the yoga sutras

of

patanjali
Who was Patanjali?

Lived in India

Between 400BC - 300AD

Wrote:
- Yoga Sutras
- Possibly Mahabhasya - a text on grammar (speech)
- Carakapratisaṃskṛtaḥ - Ayurvedic text
Mythical Birth

Lord Vishnu with Sesa

Patanjali born in the palm of a great Yogini as a half man, half serpent

Lord Shiva
Six Systems of Indian Philosophy based on the Vedas

Mimansa
Sankhya
Nyaya
Vaisesika
Yoga
Vedanta
Patanjali followed Sankhya Philosophy

Sankhya is a theoretical understanding:
It believes knowledge is the path to liberation

Two complimentary principles:
Purusha - subjective aspect of life or Self

Prakriti - matter and energy gives rise to creation
three Gunas
mind, intellect
ego
Patanjali took the theoretical Sankhya Philosophy and made it a practical textbook for Enlightenment.

We all have a spark of Divine Light within us. When that spark is activated, we begin our journey to Enlightenment.

Patanjali’s Sutras give us the tools and the map for our spiritual journey.
The Veda tells us:
- to maintain direct contact with the energies that uphold the universe
- to keep all the planes of existence in harmony with each other
- when harmony is broken, suffering results
- all thought, speech and action should promote harmony
- harmony is maintained through sacred ritual and Yoga
**Yoga** is the union of body, mind and spirit

According to **Yoga**, we suffer because of ignorance of the true Self

We suffer because of the illusion of separation of self from Brahman

**Yoga** is the journey from activity to silence

**Yoga** is a process of purification, a process of rejuvenation

**Yoga** is the “middle way” practical for most people
In Patanjali’s time, teaching was mostly an oral tradition. Students would remember a few key words or phrases (Sutras) to give them the essence of the teachings.
**Sutra** means thread

It gives the barest idea of meaning

The teacher would expand on the **Sutra** and interpret it at the level of the student’s understanding

The Universe is like a web of consciousness

**Sutras** restore wholeness where the web is broken or tangled

**Sutras** are a transformation of consciousness
Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras contains:
196 Sutras
Divided into 4 chapters

Chapter 1 - Samadhi Pada, the aims of Yoga
Chapter 2 - Sadhana Pada, the practice of Yoga, including Kriya Yoga (the yoga of action) and the first five “Limbs” of Yoga
Chapter 3 - Vibhuti Pada, the last three “Limbs” of Yoga and yogic powers or Siddhis
Chapter 4 - Kaivalya Pada, the final goal of yoga, liberation and enlightenment
The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
Sutra translation by Alistair Shearer
Chapter One
- the aims of Yoga

The essence of the whole teaching is in the first four Sutras

1.1 And now the teaching of Yoga begins we need to study and practice

1.2 Yoga is the progressive settling of the mind into silence control mental activity, illusion is in the mind

1.3 When the mind is settle we are established in our essential state which is unbounded consciousness Self-realization, the Knower of all Reality

1.4 Our essential nature is usually overshadowed by the activity of the mind our daily activity usually keeps us in delusion and suffering
1.5 *Five types of mental activity, which may or may not cause suffering*  
selfish thoughts with motivation or unselfish with no motivation

1.6-12 Patanjali describes the different mental activities

*Understanding* - knowledge from direct experience or a reliable source

*Misunderstanding* - delusion from a false impression of reality

*Imagination* - thoughts without substance, jumping to conclusions

*Sleep* - the thought of having no thought

*Memory* - returning to past experiences

Patanjali tells us they can all be settled with Yoga and the Freedom it gives
1.13-14 Patanjali tells us that we have to be committed and consistent over a long period of time.

1.15 *Freedom is that triumphant state of consciousness that is beyond the influence of desire.*

   Practice detachment from personal desires, even the desire to know God is a form of bandage.
1.17-23 Patanjali talks about the different levels of Samadhi

Savikalpa Samadhi - has four levels
   we gain knowledge and power of physical objects
   understanding the abstract nature of things
   beyond objects, only awareness of bliss
   only the satvic ego, the I-ness remains

Nirvikalpa Samadhi - one with the Soul, no mind, only infinite peace and bliss, the heart feels bigger than the universe, the state comes and goes

Sahaja Samadhi - the highest samadhi, the constant experience of Nirikalpa along with daily activity, nothing detracts from wholeness and perfection
1.24-26 Patanjali describes Brahman - free from the cause and effects of action, beyond time, finest knowledge.

1.27-28 He is expressed through the sound of the sacred syllable OM.

*It should be repeated and its essence realized*

The entire creation manifests from the sound OM.

The cosmic hum.
1.30 The obstacles to progress:

- **illness** creates **fatigue**
- **fatigue** leads to **doubt**
- **doubts** cause **carelessness and laziness**
- **laziness** brings **sensory attachment**
- **attachment** manifests **delusion**

**Delusion** is the obstacle to achieving and maintaining **Samadhi** and creates suffering

The practice of Yoga is like an obstacle course
1.33-39 The mind becomes clear and serene with the following:

- *Cultivating the qualities of the heart*
  
  - Friendliness towards the joyful
  - Compassion towards the suffering
  - Happiness (delight) towards the pure
  - Impartiality towards the impure

- Various breathing exercises

- Experiences of finer levels of the senses (higher states)

- Experience of the inner radiance, free from sorrow

- Being attuned to another mind, unperturbed by desire

- Witnessing sleep and dreaming

- Any meditation that is held in esteem
1.41-47
Patanjali again talks about Samadhi or mental absorption

1.48 *This level (samadhi) is Ritambhara where consciousness perceives only Truth*
Ritambhahara is the “realization” of Truth we can only access by going beyond the mind
Chapter Two - the practice of Yoga

Patanjali starts with the essence of the chapter

2.1 Purification, refinement, surrender. These are the practical steps on the path of Yoga

Purity - of body, mind, speech
Refinement - study of scriptures, meditation
Surrender - Karma Yoga
The causes of suffering are five:

- **Ignorance of our true nature**, failure to discriminate between the pure and impure
- **Egoism**, the limiting sense of “I”
- **Attachment**, clinging to pleasure
- **Aversion**, clinging to pain
- **The fear of death**, clinging to life

Ignorance of our true nature is the source of the other four.

The gross effects of suffering are discarded through meditation.
Karma

2.12-16 The impressions of past actions, stored deep within the mind are the seeds of desire. They ripen into action in seen and unseen ways, if not in this life, then in the next.

Every action has a reaction

The fruit of wrong action is sorrow, the fruit of right action is joy

Take responsibility

But the suffering yet to come should be averted
Make conscious choices
The Self is obscured by the world in order that the reality of both might be discovered

The Lila

It is ignorance of our real nature that causes the Self to be obscured

Who am I?

When ignorance is destroyed, the Self is liberated from its identification with the world. This liberation is Enlightenment

Ignorance is destroyed by the undisturbed discrimination between Self and the world

“Lead us from unreal to real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality”
There are seven stages in this growth to wisdom

1. **Realization that our spiritual source is within us** - loss of external desires
2. **Cessation of suffering** - ending of ignorance of true Self, as all suffering is in the mind
3. **Taste of Samadhi** - transcending thought, pure potential, pure knowledge
4. **Integrating pure consciousness into activity** - Cosmic Consciousness
5. **No more need for mental activity and the external world** - the mind becomes simple and humble
6. **Memories and Karma are released** - the mind is dissolved
7. **Full experience of Samadhi which is never lost**

These are revealed by the light of pure knowledge, when the nervous system has been purified by the practice of Yoga
The Eight Limbs of Yoga

2.29-55
Patanjali describes
Yama
Niyama
Asana
Pranayama
Pratyahara
Yama  Codes of moral and social conduct, correct social behavior, a harmonious relationship with all

1. **Ahimsa** - non-violence to all living things
   “God recognizes how much we love Him by how we treat other people” - Koran
   “If you can see God in everyone you can never harm anyone” - Gita
Yama

2. Satya - truthfulness

“If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything” - Mark Twain

“Truth is like the sun, you can shut it out but it ain’t goin’ away” - Elvis
Yama

3. Asteya - non-stealing

*If you want to be rich, stop stealing*
Yama

4. Brahmacharya - celibacy, not wasting energy
Have a love affair with the Divine
Yama

5. Aparigraha - abstaining from greed

“The riskiest thing you can do is get greedy”
- Lance Armstrong

“There’s enough in this world for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed”
- Ghandi
Niyama principles for living our own lives, process of purification, duties and obligations for a spiritual life

1. **Saucha** - purity

“When you see God within yourself, you gain perfection” - Gita
Niyama

2. Santosha - contentment

The days that make us happy make us wise
Niyama

3. Tapas - austerities

“The time has come for us to polish you, we wish to transform your inner pearl into a house of fire. You are a goldmine hidden in the earth, it is your turn to be placed in the fire. Let us cremate your impurities”

The finest steel goes through the hottest fire
Niyama

4. Svadhyaya - study

Who am I
Niyama

5. Ishwara Pranidhana - devotion

“When we give everything to God, we have nothing to worry about”
Total dedication brings unending peace” - Gita
Asana - the yogi’s seat and posture, consciousness in motion
Pranayama - mastering (expanding) the life force, breathing in the Divine

“Breathing in, God comes to pausing the breath, God stays with me. Breathing out, I go to God, pausing the breath, I surrender to God”

- Krishnamacharya
Pratyahara - turning the senses inward to explore the inner universe

“The inner secret, that which was never born, you are that freshness and I am with you now” - Rumi

“God made the senses turn outwards, we therefore look outwards not into ourselves but occasionally, a daring soul, desiring immortality, has looked back and found himself - Upanishads
Chapter Three - yogic powers

3.1-3 Patanjali completes the Eight Limbs of Yoga

Dharana
Dhyana
Samadhi
Dharana - effortless focused attention, training the mind to meditate

3.1 *When the attention is held focused on an object, this is known as Dharana*

“When you are appreciating creation as much as the Creator, then the Creator will ask, Who is appreciating My creation as much as Me, let me see this person” - Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
Dhyana - continuous flow, meditation perfected

3.2 When awareness flows evenly toward the point of attention, this is known as Dhyana

“Yoga brings us to God’s doorway, Love allows us to step through”
Paramahansa Yogananda
Samadhi - lost (found) in the Divine, the final liberation

3.3 And when that same awareness, its essential nature shining forth in purity, is as if unbounded, this is known as Samadhi

There is only one problem, ignorance. There is only one solution, Enlightenment
3.4 Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi practiced together are known as **Sanyama**

Now, by delving deep into an object we can release its secrets and the Yogic Powers - Siddhis are revealed

3.5 *When Sanyama is mastered, the light of supreme knowledge dawns*

The hidden truth of an object (its laws of nature) is understood

3.6 *But Sanyama has its application at every stage of the development of this knowledge*

Practice is accomplished in stages, master one before attempting the next
3.7 *It is the heart of Yoga more intimate than the preceding limits*

The last three Limbs are inward, mental practices whereas the first five involve the world and act as a preparation.

3.8 *Yet Sanyama is outside that Pure Unboundedness*

Even Sanyama is gross compared to Pure Consciousness. It is a lower form of Samadhi.

3.13-15 Patanjali tells us that the world may change due to time and conditions (gold becomes a ring) but to the Yogi everything remains the same and he/she develops dispassion to the world.
3.16-55 Patanjali describes the yogic powers or Siddhis which can come from the practice of Samyama. Patanjali regarded these powers as *the greatest stumbling block* to our spiritual progress. Sri Ramakrishna called them “*heaps of rubbish*”
3.21 Sanyama on the form of the body makes it imperceptible (invisible), by breaking the contact between the eye of the observer and the light reflected by the body.
3.22 The fruits of action may return to the doer quickly or slowly.

From Sanyama on the fruit of action comes foreknowledge of the time of death and the understanding of omens

Understanding the effects of one’s Karma
3.23 From Sanyama on Friendliness, compassion and happiness, these qualities blossom.

3.24 From Sanyama on the strength of an elephant or other creatures, we gain that strength.
3.26-28

From Sanyama on the sun comes knowledge of the various realms of the Universe.

From Sanyama on the moon comes knowledge of the arrangement of the stars.

From Sanyama on the pole star comes knowledge of their motion.
3.29-31 Sanyama on the navel center brings knowledge of the bodily system

Sanyama on the hollow in the throat brings cessation of hunger and thirst

Sanyama on the kurma nerve in the trachea brings steadiness
3.32

From Sanyama on the Light in the head we see the perfected ones
3.33 *By the clarity of intuitive perception everything can be known*

Through a life of purity, enlightenment comes spontaneously and gives us all powers.

3.34 *From Sanyama on the heart comes awareness of a pure mind*

We can know the contents of the mind.
3.35 Sanyama on inner fulfillment brings knowledge of the Self

3.36 From this (knowledge) are born intuitive clarity and finest hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell

Patanjali goes on to warn that these “super-physical” senses, when used for worldly pursuits, are obstacles to higher Samadhi
3.38 When attachment to the body is loosened and there is perfect knowledge of the movement of the mind, the ability to enter another’s body is gained

3.39 On mastery of udana, the life breath that rises through the body, we can direct it upward and avoid contact with such things as water, mud and thorns
3.42 From Sanyama on the relationship between body and akasha, together with absorption in the lightness of cotton fiber, we can move through the air at will.
Patanjali talks about gaining mastery over the elements and the senses and mastery over nature so that

*Nothing remains unknown to him*

3.50 *

*And when he is unattached (no interest in powers) even to this state the very seeds of bondage are destroyed and Enlightenment follows*
3.51 *We should not respond with pleasure or pride to the alluring invitations of celestial beings, because this will obstruct progress and it is always possible to fall.*

Fallen yogis and angels are jealous of us.

3.52-54 He talks about ending the illusion of time, being able to distinguish between Atman and non-atman and having knowledge of all objects at every moment of their existence.
3.55 And when the translucent intellect is pure as the Self, there is Self-Realization. Oneness, eternal peace, eternal joy. Patanjali says not to settle for less.
Chapter Four - Liberation, Enlightenment

4.1-3 Patanjali tells us that some may be born enlightened and experiences can be through things such as drugs but meditation and Samadhi are the natural way. Our spiritual growth is always due to the unfolding of Brahman and although teachers can help to clear the way, no one can do it for us.
4.6-11 **Karma**

Karma is only washed by spiritual realization

Karma can be good, bad or mixed but the enlightened are beyond Karma

Our actions create memories and desires which give rise to Karma which determines the type of birth we have regardless of where and when the action took place

Creation and dissolution are eternal so Karma has always been
Karma is rooted in ignorance and we move in and out of its grip
4.12-14 **Gunas**

Past and future exist within an object due to the different characteristics of the object.

Manifest characteristics are the present, unmanifest the past and future. All are workings of the Gunas.

The state of an object at any moment arises from the unique state of the Gunas then operating.

The same soul exists throughout all our incarnations with different forms and expressions due to the mix of Gunas, determined by Karma.
4.15-16 **Co-creation**

Two similar objects appear different because of the difference in the minds that perceive them.

An object does not depend on a single mind for its existence for, if it did, what would become of it when not perceived by that mind?

4.17-18 **Witness**

An object is only experienced when it colors the mind.

How we see things is based on our level of consciousness.

The mind itself is always experienced because it is witnessed by the unchanging Self.

Self is the constant witness of all.

Brahman witnesses Atman > Jiva > Ego > Mind/Intellect > Body/World.
Self and Mind

The mind does not shine by its own light. It too is an object illumined by the Self. Not being self-luminous the mind cannot be aware of its object and itself at the same time. The mind, like everything else is an object in relation to Self. Only Self is aware of everything at the same time, it is never the object. The mind perceives outside objects or can turn inwards to reflect the Self but not both at the same time.
4.25-28 **Discrimination**

All confusion about the nature of Self vanishes for one who has seen its glory.

Then, truly the mind begins to experience the Self as separate from activity and is naturally drawn toward Enlightenment. All thoughts that arise to interrupt this discrimination are born of the latent impressions that still exist (Leshavidya). These are to be destroyed by the same means are were described for causes of suffering. Meditation, purification, refinement, surrender.
4.29-30 **Jivanmukti**

One who has attained complete discrimination between the subtlest level of mind and the Self has no higher knowledge to acquire. **This is Dharma Megha Samadhi - the state of Unclouded Truth (Cloud of Virtue)**. The highest Samadhi - “all beautiful qualities are there”

All desires, even the desire to know God have gone

*It destroys the cause of suffering and the bondage of action disappears*

All that effects the mind is gone

All Karma except this lifetime is dissolved
4.31-33 **Transcending the Gunas**

Knowledge that has been freed from the veils of impurity is unbounded. Whatever can be known (the world) is insignificant in its Light.

This Samadhi completes the transformations of the Gunas and fulfills the purpose of evolution.

The play of the Gunas tortures the Soul until it gives up and renounces the world.

Now the process by which evolution unfolds through time is understood.

Past, present and future all become NOW.
Enlightenment

The Gunas, their purpose fulfilled, return to their original state of harmony and pure unbounded consciousness remains forever established in its own Absolute nature. This is Enlightenment
Swami Vivekananda

“Nature’s task is done, this unselfish task which our sweet nurse Nature had imposed upon Herself. She gently took the self-forgetting Soul by the hand as it were and showed him all the experiences in the universe, all manifestations, bringing him higher and higher through various bodies till his lost glory came back and he remembered his own nature. Then the kind Mother went back the same way She came for others who have also lost their way in the trackless desert of life.

And thus is She working without beginning or without end. And thus through pleasure and pain, through good and evil, the infinite river of souls is flowing into the ocean of perfect Self-realization.”
References

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
Alistair Shearer

How to Know God - The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali
Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
Sri Swami Satchidananda

Raja Yoga (The Eight Limbs)
Swami Vivekananda