

Yoga

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Statue of [Shiva](#) performing Yogic meditation in the [Padmasana](#) posture.

Yoga ([Sanskrit](#), [Pāli](#)) refers to traditional [physical](#) and [mental](#) disciplines originating in [India](#). The word is associated with meditative practices in [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#). In Hinduism, it also refers to one of the six orthodox ([āstika](#)) schools of [Hindu philosophy](#), and to the goal toward which that school directs its practices. In Jainism it refers to the sum total of all activities—mental, verbal and physical.

Major branches of yoga in [Hindu philosophy](#) include [Raja Yoga](#), [Karma Yoga](#), [Jnana Yoga](#), [Bhakti Yoga](#), and [Hatha Yoga](#). Raja Yoga, compiled in the [Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](#), and known simply as yoga in the context of Hindu philosophy, is part of the [Samkhya](#) tradition. Many other [Hindu texts](#) discuss aspects of yoga, including [Upanishads](#), the [Bhagavad Gita](#), the [Hatha Yoga Pradipika](#), the [Shiva Samhita](#) and various [Tantras](#).

The [Sanskrit](#) word *yoga* has many meanings, and is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, meaning "to control", "to yoke" or "to unite". Translations include "joining", "uniting", "union", "conjunction", and "means". Outside India, the term *yoga* is typically associated with [Hatha Yoga](#) and its [asanas](#) (postures) or as a [form of exercise](#). Someone who practices yoga or follows the yoga philosophy is called a [Yogi](#).

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History of yoga

Main article: [History of yoga](#)

The Vedic [Samhitas](#) contain references to [ascetics](#), while ascetic practices (*tapas*) are referenced in the [Brāhmaṇas](#) (900 to 500 BCE), early commentaries on the [Vedas](#). Several seals discovered at Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300–1700 B.C.E.) sites depict figures in positions resembling a common yoga or meditation pose, showing "a form of ritual discipline, suggesting a precursor of yoga", according to archaeologist [Gregory Possehl](#). Some type of connection between the Indus Valley seals and later yoga and meditation practices is speculated upon by many scholars, though there is no conclusive evidence.

Techniques for experiencing higher states of consciousness in meditation were developed by the [shramanic](#) traditions and in the [Upanishadic](#) tradition.

While there is no clear evidence for meditation in pre-Buddhist early Brahminic texts, Wynne argues that [formless meditation](#) originated in the Brahminic tradition, based on strong parallels between Upanishadic cosmological statements and the meditative goals of the two teachers of the Buddha as recorded in the early Buddhist texts. He mentions less likely possibilities as well. Having argued that the cosmological statements in the Upanishads also reflect a contemplative tradition, he argues that the [Nasadiya Sukta](#)

contains evidence for a contemplative tradition, even as early as the late Rg Vedic period.

The Buddhist texts are probably the earliest texts describing meditation techniques. They describe meditative practices and states which had existed before the Buddha as well as those which were first developed within Buddhism. In Hindu literature, the term "yoga" first occurs in the [Katha Upanishad](#), where it refers to control of the senses and the cessation of mental activity leading to a supreme state. Important textual sources for the evolving concept of Yoga are the middle [Upanishads](#), (ca. 400 BCE), the [Mahabharata](#) including the [Bhagavad Gita](#) (ca. 200 BCE), and the [Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](#) (150 BCE).

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Main articles: [Raja Yoga](#) and [Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](#)

In [Indian philosophy](#), Yoga is the name of one of the six [orthodox](#) philosophical schools. The Yoga philosophical system is closely allied with the [Samkhya](#) school. The Yoga school as expounded by the sage [Patanjali](#) accepts the Samkhya psychology and metaphysics, but is more theistic than the Samkhya, as evidenced by the addition of a divine entity to the Samkhya's twenty-five elements of reality. The parallels between Yoga and Samkhya were so close that [Max Müller](#) says that "the two philosophies were in popular parlance distinguished from each other as Samkhya with and Samkhya without a Lord...." The intimate relationship between Samkhya and Yoga is explained by [Heinrich Zimmer](#):

These two are regarded in India as twins, the two aspects of a single discipline. Sāṅkhya provides a basic theoretical exposition of human nature, enumerating and defining its elements, analyzing their manner of co-operation in a state of bondage (*bandha*), and describing their state of disentanglement or separation in release (*mokṣa*), while Yoga treats specifically of the dynamics of the process for the disentanglement, and outlines practical techniques for the gaining of release, or 'isolation-integration' (*kaivalya*).

Patanjali is widely regarded as the founder of the formal Yoga philosophy. Patanjali's yoga is known as [Raja yoga](#), which is a system for control of the mind. Patanjali defines the word "yoga" in his second sutra, which is the definitional sutra for his entire work:

This terse definition hinges on the meaning of three Sanskrit terms. [I. K. Taimni](#) translates it as "Yoga is the inhibition (*nirodhaḥ*) of the modifications (*vṛtti*) of the mind (*citta*)". The use of the word *nirodhaḥ* in the opening definition of yoga is an example of the important role that Buddhist technical terminology and concepts play in the Yoga Sutra; this role suggests that Patanjali was aware of Buddhist ideas and wove them into his system. [Swami Vivekananda](#) translates the sutra as "Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (Citta) from taking various forms (Vrittis)."



A sculpture of a [Hindu](#) yogi in the [Birla Mandir, Delhi](#)

Patanjali's writing also became the basis for a system referred to as "Ashtanga Yoga" ("Eight-Limbed Yoga"). This eight-limbed concept derived from the 29th Sutra of the 2nd book, and is a core characteristic of practically every Raja yoga variation taught today. The Eight Limbs are:

1. [Yama](#) (The five "abstentions"): non-violence, non-lying, non-covetousness, non-sensuality, and non-possessiveness.
2. [Niyama](#) (The five "observances"): purity, contentment, austerity, study, and surrender to [god](#).
3. [Asana](#): Literally means "seat", and in Patanjali's Sutras refers to the seated position used for meditation.
4. [Pranayama](#) ("Suspending Breath"): *Prāna*, breath, "āyāma", to restrain or stop. Also interpreted as control of the life force.
5. [Pratyahara](#) ("Abstraction"): Withdrawal of the sense organs from external objects.
6. [Dharana](#) ("Concentration"): Fixing the attention on a single object.
7. [Dhyana](#) ("Meditation"): Intense contemplation of the nature of the object of meditation.
8. [Samādhi](#) ("Liberation"): merging consciousness with the object of meditation.

In the view of this school, the highest attainment does not reveal the experienced diversity of the world to be [illusion](#). The everyday world is real. Furthermore, the highest attainment is the event of one of many individual [selves](#) discovering itself; there is no single universal self shared by all persons.

Bhagavad Gita

Main article: [Bhagavad Gita](#)

The Bhagavad Gita ('Song of the Lord'), uses the term *yoga* extensively in a variety of ways. In addition to an entire chapter (ch. 6) dedicated to traditional yoga practice, including meditation, it introduces three prominent types of yoga:

[Karma yoga](#): The yoga of action,

- [Bhakti yoga](#): The yoga of devotion,
- [Jnana yoga](#): The yoga of knowledge.

[Madhusudana Sarasvati](#) (b. circa 1490) divided the Gita into three sections, with the first six chapters dealing with Karma yoga, the middle six with Bhakti yoga, and the last six with Jnana (knowledge). Other commentators ascribe a different 'yoga' to each chapter, delineating eighteen different yogas.

Hatha Yoga

Main articles: [Hatha yoga](#) and [Hatha Yoga Pradipika](#)

Hatha Yoga is a particular system of Yoga described by [Yogi Swatmarama](#), compiler of the [Hatha Yoga Pradipika](#) in 15th century India. Hatha Yoga differs substantially from the [Raja Yoga](#) of Patanjali in that it focuses on *shatkarma*, the purification of the physical body as leading to the purification of the mind (*ha*), and *prana*, or vital energy (*tha*). Compared to the seated asana, or sitting meditation posture, of Patanjali's Raja yoga, it marks the development of *asanas* (plural) into the full body 'postures' now in popular usage. Hatha Yoga in its many modern variations is the style that many people associate with the word "Yoga" today.

Yoga practices in other traditions

Buddhism

Main article: [Buddhism and Hinduism#Meditation](#)



The Buddha depicted in yogic meditation, [Kamakura](#), Japan

Early [Buddhism](#) incorporated [meditative absorption states](#). The most ancient sustained expression of yogic ideas is found in the early sermons of the Buddha. One key innovative teaching of the Buddha was that [meditative absorption](#) should be combined with the practice of mindfulness. The difference between the Buddha's teaching and the yoga presented in early Brahminic texts is striking. Meditative states alone are not an end, for according to the Buddha, even the highest meditative state is not liberating. Instead of attaining a complete cessation of thought, some sort of mental activity must take place: a liberating cognition, based on the practice of mindful awareness. The Buddha also departed from earlier yogic thought in discarding the early Brahminic notion of liberation at death. Liberation for the Brahminic yogin was thought to be the realization at death of a [nondual meditative state](#) anticipated in life. In fact, old Brahminic metaphors for the liberation at death of the yogic adept ("becoming cool", "going out") were given a new meaning by the Buddha; their point of reference became the sage who is liberated in life.

See also: [Pranayama#Buddhism](#)

Yogacara Buddhism

[Yogacara](#) (Sanskrit: "yoga practice"), also spelled *yogāchāra*, is a school of philosophy and psychology that developed in [India](#) during the 4th to 5th centuries. Yogacara received the name as it provided a *yoga*, a framework for engaging in the practices that lead to the path of the [bodhisattva](#). The Yogacara sect teaches *yoga* in order to reach enlightenment.

Ch'an (Seon/Zen) Buddhism

[Zen](#) (the name of which derives from the Sanskrit "dhyāna" via the Chinese "ch'an") is a form of [Mahayana Buddhism](#). The Mahayana school of Buddhism is noted for its proximity with Yoga. In the west, Zen is often set alongside Yoga; the two schools of meditation display obvious family resemblances. This phenomenon merits special attention since the Zen Buddhist school of meditation has some of its roots in yogic practices. Certain essential elements of Yoga are important both for Buddhism in general and for Zen in particular.

Indo-Tibetan Buddhism

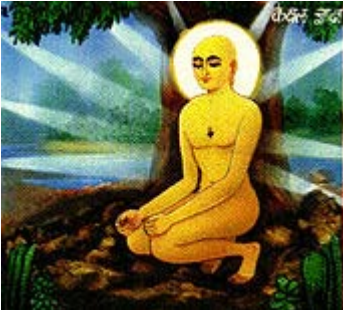
Yoga is central to [Tibetan Buddhism](#). In the [Nyingma](#) tradition, the path of meditation practice is divided into nine *yanas*, or vehicles, which are said to be increasingly profound. The last six are described as "yoga yanas": *Kriya yoga*, *Upa yoga*, *Yoga yana*, [Mahā yoga](#), [Anu yoga](#) and the ultimate practice, [Ati yoga](#). The [Sarma](#) traditions also include Kriya, Upa (called *Charya*), and Yoga, with the [Anuttara yoga](#) class substituting

for Mahayoga and Atiyoga. Other tantra yoga practices include a system of 108 bodily postures practiced with breath and heart rhythm. The Nyingma tradition also practices [Yantra yoga](#) (Tib. *Trul khor*), a discipline which includes breath work (or pranayama), meditative contemplation and precise dynamic movements to centre the practitioner. The body postures of Tibetan ancient yogis are depicted on the walls of the Dalai Lama's summer temple of [Lukhang](#). A semi-popular account of Tibetan Yoga by Chang (1993) refers to [candali](#) (Tib. *tummo*), the generation of heat in one's own body, as being "the very foundation of the whole of Tibetan Yoga". Chang also claims that Tibetan Yoga involves reconciliation of apparent polarities, such as [prana](#) and mind, relating this to theoretical implications of [tantrism](#).

Jainism



Tirthankara [Parsva](#) in Yogic meditation in the [Kayotsarga](#) posture.



Kevala Jñāna of Mahavira in [mulabandhasana](#) posture

According to [Tattvarthasutra](#), 2nd Century CE Jain text, *Yoga*, is the sum total of all the activities of mind, speech and body. [Umasvati](#) calls yoga as the cause of *asrava* or [karmic influx](#) as well as one of the essentials—[samyak caritra](#)—in the path to liberation. In his *Niyamasara*, Acarya [Kundakunda](#), describes *yoga bhakti*—devotion to the path to liberation—as the highest form of devotion. Acarya [Haribhadra](#) and Acarya [Hemacandra](#) mention the five major vows of ascetics and 12 minor vows of laity under yoga. This has

led certain [Indologists](#) like Prof. [Robert J. Zydenbos](#) to call Jainism as essentially a system of yogic thinking that grew into a full-fledged religion. ^[70] Dr. [Heinrich Zimmer](#) contended that the yoga system had pre-Aryan origins which did not accept the authority of the Vedas and hence was reckoned as one of the heterodox doctrines similar to Jainism. ^[71] Jain iconography depicts Jain [Tirthankaras](#) meditation in [Padmasana](#) or [Kayotsarqa](#) yogic poses. Mahavira was said to have achieved [Kevala Jnana](#) "enlightenment" sitting in [mulabandhasana](#) position which has the first literary mention in the [Acaranga Sutra](#) and later in [Kalpasutra](#) ^[72]

The [five yamas](#) or the constraints of the [Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](#) bear an uncanny resemblance to the [five major vows of Jainism](#), indicating a strong influence of Jainism. ^{[73][74]} This mutual influence between the Yoga philosophy and Jainism is admitted by the author Vivian Worthington who writes: "Yoga fully acknowledges its debt to Jainism, and Jainism reciprocates by making the practice of yoga part and parcel of life." ^[75] The Indus valley seals and iconography also provide a reasonable evidence of the existence of a proto-yogic tradition akin to Jainism. ^[76] More specifically, scholars and archaeologists have remarked on close similarities in the yogic and meditative postures depicted in the seals with those of various Tirthankaras: the "kayotsarga" posture of [Rsabha](#) and the [mulabandhasana](#) of [Mahavira](#) along with seals depicting meditative figure flanked by upright serpents bearing similarities to iconography of [Parsva](#). All these are indicative of not only links between Indus Valley Civilisation and Jainism, but also show the contribution of Jainism to various yogic practices. ^[77]

References in Jain canons and literature

Earliest of Jain canonical literature like Acarangasutra and texts like Niyamasara, Tattvarthasutra etc had many references on yoga as a way of life for laymen and ascetics. The later texts that further elaborated on the Jain concept of yoga are as follows:

- Pujiyapada (5th Century CE)
 - *Ishtopadesh*

- Acarya Haribhadra Suri(8th Century CE)
 - *Yogabindu*
 - *Yogadristisamuccaya*
 - *Yogasataka*
 - *Yogavimisika*

- Acarya Joindu (8th Century CE)
 - *Yogasara*

- Acarya Hemacandra (11th Century CE)
 - *Yogasastra*

- Acarya Amitagati (11th Century CE)
 - *Yogasarabhrta*

Islam

The development of [Sufism](#) was considerably influenced by Indian yogic practises, where they adapted both physical postures ([asanas](#)) and breath control ([pranayama](#)).^[78] The ancient Indian yogic text, Amritakunda, ("Pool of Nectar") was translated into Arabic and Persian as early as the 11th century.^[79]

Malaysia's top [Islamic](#) body in 2008 passed a [fatwa](#), which is legally non-binding, against [Muslims](#) practicing yoga, saying it had elements of "[Hindu](#) spiritual teachings" and could lead to [blasphemy](#) and is therefore [haraam](#). Muslim yoga teachers in Malaysia criticized the decision as "insulting".^[80] [Sisters in Islam](#), a women's rights group in Malaysia, also expressed disappointment and said they would continue with their yoga classes.^[81] The fatwa states that yoga practiced only as physical exercise is permissible, but prohibits the chanting of religious mantras,^[82] and states that teachings such as uniting of a human with God is not consistent with Islamic philosophy.^[83] In a similar vein, the [Council of Ulemas](#), an Islamic body in Indonesia, passed a [fatwa](#) banning yoga on the grounds that it contains "Hindu elements"^[84] These fatwas have, in turn, been criticized by [Darul Uloom Deoband](#), a [Deobandi](#) Islamic seminary in India.^[85]

In May of 2009, Turkey's head of the [Directorate of Religious Affairs](#), [Ali Bardakoğlu](#), discounted Yoga as a commercial venture promoting extremism- comments made in the context of Yoga practice possibly competing with and eroding participation in Islam ^[86].

Christianity

In 1989, the [Vatican](#) declared that Eastern meditation practices such as Zen and yoga can "degenerate into a cult of the body." Despite the Vatican statement, many [Roman Catholics](#) bring elements of Yoga, Buddhism, and Hinduism into their spiritual practices.^[87]

Tantra

Main article: [Tantra](#)

Tantrism is a practice that is supposed to alter the relation of its practitioners to the ordinary social, religious, and logical reality in which they live. Through [Tantric](#) practice an individual perceives reality as [maya](#), illusion, and the individual achieves liberation from it.^[88] This particular path to salvation among the several offered by [Hinduism](#), links Tantrism to those practices of [Indian religions](#), such as yoga, meditation, and social [renunciation](#), which are based on temporary or permanent withdrawal from social relationships and modes.^[88]

During tantric practices and studies, the student is instructed further in meditation technique, particularly [chakra meditation](#). This is often in a limited form in comparison with the way this kind of meditation is known and used by Tantric practitioners and yogis elsewhere, but is more elaborate than the initiate's previous meditation. It is considered to be a kind of [Kundalini Yoga](#) for the purpose of moving the Goddess into the chakra located in the "heart," for meditation and worship.^[89]

Goal of yoga

The goal of yoga may range from improving health to achieving [Moksha](#).^[90] Within Jainism and the [monist](#) schools of [Advaita Vedanta](#) and [Shaivism](#) the goal of yoga takes the form of Moksha, which is liberation from all worldly suffering and the cycle of birth and death ([Samsara](#)), at which point there is a realisation of identity with the Supreme [Brahman](#). In the Mahabharata, the goal of yoga is variously described as entering the world of [Brahma](#), as [Brahman](#), or as perceiving the Brahman or [Atman](#) that pervades all things.^[91] For the [bhakti](#) schools of [Vaishnavism](#), *bhakti* or service to [Svayam bhagavan](#) itself may be the ultimate goal of the yoga process, where the goal is to enjoy an eternal relationship with [Vishnu](#).^[92] Yoga also helps your body maintain a stable relationship with itself while going into a calm, neutral state of peace.

References: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga>