History of Yoga Questions and Answers

For quizzes and/or study guides

1. What are the Patanjali Yoga Sutras? What is their origin?

They are a set of 196 aphorisms about yoga, the writing of which is attributed to a man named Patanjali in India from sometime between the 2nd and 4th century BCE. Teaching back then was almost entirely oral, and so the sutras are very short phrases meant to be expounded upon by a teacher. The 4 chapters of the Yoga Sutras explain the aims and practice of yoga, the development of yogic powers, and liberation.

1. Who is Patanjali and what is his main contribution to Yoga?

Not much is known about Patanjali, but it was presumably a man who lived in India between the 2nd and 4th centuries BCE. He wrote or compiled the Yoga Sutras that have been the primary text for yoga instruction for centuries. Some recent scholars also suggest that rather than a single person Patanjali might be a general reference to an accomplished Yogi or Yogini.

1. What is a Sutra? What is their style?

A Sutra is a short phrase or statement, like an aphorism. It is meant to be a learning tool, like a short and easy phrase to remember, with a lot more detail provided verbally by the teacher. The literal meaning of sutra is a thread to stitch together - from the same root word as “suture.” Hence these concise wisdom sayings are meant to be a thread that weaves wisdom together into a few simple words. Sutras are meant to be studied accompanied with a commentary. There are many commentaries to Patanjalis yoga sutras aging from ancient to contemporary.

1. What are the 8 limbs of yoga according to Patanjali?

Yamas (attitudes toward our environment), Niyamas (attitudes toward ourselves), Asana (physical postures), Pranayama (conscious breathing), Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi (liberation or merger)

1. What does Dhyana mean?

Contemplation or meditation, one of the 8 limbs of yoga according to Patanjali.

1. What are the Upanishads?

The Upanishads are Sanskrit texts. There are about 108 of them, the primary of which were written, probably, from about 800 to 200 BCE. The concepts of Brahman (ultimate reality) and Atman (soul, self) are central ideas in the Upanishads.

1. What is the Bhagavad-Gita?

The Bhagavad-Gita is one of the most well known Hindu scriptures, written about 200 BCE. It is a part of the much larger epic story in The Mahabharata. The content of the Bhagavad-Gita is a conversation between Prince Arjuna and his charioteer, the Lord Krishna. It is considered a key yogic text because it discusses key concepts such as karma, dharma, bhakti, and liberation. The philosophy espoused within this story is still found as a part of modern day yoga practices.

1. What do we know about the historical origins of yoga?

There are carvings of people in what seem to be yogic postures from the Indus Valley civilization, from about 3,000 BCE. Perhaps there were female-centric, communal yogic practices for tens of thousands of years. The Vedas, scriptures from the Aryan migration into India beginning in about 1750 BCE, contain the earliest references to the philosophy of yoga. Most of what we know as yoga today, the physical postures and references to a subtle, energetic anatomy (e.g. the nadis and chakras) arose within what we now call the tantra tradition, roughly between 500 and 1500 CE.

1. How old is Yoga?

The practice of transcending the limited ego and merging into the true self may be tens of thousands of years old. The philosophical underpinnings of yoga go back at least to the Vedas, from about 5,000 years ago, and show elaboration continually since then. The origins of the actual physical and meditative practices are not well known, but some of the basic postures and mudras came from the tantric traditions around 1000 CE.

1. What traditions constitute the background of Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan(R)?

Vedanta, Sikhism, tantra

1. Who was Guru Nanak?

Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikhism. He lived from 1469 to 1539 CE, and was born in present day Pakistan.

1. What is Japji Sahib?

Japji Sahib is a sacred poem, written by Guru Nanak, that is both one of the Sikh daily prayers and a part of the Kundalini Yoga Aquarian Sadhana practice.

1. Name three aspects where you can see the influence of Sikhism in Kundalini Yoga.

Many of the mantras used in KY come from Sikhism. Practicing Japji at the beginning of the Aquarian Sadhana. Many lifestyle practices, such as vegetarianism, covering the head, keeping the hair uncut, and the importance of the community (sangat), are common practices with Sikhism, but their origins are probably from ayurveda and other cultural practices in India that predate even Sikhism.

Quizlets:

* There is a general packet of quiz questions for history of yoga (not KY): <https://quizlet.com/164892988/history-of-yoga-flash-cards/>
* several on sikhism: <https://quizlet.com/139163542/sikhism-flash-cards/>
* general on kundalini yoga: <https://quizlet.com/88834388/kundalini-yoga-flash-cards/>