



Philosophy of Ashtaang Yoga *(Eight limbs of Yoga)*

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‘Yoga’ is the most heard word nowadays not only in India but also across the globe. The ancient Indian sages had acquired the knowledge of ‘yoga’ by long drawn ascetic practices & self-enlightenment. The term ‘yoga’ in modern times is being used in more than one sense. Many teachers of Yoga have been using the term ‘yoga’ in the sense of physical exercises or drills. According to Sanskrit literature & Sanskrit grammar, the true meaning of the word ‘yoga’ is union of two abstract entities. Just as two tangible objects when added or connected together form a common object, likewise the connection or union of the soul with the Supreme Soul or Almighty is called ‘Yoga’. The true & classical meaning of the term ‘yoga’ is therefore not a physical exercise or drill but union of soul with Supreme Soul i.e. God.

The great Indian grammaticist, physician & scholar of ‘yoga’ Patanjali is the most widely acknowledged authority on the knowledge of ‘yoga’ & his famous creation ‘Paatanjal Yog Darshan’ is considered to be the most authentic literature on the science or art of ‘Yoga’. Certain important definitions of the term ‘Yoga’ are found in ancient Indian literatures as under...

- (i) **Yogashchittavritti Nirodhah (Sutra No. 2, Paatanjal Yog Drashan) :** ‘Yoga’ means complete restraint over the subjects of different organs, visible or invisible.

- (ii) **Yogah Karmashu Kaushalam (Bhagwadgita)** : Yoga' is the skill of acting with equipoise (or evenmindedness in all conditions)
- (iii) **Samattwam Yog Uchyate (Bhagwadgita)** : Being evenminded (in respect of success and failure) is called 'Yoga'.

According to Maharshi Patanjali there are eight parts of Yoga which are called 'Ashtanga Yoga'. These eight parts of Yoga as described by sage Patanjali in his famous 'Yogdarshan' are as under....

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| 1. Yama | 2. Niyama |
| 3. Asana | 4. Pranayama |
| 5. Pratyahara | 6. Dharana |
| 7. Dhyana | 8. Samadhi |

1. **YAMA** : It is a self imposed code of good conduct in one's relation to other beings in general and to the human society in particular . There are following five important parts of Yama....

(i) **Ahimsa** : Non-violence or not to cause hurt to anybody physically & mentally by deeds, words or thoughts.

(ii) **Satya** : Truthfulness by words, deeds & thoughts.

(iii) **Aparigraha** : Not to hoard unnecessary wealth or material belongings.

(iv) **Asteya** : Not to grab or usurp anybody else's property.

(v) **Brahmacharya** : Observance of celibacy in actions & thoughts.

2. **Niyama** : This means cleanliness & purification of one's body & self both from within & without. There are following five modes of purification of body & self...

(i) **Shoucha** : Internal & external cleanliness or purification of body & self.

- (ii) **Tapa** : Religious austerity
- (iii) **Swadhyaya** : Study of holy scriptures.
- (iv) **Ishawar Pranidhana** : Surrendering with devotion to the Almighty.
- (v) **Santosha** : Contentment.

3. **Asanas** : ‘Asana’ means proper physical (Yogic) posture. Practice of asana enables one to keep his body flexible & strong. There are different Bandhas & Mudras for sitting in proper yogic asanas. Different yogic asanas render help in keeping the internal organs of the body toned up & observing concentration of mind.

4. **Pranayama** : Regulation of breath. Pranayama regulates and augments the performance of the respiratory and the circulatory system & also helps control the mind.

5. **Pratyahara** : Withdrawal of sense organs from the sense objects.

6. **Dharana** : Concentration at a particular point to the exclusion of any other object.

7. **Dhyana** : Meditation with unbroken attention on the object of concentration.

8. **Samadhi** : Complete absorption of one’s self in the object of meditation. In Samadhi there is complete absence of one’s identity which merges in its goal.

The science or art of yoga practiced by ancient Indian sages had attained near perfection. Some important sort of yogas practiced by rishis (sages) in ancient India were as under...

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| 1. Bhakti Yoga | 2. Gyana Yoga |
| 3. Karma Yoga | 4. Vihangam Yoga or Sahaj Yoga |
| 5. Raja Yoga | 6. Hatha Yoga |
| 7. Kundalini Yoga | 8. Laya Yoga |

Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga & Gyan Yoga etc: These all are small fragments of Vihangam Yoga & they automatically come into a person who practices Vihangam Yoga. The word ‘Vihangam’ means ‘bird’. As a bird floats in the air over-coming the gravitational force of the earth, so does the consciousness of the soul in the limitless space of pure consciousness leaving behind it’s physical base i.e. body, mind & intellect. Cessation of mental activities has been defined as Yoga by sage Patanjali. Raja Yoga is thus a prelude or introductory event to Vihangam Yoga. Vihangam yoga therefore begins where Raja Yoga ends.

Vihangam Yoga: Maharishi Patanjali, in his Paatanajal Yogdarshan, defines ‘Vihangam Yoga’ as the union of soul with supreme soul (Almighty). This union is achieved after the soul frees itself from the shackles of the mind and intellect and attains it’s pure conscious state. The supreme soul is a purely conscious entity and is beyond the reach of the mind & intellect. The mind and intellect are inert by themselves and are activated by the consciousness of the soul. An inert object cannot reach a conscious entity, far less unite with or merge in it and therefore the physical yogas cannot reach the ideal of Vihangam Yoga.

Role of food, sleep & routine in Yoga : Under chapter 6, verses 16 & 17 of the holy Bhagwadgita , Lord Krishna declares that the Yoga or the object of yoga cannot be achieved by one who eats too much or too little and nor by one who sleeps too much or too little. Yoga is the destroyer of all griefs and it can be achieved only by those who regulate their food & recreation and strive according to their capacity and sleep in moderation.

Many experts and scholars on the science of Yoga are of the view that the three popular yogas i.e. Gyana yoga, Bhakti yoga & Karma yoga are not the real paths to attainment of never-ending supreme happiness. Unless the Reality is known by Gyana yoga, neither Bhakti yoga nor Karma yoga can be practiced successfully. The attainment of full knowledge automatically leads to Nishkama Karma (unattached actions) and the innate nature of individual soul in relation to the Supreme Soul being that of a servant and Master. Full knowledge is only possible by unbroken devotion (Bhakti yoga) to Him i.e. the Almighty.

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