



The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali

Patañjali (c. 400 CE) Translated by Charles Johnston (1867 - 1931)

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The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali is a collection of 196 Indian sūtras, or aphorisms, composed in approximately 400 AD by Patañjali. He compiled the book from older materials from two different traditions – the “eight limb yoga” known as ashtanga yoga, also raja yoga, and action yoga, also known as karma yoga. The aphorisms and accompanying commentary constitute the Pātañjalayogaśāstra, which is best translated as “The Treatise on Yoga according to Patañjali”. Yoga Sutras is divided in to four books or padas: Samadhi Pada (51 sutras) describes a blissful state whereby the yogi is absorbed into the One; Sadhana Pada (55 sutras) discusses practices and discipline; Vibhuti (56 sutras) discusses the manifestations of powers brought about by yoga; and

Kaivalya Pada (34 sutras) discusses isolation in the sense of emancipation and liberation. He outlines the system of ashtanga yoga consisting of eight limbs, five of which are external aids to yoga and three of which are internal aids. The Yoga Sutras synthesized the teachings of many philosophical systems and rest on the orthodox Hindu philosophy of Samkhya. The world and its phenomena are classified into 25 sattvas, or principles, and all activity can be seen to lie within the realm of the Gunas of Sattva (illumination), Rajas (passion) and Tamas (lethargy).

Patañjali is a proper name in the Sanskrit language. The name is historically associated with three key documents – the Mahabhasya, a treatise on Sanskrit grammar and linguistics; the Yoga Sutras; and an unspecified work on medicine, or ayurveda. All three works were mistakenly attributed to a single individual for many years, but recent scholarship has revealed three separate creators. The Patañjali who assembled the Yoga Sutras and authored the Bhasya commentary was a native of Kashmir who lived in the fifth century. The name Patañjali is revered by many groups, especially within the Shaivite bhakti tradition, and some believe he was an incarnation of the mythical serpent Ananta. He is believed to have studied with seven under disciples under the great Guru Nanghi Deva, and to have gathered with the gods to watch Shiva and Kali dance and enact the mystic Karanas, which form the backbone of the system of Natya Yoga.

Charles Johnston (1867 – 1931) was an Irish writer, theosophist, and Sanskrit scholar. His father was a member of Parliament from South Belfast and belonged to the Orange Order. Charles was a classmate of poet William Butler Yeats, with whom he co-founded the Hermetic Society. He married a niece of Theosophical Society found Madame Blavatsky and served in the Indian Civil Service and Bengal British Service. In addition to the Yoga Sutras, he translated the Mukhya Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Vedanta Philosophy of Sankaracharya, and authored numerous works on Theosophy and other subjects.