

GLOSSARY OF YOGA TERMS IN SANSKRIT

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This Glossary is now available as an [ebook](#) together with the Sanskrit in *devanâgarî* script and both academic and simplified transliteration. The booklet also includes mantras, invocations, the names of principal postures, and anatomical terms used in Yoga scriptures.

The following Sanskrit words are important terms of the Yoga tradition.

If you would like to learn more key terms, you may want to refer to Georg Feuerstein's *Shambhala Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*.

The present glossary uses a simplified form of transliterating the 49 (or 50) Sanskrit sounds. Please note that the letters â, î, and û are long vowel sounds.

Also, please bear in mind that the Sanskrit alphabet does not have capital letters.

A

Abhyâsa — practice; cf. *vairâgya*

Âcârya (sometimes spelled **Acharya** in English) — a preceptor, instructor; cf. *guru*

Advaita (“nonduality”) — the truth and teaching that there is only One Reality (*âtman*, *brahman*), especially as found in the *Upanishads*; see also Vedânta

Ahamkâra (“I-maker”) — the individuation principle, or ego, which must be transcended; cf. *asmitâ*; see also *buddhi*, *manas*

Ahimsâ (“nonharming”) — the single most important moral discipline (*yama*)

Âkâsha (“ether/space”) — the first of the five material elements of which the physical universe is composed; also used to designate “inner” space, that is, the space of consciousness (called *cid-âkâsha*)

Amrita (“immortal/immortality”) — a designation of the deathless Spirit (*âtman*, *purusha*); also the nectar of immortality that oozes from the psychoenergetic center at the crown of the head (see *sahasrâra-cakra*) when it is activated and transforms the body into a “divine body” (*divya-deha*)

Ânanda (“bliss”) — the condition of utter joy, which is an essential quality of the ultimate Reality (*tattva*)

Anga (“limb”) — a fundamental category of the yogic path, such as *âsana*, *dhâranâ*, *dhyâna*, *niyama*, *prânâyâma*, *pratyâhâra*, *samâdhi*, *yama*; also the body (*deha*, *sharîra*)

Âranyaka (“that which pertains to the forest”) — an early type of ritual text used by forest-dwelling renunciators; cf. *Brahmana*, *Upanishad*, *Veda*

Arjuna (“White”) — one of the five Pandava princes who fought in the great war depicted in the *Mahâbhârata*, disciple of the God-man Krishna whose teachings can be found in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*

Âsana (“seat”) — a physical posture (see also *anga*, *mudrâ*); the third limb (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eightfold path (*astha-anga-yoga*); originally this meant only meditation posture, but subsequently, in Hatha-Yoga, this aspect of the yogic path was greatly developed

Âshrama (“that where effort is made”) — a hermitage; also a stage of life, such as *brahmacarya*, householder, forest dweller, and complete renouncer (*samnyâsin*)

Ashta-anga-yoga, ashtânga-yoga (“eight-limbed union”) — the eightfold Yoga of Patanjali, consisting of moral discipline (*yama*), self-restraint (*niyama*), posture (*âsana*), breath control (*prânâyâma*), sensory inhibition (*pratyâhâra*), concentration (*dhâranâ*), meditation (*dhyâna*), and ecstasy (*samâdhi*), leading to liberation (*kaivalya*)

Asmitâ (“I-am-ness”) — a concept of Patanjali’s eight-limbed Yoga, roughly synonymous with *ahamkâra*

Âtman (“self”) — the transcendental Self, or Spirit, which is eternal and superconscious; our true nature or identity; sometimes a distinction is made between the *âtman* as the individual self and the *parama-âtman* as the transcendental Self; see also *purusha*; cf. *brahman*

Avadhûta (“he who has shed [everything]”) — a radical type of renouncer (*samnyâsin*) who often engages in unconventional behavior

Avidyâ (“ignorance”) — the root cause of suffering (*duhkha*); also called *ajnâna*; cf. *vidyâ*

Âyurveda, Âyur-veda (“life science”) — one of India’s traditional systems of medicine, the other being South India’s Siddha medicine

B

Bandha (“bond/bondage”) — the fact that human beings are typically bound by ignorance (*avidyâ*), which causes them to lead a life governed by karmic habit rather than inner freedom generated through wisdom (*vidyâ*, *jnâna*)

Bhagavad-Gîtâ (“Lord’s Song”) — the oldest full-fledged Yoga book found embedded in the *Mahâbhârata* and containing the teachings on Karma-Yoga (the path of self-transcending action), Sâmkhya-Yoga (the path of discerning the principles of existence correctly), and Bhakti-Yoga (the path of devotion), as given by the God-man Krishna to Prince Arjuna on the battlefield 3,500 years or more ago

Bhâgavata-Purâna (“Ancient [Tradition] of the Bhâgavatas”) — a voluminous tenth-century scripture held sacred by the devotees of the Divine in the form of Vishnu, especially in his incarnate form as Krishna; also called *Shrîmad-Bhâgavata*

Bhakta (“devotee”) — a disciple practicing Bhakti-Yoga

Bhakti (“devotion/love”) — the love of the *bhakta* toward the Divine or the *guru* as a manifestation of the Divine; also the love of the Divine toward the devotee

Bhakti-Sûtra (“Aphorisms on Devotion”) — an aphoristic work on devotional Yoga authored by Sage Nârada; another text by the same title is ascribed to Sage Shândilya

Bhakti-Yoga (“Yoga of devotion”) — a major branch of the Yoga tradition, utilizing the feeling capacity to connect with the ultimate Reality conceived as a supreme Person (*uttama-purusha*)

Bindu (“seed/point”) — the creative potency of anything where all energies are focused; the dot (also called *tilaka*) worn on the forehead as indicative of the third eye

Bodhi (“enlightenment”) — the state of the awakened master, or *buddha*

Bodhisattva (“enlightenment being”) — in Mahayana Buddhist Yoga, the individual who, motivated by compassion (*karunâ*), is committed to achieving enlightenment for the sake of all other beings

Brahma (“he who has grown expansive”) — the Creator of the universe, the first principle (*tattva*) to emerge out of the ultimate Reality (*brahman*)

Brahmacarya (from *brahma* and *carya* “brahmic conduct”) — the discipline of chastity, which produces *ojas*

Brahman (“that which has grown expansive”) — the ultimate Reality (cf. *âtman*, *purusha*)

Brâhmana — a brahmin, a member of the highest social class of traditional Indian society; also an early type of ritual text explicating the rituals and mythology of the four *Vedas*; cf. *Âranyaka*, *Upanishad*, *Veda*

Buddha (“awakened”) — a designation of the person who has attained enlightenment (*bodhi*) and therefore inner freedom; honorific title of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, who lived in the sixth century B.C.E.

Buddhi (“she who is conscious, awake”) — the higher mind, which is the seat of wisdom (*vidyâ*, *jnâna*); cf. *manas*

C

Cakra (“wheel”) — literally, the wheel of a wagon; metaphorically, one of the psycho-energetic centers of the subtle body (*sûkshma-sharîra*); in Buddhist Yoga, five such centers are known, while in Hindu Yoga often seven or more such centers are mentioned: *mûla-âdhâra-cakra* (*mûlâdhâra-cakra*) at the base of the spine, *svadhishthâna-cakra* at the genitals, *manipura-cakra* at the navel, *anâhata-cakra* at the heart, *vishuddha-* or *vishuddhi-cakra* at the throat, *âjnâ-cakra* in the middle of the head, and *sahasrâra-cakra* at the top of the head

Cin-mudrâ (“consciousness seal”) — a common hand gesture (*mudrâ*) in meditation (*dhyâna*), which is formed by bringing the tips of the index finger and the thumb together, while the remaining fingers are kept straight

Cit (“consciousness”) — the superconscious ultimate Reality (see *âtman*, *brahman*)

Citta (“that which is conscious”) — ordinary consciousness, the mind, as opposed to *cit*

D

Darshana (“seeing”) — vision in the literal and metaphorical sense; a system of philosophy, such as the *yoga-darshana* of Patanjali; cf. *drishti*

Deva (“he who is shining”) — a male deity, such as Shiva, Vishnu, or Krishna, either in the sense of the ultimate Reality or a high angelic being

Devî (“she who is shining”) — a female deity such as Pârvatî, Lakshmî, or Râdhâ, either in the sense of the ultimate Reality (in its feminine pole) or a high angelic being

Dhâranâ (“holding”) — concentration, the sixth limb (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eight-limbed Yoga

Dharma (“bearer”) — a term of numerous meanings; often used in the sense of “law,” “lawfulness,” “virtue,” “righteousness,” “norm”

Dhyâna (“ideating”) — meditation, the seventh limb (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eight-limbed Yoga

Dîkshâ (“initiation”) — the act and condition of induction into the hidden aspects of Yoga or a particular lineage of teachers; all traditional Yoga is initiatory

Drishti (“view/sight”) — yogic gazing, such as at the tip of the nose or the spot between the eyebrows; cf. *darshana*

Duhkha (“bad axle space”) — suffering, a fundamental fact of life, caused by ignorance (*avidyâ*) of our true nature (i.e., the Self or *âtman*)

G

Gâyatrî-mantra — a famous Vedic *mantra* recited particularly at sunrise: *tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhîmahî dhiyo yo nah pracodayât*, “Let us contemplate that most excellent splendor of God Savitri so that he may inspire our visions.”

Gheranda-Samhitâ (“[Sage] Gheranda’s Compendium”) — one of three major manuals of classical Hatha-Yoga, composed in the seventeenth century; cf. *Hatha-Yoga-Pradîpikâ*, *Shiva-Samhitâ*

Goraksha (“Cow Protector”) — traditionally said to be the founding adept of Hatha-Yoga, a disciple of Matsyendra

Granthi (“knot”) — any one of three common blockages in the central pathway (*sushumnâ-nâdî*) preventing the full ascent of the serpent power (*kundalinî-shakti*); the three knots are known as *brahma-granthi* (at the lowest psychoenergetic center of the

subtle body), the *vishnu-granthi* (at the heart), and the *rudra-granthi* (at the eyebrow center)

Guna (“quality”) — a term that has numerous meanings, including “virtue”; often refers to any of the three primary “qualities” or constituents of Nature (*prakriti*): *tamas* (the principle of inertia), *rajas* (the dynamic principle), and *sattva* (the principle of lucidity)

Guru (“he who is heavy, weighty”) — a spiritual teacher; cf. *acarya*

Guru-bhakti (“teacher devotion”) — a disciple’s self-transcending devotion to the *guru*; see also *bhakti*

Guru-Gîtâ (“Guru’s Song”) — a text in praise of the *guru*, often chanted in *âshramas*

Guru-Yoga (“Yoga [relating to] the teacher”) — a yogic approach that makes the *guru* the fulcrum of a disciple’s practice; all traditional forms of Yoga contain a strong element of *guru-yoga*

H

Hamsa (“swan/gander”) — apart from the literal meaning, this term also refers to the breath (*prâna*) as it moves within the body; the individuated consciousness (*jîva*) propelled by the breath; see *jîva-âtman*; see also *parama-hamsa*

Hatha-Yoga (“Forceful Yoga”) — a major branch of Yoga, developed by Goraksha and other adepts c. 1000 C.E., and emphasizing the physical aspects of the transformative path, notably postures (*âsana*) and cleansing techniques (*shodhana*), but also breath control (*prânâyâma*)

Hatha-[Yoga-]Pradîpikâ (“Light on Hatha[-Yoga]”) — one of three classical manuals on Hatha-Yoga, authored by Svâtmârâma Yogendra in the fourteenth century

Hiranyagarbha (“Golden Germ”) — the mythical founder of Yoga; the first cosmological principle (*tattva*) to emerge out of the infinite Reality; also called Brahma

I

Idâ-nâdî (“pale conduit”) — the *prâna* current or arc ascending on the left side of the central channel (*sushumnâ-nâdî*) associated with the parasympathetic nervous system and having a cooling or calming effect on the mind when activated; cf. *pingalâ-nâdî*

Îshvara (“ruler”) — the Lord; referring either to the Creator (see Brahma) or, in Patanjali’s *yoga-darshana*, to a special transcendental Self (*purusha*)

Îshvara-pranidhâna (“dedication to the Lord”) — in Patanjali’s eight-limbed Yoga one of the practices of self-restraint (*niyama*); see also Bhakti-Yoga

J

Jaina (sometimes **Jain**) — pertaining to the *jînas* (“conquerors”), the liberated adepts of Jainism; a member of Jainism, the spiritual tradition founded by Vârdhamana Mahâvîra, a contemporary of Gautama the Buddha

Japa (“muttering”) — the recitation of *mantras*

Jīva-âtman, jīvâtman (“individual self”) — the individuated consciousness, as opposed to the ultimate Self (*parama-âtman*)

Jīvan-mukta (“he who is liberated while alive”) — an adept who, while still embodied, has attained liberation (*moksha*)

Jīvan-mukti (“living liberation”) — the state of liberation while being embodied; cf. *videha-mukti*

Jnâna (“knowledge/wisdom”) — both worldly knowledge or world-transcending wisdom, depending on the context; see also *prajnâ*; cf. *avidyâ*

Jnâna-Yoga (“Yoga of wisdom”) — the path to liberation based on wisdom, or the direct intuition of the transcendental Self (*âtman*) through the steady application of discernment between the Real and the unreal and renunciation of what has been identified as unreal (or inconsequential to the achievement of liberation)

K

Kaivalya (“isolation”) — the state of absolute freedom from conditioned existence, as explained in *ashta-anga-yoga*; in the nondualistic (*advaita*) traditions of India, this is usually called *moksha* or *mukti* (meaning “release” from the fetters of ignorance, or *avidyâ*)

Kali — a Goddess embodying the fierce (dissolving) aspect of the Divine

Kali-yuga — the dark age of spiritual and moral decline, said to be current now; *kali* does not refer to the Goddess Kali but to the losing throw of a die

Kama (“desire”) — the appetite for sensual pleasure blocking the path to true bliss (*ânanda*); the only desire conducive to freedom is the impulse toward liberation, called *mumukshutva*

Kapila (“He who is red”) — a great sage, the quasi-mythical founder of the Sâmkhya tradition, who is said to have composed the *Sâmkhya-Sûtra* (which, however, appears to be of a much later date)

Karman, karma (“action”) — activity of any kind, including ritual acts; said to be binding only so long as engaged in a self-centered way; the “karmic” consequence of one’s actions; destiny

Karma-Yoga (“Yoga of action”) — the liberating path of self-transcending action

Karunâ (“compassion”) — universal sympathy; in Buddhist Yoga the complement of wisdom (*prajnâ*)

Khecari-mudrâ (“space-walking seal”) — the Tantric practice of curling the tongue back against the upper palate in order to seal the life energy (*prâna*); see also *mudrâ*

Kosha (“casing”) — any one of five “envelopes” surrounding the transcendental Self (*âtman*) and thus blocking its light: *anna-maya-kosha* (“envelope made of food,” the

physical body), *prâna-maya-kosha* (“envelope made of life force”), *mano-maya-kosha* (“envelope made of mind”), *vijnâna-maya-kosha* (“envelope made of consciousness”), and *ânanda-maya-kosha* (“envelope made of bliss”); some older traditions regard the last *kosha* as identical with the Self (*âtman*)

Krishna (“Puller”) — an incarnation of God Vishnu, the God-man whose teachings can be found in the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* and the *Bhâgavata-Purâna*

Kumbhaka (“potlike”) — breath retention; cf. *pûraka*, *recaka*

Kundalinî-shakti (“coiled power”) — according to Tantra and Hatha-Yoga, the serpent power or spiritual energy, which exists in potential form at the lowest psycho-energetic center of the body (i.e., the *mûla-âdhâra-cakra*) and which must be awakened and guided to the center at the crown (i.e., the *sahasrâra-cakra*) for full enlightenment to occur

Kundalinî-Yoga — the yogic path focusing on the *kundalinî* process as a means of liberation

L

Laya-Yoga (“Yoga of dissolution”) — an advanced form or process of Tantric Yoga by which the energies associated with the various psycho-energetic centers (*cakra*) of the subtle body are gradually dissolved through the ascent of the serpent power (*kundalinî-shakti*)

Linga (“mark”) — the phallus as a principle of creativity; a symbol of God Shiva; cf. *yonî*

M

Mahâbhârata (“Great Bharata”) — one of India’s two great ancient epics telling of the great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas and serving as a repository for many spiritual and moral teachings

Mahatma (from *mahâ-âtman*, “great self”) — an honorific title (meaning something like “a great soul”) bestowed on particularly meritorious individuals, such as Gandhi

Maithunâ (“twinning”) — the Tantric sexual ritual in which the participants view each other as Shiva and Shakti respectively

Manas (“mind”) — the lower mind, which is bound to the senses and yields information (*vijnâna*) rather than wisdom (*jnâna*, *vidyâ*); cf. *buddhi*

Mandala (“circle”) — a circular design symbolizing the cosmos and specific to a deity

Mantra (from the verbal root *man* “to think”) — a sacred sound or phrase, such as *om*, *hum*, or *om namah shivâya*, that has a transformative effect on the mind of the individual reciting it; to be ultimately effective, a *mantra* needs to be given in an initiatory context (*dîkshâ*)

Mantra-Yoga — the yogic path utilizing *mantras* as the primary means of liberation

Marman (“lethal [spot]”) — in Āyur-Veda and Yoga, a vital spot on the physical body where energy is concentrated or blocked; cf. *granthi*

Matsyendra (“Lord of Fish”) — an early Tantric master who founded the Yogini-Kaula school and is remembered as a teacher of Goraksha

Mâyâ (“she who measures”) — the deluding or illusive power of the world; illusion by which the world is seen as separate from the ultimate singular Reality (*âtman*)

Moksha (“release”) — the condition of freedom from ignorance (*avidyâ*) and the binding effect of karma; also called *mukti*, *kaivalya*

Mudrâ (“seal”) — a hand gesture (such as *cin-mudrâ*) or whole-body gesture (such as *viparîta-karanî-mudrâ*); also a designation of the feminine partner in the Tantric sexual ritual

Muni (“he who is silent”) — a sage

N

Nâda (“sound”) — the inner sound, as it can be heard through the practice of Nâda-Yoga or Kundalinî-Yoga

Nâda-Yoga (“Yoga of the [inner] sound”) — the Yoga or process of producing and intently listening to the inner sound as a means of concentration and ecstatic self-transcendence

Nâdî (“conduit”) — one of 72,000 or more subtle channels along or through which the life force (*prâna*) circulates of which the three most important ones are the *idâ-nâdî*, *pingalâ-nâdî*, and *sushumnâ-nâdî*

Nâdî-shodhana (“channel cleansing”) — the practice of purifying the conduits, especially by means of breath control (*prânâyâma*)

Nârada — a great sage associated with music, who taught Bhakti-Yoga and is attributed with the authorship of one of two *Bhakti-Sûtras*

Nâtha (“lord”) — appellation of many North Indian masters of Yoga, in particular adepts of the Kanphâta (“Split-ear”) school allegedly founded by Goraksha

Neti-neti (“not thus, not thus”) — an Upanishadic expression meant to convey that the ultimate Reality is neither this nor that, that is, is beyond all description

Nirodha (“restriction”) — in Patanjali’s eight-limbed Yoga, the very basis of the process of concentration, meditation, and ecstasy; in the first instance, the restriction of the “whirls of the mind” (*citta-vritti*)

Niyama (“[self-]restraint”) — the second limb of Patanjali’s eightfold path, which consists of purity (*shauca*), contentment (*samtosha*), austerity (*tapas*), study (*svâdhyâya*), and dedication to the Lord (*îshvara-pranidhâna*)

Nyâsa (“placing”) — the Tantric practice of infusing various body parts with life force (*prâna*) by touching or thinking of the respective physical area

O

Ojas (“vitality”) — the subtle energy produced through practice, especially the discipline of chastity (*brahmacarya*)

Om — the original *mantra* symbolizing the ultimate Reality, which is prefixed to many mantric utterances

P

Parama-âtman or **paramâtman** (“supreme self”) — the transcendental Self, which is singular, as opposed to the individuated self (*jîva-âtman*) that exists in countless numbers in the form of living beings

Parama-hamsa, paramahansa (“supreme swan”) — an honorific title given to great adepts, such as Ramakrishna and Yogananda

Patanjali — compiler of the *Yoga-Sûtra*, who lived c. 150 C.E.

Pingalâ-nâdî (“reddish conduit”) — the *prâna* current or arc ascending on the right side of the central channel (*sushumnâ-nâdî*) and associated with the sympathetic nervous system and having an energizing effect on the mind when activated; cf. *idâ-nâdî*

Prajnâ (“wisdom”) — the opposite of spiritual ignorance (*ajnâna, avidyâ*); one of two means of liberation in Buddhist Yoga, the other being skillful means (*upâya*), i.e., compassion (*karunâ*)

Prakriti (“creatrix”) — Nature, which is multilevel and, according to Patanjali’s *yoga-darshana*, consists of an eternal dimension (called *pradhâna* or “foundation”), levels of subtle existence (called *sûkshma-parvan*), and the physical or coarse realm (called *sthûla-parvan*); all of Nature is deemed unconscious (*acit*), and therefore it is viewed as being in opposition to the transcendental Self or Spirit (*purusha*)

Prakriti-laya (“merging into Nature”) — a high-level state of existence that falls short of actual liberation (*kaivalya*); the being who has attained that state

Prâna (“life/breath”) — life in general; the life force sustaining the body; the breath as an external manifestation of the subtle life force

Prânâyâma (from *prâna* and *âyâma*, “life/breath extension”) — breath control, the fourth limb (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eightfold path, consisting of conscious inhalation (*pûraka*), retention (*kumbhaka*), and exhalation (*recaka*); at an advanced state, breath retention occurs spontaneously for longer periods of time

Prasâda (“grace/clarity”) — divine grace; mental clarity

Pratyâhâra (“withdrawal”) — sensory inhibition, the fifth limb (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eightfold path

Pûjâ (“worship”) — ritual worship, which is an important aspect of many forms of Yoga, notably Bhakti-Yoga and Tantra

Pûraka (“filling in”) — inhalation, an aspect of breath control (*prânâyâma*)

Purâna (“Ancient [History]”) — a type of popular encyclopedia dealing with royal genealogy, cosmology, philosophy, and ritual; there are eighteen major and many more minor works of this nature

Purusha (“male”) — the transcendental Self (*âtman*) or Spirit, a designation that is mostly used in Sâmkhya and Patanjali’s *yoga-darshana*

R

Râdhâ — the God-man Krishna’s spouse; a name of the divine Mother

Râja-Yoga (“Royal Yoga”) — a late medieval designation of Patanjali’s eightfold *yoga-darshana*, also known as Classical Yoga

Râma — an incarnation of God Vishnu preceding Krishna; the principal hero of the *Râmâyana*

Râmâyana (“Râma’s life”) — one of India’s two great national epics telling the story of Râma; cf. *Mahâbhârata*

Recaka (“expulsion”) — exhalation, an aspect of breath control (*prânâyâma*)

Rig-Veda; see *Veda*

Rishi (“seer”) — a category of Vedic sage; an honorific title of certain venerated masters, such as the South Indian sage Ramana, who is known as *mahârshi* (from *mahâ* meaning “great” and *rishi*); cf. *muni*

S

Sâdhana or **sâdhanâ** (“accomplishing”) — spiritual discipline leading to *siddhi* (“perfection” or “accomplishment”); the term is specifically used in Tantra

Sahaja (“together born”) — a medieval term denoting the fact that the transcendental Reality and the empirical reality are not truly separate but coexist, or with the latter being an aspect or misperception of the former; often rendered as “spontaneous” or “spontaneity”; the *sahaja* state is the natural condition, that is, enlightenment or realization

Samâdhi (“putting together”) — the ecstatic or unitive state in which the meditator becomes one with the object of meditation, the eighth and final limb (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eightfold path; there are many types of *samâdhi*, the most significant distinction being between *samprajnâta* (conscious) and *asamprajnâta* (supraconscious) ecstasy; only the latter leads to the dissolution of the karmic factors deep within the mind; beyond both types of ecstasy is enlightenment, which is also sometimes called *sahaja-samâdhi* or the condition of “natural” or “spontaneous” ecstasy, where there is perfect continuity of superconscious throughout waking, dreaming, and sleeping

Samatva or **samatâ** (“evenness”) — the mental condition of harmony, balance

Sâmkhya (“Number”) — one of the main traditions of Hinduism, which is concerned with the classification of the principles (*tattva*) of existence and their proper discernment

in order to distinguish between Spirit (*purusha*) and the various aspects of Nature (*prakriti*); this influential system grew out of the ancient (pre-Buddhist) Sâmkhya-Yoga tradition and was codified in the *Sâmkhya-Kârikâ* of Îshvara Krishna (c. 350 C.E.)

Samnyâsa (“casting off”) — the state of renunciation, which is the fourth and final stage of life (see *âshrama*) and consisting primarily in an inner turning away from what is understood to be finite and secondarily in an external letting go of finite things; cf. *vairâgya*

Samnyâsin (“he who has cast off”) — a renouncer

Samprajnâta-samâdhi; see *samâdhi*

Samsâra (“confluence”) — the finite world of change, as opposed to the ultimate Reality (*brahman* or *nirvâna*)

Samskâra (“activator”) — the subconscious impression left behind by each act of volition, which, in turn, leads to renewed psychomental activity; the countless *samskâras* hidden in the depth of the mind are ultimately eliminated only in *asamprajnâta-samâdhi* (see *samâdhi*)

Samyama (“constraint”) — the combined practice of concentration (*dhâranâ*), meditation (*dhyâna*), and ecstasy (*samâdhi*) in regard to the same object

Sat (“being/reality/truth”) — the ultimate Reality (*âtman* or *brahman*)

Sat-sanga (“true company/company of Truth”) — the practice of frequenting the good company of saints, sages, Self-realized adepts, and their disciples, in whose company the ultimate Reality can be felt more palpably

Satya (“truth/truthfulness”) — truth, a designation of the ultimate Reality; also the practice of truthfulness, which is an aspect of moral discipline (*yama*)

Shakti (“power”) — the ultimate Reality in its feminine aspect, or the power pole of the Divine; see also *kundalinî-shakti*

Shakti-pâta (“descent of power”) — the process of initiation, or spiritual baptism, by means of the benign transmission of an advanced or even enlightened adept (*siddha*), which awakens the *shakti* within a disciple, thereby initiating or enhancing the process of liberation

Shankara (“He who is benevolent”) — the eighth-century adept who was the greatest proponent of nondualism (Advaita Vedânta) and whose philosophical school was probably responsible for the decline of Buddhism in India

Shishya (“student/disciple”) — the initiated disciple of a *guru*

Shiva (“He who is benign”) — the Divine; a deity that has served *yogins* as an archetypal model throughout the ages

Shiva-Sûtra (“Shiva’s Aphorisms”) — like the *Yoga-Sûtra* of Patanjali, a classical work on Yoga, as taught in the Shaivism of Kashmir; authored by Vasugupta (ninth century C.E.)

Shodhana (“cleansing/purification”) — a fundamental aspect of all yogic paths; a category of purification practices in Hatha-Yoga

Shraddhâ (“faith”) — an essential disposition on the yogic path, which must be distinguished from mere belief

Shuddhi (“purification/purity”) — the state of purity; a synonym of *shodhana*

Siddha (“accomplished”) — an adept, often of Tantra; if fully Self-realized, the designation *maha-siddha* or “great adept” is often used

Siddha-Yoga (“Yoga of the adepts”) — a designation applied especially to the Yoga of Kashmiri Shaivism, as taught by Swami Muktananda (twentieth century)

Siddhi (“accomplishment/perfection”) — spiritual perfection, the attainment of flawless identity with the ultimate Reality (*âtman* or *brahman*); paranormal ability, of which the Yoga tradition knows many kinds

Spanda (“vibration”) — a key concept of Kashmir’s Shaivism according to which the ultimate Reality itself “quivers,” that is, is inherently creative rather than static (as conceived in Advaita Vedânta)

Sushumnâ-nâdî (“very gracious channel”) — the central *prâna* current or arc in or along which the serpent power (*kundalinî-shakti*) must ascend toward the psychoenergetic center (*cakra*) at the crown of the head in order to attain liberation (*moksha*)

Sûtra (“thread”) — an aphoristic statement; a work consisting of aphoristic statements, such as Patanjali’s *Yoga-Sûtra* or Vasugupta’s *Shiva-Sûtra*

Svâdhyâya (“one’s own going into”) — study, an important aspect of the yogic path, listed among the practices of self-restraint (*niyama*) in Patanjali’s eightfold Yoga; the recitation of *mantras* (see also *japa*)

T

Tantra (“Loom”) — a type of Sanskrit work containing Tantric teachings; the tradition of Tantrism, which focuses on the *shakti* side of spiritual life and which originated in the early post-Christian era and achieved its classical features around 1000 C.E.; Tantrism has a “right-hand” (*dakshina*) or conservative and a “left-hand” (*vâma*) or unconventional/antinomian branch, with the latter utilizing, among other things, sexual rituals

Tapas (“glow/heat”) — austerity, penance, which is an ingredient of all yogic approaches, since they all involve self-transcendence

Tattva (“thatness”) — a fact or reality; a particular category of existence such as the *ahamkâra*, *buddhi*, *manas*; the ultimate Reality (see also *âtman*, *brahman*)

Turīya (“fourth”), also called *cathurtha* — the transcendental Reality, which exceeds the three conventional states of consciousness, namely waking, sleeping, and dreaming

U

Upanishad (“sitting near”) — a type of scripture representing the concluding portion of the revealed literature of Hinduism, hence the designation *Vedānta* for the teachings of these sacred works; cf. *Āraṇyaka*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Veda*

Upāya (“means”) — in Buddhist Yoga, the practice of compassion (*karuṇā*); cf. *prajñā*

V

Vairāgya (“dispassion”) — the attitude of inner renunciation, the counterpole to *abhyāsa*; cf. *saṃnyāsa*

Vāsanā (“trait”) — the concatenation of subliminal activators (*samskāra*) deposited in the depth of the mind where they exert a binding effect

Veda (“knowledge”) — the body of sacred wisdom found in the four Vedic hymnodies that form the source of Hinduism: *Rig-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, *Sāma-Veda*, and *Atharva-Veda*; also the collective name for these hymnodies; cf. *Vedānta*

Vedānta (“Veda’s end”) — the teachings forming the doctrinal conclusion of the revealed literature (*shruti*) of Hinduism; see also *Upanishad*; cf. *Āraṇyaka*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Veda*

Videha-mukti (“disembodied liberation”) — the state of liberation without a physical or subtle body; cf. *jīvan-mukti*

Vidyā (“knowledge/wisdom”) — a synonym of *prajñā*

Vijñāna Bhikshu — a sixteenth-century Yoga master who authored several works on Yoga, including the *Yoga-Vārttika* (a comprehensive commentary on the *Yoga-Sūtra*) and *Yoga-Sāra-Saṃgraha* (a summary of Rāja-Yoga as taught by Patanjali)

Vishnu (“Worker”) — the deity who is worshiped by the Vaishnavas and who has had nine incarnations, including Rāma and Krishna, with the tenth incarnation (*avatāra*)—Kalki—coming at the close of the *kali-yuga*

Viveka (“discernment”) — a most important aspect of the yogic path

Vrātya (from *vrata* “vow”) — a member of the sacred brotherhood in Vedic times in whose circles early yogic practices were developed

Vritti (“whirl”) — in Patanjali’s *yoga-darshana*, specifically the five types of mental activity: valid cognition (*pramāna*), misconception (*viparyaya*), imagination (*vikalpa*), sleep (*nidrā*), and memory (*smṛiti*)

Vyāsa (“Arranger”) — name of several great sages, but specifically referring to Veda Vyasa, who arranged the Vedic hymnodies in their current form and who also is attributed with the compilation of the *Purānas*, the *Mahābhārata*, and other works, including the *Yoga-Bhāshya* commentary on the *Yoga-Sūtra*

Y

Yajna (“sacrifice”) — ritual sacrifice is fundamental to Hinduism; Yoga also knows of an inner sacrifice (as accomplished through meditation and self-surrender)

Yâjnavalkya — the most renowned sage of the early Upanishadic era

Yama (“discipline”) — the first “limb” (*anga*) of Patanjali’s eightfold path, comprising moral precepts that have universal validity (such as nonharming and truthfulness); also the name of the Hindu deity of death

Yantra (“device”) — a geometric design representing the body of one’s meditation deity, used for external and internal worship

Yoga (“union/discipline”) — the unitive discipline by which inner freedom is sought; spiritual practice, as practiced in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; the spiritual tradition specific to India; the specific school of Patanjali (see *ashta-anga-yoga*)

Yoga-darshana (“Yoga view/system”) — Patanjali’s Râja-Yoga

Yoga-Sûtra (“Aphorisms of Yoga”) — Patanjali’s aphoristic compilation forming the source of Râja-Yoga, also called “Classical Yoga”

Yogin — a male practitioner of Yoga

Yoginî — a female practitioner of Yoga

Yoni (“womb”) — the perineum or female genitals, but also the source of the universe; cf. *linga*

Yuga (“age/era”) — a division of time; see *kali-yuga*