

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

– Swami Prabhavananda (transl.), Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1953

I. Yoga and its Aims

II. Yoga and its Practice

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I. Yoga and its Aims

1. This is the beginning of Yoga
2. Yoga is the control of thought-waves in the mind
3. Then man abides in his real nature
4. At other times, when he is not in the state of yoga, man remains identified with the thought-waves in the mind.
5. There are five kinds of thought-waves – some painful, others not painful
6. These five kinds of thought-waves are: right knowledge, wrong knowledge, verbal delusion, sleep, and memory
7. The right kinds of knowledge are: direct perception, inference, and scriptural testimony
8. Wrong knowledge is knowledge which is false and not based upon the true nature of its object
9. Verbal delusion arises when words do not correspond with reality
10. Sleep is a wave of thought about nothingness
11. Memory is when perceived objects are not forgotten, but come back to consciousness
12. They are controlled by means of practice and non-attachment
13. Practice is the repeated effort to follow the disciplines which give permanent control of the thought-waves of the mind.
14. Practice becomes firmly grounded when it has been cultivated for a long time, uninterruptedly, with earnest devotion
15. Non-attachment is self-mastery; it is freedom from desire for what is seen or heard
16. When through knowledge of the Atman, one ceases to desire any manifestation of Nature, then that is the highest kind of non-attachment
17. Concentration upon a single object may reach four stages: examination, discrimination, joyful peace, and simple awareness of individuality
18. The other kind of concentration is that in which the consciousness contains no object – only sub-conscious impressions, which are like burnt seeds. It is attained by constantly checking the thought-waves through the practice of nonattachment
19. When such concentration is not accompanied by non-attachment, and ignorance therefore remains, the aspirant will reach the state of the disincarnate Gods or become merged in the forces of Nature
20. The concentration of the new spiritual aspirant is attained through faith, energy, recollectedness, absorption, illumination
21. Success in Yoga comes quickly to those who are intensely energetic
22. Success varies according to the means adopted to attain it – mild, medium or intense
23. Concentration may also be attained through devotion to Ishwara
24. Ishwara is a special kind of Being (the principle of 'order'), untouched by ignorance and the products of ignorance, not subject to karmas or samskaras or the results of action
25. In Him, knowledge is infinite; in others it is only a germ
26. He was the teacher even of the earliest teachers, since He is not limited by time
27. The word which expresses him is OM
28. This word must be repeated with meditation upon its meaning
29. Hence comes knowledge of the Atman and destruction of the obstacles to that knowledge
30. Sickness, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, sloth, craving for sense pleasure, false perception, despair caused by failure to concentrate, and unsteadiness in concentration: these distractions are the obstacles to knowledge
31. These distractions are accompanied by grief, despondency, trembling of the body and irregular breathing
32. They can be removed by the practice of concentration upon a single truth
33. Undisturbed calmness of mind is attained by cultivating friendliness toward the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and indifference toward the wicked
34. The mind may also be calmed by expulsion and retention of breath.
35. Those forms of concentration which result in extraordinary perceptions encourage perseverance of the mind
36. Concentration may also be attained by fixing the mind upon the Inner Light, which is beyond sorrow
37. Or by meditating on the heart of an illumined soul, that is free from passion
38. Or by fixing the mind upon a dream experience, or the experience of deep sleep
39. Or by fixing the mind upon any divine form or symbol that appeals to one as good
40. The mind of a Yogi can concentrate upon any object of any size, from the atomic to the infinitely great
41. Just as the pure crystal takes colour from the object which is nearest to it, so the mind, when it is cleared of thoughtwaves, achieves sameness or identity with the object of its concentration. This may be either a gross object, or the organ of perception, or the sense of ego. This achievement of sameness or identity with the object of concentration is known as Samadhi
42. When the mind achieves identity with a gross object of concentration, mixed with awareness of name, quality and knowledge, this is called savitarka Samadhi
43. When the mind achieves identity with a gross object of concentration, unmixed with awareness of name, quality and knowledge, so that the object alone remains, this is called nirvitarka Samadhi
44. When the object of concentration is a subtle object, two kinds of Samadhi, called savichara and nirvichara, may be distinguished in the same manner
45. Behind all subtle objects is Prakriti, the primal cause
46. These kinds of Samadhi are said to be "with seed"
47. In reaching nirvichara Samadhi the mind becomes pure
48. In that Samadhi, knowledge is said to be "filled with truth"
49. The knowledge which is gained from inference and the study of scriptures is knowledge of one kind. But the knowledge which is gained from Samadhi is of a much higher order. It goes beyond inference and scriptures
50. The impression which is made upon the mind by that Samadhi wipes out all other past impressions
51. When the impression made by that Samadhi is also wiped out, so that there are no more thought-waves at all in the mind, then one enters the Samadhi which is called "seedless"

II. Yoga and its Practice

1. Austerity, study, and the dedication of the fruits of one's work to God: these are the preliminary steps toward Yoga
2. Thus we may cultivate the power of concentration and remove the obstacles to enlightenment which cause all our sufferings

3. These obstacles – the cause of man's sufferings – are ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and the desire to cling to life
4. Ignorance creates all the other obstacles. They may exist either in a potential or a vestigial form, or they may have been temporarily overcome or fully developed
5. To regard the non-eternal as eternal, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasant, and the non-Atman as the Atman – this is ignorance
6. To identify consciousness with that which merely reflects consciousness – this is egoism
7. Attachment is that which dwells upon pleasure
8. Aversion is that which dwells upon pain
9. The desire to cling to life is inherent both in the ignorant and in the learned. This is because the mind retains impressions of the death experience from many previous incarnations
10. When these obstacles have been reduced to a vestigial form, they can be destroyed by resolving the mind back into its primal cause
11. In their fully developed form, they can be overcome through meditation
12. A man's latent tendencies have been created by his past thoughts and actions. These tendencies will bear fruits, both in this life and in lives to come
13. So long as the cause exists, it will bear fruits – such as rebirth, a long or a short life, and the experiences of pleasure and of pain.
14. Experiences of pleasure and of pain are the fruits of merit and demerit, respectively (Def. 11&13)
15. But the man of spiritual discrimination regards all these experiences as painful. For even the enjoyment of present pleasure is painful, since we already fear its loss. Past pleasure is painful because renewed cravings arise from the impressions it has left upon the mind. And how can any happiness be lasting if it depends only upon our moods? For these moods are constantly changing, as one or another of the ever-warring Gunas seizes control of the mind.
16. The pain that is yet to come may be avoided
17. The pain is caused by false identification of the experiencer with the object of experience. It may be avoided.
18. The object of experience is composed of the three Gunas – the principle of illumination (sattwa), activity (rajas) and inertia (tamas). From these, the whole universe has evolved together with the instruments of knowledge – such as the mind, the senses, etc – and the objects perceived – such as the physical elements. The universe exists in order that the experiencer may experience it, and thus become liberated. [‘God made man (Atman) – as a reflexively self-conscious vehicle - for Himself’ - Ed.]
19. The Gunas pass through four states – gross, subtle, primal and unevolved
20. The Atman – the experiencer – is pure consciousness. It appears to take on the changing colours of the mind. In reality it is unchangeable
21. The object of experience exists only to serve the purpose of the Atman [purpose of the Atman is to gain ‘reflexive self-consciousness’ via the vehicle and the objects of experience]
22. Though the object of experience becomes unreal to him who has reached the state of liberation, it remains real to all other beings
23. The Atman – the experiencer – is identified with Prakriti – the object of experience – in order that the true nature of both Prakriti and Atman may be known
24. This identification is caused by ignorance
25. When ignorance has been destroyed, this identification ceases. Then bondage is at an end and the experiencer is independent and free
26. Ignorance is destroyed by awakening to knowledge of the Atman, until no trace of illusion remains
27. The experiencer gains this knowledge in seven stages, advancing towards the highest
28. As soon as all impurities have been removed by the practice of spiritual disciplines – the “limbs” of Yoga – a man's spiritual vision opens to the light-giving knowledge of the Atman
29. The eight limbs of Yoga are: the various forms of abstention from evil-doing (Yama), the various observances (Niyamas), posture (Asana), control of the prana (Pranayama), withdrawal of the mind from sense objects (Pratyahara), concentration (Dharana), meditation (Dhyana), and absorption in the Atman (Samadhi)
30. Yama is abstention from harming others, from falsehood, from theft, from incontinence, and from greed
31. These forms of abstention are basic rules of conduct. They must be practised without any reservations as to time, place, purpose, or caste rules
32. The Niyamas (observances) are purity, contentment, mortification, study and devotion to God
33. To be free from thoughts that distract one from Yoga, thoughts of an opposite kind must be cultivated [geometrical and logical thinking]
34. The obstacles to Yoga – such as acts of violence and untruth – may be directly created or indirectly caused or approved, they may be motivated by greed, anger or self-interest, they may be small or moderate or great, but they never cease to result in pain and ignorance. One should overcome distracting thoughts by remembering this.
35. When a man becomes steadfast in his abstention from harming others, then all living creatures will cease to feel enmity in his presence.
36. When a man becomes steadfast in his abstention from falsehood he gets the power of obtaining for himself and others the fruits of good deeds, without having to perform the deeds themselves
37. When a man becomes steadfast in his abstention from theft, all wealth comes to him.
38. When a man becomes steadfast in his abstention from incontinence, he acquires spiritual energy
39. When a man becomes steadfast in abstention from greed, he gains knowledge of his past, present and future existences
40. As the result of purity, there arises indifference toward the body and disgust for physical intercourse with others
41. Moreover, one achieves purification of the heart, cheerfulness of mind, the power of concentration, control of the passions and fitness for vision of the Atman
42. As the result of contentment, one gains supreme happiness
43. As the result of mortification, impurities are removed. Then special powers come to the body and the sense organs
44. As the result of study, one obtains the vision of that aspect of God which one has chosen to worship [Gita – choice to worship Ancestors, Hungry Ghosts, Gods, The Supreme – you go to that which you worship]
45. As the result of devotion to God, one achieves Samadhi
46. Posture (Asana) is to be seated in a position which is firm but relaxed
47. Postures become firm and relaxed through control of the natural tendencies of the body, and through meditation on the infinite
48. Thereafter, one is no longer troubled by the dualities of sense-experience
49. After mastering posture, one must practise control of the Prana (Pranayama) by stopping the motions of inhalation and exhalation
50. The breath may be stopped externally, or internally, or checked in mid-motion, and regulated according to place, time and a fixed number of moments, so that the stoppage is either protracted or brief
51. The fourth kind of Pranayama is the stoppage of the breath which is caused by concentration upon external or internal objects

52. As the result of this, the covering of the Inner Light is removed
53. The mind gains the power of concentration (Dharana)
54. When the mind is withdrawn from sense objects, the sense-organs also withdraw themselves from their respective objects and thus are said to imitate the mind. This is known as Pratyahara.
55. Thence arises complete mastery over the senses

III. Powers

1. Concentration (Dharana) is holding the mind within a centre of spiritual consciousness in the body, or fixing it on some divine form, either within the body or outside it
2. Meditation (Dhyana) is an unbroken flow of thought toward the object of concentration
3. When, in meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, not distorted by the mind of the perceiver, that is absorption (Samadhi)
4. When these three – concentration, meditation and absorption – are brought to bear upon one subject, they are called Samyama.
5. Through mastery of Samyama comes the light of knowledge
6. It must be applied stage by stage
7. These three are more direct aids to experience than the five limbs previously described
8. But even these are not direct aids to the seedless Samadhi
9. When the vision of the lower Samadhi is suppressed by an act of conscious control, so that there are no longer any thoughts or visions in the mind, that is the achievement of control of the thought-waves of the mind
10. When this suppression of thought-waves becomes continuous, the mind's flow is calm
11. When all mental distractions disappear and the mind becomes one-pointed, it enters the state called Samadhi
12. The mind becomes one-pointed when similar thought-waves arise in succession without any gaps between them [ie perfect association and harmonic resonance throughout the whole being]
13. In this state, it passes beyond the three kinds of changes which take place in subtle or gross matter, and in the organs: change of form, change of time, change of condition [cp. form(form), time(time), place, sequence and emotional tone(condition)]
14. A compound object has attributes and is subject to change, either past, present or yet to be manifested. [only Consciousness is not a compound(made of parts) and not being a compound is not subject to change]
15. The succession of these changes is the cause of manifold evolution
16. By making Samyama on the three kinds of changes, one obtains knowledge of past and the future
17. By making Samyama on the sound of a word, one's perception of its meaning, and one's reaction to it – three things which are ordinarily confused – one obtains understanding of all sounds uttered by living beings
18. By making Samyama on previous thought-waves, one obtains knowledge of one's past lives
19. By making Samyama on the distinguishing marks of another man's body, one obtains knowledge of the nature of his mind.
20. But not of its contents, because that is not the object of Samyama [cp. mechanics of mind(India) with contents of mind(Western)]
21. If one makes Samyama on the form of one's body, obstructing its perceptibility and separating its powers of manifestation from the eyes of the beholder, then one's body becomes invisible
22. Thus also its sounds cease to be heard
23. By making Samyama on two kinds of karma – that which will soon bear fruit and that which will not bear fruit until later – or by recognising the portents of death, a Yogi may know the exact time of his separation from the body
24. By making Samyama on friendliness, compassion, etc, one develops the powers of these qualities
25. By making Samyama on any kind of strength, such as that of an elephant, one obtains that strength
26. By making Samyama on the Inner Light one obtains knowledge of what is subtle, hidden, or far distant
27. By making Samyama on the sun, one gains knowledge of the cosmic spaces
28. By making Samyama on the moon, one gains knowledge of the arrangement of the stars
29. By making Samyama on the polestar, one gains knowledge of the motion of the stars
30. By making Samyama on the navel, one gains knowledge of the constitution of the body
31. By making Samyama on the hollow of the throat, one stills hunger and thirst
32. By making Samyama on the tube within the chest, one acquires absolute motionlessness
33. By making Samyama on the radiance within the back of the head, one becomes able to see the celestial beings
34. All these powers of knowledge may also come to one whose mind is spontaneously enlightened through purity
35. By making Samyama on the heart, one gains knowledge of the contents of the mind
36. The power of enjoyment arises from a failure to discriminate between the Atman and the sattwa guna, which are totally different. The sattwa guna is merely the agent of the Atman, which is independent, existing only for its own sake. By making Samyama on the independence of the Atman, one gains knowledge of the Atman
37. Hence one gains the knowledge due to spontaneous enlightenment, and obtains supernatural powers of hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell
38. They are powers in the worldly state, but they are obstacles to Samadhi
39. When the bonds of the mind caused by karma have been loosened, the Yogi can enter into the body of another by knowledge of the operation of its nerve currents
40. By controlling the nerve-currents that govern the lungs and the upper part of the body, the Yogi can walk on water and swamps, or on thorns and similar objects, and he can die at will
41. By controlling the force that governs Prana, he can surround himself with a blaze of light
42. By making Samayama on the relation between the ear and the ether, one obtains supernatural powers of hearing
43. By making Samyama on the relation between the body and the ether, or by acquiring through meditation the lightness of cotton fibre, the Yogi can fly through the air
44. By making Samyama on the thought-waves of the mind when it is separated from the body – the state known as the Great Disincarnation – all coverings can be removed from the light of knowledge
45. By making Samyama on the gross and subtle forms of elements, on their essential characteristics and the inherence of the gunas in them, and on the experiences they provide for the individual, one gains mastery of the elements
46. Hence one gains the power of becoming as tiny as an atom and all similar powers: also perfection of the body, which is no longer subject to the obstruction of the elements
47. Perfection of the body also includes beauty, grace, strength, and the hardness of a thunderbolt
48. By making Samyama on the transformation that the sense-organs undergo when they contact objects, on the power of illumination of the sense-organs, on the gunas which constitute the organs, and on the experiences they provide for the individual, one gains mastery of the organs
49. Hence the body gains the power of movement as rapid as that of the mind, the power of using the sense-organs outside the confines of the body, and mastery of Prakriti
50. By making Samyama on the discrimination between the sattwa guna and the Atman, one gains omnipotence and omniscience

51. By giving up even these powers, the seed of evil is destroyed and liberation follows
52. When tempted by the invisible beings in high places, let the Yogi feel neither allured nor flattered; for he is in danger of being caught once more by ignorance
53. By making Samyama on single moments and on their sequence in time, one gains discriminative knowledge
54. Thus one is able to discriminate between two exactly similar objects, which cannot be distinguished by their species, characteristic marks, or positions in space
55. This discriminative knowledge delivers a man from the bondage of ignorance. It comprehends all objects simultaneously, at every moment of their existence and in all their modifications
56. Perfection is attained when the mind becomes as pure as the Atman itself

IV. Liberation

1. The psychic powers may be obtained either by birth, or by means of drugs, or by the power of words, or by the practice of austerities, or by concentration.
2. The transformation of ones species into another is caused by the inflowing of nature
3. Good or bad deeds are not the direct causes of the transformation. They only act as breakers of the obstacles to natural evolution; just as a farmer breaks down the obstacles in a water course, so that water flows through by its own nature
4. The ego-sense alone can create minds
5. Though the activities of the different created minds are various, the one original mind controls them all
6. Of the various types of mind, only that which is purified by Samadhi is freed from all latent impressions of karma and from all cravings
7. The karma of the Yogi is neither white nor black. The karma of others is of three kinds: white, black, or mixed
8. Of the tendencies produced by these three kinds of karma, only those are manifested for which the conditions are favourable
9. Because of our memory of past tendencies, the chain of cause and effect is not broken by change of species, space or time
10. Since the desire to exist has always been present our tendencies cannot have had any beginning [we were all crucified before we were born, says the mystic]
11. Our subconscious tendencies depend upon cause and effect. They have their basis in the mind, and they are stimulated by the sense-objects. If all these are removed, the tendencies are destroyed
12. There is the form and expression we call "past" and the form and expression we call "future"; both exist within the object, at all times. Form and expression vary according to time – past, present, future
13. They are either manifest or subtle, according to the nature of the gunas
14. Since the gunas work together within every change of form and expression, there is a unity in all things
15. The same object is perceived in different ways by different minds. Therefore the mind must be other than the object. The object cannot be said to be dependent on the perception of a single mind. For, if this were the case, the object could be said to be non-existent when that single mind was not perceiving it
16. An object is known or unknown, depending upon the moods of the mind
17. Because the Atman, the Lord of the mind, is unchangeable, the mind's fluctuations are always known to it.
18. The mind is not self-luminous, since it is an object of perception
19. And since it cannot perceive both subject and object simultaneously
20. If one postulates a second mind to perceive the first, then one would have to postulate an infinite number of minds; and this would cause confusion of memory
21. The pure consciousness of the Atman is unchangeable. As the reflection of its consciousness falls upon the mind, the mind takes the form of the Atman and appears to be conscious
22. The mind is able to perceive because it reflects both the Atman and the objects of perception
23. Though the mind has innumerable impressions and desires, it acts only to serve another, the Atman; for being a compound substance, it cannot act independently, and for its own sake
24. The man of discrimination ceases to regard the mind as the Atman
25. When the mind is bent on the practice of discrimination, it moves toward liberation
26. Distractions due to past impressions may arise if the mind relaxes its discrimination, even a little
27. They may be overcome in the same manner as the obstacles to enlightenment (sutra II:3)
28. He who remains undistracted even when he is in the possession of all the psychic powers, achieves, as the result of perfect discrimination, that Samadhi which is called the "cloud of virtue"
29. Thence come cessation of ignorance, the cause of suffering, and freedom from the power of karma
30. Then the whole universe, with all its objects of sense knowledge, becomes as nothing in comparison to that infinite knowledge which is free from all obstructions and impurities
31. Then the sequence of mutations of the gunas comes to an end, for they have fulfilled their purpose
32. This is the sequence of mutations which take place at every moment, but which are only perceived at the end of a series
33. Since the gunas no longer have any purpose to serve for the Atman, they resolve themselves into Prakriti. This is liberation. The Atman shines forth in its own pristine nature, as pure consciousness

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