

Yoga: Discipline of Freedom: The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali,

Barbara Stoler Miller, Bantam Books, New York, 1998. ISBN 0-553-37428-1. 114 pp. \$11.95

Reviewed by JoWynn Johns

In this slender paperback, Barbara Stoler Miller has provided a concise, elegant, and comprehensive study guide to the classic text, *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali*. The original work, composed probably within a couple of centuries of Jesus's life, is a highly compressed compilation of ancient Indian wisdom teachings influenced by Buddhist thought. Written in the form of aphorisms and dealing with the development of super-normal states of consciousness, *Yoga Sutra* is not easy reading. But Ms. Miller, who had been practicing these teachings for 25 years when she wrote the book, has given the motivated student the tools for understanding this great spiritual text.

Yoga here means the way to live so as to realize one's human potential. It means both a discipline, a methodology for self-development, and the goal of that discipline, complete freedom from and control over the power of the mind. Patanjali, representing the discoveries of generations of spiritual pioneers, asserts that it is possible for us to be free of suffering, to be always at peace, and to have access to extraordinary powers. (Such powers have been exhaustively documented in Michael Murphy's *The Future of the Body*.) We are so much more than we know or imagine. By adopting the way of life and specific practices presented in these sutras, we can realize our potential and know who we really are—fully human, united with the All.

Devoid of religious content yet perfectly compatible with any religion, Patanjali's yoga is a how-to manual for creating one's own spiritual path. The "eight limbs" of this system prescribe the values and lifestyle necessary to spiritual development, the physical and mental exercises that prepare one for meditation, and the three levels or states of hyper-consciousness that can be experienced through meditation practice.

Miller has amplified her clear, crisp translation with brief commentaries obviously informed by her own experience of practicing the teaching. Further, she has surrounded the text with introductory material explaining the key ideas, placing the work in a historical context, summarizing each section, and tracing the growing knowledge of The Yoga Sutras in the West. For the serious student, she has added notes, references, and both English and Sanskrit glossaries. This is an exceptional work of scholarship from the heart.

Those who would like more help in understanding and practicing *The Yoga Sutras* should see the last two chapters of Dr. David Frawley's *Ayurveda and the Mind* for a readable explication in contemporary style.