The 108 Names of Lord Patanjali

Translated by
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Introduction

Recently, on the 31st October 2004, the world's first temple dedicated to Lord Patanjali, the Son of the Divine Yogini Gonikaa and the Divine Expounder of Yoga as taught by Lord Kapila (the primordial Holy Incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the Omnipresent Supreme Godhead), was inaugurated by His Holiness Shri Shri Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar (Guruji) in his holy birthplace of Bellur, a village in Karnataka, South India. Bellur is soon to become a place of pilgrimage for all Iyengar Yoga students, because the place is of immense importance to our beloved Guruji. Its tranquil and serene environment, enchanted with the grace of Lord Patanjali and his divine philosophy of Yoga, provides one of the most perfect spiritual settings for Yoga Sadhana (ardent practice of Yoga). The traditional priests, while performing Aaraadhana (divine worship) to the Lord, recite this "Ashtottara-shata-naamaavalih" (the 108 Names) of Lord Patanjali regularly in the holy sanctum of this temple. As explicitly mentioned in the last verse of this text, a devotee, who ardently recites these 108 names of Lord Patanjali, reaches the highest abode of consciousness by his blessings. Indeed, devotional recitation of the text leads to physical perfection, inner purification, mental peace, spiritual development, deep meditation and divine grace, which are the prerequisites to the attainment of Yoga, the highest goal of human existence. Yoga is the quintessence of all religions, ideologies, philosophies, ethics and nationalities. Thus, Yoga provides a better understanding of our own ideology, philosophy, religion and nation. Yoga bestows upon us firm determination, stamina and great willpower, which are essential for reaching the highest pinnacles in any field. Yoga welcomes all races, religious and ethnic groups, and renders them into one single bouquet consisting of a vast range of flowers. Yoga unites the world in its soul. Yoga is unity, in which all conflicts and hatred tend to dissolve and only unconditional pure love for the whole of creation prevails. Thus, Yoga truly has the ability to convert this earth into heaven. This is the divine vision (Darshana) of the great saint and sage of yore, Lord Patanjali, the author of the Yoga-Darshanam, the most authoritative text available on the philosophy of Yoga, and who is the spiritual successor of an extremely ancient Vedic tradition whose foundations are deeply rooted within the holy texts of the four Vedas (viz. Rig-veda, Saama-veda, Yajur-veda and Atharva-veda) and was promulgated for the first time by Lord Kapila to his beloved mother Devahuti and further exalted and embellished by Yogeshvara (the Lord of Yoga) Lord Shri Krishna in the Yoga-Shaastra (the scripture on Yoga) more commonly known as the Shrimad-Bhagavad-Gita. Finally I would like to express my special thanks and regards to Gitaji (Gita S. Iyengar) for clearing all my doubts and answering all my questions. May Lord Patanjali's blessings dawn upon us all!

Siddhartha Krishna
I bow down to Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutras, who enlightens the science of words (Sanskrit grammar) and is the teacher of Ayurveda.

After bowing down to Him with all my devotion I will reveal the 108 names of the great Muni Bhagavan Patanjali, who is the greatest spiritual master and is the purifier of mind, speech and body. (A Muni is a sage who contemplates.)

Prostration to the Great Muni Bhagavan Patanjali.

Prostration to the Great Yogi.

Prostration to the Master of Yoga.

Prostration to the explainer of the word "Yoga".

Prostration to the explainer of the various Vrittis (modifications of the mind).

Prostration to him whose heart is fixed upon the Supreme God.

Prostration to the worshipper of OM. (To worship in Sanskrit means to meditate upon.)

Prostration to the one who perceives the true nature of OM.

Prostration to him who performs Japa (repetition of Mantras, viz. OM etc.)

Prostration to the teacher of the means of Yoga (Samadhi).
Prostration to him who discloses the true nature of the word (Shabda).

Prostration to him who describes the fruit of grammar.

Prostration to him who knows the Yoga of Speech (the mutual relationship of words).

Prostration to him who helps us to understand the significance of the Vedas (The Holy Scriptures).

Prostration to him who is like a dam on the meaning of the aphorisms.

Lord Patanjali’s commentary on Panini’s Ashtadhyayi, the most authoritative text on Sanskrit grammar, is like a dam, protecting the meaning of the Ashtadhyayi from overflowing, i.e. misinterpretations.

Prostration to him who is like a bridge to reach the other shore of the meaning of the sentences in Panini’s aphorisms.

Even though Panini’s aphorisms are very small and precise, the meaning is as vast as the ocean, so only Patanjali can help to reach the other side of this ocean, i.e. to understand the significance of the aphorisms.

Prostration to him who helps us understand the rule of Dharma (good deeds, virtue).

Prostration to him who shows how to reach the knowledge of the divine word.

Prostration to him who shows examples (while commenting on Panini’s aphorisms).

Prostration to him who provides a multitude of methods.

Prostration to him who knows the secret of the letters of the aphorisms (of Panini’s Ashtadhyayi).

Prostration to him who is the Master of Ayurveda.

Prostration to him who is free from the five afflictions. (The five afflictions are described in the Yoga Sutra 2-3 – ignorance, ego, attachment, hatred and fear.)
Prostration to him who purifies (us from) the state of ignorance.

Prostration to him who is free from Karma-phala (the fruits of action).

Prostration to him who knows that which has to be avoided and that which has to be acquired.

Prostration to the teacher of (the eight) limbs of Yoga. (The eight limbs of Yoga have been described in the Yoga Sutra 2/29 – Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara i.e. withdrawal of the senses, Dharana i.e. concentration, Dhyana i.e. contemplation, Samadhi i.e. meditation)

Prostration to the conveyer of the message about the means of Yoga. (The second chapter of the Yoga Sutras is called "Sadhana Pada", the chapter of the means.)

Prostration to the follower of the path of Yoga.

Prostration to the Lord of Yogis.

Prostration to him who knows the contamination (faults) of speech.

Prostration to him whose devotion is placed in Panini.

Prostration to him who is adept in talking to people.

Prostration to him who imparts the purport of the Holy Vedas.

Prostration to him who teaches the derivations of words.

Prostration to him who knows how to explain (the truth) in detail or briefly. (He has explained the truth in detail through the Mahabhashyam [an extensive commentary on Sanskrit grammar] and briefly through the Yoga Sutras.)
Prostration to him who knows all the branches (of the Vedas).

Prostration to him who expounds the aphorisms (of Panini).

Prostration to the greatest authority on grammar.

Prostration to him who explains the letters (of Panini’s Ashtadhyayi).

Prostration to him who denies the worthlessness of any aphorism (in Panini’s Ashtadhyayi).

In his commentary on Panini’s Ashtadhyayi, Lord Patanjali denies the worthlessness of even a single aphorism and says, "Acarya Panini, the greatest authority, used to compose these aphorisms with great effort in the peaceful morning hours while sitting in an immaculate place, facing the east, (i.e. praying to the rising Sun which is the abode of life, light and knowledge, and transcends all darkness, ignorance and impurity) and holding Kusha (i.e. the purifying grass) in his hand. In such a case, when a single letter ought not to be worthless, how can a complete aphorism be worthless?"

In ancient times it was a custom to hold the purifying Kusha grass while performing any divine ritual or worship. However, the custom is still practiced in some very ancient temples even today. The razor-like sharp and pointed Kusha grass symbolizes a pure, subtle intellect and intelligence that can pierce through the subtlest of subjects, the Supreme Truth. Thus, the holy Upanishads quote, "That Supreme Truth can only be perceived through a subtle and sharp intellect." To make it clearer I would like to mention that such subtlety and sharpness of intellect can only be acquired by purifying it through ardent Yoga practice.

Prostration to him who demonstrates the reasons for special understanding.

Prostration to him who knows the relation of words.

Prostration to him who demonstrates many alternatives (of an explanation).

Prostration to him who knows all the things that have been defined (in the scriptures).

Prostration to him who explains the purport of the sentences.

Prostration to him who has a thousand tongues.
Mythologically, Lord Patanjali is considered an incarnation of the primordial mythical thousand-headed serpent Shesha, who was considered to bear the earth on his heads and forms the couch of Lord Vishnu, the Omnipresent Supreme Godhead. Because he has a thousand heads, he is also occasionally mentioned as having a thousand tongues. Indeed, there is a tale related to this particular description. It is said that in ancient times some sentences in Lord Patanjali’s Mahabhashyam were incomprehensible and unintelligible even amongst the greatest of scholars. Thus, the teachers of the text used to circle those sentences and they were not taught to the students. An explanation provided for this was that because Lord Patanjali was the incarnation of the thousand-tongued serpent, some of his tongues would prattle or babble, hence such meaningless sentences came into existence. However, a very great grammarian and the most authoritative commentator on the Mahabhashyam, named Kaiyyata, a resident of Kashmir probably in the 11th century AC, deciphered all those sentences and thus broke all those Kundalis, the circles that were in the Mahabhashyam.

Prostration to the incarnation of the primordial serpent Shesha.
Shesha symbolizes the law of Karma or the collective good and bad Karmas of entire humanity, which are considered to sustain and maintain creation.

Prostration to him who bears the stream of thoughts. (Like Lord Shiva bears the holy stream of Mother Ganga, Lord Patanjali bears the stream of divine and holy thoughts.)

Prostration to him who perceives the difference of the words and the non-difference of the objects described by them.

According to Sanskrit grammar, all the different terms are considered to ultimately denote the Supreme Brahman, the substratum of the universe, the one single entity manifested in the form of the whole of creation. Therefore, even though there are endless words in so many languages, they all eventually describe the same Ultimate Existence. This is indeed a great concept that has the potential to eradicate all the conflicts that exist among various linguistic groups.

Prostration to him who practices the various types of Samadhi.

Prostration to the bestower of peace and superhuman powers (Siddhis).

Prostration to him who explains the consequence of mental concentration.

Prostration to him who explains the various types of false attribution / misconception.

Prostration to him who invigorated and promoted the various types of Yoga.
Prostration to him who is endowed with the magnificence or splendour of Yoga.

Prostration to him who has arranged the steps of Yoga.

Prostration to him who bestows Aṇimā etc. superhuman powers.

The eight superhuman powers are Animā, the power to become as small as an atom; Laghimā, the power to assume excessive lightness at will; Prāptih, the power to obtain anything; Prākāmyam, irresistible will or freedom of will; Mahimā, the power to increase size at will; Īśitvam, superiority or greatness; Vaśitvam, the power to subjugate; Kāmāvasāyitā, the power to suppress passion. However, Lord Patanjali believes that these superhuman powers are hindrances in Samādhi. Thus, an ardent practitioner of Yoga should completely forsake the desire to acquire them.

Prostration to him who shows the path to Kaivalya (salvation).

Prostration to him who explains the causes of non-attachment.

Prostration to the greatest Muni (sage, ascetic).

Prostration to him who is worshiped by sages and ascetics.

Prostration to him who destroys the three impurities (of mind, speech and body).

Prostration to him who dwells in the country called Gonarda. Gonarda is a village in Kashmir on the bank of a river of the same name.

Prostration to the son of Gonika.

Prostration to the author of the Yoga Sutras.

Prostration to the author of the Mahabhashyam.

Prostration to the founder of the Ayurvedic scriptures.
Prostration to him who is very skilled in explaining.

Prostration to him who is only intelligible to Yogis (the ardent practitioners of Yoga).

Prostration to him who knows the complete object or meaning.

Prostration to him who teaches the true nature of Kriyayoga.

Lord Patanjali says, "Kriyayoga is self-discipline (austerity), self-study and the total surrender to God" (Yoga Sutra 2/1).

Prostration to him who knows the essence of true knowledge.

Prostration to him who describes the (subtle) divisions of time (so that we can meditate upon them).

Lord Patanjali quotes, "By the practice of Samyama (i.e. concentration, contemplation and meditation combined) on moments and their continuous succession the Yogi gains supreme knowledge born of discrimination". (Yoga Sutra 3/53)

Prostration to him who knows the Subtle Time (of the flow of the three Gunas, i.e. the qualities of nature which are also its constituents).

The three Gunas are Sattvaguna (the quality of light or knowledge), Rajoguna (the quality of action) and Tamoguna (the quality of darkness, ignorance and inertia).

When by ardent practice a Yogi reaches the state of Dharma-megha Samādhi (i.e. the Samadhi in which there is the showering of Dharma [ultimate righteousness as the law that bears the Universe]) the flow of the three Gunas terminates. Indeed, this flow is the cause of all pain and suffering in this world. While explaining the flow of the three Gunas, Lord Patanjali describes the uninterrupted sequence of subtle moments that leads towards and only terminates into the transformation of an object or a Guna, thus creating all that has been created. This uninterrupted flow of time is the Subtle Time that continuously transforms objects. This transformation leads to the continuous process of creation, sustenance and destruction. All this is mentioned in the Yoga Sutras 4/29–33.

Prostration to him who explains the seven cases (of grammar).

Prostration to him who explains or declares the words for elementary substances.
Prostration to him who explains the difference of Sphota. Sphota is the idea which flashes into the mind when a word is uttered and not the word itself.

Prostration to him who describes the qualities of words.

Prostration to him who explains the difference between various sounds.

Prostration to the follower of Kuni’s philosophy. Kuni was a very ancient commentator on Panini’s Ashtadhyayi who is considered to have existed prior to Lord Patanjali and whose work is lost.

Prostration to him who explains the meaning of Panini’s grammatical rules and their exceptions.

Prostration to him who is indulged in exquisite thinking.

Prostration to him who is well versed in the language of common people.

Prostration to him who is worshipped by the people.

Prostration to him who is absorbed in meditation.

Prostration to the one with a delighted soul.

Prostration to the one with a delighted face.

Prostration to the one with a delighted body.

Prostration to him with a pure heart.

Prostration to him who has realized the state of Kaivalya.
Prostration to him who describes the various Siddhis (accomplishment of superhuman powers).

Prostration to him who describes the nature of meditation.

Prostration to him who is free from mental confusion.

Prostration to him who shows methods to purify the mind (friendliness, compassion, delight, impartiality, as described in the Yoga Sutra 1/33).

Prostration to the author of the "Yoga Patala", i.e. the Yoga Sutras (lit. the roof of Yoga protecting us from the scorching heat and hailstorms of worldly grief, agony and suffering).

Prostration to the remover of afflictions and Karmas.

Prostration to him who rests in his own essential nature (in which the true Self is realized as described in the Yoga Sutra 1/3).

Prostration to the most compassionate soul.

Prostration to him who has obtained discriminative awareness (as described in the Yoga Sutra 2/27).

Prostration to the greatest Rishi.

The Sanskrit root "rish" means to reach, perceive and know; hence the term "Rishi" means a Yogi who has reached and perceives or knows the Ultimate Truth, the substratum and the essence of the Universe. Rishis were highly purified souls that obtained the highest level of purification through ardent practice of Yoga and to whom the holiest of the Holy Scriptures, viz. the four Vedas were revealed. Rishis also developed the Vedic teachings into the highly mystical Vedic culture. Yoga is the practical aspect and Vedanta is the theoretical aspect of this universal Vedic culture, which encompasses and welcomes all the basic concepts of every religion and theology.

Prostration to the greatest Yogi.
Prostration to him who shows the path to liberation.

Prostration to him who is worshiped by those who long for liberation.

Prostration to him who bestows the infallible fruit.

Prostration to him who is affectionate towards those who prostrate in front of him.

Prostration to him who purifies all the three instruments (mind, speech, body).

Prostration to the lord of the kings of the greatest Yogis.

Those who recite these 108 names of Bhagavan Patanjali with devotion reach the highest abode (of consciousness by His blessings).

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