

*The Basic Tenets
of
Patanjala Yoga
I
by
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THE BASIC TENETS OF PATANJALA YOGA — I

The term Yoga is being used quite extensively these days to encompass a variety of practices for different ends. Physical exercises, certain vows and constraints, meditation, attitudinal transformations towards work and results thereof are some of them, widely propagated and practised. Further, even among those practising the same system of Yoga, there are different schools with marked variations in their practices and emphasis.

The traditional concepts and practices of Yoga, however, are contained in the Yoga Darsana, propounded by Maharshi Patanjali. It stands as the most authoritative of the Yoga treatises and perhaps the most ancient of the complete work on Yoga.

Patanjali was a Rshi — the word literally meaning one who speaks the Truth. The Vedas contain such expressions of various Rshis, and the vaidic religion and philosophics are known as Arsha or those of Rshis.

The vaidic revelations belonged to two categories. Pravriti marga (Path of activity) was one which enunciated the various religious rites (karma), vows, do's and injunctions and associated Mantras, leading to worldly happiness, orderly life, removal of impediments and progressively achieving higher levels of consciousness (Loka) and thereby higher shades of bliss. There was the other group of Rshis who promulgated the Nivriti marga, or the path of renunciation. It is the way of salvation, a freedom from rebirth, sorrow and suffering, attainment of peace of mind, culminating in self realization. Janaka, Yagnavalkya, Kapila and of course Patanjali are foremost among them, apart from the less known whose immortal words arising out of intense Samadhi (concentration) are to be found in the vast vaidic literature, especially the Aranyaka and Upanishadic portions. It may be interesting to note that Patanjali who advocates renunciation as a means or self realization, the highest goal for an individual, does give the necessary methodology for the highest worldly and other worldly enjoyments and the acquisition of enormous powers. As one who speaks the truth, these supernatural powers are mentioned as they are the necessary outcome of various practices of Yoga. However, there is no mistaking what Patanjali has in mind. It is self realization, the ultimate objective of Patanjala Yoga.

THE DARSANAS:

Darsanas are schools of experiences or philosophical systems, purporting to reveal the Truth. Out of the Vedas, six schools have been in vogue. Of these, Samkya, yoga and vedanta form a close group of Darsanas and reveal the highest of vaidic wisdom. Even though there are some minor differences among these systems, one who studies them deeply will be able to easily reconcile the apparent differences and find them complimentary. There is no mistaking the general direction of these enquiries or the similarity of experiences, all arising out of immense absorption in Truth (Samadhi).

ABOUT PATANJALI:

Human happiness is at its highest, so a theory goes, when the people enjoy good health, express themselves well and deeply, and have clarity of thought. Bhartruhari, a great philosopher and grammarian emphasises the need for the purity of these three human activities (karana), viz. of mind, speech and body (Mano-vak-kaya).

Maharshi Patanjali is believed to have written the treatises on these three subjects, and evidence in terms of eulogy are to be found in ancient Sanskrit literature. Legend has it that once an early people suffering from the defilements of the above mentioned activities, prayed God (Ishwara) for guidance. Then in response to such a prayer, Ishwara condescended in the form of a serpent and fell into their praying arms. The incarnation was known as Patanjali, meaning one who falls to prayers. (Pat=to fall: Anjali=Prayer). He is believed to have written three texts, on Medicine (Chikitsa), Pada (Grammar) and Yoga (mental health).

The Yoga treatise of Patanjali itself is written in cryptic statements in four chapters (Pada). Being used by a grammarian, the Sutra language of Patanjali is of a very high order and the choice of words immaculate. The system itself is very comprehensive, showing the place, practice and the benefits of many sub-systems, such as Gnana, Bhakti, Karma, Kriya, Laya, Hatha, Mantra, Japa, Raja etc. An authentic commentary on the Sutra (thread of thought) has been written by Vyasa, believed for generations to be the author of the Brahma Sutras and the compiler of the Vedas. Further elucidations have been made by such well known stalwarts as Sankaracharya, Vachaspathimisra, Rajabhoja and others.

ON THE WORD YOGA:

The most common interpretation of the word Yoga is integration, derived from the root Yuj (Yujir, Yoge). Such an interpretation would require two separate things or principles and a movements between each other, necessitating activity in at least either of the two principles. Yoga therefore should mean the necessary activity, a consequent merger between the two and a resultant experience. On this basis, many yoga systems have come into vogue — some vaidic and some not based on the authority of the Vedas.

The conjoining of the individual soul (Jivatma) and the supreme soul or God (Paramatma) is Yoga as per Srimad Bhagawata, a well known Purana. Here the Jiva suffering from the three fold pains of phenomenal existence yearns and actively turns the mind towards God in a spirit of total surrender. This is the activity of the individual. Then the supreme Lord removes all impediments and grants him all benedictions, the highest being the integration of the individual soul with Him. This approach of total surrender or Prapathi is the surest way of salvation. Almost all religions are based on similar principles of surrender. Patanjali recognizes total devotion to God as one of the means of attaining self realization.

There are other schools which work on the physical and physiological levels and proclaim that the integration of two supposedly different aspects of the neurological forces, viz. Prana and Apana is Yoga. The Gita also refers to this practice which is basically a Hatha Yoga approach. Here both the Prana and Apana are activated and subsequently cultivated by means of asanas, Bandhas and Pranayama and then the integration is achieved. Yet another school proclaims that the dormant energy in the Muladhara is to be activated in a specified way, so that it moves up through the Sushumna and reaches and merges with the Siva (literally peace) in a position known as Sahasrara in the head. There is movement in Sakthi (Energy) and not in the Siva principle.

Manthra Yoga refers to repetition of a syllable, word or sentence so that the mind merges as it were with the god being contemplated, whose form is sound itself. It means total tuning of the mind with the vibrations of the Devata. Patanjali recognises this method also in achieving mental clarity. There are other similar systems, but suffice it to say that all Yoga systems basically recognize that activity is necessary. All the constituent principles have a certain power (Sakthi) and there is no Tattwa or principle without its distinguishing characteristics (gunas). This is a significant variation from Vedanta, especially the Advaita philosophy which proclaims Brahman as attributeless. Further, unlike the phenomenal existence which is termed as Maya or illusion by Advaita Vedanta, Yoga takes both the soul and the phenomenal existence as real (Satya). However, on deeper analysis, one would find that the difference is more on the emphasis and not the experience of Truth by Yogis and Advaita Vedantins — especially when we know that the great Advaita Vedantin Sri Sankaracharya was a Yogi himself, as could be seen from his authentic work on Yoga, Yoga Taravali.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES:

Patanjali, in the treatise on Yoga recognise three distinct principles (Tatwas). They are (1) Purusha (2) Prakriti and (3) Ishwara. It is necessary to dilate on these to have a proper appreciation of Patanjala Yoga.

PURUSHA:

Purusha literally means the indwelling principle. It is the observer, pure and simple in every being. It is total consciousness—intelligence (Drishi Matra : Observer only) and non-changing, but it is constrained to oversee all the presentations made by the Chitta, which may be roughly translated as mind or the principle which receives, collates all sensory impressions, feelings, moods, memories, etc., and presents them to the self which observes the continuous activities of the chitta. Thus in normal existence, even though the Purusha is different from the engulfing chitta, it is not entirely free of it. This ceaseless mental activity (chitta vrith) and the necessity of the observer or self to identify with it is the cause of bondage.

PRAKRITI:

Prakriti is that which evolves, the evolution itself taking place in steps, producing in all twenty-four sub-principles. The first stage, or the irreducible level is known as Alinga — the non-manifest, non-specific. This stage, also known as Moolaprakriti or root of the Universe, is that when the three fundamental constituent characteristics, viz. Satwa whose main activity is clarity, Rajas which gives mobility and Tamas which restrains, are in perfect equilibrium. Evolution itself starts with the dis-equilibrium of those three basic energies. Even though they are opposed to one another, the three gunas support mutually in the process of evolution. Prakriti is only made up of three gunas and Patanjali refers to the evolution of gunas themselves as the cause of experience for the Purusha.

The second stage is called Linga or the stage of primary or indicative manifestation. It is also known as Mahat or the universal mind.

The third stage is known as Avisesha or non-specific. In this Mahat evolves into six distinct aspects, viz. Ahankara or the individualised existence and the five sensations, viz. sound (Sabda), touch (Sparsa), form (Roopa), taste (Rasa) and smell (Gandha). These five are known as Tanmatras or the pure forms of sensations, which further require sense instruments (Indriyas) for being perceived and Bhutas (media) for their manifestations.

The individualised existence and the five Tanmatras hence require media for their manifestations and we have the next and final stage of evolution of Prakriti, which are the mind (Manas), the five instruments of perception, viz. the organs of hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling. Then there are the five instruments of action, viz. legs, arms, organs of speech, excretory and generative organs. Finally there are the five basic gross aspects of the phenomenal world, consisting of space (Akasa), matter in the form of energy (Agni), air (vayu), fluid (Appu) and solid (Prithvi). The things we observe consist of the various combinations of these five gross aspects and thus there are innumerable objects with different names and forms. Patanjali puts this entire creation as that which is observed by the individual soul

(Purusha). The instruments of perception receive sensations from the gross elements which the mind collates and, with the colouring of the "I" feeling, presents them to the Purusha or the observer. It could be observed that even the chitta, which is mistaken for one's self is actually part of the observed, as all the mental modifications (chitta vrithi) including the I-exist-feeling (Asmita), are observed by the Purusha. Prakriti can be of no use except to the Purusha (as without it, Prakriti will not be observed to exist by any) and the individual soul makes use of this principle for a variety of experiences (Bhoga) or renunciation (Apavargha). The distinction of Purusha from Prakriti is the greatest revelation of the Vaidic philosophies, especially Samkya and Yoga.

ISHWARA:

The inspirational basis of Yoga is Samkya. But unlike Niriswara Samkya philosophers, Yoga recognizes also the principle "Ishwara", the cosmic or the Universal Lord. According to Patanjali, God is one special Purusha, but unlike the individual souls as mentioned earlier, is unaffected by afflictions (klesa), deed (karma), results of activities (vipaka) or the desire for action and results (Asaya). In Him are contained all potential knowledge/omniscience. He is the first teacher, but transcends time and space. He responds and manifests to the devotee to the repetition of the most sacred mantra, Pranava (AUM). Pranava literally means highest praise, arising out of devotion. The repetition of Aum (pronounced as OM) is known as Japa, which is to done contemplating on the secret meaning of the sacred syllable. Such contemplation helps in the removal of all obstacles of a Yogi in his quest for self-relation.

MENTAL LEVELS AS PER YOGA:

Vyasa, the commentator on the Sutras, classifies mental levels of humanity into five — from the view point of a Yogi. At one extreme is the group which could be termed to have kshipta chitta or demented condition. This group lacking concentration cannot even intellectually comprehend Yoga and its benefits. The next group is in the level of Moodha (totally covered or infatuated). Such people cannot reconcile to the separate existence of a distinct indwelling intelligence principle (Purusha or self), or the all pervading cosmic principle, inwardly. They live by the dictates of the senses and the undifferentiating mind, rolling with the punches and rising with the tide, and as such are afflicted.

The third, the restless level, is called Vikshipta. It is a state of evolution in which the individual yearns towards realizing his true nature, but is constantly distracted by the senses and recollections of earlier disturbing experiences. They intellectually recognize the true nature of the self, when pointed out by such treatises as Yoga or Vedanta, but are constantly distracted, the distraction itself arising out of the acquired habits, a resultant of beginningless previous karmas. One's chitta is made up of the reminder of tendencies arising out of past karmas. (Samskara Sesham

chittam). For many of us it is first of all difficult to accept the distinction between self and the most fundamental cognition or chittavrithi which is the I-feeling. Even if one mentally accepts that view, since the mind is used to different activities, this discriminative knowledge (Viveka) itself is fleeting. Thus such people in whom a faint spiritual restlessness is discernable, are dissatisfied with mundane and phenomenal existence. They do get occasionally into a state of total absorption (Samadhi) in a higher principle, but such experiences are few and far between and according to Vyasa, those experiences will not come under Yoga as such. It requires a total transformation of the Chitta. Yoga is the science which helps one achieve such a mutation of the brain cells, by the appropriate practices of the chitta on the chitta, so that the present distracting Samskaras (habits formed of repeated activity) are replaced as it were by non-distracting and concentrating habits. When a person thus takes to the practice of Yoga with a view to achieving the objective of mental transformation leading to self-realisation, he is known as Yoga Arurukshu or one who is desirous of treading the path of Yoga. Even here, practitioners vary and are known as mild, moderate or totally involved, depending upon their dedication to the practice.

The last two mental levels really come under Yoga. In the fourth, Ekagram, in successive moments, the same object is kept by the mind, the object could be a gross object grasped by the senses, or an eternal idea, a subtle feeling or bliss. In Ekagra stage, there is one and only one idea and even the feeling of I-exist, is absent or at least dormant. The chitta is completely absorbed in the particular thought, to the exclusion of all others. Obviously a chitta which is habitually one pointed should have developed the Ekagra Samskara, by prior abhyasa or practice in this birth or here before.

Just as chitta is capable of being in various levels, to remain completely closed to any thought or stimulation is also one of its characteristics. Vyasa puts it as "Saarva Bhaumaaha chittasya Dharmaha". Our mind is capable of being in different states (of consciousness). This state is called Nirodha, which literally means constantly preventing. And even this is obtainable by practice. Practice is the quintessence of Yoga.

Thus Ekagra and Nirodha are the two deep mental states in which Yoga is interested. In both the cases, the Yogi is said to be in Samadhi. The word Samadhi literally means to hold on completely, the root word being Dhi to hold.

Patanjala Yoga darsana consists of four chapters. The first is Samadhipada or the chapter on Samadhi. Samadhi is not an end in itself as is commonly believed but the means of thorough understanding or Pragna. The objective knowledge attained by a Yogi is unambiguous and is naturally different from the normal understanding arrived at in a distracted state.

SAMADHI, ITS PREREQUISITES AND RAMIFICATIONS:

The first chapter deals with both kinds of Samadhi, one used for Pragna or knowledge and the other for the objectless Samadhi, arising out of Nirodha practice, leading to absolute quietude of chitta. When chitta becomes absolutely quiet, without any active state or feeling (Pratyaya) then the self, which is pure consciousness remains in its true form, undisturbed, unlike in other stages when it is invariably required to observe the various states of mind — acquisition of worldly knowledge, confusion, imagination, sleep and remembering.

How does one go into that state of mind when it can habitually refuse to entertain any thoughts? People in the first three stages of mental evolution will not be able to experience that stage, merely because their chittas are habituated to distraction. But one in a million is born, (possibly out of previous Samskara), who is not habitually distracted. Such a born Yogi is known as a Samahita chitta or one with a balanced and contented mind. The first chapter is to give the necessary theoretical background, so that the Samahita chittas already pure mind will develop Ekagrata or nirodha as the case may be. The ultimate aim however is to attain self realization.

How does a Samahita chitta attain the state of Nirodha, leading to self's independence? As mentioned earlier, the chitta can flow in two different directions — towards good and towards evil. According to Patanjali that which flows in the inward plane of discrimination (of self and chitta) ending in self remaining in its true, blissful, pure conscious nature, which is also known as Independence (Kaivalya), is said to lead to good. On the other hand, if the chitta moves in the direction of Pravriti, arising out of non-discrimination, leads to evil, rebirth, three fold sorrow, which could go on endlessly birth after birth. While Moodha and kshipta people are invariably inclined towards Pravriti, the Vikshipta chitta is at a crossroads.

The Samahita chitta however has already the tendency towards discrimination and subsequent self realization. To strengthen that tendency practice (Abhyasa) and renunciation (Vairagya) are the widely suggested means throughout the vaidic philosophies. Or specifically, the practice of renunciation is the principal means.

A Samahita chitta has already acquired a state of tranquillity, by previous karmas or grace of Ishwara. Absence of the common states of distractions known as chitta vrithis is called Sthiti (stationary) or absolute tranquillity. If the mind, moment after moment remains in this state it is called Prasantha vahita (flow of peace).

This is the most conductive State in which a Yogi's chitta may exist. Here the Yogi is to practice to remain in that state continuously. Since his mind is habitually in that state, further practice is not only easy but desirable, which will be difficult for normal mortals like us, without considerable effort and will power. The word Abhyasa literally means Abhi = in the direction of Aasa = remaining. This Abhyasa is the attempt to remain continuously in the state of mental tranquillity. Even this practice when continued for a long time without interruption (daily without interruption by opposing distracting influences), with the necessary authentic scriptural study (say yoga treatises), reverence and earnestness, the chitta gets a firm foundation for proceeding along the Path of self realisation.

Here it may be of interest to note what Patanjali considers as Yoga. It is the complete prevention of mental activity or chitta vrithi, achieved by the practices of renunciation (Nirodha). The practice of Nirodha, slowly but surely transforms the chitta to one which becomes habitually opposed to receiving any distracting stimulus. Thus by the 'activity' of non-engagement, a chitta which is habitually active becomes something like 'closed'. This is Yoga, resulting in the self resuming to reside in its true nature of pure consciousness. Thus here, it is not the integration of any two principles, but the quietening of one principle by some opposing Samskara producing activity, so that the apparant non-distinction between Purusha and chittavrithi is removed. Paradoxically, Patanjala Yoga is an attempt at 'dissociation' between the observer and the observed and not an integration as the word Yoga implies. However, the integration of chitta on one idea or object exclusively, called Sabija Samadhi, is also known as Yoga.

VAIRAGYA AND ITS STAGES:

It has been mentioned that the practice of Vairagya leads to such a result of total independence. The terms vairagya (renunciation) and viveka (discrimination) are such common household terms in many Hindu families in India, that they are almost taken for granted. In fact vairagya which should be done with a positive spirit of renunciation is commonly but mistakenly connoted as a wilful or even perverse negation of all wants.

The word Vairagya or desirelessness is naturally difficult to practice, but for a Samahita chitta it is a natural and enlivening practice. When the mind becomes indifferent to (a) worldly things observed through the senses and or running after objects, status, power etc. (b) those promised in the vedas on performing certain rites as Aswamedha etc., and going to the highest of heavens, (c) remaining in the subtlest states, reducing to Tanmatra bodies, becoming celestial beings etc., (d) achieving the Sidhis mentioned in Yoga texts, or (e) when the mind by means of deep study and philosophical texts as Yoga or Vedanta finds faults in such acquisitions as being ephemeral, attaining which causes pain to other beings and repeated birth and death, pleasure and pain, then such a detachment is called Vasikara Samgya Vairagya or thorough detachment.

This vasikara state of the chitta, naturally is not reached at one stroke. The ancients, to help the practice and also as milestones for ascertaining one's progress in Vairagya, mention three proceeding levels of desirelessness. The first is known as Yatamana or a stage of attempt. It is to go on attempting not to engage the sense instruments, viz. eyes, ears, etc., and organs of speech, procreation, etc., in their respective objects for sensual enjoyments. When one is successful to a certain extent in this Yatamana stage, his attachment towards some objects of the senses are completely eliminated and towards other greatly weakened. In fact, many Hindus attempt this by means of vows (Vratas). Ekapathnivrata (one man, one woman) as against promiscuity, abstinence for specific periods, control in the diet, taking only Sathwa food (that is conducive to good thoughts), rejecting the more tempting Rajasic food (that which makes one highly active and aggressive) and Tamasic like alcoholic beverages etc., which produce dullness and stupor.

After this practice, there is a general good disposition towards renunciation itself, arising out of mental clarity and a sense of well being. Maintaining this level so that this partial self control is firmly established, is called the vyatireka stage. When the practice of this abnegation is extended to all sense objects and one loses completely all interest in pleasurable sensations, and only chitta, the eleventh organ, retains the attachment, it is called Ekendriya. By further practice when the mind by discrimination, realizes the ephemeral character of itself, it is called Viveka (discrimination) he is said to have reached the fourth stage of Vairagya.

There are many authorities on Indology who have concluded that the Hindu philosophies are dismal ones and are pessimistic. Anyone who reads the Vairagya portion contained in Yoga (or Vedanta) as mentioned above, will naturally concur with that view. The Samkya which is the theoretical basis for Yoga, states in one of its works that all phenomenal existence is only suffering of the three kinds — due to internal causes (adhyatmika), external causes as animals (adhibhautika), and natural causes (adidaivika). Further, the other great philosophy born out of Indian soil, viz. Buddhism was evolved out of a great soul's intense feeling of despair at the misery of all human beings. Hence, such people tend to become desireless and still reach the stage mentioned in the Yoga. This is definitely a negative approach, in that those who are highly sensitive as, let us say, is the eye when compared to rest of the body — develop naturally vairagya.

But Patanjala Yoga recognizes that this Vairagya is of an inferior character. Such persons become merged in the feeling of existence alone (Bhava — existence; Pratyaya — feeling) and subsequently get the power to completely concentrate and master the entire Prakriti, in its gross form, in its subtle form as thoughts, or merged in the feeling of bliss or the pure "I" feeling. It is known as Sampragnata Samadhi or knowledge producing Samadhi. Or concentrating on the feeling of desirelessness above and by practice, they remain in that state.

PARA VAIRAGYAM:

The Apra Vairagya of the four states mentioned above may lead to a chitta which becomes habitually non admitting to external stimuli. However, it does not lead to self establishment (or realization). To get an unbroken state of Nirodha, for permanent establishment in one's true nature of total consciousness, knowledge of the principles (Tattwa) mentioned earlier is necessary. Thus after completely knowing the state of the observable Prakriti, one practices Vasikara Vairagya and attains a state of Nirodha. If, however, it is continued with the positive knowledge of the pure state of his Self, the Vairagya becomes strengthened. There is now a prop for the chitta to remain quiet, as it knows that what is achieved is not merely reaction from pain but is derived from the positive knowledge of the true nature of the self. This is known as Para-Vairagya or the highest vairagya. The desirelessness (Vaithrushnya) towards the ever changing, qualitative, phenomenal, painful existence is produced and fortified by the positive knowledge of one's own self. It requires earnestness in the study of the Nivrithi texts like yoga, enthusiasm to reach the goal of self realization, constant deliberation in one's mind (it is the practice) leading to total absorption in the thought (Samadhi) of self, resulting in perfect knowledge of the self. This is the right royal path of Yoga, according to Patanjali. It is thus the most optimistic philosophy as it tells the aspirant about the highest goal of human existence and the definite means of achieving it.

The time taken, which may be one or many births, will depend upon on the intensity of practice. Those who practice intensely (Tivra) get the results quickly. Others are classified as lethargic, moderate and earnest and attain results in their own time.

PATH OF SURRENDER:

It has been mentioned that Vairagya and practice are the means of attaining Samadhi in Yoga. To the question whether there is any other means of achieving total absorption (Samadhi), Patanjali suggests a second, but equally important means known as Ishwarapranidhana, which is a special kind of devotion on the part of the devotee-yogi. It is the method of Prapatti mentioned earlier. Basically it is feeling the existence of all pervading Ishwara, (whose attributes have been described earlier) in the innermost heart-cave and surrendering to Him. All deeds and the results thereof are dedicated to Him, in a spirit of loving and offering, with simultaneous total surrender. It not only leads to self realization, but also removes such obstacles or distractions as sickness, mental incompetence, doubt, exaggerations, sloth, senility, confusion, non-attainment of yogic states and subsequent slipping to-lower states. These are definite distractions a yogi would avoid. The symptoms of such distractions are a heavy mind due to sorrow, dejection, tremulous movements and heavy breathing.

EKA TATTWABHYASAM:

Whenever a Samahita chitta steps into a state of distraction, due to non-observance of yogic practices, he could regain his original state of mental equipoise by one of the eight well-known yogic methods to regain mental stability. These should be understood to have a limited objective and are not comparable to the two main means of attaining Samadhi, viz. Vairagya and Iswarapridhana. They are to concentrate on one aspect or idea to the exclusion of all others (Eka Tattwa Abhyasa). These are classic yogic practices, and separate yoga systems could be found on the specific practices.

Yoga is basically a Navrithi sastra and as such does not deal much with how one should conduct oneself in society and other social laws. However, the Yogi's attitude towards society itself is taken as a practice.

1) Since a yogi is after self-realization, he needs to develop a chitta which is not distracted by attitudes of others towards him or among themselves. He groups humanity as made up of four attitudinal groups. It is prescribed that he should develop and practice a spirit of friendliness (Maitri) towards those that are contented and hence happy (Sukhi). Then there are those who suffer from three types of mental afflictions (Dukha); towards such unhappy souls he should feel extreme compassion (karuna). Then those that tread the path of virtue (Punya), engaged in prescribed duties and working towards the welfare of society, evoke in him a spirit of goodwill and appreciation (Muditha). But then to those who are influenced by Tamas — those that are steeped in indiscrimination and vice, causing suffering to others, he will be indifferent (Upeksha) — an indifference arising out of benevolence. This attitudinal change in a yogabhyasi gives rise to an untainted pure chitta. And a purified mind regains its one pointedness and attains serenity. This particular method can be seen to be prescribed in many religious and philosophical books in India.

2) The second method for calming an agitated mind is a special Pranayama. Here the one object of contemplation is 'Prana' itself, the emphasis being in breath control, especially long exhalation (Prachardhana) and retention after exhalation (vidharana). This practice which can be attempted by many, requires some guidance. An awareness of Prana movement (sanchara) is necessary. It will give better effect if done with Mantra, when it is known as Samantraka Pranayama. Use of the mantras however requires proper initiation.

3) There is yet another practice called Vishayavati Pravaithi. It is common knowledge that objects are perceived through the sense organs — they are felt, smelt, seen, heard or tasted. However, without the objects it has been found that Yogis could get the various sensations — of a higher order — by concentrating on specific centres or places in the body, from where the sensations arise. It is possible, under

proper guidance to focus attention on these specific centres to get mental fixity. Nasagra, or the root of the nose, is the spot of higher smell perceptions which helps fix the mind firmly, removes doubts. Similarly one may direct attention to a spot within, between the eyebrows (Bhrumadhya) — the centre of sight — which practice, called Rupa Pravriti is a necessary practice for meditation by devotees on Paradevatas (forms of personal gods). When such one pointed attention leads to intense concentration, the sensations the yogi gets are out of the ordinary.

4) Yet another calls for attention on the principle of light (Jyoti), the practice itself being known as Jyotishmati Vrithi. It is the realization of Yogis that all higher and divine experiences take place in the region of Hridaya or heart. It is said that the Hridayakamalam (heart lotus) is normally closed and looks suspended. It is here the various feelings associated with the ego (Ahanta or Asmita) are said to be established. It is thus the seat of the Jiva or the soul and many Upanishads and also other Upaasana portions of the Vedas resort to this practice. Thus by directing the attention to the heart region and particularly the centre and 'imaging' Atman or soul (as defined by Patanjali) in the form of bright light (Jyotis), one's mental energy gets focused on the Atman and the mind becomes free from sorrow.

5) Shedding desire (vita raaga) for external objects and sensations (visaya), by constant enquiry is also another method which is a very important practice to those who follow the Vairagya approach for Kaivalya or independence. Alternatively it is recommended that one may repeatedly be thinking of a person (saint) who is desireless. God, in his boundless compassion — as the people who follow the path of surrender proclaim — creates great spiritual souls for the benefit of every generation as objects for contemplation and subsequent emulation. Thus, many devotees of extraordinary spiritual personages do get mental peace by constantly thinking about their saviour or Guru.

6) It is a common experience that out of sound sleep, one gets a relaxed and a clear mind. This sleep is known as Sathva Nidra. In some Vedantic literatures it is said that in such a Nidra, the Purusha gets merged (Melanam) with the Universal Lord (Ishwara). By constantly remembering the pleasant restful feeling of sleep, one can get a degree of mental peace. Further, there are many pious people or devotees, who, once in a lifetime or infrequently, get a divine dream (Divyam Swapnam) and experience a blissful feeling (Ananda), the like of which they or others have not experienced in their normal waking state. By not ignoring it, but constantly taking support in the divine vision, one can cultivate calmness of mind.

7) The various religious rituals, upasanas (devotional practices) etc., are also intended for Ekagra or mental fixity. The Hindu religion is often criticized for the multiplicity of deities (or different forms) even as the Vedas proclaim the one Ishwara. This is mainly to take care of the differences in inclination even among

those religiously minded. Recognizing this, different methods or gods of worship (Matha) have come into vogue. Srimad Adi Sankara, the founder of the present day Advaita (non-dual) School of Vedanta is credited with re-establishing six such major schools of worship, tracing back to the Vedic Gods. They are Ganapathya, Soura, Vaishnava, Saiva, Saktha and Kaumara. These well-known schools of worship are still prevalent in many Hindu families, societies and temples with minor variations in the forms of worship.

8) A particular sutra of Patanjali is sometimes commented upon in that the word Abhimatha, is to be taken to mean any object to which the practitioner finds his mind getting attached. However, according to our Aacharya, such an explanation is erroneous and is not according to the sanctions of the religion to which Yoga claims allegiance. In fact going after an object to which the mind falls naturally, due to sensuality, is the very tendency Yoga tries to correct and instead focus attention on divinity. Thus the word Yethabhimata, should be taken to mean "according to one's religious practice".

The above Yogic practices help mental clarity and fixity of mind, for one with a balanced mind. When once a yoga practitioner is able to get fixity easily, then other normal knowing states (chittavritthi) become reduced. Such a mind is compared to a high quality transparent jewel and it can grasp any idea or object presented to it, just as a spotless jewel takes on the hue of the object near it. The Yogi can fix his mind on any place in and outside his body and its centres, from the minutest to the whole of creation (nature). When his contemplations mature so that the totality of mental energy merges as it were with the object of contemplation, it is known as Samapathi or Sabija Samadhi. Such accomplishments lead to complete mastery, ultimate power and supreme objective knowledge.

YOGIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING:

The awareness of such a Yogi is different from the knowledge acquired by ordinary mortals, whose mode of acquisition of knowledge is sensory, mental (inferential) or secondhand, through authorities. And as this Yogic (Samadhi) method and understanding increases, it simultaneously destroys the normal habit (Samskara) of acquiring knowledge through senses, inference (cause — effect or logical approach) or acceptance of authority. The highest form of such yogi's contemplation is the prevention of even the yogic — knowledge-producing practices, in which case the mind develops the habit of rejecting both kinds of objective knowledge. The chitta develops the habit of not entertaining any idea or thought. It is the highest evolution of the mind, as enunciated in the first chapter of Patanjala yoga. A calm mind by the practice of Samadhi becomes a contemplative mind and becomes all knowing. Then the Yogi by further practice reduces it into perfect

equilibrium of the three basic constituent characteristics (gunas) of the mind, the palpably closest manifestation of the Prakriti to the indwelling Purusha or soul. In such a state, the self, which is pure consciousness, remains in its true nature, which is consciousness alone. That is Yoga, the Patanjala Yoga.

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In the Samadhi chapter, two types of Samadhis, objective and objectless (nirbija or nirvikalpa), have been dealt with, with nirbija samadhi as the ultimate stage for remaining self-sustained. To achieve this, the highest form of desirelessness (Para vairagya) was mentioned as the primary means. This is possible perhaps for a very few in the great sea of mankind, whose mental evolution is so high that Vairagya comes to them easily and naturally. The whole chapter is on the final stage of spiritual evolution with the appropriate practice.

But what of those who yearn for liberation but whose minds are in a state of perpetual distraction? Here Patanjali starts tracing from the root causes of such distractions and pain and commends Sadhana or more mundane practice. It is recommended for the many yoga aspirants (Yogayukta).

CLASSIFICATION OF YOGA STUDENTS:

According to my Acharya, Yogis are of three classes in Patanjali's Yoga. The highest or the most evolved is the one who starts with a balanced, steady chitta (samahita). The ordinary distracted aspirants (Vyuthitha) could be classified into middle order (Madhyama) and lower order (Manda). Both these classes are dealt with in chapter two. For the Manda aspirants, the yoga of activity (kriya yoga) is recommended.

Many people, because of their obligations to society, family and also their own low level of evolution, keep their desire for spiritual evolution in a dormant level for a long time until they are free from many of life's obligations. In fact this aspect is recognised and as such the Hindu approach to different stages of life or Ashrama consisting of first the stage of a student, then a family man, a life in retirement and finally a recluse. Such persons, have necessarily to start their yogic disciplines rather later in their life and Patanjali out of great compassion for them has suggested Kriya yoga. It consists of basically three components (1) Restraint or Tapas. Primarily he is required to be moderate in activity, sensual involvements such as speech, food, sex etc., (2) Svadhyaya or study or reflection of the thought portions of the scriptures as yoga sastras, Upanishads, Vedanta etc., (3) Ishwarapranidhana or again a mental surrender of all activity — it is the daily routine of involved Puja or worship of Ishwara in a chosen form and method. Hathayoga and Vedanta schools also refer to it as Ishwarapujanam, which word is generally known and practised by many religious minded and spiritual aspirants.

KRIYA YOGA OF PATANJALI:

This yoga, known as kriya yoga, when dutifully followed prepares the mind for consequent Samadhi. Then there are many aspirants who rather than wishing for spiritual experience, would be content with being free from the mental pain which forms fifteen out of sixteen parts of normal life. Kriya yoga therefore makes the practitioner experience reduction in mental anguish leading to a balanced contented mind, which is the right state to achieve Samadhi.

In kriya yoga, Patanjali makes considerable efforts to explain the mental afflictions, and kriya yoga is resorted to for their reduction. It has been mentioned that Purusha, or the indwelling consciousness is a pure, non-changing principle and is the real self. But the most fundamental cognition is the chitta vrithi called I-exist. The majority of people, in fact many religions and also many other philosophies claiming allegiance to the Vedas (Aastika darsana) refer to the I-exist-feeling as the self itself. The biggest departure from this commonly held belief, (which results from the confusion of identifying the I feeling with the self), resulting in the understanding that there is consciousness different from I feeling, is the gift of Samkhya, yoga and Vedanta. This confusion of non-differentiation is technically known as Avidaya in Yoga. It is the most fundamental mental affliction. Asmita or the I-exist-feeling, which becoming so strong negates the separateness of pure consciousness or true self. This thought when becoming still more strong divides all objects into beneficial and harmful, creating further strong feelings of likes and dislikes (Raaga and Davaha). This leads to the fifth afflictive mood which is the anxiety of losing what one likes and being harmed by what one dislikes. The height of this anxiety is the fear of losing ones own identity (Abhinivesa), the body or the fear of death. These persist even in a well read philosopher as in an ignorant man, as these afflictions are deep rooted and are the result of maintaining this confusion from time immemorial, continuing through birth after birth.

These afflictions are to be weakened by kriya yoga and subsequently destroyed when the three characteristics of the chitta regain their equilibrium through Nirbija Samadhi. Without the deliberate practice of yoga, these mental afflictions, continue to torment the individual, through repeated birth, activities, consequent results, which for a discerning yogi are only painful. So long as the klesas remain undestroyed, the vicious circle of birth, activity (arising of previous memories and activities) and painful experiences continue endlessly, without any force to intervene or break it and the day of deliverance is never in sight.

Activities are either meritorious or sinful and result in corresponding birth, experience and subsequent similar activities. A discerning yogi, or for that matter, Patanjali proclaims, if one would pause to ponder on his own state of affairs, he would find that the very process of constant change (Parinama) unfulfilled desire (Tapa) and haunting memories (Samskara) are painful (Dukka). Further, since the mind which

itself is fickle due to its own changing characteristics, by which what appears good at one time appears differently at another time, a discerning yogi (viveki) becomes alive to the endless misery of phenomenal existence. Patanjali gives friendly advice that this endless pain will have to be avoided, at last for the future, which is fundamentally caused by the wrong identification of the self with the mind's thought of the self.

ASHTANGA YOGA:

While the practice of Kriya Yoga, which is for the old and weak and which helps to reduce mental klesas, the practice of a more elaborate Ashtanga yoga which is recommended for the middle order yoga aspirants is enunciated by Patanjali. It is a deeper and subtler cleansing process of the body, the senses, the mind and the intellect, weakening in the process attachments and aversion to material objects and such desires as reaching heavenly consciousness or avoiding hell, as described in the texts of various religions. The mental acuity is phenomenally enhanced by Ashtanga yoga and the limit is perfect objective knowledge up to achieving the distinctive knowledge (viveka kyati) of the Purusha and the observable Prakriti (mind).

CODES FOR A YOGI:

The Ashtanga yoga, which is of eight different types of activities, could however be grouped into external and internal processes. Of these, the first two angas, the self controls and restraints are the preparatory steps. The first anga, known as yama, means control. It is an attitudinal practice of the yogi towards objects external to him. To be harmless (Ahimsa) to all beings, to be truthful, never to covet, non-acquisition and remaining non-possessive and controlled sex within the institution of marriage are these great vows and should be observed by the yogabhyasi at all times in life and on all occasions.

These yamas have a great significance. Ahimsa is the main inspiration for such religions as Buddhism and Jainism. Mahatma Gandhi attempted to develop his philosophy of self development on the basis of non-violence (Ahimsa), truthfulness (Satyam), (Astheya) non-stealing, Brahmacharya (controlled sex), leading to total abstinence and aparigraha (non-possession). The highest moral code is non-violence according to Buddhism. (Ahimsa hi paramo dharmaha). So is this also with Jainism.

As one develops this controlled attitude towards other beings, which helps to reduce mental tribulations arising out of transactions with others in society, there are other restraints (niyamas) to be observed which are more personal, pertaining to the abhyasi himself. The first is Soucha or cleanliness, which leads to a healthy life and prevents diseases arising out of close contact with people at large. Out of Santosha or contentment, arises immense mental peace. It is said in Manu smriti, that the happiness that arises out of fulfillment of desires — either here or hereafter — is not comparable to a sixteenth part of that experienced by the reduction of desire itself.

Tapas which is moderation in speech and food or generally sensual gratification, helps to make the body and senses more sensitive. Swadhyaya or study of the scriptures, the karma and Dewata portions, presumably, will help one get direct perception of the divinity contemplated. And out of an attitude of surrender to the Universal Lord (Ishwara Pranidhana), including all moral (dharmic) actions and their results thereof, prepares the mind for intense concentration (samadhi). It could be observed that the last three factors of Niyama form the Kriya yoga itself.

Some reflection on the above do's and don'ts for a ashtanga yoga practitioner will indicate that these practices and attitudinal changes are necessary and sufficient prerequisites before the other practices pertaining to one's own body and senses are taken up, and as such require a mind free from distractions and from the external environment. What is called for is a deliberate attempt to practise them so that the earlier habitual slavish tendencies of the mind to follow the dictates of senses and their objects are minimised. It is however, easier said than done.

Patanjali recognizes such a difficulty as mainly due to our childhood habits and conditioning and also the latent tendencies acquired through many previous births. To help the earnest Yogabhyasi, he suggests keeping in the back of the mind the thought that one has taken to yoga after being convinced that it is the only and the last resort to attain peace of mind. He should think repeatedly that all actions inconsistent with the injunctions mentioned are motivated by greed, enmity or infatuation and will only and invariably lead to endless misery and confusion. All attempts in yoga practice, as asana, Pranayama or meditations, will be of little use and the benefits, if any, will only be temporary without the preparatory Angas. Practice of mere asanas without change in food, habits and other attitudinal changes are perhaps the cause of much disenchantment of many yogabhyasis.

BENEFITS OF PRACTICE OF PRELIMINARY ANGAS:

These preliminary angas by themselves impart their own benefits, even if one is not able to achieve the ultimate goal of yoga in this very birth. If one, by diligence becomes firmly established in Ahimsa, friendliness will be reciprocated to him. He will encounter no enemies and hence be free from being harmed by secret or open inimical activities. He can therefore progress without let or hindrance in his chosen ambition of self realization. Similarly when he is invariably truthful, his actions always produce the right results. When one is established in non-stealing or develops a trusteeship approach towards wealth and earns only out of honest and prescribed duty, he paradoxically comes to possess and manage wealth. Strength is acquired by Brahmacharya or controlled sex within the institution of marriage. Non-possession or Aparigraha frees the mind from the worries and anxieties about protecting one's wealth and helps one in becoming a futurist.

Patanjali in his great companion to the practitioners of yoga, has thus indicated the benefits that accrue even from preliminary practices. In the Gita also, Sri

Krishna to encourage Arjuna and other devotees to take to the spiritual path through the practice of classical yoga, assures them that even if one is not able to achieve the end result of yoga which is self realisation or God realisation whichever way one would put it, his samskaras will lead him — through the grace of God — to be born in a family of Yogis or be born into a well-to-do family, so that he can pursue the practice of yoga without the compelling need to spend all his time and energy earning wealth to maintain the normal way of life.

ASANAM:

Having thus withdrawn the mind from the external environment, the next set of distractions arising out of one's own body will have to be got over and Patanjali has Asanas, as the third anga in the ashtanga yoga. However he does not go about describing the techniques or the variety of Asanas that are possible, or that have specific benefits. Since Asana is an Anga for purification, he has only then to state that perfection of the body accrues to one who has mastered this aspect of yoga. He is able to stay in an Asana (literally meaning to remain in position) comfortably and steadily, both of which require good circulation, respiration and a good tone and strength of muscles and nerves which Asanas should achieve.

Since Asanas are an important and perhaps the most widely known anga of yoga all over the world, it is necessary to dwell on the practice. A humble attempt is made to explain the basic benefits of Asana practice, according to my Acharya's Padathis with my limited capacity to appreciate the nuances of this system.

It is said that asanas are innumerable. Yoga texts mention that there are as many asanas as there are species, and more. But presently about eighty asanas or so are generally in vogue. I understand that our Acharya has in his repertoire nearly 700 Asanas. In olden days, generally, people were eradicating and preventing diseases by means of asanas and pranayamas. It is said that those ailments — chronic — that are not curable by medical sciences (Vaidya Sastra) and drugs should be cured by Asanas and Pranayamas. Unfortunately, during the dark centuries of the past, many of our ancient scriptures on Yoga therapy are lost. It is recommended that the practice of yoga asanas should be started with a prayer, possibly the one of Anantha.

The practice of Asanas is getting to be popular again after a lapse of a number of years. However, the mechanical approach to the practice of Asanas, as achieving a particular pose — somehow — will not give the anticipated results.

The chanting of the Vedas has to be done with Udatta, Anudatta and Swarita notes. This saswara chanting of Vedas has been going on since time immemorial. Similarly with the traditional music system in India, it is called music only if it is sung with Shruti, layam, dhrutam, anudhrutam, etc. There are rules in composing poetry which include, chandas (meter), yati, prasa, etc. If one takes to Mantra upasana or meditation, the various nyaasas of the Anga, kara, sarira, kala, jiva, matruka,

Tattwa, etc., are to be observed for fruition of meditation. Mere repetition of a syllable, not according to the tradition of the subject of Mantra (Mantra sastra) and without the observance of the rules of Upasana, therefore do not invariably produce results expected of such upasanas.

Similarly, the practice of yoga, especially the asana and pranayama aspects of it, are not beneficial without the preparation and variations (vinyasas) of the various postures. Without these vinyasas, the asana practice is only as good as any other physical exercise. It is of little use if one learns a dozen well-known asanas and practises them without the vinyasas. It is my Acharyas's contention that the disillusionment of many yogabhyasis is due to the practice of asana without the yamaniyamas, vinyasas, pratikriyas, synchronous breathing, the accompanying bandhas, in their greed for quick results.

BREATHING PATTERNS:

Yet another factor of importance in asanas is the use of breath in all the vinyasas and asanas. Here also, many schools teach yoga without any relation to breathing in asana practice and actually discourage the use of breath, on the plea that the practice of breathing is a separate aspect, dealt with in Pranayama. However, it is found in actual practice that synchronous breathing pattern with Vinayasas, as a deliberate practice is necessary in asana abyasa, to attain the results mentioned in various yoga texts. Patanjali in the Yogasutras mentions about making use of breath to achieve perfection in posture, which is steadiness and comfort.

Prayatna Saithilya Ananta Samapathibhyam, is the Sutra. By Prayatna is meant effort of life (Jivana Prayatna) whose manifestation is breath. Long and fine breathing is therefore Prayatna Saithilya. Texts like Yoga Kurantam, Vridha Satapatam, etc., emphasis this aspect. Further, Patanjali also suggests fixing of the mind on Ananta. The word ananta literally means unbounded or infinity and certain schools suggest that one should concentrate on infinity while practising the asanas. This is difficult, almost impossible for the practitioner, at the stage he is in to even attempt. Ananta, however, is the name given to Nagaraja or Adisesha which is the serpent king. Since Patanjali is the incarnation of Adisesha, one should — the yoga tradition requires — contemplate the figure of Nagaraja or Patanjali, the forms in the shape of sculptures are available in certain temples and description of Nagaraja are also available in certain well known poems (dhyana sloka) used as memory aids in fixing the form of Ananta in one's mind. It is also appropriate as Ananta is the first guru on yoga. Thus while practising Asanas, done with purposeful breathing and mind fixity, one gets steadiness and relaxation resulting from asana practice. From Asana sidhi, one is not affected either by pyrexia or hypothermia, or other opposing conditions, physical or mental.

BREATHING PATTERN IN ASANAS:

There are four factors in yogic breathing. First is Purakam or inhalation. Holding the breath in after inhalation, is called Antah Kumbhakam. Controlled exhalation is Rechakam and holding the breath out — as it were — is Bahya Kumbhakam.

All the movements in yogabhyasa are done deliberately and with a specified aspect of breathing. There are some movements which are done always while inhaling and there are others which are done only while breathing out. Then one could stay in a posture while holding the breath in or out or could do a controlled cycle of yogic breathing in the posture. But there are some movements which can be done either during breathing in or breathing out, depending upon the condition of the practitioner, and the results desired from the practice. Making the operative movements during inhalation and holding the breath in will come under Brahmana Kriya and doing them while breathing out and holding the breath out is langana kriya.

In Ayurveda or the science of medicine, Brahmana Kriya refers to nourishing diet for growth and langana kriya to fasting but they are not relevant in yogabhyasa: The kriyas in Sathwic yoga practice is the use of natural air in cleansing the nadis and not the use of cloth or water or other external aids.

Thus use of breath in Asanas helps to relax and attain the final posture. It helps to reach out and work on the deeper muscles, which may not be possible otherwise. Further, it has been found that with deliberate breathing, one's mind is not allowed to wander, but committed to follow the breath. Yoga practice becomes much more purposeful. In fact, Yogi Nathamuni, the author of Yoga Rahasya, calls the sixteen chapters of his treatise sixteen kalas and as such Yoga is thus an art. As in music, one has to develop a sensitivity with deliberate practice and intense concentration.

COUNTERPOSES:

Yogasanas like medicine, have good effects, but have some side effects, which are essentially physical. To counteract them, every involved posture has a counterpose, which helps to preserve the effects of the main asana and counteract some undesirable aspects. For instance, Sirsasana has many advantages. But this has to be followed by Sarvangasana. If Sarvangasana is done as the main posture (say staying for about 10 minutes or so), it has to be followed up with a mild back bending asana as Bhujangasanam or Salabasanam and followed by a sitting posture Padmasanam. One has to see the effect of doing the main asanam and its counterpose to feel the difference with practising asanas at random.

Apart from the emphasis on conscious breathing in asanas as one advances in practice, the use of Bandhas or contraction of a specific group of muscles is recommended for the higher benefits of yoga. Of the many such bandhas, three are very important. The Mulabandha requires the drawing in of the rectum, the pelvic diaphragm and the lower abdomen as if to touch the backbone. This has to be done after exhalation. It could be observed that at least in the initial stages, one has to practice "Brahmacharya" to attain a mastery of Mulabandha.

The Uddiyanabandha is the indrawing of the navel region again as if to touch the back and raising the diaphragm, so that the abdominal region becomes scaphoid. It is obvious that people who are obese will not be able to do Uddiyanabandha satisfactorily and hence the need for dietary control or Tapas and asanas, to bring the body back to the right shape.

The Jalandharabandha is the stretching of the back of the neck and pressing the chin against the breastbone, about 3" below the neck. This effectively controls the air passage during breathing and is a great aid in Pranayama and also in the practice of asana with controlled breathing. These three Bandhas (Bandha Trayas) are important in the practice of Asanas. It may not be possible for beginners to practice at the start, but will have to do it along, as they progress. It should be noted, however, that they are not to be attempted without the guidance of a competent teacher who himself has practised and mastered them.

The author of Hathayogapradeepika mentions that irrespective of age, physical condition, any one can start the practice of yoga, but regular and involved practice alone gives results (Sidhi).

Yuva Vrudho athi vridho vyadhito Durbalopiva!
Abhyasath Sidhim apnothi Sarvayogeshu Atantritaha!

It should be mentioned that yoga is useful to children and women as well. Traditionally, in India, among Hindus, children at the age of about seven years used to be initiated into Vedic Karma (activities as mentioned in the scriptures), after Upanayanam. Sandhya, or the daily oblations done at dawn, mid-day and dusk, includes asanas like Utkatasanam, Uttanasanam, Padmassanam, etc., Pranayamam or breath control with mantra followed by deep meditation on sacred Gayatri mantram. It is apparent that children were practising yoga in ancient India, and may do so in the present day also, even though such practice is not so common place now.

Regarding the controversy about whether women are fit for integral yoga, there is ample evidence to show that interested women were initiated to yoga. Yoga Yagyavalkya and Siva Samhita, two of the authentic texts on yoga, are actually the teachings respectively of Maharshi Yagyavalkya to his highly talented wife Maitreyi and Lord Siva, known as Lord of Yoga (Yogeswara) to Goddess Parvathi. Further in Yoga Rahasya, Naathamuni the great teacher of Natha sect of yogis, specifies a few asanas like Panchakonasanas (the five kona postures) as aiding the development of the foetus and certain asanas like Pasasana are said to prevent conception (ganbhanirodha). Further there are a number of asanas and pranayamas that are useful in the correction of such gynaecological conditions as prolapse, postnatal disorders, menstrual disorder, etc.

It may be said in brief that Yogasanas should be practiced according to Sampradaya or tradition to attain the benefits mentioned in the texts. The padhati or system of our Acharya requires that one should practice asanas with the necessary constraints (Yamaniyama) as prerequisites, with preparation, progressions and variations of postures (Vinyasa), corresponding synchronous, conscious and modulated breathing, interposed with stipulated counterposes and counter movements (Pratikriyas) with the Bandha and Mudras at the appropriate stages of breathing.

PRANAYAMAM:

The next aspect of yoga is the well known Pranayama. Having achieved a measure of success in any one of the well known sitting postures as Padma, Sidha, etc., Pranayamam is to be practiced as per the methods prescribed by a preceptor. The respiratory function is both voluntary and involuntary. Normally our breathing is shallow and involuntary. In Pranayama, a deliberate attempt is made to bring it under greater voluntary control, and hopefully, thereby bring under control many other involuntary conditions of the body and mind and achieve certain extraordinary power over one's own physiological functions; and then alter the mental conditions. Pranayamam therefore is a very important aspect in Yoga. Pranayama also finds a very important place in the day to day life of many orthodox Hindus. The famous dawn-dusk oblations, many other rituals and Upasanas, pujas and Japas (worship, meditation, etc.) are invariably preceded by a prescribed number of Pranayamic breathing.

Pranayama is of two kinds, Amantraka, without the use of Mantras and Samantraka with the use of Mantras.

In Pāṇjāla Yoga, the important aspects of Pranayama are mentioned. For a detailed working knowledge one has to refer to other Hathayoga texts and also a Preceptor. Prana, means that which leads well, and it refers to the breath. Ayana is to lengthen it. So Pranayama is to lengthen the breath. The effect of Pranayama is also contained in that word. It is to lengthen the span of one's life. Here Prana is taken to mean life itself. In practice, Pranayama is the control of the inhalation and exhalation.

Apart from long inhalation and exhalation, holding the breath 'out' after exhalation is Bahya Stambha vrithi and holding 'in' after inhalation is known as Abhyantara Stambha vrithi. If these Kumbhakas are long enough and fine enough, then with the help of Bandhas, it is possible to achieve the integration of two separate 'neurological' forces, Prana and Apana. During Bahya Kumbhakam, Apana, in the lower region is drawn upwards and integrated with the Prana in the heart region. On the other hand, during Antah Kumbhakam, the Prana is pushed down, as it were, and integrated with Apana. These, however, are to be practised under the able guidance of a master.

There are further controls mentioned by Patanjali, which require the attention (Paridrishti) of the practitioner. The first is Desa or place. There are different centres in the body to which the practitioner is required to direct his attention, along with the movement of Prana or Apana as the case may be. Normally these are done with the specified Mantras. Further, one has to 'stay' in a particular place for a specified period (kala paridrishti) and then the number of breaths during any one sitting should also be specific (Samkhyā Parisrishti). This kind of practice leads to an experience of 'Utghatam'.

After considerable practice of Pranayama as mentioned earlier, one attains such a complete mastery over his breath force, that he can remain suspending the process of inhalation and exhalation at any time at will. Going by the famous dictum that one who controls the breath, controls the mind, it becomes clear that a person by the practice of Pranayama, is able to attain a certain mastery over his own mental process. Thus all the uncontrolled clouded mental activities disappear and his mind becomes completely clear.

There are many Pranayamas, but Patanjali only indicates the main aspects of it. The main advantages are that one attains longevity and that his mind becomes highly Sathwic; hence it becomes fit for concentration, or the span of attention increases. It is a very important practice in Yoga and is the link between externalised yoga and takes one to study one's own mind clearly, and enables one to alter one's own chitta in the path of yoga. Having achieved a measure of success in Pranayama, one should refrain

from indulging in sensual pursuits and this practice of avoiding sensual contacts with their objects is called Pratyahara (the fifth aspect of yoga), which leads to complete mastery over the senses. As a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell, so the senses become merged as it were with the chitta.

Now the chitta is free from all external distractions, the practice of the first five angas of ashtanga yoga, helps to achieve it. It is a step by step approach to free the mind from the continuous distractions of external objects, one's own body and senses.

But the chitta retains its previously acquired habitual impressions (Samskaras). The Antaranga Sadhana or the next three angas are the means to achieve a total transformation of the mind, mutating (Parinama) the mind itself. A mind that is fleeting is made into one that can concentrate and finally get itself absorbed in the object of contemplation.

What are the objects of such contemplation! How to achieve it? They are contained in the third chapter, called Vibhuti Pada. The last chapter deals with overcoming even such objective contemplations and achieve a totally undistracted mind, leaving the Purusha to remain in its true nature which is consciousness and consciousness alone. That totally free state of the self is Kaivalya, the ultimate goal of Yoga practice. Thereafter there is nothing to practice, nothing to achieve.



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