



The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras

Dear Readers,

There are 196 sutras or statements that make up the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. In this document I have listed only those sutras or statements that are practical and essential for meditators. For this purpose I have selected 74 sutras that are useful to the meditator on the path of internal research. Sincere seekers, who wish to unravel the greatest of all mysteries, the mind, can begin here.

I have chosen to translate or rather transliterate these chosen Yoga Sutras in a narrative form for different reasons. First and foremost being, the ease in reading of what is otherwise a difficult subject. Another factor that influenced me was the fact, that it seemed almost impossible to translate the Yoga Sutras in to pithy statements and yet make them comprehensible. The technical words used cannot be translated without explanation. And last but not the least, this is written with understanding that springs from direct experience and contemplation in the spirit of the living Tradition of Samaya Srividya. Since this is not yet another academic and analytical commentary of the Yoga Sutras, I am exploring different ways to communicate the teachings to meditators and sincere seekers.

For whom are The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras?

The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras are meant, neither for intellectuals, who wish to engage in debates nor for sanskrit scholars, keen on discussing translations. These are also not meant for modern students of physical culture who learn the Yoga sutras by heart in order to get a certificate.

The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras are meant for sincere seekers who desire direct experience of Yoga as Meditation and wish to use the Yoga Sutras, as taught by a living unbroken tradition of master meditators, as a tool to deepen their Meditation practice.

How to use The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras?

Print out The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras and read it at night before you go to bed. Read it like you would read a story. It is okay if you do not understand everything. Continue reading. You do not have to read the entire text in one evening. When the mind tires, just go to bed. The text goes deep in to the unconscious mind and is slowly integrated. The next evening, continue from where you left off. Read and re-read the text. With each reading it will unravel new mysteries and disclose its secrets. Reading and re-reading this text over years will provide increasingly deeper levels of insights.

Enjoy contemplating!

Radhikaji
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Hofheim/Frankfurt Germany
Teacher of Samaya Srividya
www.that-first.com

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THE ESSENTIAL PATANJALI YOGA SUTRAS

The Essential Patanjali Yoga Sutras cover only those Sutras that are relevant to meditators and sincere seekers. This is not an intellectual approach to the Yoga Sutras; rather a very practical and simple one.

YS I.1-4

What is Yoga?

The Patanjali Yoga Sutras begin by answering the question, What is Yoga? When a high state of consciousness is attained, where thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires naturally and spontaneously subside without any forceful suppression, this state is called Yoga. When this occurs, Pure Consciousness shines forth and you know that you are One with the Infinite Whole, a wave of bliss and beauty in this vast ocean of consciousness. At all other times however, we are disturbed by our thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires, and we identify ourselves with these, mistaking our thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires for ourselves, when in fact we are none other than Pure Consciousness.

YS I.5-11

Un-coloring your thoughts

Thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires disturb us like ripples disturb the clear surface of a lake. These ripples are of two-fold nature.

1. Colored (Klishta): Colored thoughts, mental images, emotions, and desires are those that lead us to the false belief that worldly objects give us everlasting pleasure. These colored thoughts, feelings and desires cause us to mistake misery as happiness and regard our body and mind as our true nature, leading us further away from Pure Consciousness. We continue to strengthen and perpetuate this false belief system.
2. Not-colored (Aklishta): Not-colored thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires are those that lead away from this false belief system and promote the direct experience of our true nature, which is none other than Pure Consciousness.

The ripples in the lake of the mind are of 5 kinds:

1. Correct cognition is recognizing and knowing a thing to be as it is.
2. Incorrect cognition is not recognizing and not knowing a thing as it is.
3. Imagination and abstraction are words, thoughts or ideas that have no material substance beyond the word. Concepts such as truth, freedom, wisdom may be useful but have no concrete reality.
4. Deep dreamless sleep is a place we go to every night in alternate cycles of dreaming and dreamless sleep.
5. Memory is recalling all other forms of cognition, real or imagined, without adding anything from other sources.

In order to attain that state of Yoga where Pure Consciousness shines forth, it is important to learn to promote correct cognition, that is, recognising and knowing a thing to be as it is. Having learned this, it is the corner stone of practice to consistently encourage correct cognition.

Correct Cognition, in turn, is of three kinds.

1. Direct perception
2. Inference is knowing a thing through a thought process, such as, knowing the shape or size of an object such as a house from the shadow it throws.
3. Testimony is knowing a thing through an external authority, that is, a teacher who has had direct perception or who has knowledge through correct inference.

YS I.12-16

Practice and Non-attachment

The ripples of thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires that disturb the lake of the mind subside with

1. practice
2. non-attachment.

1. What is meant by practice?

Effort and energy applied repeatedly to attain the state where the ripples of the mind subside is practice. The practice becomes firm when it is continued over a long period of time without break and with the right attitude.

The details about practice are discussed in Chapter 2: On Practice.

2. What is Non-attachment?

When the mind is naturally and effortlessly content; it is attracted neither to the external world nor has it desire for some higher states or powers described in some scriptures. This state of utter desirelessness is called Non-attachment.

There is a still higher state of desirelessness known as Supreme Non-attachment. When we recognize that the ripples of thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires are transient and constantly changing and that our true nature is Pure Consciousness, this is the state of Supreme Non-attachment.

YS I.19-22

Efforts and Commitment

Some may easily attain a higher state of consciousness due to effort in previous lifetimes. These are advanced students.

The others must have reasoned faith, put in energy in to repeated practice and attain increasingly higher levels of concentration until they finally attain the higher knowledge that our true nature is Pure Consciousness.

There are 3 kinds of students with varying degrees of intensity and enthusiasm:

1. Mild degree
2. Medium degree
3. High degree

Those with highest degree of intensity and enthusiasm attain higher levels of consciousness quickly.

Depending on the system of techniques and philosophy practiced there are differences even among the most enthusiastic of students. The system of techniques and philosophy practiced are:

1. slow
2. medium
3. fast

YS I.30-32

Obstacles in Practice and Solution

On the path of meditation a student will encounter 9 obstacles that disturb and distract the mind. These are:

1. Sickness because the body is not in its natural state
2. Dullness of the mind
3. Doubt
4. Carelessness
5. Heaviness of the body and mind; laziness, sloth
6. Attraction to worldly pleasures
7. Inability to distinguish between right and wrong
8. Not being able to attain glimpses of a higher state of consciousness, and
9. Not able to establish oneself in a higher state of consciousness, instability

Out of these obstacles emerge mental and physical pain, dejection or frustration, restless body and mind and irregular breath.

The solution is to continue with one-pointedness and enthusiasm on the path of meditation and to train your mind to focus on one object. Like the river that flows over all rocks that are obstacles in its path, the student should continue to practice. As the student continues the obstacles subside naturally.

YS I.33-39

Stabilising and clearing the mind

There are two aspects of practice. We must learn to deal with both the internal world as well as the external world. Therefore it is important to observe how we relate to our external world. It may become necessary to unlearn unhealthy thinking and behavioural patterns.

If we observe our relationships and communications carefully it becomes clear that we are relating to people who fall in to 4 broad categories.

They are either

1. happy
2. unhappy and miserable
3. those whom we perceive as essentially virtuous and good
4. or those whom we perceive as wicked, selfish and bearing ill intentions

If we continue to observe our relationships with people we might find that the responses that create the least amount of disturbance in our minds are as follows:

1. Cultivate friendliness towards those who are happy
2. Feel compassion for those who are unhappy and miserable
3. Cultivate good will and encourage those whom you perceive as essentially virtuous and good
4. Be indifferent or neutral towards those you perceive as wicked, selfish and bearing ill intentions.

These are not instructions on how we “should” behave, rather suggests an alternative that we can possibly play with, so that the external world creates the least amount of obstacles in our development.

Having some guidelines on how to manage our external environment, 5 methods are suggested to stabilize the mind. These are:

1. By paying attention to the breath, allowing it to become fine and subtle, and gently allowing the time of exhalation to steadily increase until the number of breaths taken are so few that it appears the breath has subsided.
2. By contemplating on the senses, their subtler internal counterparts and steadily understanding how our internal world is constructed.
3. By contemplating on our inner light of pure consciousness and coming in touch with our inner voice of conscience.
4. Contemplating and meditating upon great saints and sages.
5. Or we may contemplate and meditate upon any other object that is suitable for the purpose of Yoga.

YS II.1-9

Reducing mild colouring

Now that we have the overview of the process of yoga, we find out how a dedicated seeker can gain glimpses of Samadhi, the highest state, and reduce the coloring of the ripples of thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires. The author(s) recommends a combination of:

Tapas: Training the senses and the mind

Svadhya: Grasping scriptural knowledge and knowing yourself

Ishvara-Pranidhan: Strengthening the glimpses of direct experience resulting in divine love

These 3 aspects are also called Kriya Yoga, not to be confused with any particular modern yoga style, teacher or tradition. The word kriya comes from action, to do.

There are 5 kinds of coloring called kleshas. They are:

1. Avidya: Ignorance or avidya is when one considers that which is transient as everlasting, that which is unhealthy as healthy and misery as happiness.
2. Asmita: Asmita or egoism is mistaking buddhi, our sense of discrimination for Purusha the centre of consciousness.
3. Raga: Attachment or Raga is that which follows pleasure, wanting more pleasure
4. Dvesha: Aversion or Dvesha is what results from pain or that which is seems painful
5. Abhinivesha: The fear of death is present in everyone, this is called Abhinivesha.

Avidya or Ignorance is the root of all kleshas or colouring. The remaining 4 kleshas or colouring are the result of Avidya or Ignorance, the first colouring. Each of these kleshas or colourings may be in any of the following 4 stages of colouring:

Dormant or Latent
Attenuated
Interrupted
Active

YS II.10-11 Dealing with deeper coloring

The deepest of colored thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires can only be burnt in the fire of knowledge, but the superficial and milder colored thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires can be dealt with in meditation so that they eventually become Not-colored. Using the example of washing dirt off a cloth. The milder stains can be washed off first, but for stubborn stains more time, effort and care is required.

YS 12-25 Breaking the alliance between karma and kleshas

These sutras explain the core and cornerstone of meditation. It is not possible to begin meditation without understanding how karma and samskaras are related and how they form a vicious cycle.

Karma is action and samskaras are the impressions of these actions that are stored. These samskaras are Colored or Not-colored.

Colored klesha or samskara are of 3 kinds:

White: These come from virtuous actions

Black: These kleshas or samskaras come from evil action

Black-White or mixed: These are mixed.

Not-colored kleshas or samskaras are also called Not Black- Not White

The colored kleshas form impressions called samskaras, and samskaras lead to further action in this life or another life. As long as the coloring remains at the root in the form of samskaras the cycle will continue, resulting in birth, the length of the life span and the experiences one goes through in life.

The birth, length of lifespan and the experiences of life produce pleasure and pain.

A person with a sharp sense of discrimination known as Buddhi recognizes that all worldly objects cause misery and suffering. The only pain and suffering that is avoidable is the one to come.

The root cause of suffering is the alliance of the Pure Consciousness on one hand (Purusha, Atman) and Buddhi our sense of discrimination and all worldly objects on the other.

All objects have 3 qualities or Gunas:
Prakash or Sattva
Kriya or Rajas
Sthithi or Tamas

These qualities exist in the active and cognitive senses, as well as in the inner organ of the mind known as Antahkarana. They are useful for experiencing the world in the form of pain and pleasure, as well as attaining liberation.

The qualities of all worldly objects, the Gunas are either gross or subtle. Gunas are either manifest or unmanifest.

Individual Consciousness, the Absolute Knower (Purusha, Atman) witnesses Buddhi, its own sense of discrimination. We often mistake Buddhi, our sense of discrimination to be our individual consciousness. Buddhi, though close in nature to Pure Consciousness, is not Pure consciousness. It serves Pure Consciousness. Pure Consciousness does not serve any purpose, it is the end in itself.

The nature and essence of all objects of the world, including Buddhi are to serve as objects to individual Consciousness.

When the individual Consciousness or Purusha fulfills its purpose of attaining liberation the world, as it appears to the unenlightened, disappears for such

liberated individual Consciousness. However Buddhi and the appearance of the world continues to remain for all individual Selves that have not recognized the objective character of buddhi and all other objects.

The alliance between the individual consciousness and Buddhi, the sense of discrimination is the cause of the appearance of the world. This is Avidya or ignorance.

Breaking the alliance between individual Consciousness and Buddhi leads to the natural state of liberation of the individual consciousness.

YS 26-29

The 8 Limbs and Buddhi, sense of discrimination

Distinction between individual Consciousness and Buddhi, the sense of discrimination leads to liberation. The one who can distinguish between individual Consciousness and Buddhi, the sense of discrimination acquires 7 kinds of insights. These are:

- 1 The practitioner knows all the things he must gave up.
- 2 The practitioner knows the colouring that is the cause of attachment to these things and the strength of this colouring has been reduced until it can no longer be reduced.
- 3 Liberation is a matter of practice and realisation
- 4 That acquiring a sharp sense of discrimination is the means to liberation has been understood

These four insights liberate one from rituals, external practices and the binding power of karma.

The next 3 insights lead to liberation from mind itself.

- 5 The Buddhi serves the individual Consciousness
- 6 Buddhi the sense of discrimination, no longer appropriates all objects for itself. It begins an irreversible process of dissolving back in to the source of all things
- 7 The individual Consciousness shines forth, it is self luminous like the sun.

Through the practice of the different limbs of Yoga, the colouring of thoughts, mental images, emotions and desires is washed away and the sense of discrimination is sharpened.

Yama, observance

Niyama, commitment

Asana, posture

Pranayama, subtle energy exercises

Pratyahara, training and directing the senses inward

Dharana, focussing the mind towards an object of meditation

Dhyana, letting the awareness flow towards a particular object of meditation

Samadhi, directly experiencing the difference between Pure Consciousness and the rest of the universe

YS 30-34

Yamas and Niyamas

The 5 Yamas are enumerated:

Ahimsa - non-violence, non-hurting, non-injury, respect, selflessness

Satya - Truth, authenticity, transparency, non-deception, self awareness

Asteya - Non-stealing, self reliance

Brahmacharya - Self mastery, balance, sustainability, responsibility, moderation

Aparigraha - non-hoarding, non-possessiveness, simplicity, less is more

When these are established unconditionally irrespective of place, time, circumstances then these observances are considered to be especially potent in washing away the colouring of kleshas.

Saucha - purity, cleanliness

Santosha - contentment, satisfaction

Tapa - self training, training of the senses and the mind, discipline

Svadhya - self reflection, self awareness, study, contemplation

Ishwar Pranidhan - surrender, effortlessness, grace, humility

When one has contrary thoughts to the above mentioned Yamas and Niyamas, for e.g. feels anger, wants to lie, wants to steal, is discontent, cannot trust the Divine, then one should conduct an inner dialogue encouraging the opposite thought.

What is the opposite thought?

The opposite thought is always the same. It is : "Actions contrary to the yamas and niyamas are the cause of infinite misery and unending ignorance of our real nature."

Actions contrary to yamas and niyamas, include those that

- 1 are either performed by oneself, performed through another or approved of
- 2 are performed through anger, greed or delusion
- 3 are mild, moderate or intense

YS 46-48

Asana

Perfecting an asana is sitting in the posture in a relaxed and effortless manner.

When the posture is effortless and relaxed, meditation on the infinite is possible.

When the body is seated effortlessly, relaxed and motionless, when the mind is meditating on the infinite, then all dualities are transcended.

YS 49-53

Pranayama

When the body is still in a posture, effortless and relaxed, the flow of inhalation and exhalation is the focus of attention. The speed at which one inhales and exhales is regulated so that the breathing rate slows down. This is pranayama.

There are 3 aspects to be considered in breathing:

Inhalation

Exhalation

The pause between the two

The above three aspects are to be regulated as follows:

Space: The awareness of the breath is located physically in the areas like diaphragm or nostrils.

Time: The length of inhalation and exhalation can be regulated to make it even and balanced.

Count: The length of inhalation and exhalation can be made longer and finer.

There is still another aspect of pranayama to be considered. This is called the fourth. The fourth aspect of pranayama is beyond inhalation, exhalation and the pause. This is prana itself.

It is through the practice and mastery of the fourth pranayama that the veil covering the light of pure Consciousness is thinned and eventually destroyed.

When the veil covering the light of Consciousness has been thinned the mind is prepared for the one-pointed concentration on an object of meditation.

YS 54-55 Pratyahara

With the correct practice of Pranayama as indicated in the earlier sutras, the cognitive and active sense of the mind recede from objects of the world and the mind spontaneous moves inward. This is called the mastery of the senses.

