



PATANJALI'S AṢṬĀṄGA YOGA

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Patanjali's *Yoga darṣan* is one of the shat *darṣanās* and aimed at obtaining liberation through perfect control of body and mind. The Sankhya system is accepted by him with slight variations. Instead of *mahat*, *Yoga* speaks of *chitta*. When *chitta* gets imprisoned in the human body it assumes the shape and quality of that body. The object of *Yoga* is to restore it to its pristine glory by suppressing the *rajas* and *tamas* tendencies. Every thought wave leaves a latent tendency in the mind. The aspirant of *Yoga* destroys the tendencies and arrests the thought waves. By doing this he makes his mind balanced. *Yoga* does not recognise *ahankara* and *manas* as separate from *buddhi*.

Yoga's emphasis is on virtuous living, constant striving, and moving according to an integrated approach to the desired end. This is the famous 'Eight Limbs' known as *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*. The first five of these are external observances and the last three mental disciplines. The "Eight Limbs" are *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇayāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*.

These eight parts have not been enumerated by the *Gīta* at one place. But all these concepts can certainly be found in the *Bhagavad-Gīta* as well. Patanjali describes the eight limbs of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* in the following *sūtra*.

*Yama Niyamāsana Prāṇayāma Pratyāhāra Dhāraṇa Dhyāna
Samādhaṣṭavangani.*¹

1. *Yamas*:

Ahimsā, *Satya*, *Asteya*, *Brahmacarya* and *Aparigraha* constitute the five abstentions prescribed by Patanjali for a *Yoga* practitioner.

*Ahimsā-satyasteya-brahmacaryaparigraha yamaḥ.*²

Vows of self-restraint comprise abstention from violence, falsehood, theft, incontinence and acquisitiveness.

These are the observances by which the mind becomes *sāttvic* and is able to destroy the impurities. The relationship of man with the objective universe is the highest manifestation of man's extrovert nature. And since this is inescapable, the *Yamas* indicate practices by which this practical life



in relation to the world can be made pure and enlightened, the actions performed with desires bring about births, sufferings, etc.

Ahimsā samata tustis tapo danam 'yaso 'yasaḥ!

Bhavanti bhava bhūtānam matta eva prithagvidhaḥ !!³

Non-violence, equanimity, satiety, asceticism, charity, reputation, disrepute—all of these various kinds of situations of beings happen only from Me.

Service to the deities, the twice born, the gurus, and the wise men; purity, simplicity, celibacy, and non-violence are said to be physical asceticism. Patanjali describes the result accrued by adherence to *Ahimsā* is given in the following *Sūtra* .

Ahimsā-pratisthayaṃ tat-samnidhau vairatyagah⁴

On being firmly established in non-violence there is abandonment of hostility in (his) presence.

For the yogi steady fast in *Ahimsā* radiates and atmospheres universal love. Scriptures abound in stories of sages and saints at whose *Āśramas* lions, lamps and deers all lived together in peace and quiet.

2. *Niyamas*):

These are the second *Anga* of *yogic* discipline which serves to lay the foundation of the *yogic* life.

Patanjali describes some principles to be observed by everyone for his progress in the following *Sūtra*.

Saucha-samtosa-tapah-svadyayesvara-pranidhanani niyamah⁵

Purity, contentment, austerity, self-study and self-surrender constitute observances.

From the observance of purity results detachment for one's body and a desire to withdraw from association with others says Patanjali in *Yoga Sūtras*.

Saucat svanga-jugupsa parair asamsargah.⁶

From physical purity (arises) disgust for one's own body and disinclination to come in physical contact with others. The result of developing purity are given in two *sūtra* s, one relating to the purity of the physical body, the other to the purity of the mind.



*Sattvasuddhi-saumanasyaikagryendriya-jayatma-daršana-yogyatvanica.*⁷

Further, purification of the inner equipment (*Antahkarana*) cheerfulness of the mind, one pointed ness of the *chitta* or pour of concentration, control over the senses and fitness for realisation of the self also result.]

3. *Āsanas*:

The third limb of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* is *Āsana*. *Āsana* or posture is that which is steady and comfortable.

Patanjali defines *āsana* as follows.

*Sthira-sukḥam āsanam.*⁸

Āsana is the posture suitable for meditation and therefore should be comfortable and steady, so that there would be no pain or disturbance in the *Yoga* sadhana. There must be effortless of the body in adopting and maintaining the posture and at the same time mind should not be wandering.

Meditation on the infinite is prescribed as one of the conditions for reaching perfection in *āsana*. When perfection in *āsana* is reached one no longer suffers from the dualities of experiences. These are given in the following two *sūtras*.

*Prayatna sithilyananta-samazttibhyam*⁹

By relaxation of effort and meditation on the endless. (posture is mastered..

*Tato dvandvanabjighatah.*¹⁰

The physical as well as meditative postures are described latter in detail in *Yoga* texts like *Hatha Yoga pradīpika*. The true sign of an *Āsana-siddha* is that there will be no awareness of the body even after sitting for hours in any posture.

4. *Prāṇayāma*:

Patanjali deals with the *Prāṇayāma* in five *Sūtras*. He defines *Prāṇayāma* as:

*Tasminsati shwasapraśwasayorgativichhedaha prāṇayamaḥ*¹¹

This having been (accomplished) *Prāṇayāma*, which is cessation of inspiration and expiration.



After mastering the *Āsana* one should practice the control of *Prāṇa* by stopping the motion of inhalation and exhalation of breath.

The breath may be stopped outside or inside or retained and regulated according to time, place and number, so that retention is either deep or subtle. Here Patanjali has shown three main kinds of *Prāṇayāma* practices. This is stage of *Kriyātmaka Prāṇayama* for it is included as one of the eight limbs of the *Yoga*. *Prāṇayāmas* are three kinds those are *Rechaka*, *Puraka*, *Kumbaka Prāṇayāma*.

*Bahyabhyāntara-stambha-vṛttir desakalasāmṅhyabhiḥ paridrsto dirghasukmah*¹²

The breath may be stopped outside or inside or retained and regulated according to time, place and number so that retention is either deep or subtle.

The fourth kind of *Prāṇayāma* is the retentional breath by concentration upon external and internal objects as given in the following *Sūtra*. This is not a conscious operation but an unconscious at natural one.

*Bahyantaraviṣayakṣepi chaturthaha*¹³

That *Prāṇayāma* which goes beyond the sphere of internal and external is the fourth. The result of *Prāṇayāma* is “that the mind becomes fit for acts of attention.” The fruit of correct practice of *Prāṇayāma* is given by Patanjali in the following two *Sūtras*.

*Tataha lṣiyate prakāṣavaraṇam*¹⁴

By the practice of the *Prāṇayāma* the covering over the Inner Light is removed.

*Dhāraṇasu cha योगyata manasaha*¹⁵

5. *Pratyāhāra* :

It means drawing backwards. The senses are restrained from their external objects.¹⁶ This aspect is explained with example in the following verse.



The happiness that he finds in the self, whose self is unattached to external contacts, he with his self joined in the *Yoga* of Brahman attains imperishable comfort. Patanjali defines *Pratyāhāra* in the following *Sūtra* .

*Sva-visayasamprayoge citta-svarūpanukaraivendriyanam pratyāhārah*¹⁷
Pratyāhāra or abstraction is, as it were, the imitation by the senses of the mind by withdrawing themselves from their objects. The fruits of the practice of *Pratyāhāra* is given in following *Sūtra*.

*Tatah parama vasyatendriyanam.*¹⁸

Then follows the greatest mastery over the senses.

The practice of *Pratyāhāra* results in supreme mastery over the senses.

6. *Dhāraṇa* :

The holding of the *chitta* fixed in one centre of spiritual consciousness is called concentration or *Dhāraṇa*. In whatever direction the fickle and unstable mind wanders out, from that very direction one should pull it and bring it under the control of the self alone. Patanjali defines *Dhāraṇa* as

*Desa-bandha cittasya Dhāraṇa.*¹⁹

Concentration is the confining of the mind within a limited mental area (object of concentration).

The main work in *Dhāraṇa* therefore consists in keeping the mind continuously engaged in the consideration of the object and to bring it back immediately as soon as the connection is broken. The objects which the *sadhaka* would place before himself is to reduce progressively the frequency of such interruptions and to eliminate them ultimately. But it is not only the elimination of interruptions which has to be aimed at but complete focusing of the mind on the object.

7. *Dhyāna* :

Patanjali defines *Dhyāna* as

*Tatra pratyayaikatanata Dhyānam.*²⁰

Uninterrupted flow (of the mind) towards the object (chosen for meditation) is contemplation.



Meditation is the steady and continuous flow, like the continuous stream of oil, of the same thought unmixed with any other thought.²¹ When he succeeds in eliminating the distractions and can continue the concentration of the object without any interruptions for as long as he decides to do so he reaches the stage of *Dhyāna*. It will be seen, therefore, that it is the occasional appearance of distractions in the mind which constitute the essential difference between *Dhāraṇa* and *Dhyāna*. The goal of meditation is to manifest our divine potential by transcending our human and animal nature.

8. *Samādhi*:

When the mind becomes still and perfectly motionless and is turned inwards *Samādhi* is reached and immediately man attains liberation by the knowledge of his real self. This is the last limb of the *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*. Swami Shivananda says that:

“If you concentrate your mind on a point for twelve seconds it is *Dhāraṇa*. Twelve such *Dhāraṇas* will be *Dhyāna* (meditation). Twelve such *Dhyāna* will be *Samādhi* (Super Consciousness)”²²

The ultimate happiness is that which is grasped by intelligence and is beyond the senses. When one knows this happiness, dwelling in it, he no longer moves from the knowledge of that reality.

The best happiness comes only to such a yogi whose mind is pacified, whose dust has settled, who has become identified with Brahman, and who is free of all stains. Patanjali defines *Samādhi* as

*Tad evarthamatra-nirbhasam svarupasunyam iva smadhiḥ*²³

The same (contemplation) when there is consciousness only of the object of meditation and not of itself (the mind) is *Samādhi*.

When in the process of meditation the true nature of the object shines forth unconditioned by the mental projections of the perceiver. That is called *Samādhi* or absorption.

When in the process of meditation the true nature of the object shines forth unconditioned by the mental projections of the perceiver. That is called *Samādhi* or absorption. In *Bhagavad-Gīta* the eight limbs of *Raja Yoga* or *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* is described vividly. *Raja Yoga* has basic for its principle mind control and towards this end. The *Gīta* prescribes the practice of mind control in various ways.



This sacrifice of the ‘Doer-ship’ or the mental renouncement of actions to God has been declared the highest *Yog* in the *Gīta*. Not to be confused with *Yoga* or physical postures, the path of *Yog* described in the *Gīta* is very easy to practice and does not require any change in one’s actions or life style or daily routine. Becoming free from attachment and desire does not at all mean abstaining from sense objects or their enjoyments. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says that a person who abstains from the objects or enjoyments but keeps desiring them is an unintelligent who eventually loses his intellect and perishes. As against this, the person who enjoys all the objects but does not have desire and yearning for them will not perish but have eternal life. To practice *Yoga*, one has to bring change in one’s thoughts only and mentally renounce all fruits and actions to God.

References

1. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 1.29
2. *Ibid.*, : 2.30
3. *Patanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.30
4. *Ibid*, 2.35
5. *Patanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.32
6. *Patanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.40
7. *Ibdi*. 2.41
8. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.46
9. *Pathanjali Yoga Sutras*: 2.47
10. *Ibid.*, 2.48
11. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.49
12. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.50
13. *Ibid.*, 2.51
14. *Ibid.*, 2.52
15. *Ibid.*, 2.53
16. Surendranath Dasgupta, *A Study of Patanjali*, p.129.
17. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 2.54
18. *Ibid.*, 2.55
19. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 3.1



20. *Panthanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 3.2
21. M.R. Yardi., *The Yoga of Patanjali*, p.200
22. M.M. Dr.Brahma Mitra Aswathi., *Raja Yoga and its practice.*, p.20
23. *Pathanjali Yoga Sūtras*: 3.3