



SOURCES OF YOGA PHILOSOPHY

Yoga practice is unthinkable, and would also be ineffectual, without the ideas on which it is based. It works the physical and the spiritual into one another in an extraordinarily complete way.

– C. G. Jung

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Version 3.0

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- What does research show in terms of the effectiveness of teaching yoga philosophy along with physical practices?
- Why is mere philosophical belief likely to be unhelpful?
- From what original source is yoga philosophy derived?
- How were the teachings said to be discovered?
- What is the meaning of “veda” in Sanskrit?
- What texts delving into yoga philosophy followed from the original source?
- How long ago was the Yoga Sutra written?
- Of what importance is the Bhagavad Gita in yoga philosophy?
- How is the Hatha Yoga Pradipika unique from previous texts?
- Upon what philosophy is *Patanjali's* Yoga Sutra based?
- "*Samkhya*" means discrimination. What does this philosophy discriminate between?
- How is *Samkhya* different from *Advaita Vedanta* and *Tantra*?
- What does *tantra* mean?

INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGINS OF YOGA

- The origins of yoga are traced back to the The Vedas (*veda* = knowledge) of India, estimated to have been written between 3,000 and 6,000 years ago.
- The four books of the Vedas are The Atharva Veda, the Rg Veda, the Sama Veda and the Yajur Veda.
- The verses within the Vedas are said to be revealed scriptures, having been heard by enlightened sages (*rishis*): seers in states of deep yogic meditation, or *samadhi*.
- The writings are on one hand "poetic, nonlinear and therefore difficult to understand" and on another, "as simple, pure, and pristine as the rishis who received them."
- Yoga becomes more defined in The Upanishads, (which include hundreds of philosophical texts) with language that is less symbolic and more direct than The Vedas.

These sacred writings... are known as "apauruseya," not given by man... Because these sciences are not man-made, they are universal and are meant for the whole of humanity.

— B.K.S. Iyengar

TEACHINGS MUST BE EXPERIENCED

[Teachings] have to be experienced because when the real quality of our lives, including the obstacles and problems and experiences that cause us to start questioning, becomes intense, any mere philosophical belief isn't going to hold a candle to the reality of what we are experiencing... Often we hear the teachings so subjectively that we think we're being told what is true and what is false. But [a wisdom teaching] never tells you what is true or what is false. It just encourages you to find out for yourself.

— Pema Chodron

YOGA PHILOSOPHY EASES ANXIETY

A regular practice that includes yoga's spiritual and ethical teachings may ease anxiety more effectively than a practice of asana, breathing, and relaxation alone, according to a recent study. Yoga students learning about the yamas and niyamas had significant decreases in anxiety, including lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol. "Spiritual principles can help you see meaning in your life situation," says researcher Tammy Greer of the University of Southern Mississippi, "and that can lower stress."

— Carol Krucoff

KEY TEXTS

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

- The Bhagavad Gita (The Lord's Song or the Song of God) is "essentially a book on yoga."
- Often called "the Gita," it is a portion of The Mahabharata, an epic poem containing 18 books, said to have been authored by an illumined sage, Vyasa. The Gita is 700 verses and forms 18 chapters of the sixth book.
- It isn't known when The Mahabharata and the Gita itself were written. Often, it is said to have been written "5,000 years ago."
- It is a dialogue between the incarnate God Krishna and the warrior-prince Arjuna, who learns the meaning of *dharma*, the paths of yoga and the purpose of life.

THE YOGA SUTRA

- The Yoga Sutra was written by Patanjali, said to have been a revered yogi and scholar of many subjects.
- The text is thought to have been written in 200 BCE, or over 2,000 years ago.
- It is made up of 196 sutras, divided into four books, or chapters.
- The word "sutra" means thread, as in a thread that strings beads together. *Sutras* are summaries (of the "utmost condensation") of teachings, designed to be remembered and recalled easily. They are intended to serve as reminders for a teacher to expand upon.
- The Yoga Sutra is the philosophy of yoga. It describes human consciousness, how suffering happens, and how to cultivate inner happiness. It describes how to remove the "veil of darkness" and to be free.

THE HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA

- The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, or "Light on Yoga," was written in the fifteenth century.
- The author was an Indian yogi named Swatmarama, of whom little seems to be known. Swatmarama's name means "one who delights in one's Atman," indicating a person who has achieved a sense of wholeness.
- Unlike the Yoga Sutra, the text focuses on bodily practices as a way to advance to Raja Yoga.
- It covers *asana*, *shatkarma*, *mudras*, *bandhas* and *pranayama*.
- In some places it is "opaque" as it is "an esoteric work from medieval India which describes mystical entities, practices, and states of consciousness." (Brian Dana Akers)

FUNDAMENTAL PHILOSOPHIES

THE ROOTS OF YOGA

- Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is rooted in Samkhya philosophy.
- Samkhya is dualistic, teaching discrimination between *purusha* (spirit) and *prakrti* (matter).
- Other Yoga schools of thought are based upon the non-dualistic philosophies of Advaita Vedanta or Tantra, which conclude that the "inherent nature of all things is Consciousness... and that there is only One Consciousness."
- Tantric practices are designed to realize through experience that everything is divine and connected.
- Some sources consider these different philosophies connected and complementary. For example: "The aspirant clears the mind through the practice of Yoga meditation as codified in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, does self-enquiry of Vedanta, and then breaks through the final barrier with Tantra, experiencing the heights of kundalini awakening." – Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

LIBERATION: A PROCESS OF DISCRIMINATION

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are rooted in the Samkhya philosophical system—a system which maintains a strong dualism between purusha (the principle of awareness, that which is sentient) and prakriti (the insentient manifest/objective world, composed of various combinations of the three gunas: tamas, rajas and sattva). The process of liberation, as articulated within this system, is fundamentally one of discrimination between what is real/sentient and what is unreal/insentient, and becoming established in ones true identity as the former as opposed to the latter.

SAMKHYA

- Indian tradition regards Samkhya as the oldest *darsana* (philosophy).
- "Samkhya" means discrimination.
- The philosophy discriminates between *purusha* (spirit) and *prakrti* (matter).

TANTRA

- "Tan" = "extend," "continue," "multiply"
- "Tantra" has many meanings. One commonly accepted definition is "what extends knowledge."
- Tantric practices are designed to realize through experience that everything is divine and connected.

– Elizabeth Reninger