



ANAHATA CHAKRA SATSANGA

Nine Gates Course Lessons

Sadhak / Aspirant / Second Degree

Introduction to the Rank

In lessons 2.1-2.3, you will be cultivating the good qualities that all spiritual aspirants should treasure. These include generosity, forbearance, patience, and contentment. A *sadhak* or *sadhaka* is one who takes the most efficient means to realization, one who has left the beginning stages behind and has firmly and decisively committed to the spiritual path. Confused and wavering consciousness departs, leaving only the sure, strong steps of self-discipline. The gemstone for this rank is citrine.

Lesson 2.1: Crossing the Threshold

At this point in your spiritual life, you have traveled down many paths and have had many blissful and many painful experiences. You have practiced many philosophies and religions, some Western and some Eastern, some religious and some secular. Like an actor trying on different costumes, you have been looking for the right “fit,” for the tradition that just “felt right” to you. You have reasoned to yourself that you wanted an appropriate level of challenge, something not too difficult and yet not too easy. You have also sought an experience of new spiritual techniques that nonetheless do not require you to abandon your home culture and ethnicity. You are willing to stand out in the crowd, and yet home and family remain important to you. You are willing to make bold changes in your life, but you still have a sense of place and community. You are open to ancient and esoteric disciplines but also value the contributions of modern science. The practices in this lesson will enable you to value the good things that you already have in your life while simultaneously moving into a higher consciousness. You will experience a buoyancy of spirit that allows you to transcend difficulty and rise above the concerns of everyday life without neglecting any of your responsibilities.

The universe has many dimensions, many levels of vibration, some gross and some subtle. These layers of reality can be perceived by children and adults alike. On the gross level, a child plays with a wooden toy, say, a car, and drags the toy along the carpet on a string. The child is dealing with concrete physical reality and is developing motor dexterity. This physical dexterity will later lead to abstract reasoning, like picturing objects in mathematical and geometric space. Counting on the fingers will come later, which will then become an understanding of number, which will lead to the intangible variables of algebra, trigonometry, and so forth. For now, the child is just playing with a car on a string. But the child already has knowledge of intangibles. The child depends on its parents for food, shelter, and clothing, and, through these concrete actions, the child understands love and care. Loving and caring are intangibles, are subtle realities, and yet they exert an influence in the tangible plane. We say that they have gross and subtle properties. We might say that love, in order to be love, *must* have subtle and tangible properties. The parents have a feeling of love in their hearts, to be sure, but they

also hug and kiss the child, provide for its needs, and do everything possible to give that small person a good start in life. If the parents fail in this endeavor, that child will have a big deficit to overcome in reaching a stable adulthood.

We all have goals that we would like to express, to bring into fulfillment. Imagine that I want to learn how to play the guitar. At first, that exists merely as an idle thought in my mind. That thought has a non-zero influence on the real world. It is a weak intention, but it does have some power. The thought, "I want to learn how to play the guitar," might lead me to listen to more music, read magazines about famous guitarists, and the like. At some point, however, I have to cross various thresholds, to actually buy a guitar and then to plunk away at it, as bad as my playing might sound at first. Then I have to put in hours and hours of practice. Notice that the process can be abandoned at any point along the way. Notice that "mastery" of a skill is relative and process-dependent. I can "master" the guitar relative to my next-door neighbor, and that is one level of mastery. But then I could "master" the guitar relative to Jimi Hendrix or Andrés Segovia, and that would be a different level of mastery entirely! On the subtle level, I have a goal in mind, "to be able to play guitar like x," but, on a gross level, I have the physical activity of guitar playing. These two levels are intrinsically related to one another, and, in fact, comprise part of the same phenomenon of guitar playing. Without goals that are mental in nature, I would be unable to accomplish anything on the tangible level. At the same time, without the tangible practice, my mental desires are impotent.

To bring this around to the spiritual life, we need examples, we need ideals for the type of spiritual life that we want to bring about. If we have been very lucky in this life, we have examples already: a kind and pious grandmother, a beloved spiritual author, a teacher or professor, and so forth. These people have become shining lights before us, to show the way. We will be doing well to pass along to the next generation the lessons that these beloved forebears passed on to us. We should never take lightly the contributions of our elders, those departed and those still with us. The things that they taught us will be a refuge in times of need. Indeed, we still commune with them when we talk to them in our heads, when we dream of them in the dead of night. Those who are still alive we can simply call on the phone. Those who have passed away we can still honor by cooking their favorite foods or saying their names or putting their pictures around the house. These beloved ones have given us a start in life and showed the way, and this has been a precious gift. We should remember never to defame or disrespect them. And yet, at the same time, we hope to go beyond what we have learned as children, to grow into full adulthood as spiritual beings, to reach the highest expression of divinity our capabilities will allow. We respect our forebears when we accomplish things they never could have imagined, when we take what they have taught us and extend it one step farther.

To take that "one step farther" the dharmic traditions offer us help in the form of the *devas*, the shining ones who show us the way. They help us to access that which is beyond both the gross and the subtle layers of existence. They help us to see beyond the mind to the divine reality that supports the entire universe. And yet, because we rely on our material natures to perceive the world, we must approach the divine with the equipment that we have. We must be able to use our five senses plus the mind (the sixth sense) to relate to the increate, intangible divine mind. Just like we have these beloved mentors who have showed us the way in life, the *devas* show us the way to realities that we have not

yet glimpsed. By worshipping them, we harness the senses and the mind, turning these six senses to the higher purpose of Self-realization. At this point it is useful to note that these lessons are called the nine gates. The body is referred to in the Bhagavad Gita as the “city of the nine gates.” The nine gates are the nine openings in the body: the anus, the genitals, the mouth, the two nostrils, the two ears, and the two eyes. These lessons use the body as a vehicle for bringing the higher consciousness into the material world. Notice also that the name for the spiritual society, the “Anahata Chakra Satsanga” has nine “ah” sounds, some long and some short, which mystically stands for self-effort and receptivity, the two strands of grace. The nine gates are symbolized by nine triangles, which, when combined, form one large triangle, which is drawn in the puja rituals as a triangle with a dot or *bindu* in the middle, signifying Shiva and Shakti, nature and consciousness, *prakriti* and *purusha*. This divine dance of all existence pulses through your body and mind even now, as you read these lines. The lessons seek to make known what is hidden behind the veil of *maya* or illusion, to allow you to see what is already the case.

We must begin somewhere. We must get started. In the Vedic tradition, the gatekeeper of all knowledge and all wisdom is Ganesha, which is a contraction of Vighneshwara, the divine Remover of Obstacles. The path of devotion begins with Lord Ganesh, and no one can ascend to the peaks of Enlightenment without his permission and blessing. He guards the door to the abode of Shiva-Shakti, and he will let no one pass into the Mother’s chamber unless they are first humbled at his mighty feet. And yet, he is also extremely kind and generous, the most accessible of gods and the most valuable of friends. He delights in receiving gifts from his devotees, but he equally delights in giving them treasures from his storehouse. To the materially-minded, he gives success and wealth on the gross plane: automobiles, houses, and status. To the spiritually-minded, he gives success and wealth in the intangible sense: peace of mind, bliss, and knowledge. He cares for us so much that he allows each person to reach his or her chosen objective, and, in this sense, each person has the help of Ganesha, whether or not He is directly worshipped. Metaphysically speaking, Ganesha can be worshipped as the Supreme Being, as a demi-god, or as a god (combinations thereof are also possible). One may take a stance on this issue or one may simply worship Ganesh without worrying about where he falls on the heavenly hierarchy. The important thing is that while one is worshipping him, one must strive as much as possible to exclude other thoughts and concentrate one’s attention on him alone.

For his devotees, realizing Ganesh becomes the goal. We seek to emulate his qualities and bring them into our lives. A kind of cross-pollination happens in which we contemplate him in spiritual practice and allow that contemplation to inform our daily living (and vice versa). Begin Ganesha devotion with his 108 names. You might wish to start with an audio or video version of the names while following along yourself with the transliteration and translation. When you find yourself comfortable with the recorded version, try chanting by yourself out loud. At first it will take you a long time to chant all of the names. Keep doing this until you feel more and more comfortable with chanting. Eventually, you will get to the point where you can chant either out loud or silently with ease. You don’t need to go very fast: just accomplish a comfortable pace that enables correct pronunciation. You need not obsess over pronunciation either: just do the best you can. The gods will understand, as they speak in the language of the heart. It can take years to master classical Sanskrit pronunciation, so just try your

best for now. Try to infuse your chanting with devotional feeling as much as you can. Picture yourself at Ganesha's feet as he dances or sits before you.

As you chant the names, you will identify more with some of them than others. This will depend on the issues that arise in your life at the time of chanting. The appropriate name will seem to leap off the page and will be imbued with special significance for you. Make note of any special names like this, as you may want to return later to say an entire *mala* (108 repetitions) of the one that really speaks to you. Ganesha can communicate with you through mantra practice, and he may be giving you an important lesson by revealing to you an appropriate mantra for that day. If you already have a Ganesha idol and a home shrine, use this place for your practice. If you don't, you can find a picture of Ganesh or even draw one yourself and use that to help you visualize his form. You will find it easier to meditate on him in this way, and far easier than trying to "clear your mind" or meditate on formlessness. The god with form (*saguna*) is the first step to finding the God without form (*nirguna*). By meditating on the personal deity, you form a staircase or ladder that will eventually lead you to the formless absolute. The eternal dharmic tradition simply disagrees with the Abrahamic traditions when they insist that God is never to be pictured as having form. It is only by envisioning such forms or worshipping idols that we can rise to the contemplation of ultimate reality. All religious people (and secular people) worship idols: Hindus just do so consciously and with the correct goal in mind. Saying mantras and visualizing Lord Ganesha is a time-honored and proven way to establish the divinity within.

Once you have become more comfortable with the 108 names, you may wish to picture him seated at the base of the spine, in the *muladhara* or root chakra. This chakra is associated with the earth element and the pull of gravity. Whether you are sitting in a chair or cross-legged on the floor, feel yourself rooted in the gravitational pull of the earth. Then picture Lord Ganesha seated atop the chakra. He is giving you good timing, inspiring you with right action, and filling your heart with devotion. The names, as you chant them, fill your entire body and finally the whole cosmos. The sacred sounds, which have no beginning or end, connect you with That Which Is. You should finally feel that you are not the one chanting but that you have simply stumbled across these sounds which have always been there. You do not produce the sounds: you simply join in them. In fact, the sounds have produced you, and you will one day return into them. It is possible to chant while working or driving a car, but try to set aside some time (at least one *mala*) for chanting each day with minimal distractions. You will find it easier over time to get into the meditative frame of mind, especially if you chant regularly at the same place and time. Lord Ganesha will meet you there, and you will quickly feel his calming presence.

When you are established in the practice of the 108 names, you can try a more simplified japa mantra, like *aum gam ganapataye namaḥ*. This mantra means something like "Om, we bow to the Lord of the Servants of God." The syllable "gahm" is the root sound for Lord Ganesh, while the aum is the mantra of mantras, the seed sound of all mantras. It refers to the creation, sustenance, and destruction of the universe, or the three divine pairings of Brahma-Saraswati, Vishnu-Lakshmi, and Shiva-Parvati, or the beginning, middle, and end of all things. So with each repetition of the mantra "aum," the entire created universe is born and dies again. The pulse of the universe is right there in your hand as you hold your mala, and the whole universe courses through your breath and your vocal cords. Students of the Western mysteries may note here the hermetic principle, "As above so below, as

within so without.” The microcosm (the body) becomes a model of the macrocosm (the universe): the gross world becomes a model of the divine world. You will feel a remarkable sense of privilege to be able to participate in this wonderful drama that is unfolding across all of existence. Your part, though small, contains the Whole.

An even simpler version of the mantra is *aum shri ganeshaya namaḥ*. The meaning of the syllable *shri* has been explored in an earlier lesson. It means wealth, increase, or respect. Ganesha, as has been stated above, is a contraction of Vigneshwara, the Remover of Obstacles. Ganesha is the deity with an elephant head. You might wish to picture an elephant charging ahead of you through the jungle, removing all obstacles from your path. An elephant’s trunk is extremely strong and can uproot trees, but it is also extremely nimble and can pick up a needle. So there is no problem too big or too small for Ganesh to handle. Whether the situation requires brute strength or precise intervention, Ganesh knows the solution and can help you with it. While practicing mantra, all you need to do is open yourself to this wisdom. The time for action will come later: for now, just concentrate on the deity.

You may begin to notice some fruits of your practice: you begin to do the right thing at the right time more easily. You have a more cheerful disposition. You don’t get upset as easily. You don’t react with anger as often. Don’t be dismayed if you don’t notice any changes right away. Try to be detached from the fruits of your practice. Allow Ganesha to move at his own pace and in his own way: your job is simply to be faithful. And keep in mind that you still have to act in the world. In fact, you should be more diligent than before in performing all of your duties. Ganesh can provide you with the occasional nudge, but it is your job to carry out the work. The work that you do today, whether it is the work of mantra practice or your regular work in the world, may take days, months, or years to come to fruition. For your part, work on moving efficiently and without hesitation towards complete enlightenment.

Assignments. Complete these activities on your own. You need not submit any written feedback.

1. As you say the 108 names of Ganesha each day, which names speak to you the most? How do these names reflect what is happening in your life right now?
2. The marks of this rank are generosity, forbearance, patience, and contentment. Which of these qualities is most present in your life? Which ones do you need to explore more fully? How can you bring them into prominence in your daily routines?

Questions for Self-Reflection. If you are interested in moving through the formal system of ranks of the Satsanga, please forward your answers to the General Secretary of the Society.

1. Have you fully committed to pursuing the spiritual path in front of you? What reservations still lurk in your heart and mind? How can you address these reservations?
2. Did you notice any small or large changes in your life when you started doing Ganesh mantra? Describe in detail.

3. Ganesha is the Lord of good timing. In what ways do you see things falling into place in your life right now? Why do you think you have come to be studying these lessons at this particular time?

Works Cited / For Further Reading

Dillard-Wright, David (Janyananda Saraswati). *At Ganapati's Feet: Daily Life with the Elephant-Headed Deity*. Winchester, UK: Mantra Books, 2014.

Includes the 108 names of Ganesha, explanation of the iconography of Ganesha, instructions on mantra practice, and more.

Grewal, Royina. *The Book of Ganesha*. Delhi: Penguin India, 2001.

Includes alternate accounts of Ganesha's birth story and deeds. Wonderfully compact and vivid.

Satyanada Saraswati, Swami and Vittalanaanda Saraswati. *Cosmic Puja (Samashti Upasana)*. Napa, CA: Devi Mandir, 2001.

This is an advanced puja that will be encountered later in this series, but the philosophical explanations in the introduction can be useful for beginners. The account of the meaning of the "aum" sound accords with Swamiji's description.