

JNANA YOGA

“This deep sense of peace that I feel from practising yoga... what is it and how can I feel it more?” In order to answer these questions, we turn to the path of Jnana Yoga.” - Tracey Cook

Through the practice of yoga, we learn that yoga is not just the physical practice. We discover that it reaches the mind and starts to make us think about the wisdom that goes far beyond the mind. A wisdom that can only be felt as the truth which lies deep in our hearts. For many of us we begin to have a deeper inquiry into the nature of being. We begin to question more: “What is this feeling I experience when practising yoga that words can’t quite explain?” or “This deep sense of peace that I feel from practising yoga... what is it and how can I feel it more?” To answer these questions, we turn to the path of Jnana Yoga.

Jnana is Sanskrit for “knowledge or wisdom” and Jnana Yoga is the path of attaining knowledge of the true nature of reality through the practice of meditation, self-inquiry, and contemplation. Jnana Yoga can be defined as the “awareness of absolute consciousness,” and is a comprehensive practice of self-study (Svadyaya).

In Jnana yoga, the mind is used to inquire into its own nature and to transcend the mind’s identification with its thoughts and ego. The fundamental goal of Jnana yoga is to become free from self-limiting thoughts and perceptions, and to achieve the union of the inner Self (Atman) with the oneness of all life (Brahman). To really study ourself we must look at relationship with the veils we create around our perceptions, world views and concepts. To do this we must use the techniques of self questioning and reflection. “Jnana Yoga, or the science of the Self, is not a subject that can be understood and realised through mere intellectual study, reasoning, discussion or arguments. It is the most difficult of all sciences.” – Swami Sivananda

The Four Pillars of Knowledge (sadhana chatushtaya) are the prescribed steps toward freedom in Jnana Yoga. These practices build upon each other and should be practiced in sequential order. Even if you don’t have the goal of achieving ultimate freedom, practicing these techniques will cultivate insight and understanding of life your life and being.

- **Viveka** (discernment, discrimination) is a deliberate, continuous intellectual effort to distinguish between the real and the unreal, the permanent and the temporary, and the Self and not-Self.
- **Vairagya** (dispassion, detachment) is cultivating non-attachment or indifference toward the temporal objects of worldly possessions and the ego-mind. “It is only when the mind is absolutely free from the attachment of all sorts that true knowledge begins to dawn.” – Swami Sivananda.
- **Shatsampat** (six virtues) are six mental practices to stabilise the mind and emotions, and to further develop the ability to see beyond the illusions of maya.
- **Shama** (tranquility, calmness) is the ability to keep the mind peaceful, through moderating its reaction to external stimuli.

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- **Dama** (restraint, control) is the strengthening of the mind to be able to resist the control of the senses, and the training of the senses to be used only as instruments of the mind.
- **Uparati** (withdrawal, renunciation) is the abandonment of all activities that are not one's Dharma (Duty). A simple lifestyle is followed that contains no worldly distractions from the spiritual path.
- **Titiksha** (endurance, forbearance) is the tolerance of external non-conductive situations that are commonly considered to produce suffering, especially in extreme opposite states (success and failure, hot and cold, pleasure and pain).
- **Shraddha** (faith, trust) is a sense of certainty and belief in one's guru (teacher), the scriptures and the yogic path.
- **Samadhana** (focus, concentration) is the complete one-pointedness of the mind.
- **Mumukshutva** (longing, yearning) is an intense and passionate desire for achieving the liberation from suffering. In order to achieve liberation, one must be completely committed to the path, with such longing that all other desires fade away.

Once you have successfully practiced the four pillars (see above), then you are considered ready to begin the three core practices of Jnana Yoga. These Upanishadic teachings include sravana or "hearing," manana or "reflection," and nididhyasana or "meditation". These lead to Atma-Sakshatkara or direct realisation.

- **Sravana** is the hearing or experiencing the sacred knowledge in the ancient Vedic texts of the Upanishad. Usually, a teacher or guru will guide you through discussions on the philosophy of non-dualism. In this stage, you will read and study the Upanishads and achieve a deep understanding of the concepts of Atman and Brahman and the philosophy of non-dualism.
- **Manana** is the thinking and reflecting on these teachings of non-duality. You are expected to spend many hours thinking and contemplating on the various ideas of svadhyaya and sravana.
- **Nididhyasana** is the constant and profound meditation on the inner Self. This involves the meditation and reflection on the real meaning of the Maha-Vakyas, the primary mantras or "Great Sayings" of the Upanishads. Through the continuous focus on these seeds of wisdom, a yogi can obtain the union of thought and action, knowing and being.

The Sanskrit word "Maha" can be translated as great or mighty, and the word Vakya translates as a sentence or saying. The Maha-Vakyas are the most revered and powerful sayings in the ancient Indian scriptures of the Upanishads. The regular contemplation and meditation of the Maha-Vakyas purifies our minds, promotes introspection and insight, and leads to transcendental states of awareness.

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There are four main Maha-Vakyas but their contemplation leads one to the same realisation. They present different points of view on how to see the indivisible oneness of all things. These four aphorisms also provide the answers to the classic questions of Jnana Yoga. "who am I?, What is my purpose? What is the nature of this reality?" These can all be answered by meditating on the Maha-Vakyas.

The Four Maha-Vakyas

- Prajnanam Brahma–Brahman (Ultimate Reality) is supreme consciousness.
- Aham Brahmasmi–I am Brahman (the Supreme Self)
- Tat Tvam Asi–Thou art that.
- Ayam Atma Brahma–Atman (True Self) is Brahman (Ultimate Reality).

Jnana Bhumikas: The Seven Stages of Wisdom

Swami Sivananda describes seven stages that the yogi will progress through while engaged in the practice of Jnana Yoga. Use this as a roadmap to gauge your progression and steer yourself skilfully towards your destination. You will need to overcome the challenges in each stage to move forward towards becoming one with the higher self.

- **Subheccha (good desire).** This beginning stage requires one to study the Sanskrit texts and be passionate about discovering the truth. One should strive towards non-attraction or indifference towards all sensual objects.
- **Vicharana (Philosophical inquiry).** The second stage involves questioning, contemplation and reflection on the principles of non-dualism.
- **Tanumanasi (Subtlety of mind).** This third stage assumes you have understood all the necessary knowledge. Tanu means thread, and in this step, the mind "becomes thin like a thread" as you let go of all external stimuli to focus all of your attention inwards.
- **Sattvapatti (Attainment of Light).** In the fourth stage, the world appears like a dream and your karma begins to dissolve. A yogi will view all things in the universe equally in this stage.
- **Asamsakti (Inner Detachment).** In this stage, you become detached and selfless and will experience a deep states of bliss. You will feel no difference between waking and dream states.
- **Padartha Bhavana (Spiritual Vision).** In the sixth stage, you begin to see the truth and understand the nature of Brahman (Ultimate Reality).
- **Turiya (Supreme Freedom).** During the final stage, you are united in superconsciousness and attain Moksha.

There is so much practice to be done...they say it takes 12 years minimum of daily rigorous practice! But I hope the above gives you a little more insight into Jnana Yoga.