

Invocation to Patañjali

Yogena cittasya padena vacham
Malam sarirasya cha vaidyakena
Yopakarottam pravaram muninam
Patañjalim pranajaliranato'smi
Abuhu purusakaram
Sankha chakrasi dharinam
Sahasra sirsam svetam
Pranamami Patañjali
Hari Om

Translation:

Let us bow before the noblest of sages Patañjali,
Who gave Yoga for serenity and sanctity of mind,
Grammar for clarity and purity of speech, and
Medicine for perfection of health.
Let us prostrate before Patañjali,
An incarnation of Adisesa,
Whose upper body has a human form
Whose arms hold a conch and disc, and
Who is crowned by a thousand headed cobra.

The life of the sage Patañjali has been the dedication of a great deal of study, and yet it is still the identity of the author or authors who as Patañjali is still unknown. Patañjali is recognised as the author of the most well-known Sanskrit text the *Yoga Sutras*, a text on Yoga theory and practice that forms the basis for most modern day yoga. The *Yoga Sutras of Patañjali* as they are now known were written between 2nd and 4th century CE. They are a collection of 196 Sanskrit *Sutras* or aphorisms on the Yoga, the science of purification of the human body, speech and mind. Patañjali is also credited with ancient treatise on Sanskrit grammar and also medicine.

Patañjali is considered in the Hindu tradition to be the incarnation of Adhishesha, the cobra, which is the seat for the God Vishnu, the creator of the world. It is said to have been birthed three different times, giving three different sciences for humanity to learn and develop. The first is Yoga.

“Together Patañjali’s three works deal with man’s [woman’s] development as a whole, in thought, speech and action. His treatise on Yoga is called Yoga Darśana. Darśana means ‘vision of the soul’ and also ‘mirror’. The effect of Yoga is to reflect the thought and actions of the aspirant as in a mirror. The practitioner observes the reflections of his [/her] thoughts, mind, consciousness and actions, and corrects himself [/herself]. This process guides him [/her] towards the observation of his inner Self. Patañjali’s works are followed by Yogis to this day in their effort to develop a redefined language, a cultured body and civilised mind.” (BKS Iyengar, Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali, Thorsons, UK, 1996 p.2)

“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.” (Geeta Iyengar)

The orientation of the mind is crucial before starting one’s practice or *sadhana*. There is a process of letting go. A surrender. Relinquishing all those things that are outside your control so can sit with what is, the present moment, with the body and the breath. This brings a neutrality of the mind and with that, tranquility. Then there is space to prepare yourself for the practice.

Then the chant of the Om can begin. It further evokes the tranquil space. Rinsing the mind with the exhale and breathing in new life and energy (prana) with the inhale. It is made up of the sounds *Ā*, *U*, *M*. Prashant Iyengar says *“Ā, when recited flushes the abdominal cavity, U flushes the region of the heart, while M flushes the brain”*. *ĀUM* is regarded as the seed of all words and all sound originates from the sacred sound.”

Geeta Iyengar says: *“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 symbolises 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 sound of the chant, when you are familiar with it, has the immediate affect of bringing you into the yoga room, to become present and open to the practice yet to come. Here, it is the significance of language, in the form

of words and meaning, that hold the unique significance. The AUM (Om) begins the chant and we repeat it three times. The collective sound and vibration connects all of us in the room. As we close our eyes and begin to listen we are immediately brought to an environment where we can feel. This contradicts our normal state of having to use our eyes to perform. We are programmed to achieve and to just keep doing and doing.

There is a strong relationship to chanting and spiritual practice. When chanted melodically the language and rhythm can have transformative and enlightening effects. It also helps to focus the mind, voice, ears and heart, so the chanting can nourish us.

The best thing is it brings people together as the meaning of the “chant” is “community”.

So here is the chant with the phonetics so you can practice it at home...

yogena cittasya padena vacam

(yo-gay-nuh chih-tah-syuh pah-day-nuh vah-chahm)

malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena

(mah-lahm shah-ree-rah-syuh chuh vy-dyuh-kay-nuh)

yopakarottam pravaram muninam

(yo-pah kar-oh-tahm prah-vah-rahm moo-nee-nahm)

patanjalin pranjaliranato'smi

(pah-than-jah-lim prahn-jah-leer ah-nah-to-smee)

abahu purusakaram

(ah-bah-hoo-poo-roo-shah-kar-ahm)

sankha cakrasi dharinam

(shahn-kah chah-krah-see dar-ee-nahm)

sahasra sirasam svetam

(sah-hah-srah sheer-ah-sahm shvay-tahm)

pranamami patanjalin

(prah-nuh-mah-mee pah-tahn-jah-lim)

hari om