

Yoga Philosophy: Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali are 196 aphorisms agreed to have been compiled prior to 400 CE (400 BCE) by the Sage Patanjali. He compiled materials about yoga from older traditions. The text fell into obscurity from the 12th to 19th century. Its modern popularization is due primarily to the widespread teachings and travel of Swami Vivekananda, as well as to the Theosophical Society. The Yoga Sutras are based in Samkhya Philosophy but also reach beyond it, some say it is Samkhya philosophy "with God".

Swami Vivekananda was the chief disciple of Ramakrishna, an Indian saint who lived during the 1800s. Sarada Devi was his wife. Vivekananda was a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world. After Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda traveled and taught throughout India, and travelled to the United States to represent India at the **1893 Parliament of the World Religions**. He was such a charismatic champion of interfaith awareness and exemplified stunning good health and exotic attractiveness, magnetism, he had a major impact. He's credited with bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion during the late 19th century. Vivekananda gave hundreds of lectures throughout the United States and Europe.

Most scholarly editions of the yoga sutras today rely to some degree (consult) on two main ancient commentators: Bhoja and Vyasa. Some scholars hold, (widely held) that Patanjali's aim was to condense two traditions of Ashtanga Yoga and Kriya Yoga under one philosophical point of view. We see evidence of that in his exposition of kriya yoga in chapter 1, chapter 2 sutra 1-27, chapter 3 except sutra 54, and chapter 4. Ashtanga's eight limbs are described in chapter 2 sutra 28-55, and chapter 3 sutra 3 and 54.

There are four chapters or books (Sanskrit *pada*) divided as follows:

Samadhi Pada (51 sutras). This chapter's focus is on concentration in which the state of a one-pointed mind is described as consciousness established in itself. Samadhi refers to a blissful state of absorption. The author describes yoga as the means to attaining samādhi.

Sadhana Pada (55 sutras). This chapter is about the practical means of attaining yogic concentration for those not able to attain Samadhi straight away. Sadhana is the Sanskrit word for "practice" or "discipline". It describes Kriya Yoga (Action Yoga) which are the last three rungs of Ashtanga Yoga, and introduces Ashtanga Yoga's first five of eight rungs (1-5).

Vibhuti Pada (56 sutras). This chapter is on the accomplishment of extra-ordinary powers sometimes attained by practitioners. Here rungs 6-8 (tapas, svadhyaya, ishvara pranidhana) are described. Vibhuti is the Sanskrit word for "power" or "manifestation". 'Supra-normal powers' (Sanskrit: siddhi) are acquired by the practice of yoga. Combined simultaneous practice of Dhāraṇā, Dhyana and Samādhi is called Samyama. It is a method used in yoga for liberation whereby siddhis may also be attained. Siddhis are considered distractions from yoga's goal of liberation and are discouraged.

Kaivalya Pada (34 sutras). This chapter describes the final results of practice: Self-Realization or Liberation. Kaivalya literally means "isolation", and can be seen as the sense of I when one has joined the One. In the Sutras it is used to denote, freedom, emancipation, It can be used interchangeably with moksha (liberation), yoga's goal.

PATHWAYS TO UNION

Ashtanga Yoga's 8 Limbs YS 2:29:

1. **Yama:** the restraints Yogasūtra 2.30 are (the don'ts):

- Ahimsā (अहिंसा): Nonviolence, non-harming
- Satya (सत्य): truthfulness, non-falsehood
- Asteya (अस्तेय): non-stealing
- Brahmachārya (ब्रह्मचर्य): chastity, marital fidelity or sexual restraint
- Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह): non-possessiveness

2. **Niyama:** are virtuous habits, behaviors and observances (the "dos"). Sadhana Pada Verse 32:

- Śauca: purity of mind, speech and body
- Santoṣa: contentment, acceptance
- Tapas: persistence, perseverance, austerity
- Svādhyāya: study of Vedas, spiritual literature, self-reflection, introspection
- Īśvarapraṇidhāna: contemplation of Ishvara (God/Supreme Being, Brahman, True Self)

3. **Āsana:** Verse 46 of Book 2, स्थिरसुखमासनम् ॥४६॥

Translation 1: Asana is what is steady and pleasant/comfortable.-YS11.46

Āraṇya translates verse II.47 of Yoga sutra as, "*asanas are perfected over time by relaxation of effort with meditation on the infinite*"; this combination and practice stops the quivering of body. The posture that causes pain or restlessness is not a yogic posture. Secondary texts say correct posture is to keeping truck, neck and head erect / aligned (proper spinal posture) is necessary.

4. **Prāṇāyāma:** prāṇa (प्राण, breath) and āyāma (आयाम, restraining, extending, stretching). Prāṇāyāma, is consciously regulating the breath (inhalation and exhalation).

5. **Pratyāhāra:** a combo of two Sanskrit words prati- (prefix प्रति-, "towards"), āhāra (आहार, "bring near, fetch"). Pratyahara is "bringing one's awareness hear" in a sense. Sensory withdrawal.

6. **Dhāraṇā:** Dharana (Sanskrit: धारणा) concentration, introspective focus, one-pointedness. root of word is dhṛ (धृ) is "to hold, maintain, keep".

7. **Dhyāna:** Dhyana (Sanskrit: ध्यान) "contemplation, reflection" "meditation".

Dhyana is uninterrupted train of thought or flow of awareness.

8. **Samādhi:** Samadhi (Sanskrit: समाधि) "putting together, joining, union. Samadhi is the mind's total absorption in its object of contemplation.

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Kriya Yoga: 2.1 named, and described

The direct Paths:

On Om: Yogasutras 1.23-1.29.

On Devotion: Yogasutra 2:45.

Reading the Yoga Sutras

There is a great body of literature surrounding the Yogasutras (also written Yoga Sutras) of Patanjali. Distinctions are made concerning the proximity of the writing to the original text with terms to distinguish a sutra in relation to the proximity of the commentary.

A **sutra** is a concise, authoritative aphorism that encapsulates a significant quantity of information.

A **vritti** is a word-for-word explanation of the sutra without any comment.

A **bhashya** is an authoritative commentary that includes background information that reveals both the meaning of the sutra and its relation to other sutras.

A **tika** is a commentary on the sutras AND bhashyas to further clarify the meaning and importance of the text.

An **upa-tiki** is a still further commentary.....

EXAMPLE

A **sutra**: yogah chitti vritti nirodhah

A **vritti**: yogah: yoga (is) chitta: (of) mind-field vritti: (of) modifications nirodhah: control. (Yoga is the control of the modifications of the mind-field.)

A **bhashya**: Vyasa states: This sutra was enunciated with the intent to state the definition of yoga, that is

A **tika**: Vijnana-bhikshu states: the word chitta in this sutra does not mean simply the retentive power of the mind, but the entire inner mental instrument.

A **upa-tiki**: Stover Schmitt states: The notion of the chitta as a field as in Vijnana-bhikshu's commentary rather than it being the mind-stuff, or the mind-matter as it is sometimes described, helps one to envision the vrittis, or waves, dissolving into the mind-field which serves as a substratum of individual thoughts.

'Anatomy' of the Mind

The four aspects of the mind constitute the inner instrument called the *antar karana*. They are:

1. **Manas** – the lower mind, links sense perceptions and actions
2. **Buddhi** – the intellect or faculty of discrimination, transmits orders, is the will, sort sense perceptions
3. **Ahamkara** – the ego or sense of identity, acts based on the buddhi
4. **Chitta** – the mind-field, mind-stuff, the location or canvas on which all the activities take place. As such it retains the impressions in the bed of memory. The unconscious is therefore part of the chitta.

Some Important Terms from the Yoga Sutras

Sutra	a short sentence, aphorism, “thread” that strings together the essential knowledge of a subject
Patanjali	the author of the Yogasutras
Samkhya	the ancient philosophy used by Patanjali as the foundation for yoga practice
Purusha	conscious principle
Prakriti	matter, nature, the principle underlying all manifestation
Gunas	three fundamental constituents of matter (prakriti), namely sattva, rajas, tamas. Sattva- purity, clarity, light. Rajas- activity, energy, movement. Tamas- inertia, heaviness, darkness, stability
Viveka	power of discrimination
Yoga	the practical side of samkhya, the means to viveka, the way to freedom from pain and misery through self-knowledge
Kaivalya	liberation, consciousness undistorted by false identities, pains, and misperceptions, uncontaminated consciousness
Pada	a chapter. There are 4 in the Yoga Sutras
Samadhi Pada	– chapter on concentration in which the state of a one-pointed mind is described; consciousness established in itself.
Sadhana Pada	– chapter on the practical means of attaining yoga concentration for those not able to attain “samadhi” straight away. Contains descriptions of kriya yoga (last 3 rungs of ashtanga yoga), introduces rungs 1-5.
Vibhuti Pada	- chapter on the accomplishments or extra-ordinary powers sometimes acquired by practitioners of yoga, begins with description of rungs 6-8 (tapas, svadhyaya, ishvara pranidhana).
Kaivalya Pada	- describes the final results of practice, true Self-realization.
Japa	mental repetition of a mantra
Isvara	God, the Purusha unaffected by karma or imperfections, OM
Klesha(s)	the five primary obstacles to attainment of yoga and the source of human Pain. They are: avidya – ignorance asmita – egotism raga – attachment dvesha – aversion adhinivesha – fear of death (fear)
Vairagya	non-attachment
Abhyasa	regular consistent practice
OM	signifier of the inner reality, the Teacher of Teachers, Isvara
Siddhis	“perfections”, powers

Some highlights of the Yogasutras of Patanjali

Samadhi Pada – Chapter on Concentration

- 1) Now begins the traditional study of yoga.
- 2) **Yoga is the control of the modifications of the mind.**
- 3) Then one abides in one's own nature.
- 4) At other times, one is identified with the modifications.
- 5) There are five types of modification; some stained (painful) and others unstained.
- 12) These are controlled by practice and non-attachment.
- 15) When the mind loses all desire for objects seen or (even) described in the scriptures, it acquires a state of desirelessness which is called non-attachment.
- 17) When concentration is reached . . . it is called *samprajnata-samadhi*.
- 18) *Asamprajnata-samadhi* is the other kind of samadhi which arises through practice of the disappearance of all fluctuations of the mind, leaving only the residue of this cessation as a *samskara*.
- 20) The samprajnata samadhi of those who have followed the prescribed path has as its preconditions faith, strength, self-recollection, samprajnata samadhi, and the awakening of wisdom acquired in samprajnata samadhi.
- 23) From practicing the presence of God, samadhi becomes imminent.
- 24) *Ishvara* (God) is a particular being unaffected by affliction, actions, the results of actions, or the latent impressions of these.
- 27) The sacred word designating *Ishvara* is OM.
- 28) *Japa* of that name, cultivating and absorbing its meaning is called *Ishvara Pranidhana*- practicing the presence of God.
- 29) From this, Self realization is attained and the impediments are overcome.
- 30) Illness, mental idleness, doubt, negligence, sloth, non-abstention, confusion of philosophies, failure to gain ground, and instability – these distractions of the mind are impediments.
- 31) From these impediments arise pain, sorrow, restlessness of the body, and disturbance of inhalation and exhalation.
- 33) **The mind becomes purified by cultivation of feelings of friendship, compassion, goodwill, and indifference respectively towards those that are unhappy, suffering, virtuous, and impious.**
- 41) When the fluctuations of the mind are weakened, the mind, like a transparent crystal, takes on the features of the object of meditation- whether cogniser, the instrument of cognition, or the object cognized – and this is called *samapatti*, or engrossment.
- 51) By the stoppage of that, too, *asamprajnata samadhi* takes place.

Sadhana Pada – Chapter on Yoga Practice

- 1) The practice of *tapas*, *svadhyaya*, and *Ishvara-pranidhana* is called *kriya* yoga.
- 2) It is practiced to bring about samadhi and to minimize stained cognitions(kleshas.)
- 3) Ignorance (avidya), egoism, attachment, aversion, and fear of death are the five kleshas.
- 10) The subtle (unconscious seeds) of the kleshas are destroyed when the mind is resolved (into the vastness of consciousness from which it has come.)
- 11) The gross states of the kleshas are avoidable by meditation.
- 13) As long as the kleshas continue to operate, they produce three consequences in the form of birth, span of life, and life experiences.
- 16) Pain which is yet to come is to be discarded (since it is only the future that can be controlled by right actions in the present.)
- 17) The false identification of the Seer and the objects of experience is the cause of pain that is to be avoided.
- 20) The Seer is the absolute knower. Although pure, the Seer witnesses the modifications of the mind as an onlooker.
- 21) To serve as objective field for the purusha is the essence or nature of prakriti.

28) Through the practice of the eight rungs of yoga, when impurities are destroyed, there arises samadhi, culminating in the highest realization.

29) *Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi* are the eight rungs to attaining yoga.

30-55) (In these sutras the first five rungs are explained.)

*46) *Yoga posture should be steady and comfortable.*

Vibhuti Pada – Chapter on Powers

1) Concentration is the fixation of the mind on a particular point.

2) In that concentration, when the continuous flow of similar mental modifications is effortlessly established, it is called meditation.

3) When the mind of the meditator has become like a pure crystal, reflecting only the object shining in it and devoid of the thought even of the self (who is meditating), that state is called samadhi.

4) These three together on the same object is called samyama.

5-54) (These sutras describe experiences and accomplishments that may be encountered during the ascent toward asamprajnata samadhi.)

*19) *By samyama (intense concentration and observance over time) on the distinguishing signs of others bodies knowledge of their mental images is obtained.*

55) (Whether any of these are experience or not), when equality is established between the purity of the mind and the purity of the Self, liberation takes place.

Kaivalya Pada – Chapter on Final Liberation

This entire pada is technical, answering questions about how the self comes into relation with the non-self; takes birth and instinctively functions according to the nature of the particular birth it has taken; how latent impressions stored in the mind function; how the mind lies between the self and the objective world; how the mind gravitates toward enlightenment as spiritual experience increases; how final discrimination dawns; how the three gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas) fulfill their purpose and are dissolved; and how Absolute Consciousness emerges and establishes Itself in Itself.

Omkaara or Pranava



The lower curve represents the gross world, conscious mind, waking state called **Vaishvanara**.

The center curve represents the subtle world, active unconscious mind, and dreaming state, called **Taijasa**.

The upper curve represents the causal plane, latent subconscious mind, and deep sleep, called **Prajna**.

The dot, point, or *bindu* represents the fourth state of absolute consciousness, the Self, Atman/Brahman, that encompasses and permeates all other (the three above) states, called **Turiya**.

The arc below the dot symbolizes the separateness of this fourth state; it stands above yet is part of the other three.