

Sage Patanjali, by Geeta S. Iyengar

Now let me tell you about the Patanjali invocation and the meaning of the invocation and their symbolism. The invocation begins with Āum. Āum is the first primordial sound, an adi nada, a melodious, sonorous and sublime sound. The three syllables Ā, U, M represent the entire range of sound and creation. They represent the waking dream and sleep states of consciousness. The crescent symbolizes the transcendental state. Āum is pranava which means exalted, unsurpassable praise of the supreme principle, the divinity. According to Patanjali it symbolises Isvara, the divinity “tasya vacakah pranavah.” Being the source of all energies Āum is uttered as an auspicious beginning. No sacred activity will be complete, profound and perfect without effecting the supreme grace and Āum is the greatest invocation to seek that grace.

The invocation we chant first is as follows:

**Yogena cittasya padena vacam
Malam sarirasyaca vaidyakena
Yopakarottam prvaram muninam
Patanjalim pranjaliranato'smi**

Meaning: To the noblest of sages, Patanjali, who gave us yoga for serenity of mind, grammar for purity of speech and medicine for the perfection of the body, I salute. The second part describes the statue of Patanjali:

**Abahu purusakaram
Sankha cakrasi dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam
Pranamami Patanjalinam**

Meaning: I salute before Patanjali whose upper body has a human form, whose arms hold a conch, and disc and a sword, who is crowned by a thousand headed cobra. Oh incarnation of Adisesa my humble salutations to thee.

The authors of [these] invocation are actually unknown. It was never the custom in those days to mention the name of oneself as an author or a writer. However, some traditional books mention that abahu purusakaram was written by King Bhojadeva in 1, 100 AD, author of Rajamartanda Vrtti a commentary on the Yoga Sutras.

Each aspect of the statue of Patanjali carries meaning like the intricately worded sutras. When one gazes at the idol of Sage Patanjali one sees the three and a half coils below the navel. The three coils indicate the Pranava Āum, a mystical symbol conveying the concept of God as generator, organizer and destroyer. It signifies him as omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. Aum is composed of three syllables, Ā, U and M with a crescent and a dot on the top.

The three completed coils symbolize the syllables and the half coil, the crescent. It also represents the three gunas of prakrti, namely sattva, rajas and tamas and an aspirant aiming at the trigunatita state, which is a transcendent state. Sage Patanjali invites our attention towards the three types of afflictions, namely adhyatmika, adhibhautika and adhidaivika, which are to be conquered by following the path of yoga. The three coils indicate that he is a master of Yoga, Grammar and Ayurveda. The half coil indicates the reaching of the state of kaivalya.

The conch, in the left hand, signifies the state of alertness, attentiveness and readiness to face obstacles, which are inevitable in the practice of Yoga. In olden days the conch was blown as a warning call to get ready to face disaster or calamities as it is done nowadays with sirens. It is also a symbol of jnana.

The disc, in the right hand, signifies the destruction of ignorance with supreme effort and is a symbol of protection. The sword, tucked in the waist, indicates the cutting of the ego, pride or sense of "I" which is the main obstacle covering pure being. It is a sword of jnana to vanquish a jnana. These three weapons also indicate the restraint of mental fluctuations, removal of obstacles and the eradication of afflictions through the practice of Yoga.

The hood above the head is an assurance of protection from Adisesa, King of serpents. This protection always remains for the practitioner, provided he surrenders to the Lord, which is signified in the atmanjali mudra, hands folded in namaskara. The Bhagavatam narrates the story of the birth of Lord Krsna. Since Vasudeva was alerted by the Gods in heaven, that his eighth child Krsna will be killed by Kamsa, he takes the infant Krsna from Mathura to Gokul to protect him from the demon Kamsa. The river Yamuna was flooded as it was raining cats and dogs. At that juncture Adisesa protected Vasudeva and the infant Krsna by holding the hood over them like an umbrella and made a way, right in the middle of the river, so that Vasudeva could cross the river easily. Lord Patanjali indicates with his hood, that he is our protector, provided we destroy the evils hidden within us by the sword of Yoga, purifying ourselves with yogic Sadhana.

The thousand headed cobra, sahasra sirasam svetam, indicates that Patanjali guides us in a thousand ways by showing us the several methods of practice and the approach to find the Soul within.

The idol of Patanjali shows him as half-man and half-serpent. The human form indicates the individuality of man, since he has been endowed with intelligence to use his own efforts to reach the goal. The form of the serpent suggests the motion and continuity of Sadhana, which cannot end until the goal is reached.

Patanjali guides us to move like a serpent, intensely, silently and fast on the path of Yoga and to be a tivasamvegin, the ultimate type as a pupil. If you have understood the significance, offer your prayers with a mind of prayerfulness so that you know what Sage Patanjali means by tajjapah tadarthabhavanam, that means - recite the prayers knowingly, repeatedly, devotedly.

Let me now give you some of the qualities of Patanjali, according to his works. Patanjali is an immortal, versatile personality, a master of diverse knowledge with divine qualities. He is a dharmin, virtuous and pious in deeds, a tapasvin, a bhaktin, a sannyasin and a devout practitioner. He is an artist, a skilled dancer, a scientist, a mathematician, an astronomer, a scholar, a physicist, a psychologist, a biologist, a neurologist, a surgeon, a skilled physician and an educationist par excellence. He is an incarnation of glorious qualities, in sraddha, virya and vairagya. He is an expert in psychological and chronological time, as well as in the science of gravity. He transcends the purusarthas namely, dharma, artha, kama and moksa, as well as prkriti. He has unsurpassable memory and is well versed with nature and its functions. Yet he remains a pure being, a perfect siddhan, a realized Soul. All these qualities suffuse the life of Patanjali.

This is not an exaggeration. The siddhis mentioned in the Vibhuti Pada, relate to various aspects of existence, cosmos, body, mind and bear the stamp of his authentic and profound experience. Let me conclude this immortal journey, dear sadhakas, with an anjali, a sublime offering. The faith in ourselves should grow with understanding. When the ego begins to dissolve, the eyes begin to see the greatness of the inspired teachings of one of the most original thinkers who ever lived. We are mortals and Patanjali is an immortal Soul. Just as a river does not retain its identity while merging into the sea, let us through our practices merge into the river of burning light of Yoga, passed onto us by Sri Patanjali.

Hari om tat sat. All that is the Truth.



