

Insights from *Hatha Yoga Pradipikā*

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A sound mind in a sound body contributes to health, happiness and longevity. The keys to developing equipoise and skilful living found in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and the eight-limbed path of *yoga* laid out in *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* are well known. However, the yogic manuals dedicated to *hatha yoga*, that provide detailed instructions to purify the body-mind configuration and help one ascend in awareness, culminating in spiritual transcendence, has received less attention.

In this regard, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipikā* compiled by Svātmārāma, that codifies the instructions and insights in the lineage of Mahayogi Gorakhnath, disciple of Matsyendranath of *Nāth Yogi Sampradāya* is an important 14th-15th century text. It covers *Chaturanga yoga*, with four limbs, consisting of *āsanas*, *prānāyāma*, *mudrās-bandhas* and *samādhi*: deploying *nāda-anusandhāna*, meditative exploration of subtle inner sounds.

In *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, moral precepts framed under *yama* and *niyama* are the foundation for taking up postures-breathworks, *āsana-prānāyāma* followed by sensory withdrawal, *pratyāhāra* that lead to concentration-meditation-absorption, *dhāranā-dhyāna-samādhi*. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipikā*, the verses showcase ways of purification to firm the body, stabilize the mind, control vital-energies, attain optimized health-vigour-balance-concentration, delivering a stable platform for exploring higher states of consciousness.¹

The text is a progressive schema of *yoga-sādhanā* with optimization of body dynamics by *āsanas*; purification by *shatkarmas*; control of life-energies by *prānāyāma*; followed by application of locks and seals: *bandhas* and *mudrās* to attain elevated states of awareness culminating in *samādhi*. *Hatha yoga* paves the way to *Rāja yoga*. The great goal is gained by shedding laziness and engaging in steady practice.

The venue for *hatha yoga* practice is specified. It should be a solitary place such as a hermitage or temple; an arrow-shot away from rocks, water and fire; located in lands which are fertile and well-managed. The specific room dedicated to practice should be of medium height and well-plastered; clean, free from dirt and insects. The structure should be in a shaded area inside a compound, on a raised platform, equipped with a well of water.

Success in *yoga* is attained in a short time by applying six-fold virtues of enthusiasm, courage, perseverance, discriminative knowledge, faith and practice of solitude. The attainment of *yoga* is disrupted by six causes: over-eating, over-exertion, talkativeness, unsteadiness, blind adherence to rules and keeping unnecessary company of people.

The recommendation for diet includes offering the food to the deity *Shiva*, consecrating it and eating in moderation, keeping one-fourth portion of the stomach empty. Food should be agreeable and nourishing for the body. The foodstuffs recommended include wholesome grains,

wheat, rice, barley, corns, milk, *ghee*, brown sugar, honey, dried-ginger, five vegetables,² *patola* fruit, lentils such as *moong dal* and pure water.

Foods that are dry, stale, oily, excessively bitter, sour, pungent, salty, acidic, made of multiple mixed vegetables, aquatic-animal flesh, curd, buttermilk, horse-gram, oil cakes, asfoetida, garlic, reheated cold food and all types of intoxicants are avoided.

Gorakhnath recommends that the practitioner should keep away from evil-minded people, fire, company of opposite gender, travelling from place to place, early morning bath, undertaking fasts and bodily exertions that cause fatigue and pain.

Yamas and *niyamas* form the harmonizing framework based on internal discipline and external conduct. The ten *yamas* include non-violence, truth, non-stealing, continence, forgiveness, endurance, compassion, honesty, moderation in diet and internal-external purity: *ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, kshamā, dhriti, dayā, ārjava, mitāhāra, shauca*. The ten *niyamas* include austerity, contentment, humility, faith, charity, worship of deity, listening to scriptures, discernment, sacrificial rites and chanting: *tapas, santosha, hri, āstikya, dāna, ishvarapujanam, siddhānta shravanam, mati, huta, japa*.

Āsanās are designed to gain steady posture, vigour in health and lightness of body. The text details the specifics of *āsanās* including *swastikāsana, gomukhāsana, virāsana, kurmāsana, kukkutāsana, utthānakurmākāsana, dhanurāsana, matsyāsana, paschimothhānāsana, mayurāsana, shavāsana, siddhāsana, padmāsana, simhāsana* and *bhadrāsana*.

The *āsanās* explore the seated, kneeling and lying positions of human body. While mentioning that eighty-four *āsanās* have come down in tradition, the subsequent

verse highlights four important *āsanās*: *siddhāsana, padmāsana, simhāsana* and *bhadrāsana*, which confer stabilization to attain elevated states of consciousness.

Elaborating on *siddhāsana*, the text instructs on the mode of sitting with spine erect, pressing the heel of the left foot firmly against the perineum, and the right heel above the pelvic organ. Next, with chin coming down to press on chest, the practitioner settles in the stable posture, senses restrained, turning eyeballs upward and inward to gaze steadily, focusing on the space between the eyebrows, setting the tone for meditateness.

Effort leads to effortlessness. The text mentions that success in *siddhāsana* alone leads to the state of *unmani*—state of ‘no-mind’, wherein the *yogi* is neither awake nor in sleep. In this state of awareness, the three seals, *bandhas* happen by themselves. Elaborating further, it is stated that there is no other *āsana* like *siddhāsana*, no other mode of retention of breath-*kumbhaka* like *kevala*, no other lock like *khechhari* and no other mode of dissolution, *laya*, as in the awareness of *nāda*, inner sound.

The therapeutic benefits of individual *āsanās* are mentioned. For example, *paschimothhānāsana* which entails the grasping of toes with legs stretched out and forehead resting on the thighs, transports vital-air to the back of body, kindles gastric fire, reduces obesity and cures diseases. *Mayurāsana* removes abdominal disorders, disruptions of bile-wind-phlegm, increases appetite, facilitates digestion and removes toxins. *Shavāsana* dissolves bodily fatigue, calms the mind and generates the relaxation response.

Padmāsana, executed with the crossing of feet and placing them on the thighs, is beneficial. It generates stability, purifies the body and awakens the *Kundalini*, destroying defilements accumulated at the entrance of

the *Brahma nādi*. Apart from *padmāsana*, other *āsanas* such as *matsyendrāsana*, *paschimothhānāsana*, *mayurāsana* are listed as *sarva vyādhināshaka āsanās*, postures that destroy all diseases. Once the *yogi* gains steadiness in *āsanas*, *pranāyāma* adds to efficacy, control and elevation. As *prāna* moves, *citta*, mental field moves. Restraint of breath leads to steadiness of mind.³

The second chapter of the text instructs on purification of *nādis*, subtle nerve network, through *nādi-shodhana pranāyāma*. The flow of breath through the left and right nostrils, associated with moon and sun, *idā* and *pingalā nādis* are regulated by alternating flow, leading to purification and subtlety of perception. While deploying *kumbhaka*, breath-retention, the aspirant goes through stages of perspiration, quivering to reach steadiness.

In a state without inhalation or exhalation, wherein breath is retained with ease, *kevala-kumbhaka* is attained. This awakens the *Kundalini*. The central channel becomes free of impurities, mind is settled and tranquil. Purification of *nādis* is the key to control of *prāna*.

Shatkarmas, purification practices mentioned include *neti*, *basti*, *dhauti*, *nauli*, *kapālbhāti* and *trātaka*. The text while elaborating on *pranāyāma* mentions the *ashta-kumbhakas*. This includes *surya-bhedana*, *ujjayi*, *sitkari*, *sitali*, *bhastrikā*, *bhrāmari*, *murchā* and *plāvini*: differing in mechanism of inhalation, retention, acceleration, control and release of breath.

The visible cues on purification of *nādis* and imminent success in *yoga* are mentioned in the text. The physique becomes lean, face turns bright with inner joy, eyes become clear, body blooms in health, appetite is vigorous, sense-desires come under control and subtle soundscape of *nāda* is heard in meditateness.

In the third chapter, ten important keys of Adinatha are provided with specifications for deploying energy ‘seals and locks’ to direct movement of vital currents *prāna* and *apāna*. This includes specifications for the Seals of *Mahāmudrā*, *Mahābandha*, *Mahāvedha*, *Khechhari* alongside Locks referred to as *mula bandha*, *uddiyana bandha* and *jalandhara bandha*, concluding with instructions for upside-down configuration of *viparita-karani* that reverses the flow of *bindu*-nectar, two types of *vajroli* and *Shaktichālana kriyā*. Sustained practice leads to *ashta-siddhis*, eight attainments and state of *unmani*, no-mind.

Analogous to a door opened with a key, the door of liberation is opened by turning on the key of *Kundalini* by deploying *hatha yoga*. In this schema, the *guru* is the means. He is the guide at every step, the dispenser of happiness, embodied manifestation of *Nāda*, *Bindu* and *Kāla*. Devotion to the *guru* paves the way to the highest bliss.

The text states that the aspirant spontaneously settled in *brahmacharya*, taking moderate diet, having aroused *kundalini* by prescribed practices, achieves significant success in a *mandala* of forty days. The text states that when the mind is stilled, *prāna* is stilled, and *bindu* is stilled, there is a *sāttvic* state which produces steadiness.

The text charts a detailed path to activate the sleeping *Kundalini*, and attain elevation of consciousness and reach *samādhi*, a state free from fluctuations. *Samādhi* is compared to a piece of camphor dissolved in fire or a pinch of salt dissolved in water. When *sankalpas* cease, individual self subsides in universal consciousness; the dissolution is *samādhi*.⁴

The ascent of *Kundalini* entails the piercing of the three psychic knots referred to as *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Rudragranthi*. These are correlated with *mulādhāra*, *anāhata* and *ājñā chakra* associated with energy-centres located in root-perineum,

heart and forehead respectively. This is the evolution of 'self-identification' from the compulsive-survival mode through emotional dynamism on to the flowering of awareness in stillness-clarity-expansiveness.

This is interpreted as movement from *tamas* through *rajas* to *sattva*. This is facilitated when vital-airs disengage from *idā* and *pingalā*, unite and flow through the activated central channel, *sushumnā nādi*. Ascent in *sushumnā* culminates in the flowering of consciousness in *brahmarandhra*, expansion of thousand-petalled lotus in awareness.

The fourth chapter explores *samādhi* in the context of *nāda-anusandhāna*, practice that facilitates *mano-laya*, mind getting absorbed in the object of meditation. The dissolution of mind deploying *nāda* has four stages of commencement, consolidation, stepping into higher state, culmination in end-state referred to as *ārambha-ghata-parichaya-nishpatti*.

In the posture of *muktāsana*, the deployment of *Shāmbavi mudrā* focusing on the *nāda* within the right ear with a focused mind is the means. On intense, uninterrupted focusing, the *yogi* goes through the stages, perceiving procession of inner sounds in the ascent of consciousness culminating at *brahmarandhra*.

The text provides the signposts of the meditative states. In the first stage, there rises the state of bliss with hearing of inner sounds akin to ocean, clouds, kettledrum, *gharjara*. As awareness moves upwards, there is hearing of inner sounds of *shankha*, gong, horn. Further ahead, consciousness corresponds to sounds of buzzing of bees, bells, flute, *veenā*.

The mind, disengaged from sense-

objects and locked into the stream of interiorized *nāda*, is compared to the restless elephant brought under control by the goad, a bird with clipped wings that has become still, a bee focused solely on drinking honey which does not care for the scent of flowers in the garden of enjoyment. Analogous to a fire that goes out when the fuel is exhausted, the mind of the *yogi* anchored to *nāda* gets dissolved when the *nāda* dies out, correlated to *parāvairāgya*: supreme non-attachment.

The text states that *hatha yoga* creates foundation to succeed in *rāja yoga*, attaining *laya*. In this process, *tattva* is the seed, *hatha* the soil and *vairāgya* the water. The *yogi* becomes *kalpa-vriksha*, the wish-fulfilling Tree of Light. All subtle sounds of *nāda* heard internally reside in the matrix of *Shakti*, Power. The final state of *tattvas* is the Formless, *Parameshwara*!

The *yogi* deploys *nāda* to reach the state of no-mind. On culmination, the inert body is compared to the dead, reflecting the state of *Unmani*. The text states that all manifestation, inanimate and animate, being an appearance of the mind, ceases as mind ceases. This is synonymous with *samādhi* that is free from sense-impressions, cares and states of body-mind, not bound by actions, non-dual. The *yogi* who is 'awakened', appears sleeping, with suspended breath, in tranquil repose, supremely free!⁵

Thus, the spiritual evolution of the *yogi* spans an evolutionary movement from sense-organ-led plane of *vishayānanda* to gain fullness in the supreme bliss of *brahmānanda*. This is the grand singularity, where separate identification in matrix of matter ends, in the plenum of Cosmic Consciousness, *Shakti* in *Shiva*! ■

REFERENCES

1 *Gheranda Samhitā*, verse 1.9 mentions seven aspects of Mind-Body training: purification, strengthening, steadying,

calming, lightness, perception and isolation. Verse 1.10 mentions six purificatory actions to be practised which include *āsana*

conferring strength, *mudrā* providing steadiness, *pratyāhāra* generating tranquillity, *prānāyama* leading to lightness, *dhyāna* facilitating direct perception, and *samādhi* leading to the splendid Aloneness of Unity-Fullness-Freedom.

- 2 *Gheranda Samhitā*, verse 5.20 mentions five vegetables including *balasaka*, *kalasaka*, *patolapatraka*, *vastaka* and *himalochika*, which are leafy vegetables similar to spinach.
- 3 *Hatha Yoga Pradipikā*, verse 4.22 mentions that there are two causes of ‘activity of mind’, one is *Vāsana*, desires and the other

is respiration connected to *Prāna*. Dissolution of one is dissolution of both.

- 4 *Hatha Yoga Pradipikā*, verses 4.3, 4.4 mention alternative terms that are synonymous: *Rāja Yoga*, *Samādhi*, *Unmani*, *Mononmani*, *Amarattva*, *Laya*, *Tattva*, *Shunya*, *Ashunya*, *Parama Pada*, *Amanaska*, *Advaitama*, *Nirālamba*, *Niranjana*, *Jivana Mukti*, *Sahaja*, *Turiya*.
- 5 *Hatha Yoga Pradipikā*, verse 4.109 states that the *yogi*, whose mind is neither sleeping, nor waking, neither remembering, nor forgetting, neither disappearing nor appearing, is liberated.

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- 3 *Vedantasara of Sadananda* by Swami Nikhilananda, Advaita Ashrama, 7th edition, 2.66, p. 64.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 2.67.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 2.68.
- 6 *Kathopanishad* 1.3.3.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 1.3.4.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 1.3.5.
- 9 *Mind and Modern Problems* by Swami Bodhamayananda (2016), p. 132.
- 10 *Vivekachudamani* 23, translated by Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashrama.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 12 *Bhagavad-Gītā* 6.34.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 6.35.
- 14 *Bhagavad-Gītā with the commentary of Shankaracharya* translated by Swami Gambhirananda, 6.35.
- 15 *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, 1.13, 1.14.
- 16 *Vairāgya Shatakam* by Bhartrihari, 31.
- 17 *Bhagavad-Gītā* by Swami Swarupananda, Advaita Ashrama, 6th edition, p. 257.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 12.8, p. 260.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 18.65 and 66.
- 20 *Words of the Master*, Udbodhan, Kolkata, 13th edition, p. 76.
- 21 *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, 7.1.31.
- 22 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sunday, April 9, 1882: Master’s visit to Prankrishna Mukherji’s house.
- 23 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Vol. 8, p. 45.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, 7.5.23.
- 26 *Ishwar Darshaner Upāy Jap-dhyān*, by Swami Vireswarananda, pp. 23-24 (free translation).
- 27 *Sādhakcharitmālā*, by Kaushik Datta, Parchment, 2019, p. 44.
- 28 *Brahmabindu Upanishad* 2 and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. 2 (Friday, September 19, 1884: At the Star Theatre (I) Bondage and Freedom are of the Mind.)
- 29 *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, 2.1.11 and 1.6.35.

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