

Invocation to Patanjali

Yogena cittasya padena vacam
Malam sarirasya ca vaidyakena
Yopakarottam pravaram muninam
Patanjalim pranjaliranato' smi
Abahu purusakaram
Sankha cakrasi dharinam
Sahasra sirasam svetam
Pranamami patanjalinam

To the noblest of sages, Patanjali,
Who gave Yoga for serenity of mind,
Grammar for purity of speech,
And medicine for perfection of the body, I bow.
I bow down before Patanjali
Whose upper body has a human form,
Whose arms hold a conch and disc,
Who is crowned by a thousand-headed cobra,
O incarnation of Adisesa, my salutations to thee.

Why do we recite the Invocation to Patanjali at the beginning of class?

Patanjali holds a unique position in the line of great Indian sages and benefactors of mankind. He is venerated in Indian tradition as the author of classical treatises on medicine, grammar, and Yoga. These three sciences effect the purification of the human body, speech, and mind.

He is said to be an incarnation of the serpent Adisesa (meaning “The Infinite One”) on whom Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the world, rests in slumber before the beginning of creation.

Patanjali was born to a saintly woman named Gonika who had spent her life in spiritual pursuits. It is said that he fell into her cupped hands in the form of a tiny snake as she was offering an oblation of water to the sun. Hence he was named Patanjali, from pata, meaning snake or fallen, and anjali, meaning hands folded in prayer. He is depicted with a man’s torso and the coiled tail of a serpent.

The invocation to Patanjali is recited to ask for the presence of this great teacher during our yoga practice. It shows our appreciation of the yoga tradition as it has been passed down to us from the many teachers since the time of Patanjali. It also shows appreciation of all the teachers who came before us and begins the class with reverence for the subject of yoga.