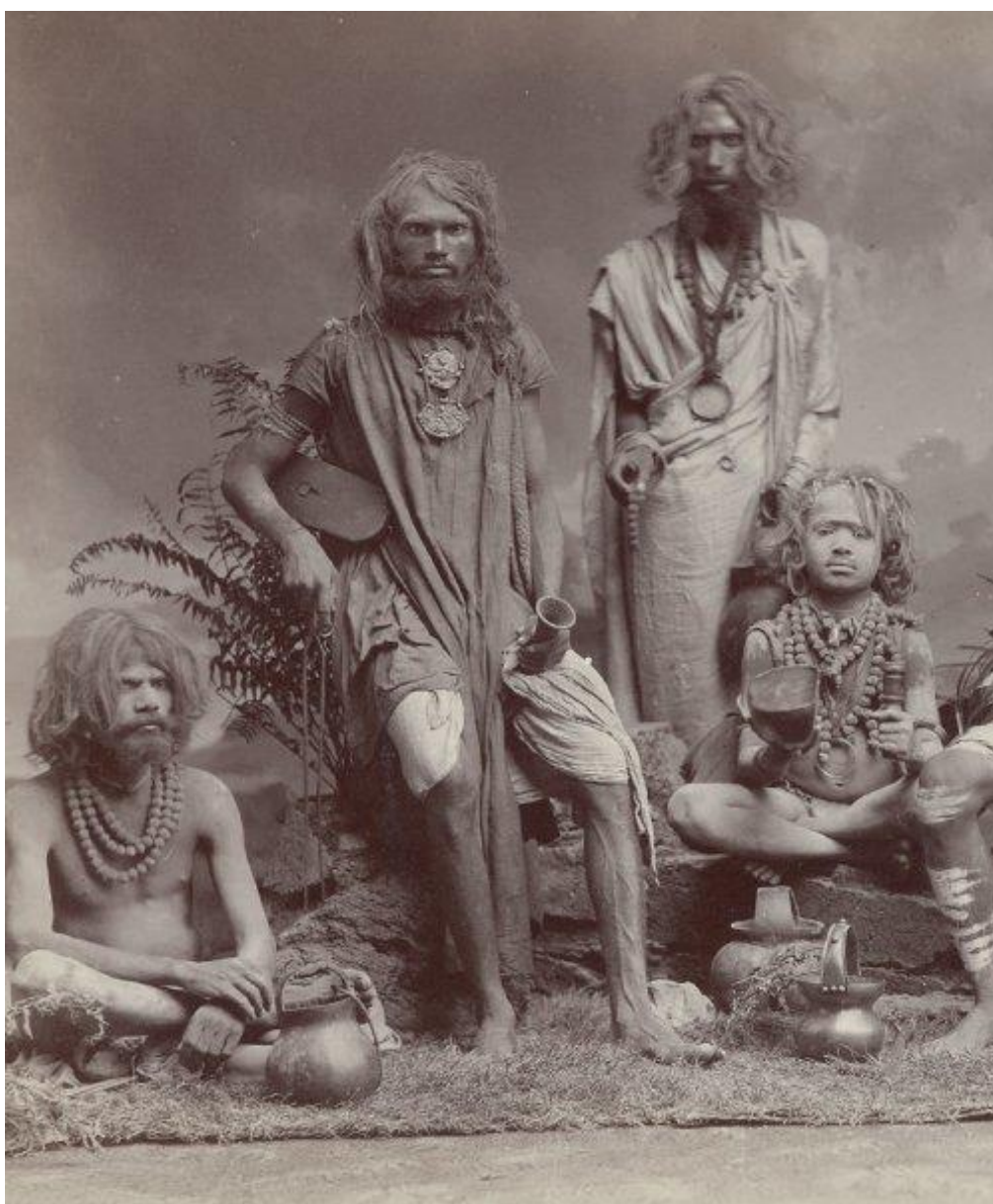


The Great Yogis of Ashtanga and Pranayam

by: Giovanni Vines

The School of Pranayam is a widely-practiced system of yoga which has evolved out of Indian and Hindu culture, and can be traced to yoga's earliest roots, perhaps predating the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedas. It is well-established in our modern world, with literally thousands of individual schools and teachers, both in India and worldwide, teaching some form of pranayama.



What distinguishes pranayama from other spiritual disciplines, including Dharana Nada Yoga, is its emphasis on controlling and empowering the pranic energies through the practice of breathing and breath-control sadhanas. These disciplines, when practiced accurately under the guidance of an adept teacher, can accrue many life-supportive benefits to the yogic practitioner. The oxygenation of the blood which takes place, for instance, is healthy, as long as it is not overdone. These disciplines can be very rigorous, and typically, a teacher will prescribe a variety of breathing methods to be used conjointly with each other.

The practice of pranayama has a powerful effect on regulating the flow of life energy through the three primary nadis; the Ida, the Pingala, and the Sushmana, all three of which run up and down the spinal column. Pranayama helps to activate life energy from the base chakra, or guda chakra, and attracts it up the spine to the ajna chakra, between and behind the eyebrows. Another outcome of this process is the activation and clearing of the six primary chakras. Pranayama also accrues other benefits, some of which are psychological. Practitioners often experience improved cognitive ability and some heightened intuitive or psychic sensitivities.

Virtually every teacher of pranayama, both historic and modern, includes meditation as a prescribed sadhana. The meditation practices often involve the repetition of a mantra or mantras, and sometimes include features related to Hindu culture. But the meditation sadhanas are separate and distinct from the pranayama sadhanas in one important way; the rigorous breathing techniques practiced in pranayama are not utilized in meditation. In the meditation sadhanas, the breathing is quiet and the attention (dharana) is focused on something else. The most common method is focusing the attention in the third eye center, or ajna chakra. It is at this point where Pranayama and Dharana Nada Yoga converge.

If you explore the many past masters and sages who have practiced pranayama successfully, you will find that many of them described their mystical experiences in terms of the light and sound they experienced.

*“In this world, they conquered death,
And escaped the pangs of birth.
The Siddhas, immersed in the melodious Shabd,
Found rapture beyond description.”*

*“When the Siddhas went deep within,
They found illumination within the eye.
In silence they saw and listened,
Then opened other’s eyes to wisdom.”*

*“Bell, sea, elephant, vina and flute,
Bee, dragon-fly, conch, drum, and lute
Audible, these subtle ten sounds are
By those alone who
Master Dharana’s quietude.”*

Tirumoolar

“When the nadis have been cleansed, the body becomes lean and radiant. The health is ideal, the appetite is strong, pranayama can be performed easily, and the divine sounds become audible.”

Gorakshnath

So, the successful practice of pranayama should ideally culminate with the practice of Dharana Nada. What pranayama has afforded, for both ancient and modern yogis, is a preparatory ground for the successful practice of meditation. Pranayama is an excellent preliminary stage; a purification process for all of the bodies - physical, astral, and subtle. The experienced yogi, an adept in pranayama, will find easy access into the inner planes, and the mystical revelations accessible through the inner eye and the inner ear. So, the ultimate objectives of pranayama and Dharana Nada are the same: successful meditations culminating in Samadhi.

Dharana Nada masters teach that the practice of pranayama, while beneficial in its own right, is an unnecessary step in the quest for fruitful meditations leading to Samadhi. All that is required is the development of the inner eye and the inner ear under the guidance of a competent teacher. Pranayama is an arduous discipline which requires a full commitment and a substantial investment of time. There is no inherent conflict between the two practices. Ancient yogis combined them successfully for thousands of years. The only real conflict between the two practices is in the time factor. If one is to achieve the ultimate success with either of these disciplines, it requires a serious commitment. With pranayama, a yogi should devote a minimum of one hour per day to his practices if he is to realize his objectives. With Dharana Nada, one should devote a minimum of two hours per day to meditation. In our modern, fast-paced, busy lives, how many people have three hours or more per day to devote to their sadhanas? Few, if any. This is the principal reason that teachers of Dharana Nada Yoga recommend that spiritual aspirants forgo the practice of pranayama in favor of devoting all of their time to the development of their inner eye and the inner ear.

Historically, perhaps the best example we have of a yogi combining the practice of pranayama with the practice of Dharana Nada Yoga, comes from the famous mystic, Dara Shikoh. Dara Shikoh was the eldest son of the Indian emperor Shah Jahan, and was identified in chapter one as being a practitioner of shabd yoga.

Dara Shikoh was mentored by Sufi mystics, so his methods represent the way shabd yoga was taught and practiced in India in the seventeenth century. Dara Shikoh combined pranayama with simran, focused concentration in the third eye center, and listening to the sound current.

Not only did he practice all four of these disciplines, he practiced pranayama and listening to the sound together, simultaneously. Shabd yoga is not taught and practiced this way by contemporary teachers and practitioners, nor is there any historic evidence that anyone else practiced it this way, with the exception of these seventeenth century Sufis.

Here is how Dara Shikoh describes his practice in his pamphlet, Compass of Truth:

“The method of practice, which has been adopted by this writer, and which he has found the best, is the regulation of breath. This is a method without which success cannot be obtained, and so everyone ought to practice this method of control of breath: and it is done in this way.

Sitting in a retired spot, place the elbows of both hands on the two knees, and with the two thumbs, close the hole of the two ears, so that no air may pass out of them. With the two index fingers, shut the two eyes, in such a way, that the upper eyelid may remain steadily fixed on the lower eyelid, but that the fingers should not press the eyeballs.

Place the ring and small fingers on the upper and lower lips, so as to close the mouth. Place the two middle fingers on the two sides of the nose, the right middle finger on the right side, and the left middle finger on the left side. Having assumed this posture, first let him firmly close the right nostril, with the right middle finger, so that air may not come through it, and the opening the left nostril, let him breathe in slowly through it.

After this he should close firmly the left nostril also, with the middle left finger, and thus keep the air confined withing the body. Then repeating, he can gradually increase the period of restraining the breath. Then he should throw out the breath, by opening the right nostril, by removing the middle finger from it, and the breath should be thrown out slowly. Let him keep the breath confined so long as he easily can do so, without feeling suffocation.”

The breathing method he describes is a fairly standard technique, one taught and practiced today by contemporary teachers of pranayama, along with numerous other breathing techniques. What is unique about this particular method is that he also plugs the ears at the same time. By plugging the ears, he is doing pranayama and shabd yoga, simultaneously. This description provides the best historic evidence we have that mystics did practice these methods together.

If a person chooses to practice both disciplines, pranayama and shabd yoga, he would be best advised to practice them separately, in distinct sessions. Since pranayama is an active, physical process, the body is not at rest, but is in motion. Shabd yoga must be practiced while the body is at rest. Therefore, if someone wants to practice both, he should leave a period of thirty minutes or so of between the two practices, so that the body can more easily adjust between the two opposite states; motion and stillness.

The Himalayan Tradition

The long history of the school of Pranayam includes many great yogis and masters who utilized pranayama as a preliminary stage in their quest for self-realization and God realization. Some of these yogis and masters can also be viewed as masters of Dharana Nada Yoga, because of their levels of attainment. While it is impossible to know any past sage's level of development, we can take clues from

their life stories and especially from their writings, where many of them make references to their mystical experiences of light and sound.

The school of Pranayam is deeply rooted in Indian culture, so when sharing the life stories of these sages, Hindu references are unavoidable. It is also important to remember that the biographical and historic accounts of these yogis are fused with a combination of historical fact, legend, and allegory. The further we go back in time, the less historic accuracy we will find compared to allegory and myth. The yogis and sages referred to here in this collection are by no means a complete list of historic masters of Pranayama, but it does include many important ones.

Many of the ancient teachers of Pranayama were yogis who lived in the Himalayan region. They had high levels of attainment, of course, but they lived the austere life of a yogi and lived amongst other yogis. Theirs was a simple, rustic lifestyle, close to the land, and close to one another. They had a strong sense of community with their neighbors, dependent upon one another for mutual sustenance. Their spiritual practices, of course, were the focal point of their lives.

Hamlets and ashrams were always built near a river, with fresh water being required for survival. Their thatched cottages took many shapes, mostly round and rectangular, engineered with four to six vertical posts inside, over which a sheet of woven branches and grasses was layered. This thick sheet of thatch, rightly constructed, could keep the region's brutal weather out. Building sites were strategically chosen under large stands of trees or against rock facings. Their huts were versatile, allowing for warmth in the harsh winter months, while being cool during the sun-intense summers. The flooring was made from a mixture of earth, mixed with cow dung and straw, and was effective in repelling unwelcome insects. Each day the floor was sprinkled with water and buffed to renew the surface.

Those involved in growing food had to terrace the sloping hillsides. They grew a variety of crops, including rice, grains, beans, lentils, and root crops. Every home was planted with apple and

apricot trees, so fruits were abundant. Families kept bees for honey and wax, cows for milk, and goats for hauling. What little grasslands they had were used for grazing. They crushed oil from mustard seed, which they used for cooking and lamp fuel. The mountains were crisscrossed with a network of trails along which people and commodities traveled to nearby settlements and marketplaces. In some places, the pathways were so narrow that only a single man or goat could pass.

The pastoral lifestyle offered many opportunities for gatherings, especially in the ashrams. These meetings often involved spirited philosophical discussions and debates. The masters, in those days, gave discourses out in the open air, sometimes under the wide canopy of a fig tree. Eager devotees would gather and sit on the ground. There were no books. Knowledge was conveyed orally and committed to memory by disciples. The masters would sometimes sit on short platforms, called pitha, from where they would impart spiritual knowledge and instructions.

Life in the Himalayan uplands was arduous and challenging, but the pure environment was conducive to spiritual pursuits. It was then, and is still today, a sacred region, where many great rishis and siddhas found enlightenment and realization.

Pranayam Lineage of Teachers

Lord Dakshinamurthy

Dakshinamurthy is believed to have lived in South India in antiquity, although he is now revered as a primordial Guru, like Lord Adinath. Dakshinamurthy literally means, 'one who is facing South'. If a person does not have a guru, they are advised to consider Dakshinamurthy as their teacher until they are fortunate enough to meet a living master.

Dakshinamurthy is a powerful avatar of Shiva, and a teacher of yoga, meditation, wisdom, and the arts, like music. He imparts awareness, understanding, and comprehension. He teaches through paravak, a form of divine communication, inaudible to human ears. He resides in the deep recesses of silence. The following ode is attributed to the ancient Rishis;

“Salutations to Sri Dakshinamurthy,

*Whose Exposition through Profound Silence is Awakening the Knowledge of the Supreme
Brahman in the Hearts of His Disciples; Who is Himself Youthful ...*

... but is Sitting Surrounded by Old and Great Sages.

He rejoices in His Own Self which is reflected on His Blissful Face;

Salutations to Sri Dakshinamurthy.”

Dakshinamurthy is said to have lived the life of an ascetic, calling the shade of a banyan tree in the deep forest his home. His was a life of physical and spiritual freedom, unconcerned with the affairs of the world. The people of the region claimed that just his mere touch would result in visions of God.

The poet of the king happened to be a disciple of Dakshinamurthy. One day he arrived at court, deeply absorbed in loving remembrance of his master, and sang a thousand couplets in praise of him. One of his verses honored him with the term ‘bharani’, which is a special reference given only to the greatest warriors who had killed hordes of elephants in war. The king was offended by this because he was the only one in the kingdom who had achieved this, and was the only person who was ever referred to as ‘bharani’.

The king called the poet before him and asked why he had conferred such an honor to a naked beggar living out under a banyan tree. He demanded that the poet find a way to justify such a claim or the poet would lose his head. The poet calmly admitted that he had no proof to justify such a claim, but

that he was not afraid to die since Dakshinamurthy had already granted him spiritual freedom. The poet pleaded to the king that before he carried out the sentence, would he kindly visit the humble saint, just once, and sit in his presence. The king agreed.

The king gathered his entourage and they trekked into the forest in search of the ‘naked beggar’. When they found the saint in a deep state of samadhi, the whole area hummed with an intense vibrating silence. When the king approached the saint, with the thought of scolding him, he was suddenly immersed in Dakshinamurthy’s powerful aura. The king’s mind went blank. The saint opened his eyes, and simply nodded to a spot next to him. The king sat. His entourage sat.

They sat in silence. They sat for a day. They sat for two days. After three days, the king’s mind had become so purified by being in the physical presence of such a great master, that he was intoxicated with compassion and joy. Eventually the king spoke and said, “I believe that my kingdom needs its king back”. They had spent days without food, without water, without sleep. But they were neither hungry, thirsty, nor tired. With abundant energy and good spirits, the king got to his feet and asked his poet to accompany him back to the palace. After they returned to the palace, the king asked the poet to continue composing songs in praise of Dakshinamurthy.

Yogi Nandinath

Long ago, centuries before the Christian era, in the remote highlands of the Himalayas, there lived a great yogi known as Maharishi Nandinath. He was one of those rare gifts from God, an illumined soul, a knower of Shiva, whose inner eye was open to the mysteries of the universe. He himself had evolved out of a long line of Sat Gurus, whose names and stories have been lost to the winds of time. He was one of the earliest seeds of Light which would one day come to be known as the Nath Sampradaya, or Nath Tradition.

‘Natha’ means lord, or master, a knower of the Self who has mastered the intricacies of his subtle bodies and levels of consciousness. Through the millennia, Nathas have been embodiments of esoteric knowledge, having attained to Siddhatva. There are many accounts of these Siddhas displaying extraordinary abilities, as a result of their acquiring the transcendental powers, or ‘siddhis’. Every significant yogic movement which has developed over the last two thousand years, can be traced directly back to Nandinath and his disciples.

Nandinath was a ‘grandfather guru’, being the progenitor of many masters, a teacher of teachers. Amongst his numerous disciples were Sanaka, Sanantana, Sanatana, and Sanatkumara – all bearing the title of Nandi. Besides them were Sundernath (Tirumoolar), Shivayogamuni, Vyaghrapada, and Patanjali. All eight became a spiritual founder of one of the initial Agamic schools and were known as Nathas.

All of Nandinath’s disciples, and their subsequent disciples, traveled far and wide, teaching yoga, not only through the subcontinent, but as far away as China and beyond. In those times, if a master was to make a connection with sincere seekers, he had to travel. Otherwise, how was anyone to find him, especially if he was living high up in the Himalayan region?

Nandinath’s yogi disciples became well-versed in the Siva Sutras, whose aphorisms were regarded as the voice of Shiva himself. These writings are an enigmatic, sophisticated set of fourteen couplets that appear on the surface to be about the Sanskrit alphabet, but on deeper reflection, are actually a key to understanding the cosmos, showing how Sanskrit provides a link to the very roots of divinity. The Siva Sutras have been studied and pondered over for centuries, and are still studied today by yogis and scholars, hoping for a deeper understanding of the gross and subtle nature of the universe.

Nandinath’s advanced disciples; Sundernath and Patanjali, were able to hear the transcendental sounds of Shiva’s drum, but as disciples, were still unable to grasp the core meaning of the aphorisms.

When they approached Nandinath for clarification, he was moved by their sincere desire for this rare knowledge, so he revealed to them the true meaning of the writing's essence.

The original Siva Sutras, and Nandinath's Kashika, are intentionally opaque. In those days, the secrets of yoga and higher consciousness were thought to be too precious to be openly expounded. Therefore, they were concealed in a cryptic language so that only those spiritually qualified would be able to access, while others would remain confounded. While this method may produce some frustration with today's students of yoga, it gives us a glimpse into the hearts and minds of the ancient progenitors of yoga, the Himalayan masters.

Patanjali

Patanjali was one of Nandinath's most advanced disciples. He is the author of the 'Yoga Sutras', an important component of the Shastras, the six distinct schools of Indian philosophy. While some would like to credit Patanjali as being the creator of yoga, this is not the case, as yoga had been practiced for thousands of years prior to his birth. There are references to yoga in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata and also the Gita. Shiva is considered by many to have been the first yogi, or 'Adiyogi', who transmitted yoga to the Saptarishis many thousands of years ago.

In the Mahabharata, Krishna states that the sun god, Hiranyagarbha, was the original 'knower of yoga'. (The Sanskrit terms Hiranyagarbha and Vivasvan are both found in Hindu literature, used interchangeably to refer to the sun god. Shiva is also associated with the sun in certain Hindu writings.)

In the Gita, Krishna states:

“The Blessed Lord said: I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvan, and Vivasvan instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikshvaku.”

What Patanjali did was to transmit the philosophy of yoga, and the fundamental principles of the practice of yoga, to the world, for all time, in writing. Prior to Patanjali, this had never been done. Patanjali was a realized master, a Siddha, who was also a consummate scholar and master of Sanskrit, a rare combination. His knowledge of human consciousness was complete and his knowledge of the intricacies of yoga was complete. His contribution to yoga, and to the spiritual evolution of humanity, cannot be overstated. While yoga had existed prior to Patanjali, one could rightly state that he is the progenitor of all of the world's modern systems of yoga.

Patanjali loved music, was an accomplished musician and singer, and composed many ragas. His favorite instrument was the vina. As a young man, he once got into a friendly debate with Vyaghrapada, one of his fellow disciples, over musical composition. Vyaghrapada insisted that under certain restrictions, no one could compose a cohesive, tonal piece of music. Vyaghrapada was right, that these limitations seemed insurmountable, but Patanjali managed to compose an extraordinary raga within the limitations anyway. Such was his great intellect and artistic proficiency.

'Sutra' means thread, a thread that leads us somewhere. It is like a formula or a solution to an equation. The Yoga Sutras are a formula for self-realization. They are brilliantly conceived and written, and are one of the most coherent and literary components to be found in ancient Hindu literature. They are a document about life and about us, a formula to open up our inner life, and reveal our higher selves.

Patanjali begins his foundational work with a chapter containing only three words.

"And Now Yoga".

He is saying to us, "All right, you have established yourself in the world, your family is provided for, your obligations have been met...now yoga. It is time to fulfill the highest purpose of your human birth."

Patanjali's work is more a complex, but practical set of tools, than it is a step-by-step set of guidelines of practice. In fact, he does not expound any comprehensive system of practice. He lets future yogis and teachers of yoga devise their own unique approach. This is just one of his many masterful contributions to future generations of yogis. He does, however, establish a set of benchmarks, a foundational basis upon which yoga can be built. He calls his foundation, 'Ashtanga', or 'eight limbs', the eight universal elements that make up the practice of yoga; all yoga.

Patanjali defines yoga as 'Chitta Vritti Nirodha', meaning the removal of the continual oscillations in the chit, or mind-stuff, leading to ascension over duality and merger with the Over-self. Therefore, stilling the mind is the direct pathway to self-realization and God-realization. He who conquers the mind, conquers everything. Yoga utilizes meditative and yogic disciplines, or sadhanas, to attain a state of consciousness, free of rambling thought, where one's consciousness is distinct of any object or thought external to itself, and becomes aware only of its own pure essence.

The Yoga Sutras

The Yoga Sutras are a collection of 196 sutras (aphorisms) on the theory and practice of yoga. The work is divided into four chapters, or books.

1. Samadhi Pada (51 sutras) – This book gives an introduction to yoga and the nature of its ultimate goal, the attainment of Samadhi. He describes various forms of Samadhi and defines it as the state of perception where the yogi's self-identity is transmuted into a state of union with the object meditated upon, where the witness, the process of witnessing, and that which is being witnessed becomes one.
2. Sadhana Pada (55 sutras) – He defines sadhana as practice or discipline. Then he outlines two primary forms of yoga, Ashtanga and Kriya. He writes that Kriya is the practice of three of the 'Niyamas' of Ashtanga: austerity, self-discovery, and devotion to God. He then explains the

eight components of Ashtanga: (1) Yama, (2) Niyama, (3) Asana, (4) Pranayama, (5) Pratyahara, (6) Dharana, (7) Dhyana, and (8) Samadhi.

3. Vibhuti Pada (56 sutras) – Vibhuti means power or manifestation. In this book, he describes the transcendental powers, or ‘siddhis’, which can be acquired as an outcome of the practice of yoga. The combined, adept practice of dharana, dhyana, and samadhi can lead to these abilities. He warns that these abilities can easily become an impediment in a yogi’s quest for complete spiritual liberation.
4. Kaivalya Pada (34 sutras) – This book describes the process of spiritual liberation and the nature of the realized self.

Ashtanga Yoga

Patanjali’s classical system is comprised of eight essential components.

1. Yamas – Yamas are moral imperatives, especially involving the eradication of negative tendencies, and their subsequent replacement with virtues. The five yamas listed by Patanjali are:
 - Ahimsa – non-violence and non-injury to all living beings
 - Satya – truthfulness
 - Asteya – non-stealing
 - Brahmacharya – chastity, including marital fidelity and self-restraint
 - Aparigraha – non-greediness, non-possessiveness
2. Niyama – This component includes the cultivation of virtuous habits, behaviors, and observances. The niyamas listed by Patanjali are:
 - Shaucha – purity, clearness of mind, speech, and body

- Santosha – contentment, acceptance of others, acceptance of one’s circumstances, personal optimism
- Tapas – persistence, perseverance, and austerity
- Svadhyaya – study of scriptures, self-introspection of one’s thoughts, words, and actions
- Ishvarapranidhana – contemplation of God

3. Asana – Patanjali discusses the yogi’s asana or posture. He describes it as a posture that one can hold for a period of time, while staying relaxed, steady, comfortable, and motionless. This combination will lead to the body being still, and not quivering. In the Yoga Sutras, he does not recommend any particular asana over another. But in another of Patanjali’s writings, the ‘Bhasya’, a commentary on his Sutras which was most likely written some time later, he suggests twelve seated meditation postures.

- Padmasana (lotus)
- Virasana (hero)
- Bhadrasana (glorious)
- Svastikasana (lucky mark)
- Dandasana (staff)
- Sopasrayasana (supported)
- Paryankasana (bedstead)
- Krauncha-nishadasana (seated heron)
- Hastanishadasana (seated elephant)
- Ushtranishadasana (seated camel)
- Samasansthanasana (evenly balanced)
- Sthirasukhasana (any pleasurable, motionless posture)

Each of the above postures is essentially an adaptation of the 'Lotus posture', sitting cross-legged on the floor or on a platform.

4. Pranayama – Pranayama consists of two Sanskrit words, prana (breath), and ayama (restraining, extending, stretching). Once the desired posture has been achieved, then he prescribes the conscious regulation of the breath. He says that this may be done in several ways; inhaling and then suspending exhalation for a period, exhaling and then suspending inhalation for a period, slowing the inhalation and exhalation, and consciously altering the time/length of the breath (deep or short). Pranas are classified into five important categories according to the nature of their functions:
 - a. Prana is concerned with the respiratory system.
 - b. Apana helps the excretory system.
 - c. Samana aids the digestive organs.
 - d. Udana is connected with swallowing.
 - e. Vyana helps in maintaining the circulatory system throughout the body.

5. Pratyahara – Pratyahara is the combination of two Sanskrit words; prati (against) and ahara (bring or fetch). This is the process of withdrawing the sensory currents from the outside world and all external distractions. It is not just closing one's eyes to the world outside the body. It is closing the 'mind' to the sensory world outside. It is the process of re-directing one's attention from the magnetic pull from the external world to the inner world of consciousness. Pratyahara marks the transition point in Ashtanga from the outer to the inner.

6. Dharana – In Sanskrit, dharana means concentration, introspective focus, and single-mindedness. It consists of holding the mind's attention at a particular point. This point may be the repetition

of a mantra, or it could be some outside object, like a statue or a physical place. It could also be a feature of the body, such as the breath, a thought, or a chakra. Fixation of the mind means not wavering from one point of concentration to another.

7. Dhyana – Once Dharana has been established, Dhyana is the ensuing, ongoing stream of experience with the attention fixed, moving forward in time. It is contemplation. It is meditation. Whatever the mind has been fixed on in Dharana, Dhyana is its contemplation. Rightly practiced, it is the focused, uninterrupted train of thought, perception, and flow of awareness.
8. Samadhi – In Sanskrit, samadhi means joining, combining with, union, and a harmonious whole. Samadhi is the achievement of oneness with the object of Dhyana. When fully achieved, there is no distinction between the contemplator and the contemplated. In Samadhi, the consciousness of the yogi loses its identity of individuality. The yogi and his object of contemplation become amalgamated.

Yogi Sundernath (Tirumoolar)

Like his fellow disciple Patanjali, Sundernath became renowned for the wealth of writing he left humanity in the form of hymns; in particular, his collection of over 3000 hymns known as the “Tirumantiram”. These writings are a part of the bedrock of Saiva Siddhanta, and are considered second in importance only to the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Agamas. They constitute the most complete and most profound exposition of the esoteric wisdom of Saiva Siddhanta ever written.

Sundernath was born in the Himalayan highlands and became a disciple of Nandinath. ‘Sunder’ means beautiful, and ‘Nath’ means divine lord. He devoted himself to his sadhanas and became an advanced yogi, a Siddha, at a young age. As a young man, he enjoyed exploring the solitudes that are

to be found in the remote Himalayan wilds. He developed the habit of performing his tapas in a cave near the Badrinath Temple. Anyone who visited him there would experience the powerful vibration of his spiritual radiation.

On one occasion, some young mischief-makers decided to visit the famous yogi in his cave. When they arrived, they found him in deep samadhi. They had never seen anyone in samadhi, so they decided to test Sundernath, to see if he was truly out of his body. They retrieved a burning ember out of the fire and placed it on the yogi's thigh. The coal burned deeply into his skin.

When Sundernath returned to his physical body, he saw what the boys had done. But rather than scold them, he thanked them for allowing him to demonstrate to them, and to himself, his deep absorption in samadhi. After that day, he felt confident that nothing would ever dissuade him from his spiritual quest.

When Nandinath could see that his advanced disciple was fully prepared, he sent him off on his own mission, to teach yoga and establish his own spiritual legacy. He instructed Sundernath to travel to the south of India, where he was to revive the age-old study and practice of yoga.

His travels took him to Vindhya and Kalahasti. Later, he passed through Tiruvilankadu and Kanchipuram. Then he trekked to Chidambaram, where he stayed for a time. Leaving the little village, he crossed the Kaveri River and reached Tiruvavaduthurai. He was drawn to the area and felt that perhaps he had reached his ultimate destination.

One day, while walking along the banks of the Kaveri, he came upon a herd of cows, who were bellowing loudly. He could sense anguish in their cries, so he approached them to see what had caused them to make such a clamor. When he neared them, he discovered the dead body of their cowherd in their midst. Sundernath felt compassion for these poor creatures, who were clearly mourning over the loss of their herder, whose name was Mular. He was also concerned for the fate of these poor beasts,

who if left out in the open at night, risked attack by wild animals. He devised a plan to remedy the situation.

He searched the area for a place to hide his physical body and found a hollow log. He crawled inside, went into samadhi, and left his body. Then, with his astral body, he returned to the herder and entered his dead body. The herder's body suddenly came to life, to the delight of the cows. The cows were literally crying tears of joy and began licking the body of Mular. The cows went back to grazing, to the delight and satisfaction of Mular (Sundernath). As evening began to set in, he led the cows back to the village.

Back at Mular's gate, his wife was waiting. She immediately noticed his changed personality and behavior. She reported to her friends and neighbors that her husband was acting strangely. He was not his old self. The villagers came and spoke with Mular. They agreed that he had changed, but it appeared that he had changed for the better. He seemed very spiritual, very wise. They decided to give him a new name, "Tirumoolar", meaning 'holy' Mular.

As soon as he had the chance, Mular returned to the hollow log, but his Sundernath body was gone. It had disappeared! He searched for days and days, looking everywhere. Finally, he stopped looking and returned to the log. He sat against it and went into samadhi. Nandinath appeared to him in his radiant form and explained to him that now he had a body that was recognized by the local people and while in it, he could speak Tamil, the local language, fluently. This was Shiva's way of facilitating his ability to engage with the local people and begin to teach them. From that day, Sundernath became Tirumoolar, and he began his important spiritual work.

Tirumoolar continued with his habit of spending long periods in samadhi. When he returned to his body, he would compose the hymns which would one day be compiled into the "Tirumantiram", his epic work. Within this collection of work, he writes about Ashtanga yoga in numerous places. This

body of sacred writings would become the most extensive texts written by the early masters of the Nandiantha Sampradaya (tradition).

Tirumoolar clarified the principals of Ashtanga Yoga and helped erase many of the ideological divisions that had emerged in South India, prior to his arrival. He helped create a more integrated culture in the area and an era of peaceful co-existence. Tirumoolar had seven principal disciples, including his successor, Kalanginath. And from Kalanginath, would spawn the great world teacher, Bhogarnath.

The Tirumantiram

The Tirumantiram has been referred to as a book of Tantra, Mantra, Yantra, and Yoga, a book combining philosophy, prayer, and meditation. Tirumoolar's original title for the book was 'Mantra Malai', which means 'garland of mantras'. The book is a collection of nine 'Tantras', or categories of knowledge. Within these Tantras, he speaks of special mantras for particular applications and expounds extensively on the meaning of the Primal Mantra, Aum, including various ways of intoning it. Literally, 'mantra' is composed of two syllables; Man, or 'mind', and Tra, or 'opening, liberation'. Thus, Mantra is a device for liberating or opening the mind or heart.

The Tirumantiram expounds on the ancient teachings, including the Vedas, and proclaims the oneness of Godhead, and the means to it, being man's mergence with Shiva, the individual Soul in the Oversoul. Each of the nine tantras is devoted to a different aspect of Spirituality. He discusses the acquisition of knowledge, the bliss of true, inner knowledge, the state of cosmic liberation, and the Samadhi of Silence. He also mentions the inner light and sound, and meeting the Guru Dev within. His writings include mention of the Ashtanga system, taught to him by his guru, Nandinath, and provide evidence of Tirumoolar's high level of attainment.

During the master's time, there was no paper and pen, so writing was accomplished with a stylus, and the characters were scratched into a specially-prepared leaf, called an Ola leaf. Many ancient

writings were produced in this manner, and amazingly, some ancient writings produced in this way still exist today. The original text was written in a rhyming, metered, lyrical style, cloaked in a mystical code, coaxing the reader to explore the depth of knowledge inherent in the verses. It is based in the science of yoga, showing and explaining how yoga leads to man's knowledge of his true self.

The Guru:

*“Entangled in the senses,
Consciousness aimlessly drifts, rudderless.
‘Come hither, into the depths’,
The guru beckons. He points the way.”*

*“Guru is none but Shiva,
Shiva they see, but see not.
Guru is your Shiva and guide,
Through him is knowledge beyond speech and thought.”*

Siddhas:

*“Realized Yogis ascend beyond the wheel.
With enchanted breath, find perpetual harmony.
All conscious, yet in the world,
In the body, yet knowing death in life.
The outer and inner become one,
As nectar flows from its source.*

*Shiva light begets the light of Siddhas,
Their splendor graces my vision.”*

*“The Siddhas testify to the Shiva world,
Knowers of Nada and Nadanta (sound current),
Established in bliss, pure and eternal,
Have tread the pathway to liberation.
Ascending the celestial steps to freedom,
They reached the ineffable realm of bliss.
Having known Shiva,
Realized, they stay on.”*

Mortality of Man Body

*“With horse and sword and canopy outspread,
Man fills his futile years with pride of life.
But as the grand cavalcade passes, left and right,
The breath of life expires in all.
Now, the ravens pick at his body,
Now, scorned by the living left behind.
This old bag of leather, now deflated,
Yama blows his conch, and smiles.”*

*“The lamp remains but the flame is out.
Fools, wailing in grief, prolong their debt,
Failing to see night following day.*

*Immersed in maya, they fall and wail,
Ever sobbing more and more.”*

Worldly Wealth

*“The radiant moon turns to darkness,
The riches of the world find the same fate.
Seek the gold of heaven’s King,
And the Lord’s bounty will pour from the clouds.”*

*“Foolish those who claim their wealth their own,
Close at hand, yet fleeting as their shadow.
As their very life is but a temporary wayfarer,
They see not its luster, nor its source.”*

*“The joys of wealth and family, life’s cherished gifts,
Yet fragile and fleeting they be.
The yogi who seeks his treasures within,
Finds Shiva’s fortune, and abundant company.”*

Importance of Youth

*“The visiting sun counts our days,
Will we ascend to Light,
Or fall in Karma’s grip?
Our fate is sealed in our youth.”*

Diet

*“Eaters of the flesh of beasts,
Are bound by death’s chains.
They find the jaws of hell,
Consumed forever.”*

Mystic Journey

*“Like ghee, hiding in the milk,
Shiva speaks out of pure silent thought.
Those listeners, fortunate few,
Shed the mortal raiment in blinding light.”*

*“As the sky’s torrent rushes down from the heights,
So does the divine stream flood my being,
Pure, vibrant, crystalline,
It flows boundless from my Master.”*

Ashtanga Yoga

*“Waver not in your quest,
But follow the eight-limbed Yoga.
Those who tread this path
Shall reach the highest,
Shall know Samadhi,
And not suffer rebirth.”*

*“Purity, compassion, frugal food and patience
Forthrightness, truth and steadfastness –
These he ardently cherishes;
Killing, stealing and lusting, He abhors –
The yogi who observes Niyamas,
Stands atop the mountain.”*

*“The Yogi rules the body, battles the senses,
His warrior’s steed at the ready.
The steed will carry an adept to the goal,
But throw the frail one off to the side.
The steed is the mastery of dharana.”*

*“Within the undistracted gaze is light.
Gaze on it, mingle, and become one.
The heavenly stream will snatch you,
And pull you up to the infinite void,
Where the Uncreated Being is witnessed.”*

Samadhi

*“There is a way to the Lord’s realm.
The Celestial Beings searched, but could not find.
Trek the mystic path to the mountain’s summit,
For there, the ambrosia flows.
The transcendent reward of Samadhi,
Will take you there.”*

“Earth’s Light-bearing visitors, the Siddhas,

They come and go and come again.

In the world, yet reposed in silent equipoise.

How can we know? How can we describe?

Shiva hides. Those who seek in Samadhi,

Indeed, will find him.”

Yogi Kalanginath

Kalanginath was one of Tirumoolar’s leading disciples, and he is generally believed to be his ‘successor’. He was born in Benares, traveled extensively, and lived in various places throughout his life. In South India, he was known as ‘Kanjamalai Siddhar’. Kalanginath is revered by both the Nath tradition of Northern India, and the Siddha tradition of Southern India. During his earlier years, he spent most of his time with his guru, Tirumoolar, traveling throughout the South.

Kalanginath’s most important contribution to the world was probably his mentoring of his dearest disciple, Bhogar. In Bhogarnath’s writings, he refers to Kalanginath as ‘father’, showing the closeness of their relationship. They had an ideal guru/disciple exchange, one that fully prepared Bhogar for his important life’s work that lay ahead of him.

Kalanginath traveled to China and began teaching yoga to the people there. After a time, he sent a message on the inner planes to his beloved disciple, Bhogar, asking him to join him in his work. Bhogar answered his master’s call and traveled to China, where he would spend most of the remainder of his life.

Yogi Bhogarnath

Bhogarnath was a Tamil Siddha, who received initiation from his guru, Kalanginath. He was from a caste of goldsmiths, and gained an interest in metallurgy at a young age. He also learned the principals of Siddha medicine from his guru, who had become a proficient herbal healer.

After spending many years together with his young disciple in the South, Kalanginath traveled north to China to spread the knowledge of yoga and traditional Siddha medicine, leaving his dear disciple behind. The separation between guru and disciple was a difficult one for both, for the two had developed a very close relationship, having spent nearly all of their time together for so long. Eventually, the pangs of separation for both became too much to bear. Kalanginath wanted his gifted disciple at his side, to help with the work in China. He transmitted a psychic message to Bhogar, who settled his affairs and began the journey to China by sea route. He located his master in the ancient Lu province, north of the Yangtze River.

Bhogarnath adopted the name 'Bo-Yang', which was derived from "Bhogam", meaning bliss. Master and disciple worked side-by-side, traveling up and down the rivers by boat, and on pathways from village to village, teaching and collecting disciples as they went. Eventually, the time came for Kalanginath to return to Northern India, to his roots. He asked Bhogar to stay on in China, to complete the important work they had begun together.

Bhogar experimented with many different herbal formulae, for various healing purposes, but his most potent remedy was one for prolonging human life. The formula utilized a total of thirty-five different herbs. He called his medicine, 'kaya kalpa'. After grinding the plants into powders, and preparing them according to a careful process, he pounded them into small tablets. Bhogar describes his special formula in one of his songs.

*“With great care and patience, I made the kaya kalpa tablets,
And then swallowed them,
Not waiting for the opinions of fools and skeptics,
Who could not appreciate.
Steadily, I lived with the foreigners,
Never aging, never ailing.
Living on Shiva and Shakti,
I became the golden color of the kaya kalpa.
Now, I live in a world of gold.”*

One day, Bhogar called for his three favorite disciples and his faithful dog, and led them to a nearby mountaintop. He offered a kaya kalpa tablet to the dog. The dog keeled over dead. He then offered his leading disciple, Yu, a tablet. Yu fell over dead. He then offered tablets to his two remaining disciples. They took the tablets, but terrified by what they had seen, they hid them. Then Bhogarnath consumed the remaining tablets and he keeled over. In a state of panic and grief, the two disciples hurried down the mountain to find help to haul the dead bodies down for burial.

When they returned, the bodies were nowhere to be found. They searched, but all they found was a note, written by Bhogarnath.

*“The kaya kalpa tablets are working.
After awakening from my trance,
I restored my faithful Yu and the dog.
You have missed your chance for immortality.”*

Bhogarnath was a prolific writer. His largest body of work is the “Bhogar Sapta Kandam”, a collection of over 7000 hymns. Today the collection is known simply as, “Bhogar’s 7000”. It is believed that he wrote most of these in the Himalayan highlands near Mt. Kailash.

But Bhogar may be remembered for a much shorter collection of writings, the “Tao Te Ching”. The yogis of the Nath Sampradaya claim that when Bhogar was in China, he adopted the name Lao Tzu, and is in fact the author of the Tao Te Ching. The Tao Te Ching has stood the test of time, being cherished by Taoists and Buddhists, and is regarded by religious scholars throughout the world as one of humanity’s most important philosophical writings.

Some modern scholars have questioned the link between Bhogarnath and Lao Tzu. However, on close inspection, the evidence that they were one in the same person is intriguing.

The Naths argue that the author of the Tao Te Ching writes in one of the chapters that ‘Lao Tzu’ was not his real name, which is true. A careful examination of the underlying ideas presented in the Tao Te Ching reveals that all of its basic philosophical principles and concepts appear to derive from Vedantic philosophy, or yoga.

Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching in the language of the time, Archaic Chinese. The book was written in a lyrical style, using images and metaphors which were commonly understood by the people in China at the time he wrote it. While Lao Tzu doesn’t use Indian or Vedantic terms or references, his ideas are all compatible with Hindu philosophy, including yoga.

He writes extensively on the concept of duality. He refers to the body’s ten doors and discusses ahimsa. Using his own terminology and imagery, he refers to all of the components of Ashtanga Yoga. He speaks to the importance of yamas and niyamas. While not mentioning the term asana specifically, he talks about the need to be in a still position. He describes fixing the attention and contemplation; dharana and dhyana. He references the process of withdrawing the senses to an inner focal point;

pratyahara. He writes extensively about Samadhi (the return to the 'Always So'), and the way to go about attaining it. Lao Tzu addresses many aspects of mysticism and the spiritual life, including spiritual seeing (ajna chakra) and hearing (shabd yoga), the importance of stillness and contemplation (dhyana and dharana), cause and effect (karma), duality, the role of the master, and returning to the source of all life.

Chuang Tzu, a Chinese philosopher who followed in Lao Tzu's footsteps a couple of generations later, comments extensively on Lao Tzu's work. He describes Taoist yoga, which appears to be identical to Indian yoga. Chuang Tzu describes the need to travel back through successive layers of consciousness to the state of pure consciousness. He also describes pratyahara, dhyana, and dharana, and the need to sit like a 'corpse'; meaning silent and motionless.

He goes into great lengths describing the practice of pranayama, both theoretically and practically. He describes Chinese yogis doing various breathing exercises, and the state of consciousness which resulted, comparing it to a trance, in which some kind of profound metamorphosis had taken place. One yogi he observed replied, "You have put it very well. When you observed me just now, my 'I' had lost its 'me'." Chuang Tzu goes on to describe, 'sitting with a blank mind...slackening the limbs and frame, blotting out the senses of hearing and sight, clearing the mind of outside forms and impressions, and being absorbed into That which Pervades Everything'.

Chuang Tzu writes,

"The breathing of the sage is not like that of ordinary men. The sage breathes with every part of himself, right down to his heels. He keeps the great treasure of his life breath in perpetual renewal. He renews with his 'clarified breath', and eliminates his contaminated or evil breath. The breathing of the sage (in Samadhi) becomes like that of an infant, or a child in the womb...He who has mastered this breath control becomes

immune to epidemics, can charm snakes and tigers, can stop wounds from bleeding, can stay under water or walk on its surface, can endure hunger and thirst, and prolong his lifespan. The beginner draws in a breath through his nose, holds it while he counts mentally up to one hundred twenty, and then expels the breath through his mouth...The counting should gradually increase up to a thousand, at which point the yogi will find himself growing daily younger, instead of older”.

Where did this Chinese (Taoist) yoga come from? It almost had to come from India. Did it come by way of Bogarnath?

After many years, Bhogarnath, accompanied by his lead disciple Yu, returned to India, by land route. He would ultimately spend much of his remaining time on this earth in Sri Lanka. One of his shorter writings, “Initiation into Samadhi”, includes the following verses;

*“The guru manifests as Truth;
It dispels all darkness.
In the elemental are spaces of vital energy,
The Divine illuminates the darkness.
In these spaces are found the Siddhis
The hub of metamorphosis.
Only Samadhi’s Light remains.”*

*“The box is locked, you have the key,
Pry the lid and stir
Take half the contents in hand,
And marvel at its wonder.”*

“This mortal body will shame a thousand suns.

It will watch three epochs pass.

Awake, arise! Denounce the allure of desire!”

Bhogarnath’s leading disciples were Pulipani and Sattaimuni. He ultimately turned over most of his work on the kala kalpa and healing to Pulipani, but the spiritual work he entrusted to Sattaimuni.

Yogi Sattaimuni

Sattaimuni is a renowned Siddha who was born in Sir Lanka, and lived most of his life in the Southern India Tamil-speaking regions. He was born into a family of poor farm workers, but he didn’t take to farming. He spent most of his time as a mendicant, outside one of the local temples. He was attracted more to the temple itself, and the activities going on there, than he was to his begging. But the begging gave him a reason to be there.

One day, he encountered an extraordinary sage who was visiting the temple. The sage glowed with the radiance of his spiritual eminence. All of Sattaimuni’s attention was riveted on this sage. When the sage left the temple, Sattaimuni followed. As they walked together, he questioned the sage about spiritual matters and was astounded by the man’s wisdom. He realized that he had met a very great soul indeed, and continued on with him from that day. The sage’s name was Bhogarnath.

Throughout the course of the time he spent with Bhogar, he also had the good fortune of meeting other great spiritual luminaries. Bhogar mentored him in the Siddha medical arts, especially regarding longevity and rejuvenation. He also became expert in chemistry and anthropology.

In those days, the most important writings, especially esoteric writings, were written in a type of code, which was called ‘Sandhya Bhasha’. This code was understood only by the Siddha intellectuals.

It was believed that this higher knowledge should remain amongst the elite, and not get into the hands of ordinary people. But Sattaimuni disregarded this approach, believing that knowledge was for everyone and that it should be shared freely. This viewpoint most likely originated from his own humble upbringings.

Sattaimuni's literary contributions include numerous writings on anthropology, medicine, and chemistry. His approach to his writing was to always attempt to tie in the subject matter with the quest for the divine. From one of his medical sutras he writes;

“Man is said to be the Microcosm and the Universe is said to be the Macrocosm; because the elements in the universe exist in man too; or in other words, there is nothing in the macrocosm of nature that is not present in man. So, man must be looked upon as an integral part of universal nature and not as anything separate or different from it. This closely follows the Siddhar doctrine. When there is abnormality in the nature of these elements in humans, diseases are caused. Similarly, in nature, when there is a disturbance in the elements, disasters like earthquakes, storms, lightening, and torrential rainfalls resulting in floods are caused.”

Regarding the quest for self-realization, he composed the following verse;

*“By ascending above the five lower chakras to the sixth,
With silence and support,
And with the ‘Mantra of the Beloved as the Essence’,
Like a thread out of hand,
You too will cross time, birth, and death.”*

Nath Tradition (Sampradaya)

The Nath Tradition first became recognized as an organized body of yogis around the beginning of the seventeenth century. Their origins are primarily tied to the Himalayan regions of Northern India and Tibet. But these yogis traveled far and wide. Their missions took them throughout all of Southern Asia and as far north as China. Most modern historians trace their direct lineage of gurus to a much earlier time, around the ninth century, with the appearances of Gorakshnath and Machendranath. However, the tradition of great yogis which we know of today as the Naths, can truly be traced all the way back to Nandinath and his disciples, Sundernath and Patanjali.

The Nath Sampradaya today comprises an order of renunciate ascetics and an order of householders. Gorakshnath and Machendranath are considered to be the original founders of the ascetic branch. The householder branch originally evolved out of Nath ascetics who were unable to keep their vows of celibacy. Today, the householder branch is comprised of a large group of Naths who live throughout India and Nepal.

The name 'Nath' was originally a surname, or a suffix attached to one's name, which denoted their adherence to yogic practices and disciplines. Its definition is 'lord'. Not all the yogis and masters in the long Nath tradition used the term as part of their name. The use of 'Nath' to identify a group of yogis is fairly recent, historically. Prior to the eighteenth century, they were simply known as 'yogis.

The Nav Nath Saints

According to the Mahabharata, the Nath mission was originally established by Lord Krishna when he called a meeting of the celestial beings and announced to them how he would go about spreading his message throughout the world during the coming age. Krishna said that he would spread his own light through the missions of nine saints, and their subsequent eighty-four disciples. These saints would travel far and wide, throughout the known world, to spread the message of love, and to facilitate the

unification of individual souls with God. He added that, only the souls of the most-worthy could be helped.

The appearance of these nine saints begins with Gorakshnath and Machendranath. These nine masters were Siddhas, with very high levels of spiritual attainment, which resulted from their mastery of pranayama, leading to mastery of Dharana Nada. Today, these nine saints are associated with various groups, including Hindu, Shaivist, Buddhist, Nath, and even Sufi. However, while they were alive, working in the world, they did not see themselves as being associated with any group or sect outside of their own master, their spiritual brothers, and their disciples. They were not the monopoly of any sect. They were spiritual emissaries who had been commissioned by God to lift the consciousness of humanity through the practice of yoga.

While it is not always possible to pinpoint specific historic details concerning the lives of these great Siddhas, we do have many stories about them which have been passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions. Written accounts are more scarce. One reason for this is that great masters normally don't like to draw attention to themselves. They are, at heart, humble beings who are focused on the work of helping and uplifting humanity. They themselves, in their youths, had undergone the process of renouncing the world, in favor of a life of renunciation. They had passed out of their early lives and been 'reborn' (initiated) into their new lives as yogis, becoming totally immersed in their sadhanas and service to the guru.

The names of the masters who are the Nav Nath Saints are:

1. Machendranath
2. Gorakshnath
3. Jalandharnath
4. Kanipanath

5. Gahininath
6. Charpatnath
7. Bhartairinath
8. Revananath
9. Nageshnath

Yogi Machendranath

“Praise to the venerable guru, the embodiment of the supreme bliss, who grants the experience of Eternal Self, by association with, the body becomes transcendent, and mind becomes purified.”

“To that yogi who being steadily fixed inside on his soul’s light, through yoga, sing praises to him. And sing praises to the True Principle, the cause of time and the ages.

To that holy Mina Natha, the great ocean of knowledge and joy, beyond existence and non-existence, where Adinath himself has merged in continuous Samadhi, worship continuously.”

Machendranath

There are many stories associated with this great Siddha, originating in India, Nepal, and Tibet, which describe his transcendental abilities (siddhis). He is often associated with Shiva in the Nath Tradition and with Avalokitesvara in Buddhism. One of these siddhis allowed him to live in his own body, while entering the bodies of other people, and remain there for prolonged periods, even permanently.

Machendranath’s origins appear to begin in Bengal, Assam, and Nepal, but his travels took him as far as Mangalore of Karnataka. He was born in eastern India and was a fisherman by caste. His name

means 'born of fishes'. The famous exponent of Kashmiri Shivaism, Abhinava Gupta, has mentioned Machendranath in his writings. Since Gupta's work was composed at the end of the tenth century C.E., we can assume that Machendranath most likely lived in the tenth century. He and Gorakshnath were contemporaries, with Gorakshnath most likely being his disciple.

Most of the stories associated with Machendranath are allegorical in nature, written with some instructive, underlying purpose. The most famous one has him being consumed into the belly of a giant fish, after preparing his net with a large bait. He remained inside the fish for twelve years. The only thing that he could do in this situation was apply himself to his sadhanas. Ultimately, another fisherman caught the fish and dragged it to his home. It was so heavy, the fisherman thought, "perhaps it has something valuable inside". He cut the fish open and was stunned to find Machendranath inside, glowing radiantly from his long period of meditation.

Yogi Gorakshnath

Guru Gorakshnath is one of history's most revered masters. His praises were sung by the likes of the famous mystical poet Kabir, and in the hymns of Guru Nanak. He has been immortalized in the Puranas, and in numerous stories, mystic tales, and legends. The Naths refer to him as Siva Goraksha. Others have referred to him as Mahayogi, Mahaguru, Adinath, Siddha Yogiraj, and so on. Gorakshnath is viewed as the progenitor of the Nath tradition. Even today, there is still a large following of his devotees to be found at Ahmednagar in Maharashtra. There are numerous caves throughout India where he is thought to have meditated, some of which now have shrines atop them.

Historical accounts imply that he was originally influenced by Buddhism, along with his master, Machendranath, but ultimately took to Sivaism and yoga and the Advaita Vedanta interpretation of the Upanishads. He thought that dualist and non-dualist philosophies were both impractical. He believed

instead that self-realization was the conscious choice of the yogi; that it was a practical path of self-discipline, leading ultimately to a state of Samadhi and Universal Consciousness.

He traveled widely throughout the Indian subcontinent, with records showing him in Nepal, Punjab, Sindh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bengal, Karnataka, and as far south as Sri Lanka. While the Nath tradition had existed for centuries prior to Gorakshnath, it was under his leadership and guidance that it grew and expanded widely during his lifetime. Many consider him to be greatest of all the Nav Nath Saints.

“The nine Naths and 84 Siddhas are all human forms, created as yogic manifestations to spread the message of yoga and meditation to the world. It is they who will reveal samadhi to mankind”.

He was a prolific writer, the author of numerous books on yoga, including; “Goraksha Samhita”, “Goraksha Gita”, and “Yoga Chintamani”. He is considered to be the developer of Hatha Yoga as we know it today, which his book, “Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati”, is devoted to. He describes the state of the liberated yogi, and explains that the yogi sees himself in all human beings and all beings within himself, with Atman existing within Brahman, and Brahman existing within Atman.

“The four castes are integrated in the human form; i.e., Brahmana in sadachar (righteous conduct), Ksatriya in Saurya (valor and courage), Vaisya in vyavasaya (business), and Sudra in seva (service). A yogin experiences all men and women of all races and castes within himself. Therefore, he has no animosity toward anyone. He has love for all.”

Goraksh literally means, ‘one who has mastered his five senses’. He taught that God existed within us, through the five elements, and that these elements transmute into divine energy through proper conduct and meditation. His teachings are timeless for the aspiring yogi, as relevant today as they were when he was alive.

“How can the yogi, who does not know the nine doors of the body, hope to attain perfection? The tenth, in the forehead, is where the liberated soul escapes. He must master the two breaths, the six circles, the three channels, Shakti, and Shiva.”

“The body is pervaded by ten vital airs which support functions of the human organism; specifically, the five senses and the involuntary processes. These airs move in channels, or paths, which are called nadi, and are found circulating throughout the body.”

“The prana is in the breath, having its chief seat in the heart region. It is found in the mouth, the nose, the navel, and the great toe. It is the most important of the airs and its control through pranayama is fundamental to Hatha Yoga. The Upanishads say that it derives from the self and it manages all physical functions.”

“In yoga practice, the prana and apana are to be joined. This knowledge of the highest in yoga, and is of great importance, delivering from aging and death.”

“The ajna chakra is also called uddiyana and the jinna-lotus. It is situated between, and just behind the two eyebrows, and consists of two white petals. The ajna is the seat of buddhi, pure mind, and has command over all sensory and motor functions in their subtle state. Here sits Paramasiva.”

The Goraksh Bani

“Speak not in haste, without understanding. Walk not in haste, without knowing the path. Take slow, cautious steps. Let not pride overtake you and lead a simple life, says Gorakshnath.”

“Gorakshnath says, one who remains steadfast in observing his sadhana, who is true to his spiritual practices, who maintains strict eating and sleeping habits, under strict yogic disciplines, will neither grow old nor die.”

“He who chants the name of God in meditation vocally or mentally (japa – ajapa), controls the five senses, and he who burns his body in dhyana brahmagni, finds Mahadeva.”

“The mind is the abode of both good and evil. One has the choice to allow the good to prevail, or to allow lower instincts to inhabit. The mind becomes pure and pious when the good is allowed to prosper. If it contemplates evil thoughts, it will become impure and impious. Yogamarga is the means by which mind can be trained to promote and sustain good instincts and tendencies.”

“O Yogi die; die to the world. Such a death is sweet. Die in the manner of Goraksh who ‘died’ (to the world) and then saw the Invisible.”

Yogi Jalandharnath

Jalandharnath was a mahasiddha yogi, who some say was a direct disciple of Shiva. He is revered by a number of traditions, including Tibetan Buddhism, and the Shaiva Nath tradition, and is known by various names. He was the author of several books, including “Suddhivajra Pradip”, and “Hevajra-Sadhana”. He was an ardent practitioner of pranayam, and through its mastery, developed various siddhis.

According to Tibetan tradition, he was born in a small village named Nagarghog, into a Brahmin family. From a young age, he became disinterested in the affairs of the world. Rather than getting involved with a worldly duty, he preferred to trek through the mountain trails, contemplating the non-permanence of life. One day he had a vision of a Dakini, who instructed him that he must be vigilant

with his mode of living and thinking, and remain pure and clean. The spirit gave him initial instructions in yoga and directed him to travel south, where she would guide him to a great master.

He traveled to Bengal where he met Gorakshnath and received initiation instructions into the practice of yoga. One of Gorakshnath's disciples was Queen Mayanamati, mother of the ruler of Bengal. The master asked the queen to please have her son, Raja Gopicandra, become initiated and accept Jalandharnath as his guru. When the queen mother proposed the idea to her son, he resisted. So Gorakshnath put the queen mother through some very difficult tests. But by chanting her guru's name, "Siva Goraksha", she was able to pass through each one. Raja Gopicandra was so impressed by this that he renounced his throne and became a disciple of Jalandharnath.

Raja Bhartarinath

King Bhartarinath was one of the most educated people of his time and authored numerous writings. Three of his books have become standards of ancient Indian literature. "Vairagya Sataka" is a hundred verses on renunciation. "Srngara Sataka" is a hundred verses on beauty and love. "Niti Sataka" is a hundred verses on the art of politics.

The story of King Bhartarinath is legendary throughout India; the tale of a king who renounces the world, and abdicates his throne in favor of his younger brother; who then becomes an ascetic, and takes up the spiritual path. Bhartair, having been first-born, had succeeded his father, King Gandharva-Sena as Raja of Ujjain.

As a king, Bhartair would have come into contact with all of the spiritual luminaries of his time, especially in his region of India. He most likely received spiritual mentoring from one or more of these individuals, including instructions in the practice of yoga. Bhartarinath was the type of soul who comes into the world with a high level of spiritual development, and for a soul like him, a little bit of guidance and training can be all that is needed.

There are a number of variations on the story of what prompted Bhartair to renounce his kingship and become a renunciate, but there is one common theme in all of them. He was heartbroken over the infidelity of his favorite queen, Pingala Rani.

Bhartair had many wives, but he was still unsatisfied and decided to take on another, named Pingala. She was young and very beautiful and Bhartair became very attached to her. He doted on her with gifts and favors, letting her have anything she asked for. But Pingala wasn't as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside. She was very cunning and took advantage of the king's adoration of her and began causing mischief, including meddling in the affairs of state. The king's devoted younger brother, Vikram, could see what she was up to and went to Bhartair to complain. He also suggested that she may not be loyal to him. But the king sided with Pingala and exiled his brother from the kingdom.

One day, Raja Bhartair was visited by a great Rishi. The king showed the holy man great respect and began serving him in various ways. The Rishi was very moved by the king's sincere gestures and offered him a special fruit, which he claimed could bestow perfect health, longevity, and even immortality. The king felt that such a valuable gift should not go to him, but should go to his beloved Pingala, so he presented her with the fruit.

Pingala had a paramour, who was the lead charioteer in the king's army. The two of them liked to sneak off alone together for chariot rides. Pingala offered the fruit to her lover. Pingala thought that the charioteer was devoted to her, but he had a courtesan who he had pledged his heart to. Later, when he met with his courtesan lover, the charioteer offered the fruit to her. Now, the courtesan felt that she was not worthy or deserving of such a magnificent gift, so she offered it back to the king, who she admired more than any other man in the world.

When the king received the fruit from the courtesan, he wondered how it could have gotten into her hands. He investigated the matter, and in the process, learned of his beloved Pingala's infidelity.

Suddenly his whole world was shattered. His belief that he and Pingala were devoted to each other was a sham. He had sided with this deceitful, disingenuous woman and had ordered his loving, loyal brother banished. He saw that no one was truthful and no one was loyal to their friends and family. He felt extreme disgust for the world and its trappings. So, he gave up his throne, donned a loin cloth, and moved into the forests to live the life of a sannyasin.

Vairagya Sataka

“I am content to wear tree-bark for clothes, and you with your rich garments; but the satisfaction is alike, and the differences not significant. He whose desires are numerous; he is indeed poor. If the mind finds contentment, then who is rich and who is poor?”

“Winning the approval of others is difficult. Why, then, does your heart seek to appease them? With inward tranquility and simple living, wise thought arises spontaneously. Should you wish for anything, what will you not acquire?”

“As long as this body is healthy and free of infirmity; as long as senility is at a distance; as long as our faculties are vigorous; as long as we are not disabled; until then, the wise ones should make great efforts to reach the supreme goal of life. For what is the use of digging a well when the house is already on fire?”

“Surviving on alms, not needing the company of people, moving about with total freedom, disengaged with the exchange of wealth; such a one is a true ascetic. Wearing worn-out rags thrown in the streets, using a discarded blanket for a seat, without pride or selfishness, the ascetic seeks only the satisfaction of the mind controlled.”

“Is this person an outcast?’ ‘Perhaps he is twice-born.’ ‘Maybe he’s a shudra or a renunciate.’ ‘Could he be some master-yogi, filled with philosophical jewels?’ When the

yogi hears this prattle coming from the mouths of the people around him, doubting and debating, he walks away, neither angry nor amused.”

Kanipanath

Kanipanath was a great Siddha yogi, and a remarkable personality, who is today revered in the Yoga traditions of India and Tibet. He was the chief disciple of Jalandharnath, and became a great Nath yogi and teacher, with thousands of disciples. He is also recognized as an important master in the Vajrayana Mahasiddha Buddhist tradition. He is associated with a prophecy made by the Buddha, that there would one day be a great saint born near Bengal, and throughout all of India, there would be no yogi equal to him. He would have many disciples, but six of them would become great Siddha yogis in their own right. The prophecy even included a version of Kanipanath’s name.

Kanip was born into a Brahmin caste of clerks, and first became a monk at Somapuri Vihara in Bengal. He was initiated into yoga by Jalandharnath and lived amongst the Nath Yogis. He practiced his sadhanas earnestly for twelve years in the mountains of Rajasthan, before achieving self-realization.

Kanipanath authored many books on tantric yoga and both he and his master, Jalandharnath, are highly respected in the Tibetan tantric traditions. His writing includes a combination of traditional tantric ideas, mixed with Saiva elements. His collected works include at least six writings on philosophy and seventy-four on tantric subjects. He is also popularly known for his devotional hymns.

“Taking three refugees in a boat, I captured eight.

In my body resides compassion, and the chamber is empty.

I crossed the river of existence like a dream.

In mid-river I came to know the waves.

I used five tathagatas as oars.

Kanip rows the boat like a dream.

Smelling, touching and tasting as they are

Like a dream without sleep.

The mind is the boatman in the Great Void.

Kanip goes for Union with great happiness.”

Kanipanath developed a number of transcendental abilities, by virtue of his acquisition of certain siddhis. But by using them inappropriately for a time, his guru, Jalandharnath, withdrew them. After learning his lesson, the siddhis were restored.

Gahininath

Gahininath was a disciple of Gorakshnath. He liked to spend his time meditating in caves in the hills of Western India, living for many years at Brahmagiri, now located in Maharashtra. One day, a young boy named Nivriddhi accidentally entered a cave where Gahininath was practicing his sadhanas. Gahininath believed that the boy's sudden presence must be Shiva's work, so he instructed the boy in yoga and provided him with full initiation instructions. Nivriddhi became an adept yogi, and went on to initiate his entire family and many more people in his region.

Revananath and Nageshnath

Revananath was a great Siddha of ancient India, born near the banks of the Narmada River and raised in a farmer's family. Revananath became self-realized at an early age and received siddhis, after being blessed by Lord Dattatreya, who recognized him as an avatar. After receiving Datta's blessing, the boy's family was blessed with an abundance of foods and grains from that time onward. Machendranath visited the boy's village and warned Revananath about misusing his transcendental gifts. He counseled him, telling him to focus on his further inner development and to work for the welfare of the hungry and needy.

There is an allegorical story about Revananath, which informs us about his transcendental attainments, and how he was involved in the birth of Nageshnath, another great Nav Nath Saint. In his province, there lived a woman, known as a 'maiee', who liked to cause trouble for all of the saintly people, especially Revananath. His disciple, Marul, requested his guru to put an end to the maiee's nuisance. Revananath accepted his disciple's plea and converted the woman into a musical instrument, which he kept as one of his possessions and played for the remainder of his life. After this, the people in the area referred to him as 'Kada Siddha'.

Revananath liked to travel around to the local villages, blessing the people with his wisdom and kindness. Once, while on a pilgrimage, he arrived at a village in Maharashtra, and was invited into the home of a local Brahmin who was conducting a ceremony to name his newly born son. He stayed over with the family, and the following morning, the family discovered that the child had died. The family was overcome with grief. The Brahmin took Revananath aside and spoke to him, telling him that his family was cursed. This was the seventh son who had died. Revananath knew that he must have some special duties to perform for this family. He prayed to Shiva to return the souls of the seven children to the Brahmin, and Lord Shiva reinstated all seven children to the parents, alive. All seven boys ultimately became disciples of Revananath.

The eldest son of the Brahmin was named Nageshnath. As the boy grew up, he and his friends used to play at the local temple, pretending to feed the deities there. One day Lord Datta appeared to the boy and asked, "I am a guest here. May I also have food?" The other boys were reluctant, but Nageshnath pretended to serve him food. Lord Datta immediately recognized the boy as an incarnation. He was so pleased with the boy's generous spirit that he told him, "Henceforth, whenever you want or need food, it will appear instantly in front of you. You will be able to serve these children and anyone else who is hungry."

Nageshnath later learned that Lord Dattatreya was living in a village to the South. He traveled there and searched for the great saint but could not find him. Then he went to the temple priest with a plan. He said he would create a giant feast for the entire village, in hopes that Datta would hear of the feast and attend. The priest agreed and the feast was a big success. To the delight of Nageshnath, Lord Dattatreya did attend and the two enjoyed a heartfelt reunion.

Charpatinath

Charpatinath is one of the most distinguished Siddhas of the Nath Sampradaya, and was a disciple of Gorakshnath. He is recognized by many later writers, including Guru Nanak in Sidh Gosti, a portion of the Guru Granth Sahib. He was the brother of Mayanamati, who was the mother of the ruler of Bengal, Gopicandra. By virtue of this relationship, he was introduced to Gorakshnath and received initiation. Later in life, he was occasionally referred to as ‘Raja’, due to his royal bloodline.

Charpatinath became the ‘Raj Guru’ to Raja Sahil Varman in the Himalayan mountain kingdom of Chamba, which made him the king’s spiritual advisor and closest administrator. He was involved in most of the important decisions involving the kingdom, including the relocation of the capital to the site where the city of Chamba is today. The king benefitted greatly from his close association with the master, and during his last years, he abdicated his throne in favor of his eldest son, and moved into Charpatinath’s ashram. As a result of Charpatinath’s powerful spiritual influence on the fate of this family, the same dynasty of kings still administers Chamba today.

There are some important literary works attributed to Charpatinath. His main book, “Carpatanatha Sataka”, is an important work in the Nath tradition. It is a practical book, aimed at the individual yogi, with motivational counseling and common-sense wisdom.

Carpatanatha Sataka

*“After making obeisance to Gorakshnath,
Who is supported by the gods and goddesses,
The delusion in my words vanished,
Replaced by the master’s wisdom.”*

*“If you are after realization, renounce anger forever.
Even a moment of wrath,
Can burn up the benefit of
Countless years of penances.”*

*“He who knows that his wealth, house, and son, belongs not to him,
He is the wise one.
The illusion of ‘yours and mine’, perverts the mind,
And must be forsaken.”*

*“His limbs become feeble,
His twisted long hairs gray.
Without teeth,
He supports himself with a stick.
But even then, the old man,
Holds to his hopes of never-ending life.”*

*“Oh mother, after seeing me take to the path of yoga,
Contain your affection.”*

Oh father, don't grieve a lost son.

Oh brother, cry not over shared memories.

We all live our own karmas,

And never those of another.”

“Like the chameleon, some may change their garments,

And outwardly renounce the world.

But if mind and heart are not changed,

If he is mired in lethargy,

How can the yogi progress?”

“Who am I and who are you?

Who is father and who is mother?

From where did this misery come?

The yogi contemplates and questions,

And recognizes the world as a passing dream.”

“Determined to clean the body, he cleans and cleans.

Outwardly he shines, but inside is still soiled.

He performs the required rituals,

But has left his soul polluted with maya.”