



Laya Yoga

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The Means of Absorption

Although it is commonplace to translate the term 'yoga' as union, explanations of what is to be united by this process are varied and contradictory. Most ancient texts speak of four kinds of yoga or methods of practice – Mantra, Hatha, Laya and Raja.

The Yoga is of four kinds: First mantra yoga, second hatha yoga, third laya yoga, fourth raja yoga, which discards duality. (Shiva Samhita 5.9)

Without guidance and without completing for oneself the process these four enfold, it is easy to misunderstand the relationship between them. In practice it is through Hatha yoga that the methods of Mantra and Laya yogas are utilised so that the fourth – Raja yoga – can manifest. As the Shiva Samhita states, it is only with the achievement of this fourth state that duality is discarded and so union achieved.

The text goes on to enumerate four levels of aspirants for which these four yogas are applicable.



5.10. Know that aspirants are of four orders
– mild, moderate, ardent and the most ardent.

5.11. Men of small enterprise, oblivious, sickly and finding faults with the teachers; avaricious, sinful gourmands, and attached helplessly to their wives; fickle, timid, diseased, not independent, and cruel; those whose characters are bad and who are weak – know all the above to be mild sadhaks. With great efforts such men succeed in twelve years; then the teachers should know fit for Mantrayoga.

Superficial reading of this passage related to the first category has led many to assume that Mantra Yoga is only suitable for weak aspirants and that for such candidates only mantra is required.

This passage refers to beginners who should first work with the asanas of basic cultivation and the karanas to free the body of obstructions while mantra sadhana is introduced to awaken inner sensitivity through the use of sound (nada).

The moderate or intermediate aspirant is guided through the early stages of pranayama which are always practiced with a simple mantra (invocation through sounds).

The ardent and most ardent aspirants can practice all seven steps of the Hatha path according to their needs and requirements.

- Cleansing through the six processes (shatkriyas)
- Attainment of strength and firmness through asanas.
- Fortitude (sthirata) through bodily positions (mudra).
- Steadiness of mind through pratyahara (restraint of the senses).
- Lightness (laghava) through pranayama
- Realisation through meditation (dhyana)
- Detachment (nirliptatva) through samadhi.

The deeper meaning of the sloka detailing the four yogas is that unless one has mastered mantra sadhana, laya or absorption is not possible. Although laya is supposed to take place during the time of kumbhaka, attainment is rare nowadays because of the erroneous notion that kumbhaka refers to the holding or restraining of the life breath or wind (pranavayu). The term kumbhaka refers to a container or that which is contained. The qualities of wind are motion and touch and so it cannot be restrained except by force which is counter to the vital principle of ahimsa (non-violence). Absorption is obtained through nada as sound is the first animate of space and wind evolved out of the resonating principle of sound. Therefore absorption of wind can only take place during kumbhaka through the use of the sound principle called mantra. Laya yoga is the process of reabsorption and marks the beginning of freedom from the fluctuating tendencies of the mind caused by the element wind.



5. 30. There is no posture like that of siddhasana, no power like that of kumbha, no mudra like the khechari, and no absorption like that of nada (the mystic sound).

Many important truths, hinted at within this verse are missed through casual and superficial reading. The first suggestion is that the accomplished master of the craft of yoga needs very few tools to sustain the sahaja or unmani avastha state. This is the natural rhythm of the universal resonance that lies beyond the jurisdictions of the mind. It also indicates that unless the three means, mantra – laya and hatha have been correctly employed during the different stages of the cultivation of the three fields there is no fourth state, raja yoga.

Unless the field of mantra yoga has been mastered the other activities will bear no fruit. Asanas correct the outer or gross body whose space is governed by the outer ear. Mantra activates the subtle or inner body through the space between the ear drum and cochlea. Then the coils of the cochlea through the combined practices of mantra, mudra and pranayama trigger the kundalini shakti into action. The cochlea, the innermost ear, is the direct line to the causal body (karana sharira) and the soul (jivatma).

The most interesting part in all of this is that while the texts recommend mantra yoga for the lowest level of aspirant, in their later chapters they all give mantras to be used to reach the highest level of emancipation.

To conclude one should remember that the container is made of sound, sound swallows wind and lightning slashes the horizon.

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