

अष्टाङ्गयोग

# Ashtaanga Yoga

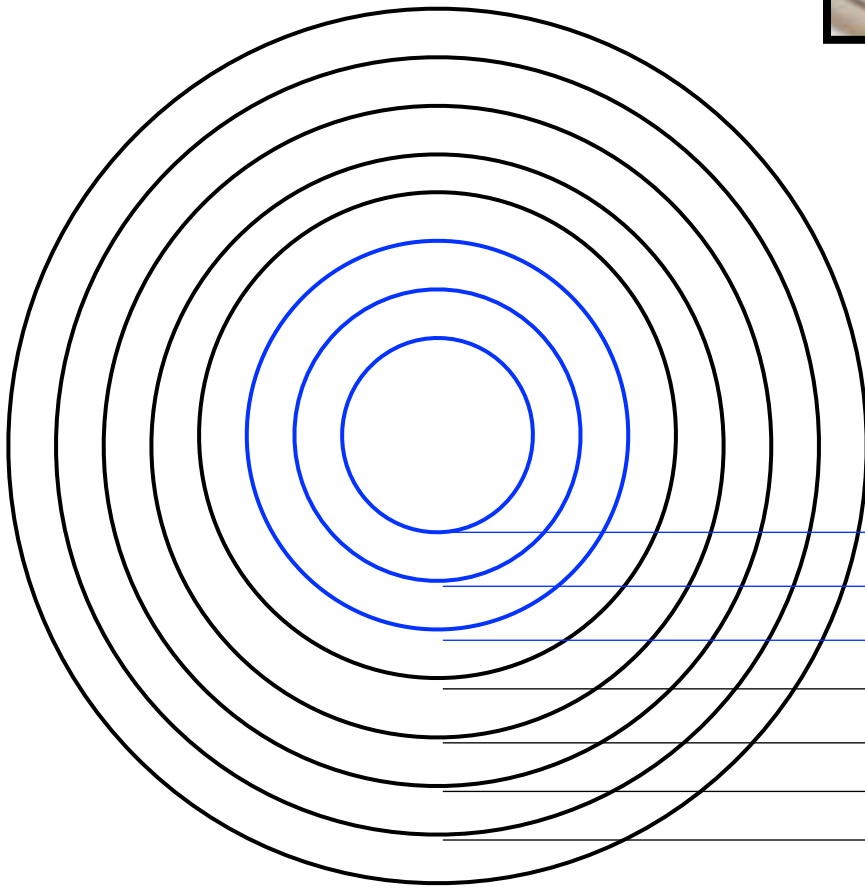
Aṣṭāṅga Yoga

aṣṭau = 8

aṅga = body, form, part, limb, layer, rung

**8 limbs of yoga** or **8 bodies** inwardly leading **to Union** with (God) Self

I like to use the imagery of the sequential dolls that stack inside of each other:



- (8) **samādhi** = absorption
- (7) **dhyāna** = meditate
- (6) **dhāraṇā** = hold, focus
- (5) **pratyāhāra** = senses inward
- (4) **prāṇāyāma** = energy / breath tools
- (3) **āsana** = physical posture tools
- (2) **niyama** = conduct toward me
- (1) **yama** = conduct toward environment and other beings

This description as sequential, from outermost to innermost, is important:  
I need to clean up my act around others and my environment in order to focus on myself.

Self-exploration leads progressively inward toward my brain and spinal cord, until I find the places between the breaths and between the heartbeats.

I explore the Seer within me that is in the stillness beyond breath and heartbeat.

This “8 bodies” description is from the **Yoga Sūtra(s) of Patañjali** ,  
a classic yoga philosophy text. **Sūtra** is a literary form - a kind of poetic, mnemonic writing style - where information is stored as code.

The **yoga sūtras** are 196 in number, divided into **4 chapters**:

1	samādhi	absorption	the 8th and deepest internal layer, where the mind is blissfully connected to “What Is”, to the moment, rather than watching over and editing itself or spinning in old survival patterns
2	sādhana	practices	technology for how to clarify the mind
3	vibhūti	special powers	powers that can come from the practices
4	kaivalya	leading to eternal happiness	beatitude; identification with the supreme spirit; detachment of the soul from matter or further transmigrations

The description of **aṣṭāṅga** in the **yoga sūtras** is found in the latter half of the second chapter leading into the beginning of the third chapter. This transition from chapter 2 (practices) to chapter 3 (special powers) mirrors how the outer practices (the first 5 outer rings of **aṣṭāṅga**) lead to the special power of being able to keep one’s awareness inside (the innermost 3 rings).

From outermost to innermost, the

# 8 layers / rungs / limbs

1	yama	check	5 checks on my conduct toward my outer environment and toward other beings
	1	ahimsā (ahinsaa)	non-harming
	2	satya	truth
	3	asteyā (asteyaa)	non-stealing
	4	brahmacarya	continence; “going with Creator”; preservation of what is vital
	5	aparigraha	non-possessiveness; “not-everywhere-grasping”; non-clinging
2	niyama	internal check	5 checks on my conduct toward myself
	1	śauca (shaucha)	cleanliness; purity
	2	saṁtoṣa (santosha)	contentment
	3	tapah	purification practice
	4	svādhyāya (svaadhyaya)	repetition of luminous study; scriptural study; “Self-total-study”
	5	īśvara praṇidhāna (eeshvara-pranidhaana)	fully aligning attention with the Supreme being within; filling up with the Holy Spirit
3	āsana	physical posture	preparing and exploring my outer shell, my physical body
4	prāṇāyāma	energy exploration	breathing technology
5	pratyāhāra	direct senses inward	turn the senses away from survival (outer sense world) and inward toward the nervous system (brain and spinal cord)
6	dhāraṇā	focus, hold	be able to hold awareness and senses inward
7	dhyāna	meditation	be able to follow awareness as it moves within
8	samādhi	absorption	blissfully absorbed in the moment - watching, watcher and watched have all become one