



## The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

*Patañjali*

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## **The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali** Patañjali

The ‘Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali’ are 196 Indian sūtras (aphorisms) that constitute the foundational text of Ashtanga Yoga, also called Raja Yoga. In medieval times, Ashtanga Yoga was cast as one of the six orthodox śāstika schools of Hindu philosophy.

## **The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali Details**

Date : Published August 24th 2015 by Start Publishing LLC

ISBN :

Author : Patañjali

Format : Kindle Edition 252 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Philosophy, Nonfiction

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## From Reader Review The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali for online ebook

### **Ffiamma says**

finito non è la parola esatta, perché questo testo- fondamentale per chi pratica yoga- si presta a infinite riletture e meditazioni. in pochi insegnamenti, niente affatto semplici, viene espressa una via da percorrere per superare l'illusione del quotidiano e rifiorire nella pratica e nell'unione. eccellente e sintetico l'apparato di commento.

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### **victor f says**

Entrei para uma escola de yoga recentemente e o professor nos indicou os Yogasutras como iniciação do curso.

A introdução e os apêndices foi o que melhor pude absorver de imediato. Já os sutras em si, todos simples e muito densos, esses precisam ser lidos novamente e sempre.

Mesmo assim, o livro me fascinou desde as primeiras linhas. Espero que minha vivência no yoga me faça gradativamente entendê-los melhor .

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### **Neeraj Shukla says**

This is a great book. Patanjali would be someone I would like to converse with in 2017. He was way way ahead of his time.

The intellectual depth of this book is astounding.

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### **Denise says**

This is the most understandable translation I have read. I enjoyed it! Now I feel lead to study this side by side with another version and see what I can decipher from between the lines.

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### **Scott Bischke says**

From my blog post about this book; see <http://www.emountainworks.com/scottbi...>

I spent some time looking for a book about Patañjali's Yoga Sutras. I've got some idea now just what sutra's are, but I want better insight into the content of Patañjali's take on the sutras as they relate to yoga, and more broadly to life.

So I started where I often start, looking for a book on the topic. I found no shortage of versions of Patañjali's Yoga Sutras, as well as no shortage of opinions on those books. Often I found reviewers deriding authors for inserting too much of their own interpretation into a book that may be 5000 years old.

How can you, dear author, know what Patañjali meant?

That thought resonated with me, so I eventually settled on two versions of Patañjali's Yoga Sutras: one straight translation with no interpretation put forward (other than that from the translation); and another translation released in 1912 by an author named Charles Johnson. Not sure why, it just seems comforting that Johnson was around "way back when".

The first thing I wanted to do was pick up some simple logistical structure of Patañjali's Yoga Sutras. Here's what I learned:

\* Patañjali prescribed or recorded almost 200 sutras--one author says 196, another 195, Johnson calls out 194. But I'm not going to quibble. Whoever's right, it's still way more wisdom than I am likely to be able to cram into my meager brain.

\* The yoga sutras are broken into four well-recognized books, each with a recognized theme.

I want to talk about the four books, but first here's the thing that I struggle with--the translation comes from Sanskrit, so much of the trying to get through the yoga sutras is endless time stumbling over language without ever getting to the soul of the book, that wisdom, those aphorisms I really want to delve into. To boot, here's some bits and pieces pulled (sometimes verbatim) and blended from several references:

\* Samadhi Pada (51 sutras).--Samadhi is the main technique the yogin learns by which to dive into the depths of the mind to achieve Kaivalya.

\* Sadhana Pada (55 sutras).--Sadhana is the Sanskrit word for "practice" or "discipline". In this book Patañjali outlines two forms of Yoga, Kriya and Ashtanga.

\* Vibhuti Pada (54 sutras, per Johnson).--Vibhuti is the Sanskrit word for "power". 'Supra-normal powers', siddhi are acquired by the practice of yoga.

\* Kaivalya Pada (34 sutras).--Kaivalya stands for emancipation or liberation and is used interchangeably with moksha, the goal of yoga.

I'm sorry folks, but my eyes quickly glaze over when the words look and sound like gibberish. So let me try describing the four books of Patañjali's Yoga Sutras again, and with the help of more research try to pull those descriptions back into language I at least have half a chance to understand:

\* Concentration.--Book 1 is about improving concentration and gaining control of the mind.

\* Practice.--Book 2 is about how we practice yoga, and how that practice sets the foundation for spiritual growth.

\* Growth.--Book 3 is about growing our practice in the spiritual realm.

\* Freedom.--Book 4 is about freeing our soul, or gaining salvation.

Ok, that helps...at least me...at least a little bit, anyway.

Next up, I want to begin to tackle the sutras themselves. Thus far I am in Book One and Johnson has taken me through the first 38 sutras. I admit to great excitement as I "read ahead" and see that Book Two includes instruction or declaration of the 8 Limbs of Yoga, something I have long wanted to learn about.

(And there, dear reader, is when my eyes really glazed over. I got lost in the what seemed like too much gibberish. Perhaps I am just not that smart, but though I skimmed and pushed and tried to decipher the rest of the way, I cannot in honesty tell you I came away with more than that already described.)

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### **David Haberlah says**

If there would be only one single book that I could recommend to aspiring Yoginis and Yogis, it would be this peerless translation of and commentary on the classic text on Yoga!

This is simply the most comprehensive and readable translation and concordance of 15 centuries of commentaries on the Yoga Sûtra by Patanjali. It is an exceptionally well researched work, full of insight and interesting references. I find it particularly valuable in providing the historical context of interpretations and commentators over the centuries. While very much a scientific monograph of 500+ pages on the 197 aphorisms, I find it impossible to put down because it's so well written and thought provoking.

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### **Tomme Fent says**

I find this interpretation much more accessible than Swami Satchidananda's interpretation.

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### **Sherri says**

This has become one of my favorite translations of the Yoga Sutras, having read a few different versions during my years of study and practice.

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### **Saiisha says**

Until Patanjali wrote his original yoga sutras about 4000 years ago, there was no written record about yoga, even though it was already being practiced for centuries. Sutra in Sanskrit means a thread that holds things together. Each of Patanjali's short, sharp and succinct sutras is like a little knot in the thread, to be teased apart for its wisdom. So there are several translations and interpretations of his work, and I've read quite a few. All of them have something to say - with a different angle, for a different audience.

I recommend Alistair Shearer's version, not just for his translation, but for the wonderful introduction to the Sutras that is almost necessary to understand the Sutras themselves.

If you're interested in spirituality, philosophy, yoga, etc., join my Old Souls Book Club (<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>) for other recommendations and thought-provoking conversations!

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### **Gia Jgarkava says**

It's ridiculous how some people comment on this book - like it is a scientific work titled "Semantic web varieties and applications in modern health informatics - meta-analysis" :)

Also, I've noticed it's a trend to compare different spiritual literature, discussing theism-atheism dichotomy in Kapila-Sankhya lineage, bla-bla. This is ABSOLUTELY misunderstanding of the point of this and other spiritual books. Here is just a great sample comment to let you know what I mean:

*"A commendable point is the author's own philosophical outlook, surfacing throughout the book in snippets of criticism of the consumerist conception of yoga in the West—which is indeed an utter distortion and travesty. But a book of academic significance must be held against higher standards of scholarship, and the author's acknowledgment that it mostly targets the general reader is irrelevant when the flaws can be misleading and lead to an essential misinterpretation of the subject matter."*

If somebody does not know - yoga is about perceiving knowledge by DIRECT EXPERIENCE. so, without practice, by just reading books nobody can succeed in perceiving the ultimate truth. Therefore, the book can be only supportive tool in this process.

This book is amazing support for European minds (which I consider myself to be). Generally the books by Swami venkatesananda shine by great mix of ancient teachings with the explanation (not interpretation) in understandable language. But the transfer of the knowledge happens only if you really practice, meditate on what you read... and it does not work if one just reads the books always keeping in mind the possible comparisons to and with full of waves of mind illusions - no.

...in the end, the very second verse from Patanjali is: "Yoga Chitta Vritti Nirodaha".

Good luck in your search of the truth, which is not a search at all :)

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### **Bernie Gourley says**

There are about a billion editions of Patanjali's *The Yoga Sutras*. The one I got was a free or very cheap on Kindle, and is, therefore, probably not the best edition. I don't know that the Kindle version I got still exists because it included a supplemental essay by Swami Vivekananda that the version I linked to on Amazon doesn't. However, the translation is the same, and is by Charles Johnston.

For many old works, the edition might not matter too much, but for Patanjali's Sutras it matters a great deal. First, there's the issue of the quality of the translation. Beyond that, however, is the question of the analysis. *The Yoga Sutras* are extremely brief, consisting of only 196 aphorisms. Owing to the terse brevity of the Sanskrit language, many of these aphorisms are only a few words long. That means that there isn't a high degree of precision in the language of the Sutras, and, consequently, there's a great deal of room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. It's for good reason, therefore, that most editions are 90% or greater commentary on Patanjali's words.

The Sutras are typically divided into 4 chapters (this convention apparently came well after Patanjali wrote them.) The first section lays out the objective of yoga. The central notion is the need for *Chitta Vrtta Nirodha*, which basically means to transcend the fluctuations of the mind. Patanjali's point is that the problem faced by mankind is that people's minds are run amok. There is a need for some system to facilitate correction of all this monkey-mindedness. That's where Chapter 2 comes in.

The second chapter lays down an outline of *Ashtanga Yoga*, which is the eight-fold path of *Raja Yoga* (i.e. Royal Yoga). While modern-day people tend to think of yoga only as pretzel-like physical postures, that's

just one of the eight limbs of yoga. The eight limbs are: commandments (*yama*), rules (*niyama*), postures (*asana*), control of breath (*pranayama*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dhanara*), meditation (*dhyan*), and liberation (*samadhi*.)

It's interesting to note that the limb that many think of as yoga, i.e. the postures, is one of the most briefly covered. Most famously, Patanjali says in Ch.2, Sutra #46, "*Sukham Sthiram Asanam*" (i.e. postures should be stable and effortless.) The massive body of *asana* that developed in *Hatha Yoga* were initially just a means to give one the ability to sit still for a long periods of time comfortably enough to get one's mind in order.

The third chapter talks a little bit about the last three of the eight limbs (i.e. concentration, meditation, and liberation.) However, the bulk of this chapter is devoted to the supposed magic powers that yogis claimed to have had as a result of their work on improving their minds. For skeptics and scientifically-minded individuals (e.g. yours truly), this is where the Sutras take a silly turn. The translation in question came out in 1912, and it's clear that rationalism was already gaining hold and magic was getting to be a harder sell. I suspect that was the reason for the inclusion of Swami Vivekananda's essay entitled "The Powers of the Mind"—to capitalize on the gravitas of the renowned yogi to convince people that chapter 3 isn't bunk.

The fourth chapter wraps up the book neatly--discussing karma and the liberation of the karmic cycle achieved through the state of higher consciousness called *samadhi*.

If one has more than a superficial interest in yoga, it's pretty much obligatory to read some edition of Patanjali's *The Yoga Sutras*. I didn't find this edition to be devastatingly poor, but there seems to be a consensus among reviewers that it's not among the best translations / commentaries.

I would recommend that one read some version of these sutras, be it BKS Iyengar's *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Swami Vivekananda's edition, or Swami Satchidananda's version. I don't have any experience with these other editions, though I have read works by BKS Iyengar and Swami Vivekananda, and found works by both to be well-written and clear. Notwithstanding the parts about magical superpowers, the book does provide a lot of food for thought, and in nice bite-sized pieces.

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## AJ Dreadfulwater says

"That which unites is called Yoga." -Patanjali

A simple, yet brilliant foundational text of yogic philosophy. Patanjali writes the on the eight limbs of yoga and progression of the yogi via the limbs of "the organic process" of enlightenment. A non religious, but spiritual and philosophic text for all!

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## Dennis Littrell says

Shearer, Alistair, trans, ed. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (2002) \*\*\*\*  
Engaging translation but not the best commentary

This book was first published in London in 1982 as *Effortless Being: the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. I assume the translation of the sutras is the same while Shearer, who is a disciple of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, has updated his Introduction. The text is presented in a sky blue color that is easy on the eyes and does not distract from the meaning of the words. The design by Barbara Sturman is indeed very attractive while the small size of the book (4.75 by 6.25 by 0.75 inches) makes for easy portability.

The translation itself takes up about one-third of the book while Shearer's commentary takes up most of the rest. The translation is strikingly original and interpretative. Patanjali's famous first line, which I recall most agreeably as "Now, instruction in yoga" (which I have from Ernest Egerton Wood's *Practical Yoga*, 1948) is presented as "And now the teaching on yoga begins." B.K.S. Iyengar, in his *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (1993), which I highly recommend in addition to this book, has "With prayers for divine blessings, now begins an exposition of the sacred art of yoga."

Clearly the differences with this first line are mainly stylistic with Iyengar emphasizing a spiritual and religious tone while Wood's aim was to reflect Patanjali's succinct style, with Shearer looking for lucidity and an affinity with the modern English expression. But let's look at the second sutra. Shearer's "Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence" is very pretty, and when one realizes that "silence" to Shearer is akin to godliness (he quotes Meister Eckhart on page 24: "Nothing in all creation is so like God as silence"), it works in a symbolic sense as well. Professor Wood's "Yoga is the control of the ideas in the mind" places a very different emphasis. But in Shearer's understanding, the idea of "control" is inappropriate. He sees instead that "Once pointed in the right direction, the mind will begin to settle down of its own accord. It needs no control or forcible restraint." (p. 68)

From my experience (I began my practice of yoga in 1974) both of these ideas are correct; and indeed it is a synthesis of conscious control of the ideas of the mind along with a sense of falling away that leads to meditation and samadhi. It is a mistake to imagine that one makes no effort, since it is the very essence of yoga that one does indeed make an effort and uses technique in order to find liberation (rather than, say, faith or knowledge). Yoga is above all a practice and nothing in it can be fully appreciated without practice. But it is also a mistake to think that one can through force of will achieve samadhi. What is required is a controlled practice in which one leads the reluctant mind and body to a place of relaxed concentration in which meditation is allowed to take place.

But let's now look at how Iyengar translates this famous second aphorism: "Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness." He adds, "This vital sutra contains the definition of yoga: the control or restraint of the movement of consciousness, leading to their complete cessation." (*Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, p. 46)

While I think Shearer's translation is very much worthwhile, I am less enthusiastic about his interpretation. He devotes the last part of his Introduction to the famous "siddhas" (psychic powers). He attempts to justify and explain them in terms of quantum mechanics, averring that "the subatomic universe...reveals a reality that is every bit as strange as Patanjali's." (p. 79) He even compares the superfluidity of helium near absolute zero to what is possible in the "least excited state of awareness" (i.e., the self in samadhi). This sophististic suggestion, which has largely been discredited, at least in the scientific community, relies on the false belief that the human mind (a macro object all the way down to the molecular level) can in some way operate on the quantum level. This is "New Age" babble of the most annoying sort and does not in any way explain the so-called psychic powers. Anyone who has practiced yoga long enough and has become adept at meditation has experienced these psychic powers, but realizes that they are phenomena of the mind and have nothing to do with ordinary consciousness or ordinary experience. They are--and this is why they are valuable and why Patanjali mentions them--signposts on the way to samadhi. When one experiences a siddha, it is an

indication that one has stilled the ordinary mind and is making progress. I don't think Shearer really understands this.

I could also take exception to his interpretation of some of the limbs of Patanjali's yoga, or express my appreciation of some of his insights. For example, I think his translation of shaucha (sauca) as "simplicity" instead of the usual "cleanliness" or "purity" is very agreeable. On the other hand, I could disagree with his interpretation of brahmacharya as something more than celibacy. I think brahmacharya means exactly that, celibacy. Or I could find his idea that pratyahara is akin to William Blake's "closing the doors of perception" (p. 68) interesting and worth adding to the regular meaning of "withdrawal of the senses." But these fine distinctions would be beside the point. Note well that the sole purpose of Patanjali's yoga is liberation from the pair of opposites (pleasure and pain) that dominate our lives. The word "samadhi" (the goal of yoga) means both the highest level of meditation and something akin to the Buddhist "satori," or enlightenment. All of yoga is a means to this end.

For anyone beginning their yoga practice this book can help, but it should be understood that reading this or any other translation and interpretation of Patanjali's yoga sutras is only the beginning and is actually worthless without the concomitant practice of yoga.

--a review by Dennis Littrell

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### **Angela says**

Rewards many rereadings....

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### **Polly Trout says**

The amount of time I've spent rereading Asian scriptures in the past month is embarrassing, but it's an obsession that always helps me pull myself together when I'm crazy and heartbroken. I spent a few weeks reading this one every single morning (don't panic - it's short and only takes about 20 minutes if you skip the commentary), and it cheered me up enormously. Shearer's translation is accessible, clean, and elegant -- but not particularly accurate. It is a good gateway translation to the text, or a good mnemonic device if you already know a great deal about Indian philosophy and just want a quick review/kick in the pants. Now I'm working through Barbara Stoller Miller's translation, which is considerably more scholarly. It's always fun to compare different translations of scripture if you don't know the original languages, which I don't.

Here's some great quotes from Shearer's translation:

"The mind becomes clear and serene when the qualities of the heart are cultivated:  
friendliness toward the joyful,  
compassion toward the suffering,  
happiness toward the pure,  
and impartiality toward the impure."

"When we are firmly established in nonviolence, all beings around us cease to feel hostility.  
When we are firmly established in truthfulness, action accomplishes its desired end.

When we are firmly established in integrity, all riches present themselves freely.

When we are firmly established in chastity, subtle potency is generated.

When we are established in nonattachment, the nature and purpose of existence is understood."

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