

# The Eight Limbs of Yoga

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The Indian sage Pantajali wrote The Yoga Sutras, where he outlines the stages of enlightenment, how to get there, what hindrances you'll meet on the way and how to overcome them. The date of his writing is generally thought to be sometime between 100b.c.e. and 500c.e. Both linear and holistic, these steps form the interconnected pathway to union (yoga) of the impermanent with the permanent, the unlimited with the limited.

1. **Yamas** (abstinence, discipline, restraint, or "attitude or behavior" / outer, or social):
  - 1) *ahimsa* - non-harming or loving kindness
  - 2) *satya* - truth & honesty
  - 3) *asteya* - non-stealing
  - 4) *brachmacharya* - chastity or 'right relationship'
  - 5) *aparigraha* - non-grasping or non-greed
  
2. **Niyamas** (inner discipline and responsibility, or inner "attitudes and behavior"):
  - 1) *saucha* - purity
  - 2) *santosha* - contentment
  - 3) *tapas* - discipline or, accepting pain and not causing pain
  - 4) *svadhyaya* - self-inquiry, study of scripture
  - 5) *isvari pranidhana* - surrendering the fruit of your actions to god or humanity
  
3. **Asanas** - postures  
Yoga regards the body as a vehicle for the soul on its journey towards perfection (union). Yogic physical exercises (*asanas*) are designed to be steady, comfortable postures (!) to develop the body, and also to broaden one's mental and spiritual capacities.
  
4. **Pranayama**  
*Prana* means breath or life force, *yama* means control; *pranayama* means control of the breath, or life force. We learn to control the body and mind by controlling the breath.
  
5. **Pratyahara** is withdrawing from or transcending the senses.  
Attention is directed inward. The mind freed from the 'tyranny of the senses.'
  
6. **Dharana** means concentration, or focused awareness.  
*Dharana* enables us to concentrate more fully, bringing a richer awareness of the mind, without preconception, prejudice, conditioning, fear, anxiety, joy or sorrow to influence our meeting with each event. We meet every moment with our true selves.
  
7. **Dhyana** - meditation  
Meditation moves us beyond concentration into a state of total awareness. We are able to concentrate on a focus point, while still being aware of everything else around and within us. The mind and body must be totally quiet and open.
  
8. **Samadhi** is transcendence of the self  
The joining or union with all living things, with the universe, with the Divine - beyond the place of knowledge, to a realization that everything is of the same substance and that all is connected. This is when the knower, the knowable and the known become one.

Sources: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, translation and commentary by Sri Swami Satchidananda  
Eight Limbs of Raja Yoga" part of the Sivenanda, Yoga Vedanta Center website.