Pandit Rajmani Tigunait's Commentaries on Sutras 2:1 & 2:2
from *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*

SUTRA 2:1

तपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः ॥१॥

tapaḥsvādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni kriyāyogaḥ || 1 ||

Yoga in action is composed of austerity, self-study, and trustful surrender to Ishvara.

Prakriti, primordial nature, is infinitely rich. She is the apex of beauty, joy, and creativity—the ground and source of everything that exists. Prakriti is the culmination of intelligence and ingenuity. Every part of us—body, mind, breath, thought, speech, and action—is infused with the infinite beauty, joy, and creativity of primordial nature. We are the ultimate expression of her intrinsic richness. We are what she is—nothing more and nothing less. In all our endeavors, both conscious and unconscious, we are striving to experience this richness.

As we saw in The Secret of the Yoga Sutra: Samadhi Pada, human beings are the finest aspect of creation. Our body and mind serve as a gateway to the boundless beauty, joy, and intelligence that is in us and is us. Yoga is the method we use to discover our inherent wealth, a subject expounded on in detail in the first chapter of the Yoga Sutra. There, the core of yoga sadhana is *samadhi,* the sublime state of mental purity and stillness.

Samadhi is the epitome of fulfillment and freedom. We reach it through *abhyasa* and *vairagya.* Abhyasa, normally translated as "practice," requires us to employ our mind to flow peacefully inward for a prolonged period without interruption and with reverence. Vairagya, normally translated as "non-attachment," requires us to disassociate our mind from afflicting thoughts. The combined forces of abhyasa and vairagya lead us through different stages of samadhi to a state of (vishoka), the self-luminous joy that is our core being (YS 1:36).

Vishoka manifests when we apply the techniques of abhyasa and vairagya by meditating on the lotus of our heart. This is a subtle process, one that requires a laser-focused mind. We cultivate this highly focused mind by concentrating on extraordinary sensory objects, which, according to Patanjali, are locked in different niches of our body (YS 1:35). Becoming aware of these extraordinary sensory objects is a great accomplishment. Concentrating and meditating on them requires mastering the art of entering the deeper dimensions of our body and sense organs and capturing sensory experiences from within. This is easy for an accomplished yogi, but for most of us it appears to be so far out of reach that it almost seems like a fantasy.

The techniques of yoga Patanjali described in the first chapter of the Yoga Sutra, "Samadhi Pada," are meant for those who have a reasonably one-pointed mind. Such

seekers are largely free from disturbing, stupefying, and distracting mental tendencies. They understand they must employ their physical, mental, and spiritual resources to discover their pristine being and become established in it. Comparatively speaking, they are accomplished yogis in search of the tools and means to further accelerate their quest—tools Patanjali provides in "Samadhi Pada."

The second chapter of the Yoga Sutra, "Sadhana Pada," begins with the recognition that we have lost much of the innate wisdom of our body and the immense power of our mind—they no longer exude the wisdom and power granted us by nature. We rarely experience the grounding quality of the earth or the freedom of movement inherent in the air. We are more often tired and depleted than vibrant and energetic. At the mental level, we are more prone to doubt, fear, anger, grief, and feelings of powerlessness than we are to clarity, self-confidence, fortitude, happiness, and self-trust. But despite these physical and mental limitations, we are aspiring yogis—we are trying to find life's purpose. The system of yoga practice described here in the second chapter is beneficial for aspiring and accomplished yogis alike. Patanjali calls this system kriya yoga.

Kriya yoga is a significant term. Kriya means "ability to act, ability to move." Kriya is the dynamic power of action, which moves by its own intrinsic virtue and sets inert matter in motion. This word is more easily understood when juxtaposed with the word karma. Although both kriya and karma can be translated as "action," there is a vast difference between them. Both are derived from the verb root kri (dukṛṅ in the Paninian system), which means "to do." Kriya refers to an action in process as well as to the dynamic force propelling the action. Karma refers to a completed action. Unless a fresh wave of action is exerted on karma, it remains unchanged. Karma is an unchanging field of completed action waiting to be harvested by the performer of the action, while kriya is ever-moving, ever-expanding energy. Kriya yoga is yoga in action, not the yoga of action, and should not be confused with karma yoga.

According to the masters of Sri Vidya, kriya shakti, the power of action, is the core of yoga. In the Sri Vidya tradition, the absolute divinity is described as Tripura, the one who pervades, permeates, and transcends the reality corresponding to the states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. She is composed of three intrinsic attributes: iccha shakti, the power of will; jnana shakti, the power of knowledge; and kriya shakti, the power of action. Will and knowledge exert their force only when animated by the power of action. The power of action shakes off the inertia blanketing our soul. It awakens our dormant forces of will and knowledge and infuses us with self-trust and self-confidence. In the light of this active will and knowledge we are able to see ourselves, discover our own strength, and awaken and deploy our dormant forces. Kriya shakti, our intrinsic power of action, is the hallmark of yoga. In the fifty-five sutras of this chapter, Patanjali describes the nature of kriya shakti and provides the methodology for acquiring it.

Every human is an island of excellence. On the material plane, the human body and mind are the crown of creation. To be born as a human is the finest gift and the greatest opportunity. The power inherent in our body and mind is immense. Nature has provided the tools and means we need to discover this immensity and to find the fulfillment and freedom we are seeking. No achievement is greater than discovering what our body and

mind hold, and no loss greater than losing our body and mind without discovering the wealth hidden in them. Our unbridled desire to live a long time (for eternity, we hope) is clear evidence that deep within we know the value of a human birth. We know our body and mind are the repository of priceless gifts and we have been given the tools and means to discover those gifts. Yoga is the means, but it is effective only when it is put into action.

The force that infuses our practice with vibrancy is kriya shakti, which is another term for yoga shakti. Without this shakti, our practice is lifeless. Kriya yoga is the practice that empowers us to acquire this shakti. Thus kriya yoga is shakti sadhana, a fact Patanjali presents in 4:34, his concluding sutra. Kriya yoga awakens the powers lying dormant in our body and mind.

In sutras 2:43–45 and sutras 3:45–48, Patanjali asserts that a methodical practice of kriya yoga enables us to acquire kaya siddhi, mastery over the powers inherent in our body, and indriya siddhi, mastery over the powers inherent in our mind and senses. With this mastery, we reclaim our pristine, powerful body and mind, and so are able to identify obstacles and conquer even those that appear insurmountable. With this kind of body and mind we have the ability to practice what is described in sutras 1:33–36; experience vishoka, the intrinsic joy unstained by even the subtlest trace of sorrow; and become established in jyotishmati, the inner luminosity that is our very core.

The forces that bring yoga to fruition are tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana. These three forces are the core of yoga. As we examine the nature of each one, it will become clear why Patanjali gives them so much importance.

The standard translation of tapas is "austerity," which has a religious connotation. In most religions, austerity is the hallmark of piety. The practice of austerity is associated with dietary restrictions and disciplines that cause discomfort, such as prolonged fasting; subsisting on a diet excluding grain, dairy, salt, and fried food; taking cold baths; staying awake all night; lying on a bed of nails; and refusing to protect oneself from the elements. Patanjali's system of yoga has no room for such austerities, as we will see when he addresses tapas again in sutras 2:32 and 2:43.

The literal meaning of tapas is "heat, radiant fire." Practice that ignites our inner fire, brings out our inner radiance, and makes us vibrant and energetic is tapas. Practice that awakens us from our deep-seated slumber and infuses our mind with the radiance we had before we began our journey into this world is tapas. Practice that enables us to recapture the joy and spontaneity of childhood and the enthusiasm and stamina of youth is tapas. Practice that fills us with vitality and with the enthusiasm and courage to discover the unknown spheres of life is tapas.

To understand why tapas is so powerful, we need to understand how we have drained the inherent power and wisdom from our body and mind. We begin our journey to this world with a clear purpose: lasting fulfillment and ultimate freedom. Before entering the world we had a glimpse of the lord of life, the knower of all the tendencies and subtle impressions stored in our mind (YS 4:18). We experienced his unconditional love and the thrilling realization that he has always been with us. But as soon as we enter the world, we are sucked back into the mental conditions that enveloped our consciousness when we were dying. Old habits formed in previous lives; the powerful urges of fear, hunger, sleep,

and self-preservation; the desire to possess and consume; an unwillingness to let go; inferiority and superiority complexes; feelings of incompetence and powerlessness; mistrust in our own judgment; and reliance on the opinions of others all return in full force. With little awareness of what we are doing, we fall back into our prior mental conditioning.

As we grow up, the reality created by this mental conditioning strengthens until it veils our true identity—our pure and pristine self. As a result, our intuition and intelligence are compromised. The mind becomes dull and dense and the body's innate wisdom declines. We become highly susceptible to the conditions imposed by our surroundings and live without giving much thought to what is right and wrong, good and bad, healthy and unhealthy. In other words, our pure and pristine being has been subdued by the world of our mental conditioning. We have lost a substantial part of our perceptive and discerning mind: we confuse sloth with comfort, possession with prestige, consumption with enjoyment, and indulgence with fulfillment. In a climate pervaded by carelessness, we search for freedom.

As the grip of carelessness tightens, we lose sight of the reality regarding ourselves and our inherent power and wisdom. Our senses grab sensory objects indiscriminately. Our perception of pleasure and nourishment becomes distorted. Our tastes and interests are no longer guided by our innate wisdom—we adopt a lifestyle without weighing its merits and demerits. Our sleep and eating habits and our feelings of pleasure and pain are no longer compatible with our inner drive for happiness and nourishment. We have become disconnected from ourselves—our body and mind are no longer in full view of our consciousness. Our knowledge of our body and mind shrinks until we know very little about ourselves. We stumble through life on autopilot. We eat, drink, and sleep. We engage in sensory pleasures. We labor to meet the demands of our body and the world around us. The result? We employ our body and mind under pressure from external forces without clearly understanding the real motives behind our actions. Because this causes enormous wear and tear on both body and mind, healing and nourishing ourselves becomes more important than using our body and mind to find lasting fulfillment and ultimate freedom.

Most of us fail to recognize fatigue and exhaustion as serious conditions with the potential to cripple our innate abilities: our power of discernment, memory, and will; the brain's capacity to regulate our internal organs; and the heart's ability to hear and heed the voice of our soul. We realize we have a problem only when our body is impaired and our mental abilities have declined. Even then we refuse to recognize that these alarming conditions have a deeper cause and look for a quick fix instead. As soon as the condition seems to have abated, we resume our old habits. This has led us to develop a complex disease-management industry, while ignoring the need to acquire a vibrant body and a self-luminous, joyful mind. As a solution to this seemingly intractable problem, Patanjali advises us to embrace tapas.

In practice, tapas means refraining from unwholesome activities and adopting a lifestyle that supports the practice of yoga. The life of a yogi is one of purpose, the first and foremost of which is keeping our most highly prized wealth—our body, mind, and

senses—fully protected. Carelessness, sloth, inertia, and unhealthy eating habits are our greatest enemies. These enemies are sneaky—they cast a veil of illusion over our mind, convincing us that they are our best friends. As a result, we run after habits that harm our body, mind, and senses. Withstanding the allure of such habits is tapas.

Because in the beginning, acting against the dictates of these habits seems like torture, tapas is commonly described as austerity. Embracing austerity without right understanding is painful. We embrace tapas joyfully only when we are able to see the immense rewards it brings.

To help us understand the crucial role of tapas in both our daily life and our spiritual quest, Patanjali introduces svadhyaya.

Svadhyaya is a composite of sva and adhyaya. Sva means "one's own." More precisely, as Patanjali and Vyasa explain in sutra 2:23, sva means "the power of one's self; the power of the objective world that we try to own, embrace, and consume." Adhyaya means "study, contemplate, examine." Thus svadhyaya means "to study, examine, and reflect on ourselves, our internal states, the objects of our senses, and the current condition of our body and mind, as well as on the thoughts, feelings, and opinions that are so dear to us." For the sake of simplicity, we can translate svadhyaya as "self-study." Self-study requires that we make an inventory of our physical and mental resources and assess the vitality of our body and the rate at which we are expending it. It also requires that we remain vigilant and avoid dissipating the power of our mind with unwholesome activities.

The job of the senses is to collect experiences and present them to the mind, but it is the mind's job to use those experiences to find lasting fulfillment and ultimate freedom. In an attempt to embrace and assimilate sensory pleasures, we must be careful not to drain the vitality of our body, damage our senses, and dissipate our mental energy. To this end, we must employ viveka shakti, the power of discernment, to help us differentiate pleasure from indulgence. From a practical standpoint then, svadhyaya is the process of employing the power of discernment and maintaining a constant awareness of who we are, what we are trying to become, and how the objective world can help us accomplish our goal.

According to Vyasa, we put the principle of self-study into practice by undertaking a well-defined course of japa, repetition of sacred sounds and mantras. As described in sutras 1:27 and 1:28, japa enables our mind to travel toward the center of consciousness without being distracted by the charms and temptations of the world. With japa we reach the self-luminous, peaceful space within, but we also become aware of the dark place from where our unwanted agitating thoughts arise. As the power of mantra japa quiets our mind, we are able to see our subtle desires, cravings, and ambitions more vividly. We become aware of the unknown parts of ourselves, including those that are painful and frightening. This provides an opportunity to identify what we must renounce in order to advance in our quest—what we must let go of in order to acquire something new and auspicious.

This is how japa turns into self-study. Our process of selfexamination becomes precise. We no longer flounder around with abstract philosophical ideas, such as whether or not our soul is in bondage, whether God is our savior, or whether the objective world is

real or illusory. We are acutely aware of the roaming tendencies of our mind and are convinced we must attain freedom from them. We also know which tendencies are most problematic. In the climate of self-examination created by mantra japa we are able to set our priorities. We employ our power of discernment, reflect on the trivial nature of our mental distractions, and remind ourselves that life is too precious to allow it to be consumed by the demands of the world.

The study of scripture is another way of putting the principle of self-study into practice. In ancient India, a text that embodied knowledge capable of guiding and leading us to the highest goal of life was regarded as shastra, scripture. The Vedas and the Upanishads were prime examples. However, with the passage of time, numerous other texts, including those expounding on mundane subjects like medicine, ethics, politics, rituals, astrology, and philosophy, began to be treated as scriptures, as did epics about kings and saints. Elaborating on the concept of svadhyaya, Vyasa emphasizes that only those texts that embody indisputable knowledge showing us the path to ultimate freedom are an essential component of self-study. In other words, svadhyaya entails the study of spiritual texts that are authentic, contain experiential knowledge, and are infused with the energy to guide us on the path of inner freedom.

Japa and the study of scripture are complementary practices. For example, during the tranquil moments of absorption in japa, a realization may dawn about the need to change our direction in life. We are thrilled, for we know this change will take us to the highest goal, but we are also frightened, for we know complying with it will require walking away from the cherished world of our desires and ambitions. In such situations, guidance from scriptures grounded in experiential knowledge is extremely helpful. The term for this is shastra kripa, grace of scripture. The tradition considers the grace of the scriptures as important as Ishvara kripa, grace of God, and atma kripa, grace of oneself, which manifests in the form of self-effort.

The third principle that brings our yoga practice to fruition is Ishvara pranidhana, trustful surrender to God. In "Samadhi Pada," Patanjali introduced trustful surrender as a means to reach samadhi (YS 1:23–29). There he described God as our inner guide, protector, provider, and eternal companion. As soon as we open ourselves to her unconditional love and guidance, the roaming tendencies of our mind subside and we reach the highest level of self-realization, which dawns in samadhi. Opening ourselves to her loving grace is trustful surrender, and japa is the means (YS 1:27–28). In "Samadhi Pada," Patanjali makes it clear that surrender to God is a complete path, and he makes this point again in "Sadhana Pada": "From trustful surrender comes samadhi siddhi" (YS 2:45). But here, in sutra 2:1, he introduces trustful surrender as one of the three essential forces that breathe life into our yoga sadhana and ensure that we reach perfection, even though at the outset we do not have a clear, tranquil, one-pointed, spiritually inclined, and discerning mind.

Here Patanjali is not treating Ishvara pranidhana as an independent path of sadhana but rather as a force which, coupled with tapas and svadhyaya, brings our yoga sadhana to fruition. At a practical level, tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana are inseparable—they breathe life into each other, and together they breathe life into our

sadhana. These three forces are essential to all the practices Patanjali introduces throughout the Yoga Sutra. But for now we will focus on the application of Ishvara pranidhana in the context of kriya yoga.

As Vyasa explains, offering all our activities into the highest guru (sarva kriyanam parama-gurau arpanam) and renouncing the fruits of those activities (tat-phala-sanyaso va) are Ishvara pranidhana. To understand what Vyasa means by this statement, we need to analyze the words he uses. In the first part of the statement, "offering all our activities into the highest guru," he uses kriya instead of karma. He also uses the locative case instead of the accusative case for the term parama-guru, highest guru. Furthermore, Vyasa is elaborating on Ishvara pranidhana while using the word parama-guru instead of Ishvara. A careful analysis of these words will help us arrive at an understanding of Ishvara pranidhana.

The literal meaning of kriya is "verb." Every verb is representative of a distinct process or function and no process or function reaches fruition without a doer. The word for "doer" is karta. Panini, the predecessor of Patanjali, defines karta as svatantrah karta: "in regard to performing an action, the one who is selfgoverned (svatantra) is the doer."

In the light of this definition, because our knowledge and capacities are limited, we are not the doer of our actions. The source of our inspiration, motivation, and decisions is too subtle to comprehend. We have little understanding of our own biological functions and no understanding of the subtler forces and causes that trigger a cascade of changes in our mind and consciousness. Our decisions are strongly influenced by emotional impulses. Most of our actions do not have their source in reason, yet we claim to be both the doer and the sole proprietor of those actions. Our problems begin when we identify ourselves as the doer of our actions, forgetting that there is a self-governed intelligent force that has endowed us with the ability to perform actions. We forget that both the fruits of actions and the dynamic that propels the phenomenon we perceive as an action are entirely dependent on higher intelligence. This intelligence is Ishvara (Bhagavad Gita 18:61).

An example may be helpful. Take two sentences: Hercules lifts the earth. Einstein solves the mystery of the universe. At a mundane level, Hercules and Einstein are karta, the doers, for without them the earth would not have been lifted or the mystery of the universe solved. At another level, however, it is childish to credit Hercules with lifting the earth and Einstein with solving an impenetrable mystery. There is a higher intelligence—the self-governing force—and when that intelligence manifests, we emerge as Hercules and Einstein. Our mind and senses are the instruments of this intelligent force. In other words, although we are instrumental in the performance of an action, the real performer is higher intelligence. Identifying ourselves as the doer of our actions is pure ignorance and leads to bondage. Only when we understand that the higher intelligence in us is the actual doer are we able to surrender the fruits of our actions. Disidentification with our actions empowers us with the wisdom and courage to surrender the fruits of our actions to the real doer.

Vyasa's use of parama-guru, the highest teacher, instead of Ishvara, is highly significant. He does not want the conceptof God—which has become the exclusive domain of theology and is often described in the language of mythology—to contaminate

the yogic understanding of higher reality. As we have seen in sutras 1:23–29, Ishvara is utterly different from the conceptof God in the various religious traditions. In yoga, God is not an entity separate from us and residing outside us. God is not a person but an ever-present guiding intelligence. It is a reality without a persona. To further emphasize this fact, Vyasa formulates his sentence to mean that Ishvara pranidhana is "offering all of our actions into parama-guru" instead of "to parama-guru." The way this sentence is constructed makes it clear that parama-guru, the highest teacher, is not an entity consisting of a discrete body to whom we hand over our actions and the fruits of our actions. It is purusha vishesha, the unique category of reality (YS 1:24–26), into which we offer our actions and their fruits.

This offering is accompanied by the understanding that we ourselves and the phenomenal world around us are guided by the ever-present inner intelligence. Everything that happens is happening at the will of this unfathomable force. It is a privilege to be instrumental in an action initiated and executed by this force. Therefore, according to Vyasa, Ishvara pranidhana means offering our sense of identification as the doer of our actions into the ever-present guiding intelligence.

Let us examine what happens when we do not acknowledge our instrumentality and instead cling to the belief that we are the doers of the actions we perform.

At this stage in our evolution, the capacity of our body has diminished and the clarity of our mind is compromised. For the most part, our actions are governed by our habits. Our desires, ambitions, and decisions are shaped by our likes and dislikes. Our understanding of good and bad, right and wrong, is stained by doubt, fear, anger, hatred, jealousy, and self-importance. In this mental environment, our actions are inevitably contaminated. Actions create impressions in the mind, further distorting our understanding. This is the law of karma. As this cycle continues, we become less and less aware of the reality pertaining to ourselves and our relationship with the objective world. If this cycle is not checked, we become the product of our own distorted understanding, which yogis call avidya. Karmic impressions are as real to the children of avidya as samadhi is to the yogis.

Karmic impressions—samskaras—are the building blocks of our mental world. They are hard to renounce. We have earned them by investing our most prized wealth, our sense of doership. Every action and its results carry the fingerprints of our doership. The impressions created by our actions retain the qualities and attributes of our actions. Karmic impressions form the content of our mind—they are firmly established in us. Our samskaras are our possessions; our bond with them is ancient and grows stronger every day. Our samskaras have molded us into what we have become today—they shape our reality. In short, they are us and we are them. Our bond with them is so strong that losing them feels like losing ourselves. That is why even though our karmic impressions are inevitably accompanied by fear and pain, letting go of them is difficult.

The dearer an object, the more we fear losing it. An object is dear because we have invested our most valued wealth—our sense of doership—in it. When we lose a child, a spouse, power, or money, we experience pain in proportion to our identification with ourselves as parents, soul mates, or magnates. We do not like pain, yet we do not know

how to let it go. This condition of helplessness forces us to find a justification for our pain. We try to hold someone or something—including God, karma, or destiny—responsible for our suffering. When the pain still does not go away, we become angry. Anger leads to confusion; confusion to delusion; and delusion to loss of memory, linear thinking, and the power of discernment. This accelerating cycle of pain further damages our mental world. Ishvara pranidhana, trustful surrender to God, reverses this cycle and helps us restore our pure and pristine mind.

When put into practice, Ishvara pranidhana is an amazing force. It demolishes the fundamental premise we use to justify our pain. It takes away our justification for crying and complaining. Ishvara pranidhana makes us aware that we have received far more than we have lost. Our reasons to be grateful for what divine providence has given to us supersede any reason for sorrow and grief. The more tightly we embrace the practice of Ishvara pranidhana, the more clearly we see how little we know about the source and nature of consciousness. This realization makes us wiser. It becomes easier for us to detach ourselves from painful thoughts and feelings without losing our sensitivity to conditions that are both real and significant on the material plane. Ishvara pranidhana enables us to operate on two levels simultaneously—spiritual and mundane. We are fully aware of the inner reality and respectful of the forces that dominate our worldly existence. We become citizens of both worlds and have the wisdom to obey and honor the laws of both. We are able to perform our actions skillfully, wisely, and lovingly, and our actions are no longer binding.

Patanjali places so much emphasis on tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana because they are the core of yoga. In combination, they enable us to reclaim the innate wisdom and power of our body and the self-luminous joy of our mind. A healthy body and a pure mind are essential to any practice.

By applying the principle of tapas as described in the yoga tradition—yatha-yogam (Vyasa onYS 2:32)—we detoxify our body, restore its natural balance, awaken its innate intelligence, and fill our limbs and organs with renewed vitality, strength, and energy.

This is what ayurvedic practitioners, tantric alchemists, and Sri Vidya adepts call kaya kalpa, total renewal. With tapas, we make the body a perfect conduit for our mind.

Svadhyaya helps us employ the resources of our body and mind for higher achievement. The principal component of svadhyaya is silently repeating sacred mantric sounds, thus training our mind to become quiet and flow inward. This inwardly flowing mind is further employed to examine our internal states and reflect on whether or not we are performing our actions purposefully.

Ishvara pranidhana is a guiding and nurturing force. While anchored in Ishvara pranidhana we are able to withstand and eventually conquer even our greatest fear—the fear of losing ourselves, our loved ones, and our most cherished possessions, our karmic impressions. Together, tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana are the force behind kriya, action, and without kriya there is no yoga.

How action-driven yoga helps us organize our mind, overcome resistance to change, cultivate a taste for higher good, rediscover our self-luminous, joyful mind, and become

fully established in our essential nature—the reality that is in us and is us—is the subject of the next sutra and those that follow.

SUTRA 2:2

समाधिभावनार्थः क्लेशतनूकरणार्थश्च ॥२॥

samādhibhāvanārthaḥ kleśatanūkaraṇārthaśca | | 2 | |

The objective of yoga is to induce samadhi and attenuate the afflictions.

In "Samadhi Pada," Patanjali defines yoga as mastery over the roaming tendencies of the mind (YS 1:2). Here he tells us that when put into practice, yoga leads to samadhi and attenuates the kleshas, the afflictions that are the subtlest cause of sorrow. Samadhi is a perfectly still, pristine state of mind. In samadhi we gain the direct experience of our essential nature and become aware of the fullness of our being. We are free from the mental conditioning of our mind—there are no boundaries around our consciousness. In this consummate state, we experience our oneness with the highest divinity, Ishvara. In samadhi, the purity of our mind is equal to the purity of Ishvara (YS 3:55). Reaching samadhi is a rare opportunity. It requires effort, and to be effective that effort must be methodical.

As we saw in "Samadhi Pada," there are various states of samadhi. They can be divided into two parts: higher and lower. Higher samadhi is the pinnacle of our quest, the state in which we experience our oneness with the highest divinity. Because no cognitions and notions pertaining to our individuality remain, this state of realization is called asamprajnata samadhi, samadhi without cognition. All cognitions—all fragments of awareness—have dissolved into pure consciousness (YS 1:18).

Lower samadhi has four distinct stages (YS 1:17). In the first stage, our mind is free from disturbances, stupefaction, and distractions, but still occupied by the gross form of the object of meditation. In the second stage, the mind rises above the gross form of the object and retains only the subtle form. In the third stage, the mind rises above both the gross and subtle forms of the meditative object and is absorbed in the joy induced by meditation itself. In the fourth stage, the mind has transcended both the gross and subtle forms of the object and is absorbed in the pure sense of I-am-ness.

The difference between the third and fourth stages is characterized by the meditative feeling that serves as a gateway to mental absorption. Both the third and fourth stages are extremely refined experiences of samadhi (YS 1:42–46). Beyond this lies the highest state of samadhi, where the yogi's awareness of the object of meditation, the process of meditation, and himself as a meditator have become indistinguishable. In this sublime state, all subtle impressions have been purified and absorbed into the infinitely vast and pristine mental field. All the causes of affliction have been attenuated; there is no possibility of any inner or outer unrest (YS 1:51). Between the lower stages of samadhi and the highest stage, Patanjali describes a transitional stage known as dharma megha samadhi (YS 1:47–50, 3:48–53, 4:30–32).

At the practical level, the lower and higher states of samadhi are a continuum. Higher samadhi is the destination of our inner quest, and lower samadhi is the process leading to that destination. Each of us has our own starting point, and we must proceed at our own pace. The starting point is determined by our physical and mental capacities, but the pace of the journey is determined by how easily we are able to overcome the obstacles we encounter.

In "Samadhi Pada," Patanjali delineates nine obstacles and five offshoots (YS 1:30–31) and provides a solution for overcoming them (YS 1:32). But that solution is available only to those who have already arrested the mind's roaming tendencies. It applies only to those who have risen above disturbed, stupefied, and distracted mental states and have cultivated a one-pointed, still, and peaceful mind. In "Samadhi Pada," Patanjali is addressing aspirants with an intense desire to reach samadhi—seekers who are endowed with faith, vigor, retentive power, stillness of mind, and intuitive wisdom (YS 1:20). Even when such seekers encounter obstacles, they are able to focus their mind on a single reality, Ishvara (YS 1:32).

But here, in "Sadhana Pada," Patanjali is offering those of us whose minds are not yet still and one-pointed a means of overcoming obstacles. It is for those whose willpower and determination are relatively weak and whose faith, vigor, retentive power, stillness of mind, and intuitive wisdom are compromised. The practice of yoga described in this chapter leads to samadhi by attenuating the kleshas, afflictions, that are the primary cause of the obstacles and the pain and sorrow they engender.

The most powerful form of misery is shoka, sorrow and grief infused with worry, fear, and a sense of powerlessness. By the time we reach this state of misery, we have damaged our rational mind. We are lost, empty, and overcome by hopelessness. This state of mind is sustained by our strong identification with worldly objects and relationships. We are convinced worldly objects and our relationship with them are real and we are incomplete without them; when they prove ephemeral, we are devastated. This sense of devastation contains the seeds of sorrow and grief. As this devastating experience repeats itself, the weight of shoka on our mind and heart becomes heavier. Yet we still continue to insist that the objects of the world and our relationship with them are real. Our unwillingness to examine the validity of this conviction is what yoga calls avidya, the ground of all afflictions. All forms of pain and sorrow have their source in this fundamental affliction and are sustained by it.

The ultimate remedy lies in understanding the dynamics of the afflictions and eliminating them once and for all. The next thirteen sutras elaborate on the nature of the afflictions, how they pulsate deep in our mind, and how this pulsation facilitates the relationship between cause and effect, thereby setting the stage for our past actions to bear fruit.