

Purpose of yoga as explained by the Sutras of Patanjali

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There are many wisdom traditions and spiritual maps to help you journey inwards. Yoga is one of these. Vedic scholars in ancient India spent many years in meditation to intuit this knowledge. Buddha studied with many of these teachers before his awakening. The knowledge was passed down orally till they were most accurately transcribed in The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. For this article, I am drawing from a fabulously accessible version translated by Alistair Shearer.

Suffering is a fact of life. The fundamental dissatisfaction of human beings has been the central concern of all religious and philosophical systems. Buddha explained this by saying all things are impermanent, our lives are short, restricted, and ultimately, unsatisfying. The cure he prescribed was called 'the path to Enlightenment.' It was a perennial teaching that he had verified by his own experience. This teaching is called yoga.

According to yoga, we suffer because we live in ignorance of our true nature. Our true nature lies beyond the restrictions of our careworn existence, ecstatically free and untouched by suffering.

Deep within the mind, beyond the faintest flicker of thought, it is experienced as an undying and omnipresent vastness. It is absolute consciousness. Animating everything in creation, this is the source and goal of all life. Yoga calls it the Self.

The nature of life is to grow toward an ever more perfect and joyous expression of itself. Each living being has a nervous system, no matter how rudimentary. This acts as a localised reflector of all-pervading consciousness, just as a mirror reflects light. The more developed the nervous system, the more it will express the pure qualities of pure consciousness – intelligence, creativity, and bliss. Only when we realise our true nature, and the individual mind becomes infinite, shall we be satisfied.

Enlightenment is said to be complete knowledge of the Self. This Enlightenment is the first and last freedom; it is the state of effortless Being. Yoga is the transformation into this Divine, and of this Divine into everything. Meditation is the key.

The quest to know oneself is embedded in every culture and myth, with the metaphorical prize of the plant of immortality, the Golden Fleece, the Holy Grail, the Emerald Tablet. The details of this alchemical journey may vary, but the pattern is the same. First comes a challenge, the call to a fuller life, the promise of a new state of being. If the hero has the courage to accept the challenge, with all its awesome metamorphic implications, he embarks on the crossing of a threshold that marks the beginning of the journey. This death and rebirth have to be accomplished many times, and every transformation suffered is a dying of the old and a resurrection into the new.



As a practical, non-ritualistic way to expand awareness, yoga is a vital means of ensuring individual evolution. It is for any individual no matter what his role in society, to purify his consciousness and live the full depth of life. The emphasis of yoga is on the direct experience of the state of effortless Being.

Direct experience is the core of yoga. You can hear testimonials from students and read my articles, but you will never know how it feels till you try it. After over 20 years of practicing yoga, I cannot say I have achieved Enlightenment, but I certainly feel calmer, more grounded, more compassionate and occasionally, I have moments when I can glimpse the divinity within me, and those around me. Those moments of clarity are my motivating force, they are why I do what I do: spreading ancient wisdom techniques in service of love.

Yoga is not a religion. It is undenominational, relying not on faith but on a number of purifying techniques that gradually lead the individual to the direct experience of Divinity.

Yoga means to join. Yoga is a way to restore our lost wholeness, our integrity as complete human beings, by unifying the personality around a centre that is silent

and unbounded.

Yoga is a path to *samadhi*, a state of unclouded truth, a state of effortless Being, a state of unbounded bliss. The Yoga Sutras serve as a map for this inner journey.

Sutras are threads. Each of the sutras is so succinct, on average only six words, almost like mnemonics to help us remember the message. Their purpose is to describe the stages of the inner journey. The sutras explain the mechanics of consciousness.

The first four sutras contain Patanjali's entire message in a nutshell: *Citta Vritti Nirodha*: Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence.

Only when the mind is silent can we realise our true nature, the effortless Being of the Self. The Sutras define the fluctuations of the mind and the stabilising effects of yoga.

The next ten sutras explain the prerequisites of *samadhi*, the obstacles that will be encountered and the way to overcome these. The next part starts with the practical steps (*sadhana*) which can help an aspirant settle the mind and explains the five causes of suffering. These are balanced by the remedy of the eight limbs of yoga.

Patanjali's examination of the eight

limbs takes us to the 'heart of yoga,' the delicate techniques of *sanyama*. It develops the state of Enlightenment by training the mind to think on the very subtle level necessary to achieve stillness. The stages in the process of expansion are described, triumphantly concluding with Self Realisation.

The sutras explain that our past actions, in this life and before, cause the mind to form attachments and aversions, the mind's bondage to its objects. To destroy this bondage requires one to come out of the prison of time, causation and space, allowing it to become unrestricted and universal.

The more universal the individual mind becomes, the less it will retain impressions of past actions. Therefore it will be less ruled by desires. As the practice of yoga matures, desires cease to be the expression of need and become instead the spontaneous unfolding of love. The clearer our mind, the more clearly we evaluate our experience.

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