



Basic YOGA SUTRAS

सरल योग सूत्र



The Inner Practice

featuring

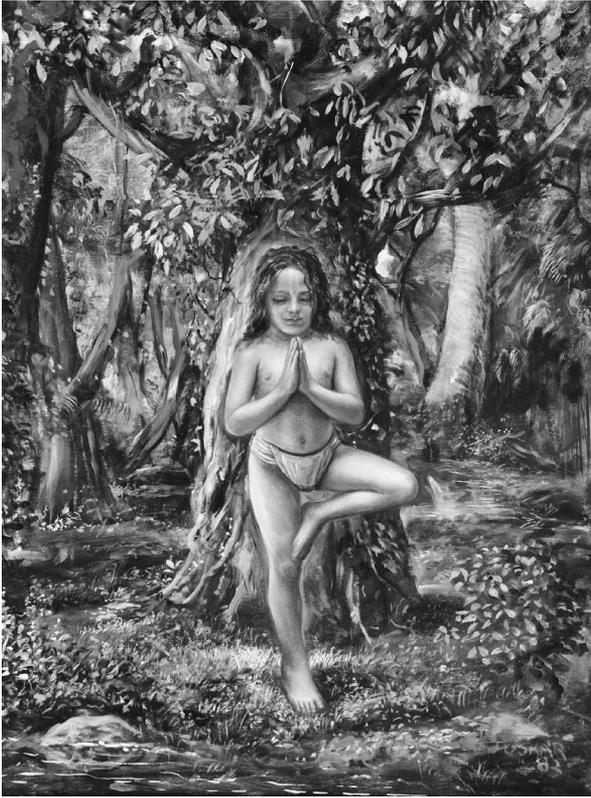
Yama and Nimaya Notebook

Sravaniya DiPecoraro, ACBSP

Barefoot Philosopher Press

Basic
YOGA SUTRAS

सरल योग सूत्र



Image—Penance of the Boy Dhruva

“Having accepted Narada Muni as his spiritual master, the young boy Dhruva followed his advice exactly. Dhruva went to the forest and engaged in worshipping the Supreme Personality of Godhead. For the first month, Dhruva ate only fruits and berries. The second month, he only ate dry grass and leaves, and in the third month he only drank water. All along, Dhruva remained completely absorbed in the worship of the Supreme Lord. In the fourth month Dhruva became a master of his breathing and only inhaled on every twelfth day. By the fifth month, Dhruva Maharaja was able to stand on one leg perfectly, without movement, and concentrate his mind fully on the Supreme cause of all causes. Dhruva's mind was completely fixed upon the form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”

—Taken from Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 4.8.71-77

Painted in 1988 by Puskar Dasa.

© Copyright The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, Inc.

Used with permission.



Basic
YOGA SUTRAS

सरल योग सूत्र



The Inner Practice

featuring

Yama and Nimaya Notebook

Sravaniya DiPecoraro, ACBSP

Barefoot Philosopher Press

Also by the Author

Books

Basic Bhagavad-Gita

An Introduction to Bhagavat Vedanta

Alchemy, Gemstones, the Planets and You

Transformation and Transcendence

Ancient Teachings, Modern Perspectives

Collected Essays

Karma & Reincarnation

Why Bad Things Happen to Good People

Audio

Knowledge

Real and Unreal

This is my offering
to anyone seeking a deeper understanding
of consciousness and reality.

Copyright © 2019 by Sravaniya DiPecoraro
Published by L&K Company, Hong Kong

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical without written permission from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Text and images (Penance of the Boy Dhruva) courtesy of The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, Inc. www.Krishna.com. Used with permission.
The rest of the images appear in the public domain.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

DiPecoraro, Sravaniya

Basic Yoga Sutras

1. Yoga 2. Spirituality and religion

ISBN: 978-988-78868-3-9 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-988-78868-4-6 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-988-78868-5-3 (Kindle)

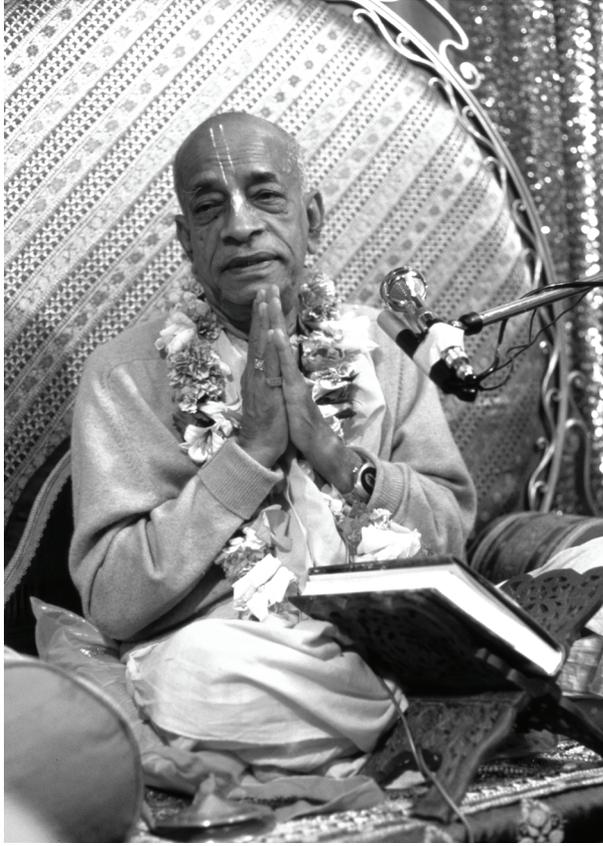
Barefoot Philosopher Press

P. O. Box 7892

General Post Office

Hong Kong

www.BarefootPhilosopher.Press



Dedication

नम ॐ विष्णुपादाय कृष्णप्रेष्ठाय भूतले ।

श्रीमते भक्तिवेदान्तस्वामिनिति नामिने ॥

nama om viṣṇu-pādāya kṛṣṇa-preṣṭhāya bhū-tale
śrīmate bhaktivedānta-svāmin iti nāmine

I offer my humble obeisances
at the lotus feet of my spiritual master,
His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda,
Founder-Ācārya of the
International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Insights from Yoga Philosophy Students

Yoga is more than an exercise. I started yoga practice four years ago with the intention of fruitive results just like everyone else. Later on, self-consciousness was slowly established by practicing asana and meditation on a regular basis. I started to realize that when breathing and body movements (asana) synchronize, meditation begins. I never felt such a level of mind-body connection until I started practicing. Therefore, curiosity brought me to a yoga philosophy class to understand the more complex yoga system and to find my own inner peace.

I feel really lucky to have several amazing teachers in my journey who care about each individual student and are dedicated to spreading goodness. Five weeks of yoga philosophy study with Sravaniya opened the door of ancient wisdom to me. Beyond my expectation, the knowledge learnt later on became the spiritual guidance of practical life.

Saron, Hong Kong



My readings of the *Yoga Sutras*, combined with the *Bhagavad Gita* have produced a profoundly calming effect within me. Yet, I feel mentally far stronger than I think I ever have. I know that I have always been aware that we are soul, living within a body. I have also always known that my soul doesn't belong on this earthly plane. However, I didn't know where I belonged, or where I had come from. To be given the knowledge that yoga itself is union with God, is a source of much contentment.

The core of these teachings is based on the eight limbed path which makes up a sort of step by step guide to consciousness. All of them are important, and should be practiced in conjunction with each other. Unfortunately, as a yoga teacher living in this age of Kali, I find time and again that quite a number of people choose to focus only on asanas, turning yoga into a sport, or worse, a method used

to gain their own temporary glorification, the very opposite of what we should be doing.

I have come to realize just how crucial it is to truly understand and practice the yamas and niyamas faithfully in order to facilitate pratyahara, which will help me to gain proper control over my mind. I also have a much better understanding of dharma now as well. If we have no purpose in life, and we are not doing what we should be, existence becomes a pointless repetition of fruitless actions.

Nicola Shepherd, Teacher
Dingolay Yoga and Yoga Therapy, Australia



The Yoga Sutras and its teachings are indeed a masterpiece! I like the fact that the Yoga Sutras are guidelines, recommendations, “pearls of wisdom” but not strict rules! There are enough rules, dos and don’ts in our lives, but the Sutras serve as reminders. It is so beautifully explained in the Sutras that “when I do this or behave like this, the outcome is like this or like that” which is not a threat or only negative, but clearly analyzed and it helps us feel encouraged to do the right thing. Patanjali’s Yoga Darsana acts like parents guiding their children...These principles are indeed the principles of Yama and Niyama, or individual moralities and social behavior which are the stepping stones of yogic principles.

Today’s trend of more and more stress, strain, competition and speed upsets the health of a person. We can all experience this, no matter which job we have or in which situation we are in our lives. I must admit, a regular Asana and Pranayama practice has helped me a lot during difficult times, like dealing with illness of family members and getting older.

Yoga will not remove or solve problems, but at least we can more easily deal with them.

Uschi Moser, Switzerland



What really impressed me most about the Yoga Sutras is that, no matter if written a million years ago, they are timeless teachings that can be applied even nowadays. In reality, it would be better if everyone would leap forward and take them seriously under consideration to make a better world!

I am mostly referring to the chapter on Yamas and Niyamas that directly call human beings to live in integrity and with an efficient ethical life. They are really timeless wisdom and by reading them one by one we can see how our society really went the other way around; creating all the chaos that is in our world. And the worst is that with so many “yoga studios” nearly nobody is talking about these basic principles of life, reducing the practice of yoga to mere empty physical exercise, “a circus” as one yoga master called it.

How humanity could have gone into to such a low level, when million years ago they already warned us, they told us how to handle our nature and we simply did not listen, we did not practice it, we did not think it was important. And yet our duality is there always. The “sacred art of yoga” (I.1) is offering us an opportunity to face our duality with discrimination and determination, but one has to get the burning desire to achieve that.

In this process, I found it particularly important to have had the Bhagavad Gita as the main backbone to everything said during the Yoga Sutras course. At the end, it is really about to surrender to God.

Always very grateful to Sravaniya for her dedication and her wisdom.

Michela Bardotti, Hong Kong

Contents

Foreword xii

Preface xiv

Glossary and Abbreviations xvii

Part I: History and Overview of Yoga Philosophy

History and Overview of Yoga Philosophy 3

The Two Faces of Vedānta 11

Knowledge ~ Real and Unreal 37

The Three Modes of Material Nature 42

The Ashtanga Yoga System 48

Part II: Yama and Niyama Notebook

The Inner Practice ~ Ethics and Morality of Yoga 55

Ethical Restraints (Yama) 59

Moral Restraints (Niyama) 67

Surrender to the Supreme (Īśvara praṇidhāna) 84

Part III: On Practice and Detachment

On Practice and Detachment 97

Obstacles to Practice and the Solutions 102

Mastering the Mind ~ Prāṇayama and Pratyāhāra 114

Fixed Consciousness ~ Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna and Samādhi 131

Part IV: Practical Application ~ Vijñāna Essays

Vedānta and Depth Psychology ~ Elementary Observations 151

Maintaining Goodness (Sattva Guṇa) 162

Health is Wealth 167

Qualifications for Learning and Teaching 169

Meat-Eating and Ahimsā Activism 175

Caring Carnivores (and Other Nonsense) 180

Acknowledgements 187

Sanskrit Transliteration and Pronunciation 189

About the Author 191

Foreword

We live in a world of advanced technology with broad access to knowledge that is unprecedented in history. Yet we have not been able to solve the problems of violence, envy, greed, stress, hate and fear that confront us daily. Seeking guidance and remedy for these woes, more and more people are looking to the wisdom traditions of older civilizations.

Among these traditions, there is an increasing awareness of the deep knowledge and opportunities embedded in the Vedic literature of ancient India. According to the histories in these literatures, Indian culture was once organized to direct the energies of the individual towards a more refined sense of self and purpose. Thus each person had an awareness of a duty and moral obligation to themselves, to their family, to the greater society and to God. This duty was known as dharma and provided a basis for a more unified, value driven culture when compared to the civilization of today.

Recognizing the diversity of interests, goals and aptitude in human society, there were different processes available that suited each person according to their progress on the path of self-realization. Despite the external differences in practice or methodology, these processes were understood as steps on the same stairway meant to lead the individual to the highest perfection of consciousness. We know these practices as karma yoga, jñāna yoga, dhyāna yoga, ash-tanga yoga, bhakti yoga, etc. Yoga means 'to link' or 'union with' and each of them is designed to engage one's body, mind, intelligence and ego to awaken his dormant spiritual consciousness, with the perfection realized in bhakti, or selfless loving reciprocation with God.

We find numerous modern adherents of current versions of these yoga systems. However, with the passage of time, many of the empowering principles of these wisdom traditions have been neglected. Without understanding the full purpose of these practices and the importance of all the disciplines connected to them, the real value is lost.

Sravaniya DiPecoraro has been a dedicated student of the Vedic Wisdom Traditions since the late 1960's and later became a teacher.

In *Basic Yoga Sūtras—The Inner Practice*, she has carefully elucidated the deeper purpose of yoga as a means of uniting, through love, the individual spirit self (each of us) and the Super-Self (God). She explains the necessity and rewards for following the oft-neglected moral and physical disciplines of genuine yoga practice. Additionally, she offers the reader a clear understanding of the history of yoga practice and the philosophical concepts on which it is based.

Basic Yoga Sutras—The Inner Practice broadened my understanding of my own practice, as well as those of the diverse yoga systems that exist today. It has reinforced my appreciation for the voluntary disciplines of monastic life. It has also given me a greater capacity to communicate the values of a life of spirituality and the scientific principles upon which it rests. It is a valuable resource for those seeking to go deeper into their journey of personal discovery.

Bhaktivedanta Vaikhānas Swami

Mahant of Śrī Govinda Gaudiya Math Bengaluru, India

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, 3rd September 2018

Preface

It seems there are innumerable volumes of literature regarding the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* already available in the market place. What need is there of another one?

The current rendering is not a book meant for scholars but rather for seriously inquisitive students, written in their own language. Yes, there are many Sanskrit terms, but don't be put off by these, for they delineate precise metaphysical concepts which are fundamental to understanding life.

Many times I have heard yoga students say they want to go deeper into the practice, but the result has been that yoga centers offer teacher training courses to them. And the inner practice? "Well, yes you can read the words of any swami you like. *Yata mata tata patha*. All paths lead to the same destination." No, not really. We all know what happens if you misspell an email address. And that's on the material platform. What happens if, by mental speculation, one makes the spiritual mistake of following an impostor guru? I, for one, am not willing to waste millions of years of reincarnations because of a careless approach. I'll take the real thing—which is available only in an authorized lineage (*sampradāya*).

My spiritual master is His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in the lineage of Brahmā-Mādhva-Gauḍīya-sampradāya. I took initiation from him and became his disciple in August 1971. Nearly half a century of my personal study, practice, realizations and teaching are shared herein.

The purpose of the present book is to inform the post-modern yoga student of things that he or she needs to know in order to solve the real problems of life and ultimately attain the wholeness of self-realization. It is to serve as a bridge between the mainstream, watered down version of yoga philosophy and the classical Sanskrit texts. I have endeavored to present the ancient teachings in a manner easily accessible. I have not altered the principles, although my approach and way of expression may be different. In a letter dated January 26, 1973 Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "Just read from my books and try and explain the meaning in your own words." He desired

that his disciples write what we learned through him and pass on the teachings for the benefit of human society. This is the meaning and purpose of lineage.

I will admit that while presenting these concepts to students at large there has been some resistance from certain quarters, along with accusations of being offensive, non-inclusive, discriminatory and judgmental. Unfortunately this is to be expected. Although the truth will set one free, one has to actually get up and walk out of the prison. Some of us are a bit too comfortable to bother to try and, besides, resistance is cool.

My guru Śrīla Prabhupāda said, “To pursue the transcendental path is more or less to declare war on the illusory energy.” He would raise his voice and become strongly insistent during his lectures, using Bhāgavat Vedānta to refute the very popular impersonalist Advaita viewpoint (which he called Māyāvāda). I later realized that he was fighting for my soul, to free it from the shackles of material illusion and repeated birth, death, old age and disease. It was not fanaticism on his part but necessity, rather like emergency rescue services.

In *Path of Perfection* (Chapter 8) he wrote:

“The perfection of yoga means attaining a blissful, eternal life full of knowledge. All yoga systems should be executed with that goal in mind. It is not that one attends yoga classes to reduce fat or to keep the body fit for sense gratification. This is not the goal of yoga, but people are taught this way because they want to be cheated. Actually, if you undergo any exercise program, your body will be kept fit. There are many systems of bodily exercise—weight lifting and other sports—and they help keep the body fit, reduce fat, and help the digestive system. Therefore there is no need to practice yoga for these purposes. The real purpose for practicing yoga is to realize that I am not this body. I want eternal happiness, complete knowledge, and eternal life—that is the ultimate end of the true yoga system.”

Śrī K. Pattabhi Jois agrees. “Yoga is an internal practice. The rest is just circus.”

The *Purāṇas* and *Bhagavad-gītā* assist the student by shedding light on the concepts presented in the *Yoga Sūtras*. They are not mythology but actual accounts of what may be called supernatural events. Śrī Badarāyaṇa Vyāsadeva would have had no interest in writing novels for amusement. The *Vedas* are the instruction book for the machine of the material universe, the Supreme Lord is the manufacturer, and the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is the description of how He does it and who His friends are. These sacred texts are like the thread of Ariadne, given to deliver us from the dangerous labyrinth of material existence.

Here, dear reader, please take it. The concepts prove themselves to be true every time they are tried.

Sravaniya DiPecoraro, ACBSP

January 2019, Hong Kong

Glossary and Abbreviations

In Sanskrit terminology there are often many words used to indicate someone or something in its different aspects.

abhyāsa—practice

Ācārya—One who teaches by example.

āgāmi-karma—reactions acquired during the present lifetime and will bear fruit in future lives

ahaṅkāra—False Ego; the spirit's false identification with the body/mind and sense of being the enjoyer, the proprietor and the controller.

akarma—action that does not result in reaction

Ānanda-maya—Brahman, the joyful Lord

asat—temporary

ātmā—self

avidyā—ignorance; knowledge of matter only

Bhagavān—The Supreme Personality of Godhead who possesses in full the six opulences of beauty, strength, fame, knowledge, wealth and renunciation.

Brahman—spirit

brāhmin—scholarly class of individuals

buddhi—intelligence; discrimination of what is true and just, real or unreal

indriya-pṛīti—sense enjoyment or gratification

Īśvara—God, the controller

jīva, jīvātmā—individual small self; one of the many

karma—work or action and its resultant reaction

Krishna or Kṛṣṇa—“All attractive,” the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the original feature of the Īśvara.

manas—mind; the subtle covering of the spirit, the software enabling use of the hardware of the body

mokṣa—liberation from matter, redemption or salvation

Nārāyaṇa—(see Vishnu)

Paramātmā—Higher Self, the One; the Supersoul.

Pārambrahman—Great Spirit

Parameśvara—Supreme Controller

prakṛti—The Receptive or nature, energy of God.

prārabdha—Activities and thoughts carried over from previous lives which karma are experienced as the present life.

Puruṣa—The Creative, God the enjoyer.

rajasic—in the mode of passion

sādhaka—one who practices, a yogī

sādhana—practice

saṁsāra—material existence

saṁskāra—subliminal activator (psychic complex)

sancita-karma—the total accumulated stock of karmic deposits (āśaya) awaiting fruition

sat—eternal

sattva—the mode of goodness

sattvic—in the mode of goodness, through which the eternal can be perceived

Śrī, Śrīla—respectful prefix, (similar to the French ‘Monsieur’)

tamasic—in the mode of ignorance or darkness

vairāgya—renunciation

vartamāna karma—acquired during the present lifetime and will bear fruit in future lives

vāsanā—impression

vidyā, jñāna—knowledge (gnosis) of what is matter, what is spirit and who is the controller of both

vikarma—forbidden action, the result of which is so pernicious that it should not be done

Vishnu or Viṣṇu—The Maintainer; the executive or official manifestation of the Īśvara in the material world.

Abbreviations

SB—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam or Bhagavat-Purāṇa, the post graduate study of the Bhagavad-Gītā compiled by the author, Śrī Badarāyaṇa Vedavyāsa, in his maturity; Vyāsa's Magnum Opus.

BG—Bhagavad-Gītā

CC—Caitanya-Caritāmṛta

Part I

History and Overview
of Yoga Philosophy



History and Overview of Yoga Philosophy

अथातो ब्रह्म जिज्ञासा

athāto brahma jijñāsā

“Now one should inquire about Brahman—

The Absolute Truth, the transcendental, spiritual nature.”

—*Vedānta Sūtra* 1.1.1

Yoga practice traditionally involves inner contemplation, a rigorous system of meditation practice, ethics, metaphysics, and devotion to God. References to yoga are found in the ancient *Purāṇas*, *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* (literally, “to sit down close”). In the current age of deterioration (Kali-yuga), the precepts of yoga—formerly an oral tradition—have been written down to avoid being forgotten and lost.

Although not the creator of yoga, Patañjali is certainly the father of Rāja Yoga as its compiler in his work the *Yoga Sūtras*. Before Patañjali wrote them down, these principles were learned through hearing and memorization, then passed down from teacher to student through generations. Patañjali is also the reputed author of a famous commentary on Sanskrit grammar and many ayurvedic texts are attributed to him.

The *Yoga Sūtras* are built on a foundation of sāmkhya philosophy and the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Patañjali prescribes adherence to eight “limbs” or steps (Ashtanga Yoga) to quiet one’s mind and reconnect with the infinite. These eight limbs systematized the standard ethical and moral principles espoused by the *Bhagavad-gītā* and describe the practice of Rāja Yoga in detail.

The book is a set of short, terse aphorisms designed for easy memorization. Their theoretical and philosophical ideas are very organized, but they are not complete descriptions— rather, the sūtras are

reminders. The yoga aphorisms that make up the work's content are compared to pearls of wisdom strung upon a thread.

The *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* are one of the sad-darshans or six Vedic philosophical systems.

- Brahma-mīmāṃsā or Vedānta: Badarāyaṇa Vyāsadeva (circa 3000 BC)
- Sāṃkhya: propounded by the sage Kapila
- Yoga: Patañjali, compiler (500-200 BC), with the commentary of Vyāsa (200 AD)
- Vaiśeṣika: Kaṇāda Ṛṣi (300 BC)
- Karma-mīmāṃsā: Jaimini (200 BC)
- Nyāya: Gautama Ṛṣi (2nd C)

It should be noted that some of these philosophies aim at service to God whereas others do not and are atheistic. The reason for this apparent discrepancy is explained in the following verse.

vadanti tat tattva-vidas
tattvaṃ yaj jñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmēti
bhagavān iti śabdyate

“Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance Brahman, Paramātmā or Bhagavān.”—SB 1.2.11

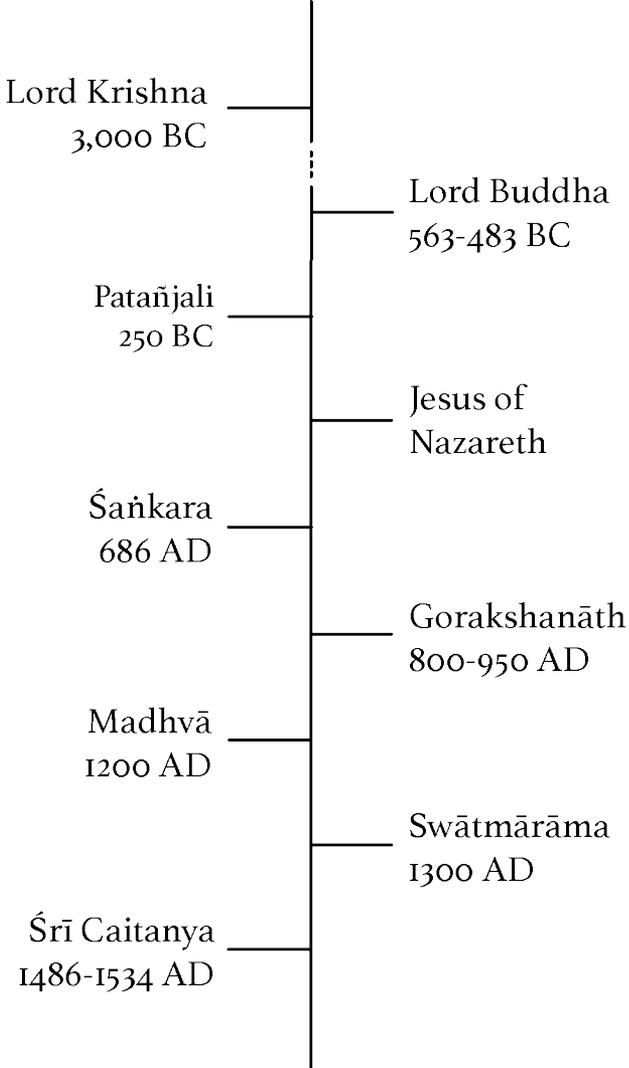
Why are there three different words for the same thing? Because these are *phases of realization* of the Absolute Truth.

- Brahman—the limitless light of being
- Paramātmā—the Higher Self or knower in all bodies
- Bhagavān—the Supreme Personality of Godhead

Brahman is the eternity aspect (sat) of the Absolute Truth. Paramātmā realization is understanding the eternity and knowledge aspect (sat-chit) and Bhagavān is blissful realization of the original divine person (sat-chit-ānanda). Correspondingly there are three categories of transcendentalists.

- jñāni—impersonalist philosopher who realizes Brahman (sat)
- yogi—meditator who realizes Paramātmā (sat, chit)

Timeline



- bhakta—devotee who realizes Bhagavān, the Supreme Personality of Godhead and engages in his eternal, loving relationship (sat, chit, ānanda-vigraha)

Currently there are atheistic impersonal philosophers who put forward the argument that bhakti yoga is for neophytes who are unable to conceptualize the ultimate reality and who therefore need to focus on a deity in the initial phases. They say that self-realization is when the self (ātmā), an individual knower in one body, merges with the Higher Self (Paramātmā) and realizes he is the knower in all bodies. This viewpoint is not supported by Bhāgavat Vedānta. We will examine the similarities and differences in our section on The Two Faces of Vedānta.

Shrouded in Mystery

As I was researching the history of Patañjali it was disconcerting to see that so little was known about him. Even the time of writing of the *Yoga Sūtras* is in question and cannot be confirmed. B.K.S. Iyengar dates the work between 500 – 200 BC. That is a big gap. Furthermore, the commentary by Vedavyāsa, his identity and date of birth are also unconfirmed. In his book *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, Edwin F. Bryant (page xl) wrote: “There may have been more than one Vyāsa, or the name Vyāsa may have been used at times to give credibility to a number of ancient texts.” After all, the Sanskrit word vyāsa literally means “compiler” which is a general term.

Having been initiated into a lineage (sampradāya) and studied authorized scripture for decades, I found this ambiguity to be not only strange but, moreover, rather alarming.

sampradāya-vihīnā ye mantrās te niṣphalā matāḥ

“If your mantra does not come through the disciplic succession, it will not be effective.”—*Padma Purāṇa*

The purpose of the sampradāya is to protect and preserve the teaching, to keep it from unnecessary alteration. Having said that, experience has shown me that even an initiated swami in a proper lineage is capable of unauthorized alterations not only within the religious organization but with the full complicity of it. It seems the age of deterioration is running full throttle.

Although some texts refer to Patañjali as an incarnation of the serpent deity Ādi Śeṣa (he is sometimes depicted as half human and half serpent) I have been unable to verify this with supporting scriptural evidence. An extensive list of incarnations of Vishnu-tattva is given in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (Canto 1 Chapter 3 and Canto 2 Chapter 7) with no mention of Patañjali. I did, however, find a verse verifying Lord Buddha:

ततः कलौ सम्प्रवृत्ते सम्मोहाय सुरद्विषाम् ।
 बुद्धो नाम्नाञ्जनसुतः कीकटेषु भविष्यति ॥
 tataḥ kalau sampravṛtte
 sammohāya sura-dviṣām
 buddho nāmnāñjana-sutaḥ
 kīkaṭeṣu bhaviṣyati

“Then, in the beginning of Kali-yuga, the Lord will appear as Lord Buddha, the son of Añjanā, in the province of Gayā, just for the purpose of deluding those who are envious of the faithful theist.”—SB 1.3.24

There is a wonderful chapter about Ananta Śeṣa (SB 5.25) entitled The Glories of Lord Ananta, wherein we find it stated that, as Saṅkarṣaṇa, He advents Himself many times.

मूर्ति नः पुरुकृपया बभार सत्त्वं
 संशुद्धं सदसदिदं विभाति तत्र ।
 यल्लीलां मृगपतिराददेऽनवद्या
 मादातुं स्वजनमनांस्युदारवीर्यः ॥

mūrtiṁ naḥ puru-kr̥payā babhāra sattvaṁ
 saṁśuddhaṁ sad-asad idaṁ vibhāti tatra
 yal-līlāṁ mṛga-patir ādade 'navadyām
 ādātuṁ svajana-manāṁsy udāra-vīryaḥ

“This manifestation of subtle and gross matter exists within the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Out of causeless mercy toward His devotees, He exhibits various forms, which are all transcendental. The Supreme Lord is most liberal, and He possesses all mystic power. To conquer the minds of His devotees and give pleasure to their hearts, He appears in different incarnations and manifests many pastimes.”—SB 5.25.10

That said, there is no mention of an advent on Earth to describe the yoga system in the form of Patañjali. Nevertheless, Swatmarāma glorifies Ananta Śeṣa in an invocation to Patañjali that is chanted at the beginning of many ashtanga yoga classes:

ābāhu puruṣākāraṃ
 śaṅkhacakrāsi dhāriṇam
 sahasra śīrasaṃ śvetam
 praṇamāmi patañjalim

“To the sage Patañjali, an incarnation of Ādi Śeṣa, who has thousands of radiant white heads (in his form as the divine serpent, Ananta), and who has, as far as his arms, assumed the form of a man holding a conch shell, a wheel of fire, and a sword, to him, I prostrate.”

In summary, virtually nothing is known about the life of Patañjali, and there are even some scholars who believe he is entirely mythical.

Real Knowledge vs. Speculation

Different sages have different viewpoints. In fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda remarked that in order to be regarded as a philosopher all one has to do is disagree with everyone else and come up with something new.

“Mind is material and thus knowledge presented by material speculators is never transcendental and can never become perfect. Mundane philosophers, being imperfect in themselves, disagree with other philosophers because a mundane philosopher is not a philosopher at all unless he presents his own theory.”—SB 2.8.25 purport

Even so, knowledge differentiates itself from theory by the fact that, when put into practice, it works. The *Yoga Sūtras* seem to fit this description. In *Yoga Sūtra* 1.7 it is stated, *pratyakṣānumānāgamāḥ pramāṇāni*: “Correct knowledge is direct perception, logical inference or testimony from an authority.” In explaining the basic concepts herein I have endeavored to give references from authorized texts to support and reinforce them. We therefore have logical inference backed by authorized testimony. Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote:

“Contemporary to Vyāsadeva or even prior to him there were many other great sages, such as Gautama, Kaṇāda,

Jaimini, Kapila and Aṣṭāvakra, and all of them have presented a philosophical path by themselves. Patañjali is also one of them, and all these six great ṛṣis have their own way of thinking, exactly like the modern philosophers and mental speculators. The difference between the six philosophical paths put forward by the renowned sages above mentioned and that of Śukadeva Gosvāmī, as presented in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, is that all the six sages mentioned above speak the facts according to their own thinking, but Śukadeva Gosvāmī presents the knowledge which comes down directly from Brahmājī, who is known as ātma-bhūḥ, or born of and educated by the Almighty Personality of Godhead.”—SB 2.8.25 purport

This assumption as to the source takes some degree of faith initially. But as it is practiced the results prove its veracity.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam is the commentary or explanation of the *Vedānta-sūtra* given by its compiler, Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsadeva. The *Vedānta-sūtra* is spiritual science (śruti pramāṇa) handed down from the Source of all knowledge through the line of disciplic succession.

“Theism is explained completely in the *Vedānta-sūtra*, whereas in other systems of philosophical speculations, practically no mention is given to the ultimate cause of all causes.”—SB I.1.7 purport

Vedānta-sūtra and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* expound on the concept of Īśvara praṇidhāna—dedication to the Lord—mentioned by Patañjali in his *Yoga Sūtras* as Īśvara praṇidhāna, the last niyama or moral principle. More than being a mere option of yoga practice, however, these texts make the case that surrender to the Supreme is the ultimate goal of yoga.

Overview of the Text

- Samādhi Pada—on contemplation
- Sādhana Pada—on practice
- Vibhūti Pada—withdrawal of the senses, trance, yogic powers
- Kaivalya Pada—eternal, non-dual existence, emancipation

In teaching these concepts to students, most of our time was spent on the first two sections since they are the most relevant. An exposition of yogic powers was also given in the course. Our study sessions included:

- History, Concepts, Ātmā and Citta
- Practice and Detachment
- Knowledge—Real and Unreal
- Secrets to Success—Yama and Niyama
- Obstacles to Practice
- Ashtānga Yoga—Prāṇāyāma & Pratyāhāra
- Self and Higher Self—Ātmā and Paramātmā

The question is often asked: What is the difference between yoga and religion? Here is the etymology.

yoga > (Sanskrit) *yuj* > to join or link

religion > (Old French) *relier* > to link together or bind

Although it would seem that both of these paths are for elevating consciousness, in practice religious life is a group affair (dependent) concerned with *regulated conformity to the rules* of natural law that ensure peaceful and productive life in society. On the other hand, yoga is an individual endeavor (independent) that aims at awakening intelligence so that one instinctively *chooses* to follow natural law—and ultimately meets the Lawmaker. Guruji Iyengar gives his opinion:

“Yoga is not a religion by itself. It is the science of religions, the study of which will enable a sādḥaka to better appreciate his own faith.”—*Light on Yoga*, Intro

Let’s explore the two Vedānta perspectives to help us understand the goal of that connection.