



Pratīkopāsana

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The term pratīka means a symbol and its root meaning refers to a movement towards something; upāsana means “attempt”.

Combined, pratīkopāsana (pratīka +upāsana) refers to the process by which the practitioner attempts to approach an object of concentration. The ultimate aim is to go beyond the outer form of the symbol and meet the deity within the depths of consciousness. This deity is the Eternal Beloved of the Soul. This meeting is not achieved by an effort of will nor does the object need to be created by the mind for the living image is already implanted deep inside the heart. The fivefold symbolism of the AUM indicates the nature of this process.

This movement towards and through the symbol is not achieved by the normal pathways of the waking mind (2. jāgrat) which deal in thought and fancy nor by the mechanical activities of the unconscious mind (1. suṣṭi) but through the the dream or visionary mode of dhyāna (3) whose root lies in the borderlands of those two. Only the steady culmination of this inward turning power can pierce the protective veil of illusion (4. māya) and take the soul safely to its goal (5. bindu).



It is this power which is cultivated on the fields of āsana and prāṇāyama and whose presence is indicated by the achievement of effortless effort and indifference. Then the yogin has reached the gate, has become the master of this art and craft and is ready to enter and soar the heights of pratīkopāsana. Yet the path to this point is hard to tread and requires patience and perseverance to overcome innumerable failures and courage to cast off all external trappings and supports. Hence this statement of Gorakhnath:

At the tenth door the avādhut (one who has ‘shaken loose’) undoes the lock. Therefore listen O people only a few, one In a hundred, can conquer the fortress of the body. Ours is a difficult path. One must keep the tongue and the genitals and the channel through which they both operate under control at all times. Then those who spend time in the practice of yoga are not eaten by time.

Therefore the body is the robe and mind is the yogi. Therefore the mind is the yogi and the body is the monastery. The five elements compose the cloak and forgiveness is sitting in the six postures. Wisdom is the ascetic seat, and good reason, the wooden sandals. Therefore correct thinking is the staff and dhyāna, the process of pure reflection on the anonymous, unseen, unblemished presence of God. This is accomplished in a specified seated posture, unaccompanied by respiration, in kevala kumbhaka (alone without parts) that is the secret of ulta-sādhana (the process of reversal). There the reversed Śakti rises to the tenth door while the breath plays throughout the whole body from the toes to the top knot (śikhā) where the reversed moon eclipses Rahu. By the process of reversal the yogi succeeds in reversing the natural trends of ageing, disease and death channelling his or her energy, seed and breath against the normal outward flow of the bodily functions.

The process of pratīkopāsana is threefold since it has both three phases and three dimensions.

Pratīkopāsana – meditation on visual images.

Nāmopāsana – meditation on sound symbols.

Ahamgrahopāsana – meditation on the Self.

For some these form three distinct and progressive stages of practice moving from gross to subtle. However, according to constitution, aptitude and conditions some may be drawn to the world of vibration rather than image whilst a rare few are equipped to move straight into the realm of the Self. As with all practices the most important thing is to respond appropriately to that which arises on ones path and not to react from emotion, agenda or obsession. Over time, and as the practice intensifies and matures, all three realms of form, sound and self will fully manifest, completely dissolve and gather (melana) into a single point (bindu).

In The Threefold Meditations of the Thunder Dragon I have described all the stages that lead to this goal from the first preliminaries, encompassing all the corresponding mindsets and necessary adaptations. Āsana gives victory over the fortress of the body. Mudrā and bandha together with prāṇāyama cause the dissolution of prāna into Śakti while dhyāna brings forth the absorption of manas. When all essences are gathered into the single point of bindu then the state of Śakti-anusandhāna is attained. Here mind and śakti are united in the thousand petalled lotus in the head (sahasrāra cakra) through the processes of the Śāmbhavamudrā whose dissolving point is anusandhātmaka that is Śivoham – I am Śiva.

When the realisation comes that one has been gazing at/listening to this living image for eternity this takes place in the innermost domain of the mind where whisper glides without a whisper and where void dwells within its own void.

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