

CONTENTS

Foreword by Tias Little	xiii
Preface	xix
Acknowledgments	xxi
Introduction	1

PART 1: KEY PRINCIPLES

1	Atha <i>Readiness and Commitment</i>	7
2	Citta <i>Heart-Mind Field of Consciousness</i>	11
3	Puruṣa <i>Pure Inner Light of Awareness</i>	17
4	Dṛṣya <i>Ever-Changing Mother Nature</i>	21
5	Viveka <i>Keen Discernment</i>	25
6	Abhyāsa <i>Diligent, Focused Practice</i>	29
7	Vairāgya <i>Nonattachment to Sensory Objects</i>	33
8	Yoga as Nirodha <i>Silencing the Heart-Mind</i>	39
9	Īśvara <i>The Source of Knowledge</i>	43
10	Karma and Saṃskāra <i>Action and Its Imprint</i>	49
11	Pariṇāma <i>Transformation</i>	57

PART 2: UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING

12	Duḥkha <i>Suffering as Opportunity</i>	65
13	Samyoga <i>False Identification of the Seer with the Seen</i>	71
14	Vṛtti-s <i>Activity in the Heart-Mind</i>	75
15	Pramāṇa <i>Correct Evaluation</i>	79
16	Viparyaya <i>Misperception</i>	83
17	Vikalpa <i>Imagination</i>	87
18	Nidrā <i>Sleep</i>	91
19	Smṛti <i>Memory</i>	95
20	Antarāya-s <i>Obstacles That Distract</i>	99
21	Kleśa-s <i>Mental-Emotional Afflictions</i>	105
22	Avidyā <i>Lack of Awareness</i>	109
23	Asmitā <i>Distorted Sense of Self</i>	113
24	Rāga <i>Clinging to Past Pleasure</i>	119
25	Dveṣa <i>Clinging to Past Suffering</i>	123
26	Abhiniveśa <i>Fear of Death</i>	129

PART 3: OUTER BEHAVIOR

27	Aṣṭāṅga <i>The Eight Limbs of Yoga</i>	135
28	Yama-s <i>Ethical Practices</i>	139
29	Ahiṃsā <i>Nonviolence and Compassion</i>	143
30	Satya <i>Truthfulness and Sincerity</i>	149
31	Asteya <i>Not Taking from Others</i>	153
32	Brahmacarya <i>Conservation of Vital Energy</i>	157
33	Aparigraha <i>Nonhoarding</i>	161
34	Pratipakṣa-Bhāvana <i>Cultivating the Opposite</i>	165

CONTENTS

PART 4: PERSONAL PRACTICES

35	Niyama-s <i>Personal Self-Care</i>	171
36	Śauca <i>Cleanliness</i>	175
37	Santoṣa <i>Contentment and Gratitude</i>	179
38	Kriyā-Yoga <i>Practice in Action</i>	185
39	Tapas <i>Practice Causing Positive Change</i>	189
40	Svādhyāya <i>Study by and of Oneself</i>	195
41	Īśvara-Pranidhāna <i>Humility and Faith</i>	201
42	Āsana <i>Refinement of the Body</i>	207
43	Prāṇāyāma <i>Regulation of Breath</i>	211

PART 5: INNER DEVELOPMENT

44	Pratyāhāra <i>Tuning Out Sensory Input</i>	217
45	Citta-Prasādana <i>Purification of the Heart-Mind</i>	221
46	Dhāraṇā <i>Choosing a Focus</i>	227
47	Dhyāna <i>Continuous Focus</i>	231
48	Samādhi <i>Complete Attention</i>	235
49	Samyama <i>Focusing Inward</i>	241
50	Pratiprasava <i>Returning to the Source</i>	245
51	Kaivalya <i>Permanent Oneness</i>	249
	Epilogue	253
	Permissions and Credits	255
	For Further Study	257
	Further Resources	259
	Index	261
	About the Author	271

INTRODUCTION

PATAÑJALI, THE AUTHOR OF the Yoga Sūtras, lived somewhere between 500 BCE and 200 CE, a time that possibly overlaps the life of Buddha and a period of intense philosophical activity in India. Patañjali was revered as an outstanding scholar and wise man who wrote significant commentaries on Sanskrit grammar and Āyurveda (East Indian medicine). So much was he praised that he became deified as a sort of prophet, an incarnation of God in the form of Viṣṇu and also Ādiśeṣa, the thousand-headed serpent whose coils provide a bed for Viṣṇu to rest on.

Yoga itself existed long before Patañjali. He did not create yoga, but he brilliantly compiled its essence in a text called *Pātañjala-Yoga-Darśanam*, meaning “view of yoga according to Patañjali.” The Patañjali yoga tradition is a later expression of older teachings based on the source texts of India known as the Veda-s, which date earlier than 1500 BCE. Yoga is considered one of the six “views,” or perspectives, on the same basic Vedic philosophy.

The Yoga Sūtras came to be accepted as the primary text on yoga philosophy, not yoga postures (*āsana*). Patañjali focuses on yoga as a method of transforming the way we think, communicate, and act by directing our attention inward and cultivating inner contentment. Less than 2 percent of the *sūtra*-s discuss the physical practice of *āsana*. In fact, according to what those few

sūtra-s say, we could interpret *āsana* as simply how to sit for meditation. So yoga is much, much more than *āsana*.

The Yoga Sūtras consists of 195 small, concise aphorisms (called *sūtra-s*) in four chapters. The aphorisms are written in Sanskrit, a language designed to express the subtle aspects of yoga. The text describes human consciousness in detail, including how our heart-mind functions, how suffering happens, and how to refine our body, breath, mind, and heart so we are able to cultivate inner happiness and free ourselves from negativity.

There has been an unbroken oral transmission of information in India for thousands of years. To facilitate the memorization of information, the *sūtra* “thread” format was invented, in which a large amount of knowledge is expressed in a short phrase or sentence. Many of these aphorisms strung together create a text on the topic at hand. Thus, one can establish a mnemonic association between the tiny, memorized *sūtra* and all of the knowledge associated with it that was received from a teacher. Traditionally the sound of a text is learned by heart first, through chanting, then the meaning is taught and applied to a well-rounded practice of all eight limbs of yoga.

Usually, there was one teacher with a small class of young students learning together. The teacher would test students occasionally to see if they were doing their practice and applying the principles outside of class. It was the students’ responsibility to apply the ideas and practices outside of class. For example, let’s say a posture is taught one day. The students are expected to practice that posture regularly. If students return with questions about it, or they have noticeably improved their form, it is obvious to the teacher that they have spent some time with it. On the other hand, if other students are making no observable progress, they will fall behind. Studious and hard-working students will move forward and receive deeper instruction, while those who are apathetic or

lazy will eventually drop out. No teacher wants to waste their time with inattentive students.

Traditionally, students may live with a teacher for many years, studying all day, every day, in order to master a subject, be it philosophy, music, dance, or other discipline. In ancient India and even today, there are teachers who are supported by the greater community and do not expect payment from students. Respect for the teacher is required, and honoring a power higher than ourselves (usually in the form of a deity) is a powerful way to prevent the ego from taking over.

Eventually, the students will become teachers or performers, and if fame follows, it is absolutely essential that humility is ingrained in their consciousness. Many teachers want nothing more than for one of their students to surpass them and, thus, carry on their teachings. Master teachers have the knowledge fully integrated into their being.

Integrating the teachings of yoga means experiencing them outside and inside ourselves. Civil and kind social interaction; caring for, developing, and stabilizing our physical body and breath; self-observation; quiet contemplation; and deep meditation all contribute to the clarification of our heart-mind. As our sensory organs become clear and acute, we perceive objects as they truly are. When we are able to focus our attention away from the external and toward our inner core, then we can connect to that pure inner light of awareness that all creatures share. Yoga is the process of stilling (*nirodha*) the distractions in our heart-mind.

The Sanskrit word *sattva* is very important to understand in the context of yoga. *Sattva* represents what is universally accepted as good and positive. Its qualities include love, compassion, wisdom, intelligence, truthfulness, radiance, purity, harmony, balance, nonviolence, virtue, appropriateness, and adaptability. Being *sattvic* means acting according to *sattva*, knowing when

and how to act for the greater good, and not being attached to the results of our actions. As our heart-mind becomes more refined through the practices and processes of yoga, it gradually becomes more and more *sattvic*.

THIS APPROACH TO LEARNING YOGA

The almost two hundred *sūtra-s* can be difficult to grasp when approached linearly, one after another. Here, I have carefully selected fifty-one key principles of yoga to focus on and explore in depth. Rather than gleaning pieces of each principle by moving through the text in a linear way, we can instead see all aspects of it in one place. All of the significant principles of yoga are encased in Sanskrit words, most of which have no English equivalent. Learning what yoga is all about requires understanding these core principles intellectually and experientially. Each principle is explained in its own chapter that includes real-life examples, thoughts to meditate on, and exercises to apply it into your life. Acquiring this basic vocabulary of yoga will enable you to converse with others using the Sanskrit words instead of awkward English approximations. Discussing these ideas with others will greatly broaden your understanding of them. Patience is key. The principles and practices of yoga will seep into your system as you study and integrate them over time.

The concepts are ordered to build on each other. Focusing on one chapter at a time will allow your heart and mind time to integrate each concept fully. Contemplate each thought deeply and quietly, and practice the exercises to experience what the concept means to you. Spend time on each concept, as you would a long, drawn-out meal, and you will be able to fully digest it. Choose the exercises that will benefit you the most. Learning the principles of yoga will expand and deepen your *āsana* practice.

PART 1

KEY PRINCIPLES

1

ATHA

Readiness and Commitment

अथ

Until one is committed, there is a hesitancy, the chance to draw back. The moment one definitely commits oneself then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would otherwise never have occurred.

Whatever you can do, or dream you can, *begin it*.

Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

BEGINNINGS, LIKE ENDINGS, CAN BE difficult or exciting. Starting something new implies change, a step toward an eventual goal. *Atha* is the very first word in the Yoga Sūtras and is considered an auspicious way to begin. Whenever we make an important decision, often the universe will energetically support us.

Atha here means beginning the study of who we are, where we are, and how we can make incremental changes to our inner and outer self in order to be less involved with material objects and more in tune with how we feel and how our actions affect those around us.

Learning, practicing, and integrating the various aspects of yoga happens over a long period of time and requires patience and perseverance. Beware: your initial eagerness and energy may not last. Allow the information to seep into your core gradually and intentionally. There is no rush. Many of us want instant gratification—to learn something and then quickly move on to something else. Yet real, lasting inner change takes time.

Our eagerness to learn and the frequency of our practice will affect the velocity of learning. A person can be extremely excited to learn yoga, yet not have the discipline to follow through with the practices. If we are enrolled in a class because it is required for our degree or certificate, we may fall into boredom or become lackadaisical. Practicing often but in an inattentive way will also hamper progress. Ideally, we genuinely want to learn, are able to carve out time in our schedule to learn, and can maintain a regular and consistent practice for long enough to allow the knowledge we seek to sink in.

A heart-mind that is fresh and open will absorb information like a sponge. Repetition reinforces the knowledge learned by creating a pattern in the heart-mind. Young children are a perfect example of open heart-minds learning through repetition. Not only do they have less in their hearts and minds to interfere with perception, but they will also repeat something over and over to themselves until it sticks (leaves a lasting impression) in their memory. Growing up, we accumulate obstacles to learning in the form of physical limitations, emotional scars, and intellectual or spiritual rigidity. Cultivating a beginner's mind during our studies will allow us to truly grasp the profound depths of yoga.

The Internet avails us to almost unlimited amounts of information. With so many different directions to choose from, how can we focus on those that improve our lives? Sitting in a restful state of quietness allows us to observe the crazy movements of the world. Regrouping, then setting an intention and deciding

to follow one particular direction, will open up opportunities that otherwise would not have been available. Similarly, prayer lets the universe know how to help us.

Sometimes we bite off more than we can chew by taking on too many projects. This can create more stress for us and siphons our attention from our friends and family. It is important to sit quietly and contemplate whether we have the time and resources to commit to another endeavor. For example, a decision to have children requires that you let go of certain activities in order to give your children the attention they need to grow up healthy and happy. All of a sudden, your priorities have shifted, and a new kind of lifestyle has begun.

Commitment holds a solid, grounding energy that provides stability and structure to our lives. Deciding to learn and experience what yoga really is requires diligence and effort, which will undoubtedly yield fruit over time. Yoga is a lifestyle designed to develop and refine our body, mind, and heart, our thoughts, words, and actions. As Steve Jobs once said, “The journey is the reward.”



THOUGHTS

Learning anything well requires eagerness,
commitment, and perseverance.

With an open mind, I can direct my attention
inward and see what unfolds.

I will set aside time for learning and practicing the principles of yoga.

EXERCISES

Think of a time when you took on too many projects at the same time. Writing down your thoughts, ask yourself:

Which projects could have waited?

How did this overextended state affect the quality of your personal life?

What could you have done differently?

Think of other areas of study you began, but could not keep up. Write down the reason(s) why you think they ended. Did something more appealing replace them? Did you give them enough of a chance?

What commitments have you made in your life that have brought you fulfillment?