

A person is shown from the waist up, sitting in a meditative pose on a patterned mat. Their right hand is in a mudra, with the thumb and index finger touching. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green grass and trees. The text is centered over the image.

# DHARANA

The 6<sup>th</sup> Limb of Yoga  
Philosophy Workshop with Nina

# Dharana – Concentration

- Dharana is usually translated as “concentration.” In Sutra 3.1 of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali defines dharana as “the binding of the mind to a single point of focus.” Yogis often use the breath as a point of focus, but it could be a sensation in the body, a mantra, an image ... basically anything to which you can fasten your attention.
- One translation of the *Yoga Sutras* (Yoga Sutras 3.1 as translated by T.K.V. Desikachar) describes Dharana as follows: “The mind has reached the ability to be directed [Dharana] when direction toward a chosen object is possible in spite of many other potential objects within the reach of the individual.”
- For context, let’s look at the steps that precede dharana. The first three steps on the eight-limbed path are the outer practices, or *bahiranga sadhana*: the *yamas* (universal ethical practices), *niyamas* (personal lifestyle observances), and *asana* (posture). These steps allow you to control your emotions and keep your body healthy.
- The fourth and fifth steps, *pranayama* (breath control) and *pratyahara* (sensory withdrawal) are the inner practices, or *antaranga sadhana*. They teach you to regulate your breath, tame your mind, and free your senses from the objects of desire.
- After the preparation of the outer and inner practices, you’re ready to delve into the innermost practices, or *antaratma sadhana*. In *Light on Yoga*, B.K.S. Iyengar describes these innermost practices of dharana, *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (enlightenment) as the “quest of the soul.”

# Dharana – The second step towards Meditation

- Dharana, the second of the innermost practices, enables you to move beyond the body and the mind to dig into the depths of your soul. While moments of concentration sometimes happen spontaneously (as in the examples mentioned above), the dharana that Patanjali refers to is an intentional state of absorption and focus. It can be actively practiced and honed, like any other skill. This practice of concentration leads to a deeper understanding of the self.
- First you choose an object to focus on, such as the breath. You sit down, find your breath, and begin to pay attention to it. You notice how it sounds and feels. Pretty soon, your mind wanders. When you realize it has, you bring your attention back to your breath. A few seconds later, you're lost in thought again, so you come back to the breath. You keep doing this, over, and over, and over again. This is the practice of dharana.

# Choosing The Right Method

Dharana is often also referred to as meditation and therefore it is important to find the right technique that works for you and your student. The following are examples to support you in finding your concentration.

- Mantra
- Visualization
- Guided meditation
- Mantra and mudra
- Yoga Nidra
- Body Scan
- Japa mala meditation

A person wearing a yellow sari is sitting in a field, holding a woven basket. The background is a soft-focus green field under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

# Common Obstacles To Finding Dharana

## **1. Comparing your practice to other yogis in the room**

- Everyone is on their own path and their individual journey

## **2. Observing your progress or regress**

- How we're able to concentrate and quiet our mind varies from day to day. Every day is unique and so is your meditation practice.

## **3. The mind begins to wander**

- And when it does, bring it back to the present moment. There is a reason why yoga is called a PRACTICE.

# Let go of any attachments

A common obstacle in our dharana practice is that we 'force' ourselves to get into the state of concentration. Or we 'think' we have to meditate. It almost becomes a chore rather than an act of love. The below quote by Bob Sharples is so beautiful and has helped me personally with how I view my meditation practice.

“Don't meditate to fix yourself, to heal yourself, to improve yourself, to redeem yourself; rather, do it as an act of love, of deep warm friendship to yourself. In this way there is no longer any need for the subtle aggression of self-improvement, for the endless guilt of not doing enough. It offers the possibility of an end to the ceaseless round of trying so hard that wraps so many people's lives in a knot. Instead there is now meditation as an act of love. How endlessly delightful and encouraging.”

A person is shown from the waist up, sitting in a meditative posture on a patterned mat in a grassy field. Their hands are in a mudra, and they are wearing several bangles on their right wrist. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a bright sky.

# COURSEWORK

1. What does your current meditation practice look like?
2. Create a written intro to teaching dharana in class and choose one of the methods that are being mentioned in this workshop.