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... Bhagavad Gītā ...

Chapter 6

AI Summary - Class 203

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Summary

aṣṭāṅga Yoga and Meditation in Bhagavad Gītā

Introduction to Yoga and Meditation Framework

This document provides an expanded exploration of Acharya Tadany's teachings on yoga and meditation as presented in the Bhagavad Gītā and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The discussion centers on the systematic approach to spiritual development through the eight limbs of aṣṭāṅga Yoga, with particular emphasis on the meditation practices that lead to self-realization.

The Eight Limbs of aṣṭāṅga Yoga

1. Yamas (Ethical Restraints) - The Five Don'ts

Yamas represent the ethical foundation of spiritual practice, consisting of five restraints that guide practitioners away from harmful behaviors:

- These principles serve as the first step in transforming an individual into a more ethical and refined person
- Without adherence to Yamas, the mind remains disturbed by unethical actions, making meditation impossible
- Yamas are considered part of bahiraṅga sādhanas (spiritual discipline)
- The practice creates a foundation of mental peace necessary for deeper spiritual work

2. Niyamas (Ethical Observances) - The Five Do's

Niyamas complement Yamas by prescribing positive practices that cultivate inner discipline:

- Together with Yamas, they form a complete ethical framework of ten principles



- These observances refine the practitioner's character and prepare the mind for meditation
- They represent the cultivation of positive qualities rather than mere avoidance of negative ones
- Regular practice of Niyamas transforms the practitioner into a gentle and spiritually oriented individual

3. āsana (Posture)

The third limb focuses on physical preparation for meditation through postural training:

- Involves developing the capacity to sit in the same posture for extended periods
- Represents a significant challenge for those accustomed to chair-based lifestyles
- Requires transitioning from sitting in chairs to sitting cross-legged on the floor
- The stability of posture directly impacts the ability to maintain mental focus
- Proper āsana practice creates a steady foundation for the internal practices that follow

4. prāṇāyāma (Breath Regulation)

The fourth stage introduces control over the breath as a means of controlling the mind:

- Focuses on regulating breathing patterns to influence mental states
- Acharya Tadany uses the metaphor of a bird in a cage to represent the mind enclosed within the body
- The breath serves as a bridge between the physical body and the subtle mind
- Mastery of prāṇāyāma leads to greater control over mental fluctuations
- This practice prepares the practitioner for the withdrawal of senses in the next stage

5. pratyāhāraḥ (Sense Withdrawal)

The fifth limb marks the transition from external to internal practices:

- Involves the deliberate withdrawal of the senses from external objects
- Particularly emphasizes the withdrawal of the eyes, as vision is the most dominant sense
- This concept is attributed to Krishna's teachings in the Bhagavad Gītā
- Serves as essential preparation for the meditative stages that follow
- Represents the boundary between external disciplines and internal practices

The first five limbs (Yama, Niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, and pratyāhāraḥ) are considered preparatory practices. Yama and Niyama are external disciplines, while āsana, prāṇāyāma, and pratyāhāraḥ are internal practices that must be established before entering the meditative stages.

The Three Stages of Meditation (Samyama)



The final three limbs of aṣṭāṅga Yoga constitute the actual meditation process. When practiced together, they are called Samyama, representing the complete meditative experience.

6. dhāraṇā (Concentration/Fixing the Mind)

dhāraṇā represents the initial stage of meditation where the mind is deliberately fixed on a chosen object:

Core Characteristics:

- Involves the capacity to focus on a specific topic or object of meditation
- Comparable to adjusting a camera to capture the perfect picture
- Requires both the mind and the object of meditation to be steady
- The practitioner actively works to hold the mind on the chosen focus point

The Practice of dhāraṇā:

- Preparation for meditation varies among individuals based on their temperament and background
- Practitioners choose an iṣṭa (preferred form of deity) for meditation
- Physical objects may be used to enhance concentration initially
- The process involves repeatedly bringing the wandering mind back to focus
- Described as a mental tug-of-war requiring consistent effort and willpower

Common Challenges:

- The wandering mind is the most common obstacle during this stage
- Experiencing setbacks and distractions is completely normal
- Like managing children, the mind must be repeatedly redirected to the object of focus
- Requires patience and persistent effort without discouragement

7. dhyāna (Meditation/Sustained Focus)

dhyāna represents a deeper stage where concentration becomes steady and effortless:

Distinguishing Features:

- Characterized by steady and profound meditation with reduced mental fluctuations
- The mind maintains focus on the object without constant effort
- Involves mental activities focused on spiritual aspects
- Always related to God or spiritual concepts in the Vedic tradition

*Nature of dhyāna :*

- Not about removing thoughts, but channeling them toward spiritual fields
- Represents sustained mental activity rather than mental emptiness
- Distinguished from mere concentration exercises by its spiritual focus
- The photographer analogy continues: maintaining focus without distraction

Vedāntic Perspective:

- In Vedānta, meditation must be associated with a deity to be considered true meditation
- Involves contemplation on the nature of the divine or the self
- Represents a mental activity that channels thoughts toward spiritual realization
- Goes beyond simple concentration to include understanding and insight

8. Samādhi (Complete Absorption/Integration)

Samādhi represents the culmination of the meditative process, where complete integration occurs:

General Characteristics:

- Complete integration where the sense of separation between meditator and object disappears
- Natural absorption occurs with minimal distractions
- The mind becomes one with the object of meditation
- Similar to being completely absorbed in a movie, losing awareness of surroundings
- The mind focuses exclusively on thoughts related to the object of meditation

ype of Samādhi	Description
avikalpa Samādhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintains a subtle division between subject (meditator) and object (deity/focus)• The practitioner remains aware of themselves as separate from the object of meditation• Represents an intermediate stage of absorption• Still involves duality in the meditative experience
irvikalpa Samādhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The final and deepest state of meditation• Complete dissolution of the subject-object distinction• Represents absolute non-dual awareness• The ultimate goal of meditative practice

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Two Types of Samādhi:

Key Concepts and Terminology

Samyama (Combined Practice)

When dhāraṇā, dhyāna , and Samādhi are practiced together in sequence, the combined practice is called Samyama:

- Represents the complete meditative process from initial concentration to final absorption
- Forms an integrated approach to spiritual realization
- Krishna discusses these stages in specific verses of the Bhagavad Gītā
- Constitutes the final three steps of the eight-limbed aṣṭāṅga Yoga system

iṣṭa (Chosen Deity)

The concept of iṣṭa is central to Vedic meditation practice:

- Refers to the preferred form of deity chosen for meditation
- Allows practitioners to connect with the divine in a personally meaningful way
- Serves as the focal point for dhāraṇā and dhyāna practices
- Represents the personal aspect of God (distinct from the impersonal Atma)

The Nature of Meditation in Vedānta

Acharya Tadany emphasizes several crucial points about authentic meditation:

- True meditation must be associated with a deity or spiritual concept
- Meditation is not about removing thoughts but directing them spiritually
- It involves active mental engagement with spiritual subjects
- Distinguished from concentration exercises by its spiritual orientation
- Ultimately aims at understanding the nature of the self (Atma)

The Ultimate Goal: Self-Realization

The culmination of the entire aṣṭāṅga Yoga system points toward a specific realization:

- Krishna in the Bhagavad Gītā discusses meditation on one's own nature
- The goal is to understand the nature of the self (Atma) as distinct from the personal God (iṣṭa)
- This represents the essence of Vedāntic teaching
- The practice moves from meditation on external forms to understanding one's true nature
- This deeper exploration forms the basis for advanced study in subsequent courses



Practical Insights and Analogies

The Photographer Analogy

Acharya Tadany uses the metaphor of a photographer throughout his teaching:

- dhāraṇā is like adjusting the camera to capture the perfect picture
- Both the camera (mind) and subject (object of meditation) must be steady
- dhyāna is maintaining that focus without distraction
- Samādhi is when the photographer becomes so absorbed that they forget themselves

The Children Analogy

The wandering mind is compared to managing children:

- Just as children need repeated guidance and redirection
- The mind must be patiently brought back to focus again and again
- This is a normal part of the process, not a failure
- Requires gentle persistence rather than harsh self-criticism

The Bird in a Cage

prāṇāyāma is illustrated through this vivid metaphor:

- The mind is like a bird enclosed within the cage of the body
- The breath serves as the connection between the bird and its cage
- Controlling the breath helps control the movements of the mind
- This prepares for the complete withdrawal of senses in pratyāhāraḥ

The Progressive Structure of Practice

The eight limbs follow a logical progression from external to internal:

Category	Limbs	Focus
External Disciplines	Yama, Niyama	Ethical foundation and moral character development
Internal Practices	āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāraḥ	Physical and energetic preparation for meditation
Meditative Stages	dhāraṇā, dhyāna , Samādhi	Progressive deepening of meditative absorption



Important Distinctions and Clarifications

Meditation vs. Concentration

- Concentration can be on any object, spiritual or mundane
- True meditation (dhyāna) must be related to God or spiritual concepts
- Meditation involves understanding and insight, not just focus
- The goal is spiritual realization, not merely mental discipline

Thought Removal vs. Thought Direction

- Meditation is not about achieving a thoughtless state
- Rather, it channels thoughts toward spiritual subjects
- Mental activity continues but becomes focused and purposeful
- The quality and direction of thoughts matter more than their absence

Personal God (iṣṭa) vs. True Self (Atma)

- Initial meditation focuses on a personal deity (iṣṭa)
- Advanced practice moves toward understanding the impersonal self (Atma)
- Both are valid and necessary stages in spiritual development
- The ultimate realization transcends the duality of worshiper and worshiped

The entire system of aṣṭāṅga Yoga serves as a comprehensive roadmap for spiritual development, beginning with ethical conduct and culminating in the direct realization of one's true nature. Each stage builds upon the previous one, creating a stable foundation for the profound transformation that occurs in the final meditative states.