

Definitions of Astanga Yoga of Maharshi Patanjali

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Introduction

Maharshi Patanjali has codified his knowledge of *yoga*, its practices and benefits by encapsulating them in the form aphorisms. They are called as *yoga-sutras*. He has given the clear definitions of *yoga* and its eight branches very precisely and scientifically in his treatise Patanjali Yogasutra in four different *padas* or sections such as *Samadhi pada*, *Sadhana pada*, *Vibhuti pada* and *Kaivalya pada*.

Definitions of Yoga

Yogah cittavrtti nirodhah.

Yoga is the arrest of activities of *chitta*. (Patanjali Yogasutra I/2)

Definitions of eight branches of Yoga

Yama niyama asana pranayama pratyahara dharana dhyana samadhyah astau angani.

Self-discipline (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), posture (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), withdrawal of the mind from sense objects (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*) and absorption in the self (*samadhi*) are the eight limbs of *yoga*. (Patanjali Yogasutra II/29)

1) Yama

Ahimsa satya asteya brahmacarya aparigraha yamah.

Non-injury or non-violence (*ahimsa*), veracity or truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), abstinence (*brahmacarya*) and non-acceptance or covetousness (*aparigraha*) are the five *yamas* or restraints. (Patanjali Yogasutra II/30)

2) Niyama

Sauca santosa tapah svadhyaya isvarapranidhanani niyamah.

Cleanliness (*sauca*), contentment (*santosa*), austerity or penance (*tapas*), study and recitation of sacred scriptures (*svadhyaya*), and devotion (*pranidhana*) to the Supreme Lord (*Isvara*) are the five *niyamas* or observances. (Patanjali Yogasutra II/32)

3) Asana

Sthira sukham asanam.

Posture (*asana*) should be firm and comfortable. (Patanjali Yogasutra II/46)

4) Pranayama

Tasmin satisvasa prasvasayoh gativicchedah pranayamah.

Once that (*asana* or posture) has been perfected, *pranayama* is practiced. *Pranayama* is the suspension of the flow of inhalation (*svasa*) and exhalation (*prasvasa*). (Patanjali Yogasutra II/49)

5) *Pratyahara*

Svavisaya asamprayoge cittasya svarupanukarah iva indriyanam pratyaharah.

Pratyahara or the withdrawal of five *jnanendriyas* (senses of perception), and five *karmendriyas* (senses of action), as it were, following the essential nature of mind (*citta*) (by those very *indriyas*), when separated from their corresponding objects (*visaya*). (Patanjali Yogasutra II/54)

6) *Dharana*

Desa bandhah cittasya dharana.

Concentration (*dharana*) is the mind's fixation on one particular point. (Patanjali Yogasutra III/1)

7) *Dhyana*

Tatra pratyaya ekatanata dhyanam.

In *dharana*, the continuous flow of similar mental modifications is meditation (*dhyana*). (Patanjali Yogasutra III/2)

8) *Samadhi*

Tadeva arthamatanirbhasam svarupasunyam iva samadhih.

When the *yogi* becomes oblivious of his own entity and only the object of meditation remains, it is called perfect concentration (*samadhi*). It is just that condition in which only the object of concentration (*artha*) shines forth and the self is absent as it were. (Patanjali Yogasutra III/3)

Conclusion

Along with the definitions of eight branches of yoga, Maharshi Patanjali has also given the simple definitions of *vairagya*, *Ishvara*, *pranava*, *sabija samadhi* (*samprajnata samadhi*), *nirbija samadhi* (*asamprajnata samadhi*), *dharmamegha samadhi*, *kriyayoga*, *samyama* and *kaivalya*.

Vairagya

Drsta anusravika visaya vitrsnasya vasikarasamjna vairagyam.

He who has withdrawn his mind from all the enjoyments of this world and the other world (heaven) is called *vasikara vairagya*. (Patanjali Yogasutra I/15)

Ishvara

Klesa karma vipaka asayaih aparamrstah purusavisesah Ishvarah.

Ishvara is a special *purusa* (consciousness) untouched by *klesha* (afflictions), *karma* (action), *vipaka* (result of action) and *asaya* (deposits of the result of action). He is different from other *purusas*. (Patanjali Yogasutra I/24)

Pranava

Tasya vacakah pranavah.

AUM is the expression word of *Ishvara*. (Patanjali Yogasutra I/27)

Sabija Samadhi (Samprajnata Samadhi)

Ta eva sabijah samadhih.

The state in which there is one object of meditation as seed (*bija*) is called *savija samadhi* or *samprajnata samadhi*. There is only one *vritti* of *chitta* as object of meditation in this state. (Patanjali Yogasutra I/46)

Nirbija Samadhi (Asamprajnata Samadhi)

Tasyapi nirodhe sarvanirodhat nirbijah samadhih.

When the single *vritti* of *chitta* present in *sabija samadhi* is removed it is called *nirbija samadhi* or *asamprajnata samadhi*. (Patanjali Yogasutra I/51)

Dharmamegha Samadhi

Prasamkhyane api akusidasya sarvatha vivekakhyaateh dharmameghah samadhih.

When the yogi is not interested even in the *viveka khyati* (intellectual knowledge) he then enters into *dharmamegha Samadhi*. Here there is heavy rain of *dharma* (righteousness). This is the state just before the *kaivalya*. Here the yogi becomes full of goodness. (Patanjali Yogasutra IV/29)

Kriyayoga

Tapah svadhyaya isvarapranidhanani kriyayogah.

Austerity or penance (*tapas*), study of scriptures and chanting of *mantras* (*svadhyaya*) and devotion to the Supreme Lord (*Isvara*) are *kriyayoga*. (Patanjali Yogasutra II/1)

Samyama

Trayam ekastra samyamah.

The triad i.e. *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi* together on the same single object is *samyama*. (Patanjali Yogasutra III/3)

Kaivalya

Sattva purusayoh suddhi samye kaivalyam iti.

When the *buddhi* and the *purusa* are equally purified the *yogi* attains *kaivalya* (isolation). (Patanjali Yogasutra III/56)

Purusartha sunyanam gunanam pratiprasavah kaivalyam svarupapratistha va citisaktaih iti.

Merger of all the modifications into their respective causes is called *kaivalya*. It is the state when the *purusa* (consciousness) is established in its real form. (Patanjali Yogasutra IV/34)

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