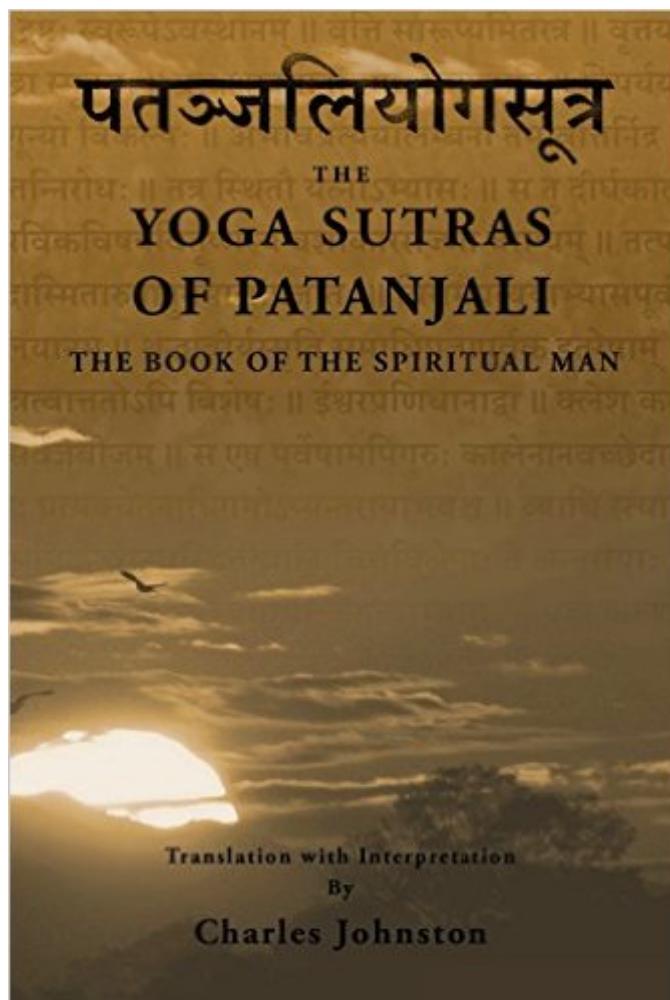


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The Yoga Sutras Of Patanjali: The Book Of The Spiritual Man



Synopsis

"The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are in themselves exceedingly brief, less than ten pages of large type in the original. Yet they contain the essence of practical wisdom, set forth in admirable order and detail. ... "Patanjali has in mind the spiritual man, to be born from the psychical. His purpose is, to set in order the practical means for the unveiling and regeneration, and to indicate the fruit, the glory and the power, of that new birth."â "Charles Johnston The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the foundational work of all Yoga practice. They contain the essence of practical wisdom, set forth in admirable order and detail. Patanjali succeeds in showing the student that spirituality is not unscientific or vague, but is an exact science. He teaches us that enlightenment is not something unattainable or solely for the elect; we can begin walking the path now. Johnston's translation of the Yoga Sutras evolved through three distinct stages. It was first published as serialized articles in the Theosophical Quarterly between 1909 and 1911. The text was then compiled and printed in book form in 1912, with only a few slight modifications. Following this, Johnston revisited the text of both his translation and commentary, as he notes in a review-article: â œl must not fail,â • he says â œto express my feeling of indebtedness to Dr. [Haughton] Woods, for a closer understanding of a number of technical points, which I hope to take advantage of, in revising the version of the Sutras I have alluded to.â • Following this reflection, several notices appeared in the Theosophical Quarterly announcing Johnston's continuing work of revision, until a second revised edition was published in the summer of 1917. It is this version that is presently reproduced verbatim, but with an adjustment in formattingâ "providing the translation itself, in whole, prior to the commentaryâ "the addition of this foreword, and of additional notes. Charles Johnston (1867-1931) was steeped in the wisdom of eastern traditions, having translated also the ten Principle Upanishads of the Vedanta, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tao Teh King of Lao Tse, and the Crest-Jewel of Wisdom of Sankaracharya. Johnston brings his in-depth understanding of the Vedanta to reveal the core meaning of Patanjali's sutras: the birth of the Spiritual Man.

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Customer Reviews

This book was first published in London in 1982 as *Effortless Being: the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. I assume the translation of the sutras is the same while Shearer, who is a disciple of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, has updated his Introduction. The text is presented in a sky blue color that is easy on the eyes and does not distract from the meaning of the words. The design by Barbara Sturman is indeed very attractive while the small size of the book (4.75 by 6.25 by 0.75 inches) makes for easy portability. The translation itself takes up about one-third of the book while Shearer's commentary takes up most of the rest. The translation is strikingly original and interpretative. Patanjali's famous first line, which I recall most agreeably as "Now, instruction in yoga" (which I have from Ernest Egerton Wood's *Practical Yoga*, 1948) is presented as "And now the teaching on yoga begins." B.K.S. Iyengar, in his *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (1993), which I highly recommend in addition to this book, has "With prayers for divine blessings, now begins an exposition of the sacred art of yoga." Clearly the differences with this first line are mainly stylistic with Iyengar emphasizing a spiritual and religious tone while Wood's aim was to reflect Patanjali's succinct style, with Shearer looking for lucidity and an affinity with the modern English expression. But let's look at the second sutra. Shearer's "Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence" is very pretty, and when one realizes that "silence" to Shearer is akin to godliness (he quotes Meister Eckhart on page 24: "Nothing in all creation is so like God as silence"), it works in a symbolic sense as well. Professor Wood's "Yoga is the control of the ideas in the mind" places a very different emphasis. But in Shearer's understanding, the idea of "control" is inappropriate. He sees instead that "Once pointed in the right direction, the mind will begin to settle down of its own accord. It needs no control or forcible restraint." (p. 68) From my experience (I began my practice of yoga in 1974) both of these ideas are correct; and indeed it is a synthesis of conscious control of the ideas of the mind along with a sense of falling away that leads to meditation and samadhi. It is a mistake to imagine that one makes no effort, since it is the very essence of yoga that one does indeed make an effort and uses technique in order to find liberation (rather than, say, faith or knowledge). Yoga is above all a practice and nothing in it can be fully appreciated without practice. But it is also a mistake to think that one can

through force of will achieve samadhi. What is required is a controlled practice in which one leads the reluctant mind and body to a place of relaxed concentration in which meditation is allowed to take place. But let's now look at how Iyengar translates this famous second aphorism: "Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness." He adds, "This vital sutra contains the definition of yoga: the control or restraint of the movement of consciousness, leading to their complete cessation." (Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, p. 46) While I think Shearer's translation is very much worthwhile, I am less enthusiastic about his interpretation. He devotes the last part of his Introduction to the famous "siddhas" (psychic powers). He attempts to justify and explain them in terms of quantum mechanics, averring that "the subatomic universe...reveals a reality that is every bit as strange as Patanjali's." (p. 79) He even compares the superfluidity of helium near absolute zero to what is possible in the "least excited state of awareness" (i.e., the self in samadhi). This sophistic suggestion, which has largely been discredited, at least in the scientific community, relies on the false belief that the human mind (a macro object all the way down to the molecular level) can in some way operate on the quantum level. This is "New Age" babble of the most annoying sort and does not in any way explain the so-called psychic powers. Anyone who has practiced yoga long enough and has become adept at meditation has experienced these psychic powers, but realizes that they are phenomena of the mind and have nothing to do with ordinary consciousness or ordinary experience. They are--and this is why they are valuable and why Patanjali mentions them--signposts on the way to samadhi. When one experiences a siddha, it is an indication that one has stilled the ordinary mind and is making progress. I don't think Shearer really understands this. I could also take exception to his interpretation of some of the limbs of Patanjali's yoga, or express my appreciation of some of his insights. For example, I think his translation of shaucha (sauca) as "simplicity" instead of the usual "cleanliness" or "purity" is very agreeable. On the other hand, I could disagree with his interpretation of brahmacharya as something more than celibacy. I think brahmacharya means exactly that, celibacy. Or I could find his idea that pratyahara is akin to William Blake's "closing the doors of perception" (p. 68) interesting and worth adding to the regular meaning of "withdrawal of the senses." But these fine distinctions would be beside the point. Note well that the sole purpose of Patanjali's yoga is liberation from the pair of opposites (pleasure and pain) that dominate our lives. The word "samadhi" (the goal of yoga) means both the highest level of meditation and something akin to the Buddhist "satori," or enlightenment. All of yoga is a means to this end. For anyone beginning their yoga practice this book can help, but it should be understood that reading this or any other translation and interpretation of Patanjali's yoga sutras is only the beginning and is actually worthless without the concomitant practice of yoga.--Dennis Littrell, author

of "Yoga: Sacred and Profane (Beyond Hatha Yoga)"

An excellent translation and commentary. This book should be ranked with commentaries of yoga masters such as McAfee's "Beyond the Siddhis" and Satchidananda's "Yoga Sutras", as one of the best books available on Patanjali's sutras. It is well written, focused, easily understood and goes to the core of the sutras - self understanding, with great insight. Shearer has done a great job.

A group I am in is studying the book - The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali by Swami Satchidananda. For some reason I was not connecting with this translation. I looked for a different one on and saw this free version for the Kindle. This one is great. My subconscious can see the truth of what is being conveyed through this translator's words. When you want to read any of the great books - The Gita, Vedas, Tao... - remember to try different versions.

[edit: it looks like, unfortunately, this review is linked to multiple versions of the yoga sutras. You'll find this in the reviews of the non Alistair version, and the real Alistair version. But apparently the publishers finally listened to my nagging and published the real Alistair version to the kindle store. Hooray. It is one of my two favorite translations of the Sutras. It captures the essence without erudite verbal masturbation (at least in the actual translation ;) So, just be sure you double check your getting the version you want.] I don't know how they did it, but they got the reviews for the awesome Alistair Shearer translation of the Yoga Sutras, to show up for this kindle version, and even a link from the original Alistair translation, so you come to this page if you want the kindle version, and all the nice reviews for the Alistair version show up for this book. THIS IS NOT THE ALISTAIR TRANSLATION. And I highly resent being led to believe so, because I was really excited about getting that version for my kindle. THE REVIEWS YOU ARE READING ABOUT IT ARE FOR THE ACTUAL ALISTAIR SHEARER TRANSLATION. The hard cover, paper and ink book that says translated by Alistair Shearer Not this digital impostor. This is just another boring, academic and dry translation. I think you can get the same thing through Wikipedia or Google books for free, which makes me wonder if the poster is even the real author. Sigh. Maybe I can email Alistair's publisher and get them to do the actual book for kindle. And whoever did this: picture your mother looking cross and waving her finger at you.

The typos drive me nuts. As an occasional Distributed Proofreader myself, the low quality of this effort is irksome. It's too bad we can't use Kindle highlights to feed errors back to publishers.

This is an enlightening translation of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. This book is easy to read and contemplate on. The English word choices are thoughtful and consistent. Mr. Shearer also writes a wonderful introduction to the translated text. I once attended a philosophy lecture on Yoga by a college professor who claimed mastery of Tantric Yoga and the Sanskrit language. During lecture, he commented that the Sutras of Patanjali were difficult and "certainly not bed time reading material." I couldn't have disagreed more with the Professor knowing that Mr. Shearer's translation is easy to read, assimilate, and makes wonderful reading anytime night or day, as I have done many, many times. I recommend this translation to my Yoga students and I also give it as gifts. Enjoy!

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