



## CHAPTER 4

# BRIEF HISTORY OF YOGA & PHILOSOPHY

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The ashrams and Gurus of ancient India used to be mental workshops. They taught and molded the minds of people to be clear, strong, and to act righteously under all possible circumstances. If all the spiritual teachers started to teach faith in the Self and stopped teaching faith in a personality, this world would be heaven.

This existence with its infinite mind is at your command.  
You need guidance and training to experience and manifest this.

—FEBRUARY 14, 1972

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## THE EVOLUTION OF YOGA THROUGH HISTORY

### HOW DO WE INTERPRET THE HISTORY OF YOGA?

When attempting to interpret the history of the past it is important to keep in mind that we are using the lenses of today, with our own histories and unconscious biases that filter our interpretation of reality. When studying the history of Yoga philosophy it is important to suspend judgements and be aware of stereotypes that label Indian cultural practices as wholly ancient, uniquely exotic, and solely mystical. Instead, it is useful to explore our own biases, de-center our own worldviews, and immerse ourselves in the contexts and circumstances that have created yoga as we know and experience it today.

### PERSPECTIVES ON YOGIC STREAMS OF KNOWLEDGE

The history of yoga does not take a single linear path but rather encompasses vast streams of knowledge and practice that have been flowing for centuries. Like a river, the streams of knowledge merge with their surroundings and continue to flow with time. The beginning of the historical stream of yoga is difficult to discern as the project of history relies on material witness. It assumes a western notion of linear time that extends from beginning to end created by an all-knowing, singular, transcendent God. In the study of history, the modern “secular” historian assumes the godlike position of omniscience with the ability to perceive historical fact and define the truth. The Indian perspective of time however, is not linear but cyclical, and the concept of truth and God is expansive, not singular. On the macrocosmic scale, time is understood as eternal cycles of Generation, Organization, Destruction (GOD) whereby processes and experiences are more instructive than origins. On the microcosmic scale, time is the eternal moment here and now. In this way, historical facts and the empirical knowledge gained from our senses does not encompass the whole truth. Truth is expansive and can be glimpsed from both the physical and subtle, finite and infinite realms, while accepting that there is a wider reality beyond the capacity of our limited human intellect and five senses.

There are various methodologies that we may use to navigate the streams of knowledge that flow through time, but like water, much will slip through our hands and remain ungrasped, unexplored, and unknown. Nevertheless, the project of history is useful and instructive, giving us glimpses into the past. Remnants of yoga’s vast history include premodern textual and archaeological sources as well as living orally transmitted knowledge passed down from teacher (guru) to student (*shishya*) over the centuries. To keep an oral-aural stream of knowledge alive, accurate, and effective, requires that the student demonstrate their aptitude and dedication

to be initiated into the tradition and taught by the teacher. In oral traditions, repetition of memory, method, and technique help to effectively transmit and safeguard the wealth of knowledge passed down from teacher to student over generations. It was not until 200 CE that this living knowledge began to be written on the page, and then translated into English during 19th century British colonization. Because of this, when reading texts today, we need to be reflective about the parts of the oral streams of knowledge that were captured on the written page and why, as well as what aspects have been lost, hidden or safeguarded. When studying Yoga and its Philosophy we can appreciate the extant knowledge that has remained as well as how it continues to evolve through different communities for different purposes throughout history.

### SPIRITUAL QUEST OF YOGA & INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The tapestry that is yoga today has inherited the wisdom and practices from countless generations of explorers of the human spirit, some of which can be traced to Neolithic times. Its history is inextricably intermingled with the broader history of Indian spirituality and philosophy, a vast river which carries currents fed from countless creeks of experience and wisdom lost in time, in which philosophical concepts, spiritual teachings, and practices have nurtured and influenced one another.

At the heart of the history of Indian spirituality is the ever-present human longing to make sense of our needs, hopes, and environments, something not dissimilar to our own modern-day life struggles. We can read in this history how ancient spiritual masters confronted and answered some of the very same life questions that we struggle with today, and in its chapters we might find that their discoveries resonate with our own lives.

It is also a story of exploration threaded with a passion for questioning and experimentation. Not unlike an explorer who discovers a new land, ancient practitioners discovered and mapped paths into the world of our inner-self, and in the process built a framework to understand our minds and a language to describe and guide us into the inner-sanctum of unchanging and ever-present inner-truths. Looking at this long history, we can appreciate that spirituality has always been a work-in-progress and it will likely continue to be so because, in the fathomless experience of being, there will always be new insights to experience, and new ways of understanding ourselves. However, it also teaches us that there are timeless truths to be honored and signposts to paths that one should tread carefully.

The practice of yoga is one of the most effective and enduring practices discovered by the sages, one that unlocks our human

and spiritual potential. Yoga is not a monolithic practice, it is one that underwent shifts, transformations, and reframing over the centuries, and almost every teacher has contributed insights into the practice.

Yogic literature is not as voluminous as other spiritual-philosophical systems of India, because it is a discipline primarily preoccupied with practices that unlock our inner wisdom, power, and experience; instead of debating about abstract philosophical concepts and writing about them. As such, a significant portion of the yogic body of knowledge has traditionally been transmitted verbally from master to student. For the historian, this presents the challenge to follow lineages and the origins of some of these practices. Kundalini Yoga specifically is at the heart of yogic traditions that attempt to unlock our human potential for self-realization.

## HISTORY OF YOGA PHILOSOPHY

This chapter offers a historical overview of yoga and basic approaches of the different yogic philosophies, showing how they developed and evolved through time, alongside the unfolding of human consciousness. Its evolution moved from the ecstatic, unsystematized experiential spiritual teachings of the Vedic and Pre-Classical Periods (4500–100 BCE), to the more rational systemization of ideas in the Classical Period (100 BCE–500 CE). These ideas were anchored in the dualistic approaches of Samkhya and Patanjali's Sstras. Yogic philosophy then further evolved through the Post-Classical Period (500–1000 CE), as the approach was revolutionized through Advaita Vedanta, shifting from dualism to non-dualism. It then further evolved into different forms of Tantra and the birth of Hatha Yoga, producing several Hatha Yoga texts. This was a time that heralded advanced practices for rejuvenation, longevity and mysticism.

By 1100 CE yogic practice flowered into Bhakti Yoga, whereby the aspect of devotional mystic union through selfless service, loving remembrance, and mantra recitation was brought into central focus. Early concepts of yoga focussed on primarily non-asana based practices such as *pranayama*, meditation, self-study, discipline and *sadhana*. Modern yoga has come to be associated with posture and asana as it was disseminated to the west. These major streams of thought contribute to the body of teachings known as Kundalini Yoga, which has been distilled and synthesized in modern day. Taking a complementary approach best serves the understanding of the roots of this practice.

## Indus Valley Civilization (3500-1500 BCE) Archaeological evidence points to the rudiments of yoga and meditation during this period.

Ancient India was concentrated in the Indus River valley spanning hundreds of miles in northwestern sections of contemporary India and Pakistan. We know little of this time, its people, practices and belief systems. The artifacts and records are sparse and the language is yet to be deciphered. Archaeology has given a few hints, though speculation fills the rest of the gaps in our knowledge. Two great cities have been excavated: Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. These sites indicate that people were sophisticated with elaborate socio-political organizations; commerce with trade routes stretching from Europe to China, and systems with running water and communal baths. Though little is known about the religious beliefs and practices during this time, there is evidence of its existence with ritual spaces and figurines thought to be related to goddess worship and animal reverence. The earliest premodern indication that yoga could have been practiced in ancient India was found on soapstone seals depicting a figure seated in lotus pose, with its hands on its knees, surrounded by animals, and wearing a horned headdress that appears to have faces in three directions. This image has been thought to indicate evidence of a yogi, proto-Shiva, or the first Jain Thirthankara (exemplar), Rishabhna.

## VEDIC Period (1500-500 BCE)

**Rishis (seers) hear cosmic sacred sound (*sruti*) as revealed knowledge. Orally recited by Brahmin priests in Vedic chants during fire sacrifice ritual (*yajña*) to appease the gods.**

The rishis, or spiritual seers, developed and practiced concentration techniques to quiet their minds and hear the unspoken or revealed sounds (*sruti*). They discovered that by getting rid of mental distractions, they could open the doors of their perception, and in doing so, gain subtle knowledge about the cosmos. Over time they developed a deep sensitivity to the effects of sounds on their experience, where every syllable had the potential of either invoking the divine or corrupting the truth. These sounds were central to the efficacy of Vedic ritual.

The Vedic people are believed to be Aryans who gradually migrated from the steppes of central Asia to the Indus Valley over centuries during the third and second millennia BCE, bringing their customs and belief systems to the Indian indigenous tribes and Dravidian people. The Aryans were nomadic herdsmen with a warrior-like culture who spoke Sanskrit, an Indo-European language in which the Vedas were spoken and eventually written. Scholars today work with their surviving Vedic literature and the earliest text, the Rig Veda, to glimpse the beliefs and practices of these people, central to which were the ordering of society based on the caste

system and the fire sacrifice ritual (*yajña*). Ancient Aryans believed their fates were tied to the fates of gods, important forces that impacted their lives. The material well-being of their communities depended upon the favor of the gods, who they aimed to please through the practice of elaborate communal ceremonies in which the Vedas were recited.

Towards the end of the Vedic period, the idea of a supreme reality beyond the realm of the gods began to appear in the literature, a reality they called Brahman. Rishis conceived of Brahman as the force that held the universe together, that enabled its expansion, and that prevented its disintegration. Brahman could not be described but could be experienced through the cosmic sacred word and sound, which came to be referred to as Shabad Brahman and Naad Brahman in the Upanishads.

## UPANISHADIC Period (800–500 BCE)

**108 Upanishads evolve Vedic thought into philosophical exploration and internalized ritual sacrifice of the ego for self-liberation from the karmic cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*).**

The reaction to the rigid external ritualism and control of the Brahmin priests finally came in the form of the Upanishads. These ecstatic writings are full of the technology of self-realization and liberation. They are iconoclastic and inspirational. They internalized all the transformations of the earlier rituals and opened the inner ground of Being as the appropriate place for gradual self-transcendence. They record the knowledge of many anonymous inspired sages who were unequalled in their sagacity and vitality. The great King Janaka was a grand figure of the time, transmitting knowledge of Raj Yoga and Kundalini Yoga. Others were ascetics and some were enlightened Brahmins.

The word Upanishad literally means to sit near and be meditative. It reflects the original way the knowledge was transmitted. It was given from guru to shishya, teacher to student, master to apprentice. It assumed respect and commitment on the part of the student. There are 108 traditionally accepted Upanishads that are themselves listed in the Mukhya-Upanishad. This knowledge is known as Vedanta and is accepted as revelations or direct transmissions. Vedanta is known as “the great knowledge which is complete or which ends the teachings.” Over the centuries, more Upanishads have been added by various authors. These newer compositions are respected as both tradition and as elaboration. There are translations available of all of them and there are many studies of the content. One of the later groups (200 BCE-1800 CE) is especially important: the 20 Yoga-Upanishads, which include the Kundalini Yoga Upanishad. The Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad is found in the Mukhya canon of 108 Upanishads. Since this canon was fixed in the year 1656, we can assume that the Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad was compiled by the first half of the 17th century at the latest; although it was likely

developed earlier than that. This Upanishad more likely dates to the 16th century, as we can see that other Sanskrit texts which treat kundalini as a technical term in tantric yoga, such as the *Sat-cakranirupana* and the *Paduka-pancaka* also date from this time period. The 20 Yoga-Upanishads contain a great deal of instruction on yogic teachings, philosophy, and practice. (See box below.)

The Upanishads emphasize the discovery and cultivation of self-liberation from suffering. Central to this philosophy is that life is suffering, due to the nature of time and the karmic cycles of action and reaction that trap the soul into the *samsara* cycle of life, death, and rebirth. The key insight is that there is an identity between the finite self and the Infinite that can be known through transcendental gnosis. The finite soul (atman) and the Infinite (Brahman) are not different in nature, but instead the micro and macro-cosmic representations of the Ultimate Reality. This fact is beyond the mind's capacity for definition and classification. It requires realization or enlightenment. It must be known all at once, as a total and complete vision. This enlightened realization of the self's true identity eases the suffering caused by ego-attachment to this world caught in the ever-changing flow of time, liberating the self from karma and *samsara*.

### Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad (1100-1800 CE)

The Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad is a short Yoga Upanishad on how to awaken the Kundalini. It puts forward yogic concepts and methods that, like the other Yoga Upanishads, are thought to be teachings that were practiced and transmitted orally prior to being codified in Patanjali's yoga sutras (200 CE) and the Yoga Upanishads (800-1800 CE). They were influenced by Hatha yoga and Mantra yoga, with the first two chapters structured in verses of Kundalini tantra, the third chapter structured in Mantra yoga. The Kundalini Yoga Upanishad was one of these texts whose teachings were found and reformulated by various yoga traditions incorporating Tantra, Hatha yoga, and Advaita Vedanta, including the Siddha Yoga teachings of Gorakhnath (11th Century).

CHAPTER 1: Raising the Kundalini—physiology and discipline: prana, diet, asana, retention of breath, the three body locks (*mula-bandh*, *uddiyana-bandh*, *jalandar-bandh*), obstacles to yoga, merging *apana-prana-agni*, awakening the kundalini, amrit nectar, the union of Kundalini, the pranic body, removing the veil of illusion, the Kundalini rising, granthis and chakras.

CHAPTER 2: Kechari mudra (*a particular tongue lock*) practice and benefits of curling tip of tongue back to soft palate to raise the Kundalini and access the amrit nectar.

CHAPTER 3: How to maintain a sadhana: auspicious days of practice, necessity of renunciation, principles of creation, basic philosophy, practice, chakras, meditation practices: soham, atman, jnana yoga, and merging with atman.

### **EPIC Period (800-300 BCE)**

**Movement toward systemization of the inner technology. The Ramayana teaches of Divine Love and self-transformation; the Bhagavad Gita the path of dharma, and karma yoga.**

This was a period of transition. The mystical technologies of the Upanishads were taught and practiced widely. Some new Upanishads were added such as the Katha-, Isha-, and Mundaka-Upanishads. The rise of the numbers of people who practiced these techniques moved many practitioners toward systematization of the inner technology, further developed in the Epic literature.

The great works that guided the popular culture of that period and which remain as important pillars in the history of yoga are: the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita.

The Ramayana is an epic poem of 24,000 verses that tells the long tale of the tragic love of Lord Rama and Sita. Vishnu, one of the three aspects of the Absolute, had ten important incarnations. Of his four human incarnations, the ones as Rama and Krishna were most powerful. As Rama he demonstrates all the virtues that lead to liberation. Righteousness, fearlessness, non-attachment, service, discipline, and a love of Truth are all depicted in the many tales of the Ramayana. Many of the often-told tales are metaphorical. They can be understood as a story and as instructions in the methods of self-transformation and ego-transcendence.

The Bhagavad Gita is part of the great epic of the Mahabharata. It is a dialogue between Krishna and his devotee Prince Arjuna. It takes place in the middle of a war on the battlefield. It directly teaches various paths of yoga, including karma yoga, in which we are taught that you can be unattached to the fruits of our actions in the midst of great actions, even wars. We can relate to a silent and constant center. The great power comes from the disciplined mind, not from external rituals or sacrifices. The real problem is not the action of life, but our attachment that keeps us bound to reaction. In real liberation, we act carefree and spontaneous without attachment or fear as motives. When we do not act from lower motivations, we learn to act from what is cosmically correct – from dharma. Then karma does not keep us bound as we are liberated from ego-attachments. Only then do concepts like love, duty, and righteousness have any meaning. The writings do not outline systematically the yoga practices and meditations. Rather, they convey the spirit and viewpoint that must accompany them.

The Bhagavad Gita became the main scripture for the Vaishnavites (and more recently the Hare Krishnas) who worship Vishnu and his incarnation Krishna. The message of the Gita is universal, to release attachment and absorb the mind into absolute Being and Love.

### **CLASSICAL Period (300 BCE–500 CE)**

**A period of dualism. Renowned philosophies of this era: Samkhya & Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.**

During this period, the tradition established in the Mahabharata flourished and expanded. Many of the streams of thought and the technologies of yoga were systematized. The six major schools of philosophy were codified, extensively taught, and began to be written during this period. In the later writings of the Sikh Gurus, the “six schools” refer to the philosophies established in the Classical Period. The most important works during this period were the Samkhya Karika by Isvara Krishna and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, who systematically compiled the yogic philosophy from various traditions into easily memorizable sutra form. (See *A Focus on Yogic Philosophy* later in this chapter, for more on Samkhya and Patanjali's Sutras.)

### **POST-CLASSICAL Period (500 CE–1700 CE)**

**Development of practices and philosophies that are a part of Kundalini Yoga including Tantra, Advaita Vedanta, Hatha Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga. Formulation of the twenty Yoga Upanishads including the Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad in the later part of this period.**

In earlier periods yogis lay primary emphasis on meditation, contemplation and ethical precepts. Their goal was to shed their ego-centered attachments to merge with the infinite. But, during the post-classical period, with the advent of Tantra, yogis began to probe the hidden powers of the body through asana, mudra, and kriya. Yoga masters designed advanced practices that would rejuvenate the body and prolong its life. This led to Hatha and Kundalini Yoga which incorporated the monistic Advaita Vedanta philosophy of non-dualism between the self and the Ultimate Reality to promote the psycho-spiritual efficacy of yogic technology and the discipline of sadhana. The Yoga Upanishads developed during this period. The Yoga Kundalini Upanishad was one of these texts developed at the end of this period whose teachings were reformulated by various yoga traditions that incorporate Tantra, Hatha yoga, and Advaita Vedanta, including the Hatha/Siddha Yoga teachings of Gorakhnath (11th Century), the leader of the “Nath” Yogis with whom the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak interacted.



## **BHAKTI Movement (1100-1700 CE)**

**Emphasizes mystical union through loving devotion.**

Bhakti (loving devotion) offered a direct experience of mystical union with the Divine manifest in form (*saguna/sargun*) through iconic worship (*murti puja*) or union with the formless Divine (*nirguna*) through repetition (*japa*) and chanting (*mantra*) of poetic-song (*bani*). This time saw a confluence between the *saguna* Bhakti devotional worship in temples and the mystical poetry of the *nirguna* Bhakti 'sants'. Prior to the Mughal rule (1526-1857 CE), the devotional influence of Sufi-Islamic poets such as Rumi and Hafiz from the 13th and 14th migrated to India, merging with that of the devotional Krishna Bhakti tradition, already prevalent in the early Post Classical period. This great confluence gave birth to poetic sant-mystics such as Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, Surdas, Mirabai and Nanak.

## **SIKH GURU ERA (1469-1708 CE)**

**Ten Sikh Gurus synthesize the practices of the Renunciate Sage into a householder tradition of the Warrior Saint. They critique and actively dismantle caste structures, ritual dogmatism, religious fanaticism, inequality, and ego-based politics.**

Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE), was the first Guru of the Sikhs (literally 'students') of a 200 year lineage of ten living Gurus (1469-1708 CE) from the Punjab region of Northern India. His spontaneous ecstatic poetic music was accompanied by his Sufi rabab playing companion Bhai Mardana. Sung in the language of the people, it captured the hearts of all those they met. The musical poetry of Guru Nanak, Kabir, and other Sikh, Hindu, and Sufi mystics is preserved in the Sikh scripture, the *Adi Granth*, the First Primal Book (precursor to the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*). It opens with Guru Nanak's *Mul Mantra* which begins by fusing the paths of *nirgun* and *sargun* Bhakti, proclaiming the formless Creator and manifest Creation are One, and this Reality is our True Identity, *Ek Ong Kaar Sat Naam*. The Sikh Gurus emphasized non-attachment, selfless service, and meditation directly on the *Naam* to obscure self-centered behavior. After ten human Gurus, they broke the cycle of searching for a personal guru and the cults of personality that often misled seekers. They embodied the eternal wisdom of the Guru in the scripture, and declared it a *Siri Guru*, a teacher of teachers. The tenth teacher, Guru Gobind Singh, declared there would be no more human Gurus in that tradition and invested authority in the *Siri Guru Granth* (Eternal Wisdom as Guru) and the *Guru Panth* (community of practitioners). The result, the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*, is a timeless technology that emphasizes the need to remember the divine essence of spirituality and to embody that essence in a distinct form. It encourages respect for all traditions and people, asks each to recognize in others the common essence

we share, to honor the Creator who created us all, and selflessly serve one another.

The *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* shares and expands upon many philosophies of the previous times and is the only scripture that is treated as a Guru. It is not just history, philosophy, and technology, it is an active vibratory presence, in poetic meter, organized by *raga* (melodic mode) that takes the practitioner beyond their ego-identity. It was designed as a *granth*, a knot that binds the Word into a creative form in which any person can interact and be transformed. It is a primary source for many mantras and shabads that exemplify the power of the Word as understood by the yogis and mystics. These mantras have been utilized in Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan®, which incorporates the powerful yogic technologies of *naad* (sound), *laya* (rhythm), *shabd* (word), *japa* (repetition), and *bhakti* (devotion) to reach a state of meditative (*dhyana*) equilibrium (*sahej*) so that one may act in the world from a place of serviceful non-attachment (*karma yoga*) and discriminating wisdom (*gyan*).

## **MODERN Period (1700 and beyond)**

**A period of European expansion, colonization, reform and the syncretic formation of new styles of yoga.**

Modernity played a crucial role in shaping Yoga as we know it today. "Modern" culture began developing during the Age of Enlightenment in 17th century Europe. As a philosophical and intellectual movement, it emphasized reason, individualism and science. The project of modernity led European countries on a colonizing mission which came to India with British Imperialism in the 1700s. The Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, placed a premium on intellectual reasoning which used the scientific method to study, categorize, and colonize people, cultures, and religions. It placed colonial subjects as objects of study on an evolutionary scale with Christian monotheism as the apex of rationality. If cultures, people, and religions were deemed rational and monotheistic, then they had the cognitive ability, therefore the civility and God-given right, to self-governance and freedom. If they were not, then it was the duty of the colonizer and the missionary to make them "civilized" subjects of Imperial rule. This colonial project affected not only how India was viewed but how Indian people viewed themselves as they were being educated in English language, culture, and intellectual frameworks. Texts, belief systems and practices were therefore translated, categorized and standardized within westernized frameworks for public consumption.

It is during this time that modern postural Yoga was created. It synthesized classical Yogic philosophy, meditation, *mudra*, *mantra*

and mostly seated asana postures with European gymnastics and bodybuilding techniques. This modernized yoga practice was then taught by teachers (gurus) who reformed and popularized the practice to create able minds and bodies. The schools of Yoga practiced today come from the guru-lineages developed during this modern era including Ashtanga, Vinyasa, Iyengar, Kripalu, Bikram, Viniyoga, and others.

It is important to understand that the history of yoga therefore is not a linear path of authentic lineages and enlightened gurus who have maintained ancient practices in their purity up to modern day. Instead, modern Yoga is a fluid mixture of knowledge streams, traditional practices, modern interpretations, and contemporary innovations that were initially transmitted orally, then codified into Yoga texts and adapted over centuries during India's tumultuous history of invasions, colonization, and modernization.

### **AQUARIAN AGE (2011 CE—onward)**

**A period based on experience, commitment, and universality, ushering in a new level of consciousness.**

The key terms for the Aquarian Age are globalization, universality, transparency and the dignity of the human being. The need is to establish an authentic transformative experience in each individual so they may serve the well-being of the global community. Consciousness and its many levels will be the theme in this age.

Through the beginning of the Aquarian Age, there will be polarization and chaos as old institutions fight the final battle with new ways of being and knowing. There will be developed and undeveloped consciousness. We will judge philosophy and spirituality by the degree of awakening and embodiment an individual attains, rather than by their association with a specific group.



## A Focus on Yogic Philosophy

In this next section we examine the main currents of yoga philosophy that inform Kundalini Yoga. These philosophies come from the rich background of the ancient yogic and spiritual traditions of India. These philosophies form a body of teachings that invite us to expand our notion of what constitutes reality and that celebrate the synergy of knowledge and experience.

In classical Indian philosophy, it was often said there were six orthodox schools of thought, or Darshanas. They were in conversation with each other about the nature of reality, the purpose of life, how to free oneself from suffering, and the means to attain final liberation. Three of those classical orthodox Darshanas—Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta (including Hatha and Tantra)—are worth looking at briefly because they inform the contemporary practice of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga teachings. These traditions document a very sophisticated system of categories that describe the relationship between human consciousness, bodily experience, and spiritual awakening. Samkhya-Yoga terminology is often used to explain how Kundalini Yoga works to liberate the mind from commotion and distraction. (See Chapter 17 for more information on Kundalini Yoga Philosophy.)

### SAMKHYA (600 BCE–500 CE)

Samkhya emerges in the Pre-classical Period, originating from the sage Kapila Muni around 600 BCE, but came later to fruition in the Classical Period, around 300 CE with the Samkhya Karika by Isvara Krishna. It is unclear if it was originally a dualistic philosophy, but it was certainly dualistic by the Classical Period. Samkhya philosophy offers the theoretical framework for Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, which uses much of its terminology.

Samkhya means “permutation or discrimination” recognizing and categorizing all the different *tattvic* (elemental) permutations of phenomena which make up creation. It is a very rationalistic and analytical philosophy that describes how our consciousness interacts with our lived experience of the world. As a dualistic philosophy, it states that reality is created from two completely separate masculine and feminine principles: Purusha and Prakriti.

With the later advent of Advaita Vedanta around 800 CE, this dualism was overcome, merging these two principles, and the philosophy itself, back into the oneness of the Absolute, Brahman. Samkhya presents Prakriti as the manifest world, primal, inert matter and the field of potential for Purusha. Purusha is the light of individual consciousness, pure awareness or what some would refer to as the soul. At the outset of the process of creation, these two principles interact. This is seen as the onset of ignorance, with the light of Purusha being hidden and trapped in the material form of Prakriti. It is like the potter being trapped in the clay pot that he makes.

Purusha, the unmanifest observer, requires Prakriti to facilitate its self-recognition and self-knowledge through tangible material experience. Purusha penetrates Prakriti's field of potential, and stimulates a movement in the previously inert *gunas* (or qualities inherent in Prakriti). This is the dynamic quality of *rajas*. The other two qualities of ‘suspension’ (*sattva*) and ‘density’ (*tamas*) are thereby also brought into play and the primal vibration is born. Proceeding from this vibration, a web of life is then spun out, evolving through 23 *tattvas*.

### Samkhya Tattva Theory

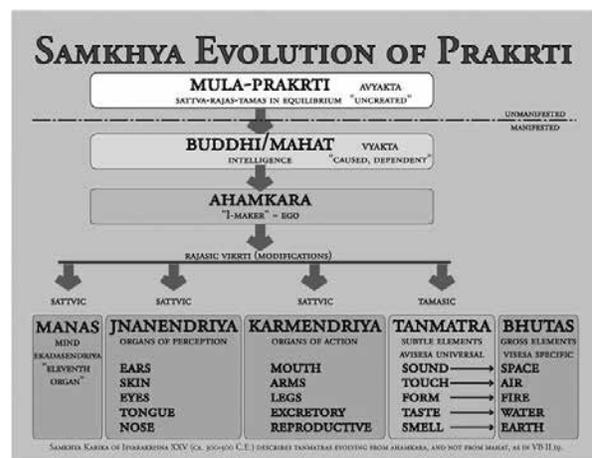
These *tattvic* manifestations emanating from the subtle to the gross are then listed to indicate how our mind, senses, organs, and actions interact with the elements to create our manifest reality. In doing so, Samkhya provides the framework for most yogic phenomena and their systems, the three *gunas*, the five elements, the *tattvas*, and sets the stage for the incorporation of the *vayus*, chakras and other yogic systems of energy anatomy.

Samkhya Tattva Theory introduces basic concepts that were used and further elaborated in later yogic schools of thought, such as:

- ☐ Buddhi - the enlightened mind
- ☐ Ahamkar (or Ahangkar) - the ‘I-maker’ or ego-self
- ☐ Manas - the sensory mind

The intention of the path of Samkhya is to:

- discriminate between the transient manifest world (Prakriti), and the intransient knower (Purusha).
- to recognize the permutations of the manifest world in a detached way, withdrawing from ego-identification with the body, the mind, and all forms of experience.
- to then shift identification to one's true Self, the knower Purusha to overcome the suffering of transient life.
- awakening by liberating the hidden light of awareness (Purusha) from the ‘prison’ of Prakriti's gross material world.



## Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (500 BCE–400 CE)

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are a short codification of the practice of yoga, which provides a sketch of the effort needed and the progress to be expected in a yoga discipline. They map the process of awakening to realize the possible human that is in each of us. There are 196 Sutras, aphorisms or threads of wisdom, which are short and succinct capsules of yogic knowledge. Its brevity is a problem and a blessing. A great deal of prior knowledge in Indian Philosophy and Samkhya in particular is assumed, which can make it difficult to fully comprehend without further elaboration from a knowledgeable source. A teacher and teaching community is helpful to understand and experience the process of spiritual practice and growth. Several teachers have written commentaries on the sutras to bridge their particular purposes and audiences.

### About Patanjali's Yoga Sutras:

- ▶ consist of 196 short thought-laden aphorisms. Sutra means "thread."
- ▶ remain a definitive work on yoga.
- ▶ are an overview of the goals, philosophy, and structure of a yoga and meditation discipline.
- ▶ state that the process of yoga is focused on the need to control the modifications, waves or fluctuations of the mind.
- ▶ describe the Eight Limbs of Yoga essential for yoga practice.
- ▶ recognize our individual consciousness as one with the Universal Consciousness, and then Samkhya explains the relationship between our unlimited consciousness and the physical world.

The Yoga sutras consist of four steps or chapters, each describing different aspects in yoga practice:

- I SAMADHI-PADA  
*Absorption and Higher States of Awareness*
- II SADHANA-PADA  
*Discipline and Practices*
- III VIBHUTI-PADA  
*Powers and Capabilities of the Possible Human*
- IV Kaivalya-pada  
*The Nature of Liberation*

The Yoga Sutras begin:

- 1.1 *atha yoga anushaasanam*
- 1.1 Now, the instruction in Yoga follows.
- 1.2 *Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah*
- 1.2 Yoga is the restraint (cessation) of fluctuation (modification) of the mind.
- 1.3 *tadaa drashtuh svarupee avasthaanam*
- 1.3 Then the seer dwells in their own true form

## The Waves of the Mind

### A commentary on Samkhyan Philosophy in the Yoga Sutras

The primary aim of yoga according to Patanjali's map of practice is to still the fluctuations of the mind so the aware light of Being can be revealed and recognize its own nature. (See *Mind & Meditation chapter*.) The mind is considered to be the link between body and spirit or consciousness. It is the habits of the mind that bind us to attachments and duality and, in turn, to suffering. It is also the habits of the mind that lead to non-attachment and to the practice of merger with what is real. The mind is a sophisticated tool that can give us liberation and the transcendence of conditional living, or it can give us confusion, ignorance, and bondage.

The mind and body are one emanation of the primal nature: Prakriti. A fundamental property of this nature is constant evolution and transformation. The result of this transformation is the creation of a multilevel gradation of nature from the most subtle and unmanifest aspects to the most differentiated and gross realm of the five senses. Body and mind—the "psyche"—are considered to be gradations of the same substance produced through three eternal forces—the *gunas*. (See *chapter 17 on Yoga Philosophy for more on gunas*.)

The mind is divided into functional aspects:

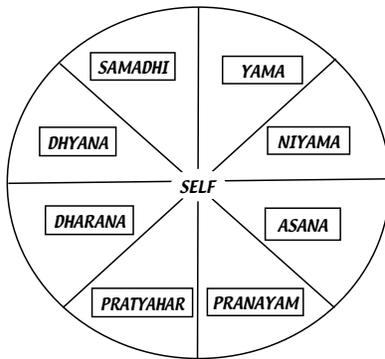
*Manas*—the more primitive exterior mind of senses and reactions; interfacing interior and exterior experience, constituting the more superficial fluctuations of the mind;

*Ahan(g)kar*—the 'I'-maker or Ego, a function based on identification and attachment.

*Buddhi*—discriminating, perceptive and discerning mind or intellect.

*Chitta*—the inner mind, or inner fluctuating waves of mind, including memories, deep inner feelings and subconscious realms.

The central task of the yogi is to calm these mental functions so that a clear perception of what is real and what is false can arise. Patanjali attributes the universal suffering witnessed throughout life not to any form of unworthiness, but to ignorance, the lack of the ability to properly discern the *real* from the unreal, the eternal from the transitory, the essential from the peripheral, and the Self from the world of experience—*maya*. Because we are wrapped in layers of mental and emotional habits that cloud our perception, we make choices that are against the Self. We initiate sequences of action with long term pain as their consequence. The moment we do that we are asleep. We are viewing the moment of choice through the blinders of ego. If we can awaken, we can discern the reality of the choice and stay in alignment with what is. Action in line with the Infinite Self is called dharma. You act in the right way at the right time. Dharmic action takes you beyond pleasure and pain to ecstasy, beyond like and hate to love, and beyond want and need to duty, commitment, and identity.



#### I. SAMADHI-PADA = chapter of concentration/absorption and higher states of consciousness

It describes the practice of yoga as it relates to the mind: witnessing five kinds of thoughts, uncoloring thoughts, the twin principles of practice and non-attachment, the stages of concentration, efforts and commitments, obstacles and solutions, and means and results of stabilizing the mind.

#### II. SADHANA-PADA = chapter of discipline & practices

It outlines specific tools of attention that are used to systematically cut away the obstacles of the inner mental “barrier” that is blocking the light of the Self within. This includes the first five of the eight-limbs of yoga, known as asht-anga, which focus on mind-body practice, breath, and ethics.

#### III. VIBHUTI-PADA=chapter of progressing, powers & capabilities

It presents the last three of the eight limbs of yoga, which are concentration, meditation, and samadhi, collectively known as samyama. The rest of the chapter explains how samyama is used as a finer tool to remove the subtler veils of ignorance and the “powers” gained once these skills are mastered.

#### IV. KAIVALYA-PADA = Nature of liberation

It explains how the mind is constructed and how it veils the inner light of the Self. It describes how the yogi deals with karma and the ego, the natural barriers to enlightenment, and how the primal building blocks of the mind resolve habitual karmic patterns of cause and effect, allowing for final liberation.

### The Eight-Limbs (Asht-anga)

Patanjali identified eight interrelated aspects of yoga practice: the eight-limbs (asht-anga) are equally essential to steady progress in refining the mind and discriminating the real from the illusory. They are called “limbs” or “parts” rather than steps to emphasize their integrated nature.

Samadhi	Awakening and absorption in spirit
Dhyana	Deep meditation
Dharana	One-pointed concentration
Pratyahara	Synchronization of senses and thoughts

Pranayama Control of *prana* (life force)

Asana Postures for health and meditation

Niyama Five disciplines [see below]

Yama Five restraints [see below]

The list above places the eight limbs in a ladder-like manner, missing the dynamic aspects of the limbs, but emphasizing the nature of the practices from the most gross and accessible (ethical behaviors) to the most rarefied and intangible (spiritual or mystic merger).

Today most popularizations of yogic techniques tend to emphasize one end or the other of the ladder. Either the body is cultivated without chanting and meditation, or the mind is cultivated through meditation, without building physical vitality through exercise. Both lead to imbalances, physically and emotionally. One of the deep truths captured by the eight limbs is the need to develop the entire spectrum of body and mind as a whole system. Kundalini Yoga includes all of the eight limbs in each kriya or complete exercise set.

**Samadhi:** Absorption of the mind with the object of focus. Merging of consciousness with that of the object of contemplation. In the highest form of yoga, object of focus is Divine or Universal Consciousness.

**Dhyana:** State of meditation occurring when we sustain directed attention. Mind-waves flow continuously towards our object of focus – without interruption.

**Dharana:** Maintaining chosen direction of attention. Sharpening single-pointedness of the mind, increasing concentration of focus by maintaining it over an extended period of time.

**Pratyahara:** Gathering senses & redirecting attention. Redirection of sensory awareness to consolidate mental wave around a point of focus.

**Pranayama:** Control of life force through control of breath. Different breathing patterns, rhythms with specific effects on the consciousness and mind.

**Asana:** Comfortable seat. Physical postures that balance and stimulate the body and energy flows so one gains vitality and flexibility, able to sit long periods in meditation.

### YAMAS AND NIYAMAS

At the base of the eight-limbed path are the yamas and niyamas. The five Yamas are taken from the five Jain vows. They are the ethical precepts to practice moral restraint in external interactions. The five Niyamas are the observances to be cultivated through daily practices designed to clarify the internal relationship to the Self.

#### Yamas (Restraints)

*Ahimsa* (non-hurting). Compassion, patience, love for others, self-love, worthiness, and understanding.

*Satya* (truthfulness). Honesty, forgiveness, non-judgment, owning feelings, loving communication, letting go of masks.

*Asteya* (non-stealing). Right use of resources, letting go of jealousy, cultivating a sense of self-sufficiency and completeness.

*Brahmacharya* (sensory control). Channelling emotions, moderation.

*Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness). Non-attachment. Fulfilling needs rather than wants.

### **Niyamas (Disciplines)**

*Saucha* (purity). Evenness of mind, thought, speech. Purity of body.

*Santosha* (contentment). Gratitude, acceptance, calmness with success or failure.

*Tapas* (purification, zeal). Determination, willingness for practices to burn karmic impurities.

*Svadyaya* (self-study). Reflection, meditation, expanding knowledge.

*Ishvara pranidhana* (devotion, surrender). Faith, dedication to one's chosen deity, god or higher self.

**The eight limbs and the three minds:** (*See Mind & Meditation Chapter for more about the three minds.*)

The Negative Mind is mastered with yamas and niyamas.

The Positive Mind is mastered with asanas and pranayama.

The Neutral Mind is mastered with pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

### **The eight limbs and the five gross elements:**

Earth: habits—confronted by yamas.

Water: emotional impulse—guided by niyamas.

Fire: energy and the urge to do—tended by asana.

Air: sensitivity and feelings—directed by pranayama.

Ether: the creative inner space—navigated with pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras offer a clear classification and overview of the goals, philosophy and structure of yoga and meditation. Even though yogis cultivate direct personal experience and capacity beyond the intellectual enterprise of systematizing, classifying and analyzing, Patanjali's sutras were so well conceived and written, that they rapidly became the central authoritative text in the yoga tradition. It has been adopted in modern times as the central text of Hatha yoga. Patanjali's contribution seems to be mostly that of a systematizer rather than an originator. Some historians question whether Patanjali was a single individual or a group of people collecting and writing the sutras. Patanjali is traditionally read as a dualist system based on Samkhya, and was subsequently criticized during the non-dualistic revolution of the Post Classical Period, with the emergence of Advaita Vedanta around 800 CE.

## **VEDANTA (500CE—1500CE)**

“Ved-anta” means the “end or completion” (anta) of the Vedas (ved). It refers to the philosophical traditions of the Upanisads and is concerned with Self-realization through understanding the ultimate nature of Reality, and Spiritual Oneness through Brahman. It arises through the experience of consciousness in states of non-separation or non-differentiation. Vedanta is monistic, whereby Brahman is the all-pervading One – the true Self and only Reality at the base of all existence. Brahman's nature is described as “*Sat, Chit, Ananda*” – *Truth/Being, Awareness, Bliss/Love*. The goal within the Vedantic path is to realize the infinite Self, which exists within the finite self. It says: our true Self is God. The question “*Who am I?*” is answered with “*Aham Brahmasmi*” – “*I am Brahman,*” or more simply “*I am that I am.*”

“*A-dvaita*” or “non-dual” Vedanta was the result of the revolution of consciousness, rebelling against the preceding rationalistic and dualistic way of thinking that had prevailed in Samkhya. This was the stage in which dualism was overcome, returning to the early precepts of Vedanta during the Pre-Classical Period of the Upanishads, to merge the philosophy of Samkhya back into the oneness of the Absolute, Brahman. The main advocate of the Advaita non-dualist philosophy was Shankara, who criticized Samkhya dualism. His philosophy was rooted in the Vedas and promoted psycho-spiritual yogic technology. The discipline of sadhana to elevate consciousness became widespread. The precepts of non-dualism are adopted by most later forms of yoga and are shared by tantra.

## **TANTRA (600 CE –1300 CE)**

The Tantric path of Shiva-Shakti polarities includes deities and specific techniques based on their divine dance. The aim is to weave the opposite polarities to merge and experience transcendent Oneness. With the emergence of Tantra came a revolution that blossomed into a new innovation. Spiritual and physical well-being was seen as attainable without rejecting the senses, or the physical realm. The world was not an illusion to be overcome, but a reality to be embraced and transformed. This emphasis led to an awakening of the philosophy of Shakti, the feminine cosmic principle of energy. Kundalini is a Shakti energy that manifests the Infinite in the finite body and mind.

Tantra appreciates that the world is indeed ‘real’, both in a practical as well as spiritual sense. It regards the universe as the divine play of Shiva and Shakti – a dynamic play of pure energy, or consciousness. All aspects of experience are considered to be simply different levels of vibration or manifestation of the same energy. Tantra employs a wide spectrum of practices and techniques, characterized by the conscious use of the mundane

Tantra is closely woven with the Samkhyan and Advaita Vedantic traditions, sharing the path of Self-realization through the Oneness of Reality, but they all represent different approaches:

The **Samkhyan path** recognizes the world (Prakriti) as a real phenomena to be rejected in pursuit of the liberation of the individual soul (Purusha).

The **Advaita Vedantic path** perceives the world as an illusion (Maya), arising from an ignorant sense of separateness. By dedicated choice to awaken, maya is overcome and the true Self is realized.

The **Tantric path** does not seek to reject, overcome or choose against worldly phenomena, but rather embraces all phenomena as a possible means to liberation when used in the correct way. Tantra accepts the world and its illusions as potential for revealing the Self.

**Kashmir Shaivism:** an early form of Tantra from 850 CE, teaches similar to Vedanta, that matter and consciousness are not separate. But then it diverges somewhat from Vedanta by stating that the world is not an illusion, but it is the perception of duality, which is in fact the illusion.

to access the spiritual, identifying with the macrocosm through the microcosm. The tantric vision of the human as a microcosm of the universal macrocosm gives rise to another important aspect of the Tantric Tradition. Rather than merely seeking to transcend the world of physical phenomena, Tantra instead seeks to manifest the soul's potential in the physical world, even as it is transcended.

Tantric practitioners harness *prana* in order to attain spiritual goals, with the purpose of achieving mastery of the inner dimension of the self, as well as gaining complete control over the exterior dimension, including all the *tattvas* and permutations of nature in order to attain union with the Divine. Tantra is a path of acceptance and inclusion with the aim to sublimate any undesirable aspects rather than negate them or reject them. Its practices focus on the precise arrangement and alignment of manifest qualities to refine and expand consciousness. It is a path that also includes rituals and identifications with gods and goddesses, in order to assimilate divine energies within the practitioner. Tantra accepts the world and its illusions as potential for revealing the Self.

## HATHA YOGA (900 CE)

Many varied physical practices influenced by Tantra are now developed to unite the polarity energies of the sun (Ha) and moon (tha). These include: asanas, *pranayama*, relaxation and cleansing techniques, sharing Patanjali's goal to facilitate the final stage of yoga, Samadhi. Aspects of Hatha Yoga can be found in sectarian

Saiva, Vaisnava, Sakta, Buddhist, and even Jain practices, which were then compiled and codified by the ascetic Nath Yogis who are credited with creating Hatha Yoga. Matsyendra and his student Goraksha (or Gorakhnath) are considered Hatha Yoga's founders in the 11th century, and heads of the Nath Yoga lineage of tantric practitioners or Siddha Yogis, seeking enlightenment, immortality and siddhis or paranormal powers.

Interacting over time with the Nath Yogis were the Udasi Yogis, an independent ascetic group of Hatha Yogis. In the early 16th century the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak travelled around the Asian subcontinent on his Udasi travels. He dialogued with the Nath Yogis as detailed in the Sikh hymn *Siddh Gosht* (Siri Guru Granth Sahib 938-946 CE) and shared his wisdom that it was not necessary to become an ascetic yogi and mortify the self to gain liberation, but liberation could be attained while living as a householder. Rather than renouncing the world, Guru Nanak emphasized the importance of ethical action and selfless service (*seva*) in daily life by renouncing the ego through meditative remembrance (*naam simran*) and chanting (*japa*) to maintain mental ease (*sahej*) amidst the disease of the world.

At the same time, Guru Nanak's eldest son, Baba Siri Chand became an adept Yogi and founded the Udasi lineage. The word "udasi" derives from Sanskrit 'udas' meaning detachment or to renounce worldly concerns. While Guru Nanak emphasized the importance of a serviceful life as a householder, his son Siri Chand upheld the ascetic approach of yoga. Through the path of devotional Bhakti, Guru Nanak sought to reform the Hatha Yogis who focused on obtaining Siddhis or personal power, which were seen as ego-centric approaches. (*See a story about Baba Siri Chand meeting the Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das in Chapter 5.*)

## MODERN SIKH DHARMA & KUNDALINI YOGA

In the early 20th century, as Indians fought to gain independence from British colonial rule, the heterogeneous Dharma traditions had to prove that they were rational, systematized, and organized along westernized "religious" lines, and thus able to rule themselves. The Sikh tradition of the 'Khalsa' (sovereign warrior-saints) became the mainstream Sikh identity for a newly created Sikh-ism, as a way to differentiate itself from the Vedic and Yogic paths that were becoming equated with Hindu-ism. In order to preserve and distinguish a purely Sikh "religious" identity, and to avoid being absorbed into the prevailing generalized religion of Hinduism as the National religion, the mainstream Sikhs distanced themselves from any influences within its tradition that would be perceived as "Hindu." This led to an exclusion of the Udasis and other

communities that had been historically affiliated with the Sikh panth, from the newly defined Tat Khalsa or “Pure Sikh” way. Until then the Sikh and the Udasi traditions had been very closely interwoven since the times of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak. The Udasis, along with the Nirmalas (an ascetic Sikh sect created by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh), had sustained Sikh philosophy, knowledge, practice, and were left as the custodians of the Gurdwaras in the 18th and early 19th centuries after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, when the Sikhs were being hunted in the jungles by the Mughal Empire. However, the mainstream Sikhs now challenged and marginalized practices and communities, such as the Udasis and Nirmalas, that bordered on a syncretism of Sikhism and Hinduism. With this, all practices associated with Hatha Yoga were also excluded from the mainstream Sikh practice. However, these streams of teaching still continue to exist amongst some of the marginalized Sikh practitioners in a more unorthodox and mystical context.

## Yogic Traditions and Kundalini Yoga

As the practices of yoga have unfolded over time through a confluence of different streams of thought and perception, different streams of yogic philosophy find their confluence in the body of teachings that Yogi Bhajan taught, known as Kundalini Yoga. Yogi Bhajan studied Yoga from many teachers. We know of the following teachers and traditions that impacted his teachings and practice of Kundalini Yoga.

- **Kundalini Yoga:** Sant Hazara Singh (Nirmala/Nihang) (traditionally thought to trace to Baba Siri Chand and Udasi lineage)
- **Maha Tantra:** Sant Hazara Singh
- **Sikh Naad mystical practices:** Baba Virsa Singh (Maharaj)
- **Raj Yoga:** Teachings of Udasi and Sikh tradition: Baba Siri Chand & Guru Ram Das
- **Raja Yoga:** Swami Devmurti
- **Hatha Yoga:** Udasi tradition & Swami Devmurti
- **Hatha Yoga & the nervous system:** Acharya Narinder Dev of Yoga Smriti
- **Hatha Yoga Dynamic Practices for Yoga Therapy:** Dharendra Brahmachari
- **Vedanta Philosophy:** Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh
- **Sanatana Dharma:** Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh
- **Comparative Religions:** Sant Ranjit Singh

## Ongoing Development and Research in Kundalini Yoga

From the time that Yogi Bhajan came to America in 1969 until his death in 2004, he taught Kundalini Yoga and White Tantric Yoga all around the world. Around him grew a community of teachers who taught this body of teachings and continue to expand and innovate, making these classical yogic systems accessible and relevant to the needs of the current generation. Now through fifty years of development, this community of teachers and practitioners continue to shape Kundalini Yoga as we experience it today. There is ongoing scientific research on the benefits of Kundalini Yoga meditations and practices, including applications of Kundalini yoga in Yoga Therapy, for healing addictions, PTSD and Trauma. Drawing from the thousands of Kundalini Yoga kriyas, meditations, and *pranayam* practices, teachers are specializing and adding their expertise from other areas. Kundalini Yoga is taught in many countries around the world to diverse communities with specialized focuses and practices.

There is further research to be done on Kundalini Yoga’s roots, techniques, and benefits as well as the history of Yogi Bhajan’s own study of Kundalini and other yoga practices. The Kundalini Research Institute maintains a link for further information on these research projects as we continue to uncover the knowledge of this path. (*See Resources link at the end of this chapter.*)

## Exploration of Yoga History & Philosophy

Having explored the History of Yoga Philosophy, we can see how it informs our contemporary practice of Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan. While the philosophies presented in this chapter may differ quite significantly, it is also possible to see how they interrelate and describe different aspects of the evolution of consciousness. They need not negate each other, rather knowledge of all these paths can enhance our overall spiritual understanding.

Yoga philosophy lies at the merging point of wisdom and experience, knowledge and practice. Delving into these traditions gives us the ability to trace through history many of the practices that are fundamental to us as yogis. These include the use of mantra as a powerful technique to awaken consciousness; the practices of stilling the waves of the mind through meditation; the understanding of the mind-body connection in the gross and subtle realms; the relationship between habitual action, karmic bondage and liberative freedom; and the interconnected relationship between the self, others and the world.

We see how yoga has always been a broad system incorporating practices of *pranayama*, meditation, lifestyle practices, psycho-spiritual practices, and asana or physical practices. The teachings on yogic energy and anatomy provide a framework for understanding how our senses interact with the elements through the *tattvas*, the

chakras, the *vayus*, and the *nadis*, and how this penetrates into the subtle realities of our being. It also gives us a framework for understanding yogic values and ethics as we grow through self-awareness, self-discipline, non-attachment, and beyond our self-centered nature to serve and care for others.

The most valuable aspect of these traditions to us as yogis is to be able to translate traditional wisdom into our lived experience. It is where we find the immediacy of our own experience. It is when a *pranayam* awakens our body; when mantra captures our spirit; when a *bandha* guides the energy through our body; and when our mind reaches a moment of its deepest peace. This is an experience that we can always rely on, our own inner experience. It is through this field of concepts and thoughts that lies the awakening of our awareness.

By understanding Yoga's historical roots and philosophical development, the Kundalini Yoga teacher and student can effectively discern the value of Kundalini Yoga as a psycho-somatic practice and ethical system that guides the mind, body and spirit through an awakening, expansion, and elevation to its highest nature.

This chapter draws from a variety of sources on yoga history and philosophy including primary texts, commentaries, articles, and books. There is a whole field of research now called Yoga Studies that deeply engages in these subjects. Please go to the link below to see an extensive list of resources that are available for you to further explore these topics.



<https://kundaliniresearchinstitute.org/yoga-research/yoga-research-history/>



**Ahangkar.** The ego-sense which claims the impressions of the mind for its own and reacts to them.

**Ashtanga.** Eight-limbed.

**Atman.** The essential Self, present within all creatures. Pure consciousness. The mind merely reflects that consciousness, so appears to be conscious.

**Bhagvad Gita.** A chapter in the Mahabharata. Dialogue between Arjuna, leader of the Pandavas, and Krishna (reincarnation of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu). A clear statement of Karma Yoga, selfless action.

**Brahm or Brahma.** Spirit. The True Self. The universe before Creation.

**Buddhi.** The component of the mind which discriminates and classifies the impressions which the *manas* receives.

**Chitta.** The Universal Mind.

**Dharma.** Righteous path of duty. “Where there is dharma there is no karma.” Action aligned with one’s Infinite Self. The central organizing principle of the cosmos.

**Gunas.** The three conditions of matter: *sattva*—pure essence (saintliness), *rajas*—active, creative or initiating energy (imperial), and *tamas*—inertia or decay.

**Karma.** The law of cause and effect. Rooted in the ignorance of Atman. Remove the ignorance and karma is removed.

**Mahabharata.** *Maha* means great. *Bharata* is an ancient name for India. An enormous epic depicting rivalries of two clans, the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

**Manas.** The recording component of the mind, which receives impressions gathered by the senses from the outside world.

**Maya.** The illusion of the reality of sensory experience of one’s self and the world around us. Usually thought of as what takes us away from, or blinds us from perceiving God.

**Moksa.** Release, when we realize we are *Purusha*, and enter into right relationship with *Prakirti*.

**Purusha.** Unmanifest spirit.

**Prakirti.** Matter. Primal Nature. Evolves under the influence of *Purusha*, so the Self may enjoy experience. Composed of the three *gunas*.

**Reincarnation.** The cycle (or wheel) of birth and death. One’s condition in life is determined by the balance of the karma.

**Samskaras.** Tendencies, potentialities and latent states which exist in the subconscious and unconscious areas of the mind. They are built up by the continued action of the thought-waves, and create new thought- waves. Our *samskaras* define our character.

**Upanishads.** The earliest yogic writings, written over 1000 years ago. 108 in all. Many dialogues between kings and yogis.

**Vedanta.** Another name for modern Hinduism. Founded on the Upanishads.

**Vedas.** The oldest religious books in the world. Literature of Brahminism, an ancient religion of India.