

Brief Timeline of Yoga Practices and Concepts

About 3500 bce (before the current era) for the first time we find the term *yoga* in the Rig Veda related generally to any practice of discipline. In the Atharva Veda, *yoga* is related to the *pranayama* practiced by priestly troubadours about 1000 bce.

About 800 bce we see *yoga* appear in the sacred Upanishads referring to union with the Universal Absolute (*Brahman*) through *karma yoga* and *jnana yoga*.

About 300 bce the Maitri (or Maitrayani) Upanishad gives the first fully developed system of yoga. The author of the Maitri Upanishad defines six limbs of yoga (*sadanga*) as control of the breath (*pranayama*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*), meditation (*dhyana*), concentration (*dharana*), contemplation (*tarka*) and absorption (*samadhi*). This Upanishad goes on to describe liberation (*kaivalya*) as the restraint of thoughts and absorption in self-luminous witness consciousness. These are all the core concepts and practices that we see in the Yoga Sutras.

Within 200 years of the beginning of the current era Patanjali wrote his classic Yoga Sutras. This work is a substantial expansion on the Maitri Upanishad. To the Maitri *sadanga* are added restraints (*yama*), observances (*niyama*) and posture (*asana*). *Tarka* is dropped from the set giving us eight limbs (*astanga*); which we see today after being refreshed in the last century into a *vinyasa* form of hatha yoga. For a very long time this eight-limb Raja Yoga was the middle of the road of yoga philosophy and practice.

In the ninth or tenth century, Goraknath gave us the Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati, the first publication specific to hatha yoga and tantra.

In the fourteenth century Svatomarama produced Hatha Yoga Pradipika, a tantric text describing sixteen asanas; variants of *Padmasana*. Note that these are all seated postures, specifically for pranayama and meditation, for attainment of *samadhi*. At the time, tantra and hatha yoga were thought radical and misguided. Note that it is 1,500 years after Patanjali that yoga begins to be associated with asana.

Now let us turn to what happened to Patanjali's dualistic philosophical view. Perhaps it was just a bubble of pragmatism; as the Vedas and sacred Upanishads that came before the Yoga Sutras were monistic, and Tantra Yoga that came after, is also non-dualistic.

Let's look at what this really means. The fundamental duality of Patanjali's Samkhya philosophy is that there is self and other; *purusha* and *prakriti*, subject and object. This is our common experience, right?

The unity fundamental to non-dual yoga philosophy is that our local conscious indweller, the Self, is not different than universal consciousness; *Atman* and *Brahman* are one and the same. This is not hard to imagine; but as such is only a concept, thus there is not that much real difference from the dualism of Patanjali. The real difference is in the personal experience of it. The sage Abhinavagupta explains:

The individual self is the Supreme Self, but with the only difference of being enwrapped with the veil of ignorance, a limitation as regards self-knowledge.

Everything we experience through our senses, we experience as a perception. These perceptions and mental constructs all exist within our awareness. Therefore, what is permanent, unchanging, and real is awareness, not the transitory world that our awareness reveals. All this takes place within our awareness. Each thing is equally a form of consciousness; equally an appearance within awareness. We switch from feeling that the world is outside us to feeling that the world is inside our Self of consciousness. This is the heart of non-dualism.

It is through the steady practice of meditation that we experience the fullness of consciousness knowing itself. It is here that the concept of non-dual yoga philosophy is verifiable in experience.