

## **The essentials of Antaranga Yoga**

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Abstract- Dhyana and Dharana are two of the three parts of Antaranga Yoga. They focus on eliminating the two characteristics of the mind i.e visayakara and nanatva. The paper then discusses the difference between dhyana- dharana and imagination. The third aspect of the paper deals with the different objects of dhyana-dharana. Lastly the paper discusses how God can be the most preferred object for dhyana-dharana. Idol worship has been propounded in India from centuries. The paper gives the psychological reasons for the worship of God.

Key Words:

Dharana: focussing attention on a small space

Dhyana: concentration

Antaranga: internal limbs of Yoga

Vishayakara: attraction towards sense objects

Nanatva: moving from object to another

Bahirmukhatva: tendency of being directed outwards

Ekatva: identification with only one object

Virata: huge

Purusha: individual soul

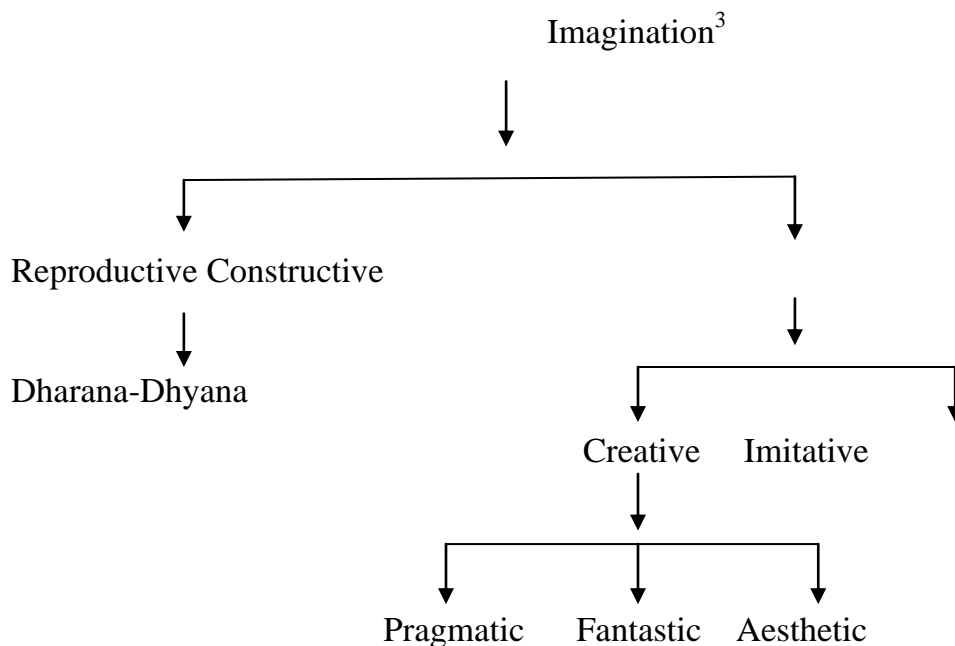
Paper:Dharana and Dhyana two of the three limbs of Antaranga Yoga tackle two characteristics of the mind i.e. the vishayakara and Nanatva. Let us understand these characteristics in some detail. This will bring out the necessity and importance of Dharana and Dhyana.During waking state the mind is engaged in one or the other activity interacting with the external world. Pratyahara stops the

innate outgoing tendency i.e. Bahirmukhatva of the mind. Now that the mind has been cut off from the external world one realizes what Bahirmukhatva has done to us. It has built in us an inner world that has vivid images of the external world mixed with desires and passions. As soon as the contact with the external world is cut off the inner world emerges and fills up the vacant mind. These images of the external world recreated from memory and mixed in various permutations and combinations is vishayakara. Also the mind dwells on these objects for a brief period and shifts to another and then to the next one in rapid succession. It can be compared to a honey bee going to one flower and when the juice has been extracted going to the next. This tendency of hopping from one set of mental images to another is called Nanatva. The practice of Dharana and Dhyana are employed to deal with vishayakara and Nanatva respectively.

One thing that a practicing meditator realizes is that the mind can exist only in two states i.e either it must think or it must sleep. An empty state of mind is just not possible! In J. Krishnamurti's words "when there is no naming and framing there is no operative mind". But if the mind is active then it displays its two characteristics! What is one to do? Yoga recognizes this problem and what it does is to use the characteristics of the mind to our advantage. Since the mind needs objects yoga tells us to give the mind object but only one. One may begin with an external gross object and then slowly move to internal subtle objects. Let the mind grasp one object and stay put upon that one object only. Thus the very objectifying tendency of the mind is utilized in order to enter into a state of Dharana. Immediately we are confronted with the next characteristic of the mind i.e. Nanatva. The mind will stay on the chosen object for a brief period of time and then it is ready to jump. Yoga says does not matter. Let it change but the different changeable ideas be the only ideas connected or related to the central object of Dharana. The idea is to make a moving film around one central object of mediation. "For example suppose one wants to meditate on the Ganga. Let the mind first of all think of the Himalayas, the Himalayan glaciers, the snows and the origin of the Ganga in Gomukh. Then one can think of the Gangotri from where it flows down to Devprayag where she joins the

Alakhnanda, then flowing towards Rishikesh, then to Haridwar to the famous Hari-ki-Paudi and thence on the various villages and towns quenching thirst and watering the crops. Then the Ganga comes down to Varanasi from where she goes to Kolkata and finally forming various tributaries and distributaries forms the Bay of Bengal and merges into the Indian Ocean. What has been done here is that one has carefully drawn a system in which the mind is changing but within a disciplined framework. In making the film there is Nanatva but inspite of Nanatva there is Ekatva because all these different objects and ideas revolve around one central idea of the Ganga. The mind is initially made unitary. It wanders in an area all of which is concerned with only one object and then gradually the area is narrowed down.”<sup>1</sup> This is what the definition of Dharana *Deśa-bandhaścittasyadhāraṇā*<sup>2</sup> seeks to explain.

Does this mean that Dhyana-Dharana and Day dreaming are the same? If that is the case then there is no need to go through the vigorous training of the Astanga yoga! Every human has this innate capacity and is actively engaged in creating an imaginary world where all the desires are satisfied and the ego is massaged. The psychological analysis of imagination will reveal the difference between the two. The following tree-diagram gives a brief outline of the faculty of imagination



The tree diagram makes it very clear that day dreaming falls under the constructive creative category while dharana-dhyana falls under the Reproductive category. Let us take an example to see the difference. A middle aged man whose son is about to get married imagines the entire wedding ceremony and reception. This is constructive thinking. Now the same person also recollects his own marriage thirty years ago and recreates his entire marriage ceremony and reception. This is reproductive imagination<sup>4</sup>. Thus one can see that though dharana and dhyana use imagination it is of a different category than day dreaming.

The object of Dharana-Dhyana should be carefully chosen because the mind is extremely receptive. It will become what it continuously thinks of and concentrates upon. As Swami Vivekananda once said “Meditate upon the lions heart and it will give you courage, think about women and it will make you feminine”. Vedant also talks about the law.

*Kitobhramarsamyogebhramarobhavātīdhruvam*

*Mānavāhshivayogenshivobhavātī nichittam<sup>5</sup>*

The object chosen for dharana-dhyana creates a deep psychological impact and changes the very attitudes with which we look at ourselves and the world. It brings fundamental and long term changes both in our personality and character.

Complete freedom is given us to which object should be chosen ranging from flower to ocean to sky to almost anything. Objects of Meditation in yoga may be concrete or abstract, a word or an idea, an image of a symbol, a divine form or personality. The yoga aphorisms chapter I verse 36-39 mentions the following as possible objects of meditation.<sup>6</sup>

36. Viśokāvājyotiṣmatī ,

37. Vīta– raga –viśayamvācittam,

38. Svapna – nidrā–jñānāmbanamvā,

39. Yathābhīmala–shyānādvā

1. The effulgent or radiant light which is beyond all sorrow. This is the light of spiritual consciousness that according to the shines in the inner recess of the heart and is beyond all sorrow. The seeker imagines in his heart a limitless, skyline, transparent brilliance and then thinks that the self is within that.
2. The heart of an illumined soul that is free from all passion and attachment. A heart of a holy personality to whom one feels drawn and in whom one has faith. The heart of such a personality is always tranquil. By concentrating on such a heart the mind absorbs that tranquillity.
3. A dream experience or the experience of deep sleep. A dream about a holy personality or a divine symbol of a blissful condition in sleep that makes a deep impression on the mind. One may meditate on any such vivid dream in three ways.
  - i) By forming a mental image of a dream object and thinking of it as real.
  - ii) By meditating upon a recollected dream condition.
  - iii) By meditating upon any spiritually uplifting dream experience.

Dreamless sleep is that state where external and internal perceptions are suppressed and only the I-sense remains which can be the object of meditation.

4. Anything that is spiritually uplifting: such a thing may be a place, some scenery, an idea or any other thing that would evoke concentration of mind. Patanjali is of the opinion that if the mind can be concentrated on one object, it can be concentrated on any other object.

According to the tradition of Vedanta, the objects that are generally preferred one the following :<sup>7</sup>

- i) a divine form
- ii) an Incarnation of God
- iii) the divine Lord as inmost self or supreme Teacher
- iv) viratapurusha or the cosmic person
- v) the sacred word Om
- vi) Gayatri Mantra or the sacred prayer of the vedas
- vii) the meaning of any of the four mahavakyas or great vedic sayings
- viii) the meaning of a sacred text, word or mystic syllable

The question of chakras also arises in this matter. The Vedanta says that no spiritual progress is possible unless one is able to raise one's thoughts upto the level of the heart. Three areas are usually prescribed.

- a) The heart
- b) The region between the eyebrows
- c) The crown of the head

*a) The Heart Centre* : The heart centre is not the anatomical heart but the spiritual heart. The location of the heart center is neither to the right nor to the left but is in the middle of the chest where we generally feel our emotions. The heart center is the seat of the individual soul which is focus of the all pervading supreme self and the meditation is done to awaken spiritual consciousness, Swami Vivekananda says "Think of a space in your heart and think that in the midst of that space a flame is burning. Think of that flame as your own soul. Inside the flame is another effulgent light and that is the soul of your God. Meditate upon that in the heart"<sup>8</sup>

*b) The Centre between the Eyebrows* :

The Bhagwad Gita briefly outlines the disciplines and observances for the practice of meditation and in that context makes mention of this space as the place to concentrate upon , "Shutting all our external objects, fixing the gaze of one's eyes between one's brows, equalizing the outward and inward breaths moving in one's nostrils, controlling ones senses, mind and understanding being ever bent on liberation, ridding oneself of desire, fear and anger: such a man of contemplation is indeed always free."<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of the words “fixing the gaze of one’s eyes between his brows” is that when the eyes are half-closed in Meditation, the eyeballs remain motionless and their gaze converges towards a point between the brows. On the other hand if the eyes are fully open they may stray to external objects and if they are closed the aspirant may fall asleep. The Bhagwad Gita also mentions the tip of the nose as a point to concentrate upon , “ He should be firm holding his body neck and head erect and still and gaze steadily at the tip of his nose without looking around.”<sup>10</sup> The instruction about gazing at the tip of the nose should not be taken in the literal sense for then the mind would be fixed only on the tip of the nose and not on the Self. When the eyes are withdrawn from sense objects, the mind becomes steady and the eyeballs are still. In that state the gaze is directed as it were to the tip of the nose.

c) *The crown of the Head:*

The crown called sahasrara or the thousand petalled lotus in the brain is the point where individual consciousness meets with the all-pervading universal consciousness. This union is the ultimate goal of all meditation. Swami Vivekanand gives the following guided meditation, “ Imagine a lotus upon the top of the head, several inches up, with virtue as its centre and knowledge as its stalk. The eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers of the yogi. Inside the stamens and pistils symbolise renunciation. If the yogi refuses the external powers he will come to salvation.... Inside the lotus think of the Golden one, the Almighty, the Intangible whose name is Om, the Inexpressible surrounded with effulgent light Meditate on that Swami Vivekanand also describes the experience of meditating on the kundalini centres in the following words “ when the power of long internal meditation the vast mass of energy stored up travels along the sushumna and strikes the centres the reaction is tremendous, immensely superior to the reaction of dream or imagination more intense than the reaction of sense perception. It is supersensuous perception. And when it reaches the metropolis of all sensations, the brain the whole brain as it were reacts and the result is the full blaze of illumination the perceptions of the self. As this kundalini force travels from centre to centre, layer after layer of the mind as it were opens up and the universe is perceived by the yogi in its fine

or causal form. Then alone are the causes of the universe both as sensation and as reaction known as they are, and hence comes all knowledge”.<sup>11</sup>

However the best object that can be chosen for dharana-dhyana has been thought by Rishis and Saints. It is the visualization of God in human form either as an idol or an icon. This is because of the following reasons.

1. Reproductive imagination is easily possible since stories about various Gods and Goddesses are readily available in epics and mythology.
2. It is easy to think of God having all the good qualities having no bad qualities, not being subject to decay and death so the impact factor that it has on the mind is extremely high.
3. God in human form fulfils various psychological demands of human existence such as:
  - A. Need for physical security : Various needs are grouped into this one umbrella of . These include food, shelter, clothing, having a family protecting it, having a healthy and wealthy long life.
  - B. Need for success, power and prestige: Once the physical needs are satisfied, every human desires success, a name of himself, power, position and prestige.
  - C. Need for association and emotional security: Everyone wants someone with whom one can form relations, share joys and sorrows, ask forgiveness and ask for help in times of need. For all such kinds of needs God in human form becomes psychologically easily acceptable. Someone who is like us in shape and form and so powerful and loving every need of man can be satisfied. As Whitehead observes “ Human form of God is the most intimate”<sup>12</sup>

S.N. Dasgupta concludes “There was no limitation on the object of the Samadhi as the whole thing proceeds not in any miraculous way but quite naturally and consistently in accordance with the general principles of yoga psychology. But yet the real road generally adopted by the yogins was the meditation of Ishvara. It is most likely that from



the earlier period of the growth of the yoga method, the Brahman was the object with whom the individual soul wanted to connect itself. When the yogin thus meditated upon GOD, God was pleased in make the advance of his trance realization easier for him by removing all obstacles which could stand in the way. It was by His will that all the movements of the prakriti were intelligently guided and it was in Him that the world was held and it was into Him that this yogi returned like a drop of water in the ocean”<sup>13</sup>.

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