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Spiritual Science

Upāsana: A Pathway to Spiritual Awakening

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Abstract

Upāsana is a yoga practice that steadily leads one into the highest relation with the divine, through bhakti. Bhakti yoga is aimed at purifying the mind, instilling mental tenacity, imbining emotional stability, and causing the overall spiritual development of an individual. Thus, the joining up would begin through Upāsana with Dhyana followed by Pratyahara, and beginning with Dharana, then Samadhi would be attained accompanied by the merging with God. Upāsana is said to be of especially great significance today, as it works intensively on Manomayakosha resulting in far stronger and faster mental clarity and other spiritual improvement hypotheses than the former techniques. This paper evaluates the benefits, structure, and philosophy of Upāsana meditation, its practice, and benefits as proposed by Dr. Chaturbhuj Sahay, while also explaining its utility and how it can be practiced to achieve harmony of the body, mind, and spirit, and its applications and usability in the present world.

Keywords: Upāsana, Bhakti yoga, Pratyahar, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi, Manomayakosha, Spiritual clarity, Awakening.

1. Introduction

Stress, worry, and mental exhaustion are becoming more prevalent in the fast-paced world of today (Maddock, 2024). Individuals are looking for different strategies to keep their lives in balance (López-Valverde et al., 2024; Mendes et al., 2024). The age-old discipline of yoga, which has its roots in ancient India, is becoming more and more popular as a means of attaining mental and physical

equilibrium (Sharma & Sharma, 2024). Practices that promote mental clarity, emotional stability, and physical flexibility are more important than ever as the pressures of modern life continue to rise. Once thought of as a spiritual activity that was exclusive to a small segment of society, yoga is now beginning to find a place in everyday routines all around the world (Chauhan & Bansal, 2024). Many facets of yoga are being incorporated into people's hectic schedules (Chauhan & Bansal, 2024). Yoga is derived from the

root word 'Yuj' in Sanskrit, which means joining (*yujyate anena iti yogah*) (Ravi Shankar, 2010). Yoga is a union of mind body and soul i.e. joining of individual self with the universal consciousness (Ravi Shankar, 2010). Yoga is among one of the important parts of Śaḍdarśanas of Indian Philosophy. Maharishi Patanjali compiled the essential components of yoga into 196 aphorisms, i.e., "Sutras". According to Maharishi Patanjali yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (*yogaschitta vritti nirodha*). Ashtanga yoga is a classification of yoga that is described in his yoga sutras. He defined eight limbs as Yama (Moral restrictions: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity, and non-possession), Niyama (Observances: Cleanliness, contentment, austerity, self-study and devotion to the Lord), Asana (Physical postures), Pranayama (Controlling the breath and energy), Pratyahara (Withdrawing the senses), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation), Samadhi (A blissful state of union between object and subject) (Ravi Shankar, 2010). One of the most remarkable scriptures related to yoga is the Bhagavad-Gītā (Prabhupada, 2019). The Bhagavad-Gītā is composed of 18 chapters, with each chapter referred to as yoga (Prabhupada, 2019). Every chapter serves as a specialized yoga that reveals the journey toward realizing the ultimate truth (Prabhupada, 2019). The Bhagavad-Gītā outlines four paths for establishing a connection with the supreme (Prabhupada, 2019). These paths are known as the yoga of perfect actions (Karma yoga), the yoga of perfect devotion (Bhakti yoga), the yoga of perfect knowledge (Jñāna yoga), and the yoga of willpower (Raja yoga) (Prabhupada, 2019). The Bhagavad-Gītā provides distinct knowledge about the purpose of human life, the immortality of the soul, and our eternal connection with the supreme (Prabhupada, 2019). This knowledge is relevant to all individuals without exception (Prabhupada, 2019). In Jainism Pratyahara and Cintana (contemplation) are two significant aspects of yoga (Singh et al., 2024). Gautama Buddha revived the Vipassanā meditation (Verma, 2023). Vipassanā is a meditation technique that focuses on observing reality as it truly is (Verma, 2023). By closely observing their breath and bodily sensations, practitioners aim to understand the impermanent nature of all things and overcome suffering (Verma, 2023).

2. Meditation and Concentration

Meditation is often confused with concentration in modern times, as focusing of the mind is the key aspect of both techniques (Bhajananda, 1980). However, both are fundamentally different from each other. In concentration, a person directs attention toward a specific thought or object, leading to a temporary state of focus (Bhajananda, 1980).

In comparison, mediation is a conscious and self-directed practice that connects with the deeper aspects of consciousness (Bhajananda, 1980). True meditation involves the pull of the mind towards its true self giving an experience of unity and peace (Bhajananda, 1980). It transcends the act of focusing on an object. It quits the mental chatter leading to a state of tranquillity and timelessness (Bhajananda, 1980). Thus the concentration serves as an initial step that leads to the state of mediation (Bhajananda, 1980). According to the Samkhya Philosophy, all the entities within the universe, including the mind are unconscious; only the Puruṣa or true self is truly conscious (Virupakshananda, 2022).

3. Various methods of Sadhana

In various spiritual disciplines (Sadhana), initial practices may vary but they all converge at a stage that resembles meditation. This stage is named differently in each tradition which involves essentially developing a state of meditative awareness. Patanjali's Yoga starts with the purification of the mind by following the Yama and Niyama, establishing proper posture (Asana), and practicing breath control (Pranayama). This is succeeded by detaching the mind from outside stimuli (Pratyahara) and concentrating the mind (Dharana) on a specific focal point. The final stage is meditation (Dhyana). This is known as Raja yoga (Ravi Shankar, 2010). Jñāna yoga starts with listening to scripture (Sravana) and contemplating it (Manana) (Prabhupada, 2019). This progresses to deep inquiry (Nidhidhyāsana), which is aligned with meditation (Prabhupada, 2019). On the Bhakti yoga path, the seeker starts with prayer, singing of hymns, and worship to meditation (Prabhupada, 2019). In the path of Karma yoga as well, there is an essential requirement to sustain self-awareness while working (Prabhupada, 2019). Christianity focuses on prayer consisting of various stages (Bhajananda, 1981). It starts with vocal prayer, then comes discursive prayer (similar to manana in Vedanta), effective prayer is done with intense longing, and the last degree of the prayer is the prayer from the heart (Bhajananda, 1981). In Sufism (Islamic Mysticism) meditation is known by different names and plays a central part (Bhajananda, 1981). In Sikhism, Naam Simran (remembering the divine name) is primarily considered as mediation. Buddhism solely focuses on meditation (Gupta & Agrawal, 2023).

4. Meditation and Upāsana

Meditation can be categorized as objective and subjective. Objective meditation happens when the mind is focused on the object which can be a deity, sky, light, etc., or on qualities like love, compassion, or the self-objectified. Objective meditation is also known as Upāsana. Whereas in subjective meditation there is no effort of will or focusing of consciousness. Subjective meditation is called Ātma-Vicāra or Nidhidhyāsana. As per Sri Ramanuja and some of the other Advaitin schools Upāsana can bring about complete liberation and it is equal to bhakti. However, Sri Adi Shankaracharya and his followers argue that only saguna brahman (attributed reality) can be realized with the Upāsana. According to Shankara outcomes of Upāsana are either material success (Abhyudaya) or gradual liberation (karma-mukti). Thus, Upāsana acts as merely a precursor to Nidhidhyāsana. In Ramatirtha's commentary on Vedanta Sara Upāsana and Nidhidhyāsana have been considered as two different disciplines. Maharishi Patanjali calls objective meditation Dhyana whereas in Vedanta term Upāsana is used. Both these expressions are encountered in Upanishads (Bhajananda, 1980).

5. Upāsana by Dr. Chaturbhuj Sahay Ji

A man's thoughts, feelings, deeds, interests, abilities, his culture are all separate and interconnected; they do not match. Even the activities of father-son and brother-brother cannot be found to be the same. Therefore, different management systems have been created for a single purpose. A single action cannot benefit everyone. Its principles are different but they are all included in the same three. In the beginning, the mind works with the senses and the body and the soul considers itself to be doing it, this is called 'Karma yoga'. The second is Upāsana yoga which is done only by the mind. The word "Upāsana" originated from the Sanskrit roots "up" and "asana," which mean "to sit near" or "to stay close by." It is often translated as worship or meditation. The focus of Upāsana meditation is Brahman, which is commonly approached through various names, metaphors, symbols, or forms. The Upanishads recommend different types of Upāsana. The Upāsana of Satya Brahman is presented in the Ishavasya Upanishad, where the Purusha, who resides in the Surya Mandala and is concealed by a golden vessel, is identical to the Purusha in the individual Jiva (Sri Aurobindo, 2010). The Kena Upanishad describes four meditations on Brahman (Sri Aurobindo, 2016), two of which are in the context of the divine (Adhidaivika) and two in the

context of the individual self (Adhyatmika). The Mandukya Upanishad offers meditations on the sacred syllable Om (Sri Aurobindo, 2016). There is no external action involved in this nor does the soul consider itself to be doing it. Meditation, concentration, and fearlessness - all these come under 'Upāsana'. The third is 'Jñāna yoga' which is done by the intellect after getting concentrated in the mind. Its components are health, good company, and wisdom, among these three, Upāsana yoga is the best, reaches quickly, gives great results, and is simple (Sahay, 2023a). Practicing Karma yoga requires a significant amount of penance, which takes a long time to achieve. Not everyone is capable of performing the advanced techniques associated with Hatha and Tantra yoga, such as Shatkarma, Asana, Mudra, Tapa, Nadi shodhana, and Kundalini utthan. Some individuals even experience mental instability or illness while attempting these practices. Reaching the Vishnu tattva is a challenging endeavor; many people spend their lives confined to their limitations, unable to turn their attention towards it. Similarly, the third 'Vivek yoga' is also difficult. Unless the four principles of Sham-Dam, Titikṣā, and Uparati are complete, unless there is perfection in them, there can be no 'Vivek yoga'. Making a thing is one thing and becoming like that is another thing. Sham means having authority over the mind, Dam means controlling the senses, Titikṣā means calmness, and Uparati means getting away from the world. That is why we say that the principle of 'Upāsana' is simple and perfect for meeting. It has proved to be very useful for the people of today (Sahay, 2023a, 2023b).

6. Upāsana method

There are three actions of Upāsana - Dharana, Dhyana, and Pratyahara. Stopping the mind by holding on to any one object is called Dharana. When a meditator gets absorbed in his goal and loses awareness of himself and his goal, it is called meditation. When the mind leaves the object and runs towards some other subject and the practitioner tries to pull it back and focus on the object, it is called Pratyahara. Through these three actions, the Upāsana yoga starts. In this, one takes their five senses inwardly. To free oneself from all the worries for a while, one has to meditate on the divine light in the chest because that is the place where the Lord resides. When Dharana becomes strong by practicing like this, then it is the turn of Dhyana. When there is stability in Dhyana, then Upāsana starts (Sahay, 2023a). This is the act of Upāsana in which one does not have to do any obeisance, one only has to depend on the master (Guru) of the renunciation of fear and the master with his power removes the veils of his impurities and bad habits and makes him pure. The

time and patience in this process are directed towards removing arrogance because, as one cannot fully surrender with an attitude of arrogance, such a surrender is unattainable under those conditions. Those who reach the master after getting rid of their arrogance quickly, get darśana soon and those who reach him with any kind of arrogance, it takes them a long time to get cleared. According to Swami Achalananda, "Upāsana is the process of practicing the proximity of God and gradually feeling His presence until one merges with Him" (Sarasvati & Muktidananda, 2022). Maharishi Patanjali's Ashtanga yoga teaches that all the limbs must be followed to attain Samadhi. The perfection of the first four limbs (Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama) works on the physical body and is a time-consuming process that may take years of practice. In contrast, the method of Upāsana given by Dr. Chaturbhuj Sahay begins by working on the Manomayakosha (the third dimension/sheath of the jivatman), rather than the Annamayakosha (the first dimension of the jivatman), resulting in significantly faster and stronger mental clarity and other spiritual improvements. The perfection of Dhyana leads to the final limb of Ashtanga yoga, Samadhi. Upāsana meditation has benefitted millions of disciples and devotees. Upāsana meditation is highly relevant in today's fast-moving world. It is beneficial in managing stress, improving mental health, and enhancing the ability to focus. It makes one emotionally strong, resilient, and productive while promoting overall health and being easily accessible. Several aspects need to be investigated by the researcher like (a) how the sadhana of the last four limbs fulfill the requirements of the first four limbs; (b) insights of the guided Upāsana meditation on concentration, which in turn improves mental well-being; and (c) how does, beyond spiritual elevation, Upāsana meditation enhances a person physically?

7. Conclusion

Upāsana meditation is an easy yet powerful practice among different techniques among different paths of yoga. While yoga normally is practiced through the purification of the mind, asanas, and pranayams, Upāsana meditation transcends the corporeal level focusing on developing a profound connection with the self. People (such as the elderly or disabled) who are not able to practice the physical posture or pranayama can easily benefit from the Upāsana meditation. Upāsana meditation emphasizes devotion (bhakti), introspection (Jñāna), and alignment with one's higher consciousness, making it effective for mental and emotional healing. Contrary to other forms of yoga which could be practiced for a specific target, Upāsana leads to the betterment of one's

emotional and spiritual self and helps one achieve a sense of calmness in the mind. In an era of constant need for mental clarity and inner peace, there is no doubt Upāsana is suitable to add value to anyone's path in pursuing a wholesome and healthy life. There is a common belief among the saints that Upāsana meditation elevates a person spiritually. Does it also elevate a person physically and mentally? There is a need to investigate this aspect.

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