



# **AN INTRODUCTION TO SATTVA**

**WHAT IS SATTVA AND  
HOW TO IMBIBE IT IN  
YOUR DAILY LIFE**

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## An Introduction to Sattva

*[Note: A few names and terms have a line in them above the letters, which explain how they're actually pronounced. So, "a" is pronounced "a" like the prefix for a singular item. (A tree, a chair, etc.) Meanwhile, "ā" is pronounced "aa" like when you open your mouth. Likewise, "i" is pronounced "e" while "ī" is pronounced "ee", like kids do when told to show their teeth.]*

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Krishna is eager to bestow upon Arjuna the knowledge of the highest spiritual truth.

But Arjuna wants none of that—at least, initially. All he wants is for Krishna to get him out of his current predicament: he is deeply anguished about waging war against his people in the opposite camp and wants to know what to do next.

We're all Arjuna. Our personal trials and tribulations may pale before the vast knowledge that the cosmos holds, but that doesn't make them trivial. For us, they're real. Things going badly at work, the people we like not liking us back, others get more than us although we worked harder — we want to know how to navigate through these problems.

### **The Three Gunas:**

Karma is often seen as the consequence of our actions. But karma is also our actions itself. In effect, karma is cause and effect—our actions dictate our experiences.

[Swāmi Vivekānanda](#) explained our experience such:

*"Some Karma we have worked out already, some we are working out now in the present, and some are waiting to bear fruit in the future. The first kind is past and gone. The second we will have to work out, and it is only that which is waiting to bear fruit in the future that we can conquer and control, towards which end all of our forces should be directed."*

According to Sāmkhya philosophy, our actions are governed by three *gunas* (attributes, tendencies, or qualities): *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*.

Tamas is the state of heedlessness, laziness, and sloth. Additionally, helplessness, doubt, shame, boredom, addiction, sadness, apathy, confusion, grief, dependence, and ignorance, all result from it. A few examples are:

1. Vegging out on the couch with junk food.
2. Staying in a job because we're too comfortable.
3. Forming half-baked opinions rather than conducting detailed research.
4. Not getting out of a toxic relationship out of fear of being alone.

Rajas is the state of energy that leads to indiscrete action. It fuels passion, attachment, prejudice, rigidity, greed, jealousy, lust, anger, and other wrong ideas that obscure judgment. Examples include:

1. Seeking a personal benefit in whatever we do.
2. Constantly being busy rather than doing what's important.
3. Craving money, lust, fame, fortune, or something else, and trying to get it through any means possible, even if it harms us or others (which leads to fanaticism or obsession).

[Sattva is the ideal state](#) between both — balance, light, goodness, and purity. Sattva isn't just about wearing light clothes and eating the right food, nor is it limited to a particular religion. A sātṭvik person:

- a. Remains calm and dignified in every activity, no matter how intense or mild.
- b. Values long-term consistency more than intensity in short-bursts.
- c. Can channelize emotions, energy, and attention on activities of their choosing.
- d. Can love for the sake of love and work for the sake of work rather than wishing for an external reward.

As humans, we keep switching between the three states. We cannot stay in sattva throughout. But the aim is to maximize that state, to **“remove tamas, discipline rajas, and awaken sattva,”** as Sri Aurobindo said.

## How to Awaken Sattva

Bringing balance and clarity in life doesn't demand a tectonic shift in the way you live. Nor is there a checklist you can follow to achieve it within a few days or weeks. Sattva is a lifelong process. But don't let that frighten you; the journey is deeply enjoyable and fulfilling.

A few simple steps taken consistently will help you remove tamas, discipline rajas, and awaken sattva.

The ones suggested in this guide are:

1. Reduce laziness.
2. Overcome ego.
3. Cultivate a state of flow.
4. Love without exception.
5. Be a lifelong learner.

### A. Reduce laziness

Laziness is not just sitting still or lying in bed, watching a bicycle ride down the road or the birds on a window.

Laziness, according to [J. Krishnamurti](#), is when the mind is unaware of its reactions and subtle movement. It's when the mind is asleep in that it doesn't work for itself.

*“[People] are drugged by knowledge, by the scriptures, by what [Shankarāchārya] or somebody else said. They follow a philosophy, practice a discipline, so their minds—which should be rich—are made dull.*

*“The man who merely accepts, rejects or imitates, the man who, being afraid, digs a rut for himself. But a man who is watchful is not lazy, even though he may sit very quietly and observe the trees, the birds, the people, the stars and the silent river.”*

If you're aware of your thoughts and can direct your attention, you're not lazy no matter what you're doing. Here are three pieces of advice to take control of your mind:

## 1. Start with control over your body

*“We have very little command of our minds. Therefore, to bring that command about, to get that control over body and mind, we must take certain physical helps. When the body is sufficiently controlled, we can attempt the manipulation of the mind. By manipulating the mind, we shall be able to bring it under our control, make it work as we like, and compel it to concentrate its powers as we desire.” — Swāmi Vivekānanda*

Your phone, laptop, and car last longer if you use them less. But your body is the opposite – this machine wears out from lack of use. (Notice how the sedentary life has affected us today. We're not just more prone to mental and physical ailments, we also struggle to control our emotions and attention.)

“Action is movement with intelligence,” yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar said. The rock climber, the yogi, and the gymnast, [gain control over their minds](#) by gaining control over their bodies. They rarely lose their composure and can focus for almost superhuman lengths of time.

Make good health your first priority, something you pursue during your “me-time.” Make it a lifelong, goalless journey.

## 2. Get over fear

*“If you read the Vedas, you will find this word always repeated – “fearlessness” – fear nothing. Fear is a sign of weakness. A man must go about his duties without taking notice of the sneers and the ridicule of the world.” – Swāmi Vivekānanda*

Homeostasis is a state of equilibrium. Your body remains healthy when it resists sudden change – imagine what would happen if your temperature or blood pressure rose or fell by 10 percent at the drop of a hat!

This phenomenon occurs in social conditions also. Each time you want to explore the boundaries of the status quo, each time you want to try an approach that’s not conventional, your family, friends, and co-workers resist.

George Leonard wrote, *“An entire system has to change when any part of it changes. So don’t be surprised if some of the people you love start covertly or overtly undermining your self improvement. . . It’s just homeostasis at work.”*

So you see? People say what they say because they don’t want to leave their comfort zone, which means their opinions are nothing to be afraid of. If anything, such fear occupies the place in your mind that should be held by productive thoughts. [Fear weakens you](#), drags you down, and eventually fills you with regret over not doing what you should have.

When you take action, you realize that your worst fears never come true, and your fear abates. And when you work fearlessly, you can move mountains.

### 3. Develop faith in yourself

*“Our first duty is not to hate ourselves; because to advance we must have faith in ourselves first and then in God. He who has no faith in himself can never have faith in God.” – Swāmi Vivekānanda*

When Gandhiji was young, he would hang out with friends who were irregular with their studies and had bad habits. His concerned mother, Putlibai, said, “Mohan, I have asked you so many times to not hang out with those boys. You will become like them. I can’t bear the thought of seeing you smoke or drink.”

Gandhiji smiled and said, “Mother, I don’t go around with them so I may become like them. Instead, I do that so they may become like me. Have faith in me. Nothing can deviate me from my path.” And he did transform his peers.

A strong mind doesn’t get swayed by emotion; it can persevere despite obstacles and setbacks. A weak mind struggles to even get out of bed.

Each day, [reflect on the good work that you’ve done](#). This will reinforce in you that you’re a strong person. The stronger you become, the less you feel the need to depend on others. You will earn the admiration of others and, more importantly, the respect of your own self.

As the saying goes, “A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking, because her trust is not placed on the branch but on its own wings.”

## B. Overcome Ego

The English word of the Latin word “I”, ego is basically the image we have of ourselves. It can manifest in the form of self-esteem, self-importance, or conceit.

In Sanskrit, the ego is called *Ahamkāra* [Aham: “self”, and kara: “to do with” or “created thing.” Effectively, *ahamkara* is I-doing, I-saying, I-creating.]

The word first appeared in ancient Vedic texts some 3,000 years ago and has stayed in Hindu teachings ever since. *Ahamkāra* is one of the 4 elements that comprise the Antahkarana (inner organ). The others are *buddhi* (intellect), *manas* (mind), and *chitta* (mind stuff/memory).

Ego makes you childish — rigid, self-centered, and whimsical. Whereas to become a better version of yourself, you have to be childlike — curious, friendly, and honest.

Here is wisdom from Swāmi Vivekānanda to help you overcome ego:

### 1. Understand the difference between ‘contact’ and ‘connection’

*“As soon as we say ‘I’, we are humbugged all the time; and we call it ‘knowable,’ but it’s only going round and round like a bullock tied to a tree. . .  
Conquer yourself and the whole universe is yours.”*

In a seminar at New York, Swāmi Vivekānanda mentioned that contact and connection are not one and the same. After the seminar, a journalist asked him to explain the difference.

Swāmiji enquired about the journalist’s family. The journalist said his mother had passed away and he had a father and four siblings. Upon further probing,

he admitted that he hadn't spoken to his father in over a month, and his family hadn't been together in more than two years.

Then Swāmiji explained that while the journalist had contact with his family, the connection was missing. A connection, he said, is, *“between hearts... sitting together, sharing meals and caring for each other; touching, shaking hands, having eye contact...”*

The more outspoken we are today – especially on social media – the more attention we get, and the more important we feel. But in the process, we lose compassion, empathy, and the desire to make relationships work. This loss of connection creates a void that people try to fill with mindless entertainment, meaningless relationships, spewing hatred, and substance abuse.

Guard yourself against this bias. Remove the desire to put yourself on a pedestal, and open yourself up to service, love, and empathy instead.

Being human is an end in itself, not a means to an end.

## 2. Don't be needed, be useful

*“The watchword of all well-being is not ‘I’ but ‘thou’. Who cares whether there is a heaven or hell, who cares if there is a soul or not . . .? Here is the world, and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in an attempt.”*

Many of us make it our personal responsibility to fix others' problems because we think they *need* us. The result? We burn out. Or we feel unappreciated for our effort that others never asked for in the first place.

Trying to be needed stokes the *Ahamkāra* (ego). The expectation of recognition, rewards, and reciprocation follow. Not getting those destroys our self-esteem.

But trying to be useful stokes the *Ātman* (soul). You can do what actually makes others' lives a little better instead of doing what *you think* will help them, without feeling attached or harboring expectations.

Instead of asking, "Who needs me?", ask yourself, "How can I be useful?" Offer to pick groceries for your old neighbors or babysit a friend's child so that she can take a walk in peace. Take out an hour from your "me-time" to complete a project for a colleague who's struggling to balance work and family. If nothing else, [leave people feeling positive](#) after you speak with them.

The reward? Happiness and contentment for you. Isn't that enough?

### 3. Believe in possibilities

*"He who believes not, believes not even after seeing, and thinks that it is all hallucination, or dream and so on. The great transformation of Krishna – the Vishvarupa – was seen alike by Duryodhana and by Arjuna. But only Arjuna believed while Duryodhana took it to be magic."*

Just before the Kurukshetra war was almost declared, Krishna went to Hastināpur to pursue the Kauravas to accept a peace offer. But Duryodhana didn't just refuse to compromise, he tried to capture Krishna and demoralize the Pāndavas in the process.

This led to Krishna revealing his *Vishvarupa* (Supreme form) that contained the entire armies of Dvārakā, the Pāndavas, the gods, the planets, and other celestial bodies. He had thousands of arms, each of which held weapons. Krishna even gave sight to Dhritarāshtra, the blind king of Hastināpur, to witness this cosmic form.

Did this dissuade the stubborn Duryodhana? No, he just called it a magic trick.

Just because we think something is not possible doesn't mean that it isn't. Did gravity not exist until Newton published his theory? Was the earth flat until it was proved to be round?

Likewise, there are always better ways to do things. Yet, people keep opposing them, saying "it can't be done," even when they're repeatedly interrupted by somebody who is already doing it.

A pessimist might appear as a logical person. But if we behave like Duryodhana, we will suffer the same fate as him. Growth — within us and around us — only occurs when we let go of what we cling to tightly.

## C. Cultivate the State of Flow

Why do we want money, health, beauty, or power? Because we think they will make us happy. In effect, we're not after the tangible things themselves, we're after happiness.

And yet... no matter how much of those aspects we get, we're always running on the hedonistic treadmill, where our levels of happiness, after rising or falling based on whether an event is positive or negative, inevitably revert to their original levels before the experience.

Happiness cannot be found in being a slim, well-loved, millionaire, nor is it something that 'happens,' according to the late psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi. *"Happiness is a condition that has to be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person,"* he wrote. *"People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy."*

This control of inner experience comes when we enter a state of *flow*: we get [so involved in an activity](#) that nothing else matters; the experience itself is so enjoyable that we go to great lengths to do it for the sheer sake of doing it.

In Vedāntist teaching, this is *nishkāma karma*, where performing the task at hand in the best way possible is all the reward you need or want.

Remember the time when you got engrossed in a conversation, in reading a book, cooking, or working on data, so much that you lost track of yourself and of time? Yet, you emerged on the other side feeling better about yourself and wondering where time went. You were in a state of flow.

The more flow states you have, the better the quality of your life will be. Here are three ways to cultivate flow in your everyday activities.

## 1. Give this moment your all

*“The secret to work is this: Let the end and the means be joined into one. When you are doing any work, do not think of anything beyond. Do it as worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being.” – Swāmi Vivekānanda*

We live in three time-spaces (*trikāla*): memory, imagination, and the present moment.

Memory and imagination make us afraid – of mistakes, failure, and society’s sneers. [Fear makes us freeze in our tracks](#). Cynicism, regret, and misery become our second nature.

The present moment is the only time worth living in. And the only way to do it is to immerse yourself in the present task. “The past is just a series of present

moments that happened, while the future is a series of present moments about to happen,” Eckhart Tolle wrote.

Whether you’re working, spending time with your family, or watching Netflix, consciously root yourself in the moment. Treat what you’re doing like it’s the last thing you’ll ever do. Who knows? It just might be.

If you give the present moment your all, you will no longer suffer from regret or anxiety.

## 2. Train your mind to become steady

*“What is practice? The attempt to restrain the mind in the Chitta form, to prevent it from going out into waves.” – Swāmi Vivekānanda*

When you started learning how to drive or how to use Excel, you probably felt incompetent. But the more you practiced, the better you got. Until you got to the point where you could feel when to change gears or use a specific formula.

This is the magic of practice: it makes you progressively better at a task until what seemed difficult at first becomes easy (and even enjoyable).

True learning doesn’t come from reading, watching videos, or talking; it comes from [experience \(anubhūti\)](#) and [practice \(abhyāsa\)](#). You take action, track the results, refine, and try again until you reach a level of competence. Rinse. Repeat.

With such practice, your distractions will reduce, your ability to focus and self-confidence will grow, and you will become better at other aspects of your life too.

Steady your mind. Don't shy away from effort. Don't do something for the sake of a distant result either. Enjoy the process. Be consistent and you'll witness a tremendous change in yourself within six months.

### 3. Life rewards the focused thought

*“The old idea was: ‘Develop one idea at the expense of all the rest.’ The modern way is ‘harmonious development.’ A third way is to ‘develop the mind and control it’, then put it where you will; the result will come quickly. This is developing yourself in the truest way. Learn concentration and use it in any direction.”*

When we don't achieve our goals, we feel hopeless and that we lack competence. But if you look closer, it wasn't competence that you lacked; it was the ability to stay focused.

The monkey mind isn't a recent phenomenon. In the Dhyāna Yoga, Arjuna said to Krishna, “The mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate, very strong, and to subdue it is even more difficult than controlling the wind.” The Chinese Taoist text, the Chuang Tzu, refers to the mind as a monkey that needs taming through self-cultivation.

[What you pay attention to](#) dictates the quality of your life. Most of us let circumstances, people, and apps control our attention. But the wise take control of it – they focus on what's important for long periods. That makes all the difference.

Treat everything you do as an exercise to sharpen your focus. Whether you're working, commuting, doing household chores, or resting, focus on the moment.

In the book *Upstream*, Dan Heath wrote, “Success comes when the right things happen by default, not because of individual passion, heroism, or fleeting moments of brilliance.” This default mode occurs when you focus consistently on what’s important and let the rest slide.

Life punishes meaningless action and rewards the focused thought.

## D. Love Without Expectation

Novels and movies make us believe that love involves sentiment, pain, emotion, and tragedy. That’s not love; it’s romance. Romance is good in moderation, as is tolerance, but it’s really love that we need.

[Love](#) doesn’t mean craving for the object of your desire or feeling anguished when you don’t get what you want. Nor does it mean changing yourself to suit others’ desires.

Love means to accept someone for who they are, strengths, flaws, and all. You can love when you let go of expectations, when you accept people and situations as they are rather than as you want them to be. Then, external forces can no longer decide how you feel.

Such love doesn’t just help the receiver, it also uplifts the giver. Below are the three tests to learn love, according to Swāmi Vivekānanda.

### 1. Love sets you free

*“The first test of love is that it knows no bargaining. So long as you see a man love another only to get something from him, you know that it is not love; it is shopkeeping.”*

People get upset when they can't find love. What they really mean is, "I can't find someone to make me feel good in the way I want." In effect, they want to take love from someone else. But love cannot be taken; it can only be given.

Loving with the hope of an exchange is a transaction pretending to be love. How will this free you from the chains of the world? If anything, it will trap you more – the more you get, the more you will want.

But when you love your family, friends, and your work for what they are, you will do things because you can, not because you have to. You will not hesitate to say "no" when needed. And you will extend the same love unto yourself.

Love, pure love, cleanses you. It unlocks aspects within that make you a better person. And by freeing you from obligation, it sets you free.

## 2. Love destroys fear

*"The second test is that love knows no fear... Does the lamb love the lion? The mouse, the cat? The slave, the master?... With love never comes the idea of fear."*

Swāmiji gives the example of a young mother. If a dog barks at her on the street, she flees into the nearest house. But if a lion attacks her child on the same street, where will you find her? At the mouth of the lion, protecting her child? Love conquered her fear.

"It is better to be feared than loved," Machiavelli famously wrote. But when we want to be feared, it's also because we are living in fear. We try to weaponize this emotion to control others, but how long can such fear suppress the spirit that wants to be set free?

There can be no control or suppression in love, only acceptance. Love is the only way to conquer all your fears and live a life free of regret, anxiety, and misery.

### 3. Love is the highest ideal

*“The third is a still higher test... When one has thrown off all shopkeeping and cast off all fear, one then begins to realize that love is always the highest ideal.”*

What does ideal love want? Nothing. The ideal love doesn't care about heaven, about anything in this world, or in the world to come. It's simply rooted in the present moment.

Love for love's sake, work for work's sake, duty for duty's sake: this is the highest ideal we should practice. And honestly, once you no longer have the desire for exchange or the fear of losing what you have, there really is nothing else to do but to practice this ideal.

Don't get trapped in fear and misery. Don't crave love from someone in order to [fill a gap in your own life](#). Use love to explore the beauty of the world and to empower others. Make love a part of your *swabhāva* (your default nature) and let it guide you towards *mukti* (freedom from bondage).

Love for God, love for all that's in the world, and love for work – these are the hallmarks of a pure soul.

## E. Always Keep Learning

Pleasure is one more aspect apart from fortune and fame that we think will get us happiness. When we experience pleasure, life feels like heaven. But when we experience its polar opposite – pain – the same life feels like hell.

Pain can cause you harm, yes, but it can also fuel growth. The larva cannot metamorphose into a butterfly without pain. That's why [knowledge](#), not pleasure, is what we should pursue, even if it causes us pain at the moment.

*“The goal of mankind is knowledge... Pleasure is not the goal of man, but knowledge. Pleasure and happiness come to an end... The cause of all the miseries we have in the world is that men foolishly think pleasure is the ideal to strive for.” — Swāmi Vivekānanda*

Once you stop learning, you start dying. So don't stop learning until you're dead. Here is wisdom from Swāmi Vivekānanda to put you on the path of knowledge:

### 1. Commit to the process

*“If you want to become an astronomer and sit down and cry “Astronomy! Astronomy!”, it will not come... You must go to an observatory, take a telescope, study the stars and planets... Every science must have its own methods... The sages of all countries, ages, pure and unselfish men, declare they've found some truth higher than what the scenes can bring to us... Before we've done their methods, we're not rational in denying the truth.”*

People don't struggle to learn because they lack intellect, but because they evaluate any new idea based on their own limited understanding.

Do you reject methods that could make you smarter, faster, or better, because they don't fit your model of the world? Or do you try half-heartedly, fail, and use that as an excuse to say, "I told you it wouldn't work"?

Of course, you can't immediately understand how or why a different approach works. (If you did, would it be different?) Nor can you get optimal results if you try an approach out of obligation. To know for sure, you have to commit fully to the process.

Day 1 will feel tough, and so will Day 2. But by week two, you will feel like a different person. Even if the exact process doesn't exactly work, you can tweak it to make it work for you. That's when you've taken something and added your touch of uniqueness to make it your own.

Sticking to rigid beliefs keeps you in the same place (which is as good as moving backward in a world that's constantly moving ahead). Opening your mind fills it with [curiosity and wonder](#), which is a step forward in itself.

## 2. Empty your cup

*"Which state is my individuality? When I was a baby sprawling on the floor trying to swallow my thumb? Was that the individuality I should be sorry to lose? Fifty years hence I shall look upon this present state and laugh, just as I [now] look upon the baby state. Which of these individualities shall I keep?"*

The Japanese Zen master Nan-in once welcomed a university professor who was curious about Zen. Nan-in served the professor a cup of tea. Even after the professor's cup filled up, Nan-in kept on pouring.

When the cup overflowed, the professor said, "It is overfull. No more tea will go in!" Nan-in replied, "Like the cup, you are too full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

Whenever your cup was empty, you were a sponge, learning from your parents, teachers, friends, and seniors. When your cup was full, you turned into a concrete block. (Can you imagine how you would've turned out if your cup was full when you were a child?)

The individuality we cherish so much today is essentially our identity attached to our beliefs, jobs, and possessions. Rather than helping us grow, this phenomenon makes us oppose new ideas, rigid, and cynical.

A better goal is one that Kevin Kelly suggests: Each year, learn enough about a subject so that you can't believe how ignorant you were a year earlier.

Don't stop learning. Open yourself up to the world. Individuality is nothing but a limitation that stops you from discovering your true potential.

### 3. Always pursue wisdom

*"If you want to be a Bhakta, it is not at all necessary for you to know whether Krishna was born in Mathurā or Vraja, what he was doing, or just the exact date on which he pronounced the teachings of the Gita. You only require to feel the craving for the beautiful lessons of duty and love in the Gita. All the other particulars about it and its author are for the enjoyment of the learned.*

*Let them have what they desire. Say "Shāntih, Shāntih" to their learned controversies and let us 'eat the mangoes.'"*

A few learned men visited a mango orchard and began noting details about the leaves, the twigs, and branches, examining their color, and comparing their sizes. Then they got into a learned discussion on each of these topics.

Meanwhile, one of them simply began eating the mangoes. We don't know whether he was as learned as the rest, but he was certainly wiser.

We could argue over whether Rāma existed, whether Goddess Durgā had (has) 18 hands, or whether Krishna indeed imparted the entire Gitā to Arjuna in two minutes. At the other extreme, we could go into the minute details of each teaching.

But what benefit will both these approaches offer? How will that make us wise? Incessant discussion and debate only create a façade of wisdom. We become like the blind men who each touched one part of an elephant and thought it was the whole.

Being blind is not your aim. You want to remove the blindfold that covers your eyes (which is why you choose to learn anything). So, less talk and more action. Each time you come across a concept, ask: How can I apply it in my own life? Apply it, learn from it, and make yourself better.

Wisdom is the sweetest fruit on the trees of knowledge that you find along the [path of action](#).

## **A Metaphysical Explanation (Plus Simple Exercises to Awaken Sattva)**

Man is not separate from the universe, but a part of it, like waves are a part of the ocean. An infinite amount of energy, *Shakti*, flows through the universe and pours itself into every name and form, and everything—living or non-living—is more or less an efficient *ādhāra* (form) of this energy.

According to the Vedas, the fundamental physical unit in a human is not material, but *retas*, in which *Shakti* is latent. This energy is either physically expended as passion, lust, desire, or something else, or conserved within the *retas*, which leads to its increase.

When conserved, this *retas* turns into *tapas* (heat), the source of powerful action and success. To be harnessed, it must be turned into a non-physical form through self-control and austerity (*tapasyā*).

*Retas* also converts into *tejas* (pure light), the source of knowledge, and *vidyut* (electricity), which is the source of vigor in the body. From *vidyut* stems *prāna*, the primal energy that comes from ether (*ākāsha*) and flows through energy channels known as *nādis* in the body.

A limited or blocked flow of *prāna* causes physical and mental ailments, while its proper flow unlocks *ojas*. *Ojas* fills the system with physical strength, energy, and brain-power, and finally rises to the brain. In its last form, *ojas* creates *vīrya*, a spiritual force by which we attain spiritual knowledge, spiritual love and faith, and spiritual strength.

The more we unlock *tapas*, *tejas*, *vidyut*, *ojas*, and *vīrya* in our system, the more *sattva* we can build in our systems, which reveals the knowledge hidden within ourselves (*Jnāna*) and brings us closer to union with the *Brahman* (cosmos). This is why *Brahmacharya* (chastity) is highly recommended in Indian teaching.

Controlling *prāna* is done through *Prānāyāma*, which is much more than just breathing. Here is how to do it. (Source: *Rāja Yoga* by Swāmi Vivekānanda)

## Practice of *Prānāyāma*

Starting meditation right off the bat is difficult; the mind runs in all directions. Instead of resisting such a phenomenon, immerse yourself in it.

Sit upright, keeping the body straight. If you sit crookedly, the spinal cord is disturbed and you will get injured eventually. Hence, keep the chest, the neck, and the head in a straight line.

In the beginning, just sit with your eyes closed and let your monkey mind run free. Don't judge your thoughts; witness them passing like you would watch waves rising and falling from a beach. This will feel difficult, but as days and months go by, you will be able to process a lot of pent up, suppressed emotion. That's when you're ready for Prānāyāma.

Step 1 is to just breathe in a measured way, in and out. This will harmonize the system. After some practice, you can add the repetition of a sacred word like "Aum." As the word flows in and out, rhythmically, harmoniously, you'll notice the whole body becoming rhythmical. Your nerves will feel calm, and you will feel rested in a way that even sleep doesn't provide.

The positive effects of this exercise are multifold. The first is the change of expression in that harsh lines will disappear and a calmness will appear on the face. Along with this comes a beautiful voice.

After practising this for a few days, take up a higher yoga:

Slowly fill the lungs through the Idā, left nostril, and concentrate the mind on the nerve current. You are, in effect, sending the nerve current down the spinal column, and striking violently on the last plexus, the basic lotus which is triangular in shape, the seat of the Kundalini.

Hold the current there for some time while imagining that you are slowly drawing the nerve current with the breath through the other side, the Pingalā, following which you slowly let it out through the right nostril.

If you find this difficult, use your thumb to close the right nostril. Slowly draw breath through the left nostril, then use your thumb and forefinger to close both nostrils, imagine you're sending current down through the nerve center down and striking the base of the Sushumnā, then take the thumb off, and

let the breath out through the right nostril, keeping the other one closed by the forefinger. Then close both, as before.

Draw in 4 seconds, hold for 16 seconds, then throw out in 8 seconds. All along, think of the basic, triangular lotus, with your mind concentrated on that center. The imagination will help you a great deal. This makes one Prānāyāma.

The next breathing is slowly drawing the breath in, and immediately breathing out slowly, and then stopping the breath out using the same numbers. The only difference is, in the first case the breath is held in while in the second it is held out.

Practice twice every day, the best times being towards morning and evening. When night passes into day and day into night, a relative calmness descends on the body. That's why the body tends to be calm in the early morning and early evening.

Do this four times in the morning and four times in the evening, then you can slowly increase the time and number when you find you have the power to do so and enjoy it.

**(Note: Be careful while increasing when you feel like you have the power to six instead of four. If practiced irregularly, it can lead to injury.)**

## Conclusion

The aim of this beginner's guide is to open a doorway for you to walk through and continue learning at your own pace to awaken *sattva*.

To sum up, the three gunas, *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva* govern our actions.

*Tamas* is the state of heedlessness, laziness, and sloth. We feel helpless, unable to control our thoughts and actions, and become a prisoner of emotion.

*Rajas* is a state of energy that leads to indiscrete action, where we prioritize busyness over focus, where we get hijacked by ego, lust, greed, jealousy, and other emotions that cloud our judgment.

*Sattva* is the state of balance, purity, goodness, and light. It's when you can remain calm, dignified, and virtuous regardless of whether you're resting or whether you're in the intensity of activity.

Experiment, study the results, and discover your own lessons. Don't try to change the world—it's like a dog's tail that will always remain crooked. Rather, let your work be a means to uplift yourself by uplifting others and make you a better version of yourself.

You can continue your journey of learning from the wise by reading the Diary of the Daily Sāttvik [here](#).