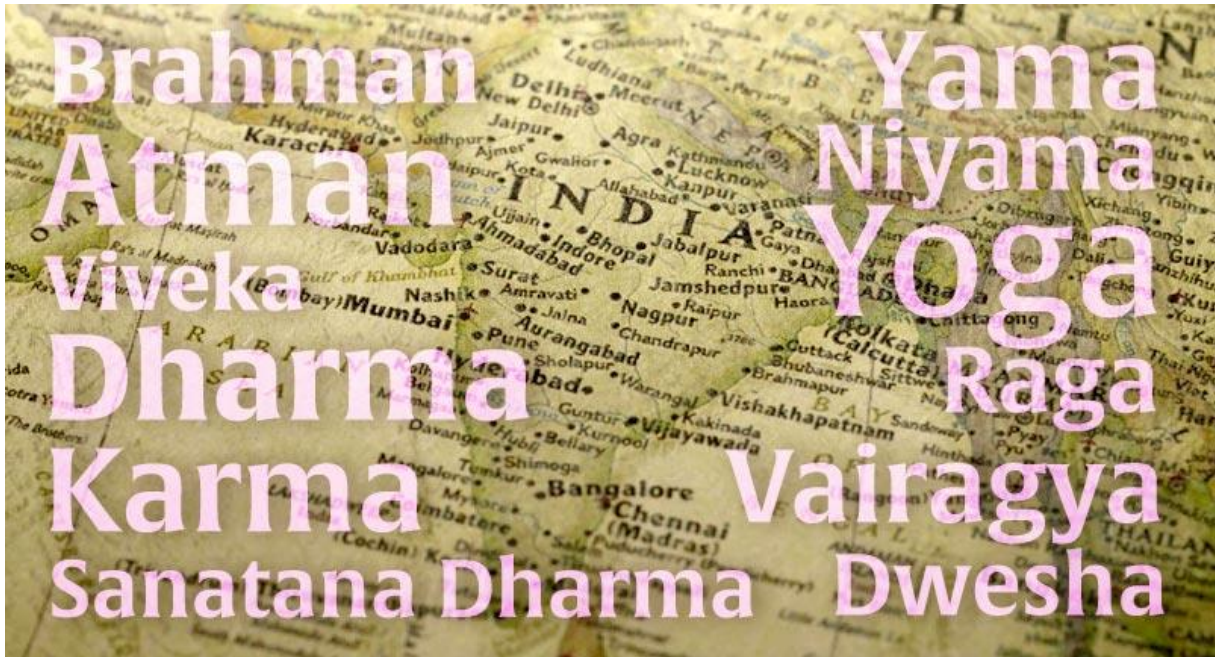


# An Introduction to Key Concepts of Indian Philosophy and Yoga



A clear understanding of the key concepts or core principles of Indian Philosophy and Yoga practice is important for the spiritual student. The Sanskrit language is rich in concise terminology about the philosophy and psychology of yoga.

On this page we will introduce you to these key concepts and give a brief explanation of the meaning of each, and often link to other articles where you can get a fuller understanding. Those unfamiliar with the Sanskrit terms used in the writings on this site will find this a useful introduction.

Many of these concepts are discussed in full in the article [Our View of Dharma as St. Thomas Christians](#). Definitions to most of the unfamiliar Sanskrit terms found on our site can be found in [A Brief Sanskrit Glossary](#).



**Dharma:** Those principles and practices which comprise a way of life that enables the individual to unfold and bring to perfection the qualities that are the eternal nature of every individual spirit.

The principles of dharma, like the principles of mathematics, are both eternal and universal in their application. Just as mathematics has no originator or author or connotation of any culture, the same is true of dharma. Dharma is discovered, not created by human beings.

**Sanatana Dharma:** The eternal (sanatana) dharma, revealed to the ancient sages of India, which enables that unfoldment, which reveals the eternal Being, Brahman. It is not a religion, it is Truth. It is “the way things are.”

**Brahman (God):** The Absolute Reality; the Supreme Reality that is one and indivisible, infinite, and eternal; all-pervading, changeless Existence; Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute (Satchidananda); Absolute Consciousness; it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself; not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and all-bliss itself.

**Atma(n):** The individual spirit or Self that is one with Brahman.

**Sanatana Dharma worldview:** Dharma includes a God-and-spirit-centric view of the world which affirms that all experiences of enlightenment and divine contact are open to every single human being.



### Three fundamental facts

There are three fundamental facts of our present existence:

1. **Karma:** Karma, derived from the Sanskrit root kri, which means to act, do, or make, means any kind of action, including thought and feeling. It also means the effects of action. Karma is both action and reaction, the metaphysical equivalent of the principle: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).  
**Read:** [Karma: What Every Aspiring Yogi Needs to Know](#)
2. **Reincarnation:** Karma renders necessary the experience of rebirth or reincarnation (punarjanma) in order for the individual to “reap” the effects of his karmic “sowing” in past, present, and future births. This, too, is a Law.  
**Read:** [Our reincarnation resource page](#)
3. **Evolution of Consciousness:** The purpose or effect of Karma and Rebirth is evolution of consciousness, the unfoldment of the individual’s inherent divinity. At first this takes place automatically, a virtual function of the cosmos (samsara), but in time the human status is reached after passing through countless lower forms of manifestation. After some time the human being becomes capable of taking charge of and accelerating his evolution through the methodology of classical yoga.  
**Read:** [Climbing the Ladder of Consciousness](#)

**Yoga:** Literally, “joining” or “union” from the Sanskrit root yuj. Union with the Supreme Being, or any practice that makes for such union. Meditation that unites the individual spirit with God, the Supreme Spirit. The name of the philosophy expounded by the sage Patanjali, teaching the process of union of the individual with the Universal Soul.

**Yama and Niyama, often called  
the “ten commandments” of Yoga:**

**Yama:** Restraint; the five Don'ts of Yoga:

1. *ahimsa*—non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness;
2. *satya*—truthfulness, honesty;
3. *asteya*—non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness;
4. *brahmacharya*—continence;
5. *aparigraha*—non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness.

**Niyama:** Observance; the five Do's of Yoga:

1. *shaucha*—purity, cleanliness;
2. *santosha*—contentment, peacefulness;
3. *tapas*—austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline;
4. *swadhyaya*—self-study, spiritual study;
5. *Ishwarapranidhana*—offering of one's life to God.

**Viveka:** Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination; ever-present discrimination between the transient and the permanent.

**Vairagya:** Non-attachment, detachment, dispassion, absence of desire, or indifference. Indifference towards and distaste for all worldly things and enjoyments.

Two of the most important words in analyzing the dilemma of the human condition are *Raga* and *Dweshha*—the powerful duo that motivate virtually all human endeavor:

**Raga:** Attachment/affinity for something, implying a desire for that. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple liking or preference to intense desire and attraction.

**Dweshha:** Aversion/avoidance for something, implying a dislike for that. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple nonpreference to intense repulsion, antipathy and even hatred.

They are commonly referred to as “rag-dwesh”—as a duality, for they are the alternating currents or poles that keep us spinning in relativity, reaching out and pushing away, accepting and rejecting, running toward and running away from.

