

## Main Points in Yoga Sutras Book I: On Samadhi

### *The teaching of yoga begins:*

#### **Sutra 1: Now the teachings of yoga are being explained**

“Now” is:

- in this present moment
- in this auspicious moment
- in this time of transition

Yoga is:

- union
- a discipline
- teachings
- samadhi*, which means “absorbed in super-consciousness” or “entranced in super-consciousness”
- a prescription for the end of suffering
- “explained” as a discipline

### *What is yoga?*

#### **Sutra 2: Yoga is the control of thought waves in the mind**

Yoga is the state of union (with the Self), and the process of becoming united

“Control” can also be understood as “cessation”, “blocking”, “arresting”

“Thought waves” are said to “revolve” in the mind

“Mind” has five characteristics:

- restrained (*nirudha*)
- one pointed (*ekagra*)
- distracted (*vikshipta*)
- restless (*kshipta*)
- dull (*mudha*)

“Mind” has four aspects:

- “I” sense, ego (*ahamkara*)
- recording faculty involving the senses (*manas*)
- discriminating faculty, intellect (*buddhi*)
- field of consciousness, reflection of substratum (*chitta*)

### *What is the result of yoga?*

#### **Sutra 3: Then (when thought waves are controlled) the seer is established in his own true nature**

“Seer” refers to the energy of consciousness or *chitti shakti*, the consciousness potential that is the same as the Self

“Established in its own true nature” is Self awareness, caused by the complete isolation from all the qualities of creations (*guna*), known as liberation (*kaivlaya*)

This is the ultimate stage of yoga resulting from the practice of *asampragnata samadhi* (*samadhi* beyond knowledge)

### *What is the normal state of mind?*

#### **Sutra 4: In other states (when the seer is not established in his true nature), the seer appears the same as the thought waves in the mind**

When the mind is not controlled, consciousness and thought appear as one. According to Samkhya, unchanging consciousness (*purush*), which is the substratum of all, reflects on nature (*prakriti*) and from that potency all creation evolves. Individual mind (*buddhi*) evolves from nature, transforms,

changes, and takes on the qualities of creation (*gunas*). The qualities of creation reflect back into the mind. This process is experienced as thoughts, cognitions, and emotions. Mind cannot distinguish itself from the reflecting consciousness that empowers and infuses it, nor from the objects reflected in it. In this state the nature of consciousness takes the form of the mind: the mind thinks it is conscious, and also thinks its cognitions and feelings are real. This serves the purpose of experience of the outer world (*bhoga*) and liberation from the pain of experience (*apavarga*).

### ***What is the nature of thoughts?***

#### **Sutra 5: The thought waves are fivefold: some are painful and some are not painful**

Non pain producing (*aklishta*) thoughts are for Self-knowledge (*viveka khyati*), and lead to liberation (*apavarga*). Through knowledge of the real and dispassion for the unreal, *aklishta vritti* (non pain producing thoughts) eventually transcend the power of *gunas* (qualities of creation).

Pain producing (*klishtha*) thoughts are for individual experience. They are caused by five afflictions (*kleshas*) that create experience through the senses:

- ignorance, the root affliction (*avidya*)
- “I-sense” (*asmita*)
- attachment (*raga*)
- aversion (*dvesha*)
- fear, clinging to life (*abhinivesha*)

The thoughts and actions that result from *klishtha* and *aklishta vritti* form the basis of our tendencies (*samskaras*) toward future thought and action.

### ***What are the types of thought?***

#### **Sutra 6: (The five types of *vritti* are) valid proof, wrong cognition, imaginary cognition, sleep, and memory.**

All thoughts can be categorized in this way. Everyday thoughts are often a mixture of several categories and all thoughts are the product of these five main *vritti*. All five can be positive or negative, productive of liberation or bondage and each can be seen in a relative or ultimate sense. For example the ultimate expression of valid proof is discriminative wisdom; its relative expression is correct cognition of information presented by the senses.

### ***What are the categories of valid proof?***

#### **Sutra 7: The three categories of valid proof are direct perception, inference, and scriptural testimony.**

The ability of the mind field to perceive is only possible because pure consciousness (*purush*) pervades nature (*prakriti*). On the level of all creation, when consciousness reflects in primordial nature the universal sense of being, the “I-sense” arises, as does all of creation. On the level of the individual, when the energy of consciousness (*chiti shakti*) illuminates the mind (*chitta*), the individual becomes able to cognize and experience.

Perception is the result of the universal “I-sense” (*asmita, sattva buddhi*) becoming the individualized “I-amness” (*ahamkar*) and operating in conjunction with the intellect (*buddhi*). Perception involves an experiencer (*grahitri*), the principles that make experience possible (*grahana*), and the objects that are experienced (*grahya*).

Experience requires both a subject and an object. *Grahitri* is the individual subject that experiences. This subject needs a means of experience and *grahana* are these instruments of experience: the five sense organs of nose, tongue, eyes, skin, and ears. The object of experience is the *grahya* or the subtle energy of the elements (*tanmatras*): odor, taste, form, touch, and sound. The experiencer (*grahitri*) has the capacity to experience because the instruments or senses (*grahana*) work together with the objects of the senses (*grahya*).

*Grahana* (instruments of experience) and *grahya* (object of experience) have the same root cause: *ahamkar*. They attract one another and join together to make experience possible. *Grahana*, the five senses, cause the mind to become absorbed by the *tamas guna* (solidity) inherent in an object. Immediately *sattva guna* (perception) arises in the mind to oppose *tamas* and knowing the object occurs. This process of absorption in *tamas*, immediate opposing of *sattva*, and resultant arising of knowing the

object is what is called direct experience. However *sattva* doesn't arise by its own power; it only arises to oppose *tamas* because of the reflection of *chiti shakti* (light of consciousness) in the mind.

As *ahamkar* (separate I-ness) is the root cause of both *grahana* (senses) and *grahya* (subtle elements) it can be said that all knowledge is a transformation of *ahamkara*. In the terms of the *sutra*, this transformation corresponds to the means of perceiving the objects: *pratyaksha* (direct perception), *anumana* (inference), or *agama* (testimony). These are considered the means of *pramana* (right cognition, valid proof.)

*Pramana* is right cognition or valid proof. In *pramana* there is a true correspondence between the external object and the mental object. In *pramana* an accurate perception of something not known before is realized. *Pratyaksha pramana* is valid proof through direct perception. In *pratyaksha* the five sense organs and the mind attain knowledge of the object with its specific characteristics. *Anumana pramana* is valid proof through inference. Correct knowledge is obtained by establishing the relationship between the mark and the object; as fire is inferred by its mark, the rising smoke. *Agama pramana* is valid proof through testimony. The knowledge is general and is accepted as true because of faith in the *apta* (accomplished person) and in the source of the scripture.

The state of *samprajnata samadhi* (super conscious trance with higher knowledge) is when direct knowledge of the object outside of any personal, individual relationship to it arises. Eventually the mind is not dependent on any external object and the reflection of pure consciousness (*chiti shakti*) is identified. This is true direct perception and is the root of all other proofs. It is *yogi pratyaksha*.

### ***What is wrong knowledge?***

**Sutra 8: Wrong knowledge is a false conception of an object, the real form of which does not correspond to the form established in the mind.**

*Viparyaya* (false conception) gives wrong knowledge of an object: that conception existing in the mind does not correspond to the actual object. For example, a mirage in the desert appears to the mind to be a pool of water but actually it is convection currents rising from the land. This false conception that gives wrong knowledge is called *viparyaya*. The classic example given is mistaking a rope for a snake.

In Samkhya philosophy, the true nature of the universe is unmanifest *prakriti*, in which the *gunas* (qualities of matter) are in equilibrium. All of manifest creation is simply the disturbance of the *gunas* and is eternally changing. Therefore even our thoughts are an alteration of the unmanifest *prakriti* and are considered to be false knowledge (*viparyaya vritti*).

Sutra I:7 explained that valid cognition has three divisions. This *sutra* explains that wrong cognition has five divisions: *avidya* or ignorance; *asmita* or egoism; *raga* or attraction; *dvesha* or aversion; and *abhinivesha* or clinging to life.

### ***What is imagination?***

**Sutra 9: Knowledge based on verbal cognition only, without an external object, is called imaginary cognition.**

In imagination (*vikalpa*), unlike in valid proof and false cognition, there is no contact with external objects. Imagination is simply a subjective thought process, a mental creation of a thought wave without support of an object. Examples include concepts such as "time" or "infinity": time is relative and infinity cannot be seen, therefore neither has an object as its reality and both are *vikalpa*.

### ***What is sleep?***

**Sutra 10: The mental modification that is based on the absence of all cognition is dreamless sleep.**

In dreamless sleep (*nidra*) there is the absence of the other four thought waves (right knowledge, wrong knowledge, imagination, and memory). However sleep is a thought wave or cognition because in sleep, consciousness is absorbed in *tamas guna* (inertia). Sleep is that thought wave of the mind in which awareness is very indistinct. If sleep were not a thought wave, it could not be an experience. During sleep *tamas guna* (dullness) is the support for the mind and the senses are temporarily inactivated. However, in sleep only a portion of the mind is fully absorbed in *tamas guna*, some of the mind maintains the activity of the body's vital organs.

### ***What is memory?***

**Sutra 11: Memory is that mental modification in which objects experienced are not lost or forgotten.**

Memory (*smriti*) refers to thoughts that recollect past experience. When the senses experience an object it makes an impression (*samskara*) in the mind. When that impression is recalled it is memory. All memories of impressions are caused by the five categories of thought waves (valid proof, false perception, imagination, sleep and memory).

Pure memory can be of the full experience or of a part of the experience, but it cannot be of more than the original experience. Memory has two types: 1) of an imaginary construct, and 2) of an actual object. Often memories are overlaid with imagination and produce a distortion version of past events. Anything added to the actual event is an imagination overlaid on memory.

Memory includes the concept of *grahya*, which refers to the object that is experienced, and *grahana*, which refers to the process of experiencing. These are the objective and subjective parts of experience. *Samskaras* or prints are created of both the object experienced (*grahya*, objective) and the experience of the object (*grahana*, subjective). Memory is caused by these *samskaras*, and in memory both the object and its experience are present.

The mechanics of memory is somewhat complex:

- The actual object perceived by the senses is actually different from the object experienced by the individual. The individual overlays or “colors” the object with past impressions and future anticipations. In this sense the object is imaginary; and yet each individual experiences the object as “real”. In this sense each person has a different experience of the same object, which is a self-created illusory reality.
- The experience of objects, as well as the act of experiencing them, creates *samskaras* that are dormant in the *chitta* but are called memory when awakened.
- *Tanmatras* or the subtle energies inherent in all the elements, senses and mind create the mental images of memory. *Tanmatras* are the cause of the gross reality and are inferred from the gross reality. Due to the conditioning within the subconscious mind we are not usually aware of them.

If the remembrance of an experienced object is not mixed with anything else, that is *smriti* or memory. However, as soon as that memory arises there comes the knowledge, “I am remembering” or “I am knowing this”. This awareness contains both the knowledge of the previously experienced object and the present awareness of knowing the past experience. The first is *smriti*; the second is a form of correct perception or *pramana*.

This concludes the *sutras* on the five types of *vritti* or mental modifications. All five are to be controlled in order to practice *samprajnata samadhi* (superconscious absorption accompanied by knowledge) and *asamprajnata samadhi* (superconscious absorption beyond all knowledge).

***How are the vritti (thought waves) controlled?***

**Sutra 12: They (the modifications) are controlled by practice and dispassion.**

This *sutra* describes the method for controlling thought waves in the mind that is first introduced in Sutra I:2. Controlling thought waves is dependent upon practice (*abhyasa*) and dispassion (*vairagya*); both need to be developed together. Dispassion removes the natural flow of the mind toward outer objects (*pravritti*); persistent practice of meditation cultivates and stabilizes the inward flow of the mind (*nivritti*).

*Abhyasa* (practice) is the effort required to become firmly grounded in one-pointed concentration. Practice on the principles of creation (Samkhya Yoga: senses, objects, mind, “I-sense”) plus aim for liberation results in the internalization of consciousness. Ultimately the mind discriminates between conscious principle (*purush*) and pure intellect (*buddhi*). When this discrimination is established and stabilized, the seer merges in non-dual reality as described in Sutra I:3. Practice includes self-development and all of its methods, as well as meditation and *samadhi*. Practice takes effort and needs continuity over time.

*Vairagya* (dispassion) is the automatic, effortless blocking of the mind’s habitual flow to the outer world. It is based on understanding that the result of indulging in worldly desires is misery. With that deep awareness the mind’s pull toward desire is automatically weakened. Dispassion comes in stages as a result

of knowledge gained by the practice of concentration on a spiritual object. It leads to deeper concentration on subtler objects as the inward flow of the mind strengthens. In supreme dispassion (*paravairagya*), consciousness (*purush*) is isolated from its reflection in the mind (*sattwa buddhi*) because all cravings are abandoned.

These two principles, *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, are the means for attaining peace. Practice strengthens virtue; *vairagya* rejects vice. Practice develops one-pointedness; *vairagya* turns away from multi-mindedness. The two together free the aspirant from bondage and establishes one in non-duality.

### ***What is practice?***

**Sutra 13: Of those two (practice and dispassion), the effort for being firmly established in that state (of controlled thought waves) is called practice (*abhyasa*).**

Practice (*abhyasa*) is vigorous, enthusiastic effort to still the mind. *Sthiti* is stability and refers to the mind free from the modifications of thought waves. Practice is one of the two supports for control (*nirodha*) of thoughts; dispassion (*vairagya*) is the other.

### ***How is practice established?***

**Sutra 14: It (persistent practice) becomes firmly grounded when it has been practiced for a long, uninterrupted time with earnest devotion.**

Practice can be well established in the aspirant. Practice that goes on for a long time, without interruption, and is done with respect and devotion is called firmly grounded, or established. This kind of practice is needed because the *samskaras* of negativity are already well established in the mind.

“For a long time” means that yoga is fully integrated into regular, daily life. It also means that the yogi does not give up practice before attaining peace.

“Without interruption” means continuity of practice. Formal yoga practice should be regular and daily. Informal practice of yogic principles should become part of regular life.

“With respect and devotion” means living a disciplined life of controlled desires, developing understanding by learning about truth, and strengthening faith in aim, methods, and teachings.

### ***What is dispassion?***

**Sutra 15: One who has lost all cravings for the objects of experience, whether seen or heard as described in scriptures, acquires perfect mastery of desires, which is called dispassion.**

In this *sutra*, the word *vairagya* is translated as “dispassion.” What is meant by dispassion? *Vairagya* can be taken to mean, “free from any mental coloring” or “free from attachment and aversion” or “free from all coloring pertaining to the objects of the mind.”

The “objects of the mind” are classified into two groups. The first is perceptible objects that are experienced with the senses. These are called *drishta*. The second is imperceptible objects that are heard about through scriptures. These are called *anushravika*.

Ordinary people desire both types of objects. One who has dispassion for both types is described as having “complete mastery” (*vashikara*), and having “lost all cravings” (*vitishnasya*); such a person has complete control of desire. There are said to be two levels to dispassion: lower (*aparavairaga*), which includes dispassion for worldly objects; and supreme (*paravairaga*), which is dispassion for all mental content.

Lower dispassion develops in the practice of *sampragnata samadhi* (super conscious trance with higher knowledge) and has four stages. Supreme dispassion is explained in the next *sutra*.

### ***What is supreme dispassion?***

**Sutra 16: That (dispassion) is supreme when, due to the knowledge of the Self, freedom from all desires for the *guna* is achieved.**

The intellect (*buddhi*) is made up of the three qualities of nature (*guna*). The three *guna* are *sattwa* (purity), *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (inertia). When dispassion is mastered, purity becomes predominant in the intellect.

Impurities of the mind caused by inertia are removed by lower dispassion as explained in Sutra I: 15. This lower dispassion is the means to supreme dispassion (*paravairagya*). Lower dispassion is only for worldly objects, both gross and subtle and develops with *viveka khyati* (discriminative wisdom).

Through *viveka khyati* (discriminative wisdom), awareness of the faults of worldly objects increases. Discriminative wisdom is the perception of the difference between the mind/intellect (*chitta*) and consciousness (*purush*). While this is the highest form of knowledge in *samprajnata samadhi* (super conscious trance with higher knowledge), it is still a movement or thought wave (*vritti*) in the mind, and so it is still an obstacle to liberation.

While lower dispassion is for gross and subtle worldly objects made up of the *gunas* (qualities of nature), supreme dispassion is for the *gunas* themselves and even for *viveka khyati* (discriminative wisdom). When discriminative wisdom advances, the knowledge of the separateness of the *gunas* from the Self becomes firm. This is called *dharmamegha samadhi*, entranced in the rain cloud of virtue and the knowledge of the nature of all things.

In this trance there is a cessation of all cravings for the *gunas*. It is the state of supreme dispassion (*paravairaga*). Super conscious trance beyond all knowledge (*asamprajnata samadhi*) follows. Without supreme dispassion, *asamprajnata samadhi* cannot be realized. The culmination of knowledge is supreme dispassion and liberation follows.

### ***What is super consciousness?***

**Sutra 17: Complete high consciousness (*samprajnata samadhi*) is that which is accompanied by reasoning, reflection, ecstasy, and pure “I-sense.”**

This *sutra* describes the four deepening levels of mental absorption in higher consciousness, as well as the knowledge that accompanies each of these levels. This mental absorption is called the trance (*samadhi*) of deep (*sam*) and perfect (*pra*) knowing (*jna*) or *samprajnata samadhi*. These trance states come as a result of practice (*abhyasa*) and dispassion (*vairagya*), which control (*nirodha*) the restless and dull thought waves in the mind.

The Yoga Sutras explain in YSIII:1-3 that *samadhi* or absorption or entrancement in an object is a deepening of meditation (*dhyana*). Meditation is a deepening of concentration (*dharana*). This *sutra* teaches that absorption (*samadhi*) reveals the true nature of the object (*prajna*). It also describes that the aspirant comes to know the true nature of the object through the persistent practice of concentration, without allowing any distractions to enter the mind.

In *samadhi* the whole mind field is completely absorbed in the object of concentration. That object is called the support (*alambana*) for the mind. The mind needs a support because it seeks for form and cannot conceive of the formless infinite.

Each of the four levels of trance (*samadhi*) depends on a support. The first level is *savitarka* (with reasoning) and depends on gross thought. The second level is *savichara* (with reflection) and depends on subtle thought. The third level is *sananda* (with bliss) and depends on ecstasy. The fourth level is *sasmita* (with “I sense”) and depends solely on the universal sense of being.

What are the mechanics of the levels of trance? In each level as the subtler realities are revealed the mind deepens in its concentration on that subtlety and rejects the former grosser knowledge. At the completion of practice of one level of trance, the subtler aspects of the object of concentration are revealed and in turn become the support for the next level of absorption.

The *sutra* explains that entrancement (*samadhi*) with gross thought as its support (*savitarka*) is abandoned when subtle thought is fully revealed. Then that subtle thought becomes the support for the next absorption (*savichara samadhi*). Reflection on subtle thought is abandoned when ecstasy is fully revealed. Then bliss becomes the support for the next deeper level of engrossment (*sananda samadhi*). Ecstasy is abandoned when “I sense” is fully revealed. Then “I sense” becomes the support for the final level of trance (*sasmita samadhi*).

This is to say that in each level, the mind deepens its focus on the increasingly subtle aspects that are “known” through the concentration. Through the practice of the four levels of trance, from gross to subtle, wisdom is attained in its perfect expansion (*sampragnata*). Each level of practice causes dispassion for the previous level; deeper knowledge is revealed causing shallower knowledge to be rejected.

The first level of *sampragnata samadhi* or *savitarka* uses a gross support. Concentration may be on a sacred object, on one of the elements, or on any form made by the elements. In ordinary consciousness the mind sees the aspects of an object as a unified whole. In the super-concentrated state of mind called *savitarka samadhi*, the mind realizes that the object of concentration is made of three components. In that state the mind’s fluctuation is controlled so that it reasons only between these three, to the exclusion of all other gross fluctuations. The three aspects of the object are revealed to be name (*shabda*), form (*artha*), and meaning (*jnana*). Another way of describing the mind’s entrancement in the object at this level is to say that in this super-concentrated state the object, the mind, and the sense perception are all one. The process of recognizing and distinguishing the three aspects of the object is called *vitarka* (with reasoning).

Take for example concentration on a sacred mountain. In everyday consciousness we do not focus on the discreet aspects of “mountain” and we allow the thought waves to revolve in the mind. In super-concentration or in trance on “mountain” as the object of concentration we come to realize that it is composed of a form, which has a name, and which means something specific. As the mind’s concentration penetrates into name, form, and meaning it comes to know that name and meaning are relative or subjective, and that only form has an independent reality. For example, the name for the form is spoken differently in different languages ie “mountain”(English) or *parvat* (Hindi) or *montana* (Spanish). The meaning given to the form is taken differently according culture, location, use ie “ski resort” or “pilgrimage site” or “working ranch.”

However, the form of the mountain is constant and objective. As the mind reasons more deeply between the relative and constant aspects of the object, the relative aspects of name and meaning drop away: form alone shines in the mind. This is the direct perception of the object. The subtle essence of the gross object is revealed to the mind and that subtlety becomes the object of the next level of engrossment called *savichara* (reflection) *samadhi*.

In *savichara samadhi* the mind reflects on this subtle essence. In that concentrated reflection the mind comes to know that the objective form of the object actually has three subtler characteristics: space (*desha*), time (*kala*) and causation (*nimitta*). In *savichara samadhi* the super-concentrated or entranced mind fluctuates only between those three subtle characteristics and on their relationship. As the mind merges in the thought wave of this reflection the *tanmatras* (subtle energies of the elements) and *ahamkar* (individual ego sense) are revealed as the essential energies that create the mind’s images within space and time.

Then, through practice (*abhyasa*) and control (*nirodha*), the mind comes to know the *ahamkar* (ego) as the cause of *tanmatras* (subtle energies of the elements), and this becomes the focus for the next level of *samadhi*. Pure *ahamkar* has the nature of bliss and this level is called *sananda samadhi* (with bliss). The only thought wave is, “I am in bliss.” The purity of universal intellect is experienced through the ego.

When absorption in bliss reveals the true nature of “I sense,” this universal intellect or *mahat*, which is also known as *sattwa buddhi* (purified intellect) and *hiranya garba* (golden womb of creation), and *asmita matra* (indicator of “I”) becomes the focus of concentration. This final level of *sampragnata samadhi* is called *sasmita samadhi*. The “I sense” is known to be the cause of bliss: the universal sense of being is the cause of the individual sense of being.

Supreme dispassion (*paravairaga*) awakens and discriminative wisdom (*viveka khyati*) develops through the practice of *sasmita samadhi*. These are the means for *asampragnata samadhi*, the trance that is beyond knowledge that is discussed in the next *sutra*.