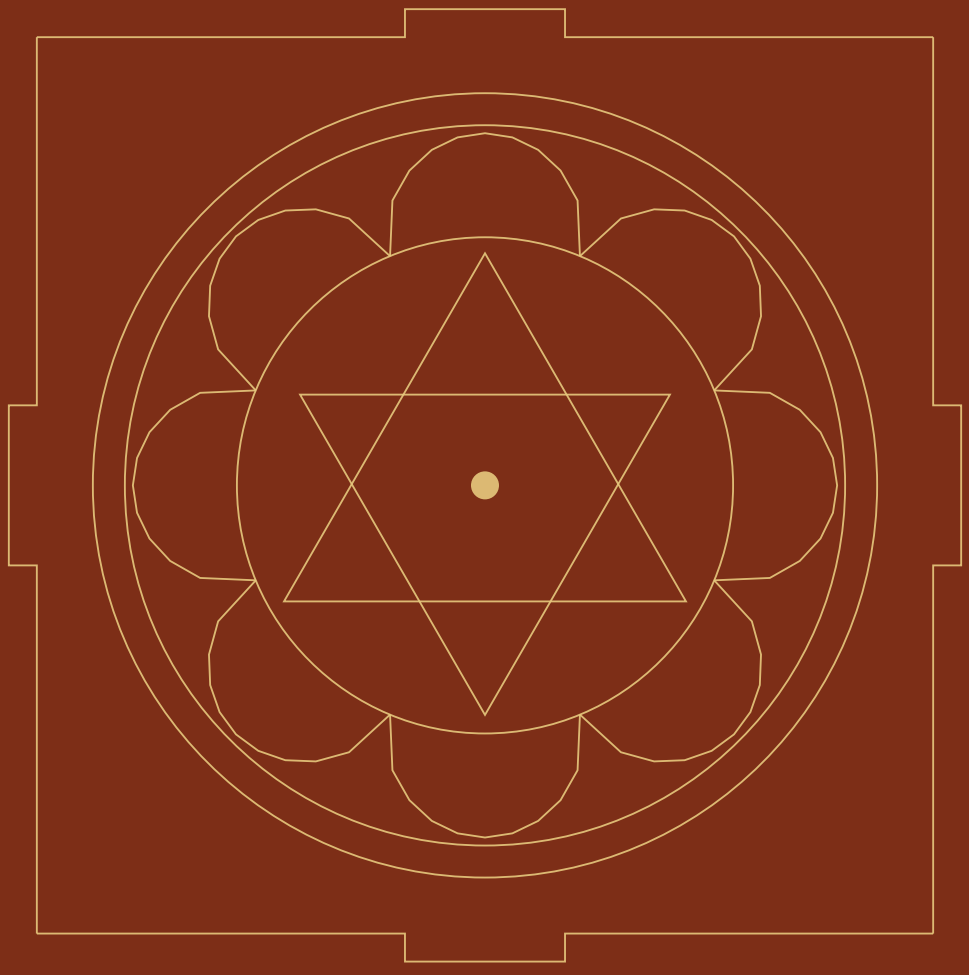
SACRED TEXTS

The Gheranda Samhita Explained

The seven lessons of the yoga of the pot: six cleansings, thirty-two postures, twenty-five seals, eight breath retentions, three meditations, with key verses in Sanskrit and our own translation



घेरण्ड

gheraṇḍa

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

Around 1700, in a short Sanskrit text, a teacher called Gheraṇḍa answers his disciple Caṇḍakāpāli, who has come to his hermitage to ask for "the yoga of the pot". The answer fills seven lessons: six cleansing actions, thirty-two postures, twenty-five seals, the withdrawal of the senses, breath control with its eight retentions, three kinds of meditation and six kinds of absorption. It is the most systematic of the classical haṭha manuals, the one that gives the largest list of postures, and the one that most clearly presents yoga as a sequence of means, each with its own fruit.

The Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā (घेरण्डसंहिता) is less famous than the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, but it is in some ways closer to the way yoga is taught today: it begins with the body, counts the postures, describes the seals and the breath with precision, and ends with meditation on a chosen deity and on light. This book reads it lesson by lesson.

It does four things.

First, it places the text: its date, its form, its debt to the Pradīpikā, and the seven means that organise it.

Second, it reads each of the seven lessons, with the key verses in Sanskrit and our own translation, a table for each list (the cleansing actions, the 32 postures, the 25 seals, the 8 retentions), and an honest commentary: what the text says, what it claims, and how it can be practised today.

Third, it separates clearly what can be practised from a book and what cannot. The text describes cleansing techniques (swallowing a cloth, washing the colon, drawing water through the nose and expelling it through the mouth) and seals (such as the stretching of the tongue) that it itself says must be kept secret and learnt from a teacher. We describe them in the text's words, to understand it, and we teach none of them.

Fourth, it gives a home practice of the seven means, safe and complete, in forty-five minutes.

> **About the translations.**
>
> All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit text. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation. Srisa Chandra Vasu's translation (1914-1915) is in the public domain and is cited only for comparison of numbering.

> **Health first.**
>
> The Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā contains practices that are dangerous without a teacher: swallowing a cloth, washing the stomach or colon, drawing water through the nose, long breath retentions, inversions, stretching the tongue. Do not practise them from this or any book. The home practice of Chapter 10 contains none of them. Talk to your doctor before any yoga practice if you are pregnant, have heart disease, high or low blood pressure, glaucoma, epilepsy, a hernia, a recent operation or a psychiatric condition. Emergency numbers: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India), 000 (Australia).

How the text is numbered

We follow the Sanskrit text of GRETIL (Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages), entered by Peter Thomi from his edition (Wichtrach, Institut für Indologie, 1993), version of 31 July 2020. In this file, the opening verse of homage is numbered 1.0, and the lessons contain 60, 45, 100, 18, 99, 23 and 23 verses. The public-domain translation by Srisa Chandra Vasu (Sacred Books of the Hindus, 1914-1915) often groups two verses under one number; we say so where it matters. Where the GRETIL file has an obvious typing error, we correct it in the verse quoted and say so.

How to use this book

Read Chapter 1 first; then one lesson a day. Practise the home session of Chapter 10 from the first week; its elements are introduced along the way. Our book Hatha Yoga: The Complete Traditional Practice sets the Gheraṇḍa beside the Pradīpikā and gives three full hatha sessions; Hatha Yoga Pradipika Explained reads the other great manual verse by verse.

Chapter 1. The yoga of the pot: the text and its seven means

A dialogue

The text opens with the same image as the Pradīpikā: haṭha yoga is a staircase to rāja yoga (GS 1.0 borrows HYP 1.1 almost word for word). Then the scene: Caṇḍakāpāli goes to Gheraṇḍa's hut, bows with humility and devotion, and asks for the yoga of the pot (ghaṭastha-yoga), the cause of the knowledge of reality (GS 1.1-2). Gheraṇḍa answers with a teaching that every student of yoga can carry:

GS 1.4

नास्ति मायासमः पाशो नास्ति योगात्परं बलम् । न हि ज्ञानात्परो बन्धुर्नाहंकारात्परो रिपुः ॥

nāsti māyāsamaḥ pāśo nāsti yogāt paraṃ balam / na hi jñānāt paro bandhur nāhaṃkārāt paro ripuḥ

Translation. There is no fetter like illusion, no strength greater than yoga, no friend greater than knowledge, no enemy greater than the sense of "I". (Our translation; same number in Vasu.)

GS 1.5

अभ्यासात्कादिवर्णादिर्यथा शास्त्राणि बोधयेत् । तथा योगं समासाद्य तत्त्वज्ञानं च लभ्यते ॥

abhyāsāt kādivarṇāder yathā śāstrāṇi bodhayet / tathā yogaṃ samāsādya tattvajñānaṃ ca labhyate

Translation. Just as, by practising the letters beginning with "ka", one comes to understand the treatises, so, by taking up yoga, one gains the knowledge of reality. (Our translation.)

The comparison is precise and modest: yoga is learnt like reading, letter by letter, before it gives understanding.

Date and author

Nothing is known of Gheraṇḍa or Caṇḍakāpāli outside the text. Scholars usually date the Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, after the Pradīpikā (fifteenth century), from which it borrows verses and ideas. It was printed and translated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Srisa Chandra Vasu's English translation (1914-1915) made it widely known.

The pot that must be fired

GS 1.8

आमकुम्भ इवाम्भःस्थो जीर्यमाणः सदा घटः । योगानलेन संदह्य घटशुद्धिं समाचरेत् ॥

āmakumbha ivāmbhaḥstho jīryamāṇaḥ sadā ghaṭaḥ / yogānalena saṃdahya ghaṭaśuddhiṃ samācaret

Translation. Like an unbaked clay pot standing in water, the body is always wearing away. Firing it in the fire of yoga, one should purify the pot. (Our translation; same number in Vasu.)

The body is a pot (ghaṭa): it comes into being through actions good and bad, and turns with them like a water wheel driven by oxen, up and down through birth and death (GS 1.6-7). Unfired, it dissolves; fired by practice, it becomes strong. This is the whole programme of the text.

The seven means

GS 1.9

शोधनं दृढता चैव स्थैर्यं धैर्यं च लाघवम् । प्रत्यक्षं च निर्लिप्तं च घटस्थं सप्तसाधनम् ॥

śodhanaṃ dṛḍhatā caiva sthairyaṃ dhairyaṃ ca lāghavam / pratyakṣaṃ ca nirliptaṃ ca ghaṭasthaṃ saptasādhanam

Translation. Purification, firmness, steadiness, calm, lightness, direct perception and freedom from taint: these are the seven means of the yoga of the pot. (Our translation. The GRETIL file reads ghatasthaṃ , a typing error for ghaṭasthaṃ .)

GS 1.10

षट्कर्मणा शोधनं च आसनेन भवेद्दृढम् । मुद्रया स्थिरता चैव प्रत्याहारेण धैर्यता ॥

ṣaṭkarmaṇā śodhanaṃ ca āsanena bhaved dṛḍham / mudrayā sthiratā caiva pratyāhāreṇa dhairyatā

Translation. Purification comes from the six actions; firmness from posture; steadiness from the seals; calm from withdrawal of the senses; (Our translation.)

GS 1.11

प्राणायामाल्लाघवं च ध्यानात्प्रत्यक्षमात्मनि । समाधिना निर्लिप्तं च मुक्तिरेव न संशयः ॥

prāṇāyāmāl lāghavaṃ ca dhyānāt pratyakṣam ātmani / samādhinā nirliptaṃ ca muktir eva na saṃśayaḥ

Translation. lightness from breath control; direct perception of the Self from meditation; and from absorption, freedom from taint, which is liberation itself, without doubt. (Our translation; Vasu numbers 1.10 and 1.11 together.)

Lesson	Means	Sanskrit	Fruit (GS 1.10-11)
1	six cleansing actions	ṣaṭkarma (षट्कर्म)	purification, śodhana
2	postures	āsana (आसन)	firmness, dṛḍhatā
3	seals	mudrā (मुद्रा)	steadiness, sthiratā
4	withdrawal of the senses	pratyāhāra (प्रत्याहार)	calm, dhairya
5	breath control	prāṇāyāma (प्राणायाम)	lightness, lāghava
6	meditation	dhyāna (ध्यान)	direct perception, pratyakṣa
7	absorption	samādhi (समाधि)	freedom from taint, nirlipta

Compared with Patañjali's eight limbs (YS 2.29), the Gheraṇḍa drops the ethical restraints and observances

as separate limbs, adds cleansing and seals, and places the withdrawal of the senses before breath control.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 28 pages.

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