

Classical Yoga, that is yoga as we find within the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is one of the Astika Darshana: -

There are six traditional Indian ways of knowing the world. The first three are ways of understanding the world using the mind as we use here in the West in contemporary times. Then Classical Yoga outlines how we can experience reality as it more truly is, through direct experience, i.e. without the mind or conceptualisation. The final two darshana or viewpoints outline how we can experience reality more deeply from this state of transcendence.

1) Nyaya

Logic-Discussion-
Reason

2) Vaisheshika

Analysis-Comparison

3) Samkhya

Enumeration of
existence

*Forms of Intellectual
Understanding i.e.
'Dualistic'
Subject & Object are
separate*

**4) Yoga (Classical
Yoga/PYS)**

Direct experience of
the Truth

*"The Bridge" between
the two main modes
of Knowing*

5) Mimamsa

Sacred Technology

6) Vedanta

Transcendental or
Metaphysical
Knowledge

*Direct knowledge
beyond the five senses
& the
mind i.e. 'Monistic'
Subject & Object are one*

Classical Yoga is a dualistic system based on Samkhyan Cosmology

- According to PYS there are two main different categories of reality, **Purusha** which is Pure Consciousness or Spirit and **Prakriti** which is Nature or everything that is manifest in space and time, however subtle.
- The main aim of Classical Yoga is to directly experience that you are in fact Pure Consciousness (Purusha) and not your mind, body or senses which are all part of transitory Nature (Prakriti).
- This means at its heart the Sutras are dualistic where when we directly experience ourselves as Pure Consciousness the world is still separate from us.
- As Pure Consciousness we are free from all limitation where we no longer primarily identify with the personal mind/body and as such there is Kaivalya or Liberation. This is the release from suffering.
- In PYS the primary method for realising this experience is through meditation.

As Swami Satyananda Saraswati in Four Chapters on Freedom page 18 says, **Yoga is "(A Method) by which consciousness is disconnected from the entanglement with mind and manifested world. Yoga (union) is the result."**

Other states of realisation

According to Classical yoga (PYS) we will have realised in short that "God dwells in you as you" however for more complete knowledge at this point is worth mentioning that once we have realised that **we are Purusha** i.e. we have experienced that '**God dwells in you as you**' there are always further states of realisation that can be experienced.

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For example there is **Unity Consciousness** where we experience that “**I am one with the whole**” where we will have experienced an immersion into the whole energy field. This is found in Vedanta as Monism. (The Upanishads & Bhagavad Gita explore this state of Being amongst many other things)

Origins of the Sutras

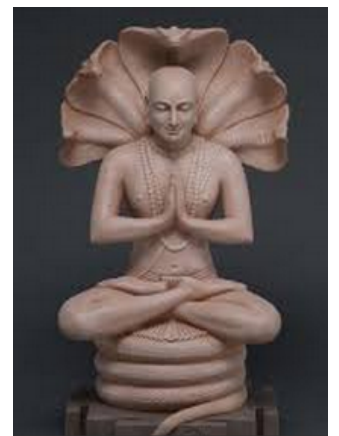
The sutras date from between **300BCE to 200CE** meaning the sutras belong to the middle period of the ancient system of yoga known as the **Classical Era**. Patanjali's system of yoga is known as Classical Yoga but there are numerous other names for this system such as Raja Yoga, Asthanga Yoga, The Eight Limbed Path. Do note however that when we say Asthanga Yoga this is not the Hatha Yoga system of Pattabhi Jois with its sequences!

The text is written in the form of **195 sutras in four chapters**. ‘Sutra’ means ‘thread’ indicating how they are **very brief, succinct verses requiring interpretation and explanation** which is why traditionally a teacher would take the sutras and provide a living commentary upon them. Today there are very many commentaries available upon the Sutras and we will find that translations will be slightly different because each Sanskrit word can have a variety of meanings, and when the Sutras are translated sometimes a concept as encapsulated in Sanskrit does not have parallel in another language, with specific nuances easily being lost in translation! Therefore it is often best to study several commentaries and reflect upon them to find the meanings that enlighten our hearts and minds.

The origins of the Sutras is shrouded in mystery and there has been a great deal of controversy regarding its date and authorship however what we can know is that in India spiritual texts have always been treated with the greatest respect and the Sutras will have been passed unchanged through the centuries in both an oral and then written form. PYS have been prized as perhaps the most authoritative work upon Yoga that has ever existed and for us as fledging yoga teachers this makes a study of the Sutras an absolute necessity and perhaps as Alistair Shearer states in his introduction to his commentary upon the Sutras we should see the Sutras as drawing upon a common body of nonsectarian knowledge that has been available from time immemorial and we should not be weighed down by academic debates where sometimes the beauty and significance of something can easily be lost in extensive discussion.

We can say however that the Sutras are attributed to Patanjali who is considered to be a compiler of existing knowledge rather than its author per se; He is also believed to have written significant works on Ayurveda (the ancient Indian system of traditional medicine) and also upon Sanskrit grammar, although more recently scholars have stated that these works may be better attributed to other authors.

There is also mythology associated with this great sage as, like many spiritual heroes, his story has assumed mythical standing. One well-known myth is that in order to teach yoga to the world Patanjali fell down to earth from heaven in the form of a little snake, falling into the upturned palms of his virgin mother, Gonika, who was herself a powerful yogini. He is regarded as an incarnation of the thousand-headed serpent-king named Shesha (Remainder) or Ananta (Endless), whose coils are said to support the god Vishnu. Indeed Patanjali is usually shown symbolically in the form of part man and part snake. Ultimately however we should not be surprised that so little is known about Patanjali as most of the ancient sages of India preferred a level of anonymity realizing that their work was the outcome of generations of study and oftentimes their work was attributed to a previous teacher or to the Divine itself.



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Once of the main reasons that the Sutras are so prized is that they are **non-sectarian (i.e. non-religious)**, this is because at its heart it is a **practical text rather than a philosophical text** meaning that the science of classical yoga has been easily adopted by any spiritual or religious group, and also means we can come to the sutras without a religious or spiritual background.

Aim of the Sutras

The aim of the Sutras is ultimately to describe the journey leading to **Kaivalya or Liberation** where we have **liberated Purusha from Prakriti** i.e. Spirit/Pure Awareness/Pure Consciousness from all manifestations of Nature including the thought mind. This is therefore an inherently **dualistic system** where there is Spirit and Matter, and we seek to experience the Spirit that we more essentially are.

The Sutras provide us with **experiential methods** whereby we can experience the separation of the Seer (Purusha) and the Seen (Prakriti) showing us in no uncertain terms that **we are not ultimately the body, mind and senses**. It is however no good to hear about this or read about this, it must be **spontaneously experienced** to be known and for our consciousness to be transformed, where our identification with who or what we are shifts.

The entire message of the Sutras is encapsulated within the first four verses, and because these verses are of great significance you will find several translations of these verses below:

1. Alistair Shearer (2002) *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Rider: London page 90

*"And now the teaching on yoga begins
Yoga is the settling the mind into silence
When the mind has settled, we are established in our essential nature, which is unbounded consciousness.
Our essential nature is usually overshadowed by the activity of the mind." BK v1-v4*

2. Swami Satchidananda (4th Ed 1990) *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Integral Yoga Pubs: VA pages 3 to 9

*"Now the exposition of Yoga is being made.
The restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff is Yoga.
Then the Seer (Self) abides in His own nature.
At other times (the Self appears to) assume the forms of the mental modifications." BK v1-v4*

3. Bernard Bouanchaud (1997) *The Essence of Yoga*, Sat Guru Pub: Dehli pages 5 to 7

*"Now is set forth authoritative teaching on yoga
Yoga is the ability to direct and focus mental activity.
With the attainment of focused mind, the inner being establishes itself in all its reality.
Otherwise, we identify with the activities of the mind." BK v1-v4*

4. Swami Satyananda Saraswati, (2nd Ed. 2011) *Four Chapters on Freedom*, Yoga Pub Trust: Bihar pages 29 to 41

*"Now, therefore, complete instructions regarding yoga
To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga
Thus the seer is established (abides) in his own essential nature
Or, there is identification with the modifications of chitta." BK v1-v4*

5. B.K.S. Iyengar (1998) *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Harper Collins; London pages 45 to 49

*"With prayers for divine blessings, now begins an exposition of the sacred art of yoga
Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness.
Then the Seer dwells in his own true splendour
At other times, the Seer identifies with fluctuating consciousness." BK v1-v4*

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6. T.K.V. Desikachar (1995) *The Heart of Yoga, Inner Traditions International: Vermont pages 149 to 150*

"Here begins the authoritative instruction on Yoga.

Yoga is the ability to direct the mind exclusively towards an object and sustain that direction without any distractions.

Then the ability to understand the object fully and correctly is apparent.

(in the absence of the state of mind called yoga) The ability to understand the object is simply replaced by the mind's conception of that object or by a total lack of comprehension." BK v1-v4

Each translation gives a slightly different emphasis, does a specific one speak to you?



Verse 1 is simply telling us that there is an immediacy to exploring what yoga is. Then the following three verses are in essence answering the question 'What is Yoga?'.

In **verse 2** if we look at the Sanskrit then there are different possible translations of which possibly the more accessible are highlighted in the table below:

"yogas chitta vrtti nirodhah" Bk1v2	
Sanskrit	translation
Yoga	Yoga
Chitta	Mental field; psyche; individual consciousness; mental/emotional field
Vrtti	Activity; movement; fluctuations
Nirodhah	Cessation; controlling; blocking; restraint; still
Meaning simply stated : "Yoga is the stillness of our mental/emotional fluctuations"	

Remember very significantly a key to understanding this is that **the term 'Yoga' is foremost a state of Being**, and only secondly yoga is a set of practices to lead us to this state of Being.

Then in **verses 3 and 4** we are told what occurs when we experience this stillness of being and when we do not respectively. So in v3 when we experience stillness of Being we experience our true state and in v4 when we do not then we continue to identify with our conditioning and will suffer.

So within the Sutras we are led to an experience of the separation or difference between the inner spiritual reality of the Self which is the silent, never changing true state of Being and the ever-changing transient world of nature or matter; this is therefore the direct realization of the difference between the Purusha (Spirt/Soul) and Prakriti (Nature or all manifestation including our mind & body). This is sometimes called the state of **Viyoga, meaning separation**. Hence in the Sutras the Self is essentially a Witness to our manifested world and unaffected by it.

Through the practices of Classical Yoga we begin to identify with the inner Self rather than the transient mind, body and senses, becoming able to be a witness to the world, where we are in the world but not of the world. This is the state of Jivanmukti (Living Freedom) or Kaivalya (Liberation) which **rather than making the world dull and emotionless gives us an unparalleled ability to relax into life, giving an immediate experience of peacefulness and joy, with the capacity to see things clearly as they really are.**



As we are told in the Sutras in Book Four verse 3 *"Incidental events do not directly cause natural evolution; they just remove the obstacles as a farmer removes obstacles in a water course running to his field."* (Swami Satchidananda) this points to the fact **we are already in the state of absolute grace but through the practices of yoga the obstacles to knowing this are removed.**

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An Overview of the Contents

The sutras are organized into four books or chapters:

1. Samadhi Pada ~ The Portion on Contemplation/The settled mind
2. Sadhana Pada ~ The Portion on Practice/Treading the path
3. Vibhuti Pada ~ The Portion on Accomplishments/Expansion
4. Kaivalya Pada ~ The Portion on Absoluteness/ Self-realization

PYS is a wonderful source of information whereby we can see how the mind works, and what steps we can take to bring a more sattvic or harmonious state to the mind creating the opportunity to ultimately transcend suffering.

As part of our introduction to the Sutras we shall investigate the gunas a little more deeply as they are one of the main three factors influencing our psychology.

The Gunas

In PYS we are told there is **“constant conflict among the three gunas, which control the mind”** Bk2 v15. As we know the tri-gunas are Tamas, Rajas and Sattwa and they colour all of Nature (Prakriti) which inevitably includes the qualities of our state of mind; indeed reference to the gunas is the main way that in yoga we describe the quality of mind.

The mind will always be changing and the predominant guna will be naturally shift which will colour our perception. Also, the world around us will also be shifting and in continuous change affecting our own gunas, again colouring the mind. To some degree this is a natural process where for instance we need to have a little more tamas to help us sleep soundly at night but in everyday life the gunas can become greatly imbalanced. So for instance in the morning, in winter time, or after a heavy meal tamas is heightened meaning our perception is dulled. Alternatively drinking lots of coffee, running around against the clock or watching a great deal of TV will increase rajas creating more rajas in our minds, again colouring our perceptions. This is the reason why Yoga encourages us to choose more sattvic foods, drinks, activities and environments!

We can explore this in more detail with the chitta bhumis or five states of mind, that differ according to the gunas.

Take a look though the chitta bhumis, or five states of mind, as given below and see if you can see what looks familiar to you:

The dull mind	The mind is slow and inert, the body cannot act, the TV picture cannot be tuned in, it is hazy, unfocused - Tamasic
The agitated mind	The mind is uncontrolled & hyperactive, flipping unconsciously from one TV station to another – Extremely rajasic
The distracted mind	The mind alternates between being attentive and distracted. Sometimes channel hopping. Somewhat rajasic – beginning of sattva
The focused state	The mind can be focused upon a single object. We stay and watch one programme only. Sattvic
The state of absorption	The mind can see the object of its focus as it really is without mental projection. Now a TV becomes unnecessary!

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As part of yoga practice we work towards being as sattvic as possible and as well as our yoga practice, this will include our choice of lifestyle, our choice of exercise, foods etc.

On a deeper level we can fundamentally alter our relationship to the gunas where as we become more sattvic, i.e. energised and stable, it becomes more possible to remain undisturbed by outer events and ultimately inner events, until we eventually release our primary identification as a personal mind and body and will naturally flow with Life itself.

“ All actions are performed by the gunas of prakriti. Deluded by identification with the ego, a person thinks, “ I am the doer”. But the illumined man or woman understands the domain of the gunas and is not attached. Such people know that the gunas interact with each other; they do not claim to be the doer.” Bhagavad Gita Ch3 v27 & v28

Attributes of the Gunas:

Qualities of Tamas in the mind:	Qualities of Tamas in Food & Drink:
Qualities of Rajas in the mind:	Qualities of Rajas in Food & Drink:
Qualities of Sattva in the mind:	Qualities of Sattva in Food & Drink:

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