

## Chant To Patanjali

The sage Patanjali is the author of the Yoga Sutras, one of the classical yoga philosophy texts. At the beginning of many Iyengar classes, we chant this invocation to Patanjali to honor the ancient tradition of yoga and the lineage of yoga that we practice.

Geeta Iyengar describes another reason for reciting the chant: "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." ( From an interview of Geeta Iyengar by Margo Kitchen, RIMYI, 1992.)

<i>Yogena cittasya padena vacam malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena yopakarottam pravaram muninam patanjalin pranajaliranato'smi abahu purusakaram sankha cakrasi dharinamsahasra sirasam svetam pranamami patanjalin.</i>	Let us bow before the noblest of sages Patanjali, 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 Patanjali, an incarnation of Adisesa, whose upper body has a human form, whose arms hold a conch and a disc, and who is crowned by a thousand-headed cobra.
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## 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 Hay Om

# 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 cakrasi 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.

## **Hari OM**

all that is / supreme truth

# 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, 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)."

# 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.