

To the noblest of sages, Patanjali,
who gave us yoga for serenity of mind,
grammar for purity of speech and
medicine for the perfection of the body,
I salute.

I salute before Patanjali whose upper
body has a human form, whose arms
hold a conch, and disc and a sword,
who is crowned by a thousand headed
cobra. Oh incarnation of Adisesa my
humble salutations to thee.



Yogena cittasya padena vacam
Malam sarirasyaca vaidyakena
Yopakarottam prvaram muninam
Patanjalim pranjaliranato'smi
Abahu purusakaram
Sankha cakrasi dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam
Pranamami Patanjalinam
Hari Hey Om

Exploring the Invocation to Patanjali

By Peggy Cady

I'm not someone who chants. Don't get me wrong; I'm not against chanting. If I feel compelled to chant, I like to understand what I'm saying and why I am doing it. Especially when the chant is in a language I don't understand. What spirits am I invoking?

At the beginning of yoga class we often chant the Invocation to Patanjali. We do a call-and-response chant with the teacher. The first time I went to a class, it happened – we chanted. I didn't know what it was all about. Was this some quasi-religious ritual? Did I want to do this? I decided to wait and listen. Respectfully. The next time I hummed along. (It was kind of catchy.) After that I maybe repeated the few syllables I could grasp. It was in Sanskrit – who speaks Sanskrit?

Being curious, I finally raised my hand one day and asked what it was all about. I'm glad I asked.

In chanting the Invocation we are taking a moment to acknowledge and pay respect the ancient roots of Iyengar Yoga, the teachings which have been handed down over the centuries and the instructors from whose experience and wisdom we benefit.

Starting the class with the chant is a way to symbolize that we are leaving our regular daily life behind, letting go of our concerns and giving ourselves over to the practice of yoga. It is both a physical and aural stimulus; we hear the sounds and feel the vibrations in our body. We begin to tune into ourselves.

Now that I've been taking classes for a few years, I can appreciate taking the time for the Invocation. I really do value the lessons, the teachers, the volunteers and what yoga has done for me. I love leaving work, family and all the daily crises behind and tuning in to this special, deep focus and letting go.

Here's my exploration of the Invocation and Patanjali. I found out what it means *and* how to pronounce the words. There's even a link where you can play an audio file of Mr. Iyengar chanting the Invocation.

So, as to this fellow Patanjali, he is believed to have lived between 200 B.C. and 450 A.D. That's a long time span. He became a mythical figure with legendary qualities, and the research is sketchy on whether or not he was one person or several different people. He is credited with "purifying body, mind and speech" with his writings on medicine, ayurveda and grammar. He is particularly known for codifying the Yoga Sutras, 196 aphorisms in Sanskrit, from which the modern practice of yoga is derived. Previously these teachings had been handed down orally. Patanjali's writings have had resonance and relevance with readers through the centuries and have been translated many times.

"The Sutras laid out a system of practice by which one can attain a pure state free of illusion. The practice begins with the adoption of a fivefold ethic (*yama*), ... – nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, sexual restraint, and non-attachment. It is followed by the adoption of five virtues (*niyama*) – purity, contentment,

*The first time I went to a class, it happened...
we chanted.*

austerity, study, and dedication. These practices inhibit the negative influences of being in the world. After adopting a lifestyle centered on *yama* and *niyama*, one begins the step-by-step adoption of the *asanas* (postures), breath control, control over the sense, concentration, and meditation, each of which should lead to the goal of *samadhi* (variously described as absorption or liberation).”¹

B.K.S. Iyengar translated and commented on the philosophy of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* in his book *Light On the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. The Iyengar tradition and yoga practice are grounded in these teachings. Through this practice we can transform ourselves to gain physical health, vitality, mental clarity, wisdom, emotional serenity and poise, “and attain the goal of yoga: *kaivalya*, liberation from the bondage of worldly desires and actions, and union with the Divine.”²

What follows are two articles by Geeta Iyengar, about the Invocation to Patanjali. The first is a translation and comments on the Invocation itself. The second article is from a teacher training paper, which discusses the symbolism of the Patanjali statue. (You’ll want to stay on the good side of him.) ॐ

1 Majumdar, Sachindra Kumar. *Introduction to Yoga Principles and Practice*. Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1976.

Patanjali. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: A New Translation and Commentary*. Edited by Georg Feuerstein. Folkstone, UK: Dawson, 1979. www.answers.com/topic/pata-jali#ixzz11J5vmvVM

2 B.K.S. Iyengar. *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Thorsons/Harper Collins, cover notes. London, UK: 1996.

Invocation to Patanjali Phonetic pronunciation

Yo-gay-nuh chih-tah-syuh pah-day-nuh vah-chahm

Mah-lahm shah-ree-rah-syuh chuh vy-dyuh-kay-nuh

Yo-pa kar-oh-tahm prah-vah-rahm moo-nee-nahm

Pah-tahn-jah-lim prahn-jah-leer ah-nah-toe-smee

A-bah-hoo poo-roo-shah-kar-ahm

Shahn-kah chah-krah-see dar-ee-nahm

Sah-hah-srah sheer-ah-sahm shvay-tahm

Prah-nuh-mah-mee pah-tahn-ja-lim

Har-ri hey Om

NOTE: THERE IS A RECORDING OF B.K.S. IYENGAR RECITING THE INVOCATION AT WWW.IYSSB.COM/MISC.HTML (SCROLL DOWN THE PAGE).

Geeta Iyengar’s Comments and Translation



The two *slokas* (verses) that we chant to invoke Lord Patanjali begin the *Bhojavritti*, Bhoj’s commentary on the Yoga Sutras. It says, first of all, that Lord Patanjali is considered to be the incarnation of Adhishesha, the cobra, which is the seat for the Lord Vishnu, the very creator of this world. It is said

he took birth three different times, giving three different sciences for people to improve themselves. The first is yoga.

yogena cittasya padena vacam

To purify the mind (*citta*), purify the consciousness, Patanjali gave the science of yoga (*yogena*) to us. To purify our use of words (*pada*) and speech (*vacca*), he gave a commentary on grammar to us, so that our use of words and way of speaking is clarified, distinct and pure.

malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena

To remove the impurities (*malam*) of the body (*sarira*), he gave us the science of medicine (*vaidyakena*).

yopakarottam pravaram muninam

Let me go near the one who has given these things to us.

patanjalin pranjalir anato’smi

Let me bow down my head with my folded hands to Lord Patanjali

Then after knowing the work of this Lord, the second stanza says what Lord Patanjali looks like. To do any meditation first the form has to be in front of the eyes.

abahu purusakaram

From the hand up to the head he has the shape (*karam*) of a human (*purusa*).

sankha carkasi dharinam

In his hand he is holding the conch (*sankha*) and disc (*cakra*)

sahasra sirasam svetam

On top of his head (*sirasam*) he has got a thousand (*sahasra*) hoods of the cobra, because he is the incarnation of Adishesha, the greatest cobra. *Svetam* means white.

pranamami patanjalin

I bow down to Patanjali

We chant so that at the very beginning that feeling of sanctification comes from inside, with the feeling of surrendering oneself, because nothing can be learned in this world unless you have the humility to learn. So the moment you think of



And you can't learn anything unless you come down; if you think you are on the top and you know everything, then you are not a learner at all. In that sense, the chanting helps.

the Lord [Patanjali] at the beginning of doing a practice, you know that you are very small in front of that greatest soul. Once that is understood then the other problems which always arise while practicing, mainly concerned with the ego, will be affected. You know that you are “coming down” to learn something. And you can't learn anything unless you come down; if you think you are on the top and you know everything, then you are not a learner at all. In that sense, the chanting helps.

We decided to chant these two *slokas* from the very beginning. When Gururji asked us to practice yoga we started with this recitation. But we didn't do it in the classes because when people came as beginners, they had the idea that it is a religious prayer of concern only to Hindus. It took people a little while to understand. Whenever we had some public program, a celebration such as Diwali or Gururji's birthday, we would recite these prayers. People started taking interest and asking us what the prayers mean. When it was understood, everybody accepted it. For several years now we have been chanting these prayers before classes. ॐ

ADAPTED FROM AN INTERVIEW GIVEN BY GEETA AT RIMYI IN 1992 DURING THE CANADA INTENSIVE, CONDUCTED BY MARGO KITCHEN, VIDEOTAPED BY HEATHER MALEK, TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED BY JUDITH M. IN CONSULTATION WITH MARLINE MILLER. ADAPTED BY FRANCIS RICKS.

Aum	name of God
Yoga	union of man with God
citta	mind
Pada	word
Vacha	speech
Mala	impurities
Sharira	body
Vaidyak	the science of medicine
Yah	one who
Apakarot	removed
Tam	him
Pravaram	the greatest
Muni	the seer
Pranjali	folding the palms
Anata	bowing down
Asmi	am
Abahu	arms up to the thighs
Purushakaram	human shape
Shankha	conch
Chakra	disc, a circular weapon
Asi	sword
Dharinam	holding
Sahasra	thousand
Shirasam	head
Svetam	white
Pranamami	I am bowing down and paying respect
Patanjalim	to Patanjali
Hari	Lord Vishnu

Teacher Training: The Patanjali Invocation

By Geeta S. Iyengar

THE FULL TRANSCRIPT OF THIS TALK IS PUBLISHED IN *YOGADHARA*. THIS TEXT IS FROM WWW.IYENGARYOGAAMSTERDAM.COM, TEACHERS TRAINING PROGRAM DOCUMENT 2009.PDF

Now let me tell you about the Patanjali invocation and the meaning of the invocation and their symbolism. The invocation begins with Āum. Āum is the first primordial sound, an *adi nada*, a melodious, sonorous and sublime sound. The three syllables Ā, U, M represent the entire range of sound and creation. They represent the waking dream and sleep states of consciousness. The crescent symbolizes the transcendental state. Āum is *pranava* which means exalted, unsurpassable praise of the supreme principle, the divinity. According to Patanjali it symbolises Isvara, the divinity “*tasya vacakah pranavah.*” Being the source of all energies Āum is uttered as an auspicious beginning. No sacred activity will be complete, profound and perfect without effecting the supreme grace and Āum is the greatest invocation to seek that grace.

The invocation we chant first is as follows:
To the noblest of sages, Patanjali, who gave us yoga for serenity of mind, grammar for purity of speech and medicine for the perfection of the body, I salute.

The second part describes the statue of Patanjali:
I salute before Patanjali whose upper body has a human form, whose arms hold a conch, and disc and a sword, who is crowned by a thousand headed cobra. Oh incarnation of Adisesa my humble salutations to thee.

The authors of [these] invocation are actually unknown. It was never the custom in those days to mention the name of oneself as an author or a writer. However, some traditional books mention that *abahu purusakaram* was written by King Bhojadeva in 1,100 AD, author of *Rajamartanda Vrtti*, a commentary on the Yoga Sutras.

Each aspect of the statue of Patanjali carries meaning like the intricately worded sutras.

When one gazes at the idol of Sage Patanjali one sees the three and a half coils below the navel. The three coils indicate the *Pranava Aum*, a mystical symbol conveying the concept of God as generator, organizer and destroyer. It signifies him as omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. *Aum* is composed of three syllables, A, U and M with a crescent and a dot on the top.

The three completed coils symbolize the syllables and the half coil, the crescent. It also represents the three *gunas* of *prakrti*, namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* and an aspirant aiming at the *trigunatita* state, which is a transcendent state. Sage Patanjali invites our attention towards the three types of afflictions, namely *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidivika*, which are to be conquered by following the path of yoga. The three coils indicate that he is a master of Yoga, Grammar and *Ayurveda*. The half coil indicates the reaching of the state of *kaivalya*.

The conch, in the left hand, signifies the state of alertness, attentiveness and readiness to face obstacles, which are inevitable in the practice of Yoga. In olden days the conch was blown as a warning call to get ready to face disaster or calamities as it is done nowadays with sirens. It is also a symbol of *jnana*.

The disc, in the right hand, signifies the destruction of ignorance with supreme effort and is a symbol of protection. The sword, tucked in the waist, indicates the cutting of the ego, pride or sense of "I" which is the main obstacle covering pure being. It is a sword of *jnana* to vanquish *jnana*. These three weapons also indicate the restraint of mental fluctuations, removal of obstacles and the eradication of afflictions through the practice of Yoga.

The hood above the head is an assurance of protection from Adisesa, King of serpents. This protection always remains for the practitioner, provided he surrenders to the Lord, which is signified in the *atmanjali mudra*, hands folded in *namaskara*.

The *Bhagavatam* narrates the story of the birth of Lord Krsna. Since Vasudeva was alerted by the Gods in heaven, that his eighth child Krsna will be killed by Kamsa, he takes the infant Krsna from Mathura to Gokul to protect him for the demon Kamsa. The river Yamuna was flooded as it was raining cats and dogs. At that juncture Adisesa protected Vasudeva and the infant Krsna by holding the hood over them like an umbrella and made a way, right in the middle of the river, so that Vasudeva could cross the river easily. Lord Patanjali indicates with his hood, that he is our protector, provided we destroy the evils hidden within us by the sword of Yoga, purifying ourselves with yogic *Sadhana*.

The thousand headed cobra, *sahasra sirasam svetam*, indicates that Patanjali guides us in a thousand ways by showing us the several methods of practice and the approach to find the Soul within.

The idol of Patanjali shows him as half-man and half-serpent. The human form indicates the individuality of man, since he has been endowed with intelligence to use his own efforts to reach the goal. The form of the serpent suggests the motion and continuity of *Sadhana*, which cannot end until the goal is reached.

Patanjali guides us to move like a serpent, intensely, silently and fast on the path of Yoga and to be a *tivrasamvegin*, the ultimate type as a pupil. If you have understood the significance, offer your prayers with a mind of prayerfulness so that you know what Sage Patanjali means by *tajjapah tadarthabhavanam*, that means – recite the prayers knowingly, repeatedly, devotedly.

Let me now give you some of the qualities of Patanjali, according to his works. Patanjali is an immortal, versatile personality, a master of diverse knowledge with divine qualities. He is a *dharmin*, virtuous and pious in deeds, a *tapasvin*, a *bhaktin*, a *sannyasin* and a devout practitioner. He is an artist, a skilled dancer, a scientist, a mathematician, an astronomer, a scholar, a physicist, a psychologist, a biologist, a neurologist, a surgeon, a skilled physician and an educationist par excellence. He is an incarnation of glorious qualities, in *sraddha*, *virya* and *vairagya*. He is an expert in psychological and chronological time, as well as in the science of gravity. He transcends the *purusarthas* namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*, as well as *prakriti*. He has unsurpassable memory and is well versed with nature and its functions. Yet he remains a pure being, a perfect *siddhan*, a realized Soul. All these qualities suffuse the life of Patanjali.

This is not an exaggeration. The *siddhis* mentioned in the *Vibhuti Pada*, relate to various aspects of existence, cosmos, body, mind and bear the stamp of his authentic and profound experience. Let me conclude this immortal journey, dear *sadhakas*, with an *anjali*, a sublime offering. The faith in ourselves should grow with understanding. When the ego

begins to dissolve, the eyes begin to see the greatness of the inspired teachings of one of the most original thinkers who ever lived. We are mortals and Patanjali is an immortal Soul. Just as a river does not retain its identity while merging into the sea, let us through our practices merge into the river of burning light of Yoga, passed onto us by Sri Patanjali.

Hari om tat sat. ॐ

Patanjali guides us to move like a serpent, intensely, silently and fast on the path of Yoga and to be a tivasamvegin, the ultimate type as a pupil.

Why Do We Chant Om?

by **Krisna Zawaduk**

Om is a sacred syllable. It is called *pranava*. Om represents divinity; it is the sound of creation, the sound that was made when the Universe was created. Georg Feuerstein writes that "It [Om] is generally regarded as the primordial sound that reverberates throughout space and time at the most subtle level of cosmic existence." Sound is vibration, and is at the source of all creation. "God is beyond vibration," B.K.S. Iyengar says, "but vibration, being the subtlest form of His creation, is the nearest we can get to him in the physical world."

Om's history is long indeed. Initially, it was a secretive and sacred practice that was only passed from teacher to disciple by word of mouth. Since then, its importance has been mentioned in many scriptures such as the *Upanishads*, *The Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*.

Om is meant to be chanted with its meaning in mind. The sound OM is meant to resonate within, to take us inwardly. The chanting of this most simple mantra has an effect on our nervous system and focuses our inner environment. Om is actually made up of

three distinct parts/sounds: "A", "U" and "M". Thus, it is often spelled AUM. These parts refer to the past, present and future, the states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. It refers to speech, mind and the breath of life plus the mother, father and preceptor.

We chant Om at the beginning of class so that we can connect to the Universe, to God and to our higher Self. It develops humility. We use Om to sanctify and purify our practice. We produce the sound of our own Om, which merges with the Oms of others. This is symbolic of our interconnection with each other as human beings. ॐ

Om chanting links:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdukkTAJE0U&feature=related

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRj9SFQqwXY&feature=related

For an interesting listen to the sound of the Big Bang, click this link. (Audio simulation of the sound waves present in the first 760,000 years of the birth of the universe):

<http://faculty.washington.edu/jcramer/BBSound.html>

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