Studying the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*

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A Personal Message to the Reader

My first *haṭha* yoga class was accidental. The gym had canceled my usual class in favor of a trial yoga hour. Although it was not an inspiring hour, the class challenged me, and I was eager to continue. After finding a more experienced teacher, I became a serious student of *āsana* (the physical practice) and meditation. Curious about the thought and science underlying these practices, I bought the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, but the book did not impress me. I gave my copy away.

Years later, I returned to this classic text to help integrate my yoga practice, lifestyle, and philosophy. I was a practicing psychotherapist with clients who had experienced trauma and addictions. I had taught *haṭha* yoga for two decades, using postures (*āsana*), breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), and meditation in my classes. I trained new yoga teachers and managed to keep my own practice steady.

In my work, I recognized that both yoga and psychotherapy could be a powerful force for personal growth and health. When physical, mental, or emotional negativity gripped a student's life, a steady practice helped bring stability and release. Students with strong practices seemed to move more easily back to center after life's disruptions. Clients who were taught simple breath and centering practices were more resilient and present.

As I began working on my doctorate in psychology, I assumed my research would contribute to the knowledge of addictions. However, my major professor, Eugene Taylor, was a William James scholar and writer in the field of consciousness. He had a passion for *Sāṃkhya Kārikās*, the major text of a classical Indian philosophy aligned with *Yoga Sūtras*. I shifted my focus to how the philosophy and practices of yoga integrate, overlap, and clash with modern psychology. Slowly, I fell in love with the depth and brilliance of these texts.

I.K. Taimni (1961), a translator of the *Yoga Sūtras,* predicts that when students start on a journey in yoga, they may doubt their abilities and determination to continue with devotion. However, he wisely points out that "the important point is to make a definite beginning somewhere and as soon as possible—Now" (p. xiii).

There are five points from the *Yoga Sūtras* that shine brightly for me personally:

1. This is an efficient practice, available to all, that will lead to a higher level of consciousness.
2. Internal transformation requires an ethical framework and right behavior.
3. Humans have unemployed potential that can come alive with practice and perseverance.
4. Know and heed the warnings that are given, but do not let the warnings deter you from practice.
5. The personal ego can be disentangled, and this is the hard work of practice.

Each time I read the *Yoga Sūtras* I find them new and enlightening. I hope you find similar inspiration for yourself.

—Judith Sugg
August 2020

Part One: Background

I. Introduction to the Study Guide

A. Welcome!

This study guide offers a pathway into yoga studies, specifically through the study of the short, enigmatic verses of a classical text called the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali.* The purpose of the study guide is to encourage the exploration of the *Yoga Sūtras*, knowing that the insights gained can be helpful, perhaps vital, components of your spiritual journey.

Many Westerners know the word yoga through classes in the physical postures, yet Patañjali only briefly mentions postures *(āsana).* Yoga postures are useful for many people and have a place, but they are not the chief or only practice of yoga. If you are a practitioner of postures, you may also have some knowledge of breathwork, ethics, and intent. Think of your practice up until now as a gateway into a more profound experience.

Written in Sanskrit roughly two thousand years ago, this text has been translated hundreds of times into English. Many translators are also commentators, explaining the deeper meanings of terse verses and demystifying obscure references. Yet, despite the spread of yoga throughout the world, modern students have difficulty seeing how this text applies to them.

An analogy might help explain this. Imagine arriving at college as a freshman and being assigned to a graduate seminar in statistics as your very first class. Goodness! You're not even sure what statistics is about. You don't know the rules of statistics or have a foundation for its study. The class is frustrating and alien, and the reading makes little sense.

Frankly, parts of the *Yoga Sūtras* can seem like that to students. Why? First, the text is a translation, and translations may or may not mirror the original. Second, yoga itself grew from a particular culture, at a particular time, with specific intentions that may not be familiar to a new student. There are unstated understandings and assumptions that, while somewhat familiar to Theosophists, are not familiar to all readers. As readers struggle to make sense of the text and follow its logic, it is hard to imagine how these pieces could ultimately prove to be transformative.

When Patañjali compiled the 196 short verses of the *Yoga Sūtras*, he wrote it for an advanced student, one with a substantial base of knowledge and practice. This student would already be devoted to a yogic path and understand the ethical constrictions and commitment required.

Few of us are so prepared these days or are so steadfast in this process. However, as Theosophists, we have declared our intention to search for Truth. We have an understanding of many of the key concepts of the *Yoga Sūtras*, and we have a deep spiritual longing that powers our search for Truth.

Studying the *Yoga Sūtras* can help a student discriminate between what is hype and what is of value. Long before the proliferation of writing about yoga on the Internet, Taimni (1961) urged students to look to the classics to avoid chaotic and misleading claims about yoga. At its heart, yoga *is* experience and practice; it is about paying attention. It is about the intention to lay bare the errors of mind that keep us from clarity about our true nature.

Guides or teachers instruct from their own experiences, whether they are the esteemed Patañjali, a distinguished commentator on yogic texts, or a teacher at a local yoga studio. When the teacher's experience is deep, mystical, transformational, or spiritual, they can inspire insight and longing in the student. They can keep students focused and safe from harm. However, teachers can also color their teaching with their own personal ego and confusion.

Practices such as *āsana* (poses) and meditation are known throughout the world, and we might say the practices are universal. Yet, yoga also has a cultural context. A reader can pick up an English copy with no background or preparation, but it is likely that the richness and logic of the text will be missed. To study the *Yoga Sūtras* in some depth is to understand how it rises from a certain culture and history, explains with precision human psychology, and provides guidance for practice throughout lifetimes. It can also inspire seekers on a spiritual and mystical path, giving them a sounding board for their experience and a glimpse of what is possible.

The *Yoga Sūtras* is not a long elucidation of a path of transformation. It is not the poetry of Blavatsky's *Voice of the Silence,* and it has few examples to make it more understandable. However, it is an incisive plan to save a serious student time and avoid mistakes of past yogis, and its advice for living a spiritual life is surprisingly practical. The *Yoga Sūtras* operates like a roadmap to translate the signposts along the way, although, like all maps, it is not the experience itself.

❖ *Introduction to the Journal or Discussion Questions*

After many of the sections of this study guide, you will find discussion questions for groups and journal questions for individual reflection. I encourage all students to write regularly in a journal about your practice, your reading, and the questions posed in the study guide. The appendices contain suggestions for working in a group or for studying independently.

- Whether you are new to the *Yoga Sūtras* or have read them before, what draws you to this text now?

- How do you think of higher consciousness? What does that term mean to you?

B. How Can the *Yoga Sūtras* Help Us Live a Theosophical Life?

Most Theosophists love learning, and students are drawn to the Theosophical Society because of the storehouse of knowledge found in its texts, its groups, and its members. Knowledge is mined from both ancient sources and modern interpretations, and the mixture is both rich and sometimes confusing. Delving into classical texts like the *Yoga Sūtras* can help explicate the concepts and terminology used so freely in Theosophical literature.

The major technique in the *Yoga Sūtras* is deep meditation. At such a level of meditation, the practitioner sheds the trappings of personality and little ego in exchange for the alert aliveness of pure consciousness. As the noise and drama of life subsides, the meditation deepens in silence. Although the *Yoga Sūtras* hints at what is Real and True, it tends to point rather than define. Words describing higher consciousness are, for the most part, limited or inept. Thus, if we delve into a *description* of experience instead of *experience itself*, yoga becomes theoretical. Learning theory helps, but yoga is the experience.

Devotion to knowledge and truth is a yogic path. Wisdom and discriminating insight, the natural byproducts of yoga, require dedication, deep self-knowledge, and service. This interweaving of knowledge, self-knowledge, meditation, and service is familiar to Theosophical readers.

Today's readers of the *Yoga Sūtras* are standing on the shoulders of many practitioners, beginning with the ancient seers who first codified this study. Being grounded in the concepts of the *Yoga Sūtras* can give any willing student precision in their choices of what to do, how to act, and where to devote their energy. It is also a spiritual practice leading steadily to self-realization. These are no small gifts!

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- How would you define a Theosophical life?
- In your own life, what is your focus for learning? What is your focus for spiritual growth?
- How do the pillars of Theosophy (knowledge, self-knowledge or study, and service) show up your life?

C. Your Personal Foundation for Study

In *Mind in Meditation*, Krishnamurti noted that "without changing our daily life, our asking what truth is, if there is a God or not, has no meaning whatsoever" (1971, p. 3). This study is not academic; it is transformational, and thus requires something more than simple academic study. What is required of you to make this study impactful?

(1) A sustained practice of contemplation or meditation or mindfulness is vital to any student of yoga; otherwise, the knowledge is theoretical. If you have a practice, this study will enrich and deepen it. If you don't have a practice, don't despair! There are many excellent guides and publications. A guide to the elements of meditation is included in Appendix 4 of this study guide. Robert Ellwood's book, *Finding the Quiet Mind*, is helpful, brief, and accessible.

(2) A second requirement is the intent to understand and incorporate the ethics of yoga. Yoga is more than a technique, and ethics are the culture in which the process of yoga lives and grows.

(3) Time and patience can unfold the inner logic of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Effort will be rewarded with personal and spiritual insight.

Over a hundred years ago, Annie Besant, in *An Introduction to Yoga*, described three faculties needed for the serious student: a strong desire, a strong will to continue practice, and a "keen and broad intelligence" developed through intensive study (Besant, 1976/1908, p. 138). Having purpose, commitment, and a curious intelligence are a powerful starting point.

Curiosity can be an especially potent asset. All yoga has an element of experimentation. You are your own scientist and number one subject in all of these practices. You are the case study in this grand experiment. Be ready to read, disagree, be confused and confounded, fall in love, be discouraged, and see growth. Track your experiments in a journal and count the insights you gain as landmarks on the journey.

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- What mindfulness or meditative practice do you already engage in? How has that affected you over time? If you are in a discussion group, share what has been helpful and what strategies you have found useful. How do you get stuck?

- If you were asked to list your personal ethical guidelines, what would four or five of your rules be? Which ones are absolutes? Which ones help with difficult decisions?

- When you were a child, what were you curious about? What did you want to know and explore? How are you curious now? How does curiosity feel to you?

D. Notes on Sanskrit

Sanskrit, a language of philosophy, science, religion, and poetry, is at least 4,000 years old. For comparison, modern English is about 500 years old. Sanskrit is logical and complex, and some words are not easy to translate. The meanings of Sanskrit terms may vary from text to text. Concepts evolved, and early writings may utilize a different definition from a later text. It can be helpful to view the chronology of texts and events found in Appendix 1.

Some terms cannot be converted to English without distorting the meaning. That is why in some translations, a student will notice key words left in Sanskrit. An example is *avidyā* which is often translated as ignorance. Yes, *avidyā* means ignorance in some sense, but it also means much more in the context of philosophical texts.

The Sanskrit alphabet, which includes 11 vowels, is considerably larger than English alphabet. Sanskrit is written in *devanāgarī* script; English is written in Roman script. Various attempts to transcribe one alphabet script into another (transliteration) have created confusion. Since there are several standardized ways of transliterating the text, it is common to see the same Sanskrit word appearing differently in different books. Also, fonts with proper markings have been lacking in the past, and many English-speaking authors did not attempt transliteration.

Here's an example of the complexity: The Sanskrit word, written in *devanāgarī*, is पुरुश. In the Roman alphabet you might see *purusha* or *puruṣa* (the dot under the s indicates one of the *sh* sounds in Sanskrit). You could also find it written *purusa* (dot left off). This word might be translated as man, cosmic man, pure spirit, consciousness—and it is also the name of plant!

If one looks at the history of this word, *puruṣa* appears in the *Vedas* as the personification or the essence of a person. In the later *Upaniṣads*, the Self, the universal principle (*ātman*) appears in the form of the Person, *puruṣa.* In *the sāmkhya* philosophy, one of the classical philosophies like yoga, *puruṣa* is the consciousness principle, as distinguished from the material world, *prakṛti.* Important concepts are renamed, reformed, and reused over centuries in ways that may not be obvious to a casual reader. Translators may use English words that have meaning in their own culture or religion, but are misleading. For example, *ātman* and *puruṣa* become soul in some English translations. Are they really the same for all readers?

Another example is *prana* which you could find written *prana, praana*, or *prāṇa*. The line over the *a* (or a double aa) indicates a long sound, while the dot under the *n* indicates a particular variant of *n* not used in English. This word is often translated as breath; however, breath is a partial definition which misses the power of the word. *Prāṇa* may also be explained as life force or spirit. With this expanded understanding, the linkage between using breath deliberately and directing one's life force deliberately is easier to grasp.

Learning key terms can make the meaning of the text richer. Reading more than one text when studying a verse may help broaden the definition. Perhaps the most important caveat is that *all words are symbols* that point towards understanding, and we meet these symbols with our heritage and background. Words are not reality, except perhaps in rare instances.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- Start a list of yogic terms and Sanskrit words now. There are excellent glossaries available, but your understanding and tracking of the major terms will help their meaning grow richer for you. Perhaps start with *prāṇa*. This is an important term in yoga: a rich, complex lens from which to investigate breath, life force, spirit, energy, evolution, and involution. Over time, add notes to your definitions that speak to the philosophical connections and, perhaps, the terms as personal symbols of transformation. You might start with the glossary in Appendix 2 for a list.

- What does it mean to say "all words are symbols?" Are there exceptions?

E. Conventions Used in this Study Guide

In creating this Study Guide, choices were made about how to present the material, the words, and the documentation.

1. Sanskrit (*Saṃskṛta)*, the language of the *Yoga Sūtras*, has more letters in its alphabet than does the Roman alphabet. Various schemes have been devised to show the additional letters. In this study guide, Sanskrit words are transliterated using the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST).
2. Transliterated Sanskrit words are italicized. Sometimes, for readability, an ***s*** has been added to create a plural. This is not the correct Sanskrit plural form, but merely a convention. The names of authors of Sanskrit texts (such as Patañjali) are not italicized.
3. Some Sanskrit words, which are now common in English, are not transliterated or italicized. These include Sanskrit, yoga, yogi, yogic, and karmic. *Yoga* is a term that has been appropriated into English. While it seemed more respectful to acknowledge its history by acknowledging the word as Sanskrit and italicizing it, it became cumbersome in the reading.
4. This study guide's documentation (citations and references) is in American Psychological Association (APA) style. APA style calls for italicizing book names and, in references, only capitalizing the first word and proper nouns.
5. The actual name of the text, *Yoga Sūtras,* is not standard throughout the many translations. In this study guide, it is first given as the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* and then shortened to *Yoga Sūtras.*
6. If a translator did not use transliteration (especially in the name of the book), I did not change this. Titles, however, are italicized per APA format.
7. Yoga, *sāmkhya*, and *vedānta* are all classical schools of Indian philosophy. Because the term *yoga* is used so widely, it is not capitalized or italicized. *Sāmkhya* and *vedānta* are not capitalized unless they are at the beginning of a sentence. This is not a perfect or equal solution, but hopefully it makes for easier reading. The titles of books that include yoga, *sāmkhya*, and *vedānta* are italicized and capitalized when in the text of the study guide.
8. *Īśvara* (and *ātman*) present a special challenge. In English, the capitalization of a letter indicates either the first letter of a sentence or a proper noun. It can indicate that the writer views the word with extra importance or respect.

   There are no capital letters in the alphabet of Sanskrit (*devanāgarī*). When English speakers capitalize transliterated word, we put our own conventions onto the word, influencing the meaning with our own assumptions. *Īśvara* is often translated as God or god. The words, "God" and "god," have different meanings to many English readers. With this caveat, the study guide uses the following conventions: Sanskrit words are capitalized if in the beginning of the sentence. *Īśvara* and *ātman* are not otherwise capitalized.
9. OM, a sacred chant, is written and transliterated in multiple ways in texts and modern writings. These variations include *Oṃ, āuṃ, aum, AUM,* and Om. I have chosen to

write it as OM. Vyaas Houston of the American Sanskrit Institute notes that this sacred sound (*mantra*) includes all of the vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet. Perhaps whatever symbol we use to represent OM is just that, a symbol, and not the reality of the *mantra*, nor the best guide to pronunciation.

II. Texts, Translations, and Recommendations

A. Recommended Translations for Primary Use

There numerous translations of the *Yoga Sūtras*, and over the centuries writers added even more words of commentary. Some of these translations and commentary are truer to the text than others, but some are biased by the beliefs or lack of knowledge of the translators. Caution is useful in choosing a translation.

From the inception of the Theosophical Society, members have translated and promoted the wisdom of Indian philosophy. Theosophical literature has much to say about classical yoga texts, and some excellent translations have been rendered by those associated with Theosophical Society.

The following are recommended texts, in order of preference for a student:

Ravindra, R. (2009). *The wisdom of Patañjali's yoga sutras.* Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press.

Ravi Ravindra's recent translation and commentary honor the depth and history of text while connecting the concepts to other teachers and everyday life. Ravindra has often taught at both Krotona School (Ojai, California) and the School of the Wisdom at the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar (India).

Iyengar, B.K.S. (2002). *Light on the yoga sutras of Patañjali.* London: Thorsons.

Iyengar was one of the masters of yoga whose work influenced American schools. Although not directly connected with the Theosophical Society, he presented at the International Headquarters in Adyar.

Taimni, I. K. (1961). *The science of yoga: The yoga-sutras of Patañjali in Sanskrit with transliteration in Roman, translation and commentary in English*. Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing.

I. K. Taimni was a professor of chemistry in India, a leader in the Theosophical Society, and a scholar of India philosophy. His translation and extensive commentary on the Yoga Sūtras, published by the Theosophical Society (Adyar), is both scholarly and practical.

Some study groups use multiple translations for comparison. It is worth the effort to be aware (and to beware) of the sources you are using.

B. Other Useful Translations of the *Yoga Sūtras*

Feuerstein, G. (1989). *The yoga-sutra of Patañjali: A new translation and commentary.* Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International.

This translation gives a precise and detailed translation that is particularly useful in combination with other texts. Feuerstein often has a point of view or opinion about what is accurate (and who has it wrong), but he carefully marks out his opinion.

Hill, D. (2007). *Yoga sutras: The means to liberation*. Victoria, Canada: Trafford.

A very readable and useful translation. Terms are explained well, and the translation and commentary make sense. This is one of my favorite translations.

Houston, V. (1995). *The yoga sūtra workbook: The certainty of freedom*. Warwick, NY: American Sanskrit Institute.

An excellent workbook for a student who wants a bare-bones translation and a focus on the original Sanskrit. The text is presented with word by word translations and a succinct phrase or sentence.

Judge, W. Q. (1987). *The yoga aphorisms of Patañjali: An interpretation by William Q. Judge.* Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company. (Original work published in 1889).

A beautiful, brief text that is lovely to use in combination with other translations. In this early translation, Judge uses Western terminology to bridge the gap of understanding. This may underplay differences in philosophy.

Mishra, R. (1973). *Yoga sūtras: The textbook of yoga psychology*. Garden City, NY:Anchor Press.

A useful and interesting translation and explanation. Good as a secondary source.

Swami J. *(n.d.) Yoga sūtras.* Retrieved from https://www.swamij.com/index-yoga-meditation-yoga-sutras.htm

Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati is from the Advaita Vedānta tradition (Himalayan Institute in Pennsylvania). Vedānta is one of the six classical philosophies of India and is closely aligned with the teachings of Blatvatsky. This online translation offers a wealth of information and connections. It is useful as a secondary source.

C. Other Recommended Texts

Bernard, T. (1999). *Hindu philosophy*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass.

Short and easy-to-read descriptions of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy. It creates a context for the study of yoga.

Dasgupta, S. N. (1995). *Yoga: As philosophy and religion*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass.

Dasgupta wrote books dedicated to explaining yogic philosophy to English readers. A good supplemental text for in-depth study.

Desikachar, T. K. V. (1999). *The heart of yoga: Developing a personal practice.* Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International.

Krishnamacharya was the teacher of well known modern yoga teachers, including B. K. S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, and Indra Devi.

Eliade, M. (1973). *Yoga: Immortality and freedom* (W. Trask, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

A beautiful translation or interpretation with commentary from an innovative and influential historian of religion.

Feuerstein, G. (2001). *The yoga tradition: Its history, literature, philosophy and practice.* Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press.

This is a rich, detailed, illustrated, and lengthy encyclopedia of all things yoga. Very handy as an auxiliary text.

Larson, G. J. (2001). *Classical sāṃkhya: An interpretation of its history and meaning*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass.

Sāṃkhya is another of the six classical Indian philosophies, closely associated with yoga. Theosophists will be familiar with concepts from sāṃkhya through HPB's work, and may find reading this classic formulation useful. Sāṃkhya is the explication of evolution (as in the Secret Doctrine) while yoga is involution, the reversal or realization of principles at the individual level. There are far fewer translations of the *Sāṃkhya Kārikās (the classic sāṃkhyan text). This one is beautifully done with Larson's commentary.*

Zimmer, H. (1974). *Philosophies of India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

A well-written sweep of history, religion, and philosophy. It is lengthy but readable. Zimmer provides a contextual foundation for yoga, related religious studies (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism), and classical philosophies.

III. Exploring the *Yoga Sūtras*

A. Brief History

Texts on yoga, both contemporary and historical, are abundant. There are centuries of reinterpretations, explanations, philosophical musings, and guides to practice. Why all this devotion to a brief manual? According to Taimni, it is "the most authoritative and useful book," and the *sūtras* are not specific to any one branch of yoga (1961, p. vii-viii).

While the *Yoga Sūtras* is a pivotal text of yogic philosophy, the *Bhagavad Gītā* is equally significant and esteemed. However its mission is quite different. The *Gītā* is the spirit, the beauty, the poetry, and the inspiration of yoga, all wound in a gripping story. Patañjali, on the other hand, gives the reader bare bone instruction with terse details, all in the service of providing a serious practitioner with clarity and guidance.

Yoga, as a science of inner exploration, long predates the *Yoga Sūtras*. The word "yoga" means joining, connecting, restraining, harnessing, or yoking together. The analogy of an uncontrolled mind, running wild like an unruly horse, was used hundreds of years before the *Yoga Sūtras* were compiled. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* contains references to yoga as contemplation through the technique of uttering the mystic sounds. Through yoga, man "attains heaven, conquers his mind; becomes master of speech, sight, hearing, knowledge . . . becomes Spirit itself . . . there he is peaceful, merry, immortal" (Purohit & Yeats, 2003, p. 66). Yoga is the harness, the way of directing and focusing the mind.

Yoga is one of the six schools of classical Indian philosophies. This study guide mentions three of them: Yoga, *sāṃkhya*, and *vedānta*. Yoga and *sāṃkhya* are closely aligned philosophically. The *Yoga Sūtras* is a major text of classical yoga, and the *Sāṃkhya Kārikās* is the major text of *sāṃkhya*. Note that the classical text of *sāṃkhya* has roots in much older versions.

Indian and Western philosophies study similar things: logic, ethics, ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics. However, there are critical differences. The source of knowledge in Indian philosophy is not just rational thought, but purposeful practice and experience. The goal is freedom from the tyranny of the mind and ego, and one's spiritual evolution and self-knowledge are consistently emphasized in Indian philosophy. Self-knowledge inherently includes moral and ethical principles to guide everyday behavior as part of a spiritual path.

The timeline of Indian philosophy, history, and religion is vast. Philosophical works were transmitted orally, long before they were written down. Dates attached to various works are usually approximate, and it would be an error to suppose that a later date denotes a historically later concept or system. The appendix at the end of this workbook gives an estimated chronology of major events and works related to the *Yoga Sūtras* and its Indian birthplace.

Dating the writing of the *Yoga Sūtras* is difficult. Some researchers regard the last (fourth) chapter as a later addition. Most researchers proposed a date of 3rd to 5th century C.E. for Patañjali, although some ascribed a 2nd century B.C.E. date for the first three chapters. This puts the *Yoga Sūtras* roughly a thousand years later than the *Vedas*, and relatively close in time to the Indian epics and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

For purposes of this study guide, it is assumed the text is slightly less than 2000 years old. However, what is more important for students is understanding that the *Yoga Sūtras* was the product of hundreds, if not thousands, of years of research and experimentation prior to the compilation of verses, and the verses were part of an oral tradition before they were written.

We know little about Patañjali, the author or compiler. There is some thought he is the same as the grammarian of the same name. Iyengar's translation and commentary (in the recommended list) assumes this is true, but other scholars do not agree.

A traditional approach for a yoga student would be to study intently under the guidance of a teacher (*guru*). This training would include practices, lifestyle, ethics, and study of texts. Desikachar, a well-known teacher of yoga himself, described his apprenticeship with Sri Krishnamacharya, one of the great masters of the twentieth century, whose students included B. K. S. Iyengar, Jean Klein, and Indra Devi (1999). In his apprenticeship, Desikachar learned practices such as yogic poses and breathing techniques, but the true focus of his training was on performing service, teaching, and studying texts.

Yoga first appeared in the American literature in the 1830s through writings of the American Transcendentalists, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. The founding of the Theosophical Society 50 years later helped disseminate the ideas of *karma*, reincarnation, *vedānta*, and Buddhism. Theosophists translated Sanskrit texts, including the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Yoga Sūtras*, then published and distributed the texts and commentaries to a wider audience. An edition of William Q. Judge's English translation of the *Yoga Sūtras* was published in Bombay in 1885 by Tookeram Tatya, a Theosophist. Judge republished the work in 1889 in a second edition with his explanatory notes to help "Western minds unfamiliar with the Hindu modes of expression…philosophy and logic" (1889/1987, p. vi). It is useful to remember how novel these ideas were for Western readers.

Americans learned about Indian philosophy largely through the lens of the earliest Indian teachers and missionaries in America, most of who subscribed to *advaita vedānta*. A prime example was Swami Vivekananda, the charismatic teacher who lectured in America as early as 1893 and established the Vedānta Societies in America. At the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, Vivekananda captivated audiences who were, for the first time, hearing about Asian religions from Asian teachers. The conference itself spurred much interfaith discussion. Vivekananda published his lectures and translation of the *Yoga Sūtras* in a book called *Raja Yoga* in 1893. A succession of Indian teachers followed, including Paramahansa Yogananda, Jiddhu Krishnamurti, a teacher originally connected to the Theosophical Society, Swami Sivananda, Swami Rama, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

Today, yogic practices are used as a type of physical and mental therapy and may be divorced from classical yoga's goals and philosophy. Many yoga students do not overtly understand the connection with a quiet, focused mind and *āsana* or postures, although they may recognize that their practice seems to help with stress and mood management. This is not new; Taimni complained of this discrepancy 60 years ago. Many researchers in mindfulness and yoga practices avoid mentioning spiritual goals even as they garner support for the practices based on health goals. The trendiness of yoga and meditation feels superficial at times. Yet the wider exposure of the public to practices of yoga also creates the potential and may activate a longing for a deeper inquiry into consciousness.

B. Overall Structure and Description

The *Yoga Sūtras* are short verses, organized into four chapters. Given the scope, brevity, and preciseness, it is likely that Patañjali wrote for an informed reader already deeply devoted to the practice. Many of the concepts discussed in the following sections were likely known by students.

The verses of the *Yoga Sūtras* by themselves can fit into a few pages of text (see Appendix 6). Most books also include commentary and reflections of the translators. It is important for a student to note that the quality of the commentary, like the translation, can vary.

Pāda is the term for chapter or section. (*Haṭha* yoga students will recognize the word as also meaning foot.). Here is a quick overview of the four chapters:

- **The first chapter, *Samādhi* (*Samādhi pāda*)** describes the essential practice of yoga as *samādhi*, a deep meditative state. This meditative state evolves into deeper and deeper levels as the mind complex (*citta)* stills into silence. (Note that *citta* is a good example of a term that is often translated as mind, but has a much deeper and richer meaning.)
- **The second chapter, Practice (*Sadhāna pāda*)** delineates the practices of yoga and identifies the obstacles students will encounter. It outlines the eight aspects or limbs (*aṣṭāṅga*) of the royal (*rāja*) path of yoga. These purposeful actions dispel spiritual confusion in body, actions, thoughts, and identity.
- **The third chapter, Attainments (*Vibhūti pāda*)** describes the supernatural powers possible in advanced practice. These powers flow from the choice of focus and thus range from physical power to subtle insight. They are a signal of the strength of the practice. The author offers a warning that the search for, and attainment of, these powers can be distracting to the student intent on spiritual realization.
- **The last chapter, Freedom (*Kaivalya pāda*)** guides the practitioner through the final steps before full liberation (*kaivalya*). Time unravels; *karma* is dissolved. There is nothing left of the illusion of personality. The practices lead to this final unraveling; what then?

C. What is the Goal of Yoga?

Indian philosophical texts are oriented towards spiritual liberation, or attainment of freedom. The goal has different names and different characteristics, but common aspects are a release of suffering and transcendence of the ignorance of our true spiritual nature. In the *Yoga Sūtras*, this moment of transcendence is *kaivalya*, often translated as aloneness, detachment, or freedom.

First mentioned in the second chapter (2.25), *kaivalya* is described as pure seeing or pure consciousness, not mixed with content from the world. Consciousness just is, without attachment or focus on materiality. (In that sense, it is alone.) *Kaivalya* is freedom from *karma*, freedom from the thought stream, and freedom from the personality. It might be said to be a moment of Real consciousness in a sea of experience.

What is consciousness? We think we understand the term, yet in common usage, consciousness always requires an object to make sense. Even the word unconscious implies there are hidden contents that may be exposed to the light of consciousness. What about awareness and mindfulness? The object of mindfulness is the content the moment, be it an internal or an external sensation. *Kaivalya* is beyond this, beyond an ordinary conception of peace or stillness. Our reliance on what we know up to now as consciousness, meaning consciousness of something, can lead us astray. Theory can only point; *kaivalya* is a lived moment.

The word "yoga" is associated with meanings such as joined, yoked, harnessed together, and unified. This unification is conceptualized in different ways. It is common to read that yoga means union with God or spirit. Patañjali, however, is most concerned with disentanglement, specifically disentangling our personality, which is part of the material world, from what is pure consciousness and Real. This disentanglement comes at the expense of the little self, the personality or personal ego, which locked in a battle for survival. Practice diminishes the driving force of the personality, dissolving the karmic impulses. This diminishment is the true opportunity for unity.

Patañjali speaks of *kaivalya* as the absence of confusion between what is real and what is transitory. Yet Patañjali artfully avoids much discussion of the result or aftermath of *kaivalya*, choosing to focus on the how, not the why or where.

Samādhi is the ultimate practice, not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is known only in practice, and the attempt to clothe it in words will always distort it to some degree. There are dire warnings about becoming goal-oriented since that type of motivation is inherently part of the personal ego. So, while there are ways to describe the ultimate goal of yoga, there is also wisdom in leaving that question open-ended. Yoga is nothing if it is not experiential.

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- There are many words for liberation, enlightenment, and spiritual freedom, all with somewhat different meanings. Make a list and explore the similarities and differences. To which philosophy or religion do they belong? Consider, as a start, the terms *mokṣa,* enlightenment, nirvana, *kaivalya*, self-realization, and liberation.

- How are these words different or similar to salvation?
- Our internal dialogue or self-talk narrates the events of our life for us. It keeps us in content and story. This narrative includes an ongoing report of the situation of life, a repetition of the assumptions that lead us to judgment, and a reiteration of our dogmas and beliefs.

  One way to describe an advanced stage of consciousness is freedom from this constant narrative. The next time your internal dialogue is engaged, probably in the next few seconds, experiment with shifting focus. Perhaps take a few breaths for relaxation, or hear the sound of *OM* in your head, or feel your palms rubbing together. Notice the effect of being free, if only for a second, of this narrative voice.
- In thinking about the narrative voice, reflect on this short poem:

  > *You* are not your story.
  >
  > *They* are not your story about them.
  >
  > *The world* is not your story about the world. (Adhyashanti, 2012).
- After an intense meditation or a calming, spiritual experience, we often feel clear and open. We can imagine that *all is one*. What happens to you after an experience like this? What makes this feeling or experience evaporate?
- In *The Voice of the Silence*, Blavatsky asks "Hast thou attuned thy being to Humanity's great pain, O candidate for light?" (1992, p. 51). We might see yogic practices as self-work or as healing personal suffering. What about the sufferings of the world?

D. The *Yoga Sūtras* as a Psychological Text

Thinking about the *Yoga Sūtras* in psychological terms has both strengths and limitations. Modern writers have penned volumes on *yoga psychology*, and Besant talks about yoga as a science of psychology (1979/1908). Yoga is deeply psychological if by that one means the exploration of human cognition and experience. The intricacies of the unconscious mind as detailed in the *Yoga Sūtras* rival psychological theories of motivation, memory, and decision-making.

Yet there are fundamental differences between yoga and psychology. As an example, psychology seeks to describe and investigate human behavior and cognition, and clinical psychology seeks to treat behavior outside the norm. This means that psychology is required to define normal within a cultural context. Yoga looks beyond the norm and views the norm as a state of spiritual confusion.

Second, with advances in neuroscience, brain activity is viewed as the only source of experience, and mind is synonymous with brain. In this framework, no yogic perception of a vast consciousness pervading the universe exists. Third, psychology's interest in how humans achieve happiness has led to useful understandings about cognition, and spurred an interest in mindfulness as a clinical technique. However, yoga has quite a different view of the goals of meditation and how suffering can be diminished. Lastly, several schools of psychology encourage exploration of human potential. However, except for Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, these models exclude the possibility of experience extending over more than one lifetime.

This section explores the intersections and divergences between the psychology embedded in the *Yoga Sūtras* and the Western model of psychology. Whether one is psychologically oriented or not, the contrast highlights major elements of the *Yoga Sūtras.*

1. One or more lifetimes: An essential difference.

⇒ ***Yoga:*** The basis of the *Yoga Sūtras* is the evolution of consciousness over lifetimes moving towards spiritual freedom or enlightenment. It does this based on an understanding of the human spirit as reincarnating, learning over lifetimes, struggling with human suffering, and seeking liberation. In yoga, each new life is cast from the fruit of some previous life, and predisposing motivations and traits are rooted in past struggles, not necessarily in this lifetime.

⇒ ***Psychology:*** Although psychology often attempts to alleviate suffering through treatment, the motivation is in this lifetime, this situation. Some practitioners might use the idea of multiple lifetimes as a technique, but even then the purpose is therapeutic for this lifetime.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

How does having the perspective of more than one lifetime change . . .

- Your approach to spirituality?

- Your perspective towards the environment?
- Your attitude towards your family?
- Your attitude towards changing your thoughts and/or behavior?

2. Is there free choice?

⇒ ***Yoga:*** Choice is always in the moment, in the experience of the moment, in perception, thought and action right now. Humans have a choice to accelerate evolution or yield to conditioning. Whichever is chosen has significance because the choice or lack of choice will mark both this lifetime and future lives.

⇒ ***Psychology:*** Different models of psychology give different weight to determinism. Is the personality of the adult determined by genetics or childhood environment? Are we victims of parents, chemicals, the environment, or other forces? Humanistic psychology emphasized the ability of humans to make choices and direct their life; transpersonal psychology acknowledges the power of the spiritual or higher mind to create change.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- Think about a time you instituted a positive change in your life. How did you choose to change? How did you go about changing? Think about your process of change rather than the content (i.e., what changed).

- Think about a change you would like to make, yet you feel stuck and unable to change. What conditioning holds you back? If you haven't changed, then when do you make the choice to remain the same?

3. How does yoga treat cognition?

⇒ ***Yoga:*** What are the mechanisms of mind and memory in the *Yoga Sūtras*? Patañjali uses the term *citta* for a combination of the cognitive mind, higher or spiritual intellect, and a sense of self-identity and ego. In the ancient *sāṃkhya* philosophy discussed earlier, the terms *buddhi*, *manas*, and *ahamkāra* describe this mind complex, which—combined with the five senses, five action capabilities, and five subtleties of sound, contact, form, taste, and smell—form the subtle-body. Evolution proceeds outward from the most conscious or spiritual aspects to the material planes.

Citta, the term used in the *Yoga Sūtras,* encompasses all aspects of human intelligence, from everyday computations to spiritual insight. *Citta* holds the predispositions creating circumstances and response tendencies in this lifetime. Thus, it contains the seeds of personality.

Citta embraces a wide range of mental activity stemming from unconscious karmic impulses, awareness of pain or pleasure from thoughts and actions, the stream of conscious thought, and all neural activity needed to support life. The scope of *citta*

includes the possibility of thoughtless but conscious mind, although even this purest aspect of *citta* will be unable to illuminate or enlighten itself.

The continual presentation of unconscious material during meditation provides fuel for transformation. Sensory data, memory, delusions, habits, and beliefs can be seen for the illusions they are, and thus untangled from experience itself. The practitioner is then more able to pay attention to experience *before* the mind objectifies and interprets the experience.

Theosophists use similar concepts but sometimes with different terminology. They identify the mind influenced by desire or attachment as the lower *manas*, while the intellect influenced by Spirit is the higher *manas*, or higher mind. *Buddhi*, the individualization of the universal spiritual aspect, *ātman*, and *manas*, combine into the highest individualized spiritual state. Our sense of *I-am*, separateness, and ego can lean towards the spiritual or the material.

⇒ ***Psychology:*** In general, psychology treats the brain as the organ of cognition and organizer of personality while diminishing or negating the role of spiritual intelligence. Mechanically, some of the processes described in yoga are close to modern psychology's approach to memory, habits, and motivation. Psychology's interests in calming reactions, understanding cognitive biases and traits, and disengaging old conditioning have parallels in the *Yoga Sūtras*.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- Krishnamurti states that "Mind is its content. The brain is the past, and from that past thought functions. Thought is never free and never new" (1999, p. 129). As you discuss this quote, consider what a less content-driven mind would be like.

- In your next meditation, try this classic yogic image: Picture a wide river. One shore represents spiritual intelligence while the other represents the material world. As your thoughts arise, decide which shore they belong to and let them flow in that direction. Then, recenter and wait for the next thought.

4. How does the unconscious work?

⇒ ***Yoga:*** In the *Yoga Sūtras*, unconscious material is predetermined by the actions and thoughts of the past (including past lifetimes) through the law of *karma*. In yoga, what drives thoughts and behavior is explained by karmic traces and karmic traits. Karmic seeds (*samskāra*) are traces of past decisions, thoughts, and actions, in this lifetime or past lives and triggered by related circumstances in the current life. The accumulation of these tendencies over lifetimes is *vāsana*, a knot of patterns or traits forged by conditioning and responses. Our character has its roots in *vāsana.*

Deep levels of meditation expose this conditioning and deflate automatic responses. Yoga practice culminates in emptying *citta* of *karmic* activators so that there is

nothing hidden left to compel or motivate further thought, word, or deed. This is the freedom or transcendence of which the *Yoga Sūtras* speak.

⇒ ***Psychology:*** The term *unconscious* has several definitions in psychology. It can refer to the mechanics of the brain working without conscious direction or awareness, and it can refer to deeply hidden motivations. It is also a term used by some schools of psychology, particularly depth psychology in the traditions of Freud and Jung. In depth psychology, unconscious material is rooted in events from childhood and repression of childhood misunderstandings and trauma. Neuroscience also talks about the layers of awareness and cognition. In cognitive psychology, our many unconscious biases of thought influence actions.

Both yoga and depth psychology acknowledge that humans are rarely aware or insightful about their motivations. We react and feel, react to our feelings, think about our reactions and actions of others, with only a surface understanding of what really drives us. In psychology, the aim of exploring the unconscious is generally therapeutic. Understanding unconscious motivations and reactions help make humans more functional, stable, and perhaps happier.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- What is something that you want in your life? It could be something concrete, like a new car, or a better relationship, or a cleaner office. After you have picked something, ask yourself:
    a) What will having this do for me?
    b) If I have this entirely or fully, what would that do for me?

  You can continue questioning until you feel like you have really understood your motivation. For example, a new car might get me to work, but it also gives me a sense of comfort and reliability, and it might mean I value my safety. What I really want is safety, and the new car is my strategy for getting safety. One is a deeper motivation; one is a strategy for getting there.

5***. How does yoga treat emotions?***

⇒ ***Yoga:*** In yoga, the frequency and strength of the emotion reflect past conditioning of the current or previous lifetime. The eruption of emotion strengthens the karmic cycle. Emotions are amplified by similar emotions. Joy spurs happiness. Irritation increases anger.

Patañjali notes that learning to cultivate opposite feelings can help neutralize emotions. If a person has angry thoughts, turning towards thoughts of gratitude begin to neutralize the anger. Nurturing other feelings breaks the trance of negativity. There is, however, a limit to this intervention because we fear the end of pleasure. We know these emotional states are limited in duration. The ethical guide-

lines in yoga diminish automatic emotional reactions by reducing the disturbances and self-created drama in one's life.

⇒ ***Psychology:*** Psychology discusses emotions as somatic expressions of our current experience, our thoughts, our imagination, and our past conditioning. In therapy, emotions are a key to the person's distress and sometimes a guide to understanding and change. Emotions summarize and express what is happening, and they can be kept alive with our thoughts, or depleted by moving on. In both psychology and yoga, emotions are part of a cycle of stimulus and response.

6. What does stilling the mind mean?

⇒ ***Yoga:*** The mind produces a stream of unbidden thoughts, feelings, memories, distractions, and fantasies. If one aggressively tries to stop thought, it usually becomes more compelling. Meditation, or stilling the mind, is a process of attention, recognition of the thought, and then release, repeated over and over. This may result in psychological insight into one's behavior, emotions, or process of change, but this is a side benefit, not the aim. Spiritual insight is of another order. Just before enlightenment, a yogi resides in a cycle of inner calm fostering spiritual insight, which stabilizes the calm mind, producing even more insight.

How do we still the mind? In Chapter 1, Patañjali says that the process of quieting the mind comes from non-attachment and practice. Being non-attached, the meditator loses fascination with stories, plans, and reminisces of the mind. With the deepest meditation, there is a steady deconstruction of everyday personality.

⇒ ***Psychology:*** Twenty-first-century psychology has embraced meditation as a way to calm the mind, relieve anxiety, avoid over-stimulation, become more empathetic, intervene in depressive loops, and retrain negative cognitions. There is evidence that meditation can even create physical, structural changes in the brain.

In psychotherapy, personal insight is often held in great esteem as a healthy precursor of change. However, the yogi would view this type of insight as a marker of progress, and not the ultimate transcendence of personality.

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- As you sit comfortably, imagine being in a city, walking down the busy street. You hear and see the city traffic, horns, movement, and harried workers. You choose to begin walking out of town, and eventually it becomes less busy and quieter. There is less traffic, more blue sky, and a few trees. As the high-rise buildings fade, neighborhoods appear. You continue walking until you find yourself approaching pastures and farms. Your last leg of the journey is path in a lovely wooded area. The smells are fresh and the air is clear. You sit down, tired and relaxed, and rest in silence.

7. What are personality and ego?

⇒ ***Yoga:*** The crux of the problem humans face is our inability to realize we are *not* our physical and mental personality. Our true nature is spirit. This confusion has created habits that impact us now and in future lifetimes. One might define personality in yoga as the embodied illusion that *I am my mind, body, and emotions.*

The ethical precepts in the *Yoga Sūtras* address common behaviors and habits that drive behaviors and thoughts. The idea is not so much to change personality as to loosen the constraints keep the practitioner stuck in misperception. In daily life, personality defines who the person is in the world, but for the yogi, personality is that aspect to be diminished or left behind through practice and non-attachment.

Ego is not a term with just one definition, even in yoga. Although it creates the experience of separation, *I-amness* is part of the evolution of the individual. Freedom is the experience of transcendence, the realization that this is an impermanent convention for the sake of evolution, but not reality.

Theosophists define the lower ego as the genesis of the personality, and the higher ego as "the divine and impersonal *Individuality* . . . (and) the reincarnating Principle . . . in the intellectual realm" (Sender, 2018, p. 183). The confusion of the lower ego is the confusion of *avidyā,* the ignorance of our spiritual nature. Personality is that which is embodied in this lifetime, and individuality (the monad: *ātman* and *buddhi*) is that which reincarnates over and over in a new personality/body in each lifetime.

For the student, the use and understanding of the term *ego* can be fraught with misunderstandings. In reading commentaries and translations of the *Yoga Sūtras,* it is useful to know the tradition and definitions of the author.

⇒ ***Psychology***: Personality is an enduring set of characteristics, behavioral and emotional habits, predictable reactions within a social role, and thought patterns. Traits are how people typically perceive and address situations in life. In psychology, personality is difficult to change. Humans can learn to respect personality differences and make adjustments, but the traits persist. Troublesome traits and patterns, such as extreme dependency, antisocial tendencies, and narcissism are behaviors to be managed at best.

Freud envisioned the personality as a three-part field of intrapsychic conflict. His terms are part of our everyday parlance, and most people can identify these parts in themselves or others. The *id* is the uncontrolled impulse to find comfort and pleasure. The *superego* contains all the rules (and shoulds) learned from one's family, religion, and culture. The *ego* attempts to mediate and maintain safety and balance, although this is difficult and anxiety-producing. When strong, the ego can create some success and ensure survival. While these parts may feel tangible, they are really dynamic forces within the mind.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- The great American psychologist of the early 20th century, William James, talked about the stream of consciousness or the stream of thought as an organizing principle of self or personality. This continuous stream of memories, ideas, fears, imaginings, and commentary often interfere with our ability to be present, now. Our own stream of thought helps defines our personality. It makes it seem as if the personality is real and continuous. Is it?

    a) How does your thought stream define you? How are the words and images in our thoughts the glue of our personality?

    b) What would happen if the mind were in silence for a short time? If you had no internal dialogue for a short time, would you be you during that time?

    c) How do you know how to be you? Imagine waking up and not putting on the same, old personality -- what might that be like?

- *Ego* is a term used in common language, in psychology, in religion, and in philosophy. Discuss how you understand the term. Where did your definition come from? What do you mean by too much ego? Too little? What do you mean by egotistical? Could you act without an ego?

- *Superego*, in a Freudian or psychodynamic sense, contains all the rules and "should" of our life, mostly unconscious and usually shared by a community. What rules drive your life or direct your actions? As you think about your attitudes towards different people, money, religion, status, gender, or professions, what were the rules that you learned or rebelled against?

- Ravindra talks about the yogic quest as freedom from (the little) self, and this story exemplifies the opposite: Two old friends meet after a long time. One talks constantly, then stops to say, "*I've been talking about me too much. Tell me, what do* ***you*** *think of me?*" While this is a humorous anecdote about addiction to self, most of us can find some accuracy in the portrayal. How do we stop being the star of our own show?

E. The Many Faces of *Yoga* Practice

Yoga has fundamental principles, but not one rigid process or practice. In the *Yoga Sūtras,* Patañjali describes yoga as the process of stilling our fluctuating mind through practice, self-inquiry, and alignment with Spirit. The eight-part system presented in Chapter 2 defines external behavioral and internal subtle practices for realization.

The *Bhagavad-gītā* is a central text of yoga and Hinduism. Ravindra calls it "perhaps the single most important work to originate from India" (2009, p. 210). Written a few hundred years before the *Yoga Sūtras*, the text is embedded in a vast epic called the *Mahābhārata.* The *Gītā* enumerates many paths, including service, knowledge, action, devotion, and meditation. Each can bring fulfillment to a committed practitioner, and yet none of these activities are exclusive. One who is focused on devotion to God, for example, may naturally want to serve those in need.

An analogy might help to explain the many practices of yoga. Imagine you want to become more physically healthy. You could learn about nutrition, start walking, drink more water, learn a sport, start exercising, learn to reduce stress, bring more balance into your life, become more optimistic, and improve relationships. All of these support health, and you may be drawn to one activity over another because of your history or your inclinations. However, some of these activities are more foundational to health: One can be healthy without learning to play tennis, but it is much harder to be physically healthy with high stress and a poor diet.

Some of the most common categories of practices include:

bhakti yoga, a channeling of our emotion into devotion to an Ideal or God

kuṇḍalinī yoga, concentrating and awakening of psychic energy

jñāna yoga, cultivating spiritual knowledge

rāja yoga, the royal path identified with the practices found in the *Yoga Sūtras*

karma yoga, directing one's actions towards unselfish deeds and motives

haṭha yoga, developing mastery and control over the body, breath, and *prāṇa*.

Tantric yoga, like *kuṇḍalinī*, is dedicated to the control of psychic energy. The world is divine; spiritual energy manifests continually. Guru-oriented, tantric yoga has many texts and practices. Developed about 1000 years later than classical yoga, tantric yoga was a rebellion against meaningless rituals and exclusionary practices. Like any path devoted to a teacher, yogic or otherwise, the teacher's authenticity and ethics are important.

Modern Western yoga is often said to be *haṭha,* and considered tantric-based. The names known in the West are like trademarks: Bikram, Anusara, yin, flow, Sivananda, etc. *Aṣṭāṅga* yoga refers to both the practices of the *Yoga Sūtras*, and, in modern parlance, to the format developed by a 20th century yogi, Patabhi Jois. Georg Feurerstein does an excellent job of tracing history, names, and practices in his encyclopedic volume entitled *The Yoga Tradition* (2001).

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- Think of a person who follows the yoga of devotion to God or a higher ideal, whether or not they would identify as a yogi. This would be someone whose focus on themselves is far less than their focus on loving devotion. Describe this person.

- Think of a person who diligently pursues knowledge and understanding, not so much for the status of knowing something special, but for the search of meaning and truth. Describe this person.

- Think of a person who embodies service to others as their spiritual path. You might think of someone in a helping or healing profession. Describe this person. How is their service a spiritual practice?

F. Key Themes and Assumptions

A traditional student of the *Yoga Sūtras* would already have a familiarity with the ideas in this section. These six topics provide a foundation for efficient study of the text.

1. Evolution and involution
2. *Puruṣa* and *prakṛti*/Seer and seen
3. *Karma* and reincarnation
4. The mind complex or *citta*
5. Ethics of the *Yoga Sūtras*
6. Who is īśvara?

1. Evolution and involution

In classical Indian philosophy, the school of yoga is viewed as aligned with the school of *sāṃkhya.* Both *sāṃkhya* and yoga have several schools and versions. The *Sāṃkhya Kārikās* by Isvarakrishna is the classic text of *sāṃkhya* codified a few hundred years later than the *Yoga Sūtras*. It is derived from ancient prototypes, and is generally considered the oldest classical Indian philosophy. It is interesting to note that there are several verses regarding the nature of the universe and its purpose that are virtually identical in the two texts.

All versions of *sāṃkhya* philosophy aim at explaining evolution. In its many forms, yoga always explains involution, the reversal of evolution in the individual's journey. *Sāṃkhya* explains how the universe flows forth; *yoga* is a journey of what is manifested moving back to Source. The structure of samadhi in *Yoga Sūtras* is a reverse of the evolution in the *Kārikās.*

Both *sāṃkhya* and yoga separate the crucial attributes of the universe (and of humans) into pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) and materiality (*prakṛti*). Patañjali refers to *puruṣa* as the Seer and *prakṛti* as the Seen. In *sāṃkhya*, the mere proximity of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* inspires the many transformations and manifestations of the material world. The word, *sāṃkhya*, means number, and it speaks to the unfolding or transformation of *prakṛti*, the material world. *Puruṣa*, pure consciousness, however, never changes.

Later traditions or schools of *sāṃkhya* and yoga drop the dualistic split between pure consciousness and materiality. Like these later traditions, Theosophists accept the two aspects (materiality and spirit), but view them as subservient to an overarching Reality.

Why might Patañjali have framed the *Yoga Sūtras* dualistically? One possibility is that the *Yoga Sūtras* refuses to fall prey to theory-making and philosophical arguments. Compiled from the experiences of many practitioners, the text strives to focus on the practice and essential concepts that inform the practice. If spiritual confusion is the root of our suffering, then untangling our misperception of spirit and world, truth and assumption, eternal and transitory, is an act of separation that paradoxically leads back to union.

The untangling is largely the work of distinguishing the personality and its desires from our essence or soul—not an easy task. The personality is too ready to jump in with *all is one*, as long as *my* personality is the one! Meditators often experience the juxtaposition of a sense of oneness interrupted by an annoying insect or personal worry. Perhaps Patañjali was wise enough to understand that, in a practical sense, a human being needs to do the work of discriminating between what is spirit and what is personality or materiality first, before attempting to ascend to a state of unity. That work is done internally, and its highest form, *samādhi,* is an experience of the realization of unity, unforced.

At this point, knowing that yoga as a philosophy has roots in the oldest Indian philosophy, *sāṃkhya*, and that both yoga and *sāṃkhya* philosophies have been modified over the centuries, is enough to begin the study. The core of the understanding holds: Evolution is the unfolding of the universe and all aspects of the material world, including humanity. The task of the individual is reversal or involution back to the source. Yoga is the reversal of what has unfolded, and its journey takes the practitioner back to what is Real.

2. Puruṣa and prakṛti/Seer and seen

These two fundamental principles are rich in meaning and definitions are abundant. In the *Yoga Sūtras*, one can think of *puruṣa* and the Seer as the same, both words representing the purest of consciousness or spirit. *Prakṛti* is that which is Seen, the world or materiality. *Prakṛti* is in a state of unmanifested potential when it is not in proximity to consciousness. When matter (*prakṛti* or the Seen) is in the presence of consciousness, it expands in a complex interplay of the three basic characteristics (*guṇa*): light, activity, and inertia. Involution for the individual is finished when the fluctuations of the mind are stilled, human drama ceases, and karmic impulses are unwound. At that point, the Seer (*puruṣa* or Pure Consciousness) abides in itself.

3. Karma and reincarnation

Most Theosophists are familiar with reincarnation as part of the cycle of evolution, the vehicle through what is permanent (or essence or spirit or soul) travels. *Karma* refers to a complex law concerning cause and effect. It also implies that energy expended in the inner and outer world has balance and equilibrium. These understandings provide a framework for most of Indian philosophy and religion.

Although *karma* is sometimes portrayed as deterministic, Theosophists understand that this law provides the basis for living a responsible life and making wise and compas-

sionate choices. The *Yoga Sūtras* describes how the mind/*citta* is driven by karmic traces of the past, and karmic traits developed over many lifetimes, and in this sense, the path is set. However, the way to take action and unwind these tendencies and conditioning is also described. As the meditator knows, the choice to be present is in each moment.

Is *karma* only related to the individual? Does it apply only to our actions and their consequences over lifetimes? In *The Key to Theosophy*, Blavatsky adamantly responds in the negative. Because humans are interconnected, their *karma* is interwoven. Thus, as a student progresses, they can positively affect change for all humanity in some way. No one acts or suffers the effects of the action alone: "Do you not perceive that the aggregate of individual *Karma* becomes that of the nation to which those individuals belong, and further, that the sum total of National Karma is that of the World?" (1995, p. 202-203).

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- As you reflect on this National Karma (also called Distributive Karma), how does that affect your perception of some of the infamous episodes of human history? How do individuals hold the effects of history?
- In social justice work, systemic racism is a term that describes how the economy, politics, education, social policy, and religion create entrenched social, political, and economic inequalities. How is this similar or different to your understanding of *karma* as belonging to more than the individual?

4. The mind complex called citta

Patañjali uses the term *citta* for a combination of the cognitive mind, higher or spiritual intellect, and the sense of self-identity and ego. A common translation is mind or mind-stuff, both of which are a little misleading. *Citta* replaces the terms used in *sāṃkhya* (and familiar to Theosophists) of *buddhi*, *manas*, and *ahaṃkāra.* In *sāmkhya*, these three, together with the five senses, five action capabilities, and five subtleties of sound, contact, form, taste, and smell formed a subtle-body, or *linga-śarīra*. In Patañjali, *citta* absorbed this role, although its constituents did not include the additional 15 elements. *Citta* includes that which could be reborn.

Citta encompasses all aspects of intelligence, yet is ultimately mental activity and materiality and can take the yogi only so far. In both *sāmkhya* and *Yoga Sūtras*, *citta* exists solely for the sake of Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*). The yogi who sees the most subtle distinction between mind (*citta*) and Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*) discontinues cultivating the false self.

5. Ethics of the Yoga Sūtras

How are ethics related to self-realization? In much of Indian philosophy and the great epics, being able to discriminate the truth of ethical dilemmas, and being able to perfect ethical responses is a prerequisite for spiritual attainment. Rama, the hero of the *Rāmayāna*, is a perfected man/god who clearly struggles at times with his role and circumstances. Through insight and wisdom, Rama acts in accordance with his duty and ethics. The *Bhagavad-gītā* starts with the ethical dilemma presented by the violence of a

battle. Here, also, struggles are investigated in light of ethics and resolved by reaching a higher level of existence.

Ethical and moral precepts are guides for the seeker or practitioner. They help resolve dilemmas before they are presented. They help avoid mistakes that arose in the past and give a framework for difficult decisions. The precepts found in the *Yoga Sūtras* are built on a code developed over centuries and function as the foundation for practice.

In the *Yoga Sūtras*, ethics usually refer to the ten high-level commitments in Chapter 2 (2.30-2.32). However, there are other *sutras* that support these ethical commitments. For example, non-violence, the first ethical commitment, is supported by cultivating an attitude of friendliness toward those who are happy, compassion toward the virtuous, and indifference towards vice (1.33). These instructions avoid ingrained emotional responses from the past. For example, others' happiness might have inspired jealousy, but responding with friendliness will inhibit the drama and lessen the karmic ties.

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is the foundation of yoga ethics. Reflect on how non-violence shows up in your life, your relationships, your self-talk, and your goals in life.
- What are the rules you have about violence in terms of your actions or actions towards you? It might help to think of an example: Would you bully someone? What would happen if someone bullied you? Would you allow another person to be bullied in front of you?
- How is violence related (or not) to judgment or competition?
- How is violence a system? Think about a thought or words or behavior one might find violent. What happens when that thought, word, or behavior is unleashed? How does that affect others? The environment? How do they respond? Does it become a chain effect? How does the response become the desire to continue (as in a violent action inspires revenge)?
- Reflect on or discuss this quote from Martin Luther King: "*The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing that it seeks to destroy. . . . Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that*."

6. Who is īśvara?

What does īśvara represent in the *Yoga Sūtras*? *Īśvara* is often translated as Lord, or god, or God. These translations can be both helpful and misleading. Words like God have deep and distinct resonances in each person, depending on one's background, religion, and assumptions. It is no wonder that īśvara has spawned debate over the centuries.

Sāṃkhya philosophy does not assume a creator god such as exists in Judeo-Christian traditions. It makes sense in that framework: If god were part of materiality (*prakṛti*) it would be touched by the material world and *karma*, and thus not free or pure (consciousness). At the same time, if god is (only or purely) consciousness (*puruṣa*), there is no desire or impetus to create.

How does Patañjali speak about *īśvara*? *Īśvara* is the ultimate seer, all-knowing, and the teacher of the ancients. Untouched by experiences and actions that feed the cycle of rebirth, *īśvara* has always been liberated. Chanting the sound of *īśvara*, OM, is a purification practice that removes the obstacles guides the practitioner to the realization of the meaning of OM.

At times, the word, *īśvara,* is used in the sense of absolute reality like Brahman. At other times, a practical translation is used: A *personal god* or God. This personal god is an externalization (a focus in our mind) for love, devotion, and meditation. *Īśvara* is unlimited and untouched by *karma*, yet we can still, as devotees, have a relationship that helps us focus. Patañjali prescribes devotion to *īśvara* as an essential part of the praxis. Why? Simply, concentration on *īśvara* helps the practitioner loosen the bonds of personality and become more like *īśvara.*

For those with strong beliefs about God in any form, there may be relief or dismay in Patañjali's references to *īśvara*. Patañjali was careful to discuss devotion to *īśvara* from the perspective of practice rather than religion and its beliefs. *Īśvara* appears in three separate areas of the *Yoga Sūtras*, all in relationship to practice. Perhaps the act of devotion and chanting directed towards the purest of all aspects is more important than a doctrinal debate.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- What does God or god mean to you?
- How did these beliefs and understandings arise?
- How is the description of *īśvara* the same or different than your conception of god?

G. What Does It Mean to Be Free?

In the *Yoga Sūtras,* the word *kaivalya* designates the final attainment of the yogi when involution back to Source is accomplished. The fourth chapter delineates the last moments before spiritual confusion ends, but it says little about what is the yogi like *after* liberation? Commentators expound on this topic, but Patañjali remains artfully vague. While the *Yoga Sūtras* gives countless instructions on how to behave, focus the mind, shift inattention, and judge what is Real and what is not, there are very few words or verses to hint at what happens next after enlightenment.

Dasgupta, a well-known philosopher and a commentator on yoga, saw *kaivalya* as an end to the psychological nature of the enlightened yogi (2005, p. 314). Although still alive in the material world, the yogi would exist in clarity of insight and detachment to the material world. Whicher, a later writer on the *Yoga Sūtras*, suggests that there would be a shift in the yogi's reengagement with the world since now the yogi's authentic identity was established (2000). Others have seen in the term, *kaivalya*, as a complete withdrawal from the world. Ravindra framed *kaivalya* as freedom from the self (ego/personality) rather than freedom from the world (2009).

Theosophical writers, including Besant, have seen the ultimate goal of yoga as a realization of unity, a step beyond Brotherhood: "Greater than brotherhood are identity and realisation of the Self as one" (1979/1908, p. 150). Besant also labels the power of yoga, perhaps referring to the attainments in Chapter 3, as potentially evil. For her, *kaivalya* is isolation and power; the (desired) enlightenment of yoga she terms *nirvana.*

Given Patañjali's warnings and his moral and ethical guidelines, it is likely that he would agree that the power of focused attention could result in harm. One might think of the driven people in the world today whose sights are firmly set on acquisition, or money, or revenge, or power over others. Focus is not the same as enlightenment.

A valuable insight comes from Iyengar's translation of the *Yoga Sūtras.* In Chapter 2, *kriyā* (action) yoga is described as an intense practice, self-study, and devotion to *īśvara*. At the point when a student becomes an adept yogi, these practices reach their pinnacle and "friendliness, compassion, gladness and oneness flow benevolently in body, consciousness and speech to live in beatitude" (2002, p. xvi). This beautiful description is not about a yogi on a mountaintop alone and unconscious; this refers to a free, living being, transformed.

Krishnamurti speaks of the mind in perfect order and silence. In a line reminiscent of the fourth chapter of the *Yoga Sūtras*, he tells us that "in that silence there is the emptying of the mind of all the past" (2071, p. 15). When the mind's state is profound silence, it is expansive. "Nobody can describe it. Anybody who describes it, doesn't know what it is. It's for you to find out" (p. 16). In another lecture, Krishnamurti asks what happens when there is no content or movement in the mind (1999, p. 121). "Is it compassion? Or is it beyond all that...When there is no movement is there something totally original, totally untouched by humanity…That may be that which is original and therefore most holy. …Where there is something most holy…then life has a totally different meaning. It is never superficial, never" (p. 122).

As we step back from everyday thought and witness the intent and energy of the mind, we can practice discrimination. Discriminating thought is a praxis requiring intense awareness, and its ultimate form is the liberating tool of the *sāṃkhya* tradition*.* Discrimination happens on many levels—is this action or behavior kind? Are these words necessary? Is this thought compassionate? Is this Real? Ravindra tells us that *viveka*, the ultimate discrimination between *puruṣa* (pure consciousness) and what is not *puruṣa*, is at the heart of the practices in the *Yoga Sūtras*. The result of the practices is "both wisdom and compassion, better to say love, which is love of God and love for the creatures of God. We become responsible for the welfare of and the maintenance of order in the creation . . . as we begin to see that it is God manifesting Himself in His creation and we are instruments of His care for the world" (2009, p. 178).

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- If we were free of the personal ego, our mind would be much quieter! Decisions would be reached with insight. Compassion would be possible without the personality seeking gratification. We could be silly because we lack attachment to a self-image. Step in these ego-free shoes for a moment? What is this like?

- Who do you know that embodies the ego-free qualities listed above?
- How are ego and judgment related? As personal ego decreases, does judgment decrease?
- In your meditation, consider a judgment you have about something or someone. Who would you be without that judgment? If you let it go, what would change? Could you act without holding judgment?
- How do you let disturbing things release? Be curious. Is it a factor of time? Do you put it behind you? Do you distract yourself? Reflect? Ruminate? How is holding on an act of ego?
- How hard would it be to give up a need for recognition or the need for attention?
- Which of these quotes speaks to you? Why?
    - "There is nothing mystical about liberation, because it is the radical act of laying down the burden, the mental burden. It is the right now, radical act of dropping the mind. Dropping the mind is laying down the mental burden. It is transcending the mind, losing all of our mental concepts." Anam Thubten, from *The Magic of Awareness.*
    - "Prayer involves becoming silent, and being silent, and waiting until God is heard." Soren Kierkegaard, quoted in David Jones, *Illustrations.*
    - "To lose your inner world is eternal silence. It is to become the shining." Adyashanti, from *The Way of Liberation.*
    - "When we meet the world with recognition, acceptance, investigation, and nonidentification, we discover that wherever we are, freedom is possible, just as the rain falls on and nurtures all things equally." Jack Kornfield, from *Bringing Home the Dharma: Awakening Right Where You Are.*

Part Two: Selected Verses

IV. Chapter One: *Samādhi*

A. Overview

Patañjali begins with an elucidation of *samādhi*, a deep meditative state resulting from continued effort on the part of the yogi. The first chapter offers a vision of where devoted practice will lead. When the mind (*citta*) is finally still and quiet, then the true self (the Seer, Pure Consciousness, or *ātman*) is known. The task of the *Yoga Sūtras* is to teach practices leading to stillness and Realization.

This chapter categorizes the possible contents of the mind to help make the activity conscious. To quiet the activity of the mind, dedicated practice and cultivation of non-attachment or dispassion is required. Without yoga, the mind is deceived into believing it, the mind, is the Seer, Pure Consciousness. It is not; but a realization of the Truth is possible. When practice and dispassion are performed with trust, energy, and deep knowledge, they form the basis for attaining the highest level of practice, *samādhi*. *Samādhi* has levels and variations, and practitioners work at different levels of intensity. Results follow accordingly.

Devotion to *īśvara* is a powerful way to restrain the inattention and distractions of the mind. The practice of chanting *OM* removes obstacles to the realization of the Self. These obstacles include illness, losing focus, doubting yoga will work, being lazy and neglecting one's practice, indulging oneself, and becoming deluded or confused about what is going on. A yogi who is in the midst of these obstacles will suffer, feel depressed, become anxious, and experience disturbed breathing.

Another aid to a quiet mind is to react differently to other people. When individuals are happy, then be friendly and supportive. When people are suffering, be compassionate. When people are doing good things, be delighted, not jealous or critical. When someone is acting badly, be impartial and rational in one's responses. These reactions reinforce clarity of mind.

What else helps? Breathing practices, paying attention to subtle sensory information without judgment, being truly joyful, imaging life without chasing after desires, and paying attention to insights from deeper states of consciousness are all part of the practices. The practitioner is also free to pick their focus for work and meditation. Eventually, when deep wisdom and insight abide, the mind is increasingly intuitive, and karmic impressions dissipate. As thoughts unwind and the ego fades, and spirit is freed.

The *Yoga Sūtras* defines levels of *samādhi* that denote increasing subtlety and freedom from busy thought. When the meditator, the object of meditation, and the act of meditating fuse, it is called *samāpatti.* With practice, *samāpatti* becomes intuitive and reflective. Beyond even subtle reflection, beyond words, beyond having a beginning focus at all, is *samādhi* without an object or seed as a focus of meditation. At this stage, insight halts the formation of new conditioning. "A person who comes out of true Samadhi brings with him transcendent knowledge, wisdom, peace, strength of inner life while others simply return no wiser than if from sleep" (Taimni, 1961, p. 285).

The distinctions and classifications of *samādhi* are difficult to conceptualize. Taimni ties the stages of *samādhi* to the Theosophical planes of manifestation (1961, p. 38). Feuerstein translates *samādhi* as enstasy, and identifies the stages with detail and history. Initially, there is an element of cognition (focused at the object of meditation); then cognition recedes. Another level develops with a reflection on the subtle form or state of the object of focus; then the state moves beyond reflection. A state of bliss arises and recedes. A state of being one with the essence of the object arises; then that awareness recedes. Then a state beyond (supraconscious) consciousness arises, beyond identification, beyond reflection, and beyond cognition. This stage of *samādhi* called *asaṃprajñāta,* described by Feurerstein describes as "temporary Self-Realization" (1998, p. 252-254).

The complexity of the levels or categories of *samādhi* can seem theoretical. Should you wish to understand these gradations through actual practice, Vyaas Houston's *Yoga Sūtras: The Practice, Part 1* (n.d.) provides specific instructions for the student. The stages are described, and practice using an element such as water (its physical character, the essential nature, the subtle nature; with language, without words, etc.) is outlined.

B. Key Verses

1. Definitions of yoga

> **YS 1.2-1.4, 1.12:** *Yoga is the process of stilling the mind. (Or, yoga is the process of ending the fluctuations of the mind.) Then the Seer (Self, the Real, Pure Consciousness) abides in its own essence or true nature. Otherwise, the moving thoughts of the mind are misinterpreted and perceived as the Real, the Self. The process of ending the movements of the mind involves devoted practice and non-attachment.*
>
> **YS 2.1.** *The activity of yoga (kriyā yoga) is an intense discipline in practice, learning or self-study, and devotion towards īśvara.*

Comment

What is yoga? First, it is a process with the intent of moving towards stillness and sustained focus. It is not the cessation of thought, although thoughts may be more spacious and the atmosphere calmer. It leads ultimately to a realization of the true Self or to experiencing Pure Consciousness as the truth of one's nature, leaving the clamor and confusion of life behind. It is the process of Realization or transformation that replaces human ignorance about our spiritual nature. It involves devotion to practice, devotion to something higher (God), and self-study. Simply, it involves a passion for practice and dispassion towards the material world.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- Read different translations of these five verses and compare them. How do these definitions of yoga relate to your own practices of mindfulness or meditation?
- Yoga requires, at the very least, that
  a) We notice what is going on (witness the constant commentary).
  b) Discriminate between what is personality-oriented and what is spirit-oriented.

c) Train the mind to stay on point and when it does wander, return to focus.

One way to disengage the moving, inattentive mind is to begin to distinguish between the mind observing bare sensory experience and the mind evaluating and judging.

Observation: Being present, noting what is happening now, then now, then now. Example: *The lights in the room are on.* (Just the fact.)

Evaluation: Judging, liking/disliking, hooking on to connections that turn into stories. Example: *I bet Jonas left the lights on again. I told him to turn them off*. (This begins a story that can lead to the recall of similar events or emotions. It can start a long dialogue about Jonas, the electric bill, or people who do not do what you say.)

- Take a few minutes to monitor your thoughts. It can be helpful to say them aloud, perhaps as a partner exercise. When an evaluation or judgment arises, find the observation underneath it. For example, your evaluation is: "This is hard to do." The observation might be: "I noted three judgments in my thoughts in just three minutes." Observing builds the skill of focus, but evaluations entice attention away, leading to a chain of thought and story-telling. After you practice this exercise, make a few notes about its impact.
- How does meditation work on our mental patterns and the noise in our head? Krishnamurti said that "any disturbance that is created in (my mind) soon dies, leaving it unruffled as before" (cited in Ravindra, 2003, p. 17). It might be discouraging to compare our own mental abilities to this level of skill, but what has helped you so far? How do you let go or soothe mental disturbances?
- In *prāṇāyāma,* there is an emphasis on the holdings at the top of the inhale and the bottom of the exhale. These pauses are called a *glimpse into eternity* by some teachers and used as an entry into deeper silence. If the breathing regulation does not cause physical strain for you, practice a slow breath with short pauses for a few minutes. A typical pattern would be a slow inhale for a count of 4, a pause for a count of 1-2, a slow exhale for 4, and a pause at the bottom for 1-2. What is the effect on your mind after only two or three minutes?

2. Devotion to īśvara

YS 1.23-1.29*: Or by surrender to īśvara (the Lord, god, ultimate seer, god inside each person). Īśvara is distinct, Pure Consciousness, free of effects arising from karma. (In īśvara) the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed. That (īśvara), not being limited by time, is also the teacher of the ancients (seers). The sacred syllable (OM) is the expression of īśvara. Repetition (of OM) reveals its meaning. Hence the attainment of inward directed consciousness and the disappearance of the obstacles.* **Note**: Obstacles are listed in 1.30, discussed in the next section.

Comment

Īśvara is the spirit in each of us that is free of conditioning, that is unlimited with unsurpassed insight. Surrendering our personality, our conditioned self to *īśvara* and chanting the sacred OM, redirects consciousness inside towards silence. In this silent space, the conditioning that created everyday obstacles to inner peace (like laziness, and doubt) dissolves.

Is this an alternative route to freedom or Realization? Or is it an adjunct to *samādhi?* It is probably both. Humans have a need to visualize or conceptualize that which is beyond our limited minds. Taimni sees devotion to *īśvara* as "another path" (1961, p. 55). Iyengar sees it as a shift in the focus of meditation (2002). Later, in Chapter 2, Patañjali will refer to devotion to god as both an ethical commitment and as part of the definition of yoga.

It might be useful to reflect on what devotion means in this context. It is not simply a moment of intense feeling, but rather a profound shift in one's priorities. Devotion is commitment, love, fidelity, zeal, perhaps even attachment. It becomes the focus of life, and life becomes the meditation. For example, when we are devoted to a parent or child, we keep them in mind through contact or reminders. The sight of them stimulates love, and when they are not present, their photo, or a thought, or a voice on the phone reignites our love. We are not intentionally bringing them to mind, but their presence is always close to our thoughts and hearts.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions:***

- What words or images or feelings come to you when you think about *īśvara*? How is *īśvara* the same and how is *īśvara* different than a Master?
- Chanting is a significant practice in yoga. What happens when you chant? Does your personality pop up or recede? Do you feel submerged in the sound? Is it disturbing or quieting?
- OM or AUM has several explanations. It is often called the universal sound. It is said to incorporate all sounds. Rolling from the back of the throat, it sounds out all Sanskrit vowels. It is identified with the Absolute, and also with states of consciousness. As a mantra, it is both a sign and a symbol, but unlike other mantras, it is synonymous with its meaning. Try these ways of internalizing OM:

  Sit for a few minutes quietly. When you have centered, open your ears to the sounds in the room, outside the room, and in your body. With each sound, hear OM, whether it is the wind, the breath, or a car noise outside. Find the *OM* in every sound.

  After you have practiced the exercise above, can you find the *OM* in a person or a person's voice with whom you have difficulties?

  Should you feel agitated, practice hearing the chanting of *OM* in your mind for one minute, timed to your breath. What happens after a minute or about eight breaths?

3. The difficulties of the yogic path

> **YS 1.30-1.32:** *The obstacles (to steady attention) are sickness, apathy, doubt, negligence, laziness, indulgence in desires, delusion/confusion, lack of progress, instability (of results, backsliding into old habits*). *Suffering, depression/despair, anxiety/nervousness, and disordered breathing co-exist with these obstacles. To prevent these obstacles, practice single-mindedly.*

Comment

Yoga and meditation are touted as a remedy for many problems, including high blood pressure, balance issues, depression, memory issues, distraction, posture, lack of empathy, anxiety, mental (unconscious) bias and reactivity, and pain reduction. Contemporary research confirms these positive results. Meditation accompanied by even, deep breath, a non-judgmental attitude, in a quiet place, with an attitude of detachment, activates our parasympathetic nervous system and promotes mental and physical health. So, while it might seem glib to say *just practice more* when obstacles arise, there is some truth here. If these obstacles persist, they are not a reason to stop; they are reason to recommit.

Serious yoga practice will highlight our personal tendency towards one or more of these obstacles, and people are often blind to the connections. Humans possess a cognitive bias towards ignoring our own patterns even when the pattern is obvious to others. At the same time, we are prone to quickly judge and label others' behavior and see patterns where none exist. In other words, we are blind to our own habitual responses while we assume, often in error, that we see others' behavior accurately.

Disordered breathing is rarely discussed in modern medicine or psychology, yet it is both a cause and a symptom of distress. Practicing steady breathing, learning to regulate the breath, and learning to recognize and change disordered breathing are powerful tools to mental and physical health. In yoga, health allows the practitioner to more fully dive into consciousness.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions:***

- When you read the list of obstacles in YS 1.30 and 1.31, which ones are most likely to derail you personally? Why?
- This simple practice is useful for moments of stress and distress. After a deep breath, ask:
    a. What word or two describes my state or emotion?
    b. Where do I experience the sensations in my body?
    c. Then put a hand on your heart as a symbol of acknowledgment or acceptance.
- If breath practice is not part of your routine, experiment for a few days with five complete breaths a few times a day. Some people find this helpful before bed-time. If at any time the practice is not comfortable, adjust or stop.

A complete breath: Start by emptying the lungs completely by squeezing the belly muscles slightly. Breathe in through your nose, letting the belly rise. Continue the inhale, expanding the ribcage and bringing the breath up towards the collarbones. Pause, then slowly pour the breath off through pursed lips.

4. Guidelines for behavior and interactions

YS 1.33: *By cultivating friendliness towards happiness, compassion towards suffering, delight towards virtue, and equanimity/dispassion towards vice, the mind is purified (tranquil).*

Comment

This beautiful verse gives the reader, in a nutshell, guidelines for many of life's interactions. As a powerful aid to shifting mental perspective in a direction that supports spiritual growth, these guidelines are best explored through examples and reflection.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- When you notice a person who appears happy, is it easy to be friendly? Why or why not?
- When an animal is suffering, what is your response? When a person is suffering, what is your response? When is it easy to be compassionate, and when do you turn away?
- When someone has done the right thing, what is your response? Are you happy for them? Delighted in the good that has been done? Are you often hyper-critical? Envious? What triggers your critical mind or your jealous heart?
- When someone does something immoral, mean, or wicked, what is your response? Have you found that judgment leads to more drama or judgment? How do you continue to have right action in the face of another's vice?
- How is dispassion related to compassion?
- In this exercise, use your imagination to explore verse 1.33.

  Imagine you are standing at the edge of a village. See yourself begin to walk through the village. You first encounter a person who is happy and good, and you interact with ease and friendliness with this happy person. As you walk further, you encounter someone who is obviously suffering. You interact showing compassion and kindness for their suffering. As you continue walking, you find a person who has behaved virtuously. Notice your delight in the goodness of others.

  Towards the end of your walk, you notice a person is acting unkind or angry towards another person or animal. Take any action you think you must take, but do it without judgment or an attempt to shame or blame or force. You act with integrity, but also with detachment or dispassion, simply doing what needs to be done.

At the end of this walk or journey, you find a place to rest in quiet. You reflect on these encounters. What was easy? What was difficult?

V. Chapter Two: The Practice

A. Overview

In the second chapter, Patañjali arrives at the heart of these spiritual teachings with the practices themselves (*sādhana*). Practice requires intensity and ascetic heat (*tapas*), self-learning (*svādhyāya)* and alignment with (or devotion to) *īśvara.* These practices simultaneously weaken the obstacles (*kleśa*) that humans face, the foremost being ignorance of our true or Real nature. Other obstacles develop from this ignorance: egotism, attachments (like and want), aversions (dislike), and clinging to our physical or known existence. These obstacles create the drama of human life.

What is meant by ascetic heat or *tapas*, the first requirement? The word asceticism implies severity, restriction, austerity, withdrawal from everyday life, avoidance of any ease or pleasure. *Tapas* connotes heat, burning, and intensity. It implies physical, mental, and social inhibition to help control attachment and desire. *The Yoga Upaniṣads* provides deeper interpretation: "What is release from bondage? How? Wherefore does one attain the wheel of births and deaths? Enquiries such as these, men of learning, that know the inner significance of things, know as *Tapas*" (Ayyangar, 1938, p. 121). The intensity of searching for the why, the how, and for freedom from the cycle of birth and death is a profound meaning of asceticism.

Later in the second chapter, Patañjali outlines the classic eight limbs or aspects (*aṣṭāṅga*) of yoga. The two first steps (*yama* and *niyama*) delineate guidelines for the practitioner's ethical stances. Starting with the most basic ethical principle, non-violence, nine additional commitments are summarized: truth, non-stealing, appropriate use of sexual energy, non-grasping, cleanliness, contentment, a fiery devotion to the practice, self-study, and devotion to *īśvara*.

Although many Westerners know yoga through the physical postures, Patañjali only briefly mentions postures *(āsana),* the third limb, as a stable and comfortable seat for meditation. With a stable seat, the meditator can stay motionless without effort, remaining neutral and unaffected by swings between pain and pleasure, hot and cold, and feeling happy or sad. Yoga postures are useful to help the mind settle, fostering relaxation and then alert stillness; that is their purpose.

The fourth limb is *prāṇāyāma*, or mastery of life force and breath. The fifth limb is *pratyāhāra*, a turning of the senses inward in preparation for the last three limbs, all related to meditation. *Dhāraṇā*, the sixth limb, develops when the student learns to stay focused with the mind in one place. For the beginner, this can be an exasperating practice. A firm intent is set, only to be forgotten a moment later. At the point when concentration is stabilized, a deeper or subtler state arises called *dhyāna,* the seventh limb, often translated as meditation. *Samādhi*, the eighth limb, encompasses the more advanced states of absorption described in the first chapter.

B. Key Verses

1 . Avidyā and kleśa

YS 2.2-2.10: *The purpose of yoga practices is to lead the practitioner to profound states of meditation (samādhi) and thereby weaken the causes of pain and distress. There are five causes of pain and distress (kleśa). The first one is the ground or basis for the others, whether the other four are active or dormant. The first cause is our ignorance (avidyā), when we confuse the non-eternal for the eternal, the impure for the pure, pain and suffering for good and pysleasure, and, most importantly, the non-self for Self.*

The second cause (kleśa) is our sense of "I am ____" (asmitā). It is the mistaken notion that our identity is the content of the world (what is seen) rather than spirit (or pure consciousness or what is Real).

The third cause (kleśa) of pain and distress is the attraction or attachment to pleasure (rāga). The fourth is our aversion to the negative experiences (dvesa). The fifth is the strong desire towards self-preservation, or maintaining the status quo of life (abhiniveśa). This one exists even for the sages. The subtle forms of these causes are canceled in yoga through the process of reversal (of how they were acquired).

Comment

The meditator simultaneously refines consciousness while clearing the impediments. The core obstacle or stumbling block to this process is *avidyā*, ignorance of our true nature. We do not know that at our core, our nature is spirit or divine, and we mislabel our personality as the Real, the Self. We think we have to achieve, do, or be something to reach somewhere wonderful. Even a desire to be enlightened is a form of separation and attachment. We acquire so many knots in our thinking that we end up living in a maze of our own creation, not knowing what drives us.

Discrimination in yoga means developing one's intelligence and intuition to order to identify what is True and Real. The human predilection for disturbed or egotistical thinking prevents spiritual progress, and these tendencies are deceptive, seductive, and distracting. Thus, there is value in looking objectively at likes, dislikes, fears, and egotism to identify the errors that keep us separate from our spiritual nature.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- A format for practicing discrimination:
    a. Take time to center and breathe. Then, when a thought comes, decide: Does this thought embody a spiritual truth?
    b. If it does, stay with the presence of the thought. Let yourself verbalize the truth of it. Then allow the words fade.
    c. If not, if this is an everyday thought coming to the surface, use a consistent phrase to acknowledge and move on. For example, you might

say to yourself: “Not necessary” or “Ah…”. Then return to a deeper silence.

Example: As I sit, I start to think about my next meal. I acknowledge the thought as not necessary and move on. As I sit, I think of a disturbing memory. I acknowledge this memory and move on. As I sit, an image of someone I love comes to me. I might choose to focus on love, which seems closer to Real, or I might move on. As I sit, I listen to silence. I acknowledge the silence and abide there until another thought comes.

Most thoughts fall into the category of not necessary. They are repetitious, random, distracting, painful, planning, or sensory thoughts. By acknowledging them, rather than condemning yourself for thinking, you help neutralize their influence. Our ability to discriminate is a muscle, and the active use of this muscle creates easiness in practice.

- What are you attached to? In discussion or a journal, make a survey starting with the examples below. Note which are important and valuable to you.

  People
  Places
  Your roles
  Your job
  Social media
  Hopes and daydreams
  Your fears
  How you look
  What you believe
  What you know
  Who likes you
  Status
  Image

- Sort through a puzzling or negative situation by identifying which of the obstacles (*kleśā*) are involved. Consider these questions:

  a) Was I attracted to something or someone? What did I desire?
  b) What did I dislike or hate or want to avoid?
  c) How was I clinging to the status quo?
  d) How did selfishness or ego show up? How was I defensive?
  e) How does this situation illustrate confusion (*avidyā*) about the true nature of each person involved?
  f) Is there something to learn that I might carry into other situations?

2. Freedom

> **YS 2.25:** *When this spiritual ignorance disappears, so does the false identification with materiality; then there is liberation (kaivalya).*

Comment

Avidyā is our false identification with the material world, including our body, in our current life. The absence of *avidyā* frees us from entanglement and drama. Iyengar says that this sutra deals with "snapping the link that binds the knower to the known" (2002, p. 135). The Seer is always "awareness personified," while our viewpoint is entangled with "the tricks of the mind."

Feuerstein (1989) says it like this: *Kaivalya* is "the Self's capacity for continuous apperception, or seeing, when that apperception is without any presented-ideas, that is 'alone'" (*kaivalya*) (p. 76). Liberation or freedom refers to freedom from the material world, whether it is desires, ego, attachment, or confusion. Pure consciousness or spirit is free already.

Ravindra (2009) ties it to human purpose, the true meaning of our life: "The human incarnation, which is a conjunction of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti,* is for a sacred purpose. . . To search for that purpose requires a clear perception and a high level of consciousness" (p. 80).

In the *Bhagavad Gītā,* Krishna is God in the guise of a charioteer, who instructs Arjuna, the ambivalent warrior. Krishna tells Arjuna that "the one who sees that the *guṇas* and nothing else are the doer, and knows what is above the *guṇas,* attains My state of being" (14.19) (Ravindra, 2017, p. 208). The three *guṇas* are forces representing the major characteristics pervading evolution. When the many manifestations of life are known as the non-self, when the personality is known as a mere actor, what remains is a realization of divine truth.

3. *Viveka*

> **YS 2.14-2.15:** *Joy is the fruit of right action; distress and pain are the fruit of wrong action. For the wise person (with viveka, with the ability to discriminate wisely), all is painful because all experiences lead to more consequences and karmic imprints.*

Comment

The *Yoga Sūtras* is for serious practitioners, and this verse speaks to those who are actively seeking to refine their decisions and choices. There is a simple delight in behaving with goodness. Wrong actions may cause one to experience guilt, punishment, or negative consequences over time. Harmful actions can also be pleasurable before they become painful. The wise person, with insight and discrimination, will understand that all actions are driven by the law of *karma*, and thus ultimately pain-producing.

Our actions, including our thoughts, have consequences, in this lifetime or others. While this is easy to say, it is hard to remember in the moment of action, and even harder to

monitor in our thoughts. These verses ask the student to step back from impulsiveness and habit to reflect on the necessity for engagement with what arises.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- How is it helpful to realize that all experiences are part of the law of *karma*? Is there resistance to this idea?
- Discuss an important issue in the world, like climate change or hunger, from the perspective of *karma*.
- Think of a time when you could identify an action you took as clearly right or wrong. Perhaps you helped another person. Perhaps you hurt someone with your words. What was your experience after the event? Did you experience joy or pain? Did you pondered the event for a time?
- We speak of *karma* as a law, but it might also be described as a system. Think of a time when there was a painful or hurtful action. You might think of a time when someone (or you) were disrespected. Perhaps this led to something else, and then something else—can you follow the trail? Of course, not all actions lead to a wide network of connections, but thoughts and actions have consequences beyond the transaction.

4. The eight-fold path

> **YS 2.29:** *The eight limbs of yoga are ethical self-regulation, ethical (right) observances, right posture, breath/life force regulation, retreat of the senses, focus, meditation, and deep meditative absorption.*

Comment

This is the comprehensive plan of practice. Note that devotion to *iśvara*, although not a separate limb, is included as part of the *niyamas*. The eight limbs expanded are:

1. *Yama:* 5 ethical principles for self-regulation (often regarding other people or the environment)
    a. *ahiṁsā:* non-harming
    b. *satya:* truthfulness, honesty
    c. *asteya:* non-stealing
    d. *brahmacarya:* wise use of sexual energy
    e. *aparigraha:* non-possessiveness, non-grasping
2. *Niyama:* 5 ethical observances (self-practices, virtues, or positive duties)
    a. *śauca*: purity/cleanliness
    b. *saṁtoṣa:* contentment
    c. *tapas:* training, practice, austerities

d. *svādhyāya:* self-study, reflection on spiritual texts and truths

e. *iśvara-praṇidhāna*: devotion to God/personal god/higher energies

3. *Āsana*: posture or seat
4. *Prāṇāyāma:* breath regulation (or life-force regulation)
5. *Pratyāhāra*: retreat of the senses
6. *Dhāraṇā:* ability to focus or concentrate
7. *Dhyāna*: sustained concentration; meditation
8. *Samādhi*: deep or profound immersion or absorption; deep state of consciousness

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- A student once asked me why non-attachment (*vairāgya*) was not part of the eight limbs of yoga. Perhaps non-attachment is the result of these practices, or a gauge of the practice, or an attitude of practice, rather than a separate activity. For example, meditation can leave a person more detached, and yet more compassionate at the same time. How does that happen? It is also possible to practice to please or impress someone else. In that case, attachment to the result would impede progress over time. Reflect on the boundary of motivation and attachment in your practice.
- Experience a simple practice of *prāṇāyāma* by bringing your arms up on an inhale and down on an exhale. (If it bothers your arm, just raise a finger, foot, or hand.) Time the movement and the breath so precisely that when you are halfway finished inhaling, your movement is halfway up. If you pause the breath, pause the movement. Can you feel the two (breath and arm) moving together? Can you focus so intently on the sensations for 10 breaths that auditory and visual senses start to recede (the beginning of *pratyahara*).

5. The ethics of yoga

YS 2.30-2.45: *Ethical self-regulation (yamas) includes (thoughts, intentions, and actions related to…) non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, appropriate sexual behavior, and non-grasping (or non-possession). These codes become a great vow when they are applied universally without regard to the other person's status, place, time, circumstance.*

Ethical observances (niyamas) are (the thoughts, intents, and actions related to…) cleanliness, contentment, self-discipline, spiritual self-study, devotion to higher self or God.

When disturbing/negative thoughts and feelings, cultivate the opposite. Cultivating the opposite helps one realize the harm in negative thoughts and actions. This is true despite how we participate (as self, done through others, or condoning); or what motivates us (greed, anger, or erroneous thinking), and no matter what the scale of the action (small, medium, large).

Once established in non-harm (ahiṁsā), hostilities are abandoned. Once established in truthfulness, the fruit of actions result from the yogi's intent. Once established in non-stealing, all riches present themselves. When acting amid awareness of the Absolute, great strength is achieved. When non-possessiveness is sustained, there comes an understanding of the how and why of incarnations (or, the purpose of existence).

Purity (cleanliness) results in non-identification with the body, and a distancing from the need of contact with others. When mind, body, and senses are cleansed, there is a joy of awareness that leads to fitness for Self-realization.

Contentment gives rise to unexcelled joy. Self-discipline results in the destruction of impurities and mastery over the physical body and senses. Self-study brings one into communion with the chosen deity. Mastery in samādhi arises from devotion to īśvara.

Comment

The first set of five ethical practices is called *yamas*, meaning a commitment to restrain conditioned behaviors and thoughts. Patañjali calls them the Great Vow for those on the yogic path. These restraints specify a code of conduct; they eradicate unethical action and assist in quieting the mind. Each of the five involves behavior in relationships; the aspirant is first obliged to modify his or her external life regarding others. The foundation of these ethical restraints is the first *yama,* non-violence.

The second set of practices is called *niyamas*. These purposeful actions or observances focus on deepening the yogi's practice and commitment. These vows are personal and positive: cleanliness and purity, contentment, a fiery devotion to practice (or austerity or asceticism), self-study, and devotion to a higher ideal or god.

There could easily be a shallow or mechanical interpretation for each of these observances. For example, the *niyama* of *śauca*, or cleansing, can simply refer to cleaning the body. However, *śauca* can also be said to embody the concept of purification of mind, ego, actions, as well as body. Non-violence, the first *yama*, is overtly a rule against killing or hurting, but it also supports the notion of thoughtfulness before action, contemplation of results, and interconnectedness. Given that violence is usually a display of domination over another being, non-violence supports non-egoism. Gandhi used it as a tool to flatten the hierarchy of colonial structure. If the right to dominate is vanquished, it is harder to justify violence.

Truthfulness, the second *yama*, is a significant practice. The practice of truth-telling in a more subtle sense requires exquisite attention and discrimination. In psychotherapy, encouraging a client to say the truth, as opposed to rationalizing, is a time-honored tradition that is thought to lead to healthier choices. Telling the truth can aid in unraveling unconscious automatic responses, such as denial or justification. Truth-telling is linked to a sense of alignment with values, higher principles, and one's sense of higher intelligence.

In its most concrete expression, non-stealing, the third *yama*, is behavioral. While we envisage stealing as the taking of objects, it can easily refer to the taking of ideas, friendship, time, and the taking or wasting of energy. Non-possessiveness or non-grasping can refer to greediness and a focus on acquisition, but it can also mean self-indulgence. Our

tolerance of small lies, envy, and greediness in our behavior strengthens the propensity for similar behaviors in the future. It is important to note that *saṃskāra*, karmic traces from past events, can be created by thought as well as deed. Neuroscience would agree that repetition in both thought and deed strengthen neural pathways in the brain and reduce the likelihood of creative or unconditioned response.

Each of these ethical principles is a lifelong practice. Their enumeration begins the yogic journey and informs it daily.

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- *Ahiṁsā*, or non-violence, non-harming, is the foundation of the other nine. *Ahiṁsā* is more than not killing; it is doing what you can to avoid unnecessary harm or pain to others both physically and emotionally. One of the most common and visible signs of *ahiṁsā* is a vow not to kill or harm people or animals. How is non-violence a part of your life overtly?
- Humans do violence to themselves with constant self-criticism, believing they are either more worthy than others or not worthy enough. They judge others maliciously. If this describes some of your thought habits, how can will you be non-violent with this violence inside?
- Many interactions with others involve a certain amount of struggle and power. We want our way; they want their way. Think about an example in your own life or experience: How does the underlying violence lead to more struggle, violence, and power-grabbing? What would lessen violence?
- *Satya*, truthfulness, shows up in actions and words. It is alignment with what we believe is right and what we believe can be verified. How does truthfulness relate to non-violence? How does truthfulness relate to wisdom?
- *Asteya* means not stealing. We can steal possessions, words, time, energy, attention. We can waste resources, which is a form of stealing. What do you consider the opposite of stealing?
- Explore one more ethical principle of your choice. The idea here is to observe and reflect, not to feel guilt or blame. Use these questions as a guide:
    a) What is the most obvious meaning of this particular *yama* or *niyama*?
    b) What might be a more subtle meaning?
    c) Is it an easy concept to embrace? Or is it foreign? Does it seem worthwhile? Does it seem crazy?
    d) How does this ethical value show up in your life? Give an example.
    e) Is this already a value in your life? If so, how does it guide your actions, words, and thoughts?
    f) If this principle were one of your most treasured values, how would your thoughts and actions be different?

- If these ten ethical guidelines were a focus of your life for a year, what would change?

6. The posture of yoga (āsana)

> **YS 2.46-2.48:** *The posture should be steady and comfortable. Perfect alignment stems from relaxation and results in a fusion with the infinite. From this correct posture, there is freedom from opposing dualities (pain/pleasure, etc.).*

Comment

Although many people know yoga primarily through physical postures, the primary role of *āsana* is to bring the physical body to a still, steady, and comfortable place. As anyone who has practiced *āsana* knows, this involves knowledge of the intent of the posture, strength to hold the posture, and relaxation of muscles not required to hold the posture. In this balance, the body is both dynamic and relaxed, alert and peaceful.

Yoga postures are about the mind-body connection; where there is peace, steadiness, balance, and strength in the body, there is often more easiness in the mind. This peace, steadiness, balance, and strength—this comfort in the seat or posture—is a perfect foundation for the two next stages of practice: *prāṇāyāma* (breath regulation) and *pratyāhāra* (retreat of the senses or sense-withdrawal).

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- If the body is still and steady, the mind will have a better chance of being still and focused. What posture do you use for meditation? Does it distract you after a few minutes? Have you have mastered a steady, comfortable posture? If your meditation posture is distracting, try these suggestions:
    a) Gently loosen or stretch the body before you start.
    b) Sit upright with natural curves in the spine. This means there is a curve in the lower back (so not slouching) and shoulders rest back and down. This may mean sitting in a chair, cross-legged, or in lotus position. If possible, sit without leaning back.
    c) Let your shoulders rest over your hips and gently pull your chin in to lengthen the neck. If your lower back aches in seated postures, a slight engagement of the abdominal muscles or lumbar support can help.
    d) If you are sitting in a chair, keep your feet on the floor. If cross-legged, sit on a cushion, blanket, or meditation cushion to counter tight hips or leg muscles.
    e) Allow muscles not holding you up (like your shoulders and jaw) to relax.
    f) Breathe through the nose when possible.
    g) Find a consistent place to put your hands. This could be a traditional *mudrā* (hand posture). Or, simply place your hands on your knees or in your lap.
    h) Close your eyes or look down at a spot on the floor. Even if your eyes are closed, hold them steady.

- What is your most common emotion? Happiness? Anger? Sadness? Confusion? What is your body doing to experience this emotion? Or, think about a person who expresses this emotion overtly. What is their pose or posture? How do they breathe and move?
- Can our physical body contain the memory traces (*saṃaskāra*) of our actions? If so, the holding, breathing, and releasing of yoga poses can bring awareness and release. For example, stress often shows up unconsciously in people's shoulders long after the stimulus for the stress has disappeared. A practice of releasing this stress makes the cycle more conscious. Explore how your thoughts show up in your bodies and how you let them go. How is this akin to the reversal of thought in *samādhi*, referred to in YS 2.10?

7. A mind ready for meditation

> **YS 2.50, 2.54, 2.55:** *Regulation of the breath involves exhalation, inhalation, and retention. Skill is gained in prolonging and refining the breath movement. Withdrawal of the senses (pratyāhāra) arises when senses are unengaged with the external world, thus the mind abides easier in its true nature. Then the highest mastery over the senses, the obedience of the senses, is realized.*

Comment

A steady and comfortable posture for the body positively affects one's mental state, and this is followed by the fourth step in the eight-fold path, regulation of the breath (*prāṇāyāma*). The breath is an unconscious signal and symptom of distress or peace, and even a brief practice of breath regulation can systematically affect one's health and progress.

Pratyāhāra, the fifth step, is translated as sense withdrawal. What does that mean? How can senses consciously retreat or withdraw? An example of a related phenomenon is the psychological state known as *flow* in which a person becomes so engrossed in an activity that they ignore physiological signals such as tiredness, temperature, and hunger. The person's self-talk revolves around the acting, planning, and conceptualization of the activity, and the world outside fades. In mindfulness meditation, the intent is to be present to what is going on, and while there is no withdrawal of the senses, there is an orientation towards the present without succumbing to attraction, judgment, or assumptions. In concentration meditation, sensory information is available, but there is turning inward towards the focus of meditation implying progressive freedom from sensory input. A student might think of *pratyahara* as an indicator that attention towards the object of focus is strengthening.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- In your next meditation:
  a) Open your ears to the sounds in the room, outside the room, in your body. Hear the sounds as if you are a child and have no information about them. They are simply sounds. One is not better than another, or more pleasing, or more

meaningful, or more important. Continue this practice for five minutes. If you start to comment on the sounds, come back to mindful listening.

b) Now, move your focus to the feel of your breath. Explore the differences in each breath. Is this breath more jerky or smooth? Left side or right side? Deep or shallow? Warm or cool? Become fascinated with the uniqueness of each breath.

c) Now, sit without an agenda. If senses become dominant (I hear a siren), hear/see/feel without comment or judgment. If a story or self-talk comes up, note it, then resume.

- Practice this same type of mindful listening with a friend or loved one. Can you avoid internal commentary or assumptions about what they are saying? Think of their words as your meditative focus and your job is to simply be there, listening. Act naturally, of course, so that your interaction is authentic.
- The next time you feel upset, notice your breathing pattern. Generally, being upset involves holding the breath, breathing shallowly, or panting. Restore your breathing to slow and easy for two minutes. What shifts?
- *Pratyāhāra* is commonly defined as the withdrawal of the senses, yet doesn't that leave a void? If your mind has no sensory data and no internal dialogue, where can it rest? Experiment with this sequence:
    a. Settle in. Quiet the body and breath.
    b. Spend 10 minutes in mindfulness meditation. See, hear, and feel what is happening just now.
    c. When centered, shift your focus to listening to the silence underneath what is seen, heard, and felt. You might experience this in the pauses between breaths, or you might listen intently to what is silent under the experience.

VI. Chapter 3: Attainments

A. Overview

The third chapter of the *Yoga Sūtras* describes the supernormal powers that arise from the perfected internal practice of fixed attention, concentration, and absorption. These powers or attainments (*siddhis)* include supernormal knowledge, abilities, and subtleties of mind leading to a knowledge of all. They can include mastery of the physical world and extraordinary powers for the body of the yogi, such as bodily perfection, mastery of senses, divine hearing, and a fiery radiance. Some writers dismiss the supernormal powers as silliness, magic, or delusion. This discredits the accounts of the yogis whose experiences provided the foundation for the *Yoga Sūtras*.

Attainments might seem to be simple signposts along the way, but the topic was important enough to fill most of a chapter. It might be useful to think about the intentions of the third chapter as three-fold: inform, inspire, and warn. Patañjali both acknowledges and warns that these powers are by-products of intense practice. Seeking these powers will lead the practitioner away from the true intent of yoga, and freedom lies in dispassion towards even the greatest of these powers.

Are these powers part of human heritage? The Theosophical Society's three Objects include the charge "to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in Man." This investigation is seen to be part of a spiritual journey and an awakening of the potential of each person (The Theosophical Society in America, 2019). There are many cautions in the Society's writings about how powers should be used, and this attitude mirrors and confirms the caution found in the *Yoga Sūtras*.

B. Key Verses

1. *Saṃyama and karma*

> **YS 3.4-3.8:** *Saṃyama, total attention (complete meditation), are these three (fixing the mind on one point, sustaining attention, and meditation with awareness of the object only) together. This gives rise to insight, illumination of higher consciousness. This happens in stages. These three steps are more internal or subtle than the previous steps or limbs of yoga. However, seedless samādhi, meaning samādhi without support for focus, is even more subtle/interior (the culmination of practice).*
>
> ***YS 3.9-3.10:*** *When the focus of meditation is the silence between the arising thoughts (arising from subliminal or karmic impressions), then consciousness is transformed towards silence and stillness. This is nirodhaḥ pariṇāmaḥ. This flow of silence becomes steady and tranquil.*

Comment

The uninitiated or untrained person possesses a mind that jumps from topic to topic. Awareness is captured by any stimulus and the mind is seduced by distractions. Yoga's first task is to build skills in stabilizing attention.

In 3.4, Patañjali defines an important term: *saṃyama. Saṃyama,* or complete meditation, includes *dhāraṇā, dhyāna*, *samādhi* with an object, called a seed, of meditation. Complete meditation is the common vehicle for the powers or attainments—only the object changes.

Dhāraṇā is the ability to concentrate and hold attention in one place. Think of it as the well-intentioned, but inexpert channeling of attention. When distractions can finally be held at bay, attention is sustained in *dhyāna*. Distractions may still arise in *dhyāna*, but attention rapidly reverts. Even at an advanced level of *dhyāna*, a duality exists between the meditator and the object of meditation. The meditator says: I focus on ___, and the "I" represents an illusion of identity. When the "I" finally begins to melt, the separation between consciousness of, and consciousness in, can dissolve, too. What remains is consciousness knowing and merged. With these barriers of separation removed, deeper subtleties of knowing emerge. A yogi in *samādhi* is absorbed or in resonance with the subtleties of the object of meditation. At this point, having proceeded through *dhāraṇā, dhyāna,* and *samādhi*, Patañjali says that complete meditation (*saṃyama*) has been achieved.

What if there is no meditator, no object, no directed attention? Then the yogi transcends the material world, abiding in a state of pure consciousness. The mind, *citta*, is restrained, stable, at peace. This is the ultimate power or attainment of yoga.

❖ *Journal or Discussion Questions*

- This can be a powerful exercise to experience a dissolving of self and experiencing a glimpse of this freedom. Think of it as taking off layers of clothes, and, as with clothes, you can always put the layers back on.

  Make sure you feel grounded and that you have practiced regularly for some time. First, consider your roles and qualities in normal life, listing 10-20. For example:

  I am a teacher

  I am from Chicago

  I am a friend

  I often feel content

  I play guitar

  I am energetic

  I practice yoga

  I am a parent

  I am a spouse

  Pick one or two of your less important statements, and ask yourself:

  Who am I without being a person who plays guitar? What goes away? What is left?

  Who am I if I am not energetic? What goes away? What is left?

Who am I if I don't practice yoga? What goes away? What is left?

Whatever arises, breathe and notice the sensation. Discuss or write about your experience.

- In your next meditation practice, focus on point when the breath turns from inhale to exhale and exhale to inhale. What do you discover?

2. Attainments

> **YS 3.16-3.18:** *Complete meditation (saṃyama) on the three transformations enables knowledge of the past and future. Name, object, and ideas are superimposed on each other, so there is confusion (in communication). Meditation (saṃyama) on the distinctions brings deep knowledge of how beings communicate. Through meditation on our saṁskāra (karmic memory traces) previous incarnations are known.*

Comment

These three verses set the stage for understanding how attainments or powers arise. The transformations that enable the powers are dynamic, sequential "modes of transformation" (Taimni, 1961, p. 293). They are: (1) The power of restraining the fluctuations and distractions of the mind entirely, (2) the power of pointing the laser of the mind in one direction, and (3) the power of losing the self-object dichotomy, which yields seemingly miraculous results based on the direction of focus.

What are these powers? The next thirty-five verses identify these extraordinary accomplishments, including knowledge of previous incarnations, knowledge another person's mind, the power to be invisible to others, the foreknowledge of death, the power of friendliness/compassion, the power of strength, and knowledge of the universe and the physical body systems. These powers include visions, intuition, paranormal sensory skill, a perfected body, mastery over the senses, super-intelligence, and ultimately freedom of realizing what is Real.

Is it real? Are these powers important? Taimni maintains that the *Yoga Sūtras* is not a handbook for attaining these states but simply recognition that they are possible and that understanding their power is useful for avoiding problems (1961). Iyengar calls them proof that the yogi's practice is proceeding correctly, although the practitioner should "be indifferent to his achievements, so as to avoid deteriorating into affliction, fluctuation and self-gratification" (2002, p. 202).

Feuerstein comments that like any knowledge or power, the attainments can be "misused or become ends in themselves" (2001, p. 104). When the focus of meditation becomes about the goal of self and ego (feeling good, being something, having something), we are again in spiritual confusion (*avidyā*).

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Question***

- What experiences in meditation have occurred that fit the experiential map described by *saṃyama*? Have you been able to master distractions for a time? Sustain focus?

- Pick a concept that speaks to you: love, justice, compassion, etc. Over the next few days, stop and focus on that concept for two or three minutes, five times a day. Focus using words, images, and/or feelings. What do you notice after a week?
- Compulsion or addiction (alcohol, drugs, food, work, sex, gambling) also involves an intense focus. Although the substance or behavior is harmful, there is an original experience or intent to feel good, avoid pain, have something, or be something. Recovery often involves shifting the focus to God or a Higher Power. Think of the parallels in this analogy.

VII. Chapter: Freedom

A. Overview

The fourth chapter reiterates much of the earlier material, and because of that and its shorter length, some writers think it was written at a different time or by a different author. The chapter delves into the mechanisms of thought and memory, the dissolution of psychological conditioning, and the movement towards *kaivalya* for an advanced yogi. Our mind cannot enlighten itself, but at the point of supreme stillness, the highest, most pure (*sattvic*) form of the mind's intelligence (*buddhi*) can grasp its reality. At that point, *karmic* impressions cease to form. The most intelligent, insightful aspect of mind, *buddhi,* becomes indistinguishable from pure consciousness. Confusion and ignorance—that which creates meaning in the human existence—is reversed or obliterated.

As you read the chapter, imagine the process in slow motion. You see the internal coding of experience revealed as the mechanics that hold the illusions are uncovered. Although it is unlikely that most of us have such a practice that could sustain this unraveling of the personality, many of us have experiences that provide a glimpse of what this could be like. Use those as reference points to deepen your understanding. Remember that all of these descriptions are merely words. The experience will be beyond words.

What happens to the yogi at the point of freedom (*kaivalya*)? What is existence in a state of Reality? The chapter does not elaborate on this future – and indeed, at this stage, what is time? Our beliefs might inform what we think it would be like for the yogi beyond time, beyond words, but, at least in this text, no map is drawn.

B. Key Verses

1. Recurring traits

> **YS 4.8, 4.11:** *(According to the law of karma) these actions create deep imprints or traits that eventually will manifest. These (deep karmic memory traces) are the fruits of other causes. They will disappear when the causes are eliminated.*

Comment

These verses reiterate the mechanism of how *karma* works in an individual. Actions create imprints and repeated similar actions create knots or traits, both in this lifetimeand those beyond. These traces or traits unconsciously direct a person's thoughts and actions in the future, and thus the cycle goes on. The practices of yoga reveal this deep structure. The ordinary mind operates from ego or personality. An advanced yogi's mind, however, operates from the fountain of Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*), and whatever is born in meditation is free of karmic traces.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- You have likely studied yourself for many years. What knots or traits appear over and over in your life? How do they drive you, and what drives the driver? For example, perhaps you are driven by a need for recognition. What has caused that desire? What pushes that need? Perhaps you are driven by a desire for love: What drives that need? Perhaps you have a drive to be right, or to be happy, or to feel righteous, or just to survive: What motivates this?

2. Seer and seen

> **YS 4.18-4.20, 4.25:** *Fluctuating individual consciousnesses are always known to the superior and changeless Pure Consciousness (puruṣa). The ordinary mind cannot illuminate itself because it, itself, is an object (of consciousness). And it is not possible for the ordinary mind to be aware of itself and the object at the same time. The yogi who sees the distinction between mind (citta) and Pure Consciousness (puruṣa) discontinues the cultivation of (false) self.*

Comment

While there are many active, everyday minds, verse 4.5 tells us that the common or uniting source is Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*). Our everyday mind is part of the material world and remains such no matter how purified or subtle it becomes. However, the ability to discriminate between even the purest aspect of the material mind and Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*) leads to the dissolution of the ego or personality. That is the entry to freedom from the limited self.

3. Returning to the source

> **YS 4.32-4.34:** *Then the transformation of three guṇas ends because their purpose (experience and liberation) is fulfilled. (Then) the process of time, and its sequence of moments, comes to an end. The end of involution (the reversal of the guṇas) is spiritual liberation (kaivalya) where Pure Consciousness abides alone in its true form.*

Comment

Evolution is the great manifestation of the world, in all its variety and glory, all its repetition and suffering. Yoga is the reversal of the process of evolution in the individual. In *sāṃkhya*, this reversal implies a separation of consciousness and matter.

Taimni discusses the nature of time in these verses and YS 3.53. Piercing "the last veil of illusion" (our sense that time is Real) is accomplished through *saṃyama.* In other words, the process is the same for dismantling our ignorance or illusion about Reality. The dismantling of time is simply the last step, bringing "the highest kind of knowledge which can be attained . . . the full awareness of the Ultimate Reality" (1961, p. 368-369).

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Question***

- Imagine for a moment that time evaporates, and the concept of time no longer directs the structure of life. There is no sequential time as it is commonly known. What happens just thinking about this possibility?
- In this exercise, you explore the mind as if it had three layers: common thought (narrative), dropping into mindfulness, then dropping into silence. After you have settled the narrative mind, become mindful of the sounds in the room, or the feeling of the your breath, muscles, or air on the skin. When your mindful practice is established, then search for a level below by listening for a deep silence, a quiet underneath. When something sensory arises, stay for a moment without commentary. If commentary and self-talk arise, say "stop" or "change" in your head and drop back to mindfulness. When you finish, reflect on these layers in relationship to what you understand about *samādhi.*

VIII. Closing Meditation

As you settle in
Begin to notice where and how you experience the breath now.
You know that breath flows through the lungs
But can you experience it in each cell of your body?
Start to notice the feel of the breath in the chest, or nostrils, or belly;
Sense the movement of the breath and enjoy its feel.
Some people call it a dance of breath
So slowly let the dance of breath move beyond your lungs and nostrils
Moving through your torso,
Then dancing through your limbs, hands, and feet.
Feel the breath dance through your head, eyes, mouth, and ears
And as it drifts through the senses and the mind,
The breath has the power to clear away the jumble
Like a fresh breeze blowing away rubble and bringing in fresh life.
And when the breath has danced all through you,
Let it begin to move beyond the edges of your skin.
Just a few inches at first
Then expanding and dancing outward beyond your skin
And into the room.
Slowly the breath expands, moving throughout the room,
Or the building, or the neighborhood, or farther
And when the breath has danced everywhere, with grace and ease,
It begins to flow back and reverse its dance,
back towards the beginning, the origin.
Slowly until it hovers a few inches beyond your body
Then it moves easily back inside
Finding a sweet home in the lungs or nostrils or belly.
Resting in arms of stillness
Quiet.

❖ ***Journal or Discussion Questions***

- How will your study of the *Yoga Sūtras* impact you going forward?
- The purpose of spiritual discipline is explained in the following quote from Lao Tzu. Discuss or reflect on how this quote fits with your study of the *Yoga Sūtras*: "Don't think you can attain total awareness and whole enlightenment without proper disciple and practice. This is egomania. Appropriate rituals channel your emotions and life energy towards the light. . . . Here is the great secret: Just as high awareness of the subtle truth is gained through virtuous conduct and sustaining disciplines, so also is it maintained through these things. Highly evolved beings know and respect the truth of this" (Walker, 1992, p. 34).

Appendices

1. Brief Timeline of Related Events and Texts

2. Glossary: Key Terms

3. Suggestions for Using this Study Guide

4. A Primer for Practicing Meditation

5. References

6. Listing of the Verses

1. Brief Timeline of Related Events and Texts

Date	***Event or Text***
Early 3200-2600 B.C.E. Mature 2600-1900 B.C.E.	Indus Valley Civilization (Harrapa) in today's northern India/Pakistan area
2000-1000 B.C.E.	In-migration of Aryans (disputed); Oral traditions
Early: 1500-1000 B.C.E. Later: 1000- 600 B.C.E.	*Vedas, Rig Veda*: Cosmic sacrifice. In (early) Sanskrit.
800 B.C.E. and later	*Upaniṣads:* Philosophic, mystical, inspirational texts
563-483 B.C.E.	Historical Buddha
356 to 323 B.C.E.	Alexander the Great (who came through northern India)
500/600 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.	Epic Period of Indian literature
400 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.	*Ramāyāna*
400 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.	*Mahābhārata/ Bhagavad Gītā*
100 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.	Early *Sāṃkhya* philosophy (pre-kārikā). Roots of *Sāṃkhya* (proto- *Sāṃkhya*) extend back to Upaniṣads (800 B.C.E.)
No consensus Typical range: 200 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.	***Yoga Sūtras*** **(YS)**, classical yoga text
350-450 C.E.	*Sāṃkhya Kārikās (SK)* (Major text of classical *Sāṃkhya*)
557-569 C.E.	Chinese translation of SK
500-600 C.E.	*Gaudapāda* commentary on *Sāmkhya* (*Bhāsya*)
500-700? C.E.	*Vyāsa*'s commentary on *Yoga Sūtras* (*Bhāsya*). Oldest commentary.
788-820/850 C.E.	*Śankara* (*advaita vedānta*)
1200 C.E.	Earliest existent tantric (text), but there are references to earlier ones. Tantra itself is an English term. Flourished 8-14th centuries C.E.
1200-1400 C.E.	Mogul invasions bring Islam to India
1600 C.E.	British come to India
1875 C.E.	Theosophical Society established
1893 C.E.	World Parliament of Religions in Chicago; *Vivekanada* lectures
1947 C.E.	India becomes an independent nation

2. Glossary: Key Terms

Most of the recommended texts have glossaries as well. This provides a quick list of important terms in Roman alphabetical order with a short definition to help with readings. Note that the first word is without markings, a non-transliterated version. The second form is a transliterated version in the IAST form. In truth, a student will see many variations.

The format for this glossary is:

1. Word without markings, as seen in many writings and online.
2. **Word in transliteration in bold.**
3. Brief translation as used in the *Yoga Sūtras*.

Avidya	***avidyā***	Ignorance of what is Real; confusion; source of suffering
Abhyasa	***abhyāsa***	Practice. Applying oneself; devotion to use of the techniques
Ahamkara	***ahaṃkāra***	What creates the small self in the world; I-maker
Ahimsa	***ahiṃsā***	Non-harm, non-violence, not to cause injury
Asana	***āsana***	Posture. A seat that is comfortable for meditation
Asmita	***asmitā***	2nd *kleśa*, a sense of I-ness, ego, personality
Buddhi	***buddhi***	Most pure form of the mind's intelligence; higher mind
Citta	***citta***	Combination of the cognitive mind, higher or spiritual intellect/consciousness, and the sense of self-identity from traits through lifetimes. Also translated as mind, mind-stuff, consciousness, mind-complex
Dharana	***dhāraṇā***	Ability to concentrate on chosen object of focus
Dhyana	***dhyāna***	Meditation, sustained focus on or absorption into the object
Ekagra	***ekāgra***	Intense attention; one-pointed
Guna	***guṇa***	The characteristics of nature/materiality and the world (of three kinds: purity/light; passion/activity; inertia/dark)
Isvara	***īśvara***	Lord, god, God, personal god
Jnana	***jñāna***	Wisdom, knowledge
Karma	***karma***	Law of cause and effect as enacted over lifetimes
Kaivalya	***kaivalya***	Consciousness isolated, freedom, enlightenment, aloneness.
Klesha	***kleśa***	Obstacles (to freedom), what keeps us in bondage/suffering
Kriya	***kriyā***	Action; yoga of practice and detachment/dispassion
Niyama	***niyama***	Ethical observances
Patanjali	**Patañjali**	Author of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Sometimes written as Pātañjali

Prajna	***prajñā***	Insight wisdom, deep understanding
Prana	***prāṇa***	Life-force energy, breath
Pratyahara	***pratyāhāra***	Withdrawing of senses; also non-grasping of the senses
Purusha	***puruṣa***	Pure consciousness; in *Yoga Sūtras*, The Seer Also written as *purusa*
Samadhi	***samādhi***	Deep, profound meditation moving towards consciousness without content, perfect absorption of mind in the object of concentration
Samapatti	***samāpatti***	State of fusion or total identification with the object of meditation; same as *samādhi* with an object of meditation
Samkhya	***Sāṃkhya***	One of the six schools of classical Indian philosophy and closely associated with yoga philosophy
Samskara	***saṃaskāra***	Karmic memory traces, unconscious activation of consequences of past *karma*, whether from this lifetime or past lifetimes, sometimes called subliminal activators
Samyama	***saṃyama***	Integration of concentration, meditation, and *samādhi*, a continuously progressing practice through the inner limbs of yoga; complete meditation which brings attainments or powers (*siddhis*). May also see this word as sanyama
Sattva	***sattava***	Purity, luminosity
Siddhi	***siddhi***	Attainment or power, supernatural power, achievements, perfections acquired from yoga
Svadhyaya	***svādhyāya***	Self-study, introspection, reflection, self-study based on understanding of spiritual writings and teaching
Sutras	***sūtras***	Threads, verses, aphorisms
svarupa	***svarūpa***	Essence, literally own-form, own true form of the Seer
Tapas	***tapas***	Self-discipline, intense practice, heat from intensity
Vasana	***vāsanā***	Personality trait developed over lifetimes, a knot of habitual responses
Vidya	***vidyā***	Knowledge
Viveka	***viveka***	Discriminative knowledge between what is real/not
Yama	***yama***	Ethical principles, restraints, regulation of one's self/behaviors
Yoga	***Yoga***	Uniting, connection, union with god, God, or Absolute; one of the six schools of classical Indian philosophy

3. Suggestions for Using This Study Guide

Guidelines for a Theosophical Study Group

1. Select a primary translation to use. Each member of the group will want to have a text for themselves.
2. Develop guidelines for the group. Here is a sample:
    A. Be prepared for each meeting by reading the assigned sections.
    B. Listen to fellow students. Listening is an art akin to meditation; listening to hear another person's truth or perspective can be significant for both parties. *Honor the knowledge and ideas in the room, and set a tone of learning and curiosity.*
    C. Keep notes of your thoughts and questions. A journal is helpful.
    D. Leave each group with a question or thought to explore during the week, and then briefly report back. For example, if yoga is about the process of ceasing the fluctuations of the mind, when did you notice, during the past week, the effects of these fluctuations of the mind?
    E. Recognize that it is common for members to feel passionate about some of the topics, and this can create disagreement and sometimes conflict. Understanding our reactions in more heated discussions can be enlightening self-study!

        Each person can explore reactions with questions like these:

        a. As I step back from my emotion or passion, what can I learn about my own mind and my patterns?

        b. What, in a deeper sense, am I defending or attacking?

        c. What might be a helpful next step, if any is needed?
3. Have a consistent format for each meeting. Here is a sample agenda for a first meeting:
    A. Have a 5-10 minute meditation.
    B. Discuss logistics: Pick a translation and a schedule; then discuss any meeting mechanics. A consistent time, place, and length of study will help students commit to the group.
    C. Agree on the guidelines for the group.
    D. As an introduction, let each person speak briefly to . . .
        - Their experience, knowledge, and interests in terms of yoga, philosophy
        - Their practices (meditation, yoga, other)
        - *Yoga Sūtras* translations available

    E. Specific Reading: For your first meeting, start with *Yoga Sūtras* 1.2. Read the translations you have, and discuss. Here are some questions that work for many of the verses:

a. What does this mean?

b. What terms or concepts are important?

c. How does this connect to my understandings of Theosophy and other studies?

d. How could this apply to me, to my practice, to my life?

F. Close by going around the group briefly to see what is valuable and important to the members. End with a short meditation.

4. Do not feel obligated to go in order, reading from the beginning of Chapter 1 to the end of Chapter 4. Use themes, or follow trails in the reading. Many students lose enthusiasm when faced with a sequential study, and some of the more esoteric verses can derail the discussion. Ask group members: *What draws you? How does one verse connect to another? What words are intriguing?* At some point, a sequential reading may be the right next step.

Guidelines for Individual Study

1. Pick a primary translation.
2. Pick an auxiliary text, book, or translation to give you a different perspective or wording.
3. Pick a time and place for study, at least weekly, and, if possible, daily.
4. Have a journal to make notes. At the close of each of your study sessions, write down one question or insight in your journal.
5. Even if your time is short, close your study with meditation or focused quiet time. If you meditate regularly now, consider adding your study to this habit by reading before or after your meditation.
6. Do not feel obligated to go in order, reading from the beginning of Chapter 1 to the end of Chapter 4. Use themes or follow trails in the reading. *Ask yourself what are you drawn to? How do verses connect? What is intriguing?* At some point, a sequential reading may be the right next step.

4. A Primer for Practicing Meditation

There are many ways to meditate. Some techniques are about staying attentive to the moment (mindfulness) and some are about learning to focus and attend to one thing—a word, an image, a concept, a feeling. Both approaches train the mind, producing more clarity, direction, and calm.

1. Find a time and place free of distractions. Wear comfortable, loose clothing so you can breathe easily. Whatever time you have—10, 20 or 60 minutes or more—*commit fully to that time*. Use a way of keeping time so you can let go of that mind-function. A soft alarm is helpful.
2. Get ready: Gently loosen the body before you start. Use yoga postures, or just circle or move in your seated position. Then sit upright with natural curves in the spine. This may mean sitting in a chair, cross-legged, or in lotus position. Whatever position, allow the spine to be long (not slouched). If possible, sit without leaning back. Allow your shoulders to be over your hips and gently pull your chin in to lengthen your neck. If sitting in a chair, keep your feet on the floor evenly. If cross-legged, sit on a cushion, blanket, or meditation cushion to keep the spine long. *Whatever the posture, be centered and balanced*. Allow muscles not holding you up to relax. Breathe through the nose if possible.

   Why is posture important? It aids in calm breathing, quiets the body/mind complex, and provides a pathway of life energy through the lengthened spine.
3. Find a *consistent place to put your hands*. This could be a *mudrā* (hand posture) or simply placing the hands on your knees or lap. In yoga, meditators often sit with the palms up, resting on the knees, index fingertip touching the base of the thumb. Buddhist meditators often place the right hand on the left in the lap below the navel, with thumbs touching. The *mudrā* is a signal to yourself that meditation is happening!
4. Close your eyes or look down at a spot on the floor. Even if your eyes are closed, *keep them steady.*
5. Start! Start with a deep sigh or an OM, but signal in some way that meditation starts *now.* Do a body scan to check your posture. Then listen intently for a minute to outside sounds without judgment about how much you like or do not like these sounds. Then feel your breath and follow the sensation of the breath while counting 1 through 10. If you get lost, start over. If you reach 10, start over.
6. Thoughts come and distract. When they come, say something to yourself like "this is only a thought". Or, "That's the story I tell myself." Breathe and enjoy the silence of the breath. Put a period on the thought and end it before another one starts. The act of ending a thought sentence shifts the habits and patterns.
7. You can use a focus other than breath, such as love, the word *one*, or a formal mantra like OM. When you realize thoughts have carried you away, come back by exercising your mental meditation muscle and your intention to be present.
8. Thoughts can be fascinating, and you may encounter marvelous insights and expansive feelings. However, it is all just thought. Come back to your point of focus. If you feel your

insights are important, have a paper close and write them down at the end. The point of meditation, however, is not psychological insight. *The point is to learn to concentrate, clear the mind, and blow away the confusion of the ego.*

9. Another tool is to label thoughts. This helps slow the traffic in your mind. Use about five labels, including one "other." You may have work thoughts, body thoughts, noise thoughts, people thoughts and other. For example: If I have a thought, "I wonder what time it is?" I label that "other" thought. If I think: "there's the train," I label it "noise" thought. The brain quiets down when the tangents halt. Another useful categorization is past, now, future. If I have a thought, "*I should call Laura,*" that is future. If I have a thought, "*I hear a noise,*" that is now.

10. Breath regulation *(prāṇāyāma)* effectively helps the mind-body complex balance and become quiet. Use a long breath, maybe with a small pause at the end of the exhale, for five breaths. Or, start with *alternate nostril breathing.* This centering, calming breath is a powerful way to come directly into your meditation practice and works well to calm fear and anxiety:

    A. Set-up: Sit comfortably. Take a few deep breaths before and after the practice. Your right hand will close off one nostril at a time. Let your pointer and middle finger rest on your forehead/between your eyebrows. Your thumb will close the right nostril, your ring finger will close the left nostril.

    B. The Pattern: Close the right nostril, inhale the left, switch and exhale right. Inhale right, switch fingers, exhale left. Inhale left, switch, exhale right. Inhale right, switch, exhale left. (Continue for at least 3 minutes, and end the practice by exhaling left).

    C. Timing: Keep the inhale and exhale even. At the top of the inhale and bottom of the exhale, add a pause (optional), shorter than the inhale/exhale. Build to an even count for inhale, exhale, and pauses. (Example: 5-count inhale, 5-count hold, 5-count exhale, 5-count hold). Whatever count you use, avoid straining. Find an even, natural flow and practice 3-5 minutes.

    D. After you have confidence in your alternate nostril breathing, try the pattern without your hand. It can be done and is useful at stressful times.

11. If thoughts are chatty or rapid, try slowing the words down. Add space between the words. You can also repeat a thought. ("I'm hungry." "I'm hungry.") These techniques disrupt persistent thought patterns.

12. If your body is uncomfortable, stay with it briefly to see if it is just a distraction (another thought). Of course, if you are in pain, move. This discrimination between discomfort and pain is important learning in itself.

13. End with a ritual. It may be a bow, a blessing, a gesture, a word, a prayer, a chant, but make the ending consistent.

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6. Listing of Verses

The *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*

Note: This is not a translation but rather a restatement of the verses for easy use by students of this study guide. The sources were Houston, Ravindra, Feuerstein, Iyengar, and Taimni; any errors are errors of the author of the study guide. Please find the source texts listed on the reference page. Explanations or words in parentheses are for clarity and ease of reading.

I. *Samādhi*: Profound Meditation

1. Now yoga instruction begins.
2. Yoga is the process of stilling the mind. (Or, yoga is the process of ending the fluctuations of mind.)
3. Then the Seer (Self, the Real, Pure Consciousness) abides in its own essence or true nature.
4. Otherwise, the moving thoughts of the mind are misinterpreted and are perceived as Real, the Self.
5. There are five categories of the movements of mind, both distressing and not distressing (also translated as helpful/not, lead to affliction/growth).
6. The five are (1) correct knowledge, (2) perceptions which are not correct, (3) imagined ideas, (4) sleep, and (5) memory.
7. Correct knowledge can come through direct perception, accurate inference, or by wisdom in valid teachings and texts.
8. The second category, misperceptions, is false knowledge based on an erroneous perception of reality.
9. The third category, conceptual thought or imagination, relies on images and thoughts, not on substance.
10. The fourth category, sleep, is when the mind, unintentionally, is without conscious activity.
11. The fifth category, memory, is the ability to hold in consciousness past experience.
12. The process of ending the movements of the mind involves devoted practice and non-attachment.
13. Practice means stabilizing the mind in stillness, in the present, without typical mind movements.
14. And practice becomes steady and firm when cultivated over a long time, without interruption, and with devotion and sincerity.
15. Non-attachment is the mastery over grasping (or craving or desiring).
16. A higher level of non-attachment comes from a vision of what is Real/eternal/Pure Consciousness, and this leads to indifference towards the things of the world.
17. Cognitive *samādhi* (*saṃprajñāta*) occurs when awareness (*prajñā)* focuses at an object of meditation. The awareness (of the highest consciousness) directed at the object may be analytical/cognitive, or insightful, or joyful, or with a sense of the fundamental being.
18. If the mental support of an object is removed (awareness without support - *asaṃprajñāta samādhi*), then only memory traces/subliminal activators remain in deep structure.
19. This state can exist for those beings that are out of body or merged into matter (as between reincarnations).

20. For others (who are not in the position of 1.19), then this state (*asaṃprajñāta*) is preceded by faith, energy, memory, *samādhi*, and insight.

21. The other (*nirodha* – cessation of the fluctuations) is near for those who are frequent and intense (also enthusiastic) (in practice and non-attachment).

22. Even then, there are distinctions that make progress mild, moderate, or extreme (given levels of devotion, intention, enthusiasm).

23. Or by surrender to *īśvara* (the Lord, god, ultimate seer, god inside each person).

24. *Īśvara* is distinct, Pure Consciousness, free of effects arising from *karma*.

25. (In *īśvara*) the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed.

26. That (*īśvara*), not being limited by time, is also/even the teacher of the ancients (seers). (It uniquely enlivens each individual while being the same for all.)

27. The sacred syllable (*OM*) is the expression of *īśvara.*

28. Repetition (of *OM*) reveals its meaning.

29. Hence the attainment of inward directed-consciousness, and also the disappearance of the obstacles (in 1.30).

30. The obstacles (to steady attention) are sickness, apathy, doubt, negligence, laziness, indulgence in desires, delusion/confusion, lack of progress, instability (of results, backsliding into old habits).

31. Suffering, depression/despair, anxiety/nervousness, and disordered breathing co-exist with these obstacles.

32. To prevent obstacles, practice single-mindedly.

33. By cultivating friendliness towards happiness, compassion towards suffering, delight towards virtue, and equanimity/dispassion towards vice, the mind is purified (tranquil).

34. (Purification also is attained) by regulation of the breath (thus the life force).

35. (Purification also is attained) by binding the mind to a subject/object.

36. (Purification also is attained) by contemplating inner joy and light, free of sorrow.

37. (Purification also is attained) when meditating on the virtue of sages with minds free of desire.

38. (Purification also is attained) from insights from dreams & sleep states of consciousness.

39. (Purification also is attained) by meditation as desired.

40. For the (skilled/clear) yogi, mastery (powers) extends from the most minute to the largest expanse.

41. As agitations of the mind diminish, the mind becomes as clear as a diamond reflecting the object (the focus of meditation) before it. A fusion (*samāpatti*) of the perceiver, perceiving, and object occurs.

42. *Savitarkā samāpatti* (a form of *samāpatti* (fusion)) is (external) knowledge based on thinking, words, and meaning.

43. *Nirvitarkā samāpatti* (another form of fusion) is knowledge beyond thought. When memory is purified, the object (of meditation) is illuminated.

44. In the same way, *savicārā* and *nirvicārā* are explained. (Subtle knowledge of the object based on thinking and meaning and subtle knowledge without thinking).

45. Subtle nature of objects extends to the level of unmanifested (potential) matter.

46. These (four levels) refer to seeded deep meditation (*samādhi*). (Seed refers to using an object for focus).
47. As *nirvicāra* (subtle knowledge without thought) continues, the spiritual self (the Real) shines.
48. Now insight is true.
49. The (true) insight obtained here is unique, and is different from that obtained by traditional understanding and reasoning,
50. The subtle karmic traces (*saṃskāra)* produced by this insight prevent further accumulation of karmic traces.
51. With the suppression of even that, through the suspension of all movements of the mind, pure meditation without seed is attained.

II. *Sādhana*: Practice/discipline

1. The activity of yoga (*kriyā* yoga) is intense discipline in practice, learning/self-study, and devotion towards *īśvara*.
2. The purpose of the activities of yoga is to lead the practitioner to profound states of meditation (*samādhi*) and thereby weaken what causes pain and distress.
3. The five causes of pain and distress *(kleśa)* (also called afflictions, obstacles, and root causes) are our ignorance (of our true nature), our sense of *I am* something other than Real, our desires, ours dislikes, and our clinging to life (or what is known; the status quo).
4. Ignorance (*avidiyā*) is the basis of the others, be they dormant, weakened, partially overcome, or in operation.
5. Ignorance (*avidiyā*) means confusing the non-eternal for the eternal, the impure for the pure, pain/suffering for good/pleasure, and non-self as Self.
6. The second cause (*kleśa*) is our sense of "I am ____" (*asmitā*). It is the mistaken notion that our identity is the content of the world (what is seen) rather than spirit (or pure consciousness or what is Real).
7. The third cause of pain and distress is the attraction or attachment to pleasure (*rāga*).
8. The fourth is our aversion to the negative experiences (*dveṣa*).
9. The fifth is the strong desire to maintain the status quo of life (*abhiniveśa*). This exists even for sages.
10. The subtle form of these causes of pain and distress (*kleśā*) is canceled through process of reversal (of their acquisition) in yoga practice.
11. Meditation reduces the effects of these causes of pain and distress.
12. Past actions, rooted in the causes of pain and distress, give birth to experiences in the present and future.
13. So long as the root of these causes exists, they will be experienced in birth, in the quality of life, and length of life.
14. Joy is the fruit of right action; distress and pain are the fruit of wrong action.
15. For the wise, all is painful because all experiences lead to more consequences and karmic imprints.
16. Avoid future suffering.
17. What is to be avoided is the misidentification of the Seer with the seen.

18. The material world, in all its evolution and qualities, exists (solely) to serve (for the enjoyment) the Seer (Real, Pure Consciousness) or liberation.
19. The material world (*prakṛti*) is made up of the three characteristics (*guṇa*), whether materiality is specific (as seen by the lower mind), universal (by higher mind – principles and archetypes, for example), manifested (part of whole, but identifiable), or unmanifested (potentiality; existence as a whole).
20. The Seer (*puruṣā*) has only the power of seeing; although pure, the Seer appears to see through the mind (*citta*).
21. The seen (the material world) is only for the purpose of the Seer (Pure Consciousness).
22. For the liberated beings, the relationship with the material world has now served its purpose of experience and liberation and thus ends. But this is not so for others (still caught in ignorance and confusion of who they are).
23. The reason for the relationship of the Seer and Seen (Pure Consciousness and the material world) is for the Seer to recognize the Seer's own true nature.
24. Spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) is the cause of the false identification of Seer and Seen.
25. When this spiritual ignorance disappears, so does the false identification; then there is liberation.
26. Uninterrupted insight and discrimination (*viveka*) are the way to remove *avidyā.*
27. This insight builds in seven stages.

    Note: The seven stages involve identifying the causes of suffering; eliminating the causes of suffering; achieving a still mind free of ego; insight (that yogi is not the doer); purifying the *citta;* dissolving *vāsanā* and halting karmic cycles, and achieving the state where the Self is self-luminous and abides in its true form.
28. Through sustained practice of the limbs of yoga, impurity is overcome, and the radiance of wisdom leads to even deeper insight.
29. The eight limbs of yoga are ethical self-regulation, ethical (right) observances, right posture, breath/life force regulation, retreat of the senses, focus, meditation, and deep meditative absorption.
30. Ethical self-regulation (*yamas*) includes (thoughts, intentions, and actions related to…) non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, appropriate sexual behavior, and non-grasping (or non-possessiveness).
31. These codes become a great vow when they are applied universally without regard to the other person's status, place, time, circumstance.
32. Ethical observances (*niyamas*) are (the thoughts, intents and actions related to…) cleanliness, contentment, self-discipline, spiritual self-study, devotion to god/God.
33. When disturbing/negative thoughts and feelings arise (regarding *yamas/niyamas*), cultivate the opposite.
34. Cultivating the opposite helps one realize the harm in negative thoughts and actions. This is true despite how we participate (as self, done through others, or condoning); or what motivates us (greed, anger, or erroneous thinking), and no matter what the scale of the action (small, medium, large).
35. Once established in non-harm (*ahiṁsā*), hostilities are abandoned.
36. Once established in truthfulness, the fruit of actions results from the yogi's intent.
37. Once established in non-stealing, all riches present themselves.

38. When acting amid awareness of the Absolute, great strength is achieved.
39. When non-possessiveness is sustained, there comes an understanding of the how and why of incarnations (or, the purpose of existence).
40. Purity results in non-identification with the body, and a distancing from the need of contact with others.
41. Through the development of purity of mind, cheerful and kind countenance, one-pointed concentration, and mastery of the senses, the fitness for Self-realization results.
42. Contentment gives rise to unexcelled joy.
43. Self-discipline results in the destruction of impurities and mastery over/perfection of the physical body and senses.
44. Self-study brings one into communion/unity with the chosen deity.
45. Mastery in *samādhi* arises from devotion to *īśvara*.
46. The posture should be steady and comfortable.
47. Perfect alignment happens from complete relaxation and with fusion with the infinite.
48. Thus (from this correct posture) there is freedom from the opposing dualities (pain/pleasure, etc.).
49. After the right alignment is established, then practice regulation of the breath/life force.
50. Regulation of the breath (*prāṇāyāma*) involves exhalation, inhalation, and retention. Skill is gained in prolonging and refining the breath movement.
51. The fourth *prāṇāyāma* surpasses even these techniques (a transformative state when the movement of the mind ceases and awakening occurs).
52. Then the covering of the inner light of the true self vanishes.
53. And the mind is fit for concentration (*dhāraṇa*, the next limb).
54. Withdrawal of the senses (*pratyāhāraḥ*) arises when senses are unengaged with the external world, thus the mind abides easier in its true nature.
55. Then the highest mastery over the senses, the obedience of the senses, is realized.

III. *Vibhūti*: Attainments or Powers

1. Concentration (*dhāraṇa*) is fixing the mind on one point.
2. Meditation (*dhyāna*) is the continuous flow of that one-pointed focus towards the object of meditation.
3. *Samādhi* occurs when there is only awareness of the object of meditation (without self).
4. *Saṃyama*, total attention (complete meditation), are these three together.
5. This gives rise to insight, illumination of higher consciousness.
6. This happens in stages.
7. These three steps are more internal than the previous step (the first 4 limbs).
8. However, these three steps are external compared to seedless *samādhi.*

9. When the focus of meditation is the silence between the arising thoughts (arising from subliminal or karmic impressions), then consciousness is transformed towards silence and stillness (coming from the restraint of mental impressions). This is *nirodhaḥ pariṇāmaḥ*.
10. This flow of silence becomes steady (because it generates only karmic impressions of silence).
11. In this transformation, there is a fading of distractions and an arising of one-pointedness.
12. The transformation towards one-pointedness happens when the movement between active attention and silence is balanced.
13. This (the transformation of the mind) mirrors or explains the transformations in quality, time, and condition for elements and senses.
14. All of the material world, whether manifested or not, has the same essential basis.
15. Variations in how these properties are ordered create differences in the transformation of matter.
16. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the three transformations (3.9, 3.11, 3.12 above) enables knowledge of the past and future.
17. Name, object, and ideas are superimposed on each other, so there is confusion (in communication). Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the distinctions brings deep knowledge of how beings communicate.
18. Through complete meditation on our *saṁskāra* (karmic memory traces) previous incarnations are known.
19. Through complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the content/intention of another person's mind, knowledge of their consciousness is known.
20. But not the concrete content, but rather the other's perception of the content.
21. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the body's form brings the power to be invisible (to others) by suspending perception and breaking the connection between light and the eye.
22. In the same manner, the powers to suspend the ability to be known through touch, smell, sound, and others is explained.

    NOTE: This verse is sometimes left out, so numbering may be different.

23. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on *karma*, both the kind quick to manifest and the slow, gives foreknowledge of death.
24. Complete meditation (*saṃyama)* on friendliness brings the power (of friendliness or compassion).
25. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on manifested strength (as in an elephant) brings this type of power.
26. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the higher functioning of the mind gives knowledge of the subtle, the concealed, or the remote.
27. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the sun gives knowledge of the world/universe.
28. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the moon gives knowledge of (constellations of) the stars.
29. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the pole star brings knowledge of the movements of the stars.
30. Complete meditation (*saṃyama)* on the energy center of the navel gives knowledge about the physical system of the body.
31. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the center below the throat causes hunger and thirst to be overcome.

32. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the tortoise channel (chest/bronchial area) results in steadiness and stability.

33. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the crown results in visions of the Masters.

34. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the intuitive light gives knowledge of all.

35. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the heart gives knowledge of the mind.

36. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the highest and purest aspect of mind (*sattva)*, which (although pure) is distinct from the Real or Pure Consciousness/Self (*puruṣa*), gives knowledge of the difference (and thus liberation).

37. This results in divine or intuitive hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting and smelling.

38. These attainments are powers in the world, but obstacles to *samādhi.*

39. With the causes of bondage loosened, and the loosening of consciousness, it is possible to enter another body at will.

40. Gaining mastery over (the subtle) upward flow of life-energy causes a cessation in contact with the ground, mud, water, thorns and the like, so that the yogi (or perhaps *kuṇḍalinī)* levitates/rises.

41. Mastery over metabolic energy (which controls the function of the heart and life force) creates radiance; inner fire.

42. Divine hearing (clairaudience?) is possible from complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the relationship between the medium of space/ether and ear.

43. Through complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the relationship between body and space, one can move through space as light as cotton fiber.

44. The veil over the inner light (Self) dispels upon the complete meditation on the great consciousness beyond the body.

45. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the elements, their essence, subtleness, interconnections, and purpose, gives mastery over the elements.

46. Then comes the extraordinary powers such as the power to be as small as an atom, as well as bodily perfection and indestructibility.

47. The perfected body is beautiful, graceful, strong, steadfast, and robust.

48. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the purpose of cognition, ego (I-ness), one's own form, gives mastery over the senses.

49. This results in quickness of mind, freedom from ordinary senses, and mastery over the very foundation of matter.

50. All-knowing (omniscience) comes through clear vision and discernment (distinction) between the highest aspect of mind (*sattva*) and Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*).

51. Non-attachment even from this state of all-knowing destroys the seed of bondage and leads to freedom, the highest state of consciousness (*kaivalya*).

52. Even if devas/angels beckon, the yogi should avoid pride, since undesired attachment would recur.

53. Complete meditation (*saṃyama*) on the moment in time and its sequence brings discriminative knowledge/insight.

54. From that discernment (3.53) comes an ascertainment of the distinctiveness (origin/category, appearance, position/place) between seemingly similar things (namely, materiality and consciousness, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*).

55. Knowledge born of discernment transcends all immediately.
56. When the highest aspect of mind (sattva) is clearly distinguished from Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*), then there is spiritual liberation (*kaivalya*).

IV. *Kaivalya*: Liberation/Freedom

1. Powers (*siddhis*) arise from birth, drugs, mantras, austerity, or *samādhi*.
2. Transformation into a new state of being results from the overflowing of the potential of the matter/world (*prakṛti*).
3. The apparent causes of transformation do not initiate evolution; they merely remove the obstacles to growth, as a farmer does (ploughing the fields).
4. The (ordinary) fluctuating mind arises only from I-am-ness/egoism (*asmitā*).
5. While there are seemingly many active minds, the source is one Pure Consciousness.
6. In the embodied mind, what is born of meditation is free from karmic traces.
7. The actions of a yogi are neither good nor bad. For others, they are three 3-fold (good, bad, mixed).
8. (According to the law of *karma*) these actions create deep imprints or traits that eventually will manifest.
9. Memory and the memory traces left by karmic actions continue even when separated by place, time or in another lifetime.
10. These (deep karmic memory traces) have no beginning because the primordial will behind them is everlasting.
11. These (deep karmic memory traces) are the fruits of other causes. They will disappear when the causes are eliminated.
12. The past and future (truly) exist within the essence of the form. The form appears differently because as time reveals different aspects or journeys of the form.
13. These characteristics (of past, present or future) are here now, or inherent (as in past/future). They are comprised of the (ever-evolving) primary elements of matter (*guṇa*).
14. The uniqueness of an object derives from the changes in the primary elements of matter (*guṇa*).
15. Since different minds are perceiving the same object, there are different perceptions of the same object (thus subject-object). (Our perceptions differ, even if the object doesn't.)
16. So an object does not depend on any one mind (to exist). Otherwise, what would happen when there was no mind to experience the object?
17. How an object is known or not known depends on how the mind of the perceiver is colored (by the object).
18. Fluctuating individual consciousnesses are always known to the superior and changeless Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*).
19. The ordinary mind cannot illuminate itself because it, itself, is an object (of consciousness).
20. And the ordinary mind cannot be aware of itself and the object at the same time.
21. And if mind could perceive another, it would lead to infinite regression and confusion of memory.
22. Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*) is unchangeable, and when mind begins to take on this same form, then the experience of self-consciousness is possible.

23. The mind (*citta*) colored by both *puruṣa* and the object knows all (at this stage, the mind exists for *puruṣa*).
24. Mind (*citta*), although filled with countless impressions/traits/habits, really exists for the sake of Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*).
25. The yogi who sees the distinction between mind (*citta*) and Pure Consciousness (*puruṣa*) discontinues the cultivation of (false) self.
26. Then this discerning mind is borne onwards towards spiritual liberation (*kaivalya*).
27. In the intervals, thoughts (other than *kaivalya*) may arise spurred by karmic traces.
28. The abandonment of these is like the abandonment of the obstacles (*kleśa*) described before.
29. The advanced yogi, with not even an interest in omniscience, exists in a vision of discernment called '*dharmamegha*' (cloud of truth or virtue).
30. Then there is freedom from the causes of pain and distress (*kleśa*) and *karma*.
31. All veils and imperfections of knowledge fall away, and because of the vastness of this knowledge, there is little left to be known.
32. Then the transformation of three *guṇas* (materiality manifested) ends because their purpose (experience and liberation) is fulfilled.
33. (Then) the process of time, and its sequence of moments, comes to an end.
34. The end of involution (the reversal of the *guṇas*) is spiritual liberation (*kaivalya*) where Pure Consciousness abides alone in its true form.