

JNANASHTANGAMULU — THE EIGHT LIMBS OF KNOWLEDGE

Every seeker (Sadhaka [spiritual practitioner]) who desires Moksha (liberation) must first practice Ashtanga Yoga [the eight-limbed path of Yoga].

Within this — Yama [restraints], Niyama [observances], Asana [posture/equanimity], and Pranayama [breath-energy regulation] — these first four limbs are to be understood as Bahya Sadhanas [external/outer practices].

And Pratyahara [withdrawal of senses], Dharana [concentration], Dhyana [meditation], and Samadhi [absorption] — these are to be understood as Antara Sadhanas [internal/inner practices].

Through the practice of Pranayama — by bringing both Prana [life-force/breath-energy] and the mind (Manas [the thinking mind]) under one's control — the Sadhaka attains Manolaya [dissolution or merging of the mind] and reaches the state of Sva-Svarupatma Sthiti [abiding in one's own true Self-nature].

The Inner Map: From Breath to Liberation

Pranayama is the bridge between outer and inner practice. By mastering Prana (the breath-energy), the mind naturally begins to quieten. When the mind quietens, it becomes Antarmukha (inward-facing). In that inward stillness, the eight limbs work together — from the first gross external disciplines all the way to the complete absorption of Samadhi.

A Yoga Sadhaka [practitioner of Yoga] — along with the practice of Pranayama — must also continuously engage in Tattva Vichara [inquiry into the nature of Truth/Reality] within the mind, in order to bring the mind under control.

That very Tattva Vichara [inquiry into Truth] — that very act of investigation — is what constitutes the Jnanashtangamulu [the Eight Limbs of Knowledge].

The Definitive Verse on the Eight Limbs

dehendriyeshu vairaagyam yama ityucyatethi budhah anuraktiparatas tattve satataM niyamaH
smRRitaH sarvavastuunyudaaseena bhaava maasanam uttamam jagat sarvam idaM mithyaa priitih
praaNa samyamah chittasyaa-ntarmukhii bhaavah pratyaahaarastu sattvam chittasya nishchalo bhaavo

dhaaraNaa-dhaaraNam viduh so-ham chinmaatra meveti chintanam dhyaanamuchyate dhyaanasya
vismaRRiti samyak samaadhi rabhidheeyate
— Trishikhi Brahmanopanishat — verse 20

Verse Translation — Line by Line

Having Vairagya [non-attachment, detachment] toward the body and the senses — this, say the wise (Budhas [the enlightened/wise ones]), is called Yama [restraint].

Always having a deep longing (Anurakti [loving devotion and attraction]) toward the Tattva [Truth/Reality] of Paramatma [the Supreme Self] — this is called Niyama [observance].

Having the attitude of Udaseena Bhava [equanimity, neutrality, non-attachment — the attitude of a witness] toward all visible objects and things (Sarva Vastu [all things/objects]) — this highest posture of mind is called Asana [seat/posture].

Considering this entire visible Jagat [world/creation] to be Mithya [illusory, false, not ultimately real] — this Priti [inclination/love for this understanding] is called Pranayama [breath-energy regulation/restraint of Prana].

Turning the Chitta [mind-stuff, the deeper mental faculty] inward — making it Antarmukhi [facing inward] — this is called Pratyahara [withdrawal of the senses and mind].

Keeping the Chitta [mind] in a Nishchala [still, motionless, unwavering] state — this is known as Dharana [concentration].

The Chintanam [contemplation, steady thinking] of 'So-Ham [I am That] — I am nothing but pure Chinmatra [pure Consciousness alone]' — this is called Dhyana [meditation].

Completely forgetting (Vismarati [total forgetting]) — even the very act that one is doing Dhyana [meditation] — this complete forgetting is called Samadhi [total absorption, the highest state of consciousness].

The Eight Limbs — Visual Overview

The Path of the Eight Limbs

The Eight Limbs form a progressive journey from outer discipline (Bahiranga) to inner absorption (Antaranga). Each limb prepares the ground for the next, like ascending steps toward the summit of Self-realisation.

— BAHYA SADHANA (Outer Practices) —

1
YAMA

యమము | Restraint

Vairagya (non-attachment) toward the body and the senses. Turning away from outer indulgences by choice, not by force.



2
NIYAMA

నియమము | Observance

Constant loving longing (Anurakti) for Paramatma Tattva. The mind's orientation is always directed toward the Supreme Truth.



3
ASANA

ఆసనము | Equanimity / Seat

Udaseena Bhava — the attitude of a neutral witness toward all visible objects. The 'seat' of the mind is unshakeable equanimity.



4
PRANAYAMA

ప్రాణాయామము | Regulation of Prana

Recognising the entire visible Jagat as Mithya (illusory). This conviction IS the restraint and mastery of Prana.

— ANTARA SADHANA (Inner Practices) —

5
PRATYAHARA

ప్రత్యాహారము | Withdrawal

Turning the Chitta (mind-stuff) Antarmukhi — completely inward-facing. The mind no longer chases outward experiences.



6
DHARANA

ధారణ | Concentration

Keeping the Chitta in a Nishchala (perfectly still, unwavering) state. The mind rests without fluctuation.



7 DHYANA

ధ్యానము | Meditation

Steady contemplation (Chintanam) of 'So-Ham — I am nothing but pure Consciousness (Chinmatra).' The identity merges with Brahman.



8 SAMADHI

సమాధి | Total Absorption

Complete forgetting (Vismarati) — even of the fact that one is meditating. The meditator, the act, and the object of meditation dissolve into One.

The Purpose of the Eight Limbs

These Jnanashtangamulu [Eight Limbs of Knowledge] are exclusively concerned with the ripening (Paripakva [maturation, full development]) of the mind.

The Central Teaching

The Eight Limbs of Knowledge are not eight separate exercises to be performed one after another. They are eight dimensions of a single process — the complete maturation and purification of the mind. Each limb describes a quality of mind at progressively deeper levels of inward absorption.

Only to those who — through Pranayama — have brought the Pranic Vayu [vital wind/breath-energy] under their control — does the mind turn inward (Antarmukha [inward-facing]).

To such ones alone it is possible to truly practice, understand, and attain Siddhi [perfection/accomplishment] through these Jnanashtangamulu [Eight Limbs of Knowledge] properly (Yathaathatham [as they truly are, in their proper form and meaning]).

Limb	Sanskrit Definition	Inner Meaning
1. Yama	Vairagya toward body/senses	Detachment from the outer world
2. Niyama	Anurakti toward Paramatma Tattva	Constant inner longing for Truth
3. Asana	Udaseena Bhava toward all objects	Equanimity — the steady inner seat
4. Pranayama	Recognising the world as Mithya	The world's unreality dissolves Prana-pull
5. Pratyahara	Chitta becomes Antarmukhi	The mind turns fully inward

6. Dharana	Chitta remains Nishchala	The mind rests in perfect stillness
7. Dhyana	So-Ham / Chinmatra Chintanam	I am pure Consciousness — steady contemplation
8. Samadhi	Dhyana Vismarati	Complete forgetting — total absorption in the Self

CHAPTER SUMMARY — JNANASHTANGAMULU

- Every Mumukshu (seeker of liberation) must practise Ashtanga Yoga as the foundation. The eight limbs are divided into two groups: the first four (Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama) are Bahya Sadhana (outer practices), and the last four (Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi) are Antara Sadhana (inner practices).
- Pranayama is the essential bridge between outer and inner practice. By gaining mastery over Prana (the breath-energy) and the mind through Pranayama, the Sadhaka attains Manolaya (dissolution of the mind) and settles into Sva-Svarupatma Sthiti — abiding in the natural state of the Self.
- Simultaneously with Pranayama, a Yoga Sadhaka must engage in Tattva Vichara (inquiry into the nature of Truth) within the mind. These very eight limbs, as defined in this text, ARE that inquiry — they describe the qualitative states of mind in deepening levels of inward realisation.
- Yama is not merely ethical conduct — it is Vairagya (non-attachment) toward the body and the senses. This is the foundation: without detachment from outer objects, no genuine inward journey is possible.
- Niyama is not merely ritual discipline — it is the continuous inner longing (Anurakti) for Paramatma Tattva. When the mind is always drawn toward the Supreme, that itself becomes the highest discipline.
- Asana is not a physical posture — it is Udaseena Bhava (the equanimous, witnessing attitude) toward all visible objects and experiences. The mind that is not moved by any outer thing has found its true 'seat.'
- Pranayama — in its deeper Jnana sense — is the recognition that the entire visible world (Jagat) is Mithya (illusory, not ultimately real). This Priti (love for this understanding) is itself the restraint and regulation of Prana. The world's unreality withdraws the Prana inward.
- Pratyahara is when the Chitta (mind-stuff) becomes fully Antarmukhi (inward-facing). Dharana is when that inward Chitta becomes Nishchala (perfectly still and unwavering). These are progressive deepenings of the same inward turn.
- Dhyana is the steady, continuous contemplation (Chintanam) of 'So-Ham — I am pure Chinmatra (Consciousness alone).' The identity of the meditator is consciously merged with the universal Consciousness.
- Samadhi is the complete Vismarati (total forgetting) — even forgetting that one is meditating. In this state, there is no meditator, no act of meditation, no object meditated upon. All three have dissolved into the One. This is the culmination of the entire journey.
- These Eight Limbs are exclusively concerned with the Paripakva (complete ripening and maturation) of the mind. They are not a sequence of external exercises but a description of increasingly refined states of consciousness.
- The crucial prerequisite is mastery of Pranayama — bringing Pranic Vayu under control. Only then does the mind become Antarmukha (inward-facing), making it possible to truly practice and realise the Eight Limbs as they truly are (Yathaathatham).

KEY CONCEPTS & GLOSSARY

Sanskrit Term	English Meaning & Explanation
Ashtanga Yoga	The eight-limbed path of Yoga. 'Ashta' = eight; 'Anga' = limb. The complete system of Yoga leading to liberation.
Jnanashtangamulu	The Eight Limbs of Knowledge (Telugu). The same Ashtanga path as described through the lens of Jnana (Knowledge) — each limb defined by its quality of understanding and inquiry.
Bahya Sadhana	External/outer spiritual practice. The first four limbs (Yama through Pranayama) are considered 'outer' in that they are preparatory and work primarily at the level of body, breath, and gross mind.
Antara Sadhana	Internal/inner spiritual practice. The last four limbs (Pratyahara through Samadhi) work at progressively subtler and deeper levels of consciousness.
Manolaya	Dissolution or merging of the mind. The state where the mind ceases its restless activity and dissolves into stillness. A key transitional state between mental activity and deep absorption.
Sva-Svarupatma Sthiti	Abiding in one's own true Self-nature. The natural state of pure Consciousness, realised when the mind is fully stilled and dissolved.
Tattva Vichara	Inquiry into the nature of Truth/Reality. The practice of deeply examining 'Who am I? What is real? What is Brahman?' — the central practice of Jnana Yoga.
Yama	Restraint; in this Jnana interpretation — Vairagya (non-attachment) toward the body and senses. The first of the eight limbs.
Vairagya	Non-attachment; dispassion; detachment. The quality of not being bound by attraction to or repulsion from any outer object or experience.
Niyama	Observance; in this interpretation — constant Anurakti (loving longing) toward Paramatma Tattva. The second limb.
Anurakti	Deep loving attraction or longing. Here used to describe the mind's constant orientation toward the Supreme Truth. The opposite of Vairagya — but directed toward the Absolute, not the world.
Paramatma Tattva	The Truth/Reality of the Supreme Self. The ultimate nature of Brahman as the one undivided Consciousness pervading all existence.

Asana	Seat/posture; in this Jnana interpretation — Udaseena Bhava (equanimity, the witness-attitude) toward all visible objects. The third limb. Not a physical posture.
Udaseena Bhava	The attitude of a neutral, unmoved witness. Being equanimous — neither attracted nor repelled by any visible object or experience.
Pranayama	Regulation of Prana (breath-energy); in this Jnana interpretation — recognising the entire visible world (Jagat) as Mithya (illusory). The fourth limb. The world's unreality IS the restraint of Prana.
Mithya	Illusory; not ultimately real; superimposed appearance. The world appears to exist but has no independent, permanent reality apart from Brahman.
Jagat	The world; creation; the entire visible, manifest universe.
Pratyahara	Withdrawal; the turning of the Chitta (mind-stuff) inward — becoming Antarmukhi. The fifth limb. The senses and mind no longer reach outward.
Chitta	The mind-stuff; the deeper layer of the mental faculty that stores impressions (Samskaras). Includes memory, subconscious tendencies, and the feeling of 'I am'.
Antarmukhi / Antarmukha	Inward-facing; turned within. The state of the mind when it no longer projects outward but rests within itself.
Dharana	Concentration; the Chitta remaining in a Nishchala (still, unwavering) state. The sixth limb. The mind holds steadily without wavering.
Nishchala	Still; motionless; completely unwavering. Describes the quality of the mind in Dharana — like a flame in a windless place.
Dhyana	Meditation; in this interpretation — the continuous, steady contemplation (Chintanam) of 'So-Ham — I am pure Chinmatra (Consciousness alone).' The seventh limb.
So-Ham	Sanskrit: 'That-I-am' or 'I am That.' The realisation of the identity between the individual self (Jiva) and the Supreme (Brahman). The natural mantra of the breath — 'So' on inhalation, 'Ham' on exhalation.
Chinmatra	Pure Consciousness alone; nothing but Consciousness. 'Chin' = Consciousness; 'Matra' = alone/only. The ultimate nature of the Self.
Chintanam	Steady contemplation; continuous, focused thinking or reflection on a single subject, without deviation.
Samadhi	Total absorption; the complete forgetting (Vismarati) of even the act of meditation. The eighth and highest limb. The meditator, the act of meditation, and the object are all dissolved.

Vismarati	Complete forgetting; total dissolution of the mental act. In Samadhi — even the awareness of 'I am meditating' is completely forgotten.
Paripakva	Fully ripe; matured; completely developed. Describes the state of mind that is ready for Self-realisation.
Pranic Vayu	The vital air/breath-energy. One of the five major Pranas. Here refers to the Prana that must be brought under mastery through Pranayama.
Yathaathatham	As they truly are; in their proper, authentic form and meaning. Practising the limbs correctly and with true understanding.
Sadhaka	A spiritual practitioner; one who is engaged in Sadhana (spiritual practice) on the path toward realisation.
Siddhi	Perfection; accomplishment; spiritual attainment. Here used to mean the successful realisation of the Eight Limbs.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Beginner Level

Q: What are the Jnanashtangamulu and why are they important?

A: Jnanashtangamulu means the 'Eight Limbs of Knowledge' — the eight-limbed path of Yoga described through the lens of Jnana (wisdom and inquiry). They are important because every seeker (Mumukshu) who desires Moksha (liberation) must traverse this path. The eight limbs provide a complete, systematic map of the inward journey — from initial detachment and ethical discipline all the way to total absorption in the Self (Samadhi). Without this structure, spiritual practice can become scattered and ineffective.

Q: What is the difference between Bahya Sadhana and Antara Sadhana?

A: Bahya Sadhana (external practice) refers to the first four limbs — Yama, Niyama, Asana, and Pranayama. These work at relatively outer levels: the body, the senses, attitudes toward the world, and breath-energy regulation. Antara Sadhana (internal practice) refers to the last four — Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. These work at progressively deeper inner levels: withdrawing the mind, stilling it, meditating, and finally dissolving into complete absorption. The outer practices prepare the ground; the inner practices harvest the fruit.

Q: In this text, Asana is defined very differently from physical yoga postures. What does it mean here?

A: In this Jnana (knowledge-based) interpretation, Asana does not refer to a physical posture at all. Asana means Udaseena Bhava — the attitude of a completely neutral, unmoved witness toward all visible objects and experiences. The mind that is neither attracted to nor repelled by anything in the outer world has found its true 'seat' (Asana). This inner seat of equanimity is considered the highest Asana — far more fundamental than any physical posture.

Q: What is the meaning of So-Ham in the context of Dhyana?

A: 'So-Ham' means 'I am That' — the realisation of identity between the individual self and Brahman, the Supreme Consciousness. In Dhyana (meditation), the practitioner continuously contemplates 'So-Ham — I am nothing but pure Chinmatra (Consciousness alone).' This is not mere repetition of words — it is the steady, sustained merging of one's sense of identity with pure Consciousness. It is also the natural mantra of breathing: 'So' (That) is heard on inhalation, 'Ham' (I) on exhalation — every breath naturally affirming this truth.

Q: Why must Pranayama precede the inner practices?

A: Pranayama brings the Prana (vital breath-energy) and the mind under control. The mind and Prana are intimately connected — when Prana is restless and uncontrolled, the mind too remains scattered and outward-facing. When Prana is steadied through Pranayama, the mind naturally begins to quieten and turn inward (Antarmukha). Only when this inward turn has happened can the deeper practices of Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi be properly practised. Pranayama is therefore the essential gateway from the outer to the inner limbs.

Intermediate Level

Q: This text defines Pranayama as 'recognising the world as Mithya.' How is this a breath-control practice?

A: This definition reveals the deeper Jnamic understanding of Pranayama. The word 'Prana' refers not just to physical breath but to the fundamental vital force that sustains attention and desire toward outer objects. Our Prana flows outward through our desires, attractions, and assumptions that the world is real and significant. When we truly recognise the Jagat (world) as Mithya (illusory, not ultimately real), the Prana naturally withdraws inward — there is nothing compelling in the outer world to attract it. This is the deepest restraint (Ayama) of Prana — not a forced holding of breath, but the natural inward withdrawal of vital force through wisdom.

Q: The text says Samadhi is the complete forgetting of even the act of meditation. What does this mean?

A: In ordinary Dhyana (meditation), there is still a meditator (the one doing the practice), an act of meditation (the continuous contemplation), and an object of meditation (the awareness 'I am Chinmatra'). Even this subtle three-fold distinction is a residue of the ego. In Samadhi, even this is dissolved — the awareness 'I am meditating' itself is completely forgotten (Vismarati). What remains is not a person in a state — it is pure Consciousness itself, without any supporting superimposition. The wave has dissolved into the ocean and is no longer aware of being a wave.

Q: How is Tattva Vichara (inquiry into Truth) related to the Eight Limbs as described here?

A: The text explicitly states that Tattva Vichara IS the Jnanashtangamulu. The Eight Limbs, as defined in this text, are not merely physical or breath-based practices — they are the stages of deepening inquiry into the nature of Reality. Yama is the inquiry 'Am I the body or the senses?' leading to Vairagya. Niyama is the inquiry 'What is my true nature?' drawing the mind toward Paramatma Tattva. Pranayama is the inquiry 'Is this world truly real?' — and so on, up to Samadhi where even the inquirer dissolves. Each limb is simultaneously a practice and a depth of understanding.

Q: The text says 'only those who have brought Prana under control through Pranayama can practise the Eight Limbs properly.' What happens to those who try without this preparation?

A: Without mastery of Pranayama — without the breath and vital energy being stabilised and inward-turning — the mind remains extroverted and restless (Bahirmukha). In this state, attempting Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, or Samadhi is like trying to sail without wind or hold water without a vessel. The mind cannot withdraw, cannot hold steady, cannot sustain contemplation, and cannot enter absorption. Practices attempted without this foundation may produce superficial experiences but not the genuine Siddhi (accomplishment) that leads to liberation. This is why Pranayama is placed as the fourth limb — the essential gateway.

Q: Why are these eight limbs called the 'Eight Limbs of Knowledge' rather than just the 'Eight Limbs of Yoga'?

A: Traditionally, Ashtanga Yoga (as codified by Patanjali) describes the eight limbs primarily as progressive disciplines. This text's naming as Jnanashtangamulu (Eight Limbs of Knowledge) highlights that each limb, at its deepest level, is a state of understanding and inquiry — not merely a practice. Yama is not just ethical restraint but the wisdom of Vairagya. Pranayama is not just breath-control but the insight of Mithya. By calling them Jnanashtangamulu, the text emphasises that the entire path is an unfolding of wisdom — that Yoga and Jnana are inseparable (as also stated in the previous chapter). Each limb is both a practice and an understanding simultaneously.