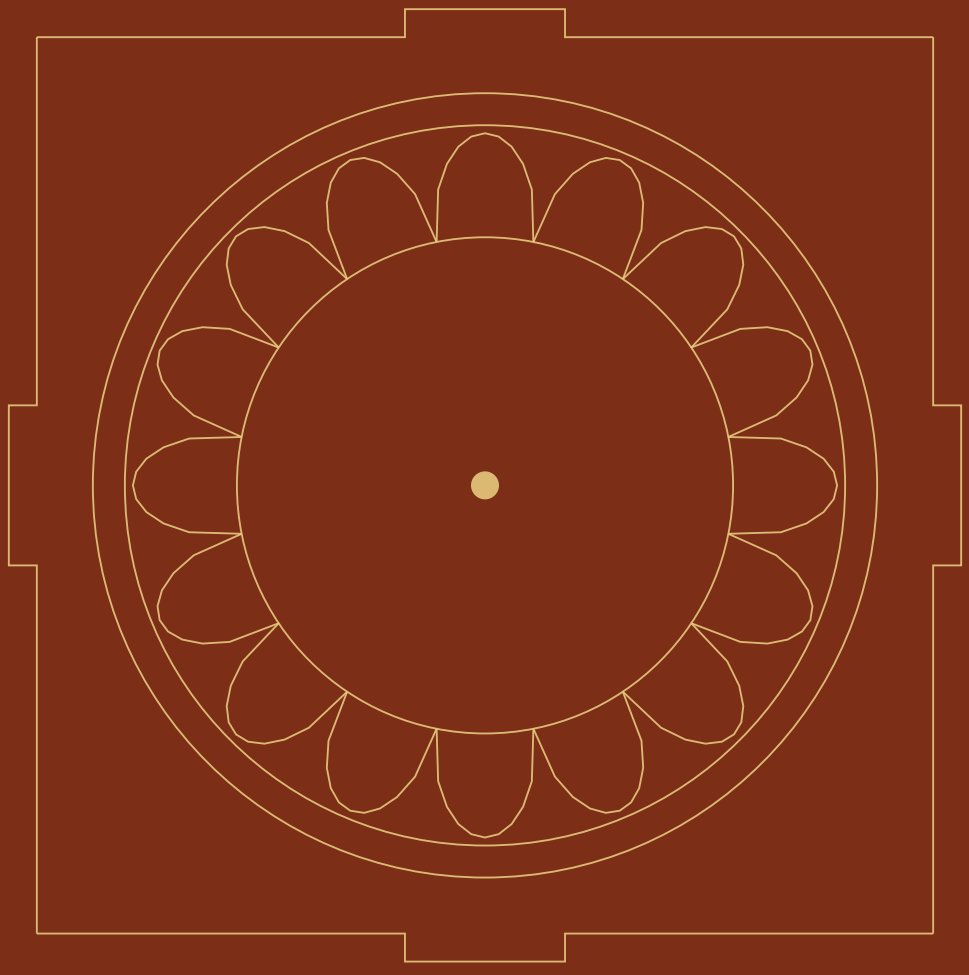
SACRED TEXTS

Jnana Yoga: The Path of Knowledge, with the Atma Bodha

Advaita Vedānta without jargon, the four qualifications, the 68 verses of the Ātmabodha in Sanskrit with our translation, neti neti, Ramana Maharshi's "Who am I?" and eight weeks of inquiry



ज्ञान

jñāna

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

Sit quietly for a moment and notice: you are aware. You are aware of these words, of the weight of your body, of a sound somewhere, of a thought passing. All of this changes. Something does not seem to change: the fact of being aware. What is that?

That question is the whole of jñāna yoga, the yoga of knowledge. It is the most austere of the paths, and also the simplest: it asks for no posture, no breath technique, no ritual. It asks you to look, with steady attention and the help of a teaching, at what you are.

This book does five things.

First, it says what jñāna means, and explains Advaita Vedānta, the "non-dual" school in which jñāna yoga is usually taught, in ten pages and without jargon.

Second, it gives the classical preparation: the four qualifications of the seeker (sādhana-catuṣṭaya), from a text we cite verse by verse, and the three stages of study: hearing, reflection, meditation (śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana).

Third, it gives the whole of the Ātmabodha, "Knowledge of the Self": 68 verses traditionally attributed to Śaṅkara, each in devanāgarī, in transliteration and in our own translation, in four parts, with notes. We name the printed edition we followed and say where editions differ.

Fourth, it presents two practices: neti neti, "not this, not this", the meditation of the witness, and the inquiry "Who am I?" of Ramana Maharshi, with dated facts on his life.

Fifth, it gives a practice to follow: eight weeks of inquiry, with a journal.

About the translations.

All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation. The Sanskrit text of the Ātmabodha follows a printed edition of 1890 (Bombay, Nirṇaya Sāgara Press), checked verse by verse on the scanned pages (Chapter 5); we take from it only the Sanskrit. Ramana Maharshi's teaching is summarised in our own words.

Inquiry and well-being.

Jñāna yoga asks for no physical effort. But intense self-inquiry and long sittings can, in some people, bring on feelings of unreality, of being detached from oneself or the world (depersonalisation or derealisation), or stir up old distress. If this happens, stop the practice, ground yourself in simple physical activity and company, and talk to your doctor. If you live with a psychiatric condition, practise only with a qualified teacher and with your doctor's agreement. In an emergency: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India), 000 (Australia).

How the texts are numbered

- **Ātmabodha (ĀB)**: 68 verses, numbered as in the Nirṇaya Sāgara edition of 1890 that we follow. Other editions, including the volunteer e-text widely circulated online, number differently from verse 8 to verse 33: they include a verse that our edition omits (upādāne 'khilādhāre…), and omit verse 33 of our edition (a quotation of the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad). From verse 34 to verse 68 the numbering is the same everywhere. Chapter 5 gives the details.
- **Vivekacūḍāmaṇi (VC)**: GRETIL text, numbered by verse.
- **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (BU)**: GRETIL text of the Kāṇva recension, with Śaṅkara's commentary, numbered by chapter, section and paragraph (2.4.5).
- **Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad**: volunteer e-text of sanskritdocuments.org, by section (2.1.3).

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 4 first: they give the frame and the method. Then read the Ātmabodha (Chapters 5 to 8) slowly, three or four verses a day, as the tradition reads such texts: once to understand, a second time to reflect, a third time in silence. Begin the eight-week practice of Chapter 12 whenever you like; it uses the verses as its support.

This book does not repeat our The Upanishads for Yogis, which gives the great Upanishads, the four "great sayings" and the teachings of Yājñavalkya in detail. Where you need them, we say so.

Chapter 1. Jñāna: to know

The word

Jñāna (ज्ञान) comes from the root jñā (ज्ञा), "to know", the same root as the English know, the Latin gnoscere and the Greek gnōsis. In ordinary Sanskrit it means knowledge of any kind. In the yoga of knowledge, it means something precise: not information about the Self, but the direct recognition of what one is.

The difference is everything. You can know a great deal about honey without having tasted it. Jñāna is the taste. The Ātmabodha puts it in its second verse: as cooking cannot happen without fire, liberation does not happen without knowledge (ĀB 2).

Knowledge, not belief

The paths of devotion and action ask for faith and effort. The path of knowledge asks for faith too (śraddhā, one of the qualifications of Chapter 3), but of a particular kind: trust enough in a teaching to test it in your own experience. Its method is close to an investigation. It points to something you already have (awareness), shows you how you confuse it with what is not it (body, thoughts, roles), and asks you to look until the confusion falls.

The jñāna yoga of the Gita

The Bhagavad Gita already speaks of a yoga of knowledge beside the yoga of action, and praises knowledge as a fire that burns all actions to ashes (BG 4.37) and as the supreme purifier (BG 4.38). Our Bhagavad Gita for Yogis reads these verses in their place. In the later tradition, especially from the teaching associated with Śaṅkara, jñāna yoga comes to mean the path of Advaita Vedānta: the study of the Upanishads under a teacher, with reflection and meditation, leading to the recognition that the Self (ātman) and the absolute (brahman) are not two.

Who is it for?

The tradition is frank: this path suits a certain temperament, the questioning mind that wants to understand, and it requires preparation (Chapter 3). Swami Vivekananda, who popularised the grid of four yogas in 1895-1896, presented jñāna yoga as one of four doors, each suited to a temperament. In practice, most people who walk this path also act, love and meditate. The Ātmabodha itself does not despise action: it says only that action, not being opposed to ignorance, cannot remove it (ĀB 3).

Practise: the one who knows

Tonight, sit for five minutes. Name, silently, what you notice: "sound… pressure in the legs… a thought about tomorrow… itching… a memory". After each name, add the question: "and who notices this?" Do

not answer in words. Just let the question turn the attention back towards the one who notices. Write one sentence afterwards.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 44 pages.

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