

# Philosophy 101

naadayoga

500 hr Teacher Training

विवेकदेहगहजिक

# Philosophy 101

## A History and Evolution of Yoga

### OVERVIEW

#### Yoga Philosophy

*"If you have learned something really well, then the way you express it will not be the same way you learned it."*

- T. Krishnamacharya

*"When I practice, I am a philosopher,*

*When I teach, I am a scientist,*

*When I demonstrate, I am an artist."*

- B.K.S. Iyengar

#### Overview

In order to understand and study Hatha Yoga you must be familiar first with what yoga is and its history and evolution. From this point of departure you can learn the vocabulary and techniques that are necessary to deepen your own yoga practice as an individual, but also lead you to eventually instructing this information to others. This course will provide a brief overview of yoga from a historical and philosophical perspective to situate its evolution and application in our culture and our times – and in how it can be relevant to your teaching and your approach to practice overall. Although our modern day exposure to Yoga focuses largely on Hatha Yoga in its physical expression, it is important to understand the various forms and expressions of how this tradition has evolved. The philosophical foundation of yoga and the key teachings of the tradition (including traditional texts: *the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika*) will be covered. Understanding Yoga's philosophical history as something that is ever-changing and evolving will help us better appreciate its modern day context as part of a greater overall movement.

## Topics include:

- Timeline of yoga's history
- Purusha/Prakrati
- Types of yoga within hinduism
- *Bhagavad Gita*: Lessons on taking action in an imperfect world. Non-violence in communication and action.
- *Upanishads*: First mention of the word Yoga
- Patanjali's 8 Limbs of Yoga: The psychology and practical implication of each limb, and practices for putting them to work in our lives.
- *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: System for body purification as preparation for meditation
- The 5 Kleshas: "hinderances" or obstacles to practice (as described in *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*), and how to practice and teach when we are stuck.
- The 5 Koshas: "sheaths" or energetic bodies.

## Objectives

Upon completion of this module you should be able to:

- Understand some of the key principles and concepts in yoga philosophy.
- Understand the relationship between the main traditional yoga philosophy texts and how Hatha Yoga fits into this framework.
- Know some of the key figures in the evolution of yoga from East to West.
- Begin a personal exploration of yoga philosophy in a modern context that is relevant to your own life, and understand how to begin teaching from this perspective.
- Have an idea of how to bring yoga philosophy into the context of a Hatha Yoga class.
- How, when or if to introduce yoga philosophy for people looking for yoga as "exercise".
- Understand the basics of Sanskrit pronunciation and key terms.

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## SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION

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The following is a simple guide to pronounce Sanskrit terms.

There are five Sanskrit diacritic markings in the text:

A line above the letter (*ā*)

A dot above the letter (*ṇ*)

A dot below the letter (*ṇ*)

A tilde above the letter (*ñ*)

An acute accent above the letter (*ś*)

*a* (short) is like the *a* in *sofa*, as in the word *manas* (mind).

*ā* (long) is like the *a* in *psalm*, as in *āsana* (posture).

*au* is like the *ou* in *out*, as in *Gautama Buddha*.

*i* (short) is like the *i* in *knit*, as in *cit* (consciousness).

*ī* (long) is like the *ee* in *meet*, as in *jīva* (soul).

*u* (short) is like the *u* in *put*, as in *guṇa* (quality or attribute).

*ū* (long) is like the *u* in *rule*, as in *rūpa* (form).

### Consonants

*c* is like the *ch* in *church* and never pronounced like a *k* in *car* or *s* in *sent*. An example of this is *cakra* or *cit*.

*ñ* is palatal and nasal, like the *ny* in *canyon* or the *ni* in *onion*, and this is how a name such as *Patañjali* is pronounced.

*ṛ* is pronounced like the *ri* in *rivet*, and is found in *Kṛṣṇa*.

*ṇ* or is like the *n* in *uncle*, as found in the word *saṅgha*.

*ś* and *ṣ* are pronounced as *sh*, through the tongue position of the *ś* is palatal as in the word *shock*, and the tongue position of the *ṣ* has the tip of the tongue at the roof of the mouth, as found in the English *shun* and the romanized Sanskrit word *śunyata*.

Source: Stone, Michael. *Awake in the World* (Shambhala Publications Inc., 2011).

## WHAT IS YOGA?

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In practice, yoga is an applied science of the mind and body. Practice and study of it helps to bring about a natural balance of body and mind in which the state of health can manifest itself. Yoga itself does not create health; rather, it creates an internal environment that allows each

person to come to their own state of dynamic balance, or health. Basically, yoga teaches that health is a harmonious integration of body, mind, spirit - and community.

At its source, yoga refers to traditional physical and mental disciplines originating in India. The word is associated with meditative practices in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism (an ancient religion of India advocating a path of non-violence towards all living beings to move the soul towards divine consciousness and liberation). Within the realm of Hinduism, eight major forms of yoga have gained prominence. They are Raja Yoga (royal yoga), Hatha Yoga (physical yoga), Jnana Yoga (yoga of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (devotional yoga, which includes the use of mantra), Karma Yoga (yoga of service), Kriya Yoga (purification yoga), Mantra Yoga (chanting yoga), Samnyasa Yoga (renunciate yoga).

The Sanskrit word “yoga” has many meanings. It is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj, meaning “to control”, “to yoke” or “to unite”. Translations include “joining”, “uniting”, “union”, “conjunction”, and “means”. It is also possible that the word yoga derives from yujir samadhau, which means “contemplation” or “absorption”. This “union” was originally based on the premise of the individual self (jiva-atman) and the supreme self (parama-atman). According to Vedanta, the dominant branch of Hindu philosophy, the individual self easily disconnects from the supreme self thus causing suffering.

The *Upanishads*, the original scriptures of Vedanta, first taught the inner ritual of meditation upon, and absorption with (samadhi) a greater unifying source, or Absolute (brahman). Vedanta greatly influenced the evolution of Yoga and the majority of Yoga schools.

While the notion of union with the supreme self makes sense within the tradition of Vedanta, it is not representative in all forms of yoga. It is valid in the Pre- and Post-Classical schools of Yoga. However, this metaphor of union does not fit with the system of Classical Yoga defined by Patanjali in the second century c.e. Patanjali defines yoga simply as “the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind.” That is to say, yoga is the focusing of attention - the “union” with whatever object is being contemplated (e.g. breath, body, movement), and then when one finds stability in this experience, we move to become more inclusive, aware of more elements in the practice - and in our lives. Ultimately, attention must move to awareness, focused on and merged with the individual self, but aware of this self in a larger context.

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra’s are a cousin of the Samkhya school of Ishvara Krishna. Samkhya is one of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy from the Vedic period and is a philosophy that is strongly dualist and does not believe in the nature of one God or Divine force. It attempts to explain the nature of all existence by dividing it into two basic principles:

- 1) Purusha (pure consciousness/spirit, which is unchanging)
- 2) Prakriti (matter or the first principle, that which changes). This is an unconscious principle, composed of three essential characteristics:

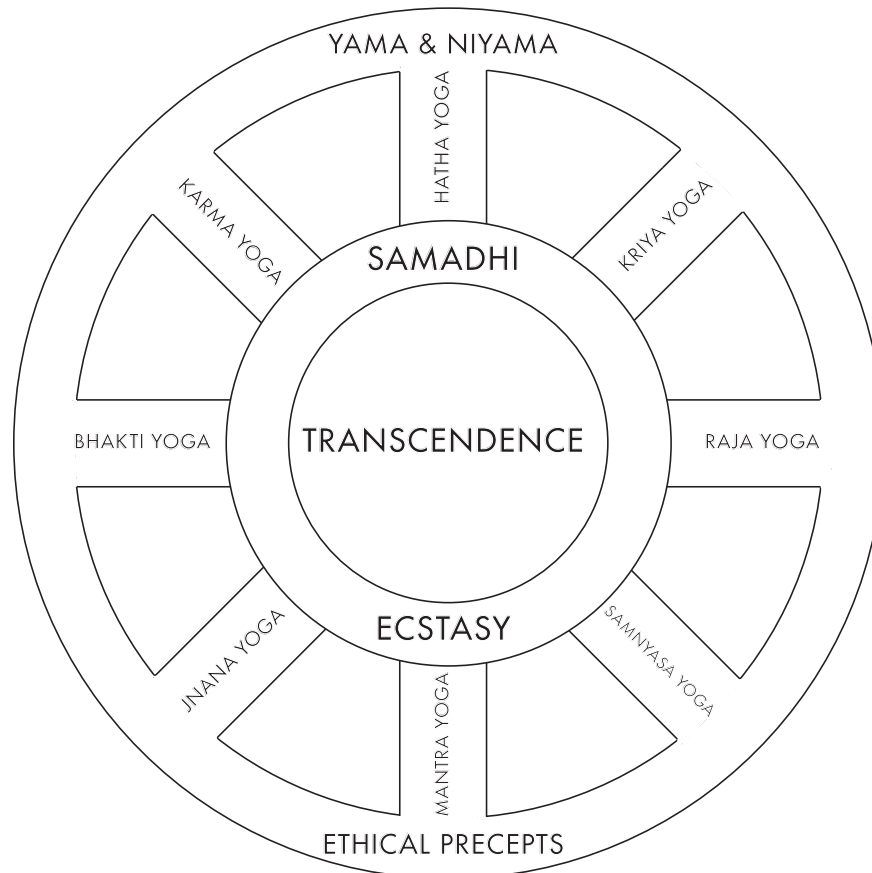
- rajas: activity/manifestation; a template of expansion or activity

- tamas: inactivity; a template of inertia or resistance to action

- sattva: the union of the two principles, which is lightness, illumination, joy; a template of balance or equilibrium.

Purusha and Prakriti can also be loosely translated as the experiencer and the experienced. All macrocosmic and microcosmic creation uses these templates, so what happens inside and outside of us is said to correspond to these principles. The separation of these two states is said to be the cause of struggle and suffering, and the path to liberation is by controlling one's body, mind and senses to reconnect with the state of true union. This practice of deep concentration and control, and the ultimate union resulting from this, is said to be Yoga.

Yoga is a broad topic and far beyond the scope of this one manual, but if we liken yoga to a wheel we can see beyond the complexities of its past and view it from a broader perspective. Imagine then the spokes of the wheel represent the diverse schools and movements of yoga, the rim symbolizes the moral requirements shared by all types of yoga, while the hub represents the experience of transcendence in which all yoga stands on. All classical schools of yoga are ways to a single center of transcendence, which may be defined differently by the various schools.



## HISTORY OF YOGA

We might already have an idea of what yoga is but to understand it better, we have to know what it has become as well as its roots and beginnings. A quick look at the history of yoga will help us appreciate its rich tradition and help us incorporate yoga into our lives.

Yoga's timeline coincides with our own "cradle of civilization", which began in the Tigris and Euphrates Valley of Mesopotamia, over 5000 years ago. In Northern India around the same time, a civilization was already developed in the Indus Valley, rich in art, jewelry, and cultural artifacts, including some forms of writing. Earliest archaeological evidence of yoga's existence could be found in several stone seals created in the area at that time (c. 3300–1700 BC). These seals were found in archeological sites in what is modern-day Pakistan. The seals depict figures in positions resembling what could be a yoga or meditation pose, showing "a form of ritual discipline, suggesting a precursor of yoga", according to archaeologist Gregory Possehl.



Indus Valley seal (c. 3300–1700 BC)



Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (c. 1930)

A connection between the Indus Valley seals and later yoga and meditation practices is speculated upon by many scholars. Others have a reason to believe that yoga existed long before that and traced its beginnings in Paleolithic shamanism. Both shamanism and yoga have similar characteristics, particularly in their efforts to improve the human condition at that time. Techniques for experiencing higher or altered states of consciousness were used in shamanic traditions, but the aim was to enter such states with the intent to obtain insights into how to heal community members - and so support the community as a whole. Although today we know yoga as focusing more on the self, it started out as community-oriented before it turned inward.

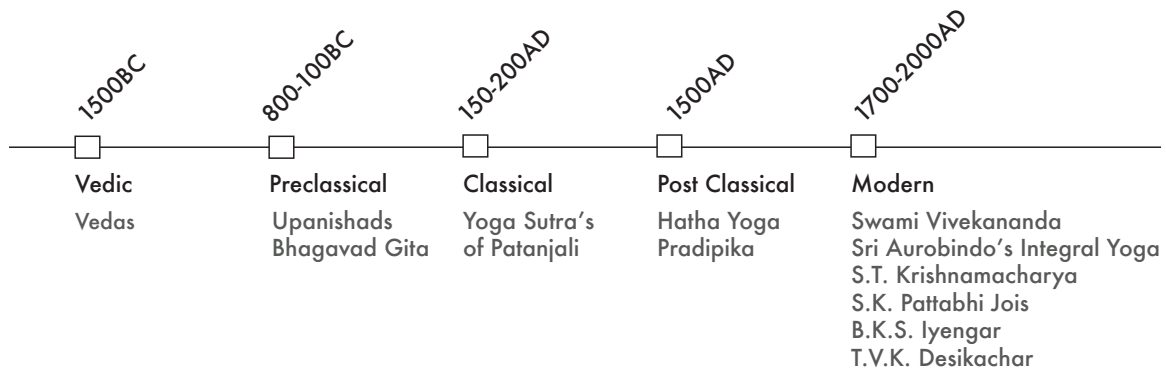
Yoga shares some characteristics not only with Hinduism but also with Buddhism. During the 6th century BC, Gautama Buddha began teaching the importance of meditation and the practice of physical postures to support this. The Buddhist texts are probably the earliest texts describing



specific meditation techniques, practices and states, some of which had existed before the Buddha, as well as those which were later developed and refined within Buddhism.

In Hindu literature, the term "yoga" first occurs in the Katha Upanishad (c. 500 BC), where it refers to control of the senses and the cessation of mental activity, leading to a "supreme state". The evolving definition of the concept of yoga can also be found in the Mahabharata including the Bhagavad Gita (c. 400-300 BC), and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (150 BC).

For a clearer overview of the history of yoga, we could divide it into four periods: the Vedic, Pre-Classical, Classical, and Post-Classical, although these categories and dates remain open to discussion.



## VEDIC PERIOD: VEDAS

The existence of the Vedas marks this period. The Vedas are the sacred scriptures of Brahmanism, which is the basis of modern-day Hinduism. The Vedas are a collection of hymns and rituals, honoring a divine power, to go beyond the "limitations" of the mind. The Vedas contains the oldest known yogic teachings, and as such, teachings found in the Vedas are called Vedic Yoga.

There are four Vedas: the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. These had a large influence on Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Scholars have determined that the Rig Veda, the oldest of the four Vedas, was composed about 1500 BC, and codified about 600 BC. It is unknown when it was finally committed to writing, but this probably was at some point after 300 BC.

During this time, the Vedic people relied on rishis (sages or "seers") who were dedicated Vedic Yogis. The rishis taught people how to live in divine harmony. They were also said to have the ability to see the ultimate reality through their intensive spiritual practice. It was also during this time that yogis living in seclusion (often in forests, hence the term "forest-dweller") were recorded.

Along with the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Enuma Elish, the I Ching, and the Avesta, the Vedas are among the most ancient religious texts still in existence. Besides their spiritual value, they also give a unique view of everyday life in India 4000 years ago.

## PRE-CLASSICAL PERIOD: *UPANISHADS & BHAGAVAD GITA*

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The creation of the Upanishads marks the Pre-Classical yoga. The Upanishads are a continuation of the Vedic philosophy, and were written between 800- 400 BC. Two words that are important in grasping the Upanishads are Brahman and Atman. The 200 scriptures of the Upanishads describe the inner vision of reality resulting from devotion to Brahman or the ultimate reality, respecting the transcendental self, the soul (Atman), and honoring the relationship between the two.

The Upanishads elaborate on how the soul (Atman) can be united with the ultimate truth (Brahman) through contemplation and meditation, as well as the doctrine of Karma, the cumulative effects of a person's actions.

The Katha Upanishad is one of the first times that the term “yoga” is used in sacred literature. The Katha Upanishad, translated as “Death as Teacher”, is based on the story of Vajasravasa, a poor and pious Brahmin, who performs a sacrifice and gives away all his worldly possessions as reward to the priests, which included a few old and feeble cows. His son, Nachiketa, feeling disturbed by the inappropriateness of his father's observance of the sacrifice, proposes that he himself may be offered as payment. As he insisted, his father said in anger, “Unto Yama [the Lord of Death], I give thee”, whereupon Naciketas goes to the abode of Yama, and, finding him absent, waits there for three days and nights. Yama on his return, offers to grant Naciketas three wishes. Naciketas wishes the following:

1. to be allowed to return to his father alive, and that his father not be angry with him
2. to be instructed as to the proper performance of Vedic fire-sacrifice in order to gain immortality
3. to be given knowledge about life after death.

Yama grants the first wish immediately. In answer to Naciketa's second question, Yama expounds the performance of a special fire-sacrifice, which will “cast off the fetters of death and being beyond grief, [help one] rejoice in the realm of heaven.”

Before answering the third question, Yama tests Nachiketa, offering him all sorts of worldly pleasures instead, but Naciketas insists on having his third wish granted. The remainder of the text contains Yama's teaching concerning true immortality, distinguishing between preya (“what is pleasant”) and shreya (“what is beneficial”).

The teachings also notably includes the parable of the chariot (which later appears in the Bhagavad Gita):

- atman, the "Supreme Self", is the chariot's passenger
- the body is the chariot itself
- consciousness (buddhi) is the chariot driver
- the mind (manas) is the reins
- the five senses (indriya) are the chariot horses
- the objects perceived by the senses are the chariot's path.

It is in this metaphor of the chariot that the term "yoga" as "yoking" or "harnessing" becomes clearer. From the Katha Upanishad:

"When the five organs of perception become still, together with the mind, and the intellect ceases to be active: that is called the highest state. This firm holding back of the senses is what is known as Yoga."

Shortly after this, The Bhagavad Gita, or "Song of the Lord" (c. 500-400 BC) was also created. The Gita is part of a much larger text, the epic Mahabharata. The Mahabharata and Ramayana are the national epics of India. The Mahabharata, attributed to the sage Vyasa (c. 540-300 BC), tells the legend of the Bharatas, a Vedic Aryan group. The Ramayana (c. 100 AD) is attributed to the poet Valmiki, although it is based on oral traditions that go back six or seven centuries earlier. The Ramayana is a moving love story with moral and spiritual themes that has deep appeal in India to this day.

The Mahabharata is probably the longest poem in any language (100,000 stanzas; seven times longer than Homer's Iliad and Odyssey combined). For years, it was only transmitted orally. The Mahabharata defines yoga as an active principle (pravritti) and further explores this in the sixth book, the Bhagavad Gita (which is within the epic of the Mahabharata), where it defines yoga as: "skill in action (yogah karmasu kaushalam) and also as equanimity (samatva); balance, harmony, and evenness.

The Gita, considered a central text of Hinduism, is a philosophical dialogue between the god Krishna and the warrior Arjuna. The text discusses selflessness, duty, devotion, and meditation, integrating many different threads of Hindu philosophy. Each of these aspects translates into a practice of yoga:

- Karma yoga: The yoga of selfless action (first 6 chapters)
- Bhakti yoga: The yoga of loving devotion (middle 6 chapters)
- Jyana yoga: The yoga of knowledge or contemplation (last 6 chapters).

In the Gita, these three facets must be brought together in our lives (i.e. "yoked") and it is because of this that it has gained importance. Just as the Upanishads further the Vedas, the Gita builds on and incorporates the doctrines found in the Upanishads.

The central point of the Gita is: to be alive means to be awoken and actively engaged in life. To do this, our actions must be done without thought of gain for self, which demands much clarity and reflection – and then we can act as the situation requires of us, in the service of awakening. In the Gita, this is metaphorically conveyed as a conversation on a battlefield between Prince Arjuna and the Lord Krishna. The “battlefield” symbolizes our lives and bodies, the “fields” which we create struggle and conflict – and which we can free ourselves from this struggle. So, true yoga comes from an awareness that one’s deepest and highest self is identical with the spirit of God, and as we act to honor ourselves, we respect others and the fields in which these actions occur: our bodies, our relationships and our community.

## CLASSICAL PERIOD: THE YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

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The Classical Period is marked by the creation of the Yoga Sutras of Pantanjali (c. 150-200 AD). The sage, Patanjali, gave yoga philosophy a classical practice format and therefore his approach is referred to as Classical Yoga. Written around the second century, Patnaji’s Yoga Sutras were defined and standardized the practice of yoga through 195 (some sources cite 196) aphorisms or sutras (from the Sanskrit word which means “thread”).

Yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein states that Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras are: “The climax of a long development of yogic technology”. Patanjali’s yoga is known as Raja Yoga, distinguished from Hatha Yoga in that it is not solely a bodily practice, but also a system for working with “higher” states of consciousness. The basis of Raja Yoga is contemplation, and it is believed that through contemplation discrimination between prakrti (nature) and purusha (pure consciousness) occurs.

Patanjali defines the word “yoga” in his second sutra, which is the definitional sutra for his entire work:

*yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhah* (Yoga Sutras 1.2)

Loosely translated as “Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind.”

Pantanjali is considered by many to be the “Father of Yoga”. He was a humble physician, who wandered throughout India. He was a moral man, compiling and codifying a moral philosophy of life and living. Putting his passion to words, he created what was and is, essentially a template for living a moral and ethical existence.

Patanjali believed that each individual is a composite of matter (prakriti) and spirit (purusha). His Sutras provided a way that people could incorporate yoga’s teachings into their lives – and yet within this, there is not one mention of a yoga asana. For Patanjali, yoga existed to cultivate not just the body and the mind; but more importantly, to develop spiritual awareness. His idea was that yoga was a state of awareness in which one can experience another level of reality.

Patanjali's concept was so dominant that for some centuries, yogis focused exclusively on meditation to the exclusion of the physical practices of asana. It was only later that the belief of the body as a temple was rekindled and attention to the importance of the asana was revived.

Patanjali's Eightfold path of yoga (also called Eight Limbs of Classical Yoga or sometimes Ashtanga - "eight-limbed") consists of:

- 1) Yamas: how we are in the world; with our friends, family and community
  - Ahimsa - non-harming, non-violence
  - Satya - honesty, truthfulness
  - Asteya - not taking what is not freely given
  - Brahmacharya - wise use of energy, including sexual/creative energy
  - Aparigraha - not being acquisitive; not accumulating what is not essential
- 2) Niyamas: who we are with ourselves; how we gain personal insight
  - Saucha - purification/clarity; of body and thought
  - Santosa - contentment
  - Tapas - discipline; patience
  - Svadhyaya - self-study; contemplation
  - Isvara-pranidhana - devotion; dedication to awareness
- 3) Asanas: dynamic movement, from inner to outer expression, in the form of postures. These help to keep the body strong, flexible, and relaxed. Their practice strengthens the nervous system and refines our process of inner perception. Asana can also be translated as a "seat", as in a meditative seat or a stance from which we gain awareness.
- 4) Pranayama: roughly defined as breathing practices, and more specifically defined as practices that help us to develop constancy in the movement of prana, or life force.
- 5) Pratyahara: a deep inner focusing, drawing of one's attention toward silence or inwardly seeing, rather than outwardly toward things or ideas about things, including concepts about ourselves which we need to have acknowledged outwardly vs. a deep inner knowing.
- 6) Dharana: focusing attention and cultivating inner perceptual awareness. Begins with the practice of "mindfulness" or single-pointed focus on one object (e.g. breath, body sensations, sound), which lead to awareness.
- 7) Dhyana: sustaining awareness under all conditions.
- 8) Samadhi: the return of the mind into original silence or its oriental nature of non-separation. Expanding this awareness out into the world.

Feurstein states that the Sutras are possibly a composite of two distinct yoga traditions: Ashtanga (the principles outlined above) and Kriya yoga (the yoga of action), thus supporting the idea that the Sutras are an outline of how to cultivate both inner and outer conditions that are a deeper expression of yoga.

*"The obstacles and stumbling blocks on the path towards Realization can easily be overcome once an intelligent and comprehensive understanding of them has been reached. It should always be borne in mind that failures are but stepping stones to success."*

- Swami Vishnu-Devananda

Patanjali also described the Five Kleshas, or factors that contribute to putting into motion the "wheel of samsara" or cyclical existence/struggle/stress. They are traditionally described as "obstacles" to practice, or what holds us back from a full understanding of and opening to the practice, and in fact, to our lives. Klesha comes from the Sanskrit "klis", which means to suffer, torment, distress. The five Kleshas are:

- 1) Avidya:** "ignorance", or "not seeing" or "mis-knowing". It refers to a fundamental misunderstanding of our true nature, or who we really are. We tend to think of ourselves as the body and the mind, and feel completely defined this. Yoga teaches us we are so much more.
- 2) Asmita:** "self-orientation", the idea of "I, Me, Mine". Seeing ourselves as separate and divided from the rest of the world, and not understanding that there is no division between ourselves and others, or ourselves and the world around us. We believe that possessions and our family or cultural background defines us, and become attached to these ideas as representative of who we are, which can lead to comparison, competition, and ultimately separation.
- 3) Raga:** attachment to pleasure. The problem is not in the pleasurable experience per se, but in one's attachment to it, which is said to cause suffering because, once attached, we keep trying to hold on to or recreate what is, essentially, an impermanent condition. When we focus all our energy in this way, it is no longer being constructively directed, and may in fact, cause suffering and struggle for both ourselves and others.
- 4) Dvesha:** aversion to unpleasant feelings and experiences. Transformation comes by letting go of attachment to our preferences or ideas of how things should be, and then opening to things as they are. To understand and work with the ideas of raga and dvesha helps us to respond more creatively to situations. Jivamukti Yoga founder, David Life, states that "if we only ever do things that we like and avoid that which we find challenging or don't feel like doing we will stay the same and that evolution in one's practice and one's life will not be possible."
- 5) Abinivesha:** often described as "fear of death", but it also refers to any fear of loss and the "small deaths" or times of letting go that we experience in our lives. More directly, it refers to the fear of letting go of our deep attachment to self-identification. Michael Stone in *The Inner Tradition of Yoga* (Shambhala Publishing, 2008) refers to this as "the fear of letting go of the story of me."

Another key concept are the Five Koshas, or "sheaths", layers of mind and body. The Koshas work interdependently, in much the same way that the various limbs of the yoga system work together, creating structure, form, awareness, insight - none separate from the other:

**1) Annamaya Kosha:** the anatomical body (bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons, connective tissue). Anna means food, that which sustains our most basic structure and function.

**2) Pranamaya Kosha:** the "breath body", where the prana or life-force from the outside, supports our inner process. It can be said to refer more to the physiological, that which "enlivens" the anatomical, consisting of the various systems (respiratory, nervous, circulatory, immune, etc.)

**3) Manomaya Kosha:** the "mind body", or the psychological body (emotions, sensations, reactions to experience), where we organize experiences. It refers to how the world is perceived through the five sense organs: you eyes, ears, nose tongue and skin. And, then, how the mind organizes this sensory information and processes it into feelings, emotions, stories.

**4) Vijnanamaya Kosha:** the "wisdom body" where we understand and know deeply what is and take action from there. This body takes the mental body one step further, providing a framework within which we make decisions and take action, based on our sense perceptions and stories. It is said that past karma, and environmental and social conditioning influence this body.

**5) Anandamaya Kosha:** the "bliss body", where one is at-one, with all that is, without conflict. It refers to that which unchanging, who we really are. It is the place where we touch the essence of this and feel no separation from ourselves and our experience where there is no experiencer and just the experience of breath, body and mind in the moment.

## POST-CLASSICAL YOGA: *HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA*

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Hatha Yoga, or the "forceful yoga", is a medieval development. During this period, there was a proliferation of literature as well as the practice of yoga. Post-Classical yoga differs from the first three periods in that its focus is more on the present. It no longer strives to liberate a person from this life, but rather teaches one to live in the moment and work with what arises as it arises.

Hatha Yoga is a particular system of yoga described by Yogi Swatmarama in his writings in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika (c. 1350). Hatha (as derived from the word "ha", referring to the sun and the "tha", meaning moon), evokes an idea of a powerful union of two primordial forces. Yoga, as the yoke, joins the sun (masculine, active) and the moon (feminine, receptive) energies together. This is believed to create balance and focus, which can then be directed towards a higher purpose. Its objective is the same as that of any authentic form of yoga. However, the focus of Hatha Yoga is on developing the body's higher potential. We are prone to think enlightenment is purely a mental state, which is not the case. It can in fact have a profound effect on the nervous system and the rest of the body. It is also known as hatha vidya or the "science of hatha" yoga.



Hatha Yoga differs substantially from the Raja Yoga of Patanjali in that it focuses on shatkarma, the purification of the physical body, which leads to the purification of the mind ("ha" or sun), and prana, or vital energy ("tha" or moon). Compared to the seated asana, or sitting meditation posture (at its root the word asana meant "a seat" or "to sit with", as in a meditative seat or to sit with what arises in experience) of Patanjali's Raja yoga, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the most popular manual of the Hatha Yoga school, marks the development of asanas (plural) into the variety body postures we now associate with the word "asana" – or sometimes, simply with the word "yoga".

While the Hatha Yoga Pradipika describes postures (asanas), purifying practices (shatkarma), mudras (finger and hand positions), energy locks or seals (bandhas), and breath practices (pranayama), it also explains that the purpose of Hatha Yoga is the awakening of Kundalini (subtle energy), leading in through Sushumna (the central energy channel), and advancing through the complete practice of yoga (Raja Yoga) to the deep meditative absorption called Samadhi.

In the Hatha Yoga Pradipika this fact is expressed:

All means of Hatha Yoga are for reaching perfection in Raja Yoga. A person rooted in Raja Yoga conquers death.

What this suggests is that Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga should be looked upon as complementary. Even a specially manufactured body must sooner or later disintegrate. It is only the transcendental Self that is deathless and immortal.

Hatha Yoga is traditionally represented as having only six limbs, while Raja yoga consists of eight limbs.

### **The six limbs of Hatha Yoga:**

*Asana:* Dynamic internal dances in the form of postures. These help to keep the body strong, flexible, and relaxed. Their practice strengthens the nervous system and refines our process of inner perception.

*Pranayama:* Roughly defined as breathing practices, and more specifically defined as practices that help us to develop constancy in the movement of Prana, or life force.

*Pratyahara:* A deep inner focusing, drawing of one's attention toward silence rather than toward things.

*Dharana:* Focusing attention and cultivating inner perceptual awareness.

*Dhyana:* Sustaining awareness under all conditions.

*Samadhi:* The return of the mind into original silence or its original nature of non-separation.



Hatha as it is now used, is the style that many people associate with the word "yoga" today – and sometimes with a form of more "gentle" yoga. Hatha yoga, in its true sense, is the physical preparation that makes the body fit for higher meditation.

## MODERN YOGA

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During 1700 and 1800s, there was an increased presence of European nations in India, especially the British and Dutch, which greatly influenced the culture. Queen Victoria, in particular became fascinated by Hindu spirituality and welcomed visits from yogis and spiritual figures from India, and eventually assumed the role of "Empress of India" in 1880.

There were, however, several spiritual practitioners in India who were dedicated to maintaining their practices and traditions and bringing introducing them to Europe, and eventually, to the West. It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that yoga was "formally" introduced in the West by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893). Swami Vivekananda is considered a key figure in the introduction of Hindu philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga in Europe and America. He is also credited with raising interfaith awareness and bringing Hinduism to the status of a world religion during the end of the 19th century.

Swami Vivekananda was the chief disciple of the mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. As a guru, Ramakrishna taught Vivekananda Advaita Vedanta (a nondualist philosophy) and that all religions are true, and service to man was the most effective worship of the Divine. After the death of his Guru, Vivekananda became a wandering monk, traveling through India and getting a first-hand knowledge of the country's condition before travelling to Europe and then North America.

An eloquent speaker, Vivekananda was invited to several forums in the U.S. and spoke at universities and clubs. He conducted hundreds of public and private lectures and classes, and established Vedanta societies in the North America, England, and eventually back in India.

Another key figure in the modern era of yoga was Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who created Integral Yoga. Yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein states that Aurobindo's Integral Yoga "is the single most impressive attempt to reformulate Yoga for our modern needs and abilities." Aurobindo refined yoga for the Western world based on changing cultural conditions and his European education, but most significantly - in the true spirit of yoga as inner experience that moves out in the world – from his deep personal experimentation and exploration with spiritual practices as a complete expression of one's being in this body and in this life.

Aurobindo saw in all past forms of yoga and attempt to transcend one's "ordinary" existence through various yogic techniques and approaches such as renunciation, ascetism, meditation, and pranayama, rather than experiencing Divine Consciousness in one's body and life as it was. It is from this that his Integral Yoga approach developed as part of an "integral philosophy",

which acknowledged the value of previous yoga approaches, but in a new light. Much is written about this in his work, *The Life Divine*.

Integral Yoga has no specific asanas, mantras, rituals or breathing exercises. Its main requirement is self-surrender at a deep level, allowing an inner transformation to occur as one opens to a higher power, which Aurobindo identifies as The Mother, a symbolic representation of meditation, prayer and deep devotion. Other aspects of the practice include chastity (brahmacharya), truthfulness (satya) and abiding calmness (prashanti).



Hatha Yoga as we know it today is comes from the schools that have arisen from the teachings of Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989). Krishnamacharya was an influential Indian yoga teacher, healer and scholar. Although many people in his time still approached yoga as a spiritual practice, with a physical component, he also incorporated principles of healing into his practice and teachings, believing that it was difficult for a person to practice and evolve if they have a great deal of discomfort from illness. Krishnamacharya also taught yoga to people of all religions and always took time to understand the religion and the culture of the people he taught. His approach has inspired such modern teachers as Sri K Pattabhi Jois (1915-2009), who developed Ashtanga Yoga, B.K.S Iyengar (1918- pres.), known, obviously for Iyengar Yoga, and T.K.V. Desikachar, who developed what was initially termed Viniyoga, but then he dropped that term, preferring a more open expression of his teachings.

Krishnamacharya and his students are all widely credited with bringing their unique experiences and practices within the realm of Hatha Yoga as a continually evolving practice in the West.

## YOGA TODAY

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The practice of yoga today has come a long way away from its roots, in ways that have both adapted to evolving cultural trends and needs, but also in ways that are far removed from its source. Many of new styles of yoga are now branded with their originator's name: Sivananda, Bikram, Iyengar. Other new creations have some association with a specific yoga tradition: Ananda Yoga, Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, Jivamukti. Still others, attempt to adapt to the demands of a growing marketplace, addressing specific needs: Pre-natal yoga, Children's yoga, Power yoga, Senior's yoga, Yoga for depression, etc. Names, however, don't convey the depth of the yoga tradition, and may in fact, sometimes move us further from yoga's roots.

Centuries ago, yoga was not a physical practice, but rather a way of approaching life. We can see this coming full circle now as modern yoga continues to evolve, and it is testament to the strength

of yoga as a philosophical and spiritual system that has undergone so many centuries of tradition and change yet still returns us to a deeper source.

We are poised at a time of change within the yoga community, and there are both challenges and opportunities in this. With a basic understanding of yoga in a historical context - where it has come from and where we are now - we can appreciate this evolution even more, and understand that ultimately, we are simply seeking a way to describe experience, to deeply connect with ourselves and our world - and it is from here that our practice and our teaching will truly evolve.

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