

Present Moment Awareness

By Greg Stein

“*Vairāgya* means living totally in the present moment. It is a state of non-hankering after that which one might have experienced in the past, or may experience in the future. However, if something comes to you, you can enjoy it.” - Swami Satyasangananda

According to the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, progress on the yogic path is achieved by a “two-fold” approach.¹ The two methods are called *abhyāsa* or practice, and *vairāgya* or non-attachment.² These two actually support each other; they “go together”. Yoga techniques, if practiced properly, will nurture in one a state of non-attachment. As in the above teaching from Swami Satsangi, *vairāgya* can be thought of as the art of living totally in the present moment.

So often, it is all too easy to “carry around” burdens of the past - whether it be guilt, grief, or attachments (which could be to people, places, things, etc). We can even “carry around” an inflated sense of ego due to a past success, or alternatively a lack of confidence due to a past “failure”. Apart from getting “caught” by past experiences, the mind can become very preoccupied with the future - projecting, hoping, desiring for, or worrying about what may be.

If one honestly and impartially takes a look at ones’ thoughts, tendencies of the mind to dwell on the past or future often do not bring any benefit. For, in a very real sense, the present moment is all that we ever truly have. It is only the present that we can experience directly. The past is said to be like a dream, while the future may be akin

¹ The Yoga Sūtras is an important traditional text on the practice of yoga, consisting of 196 short aphorisms which expound on the ‘what, why, and how’ of yoga.

² Yoga Sūtras 1.12

to a mirage. We will never really get there, because as soon as tomorrow comes it is no longer tomorrow, but today!

The point is not to force the mind to come into the present moment, which can cause tension and suppression. Rather, one can befriend the mind and gently train it using various techniques such as yoga and meditation.³ The mind is like a cute, yet mischievous little puppy! Simply beginning to witness and recognize its tendencies to ‘run off’ into the past or the future is a major step. We must be gentle and accept ourselves as we are, while beginning to see the patterns and tendencies which do not truly serve us.

We can learn to “relax” into the present moment. This moment, now, is often beautifully simple. There is much to experience - the joy of breathing fresh air, the sound of the leaves on the trees rustling in the wind, the dance of creation unfolding before our eyes. With practice, it is possible to arrive more and more in the “here and now”, and *that* is a great destination.

³ This was one of Swami Satyananda’s important teachings: to “become a friend of the mind”.