Introduction

Disciplined action, study of the self, and surrender to the Lord constitute the practice of Yoga.

"Tapas svadhyaya isvarapranidhanani kriyayogah." Yoga Sutra 11.1

In Indian philosophy there are always three strands of thought - work (karma), knowledge (jnana), and devotion (bhakti). The three strands go together.

The above quotation from the Yoga aphorisms (Yoga Sutra) of Patanjali points to this division, and we have taken it as the theme underlying the three parts of this book. Tapas relates to energetic practice, svadhyaya signifies the study of the self and of Yoga philosophy, and Isvarapranidhana shows the way of devotion, without which practice is not complete.

THE VALUE OF YOGA

Human beings are made up of three components: body, mind, and soul. Corresponding to these are three needs that must be satisfied for a contented life: the physical need is health; the psychological need is knowledge; and the spiritual need is inner peace. When all three are present there is harmony.

Modern society faces problems which affect all these aspects. Today's lifestyle with its technological wonders is a mixed blessing. Convenience and speed are obtained at some cost to physical health. Labor-saving devices minimize physical exertion, resulting in stiffness and muscular weakness. A sedentary life causes backache, neck problems, heaviness in the limbs, and difficulty in walking. The extensive use of visual media leads to headaches and eye strain.

The mental anxieties of a competitive world deplete inner resources, inviting stress-related problems such as insomnia and digestive, respiratory, and nervous disorders. If pressures are not balanced with time for quiet reflection, the quality of life is impaired.

Modern trends of thought are a melting pot of old and new ideas. Artificial values stemming from acquisitiveness and self-interest lead to alienation from the spiritual purpose of life. The loss of belief can bring a sense of loss of one's own true identity.

Yoga helps in all these problems. At the physical level, it gives relief from countless ailments. The practice of the postures strengthens the body and creates a feeling of well-being.

From the psychological viewpoint, Yoga sharpens the intellect and aids concentration. It steadies the emotions and encourages a caring concern for others. Above all, it gives hope. The practice of breathing techniques calms the mind. Its philosophy sets life in perspective. In the realm of the spiritual, Yoga brings awareness and the ability to be still. Through meditation, inner peace is experienced.

Thus Yoga is a practical philosophy involving every aspect of a person's being. It teaches the evolution of the individual by the development of self-discipline and self-awareness.

Anyone, irrespective of age, health, circumstance of life, and religion, can practice Yoga.

THE DISCIPLINES OF YOGA

Yoga is a classical Indian science dealing with the search for the soul. The word "Yoga" signifies both the way to discovery of the soul and union with it.

Yoga philosophy was systematized some 2,000 years ago by sage Patanjali in a single treatise, Yoga Sutra. The work is still acknowledged by all Yoga practitioners as the authoritative text on Yoga.

Yoga comprises eight limbs. These are:
1. Universal ethical principles (Yama)
2. Rules of personal conduct (Niyama)
3. The practice of Yoga postures (Asana)
4. The practice of Yoga breathing techniques (Pranayama)
5. Control of the senses (Pratyahara)
6. Concentration of the mind (Dharana)
7. Meditation (Dhyana)
8. Absorption in the Infinite (Samadhi)

Glimpses of the latter may come at any stage of practice, elevating it beyond the realms of physical and mental endeavor.

Yoga is built on a foundation of ethics (yama) and personal discipline (niyama). These are universal precepts found in all societies. Thus from the practical point of view, Yoga can be considered to begin at the level of postures (asanas).

Each limb forms part of the whole, and tradition teaches that, even after attaining great heights in Yoga, the practice of asana and pranayama should be continued, for the health of the body.

**YOGACHARYA B.K.S. IYENGAR**

Traditionally in India sacred knowledge is passed on by a spiritual leader who is a teacher, guide, and example. This is the Guru, meaning one who removes the darkness of ignorance, replacing it with the light of intelligence. The Guru guides the student on the spiritual path. He has wisdom, benevolence, tolerance, and the energy and ability to help others. His knowledge is authoritative.

In this century such a teacher is found in Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar. He is the world's foremost exponent of Yoga, having devoted a lifetime to its study. He lives his life according to the philosophical precepts of Yoga. Both he and his family set examples of morality, tolerance, and social conscience.

B.K.S. Iyengar began teaching in 1936 at the age of 18 and today, even though over 70, he still continues to teach and inspire students. Perfectionism, observation of scientific detail, and religiosity of practice characterize his teaching and the school of Yoga he has developed.

His system of teaching helps people to progress gradually from beginner to proficient advanced level, taking account of their weaknesses. This progression is educationally sound and brings lasting benefits; it has made his system, widely accepted by education authorities.

He has several million students all over the world following his method. There are Iyengar Institutes and centers in the US, the UK, Europe, Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well as India.

He has his own Institute in Pune, India, where his eldest daughter, Geeta, and son, Prashant, carry on the teaching tradition. Geeta Iyengar is much respected as the author of Yoga: A Gem for Women. Prashant Iyengar is involved in researching Yoga philosophy.

B.K.S. Iyengar has taught many world-famous figures, but his greatest achievement is in bringing Yoga to ordinary people so that all can benefit.

**B.K.S. IYENGAR’S CONTRIBUTION TO YOGA**

Though he has popularized Yoga, he has not sacrificed the purity of its original teachings. Yoga is a philosophy, a science, and an art. It is also a therapy.

B.K.S. Iyengar has seen all these aspects and developed them, making an immense contribution to the knowledge and understanding of Yoga. He has written exhaustively on all major aspects of Yoga and his books are regarded as modern classics, used both for reference and as practical guides. They are *Light on Yoga*, *The Concise Light on Yoga*, *Light on Pranayama*, *The Art of Yoga*, and *The Tree of Yoga*. These books have been translated into many languages. He is currently working on a definitive translation and interpretation of Patanjali's aphorisms (a short version, *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, is already available). The book *Iyengar: His Life and Work* gives a brief autobiography and narrations of his students’ own experiences.

B.K.S. Iyengar has systematized over two hundred asana and pranayama techniques and has discovered the anatomical principles on which they are based. He shows how, in the asanas, the various parts of the body have to be positioned in their correct places, so that each individual part as well as the various physiological systems may function to their best potential. Minutiae of the postures are explored to penetrate remote anatomical layers of the body.
This makes Yoga a challenge to the intelligence. Body and mind are stretched beyond their everyday limits and are made to act in unison.

B.K.S. Iyengar has evolved the therapeutic application of the postures. He has devised methods of modifying the postures for maximum benefit of patients with disabilities. Leading members of the medical profession in India and elsewhere recognize his intimate knowledge of the body and his explanations of pathology from a Yogic point of view. He is known as an expert in treating complex medical problems.

B.K.S. Iyengar has matched new thinking in the therapeutic field with fresh insights on meditation. The concept of meditation in action is a keynote of his work. Being totally aware and absorbed in the postures as they are being done is meditation. Body and mind communicate at a subtle level and are harmonized. There is a continuous interchange between the two about every movement and action taking place. The awareness gained by meditation in action translates itself into everyday life.

Finally, B.K.S. Iyengar sees Yoga as an art. The body is shaped into postures that are graceful, and he has perfected and taught their artistic presentation. Through finding the aesthetic in the postures, he has made the subject visually appealing and inspired countless people to take up Yoga.

The Asanas

If you look after the root of the tree, the fragrance and flowering will come by itself. If you look after the body, the fragrance of the mind and spirit will come of itself.

B.K.S. IYENGAR

By their wide-ranging effects, Yoga asanas and relaxation techniques make efficient use of all physical and mental resources. This brings about better adjustment in various life situations and paves the way for the health of future generations.

SEEKING HEALTH

Health is a balanced state of bodily elements and of all anatomical and physiological systems, where each part of the body functions at full potential. All these complex systems must work smoothly and without interruption, but in ordinary life they do not. Mental, moral, and emotional aspects, too, must be sound. Spirituality completes full health and puts human affairs in the perspective of the universal. Striving toward this goal is the main aim of Yoga.

The Patanjali Yoga Sutras (I, 30-31) enumerate the various physical and psychological defects that hamper progress in any undertaking. They are disease, sluggishness, doubt, carelessness, idleness, sensual indulgence, living in the world of illusion, inability to progress and to consolidate progress. In addition, there are other psychophysical disturbances. These are sorrow, despair, shakiness of the body, and labored breathing.

Yoga is a means by which to gain an increasing measure of control over these problems.

To this end, Patanjali lays down the three duties of tapas, svadhyaya, and Isvarapranidhana. These are the three cornerstones of the practice of Yoga. Here we deal with the first of these - tapas (self-discipline and fervor). It fires the practice of Yoga with zeal. Without it, nothing can be attained. This disciplined approach carries over into other areas of life.

Tapas means warmth, heat, fire. It is the heat and energy gained by devoting one's thoughts and actions toward a particular goal, without dissipating them elsewhere. These thoughts and actions themselves generate energy because they are so concentrated.

Good health cannot be taken for granted but must be striven for. Yoga teaches that this is achieved through the practice of asanas. Asanas need to be practised with tapas in order to achieve maximum benefit.
Asanas are an integral part of Yoga. They are not mere physical exercise as they involve both psychological and physiological processes. They are linked to all the other aspects of Yoga, rooted in ethics and ending in spirituality. Yoga uses the body to exercise and control the mind, so that at a later stage the body and mind together may harmonize with the soul.

The Yoga asanas affect and penetrate every single cell and tissue, making them come to life.

The wide variety of postures offers a training capable of creating a vigorous body, well-functioning inner organs, and an alert mind.

The asanas each have a distinct form and shape. To execute them, exact stretches, counter-stretches, and resistances are needed. These align the skin, flesh, and muscular structure of the body with the skeleton.

There are postures and cycles of postures that give a variety of different effects: stimulating, calming, energizing, building stamina or concentration, promoting sleep, internally soothing, and so on. These benefits come as a side effect of Yoga through correct practice. Thus the standing poses give vitality, the sitting poses are calming, twists are cleansing, supine poses are restful, prone poses are energizing, the inverted poses develop mental strength, balancing bring a feeling of lightness, backbends are exhilarating and the jumpings develop agility.

Relaxation is a separate art. The quality of relaxation depends on the intensity of the postures that precede it.

Many common physical ailments and defects, including chronic disorders, can be improved by the practice of Yoga postures. They work on specific areas of the body such as the joints, the liver, kidneys and heart. The movements and extensions in the postures, including the positioning of the inner organs in the inverted sequences, have a profound effect on how they function. The body is oxygenated and filled with healthy blood, decongested and rested. Stamina, lung capacity, heart performance, muscle tone, circulation and respiration all improve.

It is on such principles that therapeutic Yoga is founded.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE

Great emphasis needs to be laid on practice. Practice changes the physical as well as the mental state of the practitioner.

One of the principles of Yoga is not to seek the fruit of actions. Thus practice should be for its own sake, without regard to success or failure. This is the way to gain equanimity.

Practice should be systematic, starting with simple postures. Progress is made by becoming stronger in these before proceeding to more difficult asanas. Gradually the understanding and level of involvement deepens. The basic postures are repeated over and over again throughout, because they are the foundation of knowledge.

Practice is cumulative. First one set of postures is learned. When the second set is learned, it is repeated together with the first. The third set is repeated together with the second and first, and so on.

In the beginning progress is fast. After some time a plateau is reached where improvement seems minimal. With time, this will be overcome. It takes about two years to settle into the postures, to understand them, and to move the various parts of the body in an inter-related fashion. First each posture has to be analyzed and studied.

Diligence and effort are required in practice. Initially, the labor seems greater than the result, and failures are frequent; with perseverance, gains come with less effort. According to Patanjali, the mastery of asanas occurs when practice becomes effortless.

Attention to accuracy is needed. At first alignment is approximate; gradually it becomes more precise. When the posture is aligned correctly, there is no break in the energy flow.

Finally, a devoted attitude to practice is necessary. This involves, in the first place, adhering to a regular routine. Secondly, it involves belief in the efficacy of Yoga. Thirdly, it involves a sensitive, inquiring approach, constantly striving toward perfection. This frame of mind, coupled with the
discipline of habitual practice, helps in the various ups and downs of life.

Progress brings satisfaction as health improves, the details of the postures become clear and understanding deepens. When Yoga is practiced with devotion, the spiritual goal will come into sight.

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

The amount of time and effort put into practice brings corresponding results. Some students are satisfied with the benefits of a 20- to 30-minute weekly practice. Two or three times a week suits others while very keen students may practice every day.

Asanas can be done at any time. In the morning the body is stiff, but the mind is fresh; in the evening the body is supple, but the mind is not so alert.

Practice should be enjoyable and stimulating. It should be used constructively in life to tap the enormous diversity of possible effects of the asanas.

The asanas take time to perfect. It is often necessary to work on the intermediate stages until these come with ease, as well as on the complete pose. It is usual to repeat each posture two or three times. The amount of detail given in the book will gradually fall into place and be understood.

Breathing in the postures is important. Where no special instructions are given, normal breathing should be done. Between the stages in a posture, one or two breaths should be taken to quieten the mind. The postures are not static. Adjustments should be made and then stabilized. Further actions to improve the posture can then be added.

The sequences should be learned (see Courses, p.175). Asanas from several sections are normally done in one session. Each group of asanas develops the body in a different, complementary way.

It is best to learn the asanas of one grade of difficulty before attempting those of the next grade (see p. 14). This is a safeguard against injury.

It is often helpful to use whatever equipment or furniture is available to improve the postures. This also helps in understanding them.

It is best to go to classes, if possible, to get individual correction from a teacher.

The eyes should be kept open and the mouth closed throughout (unless otherwise instructed).

Some cautions

- The stomach and bowels should be empty. Allow four hours after a heavy meal, two hours after a light one.
- Do not wear tight clothes that restrict breathing, digestion, or circulation.
- Do not practice in direct sunlight or in a cold room.
- Do not hold the breath during the postures as this will cause strain. The eyes, ears, throat, and abdomen should be relaxed.
- To avoid injury, do not force the body beyond its capacity.
- Backaches and various weaknesses come to the fore during practice. If this happens, try the remedial programs or consult a teacher.
- Any pain felt in a posture should be temporary. Persistent pain is a sign of incorrect practice or of a physical problem.
- If exhaustion is felt, the practice has been too long or the wrong postures have been attempted. It may also indicate a weak physical condition or some ailment.

MENSTRUATION AND PREGNANCY

- During menstruation it is not advisable to follow an ordinary asana session, as this may be injurious. There is heat in the body and cooling postures are done to counteract this. Programs which are physiologically suitable are given at the end of the book.
- During pregnancy two lives are involved. It is not advisable to begin Yoga at this time as so many physiological changes are taking place.
- If already attending a class, inform the teacher as soon as pregnancy has been confirmed.
- Do not attend class in the 11th, 12th and 13th weeks of pregnancy.
- Do not do asanas that constrict the abdomen.
- On no account become fatigued or breathless.
- In case of complications or previous history of miscarriage, seek advice.
GRADING OF THE POSTURES

The postures are grouped into nine sections: standing poses, sitting poses, twists, prone and supine poses, inverted poses, balancings, backbends, jumpings, and relaxation. The sections broadly follow an order of difficulty, as do the asanas within each section.

The asanas are graded into four levels of difficulty, indicated by diamond symbols at the end of the descriptive heading to each, as follows:

★ Beginners
★★ General - for most students
★★★ Intermediate - for keen practitioners
★★★★ Advanced - for intense practitioners

A balanced practice session incorporates asanas from several sections, in various combinations. For this reason courses containing asanas of progressive levels of difficulty have been given on pp. 175-184 to guide the student towards systematic practice.

Anyone suffering from a minor ailment should follow the remedial program specified on pp. 183-7, until relief is gained. Those with a serious medical problem need a specially qualified teacher.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ASANA PRACTICE

The practice of asanas is integrated with Yoga philosophy and the two cannot be separated. Many details are given in the postures which gradually need to be introduced into practice. Making the shapes of the postures is a physical activity; understanding and implementing the finer details is necessary to develop complete involvement.

The body contains millions of cells which have to gain nourishment. Actions must pervade the whole body to improve cellular metabolism and circulation. In order to penetrate them, freedom has to be created. Movement starts with joints, bones, and muscles, and finer actions terminate with the skin, where microscopic muscles are involved.

\[1\] [The figures mentioned are not included in this excerpt, neither are the pages with images and detailed descriptions of the individual asanas.]

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE POSTURES

Intermediate steps as well as the final posture are explained and illustrated, as far as space allows.

Work in the Posture gives further instructions aimed at refining the asanas.

The illustrations are annotated with key points. Ways of Practicing indicates alternative methods, or methods for achieving the postures using props.

Scattered throughout are Focuses explaining specific actions, and Reflections on various philosophical or practical topics. While they apply particularly to the posture on the page where they appear, they are of general relevance to the practice of Yoga.

Where possible nontechnical terms have been used to describe parts of the body. The terms used are given on the annotated figures, below and right.

The skin is a sense organ. By developing the sensitivity of the skin new messages are sent to the brain, which explores new avenues of awareness.

In order to carry out these adjustments and to discover subtle areas of the body, mental effort is required. The mind must be sharply focused toward the part concerned. The mental force is internalized. When an action is performed it is imprinted on the brain, creating a reflective attitude. The brain becomes like a mirror receiving the impressions of actions, but the brain itself does not act.

This reflective attitude refines the intelligence. Practicing in this way refreshes both the mind and the body, and gives a sense of accomplishment. There are always new goals to be achieved and new perceptions to be experienced. This makes Yoga a lifetime interest.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

In Yoga practice precise terms are used to describe the actions performed. These occur again and again, relating to different parts of the body. Some of the key terms relating to muscle and bone movement are given below.
## Glossary of Terms

In Yoga practice precise terms are used to describe the actions performed. These occur again and again, relating to different parts of the body. Some of the key terms relating to muscle and bone movement are given below.

### Aligning: keeping in line
The limbs and trunk are placed evenly on either side of the median line of the posture.

### Drawing up
Muscles are firmly pulled up, to lie parallel to the bones and to lift them.

### Extending/stretching
Muscles are stretched along their whole length evenly. Stretching is done without tension.

### Gripping
An action is maintained by a muscular grip.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hardening</strong></td>
<td>Muscles are held firm against the bone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hitting</strong></td>
<td>The movement of muscle toward bone is done with a strong, swift action, to move the bone in the direction stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keeping lively; full of life</strong></td>
<td>Energy and awareness are maintained in an area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifting/raising</strong></td>
<td>Keeping a firm base, each part of the body is lifted away from the part below. This creates space for a proper extension and internal opening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locking</strong></td>
<td>Joints are held firm as part of an extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening</strong></td>
<td>Space is created within an area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relaxing</strong></td>
<td>Tension in the head and body is released consciously. During Yoga practice the brain should be quietly watchful. Actions should be experienced directly in the part of the body involved. In this way measurably better extensions are obtained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revolving/turning</strong></td>
<td>The relevant part of the body is turned along its full length, with adjacent parts turning in the same direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Softening</strong></td>
<td>Tension is removed from an area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tucking in</strong></td>
<td>The relevant part is taken deeper into the body.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STANDING POSES

You should do the asanas with rigor and at the same time be relaxed and composed.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

The standing poses are invigorating. They refresh the body and mind by removing tension, aches, and pains. They stimulate digestion, regulate the kidneys, and relieve constipation. They improve circulation and breathing. The back, hips, knees, neck, and shoulders all gain strength and mobility through practice. The standing poses also teach the principles of correct movement. This is fundamental for the postures and also in everyday life, where they develop awareness of the right way to sit, stand, and walk.

It is best to work on a non-slip surface. Precision is essential. Even small inaccuracies in lining up create distortions in the posture. For this reason the body and feet should be aligned with the walls of the room, and the body centered before starting. Accuracy in the postures is developed through working carefully.

To develop energy and to combat laziness, the postures should be done dynamically, with full extension of the limbs and trunk. Working with effort does not mean working with tension, and it is important to learn how to stay relaxed.

Jumping into the postures makes the body and mind alert and teaches coordination. In jumping, the feet should land equidistant from the center and in line, and the arms should move out to the sides simultaneously with the legs.

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICE

It is sometimes useful to practice the standing poses with the back against a wall for support and to check alignment. They may also be practiced at right angles to a wall, pressing the back foot against it and extending the trunk away from it. This helps to keep the back leg strong.

Virasana (p. 50) may be done during and after standing poses to recover from fatigue or if the legs are tired.

CAUTIONS: Do not do standing poses if suffering from medical conditions such as high blood pressure, heart problems, or nervous disorders.

Do not practice them during menstruation, in the first three months of pregnancy or if problems arise in pregnancy, as they are strenuous.

Do not jump into the poses if suffering from knee or back injuries, or if pregnant. Instead, walk the feet to the sides, one at a time.
SITTING POSES

Extension brings space, space brings freedom, freedom brings precision. Precision is truth and truth is God.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

The sitting poses are calming. They remove fatigue, refresh the brain, and soothe the nerves. They regularize blood pressure and aid recovery from illness. They promote healthy sleep.

They fall into two categories: upright postures that involve flexing the legs into different positions, and forward bends where the trunk bends over the legs.

It is best to sit on one or two folded blankets to give the lower back freedom to move.

The body should be lined up with the room. When the forward bends are done thoughtfully, with quiet breathing, they induce a calm, meditative frame of mind. They can also be done energetically, with vigorous breathing. This is refreshing, as tremendous freedom is created in the spine through stretching. Another way of working is to stretch up with a concave back. This strengthens the spine and helps the front of the body to extend.

When using a belt around the foot, the foot should press into it and the hands should pull on it, to bring the trunk forward.

The minimum length of time has been given for staying in the postures. This should be gradually increased as the muscles of the back are toned, as long as there is no strain anywhere.

Forward bends done with the forehead resting on a bolster or stool (see p. 64) are recuperative and may be held for several minutes at a time.

The forward bends are particularly suitable for practicing during menstruation.

Sometimes the bent knee may feel strained, particularly if it is weak or injured. In this case it is essential to support it and to work carefully (see pp. 50-51, 54-5). With correct practice it will gradually become stronger.

Twists may be done after forward bends if the back feels strained.

CAUTIONS: Do forward bends with concave movements if the lower back is weak and prone to backache or if suffering from depression.

During pregnancy take care to avoid strain: use a belt to catch the foot so that the lower back and the abdomen can lift.
TWISTS

Never perform the asanas mechanically, for then the body stagnates.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

The twists are very effective in relieving backaches, headaches, and stiffness in the neck and shoulders. As the trunk turns, the kidneys and abdominal organs are activated and exercised. This improves the digestion and removes sluggishness. The spine becomes flexible and the hips move more easily.

The body should be lined up with the walls of the room. For maximum freedom of movement in the lower trunk it is best to sit on one or two folded blankets.

In the final stage of the twists the abdomen may become compressed or the back rounded, and it is difficult to lift up. It is therefore helpful to remain working in the intermediate stage, with the elbow bent against the knee or the hands pressed into the ground. In this way the trunk can turn and extend well. Pressing the fingers of the back hand against a wall or ledge also helps the trunk to turn.

Twists may be done after forward bends or by themselves. After backbends, or to relieve a backache, they should be done gently at first.

The head can be turned in either direction.

Cautions: Do not do twists after recent operations, or if suffering from hernia, stomach, or abdominal problems.

Do not practice twists during pregnancy, except for Bharadvajasana (on a chair, p. 71), which should be done gently.
SUPINE & PRONE POSES

After acting, reflect on what you have done. If you do not reflect, there is confused action. Pause between each movement. The self has to find out whether the posture has been done well or not.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

This section includes two categories of posture. They stretch the abdomen, increase the mobility of the spine and hips, and open the groin. Some strengthen the back, arms, and legs. Others are restful.

The supine postures may be practiced intensively or quietly. When practicing quietly, with a bolster or blankets for support, time should be spent on getting into a comfortable position so that the back can relax fully.

In the back arches there is a tendency for the lumbar spine to contract. The legs and trunk should be stretched well before beginning them.

Adho Mukha Svanasana (p. 90) is an important posture as it accustoms the body to being in an inverted position. This inversion is of great benefit in helping to relax the brain.

As with the sitting poses, care should be taken to avoid straining the knees (see the advice given in the postures on pp. 50-51,54-5).

CAUTIONS: Do not do supine and prone poses after abdominal operations.

During menstruation or in pregnancy, only Supta Baddha Konasana (p. 81), Supta Virasana (p. 82) and Lying on Bolsters (p. 80) may be practiced.
INVERTED POSES

You must savor the fragrance of a posture. Until you are relaxed, you cannot savor the fragrance.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

The inverted poses revitalize the whole system. They take the weight off the legs, relieving strain. By inverting the inner organs, they activate parts that are sluggish. They improve circulation and tone the glandular system. They help concentration as blood is brought to the brain, and are a marvelous aid to sleep. Sirsasana in particular activates the pituitary gland.

Sarvangasana strengthens the nervous system and the emotions; it activates the thyroid and parathyroid glands.

There should be no strain in the head, eyes, ears, neck, or throat.

As the head is delicate, Sirsasana (p. 98) should always be done on a blanket. The blanket should be firm, not spongy.

It is not advisable to repeat Sirsasana as this irritates the brain and nerves.

The variations may be learned once the balance is steady.

In Sarvarigasana (p. 108), the neck should always be soft and relaxed. If the posture is done flat on the floor, there is a tendency for the neck to collapse and to feel pressure. To avoid this, the shoulders and elbows should be supported on folded blankets, the height of which should be varied according to the length and suppleness of the neck.

The above arrangement may not be suitable for those with neck injuries or conditions such as cervical spondyosis. Other methods need to be tried, after consultation with a teacher.

Sarvangasana variations (pp. 112-5) are easier if the blankets are not too high.

Although Sarvangasana is learned before Sirsasana, once the latter is learned it is practiced first: Sirsasana after Sarvangasana could injure the neck.

Sirsasana, if practiced by itself, can produce a feeling of irritability, which is soothed by Sarvangasana, so should always be followed by it.

CAUTIONS: Do not do inverted postures during menstruation.

Do not do inverted postures if suffering from high blood pressure, heart problems, detached retina, or ear problems.

If suffering from neck injuries, seek advice.

During pregnancy, Sirsasana, Sarvangasana, and Ardha Halasana (p. 110) may be done with support, provided there is no discomfort or medical contraindication.

Remove contact lenses.
BALANCINGS

You must hold the balance by the intelligence of the body - by instinct or the sense of equilibrium - and not by strength. When you keep the balance by strength, it is physical action; when you keep it by the intelligence of the body, it is relaxation in action.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

The balancing poses develop lightness, strength, and agility. Tremendous control is achieved over the body. Muscle tone is developed. Coordination and concentration increase.

Although the balancings strengthen the arms, they also require strong wrists. These are developed by the practice of Adho Mukha Svanasana (p. 90), Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (p. 91) and Adho Mukha Vrksasana (p. 96). Sometimes it is helpful to tie a bandage around each wrist for more support.

In the beginning it is advisable to keep a cushion on the floor in front of the head, or at the back of it, when practicing, to break a possible fall.

If the wrists become tired, rest in Uttanasana with the fingers pointing back and the palms facing up.

The neck has a tendency to compress when balancings are done from Sirsasana II (p. 107).

The back and neck need to be strong and well trained through practice of the other asanas.

Udhva Dhanurasana practiced afterward relieves the compression of the neck.

Do not do balancings for 12-18 months after an abdominal operation. Do not do them during menstruation or pregnancy.

Be careful if the wrists are weak or injured.
BACKBENDS

When the asana is correct there is a lightness, a freedom. Freedom comes when every part of the body is active. Let us be free in whatever posture we are doing. Let us be full in whatever we do.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

Backbends are rejuvenating. They give energy and courage, and combat depression. They open the chest and make the spine flexible. The arms and shoulders become strong. The mind and body become alert.

It is best to work on a non-slip surface.

Backbends are strenuous and should be started gradually. The instructions given are for the final postures. Beginners and those who are stiff should not force themselves beyond their capacity but should work on Ustrasana (p. 134) and Viparita Dandasana on a chair (pp. 136-7). The body should be toned by practicing these backbends before any of the others are attempted.

Urdhva Dhanurasana (p. 138) is an important posture. The more advanced backbends should be attempted only when this has been completely mastered.

For maximum effect the postures should be repeated at least two or three times. This will ease the back, enabling it to bend more, and will improve the postures generally.

Those who are supple should be careful to develop an even extension along the front and back of the body. Overbending in one part, e.g. the lumbar, will cause injury. Both sides of the trunk must curve evenly.

A feeling of nausea may possibly occur during backbend practice. This is caused by the liver being extended, but it is not dangerous. Headaches can occur if the breath is held inadvertently. Dizziness caused by going up and down is eased by bending forward afterward.

The back should not be strained. If it is sore after backbends, care should be taken to avoid pinching in the lumbar. When practicing, the sacrum and coccyx should move away from the lumbar (see Focus, p. 93).

After backbends the spine should be carefully released. This may be done by twists, especially Maricyasana III (p. 73) and Ardha Matsyendrasana (pp. 74@5), or nonstrenuous forward bends, particularly Janu Sirsasana (p. 59). Here the spine should be released gradually and not stretched by force.

CAUTIONS: Do not do backbends if suffering from heart trouble, high blood pressure, or other serious illnesses, nor during menstruation or in pregnancy.

If suffering from a bad back or injured knees, do backbends only under supervision.
JUMPINGS

Rhythm has to be observed in Yoga more than staying.
B.K.S. IYENGAR.

Jumpings are exhilarating and enjoyable. They develop speed, alertness, and stamina. There are two basic kinds. The first is the Surya Namaskar, where blood is diffused in the solar plexus. It stimulates the abdominal organs and gives energy. The second is a neck balance and forward bend sequence where blood is supplied to the brain, dispersing depression and lethargy.

The postures are done in quick succession, the sequences being repeated several times and accelerated, according to stamina. As facility is gained, speed will naturally increase.

To jump, both feet are taken off the floor simultaneously.

The sequences should flow smoothly. Care should be taken to move rhythmically from one pose to the next. It is necessary to know the order of a sequence to anticipate each following pose and to prepare for it.

Each posture, though done quickly, should be completed with precision, and with minimal time spent in intermediate positions. The movement of the arms, legs, and trunk should be coordinated to reach the pose at the same time.

The basic sequence should be mastered before other postures are added to it.

Jumpings need to be practiced only occasionally. Surya Namaskar (p. 146) may be done at the beginning of a practice session. The neck balance/forward bend sequence (p. 148) may be done at the end.

CAUTIONS: Do not do jumpings if suffering from a bad back or knee injuries or any other medical condition.

Do not do jumpings during menstruation or pregnancy.
RELAXATION

Detail and precision of the body lead to mastery of the art of relaxation.

B.K.S. IYENGAR.

Relaxation is a blessing. It brings peace to body and mind. The mind is introverted, developing the faculty of self-awareness.

It is important to be warm during Savasana (p. 150), as the body metabolism slows down. It is better to be covered with a blanket than to wear restrictive clothing. Even socks may constrict the toes.

The disciplined awareness of Savasana requires practice and a quiet mind. In the beginning there may be a tendency to fidget or go to sleep, and attention is required to counteract this. The regular practice of asanas greatly aids the ability to relax.

Savasana should normally be done after asana practice, to allow the asanas to take their effect in the body. Occasionally the asanas done are so relaxing that a separate relaxation period is not necessary. Or they may be so invigorating that Savasana is impossible and their energy is carried straight into working life.

Those who are tense or suffering from stress should tie a bandage around the forehead and eyes.

Savasana may be done both prior to and during Pranayama practice. It can be used to separate different methods, to rest the back and the lungs, to open the chest, and to make the mind calm. In this case it is helpful to do it with the chest supported.

CAUTIONS: Do not do Savasana if suffering from mental illness, depression, or phobias. Do relaxing postures where the chest is supported instead (see Remedial Programs).

If panic occurs during Savasana, keep the eyes open but quiet.

If suffering from hyperventilation or epilepsy, seek advice from a specialist teacher.
**PART II - THE MIND**

**Study of the Self**

*The end of analysis is the beginning of discrimination. The end of discrimination is the beginning of knowledge.*

B.K.S. IYENGAR

_Svadhyaya_, the study of the self, is the second cornerstone in the practice of Yoga. It leads to knowledge (jnana) and answers the second need of humanity, satisfaction of the mind.

**ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE**

Knowledge is a gift of the mind and marks the human being from the animal. It is both theoretical and practical and has to be acquired by study and experience.

For Yoga students, _svadhyaya_ comes through sincere practice. The student has to learn to open mind and heart to all aspects of Yoga. This effort is worthwhile as understanding of oneself brings mental and physical assurance. It also brings an awareness that the principles of philosophy need to be put into practice.

The appeal of _svadhyaya_ may not at first be apparent, as the benefits derived from asana practice are immense. However, it adds a further dimension to Yoga and is essential for those who wish to proceed deeper into the subject. The body and mind attain a state of quietness, and the boundary is crossed between physical practice of Yoga and practice with understanding. In this way a spiritual awareness is acquired.

_Svadhyaya_ has several dimensions. On the practical level it involves the development and control of the mind through the mastery and refinement of the breath (pranayama), and through the practice of stilling the senses (pratyahara). The mind must also be enriched by the study of philosophy.

According to Yoga philosophy, the mind is the instrument of perception and action. The Sanskrit word for mind is _manas_. Mind is one of the primordial principles of nature. It is part of the greater principle of consciousness (_citta_).

_Citta_ has three components: mind, intellect, and ego, and is permeated by three qualities: lightness, which makes the mind clear, intelligent, and peaceful; energy, giving it driving force that can be used for good or bad; and inertia, producing stability as well as dullness. The interplay of these qualities gives rise to mood swings.

Breath and the mind are closely linked. Usually the state of mind affects the breath. It becomes agitated and shallow during moments of excitement. When it is quiet and deep, the mind becomes calm. In _pranayama_, breath is used to change the mental state. The mind is trained to follow the course of the breath and, by so doing, its scattered thoughts are channeled inward.

The calming of the mind through _pranayama_ leads to a state of quietude. With practice, this is prolonged and deepened. Different types of _pranayama_ induce different states of awareness. Just as the many types of _asanas_ need to be practiced in order to tone and sensitize the whole body, so also a variety of _pranayamas_ are necessary for a complete experience.

The senses, too, are quietened by _pranayama_ and drawn towards the inner world. By nature, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin are attracted to their objects, constantly seeking new experiences. Detaching them from their objects and drawing them inward leads to a state that is self-contained, where nothing external is required. This is the “desireless” state (pratyahara). Once achieved, the distinction between everyday life and spiritual life is known.

Study of the self is furthered by familiarity with Yoga philosophy, which gives guidance on how to...
achieve equanimity. The study of philosophy exercises and sharpens the mind and puts individual concerns into perspective. It gives a base of understanding so that practice can be structured and ever-developing. By explaining the purpose behind practices and rules, it helps to maintain interest in the subject.

Applied to life, Yoga philosophy provides a yardstick by which to gauge whether thoughts and actions are correct. Thoughts often change and actions can be wrong. Philosophy is the means by which we analyze and build upon experience, avoiding past mistakes.

The following pages describe the technique for pranayama\(^2\) and pratyahara\(^2\) and outline the Yoga philosophy.

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**Pranayama**

*In the work of Pranayama, the back is the blackboard, the air comes to write, and the mind holds the chalk.*

**B.K.S. Iyengar**

Pranayama calms and strengthens the mind and creates a feeling of internal space. It generates a store of energy in the body. Once the lungs are strong, it increases their capacity.

It consists of three types of control of the breath: inhalation *(puraka)*, exhalation *(recaka)*, and retention *(kumbhaka)*. In these processes the breath is extended, expanded, and refined.

**Guidelines For Practice**

Pranayama is attempted only when the body, nervous system, and lungs have been strengthened by asana practice. This usually takes at least two years. As breath is subtle, even more care has to be taken over it than over the asanas.

Savasana is a preparation for pranayama.

Pranayama should be started gradually, a little at a time. Even a few minutes are beneficial. With practice, the time spent can be increased.

Pranayama is best practiced in the early morning or evening, in an airy room. The stomach and bowels should be empty.

It is not advisable to do it immediately before or after strenuous asanas, as these disturb the breath and the lungs. It may be practiced after a quietening asana session consisting of supported inverted poses.

The breathing methods given here are first practiced in Savasana with the back supported. This trains the lungs for Pranayama, without causing strain. The chest opens and breathing becomes easier. When it becomes steady, the same techniques can be done while sitting.

Sitting straight for Pranayama requires practice. The body should rise upward. The legs should be comfortable, so that they do not disturb the sitting position.

The stages given should be practiced in their appropriate order, to master the different techniques.

Exhale completely before beginning any of the techniques. One cycle consists of one inhalation and one exhalation.

If a cycle becomes disturbed, it should be completed and followed by two or three normal breaths. The reason for the mistake should be analyzed before starting again.

**Cautions**

*Do not continue with Pranayama if the lungs get tired or if there is fatigue or irritation, as it is then*
injurious. Instead, lie down and relax. Lie down also if the back aches.

If you panic or choke, make sure the abdomen is not tensing.

If the head becomes hot, this is a sign of overstrain. Lie in Savasana to recover.

Do not do deep inhalations if suffering from hypertension or heart problems.

Do not do deep exhalations if suffering from hypotension or depression.

If suffering from tension, cover the eyes with a soft cloth or tie a bandage round the forehead and eyes. (The bandage should be firm on the forehead but light on the eyes.)

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**The Philosophy of Yoga**

"On studying all the philosophies, I have come to the conclusion that none is so worthy of study as the Yoga philosophy."

**SIVA SAMHITA 1.17**

Yoga is a unique blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application. For this reason alone it is worth studying. The practice of the fourth limb (pranayama) gives an awareness that a philosophical journey has already begun.

Yoga deals with the most profound of mysteries, the essential nature of the human being in relation to the universe. The meaning of Yoga is union or yoking, from the Sanskrit root yuj, to unite. In the context of Yoga philosophy, the union is between the individual soul and the universal soul. The individual has to search for the divine within, and Yoga provides the systematic steps to achieve this, ensuring that progress can be measured.

Yoga philosophy has appealed to great thinkers over the centuries and its practice has been extolled for its benefits. In modern times Yoga has spread to all corners of the world and has helped countless people. For all these reasons, the teachings of Yoga should be approached with an open mind. As with any new subject, the concepts may at first seem difficult to grasp, but once they are understood they give a profound insight into human existence.

**YOGA TEXTS**

References to Yoga are found throughout Indian scriptures in the form of explanations, definitions, and eulogies.

The most ancient scriptures rank among the oldest in the world. The earliest are the Vedas, the root of all subsequent teachings. They are considered to be revealed by God at the beginning of time and to contain eternal truth. They consist of sacred hymns, ritualistic rules and formulae, philosophical speculation, and ancient lore.

In the West, the best known part of the Vedas are the Upanisads - philosophical and mystical treatises and poems exploring the nature of the universal soul. The Katha Upanisad speaks of the stilling of the mind and control of the senses, and the Svetasvatara Upanisad describes the practice and beneficial results of Yoga.

There is a set of specialist Yoga Upanisads of varying antiquity that deal with the revelation of the soul by means of meditation. The sacred syllable "aum" is given as the best object of meditation.

Other ancient works are the Puranas, dealing with cosmology and the world order. Usually meditation and the stilling of the mind are discussed but a significant reference is made in a principal Purana - Srimad Bhagabatam - to the therapeutic aspect of Yoga asanas.

One of the earliest references to Yoga is in a ritualistic manual, Ahirbudhya Samhita, considered be at least 3,000 years old. This defines Yoga as the union of the individual self with the highest Self. It outlines Yoga theory and practice, including the
eight limbs enumerated by Patanjali (see p. 169). It states that two texts of Yoga were revealed in the beginning, one being "mind-restraining Yoga", and the second the "Yoga of action". These works are now lost.

In a separate category are the great epic histories, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which narrate stories of the incarnations of God. Interspersed with the narrative are discourses on moral and philosophical topics. The Mahabharata is an important source of knowledge about Yoga. In the story itself the characters invariably resort to Yoga and meditation to collect their minds before any important undertaking. There are long discourses on Yoga philosophy.

The Bhagavad Gita (Son of the Lord) is a great Yoga text which is still read and recited every day by millions of people in India. It forms the scriptural portion of the Mahabharata, being a dialogue between God (Lord Krishna) and his devotee, Arjuna, on the eve of battle. It consists of eighteen chapters, discussing different aspects of Yoga. Among them are the Yoga of action (karma yoga), the Yoga of knowledge (jnana yoga) and the Yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga). Stilling the mind by meditation is also described. Various subjects are covered: religious duty, ethical living, selfless action, stability of mind, eradication of desires, and renunciation. It deals broadly with the nature of the universe and creation, and with the glory of the soul and Divinity.

From these bodies of literature a philosophical compilation was made which brought together the entire sum of knowledge about Yoga. This is the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, also known as the Yoga of Eight Limbs (Ashtanga Yoga). Its date is estimated variously to be between 200 and 800 years BC, although traditional accounts place it earlier. Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is the authoritative text, recognized by all schools of Yoga, and is the source for all subsequent works.

Parallel with Yoga, five other classical systems arose, dealing with different ways of perceiving the universal truth. One of them, Samkhya ("enumeration"), is paired with Yoga and together they provide a complete conceptual framework of the evolution and nature of the universe, and the place of man and God within it. God, the soul, and prordial matter are given as the three principles coexisting eternally.

**VARIOUS TYPES OF YOGA**

After Patanjali, many other authors wrote on the subject, laying stress on one or another aspect and founding schools on their theories. Some authors interpreted and wrote commentaries on the Yoga Sutra, and others specialized in the various branches of Yoga that are mentioned in the texts: Raja, Hatha, Mantra, and Laya Yoga (Yoga Upanisads and Hatha Yoga texts) or Bhakti, Karma, and Jnana Yoga (Bhagavad Gita). These are distinct aspects of Yoga which can be followed according to individual disposition or sectarian tradition. They presuppose a certain mastery of the subject as a whole.

Raja Yoga is the union of the mind with the soul in the transcendent state of samadhi. Raja means mastery of the mind and senses. Patanjali's Yoga is sometimes classified as Raja Yoga because it has these aims.

Hatha Yoga (the Yoga of willpower) aims to attain liberation through the grace of the divine power (Kundalini) which lies dormant in each individual. This power is aroused by means of various practices that clear the paths and centers of energy in the body. These include asanas; special internal cleansing processes using water and cloth (kriyas); pranayamas designed to channel and maintain the flow of energy; and closing actions (bandhas), preventing the loss of energy. Hatha Yoga is described in various medieval works, the most important of which are the Hatha Yoga Pradipika of Svatmarama (possibly 15th century), and the Gheranda and Siva Samhitas.

In Mantra Yoga, perfection is attained through the recitation of sacred syllables (mantra). It is considered useful for those of weak intellect (Yogatattva and Varaha Upanisads).

In Laya Yoga perfection is attained through absorption (laya) in God (Yogatattva and Varaha Upanisads). This is a desireless state where sensory objects are forgotten in the experience of the ultimate bliss.
All these types of Yoga are grounded in the eight limbs of Yoga and are interconnected.

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra is divided into four chapters, dealing with absorption in the universal principle (samadhi), practice (sadhana), accomplishments (vibhuti), and spiritual liberation (kaiivalya). These topics are condensed into 196 aphorisms (sutras).

Patanjali’s work embraces all the branches of Yoga. He shows it to be a complete and internally consistent science. It has a vocabulary of carefully defined and classified technical terms and a framework of concepts, premises, practical observations, and instructions, woven together by reasoned argument and the attestation of experience. The result is a detailed delineation of the path of Yoga from beginning to end, including motivation for undertaking it, obstacles that may be met, distractions on the way, and arrival at the final goal. The goal is to clear the clouding of the intelligence, and from this enlightenment to gain liberation.

The first chapter, Samadhi Pada, presents Yoga as the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind. It describes the various states of the mind and modes of consciousness from the unpredictable, changeable states which hold sway in everyday life to the sublime states of superconsciousness and deep meditation.

The second chapter, Sadhana Pada, gives the means for transforming the mind from its customary scattered state to a concentrated one that leads to the sublime. These are the eight limbs of Yoga. The first five constitute practices (sadhana): ethical behavior, personal disciplines, practice of postures, breathing techniques, and control of the senses. The effects of these practices lead to the last three limbs: concentration, meditation, and the transcendent state samadhi.

The third chapter, Vibhuti Pada, enumerates the various powers and extrasensory perceptions which come to an accomplished Yogi. These can be a trap for the practitioner. Attachment to them can cause a break in practice and loss of previous achievements. One must progress beyond their range towards the higher goal.

The fourth chapter, Kaivalya Pada, describes the final journey of the soul toward emancipation. The Yogi realizes the ultimate spiritual reality of the universe. This experienced knowledge shines forth and he is liberated from all ties to the material world.

The Sutras are difficult to understand. This is partly because of their subject matter and partly because present-day life and ways of thinking seem far removed from those of ancient times. They presuppose familiarity with a host of philosophical concepts; for example, about the nature and purpose of

Patanjali holds a unique position in the line of great Indian sages and benefactors of mankind. He is venerated in Indian tradition as the author of classical treatises on medicine, grammar, and Yoga. These three sciences effect the purification of the human body, speech, and mind.

He is said to be an incarnation of the serpent Ananta (meaning "The Infinite One") on whom Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the world, rests in slumber before the beginning of creation.

Patanjali was born to a saintly woman called Gonika who had spent her life in spiritual pursuits. He fell into her cupped hands in the form of a tiny snake as she was offering an oblation of water to the Sun. Hence he was named Patanjali, from pata, meaning snake or fallen, and anjali, meaning hands folded in prayer. He is depicted iconographically with a man's torso and the coiled tail of a serpent.
the universe and about human psychology. They also presume a background of practical experience of Yoga.

Like other Indian classical teachings, they belong to an oral tradition where knowledge was imparted from master to disciple at first hand. Only students capable of understanding were allowed to receive instruction. This had the double benefit of maintaining a high standard and keeping the teaching pure. Although the essential doctrines have been preserved, the schools which promulgated them no longer exist and the base of understanding has largely been lost.

**Commentaries on Yoga Sutras**

The *Yoga Sutras* are the subject of a number of important explanatory commentaries. The primary and most ancient of these is by Vyasa; it is often read together with the text itself. Other important ones span the 8th to the 18th centuries, AD. The commentaries expand, clarify and interpret the *Sutras*.

Modern scholars have also translated and interpreted the *Yoga Sutras*, as have sectarian schools, stressing particular aspects of Yoga. Not all write with the benefit of practice of Patanjali's Yoga to give insight into the subtle realms of Yoga.

Amongst these commentators, B.K.S. Iyengar is exceptional in having explored the various aspects of classical Yoga. Following in the tradition of Patanjali, he considers Yoga as one unified subject. All the eight limbs are made to play their part in the spiritual development of the individual. He clarifies the *Yoga Sutras* in the light of experienced knowledge. His insights have uncovered meanings and threads of reasoning hitherto obscure in theoretical study. His interpretation is both logical and relevant to Yoga practice.

The outline of Yoga philosophy, based on explanations by B.K.S. Iyengar and his son Prashant, is taken from the following Yoga Sutras of Patanjali:

- Chapter I, Sutras 2, 6-15, 19, 20, 24-26, 33-39, 51;
- Chapter II, Sutras 1, 6, 13, 16, 23, 30, 32, 34, 46, 49-52, 54;
- Chapter III, Sutras 1-3, 7, 8, 51, 56;
- Chapter IV, Sutras 10, 12, 18, 19, 24, 29, 34.

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**The Mystery of the Universe**

Yoga is closely allied to another philosophical system called Samkhya. Samkhya systematizes Vedic concepts about the nature of the universe and creation. These concepts form the background to Yoga philosophy.

The universe consists of two distinct principles: matter (*prakriti*) and spirit (*purusa*).\(^2\)

**The Nature of Experience**

The purpose of creation is to serve the individual being. The material world gives experience. When the experiences of life are drawn on to gain spiritual wisdom, this leads the soul towards liberation. Yoga philosophy deals in detail with the nature of experience and the need for a positive outlook.

Experience is of three types: pleasurable, painful, and delusive. The first two categories relate to rational action, in search of pleasure and avoidance of pain. In delusive experience the intelligence is clouded, and actions are impulsive, without regard to the result.

Yoga philosophy observes that living in the world is bound up with pain and suffering, and takes the view that all suffering - whether physical, mental, or spiritual - is unwelcome. It teaches that it is desirable and possible to be liberated from it. Patanjali says, "*heyham duhkham anagatam*" (11.16) - "avoid the sorrows which are to come": an injunction to practice Yoga for strength to meet possible future misfortunes.

Pleasure is desired by all, but it is linked to pain. When it comes to an end, it may bring a sense of loss. Thus, in the ultimate analysis pleasure, too, is unwelcome and one should strive to be free from attachment to it. This requires the cultivation of a dispassionate frame of mind.

The experiences and situations of life are determined by past actions. Attachments and aversions cause one to act, and, according to the universal law of cause and effect, each action has repercussions. These reactions again prompt further actions and one is caught up in the wheel of life. In this way,

\(^2\) [The paragraphs following not included in this excerpt]
embodied souls assume incarnation over and over again.

**THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Consciousness fluctuates between five states (*vrttis*), meaning literally "versions". The first is real perception or correct knowledge (*pramana*) which must be based on direct perception, inference, or reliable testimony, such as that of the scriptures. The second is illusion (*viparyaya*), based on false perception. The third state is imagination (*vikalpa*), where ideas have no substance and do not correspond to actuality. The fourth state is sleep (*nidra*), where consciousness is inactive. The fifth state is memory (*smrti*), whereby experiences are stored in the mind.

There are five types of human afflictions (*klesas*): lack of spiritual wisdom; egoism or individualism; attachment to pleasure; aversion to pain; and holding onto life.

These afflictions form part of the infrastructure that shapes the conscious mind. The infrastructure also consists of subliminal impressions (*samskaras*), gained from past experiences, giving the mind its particular dispositions and propensities. These two together - *klesas* and *samskaras* - form the subtle body of each individual, which is not destroyed at death but transmigrates from birth to birth and accounts for the diversity of characters and experiences in the world.

Consciousness has two modes - negative and positive - which incline the mind toward mundane ends or toward spiritual and religious goals. The former mode is called "painful", as it generates the *klesas* through attachment to the experiences of the world. The latter is "non-painful", as it eradicates the *klesas*.

The removal of the afflictions brings about a state of absolute tranquility called *citta prasadanam*. This peace of mind does not come easily but has to be cultivated. There are various ways of doing this, according to one's temperament and inclination.

In order to avoid emotional disturbance, it is important to know how to react to people and circumstances. Where there is happiness, one should be friendly; where there is misery, one should be compassionate; where there is virtue, one should rejoice; and where there is wickedness, one should be indifferent. Any other kind of reaction - for example, jealousy, anger, indignation, or resentment - does not engender peace.

Thoughts, emotions, and deeds that go against ethical precepts result in pain and ignorance. They are caused by greed, anger, or delusion. These negative states of mind lead to unpleasant consequences, which unsettle the mind further. They need to be checked by the practice of Yoga.

The mind can be quietened through breathing practices, and a particular pranayama of retaining the breath after exhalation is mentioned. Meditation also stills the mind. Consciousness is brought to bear on a sublime, uplifting object or experience, such as the exemplary life of a saint, or religious worship.

In these ways the obstacles that disturb the calmness of mind are overcome. The serene state attained is *citta vrtti nirodah*, the restraint of the fluctuations of consciousness, which Patanjali gives as the definition of Yoga at the very beginning of the *Yoga Sutra* (1.2). This is *samadhi*, where consciousness becomes pure and can be used as an instrument to reveal the ultimate truth of existence. Here the body is under complete control and is at one with mind and soul. The identity of the soul with the universal spirit is realized.

**THE EIGHT LIMBS OF YOGA**

Yoga is classically divided into eight aspects or limbs, astanga. The limbs are interlinked; each has numerous facets that are revealed through study of the texts and by practice. They lead progressively to the highest stages of awareness and to spiritual life. Their disciplines become more and more internal.

The limbs are as follows:

(i) **Yama**

This consists of the ethical precepts of non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), nonstealing (*asteya*), chastity (*brahmacarya*), and finally, noncovetousness (*aparigraha*).
These principles of right living are universal and form the foundation of Yoga. The essence of Yama is not to harm any living creature in either thought, word, or deed.

The translation of concepts here is only approximate. Each has a range of meanings and applications that vary according to one's own circumstances and stage of progress.

(ii) Niyama

These are personal practices to be observed. They are cleanliness of mind and body (sauca), contentment (santosa), fervor for the subject (tapas), study of the self (svadhyaya), and surrender of all thoughts and actions to God (Isvarapranidhana).

Niyama establishes discipline in daily life.

(iii) Asanas

These are the Yoga postures. Asanas are described as having the properties of being steady (sthira), and joyful (sukham). Long continued efforts are necessary to attain mastery and perfection. Body and mind move in harmony and become absorbed in the infinite. All dualities of mind cease.

Patanjali does not mention any asanas by name, but a tradition of asana practice is implied. Some postures are given in the various commentaries on his work and in other Yoga texts. Traditionally there are said to be 840,000 asanas, corresponding to the full potential of human movement. Systematic, precise practice of asanas died out in India after Patanjali's time. In recent years the range and depth of the asanas are becoming known again, through the work of B.K.S. Iyengar.

(iv) Pranayama

This is the art of Yoga breathing, consisting of the regulation and refinement of the inhalation, exhalation, and retention of breath. Learning to control and channel the life breath induces an introspective attitude and opens the gateway to spiritual knowledge.

Pranayama should be learned only after a degree of proficiency has been gained in the asanas.

Breath consists of the gross element of air and prana, the life force pervading the universe. Prana is the communicating link between the human organism and the cosmos. As it consists of energy, strong warnings are given in all traditional Yoga texts against the practice of pranayama without supervision, and before a student is ready.

(v) Pratyahara

This is the drawing in of the senses from the external world into the interior self. External disturbances and distractions are unable to cross the threshold of the inner world.

(vi) Dharana

This is uninterrupted concentration, with the mind focused steadily on a particular point or object. Constant practice is needed to achieve this.

(vii) Dhyana

This is meditation. The span of concentration is increased so that the whole mind encompasses the object and contemplates it unwaveringly. Subject and object draw near each other.

(viii) Samadhi

This is a transcending state beyond meditation where the psychological process stops as consciousness becomes totally absorbed in the soul. It is a state of truth and bliss.

Samadhi is the culmination of Yoga practice and is rarely attained. It is divided into a number of levels of spiritual evolution relating to more and more subtle realms. The pinnacle is described as "samadhi without seed" where there are no imprints of actions and desires in the mind. This is also known as kaivalya or the isolation of the soul from matter. The Yogi has completed the involutionary journey toward the source and substratum of creation and is liberated.

The first five limbs, yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, and pratyahara, are known as the disciplines (sadhana) of Yoga. They are to be undertaken with undiminished efforts and a spirit of detachment from the attractions of the world.

They still the mind and senses, and prepare the ground for dharana, dhyana, and samadhi. These three are classed as attainments of Yoga.

The heightened states of consciousness engendered by dharana, dhyana, and samadhi result in spiritual wisdom. They also bring various super-
normal attainments (*siddhis*), according to the object of meditation.

Some are within the range of human experience, such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, and the ability to read minds. Others seem more extraordinary, such as the conquest of hunger and thirst or the ability to become light or heavy, small or large.

The *siddhis* are an indication that the Yogi is on the right path. He develops nonattachment toward them as they do not fulfill his ultimate aim.

When the soul is free from the entanglement with nature, it can revert to its original, pure state. The Yogi has eradicated the imprints and desires that are deeply embedded in the consciousness. He has broken the chain of cause and effect, and thus of time. Past and future having no relevance for him, he exists in the eternal present.

He is able to differentiate between consciousness and the soul. He realizes that consciousness acts in conjunction with the mind, intellect, and senses to enable him to function in the world.

Meditation is focused on the self and there ensues the highest religious experience, where virtue and enlightenment pour forth. The true self is revealed in its shining purity. This unwavering state is known as the ultimate liberation (*kaivalya*).