

IKS : YOGA Notes

What is Yoga ?

Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle Science which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science for healthy living. The word "Yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj meaning "to join", "to yoke" or "to unite".

According to Yogic scriptures, the practice of Yoga leads to the union of individual consciousness with universal consciousness. According to modern scientists, everything in the universe is just a manifestation of the same quantum firmament. One who experiences this oneness of existence is said to be "in Yoga" and is termed as a yogi who has attained a state of freedom, referred to as Mukti, nirvana, kaivalya or moksha.

"Yoga" also refers to an inner science comprising of a variety of methods through which human beings can achieve union between the body and mind to attain self-realisation. The aim of Yoga practice (sadhana) is to overcome all kinds of sufferings that lead to a sense of freedom in every walk of life with holistic health, happiness and harmony.

Brief history and development of Yoga

The science of Yoga has its origin thousands of years ago, long before the first religion or belief systems were born. According to Yogic lore, Shiva has been seen as the first yogi or adiyogi and the first guru or adiguru. Several thousand years ago, on the banks of lake Kantisarovar in the Himalayas, adiyogi poured his profound knowledge into the legendary saptarishis or "seven sages". These sages carried this powerful Yogic science to different parts of the world including Asia, the Middle East, northern Africa and South America. Interestingly, modern scholars have noted and marvelled at the close parallels found between ancient cultures across the globe. However, it was in India that the Yogic system found its fullest expression. Agastya, the saptarishi who travelled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core Yogic way of life.

Yoga is widely considered as an "immortal cultural outcome" of the Indus Saraswati Valley Civilisation – dating back to 2700 BC – and has proven itself to cater to both material and spiritual uplift of humanity. A number of seals and fossil remains of Indus Saraswati Valley Civilisation with Yogic motifs and figures performing Yoga sadhana suggest the presence of Yoga in ancient India. The seals and idols of mother Goddess are suggestive of Tantra Yoga. The presence of Yoga is also available in folk traditions, Vedic and Upanishadic heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions, Darshanas, epics of Mahabharata including Bhagawadgita and Ramayana, theistic traditions of Shaivas, Vaishnavas and Tantric traditions. Though Yoga was being practiced in the pre-Vedic period, the great sage Maharishi Patanjali systematised and codified the then existing Yogic practices, its meaning and its related knowledge through Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

After Patanjali, many sages and Yoga masters contributed greatly for the preservation and development of the field through well documented practices and literature. Yoga has spread all over the world by the teachings of eminent Yoga masters from ancient times to the present date. Today, everybody has conviction about Yoga

practices towards the prevention of disease, maintenance and promotion of health. Millions and millions of people across the globe have benefitted by the practice of Yoga and the practice of Yoga is blossoming and growing more vibrant with each passing day.

The Fundamentals of Yoga

Yoga works on the level of one's body, mind, emotion and energy. This has given rise to four broad classifications of Yoga: Karma Yoga where we utilise the body; Jnana Yoga where we utilise the mind; Bhakti Yoga where we utilise the emotion and Kriya Yoga where we utilise the energy. Each system of Yoga we practice falls within the gamut of one or more of these categories.

Every individual is a unique combination of these four factors. Only a guru (teacher) can advocate the appropriate combination of the four fundamental paths as is necessary for each seeker. "All ancient commentaries on Yoga have stressed that it is essential to work under the direction of a guru."

Traditional schools of Yoga

The different philosophies, traditions, lineages and guru-shishya paramparas of Yoga led to the emergence of different traditional schools. These include Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Patanjala Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Dhyana Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jain Yoga, Bouddha Yoga etc. Each school has its own approach and practices that lead to the ultimate aim and objectives of Yoga.

Yogic practices for health and wellness

The widely practiced Yoga sadhanas are: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi, Bandhas and Mudras, Shatkarmas, Yuktahara, Mantra-japa, Yukta-karma etc. Yamas are restraints and Niyamas are observances. These are considered to be pre-requisites for further Yogic practices. Asanas, capable of bringing about stability of body and mind, "kuryat-tadasanam- sthairyam", involve adopting various psycho-physical body patterns and giving one an ability to maintain a body position (a stable awareness of one's structural existence) for a considerable length of time.

Pranayama consists of developing awareness of one's breathing followed by willful regulation of respiration as the functional or vital basis of one's existence. It helps in developing awareness of one's mind and helps to establish control over the mind. In the initial stages, this is done by developing awareness of the "flow of in-breath and out-breath" (svasa-prasvasa) through nostrils, mouth and other body openings, its internal and external pathways and destinations. Later, this phenomenon is modified, through regulated, controlled and monitored inhalation (svasa) leading to the awareness of the body space getting filled (puraka), the space(s) remaining in a filled state (kumbhaka) and it getting emptied (rechaka) during regulated, controlled and monitored exhalation(prasvasa).

Pratyahara indicates dissociation of one's consciousness (withdrawal) from the sense organs which connect with the external objects. Dharana indicates broad based field of attention (inside the body and mind) which is usually understood as concentration.

Dhyana (meditation) is contemplation (focussed attention inside the body and mind) and Samadhi (integration).

Bandhas and Mudras are practices associated with Pranayama. They are viewed as the higher yogic practices that mainly adopt certain physical gestures along with control over respiration. This further facilitates control over mind and paves way for higher Yogic attainment. However, practice of dhyana, which moves one towards self-realisation and leads one to transcendence, is considered the essence of Yoga Sadhana.

shatkarmas are detoxification procedures that are clinical in nature and help to remove the toxins accumulated in the body. Yuktahara advocates appropriate food and food habits for healthy living.

Ashtanga Yoga :-

In Sanskrit, **ashtanga** means eight-limbed (*asta-* eight, *anga-* limb). Ashtanga Yoga is an eight-limbed path towards achieving the state of Yoga, also known as Samadhi.

The definition of Ashtanga Yoga is found in the **Yoga Sutras of Patañjali**, an ancient text on the theory and practice of Yoga thought to have been compiled in about 200 CE by Sage Patañjali.

The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali is comprised of 196 sutras- short philosophical statements - on the theory and practice of Yoga, divided into four books, or *padas*. The Yoga Sutras are so succinct and are therefore almost incomprehensible without commentary. The most definitive commentary is by Veda Vyasa; his commentary is known as the Yoga Bhasya.

The Yoga Sutras begin with the highest teachings first, for those ready to enter into the final limbs of practice. In the second sutra of the first chapter, Samadhi Pada, we are offered the definition of Yoga: “**Yogas citta vritti nirodah**”, which can be translated as “Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind.” When the mind is stilled, and the state of Yoga is reached, the individual mind is at one with the Universal Mind and individual consciousness with Divine Consciousness, and we experience our divinity through unity.

Yoga is not only the state of Yoga, but also the practice, or **sadhana**, we engage in on the path towards Yoga. The definition of the eight-limbed path that leads to Yoga is found in book two of the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali, Sadhana Pada, the chapter on yoga practice. Sutra 2.29 states: “**Yama-niyama-asana-pranayama-pratyahara-dharana-dhyana-samadhyaya-astavangani.**” This can be translated as: “the eight limbs of yoga are yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.”

These limbs can be described in this way:

1) **Yama-** Restrains or observances regarding how the aspiring yogi should relate to his or her community.

The yamas are:

Ahimsa- Non-violence

Satya- Truthfulness

Asteya- Non-stealing

Brahmacharya- Conservation of vital energy

Aparigraha- Non-hoarding

2) **Niyama-** Intense observances that the aspiring yogi should carry out in his or her daily life in order to have a body and mind suited for Yoga.

The niyamas are:

Saucha- Cleanliness of body and mind

Santosha- Contentment

Tapas- Discipline

Svadhya- Self-study

Ishvara Pranidhana- Surrender to the Divine

3) **Asana**- The word literally translates to “seat”. These are meditative postures that promote stillness of mind, and physical postures that facilitate sitting for long periods of time in those meditative postures.

4) **Pranayama**- Prana is life force/breath/vital energy, and Yama is restraint. Pranayama translates to extension of the life force. Pranayama are breathing practices that involve the retention of breath.

5) **Pratyahara**- Withdrawal of the senses from things that are not conducive to the practice of Yoga, a moving from the external to internal world. When the 5 senses are quelled, the mind can then become still.

6) **Dharana**- Concentration on a single thing, ideally something spiritual in nature.

7) **Dhyana**- Meditation. Uninterrupted, flowing concentration in which the meditator begins to merge with the object of meditation.

8) **Samadhi**- A super-conscious trance in which the mind merges fully with and becomes one with the object of meditation. In the highest state of Samadhi, there is no longer any object of meditation.

The eight limbs are a process of going deeper and deeper inward to discover and abide in the Divinity within us. When we come to rest in Yoga, we are in a state of perfect oneness, beyond peace, beyond bliss.

INTRODUCTION TO ASHTANGA YOGA

In Sanskrit "Ashta + anga" is ashtanga. "Ashta" means Eight and "Anga" is limbs so it means Eight Limb path, Ashtanga yoga is based on Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali. The asanas, Pranayamas or the dharana which we have studied earlier or the yam and niyam are based on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Hence, we will acquaint ourselves with the fundamentals as stated by Patanjali first.

HISTORY OF ASHTANGA YOGA

Yoga has its roots about 5000 years BC as described in Vedic Philosophy and Tantras. Patanjali , great sage composed this path into a Darshan (Philosophy) in his Book Patanjali Yoga Sutra. In which he has formulated Yoga as a Eight Limbs or Eight Fold path.

EIGHT LIMBS OF ASHTANGA YOGA

1. Yama (Principles or moral code)
 - Ahimsa - A principle of non-violence
 - Satya - A principle of Truthfulness
 - Asteya - A principle of non stealing

- Brahmacharya - Continence / Celibacy
 - Aparigraha - A principle of non-hoarding or non possessiveness
2. Niyama (Personal Disciplines)
 - Shoucha - Purity
 - Santosh - Contentment
 - Tapa - Endurance
 - Swadhyaya - Self study
 - Eshwar Pranidhan - Dedication
 3. Asana (Yoga Positions or Yogic Postures)

A stable and comfortable posture which helps attain mental equilibrium.
 4. Pranayama (Yogic Breathing)

Extension and control of breath.
 5. Pratyahara (Withdrawal of Senses)

A mental preparation to increase the power of mind.
 6. Dharana (Concentration on Object)

Concentration of mind on one object and its field.
 7. Dhyan (Meditation)

With drawing mind from all external objects and Focusing it on one point and meditating on it.
 8. Samadhi (Salvation)

State of Super bliss, joy and merging individual consciousness in to universal consciousness. Union between Jivatman and Paramatman. Union of Shiva and Shakti in Sahasrar Chakra (the top of the head). Realizing the Bramhan (pure consciousness) or Realization of God is the ultimate achievement of Human Birth.

Saptang Yoga :

Gheranda-Samhita is one of the three major texts of Hatha Yoga. The other two texts are - Hathayoga Pradipika and Shivsanhita. It was composed in the second half of the 17th century. It is the most extensive and complete among the three texts of Hatha Yoga. In this, practical education of Saptanga Yoga has been given. Gherand-Samhita is the oldest and first book, in which there is a detailed description of the activities of yoga like asana, mudra, pranayama, neti, dhauti etc. The preacher of this book is Gherand Muni who gave advice to his disciple King Chandakpali when he asked him a question related to yoga.

Introduction

Gheranda Samhita

Many scholars have different opinions regarding the period of Gherand Samhita. Among all those opinions, its period is considered to be around the 17th century.

Purpose of Yoga of Gherand Samhita:- Maharishi Gherand preaches his Yoga Vidya for attaining Tatv Gyan. In this, Yoga has been described as the greatest power. The seeker attains that philosophy only through this power of yoga.

Nature of Yoga in Gheranda Samhita:- In Gheranda Samhita, considering Yoga as the greatest power, it has been preached for attaining philosophy. In this book, Gheranda Muni has given the name of body as Ghata, hence it is also known as “Ghatastha Yoga”. Gheranda Samhita is also called "Saptang Yoga" because the seven limbs of yoga are discussed in its seven (7) chapters. Which are as follows –

1. Shatkarma
2. Aasana
3. Mudra
4. Pratyahar
5. Pranayama
6. Meditation
7. Samadhi.

Now we will briefly describe all the chapters.

First Chapter:- In Gherand Samhita, first of all the dialogue (conversation) between Maharishi Gherand and King Chandakpali is shown. King Chandakpali, while paying obeisance to Maharishi Gheranda, expressed his desire to know the knowledge of Yoga which leads to the attainment of spiritual knowledge. Then Maharishi Gherand accepted his request and started giving him the knowledge of Yoga Vidya.

Saptanga / Ghatastha Yoga :-

Considering the human body as a raw pot i.e. a pitcher, seven means of yoga have been preached to make that raw pitcher-like body mature (strong) through the fire of yoga.

Benefits of Saptanga Yoga:-

While describing the seven methods of Yoga, their benefits have also been discussed in this chapter. The benefits of all the parts of yoga are as follows –

Shatkarma = purification

asana = firmness

Mudra = stability

Pratyahara = Patience

Pranayama = smallness/lightness

Dhyana=perception/realization

Samadhi = state of detachment / detachment

First Chapter :-

Shatkarma description:-

Actually, there are mainly six Shatkarmas. But further their separate departments have also been made. Whose description is as follows –

1. Dhauti:- Four main parts of Dhauti have been considered. And by further dividing their parts their total number becomes 13.

Four types of Dhauti:-

- (1) Antardhauti
- (2) Dantdhauti
- (3) Hridhdhautya
- (4) Root purification.

(1) Types of Antardhauthi:-

- (1.1) Vaatsar Dhauti
- (1.2) Varisar Dhauti
- (1.3) Agnisar Dhauti
- (1.4) Excluded dhauti.

(2) Types of Dantdhauti :-

- (2.1) Root caries
- (2.2) Jihvashodhan Dhauti
- (2.3 & 2.4) Karnarandhra Dhauti (from both ears)
- (2.5) Kapalarandhra Dhauti.

(3) Types of Hridhdhautya:-

- (3.1) Dand Dhauti

(3.2) Vamana Dhauti

(3.3) Vastra dhauti.

(4) Moolshodhan:- No other parts of Moolshodhan Dhauti have been done.

2. Basti:- There are two types of Basti –

(1) Jal Basti

(2) Sthal Basti.

3. Neti:- Neti Kriya has two parts –

(1) Jalneti

(2) Sutraneti.

4. Lauliki:- Lauliki i.e. Nauli action is considered to have three parts –

(1) Middle nauli

(2) Left Nauli

(3) South Nauli.

5. Tratak:- Other divisions of Tratak have not been made. Although it has three parts but they have been said by other yogis.

6. Kapalbhathi:- Kapalbhathi has three parts –

(1) Vaatkrama Kapalbhathi

(2) Inverse Kapalabhathi

(3) Sheetakram Kapalbhathi.

Second Chapter:-

Asanas are described in the second chapter. Maharishi Gherand believes that there are as many asanas as there are living beings in the world. Lord Shiva has said eighty-four lakh (8400000) asanas, out of which he has considered only eighty-four (84) as the best. Here Maharishi Gherand says that out of those eighty-four best asanas, thirty-two (32) asanas are very special. Therefore, a total of thirty-two asanas are described in the Gheranda Samhita.

Whose names are as follows –

1. Siddhasana, 2. Padmasana, 3. Bhadrasana, 4. Muktasana, 5. Vajrasana, 6. Swastikasana, 7. Simhasana, 8. Gomukhasana, 9. Veerasana, 10. Dhanurasana, 11. Mritasana / Shavasana, 12. Guptasana, 13. Matsyasana, 14. Matsyendrasana, 15. Gorakshasana, 16. Paschimottanasana, 17. Utkatasana, 18. Sankatasana, 19. Mayurasana, 20. Kukkutasana, 21. Kurmasana, 22. Uttankurmasana, 23. Mandukasana, 24. Uttana Mandukasana, 25. Vrikshasana, 26. Garudasana, 27. Vrishasana, 28. Shalabhasana, 29. Makarasana, 30. Ustrasana, 31. Bhujangasana, 32. Yogasana

Maharishi Gherand has considered the throne as the seat that eliminates all diseases.

Third Chapter :-

Yoga postures are described in the third chapter. Practicing mudras brings stability to the body. A total of twenty-five (25) mudras are mentioned in the Gheranda Samhita. The names of these twenty-five currencies are as follows –

1. Mahamudra, 2. Nabhomudra, 3. Uddiyana Bandha, 4. Jalandhara Bandha, 5. Moolabandha, 6. Mahabandha, 7. Mahabedha Mudra, 8. Khechari Mudra, 9. Viparitakarani Mudra, 10. Yoni Mudra, 11. Vajroli Mudra, 12. Shaktichalini Mudra, 13. Tadagi Mudra, 14. Manduki Mudra, 15. Shambhavi Mudra, 16. Earthly Dharana, 17. Ambhasi Dharana, 18. Agneyi Dharana, 19. Vayavaya Dharana, 20. Akashi Dharana, 21. Ashwini Mudra, 22. Pashini Mudra, 23. Kaki Mudra, 24. Matangi Mudra, 25. Bhujangini Mudra.

Fourth Chapter :-

Pratyahara has been described in the fourth chapter. By following Pratyahara our senses become introverted. Patience also increases. When a seeker's senses are outward, it creates hindrances in his sadhana. Therefore, the seeker should follow Pratyahara to attain patience and restraint.

Fifth Chapter:-

Pranayam is mainly discussed in the fifth chapter. But before discussing Pranayam, special emphasis has been given on diet. Mainly three types of diets have been discussed. In which three categories of diet are mentioned –

- (1) Mityahar
- (2) Acceptable or beneficial diet
- (3) Inadmissible prohibited food.

Of these, Mitahar is considered the best diet for a Yogi. Acceptable or beneficial diet includes those food items which are easily digestible and are pleasant to the mind. It has been said that prohibited foods should be completely abandoned.

Nadi purification process:-

Even in Gheranda Samhita, it has been said to practice Nadi Shodhana Kriya before Pranayam.

Pranayam discussion :-

The main topic of the fifth chapter is Pranayam. Here also Pranayam is called Kumbhaka. In this book also eight Kumbhakas i.e. Pranayams have been described. Which are as follows –

1. Including (Sargarbha and Nigarbha)
2. Suryabhedhi,
3. Ujjayi,
4. Shitali,
5. Bhastrika,
6. Bhramari,
7. Murchha,
8. Kevali.

Sixth Chapter :-

Meditation has been discussed in the sixth chapter. Three types of meditation are mentioned in Gheranda Samhita

1. Gross meditation,
2. Light meditation,
3. Subtle meditation.

Among these, subtle meditation is considered to be the best meditation.

Seventh Chapter :-

Samadhi has been discussed in the seventh i.e. the last chapter. Samadhi is said to be an excellent state of mind. Samadhi brings detachment. When our mind's attachment to all things ends. Then this yoga is proved. Six (6) types of Samadhi have been mentioned in Gheranda Samhita –

1. Dhyanyoga Samadhi,
2. Nadayoga Samadhi,
3. Rasananda Yoga Samadhi,
4. Layyoga Samadhi,
5. Bhaktiyoga Samadhi,
6. Rajayoga Samadhi.

This is how Maharishi Gherand has described his Saptanga Yoga.
