

Yoga Philosophy

Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training Manual 200-Hour Training



The sacred texts of yoga provide principles that form a foundation for acquiring direct spiritual knowledge. Your first step as a student should be to learn those principles along with the core practices of yoga. By gaining this indirect knowledge, you will develop a strong conviction in the approach of yoga. Only then can your practice deepen to remove the impurities, distractions, and veils of illusion necessary to attain direct experiential knowledge.

—Swami Kripalu

Yoga is one of the world's oldest wisdom traditions. All wisdom traditions are composed of three building blocks: a philosophical view, a practice, and the direct experience of the practitioner.

A view is a particular way of seeing yourself and the world around you. A good view provides you with a solid intellectual framework to inform your practice and a clear map to guide your journey toward truth. A good view also has conceptual models designed to help you navigate obstacles.

Practice gives you a method to inquire deeply into the nature of reality and test the validity of the view. An effective practice activates the life force, heightens self-awareness, awakens intuition, and grants access to deeper states of consciousness.

Direct experience is the firsthand knowledge that comes from the unmediated contact with reality that is fostered through focused practice. A central tenet of the Kripalu Approach is that philosophical knowledge only becomes wisdom through lived experience.

The view of a wisdom tradition is qualitatively different than a religion, philosophy, ideology, or system of metaphysics because it's not adopted as ultimate truth. A wisdom tradition puts forth a view as a working hypothesis to be validated or discarded in the experimental inquiry of practice. It is understood from the beginning that direct experience will eventually shatter the view and replace it with revealed truth. Approached as a wisdom path, yoga emerges as a way to systematically refine knowledge, as opposed to promoting a fixed mindset.

Although they all point to a universal truth, wisdom traditions differ. As a teacher in training, it is important for you to understand the views of the yoga tradition, which developed over thousands of years. The traditional term for view was darshana, or revelatory insight granting direct knowledge of the ultimate principle underlying creation. This term speaks to the origin of the various schools of yoga, each of which was founded by a particular sage whose insight and direct spiritual knowledge led to a coherent view and set of practices to realize truth. As a school develops over time, its view evolves and grows more nuanced, based on the insights and discoveries of practitioners and teachers.

Yoga has always been a search for truth. India's sages were pragmatic and defined truth as that which liberates from ignorance and suffering. They reasoned, "If the truth can be found, then we can act in alignment with truth to live more happily and avoid unnecessary pain." Two different levels of truth were recognized, social truth and ultimate truth. Social truth includes all the attitudes, understandings, and moral principles that support healthy interpersonal relationships and create a safe, just, predictable, and humane society. Sometimes this level of social truth is called dharma. A related term you might

hear is svadharma, which refers to an individual's unique expression of relative truth in a chosen lifestyle, value system, and way of contributing to society.

Ultimate truth is something different and deeper. India's sages believed there was an inner unity and truth underlying the apparent diversity of the external world. All the visible forces of nature were seen to have their source in this invisible unity, and the sages speculated that a person gaining access to this inner truth would discover an inexhaustible reservoir of power and intelligence lying at the heart of creation. Yoga philosophy records the attempts of these sages to conceptualize the ultimate truth in various ways and develop practices to experience it directly. Kripalu Yoga has always remained true to the spirit of this quest for truth. All of its practices are designed to help you establish a direct connection to your energetic source and use it to live a more empowered, authentic, open-hearted, creative, and conscious life.

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to the primary schools of yoga and their philosophical views. It is divided into the following seven subsections:

1. Vedanta
2. Sankhya
3. Classical Yoga
4. Tantra
5. Hatha Yoga
6. The Sadhana of Swami Kripalu
7. Kripalu Yoga

Notes

1. Vedanta

Vedanta Darshana is considered the highest expression of the Vedic scriptures because it focuses on the ultimate truth. A student can attain the light of this truth only by assimilating its essence, which is locked in seed form within Vedanta's esoteric terms. The final truth of Vedanta can only be gained through the practice of yoga because it involves the realization of the soul. This requires more than mere thinking.

—Swami Kripalu

The roots of yoga predate written history, and relatively little is known about its origins. Scholars agree that yoga practices arose as part of the religious expression of the peoples living on the subcontinent of India. The early Indian sages took great care in preserving, developing, and orally transmitting their teaching and practices, as they were considered sacred knowledge.

The first written texts that refer to yogic themes and practices are the four Vedas, which have the distinction of being the oldest books in humankind's library. Consisting of prayers, mantras, rituals, and other religious lore, the Vedas were composed around 3000 BCE. Both yoga and its sister science, Ayurveda, find their source in the Vedas and are at times referred to as Vedic wisdom. Unfortunately, the Vedas themselves are so old and cryptic that their meaning has been almost entirely lost.

The first teachings that remain relevant to today's yoga practitioners are collectively referred to as Vedanta. The word "Vedanta" means "the end of the Vedas." Along with linking these later teachings back to the Vedas, this term is meant to convey the notion that Vedanta distills the voluminous Vedas down to their essence.

Vedanta is not based on any single text but rather a collection of more than 100 different works called the Upanishads, written over a 500-year period starting about 500 BCE. The word "Upanishad" means "to sit at the feet of a master," and these texts preserve the spiritual dialogues between sages living as forest hermits and their close disciples. Where the authors of the Vedas sought illumination through performing religious rites such as fire sacrifices, it was the Upanishadic sages who first directed their attention inward to realize the truth within their own being through the systematic practice of contemplation, meditation, and other yogic techniques.

Over several centuries, these sages developed the view of Vedanta as summarized in the following terms and doctrines:

Brahman (the Absolute) is the term used by the Upanishadic sages to describe the inner unity and ultimate truth, which they saw as eternal and imperishable. Brahman is unmanifest and invisible, the primal source and unchanging substratum of the manifest and visible universe, which is constantly changing and passing away. Vedanta was one of the first philosophical systems to see matter as arising from an undifferentiated spiritual essence. Although it exists everywhere, Brahman is impossible for humans to grasp with the mind because it is entirely

devoid of all qualities and attributes. To realize Brahman, yogic techniques must be employed to go beyond the limited reach of the mind and the senses.

Atman (the Self) is the true individual, which is not the personality or ego, but rather one's innermost being that lies beneath the ever-changing world of the mind, body, and senses. Vedanta considers Atman the true self, which is seen as identical and one with Brahman. The nature of Brahman and Atman is described by the compound word sat-chit-ananda. "Sat" means "eternal existence"; "chit" is "pure consciousness"; and "ananda" is "infinite bliss." The path to realize Brahman is to discover it as the spiritual source and true nature of your own being—the Atman.

Maya (illusory power) is the external world perceived by the mind and the senses, which is transient and only appears to exist for a time. The sages renounced maya as illusion because they were searching for an ultimate reality that was always and forever true. Contemplating deeply, the sages saw that maya has no separate existence apart from Brahman, whose projection of the material universe is like sunlight that can't be separated from its source, the sun. When seen as a part of Brahman, maya is simply a facet of the ultimate truth. Its deluding power arises in the individual mind, which perceives external objects through the lens of the senses and considers them lasting and real. A core assertion of Vedanta is that external objects are not real but rather illusory projections cast on the screen of the mind.

The veiling power of maya is sometimes referred to by another term, avidya (ignorance), the primal nescience that keeps us unaware of Atman/Brahman and looking outside of ourselves through the senses for fulfillment. Where Brahman is a formless singularity, maya takes on a dazzling multiplicity of names and forms, causing us to lose touch with our true nature as Atman and satchitananda. Vedanta sees the root cause of human suffering as our willingness to accept maya as real, which leads us to wrongly identify with the body, mind, and ego. Seeing ourselves as small and separate, we seek fulfillment through gratifying our senses versus discovering our true identity as Atman.

Taken together, these terms expound the principle of advaita (nondualism), which is foundational to the view of Vedanta. The sages believed that Brahman could never be known through the dualistic mind, but as the essence of our being, it could be realized through direct identification with Atman. They refined this central message into two teaching maxims. The first was a clear statement that you are none other than Atman/Brahman, Tat tvam asi, which literally means "that thou art." The second was a affirmation to be used in meditation, Aham Brahmasi, which means "I am the Brahman."

The primary tools of Vedantic meditation are vairagya, the renunciation of desire, and viveka, the power to discriminate between what we truly are (Atman) and what we merely appear to be (maya). Meditation proceeds along a path of negation called neti neti (not this, not this) and the process of systematically rejecting all false identifications. What occurs upon the realization of Brahman is conveyed through the teaching metaphor of a rope being mistaken for a venomous snake. In the moment when maya's veil of illusion is drawn aside and reality is seen directly, its nondual nature is apparent. Any sense of separation and fear of the outer world falls away when the soul realizes its true identity as the eternal Atman/Brahman.

Vedanta gained prominence throughout India during the time of the Upanishads, but its influence waned with the growing popularity of Buddhism. An important figure in the revival of Vedantic thought and practice was Shankara, an eighth-century monk who travelled the subcontinent winning its inhabitants back to nondualism through his discourses and public debates. Historians credit Shankara with consolidating the ideas found in the Upanishads into a coherent philosophy and calling it Vedanta. His most famous written work is *Viveka Chudamani* (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination).

Although different names are used for the ultimate truth, the quest for Brahman remains a constant of yoga philosophy. What evolves over time to account for dynamic change or the force at work within Brahman, a parallel to the development in later philosophies of the concepts of gunas and prana, is the earlier notion of maya. Vedanta remains a vital wisdom tradition, with most of its Western practice schools drawing inspiration from Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), a modern sage who popularized Vedanta through the inquiry, “Who am I?”, or “What is my True Self?”

Notes

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Practice and Experience

That is full, this is full. This fullness has been projected from that fullness. When this fullness merges in that fullness, all that remains is fullness.

—Invocation to Svetasvatara Upanishad

Ashtavakra Gita

Chapter 7: Five verses on the nature of the Self

1. In me, the boundless ocean, the boat of the universe, moves here and there, driven by the wind of its own inherent nature. I am not affected.
2. In me, the limitless ocean, let the wave of the world rise or vanish of itself. I neither rise nor fall.
3. In me, the boundless ocean is the imagination of the universe. I am quite tranquil and formless. It is in this knowledge that I abide.
4. The Self is not limited to any object, nor does any object contain the Self, which is infinite and stainless. Thus it is free from attachment and desire and ever-tranquil. It is in this knowledge that I abide.
5. I am consciousness itself. The world is a juggler's show. So how and where can there be any thought of rejection or acceptance in me?

Sample Vedanta-inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Ujjayi pranayama for several minutes. Practice this until your mind becomes calm.
- Release the pranayama and simply watch your body as it breathes. Observe the waves of breath flow in and out, and allow the image of ocean waves to form in your mind. Let your thoughts, feelings, and sensations in your body float on the ocean waves.
- Stay with this experience as best as you can without struggle. If any disturbance arises, allow it ebb and flow.
- Now let your attention shift from the waves to the still ocean beneath the waves. Feel yourself sinking into that dark water until the waves are high above on the surface. Feel the water as a presence, an unchanging presence. It can take any form, become a wave, and then dissolve back into ocean water, timeless and eternal.

- Relax so fully that you sink to a place so deep, no wave can disturb you. Drift down to the very foundation of your being and experience the substratum beneath all thoughts and feelings, beneath all distinctions of self or other, mine or yours. Receive this as your true self.
- Begin to deepen your breath. Shift your attention from the ocean to the waves, and feel the waves of breath pulling you back to the surface. See thoughts and feeling beginning to emerge and float on those waves.
- With your next inhale, slowly raise your hands to your face and press your palms lightly against your cheeks and your fingertips against your forehead. Massage your face with your hands. Feel the passing experience, the flow of movement and sensation, and as you feel it, remember the depths of the ocean. See if, for a few moments, you can experience both.
- Lower your hands to your lap. Take five deep breaths, and slowly open your eyes. Let your body stretch and move in any way that helps you to come back to the surface.

Sample Vedanta-inspired relaxation script

- Guide your body into Savasana and adjust your posture in any way you need to be comfortable. For a few moments, feel your body in lying on the floor beneath you. Then bring all your attention to the space around you and the floor. Feel them containing, holding your body in safety and ease.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Begin with Dirgha, and then layer on Ujjayi. For a few cycles of breath, focus all of your attention on your breath. Feel it fully.
- Shift your attention and feel your body around your breath, contracting and expanding to give shape to the breath. Then release the pranayama and let your breath be completely free. Let it dissolve into your body.
- Let your attention drift in the space of your body. Every time you find a sensation, feeling or thought, let your attention go to it. For a moment, feel it fully, then take your attention to the space around that sensation, feeling or thought. Let the space be as real or more real than the things it contains.
- Again and again, experience sensation and the space around it. Affirm every thought, feeling, and sensation surrounded by space. Let yourself become the space. Let thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise within you and fade back into the space. Feel yourself formless, timeless.
- Find your breath and feel it moving in the space of your belly. The space of the belly is always the same—the breath rises and falls. The rising and falling breath generates waves of sensation, feelings, and thoughts. Our whole life arises from the waves of breath flowing in the belly.

- Deepen your breath now. The waves become bigger, and the space fades into the background.
- Take a deep breath and exhale a sigh. Slowly roll your head from side to side. Begin to wiggle your toes and fingers. Let your body stretch and move in any way that helps you to come back.
- Slowly roll to one side and come up to a seated position. Sit quietly for a few breaths before you open your eyes. As you sit, feel your body as both an object in space and the space around you. Take that expanded awareness with you as you transition to your next activity.

Notes

2. Sankhya

Sankhya darshan has been accepted as an integral part of yoga philosophy. Sankhya views the entire universe as born from two primary elements: purusha and prakriti. Purusha is the eternal and unchanging source. Prakriti is nature, which is constantly changing because of the activity of the three gunas. When pleasure and attraction or pain and aversion arise in the mind of a Sankhya yogi, he believes with a strong conviction, “I am the inactive and liberated purusha. The actions of this body and mind are not my actions, they are owned by nature. I am merely the witness of these actions.” By overcoming mental disturbances in this way, the Sankhya yogi activates discriminative intelligence (buddhi) and attains steadiness of mind. Without such steadiness, depth yoga practice is impossible.

—Swami Kripalu

Sankhya is one of the oldest of India’s spiritual philosophies. Like Vedanta, it arose from the Upanishadic sages’ search for truth. Sankhya is especially important for yoga teachers to understand because it provides the philosophical framework for both yoga and Ayurveda. Sankhya philosophy is founded on the idea that the universe comes into form through an orderly set of quantum steps that descend from causal layers to subtle layers to gross layers. This idea complements the view of contemporary science, which sees energy and matter as interchangeable and existing on a vast vibratory spectrum.

“Sankhya” means “list,” and its view enumerates the 25 tattvas, or fundamental categories of existence. Two tattvas are considered primary: purusha and prakriti. Purusha is the pure consciousness of spirit expressing as countless individual souls. Prakriti is the primordial matter from which the other 23 tattvas unfold in an orderly hierarchy of downward steps to form the manifest universe. In sharp contrast to Vedanta, Sankhya is dualistic and sees both spirit and matter as ultimate reality. This is in accord with the philosophical principle of dvanda (pair or couple), which states that everything comes into form in pairs of opposites.

Sankhya’s dualistic structure enables it to provide a succinct explanation of how an individual soul becomes bound in the material world. Purusha is pure consciousness and entirely immaterial. At its highest level of expression, prakriti exists in a state of perfect balance and its material properties are unmanifest. When purusha and prakriti interact, the equipoise of prakriti is disturbed and the process of manifestation and embodiment begins. As prakriti descends into material form, the three gunas (strands)—sattva, rajas, and tamas—emerge. Like the subatomic neutron-proton-electron of contemporary science, Sankhya describes the three gunas as the substrate of all matter. As the three gunas take form, the soul is encased by the causal body, then the subtle body, and finally the gross body. Once physically embodied, the constant barrage

of stimulation from the senses leads the soul to forget its true identity as purusha/spirit and mistakenly identify itself with the body and mind.

Sankhya likens the gunas to the three strands forming a single rope used for binding. In its macrocosmic form, prakriti is the vast, multidimensional, and dynamic structure of nature created by the interplay of the three gunas. Sattva is pure, luminous, and serene. Rajas is passionate, opaque, and restless. Tamas is impure, dull, and dark. The three-stranded rope of prakriti binds the material universe together, keeping the macrocosmic forces in a state of dynamic homeostasis.

The three-stranded rope of the gunas, a set of primary forces, is further ascribed the power of binding the microcosm of an individual. When sattva is dominant, an individual is inclined toward peace, harmony, and balance. Sattva binds one to happiness and knowledge. When rajas is dominant, an individual is inclined toward energetic actions and activities that satisfy and reinforce cravings. Rajas binds one to passion and activity. When tamas is dominant, an individual is inclined toward inertia and unconscious actions that further increase tamas. Tamas binds one to indolence and illusion. The gunas exist in a constant interplay of alternating forces that cause everyone and everything to cycle through sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic phases.

Practitioners of Ayurveda cultivate sattva by performing self-care techniques to purge excess tamas and rajas. Sattva gives rise to vibrant health and outstanding character traits that foster success in all areas of life. Even after sattva is dominant, Ayurveda is useful to keep the gunas in a state of balance. Yoga practitioners cultivate sattva to activate buddhi, strengthen their power of discrimination, and elevate their consciousness. The ultimate goal of both yoga and Ayurveda is to draw on the power of sattva to realize purusha as the true self.

Some ancient yoga schools found the Sankhya chart too complex to work with in practice. They simplified it into two different models you will learn about experientially in your training. The first model is the five koshas (sheaths). The outermost sheath is annamaya kosha, the gross sheath of food that forms the physical body. Next is pranamaya kosha, the sheath of life energy that corresponds to the nervous system. Manomaya kosha is the sheath of the thinking mind. Inside that is vijnamaya kosha, the sheath of the higher mind and witness. Closest to purusha is anandamaya kosha, the sheath of bliss.

An even simpler model describes three shariras, or bodies: the sthula sharira, or gross body; sukshma sharira, or subtle body; and karana sharira, or causal body. Both models are consistent with the Sankhya chart. Their purpose is to help practitioners shift their awareness from the outer to the inner layers and eventually transcend the layers to experience purusha directly. Indian lore says that the Sankhya system was founded as early as 1000 BCE by the sage Kapila, who is credited with writing the Sankhya Karika. The accuracy of this claim is impossible to verify because the original text was lost. While a version of the Sankhya Karika does exist, scholars know it was written at a much later date. The first record of Sankhya's existence is around 500 BCE.

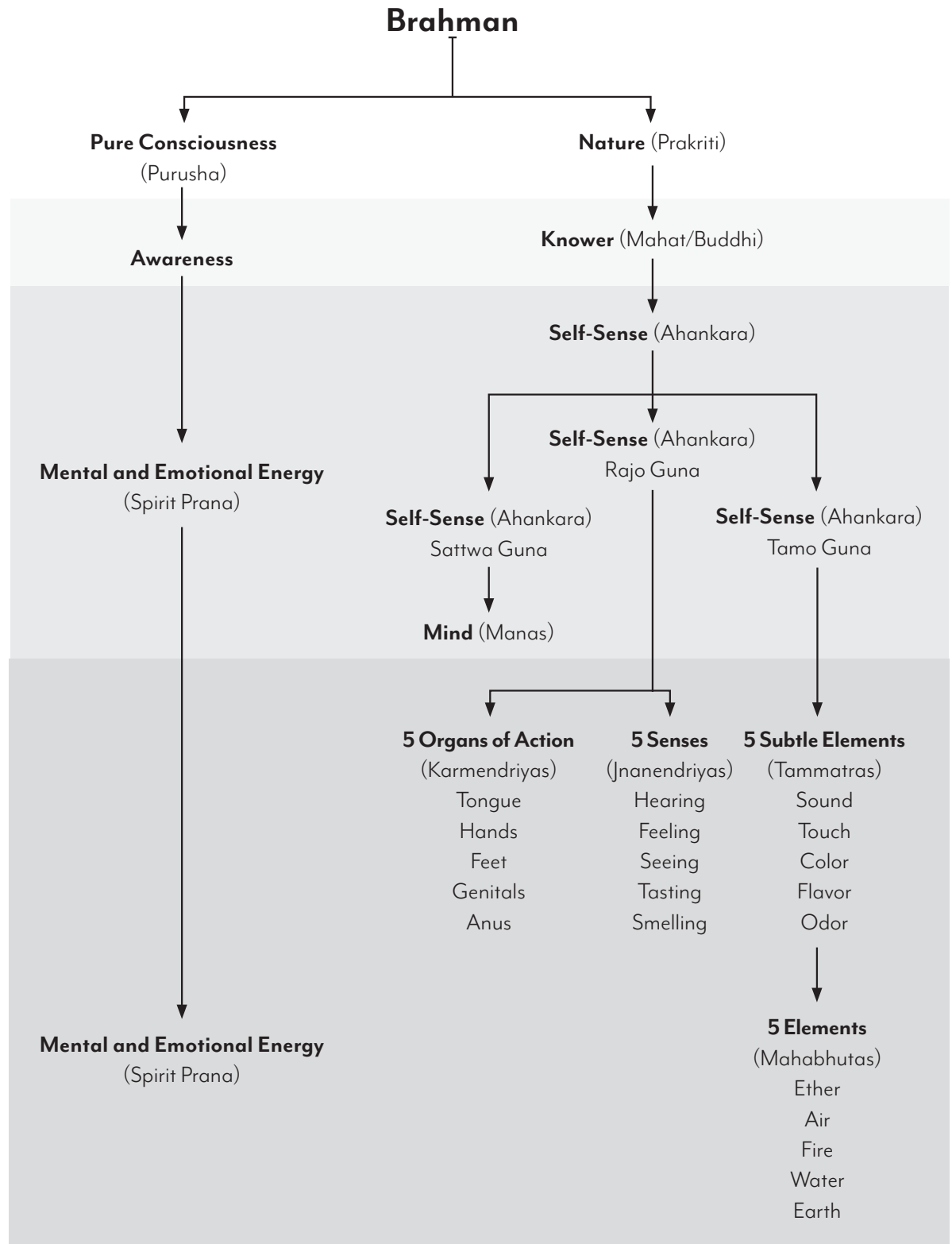
The Hierarchy of the Tattvas

According to Sankhya, everything in the universe comes into form through the hierarchy of the 25 tattvas:

- **Purusha:** spirit as the conscious principle of existence and true self of every individual
- **Prakriti:** insentient nature expressed as primordial matter, which comes into form through the activity of the three gunas: sattva, rajas, and tamas
- **Mahat/Buddhi:** the pure, discriminative intelligence that underlies the intellect
- **Ahankara:** the “I-maker” or ego, which gives rise to the sense of self
- **Manas:** the thinking mind
- **The five jnanendriyas**, or organs of perception: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch
- **The five karmendriyas**, or faculties of action: hands/grasping, feet/moving, tongue/speaking, genitals/reproduction, and anus/elimination
- **The five tanmatras**, or subtle elements, including sound, touch, color, flavor, and odor
- **The five mahabutras**, or great elements that form our bodies and everything in the physical universe: ether, air, fire, water, and earth

Notes

Sankhya Philosophy



Practice and Experience

Sample Sankhya-inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed. Now practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice the pranayamas until your mind becomes calm.
- Bring your attention to your mouth and lightly tap your teeth together a few times. Feel your teeth connected to your jawbone and skull, and the spine linking your skull to your pelvis. In the hardness of your teeth and bones, find the earth element providing a firm foundation for your body. Feel the earth element manifesting as the stubbornness of our ego mind and the steadiness of our will.
- Bring your attention to your mouth, and swallow. Feel the water element manifesting as the saliva in your mouth. As you swallow again, feel it flowing down your throat to mix with the water in your stomach, flowing to mix with all the other water in the body, the blood, lymph, and interstitial fluids. Feel the water element—shapeless, pulled by gravity as it flows over the bones and seeps through the muscles and organs. The water element imparts fluidity to our movements and flows as the smooth contracting of muscle. Hold the contrast between the rigid earth and flowing water and the range of expressions they allow. Feel it in the smooth flow of awareness.
- Bring your attention to your armpits or groin, and feel the warmth accumulating there. Feel the radiance of heat from the fire element in your body. The fire of metabolism and combustion in the cells that radiates heat from the body. The fire of digestion in the belly that churns food, releasing energy that burns in the mitochondria of the cells. Feel that fire manifesting as the heat of anger and as the laser-beam penetrating focus of intellect fueled by a strong need to know or to succeed.
- Bring your attention to your nostrils and feel the breath flowing in and out. With your awareness, follow the breath down into your lungs and out again. In the breath, find the currents of the air element. Feel the air element, formless and compressible, moving in the lungs and mixing with the liquid blood flowing through the arteries and veins. Feel it blowing on the fires of metabolism in the cells and the fire of digestion in the stomach.
- Experience the air element as the weightless wind-like thoughts flowing smoothly and quickly from one object to another—spiraling around itself to become a storm of emotion. Now bring your attention to the center of your head and find the space element. The space inside the body cavities. The space that contains all the organs and structures. Feel the space occupied by your body containing all the physical structures but unaffected by them. This space has always been, and always will be, regardless of what passes through it or what it contains. Find that space manifesting as your witness, your buddhi, unchanging behind all that changes, the perpetual witness behind all thoughts and feelings.

- Feel your breath rising and falling: The rib bones moved by fluid muscles, pulling and pushing air through space. Feel your whole body around your breath permeated by awareness.
- Begin to deepen your breath, and begin to bring yourself back. Take a deep breath and open your eyes. Sit quietly for a few minutes before moving on.

Sample Sankhya-inspired relaxation script

- Prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Savasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that you wish. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dhirgha pranayama breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dhirgha breaths, release all control of your breath.
- Bring your attention to your feet and hold it there for three breaths. If you encounter any tensions, invite them to relax. If they don't release, accept them. Then focus your attention on your hands for three breaths. Repeat for three breaths as you focus on your legs and arms.
- Bring your attention to your spine, chest and belly. Take three breaths at each location, relaxing those body parts.
- Let your attention shift from annamaya kosha to pranamaya kosha by shifting your attention to your breath, and feel your chest and belly expand as you inhale and release as you exhale. Expand your attention to feel all the sensations in your chest, belly and spine. After three breaths, bring your attention to your arms and hands, hold your attention there and feel every sensation. After three breaths, bring your attention to your legs and feet. Hold for three breaths and again, practice feeling every sensation.
- Shift your awareness to the perceiving self. Explore: Who feels my feet and legs? Bring your attention to your arms and hands. Again consider, Who feels my arms and hands? Bring your attention to your chest, belly and spine. Who feels? Who breaths? Who feels the belly move with breath? Who feels the floor beneath me?
- Expand your awareness to take in your whole self, every part and every sensation. Become the transcendent self, the purusha. Beyond time, beyond the eternal flow of sensations, thoughts and feelings. Allow all boundaries to dissolve in that transcendent self.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your belly. Feel the oneness. Gradually deepen your breath and feel your awareness expanding to take in more of your body. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes.
- Slowly stretch yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: The transcendent self, deep inside, looks through the layers to perceive the world. Even as you move through the world, hold the experience or remembrance of that transcendent self. Take a deep breath and open your eyes.

3. Classical Yoga

Ashtanga Yoga as defined by Maharishi Patanjali in his Yoga Sutra is a great tree. All yogas are included in its eight branches. It is this that has become known as Yoga, a unique method for the development of body and mind and the realization of Brahman.

—Swami Kripalu

Scholars have referred to the yoga system compiled by the sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras as classical yoga. Patanjali's approach is also called ashtanga (eight-limbed) yoga because of the eight stages of practice (see graphic).

Classical yoga builds upon the dualistic view of Sankhya. Where Sankhya describes how a soul descends the ladder of the tattvas to become bound in matter, classical yoga presents the reverse practice through which a soul can ascend the ladder to free itself from material entanglement. When a soul gains release from the bonds of prakriti, it attains moksha (liberation) and a state of being known as tri guna tithe (beyond the sway of the three gunas). This is the shared goal of Sankhya and classical yoga.

Classical yoga accepts all 25 of the tattvas enumerated by Sankhya but adds another—a purusha called Ishvara, or surrender to the Divine. Ishvara is described as the first manifestation of Brahman, a universal soul who brings the cosmos into creation. This introduction of a supreme being into yoga was an attempt by Patanjali to reconcile the competing philosophical views prevalent in his time, which included dualism and nondualism, as well as theism and nontheism. Classical yoga brings these systems together by emphasizing their many points of agreement. This gives yoga practitioners the latitude to choose a philosophical orientation and tailor their practice accordingly.

Classical yoga is a path of concentration and meditation in which asana and pranayama play only minor roles. The essential practice is called samyama, or constraint. In the words of Swami Kripalu:

“Dharana is the seed, dhyana is the tree, and samadhi is the fruit. These three are inseparable and constitute an integral whole. Sage Patanjali has termed this trio samyama (constraint). Having withdrawn the mind from the sense organs, the seeker performs samyama by focusing his attention on an object of contemplation and concentrating his mind so that nothing but that exists in his consciousness. During the practice of samyama, the seeker's mind passes through various states before reaching the state of perfect concentration and finally attains direct knowledge through samadhi or super-consciousness.”

In another attempt to reconcile competing views, Patanjali presents two modes of samyama practice in his Yoga Sutras. The first mode emphasizes the liberating power of discriminating intelligence

(viveka), which is sharpened through renunciation and nonattachment (vairagya) and then used to differentiate between what we truly are (purusha) and what we mistakenly believe ourselves to be (prakriti). The second mode of practice emphasizes Ishvara-pranidhana, or surrender.

Regardless of the mode of practice employed, its goal is to disentangle the soul from its false identification with matter and realize kaivalya, the ecstatic aloneness of the purusha freed from its bondage to matter. This occurs when the power of the yogi's samyama slows and ultimately stops the modifications of the mind. Cultivating this ability to focus, slow, and stop the mind is a critical factor in classical yoga, as it is what enables a practitioner to withdraw consciousness up the steps of the Sankhya chart until purusha "shines in its own glory." (Yoga Sutras 1:3)

A sophisticated psychology underlies Patanjali's yoga, which explains how the relentless activity of the mind can be tamed. The keystone of this psychology is the concept of samskara, subliminal activators that lie hidden in the unconscious mind. When external circumstances activate a samskara, it generates vasana, the motivating force of desire. Desire leads to vritti, a whirlwind of associated thought in the mind. Vasana and vritti give rise to karma, purposeful activity to satisfy the desire, which further reinforces the samskara.

The Yoga Sutras introduce a clear strategy to bring an end to this unconscious pattern of human motivation and behavior. All samskaras are seen as arising from the five kleshas, the afflictions that are the root cause of human suffering: avidya (ignorance of our true identity); asmita (egoism); raga (attraction); dvesha (aversion); and abhinivesha (clinging to life). The Yoga Sutras direct a yogi to engage in the constant practice (abhyasa) of samyama to resist desire and attenuate the activity of samskara. This makes it possible to meditate deeply; gain vidya, or self-knowledge; and uproot the kleshas. This process is sometimes described by Kripalu teachers as "burning the seeds of future karma."

Patanjali distills this psychology into a succinct definition of yoga: Yogash chitta vritti nirodhaha, or "yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind." Implicit in this definition is a belief in the power of samyama to surface and destroy the unconscious network of samskaras and kleshas that bind the soul to matter. Swami Kripalu considered Patanjali's practice as chitta yoga, meaning that it utilized the mechanism of focusing awareness to produce its results.

For those choosing the practice of surrender to Ishvara, Patanjali recommends japa (recitation) of the pranava mantra and the sacred syllable om. Ishvara is described as being entirely free of the five kleshas and recognized as the first guru of the ancient sages. Considered the vibrational name of Ishvara, the repetition of the pranava mantra, along with reflection on its meaning, destroys avidya and leads to omniscience.

Scholars believe that Patanjali lived around 200 CE. The eight-limbed path set out in his Yoga Sutras is not original, as it appears earlier, in the Upanishads. Classical yoga was strictly a path for renunciate monks. Sankhya and classical yoga are taught in the Bhagavad Gita in a format suitable for householders.

Eight Limbs of Yoga

1. **Yama:** character building restraints
2. **Niyama:** character building observances
3. **Asana:** physical body posture
4. **Pranayama:** breath regulation as a means to align with subtle prana
5. **Pratyahara:** a state of introversion based on the flow of prana
6. **Dharana:** initial stage of meditation as one-pointed concentration by a subjective observer on a chosen object
7. **Dhyana:** intermediate stage of meditation as the flow state between subjective observer and a chosen object
8. **Samadhi:** advanced stage of meditation wherein the subjective observer and a chosen object are mediating an experience of Oneness

Notes

Foundation of Classical Yoga

Yamas and Niyamas

The five yamas and five niyamas comprised the traditional maha vratam (great vow) taken by every yoga student and was expected to guide their behavior in order and support character development regardless of time, place, or circumstance.

Yamas, Restraints:

1. **Ahimsa**, Non-injury
2. **Satya**, Truthfulness
3. **Asteya**, Non-stealing
4. **Brahmacharya**, Practices that lead back to Source
5. **Aparigraha**, Non-attachment

Niyamas, Observances:

6. **Saucha**, Cleanliness of the heart, body, breath and mind
7. **Santosha**, Contentment
8. **Tapas**, Uplifting Discipline
9. **Svadhyaya**, Self-study
10. **Ishvara-Pranidhana**, Trusting Life

Notes

Practice and Experience

According to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Mental pain, despair, nervousness, and hard breathing are the symptoms of a distracted condition of mind.

For removing these obstacles, there should be constant practice of one truth or principle.

The mind becomes clarified by cultivating attitudes of friendliness, compassion, gladness, and indifference respectively toward happiness, misery, virtue and vice. Or by releasing or holding the breath. Also, through serene or luminous states experienced within.

—Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *Samadhi Pada*, verses 31–36

When the mind is disturbed by improper thoughts, constant pondering over the opposites is the remedy.

—Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *Sadhana Pada*, verse 33

Sample Yoga Sutras inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice the pranayamas until your mind becomes calm.
- Bring your attention to your ears and feel them. Feel the shape of your ears, the lobes and convolutions of the ears. Can you feel your hair against your ears, the weight? Bring your attention to the canals that lead from the outer ear to the inner ear. Can you feel the canal, its shape—round, oblong, rectangular? Can you sense its length?
- See if you can feel your eardrums. Can you feel them vibrating with any sounds? Can you sense the chamber inside the eardrum, inside your skull?
- Shift your attention toward sound and notice all the sounds you are hearing. Can you be aware of all the sounds without selecting one over another and without labeling them?
- Take your attention to the highest-pitched sound you are hearing. Take it to the lowest. Take it to the sound that is farthest away.
- Now bring your attention to the sounds inside your head. Listen to the sounds inside your body and the sound of static in the ears and nerves.
- Shift all your attention to the hearer. Who hears these things? Look for that hearer with all of your capacity.

- Bring your attention to your breath, and after a few moments, guide it to deepen. Let your body sway gently side to side and front to back. Lift your hands to your face and gently massage your face and neck.
- Release your hands to your lap, take a deep breath, and open your eyes. Sit quietly for a few minutes.

Sample Yoga Sutras inspired relaxation script

- Prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Savasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that make you comfortable. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dirgha pranayama breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dirgha breaths, release all control of your breath.
- Let your attention drift inside your body. Let it drift toward the strongest sensation that you feel. It might be a tight place, or it might be the floor beneath you. Perhaps it is a place where you feel the air on your skin or the fabric of your clothing on your body. Hold your attention on that place and feel it deeply. Let go of any descriptive or evaluative words and just observe the sensation. And now, as if looking into a mirror, notice what the presence of that sensation creates in you. Is it attractive or repulsive? Is there a meaning assigned by the mind? A story? Can you watch yourself be affected by the sensation? Can you become the sensation?
- Let your mind drift to another sensation, perhaps one that is more subtle, and repeat the process. Repeat it one more time with an even more subtle sensation. Can you experience yourself as the observer, noticing the experiences dissolving one into the other?
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your belly. Feel the oneness and the separateness of the in-breath, the out-breath, and the belly. Gradually deepen your breath and feel your awareness expanding to encompass more of your body. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly bring yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: Every object that we focus the mind on, both in our body and out in the world, is a doorway to merging with the infinite.

4. Tantra

Tantra is recent but its principles are ancient and rightly considered a branch of yoga. The special feature of Tantra is that it neither considers worldly enjoyment as something to be shunned nor is final liberation solely accepted. It recognizes both equally. Tantra teaches that knowledge can only dawn in a person with a pure body and mind. A true Tantric adept is a person of perfect self-control.

—Swami Kripalu

A philosophy called Tantra arose around 500 CE to offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between ultimate truth and the material world. Tantra is founded on the view that the world and its pleasures do not have to be renounced for spiritual awakening; enjoyment and human fulfillment can be stepping stones to higher awareness. A Tantric practitioner cultivates a sense of aliveness that brings intimacy and joy to daily life. According to tantric philosophy, it is by experiencing the things of this finite world fully and without guilt or shame that the doors to the infinite swing open most easily.

Tantra's positive view of worldly life was a marked departure from India's earlier philosophies. Vedanta saw the world of the senses as a beguiling perceptual illusion (maya). Sankhya considered embodiment the calamity of a soul (purusha) trapped in matter (prakriti). Consonant with these views, Vedanta and Sankhya drew a clear line of demarcation separating worldly life from spiritual life. In both these systems, ultimate truth can only be sought by a person willing to renounce the world and its pleasures.

Tantra does not see worldly and spiritual life in opposition. It embraces all facets of life and believes that a healthy person can integrate life's polarities and live from a place of naturalness and wholeness. Instead of asceticism, Tantra celebrates embodiment, avoiding the inner splits, inhibitions, and complexes that austere strategies such as self-denial often create.

Tantra is a word with many meanings. When used by weavers, it means “warp” or “woof.” The loom was likely a metaphor for the Tantric view, which sees reality as the whole cloth woven from the polarities of spirit and matter, sacred and profane, male and female, space and time, pleasure and pain, light and shadow. Tantra sees enlightenment as the natural flowering of psychological wholeness that comes from the integration and unification of all life's opposites. Tantra also means “that which expands wisdom” (jnana), which speaks to its purpose as a wisdom tradition meant to awaken practitioners to the direct experience of reality. Another definition of Tantra is “rite” or “ritual,” and most Tantric schools are highly ritualistic systems infused with the idea that wisdom is hidden within us and can be brought into conscious awareness through deepening our ability to experience all aspects of reality.

Tantra conceptualizes spirit and matter as two poles on the vast continuum of creation. It symbolizes these poles as Shiva, the masculine principle of pure consciousness, and Shakti, the feminine principle of creative energy. Shiva represents the unmanifest and formless, which is eternal and never changes. Shakti symbolizes the manifest universe in all its myriad forms, which exists in a dynamic state of evolution and change. Like Sankhya, Tantra considers spirit and matter to be real. Whether changeless (Shiva) or changing (Shakti), both are aspects of the same totality. Within the microcosm of the individual, Shiva is the supreme identity that underlies the ego and illumines the mind, and Shakti is the life force that sustains the body and vivifies its energy centers and functions. In some schools of Tantra, the life force of the body is called by another name, prana.

Tantra depicts Shiva and Shakti as cosmic lovers, drawn together by their opposite qualities. The splendor of the universe is the outpouring of their ecstatic dance and lovemaking. Seeing spirit and matter as connected by a unifying love is what enabled the founders of Tantra to pioneer a life-affirming philosophy that trusts that human life will naturally lead to spiritual awakening if lived joyously and savored. Desire is not considered a barrier to awakening in Tantra, which guides practitioners to neither suppress nor indulge, but rather enjoy the natural satisfaction of the senses with full awareness.

Since Vedic times, Indians have been practicing religious rituals that combine meditative awareness with visualization and the use of mandalas (sacred circles), mantras (recitation of sacred words and sounds), mudras (expressive gestures), yantras (geometric designs to focus consciousness), and deity worship. Usually these rituals were practiced as a form of white magic that could influence the outer world and be used to obtain boons such as the successful reign of a newly crowned king, victory in battle, recovery from serious illness, or the birth of a child.

Tantric teachers created a new repertoire of rituals designed to transform the inner consciousness of their students. Driving this innovation was their conception of reality as a vast continuum vibrating with the energy of Shakti. This omnipresent vibration was also called by another name, spanda (pulsing or throbbing). Rich symbolism was employed, with gods and goddesses representing particular energies and vibrations. Rituals were designed to invoke a specific deity in order to activate primal energy and use it to fuel transformation. Tantra was not a timid approach, and its powerful rituals sought to help practitioners break through the layers of ignorance, lethargy, resistance, and attachment.

The goal of ritual practice was to enable students to quickly overcome any obstacles preventing their entry into deep states of meditation. Tantric meditation practice proceeds along a path of affirmation and inclusion called *asmi asmi* (this too, this too). This path embraces the bodymind as a manifestation of the Divine, dispelling the myth of separateness that divides reality into artificial distinctions like matter and spirit. They distilled this central teaching into a mantra used in meditation: *Shivoham*, which means “I am Shiva.”

The enlightenment sought by Tantra was a marked departure from the traditional view of withdrawing consciousness out of the body, known as *videha mukti* (liberation by leaving the body). Tantra sought a new enlightenment called *jivan mukti* (liberated in the body), and the first

step was to connect the twin poles of energy (pelvis) and awareness (head) within the microcosm of the bodymind. The second step was to dissolve all the thought forms and rigid structures of the mind into primal energy so that that which is beyond thought could be directly experienced. Swami Kripalu considered Tantra a prana yoga, meaning that it utilized the mechanism of activating energy to produce its results.

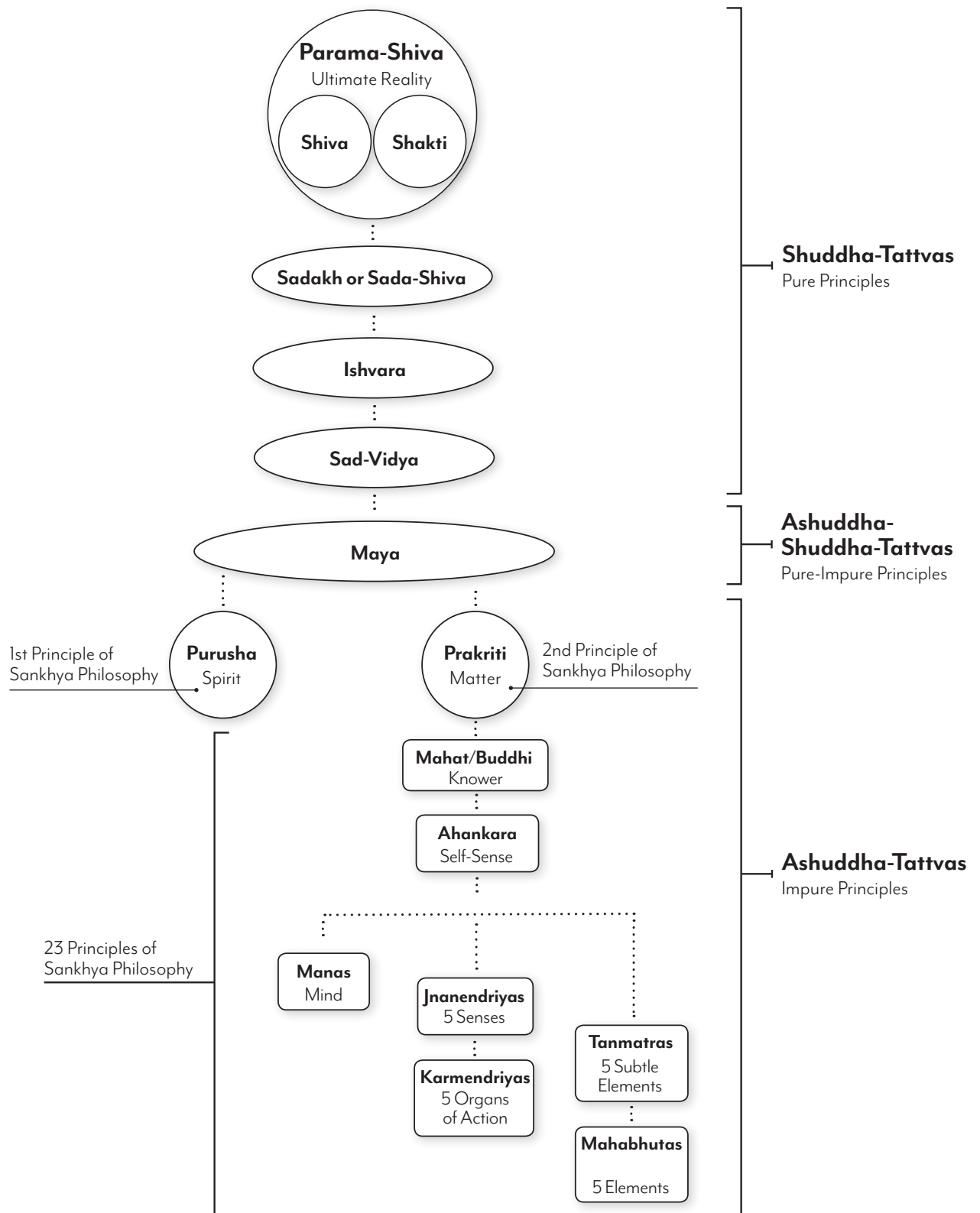
Tantra arose at a time when Indian culture was dominated by its Brahmin elite, positioned at the top of the caste system. A stifling system of religious rules controlled the behavior of the populace through deeming what actions maintained caste purity and what actions were polluting. Tantra rebelled against the caste system and rejected the task of maintaining purity as a sufficient model for anyone wanting to catalyze an authentic spiritual awakening. It held that more radical means were required to break free of the mind and its pervasive conditioning. Some scholars compare Tantra to the psychology of Sigmund Freud, which ran counter to the puritanical norms of the Victorian era. Others describe the cultural context in which Tantra arose as similar to the American 1960s with its counterculture movement. What's important to understand is that the early Tantric teachers directly challenged the politically powerful Brahmin orthodoxy and pointed out its obsession with restraint and purity.

A subset of Tantric rituals involved engaging in actions that were expressly deemed polluting. This included drinking alcohol, eating cow meat, being near or touching corpses, and ritualized sex. Participating in such rituals was guaranteed to bring up powerful emotions like fear, shame, guilt, vulnerability, anger, aggression, and lust. A skillful Tantric teacher could use the energy underlying these emotions to awaken a student to high states of consciousness. While radical techniques such as these might temporarily upset and disturb, Tantra held that they do so only to cleanse the mind and enable reality to shine forth without filters and distortion. Orthodox Brahmins condemned Tantra and declared its practices heretical and corrupt.

Early Tantra had a practical orientation that emphasized action and saw little value in theory. That view is expressed in the tradition of the mahasiddhas (great adepts), which tells the life stories of 84 Buddhist and Hindu masters, many of whom rejected their high caste and intellectual past to walk the path of Tantra. Later schools developed lofty and sublime philosophies. One school that draws the attention of Western academics is Kashmir Shaivism, started by a sage and prolific author Abhinavagupta (950–1020 CE), which expands upon the 25 tattvas of Sankhya to arrive at 36 principles of existence. Like most schools of Tantra, it describes ultimate reality as the union of male and female (see chart).

Tantra produced a cultural renaissance that flourished for a time and eventually fell into disrepute. Current research attributes the downfall of Tantra to scandalous teachers and a ritual system that grew overly complex and expensive. Authentic Tantra is qualitatively different from the sexual practices often called neo-Tantra, which use yogic techniques to prolong orgasm and increase sexual pleasure. The goal of Tantra is nothing less than wholeness through the process of enlightenment, which according to the systematic approach requires an expert teacher, preliminary disciplines that strengthen the witness, personal integrity, and all the other elements necessary for the alchemical development and transmission of spiritual education.

Tantric Cosmology



Notes

Practice and Experience

Sample Tantra-inspired meditation script

- Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice the pranayamas until your mind becomes calm. Affirm that you are doing deep and meaningful work, and that you want to experience the wholeness that comes from knowing yourself fully. If appropriate for you, offer a prayer for insight and the strength to see what may be difficult to see.
- Release the pranayama and visualize yourself in a place where you feel safe, perhaps a place you frequented in your childhood. It could be a room in a house, the beach, the shade of a large tree. Visualize yourself seated in that place and hold that visualization as you settle in.
- As you sit in peace, imagine that you feel a presence coming near the space where you are sitting. This presence does not cause any disturbance. As it draws closer, you feel the peace growing stronger. The presence moves close. It passes on your left side and moves to sit in front of you. You sense that someone is looking at you, but they are not judging. You feel waves of acceptance and compassion radiating from their eyes.
- You let this acceptance in, and your heart begins to soften. You feel a stream of love and peace flowing from and to the presence seated before you. For a few breaths, simply bask in that peace and love, acceptance and compassion.
- As you sit, feel that you are being seen, that everything about you is visible to this observer, but you are not judged. Your deepest darkest secrets, shames, and fears are exposed, and still no judgment. Again, rest in this feeling.
- For the next few moments, be as conscious as you can that you are being seen and accepted. Let this increase your own acceptance of yourself.
- The presence before you begins to rise. Feel it as it stands up and walks past you again on your left side. Stay aware of it as it drifts away. When it is gone, begin to deepen your breath. Let your body move in any ways that bring you into a smooth transition to end your meditation. Bring your hands to your face and gently massage your face and neck.
- Let your hands fall to your lap. Take a few deep breaths and again affirm that you are doing meaningful work, and that you want to experience the wholeness that comes from knowing yourself fully. For a few more moments, remember what it felt like to be accepted so fully by the presence in your meditation. Take a deep breath, and as you exhale, open your eyes and slowly transition to your next activity.

Sample Tantra-inspired relaxation script

- Prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Savasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that make you comfortable. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dirgha breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dirgha breaths, release all control of your breath.
- For a few breaths simply take in the feeling of your body. Feel the flow of your breath. As your trunk expands and contracts with the waves of breath, feel that the boundaries of your body are dissolving.
- Bring your attention down to your feet and notice every sensation there. Can you distinguish your individual toes? Your heels? The arches of your feet? The bones of your ankles? Let memories and images of your feet arise in your mind. Don't create stories, but let the images and stories form a collage in your mind. Affirm that your feet are healthy and that they can deeply relax.
- Bring your attention to your hands. Feel your fingertips. Feel the webbing between your fingers. Feel the hollows of your palms. Let memories and images of your hands arise in your mind. Don't link the images together, but allow them to drift through your mind. Affirm that your hands are healthy and that they can deeply relax.
- Bring your attention to your belly. Feel the space of your belly and every sensation in that space. As best as you can, visualize the organs inside and see if you can feel them. Let memories and images of your belly arise in your mind. Release any judgment or fear, and allow them to drift through your mind. Affirm that your belly is healthy and that it can deeply relax.
- Guide your attention to your chest and feel your lungs expanding and contracting. Then feel your heart behind your lungs. Can you feel it beating? Affirm that your heart and lungs are healthy and that they can deeply relax.
- Let your attention spread evenly through your whole body. Affirm that your body is healthy and that every process is happening exactly as it should. Affirm that your body is safe to deeply relax.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your body. Feel the oneness, the freedom from boundaries. Gradually deepen your breath and notice your awareness expanding to distinguish what is you from the rest of the universe. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes.
- Slowly bring yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: Every object that we focus the mind on, both in our body and out in the world, is a doorway to merging with the infinite.

Notes

5. Hatha Yoga

The scriptures of yoga are composed of terse sutras. Tantra has diagrams of various energy centers and energy channels that offer a similar form of condensed instruction. A focus of energy channels is called an energy center. Each energy center has a definite location in the body and is tied to particular organs of perception and action. Each energy center has a special shape, color, and is said to be inhabited by specific gods and goddesses. Energy centers are also called lotuses because they close and open. An impure energy center is closed until the life force becomes active and causes it to rotate like a powerful whirlpool and eventually blossom open. An aspirant who knows the secret of the diagram can do systematic practice correctly.

—Swami Kripalu

Hatha yoga is an offshoot of Tantra that can be traced to the sage Matsyendra and his successor, Goraksha, who lived around 1000 CE. By this time, Tantra and its system of transformative rituals had grown stagnant and fallen into disfavor. Matsyendra and Goraksha recast Tantra in yogic terms. The hatha yoga they developed had three primary rituals: asana (postures), pranayama (breath regulation), and dhyana (meditation). A student could learn how to practice these rituals again and again to catalyze their growth and awakening. The Tantric word conveying this orientation to sustained practice is sadhana, which means “the systematic practice of spiritual disciplines for self-transformation.”

Drawing on the work of earlier schools, the adepts of hatha yoga refined the model of the subtle body and its energetic anatomy that are known to contemporary practitioners today. This model includes an intricate network of nadis, or energy pathways, that branch off into ever smaller channels, much like the circulatory system. The sushumna nadi (central channel) is the chief of three principal pathways. It runs from the perineum to the crown of the head along the spinal column and is marked by seven chakras (wheels or energy centers).

The pingala nadi (solar or heating pathway) parallels the spine on the right side. The ida nadi (lunar or cooling pathway) parallels the spine on the left side. The Kripalu tradition describes the solar and lunar pathways as connecting the nostrils to the kanda, or bulb, the egg-shaped origin point of all the energy pathways located slightly below the navel. Other traditions depict the solar and lunar pathways as winding up from the base of the spine to join at the point between the eyebrows. (For more on the structure and function of the subtle body, see *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat*, pp 231–243.)

An intriguing component of the subtle body is the Kundalini Shakti (serpent power), a reservoir of primal energy symbolized as a coiled snake that lies sleeping at the base of the spine. Although the word kundalini (she who is coiled) is referenced in the Vedas, it was hatha yoga that developed the system currently known as Kundalini Yoga. In theory, the goal of Kundalini Yoga is to awaken and then raise the primal energy (Shakti) up the central channel from root to crown, piercing each chakra and causing it to blossom into vivid aliveness. When the primal energy reaches the upper centers in the head, Shakti merges with Shiva (consciousness), and the yogi experiences samadhi (union). Kundalini Yoga is a path of transformation in which practitioners are confronted by all the issues and obstacles that stand in the way of their highest expression.

Hatha yoga also developed a new and simplified model of life force animating the subtle body that differs from Sankhya and its expression in Ayurveda. Hatha yoga emphasizes two energies called prana and apana. Prana is the life force flowing inward toward the deeper self and up to spirit. When prana is strong, we are introverted and the inner world is felt to be real and primary. As introversion is sustained, the landscape of the inner world grows clear, and the confines of the outer world fade into the background. Apana is the life force flowing down and out through the senses. When apana is strong, we are extroverted and the outside world commands our attention.

A consistent theme of Indian philosophy is the struggle for spiritual awakening. In the epic stories of the Mahabharat and Ramayana, this struggle is depicted as a battle of opposing armies. This theme is evident in Vedanta, which encourages practitioners to use renunciation to strengthen their identification with Atman/Brahman and weaken the illusory power of maya. It also appears in Sankhya, which encourages practitioners to use self-restraint and discriminative intelligence to make sattva dominant over tamas and rajas and ultimately vanquish prakriti.

This theme appears in hatha yoga, which encourages practitioners to use asana, pranayama, and dhyana to make prana strong enough to overcome the outward pull of apana. When practiced with an internal focus and strong flow of prana, the rituals of hatha yoga are potent tools for transformation. As the subtle body is cleared of blocks and obstructions, hatha yogis gain sensitivity and inner clarity, which empowers them to act authentically and skillfully in the external world. Wiser choices are made in areas such as diet and lifestyle. This discrimination helps prana grow even stronger, which deepens practice..

The transformative system of hatha yoga developed by Matsyendra and Goraksha flourished for a few centuries within various Tantric sects before gradually fading. Its teachings are best expressed in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, a text written in the Middle Ages.

International interest in hatha yoga began in the 1800s and continues today. During the 1900s, hatha yoga techniques were combined with elements drawn from Western systems of physical culture and esotericism. (For interested readers, Mark Singleton's book, *Yoga Body*, sheds considerable light on this important period in yoga's evolution.)

Notes

Practice and Experience

Sample hatha yoga-inspired meditation script

- Gather all the props you will need to practice Baddha Konasana and Child's pose. Sit on a cushion on your mat with your props nearby. Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed and practice Dirgha pranayama with the Ujjayi sound for several minutes. Practice this until your mind becomes calm. Feel how strongly your attention focuses on your body, and also notice any distractions that pull your attention away from your body. Do this without judgment. Observe the pulls on your attention as simply the tug-of-war of prana and apana.
- Keeping your eyes closed and your attention focused inward, guide your body into Baddha Konasana. Hold your feet, press your knees down, and round your torso to bring your solar plexus over your feet. Scan your body to make sure this posture feels safe and that you aren't experiencing any strain. Take slow, deep breaths as your body settles into the posture.
- Let your attention flow to the strongest sensation. Take it in fully, without commentary or reaction. Explore the sensation deeply. Notice other layers, sensations inside other sensations, that are different from the layers above. Can you find a line beyond which the sensations are no longer physical? Are there layers that are emotional? Are there layers that are pure energy?
- Be with the posture until your body gives you a clear message that it is time to release. Rise back up to seated and cross your ankles. Observe what arises as you come out of the posture.
- Notice again how strongly your attention focuses on your body, and also notice any distractions that pull your attention away from your body. Has the prana become stronger and the apana weaker?
- Lift your hips and come into Child's pose. Use any props that you need. Take a few slow, deep breaths as your body settles into the posture. Let your attention flow to the strongest sensation. Take it in fully. Look deeply into the sensation and notice its shape. Does it have a color? A sound? At what point are the sensations no longer physical? Are there layers that are emotional? Are there layers that are pure energy?
- Remain in this posture for five more deep breaths. Slowly rise back up to a seated position and cross your ankles. Again, notice if the prana is stronger now.
- Gradually deepen your breath. When it feels appropriate to do so, begin to sway your body side to side or front to back. Notice if this action strengthens the apana. When you're ready, open your eyes. Observe the prana and apana as you transition to your next activity.

Sample hatha yoga–inspired relaxation script

- Lead yourself through a pranayama and asana practice that is appropriate for you. Then prepare your body for relaxation. Lie in Savasana with any props, pillows, or blankets that make you comfortable. Bring your attention to your breath and take five Dirgha pranayama breaths with the Ujjayi sound. When you have finished the five Dirgha breaths, release all control of your breath. For a few breaths, simply take in the feeling of your body.
- In your mind, go back to the first posture that you did. Remember it as best as you can—how you entered it, what you felt as you held it, how you felt when you released. Can you still feel the imprint of the posture? Can you still feel the effect? Has tension come back into the body? Can you release it with a soft exhale?
- In your memory, go back to a posture in your sequence where some part of your body exerted effort. Remember entering the posture and how it felt as you held it. Was there frustration? Was there energy moving? What did you experience as you released? Take your attention to that body part now. What do you feel there? Can you connect what you felt then to what you are feeling now? Can you fully accept what you are feeling now? Has tension or tightness come back into the body? Can you release it with a soft exhale?
- In your memory, go back to a posture in your sequence where some part of your body stretched. Remember coming into the posture and what you felt as you held it. Recall the sensations and look deeply into them. What was happening on all the different layers? How absorbed did you become? What do you feel there? Can you connect what you felt then to what you are feeling now? Can you fully accept what you are feeling now? Has tension or tightness come back into the body? Can you release it with a soft exhale?
- Let your attention drift through your body from one sensation to another. Can you find all the past events that have contributed to what you are feeling now?
- Feel yourself here in this moment, a moment created by all the moments that have gone before. Affirm that by what you are experiencing now, you are creating your future. Experience yourself in this one moment in the infinite flow of time.
- As you rest here in this moment, what can you do to influence the next moment, the rest of this day? Is there any area of tension you can release from your body or your mind? An affirmation you can express? Is there something you can open to in your body, mind, or heart that will add to the quality of this day?
- Bring your attention to your breath. Feel it flowing in and out of your belly. Gradually deepen your breath and feel your awareness expanding to take in more of your body. Find your arms and legs, hands and feet. Wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly bring yourself to a seated position. Sit with your eyes closed. Reflect: Your experience of your body has been changed by your practice. Because you have practiced today, the rest of your day will be different.

Because you have practiced today, you will sleep differently tonight, and because of that, tomorrow will be a different day. Through your practice, you have changed the trajectory of your life. Take a deep breath and open your eyes.

Notes

[illegible]

6. The Sadhana of Swami Kripalu

Yoga includes special techniques meant to awaken the life force of the body. Their appropriate practice will grant the benediction of pranotthana (prana awakening). As prana awakens, the body begins to perform postures, breathing exercises, and other disciplines spontaneously. These spontaneous actions are yogic kriyas that purify the body and mind.

—Swami Kripalu

Kripalu Yoga is a branch of the Pashupat sect revived by the sage Lakulish about 200 CE. Lakulish was born in the west-central state of Gujarat and was venerated during his lifetime—his followers believed him to be the 28th incarnation of the Hindu god Shiva. The Pashupat sect he started was a renunciate religious community. While revived by Lakulish, who was a contemporary of Patanjali, the roots of the Pashupat tradition reach further back in time. Scholars consider it one of the earliest yoga schools.

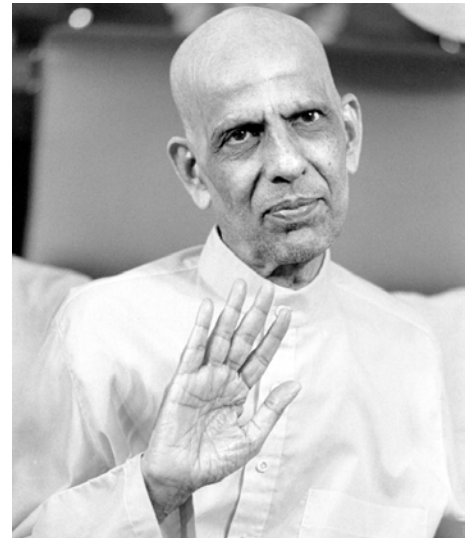
Little is known about Lakulish except for legends relating to his birth and death. Obscuring matters further, the Pashupat Sutra attributed to him is encoded in a symbolic language impossible to decipher. The text was likely written in this manner to prevent the disclosure of esoteric teachings to non-initiates. Scholars do know that the Pashupats were an early school of Tantra that gained considerable popularity and prominence. A network of temples was started in Gujarat and expanded to cover all of India by 600 CE, when the tradition began to decline.

A degree of controversy surrounded the Pashupats because of their extreme asceticism and rejection of conventional societal norms such as ignoring Hindu customs regarding appropriate food and religious rites. It was long thought that the sect had simply disappeared, but new academic research suggests that the Pashupats were one of several sects that merged into the hatha yoga school of Matsyendra and Goraksha. It is almost certain that Pashupat yoga would have been entirely lost except for the role played by Swami Kripalu, a modern yoga master who breathed new life into the tradition.

Swami Kripalu was born in 1913 into a devout Brahmin family in the small Gujarat town of Dabhoi. His father died when Swami Kripalu was seven years old, plunging the large family of two sons and seven daughters into financial hardship. As a high caste woman, Swami Kripalu's mother was unable to work, and the family sank into debt. Eventually their home was taken and their possessions put out in the street. A promising student and musician, Swami Kripalu was

forced to leave school after seventh grade in order to work.

Upon turning 18, Swami Kripalu traveled to the city of Mumbai to find a job that would enable him to support himself and his mother. It was there he met Swami Pranavananda, a guru who recognized the young Swami Kripalu as his foremost disciple and treated him like a beloved son. For a year and a quarter, Swami Kripalu lived in his guru's ashram and enjoyed a close relationship with his teacher. Swami Pranavananda taught Swami Kripalu yoga philosophy and explained the techniques through which the deeper truths of yoga can be realized. Wanting Swami Kripalu to have the best possible foundation to support his future yoga practice, Swami Pranavananda arranged for Swami Kripalu to study Ayurveda, Western naturopathy, and even the budding science of Western psychology.



After a year of instruction, Swami Pranavananda announced that he would initiate Swami Kripalu into yoga. As preparation, Swami Kripalu was led through a dietary regimen to purify his body and mind. For a week, he reduced his food intake to one meal a day. For two months, he drank only milk. For the next 41 days, he fasted on water while living in seclusion, keeping silence, and practicing mantra meditation.

At the end of this 108 day ordeal, the 19-year-old Swami Kripalu was initiated into yoga. Swami Pranavananda called the initiation shaktipat diksha (descent of the power). After teaching him Padmasana (Lotus pose), Swami Pranavananda said, "This is the seed of all postures. You will accomplish countless postures through it." Swami Kripalu was also taught Anuloma Viloma (Alternate-Nostril Breathing) and told, "This pranayama is the key to yoga. By practicing it properly, you shall know all the yogas and tantras."

Acknowledging his completion of the initiation, Swami Pranavananda instructed Swami Kripalu to begin an intensive practice of yoga later in life. Then Swami Pranavananda announced to the ashram community that he was leaving to take Swami Kripalu on a walking pilgrimage of holy sites. When the pilgrimage was over, Swami Kripalu awoke to find his teacher gone. After waiting at the spot for several days, he had no alternative but to resume his life. Eventually Swami Kripalu found meaningful work as a music teacher and playwright, which enabled him to support his mother.

The spirit of renunciation arose in Swami Kripalu after he narrowly escaped an attempt of well-meaning relatives to find him a wife. In 1942 at age 29, he was ordained as a swami and began traveling on foot from village to village throughout western India. The spiritual discourses he gave

were peppered with captivating stories, and his inspired singing stirred deep feelings within the hearts of listeners. The shopkeepers would all close their stores, creating a holiday atmosphere that enabled the entire village to attend Swami Kripalu's talks.

During his nine years as a wandering monk, Swami Kripalu's renown grew steadily. Wealthy devotees saw the purity of his service and gave him large donations. Always using the money to help those in need, Swami Kripalu established numerous secondary schools, health clinics, vocational schools, and temples. More than eloquence, talent, or good works, it was Swami Kripalu's genuine love for people that set him apart. He was held dear by countless villagers, esteemed by people of influence, and widely considered a humanitarian.

Swami Kripalu was not satisfied with scriptural knowledge or status. In 1950 at age 38, he began the yoga practice that would define the rest of his life. He started with three one-hour sittings of Anuloma Viloma pranayama a day and gradually increased the duration. Experimenting with lifestyle practices, he found that a moderate diet and silence best supported him. For the next 28 years, Swami Kripalu spent 10 hours a day in focused spiritual practice, eating one midday meal and seldom leaving his meditation room. Twelve of these years were spent in complete silence during which he communicated by writing on a chalkboard. It was during this period that Swami Kripalu realized the potential glimpsed by his boyhood teacher and became a spiritual adept.

The type of yoga that Swami Kripalu practiced was unusual. After several months of dedicated pranayama, Swami Kripalu experienced pranotthana (the awakening of prana) and was amazed to watch his body spontaneously perform countless postures, dance-like movements, and other exercises. At this point, Swami Kripalu was largely unschooled in hatha yoga. Purchasing several books, he was astounded to find many of the techniques he'd done spontaneously clearly described in the texts. Encouraged by this discovery, Swami Kripalu gradually increased his practice of spontaneous yoga to six and, finally, 10 hours a day.

Swami Kripalu was mystified by how he could practice advanced yogic techniques without first learning them from a teacher. He studied the texts intensively and reflected on the time he shared with his guru to understand the transformative process he was undergoing. Eventually, Swami Kripalu concluded that his experience resulted from the specific form of yoga initiation and pranayama instruction he'd received from his guru. In his words:

In ancient times, yoga vidya (knowledge of yoga) was given only to the most rare and deserving disciple. By his grace, the guru would bestow shaktipat diksha upon such a disciple. Through shaktipat, the prana in the disciple's body would be released. This is called pranotthana. After pranotthana, the disciple would start yoga sadhana automatically and nothing remained to be taught. The practice of yoga would itself lead to the knowledge of yoga. It is also true that one's prana can be released even without having a guru, provided one practices asana, pranayama, japa, meditation, etc., using the correct technique.

For the first several years of his spontaneous yoga practice, Swami Kripalu endured a rigorous purification process. In meditation, Swami Kripalu's awakened energy would descend into his lower centers and engage in a vigorous battle to purify his instinctual self. The word "Pashupat" means "master of the animal/beast," a term graphically descriptive of this experience. Swami Kripalu began to suspect that he was practicing the ancient Pashupat yoga revived by Lakulish and transmitted to him by Pranavanada.

Swami Kripalu's activated prana aroused the more potent kundalini shakti, which he often called the evolutionary power. As this energy ascended and pierced the chakras, he experienced pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and the lower levels of samadhi (oneness). Having successfully passed through an initial purification, it now appeared that all the later stages of yoga described by Patanjali were emerging naturally in a format that corresponded to hatha yoga and, most notably, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. This experience led Swami Kripalu to conclude that a period of intensive hatha yoga was an essential prerequisite for depth meditation and the practice of raja yoga (royal or contemplative yoga).

One day, Swami Kripalu was shown an unusual stone statue of a yogi sitting in meditation found in a nearby farmer's field. The yogi's spine was merged with a Shiva lingam (symbol of Shiva). Swami Kripalu immediately recognized this as a statue of Lakulish artfully depicting practices he'd experienced that led him to depth meditation. Swami Kripalu's belief that he had been initiated into the Pashupat lineage was solidified. His response was to raise the funds and oversee the construction of the Kayavarohan temple that now houses the ancient statue. Completed in 1974, this was Swami Kripalu's crowning act of public service in India.

Swami Kripalu had several disciples living in the West, all of whom repeatedly invited him to come to Europe or America. He always refused, choosing not to interrupt his cloistered lifestyle. In 1977 at age 66, Swami Kripalu delighted his Western students by traveling to the United States. Intending to stay four months, he extended his visit to just over four years. Most of his time was spent in residence at the original Kripalu Center in Sumneytown, Pennsylvania, where he resumed his life of yoga practice, study, writing, and music. Swami Kripalu returned to India in late 1981, where he died a few months later on December 29.

Despite his dedicated practice, Swami Kripalu never lost sight of yoga's universality. He believed that a diversity of approaches was healthy and necessary, as people vary in temperament and need different teachings and techniques to attain physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Swami Kripalu taught that the ultimate goal of all schools of yoga is one and the same: Sanatana Dharma, the direct realization of eternal truth.

(For those wanting to know more about Swami Kripalu's life and teachings, the book *Sunrise of Joy: The Lost Darshans of Swami Kripalu* by John Mundahl is recommended.)

7. Kripalu Yoga

The practice of yoga with the kriya of chitta and prana is a special type of sadhana. It is called Kripalu Yoga. This kriya is a divine grace bestowed on this lineage through the intensive practice of its great masters.

—Swami Kripalu

Swami Kripalu was an ardent yogi with an inquisitive mind. Born in the 20th century, he was able to study the texts of all the major schools of yoga and examine how the tradition had evolved over time. Swami Kripalu saw yoga as an integrated system of self-development and spiritual awakening. While the tradition as a whole offered a unified vision of humankind's highest potential, that vision was greatly enriched by each school's unique perspective and distinctive set of insights.

Contemporary yoga students face a different challenge than those of earlier times. Past students were likely to be trained in a single school and strive over many years to practice to assimilate its philosophical view. Today's students find themselves in a situation akin to the story of the five blind men and the elephant. One blind man grabs the tail and says the elephant is like a rope. A second holds a leg and says the elephant is like a pillar. A third touches the ear and says the elephant is like a fan. A fourth pushes against its side and says the elephant is like a wall.

The fifth grasps the writhing trunk and exclaims, "You're all wrong, the elephant is like a large and powerful snake." In much the same way, contemporary yoga students encounter a multiplicity of views and practices. Their task is to skillfully use one or more of them to experience the larger truth.

Kripalu Yoga is grounded in the teachings of Swami Kripalu, who held that the first step on the path of every yogi is to learn to honor the relative truth of society (dharma). You might recall that the first two limbs of Patanjali's classical yoga are yama (the five restraints) and niyama (the five observances). Swami Kripalu praised the transformative power of the yamas and niyamas and called the slow process of weaving these 10 virtues into the fabric of one's being character building. The values of the yamas and niyamas are foundational to Kripalu Yoga.

Swami Kripalu taught yoga in alignment with a doctrine known as the Four Noble Aims of Life. According to this doctrine, human beings are born with four primary drives: artha (the drive to obtain necessary material resources), kama (the drive for comfort and pleasure), dharma (the drive for self-esteem, genuine virtue, and status), and moksha (the drive to awaken spiritually and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death).

It is important to understand that Kripalu Yoga is not the renunciate form of the Pashupat kundalini yoga practiced by Swami Kripalu, who was focused exclusively on attaining moksha. Kripalu Yoga is an adaptation of this yoga designed to help students obtain the balance of all four aims, which Swami Kripalu liked to call "success in life." Swami Kripalu was clear in drawing this distinction:

Yamas, Character Building Restraints:

- Ahimsa, Non-injury
- Satya, Truthfulness
- Asteya, Non-Stealing
- Brahmacharya, Practices that lead back to Source
- Aparigraha, Nonattachment

Niyamas, Character Building Observances:

- Saucha, Cleanliness of heart, body, breath and mind
- Santosha, Contentment
- Tapas, Uplifting Discipline
- Svadhyaya, Self-Study
- Ishvara-Pranidhana, Trusting Life

Kripalu Yoga is the most advantageous practice for a person living an active life in society. Success in life requires both mind power (chitta) and life force (prana). Chitta and prana usually work independently. While waking, chitta is dominant and controls the body. While sleeping, prana is dominant and controls the body. While practicing Kripalu Yoga, a smooth flow of attention is maintained on the body while gracefully passing from posture to posture. Through regular practice, chitta and prana become friends of equal strength who cooperate closely with one another.

In both kundalini yoga and Kripalu Yoga, it is necessary to awaken the evolutionary power. Without this, it is not possible to develop spiritually. In Kripalu Yoga, the evolutionary power is awakened in its partial and tolerable form. Because chitta and prana are kept at equal strength, kundalini does not manifest in a furious form. This is the way for aspirants to progress spiritually while living a family life in society.

Through Kripalu Yoga, one develops good character and the following worldly powers: personal strength, determination, clear and logical thinking, good memory, creativity, and decisiveness. By directing the life energy with the mind, one can act skillfully and ethically to fulfill his or her noble desires and achieve wealth, pleasure, status, and true virtue.

Unless an aspirant succeeds at willful yoga, embarking on the path of surrender yoga is like trying to jump from the earth to reach the feet of Almighty God. Only through willful yoga does an aspirant come to qualify for the path of surrender.

Swami Kripalu used a technical term to differentiate Kripalu Yoga from other forms of yoga: the kriya of chitta and prana. Its meaning lies at the heart of Kripalu Yoga in all its myriad expressions.

The kriya of chitta and prana is a form of samyama, a term used in the Yoga Sutras and introduced in the discussion of classical yoga. Samyama means “tying together,” and refers to the process of bringing different aspects of your being into a single and powerful focus. Swami Kripalu taught that anyone who intently brings together their mental awareness, the energy of the breath, and the area of strongest sensation in the bodymind into a single point of focus will generate a spontaneous yogic kriya. A kriya is a purifying or healing action.

A kriya has an outer form, typically the asana and pranayama used to stimulate a strong flow of sensation. A kriya also has an inner form, as prana releases deep-seated tensions, uncovers intuitive wisdom, and fosters healing. As practice deepens, kriyas progress from fostering healing to catalyzing evolutionary shifts to the next level of growth and transformation. Advanced kriyas are called by a different name, mudras.

Kripalu Yoga was created and named by Amrit Desai, a close householder disciple who brought Swami Kripalu’s teachings to North America in the 1960s. Desai adapted Swami Kripalu’s teachings on Pashupat kundalini yoga to make them accessible to contemporary practitioners. Up until that point, these teachings had historically been reserved for reclusive monks seeking moksha and not practiced by householders looking to satisfy all four aims of life.

Starting in 1974, Desai began collaborating in this endeavor with the Kripalu ashram community. Over the next 20 years, Desai worked with a large body of Western practitioners, including hundreds of yoga teachers, to develop Kripalu Yoga into a three-stage system for prana awakening, complimented by a holistic off-the-mat lifestyle. A full exposition of the curriculum created during this time period can be found in *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat*.

Designed for Western students, this curriculum did not use Swami Kripalu’s term the kriya of chitta and prana. It used a different term, prana awakening, which was more accessible. A Kripalu Yoga practitioner learns to activate prana through a variety of techniques, including holding postures with proper alignment, breathing deeply, allowing micromovements to occur, and releasing sounds. Any posture held with sufficient duration and intensity will become an energy experience. As prana energy awakens, it naturally guides the practitioner into intuitive actions (kriyas) that remove energy blocks and purify the bodymind.

As energy flow intensifies, this process builds momentum and spontaneous actions (mudras), freeing the practitioner of unnecessary emotional armoring, psychological defenses, and layers of false identification. Over time, all the bodily energies and levels of psychological awareness integrate in the experience of meditation. This integration process, driven by the power of prana, is the core of Kripalu Yoga philosophy and its direct link with the yoga of Swami Kripalu and the Pashupats.

When the kriya of prana and chitta is understood, it can be seen mirrored in all three stages of Kripalu Yoga:

1. Stage One begins with the practice of being present: Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, and Allow. This instruction brings together all the elements of samyama. Stage One practice continues as you learn classic yoga postures and basic pranayama and cultivate compassion and self-acceptance.
2. Stage Two begins as you intensify the willful practice of asana and pranayama. Holding postures with deep breathing amplifies sensation and activates energy. Stage Two includes a set of teachings that help you sustain focus as sensation grows strong and energy builds. These teachings include finding your edge, how to safely move beyond your comfort zone with awareness, micromovements, riding the wave of sensation, and witness consciousness. As all aspects of your being come into the single-pointed focus of samyama, you learn to initiate the process of kriya.
3. Stage Three is about letting go of will, opening to surrender, and allowing the process of kriya to come to completion. The wave of energy driving the kriya has been generated by the power of your willful practice. Intuitive wisdom will emerge if you can allow this wave of energy to crest and a state of flow to arise in the mind.

What distinguishes Kripalu Yoga from Pashupat kundalini yoga is the emphasis on maintaining a balance between energy (prana) and mental awareness (chitta). Using the terminology of Swami Kripalu, Kripalu Yoga is neither a chitta nor a prana yoga. It is a yoga that strengthens awareness (chitta) and raises energy (prana) in a balanced fashion. Where the Pashupats used powerful kriyas and mudras to overwhelm the mind and attain moksha, Kripalu Yoga emphasizes a less intensive level of practice to revitalize the body, clear the mind, and live with greater aliveness and purpose. The goal of Kripalu Yoga is to enable practitioners to forge a direct link to pure awareness and primordial energy, empowering them to attain success in all four domains of life.

The three stages of Kripalu Yoga are not linear. Instead of a progression whose purpose is to get you to Stage Three, the goal is to learn how to use all three stages to ride the wave of energy within the primary kriya of prana and chitta. A mature practice integrates all three stages into a dynamic blend of will and surrender that awakens energy, strengthens awareness, and empowers you to transform your life. For practitioners who progress to high levels, the teachings of Kripalu Yoga offer a bridge to the liberation path of hatha yoga.

Conclusion

If you want to learn a particular subject, you should study the most trustworthy literature in that field. If that subject is yoga, you must also strike a balance in your study and practice. The secrets of yoga are revealed only through a combination of continual study and practice. At the holy moment when your experience matches that of the scriptures, your joy will be boundless.

—Swami Kripalu

Swami Kripalu displayed a progressive spirit and held the scientific method in high esteem. Along with studying yoga's classic texts, he encouraged his students to read the inspirational works of contemporary authors and keep abreast of new discoveries in yoga research.

Based on his study of the traditional yoga philosophies, Swami Kripalu came to believe there was a natural progression for practitioners to follow. Practice begins with the dualistic approach of Sankhya, which recognizes the reality of the world and draws a sharp distinction between spirit (purusha) and matter (prakriti). The principles of Sankhya provide a firm foundation for self-care and disciplined practice, both of which are needed to steady the mind and complete the initial purification and strengthening process of hatha yoga.

As practice deepens, the philosophy of Tantra enables a practitioner to leave rigid distinctions behind and explore the interconnectedness of spirit and matter. Instead of purification, Tantra seeks wholeness by integrating the opposites in the powerful process of energy awakening. Tantra philosophy also provides an inspiring framework for integrating spiritual principles into daily life.

As practice enters the domain of raja yoga and the drive for self-realization becomes strong, the nondual teachings of Advaita Vedanta provide guidance on how to make the critical shift from the many to the One. It is interesting that Swami Kripalu's suggested progression is mirrored in the teachings of Vedanta, which are often summarized in the pithy statement "The world is illusion. Brahman alone is real. The world is Brahman."

Swami Kripalu held this progression lightly. His primary guidance was to simply choose one or more classic yoga philosophies to inform practice based on the practitioner's interest and preferences.

Another way the four philosophical schools are integrated into Kripalu Yoga is through the model of chitta and prana. Chitta essentially is the thinking self. In Sankhya, it is the combination of manas (mind), ahankara (ego), and buddhi (witnessing self). Chitta is our rational thinking part.

Prana is usually translated as "life force" and is the prime mover of all actions. It can be seen as the energy behind desire and fear. As a later expression of the concept of maya that occurs in

Vedanta, the updated notion of prana emerges in Sankhya, as the primary force that causes the three gunas to function and influence the five elements.

Vedanta and Sankhya are often called chitta paths. They teach that prana causes disturbances that lead to pain. They encourage the development of strong chitta to cut through desire and fear with penetrating insight. One cultivates strong chitta by practicing disciplines, which in modern psychological terms we might call practicing delay of gratification or impulse control. Both Vedanta and Sankhya teach that when chitta is stronger than prana, one can make clearer decisions and act with integrity.

Tantra and hatha yoga are often called prana paths. They teach that even though prana may cause trouble, when we cut ourselves off from prana we increase a sense of separation and alienation from our own knowing. We might feel peace, but it is the peace of isolation. We have separated ourselves from our passion and from the world. On a prana path, practitioners would create a safe, contained environment. They would practice alone in locked rooms. They practiced pranayama and postures with long holding times to raise the prana. When the prana was strong, they allowed it to move freely through their body, mind, and heart. The strong prana generated spontaneous movement and an uncensored flow of emotion. By dissolving the ego and mind in the prana, the practitioners experienced a profound sense of oneness with the universe.

While the various systems of philosophy employ the respective terms to narrate subtle dynamics, this core experience of dissolving to realize yoga, or union of consciousness between the microcosm and macrocosm, was consistently sanctified and cultivated. In that state, all memories melted away, as did all fear and any awareness of separation. The practitioners had transcended the world and merged with spirit. By experiencing this merging daily, their attachments to worldly activities faded and they came to “live in spirit” as *jivan muktis*—living, liberated beings. Swami Kripalu believed that raising prana generated dissolving experiences characterized by profound oneness. The strengthened prana also magnified inner experiences. Subliminal desires and suppressed emotions would rise and could be felt.

If the prana alone were strengthened, the mind could become disturbed and the practitioner would be driven in ways that could be self-destructive. If the chitta were also strengthened and made a little stronger than the prana, it could observe the strong prana while staying detached from action. The strong prana would reveal hidden desires and fears that would normally be suppressed. If the chitta were to act on these desires and fears, one could be hurt or hurt others. But, if the strong chitta could stay in the observing role, the practitioner could see themselves from a very unique perspective. By taking responsibility for what one observed, transformation could occur.

By raising the prana while keeping chitta strong, a churning happens in the body, emotions and mind. To guide that churning skillfully is the heart of Kripalu Yoga.

This section was written to introduce you to the primary schools of yoga philosophy and how they relate to the Kripalu Yoga curriculum in which you are training. The following references and resources are recommended for your ongoing education:

- Swami Rajarshi Muni, *Yoga, the Ultimate Spiritual Path* (St. Paul, M: Llewellyn Publications, 2001)
- Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, 1998)
- John Mundahl, *Sunrise of Joy: The Lost Darshans of Swami Kripalu* (Rhinebeck, NY: Red Elixir in association with Epigraph Books, 2012)
- Richard Faulds, *Kripalu Yoga: A Guide to Practice On and Off the Mat* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2006)
- Richard Faulds, *Sayings of Swami Kripalu* (Greenville, VA, Peaceable Kingdom Books, 2004)
- Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Kundalini Tantra* (Munger, Bihar, India, Yoga Publications Trust, 2003)

Notes