

Title of the paper: The Eight Limbs of Yoga Philosophy: A Path to Self-Discipline and Enlightenment

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Abstract—Recognized as a discipline of holistic well-being, Yoga Drshan primarily focuses on the mind while promoting the harmonious integration of the mind, body and spirit. Yoga encourages a deep understanding of the mind, its various states and cognitive functions. It also provides techniques for regulating thoughts and emotions. It serves as a path to spiritual realization through self-purification and mental discipline. To attain profound self-awareness and a deeper comprehension of human existence, Yoga philosophy emphasizes the importance of physical, psychological, and moral well-being. These aspects collectively refine the mind, allowing for complete mastery over both the body and mind. The *Yoga Sūtra* presents the eight limbs, known as *Aṣṭāṅga Mārga*, which leads to self-knowledge, liberation, and the cessation of suffering. In the modern world, where stress and unhealthy lifestyles contribute to various mental and physical health challenges, adopting the principles of *Aṣṭāṅga Mārga* can offer effective solutions for maintaining balance and well-being. This paper explores the practical significance of Yoga philosophy in contemporary society, examining its role in fostering self-regulation of thoughts and actions.

Index Terms—Mind, Body, Soul, Ashana.

I. INTRODUCTION

Yoga, one of the major Vedic systems of Indian philosophy, was founded by the great sage Patañjali. Philosophically, it is closely aligned with the Sāṅkhya system. Like Sāṅkhya, Yoga adopts its epistemology, recognizing three pramāṇas (sources of valid knowledge): pratyakṣa (perception), anumāna (inference), and śabda (scriptural testimony), except upamāna (comparison). Yoga also embraces the metaphysical framework of Sāṅkhya, including its twenty-five tattvas (categories). However, the two systems diverge on one crucial point: Sāṅkhya does not acknowledge the existence of Īśvara (God), while Yoga affirms it.

The term Yoga literally means ‘union,’ referring to the spiritual union of the individual ātman (soul) with the Paramātman (Universal Soul). However, Patañjali used the term in a different sense. For him, Yoga does not signify union but rather the spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of the śarīra (body), indriyas (senses) and manas (mind). Yoga philosophy emphasizes inner peace as the ultimate goal, which can be achieved through practices like daily meditation, ethical living, regular physical movement, self-discipline, and mindfulness. These practices foster a deeper sense of mental and physical well-being. The practice of Yoga is considered the best way of śuddhi (self-purification), both of the śarīra (body) and buddhi (intellect). Yoga practices are recognized even in the Upaniṣads (like Kaṭha, Śvetāśvatara, Maitrī), Smṛtis (like Manusmṛti, Yājñavalkya Smṛti), and the Purāṇas (like Bhāgavata, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Mārkaṇḍeya).

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To study the principles and practices of Aṣṭāṅga Mārga
- To study the Impact of Aṣṭāṅga Mārga on Mental Well-Being and Inner Peace.

Data Source and Methodology: This work is based on secondary data collected from different sources including various books, journal, contemporary records etc., mainly descriptive and analytical method is adopted.

III. DISCUSSION

In today’s world, most people are deeply immersed in material pursuits, constantly rushing and living by the clock. Everything seems to be time-bound, with little time to relax or unwind. In order to get everything done quickly, many experience physical exhaustion and mental tension, turning life into a web of

problems. It's challenging to pinpoint what truly brings happiness. While people buy material items for comfort, they often end up feeling even more stressed, fatigued, and dissatisfied, as material comforts alone cannot provide ever lasting peace or contentment. At this point, Yoga offers significant value, providing an effective means to relieve stress and restore balance. This balance could be the balance between mind and body, between expectation and reality, between satisfaction and dissatisfaction and many more. By practicing Yoga, we can address and alleviate stress-related issues, leading to a healthier and more peaceful life. Patanjali in his Yoga-Sutra defined Yoga as the inhibition (*Nirodhah*) of the Modifications (*Vṛtti*) of the Mind (*Citta*) - *yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhah*, (*Yoga Sūtras 1.2*)². This *Sūtra* defines the essence of Yoga in just four words. Every field of study has some fundamental concepts that must be understood for a deeper grasp of the subject. The ideas behind these four words are also fundamental to understand Yoga philosophy. Let's briefly explore their meaning.

The word Yoga, is derived from the Sanskrit root *Yuj*, meaning 'to join.' The central idea of Yoga is union-specifically, the union of the *Jīvātma* (individual soul) with the *Paramātma* (Supreme Soul or Divine Reality). Although in essence the two are the same and are indivisible, still, the *Jīvātma* has become subjectively separated from *Paramātma* and is destined, after going through an evolutionary cycle in the manifested Universe, to become united with Him again in consciousness. This state of unification of the two in consciousness as well as the mental process and discipline through which this union is attained, is called Yoga. The word *Citta* is derived from *Cit* or *Citi*, one of the three aspects of *Paramātma* (*Sat-Cit-Ānanda* as referred in *Vedānta*). It is through this aspect that the Universe is created. The reflection of this in the individual soul (microcosm) is called *Citta*. *Citta* is the medium through which the *Jīvātma* experiences and evolves in the world until it reunites with the *Paramātma*. While *Citta* can be compared to the 'mind' in modern psychology, it has a broader role, encompassing all levels of consciousness, while psychology focuses only on thought, will, and emotion. The last word to be considered is *Nirodha*. This word is derived from the word *Niruddham* which means 'restrained', 'controlled', 'inhibited'. All these meanings are applicable in the different stages of Yoga. Restraint is involved in the initial stages, control

in the more advanced stages and inhibition or complete suppression in the last stage. Thus, this definition encompasses all stages of progress the *Yogi* undergoes and the unfolding of consciousness that results from this progression. Yoga philosophy emphasizes the physical, psychological and moral states of being. The aim of these three states is to modify the mind so that one can achieve complete control over both mind and body.

The Yoga Sutra prescribes a set of eight limbs, known as *Ashtāṅga Mārga*, which leads to self-knowledge, liberation, and the cessation of personal suffering. *Ashtāṅga Yoga* of Patanjali, as noted by Taimni, points out only the broad principles of the general method which has to be followed in liberating human consciousness from the limitations of *Avidya* and gaining *Self-realization*. It is true that in this system a well-defined technique has been laid down for achieving this end, the different parts of this technique are not rigid in their nature but sufficiently elastic to allow the aspirant to adapt them to his personal needs, temperament and convenience³. The stress-induced lifestyle prevalent in the modern world leads to a range of mental and physical health issues, which can be mitigated by embracing the *Ashtāṅga Mārga* of Yoga philosophy. These are:

1. *Yama* or restraint: The *Yamas* are often described as restraints or ethical guidelines. There are five *Yamas*, which are *ahimsā*, *Satya*, *Asteya*, *Brahmacarya*, and *Aparigraha*⁴.

i) *Ahimsā* or non-violence means abstention from injury. It is tenderness, goodwill, and kindness for all living beings. It extends beyond physical harm to thoughts, words, and actions. *Ahimsā* encourages kindness, empathy, and forgiveness.

ii) *Satya* or truthfulness refers to abstention from falsehood, being truthful in thought, word, and deed. *Satya* emphasizes the importance of honesty and authenticity. It means being truthful in intentions and beliefs. However, truthfulness must be balanced with compassion so that honesty does not harm others.

iii) *Asteya* or non-stealing is the practice of not taking what is not freely given. This encompasses both material and non-material aspects, like avoiding envy, greed, and the desire to possess more than what is needed.

iv) *Brahmacarya* or control of the carnal desires and passions, traditionally interpreted as celibacy, in a modern context can mean responsible use of one's

energy, avoiding overindulgence, and maintaining balance in relationships, emotions, and personal activities.

v) Aparigraha or non-possessiveness, or non-acceptance of unnecessary gifts from others. Aparigraha encourages us to let go of greed and the desire to possess. It is the practice of avoiding materialism and embracing simplicity, allowing us to detach from outcomes, people, or things that may hold us back.

2. Niyama or Self-Discipline refers to personal practices that promote self-growth and well-being. It includes:

1. Śauca (Purification): Keeping both the body and mind clean. External purification involves hygiene and eating pure food, while internal purification means maintaining positive thoughts and emotions.
2. Santoṣa (Contentment): Being satisfied with what one has and accepting life without unnecessary struggle.
3. Tapah (Discipline): Practicing self-control and endurance, such as withstanding discomfort and following strict vows.
4. Svādhyāya (Self-Study): Reading sacred texts and engaging in self-reflection for deeper understanding.
5. Īśvara-praṇidhāna (Devotion to God): Surrendering to a higher power through meditation, humility and faith.

3) Āsana or Posture: Āsana means a steady and comfortable posture, essential for physical and mental discipline. Postures like Padmāsana (Lotus Pose), Vīrāsana (Hero Pose), and Bhādrāsana (Gracious Pose) help improve immunity, enhance well-being, and regulate the nervous system. Practicing āsanās stabilizes the mind and prevents distractions, but they should be learned under expert guidance. A healthy body is necessary for concentration, as illness and discomfort make focus difficult. Yoga provides guidelines for maintaining physical health, preserving energy and purifying both body and mind to support mental discipline. It includes rules for preserving vital energy, strengthening, and purifying both body and mind. The recommended āsanās (postures) are effective in keeping the body partially free from disease, bringing all limbs, especially the nervous system, under control, and preventing mental disturbances.

4) Prāṇāyāma, or breath control: It is a vital practice in disciplines like yoga and meditation. It involves the deliberate regulation of the breathing process, which includes three main stages. The first stage is Inhalation (Pūraka) that refers to the technique of drawing air into the lungs in a controlled manner. Second stage is Retention (Kumbhaka) that refers to the technique of holding the breath for a specific duration, which helps in absorbing oxygen and increasing lung capacity. Thirdly stage is Exhalation (Rechaka) it refers to the technique of releasing the breath slowly and completely⁵. Though the practice of prāṇāyāma is very beneficial, it must be approached with caution. Performing it incorrectly, especially without expert guidance, can lead to negative effects such as dizziness, headaches or even respiratory issues. Proper supervision ensures that practitioners learn the correct techniques and sequences, maximizing the benefits while minimizing risks. That Prāṇāyāma which goes beyond the sphere of internal and external is the fourth (variety).

5) Pratyāhāra or withdrawal of the senses: It refers to the control of the senses and consists in withdrawing the senses from their objects. Our senses have a natural tendency to go to outward objects. Pratyāhāra involves withdrawing the senses from their external objects and bringing them under the control of the mind. When the senses are effectively governed by the mind, they no longer pursue their natural objects but instead follow the mind's direction. In this state, the mind remains undisturbed by external sights and sounds, guiding the senses to focus on its chosen object. This state is very difficult, although not impossible to attain. It requires a strong will and prolong practice to gain mastery over one's senses.

These five are called external aids to Yoga (Bahiranga sādhanā), while the remaining three -Dhāraṇā, Dhyaṇā and Samādhi which follow are called internal aids (Antaranga sādhanā).

(6) Dhāraṇā or attention: It is a mental discipline which consists in holding (dhāraṇā) or fixing the mind (citta) on the desired object. This object can be internal, such as a part of the body or external, such as the moon or the image of a deity. It implies keeping the mind fixed on something, like the tip of the nose, the space between the eyebrows, the heart, or an image of a deity. The mind should remain steady, like a lamp's flame that does not flicker. The ability to focus

steadily on one object is an important step in advancing in Yoga.

(7) Dhyāna or meditation: Dhyāna refers to the continuous and uninterrupted flow of thought. It is the stage before Samadhi and involves complete mental stability. Dhyāna is a course of Uniform modification of knowledge at that place where the internal organ is fixed in attention by avoiding the otherwise (not uniform) modification of knowledge⁶. According to Patanjali, it is the focused concentration of the mind (chitta) on one thought or object without distraction. In meditation we chant a sacred sound or word repeatedly to focus the mind. Sound vibrations play a significant role in enhancing meditation by aligning the mind and body with specific frequencies. Because, chanting, listening to mantras, or using sound instruments like Tibetan bowls, tuning forks can create vibrations that calm the mind and deepen focus. By repeating the mantra (generally a mystic word) aligns thoughts, reducing mental chatter and increasing concentration. Sound vibrations help release negative energy, fostering relaxation and inner peace. The rhythmic nature of sound vibrations helps slow down brainwave activity, shifting it from active (beta) to calm (alpha) or meditative (theta) states. Dr. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese scientist, in his book 'The Hidden Messages in water' noted that, the entire universe is in a state of vibration, and each thing generates its own frequency, which is unique⁷. With his experiment he shows how the influence of our thoughts, words and feelings on water. water is not just a substance - it is the life force of majestic nature even human beings whose body's 70% is made of water. It has a mysterious ability to cleanse and give life to all living creature. He claims that words expressing emotions have effect on the crystals of water formed in the process. Emoto also noted that words with positive emotional contents produce beautiful crystals and those with negative emotional content generate ugly ones. Even the science of quantum mechanics generally acknowledges that substance is nothing more than vibration. When we separate something into its smallest parts, we always enter a strange world where all that exists is particles and waves.

(8) Samādhi or concentration: This is the final step in Yoga. Here the mind is completely absorbed in the object of meditation. Dhyāna is integrally related to Dhāraṇa, one leads to other. Dhāraṇa is a state of mind, Dhyāna is the process of mind. In Dhyāna, the

meditator and the object of meditation remain separate. In Samādhi, this separation disappears and they become one. Samādhi is the deepest state of meditation, where thoughts stop, and only pure awareness of the object remains. This state is a key step toward liberation, as it frees the mind from distractions and external connections. In Samādhi, the mind is fully absorbed in the object, losing awareness of itself. Unlike Dhyāna, where the act of meditation is still recognized, in Samādhi, only the object remains, with no awareness of the thinking process.

Dhāraṇa, Dhyāna, and Samādhi are stages of the same mental process, each representing a deeper level of concentration and focus. Together, they form Sāmyama, a practice in Yoga that leads to profound knowledge and special abilities called Siddhis. Mastering Sāmyama unlocks both wisdom and extraordinary powers.

Masaru Emoto has carried out very interesting experiments with water at critical point for freezing. He claims that words expressing emotions have effect on the crystals formed in the process. Emoto reports that words with positive emotional contents produce beautiful crystals and those with negative emotional content generate ugly ones. Also, music and even pictures are reported to have similar effect.

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IV. CONCLUSION

It is a psychological law that a sound mind resides in a sound body, and that neither can be sound in the case of a man who does not control his passions and sensual impulse. Yoga as a discipline taught us the process of termination of mental functions or modifications (cittavrittinirodha). It does not pursue any kind of connection between the individual self and some other reality like God or the Absolute. The aim of yoga is to prevent the self from identifying itself with mental modifications. In this system the Ashtanga Mārga is a complete guide to self-discipline, leading to physical, mental, and spiritual growth. It includes ethical principles (yama and niyama), physical and mental control (āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Pratyāhāra), and deep concentration leading to enlightenment (Dhāraṇa, Dhyāna, Samādhi). By following this path, one cultivates self-discipline, inner peace and ultimately liberation (Moksha), achieving harmony between body, mind and soul. Thus, Aṣṭāṅga Mārga aren't just practices but a state of dynamic awareness, transforming an individual's personality. It shifts the mind from the external world to the inner self, creating a sense of bliss. It promotes self-discipline through mental, emotional and spiritual practices. The principles of yoga provide a structured way to cultivate inner control and balance in life.

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