



Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali

Barbara Stoler Miller , Njali Pata

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Dating from about the third century A.D., the *Yoga Sutra* distills the essence of the physical and spiritual discipline of yoga into fewer than two hundred brief aphorisms. It is the core text for any study of meditative practice, revered for centuries for its brilliant analysis of mental states and of the process by which inner liberation is achieved. Yet its difficulties are legendary, and until now, no translation has made it fully accessible.

This new translation, hailed by *Yoga Journal* for its "unsurpassed readability," is by one of the leading Sanskrit scholars of our time, whose *Bhagavad Gita* has become a recognized classic. It includes an introduction to the philosophy and psychology underlying the *Yoga Sutra*, the full text with explanatory commentary, and a glossary of key terms in Sanskrit and English.

Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali Details

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Author : Barbara Stoler Miller , Njali Pata

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Sarah says

Very hard book to get through. Ancient and allusive, has been debated for a looong time, but still a yoga must-read. I enjoyed the translator's discussion of the rationale behind the yamas & niyamas. The more I learn of yogic philosophy, the more it reaffirms my own faith in my own beliefs in a very positive & complimentary way.

Dennis Littrell says

Miller, Barbara Stoler. Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali (1995) *****
Excellent for a first reading

The main strength of this book is in the late Professor Miller's Introduction which is lucid and insightful in identifying and placing Patanjali's Yoga Sutras for the general reader. The weakness is in Miller's use of certain non-yogic and sometimes misleading terms in her translation, usage which stems from her position as an academic of yoga and not a practitioner. Sometimes she translates words that probably should not be translated since there are no real English equivalents--for example, "samadhi" itself. And sometimes she uses what I would consider not the most agreeable English equivalent.

Her use of the word "spirit" in the third aphorism is an example: "When thought ceases, the spirit stands in its true identity as observer to the world." The Sanskrit word she is translating is "drashtri" which is usually "seer" although it can also mean "soul," according to B.K.S. Iyengar. When one reads the next aphorism, "Otherwise, the observer [seer:] identifies with the turnings of thought" it becomes clear that the seer is not spirit; indeed "spirit" is a confusing word in this context since it has no clear cognate in the dualistic yoga philosophy. The closest equivalent would be "purusha" but that would be inappropriate since that refers to the entire non-material consciousness (as opposed to "prakriti," which is what is manifested). Perhaps I should simply say that "soul" in yogic philosophy is not the same thing as "spirit."

Another example would be her translation of vairagya in I.15 as "dispassion" which is technically correct but misses the larger meaning of the non-attachment that comes from renunciation, which is the point of the aphorism.

I could also quibble with her use of the word "contemplation" as the equivalent of the Sanskrit "samadhi." But it is really impossible to translate the last three limbs of yoga: dharana, dhyana, and samadhi into English, and the contemporary practice is to simply use the Sanskrit terms themselves. And, at any rate, there is considerable controversy about the experience of these states. Miller follows the established practice of rendering them respectively as concentration, meditation, and contemplation. Yet it is clear that samadhi, especially "nirbija samadhi" or seedless samadhi, is beyond contemplation. Georg Feuerstein actually defines samadhi as "ecstasy."

Another strength of the book is the translation itself--once one puts aside the quibbles about some of the terms and looks at the forest, as it were, of the entire expression. Miller has worked hard to make the text readily accessible to the general reader by using familiar terms in familiar sentence structures. She also groups several related aphorisms together and comments on them as a whole, giving each group a title. For example, aphorisms I.17 - I.22 are labeled, "Ways of Stopping Thought." This organization works well in

helping the reader to a good overall understanding of Patanjali with only a first reading. Miller has not simplified the text or dumbed it down in any sense. What she has done is to give the pithy statements a sort of liquidity that makes for easy reading.

Her subtitle: "Discipline of Freedom" is an apt description of Patanjali's yoga in the sense that this yoga employs technique and practice to reach liberation whereas other yogas might employ faith and devotion, selfless service, or knowledge as ways to transcend this earthly existence.

I would recommend that this text be studied in conjunction with Iyengar's Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (1993) since that book contains a more detailed exposition of Patanjali's text and has more extensive commentaries.

--a review by Dennis Littrell

Kara says

This is the first book I have read of the Yoga Sutra. Although I have attended countless yoga classes and have a nice little yoga home video library, it was nice to read what this phenomenon called yoga is primarily aimed to achieve. I knew it had more to do with posture and breathing, those are just a means to an end in enlightenment, and that each asana involves not only the physically body but the mental and spiritual as well. It is the acknowledgement of spirit playing a central part in yoga's reason for being that interests me the most. By the end of this book I had realized, as if I had known it forever, that if one wants to get to the heart of something, one surely can.

Zack says

I read this for a class.

This is a decent translation with a good format, but the content just isn't my thing, honestly.

Kelsey says

Spoiler alert. I think this last line of Yoga Discipline of Freedom really sums up the point to the yoga sutras.

"In a real sense Patanjali has established what it means in terms of yoga for one's spirit to achieve its true identity as observer to the world - a witness rather than a suffering participant in a world of ceaseless volatile change." -Patanjali, Yoga, Discipline of Freedom.

Briana says

I've read Patanjali's Yoga Sutras two times cover to cover. The first time I read it I had been doing yoga for five years and I stopped after reading the book and did not pick up my practice again for two and a half

years. The second time I read it I was practicing again and I did not stop my practice. "Yoga" comes from the Sanskrit verb "Yuj." Sanskrit being the Mama of Indo-European/Indo-Iranian languages gives us a cognate of the word in our own language "yoke." Indeed, that is what the practice of Yoga as understood by its originators and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are dealing with, the practice of yoking oneself. To what? Well, that's where for most of us it gets complicated. You have to read the book to find out. But if you spend time on the mat, you should spend time with this book too.

Thevuni Kotigala says

“In a real sense, Patanjali has established what it means in terms of yoga for one’s spirit to achieve its true identity as observer to the world — a witness rather than a suffering participant in a world of ceaseless, volatile change.”

Jennifer Christensen says

This translation is so much more accessible than some of the myriad of translations out there. I browsed several different copies in the used bookstore and no two translations were the same. Each translator puts their own spin on Patanjali's spartan sanskrit. This one resonated with me.

Jess Moss says

I think I would have enjoyed this more if I practiced yoga. As it is, I basically speed-read the book so I could count it as "read" before selling it back to the bookstore. I would have probably gotten more out of it had I taken my time.

Sarah says

Miller's introduction and commentary are very helpful - although I obviously can't comment on the quality of the translation, her explanation of the nuances and polyvalence of particular terms and their possible translations is very thorough and interesting. A great way into understanding Patanjali's text.

Brooke says

Growing up in western society played a large role in my reading experience. Eastern thought of the goal of losing oneself to find integration with God is an idea that I still do not understand. It was a good learning experience to find that Hinduism is not so much a hippie, love all, pacifism religion, but is very complex and deep. I know each after a three week study on this topic I've still barely scratched the surface.

Also yoga, as a means of meditation, prayer, and worship is a new concept. American society has certainly white-washed the true devotion and meaning of Hinduism. Perhaps seeing Hinduism in action in the mother country of India would be a new understanding to it.

Alexis says

excellent translation and very useful notes on each line. plus some great stories about the powers of adept yogis. there is one mention of the word "atom" which i really wish had been explained in some footnote - i can't imagine there was a word for the basic molecular building block in sanscrit. but patanjali does seem to know everything, so maybe i'm wrong there. nice commentary on yoga's similarities and variations on ancient buddhist doctrine that was being developed at the same time. it's short and beautiful enough to be read over and over.

Thomas says

A clear and concise translation with just enough commentary to flesh out the short but often obscure aphorisms. It's not a technical or academic treatment, but the commentary serves as a good jumping off point if you want to get into the deeper philosophical stuff. If you've already read the Sankhya karikas and are looking for a more rigorous connection with the Yoga Sutra you'll have to turn elsewhere. Miller's translation is an excellent way to get started though.

Sara says

I had to read this for my World's Religions class. having taken a yoga class I did find this text interesting. But at the same time it was hard for me to keep awake reading this, ans I feel like that had to do with Miller's commentary - it was a bit dense.

All in all, though, this was a quick, interesting read.

Thomas says

I struggled with this short summary of the Sutras. I think Miller did little to identify Classical Yoga's philosophy and method in the context of the greater conversation of yoga (about this particular text). My opinion is that the recitation of this Sutra is most useful for inspiring faith within the practitioner, and considering the brevity of *Discipline* and emphasis on Miller's translation (rather than commentary) this text could be used for just that. -1 for no original Sanskrit.
