



Yoga as a View – The Path and Goal of Yoga in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra

It is interesting these days that as a Yoga teacher the question I am more likely to be asked is 'What kind of Yoga do you do?' rather than 'What is Yoga?'. It's either that we think we know what Yoga is or, more likely, that the view has become lost. These days there seems to be little apparent clarity around what Yoga is, or if there is a view, it is not very apparent.

This view may also be coloured by religious influences such as Hinduism, Sikhism or even bodywork paradigms such as physical culture, body building and gymnastics.

In the Yoga world today in the West it seems as if many teachers are teaching without a clear 'view' of what Yoga is and how we might realize this view. Look for example at how we appear not to even know or use the Yoga name for meditation. Here the often used phrase is Āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Meditation.

Or saying I am going to do Yoga which invariably refers to getting the sticky rather than the zafu out. One can even come across websites and Yoga writings that refer to Yoga and Meditation as if they are different. How about a reframe into Yoga is meditation?

In terms of what is presented as Yoga today where is the view? We need to have a view, we need to know how to access it and we need to know how to stabilise and sustain it.

In Yoga the View is explored most eloquently in the Yoga Sūtra and its main focus is the relationship between two aspects that constantly interact in sustaining our sense of being and individuality. The two aspects are that of the perpetual activity of the mind or Citta and the ever present quality of stillness inherent within the awareness of Cit.

When the Citta dominates we are more in the past than the present and when Cit dominates we are more in the present than the past.

The premise of the Yoga Sūtra is that when the past takes over we are more liable to act and interact unskillfully. Even within different aspects of our Yoga practice when a disturbance arises it is because the past has taken over, a memory has arisen. However if there was no past there would be no Citta. Citta is like a vault full of past memories. Within this ever active process we want to create a space between impulse and reaction.

So looking at many Yoga classes today what is the View that we are trying to guide the group towards? Yoga would argue that ultimately we want to enable the student to have the ability to sit and to be able to experience a quality of stillness.

If the teacher does not have a 'view' to inspire and guide them whilst accommodating the many vagaries of Yoga classes today then we are more likely to be looking at the view dissolving into the many nuances of postural performance.

A Yoga view would be that a group class moves from the starting point of physicality towards some point of stillness, giving students an experience of 'sitting' and experiencing the potential of stillness at some point along the way.

The priority in terms of what we are trying to teach is 'stillness' or an experience of 'Cit'. Can I be present within the activities of the mind? The longer I can be present, the more awareness that can emerge. When people touch that stillness something happens – a wanting to move away from the dominance of the activities of the Citta.

The more that we go back in time with Yoga the more we see that the goal was the achievement of the ability to sit and experience stillness. The more forward we move in time with Yoga the more we see the movement towards increased physicality.

The View primarily comes down to the relationship or yoking of activity (citta) with stillness (cit), in order to facilitate the emergence of stillness within the landscape of the mind. Images such as the emergence of the sun (clarity) as the cloud (confusion) recedes may help to convey a sense of the process.

When a student reaches the end of the class something touches them. It's about the settling of the mind into stillness. The flux of the Citta settling within the presence of the Cit.

Is it not the Yoga teachers responsibility to guide students towards this experience and empower them to realize they can touch this sacred space for themselves outside of the class or guided practice environment?



Yoga as a Practice – The Place and Purpose of Prāṇa, Agni, Nādī & Cakra

Another irony in the emerging role and identity of Yoga in the West today is with regard to the term Haṭha Yoga. The term is mainly used generically these days to identify and group ‘physically’ based Yoga practices. As a teacher I am often asked in connection with the question what kind of Yoga do you teach, is it Haṭha Yoga?

The irony is that when we look at what Haṭha Yoga really is we find that the physical elements are relatively limited with very few Āsana discussed. Furthermore within the few discussed the largest group are concerned with sitting, in preparation for practice elements other than Āsana. Primarily to facilitate a quality of being able to sit still and as if move beyond the physical body.

Here the primary concern and field of activity for Haṭha Yoga practitioners is with regard to the energetic or ‘Prāṇa’ body and its role in helping to facilitate a quality of energetic ‘clarity’ and energetic ‘stillness’ ultimately as a ladder to support the practitioners exploration of meditational states of being.

The role of Haṭha is to help take the student towards the View and to help refine the View. What is important also is that we understand the various influences that exist in the West today in terms of ‘Yoga’.

What seems to be in danger of being lost in all of this are the ‘energetic principles’ that underpin Haṭha Yoga because people have become very focused on the physicality, or even gymnastic type influences. It seems that modern Yoga practice is dominated by Āsana and the words Āsana and Yoga appears to have become sadly synonymous.

A further irony is that there is an increasing body of research suggesting that even this postural repertoire and physical style of performance is hugely Westernised in terms of both origins and emphasis.

This is especially curious when we consider the primary practice inherent within the teachings of Haṭha is a set of breathing practices called Prāṇāyāma. Furthermore its role in working on the energetic matrix within the individual and often the most neglected aspect of Yoga practice.

The purpose of our teaching is to use the energetic principles and practices inherent within the techniques of Haṭha (Āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Mudrā) to bring the student more towards Rāja.

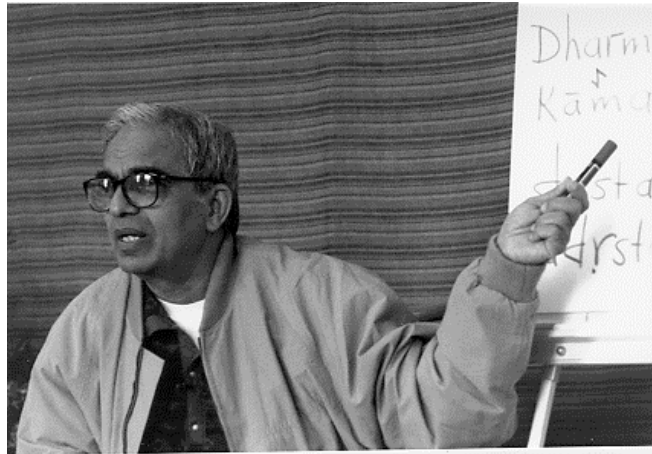
The purpose of Haṭha is to prepare the mind for the rigors of Rāja. Generally seen as synonymous with the meditational essence of Yoga Sūtra, the purpose of Rāja is to lead the student towards a greater awareness of and in the mind.

So what are the energetic principles that are the focus for enquiry within Haṭha Yoga? Some examples of these primary concepts are:

- Pañca Prāṇa (the five aspects of Air)
- Agni (the digestive fire)
- Tridoṣa (the constitutional characteristics)
- Dvadasa Nādī (the primary pathways)
- Ṣat Cakra (the six centres)

The purpose of Haṭha is to understand how to utilize these energetic principles as a means towards realising the view.

The question that remains is how much the various tools (styles or approaches) of Yoga engage, adhere and respect the principles of practice in order to help realize the view of Yoga.



Yoga as a Tool – The Art of viniyoga for developing a Personalized Practice

Yoga as a tool is more likely to be the starting point for most students these days in that we often choose a style or approach to Yoga as a starting point in our Yoga experience. There are many, many choices these days, although the common denominator now appears to be based around Yoga teachers rather than Yoga teachings.

For example we can choose from Anusāra, Aṣṭāṅga, Bikram, Dru, Gītānada, Integral, Iyengar, Jīvamukti, Kripālu, Kuṇḍalinī, Sahaja, Scaravelli, Śivananda, Satyānanda, Viniyoga, etc.

Which is fine in itself. However the question that arises is how do the various methodologies relate to the principles of practice in order to realize the view of Yoga? My own field of expertise lies within the teachings often referred to as Viniyoga, so I can only speak with experience from this perspective.

The primary principle here is that the practices of Yoga must be adapted to the starting point, potential and needs of the student. Within this premise is a further question how, or even how much, the tools of Yoga utilize the practice principles of Haṭha, in order to realize the view of Yoga as formulated in what is seen as the primary teaching on the goal of Yoga, the Yoga Sūtra.

This developmental process often starts with the physical limitations of the student in terms of Āsana. However, how much does this process integrate the principles behind practice and also evolve towards exploring the spiritual potential inherent within all beings? A further factor are the ambitions of the student in wanting to explore beyond what we take to be the everyday self.

These days the purpose and role of Yoga is much broader or, perhaps some may argue, shallower in the ways Yoga (often meaning just Āsana) is presented. However these myriad of possibilities in the ways Yoga can be presented, speaks highly of the potentials of Yoga to meet many needs such as exercise, fitness, health recovery, stress reduction, emotional balance, mental performance, energetic stability, to name but a few modern examples of Yoga as a tool.

From my own background the developmental tools of Yoga come from my deep immersion in the teachings of T Krishnamacharya as received through many years of individual lessons with my root Yoga teacher TKV Desikachar.

Within this 25 years of study were the tools of applying Yoga (the viniyoga of Yoga) in appropriate and developmental steps according to the needs, interest, potentials and possibilities of the student.

Within these teachings the tools include:

- Intelligent practice planning according to needs, time available and personal abilities of the student.
- When to move or stay within Āsana.
- The integration of the breath into all aspects of practice.
- The use of the principles of variation and modification to bring the student closer to the qualities inherent within the principles of practice.
- The application of practice according to stage of life, gender, profession, family commitments, constitutional health, energetic tendencies and psychological characteristics,

So it appears that the conceptual models of Haṭha on their own mean little without the tools of intelligent and appropriate application (viniyoga). Plus the link of tools to the principles of practice must also in turn link to the view which underpins the path and goal of Yoga.

To summarise the three aspects or strands for Yoga Practice and Study we have:

1. Yoga as a View or path and goal for our long term practice map.
2. Yoga as a Practice principle of Haṭha as guidance for the direction of our physical and energetic practices.
3. Yoga as a Tool for intelligent, appropriate and developmental application of the practices.

This is also why I have chosen to focus this last phase of my Yoga teaching work around expanding the possibilities for student's personal development rather than just through teacher training courses.

The cYs study programme now offers three separate, yet linked, strands each with Study and Practice options at an Introductory and Foundation level for deepening our exploration of Yoga from the perspective of a View, a Practice and a Tool.

Further details can be found on the cYs home page.

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