

THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF YOGA

AN EXPOSITION OF THE YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

**VOLUME II – SADHANA PADA, VIBHUTI PADA AND
KAIVALYA PADA**

by

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Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

(Internet Edition: For free distribution only)

Website: www.swami-krishnananda.org

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Chapter 52

YOGA PRACTICE: A SERIES OF POSITIVE STEPS

The great adventure of yoga is not easy for those whose minds are distracted with various occupations. The difficulty with the human mind is that it cannot be wholly interested in anything. While on the one hand there is a pressure of the mind towards taking interest in things, there is, simultaneously, a peculiar cussedness of the mind on account of which it cannot take interest in anything for all times. It has a peculiar twofold *rajas*, or inability to rest in itself, working behind it, inside it and outside it—from all sides—as a disturbing factor. There is no harm in taking interest in anything; but the interest should be only in one thing, not in many things.

Anything in this world can be taken as a medium for the liberation of the soul. An object of sense can cause bondage; it also can cause liberation under certain conditions. When an object becomes merely one among the many—just one individual in a group—and the interest in the object may shift to another object after a period of time, then that object becomes a source of bondage, because it is not true that any single individual object can manifest the wholeness of truth in itself.

Such an apprehension that any peculiar individual feature can reveal the whole of truth is regarded as the lowest type of understanding. *Yat tu kṛtsnavad ekasmin kārye saktam ahaitukam, atattvārthavad alpaṁ ca tat tāmasam udāhṛtam* (B.G. XVIII.22), says the Bhagavadgita. The lowest type of knowledge is where a person clings to an object as if it is everything and there is nothing outside it—it is all reality. But, this feeling that a peculiar object is all reality is not sincere. It is an insincere feeling which can subject itself to modifications under other circumstances.

“My child, thou art everything,” says a mother to her only child. But she has a false affection because she does not really believe that it is everything, though there is an expression of that kind when emotions prevail. If that child is everything, she cannot have interest in anything else in this world. But, is it true? She has hundreds of interests other than her baby, though she falsely makes an exclamation that it is everything—her soul, her heart, her alter ego, and whatnot.

Likewise, under limited conditions we temporarily exclaim our feelings of brotherliness and friendliness with things of the world, but these feelings are projected by conditions. When the conditions are lifted, the feelings also get lifted. Such a state of mind is unfit for yoga. But when the very same object that has been wrongly regarded as a thing of attachment becomes an object of possession exclusively, it can also liberate the soul. One of the principles of yoga is that any object in this world has two characteristics: enjoyment and bondage on one side, and experience and liberation on the other side.

This philosophy of the twofold character of an object is vastly emphasised in the Tantra Shastra, where nothing in this world is to be regarded as evil, unnecessary, useless or meaningless—everything has a meaning of its own. And, the seed of this philosophy is recognised in a *sutra* of Patanjali himself: *bhogāpavargārtham dr̥śyam* (II.18). The *dr̥śya*, or the object, is for two purposes: for our enjoyment and bondage, and, under different conditions, also for our freedom.

Thus, a thing in this world is neither good nor bad. We cannot make any remark about any object in this world wholly, unlimitedly or unconditionally; all remarks about things are conditional. Things are useful, helpful and contributory to the freedom of the soul under a given set of circumstances, but they are the opposite under a different set of circumstances. Not knowing this fact, the mind flitters from one thing to another thing. This is the character of what is known as *rajas*—the principle of diversity and distraction. The remedy for this illness of distraction of the mind is austerity, or self-restraint. The great goal of yoga that has been described all this time will remain merely a will-o'-the-wisp and will not be accessible to the mind if the condition necessary for the entry of consciousness into the supreme goal of yoga—namely, freedom from distraction—is not fulfilled.

While desire is a bondage when it is caught up in diversity, it is also a means to liberation when it is concentrated. The concentrated desire is exclusively focused on a chosen ideal; and the freedom of the mind from engagement in any other object than the one that is chosen is the principle of austerity. We limit ourselves to those types of conduct, modes of behaviour and ways of living which are necessary for the fulfilment of our concentration on the single object that has been chosen for the purpose of meditation. We have to carefully sift the various necessities and the needs of our personality in respect of its engagement, or concentration, on this chosen ideal.

This is the psychological background of the practice of self-control. Self-control does not mean mortification of the flesh or harassment of the body. It is the limitation of one's engagements in life to those values and conditions which are necessary for the fulfilment of the chosen ideal and the exclusion of any other factor which is redundant. It is a very difficult thing for the mind to understand, because sometimes we mix up needs with luxuries, and vice versa, and what is merely a means to the pampering of the senses, the body and the mind may look like a necessity or a need. Also, there is a possibility of overstepping the limits of self-restraint which, when indulged in, may completely upset the very intention behind the practice. Diseases may crop up, distractions may get more intensified, and the practice of concentration may become impossible.

While indulgence in the objects of sense is bad, overemphasis on excessive austerity beyond its limit also is bad. Moderation is to be properly understood. It is difficult to know what moderation is, because we have never been accustomed to it. We have always excesses in our behaviours in life. There is always an emphasis shifted to a particular point of view, and then that becomes an exclusive occupation of the mind. The difficulties and the problems encountered by great masters like Buddha, for example, in their austerities, are instances on hand.

Enthusiasts in yoga are mostly under the impression that to take to yoga is to mortify—but it is not. The subjection of the personality to undue pain is not the intention of yoga. The intention is quite different altogether. It is a healthy growth of the personality that is intended, and the obviating of those unnecessary factors which intrude in this process of healthy growth of the personality—just as eating is necessary, but overeating is bad, and not eating at all is also bad. We have to understand what it is to eat without overeating or going to the other extreme of not eating at all.

The famous exhortation on moderation in the sixth chapter of the Bhagavadgita is to the point. Yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu, yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥā (B.G. VI.17): The pain-destroying yoga comes to that person who is moderate in every manner. Nātyaśnatas tu yogo'sti (B.G. VI.16): Yoga does not come to one who eats too much, enjoys too much, or indulges in the senses too much. Na caikāntam anaśnataḥ (B.G. VI.16): One who is excessively austere also is far from yoga. Na cāti svapnaśīlasya jāgrato naiva cārjuna (B.G. VI.16): One who is excessively torpid and lethargic and given to overindulgence in sleeping is far from yoga, but one who remains excessively awake—to the torture of the body and the mind—is also far from yoga.

Therefore, the wisdom of the practice consists in a correct understanding of the necessities under the given circumstances. These necessities go on changing from time to time and are not a set standard. We cannot say that today's necessity may also be tomorrow's necessity. Just now, when it is hot and sultry, I may require a glass of cold water, but it does not mean that I should go on drinking cold water always, because the climatic conditions may not require it.

So also, the particular placement of the human personality under a given set of circumstances, external as well as internal, may be taken as the determining factor of what moderation is. We have to judge every condition independently, from its own point of view, without reference to other points of view of the past or the future. This is very difficult indeed, and this is precisely the point where people miss the aim. Every case is an independent, genuine case, and it cannot be compared with other cases. We should not make a list of our necessities for all times throughout our life, because time, place and circumstance will tell us what a particular necessity is. At what time this condition is felt, in what place, under what circumstances, in what atmosphere, and so on, are to be taken into consideration.

It is mentioned in the Yoga Shastras that the essence of yoga is self-restraint, no doubt, but this is precisely the difficulty in understanding what yoga is, because we cannot know what self-restraint is unless we know what the self is which we are going to restrain. Which is the self that we are going to restrain? Whose self? Our self? On the one side, we say the goal of life is Self-realisation—the realisation, the experience, the attunement of one's self with the Self. On the other side, we say we must restrain it, control it, subjugate it, overcome it, etc. There are degrees of self, and the significance behind the mandate on self-control is with reference to the degrees that are perceivable or experienceable in selfhood. The whole universe is nothing but Self—there is nothing else in it. Even the so-called objects are a part of the Self in some form or the other. They may be a false self or a real self—that is a different matter, but they are a self nevertheless.

In the Vedānta Shastras and yoga scriptures we are told that there are at least three types of self: the external, the personal and the Absolute. We are not concerned here with the Absolute Self. This is not the Self that we are going to restrain. It is, on the other hand, the Self that we are going to realise. That is the goal—the Absolute Self which is unrelated to any other factor or condition, which stands on its own right and which is called the Infinite, the Eternal, and so on. But the self that is to be restrained is that peculiar feature in consciousness which will not fulfil the conditions of absoluteness at any time. It is always relative. It is the relative self that is to be subjected to restraint for the sake of the realisation of the Absolute Self. The aim of

life is the Absolute, and not the relative. The experience of the relative, the attachment of the mind in respect of the relative, and the exclusive emphasis on the importance of relativity in things is the obstructing factor in one's enterprise towards the realisation of the Absolute Self.

The external self is that atmosphere that we create around us which we regard as part of our life and to which we get attached in some manner or the other. This is also a self. A family is a self, for example, to mention a small instance. The head of the family regards the family as his own self, though it is not true that the family is his self. He has got an attachment to the members of the family. The attachment is a movement of his own consciousness in respect of those objects around him known as the members of the family. This permeating of his consciousness around that atmosphere known as the family creates a false, externalised self in his experience. This social self, we may call it, is the external self, inasmuch as this externalised, social self is not the real Self. Because it is conditioned by certain factors which are subject to change, it has to be restrained. That is one of the necessities of self-restraint.

Attachment, or affection, is a peculiar double attitude of consciousness. It is simultaneously working like a double-edged sword when it is attached to any particular object. It has a feeling that the things which it loves, or to which it is attached, are not really a part of its being—because if a thing is a part of our own being, the question of desiring it will not arise. There is no need to love something which is a part of our being, so we have a subtle feeling that it is not a part of us. The members of the family do not belong to us, really speaking. We know it very well. Therefore, we create an artificial identification of their being with our being by means of a psychological movement or a function known as affection, love or attachment. We create a world of our own which may be called a fool's paradise.

This is the paradise in which the head of the family lives. "Oh, how beautiful it is. I have got a large family." He does not know what it actually means. Also, it is very dangerous to know what it is because if we know what it really is, we will be horrified immediately, to the shock of our nerves. But an artificial circumstance is always created by us for the sake of a temporary satisfaction, and all our satisfactions are temporary and artificial. They are artificial because they are created out of a circumstance which is subject to change at any moment, and because the relationship that is established is not true. It is a false relationship which cannot really exist.

This externalised self is a peculiar self, known in Vedanta and Yoga as *gaunatman*—an *atman* which is *gauna*, which is not primary, but secondary. The son is a *gaunatman* for the father; the daughter is a *gaunatman*, etc. Anything that is outside us which we like, love and get attached to, which we cannot live without, with which we identify ourselves, whose welfare or woe becomes the welfare and woe of one's own self—that is the *gaunatman* or the externalised self. It has to be subjugated, which is a part of our austerity. How do we subjugate this self? We do so by understanding the structure—the pattern—of the creation of this self, because the definition of Selfhood does not really apply to this peculiar condition called the externalised form of selfhood.

The Self, or the *atman* as we call it, is a principle of identity, indivisibility and non-externality or objectivity. It is that state of consciousness or awareness which is incapable of becoming other than what it is, and incapable of being lost under any circumstance. It cannot be loved and it cannot be hated, because it is what we are. This is what is called the Self. There is no such thing as loving the Self or hating the Self. No one loves one's Self or hates one's Self, because love and hatred are psychological functions, and every psychological function is a movement of the mind in space and time. Such a thing is impossible in respect of the Self, which is Self-identity. Thus the definition of the Self as Self-identity will not apply to this false self which is the circumstantial self, the family self, the nation self, the world self, etc., as we are accustomed to.

Also, there is another self which is known as the *mithyatman*—the false self which is the body. The body is not the Self. Everyone knows it very well, for various reasons, because the character of Self-identity—indestructibility, indivisibility, etc.—does not apply to the body. And yet, these characters are superimposed upon the body and we shift or transfer the qualities of the perishable body to what we really are in our consciousness, and vice versa. On the other hand, conversely, we transfer the indivisible character of consciousness to the body and regard the body itself as indivisible Selfhood.

The third step of self is the Absolute, as I mentioned, which is the goal of the practice of yoga and the goal of life itself. Self-restraint is, therefore, the limitation of the false self to the minimum of self-affirmation. Here, again, one has to exercise caution. We should not mortify this self too much. We cannot whip it beyond the prescribed limit; otherwise, it will revolt. Though it is true that false relationships have to be overcome by wisdom, philosophical analysis, etc., this achievement cannot be successful at one stroke, because even a false relationship appears to be a real relationship when it has got identified with consciousness. That is why there is so much intensity and so much attachment—so much significance is seen in that relationship. There is nothing unreal in this world as long as it has become part of our experience. It becomes unreal only when we are in a different state of experience and we compare the earlier state with it and then make a judgement about it.

Inasmuch as our external relationships—which constitute the outward form of the relative self—have become part and parcel of our experience, they are inseparable from our consciousness. It requires a careful peeling out of these layers of self by very intelligent means. The lowest attachment, or the least of attachments, should be tackled first. The intense attachments should not be tackled in the beginning. We have many types of attachment—there may be fifty, sixty, a hundred—but all of them are not of the same intensity. There are certain vital spots in us which cannot be touched. They are very vehement, and it is better not to touch them in the beginning. But there are some milder aspects which can be tackled first, and the gradation of these attachments should be understood properly. How many attachments are there, and how many affections? What are the loves that are harassing the mind and causing agony? Make a list of them privately in your own diary, if you like. They say Swami Rama Tirtha used to do that. He would make a list of all the desires and find out how many of them had been fulfilled: “What is the condition? Where am I standing?”—and so on. This is a kind of spiritual diary that you can create for yourself: “How many loves are there which are troubling me? How many things do I like in this world?”

The percentage of attachment that you have towards these things also has to be properly understood. What is the percentage of love for 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', etc.? In a gradational order, tabulate the objects of sense or the conceptual objects, whatever they be, and note the degree of attachment involved in every particular case. Take the least one, the simplest, as the first. If you have a desire to sleep on a Dunlop cushion—well, you may think over this matter. "Is a Dunlop cushion very necessary? I can have a cotton mattress instead." This is not a very serious attachment, though it is an attachment. There are well-to-do aristocrats who may like to sleep on Dunlop beds, Dunlop pillows, have air-conditioning, and so on. These are desires, but they are not so vehement. There are other desires which cannot be touched immediately, and they have to be tackled later on.

By a very dispassionate and unattached attitude, one can diminish one's relationships with things which are really not essential for one's comfortable existence. Let us assume that a comfortable existence is a necessity; even that comfortable life can be led without these luxuries. How many wristwatches have you got? How many coats? How many rooms are you occupying? How much land have you? How many acres?—and so on.

These are various silly things which come in the way of our yoga practice because the extent of trouble that they can create will come to our notice only when we actually touch them, or interfere with them, or try to avoid them. As long as we are friendly with things, they also look friendly, but when we try to avoid them, we will see their reactions are of a different type altogether. It is very necessary to use tact even in avoiding the unnecessary things; otherwise, there can be a resentment on the part of those things. This is the philosophy of moderation—the *via media* and the golden mean of philosophy and yoga—where the self that is redundant, external and related has to be made subservient to the ultimate goal which is the Absolute Self.

The social self is easier to control than the personal self, known as the bodily self. We cannot easily control our body, because that has a greater intimacy with our pure state or consciousness than the intimacy that is exhibited by external relations like family members, etc. We may for a few days forget the existence of the members of the family, but we cannot forget for a few days that we have a body; that is a greater difficulty. So, the withdrawal of consciousness from attachment has to be done by degrees, as I mentioned, and the problems have to be gradually thinned out by the coming back of consciousness from its external relationships, stage by stage, taking every step with fixity so that it may not be retraced, and missing not a single link in this chain of steps taken. We should not take jumps in this practice of self-restraint, because every little item is an important item and one single link that we missed may create trouble one day. There may be small desires which do not look very big or troublesome, but they can become troublesome if they are completely ignored, because there is nothing in this world which can be regarded as wholly unimportant. Everything has some importance or the other; and if the time comes, it can help us, or it can trouble us.

Everything has to be taken into consideration so far as we are related to it, and a proper attitude of detachment has to be practised by various means, external as well as internal. This is the principle of austerity which, to re-emphasise, does not mean either too much indulgence or going to the other extreme of completely cutting off all indulgence. It is the allowing in of as much relationship with things, both in quantity

and quality, as would be necessary under the conditions of one's own personality in that particular stage of evolution, with the purpose of helping oneself in the onward growth to a healthier condition of spiritual aspiration.

Again, it may be pointed out that every stage in self-restraint or practice of yoga is a positive step, so that there should not be pain felt in the practice. When we feel undue pain, suffocation or agony—well, that would be an indication that we have made a slight mistake in the judgement of values. We should not feel restless or troubled in our practice. That would be the consequence of a little excess to which we might have gone, not knowing what actually has been done. So when we feel that one side of the matter is causing us some trouble, we should pay a little special attention to it and see that it is ameliorated to the extent necessary. We have to bear in mind that the goal of yoga is the consummation of a series of practices that we undertake, every step therein being a positive step without any negativity in it. Really speaking, every step in yoga should be a step of happiness, joy and delight.

Chapter 53

A VERY IMPORTANT SADHANA

For the purpose of those students of yoga who would not be in a position to practise these meditations daily as has been indicated up to this time, the great sage Patanjali says that the same goal can be reached, though with a greater effort and in a longer period of time, by milder techniques of *sadhana* if intense meditation is difficult. The very attempt at the control of the senses—austerity, about which we were discussing previously—generates a new strength in the mind and sets the mind in tune with more impersonal powers. Thus, meditation becomes less difficult than it would have been otherwise.

It is the pressure of the senses towards objects that prevents the mind from taking to exclusive spiritual meditations. The objects of sense are so real to the senses that they cannot easily be ignored or forgotten. Even the very thought of an object will draw the mind towards it, and every particularised thought in the direction of an object is a further affirmation of the falsity that Reality is only in some place, in some object, in some thing, in some person, etc., and it is not universal in its nature. The universality of Truth is denied by the senses, at every moment of time, in their activities towards sense gratification.

The very purpose of the senses is to bring about this refusal of the ultimate universality of Godhead, to affirm the diversity of objects and to push the mind—forcefully—towards these external things. If this undesirable activity on the part of the senses can be ended to the extent possible, this force with which the mind moves towards objects can be harnessed for a better purpose, for a more positive aim than the indulgence of the senses in objects. The very restraint of the senses from their movement towards objects is a meditation by itself, at least in some sense, because energy cannot be bottled up, unused; it always finds expression in some way or the other. If we do not utilise it in more beneficial ways for spiritual purposes, the only alternative would be for this mental energy to leak out through the senses towards

objects of sense. If this leakage is blocked and prevented, the energy wells up within like the waters of a river that will rise up when a bund is constructed across it.

This energy that is thus stored up and conserved will naturally find its way in the direction of a better aim than what is pointed out by the senses. This effort is called *tapas*, austerity. Literally, the word '*tapas*' means heat—a heat that is generated by the preservation of energy in the system. It is not merely the heat of fire. It is energy, a concentrated force which, when it is accumulated to an appreciable extent, will light up as a kind of aura in one's personality. The radiance will emanate from one's face, from one's eyes, from one's personality. This is nothing but the very same energy finding its expression in other ways than the sensory indulgence in which it would have engaged itself if self-restraint had not been practised.

All meditation is freedom from distraction by directing the energy in one specified manner, and it is also freedom from every other motive, purpose or incentive. Since the senses are accustomed to contemplation on objects and will not so easily yield to this advice, another suggestion is given—namely, a daily practice of sacred study, or *svadhyaya*. If you cannot do *japa* or meditation, or cannot concentrate the mind in any way, then take to study—not of any book at random from the library, but of a specific sacred text which is supposed to be a *moksha shastra*, the study of which will generate aspiration in the mind towards the liberation of the soul.

A daily recitation—with the understanding of the meaning—of such hymns as the Purusha Sukta from the Veda, for instance, is a great *svadhyaya*, as Vachaspati Mishra, the commentator on the Yoga Sutras, mentions. Also, the Satarudriya—which we chant daily in the temple without perhaps knowing its meaning—is a great meditation if it is properly understood and recited with a proper devout attitude of mind. Vachaspati Mishra specifically refers to two great hymns of the Veda—the Purusha Sukta and the Satarudriya—which he says are highly purifying, not only from the point of view of their being conducive to meditation or concentration of mind, but also in other purifying processes which will take place in the body and the whole system due to the chanting of these mantras. These Veda mantras are immense potencies, like atom bombs, and to handle them and to energise the system with their forces is a spiritual practice by itself. This is one suggestion.

There are various other methods of *svadhyaya*. It depends upon the state of one's mind—how far it is concentrated, how far it is distracted, what these desires are that have remained frustrated inside, what the desires are that have been overcome, and so on. The quality of the mind will determine the type of *svadhyaya* that one has to practise. If nothing else is possible, do *parayana* of holy scriptures—the Sundara Kanda, the Valmiki Ramayana or any other Ramayana, the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana, the Srimad Bhagavadgita, the Moksha Dharma Parva of the Mahabharata, the Vishnu Purana, or any other suitable spiritual text. It has to be recited again and again, every day at a specific time, in a prescribed manner, so that this *sadhana* itself becomes a sort of meditation—because what is meditation but hammering the mind, again and again, into a single idea? Inasmuch as abstract meditations are difficult for beginners, these more concrete forms of it are suggested. There are people who recite the Ramayana or the Srimad Bhagavata 108 times. They conduct Bhagvat Saptaha. The purpose is to bring the mind around to a circumscribed form of function and not allow it to roam about on the objects of sense.

The mind needs variety, no doubt, and it cannot exist without variety. It always wants change. Monotonous food will not be appreciated by the mind, and so the scriptures, especially the larger ones like the Epics, the Puranas, the Agamas, the Tantras, etc., provide a large area of movement for the mind wherein it leisurely roams about to its deep satisfaction, finds variety in plenty, reads stories of great saints and sages, and feels very much thrilled by the anecdotes of Incarnations, etc. But at the same time, with all its variety, we will find that it is a variety with a unity behind it. There is a unity of pattern, structure and aim in the presentation of variety in such scriptures as the Srimad Bhagavata, for instance. There are 18,000 verses giving all kinds of detail—everything about the cosmic creation and the processes of the manifestation of different things in their gross form, subtle form, causal form, etc. Every type of story is found there. It is very interesting to read it. The mind rejoices with delight when going through such a large variety of detail with beautiful comparisons, etc. But all this variety is like a medical treatment by which we may give varieties of medicine with a single aim. We may give one tablet, one capsule, one injection, and all sorts of things at different times in a day to treat a single disease. The purpose is the continued assertion that God is All, and the whole of creation is a play of the glory of God.

The goal of life in every stage of its manifestation is the vision of God, the experience of God, the realisation of God—that God is the Supreme Doer and the Supreme Existence. This is the principle that is driven into the mind again and again by the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana or such similar texts. If a continued or sustained study of such scriptures is practised, it is purifying. It is a *tapas* by itself, and it is a study of the nature of one's own Self, ultimately. The word 'sva' is used here to designate this process of study—*svadhyaya*. Also, we are told in one *sutra* of Patanjali, *tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe avasthānam* (I.3), that the seer finds himself in his own nature when the *vrittis* or the various psychoses of the mind are inhibited. The purpose of every *sadhana* is only this much: to bring the mind back to its original source.

The variety of detail that is provided to the mind in the scriptures has an intention not to pamper or cajole the mind, but to treat the mind of its illness of distraction and attachment to external objects. The aim is highly spiritual. Sometimes it is held that *japa* of a mantra also is a part of *svadhyaya*. That is a more concentrated form of it, requiring greater willpower. It is not easy to do *japa*. We may study a book like the Srimad Bhagavata with an amount of concentration, but *japa* is a more difficult process because there we do not have variety. It is a single point at which the mind is made to move, with a single thought almost, with a single epithet or attribute to contemplate upon. It is almost like meditation, and is a higher step than the study of scriptures. Adepts in yoga often tell us that the chanting of a mantra like *pranava* is tantamount to *svadhyaya*.

The point is that if you cannot do anything else, at least do this much. Take to regular study so that your day is filled with divine thoughts, philosophical ideas and moods which are spiritual in some way or the other. You may closet yourself in your study for hours together and browse through these profound texts, whatever be the nature of their presentation, because all these philosophical and spiritual presentations through the scriptures and the writings of other masters have one aim—namely, the analysis of the structure of things, and enabling the mind to know the inner reality behind this structure. There is a threefold prong provided by Patanjali in this

connection wherein he points out that self-control—the control of the senses, austerity, or *tapas*—together with *svadhyaya*, or study of sacred scriptures, will consummate in the adoration of God as the All-reality.

The idea that God is extra-cosmic and outside us, incapable of approach, and that we are likely not to receive any response from Him in spite of our efforts at prayer, etc.—all these ideas are due to certain encrustations in the mind, the *tamasic* qualities which cover the mind and make it again subtly tend towards objects of sense. The desire for objects of sense, subtly present in a very latent form in the subconscious level, becomes responsible for the doubt in the mind that perhaps there is no response from God. This is because our love is not for God—it is for objects of sense, and for status in society and enjoyments of various types in the world. And when, through austerity, or *tapas*, we have put the senses down with the force of our thumb, there is a temporary cessation of their activity.

But the subconscious desire for things does not cease, just as a person who is thrown out of his ministry may not cease from desiring to be a minister once again; he will stand for election another time, if possible. The subtle subconscious desire is there. He will be restless, without any peace in the mind, because the position has been uprooted. The senses are unable to move towards the objects because we have curbed them with force by going away to distant places like Gangotri where we will not get any physical or social satisfaction. But, there is a revulsion felt inside, and there is a feeling of inadequacy of every type. This will create various doubts—if not consciously, at least subconsciously.

The various types of suspicion that arise in our mind, and the diffidence we often feel in our daily practice, are due to the presence of subtle desires. The subtle desires may not look like desires at all. They will not have the character of desires, as they are only tendencies. They are tracks or roads kept open for the vehicle to move. The vehicle is not moving, but it can move if it wants; we have kept everything clear. Likewise, though the vehicle of the senses is not moving on the road towards the objects outside, there is always a chance of it moving in that direction, in spite of the fact that it has been controlled.

Austerity, *tapas*, does not merely mean control of the senses in the sense of putting an end to their activity. There should be an end to even their tendency towards objects; otherwise, they will create a twofold difficulty. Firstly, they will find the least opportunity provided as an occasion for manifesting their force once again; secondly, they will shake us from the core of all the faith that we have in God and the power of spiritual practice. The powers of sense are terrible indeed. They work on one side as a subtle pressure exerted towards further enjoyment of things in many ways, and on the other side as a feeling that, after all, this practice is not going to bring anything. This is a dangerous doubt that can arise in one's mind, because it is contrary to truth.

Nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate (B.G. II.40), says the Bhagavadgita. Even a little good that we do in this direction has its own effect. Even if we credit one *paisa* (one-hundredth of an Indian rupee) to our account in the bank, it is a credit, though it is very little. It is only one *paisa* that we have put there, but still it is there. We cannot say it is not there. Likewise, even a little bit of sincere effort that is put forth in the direction of sense control and devotion to God is a great credit indeed

accumulated by the soul. There should not be a doubt whether it will yield fruit. We should not expect fruit in the way we would dream in our mind, because the nature of the response that is generated by the practice depends upon the extent of obstacles that are already present and not eliminated. The peculiar impressions created inside by frustrated feelings will also act as an obstacle. The frustrated feelings are the subtle longings of the mind, deeper than the level of conscious activity, which create a sense of disquiet and displeasure in the mind.

We are always in a mood of unhappiness. We cannot know what has happened to us. We are not satisfied—neither with people, nor with our *sadhana*, nor with anything in this world. This disquiet, peacelessness and displeasure which can manifest as a sustained mood in spiritual seekers is due to the presence of the impressions left by frustrated desires. We have not withdrawn our senses from objects wantonly or deliberately, but we have withdrawn them due a pressure from scriptures, Guru, atmosphere, monastery, or other conditions.

Sometimes factors which are extraneous become responsible for the practice that we have undergone or are undergoing; and because the heart is absent there, naturally the feeling of happiness is also not there. When the heart is not there, there cannot be joy. That is why it is suggested that the *sadhana* of self-control, or control of the senses, should be coupled with a deep philosophical knowledge and spiritual aspiration, which is what is indicated by the term '*svadhyaya*', and the other term '*Ishvara pranidhana*', which is adoration of God as the ultimate goal of life.

The purpose of sense control, study of scripture and adoration of God is all single—namely, the affirmation of the supremacy and the ultimate value of Godhead. This requires persistent effort, no doubt, and as has been pointed out earlier, it is a strenuous effort on the part of the mind to prevent the incoming of impressions of desire from objects outside on the one hand, and to create impressions of a positive character in the form of love of God on the other hand. *Vijatiya vritti nirodha* and *sajatiya vritti pravah*—these two processes constitute *sadhana*. *Vijatiya vritti nirodha* means putting an end to all incoming impressions from external objects and allowing only those impressions which are conducive to contemplation on the Reality of God. *Vijati* means that which does not belong to our category, genus, or species.

What is our species? It is not mankind, human nature, etc. Our species is a spiritual spark, a divine location in our centre. The soul that we are is the species that we are. So all impressions, thoughts, feelings and ideas which are in agreement with the character of the soul, which is our *jati*, or species, should be allowed, and anything that is contrary or different from this should not be allowed. The *vijatiya vritti nirodha* is the inhibition or putting an end to all those *vrittis* or modifications of the mind in respect of things outside, because the soul is not anything that is outside. *Sajatiya vritti pravah* is the movement like the flow of a river, or the pouring of oil continuously, without break, in a thread of such ideas which are of the character of the soul—which is universality.

This threefold effort—namely, a positive effort at the control and restraint of the senses from direct action in respect of objects outside, deep study of scriptures which are wholly devoted to the liberation of the spirit from the beginning to the end, and a constant remembrance in one's mind that God is All with a surrender of oneself to

His supremacy—constitute a very important *sadhana* by itself, which is the meaning of this single *sutra*: *tapaḥ svādhyāya Īśvarapraṇidhānāni kriyāyogaḥ* (II.1).

Chapter 54

PRACTICE WITHOUT REMISSION OF EFFORT

The practice mentioned is for the purpose of directing the mind slowly towards its final achievement, and for the attenuation of all the obstacles. The difficulties that present themselves with great intensity, ostensibly as if they are insurmountable, will be there in that form for a long time, making it appear that perhaps they are impossible to approach and difficult to overcome. It is the experience of all students of yoga, and saints and sages of the past, that honey does not start flowing in the beginning itself. One cannot see the light of day at the very commencement of the practice. It will be like a dark sky thickly covered with black clouds, and the only thing that one will be able to see or visualise in front of oneself are problems, difficulties, pains, and everything that is the opposite of what one is asking or aspiring for. It is not till very late in the day that a feeling comes within oneself that, after all, things are not so bad as they appear.

These difficulties and pains that are consequent upon one's strenuous effort are due to the thick layer of *samskaras* and *karmas* which have been accumulated in oneself since many births. The very personality of the individual is nothing but a bundle of *karmas*. It is made up of only these forces, and nothing but that. It is, if we would like to put it in that way, a heap of desires that has become this body, mind and personality—this outlook of life, even. Everything is made up of desires. There is nothing in us except desire. From head to foot we are made of that; every fibre of our body is only that. The only thing is, it is sometimes visible outside as an activity of the mind towards fulfilment, and sometimes it is present inside merely as a possibility, a latent tendency and an urge towards a particular fulfilment, which may or may not be conspicuous.

Long practice is the only solution. These difficulties, problems, pains, *samskaras* and desires cannot be faced with any armour or apparatus that we have with us. There is no alternative except continued practice. This is a kind of *satyagraha* that we are doing with these desires, we may say. We cannot face them in battle directly because they too are equally powerful. But, we can be persistent to such an extent that there is no chance for them to show their heads again. The feeling that one is moving towards one's goal begins to rise within oneself after years and years of practice—not after months. Of course there are masters, great heroes on the path, who must have done this practice in previous births, such as Jnaneshwara Maharaj, Janaka, and such great heroes of the spirit who showed signs of mastery and achievement early in age. For others it is a torture—but it is a necessary ordeal that one has to pass through for the sake of scrubbing out all the encrustations in the form of anything that goes to make up this personality of ours in all its five vestures. *Annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya*—all these five *koshas* are various densities of the manifestation of desire. There is nothing but that—like the dense clouds which cover the bright sun and make it appear as if the sun does not exist at all. But the *kleshas*, or these obstacles, become attenuated gradually due to the

pressure of practice, *abhyasa*, and the accompanied *vairagya*. Samādhi bhāvanārthaḥ kleśa tanūkaraṇārthaśca (II.2) is the *sutra*. For the purpose of generating within oneself a feeling towards the achievement of one's goal, which is *samadhi*, and for the obviating of all the obstacles, practice should be continued.

Therefore, practice is the panacea. The watchword of yoga is practice—*abhyasa*. There is no other method; there is no alternative; there is no other remedy. When continued practice is resorted to, the force of the practice keeps all these impediments in check, and because of this continued pressure exerted upon them by the practice, one day or the other we will see a ray of light of hope beaming through these dark clouds of opposition. At a later stage, it will be realised that no help from this world will be of any avail here in this endeavour. People cannot help us. Nothing in this world will be of any avail in this single combat with the powers of nature in which one is engaged with all one's might. Our strength will be seen here in this duel that we have to engage ourselves in—between standing alone on one side, and the whole world on the other side. We have to face the whole world single-handed. Imagine what strength we must have! Nobody will help us here, though a day will come when all forces will come to our aid.

It is a great symbolic march of the soul towards its goal, represented in such epics as the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, etc., where a time presents itself when it looks as if we have no friends in this world. So was the case with Yudhisthira and others. They were thrown to the forest, into the wilderness. They were princes, born of great kings, but who bothers about this heritage and inheritance? They were driven to the wilderness with no help and no succour of any sort whatsoever, as if they were the most unwanted people in the whole world. This is the Mahabharata of the spirit that we are discussing—the war of consciousness with the entire structure of creation.

Here, the same problems will arise as have been depicted by the epics. There is an enthusiasm of spirit in the beginning, as was the case with the childish Pandava brothers in their jubilant youth when it looked as if everything was beautiful, the world was friendly, and they had parents, brothers, relatives and protectors. It was all very nice, no doubt. We have parents, friends and brothers, and all things that are needed for safety and security, but suddenly we will find that the earth will give way under our feet and we will be the target of the very same persons and forces whom we looked upon as our friends. The very same cousin-brothers drove the Pandavas out. They were cousin-brothers, not enemies; and the succour, the source of support, the great heroic elements in the family who were the refuge of all these brothers were helpless—in a predicament which was understandable only to God. Man cannot understand.

Therefore, there is a great suffering; and, tentatively, the suffering may end. There are various stages of our experience where we look like we are sinking down into the ocean of sorrow and then coming up and showing our heads once again, as if we are going to have a support to save us—and, again, going down. The suffering ends and we come back, and then we are coronated once again with the apparent rejoicing of the *rajasuya*, which was the great delight of Prince Yudhisthira. He thought everything was all right: "Now, what is the difficulty? All the kings are paying tribute to me."

This is what we are all in—everyone, without exception. It looks as if we are crowned king now, and we are in a very secure position—very safe, and nobody can shake us. But this is a dangerous *rajasuya* coronation which has the seeds of destruction and opposition, and a further combat is going to follow; and then we have to go to the forest once again.

Here it is that we have the most interesting subject in mystical life. The Aranya Parva of the Mahabharata is the beginning of spiritual practice, which is almost equivalent to the first chapter of the Bhagavadgita, where we are lost completely—no one wants us and no one looks at us. No one is even aware of our existence, and no one bothers about our parentage, our heritage, our inheritance, our princely life, that we are children of a king, and so on—nothing of the kind. We may be the brother of Julius Caesar, but who bothers about us? We are in the forest. This is a condition into which we will enter after a rejoicing that everything has come. This is not the first stage itself; this is a stage that comes after a jubilant feeling that some sort of achievement has been made. There is first a sense of renunciation—everything is cast out, and we feel that we are directly in the face of God Himself, where we are perfectly protected from all forces that are opposed to us. But, this is only a feeling. Whatever the truth be of that feeling, it has the seeds of counter-opposing forces and experiences. There is a rising up, as I mentioned, in the *rajasuya*, and then again, a sinking down.

Here, one has to gather up one's energies. It is not true that the path of yoga is a smooth movement, a continuous ascent, one step rising above another step, steadily. It is a very zigzag way. We have to go round and round, as if in a *chakravyuha* formation (an intricate labyrinth formation of troops and armament used in ancient combat) whose ways are not visible to the eyes. We can see only one step at a time, not a hundred steps. One step ahead of us may be visible, but the step after that cannot be seen because the path has turned.

There is a famous epic called *The Divine Comedy* written by the great Italian poet Dante, where he describes these winding processes of the movement of the soul in its higher journey through the Inferno and through various stages of ascent to the Paradiso. This is only a description of the winding movements of the soul in its higher journey where for miles ahead it cannot see things properly. It can see only a little bit in front of it, and is kept in uncertainty at every stage.

We cannot be clear and confident at any stage. Everything is uncertain. We cannot know what is going to happen to us the next moment, though we may be in a highly advanced condition. We may have more than a pass mark, and we are going to get a certificate of having won victory. It may be so, but even that will be uncertain. We will not know it. That everything is kept secret is the peculiar way of God, and in this Vana Parva, Aranya Parva of the *sadhaka*, he is almost a lost soul, with no help from the world and no help even from the gods. Everything is dark, misty and dusty, and tempestuous winds are blowing. The sorrow of Yudhisthira was unthinkable, intolerable, when he wept to the core of his heart and cried to the sage that came to him, and asked him, "Did creation see a person worse than me at any time?" Sometimes we feel like that: "Can there be a person worse than I? How miserable am I! I have no help. Neither God helps me nor man helps me."

Well, these are stages we have to pass through. All great men passed through this wilderness. Rama went to the forest; Nara went to the forest; Yudhisthira went to the

forest; and why not us? We have to go to the forest. No one can escape this great, terrific passage of the soul towards its ultimate victory. We may enjoy *ramarajya* in the end, no doubt, but in the beginning we are in the forest. We have lost everything. All the forces of nature set themselves tooth and nail against us in the Aranya Parva, and we are harassed even there. Even when we are downtrodden, and we have fallen and are sinking, we will be given a kick on the back. This also is to be tolerated, borne, and we have to face it and expect it.

Supreme fulfilment is the consequence of supreme relinquishment. It is only in the Udyoga Parva onwards in the Mahabharata that we have the description of powers coming to our aid, cooperation and coordination—where all that looked dark and hazy, misty and unclear becomes slowly clear, and one begins to feel that the sun is going to rise after all. It is not midnight, as it appeared to be. There is the light of hope visible in front of us, and we can see the dawn approaching. Then it is that all those powers which were keeping quiet up to this time gird up their loins and come to our aid—unasked. We need not ask for help. Help shall come, and it shall pour like rain from all sides. Even to excess, the help will come; beyond the limits of expectation and hope, support should come from all sides of nature. But that is only in the Udyoga Parva—not before that. Until that time we are in sorrow and are being harassed. We can imagine the pitiable condition of the Pandavas in the Aranya Parva and the Virata Parva. We will cry if we read these portions of Mahabharata. Even the reader of these portions will cry, let alone those people themselves. But, this is a necessary stage of purification—purgation as it is called in mystical language—for the purpose of the enlightenment into a new vista of things which will be seen in the Udyoga Parva where they gird up their loins once again. The situation is not over. The battle is going to take place further. Every *parva* of the Mahabharata is a *parva* of the spirit's advance towards its great achievement.

Patanjali, in his *sutra*, samādhi bhāvanārthaḥ kleśa tanūkaraṇārthaśca (II.2), mentions that we need not be disconsolate and melancholic. There should be no discomfiture about our future. Everything shall be all right; one day or the other there shall be success. But, we must wait for that day. We should not ask for the fruit to fall from the tree merely because we have sown the seed for the tree today. It shall have its own time for maturity and ripening. Karman evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana (B.G. II.47): Our duty is to do what is expected of us and not expect the fruit thereof, because the fruit is not in our hands. While it is in our hands to plough the field, sow the seed and take care of the little plant that grows, it is not in our hands to produce the harvest; that is in the hands of other forces, and we should not compel them to work instantaneously or overnight. They will take their own time, and they will work in the manner necessary.

So the practice of yoga, which is expected to be a very strenuous, relentless pressure of the mind towards its goal, will release the tension of the impediments mentioned already. All the obstacles will disperse, and the mind will tend towards the goal. Now the mind is tending towards objects of sense. We have to bring it back with great effort. We have to struggle hard to wean the mind from the objects which it is contemplating day in and day out. All our effort now is in a negative direction, in the sense that we have to see that the mind does not fall upon the objects again and again. The positive effort is a different thing altogether. The positive effort of the mind should be towards contemplation on the goal of life. But that is far ahead; it has not yet come. Now the whole effort is directed in respect of not allowing the mind to

go to the objects. Before trying to be positively healthy in our body, we have to see that we do not become worse in our sickness, that the illness does not become more and more emphasised. Before we try to see that we are positively strong, healthy and robust, we should see that our temperature does not rise higher tomorrow.

The confidence and the power of will that one has to manifest in this practice are almost superhuman because, while the inward tendencies of the mind towards its goal always remain submerged and never become visible outside, the problems will always be visible—and they will be the only things that are seen before the eyes. We will see only the seamy side of things—the problems, the evil, the ugliness, the pain, the sorrow, the difficulty and the almost impossibility of doing anything in this world. That is the only thing that we will see outside. The positive side will be like the undercurrent of these outer waves that are dashing upon us, and it will not be felt in the beginning stages.

The reason is that we are floating on the surface. We have not gone deep into things. When we are on the surface of the ocean, we will be subject only to the onslaught of the waves. The calmness of the bottom of the ocean is not known, because we have not sunk deep. Hence, the struggle is to first get out of the clutches of these waves. We cannot go into the bottom of the ocean because the waves will not allow us to go; they will throw us hither and thither. The moment we try to escape being hit by one wave, we will be hit by another wave, so that we will be dashed hither and thither, and we cannot go in. But once we go in, we will not see the waves at all. There is a profundity, a depth, a deep silence and a grandeur whose powers are far superior to the clattering noises that the waves make on the surface; and the silence of the spirit will be realised to be more thunderous than the shattering noises of the senses and the sensuous mind.

Samādhi bhāvanārthaḥ (II.2). For the purpose of directing the mind towards *samadhi*, to generate within oneself the feeling towards the ultimate goal, to create in oneself a confidence that one is moving in the right direction as well as to put down all the obstacles, one has to set oneself to practise. Again, to reiterate, we have to emphasise the importance of practice—namely, the continuance of whatever little we are doing every day, without remission of effort. We should not withdraw the effort merely on the assumption that success is not forthcoming. We cannot complain that years of meditation have brought nothing, and feel that evidently, “It is better I give it up.” This is a wrong approach because who can know what is ahead of us and when we will achieve success? We cannot dig three inches into the ground and say, “I am not finding water.” Even if we dig twenty feet down, we may not find water. Therefore, we should not lose hope, because if we dig twenty feet and then think that nothing has come and we give up hope—well, we are going to be the loser, because water may be there at the twenty-first foot.

There is an old story of a devotee of Lord Siva. It seems he used to carry a pot of water from a distant river for *abhisheka* in the temple, and he was told by his Guru, “Do *abhisheka* in this manner 108 times, and you will have *darshan* of Lord Siva.” It was a strenuous thing, because he had to carry water for a long distance. This disciple followed the instruction of the Guru, and was indefatigably working, sweating and toiling, carrying this holy water from a distant river and doing *abhisheka* to the *murti*, the *linga* of Lord Siva in the temple. He did it 107 times and got fed up. He said, “107 times I have done it; nothing is coming, and is one more pot going to bring

anything?” He threw the pot on the head of Siva and went away. Then it seems, a voice came, “Foolish man! You had not the patience for one more pot? You were patient enough for 107. You could not wait for one more? And that would have worked the miracle!”

Likewise may be the fate of many people like us. We may be working very hard. We may be spending half of our life in sincere effort towards achieving something, but at the last moment we lose hope and give up the effort altogether. The advice of Patanjali is that this should not be.

Chapter 55

THE CAUSE OF BONDAGE

It is pointed out once again, for clarifying the path of the seeker, how one has got into bondage and what its significance is in the effort at the practice of yoga meditation. What is the bondage from which we wish to be free? What is actually meant by this thralldom of *samsara*? How has it come about? Why is it that we are full of sorrow and we have no peace? This is mentioned in a single *sutra*, *avidyā kṣetram uttaraśāṃ prasupta tanu vicchinna udārāṇām* (II.4), which states that the series of processes by which the individual soul has got into bondage consists of nothing but pains and pains, one after another, in various degrees of involvement.

As far as the origin of bondage is concerned, the common background of all schools of thought and philosophy is the same—namely, ignorance of the true nature of things. ‘*Avidya*’, ‘*ajnana*’, ‘nescience’, etc. are the terms used to designate this condition. What actually exists is not known; this is called *avidya*. We cannot, by any amount of effort of the mind, understand what is actually there in front of us; and whatever we are seeing with our eyes or think in our mind is not the true state of affairs. This is called *avidya*. We may logically argue, deduce, induce, but all this is like the definitions given by the blind men who touched different parts of the elephant. Every school of thought is like one blind man touching one part of truth and giving a partial definition of it, but never the whole definition of it. On account of a partial grasp of truth, there is a partial attitude to life; and everything follows from that, one after the other.

This principle of bondage is the subject of the vital discussions in Buddhist psychology known as *Paticcasamuppada*, or dependent origination. Every successive link in the chain of bondage is dependent in one way or the other on the previous link. There is then a circular action of these links—one hitting upon the other, intensifying the other and compelling the other to act more forcefully than it did earlier, so that it may look that we are becoming worse and worse every day, rather than better. This is because of a peculiar psychological process that takes place which is difficult to fathom on account of our involvement. Bondage is nothing but involvement, and not an ordinary type of involvement—a very, very complex type so that there is attack from every side. And, apparently, there is no escape.

The inability to perceive the true state of affairs, the absence of an understanding of the correct relationship among things, creates a false sense of values. This sense of values is not merely an abstract imagination, but is a solid metaphysical entity that crops up. *Avidya* is not merely absence of knowledge—just as, as the expounders of this *sutra* tell us very humorously, the word '*amitra*' in Sanskrit grammatically means 'no friend' or 'non-friend', though actually it means an enemy. A non-friend is not a non-existent person; he is a very existent enemy. Likewise, even as *amitra* does not mean the absence of a friend but the presence of an enemy, *avidya* does not merely mean the absence of knowledge but the presence of a terrific foe in front of us, which has a positivity of its own. It exists in a peculiar way which eludes the grasp of understanding.

So a negative type of positivity is created, we may say, called the individuality, which asserts itself as a reality even though it is based on a non-substantiality. The individuality of ours is insubstantial, like vapour. It has no concrete element within it. It can be peeled off like an onion, and we will find nothing inside it, but yet it looks like a hard granite adamantine being on account of the affirmation of consciousness. The reality that is apparently visible in the individuality is borrowed from that which is really there. The support comes from that which really exists, which is True Being, and this support is summoned for the purpose of substantiating something which is utterly false and wholly untenable. This untenable position is called self-assertion, affirmation, egoism, *asmita*, *ahamkara*, etc. All this has happened on account of not knowing correctly the interrelationship of things. There is a dependence of every factor on every other factor so that individuality can have no ultimate value in the scheme of things, because the very term 'individuality' implies an isolated reality of a part of the cosmos, but this is ruled out entirely by the inner structure of things which demands that every part hangs on some other for not only its existence, but also its function.

The inability to grasp this truth is the cause of a hobgoblin that is in front of us—namely, the individuality, the *jivatva*, and everything that follows from it. The *asmita tattva* that is mentioned as the effect of *avidya* is a centralisation of consciousness, a focusing of it at a particular point in space and time, and a hardening of it into an adamantine substance which gets encrusted more and more by repeated experience of sense contact which confirms the false belief that the isolated existence of the individual is a reality. We get confirmation every day that our individuality is real due to the pleasure that we receive by sense contact. If our personal existence—the individuality—is not real, how does pleasure come, which is real? We live on the bank account of the pleasures that we derive by the contact of the senses with the objects outside. And every contact is an added confirmation of the notion within that our individuality is a substantial reality, so we go on pursuing the pleasures with added zeal, greater enthusiasm and more vigour. This again adds a greater confirmation to the already existent notion that our individuality is real.

Piles and piles of notions of this false individuality, *asmita*, get grouped together, and there is an impregnable fortress created in the form of what we are as individuals. It looks as though now the cart is before the horse—that which is real has become unreal, and that which is unreal has become real. The thing that has really evolved as an effect becomes the cause, as it were; and that which is the cause looks as if it is the effect. The cosmic substance out of which the individuals have evolved has become the object of perception of the individuals, and the latter have usurped the position of

the cause of cognition, experience, etc. notwithstanding the fact that they are evolutes. They have come further than the original substance which is cosmic. This is a very beautiful process described in the Aitareya Upanishad: how the cause can become the effect and the effect can become the cause by a topsy-turvy positioning.

Everything is in a state of confusion on account of this situation that has arisen, and there is a total misconstruing of all the features that rule this world. Conclusively, we may say that everything that we think is a wrong thought. There is nothing like correct thinking as far as the reality of the individual is concerned. When the very basis is wrong, how can anything that proceeds from it be correct? This is the history of the production of *asmita* out of *avidya*. We can imagine how far and to what extent *avidya* is real from the direct experience of the extent of reality that we see in our own individuality, which is *asmita*, the effect of *avidya*. How far are we real? From that, we can judge the reality of *avidya*, from where we have come. How solid and concrete are we in our individuality? How hard is the personality? How adamant is the ego? How flint-like is our experience? From that we can understand how substantial *avidya* can be and must be, though it is ultimately an airy nothing.

In one place Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj has mentioned in a humorous way that the mind is something which is really nothing, but does everything. The mind is something which is really nothing but does everything. This is the world—it is really not there, but it is terrible. That terrific character of it, which is not there, is due to something else that has taken place. There is a transposition of values, on account of which the reality of 'unreal' becomes possible. The character of the real is injected into the apparent formation of the unreal, and then the unreal looks like a reality. We transfer ourselves to the objects in our perceptions, and then it is the reality of the background of our being which is the cause for our belief in the reality of objects. All this is unknown because the causative background of our own individuality cannot be known by us since we cannot climb on our own shoulders, or look at our own back, or see our own eyes, etc. Because of the fact that the causes of our individual existence cannot be known by the faculties with which the individuality has been endowed, we are caught up in a confusion—a mess, which is a total disorder.

This kind of disorder, whose essence is in our individuality, *asmita*, is the product of *avidya*; and this concretised individuality of ours is the source of our loves and hatreds, likes and dislikes. We like certain things and dislike certain things because of the sympathy which a peculiar structural pattern of an individual feels with the structure of certain groups of things outside, with which it gets related for the sake of a temporary feeling of completeness. No individual can be complete. Everything is a part. Therefore, everything is restless; it has to be restless. But this restlessness, pain and anguish felt by each partial experience of individuality tries to get fulfilment by finding its counterpart in sensory experience. Inasmuch as the whole cosmos cannot be the counterpart of an individual, only certain elements which are projected by what is known as the *prarabdha karma* become the indicators of what is actually necessary for the fulfilment of individual wishes. This conditioning factor in the form of the group of *prarabdhas* becomes the projecting force, the motive power behind the type of desire that the individual manifests in respect of objects outside.

Therefore, we may say our likes and dislikes are conditioned by our *prarabdha karma*. That is why everyone does not like everything—my likes are different from

your likes, etc. The reason is that we as individuals are constituted of certain forces which do not relate themselves directly with every factor in the universe, because the *prarabdha* is a peculiar sample that is taken out of the entire resources behind us, called *sanchita karma*. This sample is not the whole stock that is inside; it is only a little bit of retail that is taken out for the purpose of practical experience or transaction in the present life. This little sample of *prarabdha karma* is concerned only with a particular type of experience. Therefore, it selects out of the whole pattern of the universe certain objects which are directly connected with the limitations of its own individuality as sanctioned by the *prarabdha*. Hence, there are varieties of likes and dislikes; and what I like, you may dislike, so that we cannot know which object is the object of like, and which one is the object of dislike, generally speaking. Anything can be the object of like of one individual and the object of dislike of another. There is no generalisation of this feature; it is only the finding of one's counterpart. That which is ugly to me may be beautiful to you, and so on, because of your way of thinking, the needs of your mind, etc.

This peculiar effect that further follows from *asmita*, or individuality, in the form of the pulls and repulsions, *raga* and *dvesha*, adds a further confirmation to our belief that the world is real, the body is real, individuality is real—that all our phenomenal experiences are real. Already the fire has been ignited by the presence of *asmita*, and now the flame is burning, and it becomes more and more consuming and vehement because of the winds of desire that blow over it. The fire becomes a flame, and having become uncontrollable by the tempestuous movements of the desires for objects of sense, there is a tossing of the individual from one end to another in search of the pleasures of sense, which is the world of *raga-dvesha*—the fully expanded condition of the active mind in respect of its objects of pleasure. We can imagine how we get into bondage more and more every day. We go deeper and deeper into the quagmire. A quagmire is a peculiar kind of mire into which we will sink if we step on it; and if we try to lift one foot, the other foot will sink in. We cannot get out of it—that is called a quagmire. Such is this world, where once we get in, we cannot come out. And, how many difficulties follow from this!

The confirmed belief in the substantiality of our phenomenal experiences subtly creates a feeling of fear in us simultaneously, which is contrary to the apparent belief in the reality of things. Why are we afraid of things? The fear is due to the subtle feeling of the possibility of one's being wrenched out of one's contact with the objects of sense. The fear of death is nothing but the fear of loss of pleasure. "I may lose all my centres of pleasure if the forces of death come and catch hold of my throat." The love of life which is so inherent in every individual, accompanied by the fear of death, is another form of the love of pleasure; otherwise, why should one fear death so much? It is because the so-called phenomenal relationships created by *asmita* have formed the impression that there are centres of joy here, and they are the only realities—there is nothing beyond. Can anyone imagine, even with the farthest stretch of thought, that there is any delight possible, or even conceivable, beyond the pleasures of sense? There is nothing conceivable. We only imagine intellectually, academically—but practically, there is none. Everything is included within sense pleasures. They are everything.

This peculiar involvement of the individual is what is known as the bondage of the *jiva*. As I mentioned, more detailed explanations of the various minor links in this chain of involvement are given in Buddhist psychology in the philosophy known as

Paticcasamuppada, which finally amounts to saying that we are only to take the first step in the direction of a mistake, and then everything will follow. If we take one step in the direction of a mistake, afterwards we will be pushed automatically. One push is given to us, then another push will follow, then the third, the fourth and the fifth. Twelve pushes are given to us, says Buddha, so that now we are in the twelfth push. We are in the deepest nether region of the most utter form of sorrow, in the most formidable condition of involvement, utterly incapable of understanding—but yet, giving the impression that it is the only reality. According to this psychological analysis, we are fools of the first water at present, though we look so wise. It is no wonder that yoga should be very difficult to practise for such fools as we. How is it possible? It is because the involvement is so intense, and we have to gradually remove the encrustations, one after another.

For the uninitiated and uninformed souls who have not yet been able to grasp the truths of things directly by vision, Patanjali goes on to give a series of descriptions for the freeing of one's consciousness from such involvements by graduated techniques and graduated practice. A sudden directing of the mind to meditation is not possible because the layers are hard enough that they cannot be pierced through at once. Also, the layers of bondage, which have manifested themselves in a series, are not placed one above the other in a linear fashion, like piles of paper kept one over the other. They are intricately involved—one getting into the fibre of the other, as it were—and we cannot peel one layer out without causing pain to the other layer that is underneath. Because of the vital involvement of consciousness in every layer, there is a little bit of suffering involved in the peeling out of the layer, just as we feel pain when we peel the skin. We know that skin is not our real nature, but yet we feel pain when it is peeled off because we have become one with the skin, one with the bone and marrow, the flesh—one with everything. Likewise, every layer of bondage has become part of the self, so that the removal of the bondage is not desirable. It looks pleasurable for the soul.

Bondage itself has become a source of joy, so that we can say that the very vision of there being something beyond in the form of freedom has left one's vision. If a person is a captive in a jail for fifty or sixty years, he may take that as the natural way of living. He has been in the jail for sixty years; he has been used to that way of living, and he cannot think of any value or reality other than that. In a similar manner, there is an accustoming of consciousness to a life of bondage, and the conditions, limitations and restrictions have been regarded as a type of freedom by itself. Even the limitation that has been imposed upon us, we mistake for freedom, and the pain that follows is regarded as joy.

The pleasures of sense are not really pleasures. This is the point that is mentioned in one of the following *sutras*. They are pains which are misread as pleasures. There is a misconstruing of structure in the reading of meaning in the contact of senses with objects. There is a total misreading of the whole value. We read things topsy-turvy, as it were—just as when we look at our face in a mirror, the right looks left, and the left looks right. We do not see things properly. There is a complete reversal of values taking place in the judgement of the mind in respect of its contact with objects. The reactions that are produced by the contact of senses with objects are called the pleasures of sense, but these reactions are very peculiar things. They are difficult to understand.

Why are these reactions set up at all? Because of something inscrutable in this process, this reaction is mistaken for a desirable feeling, and because the feeling has already been called desirable, designated as desirable, it has to be called pleasurable. It is an intense tension that one feels in the process of this reaction that is created at the time of the contact of the subject with the object. We know that every tension is a pain. If we are placed in a condition of utter limitation from every side, we will feel unhappy, and any kind of lifting of this tension—even a modicum of it—will appear as the removal of a burden from our heads, a load taken away from us. The mere absence of nervous tension inside can look like a positive happiness, while what has happened is simply that the tense nerves have been released due to a particular action that has taken place biologically and psychologically.

It is difficult to know why we feel happiness, why there is pleasure at all in sense contact, unless we know the anatomy of perception itself. Why is it that we are seeing objects? What is it that compels us or drives us towards objects? Where is the need for us to come in contact with things? If the history and the anatomical background of this situation are properly grasped, we may also be able to know to some extent why it is that we wrongly mistake pain for pleasure, and how is it that we can get fooled by the senses in creating a notion of falsehood—how a negative reaction, which is merely a little bit of freedom from tension of nerves, can look like a positive bliss.

It is the inability to grasp these things that has created an impression that bodily experiences and phenomenal processes are independent by themselves—a reality taken by themselves. This is the essence of bondage; and how difficult it is to get out of it is clear on the very surface.

Chapter 56

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE IS THE SOURCE OF SUFFERING

In the discussion of the yoga *sutra* [II.4] whose meaning we are trying to understand at present, the great point that is insisted upon finally is that a mere tackling of the effect, or an attempt at subjugating the effect while allowing the cause to remain as it is, will not yield beneficial results. Most of the endeavours in spiritual practice become failures on account of the causes being left untouched and the effects being taken into consideration with great ardour and force of concentration. This is partly due to circumstantial reasons. We should say that the internal causes of one's mental suffering are such that, in most cases, society is not sympathetic with these presences. It is an unfortunate historical circumstance, but nevertheless it is there, so that mankind is perpetually kept in an artificial state of inward tension merely because of its own peculiar ethics. It has created its own bondage by creating rules which are ultimately no good. But this situation is there, whatever be the analytical reasons behind the worthwhileness of such a condition.

Avidyā kṣetram uttaraśāṁ prasupta tanu vicchinna udārāṇām (II.4) is a very important *sutra* which has psychological importance and practical significance. The root cause

of our sufferings is an ignorance with which we are perpetually associated, which is our constant friend, and whom we can never leave even for a moment. This friend, called 'ignorance', is with us day in and day out. Inside and outside, this friend is with us and becomes one with our nature so that our very thoughts are based on ignorance. Therefore, any effort even in the so-called right direction may not yield the desired results, because there is a basis of ignorance even before the rectitude which society parades so much.

If we go into the psychology of human nature, we will find that the whole of mankind is stupid and it has no understanding of what right conduct is, in the light of facts as they are. Nevertheless, this is the drama that has been going on since centuries merely because of the very nature of mankind's constitution—he cannot jump over his own skin. But then, suffering also cannot be avoided. We cannot be a wiseacre and at the same time be a happy person. This wiseacre condition is very dangerous, but this is exactly what everyone is, and therefore it is that things are what they are. This *avidya*, or ignorance, is a strange something which is, as we were trying to understand previously in our considerations, a twist of consciousness, a kink in our mind, a kind of whim and fancy that has arisen in the very attitude of the individual towards things in general—which has been taken as the perpetual mode of rightful thinking.

This ignorance or *avidya* is, really speaking, an oblivion in respect of the nature of things in their own status, and an insistence and an emphasis of their apparent characteristics, their forms, their names and their relationships, upon the basis of which the history of the world moves and the activity of people goes on. This ignorance is the root cause of all mental suffering, which of course is the cause of every other suffering. It may be any kind of suffering; it is based ultimately on this peculiar inward root of dislocation of personality—where begins our study of abnormal psychology, if we would like to call it so.

If abnormal psychology is the study of disordered mental conditions, then we may say that every psychology is abnormal psychology, because there is no ordered mind anywhere in the world, in the sense that everything is set out of tune from reality. Psychoanalysts are fond of saying that when the mind is out of tune with reality, there is abnormality. This is a great dictum of Freud, Adler, Hume, and many others. But though the saying is well-defined and accepted by all psychologists, the crux of the matter is: what is 'reality' with which the mind is supposed to be in tune? According to psychoanalysts, reality is the world that we see with our eyes and the society in which we are living.

The point they make out is that if we are in tune with the way in which society expects us to live, we are normal. If we are not able to live in that manner, we are abnormal. The laws of society are supposed to be what they call the 'super-ego' in psychoanalytical language. It has nothing to do with the ego that we are speaking of in philosophy; it is something different altogether. The superego is a Freudian word which implies the check that is put upon individual instincts and desires by the laws of human society outside. On account of this pressure that is exerted perpetually upon inward desires by the reality of social rules and regulations outside, every human being is kept in tension. Therefore, there is a tendency to revolt against society. No one is really happy with society, ultimately. There is a disrespect and a dislike and a discontent, but because we cannot wag our tail before this monster

called society, we keep quiet. But sometimes we become vehement, and then so many consequences follow—inwardly as well as outwardly.

The attunement of the inward conduct and character of the individual with the conditions prevailing outside in human society is supposed to be the normal behaviour of the mind, according to psychoanalysis. The word used for this prevailing condition outside is 'reality', because that is what persists always, whereas individual instincts may go on changing. But the definition of reality as applied to the social laws would not hold water for long, because anything that is subject to change cannot be called real. The constitution of human society is subject to transformation on account of the mutations of history—the changes that we see in the world through the process of evolution. Therefore, laws will change, and our concept of normalcy also will change.

The root cause of unhappiness, therefore, is an irreconcilability between the individual and its environment. This 'environment' is a very peculiar word which has deep connotations. It means anything and everything. The circumstances in which we find ourselves are of the environment—the geographical conditions, the social conditions, the psychological conditions, the astronomical conditions. All these have to be taken into consideration when we speak of the environment of an individual. These are vast things, insurmountable by ordinary human thinking. It is not usually practicable for the mind to tune itself to all these things that are outside. If it succeeds in one line, it will fail in another, so that there is always some kind of difficulty, one coming after the other. And so, there is a perpetual restlessness within.

This restlessness which is the immediate outcome of ignorance produces unnatural, abnormal attitudes in respect of things, because a drowning person may try to catch even a straw that is floating on the surface of water, whether or not it is going to be of any help. The mind that is defeated from every side and cannot express itself at all for various reasons, tries to hold on to any support of satisfaction that is visible before it. At the same time, it is not allowed to hold on to it for a long time due to the force of the flood in which it is caught. It will be showing its head above for a few minutes, and then sinking down again. This condition goes on for a long time, and one cannot say who will win. The feelings of the individual during this time are obvious. They are unthinkable, unanalysable, not subject to scrutiny in a logical manner. They remain in a very confused state.

The tendencies of the individual towards external objects remain either dormant, when they cannot be expressed at all because facilities are not forthcoming, or they can be present in a manifest state, but in a very attenuated form, like a fine, silken thread—visible, and yet very slender, not strong and powerful. It is also possible that these tendencies can appear to be completely absent at some time, and suddenly crop up at another time, like a fever in typhoid—one day we look normal and the next day we have fever. These tendencies will look completely buried and almost extinct for some time and we will be under the impression that they have gone for good, but it is not so. They will suddenly show their heads when the atmosphere becomes favourable. And there are occasions when they can be fully manifest and they can be at war with us, daggers drawn.

These conditions are mentioned in this *sutra*, *prasupta tanu vicchinna udārāṇām* (II.4), which enumerates the four conditions of the tendency of the individual towards objects. *Prasupta* is sleeping, or dormant; *tanu* is attenuated, or thinned out and weakened; *vicchinna* is interrupted; *udara* is fully manifest, or expressed. These conditions represent the activity of the tendencies of the individual, which are born of *avidya*, or ignorance. Ignorance of the nature of things means a complete obscuration of the knowledge of the ultimate character of one's true being. It is impossible in this state to know what one's Self really is, just as in dream one forgets one's wakeful condition—wakeful state and status. If we are a well-placed dignitary in the waking condition, in dream we may be a mosquito or a fly, or we may be a nothing. We completely forget our status in the waking state due to a total transformation of the mind in dream. This is an illustration to give an idea of what ignorance of one's true nature is. We may be an emperor; we may be a president of our vast country, or a prime minister—what does it matter? When we are in dream, we are something quite different. We are different to such an extent that we cannot have the least trace of the memory that we are something else in the waking state.

Now, what happens in dream? This ignorance of what we really are does not simply keep quiet like that. We are not simply in a sleepy condition where we are completely oblivious of our true nature. There is a mischievous activity taking place simultaneously with this ignorance, and that is what is called the dream perceptions. Not only are we not allowed to know what we really are, but we are told that we are what we are not. This is a terrible type of brainwashing that is going on there, where we become stupid to the utmost, and become totally helpless. We become a tool of forces over which we can have absolutely no control. This is what happens to us in dream. We have forgotten what we really are, and are seeing something which is not there. Then we cling to it, run after it, believe in its reality and then cry for it, and get involved in it as if that is the only reality. So there is a tremendous *vikshepa* or projection, a violent *rajasic* activity taking place—a tempestuous wind that blows in a wrong direction as a consequence of the dark clouds covering the light of knowledge. Thus *avidya*, or ignorance, which is the obscuration of the knowledge of our true nature, at the same time produces a counter-effect that is deleterious to the knowledge of our own being—the perception of a wrong externality, as happens in dream.

We know how fantastically and frantically we run about in dream for the purpose of fulfilment of the desires manifest in the dream mind and the avoidance of the pain that is also manifest there. The joys and sorrows, the loves and hatreds of the dream world become so real that the experiencing unit there gets involved in it, gets submerged into it and becomes one with it, which is the direct effect of the forgetfulness of what one really is in waking. This is exactly what has happened in the waking condition also. This so-called waking consciousness is similar to the dream condition as far as its structure and mode of operation is concerned. This external activity of the mind in waking life, this engagement of the mind in the objects of sense and this pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain in life are the consequences of the obscuration of the knowledge of what we really are. That is *avidya*.

Avidyā kṣetram uttareṣāṁ prasupta tanu vicchinna udārāṇām (II.4). This *sutra* tells us that the obliteration of the knowledge of our essential nature, which is *avidya*, produces a false condition of individuality, *asmīta*, which rushes forward outwardly for the purpose of contact with other individuals—animate or inanimate. This is

