

Satyam Speaks Dharana



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satyam Speaks
Dharana

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

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Dharana



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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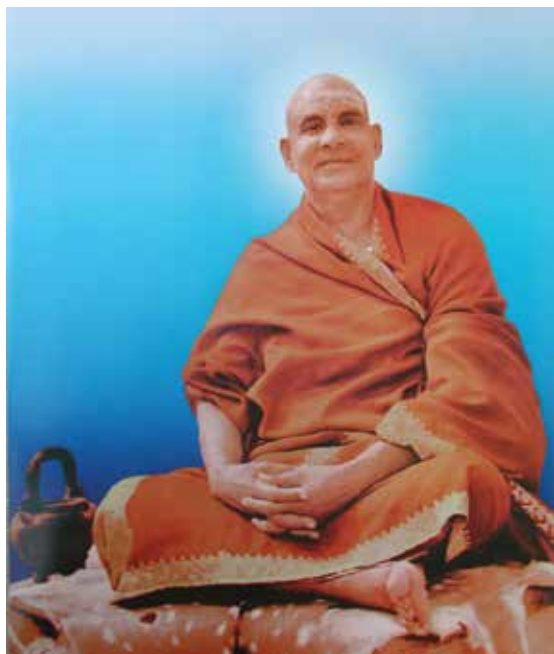
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

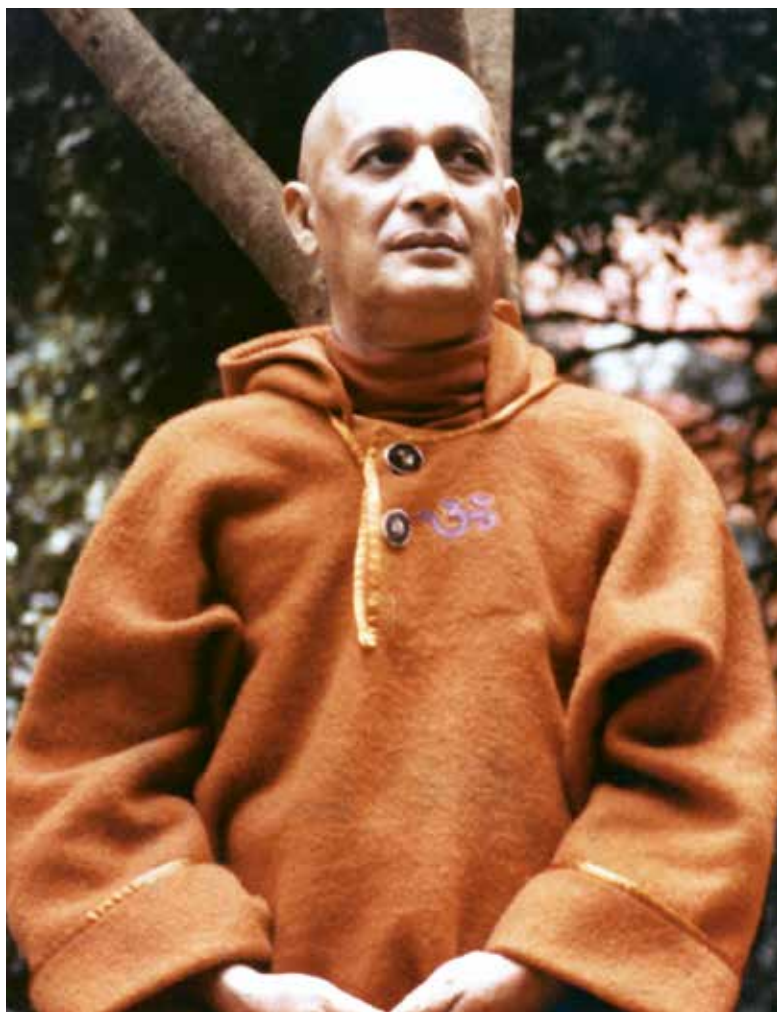
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Preface

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati dedicated twenty years of his life to the propagation of yoga, and thus fulfilled the mandate given by his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 'to spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. He travelled around the globe many times bringing the message of yoga to people of all walks of life, regardless of caste or creed. Master of yoga vidya and creator of the Yoga Chakra, he adapted his knowledge and understanding of yoga to the needs and abilities of people. Swami Satyananda simplified valuable techniques and complex processes by giving systematic and clearly defined sequences. Everyone could understand and progress following the theoretical explanation and practical instructions. Everyone was able to benefit from yoga.

Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. For some titles, more information is provided of specific conditions or applications, which are for the information of the aspirant only and not for practice. These have been included to show the depth of understanding and experience Sri Swami Satyananda had of yoga vidya.



Satyam Speaks Series is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere aspirants to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place.

Learn from an accomplished yoga master, not from a book. This series is a knowledge guide and a yoga master is a practical guide.

1

Introducing Dharana



Each of us at one time or another has looked at the sky and stars at night and felt an ineffable awe at the immensity of everything. Some feel an inexpressible joy while others feel a sense of complete insignificance compared to this infinite colossus called the cosmos. If each and every one of us also

looked inwards to the unfathomable depths of the internal cosmos of the mind, this inner universe is just as awesome, breathtaking, stupendous and exciting as its outer equivalent; in fact, it is more so. It is also infinite in extent. It is limitless. It is by knowing the nature of the inner cosmos that one ceases to feel totally dwarfed by the outer cosmos. This is the whole reason for meditational practices.

In Sanskrit the material universe around us is called the *mahakasha*. The word *maha* means 'great', and *akasha* means 'space' or 'ether'. Therefore, mahakasha literally means 'the great space' or 'ether'. It is the exploration of the mahakasha, the external universe, that almost everyone has been totally concerned with in the past and today. This applies to the farmer, the engineer, the sailor and the astronaut. They are all exploring the potential of the material cosmos in their own way. It is a sad thing, yet nevertheless a fact, that very few people make any attempt to explore the inner cosmos. They don't even know of its existence. Man continues to go further and further into outer space but neglects the infinite within himself. Almost everyone is so engrossed in looking outwards that they forget to look inwards.

However, there is one simple thing that everyone in this world should know: 'Man is more than he appears to be'. In every human being there is a state of consciousness, a dimension of personality which is tenable, powerful, creative and beyond pain. We have lived in the body, and we continue to live in the body – that is the tragedy of our life. We have never been out of the body. We don't know if there is anything that is beyond the body or anything that controls the body. We have a mind and we don't know it. We have a cobra in our pocket; we have a bomb ready to explode; we have the treasures of the three worlds underneath us, and we don't know it.

This is not to be taken in the religious sense, but it is something very intimate. You know the difference between an illiterate man and an educated man. An educated man is capable of handling certain things in society, whereas an

illiterate man is not. Both are human beings. Both have brains, jnanendriyas, and minds, but one is capable and the other is incapable. This is because one has undergone incessant training and the other has not. On account of training, the *buddhi* or intellect of the educated man is able to handle the affairs of his life in a much better way than the illiterate man.

In the same manner, thousands, all over the world, are in the grip of suffering; and everyone, without any exception, is a victim of what is called the 'pains of life'. It is not because the world is full of pain – it is man's incapacity to transcend the pain and apprehend the pleasure of life.

Yoga is a very scientific system by which man is able to transform his state of consciousness. The same mind which suffers from pain is also capable of experiencing pleasure. Happiness and misery are both expressions of the human mind in different states. So, instead of fighting with pain, instead of kicking the shadow, why not bring in the light? The mind of man is total and complete, and it is the most mysterious personality of all. Unless you are able to handle the mind, you can never handle the affairs of life. If you can't handle life, you can't handle God – it is impossible no matter what you think or who you worship. Knowledge of the mind and the harnessing of the potentialities of the mind are necessary if we are to be successful in life. This mind is passion and greed, neurosis and suicide, insomnia and cancer, but this same mind is also samadhi.

Sage Patanjali's treatise on raja yoga, the *Yoga Sutras*, codified the first definitive, unified and comprehensive system of yoga. He divided the path of raja yoga into eight stages, starting from the basic rules of character change in the individual and ending with the final stage of samadhi, which is also being divided into four stages, culminating in self-realization. The first five stages are the preparatory practices and stages six to eight are the higher stages. It is divided into two divisions, the external yoga, *bahiranga yoga*, and the internal yoga, *antaranga yoga*.

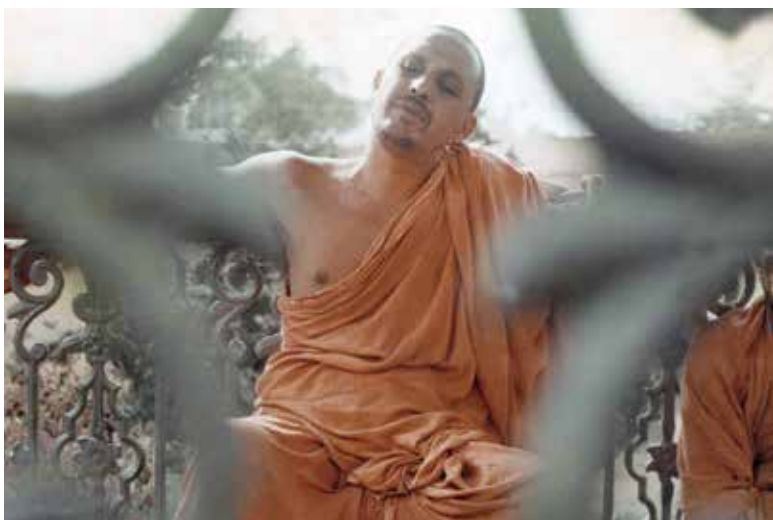
Dharana etymologically means 'to hold fast', from the root *dhr*. Patanjali's definition has been translated in several ways in the *Yoga Sutras*: Vibhooti Pada (3:1):

Concentration (dharana) is binding the mind to one place.

It has been interpreted as 'fixation of the mind on a single point'. This is literally correct. It has also been rendered as 'holding the mind within a centre of spiritual consciousness in the body or out of it, or fixing it on some divine form, either within or without the body'. Such steadiness of mind in order to be meaningful has to have the aim of comprehending the object.

Dharana means concentration of mind. It is the step before meditation and is concerned with fixing awareness on one object to the exclusion of all others. If the state of pratyahara has been achieved, then all outer disturbances should have been eliminated, yet the mind is still full of inner chatter in the form of memories of the past and projections of the future. The mind thinks of and tries to relive past pleasant experiences, is obsessed by unpleasant experiences, or is planning or fearing the future.

Dharana is one of the stages leading to *dhyana*, meditation. It is a practice of pictorial conception. For the mind there are three bases: the gross base, the base of the idea and the occult base. When you concentrate on your guru, that is the gross basis. When you concentrate on any object like Christ, a cross, a rose, that is a concrete basis because you can see it. The second type of base is the basis of an idea; you think of eternity, infinity, bliss, and develop that as a base. Third, you concentrate your mind on the unseen, or on unheard sounds, or you fix your mind on some of the occult centres of the body or on some of the forms you cannot see. This is called the occult base. When you concentrate on any of these symbols that is called dharana.



Meditation begins with relaxation

In the technique of meditation and in the technique of yoga it is believed that when the consciousness is detached from the conscious, from the subconscious and also from the unconscious and when the awareness functions independently of these three dimensions of consciousness, relaxation takes place and meditation begins. Meditation can never begin before relaxation and the greatest thing and most difficult is relaxation. You may think that meditation is difficult, but it is not. Meditation is accomplished spontaneously. Meditation comes to you and it does not take time. In order to develop meditation, it is necessary that the whole process of relaxation has been gone through. But this relaxation is not the relaxation where you lie down quietly, close your eyes and feel that you are becoming lighter and happier and so on, this is a method of auto-suggestion, this is the hypnotic method.

It is not enough to be able to visualize your subconscious mind. Yoga teaches, that it is a science, and you should be able to see your conscious mind, you should be able to see your subconscious mind, and you should be able to see your

unconscious mind, which is very difficult. The moment the experience of the perception of the unconscious personality takes place, complete relaxation comes to man. Therefore, you will find that there are moments in an individual's life when he becomes aware of the unconscious during deep sleep and after that he feels that he was completely relaxed.

Negation and expansion

Meditation has got everything to do with consciousness, the consciousness that is empirical and the consciousness that is internal, the consciousness that perceives the world and the consciousness that is unable to perceive the world. This consciousness in man is the subject of meditation.

Classically and scientifically meditation is classified into two parts. When the withdrawal of consciousness takes place, when the negation of consciousness has taken place, then starts what is called expansion of consciousness. So the whole thing is divided into two, negation and expansion. In the process of negation, you have different techniques which withdraw or which calm down the tensions created by the ocular system, the auditory system, the nervous system and tensions created by the internal functional deficiencies. All these systems are affected during the practice of relaxation. Some of the most important techniques of yoga are practices of relaxation.

When we practise meditation or when we start the practice of relaxation, first of all we must have a method, we must have a technique. Every technique is not useful for everybody, but at the same time there are practices which can be taken up without any difficulty, without any risk.

Conception of consciousness

Dharana means conception of consciousness in a particular way. You see your consciousness, you see your awareness but it is internal perception. It may be a round stone, it may be a triangle, it may be a flower, it may be anything but you should be able to see it. That which you see inside is not imagination;

it is a form of your consciousness. If you see a flower inside, you see your own consciousness in the pattern of a flower. If you see a triangle, you do not see a triangle as in imagination. It is your consciousness that you perceive in the form of a triangle and the triangle which you see inside is made up of your consciousness – your consciousness through which you perceive the world, your consciousness through which you are able to understand me. It is the same consciousness through which I am able to explain something about yoga to you, and it is the same consciousness through which you know right and wrong. It is the same consciousness through which your intelligence or intellect functions.

It is the same consciousness which manifests in day-to-day life in the form of the memory principle and the same consciousness through which you understand hatred and through which you understand love. It is the same consciousness which functions in the world and is not imagination and which is not a hypothesis but which is a force, which is awareness or an instrument of knowledge, a medium of understanding, or the substratum of perception. It is that consciousness that is withdrawn from the objects, which is withdrawn from intellectual knowledge, which is withdrawn from experiences and memory of the past and which is withdrawn from right knowledge and wrong opinions. When this consciousness has been disassociated from different bases of perception but when at the same time it becomes clear to you in the form of a triangle, a flower, a stone, in the form of light, or in the form of an animal, or whatever, then it means that you are seeing your own consciousness and this is the fundamental secret of yoga.

To give you an example, if the mind is completely broken, say that it is the mind of a businessman, who has millions of dollars' worth of property, business and industry and something happens and he loses it all. Now, ask him to meditate. It is impossible for him, and if he does it there will be a great deal of damage to his brain. In electro-physiology the current of consciousness works on an intermediate plane.

There is the external and the internal, but there is also an intermediate plane where the consciousness gets stuck, it does not move and it goes thuck, thuck, thuck, etc. That is the state that has to be eliminated through yoga. I am talking to you in terms of time so that you can understand it better. It happens in your life, it may be happening also to most of you. If there is dissipation, if there is some great event in life, some great accident in life, it will be impossible for your physiological condition to attain that intermediate point, and this has been demonstrated experimentally already.

If your consciousness can stay in the intermediate point, for one minute, it is called dharana or visualization in yoga. If you can stay for three minutes it is called meditation or dhyan. If it can stay for five minutes in that intermediate plane, it is called samadhi or cosmic consciousness. That particular state has to be achieved.

Pure visualization

Dharana is the most common type of meditational practice, which is done by millions of people all over the world and is a most important part of all religious systems. Generally known as concentration, this practice is done in many different ways. The object to be visualized can be seen to be located in any of many different centres throughout the body, such as chidakasha, hridayakasha, daharakasha or in any of the chakras, or as a full sized form outside of and in front of the body. Initially the meditator tries to induce pratyahara. He may achieve this by exhausting his physical body, repeating the same movement again and again. He may concentrate on one sense such as vision and gaze at an object continuously, or if it is auditory, a sound. He may chant or repeat prayers over and over again, aloud or silently. In all cases awareness is focused completely on the movement, object or sound.

After pratyahara the meditator tries to make his mind one-pointed by fixing it to an internal image of a symbol, a divine being or a thought, prayer or a particular feeling. This is dharana.

Isolating the mind

You cannot practise concentration directly. Concentration is the outcome of an isolated state of mind. You concentrate on a candle flame, on a symbol, on Christ or you concentrate on me or your guru. The mind runs out. You bring it back again, again it goes away, again you are pulling it. Oh, this is bad wrestling! This indicates that you have not gone through the process of total isolation.

If you did not go through the primary school or middle school and jumped into high school, what would happen? You would fail in one of the subjects. Don't worry about concentration, it will come by itself. Don't worry about sleep, when you are tired it will come. When the body is tired you sleep automatically, spontaneously. Does the man who is tired need sleeping pills? Work in the garden, work physically the whole day and you will see that you forget sleeping pills completely.

So, you must practise pratyahara first, when pratyahara is achieved you start concentration. You are trying to focus your mind on one object, it can be external and internal. Where concentration ends and meditation begins, nobody can tell you. Concentration and meditation are almost a continuity. Concentration, meditation and samadhi, these are the three important faculties which one must have for awakening kundalini. When you can attain a state of thoughtlessness then you are ready to begin dharana – concentration on a psychic symbol.

Concentration – departure from the hypnotic process

When you reach dharana, you depart from the hypnotic process. From the point of dharana you are expanding your consciousness; the normal awareness of the object is expanded. This is called expansion of mind. Dharana is concentration, fixing the mind on an object and holding the awareness on that object for a particular period of time; so much so that the mind which has an idea transforms itself into the form. The idea is converted into a form, it is given a form.

Supposing the form upon which you are trying to concentrate is your guru, you are concentrating on that form. Who is concentrating and what is that? That is an idea which is otherwise formless and it assumes a form. When you visualize your guru or the symbol inside you, the idea has assumed a shape. After some time, this idea that has assumed a shape has the power, the ability to come out of the enfoldment of the body. This idea initially seems to be of psychological stuff, a thought or an emotion, but when you give it a shape of a guru, an object or a symbol, then it gains momentum. When it gains momentum it is converted into an energy substance; it becomes energy and is no longer psychological stuff or an idea. This energy can be transmitted, you can link yourself to the person upon whom you are meditating.

This is the capacity which one develops by the practice of dharana: holding the awareness and experience of an object for some time. If you are trying to see the rose in the mind, you must try to do so as clearly as possible. Well, it should be a living experience which is maintained for a period of time. Dharana means maintaining a concept or type of idea.

The mind maintains a concept and what is that, a rose. Rose is an idea. An idea is fluid, it has no form and you cannot see it. You gradually condense the idea, it has an outline. Mind becomes subtler and converts itself into energy patterns and then you will see the rose. The same thing happens in a dream; you see a rose, an animal, a train, a motor car. In dreams you see so many objects, many times black and white, at times in Technicolor. It has, of course, only one dimension because to experience an object in three dimensions is very difficult and if you are able to do so, you are the master of your mind.

From knowledge to experience

We human beings, particularly of this century, are intellectuals. Even the yoga we practise is intellectual yoga. I'll give you an example, so you can confirm this for yourself. Have

you eaten chocolate? Of course, everybody has, and some eat it every day. Now, sit quietly and try to experience the taste of the last chocolate you ate. Can you enjoy the taste of a chocolate without a chocolate? No, it is not possible. You know how sweet it was and how delicious it was, but you cannot experience it. That is the limitation of an intellectual mind. We have a lot of knowledge but we lack experience. If you ate a chocolate yesterday, why can't you experience its taste now?

If you go to a Zen master, he will ask you a question like this: 'Have you ever been pricked by a thorn?' You will say, 'Yes.' 'What did you feel?' You'll say, 'Pain.' 'Can you experience that pain now?' You'll say, 'I remember it but I can't feel it.' Then the master will say, 'Go and sit there and develop that experience.' If you have already had an experience in life, why can't you manifest it at another place and at another time? By the practice of yoga, you should break those limitations and be transported to the terrain of experience. What you refer to as visualization, I call an experience. The Sanskrit word for experience is *anubhava* which literally means 'to be'. If you want to visualize a rose, you have to be the rose. If you want to visualize pain, you have to be the pain. If you want to visualize the guru, you have to be the guru. So, the definition of experience is, to be that. It is not merely feeling or imagination; it is not illusion, it is a transformation of the total force of the mind. You can transform yourself into a rose, your guru, Christ or even a chocolate cake.

2

Exploring Dharana



D*harana* means concentration or one-pointedness of mind. It is the step before meditation and is concerned with fixing awareness on one object to the exclusion of all others. By the time one is ready to practise this stage all external disturbances to the mind should have been eliminated. However, the mind is still in a state of turmoil; it is still plagued by thoughts. These thoughts are not concerned with the present time, for all outside stimuli have been shut off.

They can be classified into two groups: memories of the past and projections of future events. How can we remove these activities of the mind? The method of elimination is through dharana or concentration.

We feel that when we close the eyes and withdraw the mind from the objective, mundane, sensual awareness we are escaping from reality, withdrawing ourselves from the realities of life, and thus a lot of misunderstanding has cropped up. We have come to understand that as and when we are able to withdraw our mind, our consciousness, from the outside, we are able to become more aware internally. There are many ways to turn in but when you turn inwards, what happens to you? Is it just a withdrawal of consciousness, is it just a superficial mental state, or is it an act of conversion, a transformation that is going on?

What happens to matter when it is disintegrated? What happens to matter when its components are split? What happens to matter when it has to undergo a process of fission? The same thing happens to the mind when it goes through the process of pratyahara and dharana to samadhi – it is not a state of inertness, but a state of total awareness.

Harmonizing the mind

There are many kinds of pratyahara; for example, trataka, nada yoga, japa, music, kirtan and so on. They are all meant for purifying the sense awareness and making it turn inward. Some persons can get into it with just one nada yoga practice; others may find japa easier. Sometimes you are able to hold pratyahara for some time, then you find afterwards that it does not work even if you sincerely follow the sadhana, so this problem of pratyahara becomes very difficult. If you can master the technique of pratyahara, then concentration becomes very easy. It is impossible to go on to dharana and dhyana unless the field of pratyahara is crossed.

In the practice of meditation there are two important phases – negation of consciousness and expansion of consciousness. In the first phase there is an act of negation

or withdrawal of the senses to a central point. This is the progression from *pratyahara* to *dharana*.

Yoga anatomy

It is desirable to have an idea of yoga anatomy before trying to understand what *chit* is. According to yogic anatomy, it is said that man's being consists of twenty different elements: five *karmendriyas*, organs of action, five *jnanendriyas*, sense organs, five *pranas*, the four constituents of the *antahkarana* and consciousness or spirit. The *antahkarana* is a collective name for mind, intellect, *chitta* or memory and the awareness of 'I'. Thus we find that our ancient rishis were fully aware of the unconscious and the subconscious dimensions of man.

Meditation – a state of being

In yoga, meditation cannot be taught. Meditation also cannot be practised. It is an event, a happening, a state of being and becoming. What we teach in tantra and yoga are techniques such as *pratyahara* and *dharana*, withdrawal and concentration of mind, which will, with regular practice, lead to the experience of meditation. In yoga, meditation is known as *dhyana yoga*; this is the technical word used in the yoga scriptures. The English word 'meditation' does not convey the whole import, so I will first explain the meaning of *dhyana yoga*.

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, meditation is defined as, "When the mind has been able to transcend the knowledge of smell, sound, touch, form and taste, and at the same time the consciousness is functioning around one point." This is the technical and classical definition of *dhyana*. It is not the act of concentration, when we are trying to concentrate or consolidate the dissipated energies of our mind. That is not *dhyana*, but the way to *dhyana*. There are three distinct stages in this practice. The first leads to sense withdrawal, *pratyahara*, the second to concentration, *dharana*, and the last to meditation (*dhyana*). Between these states there are no rigid barriers; they are completely spontaneous.

Once we reach pratyahara we are on the border of the internal and external worlds and our awareness fluctuates from one state to another. This is the same state that occurs just before and just after sleep, the hypnagogic and hypnopompic states respectively, when internal images and sounds are most prominent. This is the deepest state in which we can retain inner awareness and relaxation without falling asleep. To go further we need a different process to the hypnotic one. Dharana must be developed and the inner will strengthened so that one can work steadily towards the attainment of dhyana.

Objects for dharana

Dharana is one of the stages leading to dhyana. It is a practice of pictorial conception. There are many objects on which you can concentrate and the effect of each object is different. You can concentrate on a flower, flame, blue lotus, sun, moon, star, a saint, a yantra, a mandala or your guru. There are thousands of objects on which you can concentrate, but the effect is not the same.

Each and every object has a different centre of influence. Certain objects create energy in your body and certain objects create relaxation, peace of mind, *shanti*. That is why sometimes you have trouble. You say, "After I began practising concentration, I became restless. Should I stop?" People think that something wrong is going on. It's not that. You must have been concentrating on an object which was creating force and energy, and due to that you became restless. Sometimes you concentrate in the night and then you are not able to sleep the whole night because you are concentrating on a particular centre, which creates energy or force.

Therefore, all the centres of concentration are divided into two. Some give you peace of mind, one-pointedness and relaxation. After the practice, your mind is very quiet. But there are certain symbols, which make you restless because they create energy, and these centres are intended for psychic



powers. For this reason, mantra, yantra and mandala as symbols of concentration should be properly ascertained from the guru. If you concentrate on this microphone, God only knows what will happen. It is not a question of what you like. The question is what are you like? Everybody is not the same. Our natures are different, our thoughts are different, our destiny is different. We are born at different times, different places. Therefore, our signs have to be different. Just because you like me, you concentrate on me, that is not correct.

To be able to conceive an object in three dimensions you have to practise with a mandala. That is the reason why Hindus practise idol worship. We know very well that God has no form, he is not a judge. We know God is a reality, a force, a truth. It has no hands, feet, nose, eyes, head, masculinity, femininity. But still these wise people do the most unwise act, considering God in an idol, and they worship Him day in and day out. Why do they do this? It is to convert the idea into a three dimensional experience.

A dream has one dimension, hallucination has one dimension. Whenever you see an object shining through even

with the eyes closed, that is one dimensional; that is called vision, experience, *bhava*. But when you can see an object or animal or anything. with the eyes completely closed in the absence of the ego or the object and it is three dimensional, that is known as darshan. *Darshan* means to see.

Ishta devata

Concentration should be done on that concrete form which is easy to conceptualize. If one can concentrate well on the abstract mental form, well and good. A photo is required only if the mental form is difficult to conceptualize. If one finds it difficult to visualize the ishta mentally, then a photo should help. Whenever the mental image of the ishta vanishes, a photo will help to regain it. In the beginning the photo alone is helpful, but gradually one should attempt mental dharana.

One can talk to that inner form. But always remember that the mental picture should be presented in one and the same posture. Don't change it when once a particular posture has been decided. The idea is that the form one has chosen must continue as a definite posture, colour, dress, height, etc., up to the last. If any other form tries to replace that chosen one during meditation, it will only upset the inner pattern of the mind. So one has to decide once and for all as to which form he likes to meditate upon. Say, if you have decided upon the form of your ishta seated in a meditative posture, then let him meditate upon that alone. If it is difficult and strenuous, then be contented with the photo alone.

The yoga sadhaka has to feel as if the ishta is sitting in front of him in a meditative posture; this is one form of dharana. Or else let him see him as standing and blessing the sadhaka in all kindness; this is another form of dharana. If nothing of this sort is possible, then trataka on the photo will have to be practised at first in order to collect the mental energies. When this process is complete, then only should he go in for dharana or mental visualization. Ultimately it is the mental picture which will pave the way for dhyana.

Visualization

This technique is related to raja yoga, and in particular to the sixth step which is known as dharana, visualization or pictorial conception. If you want to have a living visual experience, you should firstly try to block the sensory channels and isolate your brain. The senses are constantly feeding the brain with impressions twenty-four hours a day all throughout life, and unless you can disconnect the brain from the sensory impulses, you will only have a feeling of the image and not see the image itself. If you try to see your image in a dirty or dusty mirror, you can have an idea of your image, but you will not get a clear reflection. Therefore, certain practices of yoga that lead to perfect pratyahara must be practised before you try to develop dharana.

Most people have trouble maintaining a clear image of their symbol. Either they cannot visualize it or the image tends to fade away. Do not become frustrated, this is merely an indication of the state of your mind. It is difficult to visualize inner images with a disturbed mind; you will be able to think about it but not see it. As your mind becomes calmer, you will find it progressively easier to visualize your symbol. When your mind is silent, then you will be able to maintain a fixed inner vision of your psychic symbol. This leads directly to dharana and dhyana, but time is required. Do not expect this to arise overnight. Regular practice for many months and years is necessary.

When most of the tensions have been removed from the mind, then it should be possible to hold one image in the mind. This is called dharana where you visualize one symbol to the exclusion of all others. This is a more advanced stage of yoga nidra and leads to dhyana.

Chidakasha dharana

Chidakasha literally means the 'space of knowledge'. It is a psychic space where all psychic events are viewed. In Sanskrit the inner cosmos is called the chidakasha; the word *chit* means 'consciousness'. Therefore, the literal translation of the word

chidakasha is 'the space of consciousness'. This space or sphere within, where the capacity of sense perception is internalized to observe the process and reactions of individual awareness, the inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes or in the region of ajna chakra, is the state of pure, unbounded consciousness. It is the viewing screen of ajna chakra, the space behind the forehead where all visualization and psychic events are viewed. In the mahakasha we see the material world and the innumerable occurrences and forms of the macrocosm. In chidakasha it is possible, though few realize it, to view the infinite psychic events occurring within each and every human being.

When you close your eyes you are able to measure to some extent your infinite existence in the world in the form of consciousness. With eyes closed your vision penetrates deeper. The senses become more refined. Chidakasha is thus the personification of mysticism. With its powers of imagination, thought, speculation and will, it can penetrate into any area of the world. When you dwell within, it is on the plane of chidakasha that you are aware of your existence although you are not able to see your gross material body. This subtle but lively experience of the self and its workings takes place in the background of chidakasha. The infinite, unidimensional, eternal space of chidakasha is a platform for the manifestation of your consciousness.

Chidakasha is the link in man between the conscious, subconscious and superconscious, and it is also the point where the object of meditation is most easily perceived. Chidakasha is visualized as a black room with four walls, a floor and a ceiling. In the floor near the centre of the rear wall is a small hole, leading to a tunnel. This is sushumna nadi, extending downwards through the lower chakras. In the front wall is a screen on which visions will appear as the mind becomes more relaxed and able to concentrate.

Chidakasha dharana is a meditation technique, which can unlock the gates to the secret realms of awareness, the stage of mind and states of consciousness which are now beyond

our mortal sight. To him who perfects this kriya comes light and wisdom, untainted by the aberrations and limitations of our physical eyes. It is basically a practice, which, with the aid of visualization, intensifies concentration and makes the mind one-pointed. Its perfection will lead to the state of meditation and may awaken the latent potential of clairvoyance.

You have to know the trick of acquiring detachment and spiritualization. Do not be influenced either by thoughts of imagined faults and weaknesses, or greatness. On the contrary, take frequent flights into *chidakasha* and meet the *purusha*, the Supreme Being, often and again. Then the totality of your activities will gain the experience of unity or oneness, even though on the surface you will appear to be a worldly person. This is the inner trick, which has no connection with the intellect or books. It is only a matter of subtle understanding.

Discovering chidakasha

Just for a minute or so, close your eyes. What do you see? You should see a space in front of your closed eyes. It is something you have seen many times before, but have probably never paid much attention to it. The space may be black; it may be dark orange or it may be any other colour. But there should be a space, ether or a firmament in front of your closed eyes. It may seem rather insignificant. This is the mind screen. It is on this screen that you will, with sufficient practice and relaxation, see the most incredible psychic events – events that you never dreamed were taking place within you. Watch and see for yourself by doing meditational practices. At first you will see nothing for you will be too tense. You may not see anything for many months, but there will come a time when you will be suddenly confronted with the most incredible psychic film show you have ever seen.

This mind screen can also be likened to a cave – the cave or entrance to the depths of your mind. Consider a real cave in the side of a mountain. If you stand outside and look into the cave you will see nothing. You must have experienced

this for yourself. All you can see is an impenetrable wall of blackness, so black that you cannot see anything in the cave. Then as you start to walk in the cave and your eyes slowly become accustomed to the murky darkness, you begin to see things. These things were there previously, but you were unable to perceive them. Now you begin to see them. You begin to see more and more things. The cave, that before seemed to be only blackness, is seen to be full of so many objects: rocks, stalactites and stalagmites, litter of all types and perhaps even a hermit meditating in the far corner! As you become more familiar and accustomed to the darkness and nature of the cave, you see things that you did not previously expect.

It is the same with the mind-cave. At first when you look into the cave of the mind you will see nothing. You will most probably be tempted to think that there is nothing there to be seen. But as you look deeper into the depths of the mind-cave you will begin to see things that previously were inconceivable. Things were already there – they did not magically appear; but they were there without your knowledge, without your awareness. You start to develop awareness of your inner being. This is *chidakasha dharana*.

You should clearly understand that the language of the subconscious mind is not words – it is the language of symbols, of psychic symbols. The subconscious mind speaks in symbols, whether it is through dreams or during the practice of meditative techniques such as *chidakasha dharana*. Subconscious problems are stored, so to say, in the mind in the form of symbols. When one confronts these symbols in a state of relaxed awareness, then they can be removed. I did not say that the symbols should be confronted in a state of relaxation, for this means sleep to most people, and one's subconscious problems can never be eradicated during sleep. The symbols must be faced in a state of relaxation combined with awareness. You must be fully awake when you confront these psychic manifestations. This is the role of *chidakasha dharana*.

Seat of chidakasha

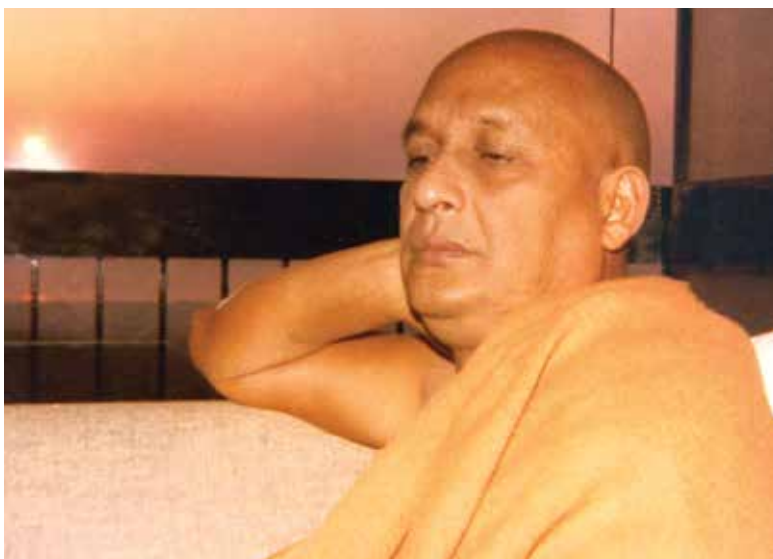
The *chit* is unidimensional consciousness or awareness of our inner personality. It is a vast treasure-house of knowledge of all kinds. It has an all-pervasive record of the past, present and future. Chit is the unending firmament of inward awareness enveloping both the conscious and unconscious existence of man. The seat of chit may roughly be located above the eyebrows in the forehead. There is one consciousness which works through the sense organs while extroverted, and the same is turned inwards when we close the doors of our outer sense organs through physical and mental efforts. The chit appears to function through the apparatus of the mind and the intellect but it is beyond their reach. You can experience it only when mind and intellect both cease their normal functioning in connection with the senses. To have a thorough understanding of the chit is essential, since it is the root cause of all human activities.

To locate the chidakasha, you must hold your consciousness somewhere in the cavity of the skull just behind the bones of the forehead. Have an unwavering grip over the point where your consciousness gathers while closing the eyes. Very often this seat is imagined in the hollow of the forehead's bony cavity. Therefore, while concentrating on chidakasha, the space behind the forehead should serve as a material footing on which to centre your consciousness.

When you practise chidakasha dharana you gain a greater understanding of your imagination and you learn how to direct the image-making faculty to constructive purposes. Chidakasha dharana is a technique, which can unlock the gates to the secret realms of awareness. Wisdom and light will only come to those who can perfect this form of meditation.

The experience of dreams

Dream is a state of experience. You call them dreams, but in yoga they are not known as such. The word used for dream is self-experience, and whatever you see in a dream is what is in you. Dreams give you knowledge of what is in



store. Another important point is that dream is a process in which some of the karmas are released in a different sphere of existence. Many karmas are spent by this life process as you are involved here. Others are exhausted by a process of thinking in which you are involved. And many karmas are spent through the process of dream, or they are exhausted during the process of dharana, when you have visions. They are not dreams or imaginations; they are expressions of something that is already within you. In a sense, you work out your subconscious problems in symbolic form. It is more than likely that there will be little or no intellectual understanding of the cleansing process, but the process will nevertheless take place.

The commands of the guru are heard in ajna chakra. The guru speaks through chidakasha. The guru, by various methods, sends his commands to check the influence of thought currents intervening between him and his disciple's meeting. The disciple need not know about this. If the speed of the disciple is slow, his enthusiasm half-hearted, if he does not worry much about success or failure, and makes an

experiment and says to himself, “Let us see what happens” – then such a disciple always fails in his sadhana. A true disciple remains as much concerned about samadhi as the guru. It should be that the determination and will of the disciple is more firm than the guru’s and he should make the goodwill of the guru an inspiration in the sadhana. A true disciple becomes the guide of the guru on the path of yoga.

The karmic block

Everybody is sincere, everybody is working hard, but still for most people success does not seem to be in view. Where is the block? That is what we have never thought about. What will happen if you light a candle inside and then open all the windows and turn on a few fans? The flame will never remain steady. Do what you may, it will soon be blown out. That is what is happening to all of us in the course of daily life. There is light within, but it is constantly flickering and going out. Due to so many storms in life, the inner light does not burn steadily. What does the wise man do then? He switches off the fans and closes all the windows, so there will be steadiness of light.

The block is really very easy to understand. It is created by your own personality which is an effect of the samskaras, and these are the effects of your karma. First of all, these samskaras have to be cleansed, but you cannot exhaust your karma by any ordinary method. You may practise charity, but your karma will not be affected. You may serve the poor, but it will not affect your destiny. Do anything that you consider to be good, philanthropic and altruistic; this is all external painting. Nothing you do can penetrate deep into your inner life.

Therefore, in our daily practice of yoga sadhana, we have to keep two points in mind: first, how to contact the mind through the valleys and alleys, and second, how to remove the obstacles from the path. Therefore, Patanjali has suggested one beautiful idea: ‘You must attain peace of mind’. The peace of mind in raja yoga is known as *chitta*

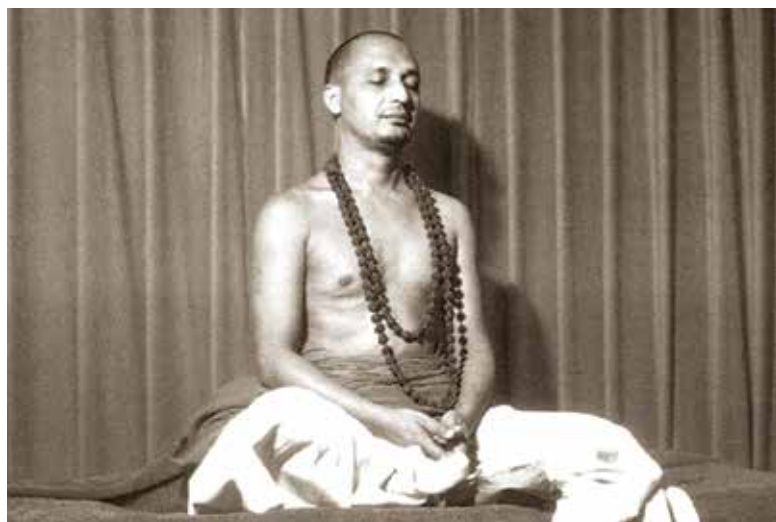
prasadam. When mental peace is attained, then your sadhana gains momentum. Peace of mind can be gained through the practice of vairagya. *Vairagya* does not mean renunciation; it means control over the past reflections, pleasant or otherwise.

In Samkhya philosophy, the evolution of mind is conceived in five stages: dull, scattered, oscillating, one-pointed, and controlled. By regular practice, the lower states of the mind are gradually evolved into higher states. If you have a mind which is dissipated and restless as a monkey, what are you going to do? Instead of arresting, crushing, or punishing the mind, why don't you find out why it becomes restless. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is written (6:19):

As a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker – to such is compared the yogi of controlled mind, practising yoga in the Self (or absorbed in the Yoga of the Self).

In Munger in the month of April, we have the fiercest dust storms imaginable, and as soon as they come, we close all the windows of the ashram. In the central hall there is an *akhanda jyoti*, eternal flame, which has continued to burn day and night since 1963. If it is blown out by a storm, then the sankalpa would be broken. Therefore, when a storm comes we close all the windows, then open them again when the storm finishes. Similarly, when the mind becomes restless, the passions ride high, and the vrittis are absolutely notorious, you must know how to close the windows of the mind and make this light one-pointed and unwavering. This is called yoga.

In the *Yoga Sutras* of Rishi Patanjali, dharana has been defined as the fixing of mental faculties in one region or on a single objective. In other words, the mind has to be one-pointed or in the *ekagra* stage as opposed to its three preceding stages: *mudha*, inert, *kshipta* distracted, *vikshipta*, alternating between steadiness and distraction. To make the mind steady on one objective is the meaning of the word dharana and the yoga sadhanas include various types of dharanas.



Influencing the gunas

Most people understand how a chemical undergoes transformation. Mind is not a single unit but a composition of many *tattwas* or elements. In order to transform the mind, you have to know what the tattwas are, and this is the subject of yoga, just as the milk is transformed into curd, curd into butter, then ghee and fat. In the same manner, the tamasic mind is transformed into the rajasic, then into the sattwic mind; finally, you transcend the mind.

Sometimes you find that sattwa guna is powerful, although the other gunas are also operating one after the other. Of course, you do not have to eliminate sattwa guna; you will have to strengthen it, because sattwa is desirable. Tamoguna is undesirable and you will have to reduce it. Rajoguna is also undesirable and you will also have to reduce it. While tamoguna is predominating, you have to reduce it; when rajoguna is predominating, you have to reduce it, but when sattwa is predominating and at the same time rajas and tamas are present, you have to intensify the power of sattwa guna by different methods, as enunciated in yogic texts. You need to think for yourself by which method you can strengthen

your sattwa guna – maybe through dharana, maybe through satsang, maybe through studying books, maybe through adjustment of diet.

The internal experience

What you see outside, you can also see inside. In order to see outside, you need the sensory channels. But to see inside, you don't need any sensory medium. That capacity has to be attained. Don't worry about the quality or the virtue of the practices. Be sure that the practice you are doing is so powerful that you can see the object inside clearly, as though it were real.

If your practice cannot give you a living experience, then it is necessary for you to review it once again. There is no difference between the external and the internal experience, both appear to be alike, but when you are able to have the inner experience without the dependency of your senses, then your mind becomes very powerful. You can influence your destiny and career; you can change the circumstances of your life. There is nothing which you cannot change. That is the ultimate point in yoga which we all have to reach. That state of mind, that quality of experience, is known as supermind. Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry used to refer to it in terms of a psychic race, superhuman race, supermental race. That supermental race is a product of the yoga practices. It is a race of men whose minds can create living experiences of anything they think about.

According to Patanjali, the peak form of awareness or consciousness is experience. This experience is not psychic in nature, nor of devi or devata, sun or moon, or demons. No! It has no category, it is simply an experience by itself, devoid of images or concepts. Furthermore, this state of anubhava cannot occur through the medium of mind. The mind has its own relative personality and limiting boundaries. The mind is not absolute. It has its own laws of determinacy.

Anubhava, the ultimate spiritual experience, moves with undetermined law. The laws of determinacy and indetermin-

acy must be well understood. When the nature and origin of the experience cannot be explained in terms of the normal language of logic, we ask, “Who was the experiencer?” I say, no one. Yet when we speak of experience, we imply a duality, namely the experience and the experiencer. Duality cannot exist within the realms of anubhava, thus, two conflicting viewpoints arise. But in samadhi, the rules of logic do not apply. Therefore, the sadhana of raja yoga is not determined according to logical, puritanical philosophy or in order to fulfil a religious code or morality.

From dharana to dhyana

One of the principal aims of dhyana is to cultivate an efficiency of the mind which enables you to see the object in three dimensions. If you meditate on your Guru or on Rama, a bird or the sun, the ego eventually withdraws itself and the idea is converted into an electrical experience, substance and suddenly the object is in front of you, the Guru is in front of you. There is no doubt that he is flesh and blood because he has three dimensions. That is called to see, meaning the living experience and in order to have that you will have to create an efficient mind. That efficient mind is created in dharana.

Dhyana is really an extension of dharana and has been defined by Patanjali as the uninterrupted flow of concentration of the mind on the object of meditation or concentration. There is a fine difference between dharana and dhyana. In dharana the mind continually tries to think of things other than the object, and the practitioner has to bring the awareness back to the object; distractions still exist in one form or another. In dhyana, however, the mind has been subjugated and is totally and continually absorbed in the object. It is in meditation that the deeper aspects of the object start to manifest themselves. The depth of concentration in dhyana is far greater than in dharana. It is through the regular and continual practice of concentration that dhyana spontaneously manifests itself.

3

Dimensions of Dharana



Matter is never homogeneous; nothing is homogeneous. The body is not homogeneous. It is a composition of various elements together. In the same way, life itself is a composition of two elements: matter and consciousness. They live together. Matter is in total union with consciousness, and

that is called manifestation, that is called creation. During the practice of yoga, you have to separate them. In meditation, in kriya yoga, in raja yoga, in bhakti yoga, in any form of yoga, matter and consciousness have to be separated. This separation is known as liberation, and it is possible when the practices of yoga are adhered to.

The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali talk about three stages; in Sanskrit they are known as: *pratyahara* or isolation of the brain from the senses, *dharana* or awareness of one point, and *dhyana* or total awareness of the point, but not of the meditator. It is at that time that matter and consciousness, related to your experiences, are separated. When you are meditating on a flower, for example, it is a combination of both matter and consciousness. When you become aware of any object, it is a combination of matter and consciousness. Now if you concentrate on the flower and try to see the flower within yourself, and make it clear, there comes a moment within the realms of your experience when you as a meditator cease to exist. There is only the experience, not the experiencer; at this point, matter and consciousness are separated.

Pratyahara and dharana

Pratyahara is the first state in yoga in which your awareness is disassociated from the sense experiences. Yoga does not begin with asanas, nor with ethics and morality. Yoga begins when all the sense perceptions are withdrawn. This state of pratyahara is where the lower scheme of yoga begins.

The second process is control of the mind. The mind remembers through memory, in the form of visions, thoughts, impressions, worries, anxieties, etc. It is easy to withdraw your awareness from the senses, but it is more difficult to control the mind. The mind is very powerful, and it is through the mind that you are working on the whole scheme of spiritual evolution. Therefore, in order to consolidate the multiphase tendencies of the mind, there is a beautiful method known as dharana.

Dharana means fixing the mind on an object after the senses have been withdrawn. The object could be gross, semi-gross or abstract, but the mind must have an object or a centre on which to fix itself and gradually focus all of its faculties. Thus the field of the mind is made very narrow. This particular art of yoga is known as the process of negation. This is the process of involution. When the personality is completely withdrawn, it comes to a point. Various methods can be used to induce mental one-pointedness.

Devotional methods try to induce it through rituals, church services, pooja or worship, chanting, kirtan, prayer and so forth. Patanjali's yoga utilizes a psychic symbol as a focal point for internal concentration. It can be one's guru, a deity, a mantra, a sound, a star, the form of a saint, an idea or a feeling, or it may be a gross object; it can be almost anything. It must however, be something that spontaneously attracts one's attention and must be chosen to suit the inherent nature of the mind and personality. The psychic symbol projected in front of the closed eyes must be so overwhelming that one's whole being is absorbed by it. Otherwise the psyche will remain scattered and balance of mind will not be possible.

Process of concentration

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* much is said about the subject of concentration. If you are able to hold the concept of a flower in your mind for a period of time, then we say that your mind has accomplished dharana. Dharana becomes perfect and complete only if pratyahara has been practised well. When you are trying to isolate the mind from the sensory channels, at first there is a lot of distraction. Every time, the *chitta vritti* or mental patterns become disturbed because the senses affect the mind, and the mind has become so dependent on the senses that it goes on accepting these disturbances. Here one thing becomes very clear. In the beginning of your spiritual practice, it is not necessary to select a religious symbol for concentration. Sometimes a thought which makes

a greater impression on your mind can be used instead, because there is no use in fighting with the mind.

During meditation you may be trying to think of a religious symbol, but the mind does not agree, because you have been brought up in certain circumstances and that is how the mind is conditioned. So, when you are trying to concentrate on something alien to this conditioning, the mind pulls itself out. When you think about very ordinary things in your day-to-day life, there is no distraction, but when you try to concentrate on a religious symbol, the distraction comes and the confrontation begins.

It is very important to know that when you are practising sadhana, there should be minimal confrontation in the mind. There is no use fighting with your own mind. Who is fighting with whom? There are not two minds; consciousness is one, but for the sake of diversity, there are various *vrittis*, patterns or modifications. When you confront yourself, you are creating a quarrel between your own *vrittis*. And when this confrontation between your own *vrittis* becomes very keen and intense, then you have schizophrenic attacks.

Holding one form, one idea before the mind, crystallization of the mental energy takes place. The mind which is otherwise aware of all and sundry becomes aware of one thing, one form and one object. When the awareness of one object remains in the mind for a particular period of time, if it stays there, transformation takes place. This transformation is known as *dhyana*, meditation.

The psychic symbol

Dharana means conception, holding an idea before you. The object you have to decide for yourself. There is a lot of controversy. Some people say, "Oh, God is abstract he has no form." And others will say, no, no, we must have a form of God because of this and that and that, but the question of God with form and without form does not arise here, please do not misunderstand. Here it is a question of concentration; here it is a question of integration of your



dissipated consciousness into one pattern. Therefore, it is important for you, it is essential for you to hold your mind on one object whether it is myself, or your father, or your master, you should do it. It has nothing to do with God, it has nothing to do with any divine being, it has nothing to do with any supernatural thing.

You must remember only one thing, that the object on which you are concentrating is attractive, is inspiring, and it has a pull and has magnetized your consciousness. If you meditate on a rose, the very idea of a rose, or a lotus or any kind of flower should be able to consume your entire consciousness, and within a few moments you are in. With your eyes closed, the rose is inside. You are visualizing the rose, your mind does not go away from the rose. One object is important.

Willpower does not come by just repeating a few suggestions like, "I am very healthy, I am getting better, I am not going to have any disease, I will be truthful, I will speak the

truth.” These suggestions are only hypnotic suggestions. They cannot help very much. Willpower is the essence of the mind. Once you get this willpower you can change not only yourself but many other people. Mind becomes very powerful when it is brought into focus by concentration.

If you can concentrate on one particular object and can visualize it, and retain it not only on the conscious plane but on the subconscious plane as clearly as you see it in dream, not only in black and white but also in Technicolor, then you are a man of strong will. With that strong will you can get guidance for your life and at the same time you can definitely have a positive influence on other people. Therefore, it is of utmost importance in the sixth step of raja yoga known as dharana, to conceive a particular form, retain it in the mind and try to see it as clearly as it is outside.

The symbol could be fire, the sun, the moon, guru, a flower or a star; it could be one static substance. At that point, everybody must have a symbol and visualize it. Even if you haven't been a visionary, even if you have been very poor at visualizing things, at the point when the senses and the mind have been completely cut off, you can easily visualize the symbol in your mid-eyebrow centre and go on seeing it. With that, your sadhana is finished; your personal efforts are finished. Beyond that, you can't do anything.

Yantras, mantra and mandala

For many years I have been thinking about the symbols for concentration, and I have realized that there are millions and millions of symbols. All the symbols are actually related to our own archetypes. We have our own samskaras, our own mental composition. Our mind is composed of millions and billions of archetypes. Now, these archetypes may not be influenced just by religious symbols. In my opinion, they can best be influenced by the tantric symbols, through yantra, mantra and mandala. For example, try to concentrate on mooladhara chakra and the yantra and bija mantra of mooladhara chakra. If that does not work, concentrate on swadhisthana chakra

and its yantra and mantra. If that does not work, go to manipura, anahata, vishuddhi or ajna chakra.

Of course, some of the chakras will fail to respond, because we are all evolving human beings. If your evolution has taken you beyond manipura, but you are trying to concentrate on mooladhara, then you are not going to have success. Therefore, the guru, who has awakened inner knowledge of the various chakras and their yantras and bija mantras, must come to your aid.

Working out the samskaras

During the practice of sense withdrawal and concentration, you have to work out all the perceptions and experiences in the realm of reflections, as well as in the realm of imagination or visionary experiences. If you are not prepared to exhaust the experiences amicably and with pleasure, then you will face them in the subtler form of visionary experiences. These are not spiritual experiences; they are your own samskaras, your own complexes, guilt, pride, pain and all your pathos coming out. The totality of the vrittis or modifications of consciousness that stick to you life after life and cause mental and emotional imbalances take considerable time to be discharged. It is not just a matter of two or three months. The process will take many lifetimes.

In the process of cleaning out the mind, it is a good idea to combine ajapa with chidakasha dharana. In this case, you will see the subconscious contents of the mind in the form of images on the mind screen or *chidakasha* in front of the closed eyes. These will be like dreams, but you will be fully conscious of them. These will be images of your deeper problems. In Sanskrit they are called *samskaras*, mental impressions, and *vasanas*, deep-rooted desires. Don't suppress these images or react to them. You must merely be aware of them and watch them with an attitude of an unconcerned witness. You must feel as though they are something separate from your being. In this way, these samskaras will be exhausted and the mind will be relieved of much tension and anxiety. This will

take time and practice, but is essential in making the mind a perfect instrument.

Meditation is not a practice

If your pratyahara becomes successful, then you may practise *dharana*, concentration, and that will take you to *dhyana*, spontaneous meditation. If you are able to continue japa yoga for one and a half minutes without any thought interruption, it means your pratyahara has entered into dharana. At present this is not possible, as you know by experience how difficult it is to maintain awareness of one object for a long time, without any thought intervention. Even if you are aware of only one particular thought which is related to the object of your concentration, still it is an associated thought. In dharana, even these associated thoughts should not come.

If you continue concentration on one item for one or one and half minutes without any intervention, that is called one dharana. Again after intervention, if you continue the same thought uninterrupted for one or one and a half minutes, that means the second dharana is completed. If you continue this eleven times, you have completed pratyahara and entered the stage of dharana. Eleven durations of dharana will take you to dhyana. That means, if you are able to continue awareness of one object for a certain period, eleven times, that becomes dhyana, the true state of meditation, which will itself, naturally culminate in *samadhi*, self-realization, the goal of yoga and the zenith of man's spiritual evolution.

How do you do it? Through the practice of mantra, kirtan, or by concentration on a number of things. What happens when you concentrate on one particular thing? The neurosis of the mind is withdrawn for the time being. Now, when concentration becomes deep, then what happens is that you lose touch with the ego. This is a very important accomplishment in yoga. In the *Yoga Sutras*, this particular accomplishment is known as *samyama*. When concentration and meditation take place at once, without any effort, with absolute spontaneity, that is called *samyama*.

Samyama

By attaining samadhi through a particular symbol, one has complete control of the awareness of the object on which one is meditating. This happens in samyama, which includes the threefold processes of dharana, dhyana and samadhi. *Samyama* means holding the object completely in one's awareness and keeping the awareness of the object under full control. The result of samyama, of complete absorption or fusion in different objects, is different for each object.

The sixth, the seventh and the eighth stages are not three stages but are continuities. Dharana, dhyana and samadhi are conception, meditation and complete samadhi. Where does dhyana begin and where does samadhi begin? Nobody can say. You take the form, concentrate, forget yourself, visualize the form, it becomes clear and you become one with the object.

Dharana, dhyana and samadhi

Dharana can be said to have been consummated when the object thereof is consciously localized, perceived and fully comprehended, whereas dhyana can be said to be accomplished only when the consciousness is assimilated with the object or centre comprehended in dharana.

Patanjali has defined dharana, dhyana and samadhi chiefly in terms of the nature and intensity of mental or psychic effort and not in terms of duration. Samadhi is the culmination of dharana and dhyana. Samadhi as a direct experience is not possible according to Patanjali. Samadhi differs from dharana and dhyana in that while in the former perfect comprehension of the subject is attained and while in the latter an uninterrupted assimilation of the object is made, in samadhi the dualism between the knower and known disappears with all its modalities. In other words, in the ultimate form of samadhi, pure consciousness prevails and the chitta vrittis do not disturb the realm of the mind.



Avoid siddhis

Psychic powers are called *siddhis* in Sanskrit. They include telepathy, clairaudience, clairvoyance, premonition and a vast array of less well-known powers. They take place through the mediumship of super-individual realms of the mind. The siddhis arise in the collective unconscious where every person, every individual mind and everything is linked intimately to everything else. They can take place in the past, in the future and even in the realms beyond time-space, yet no matter how wonderful they may seem, they are still merely expressions within the mind.

Many of the verses of the *Yoga Sutras* describe a large selection of well-known and obscure siddhis. However, the text clearly warns that one should not aspire to achieve these powers or dabble with them. They can be dangerous for oneself and others if they are used for selfish purposes. The purpose of yoga is *not* to develop siddhis, but to bring realization of one's real nature. The siddhis are merely passing scenery which will surely arise as the mind becomes more one-pointed and purified. There should be ruthless detachment towards them.

For those who want to practise yoga for the purpose of God-realization, it is necessary to shake off the temptations of psychic powers, because in the end they will only lead one back into suffering, which is what happens to most yoga aspirants. The majority of people take up yoga with the sole view of achieving psychic powers to become mediums, and exercise telepathy and so on. Sage Patanjali considers psychic powers as hindrances on the path to higher realization because they make the mind restless, and have to be shaken off.

Yoga and hypnosis

The practices of hypnotism and yoga follow the same path until they branch off at the point of dharana; then yoga branches off into the path of expansion of consciousness. An aspirant of hypnotism undergoes a process whereby his consciousness diminishes until it is completely overtaken by a state of hypnotism, whereas the aspirant of yoga widens his frontiers of consciousness. His consciousness assumes the form of a symbol, a deity, ishta devata, the form of a mantra, the form of a sound, or any concrete form. But, of course it is only his consciousness. It keeps on expanding and this act of expansion is spontaneous.

Dharana and beyond

The withdrawn sense consciousness is to be focused on an image, so much so that you are not aware of anything outside; for one minute, three minutes or longer there has to be unceasing awareness of that one form. The time will increase through practice. When the time increases, it means you are moving into dharana, concentration, then dhyana, meditation, and finally samadhi. It can be called Godhood, it can be called nirvana in the language of the Buddhists, it can be called darshan in the language of Hindus, or it can be called samadhi in the language of yoga. This state can also be described as the divine state of oneness.

In the states of dharana and dhyana, the aspirant imagines certain objects and qualities. They may be unreal

and fanciful notions in the ultimate analysis, but they are very helpful in the beginning and a student of yoga must use their assistance until he goes forward to master the deeper states. It is declared by many great thinkers that up to nirvikalpa samadhi, the different experiences an aspirant goes through are nothing but the planes of one's mental consciousness.

Psychic processes for dharana

The mind can also be controlled by making it form-conscious through *trataka*, which is concentration on a particular form, and similarly, in the case of touch-consciousness and taste-consciousness. The former happens when the guru touches the disciple on the head, and the latter is brought about by *khechari mudra*. By concentrating the mind on the tip of the nose, a subtle or psychic smell is experienced, which can be utilized for controlling the mind. Taste consciousness is developed by concentrating on the front part of the tongue. Colour visions are developed by concentrating on the palate in *khechari mudra*. Psychic touch is experienced by concentrating on the central part of the tongue. Psychic sound is developed by concentrating on the root of the tongue. All these psychic processes become the basis of self-control. When these psychic processes are developed, the student starts concentrating on them. In due course, his mind transcends them and goes deeper. That is a state of complete mental control. All this involves the action of the senses, the *indriyas*, in *dharana* and *pratyahara*.

Regardless of which system you follow, practices of introversion alone cannot lead you to awakening. They are only intended to create passivity and tranquillity. The restless tendencies of the mind must be pacified. This is the first stage. The next stage, *dharana*, means fixing the mind on one point and reducing the area of space. When the mind is fixed on one point and is concentrating itself, it will lead to *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

4

Preparing for Dharana



In raja yoga, dharana, concentration, is the sixth step. Sometimes people do not prepare for the sixth step. They hear others say, “Concentration is very good, you must do it,” so they jump immediately to the sixth step

without preparing the mind, the body, the philosophy and lifestyle. Concentration is not an abstract practice. When one concentrates, biochemical changes occur in the physical body. Scientists have shown that during any practice of yoga, and especially during the concentration practices, biochemical changes take place. Therefore, prior to concentration other practices such as pranayama and pratyahara are required as preparation. Before attempting to practise concentration, purify the body with the help of hatha yoga.

Achieving dharana

One-pointed concentration cannot be achieved without regular practice. Try it for yourself and you will see just how difficult it is. Try to concentrate solely on one object or one thought for five minutes and witness how many things distract your steadiness of mind. The object you choose to concentrate on should be something you can focus on easily and spontaneously, without force. Often people try to force concentration, but this leads nowhere, and tends to cause them to grit their teeth or tense their facial muscles. They know that concentration leads to higher practices, and that if they can attain high states of concentration, they will induce dhyana. So in an effort to achieve concentration they fight with their minds and sometimes even end up with a headache. Forced concentration is not really concentration; it creates tension in the mind and separates one from the path to dhyana.

Expert advice is always available and the serious sadhaka will seek it. Those who are meant to proceed on the path of sadhana will always find the proper way. However, remember that without practising preparatory sadhanas such as japa, asana, pranayama, naam japa, naam sankirtan, taking a sattvic diet, maintaining celibacy, self-improvement, mental balance, the aspirant cannot be introduced to more advanced sadhana. Do not be in a hurry. Be patient and persevering, sincere and earnest.

Dharana needs regular and persistent practice for a substantial period of time. In this manner the symbol or

the object of concentration will help your consciousness to crystallize itself, and then when the symbol becomes clear and vivid in your imagination, the final stage of meditation comes by itself. Gradually, as the mind is harmonized, one will perceive deeper aspects of the symbol; its archetypal nature will start to reveal itself. One will spontaneously flow into dhyana.

Process of visualization

When you try to visualize an object, a clear image will not come all at once. At first you will only have the feeling of the object. Suppose you want to visualize a rose. You have seen the rose with your eyes and you know how it looks. You also know how it smells and how it feels and you are familiar with its other attributes such as its colour, size, texture. When you close your eyes, you can think about a rose. If you go a bit deeper, you can feel like a rose, but you will have difficulty in experiencing the different attributes of the rose itself.

Now, if you can visualize the different attributes of a rose quite easily, it indicates the efficiency of your mind. If you have been able to isolate the brain and block the sensorial communications, then you can imagine the rose and the image you see will be just as clear as the one that manifests when you dream of a rose. Some people dream very vividly while others don't, and some people dream in black and white while others dream in Technicolor. This depends upon the extent to which the brain has been able to de-link itself from the sensorial channels.

When you can create an internal image of a rose and you can feel all its attributes, this is known as visualization or dharana. When your mind is able to hold the object in vivid imagination, that is dharana. Success in this practice depends on how much you have been able to separate the brain from the senses, but this is not the ultimate efficiency of the mind. When you have perfected dharana you can develop your mind to such an extent that you have a living experience of a rose.

Approaching dharana with yoga nidra

In yoga nidra awareness is progressively withdrawn from the external world, the body, the process of breathing, the conscious mind, and finally, the unconscious mind. In advanced stages, when relaxation is complete, yoga nidra involves dharana and samadhi.

When the intellect is withdrawn, when the senses become tranquil, they become free from excitement, turbulence, and there is a direct circuit between the speaker and the listener. There is no agent in between you and me. At this moment, I am trying to reach you not directly, but by means of a junction which is called *buddhi* or intellect. It is not possible in every case for a guru, for a teacher, for an operator, to have a direct communication with a pupil or a disciple. In order to make this direct contact possible, the senses have to be withdrawn, which is the fifth step in raja yoga, known as pratyahara. Pratyahara is that state of mind where the senses are no longer required to feed the brain and the mind with information.

The ears, the eyes, the nose, etc. do not feed the brain with information during the state of pratyahara. When pratyahara is complete and profound, then the inner mind, let us say for the time being, the subconscious mind, or the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body, attains very great efficiency. Then it is able to imprint all the information directly as a camera can do. These impressions directly influence the experience, then, at a certain stage, you will have to develop those impressions. The guru has to know how to develop those impressions. If these impressions or imprints are not developed, then they remain in a negative form. In order to make them positive, or to bring them back to the intellectual level, or to the level of reasoning, logic, understanding, there is the process of dharana. The combination of pratyahara and dharana may be understood as a practice of yoga nidra. Therefore, it is necessary that through yoga nidra you should be able to arrive at a profound state and then you practise what we call dharana.



Dharana means pictorial concept, visualization, imagination or developing images in your mind. During the process of imagination, you have to pass from one object to another as swiftly as possible, without letting the mind think. Images must be produced spontaneously. If you say, red rose, you do not have to think about it, it has to come spontaneously. If you continue practising dharana for five minutes and swiftly pass from one object to another object, within a few minutes the mind attains greater efficiency. The moment you say a word expressing a thought it is very clear in your imagination, and when your mind is able to develop that image clearly without involving the thinking process, it indicates that now your mind is becoming more efficient to translate a thought into an experience.

Kriya yoga – preparation for dharana

Kriya yoga is a combination of the fifth, sixth and seventh step of raja yoga: pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana. Pratyahara is the separation or disconnection of sense cortex and motor cortex. When that takes place, then the subjective consciousness is to be formulated on one pattern. That is called dharana, a kind of pictorial mandala. In kriya yoga you do not just formulate a pictorial mandala, it is a system by itself, depending upon pranayama, mudras, bandhas and many other symbols.

There are twenty major kriya practices which can be learned without difficulty. In kriya yoga you don't close your eyes, you don't maintain a steady posture all throughout, nor are you asked to concentrate the mind on one object. The practices are arranged in a special order to systematically induce pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. There are no social or age restrictions for kriya yoga. However, you should be able to practise pranayama so that the practices do not produce heat in the body.

An integrated sadhana

Those who are serious about realization, about attaining the deeper states of consciousness must earnestly involve themselves in some form of sadhana. Firstly, they must purify their mind through hatha yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and general meditative techniques that involve awareness more than concentration.

We must keep eliminating all our foreign elements and concepts which have, through habit, coloured our pure awareness. We can do this by practising *viveka* or discrimination, yama, niyama, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Awareness must be intensified and the duration of awareness must be increased. One should do everything with complete awareness. We must work at separating from our gross consciousness step by step, purifying and isolating the unreal self from the true eternal self.

5

Practices for Dharana



Imagine a candle burning on a small table in a room. The window is open and the flame flickers. Now, if you switch on the fan, the flame will be extinguished, but if you close the window and turn off the fan, the flame will become steady. Your awareness is like the flame and it must be made constant by closing the windows of the senses. Then you will effortlessly experience dharana or concentration. Simply close your eyes, and without mental pressure, you will perceive the object.

Suppose you are trying to visualize the flame of a candle. In the stage of pratyahara, you can't stabilize your mind enough to hold the image. In dharana, however, the light of the candle immediately appears, although this is interspersed with thoughts as the mind is diverted. Basically, in dharana, the symbol becomes effulgent and steady.

Asana

Static practices of intermediate and advanced asanas have a more subtle and powerful effect on the pranic and mental bodies. They are performed with little or no movement, the body often remaining in one position for a few minutes. These asanas are intended to gently massage the internal organs, glands and muscles as well as to relax the nerves throughout the body. They are specifically concerned with bringing tranquillity to the mind and preparing the practitioner for the higher practices of yoga, such as meditation.



Padmasana (lotus pose) is traditionally regarded as one of the best postures for pranayama and pratyahara as it allows the body to be held completely steady for long periods of time. As the body is steadied, the mind becomes calm and gives a firm foundation for concentration. *Padmasana* directs the flow of prana from mooladhara chakra

in the perineum to sahasrara at the crown of the head, heightening the experience of meditation.

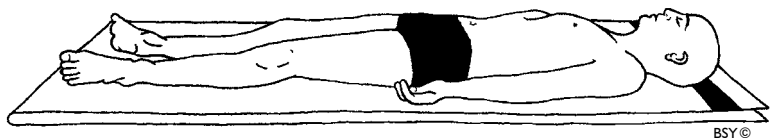
The asanas in the padmasana group clear physical, emotional and mental blocks, help awaken the energy centres of the body and induce tranquillity. They increase the ability to sit in padmasana for extended periods of time as required for advanced meditation practices, but should only be practised by people who can already sit in padmasana without the slightest difficulty or strain.

Siddhasana (accomplished pose) when the mental fluctuations cease, inner consciousness blooms forth and exterior consciousness withdraws, the body metabolism alters. The brain-waves, inner body temperature and skin resistance undergo tremendous changes, and the effects on the consciousness can be detrimental if one is not careful. *Siddhasana* prevents nervous depression from occurring during meditation, as it stops the blood pressure from falling too low, regulates the production of the male hormone testosterone, and helps maintain the inner body temperature.



Both asanas, however, are designed for effective *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. *Padmasana* specifically balances *prana*, and *siddhasana* maintains blood pressure and balances both the *pranic* and mental forces.

Shavasana (corpse pose) is beneficial no matter what the condition is, even in perfect health, because it brings up latent impressions buried within the subconscious mind, and the mind which operates during waking consciousness relaxes and subsides. It is, therefore, necessary to practise *shavasana* for developing *dharana* and *dhyana*. Even though it is a static pose it revitalizes the entire system.





Pranayama

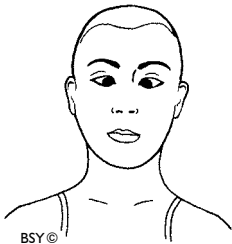
Nadi shodhana pranayama brings about a state of purity in the nervous system. When your nervous system is agitated it will not allow your mind, your brain, your consciousness to rest. Therefore, purification of the nervous system is of utmost importance.

Nadi shodhana for dharana

The ratio is important in pranayama because it is directly linked with the right and left hemispheres of the brain and with the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. There has to be a ratio in pranayama, not so much for the sake of oxygenation but in order to influence the brain.

The ideal ratio, which will completely put the mind under control so that it can't move, is 1:6:4:4, but one cannot start with this. One must start with the minimum ratio which is 1:2. Later it can be increased to 1:3, 1:4, 1:5, and 1:6. After completing each round of nadi shodhana, the awareness is fixed at the eyebrow centre, and concentration on one's symbol is begun. This is practised for a short time, maybe a minute or two, not more than that, then the second round is started. In between each round, practise concentration. If five rounds of pranayama are practised, then five rounds of concentration will be done.

Mudras



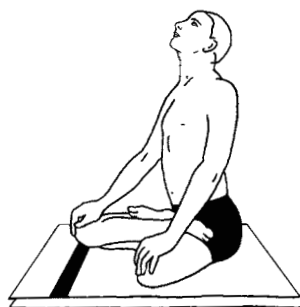
Tantric literature states that once the dissipation of prana is arrested through the practice of mudra, the mind becomes introverted, inducing states of *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal, and *dharana*, concentration.

The practice is *nasikagra drishti*, in which one gazes at the nose tip. It

strengthens one's ability to control the rapid eye movements (R.E.M.) and thereby enables one to maintain a steady vision of the symbol. Bhoochari mudra may be performed as a preparation for meditation and as a meditation technique in its own right. It belongs to a group of techniques featuring gazing at an external focal point as a means to achieve dharana or the meditative state of relaxed concentration. It is allied to nasikagra drishti and shambhavi mudra, all three being forms of trataka. Akashi mudra also features gazing at an external focal point as a means to achieving dharana or the meditative state of relaxed concentration.



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Trataka – a sadhana for the mind

The first sadhana of a sadhaka consists of understanding the mind, in knowing its direction and turning it upwards. The sadhana of trataka will help you a great deal in understanding the mind and making its unseen powers active. Trataka shows us that the eyes are the instruments by which the mind and the soul are reached.

Trataka means gazing fixedly. It is of two kinds, *bahirmukha* or external, and *antarmukha* or internal trataka. (The latter is called dharana or concentration). Trataka is gazing without blinking at an object placed directly in front of the eyes. At the time of practising trataka, the eyeballs should remain steady and the eyelids should not flicker. No object except the one on which trataka is to be performed should be seen, and the mind should not wander hither and thither but be merged in observation of the object.



In this practice, you gaze steadily at one point, such as a candle flame. The rapid eye movements (R.E.M.) which take place during dharana, break your concentration from time to time, and they also remove the pattern of your symbol. You see the flame and it disappears. This is because the movements of the eye influence the structure of consciousness which is supported by the brain. So concentration on a particular point in trataka will give your eyes the required steadiness. Then, with eyes closed, you will be able to hold

your concentration for three to five minutes, and R.E.M. will not occur.

External *trataka* is performed on the form, the *trikuti* or the tip of the nose. This means gazing with a fixed and flickerless gaze, steadily with concentration, on a point, the astral point, *vyoma*, a flower, star, or the *ishta*. Internal *trataka* brings about perfection in *sanyam* or control. It is performed on the *chakras*, the *ishta*, a *bija* mantra or a *yantra*.

It should definitely be practised for at least five minutes before beginning any *sadhana*. When one wants the mind to be concentrated, *trataka* should be performed on any object for some time.

Yoga nidra and visualization

The last stage of *yoga nidra* induces mental relaxation. In this part of the practice, the student visualizes the images named or described by the instructor. Since the images that are used often have universal significance and powerful associations, they bring the hidden contents of the deep unconscious into the conscious mind. The images used include landscapes, oceans, mountains, temples, saints and flowers, stories, and descriptions of powerful psychic symbols such as the *chakras*, the *lingam*, the cross, or the golden egg.

The practice of visualization develops self-awareness and relaxes the mind, by purging it of disturbing or painful material. It leads the mind to concentration or *dharana*. In advanced stages, visualization develops into *dhyana* or pure meditation. Then there is the conscious experience of the visualized object in the unconscious, the distinction between conscious and unconscious dissolves and distracting images cease to arise.

Techniques of *pratyahara* such as *yoga nidra* affect all aspects of the individual, because physical and mental relaxation through withdrawal of the empirical awareness, and concentration, the focusing of attention, or *dharana*, are important elements of that technique.

Yoga nidra as a meditative technique

Yoga nidra, if practised correctly, can lead directly to meditation. Yoga nidra is, in fact, a powerful meditative technique. At the stage of dharana one should fix the awareness on a psychic symbol. This can be done at a suitable stage of yoga nidra. As concentration deepens, dharana is transformed into dhyana or meditation.

One advantage of yoga nidra over other meditative techniques is that it does not require the practitioner to sit in a difficult pose such as padmasana. One merely lies on the back throughout the practice. The disadvantage is that this comfortable position can very easily lead to sleep. In yoga nidra one does not fight the mind but systematically tranquilizes it. Attention is not fixed on one point as in many types of meditative techniques. Instead, one is asked to move attention from place to place in the body. At a certain stage the mind will automatically concentrate on one point.

Antar mouna

Antar mouna is a complete training system for the awareness process; it teaches one how to know the processes of the mind and ways in which one can bring them under control. When you have perfected this inner silence, then dharana begins. The practice of antar mouna is subdivided into a number of stages which are briefly as follows:

Stage 1: The practitioner develops awareness of his senses and how they connect him with the outer world. It is possible to practise it anywhere. You try to observe mentally what you feel, hear and smell. You will find that in a short time all external sounds and objects have disappeared from your mind. Your senses have become withdrawn, although of course, not completely. The mind ceases to be interested or disturbed by external sounds and automatically approaches stage 2.

Stage 2: This involves withdrawing your attention from all outside stimuli and focusing all awareness on the workings of the mind: what it is thinking, how it is reacting and what

images are coming from the subconscious. This is the stage where the grosser neuroses, phobias and tensions of the mind are released. We relive many past experiences and witness the eruption of suppressed desires. This stage should be practised until the mind becomes reasonably calm and trouble-free.

Stage 3: It is meant to eliminate thoughts from the subconscious mind. Every experience which is not properly analyzed goes back into the subconscious mind, so the third stage of antar mouna trains the mind to dispose of thoughts and impressions.

Stage 4: Involves watching the spontaneous thoughts which are surfacing. The most prominent thought must be analyzed and exhausted at will. Again you should be aware of the spontaneous thought process and choose a prominent thought to be removed by will. When you have mastered this stage, your mind is going deeper into the subconscious.

Stage 5: At this stage the mind should be reasonably calm. Thoughts will still arise, but they will not be very strong. At this stage it is therefore justified to suppress all thoughts completely. This should lead to a state of thoughtlessness and pratyahara. At this stage you should adopt a psychic symbol as a focal point for concentration. Without this symbol you will become lost in the bottomless psychic realms of your being, and will not reach the destination . . . dhyana.

Stage 6 or psychic symbol awareness: When the thoughtless state has been attained then the mind has to be moulded so that it patterns itself into the form of a symbol.

Chidakasha dharana

What is chidakasha? This term has to be comprehended in its correct manner. The proper significance has to be grasped before you can successfully undertake the practice. Chidakasha is made up of two words, 'chit' and 'akasha'. *Chit* means consciousness, awareness and *akasha* means space. Our awareness extends in time and space and it is a portion of our subjective understanding. This is one of the most widely

used techniques in yoga. It is generally incorporated with other practices. It is concerned with the mind screen; with watching the space, chidakasha, in front of the closed eyes. The word *dharana* means 'to concentrate' or 'to be aware'. This technique can be called 'awareness of the inner space of consciousness'.

Like all other meditational techniques, relaxation of the body and mind is essential. The preliminary techniques of *kaya sthairyam*, *Aum* chanting and breath awareness systematically induce deep relaxation. These practices are very important. It is helpful if you practise some pranayama before commencing chidakasha dharana. Choose a technique, which utilizes nasagra mudra, such as nadi shodhana or bhasrika. Then awareness can proceed straight to the point where the middle finger is in contact with the eyebrow centre. This will make it easier to locate chidakasha.

Kapalbhati is also a good preparatory technique for meditative practice. It empties the mind of thoughts, emotional feelings and excessive visions. It induces a tranquil, receptive state of mind.

The important thing is that you attain deeper states of relaxation. It is in this manner that you will start to dive into the depths of the mind-cave. If you are not reasonably relaxed, both physically and mentally, you will never penetrate the surface, the veil of chidakasha. So, make sure you systematically relax yourself through any yoga techniques, whether asanas, pranayama or meditative techniques. The best time for practice is in the early hours of the morning and at night after taking a bath.

Practice of chidakasha dharana

The practice of chidakasha dharana is divided into five stages as follows:

Stage 1: The first stage consists of your watching the darkness that envelops the chidakasha when you close your eyes. You have to continue to watch it carefully as a witness,

seeing some drama unfolding before your mind's eye until the second stage is reached.

Stage 2: In the second stage, you will see the darkness interspersed by a variety of colours – red, yellow, blue and so on. Your attention must be centred on watching this interplay of colours, neither trying to think, nor understand or analyze them.

Stage 3: In the third stage, let the consciousness penetrate deeply through the veil of darkness or the play of colours. Make it deeper. Your concentration is getting more intense. Here is the basis of mental telepathy. Therefore, you have to be careful. Intensify your concentration, and at the same time witness the flight of consciousness in the 'dark night of the soul'. As the practice intensifies you will come across rare experiences. Continue this for some time.

Stage 4: The fourth stage consists of having an overall survey of chidakasha. Above, below, at the front, back and sides, consciousness becomes all-pervasive. It behaves as if it is a person in search of something, gazing all around himself and fully alert to what he is doing. So you must survey chidakasha for some time, at the same time carefully retaining the awareness that you are doing so.

Stage 5: The fifth stage consists of putting yourself in the centre of chidakasha. Visualize the inner firmament or chidakasha and then try to be in the centre of it. Your awareness will then become more subtle and penetrating by practice. After this, meditate on your ishta devata in chidakasha for a short time and then end the practice.

Kriya yoga

Kriya yoga is actually a combination of mudras, bandhas, pranayamas, asanas, and awareness. By practising the techniques of kriya yoga, kundalini, the vital shakti energy which lies in a coil in mooladhara chakra, can be awakened. With this kundalini energy we can also awaken the different chakras and with the functioning of these centres we can directly operate upon the dormant and hidden areas of the

brain. This will only take place according to the purification of the body. If the nadis are purified then the awakening of kundalini becomes a divine experience.

Sometimes the word *kriya* is translated as 'preliminary'. This too is a good definition, for kriya yoga is a preliminary practice that leads first to dharana and then eventually to the transcendental state of dhyana, meditation, and *yoga*, union. It is a technique which has been designed to lead to that state of being which is beyond all techniques. Finally, the word *kriya* is used to describe each individual practice. Thus, the process of kriya yoga consists of a number of kriyas each being done one after the other in a fixed sequence.

Structure of kriya yoga

The kriyas are arranged in a special order to systematically induce pratyahara, dharana and dhyana.

The practices of kriya yoga follow a specific plan and can be divided into three distinct groups. These groups combined together systematically induce:

1. *Pratyahara* (sense withdrawal)
2. *Dharana* (concentration)
3. *Dhyana* (meditation)

These three states are actually a continuity of evolution, that is, the consciousness flows from one to the next without any apparent dividing point – so these practices should be done in an unbroken sequence. This whole process is progressive and natural, without any strain and frustration. Regular practice leads to pratyahara and eventually to meditation.

The main hypothesis or contention here is that you can influence the structure of the body, you can create a change in the energy forces by altering the physical secretions. By altering the chemical proportions and the energy proportions in the body, you can create an effect on the mind which you may call shanti, dharana, dhyana or samadhi. This means that, even though your mind is totally undisciplined and you cannot handle it for a second, if you are able to create the correct proportion of secretions in the different areas of

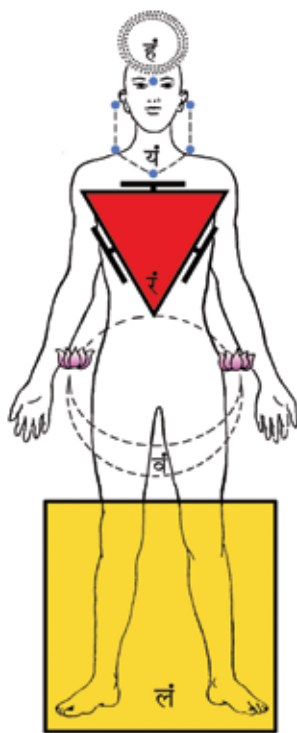
the body and mind, then the higher state can be achieved. Therefore, the practices of kriya yoga do not require closed eyes and a steady posture. Kriya yoga is a tool, a powerful method that will help to propel you along the path to self-realization.

Kriya yoga practices will help to foster many of the personal qualifications that are necessary for progress. Furthermore, sincere and regular practice will bring about *pratyaksham*, direct perception, as a prelude to the highest experience of yoga samadhi.

The five tattwas or elements

There is a school of dharana where meditation is conducted on the five elements: sky, air, fire, water and earth. The concentration is practised on these five elements, with their respective colours, bija mantras and symbols. They are called the five systems of concentration. The concentration is done on the five primal principles of the human body by watching the colours of the elements and trying to discover the colour of one's own personality.

On account of the three gunas, the five *tattwas*, or the elements, are continuously flowing in the body. These five tattwas are classified under the three gunas. When a particular guna operates in the physical system, the element corresponding to it will evolve, and its colour will manifest. For example, when rajoguna operates the red colour manifests and its corresponding fire element begins to operate.



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Methodology of sadhana

The sadhaka should do his sadhana according to dharma, that is, in a well-organized manner. To be successful in sadhana, what is essential is in the following sequence: first, balance of the body; second, emotional awakening; third, *dharana*, one-pointedness; fourth, *dhyana* (nirvishaya vritti), meditation. People who do not follow this sequence of sadhana keep wandering.

The best time to practise is in the morning before the sun rises, when everything is quiet and tranquil. Then your mind is fresh from sleep and is not yet disturbed by the events of day-to-day life. Take a bath and get yourself ready for sadhana. Chant *Om* for ten minutes and superimpose the sound vibration in and through your spinal column. Then practise a few asanas, followed by pranayama. Now you are ready to commence visualization.

Focus your awareness at the heart centre or at the mid-eyebrow centre and practise your visualization there. For those who are not psychic or rational by nature, the heart is the best centre. Those who are psychic or rational by nature will find the mid-eyebrow centre is best for them. Now, don't try to visualize the object as a whole. You must first proceed through general to specific, or you must select for visualization one of the many attributes of the object. If you are trying to visualize the deity or your guru, you can practise *trataka* on his image.

So, fix your gaze on one point of the person. Develop in your mind the image of his toe, one of his eyes or his mid-brow centre. If you try to visualize the whole person, your mind will be dispersed because it is not capable of visualizing a person in the same way that it would view a panorama. You might be able to imagine the hair, forehead, nose, eyes, face, body, feet and hands, but nothing will be clear. Therefore, just try to feel or imagine one point. You might find success with this technique: imagine a red dot on the guru's forehead and try to make it more clear and more dear to yourself. As soon as the red dot becomes visible,



the whole figure of the guru will flash clearly through your mind.

Of course, everyone has to discover the best method for themselves, but I will tell you my personal technique. Whenever I want to visualize or communicate with a person, I don't really think about his form or concentrate on it. I first develop in my mind a long blade of grass. Then I visualize a whole bunch of blades of grass and automatically the person is before me. I can see him face to face. This technique may not work for everyone, but it is a very spontaneous experience for me.

6

Benefits of Dharana



A concentrated mind is a powerful mind and a dissipated mind is a weak mind. Those who want to develop willpower must first of all develop a concentrated mind. A dissipated mind cannot have willpower.

Take a magnifying glass and put it in front of some paper in the sun. The rays of the sun will quickly burn the paper because the rays have been concentrated. Remove the magnifying glass and the rays of the sun can do nothing to the paper. Why? Because now the sun's rays are dissipated.

When the rays of the sun are concentrated, they develop such power that they can burn paper or almost anything.

In the same way, your thoughts are either dissipated or concentrated. If they are scattered, then they can be brought into concentrated focus by specific yogic practices.

Willpower

Your mind will become so powerful you can influence other minds. You can influence your character, your whole life and your own health or sickness. If you have a stomach disorder, mental disorder, breathing disorder, or any disorder, you can remove it by willpower alone. How then can one develop willpower? The secret is to learn to concentrate the mind on one point.

Concentration can prevent or minimize the problems of senility. After reaching the age of thirty, man's brain cells begin to deteriorate and die off at an amazing rate per day and they are not replaced. Therefore, it is advantageous to practise concentration daily for the sake of retaining clear mental vision and preventing the onset of senility.

You can select any one point for yourself upon which you can focus your mind. Gradually, with practice, you will find that the mental focus becomes smaller and smaller. You will start to develop enormous willpower and then many benefits will come into your life. If you want to get up at four o'clock in the morning it will not be necessary for you to put on the alarm clock. You will be able to tell your mind to get up at 3.50 or 3.55 am and at exactly that time you will wake up, because the mind is more capable than an alarm clock. Of course, at present, if you have weak willpower, you will have to continue to depend on an alarm clock to wake you up.

Close your eyes and try to visualize, to develop that point. Try to manifest that point. Try to make that point as clear as you would see it outside, but with the eyes closed. Suppose you are trying to concentrate on a sunflower. Close your eyes and try to see it. If you cannot, then try again. Keep on trying for days, weeks and months, and ultimately you will

be able to see that yellow petalled sunflower with perfect clarity. It will manifest suddenly, and when it comes to you, it is an indication that your mind has attained a state of one-pointedness.

Overcoming fears and conflicts

It is essential that you watch the psychic symbols with as much detachment as possible. This indifference and lack of emotional response to these psychic visions in deeper states of relaxation will tend to carry over into daily life. In this way, things that previously caused fear or conflict or whatever will cease to do so. The scourge of subconscious fears etc. will cease to plague you and make your life unhappy.

There is another reason why it is important to be a witness to occurrences on the mind screen: it is only by watching, by being a witness that you allow subconscious data to freely arise to conscious perception. It is only in this way that the subconscious bubbles of the mind can spontaneously reach the surface. If you expect something you will only hinder the process.

There is another important use of chidakasha dharana. Desensitization. It is a method where one purposely and consciously creates a mental image of objects of fear or phobia on the mind screen, while in states of relaxation. In this manner, the more obvious psychological problems can be purged. Chidakasha dharana is ideally suited for this purpose, for one merely tries to create and project the object of neurosis on to the mind screen as part of the practice of chidakasha dharana.

Inducing subtler states

Some people find it easier to control the chitta vrittis after a little effort. But many people find it very difficult to handle the chitta vrittis. There is another factor involved in these practices. When you try to control the mind, you are creating a split in your personality. This split particularly takes place in the mind when the chitta vrittis are functioning at a very



high speed. Therefore, it becomes necessary to find a more suitable way for those people who are extremely rajasic, who are extremely aggressive on the mental plane.

We should keep in mind that in the world there are more rajasic people and just a few sattwic people. As such, a method has to be formulated, or a method has to be founded on the basis of the limitations of our personality. If one belongs to the rajasic temperament and sits for meditation, and keeps on fighting with one's mind, how long can one do it? It has also been witnessed by different scholars, psychologists and practitioners themselves, that when you go on fighting with your mind for a very long time then the brain waves are transformed to a state of depression. So what happens is that people fall asleep.

That is why, a long time ago, a path was discovered for the majority of people who are searching for a higher realm of consciousness. This path which was discovered is famous as kriya yoga. It is particularly suited for those people who have an excessively aggressive, dynamic, restless and scattered frame of mind. In other words, a path was discovered for

those people who are psychologically incapable of practising pratyahara and dharana. Dharana needs regular and persistent practice.

Kriya yoga – balancing the inner and outer

The incredible sophistication of kriya yoga is that it brings balance between total external awareness, outer distraction, and total inner haziness, where one lapses into a dreamy reverie or psychic picture show. It automatically leads to sushumna awareness. In the early kriya practices, the eyes are kept open for some time and then closed for some time. This allows one's awareness to tread the middle path; the closed eyes tend to induce introspection and the open eyes tend to induce extroversion. Eventually this can lead to a balance point and intense dharana arises automatically. This becomes the gateway to dhyana.

There is a remarkable difference between kriya and other forms of meditation. Many people find that when they try to meditate they cannot control the mind; they cannot even remain aware of what they are doing and after just five or ten minutes they begin to fidget and become bored. In kriya yoga the eyes remain open for some time, concentration is not necessary and the body can be moved. One allows the mind to do as it wants and simply watches its activity as it exhausts its restless tendencies. After fifteen minutes of kriya practice most aspirants want to close their eyes and go into meditation. It is a wonderful system for systematically inducing pratyahara, dharana and dhyana.

Benefits of yoga nidra and antar mouna

Yoga nidra is intended to balance muscular, mental and emotional tensions. It is a perfect system for inducing relaxation by creating one-pointedness of the body and mind. It affects all aspects of the individual, because physical and mental relaxation through withdrawal of the empirical awareness, and concentration, the focusing of attention, or *dharana*, are important elements of that technique.

Yoga nidra is a powerful means for sense withdrawal from all bodily centres, culminating in dhyana; one can reduce sleep to an unbelievable extent and save the precious hours of life. Bad habits can be changed through yoga nidra; it cures many mental diseases.

Witnessing the thoughts and images, everything that is taking place in the mind during mantra meditation or any type of meditation is a very powerful sadhana known as antar mouna. Sometimes when a thought emerges on the conscious plane, it immediately releases a particular disease from the body. There are many cases where the most deadly diseases have just gone away miraculously overnight due to the witnessing and expansion of one thought. Meditation is the practice of mindfulness, and when it is perfected and mindfulness becomes constant and unbroken, it culminates in samadhi.

Diving into the mind with chidakasha dharana

The purpose of meditational practices such as chidakasha dharana is not only to remove your gross mental problems, it is also to dive into the depths of the mind. The psychic manifestation of subconscious mental problems, arise only from the superficial layers of the mind. The grosser problems exist in seed form just below the surface of the mind ocean. You will confront them in the earlier stages of meditational practices. The eventual aim is to go much deeper into the depths of the mind. Once these levels are contacted and experienced, your life will shake at the very foundations, not catastrophically but with joy.

Chidakasha dharana is probably the best method of developing concentration and its techniques are applicable to all people, whether intellectual or non-intellectual, imaginative or unimaginative. We all have an imagination but not all of us use it creatively or to its full extent. By practising chidakasha dharana we will learn how to utilize our imagination both positively and creatively. Most people do not realize that they are continuously using their imagination to shape the reality of their lives. Hopes, fears and attitudes are condi-

tioned by our imagination, which determines our environment and what happens to us. This in turn influences our emotions and thoughts again, in a never-ending sequence.

Through this, you can experience the existence of chit very well. For therapeutic value and the prevention of physical and mental diseases, you have to reach to this depth of your personality. You have to approach the chit for fulfillment of your desire.

Samyama – perfection in mind

Dharana, dhyana and samadhi when accomplished at one stretch is samyama. When you are able to practise these three altogether, then your mind becomes creative, constructive and competent. It is able to hold any idea in itself with greater force, and there is no barrier or limitation to its capacities.

Samyama means control over the functions of your awareness. You should train your mind so well that if you want to have awareness of the sun, you can have it. If you want to see a star-studded sky with closed eyes, you can see it, and if you want to visualize your own heart, lungs or intestines, you can see them. You should be able to visualize any object and see it as clearly as you would with your gross brain. You should also be able to hold your awareness on the process of your thinking and then move your awareness to another person and follow his process of thinking. The *Yoga Sutras* declare that when you have total control over all the functions of the mind, you have control over the objects.

A perfect mind which is capable of thinking of a flower can also think about the sun. When you have accomplished samyama, then you can apply it to different symbols. You can practise samyama on the sun, on the thoughts of others, on your kurma nadi situated near the thyroid gland, on your reflection, or on the heaviness or lightness of your body. Since your mind has become very capable and efficient, it can now practise on any object.

When the mind has achieved perfection in samyama then it attains *siddhi*, perfection.

7

Applications of Dharana



In order to know the higher Self, a true awareness of reality has to be developed, which is neither mental nor intellectual. That deeper awareness develops only through spiritual illumination, which continues to intensify with the gradual removal of impurities. The impurity of the mind

is destroyed through the practice of yoga; through the vast range of disciplines such as yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

Chitta shuddhi

In Patanjali's yoga system cleansing all the mind-stuff takes first priority. During the practice of pratyahara and dharana, when many impressions come up from the depths of consciousness, you try to resist them and push them back down. Whenever a thought comes into your mind you refuse to recognize it, and so because of preconceived, fixed moralities and conditioning, you are unable to face your mind. You have developed your own philosophy of puritanism which categorizes thoughts or mental impressions into good and bad. Yet it is necessary to see these thoughts also. Thousands of patterns of experiences, unworked karmas, suppressed emotions and everything else in the mind-stuff, desirable and undesirable, necessary and unnecessary, horrible and wonderful, must come out. There is no other way to achieve equanimity.

There are some forms of karma which can be managed well. It is important that one works out one's karma, otherwise evolution is incomplete. Many ways have been suggested to work out the samskaras. The most important way is expressing and living them.

The way the karmas can be worked out is by going deep into meditation: pratyahara, dharana or dhyana, and expressing or transforming those samskaras in the form of visions. In the stages of pratyahara and dharana a lot of visions and feelings are experienced. This means one has not lost the individual ego. One is still at the level of duality. These experiences in meditation are only a transformed vision of one's samskara. One is expressing the samskara in that form. This can happen in the state of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana or in the early stages of samadhi. The deeper one goes, the greater is the fixing process of the samskara. As more and more impressions are exhausted,

the mind develops concentration, or fewer distractions are evident to it.

At the point of dharana, mental and physical relaxation is complete and only deep-rooted emotional tensions remain. By regular and consistent practice, the aspirant exhausts more and more impressions, which are the obstacles to pure one-pointed concentration. The experiences become deeper and deeper and the point of *dhyana*, one-pointed concentration for a great length of time, is reached. It is the distractions that have to be removed, and it is at this point that many aspirants are misguided. When, during meditation, through their minds' eye, they only witness distractions, they become very perturbed and disheartened in their efforts. They do not realize that the process of exhaustion of distractions entails witnessing and experiencing as they pass up from the memory store.

During the practices of meditation, the exhaustion of these high tensions, desires and complexes occurs first. This exhaustion takes place in the form of experiences. With the mind cut off from the outer experiences and in a relaxed and aware condition it is free to experience the inner impressions. This is the path to purity, more aptly termed *shuddha*.

The term *shuddha* does not imply ethical and moral purity, but freedom from tension, inhibition, ideas which one does not like, complexes, anxiety and guilt. Such a pure mind will always be cheerful. Under the most difficult and arduous circumstances, under constant stress and strain, the mind will always work without error, thinking will be clear and powerful, words will be forceful, meditation will be deep and refreshing, and sleep will come whenever time permits.

Strength of mind and control

When your mind is happy, you must have the capacity to hold that happiness. If your mind is calm, you must have the capacity to hold it there. If the mind is taking you along the wrong path, you must say, "No, I don't want it," and you must bring it back. You must be like a trained horseman. You

must be like a good driver so that when the car is going at full speed and the traffic is according to your wish, you should be relaxed but still in control. You should use your car by all means. It does not mean that you should keep your car in the garage as an ornament and then go on foot. The message of yoga is to exercise the mind every day, just a little, so that you have conscious control over the reactions of the brain.

In order to develop a strong mind and a strong discipline, you must practise concentration every day. This is best done in the early morning and at night, for a period of ten minutes. Concentration of the mind on one point, without allowing it to think of any other thought or object is dharana. Those who have a one-pointed mind, have a strong mind, while those whose minds are distracted or disturbed, do not. Their willpower is very weak. In order to improve the capacities of the brain and the process of intelligence, the practice of dhyana yoga is utilized.

Chidakash dharana for children

The best meditation practices for children are chidakasha dharana and visualization, as they give full rein to the imagination. It is beneficial for children to practise shambhavi mudra in order to influence ajna chakra inwardly and to delay sexual maturity until the correct time.

To make this practice more interesting, we ask the child to practise visualization at the same time. Visualization in yoga is known as dharana. In this form of dharana we name about fifty items and let the child visualize them one by one. He keeps on moving his awareness, saying to himself and seeing: a pink rose, a flowing river, a snow-capped mountain, a moving car, an airplane in flight, a guava fruit, a church and so on.

This practice not only helps the child to maintain psycho-emotional balance, it also helps his ability to visualize. Later on, when he is in school studying geography, history and mathematics, he will have a visualizing mind as well as a thinking mind. There are three ranges of objects to visualize.



One is the range of objects which the child has seen, another is the range he has not seen and the third is the range of abstract concepts such as love-hatred.

Although we don't have strong scientific evidence for this, I believe that the practice of yoga can also maintain the health of the pineal gland and can give years of life to it. This is why, in India, we have been teaching surya namaskara, a dynamic yoga exercise; nadi shodhana pranayama for health and balance of the pineal gland; mantra to challenge the child's distracted mind; and shambhavi mudra with visualization to maintain the pineal gland.

Concentration practices for memory and recall

Yogic practices to concentrate the mind are also very essential for children and students. Concentration is of two types: on one point and on a series of objects. For the second type you should sit down quietly with eyes closed and remember a number of items, which you should know by heart, and try to visualize them. You can visualize anything, whether a banana leaf, an apple, the rising sun, the half-moon, tidal waves and so forth according to your choice. However, it is much better to select things from nature which are soothing to your mind like the sky, the stars, flowers, fruits, birds and animals, and not such things as a motor car, a factory or an engine. Choose as many things as you wish; ten, then twenty, then thirty and then forty. You can go up to one hundred items.

By doing these types of practices, you will improve your memory power. First start with ten objects. But you must remember that the sequence of objects should be the same every day and should not change. If you can remember and visualize one hundred objects in one sitting and go on seeing them like a dream, you will develop a fantastic memory. These objects should also include colours and mantra such as *Om* or *Om Namah Shivaya*. Even yantras (geometrical figures) can be utilized and visualized. If you have not seen any, then ask your teacher. These yantras are very powerful in influencing the subconscious and unconscious mind.

Psychologists and scientists say that these geometrical figures work directly on the deeper levels of mind. There are numerous yantras: Sri yantra, Tara yantra, Surya yantra, Gayatri yantra, Baglamukhi yantra and so on. Many yantras are associated with chakras or psychic centres, each of which has a specific mantra, colour and ishta devata, the presiding deity. All of these concentration practices greatly improve memory.

It is not, however, sufficient merely to have a good memory. You must also have the ability to recall at any time what is in the mind. This is very important, for example, at the time of examinations. When we talk about memory, we

must know that side by side with the power of retention, we should also have the capacity to recall facts efficiently when required. Many children are very bright but they cannot write or pass examinations, because they do not have the power or capacity to recall. To be able to recall facts and figures it is necessary to practise this type of dharana on the flow or sequence of objects, mantra, yantra, etc. You can try your own sequence, and you can start practising from tomorrow. The best time is at night before going to sleep. You will have good dreams and also a deep, restful sleep.

Preparation for samadhi

There are no special practices to materialize this state of experience because it is a gradual state of perfection. If there are latent problems lurking in your mind, if your personality is tossed hither and thither like a shuttlecock, or if your consciousness is moving this way and that way like a pendulum, then this kind of experience is not possible. You may sit for visualization and meditation, but without accomplishing the necessary preparation of the mind, you will only enter into a state of deep autohypnosis. That is why raja yoga outlines eight systematic steps of mental purification for samadhi. Each step is a preparation for the next and requires a different type of training in order to be perfected.

Samadhi is a living experience, it is not trance or ecstasy, nor is it unconsciousness. If you are trying to visualize Rama, Christ or your own guru, when you attain samadhi you see him there as real or more real than in life. Samadhi is a very powerful and efficient state of your personality which marks perfection of the mind. It is materialization of the entire process of awareness. If you have been meditating on a rose, in samadhi you can have a rose.

8

Scriptural References



The first books to mention yoga were the ancient Vedas. They don't give any specific yogic practices, but generally allude to yoga in symbolic form. The verses of the Vedas were uttered by rishis or yogis in states of spiritual bliss and knowledge or *samadhi*. It is for this reason that the Vedas are regarded as revealed scriptures – the rishis did not compose

the verses but acted in a sense as transmitters through which these revelations were expounded.

The Vedas are regarded as the first yogic texts, for they illustrate, even in an indirect manner, the essence of yoga. The word yoga is mentioned in various places in the Vedas, particularly the *Rig Veda*, but it is generally a vague reference to the meaning of yoga in relation to something else, such as harnessing horses together for example. Of course the terms are symbolic, but one would learn little of yoga as it is understood today by reading the Vedas.

Many aspects of yoga are mentioned, such as *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and so on, though in little detail. The Self or consciousness was fully understood as being something beyond the body and mind and yet to be realized within. This is not, however, surprising in view of the fact that the inspiration behind the Vedas is from highly evolved yogis. This higher knowledge transcends all national and language barriers. It is something that has been realized by persons in every part of the world and at every period of history.

SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM

Nada yoga is illustrated, in the great book of the Indians, entitled *Bhagavata* (*Bhagavata* is different from the *Bhagavad Gita*). A symbolic and allegorical description is given in the form of the story of Krishna. The *Bhagavata* mentions:

Lord Krishna left his place at midnight and went into a jungle. It was the full moon night of the first month of winter. He began to play the flute. The echo of the flute spread in the calm and undisturbed atmosphere. Music rose from the jungle and it was heard by the gopis, the village girls and cowherd girls. When they heard the sound of the flute, they immediately left their houses and their husbands, forgetful of all that was taking place. They ran without consideration to the place where the nada from the flute was emanating.

They started dancing about the flute bearer. After some time, it happened that each one of them found herself dancing with an individual Krishna.

The story seems fantastic, but it is not exactly understood by the people of the world. It is understood only by the yogis. Nada yogis consider Krishna to be that higher sphere of consciousness where the nada of the higher sphere emanates during the deepest state of nada sadhana. When the emanation of flute music takes place, the senses or the sense consciousness forsakes its respective objects, and the indriyas withdraw themselves from their respective centres of pleasure and perception. They recede and go back to the place from where the flute sound or the nada is emanating. There, the senses dance around the nada. In that state, the senses completely withdraw their relation from the outer objects. In other words, a yogi may say, “Dharana has taken place and dhyana is about to dawn.”

PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS

The path to liberation is known as *ashtanga yoga* or *raja yoga* (the royal path). This is a direct path to God-realization following the eight limbs as defined by Rishi Patanjali: yama and niyama asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and *samadhi* or self-realization. This path requires a high level of mental stability and purity, and is followed successfully by only a very small number, although many follow some of the limbs in an incomplete manner in conjunction with an active life of karma and bhakti yoga. Raja yoga has been the path to liberation followed by the holiest of holy men. It is the way of the severe ascetics and those older people who have passed successfully and completely through the three earlier stages of life and entered the final stage, sannyasa ashrama.

Patanjali is very careful about this point. In Sanskrit in his sutras there is a very beautiful sutra:

(Samadhi Pada, sutra 39) – Or by meditation as desired:

Yatha Abhimata Dhyanat Va.

If you are not able to concentrate by the methods suggested to you, you choose your own.

The symbol should be so impressive that your mind must get integrated with the symbol completely and when you practise this way then you can enter into dhyana or meditation easily. There are three steps that are suggested in raja yoga, he says dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Dharana is the capacity of the mind to hold a concept.

(Sadhana Pada, sutra 53) – Mind becomes fit for dharana

Dharanasu cha योग्याt manasah

And fitness of the mind for concentration (develops through pranayama).

By doing pranayama, there develops a capacity for concentration in the mind and one becomes qualified for concentrating the mind in the state of dharana. Therefore, if pranayama is correctly followed, one can attain the highest steps in yoga.

(Vibhooti Pada, sutra 1) – What is dharana?

Deshbandhshchittasya dharana

Concentration (dharana) is binding the mind to one place.

Place here means a mental or physical spot. It is said in different scriptures that there are three bases available for a student, namely objective, subjective and visionary. So dharana means confinement of the mind to one point or one object or one area. There is a good example of one-pointed attention given in the *Mahabharata*. While teaching archery to the Pandavas, their guru Drona asked them what object they could see. Arjuna said that he could see only the eye of the bird which was the target and nothing else. This is an example of concentration.

(Vibhooti Pada, sutra 4) – What is samyama?

Trayamekatra sanyamaha

The three (dharana, dhyana and samadhi) together constitute samyama.

Samyama is the totality of the three processes described above. It contains two parts: *sam* means perfect or thorough, *yama* means control. So *samyama* means complete mastery over the psychic process or a complete control of mental concentration. This is a very important topic of yoga. It reveals to us the secret of yogic powers. The application of samyama to different objects or thoughts will give rise to psychic powers called *vibhootis*.

The samyama cannot be said to be complete unless there is fusion of the three processes of concentration. The object of meditation must become extremely clear and there should be no personal consciousness. The object may pertain to the body or mind or society or personal possessions and so on, but there should be these two factors. The samyama starts with the subjective and objective awareness; that is a dual awareness. You are aware of your object of meditation within as well as in the outside world, but gradually the outer doors are closed and you see only the thing that is inside. That is dhyana. Then the thing seen inside becomes clearer and clearer and simultaneously you lose your personal consciousness; that is called samadhi. The three put together are known as samyama.

(Vibhooti Pada, sutra 6) – Its application

Tasya bhoomishu viniyogaha

That (light of higher consciousness) should be applied to different, finer states of consciousness.

HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA

Sushumna is purified and awakened by the sequential and systematic application of the hatha yoga practices. A consecutive order should be followed, starting with shatkarmas and progressively continuing through to dharana, or concentration. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:124) it states:

*Iyam tu madhyamaa nadee dridhaabhyasena yoginaam;
Aasanapraanasamyamamudraabhih saralaa bhavet.*

This middle nadi, sushumna, easily becomes established, (straight) by the yogi's persistent practice of asana, pranayama, mudra and concentration.

With the straightening of sushumna, the yogi's awareness in relation to the flow of energy within the spinal axis becomes established on a more or less continual basis. Straightening the nadi means it becomes functional in the same way that a hose which is entangled and kinked must be disentangled and stretched from end to end in order for water to flow.

What are these kinks and entanglements which obstruct the sushumna passage? In psychological terms, they are the barriers and blockages within an individual's mental and vital makeup which oppose the uninhibited expression of the greater personality. Straightening of sushumna is not accomplished without difficulties, and it takes time. Nor is it an easy process, but it is the inevitable outcome of continuing the practices.

9

Approaches to Dharana



The body and the mind are vehicles. The emotions, passions and thoughts are *vrittis*, modifications of the mind, but they are not the mind. Mind is not bad or good, not evil or divine. Mind is nirguna, born of Brahman, and its shakti is beyond imagination. Just as light, when it leaks through the cracks in a door can enable you to see objects,

in the same way, the supreme power is leaking through the mind and that is awareness and consciousness.

Mind is not a mischievous bundle of habits. It is not sinful, or composed of religious dogma. It is the leakage of transcendental reality through the consciousness and the senses. With that little light of the mind, you are able to see and you are aware. This tiny light can be made more effulgent, so that you can realize the cosmos and your creator. The raja yoga system of Patanjali can develop the mind to an infinite degree. It is designed so that a multitude of people in the world who are clamouring for delivery from pain, may tread the path and attain *kaivalya* – the highest state of self-realization.

Dharana and different yogas

Concentration and meditation come under raja yoga, and before you practise raja yoga, you must purify the physical body by the techniques of hatha yoga. In yoga, we believe that as far as possible, the causes of thought processes should be cleared up first through the physical medium. For example, sometimes a thought can be the outcome of a bad stomach or the effect of a thyroid malfunction. Therefore we recommend the purifying techniques of hatha yoga. There are six hatha yoga cleansing techniques: *neti*, *dhauti*, *basti*, *nauli*, *trataka* and *kapalbhati*. They are called the *shatkarmas*. With the guidance of an experienced teacher, you do these practices according to your requirements and capacity.

After you have practised the *shatkarmas* for one to two years, harmony is attained within the nervous system, the parasympathetic and sympathetic, in *ida* and *pingala* nadis. They are responsible for *manas shakti*, mental energy, and *prana shakti*, pranic or vital energy, respectively. If either of these nadis are disturbed, then you have diseases born of *manas* or *prana shakti*.

By hatha yoga, therefore, we are actually purifying all the flows so that they are homogeneous and uninterrupted. When this has been accomplished you should then start

concentration for which a strong nervous system is imperative. When the flows in ida and pingala are correctly energized and balanced with respect to each other, the third flow, sushumna, is automatically activated. When this happens, meditation becomes spontaneous.

In the raja yoga of Patanjali, you have eight steps: yama and niyama are the first two, asana and pranayama make it four, pratyahara and dharana six and dhyana and samadhi make it eight. The contention of Patanjali is that you have to perfect yama and niyama first. Without the perfection of yama and niyama, asana and pranayama etc. will not give the desired results. What is yama and niyama? *Yama* means self-control, rules and observances: truth, non-violence, celibacy, non-stealing, non-aggrandisement. External and internal purity, contentment, self-study, austerity and surrender to the higher reality are niyamas.

Patanjali was a contemporary to Buddha and therefore, I think, his system of yoga was influenced by the Buddhist philosophy of yama and niyama. But the authors of hatha yoga are very clear about it. They do not say that yama and niyama form the basis of this system. The order here is different – first comes shatkarma and with this hatha yoga begins. But shatkarma alone does not constitute the whole of hatha yoga. After shatkarma comes asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. Then comes pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

The authors of the hatha yoga texts were very much aware of the practical difficulties of every man in relation to yama and niyama. Moreover, yama and niyama have more to do with religion than with man's spiritual life. That is the reason why the texts on hatha yoga do not lay emphasis on yama and niyama. They straight away begin with shatkarma, and say that you should first purify the whole body – the stomach, intestines, nervous system and other systems. Then you should start asana and pranayama. After this, you should go on to practise kriyas like vajroli, sahajoli, khechari and shambhavi. Then you should practise mudras like vipareeta

karani, yoga mudra and others. In this way, it will be possible to get into deep meditation.

The most important thing to know about is the mind. When the mind is stopped, the prana is stopped – technique number one. When the prana is stopped, the mind is stopped – technique number two. Three – stop the emotion, and control both the prana and the mind. These are the three ways: raja yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga.

In bhakti yoga, the emotions are controlled and directed to the higher self. Thereby, both the mind and prana are controlled. In raja yoga, by pratyahara, yama and niyama, and dharana and dhyana, the influence of the mind and consciousness are controlled; thereby the prana is controlled.

In hatha yoga, one practises pranayama, kumbhaka, moola bandha, jalandhara bandha and uddiyana bandha; the prana is controlled. By controlling the prana, the mind is automatically suspended.

As long as a man's wishes, desires and karmas persist he should follow the path of bhakti. Bhakti yoga means pooja, reading the scriptures, japa and satsang.

Bhajan is one of the popular sadhanas in India. The singer may sing only one line or only one song for hours together, with the eyes and ears closed to everything else except the sound of the bhajan. This is one of the elementary sadhanas but it is important insofar as it can easily lead to dharana and dhyana. Kirtan is also one of the easy, yet effective sadhanas. It is done with one person leading and others following. There are different methods in different provinces. Sometimes it can continue for twenty-four



hours or even longer and produces wonderful effects on the audience.

On the yogic path, asana and pranayama are for everyone; while satya, ahimsa, brahmacharya, asteya and aparigraha should be practised according to one's station in life, one's *varna ashrama*.

Dharana, dhyana and samadhi are the practices of raja yoga. This is ashtanga yoga which is practised only after bhakti yoga. Read the original shastras and find out when the practice of yoga starts. The first sutra of Maharishi Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* says: *Atha yoganushasanam*. Here the word *atha* means 'now therefore'. 'Now' that you have passed your graduation, you may study further. 'Now' that you have practised bhakti yoga, we will tell you the discipline of yoga.

Tantra

Some people find it easy to concentrate on a thought, on an idea, but most people find it difficult or impossible. Therefore, for successful meditation one must first of all choose a form. According to yoga and according to tantra, this form is either a yantra, a mantra, or a mandala. Yantra, mantra and mandala, these three cannot only help you to create a concentrated state of mind but they can also help you improve the quality of your inner being or the depth-mind.



These are the three things which are the basis of tantra. Yantra is a kind of geometrical diagram. Mantra is a sound. Mandala is the finalization, it is the discovery or the realization of a particular yantra for you that becomes a mandala, that becomes a medium of conception. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali it is called dharana and that is a mandala.

What is a mantra? For most people a mantra is a divine name, or the name of a Hindu God or Goddess. That is not correct. I think this is not the classical definition of mantra. A mantra represents a sound, and this sound is to be conceived of as a seed which you sow and that seed germinates, sprouts, grows and fructifies. In the same way, a sound can attain any frequency. At one level the sound is gross, but the same sound, when it attains a high frequency, can also become an explosive force.

In the tradition of tantra, knowledge of the structure and combination of gross and subtle sounds is known as *mantra shastra*, and is considered to be very important. In fact, it has been said many times that without mantra there is no tantra. According to both the Vedas and the Bible, the seed out of which the gross manifestation of the material universe is emerging is a matrix of eternal sound.

Mantra exists as energy in the form of gross and subtle sounds. Different dimensions of nada have been perceived and passed on by the great yogis, rishis and munis in the form of mantras. Inner knowledge of mantra is known as *mantra siddhi*. Mantra is to be used for spiritual evolution and must be received from a guru. In the practice of nada yoga, these inner sounds are used as a pathway to pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

These yantras, mantras and mandalas can be seen in the ancient Kabbala system. They were also very much prevalent before Christianity came to Europe in the mystic tradition of the Celtic civilization. The symbols were very popular in Egypt, in Tibet, in China, in Japan. In India we have the yantra and those yantras are used for maintaining a sort of psychological balance.

Tantric literature states that once the dissipation of prana is arrested through the practice of mudra, the mind becomes introverted, inducing states of *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal, and *dharana*, concentration. Because of their ability to redirect prana, mudras are important techniques for awakening kundalini. For this reason, they are incorporated extensively in kriya and kundalini yoga practices.

There is a great similarity between tantra shastra and yoga shastra; in both you will find reference to asanas, mudras, bandhas, chakras and dharana; kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, hatha yoga, mantra yoga, jnana yoga are parts of tantra shastra. In the sixty-four tantras there are hundreds of such methods meant for highly developed and also for undeveloped people. Each tantra can be said to have been created to suit a limited number of temperaments.

Other traditions

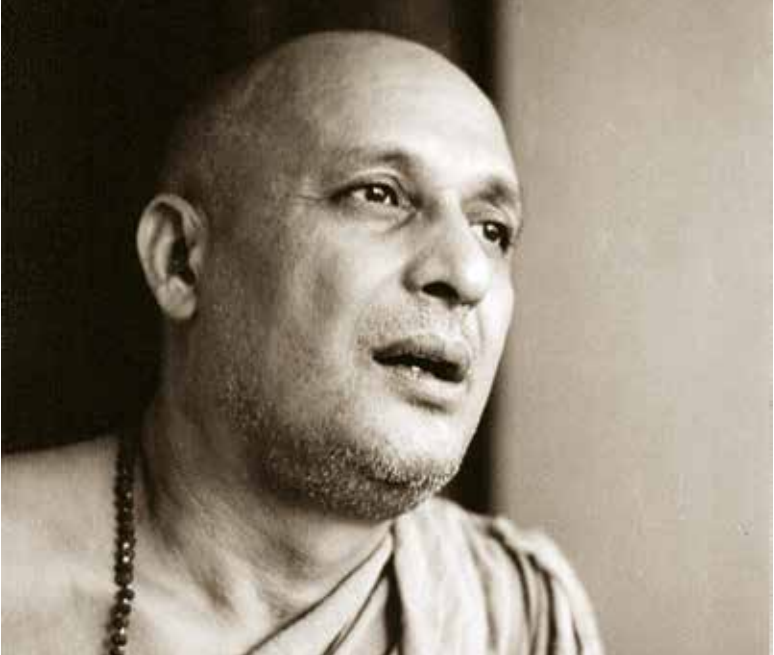
Jain texts, like the *Yoga Shastra* of Hemacandra, mention several asanas or postures which are identical with those of tantra and yoga. In Subhadra's *Jnanarnava* (800 CE) there are several chapters on yoga as well as long discussions on asana, pranayama, mandala, dharana and dhyana. Other texts give instructions for *nyasa*, the technique from which yoga nidra evolved.

Some sects of Christianity, notably the Catholic and Greek Orthodox, utilize ishta devata sadhana. Their churches and homes are adorned with many images of Christ, his mother, various saints and so on. The images such as the cross, or a particular form of Jesus or his mother Mary, become deeply impressed in the consciousness of the practitioners in the same way that trataka on a candle flame, a picture or a symbol is used in yoga to induce sense withdrawal (*pratyahara*). This leads to concentration of the mind (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*).

In certain Buddhist schools of meditation, the priests beat drums and meditate on the sound. It is a very elementary sadhana but it is useful for many of us.

10

Conclusion



The ancient science of yoga as enunciated by rishis of old relates to us the process of harnessing the mind. Schopenhauer once wrote that desires are infinite and fulfilment is limited. Will has more power to grasp than attain. The best way to ensure happiness is to have minimum

wants and desires. One desire leads to another associated desire and the process goes on endlessly. This is true. The eastern philosophers and saints have been telling us for ages that the mind is the cause of happiness and sorrow. One who conquers the mind goes beyond the reach of pain and pleasure. But how to conquer the mind? We believe it can be achieved through yoga alone. Peace or liberation is nowhere beyond this earth and it is to be acquired here and now by proper mental discipline.

Self-realization is only an act of eliminating the layers of ignorance. So one proceeds on the path of dharana – a practice of retaining a form of consciousness within and not allowing that form of consciousness to disappear from the mind. So much so that in the act of holding the consciousness, all other dissimilar forms drop away and the original form always remains. It shines in all its infinite glory and infinite beauty, and samadhi dawns.

The stages from dharana to samadhi are really different names for different degrees of attainment. One automatically leads to the next when the aspirant has reached a certain level of development. They are not totally different practices as are the lower stages such as asana, pranayama, for example. There is no abrupt change from one stage to the next. The progress of the aspirant in these realms is natural and spontaneous. Therefore, Sage Patanjali has reaffirmed the technique of ashtanga yoga in both its aspects – *bahiranga*, external, and *antaranga*, internal – for the perfection of yoga.

Yoga has always aimed at the emergence of a healthy and integrated personality in man as the indispensable condition for his ability to take to higher flights in yoga. We are talking about the transformation of the mind, our struggle or battle with the mind. For us, the mind is not Satan or the devil, it can be examined scientifically. The mind is definitely a greater, broader and more infinite substance than the body, which is limited by material associations. But the mind still resides within the realm of our human existence and it can be visualized.

During the practice of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, whatever experiences you come across are nothing but the manifestation of the knowledge acquired by you; it is your mind facing itself, it is your own mind-stuff. The mind exists on conscious, subconscious and unconscious levels, and also in the *sthula*, gross dimension, *sukshma*, subtle dimension, as well as other dimensions. Self-awareness functions throughout and it becomes more and more effulgent and luminous when the forms, patterns and modifications that are being identified with the structure of consciousness are withdrawn.

During the practice of dharana, when you are concentrating on the object, you must see that the purging is taking place. A lot of ideas, images, memories, unhappiness, happiness, all the good and bad experiences, the guilt, the conflict, the obsessions, the complexes will come up and you must look at them. That is called witnessing the mind. From the point of dharana you are expanding your consciousness; the normal awareness of the object is expanded. It leads the mind to concentration or dharana. In advanced stages, visualization develops into dhyana or pure meditation. Then there is the conscious experience of the visualized object in the unconscious, the distinction between conscious and unconscious dissolves and distracting images cease to arise. This faculty of dhyana is a faculty inherent in us all. It is the distractions that have to be removed.

Man, in his ignorance, has been experiencing the horrors of his own personality. He creates problems, and in his anxiety to solve them, creates further problems. How can problems ever cure problems? How can a mind which is incapable and impotent, resolve such turmoil? You cannot overcome the dilemma of conflict through the medium of the mind. Many people from both the east and the west who hold great qualifications in the study of the mind and psyche, are unable to solve their own problems. The solution lies in transcending the mind. If you have mental distress, psychoses and neuroses, you must learn how to master the

mind. It is not enough to merely know all its components. This cannot be achieved by observing religious practice or simply submitting yourself to a puritanical way of life.

Just as there is a science to teach you how to drive and maintain a car, there is also a science in which you can learn to operate this vehicle, this life. Yoga is the science which teaches you to hold the steering mechanism correctly, how and when to apply the brakes, how to run this life in different gears, so that it will flow in harmony and carry you wherever you desire.

The purpose of meditation is to develop super-awareness which should take charge of all the affairs of life, replacing the mind just as in presidential rule the governor takes charge of all the affairs of the state when the cabinet does not function. In the same way, when we know that this mind is not able to conduct the affairs of life properly, when it is creating torture, agony and suffering we say, “No, the mind is not a good director.” The limited mind must be replaced by a superpower, super-awareness.

From dharana to dhyana and samadhi

Dhyana is merely an extension of dharana. It arises when one is able to maintain a smooth, unfluctuating flow of concentration towards the inner symbol for a period of time. The mind becomes balanced as it moulds itself around one pattern in the form of the psychic symbol. The flow of awareness is often compared to a smooth flow of oil. Eventually this leads to an elimination of duality; the seer, seen and seeing merge into unity and one's being fuses into the state of samadhi.

From this perspective yoga is a process of purification. It is an act of separation in which we separate the non-self elements from the atman. This awareness is atman, it is pure, undifferentiated, always homogeneous, always eternal, always unchanging, in everyone.



Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. *Satyam Speaks Series* is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere seekers to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place to be.

Dharana, the sixth stage of sage Patanjali's raja yoga, means concentration, focus, one-pointedness on one thought, idea, sound or image. This volume presents the techniques and benefits of developing the skill to concentrate.

Note: This series is for knowledge only. The practices must be learnt from an accomplished yoga master.

