

Yoga Sutras - Introduction

Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

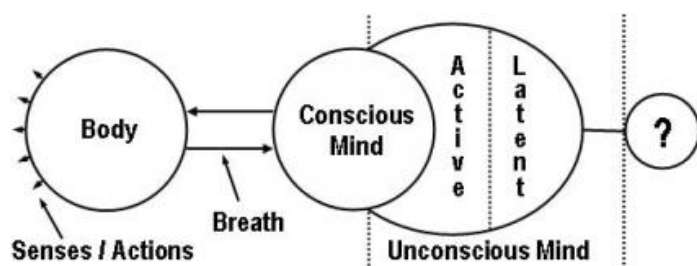
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Yoga Nidra CD
Swami Jnaneshvara

What are the Yoga Sutras?: The Yoga Sutras of [Patanjali](#) succinctly outlines the art and science of traditional Yoga meditation for Self-Realization. It is a process of systematically encountering, examining, and transcending each of the various gross and subtle levels of false identity in the mind field, until the jewel of the true Self comes shining through.

Yoga means union & sutra means thread: Yoga means *union* of the parts of ourselves, which were never divided in the first place. Yoga literally means *to yoke*, from the root *yuj*, which means *to join*; it is the same as the absorption in the state of samadhi. *Sutra* means *thread*, and this thread, or multiple threads, weave a tapestry of insight and direct experience. Some say that the name of the text uses the word *sutra* in its plural form, as Yoga Sutras, in that each of the sutras, or threads, comes together to form a complete tapestry. Others say that it is used in its singular form, as Yoga Sutra, in that there is one, consistent thread that flows through the entire text. Both views add a useful perspective to the process being described. In the writings on this website, both terms are intentionally used.



[Click here for the Yoga Sutras Summary page](#)

Codifying the pre-existing Yoga: When Patanjali codified, or compiled the Yoga Sutras, no new system was created, but rather, the ancient practices were summarized in an extremely organized and terse way. While the Yoga Sutras are thought to be as old as 400 BCE, archaeological evidence and other texts suggest that the methods described in the Yoga Sutras were being practiced as early as 3000 BCE. Oral tradition states that the period may be even longer.

Purpose of this rendition: The goal of this rendition of the Yoga Sutras is to make the principles and practices of the Yoga Sutras more understandable and accessible. The descriptions attempt to focus on the practical suggestions of what to *do* to regulate the mind, so as to attain direct experience beyond the mind. The intent is to explain, not to proffer some new system or school of Yoga. Hyperlinks are used extensively, allowing you to easily move around among the many sutras, principles and practices. This collection of web pages on the Yoga Sutra is being routinely revised and improved.

Six ways to review: Here are six ways to review these web pages on the Yoga Sutra:

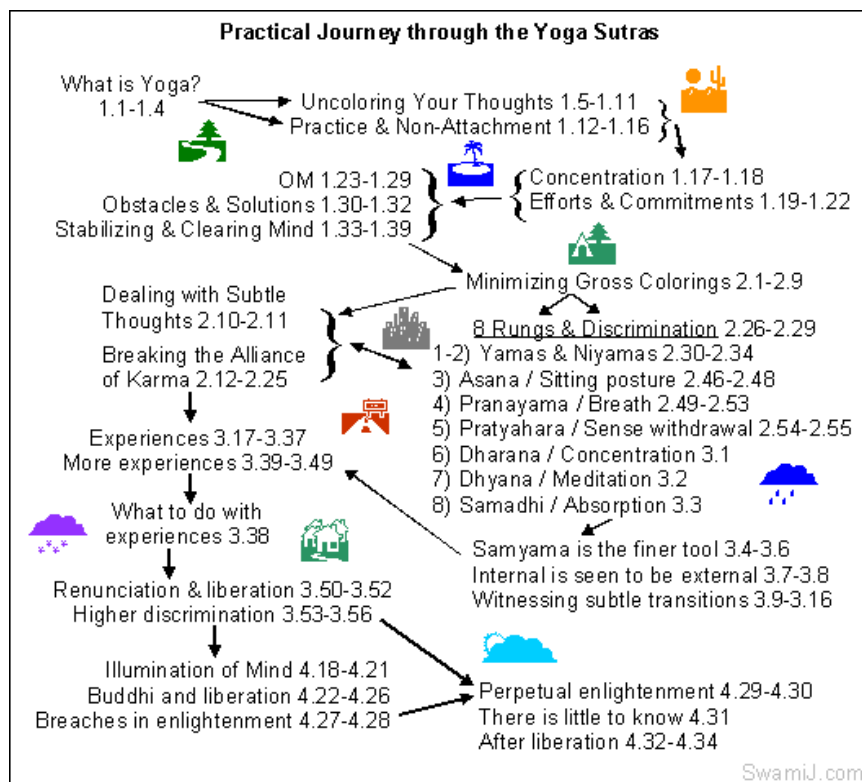
1. **Summary page:** Go to the [Summary](#) page and glance through the headings and topics. Click on the individual sutras that draw your attention. (To print the Summary page, it is better to reduce the View size in the browser, and to print in Landscape view; then tape the pages together.)
2. **Chapter overviews:** Go through the brief overviews of each of the four chapters, beginning with [Chapter 1](#). Then, click through the links to each of the other Chapter overviews.
3. **Section reviews:** The 196 sutras have been divided into 39 sections (in this website). Each section has a few paragraphs that describe that section. Start with the [first section](#), read those few paragraphs (not reading the individual sutras), and then click on [Next section](#) at the top of the page. This will take you to the next section.

4. **Review all sutras:** There is also a running [list of all 196 sutras](#), which can be read in its entirety in a few minutes. Each sutra in this list has a link to the complete description of the sutra.
5. **Questions:** There is a page of [Reminder Questions](#), along with a link to the sutra that answers the question.
6. **Narrative:** The [narrative](#) version presents the Yoga Sutras in paragraph format, which might be a more familiar way to learn.

Commentaries: It's useful to have [several different commentaries](#) close at hand so as to get greater depth and a variety of perspectives when exploring a particular sutra.

Downloads: There are also [Downloads on the Yoga Sutras](#), including interpretive translation with transliterated Sanskrit and word-for-word translations, a narrative summary of the interpretive translation, study questions, and a two-page summary of all sutras (which can be printed and taped together to make it a one-page summary).

Visual journey through the Yoga Sutras: The picture below gives a simple, straightforward view of the process of meditation in Yoga. There are links on each part of the picture that will take you to the relevant sutras. The picture can also be printed for convenience in learning.



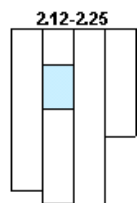
Regulating your own mind: Swami Rama explains, "There have been many scholarly commentaries on the Yoga Sutras, but all the commentaries miss something very practical. Such commentaries can only satisfy the intellect, but do not actually help you beyond that: 'yogash chitta vritti narodha'--yoga is the control of the 'modifications' of the mind [1.2]. Narodha means control; there is no other English word for it. Control doesn't mean suppression, but channeling or regulating."

Other names: The Yoga Sutras is also referred to as *Raja Yoga*, the *Royal Yoga*. Some call it *Kriya Yoga*, drawing on the use of the word from Chapter 2 (2.1). Others refer to it as *Ashtanga Yoga* (Ashta = eight; anga = rungs), which is the eight-fold path of Yoga, including yamas, niyamas, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi, which begin with Sutra 28 of Chapter 2 (2.28) (Note that this does not refer to the popularized physical yoga that has chosen to use the same name, Ashtanga Yoga, for their practices).

Yoga and Sankhya philosophies: The process of realization through Yoga rests on the discovery of pure consciousness ([purusha](#)) as separate from all the many false identities, which are considered to be evolutes of primal matter ([prakriti](#)). These principles of purusha and prakriti are part of the philosophical system known as Sankhya. [Yoga](#) and [Sankhya](#) are two of the six systems of Indian philosophy. See also these articles:

- [Six Schools of Indian Philosophy](#)
- [Prakriti and Its Evolutes: Returning to Self-Realization](#)

Interpretive translation: The translations on both the [summary page](#) of the Yoga Sutras and the [page listing all 196 sutras](#) of the Yoga Sutras here are interpretive, providing expanded translations (some renditions are divided into 194-200 sutras). For example, sutra [1.2](#) defines Yoga with some 25 English words, rather than only 4 Sanskrit words. The practices of the Yoga Sutras are extremely practical, though it can seem quite complicated when trying to sort through the language. By providing expanded, interpretive translations, the practical meaning of the suggestions more easily comes through.



About the Icons: From the [main page](#) on the Yoga Sutras, there are links to 39 clusters of sutras. Each of those pages has an icon such as the one on the left. The reason for these is that the mind can remember information much more easily when there is a visual component. This icon allows you to "see" where a particular topic is located in the four chapters of the Yoga Sutras. The example at the left is Yoga Sutras 2.12-2.25, which is on Breaking the Alliance with Karma. Now that you "see" this, you might more easily remember

that these sutras on karma are close to the middle of column 2, which is Chapter 2. Then, at some later time, when you want to read the part about Karma, you may remember to go to the [main page](#), scroll to that location in column 2, and click on that topic. It might also help you to simply recall that Karma is discussed around the middle of Chapter 2.

Many translations: There are many different English translations of the Yoga Sutras, with each providing a perspective. It can be tempting to look for the single translation that seems "best" compared to the others. However, each translation adds something, and each translation might miss something else. What seems most useful is to read many translations, and then draw from them what you find most useful.

Acknowledgements: These interpretive translations and descriptions could not happen without the codifying of the Yoga Sutra by the Patanjali lineage, the commentator Vyasa, and the various translations and commentaries of many others, each of whom have contributed something to this mind. Of greatest acknowledgement is the [tradition of the Himalayan Masters](#), who continue to teach and operate through this mind, as instructed by [Swami Rama](#), the one to whom the highest acknowledgement, gratitude, and love is given.

Typographical errors: If you notice any typographical errors or bad links, would you please [contact](#) me so that corrections can be made.

Printing this website: It may be tempting to print out the many Yoga Sutra pages on this website, but that is not recommended for the simple reason that you would lose the benefits of the hyperlinks. These links allow you to easily move around throughout the sutras, and that is a great aid in learning. Some of the individual pages might be good to print, such as the [Introduction](#) (which you are now reading), [Summary](#), [Keys](#), [List](#), or [Chapters](#). The one page that is most recommended to print out is the [Summary](#) page. (To print the [Summary](#) page, it is better to reduce the View size in the browser, and to print in *Landscape* view; then tape the pages together. A printable version of the Summary page is also in the [Downloads](#) section of the website.)

Using the search engine: The website itself has a search engine on the [home page](#) or any of the Index pages, which can be reached by clicking on any of the links at the top of the pages. While this searches the whole website, you can see in the link address which ones are linked to the Yoga Sutras pages. Just type in the subject you are looking for. If you also type in the words "yoga sutras," in addition to your search term, it should bring you to the appropriate pages.

Yoga Sutras is for teachers: It can be comforting to know that the Yoga Sutra is actually designed for teachers as a guideline in training students. By remembering this orientation, it is easier to see that at the current moment, only portions of the text apply to you personally. The rest can then be allowed to come along the

way. While progressing along the path, it is very useful to have a general understanding of the whole process being outlined in the Yoga Sutras.

How to learn the Yoga Sutras: Yoga has to do with examining one's internal states of consciousness, and clearing out the clouded mind, so that the jewel of the [center of consciousness](#), the Self, can be experienced in its unalloyed purity. There are several compatible parts of the process:

- **Written study:** A good deal of effort is needed in going through the written explanations and commentaries on the Yoga Sutras.
- **Oral learning:** More importantly, the practical application of the Yoga Sutra needs to be discussed orally with those who are really following and doing the practices themselves.
- **Direct experience:** Even more importantly, however, the practices must actually be done to attain the validation of direct experience.
- **Transmission:** In the [tradition](#) of the Himalayan masters, the higher understanding comes through direct transmission known as shaktipata.

Books and commentaries: There are many books on the Yoga Sutras, which provide different translations and commentaries. Some of these are extremely useful, and some not so useful. For those who are serious about practicing the profound teachings of the Yoga Sutra, it is recommended to have several translations and commentaries at hand. This allows you to go into greater depth when you are trying to work with an individual sutra. There are a handful of [recommended books on the Yoga Sutras](#) on this website.

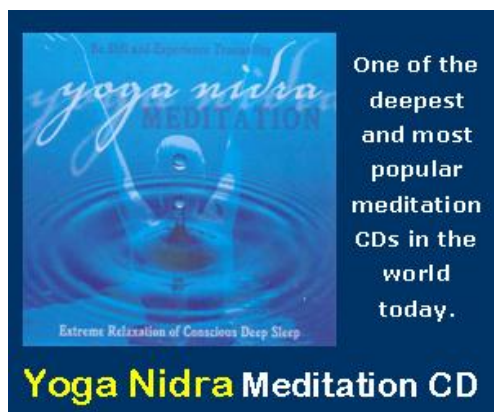
Diversity of opinions: If an art teacher asked a class of ten students to each paint a picture of a vase of flowers, the result would be ten different paintings, which might bear some resemblance to one another, yet would each be unique. The same thing happens when descriptions are written about the practices of the Yoga Sutras, or other such writings. It is important to remember this when reading commentaries, so as to experience them as complementary rather than as contradictory.

Succinct versus Incomplete: In going through the Yoga Sutras, it is extremely useful to note that one of its most wonderful features is that of being *succinct*. It is an outline of only some 196 sentences, threads, or sutras. It is like the table of contents of an extremely large book, if not encyclopedias. Historically, this outline is used in oral discussion, where the teachings themselves are shared in face-to-face dialogue, usually with people living together in community. With the invention of the printing press, and our recent innovations with computer technology, there are ever more written words. If we are tempted to say that Patanjali is *incomplete* in his comments, please keep in mind that it comes from *oral* tradition, where students memorized the entirety of the Yoga Sutras, and that the depth of the information was *oral*, not *written*. Viewed in that light, we can see that it is not valid to say that the Yoga Sutras is *incomplete*, simply because it has the very useful quality of being *succinct*.

Witnessing the inner world: Yoga is a journey within, exploring and moving through the various levels of our being. There is a paper on the website entitled [Witnessing Your Thoughts](#), which gives practical suggestions on exploring this inner world. Most of the principles and suggestions in that paper are directly related to the Yoga Sutras.

Yoga Sutras is a preliminary step: In the tradition of the Himalayan sages, this ancient, oral yoga system, recorded by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras is accepted as a preliminary step. Building on that foundation, the Advaita Vedanta system is practiced, particularly relating to the states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the fourth state, turiya. Purely internal tantra is practiced as a means of spiritual awakening and realization. Thus, [Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra](#) work synergistically in philosophy and practice.

Revisions: This collection of web pages on the Yoga Sutra is being routinely revised and improved.



This site is devoted to presenting the ancient Self-Realization path of the Tradition of the Himalayan masters in simple, understandable and beneficial ways, while not compromising quality or depth. The goal of our sadhana or practices is the highest Joy that comes from the Realization in direct experience of the center of consciousness, the Self, the Atman or Purusha, which is one and the same with the Absolute Reality. This Self-Realization comes through Yoga meditation of the Yoga Sutras, the contemplative insight of Advaita Vedanta, and the intense devotion of Samaya Sri Vidya Tantra, the three of which complement one another like fingers on a hand. We employ the classical approaches of Raja, Jnana, Karma, and Bhakti Yoga, as well as Hatha, Kriya, Kundalini, Laya, Mantra, Nada, Siddha, and Tantra Yoga. Meditation, contemplation, mantra and prayer finally converge into a unified force directed towards the final stage, piercing the pearl of wisdom called bindu, leading to the Absolute.