

Yoga

Patanjali is credited with founding the Yoga system, where the term 'Yoga' signifies a spiritual connection between the individual soul and the Universal Soul, as described in Vedanta. In the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga is defined as the ultimate state of realization and inner stability, free from suffering. However, Patanjali's perspective on Yoga differs; he views it as a spiritual endeavor to achieve perfection by mastering the body, senses, and mind, along with discerning between Purusha and Prakriti.

Yoga is closely linked to Sankhya, often considered two facets of the same system. Sankhya provides the theoretical foundation, while Yoga offers practical guidance. Sankhya relies on perception, inference, and testimony as sources of knowledge and encompasses twenty-five metaphysical principles. In contrast, Yoga incorporates these principles and acknowledges God as the highest Self, distinguishing it from classical atheistic Sankhya.

The Yoga-sutra is divided into four sections: Samadhi-pada explains the nature and purpose of concentration, Sadhanapada elucidates the means to achieve this goal, Vibhutipada explores the extraordinary powers attainable through Yoga, and Kaivalyapada delves into the nature of liberation and the essence of the transcendent self.

Yoga promotes mastery over the body, senses, and mind, emphasizing their perfection rather than harming them. A balanced mind relies on a healthy body. The allure of sensory attachments and passions can disrupt both the body and mind, and Yoga offers the Eightfold Path of Discipline (Ashtanga Yoga) to conquer these distractions:

Yama: This entails abstaining from harm in thought, speech, and action (ahimsa), being truthful (satya), not stealing (asteya), practicing chastity (brahmacharya), and avoiding greed (aparigraha).

Niyama: It focuses on self-cultivation, including inner and outer purity (shaucha), contentment (santosa), self-discipline (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), and devotion to the divine (Ishvara pranidhana).

Asana: It involves adopting steady and comfortable postures, which aid in physical well-being and meditation.

Pranayama: This is the regulation of breath, beneficial for health and concentration but should be performed under expert guidance to avoid adverse effects.

Pratyahara: It's about controlling the senses by redirecting them inward, away from external distractions.

These five are considered external aids to Yoga (bahiranga sadhana), while the next three are internal aids (antaranga sadhana):

Dharana: This is the concentration of the mind on a chosen object, like the tip of the nose or the heart's lotus, maintaining unwavering focus.

Dhyana: It's meditation, the uninterrupted flow of thoughts centered on the chosen object, without interruption.

Samadhi: The final step in Yoga, where the mind becomes completely absorbed in the object of meditation, leading to the cessation of mental fluctuations and eventual liberation from worldly connections.