



## Yoga Sutras of Patanjali - Basics

by Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati

SwamiJ.com

In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali describes the art and science of Yoga in 196 pithy phrases or sutras (literally, *threads*). The gist of Yoga is summarized in the first few sutras of the Yoga Sutras, which are summarized and described below.

### Summary of the first five of the Yoga Sutras:

---

#### Sutra 1:

- *Sanskrit:* Atha yoga anushasanam
- *English:* Now, at this auspicious time, and after having done previous preparation, begins the study and practice of yoga.

#### Sutra 2:

- *Sanskrit:* Yogash chitta vritti nirodhah
- *English:* Yoga, or union is the mastery and integration of the activities of the mind-field.

#### Sutra 3:

- *Sanskrit:* Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam
- *English:* Then, resulting from that mastery and integration, the seer, the Self rests in its true nature.

#### Sutra 4:

- *Sanskrit:* Vritti sarupyam itaratra
- *English:* At other times, when that mastery and integration is not present, the seer or Self appears to take on the forms of the thought patterns in the mind-field.

#### Sutra 5:

- *Sanskrit:* Vrittayah pancatayah klishta aklishta
- *English:* Those interfering thought patterns are one of [five kinds](#) (correct, incorrect, fantasy, sleep, or memory), and are either [colored or not-colored](#) (colored with [five colorings](#): clouding over of truth, I-am-ness, attachment, aversion, and/or fear).

## Descriptions of the first five of the Yoga Sutras:

### Sutra 1:

- *Sanskrit:* Atha yoga anushasanam
- *English:* Now, at this auspicious time, and after having done previous preparation, begins the study and practice of yoga.

Atha = now, at this auspicious moment; implying the transition to this practice and pursuit, after prior preparation; implying a blessing at this moment of transition

Yoga = of yoga, union; literally, to yoke, from the root *yuj*, which means *to join*; same as the absorption in samadhi

Anu = within, or following tradition; implies being subsequent to something else, in this case, the prior preparation

Shasanam = instruction, discipline, teaching, exposition, explanation; *Shas* implies the imparting of teaching that happens along with discipline

Discussion: This introductory sutra suggests that after our many actions in life, and whatever preparatory practices we might have performed, now, we are finally ready to pursue the depths of self-exploration, the journey directly to the center of consciousness, Atman, or Self, our eternal and True identity.

### Sutra 2:

- *Sanskrit:* Yogash chitta vritti nirodhah
- *English:* Yoga, or union is the mastery and integration of the activities of the mind-field.

Yoga = of yoga, union; literally, to yoke, from the root *yuj*, which means *to join*; same as the absorption in samadhi

Chitta = of the consciousness of the mind-field

Vritti = of the operations, activities, fluctuations, modifications, changes, or various forms (of the mind-field)

Nirodhah = Mastery, coordination, control, regulation, setting aside of

Discussion: This single sentence is a most succinct definition of the science of Self-realization, or Yoga. The key to understanding is the word *nirodhah*, which defies translation or description. When translated poorly or misunderstood, it can sound like the suppression or repression of thoughts and emotions, which is definitely not what Yoga is about. Rather, it has to do with a process more like coordinating and setting aside what is not significant. It means finding the jewel of Truth that is *underneath* or *behind* all of the other activities in the mind-field. Ultimately, the meaning of *nirodhah*, and thus, of Yoga itself begins to emerge experientially through doing the practices.

**Sutra 3:**

- *Sanskrit:* Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam
- *English:* Then, resulting from that mastery and integration, the seer, the Self rests in its true nature.

Tada = then, at that time; at the time of concentration and meditation

Drashtuh = the seer's, of the soul, witness, Atman, Self; from the root *drsh*, which means *to see* (It is significant to note that Patanjali is not trying to define who is the seer, or the nature of that seer. This is left to be answered or resolved in direct experience.)

Svarupe = in its own nature, own form or essence; the root *sva* means *own*, and *rupa* means form

Avasthanam = stability, settling, remaining, being in a state, resting, standing, lying, abiding; the root *stha* means *to stand*

Discussion: This means that, as a result of having done the process of *nirodhah*, described in the last sutra, the true Self stands alone, unencumbered by our many false identities (described in the next sutra). This standing alone process is why the phrase Self-realization uses the word *realization*, rather than a word like *attainment*. The process is not one of attaining something we do not have, but rather is one of removing the clouds, so as to see the light that is already there.

**Sutra 4:**

- *Sanskrit:* Vritti sarupyam itaratra
- *English:* At other times, when that mastery and integration is not present, the seer or Self appears to take on the forms of the thought patterns in the mind-field.

Vritti = of the operations, activities, fluctuations, modifications, changes, or various forms (of the mind-field)

Sarupyam = similarity, assimilation, appearance of, identification of form or nature, conformity with the shape of; the root *sa* means with, and *rupa* means *form*

Itaratra = elsewhere, at other times, when not in that state of realization above

Discussion: When a metal sculptor wants to make a mold, he might first make a plaster statue, then form the clay mold around that statue. Later, that clay becomes the mold for pouring the liquid metal. The process of the clay taking the form of the original plaster model is the meaning of the seer or Self (which is not really subject to change) appearing to take on the form of the thought pattern stored in the mind-field. When pure consciousness wraps itself around the mental object it encounters, it appears to take on the identity of that object. It is a sort of mistaken identity that results.

**Sutra 5:**

- *Sanskrit:* Vrittayah pancatayah klisha aklisha
- *English:* Those interfering thought patterns are one of [five kinds](#) (correct, incorrect, fantasy, sleep, or memory), and are either [colored or not-colored](#) (colored with [five colorings](#): clouding over of truth, I-am-ness, attachment, aversion, and/or fear).

Vrittayah = the vrittis are

Pancatayah = five fold (and of two kinds); *panch* means *five*

Klisha = colored, painful, afflicted, impure; the root *klish* means *to cause trouble*; (*klesha* is the noun form of the adjective *klisha*)

Aklisha = uncolored, not painful, not afflicted, pure; not imbued with kleshas; the root *a-* means *without* or *in the absence of*; hence, without the coloring called klisha

Discussion: Describing the nature of the five kinds of thoughts and the fact that they are either colored or not colored suggests the entire process of yoga. In that process you gradually, systematically set aside all of the false identities that cloud over the true Self. It does not mean that you stop animating through a personality when engaging the external world, but that are free from those conditionings, and rest in your true nature (sutra 1.3). The nature of this freedom may initially come in glimpses, and become more firm of ground over time, as the practice of meditation grows.

## Outline of the Yoga Sutras in 39 Sections

### CHAPTER 1: Concentration (Samadhi Pada)

- 1: What is Yoga? (1.1-1.4)
- 2: Un-coloring your thoughts (1.5-1.11)
- 3: Practice and non-attachment (1.12-1.16)
- 4: Types of concentration (1.17-1.18) 87
- 5: Efforts and commitment (1.19-1.22)
- 6: Contemplation on AUM or OM (1.23-1.29)
- 7: Obstacles and solutions (1.30-1.32)
- 8: Stabilizing and clearing the mind (1.33-1.39)
- 9: After stabilizing the mind (1.40-1.51)

### CHAPTER 2: Practices (Sadhana Pada)

- 10: Minimizing gross colorings veiling the Self (2.1-2.9)
- 11: Dealing with subtle impressions veiling the Self (2.10-2.11)
- 12: Breaking the alliance of karma (2.12-2.25)
- 13: The 8 rungs of Yoga are for discrimination (2.26-2.29)
- 14: Yamas and Niyamas, rungs 1 and 2 (2.30-2.34)
- 15: Benefits from the Yamas and Niyamas (2.35-2.45)
- 16: Asana or meditation posture, rung 3 of 8 (2.46-2.48)
- 17: Pranayama and breath control, rung 4 of 8 (2.49-2.53)
- 18: Pratyahara or sense withdrawal, rung 5 of 8 (2.54-2.55)

### CHAPTER 3: Progressing (Vibhuti Pada)

- 19: Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi, rungs 6, 7, and 8 (3.1-3.3)
- 20: Samyama is the finer tool (3.4-3.6)
- 21: Internal is seen to be external (3.7-3.8)
- 22: Witnessing subtle transitions with Samyama (3.9-3.16)
- 23: Experiences from Samyama (3.17-3.37)
- 24: What to do with subtle experiences (3.38)
- 25: More attainments from Samyama (3.39-3.49)
- 26: Renunciation that brings kaivalya or liberation (3.50-3.52)
- 27: Higher discrimination through Samyama (3.53-3.56)

### CHAPTER 4: Liberation (Kaivalya Pada)

- 28: Means of attaining experience (4.1-4.3)
- 29: Emergence and mastery of mind (4.4-4.6)
- 30: Actions and karma (4.7-4.8) 346
- 31: Subconscious impressions (4.9-4.12)
- 32: Objects and the 3 gunas (4.13-4.14)
- 33: Mind perceiving objects (4.15-4.17)
- 34: Illumination of the mind (4.18-4.21)
- 35: Buddhi, discrimination, and liberation (4.22-4.26)
- 36: Breaches in enlightenment (4.27-4.28)
- 37: Perpetual enlightenment (4.29-4.30)
- 38: Knowables become few (4.31)
- 39: Gunas and liberation or Kaivalya (4.32-4.34)