

In Book Three of PYS the Siddhis (perfections) or Yogic Powers are introduced. The siddhis often create fascination and can also create a certain amount of skepticism, but it is important to realise that according to yoga these abilities are part our natural evolution.

The Siddhis are the natural abilities lying latent within us, that in terms of Raja Yoga, become available to us once we are able to achieve Samadhi, i.e. that we are able to have the experience of our consciousness being absorbed within an object of our focus, and ultimately the Self itself.

At the beginning of book four in Alistair Shearer’s translation we are told:

4.1 The perfections may already be present at birth, or they can be developed by herbs, mantras, by purification, and by Samadhi.

And here in the Sutras we are primarily concerned with the final possibility of Samadhi.

We are told:

- 3.4 Dhyana, dharana and samadhi practiced together are known as samyama.
- 3.5 When samyama is mastered, the light of supreme knowledge dawns
- 3.6 But samyama has its application at every stage of the development of this knowledge.
- 3.7 It is the heart of yoga, more intimate than the preceding limits.
- 3.8 Yet even samyama is outside that pure unboundedness.

Once we have experienced Samadhi it becomes possible to work with the Siddhis directly through the practice of Samyama where we **practice dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (absorption) simultaneously.**

Samyama is an advanced practice that can be applied to any object, event, process or activity, whether it be mental, energetic or physical, to enable us to know it completely. This can be applied to all of Prakriti, i.e. all manifestations of Nature and ultimately to the direct experience of the Self itself.

Rather than previously where we first concentrated upon an object, until that concentration became effortless and unbroken, and we became the object as it is, i.e. a movement from dharana to dhyana to samadhi, now we do this **from the state of samadhi**, a state of pure inner silence.

This has the effect of changing the experience where **we do not only experience the object directly but also are aware of the relationship of the object to the external world**, meaning that this will be able to give us knowledge beyond the usual limitations of time and space. **In fact for Samyama we are focusing on the inner and from here energy moves outwards which is contrary to the former process where we are taking our focus from the outside to the inside! i.e. from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana to samadhi.**

So for Samyama in simple terms:

- We sit within complete silence, a state of no thought (samadhi)
- Whilst in silence create the slightest remembrance of a concept, letting it be the faintest recollection possible (dharana) and release this into the silence within (dhyana)

PYS 6: The Siddhis ‘The Perfections’

- Relax completely for 15 seconds or so without getting involved in any thoughts etc. (samadhi)
- Then repeat again with the same concept making it as ‘fuzzy’ as possible (dharana) and releasing it into the silence (dhyana)
- Relaxing again for another 15 seconds. (samadhi)

This is a seemingly simple technique but relies on our ability to enter samadhi and let go completely. At first it can be ‘practiced’ but really it is more a case of ‘accessing’ so that all parts of the process occur simultaneously.

We can offer concepts such as love or strength to inner silence, prayers for healing and in the Sutras we find many examples of concepts to be accessed in v3.13 to v3.55. But note that often in the Sutras we have to place attention in a specific location.

Patanjali does however warn us that the siddhis can be distracting and should be treated with equanimity, so that the practitioner can move beyond even this state to Kaivalya or Liberation. As we are told in 3.8 even “Yet even samyama is outside the state of Pure Consciousness in its unbounded state.” And in 3.50 “And when he is unattached even to this state, the very seeds of bondage are destroyed, and Enlightenment follows.”

Remember in 4.1 in Alistair Shearer’s translation we are told that “The perfections may already be present at birth, or they can be developed by herbs, mantras, by purification, and by Samadhi.” so that ultimately the siddhis may be attained by many different routes. We can say however that within the Sutras there is a system of eight limbs that provides an excellent framework within which to practice and will always help us to act in good faith.

Science and the Siddhis

In recent years it has been very interesting to see how science is evolving and becoming more aligned with yoga so that increasingly we can see how siddhis are possible. For instance if we consider the idea that there is a vast indivisible ocean of energy, a quivering, resonating field of energy, where any one part of it is connected to the whole. Or how scientists suggest that electrons are blinking in and out of existence, being able to affect one another at distance. Or how each molecule and cell of the body emits tiny quantum emissions as light. Or how it has been found that physical objects all emit and reabsorb energy which at the quantum level carries information about the history of that physical object. Suddenly the siddhis do not seem so very strange afterall!!

A wider application of samayama

To go further, in a way we can also relate Samyama to Jnana Yoga where the deepest questions can be answered from the silence within, also to Karma Yoga where we allow our actions to be initiated from the silence within, or Bhakti Yoga where the love we experience within the silence is expressed outwardly, or a prayer is offered into the inner silence without expectation. We can even say that in asana we can create the situation where it is experienced as stillness in action.

This means in a way Samyama can also be a broad means of expressing the higher qualities we possess where we are cultivating the habit of thinking, acting and feeling at the level of stillness, that is offering our thoughts, actions and feelings to stillness. This can be done formally in meditation and also in daily life until we establish the duality of the witness and all else, including our body, mind, feelings etc. Then eventually as the stillness of the witness is more firmly established within we can grow in vairagya (non-attachment) and viveka (discrimination). Now with the application of samyama we can expand our awareness to an experience of the furthest reaches of our physical and subtle dimensions; of ‘cosmic

PYS 6: The Siddhis ‘The Perfections’

samyama’ and we can experience how as we have been told the whole universe sits within us.

One famous book which contains many accounts of the Siddhis is Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda. For instance in chapter 30 he says:

“A yogi who through perfect meditation has merged his consciousness with the Creator perceives the cosmical essence as light; to him there is no difference between the light rays composing water and the light rays composing land. Free from matter-consciousness, free from the three dimensions of space and the fourth dimension of time, a master transfers his body of light with equal ease over the light rays of earth, water, fire, or air. Long concentration on the liberating spiritual eye has enabled the yogi to destroy all delusions concerning matter and its gravitational weight; thenceforth he sees the universe as an essentially undifferentiated mass of light.”

However he was very clear that the siddhis were not to be freely shown, as he said in public:

“Many come expecting miracles, but those who have realized God never show their powers, unless God directs them to. People don't see that in that complete humility lies the greatest miracle! If I were to perform miracles in public, I could attract crowds of followers. But that isn't the way God wants it.”

-From *Conversations with Yogananda*