

Invocation to Patanjali

Patanjali who compiled the Yoga sutras (around 200-300 C.E) is also credited with some work on medicine (eighth century B.C.E) and a treaty on Sanskrit grammar (third century B.C.). Thus, in the invocation he is given credit for purifying body, mind and speech.

**Yogena cittasya padena vacam
Malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena
Yopa karot tam pravaram muninam
Patanjalim pranjalir anato 'smi**

**Abahu - perushakaram
Sankha - cakrasi - dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam
Pranamami Patanjalinam
Hari AUM**

Translation by Geeta Iyengar

To purify the mind (chitta) Patanjali gave us
Yoga, to purify our use of words (pada) and
speech (vaca) he gave us a commentary on
grammar
To remove the impurities (mala) of the body he
gave us the science of medicine (vaidyakena)
Let me go near the one who has given all these
things
With my hands folded in front of my chest, to
the noblest sage Patanjali, I bow

*Then follows a description of what Patanjali looks
like:*

From the waist up to the head he has the shape
(karam) of a human being (purusha)
In his hands he is holding a conch (sankha) and
a disc (chakra)
The top of his head (sirsa) which is white
(svetam) is crowned by a thousand headed
(cobra)- because he is the incarnation of
Adishesa-
I bow down (pranam) to Patanjali.



Each symbolic element reminds the yogi that the purpose of his life is to turn the mind inward and guide it towards illumination, liberation and Self-realization.

Patanjali's Symbolic Form

According to legend, Patanjali was born fully self-realized when the aged yogini Gonika, praying for a son to whom to impart her wisdom, offered a handful of water to the Sun God. A tiny snake fell into the water and then took human form, whom she named *Pata* ("fallen") - *anjali* ("hands folded in prayer").

Patanjali is depicted as having the upper body of a human and the lower body of a coiled serpent. The three and a half coils represent the *triguna* (*sattva, rajas and tamas*) and the *gunatita*, the transcended state that lies beyond the influence of the *gunas*; *kaivalya*, liberation, through the purification of body, mind and speech; the three types of afflictions (diseases of the bodily elements, genetic and self inflicted) that may be overcome through the practice of yoga and the three syllables of the sacred *mantra* AUM.

Patanjali is considered to be the incarnation of Adhishesa, the cobra who is the seat of Lord Vishnu the creator of the universe. It is said he took birth at three different times to give us the science of medicine, grammar and yoga to improve ourselves.

The Hood of the Thousand Headed Cobra:

The hood assures the protection of the Lord when the yogin surrenders to God with his palms in *namaskara*. As the hood turns inward, so does the *citta*, consciousness, involute to concentrate only on the sight of the soul (*atma darsana*). The thousand heads are the multitude of thoughts directed into a single pointed meditation. They also represent the multitude of ways in which Patanjali guides the yogin. The cobra's white color signifies *sattvic* purity.

The Crown : Patanjali's crown represents sovereignty, the command that comes with *sattvic* illumination when the will is unimpeded by the obstacles of yoga.

The Four Arms : These represent the four aspects of the psyche: *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahamkara* (ego), and *citta* (consciousness).

The Hands in Namaskara : Joining the two palms in the *atmanjali mudra*, as when greeting another, recognizes the universal soul in each of us, and signifies that we bow to that shared soul. Each palm represents the separate *jivatman*, the individual soul. The five fingers are associated with the *panca kosas*, the five nested sheaths of the *sarira* (body): *annamaya kosa* (structural), *pranamaya kosa* (physiological), *manomaya kosa* (psychological), *vijnanamaya kosa* (intellectual) and *anandamaya kosa* (spiritual bliss).

The 3-1/2 Coils : The coils represent the divine *kundalini* energy that lays dormant and coiled at the *muladhara cakra*. When awakened, it

winds up through the body three and a half times from the base of the spine to the top of the head, at the *sahasra cakra*, the thousand petaled lotus. Through the discipline of yoga to remove the obstacles, nature's energy (*Prakrti sakti*) is able to flow freely for the purpose of realization.

The three coils also refer to three major *nadis* (channels of subtle energy): the lunar *ida* on the left and the solar *pingala* on the right, both of which feed the *susumna* in the center. The divine *citra nadi*, which originates at the heart and extends to the head, is represented by the half coil.

Patanjali uses three weapons, a conch, a disc, and a sword, to restrain the *citta vrttis*, the movements of consciousness, remove the obstacles and eradicate the afflictions

The Sankha (Conch): It calls practitioners to lead a pure and noble life and to seek the Self within. It also alerts the practitioner to be ready to face the inevitable obstacles and afflictions of yoga practice

The Cakra (Discus): It is used to destroy evil actions and to protect right against wrong. Krishna also used the discus as a weapon of enlightenment to cut off the heads of the *tamasic* demons.

The Asi (Sword): It is tucked in the waist to destroy *avidya*, spiritual ignorance and cut the arrogance of *asmita* (egoism or pride) that covers the pure being