

Development of the Term Dhyāna in the Discourse of Yoga from the Vedic Origins to the Haṭha-Yoga Sources

Dmytro Danylov

H. S. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of NAS of Ukraine (Kyiv)

Dhyāna is a category and one of the basic elements of yoga philosophy (yogadarsana). This term has ancient roots that are first mentioned in Rg Veda (RV). Later dhyāna becomes a part of yoga discourse in the Upanisads, and a cornerstone in the framework of Patañjali's Yogasūtras. It is often used in Mokṣadharmaparvan and Bhagavadgītā of Mahābhārata, texts which are disclosing yoga and in many details describe dhyāna. In haṭha-yogic texts, such as Dattatreyayogasāstra, Gorakṣasataka and others, dhyāna is still used as one of the major parts of yoga-practice.

The term dhyāna is generally translated as meditation. The results of my Ph.D. research show that the meaning of the term dhyāna is non-homogeneous. Dhyāna in different texts has had a different meaning, explaining various mental and embodied practices. Analysis has shown that the term meaning was continuously changing, going from poetic, visionary and less specified in its first mentioning in RV (root dhī derivatives in 4.36.2, 8.12.10, 10.11.1.) to mystical practices of seeing ātman in Upanisads (e.g., Śvetāśvatara Up. 1.14.). In Patañjali's Yogasūtras (2.11. and 3.2.) a clear and unambiguous definition of dhyāna is given, it is there a continuity of cognition on the subject of dhāraṇā and destroyer of vṛtti, which are accurately defined in the Yogasūtras. The text of Mokṣadharmaparvan (12.181, 12.188, 12.203, 12.333.) contain explicit explanations of dhyāna-yoga practice, with its cognitive component and substantial vision of the mind. Bhagavadgītā (12.6.) equates dhyāna and bhakti. The haṭha yogic texts, mentioned earlier, describe dhyāna as an embodied practice, sometimes followed by a visualization.