

ॐ Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga ॐ

In the second century C.E., Sage Patanjali compiled 196 aphorisms in four books, or chapters, called the Yoga Sutras. In these passages, Patanjali describes the eight aspects of a Yogic Lifestyle and called it Ashtanga Yoga or the Eight Limbs of Yoga. The Eight Limbs of Yoga are outlined in the second chapter, Sadhana Pada (the chapter on practice): sutras 2.29-2.55, and the beginning of the third book, Vibhuti Pada (the chapter on the progression of the practice): sutras 3.1-3.8. The Eight Limbs of Yoga are guiding principles on how to live a meaningful and purposeful life. They provide a foundation of moral and ethical behavior, self-discipline, personal development, attention toward one's well-being, and they help bring awareness to how we define and integrate spirituality into our lives on and off the mat. The Eight Limbs of Yoga are a pathway that can lead to physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and human flourishing.

1st limb, Yama: moral code of conduct, the way we interact with others ~ in thoughts, words, and behaviors; *Nischala Joy Devi interprets the 5 Yamas as a reflection of our true nature.*

Ahimsa – non-violence, not harming, kindness, compassion for all

Satya – truthfulness, honesty, integrity

Asteya – non-stealing, not taking from others, big-heartedness

Brahmacharya – non-excess, awareness of energy

Aparigraha – non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-attachment, awareness of abundance

2nd limb, NiYama: self-observation, self-study, self-discipline ~ integration of body, mind, & spirit; *Nischala Joy Devi interprets the 5 Niyamas as evolution toward harmony*

Saucha – purity, cleanliness

Santosha – contentment, embracing the moment for what it is, whether difficult or enjoyable

Tapas – discipline, training the senses of the body & mind

Svadhya – sacred self-examination, contemplation

Isvara Pranidhana – surrender to the Divine

3rd limb, Asana: physical posture

In the West, asana is the most commonly recognized limb of Yoga. Yoga Sutras 2.46-2.48 are related to the body being steady and at ease, which can contribute to decreasing the fluctuations of the mind.

4th limb, Pranayama: energy control

Prana means life force or energy. Pranayama practices (breathing exercises) have a positive effect on the Parasympathetic Nervous System (rest and digest system) and contributes to a calm and focused mind. The length of inhalation and exhalation of the breath, and the specific Pranayama practices, are chosen based the practitioner's experience with the practice and/or the imbalance in body and/or mind. The goal is to strengthen and cleanse the nervous system and increase our prana.

5th limb, Pratyahara: withdrawal of the senses

Pratyahara occurs when the practitioner is so focused on the practice (Asana, Pranayama, or Meditation) they become unaware of outside distractions. Practices include Restorative Yoga, Yoga Nidra, and Guided Meditation.



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6th limb, Dharana: contemplation, cultivating inner awareness

Nischala Joy Devi describes Dharana as 'gathering consciousness and focusing it within'.

Dharana means "immovable concentration of the mind". Dharana is paying attention and training the mind toward one-pointed focus in preparation for Dhyana, or Meditation. Practices include mudra, mantra, chanting, and concentrated gazing.

7th limb, Dhyana: Meditation

Nischala Joy Devi describes Meditation as 'the continuous inward flow of consciousness'.

Stilling the mind in a sustained flow of concentration with the intention to increase awareness and cultivate oneness with the universe. Types of Meditation include mindfulness, lovingkindness, mantra, present moment, visualization.

8th limb, Samadhi: deep absorption, to merge

Nischala Joy Devi describes Samadhi: 'when individual consciousness unites with the divine consciousness and the illusion of separateness dissolves'. It cannot be described, it can only be experienced.

RESOURCES

Books:

- *Secret Power of Yoga*, Nischala Joy Devi
- *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Sri Swami Satchidananda
- *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutras*, Barbara Stoler Miller
- *The Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice*, Deborah Adele
- *Meditations from the Mat: Daily Reflections on the Path of Yoga*, Rolf Gates and Katrina Kenison

Websites:

- <http://www.swamij.com>
- <http://www.expressionsofspirit.com/yoga/eight-limbs.htm>, *William JD Doran*
- <http://www.arlingtoncenter.org/Sanskrit-English.pdf>, *Chip Hartranft*



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