



Amarantos[®]

YOGA VASISTHA

ANCIENT PSYCHOLOGY TO THE
RESCUE OF MODERN MAN

AMARANTOS[®]
FOUNDATION



PRESENTS

YOGA VASISTHA

**Dedicated at the lotus feet of my Blessed Lord
who revealed the greatest of all the secret.**

यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥ SBG 4.37॥

As a blazing fire reduces wood to ashes,
similarly the fire of knowledge burn to ashes
all [lifetimes of] karma!

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WHAT IS YOGA-VASISTHA?



Think of a problem that you have in your life now.

Take a deep breath and imagine how amazing it would be if it is resolved now!

Wouldn't it be phenomenal if we had a clear map giving us directions on how to end all our suffering by attaining eternal bliss or Moksha or Nirvana?

The genuine sages heard this outcry and have graciously shared their spiritual journey and blessed us with the hope that it is possible.

Hence, summarising roughly, all the Vedic scriptures begin with the question, "What is that Gyana—knowledge attaining which I can break through the karmic cycle of birth, death, and the misery of life in between and attain eternal bliss?"

We also find this inquiry of existential crises leading to self-actualisation from the time a thoughtful man walked this earth.

If there is only one important thing we can take away from this book, then let it be these blessed words of Sri Bhagvan Adi Sankara summarising all the teachings up until now:-

Gyana is the direct experience of the absolute truth¹

So does it mean that now we need to learn Sanskrit or go through the 7 crore Vedic verses to attain this Gyana?

¹ Known by various names Bhraman, Paramatman, Purusha....

You might do that if you had the time and the means but it might still be futile if we do not know the how to put these teachings into practice—*Abhyasa*.

Seems like Sri Vasistha Maharishi sensed the need of the hour and authored “Yoga-Vasistha”.

What makes this scripture outstanding is that it's not only a summary of all the essentials which are to be known but also the *Abhyasa* to gain *Gyana*.

Additionally, this is one ancient text which has the exhilarating ability to take us back thousands of years and make us wonder how advanced the sages were in the field of psychology.

Could psychology which means “study of the mind” be as ancient as the mind itself?

WHY IS IT SO SPECIAL?



The wealth of knowledge that Sri Vasistha Maharishi shared with us is found throughout Vedic, Upanishadic, and Puranic literature. But the main sources of his teachings are the Yoga Vasistha and Vasistha Samhita.

Unfortunately Vasistha Samhita is no more available but we must count our blessings that this treasure is still available to us.

Yoga Vasistha comprising of 24,000 Sanskrit verses is a complete system in which the great sage Sri Vasistha Maharishi systematically imparts the practical aspect of yogic disciplines related to body, breath, and mind.

The eternal conflict—mind chasing happiness but ending up experiencing misery is as ancient as the mind itself. With the sages coming down to our level this scripture unravels this mystery with the sage coming down to our level and then holding our hand and raising us. And eventually resolving the issues related to almost every aspect of our life.

What I love about it is that its not some fairy dust and esoteric fluff but we find here the time tested precise techniques of pranayama (breath regulation), pratyahara (sense withdrawal), and Dharna (concentration).... blending yogic practices with the sublime teachings of Vedanta (Gyana yoga).

One of the important points to note before we being exploring this astounding scripture is that it also insures us from inaction. Though based on *Vairagya* (intense longing for the highest) it is fully balanced with *Abhyasa* (yogic action). Knowing this Sri Rama could maintain the highest Yogic state even during the brutal battle.

SRI RAMA'S DEPRESSION?



ri Valmiki Maharishi—the first poet of the world who composed Srimad Ramayana narrated the complete dialogue between Sri Vasistha Maharishi and his blessed disciple Sri Rama.

The charming prince went to Gurukula at an early age and studied under their family guru Sri Vasistha Maharishi.

After completing his formal education he returned to his palace to live with his doting father Sri Dasarath Maharaj and his family. Within a few days of being surrounded by the luxuries, Sri Rama suffered a deep depression. A genuine seeker can never really find full satisfaction in the senses.

The distressed father sought their family Guru's advice and accordingly sent Sri Rama on a pilgrimage to holy places which would also give him the good fortune of meeting sages.

Sri Rama's set out wandering but even after several years, he couldn't get the contentment he was seeking. Though it did increase his "Patrattva" (capacity and capability) to receive the higher spiritual teachings.

RIGHT INQUIRY



Sri Rama came back to his Guru's ashram and requested him to cure his depression. Following is the dialogue between the Lord of the cosmos pretending to be enmeshed in *Maya* (illusion).

He might have donned ignorance to excavate the highest Yogic teaching from the greatest of the Sages for our benefit. As they are so relevant to our modern problems even after thousands of years.

Sri Rama: What should I do to solve this mystery of life and attain eternal bliss?

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: Mind is the greatest of all mysteries. It stands between you and the highest truth, and it is the cause of both bondage and liberation.

Properly trained, the mind can help you attain enlightenment. But if unchecked, it can leave you confused and stuck.

Just like misery, peace is also created by the mind, Rama. So first, make the decision to be content in any circumstance.

Peace is born of this resolve alone.

It is foolish to attain peace by retiring into a deep forest or leaving for a distant galaxy. Ultimately you must find peace within yourself.

WHY IS THE MIND RESTLESS ALWAYS?



ri Rama: If peace is within me, then why does my mind keep thinking and running after the external world?



Mind and Senses

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: The mind has bound itself tightly to the senses, and is driven by sense cravings—*Vasanas*, it runs to the external world. As long as you do not know how to withdraw the senses from the external world you have almost no choice but to let your mind remain a victim of sense pleasure.

The objects of the senses and the pleasure derived from their union with the senses are momentary. Our mind realises the emptiness of the experience soon after the sensory pleasure. But not knowing where to find satisfaction, it attempts for it once again in the external world. This cyclic turning is what is known as *Samsara*. Thus dissatisfaction becomes a way of life.

Eventually, this never-ending pursuit of happiness leads to frustration. Peace is lost, and the inner world becomes chaotic. Deep dissatisfaction and restlessness then manifest in our external life. And Both the internal and external worlds are filled with misery.

WHAT IS THE WAY OUT?



Sri Rama: Oh Blessed Master what is the solution then.

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: *Vairagya* (Non-attachment) is the only way to overcome this strife. When aspirants cultivate this attitude, they come to realise that all the objects of the world are transitory and that the value of worldly objects is simply a creation of the mind. Once they realise that they came into the world with nothing and will depart with nothing, they will not be attached to the objects of the world.

Sri Rama: I know that this is true, but I loose this knowledge upon interacting with the world.

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: That is because the mind is fully convinced that this world and its objects are real; this is called *Maya*—a strong belief in the existence of that which does not exist. To illustrate this point, let me tell you a story.

Washing his cloths by the river a washerman asked his son to bring the donkey from the barn. The obedient son went to the barn and fetched the rope tied to the donkey but to his surprise the animal wouldn't budge an inch.

So the boy went back to his father and told him what had happened.

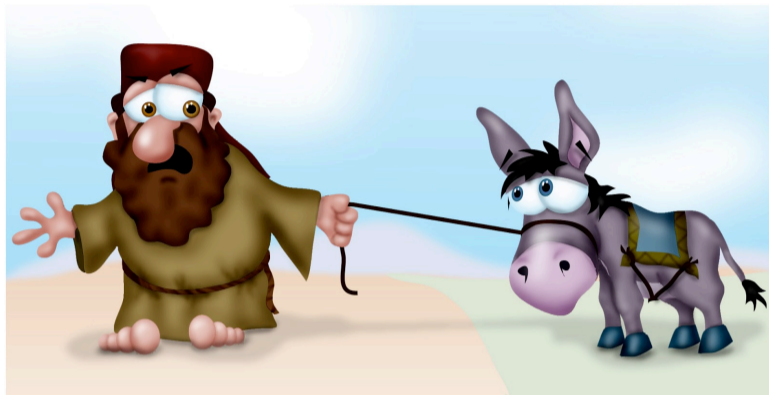
The washerman hadn't yet caught up with the idiosyncrasies of the old donkey and hence enquired "Is the donkey tied up?"

“Well, No!” Blurted the son and lamented, “alas that is what I don't understand!”

The father shouted, "Well then try kicking him!”

The son tried this but the donkey still wouldn't move.

Feeling guilty for having hurt a dumb animal the boy went back to his father and enquired, "Father, could he be sick? Why don't you come and see him?”



The duo reached the barn and found the animal hail and hearty and despite them tugging it together, the animal seemed to be stuck to the ground.

The father had a flash, he wound the rope around the post. The son and father walked out of the barn. In a few moments, they walked back in casually and untied the rope from the pole. To their surprise, the animal walked out of the barn in the same way he had done for so many years.

This, Rama, is the case with those whose minds are convinced of the reality of worldly objects and the bondage they create. But this world is not capable of binding either the mind nor the soul. The mind is in bondage simply because it believes that it is!

HOW TO BREAK THE ILLUSION?



Sri Rama: Now I understand that I am unable to find the peace within, because the mind is dragging me to the external world in the hope that the thirst of the senses can be quenched by the mirage of a colossal lake.

But no matter how vast the illusory lake is, it cannot wet a grain of sand. So I am sure that no matter how much I get of this world, I cannot find true happiness but how can the mind overcome this illusion forever?

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: First, through constant contemplation on the illusory nature of worldly pleasure the mind must overcome its craving for worldly objects.

Second, the mind must recognise its true nature and maintain that awareness constantly.

Forgetting the true nature of the Self is what makes human beings subject to timidity, weakness, fear, and insecurity. And it is this forgetfulness that causes us to keep searching for happiness in the external world.

But once we realise our inner Self, we are free from the charms of the world as well as the fear of death. I will tell you another ancient tale to illustrate this point.

LION'S ILLUSION OF BEING A SHEEP



Once upon a time an orphan cub found a flock of sheep passing by the forest and followed them.

He grew up with them and identified himself with the sheep unconsciously and learned to behave like them. He was conditioned to be afraid of dogs and meekly submitted to being whipped by the shepherd. He bleated in panic and had identified himself completely with the sheep, never for once enquiring why he had claws instead of hoofs and how loud he could roar. Nor did he try to find out how fast he could run, how high he could jump!

After some years the flock was grazing near the forest and a hungry lion attacked the flock and roared tremendously. The flock saw their death face to face. With its tail high up in the air, the young lion too was scampering around like the sheep.

The lion was amused to see a young fellow of his kind behaving just like the sheep. He chased him and upon catching up with him, he dragged him to a pond. Out of immense fear the young lion didn't want to open his eyes and face reality. But the bigger lion slapped the frightened beast to open its eyes and look at the reflection. And to his astonishment he resembled the lion he was running away from!

With the eyes of someone who is begging for mercy he looked once again at his predator and then his own reflection. He went back to examine the reflection. At first, he was disappointed because he expected to see a sheep, but this quickly turned into curiosity.

He couldn't understand what was happening. He thought to himself, "If I can look like this lion, can I also roar like him? He gave it a try and was shocked to hear his own roar! He released himself from the grips of the other lion and jumped and roared some more, and relished the realisation that he was truly a lion—The king of the forest.

You see, Sri Rama, through our identification we create a self-image, and based on that we create a reality. If this identification is false, we are victims of falsehood. If the identification is correct, then we are fortunate enough to live in the light of truth.

THE SECRET PRACTICE OF PRATYAHARA



ri Rama: I understand, Gurudeva. Overcoming the charms and temptations of the world, turning the mind inward, and attaining a true glimpse of oneself is possible through vairagya [non-attachment due to love for the reality].

But the essence of vairagya is too subtle for me to grasp. Furthermore, while I am trying to practice vairagya, how do I deal with my other weaknesses, which distract me during *Sadhana*?

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: Learn to withdraw your senses and mind systematically before you practice vairagya or commit yourself to any intense practice of contemplation or meditation. This process is called pratyahara [sense withdrawal].

In the following discourse, Sri Vasistha Maharishi teaches Sri Rama how to practice pratyahara.

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: People who search for joy in the external world, Rama, are always disappointed. Desires and cravings begin in the mind, and the mind then motivates the senses to contact objects. That is why trying to control the senses alone will not be effective.

The first step in pratyahara is to convince the mind and senses that it is necessary to withdraw. To do this, you must find out why the mind is running in the external world, that the mind and senses keep busy in the external world, or to sleep in order to escape from reality, which is painful.

But the eternal search for peace is very tiring, and sooner or later the mind stops to rest. This feels good, and if the mind can be made to acknowledge the effect of rest, it will begin to develop a willingness to rest and withdraw the senses.

When we pull in the mind and senses voluntarily with the thread of knowledge, we experience true relaxation. And after the mind experiences the joyful stillness in the body that results from pratyahara, it can be successfully instructed to look within for the true source of happiness.

There are three ways of practicing pratyahara, Rama:-

The **first** is to withdraw the senses and mind from the external world, and then to focus them consciously on a chosen object in the realm of the mind.

The **Second** way to practice is to see everything in the world as existing within the Atman, the Self. Then there is nothing outside the Atman, so there is no need to withdraw the senses.

A **third** practice is to carry out all your activities as if they were sacred duties. In this way, you bring sanctity to even the most mundane aspects of life.

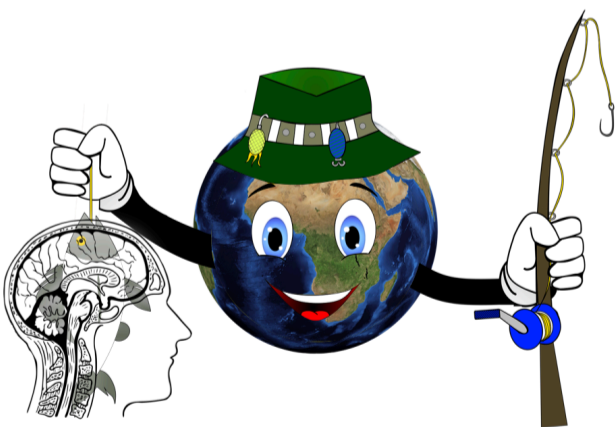
THE SECRET TO SENSE CONTROL FINALLY REVEALED!



ri Rama: How to control the senses.

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: If you cannot control your senses immediately, Rama, do not be discouraged. The process by which the senses move toward their objects is very subtle.

The greatest secret is *It begins with thinking* — you become attached to something just by thinking about it. Something becomes attractive because of inner cravings or because of latent impressions from the past that exist in the mind. The *samskaras* and *vasanas* in the mind see something similar to themselves in the external objects and feel joy in this correspondence. The inner experience of full identification is called enjoyment. In that affinity or feeling of sympathy, you say “This is mine!” Attachment follows that thought.



Most of our actions spring from that attachment and anything threatening it leads to anger. When we feel incapable of overcoming the impediment we feel **depressed!** Or we could use the false strength of anger to fight the opposition.

But from anger arises delusion, and from delusion, loss of memory or balance. With the loss of memory, *buddhi* [the mental faculty responsible for taking the right decision] is lost, and it is then impossible to decide anything appropriately. Decisions taken at this point leads us to our doom!

SIMPLIFYING IT ALL



ama - Desire - is desiring for an object or an experience.

Krodha — Angry — is any reaction towards anything or anyone blocking the fulfilment of Kama

Moha — Attachment— clinging on to what has been procured

Lobha — Greed — is desiring more of it.

CREATE YOUR WORLD



So study yourself, Rama, because only by doing this will you be able to build a foundation you need for withdrawing your senses and mind. Ponder over the nature of pleasure and pain. Determine for yourself what attachment to the world of names and forms does to you.

As a human being, you have the freedom to create your world. Start from controlling your senses which is also your birth right. This can be done efficiently with the practice of pratyahara to conserve your energies. Utilise these energies to focus one-pointedly.

SHAT-SAMPATTI : 6 TREASURES



A pot with a hole cannot hold water no matter how much is poured into it. Similarly, we cannot give ourselves fully to our Sadhana or spiritual practice without first cultivating the six qualities. Finally, Sri Vasistha Maharishi tells Sri Rama the prerequisites for a student who is committed to attaining the highest.

Sri Vasistha Maharishi: Now, Rama, hear how you can create an environment conducive to self-transformation. Since you will be controlling the unruly senses on their hot pursuit there could be repression and suppression. And to avoid suffering any withdrawal symptoms adopt a healthy philosophy of life. These are six treasures of mind that will help you accomplish this:

1. shama,
2. dama,
3. titiksha,
4. uparati,
5. samadhana,
6. mumuksha.

SHAMA: CALMNESS



hama is inner silence, the quietude of mind, tranquility, equanimity, and composure.

The first step is to learn to compose yourself is by expecting the unexpected. Don't expect anyone or anything in this world to conform to your expectations. The world will keep throwing something unexpected at you at all times, regard turmoil as normal, and take worldly blows in stride.

Don't even expect anything or anyone to be perfect. Perfectionism leads to disappointment. *Disappointment and tranquility cannot coexist.*

It's normal for people to be happy in response to happy events and miserable in the face of sad events. Such people are tossed by tides of the external world, and happiness is purely accidental for them.

To attain tranquility you must learn not to be influenced by external circumstances. That is the only way to find the state of stillness within. And once you know how to remain still, you can study both the external and the internal worlds.

DAMA: SELF-CONTROL

Dama is control over your senses, self-restraint, self-control, and self-mastery. The activities of the senses are the first step in the formation of habit patterns.

The **conscious mind** is connected to the senses, and it is through the senses that the conscious mind interacts with the objects of the external world. An untrained mind is dragged helplessly by the senses.

Helplessness is because the mind gives too much importance authority to the senses and their objects. Consequently, they take over.

Think of this analogy, the senses are like the unruly horses pulling the chariot of the body. The mind is the charioteer. The soul is the owner who is on a ride. Only a dexterous charioteer can steer the wild horses and reach the destination safely, so train your mind.

Hence training the senses is of the utmost importance. But this restraining should be based on a proper understanding, else it could lead to **repression** and **suppression**.

You must be fully convinced that the happiness and health you seek are possible only by making the right choices for the senses. Discipline is controlling the senses based on knowledge and letting the mind lovingly accept it. The way we train a pup or a baby, ever an act of punishment but nudging gently.

TITIKSHA: LOVING ACCEPTANCE



itiksha is defined as forbearance, tolerance, and endurance at the physical, mental, and verbal levels. Loving acceptance of whatever is our destiny presents.

Expand your capacity to face every situation and circumstance that life brings. [Because everything in this life is a fruition of the karmic seeds we had sowed in our past lives.]

Coping with the world requires endurance and forbearance. Be ready for anything in life, because anything can happen.

The body has enormous capacities, we just have to unfold them. Try to cut down as much as possible your dependency on external objects. [Minimalistic approach to life]

Having said that it is never an act of self-torture, you should have a comfortable life and a regular schedule. But do not let comfort make you lazy and do not let regularity lapse into rigidity. Maintaining a degree of flexibility is also part of discipline. Learning to endure the discomfort brought about by heat, cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and sleepiness is part of the practice of titiksha. Develop the ability to adapt to any situation.

UPARATI: SATIATION



parati means being so satisfied within that there is no necessity for the sense to seek pleasures outside.

There is a difference between craving objects and needing objects. You must make a sincere effort to earn your livelihood. And after you have earned it, enjoy it. But even though you have means and resources, you should be able to withdraw yourself whenever you wish, and you can do this only when you are not involved with the objects you have acquired.

You get involved by analysing how much time and energy you have put into gaining something. Strong attachment to objects is created when we think how hard you've worked. How many years it took, and therefore how valuable these objects are. We bind ourselves more by keeping track of all these details. The objects we possess start possessing us.

Don't take your success too seriously as that will get entangled in them and fail to use the objects of your success as a means for spiritual advancement.

Hence know from the beginning that all the worldly endeavours desist the cravings of the senses and know that the creature comforts are ultimately worthless. They in themselves cannot give us the real satisfaction that we seek.

Rama, work hard, but once the work is done, forget it. Think and feel as if you haven't done anything. Perform your actions diligently but when consider the fruit as a gift from above. This is uparati—the ground on which you practice non-attachment.

SAMADHANA: COMPOSURE



Samadhana is what helps us remain focused on our goal by being composed within. It is understanding everything in the right context.

Only a quiet mind can put the statements of different teachers and scriptures in their proper context. There are many philosophies, many instructions and in most cases, they appear to be contradictory.

For example, anyone without Samadhana will be confused by the following two statements.

One, the objects of the world are illusory, like objects in a dream and they are totally worthless. But it is also said that everything comes from God and you should enjoy them without getting attached to them.

Two, the path of karma (action) is as valid as the path of knowledge. And it is also said that one cannot attain the highest realisation by performing one's actions because it is through knowledge, not karma, that one gains liberation.

For someone without Samadhana due to laziness would resort to indulging in sensual pleasures as they are God and ditch all action as they cannot give me the highest why bother working.

Learned teachers resolve this conflict by pointing out that no matter what spiritual path you are treading, you have to perform your actions skilfully else they will create obstacles. Performing your actions skilfully will minimise the obstacles and let you live happily. And the one with Samadhana will understand that karma springs from Gyana.

MUMUKSHA: BURNING DESIRE FOR LIBERATION



Without *mumukshva*, spiritual practice is merely a show. Study will make you an accomplished philosopher carrying the burden of knowledge without the benefit of experience. [Like a donkey carrying sugar bags without having tasted it.] All spiritual pursuit then is to become a pedant, a logician to impress others.

People learn and explore so many philosophies that they lose their way. The more they study the more contradictions they discover. Because they lack *mumukshva*, they do not understand the principle of samadhana.

But once you desire liberation alone [not hankering after comfort philosophy], it becomes the rule of the thumb, the compass, the pole star. It lets all the teachings and scriptures fall into place. Everything makes sense, and you become tongue-tied.

You understand that all this doesn't make sense to several people, but don't waste your time explaining it to them because they don't have *mumukshva*. That's why the Upanishads say, "Those who think it is known to them know nothing at all. And those who do not think it is known to them might know it." Because it is so subtle.

Questions that arise from curiosity have their answers within you if you can study the nature of curiosity and the source from which they grow.

But *mumukshutva* makes you restless, it arises in the form of those powerful questions for which you wouldn't be able to find the answers outright. You will be dragged from one book to another, from one teacher to another, one place to another!

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN...



Following this life-transforming discourse, the veil of Maya was removed from Sri Rama's mind. He found the clarity of thought and found the strength to tread this path. How effective this discourse was is evident in what an adorable Lord he is that the world is unable to stop loving him even after 8000+ years!