

2. THE SAMĀDHI-PĀDA (PART ONE)



In this the second session of the course, we will start off our consideration of the principal ideas of the *Yoga Sūtras* by looking at the first half of the *Samādhī-pāda*, which forms the first chapter of the text as a whole. What I propose to do is take each *sūtra* in turn, consider its significance and meaning, and try to locate the ideas within the wider context of Indian religious thought. This search for meaning will be assisted by the interpretations of the main commentators referred to in Session One, and the primary commentary of Vyāsa in particular. So with all our introductions now complete, let us start off at the most obvious point by reviewing the opening group of *sūtras*.

SŪTRAS 1 TO 4, DEFINITION AND GOALS OF YOGA

Patañjali opens his discourse by explaining what is meant by the term yoga and why it is a worthy enterprise to embark upon. Indeed, the value of yoga is stated to be nothing less than the spiritual liberation of the practitioner from a false position of embodiment in this world.

SŪTRA ONE

atha yogānuśāsanam

Here is the teaching on Yoga.

This opening *sūtra* is a straightforward introduction that simply announces that this treatise will provide instruction on the subject of yoga. The *sūtra* is comprised of three words, *atha*, meaning now or here, *yoga*, which is yoga, and *anuśāsanam*, meaning teaching or instruction, thereby giving us a clear introduction.

Despite its apparently obvious meaning, all of our commentators

take the opportunity to present lengthy discussions on a range of different points that are not directly related to the *sūtra* itself. Vyāsa starts his relatively short commentary by stating that the word *atha* simply means ‘the beginning’ in the sense of ‘here begins’. He then states that yoga is to be understood as *samādhi*, and that this state of *samādhi* is present in all states of consciousness. Where the mind is in a restless or agitated state, however, *samādhi* remains non-manifest, but when one is able to fix the mind on a single point, that is to be understood as *samprajñāta-samādhi*, and when even that single-pointed *samādhi* is restrained, then that is *asamprajñāta-samādhi*. Thus yoga is defined by Vyāsa in relation to the two manifest forms of *samādhi*. In this state, the bonds of karma are loosened, a statement implying that yoga is the means by which one may become liberated from the state of bondage in which we currently exist in this world.

Śaṅkarācārya builds on this point about liberation, asserting that such release from bondage can only be achieved through the acquisition of higher knowledge. If it be asked, why in that case Patañjali has not written a text on knowledge, that is because Yoga is the means by which knowledge is obtained. The ailment that afflicts us is suffering; the cure is knowledge; and yoga is the means by which that cure can be administered. Vācaspati Miśra also discusses the word *atha*, and denies any view that this should be understood as meaning ‘now the previous stage is completed’. *Atha* simply indicates the beginning of a discussion. He also makes an interesting point about the origin of the word *yoga*, insisting that it is not related to the verb meaning ‘to join’ but in fact refers to the practice of concentration. Vijñāna Bhikṣu focuses on the idea of yoga loosening the bonds of karma, pointing out that this shows that yoga is properly understood as the means by which liberation from rebirth is achieved. Yoga has the quality of *mokṣa-hetutva*, being the cause by which liberation, *mokṣa*, is achieved.

This is all easily understood, but now in the next *sūtra* we are presented with a succinct definition of what Patañjali himself means by yoga, and in particular, the essential method through which the practice of yoga is to be undertaken.

SŪTRA TWO

yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ

Yoga is the restriction of the movements of the mind.

We have four words in this *sūtra*, *yoga*, *citta*, *ṛtti* and *nirodha*, the first of which, *yoga*, is the subject of the definition offered herein. So what does *citta-ṛtti-nirodha* mean? What is it that is being referred to in Patañjali's text as *yoga*? If we can go back to the Sāṃkhya analysis of the mental faculties discussed in Session One, we will recall that these are designated as *buddhi*, *manas* and *ahamkāra*, which collectively comprise the *antaḥ-kāraṇa*, the inner organ. The word *citta* does not appear in the typical Sāṃkhya listings, though the use of the term in other texts such as the *Bhagavad-gītā* makes it clear that it refers to our mental activities. Hence when Kṛṣṇa speaks of fixing one's concentration on himself, he uses the phrase *mac-cittaḥ*. So it does not seem unreasonable to understand *citta* as used here as referring to the mind or the thought processes. The word *ṛtti* indicates activity or movement, and in relation to *citta*, it is easy to recognise the way in which the mind constantly moves from one thought to another, never remaining still even for a moment as our sense perceptions constantly give rise to new and ever-changing patterns of thought. Then the word *nirodha* means suppression or restriction, and so we can see that the technique of *yoga* being defined here is that by which our conventional mental activities are brought to a halt.

In Vyāsa's commentary on the previous *sūtra*, he referred to *samprajñāta-samādhī* and *asamprajñāta-samādhī* and now we can see how these are related to the *citta-ṛtti-nirodha* presented here as a definition of *yoga*. *Samprajñāta-samādhī* is where the mind is fixed unwaveringly on a single point, perhaps a *mantra* or sacred image, so that the usual wandering thought processes are reined in and all movements away from that single point are restrained. This is a practice generally referred to as *dhyāna*, meditation, and anyone can attempt it as a form of regular practice—though in most cases it will quickly become apparent that this is an extremely difficult technique to master. As Arjuna says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*: *tasyāhaṃ nigrāhaṃ manye vāyur iva su-duṣkṛtam*, 'I think controlling the mind is as hard to achieve as controlling the wind' (6.34). And *asamprajñāta-samādhī* is a stage beyond even the constant focusing of the mind on a single point, as in this highest stage of *yoga* perfection there is nothing at all that the mind is fixed upon. According to the sixth chapter of the *Gītā*, it is at this point that external perception is entirely nullified and internal knowledge of the true spiritual identity, knowledge of the

ātman, comes to the fore. Clearly, this is in line with Śaṅkarācārya's view that yoga is the means by which higher knowledge is acquired, which in turn brings liberation from suffering and rebirth.

Here Vyāsa places a particular focus on the fact that the *sūtra* does not state that all movements of the mind are to be restrained. Such movements are influenced by the three *guṇas*, but where there is a predominance of the *sattva-guṇa*, which is reflected as purity, serenity and wisdom, then the related movements can be beneficial in the progression towards *samādhi*. The goal sought through meditation is *viveka-khyāti*, knowledge of the distinction between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, and this *viveka-khyāti* arises due to the influence of *sattva*. Hence when the *ṛtti* is related to *sattva* this should not be restrained, at least in the initial phase. Śaṅkarācārya builds upon this point and further emphasises the role of *sattva-guṇa* in bringing the aspiring practitioner to a state of *viveka-khyāti*. Vācaspati Miśra also focuses on Vyāsa's statements about the way in which the *guṇas* shape the movements of the mind, showing how it is that when these movements are influenced by *rajas* or *tamas*, there is a concomitant tendency towards the performance of unrighteous acts. It is these *ṛtti* in particular that are to be restrained by the practitioner. Vijñāna Bhikṣu comments at some length here, and he is also primarily concerned to confirm Vyāsa's emphasis on the value of *sattva-guṇa*, and to argue that where *sattva* predominates in the movements of the mind, this can have positive influence.

SŪTRA THREE

tadā draṣṭuḥ sva-rūpe 'vasthānam

When this is achieved, the witness comes
to exist in terms of its true identity.

This third *sūtra* contains four words, one of which, *sva-rūpe*, is a dual compound. The word *tadā* means 'then' or 'in that case' and obviously refers to the restriction of the movements of the mind from the previous *sūtra*. Then *draṣṭuḥ* means 'one who sees' and in this case, almost certainly means *puruṣa*, our spiritual identity that observes the world through the senses. The compound *sva-rūpe* means 'in its own form' or 'in its own identity' and I think we must take this as referring to the separation of *puruṣa* from *prakṛti* so that it can come

to exist as a purely spiritual entity free from the false sense of identity with the elements of *prakṛti* that we currently experience. *Puruṣa* is entirely spiritual by nature but because it wrongly identifies itself with its physical and mental embodiment, it undergoes suffering and rebirth within the domain of *prakṛti*. This existential problem of the living being can only be resolved if *puruṣa* gains realisation of its true spiritual nature, untouched by *prakṛti*. It then regains its true identity, here referred to as *sva-rūpa*, so that the *sūtra* as a whole is stating that when yoga is successfully practised, and the movements of the mind are fully restrained, *puruṣa* gains release from its association with *prakṛti* and comes to exist in a purely spiritual state of being. *Avasthāna* simply means a ‘situation’, ‘position’, or ‘state of existence.’ I think we can thus understand that in this *sūtra*, Patañjali is indicating that his composition is a work dealing with the subject of the means by which liberation from rebirth can be attained. This is what yoga is.

Vyāsa gives only a short commentary in which he states that the mental state referred to here is that in which *kaivalya*, liberation, is attained. Śaṅkarācārya confirms the fact that the *draṣṭuḥ*, the seer, is *puruṣa*, and that this *sūtra* is about liberation, whilst Vācaspati Miśra summarises its meaning as follows: ‘The words *sva-rūpe* mean that the peaceful and the cruel and the infatuated nature falsely attributed to the Self has ceased.’ Vijñāna Bhikṣu adds to the discussion by stating that the word *tadā*, meaning then, in this *sūtra* refers in fact to the state of *asamprajñāta-samādhi*, which is the final, perfected stage of the yogic endeavour.

SŪTRA FOUR

vṛtti-sārūpyam itaratra

Otherwise, the witness assumes the identity
dictated by the movement of the mind.

This next *sūtra* refers to the alternative state of existence where the movements of the mind are not restrained by yoga practice, as is indicated by the word *itaratra*, which means ‘otherwise’ or ‘alternatively’. In the previous *sūtras*, we were told that *puruṣa* exists in its own pure, spiritual form, its *sva-rūpa*, when the state of *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* is achieved and the movements of the mind are restrained. Here the phrase *vṛtti-sārūpyam* means that where this restraint is not achieved,

then *puruṣa* comes to adopt the form of the particular state of mind that exists at that time. In other words, when one is angry, *puruṣa* is forced into an angry state of being and when one is happy, *puruṣa* is carried into that happy identity, even though in its true nature, its *sva-rūpa*, it is untouched by these mental fluctuations.

On this *sūtra*, Vyāsa emphasises the close relationship that exists between *puruṣa* and *citta*, even though *citta*, our mental embodiment, is an element of *prakṛti*. It is because of this close interaction that *puruṣa* comes to exist in relation to the *citta-vṛtti*, the mental transformations we experience moment by moment. He writes, ‘Therefore, the reason for *puruṣa*’s knowledge of the modification of the mind is the beginningless relationship with the mind’. Śaṅkarācārya provides us with a further explanation of how and why this takes place. It is not the case that *puruṣa* actually undergoes transformations, as its true identity is as a changeless being, but when objects are displayed to it due to its close association with the mind, then, ‘the apparent change is not intrinsic but projected’. In other words, although *puruṣa* is not truly affected by mental fluctuations, these fluctuations are projected upon it. Vācaspati Miśra expands on this idea by using the comparison of a red rose and a crystal. The crystal is changeless and without colour but when the red rose is adjacent to it, it appears to have a rosy hue even though it has not itself undergone any transformation. Vijñāna Bhikṣu enters into a lengthy debate on the question of how it is that the changeless *puruṣa* can be transformed by the movements of the mind, although, as we can see, a viable answer is readily supplied by the other commentators.

SŪTRAS 5 TO 11, THE DIFFERENT MOVEMENTS OF THE MIND EXPLAINED

Having started out by defining yoga as *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, Patañjali now seeks to explain further what is meant by that phrase. He begins that explanation in this next group of *sūtras*, which analyse the nature of the *vṛttis*, the movements of the mind, which the yogic endeavour seeks to restrain.

SŪTRA FIVE

ṛttayaḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ

The movements of the mind can be divided
into five categories; these can either bring
affliction or be free of affliction.

With the introductory passages now complete, we move into a new passage of discussion relating to the nature of the *ṛttis* referred to in the second *sūtra*. *Sūtra* five introduces that consideration by stating firstly that there are five types of *ṛtti* and that these can be either *kliṣṭa* or *akliṣṭa*, depending on whether or not they cause affliction. These statements will be explained in the *sūtras* that follow. Vyāsa here explains that the *kliṣṭa ṛttis* are those that give rise to future results, as the law of karma unfolds, whilst the *akliṣṭa ṛttis* are those that lead a person towards *viveka-khyāti*, the power of discrimination that leads to realisation of the Sāṃkhya truth of the difference between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. It is in this sense that the terms afflicted and non-afflicted should be understood, although perhaps afflictional and non-afflictional would more accurately convey the intended meaning.

Following a line discussion started by Vyāsa, Śaṅkara reminds us that the *kliṣṭa* and *akliṣṭa* categories of mental transformation are not entirely distinct and will frequently be closely intermingled. Vācaspati Miśra goes a little further by arguing that the *akliṣṭa ṛttis* are to be regarded, at least initially, as a positive force, as these have the effect of nullifying the *kliṣṭa ṛttis*. This relates back to the statement of Vyāsa that the second *sūtra* does not use the word ‘all’ in relation to the restraint of the movements of the mind, for those movements that take us in the direction of discriminative knowledge are to be fostered rather than restrained. Vijñāna Bhikṣu takes a more directly practical approach by explaining how the *kliṣṭa* movements of the mind are to be witnessed in the world around us. He writes: ‘Overcome by greed & c. created by identification with objects, and striving to overcome that through hurting and helping others in the process dharma and adharma results are collected and from that, there is a flow of pain, that is the idea’. Here he is essentially confirming Vyāsa’s explanation that the *kliṣṭa ṛttis* are those that perpetuate the cycle of karma and hence the pain of rebirth.

SŪTRA SIX

pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtayaḥ

These five are proper judgement, false
assessment, mental construction, sleep,
and the remembrance of things past.

The sixth *sūtra* takes the form of a lengthy compound consisting of five words that are in effect a list of the five types of *vr̥tti* experienced by the mind, as mentioned in the previous *sūtra*. As all five of these are defined and briefly explained in the next five *sūtras*, Vyāsa offers no commentary here and our other three commentators are similarly restrained.

SŪTRA SEVEN

pratyakṣānumānāgamāḥ pramāṇāni

Proper judgement comes from direct perception,
logical inference, and scriptural revelation.

Here Patañjali begins his explanation of the five types of *vr̥tti* by presenting a threefold definition of what is meant by *pramāṇa*, the first of the five given in the list in the previous *sūtra*. Indian philosophy typically begins from the point of establishing a set of *pramāṇas*, which usually refers to the means by which reliable knowledge can be attained, and the threefold list given here is the usual one arrived at by most systems of thought. The question is asked as to how we know what we know, how we acquire the knowledge we possess, and the answer given here is that we gain knowledge through sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*), through the application of logical reasoning and inference (*anumāna*), and by receiving instruction from a reliable source. In this case it is made clear that the reliable source in question is scripture, and the Vedas and Upaniṣads in particular, as it is argued that the highest knowledge cannot be gained through sensory perception or inference, and comes only through the revelation of infallible sacred texts. These are here referred to as *āgama*, which literally means the wisdom that has come down to us.

By its acceptance of this third *pramāṇa*, the *Yoga Sūtras* places itself quite clearly within the domain of orthodox philosophical systems, those which accept the Vedic revelation, in contrast to Buddhists, Jains and others who do not accept this infallible status of the Vedas. It is interesting to note, however, that the main thrust of Patañjali's teachings herein rests on the view that true knowledge can be obtained through yoga practice, through *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, by means of which the external movements of the mind are stilled and knowledge of *puruṣa* can then emerge from within, without reference to any scriptural teachings. Hence one has a sense that the acceptance here of āgama as a valid *pramāṇa* is more formal than actual, and it is notable that at no point does the *Yoga Sūtras* cite any sacred text in order to give support to its own teachings. It is also interesting to note that in his commentary on this *sūtra*, Vyāsa does not define āgama in relation to the Vedas, but treats it more generally as received wisdom from a reliable source.

Śaṅkara takes this opportunity to present a lengthy discussion of the role of *pramāṇas* in arriving at valid conclusions, and in so doing moves well beyond the exposition of the *sūtra* itself or Vyāsa's commentary. Vācaspati Miśra notes that *pratyakṣa*, sensory perception, is given first in the list and he argues that this precedence given to perception indicates the reality of the world as it is perceived. He notes alternative views on this point and then provides a detailed explanation of how knowledge of objects is gained by *puruṣa* by means of the mind and senses. Vijñāna Bhikṣu follows this same line of discussion and one can observe that the preoccupation of the commentators with this particular point is due to the fact that *puruṣa* is regarded as entirely distinct from the senses and the mind. They are *prakṛti* whilst *puruṣa* is non-*prakṛti*, so how is it that *puruṣa* appears connected to them when gaining knowledge by means of sensory perception. Complicated arguments are considered on this point, but unfortunately the intricacies of this analysis lie beyond our present scope.

SŪTRA EIGHT

viparyayo mithyā-jñānam atad-rūpa-pratiṣṭham

False assessment means misunderstanding based
on mistaken apprehension of the object.

Here the second of the five types of *vṛtti* is considered. This is *viparyaya*, meaning false assessment or misapprehension, which is identified as the opposite of *pramāṇa*, the first of the *vṛttis* considered in the previous *sūtra*. Hence Vyāsa explains that when the mind adopts a position contrary to the three sources of true knowledge mentioned there, that is what is meant by *viparyaya*, which can be counteracted by the proper application of one of the three *pramāṇas*. Śaṅkara then adds to the discussion by stating that *viparyaya* is to be understood as mistaking an object one sees for something else, and here one is reminded of the oft-repeated example of perceiving a rope as a snake that appears frequently in the writings of Śaṅkarācārya. Vācaspati Miśra here presents his readers with a detailed discussion of different perceptions which may overlay each other, whilst Vijñāna Bhikṣu discusses at some length the distinction or non-distinction to be drawn between different types of ignorance in relation to the world.

SŪTRA NINE

śabda-jñānānupātī vastu-śūnyo vikalpaḥ

A mental formulation arises when knowledge is based on words alone, and is devoid of a proper object of perception.

Here *vikalpa*, the third of the five *vṛttis*, is considered. There are a few different meanings that could be applied to the word *vikalpa*, but if we rely on Vyāsa's commentary then the meaning intended here becomes more apparent as his commentary is quite specific. The previous two *vṛttis* related to *pramāṇa*, which is the absorption of knowledge by appropriate means, and then *viparyaya*, which is false knowledge absorbed by the mind when a *pramāṇa* is improperly applied. *Vikalpa* is the movement of the mind that occurs when it hears or reads words on a particular subject. As a result of that hearing, the mind forms an internal construction that is supposed to give mental substance to the words that have been heard. Now that *vikalpa* may be exactly correct or erroneous, and therefore Vyāsa states, 'It is not included under true knowledge, and it is not included under false assessment,' referring to the two *vṛttis* already discussed. Essentially, according to Vyāsa, *vikalpa* is a formulation created within the mind when words on any subject are heard without there being any direct perception of the object or idea being described by those words.

Śaṅkara gives an explanation of why it is that *vikalpa* does not fit into the category of either established or false knowledge, pointing out why it can fall into either category. Vācaspati Miśra gives a similar explanation, writing as follows, ‘a man in some cases falsely attributes diversity to things that are identical, and again in other cases identity to things that are diverse’, thereby making the point that when we hear words, the idea we develop from them may be either correct or false. Here Vijñāna Bhikṣu does not choose to go beyond a recapitulation of the points made in the *Vyāsa-bhāṣya*.

SŪTRA TEN

abhāva-pratyayālambanā vṛttir nidrā

Sleep is where the movement of the mind
has no object on which to focus.

Here it is the state of deep sleep rather than the dreaming state that is being referred to as *nidrā*, the fourth of the five *vṛttis* under discussion. One might naturally enough feel that this state of dreamless sleep is one in which the movements of the mind are restrained, but according to Patañjali one should not make the mistake of thereby equating sleep with *samādhi*. Vyāsa explains why such a distinction should be made. When one awakens from sleep, one can recall either, ‘I slept very deeply’, or else, ‘I have slept very poorly.’ He thus concludes that, ‘This kind of memory in one who has awakened from sleep is not possible if there were no experience of the *vṛtti*.’

Śaṅkara responds to his imagined opponent by denying that the dreaming state must also be included as *nidrā*, asserting that dreams are a form of memory whereas *nidrā* is deep dreamless sleep and hence a distinctive *vṛtti*. Vācaspati Miśra discusses why it is that *nidrā* cannot be considered a cessation of all movements of the mind, whilst Vijñāna Bhikṣu makes the point that the word *vṛtti* is repeated in this *sūtra* to emphasise the understanding that deep sleep is indeed to be regarded as one of the movements of the mind.

SŪTRA ELEVEN

anubhūtaḥ-viśayāsaṃpramoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ

Remembrance is where the experience
of an object is retained.

This *sūtra* gives a readily comprehensible definition of memory, which is simply the recollection of a previous sensory experience. Vyāsa gives a more complex analysis of what we mean by memory, stating that it is the recollection both of the object itself as perceived in the past and of the knowledge gained through that perception. In other words, memory enables us to experience both an object from the past and our own understanding of that object when it was perceived. He further goes on to state that whenever we have a mental experience of an object through perception, that leaves a *saṁskāra*, a latent impression, on the mind; memory is hence to be understood as the process by which that *saṁskāra* is brought to the fore once more. Śaṅkara takes this opportunity to criticise the Buddhist understanding of memory by rejecting the view that all recollections are simply mental processes without reference to any specific object. This relates to the Buddhist notion of momentariness, which denies the reality of actual objects. Vācaspati Miśra emphasises the fact that memory cannot go beyond perception or a previous mental formulation, and as such it is limited in its range of activity. Vijñāna Bhikṣu points out that memory relates only to the *saṁskāras*, the latent impressions existing in the mind as a result of past perceptions, and hence it must be understood as a type of *vṛtti* that is distinct from that formed by direct perception of the object as it is.

Now the fivefold analysis of the *vṛttis* that are to be restrained has been completed, and Patañjali moves on from this point to consider the meaning of another of the words used in the second *sūtra* to define yoga. Here is what he says regarding *nirodha*, the restraint of those *vṛttis*.

SŪTRAS 12 TO 16, THE PROCESS OF RESTRAINT

Having concluded his analysis of the movements of the mind, Patañjali now moves his focus towards *nirodha*, the means by which such movements are restrained in order that the highest spiritual goals can be achieved. The discussion focuses primarily on two words, *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, dedicated practice and renunciation of other more worldly pursuits. If the process of *nirodha* is to be successful, then these two factors must be kept constantly to the fore.

SŪTRA TWELVE

abhyāsa-vairāgābhyām tan-nirodhaḥ

The restriction of the movements of the mind is achieved
through regular practice and through renunciation.

In this *sūtra*, Patañjali gives an insight into how the difficult yogic task of restricting the movements of the mind can be achieved. The means is defined by the two opening words which are *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, which are given the ending *ābhyām* to provide the meaning of 'by means of.' Here one might note that in sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna a similar instruction about practising yoga by restraining the mind, a process which allows direct perception of the ātman. In response to this instruction, Arjuna states that he thinks restraining the mind is as difficult to achieve as restraining the wind, *vāyor iva su-duṣkaram* (v34). Kṛṣṇa agrees that it is indeed a difficult process to follow, but insists that it is possible if one adopts the proper means, which are similarly named as *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, and it might be suggested that in constructing this *sūtra*, Patañjali had in mind the discussion located in the *Gītā*.

The main point of the *sūtra* is, of course, to affirm that the successful practice of yoga is not an easy task or one that can be taken up lightly. It requires that regular practice be undertaken on a daily basis over a period of years, and, moreover, that one make a commitment to abandon some of one's more worldly endeavours and aspirations. Nonetheless, lest one think that this is a process to be avoided on the grounds of its impracticability, we should again recall the progression of the conversation in Chapter 6 of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Following on from Kṛṣṇa's advocacy of *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, Arjuna asks about the fate of one who starts out on the path of yoga but falls short of final success. Does not such a person lose out in all spheres of life? On this point, Kṛṣṇa reassures him that whatever progress is made is never lost and will remain with one throughout all future forms of existence.

Vyāsa here refers to two directions in which we might project our existence: one he defines as *kalyāna*, meaning pure or auspicious, and the other as *pāpa*, meaning wicked or false. His point is that for the practice of yoga one must adopt the way of *kalyāna* and avoid any tendency towards greed, malice or anger, all of which fall under the heading of *pāpa*. In this way, he explains what is meant by renunciation;

it is adopting the *kalyāna* way of life and abandoning our tendency towards *pāpa*. Śaṅkara and Vācaspati Miśra add very little here by way of further explanation, and Vijñāna Bhikṣu confines himself to definitions of terms used in the *Vyāsa-bhāṣya*.

SŪTRA THIRTEEN

tatra sthitau yatno 'bhyāsaḥ

Abhyāsa means the exertion required
to achieve steadiness of mind.

In his next *sūtra*, Patañjali gives an explanation of what he means by *abhyāsa*, which we have defined as 'regular practice'. The translation is not absolutely clear but the intended meaning seems to be that *abhyāsa* is the exertion, the *yatna*, required to bring the mind to a state of steadiness, *sthitau*, which one must presume relates to the restraint of mental activities referred to in the second *sūtra*. *Sthita* means fixed or situated, and this clearly stands in contrast to our normal state in which the mind moves constantly from one state to another. Hence we can see that *abhyāsa* means the determined effort to achieve the state of *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, which is a primary goal of the yogic endeavour. In his short commentary, Vyāsa confirms this view, whilst Śaṅkara merely states that the grammatical form of *sthitau* indicates that steadiness is the goal to be reached through *yatna*, one's concerted efforts. Vācaspati Miśra makes exactly the same point as Śaṅkara, whilst Vijñāna Bhikṣu again seeks to define the exact meaning of Vyāsa's terminology.

SŪTRA FOURTEEN

sa tu dīrgha-kāla-nairantarya-satkārāsevito dṛḍha-bhūmiḥ

Now when the exertion is properly performed for a long
time, without interruption, it becomes firmly established.

Here the final phrase, *dṛḍha-bhūmiḥ*, means 'it becomes firmly grounded' or, 'firmly established', indicating the conditions by which the endeavour towards stability of the mind becomes successful. So this *sūtra* is telling us more about what is meant by *abhyāsa*. Three components of *abhyāsa* are established herein. It must continue for a considerable period of time, *dīrgha-kāla*, it must be performed without interruption, *nairantarya*, and it must be practised with due respect

in an appropriate manner, *satkāraśevita*. Vyāsa then adds to this by stating that yoga should be undertaken with due respect for the means and the goal, so that the practitioner adheres to the precepts of austerity, celibacy, knowledge and faith in its efficacy. Otherwise, the full commitment that *abhyāsa* demands will not be apparent. Our other three commentators make only brief additions to the discussion, reiterating the points made by Patañjali and Vyāsa.

SŪTRA FIFTEEN

dr̥ṣṭānuśravika-viṣaya-vitr̥ṣṇasya vaśīkāra-samjñā vairāgyam

Vairāgya is known to be the self-mastery
that removes the hankering arising from
perceiving or learning about an object.

If we trace the course of the discussion, we can see that this and the previous three *sūtras* are offering the reader a clearer understanding of what is meant by *nirodha*. Firstly, it was explained that *nirodha* depends on *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, regular practice and renunciation, and now each of these two terms has been explained. The precise meaning is not absolutely clear, but it seems that *vairāgya* is being defined as *vaśīkāra*, gaining control or mastery, and that control is directed towards the hankerings that typically arise from encounters with objects that might give us pleasure in a worldly sense. When we see or hear about a particular thing or object, a longing for it will often arise in the mind, but *vairāgya* means gaining sufficient self-control so that this unwanted sense of longing is restrained and suppressed. The particular word used for the suppression of hankering is *vitr̥ṣṇa*, which has some resonance with Buddhist thought, though of course it was probably a term that was in wide circulation across traditions.

Vyāsa defines this *vaśīkāra*, the power of control, as the ability to apply the discriminative knowledge that enables us to assess the true worth of any object. In this way, we can recognise that these worldly pleasures are of little value in comparison to the spiritual goals pursued by the *yogin*. Śaṅkara offers a fourfold analysis of how *vaśīkāra* is gained. First there is a consciousness of the efforts we need to make, then a recognition of when and how we fail in these endeavours at restraint, then a consciousness of the workings of the mind, and finally a full attainment of self-control. Vācaspati Miśra

understands *vaśīkāra-saṁjñā* as meaning an awareness of one's power of mastery rather than *vairāgya* being understood as the power of self-mastery. Both readings are equally valid, but in this latter case the meaning is that we become aware of the power that we possess over the inclinations of the mind and are thereby able to exert that power in attaining the desired state of *vairāgya*. Vijñāna Bhikṣu offers an alternative, and rather complex, fourfold analysis of the means by which one attains the control referred to as *vaśīkāra*, and also states that the attainment of superior knowledge enables us to see the objects of pleasure for what they truly are, trivial things of little importance.

SŪTRA SIXTEEN

tat-param puruṣa-khyāter guṇa-vairṣṇyam

A superior form of renunciation is the lack of hankering for material attributes that arises from realisation of puruṣa.

In this *sūtra*, a higher means (*tat-param*) of gaining renunciation than *vaśīkāra* is presented. This is defined as *puruṣa-khyāti*, realisation of *puruṣa*, the spiritual part of our identity that is the true self beyond body and mind. The point here would be that in the initial stages of yoga practice, one undertakes renunciation because it is part of the process by which a successful outcome is achieved, but when the result of yoga practice becomes apparent in the form of *puruṣa-khyāti*, then renunciation becomes instinctive and is inherent in one's new state of consciousness. A similar point is made in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.59), where it is stated that when one gains the higher experience of spiritual joy, then the desire for the pleasures of this world naturally diminishes. And hence Vyāsa states, "The uppermost limit of just this knowledge is the highest detachment. For *kaivalya* is inseparable knowledge connected with this detachment."

Śaṅkara makes the point that the previous *sūtra* referred to preliminary renunciation, which is in relation to individual objects, but here we find the phrase *guṇa-vairṣṇyam*, which means complete detachment from the world as a whole, consisting as it does of the three *guṇas*. Vācaspati Miśra provides a slightly different perspective by arguing that one should promote the *guṇa* of *sattva*, as it is the purity of *sattva* that is the means by which discriminative knowledge is gained. And then that very same discriminative knowledge enables

one to see oneself as one truly is, *puruṣa*, which is entirely distinct from all the *guṇas*. Vijñāna Bhikṣu, certainly unknowingly, makes a similar observation to Śaṅkara's comment that the previous *sūtra* referred to individual objects while the superior *vairāgya* discussed in this *sūtra* entails wholesale detachment from the world.

SŪTRAS 17 TO 20, THE GOAL OF YOGA PRACTICE

Up to this point the discussion has focused primarily on the means by which success in yoga can be achieved, explaining firstly the movements of the mind that are to be restrained, and then the process by which that restraint is accomplished. Now the attention moves towards the outcome that is sought, which is defined in terms of two forms of *samādhī*, or fixed concentration, which are termed *saṁprajñāta* and *asaṁprajñāta*.

SŪTRA SEVENTEEN

vitarka-vicārānandāsmītā-rūpānugamāt saṁprajñātaḥ

Where this realisation is conscious (*saṁprajñāta*),
it is achieved through deliberation, reflection,
joy and the experience of selfhood.

Building on the statement of *sūtra* 16 regarding *puruṣa-khyāti*, realisation of our spiritual identity, *sūtra* 17 now takes us in a new direction by referring to one of the forms of *samādhī* which brings that realisation. This is the *saṁprajñāta-samādhī* in which the mind becomes focused exclusively on a single object, thereby restraining all other movements of the mind. As is made clear in Chapter 6 of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, once the ability to focus the mind on a single object has been acquired, it should be utilised to concentrate on the ātman, *puruṣa* in the language of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Hence Kṛṣṇa says, *vinīyataṁ cittam ātmany evāvatiṣṭhate*, the *yogin* fixes the controlled mind on the ātman alone. It is in this way that the *puruṣa-khyāti* mentioned in *sūtra* 16 is achieved, along with a concomitant mood of renunciation. The method by which this *saṁprajñāta-samādhī* is achieved is said to be fourfold: *vitarka*, *vicāra*, ānanda and *asmitā*. The terms *vitarka* and *vicāra* seem to have been commonly used in early yoga treatises as we find them, for example, in Chapter 188 of the *Mahābhārata*'s twelfth book (*Śānti-parvan*), where *viveka*, discrimination, is included as a third element.

What is apparent from these the first two of the fourfold list is that *saṁprajñāta-samādhi* is achieved by properly utilising the conventional mental processes of deliberating and reflecting in order to understand the presence of our spiritual identity. When *viveka* is added, as in the *Mahābhārata*, it is more clearly apparent that the aim here is to realise the truth of the Sāṅkhya assertion *anyo 'ham*, 'I am different from the mental and physical embodiment with which I presently identify myself'. We will then naturally wonder why it is that ānanda and *asmitā* are added as two further means by which this realisation is attained. One might suggest that this is because of the deep sense of joy that arises when there is contact between the meditating mind and our spiritual nature, a joy referred to by the *Gītā* as *sukham* ātyantikam, endless delight. This sense of joy must inspire the practitioner towards a realisation of the spiritual source of that joy, whilst *asmitā*, the sense of selfhood, refers to the realisation of oneself as a transcendent individual being that is not a part of the material manifestation.

Vyāsa contends that *vitarka*, *vicāra*, ānanda and *asmitā* represent progressive stages on the path towards *saṁprajñāta-samādhi*. When conscious deliberation is employed that is *vitarka*, but the *vicāra* stage is that in which one goes beyond such conscious deliberation. In the ānanda stage of pure spiritual joy, even *vicāra* is transcended whilst *asmitā* is simply a changeless sense of 'I am.' Śaṅkara appears to deviate somewhat from Vyāsa's reading by suggesting that the four are not so much stages towards attaining *saṁprajñāta-samādhi*, but rather the forms of consciousness that characterise *saṁprajñāta*. Vācaspati Miśra follows the same line by explaining that it is when *saṁprajñāta-samādhi* is attained that *vitarka*, *vicāra*, ānanda and *asmitā* become manifest. Vijñāna Bhikṣu elaborates further on the meaning of the four terms, suggesting that *vitarka* means intense concentration on a particular object or form such as the image of a deity, whilst *vicāra* is focusing the concentration on the subtle elements of which the mental faculty is comprised. Following Vyāsa more strictly, he then says that when one goes beyond *vicāra*, the concentration rests solely on the sense of pure bliss, ānanda, that is experienced by *yogins* in the higher stages of practice. And finally *asmitā* is to be equated with *kaivalya*, the state of liberation when *puruṣa* exists solely as *puruṣa*, without any connection or sense of identity with the variegated manifestations of *prakṛti*.

SŪTRA EIGHTEEN

virāma-pratyayābhyāsa-pūrvāḥ saṁskāra-śeṣo 'nyaḥ

The other type of realisation is preceded by the practice of suppressing conscious thoughts so that only subconscious impressions (saṁskāras) remain.

Given the context of the discussion, we must presume that here the word *anyaḥ*, meaning 'the other,' must refer to *asaṁprajñāta-samādhi*. In this alternative state of *samādhi*, there is no deliberation or reflection, for these mental processes are suppressed, and all that then remain are the *saṁskāras*, the subtle impressions left on the mind by previous mental states, by previous *vṛttis*. In this state, which is attained by prior practice (*abhyāsa-pūrvā*), there are no longer any conscious thoughts or thought processes. This understanding of the *sūtra* is confirmed by the Vyāsa, whilst Śaṅkara adds that this highest state of *samādhi* can be achieved only through total *vairāgya*, absolute renunciation of the world. Vācaspati Miśra states that this highest state of yogic achievement is equivalent to the *nirbīja-samādhi* mentioned in later *sūtras*, whilst Vijñāna Bhikṣu asserts that *saṁprajñāta*- and *asaṁprajñāta-samādhi* are not to be regarded as alternative paths, for the *asaṁprajñāta* state involves the setting aside of all practices defined under the heading of *saṁprajñāta*.

SŪTRA NINETEEN

bhava-pratyayo videha-prakṛti-layānām

For beings who do not have bodies, and those whose physical forms have merged back into *prakṛti*, mental processes focus on existence alone.

Here we naturally ask the question as to who is being referred to by the term *videha*, meaning without a body, and this question is answered by Vyāsa who states these beings are the gods and those who dwell in higher realms of existence than our own. Unlike ourselves, such beings do not inhabit forms composed of gross matter but have a more subtle form of existence. Vyāsa also distinguishes between two types of beings that are referred to here, the *videha* and the *prakṛti-laya*, although it would be quite reasonable to regard both expressions as referring to the same form of existence. He indicates

that the *prakṛti-laya* are those who exist in our own realm of being but who have transcended the present form of existence, presumably through the forms of *samādhi* just considered. Both the gods and successful *yogins* are able to attain a state somewhat akin to *kaivalya* even whilst existing in this world of *prakṛti*. This is not an easy *sūtra* to interpret, but this would seem to be the meaning and this is the interpretation that Vyāsa offers us.

Śaṅkara states that these two types of beings are those who have attained this state by birth, the gods, and those who have attained it by practice. Both appear to be approaching the state of liberation but they are not to be regarded as liberated because further progress is still required. Vācaspati Miśra offers a detailed and rather complex analysis of how it is possible to exist in this world whilst being *videha*, without a body, or *prakṛti-laya*, with one's existence merged back into primal *prakṛti*; unfortunately, we do not have the scope here to provide a detailed consideration of his ideas on this point.

This discussion of the *videha* and *prakṛti-laya* beings still leaves open the question of what is meant by *bhava-pratyaya*, which defines their state of existence, and on this the commentators, including Vyāsa, are not particularly forthcoming. Going out on a limb therefore, I would suggest that this phrase means that they exist on a purely intellectual level for *bhava* means existence and *pratyaya* is often used to refer to the subtle mental processes that stand in contrast to the activities of the physical body. This view seems to be shared by Vijñāna Bhikṣu who writes, 'the *videhas* have the modification of the intellect without reference to the body.'

SŪTRA TWENTY

śraddhā-vīrya-smṛti-samādhi-prajñā-pūrvaka itareṣāṃ

Others attain this state preceded by faith, vigorous endeavour, recollection, *samādhi* and realised knowledge.

Here we are told that apart from the gods who are born into that state and those who have merged their individual existence into *prakṛti*, there are others who reach that state through a series of attributes or practices, which precede its attainment. Using the word *upāya*, Vyāsa designates these as the means by which that goal is achieved, and gives an informative outline of what each of them means. Perhaps

unexpectedly, he defines śraddhā, faith, as serenity of mind and from this serenity comes *vīrya*, which often means heroism or courage, but here probably indicates the intense endeavour that would be made on the basis of one's faith in the process. From *vīrya* then comes *smṛti*, which usually means memory, but could here refer to a state of enlightened intelligence, as that meaning is also sometimes encountered. The acquisition of *smṛti* allows one to reach *samādhī*, which Vyāsa defines in this context as meaning an undisturbed state of mind. The state of *samādhī* leads in turn to *prajñā*, which is defined by Vyāsa as *viveka-prajñā*, which means a form of higher wisdom that allows discernment or discrimination in relation to *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. Again we find ourselves confronted by the Sāṃkhya idea of *anyo* 'ham, I am different from matter, which is the goal of the realisation sought through yoga practice. Śaṅkara provides a summary of Vyāsa's analysis, whilst Vācaspati Miśra emphasises the role of faith in guarding practitioners against discouragement due to setbacks in their practice. Vijñāna Bhikṣu follows a similar line by emphasising the fact that faith is the basis of the necessarily intense yogic endeavours here referred to by the term *vīrya*. It is these endeavours that form the subject of the next two *sūtras*.

SŪTRAS 21 TO 22, THE NECESSITY OF ENDEAVOUR

We now have a short passage in which Patañjali emphasises the need for deep commitment if one is to gain spiritual release, which has already been noted as the goal to be sought through the yogic endeavour.

SŪTRA TWENTY-ONE

tīvra-samvegānām āsannaḥ

This state is very near for those who display
ardent intensity in their practice.

This is one of the easiest *sūtras* to comprehend, as it simply makes the point that the more one commits oneself to yoga practice, the sooner the desired results will be achieved. One point we might note, however, is that this short statement indicates the form of spirituality we are in contact with here. From the perspective of yoga, spiritual perfection is achieved through one's own endeavours, a view that stands in contrast to the teachings of the *Bhagavad-gītā* in which

divine grace is revealed as an alternative path to liberation. As the *sūtra* is quite straightforward, Vyāsa merely adds that it is referring to the acquisition and results of *samādhi*; our other three commentators have little further to add.

SŪTRA TWENTY-TWO

mṛdu-madhyādhimātravāt tato 'pi viśeṣaḥ

Even then, there is still a distinction between those who are leisurely, middling, or intense in their practice.

This is a slightly odd *sūtra* because it is still discussing those who are ardent in their practice and yet classifies some of these as *mṛdu*, which means mild, gentle or leisurely in their yogic endeavours. One must presume that all serious practitioners are classified as *tīvra-saṁvega*, ardent in their endeavours, but that even amongst such ardent *yogins* some remain more committed than others. Vyāsa makes the rather obvious point that those who are most committed or intense are closer to the goal than others who are *mṛdu* or *madhya*, mild or middling, whilst Śaṅkara suggests that the intention of the *sūtra* is to encourage practitioners to give greater commitment to their endeavours. Vācaspati Miśra appears to recognise the apparent contradiction between this and the previous *sūtra*, but suggests that this is resolved in one's mind if one reads them aloud. Vijñāna Bhikṣu contends that this *sūtra* is referring to a special class of *tīvra yogins* who are most committed to succeeding in yoga practice. Even amongst this class, however, there are still distinctions of endeavour and success to be noted.

SŪTRAS 23 TO 28, DEVOTION TO ĪŚVARA

The final word of *sūtra* 23, *vā*, which means 'alternatively', indicates that a process different to *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* can be adopted in order to attain the same desired outcome. This other process is designated as *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, devotion to God, and the commentators all make it clear that the efficacy of this alternative path to liberation is due to the divine grace that it invokes. Theism of this type is somewhat unusual in early Yoga treatises, such as those located within the *Mahābhārata*, although it is absolutely central to the ideas enunciated within the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

SŪTRA TWENTY-THREE

īśvara-praṇidhānāḍ vā

Or it may be achieved by devoting oneself to the Lord.

In this and the following five *sūtras*, we can observe a marked change in the direction of the discourse, and one that is initially quite surprising. We can learn from Chapter 289 of the *Mahābhārata*'s *Śānti-parvan* that the theism of the Yoga system was noted from earlier times as the distinguishing feature that set Yoga somewhat apart from Sāṃkhya, and this idea finds clear confirmation in this and the following *sūtras*. And although the Yoga treatises of the *Mahābhārata* rarely display a clearly theistic orientation, the same cannot be said for the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which combines teachings on the techniques of meditational yoga with a pronounced form of theism that includes the idea of liberation being gained through the love and grace of the Supreme Deity. I have earlier stated my suspicion that Patañjali had a knowledge of the *Gītā*, which he made use of in compiling the *Yoga Sūtras*, and it is on the basis of this next group of *sūtras* that this suspicion is most particularly aroused, although it is to be noted that our text does not venture as far as Kṛṣṇa's revelation by referring to the love of God, or liberation being granted as a gift of divine grace.

This first one of this group of *sūtras* is fairly straightforward in its assertion that devotion to the Deity, *īśvara*, is an alternative form of spiritual practice that brings the same level of success as that achieved by *yogins* who are intense in their endeavours. The word *praṇidhāna* can mean either meditation or dedication, but if we take the *Gītā* as our guide we can see that it may well mean both; one's meditation is focused on *īśvara* who is also the object of one's devotion. It is often said that the *Bhagavad-gītā* offers alternative forms spiritual practice, which include meditational yoga and *bhakti*, devotion to God, but a careful reading of its text reveals that these two apparently distinct paths are in fact inseparably intertwined, and it seems reasonable to suggest that here the *Yoga Sūtras* is adhering to that same position by recognising that the potency of devotion to God is equal to that of intense yogic endeavour.

Vyāsa uses the word *anuḡrḥṇāti*, meaning he favours or blesses them, to indicate the divine grace invoked by the *praṇidhāna*. All the commentators follow Vyāsa and agree that what is being referred to

here are expressions of devotion to Īśvara, which invoke the grace of the Lord who then assists the *yogin* in his spiritual endeavours. Śaṅkara writes: ‘the grace is effortless, by the mere omnipotence of the Supreme Lord. By that grace of the Lord, *samādhi* and its fruits are soon attainable.’ Vācaspati Miśra reminds us that *praṇidhāna*, acts of devotion, can be mental, verbal, or bodily, suggesting the usual forms of worship executed by Hindus.

Vijñāna Bhikṣu takes a slightly different approach by suggesting that *praṇidhāna* means fixed mental concentration on the Deity as a form of yoga practice. *Sūtras* 21 and 22 are advocating meditation on the *jīvātman*, one’s own spiritual identity, whilst here the focus is on *paramātman*, the manifestation of Īśvara that is said to be present in each of us alongside the individual ātman. Such a suggestion notwithstanding, it is apparent that here we have a significant change of direction in the line of teaching, which again reminds us of the transition made in the *Bhagavad-gītā* between its sixth and seventh chapters. At the end of Chapter 6, after Kṛṣṇa has concluded his discourse on meditational yoga, Arjuna objects that the process described is impossibly difficult to follow, and then in the seventh chapter we find the introduction of devotion to the Deity as an alternative path to follow. It is perhaps the case that in these *sūtras*, Patañjali is following the *Gītā*’s lead in structuring the course of his presentation.

SŪTRA TWENTY-FOUR

kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair aparāṁṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viśeṣa īśvaraḥ

Īśvara is a special puruṣa, free from the
influence of affliction, action, the ripening of
accumulated karma, and latent impressions.

In this next *sūtra*, Patañjali gives us more information about what he means by the term Īśvara, and it is not absolutely clear that this is to be equated with the idea of a Supreme Deity, as found in overtly theistic texts such as the *Bhagavad-gītā*. First of all, Īśvara is a special *puruṣa*, *puruṣa-viśeṣa*, that is free from all affliction, action, the results of action and also from the subtle impressions left by earlier states of mind. This would suggest that Īśvara is wholly transcendental to this world and its various fluctuations, but it does not indicate that Īśvara is the creator and controller of the world, as in more overtly

theistic texts. And it might be argued that the definition offered here might equally apply to a previously non-special *puruṣa* that has gained liberation through yoga practice. Given the previous *sūtra*'s reference to *praṇidhāna*, worship, however, that seems unlikely, and I think we must presume that the words here are offering a somewhat restrained version of theistic doctrine.

Vyāsa directly rejects any suggestion that Īśvara is no more than a *puruṣa* that has gained liberation, stating, 'the earlier bondage known with reference to a liberated soul is not there with reference to Īśvara'. He further emphasises the monotheistic nature of the teachings in this passage by stating, 'he who has pre-eminence which is free from an equal or superior pre-eminence is that Īśvara'. He then points to sacred texts as providing proof of the utterly transcendent nature of the Deity being referred to here. The other three commentators devote considerable attention to expanding on Vyāsa's interpretation of the *sūtra*, but for the most part construct their arguments along lines parallel to those followed by the primary commentator.

SŪTRA TWENTY-FIVE

tatra niratīśayaṁ sarva-jñātva-bījaṁ

For Īśvara, the seed of omniscience reaches
a state that cannot be surpassed.

Here the use of the word *bīja*, meaning a seed, might suggest that Īśvara's knowledge of all things is something that has grown or developed from a previous state of non-knowingness, in the manner that it does for the *yogin* who attains liberation. Again, however, all the commentators follow Vyāsa's view in denying that there is any such intended meaning to be found here. Vyāsa points out that in this world *puruṣa* might move towards a state of omniscience through practices that lead to liberation, and it is for this reason that the idea of a seed is referred to. Īśvara, however, is absolutely distinct, as in him the state of omniscience always exists in its ultimate form; it is not that he has at any time needed to cultivate that state.

Śaṅkara takes this opportunity to set forth a lengthy argument in favour of pure monotheism, debating with an imagined opponent who is attempting to disprove the possibility of any such idea. Vācaspati Miśra explains why the word *bīja*, seed, is used here. The *sūtra* refers

to *sarva-jñatva*, omniscience, but this is to be understood as the ultimate point of a gradual process by which an individual's knowledge is expanded. For Īśvara, however, there is no such gradual progression of knowing, for in his case *sarva-jñatva* is a permanent, unchanging attribute. Vijñāna Bhikṣu here provides a lengthy and complex discussion of different forms of knowledge, but also points out that the word *niratiśayam*, meaning unsurpassed, reveals again the absolute distinction between Īśvara and any other *puruṣa*, whether liberated or not.

SŪTRA TWENTY-SIX

sa pūrveṣām api guruḥ kālenānavacchedāt

He was the guru of the ancient teachers,
for he is unrestricted by time.

More information is given here about the nature of Īśvara and an indication that he is active in this world as a teacher. One might feel that this *sūtra* thus tends to indicate that Īśvara is in fact to be understood as an enlightened being of this world, the original guru, but we should also be aware of the widespread Śaivite view that it is Śiva himself who is the *ādi-guru*, who reveals knowledge of yoga to sages of this world. Here one is perhaps more particularly reminded of the opening verses of the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā*. In those verses, Kṛṣṇa, who is himself Īśvara, reveals that at the beginning of creation he taught the science of yoga to Vivasvān, the sun god, who passed the knowledge on to others. It does not seem too improbable to suggest that it is these verses that Patañjali has in mind in presenting this *sūtra*.

Vyāsa here continues with the same line he has taken for previous *sūtras* by pointing out that the ancients, to whom Īśvara initially revealed the science of yoga, were themselves conditioned by time. The statement here that Īśvara is unrestricted by time again demonstrates the clear distinction that is to be recognised between Īśvara and all other living beings. Vijñāna Bhikṣa is of the view that the ancients referred to by the word *pūrveṣām* are in fact the triple deities, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, who are lesser manifestations of the absolute Īśvara. He then takes the opportunity to present his own view of Vedānta, stating that Īśvara exists within each one of us and can give guidance to us by acting as the inner guru.

SŪTRA TWENTY-SEVEN

tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ

His sound form is praṇava.

In this and the following *sūtra* a further technique is suggested, and it is one that has a clear relationship to the idea of *īśvara-praṇidhāna*. *īśvara* is represented or embodied by the sound vibration of *om*, which is here referred to by the accepted term of *praṇava*. This is a general term for a sacred vibration, but is used on almost all occasions to indicate the sound of *om*. There are a number of references to *om* in the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* in particular provides a detailed revelation of the significance of each of the letters of which it is comprised. Here we are simply told that *praṇava* is the *vācaka*, the verbal expression, of *īśvara*, although the degree of identity between them is not elaborated upon.

Vyāsa raises the question of whether *om* is no more than a word that means *īśvara*, or whether the relationship between them is inherent and absolute. He answers by saying that the latter view is correct; it is like the relationship between father and son, which is unchanging, regardless of the words used to describe that relationship. So *om* and *īśvara* have an eternal identification and it is this that gives spiritual potency to the vibration of *om*. Śaṅkara takes the opportunity to embark on a fairly lengthy discussion of the relationship between words and the objects they denote, contending that because the Vedic usage of words is eternal, the relationship between the Vedic word and the object it denotes is also inherent and unchanging. This discussion is of great interest to followers of the Vedānta and Pūrva Mīmāṃsā systems of thought for whom the revelation of the Vedas is an absolute authority, and hence it is no surprise to find Vācaspati Miśra following that line of commentary. Vijñāna Bhikṣu refers to *om* as a 'name' of *īśvara* but insists that this is not like the name of a person known as Devadatta. The name Devadatta is a temporary appellation for that living being, whereas the association of *om* and *īśvara* is eternal.

SŪTRA TWENTY-EIGHT

taj-japas-tad-artha-bhāvanam

The quiet repetition (japa) and meditation on
the object of that japa is the process.

This passage concludes with instruction as to one of the methods of *īśvara-praṇidhāna*. One might naturally think about the rituals of temple worship in that context, but we should bear in mind that at the time when the *Yoga Sūtras* was probably composed, the tantric rites of image and temple worship were not that widespread. Hence the method of worship or meditation focused on the Deity that is given here consists of the quiet recitation of the mantra *om*, which has been shown to have an intimate and inherent connection to the Deity. This practice of *japa* is still widespread amongst those Hindus whose religious orientation is primarily devotional, with a wide range of *mantras* being employed for that purpose, dependent on the particular deity who is the object of veneration, and the particular devotional group to which the practitioner belongs. It is almost certain that the idea of *japa* goes back to Vedic times; in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.25), Kṛṣṇa says *yajñānām japa-yajño 'smi*, meaning, 'of all *yajñas* (sacrificial rites), I am the *japa-yajña*,' whilst in Book 12 of the *Mahābhārata* we have a lengthy passage entitled the *Jāpaka-upakhyānam* (Chs 189–193), which tells of the fate of a resolute performer of *japa*, although we are not told whether or not it was *om* that he recited. Pursuing what might appear to be a somewhat hackneyed theme, I would again suggest a link here to the ideas found in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which states, *om ity ekākṣaram brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran*, which means, 'reciting *om*, the single syllable which is Brahman, and fixing his mind on me', thereby revealing a similar connection between meditation on *īśvara* and *japa* of *om*.

Vyāsa then explains that the two practices of meditating on *īśvara* and reciting *om* are effective in leading one to success in yoga practice, which he refers to as *cittam ekāgram*, fixing the mind on a single point. He then cites a verse confirming this idea, which appears to be taken from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Śaṅkara explains that *japa* can be either mental or enunciated in a quiet tone, though mental *japa* is better because it is closer to meditation. He also continues to emphasise the devotional orientation of these *sūtras*, stating that this practice is the way to attract the grace of the Lord. Vācaspati Miśra here merely summarises the points made by Vyāsa, but Vijñāna Bhikṣu comments at some length, providing quotations from *Purāṇas* that show the relationship between *om* and the Supreme Deity, who is represented in those citations as both Viṣṇu and Śiva.

CONCLUSION

After considering in some detail the first twenty-eight *sūtras* of the *Sādhana-pāda*, let us conclude this session with a summary of the main lines of discussion that Patañjali has presented us with. We started off with a definition of yoga as *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, restraining the movements of the mind, which was said to allow the *puruṣa*, the true self, to come to exist in its full spiritual identity. This was followed by a discussion of the nature of the movements of the mind that are to be restrained, presented in terms of a fivefold analysis. Then the consideration turned towards the process of restraint, the *nirodha*, which was explained in terms of two factors, *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, regular practice and renunciation of alternative preoccupations. The extent of the dedication applied by the practitioner is likely to determine the extent to which a successful outcome is achieved. And then finally, we were offered an alternative form of practice based on devotion to the Supreme Deity, which the commentators regard as a means by which liberation through divine grace is received from the Deity as an expression of love. At this point, the discussion turns its focus towards analysing the obstacles to progress in yoga that may be encountered and the means by which such obstacles may be overcome. It is towards that topic that we will turn our attention at the start of the next session.