

## **The Science of Upanishads – Part 53: Foundations of Modern Yoga Practice (Contd.): Description of Dhyana (Meditation) as The Seventh Anga (Limb) of The Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbed Yoga) of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali**

(March 21 – March 27, 2018)

Last week we covered Dharana (Concentration), the sixth Anga of the Eight Angas (Ashtanga) of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. **Today, we will discuss the Seventh Anga, namely Dhyana (Meditation).** As discussed earlier, the last three limbs of Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, including Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi, are inward practices. When practiced together, it leads one to *samyama*, a state of full detachment of the mind from worldly bindings and a deeper understanding of the object of meditation. The word Dhyana, which originates from the Sanskrit words Dhi (mind) and Yana (moving), appears in Taittiriya Aranyaka of Rigveda as well as in many Upanishads, including but not limited to Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Maitri, and Kaushitaki Upanishads. It also appears in Bhagavadgita, such as in chapters 2, 12, 13 and 18. **Dhyana is integrally related to Dharana, one leading to the other. Dharana is a state of mind, Dhyana the process of mind. Dhyana is distinct from Dharana in that the meditator becomes actively engaged with its focus. Patanjali defines contemplation (Dhyana) as the mind process, where the mind is fixed on something, and then there is "a course of uniform modification of knowledge".**

Adi Shankaracharya, in his commentary on *Yoga Sutras*, distinguishes Dhyana from Dharana, by explaining Dhyana as the yoga state when there is only the "stream of continuous thought about the object, uninterrupted by other thoughts of different kind for the same object". Dharana is focussed on one object, but aware of its many aspects and ideas about the same object. **Imagine an example of a yogi who is in a state of *dharana* on morning sun. He may be aware of its brilliance, color and orbit. The yogi in a *dhyana* state, on the other hand, contemplates on sun's orbit alone, without being interrupted by its color, brilliance or other related ideas.**

Dhyana is "a refined meditative practice", a "deeper concentration of the mind", which is taken up after preceding exercises. **In Hinduism, *dhyāna* is considered to be an instrument to gain self-knowledge. It is a part of a self-directed awareness and unifying Yoga process by which a world that by default is experienced as disjointed, comes to be experienced as Self, and an integrated oneness with Brahman. In Dhyana, the meditator is not conscious of the act of meditation (i.e. is not aware that he/she is meditating) but is only aware that he/she exists (consciousness of *being*), his mind and the object of meditation.** Dhyana is distinct from Dharana, in that the yogi contemplates on the object of meditation and the object's aspects only, free from distractions, with his mind during Dhyana. With practice, the process of Dhyana awakens self-awareness (Soul, the Purusha or Atman), the fundamental level of existence and Ultimate Reality in Hinduism, the non-afflicted, conflictless and blissful state of freedom and liberation (Moksha).

Meditation has benefits for both the body and the mind. It will release stress from the body, your mind will feel calmer, and you will feel more at ease in your life. We can find more peace of mind in our daily business by acknowledging the space between external events and our reaction to them.

**Read Here for more on [Dhyana Anga](#) of Ashtanga Yoga**