



## SŪTRA IN FOCUS: ATHA YOGA ANUŚĀSANAM (1.1)

We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are.

—Joseph Campbell, 1988, 5

### SŪTRA 1.1: THE OCEAN OF YAUGIKA LINEAGE

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*Patañjali*

**I**n uttering the very first *sūtra* of Patañjali's great work—*atha yoga anuśāsanam*—we transport ourselves into a sacred realm beyond the confines of the known and the familiar, beyond the confines of conditioned time and space. *Atha* means both 'now' and 'then', indicating that these ancient wisdom teachings are timeless, relevant to countless seekers for generation upon generation. Stepping into this ocean of tradition, we are immersed in the spirit of the Yaugika lineage—a spirit that transcends place, time, and circumstance, uniting all sincere aspirants with the heart of Patañjali's teachings.



## ŚLOKA IN FOCUS: BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ 4.3

*Sa evāyam mayā te'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātaṇaḥ  
Bhakto'si me sakhā ceti rahasyam hyetad uttamam*

This ancient yoga is today declared by Me to you, since you are My devotee and friend. This secret is supreme indeed.

—*Bhagavad Gītā* 4.3, Swami Kripananda, 1989, 47

### DISCIPLESHIP: INITIATING THE ANCIENT AND TIMELESS ART OF YOGA

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**T**he subject of Chapter 4 of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is discrimination and by extension the Yoga of ancient wisdom. Here, the Yogic teachings are revealed by Kṛṣṇa—the God-man, Lord Viṣṇu incarnate—to his devotee, student, and dear friend, Arjuna. The *Gītā* actually starts after a long series of complicated events. By this time our hero, Arjuna, finds himself in the unenviable position of being poised for war—only his opponents include his old teachers family members. Given the choice between all the weapons in the world and Lord Kṛṣṇa as his ally he chooses the latter as his guide and companion in this difficult battle. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, which represents a fraction of the greater epic of the *Mahābhārata*, opens as Arjuna stands on the battlefield, unprepared and unwilling to take up what is actually a righteous struggle against the forces of *adharma* (that which runs against virtue, duty, higher law).

After some discussion with his despairing companion, we finally hear Kṛṣṇa invoke the same spirit of *atha* that Patañjali presents in *sūtra* 1.1. Coming to chapter 4, verse 3 of the *Gītā* (see above) we learn about the timeless nature of Yoga (“This ancient Yoga”), the pivotal role of the Guru-disciple (teacher/student) relationship (“declared by Me to you”), the necessary qualifications of the disciple (“since you are my devotee and friend”), as well as the transformative power of discriminative wisdom (“This secret is supreme indeed”). Upon a close reading, this *śloka* yields many of the same themes of Patañjali's opening aphorism.

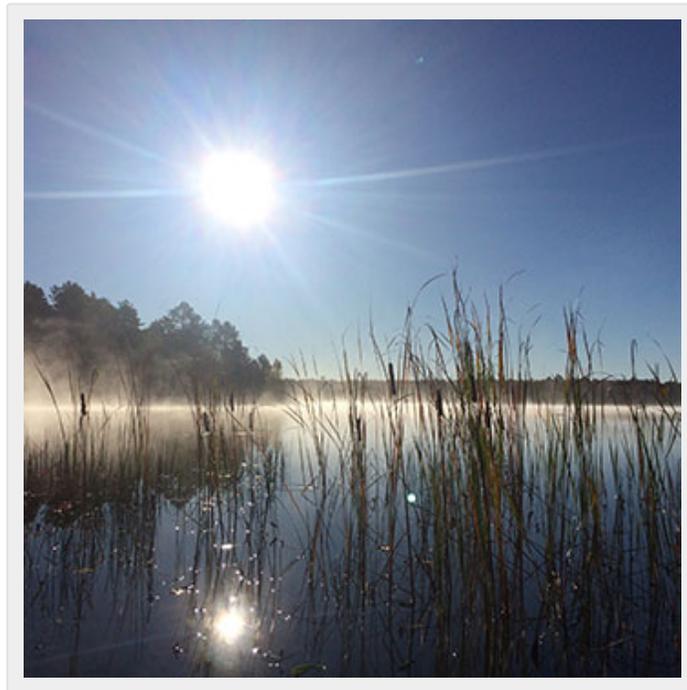
We will continue to examine these concepts and teachings in this assignment as they are the heart and life-blood of the Yoga tradition. Without them the greater body of Yoga cannot stand together as a whole.



## INTENTION-SETTING: TRADITIONAL INVOCATIONS & BLESSINGS

### ATHA: SETTING INTENTION WITH TRADITIONAL INVOCATIONS AND PRAYER

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**C**reation, maintenance, and dissolution—each day from morning to night we experience the threefold nature of the universe. Not only do we experience these three actions in the cycles of nature, but also within our daily activities, relationships, bodies, minds, and souls. We awake each morning to create the day anew. We go about our daily activities in order to sustain our life's direction and physical existence, and, finally, allow our awareness to dissolve at night into the abyss of sleep and dream.

In Indian mythology, these different facets of reality are represented by the central deities of Hinduism: Lord Brahma, who symbolizes the power of creation, Lord Viṣṇu, as the power of maintenance or preservation, and Lord Śiva, as the power of destruction or transformation. Śri B.K.S. Iyengar relates the *trimūrti* (three forms) to the actions of Generation, Organization, and Destruction as GOD (2012, 159). Each of these figures is also closely tied to the Yogic path and mythology—it is said that Brahma in the form of Hiraṇyagarbha arose from Viṣṇu's navel to become the first teacher of Yoga. In other mythologies, it was Lord Śiva as the cosmic dancer who inspired Patañjali to take birth as a human in order to perfect the art of Yoga. Finally, Lord Viṣṇu incarnated as Kṛṣṇa to share with Arjuna his divine wisdom of the Yogic path as the artful skill of living in the world but not of





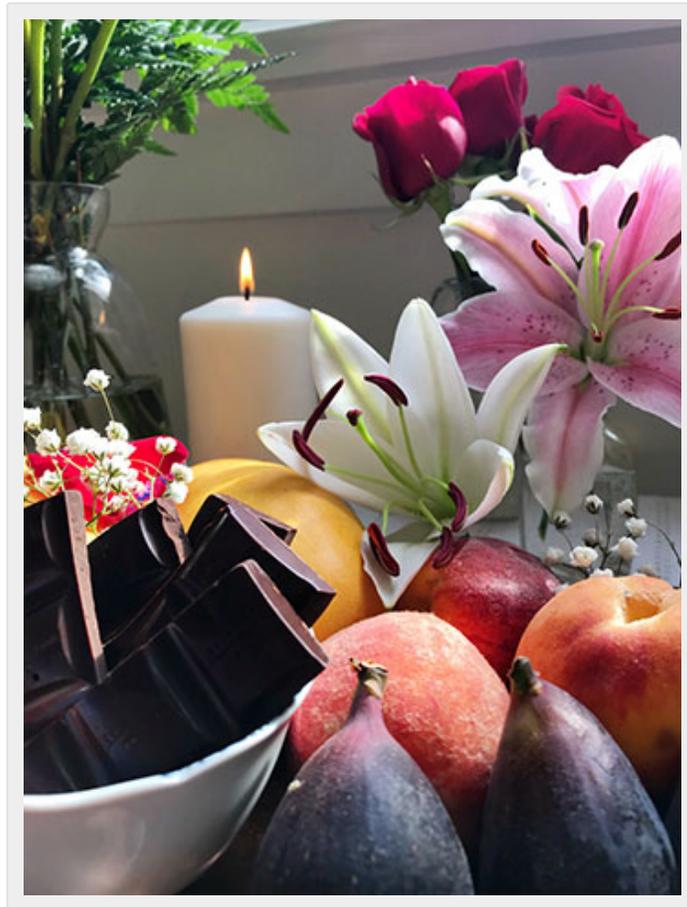
## PREPARING FOR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE AND SELF-INQUIRY

To acquire self-knowledge through scriptures and then to practically transmit this studied knowledge (svadhyaya) is sadhana.

—B.K.S. Iyengar, 2012, 112

### CREATING SACRED SPACE AND TIME FOR INWARD-MINDED STUDY

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*Creating sacred space*

**T**he acts of reading or writing can be performed by the intellect, or they can be approached as a form of contemplative practice. *Svādhyāya*, as study of scripture and also self-study, is always meant as an embodied form of contemplation. Within the Yoga tradition, it was never intended that this study be

## SVĀDHYĀYA ESSENTIALS

### *deśa*

place (for practice/study)

### *kāla*

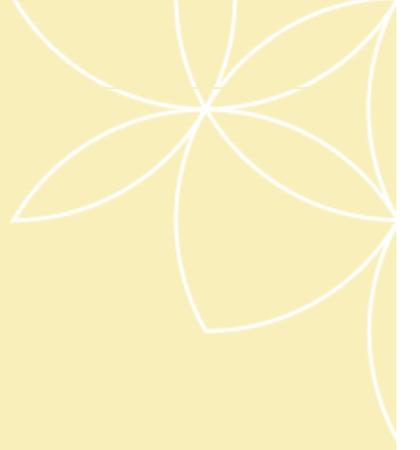
time (for practice/study)

### *nairantarya*

continuous (study/discipline)

### *satkāra-āsevita*

wholeheartedly, with a very fine intention and sincerity (for the work)





## THE INDISPENSIBLE VIRTUES & INNER ALIGNMENT

### SŪTRA 1.20

*śraddhā vīrya smṛti samādhi prajñā pūrvaka itareṣām*

Practice must be preceded by faith, energy, mindfulness, meditative absorption and wisdom.



*White peony*



## ALIGNMENT & IYENGAR YOGA

Precision in action is yoga. The Lord is Precision.

—B.K.S. Iyengar, as cited in Perez-Christiaens, 2012

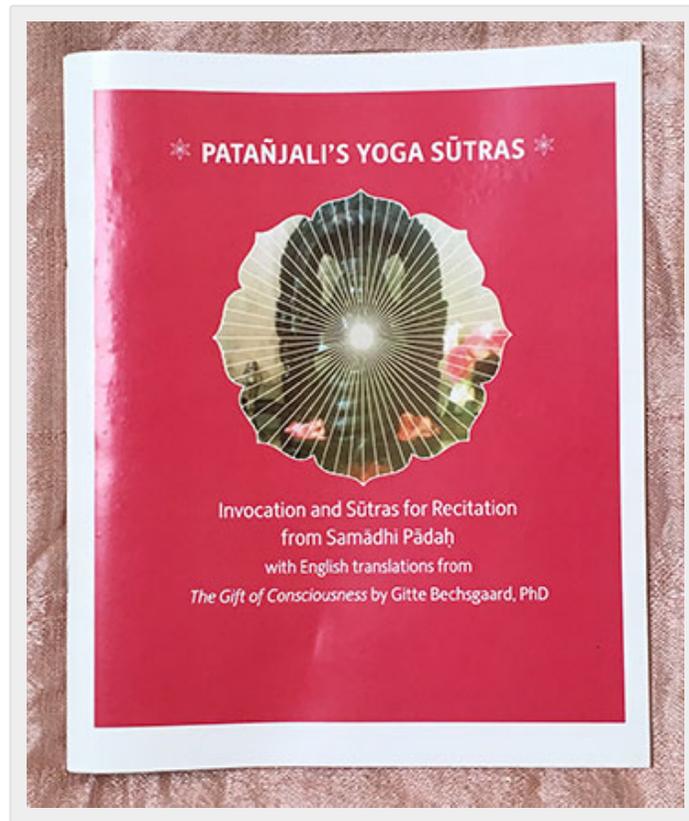
**I**t is fascinating to see that the plasticity of the body, mind, and human life is recognised within Yogic tradition and scripture. These ancient texts encourage each one of us to seek alignment, and at the same time acknowledge the many obstacles, resistances and misalignments we have to face on this inner quest of healing. In Iyengar Yoga we readily associate the term *alignment* with our continual work for precision and integrity in the individual postures (*āsanas*). In this struggle to align and re-align, the whole body has to act, and in this we attain a visceral kind of self-knowledge. This naturally entails a certain amount of analysis in action, and requires for our mind and intelligence to be on board with the body. As Iyengar writes: “[A]ction of the body and analysis of the mind must be synchronised. This synchronisation brings harmonious development” (2012, 109).

Every time we come to practice in Iyengar Yoga, our effort is guided by this first principle in an ongoing creative attempt to find health and balance. Without alignment as a guiding principle, we easily lose direction in the pose, and stay confined to the ‘old tracks’ of the body and familiar tricks of the mind. Without its dictates of right placement and self-correction we can fall into the trap of practicing on automatic, or in a rather dull manner. Though the body easily finds its known patterns, it is exhilarating when we can nudge the body into a better ‘groove’. Iyengar uses the metaphor of a potter using his hands to mold the pot, for the way that we are to use “our zeal to mold ourselves” (2012, 130). Alignment, when correctly done, brings not only beauty in form but also interior peace and quietude.

From an energetic perspective alignment allows for a proper flow of *prāṇa*, life force energy, bringing invigoration to the thousands of *nāḍīs* (energy channels) and the *sūksma śarīram* (the subtle body). Every scripture agrees that it is crucial to cultivate a straight spine so that the flow of spiritual energy can be harmonious—and ultimately flow through the *susūmnā nāḍī* (the spiritual channel).



## AUSPICIOUS BEGINNINGS OF SĀDHANĀ AND/OR YOGA CLASS



**I**n this course, we have focused extensively on the opening words of the *Yoga Sūtras*: the multifaceted meanings of *atha yoga anuśāsanam*. In this context we have examined certain essential themes such as auspicious beginnings, intention-setting, alignment with tradition and Yaugika lineage, as well as the understanding of Yoga as separation.

It can be tempting to think of such concepts in an abstract or metaphysical way, devoid of any lived connection to our daily *sāadhanā*. But instead, I will encourage you throughout this course to bring your philosophical understanding into your practice (and/or your teaching) in a very tangible way. Remember B.K.S. Iyengar's words: "Philosophy is a way of living" (Perez-Christiaens, 2012, 36). Some of you might already be practicing and teaching in this way; but even if that is the case, it never hurts to strengthen your resolve and deepen your understanding of why you are 'going through the motions'—performing (or instructing) particular actions within the context of your practice.



## REFLECTIONS IN COMMUNITY

*For the following, you can choose one fellow Yogi or colleague to discuss these questions with and/or you may also want to discuss in a larger group. Take time to reflect and possibly make a few notes so that you are prepared to share when you meet together.*

1. Discuss the relevance of the definition of Yoga as separation. How can you see this concept at play in your own practice and possibly also in your students (if you teach)? How does it alter or affect your understanding of practice?
2. In this course, we discussed Yoga as an archetypal journey. Has this been your experience? What challenges and also achievements or growth have been part of your Yogic path?
3. How comfortable are you in reading or interpreting symbols? Does this way of thinking speak to you? How could you see symbolic thinking as being an important tool on a path of self-cultivation?
4. In terms of the three energies (creation, maintenance, destruction) personified by the Hindu deities, which phase of action do you feel most at home with? Is there another of the three that feels more foreign? For example, are you good at starting new projects, but have difficulty sustaining them etc. How could this understanding help you in your Yogic studies and practice?
5. We discussed the importance of alignment with a form of the divine that speaks to you (or the consciousness within), the teacher or *Guru*, and also with Patañjali (lineage). Have you thought about this kind of alignment before? How could you see it informing or changing your practice and/or teaching?
6. Do you or have you had a deliberate practice of *svādhyāya* (study, self-inquiry)? What obstacles have you come across in trying to establish regular study or time for self-inquiry? Or, if you are preparing to formally take up this practice for the first time, what challenges could you foresee? Reflect on the principles of *kalā* (time), *deśa* (place), *nairantarya* (without interruption), and *satkāra* (working with care and good intention).
7. In the section on *smṛti sādhanā*, you were given several different ways to start your practice or class. Which approaches did you choose? Did it change your experience of the practice or teaching? If so, how?
8. Reflect on the importance of ‘drawing a line in the sand’. Is this something that you do naturally or have you had to cultivate it? As teachers, discuss the importance of setting the tone and signaling your role to students in a way that is clear without being harsh or distant.



## REQUIRED / SUGGESTED READING

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- Bechsgaard, Gitte. *The Gift of Consciousness*. Chapter 1 and commentary/study material on *sūtra* 1.1 (166–170).
- Iyengar, B.K.S. *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. Material on *sūtra* 1.1 (page number depends upon the edition).

### SUGGESTED READING

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- Bryant, Edwin. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. pp. 3–10.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Transformations of Myth through Time*. Chapter 7: From Id to Ego in the Orient: Kundalini Yoga, Part I, pp. 129–149; Chapter 8: From Psychology to Spirituality: Kundalini Yoga, Part II, pp. 151–169.
- Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali*. Material on *sūtra* 1.1 (p. 25 in the 1989 edition).
- Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition*. Chapter 3, Section VI: Yoga and Hindu Religion for a brief overview of Indian deities.
- Iyengar, B.K.S. (Compiled by Noelle Perez-Christaens). *Sparks of Divinity*. “The Early Life of B.K.S. Iyengar”, 195–214.
- Leggett, Trevor. *Śaṅkara on the Yoga Sūtras*. Material on *sūtra* 1.1.
- McCann, Gillian & Bechsgaard, Gitte. *The Sacred in Exile: What it Means to Lose our Religion*. Chapter 2: Religion as Ordering Principle and Higher Law.
- Rukmani, T.S. *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivarāṇa of Śaṅkara*. Material on *sūtra* 1.1; 1–16 in the 2001 edition.
- Hariharānanda, Swami. *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali*. p 1–6.
- Chidvilasānanda, Swami. *Kindle My Heart*. Chapter 12.
- Radha, Swami. *In the Company of the Wise: A Disciple's Path*. Chapter 2: The Guru-Disciple Relationship.
- *The Bhagavad Gītā*. Chapter 4, verses 1-11. Suggested: Swami Kripananda, Jnaneshwar's Gita.





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- Perez-Christiaens, Noelle. 2012. *Sparks of Divinity: The Teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar from 1959 to 1975*. Berkeley, CA: Rodmell Press.
- Swami Chidvilasananda. 1994. *My Lord Loves a Pure Heart: The Yoga of Divine Virtues*. South Fallsburg, NY: Siddha Yoga Publications.
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- Swami Muktibohdananda. 1998. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika: Light on Hatha Yoga*. New Delhi, India: Yoga Publications Trust.

