

THE YOGA VASISTHA IN POEM

CHAPTER TWO

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Dedicated to

SWAMI VENKATESANANDA

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PRAYER BEFORE READING

Salutations to that supreme reality
In which all shine as if independently
In which they exist for a short while
And into which they merge eventually

Salutations to that consciousness
Source of apparent threefold division
Of knower, knowledge and known
Seer, sight and seen; doer, doing and deed

Salutations to that bliss-absolute
Which is the life of all beings
Deriving happiness from the shower
Of its ocean of supreme bliss

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEHAVIOR OF THE SEEKER

Visvamitra Narrates the Story of Suka

O Rama, among the wise you are foremost
There is nothing you really need to know
Your knowledge needs inner confirmation
Even as Suka received from Janaka

In depths of much contemplation
Suka too arrived at this truth
About the truth concerning existence
Due to the world's changing nature

He attained supreme dispassion
Though he couldn't affirm it as truth
But because it was self-acquired
He thus sought his father's confirmation

He approached the great Sage Vedavyasa
Though his father, but as a disciple
Inquiring humbly about this diversity
Which appears, though as one creation

How has this world-creation come to be?
How will this come to an end finally?
Vedavyasa did give detailed answers
But Suka felt he knew these intuitively

Vedavyasa sensed and said to Suka
Son, I do not know any more than this
King Janaka the sage knows even more
Kindly approach him for confirmation

To Janaka's palace went young Suka
And stood outside the palace doors
Janaka the king was informed of this
But ignored his presence for a week

At the behest of king Janaka
Suka was ushered into the palace
Entertained by dancers and musicians
But Suka was unmoved by any of this

The sage king then gave Suka an audience
Confirming that he was a knower of truth
Nothing further needed to be known
As Suka had direct self-realization

Janaka did offer some words of wisdom
Diversity arises due to mental modifications
When these cease, diversity too ceases
Suka entered the state in meditation

Rama too has attained the highest wisdom
He is unattracted by any worldly pleasures
Subtle tendencies too have ceased in him
He stands at the threshold of liberation

One who is not swayed by sense pleasures
Who is able to do what needs to be done
Without motive of any sort at all
Is a liberated sage who has realized

Sage Vasistha, I request of your good self
To kindly give Rama thy words of wisdom
Thy instruction will confirm his intuition
And we all too will be greatly inspired

SAGE VASISTHA'S INSTRUCTION

Countless Universes Exist

I shall impart to Rama the highest wisdom
Revealed to me by the creator himself
Countless universes have come into being
And countless have been dissolved too

Countless universes exist at any moment
All these can be realized in one's own heart
All universes are creations of desires
Rising and dissolving in one's heart

Though matter and creation appear real
They are not truly real as they appear to be
They are an appearance and presentation
Seemingly real due to ignorance

Water remains water, ever unaffected
By the presence or absence of waves

So too the sage remains unchanged
Whatever be his external appearance

SELF-EFFORT, FATE AND DESTINY

Self-Effort

Listen attentively to the instruction
Darkness of ignorance will be dispelled
All gain is due to self-effort put forth
All failure is due to slackness in effort

Mental, verbal and physical action
In accordance with scriptures
Or the instructions of holy men
Is self-effort - fate does not exist

Self-effort now can triumph over
Effort and fruits of previous births
As fate is self-effort of the past
So strive sincerely in the present

Obstruction in fruition has a cause
It is deluded action in the past
Correct this by right effort in the present
All have this opportunity and ability

Grinding your teeth exert here and now
Act wisely, exert in the present
Overcome what is called evil and fate
By wisdom-inspired present effort

Lazy people are worse than donkeys
Never yield to laziness, exert ceaselessly
Life ebbs away every moment
Wasteful is indulgence in sense-pleasures

Fate

Those who pin blame for failures on fate
Are brainless and abandoned by good fortune
Exert ceaselessly in every moment
For direct self-realization here and now

As is the cause, so is the effect
As is the effort, so is one's fate
Fate being self-effort of the past

Therefore exert without remission

Unexpected gains too have their cause
It is always self-effort of the past
Not accident or good luck as people say
Not divine acts or chance events

If efforts in the present seem fruitless
Continue to exert wisely without ceasing
What are called obstructions by people
Are seeds sown in the past carelessly

Destiny

Free yourself from likes and dislikes
Engage in right action, reach the truth
What is called divine will and destiny
Is nothing but the fruit of self-effort

Shape your destiny by right self-effort
Based on right understanding in the heart
Which rises within after being exposed
To scriptures and company of holy ones

You must keep your body free from illness
Mind too must be free from all distress
To pursue the path of self-knowledge
For freedom from the pains of rebirth

Threefold root and threefold cause
First is awakening in the inner intelligence
Second is a decision in the mind
Third is doing what ought to be done

Destiny can be shaped by these
First is knowledge of the scriptures
Second is instructions of the preceptor
Third is one's own right self-effort

Two tendencies are brought forward
Pure tendencies lead to liberation
Impure tendencies invite trouble
Choose wisely and shape your destiny

Nothing and none can impel you
Pure consciousness is your true nature

Strengthen the pure, reap a good harvest
The impure will wither away by disuse

All that anyone has ever attained
Has been had by putting forth effort
Fate can never give you anything
As it is itself fruition of self-effort

Fate or such god has never been seen
All experience results from actions done
So promote your own good and salvation
By holy company and right self-effort

If fate did really exist as an entity
What would exertion mean at all
Why would people work hard at all
So why believe in fate or destiny

Renounce fatalism, exert correctly
Fruition of action is fate and destiny
Sages attained the highest by self-effort
You too can attain if you exert intelligently

NARRATIVE DEALING WITH LIBERATION

Background

If you listen to this narrative attentively
Revealed to me by the creator Brahma
The Supreme Being will be realized
Sorrow and destruction will come to end

The omnipresent omniscient alone shines
When vibration arises in this cosmic being
It gives rise to Brahma the creator
Who begins to create endless variety

Pain and suffering are inherent in creation
As are sacred centers, learning and piety
But suffering's tight grip is merciless indeed
Liberation from its clutches is a difficult task

I was brought into being by the creator
And veiled by ignorance, self-forgetfulness
Sunk in misery, unable and unwilling
To find a way out, staying lazy and inactive

I prayed to the creator for his grace
For a way out of suffering and grief
Immediately the veil of ignorance was lifted
I regained peace through self-realization

The creator told me the reason for veiling
Was to experience the glory of realization
As there is no other way to experience this
Except self-forgetfulness and its transcendence

Experiencing suffering makes one compassionate
As one feels and reaches to help spontaneously
Thus equipped with this knowledge I am here
And will continue till the end of creation

In every age sages are willed into being
For the spiritual welfare of all beings
As desires and greed harden the heart
The cure is spiritual insight and wisdom

Real Dispassion

The dispassion arisen in you is of discrimination
It is superior to that born of circumstances
Such dispassion is by the grace of God alone
Maturing when lodged deep within the heart

Till this dispassion lodges deep in the heart
One stays in the cycle of birth and death
Listen therefore with a concentrated mind
As the fire of wisdom destroys ignorance

One should approach the enlightened teacher
With the right questions and attitude
To elicit the teachings, light on the path
Which must become part of your very being

The fool asks irrelevant questions disrespectfully
The greater fool spurns the sage's wisdom
'Tis not a sage who answers any of these
Vain questions from a foolish questioner

You are indeed the foremost of seekers
For you have reflected over the truth
And are inspired by dispassion's fire
Fix these teachings within your heart

The seeker must strive to fix in the heart
Teachings of sages and the wise
The seeker must avoid unwise company
As the mind is unstable and impressionable

FOUR GATE-KEEPERS TO FREEDOM

Self-Knowledge: Your Foremost Duty

The entrance to the Realm of Freedom
Are guarded by four gate-keepers
Self-control, spirit of inquiry
Contentment and good-company

Strive diligently to cultivate friendship
With all four or at least one of them
Overcome the deadly serpent of ignorance
Or endless suffering will be thy lot

Overcoming this sorrow of samsara
You will live here like gods right now
Delusion alone is the prison house
Inquiry into self-nature the means out

When the mind's disturbances have subsided
There is unbroken flow of peace within
The truth is seen by the heart directly
This very world becomes an abode of peace

Such a person is untainted by life's defects
Untouched by life's sorrows is he
He sees nothing to acquire or to shun
Though he appears to live quite normally

The past has lost its grip on him
His mind has given up its restlessness
He rests in the bliss of his own nature
All by direct experience of self-knowledge

Self-knowledge alone is your foremost duty
Disregard is an invitation to grievous harm
If you want to free yourself from samsara
Receive this wholesome instruction sincerely

Self-Control: The First Gate-Keeper

This formidable ocean of samsara

Is like sleeping in a burning house
Resort to the eternal and unchanging
There alone does the mind find peace

You have nothing to lose by self-inquiry
Only freedom to gain from life's turmoil
Hence all should strive without remission
To conquer the mind and end bondage

A pure mind is peaceful and tranquil
Free from delusion and untangled
It does not long for anything at all
Nor does it feel a need to reject things

This is self-control or conquest of mind
The first gate-keeper to the Absolute
All that is good emanates from here
All evil is dispelled by self-control too

No gain or pleasure can ever compare
To the joy and delight of the self-controlled
All trust one who is self-controlled
It is the remedy for physical and mental ills

While functioning among the pleasant
Among that considered unpleasant too
He is neither elated nor depressed
Living naturally in unbroken self-control

He looks upon all in equal vision
Having disciplined the senses well
Living amongst all, unaffected by them
Even-minded is the person of self-control

Inquiry: The Second Gate-Keeper

Inquiry is the second gate-keeper
Undertaken by an intelligence purified
By a close study of sacred scripture
It must remain unbroken until liberation

The wise regard all gain as inquiry's fruit
Spirit of inquiry is the best protection
Absence of inquiry renders the mind dull
Making one's life a journey in sorrow

Avoid the company of foolish ones
Who live without the spirit of inquiry
As they bring grief upon themselves
And others by being in their company

Inquiry is not reasoning or analysis
It is directly looking into oneself
To know directly "Who am I?"
"How has this samsara come to be?"

When the spirit of inquiry is ever awake
You enlighten all who come in contact
Dispelling ignorance and falsity
By the light and fire of inner clarity

The light of inquiry brings realization
Of what is unchanging amidst change
Freedom from delusion and attachment
One functions normally, completely free

Even in the midst of life's activities
The eye of inquiry shines brightly
Far better to be born as a worm in mud
Than be without the eye of inquiry

From inquiry arises knowledge of truth
From such knowledge arises tranquility
Then, the peace that passeth understanding
The end of sorrow and suffering permanently

Contentment: The Third Gate-Keeper

Contentment is the third gate-keeper
All craving is absent in the contented one
He does not relish any sense pleasures
Delighting in contentment, the destroyer of sins

Contentment is complete renunciation
For all that is sought in every way
Satisfied with what comes naturally
Unsought, increasing the heart's purity

The contented mind is a continual feast
The heart blooms like a continual spring
Free from the sense of possessiveness
Thereby owning the entire universe

Satsanga: The Fourth Gate-Keeper

Satsanga is company of the wise
The truly holy and enlightened ones
It brightens one's inner light
And awakens one's intelligence

Destroying ignorance and psychic distress
Most precious of all is this good-company
Attain this at any cost to your own self
Satsanga is light on the path of freedom

Superior to any and all religious practices
To charity, austerity, pilgrimage and rites
Serve and adore saints and holy ones
Disrespecting them invites great suffering

Summary: Four Gate-Keepers to Freedom

Self-control, spirit of inquiry
Contentment and good-company
These four are the surest means
Of rescue from the ocean of samsara

Self-control is supreme happiness
Self-inquiry is the highest wisdom
Contentment is the supreme gain
Satsanga is the very best company

If unable to befriend all four sentinels
Then resort to at least one sincerely
With diligent practice without remission
The others will grow in you gradually

Tame the wild elephant of the mind
Wisdom will seek you of its own accord
Without this, there is no spiritual life
No progress, only increasing vanity

Strive by all means to attain these four
Necessary when on the spiritual path
If you have these in good measure
You are qualified to ascend spiritually

STUDY AND EXPERIENCE

On Study

The seeds of knowledge of scriptures
Must be sown deep in the heart
Origin and author are not important
The wisdom within is what is divine

Words of wisdom should be accepted
If they be from the mouth of youth
Unwise words should be rejected
Even if they be from gods or any other

Listen carefully to these teachings
Let the message contained reflect within
It will lodge in your heart as wisdom
A liberated sage you shall soon be

When truth has not been experienced
Illustrations point to truth beautifully
These have a definite scope and utility
Do not stretch them beyond intention

Study this scripture again and again
Until you reach complete enlightenment
Stopping short will worsen confusion
Imperfect knowledge is perversion

On Direct Experience

As the ocean is substratum of the waves
So also experience is basis for all proofs
The substratum of experiencing intelligence
Becomes experiencer, experiencing and experience

Just as movement is inherent in air
Manifestation is in experiencing consciousness
The perceiving mind ignorantly thinks
'I am this object' and becomes it

What we call object or objectiveness
Is experienced in the subject only
Not experienced anywhere else at all
It is experienced in the subject only