

Study Guide for Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is the classic text of Yoga theory and practice. It is a manual for transcending all artificial notions of self and the universe we live in.

This study guide can be used with any translation of the Sutras that you prefer. Although it is non-sequential, it follows a logical flow of thought and ensures that students incorporate practice into their study as soon as possible.

Track I presents the foundation teachings for all the subsequent sutras. After becoming familiar with this track, you can study the next five in any order you wish, although the sequence provided usually works well for most students.

It is not necessary to master a track before moving on, but it is best to not move ahead until there is at least a familiarity with the material in a track. If you wish to further your understanding of the sutras, you can start again from the beginning, perhaps substituting or adding a different commentary. Repeated readings are a great way to grow in understanding. See *Resources* at the end of this book for some suggestions for further study.

Track I: The Foundation

This track lays the foundation of Raja Yoga theory and engages the student in practice as soon as possible.

The two pillars that support all of the theories and practices of Raja Yoga are presented in this track: the first sixteen sutras of Pada One and the eight limbs of Raja Yoga that are the major topic of Pada Two.

Sutras 1.1–1.16

Introduction to the basic philosophy; practice and nonattachment are introduced.

Sutras 3.1–3.3

These sutras, which introduce meditation, are included at this point in order to facilitate and encourage the practice of meditation.

Sutras 1.30–1.41

These sutras cover the obstacles encountered in meditation and offer several possible objects of meditation to choose from; therefore the group nicely follows the sutras listed above. This group of sutras ends with our first exposure to a definition of samadhi, the superconscious state.

Sutras 2.28–2.45

The eight limbs are introduced. They reflect the central teachings and practices of Raja Yoga. In fact, many people know Sri Patanjali's work as *Ashtanga Yoga*, the eight-limbed Yoga. These eight limbs bring together the principles of nirodha, discriminative discernment, nonattachment, moral and ethical precepts, and the physical facets of Yoga—*asana* (posture) and *pranayama* (breath control).

The sutras of this group focus on the first two limbs: the moral and ethical precepts of Yoga, known as *yama* and *niyama*.

Sutras 2.46–2.55

We continue the exploration of the limbs of Yoga with *asana*, *pranayama*, and *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal). Their practice and benefits are introduced.

Sutras 2.1–2.12, 2.14–2.17, 2.24–2.26, and 2.28.

Since Track 1 emphasizes regularity in Yoga practice, it is important to become familiar with the obstacles that will be encountered and the method for their removal.

We are introduced to *karma* (the law of cause and effect) in sutra 2.14, and in sutra 2.26 we find the first sutra on *viveka*, discriminative discernment.

Sutra 2.26 and 2.28 bring us full circle back to the eight limbs by presenting the connection between the practice of the eight limbs and the discriminative insight necessary to remove ignorance.

Track II: Meditation, Devotion, Obstacles

Sutras 1.23–1.29

This track discusses devotion as a viable means to Self-realization. It opens with sutras that describe *Ishwara* (the Creator) as “the Supreme Purusha (Self) free from afflictions and karmas.”

Also introduced are mantras as meditation techniques.

At the end of this track, review sutra 1.30, on obstacles.

Track III: Samadhi

Sutras 1.17–1.22 and 1.42–1.51

This track describes the various samadhis (superconscious states).

Since this material is technical in nature, it has been placed here to allow students time to begin a personal practice and become familiar with the fundamental philosophical points.

Before going on, review sutras 1.2 and 1.41.

Track IV: The Nature of the Seer and Seen

Sutras 2.18–2.27

In this section, Sri Patanjali teaches us that Nature needs to be understood for the Self to be realized.

This track takes us on a journey of exploration where we discover the distinction between Nature (Prakriti) and the Seer (Purusha).

Track V: Development in Nirodha and the Siddhis

Sutras 3.4–3.55

This group of sutras begins by examining how nirodha (restraint of the mental modifications) is developed. It goes on to list the siddhis—the various accomplishments that can come as a result of Yoga practices.

Track VI: Freedom

Sutras 3.56–4.34

This track restates some of what has been covered before but in more depth. There are a number of sutras that discuss the topic of evolution. It also offers a breakdown of the seeker's experiences as he or she approaches Self-realization.