

# ASHTANGA YOGA

**New Year Lecture by Swami Paramarthananda (2013)**

**Transcribed by Sri VLN Prasad**

NOTE: Swami Paramarthananda has not verified the transcription of talks.  
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## Ashtānga Yōga

*sadāsiva samārambhām sankarāchārya madhyamām  
asmad āchārya paryantām vande guru paramparām*

First of all, I wish all of you a very happy, healthy and prosperous New Year 2013. Last year, I talked about the popular word **Yōga** and how different meanings are there for the word **Yōgaha**. In the Vēdic scriptures, I said that the primary meaning of the word **Yōga** is the **Aykyam** or oneness between **Jīvātma** and **Paramātma**.

According to the scriptures, **Jīvātma** and **Paramātma** are always one. Because of ignorance, we have created a division between **Jīvātma** and **Paramātma**. When we remove this notional division through knowledge, it is called **Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam**, which is nothing but **Gnyānam**. Therefore, the primary meaning of the word **Yōga** is **Gnyānam**, which is in the form **Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam**.

This is the ultimate goal of every **Jīva**. Therefore, we call it **Sādhyā Yōgaha**, **Yōga** the destination. To reach this destination, the scriptures present several spiritual disciplines. All those disciplines are also called **Yōgaha**. All these **Yōgās** are generally called **Sādhana Yōga** because they serve as a means to attain the **Sādhyā Yōga** of **Gnyānam** and **Aykyam**.

Varieties of **Sādhana Yōgās** are talked about. We have seen one type of **Sādhana Yōga** called **Karma Yōga** which will take us to the destination. The second type of **Sādhana Yōga** is **Upāsana Yōga** which also will help. The third type of **Sādhana Yōga** is **Gnyāna Yōga** which is consistent and systematic study of Spiritual scriptures like the **Gīta**, for length of time, under the guidance of a competent guide, **Ācharya**.

This **Gnyāna Yōga** also will come under **Sādhana Yōga**. Thus, **Karma Yōga**, **Upāsana Yōga**, **Gnyāna Yōga** are all **Sādhana Yōgās**. The **Gnyānam**, the spiritual knowledge that is attained by following them is

called Sādhyā Yōgaha which is in the form of Jīvātma Paramātma Aykyam which is Mōkshaha.

Along with these three Sādhana Yōgāha, we add one more Yōgaha. That is called Ashtānga Yōgaha which is also considered a very important Sādhana Yōgaha. Today, I would like to briefly dwell on this topic of Ashtānga Yōgaha, which is otherwise called Pātanjala Yōgaha. It is spiritual discipline which is propounded by Patanjali Maharshi.

Therefore, it is called Pātanjala Yōgaha. Patanjala means propounded by Patanjali Maharshi. This Ashtānga Yōga has been presented by Patanjali Rishi in his well known work called Yōga Sūtrāni. Patanjali's Yōga Sūtrās are very popular. Now, Ashtānga Yōgaha has become more popular than all other Yōgās. These Yōga Sūtrās have got two parts.

One is a philosophy which is presented by Patanjali which is called Yōga Darshanam. The second part is a scheme of spiritual discipline which is also presented in the Yōga Sūtrās. This scheme of discipline is called Yōga Sādhana. Yōga Darshanam is philosophy, Yōga Sādhana is spiritual discipline. Of these two, generally we don't take Yōga Darshanam in the tradition.

The tradition does not take the Yōga Darshanam or philosophy because it deviates from the Vēdic teaching. Therefore, the Darshanam part is rejected. In the famous Brahma Sūtra of Vyāsāchārya, while presenting the Vēdic vision, Vyāsāchārya sets aside the Yōga Darshanam propounded by Patanjali Maharshi. Therefore, for Darshanam, we don't follow Yōga Darshanam, but we follow Vēdānta Darshanam.

Even though we reject the Yōga Darshanam part of Yōga Sūtrās, we accept the other part. **What is the other part?** Yōga Sādhana which is called Ashtānga Yōgaha, which is a fantastic discipline accepted by Vyāsāchārya and accepted by Shankarāchārya. While accepting the Ashtānga Yōga, we make certain modifications in its interpretation so that it is in agreement with Vēdānta Darshanam.

Thus, **Yōga Sādhana** is reinterpreted, redesigned and adapted to be Vēdāntic teaching. This Ashtānga Yōga, being very beautiful and very useful for all the people, I propose to briefly present its principles. While defining Yōga in the Yōga Sūtrās, Patanjali Maharshi presents the definition.

In this particular context, he gives the definition of Yōga as **Chitta Vrutti Nirōdhaha**. **Chittam** means Mind, **Vrutti** means function. Literally, it means thought or Vrutti or Pravrutti. **Pravrutti** means function. **Chitta Vrutti** means mental function. **Nirōdhaha** means disciplining or regulating.

Therefore, Ashtānga Yōga is a scheme for regulating or disciplining the mental function. In simple language, Yōga means mental discipline. Mental discipline is extremely important for all people. We will know the importance of this mental discipline (Yōga) if we know two things regarding the mind.

We should know the greatness of the mind, which we are blessed with as a powerful internal organ. Mind is a very important and powerful internal organ. We should know the greatness of the mind. We also should recognize the problem faced by the mind. If we understand the greatness of the mind and also understand problem of the mind, we will know the importance of Ashtānga Yōga.

**What is the greatness of the mind?** It is the most powerful instrument that we have, with which we can accomplish all the goals of life like **Dharma**, **Artha**, **Kāma** and **Mōksha**. We have got a powerful instrument for accomplishing all the goals, which is the mind. The mind is a prominent instrument also because it has to be utilized in all our activities.

We have got different sense organs for different activities. For seeing form and colors, eyes are used. When you want to hear something, we don't use the eyes, but we use the ears. As far as sense organs are

concerned, they are used only in particular areas, but not always. As far as mind is concerned, it has to be employed in all the areas.

Therefore, mind is a primary instrument, in addition to being a powerful instrument. Mind is not only primary and powerful, but it has got a unique capacity to convert heaven into hell and to convert hell into heaven. A person with all wonderful things can feel miserable and a person surrounded by all negative things can feel wonderful also.

Mind has the capacity to convert heaven into hell and hell into heaven. That means the quality of our life is determined by the most important, most powerful instrument called Mind - [mana ēva manushyānām kāranam bandha mōkshayōh](#). These are all the glories of the mind. You can do an Ashtōttara Archana.

In fact, we do that in the Shāstra. It is called [Hiranyagarbha Upāsanam](#). It is nothing but glorification of the mind. [saya eshōntar hrudaya ākāshaha, tasminayam purushō manōmayaha](#) - [Manōmaya Hiranyagarbha Upāsana](#). This is the positive side of the mind, but equally, the mind has got a very serious problem also.

**What is the serious problem of the mind?** The mind has the nature of generating continuous thoughts. Mind has the nature of generating continuous thoughts without taking permission from us, without our participation, without our will, without our involvement, even though it is supposed to be our instrument.

Therefore, the mind is supposed to do everything after asking permission from the owner. **Who is supposed to be the owner?** I am supposed to be the owner and the mind is supposed to generate thoughts with my permission. Unfortunately, the mind has got a nature of generating continuous, involuntary thoughts. Even now, it is happening.

I have no idea that what all involuntary thoughts are going in which all minds and I don't know who is listening to me. This generation of

continuous, involuntary thoughts is a very serious problem. Because of that, several adverse consequences take place. The first adverse consequence is - when the mind generates involuntary thoughts, the mind is under the grip of the involuntary thoughts that the involuntary thoughts kidnap the mind.

The involuntary thoughts kidnap the mind, which means the mind is not available for my use. Even though Bhagawān has given me a wonderful mind, I am deprived of the benefit. It is like I buy a car for my use and all the family members take it for all their purposes. I want to come to the morning class and the car is not available.

Imagine, I buy an instrument and it is not available. Bhagawān has provided the most glorious instrument called the mind and involuntary thoughts encroach upon it. There is powerful property dispute which we are not aware of. **What is the property dispute?** We are not even aware who the owner of the mind is.

**Who is the winner in this dispute, most of the time?** It is like our property or Government property is encroached and a seven-stored building is constructed. Government recognizes after 15 years and demolishes. Thus, involuntary thoughts are the encroachers which kidnap the mind and the biggest problem is that I don't have mind for my use, most of the time.

My mind is pre-occupied and I do almost all actions as an absent minded person, as a mind-less person. Somebody called it - living in absentia. I go through the entire life in absentia because the mind is not available. Because of this absentmindedness, the consequences are - as a **Karta**, I am inefficient in all my actions.

Many mistakes are committed. Forgetfulness is a problem. I misplace things all over and most of the time, I waste hours for searching the things I myself have kept absent mindedly. Almost everything I have to search. As a **Karta**, I am prone to blunders. As a **Bhōkta**, I cannot enjoy

a beautiful music program because I am in the auditorium, but my mind is somewhere else.

As I often say - I am here, but I don't hear (absent minded). Therefore, I fail as a Karta and I fail as a Bhōkta. As **Pramāta**, a learner, I cannot learn anything because I don't listen as the mind is not there behind the ears. I lack listening skill. Several communication gaps are caused because of that.

I announce the program in the morning and invariably, some students come in the evening and call me. The announcements are not registered. Every time an announcement comes, some people recall and ask. So, involuntary thoughts are the greatest enemy that we have not recognized.

The second problem is - when the involuntary thoughts are moving constantly in the mind, several times they generate disturbing emotions also. During the course of these involuntary thoughts, without permission, these involuntary thoughts generate several disturbing, toxic emotions like worry, anxiety, fear, depression, regret, hurt, guilt etc.

All the disturbing emotions are generated in the mind by the involuntary thoughts. Without my invitation, they come and encroach upon my mind. Not only that, but often when I ask them to go, they don't go away. Therefore, the second problem is emotional disturbances. When they remain for a long time, I lose my health.

Involuntary thoughts remove my efficiency. Loss of efficiency is one adverse consequence. Loss of health is the second adverse consequence because of toxic emotions. In fact, many of the modern diseases are caused by stressful mind.

Stress means involuntary thoughts are continuously running in my mind very, very fast. The third and more serious problem is - when I grow old and when I retire and withdraw from most of the activities, as I cannot

do them, I am stuck with my body and mind. In the old age, I have a mind which I don't own. I am stuck with the mind. I can send away any other thing, but I cannot send away the mind.

Wherever I go, I am stuck with a mind which I don't own, but owned by involuntary thoughts. Therefore, thoughts after thoughts come and mind is tortured by all types of problems. I call them FEDEREL problem - problem of old age. FE means Fear, DE means Depression, RE means Regrets and L means Loneliness.

I am stuck with a mind which is gripped with FEDEREL problem. And the old age becomes the most miserable thing. All this is because of the fact that I did not recognize the problem of involuntary thoughts and the disastrous consequences of not tackling these involuntary thoughts. [Ashtānga Yōga](#) is a scheme by which I learn to be aware of this problem and take steps to handle this problem.

Ashtānga Yōga, as the very word shows, consists of eight steps known as [Yama](#), [Niyama](#), [Āsana](#), [Prānāyāma](#), [Pratyāhāra](#), [Dhāraṇa](#), [Gnyāna](#), and [Samādhi](#). These are the eight steps of Ashtānga Yōga. Of these, the first two [Yama](#) and [Niyama](#) are general disciplines. I will briefly mention them later.

Today, I would like to focus on the later six parts [Shadanga Yōgaha](#) called Yōgic meditation which is an exercise to make myself aware of this problem. Only when I am aware of this problem, I will be serious in tackling the problem. **What is this Shadanga Yōgābhyāsa?** I want to see whether involuntary thoughts are powerful, occupying my mind or whether I am the owner of the mind, capable of giving a job to mind.

**Who is the boss? Is the involuntary thought the boss or am I the boss? What are these Shadanga Yōga?** The first step is [Āsanam](#), in which I am supposed to be seated in a posture deliberately. I should consciously take up a physical posture and become intensely and totally aware of my entire body, top to bottom.



I am conscious of the body, conscious of the posture and I consciously relax the body. If I can consciously do that, it means that I have got my mind available for my job. Incidentally, it will help in relaxing also. This is called the Āsanam - consciously being seated in a posture and being conscious of the entire body.

The whole principle of [Ashtānga Yōga](#) is deliberate and conscious action. The second step is [Prānāyāmaha](#) - consciously and breathing slowly, being intensely aware of the breathing process. Conscious and slow inhalation and exhalation, making sure that my mind is available for doing this job deliberately and consciously.

Once I go through [Āsana](#) and [Prānamaya](#) and if I do both of them very consciously and as I have used the mind, the involuntary thoughts have gone away because I have taken possession of the mind by doing two conscious jobs of Āsana and Prānamaya. **What do I do?** I snatch my mind from the clutches of involuntary thoughts.

By the time I go through conscious Āsana and conscious Prānamaya, I have managed to own my property called my mind and snatch the mind from the terrible, powerful involuntary thoughts. If I have succeeded in snatching my mind from involuntary thoughts, I have come to [Pratyāhāraha](#).

[Pratyāhāraha](#) means retrieving my own mind from the hands of involuntary thoughts. [Āharanam](#) means bringing. [Prati Āharanam](#) means bringing back. **What does it indicate?** I am the original owner of mind. But unfortunately, the mind had been owned by the involuntary thoughts. I have retrieved the mind after trying for 15 minutes. I am not trying here.

I am talking about the theory which you can try which is the Yōgic meditation - to be aware of our serious problem and deciding to take steps. This is the [Yōgābhyāsa](#), steps 1 to 3. I have retrieved the mind in the 3<sup>rd</sup> step which is called Pratyāhāra. Now, I want to make sure that I

continue to own the mind. If I don't do that, the involuntary thoughts are waiting there.

**What will they do?** They will give me the mind for one minute and will clutch back. They are powerful enemies. Involuntary thoughts are the most powerful internal enemies. Therefore, to make sure that I continue to be the owner, I give a job to the mind and ask the mind to that job for five to ten minutes.

You give any job to the mind for 5 to 10 minutes. The best job is - whatever prayer you know by heart in any language, chant that mentally with awareness. It may be Guru Stōtram or Gīta Dhyānam or Kamalaja Dayitāshtakam. I should chant the entire Slōka, being aware of every word that I am chanting.

I might be hearing or I may be seeing the words appearing. We need not think of the meaning - **Shabdha Pradhāna Mānasa Pārāyanam**. I should be able to be aware of every word for five minutes only. When I do that, I am extending my attention. **Dhārana** is attention on particular area. Then, I go to a next step which is **Dhyānam**, remaining in the chanting for a length of time. It may be for five minutes or ten minutes.

**Dhārana** is attention, **Dhyānam** is attention span. Many people have got attention but they don't have attention span. In any lecture, they will listen for the first ten minutes and then they are out. They start looking around. All this happens without your permission. Involuntary thoughts can take your mind at will. **Who is the boss?**

If I can listen to sixty minutes with total attention, it is called attention span. It is a mind which has got converging power. Thus, **Dhārana** is attention, **Dhyānam** is attention span. **tatra pratyaya ēkatānata dhyānam** (Patanjali Sūtram) - the thoughts must continue in the same field.

If Dhyānam determines the length of attention, the last step is **Samādhihi**. Samādhi is the depth of attention, how deep and total my

attention is. Samādhihi means absorption. If I can have Samādhi, it means my mind is totally absorbed in the field that I have provided. We are not attempting for one hour or so.

**In Yōgābhāyasa, five minutes can I remain totally absorbed in the field I have chosen? What is the indication of total absorption?** I forget the surrounding. I don't hear anything, I don't smell anything. I don't taste anything. I am ignorant of the world. It is called **Savikalpaka Samādhi**. Then, in totally absorption, I not only forget the surrounding, but I forget myself also.

They call the total self-absorption **Nirvikalpaka Samādhi**. Thus, these six steps put together are called **Shadanga Yōga Abhyāsaha**. When we try to practice that, we will know whether we are the owners of the mind or the involuntary thoughts are the owners.

If we don't practice Yōgābhāyasa, we never know the seriousness of the problem. **When we don't diagnose the problem, how will we attempt a solution?** Therefore, we go through **Āsana, Prānāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇa, Dhyāna** and **Samādhi** for ten minutes or fifteen minutes. By that time, we will know where we stand.

I will know whether I am a **Yōgi** or **Rōgi**. Rōgi means **Mānasa Rōga**. It is a very deep disease. I will know whether I am a Yōgi or Mānasa Rōgi. **Mānasa Rōga** is called **Samsāra Rōgaha**. Once I discover this problem, then I take a **Sankalpa**. **What is the Sankalpa?** - Acknowledging the fact that I have a problem of involuntary thoughts.

The involuntary thoughts happen to be the master of my mind. Now, I have to get back my property by defeating the involuntary thoughts. When my war begins with my involuntary thoughts, I am an **Ashtānga Yōgi**. **Who is an Ashtānga Yōgi?**

**Ashtānga Yōgi** is a person who starts his war, not with family members, not with external enemies, but with his involuntary thoughts. **How do**

**you do that?** I take a Sankalpa (auto suggestion) that I will lead an alert and conscious life in which I will watch for involuntary thoughts. My aim is gradual reduction of involuntary thoughts and weakening the involuntary thoughts.

Involuntary thoughts cannot be totally avoided, but I have to reduce FIR - the Frequency in which the involuntary thoughts snatch away the mind and the Intensity with which the involuntary thoughts rob my mind and how long the involuntary thoughts keep my mind with them. I will be alert and vigilant.

My aim is - gradually, involuntary thoughts (IT) must become weaker and I should become stronger owner of my own mind. I have to get it back. **What are some of the methods to lead an alert life?** In **Shadanga Yōgābhyāsa**, I take a Sankalpa. **What is Sankalpa?** I will lead an alert life in which I want to make sure that involuntary thoughts do not kidnap my mind and that is called **Karma Yōgaha**.

**Karma Yōgaha** not only includes doing the duty, not only includes **Ēshwarārpana Bhāvana**, but Shankarāchārya in **Gīta Bhāshyam** writes that **Samādhi Yōga** or **Shadanga Yōga** must be made an integral part of Karma Yōga, which is spending some time to find out where my mind is and leading an alert life. Krishna says in the Gīta -

***traigunya vishayā vēdāha nistraigunyō bhavārjuna  
nirdvandvō nitya satvastaha niryōgakshēma ātmavān***

**Atmavān** means be mindful in your day to day life. **What do you mean by mindfulness?** In Buddhism also they talk about right mindfulness. **What you mean by that?** Whenever you do any action, make sure that those actions are done consciously. When we do actions consciously, we have two fold advantages.

**What are the advantages?** The efficiency will increase when I am deliberate. **What is the advantage when I consciously place my pen in one place?** Next time you need not search for it. So, efficacy will

increase when the actions are deliberate. When the actions are non-deliberate and mechanical, involuntary thoughts will thrive.

Mechanical actions will proliferate involuntary thoughts. Therefore, one method of defeating involuntary thoughts is trying to be deliberate. Before we start our class, we chant Guru Stōtram etc. You can try and see if you are able to chant Guru Stōtram deliberately or not. These are all very beautiful experiments. **Am I able to do deliberately?**

We have two types of benefits. One is - all the actions will be efficacious because when mind is behind, mistakes will become lesser. Even while giving a check, you put the year properly. Everything I have to do several times because whole life is with pre-occupation. Nothing is efficacious.

Therefore, conscious actions will make the action efficacious and more important thing is that in conscious action, we win our war against the most powerful enemy called involuntary thoughts. **ātmavān bhava manassamādhāyasa sātvikaha** - Krishna calls all the conscious actions as **Sātvik** actions.

We think that mechanical chanting of prayers is **Sātvika Karma**. Mechanical Pūja is **Rājasa Karma**. Mechanical chanting is Rājasa Karma. If I can do Pūja, Japa etc consciously, then alone it is called **Sātvika Karma**. Increase your Satva Guna - **nirdvandvaha nitya satvasthaha**.

Suppose, there are some actions which you need not do consciously because they are regular chores and you don't require deliberate attention. For example, you are going for a walk where you don't have to be deliberate. You better be conscious while walking on Indian roads!

Walking must be Yōga, especially if you are old. All these are because actions are mechanical. **drushti pūtam nyasēt pādām** is a Shāstra Vākya. Before you place your foot somewhere, purify that place by

your **Drushti**. What a nice way of presenting! Our scriptures say that even your walking must be Yōga. What a nice statement. You meditate on it.

You place your foot on a place after purifying the place with your Drushti. Therefore, make your actions conscious. If you think it is a rote action where your mind is not required, remember that in all mechanical actions, mind will generate involuntary thoughts. Therefore, have some program for the mind.

Since involuntary thoughts will be generated in all mechanical actions, have a program. **What is the best program?** Learn some Slōkās and repeat the Slōkās which you have to chant consciously. They should be recently learnt Slōkās. If you know Vishnu Sahasranāma thoroughly, don't chant that because you will do that mechanically and involuntary thoughts will be generated. Have some conscious action.

You can learn a set of new Slōkās and repeat them. There is a double advantage. **What is that?** You learn the Slōkās by-heart. Once it has become by-heart and mechanical, keep that aside and learn fresh set of Slōkās. You should have some conscious actions ready for utilization to defeat involuntary thoughts.

Ultimately, a successful person is one who is the owner of his own mind. **Therefore, what is Ashtānga Yōga?** It is winning the property dispute after several years. Sometimes, your property is encroached and you go for a court case. You go through Lower Court, Higher Court, and Supreme Court etc and after several years you say - Swāmiji, I got back my property.

Ashtānga Yōga is the longest war in which I have to get back my property which is my own mind. If I own my mind, I can get **Dharma**, **Artha**, **Kāma**, and **Mōksha**. Not only that, but once I remove involuntary thoughts, several toxic emotions like habitual worry, habitual anxiety, habitual depression can be resolved.

You are very good in worrying. All emotional problems such as habitual worry, habitual anxiety, and habitual depression are because of mechanical life. And we want to solve the problem by doing some prayers and those prayers themselves are done mechanically! The problem is mechanical-ness.

Without solving the problem, we add some rituals which are also mechanical. Temple visits are mechanical, Pūja is mechanical and Kamalaja Dayitāshtakam is chanted mechanically, Vēdāntic meditation is also done mechanically. Break mechanical-ness and own your mind.

This is the fantastic scheme presented by Pantajali Maharshi thorough the [Shandanga Yōgaha](#), which I consider very important. During the New Year, we enter into that important war with involuntary thoughts (IT war). Just in two minutes, I will briefly mention the first two steps called [Yama](#) and [Niyama](#) which are a set of rules given in the form of Ten Commandments of Hinduism.

I have talked about these ten commandments of Hinduism. Since I have already dealt with it elaborately, I don't want to go details. I will just mention the [Yama](#) and [Niyama](#) which are ten values to be observed, if you are a serious spiritual seeker. For a spiritual seeker, [Shandaga Yōga](#) is also important to use the mind and the first two steps are also important for spiritual success.

I will mention the ten disciplines and stop. [Yama](#) is five values called [Ahimsa](#) - Non-violence, [Satyam](#) - Truthfulness, [Astēyam](#) - Not owing any illegitimate property, [Brahmacharyam](#) - Following the sexual morality perfectly, [Aparigrahaha](#) - Not possessing too much. These are called five Yamās.

Then, the five [Niyamās](#) are - [Shoucham](#) - Cleanness in thought, word and deed, [Santōshaha](#) - Contentment, [Tapaha](#) - Moderation in everything, [Swādhyāyaha](#) - Scriptural study and [Ēshwara Pranidhānam](#) - Surrender to the Lord. These [Ten Values](#) + [Shadanga Yōga](#) will give

spiritual success. I have given these ten values as Ten Commandments. You have heard them or you can hear those talks and follow them. With these words, I conclude my talk and wish you Success in your war against Involuntary Thoughts.

***Pūrnadah Pūrnamidam Pūrnāth Pūrnamudachyatē.  
Pūrnasya Pūrnamādāya Pūrnamēvāvasishyatē..***

*Om shānti shānti shāntihi*





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