

# **Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga & Human Life**

## **- an Overview**

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Yoga is one of the six orthodox classical Indian Philosophies, the other five being Vedanta, Mimamsa, Nyaya, Vaiseshika and Sankhya. These philosophies are termed orthodox or 'aasthika' because they accept the authority of the Vedas unlike the unorthodox or 'nastika' Indian philosophies (Buddhism, Jainism, Charvakas or pure materialists, etc) which do not accept the authority of the Vedas.

Yoga is practical to the core and is founded upon the metaphysics of Sankhya philosophy, which is theoretical or intellectual. Yoga and Sankhya together form a complete system. However, Yoga by introducing the concept of Ishvara deviates from Sankhya, which is atheistic. Yoga, therefore, is called as Sa-Ishvara Sankhya.

Sage Patanjali, who is the originator of Yoga philosophy, compiled the Yoga Sutras, which form the basic text of Yoga, in the 3rd / 4th century B.C. Not much is known biographically about Sage Patanjali except that he is considered to be a 'swayambhu' ('self-evolved' or 'self-originated').

Like all ancient Indian philosophies (with the exception of Charvakas), Yoga too arose out of the practical necessity of eradicating the sufferings and miseries of human life and setting man free once-for-all-time from the bondage to the seemingly never-ending cycle of birth-life-death-rebirth. These sufferings are caused by avidya or ignorance (false knowledge).

Yoga believes that man is comprised of two principles – the principle of Pure Consciousness (Purusha) and the principle of Matter (Prakriti). Man, who is essentially Pure Consciousness in nature, due to the ignorance of his own Reality, associates and identifies himself with his body-mind-ego-intellect complex (Prakriti). Once this identification happens, whatever befalls the elements of the said complex i.e., growing old, disease and death to the body, miseries and sufferings of the mind and ego, etc., are assumed as happening to himself. The

identification leads to appropriation of endless sufferings birth after birth extending over several life times. This identification happens at the level of Chitta (say, mind). Hence, all yogic practices aim at taking man towards the cessation of this identification between his Real Self (Pure Consciousness) and his false self (body-mind-intellect-ego complex). Thus the definition of Yoga is given as “Chittavritti Nirodah” (restraint to the point of cessation of mental modifications). When that takes place, the Pure Consciousness is restored to its original state (“Tada Drashtu Swarupe Awasthanam”). Man is then said to have re-attained his nature of Pure Consciousness. That is the state of Kaivalya, ‘Only-ness’, Pure Consciousness.

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras propound the Ashtanga Yoga or the Yoga having the following eight angas or limbs or parts:

1. Yamas or social observances

- ahimsa (non-violence),
- satya (truth),
- asteya (non-stealing),
- brahmacharya (moderation in sensual and sexual pleasures),
- aparigraha (non-accumulation of unnecessary things)

2. Niyamas or personal observances

- Shaucha (physical and mental purity)
- Santosha (contentment)
- Tapa (austerities)
- Swadhyaya (study of Self)
- Ishvarapranidhan (total surrender to Ishvara)

3. Asanas (steady and comfortable postures catering primarily to physical and physiological health)

4. Pranayama (control of ‘Prana’ through breathing practices)

5. Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses from their pre-occupation with the external world)

6. Dharana (concentration)

7. Dhyana (meditation)

8. Samadhi (perfection integration of personality on the empirical plane leading to spiritual liberation or Kaivalya).

These eight angas are hierarchical in nature in that the practice of each anga is subservient to and necessary for leading to the next higher

anga. In each of these angas, the final goal of Samadhi is not lost sight of. Though the practice of each anga provides unique and exclusive benefits of its own, it does not fulfill its purpose fully if it does not lead the aspirant or yoga sadhaka to the next anga and finally to Samadhi.

Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga, called as Raja Yoga because of its mental orientation, is distinguished from Hatha Yoga wherein the emphasis is on the physical dimension. For both the end goal is same i.e. spiritual liberation. Yoga is a spiritual discipline because it considers man to be a spiritual being.

Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali is holistic in that it caters to all dimensions of human personality (the social, physical, physiological, mental, intellectual and spiritual). Yogic practices are secular and universally applicable to all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion, nationality, etc because human problems and predicament are the same everywhere.

Optimum effect of Yogic practices is seen when Yoga is incorporated into the daily life style and not practiced merely to get rid of some physical or mental ailments. In other words, Yoga is more relevant and effective as a preventive measure rather than as a therapeutic resort.

The exponentially growing popularity of Yoga all over the world is a testimony to the bounties and blessings that Yoga practices have in store for human beings. The efficacy of Yogic practices is time-tested and in today's world they are the need of the hour.

*"All He loves, all He moves, all are His, all are He."*

*- Shri Aurobindo,*

*from 'Light. Endless Light',*

*published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.*

# PATANJALI'S YAMA

## - in Modern Perspective

*G S Sahay*

Yoga was available in scattered form even in Vedic Literature but credit of presenting Yoga in a systematic manner goes to Patanjali. One working in the field of Yoga will ever remain indebted to his Yoga Sutra of just 195 aphorisms or Sutras divided into Samadhi Pada, Sadhana Pada, Vibhuti Pada and Kaivalya Pada. It is also accepted as one of the six orthodox systems of Indian Philosophies. Patanjali's system of yoga is popularly known as Ashtanga Yoga or Eight Limbed Yoga. People by mistake understand it as eight steps of Yoga. Actually speaking they are not the steps rather than they are limbs and each limb is important in its own turn. Ashtanga Yoga consists in Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Yama is first of the eight limbs of Patanjala Yoga. They are

1. **Ahimsa** (Non Injury),
2. **Satya** ( Truthfulness),
3. **Asteya** (Non-stealing),
4. **Brahmacharya** ( Celibacy), and
5. **Aparigraha** (Non possessiveness).

Yama grammatically mean control over senses ' Yama samyamane' but considering the five yamas mentioned by Patanjali, it is also said to be the code of conduct for inter personal relationship. However, its social impact is only a by product of its practice from strict Yoga point of view. Yama can also be interpreted as discipline or code of "attitude" or "behavior". A particular attitude can be expressed as discipline, which in turn influences behavior. These Yamas actually purify the mind by removing negative ideas or behaviors and culturing oneself towards positive ideas or behaviors.

Yamas are available in Jainism as Pancha Mahavrata and in Buddhism it is available as Pancha Sheela. They are the group of injunctions presented in the form of Do's and don'ts. e.g. Ahimsa, Asteya and Aparigraha are

Don'ts whereas Satya and Brahmacharya are only seemingly of the nature of Do's whereas they are also don'ts . Thus all the instructions are of the nature of don'ts. We are required to find out Do's i.e. exactly what we are supposed to do.

## Anti yama

Patanjali was aware that we are fundamentally under the grip of **anti yamas** or **vitarkas**. Anti Yama means opposite of Yamas , e.g. Himsa is the anti yama of Ahimsa and Asatya is the anti yama of Satya and so on. Yamas are required to be followed very consciously. A casual approach towards following of Yama will not be sufficient. We are required to be always mindful and ever watchful. **Anti Yamas** are performed by oneself or getting it performed by others or even supporting the act done by others. We do so because of anger, greed or infatuation. However, our involvement in the performance of anti yama can be mild or less intense or more intense. But these involvements usually are painful and leading to ignorance. We have to understand this functioning of mind and skillfully curb ourselves from the grip of anti yamas. Let us try to understand each of the five Yamas: **Ahimsa (Non Injury)** Ahimsa means do not kill or injure. We are expected to follow Ahimsa not only because other will be harmed but it is required because any such act has adverse effect on mind and it generates tension. Truly speaking injuring others is the result of anger and anger first of all takes away the balance of mind. Thus the practice of Ahimsa not only involves the physical aspect but also the mental aspect. Therefore, Ahimsa should be practiced at all the three levels – Physical, Mental and Speech. Ahimsa is negative injunctions i.e. 'don't do'. But question remains 'what to do'. If any affirmative word which can replace Ahimsa is 'Love' and 'Compassion', for all. And the most famous propagator of this Love and Compassion was 'Buddha' and 'Mahavira' in India and 'Jesus Christ' in the west. Actually Ahimsa or Love is the first lesson of any religion or dharma, philosophy and ethics. It forms the first step towards Yoga also. There is no measuring rod as to how much we have practiced Ahimsa but undoubtedly Patanjali has indicated the final state of its mastery over it. "Ahimsa pratishthayam tatsannidhau vairatyagah". i.e. as a result of mastery over Ahimsa, any person , coming in contact with such person who has attained it, will loose enmity in himself.

It is said that a man is judged by the company he keeps. It suggests that our behavior is highly influenced by the company we keep. It is said 'keep good company'. A good person or bad person always discharges

an electrical wave around himself. And if these waves are stronger than yours one, undoubtedly you are bound to be influenced by his waves. Perhaps, that is why it is said, “even for small moment of time, if you are in the vicinity of a good person, it has the potentiality to make you free from sins. Thus message of Ahimsa can best be followed by cultivating a nature of love and compassion for every body and keeping good company. **Satya ( Truthfulness)** Speak truth and never lie. Enumeration of truth after non injury suggests that ‘such truth which is full of Himsa or injury should be avoided and undoubtedly Patanjali would not have supported such truth. Perhaps the Sanskrit quote conveys this very idea “satyam bruyat , priyam bruyat, na bruyat satyam-apriyam”. In the above quote the word ‘priya’ is very important. Satya is that which is true but at the same time also sweet and agreeable to the listener or at least listener is not offended. According to me, priya should mean not exactly the agreeable but full of welfare for others. Thus the quote will have the meaning ‘speak truth which is full of welfare for others. Do not speak such truth which is not containing welfare message’. **‘satyam bruyat shubham bruyat na bruyat satyam ashubham’** According to Patanjali the mastery over truth is indicated by the fact that his speech is followed by the action i.e. whatever such a person utters becomes true. In the Indian perspective we have the example that the boon or curse uttered by great sages and Munis was definitely becoming true. It can be said that they were great practitioners of Satya. Speaking truth is also associated with our age old belief that Goddess Sarasvati / Minerva resides at the tip of the tongue and tongue is the main organ of speech. It is believed that whatever we speak, good or bad, gets offered directly to the Goddess. Therefore, We must cultivate a habit of speaking good or containing welfare. Whenever, we get up in the morning, we say ‘Suprabhata’ ‘Good Morning’ to others or while seeing any person off, we say ‘Wish you best of journey’ or at other occasion ‘Best of luck’. These are all welfare words which can be said to be the first step towards **“TRUTH” Asteya ( Non Stealing)** Asteya means non-stealing or absence of the feeling of theft. Let us try to understand the reason behind the action of theft by the individual? Dissatisfaction in one’s own achievements and possessions and desire for getting such thing which one can’t get through fair means, is the main reason behind the activity like theft. If you do not have longing for such thing which you do not afford to obtain through fair means, then observance of ‘non theft’ becomes very easy. Actually object attained through one’s own fair means gives a celestial pleasure which can not be attained

through the object obtained by way of unfair means. The best method to observe this yama is to develop a feeling of contentment towards one's possession and develop a habit of obtaining an object through one's own earning and fair means. After the development of this attitude only, ASTEYA will be established. Sage Patanjali writes "as a result of the establishment of Asteya, the person becomes the possessor of all sorts of gems. I believe, all sorts of gems here refer to best among Gems. According to Indian thought, Santosha or contentment is considered to be the best of all gems. Following Hindi couplet very nicely brings out this concept -

*godhana gajadhana vaajidhana aura ratan dhana khaan |  
jaba aave santosha dhana, saba dhana dhuri samaana ||*

i.e. one who has attained the jewel or gem like contentment, for him all other gems or properties, like cows, elephants or horses, are useless like dust. **Brahmacharya ( Celibacy )** Generally Brahmacharya is considered as first stage of life out of four stages of life according to Indian Thought. When Patanjali mentions it under Yama, undoubtedly it is not taken as first stage of life. Traditionally, Brahmacharya means involved in - study, spiritual practice, performance of sacrifices and remaining pure like that of a concept of Brahman. It also includes the concept of much disciplined life like that of a student. It is difficult to trace as to when and how this word became identified with the limited meaning mentioned above. As the second stage of life, we find the mention of **Grihastha**. Which means **household stage of life**. I believe, as against Grihastha, which permits house hold life and so also permission for sex with one's own wife, this Brahmacharya was considered as life without any type of contact with opposite sex or abstinence from sex.

In India Brahmacharya Ashram is not essentially succeeded by Grihastha Ashram and those who do not wish to adopt household life directly proceed to Sannyasa without undergoing Grihastha and Vanprastha. However, initiation into Sannyasa from Brahmachari is decided and given by only a competent guru. And such Brahmachari is expected not only to abstain from sex but also to lead a very disciplined life. This may be understood as life for the conservation of energy.

Sage Patanjali writes "**By the establishment of Brahmacharya, there is conservation of energy**". The word used for energy is 'virya'. The other meaning of 'virya' in English is 'Semen'. Thus people say virya labha should mean conservation of semen. This has led us towards the meaning of abstinence from sex. But actually it denotes conservation

of energy. Energy can be conserved by consuming energy judiciously. That is why Brahmacharya has been described by Vasishtha for Grihastha also as indulging in sex with one's own wife after the proper interval of menstrual period (Vasishtha Samhita I / 43 - 45) . Serving the Guru regularly is also considered to be Brahmacharya. **Aparigraha (Non Possessiveness)** Possessiveness is a natural attitude of human being. And attainment of Non possessiveness is not so easy but at the same time it is also true that if we are a little conscious, we can make ourselves able to follow it, may be on humble level. We have infatuation towards our own life because of Abhinivesha ( love for life or fear from death) form of inborn pain (Klesha) which is full of Avidya is always with us. Love for life gives rise to the love for all those objects which one feels to be useful in life. Love for such objects which are useful for life has reached to such an extent that we wish to accumulate even those objects which may not be required immediately for use but considering that it may be useful tomorrow, we try to possess it. This infatuation is so strong that we go on accumulating even such objects which are not useful at all and we are unable to detach or discriminate ourselves from such objects. It is so subtle that we do not remain careful at all as to how we have accumulated objects around out of which some may be very useful and yet some may not be useful at all. One more dimensions is associated with Aparigraha and that is 'not to feel pain even after loosing such object which was in your possession'. Actually speaking this is the first step towards vairagya (detachment). Sage Patanjali through Aparigraha has reminded us 'let us identify limitations of our needs'. No sooner we understand it, the Aparigraha starts from that very moment. **Mahavrata** These yamas are to be practiced in the form of **Mahavrata** which means there is no scope of liberality any where, at any point of time, any day and for any body. There is no holiday for these Yamas.

But in this materialistic world where it is very difficult to keep one's existence, we will have to find out a method to follow them on mild level. Acharya Tulsi – a Jain Muni has suggested for 'ANUVRATA'. **“We can escape from speaking lie, work on non anger, possessiveness can be limited to a justified extent and can follow Brahmacharya by being devoted to one's own wife and be contented with our possession”.**



# NIYAMA

## - in Modern Perspective

*B R Sharma*

### Abstract

An attempt has been made to analyze a few Yogic Texts to find out the state of knowledge regarding the tradition of Niyama and the relevance of this knowledge in modern perspective with special reference to Patanjala Yoga Sutra (PYS).

Key Words: Niyama, modern perspective, yogasutra

### Introduction

The term 'Niyama' literally represents 'binding rules' or 'observances' or 'discipline'. It can be observed that the human existence is based on the awareness of some rules or discipline in the form of do's and don'ts as the value of such concepts has been recognized in entire literature of the world and hence it can be said that this aspect of human life existed in some form or the other with the human race since the beginning of civilizations wherein don'ts can be said to be prohibitive while do's as disciplinal and constructive. The don'ts aspect lays ethical foundation while do's regulate the inner ambience of an individual which is to be maintained regularly with help of healthy guidelines such as the role of cleanliness, satisfaction, hard work, self analysis, self surrender etc.

Yoga, as a science of discipline (anushasana) which has several stages and dimensions, well recognizes and incorporates these aspects under the practices of Yamas and Niyamas respectably. Maharishi Patanjali, the author of Yoga Sutra, has very succinctly accorded them as first two components in the scheme of his eightfold path of yoga. The practice of Yamas & Niyamas is preparatory and facilitatory to get the desired results of further components such as dharana, dhyana etc., hence it is essential to understand the nature and significance of these components.

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## Objective of the study

In Yoga texts, description of Yamas & Niyamas has been made thoroughly so as to lead Sadhaka towards Samadhi. While viewing from modern perspective it may not be possible to follow the Niyamas to fullest possible extent as described in yogic literature. However, so far the common people are concerned, the aim of the Yoga studies/practices is not to achieve Moksha or Kaivalya but their aim is to live a meaningful, healthy and happy life with contentment. Keeping this aspect in mind the twofold analysis has been undertaken-

1. What Yogic Texts say about the traditions of Niyamas?
2. Discussion of Niyamas in Modern Perspective with special reference to PYS.

## Material and Methods

Following Traditional Yogic Texts were chosen for the purpose of understanding the traditions of Niyama-

1. Patanjala Yoga Sutra (PYS),
2. Hathapradipika (HP),
3. Siddhasiddhantpaddhati (SSP),
4. Darshnopnishad (DU),
5. Mandalabrahmanopanishad (MBU)
6. Shandilopanishad (SAU)
7. Yoga Tattvopanishad (YTU)
8. Varahopanishad (VU)
9. Tejobindupanishad (TBU)
10. Trishikhabrahmanopnishad
11. Vasishtha Samhita (VS)
12. Yogyajnavalkya (YY)
13. Jyotsna of Brahamananda (J)
14. Ashtanga Yoga of Charanadasa (AYC)

### 1. What Yogic texts say about the traditions of Niyama

Collected material for this study has been presented as follows-

- a. Niyama as one of the components of ashtanga yoga. Patanjali has mentioned five **niyamas: shauca, santosha, tapas, swadhyaya and ishvarapranidhana** (PYS II 29, 32;40-45)

- b. DU I 4, 2/1-16, SAU I (1) 2-3, (2) 1-11; YTU 24, 29 and VU V 11,13, 14 describe 10 Niyamas
- c. In MBU I (1) 3-4 we find the description of 9 niyamas.
- d. YTU considers **niyama** to be one of the twenty components of **Hathayoga** and **ahimsa** to be the principal niyama. No other niyamas are mentioned in this text. HP (I 38) also considers ahimsa to be the principal niyama.
- e. Although TBU I 15- 18 never said in this text that yoga is eightfold but **yogangas** are described one after the other wherein reality **brahman** is one description of niyama.
- f. Observances like bathing early in the morning, eating only at night, in other words fasting, are called niyamas by the commentator Brahmananda (on HP I 15). He does not recommend this theory for yogis.
- g. HP II 14 talks about the restrictions about food etc. According to this text, these must be observed by yogis in the beginning but can be released after the practice is well established.
- h. VS and other texts enumerate Niyama as vow (VS I 33, 35, 53, 83; SSP II 33 VU V/1,113&14,AYC p.7-8), Niyama is the second among eight yogangas. It is ten in number. They are: **tapas** (austerity), **santosha** (contentment), **astikya** (thesim), **dana** (charity), **ishvarapujana** (worship of God), **siddhantshravana** (listening to the doctrines), **hri** (modesty), **japa** (repetition of mantra), **mati** (decision), and **vrata** observance of vows). SSP defines it as restraining all the activities of **manas** (mind). For this SSP describes to dwell in aloof, non-attachment, indifference, contentment over what is acquired, absence of sentiment and devotion to the feet of **guru**.

## Observations

- Patanjali enumerates 5 components of niyama along with effects thereof. He does not provide any instruction about their practice. However, in the context of yama & niyama, we find a technique called '**pratipaksha bhavana**' i.e. cultivation of opposite feeling in the face of negative ones with a view to maintain serene frame of mind.
- YY & VS and other texts have described 10 components of Niyama with little variation in their names e.g. ishvarapujana in place of ishvarapranidhana etc.
- Hathapradipika does not include niyama in his fourfold path of yoga

but emphasizes the utility of ahimsa as niyama in his text. TBU & HP consider ahimsa as niyama whereas in PYS ahimsa is described under yamas which is prohibitive in nature.

- Jyotsna (a comm. on HP) talks about simple observances like bathing in the early morning, eating only once in a day etc.

The above observations make it clear that mainly there are two traditions available in yoga wherein one tradition accepts 5 components and other 10 components of Niyama. However, the purpose of the practice of these components of niyama (either 5 or 10 in number) is nothing but to develop inner ambience of yoga sadhaka by controlling the senses so that he can take up the higher practices of yoga.

## **2. Discussion of Niyamas in Modern Perspective with special reference to PYS**

### **Shauca – (Purity)**

It is said “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” that helps us in clearing away the negative physical and mental states of being and thus considered to be of two types- outer and inner. Outer purity can be gained through bathing and brushing and keeping all the body organs in healthy condition with the help of neti, dhauti etc., also we should earn our food through hard work and fair means. The inner purity can be gained through recitation of mantras, prayer that helps in purifying the feeling of egoism, fear, lust, anger and all other negative thoughts and emotions. When we understand the value of pure body and mind we become health conscious and accordingly avoid those whichever is not conducive to our constitution and temperament. We try to avoid even the touch of other body and engage ourselves in purifying our own thought process.

### **Santosha – (Contentment)**

This is an important virtue which is described as not desiring more than what one has earned by his honest effort. This state of mind is about maintaining equanimity through all that life offers. Santosha involves the practice of gratitude and joyfulness—maintaining the serene state of mind at all conditions. This state of mind does not depend on any external cause. This attitude will reduce pain and suffering in life. When these contented feelings are cultivated by the mind, the perpetual happiness is not far behind.

### **Tapas (Austerity - process of purification & self discipline)**

Tapas means to bear conflicts with a good intention even when there is some physical or mental strain, one should not discontinue his efforts and on the contrary should continue them. This is known as Tapas. It includes fasting, observing various vows and practicing pranayama, which is considered to be the best form of tapas, etc. with a view to remove all kinds of physical, emotional, mental impurities and when impurities are removed, one becomes self-disciplined and thereby gets mastery over his personality as a whole.

### **Swadhyaya (Self Study)**

Study of scripture or japa of holy mantras is swadhyaya that ultimately leads one to analyze one's own existence. In daily life of commoners, swadhyaya can be said to mean reflection over the deeper problems of what is taught by the Holy Scripture with the help of which one develops serene state of mind and can achieve whatever one wants.

### **Ishwarpranidhana (Total Surrender to God):**

It means while believing in the existence of God and having faith in His Greatness, completely devoting oneself to Him and do only what is approved of by Him is living with an awareness of the Divine. In other words, there is some divine force at the root of this universe, which is beyond our imagination. To identify this force and to surrender completely to it is Ishwarpranidhana. Moreover, Surrender to God in the form of detachment towards the fruits of one's actions leading towards minimizing one's feeling of doer which is the root cause of all worldly problems. At times, even after our persistent efforts, we are unable to succeed. At such a time, if we have faith in Divine existence, we get courage to face any situation in life.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, on the basis of the above discussion it becomes aptly clear that though there are two traditions available in Yogic Literature wherein one tradition accepts 5 components of Niyama and other 10 components but for the sake of common people in modern context the understanding of niyamas in the light of PYS is appropriate and sufficient in managing our thoughts, feelings and emotions in an integrated manner, complementing our outer life to the development of inner ambience by way of developing a self-discipline and controlling the senses so that we can respect the values of this life and can live a meaningful, healthy and happy life with contentment. In short, Niyamas help us to lead a conscious life.

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# ASANA

## - an Important and Integral Part of Yoga

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The Sanskrit word asana means a posture or a seat. It is the third aspect or limb of the system and philosophy of astanga (eight limbed) yoga codified by Sage Patanjali way back in the 2-5th century BC. The other 7 aspects being yama (social discipline), niyama (personal discipline) pranayama (regulation of the 'life-force'), pratyahara (involution of the senses), dharana (concentration) , dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (a state of eternal bliss).

Sage Patanjali describes asana as sthira sukham asanam where sthira means steady or stable; sukha is pleasure or delight and literally can mean a posture where you are delightful as well as stable. The terseness of this sutra (aphorism) can lead to various interpretations. It can be (mis)interpreted as 'being in ANY delightful or comfortable position' or interpreted as 'being delightful in any position'. Just a reshuffle of the words but a radical change in the meaning it conveys and our approach to life. The latter meaning suggests that we can be trained to be handle any situation or condition we may face in life.

There are thousands of positions that the human body can be moulded into. According to Shiva Samhita, there are 8,40,000 asana-s. However, no ancient text names or describes all these. Sage Patanjali in his treatise on yoga does not even mention a single name of an asana. Subsequent texts such as the Shiva Samhita, Gheranda Samhita, Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Hatha Ratnavalli name a few asana-s and describe the techniques for some of them.

AS has been the Indian traditions for centuries, knowledge was transmitted orally and not essentially via the written word. It is therefore very likely that knowledge about various asana-s did exist in the times of Patanjali but there may not have been a need to 'describe' them as possibly they formed a daily part of an individual's life. Today, Light on Yoga by Yogacharya BKS Iyengar can be considered as one of the foremost books on yogasana-s which describes the techniques of about 200 asana-s.

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The positions that the human body is capable of acquiring range from standing, sitting, backward bending, forward bending, twisting, inverted and prone. The challenge lies in attaining the various asana-s and still being stable and in a state of pleasure or delight (sukha).

A tremendous interest has been generated in the practice of asana-s in the last few decades as the word about the physical, physiological, emotional and intellectual benefits that these provide has been discovered. These asana-s when done correctly are capable on working at all levels of the human being. To start with, it improves flexibility of the body; it strengthens the muscles, creates space and lubricates the joints and thereby helping the practitioner attain relief from musculoskeletal disorders like neck pain, low back pain, shoulder stiffness, arthritis of the joints. It helps to keep the musculo-skeletal system healthy. When practiced with understanding, one can even 'access' the internal organs of the body such as heart, liver, pancreas, lungs, intestines and thereby aid in keeping the various physiological systems of the body also healthy. The greatest impact of these asana-s are on the mind whereby they make the mind calm and quiet facilitating emotional control and intellectual clarity.

The best way to understand how the asana-s work and facilitate human existence is to practice them. No amount of reading or writing can compare with your personal experiences with the practice of asana-s.

***“There is no better way to become friends  
than to laugh together.”***

***- The Mother,***

***from ‘Seeds of Light’,  
published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.***



# PRANAYAMA

*Om Prakash Tiwari*

Pranayama forms the fourth step in Maharshi Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. Though the word Prana and Apana occurred earliest in Rigveda but the discipline of prana and its technical aspect during breathing were first referred in PYS II-49: Tasmin sati swasa praswasa yor gati vischedah pranayama.

The basic quest of Patanjali is, Chitta vrutti nirodha: PYS I-2 and to achieve the Goal he has advised practice of Ashtanga Yoga. Therefore, he has advised very strongly the practice of pranayama. The word Pranayama consists of two words - Prana (vital force) and Ayam (to pause, to hold or to extend). It was very well recognized by our rishis that the breathing has something to do deeply with the mind. For them there was no problem in the mind. Mind itself is abnormal. Therefore, in all our Indian philosophies the emphasis is given either to channelize the mind or go Beyond the mind. Our Mind and breathing is so closely related that one affects the other. If our pranic flow becomes active the mind becomes hyper and vice versa. Therefore, to achieve the steady condition of chitta, pranayama was advocated. The practice of Pranayama trains us to channelize the breathing in different ways. Therefore the different variety of pranayama has been developed. It is said in Hatha pradipika, ch 2 verse. One that it must be done under the guidance of perfect teacher. Practice of Pranayama removes the obstacle which stand in the way of having clear perception of that reality where person attains swarup or kaivalya. It is the progressive approach by disciplining ones breath by prolonging and bringing pause in the process of breathing. According to patanjali it could be practiced in four ways.

1. Pause after breathing inside
2. Pause after breathing outside
3. Puring process of inhalation in between
4. During exhalation. It brings the wonderful change in at the level of your awareness and purifies the chitta.

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Later on during evolution of pranayama, 3rd century AD to 12th AD when Hatha Yoga became popular pranayama was developed into eight variety. They are, Surya Bhedan, Ujjai, Shitkari, Shitali, Bhastrika, Brahmari, Murcha, Plavani. The concept "until you have healthy body you cannot have healthy mind" was brought in. and we find these ideas in Hatha Pradipika. The verses 1-2 to 66,68,74 ,75 in chapter 2 establish the need of pranayama from spiritual point of view but further the verses 50,52,53,55,58 ,65 in chapter 2 clearly establish that practice of pranayama creates the balance in vata pitta and kapha. Hence from evolution point of view pranayama has been a gauge of spiritual growth and also giving in positive health.

*Swami Kuvalyananda has added new dimension by bringing modern concept of rational explanation based on scientific experiment. So he explained the mechanism of respiration and interpretation of CO2 value in Pranayama as against the misconception that. practice of Pranayama gives more oxygen during the practice of Pranayama. He has beautifully explained the scientific basis of the eight variety of Pranayama.*

***"Each victory gained over oneself means new strength to gain more victories."***

***- Shri Aurobindo,***

***from 'Light. Endless Light',  
published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.***

# PRATYAHARA

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Pratyahara is the fifth limb of the astanga Yoga of Patanjali. The 8 limbs of Yoga are divided into bahiranga and antaranga Yoga. The first five limbs namely yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and pratyahara are called bahiranga leading to dharana, dhyana and samadhi. These are the components of antaranga Yoga which are more internal compared to the earlier five. Thus it is the bridge leading to antaranga Yoga.

In order to understand the nature of pratyahara, we have to understand the role of earlier four limbs of Yoga. Yama and niyama prepare the practitioner morally and ethically so that the foundation of Yoga becomes deep and firm. The constant practice of these gives tremendous mental strength to the practitioner. The asanas remove the conflict between opposites at the physical, physiological, cognitional and psychological levels. When one is able to sit in a meditative posture for a long time, then one is fit to do pranayama. The control of breath brings control over the mind. The mind becomes fit for dharana i.e. concentration which is the first component of antaranga Yoga.

When the mind becomes concentrated and introvert, what happens to senses? This is answered in pratyahara which comes after pranayama and before dharana. When the mind becomes concentrated, the senses also lose their contact with outside objects and become introvert like the mind.

If the mind is not concentrated, then one has to undertake various means to conquer the senses. In order to have control over tongue one fasts, listens to devotional songs etc. to have control over ears, the fragrance of incense or the holy smoke of sacrifices give control over nose, trataka or nasagra gaze gives control over eyes, doing worship and going to pilgrimages give control over hands and feet and so on and so forth. All such things are required to have control over senses as their doors open outside. The nature has made them so. Hence they become aware only of outward objects and never become introvert. With proper and directed efforts they become internalized and then only one can progress on the spiritual path.

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Pratyahara brings natural control over senses. The senses follow the mind which has become introvert and become internalised. They behave like the bees which always follow the queen bee. Hence the control that one has on senses through pratyahara is called the highest control as it does not require any extra efforts towards this.

*“A smile acts upon difficulties as the Sun upon the clouds -  
it disperses them.”*

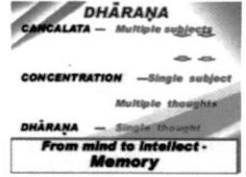
*- The Mother,*

*from ‘Seeds of Light’,  
published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.*

# DHARANA

*Dr. H R Nagendra*

The second phase of Ashtanga yoga i.e., Antaranga yoga deals with direct control over the mind. The systematic way to gain control over the mind directly is explained here. The spiritual concentration is mainly based on the denial of the body idea 'I am not this body, mind and senses.' 'I do not belong to this perishable



universe.' I am an ever free and perfect spiritual being. With such ideas one should concentrate on inner being. At concentration level there will be single subject and multiple thoughts. Then it is brought to one subject with single thought and this stage is called dharana.

Patanjali defines dharana as देशबन्धः चित्तस्य

धारणा which is binding the mind on single thought. Mind holds on to some object, either in the body or outside the body, and keeps itself in that state. Keeping a burning candle at eye level and concentrating by focusing on the single thought of the tip of the wick of the candle is good example for dharana. Dharana comes between pratyahara and dhyana among the eight limbs of yoga prescribed by Patanjali. In Kathopanishat concentration is explained by Yama the Lord of Death to Nachiketa as तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रिय धारणाम्। अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययों।। The firm control of the senses and the mind is the yoga of concentration. One must be ever watchful for, this yoga is difficult to acquire and easy to lose. Lord Krishna explain dharana in Bhagavadgita as समं काय शिरोऽग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः। संप्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन्।। (६-१३) Let him hold the body, head and neck erect and still, gazing at the tip of his nose, without looking around. Initially there were several subjects with many thoughts floating in the mind. With concentration it is reduced to one subject and to a single thought. This stage is called dharana.

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Through the process of dharana we reach a point where there is total cessation of movement, where everything just stops, where there is no activity. Dharana is used as a power tool for cleansing of mind to bring about cittashuddhi. The perfection of dharana leads to meditation or Dhyana the



next stage in Ashtanga yoga. If dharana is focusing then dhyana is defocusing. Dhyana is an effortless dharana. Sage Patanjali defines dhyana as तत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम्। An unbroken flow of knowledge in particular object is called dhyana. Krishna says in Bhagavadgita as शनैः शनैरुपरमेत् बुध्या धृति गृहीतया आत्म संस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत्॥ (६-२५) With his intellect set in firmness, let him attain quietude; with the mind fixed on the self, let him not think of anything. The mind tries to think of one object, to hold itself to one particular spot, as the top of the head, the heart etc., and if the mind succeeds in receiving the sensations only through that part of the body, and through no other part, that would be dharana and when the mind succeeds in keeping itself in that state for sometime, it is called dhyana. In samadhipada (Sutra 14) of Patanjali the process of meditation is explained. सत्तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्काराऽऽसेवितो दृढभूमिः॥ (२-१४) That practice becomes firmly grounded which is continued for a long time with reverence and without interruption.



There are different obstacles in the path of Dharana like, visions, kundalini awakening, sensuality, encountering illness, disillusionment, oversensitivity, adopting too many practices, excessive socializing, irregularity in lifestyle and practice, imbalanced diet, tension, etc. To overcome the obstacles one should always be happy at the happiness of others. Move with sympathy and compassion at the pain and suffering of others. Praise the goodness and virtues in others when we see them. The more the faith we have greater the energy and the encouragement we get in our endeavor. The practices of dharana are designed to purify the nadis and chakras of the psychic body through techniques of concentration and visualization.

# DHYANA

## - Practical tips for beginners

*R. S. Bhogal*

### **Abstract**

The classical approach to Dhyana i.e yoga meditation has been dealt with in the context of Patanjala Yoga Sutra, so as to understand its metaphysical perspectives, as well as, general instructions, to be followed by the aspirants of Dhyana are also discussed. Finally, a model meditation technique has been presented for the beginners in Yoga meditation.

Key words: Dhyana i.e Yoga Meditation, metaphysical perspectives, cognitive-behavioral model of relaxation, therapeutic features, Holistic Meditation.

### **Introduction**

Yoga Meditation (i. e. Dhyana) is much more than the term Meditation, in that the former is non-intentional and transcendental, unlike the latter. Dhyana, the seventh limb in Pantanjali's Ashtanga Yoga, has been defined as, "A continuous and unbroken flow of consciousness (P.Y.S: III: 2). Dhyana is preceded by Dharana which is defined (P.Y.S. III: 1) as "Attention localized within or without the body." However, Karambelkar(1987), Shastri (1960) and some other authorities in Yoga hold that in Dharana the attention should necessarily be glued to some space within the body itself, and not outside the body. According to Patanjala Yoga Sutra, Dharana is preceded by samapattis that are of four types viz. Vitarka, Nirvitarka, Savicara and Nirvicara. Our consciousness is increasingly, getting 'purified' as we transcend these samapattis one by one. In Dhyana, though consciousness is purified to quite an extent, there remains the distinction amongst dhyeta (mediators) Dhyana (meditation) and Dhyeya (object of meditation). In Samadhi, however (P.Y.S.III: 3), only the meaning of the object shines forth. By virtue of getting influenced fully by the object of meditation, the consciousness appears to be akin to a void-like state.

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## General Instructions for the process of Yoga

### Meditation i.e. Dhyana

Any one aspiring for meditative experiences can keep the following points in mind, while meditating with advantage:

1. Your mental set should be relaxed, so as to welcome the memories, thoughts, emotions and feelings as they simply occur to you, without reacting to them in any way. A relaxed yet stable posture, sitting or supine should be assumed and maintained during the entire session. Shiva Samhita (V: 71, 72) mentions supine posture for Dhyana.
2. Mental set should have a sense of purpose, yet one should-not-put-any-stake mentally in case meditation does not happen at all.
3. Suspend your trying stance and just be in an accepting mode mentally. If it helps, just feel the entire expanse around or feel an ocean around. Instead of resorting to Imagery and imagination just “feel & feel an abstract way”, with minimal of brain work.
4. Let the mind wander freely for a while, yet keep your “feeling mode” intact.
5. Just watch all trouble producing thoughts, memories and emotions with a neutral stance with a stance that nothing is bad and nothing is good. If you continue to feel all nagging thoughts, emotions and feelings, though this “neutral state of attention”, you will become non-reactive gradually, at least to some extent, to all happenings within and without.
6. Mean-while just go on watching as to how do you feel within, in general!
7. This will train your attention to accept even the relaxation as it comes, without naming or defining it.
8. Thus, a yogic concentration or some ‘abstract comprehension’ of your state of being may dawn upon you.
9. If you feel any discomfiture, apprehension or uneasiness or such not-so-desirable things happening to you, then simply allow some time to pass by, while remaining neutral internally, as far as easily possible for you.
10. If you remain ‘neutral’ for a while as mentioned in step 9, an Absolute / Transcendental joy might happen. You may allow your mind to wander for a while yet bring it slowly back to the neutral state of attention. You are likely to welcome meditation as it may occur and stay, while you



continue to keep “neutral yet accepting stance” within.

Lachnitt and Bhogal (2006) have proposed a meditative technique viz. Holistic Meditation, which can, initially, be administered in a guided manner. Slowly, the meditator is then weaned away from guided instructions, in due course of time, and can then meditate independently, without guided instructions.

### **Holistic Meditation (A guided Meditative Technique)**

1. Keep your glance on the floor, approximately 5-7 feet straight in front of you, with eyes partially open and blinking reflexes continuing as usual. Eyes may close all by their own accord, after a while.
2. Continue to feel the relaxation that already prevails in your eyes until the same gets spread on the whole body naturally, in a gradual manner.
3. At this stage your body may give you different signals such as discomfort, uneasiness, aches, pains and so on. Please continue to experience the same with a non-reactive stance.
4. If you feel the stage – 3 above as unbearable. If you feel it is a bit too much for you to continue with the same, you may then come to lying supine posture any time.
5. In supine posture now, continue to experience whatever may be happening within the entire body. Your mental stance should, however, remain non-anticipatory, non-judgmental and non-reactive, throughout.
6. Continue to be aware of all the parts of your body by letting a “Parallel Vigilance” continued throughout the body.
7. You may deepen further the whole body – awareness with the help of such techniques as breathing awareness, sensations within the nose and so on.
8. Now continue to remain with the whole body awareness by using “both the legs & both the arms” technology.
9. As you continue with the whole body awareness, a soothing effect (or a kind of comfort) would ensue.
10. Simply go on watching the soothing effect (or comfort or whatever you name it) until the same becomes maximally deep and ecstatic. Now, continue to maintain the same as much as possible and as far as possible, easily.
11. In case of any kind of interference such as thoughts, memories

occurring during this stage just use "Suspend the process & let some time pass by" technology. The ecstatic experience would come back. Now you may come to sitting posture any time and 'experience the meditation' for two more minutes before allowing your eyes to get open.

*Notes:*

Patanjali is the name of the sage while Patanjala means "of Patanjali" Just like Daashrath means "of Dasrath".

Samapatti means "a complete merging with the background, just as when a crystall is kept on a background, it would completely be camouflaged with the background." The same way the meditator should be completely one with the object of Dhyana. This is possible when the meditator overcomes four stages viz. Vitarka meaning doubtful attitude towards the need of meditation; Nirvitarka means overcoming this stage; Savicara means one is yet to overcome thought processes during the process of Meditation; Nirvicara means overcoming this stage. Once all these Samapattis are transcended then only one enters the stage of Dharana. when one gets established in Dharana, one can enter into Dhyana, whereby a pure comprehension of the object of Dhyana is continued as a stream of uninterrupted awareness about the real nature of the object of Dhyana. However, there remains the distinct discrimination of the object of Dhyana, the meditator and the process of Dhyana. Only in Samadhi, the pure meaning of the object of Dhyana shines forth, along with a void-like state being experienced at the same time.

# SAMADHI

*Dr. Ishwar V Basavaraddi*

Mainly two things have led to the origin of Yoga – one is suffering and another is curiosity. The aim of Yoga is get freedom from all kinds of sufferings, the root cause of which is “अविद्या”, i.e., Ignorance. “**Samadhi**” is the means of this freedom. The science of yoga is thousands of years old. The great Rishis and seers, with the help of meditation techniques, dived deep into the inner realms of their consciousness and experienced directly the wisdom of intuitive knowledge, which is also called yoga “**Pratyaksha**”. This can be experienced in the final stage of ‘Samadhi’. **Patanjali**, a great Yoga Rishi, who systematised and organised the study and teachings of yoga has advocated Ashtanga yoga, in which Samadhi is the last, but the most important limb. Therefore Rishi Yoga Vyasa, the traditional commentator on Patanjali yoga sutras rightly said that Yoga is Samadhi. That shows the importance of Samadhi in yoga Sadhana.

There are several stages of Samadhi as marked by Rishi Patanjali. Broadly, it has been divided into two; **Samprajnata** and **Asamprajnata**. From another point of view, the same has been termed as ‘**Sabija**’ and ‘**Nirbija**’ - having a potentiality of germination and having been incapacitated of the power of germination respectively.

Asamprajnata or Nirbija has been left undivided in itself, whereas, Samprajnata or Sabija envisages six kinds or layers of Samadhi. These are **Savitarka**, **Nirvitarka**, **Savichara**, **Nirvichara**, **Anandanugata** and **Asmitanugata**. Savitarka is that stage of Samadhi in which, the practitioner of yoga remains in the state of **Dhyana** and is yet aware of the object of his Samadhi, along with the non-distinction of the object from the ‘word’ which represents it and its knowledge (PYS I/42).

**Nirvitarka Samadhi** is the state of Samadhi, in which due to the elimination of factor of memory, only the object of meditation remains in the awareness of the practitioner. (PYS I/43).

**Savitarka and Nirvitarka** states of Samadhi are concerned with tangible objects, where as **Savichara** and **Nirvichara** states of Samadhi are related to intangible objects e.g. for example (such as) smell, taste,

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form, touch and sound in relationship to the earth, water, fire, air and space respectively. According to Sankhya – Yoga cosmology, it is out of these subtle sensations that the elements of earth, water, etc, respectively are produced rather than what is converse of it.

**Anandanugata and Asmitanugata** states of Samadhi are those, which are accompanied by the sense of bliss and I-ness respectively. The bliss concerned is similar to the sense of satisfaction one gets after deep sleep with the significant difference that while this sense of satisfaction is due to immersion in the ignorance brought in on account of dominance of **Tamas** (darkness), the bliss of Samadhi is the result of complete purification of the 'Chitta' (mind-stuff) of **Tamas and Rajas Gunas** and the presence only **Sattva Guna**, which is the nature of illumination and bliss, as admitted by Sankhya and Yoga systems. The sense of I-ness, accompanying **Asmitanugata Samadhi**, has its source in the **Ahankara**, which is only next to **Mahat**, the first product of **Prakriti**, according to Sankhya philosophy. This state of Samadhi is quite similar to **Kaivalya**, the state of complete emancipation from the clutches of **Prakriti**. The final stage of Samadhi is called **Nirbija**, because it results in the experience and knowledge of distinctness of the **Purusha** from **Prakriti**, which permanently ceases the necessity of rebirth, which is the goal of yoga. The engrossment of the individual in **Prakriti** and her products is the cause of birth and rebirth in the world, which leads to suffering (**Tapatraya**).

Yoga is a beautiful experience in one's life. Anybody can practice all the limbs of Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali ranging from **Yamas to Samadhi**. They are not one after another, but are seamless and harmoniously integrated. Every stage of Samadhi will make a **Sadhaka** (aspirant) perfect in the practices of all limbs of Ashtanga yoga.

The human psyche epitomizes the entire creative process of the world, but it is natural for it to unfold from within it the entire hierarchy of the Cosmos as different from the external Cosmos. **Savitarka** and **Savichara** states of Samadhi are related to tangible and intangible states of physical world, respectively, comprising the senses of touch, etc on the one hand and subtle and gross forms of matter on the other hand. **Anandanugata** and **Asmitanugata** states of Samadhi are related to the states of pure Sattva and its source, **Ahankara**. **Asamnprajnata** or **Nirbija** state of Samadhi represents that stage in the process of creation, where **Prakriti** is on the verge of coming in contact with the **Purusha** and therefore **Purusha** is capable of being realized as and when

he climbs the higher states of Samadhi. By becoming perfect in each stage of Ashtanga Yoga, the aspirant can perfect in **Ahimsa, Satya, or Brahmacharya or Asanas** and he thus crosses Samprajnata Samadhi.

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***"An aimless life is always a miserable life."***

***- The Mother,***

***from 'Seeds of Light',***

***published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.***

# INSIGHTS IN THE PRACTICE OF THE EIGHT LIMBS OF YOGA

*B.K.S.Iyengar*

Everybody knows that yoga is one and it is composed by eight petals that have to be practised in order to bring transformation in the consciousness. The problem begins when the eight anga-s are considered as being each one independent from the others. The realisation of the true yogic value depends upon the depth of the practice of the eight limbs when they are not practised as separate entities, but practised as they are interrelated, intermingled and interwoven. It demands that while practising one of the anga-s, the other anga-s have to be implied in the practice. If one petal is explicit, others are implicit, and this opens the gates for transformation in the practitioner.

For a better understanding of the eight limbs of yoga, we can classify the eight petals in three categories:

1) The art of living, covering yama and niyama as these two wings are mandatory to grow in the spiritual path.

2) Yoga has two samyama-s, one is bahya (external) and the other is antara (internal). The bahya samyama is the perceptive way, covering asana, pranayama and pratyahara, where the perception of the external coverings of the soul (body, organs of action, senses of perception, external mind) is the main instrument. These are made to invert their attention and actions towards the consciousness and the self.

3) The other samyama, namely dharana, dhyana and samadhi, wherein the internal garments of the soul (the inner mind, intelligence, ahamkara and intelligence, which are the conceptual instruments) are made to act and move towards the self in order to realise the soul without the help or without the direct contact of the external garments (body, organs of action, senses of perception and the external mind)

One thing should be very clear at this point: there is no chance of transformation in the conceptual way if we go away from the perceptive way. The conceptual way may seem higher, more advanced, but there is no valid conception without the ground, the base of perception.

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This can be explained in other words. In the yogic path, there are three types of agni:

- 1) darsana agni, the visual fire, visual intelligence, through the eyes,
- 2) jnana agni, the fire of knowledge,
- 3) atma agni, fire of atman, intuitive knowledge coming from the soul.

Without darsana agni it is difficult to reach jnana agni and atma agni. Darsana agni has the capacity to transform the conceptual knowledge into perceptive knowledge, making the objective consciousness and self into a subjective consciousness and self. Without mastery on the first samyama, transformation towards the second samyama is no doubt a great herculean task, except in rare personalities like Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Aurobindo or Mahatma Gandhi.

This shows the crucial importance of the practice of asana and pranayama, and how they have to be practised, with the presence of the three fires but under the guiding light of darsana agni, as the visual intelligence is the main tool in the perceptive way.

When the intelligence and consciousness are ripe, atman comes out from its dwelling place to welcome them, to receive them, in the way a host welcomes his guests at the threshold of his house.

This meeting will only be possible when darsana agni and atma agni meet together through the all embracing fire of yoga agni.

***“What people think, do or say is of little importance. The only thing that counts is your relation with the Divine”***

***- The Mother,***

***from ‘Seeds of Light’,***

***published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.***

# YOGA AS THERAPY

*Ramesh Bijlani*

Yoga is not a system of medicine but a discipline for spiritual growth. But since one of the important by-products of the discipline is good health, systems of medicine have used with profit certain elements of yoga. Ayurveda did it long ago; modern medicine is doing it now.

Yoga may be used as therapy because it combines a healthy lifestyle, and an attitude to life which ensures lasting mental peace. Thus yoga rectifies the two major contributors to chronic mid-life diseases characteristic of the modern civilization. By improving the lifestyle and reducing mental stress, yoga creates the right conditions for the self-healing mechanisms of the body to be at their best. The physical culture of yoga involving an increase in physical activity, a healthier diet, better sleeping habits, abstaining from harmful practices such as smoking and drinking, and an attitude which promotes positive thinking, all contribute to recovery from disease.

There are many popular misconceptions about yoga therapy which need to be clarified. Yoga does not work only through physical postures (asanas) or breathing practices (pranayamas). There are no specific practices for specific diseases: the same yogic lifestyle helps recovery from a variety of diseases, and also prevents many diseases which might have developed in future. Yoga is not a substitute for, an alternative to, or an adjunct to modern scientific medicine. Yoga is a mind-body approach, is adequately supported by psychoneuroimmunology, and is an integral part of modern medicine. Yoga has added a new dimension to modern medicine. Yoga has widened the armamentarium of the physician practicing modern medicine. Therefore, the approach that is in the best interests of the patient is not an either/or approach but an integrated approach. Drug therapy or surgery might be useful to buy time for the self-healing mechanisms activated by yoga to work. On the other hand, yoga is useful in preventing recurrence (as in coronary artery disease) or in reducing the dose of medication required (as in diabetes mellitus). Finally, yoga can neither guarantee perpetual health nor can it cure all diseases. What yoga can guarantee is that, with the

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yogic attitude, even if the patient does not recover (as sometimes in cancer), he can die in peace.

Purists often question how far it is legitimate to use a system designed for spiritual growth for a mundane purpose like treating a disease. However, there is another way of looking at this question. People often need an excuse to turn to yoga, and illness is as legitimate as any other excuse. However, what the yoga therapists should try is to use the opportunity to make the patient aware of the wider implications of yoga. Any excuse is good enough to start yoga; no benefit is good enough to stop yoga. Yoga is a full-time life-long commitment which makes life healthier, happier, and more meaningful.

*“O Lord, how I would be before Thee always like a page perfectly blank, so that Thy will may be inscribed in me without any difficulty or mixture”*

*- The Mother,*

*from ‘Seeds of Light’,  
published by Shri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.*