

Yoga Vāsiṣṭha

Important Teachings



Swami Suryadevananda

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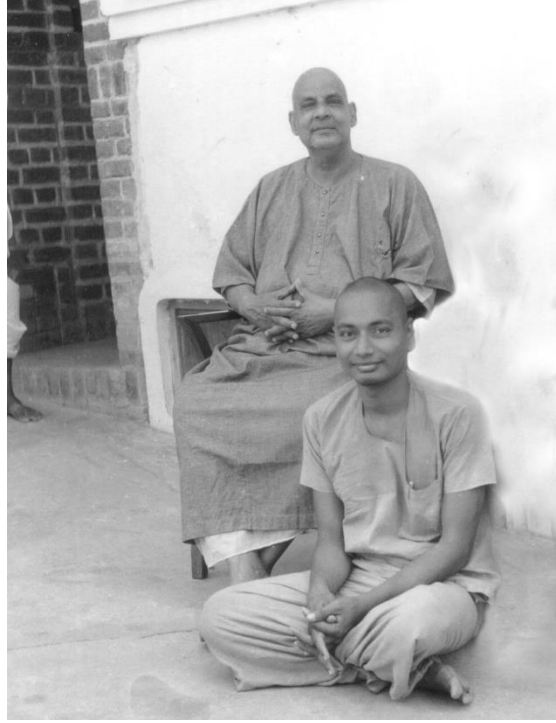
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DEDICATED TO



Gurudev Swami Sivananda

And

Swami Venkatesananda



PREFACE



This offering was not intended to be a book as such. I kept some notes on the main points covered in the video and expanded them a little so there could be a take-home in the form of a pdf handout to be released along with each video. I have received some feedback on culling these handouts into an eBook so with a little tweaking—here it is. I humbly offer this unto all who may feel it useful.

The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is a very important scripture for sincere seekers of the truth but perhaps not as well-known as some others. This scripture has many stories that are used to point to subtle truths which are generally hard to absorb theoretically—especially today, when political correctness imposes itself on direct communication. Swami Venkatesananda’s translations on the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha are the very best as only excessive descriptions in the story or redundancy is left out but the essentials are brought to light in very simple language.

Here, I have chosen to focus on the important teachings communicated through the stories, without the stories or illustrations. This has its advantages and disadvantages. The reader may not get the background based on which or through which the teachings were communicated and it may also seem repetitive as some stories bring out teachings covered earlier so some overlap and redundancy was unavoidable. The advantage however falls to seekers who have been on the path for a while and are able to grasp the subtle but lofty truths without concern of redundancy.

Chapter six is the largest part of the scripture and broken in two parts. I have gone light in the contents of this chapter and instead, chosen to focus on topics useful to the seeker which is mostly in the earlier chapters. I recommend a study of either version of Swami Venkatesananda’s work, the fuller version or the concise version to benefit from this focused attempt to highlight the main teachings of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. Let us begin.

Swami Suryadevananda

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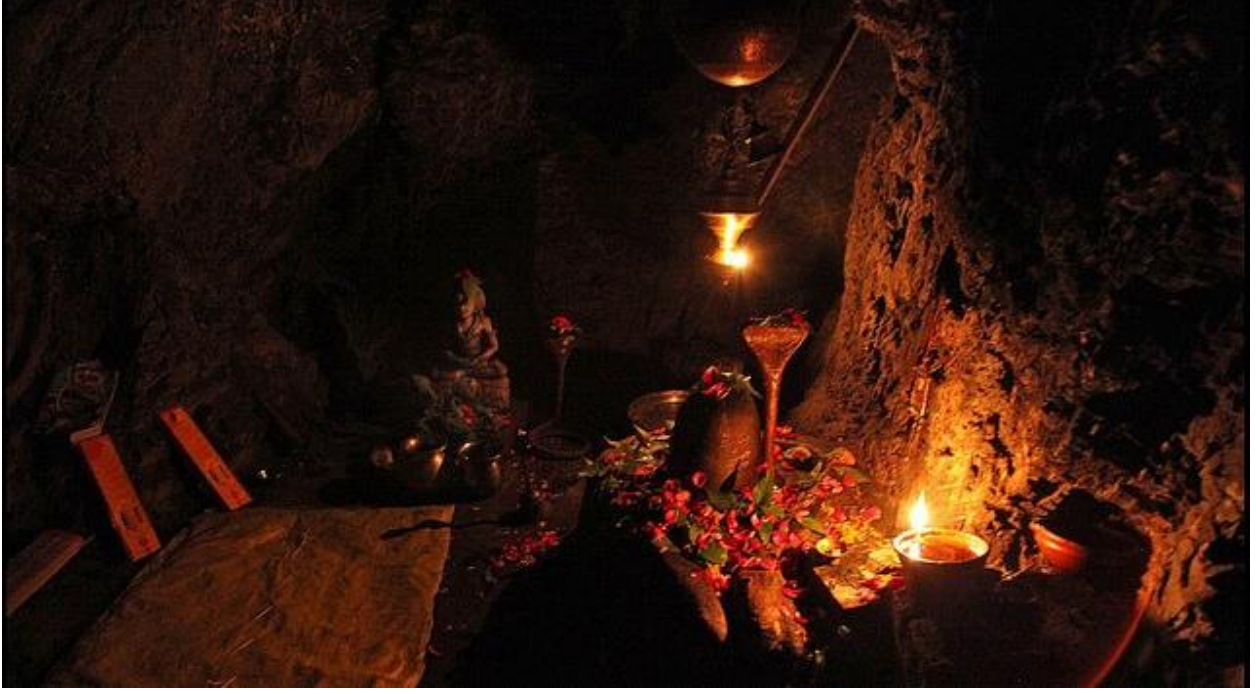
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PRAYER BEFORE STUDY

OM TAT SAT

yataḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni pratibhānti sthitāni ca
yatrai 'vo paśamaṁ yānti tasmai satyātmāne namaḥ

Salutations to that reality in which all the elements, and all the animate and inanimate beings shine as if they have an independent existence, and in which they exist for a time and into which they merge.

jñātā jñānaṁ tāthā jñeyaṁ draṣṭā darśana dṛśyabhūḥ
kartā hetuḥ kriyā yasmāt tasmai jñāptyātmāne namaḥ

Salutations to that consciousness which is the source of the apparently distinct threefold divisions of: knower, knowledge and known; seer, sight and seen; doer, doing and deed.

sphuranti sīkarā yasmād ānandasyā 'mbare 'vanau
sarveṣāṁ jīvanaṁ tasmai brahmānandātmāne namaḥ

Salutations to that bliss absolute (the ocean of bliss) which is the life of all beings whose happiness and unfoldment is derived from the shower of spray from that ocean of bliss.

Part 1 (Chapter 1)

Introduction

The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is a very important scripture for sincere seekers of the truth but perhaps not as well-known as some others. Here, we have a dialogue between the great sage Vāsiṣṭha and Rāma who amongst other wonderful qualities, was also a prince. The core of the scripture is a dialogue between Rāma and Vāsiṣṭha in the royal court of his father and in the presence of other great ones and sages.

After finishing his education with others, Rāma returned to his home and resumed his normal way of princely living. Very soon, he had an urge to go out and see the country before he would get into the thick of his duties and responsibilities. With his father's permission, he set out to see the world—the land his duties were tied to. He toured the length and width of the land and eventually, returned to the palace and princely way of life.

Soon, a wave of thought overtook him and he became indrawn and pensive. Others noticed this but did not know quite what to make of it. One day, the great sage Viśvāmitra came to the royal court and asked the king, Rāma's father for a favor. He asked that Rāma's company him for some time as he was involved in a sacred rite which required his full involvement and there were others bent on disturbing the rite. With Rāma, the rite would be secure and this would benefit others including Rāma in many ways. Rāma was sent for but to the surprise of his father, he appeared very indrawn and pensive. When asked about the cause of his present state, Rāma spoke about his observations on life and the inability to reconcile what was observed during his journey, what he had very intelligently pondered upon and what was expected of him in terms of his duties and responsibilities. He was not dejected but at the threshold of awakening and sage Viśvāmitra requested the sage Vāsiṣṭha to resolve any doubts Rāma may have.

1. Background: The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha unfolds as the dialogue between the sage Vāsiṣṭha and Rāma, in the presence of others in the royal court and other great ones who assembled to hear what would unfold.

2. Examining everything: Rāma came to the crossroads of life and understanding by his own careful examination of things. This crossroad is not of finding fault in things as they are but in finding one's understanding of things not adequate to a deeper scrutiny of them. Inner wisdom is intuitive and not something learned in a classroom or from others. It comes about by one's direct observation of things as they are, as things unfold and while desiring a good understanding of them. This intelligent way of observing is fluid and sees things as they are as it is not based on memory but on one's direct observation in the present.

3. Awakening: When one lives intelligently, which is examining things as they are and as they unfold—one sees that one's existing notions and understanding of things as they are is not

adequate. This bucket of existing notions about things is conditioning as it conditions one's observation based on many things which we will not get into further here. When one discovers that existing notions or the known is not adequate to really know things as they are—one awakens and stays awake.

4. At the crossroads: To awaken and stay awake is to not rely on any existing notion—however elevated the notion be. One learns to see things as they are and as they unfold. While walking the awakened path, one comes to a crossroads where what is seen cannot quite be reconciled with what is expected of oneself and the way through the maze is not quite clear. It is here, the guru or teacher's light on the path becomes very important as just as you light one candle with another, one's own inner wisdom is also brought to a steady flame with the help of the teacher.

Part 2 (Chapter II begins)

1. The liberated sage

Mention a 'liberated sage' and the mind instantly conjures fantastic ideas of what this person should be and even look like. What does it mean 'to be liberated'? Just like two people, one free of debt and one in debt may not necessarily look different—the liberated sage may not appear to be any different from the average person. Today, there is much emphasis on 'conformity' and so, the liberated sage may even seem like a rebel of sorts. Two important qualities are mentioned: *he is truly a liberated sage: who by nature is not swayed by sense pleasure, and, who does what needs to be done without the motivation of fame or other incentives.*

2. Self-effort

The effort that arises from right understanding which has been felt in one's heart, exposed to the teachings of the scriptures and the conduct of holy ones. This type of self-effort is natural action but may take some inner strength as the old ways of habit insist and must be overridden. Habit or conditioning interferes with a fresh take on things and the right response to each situation. It must be overcome by inner strength which Vāsiṣṭha calls 'grinding one's teeth'—which is the inner grinding of resistance by habit.

In this way one should overcome evil or habit by good doing what is needed and thus change fate by present effort.

3. Essence of all scriptures

Overcoming habit is not easy as we go against our own grain so to say. But, with inner strength, one should *continually divert the impure mind or conditioned mind to pure action by persistent effort.* This takes inner resolve, relentless vigilance and courage to stay the course.

4. The course of action

Action or doing things is not for the purpose of accomplishing the outer but to see and transform the inner while acting in the outer. This is intelligent action and it gives us a steady window to the deepest reaches of the mind along with a way to free it of its conditioning. In the course of action, we see our conditioning which is the conditioned mind with which we are very tightly identified. When we live an examined life, the inner intelligence sees each situation in the moment and does what needs to be done and not what is preferred, beneficial or otherwise. In this way, while living wisely, we thin conditioning and gradually revert to the unconditioned self. The purpose of action is to be acted on.

Part 3 (Chapter II continues)

FOUR GATEKEEPERS TO THE REALM OF FREEDOM OR MOKṢA

1. Śama or self-control

Self-control is a struggle at best until one has a solid and stable platform to rest on just like you cannot pull or push something when your feet have no traction on the ground. This is why those who struggle with change—try for a different state without firm footing on it inwardly first. In yoga, it is easier when the mind that is pulled in so many directions and ways is tethered to one common factor so inner conflict can gradually subside. The safest way is for the mind to rest on the eternal or God as then, all action flows in light of God’s omnipresence. Self-control and resulting inner peace come naturally when one is inwardly grounded or it is a constant struggle at best which Vāsiṣṭha says is like sleeping in a burning house. —*Self-control is supreme happiness.*

2. Vicāraṇā or the spirit of inquiry

Vicāraṇā or the spirit of inquiry is a mind that is observed relentlessly—without remission. Here again, the difficulty lies in not first clearly seeing the danger of an unexamined life. When one clearly sees real danger in unexamined living—one does not trust the slippery mind, aspires for a better way to live and be, and inner vigilance is activated. As long as one sees any value at all in the status quo, for any reason what so ever—conditioning dominates ruthlessly. Once the status quo is sincerely and wholeheartedly devalued and a wisdom more reliable is sought in the heart—the spirit of inquiry rises. —*The spirit of inquiry is itself the greatest wisdom.*

3. Santoṣa or contentment

Contentment is the renunciation of all craving for what is not obtained without seeking actively and to be at the same time satisfied with what comes naturally without being elated or depressed by them. It is a state of inner satisfaction, not with things but just satisfaction. This is not an unmotivated state but rather, a highly motivated state. You can only sustain peak motivation when you take out result, what comes, or what should come out of the equation. When you are doing the right thing in the right way—which is doing what needs to be done because it needs to be done—you find tremendous strength and energy within. As long as one is not satisfied in the self, he will be subjected to sorrow. With the rise of contentment, the purity of one’s heart blooms. The contented man who possesses nothing is not poor but owns the world as he is not anchored to narrow ways of thinking based on selfish purposes. —*Contentment is the supreme gain.*

4. Satsaṅga or good company

Satsaṅga is not a mere religious program of sorts but the coming together of the self and its holy aspirations with others or even with teachings to raise one’s own spiritual yearning. The heart or

core of one's being has to be fully involved so there is a deepening of yearning and seeking which replaces prior urges for this, that and the other. Satsaṅga is not limited to being with others but also the thoughts and feelings that one keeps company with. It can also be with writings and works of great masters who have themselves trodden the path of liberation. It does no good to 'attend religious programs' if the heart and mind do not tend to their import and stay firmly rooted in their ways. Satsaṅga is taking the hand of the good, in every way, all the time—as a companion and guide on the journey towards Self-realization. —*Good company is the best companion to the destination.*

Part 4 (Chapter II ends)

1. The task

When one leads an examined life, one sees things for what they are and realizes that what needs to change is the way we see things. The world is what it is and it will continue to be what it will. Why should things as they are affect me? Is there a better way to be and do that where one can still do what needs to be done but free of our reactions to it? Usually, our focus is on things outside and only turns inward for a few moments when we experience the lows of sorrow and highs of joy. It is possible to watch that in us which reacts to things as they are and see that these reactions are the play of habit and the self is quite distinct from them. If this is felt in the heart, one starts living an examined life where everything is examined afresh, not just the first time but from here out. Nothing changes outside but a fundamental change sizzles within as waves of habit rise and finding no shore, splash on themselves.

When the mind is at peace, the heart leaps to the supreme truth.

2. In the heart first

You would be quite surprised to realize how much easier the journey is if we have a good beginning and solid foundation. Struggle is often the sign of something wrong or something missing. Disturbing thought waves die down when we stop sparking and feeding them just like a fire. The energy in consciousness has to be given a different channel that is akin to goal and non-scattered.

When all the disturbing thought-waves in the mind-stuff have subsided and there is unbroken flow of peace and the heart is filled with the bliss of the absolute, when thus the truth has been seen in the heart, then this very world becomes an abode of bliss.

3. Self-control next

There is an old saying, “Blossom where planted”, I would add, “Blossom where planted first”. Don’t be in a hurry to uproot and change things externally. If the heart and mind do not change first, you will find yourself pulled on two ends and going nowhere but getting frustrated. When inner vigilance is active and natural as outer awareness, self-control becomes natural as you see ‘what actually is’ and are simultaneously aware of the inner notions. You learn to deal with what is and do what needs to be done without the superfluous and redundant ‘I’.

He is self-controlled who, though living amongst all is unaffected by them, does not feel elated nor hates, even as one is during sleep.

4. Then inquiry

Knowledge of truth arises does not arise from a book or teaching but from one's inquiry or direct observation. When you do not participate in attempted agitation, the agitation weakens and stops.

From such knowledge, there follows tranquility in oneself; and then there arises the supreme peace that passeth understanding and the ending of all sorrow.

Part 5 (Chapter III begins)

1. The illusion

We often think action and renunciation are external but Vāsiṣṭha tells us...

What is done by the mind alone is action; and what is abandoned or renounced by the mind alone is renunciation.

Action: This implies that we must be very careful with what we think as mental action is real action. There is a difference between what 'we think' and what 'thought thinks' and we must be very clear about this point continually. Let thought think and exhaust itself, we must know in every moment that it is thought that is thinking and we are aware of its movement or we are caught in its cycle. The seeds of experiences thus fall on the soil of the mind to sprout in time, and thus, add momentum to the cycles of life and death.

Renunciation: In the same token, outer renunciation means nothing if one is not completely free from the person, condition or object mentally or psychologically. But, we have to be careful here as often, physical renunciation is essential and necessary till mental renunciation takes hold firmly. Rare is the person who can at one stroke effect true renunciation in the mind of subtle and deep rooted attachments directly.

2. The cure

The mind runs after objects because it seeks fullness and feels that these objects will bring fullness. Actually, the mind does not run after objects really but after the notion one has that about them and the hopes of what having them may bring. If this notion was not there, the mind would not run after any object. This notion is created by the mind and so, it runs after itself only.

Inner fullness cannot come if it is not already there as the object will continue to be outside but fullness is experienced inside or within. It is a strange game the mind plays in assuming a seeming split within and somehow feeling that one part of this tear called the object will bring fullness—while staying full all through this jugglery. The object is in the mind and till the inner intelligence steadily holds this close at heart, the jugglery will continue.

The mind that has been relieved of its object becomes steady, then by deep meditation it attains the supreme state.

3. Spiritual discipline

Spiritual discipline is positive, not punitive. When the inner intelligence awakens, it shines a floodlight on what is best, while habit insists on the habitual. When one has seen the dangers in habitual ways, and, sincerely seeks what is best—the inner intelligence awakens and shows the way. Spiritual discipline is that inner strength to stay the course of what is best, enduring the

force of blind habit till it weakens and wisdom strengthens. When the mind is properly and effectively disciplined, the world-illusion vanishes.

The best treatment for this dreadful disease known as saṃsāra or the perception of world-illusion is the abandonment the pursuit of pleasure and this is conquest of the mind and freedom from the illness of saṃsāra.

4. All these help

Everything helps but you have to do what needs to be done and keep doing what is best every moment, every day and without remission.

Awakening: Along with examined living, these help awaken the mind: (1) the study of the scriptures is study of the self through scriptures, and, (2) the company of the wise, is company with wisdom—both these help kindle one’s own flame of awakening.

Having awakened: Having awakened, it is necessary to stay awake, this prevents existing concepts from simply rising and falling to going into action. Strengthen the awakened mind by relentless use, for this, you must stay awake each moment. Staying awake means a mind that is watched without remission, then only will the habitual mind weaken by disuse. For this: (3) self-effort is necessary to embrace the good and let go of habit, and must be strengthened in all that you do, and, (4) at the same time there must be abandonment of the pursuit of pleasure which is itself tranquility of mind.

Gradually, a fullness is experienced as the mind merges into the mind, rising above the mind itself towards establishment in the supreme state.

Part 6 (Chapter III continues)

1. Beyond conditioning

Conditioning disallows seeing things as they are by substituting what is preferred—positively or negatively so that even while seeing, we are seeing conditioning only. Spiritual discipline is the fuel required for the lamp of vigilance. Relentless empowered inner vigilance is required for one to stay free of conditioning. Vigilance without empowerment is useless. That which sees must be able to also do and steer clear of what is not good. This initial empowering may not feel natural at first and this is due to many factors including: *not clearly seeing* the harm of conditioning's play, *lack of will-power* and just the force of habit trying to fight aspiration.

The effort needed to correct this or to free the mind off its habitual ways and rest in itself, is directly proportional to the sincerity of the seeker's aspiration.

One has to stay continually awake so that the habitual mind sees that things go on much better, without agitation, and in peace by the inner intelligence—for it ceases its agitation and gradually fall back into its source. When we remain inwardly steady and unagitated as a natural state for a long time, the inner intelligence is fully awakened and the habitual mind significantly weakened.

It is by non-agitation that peace of mind is intensified; the conquest of the three worlds is nothing compared to the conquest of the mind.

2. Purification

Purification is the adjustments needed to steady one's sense of being in the self instead of the personality, in the waking state.

This steadying may seem like it involves some doing at first but all the doing is only to strengthen the sense of being and leave the shore of habit permanently. All that one does to bring about inner purification, involves a wide variety of practices for the different inner conditions and temperaments.

Among the many practices recommended by Vāsiṣṭha, is the practice of *fixing your attention within*, in the 'space in the heart', which weakens the habitual mind tremendously.

Fixing your attention within, is the practice of staying vigilant till it becomes natural and ongoing. The mantra repeated mentally, continually, to the rhythm of one's natural breathing, is of tremendous help towards fixing the attention within. Inner intelligence empowered, you will still be able to do what needs to be done very well but without any personal motive or gain.

This is inner purification and you will know when the grip of habit has weakened when objects are divested of the likes and dislikes and are seen just as they are. Objects include people, conditions and things—anything considered external or objective to the sense of self.

The mind is nothing more than the concepts 'I am this' and 'This is mine': when these concepts do not arise, the mind vanishes. The non-arising of these concepts purifies the mind. Then even the greatest calamity is not experienced as a loss.

3. Staying undistracted

Purification we discussed earlier, requires you to stay vigilant continually. This vigilance includes the inner and outer in the same field of view. This may seem difficult at first, but with sincerity and diligence—it is possible to be completely free of distraction. There is no harm in the rising of notions in the mind, they will do so till they have residual momentum or energy.

The problem occurs when arising concepts start illumining diverse objects within—which are also concepts.

This fall can only be prevented leading an orderly and disciplined life, which is doing what needs to be done because it needs to be done, one thing at one time, wholeheartedly, and by eternal vigilance at the same time. There is no suppression involved, just wholeheartedness in effort, better choices at each step and relentless vigilance.

In the non-arising of concepts lies perfection. You are conquered by the mind when a concept arises in it and illumines diverse objects. You will conquer the mind if you rest content in the self, undistracted by the concepts.

4. Beyond restlessness

Ongoing vigilance drains the mind of sense of objectivity and the energy that made the objects seem so real, begins to melt and return to subjectivity.

The same energy which illuminated the objects so to say, has to now illuminate the self. This cannot happen selectively, as and when it is convenient to one—it is an all or nothing just as a boat cannot be tied to the dock and sail out on the ocean's expanse at the same time.

The habitual mind is restless and this restlessness is steadied by being steady. This requires one to lead a simple, orderly and disciplined life of inner purification. When restlessness melts down, it itself melts into its source it becomes restful. It is a struggle at best to try to meditate till some level of inner purification or steadiness has been attained through disciplined living, which is avoiding distracted and careless living and at the same time, other practices such as asanas, pranayama, japa, kirtan and some daily study.

Most important is that you have to want to bring some order in the mind and first stop stirring the mind. The emphasis on 'always connected, everything now, all the time' leads to inner degradation and collapse.

The mind's restlessness must be curbed by bringing some order into our lives. There is no such thing as 'quality of life'—only quality of the liver, the one who lives life. The mind's restlessness is brought under control and thinned by order and some discipline. The order is tied to what is important and the discipline is the enforcing arm of order. This may sound punitive but just think about it—how can it be punitive when you are going from worse to better? It is not punitive—only positive and the gains are soon noticed in all aspects of one's life including ones over health and sense of well-being.

It is the power of restlessness of the mind that creates this world-illusion. The mind that is freed of restlessness is itself known as liberation or immortality.

Part 7 (Chapter III continues)

1. Restlessness

The mind has three modes: sattvā which is natural balance, purity etc., rajas which is dynamism and this includes restlessness, and, tamas which is dullness and lethargy. Restlessness of the mind is rājasic and mental conditioning in operation. The more conditioning acts in our life, the more restless we become as they get infused with additional energy each time and keep pushing one to act.

Mental actions are real actions as fruition follows mental action and sets the wheel of karma into action.

Taking the gist of Vāsiṣṭha's teachings on this, I would like to blend in some other practical thoughts which will make it easier to put into practice. Practical methods to overcome restlessness are...

Simple living: Swami Sivananda recommends a threefold approach; having a clear-cut goal of life, a plan to accomplish the goal and a system of self-accountability that enabled what needs to be done and allows you to accomplish them. This does not allow restlessness in the form of whims and fancies to act as these are the ways conditioning strengthens and increases. It is simple living, because it streamlines one's effort towards what is best. *When you do what is best for you, the best returns as result.*

Continual vigilance: do one thing at a time and do it with all your being—*because it needs to be done*. This will enable you to focus your attention and energy and at the same time do what needs to be done on its own merit—not because of some personal purpose. You begin to stand with all things by doing what needs to be done instead of 'my interests'. Along with the 'my', this weakens the force of personality which is the front end of the ego while strengthening vigilance.

Balanced practice: Swami Sivananda calls this the 'Yoga of Little'—doing a little of different practices which keeps your heart in the practice, thus keeping it from becoming mechanical while giving you a wider base.

When this restless mind is made quiescent by true renunciation, then the supreme good is attained.

Practice in life and on the mat, must be seamless as otherwise, the mind will swing between the real and the unreal, dwell on the unreal when it can and increase conditioning and its consequences. By relentless vigilance, one's understanding is purified by inner renunciation of conditioning, restlessness is curbed and the mind attains quiescence.

2. Controlling the mind

Giving the mind a positive direction or field to work in, is a practical and struggle free way to control the mind.

For this, we must have at heart a clear cut single ideal worth striving for that threads all situations. This will throw a light on the path in all conditions. Struggle and its resulting pressures are the result of conflicting priorities.

Having one single underlying purpose for doing all things cuts at the root of the mind's restlessness.

As a single purpose, it can be moral perfection, or, to see your own true nature. Having this purpose, the mind will be watched relentlessly and all promptings will be seen along with each situation and the best will be decided in each situation. The force of habit will be greatly weakened, doing what is best will become natural and you will find yourself standing with all things.

The mind alone is capable of controlling the mind. Controlling the mind by the mind involves relentless vigilance, a better choice in each situation, and wholeheartedness in doing what needs to be done.

3. Understanding renunciation

Desire or craving is a prompting by the force of habit and its cessation is liberation.

Earlier, we have talked about the need for ongoing vigilance. This takes firm resolve and inner strength as the force of habit can be quite strong.

If one has a strong urge to know one's self, it is much easier as struggle requires competing urges. Many things including good company in all conditions, simple living and leading an examined life will allow one to see through appearances and give rise to the urge to know the self. Take your mind back to the beginning, we spoke about Rāma going out in the world to see things as they are. It was as a result of this examination, that a strong dispassion born of wisdom arose in him.

When in this ignorant state there arises the desire to know itself, then ignorance ceases to be. When the sun of self-knowledge arises, the cloud of ignorance or mental conditioning is at once dispelled.

4. Renunciation

Renunciation is a very intelligent and necessary pivot for the seeker. You cannot face the light if you do not turn your back to darkness. When you face the light, you turn away from darkness.

We just spoke about renunciation and unless you face all things with light, which means to see things as they are—you may find it hard to aspire for the better and let go of the habitual.

Take your mind back to the beginning again when Rāma went out on a pilgrimage to see things as they were. This is very important as unless we go out of our inner habitual comfort zones by dealing with all things fresh and in the light of wisdom—habit will strengthen its grip.

When you start seeing things as they are and as they happen, the first ropes of habit are loosened which are the false infatuation we have with them which makes us run after them or reject them. This weakens pursuit and rejection which are based on rāga-dweṣa or likes and dislikes which are the dividing principles in the mind.

So, where do we start? Vāsiṣṭha says:

1. First abandon the pursuit of pleasure.
2. Then, give up all ideas of other or division.
3. Then, go beyond even being and non-being and establish in the non-movement of consciousness.

Aside from being very good advice in living wisely, this is also a step by step approach in meditation for the destruction of ignorance and transcending the mind.

Clinging to hopes and desires is sorrow, their abandonment is peace. Abandonment of hopes and desires is necessary to discover your true nature. For conditioning, which is ignorance, blocks self-realization by insisting on itself till one renounces them without reserve. Renunciation happens when one faces something better wholeheartedly as one's back is automatically turned on habit without struggle. Renunciation can also be thus seen as wisdom in action.

Part 8 (Chapter III continues)

1. How bondage happens

Thoughts arise in the mind on their own accord. When consciousness is aware of these rising thoughts, it is known as the mind.

The substratum and essential substance of all that appears in consciousness is consciousness only. Since consciousness is the all in all, which is omnipresent and omnipotent—the activity of throwing up thoughts expands immensely and instantly.

Consciousness is continually self-aware and so, it does not matter if these thoughts or notions arise in it. We however, find ourselves riveted to the appearances we find ourselves amidst—forgetting our essential nature as pure consciousness. There is then a further fall from our original nature when we start conceptualizing ourselves.

When our awareness or attention is disengaged from the inner sense of self and is completely outward, awareness is lost and bondage happens.

The mind is bound by its complete identification with what it contemplates and freed by a return to its original nature.

The firm conviction “I am different from the body, I am the supreme being” destroys ignorance, and one is freed.

2. Mind is the doer

Whatever the mind contemplates, the senses pursue. This is why one has to be very careful with ‘the pursuit of pleasure’ as the mind will pursue them vigorously. There is a difference between what comes and goes naturally and the pursuit of something—especially if we feel that the object is the source of pleasure. The mind at once registers these forms by itself, within itself and then, pursued—all within itself. We may feel that we are in pursuit of something outside but it is the inner fragmentation that is attempted to be restored to fullness again—real jugglery by the mind within itself.

The solution is to do what needs to be done, wholeheartedly, but as duty—this keeps the twin currents of rāga-dweṣa or infatuation or aversion out of action and thereby, out of consciousness. The mind stays whole and undivided and it is in this wholeness that the sense of fullness and joy are experienced naturally. The happiness felt by fragmentation and an apparent recovery so to say, is riddled with unhappiness and restlessness before, during and after its attainment.

Vāsiṣṭha tells us that that the mind alone is the doer of actions and the mind alone experiences the fruits of actions—not the body.

The objects pursued are forms taken by and in the pursuer in the confusion of their experience as pleasure and pain. Hence one should destroy pursuit of pleasure with all one's might.

A good way is to remain engaged in one's activity, but as duty—without infatuation or aversion, just as a crystal reflects objects non-volitionally.

3. Liberation and delusion

Being established in one's true nature attained by direct experience is liberation. Losing sight of one's true nature by awareness of 'the other'—is delusion.

Let us take a slow down a little and look at how we can establish the sense of self in our true nature.

- 1) The self can only be experienced by the self so we have to first keep any redundant self or ego out of perception, action and fruition. This is done by first really wanting to break free from the ego, and, ongoing vigilance which is non-selective and fully empowered to do what needs to be done in all situations. For this, a life of discipline which enables one to do one thing at one time while disengaging from all *non-essential* or *counterproductive* mental and physical activity is needed.
- 2) All inner activity has to be brought into the same field of awareness as outer activity as they are happening non-selectively. When one sees the outer, one is also aware of the inner and this awareness watches the rising inner thought waves till they fall back into themselves. This vigilance does not involve any suppression; it purifies itself by awareness staying awareness so that it can be self-aware instead of aware of something as other than itself.
- 3) The gathered rays of the mind have to be turned on their source in meditation or self-inquiry.

4. The unconditioned state

The conditioned mind goes from one object to another, whereas the unconditioned intelligence is between 'this' and 'that' and always steady. To see your true nature, you have to first live in such a way that the one significantly reduces the unnecessary activity of the mind as much as possible. Without reduced activity of the mind, it will be very difficult to observe the mind and you will find yourself constantly mixed-up with rising thoughts.

When the mind's activity is able to be observed relentlessly, one can do what needs to be done instead of what the ego would like to do and further weaken the mind.

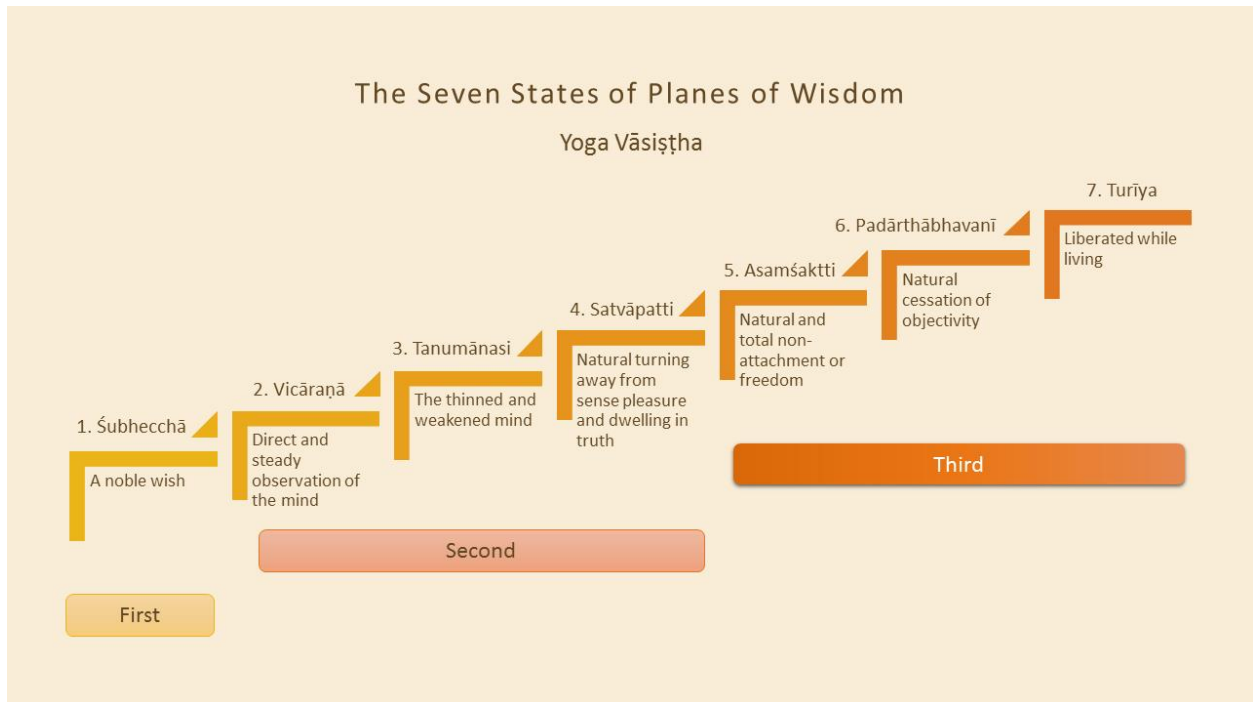
Then, is it possible to begin direct observation of the mind and self-inquiry.

That state in which there is absence of all concepts and when the consciousness remains motionless but in which there is neither dullness nor inertia—that is the unconditioned state. In the unconditioned state, the 'I' notion, as well as the vision of division cease to be.

Part 9 (Chapter III continues)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

The Seven States of Planes of Wisdom are among the core teachings of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha, as they form a virtual roadmap for the sincere spiritual seeker. Care should be taken not to see these as accomplishments, milestones or achievements, because each state is a letting go of what does not allow one's true nature to be seen. It is by letting go that we return to our original nature and this is a double-edged sword as it is not difficult to let go if it obscures something you have seen real value in, but, it is sheer struggle if this clarity has not flooded the heart and mind. I have put these Seven States of Planes of Wisdom into three broad groups as some states often happen together though they need not always be so. Towards the end, we will return to look at each of The Seven States of Planes of Wisdom individually.



First, there must be a sincere urge in the seeker at gut level or at the core one's being, to have inner clarity, to be able to see things as they are and to know one's true nature. This inner clarity is for return to our own nature and it cannot happen if one is not ready and enthusiastic about letting go of all conditioning—this is the first plane of wisdom called a noble wish or śubhecchā.

Second, there must be clarity in perception, which means to see things as they are, without our notions, hopes or expectations about them. This is also called awakening as we awaken to the delusion we create which disallows clarity in perception, action and experience. The sincere urge we have just discussed, now enters life and this, weakens and gradually uproots inner

conditioning. The mind's activity is brought into the field of steady observation along with outer activity and this is seen in one field. When one is continually aware of one's conditioning and has direct perception, which is to see things as they are and not as one's conditioning would like to see them, and conditioning weakens by disuse—this is the second plane of wisdom where begins direct and steady observation of the mind called vicāraṇā. The more you use inner clarity, the more it shines and illumines—this is the third plane of wisdom where the mind becomes thin and weakened and is called tanumānasi. Then, there is a natural turning away from natural turning away from sense pleasure on seeing it as delusion, and, and one prefers to dwell in clarity, things as they are, or the truth of things—this fourth state is called satvāpatti.

Third, we must be able to turn this gained clarity onto its source so to say to know who we are or our true nature and this is called liberation. At some stage in the seekers march to perfection, the first four states or planes of wisdom come together and are practiced together steadily. It is then that arises a natural and total non-attachment or freedom—this fifth state is called asamśakti. Due to a natural cessation of objectivity, one rejoices in subjectivity or one's own self and the perception of duality and diversity ceases and the seeker blossoms as a man of wisdom who is aware of objects only if and when he feels compelled to do so. This is the sixth state where there is natural and spontaneous cessation of objectivity—and is called padārthābhavanī. The seventh stage is when vision of division ceases and one is fully established in one's own unconditioned nature. Self-knowledge is spontaneous, natural and therefore unbroken—this state is known as liberated while living or turīya.

This is why the rungs of yoga are essential in the foundation for one's spiritual ascent and no rung can be bypassed. An earnest awakening is requisite before the journey home, nay, it heralds the journey home. This awakening does not come unless one leads an examined life to see the defects lie in our current way of seeing things—with conditioning. It is only when one clearly sees the danger within, up close and personal, that one awakens and aspires for the good—a better way of being and living which is free from the inner turmoil. Here, the march of the soul on the journey back home begins.



THE SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

1. Śubhecchā or a noble wish

When one clearly sees the danger in leading an unexamined life, one has given up any and all craving for pleasure as well, and one aspires for what is good and lasting—it is called a noble wish or śubhecchā.

2. Vicāraṇā or direct and steady observation of the mind

When the mind is directly observed without remission, it is also called the practice of inquiry or direct observation into the nature of the reality or vicāraṇā.

3. Tanumānasi or the thinned and weakened mind

When there arises a disinterestedness in the pleasure of the senses, it is true non-attachment based on intelligent discrimination—the mind is weakened and it becomes subtle and transparent or tanumānasi.

4. Satvāpatti or natural turning away from sense pleasure and dwelling in truth

When the first three are sincerely practiced, there arises in the seeker a natural turning away from sense-pleasures and a natural dwelling in truth. This result in purity or satvā at heart is called satvāpatti.

5. Asamśakti or natural and total non-attachment or freedom

When the first four are sincerely practiced, there is total non-attachment or freedom and at the same time a conviction in the nature of truth. There is great inner peace and joy independent of external objects and internal mental states. This state of non-attachment or freedom is asamśakti.

6. Padārthābhavanī or natural cessation of objectivity

When one rejoices in one's own self, the perception of duality and diversity ceases, and the efforts that one made at the inspiration of others, bear fruition in direct spiritual experience. The man of wisdom is aware of objects only if and when he feels compelled to do so. This natural and spontaneous cessation of objectivity is called padārthābhavanī.

7. Turīya or liberated while living

Coming to this stage, there is no other support, *by persistent practice* the vision of division ceases and one is fully established in one's own unconditioned being. Self-knowledge is spontaneous, natural and therefore unbroken, that state is known as liberated even while living here or turīya.

Conclusion

The goal of all these states is known as Brahman in which there is no 'I' or 'soul' or 'the other', no vision of division, or notions of being and non-being. Self-knowledge is the cutting asunder of the knots of bondage. They who have risen above delusion rest in the supreme state, they are the holy men who have conquered their senses.

Part 10 (Chapter III ends)

We are now at the end of the third chapter and the teachings are subtler. It is difficult to find precise verbiage for the teachings because, like a finger pointing to the moon the teachings try to point to something beyond them too. Still, let us journey together once again and try to feel the finger pointing and its direction.

1. Yoga—the way of purification

Our inner conditioning is itself all the agitation we experience in our lives as it prevents the experience of our true nature which is peaceful. Reality is simple, it just is. Our minds are complex and hence, always in conflict with things as they are and the reality of all things as well. We have grown too used to our conditioning and it seems natural, whereas, our true nature seems like a nice idea in theory but not practical.

Some say that times have changed and all of this needs to be rethought. Times may have changed but what we are talking about is the inner dynamics which has been and still is the same through time's march. Something or someone beyond change can know that things are changing. To get to the bottom of all this, the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha asks you to challenge this habit by your own direct inquiry. Vāsiṣṭha's 'Seven States of Wisdom' which we discussed last time, are a roadmap of inner restoration. Gradually, inner tranquility is restored by purifying the mind of its conditioning and this is known as yoga.

The goal of all these states is known as Brahman, in which there is no 'I' or 'soul' or 'the other', no vision of division, or notions of being and non-being. It is absolute peace, eternal and all-good.

Truth, reality or Brahman, cannot be described as real nor as unreal, the all nor not-all—for it is beyond description. When one is aware of it, it is said to pervade all; when this awareness too is transcended, there is pure peace.

2. Appearances—reflections in consciousness

Concepts and notions arise in one's consciousness of their own accord, and they are also reflected in the consciousness of others. There is no harm in the rising of these concepts and notions but we take them to be real and act on them, this is the root of much of the turmoil we experience and it can and should be avoided.

When we face these while forgetting or turning our backs on our true nature—there is bondage.

When we lead an examined life, we are aware of the rise and eventual fall of these concepts and notions along with all that appears outside. Being aware of notions as notions and outer

conditions for what they appear to be, we can do what needs to be done as situations occur, free of inner conditioning and its turmoil—before, during and after.

We can thus weaken the entire accumulation of conditioning by disuse, engaging present conditions by the inner intelligence instead of the habitual and conditioned mind.

As we come to the close of the third chapter, let us bring some of what we have covered so far into three broad steps.

First, there must be a ‘real awakening’. An awakening is quite different from a mere stirring that comes as an effect of some situation in our lives. Though many factors contribute to an awakening, the main cause is leading an examined life and seeing the defects in how we respond to life or in our way of perception, action and experience.

Second, it is on awakening that we see the danger in living an unexamined life and start leading the examined life. This is called ‘staying awake’. Along with spiritual practices, one leads an examined life by doing what needs to be done, as it needs to be done and existing conditioning is thinned by disuse. Inner joy begins to rise the surface automatically when it is not obscured. The scattered rays of the mind begin to gather once again and the mind becomes concentrated.

Third, the gathered rays of the mind which are now stable (*in that they are not scattered or charged with desires*), are turned upon their source in self-inquiry.

3. Reality—the indivisible consciousness

One often hears that life is complex nowadays but life is just what it is and has always been just what it has been. We have become complex and it is necessary to return to simplicity, not just outwardly but inwardly as well. This return to simplicity is a return to oneness within and without. Having a clear goal and way to live so that all activity contributes to one single goal reduces inner conflict and increases focus.

Without first gathering the rays of the mind, inquiry will be an exercise of struggle at best as one will never be able to turn the rays of the mind upon their source in self-inquiry. Inner simplicity coupled with outer simplicity and bonded with the glue of earnest sincerity, will not give the mind a reason or avenue to want to move outward and conditioning will gradually start to unravel. When the mind stays together naturally for a while and is deeply observed, one’s true nature is gradually seen.

Between the seer and the object is the experience which alone is the truth which is the infinite and indivisible consciousness.

That is your true nature, devoid of the conditioned mind—remain firmly established as that. You are that which remains when the conditioned mind is abandoned.

Cut asunder the bondage of conditioning—then the unconditioned being alone will shine as the truth.

Part 11 (Chapter IV begins)

Simple Ways to Increase Satvā or Natural Goodness

As we discussed earlier, the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha is a dialogue between Rāma and the sage Vāsiṣṭha where Rāma raises different questions to clarify his understanding with the sage. Though questions raised today may appear slightly different, the answers provided by the sage continue to be very useful to us in our lives and in the quest for truth. It is important to try to see, and get a feel for what is pointed to through the illustrations and background rather than get caught-up on the inessentials.

Kindly bring back to mind that the entire dialogue between Rāma and Vāsiṣṭha is on clearing Rāma's doubts concerned: the world appearance, its transcendence while still doing one's duty, reality and its attainment. Though Rāma expresses his doubts in many areas and from different angles, the truth expounded by the great sage Vāsiṣṭha is rooted in one theme—appearances seem to manifest themselves in the absolute in a certain condition but they do not alter the nature of reality which stays absolute and unchanged.

Repetition in our attempt to realize the truth is necessary, not because it just takes repetition or we don't get it, but because the conditioned mind which is very strong, interferes and insists on habitual ways so our attempts may not reach the depth where conditioning is rooted. This interfering mind is itself the problem as it is conditioning itself—trying to act intelligent. To loosen conditionings grip, it helps if one starts seeing everything fresh, as it occurs, and in context of the present situation only. This gives rise to a spirit of non-reliance, non-acceptance and non-cooperation of conditioning and prevents backsliding.

There is a beautiful verse among the early verses...

Verily, birds are able to fly with their two wings: even so, both work and knowledge together lead to the supreme goal of liberation.

It is interesting how action is called 'work' in the scripture. This so because it was clear in the minds of the sages that all work was a window to see existing conditioning and an opportunity to rise above it. During any and all work or perhaps we should just call it action, if we are aware of the mind's activity and outer activity at the same time, we should be able to avoid its pull by doing what is best instead. Real motivations of actions often stays hidden beneath the veneer of outer pleasantries and niceties, so much so that we ourselves stop looking at our real motivations and also come to believe what we are communicating or projecting externally.

This loss of continual awareness of our real intent, projected externally or kept hidden, is a great loss in the pursuit of truth. If we are sincere, which means our actions, underlying thoughts and feelings are one—action becomes a window to the most potent latent tendencies of the mind. It

is these tendencies that bind us, and, being aware of them while doing what needs to be done while not identifying with these tendencies paves the path of peace and joy that lies just beyond. In today's politically charged atmosphere, what is seen outside may be quite different from what is actually felt or meant and this seems to be very common. So much so that it becomes harder even for one's own self to separate outer behavior from inner intent as they seem to blend seamlessly to stay hidden. This loss is a wide gap that will have to be bridged—each for oneself.

Wisdom or teachings must be practiced in life for it to take root and blossom right where conditioning as wisdom has to replace conditioning. When wisdom is practiced, conditioning weakens by disuse and the heart experiences peace and joy as the disturbing thought waves or conditioning subside. This peace and joy is not something new that we come upon, but our own true nature which surges to the surface in proportion to our enthusiasm to be aware of conditioning and let it go. Conditioning exists in the mind as thought waves and these disturb our natural peace and joy. There is no loss in letting it go, only gain—this has to be felt in the heart.

This practice of wisdom is not the practice of some nice theory but the 'practice of being wise by being vigilant continually'. This practice consists of clear perception of each situation as it happens, and our response if needed in light of what is good—not just for our interests but what is inherently good. The practice of wisdom can also be called the practice of goodness as it calls on us to do what is 'best' rather than 'what is best for us'. The 'us' is not a part of best and when we practice what is best, we expand as we stand with things and the 'us' weakens by disuse. The more you use wisdom, the more goodness shines in you. Soon, goodness shines as you and finally, you shine as goodness yourself.

When all the disturbing thought-waves in the mind subside, the mind experiences its natural peace and joy.

So, where do we start?

The journey starts with a firm resolve that comes about by living a vigilant life or an examined life.

Work on the inner perimeter and outer perimeter together. For the inner perimeter, plug inner leaks of the mind, preventing it from strengthening habit pathways and allowing the mind to begin resting in itself. You can do this by always having clear before your mind the ideal you seek and the cost of falling to the pull of habit. For this, you will need a clear-cut ideal etched in your heart.

Work on the outer perimeter by giving the mind better choices instantly which are conducive to the goal instead of habitual ones. For this, you must have a well-conceived program of life.

The mind begins to get concentrated as the gathered rays of the mind start resting in themselves. Self-control is not punitive but positive and gives rise to innate, natural joy which is not

dependent on others, things or conditions. As one gets established in self-control, one no longer reacts to outer conditions or inner surges as one has cultivated the practice of doing what needs to be done in spite of them, wholeheartedly—just because it needs to be done.

The time it takes to gather the rays of the mind is proportional to the unwavering firmness of resolve we are able to muster and sustain. Without real inner clarity, it is difficult to muster firm resolve and Vāsiṣṭha advises taking recourse to the knowledge transmitted by the great teachers till our own clarity blossoms and our resolve becomes unwavering.

But, why all this?

The world appearance and conditioning are problems only because of our deep-rooted belief and hope in them as sources of joy and happiness. They are not! Joy and happiness surge within and people, things and conditions have nothing to do with it. Therefore, our sadhana or efforts are the breaking free from the inner bonds of habit and should be practical, balanced, methodical and whole-hearted. We are going against the flow of a river we have ourselves created and sustained and unless we create a new current, it is difficult to change the existing flow which has so much habitual energy infused in it. Sadhana is not only spiritual practice but the spiritual way or way to return our true nature.

Conditioning ceases as and when the truth is clearly seen and realized but for this, the truth in all things has to be given a real chance. We cannot abide in habit and aspire for something beyond—it just will not work. The peace and joy we seek is found in abiding in our true nature and towards this, we have to be willing and enthusiastic in the breaking free of habit.

Good foundation and start

In one simple statement, Vāsiṣṭha declares the quintessence of all wisdom, “*Bondage is the craving for pleasure; and its abandonment is liberation*”. We must be clear here that ‘craving for pleasure’ is what is pointed to but, this is a very slippery slope as initially, it is not easy to always discern between simple pleasures that come naturally and even simple pleasures for which we may seek subtly—even if just a little wish. It is this seeking or subtle wishing that is the offshoot of a deeper vein that keeps consciousness restless and so, it is wise to block this by leading a simple life externally as well to get a solid foundation.

We are taught from early on to inquire into things, Vāsiṣṭha once again turns the tables on us and suggests that there is no point in inquiring into how ignorance or conditioning has arisen—but to focus our entire effort on the quest of getting rid of conditioning, root and branch. Why find a reason for everything? Having a reason or an explanation does not give you immunity. When you focus instead on getting rid of ignorance, you also find how it has gained such a foothold and are equipped to prevent such anchoring in the future.

Satvā or natural goodness

Satvā is purity, natural or innate goodness. It is one thing to do good consciously, it is another to do good naturally. The 'doing good' naturally is not so much a doing or an action of sorts but an expression of being—just who you are, and so, it is natural just as the sun shines not because it is doing something but because it *is* luminous.

Over some verses, the sage gives us several ways to increase satvā or our own innate natural goodness. I have culled the important ones—they are very practical and simple but can bring about a wonderful change within. Keep in mind that we are not talking about behavioral goodness but a goodness that is the base of spiritual effort which is essential in the quest to realize one's true nature.

Simple Ways to Increase Satvā or Natural Inner Goodness

1. Do not grieve or despair in calamities

Wonderful teachings are rolled-up into this one, single, pithy statement. Firstly: do not grieve or despair—remember, we cannot really change the outcome or shape of things but we do have a choice in adding grief or despair and worsening the impact of things. Do your very best and accept the rest is a simple but good way. We have full latitude in doing and we should do our very best, finding satisfaction from 'doing' which is always in our hands—not the way things turn out as various factors beyond our control are involved in shaping the final outcome or shape of things. Doing our best, accepting how things turn out and moving on to once again doing our best will always keep 'best' in the heart rather than disappointment, grief and despair.

2. Do not wish for other than what is present and what is natural

Here, we follow on the lead of what we have just discussed. If we are satisfied with doing our best, we are always satisfied as 'doing' is in our hands—the outcome is not. When this is accepted in the heart, we are also satisfied with what is present or here now and with what is natural. The looking over the shoulder to what others have stops once we associate satisfaction with action instead of outcome. This does not mean we slacken in our efforts but that we find satisfaction in the very act of doing which is always in our hands instead of outcome which is shaped by many other factors and elusive. When the wishing for other than what is present and natural stops, the mind rests in itself and that is the source of more peace and joy that any outcome could give rise to.

3. Rejoice in doing what is right and appropriate

When we do what needs to be done, as is right and appropriate or the best way it can be done—rejoicing is natural and spontaneous. Remember back when you did what was right and also appropriate to the moment and you will recollect a sense of joy and satisfaction. When we

include other factors in in equation, we complicate things unnecessarily. Each moment looks at us for a response, “Do I need to do something or not?” and it is only after this question is answered, “What is the right and appropriate response?” It is best not to put the cart ahead of the horse by thinking of what should be done and how as these are only relevant if you have clearly felt that something needs to be done. In the second part, the question of ‘right’ and ‘appropriate’ are both important as what is right in one situation may not be appropriate in another.

4. Experience the fullness of bliss and satisfaction within their heart at all times

Once you have rewired yourself to associate satisfaction with action, you eliminate dissatisfaction resulting from the way things work out or the shape they take. This satisfaction blossoms into a feeling of fullness and joy in the heart as you know that you dealt with every situation in the best way possible and you keep going from this ‘best way feeling’ to other ‘best way feelings’ and joy expands in the heart. This principle is easy to remember in good times but can be forgotten in difficult times and calamities but must be practiced even in the simplest of actions till it becomes natural and ongoing. The door of right action or doing points to the door of ‘being’ or our true nature—remember, right always points to right. In this way, right action or doing, becomes a window to the out true nature or self. Walking the outer correctly, we are also able to find the way within to our true nature.

5. Be radiant with noble qualities such as friendliness

It does not cost us anything to harbor noble qualities such as friendliness but it gives us a whole lot. Taking friendliness as an example of many other good qualities, it is important to remember that friendliness must be free of expectations of any sort or reciprocity. Friendliness is not greeting everybody all the time or always opening doors etc. but much more. Friendliness is a way of being without unfriendliness and cannot truly blossom in the heart if we harbor any kind of favoritism or preference towards those we consider ‘our people’ or ‘kith and kin’. Friendliness is not anything we do particularly but an outer expression of an inner vision or just how we see things. It is only when we see all in a balanced way, equally, without any preference or prejudice and as they happen that natural friendliness which blossoms in the heart and is felt by all. The so-called friendliness that is associated with ‘friendly behavior’ is empty as doing is quite different from ‘being’ or just who we are. When we are friendly, we exuberate friendliness whether it be recognized or appreciated.

6. Be ever in a state of equanimity

Over the past five points, we have been focusing on inner rewiring to associate peace and joy with doing. This peace and joy felt in the heart sources from a deeper well of peace and joy which is our true nature or the self. This rewiring gives rise to inner balance as we no longer sway from joy to despair due to the outcome of things, finding joy in right vision and right action. As we

become steady in this, we become steady in equanimity as we see all things of equal value since our all our actions are done equally well. The mind becomes steady and a sense of inner balance or equanimity rises in the heart and mind.

7. Insure your conduct is always good and noble

Now, we go outward even more by ensuring our conduct is always good and noble. This ensuring is a sort of double check or verification as the earlier steps should have given one a solid footing but it is good to insure before and while we act anyways. Remember, it does not cost any more but can give a whole lot more as the goodness of conduct rises from the goodness of heart and mind or just who we are and if we can use all action to elevate and point to the sense of being—we have come a long way.

Part 12 (Chapter IV ends)

Changing Existing Rajas and Tamas into Satvā

The pivot

Having reviewed the outer court, we pivot to the inner. Along with increasing satvā, we have to do something about existing rajas or the dynamic and restless temperament and also, about tamas or the lazy, dull or lethargic temperament. You may feel that rajas and tamas are not an issue with you in taking the word meaning at a glance, but some sort of percentage of rajas and tamas exists in all.

The key is in being able to recognize their surge and being able to do the activity in those periods which puts them to good use in such a manner that gives rise to satvā in their place. This, is called transmutation and here lies the key in amassing spiritual fuel which is most necessary for yoga's inner rung of meditation.

If rajas and tamas are not watched and put to constructive use, they will seek their own level and rouse up passions and dullness that can set you back hard. You have to know what guna or quality is in operation and while being vigilant, do the activity that is best at that time. For instance, if there is a feeling of dullness or lethargy—get out and do some physical work for yourself or as karma yoga. These will soon transmute tamas into rajas and if done with the feeling of God's omnipresence—it can even jump a notch to satvā. It all depends on the strength of the feeling you can muster and sustain when the gunas change. If there is a feeling of rajas or impulse to do something—you can channel your efforts into bhakti yoga practices like kirtan and quite soon, there may be a feeling to study or even meditate. Have an eye within at all times to discern what gunas are operating in you at all times and do that activity which will transmute them till you have an abundance of satvā which is the fuel for deeper practice.

See my friends, you cannot go to the store and buy satvā for meditation—you have to make the fuel you need from existing sources. Just like if oil is needed and the only source is a deep strata of rock bed—it has to be extracted from those rocks. Some careful work has to be done and those who persevere—will have fuel. It all depends on the gunas you have in you and your enthusiastic willingness to transform them for extraction.

Now, these things are not elaborated in the text of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha because Rāma was Vāsiṣṭha's student growing-up and it is presumed that he learnt these things at that stage. Still, I think it is important for those coming to this point to know the importance of this fourth chapter which can get overlooked as some nice but rather non-important points and be in a hurry to get straight to meditation, only to find out that there are these surges of thought and feeling and also pockets of lethargy which one is totally unprepared to deal with. Meditation is a struggle if you have not prepared yourself just as it is a struggle to light a wet log on fire—especially if it is

very cold and snowing also. Among other things, ignoring this essential preparing the instrument often leads to stagnation or a fall and hence, should be addressed at the offset.

1. Inquire into your true nature and of this universe and remain indifferent to it

The mind runs outward to know ‘who’ and ‘what’ and hence, it is important to keep the attention within. At the basic level, you will see that what you perceive is one thing and what the mind is making it out to be is another. You can now easily deal with what is perceived—without the mind’s add-on paint strokes. Keeping the outer, which is what appears and the inner which is our reactions in view at the same time, all the time—is called vigilance. As vigilance becomes natural and ongoing, you can begin inquiry without loss of perception—even while you move about.

Inquire into one’s true nature and of this universe: “Who am I?” and “How has this universe arisen?”

Inquiry keeps the mind on its source and this avoids to tendency of the mind to dwell on existing conditioning which weakens by disuse. Conditioning is held together by the glue of rajas and tamas and weakening conditioning—dries up rajas and tamas. Initially, it does not matter if there is no self-inquiry as long as one is seeing things as they are and not as they are being made out to be by the mind. When the shallow layers of conditioning are dried-up, the deeper layers which are more calm will become prime for inquiry.

2. Avoid unworthy company, conduct, and inactivity

Political correctness increases lack of clarity. The important thing about words is the intent but political correctness dwells on the word itself and has made good communication difficult. Being concerned with the points to be made, allows us to bypass this gridlock.

Unworthy is anything that does not support your aspiration—quite simple. Your aspiration is something very worthy and that does not support it or detracts from it is not worthy—hence, unworthy. This can be done without condemning or having any disdain towards company, conduct or inactivity. Merely seek that which supports your aspiration and let your conduct and activity always reflect your aspiration to a good degree. Gradually, the inner shift from all things non-conducive to all things conducive will rise.

3. Remember the all-devouring death

This is not a doom and gloom suggestion but very important and most practical. We go around the circles of habit as if mounted on a Ferris Wheel though we have complete free will to do otherwise. Remembering what Vāsiṣṭha calls, ‘all-devouring death’ is necessary to rouse from the feeling of complacency tamas gives rise to. Rajas then, suggests this, that and the other and merely yawns at wisdom’s call to remember that all things shall pass away as a poet has written so well. So, remembering ‘all-devouring death’ is not a doom and gloom thing but a wake-up call to reality once again as the illusion of time and complacency are themselves doom and gloom.

It would be useful to even write this down in a few places to remind ourselves visibly so we can avoid complacency's pull. They say time and tide wait for no one. You cannot do rigorous sadhana when the body has aged and the work-to-day and family life have taken their toll on you mentally. Remembering the all-devouring death is a direct blow to complacency which is not your friend at all.

4. Abandon identification of the self or the infinite consciousness with the body composed of flesh and bones

This is very important preparation for meditation. Getting over body consciousness in meditation does not happen if you are fully rooted in it the rest of the time. Ongoing and relentless vigilance is key to being aware of all urges to think, feel and act in ways that strengthen identification with the body.

This does not mean that you ignore the body completely but being fully awake—you are aware if the urges that rise within are actual needs of the body or cravings that try to appear as such. When panning for gold, one has to sift through large amounts of dirt and rock to find a little speck of gold. Similarly, you will have to sift through the mind continually to rid it of its energy that makes conditioning so strong and vehement. The images may be there; it does not matter much. The problem is the energy and feeling that is infused with them—it is this potent mixture that makes it volatile.

5. Inwardly behold the consciousness that knits together all beings.

The light that shines in the sun is the same that exists and illumines the smallest of insects, and that is the light of the infinite consciousness.

Extend 'all beings' beyond its verbal implication as there is no non-being—period! In the ancient days, people would even say a little prayer before they arose from their bed in the morning as a sort of apology which formed a powerful reminder of this truth through the day, 'Mother, forgive me for I am about to put my feet on Thee but I have no place else to put them as I arise to do what needs to be done'. How wonderful!

Swami Venkatesananda has written, "*The recognition of divine omnipresence is itself self-surrender*".

This inner abidance has also been alluded to by western mystics. Brother Lawrence speaks about it in the little but inspiring book, "*The Practice of the Presence of God*".

If you are sincere, you will understand that emblazing this feeling on your heart tablet is very important and focus on it till it is felt. The constant and ongoing repetition of the mantra within along with the image of your *iṣṭa-devatā* or chosen ideal, helps towards giving rise to this feeling. When the feeling is able to be held within, it is easy to sustain it through all activities and conditions.

6. Engage yourself in the inquiry into the nature of the reality in the company of holy ones

Inquiry begins with first seeing things as they appear. Inquiry then turns on its source and the inquirer seeks to know one's self. To do this without wobbling too much, it is best to spend time with those who are well-rooted in it. Small hints, passive or active from those who are grounded in this can get you off to a sound footing.

Though much has been written on this and much is available on different media sources, it is one thing to read or hear about it, it is another to see one function quite normally in outer changing conditions while rooted in the unchanging inwardly. When one sees this for some time, there is an inner letting go of habit as one now feels—letting go is a gain and not a loss.

Part 13 (Chapter V begins)

Having discussed cultivating satvā (natural goodness), and also, transforming existing rajās (dynamism, passion) and tamas (lethargy, dullness) into satvā; let us turn our attention to cultivating the larger mind in which these gunas or qualities operate. The mind has to be cultivated by the mind itself.

Today, we begin with the important teachings of the fifth chapter. We will look into the seeds of saṃsāra and the mind and conclude with some practical ways to unbind the mind.

1. Seed for saṃsāra

The seed for this saṃsāra or world-appearance is the body. If we were not born, saṃsāra would not be an issue. We will discuss saṃsāra a little later again because just as it is part of the problem, it must also be part of the solution. You may have good conditions in this life but there is no telling what conditions you may have undergone in the past or may be faced with in the future. This is not a negative view of things but very practical thinking.

We are not here as either a challenge or a punishment of any sort, but to work out the obstacles in the direct realization of our true nature. These obstacles have not been placed in our lives by others or other forces, but, are within and have been placed there by ourselves. We have made them and fortified them in the erroneous hope that they will help us, but, they restrict, limit and eclipse the grandeur of our true nature. We have become preoccupied with harnessing what we call 'potential' but in this unexamined outburst, forget that we are already far more than can be harnessed by all—collectively, over all of time to come. The realization of our true nature is by far infinitely greater than the harnessing of potential as all potential flows from our true nature only.

Sharpening the focus, the seeds for saṃsāra are also the seeds of the mind: the movement of the prāṇa or life-force, and vāsanā or deep-rooted mental conditioning. To put it in a simpler way, when energy moves over latent impressions—they are animated within. Since this animation happens within, in the same consciousness of 'being' or our self—it all appears so very real and the conditioned mind reacts.

If life is lived wisely, we will use the outer to work out these inner self-imposed limitations. For this, the mind has to be watched relentlessly and without remission. As, the mind, dominated by hopes, desires and fruits from the past is the seed for the body and our journey through saṃsāra.

If life is lived with any lesser goal, the root of all sorrow which disallows lasting inner joy is strengthened. But, if life is lived with self-realization as the goal, each life would progressively exhaust experience while lessening conditioning and increasing our spiritual ascent. This choice always lies before us beneath the veneer of different appearances—however they appear to be.

A great one once said, “The only choice we have is to face the light or darkness”. If the goal of self-realization is not embraced in the heart early on, other goals firm themselves and it becomes difficult to bring real change in the heart which is essential for peace, joy and real fulfilment that endures.

2. Seeds for the mind

Prana or life force: When the life-force moves along the subtle channels of the psychic force, awareness and experience arise and mental activity commences. Though this awareness exists everywhere, it is activated by the movement of the life-force. It is the extension of experience that leads to countless experiences and to great sorrow. If this awareness rests in itself *as if asleep*, one attains the supreme state.

Restraining the movement of prana, prevents the expansion of the field of objective experience which results from the movement of the mental conditioning, and one goes beyond saṃsāra. Just as seeds do not generate in dry soil, so also, latent impressions do not gain strength till without an unrestricted link to prana. Prana or life force makes the vāsanā or impressions come alive and seem so very real. The practice pranayama is among other things the practice of letting the energy flow where it is essential and not to these vāsanā. The practice of regular pranayama enables one to attain peace of mind, supreme equanimity, happiness or blessedness, and healthy experience or awareness by conservation of energy and weakening conditioning.

Control of prana, will lead to control of mind by depleting it of its existing energy. But, you cannot just drain the mind from the energy angle as the energy channels or habit pathways will continue to replenish and augment them. A two-pronged approach is necessary; you have to deplete existing residual energy and you have to cut new grooves in the mind which are conducive to your aspiration.

Lack of focus on cutting new pathways leads to habitual pathways getting stronger. Just as water seeks the path of least resistance, the mind’s energy will also flow to our likes and dislikes and rouse them into vehemence. If you do not at the same time rewire the mind, the flow of energy in existing pathways will strengthen. For meaningful change, there must a real change of heart—this is necessary and essential.

Vāsanā or mental conditioning: The mind arises from the seed of vāsanā or mental conditioning. Vāsanā develops or strengthens, when one perceives an object on the basis of one’s conviction, without inquiring into it at all. When the firmness of notions are held in one’s consciousness with great intensity—it all appears very real. Notions are thus seen as reality and one gets deluded, abandons his own unconditioned nature and one’s vision is perverted.

That is known as the mind in which such perverse vision creates confusion between what is, and, what appears to be. When such perverse vision gains firm ground, the restless mind comes into being, bringing in its train the cycle of birth and death.

Vāsanā has gained strength by repeated use, it will weaken by disuse. Awakened living is living consciously, not by habit and at each step of the way. As the inner intelligence or pure awareness is brought into play consciously, and the habitual mind weakens in proportion to its disuse and the use instead of the inner intelligence.

All sorrow and suffering is the result of unawakened living or living habitually—no matter the allure, acceptance and encouragement by all as ‘normal living’. True normal living is to live from the ‘norm of our true nature’.

3. Unminding the mind

Spiritual Discipline: Contrary to some misconceptions, the disciplined mind is not a stressed mind or a mind that is denied anything good. The mind is just offered what is good, wholesome and conducive to its aspiration and it thus learns better choices instead of taking the path of least resistance.

This spirit is sustained by one’s aspiration and self-discipline. Spiritual discipline is the fire which forges potential into ability and with this gain, it is never a loss but movement from gain to gain.

The undisciplined mind is the mind that is allowed and perhaps, even encouraged to seek the path of least resistance. The undisciplined mind causes sorrow, and its cessation gives rise to joy immediately. Happiness and joy are your true nature, the undisciplined mind disallows this by vehemently suggesting this, that and the other. This inner discipline works hand in hand with outer discipline—the battle cannot be fought on one dimension. Let us see how the mind become undisciplined, its effects and need to bring order to the mind.

Carelessness: The mind, when tied to the ego—leads to carelessness and culminates in callousness with time. This is a great loss indeed as when the outer takes center stage—the inner promptings are not heard anymore and one’s ability to discern what is good for one’s true development is impaired. We do not have to choose between the outer and the inner as they are both known in the same plane.

Carelessness is rooted in subtle feelings of possessiveness such as ‘this is mine’ or ‘this I prefer’ and these are the front end of the huge train of sorrow which is hard to stop. I understand that we have to live in life and there are some aspirations but everything has to be given gravity against any resulting inner turmoil or degradation.

The faulty wiring of ‘what’s in it for me?’ must be abandoned and with this, we are able to do our best and not nourish the ego which thwarts performance and is never satisfied with result. This results in inner restlessness, constant turmoil and disallows the simple joys of life and inner peace. This carelessness is the rope that ties the mind to the ego and it all starts with seemingly innocent notions like ‘this is mine’ and soon, one experiences the roaring rapids that follow.

We are asked, even implored to do our best in all that we undertake but to keep an eye on other things such as greed and ambition that contrary to popular belief—do not support doing or achieving the best. Selfish inner urges disallow doing one's best as potential is thwarted when some of the mind dwells on 'what's in it for me'. What does 'what's in it for me' to do with doing one's best? All things come when we do our very best—sooner or later. Why let thoughts of 'what's in it for me' even come into the equation of 'doing one's best'? Focus on 'what's in it for me', is a call to carelessness as the little 'me' becomes the target of fulfilment.

Saṃsāra: We touched on this lightly earlier, let us go a little deeper. When the mind is tied to the ego-sense and notions of pleasure and pain—this, is the seed for this saṃsāra or world-illusion. The formula is simple: ego-sense + notions of pleasure and pain = saṃsāra or world illusion.

Living an awakened life, stops watering saṃsāra's roots and meditation uproots existing roots. Challenge habit by asking yourself, "Just why do I need these notions about anything or anyone at all? Am I not capable of living better without them?" If you sincerely keep these questions in your heart and try to go about your life without them consciously at first—you will soon see that life is better lived without them and earlier, you carried their weight unnecessarily by habit.

Equanimity: The mind that is not swayed by pleasure, pain, honor and even great calamities experiences equanimity. This does not mean one does not care but to realize that caring and being compassionate can happen in their true sense when one is not swayed. This 'swaying' is an effect that is not at all part situations, but habitual reactions of the mind. They are not part of the fabric of life—they are the mind's reaction to events that occur naturally.

The non-recognition of things as they are—is ignorance or foolishness. The destruction of ignorance is the destruction of the mind.

The destruction of the mind is not a gain and not a loss as we are talking about the destruction of likes, dislikes and other such conditioning that has nothing to do with things as they are. Relentless vigilance enables awakened living as the outer and inner are seen the same field of view. One does what needs to be done while being aware of habitual surges but not being swayed by them. These inner urges or impulses are vāsanā or mental conditioning which weaken by disuse.

As vāsanā weaken, there is a proportional increase in satvā or natural goodness and at the same time, in noble qualities like friendliness. We will talk about vasanas a little later. One naturally does what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and in the manner, it needs to be done only when the mind is in equanimity or not swayed by the rise and fall of conditioning.

Part 14 (Chapter V continues)

Today, discuss three things: the state of quiescence, going beyond—the no-mind, and, reality—the seed for consciousness.

1. The state of quiescence

Earlier, we have discussed the joy and delight of a quiet mind. We are not talking about a mind that does not work but of one that works when needed and as needed and in the light of wisdom. The noisy mind works relentlessly, often in directions different from current activity and under the strong influence of conditioning.

The effort it takes to quieten the mind is not so much to bring about natural inner silence but to endure the strong pull and vehemence of inner turmoil. Restoring inner silence thus takes effort across all aspects of life, not just on the mat in the hours in meditation. The mind has to be watched relentlessly and the inner has to be brought into the same field of awareness along with the outer as we discussed last time. Habits like ‘multiple tasking’ must be abandoned as they accomplish nothing substantial while leading to severe degradation of the psyche and a substantial increase in restlessness.

You cannot do anything really well if you are not fully involved—heart, mind and body must all be doing what needs to be done for peak performance. In doing one thing at one time with all your heart, mind and body, will result in accomplishments in the outer as well as the inner.

There is a very insightful verse in scripture: “Verily, birds are able to fly with their two wings: even so, both work and knowledge together lead to the supreme goal of liberation.” (I.1.7) The purpose of work is to support your spiritual ascent while at the same time, enabling you to succeed in your work and have experiences in a way that is positive and healthy. All action so to say, are called ‘work’ in the language of Vāsiṣṭha. Work or action acts as a mirror as while doing, one sees one’s reactions. Work is a transformer as while being aware of existing reactions, one does what needs to be done, because it needs to be done and on its own merit. Thus, selfishness and the ego are not given room to thrive while still being fully aware of them and this exhausts their residual energy, weakening them to mere impressions.

If we do all that needs to be done, because it needs to be done and with all our being—we will accomplish much in the outer or realm of activity and the inner or the realm of spirit. In doing wholeheartedly with relentless vigilance, inner quiescence will come about as the mind’s chatter will exhaust itself in disuse. Our duties will thus also result in spiritual growth.

If the inner is not cultivated with the outer, all efforts are not worth much as all we do and accomplish are in time process. When we cultivate the inner amidst the outer, action and time process become a gateway to the quiescence of eternity.

2. Going beyond, the no-mind

When we bring the inner and outer in the same field of view and sustain it—the feeling of spatial separation begins to melt and the psyche starts to heal into oneness. Gradually, all notions such as ‘this is desirable’ and ‘this is undesirable’ are given up, and the mind becomes quiet. In the resulting silence, the inner intelligence functions in an unconditioned manner—this is a state of supreme quiescence.

Vāsanā or conditioning alone is the form of the mind when it thinks of objects on account of its like and dislike for them. When such taste ceases to exist and the heart is clean and clear—there is no inner turmoil. Firstly, it takes sincere and wholehearted effort to heal the mind and as we have discussed earlier, not so much because some quantity of effort is ‘required’ so to say but because of the heavy force of existing conditioning that already exists—whether we realize it or not. Secondly, we have to find the way to quiescence while enduring the noisy mind with which we are very familiar and intertwined. This is why a wholehearted resolve is essential or inner quiescence will seem unattainable. Friends, inner silence is already there, we have to stop inner agitation to experience inner silence. This my friends, cannot be accomplished in a little time on the mat or prayer area—there must be total change of heart so the quest for quietude threads all aspects of our life and living.

Inner quiescence is also known as no-mind as in it, there are no notions and there is consciousness of pure consciousness alone. One perceives what-is, as what-is, not according to preexisting notions or mental conditioning, even if there are thoughts and ideas in such a mind.

Please bring back to mind what we had discussed the last time with the ‘two seeds of the mind’. If either of the two seeds of the mind: *movement of the life-force* and *mental conditioning* are destroyed, both are destroyed because they are interdependent. Both arise from the objects of the world which are therefore the seed of both prana and vāsanā. When the notion of objects is abandoned, both the movement of prana and vāsanā are destroyed by their roots.

Consciousness alone is the seed for the objects of experience. Without consciousness, no objects of experience can ever arise. There is nothing either within or without which is distinct from consciousness, known as the object of consciousness. There is a notion or a movement in consciousness itself, which is known as the object of that very consciousness. As long as this is not clearly understood, objects seem real and this constitutes saṃsāra—*the removal of this misunderstanding is liberation*.

Contact with and experience of ‘objects’ is sorrow: non-contact *while remaining fully aware and active* promotes happiness. That which remains when there is no contact with or experience of objects and when there is no inertia is your true nature or self.

When one has firm resolve and lives with relentless vigilance, one’s practice empowers living in such a way that exhausts habits and the accumulation of likes and dislikes. Without likes and

dislikes, vasanas or subtle impressions may continue to be there but lack energy that makes them an urge. Then, spiritual practices add momentum and with God's grace, one feels stability in the inner march. Unless one has firm resolve and perseverance, one does not come to this threshold and it always feels like an uphill climb or struggle.

3. Reality—the seed for consciousness

It is said that God helps those who help themselves. Self-effort is the path to grace. The entitlement mentality runs counter to self-effort. In the spiritual path, all are entitled but there are no free rides as you are not working for something, or from someone else. You have to undue the knots on the heart and mind that are self-caused and self-sustained. Till the window of the mind is cleaned, one sees oneself just as one is now as the conditioning has rendered the clear window opaque.

Reality is the seed for consciousness for consciousness arises in pure existence. This pure existence has two 'forms', as it were; diversity and unity. Consciousness has to be fully empowered and one has to live consciously in light of one's aspiration. When the mirror of consciousness is cleaned of all impurities, diverse objects are seen as diverse appearances of one indivisible unity. When this diversity is abandoned by the consciousness, it rests in unity.

When one abandons all apparent divisions of pure existence, and is devoted to one pure existence—divisions that create confusion in one's vision cease. When you leave divisions, division leaves you. Therefore, it is essential to always live with the thought and feeling of one pure existence. Gradually, the notion of this world-appearance will recede as the seeds for its appearance are destroyed and one's entire being will be filled with bliss.

Let us close with another verse in the first chapter...

It is this mind alone which is the cause of all objects in the world; the three worlds exist because of the mind-stuff; when the mind vanishes, the worlds vanish, too.

(I.16.25)

Part 15 (Chapter V concludes)

1. The state of pure being

Simply put, a state of pure being is when one does not experience sorrow again. Sorrow, is the reaction of the mind to its own notions and is not dependent on others, circumstances or things. When the mind stops reacting to itself, it regroups or rests in itself. When the mind rests in itself, everything is reflected just as objects are reflected in a mirror and the mind attains perfect peace. The mind that attains to perfect peace, soon attains the pure state where appearances do not affect the reality in which one abides.

2. Attain a quiet mind first

A noisy mind is a mind where the energy built up in the mind feeds on conditioning and conditioning feeds on energy. Energy is built up by our erroneous attitude towards things as favorable or unfavorable. This energy is harnessed from and in consciousness itself and resides in the mind causing unrest till resolved.

Usually, attempts at resolving this only result in an increase in either like or dislike and this becomes a vicious cycle that feeds in itself and generates more and more turmoil. As long as the mind is not quiet, conditioning does not cease; unless conditioning ceases, the mind does not reach quiescence. The yamas and niyamas of yoga are a good restorative prescription for our habitual reactions and these, along with simple living and focus on the goal of self-realization will reset the mind gradually.

Just as in a calm and placid pond, reflections are seen without distortion—quiescence of mind and knowledge of truth are interdependent. Similarly, cessation of mental conditioning and the realization of truth are also interdependent.

3. Inner ascent

With inner quiescence, mental conditioning ceases and as conditioning ceases, one's true nature is seen. When one abides or remains in the state of pure being for even a little while—one gradually gets established in that state. This cycle to abide in one's true nature replaces the prior cycle of being tied to conditioning and feeds in itself with sustained effort.

This abidance is an easier way to uproot mental conditioning compared to contemplation or meditation. Abidance has a steep price tag up front which is 'total sincerity'—one has to be fully on board the train of change and be willing to restructure all and everything in ways that support the goal. If one is not able to muster this level of sincerity, meditation and contemplation is the other means but it is a difficult path as one constantly goes against one's own counter-currents or likes and dislikes.

4. Control of mind

If one has firm resolve, the path becomes much easier. This is why a good foundation with śama or control of self; vicāraṇā or the state wherein the mind is constantly observed; santoṣa or contentment and satsanga or company of the wise is essential. Rather than fight against the currents of habit, it is easier to cut new groves and let the old ways weaken by disuse.

While setting a new foundation, it is necessary to stop feeding old habits. For this, resolutely abandon the pursuit of pleasure—this takes mighty self-effort accompanied by right understanding. We are not talking about abandoning all of what may give pleasure but the pursuit of pleasure as pursuit strengthens the values which is the glue that holds conditioning together. Simple joys are those which are not the result of pursuit but the feeling of delight in things as they come about.

Gradually, the mind is rendered stable and one can advance one's practice to focus on: further quiescence of mind, eradication of mental conditioning and direct knowledge of truth. When these three are practiced simultaneously for some time relentlessly, the knots of ignorance are rent asunder. This saṃsāra or world-appearance begins to appear as an appearance as one gets firmly established in one's true nature with persistent effort for a considerable time.

Pranayama or the restraint of prana (life-force) has equal value to the destruction of vāsanā or conditioning, hence practice pranayama also. Prana is controlled by pranayama, the practice of yoga asana, discipline in eating, etc., among other methods.

5. Cause and cure of saṃsāra

Cause: contact of the ego with its own conditioning which are the likes and dislikes are the cause and sustenance of saṃsāra. When these likes and dislikes are abandoned, the heart is purified and one is liberated—no longer affected by pain and pleasure, good fortune or misfortune.

Cure: one should do what needs to be done on its own merit—just because it needs to be done and do all things wholeheartedly, is the way to be free refrain from contact with existing conditioning and get established in equanimity. In equanimity, the mind is no longer stirred up reactively and begins to rest in itself.

The cure does not happen at one stroke so it is advisable for one intent on spiritual progress to lead a disciplined life while restoring the mind and heart.

6. Avoid conceptualization

When one wishes, 'May this be mine', such desire or thought is known as a concept. We really do not know what 'this' or the object is and there is an erroneous notion of 'I'. Therefore, all thinking or remembering is conceptualization which is based on notions of the object and without any real basis.

When the mind does not desire, only the object is, the corresponding thought or concept is abandoned. This abandonment of desire is usually misunderstood as a rejection of things outright. You may need to simplify your life or the outer as this may be necessary till you can simplify the inner or rid the mind and heart of the strong currents of likes and dislikes based on conceptualization.

A wise person lives without the thought of what has been or has not been experienced and does what needs to be done wholeheartedly on its own merit. Vāsiṣṭha gives us a very beautiful analogy towards this: “He functions as the feet of one who walks function, without volition or desire”. Once again, bring back to mind that functioning without volition or desire does not mean living joylessly but rather living joyfully as desires, their fulfillment and the avoidance of all that seems contrary to the desirable is itself sorrow.

7. Relentless self-inquiry

We have discussed six important points so far—the heavy work of the spiritual path is transforming the mind from its habitual ways, closer to its natural state. This is essential for self-inquiry as there is no other instrument with which to inquire. The source of the mind is the source of being and this has to be realized or become real to us by direct experience. If the heavy work is not done upfront, it will take a bigger toll later, especially as age sets in with all its afflictions.

In ancient days, knowledge of yoga along with the goal of life and its attainment was taught along with secular subjects by which one would earn one’s livelihood. The ‘what’ was guided by the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ about things became clear. This sharp focus allowed one to progress through the stages of life progressively and make good progress in each life journey towards to goal of life—self-realization.

Those days along with their structure are long past but we still have the same goal of life and being unaware of it is not an excuse just as ignorance of the laws where we reside are not. The challenge before us is to come to the understanding and acceptance of the lofty goal of self-realization, take advantage of the availability of some aids with the advent of technology and start in the quest of self-realization. You are never alone in the spiritual path so rest on the belief that help comes when one strives sincerely. Sincerity and self-effort merge in the call to grace.

I wanted to talk about these few things to once again stress that the heavy work of the spiritual path is non-glorious but a struggle only till one is fully on board the train of change. Just like the farmer does the heavy work of preparing the soil and planting, we too must cultivate the inner field as that is not only the field but also the instrument. Self-inquiry now has a good amount of capital of ‘self’ for the inquiry and it must as the Self can only be known by the self. There is no other instrument or means for the task on hand.

Now back to Vāsiṣṭha’s teachings. Inquire into the nature of truth relentlessly to attain the fruit of this birth. Take the idea of gradual work out of the mind as the habitual mind will offer trickle-

down cooperation which will at best be one step forward, two back. Swami Sivananda has a perfect recipe for our approach: a firm resolve, an effective system of daily self-accountability, and, an intelligent but effective way of self-punishment which deters habit.

With this triad, sit to realize—with this solid foundation, you will be unshaken by even the most turbulent distractions. It is not that distractions and turbulence will absent soon, but that you would be very well grounded and anchored to sail over the rough seas.

Self-inquiry is looking directly into one's self and not thinking or rationalizing. You are not satisfied by an answer or explanation—a direct experience must be had. Inquire thus: “What is this world? Who am I?” Such inquiry is the essence of the science of self-knowledge, and the answer will be found in the question itself.

One who engages himself in self-inquiry is fearless, for he knows that the infinite consciousness is pure and is the only truth. He looks upon all with equal vision. The wise restrain their senses from apprehending the unreal world-appearance, whereas those who are unable to rest in the self are prey to their own senses.

Part 16 (Chapter VI begins...)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

In the ninth video in this series, we briefly took up the Seven States or Planes of Wisdom. Now, as we near the end of the essential teachings of the sage Vasiṣṭha, we are once again brought back to them, but this time—with further depth.

I. Śubhecchā or a noble wish

Awakening

There are two types of awakening: one that comes about as a sort of jolt when things do not go at all as planned, and, the other that comes about by living an examined life or a series of examined lives. The first is a mere stirring and not really an awakening. It is more like a passing shower and one quickly reverts to habitual ways once the outer looks even a little favorable. The second is a lasting thunderstorm, the likes of which one has seen before and cumulatively, they form an awakening that propels one to find a better way.

This lasting awakening should not be taken lightly as it comes after many lifetimes of examined living whereby one is spiritually awakened and a wish arises in the heart: “Enough of life in this saṃsāra which is devoid of any essence. Why do I live like a fool? Let me look into the scriptures and listen to the wise men”.

Awakening takes time only because we take time to get over the unexamined notion that our joy comes from people, circumstances or things. Joy is experienced within and its source is within only. True joy is experienced in the fullness of being. This fact resonates in one’s heart and urges one to live an examined life.

Renunciate

Awakening is a mere stirring unless it is followed through by action just as when we awaken from sleep. This action we are talking about here is to set one’s sight on the higher and this, at once, is letting go what is not conducive to one’s aspiration. This natural letting go is not a loss, nor is it repressive as the heart and mind are now intent on that which is better and lasting.

This awakened or natural letting go is also the letting go of craving that we had for this is what makes it noble. One aspires for that which is good and lasting—this, is called a noble wish. With this wish in one’s heart, letting go is not a struggle but natural. Without this wish for the noble in one’s heart—letting go is a struggle. Awakened or examined living is the way to come to a change of heart.

We have already covered that there is a big difference between simple joys that come about naturally or without any craving and joys or pleasures craved for.

Vāsiṣṭha says, “When such a wish is *preceded by the absence of craving for pleasure*, it is called a noble wish or śubhecchā—he is known as a renunciate”. The giving up of craving is what makes it noble as the craving is what disallows peace, inner balance and the calm needed for self-inquiry.

Renunciation

Giving up craving, one finds the way to give up other ties of the mind and gradually, the mind attains a state of balance or equipoise. The seeker delights at the peace and calm that dawns and asks himself, “What should I do in order to cultivate dispassion and cross this mire of saṃsāra?”

Dispassion is not disdain or hatred for things but the letting go of unexamined passion for the habitual. Contrary to common belief, dispassion is full of joy as one now has inner capital again to pursue the higher that he is not tied by habits chains. The seeker rejoices in renunciation and his attitude reflects in his behavior.

Behavior of a renunciate

1. He avoids the snare of his own mental conditioning.
2. He delights in beneficial actions.
3. In secret he performs auspicious actions.
4. His actions are non-violent and they do not excite others.
5. He refrains from sin and from the pursuit of pleasure.
6. His speech is friendly and appropriate to the occasion.

Focus of a renunciate

One who aspires for the higher, values the higher and respects those who have trodden the path before towards its attainment. He serves holy ones with thought, word and deed. Let us start with ‘deed’ as this is what there are many misconceptions about. We are familiar with physical service but here, in ‘deed’ includes but is not limited by physical service rendered. Now, let us jump to the beginning and look at all three.

His thoughts reflect his aspiration as thought strengthens or weakens aspiration. For this, the seeker adopts a background of thought felt needed to take him to the next step from where he is. This is an evolving process and the rise of sublime thoughts reflects in word and deed. Let us get back to serving holy ones with thought, word and deed. Rendering full-hearted service is not easy as inherent selfishness interferes in many subtle ways as personal interests do come up at some point. In serving those who have trodden the path before him, he also serves his aspiration

as he finds a way to serve without wholeheartedly without even a tinge or selfishness. This is surgery on the ego as finding a way to serve selflessly is finding a way to be without selfishness.

This selfless service purifies the heart and mind and the seeker diligently searches for the scriptures of self-knowledge and studies them. It is difficult to plunge yourself into meaningful study with the ego lurking in the shadows as in 'study'—we are not studying the scripture but through the scripture—we are studying our self.

Thus, study leads to inquiry naturally and the seeker enquires into the nature of saṃsāra and the means of crossing it. Now, the seeker is said to be established in the first stage of yoga.

Part 17 (Chapter VI continues)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

II. Vicāraṇā or direct and steady observation of the mind

When one engages in the practice of inquiry or direct observation into the nature of the reality, it is inquiry or vicāraṇā. Direct observation of the mind is not passive but active in that the watching is also transforming. One does not just observe the mind but in observing, one is conscious that one is observing and does not get lost in the observation. The more one is able to sustain inner observation, the more conditioning reduces—as long as one does not add on conditioning any other way. This is essential, not only to spiritual practice, but also in living without inner conflict.

All of what we are going to talk about today, focuses on enabling vicāraṇā or direct observation of the mind and this enabling is at once the full willingness to let the inner intelligence act instead of the ego. Vicāraṇā is not something that the ego does. Vicāraṇā is the relentless watching of the ego while the inner intelligence does what needs to be done, as the situation arises and as a natural response to the situation without standing outside it. The ego has no room in vicāraṇā and it is weakened by disuse when the inner intelligence is empowered. Vicāraṇā therefore is also the pivot of the ego's surrender. The journey of surrendering the ego is at once an abidance in the spirit and therefore there is no loss—only gain. Let us now shift from talking about vicāraṇā to looking at ways to making it happen. One who is in this stage...

1. Engages himself in the study of scriptures, right conduct and meditation.

Study: The sincere seeker does not 'study scriptures' to understand them, but to understand one's self. Through the scriptures, the seeker studies himself. Vāsiṣṭha has carefully chosen the word 'study' as this involves being a student and a wholly different attitude. A student does not have any preconceived notions as these notions interfere and disallow study. He approaches study with a clear mind and heart, holds on to the core teachings in his heart and ponders on how to practice them wholeheartedly. These three things are the focus of the seeker's study: right approach; finding the teachings which allow one to progress in his spiritual journey; and; fiery determination to practice them in one's life or off the mat as well.

Right conduct: This is the bringing into life of one's study in one's daily life. Spiritual aspiration is not something confined to the prayer area but extends through all life. One's conduct, which is thoughts, feelings, communication and action, should reflect the ideals of one's spiritual aspiration wholeheartedly. This is what makes 'right conduct' with a spiritual basis different from social conduct and such—one's deepest aspiration is the very foundation and basis for all of one's conduct. Protecting one's spiritual flame or aspiration may appear to be at odds with social

conduct of the times as social norms change and differ continually. It is best to emblaze one's spiritual ideal or goal in the heart first, as this will allow it to reflect naturally in life. To start in the outer first without having the ideal firmly set in one's heart, does not afford one the inner stability required to sustain the journey and evolve spiritually.

Concentration and meditation: The mind for meditation is cultivated in the hours of one's regular day-to-day life or off the mat. There is therefore no such thing as day-to-day life or secular life for the seeker as inner cultivation threads all aspects of one's life—all the time. The most basic and essential rule is: do one thing at one time, wholeheartedly or with full dedication and because it needs to be done. This is the way to become 'wholehearted' or sincere. If one practices this type of concentration off the mat or in one's daily life—concentration on the mat comes naturally. If one's attention is scattered and diffused in one's regular life—concentration is a struggle at best.

Concentrating the mind in one's daily life, one can concentrate the mind further on an object or ideal. This gathers the rays of the mind further and brings them into a tight focus. Supplementary yogic practices such as trātak or steady gazing and pranayama with concentration further tighten the rays of the mind and bring them into sharp focus. Now, the mind is primed for either concrete or abstract meditation. Concrete meditation is meditation on a particular form—this, leads to abstract meditation and then to self-inquiry naturally.

2. Resorts to the company of the wise and the good.

This is the glue that binds one's life with one's spiritual aspiration. No matter how things are, we always have the choice of a way that increases inner goodness or other choices. There are only these two paths. Katha Upanishad refers to them as preyas and śreyas—the pleasant and the good. This is the very basis for one's spiritual growth: knowing what is good, what supports one's spiritual ascent and the wholehearted willingness to practice it.

The company of the wise and the good is not limited to programs one attends from time to time or gatherings with some religious theme. To keep company is to keep steady companionship with the good or what supports one's spiritual aspiration as the basis for all choices in life. This wholehearted embrace removes struggle from the journey and if struggle is felt—there is lack of wholeheartedly embracing the good.

3. Knows what is good, harmful, right and wrong.

As we have discussed, the mind for concentration and mediation is cultivated in our day-to-day lives. Therefore, one should resort to company of the good in all aspects of life. Our choices add or subtract momentum to our spiritual practice. This makes it essential to know what is good and harmful, right and wrong as there is a direct impact in our spiritual quest.

All of this may stand at odds with today's 'politically correct atmosphere' but it has been this way since the very beginning. The scriptures give us a beautiful analogy, "Be in this world but not off the world..." It is impossible to please two masters—the flesh and the spirit at the same time. This does not mean that one has to be at odds with the world at all. The world will go on with its own momentum and direction—let it. The seeker has his own direction and momentum. Both these intersect as needed but the seeker is set on the goal and clear of what is truly worth seeking. When there is this level of clarity in the heart—there are no choices at all. Sincerity is being fully onboard what is good and right and this fire, at once does away with the allure of any other temptation. Inner conflict is a sign that such clarity has not yet dawned in the heart.

4. Resolutely give up all negative qualities like pride, envy, vanity, desires and delusion.

Sincerity is the pivot in the spiritual journey. The last time we discussed bringing about this level of sincerity. When sincerity blossoms in the heart, it is like a fire that burns any existing or new desire as the heart is set on what it considers truly best. Sincerity simply means that you are fully onboard your deepest aspiration. Both of these must be there—you have a deep aspiration or one that you value more than all others and you are prepared to do what is needed towards its attainment—this is sincerity.

Just aspiring will do nothing unless you are enthusiastically prepared to let go of all that is not conducive to your aspiration. Giving up negative qualities like pride, envy, vanity, desires and delusion is giving up what stands in the way of your spiritual aspiration. Instead of struggling with the 'giving up'—it is easier to focus on the aspiration as the grip of all that hinders will loosen with time. While focusing on aspiration and all that supports it—you have to still have to recognize the surge of habit and avoid it by strengthening all that supports aspiration.

If there is a slip to negative qualities, there must be a system of accountability or intelligent self-punishment as we have discussed earlier. This is what makes it resolute as it has a resolve to stay on the chosen path. This intelligent self-punishment is positive and not punitive as it checks backsliding. Today's 'politically correct climate' tends to differ with any way of self-accountability so one has to maintain a deeper understanding for any real progress within.

It is necessary to clearly see that any or all of these negative qualities keep you from what you really want and consider best. The struggle on the journey lessens in proportion to your being fully on board your own aspiration. Regular meaningful study of scriptures, service of the teacher and relentless vigilance are an excellent backdrop in cultivating the heart and mind for one's spiritual journey.

Part 18 (Chapter VI continues)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

III. Tanumānasi or the thinned and weakened mind

The mind gets thicker or more conditioned when it feels that pleasure resulting from sense contact is experienced. Simultaneously, attachment arises in the mind as the mind wants to preserve the experience which it feels gives pleasure and an aversion to anything that would inhibit the experience. This phenomenon is widespread across all of our lives so much so that it feels natural and goes unexamined.

This phenomenon goes unexamined and the means for pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of all that would disallow pleasure blossoms from apparently harmless mild preferences to strong currents of like and dislike. The mechanism that was allowed to take root to further pleasure and reduce or avoid displeasure soon grows into a destroyer of peace as it keeps the mind on the current of pursuit and avoidance.

There is nothing wrong with the simple pleasures of life which come by very naturally and do not require 'pursuit' and resulting 'avoidance' which change to likes and dislikes. Seeing this clearly, a feeling of disinterestedness in the pleasure of the senses arises in one and this gives rise to non-attachment.

There is a difference between the 'pursuit of pleasure' and not the 'simple pleasures that come about naturally' which require no pursuit. Pursuit and avoidance energizes likes and dislikes and these become deeper cravings and aversions. In giving up these inner ties that bind, the mind's likes and dislikes are weakened and the mind becomes subtle and transparent or tanumānasi. This is the third state of the seven states or planes or wisdom of Vāsiṣṭha and is also known as non-attachment and freedom. Tanumānasi is characterized by...

1. Assimilate the teachings, live with masters and listens to their teachings.

Assimilation is a different from 'internalizing' that we hear so much about nowadays. Internalizing is having the teaching within—perhaps, ready to use. But, the user stays the same with this 'so called teaching' in his hip pocket. This does nothing at all but increase vanity. Assimilation is very different—*the teachings become flesh* so to say and are empowered to act unrestricted and unhindered across all life.

For assimilation, the approach to study has to be more than a daily activity—one among others. Study becomes the way of feeding the soul's hunger to merge in its source. One does not merely study but through study—there is immediate and irreversible change in ones thinking at deeper levels and one ponders on how to practice the teachings across the spectrum of life. Along with

this, one also considers all that is not conducive to self-knowledge and immediately uproots them root and branch.

It is rare that one can bring about total transformation within without contact with others who have done so. Towards this, one seeks the company of the masters and listens to their teachings as well. What was studied in the scriptures now meets practical experience and this gives tremendous momentum to one's practice.

2. Be indifferent to this world and lead a disciplined life free from all contacts.

Having studied and read, one is steady in the inner journey and becomes indifferent to the outer world. This does not mean that one abhors or hates the world but it does not lure the seeker who now knows that the inner journey is far more rewarding and durable.

One leads a very disciplined life as discipline is the pivot that makes teachings come alive within. A disciplined life is not a life of punishment and denial but an avoidance for what is not truly good and lasting for what is indeed good and lasting. As in any big change, there is a strong pull of habit and to prevent backsliding, one sets-up a structure for managing one's self and one's time with a way of self-accountability.

Real change is most difficult while still living amidst kith, kin and friends as they will insist on the 'old you' which you have gradually grown out of or gone beyond. Initially, all change is a novelty and hence taken with a grain of salt but soon, non-acceptance and even disdain come to the surface and situations deteriorate drastically for many reasons.

To prevent these sorts of difficult situations and to protect one's spiritual flame—it is best to be free from all contact unless very necessary for some reason so you can be clear in your heart and mind and have no ties that bind.

3. By practicing the teachings and good actions, one attains right perception of what is.

Sincerity in study is interest in self-change and not just knowing about some topic. In spiritual life, you—your true nature is the topic. You are learning about yourself and feel a strong urge to burst out of this cage of habit into the infinity of your true nature. This means that you are to grow into the likeness of your aspiration till you melt into your aspiration. This is the practice of the teaching.

Growing into the teachings is at once leaving the habitual self behind. Towards this, it is most helpful to do as much good actions and deeds as possible. We have to learn to do good not for any other reason but because it needs to be done. This is the way to understand that the practice of goodness is: goodness in you must do good deeds till goodness in you increases and fills all being. This will squeeze out all that is not good or habit just as you squeeze out the last toothpaste from a tube.

Here too, it is difficult to truly practice good in familiar environments as the initial surface acceptance will soon give way to total rejection as others shift from the good intent to the means and scrutiny intensifies. All of this makes it difficult to plunge deep within and there is constant inner conflict. This is so even more today in the times of 'connectivity' than earlier and all of this will have to be well-thought off and resolved.

The difficulty in progress is backsliding and hence, one has to have tremendous clarity, inner conviction and readiness to let the outer take its own course as you journey within. With this sure footing, relentless perseverance and God's grace—one attains right perception of what is.

4. The spirit of non-attachment increases.

Non-attachment does not mean one is cold, clammy or that one does not care. It is quite the opposite. Just think about it—in all the so-called 'warm talk' and more—how much of it is really sincere? A shrewd and calculating mind could be working overtime while pleasantries are exchanged. I am merely suggesting that one needs to go beyond the convenient face of the outer to even understand what non-attachment is. Towards this, let us go beyond theology, differences in doctrine and the rest of it as one cannot inquire if one is biased to begin with.

Non-attachment is a very deep field, let us look at the high-end and work our way back. If God is All, all must be in God somehow or just who may I ask controls the real estate between God and all of us? If God is all, the differences in all their forms must be appearances with God as the only reality. The final approach to God, the only reality must be one of non-separation till this is actualized or directly experienced. This melting or surrender requires tremendous inner courage, fortitude, faith and unrelenting perseverance.

This is not easy and hence, the masters have laid out two forms of non-attachment: ordinary non-attachment and superior non-attachment. The difference is qualitative and requires the highest level of all those qualities and more that we have just talked about. Ordinary non-attachment when sustained and fuelled by sustained inner discipline and unrelenting love for God, bursts into superior non-attachment.

Ordinary non-attachment: One who has not directly realized the truth, ascertains to himself: "I am not the experiencer nor the doer; I have nothing to do with anyone nor has anyone anything to do with me. Whether what happens is because of past karma or because of divine will, whether it is pleasure or pain, what have I to do? Pursuit of pleasure is a dire disease, prosperity is calamity, meetings are only for parting, and time is all-devouring". In this manner, by the company of the holy ones, by avoiding the contact of all that is not supportive of one's aspiration, sustaining self-awareness, and by intense self-effort—one gains correct understanding of the truth concerning everything.

Superior non-attachment: One who has directly realised the truth: "I am not the doer; the doer is either past karma or the divine will"; when he has crossed this ocean of saṃsāra and rests in

peace and silence that is known as superior non-attachment or freedom. There is no division between inside and outside, above and below, substantiality and insubstantiality inertia and consciousness, appearance and non-appearance. Then, there arises in the heart real wisdom, characterized by contentment and right action, and which yields the fruit of total freedom.

Part 19 (Chapter VI continues)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

Before we begin

A few thoughts before we begin. As with our previous sessions, repetition of certain teachings is necessary. Just as a doctor may prescribe medication or treatment, discontinue it, and, include it once again in the regimen once again; similarly, inclusion of certain practices is natural in spiritual ascent. Vāsiṣṭha's potent remedies include certain instructions that may have been mentioned earlier as the current step requires its inclusion.

Yoga is not a linear path, there is a lot of adjustment back and forth. Being methodical by diligently maintaining a spiritual diary is a good way to get an accurate feel for the adjustments needed as one treads.

IV. Satvāpatti or natural turning away from sense pleasure and dwelling in truth

When the first three states (*having a noble wish, continual direct and steady observation of the mind, and, the thinning or weakening of the mind*) are practiced together, the seeker naturally turns away from sense-pleasures and dwells in truth. Goodness sprouts and blossoms, and gradually, the seeker overcomes ignorance. Right perception arises and the vision of division ceases.

In this fourth stage, diversity is overcome and one is firmly established in unity. Diversity and conditioning are the same thing. The world which appeared so very real, is now perceived as a sort of dream, hence, the fourth stage is compared to the dream state. Without the play of conditioning, purity or satvā blossoms in the heart and this inner blossoming is called satvāpatti. The seeker now *naturally turns away* from sense pleasure and abides in truth.

Along with the three stages covered earlier, these four principles help bring about the state of satvāpatti.

1. Do what should be done because it needs to be done and not for any other purpose.

Action is a way to calibrate the mind and heart—no matter what the action or field of action be. In doing, we also become aware of our motivations by vicāraṇā or unrelenting observation of the mind along with all that appears outside. The ego will suggest ways that are self-serving but, the footing we have made in the spiritual journey will point to what is best—not what is best for 'me'.

In each situation, to do what is best or what needs to be done is a way to stand with all things by dismissing the ego's urges though being aware of them. For this, we have to look at all things, people and conditions included—afresh, without the interference of conditioning. Weakening

conditioning in and through our daily lives is essential and necessary for meditation as we meditate with the same mind that leans towards the ego or universality. The mind driven by ego will always—even in the hours of meditation, be a looking glass of the ego’s agenda. The mind that through action, has calibrated itself out of self-centeredness—will be able to get past the ego’s promptings in meditation as well.

There is no inner conflict when we do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and in the best way possible. Great satisfaction and peace is felt when selfishness is gradually purged out of the system. Selfishness does not promote inner peace and ‘taking care of me first’ is ruining all hope for peace and harmony—both for ourselves and others. This is especially relevant today as ‘individuality’, ‘me first’ and ‘whatever’ are infused into the hearts and minds of the young vigorously. These are not only major blocks in spiritual progress but in leading a sane and peaceful life.

For example, in feeling part of one family—one does what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and in the best way possible. Only when the family unit is placed ahead of individuality can there be harmony in the family. This giving up of individuality is not a loss but a gain as one gains the experience of a larger whole.

In spiritual life, universalizing one’s sense of self is *essential as the ego cannot do yoga*. Only the universal can seek the universal. In the Bhagavad Gita, we are told, “Seek the self by the Self...”. Action is a field for spiritual unfoldment and inner ascent. Action affords a view of the deeper mind that does not usually come into the field of conscious observation for many reasons. Action also is an opportunity to calibrate the mind back to its universal state by letting existing conditioning exhaust itself and the mind is gradually restored to its non-fragmented state. The only purpose of all action is to see the mind and heal the mind—all other purposes may for the moment appear to deliver more but hack away on the mind, heart and are driven by the law of diminishing returns.

2. Refrain from doing what should not be done by so knowing intuitively.

Along with ‘doing what needs to be done’, vicāraṇā or unrelenting vigilance also lets us be aware of all the mind’s habitual promptings and avoid what should not be done by better selections instead. All action, and here we are talking about the entire spectrum: feeling, thought, communication and action—that promotes the ego, should be avoided by instead doing what needs to be done because it needs to be done.

This refraining and doing happen together—they are not two different processes. Struggle or inner conflict is a clear sign that there is lack of sincerity. There is no other reason for inner struggle in yoga. Results have no connection with doing what needs to be done—this has to be seen very clearly and accepted in the heart.

“Let things go this way or that—what does it matter if I am concerned with doing the right thing with all my heart, mind and body?” This ‘being concerned with doing the right thing...’ weakens inner struggle because you are not concerned with anything else including habit. The heart is wired to ‘doing the right thing’ and hence—it does not feel pulled towards habit even though habit may call.

When the heart and mind is rewired to see all action as a field for restoring one’s self—one gains tremendous momentum in the spiritual path. It feels like a chain or rope that tethered one to habit has just broken loose. Then, there is no concern for the shape of things—only focus on responses that are best, and that promote natural goodness and thus, avoid conditioning which weakens by disuse.

3. Live a simple and natural life.

To live a simple life means to be simple and live simply. I deliberately stated ‘be simple’ before live simply as one can live simply in outer appearances and be very complex in the mind. The appearances of ‘outer simplicity’ can have ulterior purposes which are hidden. This is why one should not jump to outer simplicity.

It is essential to simplify the heart and mind first. Threading all activities or aspects of one’s life towards one single goal is a good way to simplify. This is more important today as society places a high premium on outer correctness and conformation. Each person is in a different state of inner evolution and the push to confirm and make others confirm outwardly will take the inner rails further apart and have disastrous results.

Having a single focus of effort that threads all of life and is the foundation for a simple life. With a single focus, activity becomes a looking glass within and purposes that otherwise stay hidden, are brought into the field of view. The activity becomes second to each activity’s purpose and the wholeheartedness with which it is done.

These inner dynamics causes a change within as it is deeply felt that the inner is more important to the outer. Once this is felt in the heart, there arises a genuine want for outer simplification as well to more resemble the inner state. Outer simplification then is genuine and the reflection of real inner change which preceded it.

4. Live in accordance with the teachings, engage yourself in appropriate activity and accept whatever happens naturally.

Masters that have gone before us, have written on the path. It is very important to have a fixed time set aside for study daily. One may not have regular direct contact with a teacher but the teachings serve as indirect satsang and this is spiritual nourishment for the seeker. Initially, you may study from a few texts, but you will soon feel pulled to go deeper in the study and practice of teachings of one that you feel intuitively drawn to.

Be careful that you do not prejudge the teachings. Remember that you are not studying the scripture or teaching but through the scripture or teaching, *you are studying yourself*. When this spirit lodges in the heart, enthusiasm to actualize the teachings increases and the energy needed is released within.

The first three points we have discussed so far, lay the groundwork for 'living the teaching, doing what needs to be done and accepting however things turn out'. Action is seen as duty and duty is based on feeling intuitively that it needs to be done. Habit surges but falls back on itself when one sees life as duty. When all action is threaded by duty, natural simplicity increases and letting go of all that is not conducive to your aspiration becomes struggle free.

Part 20 (Chapter VI continues)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

V. Asamśakti or natural and total non-attachment or freedom

Vāsiṣṭha's seven states or planes of wisdom is a virtual roadmap for the unraveling of conditioning and a simultaneous revealing one's true nature—if one practices sincerely. This practice is the holding on to principle in the heart and ensuring that the mind and body reflect them in full measure without compromise.

With full focus on the mind and way we feel about things, it may seem that the 'religious element' or the 'spiritual element' has not been addressed very much as perhaps one is accustomed to hearing about.

Conditioning and its deep roots in the heart and mind are all that keeps us from God or the realization of our true nature just as turbulent waters keep one from seeing the pond's depths. All else has value only if it leads one to tackle and wipeout conditioning—root and branch.

1. Total non-attachment or freedom and conviction in the nature of truth happen together.

It may surprise some to hear that non-attachment is also called 'freedom'. The very term 'non-attachment' may imply cold and perhaps even insensitive. A closer look will show that it is actually the opposite. Attachment is usually based on duality and usually favors a 'status quo' of some sort. Duality gives rise to the urge to unite in some way and the condition or status quo one expects seems to give durability to this unity as not only must unity be desired but it must last or endure.

This is because there is an underlying unity or oneness in which duality seems to appear. If there wasn't existing oneness—there could never be any feeling of unity by any means. The feeling of non-attachment is a shift from the outer jugglery of artificial unity to abide in the oneness that is the truth of things. Any sincere effort towards the realization of unity or oneness, requires stepping back from the midst of outer arrangements or one will feel pulled in both directions and the force of the outer may feel stronger and formidable.

With sincerity and sustained unwavering practice while being free or relatively free of outer arrangements—one will gradually start to experience and abide in oneness. Freedom and conviction in the nature of truth are experienced proportionate to the degree there is outer non-attachment and sustained unrelenting practice—these happen together.

2. The state of non-attachment or freedom is asamśakti.

There is inner peace and joy, independent of external objects or internal mental states. As long as the feeling of 'other'—whether this be towards a person, condition or thing is in the mind—

real peace is not possible. As long as one lives with personal interests first—the feeling of otherness strengthens.

When one lives a life based on oneness as the truth of things—the feeling of otherness thins out of the mind. As the feeling of otherness thins in one’s mind—attitudes such as likes and dislikes also thin away. One learns to do what needs to be done wholeheartedly—because it needs to be done and the feeling of non-attachment blossoms within.

When the feeling of non-attachment blossoms within, one experiences a sense of freedom. This freedom is freedom of being and this can only be experienced in letting go. One has tremendous clarity as in this inner freedom—one can do what is best in all conditions, all the time without being bound by ‘what’s in it for me’ and ‘my people’. All ties keep one from clear perception and doing what needs to be done because it needs to be done and wholeheartedly. This is why non-attachment or *asamśakti* is also called freedom.

In this inner freedom or *asamśakti*, the heart and mind soar high, free of the fetters of ‘me’ and mine’ and one stands with all things instead of outside them. There is a feeling of real inner expansion and this can only be had in letting go.

3. Perception of the world gives way to the feeling of being.

With inner expansion, the ties that bind are let go and the focus dwells on the inner expanded state or on the sense of being. This is a big shift from dwelling on the perception on the world comprised of many things which are all outside. As you rest in the sense of being, it begins to be experienced as more and more real and the world outside feels like an appearance of sorts.

Gradually, the perception of things outside feel even more of an appearance till even this recedes when all distinguishing characteristics disappear. In this feeling of oneness, one experiences peace and non-duality.

4. Though engaged in ‘worldly activities’, one is established in an inner vision of non-duality.

When one is very sincere and focussed in practice, external activity may need to be thinned out so all of one’s energy and awareness and flow uninterruptedly. Gradually, the feeling of oneness strengthens and then one is able to resume worldly activity without loss of this inner vision.

Then, though one seems to be engaged in outer activity, one’s vision is fully introverted. One is at peace, the mind unconditioned, and the practice of yoga continues steadily.

Part 21 (Chapter VI continues)

SEVEN STATES OR PLANES OF WISDOM

Today, let's briefly look into Vāsiṣṭha's sixth and seventh states or planes of wisdom: padārthābhavanī or natural cessation of objectivity and turīya or liberated while living. There is not much to be said about these states as the gap between knower, known and knowing—melt and particularities also fade.

A similar thought has also been expressed in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad when the great sage Yājñavalkya says to Maitreyī:

There are no means or instrument to illumine the Self, as the Self illumines all the modifications of the intellect and remains as their witness. By what means can you know this Self which shines by its own light? —Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad

But still, we have to say something as we cover these important teachings. So, let us try to discuss with the understanding that as one climbs the ladder of yoga—less is more.

VI. Padārthābhavanī or natural cessation of objectivity

Before coming to all this, it may have been felt that people, conditions and things when favorable—are the sources of joy. A closer examination by staying witness to the mind's notions shows us that it is not so. Notions and our reactions rise and fall within consciousness or we could never be conscious of them.

Reactions and getting caught up in them is a habit and this habit can be let go when you sincerely wish to do so. Yoga is the system and means of disentanglement from habit and at the same time, abidance in witness-consciousness or the self. Just because we perceive someone or something does not mean the person or thing is external, separate or other.

When this truth lodges deep in the heart and mind, one rejoices in one's own self and the perception of duality and diversity ceases. The efforts made at the inspiration of others, bear fruition in direct spiritual experience. The man of wisdom is aware of objects only if he feels compelled to do so. This natural and spontaneous cessation of objectivity is called padārthābhavanī and it is the sixth state. Mental activity has been greatly decreased and even concepts such as unity and diversity do not arise. All bonds are severed and all doubts dispelled.

One reaching this state is called liberated in embodiment or a jīvanmukta. He lives a normal life but in an extraordinary way, like a house whose door swings open and closed naturally with the wind. He has attained something but truly nothing as what he has attained—is his own true nature.

VII. Turīya or liberated while living

There is no other support, by persistent practice—the vision of division ceases and one is fully established in one’s own unconditioned being. Self-knowledge is spontaneous, natural and therefore unbroken—this state is known as liberated while living or turīya. Body-consciousness is completely overcome and in this state, the boundary of becoming is crossed and one abides in true being. When one reaches this stage, one goes beyond sorrow permanently.

Brief Review

Today, we discussed the sixth and seventh of the seven states or planes of wisdom: padārthābhavanī or natural cessation of objectivity, and, turīya or liberated while living. Let us briefly review all seven states or planes of wisdom.

- 1. Śubhecchā or a noble wish:** When one clearly sees the danger in leading an unexamined life, one has given up any and all craving for pleasure as well, and one aspires for what is good and lasting—it is called a noble wish or śubhecchā.
- 2. Vicāraṇā or direct and steady observation of the mind:** When the mind is directly observed without remission, it is also called the practice of inquiry or direct observation into the nature of the reality or vicāraṇā.
- 3. Tanumānāsī or the thinned and weakened mind:** When there arises a disinterestedness in the pleasure of the senses, it is true non-attachment based on intelligent discrimination—the mind is weakened and it becomes subtle and transparent or tanumānāsī.
- 4. Satvāpatti or natural turning away from sense pleasure and dwelling in truth:** When the first three are sincerely practiced, there arises in the seeker a natural turning away from sense-pleasures and a natural dwelling in truth. This result in purity or satvā at heart is called satvāpatti.
- 5. Asamśakti or natural and total non-attachment or freedom:** When the first four are sincerely practiced, there is total non-attachment or freedom and at the same time a conviction in the nature of truth. There is great inner peace and joy independent of external objects and internal mental states. This state of non-attachment or freedom is asamśakti.
- 6. Padārthābhavanī or natural cessation of objectivity:** When one rejoices in one’s own self, the perception of duality and diversity ceases, and the efforts that one made at the inspiration of others, bear fruition in direct spiritual experience. The man of wisdom is aware of objects only if and when he feels compelled to do so. This natural and spontaneous cessation of objectivity is called padārthābhavanī.
- 7. Turīya Liberated while living:** Coming to this stage, there is no other support, by persistent practice the vision of division ceases and one is fully established in one’s own unconditioned

being. Self-knowledge is spontaneous, natural and therefore unbroken, that state is known as liberated even while living here or turīya.

Part 22 (Chapter VI continues)

The Dreadful Elephant in The Forest of Saṃsāra

We are coming to the end of this series on the important teachings of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. This wonderful scripture expounds very subtle truths with the help of stories which make it easier to grasp. So far, we have only covered the teachings these stories point towards. Today, we will follow one of the very short but important stories as we gradually wrap-up this series.

The Dreadful Elephant in The Forest of Saṃsāra

From the scripture

There is a dreadful elephant in the forest of saṃsāra, which is terribly destructive. If this elephant has not been conquered, there is no hope of self-knowledge. *The elephant is desire and her form is the wish “May I attain this” or, “May this happen”.*

It roams in the forest known as this body and plays havoc in various ways. Its young ones are the agitated senses, especially the sense of taste. Actions are its tusks. Mental conditioning is its rut. This elephant destroys everyone who is ignorant and conditioned. The entire saṃsāra is the battlefield in which it operates.

It's others names are vāsanā or mental conditioning, saṅkalpa or concepts and mental images, mōhā or attachment, bhāvanā or mental attitude or feeling, and, and the mind itself.

Destroy this deadly elephant with the help of the supreme weapon such as courage, persistence and endurance. As long as this elephant roams in the forest of the body, saṃsāra or world-appearance persists.

Some thoughts

I picked this very short story among all the many stories in the scripture as having covered the many teachings from them—this one brings it all together. The story of the mad elephant is our story and the madness is the conditioning we harbour though it destroys peace and prevents realization of our true nature. This madness can be let go when we clearly see this to be true and wholeheartedly want peace and serenity now—not tomorrow. If you constantly throw pebbles in a placid pond, you will never see the bottom. Blaming the wind for the ripples you cause is vanity. Now, let us go over some of the poignant lessons briefly.

The only dread which makes up this saṃsāra is desire. Desire has wide connotations and includes all kinds of hoping for or hoping against including its milder forms of preference. ‘What I want (*or prefer*) is not happening and what I don't want or don't prefer is happening”. Isn't this at the heart of all turmoil? Is wanting and rejecting necessary to live a joyful and productive life? Can

we not do our very best in every situation as it unfolds and get satisfaction and happiness from ‘doing everything well’ rather than ‘what comes’ or ‘what should not come’ —as these are mostly not in our control? Let come what comes—you need not run after result. Just do everything wholeheartedly and let go while doing (*I would say that you can only do your very best if you let go while doing wholeheartedly too*) and when it’s done.

Desire in all its forms is itself mental agitation. Why agitate the mind if we want peace? Instead of wanting a certain outcome, why not value the peace that comes from ‘not wanting’?

Inner agitation leads to outer agitation and this vicious cycle feeds on itself. Agitation increases conditioning and besides making meaningful meditation difficult or impossible—destroys even simple joys that come naturally. We have to make this very fundamental choice in how we want to live: do we want to live with agitation or live in peace? A meaningful spiritual life is not possible is there is agitation within. Inner peace however, can lead to a wonderful spiritual harvest.

So, just what are the major agitations that we have to avoid? Vāsiṣṭha has a short list includes:

- 1. Vāsanā or mental conditioning:** all notions that have gathered in the mind.
- 2. Saṅkalpa or concepts and mental images:** each time we revisit an image and entertain certain notions about the image—the notions fuse with the image.
- 3. Mōhā or attachment:** this includes infatuation of any kind. The stronger the notions entertained, the more we are infatuated or attached—not to the object but to the object infused with the notions we have about them.
- 4. Bhāvanā or mental attitude or feeling:** Repeated visiting images and entertaining the notions we have about them makes it very difficult to separate images from how we feel about them. They fuse together and form our mental attitude.
- 5. The mind itself:** the mind is not only a receptacle of notions but has energy on which is acts. Seeming intelligent, the mind is not able to comprehend anything really. The mind borrows its light from the inner intelligence and when the mind is watched without remission—it is weakened. Even though the mind may still hold images, unrelenting vigilance renders the mind powerless over time.

In a few short verses, Vāsiṣṭha has outlined the root cause of all our problems. It all comes down to an out of control mind which acts based on unexamined notions and convictions that have been held close for a long time. As long as this elephant roams in the forest of the body, saṃsāra or world-appearance persists and our lives will be chaotic, a struggle at best and we will miss the purpose of life which is to know our true nature.

All that we do is in time process but if we do all that we do while watching and weakening the mind—action which is in time process provides a window into our true nature or eternity. The

great sage advises us to destroy this deadly elephant with the help of the supreme weapon of courage, persistence and endurance for our highest good.

We are not here to do this and that but to through doing, restore our feeling of 'being' to its natural state.

Part 23 (Chapter VI ends)

Before we begin: I am not going to try to convince anyone about anything, only summarize the important teachings of the great sage Vāsiṣṭha. Sincere seekers, will be eager to meditate relentlessly and validate the teachings for themselves. Let us then just review some important teachings and go into them a little.

Conclusion

What liberated sages conclude

There is no such thing as ignorance or māyā as reality. Whatever is seen in front of you is the pure ever-peaceful omnipotent Brahman. —Yoga Vāsiṣṭha

For there to be something called ‘reality’, there must be some sort of ‘unreality’. There must also be something that knows reality and unreality and the difference. The knowable and knower, both arise in knowingness—the substratum which is all there is. This substratum is the pure ever-peaceful Brahman or Absolute.

Attitudes conducive to liberation

Inwardly, remain at peace in the self but outwardly, as if you are deaf, dumb and blind. Live an active life, but remain as if in deep sleep. Inwardly renounce everything; outwardly do what is necessary. The existence of the mind is sorrow; the absence of mental activity is bliss. —Yoga Vāsiṣṭha

Peace is experienced when the urge to react does not surge within. This state does not come easily because we are so used to reacting that we call it normal and human. But, we are not human, there is a human condition that we are passing through to discover our true nature.

First, stop reacting to what is generally considered external or outside. Ask yourself, “Is it necessary to react to this, that and the other to live in peace and experience joy?” If we rewire the mind to equate satisfaction with ‘effort’ instead of ‘result’—reactions to ‘things outside’ will gradually stop.

Second, when the outer battle dims, one becomes aware of the inner battle. This comes as a shock to most just because they have not been aware of inner turmoil. If one is established in the habit of relentless vigilance—one is able to not react to inner surges of conditioning and they gradually weaken by disuse. This is why it is so important not to have any missteps in the spiritual path. The practice of aligning the silent repetition of the mantra with one’s natural breathing is a sure way to prevent consciousness from getting entangled with surges of conditioning by abiding in witness consciousness. I have covered this practice in detail in the series on Raja Yoga while discussing meditation.

Letting go of all these surges by not reacting to them leads to inner renunciation or inner disentanglement. With this inner freedom, one is able to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and in the best way possible. So, things still get done but without the chaos of mind's turmoil. The mind is gradually drained of its turmoil and it rests in itself as consciousness. The existence of conditioning is sorrow; the absence of conditioning is itself bliss.

Overcoming saṁsāra and some sorrow

Withdraw yourself from objective experience. Remain unmoved by the pleasant or unpleasant like a rock. Remain silent, without thinking but established in nirvāṇa. —
Yoga Vāsiṣṭha

As long as we are involved in 'objective experience', we will not experience our subjective nature. Vigilance is the crystal of awareness turned on itself and held on itself steadily. This is achieved by diligence and sincere practice—on the mat and in life.

We can still do what needs to be done while inner steadiness increases and the joy of one's true nature surges naturally. Unless you see the worthlessness of trivial pursuit and at the same time, see the joy of noble pursuit—this threshold seems distant and difficult. Withdrawing yourself from objective experience is necessary for subjective experience to blossom.

A noble person

These four points come towards the end of the scripture and form a blueprint for spiritual living.

1. Does what should be done: We have discussed this many times before: do what needs to be done, because it needs to be done or on its own merit. This drains the ego by eliminating the 'what's in it for me' and thus the 'little me'. In standing with the situation, one learns to stand with the larger and one gradually feels oneself not apart from the wider fabric of all life. This is a very important milestone in our spiritual journey as the pivot within happens only when one is not riveted on the outer or things outside.

2. Refrains from doing what should not be done: This goes along with the first but inner derailment can block this. If one does not while doing what needs to be done—refrain from what should not be done—a fall is inevitable. There will be backsliding and a downward spiral. Both doing what needs to be done and refraining from doing what should not be done must happen together.

Swami Sivananda has a wonderful three prong approach called 'Sivananda's Trishul' (*trishul is a three-pronged spear*) towards preventing backsliding or a fall: A resolve form in writing, a well thought out play for all activities in the form of a spiritual diary, and, an effective system of self accountability and intelligent self-punishment.

3. Lives a simple and natural life: A simple life has one focus that threads all activities. Though one has different activities, they can be done in a way and makes all activity an offering a sacrifice

by sacrificing the ego and all personal gain out of the equation. When selfishness is squeezed out of the equation, one leads a natural life which is one stands with the wider fabric of nature—not apart from it.

4. Accept whatever happens but lives in accordance with the scriptures—while engaging yourself in appropriate activity: Do your best and accept the rest—this is a good maxim to live by. Many who have achieved the goal before us, have left their writings for us. To live in accordance with their teachings and the teachings of the scriptures is essential when treading the spiritual path.

Society changes with time and with this, all that is considered ‘proper’ also seems to change. What is considered ‘proper’ may not be what is right spiritually. Sages have mentioned this as three different kinds of truth: a behavioral truth which changes with time, a perceptual truth which is what our senses and mind tell us, and, an absolute truth which is experienced by the seeker who is resolute and unrelenting.

Society will be what it is from time to time—let it be as it may. When you take to the spiritual path, you are in a different flow and should not get caught up in conflict with society’s flow. This is why many seek the shelter of a monastery or spiritual company in the form of satsang etc. One learns to let the outer be as it may by being anchored to one’s spiritual ideal in the heart. One does not reject life but treads carefully, never losing sight of the goal in one’s heart.

Vāsiṣṭha’s concluding instructions

All this creation is peace, infinite and eternal. Behold all this as the infinite consciousness and rest in peace.

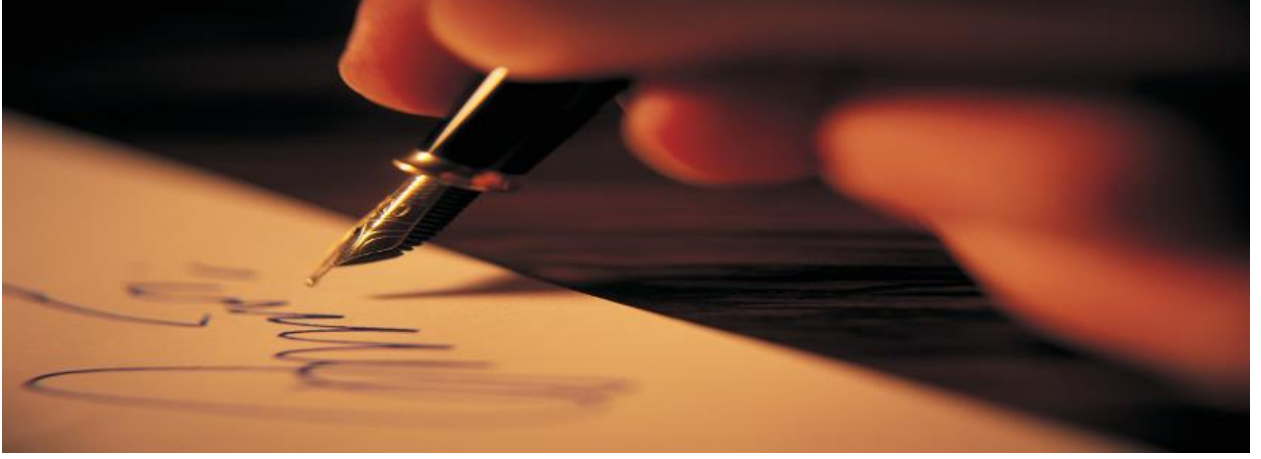
True abandonment of all actions is constant awareness that, “All this is the Lord who is omnipresent, unborn and infinite consciousness”.

Yoga is the cessation of experience of objects, rest in yoga and live, then you will be free from the painful feelings of ‘I’ and ‘mine’.

Be freed from the experience of objects and do what you needs to be done.



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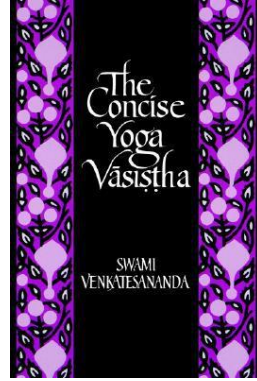
On another note, I have started working on a short series of 4—5 videos with the essential teachings of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. The verses will be chanted in Sanskrit and followed by a translation in English. Some verses will have slightly modified translation to be relevant today. The video and audio will be succinct, with the verse in Sanskrit and the fluid translation in English. The text will be also be on the website in print and reader versions and have some footnotes that may be helpful.

Recommended Reading

Recommended reading: Vāsiṣṭha's Yoga by Swami Venkatesananda, published by SUNY Press and available at Amazon.



768 pages



448 pages

There are two versions of this book available: a fuller version and a concise version which though half the size, has the most essential teachings as well.



