

The History of Yoga

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1. Yoga means joining oneself (*yoga*) firmly to a spiritual discipline (*yoga*), the central element of which is the process (*yoga*) of achieving integration (*yoga*) and full connection (*yoga*) to reality, primarily through scripturally prescribed exercises (*yoga*) characterized by the meta-principle of repeatedly bringing together all the energies of the body, mind, and senses in a single flow (*ekāgratā*) while maintaining tranquil focused presence (*yukta, samāhita*).

2. Yoga in the Indus Valley Civilization? 2500-1700 BCE [hardly likely!]

3. Yoga in the early Vedas? (lit., 'texts of knowledge,' 1800-800 BCE): not in the hymns (*saṃhitās*), but there are early yogic ideas in the priestly knowledge-books (*brāhmaṇas* and *āraṇyakas*)

4. Yoga in the *śramana* movement (600 – 300 BCE)

A. the Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama), 480 – 400 BCE

B. Mahāvīra Jina, founder of Jainism, ca. 550 – 450 BCE

5. Yoga in the Upanishads (lit., 'hidden connections' 700 BCE -100 CE): key teachings

A. "Thou art That" (*tat tvam asi*; Chāndogya Upanishad 6.8.7)

- cf. "I am Brahman!" (*aham brahmāsmi*; Bṛhad-āraṇkaya Up. 1.4.10)
- Practice (*abhyāsa*): SO'HAM japa

B. "Two birds...nestle on the very same tree. One of them eats a tasty fig; the other, not eating, looks on." (Muṇḍaka Upanishad 3.1.1)

- Practice: Witness Consciousness meditation

C. "A divine Self (*ātman*) lies hidden in the heart of a living being...Regard that Self as God, an insight gained through inner contemplation." (Kaṭha Upanishad, ca. 200 BCE)

- Practice: concentrative meditation. "When the five perceptions are stilled, when senses are firmly reined in, that is Yoga."
- Practice: sense-withdrawal & one-pointedness

D. "When he keeps his body straight...and draws the senses together with the mind into his heart, a wise one shall cross all the terrifying rivers with the boat consisting of *Brahman*." (Śvetāśvatara Upanishad 2.8, ca. 200 CE)

- Practice: concentrative meditation

Recommended translations: Juan Mascaro (poetic), Patrick Olivelle (literal), Radhakrishnan (with some commentary)

VI. Yoga in the Bhagavad-gītā (lit., "Song of the Blessed Lord", 100 BCE) [INSPIRED BY 5.C. ABOVE]

- A. Definitions of Yoga: "Yoga is skill in action"; "Yoga is the severance of union with pain," "Yoga is equanimity."

- B. Karma-yoga: the Yoga of Action. "Be intent on action, not on the fruits of action. . . . Perform actions, firm in discipline, relinquishing attachment." (2.47-48)
- C. Jñāna-yoga: the Yoga of Insight. "When a man is unattached and free, his reason immersed in knowledge, acting only in sacrifice, his karma is wholly dissolved." (4.23)
"Knowledge will let you see all beings within your Self, and so in Me." (4.35)
- D. Dhyāna-yoga: the Yoga of Meditation. "Disciplining himself, his mind controlled, a yogi finds peace, the pure calm that exists in Me. . . . When his controlled thought rests within the Self alone, without craving objects of desire, he is said to be disciplined." (6.15 & 18)
- E. Bhakti-yoga: the Yoga of Devotion. "Surrender all actions to the Divine, and fix your reason on your inner Self." (2.30) "Keep your mind on Me, be My devotee, sacrificing, bow to Me --you will come to Me, I promise, for you are dear to Me." (18.65)

Recommended translations: Barbara Stoler Miller, R.C. Zaehner, J.A.B. van Buitenen, Graham Schweig

VII. Classical Yoga of Patañjali (flourished 400-1100 CE) [Developed from 5.B. ABOVE]

- A. Definition of Yoga: "Yoga is [the state in which] the fluctuations of the mind have become still." (1.2)
- B. Fruit of Yoga: "Then the Seer abides in its own true nature." (1.3)
- C. Philosophical framework (same as Sāṅkhya): two basic principles of reality, that is, 1. pure (contentless) consciousness, i.e. the inner Self (*puruṣha*), and 2. materiality, including mind & body (*prakṛti*); the misidentification of 1. and 2. is the cause of suffering (this duality rejected by Tantrik Yoga)
- D. Eight Components of Yoga practice. (accepted in Tantrik Yoga)
1. Yama (non-violence, truth, non-stealing, sexual restraint, greedlessness)
 2. Niyama (purity, contentment, austerity, study of sacred lore, surrender to the Divine)
 3. Āsana (meditation posture)
 4. Prānāyāma (breath regulation)
 5. Pratyāhāra (sense-withdrawal)
 6. Dhāranā (concentration)
 7. Dhyāna (meditation)
 8. Samādhi (immersion)

Recommended translations: Edwin Bryant, Chip Hartranft, Barbara Stoler Miller, Matthew Remski

VIII. The Jñāna-yoga of Vedānta (flourished 800 CE - present) [BASED ON 5.A. ABOVE]

- A. Philosophical framework: there is only one existent thing, Brahman, whose nature is Being, Consciousness, and Bliss; the perception of multiplicity is illusion (*māyā*). [the first statement accepted by Tantra, the second rejected.] This ignorance is remedied only by scriptural knowledge (*Upaniṣads, Bhagavad-gītā, Brahma-sūtra*).

B. Quote: The highest [Brahman]--which is of the nature of Perception, like the sky, ever-shining, unborn, one alone, imperishable, stainless, all-pervading, and non-dual--That am I and I am forever released. OM. I am Perception, pure and by nature changeless. Being the infinite, I am unborn, abiding in Myself...self-effulgent, all-pervading, non-dual, neither cause nor effect, always satisfied and therefore [always] released. OM." (*Upadesha-sāhasrī*, translated by Sengaku Mayeda [recommended])

C. Note: Vedānta also incorporates the teachings of the Bhagavad-gītā, and later becomes Tantrified; therefore modern Vedānta does not take the hard line of ancient Vedānta (that knowledge alone liberates and all practices besides contemplation of the scriptures are useless)

IX. Tantrik Yoga (500 - 1200 CE, with influence down to present) [DISTANTLY RELATED TO 5.D. ABOVE]

A. Tantric definitions of Yoga: "Yoga is said to be self-mastery." "Yoga is [realization of] the oneness of one entity with another." "Yoga arises from the influence of Śakti."

B. Key teachings of Tantra (for 0, substitute any term for the Divine):

1. 0 dwells within you as you
2. See 0 in all beings
3. Nothing exists that is not 0

C. Types of Tantric yoga: *mantra-yoga*, *kriyā-yoga*, *laya-yoga*, *kuṇḍalinī-yoga*, *ṣaḍaṅga-yoga*, *jnāna-yoga*, *bhakti-yoga*, more (these are not separate paths, but interrelated modes)

D. Key practices: meditation, *prāṇāyāma*, mantra, *mudrā*, visualizations, focusing on centers of the subtle body, *karaṇa* (early yoga poses), releasing the energy locked up in mental constructs, more

E. Key concepts: shakti, *spanda*, *upāya*, *līlā*, *shaktipāta*, *kuṇḍalinī*, *chakras*

F. Philosophical framework: see "The View," p. 55 of *Tantra Illuminated*

Recommended reading: my book *Tantra Illuminated*; *Introduction to Tantra* by Lama Yeshe, "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions" available from alexissanderson.com; my dissertation on Tantric philosophy and practice. Most everything else available is either not about original Tantra or severely distortive.

X. Haṭha-Yoga (1200-present; a combination of Tantrik techniques and ascetic practices; founded by Gorakṣha (aka Gorakh-nāth)—the traditional Indian basis for modern yoga)

A. Purpose: to strengthen and empower the body; to awaken the *kuṇḍalinī*; to exert physical and psychic effort that will make the attainment of meditative absorption (*samādhi* aka *rāja-yoga*) almost effortless

B. Key practices (in ascending order of importance): purification, *āsana*,

mudrā, pratyahāra, prānāyāma, meditation

- C. Quotes: "Salutations to Shiva, who taught the science of Hatha-Yoga. It is the aspirant's stairway to the heights of Rāja-yoga. Yogi Svātmārāma, after saluting the Lord and Guru, explains the science of Force (Hatha) for one reason—Rāja-yoga (meditative attainment)." ~ *Hatha-pradīpikā* 1.1-2 [translation Brian Akers] "Yoga perishes by these six: overeating, overexertion, chattering/gossiping, needless austerities, socializing, and restlessness. Yoga succeeds by these six: enthusiasm, openness, courage, knowledge of the truth, determination, and solitude." ~ *Hatha-pradīpikā* 1.15-16 [translation Brian Akers]

Other key texts: The *Viveka-mārtanda*, the *Śāradā-tilaka* (translated by Gudrun Buhnemann); *Gheraṇḍa Samhita*, the *Shiva Samhitā* (both translated by James Mallinson, available from YogaVidya.com)

XI. Modern Yoga

- A. "Modern postural yoga" (MPY) was "redacted" by Krishnamāchārya in the early 1930s in Mysore (after studying with Kuvalayānanda in Mahārāṣṭra), drawing on the Haṭha-yoga texts and oral traditions as well as the Western physical culture such as "harmonial gymnastics" (see Singleton's *Yoga Body*).
1. Indra Devī (first to bring MPY to the West, in the 1940s)
 2. B.K.S. Iyengar
 3. Pattābhi Jois
 4. T.K.V. Desikachar (Krishnamāchārya's son)
 5. Etc. (NB: all modern forms of postural yoga trace directly back to Krishnamāchārya, except that taught by the disciples of guru #5 below)

Recommended reading: *Yoga Body* by Mark Singleton

- B. "Modern meditational yoga" was first transmitted to the West in 1893 (by #1 below), with several more significant transmissions between 1965 - 1970 (e.g., #2-5 below)

1. Vivekānanda (of Rāmakrishna's lineage), founded Vedānta Society in NY and CA
2. Muktānanda (of Nityānanda's lineage, lineage also includes Gurumayī Chidvilāsānandā [Siddha Yoga], Rudrānanda or "Rudi", etc.)
3. Chögyam Trungpa (Kagyū and Nyingma lineages, Tibetan Buddhism)
4. Tarthang Tulku (Nyingma, taught Kum Nye Tibetan yoga, Berkeley CA)
5. Swāmī Shivānanda of Rishikesh, with several famous disciples
 - a. Satyānanda, founder of Bihar School of Yoga
 - b. Satchidānanda of Integral Yoga (Yogaville, VA)
 - c. Vishnudevānanda of the Śivānanda Yoga Vedānta Centers

Recommended reading: *Play of Consciousness* by Muktānanda, *Spiritual Materialism* by Trungpa, *Skillful Means* by Tarthang Tulku, *Sure Ways to Self-Realization* by Satyānanda, *Sādhana of the Heart* by Gurumayī, etc.