

Kriya Yoga

At the start of book two Patanjali outlines Kriya yoga or the Yoga of Action which is comprised of **Tapas, Svadhaya & Isvara Pranidhana**. There are various translations for sutras 2.1 and 2.2 which have a slightly different interpretation but a good one can be found within Carrera's translation.

- 2.1 *Accepting pain as help for purification, study, and surrender to the Supreme Being constitute yoga in practice.*
- 2.2 *They help us minimise the obstacles and obtain samadhi.*

Others include:

"Self discipline, self study and surrender to God constitute the yoga of action (Kriya Yoga). These are performed to promote Samadhi and to remove afflictions from the mind." Dr David Frawley

"Purification, refinement, surrender. These are the practical steps on the path of yoga. They nourish the state of Samadhi and weaken the causes of suffering." Alistair Shearer

There are many varying views on what Kriya Yoga actually is and when it should be practiced.

As a **preparation** for the Eight Limb Path here are some possible views:

1) Often Kriya Yoga is considered to be 'off the mat' guidance where we are asked to inquire into our lifestyle. Meaning we must exert right discipline in our lifestyle, eat the right foods, sleep the correct amount and relax when needed, all of which help to make us stronger (tapas)! We must inquire into our selves knowing our own strengths and weaknesses (svadhyaya) and spend time in communion with what represents the divine for each of us (isvara pranidhana).

2) As preparatory stages to be practiced before the eight limbs Taimni in his commentary says Kriya Yoga is:

"A preparatory period of self-training in which he (the yogi/yogini) gradually assimilates the Yogic philosophy and its technique and accustoms himself to self-discipline makes the transition from the one life to the other easier and safer. This preparatory self-discipline is triple in its nature corresponding to the triple nature of a human being. Tapas is related to his will, Svadhyaya to the intellect and Ishvara pranidhana to the emotions."

3) Sometimes Kriya Yoga is equated with the three paths of yoga, the path of service (karma yoga), the path of wisdom (jnana yoga) and the path of devotion (bhakti yoga) in essence suggesting we must practice with our bodies, minds and hearts.

Alternatively Kriya Yoga is not seen as preparation but a **path in it's own right**.

Here Kriya Yoga is seen as the path for those who have already reached a state of steady mind and are able to utilize their faculties of abhyasa (practice) and vairagya (non-attachment) and can also utilise their faculty of viveka (discrimination). These authorities see that chapter one in essence gives us kriya yoga, and for these students the eight limbed path is unnecessary, although those who are of an unsteady mind will still need to follow the path of the eight limbs.

Whichever the view traditionally the three different aspects of Kriya yoga can be described as:

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Tapas or Discipline.

We need to discipline ourselves to make the body and mind strong. We need to address our daily habits by for instance moderating our eating habits our exercise etc. 'Tap' means to apply heat for transformation so it means this is not a matter of wishful thinking but of practice. Here practices may also include fasting, meditation, mantra etc. As Carrera says it can also refer to meeting the challenges we will encounter where our limitations are met, so that necessary pain can be accepted.

Svadhyaya or Self Study

Here study can take the form of all those things that help us know ourselves such as a self reflection, listening to a teacher, reading spiritual texts etc. All of which help us to see ourselves as in a mirror. At first this may require raising some awareness of our own psychology. We use life to help us move through challenges gaining new perspectives, inspirations, opening ourselves to change.

Ishvara Pranidhana

Cultivating a relationship with the divine, surrendering our will to a higher will, establishing faith and the energy of the heart. Acknowledging a higher level of consciousness that can help energize us and guide us.

In this way through kriya yoga we weaken the causes of suffering (kleshas) and nourish the state of samadhi.

The Eight Limbs

1. Yama	Outer Observances	
2. Niyama	Inner Observances	
3. Asana	Posture	
4. Pranayama	Breath Techniques	
5. Pratyahara	Withdrawing the senses	
6. Dharana	Concentration	} Samyama
7. Dhyana	Meditation	
8. Samadhi	Absorption	

The eight limbs are an excellent summary of the different aspects of a spiritual practice where it is possible to see how yama is concerned with our outer relationships and niyamas with our inner relationship. Asana relates to our physicality and pranayama to our prana or energy body. Pratyahara is concerned with the senses and dharana/dhyana with the mind and our capacity of attention. Finally, samadhi is concerned with consciousness itself.

As we have seen Hatha Yoga is an ecstatic path, creating electrical or pranic conductivity where the movement of prana, or more specifically kundalini, creates a feeling of ecstasy ultimately leading us to the bliss of absolute silence or stillness, that is Hatha Yoga has led to Raja Yoga. In contrast Classical Yoga is an **enstatic path** where we work with the mind more directly and create the circumstance where we can allow the silence of contentless consciousness, the Purusha, to emerge and be directly experienced as who or what we are.

This may be a gentle easeful release into the deeper state of Pure contentless Consciousness or it also possible that as we fall into deeper states of Consciousness we will experience kundalini movement carrying us to Purusha.

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It is interesting to note that the word 'Anga' or limb is used rather than a word like 'Bhuma' meaning stage, so we see that perhaps these eight limbs are not sequential, i.e. we do not achieve one and then move onto the next....rather they are all related to the other, each limb strengthening and balancing each other like the branches of a tree.

Different yoga schools or styles of yoga emphasize different limbs but generally speaking we can say that an integrated approach is needed.

The Outer Limbs of Classical Yoga (1 to 5)

1 & 2. Yamas & Niyamas

It is sometimes suggested that traditionally prospective students would need to show that they had right behaviour and the yamas and niyamas would be a summary of this; alternatively they can be seen as the behaviour of an awakened being showing us what is possible and what we can gradually cultivate through our practice and by raising our awareness of how things are for us in everyday life. More later...

3. Asana

Very little is said regarding asana in the Sutras, as it says in Swami Satchidananda's and Carrera's translation:

2.46. Asana is a steady, comfortable posture.

2.47. By lessening the natural tendency for restlessness and by meditating on the infinite, posture is mastered.

2.48. Thereafter, one is undisturbed by the dualities.

There are many different ideas concerning the significance of asana in the Sutras with some authorities stating that asana relates only to finding a seat for meditation whereas other authorities state that asana within the Sutras refers to the practice of a range of asana, such as we find in Hatha Yoga.

What we can say for sure is that, 2.46 "sthira sukham asanam", meaning the posture must be 'steady and comfortable' is often used as a benchmark for all asana practice and that in reality for the practice of Raja/Classical Yoga as meditation it is usually very beneficial to practice a range of asana to help us establish a comfortable, steady, seated pose for meditation; as we saw in the HYP asana helps us to stay well, giving strength and lightness, keeping energy moving, and very significantly creating a state of sattva, where restlessness or the need for action is lessened. In this way Hatha Yoga is leading us towards Raja Yoga where we have the capacity to truly enter stillness.

Verses 2.47 and 2.48 refer to how we need to create a sattvic state, something that naturally arises when we practice with right effort and a relaxed mind i.e. where rajas is overcome. It is finding an equilibrium so that as we meditate in stillness where our mind rests beyond the thinking mind, our 'seat' is mastered. That is our mind must be aligned and orientated within where it remains undisturbed.

4. Pranayama in the Sutras

2.49. That [firm posture] being acquired, the movements of inhalation and exhalation should be controlled. This is pranayama.

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2.50. The modifications of the life-breath are either external, internal or stationary. They are to be regulated by space, time and number and are either long or short.

2.51. There is a fourth type of pranayama that occurs during concentration on an internal or external object.

2.52. As its result, the veil over the inner Light is destroyed.

2.53. And the mind becomes fit for concentration.

The description of pranayama is quite straightforward, where ultimately we are told that we can practice control of the breath as a precursor to meditation and that kevala kumbhaka, or spontaneous breath retention will occur as the mind stills in meditation; in essence pranayama leading us to a state fit for the inner practice of concentration.

5. Pratyahara

2.54. When the senses withdraw themselves from the objects and initiate, as it were, the nature of the mind stuff, this is pratyahara.

2.55. Then follows supreme mastery over the senses

In 2.54 to 2.55 the Sutras tell us we will find that as we practice we will develop the ability to successfully and willingly direct our attention inwardly rather than being continually entranced by the play of the senses which generally attract the mind to the outer world; so now we have mastery over the senses rather than the senses leading us.

In addition we find two specific practices which we have touched upon previously which can also be considered to be outer practices. Each of them helps us to achieve more sattva.

The Brahmavihara (The Four Attitudes)

If you remember we also saw in 1.33 Patanjali suggests four attitudes that we can bring to our everyday life in order to secure sattva or peacefulness. In Carrera's translation they are given as:

1.33 By cultivating attitudes of friendliness towards the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and equanimity toward the non-virtuous, the mind-stuff retains its undisturbed calmness.

As it is our relationships that tend to provide us with most challenge then this is of great interest! There will always be different types of people to be encountered on a daily basis and yoga is telling us that we can consciously alter our perspective towards them. For instance:

- Can we be friendly towards and spend time with those who are happy?
- Can we cultivate empathy for others and be compassionate in any way, offering help or prayer, or seeing how their suffering is a shared state that any of us might encounter?
- Can we cultivate pleasure in another's success or good fortune, without comparison or self-pity, can we spend time with those who uplift us?
- Can we keep ourselves safe but cultivate a release of any need to hold onto resentment or story telling of the ills of others?

[For more information on the The Four Attitudes see Carrera's translation pages 80 to 84]

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Pratipaksha Bhavana (cultivating the opposite)

“2.33. When disturbed by negative thoughts, opposite (positive) ones should be thought of. This is pratipaksha bhavana.

2.34. When negative thoughts or acts such as violence and so on are caused to be done or even approved of, whether incited by greed, anger or infatuation, whether indulged in with mild, medium or extreme intensity, they are based on ignorance and bring certain pain. Reflecting thus is also pratipaksha bhavanam.” (Carrera’s translation)

Here is 2.33 and 2.34 Patanjali describes another way in which we can keep the mind calm and peaceful when it has become disturbed by negative thinking. Here it is suggested that when a negative thought arises then we need to reflect upon an opposite thought so for instance if we feel hate then reflect upon love. We must not suppress what we are feeling just focus upon the opposite. This is also true when we see negative acts by others where if we see someone in anger perhaps we can consider them in the light of compassion knowing they are expressing their own pain. The practice of pratipaksha bhavana will be of great help when cultivating the yamas and niyamas.

[For more information on Cultivating the Opposite see Carrera’s translation pages 141 to 144]

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