

Patanjali at a Glance

Introduction to Patanjali Yog Darshan

*From the Essence of Patanjali
Yog Sootras Course*



Brijendra

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Yog Sootras Course**

Based on a seven-lecture course given in
The Valley of Gods, Himalayas

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This introduction is being published free of cost as an offering to students of yog. Please feel free to forward it to your friends or colleagues.
This is an excerpt from the Essence of Patanjali Home Study Course.

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Introductory Overview of Patanjali Yog Darshan

The *Essence of Patanjali* course is based on spoken meditations recorded in the Himalayas. They are an overview of *Patanjali Yog Darshan*, an explanation of most of the main and essential points of the work. Equipped with this basis of understanding the aspirant is very well prepared not only to comprehend the interconnection of the various ideas but to begin practicing and speaking about the essence of *Yog* which is meditation.

This Introduction is meant to give a brief reference overview of the subject matter of the *Essence of Patanjali* course. Each lecture session develops the ideas further so that after reading, one can come back to the overview and have a clearer understanding of the relationship of the parts with a more in-depth understanding.

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Patanjali Yog Darshan is the philosophical and practical handbook for yogis who are practicing *Yog* for the purpose of removing uneasiness, worry, agitation, pain, and angst from their lives and allowing themselves to be filled with a sense of joy, love, purpose, understanding, and direct experience of their fundamental, true, and permanent Self. Unity with one's true nature or Self and the resultant freedom from pain are the aim of *Yog saadhanaa*, the practice of *Yog*.

There are many topics covered in the yogic text called *Yog Darshan*, or the *Yog Sootras of Patanjali*, *sootra* meaning "aphorism." It is very helpful in studying and investigating *Yog Darshan* to have an overall view of this text. In order to begin to acquire this overview, one should be clear about where Sage Patanjali is leading us.

Clear indications of the aim of practicing *Yog* are scattered throughout *Yog Darshan*, and the issue is particularly discussed in the fourth and final chapter of the work. That chapter is called *Kaivalya Paad*, meaning the chapter on *Kaivalya*, liberation. The very last *sootra* of *Kaivalya Paad*, and indeed of the whole book, sums up the entire process of *Yog saadhanaa* as it progresses towards the final goal which is *Kaivalya*.

Kaivalya means “alone.” This is not aloneness in the sense of one person being alone or away from other people. It is not the aloneness of separateness. The liveness of *Kaivalya* is in the sense of all One, or One alone, in which there is no other from which one could be separate or apart. This state of complete, absolute liberation is what is meant by *Kaivalya*, in which You alone are—not you in relation to some other person or thing or abstract idea or nature. But You alone exist. All is You. Other terms may sometimes be used synonymously with *Kaivalya*—such as *mukti*, *moksh*, *haan*, *nirvaan*. Simply put, these words all represent the absolute, permanent freedom of the Self, which is the pure, undivided You.

So *Kaivalya* is the state to be attained by the practicing yogi. Knowing this puts all of the content of *Yog Darshan* into perspective, whether it be the subjects of *vrutti*, *samaadhi*, the *klaysh*, *sanyog*, the Order of Manifestation, the various practices of *Ashtaang Yog*, or the *siddhis*—all are being discussed in the light of, and in relation to, the final aim which is *Kaivalya*, liberation. In the state of *Kaivalya*, the yogi is one with *Yog*, the Eternal Oneness.

It is a human being who chooses, or is led, to enter upon this path of research and investigation into the truth of existence; and the field of such a person’s research is his or her own mind, body, awareness, and sense of I, especially the sense of I. So the yogi is engaged in an investigation into his or her own self. This must be clear. Nobody can do this work for you. Guru helps, guides, leads—and, I would say, is indispensable—but even Guru cannot do it for you. You are the one who must do the research into your own being, taking the help of teachers and texts such as Patanjali and his *Yog Darshan*. Of course, an alive teacher has the advantage of being able to explain and elucidate the state of the Self directly. Still, it will be up to you to do the work of *Yog* practice to establish yourself in the Vision of *Yog* Oneness.

And what is to be done? Investigate the contrasting natures of the mind and the Self. The entire work of *Yog Darshan* is summed up in the second *sootra* of the book. It is: “*Yogash-chitt-vritti-nirodhaha... The state of Yog is freedom from identification with the modifications of the mind.*” Here, for all practical purposes, *Yog* means *Kaivalya*. A being whose consciousness is one with *Yog* is said to be in the state of *Kaivalya*. In contrast to the state of consciousness called *Kaivalya*, the human mind is caught in *vrutti*. *Vrittis* are thoughts; they are the waves or modifications of consciousness, and *chitt* is the mind in which they are occurring. In the *sootra*, Patanjali is saying that

nirodh, or freedom from *chitt vrittis*, is *Yog*, the state of absolute, indivisible Oneness which is our true nature and being. So in practical terms all of *Yog saadhanaa*, all of the practice of *Yog*, is for the purpose of attaining this state of *nirodh*, which is the state in which the Self is in awareness of itself and is not caught up in the mind's *vritti* awareness of things, forms, people, relations.

To accomplish the state of *chitt vritti nirodh*, or de-identification from the modifications of mental consciousness, the yogi must take up practice, *Yog saadhanaa*. *Ashtaang Yog*, the Eight Limbs of *Yog*, covered in the second and third chapters, is the description of what could be called the lifestyle of the yogi. It describes in eight parts the practice that the yogi undertakes.

The Eight Limbs are:

1. *Yam*, injunctions. These are for living a pure, life-supporting life. They are: *ahinsaa*, non-killing or non-hurting; *satya*, speaking truth; *astayy*, non-stealing; *brahmacharya*, moving in *Brahm*, regulation of sexual energy; *aparigraha*, simple living.

2. *Niyam*, observances. These continue *yam*'s emphasis on living a pure life, with indications of general practices. *Yam* and *niyam* both deal with how to manage one's life in basic terms. They cover one's relation to the so-called outer world of people, places, and situations, with guidance being given on how to minimize unnecessary involvement and energy loss in that field. The *niyams* are: *shauch*, cleanliness; *santosh*, contentment; *tapah*, challenging one's preferences; *swaadhyay*, study; *Ishwar pranidhaan*, devotion to the Supreme Being.

3. *Aasan*, physical postures. *Aasan* cultivates one's physical self, the body, through exercises developed over thousands of years. The underlying purpose of the exercises, as with all of *Ashtaang Yog*, is to facilitate the opening of the yogi's being to the Vision of Oneness, which will be the state of *Kaivalya*.

4. *Praanaayaam*, breath regulation. This deals with cultivation of one's *praan*, or life-energy, through regulating one's breath. *Praanaayaam* leads us into the subtler field of our being.

5. *Pratyaahaar*, inward focus of attention. One's energy follows the direction of the mind, rather than the mind unconsciously following the senses.

From here, the final three limbs develop. These are the inner development of

one's attention.

6. *Dhaarnaa*, focusing the mind.

7. *Dhyaan*, meditation stability.

8. *Samaadhi*, the state of Oneness.

These last three comprise what is usually called meditation, the cultivation of one's inner attention and awareness. They bring about one-pointedness, the reduction of unconscious distraction, and the profound simplicity of focusing upon the state of the Self. The Self is free from *vritti* and therefore is the state of *chitt vritti nirodh*, the stillness of one's external identification, so that one is left as the indivisible, Pure Consciousness of the Self.

As one evolves during one's *saadhanaa*, especially through these last three limbs, one experiences the states of *samaadhi* as they are enumerated in the first chapter, called *Samaadhi Paad*. There it is described that one's consciousness is cultivated in the four stages of *sampragyaat samaadhi*, where the characteristic of each stage is that of the subject meditator meditating on an object. The object that one meditates upon becomes subtler and subtler, moving from *vitark*, physical-sensory, to *vichaar*, mental, to *aanand*, the *ahankaar*, or ego sense of relation, to *asmitaa* the sense of am-ness.

The subject/object progression of consciousness in *sampragyaat samaadhi* culminates in *vivayk khyaati*, discrimination, in which the yogi's finer intellect, developed through meditation, is able to discriminate or distinguish *Purush*, the Pure Consciousness, from *prakriti*, the natural creation of world and mind. This discrimination that is *vivayk khyaati* leads to its culmination in *dharm maygh samaadhi*, in which *Purush* shines in one's consciousness, and *paravairaagya*, the detachment that occurs when one is focused on the Self. The result is *Kaivalya*, which is first ascertained through the meditative happening called *asampragyaat samaadhi*, the formless state of *samaadhi* in which there is no subject/object relationship—therefore no division. This is the state of Oneness. The perfection of *asampragyaat samaadhi* is *Kaivalya*.

These attained states of consciousness are reached through one's practice, especially of meditation. Meditation purifies the human mind and intellect, allowing the higher state of consciousness of the Knower to unfold.

The highest use of the human intellect, or *buddhi*, is to discriminate the nature of one's true Self from the formations that are known by the mind as well as

from the formation which is the mind itself. To help in this discrimination, Patanjali uses the system of the Order of Manifestation as derived from *Saankhya Yog*. This system describes the 24 *tattwas*, or basic levels of existence, ranging (moving from the gross to the subtle) from the physical, elemental states of earth, water, fire, air, and space, to the senses that perceive and interact with them, to the *ahankaar*, or ego sense, that knows these as separate realms, to *mahat tattwa*, the pure *sattwa* level where manifestation first appears in existence, to *mool prakriti*, the essential, unmanifest, yet still objective, root of manifestation. As a process of manifestation, this order is reversed and is described as occurring from *mool prakriti* to the physical elements.

Knowing all these levels of the knowable, one is in a position to acknowledge: “I am that which knows all these. All these, therefore are not the real me. I am that which is the essence and basis of all these.” This growth of discriminating awareness is *vivayk khyati*, the highest use of intelligence, whose purpose is to bring about the awareness: “My true nature is Pure Consciousness, not changing form.”

As this progression of understanding and consciousness takes place, various powers, called *siddhis*, sometimes unfold and indeed can be unfolded consciously. Patanjali, like an objective scientist, describes some of these attainments. He is not recommending them. Rather, it should be noted that towards the end of the third chapter, which contains a description of some of the *siddhis*, the sage is very careful to point out that these *siddhis* appear to be wonderful to the *vyutthaan* mind, to the mind whose reality-orientation is towards external phenomena. He makes it clear, however, that for the *samaadhi*-oriented mind, the one who is seeking liberation, these *siddhis* are actually distractions from one’s path. So one is advised to maintain the discrimination, the *vivayk*, that the *siddhis*, being something known, are therefore not you, not the real you, the eternal, pure, free, blessed You. Dalliance with the *siddhis* leads to further involvement with *ahankaar*, the ego I-sense which, being a temporary phenomenon, is not actually real in the absolute, eternal sense. Therefore, the *siddhis*, or powers, are part of the illusion of the subject/object, waking state, *vritti* field of consciousness.

So we can see that *Yog Darshan* leads our attention away from identification with any manifested formation of knowing towards that which knows, which is the Self, the absolute Knower. Patanjali calls the identification of the Self

with form *sanyog*, or mixture, a topic covered in the second chapter of *Yog Darshan*. *Sanyog* is based upon *avidyaa*, the main one of the five *klayshas*, which are the obstacles to knowing one's true Self.

Avidyaa is the root *klaysh*, the generating root of the other four *klayshas*—*asmitaa*, am-ness, *raag* attachment, *dwaysh*, aversion, and *abhinivaysh*, fear of death—which grow out of it. *Avidyaa* is the sense of not knowing one's true Self. *Avidyaa* is forgetfulness of the Self, it is ignorance of one's true nature. Virtually simultaneous with this ignorance is the resultant sense of being something. This is the second *klaysh*, which is *asmitaa*, am-ness. Now the mixing power of *sanyog* manifests more and more identification with the formed levels of being. As *asmitaa* individuates into *ahankaar*, ego, the *sanyog* power of identification causes us to know: "I am this body and mind." This ongoing and developing identification of the Pure Consciousness of *Purush* with a formation of *prakriti*, the natural, phenomenal field, is called *sanyog*. Knowing ourselves as body and mind, we experience dispositions of attraction and aversion that determine our daily reactions to life's situations and forms. Along with attraction and aversion, we also become bound by the fifth *klaysh*, which is *abhinivaysh* fear, particularly fear of death. The human mind moves in the circle of *karm*, action, caught in the web woven by *asmitaa*, *raag*, *dwaysh*, and *abhinivaysh*, all of which stem from the initial, illusory, mistaken understanding which is *avidyaa*, ignorance of the fact that the Self is one's true nature.

All of this is going on in the *chitt*, the mind, which continually generates its *vrittis*. So *sanyog* is identification of the Self with the mind, for it is mind which is involved in the knowledge of objective, appearing reality, which *avidyaa* declares is *the* reality.

In contrast to this progressive enmeshment in the bound state of ignorance of the Self, the yogi's practice towards freedom, called *Ashtaang Yog*, which culminates in *vivayk khyaati* and *samaadhi*, leads to de-identification or disentangling of the Pure Consciousness from the sense of body, mind, and world. This undoing of the knot of identification of Self with mind is called *viyog*. *Sanyog* is identification of Self, or *Purush*, with mind, or *chitt*. *Viyog* is the undoing of this false, illusory identification with the physical mind.

The liberating process of undoing our illusory identification with *prakriti* has nothing to do with destruction. It has nothing to do with destroying the world, destroying one's body, destroying one's mind, or destroying one's

I-sense. Negativity is not the focus of *Yog*. Nor is it the focus of *Yog* to control the world, control the body, control the mind, control the *praan*, or life energy. All such control would be *ahankaar*, ego-based. Obsession with control is not the way to practice for the attainment of the freedom that is *Kaivalya*. You are *Kaivalya*. *Kaivalya* is your real, eternal nature. You are the free Being. Control is not part of the essence of *Yog*. The essence of *Yog* lies in knowledge, *gyaan*. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of the Self, *Aatm gyaan*, through discrimination, or *vivayk gyaan*. So, the purpose of *Ashtaang Yog* and the practice of meditation and *samaadhi* is the attainment of the knowledge of one's Self; and this knowledge is not gained through controlling things, your mind, your body, or anything.

Through the practice of *Yog saadhanaa*, life will continue in a more and more refined and balanced manner for the sake of the well-being of the Whole. And through this practice, knowledge of the Self will unfold. Through knowledge of the Self, the ignorant identification of *sanyog* will dissolve as *vivayk khyaati* discriminates the essential, true nature of one's Self and finds that it is *Purush*, the eternal, unborn, undying Pure Consciousness. As Pure Consciousness, you always are, you always were, you always will be. There is no death to You, the Pure Consciousness. There is no change to You. This discriminating knowledge of the Self is *vivayk khyaati*, which undoes *sanyog*, the knot of ignorance in which *Purush*, the Pure Consciousness, falsely understands through *prakriti* that it is a form of *prakriti*.

When Pure Consciousness, through this cultivated *gyaan*, or knowledge, comes to know its true Self as *Purush*, this is *Kaivalya*, One alone. There is no other. This means that there actually is no separate *prakriti*. The sense of there existing a separate *prakriti* was actually an illusion. Now the illusion is gone. It has been removed through the pure clarity of the *gyaan*, *Purush gyaan*, in which you know that you were never born. Then who is this "You"? If you were never born, who is this You? You are *Purush*. The forms of *prakriti* are born; but You, the *Purush*, are never born. Through the interactions of the *gunas*, or powers of *prakriti*, forms are created. But you are not the *gunas*. You are not *prakriti*. You are *Purush*. This discrimination is essential. Without it, there is no liberation, there is no *Kaivalya*. So the yogi engages in cultivating all the powers that will aid in holding and sustaining the discrimination: "I am the Pure Consciousness."

The state in which one is Pure Consciousness alone is *Kaivalya*. Then there

is nothing to be discriminated. There is only One. So it is said there is no world, there is no body, there is no mind. What this means is that there is only Pure Consciousness. To emphasize that there is only Pure Consciousness, sometimes such negating statements are made. But they are made for the purpose of affirming that the only reality is You, the Pure Consciousness.

As a practicing yogi, you are to investigate what is that “You.” Your mind which has been created through sensory knowledge will tell you only what it can tell you: “I am body and mind.” So for the yogi there is the need to investigate, inquire, study, meditate, meditate, meditate. Only through meditation will the state unfold in which you know: “I am the Pure Consciousness that exists before I wake up, before sleep, before dream. I am that eternal One, the eternal *Yog.*” Then all will unfold in joy, love, peace, blessedness, and a spontaneous response to help those, your own forms, who have not yet known their true and real nature as Pure, Eternal Consciousness.

Sarvay bhavantu sukhinah
May all beings be blessed
Amaram Hum Madhuram Hum
Pure, free, forever

A meditator throughout his life, Brijendra writes and speaks about meditation and the Vision of Oneness. Brijendra has been practicing and teaching Patanjali’s system of yoga and meditation for over twenty-five years.

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