

## Yoga Sutras Re-Cap

The dialogue of yoga has been going on for several thousand years in India, beginning in the Vedas, and carrying through the Upanishads, Puranas, Tantras, Sutras and Bhakti movement.

The earliest Vedas date back between 1800 and 1000 BCE. The Upanishadic age is from roughly 1200 BCE to the 4th or 5th century CE.

Maharishi Patanjali's work is dated between roughly 200-400 CE.

Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and all of the various philosophical and soteriological systems that developed in India arose from a common pursuit: liberation. We do not need to think of these as separate, distinct "-ism's", but branches of a several thousand year old dialogue and quest for understanding and realization that has resulted in different conclusions that are based on similar ideas and terminologies.

Yoga, as part of this dialogue, is a discipline that is aligned with Sankhya. There are different versions of Sankhya: the early Sankhya is dualistic, the later versions are non-dualistic.

The lens by which yoga is primarily viewed these days is through Hatha Yoga, which is a much later development, arising somewhere around roughly the 10th to 15th centuries CE. The prevalence of asana and pranayama directly associated as the description of yoga is recent. Yoga is a practice of gnosis, not of asanas. Asanas and pranayama are a tool for helping to achieve that.

Though Patanjali's system is very cohesive, it is not the only presentation of yoga, and is not wholly accepted by all. However, many parts of his system are widely accepted, such as the enumeration of the eight limbs. In the same way the conclusions of Sankhya are not accepted by all other darshanas, there are aspects that are widely accepted, such as the elucidation on the gunas, tanmatras, panchamahabhutas, karma and jnana indriyas.

The word sutra means stitch or thread. The sutras themselves are short phrases that contain deep meanings. They are not instruction books with elaborate or precise descriptions or definitions. Much of what is in the sutras have to be understood based on prior knowledge and study. To read them out of context is to misunderstand what is being imparted. This is one area where we, as Westerners and non-scholars, are at a disadvantage. However, we can still gain some benefit from studying them. The meanings of the sutras are elaborated on in the bhasyas, or commentaries. Not all of the commentaries agree with each other.

The first sutra, is

### ***Atha yoga anushashanam***

*Now, yoga instruction*

*Anushashanam*, generally speaking, means instruction or explication. It contains the word *shash* within it, which means to punish, which infers discipline. Discipline and disciple have the same root. Yoga is a discipline, and so the word *shash* as a disciplined instruction is a clue to what yoga is.

*Atha*, which means now, is often used as the opening word of the sutra form of text. As well, now indicates a time that is not the past and not the future, so it is used to indicate the timeless state. The instruction of yoga is timeless.

The second sutra is

### ***Yogah citta vritti nirodhaha***

This is an equation. Yoga equals the *nirodhaha* of the *vrittis* in *citta*. *Vritti* means an activity in the mind, and comes from the verbal root that denotes a circular pattern. We often think in circles. *Vrittis* are the myriad of activities occurring in *citta*, which is the mind. While *vrittis* are an activity in the mind, the mind is an activity of nature. It is composed of the three *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in different ratios. The mind is not a separate “thing,” it is an activity of nature, just like our body and emotions. *Nirodhaha* can mean either stopping, stilling, elimination, confinement, or restraint. Though it indicates a negative process, it also infers that while we confine or restrain the mind, it is a positive restraint, because we are choosing the place where we wish it to be restrained, for example, to the breath, a mantra, or an idea, such as gratitude, compassion, or friendship. The control of the mind is the conscious choosing of where you want your mind to be, and where you want it to not be.

The primary state of mind discussed in Yoga Sutras are the different *samadhis*, a special type of concentration, and *kaivalya*, the dissolution of mind into its source. *Samadhi* is not the end goal of yoga, it is the last stage before the end goal.

The third sutra is

### ***Tada drashtuhu svarupe'vasthanam***

Then, when the mind is constrained and remains without any activity, consciousness self-identifies as consciousness. The effort at stillness is the active process of yoga, the non-effort of stillness is the culmination of yoga. This is the timeless state, pure being. When being remains as being, it simply is. When being is not resting in itself, then the condition of the next sutra occurs, which is the state of becoming.

The fourth sutra says

### ***Vritti sarupyam itaratra***

Purusha and prakriti can be described as pure being and infinite creative potential. Creative potential is an infinite reality, as infinite as consciousness, according to Sankhya. Prakriti has an infinite capacity for change, which is another way of saying nature and creativity.

The sutra says: Otherwise, when consciousness is not self identifying as consciousness, it self-identifies with the activities of mind that are presented to it.

That is the state that anyone who comes to study yoga is in.

## **A Very General Timeline of Hindu Texts**

BCE

Vedic period roughly 1800-800

Rig Veda

Sama Veda

Yajur Veda

Atharva Veda

Early Upanishadic period roughly 900-300 BCE

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

Chandogya Upanishad

Taittiriya Upanishad

Aitaryeya Upanishad

Kausitaki Upanishad

6th century Jainism

5th century the time of Buddha

Itihasa and early Sutra period roughly 400-200 BCE

Brahma Sutras

Mahabharata

Ramayana

Artha Shastra

Sankhya Sutra

Mimamsa Sutra

Late Upanishadic period roughly 300-100 BCE

Kena Upanishad

Katha Upanishad

Isa Upanishad

Svetasvatara Upanishad

Mundaka Upanishad

Sutra period roughly 400-100 BCE

Sankhya Sutra

Mimamsa Sutra

Nyaya Sutra

Vaisheshika Sutra

Shiva Sutras

CE

Prasna Upanishad

Mandukya Upanishad

Yoga Sutras 200-400

Puranas 250-1000s

Yoga Vashishta 750

Amritasiddhi 1000s

Goraksha Paddati 1000s-1200s

Dattatreya Yoga Shastra 1200s

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 1400s

Gheranda Samhita 1600s

Hathabhyasa Paddati 1700s