

Yoga Philosophy-2:

Why Yoga? What are its sources?

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We have seen before how, given liberation as the goal of philosophy, Yoga as a system of controlling the mind gains ground as an aid to realisation as a means to liberation. Indian philosophical schools have, therefore, accommodated Yoga in their home theory, ignoring its Sāṃkhya bias in metaphysical matters. The culmination of philosophy into experience is an outlook unknown to western philosophical schools which partake more of the character of intellectual exercises than actual experience of their doctrines in life. Historically, the clear-cut distinction between Indian philosophical schools is a later development as may be judged from the undifferentiated presentation of the doctrines and terminology of Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Vedānta in Upaniṣadic literature as well as the Bhagavad-gītā. If this is regarded as a later work, we can see in it a conscious effort to show that the three systems have much more in common than their points of difference.

This should make it clear that the Upaniṣads are the oldest texts to introduce Yoga terminology. Of the older Upaniṣads, Kaṭha (I.2.12, II.3.11) and Śvetāśvatara (II.8-9, 12) are prominent sources of Yogic material. We come next to the Bhagavad-gītā which, besides stray references elsewhere (Ch 8), devotes a whole chapter, the sixth one, to the practice of Yoga and related problems. In fact, it gives a much wider meaning to the term Yoga so as to include in its span such spiritual pursuits as disinterested action (*karma-yoga*), devotion (*bhakti*), renunciation (*samnyāsa*) and so on. From this literature, it appears that the word Yoga may be an abridgement of a longer one—'*adhyātma-yoga*' (spiritual device) as the Kaṭha employs at one place (I.2.12) and '*abhyāsa-yoga*' (practical device) as the BG employs in 8.8, besides '*dhyāna-yoga*' (meditation) in 18.52.

Though aimed at the purity of mind, Yoga deals also with such physical and physiological aspects as contribute to the control of the mind. This makes room for Yogic postures and breath training — aspects which, along with some more methods of physiological control, eventually branched off into a separate school called Haṭha-yoga (Yoga of force) with its own methodology, as against the earlier approach termed Rāja-yoga (Royal Yoga or Yoga of persuasion). Our present knowledge of postures and breath control comes from the tradition of Haṭha-yoga; Patañjali treats of these topics in a cursory way. Extant works on Haṭha-yoga do not date as far back as Patañjali's work; but significant references to postures and breath training in earlier works point to the existence of an old tradition thereof.