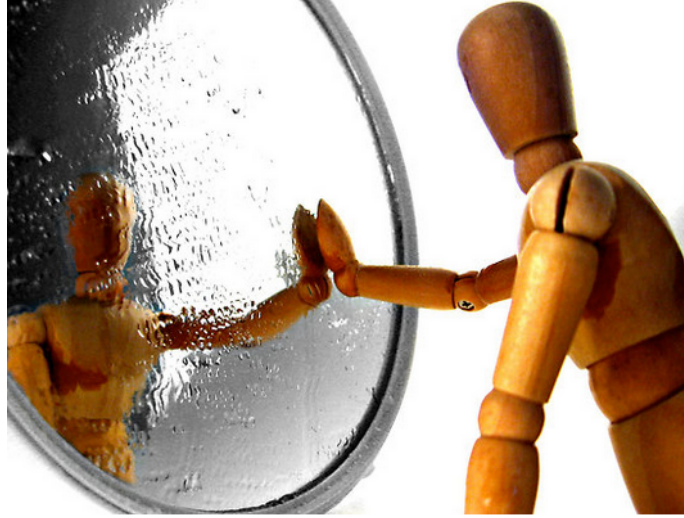


The Eight Limbs of Yoga – Science of the Soul



The Eight-Limbs of Yoga is the structural frame work of yoga, as outlined in the Yoga Sutra compiled approximately 2000 years ago by Patanjali, for controlling our restless minds so that we have better focus to engage fully in our daily lives. The very first stanza of the Yoga Sutra states clearly what the purpose of yoga is.

“Yogas **Chitta** vritti nirodah
Tada drastuh svarupe vasthanam”
(Yoga Sutra 1.1-1.4)

*Yoga is stilling the fluctuations of the mind
Then one abides in their own true nature.*

What is the mind?

In order to still the mind, it is important to first understand what the mind (chitta) is. **Chitta** in Sanskrit means memory. In effect, the mind is the storehouse of a person’s memory, experiences and deeply embedded samskaras (impressions of actions). It is composed of what it receives in the sense organs and ingrained as lasting impressions.

There are **three levels of the mind**;

1. *Conscious mind*: the functioning awake state
2. *Subconscious mind*: the dreaming state
3. *Unconscious mind*: the deep sleep state

Within the various levels of the mind, lay our deep desires, which often cannot be manifested due to confusion, repression, negative experiences and lack of clarity. Such psychological issues are caused by imbalances in **four basic human needs and instincts**;



- . *Food:* Imbalance in nutrition, over indulgence
- . *Fear:* Triggering fight or flight, hiding from our fears limits us
- . *Sleep:* Too much sleep causes laziness or signifying depression, too little sleep causes inefficiency and poor health
- . *Sex/Entertainment:* Over indulgence causes addictions, deprivation causes frustration

An important purpose of yoga is the management of these four basic human needs and instincts. For example, if we run from our fears, and not face them, it will cause psychological problems, such as phobias, or manifest in physical illnesses, such as asthma and other ailments.

How does one still the mind?

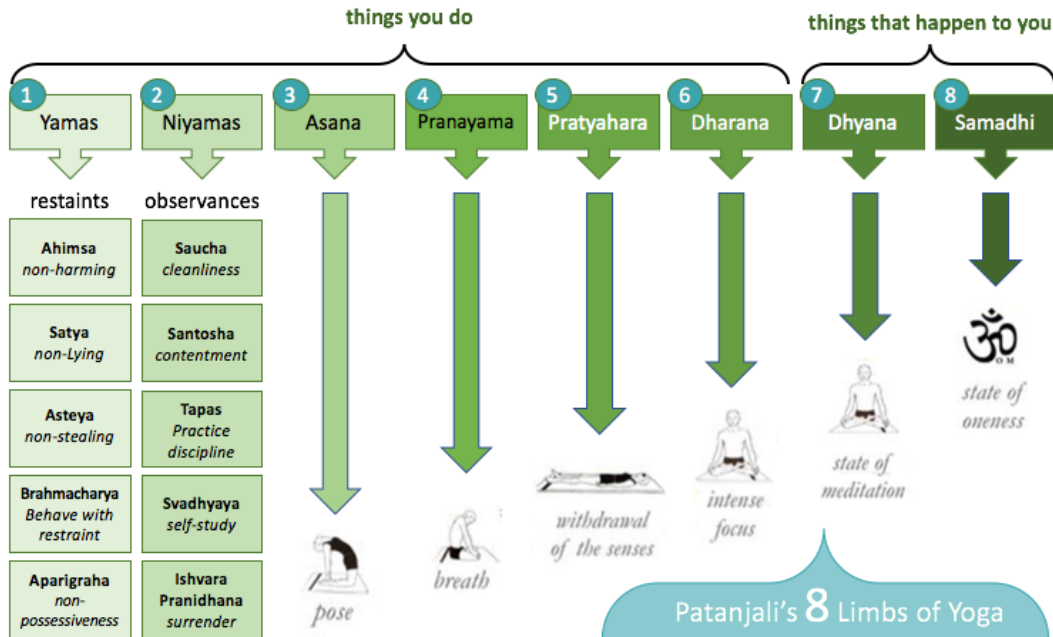
Patanjali designed a scientific methodology to still the mind, called the Eight Limbs of Yoga, so that people may evolve to their fullest potential. Yoga is an internal experiment, whereas science is an outer experiment. Many people seek the same results through an organized religion. However, yoga is experiential, not based on faith, but rather on resolve and practice. This means that yoga can be practiced across all faiths to serve as a tool to reach a common goal among people of all religions. In other words, yoga is a personal religion, compatible with any creed or congregation.

Starting Point

Although the Eight Limbs of Yoga teaches us the process to reach a no-mind and awakened state, without our resolve and correct understanding of the practices, Patanjali's blueprint for self-evolution is ineffectual. Our commitment to sadhana (daily spiritual practice) is the starting point of your yogic journey.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

Also known as Ashtanga Yoga (eight limbs) or Raja Yoga (Kingly path of self-discipline), the Eight Limbs of yoga is a method of self-realization in 8 progressive steps. However, various practices must be done in synchronicity to develop in organic unity.



1st Limb: Yamas

Yoga takes us on an inward journey from the external to the internal. The first limb is the Yamas, a code of social conduct. The 5 rules of Yamas are external disciplines to help people live harmoniously in a society and to direct their energy positively.

Yamas

1. **Ahimsa:** practice non-violence and non-harm physically, verbally and emotionally
2. **Satya:** practice truthfulness and honesty
3. **Asteya:** No stealing, materially, personally and intellectually
4. **Bramacharya:** Behave with restraint and good intentions (Traditionally known as the practice of celibacy but recently, the aspect of “Godly behavior” has become the focus of this practice.)
5. **Aparigraha:** practice non-possessiveness

2nd Limb: Niyamas

Positive external conduct of a person cannot be achieved if we are not in command of our actions. The second limb is the Niyamas, the code of personal conduct, consisting of 5 rules of internal discipline to help us live harmoniously with others, prevent personal accumulation of negative karma and, ultimately, to reduce unnecessary suffering for ourselves. In effect, both the Yamas and the Niyamas create guidelines for people to live mindfully and in peace, while avoiding creating negative energy. It takes more energy to be in conflict with others, to maintain lies or to be jealous than live a wholesome life with honesty contentment, then we are that much happier.



Niyamas

1. **Saucha:** practice of physical and mental cleanliness
2. **Santosa:** practice of contentment, be satisfied with what you have
3. **Tapas:** practice discipline
4. **Svadyaya:** practice self-reflection, awareness of one's mind and actions
5. **Ishvara Pranidhana:** practice of devotion to align one's energy to higher consciousness and to the ideals of one's pure awareness

To live completely abiding by the yamas and niyamas is a challenge in our daily lives. A good way to begin is by picking one yama and niyama closest to your nature and makes an effort to stick to these conducts. By doing so, you will gradually shift towards living a life closer to the ideals which the moral codes of conduct outlines. For example, if you pick to abide by satya (practice of truthfulness), then naturally, you would practice asteya (no stealing).

3rd Limb: Asana

Asana is the practice of mastering the body to sit still in meditation. The Sanskrit etymology of the word means cushion, which is used for sitting in a meditative pose. The physical postures, purposefully created for the asana practice, must be done with body, mental and breath awareness. Without awareness, nor adhering to the yamas and niyamas, the practitioner is only doing physical exercise, not yoga. For example, the first Yama, ahimsa (non-violence) must also be practiced during asana practice. Treat the body as a friend and move gently into the posture, never using force. Steadiness and ease of asana postures can be gained through daily practice, and gradually, the body becomes stronger, more flexible and lean. The third niyama, tapas (discipline), is also necessary to make asana practice a sadhana (daily practice). Getting to know our physical bodies is the first step to gaining self-awareness and preparing ourselves for the breathing and meditation practices. Many people misunderstand asana to be the entirety of yoga or over emphasize the practice. It is crucial to remember that the physical postures are only one aspect among the Eight Limbs of Yoga.

4th Limb: Pranayama

Pranayama is breathing practice to control the flow of prana, the vital life force, and to deepen one's physical and mental awareness in deep relaxation. The word pranayama is a compound Sanskrit word. Prana means subtle energy and yama means dimension or medium to direct. Although the physical benefits of the practice are undeniable, ranging from controlling the heart rate to purifying the lungs, it also balances the mental and emotional state of a person. It is the first stage of advanced yoga practices, followed by



the meditative limbs of yoga. In pranayama, the breath acts as a bridge to connect the body and mind. Asana and pranayama practices gradually opens up our deepest personal conditioning and makes us aware of the suffering this conditioning generates.

5th Limb: Pratyahara

Pratyahara is the practice of detaching from the sense organs. It brings us to a state of complete relaxation and leads our awareness inward, getting closer towards stilling the mind. Often a calming sensation of “coming home” is experienced by the practitioner. The word pratyahara is composed of two Sanskrit words. Prati means “against” or “away” and ahara means “food” and together conveys the meaning of gaining mastery over external influences. Yoga Nidra is an example of a pratyahara practice where a person lays in a relaxed position on his or her back with the neck and spine straight, and is guided by a teacher through a sensory awareness meditation. The purpose of this practice is to give full focus on one sensation at a time while detaching from other sensations in a deep state of relaxation.

6th Limb: Dharana

Dharana is the practice of one pointed concentration where an actual object or a visualized image in the mind is used as a focal point of awareness in order to prevent the mind from wandering. This stage of practice marks the practitioner’s arrival at “the door to the house” of meditation. A teacher can guide a student up to this stage of development. From here on forward, the student must practice and venture him or herself to the next level of meditation. An example of dharana practice is Trataka, where a practitioner stares at the tip of the wick of a lit candle flame while sitting still in a meditative posture, and later visualizing the flame with eyes closed. Through the use of visual aid to lock one’s concentration, the ability to be in the present moment, without mind chatter, can be prolonged.

7th Limb: Dhyana

Dhyana is the practice of meditation where the practitioner is fully in the present moment for a period of time. This state can be achieved only through complete stillness of the body and the mind, and is the culmination of all the previous practices. Meditation eliminates mind’s afflictions of ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion and longing for life, and thus prepares us for the final limb of yoga.

8th Limb: Samadhi

Samadhi is the indescribable state of experiencing unity with all that is in the universe. It is the awakening to the divine essence of who we really are and thus gaining access to all knowing. The mind no longer dominates our awareness and stops comprehending the world in dualities. The true self, the



divine essence, takes charge of the mind and the body to live authentically without afflictions and to be free from the vicious cycle of karma. Yogic discipline takes us to this ultimate stage of human evolution by balancing and opening the body's 7 energy centers (chakras), working up from the root up to the final crown chakra in progression.

Begin your inward journey of self-discovery

Why pass up on a good adventure? Yoga is experiential. We can read about it but experiencing yoga teaches us far more. The Eight Limbs of Yoga is a tried and tested method, taking us on our inward journey to discover our true potentials. Our commitment to discipline is the only ticket we would need.