



Existence of Yoga

Subject 1: Basics of Yoga

Unit 2: Existence of Yoga

2.1 Existence of Yoga in the Vedic Period (Vedas)

The Vedic corpus presents the earliest cultural matrix in which the idea of Yoga takes shape. While the formal, systematized “Yoga” of later texts is absent, Vedic hymns repeatedly invoke **discipline, yoking, attentional control, breath, austerity (tapas), vow (vrata), and order (ṛta)**—all seeds of yogic insight. The root **yuj (युज्)**, “to yoke/join,” appears in contexts of harnessing chariots and forces, symbolizing **gathering and directing energy**. Vedic ritual, mantra recitation, breath awareness, and contemplative **upāsana** foreshadow later meditative interiors.

Vedic literature also treats **prāṇa** as a life-principle permeating the organism, and values **brahmacharya** (disciplined student-life) as the foundation of learning and purity. The image of the **yoked mind**—steady, harnessed, available—anticipates yogic stabilizations of attention.

Concept cluster (Vedic to Yogic continuity)

Vedic term/idea	Yogic resonance	Student takeaway
ṛta (cosmic order)	Inner order/equanimity	Align daily routine with natural rhythms
tapas (austerity/heat)	Disciplinary energy for transformation	Steady practice generates change
vrata (vow)	Ethical commitment (yama-niyama)	Small vows cultivate reliability
prāṇa (vital breath)	Prāṇāyāma, subtle vitality	Breath is a lever for mind-state
upāsana (devotional sitting)	Dhyāna/meditation	Still sitting ripens clarity

2.2 Existence of Yoga in the Upaniṣadic Period (Upanishads)

The Upaniṣads move decisively inward, exploring **Ātman-Brahman** and techniques of **sense-restraint, breath-focus, and meditation**. The vocabulary of Yoga matures here.

- **Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.3.11:**

“तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।”

Yoga is regarded as the firm control of the senses.

- **Kaṭha Upaniṣad 1.3.3-4 (the chariot allegory):**

“आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु ।

बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च ॥”

Know the Self as the rider, the body as the chariot; know intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins.

The **Śvetāśvatara** and **Maitrī (Maitrāyaṇīya)** Upaniṣads elaborate **posture, breath, and attention**. Maitrī notably outlines a **six-fold yoga** (often listed as **prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna, dhāraṇā, tarka, samādhi**), showing that before Patañjali, there were recognized **modules of practice**. Upaniṣadic Yoga thus centers on **inward discipline, discrimination (viveka), and realization**, establishing the contemplative heart of later traditions.

2.3 Existence of Yoga in the Darśana Period (Classical Philosophical Systems)

In the classical period, Yoga becomes a **formal philosophical school (Yoga Darśana)** closely allied to **Sāṃkhya** metaphysics. Patañjali's **Yoga Sūtra** presents a compact psychology and method:

- **Yoga Sūtra 1.2:** “योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥” — *Yoga is the stilling of mental modifications.*
- **Yoga Sūtra 1.3:** “तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम् ॥” — *Then the Seer rests in its own nature.*
- **Yoga Sūtra 2.3:** “अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः क्लेशाः ॥” — *Ignorance, egoity, attachment, aversion, and clinging-to-life are the afflictions.*

Patañjali codifies **Aṣṭāṅga (eight limbs)**—**yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna, samādhi**—providing a **graded curriculum** from ethical foundations to contemplative absorption. While **Sāṃkhya** analyzes reality into **puruṣa (conscious witness)** and **prakṛti (primordial nature)**, Yoga offers **practical means** to disentangle awareness from mental processes, culminating in **kaivalya** (liberation).

This period also witnesses **Haṭha precursors** (later consolidated in *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā, Śiva Saṃhitā*), which detail **physiological and energetic methods**—**śatkarmas, prāṇāyāma, mudrā, bandha**—to stabilize the body-mind for rāja-yoga.

2.4 Existence of Yoga in the Modern Period

The modern era revives, reforms, and globalizes Yoga.

1. **Intellectual renaissance:** **Swami Vivekananda** (late 19th c.) presents **Rāja Yoga** to global audiences, framing Yoga as universal psychology of mind control and meditation. **Sri Aurobindo** articulates **Integral Yoga**, integrating action, devotion, knowledge, and transformation of life.
2. **Pedagogical lineages:** **T. Krishnamacharya** (20th c.) innovates **therapeutic pedagogy**; his students—**B. K. S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi**—shape influential schools (alignment-focused practice, vinyāsa sequencing, and global popularization). **Swami Sivananda** and the **Bihar School (Swami Satyananda)** systematize integrated practices including **yoga nidrā**.
3. **Research and public health:** Post mid-20th century, Yoga enters **medical research, rehabilitation, and community health**. Universities and national institutes develop **curricula, clinics, and protocols**; governments and international bodies recognize Yoga's role in **preventive health and well-being**.
4. **Contemporary synthesis:** Today, Yoga functions as **philosophy, sādhanā (practice), and health modality**, combining **ethics, movement, breath, relaxation, and mindfulness** for learners across ages and contexts.

2.5 Nature of God Described in Yoga (Īśvara in Yoga Darśana)

Patañjali's Yoga introduces **Īśvara** not as a creator-deity in a theistic system, but as a **puruṣa-viśeṣa**—a **special, unique consciousness** that is **untouched by afflictions and karmic residues**, serving as **archetypal teacher** and object of meditative devotion. This allows Yoga to remain **philosophically rigorous** while accommodating **devotional orientation**.

- **Yoga Sūtra 1.23:** “ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥” — *Or (samādhi is attained) by devotion to Īśvara.*
- **Yoga Sūtra 1.24:** “क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः ॥”
Īśvara is a special puruṣa, untouched by afflictions, actions, their fruition, or latent impressions.
- **Yoga Sūtra 1.25:** “तत्र निरतिशयं सर्वज्ञबीजम् ॥”
In Him is the unsurpassed seed of omniscience.
- **Yoga Sūtra 1.27:** “तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः ॥” — *His expression is the syllable Om̐.*
- **Yoga Sūtra 1.28:** “तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम् ॥” — *Its repetition and contemplation of its meaning (are recommended).*



Further, **Īśvara-praṇidhāna** appears among the **niyamas** (Y.S. 2.32) and is said to **perfect samādhi** (Y.S. 2.45: “समाधिनिधिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् १”). In practice, this teaches **humility, surrender, and steady orientation**—psychological antidotes to egoic agitation—without prescribing a sectarian theology. Thus, Yoga’s God-concept is **functional and contemplative**, enabling practitioners of varied beliefs to employ **devotion as a stabilizing aid**.

Section Summary

Yoga **exists across epochs** as an evolving synthesis of discipline, contemplation, and liberation. The **Vedas** carry the idiom of yoking, order, vow, breath, and austerity. The **Upaniṣads** interiorize the quest, defining Yoga as **sense-mastery and meditative insight**. The **Darśana** period systematizes Yoga as **mind-science and method**, closely allied with Sāṃkhya. The **modern period** democratizes and globalizes Yoga, coupling it with **education, therapy, and public health**. Within Yoga Darśana, **Īśvara** is a **special puruṣa**, a contemplative ideal whose remembrance and mantra (Om) aid concentration and the maturation of samādhi. For students, this history clarifies that Yoga is neither merely exercise nor bound to one sect; it is a **comprehensive path** uniting ethics, practice, and insight.

Key Terms

- **ṛta** – cosmic order; basis for disciplined living
- **tapas** – transformative austerity/discipline
- **upāsana** – devotional/meditative sitting
- **Aṣṭāṅga** – eight limbs of Yoga (Patañjali)
- **kleśa** – afflictions that disturb the mind
- **kaivalya** – liberation/isolation of pure awareness
- **Īśvara** – special puruṣa, untouched by kleśa and karma
- **Om (praṇava)** – mantra-symbol of Īśvara

Self-Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. In the Vedic period, which concept most closely anticipates yogic discipline?
 - a) yajña alone
 - b) ṛta and tapas
 - c) varṇa alone
 - d) tīrtha-yātrā
2. The chariot allegory that frames sense-restraint and intellect as reins and charioteer occurs in:
 - a) Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
 - b) Kaṭha Upaniṣad
 - c) Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
 - d) Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
3. **Yoga Sūtra 1.2** defines Yoga primarily as:
 - a) bodily purification
 - b) stilling of mental fluctuations
 - c) devotional singing
 - d) scriptural study alone
4. Patañjali’s conception of **Īśvara** is best described as:
 - a) creator-god bound by karma
 - b) special puruṣa beyond kleśa and karma
 - c) material principle of nature



- d) allegory for breath
5. The sixfold yoga enumerated in **Maitrī Upaniṣad** includes:
- yajña and dāna
 - prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna, dhāraṇā, tarka, samādhi
 - tapas and tīrtha
 - nyāsa and homa

Answer key: 1-b, 2-b, 3-b, 4-b, 5-b

Short Answer

- Explain how Vedic **tapas** and **vrata** prefigure yogic **yama-niyama**.
- Summarize the relationship between Sāṃkhya metaphysics and Yoga method.
- What practical roles do **Om-japa** and **Īśvara-praṇidhāna** play in stabilizing attention?

Reflective Prompts

- Trace one week of your routine and identify two points where **breath-awareness** could transform reaction into **equanimity**.
- Compose a brief personal statement (4-6 lines) articulating your understanding of **Īśvara** as a contemplative ideal in your practice.