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Patanjali lived around 200 B.C. He was born in Takshashila, the site of the world's first university and perhaps the world's leading repository of spiritual teachings. Patanjali was also called Dakṣa, which means "first-born son of God, whose role is to disentangle or to move humanity forward."

The sutras cannot be fully understood without contextualizing Patanjali and the times in which he lived. Like Buddha before him, Patanjali was alive and revealed the *Yoga Sutra* at the end of the era that has been described as the decline (or dark period) of Vedic wisdom. Similar to Buddha, Patanjali cut through orthodoxy, blind ritual and superstition with a powerful and practical message: take care of your distinct identity; if you are to overcome suffering, you must address it and its causes. Thus, Patanjali used dualism to present his system of yoga.

A dualistic philosophy is critical if you are trying to convince seekers to take responsibility for themselves and the quality of their life. It is predicated on the principle that your fate is not preordained or in the hands of a priest or religious dogma. You are the master of your destiny and it is up to you to see this and respond accordingly. Through self-effort you can come into alignment with your perfect self. The system of yoga as outlined by Patanjali tells you to first acknowledge that you do suffer; then understand that there is a part of you that is beyond suffering and finally, seek to apply the practices and experiences that can lead you beyond suffering.



Samkhya is the philosophical blueprint for the sutras.

Its distinctive features are:

- dualism, distinguishing between *prakriti* (nature—that which is always changing) and *purusha* (consciousness—that which is pure, unchanging, essential, immortal)
- distinct as a spiritual system, *Samkhya* does not rely on a belief in God.

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SECRETS OF THE SUTRAS M5

Timeline of the Vedas, Sutra and Tantra





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**Yógena cittasya padená vacāṃ
málāṃ sáríráśya ca vaidyákeṇa**

**Yópākarottamṃ pravaramṃ munināṃ pátánjálīm
prāñjalirāná tosmī**

**Ábāhu purusākāramṃ sankhacakrāsí dhāriṇam
sáhásrasirasámṃ svetamṃ práñámami pátanjalim**

Srī mate anantāyá nāgarājaya namo namaḥ

I pray to Patanjali, heir of the great sages, who gave us the knowledge of Ayurveda to remove impurities of the body, Sanskrit grammar to remove impurities of speech, and Yoga to remove impurities of the mind.

I bow completely to Patanjali, who, with a thousand heads and a pure white complexion above his shoulders, a human body below, carries a conch, a disc and a sword.

I pay homage and bow perpetually to the serpent king, Adishesha.



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The first word of the *Sutra* is *atha* meaning “auspicious beginning.” Above all else, the *Yoga Sutra* is a system of practice. The last words of the text, *chiti shaktih* and *iti*, refers to the ever-awakened power of consciousness (*chiti shakti*) that is our final destination (*iti*). The single most vital preparation is having a teacher. A teacher is necessary to comment and elaborate on the teachings and give insight to the text's critical details.

Yoga is not necessarily about learning to restrain the forces of mind. It is a means to calm the “mind's tendency toward restlessness” (*vritti* = “to roam,” “to spin”). The intention of stopping its movement is to make it possible to attend to the present moment as well as to unveil your inner luminosity. In order to overcome the restlessness of the mind, you'll utilize not just your mind. You'll combine *asana*, *pranayama*, relaxation, concentration and meditation.

Sutra 1:3 tells us that our essential nature (*svarupa*) is only revealed to a still mind. Soul is pure and divine, never subject to change. When awareness of it is mixed with disturbances within the mind (or spinning), the soul loses its self-awareness. On the other hand, once your self-luminous essence shines forth, you see that it lights all of life.

When you are not resting in your true nature, you are identified with thought, agitation and disturbance, in which case your mind roams from object to object. Whereas a one-pointed, inwardly focused mind is illumined by the eternal light residing within you.



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The key to gaining access to the luminous guiding intelligence—the power of consciousness (*chiti shakti*)—is mastery of mind. To access it, you must overcome the mind's roaming tendencies. These are the five states of mind, the first three of which must be overcome if you are to achieve the state of yoga:

- *kshipta* – disturbed, chaotic, no control of the mind, i.e. schizophrenia, psychosis
- *mudha* – stupefied, prevents us from being focused or accessing the higher nature of mind; people who are highly emotional fall into this category where their moods overshadow their objectivity
- *vikshipta* – distracted, restless, diffused; this is the mental state of most yoga seekers; the mind has desires for achieving its higher capacities but is restless, unable to sustain one-pointedness
- *ekagrata* – one pointed; this is a still-present-moment-aware mind capable of steadiness and clarity
- *nirodha* – no more mental spinning, the pristine luminous qualities are revealed; in this state you are free; the seeker and sought are one

Yoga is the process of moving from distraction to one-pointedness to freedom. To achieve it, you must engage your power of will and determination (*sankalpa shakti*).



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Two terms, *abhyasa* ("practice") and *vairagya* ("non-attachment") are introduced and defined. In these sutras, practice involves a two-part process of one, turning away from the external, material, objective world and two, turning inward, focusing the mind and training it to rest in the inner world. The point of practice is to create positive/constructive impressions (*samskara*).

This is how you form new, spiritually enlivened thoughts and thought patterns; your negative thought habits are gradually replaced by new, inspired and elevated ones.

Vyasa expands on the idea of practice, telling us that practice is the endeavor to stay "there." "There," he indicates, is *sthiti*, which he defines as the "continuity of mind devoid of all fluctuations or undisturbed calmness." *Sthiti* is not a goal or object. It is the mind's essential nature, in which you will learn to be established. From this state all things are accessible and without it, nothing is. Thus, practice is the effort to remain established in the continuity of tranquility.

If practice is going to deliver you to this stated goal, it must be done for a long time, without interruption and done with love/reverence.

Sutras 1:15 and 1:16 describe nonattachment (*vairagya*), which means "without coloring," "detachment," "renunciation" or "to be free of craving." The perfect embodiment of *vairagya* occurs when any or all



things stop having meaningful, constructive value. *Vairagya* leads to recognition of those things that bind you. Vyasa on *vairagya*: "Anything that contributes to the confusion of our mind should not be honored, for only a clear mind can help us see the light." In other words, if something is causing the mind to spin, we must apply non-attachment to it in order to overcome it and rediscover truth.

The Steps of Detachment:

- *yatamana* – understanding and acknowledgement; pay attention to your thoughts, speech, and actions; discover your role in the world; ask yourself these questions: "What am I attached to?" "Why am I attached to it?" "How does it serve me?"
- *vryatireka* – the processes to eliminate these forces; could be a variety of practices; isolate the habits and attenuate those habits (practice)
- *ekendriya* – purify the one sense that got you there – one of the five senses; work with this sensory awareness in order to be free; meditate on that sense until you realize it is no longer pulling you and creating disturbance
- *vasikara* – dispassion, sense of freedom, no longer wanting liberation; this enables you to be a master of yourself, to be free from the dictates of even religion and spirituality

The highest form of *vairagya* is the non-attachment that arises from recognizing your highest nature. At this stage, the invisible forces of the *gunas* no longer affect you. In time, as you experience that which is beyond the *gunas*, you are less and less pulled by them.



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Sutra 1:17 tells us that all objects known to the mind can be classified into four categories:

- physical
- mental objects, ideas/thoughts
- the inherent joy that is found as we access the reservoir of sense-pleasure
- the pure sense of I-am-ness

Depending on which of these objects you use in your meditation, you have the possibility to reach varying levels of *samadhi*. These are the levels in order, from lowest to highest:

- the first level is *vitarka* ("perceptible object" or "to reason"), in which your concentration on a material object reveals a clear sense of yourself
- the second level is *vichara* ("to reflect or contemplate"), where you meditate on a kind of thought or feeling; this will have the effect of pulling you to other thoughts or mental ideas
- the third level is *ananda* ("joy," "bliss"), which is reached by meditating on the inherent feeling of joy behind your thoughts; this is the pleasure that is constant, not externally dependent; its affect creates future disturbance by germinating more desires for other forms of bliss



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- the fourth level is *asmita* ("egoism"), which is accessed by meditating on the pure sense of I-am-ness; ultimate absorption of this type leads to involuntary spinning of the mind as it searches for the sense of I-am-ness in other objects

The teaching is making the point that while all of these levels are profound, there is a necessarily associative mental "spinning" in each of them. There is still much deepening to do before one can achieve the highest levels of *samadhi*.

In the highest state of *samadhi* ("spiritual absorption") the yogi's awareness (of the object, the process of meditation and the self as the source of meditation) is left behind. This opens the gate to ultimate freedom and power. You now rest in a world and quality of being that is beyond time, space and causation.

Sutra 1:21 tells us that success on this path comes to those who exercise intense desire. This emphasizes the necessity of intentionality to attain victory over the mind. The lowest level of desire is little more than curiosity. The intermediate level is more intentional, but invariably obstacles will stand in the way of the highest achievements. Highest level aspirants are endowed with an intense desire that consumes all others. They will settle for nothing other than the supreme achievement.