

BASICS OF YOGA

Learn the basic concepts of Yoga including its origins, meaning, definitions and the goals through this simple free e-book.

The goal is to place Yoga in its correct context and bring forward the ancient practices & rich knowledge of Yoga that can help you set a strong foundation.

Most schools of Yoga today have been derived the Yoga Sutras. Yoga Sutras is a compilation of all the learnings of Yoga. It's interpretations have given rise to multiple schools in Yoga.

This book is useful for beginners, practitioners, and enthusiasts in Yoga.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
What is the goal of Yoga?.....	5
Yoga & Meditation.....	6
The 8 Limbs of Yoga.....	7

Introduction

Yoga is one of the 6 philosophical schools of Hinduism. These include Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. The practice of yoga has been thought to date back to pre-Vedic Indian traditions; possibly in the Indus valley civilization around 3000 BCE.

Yoga quite literally means – Union with the divine. It is derived from the word *Yuja*

A questions often asked by users is around the origins of Yoga. The debate around origins of Yoga and who exactly founded Yoga has had multiple explanations. **To keep the answer simple, the founder of Yoga as it is known today including many of its off-shoots is Patanjali.**

The word Yoga, Yogis have been mentioned quite a few times in Vedas and Upanishads.

The evidence of Yoga is mentioned in the oldest Vedic texts – The Rig Veda where the presence of Yogi-like ascetics has been mentioned. The Upanishads placed a greater emphasis on the mystical & philosophical discourse in particular the quest for Brahman, present in living beings as atman(& move away from the sacrificial rite, which is referred to as an inferior form of Yoga as described in the Vedas). The Upanishads also criticize the Vedas. For instance, the Mundaka Upanishad calls the performers of sacrifice – deluded & ignorant.

In ancient times, there was a discourse particular in Upanishads on the quality of human life and on how to remove human suffering. The Svetasvatara Upanishad, the Maitri Upanishad, Katha Upanishad describe Yoga in detail.

Patañjali (पतञ्जलि) has been the author of a number of Sanskrit works and the greatest of these is the Yoga sūtras. Yoga Sutras is a text on Yoga theory and practice. The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali is a collection of 196 sanskrit sutras (aphorisms) on the theory and practice of yoga. Yoga tradition holds the Yoga

Sūtra of Patañjali to be one of the foundational texts of classical Yoga philosophy.

In terms of Yoga's earliest origins, the Vedic period is the earliest era in South Asia for which we have written records, and it provides the matrix from which later religious, philosophical, and spiritual expressions such as Yoga evolved in India.

From the rich post-Vedic period emerged an individual called Patanjali whose systemization of the heterogeneous practices of yoga came to be authoritative for all subsequent practitioners. Patanjali is NOT the founder or inventor of Yoga. He systemized the pre-existing traditions and authored what came to be the seminal text on Yoga.

What is the goal of Yoga?

It's important to understand the goal of Yoga before we get in to the practice of Yoga. For this we take the help of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

According to Patanjali's definition in the 2nd sutra, yoga is cessation (nirodha) of the activities (vrittis) of chitta. Vrittis refer to any sequence of thoughts, ideas, mental imaging or cognitive act performed by the mind, intellect, or ego.

It is important to note that the mind & body are one and a part of nature (prakriti), and the soul is separate.

Chitta comprises of 3 things

1. Intelligence (Buddhi)
2. Ego (Ahankara)
3. Mind (Manas)

Chitta can be compared to the software and the body to hardware. Both software & hardware are useless without the presence of an observe. Only the soul (purusa) is truly alive.

When the soul is uncoupled from the mind in its pure state cannot be rambled and is changeless (unlike the mind)

The soul does not change. It is a spectator, a witness. It does not transform when in contact with the ever-changing states of mind. It simply becomes aware of them. Think of soul as light. When light passes through a denser medium, it refracts but the light still remains the same.

The Chitta is aware of suffering, birth, death etc. The goal of Yoga is to prevent the chitta (impressions of the world/nature/objects etc.) such that the soul (purusa) can regain its autonomous nature.

Yoga & Meditation

To accomplish the goal of Yoga, the means prescribed by patanjali is to still the states of mind, thoughts (vrittis) through meditation (keeping the mind fixed on any particular object of choice without distraction). You may be wondering of how all of this is working.

It works in 3 stages.

Mind to attain an inactive stage: Through sheer power of concentration, the mind can attain an inactive state where all thoughts are non-active. In this inactive state, the mind is not cognizant of anything. It does not mean unconsciousness.

Consciousness to have no choice: When there are no more thoughts or no awareness, the consciousness has no choice but to become aware of itself. It's like a beam of light reflecting back from a mirror. The light has no choice but to become aware of itself.

Self-realization: Awareness can now only be aware of itself. This is the point of self-realization or the ultimate state of awareness, which is the final goal of Yoga.

The 8 Limbs of Yoga

Asmaprajnata Samadhi is the ultimate state of awareness, the state of consciousness where nothing can be discerned except the pure self. (Read more about this in the goal of yoga). This is the ultimate goal of yoga Asmaprajnata Samadhi is the 8th limb and the final limb of yoga presented by Patanjali.

The 8 Limbs of Yoga

1. **Yama** (Abstentions, moral restraints such as truthfulness, non-violence, etc.) – This deals with how you deal with others. If your goal is to remove consciousness with identification with body, you have to stop pandering to the grosser urges of the body including violence, sexual exploitation, deceit, theft etc.
2. **Niyama** (Cleanliness, contentment, austerity, devotion to god) – This deals with cultivating your lifestyle. Once the more destructive urges are curtailed (Yama), consciousness can be turned inward towards refinement.
3. **Asana** (Stretches, postures) – This is in preparing the body to sit for prolonged period of meditation.
4. **Pranayama** (Breath control) – In this stage you are focusing on stilling the mind. You do it through fixing the mind through breath control. By regulating the breath, the mind too (focused on it), becomes regulated/quiscent.
5. **Pratyahara** (Withdrawal of senses) – The process deepens and there's a withdrawal of senses including sound, sight, taste, smell, & touch.
6. **Dharana** (Concentration)
7. **Dhyana** (Meditation)
8. **Samadhi** (Full meditative absorption)

The last 3 limbs are essentially different degrees of concentration intensity and culminate in ultimate awareness i.e. Asmaprajnata Samadhi. Asmaprajnata samadhi is fundamentally a realization by awareness of its own nature.