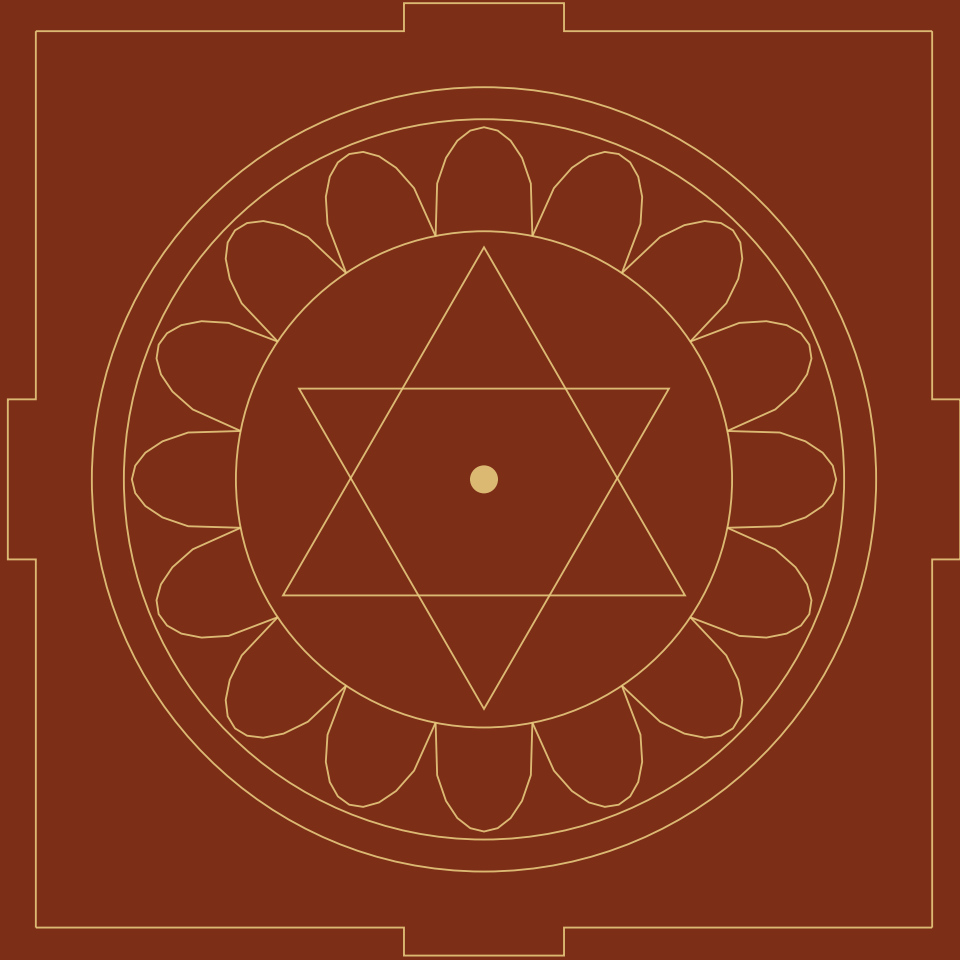


SACRED TEXTS

Sanskrit for Yogis

*Read Devanagari, pronounce every yoga word correctly and understand the mantras
you chant, word by word*



संस्कृत

saṃskṛta

YOGIDE

Free sample

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teacher or medical advice. Questions; administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

Every yoga class in the world, from a rooftop in Rishikesh to a studio in Chicago, still speaks a little Sanskrit. We say namaste at the end, śavāsana for the last rest, om before we begin. Teachers count ekam, dve, trīṇi in led Ashtanga classes. Chants close the session. Most practitioners repeat these sounds for years without being sure what they mean, how they are written, or whether they are pronouncing them as they were meant to be heard.

This book is a door into that language, written for yogis rather than for linguists. It will not make you a Sanskrit scholar. It will give you three things that change the way you practise:

- **You will be able to read Devanagari**, the script in which Sanskrit is printed today, slowly and correctly, letter by letter.
- **You will pronounce the words of yoga with confidence**, thanks to a simple key: the IAST transliteration with its little dots and dashes, explained sound by sound.
- **You will understand what you say**: the names of the postures, the vocabulary of the Yoga Sūtras and of haṭha yoga, and the meaning, word by word, of the mantras most often chanted in yoga schools and ashrams.

Our principles

Every Sanskrit word is given twice, in Devanagari (योग) and in IAST (yoga), and often a third time in the usual English spelling (for example chakra for cakra). The glossary at the end gathers 386 terms, grouped by theme.

Every translation in this book is our own. Where we explain a mantra, we start from the original text, which we checked against reference editions available online (the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages, GRETIL, and sanskritdocuments.org; the full list is in the Sources). We give a word-by-word breakdown so that you can see for yourself how the meaning is built, rather than taking any translation on trust. We never reproduce modern copyrighted translations.

We say where a text comes from, and when we are not sure. Some of the best-loved chants of modern yoga are ancient; others are later than people think; for a few, nobody knows their first source. We tell you what is known and stop there.

A word on respect.

Sanskrit is not a dead language in India. It is chanted every morning in temples and homes, studied in schools and universities, and spoken in a few communities. Many of the mantras in this book are prayers that belong to living traditions. Learning to pronounce them correctly, and to know where they come from, is a way of honouring the people who have kept them alive for three thousand years.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 3 in order: they give you the script and the sounds. After that, use the book as you need it. Chapter 5 shows you how to take an āsana name apart. Chapter 7 gathers the mantras. Chapter 8 offers exercises with answers. Keep the glossary near your mat.

You do not need any prior knowledge. Ten minutes a day for a few weeks is enough to read Devanagari slowly. Write the letters by hand: the hand remembers what the eye forgets.

Chapter 1. Why Sanskrit, and a short history

The language of the texts of yoga

The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, the Bhagavad Gītā, the Upaniṣads, the Haṭhapradīpikā, the Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā: every foundational text of yoga was composed in Sanskrit. When you read them in translation, you read someone's choices. The word citta becomes "mind" in one book, "consciousness" in another, "mind-stuff" in a third. Knowing a little Sanskrit does not replace a good translation, but it lets you see the original word behind the English and understand why translators disagree.

Sanskrit also matters because of sound. In the Indian traditions, a mantra is not simply a sentence with a meaning. It is a sound form that is transmitted, often from teacher to student, and its correct pronunciation is part of the practice. The Vedic texts were preserved orally with extraordinary precision for many centuries before they were written down, using methods of recitation in which each word is repeated in several orders to prevent any change.

The word saṃskṛta

The name of the language, संस्कृत (saṃskṛta), means "put together, refined, perfected". It is built from the prefix sam (together) and the root kṛ (to make). It was contrasted with the prākṛta languages, the "natural" vernaculars spoken in everyday life, from which many modern languages of North India descend.

Three moments in a long history

Vedic Sanskrit. The oldest form of the language is that of the Vedas, and above all the Ṛgveda (ऋग्वेद), a collection of 1,028 hymns. Scholars commonly date its oldest layers to the second half of the second millennium BCE. Vedic Sanskrit has a pitch accent, which some traditions of recitation still preserve, and grammatical forms that later disappeared. Two mantras of Chapter 7, the Gāyatrī and the Mahāmṛtyuñjaya, come from the Ṛgveda.

Pāṇini and the grammar. Around the fourth century BCE (the exact date is debated), the grammarian Pāṇini composed the अष्टाध्यायी (Aṣṭādhyāyī), "the eight chapters": about four thousand extremely concise rules that describe the whole of the language, from sounds to sentence formation. Pāṇini's work fixed the norm of what became classical Sanskrit. Later grammarians commented on it, in particular Patañjali, author of the Mahābhāṣya, the "great commentary". Indian tradition sometimes identifies this grammarian with the Patañjali of the Yoga Sūtras; most historians consider them two different people, separated by several centuries. You will meet this tradition again in the invocation to Patañjali in Chapter 7.

Classical Sanskrit. From then on, Sanskrit became the language of philosophy, science, law, medicine (āyurveda), poetry and theatre across South Asia and beyond, and it remained so for more than two thousand years. The Yoga Sūtras, which many scholars place in the first centuries of the common era, the

haṭha yoga texts written between roughly the eleventh and the eighteenth centuries, and the tantras are all written in classical or near-classical Sanskrit, sometimes with freer grammar.

One language, many scripts

Sanskrit has no script of its own. Over the centuries it has been written in the Brāhmī script and its many descendants: Śāradā in Kashmir, Grantha in the Tamil country, the Bengali, Telugu, Kannada or Malayalam scripts, and many others. Devanagari, which developed in northern India from the Nāgarī family of scripts, became the most common choice for printing Sanskrit from the nineteenth century onwards. This is the script you will learn here, and the one you will see in Rishikesh on temple walls and in the books sold near Ram Jhula and Laxman Jhula.

And IAST?

To write Sanskrit in the Latin alphabet without losing information, scholars use a transliteration system called IAST (International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration), whose principles go back to a decision of the International Congress of Orientalists held in Geneva in 1894. Each Devanagari letter corresponds to exactly one Latin letter or group, with diacritics: ā, ṛ, ṡ, ś, ṣ, ṁ, ḥ and so on. Learn IAST and you can pronounce any Sanskrit word correctly, even before you can read Devanagari.

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 47 pages.

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One-time payment, instant PDF.