

# SKM YOGA

*Yoga Teacher Training Programme*

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## ORIGIN, MEANING & DEFINITION OF YOGA

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*A Comprehensive Study Guide for Yoga Teacher Training Students*

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*For Internal Educational Use — Yoga Teacher Training Students Only*

# Foreword

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Dear Yoga Teacher Training Students,

Welcome to one of the most foundational modules of the SKM Yoga Teacher Training Programme. Before a yoga teacher can guide others in the practice of yoga, they must understand what yoga truly is — not just as a physical exercise system, but as one of the most ancient, comprehensive, and transformative sciences of life ever developed by humanity.

This study guide is dedicated entirely to three foundational questions that every yoga teacher must be able to answer with clarity and confidence:

- Where does yoga come from? (Origin)
- What does the word 'yoga' actually mean? (Meaning)
- How have the great masters and traditions defined yoga? (Definition)

These may seem like simple questions, but the answers are profound, multidimensional, and historically rich. A yoga teacher who has deeply understood these foundations carries an authenticity, depth, and conviction in their teaching that no amount of asana practice alone can provide.

As you study this text, you are encouraged not just to read but to contemplate. Let these teachings settle into your experience. Connect what you read here to your own practice on the mat, in meditation, and in daily life. The greatest yoga teachers are those who have made this ancient wisdom their own living understanding.

With the blessings of the yoga tradition,

**SKM Yoga Institute**  
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# Chapter 1: The Eternal Science — An Introduction to Yoga

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## 1.1 Yoga: More Than Exercise

In the modern world, millions of people roll out a yoga mat, stretch, breathe, and call it yoga. While physical practice is certainly one dimension of yoga, the complete tradition of yoga is vast, ancient, and extraordinarily profound. Yoga is not merely a fitness system. It is a comprehensive science of life — a systematic method for understanding the nature of the human being, the nature of reality, and the path from suffering to freedom.

To teach yoga authentically, we must understand it at this deeper level. A yoga teacher who knows only the physical postures but not the philosophy, history, and authentic meaning of yoga is like a physician who knows how to administer medicine but does not understand how or why it works. Depth of understanding produces depth of teaching.

## 1.2 Why This Study Matters

Students increasingly come to yoga classes with genuine philosophical questions. They want to know: What is yoga? Where does it come from? What does it actually mean? What does yoga promise? A well-trained yoga teacher must be equipped to answer these questions with intelligence, accuracy, and the warmth of personal understanding.

The goal of this module is to equip you with a thorough, clear, and confident understanding of yoga's origin, meaning, and definition — so that this wisdom becomes a living foundation for everything you teach.

## 1.3 Yoga as a Living Tradition

Yoga is remarkable in that it is simultaneously one of the world's oldest knowledge systems and one of its most alive and dynamic. For over five thousand years, human beings have practiced, studied, debated, transmitted, and evolved the tradition of yoga. Today, more people practice some form of yoga than at any point in human history. This living quality of yoga — its capacity to remain relevant across millennia — speaks to the depth and universality of its teachings.

As yoga teachers trained at SKM Yoga, you are joining this living tradition. You are receiving a transmission that has been passed from teacher to student for thousands of years. This is a profound responsibility and a tremendous privilege.

## Chapter 2: Origin of Yoga — A Journey Through Time

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### 2.1 How Old Is Yoga?

The origin of yoga is one of the most fascinating questions in the history of human civilization. The honest answer is that yoga is so ancient that its precise beginning cannot be pinpointed to a single date, text, or person. Scholars, archaeologists, philosophers, and practitioners all offer different perspectives on when and how yoga began. What is universally agreed upon is that yoga is among the oldest systematic methods of inner exploration ever developed by human beings.

Most scholars place the earliest recognizable origins of yoga at least 5,000 years ago, and some argue for origins stretching back 10,000 years or more. The tradition itself teaches that yoga is eternal — 'Sanatana' — without beginning or end, not invented by any human being but revealed to ancient seers (Rishis) in the depths of their meditation.

### 2.2 The Archaeological Evidence — The Indus Valley Civilization

The earliest physical evidence of yoga-like practices comes from the Indus Valley Civilization (also called the Harappan Civilization), which flourished in the northwestern Indian subcontinent from approximately 3300 BCE to 1300 BCE. Centered around the cities of Mohenjo-daro (in modern Pakistan) and Harappa, this was one of the world's earliest and most sophisticated urban civilizations.

During excavations, archaeologists discovered numerous seals and figurines depicting figures seated in meditation-like postures. The most famous of these is the 'Pashupati Seal' — a soapstone seal discovered at Mohenjo-daro, depicting a horned figure seated in what appears to be a meditative posture (possibly Mulabandhasana, the bound root posture), surrounded by animals. Many scholars identify this figure with Lord Shiva in his form as Pashupati (Lord of Animals) — a deity closely associated with the yoga tradition.

*These archaeological discoveries suggest that meditative and contemplative practices were present in the Indian subcontinent at least 4,500 to 5,000 years ago, making yoga one of the oldest living knowledge traditions on earth.*

Other seals found at Indus Valley sites depict figures in yoga-like seated postures, showing the likely presence of physical and meditative disciplines that would evolve into what we know as yoga. While the script of the Indus Valley Civilization remains undeciphered, these visual artifacts provide compelling evidence of yoga's deep antiquity.

### 2.3 The Vedic Period — Yoga in the Oldest Scriptures

The Vedic period (approximately 1500 BCE to 500 BCE) gave humanity the Vedas — the most ancient scriptures of the Indian tradition and among the oldest texts in any human language.

The four Vedas (Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda) are considered the foundational sacred literature of the Hindu tradition.

The word 'yoga' appears multiple times in the Rigveda — the oldest of the four Vedas — though not always in the philosophical sense it would later acquire. In its earliest Vedic usage, 'yoga' referred to the yoking or harnessing of horses to a chariot. However, even in this physical usage, the underlying metaphor of bringing something under disciplined control — which is central to yoga philosophy — is clearly present.

The Atharvaveda contains early references to breath control (prana) and meditation-like practices. The Vedic period also saw the composition of the Brahmanas (ritual texts) and the Aranyakas (forest treatises), which began to explore the inner meaning of Vedic rituals and the nature of the self — themes that would fully blossom in the Upanishads.

## **2.4 The Upanishadic Period — Yoga Becomes Philosophy**

The Upanishads (approximately 800 BCE to 200 BCE) represent the philosophical climax of the Vedic tradition. Often called 'Vedanta' (the end or culmination of the Vedas), the Upanishads are profound dialogues between great sages and their students, exploring the deepest questions of existence: What is the nature of the self (Atman)? What is ultimate reality (Brahman)? What is the relationship between the individual and the universe? How can a human being achieve liberation from suffering?

The Upanishads contain some of the earliest fully philosophical treatments of yoga. The Katha Upanishad, for example, presents a beautiful dialogue between the young student Nachiketa and the god of death Yama, in which yoga is described as a path to self-knowledge and liberation. The Shvetashvatara Upanishad describes physical and meditative yoga practices in considerable detail. The Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads explore the nature of Brahman and Atman in ways that directly inform later yoga philosophy.

The Upanishadic period established yoga's most fundamental philosophical framework: the idea that the deepest cause of human suffering is ignorance of one's true nature, and that yoga is the path of systematic inner inquiry that removes this ignorance and reveals the truth of the Self.

## **2.5 The Epic Period — Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita**

The period of the great Indian epics — the Ramayana and the Mahabharata — (approximately 500 BCE to 400 CE) produced one of the most celebrated yoga texts in history: the Bhagavad Gita. Embedded within the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita is a dialogue between the warrior prince Arjuna and the divine teacher Krishna, set on a battlefield at a moment of profound personal and moral crisis.

The Bhagavad Gita is remarkable for presenting multiple paths of yoga as complementary rather than competing: Jnana Yoga (the yoga of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the yoga of devotion), Karma Yoga (the yoga of selfless action), and Raja Yoga (the yoga of meditation). Lord Krishna

states in the Bhagavad Gita: 'Be steadfast in yoga, O Arjuna. Perform your duty and abandon all attachment to success or failure. Such evenness of mind is called yoga.' This teaching — yoga as equanimity in action — became one of the most widely embraced definitions in the entire tradition.

## **2.6 The Classical Period — Patanjali and the Yoga Sutras**

The most systematic and authoritative formulation of yoga philosophy was composed by the sage Maharishi Patanjali, most likely between the 2nd century BCE and the 4th century CE. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras — a collection of 196 terse aphorisms organized into four chapters — represent the classical, definitive codification of the yoga tradition. This text is considered the foundational scripture of what is called 'Classical Yoga' or 'Raja Yoga.'

Patanjali did not invent yoga. He synthesized, organized, and gave systematic philosophical form to a tradition that had already been developing for thousands of years. The Yoga Sutras defined yoga's goal (liberation or Kaivalya), identified its obstacles (the five Kleshas or afflictions), and prescribed its method (the eight-limbed path or Ashtanga Yoga). This text remains the single most studied and referenced scripture in the yoga tradition worldwide.

## **2.7 Post-Classical and Medieval Yoga — Hatha Yoga**

Following the classical period, yoga continued to evolve and develop. The period from approximately 500 CE to 1500 CE saw the emergence of Tantra and later Hatha Yoga — traditions that emphasized the physical body as a vehicle for spiritual transformation. Important texts of this period include the Hatha Yoga Pradipika (composed by Swami Swatmarama, approximately 15th century CE), the Gheranda Samhita, and the Shiva Samhita.

Hatha Yoga introduced and systematized the physical practices that modern yoga is most associated with: asanas (physical postures), pranayama (breath control), mudras (energy seals), bandhas (energy locks), shatkarmas (purification practices), and the science of Kundalini Shakti. These texts established that the body, properly purified and strengthened, is not an obstacle to liberation but a powerful instrument for it.

## **2.8 Modern Yoga — The Global Transmission**

The transmission of yoga from India to the wider world began most significantly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The pivotal moment came in 1893 when Swami Vivekananda addressed the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago — the first time yoga philosophy was systematically presented to a Western audience. His lectures and subsequent work in the West established yoga as a universal science applicable to people of any background, culture, or religion.

In the 20th century, great masters including Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, B.K.S. Iyengar, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, and many others carried

yoga to every corner of the globe. Today, yoga is practiced by an estimated 300 million people worldwide — a testament to the universal relevance of this ancient science.

## Chapter 3: The Word 'Yoga' – Linguistic Roots and Etymology

### 3.1 The Sanskrit Root of 'Yoga'

The word 'yoga' comes from the ancient Sanskrit language — one of the oldest and most precise languages in human history, sometimes called 'the language of the gods' (Deva-bhasha). Sanskrit is the sacred language in which all major yoga scriptures were composed, and understanding the etymology of key Sanskrit terms is essential for understanding yoga's authentic meaning.

The word 'yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root 'yuj' (pronounced 'yooj'). This root is the origin of the entire word and carries the fundamental meaning of the tradition within it.

<b>Sanskrit Root</b>	Yuj (युज्)
<b>Basic Meaning</b>	To yoke, to join, to unite, to connect, to harness
<b>Related Words</b>	Yoga, Yuga (age/epoch), Yoke (English)
<b>English Cognate</b>	The English word 'yoke' shares the same ancient Indo-European root as 'yuj'
<b>First Usage</b>	Rigveda — the world's oldest scripture (approximately 1500 BCE or earlier)

### 3.2 Two Interpretations of 'Yuj'

Interestingly, the Sanskrit root 'yuj' carries two related but distinct meanings, and different philosophical traditions emphasize different meanings:

#### 3.2.1 Yuj in the Sense of 'Samadhi' (Absorption / Union)

The first interpretation of 'yuj' is in the sense of 'samadhi' — the state of complete meditative absorption or union. In this interpretation, yoga means the direct experience of unity or oneness — the merging of individual awareness with universal consciousness. This is the meaning emphasized by Vedantic and non-dualistic traditions, which understand yoga as the recognition of the fundamental unity of Atman (individual self) and Brahman (universal consciousness).

*In this sense, yoga is not about achieving something new — it is about recognizing what has always been true: that the deepest nature of the individual is not separate from the deepest nature of reality. Yoga is the practice of removing the illusion of separation.*

#### 3.2.2 Yuj in the Sense of 'Samyoga' (Joining / Harnessing)

The second interpretation of 'yuj' is in the sense of 'samyoga' — joining or harnessing. This is the meaning emphasized by Patanjali and the Classical Yoga tradition. In this context, yoga

refers to the disciplined practice of harnessing and controlling the forces of body and mind in order to achieve the state of liberation (Kaivalya). Just as a charioteer harnesses horses to a chariot, the yogi harnesses the restless energies of mind and body through disciplined practice.

Patanjali uses the term 'yoga' primarily in this practical sense — as the systematic discipline of controlling the fluctuations of the mind (chitta vritti nirodha) through the eight-limbed path.

### 3.3 Yoga's Linguistic Family — Related Terms

Understanding the broader linguistic family of the word 'yoga' deepens our appreciation of its meaning:

<b>Yogi / Yogini</b>	One who practices yoga (masculine / feminine). A person who has realized the state of yoga.
<b>Yogic</b>	Adjective form — relating to or characteristic of yoga (e.g., yogic lifestyle, yogic breathing).
<b>Yoga Darshana</b>	The yoga philosophy system — one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy (Shad Darshan).
<b>Yuga</b>	An age or epoch — from the same root 'yuj.' The four cosmic ages: Satya, Treta, Dvapara, Kali Yuga.
<b>Yoke (English)</b>	The English agricultural implement for joining oxen shares the same Proto-Indo-European root as Sanskrit 'yuj' — demonstrating the vast ancient linguistic family.
<b>Jugum (Latin)</b>	The Latin word for 'yoke,' also from the same root — showing the connection across ancient civilizations.

### 3.4 What 'Union' Means in Yoga

When we say yoga means 'union,' we must be precise about what is being united. Different traditions within yoga understand this union differently:

- Union of body, mind, and spirit — the most accessible and popular understanding in contemporary yoga.
- Union of the individual self (Atman/Purusha) with universal consciousness (Brahman/Ishvara).
- Union of the individual breath with the cosmic breath (Prana with Mahaprana).
- Union of the masculine and feminine principles within the human being (Shiva and Shakti in Tantric Yoga).
- Union of action, devotion, and knowledge — the three great paths of the Bhagavad Gita.
- In Patanjali's system, a more technical meaning: the union of the practice of yoga with its result — the stilling of the mind and the revelation of pure awareness.

What all these meanings share is the sense that something that appears separate is actually connected, and that yoga is the practice of recognizing, experiencing, and living that connection.

Yoga teaches that division, fragmentation, and isolation — whether experienced in the body, the mind, or the spirit — are forms of suffering, and that the experience of wholeness and unity is the deepest healing and the highest freedom.

## Chapter 4: The Meaning of Yoga — Multiple Dimensions

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### 4.1 Yoga Has Many Faces

One of the most important things a yoga teacher must understand is that 'yoga' is not a single, fixed thing. The word 'yoga' is used to describe an entire family of related practices, philosophies, experiences, and ways of life. Throughout its 5,000-year history, yoga has expressed itself in many different forms — all sharing the same root intention of human transformation and liberation, but differing in emphasis, method, and philosophical framework.

Understanding the multiple dimensions of meaning that the word 'yoga' carries will allow you to teach with nuance, accuracy, and the capacity to meet students wherever they are — whether they come to yoga for physical fitness, stress relief, spiritual seeking, or philosophical inquiry.

### 4.2 Yoga as Union — The Experiential Meaning

At its most fundamental experiential level, yoga means the direct experience of unity or wholeness. This experience is the opposite of the fragmentation, distraction, and inner conflict that characterize ordinary human consciousness. Most human beings most of the time experience themselves as divided: the body pulls in one direction, the emotions in another, the intellect in a third. Desires conflict with values; the past haunts, the future anxieties.

Yoga, as a practice, gradually dissolves these divisions. The practitioner begins to experience a growing integration — body, breath, mind, and awareness moving together in harmony. At the deepest levels of practice, this integration opens into a state of profound inner unity that the tradition calls Samadhi — a state in which the boundary between the meditating awareness and the object of meditation dissolves, and only pure, luminous consciousness remains.

*This experience of inner unity is not a philosophical belief to be adopted — it is a living reality to be directly experienced through practice. This is what makes yoga unique: it does not ask for faith or intellectual agreement, but for direct personal inquiry and experience.*

### 4.3 Yoga as Discipline — The Practical Meaning

In its practical sense, yoga means a systematic discipline or method of training. Just as a musician must practice scales and exercises to develop mastery, the yogi practices a systematic curriculum of physical, breathing, and meditative exercises to develop the capacity for sustained inner attention, equanimity, and ultimately liberation.

This practical meaning of yoga as disciplined method is perhaps most clearly expressed in Patanjali's definition and in the tradition of Hatha Yoga. Both understand yoga as a technology — a precise, systematic set of practices that, when applied consistently and correctly, produce

specific, predictable results in the body, the nervous system, the mind, and ultimately in the quality of consciousness.

#### **4.4 Yoga as a Way of Life — The Ethical Meaning**

Yoga is not only something you practice on a mat for 60 or 90 minutes. In its fullest sense, yoga is a comprehensive way of life — a set of principles and values that guide how you eat, sleep, relate to others, work, and navigate all of life's challenges and joys. The ethical dimension of yoga is expressed in Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga system through the Yamas (ethical restraints) and Niyamas (personal observances) — the first two limbs of the eight-limbed path.

The Yamas include: non-violence (Ahimsa), truthfulness (Satya), non-stealing (Asteya), continence (Brahmacharya), and non-possessiveness (Aparigraha). The Niyamas include: purity (Saucha), contentment (Santosha), self-discipline (Tapas), self-study (Svadyaya), and surrender to the divine (Ishvara Pranidhana). Together, these ethical principles form the foundation of the yogic way of life — without which all further practice lacks a stable ground.

#### **4.5 Yoga as Philosophy — The Intellectual Meaning**

Yoga is also a complete philosophical system — one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy (Shad Darshan). As a philosophy, yoga offers a comprehensive account of: the nature of consciousness and matter, the cause of human suffering, the nature of liberation, the valid means of knowledge, the existence and nature of God (Ishvara), and the relationship between the individual self and ultimate reality.

For a yoga teacher, this philosophical dimension is of great importance. Students increasingly come to yoga with deep philosophical questions. Understanding yoga as a philosophy equips you to engage with these questions thoughtfully and to offer genuine insight into the nature of the mind, the self, and the path to lasting well-being.

#### **4.6 Yoga as Science — The Contemporary Understanding**

In the modern era, yoga is increasingly recognized as a science — a systematic body of knowledge about the human being that can be tested, applied, and validated through direct experience. Contemporary neuroscience, psychology, and medicine have produced an enormous body of research validating yoga's profound effects on physical and mental health. Studies have documented yoga's effectiveness for conditions including anxiety, depression, chronic pain, hypertension, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and many others.

The ancient yogis were, in a sense, empirical scientists of consciousness — conducting precise experiments in the laboratory of their own bodies and minds, carefully observing results, and transmitting their findings to future practitioners. The extraordinary precision of classical yoga texts supports this understanding: the tradition did not rely on blind faith but on rigorous first-person investigation and the transmission of verified findings.

As yoga teachers, we inhabit all of these dimensions simultaneously. We practice yoga as discipline, live it as a way of life, understand it as philosophy, and increasingly support it with scientific evidence. This multidimensional understanding is what makes yoga teaching a genuine vocation rather than merely a job.

## Chapter 5: Definitions of Yoga — Ancient to Modern

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### 5.1 Why Definitions Matter

Throughout its long history, yoga has been defined by many great sages, teachers, and philosophical traditions. These definitions are not contradictory — they illuminate different facets of the same jewel. As a yoga teacher, knowing these definitions will allow you to draw upon the full richness of the tradition and to offer students a nuanced, accurate understanding of what yoga is and what it is not.

### 5.2 Patanjali's Definition — The Classical Standard

The most famous and authoritative definition of yoga in the classical tradition comes from Maharishi Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. In the very opening of his text, Patanjali offers a definition that is both remarkably concise and extraordinarily profound:

*"Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind." (Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah — Yoga Sutras, Chapter 1, Sutra 2)*

Let us unpack this definition carefully, as every word is significant:

- Yoga — the state or condition being defined, as well as the practice that leads to that state.
- Chitta — the mind-field; the totality of individual consciousness including the conscious mind (Manas), the ego-sense (Ahamkara), and the deeper intelligence (Buddhi).
- Vritti — fluctuation, modification, or movement; the constantly changing patterns of thought, emotion, and memory that constitute ordinary mental experience.
- Nirodhah — cessation, restraint, stilling; the complete subsidence of mental fluctuations.

Patanjali's definition is remarkable for what it focuses on: not the body, not the breath, not ritual, not devotion — but the mind. Yoga, for Patanjali, is fundamentally a science of consciousness. The goal is the complete stilling of mental restlessness, after which the true nature of the Self (Purusha — pure consciousness) shines forth in its own undimmed radiance.

Patanjali immediately follows this definition with the result: 'Then the Seer abides in its own nature.' (Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam — Yoga Sutras 1.3). When the mind is stilled, what remains is not blankness or unconsciousness but the radiant, ever-present awareness that was always there, obscured by the movements of the mind like the sun obscured by clouds.

### 5.3 The Bhagavad Gita's Definitions

The Bhagavad Gita, which predates Patanjali and represents a somewhat different approach, offers several memorable definitions of yoga, each reflecting a different dimension of the path:

*"Yoga is equanimity (sameness of mind) in success and failure." (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 48)*

This definition emphasizes yoga as the inner quality of steadiness and non-reactivity — the capacity to remain centered and equanimous regardless of whether external circumstances are favorable or unfavorable. This is yoga not as a technique but as an orientation toward life — a quality of inner stability that cannot be disturbed by the inevitable fluctuations of worldly experience.

*"Yoga is skill in action." (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 50)*

This extraordinarily practical definition — 'Yogah karmasu kaushalam' — defines yoga as the quality of intelligence, precision, and awareness brought to every action. A yogi is not someone who retreats from life but someone who engages with life with complete skill, awareness, and non-attachment to results. This definition forms the philosophical foundation of Karma Yoga — the yoga of selfless, dedicated action.

*"When one's mind, intellect, and self are under control, freed from restless desire, one's self becomes unified — this is called being established in yoga." (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, Verse 18)*

## **5.4 The Hatha Yoga Pradipika's Definition**

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika — the foundational text of Hatha Yoga, composed by Swami Swatmarama in approximately the 15th century CE — offers a definition that situates the physical practices of yoga within their authentic spiritual context:

*"Hatha Yoga is a staircase leading to Raja Yoga (the royal path of meditation). For the aspirant desirous of knowing Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga is a ladder to reach that state." (Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Chapter 1)*

This definition is profoundly important for modern yoga teachers to understand. Hatha Yoga — the system of physical postures, breath control, and purification practices — was explicitly designed as a preparatory system for the deeper meditative practice of Raja Yoga. The body is purified and strengthened not as an end in itself but as a vehicle for the deeper inner journey.

This context gives asana practice its authentic meaning and prevents yoga teaching from degenerating into mere physical fitness training.

## 5.5 Modern Masters' Definitions

### Swami Vivekananda

*"Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature — external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one, or more, or all of these — and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details." — Swami Vivekananda*

Vivekananda's definition places yoga within the broadest possible framework — as the universal science of manifesting the divine nature latent within every human being, by whatever path is most suited to the individual's temperament and capacity.

### Sri Aurobindo

*"Yoga is a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the cosmos." — Sri Aurobindo*

Sri Aurobindo's definition emphasizes yoga as a method of actualizing human potential — bringing forth the higher capacities latent in every human being — while simultaneously connecting the individual to the greater whole.

### B.K.S. Iyengar

*"Yoga allows you to rediscover a sense of wholeness in your life, where you do not feel that you are constantly trying to fit broken pieces together." — B.K.S. Iyengar*

Iyengar's experiential definition captures the lived reality of what yoga does: it restores a sense of inherent wholeness, healing the fragmentation and inner division that characterize modern life.

### T.K.V. Desikachar

*"Yoga is the process of removing that which disturbs the clarity of perception. It is the art and science of healthy living — physically, mentally, and spiritually." — T.K.V. Desikachar*

## 5.6 A Synthesis — The Complete Definition for Yoga Teachers

Drawing upon all these sources, we can offer a comprehensive working definition of yoga that honors the full depth and breadth of the tradition:

YOGA is an ancient, systematic, and living science of human transformation — a comprehensive set of practices, philosophies, and experiential understandings that guide the human being from a state of fragmentation, suffering, and ignorance toward a state of integration, well-being, and liberating wisdom. Through the disciplined cultivation of body, breath, mind, and awareness, yoga reveals the deepest nature of the self as inherently whole, pure, and free. Its ultimate aim is the direct experience of unity — the recognition that the individual self and the universal self are not two.

## Chapter 6: Types and Paths of Yoga

### 6.1 The Four Classical Paths

The Bhagavad Gita and the broader yoga tradition recognize that human beings are different in temperament, capacity, and inclination. Some are predominantly intellectual; others are emotionally oriented; others are active and energetic; still others are naturally contemplative. In its wisdom, the yoga tradition offers different paths suited to different temperaments — all leading to the same ultimate destination.

Jnana Yoga	Bhakti Yoga	Karma Yoga	Raja Yoga
<b>Yoga of Knowledge</b> For the intellectually inclined. Liberation through discriminative wisdom and self-inquiry.	<b>Yoga of Devotion</b> For the emotionally inclined. Liberation through love of and surrender to the Divine.	<b>Yoga of Action</b> For the active. Liberation through selfless, non-attached, dedicated action.	<b>Yoga of Meditation</b> For the contemplative. Liberation through systematic control of body, breath, and mind.

### 6.2 Additional Classical Paths

- Tantra Yoga — The path that uses all aspects of human experience, including the body and its energies, as vehicles for liberation. Emphasizes the awakening of Kundalini Shakti.
- Mantra Yoga — The path of sacred sound, syllable, and vibration. Practices include Japa (repetition of divine names), chanting, and working with the transformative power of sound.
- Kundalini Yoga — The specific practice of awakening the dormant spiritual energy (Kundalini) at the base of the spine and raising it through the chakra system to the crown.
- Laya Yoga — The yoga of dissolution — dissolving the ordinary limited consciousness into the infinite through deep meditation and mantra.
- Hatha Yoga — The physical path that prepares the body and nervous system for deeper meditative practice through asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, and purification practices.
- Kriya Yoga — Introduced to the West by Paramahansa Yogananda; a specific system of breath, mantra, and concentration practices designed for rapid spiritual advancement.
- Ashtanga Yoga (Patanjali) — The eight-limbed path: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi.

### 6.3 The Eight Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga — A Summary

Patanjali's eight-limbed path (Ashtanga Yoga) provides the most complete and systematic framework for the yoga journey. As yoga teachers, we must know these eight limbs thoroughly,

understand their sequence and interdependence, and be able to explain them clearly to students:

<b>1. Yama</b>	Ethical restraints: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (continence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness)
<b>2. Niyama</b>	Personal observances: Saucha (purity), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (self-discipline), Svadhyaya (self-study), Ishvara Pranidhana (surrender to God)
<b>3. Asana</b>	Physical posture — steady and comfortable; the foundation for meditation
<b>4. Pranayama</b>	Expansion and regulation of vital life force (Prana) through breath control
<b>5. Pratyahara</b>	Withdrawal of the senses from their external objects — the bridge between outer and inner practice
<b>6. Dharana</b>	Concentration — the practice of fixing the mind upon a single object or point
<b>7. Dhyana</b>	Meditation — uninterrupted, effortless flow of awareness toward the object of concentration
<b>8. Samadhi</b>	Complete absorption — the culminating state of yoga in which the meditator, the act of meditation, and the object of meditation merge into one luminous whole

# Chapter 7: Yoga as a Philosophy — Its Place in Indian Thought

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## 7.1 Yoga Among the Six Darshanas

Yoga Darshana is one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy known as the Shad Darshan. The six schools are: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. Each school accepts the authority of the Vedas and each addresses the fundamental philosophical questions of existence, knowledge, and liberation — but from different angles and with different emphases.

Yoga Darshana is most closely paired with Samkhya Darshana. Samkhya provides the theoretical metaphysical framework (the nature of consciousness, matter, the self, and liberation), while Yoga provides the practical path (the eight-limbed method for actually achieving liberation). This is why Yoga is sometimes described as 'Samkhya with practice' and Samkhya as 'Yoga without practice.'

## 7.2 Core Philosophical Tenets of Yoga Darshana

- Reality consists of two fundamentally distinct principles: Purusha (pure consciousness, the Self) and Prakriti (primal matter, including the body and mind).
- The individual self (Purusha) is in reality eternally free, pure, and whole — it only appears to be bound because of its false identification with the body and mind (which are products of Prakriti).
- The root cause of all suffering is Avidya — fundamental ignorance of the true nature of the self.
- Liberation (Kaivalya or Moksha) is the recognition of Purusha's true nature as completely distinct from and unaffected by Prakriti.
- The path to liberation is the systematic practice of Ashtanga Yoga — the eight-limbed path — which progressively stills the mental fluctuations and reveals the ever-present luminosity of pure awareness.
- God (Ishvara) is a special Purusha — eternally free, omniscient, untouched by afflictions — who is the teacher of the ancient teachers and who can be approached through devoted meditation (Ishvara Pranidhana).

## 7.3 Yoga and Vedanta — Complementary Philosophies

While Yoga Darshana (as codified by Patanjali) presents a dualistic philosophy — Purusha and Prakriti as two distinct realities — the Vedanta tradition (particularly Advaita Vedanta as articulated by Shankaracharya) presents a non-dualistic philosophy in which Atman (individual self) and Brahman (universal consciousness) are ultimately identical.

These two philosophical frameworks are not contradictory but complementary. Yoga Darshana describes the experiential path of practice — the stages through which a practitioner

progressively quiets the mind and reveals awareness. Vedanta describes the metaphysical truth of what is revealed — that the awareness which was obscured was always and already the one universal consciousness. Together, they form a complete picture: the path and the destination.

In contemporary yoga teaching, both philosophical frameworks are regularly drawn upon, and a well-trained yoga teacher should be conversant with both.

## 7.4 The Five Kleshas — Yoga's Understanding of Human Suffering

One of Yoga Darshana's most psychologically profound contributions is its analysis of the root causes of human suffering. Patanjali identifies five Kleshas (afflictions) that are the sources of all pain, confusion, and bondage:

<b>1. Avidya</b>	Fundamental ignorance — misperceiving the self and reality. Mistaking the impermanent for permanent, the impure for pure, pain for pleasure, the not-self for the Self. The root from which all other afflictions arise.
<b>2. Asmita</b>	Ego-sense — the false identification of pure awareness (Purusha) with the mind-body complex. The sense of 'I am this body' or 'I am these thoughts.'
<b>3. Raga</b>	Attachment — the habitual craving that arises from the experience of pleasure. The mind's tendency to grasp at pleasant experiences and to build its identity around them.
<b>4. Dvesha</b>	Aversion — the habitual repulsion that arises from the experience of pain. The mind's tendency to push away unpleasant experience and to contract around it.
<b>5. Abhinivesha</b>	Fear of death — the deep-seated instinctive clinging to existence that affects all living beings, even those who have great wisdom. The fundamental resistance to impermanence and ending.

Understanding the five Kleshas is not just theoretical knowledge — it is a map for working with students' actual experience. When you see a student gripping in a posture, that is Raga and Abhinivesha. When you see a student avoiding a challenging pose, that may be Dvesha. When a student identifies completely with their physical appearance or athletic performance, that is Asmita. The Kleshas are alive in every yoga class — and a yoga teacher who can recognize them can offer genuinely transformative guidance.

## Chapter 8: Yoga in the Modern World

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### 8.1 The Global Yoga Phenomenon

Today, yoga is practiced by an estimated 300 to 500 million people worldwide — in yoga studios, gyms, hospitals, schools, corporate wellness programs, prisons, military bases, and living rooms. This extraordinary global spread represents one of the most significant cross-cultural transmissions of wisdom in human history.

The global yoga phenomenon has been a force of tremendous benefit: introducing millions of people to practices of self-care, mindfulness, stress reduction, and inner inquiry. At the same time, the commercialization of yoga and its reduction to a purely physical practice have raised important questions about authenticity, depth, and the integrity of the tradition. As yoga teachers trained at SKM Yoga, you are entrusted with upholding the depth and authenticity of this ancient science.

### 8.2 Scientific Research on Yoga — A Brief Overview

Modern science has extensively studied yoga's effects on human health and well-being. The evidence base has grown dramatically in recent decades:

- Neurological research has shown that regular yoga and meditation practice increases cortical thickness in brain regions associated with attention, interoception, and sensory processing.
- Psychological research consistently demonstrates yoga's effectiveness for reducing anxiety, depression, and perceived stress.
- Cardiovascular research has documented yoga's ability to reduce blood pressure, lower resting heart rate, and improve heart rate variability — a marker of nervous system flexibility and resilience.
- Research on chronic pain shows yoga to be significantly effective for conditions including lower back pain, arthritis, fibromyalgia, and migraine.
- Research in trauma treatment (particularly the work of Dr. Bessel van der Kolk and others) has demonstrated yoga's unique effectiveness in helping the body process and heal from trauma.
- Research on aging shows that yoga practitioners have measurably greater flexibility, balance, strength, and cognitive function in older age compared to non-practitioners.

These findings validate what the yoga tradition has taught for millennia: that systematic practice of yoga produces profound, measurable, positive changes in the human being at every level — physical, psychological, neurological, and (beyond the reach of current measurement) spiritual.

### 8.3 Yoga's Place in Healthcare

Yoga is increasingly being integrated into mainstream healthcare settings. Hospitals, clinics, and health systems worldwide now offer yoga programs as part of treatment for a wide range of conditions. The field of 'Yoga Therapy' — the individualized application of yoga practices for specific health conditions — has emerged as a recognized therapeutic modality, with its own training standards and professional organizations.

As yoga teachers, it is important to understand both the potential of yoga to support health and healing, and the boundaries of your role as a yoga teacher (as distinct from a yoga therapist or healthcare provider). Teaching yoga from a place of clear knowledge of both its power and its appropriate limits is the mark of a responsible and professional yoga teacher.

## **8.4 The Challenge of Authenticity**

One of the most important issues facing contemporary yoga is authenticity — the question of whether the yoga being taught preserves the depth, integrity, and intention of the original tradition. When yoga is reduced to a physical fitness system disconnected from its philosophical roots, students are deprived of the deeper dimensions of transformation that yoga is capable of producing.

At SKM Yoga, our commitment is to train yoga teachers who understand and honor the full depth of the tradition — who can teach asana with anatomical precision AND with philosophical depth, who can guide pranayama as a physiological practice AND as a tool for expanding awareness, and who understand meditation not just as stress reduction but as the heart of the entire yoga journey.

*A yoga teacher who knows only the physical form of yoga is like a musician who knows only the notes on a page but has never felt the music. The notes are necessary, but they are not the music. The music lives in the understanding that animates them.*

## Chapter 9: Practical Implications for the Yoga Teacher

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### 9.1 Teaching from the Roots

Every dimension of yoga teaching is enriched by a deep understanding of yoga's origin, meaning, and definition. When you know where yoga comes from, your teaching carries the authority and humility of someone who stands in a great lineage. When you understand what yoga truly means, you can point students toward something far greater than physical fitness. When you can articulate yoga's definitions with precision and depth, students trust that they are receiving an authentic transmission.

### 9.2 How to Introduce Yoga's Origin in Class

You do not need to deliver a lecture on yoga history in every class — but weaving historical and philosophical context into your teaching enriches the experience enormously. Here are specific approaches:

- In the opening of a class, you might briefly mention that what students are doing connects to a practice that has been refined over 5,000 years — giving the session a sense of depth and context.
- When introducing pranayama, you might reference the Upanishadic understanding of prana as the vital life force — not merely as 'air' but as the energy that animates all living beings.
- When teaching meditation, you might briefly mention Patanjali's definition of yoga as 'the stilling of the mind' — connecting the specific practice to the overarching tradition.
- When students ask 'what is yoga?', you now have the resources to give a genuinely comprehensive, layered, and interesting answer that inspires rather than simplifies.
- Sharing occasional stories from yoga's history — about the great masters, the ancient scriptures, the Indus Valley discoveries — brings the tradition alive and nourishes students' sense of connection to something ancient and universal.

### 9.3 Embodying the Meaning of Yoga as a Teacher

The most powerful way to convey the meaning of yoga is not through words but through embodiment. Students will feel whether their teacher actually lives what they teach. A yoga teacher who has genuinely integrated the meaning of yoga — who moves with awareness, speaks with truthfulness, responds to challenges with equanimity, and relates to students with genuine care and non-judgment — is teaching yoga with every breath and every gesture, far beyond what any lecture can convey.

This is what the tradition means by 'guru' — one who dispels darkness through the light of their own realized understanding. The highest teaching is the teacher's own being. Work toward this, not as a performance of perfection, but as a sincere daily practice of living what you teach.

## 9.4 Common Student Questions — And How to Answer Them

<b>'Is yoga a religion?'</b>	Yoga is a universal science of human transformation, not a religion. It has no dogma or required beliefs. People of every religious background — or no religious background — practice yoga. Its practices are tools for inner exploration accessible to all.
<b>'Can anyone do yoga?'</b>	Yes. Yoga is adaptable to every body, age, and fitness level. The physical practices can be modified; the breathing and meditation practices require no particular physical capacity. Yoga's wisdom is available to all human beings.
<b>'What is yoga for?'</b>	At its most accessible, yoga is for physical health, mental clarity, and stress reduction. At its deepest, yoga is for the complete liberation of the human being from all forms of suffering — the direct recognition of the true Self as free, whole, and luminous.
<b>'Is yoga just stretching?'</b>	Stretching is one small component of the physical dimension of yoga. But yoga encompasses ethical living, breath work, sense withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and absorption. It is a complete system of human development — far more than stretching.
<b>'How old is yoga?'</b>	Archaeological evidence suggests yoga-like practices existed at least 5,000 years ago in the Indus Valley Civilization. Yoga texts appear in the Vedas (1500 BCE or earlier). The tradition itself teaches that yoga is eternal — without beginning or end.

## Chapter 10: Summary and Key Takeaways

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### 10.1 Core Concepts to Remember

1. Yoga is at least 5,000 years old, with archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization (3300-1300 BCE) and textual evidence from the Rigveda (approximately 1500 BCE or earlier).
2. The word 'yoga' derives from the Sanskrit root 'yuj' — to yoke, join, unite, or harness. Related to the English word 'yoke,' it reflects the core idea of bringing together what appears separate.
3. Yoga has two primary etymological meanings: (a) union — the direct experience of wholeness or non-separation; (b) disciplined practice — the systematic harnessing of body, breath, and mind toward liberation.
4. Patanjali's classical definition: 'Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind.' The Bhagavad Gita defines yoga as equanimity, skill in action, and inner integration.
5. Yoga operates simultaneously as practice (Sadhana), philosophy (Darshana), way of life (Dharma), and science of consciousness.
6. The four classical paths of yoga — Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion), Karma (action), and Raja (meditation) — address different human temperaments, all leading to the same liberation.
7. Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbs) is the most complete and systematic framework for the yoga journey: from ethical foundation (Yama, Niyama) through physical practice (Asana, Pranayama) to inner mastery (Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi).
8. The five Kleshas — Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha — are yoga's masterful analysis of the root causes of human suffering and the targets of yogic practice.
9. Modern science has validated yoga's profound effects on physical and mental health — affirming what the tradition has known for millennia.
10. The greatest yoga teaching is the teacher's own embodiment of yoga's principles. Words inform; presence transforms.

### 10.2 Reflection Questions for Self-Study

- In your own words, without referring to this text, how would you define yoga to a complete beginner? Practice articulating this in one or two clear, accessible sentences.
- Which definition of yoga from this chapter most resonates with your own experience and practice? Why?
- How does understanding yoga's ancient origins change the way you relate to your own practice?
- Which of the five Kleshas do you most recognize in your own experience? How does your yoga practice work with that Klesha?

- How will you bring yoga's full meaning — not just its physical dimension — into the classes you teach?

## Glossary: Key Terms in Yoga Philosophy

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This glossary provides clear, accessible definitions of the key Sanskrit and philosophical terms used throughout this text. Learn these terms thoroughly — you will use them throughout your teaching career.

**Abhyasa** — Consistent, sustained practice — one of the two foundational pillars of yoga practice, paired with Vairagya (non-attachment).

**Ahimsa** — Non-violence, non-harming — the first and most important of the Yamas (ethical restraints); the foundation of yogic ethics.

**Ashtanga Yoga** — Eight-limbed yoga — Patanjali's systematic eight-step path: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi.

**Asana** — Physical posture; the third limb of Ashtanga Yoga; literally means 'seat' — traditionally referring to the stable seat for meditation.

**Atman** — The individual self or soul; in Vedanta, identical with Brahman; the innermost essence of a human being.

**Avidya** — Fundamental ignorance; misperception of the nature of self and reality; the root cause of all suffering in Yoga philosophy.

**Bhakti** — Devotion, love — the path of yoga that uses loving surrender to the Divine as the means of liberation.

**Brahman** — Ultimate reality; the infinite, self-luminous, non-dual consciousness that underlies all existence in Vedanta philosophy.

**Chitta** — The mind-field; the totality of individual consciousness including conscious mind, ego, and deeper intelligence.

**Darshana** — Vision, philosophical system; the six classical schools of Indian philosophy. Yoga is one of the six Darshanas.

**Dharana** — Concentration; the sixth limb of Ashtanga Yoga — fixing and holding the mind upon a single point.

**Dhyana** — Meditation; the seventh limb of Ashtanga Yoga — uninterrupted, flowing awareness toward the object of concentration.

**Gunas** — The three fundamental qualities of Prakriti (primal matter): Sattva (clarity), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia).

**Ishvara** — God; in Yoga Darshana, a special Purusha eternally untouched by affliction — the teacher of all teachers, object of devotion.

**Jnana** — Knowledge; particularly direct, liberating self-knowledge; the path of wisdom — Jnana Yoga.

**Kaivalya** — Liberation in Yoga Darshana; absolute independence of pure consciousness (Purusha) from matter (Prakriti).

**Karma** — Action; the accumulated results of action; also the path of yoga that uses selfless action as a means of liberation.

**Klesha** — Affliction; the five root causes of suffering identified by Patanjali: Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha.

**Moksha** — Liberation; freedom from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth; the ultimate goal of yoga and all Indian philosophy.

**Niyama** — Personal observances; the second limb of Ashtanga Yoga: Saucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya, Ishvara Pranidhana.

**Prana** — Vital life force; the energy that animates all living beings; the subject of pranayama practice.

**Pranayama** — Expansion and regulation of prana through breath control; the fourth limb of Ashtanga Yoga.

**Pratyahara** — Withdrawal of the senses from external objects; the fifth limb of Ashtanga Yoga — the bridge between outer and inner practice.

**Purusha** — Pure consciousness, the witnessing Self; the spiritual principle in Samkhya-Yoga philosophy; eternally free and unchanging.

**Prakriti** — Primal matter or nature; the material principle in Samkhya-Yoga philosophy; constituted by the three Gunas.

**Raja Yoga** — Royal yoga; the path of meditation and mental mastery; often used synonymously with Ashtanga Yoga (Patanjali's eight-limbed path).

**Sadhana** — Spiritual practice; the consistent effort and discipline applied on the path of yoga.

**Samadhi** — Complete absorption; the eighth limb of Ashtanga Yoga; the state of non-dual awareness in which meditator, meditation, and object merge.

**Santosha** — Contentment; the second Niyama; the practice of finding peace and completeness in the present moment.

**Tapas** — Self-discipline, purifying heat; the third Niyama; the willingness to endure discomfort in service of growth and purification.

**Upanishads** — The final teachings of the Vedas (approximately 800-200 BCE); philosophical dialogues exploring the nature of self, reality, and liberation.

**Vairagya** — Non-attachment, dispassion; paired with Abhyasa as the two foundational pillars of yoga practice.

**Vedas** — The oldest scriptures of India and among the oldest texts in any human language; the source-texts of the yoga tradition.

**Viveka** — Discrimination; the capacity to distinguish between the permanent and the impermanent, the self and the not-self; the direct means to liberation.

**Vritti** — Mental modification or fluctuation; the constantly changing patterns of thought, emotion, and memory; what yoga aims to still.

**Yama** — Ethical restraints; the first limb of Ashtanga Yoga: Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha.

**Yoga** — From the Sanskrit root 'yuj' — to yoke, join, unite; a complete science of human transformation aiming at the direct experience of wholeness and liberation.

**Yogi / Yogini** — One who practices yoga (masculine / feminine); one who has realized the state of yoga in their own direct experience.

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***Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi***

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*May all beings be happy. May all beings be free.*

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