

**Classical Yoga, that is yoga as we find within the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is one of the Astika Darshana**, meaning it is one of the six traditional Indian ways of knowing the world where we experience reality as it is without the mind, that is without conceptualisation:

**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 (found in  
west)*

**4) Yoga**

Direct experience of  
the Truth

*"The Bridge" between  
the two modes of  
Knowing, i.e. a path  
to direct knowing*

**5) Mimamsa**

Sacred Technology

**6) Vedanta**

Transcendental or  
Metaphysical  
Knowledge (Gita,  
Upanishads)

*Direct knowledge  
beyond the mind & five  
senses i.e. 'Monistic'  
Subject & Object are  
one, there is just the  
'knowing'.*

### **Classical Yoga is a dualistic system based on Samkhyan Cosmology**

Please see the handout on Samkhyan Cosmology and simply stated here you can see there are 25 tattvas or things denoting the different levels of creation [according to our personal experience](#). What is interesting for us is that there are two main different categories of reality, Purusha which is Pure Consciousness or Spirit and Prakriti which is 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 and when we directly experience ourselves as Pure Consciousness the world is still separate from us and is witnessed clearly. The primary method for realising this experience in PYS is through meditation.

### **Other states of realisation**

In Classical yoga we 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'**; then there are further states of realisation that can be experienced according to other traditions. Sometimes this is seen as Realisation at the level of the Head (third eye).

There is Unity Consciousness where we experience that **"I am one with the whole"** where we have experienced an immersion into the whole energy field. This is found in Vedanta as Monism. (Upanishads & Gita). Sometimes this is seen as Realisation at the level of the Heart.

There is also Absolute Consciousness which is the experience of being **"One with All that is and is not"** which is when we experience the groundstate of Being where there is a dynamic stillness, where all potentiality lies. As found in Tantra. Sometimes this is seen as Realisation at the level of the Gut.

# PYS 1: An Introduction to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Note these three levels of realisation do not need to be mentioned in your work on the Sutras but is for your information only – more later on this!

## 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**, i.e. written well after the Vedas and the early Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and well before the texts of Hatha Yoga. Indeed Patanjali's system of yoga is known as Classical Yoga; it is also often known as Raja Yoga or Asthanga Yoga, The Eight Limbed Path of Yoga. Note that this is not the Hatha Yoga system of Pattabhi Jois!

If you remember from our study of the Astika Darshana, the six traditional viewpoints on Reality where we can look at the same mountain from different perspectives then in Classical Yoga we are **given the practical tools for the direct experiential knowledge of Reality, i.e. it is a view that is not intellectual but what remains when the mental/emotional fluctuations are stilled.**

The text is written in the form of **195 sutras**, 'sutra' meaning 'thread', making the title of the text 'The Threads of Yoga according to Patanjali', indicating how they are **very brief, succinct verses requiring interpretation and explanation** which is why traditionally the teacher known as the Guru, meaning s/he who dispels ignorance (avidya), would take the sutras and provide a living commentary upon them. If you remember it is inevitable that translations will be subject to differences because Sanskrit is unusual in that each word can have a variety of meanings, and more than this because when it is translated into another language sometimes a concept as encapsulated in one language does not have parallel in another language, with specific nuances easily being lost in translation! Today there are many, many commentaries available upon the Sutras and 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 are most likely to have been passed unchanged through the centuries in both an oral and then written form; indeed this will have most certainly have been the case for the Sutras as the Sutras have been prized as perhaps the most authoritative work upon Yoga that has ever existed. 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 had been available from time immemorial and therefore not be weighed down by these academic debates where sometimes the beauty and significance of something can easily be lost in extensive discussion.

That said 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



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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 an older teacher or to the Divine itself.

One of the main reasons that the Sutras are so prized is that they are **non-sectarian**, 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; this of course also means we can come to the sutras without a religious or spiritual background. We must also recognise however that in time in India several contemporary experts tell us that the practical components of Classical Yoga were absorbed into the later traditions of Tantrik and Hatha Yoga, meaning that Classical Yoga was gradually not practiced as an independent system. We can also assert that it has been revitalised more recently in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This is however an area of contemporary study and is still very controversial!

### 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 mind. This is therefore an inherently **dualistic system** where there is Spirit and Matter, and we seek to experience the Spirit that we are at a deeper level.

The Sutras provides 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.

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.”**

**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 (4<sup>th</sup> 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: Delhi pages 5 to 7

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*“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, (2<sup>nd</sup> 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*

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?

So **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** giving a definition of Yoga if we look at the Sanskrit then there are different possible translations of which possibly one of the more accessible is highlighted in the table below:

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

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. That is when we experience stillness of Being we experience our true state of being and when we do not then we continue to identify with our ego and 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-

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changing transient world of nature or matter; this is therefore the direct realization of the difference between the Purusha (Spirit/Soul) and Prakriti (Nature or all manifestation including our mind & body). Note paradoxically this is sometimes called the state of **Viyoga, meaning separation**. Hence the Sutras are usually considered to be **Dualistic** in Nature where 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 or liberation (Kaivalya) 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.**

We shall explore the Sutras in more depth over the coming months but for now just to note that it the Sutras then goes on to outline the **practical ways** in which we can achieve this aim of Kaivalya, where there is the removal of our existential ignorance (avidya). It incorporates the main aspects of the paths of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga, but is **especially centered upon the nature of the mind and the practice of meditation**, and as such it is known as Raja Yoga or the Royal Yoga Path. At its heart are the famous Eight Limbs of Classical Yoga.

### 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

There has been a good deal of debate as to the logic of the progression through the Sutras however in Indian texts there is a logic where we usually find that initially we are told what can be accomplished, and then we are told what we must do if that is not already a possibility. We also often find a concept is mentioned and then expanded upon at a late point.

To explore the contents of the Sutras we can list the concepts included, and also it is beneficial to think in terms of a series of questions that are answered by specific verses; the following questions are based on those questions posed by Bernard Bouanchaud in his translation of the Sutras “The Essence of Yoga”.

#### Chapter One

#### Samadhi Pada or The Portion on Contemplation/The settled mind

The first chapter answers the following questions:

- What is yoga? (v1 to v4)
- What is the mind (vrttis)? (v5 to v12)
- How can we attain the state of yoga, stilling the vrttis? (v13 to v29)
- What are challenges we may encounter? (v30 to v31)

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- How may we overcome these challenges? (v32 to v39)
- What stages will I go through before arriving at the state of yoga? (v40 to v51)

This chapter includes:

- A definition of Yoga and the need for practical application
- The nature of the mind including:
  - *Types of mental modifications*
  - *Sources of Right Knowledge*
  - *Practice & Non-attachment*
- General ways in which to still the mind
- Samadhi:
  - *Types of Samadhi*
- The qualities of Ishwara
- The obstacles to practice
- Ways to overcome the obstacles to practice

It is often said that the first chapter gives the whole essence of yoga and then proceeds to outline the ways an already settled mind may practice.

### *Chapter Two*

#### **Sadhana Pada or The Portion on Practice /Treading the path**

This chapter is probably the most important of the chapters as it tells us how to practice when the mind is not already quiet, helping us then to stabilize & still the mind. It introduces the ways in which suffering is caused and the basic psychology of yoga. We are introduced to kriya yoga and are then given the overview of asthanga yoga, being led through the practices of asthanga yoga to the point of the fifth limb, pratyahara.

This chapter answers several questions:

- What is the yoga of action? (v1 to v2)
- What obstacles do our personalities present? (v3 to v17)
- What are the two levels of being? (v18 to v27)
- How can the eight limbs lead me to the state of yoga? (v28 to v55)

It includes:

- The yoga of action, kriya yoga
  - *Purification or Tapas*
  - *Study or Svadhyaya*
  - *Surrender or Isvarapranidhanam*
- The obstacles to practice our personality presents, the kleshas
  - *Ignorance or Avidya*
  - *Egoism or Asmita*
  - *Attachment or Raga*
  - *Aversion or Dvesha*
  - *Clinging to bodily life or Abinivesah*
- The Nature of Karma
- The importance of Discrimination or Viveka
- The significance of Purusha and Prakriti
  - *The nature of Pain or Dukkha*
- The Eight Limbs of Yoga

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- *Right ethics or Yamas*
- *Right discipline or Niyamas*
- *Posture or Asana*
- *Breath Control or Pranayama*
- *Withdrawal of senses or Pratyahara*
- *Concentration or Dharana (more detail in book three)*
- *Meditation or Dhyana (more detail in book three)*
- *Absorption or Samadhi (more detail in book three and four)*

### Chapter Three

#### **Vibhuti Pada or The Portion on Accomplishments/Expansion**

This chapter is a continuance of the previous chapter where we now are shown the possible accomplishments of samyama, which is the combination of dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (absorption). We are told about the way that the process of samyama leads to various occult powers or accomplishments with the greatest being Self-Realization.

It answers several questions:

- What are the steps towards mastery? (v1 to v4)
- What is mastery and how do we use it? (v5 to v8)
- What are the different stages of transformation? (v9 to v12)
- What are the great powers? (v13 to v49)
- What do we need to avoid? (v50 to v51)
- What is ultimate realization? (v52 to v55)

Including information on:

- Dharana (concentration)
- Dhyana (meditation)
- Samadhi (absorption)
- Samyama (dharana, dhyana & Samadhi)
- Siddhis (accomplishments/supernatural powers)

### Chapter Four

#### **Kaivalya Pada or The Portion on Absoluteness /Self-Realization**

This chapter is primarily concerned with the ultimate result of the realization of the Purusha from which the state of liberation or Kaivalya is achieved. It focuses upon the subtle aspects of the relationship between the Purusha and the mind relative to karmas and samskaras.

It answers the questions:

- Where do the great powers come from? (v1)
- What is the human psyche? (v2 to v11)
- What is the nature of prakriti and its relationship to the mind? (v12 to v21)
- What is the illumined mind? (v22 to v34)

This chapter includes:

- A review of the Siddhis and their relationship to Karma
- The Vasanas or the subconscious impressions
- The nature of perception & the relationship of the mind stuff or chitta and the Purusha
- Kaivalya (Liberation)



### Samkhyan Cosmology

25 Tattwas of creation

