

## YOGA - THE MOST WELL KNOWN COMPILATIONS

Yoga has been written about in the Hindu mythological literature on many occasions. Some of the compilations are used till today and are published and discussed in various ways. The main ones are:

**Bhagwad Gita:** Bhagwad Gita is a part of the epic Mahabharata. It describes the sequence when just before the war Arjuna feels uncomfortable and reluctant to go into the war as the enemies were all members of his extended family. Lord Krishna advises him against having any cowardly feelings and preaches to him the importance of right effort under any kind of moral or social dilemma. This is indeed the essence of *Karma Yoga*. Bhagwad Gita is till date the oldest work of Hindu mythological origin. It describes various forms of Yoga, most of which are practiced till date. These branches of Yoga are mainly *Karma Yoga, Gyana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Raj Yoga, Kundalini Yoga* and *Tantra Yoga*.

**Yoga Sutras of Patanjali:** Originally propounded by Maharishi Patanjali between 100 BC and 200 AD, this work remains of interest even today. This fact can be proven by seeing the number of commentaries given by various people in the field of Yoga on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, most of which are available in the forms of books in the marketplace. The reason for this popularity could be that Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are based on bodily exercises and meditation. He emphasizes *cittavritti nirodha* or control of mental fluctuations through Yoga.

Patanjali calls his form of Yoga as Ashtang Yoga owing to the eight limbs of the entire system. But according to the most frequently used definitions it comes closer to Raj Yoga because of the approach to meditation. These became very acceptable eight branches and are used till date by the practitioners of *Hatha Yoga* also.

1. **Yama:** Cleansing the mind consciously from the five vices of violence, dishonesty, theft, impure sexual thoughts, and unnecessary possessions.
2. **Niyama:** Observation of five rules of purity, austerity, satisfaction, study and surrender to God.
3. **Asana:** Refers to the seated position during meditation. In the advance stages all the postures of Hatha Yoga are also covered.
4. **Pranayama:** *Prana* means breath that unites the body into a chord of vitality and vigour. These are basically breathing exercises to cleanse the system and provide the necessary oxygen to each and every part of the body.
5. **Pratyahara:** This refers mainly to the process of redirecting the sense organs inwards as against their normal outwardly orientation.
6. **Dharana:** This refers to concentrating whole attention on a single object.
7. **Dhyana:** This refers to intense concentration on the inner reality and cutting off from the external distractions temporarily.
8. **Samadhi:** Attaining a state of complete unison with the supreme consciousness. This is also the state of complete liberation.

**Hatha Yoga Pradipika:** It is the compilation made first by Swami Swatmarama. He has identified the body to be used as tool for mental purification as opposed to the approach of Maharishi Patanjali who says that mind has to be developed first through meditation and then the knowledge should be utilized by the body to energize and ultimately liberate itself. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* emphasizes the importance of various *asanas*. In the Western world many people consider this as the essence of Yoga because the various bodily postures give physical health and vitality, but the exploration and development of the mind is never reached. Hatha Yoga has influence of *Tantric* Yoga substantially on it.

There are various other compilations. Due to their ancient nature and not enough archiving done, many of them may have been lost during the years. Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya has done the only known translation of ***Yogayajnavalkya Samhita***. He has also reconstructed the ***Yog Rahasya*** propounded by Rishi Nathmuni, for which no records were available.

There are various texts and books available on Yoga these days. Most of them deal with one branch of Yoga or the other. There are very few compilations that give complete knowledge of Yoga. Another very important feature is that Yoga emphasizes the role of a teacher or guru who can impart the knowledge in unselfish and useful way with all explanations. So just reading a few books is not enough as complete knowledge is essential in this field.

Many of the books available are in the form of commentaries of practitioners of Yoga and Yogic gurus. These generally have heavy influence of commentator's personal biases, interpretations and inclinations and should not be thought of as translations of the original works.

To ease out the discrepancies an attempt is made through this series to impart impartial and comprehensive information in the most comprehensible way to the people who are making an attempt to understand the ancient methodology of yoga.

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