



# Shadanga Yoga

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Guru Goraknath in his Goraksha-Shatakam does not use the terms Hatha Yoga or Raja Yoga nor the Ashtanga Yoga terminology of Patanjali. The term he uses is Shadanga Yoga, referring to a Yoga of six limbs, namely Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi (the implication being that Yama and Niyama have already been understood). He goes on to list auxiliary techniques including mudra, bandha, kundalini-udbodha (arousing) and also the shatchakras that figure so prominently in later classical texts like the Hatha yoga pradipika and the Shiva Samhitha. For pratyahara he prescribes the Viparita karani mudra and he gives only two asanas – Siddhasana and Padmasana.

These six steps together with their prescribed techniques are to ensure the absolute control over the mind which will bring final emancipation. He clarifies the nature of this goal in the last section of the text (slokas 92-101). Here Goraknath acknowledges the indivisibility of Yogavidya (the science of yoga) and Brahavidya (the science of the Eternal one). In accordance with the view of the Upanishads he explains the relationship of the two in that while Brahavidya is the end, Yogavidya is the means.

The Shatakam clearly outlines the steps in this process:

- Mental steadiness
- Complete control of the physical organism
- Reversal of the flow of mental activity

The goal is not Kaivalya (an isolation of the spirit from matter which suggests duality) but rather a dissolution of the mind through withdrawing from the objective world and turning towards the higher self. As the mind loses itself in the higher self the yogin experiences a state of non-duality at the summit of spiritual elevation. Guru Goraknath's Shatakam thus reaffirms the Upanishadic ideal of 'Oneness'.

A brief outline of the Shadanga Yoga of the Nath Sampradaya is enough to demonstrate how far most contemporary forms of yoga have deviated from this traditional path of spiritual upliftment. The Shatakam states that 2 seats, 5 bodily mudras and 3 bandhas are sufficient for the unfolding of the spiritual forces within the individual's body. The specified asanas, if properly and continually practiced, not only establish physiological balance within the body but also secure mental equipoise. From this foundation, mental techniques applied during the different modes of pranayama, can then achieve control of pranic forces that in turn allows the dissolution of the activities of the mind.

At this point it is appropriate to distinguish two broad divisions of asana within the hatha yogic corpus – the cultural and the meditative. Establishing the chief characteristics of these two divisions and their crucial differences will clear any confusion that has arisen through these activities being subsumed under the one term 'Yoga'. From the structure and content of the Shatakam we can see that Goraknath assumed his readers would already understand this.

The cultural poses are all those that require specific movements of the spine for their attainment and in which a special position of the spine must then be maintained. The effort required to enter and maintain these positions (as in asanas like Sirsa, Sarvangha, Hala and Bhujanga) does not allow the mind to be free for meditation. The principle goals of the cultural asanas is to secure physical health and dharana (single pointed attention). The muscular exertion required to achieve these benefits increases the activity of the lungs and heart and the production of carbon dioxide which imprisons the consciousness in the physical structure of the body.

Although the meditative postures are sitting postures, not all sitting postures are meditative. The meditative asanas can be held for hours since the erect position of the spine keeps the abdominal viscera free from pressure and brings lightness and ease to the whole structure. This frees the mind of the burden of the body and allows it to coordinate the yogic exercises of pranayama, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. These reduce the activity of the lungs and heart and minimise the production of carbon dioxide. This state is the foundation for the arousal of the cosmic force Kundalini Shakti.

As one can see both divisions fulfil important roles during the individual's journey. Over twenty years ago Shadow Yoga introduced first the Prelude forms and later the Nrtta Sadhana for the improvement of the physical structure. More recently, the Asana-angahara 1 & 2 were introduced for the improvement of the health of the physiological organism. At present we are in the the third phase, the introduction of Shadanga yoga 1 & 2. These are preparatory stages for the purification of the organism and the setting up of the nadi system for the stages of pranayama, dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

Shadanga Yoga 1 and 2 have been composed from the 32 asanas of varied intensities: in the course of mastering the two forms they will be reduced to 2 seats, 5 mudras, and the 3 bandhas.

The apparent simplicity and unparalleled ease of the meditative postures developed by the followers of the Natha Sampradaya and Hatha Yoga can be deceptive.

As the Teju-Bindi-Upanishad states:

**'A posture can be recognised as an asana only if it allows meditation on Brahman (the Eternal One) without any break. Otherwise it is to be condemned as miserable.'**

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