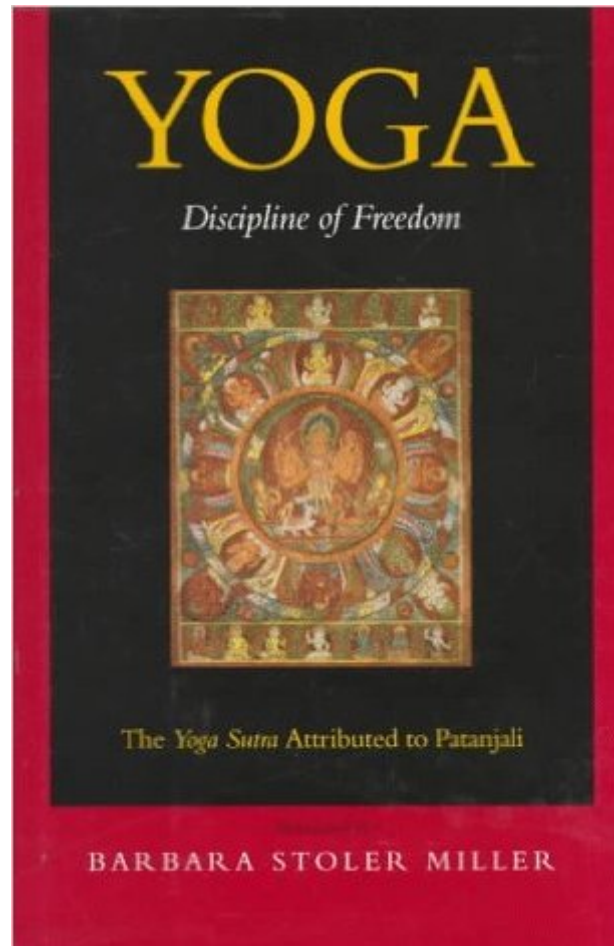


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Yoga: Discipline Of Freedom. The Yoga Sutra Attributed To Patanjali



Synopsis

The Yoga Sutra, dating from about the third century A.D., distills the essentials of a complex system of physical and spiritual discipline into 200 brief aphorisms. Yoga is at the heart of all meditative practice in Asia, yet until now there has been no first-rate English version of this primary text. Barbara Stoler Miller's translation admirably fills that gap; her clear, strong style and sensitive phrasing convey every nuance of Patanjali's words, and her commentary offers invaluable guidance to anyone seeking to understand Indian philosophy or the practice of yoga. The Yoga Sutra does not propose to offer new knowledge but rather a new perspective on the nature of knowing. As a method of achieving insight, the discipline of yoga is far from mystical ecstasy or ritual trance. Its goal is a contemplative intensity that can unbind the constraints of everyday experience, and that goal helps explain Americans' growing interest in yoga in recent years. This interest has been most widely expressed in the physical dimension of yoga; the postures known as hatha-yoga; but attention is increasingly being directed at the philosophy and psychology that define the discipline. Here the Yoga Sutra shines most brightly; in a world of bewildering complexity and seductive material culture, this centuries-old text offers powerful techniques for countering private mental chaos and moral confusion. The Yoga Sutra has great relevance today, and thanks to Barbara Stoler Miller it is now truly accessible.

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Customer Reviews

The main strength of this book is in the late Professor Miller's Introduction which is lucid and insightful in identifying and placing Patanjali's Yoga Sutras for the general reader. The weakness is

in Miller's use of certain non-yogic and sometimes misleading terms in her translation, usage which stems from her position as an academic of yoga and not a practitioner. Sometimes she translates words that probably should not be translated since there are no real English equivalents--for example, "samadhi" itself. And sometimes she uses what I would consider not the most agreeable English equivalent. Her use of the word "spirit" in the third aphorism is an example: "When thought ceases, the spirit stands in its true identity as observer to the world." The Sanskrit word she is translating is "drashtri" which is usually "seer" although it can also mean "soul," according to B.K.S. Iyengar. When one reads the next aphorism, "Otherwise, the observer [seer] identifies with the turnings of thought" it becomes clear that the seer is not spirit; indeed "spirit" is a confusing word in this context since it has no clear cognate in the dualistic yoga philosophy. The closest equivalent would be "purusha" but that would be inappropriate since that refers to the entire non-material consciousness (as opposed to "prakriti," which is what is manifested). Perhaps I should simply say that "soul" in yogic philosophy is not the same thing as "spirit." Another example would be her translation of vairagya in I.15 as "dispassion" which is technically correct but misses the larger meaning of the non-attachment that comes from renunciation, which is the point of the aphorism. I could also quibble with her use of the word "contemplation" as the equivalent of the Sanskrit "samadhi."

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