

Exploring the Sutras: Practice, Non-attachment and Faith : Abhyasa, Vairagya, Shraddha

After discussing the purpose of yoga and the tendency of the mind to fluctuate (sutras 1.1 – 1.11), Patanjali goes on to tell us what is needed as we begin our journey with yoga.

1.12: *“These mental modifications (Vrttis) are restrained by practice (abhyasa) and non-attachment (vairagya). Sri Swami Satchidananda*

This is encouraging! In this sutra Patanjali tells us that we have the ability within us to contain the thoughts and fluctuations that otherwise keep us from experiencing transformation, and that we can do this through consistent effort and non-attachment.

These two must go hand in hand if we are to make progress. Nischala Joy Devi gives us a beautiful analogy, saying that they are “two wings of one bird. They flap in unison enabling the bird to fly, when they are seemingly still the bird glides.....In order to soar the bird needs both wings to flap in unison”.

Gregor Maehle also explains that the important word in this sutra is “and” – we cannot have one without the other, as to do so would lead to extremes. To practice without non-attachment can result in the ego becoming involved in our efforts and a sense of ‘end-gaming’. Similarly, if we become overly attached to the efforts and the outcome then this can lead to unhealthy patterns or even obsessions, either to the practice itself or the fruits of the practice.

“Vairagya assists abhyasa, allowing us to make a deep commitment to our practice ... while keeping us free from anxiety about its fruit” Pandit Rajmani Tigunait

Balancing the two is key to Yoga.

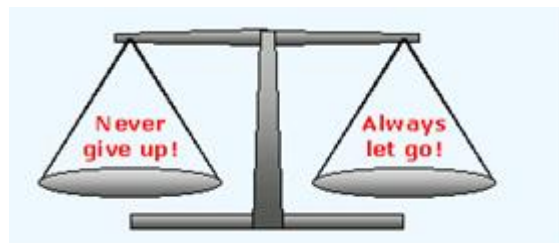


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“Through effort we come to step into a stream that can carry us. When we begin to let this current carry us, gradually the person who is making the effort needs to take a backseat. At this juncture we spontaneously shift from an effort to be, to effortless being” Donna Farhi

Abhyasa - practice

1:13 Practice is the steadfast effort to still these fluctuations (BKS Iyengar)

1:14 It is only when the correct practice is followed for a long time, without interruptions and with a quality of positive attitude and eagerness, that it can succeed (TKV Desikachar)

It is only through dedicated, regular practice that we create the conditions in which we can generate awareness, balance and peace.

On Day 1 of this course you considered “what does yoga mean to me”, and what positive impact you have experienced through the practice of yoga since the first time you stepped on a yoga mat.

Over the years you have created a regular habit of attending yoga classes, and perhaps even built your own personal practice at home. You will have noticed the ways in which your body and mind have transformed and the ripple effects that this has had throughout the rest of your life and relationships.

This transformation won't have happened by magic, but through prioritising time for yoga - creating a healthy habit by regularly attending your yoga classes, practising online or on your own in a self-guided practice. Would these transformations have been quite so significant or sustainable if you had only dropped into yoga every now and then?

Patanjali tells us that there are some who are born into a state of yoga (1:19) but for most of us if we want to continue to experience the benefits and full potential of yoga, we must continue with steadfast effort and commitment.

There will be many distractions along the way, and so developing a committed practice is essential if one is to explore the full beauty of yoga.

Points for reflection:

Consider “what do I bring into my life through my practice”?

Recommit to developing and sustaining a personal practice.

If you're stuck with establishing your personal practice re-read the 'Personal Practice Tips' Handout from Day 1 for practical ideas. Reach out to the group for support when you could do with a boost with your motivation.

If you miss the energy of a group class when you practice at home, consider that all around the world in this very moment there are others rolling out their yoga mat or meditating. Spend a moment to tap into that global group energy as you arrive for your practice.

Use your journal to record your practice – see how it changes over time.

It takes time and persistence to create a new habit. Use a habit tracker to help chart your success, and to identify where you have blips (you'll find one in the [Meditation Portal](#)).

“Do what you can, and do it fully” Judith Hanson Lasater

Vairagya – non attachment

1:15: When an individual becomes free of craving for the sense objects which he has experienced as well as heard, that state of consciousness is vairagya (Swami Satyananda Saraswati)

Vairagya is the state of non-attachment in which we let go of desires and attachments to objects, thoughts, negative patterns, and specific ways of being.

This is not the same as being disinterested or uninterested in life, rather it requires being fully engaged in the present moment exactly as it is. Giving up your attachment to the way you think things should be.

Whereas abhyasa (practice) is an act of creation and bring something in and moving us toward a peaceful state, vairagya is an act of release – moving us away from unhelpful habits, distractions, and the scattered nature of the mind.

Points for reflection...

Consider “is there something that I would like to release to make time for practice”?

During your meditation or asana practice notice - where is your attention? Has the mind attached itself to a particular thought or are you fully present? Can you release attachment to the distraction and rest your awareness back in the moment?

Since you began yoga, are there any attachments that have naturally diminished or faded away completely?

If you're resisting practicing, can you let go of the resistance and practice anyway?

Do you attach to things being a particular way so that you can practice?

'I don't have enough time' (5 minutes is better than none)

'The house is too noisy' (perfect practice for maintaining focus and releasing distractions)

'My back is too sore to sit for meditation today' (meditate lying down).

Let go of the need for things to be perfect, and let your determination and commitment be more powerful than your excuses. Remember: 'No effort is ever wasted' (Bhagavad Gita)

Notice throughout your day off the yoga mat – are you feeling attached to a particular outcome? Can you let that go a little, be more open and invite in whatever arrives?

At work, do you feel the need to always be right and have the final say when decisions are to be made? Or can you be truly open to ideas or give responsibility for a project to a colleague. (As well as taking the all the pressures from you, this may also help your colleague to learn and grow).

At intervals in the day, check where your mind is – keep guiding yourself back to living each moment to its fullest.

What does 'advanced' yoga mean to you? Is it about getting into more and more complex or challenging postures or how far we go? Or is it about exploring how you feel when you're in those postures, listening to the intelligence of the body as you focus on the breath and alignment, and the wise use of props? Do we measure our progress in yoga through how our body looks on the mat, or through the ways the practice filters into our life?

Listen to your body. Let the wisdom and messages from the body and heart be louder than the attachments of the mind.

What do I need to release? What is no longer serving me? Can I let go a little?

1:20 SHRADHHA: Faith

When the going gets tough, or your commitment waivers, knowing with unshakeable belief that your practice will support you. These practices take time, and the effects aren't instant so we need faith in the power of our practice, trusting that in time we will experience change. For example, do we give up meditation after a week because our mind is too busy and scattered and we think we're no good at meditating, or do we have faith that despite the swirling mind the effects of meditation will gradually trickle through into our being, and gradually with time our life will begin to flow with more ease.

Judith Hanson Lasater offers us a simple mantra for daily living: "I have faith in yoga". This is a beautiful way to begin your practice, and to reflect upon during times when your commitment falters. Or perhaps you would like to create your own mantra or affirmation (if you think it might be helpful share this with others in the group to help inspire their practice).

"Everything changes in this world, but flowers will open each spring, just as usual"
Japanese folk saying

References & Sources of Inspiration:

Many versions of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras including:
The Path of the Yoga Sutras: Nicolai Bachman
Living Your Yoga Second Edition: Judith Hanson Lasater
Bringing Yoga to Life: Donna Farhi
[Helena Del Pino, YogaHome](#)