

Classical yoga: *Stilling the body, stilling the mind*

This is the teaching of yoga. Yoga is the cessation of the turnings of thought. When thought ceases, the spirit stands in its true identity as observer to the world.

-- Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* 1:1-3

The aim of yoga is to eliminate the control that material nature exerts over the human spirit, to rediscover through introspective practice... a state of perfect equilibrium and absolute spiritual calm.

-- Barbara Stoler Miller, translator of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yoga Sutras*

By stilling all thought, meditation removes all objects of awareness. Awareness can therefore now be aware only of itself... This is the final goal of yoga and thus of human existence.

-- Edwin F. Bryant, translator of the *Yoga Sutras*

IN THIS CLASS we will be studying the most important text of classical yoga, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. This ancient text is revered and studied in yogic traditions both in India and in the west. Scholars believe that it was written in the 3rd century CE, but the teachings contained in it were probably passed down orally for centuries before its composition. Although Patanjali draws heavily on early Buddhist teachings and practices, his worldview is most closely aligned with Samkhya. In these sutras, the theoretical cosmology of Samkhya is grounded in practical techniques intended to lead the yogi to liberation. For Patanjali, the path to liberation involves disentangling (or *unyoking!*) the inner Witness from its involvement with the material world.

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS:

READ this excerpt from the *Yoga Sutras*.

READ "Close Encounters With Mind" by Stephen Cope: A psychotherapist/yoga teacher offers his understanding and experience of Patanjali's first three sutras.

SIT QUIETLY FOR AT LEAST 30 MINUTES. Turn off your cellphone, close your door... do whatever is necessary to ensure you won't be interrupted. Choose one thing to pay attention to: your breath, a tree on the far horizon, a flower a few feet in front of you. Set an alarm, focus on your object, and don't get up until the alarm goes off!

OPTIONAL:

READ a description of the goals of yoga according to Edwin Bryant, a contemporary scholar/practitioner who recently published a commentary on the *Yoga Sutras*.