

The 9 Obstacles Distracting Us From Samadhi: Sutras 1.30 – 1.31

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Covered in this article: Sutras 1.30-1.31. These Sutras describe what distracts us from attaining Samadhi.

Sutra 1.30

व्याधि स्त्यान संशय प्रमादालस्याविरति भ्रान्तिदर्शनालब्ध भूमिकत्वानवस्थितत्वानि चित्तविक्षेपास्तेऽन्तराया
vyādhi styāna saṁśaya pramāda ālasya avirati bhrāntidarśana alabdhabhū mikatva anavasthitatvāni
cittavikṣepāḥ te antarāyāḥ

The obstacles to samadhi are distractions of the mind caused by: disease or physical illness, lack of interest (mental dullness), doubt or indecision, negligence or inattentiveness to one's daily sadhana (yoga practice), laziness, lacking moderation or control (over-indulgence in the senses), living in illusion (distorted thinking), lack of perseverance in one's sadhana, and instability in maintaining a steady level of practice (backsliding).

Here, Patanjali lists 9 obstacles preventing us from reaching Samadhi:

1. Disease, sickness, ailment, distress, or illness, of the body or of the mind. This causes much difficulty in the path to enlightenment. It is difficult to concentrate for meditation if your body is unhealthy, not at ease or comfort. Even just having the common cold can throw one off from their daily practice.

Asana (yoga poses) were given and developed over the centuries for the very purpose of increasing ease in the physical body to allow for Samadhi to happen, but even then, problems can arise due to normal human imperfections in our genetics. It can take many years, even lifetimes of advancement to improve and perfect oneself.

2. Lack of interest, mental dullness, lack of enthusiasm. How will you maintain a steady path of advancement if you are bored and have no interest in it?

If you get bored, perhaps try something new relating to spiritual practices, and clean your chakras and aura to remove any dross which keeps you from igniting your inner fire. There are many meditations, mantras, and yoga sequences that will help overcome boredom or apathy.

3. Doubt or indecision. If you do not know what to do, if you second guess everything, it will be impossible to maintain a steady course. Not knowing what to do is a hindrance to your progress; likewise, knowing what to do but not how to do it is a hindrance and can cause mental agitation.

Doubt in the Gods, doubt in spirituality in general, doubt in your own value and worth; any of these will make it difficult for you to keep steady in your spiritual practice.

4. Negligence or inattentiveness to one's daily sadhana (yoga practice). If you don't put in the effort to advance, then you won't advance. Advancement requires consistent practice and effort.

5. Laziness of mind and/or body. Laziness will get you nowhere. You need to strive towards goals and milestones.

6. Lacking moderation or control, over-indulgence in the senses. Those who overly focus on food and other sensory comforts will not be able to rise above them and strive for the spiritual. Your energy dissipates if it is spread too thin among many sensual gratifications.

Indulge when and where needed in a healthy way, but moderate yourself and establish balance overall, and don't neglect the spiritual in favor of the material. Samadhi requires some time spent in spiritual focus each day.

7. Living in illusion, distorted thinking. Spending your days lost in imagination will get you nowhere. You need to clearly see your life and who you are, in order to improve it and do what you need to do for your advancement. Ignorance is closely related here. You cannot advance if you have distorted thinking, if you cannot think clearly or perceive the Truth.

8. Lack of perseverance in one's sadhana. Many people will try for short periods of time, then quit before the habit is ingrained. This is why it's important to strive for 40 day workings, then 100 days, 120 days, and longer. These develop the brain's capacity to build a new habit and make it a part of your life and identity.

9. Instability in maintaining a steady level of practice (backsliding). This is common too, it is natural to backslide into a previous way of life. When you reach your goal, you need to keep at it. Humans get lazy and backslide, we slip into previous habits very easily. We need to keep working on ourselves.

There are stages in our development, stages in spiritual advancement. You need to firmly establish yourself in each stage and then move on to the next, without backsliding. It is only when you have achieved the highest level of development, that you will not backslide.

Do not become discouraged by these obstacles; instead, find ways to overcome them. Methods are spread throughout the Sutras and in the Temple of Zeus website. Self-understanding and self-mastery are imperative for overcoming obstacles.

Sutra 1.31

दुःख दौर्मनस्याङ्गमेजयत्व श्वासप्रश्वासा विक्षेप सहभु

duḥkha daurmanasya aṅgamejayatva śvāsapraśvāsāḥ vikṣepa sahabhuvāḥ

At the same time there are 4 types of physical and mental afflictions: mental or physical pain, distress, or restlessness; mental agitation (despair, depression, grief, sadness); shakiness or trembling of the body; shakiness or unevenness of the breath.

The 9 obstacles to Samadhi listed in the previous Sutra are accompanied by:

1. Mental or physical pain, distress, or restlessness. *Duḥkha* also translates to sorrow, unhappiness.
2. Mental agitation, despair, depression, grief, sadness.

3. Shakiness or trembling of the body, tremor of the limbs, unsteadiness of the body.

4. Shakiness or unevenness of the breath, scattered or unsteady inhalation and exhalation.

A daily yoga practice will manage and then in time cure these. Upon reflection it is easy to understand that the 9 obstacles do cause varying amounts of mental agitation, distress, unhappiness, as well as shakiness and trembling of the breath and body.

Concentration is difficult to maintain when the breath is chaotic. Pranayama soothes the breath and the nervous system, and yoga asana alleviates stress held in the body and mind.

Meditation, including contemplation upon our Gods, and study of spiritual philosophy will help you overcome mental pain.

Covered in the next article: Sutras 1.32-1.40. These describe methods to balance and heal the mind to lead to Samadhi.