

The Vedic Samhitas contain references to ascetics, while ascetic practices (tapas) are referenced in the Brāhmaṇas (900 B.C.E. and 500 B.C.E.), early commentaries on the Vedas. Several seals discovered at Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300–1700 B.C.E.) sites depict what may be figures in a yoga- or meditation-like posture, "a form of ritual discipline, suggesting a precursor of yoga", according to archaeologist Gregory Possehl. Gavin Flood states that it is not clear that the 'Pashupati' figure on these seals is seated in a yoga posture, or that the shape is even intended to represent a human figure at all. Techniques for experiencing higher states of consciousness in meditation initially had only a slight philosophical underpinning, and were unconnected with Samkhya doctrines. These techniques were developed by the shramanic traditions and in the Upanishadic tradition. An early textual reference to meditation is made in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the earliest Upanishad (approx. 900 B.C.E.). The Buddhist texts are probably the earliest texts describing meditation techniques. In Hindu literature, the term "yoga" first occurs in the Katha Upanishad, where it refers to control of the senses and the cessation of mental activity leading to a supreme state. Important textual sources for the evolving concept of Yoga are the middle Upanishads, (ca. 400 B.C.E), the Mahabharata including the Bhagavad Gita (ca. 200 B.C.E), and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (300 B.C.-200 B.C.E).

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In Indian philosophy, Yoga is the name of one of the six orthodox philosophical schools. The Yoga philosophical system is closely allied with the Samkhya school. The Yoga school as expounded by the sage Patanjali accepts the Samkhya psychology and metaphysics, but is more theistic than the Samkhya, as evidenced by the addition of a divine entity to the Samkhya's twenty-five elements of reality. The parallels between Yoga and Samkhya were so close that Max Müller says that "the two philosophies were in popular parlance distinguished from each other as Samkhya with and Samkhya without a Lord..." The intimate relationship between Samkhya and Yoga is explained by Heinrich Zimmer:

These two are regarded in India as twins, the two aspects of a single discipline. Sāṅkhya provides a basic theoretical exposition of human nature, enumerating and defining its elements,

analyzing their manner of co-operation in a state of bondage (bandha), and describing their state of disentanglement or separation in release (mokṣa), while Yoga treats specifically of the dynamics of the process for the disentanglement, and outlines practical techniques for the gaining of release, or 'isolation-integration' (kaivalya). Patanjali is widely regarded as the founder of the formal Yoga philosophy. Patanjali's yoga is known as Raja yoga, which is a system for control of the mind. Patanjali defines the word "yoga" in his second sutra, which is the definitional sutra for his entire work:

This terse definition hinges on the meaning of three Sanskrit terms. I. K. Taimni translates it as "Yoga is the inhibition (nirodha) of the modifications (vṛtti) of the mind (citta)". The use of the word nirodha in the opening definition of yoga is an example of the important role that Buddhist technical terminology and concepts play in the Yoga Sutra; this role suggests that Patanjali was aware of Buddhist ideas and wove them into his system.[35] Swami Vivekananda translates the sutra as "Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (Citta) from taking various forms (Vrittis)." A sculpture of a Hindu yogi in the Birla Mandir, Delhi

Patanjali's writing also became the basis for a system referred to as "Ashtanga Yoga" ("Eight-Limbed Yoga"). This eight-limbed concept derived from the 29th Sutra of the 2nd book, and is a core characteristic of practically every Raja yoga variation taught today. The Eight Limbs are:

1. Yama (The five "abstentions"): non-violence, non-lying, non-covetousness, non-sensuality, and non-possessiveness.
2. Niyama (The five "observances"): purity, contentment, austerity, study, and surrender to god.
3. Asana: Literally means "seat", and in Patanjali's Sutras refers to the seated position used for meditation.
4. Pranayama ("Lengthening Prāna"): Prāna, life force, or vital energy, particularly, the breath, "āyāma", to lengthen or extend. Also interpreted as control of the life force.
5. Pratyahara ("Abstraction"): Withdrawal of the sense organs from external objects.
6. Dharana ("Concentration"): Fixing the attention on a single object.
7. Dhyana ("Meditation"): Intense contemplation of the nature of the object of meditation.
8. Samādhi ("Liberation"): merging consciousness with the object of meditation.

In the view of this school, the highest attainment does not reveal the experienced diversity of the world to be illusion. The everyday world is real. Furthermore, the highest attainment is the event of one of many individual selves discovering itself; there is no single universal self shared by all persons.

The Bhagavad Gita ('Song of the Lord'), uses the term yoga extensively in a variety of ways. In addition to an entire chapter (ch. 6) dedicated to traditional yoga practice, including meditation, it introduces three prominent types of yoga:

- \* Karma yoga: The yoga of action
- \* Bhakti yoga: The yoga of devotion
- \* Jnana yoga: The yoga of knowledge

Madhusudana Sarasvati (b. circa 1490) divided the Gita into three sections, with the first six chapters dealing with Karma yoga, the middle six with Bhakti yoga, and the last six with Jnana (knowledge). Other commentators ascribe a different 'yoga' to each chapter, delineating eighteen different yogas.

Hatha Yoga is a particular system of Yoga described by Yogi Swatmarama, compiler of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika in 15th century India. Hatha Yoga differs substantially from the Raja Yoga of Patanjali in that it focuses on shatkarma, the purification of the physical body as leading to the purification of the mind (ha), and prana, or vital energy (tha). Compared to the seated asana, or sitting meditation posture, of Patanjali's Raja yoga, it marks the development of asanas (plural) into the full body 'postures' now in popular usage. Hatha Yoga in its many modern variations is the style that many people associate with the word "Yoga" today.