

Karl Baier / Philipp A. Maas / Karin Preisendanz (eds.)

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Keeping the commitments of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), speaking the truth (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), chastity (*brahmacārya*), and not possessing property (*aparigraha*) is the condition for taking up the five obligations, i.e., (1) purity (*śauca*), (2) satisfaction with the personal living conditions (*saṃtoṣa*), (3) asceticism (*tapas*), (4) studying for oneself (*svādhyāya*), and (5) dedication to God (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*).¹⁷

According to Patañjali’s explanations in PYŚ 2.30, non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is the central conception of yogic ethics as a whole. It is the condition and the aim of all other commitments and obligations.¹⁸

In the further course of practice, the yogi complements the honouring of commitments and obligations step by step with the practice of further ancillaries that take him gradually to different kinds of mental training and meditation, and finally to absorption. In the ultimate stage of absorption, the yogi gains the liberating insight into the ontological difference between the Subject and Matter.

The way to liberation is a stairway on which each step brings the aspirant closer to his goal. Therefore the practice of ancillaries of yoga does not constitute a religious aim in its own right. The role and meaning of each ancillary in classical Yoga is determined by its potential to promote the yogi’s spiritual progress towards liberation.

3. Patañjali’s Posture Passage

With these general considerations in mind, it is now possible to turn to the passage of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* dealing explicitly with the practice of postures. This passage, which runs from PYŚ 2.46 to PYŚ 2.48, reads as follows:¹⁹

obligations attains the practice of each of the subsequent [ancillaries] after having attained a firm foothold in each of the preceding ancillaries starting with posture. For one cannot climb the following step without having climbed the first” (*yamaniyamayuktasyādhikṛtasya yogina āsanādyanṅānāṃ pūrvapūrve sthiraṇāprāptasyottarottarānuṣṭhānaṃ prāptam. na hi prathamam sopānam anāruhyottaram āroḍhum śakyam*).

17 See YS 2.32 (p. 104, l. 12f.): *śaucaṣaṃtoṣatapaḥsvādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni niyamāḥ*.

18 See PYŚ 2.30 (p. 102, ll. 5–10): “And the subsequent commitments and obligations, being rooted in non-violence, are taught here as being conducive to the perfection of non-violence in order to teach non-violence. They are employed only to produce a pure form of non-violence. And thus it has been authoritatively stated: ‘Depending on the degree this Brāhmaṇa here wants to keep the vows, which are many, he produces non-violence in its pure form, inasmuch as he desists from the causes of violence produced out of carelessness’” (*uttare ca yamaniyamās tanmūlās tatsiddhiparatayaiva tatpratipādanāya pratipādyante. tadavadātārūpakaraṇāyāivopādīyante. tathā cōktam: “sa khalv ayaṃ brāhmaṇo yathā yathā vratāni bahūni samādīśate tathā tathā pramādaḥkṛtebhyo hiṃsānidānebhyo nivartamānas tām evāvadātārūpām ahiṃsām karoti,” iti*).

19 For the critically edited Sanskrit text of this passage, see Appendix 1 below.

The commitments and obligations have already been explained [previously] together with the supernatural powers [that they generate]. Now I shall explain [the ancillaries] posture and so on. Of these, *a steady and comfortable posture* (YS 2.46) – as there are the Lotus Posture, the Good Fortune Posture, the Hero Posture, the Lucky Mark Posture, the Staff Posture, the One with Support, the Couch Posture, Sitting Like a Sarus Crane (?),²⁰ Sitting Like an Elephant, Sitting Like a Camel, the Even Pose, Constant Relaxation, and As is Comfortable, and so on like this – *either from the slackening of effort or from merging meditatively into infinity* (YS 2.47). “Arises” has to be supplied in this sentence. Either the posture is achieved because effort stops, so that the body does not tremble. Alternatively, the mind, merging meditatively into infinity, brings about the posture. *Because of that, one is not afflicted by the pairs of unpleasant sensations* (YS 2.48). Because one masters the postures, one is not overcome by the pairs of unpleasant sensations such as cold and heat.

The Sanskrit original of this passage contains (as YS 2.46) the famous phrase *sthiraasukham āsanam* that is frequently cited in the literature of transnational postural yoga as a definition or characterisation of posture practice.²¹ From the late nineteenth century up to the present date, modern translators tend, as the following more or less randomly chosen examples show, to render this phrase into English in similar ways:²²

- a) Posture (is that which is) firm and pleasant (Mitra 1883: 102)
- b) Posture is steadily easy (Prasāda 1910: 169)
- c) Stable-and-easy posture (Woods 1914: 191)
- d) Posture is steady and comfortable (Rukmani 1983: 217)
- e) Posture is to be firm and pleasant (Leggett 1990: 273)
- f) A posture [as a constituent of yoga] is that which is steady and easeful (Veda Bharati 2004: 568)
- g) L'assiette est qui est stable et confortable (Filliozat 2005: 229)
- h) Posture should be comfortably steady (Larson 2008: 172)
- i) Posture should be steady and comfortable (Bryant 2009: 283)
- j) Postures (*asana*) should be firm but easy (comfortable) (Phillips 2009: 215).

The only translator who did not read the *sūtra* as a definition or characterisation of posture was James H. Woods (translation c above), who provided a virtually

20 On the problem of identifying the bird called *krauñca*, see below, p. 75.

21 A search on Google at <http://google.com/> for the phrase “sthira sukham asanam” on 16 November 2017 yielded 65,300 results.

22 To the best of my knowledge, the only English translation of *sūtra*-s 2.46 and 2.47 as a syntactical unit was published in Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 97–99. This translation may be based on the explanation of the two *sūtra*-s that I first suggested in Vienna during my presentation at the conference “Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on a Global Phenomenon” on 19 September 2013, which James Mallinson and Mark Singleton were kind enough to attend.

unintelligible rendering that simply consists of a collocation of two English words. All other scholars understood YS 2.46 as a complete sentence that defines what a posture is (translations a, b, d, f, and g), or how a posture should be (translations e, h, i, and j). None of the above cited translators took into account that YS 2.46 actually is just the initial part of a sentence that extends – over a parenthesis in the *bhāṣya*-part of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* – into the following YS 2.47. This is quite surprising, because the fact that the two *sūtra*-s 2.46 and 2.47 form a single sentence is clearly expressed at the beginning of the *bhāṣya*-part of PYŚ 2.47, in which Patañjali remarks that the verbal form “‘arises’ (*bhavati*) has to be supplied in this sentence.”²³

Regardless of the exact meaning of the word *sthirasukham*, the two *sūtra*-s may be translated together with their supplement from the *bhāṣya* as follows: “A *sthirasukha* posture (*sūtra* 2.46) [...] from the slackening of effort or from merging meditatively into infinity (*sūtra* 2.47).” “Arises” has to be supplied in this sentence.²⁴

The interpretation of the two *sūtra*-s 2.46 and 2.47 as a single sentence is in accord with the explanation presented in the following *bhāṣya*-passage of PYŚ 2.47:

Either a posture is achieved because effort stops, whereby trembling of the body does not happen, or the mind, having merged meditatively into infinity, brings about the posture.²⁵

Here Patañjali presents a commentarial paraphrase of the preceding *sūtra* 2.47 (“either from the slackening of effort or from merging meditatively into infinity”, *prayatnaśaithilyānantyasamāpattibhyām*), as can be inferred from the fact that he explicitly mentions both the stopping of effort and the meditative merging into infinity as alternative causes for establishing a yogic posture. The use of the ablative case in the paraphrase of the first part of the compound indicates that Patañjali intended the ambiguous dual ending *-ābhyām* to express the ablative case with a causal meaning. Moreover, the formulations “a posture is achieved” (*āsanam sidhyati*) and “brings about a posture” (*āsanam nirvartayati*) may be read as auto-comments on the supplied verb form “arises” (*bhavati*) that clarify how the two mentioned practices result in a *sthirasukha* posture.

If YS 2.46 is read together with the following *sūtra* 2.47 as a single sentence, the meaning of the phrase *sthirasukham āsanam* differs from the meaning assumed in all the translations cited above. Since *sthirasukham āsanam* is not a complete

23 PYŚ 2.46, l. 6 in Appendix 1 below: *bhavati, iti vākyaśeṣaḥ*.

24 PYŚ 2.46–47, ll. 1–6 in Appendix 1 below: *sthirasukham āsanam* (YS 2.46) [...] *prayatnaśaithilyānantyasamāpattibhyām* (YS 2.47) *bhavati, iti vākyaśeṣaḥ*.

25 PYŚ 2.47, l. 6f. in Appendix 1 below: *prayatnoparamād yā sidhyaty āsanam, yena nāṅga-mejayo bhavati. ānantye vā samāpannam cittam āsanam nirvartayati, iti*.

nominal sentence, the phrase can neither describe nor prescribe posture practice in general. The phrase is just the initial part of a sentence stating that a *sthira-sukha* posture results from either of two alternative activities, i.e., from “slackening of effort” or from “merging meditatively into infinity”. But what exactly is a *sthirasukha* posture?

3.1. Grammatical Analyses of the Compound *Sthirasukha*

The compound *sthirasukha* consists of the two nominal stems *sthira-* and *sukha-*. The first one is evidently an adjective with the lexical meanings, among others, “firm, not wavering or tottering, steady”, and “durable, lasting, permanent, changeless”.²⁶ The second stem, *sukha-*, may either be a noun meaning “ease, easiness, comfort, prosperity, pleasure, joy, delight in” or an adjective. In the latter case, the word means “pleasant, agreeable”, or “comfortable, happy, prosperous”.²⁷ Since all three commentators of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* interpret *sukha-* as an adjective, following them in this regard appears appropriate.

Vācaspati analysed the compound *sthirasukha* in his gloss of YS 2.46, where he interprets the compound to mean “steadily comfortable”: “The meaning of the *sūtra* [i.e., YS 2.46] is that posture is steadily, i.e., unwaveringly, comfortable, i.e., comfort-producing.”²⁸

This is an interpretation of the compound as a descriptive determinative compound (*karmadhāraya*) in which the first adjective is used to qualify the second one adverbially. This interpretation corresponds to the two translations by Rāma Prasāda and Gerald Larson (translations b and h cited above). Most of the remaining translations are based on an analysis of *sthirasukha* as a *karmadhāraya* in which the meaning of the second word stem stands in apposition to the meaning of the first stem. This interpretation may have led to the translations of *sthirasukha* as “firm and pleasant” by Rajendralal Mitra, “steady and comfortable” by T. S. Rukmani, “firm and pleasant” by Trevor Leggett, “steady and easeful” by Veda Bharati, “stable et comfortable” by Jean Filliozat, “steady and comfortable” by Edwin Bryant, and finally also to Steven Phillips’s translation “firm but easy”.

The interpretation accepted by the majority of modern translators matches the interpretation in the oldest and most informative commentary of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, the afore-mentioned *Pātañjalayogaśāstravivaraṇa*. Śaṅkara

²⁶ MW p. 1264, column 3, s. v. *sthira*.

²⁷ MW p. 1220, column 3f., s. v. *sukha*.

²⁸ TVai on PYŚ 2.46, l. 2f. as critically edited in Appendix 3 below: *sthiram niścalam yat sukham sukhāvaham, tad āsanam iti sūtrārthaḥ*.