

Sūtra 2 योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥२॥

Yogaśh-chitta-vṛitti-nirodhaḥ

Control of thought waves in the mind is yoga.

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| योगः | <i>yogaḥ</i> | yoga is |
| चित्त | <i>chitta</i> | of mind/eld |
| वृत्ति | <i>vṛitti</i> | modifications, activities, uctuations |
| निरोध | <i>nirodhaḥ</i> | control, suppression, restraints, blocking; its verb root is रुध <i>rudha</i> (to block) |

This *sūtra* defines the essential concept of yoga (union), which is further explained in all of the succeeding *sūtras*. Yoga is defined as a method—the practice of *nirodha* (mental control)—by which union (the goal of yoga) is achieved. Yoga is therefore both the process of *nirodha* and the unqualified state of *niruddha* (the perfection of that process).

The word *yoga* (union) implies duality (as in the joining of two things or principles); the result of yoga is the nondual state. Union in dualistic terms can be described as the union of the individual with God or with universal consciousness, or as the union of the lower self and higher Self. The nondual state is characterized by the absence of individuality; it can be described as eternal peace, pure love, Self-realization, or liberation.

Śhrī Vyāsa, in his classical commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras*, says this *sūtra* indicates that both *samprajñāta samādhi* (super-consciousness with perfect knowledge) and *asamprajñāta samādhi* (super-consciousness beyond perfect knowledge) are yoga. The *sūtra* simply says, “Control of thought waves,” rather than, “Control of all thought waves.” Control of all thought waves is a state of *asamprajñāta samādhi*, which has no knowledge of an object, or seed, as a support. In *asamprajñāta samādhi* no knowledge relating to the creation exists and the individual is merged completely in *puruṣha* (the Self). This state, called *kaivalya* (isolation of the Self in the Self), is the goal of *sādhana* (spiritual practice). In *samprajñāta samādhi*, there is complete higher knowledge of the creation, and *vṛittis* (thought waves) still exist in their subtle forms, although their gross forms have been eliminated by mental purification. *Samprajñāta samādhi* constitutes the stages preceding *asamprajñāta samādhi*. The stages of *samprajñāta samādhi* are a step by step revelation of the true nature of material existence.

The reality that is attained through the practice of yoga is nothing external to one’s true Self. Therefore its attainment is accomplished simply by removing the obstacles that veil one’s true nature. These obstacles come in the form of *vṛittis* (thought waves or modifications) in the mind.

What is this *chitta* (mind), and how do the *vṛittis* (thought waves) obscure reality? The *chitta* is the eld of consciousness in which all actions of the

present, memories of the past, and visions of the future take place. All *bhoga* (experience) and *apavarga* (liberation from experience) take place on this eld; indeed experience and liberation are the nature of the *chitta*. Just as a projector shines light on a movie screen, so *puruṣha* (the eternal principle of consciousness) enlightens *prakṛiti* (the eternal principle of matter), creating the *chitta* (mind eld), which in its cosmic form is called *mahat* (cosmic mind). The individual mind evolves from the cosmic mind. Our lives are played on this mind eld, just as a movie plays on the movie screen.

The interaction of *chitta* with the three other aspects of mind collectively forms the *antaḥkaraṇa* (human psyche). The *antaḥkaraṇa* is divided into four faculties according to function:

1. *Manas* (recording mind) receives impressions through the senses and responds to them through the organs of action.
2. *Buddhi* (intellect) discriminates and contains intuitive wisdom.
3. *Ahaṁkāra* (ego) is the owner of all experiences, relating them to its identity.
4. *Chitta* (mind or eld of consciousness) includes *manas*, *buddhi*, and *ahaṁkāra* as described above, and also the storehouse of *saṁskāras* (latent impressions).

These four minds, interacting with the *jñānendriyas* (subtle organs associated with sense perception) and *karmendriyas* (subtle organs associated with action), create a feeling of separate identity and experience within the duality of the subjective and objective world.

“Yoga is the control of the *vr̥ttis* (modifications of the mind eld)” means the control of all four faculties of the psyche. The word *vr̥tti* means to revolve or actuate, so any movement in the *chitta* is called *vr̥tti*. The term *vr̥tti* includes any kind of thought process—such as cognitive, reactive, gross, or subtle—as well as any emotion, feeling, or memory. Therefore, *vr̥tti*, which is translated here as thought wave, is sometimes translated as mental modification. The nature of *vr̥ttis* is movement; thoughts are ephemeral and transitory. As such, they are disturbing to the mind seeking peace and are considered obstacles to yoga.

The word *nirodha* is variously translated as, “to control, to suppress, to restrain, to hinder, to arrest, to stop, or to block.” These meanings do not imply a repression (as in repressing emotions), but rather *nirodha* is the mechanism by which the mind excludes various inputs in order to focus on a selected object. Here, *nirodha* is translated as control because both focus and exclusion are required. This is further elaborated in Sūtra I:12.

Nirodha is necessary for concentration, as the mind must remove itself from competing objects in order to concentrate on one object. The internal discipline of spiritual life starts when a spiritual object, such as Om, is chosen for concentration. This is *dhāraṇā* (concentration), and it leads to *dhyāna* (meditation), which, when further reined, becomes *samādhi* (super-conscious absorption).

Nirodha is therefore the operative factor in switching the mind from its multiple external preoccupations. It causes the mental consciousness to turn inward to become aware of its source. *Nirodha* is both a process of renement of consciousness and, in its perfection, a nondual state of consciousness.

Nirodha develops as follows:

1. The mind turns inward, leaving its external activities.
2. The *samskāras* (prints of past actions in the mind) do not get active.
3. *Samādhi* (super-conscious state) leaves its own *samskāras* (prints) in the *chitta* (mind eld).
4. The knowledge that *puruṣha* (the Self) is separate from *buddhi* (intellect) is acquired.
5. The Self gets established in its own true nature, or it can be said, the Self dwells in the Self.

This last state is called *asamprajñāta samādhi*.

The states of union indicated by the various *samādhis* develop in levels as the process of *nirodha* advances and the mind penetrates deeper and deeper into reality. With each stage of *samādhi* comes *jñāna* (knowledge) and *vairāgya* (dispassion); knowledge of what is real and dispassion for what is unreal. The dispassion that comes from knowledge leads the aspirant to subtler and subtler levels of consciousness.

If the *chitta* is likened to a body of water, the *vr̥ittis* can be seen as the waves on its surface. Just as wind creates waves on the water, similarly *pratyaya* (objects) create *vr̥ittis* (thoughts) in the mind. If the wind calms down, the waves merge back into the water. In the same way when the objects are removed from the mind, the thought waves merge back into the *chitta* (mind eld). This state is called *chitta vr̥itti nirodhaḥ* (arrested mind). When the *vr̥ittis* are controlled and not allowed to go out to worldly objects, but rather are reversed back and absorbed into the *chitta*, that is called yoga.

The internalization of consciousness can also be seen as a process of purification of the *chitta* (mind eld). The *chitta*, like all evolutes of *prakṛiti* (matter), is constituted by the three *guṇas* (qualities of creation). *Chitta* has three characteristics according to the predominance of the respective *guṇa*:

1. *Prakāśha* (illumination) is caused by the predominance of *sattva guṇa* (purity).
2. *Kriya* (effort) is caused by the predominance of *rajas guṇa* (activity).
3. *Sthiti* (stability) is caused by the predominance of *tamas guṇa* (inertia).

The renement of consciousness that accompanies the progressive stages of *samādhi* occurs as *sattva guṇa* becomes predominant. In *samādhi*, *sattva guṇa* (purity) illuminates the mind, while *rajas guṇa* (activity) and *tamas guṇa* (stability) play supporting roles.

When the *chitta* (mind) is predominantly *sattvik* (purified), it has four attributes:

1. *Dharma* (righteousness, with the quality of non-violence)
2. *Jñāna* (knowledge achieved through yoga)
3. *Vairāgya* (dispassion)
4. *Aiśhvarya* (sovereignty and spiritual freedom).

When the *buddhi* (intellect) is completely purified by the practice of *samādhi* (super-consciousness), *viveka khyāti* (discriminative wisdom) dawns. By this process, the *sattva buddhi* (purified intellect) experiences *puruṣha* (pure consciousness) as separate from its reflection in the *chitta* (mind). This brings *paravairāgya* (supreme dispassion) for even the highest knowledge, and consciousness merges in the Self.

So, in the words of the *sūtra*, *yogaḥ* (union) takes place when the *vr̥ttis* (thought waves) in the *chitta* (mind), which are caused by the mind's involvement with external experiences, are arrested through *nirodha* (control). In this process the *vr̥ttis* turn inward and merge into their origin. When the mind is free from the disturbances of *vr̥ttis*, it merges in the *paramātman* (supreme Self). Such a yogi is called *yoga yuktaḥ* (joined in yoga).