

The 8 Limbs of Yoga to Self-realization

One of the foundation texts of yoga is called the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. It is believed to have been written over 2,000 years ago by the Father of Yoga, Sri Patanjali Maharishi.

The sage presented the ancient teachings of yoga in a systematic way and outlined the eight limbs of Yoga as a guideline for living a meaningful and purposeful life.



YAMA (social codes of conduct)

The five Yamas (or yogic ethics) consist of:

- Ahimsa (non-violence, compassion, self love)
- Satya (truthfulness)
- Asteya (non-stealing, honesty)
- Brahmacharya (control of sexual energy)
- Aparigraha (non-coveting, non-possessiveness)



NIYAMA (personal code of conduct)

The five Niyamas (yoga lifestyle disciplines) are:

- Shaucha (purity - body, thought, environment)
- Santosha (contentment, gratitude)
- Tapas (austerity, the ability to go without)
- Swadhyaya (self-study and development)
- Ishwara pranidhana (surrender to the Divine)



ASANA (posture and movement)

Practice of physical postures with awareness, balancing effort and comfort, revitalizing the body. The main purpose of Yoga Asanas in the Yoga Sutras is to make the body a fit vehicle for Pranayama and meditation. For this purpose, the asana should be steady and stable. In that pose, one relaxes one's efforts and lets the mind slip into infinity.



PRANAYAMA (breath control)

Pranayama consists of the calming of the movement of inhalation and exhalation. Pranayama controls the energy (prana) within the organism, energizing both body and mind, in order to restore and maintain health. Yogis believe that pranayama not only rejuvenates the body, but also extends life itself.

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PRATYAHARA (withdrawal of the senses)

Education of the senses and the ability to withdraw them to achieve spiritual goals. One is able to do this when completely absorbed in something, as when relaxing, sleeping, meditating, practicing Yoga nidra or a restorative asana posture.



DHARANA (concentration)

When the body has been tempered by asanas, the mind has been refined by pranayama, and the senses have been brought under control by pratyahara, dharana (or concentration) is reached. Concentration is the binding of consciousness to a single spot.



DHYANA (meditation)

The steady, continuous flow of attention towards an object, such as the breath, a mantra or a sacred image. At this stage, the mind has been quieted, and in the stillness it produces few or no thoughts at all.



SAMADHI (absorption or bliss)

The complete union of the meditator with the object of meditation. The meditator comes to realize a profound connection to the Divine, an interconnectedness with all living things and the experience with Oneness with all creation.

The right means are just as important as the end in view. Yoga begins with yogic values and goals in life and yogic lifestyle (Yamas and Niyamas). Then it proceeds to the yogic development of the body (Asana), energy (Pranayama), senses (Pratyahara), mind (Dharana), intelligence (Dhyana) and consciousness (Samadhi).

According to Patanjali, Yoga is the science of the Mind, and is the means by which we can uncover our full potential.