

Discovering The Lake Of Consciousness Through Yoga

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Abstract

Yoga is often narrowly understood as a physical discipline; however, its deeper purpose lies in harmonizing the mind, body, and consciousness. This reflective essay explores the holistic dimensions of yoga through the lens of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, with particular emphasis on *chitta*, *vrittis* (mental fluctuations), and the influence of the *trigunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Drawing upon personal experience gained through advanced yoga teacher training and philosophical study, the essay illustrates how yoga functions as a transformative tool for stabilizing the mind, cultivating inner clarity, and realizing oneness with the self, metaphorically described as the “lake of consciousness.” The discussion further highlights the practical application of yogic principles in daily life, demonstrating yoga's potential as an integrated spiritual and psychological discipline rather than merely a physical practice.

Keywords: Yoga, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, Chitta, Vrittis, Trigunas, Mindfulness, Consciousness, Sattva, Meditation, Spiritual Practice

1. Introduction

For the past three years, I have been professionally working in the spiritual field, using yoga, Vedic astrology, and tarot to serve clients and the community. This year, I completed my 500-hour yoga teacher training, having previously completed the basic 200-hour course in May 2023, and advanced 300-hour training in May 2025 in Rishikesh. The advanced training spanned nearly a month and was both challenging and demanding, with classes starting at 6:00 am and ending at 7:30 pm, with only two short breaks for meals, and Sundays off for rest and reset. While many assume such a schedule involves mostly physical practice, in reality, only four hours were devoted to physical postures; the rest of the time is spent in

learning all the other things that Yoga offers which includes: Yoga Philosophy, Anatomy, Healing and Therapy with Yoga and Ayurveda. Among these subjects, yoga philosophy emerged as the most profound. It shows us that it is a complete mindset and lifestyle and not just one act or one hour of a particular practice. Yoga is holistic and all-encompassing. Physical postures are only one of the eight limbs of yoga (*Ashtanga Yoga*), outlined by sage Patanjali¹ in the classical text *Yoga Sutras*:

- **Yama** – self-restraint
- **Niyama** – observances
- **Pranayama** – breath control
- **Pratyahara** – withdrawal of senses
- **Dharana** – concentration
- **Dhyana** – meditation
- **Samadhi** – oneness, bliss



2. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

Studying Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* was one of the most intriguing aspects of my training. Though concise, the text's depth requires focus, determination, and mindfulness, giving it due time and energy to truly understand and embody. Comprising 196 sutras, the text organizes scattered wisdom that was passed on orally or scattered in different places in an unorganized manner. The sutras serve as a practical guide for individuals seeking liberation through yoga. Numerous scholars and spiritual teachers have commented on the *Yoga Sūtras*. Among these, Swami Vivekananda's commentary was particularly influential for me. Many practitioners devote extensive time to a single sutra to fully grasp its meaning and integrate it into daily life. Under the guidance of Mr. Joshan Kotnala, I explored select sutras deeply. Rather than prescribing techniques alone, the sūtras address the fundamental question of *why* yoga is

¹ Father of classical yoga

practiced, or one could say a deeper sense of purpose to engage in and embody yogic principles in our life.

3. Purpose of Yoga

Many individuals approach yoga seeking physical fitness, flexibility, stress relief, or general



well-being. The city folk are inclined towards it as a medium for calmness and relaxation. As teachers find it difficult to incorporate philosophical aspects in a class, and even students or participants don't show curiosity to know beyond the breathing and movement. When the body becomes the sole focus, the holistic benefits of yoga are diminished, as our foundation is not based in true purpose, it's like going to watch a movie to destress, but with that primary intent, missing out on what the movie truly wanted to offer as a message or what the story truly wanted to communicate, as we were only there for distraction not absorption. The sutras of Maharishi Patanjali provide clarity and guidance for the yogic journey. Studying all of them can take a lifetime. One foundational sutra, however, is powerful enough to enlighten us about the true goal of yoga: "***Yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhah.***"² Breaking it down:

- **Yoga** – the practice of yoga itself
- **Chitta** – the mind
- **Vṛtti** – fluctuations within the mind
- **Nirodhah** – to stop or restrain.
- **Mind** (*chitta*) is consciousness itself, encompassing the storehouse of memories and the source of mental faculties.
- **Manas** – the thinking mind; processes primary sensory input and experiences, collects information

² Yoga Sūtra I.2

- **Ahamkara** – the ego; creates individuality and separation
- **Buddhi** – the intellect, discernment, higher cognition and decision making, forming an opinion or deeper level understanding and creativity.

Together, **Manas, Ahamkara and Buddhi** and their processes constitute the “mindstuff” known as chitta, including conscious, subconscious, and unconscious layers. Vrittis are the fluctuations, thoughts, desires, memories, imagination, as we continue to interact with the external world, naturally vrittis arise. As a practitioner once you know what yoga is, it also becomes the base of why it is important.



4. The Triguna Influence on the Mind

The mind is shaped by three fundamental qualities (*gunas*):

- **Sattva** – harmony, purest form and peace
- **Rajas** – activity, passion, and restlessness
- **Tamas** – inertia, dullness, and passivity

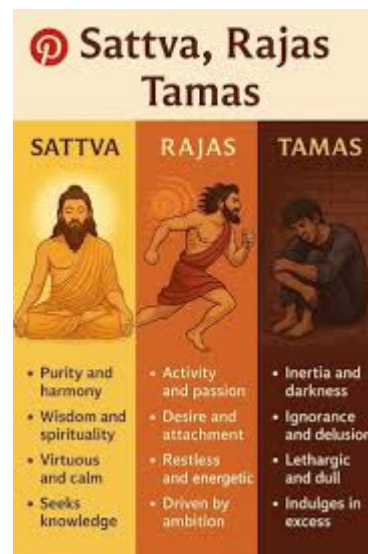
Lifestyle choices affect which *guna* dominates, thereby influencing the state of chitta. For example:

- A fresh salad is *sattvic*
- A spicy dish is *rajasic*
- Fast food or meat is *tamasic*

Individuals can balance all three *gunas*, or one may dominate. Lethargy, excessive consumption of tamasic foods, or living in unhygienic conditions without maintaining proper cleanliness of their body and space, all of these qualities are considered tamasic and eventually the chitta would also be influenced by this, fostering negative, pessimistic or dull thoughts and emotions. If a person is physically active, maintains themselves properly, is

driven by passion and purpose the mind would foster creativity and ideas, a rajasic state. If a person follows a sattvic diet, spends time learning and cultivating righteousness, does meditation and yoga, the state of mind will be dominated by sattva, promoting inner and external harmony, peacefulness.

Internal states influence external life as much as external circumstances affect the mind. A person living a predominantly tamasic life, finds a mentor or guru who



promotes a sattvic mindset, or reads a book with positive influence, a positive shift in the chitta can trigger a shift in lifestyle choices as well. Many would agree that the external changes we make in life on our own are powered by internal desire for change and its result and at the same time external changes that naturally happen as we grow, moving to a different country, changing a job, shifting to a new home, which also influence new changes as well. Thus, *chitta* continuously interacts with *manas*, *buddhi*, and *ahamkara*, while its nature is influenced by the *gunas*, which also influences the nature and intensity of *vrittis*.

5. The Mind as a Lake

Patanjali metaphorically describes the mind as a lake, where *vrittis* are ripples on the surface and the bottom represents the soul. The water's nature is influenced by the *gunas*:

- **Tamas** – dark waters, difficult to see the bottom
- **Rajas** – active waters, waves and ripples
- **Sattva** – clear, peaceful, and easy to see the bottom

Yoga, inherently sattvic, gradually calms the ripples of the mind. Ego, emotions, desires, habits, hopes and regrets, sometimes we are stuck in the past, or too far ahead in the future or circling in our own assumptions, all of which create the *vrittis*. In this stillness, one can

directly see and experience union with the self, understood as a reflection of universal consciousness. Yoga and all its eight aspects create a wholesome lifestyle which encourages the sattvic element in our life, where we find more peace and stability, and use our minds to rise to the soul and not degrade to the ego.

6. Conclusion

Yoga extends far beyond physical exercise. By harmonizing body, mind, and consciousness, it stabilizes mental fluctuations, cultivates *sattva*, and deepens self-awareness. Through engagement with Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras, reflection on the *guṇas*, and the integration of yogic principles into daily life, practitioners can access the "lake of consciousness," achieving inner clarity, peace, and purposeful living.

Bibliography

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