

This esoteric yet practical meditation and behavior system was recorded by the sage Patanjali around 200 BCE. The ancient yoga of meditation is also called Kaivalya, isolation, freedom from interference, the yoga of liberation; raja yoga, the king of yogas; jnana yoga, the yoga of spiritual wisdom; and the yoga of Samadhi, the union of the individual with the bliss of the divine. Within the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the sage enumerates several interlocking methods to achieve liberation: Nirodha/Stillness, Samadhi/Bliss, Kriya/Purification, Ashtanga, Bhakti/Devotion, Kaivalya/Isolation. These methods of achieving yoga are described in detail in his four-chapter masterpiece. Ashto is eight and anga is limb, member, constituent part. Yoga is union, the joining of body, mind and spirit with the soul of the universe.

I have used my own arrangements of English words to translate the various Sanskrit texts for this essay. All mistakes and obfuscations are mine. All illumination is thanks to the great souls who loved us so much they set their teachings into song and writing. Thanks go to God's grace for making them available to us. May you be blessed to continue your studies with these great souls. Shanti.

The eight limbs of Ashtanga yoga are:

1. **YAMA**: five controlling behaviors: Ahimsa-Non-violence; Satya-truthfulness; Asteya-no stealing of any kind; Brahmacharya-abstention from indulgence in illicit sex and intoxicants; Aparigraha-freedom from selfish desire.
2. **NIYAMA**: five practices to observe: Shaucha-Purity of body and mind; Santosha-contentment; Tapas-good deeds; Svadhyaya-study of the collected wisdom of the world; Ishvara Pranidhana-dedication of all one's actions for the greatest good, living a life of love free from anxiety for the fruits of our efforts.
3. **ASANA**: physical positioning, mastery of our bodies so that we can concentrate on our spirit.
4. **PRANAYAMA**: breath control, the science of the regulation of the life force.
5. **PRATYAHARA**: withdrawal of the senses from the exterior world and focusing on our inner life.
6. **DHARANA**: concentration on the chosen object of meditation.
7. **DHYANA**: immersion in meditation.
8. **SAMADHI**: the bliss that comes from perfect absorption into the divine essence of life.

Patanjali describes these limbs and their benefits in short, almost cryptic statements. He was putting an ancient oral tradition into writing that students had been memorizing and chanting for thousands of years. The term 'yogi' describes the male practitioner of the art of yoga; 'yogini' describes the female. Patanjali uses quite a number of technical Sanskrit terms for which there are no easy one-word translations. However, the willing student who examines the context and references one or two of the extensive commentaries widely available can understand the meaning very quickly.

The five yamas are called the great vows because they apply to all peoples of all religions in all cultures in all times in all circumstances. Patanjali defines these actions in terms of the benefit to the practitioner. Patanjali is a practical teacher for whom thought, word and deed all spring from a person's intention. Patanjali, Narada and Krishna all

agree that the simplest and most desirable form of yogic practice is love. Devotion is 'bhakti'. The dedication of all actions and the anxiety one feels for the expected outcomes are to be given over to the creator of all our circumstances. Love has the great advantage of being the path and the goal. Loving actions towards all living and created beings and objects is the recommended way we can express our love to the creator of all. Our religion can be truth and our worship can be kind generosity.

Kriya yoga, the yoga of purification, comprises the last three niyamas and is also described in the first few verses of chapter two of Patanjali's yoga sutras. Tapas: Good deeds that purify the mind and body. Svadhyaya: Study that leads to knowledge of the Self, the atman. Ishvara Pranidhana: the devotional attitude; bhakti; the dedication of thought, word and deed for the good of one's self and of all other beings. This intention of active love purifies all our activities and releases us from the stresses of futilely trying to control other people and events. Hope for one outcome can be merely a disguised fear of its opposite. To trust is to never fear, another clear superior side effect of Bhakti yoga. Happiness is not dependent upon results; the opportunity to act in a loving way is the reward. We are happy because we are alive, not because circumstances favor us.

There are as many levels of practicing yoga as there are practitioners. For most of us city dwellers we will have a difficult, if not an impossible time of living up to the yogic ideal espoused by Patanjali. His students lived in forest ashrams, communities of men or women practicing spiritual awakening every day for lifetimes. He claims some fantastic and amazing powers for the perfected yogi because he was recording a system that produces liberation. We cannot hope even to win an Olympic medal if we practice sporadically and do not have certain advantages of birth and circumstance. However we all can enjoy ourselves if we choose to, if we train ourselves to. Thankfully our past lives have influenced this life to at least give us a nominal exposure to yoga. Our experience will be commensurate with the sincere effort we put into our awakening.

"Cultivate the habit of meditation upon the opposite when the mind is disturbed by negative, unwholesome thoughts," chapter 2, sutra 33. Patanjali enjoins us to contemplate the opposite of any action or thought to gain essential insight into our circumstances. In his writings he displays the tools of modern psychological character building. One bad habit must be replaced with a good one, not merely repressed. We can also understand and assimilate the yamas and niyamas better by contemplating their opposites and those implications. No stealing means generosity. Contentment means no whining about our short hamstrings. Thank God I have legs that feel. Thank my good luck that I have discovered a way out my tight existence. Maybe I should pray for the good sense to continue with a healing physical program. "I can't do pull-ups, I have no upper-body strength." You don't speak Russian because you don't practice it, not because you can't. Learning anything requires three things: the interest in the subject, available time and a sense of humor.

In the NBA huge men will knock you down if you try to put the ball through the basket. With Monkey Yoga, I'll get you a ladder and hold it steady so you can dunk the ball and hang on the rim. "Its too hard for me" really means, "I'm too hard on myself. My ego can't handle the baby steps I have to take to learn this enormous and beautiful art that other people are enjoying. I am not interested. I refuse to contemplate that the teacher can help me like she has helped others achieve the level of competency I see displayed around the room." This is tamasic, demonic thinking. The devil wants you weak and

stupid and whining, whether he exists or not. The opposite of strength is weakness. Wisdom or foolishness, patience or haste, despair or confidence. We choose our emotional state, whether we notice or not. The rain is not cold and miserable. I might be grouchy or I might be playful. It's my choice, not the weather's. Rajas, activity, is needed to overcome inertia and bring us to health and harmony. With dedication and a good attitude anything can be accomplished that is pleasing to the gods. And what could be better than a world full of loving, strong, funny and brilliant people?

The next sutra lists excellent reasons why we should not allow evil of any kind to flourish. 2:34—"A negative mind state that produces unwholesome thoughts is inherently violent in that it causes harm to you and to others whether you perform a malicious act or are an accomplice or passively allow another to perpetuate a nefarious deed. These acts and thoughts are easily recognizable because they are preceded by selfish desire, anger, and delusion. Their origins and fruits can be of mild, medium or intense miserable pain, but the ignorance and suffering they produce is guaranteed and endless. Therefore habitually meditate upon the opposites of lobha, krodha and moha." What would you consider to be the opposites of greed, anger and deluded confusion?

What is the opposite of lust? Is it unconditional love or indifference or repulsion? Is the opposite of anger a happy welcoming acceptance? What is right thinking? Clear thinking about what subject is proper meditation? The Buddha enumerated four noble truths and gave us the eightfold path, the middle way to enlightenment. There is suffering, there is a cause of suffering, there is a way out of suffering and that path is the eight methods he recounts. Right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration--"Samma Samadhi" Please refer to and meditate upon the extensive Pali and English commentaries on the Buddha's teachings. We have a great advantage of the blessing of God's grace in that we can study the exact words used by these great souls to convey their teachings.

Patanjali lists the obstacles to success in chapter one, sutra 30 and of course precedes and follows that list with practical actions to eliminate suffering "Disease, apathy, doubt, careless negligence, laziness, craving for worldly pleasures, delusion, abandonment of yoga practice and instability are the nine obstacles. Mental pain, despair and depression, nervous restlessness and irregular breathing are the symptoms of Vikshepa, the distracted condition of the mind. Intense application to one principle is the method of removing these obstacles. Cultivating the attitudes of friendliness to all, compassion for the suffering, sharing in the gladness of the happy, indifference towards the wicked and equanimity towards virtue and vice and the vicissitudes of life purifies the mind of its obstacles to liberation." 1:30-33.

Friendliness: "Kindness is my religion," says the Dali Lama. "Truth is my brother's religion," says Laxmana of Rama to Hanuman. Compassion: Pity is of the intellect and sympathy is an emotional response. It is love that propels compassionate action. Gladness: Krishna revealed the wisdom of the Gita to his friend Arjuna because Arjuna was not jealous. Arjuna was humble and resented no one else's success. Indifference: The wicked should not be entertained or even contemplated. They should be punished when they encroach upon the bounds of pleasant society, but otherwise ignored for our own peace of mind. Equanimity is the enjoying of one's true nature. We are bliss, peace and love. When we behave consistently in accordance with our happy, loving nature we are

free from the plagues of the deluded mind. Winning and losing chess games, making beautiful and squawky music, giving presents that aren't noticed and smiling at insults and flattery train us to enjoy the process and releases our anxieties and desires for pleasure and rewards. Sutra 1: 33 is my favorite in the whole book.

The five **YAMAS** are:

1. **AHIMSA**—No violence. Harmlessness. Kindness. Compassionate action. This injunction implies vegetarianism. Ahimsa is the recognition that all life is sacred. Every being is an expression of the universe's creativity and worthy of our love. "When established in the expressions of peace and kindness, then all hostilities cease around the yogi." 2:35 This obviously applies to physical yoga: No harming of the knees to gain some cross-legged asana. No harm to oneself or to others. Positive loving thoughts, words and deeds towards oneself and others is the recipe, not negativity, not domination, not repression. When I ride my bike on the streets people sometimes drive their cars into the next lane to give extra room. That's nice. Now if they threw flower petals out of their windows at me as they passed that would be ahimsa.

2. **SATYA**—Truthfulness, sincerity, honesty, transparency, guilelessness. "When a yogi does not lie or utter harmful words, all his utterances come true because he only speaks and thinks the truth." 2:36 No lying, no exaggerating, no passively taking undo credit. This also means no gossip, because how can we ever talk about the truth if we rely on hearsay?

Our physical practice can only improve if we do what we can when we can. To be humble is to see and accept ourselves as we are. To be proud is to think more or less of ourselves than is appropriate. Megalomania and false modesty are mental obstacles we can train ourselves out of with the consistent practice of the hatha yoga asanas.

3. **ASTEYA**—No stealing, non-hoarding, freedom from misappropriating, generosity. "When established in not stealing and the practice of generosity then all the world's riches come to the yogi." 2:37 The yogi becomes aware of all the riches around him that ordinary people would not notice. There is even the super-power of being able to divine the presence of buried treasure or a gold mine like a water-dowser. Perhaps this also applies to the discovering of hidden talents. The yogi purifies himself by reducing his possessions and reducing his attachment to his possessions. He does not keep what he does not need because someone else might have a good use for it. The yogi is no miser of things, talents or relationships.

We steal from ourselves when we do not do what we can. Using our creativity to make difficult hatha yoga asanas possible is a form of generosity. We can use props and create variations to gain many of the benefits of advanced asanas. We can give ourselves the gifts of dedication and persistence to learn beneficial arts.

4. **BRAHMACHARYA**—"Conduct of Brahma". 2:38 "When the yogi behaves with the propriety of the creator god then he will not engage in sexual misbehaviors and the abuse of intoxicants. Thus the yogi gains the great vitality needed to pursue these intense meditations." The yogi is like an athlete who benefits by adhering to a healthy training regime. A controlled person is a benefit to themselves and all of society. An obvious implication would be the disaster if the creator of the universe were drunk or befuddled

when he made the atoms and the galaxies. Or if a person is absorbed in his own selfish pursuit of sense-gratification of what use is he to the society who provides him with all the conveniences of his indulgent life? He is a burden to the world and is squandering his vital life force. The selfish pursuit of pleasure through sex and intoxicants makes beasts of us all. Abuse and overdose are plagues upon the rich and the poor.

Addiction to sense pleasure is pushed by the predators of our money and time in our society as a path to happiness. But that's as obviously silly as thinking that fire will be satisfied if we give it more fuel. Pornography is inherently boring and desensitizing. After seeing a scene or a magazine a few times a man will abandon it and peruse another. Why? Because the thrill of the new is the only thrill porn has to offer. It's the same act again and again with different actors.

In the Ramayana the sage Vishvamitra tells the story of Ahalya, Gautama her husband and Indra, the lusty lord of heaven. Ahalya was the most beautiful woman Brahma created and He gave her in marriage to the self-controlled sage Gautama. Indra assumed Gautama's exact form one day and entered their house when the sage was out collecting firewood and bathing. Ahalya was not fooled by Indra's disguise and yet agreed to make love a few times with him. What did she gain by this? Indra had the exact form as her husband and they pleased themselves in a predictable way. She was curious and flattered that the lord of the skies desired her and she gave herself willingly. Indra knew only his desire and gambled that he could enjoy and escape undetected. He lingered in her embrace even though he was married to the incredible Sachi Devi.

When Gautama returned he saw his doppelganger and the dust on his wife's clothes and knew what had happened. He cursed Indra to be covered with a thousand vaginas and his wife to live as the dust she preferred to his company. She was restored to bodily life by the touch of Rama's feet into their ashram and Gautama came back for her and forgave her. Indra hid as an atom in the fiber of a lotus stalk until Gautama modified the curse as one thousand eyes to replace the thousand yonis. Sachi Devi had sent Agni, the god of fire to find her husband and convince him to resume his duties as the protector of the heavens.

As the king Kaushika was performing tapas to become the Brahmarishi Vishvamitra Indra sent a damsel from his court to tempt the powerful ascetic and divert him from his meditations. Kaushika spent ten or one hundred years making love with Menaka before realizing he had been tricked by the jealous lord of heaven. Kaushika withheld his anger and did not curse her because Menaka had truly come to love him and he shared in her punishment of never seeing each other again.

Kaushika resumed his tapas for another thousand years to regain the merit that he had squandered upon sensual pleasure. Indra does not want anyone to challenge him as the greatest tapasvin and so he sent another apsarasa, Rambha, to tempt Kaushika again. She protested quite reasonably, "Kaushika's anger is legendary and he is sure to curse me because he does not love me as he loved Menaka." Indra assured her that he would be there as well as the god of love and the spirit of the spring to make sure Kaushika assumes the proper mood.

But when Kaushika saw the beautiful woman in his inaccessible and inhospitable Himalayan retreat he knew why she was there and who sent her. "The trees and flowers bloom out of season and you are where someone else placed you. Since you are insensitive to my feelings and your own common sense become a rock and stay where you are for a thousand years so that no one will be tempted by your beauty." Kaushika

immediately saw that he was not the master of his own senses and emotions and repented of his indulgence in displaying his anger. His curse had depleted his store of merit and so he dedicated himself to even greater austerities for the next thousand years. Brahma eventually came to him and declared him to be a Jitendriya, a master of his senses and a Brahmarishi. Vasishtha, Brahma's son and Kaushika's old rival gave him the name Vishvamitra, the friend of the universe. Perhaps these myths have more value in their ability to stimulate meditations than upon their factual and historical veracity.

The women who perform in the adult entertainment business start young and have very short careers, why? What is it to be jaded and should we fear it or embrace desensitization and dissipation as marks of our sophistication? Who drinks whiskey the first time and doesn't cringe? Yet that same person can with practice eventually guzzle that firewater and not even feel it spilling down his throat and all over his clothes. We overeat because our food choices do not nourish. We surf porn and music sites because our senses need more and different stimulation. Yet the more we tug on our fun parts the less they can feel. A diet of chocolate loses its flavor. Streams of women, wine and song are swiftly forgotten. The ordinary should become sacred, not the sacred ordinary.

A few phrases of scripture can nourish a person throughout a lifetime. Layers of meaning and new applications and interpretations will come to those who meditate upon the words of the great souls. Any sexy fantasy or popular song has a very short entertainment value. Monotony and repulsion come from their incessant repetition, not enlightenment. Are we not a living scripture? Are we not the embodied proof of the love of the universe? Are we not worthy to be cherished our entire lives? Is our value in our performances or in our existence?

This world exists for two reasons say Patanjali, Krishna, Narada and Buddha: for our pleasure and our enlightenment. We can enjoy this world without being enlightened, obviously. But to truly enjoy it as a realized being is like using the right side of the spoon to enjoy the soup. Only better. Much better.

5. **APARIGRAHA**—No grasping, no coveting, no wanting, free from attachment, non-possessiveness. The elimination of selfish desire. “When a yogi is established in a life without greed he becomes aware of the reasons for his present, past and future births.” 2:39 He finds he has all and more than he needs all around him and looks for ways to share. The garden hose does not hoard the water. We will know why we exist when we do not cling to our possessions or titles or functions.

Perfection in life comes from relinquishing objects and our attachments to those objects. “I want this, I DON'T want that!” Healthy activity is healing and evil is damaging. Hell and heaven are states of mind. “The kingdom of God is within.” Hell is described as a miserable place where people are bound hand and foot, gnashing their teeth in frustration. It is the wanting that causes the misery and the lack of trust in providence. We must act, so let us act logically and for the best of all. Nirvana is the cessation of selfish desire. We can train our wants to reflect the mind of the divine.

The five **NIYAMAS** include a complete yoga system within the last three members. Patanjali describes Kriya yoga as the yoga of purification. The first two niyamas are essential attitudes for every happy person.

1. **SHAUCHA**—Purity in body. Cleanliness in surroundings, clothes, companions. “When the yogi is established in the purity of the body he develops a healthy disgust for his own body and a disinclination for contact with other bodies.” 2:40 Our bodies are bags of blood and partially digested food and bones, sinews and organs. Whenever we see one or more of these items poking out through accident or trauma, we feel a natural revulsion. Bones and blood and guts look better under the skin, unseen. Our beautiful hair in someone’s soup is enough to get the whole mess sent back to the kitchen. The yogi identifies himself with the atman, the spark of the divine within, not this temporary, decaying shell. Another human body is basically another filthy house with a celestial inhabitant. Our actions and intentions can truly touch each other’s spirit. The physical expression of love is fleeting. The intention of our love can touch another deeply and last a lifetime. The creations of artists touch their audiences across the divide of centuries and cultures. We have a unique and powerful opportunity in this life because we are incarnated in a human body. Our physicality is sacred, not trivial.

“Shaucha in thought leads to purity in sattva, cheerfulness, one-pointedness of attention, control of the senses and fitness for the vision of the Self.” 2: 41 Sattva, rajas and tamas are the three gunas, the strands of the rope of this material existence. Sattva is purity, harmony, balance, and goodness, food like fruit and succulent vegetables, unconditional love, clarity. The goal of yogic practice is to transform ourselves into sattvic beings. Rajas is action, hyper-activity, blind ambition, passion, attachment, anger, spicy food, caffeine, business arrangements, the effort one needs to overcome inaction and reach balance. Tamas is the inertia of stillness, sleep, rest, resentment, ignorance and apathy, distrust, a sense of entitlement, lack of faith, blaming others for one’s problems, callous carelessness, drunkenness, food that is non-nourishing or even poisonous, narcotics.

Mental purity gives the fruit of perfection. Tamas can only be overcome by the judicious use of rajas. The acrobat walking on the tightrope must use more and consistent effort to keep her balance. Sattva will produce sattva eventually, but we need effort to overcome apathy, research to overcome ignorance, exercise to overcome weakness. That we will gain in cheerfulness and abilities to concentrate and control ourselves will undoubtedly help us discover our true nature. We are love. We are truth. We are life and we are magnificent and worthy simply because we are alive. Dogs and babies are famous for loving whoever is placed in front of them and filling that lucky person of the moment with an experience of unconditional love. We are refreshed every time we interact with one of these angels. We connect with them through our essential nature and lose a coating of cynicism with each visit.

Hatha yoga is sattvic exercise. It is healthy and healing. Tricks like the splits are expressions of the health of the body and the determined character to overcome painful obstacles. Basketball and football are examples of rajastic exercise. They are movement for movement’s sake. The trick is more important than the health of the individual. Performing while injured, performing injurious activities and drug abuse that increases temporary proficiency while sacrificing a person’s long term health are all obvious in the world of sports.

Examples of tamasic sports are chess, video games, gambling and spectator entertainments. Why should two million watch and only ten play? Because they can play better? Success is not performing something perfectly or obtaining the next object. Asana acquisition disease can be fatal. Failure is losing one’s connection to our ever-

present joy inside. Success is maintaining connection to our true nature in every circumstance. We can smile at the police officer when we get our ticket for speeding. We can kiss our creaky knees and thank them for this thousandth opportunity to show them love.

2. **SANTOSHA**—Contentment. “Unexcelled happiness comes from contentment.” 2:42 This is profound in its simplicity and directness. Happiness does not produce contentment. We can be happy about something or we can notice that we are happiness. No amount of possessions or rewards can guarantee a person’s happiness as any perusal of tabloid journalism proves.

The elimination of selfish desires creates a stillness within us that allows our inherent joy to predominate. A conniving, planning, wanting greedy mind will only perpetuate itself and move from one accomplishment to another like a fire consuming trees in a forest. To accept, to surrender, to acknowledge, these are positive, powerful actions. If we deny the cold and go out without our jacket and come back with the sniffles, we have been childish. If we deny our cold and go to our work place anyway and spread a flu virus we have become a menace. Denial and repression are ultimately damaging. Suffering that is yet to come can be and should be avoided. Satisfaction is power. How often are our wants and fears exploited for someone else’s financial gain? Every day of our lives?

Happiness is not inside the chocolate cake. The cake can help us enjoy our happiness or be a source of torture. Enlightenment is essentially an education, not a set of religious rituals and edicts.

3. **TAPAS**—Heat, the intense zeal of purifying practices, good deeds. Burning away bad habits with the consistent practice of healthy and useful ones. Austerities perfect the body and sense organs and personality by destroying impurities. There is a common saying that the yogi prefers the good to the pleasant, while the fool prefers the pleasant to the good. The yogi prefers that which at first appears to be bitter as poison and is later revealed to be sweet as nectar, while the fool prefers that which first appears sweet and agreeable yet is really poison in disguise. Will power is increased by the physical expressions of one’s ideals. Healthy diets, kind speech, hatha yoga exercise and the avoidance of corrupt companions are some of the obvious disciplines we can begin. Tapas is the expression of all the yamas and niyamas and other limbs of yoga.

We can pleasantly and effectively train our bodies by immersion in the cold and hot waters of mineral springs. Lots of people say, “the water’s too hot—it’s too cold!” Yet many other people enjoy those waters. Do the waters change temperature for each person or do the people have different temperaments and skill levels? We can train our sense organs to obey us instead of their own temporary and fickle preferences. We can strengthen our bodies and minds to obey us instead of themselves. To be a slave of our senses is unnecessary and demeaning. To avoid strength-building exercises because we feel weak is tamasic reasoning and we need rajas to bring us to sattva. Action overcomes indolence and produces harmony. The guitar won’t play itself. Beautiful music is created by sensitive effort. We can only build strength and endurance when we feel so weak we cannot make another repetition with good form. It is the last five push-ups of a set of twenty that make us stronger, not the first ten. Strength and endurance are created only when we feel weak and tired.

Shiva is the god of yoga and the lord of the dance. He is the god of fertility and the harvest, the god of destruction that precedes creation. The myth clearly reflects known science. We cannot create muscle through exercise; only destroy it. Our bodies will create new muscle while we sleep. Yoga is a process of eliminating distractions so our resplendent nature will shine through.

Too much is too much, not enough is too little. Sattva is the appropriate balanced effort and the pleasant result of our skillful efforts. In the Bhagavad-Gita Krishna defines yoga as skill in action, and also as the cessation of contact with pain and suffering. “A tree shall be known by its fruit.” Our hatha yoga practice is a perfect opportunity to steadily perfect our bodies and characters because of its immediacy. We get to enjoy the process and the results. I often tell my students NOT to practice hatha yoga asanas. Do not do some pose you saw in a book or do something because someone told you. Heal your bodies instead. Make the healthiest shape you can create and the hatha yoga asanas will appear. Health first and then some cool trick will appear. Doing what you can’t do is called self-injury. Expanding your abilities through considered and consistent efforts is sattvic training. Compassion and wisdom need to be developed together or we will become a kind-hearted fool or a cold-shouldered brainiac.

4. **SVADHYAYA**—Study that leads to knowledge of one’s true Self. Study of the scriptures illuminates our connection with the universe. Our body is a holy scripture. Study of the atman reveals the divine within us. Union with one’s chosen deity is accomplished through meditation and examination of the world’s collection of sacred writings and the practice of proven methods of connection. Where is God? I can only see you so I will be kind to you. You are my cipher for my chosen deity. The satisfaction I feel in my heart because of our interaction is my proof of God’s love for us. Our intellect is best developed when it is deployed to uncover the true meaning of our life. We can play chess all day and not gain a single insight into the beauty of the created universe. What is suffering, what is happiness? Who is this that suffers and rejoices? What is the end of suffering and what is the path of happiness? Who are we and why are we here on this earth right now?

Professor Einstein’s greatest regret was that he lent his intellect to the creation of the atomic bomb. The rest of his life he wrote and lectured on the need for peace and the sanctity of all human life. We have a unique opportunity as incarnated beings in the 21st century. We have resources and opinions available to us in unprecedented quantity and accessibility. What shall we choose as worthy of our efforts?

Svadhyaya includes the use of japa as a tool to join with our chosen deity. Japa is the meditative repetition of a mantra, a phrase or word that is designed to uplift the human spirit. Negative thinking is harmful japa. It is our pleasure and responsibility to choose our thoughts wisely. We can ignore the many mysteries and beauties in life and slide into an indulgent routine of superficiality. We can make a lifelong effort of discovering our highest calling. Self-awareness is enjoying our connection with the creator of the universe and each other. Svadhyaya is the study that leads to enlightenment. How many angels on the head of a pin care how many college students can stuff themselves into a Volkswagen?

5. **ISHVARA PRANIDHANA**—The release of one’s anxiety for the fruits of one’s actions to the greater grace of God. “Perfect existence and success in supernatural powers

is gained by placing the fullness of our lives under the Lord's grace" 2:45 Samadhi is accomplished and perfected by the dedication of the whole of one's being to the will of God. If God is the most loving and intelligent being extant then it follows that He and or She would always want what is best for us. This is, in fact the position of every religious tradition. Sometimes like children we cry for the wrapping paper and the box and ignore the toy our parents gave us. They laugh and indulge us and wait until next year when perhaps we will be old enough and aware enough to enjoy the gift they have chosen to please our unique personalities. When we eliminate our selfish desires and train ourselves to think and behave as the creator and maintainer of the universe we must begin to enjoy the very best life has to offer. This training of our emotions is a complete path towards enlightenment.

Patanjali, Krishna and Narada all agree that love is the method and goal most worthy of being pursued. The other paths of work or knowledge or meditation can delay or even lead one astray or make a person cold to life's pleasures and opportunities. "The fruit of those paths is spiritual devotion...spiritual devotion is its own fruit," writes Narada, the immortal mind-born son of Brahma in the Narada Bhakti Yoga Sutras. "Work, and dedicate all your actions to Me," advises Krishna, the soul and maintainer of the universe, Narayana/Vishnu, while gifting the Bhagavad-Gita to the warrior Arjuna and thus to the world. Patanjali is widely regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu's thousand-headed serpent couch, the divine Adishesha, Ananta, the embodiment of the infinite and the support of the created universe. All his heads with their wide hoods hover over Narayana and shelter Him while He sleeps. The poison of the cobra is controlled; the attention of the devotee is complete. Adishesha looks after his master while still performing his worldly duties. Samadhi is the complete absorption of the individual into the bliss of the divine. That one could be perfected by the proper attitude is astounding.

"Yoga is the control of the disturbances of the mind" 1:2 "Then the yogi is established in his own true, resplendent nature" 1:3 "At other times he identifies himself as those disturbances." 1:4 I am hungry, I am tired. The silliness of English is obvious when compared to French, for example—"J'ai faim. J'ai fatigué. --I presently have hunger. I presently have tiredness."

Patanjali lists five disturbances of the mind "Right knowledge, wrong knowledge, fanciful imagination, sleep and memory." 1:6 These fluctuating mind states do not trouble the bhaktan, the devotee. Tibetan monks train themselves in lucid dreaming as another opportunity of expressing their love for the entire created world. Anything is possible in our dreams and who but we would know? Why not indulge in sensuality and mayhem in the safety of our slumbers? Desires will manifest as words and action eventually. We cannot swim and pretend to be dry. The repression of anger or sexual desire is not love. Understanding our true nature matures us past indulging in harmful pleasures. Right or wrong, imagined or remembered, oblivious or hidden, our thought patterns shape our souls.

The intention to do what's best for everyone and ourselves purifies our actions, even if we have traces of lust and greed and fear. Those impurities will lessen with our increased practice. Our skill will reflect our determination. "Enlightenment is not won by the weak." Or by the sporadic. If we have no selfish motives then we will have no conflicting disturbances within our minds and our intentions and actions will be pure. We will think and act like the god of love and truth. We will find our true expression by abandoning a small set of fickle preferences and embracing one great principle. No fear. All love. No

anxiety for the results of our actions. Trust in the wisdom of the creator of this universe. Because we are love this is our natural state. Our conflicts come from fighting our true nature and insisting upon our ego's dominance of our world.

Narada writes, " Bhakti is developed by relinquishing objects and relinquishing attachments. And by unceasing worship... But primarily from the grace of God through the blessings of the company and grace of a great soul. Unfathomable and infallible, the companionship of the great souls is certainly difficult to obtain. It is obtained by the grace of God only....Therefore, cultivate grace alone; cultivate the grace that will bring you into contact with the great souls as your highest priority. Relinquish negative companionship in all its forms. Selfish desire, anger, delusion, losing one's awareness of God, the loss of one's discriminating intellect and the loss of everything worthwhile in this world is caused by accompanying the wicked and entertaining the negative. Acting as small waves in the beginning, these companions become like a swelling ocean... One who resorts to solitude, one who eradicates the bondage of the world, becomes free from the influences of the three gunas and relinquishes the idea that acquisitions can provide happiness. One who relinquishes the fruit of karma and renounces selfish actions thereby becomes free from the pairs of opposites.... Love manifests within an able vessel... The path of spiritual devotion is easier than others...It is of the nature of peace and supreme joy. Anxieties of worldly losses do not trouble the bhaktan who dedicates himself to performing his social and traditional activities from a sense of duty. If that anxiety-free state is not immediately perfected it does not mean that interactions with the world should be forsaken, rather that the relinquishment of the fruits of action is the proper method of performing one's duties and will create the proper attitude through consistent practice. Stories about sexual escapades, winning and losing wealth and the concerns of worldly, atheistic people should not be listened to. Egoism, arrogance and the like are to be relinquished. Doing one's duty in a spirit of love sanctifies all actions, even if anger, egoism, selfish desire and delusion are present. Break your idea of service; go beyond all forms previously mentioned. One's only duty is to love. Love and worship God in the nature of an eternally devoted servant or an eternally loving wife." The Narada Bhakti Yoga Sutras, verses 35,36, 38-40,42-45,47,48,53,58,60-66

3rd limb-- **ASANA**—Seat, posture. To sit with, to embody. "The posture for meditation should be steady and comfortable. Asana is mastered by the relaxation of effort and the fusing of the mind with the infinite. Then the yogi is free from the assault of the pairs of opposites." 2:46.47,48. Patanjali is instructing his students in Kaivalya yoga/ Raja yoga/ the yoga of meditation. During Vipassana meditation we sit for one hour at a time twice a day without moving our hands or legs. During the dhyana meditation that leads to Samadhi a yogi will sit for hours to days.

Hatha is "Sun-Moon," consistent intense balanced effort. Hatha yoga is described in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika as the ladder that leads to the heights of Raja yoga. Like a ladder is kicked away once the balcony is gained, the yogi pursues his task without looking back. The Buddha says the body should be cared for as a man would care for his raft that allows him to take a long and perilous journey. Excessive fixation upon the body is harmful and childish, like a person who won't leave his car after a long trip to explore the countryside. Hatha yoga is like cleaning and mending clothes. Samadhi is like dancing on your wedding night.

A hatha yoga asana will last from thirty seconds to a minute with great effect. Some positions can be held for ten to thirty minutes even. The amount of effort needed to maintain an asana varies with each position and the objective of the practitioner. Restorative yoga is a separate discipline from the strenuous yoga of hatha exercises. Hatha yoga is training for the mastery of asana. Raja yoga demands the practitioner be a master of asana to reach the next, subtler levels of existence. Krishna told Arjuna, “Yoga is skill in action.”

The supreme personality of the universe instructed, “A yogi must concentrate upon the union of the body, mind and self constantly. He should live alone in a secluded place, his mind and body under control, rid of desires and established in aparigraha, non-possessiveness. In a sanctified land he should create a firm seat, neither too high nor too low, covered with the sacred kasha grass, a deerskin and a cloth. Sitting on that seat, with one pointed attention of mind, the functions of thought and sense in control he should set himself to the practice of yoga for the purpose of self-purification. With body, head and neck in a straight line, holding himself still and unmoving, he looks at the tip of his nose, and not all around. His spirit unagitated and devoid of fear, steadfast in the vow of Brahmacharya, completely subduing his mind, the yogi should sit, with his whole consciousness absorbed into Me, the ultimate goal. Practicing constant control of mind and body the yogi regulates his mind and attains true peace and the spiritual sky and the cessation of material existence-nirvana.”(The extinguishing of selfish desire and union with God) Bhagavad-Gita 6:10-15

Those instructions are for the yogi who sits in meditation for hours at a time. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Gheranda Samhita have extensive advice for yogis practicing various hatha yoga exercises. We do hatha yoga to prepare our backs and knees and nervous systems to sit cross-legged for an hour, steady and comfortable. Who can enjoy standing before the Mona Lisa with a toothache? If our knees are screaming we will not hear the subtle voice of God inside. Proof of mastery of an asana is to not be assaulted by pain or pleasure, joy or sorrow, fear or hope while meditating. The freedom to contemplate the infinite, to transcend the temporary, changing body, the fleeting sensations that prick and pass over one like leaves and sticks in a stream. To enjoy one’s bliss free from distractions is yoga.

What is the infinite? What action can perpetuate itself without friction? Love. The soul of the universe rests upon infinite love. Narayana/ Vishnu/ Krishna sleeps on Ananta and Ananta supports the whole universe besides. The mythology could not be sweeter.

PRANAYAMA 4th—Life force lengthening. Control of the breath. “Upon this mastery of asana being accomplished Pranayama is regulation of the inhalation, exhalation and the pause in between. It is external or internal or suspended: regulated by place, time and number becoming progressively prolonged and subtle. That Pranayama which goes beyond the domain of internal and external is the fourth variety. From this state the covering of light disappears and the mind is prepared for dhyana, concentration” 2:49-53

Pranayama comprises a four-part breath: inhale, pause, exhale, pause. These four sections can and will be manipulated and extended in various ways by the yogi. Circumstances like time and place are important factors. Season and geography and time of day will demand different ratios. Circumstances like summer in the tropics at noon or three a.m. in Iceland will influence the student’s practice as much as his or her ability and goals.

Please refer to the brilliant works of B.K.S. Iyengar, particularly his books “Light on Yoga” and “Light on Pranayama.” Master teacher and yogi Iyengar describes many training regimes for the dedicated student. Regarding the “fourth variety”, I will not pretend to know what goes beyond holding the breath within or the air outside a person. Perhaps a yogi can absorb air through his pores? Patanjali doesn’t elucidate on those practices in this text. Advanced Pranayama must be learned from a qualified master by a sincere and purified student. The dangers of frying one’s nervous system in ignorant zeal are very real. People can do permanent physical damage to themselves, go temporarily insane, and produce other unsavory side effects by shoddy practice.

The light that is removed upon mastery of Pranayama is the glare of conditioned existence, like the mirage on the desert floor, like the bright reflection hides the surface it shines off of and distracts from its source. The simple Ujjayi Pranayama, the “victorious breath”, used by hatha yogis certainly increases a person’s ability to concentrate. 5 seconds inhale, 1-second pause, 5 second exhale, 1-second pause. Constrict the back and top of the throat, so the voice comes out like a whisper or a growl. “I’ll make you an offer you can’t refuse”, like Marlon or the “Oh, Homey” of Marge, the steady loud rhythm of Darth. The exhale is easier to master and to talk during. Marlon would have bombed his audition if he would have spoken on the squeezed inhale.

Vayu is the wind god and he is also called Prana. Prana is not the wind or the air but the life force that permeates all creation, even in the vacuum of space and the hearts of stars. The Ramayana is an ancient Indian tale of a prince whose wife is stolen by the king of the demons. Hanuman, the yogi monkey son of Prana finds Sita, Rama’s wife and leads a great army to liberate her from the clutches of the evil Ravana. This story is an allegory. Rama is the Self, the king of Ayodhya, our body, Sita his queen is our pure mind, and Hanuman their friend is the effort of prana carried by breath that looks everywhere and accomplishes everything with grace and aplomb. Ravana is the massive, ten-headed, twenty-armed one hundred-fingered cipher of greed and selfish desire and jealous, malicious negativity that steals and imprisons our true nature. Rama, an avatar of Vishnu and his brother Laxmana, an incarnation of Adisesha and the symbol of awareness, of our loyal, perfected intellect, are the only two humans who fight in the war of millions of monkeys and bears against the corrupt rakshasa armies.

Laxmana kills Ravana’s great son, Indrajit, “The conqueror of Indra” and Rama defeats, spares, and then finally kills Ravana. Sita is liberated and all the monkey, bear and holy people of the forests are free from the constant murderous escapades of the rakshasas. Even Ravana goes to heaven. When he dies he is only thinking of Rama and feeling Rama’s arrow that kills him. Everyone on the battlefield was astonished when his spirit left his body and was absorbed by Rama through the top of his head. God is eternally merciful. And surprisingly funny.

This same subsuming of an enemy happened to Krishna in the Mahabharata with a rude and obnoxious king that insulted Krishna way beyond his promised acceptance of one hundred insults. Vishnu’s chakra appeared in Krishna’s hand and he hurled it to lop off the fool’s head. His spirit entered into Krishna before the amazed eyes of the assembly of kings. Our painfully short hamstrings are our friends and they become transformed by our loving care into precious and enjoyable assets.

I see these myths as practical advice and so I have built a hatha yoga system because of them. Isometric Monkey Yoga emphasizes the inherent counter forces available in the asanas to build strength. You can sit down or you can stand up while you sit down. The

only way to get a better workout in the same amount of time is to increase the intensity of effort. Another form of aerobics is to breathe less and more efficiently. “To monkey” has three meanings: to move while in the asana for pleasure and education, to use a tool such as a block or strap or weighted ball, and to make a variation or a substitution while fulfilling the idea of the original asana. We need to develop an alliance with our animal natures to conquer our self-destructive, sometimes hyperactive and sometimes lazy and shortsighted desires. The series of asanas and the methods of performing them that we teach at Monkey Yoga Shala create strength, flexibility, agility and steadiness of mind. But don’t take my word for it; sign up for some classes!

The body is perfected through movement and the mind through stillness. When the body is still the student’s mind wanders easily. When the student controls her breath, and moves and exerts forceful effort appropriately her mind becomes fixed within her body and upon her present task. Because I practice walking around the room on my hands I can hold myself still in the center of the room; the muscles in my fingers and forearms are strong enough and integrated with the muscles of my arms and torso to effect the subtle adjustments needed to keep me steady while upside down. Being upside down and unmoving is a great, yet short opportunity for blissful meditation and for showing off.

Attitude is everything or every acrobat would be enlightened. We can do our duties and live up to our abilities in a spirit of service or we can create self-serving or self-limiting opportunities. Our health and abilities are gifts we can enjoy and give to the world. Everything has its price. Classes are inexpensive but the body you create will replace the body you now have at a cost of initial pain and soreness in the mornings. Have fun! Three things are required to learn anything: Time, Willingness and a Sense of Humor. Push-ups, pull-ups and sit-ups are free! Isometric Monkey Yoga loves you.

PRATYAHARA 5th—Withdrawal of the senses from external objects and focusing their power to discern the atman, the Self within. “Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the senses from their external objects and their following the mind to its source. Then follows the greatest mastery of the senses” 2:54, 55 Like the bees follow the queen, our senses will follow our controlled mind. Another useful analogy is that of the chariot of our body pulled by the horses of our senses controlled by the charioteer of our intellect for the benefit of our true Self, the passenger. We must remain alert and command our sarathy, our charioteer, and he must control the horses. The beautiful fields of the world are enticing and the senses pull our bodies this way and that to pleasure themselves.

Yoga is the unification and perfection of our mind, ego, intellect, senses, body, will, and spirit. We must control and eliminate the tyranny of sense-gratification and distraction if we are to control and eliminate the distractions within our minds. Memory and imagination are tools we must overcome to discover their source. Internal disturbances must not be compounded with external ones if we have any hope of enjoying our subtle essence. The exercises of tapas, immersion in hot and cold water, for example, make our intellect and senses our obedient servants who take our bodies where we choose, not where they ficklely prefer. Our acts of kind generosity without demands for reward transform our personalities toward the divine.

DHARANA 6th—Concentration upon an object suitable for meditation. “Dharana is confining the mind to the object under concentration.” 3:1 Dharana is the spotlight on the clown; it is the choosing of the target for the arrow and the relentless persistence of

focusing on a moving target from a speeding chariot. When the physical disturbances have been quelled, then the Sadhaka, the seeker, can begin the inward quest of yoga. Those previous five limbs are called the outer practice; these next three are the inner. Concentration, meditation and absorption practiced together are called “Samyama.” It is Samyama that gives the “siddhis”, perfections, accomplishments, and the incredible super powers listed in chapter three.

Yama and Niyama eliminate the mental and emotional disturbances of selfish desires and habits and replace them with beautiful mind states and activities. Asana and Pranayama eliminate physical obstacles and give incredible gifts of steadiness, strength of body and will and concentration. Pratyahara allows us freedom from the external world and the capacity to see past the superficial layers of existence. Pratyahara is like a trusted guard at our door allowing no one in.

Free and isolated from mental disturbances from the outside we have a chance to control the tumultuous inner life and focus upon our chosen object of meditation. Nirodha is translated as control, elimination, restraint, stoppage, cessation, stillness, suppression, and inhibition, literally to negate the god of the storm. “Desha-bandhash cittasya dharana”3:1 “Concentration is binding the four part mind to one place.” Citta is manas, mind; buddhi, intellect; ahamkara, “the I maker”, the ego; and our relationship with the world. We share a common connection through consciousness. We are the result of millions of loving relationships. But like the lifeguard who throws a rope to a drowning man, we must keep our distance to be effective or we, too, will drown in this stormy sea.

DHYANA 7th—Absorption into meditation upon the chosen object. “Dhyana is the state of unbroken concentration of consciousness in contemplation of its object of meditation.” 3:2 This is the eternal flow of a river into the sea. Dharana is like the flow of water from pitcher to pail. Dharana is like the bucket brigade; Dhyana is the water streaming out of the fire hose. They are the same except for duration. A scientist peering through a microscope at a droplet of water has restricted her vision to one place, like Dharana. Within that new and restricted vision many aquatic creatures squiggle about. Dhyana is like choosing one section of one of those creatures to study uninterrupted.

Arjuna and his brothers and cousins were once given a challenge: hit the target of a bird placed in the top of a tree a great distance away with an arrow. Drona, their weapons master, would not let anyone shoot because they all described the target imperfectly: “a bird in a tree” “the head of a brown bird.” When Arjuna aimed and Drona asked at what he was aiming, Arjuna replied, “All I can see is the glint of sunlight within the pupil of the eye of the bird.”

“Release your arrow, Arjuna.” Drona commanded.

SAMADHI 8th—Living in bliss. Enlightened existence. The enveloping ocean. The raindrop slipping into the shining sea. The control of the disturbances of the mind and the enjoyment of one’s true nature free from interference. “Samadhi is that trancelike contemplation when the mind is conscious only of its chosen object with no interference from the mind.” 3:3 A mystical trance state where the yogi is completely identified with the divine essence of creation. Kaivalya: isolation. The yogi experiences himself as he truly is, pure joy, love walking the earth, free from distraction. If Dharana is a stroke and Dhyana is swimming from here to there, then Samadhi would be swimming enjoying swimming. Even this Samadhi is external and preparatory to seedless Samadhi.

A “runner’s high’ is a loose equivalent to a low-level physical Samadhi. Each step is Dharana and the consistent running is Dhyana. Samadhi though is a complete identification with the object of meditation with no self-consciousness whatsoever. “I am running” becomes “Running is running” without the awareness of the self. A musician playing or composing, an artist lost in her painting, an inventor discovering a new creation through unself-conscious inspiration, a writer who loses track of time because of the pleasure of the words that write themselves. The joy of the garden hose watering the garden? These are pale imitations of the power of Samadhi with seed.

My personal experience has so far been limited to some very enjoyable and blissy meditation sessions. I do not claim to have ever experienced Samadhi. Dhyana once in a while, yes. Patanjali is describing something so advanced that its practice leads to powers like phenomenal strength, invisibility, the ability to change shapes, to fly, to read minds. I can put my foot behind my head. Patanjali also points out that these siddhis, these perfect accomplishments are distractions and impediments to the higher stages of yoga. Greed destroys liberation. Pride in yoga asana is the silly pride of a child who can finally floss and brush his teeth.

Relinquishing attachments to our possessions even applies to our ideas of enlightenment. To love is enough. Love and get it wrong and then love some more because you can’t go wrong if you truly love. Your good intentions purify every feeble attempt just as selfish desires will poison every grandiose display of charity. “The road to hell is paved by good intentions.” No. That is a childish aphorism. Yogis train themselves to desire only what is good and they continue to modify their behavior accordingly. Eventually thinking is no longer necessary. Goodness is instinctive. You are love. You are God operating in the world. Trust yourself and make the necessary corrections as you decide are appropriate and loving.

Narada says, “Bhakti does not arise from desire. Its true nature is stillness. Nirodha consecrates the performance of worldly duties.” Narada Bhakti Yoga Sutras, verses 7 & 8. We can generate karma for ourselves or we can act in such a way that the needful is done and no karma accrues to us.

This last set of verses is the most holy Gayatri Mantra. 33 syllables of Sanskrit bliss that is sung into baby’s ears the day they are named and chanted by millions of yogis before time birthed history. This mantra stops the momentum of karma. We can go beyond the effects of the gunas. We can and should break the golden chain of sattva. Good deeds create an addiction to perform more good deeds. We should do what is best, not merely what is good.

aum bhur buhvah svah
tat savitur varenyam,
bhargho devasya dhimahi;
dhiyo yonah prachodayat

“Through the coming, going, and the balance of life
The essential nature that illuminates existence is the Adorable One.
May all perceive through subtle intellect the brilliance of enlightenment.”

Or,

“May we meditate on the effulgent Light (or Power)
of He who is worshipful and who has

Given birth to all the worlds. May He direct the rays
of our intelligence towards the path of good.”

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