtras* is broadly equivalent to that advocated in these two texts. It is this form of practice that is commonly referred to as 'classical Yoga' as a way of contrasting it with the Tantric or Haṭha Yoga more commonly encountered in the modern era. We should, moreover, be aware of the significant Buddhist and Jain influence on Indian thought during the period when the *Yoga Sūtras* was compiled, and it is certainly possible to identify ideas and terminology that Patañjali shares with these other traditions.

What becomes readily apparent as we read through the *Yoga Sūtras* is that this text is closely integrated into the wider context of Indian religious thought, and the central theme of gaining liberation from rebirth. This imperative towards *mokṣa* is shared with the *Sāṃkhya* and *Vedānta*

systems, with the Jain and Buddhist traditions, and with most of the devotional expressions of Hinduism as well. Hence it is important to see Patañjali's revelations in this light in order to understand his primary intention in compiling the *Yoga Sūtras*. As the Buddha taught, life is primarily characterised by suffering, as each being progresses through an endless cycle of rebirth. Yoga philosophy teaches the process through which rebirth is perpetuated, as each action and each thought leaves a latent impression on the consciousness, which must at some point come to fruition as material existence is carried forward. What Patañjali is offering here is not just an explanation of the process, but also a concomitant means of ending it. If the activity of the mind can be stilled in some way, then the creation of new impressions will also cease, and these in turn will then cease to generate further rebirths. The Yoga system is proposed as a means by which the action of the mind can be stilled, and the progression of rebirth finally concluded thereby.

With these thoughts in mind, let us now proceed to study each of the four *pādas* in turn so that we can acquire a greater insight into the explanation of life in this world, the process of cessation, and goals to be achieved.

CHAPTER 1: THE SAMĀDHI-PĀDA



THIS first section of the *Yoga Sūtras* provides an explanation of what Yoga is, and what its aims are. Patañjali's usual style is to introduce a concept briefly, and then build upon it in the ensuing *sūtras*, so that it is hard to understand a single *sūtra* when taken out of context. The text thus builds progressively, and it is important to follow the pattern, as it is clear that the overall structure is carefully designed. We will bear these points in mind as we begin our reading.

1-4: THE PURPOSE OF YOGA

1. *atha yogānuśāsanam,*
Here is the teaching on Yoga.
2. *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ,*
Yoga is the restriction of the movements of the mind.
3. *tadā draṣṭuḥ sva-rūpe 'vasthānam,*
When this is achieved, the witness comes to exist in terms of its true identity.
4. *vṛtti-sārūpyam itiratra,*
Otherwise, the witness assumes the identity dictated by the movement of the mind.

This opening passage is vitally important for understanding

the *Yoga Sūtras* as a whole. The first *sūtra* simply acts as an introduction, but in *sūtra* 2, we have the definition of Yoga on which the entire work is based: *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*. The use of the word *citta* is a little unusual, as it does not appear in the usual Sāṃkhya analyses of the human consciousness. Sāṃkhya typically speaks of *manas*, *buddhi* and *aḥmkāra*, mind, intellect, and a sense of self, as jointly comprising the mental faculty, and so we must consider what is meant here by the word *citta*, as it is a term that Patañjali uses repeatedly.

Barbara Stoler Miller insists that it should be understood as ‘thoughts’, but this tends to give an impression of something the mind does rather than being integral to the person. It would probably be better to understand *citta* as the thinking faculty, and in fact most translators opt for ‘mind’, which is probably as close as we can get in English. The word *vṛtti* means movement or activity, and hence *citta-vṛtti* means the different types of mental activity the thought process pursues. And *nirodha* means to restrict or to inhibit, so *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* means to inhibit the fluctuations of the mind as it follows its conventional patterns of thought. Hence we should note from the outset that the type of Yoga Patañjali is delineating is a Yoga of the mind rather than of the body.

The third *sūtra* then reveals the purpose behind this Yoga practice, namely to allow the *draṣṭṛ* to remain in its true form. The word *draṣṭṛ* literally means one who observes, and here we must regard it as referring to the *puruṣa* or *ātman*, the true self that exists in a state beyond matter. Hence its natural *sva-rūpa*, or true form, is to be untouched by the limitations we must endure in life; it is this state of liberation that Yoga is designed to bring about, freeing the soul from its unnatural condition of embodiment.

Sūtra 4 then tells us more about the alternative state of existence for the *draṣṭṛ*, a false condition in which it loses contact with its true identity, and instead assumes the condition imposed upon it by the *vṛtti*, the fluctuations of the mind. Essentially what Patañjali is saying here is that the

identity we conceive for ourselves is not a true identity, it is simply a reflection of our state of mind. If the *vṛttis* can be curtailed, then the false material identities they impose upon the soul will cease to exist, and the soul will return to its natural state beyond the miseries of this existence. This then establishes what Yoga is about, what it consists of, and what it is designed to achieve.

5-12: CITTA-VṚTTI DEFINED

5. *vṛttayaḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ,*
The movements of the mind can be divided into five categories; these can either bring affliction or be free of affliction.
6. *pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtayaḥ,*
These five are proper judgement, false assessment, uncertainty, sleep, and the remembrance of things past.
7. *pratyakṣānumānāgamāḥ pramāṇāni,*
Proper judgement comes from direct perception, logical inference, and scriptural revelation.
8. *viparyayo mithyā-jñānam atad-rūpa-pratiṣṭham,*
False assessment means misunderstanding based on mistaken apprehension of the object.
9. *śabda-jñānānupātī vastu-sūnyo vikalpaḥ,*
Uncertainty arises when knowledge is based on words alone, and is devoid of a proper object of perception.
10. *abhāva-pratyayālambanā vṛttir nidrā,*
Sleep is where the movement of the mind has no object on which to focus.

11. *anubhūta-viṣayāsaṃpramoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ*,
Remembrance is where the experience of an object
is retained.

These *sūtras* seek to expand on the idea of *citta-vṛtti*, introduced in the second *sūtra*. What are these fluctuations or movements of our thought processes? We now learn that they can be categorised firstly as twofold, and then into five categories. The twofold division is as *kliṣṭa* and *akliṣṭa*, causing pain or being troublesome, and then not causing affliction. *Sūtra* 6 lists the five types of *citta-vṛtti*, but it is not made clear whether it is two, three, or four of the five that are *kliṣṭa*, and the remainder *akliṣṭa*, or whether all five can be sometimes troublesome and sometimes benign; the latter seems to be more likely.

The five types of *citta-vṛtti* are listed as *pramāṇa*, reaching a proper judgement, *viparyaya*, false understanding of a situation, *vikalpa*, not being able to reach any certainty, *nidrā*, sleep, and *smṛti*, memory or recollection. As we have seen, Yoga is defined as the process by which these five mental activities are brought to an end. Five *sūtras*, 7 to 11, then describe each of the *citta-vṛttis* in turn. *Pramāṇa*, proper understanding, can be gained from direct perception, from inference, and from the revelation of the *āgamas*, or sacred texts. This idea of how true knowledge is acquired is one that is shared with other *darśanas*, including the *Sāṃkhya* and *Vedānta* systems. *Viparyaya*, wrong understanding, is the exact opposite of *pramāṇa*; it is not derived from any of the three solid bases of knowledge, but rather rests upon *mithyā-jñāna*, false or wrong knowledge of what something truly is. *Vikalpa* is the state where one cannot determine between *pramāṇa* and *viparyaya*, and is left in a condition of uncertainty.

The final two *vṛttis* are *nidrā* and *smṛti*, sleep and memory. Here it seems that *nidrā* indicates the state of deep dreamless sleep referred to in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (5). In this state,

the mind has no tangible object on which to focus, and yet it cannot be said to be wholly inactive. Therefore this condition is also included amongst the movements of the mind. *Smṛti* is the process whereby the sensory encounter with a particular object is not lost, so that the flavour, smell, sight, or feel of the object can be recalled and recognised at a later date.

These then are the *citta-vṛttis* that must be brought to a state of *nirodha* through the practice of Yoga.

12–16: THE MEANING OF NIRODHA

12. *abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyām tan-nirodhaḥ*,
The restriction of these movements of the mind is achieved through regular practice, and through renunciation.
13. *tatra sthitau yatno 'bhyāsaḥ*,
Regular practice means the exertion required to achieve steadiness of the mind.
14. *sa tu dīrgha-kāla-nairantarya-satkārāsevito
dṛḍha-bhūmiḥ*,
Now when this exertion is properly performed for a long time, without interruption, it becomes firmly established.
15. *dṛṣṭānu śravika-viśaya-vitr̥ṣṇasya vaśīkāra-samjñā
vairāgyam*,
Renunciation is known to be the self-mastery that removes the hankering arising from perceiving or learning about an object.
16. *tat-param puruṣa-khyāter guṇa-vaitr̥ṣṇyam*,
A superior form of renunciation is the lack of hankering for material attributes that arises from realisation of the *puruṣa*, the true self.

In this next passage the meaning is provided for another of the terms used in the definition of Yoga found in *sūtra* 2. *Nirodha* means the restriction or the cessation of the *citta-vṛttis* previously discussed. First we are told how this is to be accomplished; it is through *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, exactly the same terms as are used by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* when he rejects Arjuna's complaint that Yoga is virtually impossible (6.35). It is difficult, but *nirodha* can certainly be achieved through continual practice, *abhyāsa*, and by turning away from worldly aspirations, *vairāgya*. *Sūtras* 13 and 14 then further define *abhyāsa*, whilst 15 and 16 explain how *vairāgya* is to be accomplished. The practice of Yoga must be resolute and sustained if it is to be successful, and must be carried on uninterruptedly over a long period of time. Only dedication of this type will bring success.

Vairāgya can be achieved by overcoming the longing we feel when the senses perceive a desirable object. This clearly requires a great effort of will, but in *sūtra* 16 a superior form of *vairāgya* is noted, whereby detachment from the material world is achieved through realisation of the spiritual entity, the *puruṣa*, that is the true self. Here again, I think, we can note a link to the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.59) in which full detachment from this world is said to be achieved by perceiving the spiritual joy that comes through realisation of the higher domain, *param dṛṣṭvā nivartate*. These *sūtras* thus explain that the *nirodha* mentioned in *sūtra* 2 can be achieved only by constant and resolute practice, and by detaching oneself from the world either by an effort of will, or better still by realisation of the spiritual truth that abides within one's own being as the *puruṣa*.

17–20: SAMPRAJÑĀTA AND ASAMPRAJÑĀTA REALISATION

17. *vitarka-vicārānandāsmitā-
rūpānugamāt samprajñātaḥ,*

Where this realisation is conscious, it is achieved through deliberation, reflection, joy, and the experience of selfhood.

18. *virāma-pratyayābhyāsa-pūrvaḥ saṃskāra-śeṣo 'nyaḥ,*

The other type of realisation is preceded by the practice of suppressing conscious thought so that only subconscious impressions remain.

19. *bhava-pratyayo videha-prakṛti-layānām,*

For beings who do not have bodies, and whose physical forms have merged back into *prakṛti*, mental processes focus on existence alone.

20. *śraddhā-vīrya-smṛti-samādhi-prajñā-pūrvaka itareṣām,*

Others attain this state preceded by faith, vigorous endeavour, recollection, *samādhi*, and realised knowledge.

Here one must presume that Patañjali is expanding upon the idea of *puruṣa-khyāti*, realisation of the *puruṣa*, introduced in *sūtra* 16. We are now told that this realisation can be of two kinds, with and without conscious thoughts, designated as *saṃprajñāta* and *anya*, meaning the other or the opposite, which we may therefore take as *asaṃprajñāta*. As always, when states of consciousness are being discussed it is difficult for one who is not an expert in Yoga practice to determine exactly what is meant by the discussion. *Saṃprajñāta* realisation is said to be based on *vitarka*, *vicāra*, *ānanda* and *asmita*, conscious deliberation, reflection, a sense of joy, and an awareness of oneself. This would seem to indicate that this type of realisation is based on reflective insight, by which one tries to make sense of one's own identity, and reaches the conclusion that there must be a soul that is above

and beyond the overt personality.

Asamprajñāta realisation, by contrast, occurs when such conscious reason is suppressed, and is replaced by an unchanging awareness of the *puruṣa* that is not dependent on thought or reason. For most persons, this type of higher realised consciousness, which transcends the thought processes, is simply a theoretical concept, but it is towards this state that the process of *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* is aspiring. *Samprajñāta* realisation seems to be based on reasoned conviction whilst the other type of realisation is experiential. And because it is not dependent on reason or mental activity, it can also be sustained by beings who do not possess bodies, which according to Vyasa refers to the gods, or beings who live in higher worlds. For such higher beings, *asamprajñāta* realisation is natural, but for others it can be attained through a variety of means including faith, endeavour, recollection, *samādhi*, and knowledge.

We must recall again that these two types of realisation were related to the higher path of *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* where *nirodha* is achieved by realisation of the true self. We now have two means by which this realisation of the self is achieved, one by conscious thought processes, and the other by transcending such processes.

21–22: THE NECESSITY OF ENDEAVOUR

21. *tīvra-saṃvegānām āsannaḥ*

This state is very near for those who display ardent intensity in their practice.

22. *mṛdu-madhyādhimātratvāt tato 'pi viśeṣaḥ*

As persons are leisurely, middling, or intense in their practice, so excellence is achieved accordingly.

These two *sūtras* seem relatively straightforward and can be regarded as referring back to *sūtras* 12 and 13, in which

abhyāsa, regular practice, was given as one of the means by which *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* can be achieved. Now we are told that when the *abhyāsa* is intense or committed, realisation will be close, but if it is only middling or mild then the level of realisation will be commensurate. In other words, success in Yoga practice is dependent on the amount of dedication one is willing to give to it.

23–28: DEVOTION TO ĪŚVARA

23. *īśvara-praṇidhānād vā*,
Or it may be achieved by devoting oneself to the Lord.
24. *kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair aparāmṛṣṭaḥ puruṣa-
viśeṣa īśvaraḥ*,
Īśvara (the Deity or Lord) is a special *puruṣa*, free from the influence of affliction, action, the ripening of accumulated *karma*, or latent impressions.
25. *tatra niratiśayaṃ sarva-jñatva-bījam*,
For the *īśvara*, the seed of omniscience has grown to a state that cannot be surpassed.
26. *sa pūrveṣāṃ api guruḥ kālenānavacchedāt*,
He was also the *guru* of the ancient teachers, for he is unrestricted by time.
27. *tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ*,
His sound form is *praṇava*, *oṃkāra*.
28. *taj-japas-tad-artha-bhāvanam*,
The quiet repetition (*japa*) of that sound makes its object become manifest.

It has to be admitted that ideas of this type are rather unusual within the context of Yoga discourse, and my suspicion

is that they reflect Patañjali's awareness of, and respect for, the teachings of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which is overtly theistic. It is also the case, however, that passages on Yoga within the *Mahābhārata* include the assertion that it is reverence for a Supreme Deity that distinguishes the adherents of the Yoga system from the followers of Sāṃkhya.

Here the word *vā* in *sūtra* 23 indicates that *īśvara-praṇidhāna* is another means by which realisation can be attained, in addition to the *saṃprajñāta* and *asaṃprajñāta* just considered. The word *īśvara* is frequently used in Hindu religious literature to refer to the Supreme Deity of monotheistic doctrines, whilst *praṇidhāna* can mean either veneration for, or intense focus upon, a particular object. In this context, veneration would seem to be the more natural meaning.

Sūtras 24 to 27, however, then define *īśvara* in a manner that must raise questions as to the extent to which Patañjali is truly expounding the type of monotheistic teaching found within the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and most notably in the writings of medieval *ācāryas* such as Rāmānuja and Madhva. *Sūtra* 24 declares that the *īśvara* is a *viśeṣa puruṣa*, a special or superior soul, a term that might be taken as equivalent to *puruṣa uttama* or *puruṣottama*, which the *Gītā* uses to refer to the Deity in its fifteenth chapter. Why is this *puruṣa* different from all others? It is because he is beyond all affliction, and is untouched by the influence of karma, and because the 'seed of omniscience' has reached full fruition.

These explanations are interesting because they could perfectly well be applied to any *puruṣa* that has achieved *kaivalya*, the state of liberation in which *puruṣa* separates itself entirely from matter. If the *īśvara* is simply a liberated *puruṣa* then the claim that the *Yoga Sūtras* is theistic in orientation must be seriously called into question. It is also noteworthy that at no point does Patañjali take up the *Bhagavad-gītā*'s idea that liberation can be acquired as a gift of grace from a loving God. At all times, *kaivalya* is presented

as a goal to be achieved by personal endeavour, by *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, and not by *deva-prasāda*, the grace of God.

I think *sūtra* 26 is particularly interesting in its assertion that *īśvara* is the *guru* of those who appeared in ancient times, and who is not restricted by time, as this seems to be directly related to the opening verses of Chapter 4 of the *Gītā*, and may well be derived from them. There Kṛṣṇa states that he originally taught Yoga to the sun god, Vivasvān, *imaṁ vivasvate yogaṁ proktavān aham*, and when Arjuna questions how this is possible, Kṛṣṇa replies that he appears many times, uninhibited by the influence of time.

We are then told that the syllable *om* is the Deity's *vācaka*, the sound that represents him, and that he becomes manifest to one who resonates this sound. *Om* or *praṇava* is referred to on a number of occasions in the *Upaniṣads* as the sound that is equivalent to Brahman, the supreme principle, and in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* it is declared that all things are simply *om*, *sarvam omkāra eva* (1). The *Yoga Sūtras* does not fully expand upon its understanding of the nature of *īśvara*, and hence there must be some doubt about the extent of its theistic tendencies; we should, however, be cautious about presuming that Patañjali advocates a notion of God that can be accepted as consonant with Western or Indian monotheisms, or indeed the monistic ideas advocated by the Advaita school of Vedānta.

29–32: OBSTACLES TO PROGRESS

29. *tataḥ pratyak-cetanādhigamo 'py antarāyābhāvaś ca*,
At that point one achieves the state of inward contemplation, and the obstacles to practice cease to exist.
30. *vyādhi-styāna-saṁśaya-ramādālasyāvirati-bhrānti-darśanālabdha-bhūmikatvānavasthitatvāni citta-vikṣepās te 'ntarāyāḥ*,

These obstacles that distract the mind are disease, sloth, doubt, negligence, indolence, indulgence, misapprehension, failure to keep one's understanding firmly grounded, and a lack of consistency in one's practice.

31. *duḥkha-daurmanasyāṅgam-ejayatva-śvāsa-praśvāsā vikṣepa-sahabhavaḥ,*

The distractions are accompanied by distress, dejection, trembling of the body, and heavy inward and outward breathing.

32. *tat-pratiṣedhārtham eka-tattvābhyaśaḥ,*

In order to overcome the obstacles, one should engage in regular practice aimed at a single object.

These *sūtras* are concerned with the obstacles to Yoga, and how they may be overcome. The word *tataḥ* in *sūtra* 29 literally means 'from that', and therefore must logically refer to the *japa* of *om* mentioned in 28. The result of this *japa* is two-fold, firstly the mind is directed inwards away from external perception through the senses, and secondly the obstacles to progress cease to exist. *Sūtra* 30 lists the obstacles and describes their effect on the *yogin* as *citta-vikṣepa*, which means that they scatter the movements of the mind in all directions. As the aim of Yoga is to suppress the movements of the mind, it is logical to see that the obstacles should have the opposite effect. In 31, it is stated that as the distractions become predominant, one feels a sense of distress and frustration, and then in 32 we are told that the distractions can be overcome only by single-minded *abhyāsa*, in other words by dedication to the task, and making it the topmost goal. The next verses then build on this more hopeful assertion by discussing *citta-prasāda*, serenity of mind, which one presumes is the opposite of *citta-vikṣepa*, distraction of the mind as it scatters in all directions.

33-40: SERENITY OF MIND AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

33. *maitrī-karuṇā-muditopekṣāṇām sukha-duḥkha-puṇyāpuṇya-viṣayāṇām bhāvanātaś citta-prasādanam,*
Serenity of mind is achieved when one shows friendship towards those who are happy, compassion for those who suffer, delight towards the righteous, and indifference towards the wicked.
34. *pracchardana-vidhāraṇābhyām vā prāṇasya,*
Such serenity may also be achieved through the exhaling and the retention of the breath.
35. *viṣayavatī vā pravṛttir-utpannā manasaḥ sthiti-nibandhinī,*
Or by controlling the mind, and making it still when it becomes active in relation to an object.
36. *viṣokā vā jyotiṣmatī,*
Or by remaining free of sorrow, and filled with light.
37. *vīta-rāga-viṣayam vā cittam,*
Or when the mind is free of longing for any object.
38. *svapna-nidrā-jñānāmbanam vā,*
Or by focusing upon the realisation acquired whilst dreaming, or in a state of deep sleep.
39. *yathābhimata-dhyānād vā,*
Or by meditating on any object one likes.
40. *paramāṇu-parama-mahattvānto 'sya vaśīkāraḥ,*
The result of this mental serenity is that one gains control over that which is the most minute, and that which is the largest thing.

The *sūtras* in this passage expand upon the phrase *eka-tat-tvābhyāsa*, single-minded practice, from *sūtra* 32, by explaining different ways in which this practice can be undertaken. The result of this *abhyāsa* is *citta-prasāda*, which can be taken as the antithesis of the *citta-vikṣepa* that the obstacles produce. I am not sure, however, that we should take *citta-prasāda* to be equivalent to *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, which is the goal of Yoga practice, and it is probably better to regard it as a state of mind conducive to progress in Yoga, devoid of the obstacles discussed above. This view would seem to be confirmed by the different ways through which this serenity of mind can be achieved, which do not involve the full eightfold practice that will be outlined in the *Sādhana-pāda*, the second chapter of the *Yoga Sūtras*.

The methods for achieving this positive outlook and serene state of mind begin from *sūtra* 33, which describes the appropriate manner of relating to persons of different types. One should be joyful when others find happiness, feel compassion for those who suffer, take delight in other people's virtue, and feel indifference, rather than hostility, towards wicked-minded persons. Then other more technical methods are presented. Firstly, there is breath control, then holding back the mind from its preoccupation with external objects, then refusing to indulge excessively in grief or regret, and then limiting the extent of material desires. *Sūtra* 38 refers to the belief that insight or realisations can enter the unconscious mind whilst a person is in a state of sleep, and that truth can be revealed through dreams. Hence it is stated here that paying close attention to these subconscious revelations is another means by which *citta-prasāda* is gained. And the final method, given in *sūtra* 39, is *dhyāna yathā abhimata*, meditation on a particular object one is drawn towards. Here one presumes that the fact that the object is one of choice makes meditation upon it easier to achieve, and the goal is to limit the *citta-vikṣepa*, the scattering of the mind, so that *citta-prasāda* emerges in its place. In the final *sūtra* of this passage (40), we get an indication that one who achieves

such serenity of mind obtains an inner strength that allows mastery over great and small things. This may be a reference to the supernatural powers described in Chapter 3 of the *Yoga Sūtras*, or it may simply mean that a person who achieves such serenity has the mental strength that brings success in all endeavours.

41-46: THE STATE OF SAMĀPATTI

41. *kṣīṇa-vṛtter abhijātasyeva maṇer grahīṭṛ-grahaṇa-grāhyeṣu tat-stha-tad-añjanatā samāpattiḥ,*

When the movements of the mind are weakened, it becomes like a clear gemstone, assuming the form of the perceiver, the process of perception, and the object of perception. This state of absorption of the mind is called *samāpatti*.

42. *tatra śabdārtha-jñāna-vikalpaiḥ samkīrṇā sa-vitarkā samāpattiḥ,*

Where this state is adulterated by uncertainty in understanding words and their meaning, it is to be known as *samāpatti* mixed with conscious deliberation.

43. *smṛti-parīśuddhau svarūpa-śūnyevārtha-mātra-nirbhāsā nirvitarkā,*

But when the memory is purified, the external form of the object disappears and it shines forth alone. This state is called *samāpatti* free of conscious deliberation.

44. *etayaiva sa-vicārā nirvicārā ca sūkṣma-viṣayā vyākhyātā,*

In this way, *samāpatti* focused on subtle objects, with and without reflective modes of thought, has now been explained.

45. *sūkṣma-viṣayatvam cālīṅga-paryavasānam,*
As has the subtle nature of objects which occurs
when external characteristics are no longer present.
46. *tā eva sa-bījaḥ samādhiḥ,*
These practices, defined as *samāpatti*, are to be
known as *samādhi* arising from a seed.

In this passage we are taken back to the earlier line of discussion that is more directly related to the topic of the chapter as a whole, namely *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, the stilling of the movements of the mind, which is what Yoga amounts to. Here a new concept, *samāpatti*, is introduced and defined in relation to the wider process. The term *samāpatti* is often taken as being equivalent to *samādhi*, the ultimate state of consciousness that Yoga is striving towards, but here I think we can see that this equation is only partially valid; in fact *samāpatti* is the preliminary stage of *samādhi*, and not the full state of absolute realisation. The word *samāpatti* is derived from the verb *sam-ā-pad*, which means to attain or enter a particular place or condition, and hence a loose translation might be ‘realisation’, but there seems little point in using any term other than the original Sanskrit word.

Sūtra 41 gives an explanation of what is meant by *samāpatti*, although as always it is difficult to say precisely what this state of consciousness amounts to. *Samāpatti* occurs when previous practice has brought success by reducing the *citta-vṛttis*, the movements of the mind. In the previous mental condition, there is a clear distinction between the perceiver, the object, and the process of perception, but Yoga practice now brings about a state of intense clarity in which those distinctions are removed, as the mind becomes utterly still. Of course, this verbal explanation cannot come close to replicating the experience Patañjali is referring to, but for now it must suffice.

Sūtras 42 and 43 provide further elaboration by revealing

that the state of *samāpatti* is twofold, defined as *sa-vitarka* and *nir-vitarka*, with and without *vitarka*. We have encountered a rather similar idea earlier in the chapter in relation to *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta* realisation (*sūtras* 17-20), although we must not necessarily presume that it is exactly the same concept being considered here. What does seem to be apparent is that *samāpatti* can be achieved whilst the conscious mind is still active in some way, *sa-vitarkā samāpatti*, and then when conscious deliberation is wholly stilled as *nir-vitarkā samāpatti*. As far as can be understood, *sa-vitarkā samāpatti* is a state in which the mind is consciously focused on the characteristics of an object and *nir-vitarkā samāpatti* is where the mind is wholly absorbed in contemplating the object, but without any conscious thoughts relating to it.

Sūtras 44 and 45 conclude by stating that this account has covered *sa-vicāra*, *nir-vicāra* and *sūkṣma-viśaya*. As we have seen, there is not a great deal of difference between *vicāra* and *vitarka*, and it is probably the case that here Patañjali is pointing out that *sa-* and *nir-vitarkā samāpatti* are also *sa-vicāra* and *nir-vicāra*. *Sūkṣma-viśaya* means subtle objects, and I take this to mean the nature of an object when the mind is absorbed in consciousness of it without reflective thought. Here the mind is not fixed on the qualities and features of the object, after the manner of conscious thought, but is simply absorbed in its absolute nature, and it is this that is being referred to as the subtle nature of the object, transcending the overt qualities that are the subject of conscious reflection. And in *sūtra* 46, we are informed that *samāpatti* is equivalent to *samādhi*, but only *sa-bīja samādhi*, *samādhi* with a seed, presumably because even where the *samāpatti* is *nir-vitarka* there is still an object involved, at least in a seed form.

47-51: THE NATURE OF NIRBĪJA SAMĀDHI

47. *nirvicāra-vaiśāradye 'dhyātma-prasādaḥ,*
When one attains perfection in *samāpatti* free of
conscious reflection, one gains a serenity directly
related to the *ātman*, the soul.
48. *ṛtambharā tatra prajñā,*
The realisation acquired in this way is laden with
ṛta, absolute truth.
49. *śrutānumāna-prajñābhyām anya-viṣayā*
viśeṣārthavāt,
This realisation has a different object to that acquired
through the scriptures or through inference, because
it is directed towards a higher purpose.
50. *taj-jaḥ saṃskāro 'nya-saṃskāra-pratibandhī,*
The latent impression on the mind generated by
this realisation serves to neutralise other latent
impressions.
51. *tasyāpi nirodhe sarva-nirodhān nirbījaḥ samādhīḥ,*
When even that movement of the mind is also
restricted, all movements are restricted, and the
state known as seedless *samādhi* is then achieved.

In this final passage of the *Samādhi-pāda*, we reach the ultimate conclusion of this section of the discourse, as Patañjali reveals the final stage of Yoga realisation, which he defines in *sūtra* 51 as *nirbīja samādhi*, seedless *samādhi*. Further insight is provided by *sūtra* 47, which informs us that this ultimate attainment comes when one achieves perfection in the *nir-vicārā samāpatti* previously discussed; and it is also defined there as *adhyātma-prasāda*. We encountered the word *prasāda* a few *sutras* earlier where *citta-prasāda*,

serenity of mind, was presented as an alternative to *citta-vikṣepa*, scattering of the mental processes. The word *adhyātma* is found in the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Upaniṣads*, but probably more significantly within the *Mahābhārata*'s discourses on Sāṃkhya where knowledge of the *ātman*, the true self, is designated as the science of *adhyātma*. Here then I think we can presume that *adhyātma-prasāda* means the absolute serenity that is gained through realisation of the *ātman*. *Nir-bīja-samādhi* is thus to be equated with realisation of the true self, the spiritual entity that is the true essence of our being.

Sūtra 48 states that the knowledge attained in this way is *ṛta-ambhara*, or saturated with *ṛta*. The word *ṛta* is found in the earliest Vedic texts where it is often taken as broadly equivalent to dharma, meaning the proper order of things. Here the knowledge acquired through Yoga is described as being *ṛta*, imbued with the highest level of truth, in other words the truth of the soul's spiritual identity.

This point is clarified in 49 and 50, which assert that this knowledge is superior even to that gained from scripture (because it has a different object), and that the impressions it generates overwhelm all the other impressions that shape and reshape the mind. Here we may recall the statement of *sūtra* 7, which gave the three sources of knowledge as *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), and *āgama* (scripture). Here we must take *śruta* as being equivalent to *āgama*, which leads us to the conclusion that the realisation gained through Yoga is based on direct perception. In other words, Yoga practice brings the practitioner inward perception that ultimately allows for experiential knowledge of the spiritual reality to develop. Like all perceptions, this too creates a *saṃskāra*, a latent impression upon the mind, and this *saṃskāra* drives away all the material impressions that produce ignorance and rebirth. And finally this *saṃskāra* is also removed so that the soul exists in its true identity, as was asserted at the beginning in *sūtras* 3 and 4. Here

again there is an alignment of ideas with the teachings of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, as in both works we find the teaching that the culmination of Yoga practice is realisation of spiritual wisdom based on direct perception of the true self.