

# Dattātreyā's Discourse on Yoga\*

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(1) To him who has the form of Narsingh, whose self is consciousness, whose true form is bliss, and who is defined by the three words beginning with *tat*, homage!

(2-5) After roaming the whole earth in the hope of learning yoga, that best of sages, Sāṃkṛti, reached the sacred Naimiṣa Forest, which was adorned with trees bearing various sweet-smelling flowers and delicious fine fruit, and pools of water. While wandering about there, that sage came across the great muni Dattātreyā, sitting on a platform under a mango tree in a bound-lotus pose, his gaze fixed on the tip of his nose, resplendent with his cupped hands in his lap.

(6) Then, after bowing to that rishi Dattātreyā, Sāṃkṛti sat down with his pupils right there opposite him. (7) The sage [Dattātreyā] immediately stopped his yoga and [seeing] Sāṃkṛti there in front of him, welcomed him warmly.

(8) “Sāṃkṛti, tell me why you have come here.”

On being asked this Sāṃkṛti said that he had come there to learn yoga.

Dattātreyā said: (9) “Yoga has many forms, o brahmin. I shall explain all that to you: the Yoga of Mantras (*mantrayoga*), the Yoga of Dissolution (*layayoga*) and the Yoga of Force (*haṭhayoga*). (10) The fourth is the Royal Yoga (*rājayoga*); it is the best of yogas. [The stages] are said to be “beginning” (*ārambha*), “pot” (*ghaṭa*) and “accumulation” (*paricaya*). (11) And “completion” (*niṣpatti*) is deemed to be the fourth stage. I shall describe these to you in detail, if you want to learn about them.

## I [The Yoga of Mantras (*mantrayoga*)]

(12) The wise man should recite a mantra after installing the alphabet in his limbs. That which can be mastered by all and sundry is called Mantra Yoga. (13) Lowly is the yogin entitled to practise it. After practising for twelve years he usually attains gnosis, as well as the powers of becoming infinitesimally small and so forth. (14) The lowest aspirant, he of little wisdom, resorts to this yoga, for this Yoga of Mantras is said to be the lowest of yogas.

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\*This translation is based on James Mallinson's critical edition of the *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* which was read with Professor Alexis Sanderson, Dr Péter-Dániel Szántó, Jason Birch and Dr Andrea Acri at All Souls College, Oxford in 2012. Many thanks to them for their valuable input. The edition will be published along with an introduction and annotated translation at a later date.

## 2 [The Yoga of Dissolution (*layayoga*)]

(15) The Yoga of Dissolution (*layayoga*) happens as a result of the dissolution of the mind by means of esoteric techniques (*saṃketas*) Ādinātha has taught eighty million esoteric techniques.”

Sāṃkṛti said: (16) “Please tell me, what form does Lord Ādinātha take? Who is he?”

Dattātreya said: (17) “The names of Mahādeva, the great god, are Ādinātha, Bhairava and Lord of the Śabarās. While that mighty god was sporting playfully (18-19) with Pārvatī in the company of the leaders of his troop in [various places such as] Mount Śrīkaṇṭha, Śrīparvata, the top of a mountain in the region of the Banana Forest, [and] the mountain at Citrakūṭa covered with beautiful trees, he, Śaṅkara, out of compassion secretly told an esoteric technique to each of them in those places. (20) I, however, cannot teach all of them in detail. I shall gladly proclaim some of them, [such as this one] which consists of a simple practice and is easy: (21) while staying still [or] moving, sleeping [or] eating, day and night one should meditate on emptiness. This is one esoteric technique taught by Śiva. (22) Another is said to be merely staring at the tip of the nose. And meditation on the rear part of the head conquers death. (23) The next esoteric technique is said to be merely staring between the eyebrows. And that which is [staring] at the flat part of the forehead between the brows is said to be excellent. (24) [Another] excellent dissolution (*layam*) is [staring] at the big toes of the left and right feet. Lying supine on the ground like a corpse is also said to be an excellent [dissolution]. (25) If one practices in a place free from people while relaxed, one will achieve success.

(26) Thus Śaṅkara has taught many esoteric techniques. That dissolution of the mind which occurs by means of [these] and several other esoteric techniques is the Yoga of Dissolution (*layayoga*). Next hear about the Yoga of Force (*haṭhayoga*).”

## 3 [The Yoga of Force (*haṭhayoga*)]

(27) Rules (*yama*) and restraints (*niyama*) and then posture (*āsana*); the fourth is breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), the fifth is withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāra*); (28) then fixation (*dhāraṇā*) is taught; meditation (*dhyāna*) is said to be the seventh; absorption (*samādhi*) is taught as the eighth [and] it bestows a reward equal to all religious merit. (29) Thus is the yoga of eight auxiliaries known by Yājñavalkya and others. Adepts such as Kapila, on the other hand, practised Force in a different manner. (30) It is as follows: *mahāmudrā* and *mahābandha*; then there is *khecarīmudrā* and *jālandharabandha*; (31) *uḍḍiyāna*, *mūlabandha* and *viparītakaraṇī*; *vajroli* is considered to be threefold, [comprising also] *amaroli* and *sahajoli*. (32) I shall teach the characteristics of these practices and, in detail, how they should be done.

### 3.1 [The Yoga of Eight Auxiliaries: The Way of the Ancient Seers such as Yājñavalkya]

#### 3.1.1 [Rules (*yama*) and Restraints (*niyama*)]

The sages who see things as they truly are have said that there are ten rules. (33) Of them, a moderate diet is the single most important, not any of the others. Of the restraints,

non-violence is the single most important, not any of the others.

### 3.1.2 [Posture (*āsana*)]

(34) Of the 84 lakh postures, hear that which is best: the lotus posture taught by Ādinātha, which is now described. (35-37) Turn the [soles of the] feet upwards and carefully place them on the thighs. Put the hands in the lap and turn them upwards in the same way. Then focus the eyes on the tip of the nose, lift up the base of the uvula with the tongue, put the chin on the chest and, slowly inhaling as much as possible, slowly fill the abdomen. Then slowly exhale as much as possible. (38) This is said to be the lotus posture. It destroys all diseases and is hard for anyone to attain; it is attained by the wise man in the world.

(39) Sāṃkṛti, listen resolutely to the sequence of yoga practice carefully being expounded by me for yogins, along with all its characteristics.

(40) [If] diligent, everyone, even the young or the old or the diseased, gradually obtains success in yoga through practice. (41) Whether brahmin, ascetic, Buddhist, Jain, Skull-bearer (*kāpālika*) or materialist (*cārvāka*), the wise man endowed with faith (42) who is constantly devoted to his practice obtains complete success. Success happens for he who performs the practices - how could it happen for one who does not? (43) Success does not arise in any form merely by reading the scriptures. Shaven-headed, bearing a staff or wearing ochre robes; (44) saying “Nārāyaṇa”, having matted hair, smearing oneself with ash, saying “*namaḥ Śivāya*”, or worshipping external images; (45) marking oneself in the twelve places, or adorning oneself with lots of rosaries: if one does not practice or is cruel, how is one to get success? (46) The wearing of religious garb does not bring success, nor does talking about it. Practice alone is the cause of success: this is indeed true, Sāṃkṛti. (47) It is a well known fact that men who wear religious garb but undertake no religious practices deceive people by talking of yoga for purposes of lust and gluttony. (48) Crafty men try various deceptions; declaring “we are yogins” they are fools, intent on nothing but their own satisfaction. (49) Gradually coming to realise that men like that do not practise yoga, but attain their ends through words alone, one should shun those who wear religious garb.

(50) These people are always obstacles to your yoga practice. One should take pains to shun them. Such behaviour bestows success.

(51-53) When one starts to practise, o sage, there are various obstacles. The first obstacle is laziness, the second is said to be talking with the rogues just described and the third is the use of mantras. The fourth is alchemy, the fifth the science of digging for buried treasures. Various types of delusive obstacles like these arise, o sage, for the yogin whose *āsana* is solid. The wise man should recognise and reject them.

### 3.1.3 [Breath-Control (*prāṇāyāma*)]

(54) After that he should practise breath-control regularly, sitting in the lotus position. He should make a beautiful hut with a small opening and no holes, (55) duly and carefully smeared with cowdung or whitewash, zealously cleared of bugs, mosquitoes and creatures, (56) tirelessly swept with a brush every day, scented with fine fragrance, fumigated with the smoke of substances such as bdellium, (57) free from the eighteen types [of impurities] such as faeces, urine and so forth, having a door or covered with a cloth, (58) not spread

anywhere else with grass, and free from other people. After spreading out a seat covered with a fine cloth in the middle of it, (59) the wise [yogin] should sit down in its middle, assuming the lotus position. With his body upright, he should put his hands together and worship his personal deity. (60) Then he should block the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand and gradually inhale through the left nostril (61) without interruption as deeply as he can. Then he should perform breath-retention (*kumbhaka*). Next he should exhale through the right nostril gently, not forcefully. (62) He should inhale again, through the right nostril, and gently fill his abdomen. After holding [his breath] for as long as he can, he should gently exhale through the left nostril. (63) He should inhale in the same manner that he exhales and hold [his breath] without interruption. Sitting down in the morning he should perform twenty breath-retentions in this manner. (64) In the same way he should perform twenty breath-retentions at midday. Similarly, in the evening he should again perform twenty breath-retentions. (65) At midnight too, he should perform twenty breath-retentions in the very same fashion. He should do them every day together with exhalation and inhalation. (66) It is because it is accompanied by exhalation and inhalation that it is called “accompanied” (*sahita*) breath-retention. He should practise tirelessly in this fashion four times a day.

(67-69) If he practises thus for three months, purification of the *nāḍīs* arises. When the *nāḍīs* are purified, then perceptible signs appear in the body of the yogin. I shall teach all of them. Suppleness of the body, radiance, an increase in the digestive fire and leanness of the body are sure to arise. Then I shall tell you things that create obstacles to yoga and are to be avoided: (70) salt, mustard, food which is sour, hot, dry or sharp; overeating is to be avoided, as is sexual intercourse with women. (71) The use of fire is to be shunned, and one should avoid gatherings of rogues.

And now I shall teach the means to quick success in yoga: (72) milk, ghee and sweetened grain; and one should eat sparingly. And [the yogin] should perform his breath practice at the aforementioned times. (73) After that he should have the ability to hold his breath as long as he wishes. “Pure” (*kevala*) breath-retention is mastered as a result of holding one’s breath for as long as one likes. (74) Once pure breath-retention, free from exhalation and inhalation, is mastered, there is nothing in the three worlds that is unattainable for [the yogin].

(75) At first sweat appears. [The yogin] should massage [himself] with it. By slowly increasing, step-by-step, the retention of the breath, (76) trembling arises in the body of the yogin while he is seated in his *āsana*. Through further increase [in the duration] of the practice, the frog [power] (*dardurī*) is sure to arise. (77) In the same way that a frog hops across the ground, so the yogin seated in the lotus position moves across the ground. (78) And through further increase [in the duration] of the practice levitation arises. Sitting in the lotus position, [the yogin] leaves the ground and remains [in the air] (79) without a support. Then peculiar powers arise. The yogin is not troubled whether he eats a little or a lot. (80) His faeces and urine diminish and he sleeps little. Worms, weeping eye, slobber, sweat, body odour: (81) henceforth these never arise for him. Through further increase [in the duration] of the practice, great strength arises, (82) through which he gets the animal power (*bhūcarasiddhi*), the power to overcome animals. A tiger, a buffalo, a wild gayal, an elephant (83) or a lion: these are killed by a blow from the hand of the yogin. The yogi looks like the god of love; (84) then a great obstacle can arise for the yogin if he is not careful. Overcome by his beauty women want to have sex with him. (85) If he has sex, his

semen is lost. Through loss of semen (*bindu*), [his] lifespan is diminished and he becomes weak. (86) Therefore he should carefully carry out his practice avoiding the company of women. Through constant retention of semen, a fine odour arises in the body of the yogin, (87-88) so the yogin should make every effort to preserve his semen.

### 3.2 [The Beginning Stage (*ārambhāvasthā*)]

Then, sitting down in a private place, he should chant the syllable *om*, extending the syllable threefold, in order to get rid of previously accumulated sins. This *om* syllable destroys all obstacles and all faults. (89) By using this practice, mastery of the beginning (*ārambha*) [stage] arises; next, for the yogin who constantly performs the breath practice, the pot stage (*ghaṭāvasthā*) arises.

### 3.3 [The Pot Stage (*ghaṭāvasthā*)]

(90) The upward-moving and downward-moving life forces; the mind and the breath; the individual and universal selves: when, through the absence of mutual incompatibility unity arises (*ghaṭate*), (91) then the famous condition called the pot (*ghaṭābhvayā avasthā*) is said [to arise] for yogins. After [describing] that, I shall describe some of the signs [of it] that might arise.

(92-93) The yogin should stop the fourfold practice which has just been taught. He should practise pure breath-retention (*kevala kumbhaka*) once a day for three hours, either by day or by night. Sense-withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*) will thus arise for the yogin practising in this way. (94) When the yogin, while holding his breath, completely withdraws his sense organs from their objects, that is called sense-withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*). (95) Whatever he sees with his eyes he should cause to exist in his self. Whatever he smells with his nostrils he should cause to exist in his self. (96) Whatever he tastes with his tongue he should cause to exist in his self. Whatever he touches with his skin he should cause to exist in his self. (97) The yogin should carefully and tirelessly draw together his organs of knowledge †... † in this way for three hours every day. (98) Amazing powers are then sure to arise for the yogin: clairaudience, clairvoyance and the ability to travel long distances in an instant; (99) eloquence, the ability to do what he wants and the power to make things invisible; turning iron and other metals into gold by smearing them with his faeces and urine; (100) the power of moving through space; through regular practice these and other powers [arise]. Then the wise yogin, in order to gain success in yoga, should think that (101) these are obstacles to the ultimate attainment; the wise yogin should not take pleasure in them. He should never show his powers to anyone (102-3) (although he might perhaps, out of affection, show [them] to one full of devotion). In order to keep his powers secret, he should behave amongst people as if he were dumb, simple or deaf. If not he is sure to get lots of disciples (104) and they are bound to ask that lord among yogins about their own various problems. Busy with solving them he will forget his own practice. (105) Neglecting his practice he will then become an ordinary man. So he should not forget his guru's teachings and practise day and night. (106) The pot state (*ghaṭāvasthā*) arises through constant practice in this way. Not practising yoga gets one nowhere; it is not mastered by getting together and talking. (107) So one should make every effort to practise nothing but yoga.

### 3.4 [The accumulation stage (*paricayāvasthā*)]

Next the accumulation stage (*paricayāvasthā*) arises as a result of the practice of yoga. (108) Carefully gathered together, the breath, with fire, awakens Kuṇḍalinī and enters the Suṣumnā without obstruction. (109) The mind too enters the great pathway with the breath. The great pathway, the cremation ground and the Suṣumnā are one and the same. (110-112) The names are different in different teachings, [but] there is no difference in the result. He whose mind, together with the breath, enters into this Suṣumnā, knows the present, the future and the past.

#### 3.4.1 [Fixation (*dhāraṇā*)]

Knowing things that are going to happen, the yogin should carefully [and] in private carry out the fivefold fixation (*dhāraṇā*) which removes dangers caused by each of the respective elements. I shall teach the fixation of the earth, which removes danger from things made of earth. (113) He should fix the breath below the navel and above the anus for two hours. From this the fixation of the earth arises, which removes danger from the earth element. (114) The yogin cannot be killed by the earth element. Then he should fix the breath in the navel for two hours (115) as a result of which there is no danger from water and the yogin cannot be killed by water. [The yogin] should fix the breath in the region above the navel for two hours. (116) This is the fiery fixation: he cannot be killed by fire. His body is not burnt even if thrown into a fire-pit. (117-119) [The yogin] should fix the breath for two hours in [the region] three fingers broad between the navel and the eyebrows. This is the airy fixation. The yogin has nothing to fear from the air [element]. The yogin should carefully fix the breath above the place between the eyebrows for two hours. This is the space fixation. By practising the space fixation, [the yogin] completely overcomes death. (120) Wherever he may be he enjoys great bliss.

In this way the wise yogin should practise the five fixations. (121-123) Then his body becomes firm and he does not die. Death does not occur even at the final dissolution of *brahman* for [the yogin] who practises fixation of the five elements in this way.

#### 3.4.2 [Meditation (*dhyāna*)]

Then [the yogin] should practise meditation (*dhyāna*). He should hold his breath for twenty-four hours and meditate on the deity who will grant what he wants. Thus the conditioned meditation arises, which bestows the powers of becoming infinitesimal and so forth. (124) By meditating on something unconditioned, such as space, he enters on the path to liberation.

#### 3.4.3 [Absorption (*samādhi*)]

Then, having perfected unconditioned meditation, [the yogin] should practise absorption (*samādhi*). (125) In just twelve days he attains absorption. By holding the breath the wise [yogin] is sure to become liberated while alive. (126) Absorption is the condition of identity of the individual and universal selves. If [the yogin] has the desire to cast off [his] body [and] if he wants to cast it off himself (127) [then] he should abandon all actions, good and bad, and dissolve [his self] into the supreme *brahman*. And if [he does not want] to

cast off his body, if it is dear to him, (128) then he should wander about all the worlds endowed with the powers of becoming infinitesimal and so forth. He might, should he so want, become a god and wander about in heaven. (129) Or, should he so want, he might in an instant become a man or a *yakṣa*. Or he might want to become an animal: a lion, a tiger, an elephant or a horse. (130) The wise yogin thus wanders at will as a great lord (*mahēśvara*).

I have taught you the way of the ancient seers (*kavimārga*), o Sāṃkṛti, as a yoga of eight auxiliaries.

### 3.5 [The Way of Adepts such as Kapila]

(131) Next I shall teach the doctrine of adepts such as Kapila. The difference is a difference in practice, but the reward is one and the same.

#### 3.5.1 [The Great Seal (*mahāmudrā*)]

(132) I shall carefully proclaim the great seal (*mahāmudrā*) as taught by Bhairava. [The yogin] should place the heel of his left foot at the perineum. (133) He should stretch out his right foot and hold it firmly with both hands. After placing his chin on his chest he should then fill [himself] up with air. (134) Using breath-retention (*kumbhaka*) he should hold [his breath] for as long as he can before exhaling. After practising with the left foot he should practise with the right.

#### 3.5.2 [The Great Lock (*mahābandha*)]

(135) [The yogin] should place the outstretched foot onto his thigh. This is the great lock (*mahābandha*) and he should practise it like the [great] seal.

#### 3.5.3 [The Great Piercing (*mahāvedha*)]

(136) While in the great lock, [the yogin] should gently tap his buttocks on the ground. This is the great piercing (*mahāvedha*); it is practised by perfected men.

#### 3.5.4 [The Sky-Roving Seal (*khecarīmudrā*)]

(137) Next [the yogin] should turn back his tongue and hold it in the hollow in the skull while looking between the eyebrows. This is the sky-roving seal (*khecarīmudrā*).

#### 3.5.5 [The Jālandhara Lock (*jālandharabandha*)]

(138) [The yogin] should constrict the throat and firmly place the chin on the chest. This is the *jālandhara* lock. It prevents loss of the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*). (139) As long as it keeps drinking the nectar of immortality that has dripped from the thousand[-petalled] lotus in the skull of embodied beings, the fire at the navel burns brightly. (140) And so that the fire might not drink that nectar of immortality, [the yogin] should drink it himself. Through constant practice in this way, it goes by the rear pathway (141) and makes the body immortal. For this reason one should practise *jālandhara*.

### 3.5.6 [The *Uddiyāna* Lock (*uddiyānabandha*)]

*Uddiyāna* is easy and always taught because of its many good qualities. (142) Practising it regularly, even an old man becomes young. With special effort [the yogin] should pull his navel upwards and push it downwards. (143) Practising [like this] for six months, he is sure to conquer death.

### 3.5.7 [The Root Lock (*mūlabandha*)]

He who regularly practises the root lock is expert at yoga. (144) He should press his anus with his heel and forcefully contract his perineum over and over again so that his breath goes upwards. (145) Becoming united by means of the root lock, the upward and downward moving breaths, and the *nāda* and *bindu* are sure to bestow complete success in yoga.

### 3.5.8 [The Inverter (*viparītakaraṇam*)]

(146) The technique called the Inverter destroys all diseases. In one constantly devoted to [its] practice the digestive fire increases. (147) He must eat a lot of food, o Sāṃkṛti. If he eats little, the fire will burn [him] up. (148) Listen, Sāṃkṛti, to how the sun can be up and the moon down. On the first day the head should be down and the feet up for a short while. (149) By practising for a little while longer every day, after six months grey hair and wrinkles disappear. (150) He who regularly practises for three hours is expert at yoga.

### 3.5.9 [*Vajroli*]

I shall teach *Vajroli*, which is kept hidden by all yogins, (151) for it is a great secret, not to be given to all and sundry. But one surely should teach it to he who is as dear to one as one's own life. (152) The yogin who knows *Vajroli* is worthy of success, even if he behaves self-indulgently, disregarding the rules taught in yoga. (153) I shall tell you the two things (necessary) for it which are hard for anyone to obtain, [and] which are said to bring about success for a [yogin] if he does obtain them: (154) Milk and Āṅgīrasa. Of the two, the first is [readily] available. The second is hard for men to get; they must use some stratagem to procure it from women. (155-156) A man should strive to find a woman devoted to the practice of yoga. Either a man or a woman can obtain success if they have no regard for one another's gender and practise with only their own ends in mind. If the semen moves then [the yogin] should draw it upwards and preserve it. (157) Semen preserved in this way truly overcomes death. Death [arises] through the fall of semen, life from its preservation. (158-160) All yogins achieve success through the preservation of semen.

The method of practice by which *Amaroli* and *Sahajoli* arise is taught in the tradition of the Adepts.

## 4 [Royal Yoga (*rājayoga*) and the Completion Stage (*niṣpattyavasthā*)]

[The yogin] should practise using these [techniques] that have been taught, each at the proper time. Then the royal yoga will arise. Without them it definitely will not happen.



Success does not happen merely through superficial knowledge (*dirimātrena*); it happens through practice alone. (161) After obtaining the excellent Royal Yoga which subjects all beings to his will, [the yogin] can do anything or nothing, behaving as he likes. (162) When the action (*kriyā*) of the yogin is complete without yoga, the completion (*niṣpatti*) stage [arises], which bestows the rewards of enjoyment and liberation.

(163-166) I have taught you everything, o brahmin. Practise yoga, Sāṃkṛti!”

After hearing these words of his, that Sāṃkṛti obtained complete success through the grace of Dattātreya and then attained yoga.

He who regularly studies this [text] and teaches it to good people is sure to gradually obtain success in yoga. Whether in forests or houses, yogins who are devoted to practice have lived happily for a long time, free from repeated deaths (? *babukālavivarjitāḥ*). So one should make every effort to practise yoga regularly. (167) The practice of yoga is the reward of being born, so those who do not practise it are wasting their lives. May everyone experience its bliss through the grace of the goddess Mahāmāyā! (168) So one should worship her with whom all this is joined.

(169) I, even though I am devoid of devotion, constantly worship the two lotus feet of Viṣṇu [in his form as] Dattātreya, the guru of all people and the wish-fulfilling jewel of devotion, who on being thought of removes the difficulties of even sages and grants them success in yoga, who, out of compassion, is the lord, the teacher of the yoga scriptures which effortlessly steal the heart.