



Patanjali's Yoga Sutras:

A workbook

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“Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.”

— William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

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Recommended Reading

There are many translations and commentaries on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. I highly recommended to go through a few translations to gain different perspectives and see how different commentators have translated the same sanskrit phrases.

Here are some of my favorite translations, as well as the reason you might be interested in them:

Read the translation by...	If you want...
B.K.S Iyengar	The perspective of one of the "fathers" of modern yoga practice.
Chip Hartranft	A quick overview to read on the plane to your YTT :-)
Edwin F. Bryant	An incredibly comprehensive, informative, and scholarly work.
IK Taimni	An easy to read and also scholarly Indian Perspective.
Nischala Joy Devi	One of the few female perspectives available.
Sri Swami Satchidananda	A straightforward commentary from an Indian Guru
swamij.com/	An online resource with informative diagrams

Om
Vande Gurunaam chara naara vinde
Sandar shita swaatma sukāava bodhe
Nishreyase jaangali kaayamaane
Samsaara haalaa hala mohashaantyai
Abaahu Purushaakaaram
Shan kha cakrsi dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam
Pranamaami Patanjalin
Om

I bow to the lotus feet of the Supreme Guru which awaken insight into the happiness of pure Being, which are the refuge, the jungle physician, which eliminates the delusion caused by the poisonous herb of Samsara (conditioned existence).

I prostrate before the sage Patanjali who has thousands of radiant, white heads (as the divine serpent, Ananta) and who has, as far as his arms, assumed the form of a man holding a conch shell (divine sound), a wheel (discus of light or infinite time) and a sword (discrimination).



Introduction

Any genuine philosophical discussion will begin with and seeks to answer fundamental questions about human existence, such as:

- What does it mean to be human?
- What is the meaning of life?
- Why are we here?
- How do I lead a happy life?
- What does it mean to be a good person?
- Do we have free will?
- Does God exist?
- What happens after we die?

A comprehensive system of philosophy will attempt to either answer these questions fully, or explain why the questions themselves are the problem.

Modern yoga is an incredible amalgamation of physical exercise, health and wellness, spirituality, new age beliefs, self-help psychology, and more. But historically yoga has been (and continues to be) a system of philosophy.

More specifically, yoga is considered to be one of the ten (some scholars say nine or eleven) ancient philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent. These schools are often divided into whether they consider the Vedas to be an authority of yoga, known as **orthodox/astika**, or not, known as **heterodox/nastika**. The orthodox schools include **Yoga**, as well as the **Nyaya**, **Vaisheshika**, **Samkhya**, **Mimansa**, and **Vedanta** schools. The heterodox schools include the **Jain**, **Buddhist**, **Ajivika**, **Carvaka** schools.

In the lessons below, we will look at the philosophical aspects of yoga as it is outlined in Patanjali's yoga sutras, dated to around 200CE. While not the first mention of yoga in ancient scriptures, Patanjali's system represents one of the first compendiums of yogic knowledge, as well as an accessible prescription for the tribulations of the modern spiritual practitioner. It is not known whether Patanjali was one person or a number of people that worked together, this has been lost in history.

The term *sutras* is similar to the term "suture," meaning *thread*. The 196 terse aphorisms split up over four books that make up the Yoga Sutras represent a woven fabric of philosophical discourse.

The sutras are written in the ancient sanskrit language, and not only is the direct translation of the words open to interpretation, but also what the sentences then mean as a whole can greatly vary

depending on one's perspective. As a result, there are many different translations and associated commentary by different authors, gurus, practitioners, and scholars.

This makes sense when we consider the role of philosophy, as its etymology means “the love of knowledge.” Philosophy is meant to be considered, debated, and argued over with others.

As such, this guide is more of a workbook designed to stimulate discussion, rather than a presentation of facts. Pantanjali's words are best read with a curious and inquisitive mind by a person that seeks to better understand oneself and the nature of reality.

The Yoga Sutras can be a great entry way into larger and more complex Eastern spiritual scriptures, like the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads* or the *Tao Te Ching*. Let these words be the beginning of a lifetime of philosophical inquiry and rich spiritual discourse.

Namaste.

-Zach

Lesson 1: Patanjali's Main Thesis

The Four Books of the Sutras:

Book I - *Samadhi*: _____

Book II - *Sadhana*: _____

Book III - *Siddhis*: _____

Book IV - *Kaivalya*: _____

Book I - Samadhi

1.1: Now, after having done prior preparation through life and other practices, the study and practice of Yoga begins.

yukta: _____

yuj: _____

1.2 Yoga is the control of the modifications of the mind field.

yoga: _____

citta: _____

vritti: _____

nirodhah: _____

1.3 Then the Seer abides in Itself, resting in its own True Nature.

drashtuh: _____

svarupe: _____

1.4 At other times, when one is not in Self-realization, the Seer appears to take on the form of the modifications of the mind field, taking on the identity of those thought patterns.

Lesson 2: Stilling the Mind Through Practice and Devotion

1.5 Those gross and subtle thought patterns fall into five varieties, of which some are colored and others are uncolored.

klisha: _____

aklisha: _____

1.6 The five varieties of thought patterns to witness are:

- 1) knowing correctly,
- 2) incorrect knowing,
- 3) fantasy or imagination,
- 4) the object of void-ness that is deep sleep, and
- 5) recollection or memory.

(Sutra 1.7) *Pramana*: _____

(Sutra 1.8) *Viparyaya*: _____

(Sutra 1.9) *Vikalpa*: _____

(Sutra 1.10) *Nidra*: _____

(Sutra 1.11) *Smrti*: _____

1.12 These thought patterns are mastered through practice and non-attachment.

abhyasa: _____

vairagya: _____

1.14 When that practice is done for a long time, without a break, and with sincere devotion, then the practice becomes a firmly rooted, stable and solid foundation.

dirgha: _____

kala: _____

1.30 Nine kinds of distractions come that are obstacles naturally encountered on the path, and are: physical illness, tendency of the mind to not work efficiently, doubt or indecision, lack of

attention to pursuing the means of samadhi, laziness in mind and body, failure to regulate the desire for worldly objects, incorrect assumptions or thinking, failing to attain stages of the practice, and instability in maintaining a level of practice once attained.

vyadhi: _____

styana: _____

samshaya: _____

pramada: _____

alasya: _____

avirati: _____

bhranti-darshana: _____

alabdha-bhumikatva: _____

anavasthitatva: _____

chitta-vikshepa: _____

1.32 To prevent or deal with these nine obstacles, the recommendation is to make the mind one-pointed, training it how to focus on a single principle or object.

eka: _____

tattva: _____

1.33 In relationships, the mind becomes purified by cultivating feelings of friendliness towards those who are happy, compassion for those who are suffering, goodwill towards those who are virtuous, and indifference or neutrality towards those we perceive as wicked or evil.

maitri: _____

karuna: _____

mudita: _____

upekshanam: _____

Lesson 3: The Mind, Soul, and Maya

1.16 Indifference to the subtlest elements, constituent principles, or qualities themselves, achieved through a knowledge of the nature of pure consciousness, is called supreme non-attachment.

purusha: _____

manas: _____

buddhi: _____

ahankara: _____

parkrti: _____

gunas: _____

satva: _____

rajas: _____

tamas: _____

maya: _____

1.23 The goal of yoga can also be attained through the grace of God.

Ishvara: _____

pranidhana: _____

1.27 Om is God's name as well as form.

pranavah: _____

Brahma: _____

Vishnu: _____

Shiva: _____

Lesson 4: Ignorance and the Beginning of the Eight Limbs

2.1 Yoga in the form of action (kriya yoga) has three parts:

- 1) training and purifying the senses,
- 2) self-study in the context of teaching, and
- 3) devotion and letting go into the creative source from which we emerged.

tapas: _____

swadhyaya: _____

pranidhana: _____

2.3 There are five kinds of obstacles:

- 1) forgetting, or ignorance about the true nature of things,
- 2) I-ness, individuality, or egoism,
- 3) attachment or addiction to mental impressions or objects,
- 4) aversion to thought patterns or objects, and
- 5) love of these as being life itself, as well as fear of their loss as being death.

kleshas: _____

avidya: _____

asmita: _____

ragah: _____

dvesa: _____

abhinivesah: _____

2.13 As long as those obstacles remains at the root, three consequences are produced:

- 1) birth circumstances,,
- 2) span of life, and
- 3) experiences in that life.

karma: _____

2.15 A wise, discriminating person sees all worldly experiences as painful, because of reasoning that all these experiences lead to more consequences, anxiety, and deep habits.

dukkha: _____

viveka: _____

2.25 By causing a lack of avidya, or ignorance there is then an absence of the alliance, and this leads to a freedom known as a state of liberation or enlightenment for the Seer.

kaivalya: _____

2.29 The eight rungs, limbs, or steps of Yoga are the codes of self-regulation or restraint, observances or practices of self-training, postures, expansion of breath and prana, withdrawal of the senses, concentration, meditation, and perfected concentration.

ashtanga: _____

yamas: _____

niyamas: _____

asana: _____

pranayama: _____

pratyahara: _____

dharana: _____

dhyana: _____

samadhi: _____

2.30 Non-injury or non-harming, truthfulness, abstention from stealing, walking in awareness of the highest reality, and non-possessiveness or non-grasping with the senses are the five yamas, or codes of self-regulation or restraint, and are the first of the eight steps of Yoga.

ahimsa: _____

satya: _____

asteyah: _____

brahmacharya: _____

apirigraha: _____

2.32 Cleanliness and purity of body and mind, an attitude of contentment, training of the senses, self-study and reflection on sacred words, and an attitude of letting go into one's source are the observances or practices of self-training , and are the second rung on the ladder of Yoga.

saucha: _____

samtosha: _____

tapas: _____

svadhyaya: _____

Isvarapranidhanam: _____

Lesson 5: The Rest of the Eight Limbs and New Stages in Our Meditation

2.46 The posture for Yoga meditation should be steady, stable, and motionless, as well as comfortable, and this is the third of the eight rungs of Yoga.

asana: _____

sthira: _____

sukha: _____

2.49 Once that perfected posture has been achieved, the slowing or braking of the force behind, and of unregulated movement of inhalation and exhalation is called breath control and expansion of prana, which leads to the absence of the awareness of both, and is the fourth of the eight rungs.

pranayama: _____

2.54 When the mental organs of senses and actions cease to be engaged with the corresponding objects in their mental realm, and assimilate or turn back into the mind-field from which they arose, this is called pratyahara, and is the fifth step.

pratyahara: _____

3.1 Concentration is the process of holding or fixing the attention of mind onto one object or place, and is the sixth of the eight rungs.

dharana: _____

3.2 The repeated continuation, or uninterrupted stream of that one point of focus is called absorption in meditation, and is the seventh of the eight steps.

dhyana: _____

3.3 When only the essence of that object, place, or point shines forth in the mind, as if devoid even of its own form, that state of deep absorption is called deep concentration or samadhi, which is the eighth rung.

samadhi: _____

More on meditation from other texts:

Adhering to the observances, the sage should make progress in yoga at the three times: dawn, noon, and dusk. He should practise yoga on the top of a mountain, in a shrine or at the foot of a tree. Having restrained all his sense organs, like a trader thinking of his wares in the marketplace, he should constantly think with focus and through yoga not disturb his mind. He should assiduously engage in whatever method allows his fickle mind to be restrained and not deviate from it. Focuses, he should find empty mountain caves, temples, or empty houses to live in.

- Mahabharata 12.232.23-6

The yogi should meditate constantly on the self, in private, alone, with mind and self under control, free from desire and acquisitiveness. In a clean place he should set up a firm seat for himself, neither too high nor too low, with cloth, a deerskin and kusa grass on top. Sitting there on his seat, he should concentrate his mind on a single object, and, with the thoughts and senses under control, engage in yoga in order to purify himself. Steady, holding body, head and neck straight and unmoving, gazing at the tip of his nose and not looking in (any other) direction, calm, fearless, established in the celebrator's vow, he should control his mind and, with this thoughts on me, he should remain engaged in yoga, intent on me. Keeping himself thus constantly engaged in yoga, the yogi whose mind is restrained attains the peace that is beyond nirvana and abides in me.

- Bhagavad Gita 6.10-18

Lesson 6: Complete Liberation / Absolute Independence

3.18 Through the direct perception of the latent impressions comes the knowledge of previous incarnations.

Or another translation...

Through sustained focus and meditation on our patterns, habits, and conditioning, we gain knowledge and understanding of our past and how we can change the patterns that are not serving us to live more freely and fully.

samskaras: _____

3.50 To one well established in the knowledge of the distinction between the purest aspect of mind and consciousness itself, there comes supremacy over all forms or states of existence, as well as over all forms of knowing.

4.18 The activities of the mind are always known by the pure consciousness, because that pure consciousness is superior to, support of, and master over the mind.

jnatah: _____

Tat: _____

purusasya: _____

aparinamitva: _____

4.19 That mind is not self-illuminating, as it is the object of knowledge and perception.

svabhasam: _____

drishyatvat: _____

4.20 Nor can both the mind and the illuminating process be cognized simultaneously.

eka-samaye: _____

4.26 Then the mind is inclined towards the highest discrimination, and gravitates towards absolute liberation between seer and seen.

(remember from before?)

viveka: _____

kaivalya: _____

4.27 When there are breaks or breaches in that high discrimination, other impressions arise from the deep unconscious.

samskarebhyah: _____

4.29 When there is no longer any interest even in omniscience, that discrimination allows the samadhi, which brings an abundance of virtues like a rain cloud brings rain.

dharmameghah: _____