

Chapter 4: Meditation and Happiness

Chapter 4, Verse 2

*Now I will reveal the proper method of samadhi.
It is the destroyer of death, the means to happiness,
and the best giver of enlightenment.*

The fourth chapter is about meditation and the path to happiness. Metaphors woven throughout tell the same story: the path to happiness is all about mastery of the mind. In modern science, we know meditation works to help us be mentally calm, clear, and content. We also know that the power to change the mind is infinite. Neuroplasticity is what yogis understood thousands of years ago: that we decide our thoughts, and our life is created by the thoughts we choose most often. Meditation frees us from the undisciplined thoughts that run riot in our heads, allowing us to slow things down, and decide.

Between the metaphors for experiencing bliss are instructions for proper meditation practice. In the beginning, Svatmarama recommends a teacher, and the postures, breathing practices and energy locks he's already described.

Begin by sitting up straight and keeping the chest up, so the breath can flow fully and easily. Typically in modern yoga, we ask students to focus on the center of the forehead, on the "third eye." In Verse 39, however, Svatmarama describes gazing at the tip of the nose and third eye to:

*Join the pupils in the light. Raise the brows a little.
Concentrate on the mastery of the mind.
This will quickly open the flow.*

Instructions we use today are in the text: stillness, coming back to the breath, and continually challenging the breath to be still. He admits he's presenting a list of methods he's accumulated from the great masters, so it sometimes reads like a long, droning guided meditation from a teacher who can't stick to a theme.

JUST BREATHE.

Nonetheless, some of the themes are beautiful, and along the way, we get the big picture and some great sounds to look forward to as our practice deepens.

Meditation Exercise: Choose one of the following verses to meditate on. Just sit. Breathe deeply and slowly. Keep coming back to the breath, and the image you've chosen. Don't judge. It is a practice with no end. Just sit. Breathe.

Verse 5

*As salt and water become one when mixed,
so the unity of the self and mind is bliss.*

Verse 21

*He who binds the breath, binds the mind.
He who binds the mind, binds the breath.*

Verse 23

*The breath dissolves where the mind dissolves.
The mind dissolves where the breath dissolves.*

Verse 29

*The mind is the lord of the senses,
but the breath is the lord of the mind.*

Verse 50

Be like an empty pot; space outside, space inside.

Verse 56

*Empty within, empty without, empty like a pot in space.
Full within, full without, full like a pot in the ocean.*

*The entire universe is just a creation of thought.
The play of the mind is just a creation of thought.
Abandon the mind, which is only thought.
Take refuge in the changeless,
and surely find peace.*

From verses 65 - 105, Svatmarama spends a lot of time on describing the sounds a yogi will hear as they advance in their practice, but since it is unimaginable until you get there, he also provides a convenient summation mid way.

Verses 84 - 87

*Various sounds are heard in the first stage of practice;
Subtler and subtler ones are heard as the practice grows.*

*These are the various sounds heard in the middle of the body.
On the beginning: ocean, cloud, kettledrum, and jharjhara drum.*

On the middle: drum and conch, bell and drum.

On the end: tinkling bell, flute, vina and a bee.

*Concentrate only on the subtler than subtle sound, even when
sounds like a cloud, a kettledrum and so on, are heard.*

The “subtler than subtle sound” is the meditative state we are seeking; the resulting sensation is bliss. However, that sound is not attainable so much by seeking as by letting go, as Svatmarama goes on to explain:

*As a bee drinking honey ignores the fragrance,
so the mind dissolved in bliss surely doesn't desire objects.*

Although Svātmarama's descriptions and details of the lives of our yogic ancestors is irreplaceable and valuable, he's an extremist, and you just know he's going to end his treatise on an extreme note. I will end a few sutras before that, with the reason we meditate at all.

Chapter 4, Verse 100

*The knowable exists inside the audible reverberation
of the sound not struck.
The mind unites with the knowable and dissolves there.
This is the highest experience of bliss.*

Wha?

Maybe my meditation teacher said it better:

*Enlightenment only happens by accident.
Meditation makes you accident prone.*

Thank you. May you be healthy, happy, and wise.