

YOGA

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

“The supreme path begins when the five senses and the mind are stilled and when the intellect is silent, This tranquility of the senses is yoga”

-Katha Upanishad

Yoga is increasingly being known and appreciated all the world over now-a-days, though its different meanings and its deeper significance and purpose are not well understood.

Yoga was known and developed for more than 5000 years, and was practiced in India even before the Aryan civilization started to flourish in the Indian Sub-Continent.

The word 'Yoga' is mentioned in various places in the Vedas particularly in 'Rig Veda'. Many aspects of Yoga are mentioned such as 'dharna', (Concentration), dhyana, (meditation) etc. The 'self' or consciousness was understood as something beyond the body and mind, and yet, to be realized within. The seers of the Vedas clearly recognized that there existed dynamic life principles which they called 'Vayu' (or 'Prana') which, they clearly recognized, was closely related to breathing,

The Vedas also mention the existence of pranic centres ('chakras') within but not in the physical body; The Science of sound was also clearly recognized for they mention psychic sounds ('mantras') that can be used for the attainment of both spiritual and material goals. In the Vedic times, the experience of Yoga were known, but the Science of Yoga had not yet developed and systematized.

The Brahmans mention 'Japa' (meditative technique with chanting of 'mantras') and 'mauna' (inducing inner silence).

The various Upanishads give Yoga a more definite shape.

The essential message of the Upanishads is that the 'self' can be only known through union or Yoga, and not by mere speculation and learning. It is also emphasized again and again that the Self is not to be realized outside; it is not something separate; but at the core (centre) of our being.

Many of the 'Upanishads' describe the mental attributes that must be adopted, developed and cultivated in order to both begin and make progress on the yogic path. Other 'Upanishads' mention methods that can be practiced in order to induce meditation ('Dhyan').

Several 'Upanishads' devote much space to describing 'prana' and its implications. The earlier Upanishads recognize that 'prana' is the sub-stratum behind all life-forms. They describe the psychic pathways that exist within physical body, through which 'prana' flows, including the all important 'nadis', 'ida', 'pingala' and 'sushumna'.

In the later Upanishads such as Prashna and the Katha, this theme was further developed. The

different forms of 'prana' within the body were mapped out according to the functions performed, and it is stated that there are seventy two thousand 'nadis' or pranic channels within the body. The concept of 'Kundalini' (psychic and spiritual power) in the form of a serpent within the body is also explained.

Various other Upanishads also cover a range of practical aspects of Yoga, ranging from 'asana' and 'pranayana' to psychic centers and self-realization.

Bhagvad Gita is a Yogic scripture par excellence, and is applicable to people throughout the world and in every walk of life. It maps out in concise, but specific manner, the Yogic paths of Karma Yoga (the path of action), Gyana Yoga (the path of intuition), Bhakti Yoga, (the path of devotion) and Dhyana Yoga (the path of meditation).

It is in Bhagvad Gita where we really see that Yoga is for everyone and not for the recluse. Before the writing of Bhagvad Gita, there was a tendency to regard Yoga as something only meant for the later stages of life and not concerned with daily life from the very beginning. It is the Bhagvad Gita that urges everyone to start practicing Yoga here and now, and not to consider it something to be practiced on retirement from one's responsibilities or at some time in the future when the opportunity presents itself. It is to be practiced NOW as an integral part of one's life.

Another important aspect of the Bhagvad Gita is that it synthesizes the different aspects of Yoga into a comprehensive whole. Practice of Yoga should not be confined to one path. In fact this is impossible. Integration of all the different paths is necessary. Though a person might follow one path in particular, the other paths should also be practiced where possible. The Gita makes this point very clear. Before the time of writing the Gita, the different paths were considered as separate and even some of the paths were considered as mutually exclusive. It is the Gita that formulates the basic structure of the Science of Yoga as it is known today.

The first great sage who contributed the foundation of the Yoga system was Kapila (700 B.C.) who was the author of 'Sankhya' system of Philosophy. He developed the theory of 'Samyak Gyana' (proper knowledge) of 'Purusha' ('prana' and 'consciousness') and 'prakriti', the inert matter including the 5 sense organs, the five organs of action, their 'tanmatras' ('manas', 'Budhi', 'chitta', 'ego', and 'mool prakriti').

According to the theory of evolution expounded by the 'Sankhya', all experience is based on the duality of the subject 'purusha' and the object 'prakriti'. 'Prakriti' (or Nature) is the basis of all existence-physical and psychical. It is pure potentiality. It is a state of tension of three constituents ('Gunas') – 'Sattva', 'Rajas' and 'Tamas',

'Sattva' is potential consciousness, 'rajas' is the source of activity, and 'tamas' is that which resists activity. They are instrumental to the experience of pleasure, pain and indifference.

When the three constituents are held in balance, there is no action. When there is disturbance in the equilibrium, the process of evolution emerges,

The evolution of 'prakriti' can take place only through the presence of 'purusha' (consciousness).

The development of this process of evolution follows a law of succession. 'Mahat' (literally the 'great one') is the first product of 'prakriti', It is the basis of intelligence ('Buddhi') of the individual, 'Buddhi' is the subtle substance of all mental processes. 'Ahamkara' or self-sense instinct develops out of 'Buddhi' and is the principle of individuation.

From 'Ahamkara' arise the three different lines of development. In the 'sattva' aspect arises the 'manas' (mind), the five organs of perception and the five organs of action. From the 'tamas' aspect arise the fine or subtle elements. The 'rajas' aspect supplies the energy for both these developments.

The individual is not the body, life or mind; but the informing SELF, silent, peaceful and eternal-the pure spirit. 'Buddhi', 'manas' etc., are the instruments of consciousness and are not in themselves consciousness. We become conscious of 'prakriti' by the light of 'purusha'.

As there are many conscious beings in the world, the Sankhya adopts the view of plurality of Self,

Salvation in the Sankhya system is only phenomenal. The true Self is always free. Bondage is the activity of 'prakriti', not knowing the distinction between the 'purusha' and 'prakriti'. Release is inactivity of 'prakriti', Freedom from bondage is obtained by discriminative knowledge, It is the result of the practice of virtue and yoga,

Later, Sage Patanjali (2nd Century B.C.) expounded the Yoga system as it is known today. He emphasized Yogic practice along with '*Samyak Gyana*' to achieve excellence of body and mind. He is the Author of the basic text. '*Yoga Sutras*', which consist of 175 '*Sutras*' (cryptic sayings) divided into 4 sections

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| 1. Samadhi Pad | (51 Sutras) |
| 2. Sadhana Pad | (55 Sutras) |
| 3. Vibhuti Pad | (35 Sutras) |
| 4. Kaivalya Pad | (34 Sutras) |

Yoga according to Patanjali is the power to discriminate between subject and object, '*purusha*' (self or spirit) and '*Prakrti*' (nature), which means the realization of the inner self. Yoga is a methodical effort to attain perfection through the control of the different elements of human nature, physical and psychical.

What the Sankhya calls '*mahat*' (the great one, or 'buddhi') is called '*chitta*' (mind-stuff) in the Yoga system of Patanjali. The '*Chitta*' undergoes modifications when it is affected by objects through the senses. The consciousness of '*purusha*' reflected in the '*Chitta*' gives rise to the impression that it is the experiencer. '*Chitta*' is really the spectacle of which the Self is, by reflection, the spectator.

We have as many '*Chittas*' as there are '*selves*'. The ego ('Ahamkara') is different from the self and is dependent on the experience of the world. The life of the ego is restless and unsatisfied, being

subject to the five afflictions of

1. Ignorance or the mistaking of non-eternal for the eternal ('*Agayana*').
2. The erroneous identification of oneself with the instruments! of body and mind.
3. Attachment to pleasant things.
4. Hatred of other things.
5. The instinctive love of life and the dread of death.

When the 'Self' is freed from '*Chitta*', it withdraws itself into its own pure nature, and is no more influenced by the external afflictions that affect the '*Chitta*'.

The Yoga system accepts the Samkhya psychology and metaphysics. However, it is definitely more theistic than the Samkhya, as evidenced by the addition of God to the Samkhya's 25 elements or reality.

The main interest of Patanjali is not metaphysical theorizing, but the practical motive of indicating how salvation can be attained by disciplined activity.

The special feature of the Yoga system is its practical discipline by which the suppression of mental state is brought about through the practice of spiritual exercise and the conquest of desire.

Patanjali, the author the Yoga Sutras, defines Yoga as "....complete control over the different patterns or modifications of consciousness."

In other words, Yoga implies control over the conscious, unconscious, subconscious and super-conscious realms of our being, One becomes the observer of these different higher states of changes attaining complete knowledge of them.

Yoga really means Union-union between the limited self ('*Jiva*') and the cosmic self ('*Atman*').

Yoga can be defined as a science for developing creativity; as the science for unfolding the deeper aspects of the personality; as the science of being; as the science of consciousness. The implications of Yoga on one's life are vast, for Yoga concerns itself with the every core of our life body, mind and consciousness.

YOGA as it is commonly understood is the path or method which one adopts to attain the realization of '*yoga*'-One's true identity, The practice of Yoga is aimed at rooting out the ego, the aspect of our individuality, and enhances the sense of independence from our surroundings. Once the ego is transcended, the Individual realizes his real inner nature.

The various methods of Yoga, in practice, aim at bringing the functions of the different organs, muscles and nerves into perfect coordination. so that their functions harmonize and assist each other, and work for the overall good of the body and mind. Thus yoga also means physical harmony and health.

Yoga also leads to mental balance and mental peace, i.e. coordination between mind and body, so that the body responds perfectly to our mental command, conscious and sub-conscious.

For practice, Yoga system suggests the following techniques for the attainment of its goal.

1. 'Yama' (control and discipline of the mind.)
2. 'Niyama' (observation of rules to obtain the aim).
3. 'Asana' (physical posture)
4. 'Mudra' (external expression of inner attitudes)
5. 'Bandhana' (psychic locks)
6. 'Pranayama' (breath-control and. manipulation of breath to control 'Pranayama')
7. 'Pratyahar' (abstraction of the senses)
8. 'Dharna' (concentration)
9. 'Dhyana' (meditation)
10. 'Mantra' (special sound patterns which can produce subtle impact and change)
11. 'Samadhi' (unfolding of the spiritual realm, the super conscious state, the climax of meditation in which one experiences unity with cosmic consciousness, '*Kaivaiya*').

'Yama' (control and discipline of the mind) and 'niyama: (observance of rules for maintaining the purification, internal and external) are the prerequisites for the practice of Yoga.

'Asana', posture, is a physical. aid to concentration.

'Pranayama', breath control, promotes serenity of mind.

'Pratayahara', withdrawal of the senses from their natural functions, helps to keep the mind still.

These five steps are indirect or external means to pursue Yoga.

'Dharna', fixed attention, or concentration, helps the mind to remain focused on a particular object.

'Dhyana', contemplation or meditation, leads to concentration.

The ultimate aim of yoga is 'Samadhi', where the self regains its eternal and pure free status, totally detached. This is the meaning of freedom or salvation in the Yoga system, leading to 'Moksha', release from the cycle of births and deaths.

The co-ordination of these in a specific and scientific manner brings about the developments in a person as a whole, ultimately leading to complete co-ordination of the physical. psychic and mental activities.