

# Themes of Yoga Philosophy

## 7. Control and its aid

Prof. K. S. Arjunwadkar

### Primary aids

Yoga is conceived as having eight aids (*ashtaanga*, eight-limbed or consisting of eight parts), of which the first five are treated as external (*bahir-anga*), meaning distant, and the next three as internal (*antar-anga*), meaning closer, also jointly called *samyama* (III.4). This classification relates to the *samprajnaata* (object-supported) type of meditation. In the context of the objectless meditation, even the last three aids are external (III.7-8). Internal or external, they are primary aids of Yoga which call for total devotion to it as the practitioner's major concern. They are:

1. *Yama*-s, restraints (II.30): *a-himsaa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *a-steya* (refraining from theft), *brahmacharya* (restraint of the sexual senses), *a-parigraha* (rejection of the objects of pleasure). Of these, *a-himsaa* is the basic restraint; the rest of the restraints and observances contribute to the perfection of *a-himsaa*. Truthfulness implies fidelity of speech and thought to facts aimed at the good of all creatures. Non-theft in its ideal form implies abstention even from the thoughts of theft. This aspect applies to other restraints also. This should make it clear that the ultimate aim of the restraints is the purification of the mind. A total observance of these is designated The Great Vows. Development of these attitudes includes focusing of thoughts on their opposites to counter thoughts of violence etc. in the event that they occur in the mind. Patanjali indicates the criteria of perfection of the restraints as well as of the observances ( II.35-45)

2. *Niyama*-s, observances (II.32): *shaucha* (purity of body and mind), *santosha* (contentment), *tapas* (tolerance of extremes like heat and cold), *svaadhyaya* (study of philosophical texts, or muttering of the *om* sound), *iishvara-pranidhaana* (dedication of all actions to God). The last three are also designated as *kriyaa-yoga* (II.1). *Vyaasa* describes God as the ultimate teacher/guide. Dedication of all actions to Him is a concept originating in the *Bhagavad-giitaa* (IX.27).

3. *Aasana*-s, sitting postures (II.46-47): The term *aasana* basically means sitting, and may thus refer to some sitting postures. It is defined as a posture which is stable and comfortable. This precludes the popular concept of the *aasana*-s as the multiplicity of postures aimed at manouvability of all limbs of the body as developed by Hatha-yoga. *Vyaasa* refers to as many as eight *aasana*-s, but they too are related to sitting. It reflects Patanjali's outlook towards *aasana*-s. *Aasana* is said to be perfected when the practitioner ceases to make special efforts for it; the criterion for this is the tolerance of opposites like heat, cold etc.

4. *Praanaayaama*, breath control (II.49): It is defined as holding/suspension of the movements of the air, viz. inhalation and exhalation. This can be done by

holding the breath out or in. The third one is instantaneous holding/suspension at any point. A fourth variety is also conceived of on the basis of the subtle change in the process of the third one.

5. *Pratyaahaara*, withdrawal of the senses (II.54): the cessation of the operation of the senses as a result of that of the mind. This is compared by Vyaasa to the movements of bees pursuant to those of the king-bee.

6. *Dhaaranaa*, fixation of the mind (III.1): Fixing the mind on specific parts of the body such as the navel, heart or an external object such as a deity.

7. *Dhyaana*, meditation (III.2): meditation or the flow of awareness of the selected object of focus uninterrupted by any other object, but accompanied by the awareness of the process of meditation.

8. *Samaadhi*, contemplation (III.3): meditation characterised by the awareness only of the object without the awareness of the process of meditation. This is *samprajnaata*. Aids 6 to 8 are jointly called *samyama*.

### Secondary/contributory aids

Preliminary or start-up aids, countering obstacles in meditation and/or preparing a grounding (such as cleansing of the mind of impure thoughts, *chitta-prasaadana*) for the primary aids, are:

- (1) dedication of all actions to God (I.23),
- (2) sympathetic or dispassionate attitude towards creatures of different tendencies (I.33); these attitudes are:
  - maitrii* (friendship, towards happy creatures), – this eliminates the attitude of jealousy.
  - karunaa* (pity, towards unhappy creatures), – this eliminates the attitude of revenge.
  - mudita* (delight, at righteous creatures), – this eliminates the attitude of envy.
  - upekshaa* (indifference, towards sinful creatures) – this eliminates the attitude of anger.
- (3) methodical exhalation and holding out of breath (I.34),
- (4) experience of divine/subtle smell etc during the process of meditation (I.35),
- (5) focusing of the mind on the heart or the ego (I.36), – this state is called *gyotish-matii*, brilliant.
- (6) focusing of the mind on past masters of Yoga (I.37),
- (7) focusing of the mind on a spiritually sublime object perceived in a dream, or on the placid state of sleep (I.39),
- (8) meditation on a deity of one's liking (I.39),
- (9) the triad called *kriyaa-yoga* (II.1-2). Cf. *Niyama*-s above. It paves the way to meditation by progressively eliminating the causes of suffering (*klesha*-s).

## Obstacles

Patanjali introduces obstacles of meditation in the context of *iishvara-pranidhaana* which is noted earlier as a contributory aid, – an aid that takes the practitioner faster to meditative ability (Vyaasa, I.23). These obstacles are factors which distract the mind.

They are *nine*: disease, languor, doubt, heedlessness, sloth, self-indulgence, delusion, failure to attain a plane of Yoga, and instability. They are described as impurities and as adversaries of meditation (Vyaasa).

They are accompanied in their train by other *five*: triple pain, dejection, tremors of the body, (irregular) inhalation and exhalation (I.30-31). Triple pain is: physical (*aadhyaatmika*), elemental (*aadhi-bhautika*, arising from natural causes) and divine (*aadhi-daivika*, resulting from adverse stars etc).

To counter these obstacles, Patanjali prescribes perpetuation in concentration on a single principle – God, according to Vaachaspati (a commentator of Vyaasa); any, according to other commentators

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