

DHARANA : A YOGIC SCIENCE

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Abstract

The yogic term for concentration is Dharana, which means to hold the mind at one point. This holding or binding of the mind to one point is the concept of Dharana. In Sanskrit the word Dharana is derived from the root Dhri, which means "foundation" or "base". So, that object or concept upon which the mind is firmly based is the actual definition of Dharana. In the yogic tradition Dharana (concentration) belongs to the internal stages of Raja-Yoga, which is the path of mental discipline. Dharana (concentration) follows the stages of Pratyahara in which the mind is withdrawn from the external sensory objects and internalized.

Concentration is spoken of in the Katha Upanishad (2:3:11) where it is explained by Yama and Lord of death, to Nachiketas, a young seeker.

The sixth *Anga*, the sixth stage of Raja Yoga, is called *Dharana* and it is loosely stated or expressed by the English term "Concentration", which means to hold the mind at one point. This holding or binding of the mind to one point is the concept of *Dharana*. In Sanskrit the word *Dharana* is derived from the root *Dhri*, which means "foundation" or "base". So, that object or concept upon which the mind is firmly based is the actual definition of *Dharana*. In the yogic tradition *Dharana* (concentration) belongs to the internal stages of *Raja Yoga*, which is the path of mental discipline. *Dharana* (concentration) follows the stage of *Pratyahara* in which the mind is withdrawn from the external sensory objects and internalized.

The Mind

The vast majority of men know not the existence of the mind and its operations. Even the so-called educated persons know very little of the mind subjectively or of its nature and operations. They have only heard of a mind. Western psychologists know something. Western doctors know only a fragment of mind. The afferent nerves bring the sensations from the periphery or extremities of the spinal cord. The sensations then pass to the *medulla oblongata* at the back of the head, where the fibers decussate. From there, they pass on to the

superior frontal gyrus or superior frontal convolution of the brain in the forehead, the supposed seat of the intellect or mind. The mind feels the sensations and sends motor impulses through the afferent nerves to the extremities hands, legs, etc. It is a brain-function only for them. Mind, according to them, is only an excretion of the brain, like bile from liver. The doctors are still groping in utter darkness. Their minds need drastic flushing for the entry of Hindu philosophical ideas.

It is only the Yogis and those who practice meditation and introspection that know the existence of the mind, its nature, ways and subtle workings. They know also the various methods of subduing the mind.

Mind is one of the Ashta-Prakritis. Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, reason and egoism these constitute the eightfold division of My Nature (Gita, VII-4). Mind is nothing but Atma-Sakti. It is brain that wants rest (sleep), but not the mind. A Yogi who has controlled the mind never sleeps. He gets pure rest from meditation itself.

Mind in Samkhya Philosophy

In Sankhya philosophy, Mahat is the term used to denote cosmic mind or universal mind. It is the first principle that is derived from Avyakta. It is

the first principle that is manifested out of the unmanifested Avyakta. From Mahat comes Ahankara. From Sattvic Ahankara comes mind; from Rajasic Ahankara comes Prana; from Tamasic Ahankara, Tanmatras; from Tanmatras, gross elements; from gross elements, the gross universe.

Mind is no other than Ahankara, the idea of I. It is, indeed, difficult to eschew this idea of I. Mind always attaches itself to something objective (Sthula). It cannot stand by itself. It is only this mind that asserts itself as I in this body.

The idea of I is the seed of the tree of mind. The sprout which first springs up from this seed of Ahankara is Buddhi. From this sprout, the ramifying branches called Sankalpas have their origin.

Fourfold Mind

Mind is Chetana (intelligent) when compared with the senses. It is Jada (non-intelligent) when compared with Buddhi. Sankhya Buddhi or Buddhi in Sankhya Philosophy is will and intellect combined. Some put Chitta under mind, Ahankara under Buddhi. Manas, Buddhi, Chitta and Ahankara are only Vritti-bhedas or functional aspects of the mind. The Manas has all things for its objects and extends through the past, present and future; it is one only, but has various functions. You are a Judge when you exercise your judicial powers in the court. You are a cook when you work in the kitchen. You are a president of an association when you sit in the chair in that capacity. You are the same man, but you function differently and you are called by different names according to those different functions. Similarly, when the mind does Sankalpa-Vikalpa (will-thought and doubt), it is called Mind; when it discriminates and decides, it is Buddhi; when it self-arrogates, it is Ahankara; when it is the storehouse of Samskaras and seat of memory, it is Chitta; also when it does Dharana and Anusandhana.

Who gave coolness to water, warmth to fire, motion to air? These qualities are their very nature. Even so, mind has got its Svabhava of running

towards objects, Buddhi of determining, Ahankara of self-assertion and self-identification, Chitta of thinking (Smriti) of those objects which are identified by Ahankara.

When the mind is at work, Buddhi and Ahankara work simultaneously along with the mind. Mind, Buddhi and Ahankara work in healthy co-operation. Mind makes Sankalpa-Vikalpa. It thinks whether a certain thing is good or bad. Buddhi comes for determination. It is Buddhi which discriminates the Vishaya (Nischayatmika, Vyavasayatmika). The Svarupa of mind is thought only. Mind is Sankalpa-Vikalpatmaka. It is Vyakaranatmaka when it forwards the decisions of Buddhi, the messages from Buddhi, to the organs of action for execution. Mind selects, attends and rejects.

Concentration is spoken in the *Katha Upanishad* (2:3:11) where it explains the *Yama*, the Lord of death to *Nachiketas*, a young seeker.

तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणम् ।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥^१

The firm control of the sense and the mind is the Yoga of concentration. One must be ever careful that the Yoga is difficult to acquire and easy to lose. *Dharana* is spoken of in the yoga Sutra 3/1 where *Patanjali* explains it.

“देषबन्धश्चित्तस्य धारणा ॥”^२

It is spoken of in the *yogopanishad*

मनः संकल्पकं ध्यात्वा संक्षिप्यात्मनि बुद्धिमान् ।
धारयित्वा तथात्मानं धारणा परिकीर्तिता ॥^३

Dharana means holding the mind at one point, at one place, and keeping it held for a sufficient length of time. So, a certain length of time and a specific focal point—these two are included or implied in the term *Dharana*. Before we go into the consideration of the specific exercise, process or technique of *Dharana*, it is very important to know something about the mind, because it is this factor that I have to deal with in *Dharana*. In concentration, I have to deal with our mind, and I have to know

therefore the nature of the mind, the innate inherent tendency of the mind, and its habitual behavior pattern, and also the laws that govern the activity of the mind.

Why is concentration so important? This can be best answered by comparing the mind to a light bulb. The rays of light from the bulb go out in all directions; the energy spreads. If I stand five feet away from the bulb, I can see the light but cannot feel the heat, but there is great heat at the center of the bulb. In the same way, the mind has great power in a potential form, but it is dissipated in all directions. The mind thinks of different things one after another, without dwelling in depth on any particular subject. Therefore, the average mind does not utilize its power.

The word “concentration” means one-pointedness. Just as we need a sharp pencil to write with or a sharp knife to cut with, the mind also must be sharpened through the practices of yoga. The importance of a concentrated mind in everyday life is widely recognized but the average mind does not function in a concentrated way.

Intensity of Dharana

There are number of ways when *Dharana* can take place, for example, we can compare *Dharana* with the experience that two lovers have when they are together for hours and hours, but it seems only a few moments have passed. However, if something unpleasant has occurred, one moment will be passed like hours. So the intensity that makes us aware of one moment as being a long time or of a long time being as one moment is *Dharana*. In positive aspect, *Dharana* is depending of awareness, where the concept of time is lost, where the objective consciousness is lost, and only the awareness of space remains.

The important issue here is to fix the mind on one point. Another best example of *Dharana* is to be found in *Mahabharata*. There is a story in *Mahabharata*, which illustrates the intensity of

concentration is required for the practice of “*Dhanur Vidya*”. When *Acharya Drona* was teaching archery to the *Pandu* and *Kuru* princes, he asked his pupils to come forward one at a time in order to shoot the eye of the small clay bird that he had placed on a branch of the tree. As each *prince* came forward, the guru asked them the same question, “What do you see?”

Except *Arjuna* all princes replied different from that target. When *Arjuna*’s turn came the guru asked him same question, “What do you see?” *Arjuna* replied, “I see only the eye of the bird.” The guru asked, “Do you not see the leaves of the tree and the branch on which the bird is sitting?” No said *Arjuna*, “I see only the eye and nothing else.” So then the guru was satisfied and said to *Arjuna*, “You have learned well.” *Arjuna* did not have tunnel vision, nor was he blind to scenery around him. But the intensity of his *Dharana* was so great that all his faculties of perception were fixed on one single point.

Types of Dharana

The five types of *Dharana* is spoken in the *Darshnopanishada*.

अथातः संप्रवक्ष्यामि धारणाः पंच सुव्रत।
देहमध्यगते व्योम्नि बाह्याकाशं तु धारयेत् ॥
प्राणे बाह्यानिलं तद्वत् जलवनं चाग्निमौदरे।
तोयं तोयांशके भूमिं भूमिभागे महामुने॥
हयरावलकाराख्यं मन्त्रमुच्चारयेत् क्रमात् ।
धारणैषा परा प्रोक्ता सर्वपापविषोधिनी॥
जान्वन्तं पृथिवी ह्यंशो ह्यपां पाय्वन्तमुच्यते।
हृदयांशस्तथाग्न्यंशो भूमध्यान्तोऽनिलांशकः॥
आकाशांशस्तथा प्राज्ञ मूर्धांशः परिकीर्तितः।
ब्रह्माणं पृथिवीभागं विष्णुं तोयांशके तथा॥
अग्न्यंशे च महेशानमीश्वरं चानिलांशके।
आकाशांशे महाप्राज्ञ धारयेत्तु सदाशिवम् ॥*

The PanchaBhuta Dharana is also derived from *Trishikhabhramanopanishd* -

आजानुपादपर्यन्तं पृथिवीस्थानमिष्यते।
पीतला चतुरस्रा च वसुधा वज्रलांछिता॥
स्मर्तव्या पंचघटिका तत्रारोप्य प्रभंजनम् ।
आजानुकटिपर्यन्तमपां स्थानं प्रकीर्तितम् ॥
अर्धचन्द्रसमाकारं श्वेतमर्जुनलांछितम् ।
स्मर्तव्यमम्भः श्वसनमारोप्य दशनाडिका॥
आदेहमध्यकट्यान्तमग्निस्थानमुदाहृतम् ।
तत्र सिन्दूरवर्णोऽग्निज्वलनं दश पंच च॥
स्मर्तव्या घटिका प्राणं कृत्वा कुम्भे तथेरितम् ।
नाभेरुपरि नासान्तं वायुस्थानं तु तत्र वै॥
वेदिकाकारवद्धूम्रो बलवान् भूतमारुतः।
स्मर्तव्यः कुम्भकेनैव यत्नवान् ॥५

The purpose of PanchaBhuta Dharana is also derived in *Trishikhabhramanopanishd*.

पंचभूतमये देहे भूतेष्वेतेषु पंचसु।
मनसो धारणं यत्तद्युक्तस्य च यमादिभिः
धारणा सा च संसारसागरोत्तारकारणम् ।

There is one different type of *prana* or *pranayama Dharana* is also available in the *Upanisads*-

नाभिकन्दे च नासाग्रे पादाङ् गुष्ठे च यत्नवान्।
धारयेन्मनसा प्राणान् संध्याकालेषु वा सदा॥
सर्वरोगैर्विनिर्मुक्तो जीवेद्योगी गतक्लमः।
कुक्षिरोगविनाशः स्यान्नाभिकन्देषु धारणात् ॥
नासाग्रधारणादीर्घमायुः स्यादेहलाघवः।
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यत्र यत्र धृतो वायुरङ्गे रोगादिदूषिते।
धारणादेव मरुतस्तत्तदारोग्यमश्नुते॥७

The yoga *upanishads* describe the various methods and levels of *Akasha Dharana*. *Upanishadic Dharana* is not just simply justification of the mind on some object or point. It is very complex process where the mind is taken through different states of

external intermediate and internal experiences. These methods all use different visualization techniques, which are done through the mediums of *akash* or space. According to the Vedic tradition, *akasha*, space or the sky, is the most effective support for meditation. By dwelling on the image of the sky, an expansion of mind takes place automatically.

In the mind there is normally a ceaseless bubbling of thought, feeling and desire, which is like the foam on the surface of the ocean. We can see the foam and the bubbles but not the ocean itself. The bubbles and foam represent the mental consciousness. By dwelling upon the limitless space, the mind becomes conscious of the ocean, which is the infinite consciousness.

The Yoga Upanishads describe three different levels of *Dharana* (i) *Bahir lakshya Dharana* (external stage) (ii) *Madhya lakshya Dharana* (intermediate stage) and (iii) *Antar lakshya Dharana* (internal stage). The various practices of *Upanishadic Dharana* have been taught according to these three levels.

As I have mentioned that *Dharana* has dealt with the techniques of concentration, of withdrawing or gathering in the mind and senses. But there is another kind of *Dharana*, which *Patanjali* calls *Videha Dharana*, fixation outside the body. It belongs to *Jnanayogins*, those who practice the yoga of knowledge. The essential idea behind it is to convert the five physical Elements into their non-physical Yogic qualities. To do this non-physical *Dharana*, it is necessary to have knowledge of two things; first, a clear understanding of physical Elements or qualities (*Bhutas*); second, a through knowledge, gained through self-observation, of the developments and changes that occur in the body-consciousness (*Deha-bodha*).

Let us conclude our discussion of *Dharana* at this point. The concept has many other subtle variations, but we need not enlarge this paper by delivering those issues. One thing alone must be kept in mind: the whole object of *Dharana* is to awaken the body consciousness and illumine it. The process begins with *Pratyahara*, the drawing in of the mind and senses; actually, this practice has two movements or rhythms, to withdraw inward and to expend outward. One must be mastered in both (*Pratyahara* & *Dharana*) in order to make the yoga practice complete and perfect.

References :

1. Katha Upanishad 2:3:11
2. Yoga Sutra 3/1
3. Amritanadopanishad 15
4. Darsanopanishad 8/1-6
5. Trishikhabrahmanopanishad 135-141
6. Trishikhabrahmanopanishad 133-134
7. Trishikhabrahmanopanishad 109-113