

## The History of Yoga: In brief

1. The Vedas (1800-100 BCE): ancient hymns praising the divine forces of nature. The last phase of Vedic literature (500-100 BCE) is called the Upaniṣads or “hidden connections”. These are the first philosophical texts, and also the first texts to use the word *yoga* in the general meaning that would become dominant for the next 2,400 years: “disciplined spiritual practice that utilizes the body and emphasizes focused awareness”. See esp. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, which influenced the Gītā (below).
2. The Śramaṇa movement (600-400 BCE): a counter-cultural, renunciate movement that instantiated *tapas* and explored the mind-body connection; and the Buddha (480-400 BCE): the first (documented) yogī to attain awakening or “enlightenment” (*bodha*).
2. The Gītā (c. 100 CE): the best-known Indian spiritual text, it draws on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and articulates four aspects of yoga: *karma-yoga* (the yoga of action, ch. 2-3), *jñāna-yoga* (the yoga of insight, ch. 4-5), *dhyāna-yoga* (the yoga of meditation, ch. 6) and *bhakti-yoga* (the yoga of devotion, ch. 7-11). It teaches a non-renunciate yoga, defined as a state of equanimity (*śamatvam*), skill in action, and severance of union with pain.
3. Yoga-sūtra of Patañjali (c. 400 CE): a meditation manual which codified the practices of yoga then known into an 8-part system framed by a dualistic (spirit vs. matter) philosophy. The various practices of this system were all absorbed into Tantric Yoga (see below), but the fundamental ideas of the philosophy were rejected.
4. Śaiva Tantra (flourished 600 – 1200 CE): a non-renunciate spiritual movement that emphasized practices of yoga—mantra, meditation, visualization, breathing, and divinization of the body—within the context of a worldview that was (in the nondual schools) profoundly life-affirming, world-embracing, and feminine-exalting. Tantra argues that only one thing ultimately exists, i.e. Divine Consciousness, and sees the whole world as a manifestation of the powers of Consciousness, personified as goddesses that are worshipped and celebrated as our own innate powers. It therefore invites us to release or radically reconfigure our hierarchical and judgmental constructs of reality that do not allow us to experience us the exquisite beauty of the divine in **all** things.
5. Haṭha-yoga (1200 – 1800): a renunciate system that combined elements of Tantric *kuṇḍalīni-yoga* with the ancient disciplines of *tapas*. Absorbed much from Tantra but jettisoned the refined philosophy and complex mantra-systems (due to loss of patronage). Āsanās important but not central.

Approx. number of āsanās practiced circa 1850: around 100.