

Yoga Sutras - 7 Keys to Practice, by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati from www.SwamiJ.com

Focus on a few key suggestions: One way of making the Yoga Sutras simpler and more accessible is to initially focus on a small number of the more straightforward, practical suggestions that contain foundation principles and practices. Following are seven such practices that will open the door to the deeper practices of the Yoga Sutras.

1. Make choices that lead to stable tranquility
2. Reaffirm your convictions regularly
3. Be vigilant about the coloring of thoughts
4. Use 1 simple solution for 27 forms of negativity
5. Train your mind to be one-pointed
6. Witness everything
7. Discriminate at all levels

1 **Make choices that lead to stable tranquility:** In yoga, one of the central principles against which all decisions in life are made is the question of what will bring you in the direction of a stable tranquility (1.13). This is the meaning of the word *abhyasa*, which means practices. Cultivating and training yourself in this art of decision making will consistently lead you in the direction of inner peace and Self-realization. Repeatedly ask yourself, "Is this useful or not useful? Will this lead me in the right direction or the wrong direction?" Then, you can move in that direction with conviction, and in a spirit of non-attachment (1.15).

Some of the related sutras: (1.13, 1.12-1.16)

2 **Reaffirm your conviction regularly:** Of the core attitudes to develop and reaffirm, none is more important than *virya*, which means the energy of conviction and persistence (1.20). Often we seek the emergence of *kundalini shakti*, the spiritual awakening, but the first form of that to emerge is *sankalpa shakti*, the shakti of determination. It says, in a strong voice, "I can do it; I will do it; I have to do it!" Perpetually having this attitude as a companion will keep you going when the path seems to be filled with obstacles. With this attitude, the same ego that is seen as an obstacle becomes a best friend. Paradoxically, determination goes hand-in-hand with letting go, surrender.

Some of the related sutras: (1.20, 1.19-1.22)

3 **Be vigilant of the coloring of thoughts:** The joy of deeper meditation comes through uncoloring (1.5) the mental obstacles (1.4) that veil the true Self (1.3). This process of cultivating uncolored (*aklishta*) versus colored (*klishta*) thought patterns permeates the Yoga Sutras and is a core principle of the practices. It involves minimizing the gross colorings (2.1-2.9) and then dealing with the subtler colorings (2.10-2.11), so that the alliance with karma can be broken (2.12-2.25). It is extremely useful to be ever mindful (1.20) of these colorings, particularly as they apply to attractions, aversions, and fears (2.3). By being gently, lovingly mindful of the colorings both in daily life and at meditation time, they can gradually be attenuated (2.4). This increasingly thins the veil over the true Self (1.3).

Some of the related sutras: (1.5, 2.1-2.9, 2.10-2.11, 2.12-2.13)

4 **Use 1 simple solution for 27 forms of negativity:** There are many positive suggestions in the Yoga Sutras for actions, speech, and thoughts, including the five *Yamas* of non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, remembering the creative force, and non-acquisitiveness (2.30-2.34). However, we often are not able to completely live up to these high standards. Whenever our

actions, speech, or thoughts are contrary to these principles, they may be accompanied by anger, greed, or delusion. They may be mild, medium, or intense. Thus, there are 27 combinations of these three triads (2.34). Though we may never have counted the combinations in this way, we are all familiar with the diverse way in which negative emotions can cause problems. However, there is a single principle in dealing with these that is elegantly simple (though certainly taking a great deal of effort). That is, retrain the mind by repeatedly reminding it that this is going in the wrong direction, and will bring you nothing but unending misery (2.33, 2.34). While this can sound so simple as to be of little use, it really is extremely effective in clearing the mind, and is well worth studying closely and practicing every day. It opens the door for subtler meditation. Some of the related sutras: (2.33, 2.34)

5 Train your mind to be one-pointed: There are several predictable obstacles on the inner journey, according to Patanjali. These include illness, dullness, doubt, negligence, laziness, cravings, misperceptions, failure, and instability (1.30-1.32). However, there is a single antidote that deals extremely effectively with these, and that is to train the mind to be one-pointed (1.32). Whether the means of one-pointedness is mantra, a short prayer, a remembered principle, or being focused in the work you do, this seemingly simple practice is profoundly useful. It must be practiced and experienced to be fully appreciated.

Some of the related sutras: (1.30-1.32, 1.33-1.39, 2.41)

6 Witness everything: There is a single process that threads its way throughout the Yoga Sutras. That is to systematically observe, explore, set aside with non-attachment (1.12-1.16), and go beyond each of the levels of reality and our own being. The meaning of witnessing is a simple formula: Witnessing = Observation + Non-attachment

To witness everything involves systematically disentangling from the thought patterns (1.4), witnessing thoughts (1.6-1.11), cultivating remembrance or mindfulness (1.20), moving through the levels of awareness (1.17), and dealing with the gross (2.1-2.9), the subtle (2.10-2.11), and the subtler (3.9-3.16). (See also the article, Witnessing Your Thoughts)

Some of the related sutras: (1.4, 1.6-1.11, 1.17, 2.1-2.9, 2.10-2.11, 3.9-3.16)

7 Discriminate at all levels: The entire science of Self-realization of Yoga rests on discrimination (viveka). Discrimination is used to make choices that bring stable tranquility (1.13). The purpose of the eight rungs of Yoga is discrimination (2.26-2.29). Razor-like discrimination (3.4-3.6) is used to separate the seer and the seen (2.17), so as to break the alliance of karma (2.12-2.25), and to get past the four mistakes of ignorance, or avidya (2.5). The subtler discriminations involve many subtle experiences (3.17-3.37, 3.39-3.49), as well as mind and consciousness (3.50-3.52, 3.53-3.56), with the highest discrimination leading to absolute liberation (4.22-4.26).

Ask yourself: One of the most simple, straightforward, and useful ways to practice discrimination is to reflect on your actions, speech, and thoughts, and ask yourself, "Is this useful or not useful? Helpful or not helpful? Is this taking me in the right direction or the wrong direction? Is it better that I do this or do that?" Measure your responses on the basis of what brings you closer or further to Self-realization. Ask yourself questions such as these, and answers will definitely come through discrimination.

Some of the related sutras: (1.13, 2.5, 2.17, 2.12-2.25, 2.26-2.29, 3.17-3.37, 3.39-3.49, 3.50-3.52, 3.53-3.56, 4.22-4.26)