

The History of Yoga

An Introduction to the Earliest History and Background of Pātañjala type *yoga* practice.

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This four part course will feature some aspects of the history of yoga through a reading of primary textual sources. Patañjali indicates in his first verse that he is continuing pre-existing teachings (the Sanskrit prefix *anu* in the *anusāsanam* of *sūtra* I.1, indicates continuation, thus: “Now the *continuation* of the teachings of *yoga*”). The question therefore arises: continuing from what? Hence, the course will set out to excavate some of the earlier references to *yoga* in the Sanskrit textual traditions. After quickly reminding ourselves of the definition of *yoga* provided in the first four verses of the *Yoga Sūtras* so as to pinpoint the specific type of practice for which we will be seeking, we will pursue the earliest pre-Patañjali references to this type of *yoga*. These are to be found in a genre of Vedic texts called the *Upaniṣads*. We will read some passages in these texts pertaining to the nature of the true self, the *ātman* (*puruṣa*), along with exhortations by the sages to seek this self. Then we will look at the sections in these *Upaniṣads* wherein a method is presented to accomplish this - our earliest references to *yoga* as practice.

The course will then briefly touch upon the depiction of *yoga* in other textual sources such as the *Vedānta Sūtras* and *Nyāya Sūtras* (of the Hindu logicians), and then proceed in more depth to study how Pātañjala Yoga is presented in the *Gītā*. Here we will find it taking its place as one of the two types of *yoga* - action and inaction *yoga* - revealed by Kṛṣṇa “in the beginning.” We will read the Pātañjala type verses in chapter 5 and 6 (inaction *yoga*) and then contrast that with the action *yoga* favored by the *Gītā* (even as it honors both types). Tradition in fact associates the original recipient of *yoga* as Hiranyagarbha (another name for Brahmā, the secondary creator). So the course will conclude with the story from the famous *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* of Brahmā as the first *yogi*, featuring the very first act of *yoga* practice prior even to Creation itself. We will try to keep time in the fourth session of the course for Questions and Answers.

If there is sufficient interest generated by this Introductory course, our intention is to then continue with a perennially ongoing weekly 2 hour *svādhyāya* course reading the primary texts of Yoga such as the *Upaniṣads*, the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*, sections from the *Gītā* and most especially (from the point of view of the heart of the teacher), the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.