

Sūtra 12

अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः ॥ १२ ॥

Abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyāṁ tannirodhaḥ

They (modifications) are controlled by practice and dispassion.

अभ्यास	<i>abhyāsa</i>	practice
वैराग्याभ्याम्	<i>vairāgyābhyām</i>	with dispassion, non-attachment, absence of desire
तत्	<i>tat</i>	of those
निरोधः	<i>nirodhaḥ</i>	controlled, restrained, blocked

The *nirodha* (control) of *vṛittis* (mental modifications) is dependent on *abhyāsa* (persistent practice) and *vairāgya* (dispassion). Both *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* should be developed together. The natural flow of the mind towards outer objects is removed by dispassion, and the inward flow of the mind becomes stable by persistent practice of meditation.

In Sūtra 2, yoga is defined as the *nirodha* (control, restraint) of the *vṛittis* (thought waves) in the *chitta* (mind). Here, in Sūtra 12, this control (*tan nirodha*) is further defined as the working together of two great principles of emancipation: *abhyāsa* (practice) and *vairāgya* (dispassion). In Sūtras 13 - 16, Patanjali gives the definitive elucidation of the principles of practice and dispassion.

Practice (*abhyāsa*) is the effort required to become firmly grounded in one-pointed concentration. Concentration on the *tattvas* (principles of creation: senses, objects, mind, “I-sense”) with the aim of liberation leads to an internalization of consciousness that culminates in Self-realization. Ultimately, practice means the discrimination between *puruṣha* (conscious principle) and the *sattva buddhi* (pure intellect). When this discrimination is established, the seer merges in the non-dual reality. Practice includes development of spiritual knowledge, discriminating wisdom, the means and methods of attaining such knowledge, and the practice of meditation and *samādhi* (superconsciousness). They all require strong mental, moral, and physical discipline.

Through dispassion (*vairāgya*) the flow of the mind toward the world (*saṁsāra*) is blocked. This principle of “stopping” is suggested by the root of the word *nirodha*, which is *rudh*, “to stop or block.” The translation of the word *nirodha* as “control” also implies practice, or the aim and effort required to attain absorption (*sthiti*) in concentration (*samādhi*).

Dispassion comes in stages as a result of knowledge gained by the practice of concentration on a spiritual object. Knowledge of the real gives dispassion for the unreal. Dispassion, in turn, leads to a deepening of concentration on subtler and subtler objects. In this sense cultivating dispassion is a practice itself. The first stage of dispassion comes with the awakening of spiritual

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awareness and the turning of the mind from the distractions of objects of desire. In the final stage of supreme dispassion (*paravairāgya*), consciousness is completely isolated from its reflection in the mind.

The *chitta* (mind) is like a river in which two parallel streams flow. In the wider, deeper, and more active stream worldly desires flow. These include non-virtuous *vṛittis* such as anger, lust, greed, and attachment. This stream flows into the ocean of *samsāra* (the world) and is fed by the *samskāras* (impressions) of past births. The other stream is narrower and flows with the *vṛittis* of virtue, or positive qualities. It can easily be obstructed. In order to make this stream deeper, wider, and stronger, it needs to be dug out, cleaned, and widened daily. This is called *abhyāsa*. At the same time the other, swiftly flowing stream must be blocked with the dam of *vairāgya*. When the first stream is successfully dammed, the *chitta* will naturally flow into the second stream. The building of a dam requires hard work, and is called *tapas* (austerity).

The flow of the mind to the outer world binds the soul in the cycle of birth and death, and the flow of the mind inward towards *kaivalya* brings liberation of the soul. In yoga, the principles of practice and dispassion are the means (*upāya*) by which the soul is released from bondage and is established finally in non-duality.