



**YOGA JOURNEY**  
ADELAIDE

For many, Yoga is associated with physical movement, breath control and meditation, but at the heart of this is a philosophy to bring positive change and transformation to every individual that chooses to walk the path.

While the study of Yoga is not compulsory for the practice of Yoga, it too has many benefits.

## The Philosophy behind the Practice

Yoga is a simple word with vast meaning<sup>1</sup>. It has something to offer every segment of society and its adaptability has resulted in countless definitions being passed down over the centuries. There are also many different Yoga pathways to choose from, each with its own emphasis.

Through the study of Yoga we come to see that no matter which definition resonates with us the most or which pathway we choose to take, Yoga is one and will continue to be only one. There may be differences in approach but the ultimate goal remains the same.

The study of Yoga provides us with a road map for our Yoga journey. A map that not only helps us to determine if we're on the right path, but also helps us to reach our goal in the correct way, bringing clarity to our experiences along the way.

### The Roots of Yoga

Yoga is a philosophical school of thought which has its roots in the Veda-s.

The Veda-s is the name given to the collection of mantra-s which form the basis of all Indian Philosophy. They were heard by Great Rṣi's, many millions of years ago, while they sat in deep states of meditation.

The Veda-s are vast and contain information on every conceivable subject. They are known as *pramāṇa* which means 'that which establishes the truth' and are the primary source of reference for living in India.

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<sup>1</sup> TKV Desikachar, Health Healing & Beyond, p. 16

Because the mantra-s that make up the Veda-s were heard by different Rsi's at different times and in different places throughout India, they remained scattered for many years. As a result, knowledge systems developed independently and remained isolated for many centuries and because the means of communication and transportation were extremely limited systemisation was difficult<sup>2</sup>.

It was a Sage by the name of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana who eventually undertook the enormous task of organising and classifying the vast collection of Vedic knowledge into four Veda-s: Ṛg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda and Atharvaṇa Veda. In so doing, he made the Vedic teachings more accessible and comprehensive to those who sought their wisdom and in recognition of his commendable efforts, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana came to be known as Vedavyāsa (Compiler of the Veda-s).

## Yoga the Philosophy

Even after Vyāsa divided the Veda-s into four categories, it was still not possible for all the followers to discern them completely and it is for this reason that the darśana-s evolved.

A darśana is a philosophical school or perspective. There are many darśana-s in Indian culture, however, only six are based on the Vedic teachings. These six philosophies are known collectively as Vaidika Darśana-s (Darśana-s born of the Veda-s) and include Nyāyā, Vaiśeṣika, Sāmkhya, Yoga, Pūrva Mīmāmsa and Vedānta.

While each darśana has a different way of viewing the world, all six share the same goal: to reduce duḥkham or 'suffering'.

In Yoga Darśanam, the mind is considered to be both the cause of duḥkham and the solution. We perceive the world through the mind but more often than not it is veiled by habits, tendencies and associations that it has accumulated over time which colour and bias our perception of whatever it is that we observe. It is like looking through a dirty window. Yoga Darśanam is a practical philosophy that brings about transformation of the mind which in turn results in a greater understanding of our true nature.

Each darśana contains all the concepts, principles, practical techniques and other details pertaining to that darśana found in the Veda-s. To make it easier for these schools of thought to be studied and put into practice, and to retain the purity of the teachings, a sūtra text was written for each darśana.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr N Chandrasekaran, First Four Yoga Sūtra-s, p. 47

## The Yoga Sūtra-s

The Yoga Sūtra-s contain all the concepts, principles, practical techniques and all other details which pertain to Yoga in 195 aphorisms. Literally translated, a sūtra stands for a string or thread, and the Yoga Sūtra-s can be thought of as the metaphorical stringing together of core ideas and concepts relevant to Yoga.

It was a Sage by the name of Patañjali who codified the sutra-s about Yoga that evolved from the Veda-s.

Like many of the Vedic teachings, the story of Patañjali is delivered as a mythological story.

Patañjali is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Śeṣa, a thousand-hooded serpent who supports the whole world on its hoods.

The human beings on the earth were tormented by intolerable sufferings: their physical bodies were assailed with many diseases, their means of communication were thoroughly imperfect and their minds were highly imbalanced and agitated.

Unable to assuage their suffering, their plight became unbearable. They prostrated to Lord Viṣṇu and pleaded for help, holding their hands in front of their chests in Añjali Mudra. Lord Viṣṇu took pity on them and decided to help them. He glanced at Lord Śeṣa and in that moment, Ādiśeṣa fell from the heavenly abode into the hands of the people below.

Since Ādiśeṣa fell (pat) into the hands of the people (añjali mudra), he became known as Patañjali.

In response to the human suffering, Patañjali composed three treatises: one on medicine (Caraka Saṁhitā) to maintain health and guard against disease; one on Sanskrit grammar (Mahābhāṣyam) to improve communication; and one on Yoga to cleanse the mind, bringing peace, clarity and spiritual growth.

As such Patañjali-s Yoga Sūtra-s is considered a *mano śāstrā*: a text that deals with the mind. All the techniques of Yoga - *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, meditation, etc - when applied appropriately, bring a qualitative change in the mind of the practitioner.

Each sūtra is a brief, extremely precise statement that bears a central idea in a minimalist literary style, devoid of embellishment of any sort. Such brevity and simplicity (Patañjali used less than 2000 words) ensured the text could be handed down through oral tradition from generation to generation without compromising the integrity of the text.

Yet each sūtra is rich in meaning, generating endless commentaries and lifelong study and contemplation.

The 195 sūtra-s are divided into four chapters. While the four chapters progressively weave together as a harmonious whole, each chapter also presents a coherent teaching in itself. According to T Krishnamacharya, Patañjali taught each chapter to a different disciple, each at a different stage of Yoga development.

## The Teacher and the Teachings

From a very young age, Krishnamacharya made it his life's purpose to study the Veda-s and Darśana-s. He studied earnestly to master all six Vaidika Darśana-s and earned the equivalent of 7 PhD's and the title Professor T Krishnamacharya.

It was hearing a discourse on yoga by his father when he was a young boy that planted the seed for the study of the Yoga Sūtra-s. However, it wasn't until much later - during his seven and half year stay with his Guru Rāma Mohana Brahmācārī in the Himalayas- that he studied them.

Krishnamacharya considered the Yoga Sūtra-s of Patañjali to be the most significant text on Yoga.

He believed the Yoga Sūtra-s "could be made as accessible to each man, woman and child as their next breath"<sup>3</sup> and was revolutionary in re-shaping this ancient wisdom for modern life. He would say, "whatever place, whatever time, the ancestors have framed the yoga practices to suit them all. Only the attitudes and circumstances of human beings change"<sup>4</sup>. As a result, his application of Yoga was far reaching and Krishnamacharya was able to offer Yoga to every segment of society.

Krishnamacharya relied on the authority of the Yoga Sūtra-s in his teaching of Yoga and could validate everything he taught with the appropriate sūtra<sup>5</sup>. He would even go so far to say that "anything said or practiced that is inconsistent with the teachings of the Yoga Sūtra-s should be rejected"<sup>6</sup>.

His respect for, and faith in, the Yoga Sūtra-s, particularly the path of aṣṭāṅga yoga given in Chapter 2, is reflected in two of his poems: Dhyānamālika and Yogāñjalisāram.

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<sup>3</sup> TKV Desikachar, Health, Healing and Beyond, p. 20

<sup>4</sup> Pūrnācārya, p. 11

<sup>5</sup> Pūrnācārya, p. 43

<sup>6</sup> S Ramaswami, My Studies with Śrī Krishnamacharya, Nāmarūpa Spring 2007, p. 19

“Vedas speak of yoga in many ways, aṣṭāṅga yoga is the best among them.

Which compassionate Patañjali expounded through his sūtra-s.”

- T. Krishnamacharya, Dhyānamālika Śloka 6

He also wrote his own commentary on the Yoga Sūtra-s titled ‘Yogavallī.

## Passing on the Teachings

Krishnamacharya used his vast knowledge of Yoga Darśanam not to preserve the past, but to serve the present and the future. He was convinced Yoga was India’s greatest gift to the world<sup>7</sup> so to preserve the teachings and ensure their continuity, Krishnamacharya shared his vast knowledge with his serious students.

Neither Yoga Darśanam nor the Veda-s are easily accessible or understood without actual practice and concrete explanations from an experienced teacher. Their semantic richness allows for multidimensional levels of interpretation which can render understanding difficult without an experienced teacher.

This transmission of the teachings from teacher to student is known as *paramparā*. In the words of Krishnamacharya, “Guru paramparā is essential for proper teaching, understanding and practice of all Śāstra, whether Yoga, Veda or Vedāṅga. It is paramparā alone that ensures that words of the texts are interpreted correctly”<sup>8</sup>.

Krishnamacharya’s own son, TKV Desikachar, was one such serious student. He studied with his father for more than 30 years. During this time, they carefully studied the Yoga Sūtra-s nine times, “each progressively more enriching and more profound”<sup>9</sup>. Like his father, Desikachar went on to share these teachings with his serious students both in India and around the world.

## The Future of Yoga

The process of *paramparā* is how the philosophy of Yoga has remained intact since the Ṛṣi’s first heard the Vedic mantra-s while sitting deep in meditation. Patañjali also honours this process in the very first aphorism of the Yoga Sūtra-s when he invites both

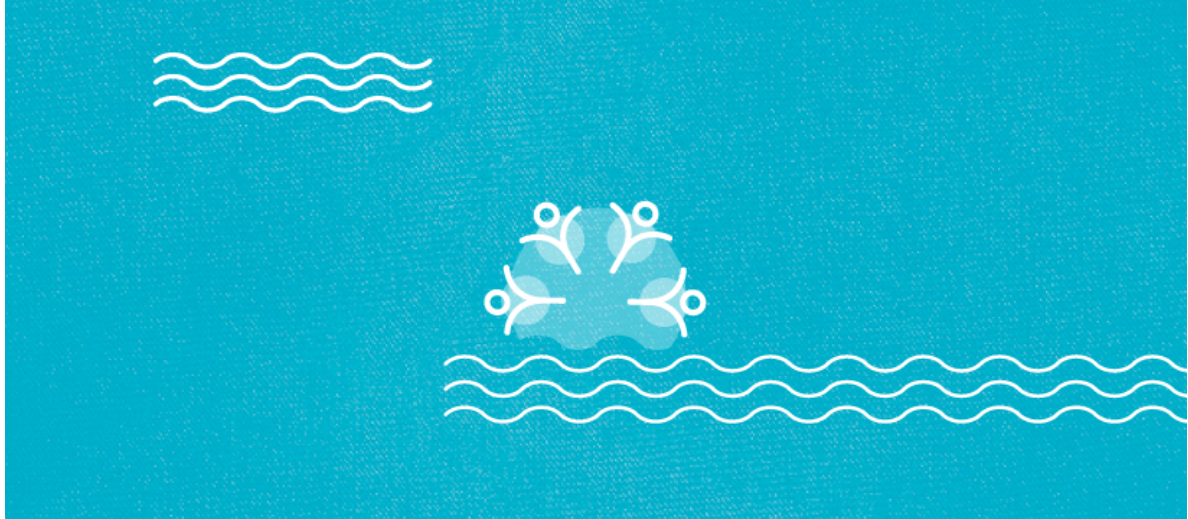
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<sup>7</sup> TKV Desikachar, Health, Healing and Beyond, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> <https://yogastudies.org/2014/01/it-is-paramapara-alone-that-ensures-that-words-of-the-texts-are-interpreted-correctly/>

<sup>9</sup> TKV Desikachar, Health, Healing and Beyond, p. 54

teacher and student to acknowledge their readiness and commitment before they embark on the journey of teaching and learning together. It remains as important today as it was then and is the reason Yoga Darśanam will continue to guide Yoga practitioners for future generations.



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Polly Holmes is both a teacher of Yoga and Vedic Chant. She began her own Yoga journey in earnest almost twenty years ago. A teacher in the tradition of T Krishnamacharya, Polly has had the privilege of studying with Barbara Brian at Āgama Yoga Centre in Melbourne as well as at the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in Chennai. Polly is passionate about all aspects of Yoga and offers workshops and training as well as regular group classes. She has an aptitude for Yoga Philosophy, Vedic Chanting and the use of mantra in āsana, prāṇāyāma and meditation.

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