

Patanjali Invocation Comments and Translation
by Geeta S. Iyengar

yogena cittasya padena vācām

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

malam śarīrasya ca vaidyakena

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

yo'pākarottam pravaram muninām

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

patañjalim prāñjalirāṇato'smi

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

ābāhu puruṣākāram

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

śaṅkha cakrāsi dhāriṇam

(shahn-kah chah-krah-see dar-ee-nāhm)

sahasra śīrasam śvetam

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

praṇamāmi patañjalim

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



The two slokas (verses) that we chant to invoke Lord Patanjali begin the *Bhojavritti*, Bhoj's commentary on the Yoga Sutra. 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.

patanjali 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. So the moment you think of the Lord 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 Guruji 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 Hindu's. It took people a little while to understand. Whenever we had some public program, a celebration such as Divali or Guruji'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.