



Patanjali Yoga Sutra

Yoga is the ancient health keeping system developed by Hindu sages and seers thousands of years ago. It not only keeps the body healthy but also cultivates mind and spiritual awareness. It also helps to live a disciplined, yet enjoyable life. It is vaguely considered as an exercise. But it is more than just an exercise. A great sage Patanjali has codified his thoughts, the knowledge of yoga and its practices by encapsulating them in the form aphorisms. They are called as yoga-sutra. The main yoga-sutra are eight in numbers. They are also known as eight limbs of Patanjali or Ashtanga-yoga. Let us try to understand them.

Yama (eternal vows):

Yama is social behavior (moral principles) that describes how one should treat others. There are five yamas:

- Nonviolence (ahimsa). Do no harm to anybody in thought or deed.
- Truth and honesty (satya). Always be honest and speak truth.
- Nonstealing (asteya). Do not steal material objects (a car) or intangibles such as the center of attention or your child's chance to learn responsibility or independence by doing something on his own.
- Nonlust (brahmacharya). Avoid lust for anything and see divinity in all your deeds and thoughts.
- Nonpossessiveness (aparigraha). Free yourself from greed, hoarding, and collecting. Do not accumulate anything, and keep only things that are really necessary. Make your life as simple as possible.

Niyama (Observances)

Niyama is inner discipline and responsibility that describes how one should treat himself/herself. There are five niyamas:

- Purity (shaucha). It implies both external and internal purity. Achieve external purity by keeping yourself, your clothing, and surroundings clean. Eat fresh and healthy food. Treat your body like a temple. Achieve internal purity by acquiring true knowledge and austerity and truthfulness in mind.
- Contentment (santosha). Be satisfied with what you have. Seek happiness in every moment. Your state of mind should not be affected by external causes.
- Austerity (tapas). Show discipline in body, speech, and mind. The purpose of developing self-discipline is not to become ascetic, but to control and direct the mind and body for higher spiritual aims or purposes.
- Self-education (svadhyaya). Study sacred texts, which are whatever books are relevant to you and inspire and teach you. Education changes a person's outlook on life.
- Living with an awareness of the Divine (ishvara-pranidhana). Be devoted to God or whatever you consider divine.

Yogasana

Yogasana is a posture in harmony with one's inner consciousness. It helps in balancing and harmonizing the basic structure of the human body. Although nowadays yogasana are practiced as an exercise, they are really meant to prepare yourself for the meditation. For meditation, healthy and sound body and tensionless mind are required. Various postures of yogasana which include standing and sitting asanas help to keep body healthy and tension-free mind.

Pranayama (breath control exercise)

Pranayama is a breathing technique. Breathing is a basic of life. One is breathing means he/she is alive. Most of us breathe improperly.

It helps Prana is the life force or energy that exists everywhere and flows through each of us through the breath. Pranayama is the control of breath. The basic movements of pranayama are inhalation, retention of breath, and exhalation. The practice of pranayama purifies body and removes distractions from the mind making it easier to concentrate and meditate. It also balances nervous system and encourages creative thinking. Deep breathing makes sure the enough amount of oxygen to the brain which improves mental clarity, alertness and physical well being.

Pratyahara

Pratyahara involves rightly managing the senses and going beyond them instead of simply closing and suppressing them. It involves directing the concentration inward. With the withdrawal of the senses, one no longer feels it or hear or smell anything around or feel hungry. Practice of pratyahara helps to forget everything around and concentrate on meditation.

Dharana (concentration)

Dharana involves developing our powers of concentration. Here the goal is to push away superfluous thoughts and fix your mind by concentrating on a particular object such as god's image.

Dhyana (meditation)

All the previous limbs that we learnt are the preparation of meditation. Dhyana means actual uninterrupted meditation. Concentration (dharana) leads to the state of meditation. The goal of meditation is to achieve heightened awareness and realize oneness with the universe.

Samadhi

The purpose of meditation is to achieve samadhi or absolute bliss. This is pure contemplation, superconsciousness, in which you and the universe are one. Those who have achieved samadhi are enlightened. In other words, samadhi means free yourself from the cycle of birth and death and merge yourself (your soul) with the almighty.

The eight limbs work together: The first five steps – yama, niyama asana, pranayama, and pratyahara – are the preliminaries of yoga and build the foundation for spiritual life. They are concerned with the body and the brain. The last three, which would not be possible without the previous steps, are concerned with reconditioning the mind. They help you to attain enlightenment or the full realization of oneness with spirit.

Perhaps, last four limbs (Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi) may be complicated and difficult to understand for us (kids), but the first four are easy to understand. They are also very easy to practice; all we need is determination. Let us start practicing the first four limbs of Patanjali Yoga to live a healthy, balanced and spiritual life.

