

Constant Practice and Letting Go

Abhyasa - Vairagya

In the scope of the last letter the features of **egoism** were explained, which is the habit of imagining a **false identity** made up of *thoughts, feelings and body sensations*.

The **koshas** were also mentioned, the 5 strings, that build the web of our worldly entanglement, which covers our true **spiritual identity**.

I will continue with further elucidations on the manifestation of **egoism (asmita)**, such as **attachment (ragah)** and **aversion (dvesah)**, and with a deeper reflexion on our spiritual **ignorance (avidya)** in future letters.

At the moment I consider it more important to deal with Patanjali's means to remove that ignorance and its resulting egoism.

As already said, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (written about 200 AD) constitute the most systematic framework of classical Yoga. I will therefore keep referring to the Sankrit terms used by Patanjali.

Before we dwell into the topic of Abhyasa and Vairagya, I would like to take you to the very first sutras of Patanjali's work:

In the first chapter on Samadhi (cognitive absorption) Patanjali defines Yoga as the **cessation (nirodah)** of the **fluctuations (vritti)**, arising within **consciousness (chitta)**.

This is the state of Samadhi. What is left when the fluctuations cease to arise, is the **Seer in his own true form (drastuh svarupe)**.

Otherwise, Patanjali reminds us, there is an **identification (sarupyam)** with the fluctuation (changes or temporary appearances within the pure consciousness), or in other words an identification with our **apparent identity**, our ego, which consists of the different **mental modifications (chitta-vrittis)**, such as the means to acquire **true knowledge (pramana)**, **misconception (viparyaya)**, **imagination (vikalpa)**, or **memory (smrtayah)**. Patanjali even defines the dreamless **deep sleep state (nidra)** as a mental modification. We can understand the latter as a thought about nothing, and not as a total absence of disturbance or fluctuation.

Because the state free from fluctuation is **chitta-vritti-nirodah**, the state of Yoga or Samadhi, in which we perceive ourselves as pure, absolute consciousness, as the Self, or in the words of Patanjali, it is the state in which we abide in our own true form.

Let us now follow the thread of the last letter:

Chitta-vritti-sarupyam, or the *identification with body-mind*, is the original misconception, the apparent *expulsion from paradise*, or the *fall from the heavens*, and therefore the base for egoism, or the belief, that we are the sum total of something that is insubstantial, which does not contain anything of consistency.

In Buddhism this is known as **No-Self (Anatta)**, or the revelation that body-feeling-mind and all of its changing, temporary states and appearances, do not contain anything abiding or constant, *no I nor a Self*.

Chitta-vritti-nirodah or the cessation or standstill of the mental modification, is the absence of egoism and unveils our true Self, the fact that *we never left paradise*.

As a matter of fact, chitta-vritti-nirodah is our natural state, which underlies all mental modification.

Let us now go into the actual subject of the letter:

How do we attain to this cessation of fluctuation or revelation of pure, undisturbed consciousness?

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abhyasa vairagyabhyam tan nirodhah

By constant practice and with detachment arises this cessation.

This Sutra is the foundation and basic understanding of the yogic discipline. Constant **practice (abhyasa)** and **letting go (vairagya)** are the supporting pillars of Yoga

M.G. Satchidananda sees *Abhyasa as all that we do to remember our true nature and Vairagya as all that we do to let go of what we are not.*

Constant Practice can be compared to the effort of bailing out water from a sinking boat. To prevent the boat from sinking we must not stop to bail out the water. Constant practice means to remember our highest truth at every moment.

Practically, it means to get the mind established in equanimity and detachment in all life situations and to focus and concentrate the mental power.

Detachment refers to letting go of wrong views, which make us and others suffer. Thoughts, which promote separation, judgments, guilt, hate and fear disconnect us from our true Self and must therefore be gradually abandoned.

Abhyasa and Vairagya are two sides of one coin and the foundation of Yoga Practice. They are the pillars of a spiritual discipline that leads us to the awakening from the dream of egoism.

In the next letter I would like to continue with a more detailed reflexion on the first of the aforementioned pillars, namely Abhyasa.

OM

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