

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are 196 Indian sutras (aphorisms). The Yoga Sutras were compiled around 400 CE by Sage Patanjali, taking materials about yoga from older traditions. Together with his commentary they form the Pātañjala yogaśāstra.

This article will give a brief description about the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali within the context of the IAS Exam.

Origin of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

The manuscripts of the Yoga Sutras are believed to be the work of Patanjali. But the identity of Patanjali has been a subject of academic debate as an author of the same name is credited to writing the classic text on Sanskrit grammar named Mahabhasya. Yet the two works are completely different from one another in terms of language, vocabulary and grammar.

It is believed by scholars that Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are dated from 400 AD based on the history of the commentaries published in the first millennium AD and on the opinions of earlier Sanskrit Commentators. This dating for the Pātañjalayogaśāstra was proposed as early as 1914 has been accepted widely by academic scholars of the history of Indian philosophical thought.

The Sutras fell into relative obscurity for nearly 700 years from the 12th to 19th century before coming to the fore in the late 19th century through the efforts of Swami Vivekananda and the Theosophical society among others. It gained prominence again as a comeback classic in the 20th century.

Contents of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are divided into four chapters containing all 196 aphorisms. They are as follows:

1. **Samadhi Pada:** Samadhi refers to a state of direct and reliable perception (pramana) where the yogi's self-identity is absorbed into pure consciousness, collapsing the categories of witness, witnessing, and witnessed.
2. **Sadhana Pada:** Sadhana is the Sanskrit word for "practice" or "discipline". Here the author outlines two systems of Yoga: Kriyā Yoga and Ashtanga Yoga (Eightfold or Eight Limbed Yoga).

3. **Vibhuti Pada:** Vibhuti is the Sanskrit word for "power" or "manifestation".
'Combined simultaneous practice of Dhāraṇā, Dhyana and Samādhi is referred to as Samyama, and is considered a tool of achieving various perfections, or Siddhis.
4. **Kaivalya Pada:** Kaivalya literally translates to "isolation", but as used in the Sutras stands for emancipation or liberation and is used where other texts often employ the term moksha (liberation).

Definition of Yoga as per the Sutras of Patanjali

Patanjali defines yoga as having eight components they are as follows:

1. Yamas: Yamas are ethical vows in the Yogic tradition and can be thought of as moral imperatives. The commentaries on these teachings of Patanjali state how and why each of the above self restraints help in the personal growth of an individual.

2. Niyama: Niyama includes virtuous habits, behaviors and observances

3. Asana: Asana is a meditation posture that one can hold for a period of time, staying relaxed, steady, comfortable and motionless. Patanjali does not list any specific asana, except the terse suggestion, "posture one can hold with comfort and motionlessness".

4. Pranayama: Pranayama is made out of two Sanskrit words prāṇa (breath) and ayama, (restraining). This is done in several ways, inhaling and then suspending exhalation for a period, exhaling and then suspending inhalation for a period, slowing the inhalation and exhalation, consciously changing the time/length of breath (deep, short breathing).

5. Pratyahara: Pratyahara means not taking any input or any information from the sense organs. It is a process of retracting the sensory experience from external objects. It is a step of self extraction and abstraction.

6. Dharana: Dharana as the sixth limb of yoga, is holding one's mind onto a particular inner state, subject or topic of one's mind. Fixing the mind means one-pointed focus, without drifting of mind, and without jumping from one topic to another.

7. Dhyana: Dhyana is contemplating, reflecting on whatever Dharana has focused on. If in the sixth limb of yoga one focused on a personal deity, Dhyana is its contemplation. Dhyana is integrally related to Dharana, one leads to another. Dharana is a state of mind, Dhyana the process of mind.

8. Samadhi: Samadhi is oneness with the subject of meditation. There is no distinction, during the eighth limb of yoga, between the actor of meditation, the act of meditation and the subject of meditation.