



HATHA VIDYĀ

An Exclusive E-Magazine on Traditional Yoga



April 2024



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Dhyāna-Moolam Gurur-Murthih
Pujā-Moolam Gurur-Padam |
Mantra-Moolam Gurur-Vakyam
Moksha-Moolam Gurur-Kripa ||

*The Root of Meditation is the Form of the Guru,
The Root of Worship is the Feet of the Guru,
The Root of Mantra is the Word of the Guru,
The Root of Liberation is the Grace of the Guru.*

From

The Editor's Desk

For those who are in the path of spiritual enquiry, Satsang will be a familiar word. However, it is doubtful whether the true essence of the word is correctly grasped by all. This is because the meaning of Satsang delves into much deeper, broader, and far-reaching realms than it may appear to be.

Satsang has two components, namely the word 'Sat' and 'Sang'. Only if one can carefully analyze these two components, it will provide the real answer to the search for spiritual truth.

The meaning of 'Sat' can be interpreted in many ways such as the truth, the everlasting, the base of this universal existence, the fundamental principle underlying every gross and subtle manifestations, and that which is embedded within and connects everything together. Though one could gain such understanding in a literal sense, the reality signified by this word is still beyond the grasp of human intellect. It is essentially an experiential understanding.

The understanding of the Self as the truth that manifests using the mind as a medium by expressing through the Antakaranas (4 faculties of mind) and radiating through the body, is the experience of the ultimate knowledge. The lack of such true experiential wisdom is the reason for all sorrows suffered by human beings.

The idea of permanent removal of sufferings is what drives one towards spiritual quest. With the realization of the absolute knowledge, the embodiment of supreme bliss, all the thirst and longing for seeking the truth comes to an end.

Even if one has realized the truth, it is very difficult to share such experiential knowledge to others. This is so because such knowledge is eternal and regarded as the imperishable 'Aksharam' which is indefinable and beyond words and deeds. If this is the case, one can rightfully wonder how then sharing of this profound knowledge is possible. The only way is to lead the seekers to the same path or the system through which one realized the true knowledge, by imparting with relevant indications and examples. This process can be understood as Sangam, and in a broader sense, the process that unites one with the knowledge of the true Self can be understood as 'Satsangam'.

It would be appropriate here to recall and reiterate the words of Acharya Baghavadpada's (Sri Adi Sankaracharya) that clearly articulates the significance of Satsang:

“Satsangatve nissangatvam nissangatve nirmohatvam, nirmohatve niscalatattvam niscalatattve jivanmuktih”

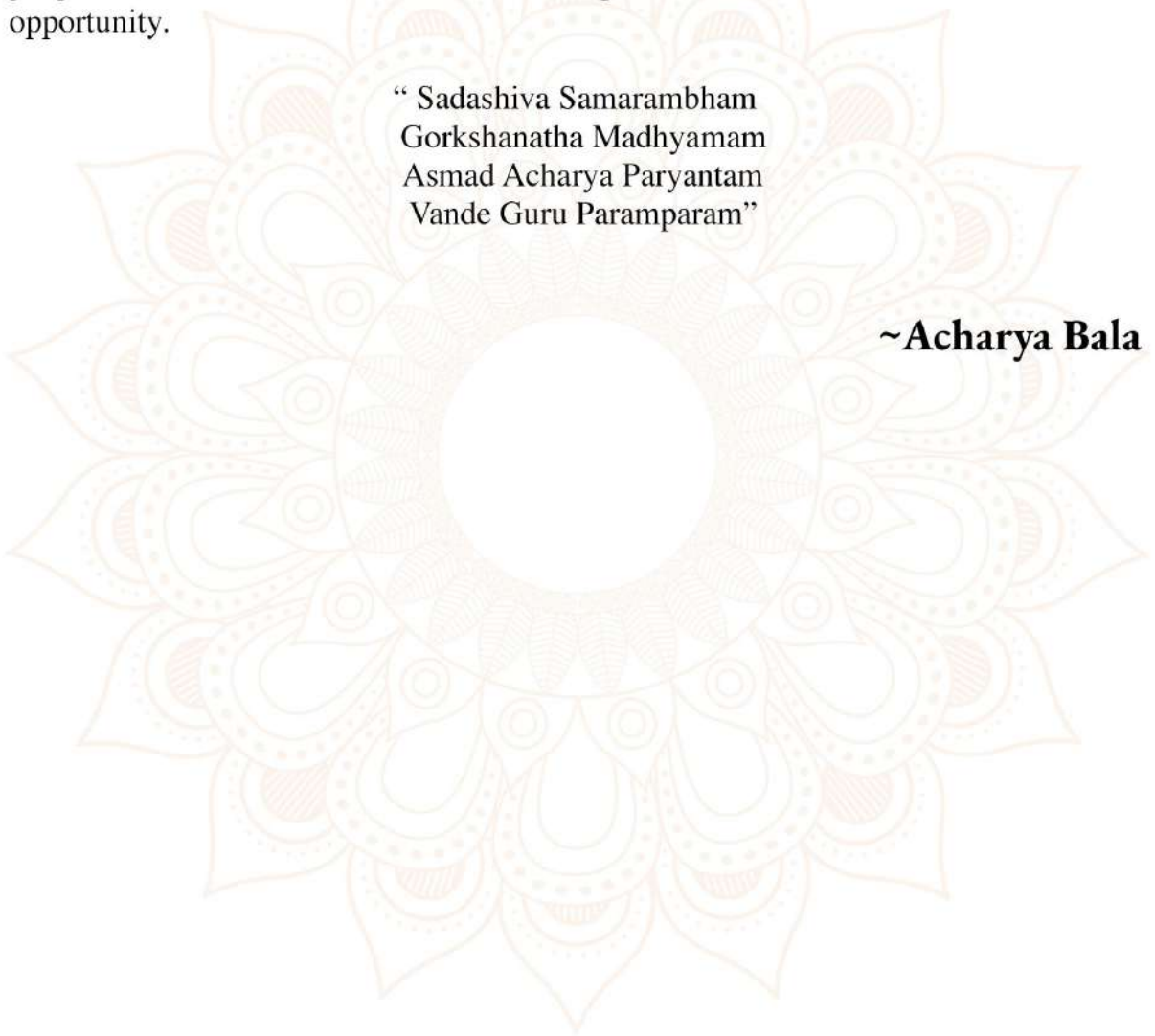
*“Through the company of the wise or the good, there arises non-attachment;
from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion; where there is freedom from
delusion, there is abidance in self-knowledge, which leads to freedom while alive.”*

-Bhaja Govindam-9

While embarking on the path realized it, the great knowledge, taking recourse to the guidance of one who has realized it will be comparatively easier. When others rely on such a person who has acquired the knowledge, it evolves into a tradition. Constant efforts in enquiry of truth over several life cycles alone can lead one to the fortune of being a worthy candidate to be part of a lineage of tradition. I hereby conclude by seeking the blessings of Guru Parampara (Lineage) to bestow the grace upon all such fortunate people, to enable them to understand the significance and make the best use of the opportunity.

“ Sadashiva Samarambham
Gorkshanatha Madhyamam
Asmad Acharya Paryantam
Vande Guru Paramparam”

~Acharya Bala



Yoga, The Only True Doctrine

-Wholistic view on Yoga



Vijesh Ravindran

Since time immemorial the pursuit of mankind has always been to find ways to experience a life full of pleasure and without sorrows or sufferings. While there have been many advancements in comfort and lifestyle that have contributed to better living, these have not been able to eliminate human's problems. Therefore, the question arises on possibility of everlasting peace and solace not interrupted or disturbed with sadness and suffering. Luckily the solution to this has been offered by our ancient masters centuries ago. Through their own direct experience, they were able to come to an understanding that identifying one with the body, mind and sense driven experiences is ignorance and the only way out of sufferings is by understanding one's true self. This is "Prajnanam Bhramam" (Universal consciousness is the absolute knowledge) and is considered the only true knowledge that human need to know.

There are many philosophies, schools of thought, doctrines, and ideologies that guide us to reach this state. Among the many approaches, Yoga stands out tall as categorically pointed out in Siva Samhitā, one of the most respected traditional text on Yoga.

आलोक्य सर्वशास्त्राणि विचार्य च पुनः पुनः ।
इदमेकं सुनिष्पन्नं योगशास्त्रं परं मतम् ॥ १७ ॥

"Alokhya sarvasastraani vicharya cha punah punah /
Itamekam sunitpannam yoga sastraam param matham |"

"Having studied all the Shastras (traditional Scriptures on true knowledge) and having pondered over them well, again and again, this Yoga Sastra has been found to be the only true and firm doctrine."

- Siva Samhitā 1.7

Siva Samhitā, is one of the oldest Sanskrit text on Yoga. In lead up to the above verse, it establishes what true wisdom is, and lists down varying views and approaches to gain the ultimate knowledge for liberation. Through this verse it emphasizes the significance of Yoga in no uncertain terms. It is important to understand that the intent here is not to make other approaches inferior to Yoga, rather it is only to establish the importance of Yoga for potential aspirants. We will find out why this is so in the rest of this article.

Multitude of Varying Approaches and Ideologies

There are many scriptures and multiple of approaches recommended for spiritual aspirants. These include Advaita Vedanta which views world as a current of consciousness, then there is Samkhya philosophy that talks about the dualistic approach of purusha and prakriti, and Boudha which views Shunya (Void) as the greatest. There is also the Charvaka approach which only believes in this material world and thereby prescribes enjoying life without any restrictions. Besides there are also ritualistic approaches.

Further, several scriptures talk about various principles, and attributes needed for liberation. Most emphasize on the “Truth” or “Reality” and the importance of purification of self. Sincerity in seeking the truth, vairagya (dispassion), doing one’s Karma and performance of duties without attachment, are widely acknowledged as essential in the search for knowledge. Asceticism, the need to develop the attitudes of forgiveness, and equality in treatment of all living beings are some other known attributes recommended. Besides, practice of austerities, rituals, fire sacrifice, and pilgrimage are also given importance by some.

There are many more virtues and rules prescribed, some of which are contradictory as well. These naturally could lead to possible misunderstanding that such knowledge is only reserved for people with unique traits and not for common people who are far from perfect. Thus, given the varying systems and approaches, any aspirant would get confused as to which is true, what is appropriate, and how to follow.

Yoga is for all

Yoga provides a comprehensive and systematic path for any seeker for liberating one’s consciousness from the ignorance. It transcends all other methods of liberation and philosophical views.

- It is a comprehensive Paddhati covering body, mind and every aspect of human existence.
- Yogic teachings are focused on the practical aspects of acquiring the knowledge.
- Yoga is for householders; there is no need to renounce and is the only relevant and most suitable path in this modern world.
- It is scientific, and is recommended for all regardless of their age, gender, nationality, race and whether or not the practitioners has

physical disabilities.

- It does not per-se strictly impose any code of conduct nor one needs to have a desired set of moral values.
- Yoga offers methods for any type of individual and offers solutions to overcome difficulties the practitioner may encounter during Sandhana.

With a proper understanding, following the guidance of an eminent Acharya or Guru, one can cross over any hurdles and reach the goal of true knowledge of the self. All one needs is a guide/teacher, practice, persistence, and patience.

Yoga is a comprehensive and complete path

Yoga Vidyā embraces the understanding of the only universal consciousness, acknowledges laws of karma, and is strongly rooted in the fundamental idea that an individual is no different from the universe.

Yogic approach is methods and techniques oriented which leads one to the idea that individual is not different from the absolute universal consciousness. It explains the evolution of universe and has advanced practices wherein the individual body is considered as representation of the universe.

It encompasses Haṭha, Mantra, Laya and Raja yoga. Haṭha yoga includes practices which work on the body, breathing and mind that leads one to highest state of yoga. The methods include asanas, prāṇāyāma, mudras/bandhas, nadanusandhana, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Advanced yogic practices also include practice of mantra (repetition of sound syllables). Ultimately all the practices help internalization.

Yogic path cannot be without the element of Bhakti. Although this may not be explicitly stressed in the texts, when someone practices yoga under a master from a yogic tradition, Bhakti will develop naturally with practice. It also has elements of Jnana yoga, because eventually the result of yogic practices leads to true knowledge that forms the basis of the approach of Jnana. Yoga ultimately leads to non-dualistic Vedantic philosophy while being dualistic in approach.

Therefore, it cannot be disputed that the path of Yoga is an all-inclusive and comprehensive system available for common man to elevate his being. However, this knowledge cannot be known through texts and hence one needs a master who can guide the seeker of yoga in all aspects depending on the need and nature of the seeker.

Ending Note

The aim of all the varying approaches and ideologies is to lead mankind to elevate themselves and realize the universal consciousness from within. Regardless, of the methods or approach undertaken by the aspirant the eventual realization will end with the state of yoga, the state of being with one's own true self is the state of Yoga. That true knowledge is liberation, the only way out for everlasting happiness.

Liberation is not something to be achieved after death rather should be experienced while one lives in the body. Yoga, no doubt is an all-inclusive system that provides the science of opening up one towards liberation. It is not to say other approaches are by any means inferior, but yoga is the most suitable, atleast in today's world.

There is a misunderstanding that Yoga is meant for certain category of people who have chosen to be away from life. Whereas on the contrary Yoga is meant for every common man to awaken the true life from within. Especially for those who are drowning in the never-ending waves of life's sufferings, Yoga is a beacon of light that leads one to liberation.



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Śakti Chālanam

-Arousing the Energy



 Acharya Bala

All Haṭha yogic literature unanimously accept that Śakti Chālana practice is of the highest order and most guarded among Haṭha yogic practices. This is a practice meant only for kundalini awakening and is prescribed directly by the master to those students who are highly disciplined in their sadhana. Those who are fully established in the fundamental Haṭha yogic practices and achieved the control over movements of the pranas; and those adept practitioners who have attained proficiency in the practices of Bhuta Shuddhi and Tatwa Sodhana, alone are eligible for Śakti Chālana practice, as indirectly conveyed in the Haṭha yogic texts.

In this modern era, bits and pieces of this practice are being showcased in front of public without understanding the significance of the practice, for selfish motive, without any ethical considerations, and without any discriminative assessment of eligibility. It is highly unfortunate to witness such mistreatment of this advanced practice, particularly for those who have understood a little bit about the essence of this practice.

Since most of the Haṭha yogic texts and Acharyas repeatedly emphasize Śakti Chālana practice as highly personal in nature without revealing to others (Gupta Sadhana), we can only present a generic overview of Śakti Chālana practice in the interest of those who want to understand Yoga in depth and also to serve as a warning to ensure they do not get trapped in inadequate ideas being spread in the name of this practice.

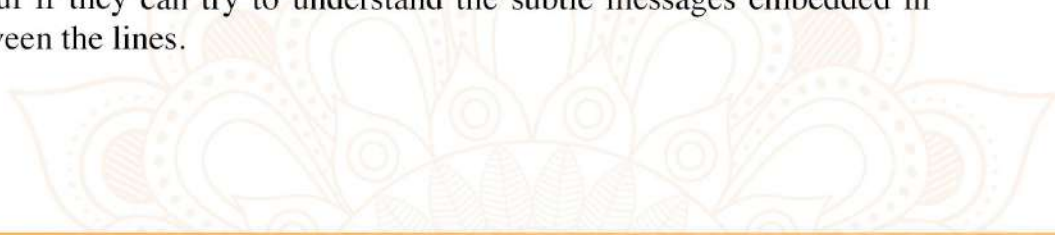
As already pointed out in the beginning, several preparations are very necessary for the practice of Śakti Chālana. Accordingly, those who are established in the most essential practices of Haṭha Yoga, this practice is prescribed in two approaches.

In the first approach, the practice is physical oriented. The practices of Nauli kriya, Moola Bandha or Ashwini Mudra in Siddhasana, Antar Kumbhaka, Bahir Kumbhaka, are prescribed based on the type of the practitioner. This method of the practice comprises of three parts, of which the first part includes preparation, then the main practice, and thirdly supplementary and supportive practices are applied.

The second approach of the practice of Śakti Chālana is subtle and visualization oriented, which is fully based on, and extracted from tantric practices. Beginning from salutation to the master and lineage based on the respective traditions (Guru Vandanam), through the breathing practices and applying the power of concentration, also with the help of mantras, the Śakti (pre-mordial energy within) situated in Mooladhara is drawn upward channeling through the Susumna, all the way upto Akula Sahasrara and then drawing back downward to Mooladhara situated in Kula Sahasrara. In this way, the practice is continued with ascending and descending movement of the Śakti, and then concluded along with certain complementary practices. A small portion similar to this practice can also be found in Kriya Yoga methods.

In both physical and subtle level practices, Yoni mudra is the complementary practice prescribed which should be received directly from a Guru. The practice in both the methods may take around 20 minutes during the initial days which could go up to 90 minutes as one progresses. During the period of practice of Śakti Chālana, restraining from sexual indulgences (Bhramacharya Nishta) and moderate diet (Mitahara) are very essential.

Further, for the second method, there are many recommended guidance on matter such as the sitting position, the type of seat used for sitting, place of practice, and type of cloth to be worn. For the inquisitive seekers (Jignasu) of yoga, Haṭha Pradīpikā, Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā, and Siva Saṃhitā provides details of the practice of Śakti Chālana and it will be useful if they can try to understand the subtle messages embedded in between the lines.



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Samkhya Darshana

-The Dualistic Viewpoint



 Devanjana Chatterji

In the first episode of the series on Samkhya, we understood how Samkhya Darshana accepts the existence of suffering at 3 levels (Dukkhatraya- abhigatha) and provides clarity on how to overcome those 'dukkhas' by way of self-realisation; through attaining the true knowledge of discrimination (Viveka Khyati).

We then touched upon the dualistic viewpoint of Samkhya, which talks about the existence of two primal yet opposing realities that exist in tandem with each other namely, Purusha the conscious principle and Prakriti, the dynamic principle.

Let us begin by understanding the concept of Prakriti which is eternal and co-existing with Purusha.

The Samkhya view is, that creation is the result of a single substance which is complex and all pervasive, as opposed to other schools of thought which believe, that nature is born out of the five elements namely - ether (space), air, fire, water and earth.

This is mainly because Samkhya believes that the subtle products like the mind, ego and intellect, cannot have their origin in the material atoms of the five elements. The cause, we must realise is always subtler than the effect, and all pervasive in the effect. For example a full grown tree emerges out of a single small seed, which contains the potential of growing into something so strong and big.

Prakriti can thus be defined as 'Pradhan' or the primal cause or potency, that brings forth the empirical world in its manifested form. Despite being the ever-active unlimited power, Prakriti itself is unperceived, unmanifest, unintelligent and unconscious. It is so subtle, that the human mind cannot perceive it.

Hence to understand Prakriti as the cause, we need to move backwards, from the visible effect to the unperceivable cause. For example when a claypot is broken, after reducing the fragments further and further into tinier particles, there comes an endpoint where the particles cannot be further reduced, and thus become one with the cause. This is essentially the Process of Involution, i.e., going backwards from the effect to the cause, wherein the effect loses its identity completely and becomes one with the cause.

And why is this necessary? Because if this is not done, we tend to get caught up in the fallacy of multiplicity, and this leads to suffering.

Prakriti is essentially made up of 3 factors, the 'Tri-Gunas', these are -

- 1) Satwa characterized by purity, goodness and illumination (white)
2. Rajas characterized by action, passion and aggression (red)
3. Tamas characterized by darkness, heaviness and concealment (black/Dark).

The whole material world arises ONLY from these 3 forces. These Tri-Gunas cannot be perceived, but only inferred. They are entirely different from each other and yet intertwined and interdependent. They exist in mutual conflict, in support, in generation and in coexistence.

When the Tri-Gunas are in equilibrium, this is the natural state of Prakriti; where all activities remain suspended. This is the State of Dissolution or 'Pralaya'. In this state of Prakriti, all the 3 gunas are formless. However, when there is a disbalance and one guna starts to dominate over another, it is called the State of Evolution or 'Vikriti. In Vikriti, Rajas being the aggressive guna, it becomes the centre and gives rise to activity, and thereby creation.

Let's understand Purusha next. Purusha is nothing but pure consciousness.

It is the Self, the Spirit, the Knower. It is the self-illuminated, uncaused, unchanging, all pervading eternal reality. Purusha is the pure witness; solitary, neutral, a spectator and non-agent, and thus very different from Prakriti, the dynamic principle.

Samkhya darshana offers 5 arguments as to prove the existence of Purusha :

1. Purusha, the witnesser, is said to be the first stimulus for creation. The sole reason for Prakriti to manifest itself in the form of the empirical world is for the benefit of Purusha. This can be understood with the help of the chair analogy. Just like a chair is not made for the chair itself, but it is made for the use of another being, which again must be different from a physical object like itself, so also, creation is not for itself but for the use of Purusha. This proves that evolution is purposive.

2. Prakriti is the cause or essence of all pain, pleasure and neutral states, and thus it cannot be the enjoyer of itself, just as even the smartest of men cannot sit on their own shoulders. Also, since every manifested thing is made up of the Tri-Gunas, the experiencer must be a conscious being who does not possess the Tri-Gunas and is completely different from them, in their balanced and heterogenous states. This transcendent reality, who can feel and think and enjoy Prakriti, is thus Purusha.

3. Since Prakriti is unconscious and unintelligent, it cannot function without guidance from some intelligent principle. Thus that conscious self, who guides and controls the functioning of Prakriti and its manifestations, is Purusha. Just like a chunk of clay cannot get onto the potter's wheel by itself and turn into a pot, and needs a potter to do the job and to give the clay the shape it can be moulded into, so also Prakriti needs Purusha to guide it.

4. In the spiritual sense, liberation and freedom from pain and misery, is the aim of every human being. But anything derived from Prakriti brings pain and misery. Thus, if we say that there is nothing apart from Prakriti and its evolutes, then liberation is not attainable. And if this were to be true, then it would render the talks of liberation found in all our scriptures, meaningless.

5. Also, that conscious principle which strives for liberation from the pain caused by Prakriti, has to be different from it. This is the Self or Purusha.

The physical world is thus produced from a principle which is similar to it in its nature (Prakriti), but it serves and promotes the ends of another, which is completely different from it (Purusha).

PLURALISTIC VIEWPOINT

We know that birth, death, disabilities etc. are caused at different times for different beings. Also, when one person is active or sleeping, not everyone is active or sleeping, or acting the same way. Thirdly, each form of life is different from the other, like humans from plants, who in turn from animals, who in turn from insects and so on.

Samkhya says that if purusha was just one, the above would not be possible. This proves that there is plurality of selves, each of whom are intelligent and eternal, in their individual capacity. Also, different beings are affected differently by the Tri-Gunas. Some have more affinity to Satwa, some to Rajas and some to Tamas. Accordingly, they are of the nature of divine, aggressive or inert, respectively. Thus, each Purusha has a distinct personality depending on the dominant guna, and hence we can infer that there is a plurality of souls.

Sri Adi Shankaracharya in his bhashya on the Brahma Sutras had mentioned that, Kapila's Samkhya is in opposition to the vedas and the teachings of Manu; since it posits not only an independent Prakriti, but also postulates the manifoldness of souls.

In the third part of this series on Samkhya Darshana, we will take a look at the Samkhya theory of Evolution and the roles of Purusha and Prakriti therein. We will also explore the Stages of Evolution and the Tatwas and their classification.



Bhakti Yoga

-A Path to Divine



 Divya

Bhakti, without doubt, is the fundamental principle that underpins human existence. Bhakti is devotion, starting from the ground on which we stand, to everything in the universe, makes one's life smooth. This is so and will be much clearer, if we examine the state of mind that induces Bhakti.

The word bhakti emerged from the term “Bhaj” which means “to serve, to seek, or to depend on.” When we think in these terms, one cannot but develop a respectful love towards the Prakriti (phenomenon of cosmic manifestation) that supports the human existence and towards all the living beings, parents who are responsible for one's birth, those who gave the Vidyā (knowledge) that helps face the challenges of the life, and those rulers who are protecting and governing the place where one lives in. If this further expands, Bhakti develops towards the divine all-pervasive principle that connects the entire universe covering from grass to everything else, and this Bhakti further grows into total communion with the cosmos. Thus, one crosses over the limitations of space, time and objects leading to the conclusion that there is nothing great or ultimate beyond this.

If we further analyse Bhakti, based on the characteristics, it can be categorized into Apara Bhakti and Para Bhakti as explained by the ancient sages. In this, the Bhakti along with rules and orders is called Apara Bhakti. For examples hymns on name of deities, and Upasana schemes fall under this category.

Bhakti originates from Sraddha, and in the initial stages it progresses through shravanam (hearing, paying attention), keertanam (expressing through words/songs), smaranam (remembrance), and then progresses to upasana schemes such as pada sevanam (serving the feet), archanam (worship), vandanam (offering respectful obeisances). Subsequently they converge into higher states of daasyam (mode of servitude), sakhyam (state of friendliness), atma nivedanam (self-surrender). Like this, Bhakti is expressed through these nine bhavas (facets). If we examine in finer subtle details, through this we can understand the transformation of Apara Bhakti into Para Bhakti.

Based on the various dimensions of Bhakti, understanding the types of Bhaktas (devotees i.e. those who express and experience Bhakti), will also be relevant here. They include Aarthan (Sad person), Artharthi (who is longing for materialistic gain), Jignasu (inquisitive), and Jnani (wise person), as explained in Bhagavad Gita. Among these, the basis of the bhakti bhava in an Aarthan is the longing to liberate from the hardships and miseries, whereas for the Artharthi it is the manifestation of the desired results out of the kriyas and upasanas done with bhakti, while for the Jignasu or Mumuksha, bhakti acts as an impetus for the process to know the ultimate truth. For a Jnani, bhakti is nothing other than Swarupa Anusandana (inquiry on the true nature of Self) which is the state of Ananya Bhakti (Para Bhakti) i.e. the absence of discrimination and that nothing is separate from oneself. This essentially is Bhakti Yoga.

Narada Bhakti Sutra and Shandilya Mimamsa Sutra comprehensively discusses about Bhakti Yoga. Similarly in Puranas (story based ancient Indian literature) and Itihasas (epics) contains several examples of divine characters that attained the pinnacle of bhakti. The experiences of those who attained fulfillment through bhakti continue to be relevant and serves as inspiration across all ages. Whichever approach one follows in the path of Yoga, bhakti is indispensable; and further there are several examples to show that bhakti will serve as an impetus to intensify their efforts and methods for spiritual progress. If the yoga sadhaks (practitioners) can take these examples as a motivation and move forward, then the goal is not far from reach.

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Trāṭaka

-Door to Deeper Dimension



 Dr. Gita Balan

Shatkarmas – six cleansing techniques, is the first limb out of the total seven limbs – Saptanga Yoga as per Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā. Purification of the body and mind is considered essential and a pre-requisite for the higher practices of Haṭha Yoga. These practices ensure that gross body is free from any kind of ailments and disorders, enabling the subsequent Haṭha Yogic practices to yield the maximum benefit.

Trāṭaka, is one of the cleansing techniques, used for purification of the eyes. Trāṭaka is a sanskrit word, which means "to look" or "to gaze."

The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā defines Trāṭaka as "looking intently with an unwavering gaze at a small point until tears are shed."

Method

Sit in sidhasana or any meditative posture with your head, neck, and trunk aligned. Set a lamp on a stand two feet in front of you, with the flame positioned at eye level. Make sure the room is dark and the lamp is set opposite a plain wall with no other objects obstructing the view of the practitioner.

Ghee lamp is considered ideal compared to a candle for a variety of reasons. The quality of the flame of a ghee lamp is better compared to that of the candle. Also the flame needs to be steady throughout the practice. Candle wax will melt resulting into the flame going lower eventually.

Begin the practice with eyes closed, surveying the body and watching the breath until it

becomes calm, regular and even. Then open the eyes and rest the gaze on the middle part of the flame, right above the tip of the wick. Keep the eyelids slightly more open than usual and maintain the gaze without blinking or blurring the vision for as long as possible. Observe any thoughts that arise, watching them come and go without becoming engaged.

Close the eyes only when they begin to strain and water. Eyes can be cupped by the palms to ease the strain, but do not rub the eyes.

Find the after-image of the flame in the mind after closing the eyes, resting the awareness at the ajna chakra, or eyebrow center.

Techniques of Practice

Bahiranga Trāṭaka- External Gazing: This method uses a physical object, typically the flame or any external object or simply a black dot. This is done in the beginning in order to develop the focus and later on lead to the internal gazing (Antaranga Trāṭaka). External Tratak builds up the dhāraṇā (concentration) and is a preparatory process for inner & deeper meditation.

Antaranga Trāṭaka - Internal Gazing: Once the external Trāṭaka is mastered then internal Trāṭaka also known as Antaranga is practiced. The practitioner focuses on a mental picture inside the mind's eyes, eventually gazing into the void. Antaranga Trāṭaka is done with the eyes closed, maintaining the focus on the void at the middle of the eyebrows or at the heart center.

Prāṇāyāma or traditional breathing techniques can also be used but long-time Trāṭaka practitioners can meditate and focus without the need for these other techniques. The meditation is done in three levels: external-gazing with a physical object, external gazing without a physical object and internal gazing with the eyes closed.

Benefits

Trāṭaka practice is known to provide the following benefits:

- Strengthens eye muscles
- Purifies and cleanses both the eyes and the cerebral cortex
- Treats eye disorders
- Relieves insomnia
- Aids in treating depression
- Improves concentration
- Calms the mind
- Promotes emotional stability
- Boosts willpower
- Develops intuition and clairvoyance
- Balances the nervous system

Contraindications

The following contraindications should be considered before practicing Trāṭaka.

- Epilepsy because the flickering lights may trigger an episode
- Schizophrenia / Hallucinations
- Myopia
- Glaucoma
- Migraine

This simple technique has a purifying and invigorating effect on the mind. It improves concentration, paving the way for a deeper meditation practice. This meditation technique involves staring at a single point of focus typically a flame of light. Other objects may also be used including a dot on the wall, an object of worship, a deity, flower, mountain, rising sun or moon. However, a flame is believed to work the best. Proper selection of the item for the Trāṭaka practice is of utmost importance, as the impact of the object on the subtler layers of the mind will be permanent

and the mind will absorb the qualities of that object.

When we concentrate, the mind is focused on a particular subject or object, in this case the flame of the lamp. This results in diminishing the thoughts or even become void of them completely. At the same time the eyeballs become steadier. There is a connection between eyeball movement and the mental state.


This can be easily demonstrated on an EEG machine. Scientifically, the movement of the eyeballs can reflect our thinking process. Eyes are the medium through which the mind communicates with the external environment. Sensory or motor signals are sent to the brain through the eyes, which are perceived by the brain for information and analysis. Eyes are having direct association with the brain.

Conclusion

Trāṭaka is said to be most effective when practiced consistently at sunrise or midday. Practicing nadi shodana, or alternate nostril breathing in the beginning, can enhance its effects. Meditating in this way is believed to energize the ajna (third eye) chakra, which is associated with intuition and wisdom, as well as psychic abilities.

Steady gazing in Trāṭaka helps to channel the mind by reducing the images in front of eyes. It is one of the concentration-building practices in yoga, which helps calm the mind, improve brainpower and aid in gradual development of intuition, if practiced regularly.


Trāṭaka is an art of exclusion, a road to the inner path and a journey towards self-realization, where the lower and higher selves meet. Traditionally, it is said that the practice allows the past, present and future to be perceived with equal clarity. Therefore it is utmost necessary to practice this under the guidance of an eminent Acharya or Guru.



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Ujjayi Prāṇāyāma

-Invoking Prana



 Ulpala Das

Prāṇā is the basis of everything; it is the energy-whole that creates the mind, life and matter. In order to understand the nature of our existence, Prāṇā must be understood and realized through systematic study of the dimensions of our own consciousness. This is possible through the practice of various yogic techniques of Prāṇā Dhāraṇā and Prāṇāyāma. Prāṇāyāma leads us to the understanding that there is a rhythmic force within the body and mind, which we are usually unaware of. Awareness about the prana helps us redirect the dormant energy in the process of awakening our own consciousness.

Through regular practice of Prāṇāyāma a certain amount of heat is generated in the body, which helps in the actual awakening of the dormant Kuṇḍalinī. It is the technique through which the prana in the body is activated to a higher frequency and since it is very subtle, it can be only felt by the psychic body. When the practice takes a subtler approach the practitioner is able to transgress through the different layers of the body in search of their true inner self. These layers are called the Pancha Koshas – Five Sheaths.

Pancha Koshas – The Five Vital Sheaths

Yoga says that each person has five distinct energy bodies or Koshas, vibrating at different speeds. These five levels of energy mutually coexist and range from the most gross to the subtlest. Kosha is a Sanskrit word meaning, sheath and these interacting and overlapping layers of energy form the complete physical, mental and spiritual nature of the human disposition. Each Kosha signifies a more refined dimension of consciousness.

- Annamaya (food sheath) – This is the physical sheath of the body also referred to as the food sheath, due to its dependence on the nourishment received from food, water and air.
- Pranamaya (energy sheath) – The pranamaya Kosha is the vital sheath or the pranic body. This sheath is subtler than the physical body, which it supports and sustains at the same time.
- Manomaya (intellectual sheath) – Known as the mental sheath, performs many functions to keep the previous two sheaths in an integrated form. Also this layer works as a messenger, conveying the experiences of the external world to the intuitive layers and vice-a-versa.
- Vijnanamaya (intuitive sheath) – This is known as the astral sheath or intuitive body, which once awakened leads to ultimate wisdom.
- Anandamaya (bliss sheath) – The subtlest layer of all is the blissful sheath.

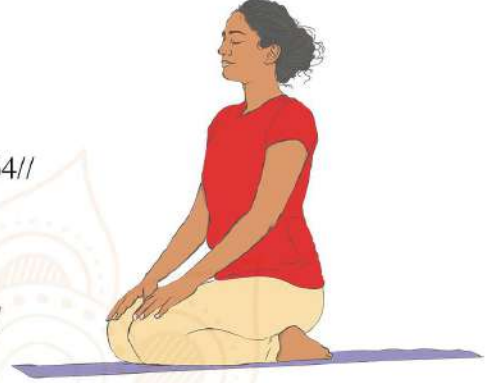
Prana pervades all the five sheaths, and it maintains an absolute relationship between them. The journey begins by unlocking the first subtle layer, which is the Pranamaya Kosha, by bringing awareness towards the flow of Prāṇā via breathing awareness and then integrating this experience with the practice of psychic breathing, popularly known as Ujjayi. This is the first key to unlock the pranamaya Kosha. In the initial stages, the only requirement is the physical awareness of the breath that is the natural flow of the breathing cycle. Once this is achieved the movement of inhalation and exhalation has to be experienced through the practice of Ujjayi Prāṇāyāma.

Ujjayi means victorious and root word is “Ujji” which means to conquer or to acquire by conquest. When Ujjayi is practiced, with total awareness of the breath, clubbed with the deep sound, the mind begins to relax. This leads to the manifestation and experience of the movement of prana in the body.

Ujjayi Prāṇāyāma

नासाभ्यां वायुमाकृष्य मुखमध्ये च धारयेत् ।
हृद्गलाभ्यां समाकृष्य वायुवक्त्रे च धारयेत् ॥६४॥
nāsābhyām vāyumākṛṣya mukhamadhye ca dharayet/
hr̥dgatābhyām samākṛṣya vāyum vaktre ca dharayet //64//

मुखं प्रक्षाल्य संवन्द्यकुर्याज्जालन्धरततः ।
आशक्तकिम्भकृत्वा धारयेदवरोधतः ॥ ६५ ॥
mukham prakṣalya samvandyakuryāj्jalandharamtataḥ/
āśaktikumbhakamkrtvā dhārayedavirodhataḥ //65//



According to the Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā (Ch.5, V-64/65), Ujjayi is explained as drawing in the air from both the nostrils, retain it in the mouth. Then drawing up the air from the heart and throat retain it also in the mouth. Washing the mouth with that air and bending the neck do the chin lock and retain the breath till it can be done easily.

Inhalation takes place smoothly without effort with a slight contraction on the glottis. This results in to a peculiar sound that is produced owing to the partial closing of glottis. This sound produced during inhalation should be of a mild and uniform pitch. It should be continuous also. This process of inhalation by contracting the throat and producing a subtle sound is described in Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā as breathing through the heart and throat. When throat is contracted, the windpipe narrows and when air enters through this narrow passage a gentle sound is generated. This breathing sound should not be too loud and should be heard only by the practitioner himself.

मुखं संयम्य नाडीभ्यामाकृष्य पवनं शनैः ।
यथा लगति कण्ठात्तु हृदयावधिस-सवनम ॥ ५१ ॥
mukhaṃ saṃyamya nāḍībhyāmākṛṣhya pavanaṃ śanaiḥ ।
yathā laghati kaṅṭhāttu hṛdayāvadhī sa-svanam ॥ 51 ॥

According to Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (Ch-2, V-51), closing the mouth, inhale with control and concentration through the Ida & Pingala, so that breath is felt from the throat to the heart and produces a sonorous sound.

Prima facie, Ujjayi can be practiced with Kumbhaka, by adopting the bandhas. Under advanced application the practice of Ujjayi functions as an indispensable part for many higher practice techniques. When combined with Khechari Mudra, (by folding the tongue back pressing the tip of the tongue to the back of soft palate), during the practice of Kriya Yoga techniques, Ujjayi facilitates to understand the arohanam and awarehanam – ascending and descending of the flow of energy through the psychic passages.

Benefits

- Practicing Ujjayi helps to reduce the disorders of kapha, constipation & liver problems.
- When the practice is done with Bandhas, it facilitates reducing the blood pressure (BP) for those suffering from high BP.
- Ujjayi is also useful in the practice of Pratyahara – withdrawing the outgoing nature of our senses, when combined with the practice of Kriyas.
- It helps to soothe the nervous system and relaxes the mind.
- The practice of Ujjayi also induces a state of Dhyana (meditation).

Contraindications

Those suffering from heart diseases should avoid practicing Ujjayi along with bandhas or kumbhakas and should take the practice under proper guidance.

Historically our traditional ancient texts have highlighted an array of time-tested methods that can be done by a yoga sadhak in order to achieve the accomplishments or Siddhis that come as an after effect of the practices. Contrary to the understanding of many practitioners, these practices are definitely not stand-alone and have to be combined with certain preparatory and complimentary practices, which are supposed to be done prior to, and post, the main practice to ensure no adverse effects are experienced and at the same time maximum benefits are derived.

As recommended for all the practices the techniques should be learned individually and practiced under the guidance of a Guru. The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (Ch-2, V-16), clearly states:

प्राणायामेन युक्तेन सर्व-रोग-कषहयो भवेत् ।
अयुक्ताभ्यास-योगेन सर्व-रोग-समुद्गमः ॥ १६ ॥
prāṇāyāmena yuktena sarva-rogha-kṣhayaḥ bhavet ।
ayuktābhyāsa-yoghenā sarva-rogha-samudghamaḥ ॥ 16 ॥

“By the proper practice of Prāṇāyāma, all diseases get diminished and due to improper practice all diseases get generated.” It is imperative to be cautious about the gradual increase in the practices and be well aware of the proper technique to follow them under direct supervision of an eminent Master.



Utkatāsana

-Traditional Approach



 Hetal Takkar

The popularity of Yoga has grown by leaps and bounds globally. More profoundly, yoga practitioners are gradually developing an interest in getting acquainted with the source of the yogic practices. Sincere practitioners are keen to know traditional approach of yogic practices. There are many books published on yoga. But unfortunately, very few books exemplify the true insight into the asana and other traditional yogic methods.

Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā is one of the profound classical Haṭha yoga text describing seven limbs of yoga by sage Gheranda.

Gheraṇḍa Muni has described the Asana in detail in the third lesson. He has considered only 32 asanas which are highly beneficial to makes body strong and stable. The aim, after ensuring complete control over the body, is to attain a stage in which there is no physical discomfort or pain. The steadier you are in your asana, the more you will be able to concentrate with one pointed mind and feel infinite peace and cosmic bliss.

Utkatasana has been described as one of the 32 classical asanas.

**Angusthabhyamavastabhya dharam gulphau ca khegatau/
Tatraparigudamnyasya vijneyam tuykatasanam// 3.27**

“Placing firmly the toes on the floor, lift the heels and upon that heel, place the anus. This is known as Utkatasana.”

This is actually a sitting posture but the initial position of its performance is standing position and also considered as a balancing posture.

Gheraṇḍa Muni has mentioned the technique of Utkatāsana in Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā (CH-1.,45) to perform Jala Basti, which is one of the six cleansing practices.

‘Haṭha- sanketa- candrika ‘ by Sunderadeva has described the same technique of Utkatāsana in a different way, which is used to practice Jala Basti kriya.

Yujasphijoh sthiyata urdhvajanu-yatrasane padataladvayopari/
Snigbhyammanag-utturakandharinyam-asprsya pitham smrtimutkatakyam// (HSC – 37)

“Place the toes on ground and raise the heels up and place the buttocks on them.”

Though in Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā, its technique is not available nor it has been enumerated as one of the 15 asanas but in the context of ‘ Jala basti ’, Svataṃmarama has mentioned the name of

Utkaṭāsana which confirms that Svātmarāma has considered Utkaṭāsana also as an āsana (CF. HYP 2.27).

All these three Haṭha yoga texts (Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā , Haṭha-saṅketa-candrika and Haṭha-Pradīpikā) has accepted that traditionally Utkaṭāsana is mainly practiced to perform the Jala Basti kriya.

However, Utkaṭāsana is widely accepted and practiced under the sequence of 84 traditional āsana. In this article we will explore Utkaṭāsana in further detail.

The word Utkaṭāsana is a Sanskrit term. “Utkata” means intense, while “āsana” denotes posture.

Utkaṭāsana is one of the most effective standing yoga postures that have a tremendous impact on physical and mental wellbeing. It is also called the Chair pose since it requires to mimic the position of sitting in imaginary chair.

Practice Method :

A step by step method to practice Utkaṭāsana is given below:

- Stand straight with the feet together and arms by your side.
- Inhale as you raise the arms above the head and join the palm in namaskar mudra. Make sure the elbow is straight and biceps are by the side of the ears.
- Exhale as you bend the knees and lower the hips down to bring the thighs almost parallel to the floor. Ensure the knees are together and should not go beyond the toes.
- Keep your spine erect. Maintain the posture with normal breathing.
- To release from the posture, straighten the knees with inhalation. Exhale completely and bring the arms down by your side. Separate the legs and take normal breath to relax.

Benefits of Utkaṭāsana :

Utkaṭāsana is little challenging posture for beginners but a little determination will help one to hold the posture for longer.

There are multiple benefits you will reap by practicing Utkaṭāsana.

- **Improve the posture :** The entire upper body, shoulders, chest, spine, neck, middle and upper back get stretched in this pose, while the lower body gets strong. The lengthening of the spine coupled with the strengthening of the knees, ankle joint supported with stable hip enhances the overall flexibility and improves the posture.
- **Tones leg Muscles and strengthen the hips, thighs and ankles :** As a deep squat, the Utkaṭāsana works on Quadriceps, erector spinae, pelvic region, thighs, knees, calves and ankles. If Utkaṭāsana can be practiced for a significant period, individual can enhance the overall physical capabilities and endurance.
- **Helps to treat flat foot :** One can handle the flat foot symptoms like pain in legs, hips or ankles with regular practice of this Asana. It also improves mobility, which is usually impaired with flat feet.
- **Relives the back pain :** Practicing Utkaṭāsana can help relieve the pain in lower back, as it works on sacrum and lumbar region of the spine, improving the blood circulation and endurance in these areas.
- **Stimulate the heart function:** As arms are stretched above the head, and expansion of shoulder gives a deep stretch to the intercostal muscles and expand the chest region. Moreover, erect spine will stimulate the heart, diaphragm and abdomen muscles which improves breathing and enhance the vital capacity.

- **Therapeutic:** Haṭha-sanketa-chandrika ‘ text has given the therapeutic advantage: “*Asmina jalandhare sati vahinidipanam bhavatiti sanketaḥ*” – “*This asana helps to enhance the gastric fire.*”

The lengthening of the spine tones the spinal nerves and calms the nervous system. The abdominal toning acts as massage to the digestive organs and it is adequate to treat constipation, irritable bowel disorder, lack of appetite, and acidity. The pelvic toning gives massage to uterus and stimulates the endocrine gland, which effectively enhance the functioning of the ovaries and testis.

- **Improves the balance and focus :** To stay in this challenging posture, balance and focus plays a very important role. This asana requires you to stabilize your lower body and can help you achieve better balance and posture.
- **Reduces Stress :** Practicing Utkāṣana regularly can reduce stress and energize your mind by bringing in the sense of motivation and positivity. Moreover, it can activate the Mooladhara and Svadhithana chakra below the navel, a centre of ease and enjoyment. It can result in mental wellness and enhance creativity.

Contraindications :

Practitioner should be aware of the contraindication and precautions of Utkāṣana which are mentioned below:

- If you are a beginner, perform this asana with repetitions then start maintaining with few seconds initially. Then keep increasing the time limit as you get used to the time limit.
- Chronic knee pain or knee injury will make it difficult to practice this pose. Hence, it’s best done once completely healed or with the knees strong enough.
- You should avoid this asana if you suffer from shoulder pain or injury, as it will exert pressure on those muscles. However, you can attempt this asana without raising your hands over the head. Instead, keep them on the waist.
- People with high or low blood pressure, vertigo, or migraine ailments need to practice this posture under the guidance of competent yoga teacher. Severe arthritis or acute spondylitis will create more joint pain, and hence this asana is best done slowly with guidance or mastery of simpler poses to reduce the injuries before practicing the final posture.
- Pregnant women and senior citizens should modify this asana to avoid risk. It is advisable for them to practice under the guidance of competent yoga Teacher.

Utkāṣana demands strength and stamina in the body. Moreover, focus on breath and maintain alignment of the posture play a great role in improving the awareness and mental clarity.



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which dispels all the doubts of student**

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