

Introduction :

So what is yoga?...

YOGA is usually translated as 'Union'. Its origin is the word that means 'to bind', to 'put back together', 'to integrate'. The word also refers to the yoke (the origin of this word is 'yoga') – A brace that binds oxen together so that the cart-driver can get them to move in unison, or a wooden device balanced over someone's shoulders used for carrying two pails of water. So the meaning of the word itself gives us hints about how to go about practicing it.

Classical Yoga

Who was Patanjali?

Patanjali is said to be a scholar/yogi that lived at some time between 400BC and 200 AD. He is meant to be one of the first to attempt to define and put down in writing a succinct 'how to' in terms of self realisation through Yoga practice. And this work is referred to as 'Patanjali's sutras'.

The Sutras (sutra='thread') were originally learnt and passed on by people orally, generation by generation, for between 3000 and 4000 years before Patanjali existed. It is quite likely that the sutras attributed to Patanjali were compiled and edited over several hundred years by various different factions with various different agendas (similar to the books and versions of the bible). Scholars debate the actual dates of Patanjali's existence because the knowledge was passed on in an oral tradition rather than written down, which would be easier to date more accurately.

Patanjali is a surname, and perhaps the name of a lineage and school of teachers, students, and sages, rather than being only one person. However, for convenience sake, Patanjali is spoken of as a single person, but nobody knows for sure.

(Give it a couple of thousand years and scholars might be debating what the 'correct' rendition of 'Creating the Conditions' is, and who this AcquaViva actually was...)

Is this the only tradition/authority?

Patanjali's sutras are by no means the only treatise on yoga, there are many others from other traditions and areas of India (Tantra being one of the most well known), and these other sutras hold just as much value in their investigation.

For the purposes of investigating the links between what we are doing, and the ancient traditions and understandings of yoga, this 'classical' look at how the yoga works is as good a frame of reference as any. It is the most prevalent reference to historic definition of yoga in the West, so this particular version will probably be the most useful in terms of communicating to others.

However, it is important to understand the fact that ALL descriptions of yoga hold a cultural bias. So if you treat any one interpretation as gospel, without practicing to find your own meaning, you will inevitably misinterpret the interpretation...

Classical yoga can offer a useful framework for practice, but only if you are prepared to work from a scientific premise... Direct investigation, together with unbiased observation of both action and outcome (these things are covered in Patanjali's sutras)

Yoga and religion?

Patanjali is associated with linking the intent behind the practice of yoga with 'merging of the Self with the Divine'. Other than this, Yoga has never really been a religious pursuit, more of a philosophical/practical approach to self-realisation. Patanjali shifted things a little by stating that 'Union with the Divine' was basically a fast-track way of achieving this – but practicing to 'Unify' can be done with anything you choose. In the AcquaViva tradition, the idea is that the first port of call is to unify the mind with the body, and that other personal and paradigmatic changes and inferences arise naturally from the investigation.

Yoga and science?

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika opens with the statement '*Praise be to Shiva that gave use the science of yoga*'. The word 'science' is usually understood as 'established knowledge'... but in my interpretation of things I would venture to say that a more useful interpretation of 'the science of yoga' might be the 'scientific method'. Shiva represents consciousness that has the power to destroy all that is unreal... Consciousness together with scientific method would naturally yield observations that move ever closer to the truth.

The primary object of yoga was to prepare for meditation, and the purpose of meditation was to be able to centre the mind on any object so that it may be directly experienced and therefore understood.

However they managed it, the mystics of the day managed to map out the solar system, calculate occurrences of eclipses and other celestial events and accurately measure the circumference of the Earth. And all of this was a few thousand years before western science even accepted that the Earth was not flat.

Meditation was the central practice of the Magi and the Vedics – the separation between science and mysticism is a relatively recent divide.

The AcquaViva approach vs. 'Classical yoga' ?

Traditional English translations of the original Sanskrit texts on yoga are full of words like 'control',

‘restraint’, ‘withdrawal’ and other such restrictive descriptions.

This wording is similar to an old-school idea of how some people discipline an errant child, rather than an intelligent and self-aware adult.

So, we at AcquaViva, prefer to assume that these words are perhaps mis-translations based on the cultural influences of the time of translation. In addition, from our direct experience within practice, these words simply don’t work. So perhaps the discrepancies lay as much in contemporary interpretations of these words.

So, if you are willing to take this possibility into account and allow some room for poetic license and re-interpretation, then perhaps;

- ‘control’ could be more usefully translated as ‘skilful responses’
- ‘restraint’ as ‘staying with non-reaction long enough to become clear’,
- ‘withdrawal from...’ as perhaps ‘try not to be distracted by...’

This outside-the-box thinking renders traditional writings useful to us as well as giving us a point of communication with those that have a more restrictive practice based on the idea of control and restraint.

This way vs. that?

Generally, in the contemporary world of yoga, there seems to be an expanding polarisation. Gaining momentum on the one side, there are homogenised practices such as Bikram and other posture-achievement centred practices that prescribes 'right and wrong' ways of doing things, but which paradoxically seems to invite a natural humility and bring people together into a unified community.

And equally expanding on the other side, is a pendulum swing in the opposite direction, perhaps in reaction to the asceticism and control of the traditional approaches to education. This other direction attempts to honour the individual, empowering them to make their own minds up. But this position also leaves a great deal of room for mistaking personal preference and bias for 'right' or 'natural'. So it becomes quite possible for people to use their yoga to exaggerate and expand personality/ego, rather than for developing potential.

Any kind of yoga with some sensitivity can easily lose itself in an equally homogenized idea that ‘everyone's body is different, so everyone's yoga is different’.

Which is absolutely true in terms of subjective experience and interpretation. But the fact remains that despite our entirely unique frames of reference, there is commonality in terms of natural biomechanical function, gravity, breathing, and real physical relationships between things. These are things that we can agree on whatever our individual interpretation of somatic experiencing. Ignoring commonality in favour of personal bias is as misguided as scripted instructions that ignore individuality.

We are individuals with self-responsibility for self-realisation, so the degree of our own liberation is down to our own investments in our individual journeys.

But how then do we help each other? How is this taking us towards union with our own species, let alone with the Divine? And how do we help guide those with less experience than ourselves?

Keep on keeping on...

I think its simple really - perhaps you don't 'educate', you just inform and inspire. You can make a living out of either of those things individually... but if you can provide both, you are giving people all that they need to transform things for themselves.

The AcquaViva tradition – From Marc's Perspective

There is an unusual relationship between my particular way and 'tradition'... Traditions begin because the people involved were passionate enough about their art to dare to redefine it, and of course it would be in the face of established views.

Yoga's long history is one of rebellion against establishment, only to become the next establishment that requires rebelling against. ... Iyengar's approach to teaching was a revolution in its time and in opposition to how he was taught (by Krishnamacarya).

Vanda Scaravelli's approach (taught directly by Iyengar for many years) seems entirely oppositional to Iyengar's and is of course spoken of as a revolution. I believe I am finding these 'brand new' things out for myself but many of the relationships that I work with are being recognised by people that have worked directly with Iyengar... they say to me "Ah, that's what he meant! - only he said it was a movement of the skin" ...

My point is that yoga is and always has been just yoga, but it needs to keep evolving for it to remain yoga.

So I personally will seek value in the traditional sources, which others might dismiss as 'the old way', whilst continuing to investigate things for myself without undue influence from any 'party line' (I actually believe that this way of working is probably the way it was originally worked out thousands of years ago).

To me this is actually part of what it means to be a Scaravelli inspired - to play with and explore the nature of all things from all angles with an unbiased and uncluttered mind. When I read Vanda's book, this is how I am inspired. And if my own efforts, to expand upon and spread the work, go the way I see them, I suspect that all I am actually doing is starting the 'AcquaViva tradition'... Ho hum! but hopefully the baseline requirement of 'AcquaViva inspired yoga' will be of direct personal investigation into the meaning and potential value of what is being 'taught'.

Classical Yoga - the Sutras & the Eight-fold path.
Patanjali's sutras (Pātañjalayogasūtra) an overview:

Patañjali's Sutras contain in all between 194- 198 aphorisms (depending on rendition), divided into four chapters (or 'steps') as follows:

- **Samadhi Pada**

Samadhi is the Sanskrit for the state of union ([see below](#)), and Pada means 'step' or 'foot' (as in 'padmasana' - lotus pose) ... So, this would be 'the unification step/chapter'.

- **Sadhana Pada**

Sadhana is the Sanskrit word for "practice" or "discipline". Here the author outlines two forms of Yoga: Kriya Yoga (the yoga of selfless action and service) and Astanga yoga (Eightfold path or Eight Limbed Yoga, also known as Raja yoga when all eight limbs are practiced. This is the classical approach we will be investigating).

- **Vibhuti Pada**

Vibhuti is the Sanskrit word for "power" or "manifestation". 'Supra-normal powers' (Sanskrit: siddhi) are meant to be acquired by the practice of yoga.

Marc says:

'I personally have no idea (nor any particular interest) in how far these abilities are developed, but I personally believe that these are just natural human potentials that can arise in the removal of other obstacles.'

When people first meet me and don't know any better, they might think that my ability to 'see' what's going on inside people's bodies is some kind of magic trick... its not, its just the skill of recognising linked patterns of movement and support, and it results simply from practicing in this way and looking for such things. And being familiar with the emotional content of physical releases in certain areas of my own body, allows me occasionally to get a sense of what is going on for someone else, so I might find the best kind of language to use when an obstacle arises. We don't necessarily need to go into the story of it, if I can remind myself to be Present to the person's emotional body, it is simple enough to sense when there is a tricky 'no-go' area that might require physical investigation with appropriate degrees of kindness. These things are just increased sensitivities through practice, and my assumption is that the 'siddhis' are simply this. The purpose of unifying (samadhi) is to experience directly, and the siddhis (perhaps the ability to directly understand something that arises from being able to become one with it) arise as a natural consequence.

I would say that the 'siddhi' of anti-aging is probably worth recognising for the purposes of motivation. Its not really a vanity, in that when we treat the body with the degree of respect that really it deserves, it simply doesn't age at the same rate that 'normal' stress-centred being brings on. Just look at how quickly Presidents and Prime Ministers age with the stress of their jobs. Yoga could be considered the opposite of such stress.

Putting in the work will make your appearance and movement develop a more youthful quality than might be expected for your age, and this of course will be part of the 'evidence' that will appeal to those that are looking for yoga.'

- **Kaivalya Pada**

This literally translates as "isolation", but as used in the Sutras but can be translated as emancipation, liberation and it can be used interchangeably with moksha (liberation), which is meant to be the goal of yoga. The Kaivalya Pada describes the process of liberation and the reality of the transcendental ego.

It is worth asking the question: Liberation from what? 'Freedom' is a relative and entirely subjective term, that is worth being clear about on a personal level. One person's freedom, is another person's chaotic dissarray.

Marc says,

'Currently, I think it is liberation from obstacles to fulfilment of potential. Which includes things like liberation from pain, misconception, and self-harm.'

The first few sutras:

Below is a personal translation of the first 4 of Patanjali's sutras (from the first chapter - Samadhi Pada)...

1.1: Now begins the way of Yoga. Usual translation: And now begins (atha) the instruction (anuśāsanam) regarding Yoga:

Atha yogānuśāsanam. अथ योगानुशासनम्

1.2: The experience of Yoga arises when the movements of the mind become still. Usually: Yoga (yogaḥ) is the suppression (nirodhaḥ) of the modifications (vṛtti) of mind (citta):

Yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनरोध

1.3: Then the witness naturally enters the yoga state. Usually: Then (tadā), there is an abiding (avasthānam) in the essential nature (sva-rūpe) of the Seer (draṣṭuḥ).

Tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vasthānam तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम्

1.4: At other times, the witness identifies with the movements of the mind

Usually: On other occasions (itaratra), there is identity (sārūpyam) (between the Seer and) the modifications (of mind)(vṛtti)

Vṛttisārūpyamitaratra वृत्तिसारूप्यमतरत्र

The sutras go on to describe what those movements of the mind are, so that in the absence of a 'stilled mind', you can discern between useful ways of seeing things and ways that distract from the aim of integration or wholeness. The movements of the mind are divided into upward thinking, which is useful and downward thinking which are distractions.

Marc says,

'From my own explorations I would further redefine these aphorisms and I think they are better interpreted when the solutions are incorporated in the descriptions of what the interferences to the yoga might be...'

1.1 Yoga is already occurring; understanding/instruction of yoga arises naturally when you are simply Present to this moment, so turn up! ~ Condition 1.

1.2 Yoga is naturally experienced by a person when the mind is not distracted by other things So get clear in your intent. Strategically occupy the busy mind with things that keep you 'whole' - eg. equal touch.

1.3: Then the person will directly recognise the experience that is Yoga, this is the 'third way' experience, where a moment of wholeness and stillness occurs spontaneously when you happen to achieve a degree of equality of touch and/or meeting of space. i.e. Condition 3. Having experienced it, you can choose to identify with that state of being, temporarily at least, until the next distraction draws the mind away from the experience.

1.4: As they occur, your distractions will appear to be who you are, but this is temporary.

And although it is a real experience, it is useful to remind yourself that it is not reality. eg. 'I am hungry', 'I am sad', 'I am restricted'. Distractions are sourced in need or conflict, so resolve to meet your needs and set intent to undo your conflicts. One approach to doing that is by Creating the Conditions. Despite the feeling that things happen 'to us', what we experience depends entirely on what we are centring our attention on and we can choose where we point our awareness.

This description is obviously more wordy but consider that not only were the sutras handed down, but their inner meaning would also be discussed and explored between teacher and student. The sutras were explored not just learned and repeated.

Marc says,

'You may notice that in putting together 'the Conditions' I have essentially written my own series of 'sutras' - perhaps its purpose being more directly to do with the physical practice of yoga, than with spiritual aspirations, although I also believe there is a natural humanistic intelligence that arises from applying yourself to this kind of non-violence in your yoga.'

Regularly return to the sutras when you are feeling the need for some larger context to your practice.

Below is a link to a word document that lists all the Sutras (copy and paste onto your browser)

<http://www.acquavivayoga.com/STUDENT-RESOURCES/CourseNotes/Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.doc>

(it also contains links that expand upon each one ... courtesy of [SwamiJ.com](http://www.SwamiJ.com))

'Samadhi' - meaning & implications

Samadhi is the Sanskrit term for the blissful 'yoga state' of being that occurs when the mind merges with/locks with/unifies with an object of meditation.

The implication is that when the conditions are right, and the mind can become objectively present to a thing. The subject of the experience should be able to identify with, to unify with whatever there is objective awareness of. In other words, in removing the distortions of projected perception of a thing, the mind is capable of experiencing the thing directly as it is, so understanding then ceases to be a mental construct.

In principle, the truth of any matter is directly available, simply by shining the mind's light on it! This is the ideal mental state that we are in as we practice with the physicality of Yoga.

Being Absolutely Present to what is, as it is, so that we can directly 'see it'. This is appropriate for your own practice and equally appropriate for helping someone with theirs.

Marc says,

'Objective presence to something or someone is what I consider to be an act of real (unconditional) love. And when action follows the understanding that arrives with this level of Presence, it has immense transformative power...

We must start by finding this objective awareness for ourselves, within ourselves. Presence to our apparently 'separate' parts, so that we might unify them and become 'whole' again.

You can do this very simply... Condition 1:

Turn up to yourself and your body... become Quiet and Present to things as they are, until you are able listen to what is going on right this moment. Then there is room for objective and intelligent solution-based responses... To me this is true compassion. This is how you actually make a difference to others, and this is how you can actually make a difference to yourself.'

Do not feel you need to learn the Sutras!

Nor do you have to learn the Acquaviva notes nor anything anyone else has written. It's not the point. The intent of the sutras is simply to help. They were created as a series of repeatable cyclic and sequential catch-phrases which were easily memorable before writing. The sutras then can be used to help monitor and guide your practice and progress.

The first sutra basically says it all, then subsequent ones are there to clarify what should arise naturally from the practice, just in case it is not naturally forthcoming.

It's worth being familiar with what is to come, but 'moving on' to later Sutras/Conditions is something worth doing specifically only really if you find yourself stuck. You will be stuck because your understanding of the first sutra is incomplete or there is some degree of misunderstanding in your interpretation, so you would benefit from exploring what these later sutras/conditions mean by directly putting them into practice, because they may contain the solution to your 'block'.

Marc says:

'I personally haven't really practically investigated beyond the first 11 or 12 sutras, as these first few seem to have enough content to keep me investigating to my heart's content... I may put energy into doing more than just reading the others, if one day I find myself at a dead stop in my practice.'

The principles ...

Principles vs. technique ...

Principles are generally more useful than techniques. A technique is something you learn and do to help you achieve something, usually with a fixed end goal. Whereas, a principle is something that you experiment with and apply consciously to what you are doing to see if it improves the quality of it. The outcome is objectively observed rather than measured against a pre-determined answer. That way you refine your understanding of both the principle and its purpose. Principle based practice requires Presence of mind and honest, objective self-enquiry.

The Eight-fold Path

Described in the Sutras is the 'eightfold path to yoga' – Astanga (meaning 8 limbs), the eightfold path is a set of guidelines, that if applied to life will lead to a life well led. (Note: through misappropriation, the word astanga in the west has come to mean a particular sequence of postures that was originally designed to make 14 year old boys fit for war)

Traditionally the path is considered as sequential. So, first you deal with ethical behavior and practice, then you deal with the body, breath, perception etc. until you reach a state of Presence so you may unite with whatever you choose to perceive.

Marc says,

'The traditional translations of the contents of the 8 fold path seems to involve the words like 'CONTROL' ... I personally believe that this has been MIS-translated. When people talk about control in yoga, it is interpreted as the cognitive restriction of action that you might associate with repression, whereas what I believe is meant is more the 'control' you might be describing about someone that is surfing well on very large waves... This is more of a skill of being practiced enough and relaxed enough to be able to respond naturally and freely to the ever-changing waves and other elements. So, to avoid confusion I have changed the word 'control' wherever I come across it, to 'refine or 'refinement' so that it describes more accurately how to go about it.'

Astanga The eight limbs are:

- 1 **Yama** refinement of personal ethics and behaviors, because this determines your experience - Yoga practice shows the precise meaning of 'karma'
- 2 **Niyama** essential practices, rituals and attitudes that get you do what you need to do in appropriate balance

- 3 **Asana** refinement of body and action - expanding choice in movement and support
- 4 **Pranayama** the practice of refining and expanding breathing choices - the solution to the above
- 5 **Pratyhara** translated as 'control of' or 'retraction from' the senses - it is far more accurate to describe it as the practice of 'refining the external senses of perception', which includes 'ceasing reactionary responses to the senses'
- 6 **Dharana** often translated as 'concentration'... the practice of refining inner perceptual awareness - a natural consequence of becoming more accurate in interpretation of the senses - refinement of mind
- 7 **Dhyana** ~ Meditation settling mind on the Divine/object that it wishes to perceive directly
- 8 **Samahdi** ~ Union the 'yoga state' - when mind is unified/merged with the Divine/whatever is being perceived

Marc says,

'I would also suggest that it is inaccurate to look at this list a sequential progression... I believe that each limb of the '8 fold path' is an expression/aspect of the whole (the Yoga - the developing direct Presence to things as they are in the moment). As such, applying yourself to any limb of practice should bring you towards the practice and understanding of any of the others... This is Raja yoga.

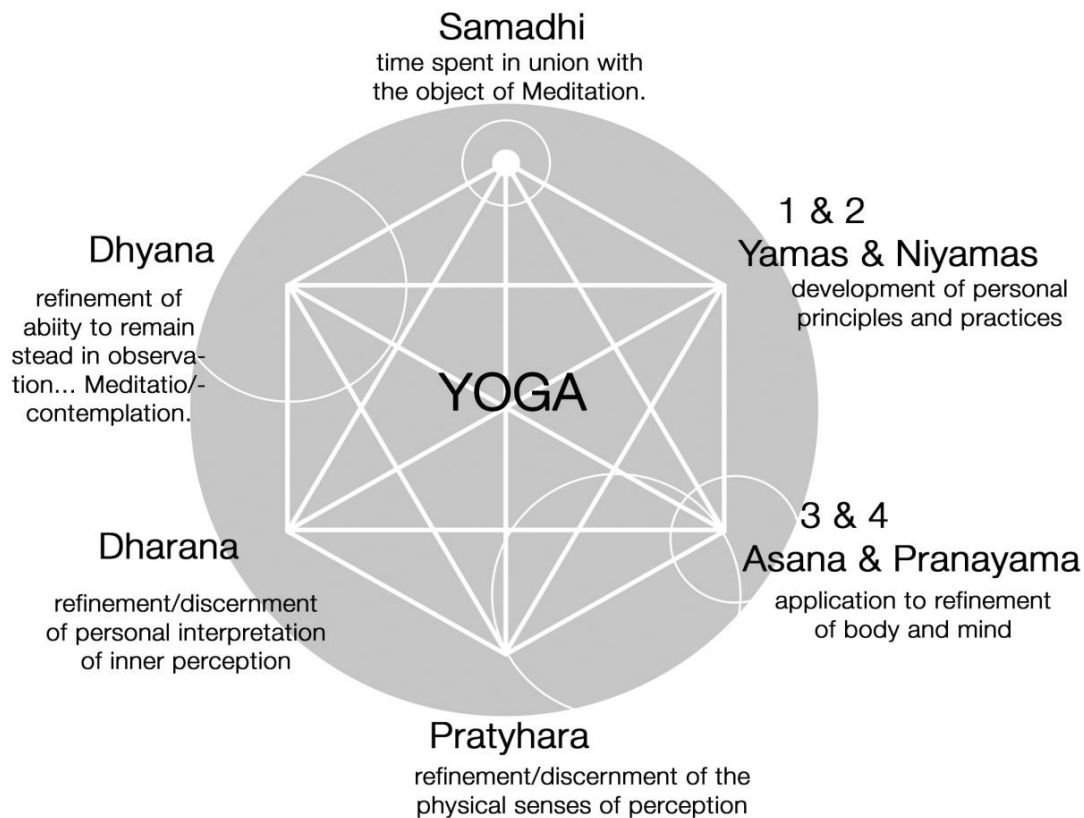
If it doesn't, then you need to adjust what you believe the practice to be, this is a very precise way of monitoring your progress and adjusting HOW you work accurately...'

ALL ASPECTS/QUALITIES OF PRACTICE SHOULD ARISE AS A NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF PRACTICING ANY OF THEM

ANY LIMB CAN BE USED TO GAIN UNDERSTANDING OF ANY OTHER

If they seem to conflict, then it is your interpretation that needs adjusting.

The Eight-fold path of discernment



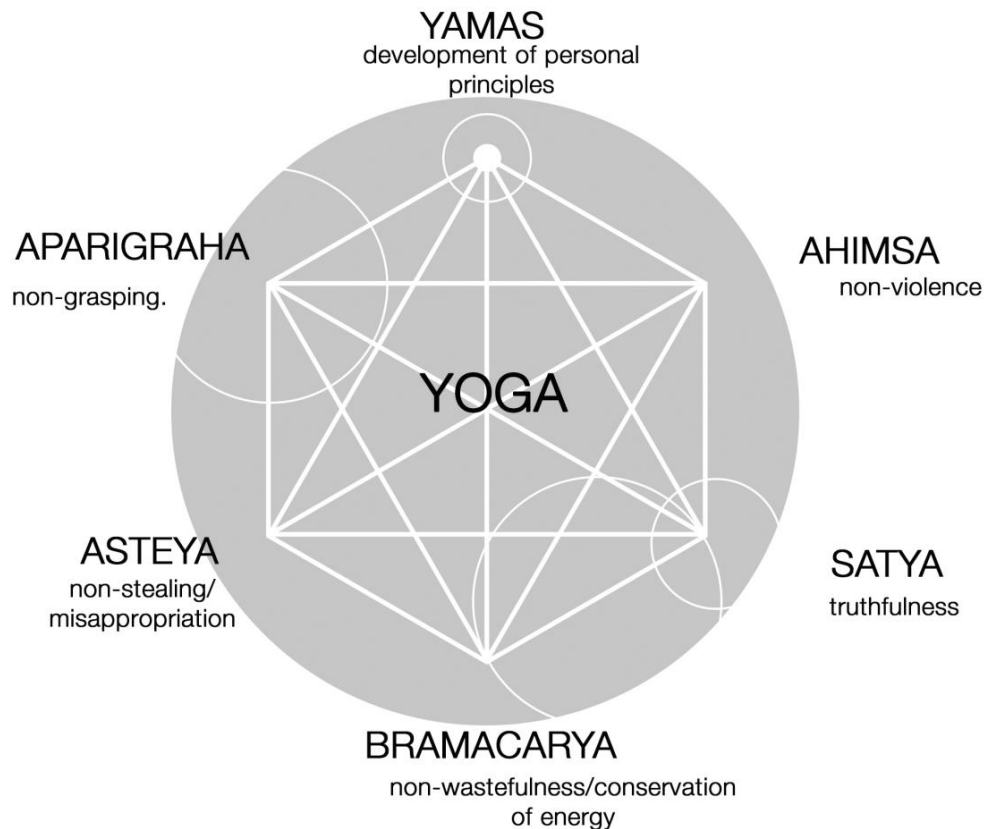
1. The Yamas

"... refinement of one's ethical standards and sense of integrity, focusing on our behavior and how we conduct ourselves in life. Yamas are universal practices that relate best to what we know as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Marc says,

'I would suggest that it is equally if not more important to "Do unto yourself as you would have yourself do unto others". Yoga practice can highlight hidden attitudes to yourself (and therefore others). And I can think of no better way to refine personal codes of ethics, than applying them to your physical practice, because the evidence will make ethical conduct an obvious way forwards.'

The Five Yamas



1. Ahimsa: Non-violence Not harming other people or other sentient beings. Not harming oneself. Not harming the environment. Tolerance even for that which we dislike. Not speaking that which, even though truthful, would injure others.

Marc says,

'I believe Ahimsa is the primary guide to the physical Practice of Yoga... in my experience and observation most restrictions in movement are to do with a conflictive relationship with a joint, a section of spine, breathing and gravitational balance. If you practice to remove conflict that is discovered in the relationships between of all of the above, the restriction can simply disappear allowing movement. And even though the connective tissue and musculature will still need opening out, the body won't resist the movement as much because there will be less need to do so. But please don't confuse non-conflict with submissiveness

and collapse, or avoidance of less-than-pleasant sensations – I would consider that as self-violence born of denial and not daring to allow expansion.'

2. Satya: Truthfulness Note that sometimes we may know our words are literally true, but do not convey what we know to be truthful. This is a child's game. Satya means not intending to deceive others in our thoughts, as well as our words and actions.

Marc says,

'In practical terms, we must be equally vigilant in being honest with ourselves. If we physically deceive ourselves through a desire to 'get there', we create unconscious conflict that robs us of the Presence to achieve 'getting there'. Without Satya, the ego tends to take over and keeps us confused.'

3. Asteya -- Non-stealing Not taking that which is not given.

Marc says,

'I think this also applies directly to practice... Its important not to steal an idea or to blindly adopt a method... it is a little lazy. You get your clues from everything around you including the teachers you trust, but if you just copy what you see without investigating your personal interpretation, or if you try to teach something you have been given but without reference to its source or a direct understanding born of your own practice, you are effectively imposing on your own body and passing on second hand information in a 'Chinese whispers' fashion – which I believe gives rise to much of the misunderstanding about Yoga in the West.

However, if you use the tools you are given to discover the meaning of the Yoga directly for yourself, then you are not stealing, you are tapping into the source, as was no doubt the person you were inspired by.'

4. Brahmacharya: Continence The spirit of this precept is conservation of energy for the purpose of spiritual practice. This is commonly translated as celibacy, but sex is not incompatible with a yoga path. A more accurate translation is 'appropriate conservation of energy', for instance by avoiding endless chattering with no clear purpose

Marc says,

'When applied directly to the physical practice of Yoga Brahmacharya could be viewed as economy of effort... doing what is needed in that moment, but not more... No matter how useful the thing you found to do last time was, it is misleading to just do it ... you will need to re-discover it if it is appropriate in this moment under these particular circumstances.

In terms of teaching, Brahmacharya would also have an element of 'non-invasion'. If you approach a student (or a posture) with the intention of 'fixing' something, the student may react to the approaching invasion and either brace or collapse under your touch. In your own practice, arrival with an invasive intent will make you unnecessarily tense. There needs to be

a clarity in your own intention as you approach the object of your attention.

Brahmacarya is possibly one of the harder balancing acts to master in both practice and teaching – there needs to be whole-hearted engagement for anything to happen in practice, but the real transformations occur in the release of unnecessary tension and effort –but that doesn't mean become floppy! Brahmacarya as a base principle reminds you to look for the simplicity and economy of effort within the depth of practice, and would ask the same of you in teaching, provided that it remains non-violent and honest.

Brahmacarya is straight forwards in moments of being objectively Present from the Heart. If presence is subjective, it is hard to distinguish between your desire to fix/be the healer and what the object of your attention actually needs – and that includes yourself. Compassionate and objective Presence makes Brahmacarya the obvious way to go.'

5. Aparigraha: Non-greed Avoidance of unnecessary acquisition of objects not essential to maintaining life or spiritual study. Not coveting a particular outcome.

Marc says,

'I would translate Aparigraha as non-grasping of that which is not in accordance with what you desire to achieve. In terms of physical practice, one application would be not grasping for the posture if what you wish to achieve is a non-conflicted state of liberation.

Another would be non-attachment to the feel-good factor, because you will become addicted to what feels like yoga practice whilst avoiding your core issues. The idea of 'being good' at yoga is unhelpful because when you make true progress and something fundamental in you changes, you will need to start again from scratch to integrated it, and whilst you integrate you will feel like a total beginner again...etc. etc. So if you need to feel good at yoga, you will avoid the integration because the beginner feeling is unpleasant.

As a practitioner who was eager to relieve himself of the various aches and pains of my original distortions, I came to understand very early that if I really wanted to solve the issues the quickest route was to take ambition out of the equation and work with what is. Whenever I did so, in the release of my grip, phenomenal changes would take place after the process, just from a simple movement like coming out of the posture.

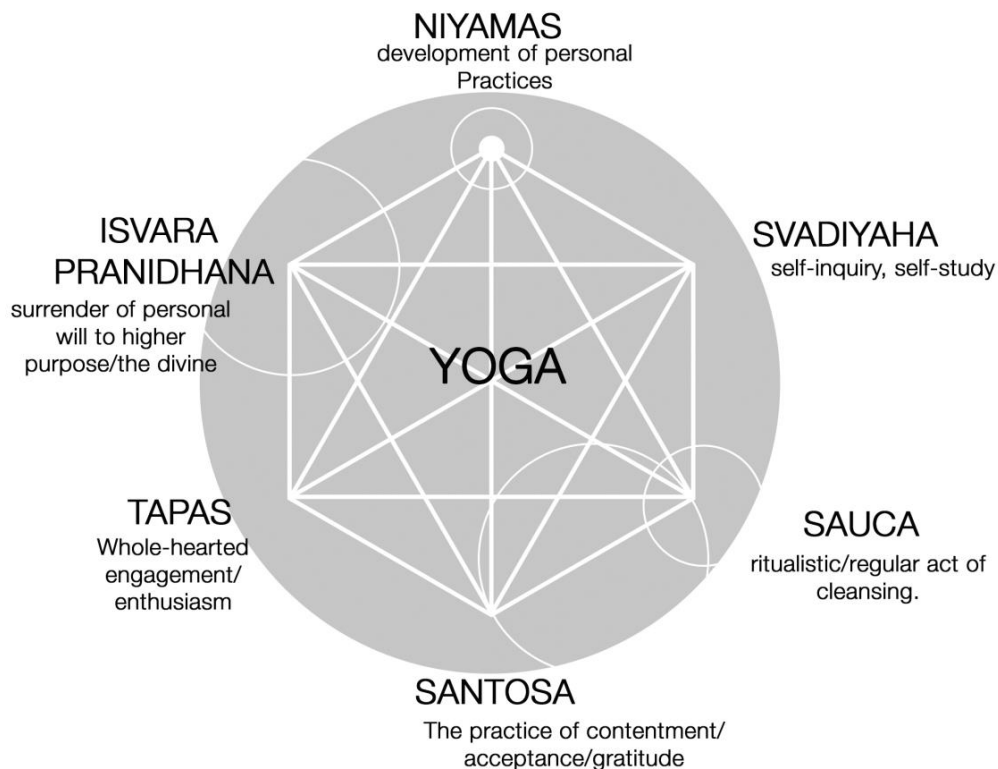
Without Aparigraha, our relationship to practice can become neurotic and unhelpful, as can our teaching. With patience born of the understanding that grasping for things generally pushes them away, progress becomes free-flowing and natural.'

2. The Niyamas

"... refinement of self-discipline and spiritual observances. Ritualistic practice which reminds you of your place in the grand scheme of things; going to a yoga class, going to church, actively feeling grateful for your food or saying grace, developing your own personal meditation practices, or

making a habit of taking contemplative walks alone, writing a personal journal etc. are all examples of niyamas in practice."

The 5 Niyamas



1. Saucha: Cleanliness. Moderation in diet. Not only external cleanliness of the body, but attending to internal cleanliness such as avoiding the impurities of anger and egoism.

Marc says,

'Personally I'm not comfortable with the word 'avoid'. Denying your own 'negative' emotions and thoughts buries them in growingly darker places where they will continue to drive your actions. The deeper the denial, the more powerful the influence.'

There is a simple way to give a 'negative' emotion the space to transform into something useful – Simply sit as a Witness to the sensation of it, and rest there just listening to the space inside it as it moves. It can simply dissolve into a different sensation, or you might gain some clarity on the true source of the feeling, or you could just as easily find yourself

spontaneously e-moting (emotion=outward movement). Whichever way it goes, you will have actually cleared out some of the clutter in your system. Until the next time ... cleaning necessarily is a daily practice, but it gets easier with practice'

2. Santosa: Contentment. Not spiritual complacency, but acceptance of the external situations we find ourselves in at this moment, so we can work from where we are, not where we want to be.

Marc says,

'I also think it's important to take pleasure – in who you are as you are and in your achievements in this moment. I personally find that gratitude for my life makes me the most content – especially when I realize that without the apparent difficulties of my past I would not be enjoying my current gifts – the difficulties were the gift. Santosa is not the kind of contentment that fixes you where you are, it allows for change, because you can stay content as your circumstances change this way or that.'

3. Tapas: Austerity. Deep commitment to practice. "Blazing practice with religious fervor."

Marc says,

'Whole-hearted engagement in whatever you are doing. It's who I'm referring to when I am advertising to 'dedicated practitioners'... If you put the whole of yourself into it, the whole of you will reap the rewards. This is not the opposite of Ahimsa or Brahmacharya – being less than whole is the self-violence of laziness, and is no economy of effort because being less than whole-hearted means having to put a lot more time and effort into practice or study. If you wish to be free, you must be prepared to work for it when you need to.'

4. Svadhyaha: Self-study. Self-education. Contemplation and application of the information, scriptures or sacred texts of the chosen path.

Marc says,

'This is an extremely important principle to apply to the physical practice and is often missing in many people's idea of what yoga is. Yet I would put it as the #1 requirement if you wish to define what you do as 'yoga' as distinct from physical exercise. The self-inquiry is about self-realisation. The inquiry can be scientific (or rather following the scientific principle of;

- 1. establishing frame of reference*
- 2. noting action*
- 3. outcome*

Equally, it can be an investigation into the practical application of humanistic or spiritual principles in action. But whatever the style of self-study, the Yamas and Niyamas serve as a guide that can help you evade the most likely pitfalls and blind alleys of misguided interpretation. You will naturally become more skilled at recognizing misdirection of attention and misinformation as it appears. So you will inexorably move towards clarity and freedom. It is this that turns any passion into a route to personal development and

realization of your potential.'

5. Isvara pranidhana: Surrender of the self (to God). Acknowledgement that there is a higher principle in the universe than one's own small self. Modesty. Humility.

Marc says,

'I would add surrender to nature. Release of personal control. For surrender to God, I would read - Trust ! In the ground beneath our feet, in the nature of our breathing, and in the potential to evolve beyond the limitations we find ourselves in.

To be Present to life AND to our practice, we need to be able to LET GO of CONTROL, because as long as our personality is in charge of our movement, we can only experience things that we are familiar with. The total loss of ego that comes with surrender to a higher power is an efficient way to let go of everything we have become so as to have a taste of everything we can be, but only if doing it doesn't injure you, so that you can learn to do it without reservation...

In the recognition of my own individualistic upbringing, I know that I will surrender only to the degree that I trust that letting go will be safe. For this surrender to happen I (my personality) needs to understand what will make it safe, so that I can let go enough to get direct empirical evidence of it working.

So I am a Yoga scientist and my faith lies in the models of movement and principles of existence that make sense to me. Even then, my body and mind will only actually let go to the degree the experience allows me to and in noticing the next layer of constriction, I am invited to understand something deeper.

Perhaps it would be far simpler to surrender myself entirely to a Deity, but then I would not be following the Santosa principle of contented acceptance of my lot – at present. It would be an affectation that could only lead to further misunderstanding.

As an aside, the more I know, the more I realize I know nothing, and the more I understand that life is about kindness, compassion and service. So Humility, modesty and my own essential spirituality are developing as a natural by-product of my practice... which, for the scientist in me, validates the principles I have developed faith in.'

3. Asana

... refinement of the body/action

The usual translation of the word 'asana' is almost inevitably 'pose' or 'posture', which imbues a misleadingly superficial idea of the physical work. A more accurate translation would be 'comfortable seat' or 'the ground beneath the posture'.

Eg. 'Ekapadarajakapota' means 'One(eka) legged (pada) king (raja) pigeon pose (kapota)'

Whilst 'Ekapadrajakapotasana' would imply that you have a 'comfortable seat' for it.

Marc says,

'Don't think of achieving the Asana as achieving the posture. You achieve the 'Asana' when you find a relationship to your ground that directly supports every part of you without inducing conflict, leaving you free to Witness the experience of it. If the shape makes this impossible, you need to back off to something less complicated so you can find the Yoga practice.'

As I mentioned before, the eight limbs are generally considered as sequential and hierarchical. This idea of linear progression is just a construct to make it easily understandable to linear thought processes.

I would consider that a far more efficient approach to asana would be to presume that it is all the same. Surely it must be the embodiment of all other principles. I also think there is no hierarchy in postures, so no posture is more advanced than any other. The more complicated postures sometimes make it easier to find the yoga in the approach to them, because 'cheating' doesn't get you there.

I would also presume that the end aim of absolute objective Presence would need to be practiced as much as anything else. If we wish to become one with the body, we need to still the mind and become Present to it.'

4: Pranayama

... refinement of the breath – breathing practices. Generally considered as breath 'control'... the idea being that the mind moves with the breath, so if you can control the breath, you control the mind.

Marc says,

'In my observation, attempting to 'control' the breath is as counterproductive as 'controlling' the mind and mostly leads to a stressful relationship with it. Perhaps this is why pranayama is considered a very advanced practice.'

However, another observation I have made is that ALL of the pranayamas and breath-based kriyas (cleansing techniques) have a root in some natural physiological breathing response. So the practice of pranayama is best approached with the intention to find the physical or psycho-physiological actions that give rise to the movements of breath you are interested in developing eg. if you realize that bhasrika is simply a development of the muscles you work when you are in 'side-splitting' laughter, its true nature and accuracy can be found far more easily.

In normal day-to-day life, our breathing changes according to how we feel and what we are doing. And this is how it should be. But along with the development of the personality, there

are feelings and things to do that we like, and those that we don't. In the repetition of avoiding things that don't suit our preferences and reinforcing the things that do, the breathing patterns associated with the emotions and action become habitual and repeated in preference to other breathing options.

Then the habitual breath becomes the only way of breathing available to us, regardless of its appropriateness to what we are doing or feeling. It is the habitual holding patterns in the breath that need redressing and pranayama gives us a opportunity to explore the mechanics of the choices available in breathing from an objective perspective. In doing so, it is likely that we will liberate the emotional responses that we usually avoid, and possibly make us aware of why we avoid them.

Presence to the sensations of the experience can help us stay with the feelings objectively until they can transform. Liberating choice in our breathing liberates the range of our movement and perceived sense of freedom.

In the end, you will discover that postural support is the breathing mechanism. We are supported because we breathe. Which is the opposite of the usual experience of trying to breathe whilst we work to support ourselves.

To understand pranayama, you need to understand that the body is basically an encapsulated fluid system, and that the movements of pressure within the fluid (i.e. breathing) are the reason we can release tension and grow away from the ground in the process.

Then it becomes clear that you don't need to change the breath to find yoga, you need to change the body and mind so it gets out of the way of this natural upward movement of fluid. Then the fluid movement will physically and experientially support both the body and the mind.

The movement of breathing IS the posture.

The sensation of this is what I believe has given rise to the entire pranic system: the chakras, the nadis and other energetic or mystical understandings. This doesn't mean those systems are not real, in fact it proves them to be a felt-sense experience of what is actually going on. So as a frame of reference, as a model of understanding, the Pranic system can be really useful to help people experience.

But in the name of seeing things as they are, I would be a little worried about potential misinterpretation that can arise from 'working with energetics' if there isn't the clarity that comes with direct physical experience of what is occurring. It is only considered 'subtle' because the movements are usually overshadowed by superficial control. When the external control is released, the strength and clarity of sensation of the movements of breathing expands enormously, for the simple fact that it is the musculature of breathing that is now supporting you though your frame, so it will be naturally working harder without you contriving any effort.'

5: Pratyhara

... refinement of the senses. Generally considered as 'control' of the senses.

Marc says,

'I would again have trouble with the word 'control'. If you try and control the senses, you create conflict with yourself. It would make more sense to me to simply apply the basic precept of Yoga to the action of the senses eg.

- *instead of 'looking for', be present to what can be seen;*
- *instead of 'listening to', be present to what is being said;*
- *instead of 'feeling' where you touch, be present to sensation of touch and what you are touching*

Then you are more likely to create the conditions that would allow the senses to develop and quieten naturally. All yoga practice with clear intent can help you refine the accuracy of the senses. Practice allows Pratyhara to arise naturally.'

6: Dharana

... refinement of inner perceptual awareness. Usually referred to as 'concentration' on inner perception awareness.

Marc says,

'As the senses of perception refine, how you interpret the sensations become more accurate... perceptual awareness should refine as a natural by-product of practicing yoga.'

7th limb – Dhyana

... Devotion, Meditation on the Divine.

Marc says,

'The experience of full immersion in direct and accurate perception is the meditative state. The eight-fold path suggests that when this occurs, you might turn your attention to all that is. I would suggest that until perception is broad enough to encompass all that is, you are more likely to experience the precept of Dhyana naturally if you simply remain in a meditative and contemplative state with what is currently perceived. All things can be considered as Divine – the beauty of the movements of your breathing and the expression of your life through posture work is no less immense than the rhythms of the universe. As things simplify and unify, the meditation can expand.'

8: Samadhi

... union with the Divine

Marc says,

'Or union with whatever the mind shines its light on... perhaps this is the moment of integration in practice: see [introduction](#).'