

PATAÑJALI'S
YOGA-SUTRA

What Is the Yoga Sutra About?

Recently, on the German question & answer platform GuteFrage.com, someone asked: “How do I find out what I’m looking for? I’m looking for something, but I don’t know what. Do you know how I can find out what I’m looking for? Not material, but spiritual.”

My answer: “Probably you are looking for your true Self and the reason why you are on earth. An answer to such questions can be found briefly in the Yoga Sutra of Patañjali. It contains 195 short sentences regarding the basic questions of human existence:

What does our mind do?

Why do we suffer?

How do we eliminate suffering?

What is ignorance?

How do we acquire knowledge?

How do we find our personal calling?

How can we live happily and be fulfilled?

The answer from yoga, in one sentence: We are only truly happy and fulfilled when we have found our Self and when our individual soul merges again with its origin, *Atma*, the Cosmic Self. This is achieved through meditation by calming the mind and experiencing *Samadhi*.”

This reading is a great enrichment for newcomers as well as for “veteran” yogis of all colors and schools. One senses that there is no theorising here, but that the author draws from decades of spiritual practice and experience.

– Dr. Jens Petersen

To translate the sutras as literally as possible and then to give personal experiences of them seem to me much more honest and authentic than any theoretical interpretation!

– Lothar Hahn, MD

Recommended for all those seeking orientation in their lives or further clarity on their yoga practice, enriched by the author’s authentic accounts of his experiences – very inspiring.

– Michael Floymayr

PATAÑJALI'S YOGA-SUTRA

*Yogic Power through
Samadhi & Sidhis*

Translated from Sanskrit in the Light of
Maharishi's Vedic Science and Technology
and Commented along with Experience Reports
by Jan Müller, BSCI (MERU), MTHP

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*In happiness
and silent bliss
we feel the glow of life.
But happiness
is fleeting bliss,
it shows up and it hides.*

*In happiness
and silent bliss
the soul begins to thrive,
returning home
back to the Self,
where all the bliss resides.*

*Ein Augenblick
voll stillem Glück –
das kostbarste im Leben.
Der Augenblick
kehrt nie zurück,
nur das, was er bewirkt.*

*Ein Augenblick
voll stillem Glück
kann uns das Höchste geben,
führt leise uns
zum Selbst zurück,
wo alles Glück sich birgt.*¹*

Dedication

In deep gratitude to the Vedic Tradition of Masters, who have handed down the knowledge of integrated life to the present day, and to my master Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, whom I met at the very moment when I was in danger of sliding down an undesirable “slippery slope”. My encounter with him changed my life’s course for good and I was able to gain deeper insights and experiences on my Yogic path.

On September 16, 2017, the founder of the American Institute of Vedic Studies, Vedacharya Dr David Frawley, wrote in the weekly magazine INDIA TODAY:

“Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was probably the most influential yoga guru from India over the past 50 years, with millions of followers in every part of the world. His meditation-based teachings had an enormous impact, including on some of the best educated, most affluent and articulate minds from the East and West.

His influence in India was extensive, where he redefined the image of the guru and the corpus of knowledge that the guru was expected to represent. He became a cult figure in the West, the media face of the yogi and meditation master. Despite the adulation he received, he did not encourage a personality cult, emphasizing ‘higher knowledge’, which is impersonal in nature. He was able to articulate the ancient traditions of Vedic and yogic knowledge for the modern mind. [...]

He took the teachings of the old pundits of India, looked down in their own country as museum pieces from another era, and via skillful repackaging, gained them respect as guides to universal consciousness, the cutting edge of science and medicine and the future evolution of humanity.”

*When I'm sitting
all al-one,
I am settling
flesh and bone,
I transcend,
till all is gone,
and I melt
to the
All-One.*

*Wenn ich so
alleine bin,
setz ich froh
die Beine hin,
tauche ein
in Reines Sein,
schmelze hin
und bin
All-Ein.*¹*

prathamah samādhi-pādaḥ ॥

First Step: *Samadhi* – Restful Alertness



This first step (*Pada*) deals with the oldest and most original part of yoga: *Samadhi*, the effortless approach to restful alertness until transcendental consciousness is gained. Yoga is defined as settling thought waves, thereby bringing the mind to its ground state, where we rest within ourselves and our brain waves are coherent. Patañjali defines the functional modalities of the mind and gives the methods by which we can come to rest and find ourselves. He lists the different levels of *samadhi* that we experience in meditation as we go beyond superficial thinking and dive into finer layers of the mind. The reasons why someone stops meditating and the distractions during meditation are also described. On pages 15 and 16 you can see the 51 short Sanskrit Sutras of this Pada in the original *Devanagari* script.²

prathamah – first, earliest, oldest, most original, most excellent; *pra-* before, ahead, forward; *tha* protect, preserve; *atha* then, from here on, now; *ma* time, happiness; *pra+atha+ma* “before the now time” or “forward from here on happiness”.

samādhi – *Samadhi*, arranging, bringing together, harmonizing, bringing into agreement, adjusting, fine-tuning; contemplative meditation, restful alertness, transcendental consciousness.

The richness of meaning of the word *Samadhi* can – as usual in Sanskrit – be deduced from its individual parts:

sam – with, together, connected;

sama – even, similar, constant, unchanged; peace;

ā – up to; exclamation of something contemplative;

ādhi – thought;

ādhi – thinking, meditating, wishing, longing, caring;

adhi – understand, know, remember, straighten the mind, study, teach;

adhi – over, above;

dhi – satiate, delight; hold, carry;

dhī – intelligence;

sama+dhī – even intelligence;

sama+dhi – even delight, equally carry;

sama+dhi – enjoy peace;

sama+dhi – equally satisfying;

sama+ā+dhī – connected with – ah! – intelligence;

sama+ādhi – even thinking;

sama+ādhi – even thought;

sama+adhi – knowing unchanged;

sama+adhi – equally above.

pādaḥ – foot, step, quarter, part.

पातञ्जलयोगसूत्रपाठः । प्रथमः समाधिपादः ।

अथ योगानुशासनम् ॥ १ ॥
योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २ ॥
तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम् ॥ ३ ॥
वृत्तिसारूप्यमितरत्र ॥ ४ ॥
वृत्तयः पञ्चतय्यः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः ॥ ५ ॥
प्रमाणविपर्ययविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः ॥ ६ ॥
प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमाः प्रमाणानि ॥ ७ ॥
विपर्ययो मिथ्याज्ञानमतद्रूपप्रतिष्ठम् ॥ ८ ॥
शब्दज्ञानानुपाती वस्तुशून्यो विकल्पः ॥ ९ ॥
अभावप्रत्ययालम्बना वृत्तिर्निद्रा ॥ १० ॥
अनुभूतविषयासंप्रमोषः स्मृतिः ॥ ११ ॥
अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः ॥ १२ ॥
तत्र स्थितौ यत्नोऽभ्यासः ॥ १३ ॥
स तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितो दृढभूमिः ॥ १४ ॥
दृष्टानुश्रविकविषयवितृष्णस्य वशीकारसंज्ञा वैराग्यम् ॥ १५ ॥
तत्परं पुरुषख्यातेर्गुणवैतृष्यम् ॥ १६ ॥
वितर्कविचारानन्दास्मितारूपानुगमात् संप्रज्ञातः ॥ १७ ॥
विरामप्रत्ययाभ्यासपूर्वः संस्कारशेषोऽन्यः ॥ १८ ॥
भवप्रत्ययो विदेहप्रकृतिलयानाम् ॥ १९ ॥
श्रद्धावीर्यस्मृतिसमाधिप्रज्ञापूर्वक इतरेषाम् ॥ २० ॥
तीव्रसंवेगानामासन्नः ॥ २१ ॥
मृदुमध्याधिमात्रत्वात्ततोऽपि विशेषः ॥ २२ ॥
ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥ २३ ॥
क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः ॥ २४ ॥
तत्र निरतिशयं सर्वज्ञबीजम् ॥ २५ ॥
स पूर्वेषामपि गुरुः कालेनानवच्छेदात् ॥ २६ ॥

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः ॥ २७ ॥
 तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम् ॥ २८ ॥
 ततः प्रत्यक्केतनाधिगमोऽप्यन्तरायाभावश्च ॥ २९ ॥
 व्याधिस्त्यानसंशयप्रमादालस्याविरतिभ्रान्तिदर्शना
 लब्धभूमिकत्वानवस्थितत्वानि चित्तविद्योपास्तेऽन्तरायाः ॥ ३० ॥
 दुःखदौर्मनस्याङ्गमेजयत्वश्वासप्रश्वासा विद्योपसहभुवः ॥ ३१ ॥
 तत्प्रतिषेधार्थमैकतत्त्वाभ्यासः ॥ ३२ ॥
 मैत्रीकरुणामुदितोपेक्षाणां सुखदुःखपुण्यापुण्यविषयाणां
 भावनातश्चित्तप्रसादनम् ॥ ३३ ॥
 प्रच्छर्दनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य ॥ ३४ ॥
 विषयवती वा प्रवृत्तिरुत्पन्ना मनसः स्थितिनिबन्धनी ॥ ३५ ॥
 विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती ॥ ३६ ॥
 वीतरागविषयं वा चित्तम् ॥ ३७ ॥
 स्वप्ननिद्राज्ञानालम्बनं वा ॥ ३८ ॥
 यथाभिमतध्यानाद्वा ॥ ३९ ॥
 परमाणुपरममहत्त्वान्तोऽस्य वशीकारः ॥ ४० ॥
 क्षीणवृत्तेरभिजातस्येव मणोर्ग्रहीतृग्रहणग्राह्येषु तत्स्थितदञ्जनतासमापत्तिः ॥ ४१ ॥
 तत्र शब्दार्थज्ञानविकल्पैः संकीर्णां सवितर्कां समापत्तिः ॥ ४२ ॥
 स्मृतिपरिशुद्धौ स्वरूपशून्येवार्थमात्रनिर्भासा निर्वितर्का ॥ ४३ ॥
 एतयैव सविचारा निर्विचारा च सूक्ष्मविषया व्याख्याता ॥ ४४ ॥
 सूक्ष्मविषयत्वं चालिङ्गपर्यवसानम् ॥ ४५ ॥
 ता एव सबीजः समाधिः ॥ ४६ ॥
 निर्विचारवैशारद्येऽध्यात्मप्रसादः ॥ ४७ ॥
 ऋतंभरा तत्र प्रज्ञा ॥ ४८ ॥
 श्रुतानुमानप्रज्ञाभ्यामन्यविषया विशेषार्थत्वात् ॥ ४९ ॥
 तज्जः संस्कारोऽन्यसंस्कारप्रतिबन्धी ॥ ५० ॥
 तस्यापि निरोधे सर्वनिरोधान्निर्बीजः समाधिः ॥ ५१ ॥
 इति पतञ्जलिविरचिते योगसूत्रे प्रथमः समाधिपादः ।

|| 1.1 ||
atha yogānuśāsanam ||
Now *yoga* instruction.

“Now, let’s begin!”

Something new begins! Something we’ve been awaiting for a long time, something we’ve been looking forward to. A secret date. An exciting adventure with an uncertain outcome. A journey into the unknown ... Yes: Even one’s own mind can be unknown terrain, although we have been using it since birth. Or perhaps even before that? In the womb? In earlier lives? Why are we here on earth? Isn’t the search for our innermost being the greatest adventure of all? Especially when the path is completely unknown.

atha – now, from here on, then.

yoga – *yoga*, yoke, connection, union, self-absorption; bonding, merging; oneness of the individual with the cosmic self.

anuśāsanam – instruction, explanation; *anu-* under, near, along, with, after; *sās* instruct, teach, dominate; *anu-sās* instruct, show the way; praise, laud; *sāsanam* teaching, instruction, correction; decree, enactment; written work, book.

The word “*Atha* – Now” indicates the beginning of the path of *yoga*. This can happen at any time in life. Some may begin after a long search at the end of life, others after a crisis, shortly after puberty, in childhood or at the impulse that initiates the next incarnation. Imagine two souls floating in the sky above the Ore Mountains on the starry New Year’s eve of 1945. One soul – let us call it *Atha* – discusses a new life on earth with its mentor.

New Year’s Night 1945: „*Atha!*“

“*Atha!*” says the mentor.

“What’s up?” *Atha* asks.

“Are you ready?”

“For what?”

“For your next life on earth. Look!”

He waves his arm and we see a bird's eye view of a deeply snow-covered wooden house on a mountain slope, which we approach silently. The light is on in the bedroom. In the double bed lies a couple.

"Your parents", says the mentor. "Do you like them?"

Atha looks around the bedroom. On the bedside table are two half-full red wine glasses and a bottle of Bordeaux. On the back of a chair we see a German major's uniform hanging. Atha winces.

"A German major? For Christ's sake!"

"But he is not a Nazi. He has never fought, is a philosopher, poet, musician, lawyer, and military purchaser. He buys luxury goods in France for the Wehrmacht. He also practises yoga. You have known him before. His wife was his secretary as a lawyer."

Atha looks in the man's face. He is about 40 and a little drunk. "Was I his father before?"

The mentor nods.

"And this house, where is it?"

"Ore Mountains, Saxony, south of Dresden."

"In Germany? As a Jew? Never! They'll kill me again!"

"As the son of a German major, you would no longer be a Jew. Didn't you want to write books in the language of Goethe, Busch and Rilke?"

"Yes. But my life was cut short. Germany is at war with the whole world. This time I want to live in peace. Preferably in Palestine."

"Peace in Palestine? Don't fool yourself! By the time you will be born, Germany will be much more peaceful than Palestine."

With mixed feelings Atha looks at the couple who are to become his parents. Then the scene disappears, and the mentor asks, "Do you know what your name means?"

"In Hebrew, that is the masculine form for you."

"And the deeper meaning?"

"Atha is spelled with *Alef*, *Tav* and *He*. Alef, the beginning of the *Alef-Beth*, embodies the beginning, the One, the unity of God, the harmony of the world soul."

"And next?"

"*Tav*, the end of the *Alef-Beth*, represents the truth."

"Why?" the mentor asks.

“Because the word *Emet* for truth ends in *Tav*.”

“Why did the compilers of the Kabbalah choose the last letter of *Emet* instead of the first?” the mentor asks.

“Because the truth often seems unattractive at first. Only at the end do we realize that it was the only way. From *Alef* to *Tav* means from beginning to end.”

“And next?”

“The *He* represents the conversion, the return to one’s own Self, through which man achieves perfection in thinking, speaking and acting.”

“Good,” says the mentor. “You know about the Kabbalah. But what about the Sanskrit word *Atha*? This is the first word of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sutra*. In Sanskrit, word meaning can be derived from pronunciation, or the natural flow of breath through lips, teeth, tongue, mouth and throat.”

“Oh, I see.” *Atha* closes his eyes and lets the sound “*Atha*” melt on his tongue. “At the *A*, the mouth is fully open and the sound flows freely,” he continues. “So the journey goes from *A* to *A*, from fullness to fullness. But in between, the breath is stopped by *Th*, where the tongue separates the front part of the mouth from the back. As lips and teeth are visible from the outside, they symbolise the outside world. On the other hand, the inner oral cavity is hidden. So notionally, the *Th* separates the individual soul from its inner origin, the universal Soul. That original separation started the cycle of rebirths, and the journey that began at *A*, finally ends up at *A*, at fullness again.”

“Good,” says the mentor. “Already in the first word of *Yoga Sutra* you recognize the meaning of *Yoga*: how the soul finds its way back to its origin. With these parents, you can take the next step on the journey. So do you want these parents or not?”

The above discussion might have occurred in heaven on the night of my conception as a preliminary conversation for my present incarnation, in which my parents called me “*Jan*”.

The Sanskrit word “*Atha* – Now”, is the dividing point between our previous development and everything that is still waiting to be experienced, mastered and digested. Everything we have learned and experienced so far has led us to read the *Yoga Sutra* right now.

As we can see, Patañjali keeps it short, using concise *sutras*, which can easily be memorised and passed on orally from generation to generation. The entire Yoga Sutra can be recited in less than half an hour. It is an aide mémoire for oral presentation, without explanations. After all, the sutras are meant to stimulate personal reflection, so that everyone can digest the subject of yoga for themselves. That is why I have maintained the concise and sometimes ambiguous telegraphic style. Patanjali's frugal style is the reason why the *Yoga Sutra* has been translated and commented on again and again. There is no end to these reinterpretations. Each author, based on his own experiences, interprets the keywords differently. I can't do otherwise. That is why I restrict myself to the literal translation as far as possible, and I illustrate the meaning that I understood from the sutras by describing my own experiences. Since Sanskrit is an ancient language that has evolved over thousands of years, many words have a much wider range of meaning than the translation can show. Therefore in the word meaning list you will find multiple translations. You will also find an analysis of the Sanskrit word's constituent parts which is usual in Sanskrit. From this you can derive your own meaning of the sutras, which fits best for you at the moment.

The whole manual contains only 195 *sutras*, literally "threads" or "guides". *Sutra* is also the thread that sews together and connects two parts: the realm of the Absolute, which we experience through *Samadhi*, and the realm of the Relative with the *Sidhis* that can sweeten our daily lives and make us more successful. In this first sutra, Patañjali gives us the choice as to whether the yoga teaching *begins* now or whether the teaching itself already *lies* in the "now". Those who are merged with the cosmic Self and live fully in the Now do not need any further yoga instruction. They are guided by their inner voice at every moment. For them, this guide merely serves as confirmation of what is meant by Yoga, which follows in the next sutra.

|| 1.2 ||

yogas citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ ||

Yoga: mind waves cessation.

According to Patañjali, yoga consists of bringing the mental activity to rest. All the excitement when we said “Now, let’s begin!” settles down. To be able to work purposefully, our restless mind needs to calm down. Patañjali will give us more advice on this later.

yogaḥ – *Yoga* comes from the root *yuj*, which is also the root of the English word *yoke*, that connects the ox with the cart. *yuj* means to connect, unite, bring together, and *Yoga* is the process that connects two things. It is both the path to unity and the state of unity. What is united? The individual soul with its transcendent Self, the *Purusha*, the cosmic Soul, which permeates everything and from which everything originates.

citta – *Citta* comes from the root *cit*: to perceive, remember, observe, comprehend, show oneself, know, and be aware. *Citta* is that which has been seen, observed, noticed. It is also that which notices, the noticing, thinking, thought, awareness, consciousness, mind, and spirit.

vṛtti – *Vṛtti* comes from the root *vart*: to turn, to roll, to run, to behave. So *Vṛtti* is literally any vibrational activity, including rolling, behavior, conduct, wave motion, functional activity, effect, moving.

ni-rodhaḥ – the prefix *ni-* means down, downwards, backwards; *rodha*, from the root *rudh*: to stop, inhibit, hold back, hold on. *ni-rodha* thus means to bring down, hold back, stop, calm down, cease, transcend.

citta vṛtti nirodhaḥ thus literally means: stopping, calming, soothing, transcending the rolling of the mind; or, if we interpret *yoga* not as a path but as an already realized state: mind waves rested.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, when asked about the meaning of this sutra, replied: “*This simply means: Transcendental Consciousness is a state of yoga in which mind is not functioning.*” Whereby mind is to be understood as “vibrating consciousness”. Similarly Osho translated it: “*Yoga is the cessation of mind.*” So we can see that basically yoga is very simple: we only need to calm the mind, nothing more. According to this definition, even rocking in the cradle is a yoga technique, because it calms the baby’s mind waves. In this sense, the majority of humanity is already familiar with the first, basic yoga technique soon after birth. I myself still remember the following experiences from my childhood.



**1.2 Yoga:
mind waves
cessation.**

*I learned my first
Yoga technique
as a baby.
When my cradle
was rocked
everything became
heavenly bright and
calm
in my head.*

With Light into Heaven

Whenever I kicked and screamed restlessly in the cradle, my mother or my grandmother would rock me gently until I fell silent. Then my head was very expanded, bright inside and felt soft as cotton wool. My mind would float up into the familiar space, where I felt at home again. Alas, when I was later transferred to a crib with white bars, these wonderful rocking experience ceased. How could I get to heaven now? Suddenly I was completely locked into this clumsy child's body and had no access to heaven.

Shortly before the Russians occupied eastern Germany, my father had brought the whole family from the Ore Mountains to the West, to a rural village called Deutenheim, because, as he said, farmers were the closest to food. When I was not yet two years old, my five-year-old sister and my brother, who was already seven, took me to a small brook, to swim and play.

While my sister and brother played in the meadow, I crawled unnoticed to the brook, tipped over and lay under water in the stony brook bed. Suddenly my soul floated above the stream and saw my body lying in the water. My brothers and sisters played with other children in the meadow and had not noticed my disappearance. I felt free and as light as a feather, as if I was being rocked in my cradle.

“Back in heaven at last,” I thought. “Home at last.”

Then I clearly heard an inner voice: “But you haven’t done your job yet.”

“I don’t want to leave heaven.”

“Fine. But you don’t have to drown for that. There are other ways.”

At that moment, my sister anxiously called my name. She ran to the bank of the brook, saw my body lying under water and began to cry heart-rendingly. My brother came running, took me out of the brook and laid me down on the bank. My sister screamed for help. The mother of a neighboring child came over, saw me and said, “Let me try. I’m a nurse.”

She put her mouth over my mouth and nose and blew air into me. She pressed her fingers lightly on my chest. Suddenly I was no longer hovering over the meadow, but saw the woman’s face right before my eyes.

“He opens his eyes. He breathes again. Thank God.”

Yes: Drowning was not the best method for calming mind-waves. However, shortly afterwards I discovered something better.

|| 1.3 ||

tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe’vasthānam ||

Then, seer established in own state.

As soon as our mind comes to rest, we rest in ourselves, in our own being, in the form in which we feel at home. Just as we were in the womb without any distraction from earthly influences, sheltered and protected, nourished by our mother through the umbilical cord, without any obligation to pay taxes or rent, without meetings and exams, free and unbounded as in heaven.

tadā – then, in that case.

draṣṭṛ – seer, perceiver, examiner, judge; from *drś*, *darś* to see; seeing, knowing, perceiving.

svarūpe – in own form, nature, peculiarity; *sva*- itself; *rūpa* form, shape.

avasthānam – founded, staying; position, location; *sthā* standing; *ava+sthā* staying.

But why does Patañjali not speak of the mind but of the seer? Is it not the mind that rests in its own state? Who is meant by seer? I can only answer this from my own experience.

The External Observer

As a soul in heaven, even in the womb and rocking in the cradle, I identified neither with my mind nor with my body. I only felt really comfortable after the space in my head became light and expanded and I had landed on the light green sky meadow again.

When rocking in the cradle I always had the feeling that a pendulum was swinging gently back and forth in my body. It was this steady swinging motion that had soothed me and filled me with an inner feeling of happiness. Sometimes the pendulum swung back and forth through the length of my spine, at others it swung backwards and forwards in my head. This swinging feeling was always connected with a pleasant light, sound and easiness. Then the narrowness of my earthly body dissolved and stretched into wide fields of down or clouds. This daily visit to what I call the heavenly world was as much a part of falling asleep as breakfast was after waking up.

Shortly after my accident in the brook, I found a new way to swing the pendulum, light the light in my head and float up to heaven.

I would lie down on my stomach and rhythmically bounced my forehead on the pillow until I felt the pendulum start to swing again and it became brighter and wider. Only when I had landed on the light green sky meadow again did I fall asleep calmly.

Although this bouncing technique produced red spots on my chin and forehead, it was the only method I had to settle the mind waves. My pillow bouncing lasted until I was seven or eight years old. Then I gradually forgot my heavenly home and I could fall asleep in the dark.

Many years later, when it became brighter in my head during meditation when my mind and body came to rest, I again remembered the time as my soul had regularly floated to heaven and felt at home there. Patañjali aptly describes this soul, the innermost Self, which observes and guides body and mind as an uninvolved witness, as *draṣṭṛ*, the “seer”.

|| 1.4 ||

vṛtti-sārūpyam itaratra ||

Mind waves of same form from here to here.

Usually:

Otherwise with mind waves uniform.

We can interpret this sutra in two completely opposite ways: Either as an explanation of the previous sutras or as an introduction to the following five. When we look at this sutra in the light of today's brainwave measurements of TM meditators, we get a very unconventional interpretation. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi translates *itar-atra* as "from here to here" as opposed to the usual translation of *itaratra* as "otherwise".

vṛtti – the rolling of the mind, the mental brainwave activity that we can record today with modern EEG devices.

sā-rūpyam – uniform, same shape, agreement, coherence.

sa- same, together, connected; *rūpa* form, shape; *rūpya* beautifully designed.

itar-atra – from here to here; *itaḥ* from here; *atra* there, here.

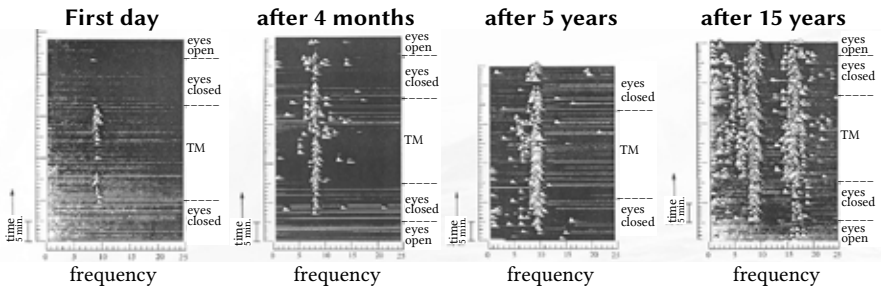
itaratra – otherwise.

Brainwave Coherence

"From here to here" indicates a virtual movement of thought waves, which has no spatial extension, but only shows a potential dynamic. In quantum field theory, the intrinsic state mentioned in the previous sutra is also described as the "ground state" or "vacuum state", a field of least excitation full of virtual fluctuations. Similarly, today's EEG coherence measurements on meditators show an orderly brain wave ground state.

Brain waves of the same form appear at different points on the skull: *vṛtti-sārūpyam*, i.e. waves of the same frequency, phase and amplitude; a sign that the greatest possible power and orderliness prevail in the brain. The following measurements show how brain wave coherence increases through the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM).

This interpretation of *vṛtti-sārūpyam itar-atra* describes the state of least excitation of the mind, as being brainwave coherent.



Increase in brain wave coherence during Transcendental Meditation (TM). EEG recordings of persons who have been meditating regularly for various lengths of time. Each “mountain” on the graph shows a 95% coherence of brainwaves over at least 10 seconds in different frequencies from 0-25 Hertz.

The non meditating control group showed no coherence when waking or sleeping during rest periods.

Researchers define coherence as the mathematically determined similarity between the phases of the EEG of a certain frequency that are derived at two different points on the scalp.

Alpha wave coherence (10 Hz) is immediately apparent in the first meditation. With increasing practice theta waves (6 Hz) and finally all wave ranges become coherent during TM. Soon these coherences also appear during rest periods with closed eyes. This is a sign that orderly brain functioning continues outside of meditation.”³

If, on the other hand, we translate the word *itaratra* as “otherwise”, then this sutra forms the introduction to the following sutras, in which the different types of normal thought activity (*vritti*) are described. “Otherwise” means that when the seer is not grounded in his own state, he resonates uniformly with all *vritti* activity, as shown by the following interpretations by different authors:

- In the other mental states – with *Vrittis* – the perceiver identifies with the movements in the mind.
- At other times the seer sees himself as changing consciousness.
- In other circumstances, the movements of *Citta* form the manifestations of the seer.
- Otherwise, identification with the fluctuations of the mind occurs.
- Otherwise, the conscious mind thinks of itself as the patterns of consciousness.

- At other times, the Seer seems to assume that these are the modifications of the mind.
- Otherwise, the observer identifies with the fluctuations of the mind.
- At other times, the self assumes the forms of the mental modifications.
- Otherwise, the thinking distorts the perception.
- Otherwise, the clouds alienate his perceptions.

From this we see how differently Patañjali's succinct sutra style can be translated. The next sutras describe the *vrittis*, the basic types of mental activity that are calmed by yoga.

॥ 1.5 ॥

$\overline{vṛttayaḥ}$ $\overline{pañcatayyaḥ}$ $\overline{kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ}$ ॥

Mind modes are fivefold: painful, non-painful.

Since the human mind can have an infinite number of different experiences, Patañjali limits himself to five elementary categories of mental activity, which can be associated with either suffering or joy.

vṛttayaḥ – the Vrittis, ways of thinking.

pañcatayyaḥ – fivefold.

kliṣṭa – suffering.

akliṣṭāḥ – not suffering.

These five basic activities are first enumerated in the next sutra and then each of them is defined more precisely in the next five sutras.

॥ 1.6 ॥

$\overline{pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtayaḥ}$ ॥

Cognition, error, imagination, sleep, memory.

If you have been wondering what is meant exactly by *Vrittis*, you will now realize that it refers to normal mental activity. Please pause for a moment and recall your own experiences for each *Vritti*.

pramāṇa – measure, scale, standard, measure of any kind; *pra-* before; forward, in front; *pramā* basis, foundation; measure, scale; right measure, true knowledge, correct notion; *māna* opinion, notion, conception.

viparyaya – reversed, inverted, perverse; misapprehension, error, mistake; *vi-* signifying separation and distance; *paryaya* revolution, lapse, expiration, waste or loss (of time); inversion, opposition.

vikalpa – alternation; variation; indecision, doubt, fancy, imagination.

nidrā – sleep, drowsiness.

smṛti – remembrance, commemoration, memory.

Everyday Activities of the Mind

When and on what occasion have you had an important insight, how did it come about and how would you put your insight into words? When did you make an error, what were the consequences, and how could you have avoided the mistake? Are you aware of any idea that you are convinced of is true, even though you have no proof of it and it exists only in your imagination? Can you remember the last time you slept? Now you know you experience all five vrittis. Is it your experience that they are always pleasant or sometimes painful?

We see that this Sutra refers to normal everyday life. The only mystery is how and why these daily activities should be calmed down by yoga. What happens to our life when all this comes to a standstill? What advantage could that have? Would life still be worthwhile? Would there still be joy and enthusiasm?

Well, we can certainly do without mistakes, maybe even without imagination or ideas. But why should cognition come to a standstill? Or memory? Wouldn't we then completely lose our memory and our connection to the environment and the past? And how and why should sleep come to a standstill?

Patañjali will explain, but first he defines the five vrittis sutra by sutra in more detail. Please check if his definitions correspond with your own life experience.

॥ 1.7 ॥
pratyakṣānumāṅgamāḥ pramāṇāni ॥
Perception, inference, testimony: modes of cognition.

Think about your childhood. How did you learn your mother tongue? You had to perceive or hear your mother, you had to combine sound with form to gain understanding. And when your mother confirmed your understanding you knew it was right. So you see that Patañjali does not only offer us a philosophical treatise on yoga, but also a complete life manual, a practical guide for a fulfilled life.

pratyakṣa – present before the eyes, visible, perceptible, direct perception, apprehension by the senses; *prati* against, opposite, in view, in front; towards, near to, in the direction of, before; *akṣa* eye.

anumāna – conclusion; analogy; *anu* according; *māna* opinion, imagination, notion, conception, idea, consideration.

āgamāḥ – handed-down teaching, textbook, rule; proven truth; arrival; origin; studying; acquisition of knowledge, science; a traditional doctrine or precept, collection of such doctrines, sacred work; anything handed down and fixed by tradition; *ā* near, towards here; *gama* going, course, march.

pramāṇāni – the means to right knowledge, paths of knowledge.

Painful and Non-Painful Insights

Even as small children we perceive our environment, draw our conclusions from our behavior and learn our mother tongue from the mouths of adults. We therefore use the paths of perception, reasoning and testimony to find our way in the human world. Knowledge is something very useful and enjoyable. So why should it also be painful?

The answer can be found in your own life experience, when you think back to the moments when you made painful discoveries that were associated with disappointment or frustration: We wished for something, but our parents forbade it. We fell hopelessly in love and were rejected. We trusted someone blindly and only later realized that we had been betrayed. We were too careless and had an accident ... Surely you can think of enough experiences in which you felt that revelation is not always satisfying.

|| 1.8 ||

viparyayo mithyā-jñānam atad-rūpa-pratiṣṭham ||

Error: deceptive knowledge not based in fact.

viparyayaḥ – wrong; error, mix-up, wrongness, opposite.

mithyā – wrong, not really, apparently.

jñānam – knowing, understanding, knowledge, recognizing.

atad – that which not.

rūpa – form, shape, appearance, image.

pratiṣṭham – based on, founded on, foundation.

A Mystical Light Phenomenon

I still remember one of my first misconceptions about yoga and spirituality. For my thirteenth birthday my father gave me Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. The stories of the many miracle-working yogis in Yogananda's book awakened in me an enthusiasm for yoga, and I soon combed through other books on yoga and made my first attempts at meditation in order to attain such yoga powers for myself. One of the "smart books" advised me to sit cross-legged in front of a burning candle and look into the flame for minutes with my eyes half-closed. This was indeed calming. I watched the steady, gentle flickering of the silent candle flame attentively and became more and more relaxed. After a while I closed my eyes and was amazed by the strange light in front of my inner eye: I saw a blue-green glowing form with a broad, deep red halo of light. Even when I opened my eyes, the apparition remained visible in the dark corner of the room. In front of the wall illuminated by candlelight, however, it became a dark red form with a light blue rim. I wrote in my diary "Have I just seen God?" and enthusiastically described my wonderful apparition.

Only years later did I realize that I had only seen the afterimage of the candle flame on my retina, which could easily be explained physiologically. Although I had a real perception, I had misinterpreted it.

Later I learned from a hobby magician how to make colored table tennis balls appear and disappear in my hand with dexterity. This soon made some of my teachers furious, because I used it to lighten up boring lessons without being caught. After all, the magic tricks were an entertaining

substitute for real yoga powers – and useful too. Because when I did magic, I learned to mislead the audience’s perception so much that they thought they knew something that wasn’t based on fact.

|| 1.9 ||

śabda-jñānānupātī vastu-śūnyo vikalpaḥ ||

Following verbal knowledge without substance: imagination.

śabda – sound, voice, word, speech, name.

jñāna – knowledge.

anupātī – following.

vastu – object, thing, circumstance.

śūnyaḥ – empty, free from, missing.

vikalpaḥ – false idea, imagination; indecision, doubt.

Childish Castles in the Air

In my fertile imagination, the miraculous powers described by Yogananda left a lasting mark. When I was on the train from Wiesbaden to my uncle’s house in Hamburg, I imagined how time and money would be saved by teleporting me simply by the power of my mind. I closed my eyes, concentrated on my wish and simply could not explain why my body did not follow the command of the mind and why I had to sit in the chugging train for hours. I had read in black and white that such mental powers were possible. Why did it not work for me? The knowledge of words alone was apparently not enough. Perhaps my mental powers were not yet sufficiently trained?

|| 1.10 ||

abhāva-pratyayālabhanā vṛttir nidrā ||

State grounded in absence of notion: sleep.

abhāva – Non-being, absence.

pratyaya – imagination, concept, idea, belief, acceptance.

ālabhanā – lean on; support, foundation.

vṛttiḥ – activity, state, behavior, nature, being.

nidrā – sleep.

Between Waking and Sleeping

During my school days I slept for a while in a room with my two older siblings. When we turned off the light and were supposed to sleep, we were still alert and talked to one another in the dark. I often noticed how my perception of the room slowly expanded. While our beds were about two metres apart against opposite walls, the voices of my siblings gradually sounded as if they were coming from further away. My sister's bed seemed to be miles away, her voice echoed through the night sky from the moon, my brother's voice came from Mars, and I myself flew through space, detached from the Earth's sphere. The voices became quieter, more distant, faded, and at some point everything became quiet and was completely gone Only when the alarm clock rang did I lie in the narrow bedroom again.

|| 1.11 ||

anubhūta-viṣayaśampramoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ ||
Experienced object unforgotten: memory.

anubhūta – perceived, experienced.

viṣaya – area, content, object of sense.

śampramoṣaḥ – unforgotten, not lost.

smṛtiḥ – memory.

An Unforgettable Dream

It was on those nights when the three of us slept in one room that I had a recurring dream which I remember simply because it was so enigmatic, strange and disturbing: I was gliding along a stretch of smooth track, then the path became rough and I was only making slow progress until suddenly it was smooth and fluid again. In this alternation of rough and smooth, I moved forward until I reached a large figure that appeared in front of me in the middle of the path. And this figure – that was the frightening thing – looked deceptively like me, but was bigger and stiff and mute like a doll. It looked pale and its eyes were closed as if it was dead. This unforgotten dream is still a clear memory today, some 65 years later, as if my inanimate, great Self had stood before me only yesterday.

After Patañjali has defined the five types of vrittis that we know from everyday life, he now explains how they can be calmed. But firstly he defines the terms and then gives advice on yoga practice.

॥ 1.12 ॥

abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyām tan-nirodhaḥ ॥

By practice and non-attachment these are calmed.

Although the modes of the mind have been clearly defined, we often find it difficult to distinguish between knowledge, error and imagination. We see the sun rising in the east and setting in the west, and we might conclude that it revolves around the earth. Yet it is not true knowledge, but an error, a mere imagination. Even with the many contradictory messages on the internet, it is often difficult to distinguish fact from fake. But the distinction is not even necessary in yoga. Because according to Patañjali, all five *vrittis* – including cognition and memory – should be calmed. As soon as the mind comes to rest, the seer is established in his own state and draws all necessary knowledge from the now – through the connection with his fully awakened big Self, whose guidance is not lost even in deep sleep.

abhyāsa – practice, repetition, repeated use, habit.

vairāgya – *virāga* – equanimity, non-attachment, detachment; literally *virāga* not desirous; *vi-*less, free of; *rāga*, passion, desire, craving.

tan – this.

ni-rodhaḥ – calm down; *ni-* down; hold back *rodha*, stop.

Practice in Non-Attachment

Abhyāsa means practice, habit, and regularly repeated use. In order to bring mental activity to rest, we should therefore make a habit of a specific exercise and repeat it regularly. What should that be? Which yoga exercises? Headstand, candle, bridge, holding your breath and counting? Since the mind is not calmed by effort but by relaxation, Patañjali adds non-attachment as a requirement, because effort robs us of equanimity and serenity. So if we want to add something to our daily routine to calm the mind, it should be something effortless that we like to do without attachment.

Unfortunately, many self-proclaimed yoga experts still claim that we have to make an effort, concentrate, and constantly strive to control the mind. Often yoga is translated as a yoke with which to control attention, and therefore effort is necessary in yoga. All these assertions can be classified in the above-mentioned category *Viparyaya* – error. Patañjali advises exactly the opposite: regular and unattached calming of the mind as the first and most important exercise on the path of yoga.



*Anything that
brings us joy,
we like to do
regularly.
Swinging calms
the mind and
invigorates
the senses at
the same time.*

॥ 1.13 ॥

tatra sthītau yatno'bhyaśaḥ ॥
Established there by careful practice.

The practise therefore consists of regularly calming down the mental activities, the *vrittis*, with care and non-attachment.

tatra – there.

sthītau – in standing still; from *sthiti* standing upright or firmly, not falling; standing staying, remaining, abiding, stay, residence, sojourn in or on or at; from *sthā* to stand.

yatna – striving, eagerness, care; careful.

abhyaśaḥ – practice, repetition, use, habit.

First Attempts to Practise Yoga

Since Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* had awakened my enthusiasm for yoga, as a student I searched our national library for books on yoga and experimented with all kinds of exercises. In addition to looking into the candle flame, I practiced mentally counting slow inhalations and exhalations with breathing stops in between, I also tried the Buddhist practice of observing the movement of my abdominal wall while breathing, I also sang Indian bhajans, to which I was invited by a disciple of Yogananda. All these attempts did not last long. As soon as the initial curiosity and joy of experimentation had faded, I lost interest in these convoluted exercises, as I could not detect any improvement in my well-being or clarity of thinking.

|| 1.14 ||

sa tu dīrgha-kāla-nairantarya-satkāraśevito dṛḍha-bhūmiḥ ||
Whosoever long time regularly practices is firmly established.

From this, we see that endurance is part of yoga. But we only do something regularly when we are motivated to do it because we either like to do it or see clear progress or advantage from it.

sa – this.

tu – but, then, do, now.

dīrgha – long.

kāla – time.

nairantarya – continuously, regularly, in short intervals.

satkāra – attentive care, attention, consideration of or regard for a thing.

āsevitaḥ –practiced; diligently practiced.

dṛḍha – firmly, fixed, firm, hard, strong, solid, massive; firmly fastened.

bhūmiḥ – established. the earth, soil, ground, a territory; country, district.

Perseverance Needs a Sense of Achievement

When I began to think about the meaning of life shortly after puberty, I already knew that life was not just a simple walk in the park. For example, when I fell hopelessly in love with a girl from afar without having the courage to speak to her, I felt insecure and inhibited in her presence,

behaved clumsily, was ashamed and blushed. Then I wished to develop more self-confidence, courage and spontaneity through yoga, but unfortunately progress was so slow that I never did the exercises for long enough.

|| 1.15 ||

dr̥ṣṭānuśravika-viṣaya-vitr̥ṣṇasya vaśīkāra-samjñā vairāgyam ||

**Seen, heard objects of the non-thirsty mastering:
sign of non-attachment.**

dr̥ṣṭa – seen, perceived; from *dars* see, see, perceive.

anuśravika – heard; from *śru* hear, experience, perceive.

viṣaya – thing, object.

vitr̥ṣṇasya – of the desireless, not thirsty; *vi-* free of; *tr̥ṣṇa* thirst, desire.

vaśīkāra – mastering, conquering, subjecting to will.

samjñā – sign; designation; consciousness, imagination; consent.

vairāgyam – equanimity, calmness, non-attachment; *vi-* free of; *rāga* desire, passion.

Only Wish Fulfilment Makes Us Desire-less

What is seen and heard are sensory impressions that one who is not thirsty masters as soon as he has reached the state of equanimity. Sometimes this *sutra* is interpreted as saying that the yogi must learn to restrain and contain his desires. However, this completely contradicts both our life experience and what Patañjali actually says.

Let us consider under which conditions a person is no longer thirsty. Is his thirst quenched when he forbids himself to drink? Or is his thirst quenched when he has drunk enough? Are we happily desire-less when we have a thousand unfulfilled wishes, or when our most beautiful and deepest wish has just been fulfilled? This simple consideration makes it clear to us what this *sutra* means: a state of fulfilment that comes from being able to realize all our desires, so that we are perfectly happy at the moment of wish fulfilment. He who has drunk just enough does not thirst. But since thirst is a natural and life-sustaining bodily function, the thirstless state will of course not last forever. After some time, the body needs more fluid, and

we will drink again to quench our thirst. Thus by effortlessly satisfying our desires without long delay, we are blessed with equanimity and serenity.

Anyone who has ever been to areas where people suffer severe shortages knows that because they cannot satisfy their needs, they are inwardly full of unfulfilled desires. The urge for wish fulfilment burns so strongly in them that they are even willing to harm others and commit crime to achieve their goals. So, denying oneself one's natural needs and desires does not lead to equanimity and serenity.

Sadly, we can easily see this in people who believe that a "good yogi" should exercise "self-control" and deny himself as many wishes as possible. Seldom will such people be happy and be able to calm their minds. Instead of practicing yoga according to Patañjali, they make life unnecessarily difficult for themselves by following a false teaching.

Vanity, Vanity, all is Vanity

Shortly after puberty, when I began to think more deeply about the meaning of life, I often ran through the schoolyard during the breaks, brooding and thinking: "What's the point of all this? Why should I know that in the year 1066 was the battle of Hastings? Stuffing myself with information that was of no use in everyday life seemed to me to be completely pointless.

Even my classmates' usual topics of conversation didn't mean anything to me. Neither football, motorbikes nor cars could inspire me. Wistfully I searched for the deeper meaning of life. And I loved the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes from the Old Testament: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?"

Striving for possessions, money and power seemed to me to be in vain, after all, those were not lasting, only like flowing sand running through my fingers. My German graduation topic was Kafka's "A Hunger Artist", who didn't want to eat because he simply couldn't find anything he liked

However, this restless search did not make me happy. I often felt paralysed because I lacked any motivation for action. This was by no means the equanimity of a realized yogi. So how can this equanimity, this balanced state of mind be achieved? The next sutra will tell us.

॥ 1.16 ॥

tat param puruṣa-khyāter guṇa-vaitṛṣṇyam ॥

The highest through Self-insight is freedom from the *Guṇas*.

The highest, that is, the summit of equanimity, arises in the mind through knowledge of *Puruṣa* – the Self. Does the “non-thirsty” perhaps mean our true Self? That level of consciousness in the depths of our mind that is beyond all relative attachments and all desires and which we experience as soon as the *vrittis* have come to rest? When we consciously experience the uninvolved observer within, the transcendent Self, *Puruṣa*, and identify with it, we become independent of the three *gunas*, the attributes *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which permeate and give unique characteristics to everything in the relative.

tat – this.

para – the highest.

puruṣa – *Puruṣa*, the transcendent Self, the cosmic Soul, which is the uninvolved observer of all creation.

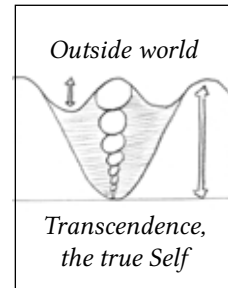
khyāteḥ – through knowledge, insight.

guṇa – the three active forces *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (see glossary).

vaitṛṣṇya – freedom from desire, liberation.

Where Do We Find *Puruṣa*, the Transcendent Self?

The question now arises: How do we reach this “highest”, this knowledge of *Puruṣa*, our transcendent Self? Where is this Self to be found? I first received an answer to this question in the autumn of 1967, when a poster with a picture of a bearded yogi invited me to a lecture on Transcendental Meditation. In this talk a diagram was used to explain how our thoughts rise from the transcendental level of our subjective subconscious like air bubbles from the bottom of a pond, to the surface level of our waking consciousness, where we consciously perceive the thought and the outside world through our senses. In the depth of our mind, when the mental activity comes to a complete rest, our subjective conscious-



ness slides into transcendence, or Pure Consciousness, the state of restful inner alertness beyond thoughts. This is our true Self, where our individual soul merges with its origin, the Cosmic World Soul.

Maharishi was once asked, “What is the purpose of desire?”

Maharishi on the Self and the Purpose of Desires

Advancement, evolution. Desire is not binding, as the whole world has been mistakenly understanding for the last thousand years: ‘Desire is bondage!’ Desire is NOT bondage! The inability to maintain our Self in the midst of all desires is bondage!

Desire is the basis of evolution – because always the desire is for more and more. And it’s legitimate for any level of life to desire for a higher level. That is life!

There is a word in Sanskrit: ‘Sansâr’, and Sansâr means ‘the world’. Sansâr comes from the root: ‘Sansarati iti sansârah’, that is that which goes on and on and on. It goes on, even though changing, but it goes on, on, on. That is Sansâr!

So, it is the nature of the world to go on and on and on. And going on is on the basis of desire. More and more and more. Whether one gains more or not but always there is that temptation, there is that flow of life towards that more and more.

‘More and more’ belongs to Nature! It’s natural. The whole process of evolution is carried on on the basis of desire. So, desire is not bondage – the inability to save our Self in the waves of desires is bondage. Desire is elevating. Desire is the basis of all progress. Desire is leading to fulfilment.

The inability of the Self to maintain itself is the cause of bondage. And the Self begins to maintain itself when the mind becomes familiar with it. When the Self comes on the conscious level then the Self begins to maintain itself. As long as the Self is not on the conscious level, it cannot be maintained.⁵

|| 1.17 ||

vitarka-vicāraṇandāsmitā-rūpānugamāt saṁprajñātaḥ ||

**Word-thinking, subtle thinking, happi-ness, am-ness –
from this sequence: *Saṁprajñyāta*.**

During the lecture on Transcendental Meditation our consciousness was compared to the sea with the *citta-vṛttis* as the surface waves of our mind, which cannot be calmed down voluntarily. A boat floating on the water is naturally rocked back and forth by the waves. But if the boat is a submarine, then we can leave the turbulent surface and dive into deeper layers of the sea, where conditions change and the water becomes calmer. There we experience a world of plants and creatures that we could not even imagine on the surface. If we dive even deeper down to the bottom of the sea, complete silence sets in and we experience only restful alertness. This is the process of transcending that Patañjali describes in this sutra.

vitarka – coarse thinking, reasoning, conjecture, linguistic thinking; *vi-* decomposition – prefix denoting division; *tarka* – consideration, speculation, **vicāra** – fine thinking, discrimination, investigation, exploration; *cāra* gait, movement, procedure, behavior, swaying.

ānanda – bliss, happiness; *ā-* the fully open mouth position of the A denotes fullness, wholeness; *nanda* lust, happiness.

asmitā – Am-ness, I-consciousness; *asmi* I am; *-tā* -ness.

rūpa – form, shape, appearance, color.

anugamāt – from the sequence, order.

saṁprajñātaḥ – exact knowledge; *saṁ-* together, united, connected; *pra-* before, away; *jñā* knowing, intelligent; *prajñā* insightful, understanding, wise; *-taḥ* -ness; *prajñātaḥ* known, understood.

My First Meditation: Finer Levels of Thinking

At the lecture on Transcendental Meditation, I heard for the first time about a transcendental Self that is found in the depth of our consciousness, and I wanted to get to the bottom of it. Was this mere theory, or could this Self within actually be experienced? At the end of the lecture, postcard invitations were distributed asking us if we wanted further information. After a

few days I plucked up courage and finally checked the box: “I am interested in an introduction to Transcendental Meditation” and sent the card.

Shortly afterwards I received a message that I should come to the “Chauseehaus” Wiesbaden on Sunday, November 12th, at 11 am to learn the technique. I was to bring some flowers, sweet fruits and a white handkerchief for the introduction ceremony. This ceremony had been mentioned by the lecturer, and it had been one of the reasons why I had initially hesitated to register. For when he shyly spoke of the introductory thanksgiving ceremony, he had apologized in his light Viennese: “A bissl sentimental derf mer wohl sein – One might be a little sentimental.”

That made me suspect that I might have to endure some kind of celebration with schmaltzy songs and hand-holding flower waving dancing. So, with some scepticism, I handed over the requested items and prepared myself to switch off, grit my teeth and bite the bullet until the sentimental fuss was over.

First of all I had to fill out a questionnaire with my personal details and the reasons why I wanted to learn meditation. I wrote, “To explore the deeper layers of my emotional world.” Eventually I hoped to gain more self-confidence and to overcome my shyness, especially in the presence of the opposite sex. As a profession, I chose art student, even though I was working as a literary translator at the same time, because the student fee was lower.

Carrying my questionnaire, fruit, flowers and handkerchief in a small basket I was led into a room where the curtains were slightly drawn. On a small table a candle was burning in front of a painting of another yogi whom I had not yet seen. There was also an aromatic smell of incense sticks, with which I was already familiar from the '60s hippie scene.

An elderly man greeted me in Bavarian with “Grüß Gott” and introduced himself as a meditation teacher. He had travelled all the way from Munich to my home town to meet the meditators from my area on that weekend. “Congratulations”, he said, “today is your spiritual birthday.”

He went through the questionnaire with me, handed me one of the flowers I had brought, asked me to stand next to him and just watch the ceremony. He told me that the ceremony was performed in gratitude to the tradition of masters, from whom this knowledge of the integration of life

originated, and that the painting on the table was of Guru Dev, Maharishi's Master. I was delighted and surprised that my fears about schmaltzy songs were completely unfounded. The ceremony was by no means a sentimental mood-making affair, but a short, dignified devotion with recitation in Sanskrit.

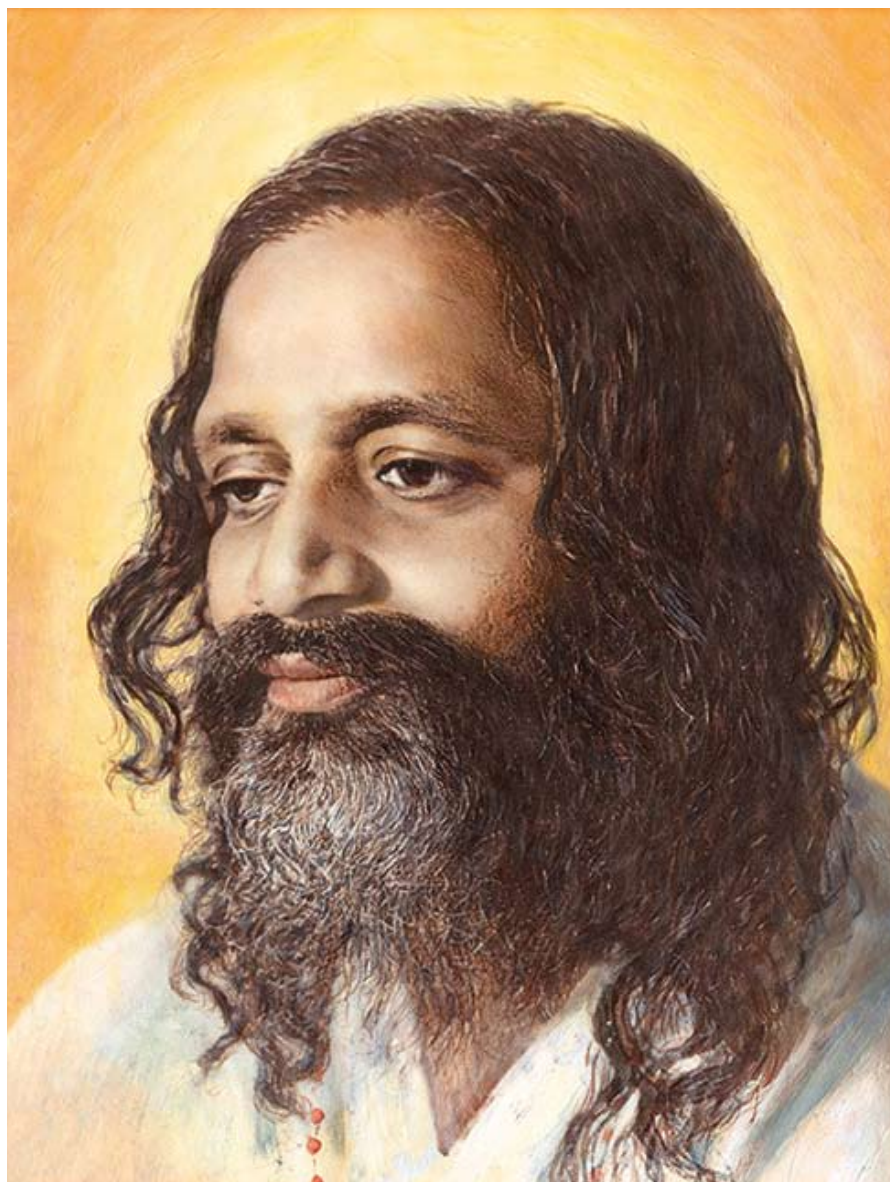
During the short ceremony I heard Sanskrit for the first time in my life and was fascinated by this pure clear sound. My father had once told me that each language expresses its own view of the world, which I could not imagine at first. What was meant by different world views anyway? The world was simply the way I experienced it.

That's why I had attended all the voluntary language study groups at school, and even went to adult education centres, private teachers and other schools. I wanted to know as many different "language world views" as possible, from Hebrew to Arabic, Greek, Latin, Russian, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Yiddish and Esperanto. This Sanskrit, however, sounded quite different: even older, even more biblical, even more original than Old Hebrew, which I had previously considered to be the oldest language.

After the short ceremony my meditation teacher asked me to sit down and gave me a *mantra* to repeat quietly. This was the second surprise of the day. I had expected that he would now make a test to see which mantra would be the most suitable for me, because during the introductory lecture it had been said that everyone would get a special mantra suitable for him. However, he just said one word and asked me to repeat it.

Apparently there is only one word, I thought. The story of different mantras is just hocus-pocus, just a protective assertion to keep the trade secret.

However, all these inner reservations and doubts were suddenly erased when I started to repeat the word inside with closed eyes without saying it out loud. Because now something completely new happened in my life: I experienced my first conscious inward journey into finer levels of thinking, which had been long forgotten since my childhood.



*This picture of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on a poster
in front of the Wiesbaden Museum lured me in autumn 1967
to a lecture on Transcendental Meditation.*

At first I simply thought the sound I had received as a mantra. But it didn't take long until this sound changed: it became quieter and finer, got its own rhythm, started to pulse faster then slower. And suddenly it was no longer just a sound, but a force pulse, a magnetic vibration that swung through my body like a pendulum. My childhood memories flooded back: My head became a swinging bell, and between my forehead and the back of my head an energy pulse was swinging back and forth Or was it swinging through my spine? Up and down my whole body? What happened to my body? It seemed to me like a fluffed up feather bed.

A strange feeling of happiness flowed through me. And then I just sat there and had completely forgotten the surroundings. All external data faded from my consciousness. Where was I? Who was I? When was I? How was I? What was I? And why was I? Everything was forgotten. I did not know how big my body was, in which room I sat, in which position I sat or lay, what my name was, how old I was, what I studied ... all this was forgotten. But I was fully aware of something else: I am! I exist! I am alive, I am life itself. And a deep relief flowed through me.

Suddenly I had to take a deep breath, and that deep breath brought my consciousness back into this body that was sitting here on a Sunday morning in a small, half-darkened hotel room, with a candle and two incense sticks, scented sweetly of sandalwood.

Then I heard the soft voice of my meditation teacher. "Now we stop thinking the mantra. Give yourself two more minutes, just sit quietly and then slowly open your eyes."

What had happened to me during this introduction? Only now, fifty years later, having been a meditation teacher myself for many years, having studied Sanskrit and translated the *Rik-Veda*, do I finally realize that Patañjali has enumerated the exact technical terms for all the different levels that I had experienced in my very first meditation after the introduction to TM.

When I thought the mantra as a word and repeated it inwardly, my mind was in normal waking consciousness on the first level of thinking: *vitarka*.

By thinking the mantra my mind became calmer and I noticed how the mantra refined and lost its solid sound structure. Only a fine, vague energy impulse remained, which gently waved through my mind. This was the second level, fine thinking: *vicāra*.

Then this fine impulse also disappeared and gave way to a feeling of happiness, a feeling of serene satisfaction with myself and the world: *ānanda*.

And finally even this blissful feeling was lost, until I only felt: I am: *asmitā*.

Patañjali calls this conscious transcending of different levels of thought during Transcendental Meditation *Sampragyata* (in Sanskrit *jñ* is generally spoken as *gy*): Samadhi connected with thought processes.

word-thinking – *vitarka*
subtle thinking – *vicāra*
happi-ness – *ānanda*
am-ness – *asmita*
—————
Samprajñāta

Maharishi about the Stages of *Samadhi*

When *Maharishi* was asked to comment on this *sutra* in Amherst, Massachusetts, 1971, he said:

“All those stages described are different levels of your experience. When you start the mantra, you have the mantra and then the mind at every moment is settling down ... settling down ... settling down. Another state is, that you have transcended. It’s also a state of samadhi. Now, you are coming to a thought, yet you don’t lose that pure awareness, it’s there with the thought. That means the immovable transcendental consciousness along with moving thoughts. That’s also a state of samadhi. And then, when that pure awareness has come outside even along with actions, that’s also a samadhi. Each different states of samadhi, but all of them verified by your experience of TM. In one stroke of TM all the states of samadhi described in the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali. You can experience the whole thing.”

Question: “*Vitarka?*”

“In our case we don’t contemplate, but you can locate what that state is. Very clearly you are pronouncing the mantra. Clear pronunciation

of the mantra on the gross thinking level, a little subtler than the gross but the mantra is clear. When it becomes much subtler then that clarity of pronunciation becomes dim. ‘Vitarka’: where one could discriminate. ‘Tarka’ is logic, discrimination. You can distinguish from one sound to the other sound. You can discriminate. That is the vitarka-level, which is a finer level of thought but the thought is clearly definable.”

Question: “Vicara?”

“Vicara is thought. You know that the mantra is not clear, yet there is a thought finer than that. Where you know you have not transcended, yet the mind is on the active level, but it is not active on the level of discrimination. It is just on the faint thinking level. That is the level of vicara.”

Question: “And then asmita? Is that like mother is at home?”

“Finer than vicara, that level finer than that is asmita. that am-ness, ‘asmi’, that level. And that is transcendental level. I am. Am-ness.

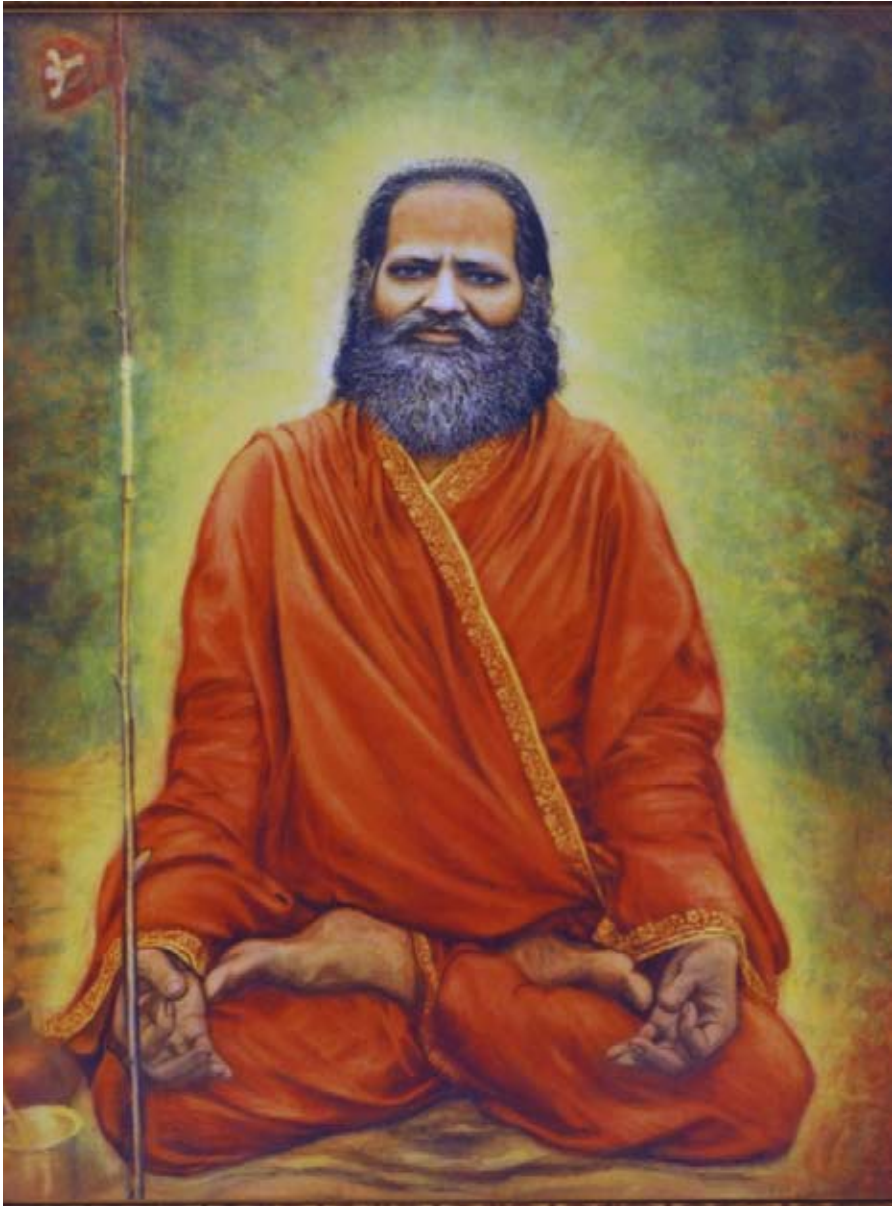
Question: “And then ananda?”

“Ananda is a wave of that. Am-ness is now expanding. It is a very beautiful state. Am-ness, individual. Individual-ness, the Am-ness is a direct awareness, but this individuality is expanding. And in the expansion is that ananda. Bliss or happiness in the expansion of individuality.”

|| 1.18 ||

virāma-pratyābhyaśa-pūrvāḥ saṁskāra-śeṣo’nyaḥ ||
Stop-thinking-practise first – Samskara remains: the other.

This *sutra* illustrates Patañjali’s SMS style, which is intended to inspire us to think for ourselves. *Samskara* are the past impressions physically and mentally recorded in our nervous system. We constantly take in impressions through the senses, which our nervous system processes and stores as experience, so that we can learn something from it and act accordingly. Through deep relaxation during meditation, tensions associated with those impressions are released. However, some of these impressions still remain stored in our nervous system.



*Maharishi's Master Guru Dev, Bhagavan Swami Brahmananda Sarasvati,
Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math.
The ceremony took place in front of a painting of Maharishi's Master,
before I was given my mantra.*

virāma – stop, end, pause.

pratyaya – thinking, thought, experience.

ābhyāsa – practice, habit.

pūrvah – before, earlier.

samskāra – *samskara*, impression, aftermath.

śeṣaḥ – rest, the remainder; what is left.

anyaḥ – the other.

Restful Alertness

When I thought the mantra as prescribed in my first meditation with my eyes closed, the rhythm of the mantra reminded me of rocking in my cradle, and old memories reappeared. I had to think of my school days and all the impressions that had been driven into me, and I thought: “Now all this will be erased until my head is free and unburdened and I can once again marvel with open eyes like a newborn child. Let’s go back to birth, and all I learned in school will be erased.” Of course, that was a gross exaggeration. After all, I had learned many useful things: speaking, writing, reading, walking, cycling, calculating, drawing, painting ... Certain skills are not only useful but vital for life on earth. Therefore the remains of some impressions are indispensable. As long as we are incarnated in this earthly body, a small remainder of impressions will always exist. In Sanskrit this is called *Lesh-Avidya* (*leśa* remains, faint traces; *avidya* ignorance). If we calm down the mind until only a remnant of *samskaras* remains, we experience the other state: pure, transcendental consciousness beyond the levels of finest thinking – the state of restful alertness.

|| 1.19 ||

bhava-pratyayo videha-prakṛti-layānām ||

Through birth, the bodiless merges with *Prakṛti*.

Prakṛiti refers to nature consisting of earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego, or to what our manifest universe or creation is made of. The word *Videha*, the “disembodied”, has led to many mystical and sometimes quite hair-raising interpretations of this *sutra*. My personal interpretation of what could be meant by “*Videha*” and “merges” follows.