

Samyama

Samyama or “perfect discipline” is the collective and seamless integration or fusion of the three practices of *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (contemplative absorption) (see Miller 46). The goal of *samyama* is essential to, as well as, parallel to the goal of yoga: “to eliminate the control that material nature exerts over the human spirit . . . through introspective practice” (Miller 10). According to yogic philosophy, as an individual manoeuvres through daily life by use of his or her sensory engagement, he or she identifies and attaches with material phenomena; thereby, because of ignorance (*avidya*) the individual is not aware of the true nature of things (*svarupa*) (Kesarcodi-Watson 3), and the individual does not observe true spirit or *purusa*. Inherent in the practice of yoga is the attempt to remove the veil of ignorance and return the consciousness to the source, which is *purusa*. In a similar fashion, the yogi/yogini attempts to withdraw from the interplay of material manifestation in the form of the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—in order to observe the world from a transformed state of consciousness (Dasgupta 92). The yogi/yogini carries out the process to liberation through consistent and continual practice (*abhyasa*) (Saraswati 58), and through a total detachment or dispassion from desires, accomplishments, and cravings (*vairagya*) (Saraswati 62). Practice and detachment are said to result in greater insight into the mind, and clearer knowledge of the spirit.

The student begins the yogic journey by first cultivating the external limbs of Patanjali’s eight limbs; namely, *niyama*, *yama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, and *pratyahara* (Devi 252), and then developing the internal (*antaranga*) (Vasu 9) limbs—*dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. The limbs are not thought of as mere stages or individual practices, but processes that are interconnected and dependent on each other. Spiritual progress in *samyama* is said to result in supernormal powers or *siddhis*. For instance, if *samyama* is done on the strength of an elephant this same strength may be gained by the yogin/yogini (Saraswati 236). However, Patanjali emphasizes that for the yogin/yogini to achieve the supreme goal of yoga there must be a total dispassion and detachment to all powers, otherwise, the yogin/yogini will only delay ultimate liberation.

In Patanjali’s second aphorism of the *Yoga Sutra*, he defines yoga as, “*citta-vrtti-nirodha*,” which means the “cessation of the turnings of thought” (Miller 28). Our thought, through its daily wondering, worrying, calculating, and assessing is in a constant “turning” or modifying (*vrtti*) process (Whicher 92). The totality of *citta* (thought) is composed of *manas* (mind), *ahamkara* (the ego), and *buddhi* (the intellect)—the three *tattvas* (Whicher 90). The goal

of the practitioner in Patanjali's *Raja Yoga* is to implement disciplined practices in order to harmonize the body and mind; thus, allowing the yogin/yogini to eliminate senseless thought, develop a clearer focus or "one-pointedness", and a highly absorbed contemplation. The simultaneous joining of the three, *samyama*, allows for finer contemplation of the more subtle forms of *prakrti*—*manas*, *ahamkara*, and *buddhi*.

The "perfect discipline" that is *samyama* is said to be comparable to the application of oil to hard, tough leather. If an individual applies a small amount of oil to the leather and then wipes it off, the leather is briefly softened, but the oil does not greatly affect the composition of the leather; this is comparable to *dharana*. If the individual applies the oil again, but leaves the oil for a longer duration before removing it, the oil will slightly alter the composition of the leather, and make it more malleable; this is comparable to *dhyana*. Finally, if the individual applies the oil to the leather allowing it to penetrate and become fully absorbed by the leather, no residue of oil remains. The oil dramatically transforms the composition of the leather, and leaves it soft and pliable; this is comparable to *samadhi* (Devi 253).

Dharana

The first part of *samyama*, *dharana*, is the internal concentration of the mind to a single place or entity for a short duration of time (Saraswati 225). Practicing *dharana*, a yogin/yogini may concentrate on an object in his or her mind, on a mantra, on the breath, or even on a single location of the body. The practitioner, by means of focusing intently on the chosen object, is able to "zone" in the attention to the exclusion of other mental activity. The process of *dharana* produces a foundational "one-pointedness" or *ekagrata* (Feuerstein 84), wherein, the object of focus captures the yogin/yogini's attention with great intensity. To effectively assert the full faculty of the yogin/yogini's attention the object must be personal or pertinent to the practitioner; thus, the object may be any personally chosen *mantra*, deity, vivid picture, or such things as, the tip of the nose, the navel, or the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. Sutra I.39 of the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali states that the yogin/yogini is free to choose any object that facilitates in effectively concentrating the attention (Saraswati 107).

Dhyana

Flowing effortlessly from *dharana* the practitioner arrives at *dhyana*, which is the continuous and unbroken flow of consciousness (Saraswati 228). *Dhyana* is said to be comparable to the unwavering flow of oil or honey pouring from a container to its source, in which the content of the consciousness is the continuously uninterrupted stream of oil (Devi 259). At this stage no other thoughts or distractions impede upon the steady flow of focus on the object, and the yogin/yogini's concentration extends to a more thoughtful meditation of the object's inexpressible nature. The yogi/yogini begins to comprehend the object and its inner essence begins to reveal itself, thus aiding the practitioner in the quest for a higher transcendence (Feuerstein 84). *Dhyana* or meditation "generates a necessary churning process" that allows the practitioner to regenerate new perceptions of the falsehood present in his or her perceptions of the material world (Whicher 20). After extensive practice in *dhyana* the *samskaras* (Saraswati 393) or mental suppressions, which are imbedded in the mind, begin to dissolve. It is necessary for the seeds to dissolve, otherwise, these impressions continually multiply themselves in the subconscious—sprouting, and taking form through thoughts, memories, and dispositions (Feuerstein 73).

Sutra I.41 of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* explains that when the *vrttis* (turnings of thought) stop, the thought is purified and colourless; therefore, he compares pure thought to a clear crystal, which reflects, without distortion, the color of any object presented to it (Miller 34). When the yogin/yogini's thought is not bound by the ego's false identification with the continuum of material phenomena, the yogin/yogini is free to look upon objects and realize their undifferentiated nature.

Samadhi

The bud of *dhyana* matures and flowers into the deepened meditative state of *samadhi*. In the pure contemplation of *samadhi* the yogin/yogini is fully absorbed by the object, and only the true essence of the object is illuminated, shining forth to the observer (Dasgupta 336). *Samadhi* is divided into two kinds: "seeded" (*sabija*) and "seedless" (*nirbija*) (Whicher 201). *Samadhi* with seed is termed *samprajnata-samadhi*; furthermore, within states of *samprajnata* the practitioner uses an object, whether it is gross or subtle, to support his or her practice. *Samprajnata-samadhi* can further be divided into four states, all containing seeds within the consciousness: *vitarka-samadhi*, *vicara-samadhi*, *ananda-samadhi*, and *asmita-samadhi* (Whicher 203).

In *vitarka-samadhi*, the “aspirant is aware of an object, without there being any awareness of anything else” and the grosser manifestations of *prakṛti* are understood (Whicher 203). For instance, in the *vitarka* state, the aspirant sees a cow appear before him or her, knows that the object is called “cow”, but also knows that the word, object and idea of the cow are unified or one. In *vicara-samadhi*, the practitioner experiences the object like the natural transformations of a clay pot. The formless pot begins as minute dust particles that accumulate into the form of clay. Next a potter uses the clay to mould a pot that an individual will use for daily functions. In time, the pot disintegrates back to its minute dust particles and exists only as formless dirt particles apparently devoid of any obvious “potness”. Through *abhyasa* (practice) in *vitarka-samadhi* the aspirant is able to master and understand the underlying nature of all things (Miller 47-48). In the *vitarka-samadhi* state the object of focus is the *manas* (mind) and the *ahankara* (ego) (Whicher 229-238).

The third state is *ananda-samadhi*, which means “joy” (Whicher 203). The *ahankara* (ego) is focused on in *ananda* contemplation, and the yogin/yogini is able to grasp the joy of the *sattva guna*; thus, the yogin/yogini identifies with the inherent happiness that is *sattva* (Whicher 240). The fourth state *asmita-samadhi*, occurs when the aspirant realizes the faulty nature of the subtle *guna* identity, and is able to detach from self-identification with *ahankara* (ego), to identify with the most subtle of the *tattva—buddhi* or *mahat* (Whicher 243). The aspirant’s mind becomes like a still ocean, and liberating knowledge, dispassion, and an all-encompassing compassion pervades the yogin’s/yogini’s consciousness.

Accompanying the application of *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*, is the manifestation of psychic, spiritual, or supernormal powers (*siddhis*) (Devi 249). Through pure meditative contemplation the consciousness is able to actualize knowledge and power that is not possible at regular levels of thought (Miller 48). When the knowledge of *samadhi* is strengthened in *samyama*, the consciousness is transcended to a higher level and the object of meditation shines with clear knowledge (*prajnaloka*) (Dasgupta 339-340). Thus the yogin/yogini applies *samyama* to any gross or subtle object in order to clearly see the underlying nature (Saraswati 233-234). Through application of *samyama* to various entities the yogin/yogini gains extraordinary powers (*siddhis*), “such as, invisibility, superhuman strength, knowledge of past and future lives, knowledge of the workings of the cosmos and the microcosm of the body, as well as control over the physical needs of hunger and thirst” (Miller 49). Furthermore, a yogin/yogini can perform

samyama on (among many) friendliness, the strength of an elephant, the sun, the moon, and the heart in order to gain, knowledge—respectively—of friendliness, strength, the solar system, the position of stars, and the *citta* (Saraswati 263-273). However, Patanjali cautions that, although the powers are a sign of spiritual progression, they “might lead the unwary astray by inspiring pride, egoism, and new cravings” (Miller 53). Therefore, if the yogin/yogini attaches to the powers, the powers will impose a barrier on the ultimate transcendence of the spirit; the yogi/yogini through dispassion must relinquish the powers for the sake of the supreme separation of *purusa* from *prakrti*.

The growth and application of *samyama* culminates in the second kind of *samadhi*, *nirbija-samadhi*. *Nirbija-Samadhi* is a finer state of consciousness, wherein, the yogin/yogini no longer relies on an object for support in his or her practice. At this point, the consciousness of the yogin/yogini is completely void of thought, leaving no seeds to mature into future thoughts, and the spirit free from the material world. All *samskaras*, which are karmic residue or dormant mental impressions, are cleared from the consciousness, and no longer affect future consciousness (Saraswati 393). In *nirbija-samadhi* “all affliction and its effects are ‘burned away’ ‘scorched’, bringing about the total cessation (*nirodha*) of thought” (Whicher 274). *Nirbija-samadhi* gives rise to *kaivalya* (liberation or oneness) which is a definite isolation or aloneness from all the afflictions of material nature (Sarbacker 38-39).

References and Further Recommended Reading

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<http://home.earthlink.net/~lunarmansions/id5.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samyama>

<http://www.swamij.com/yoga-sutras.htm>

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