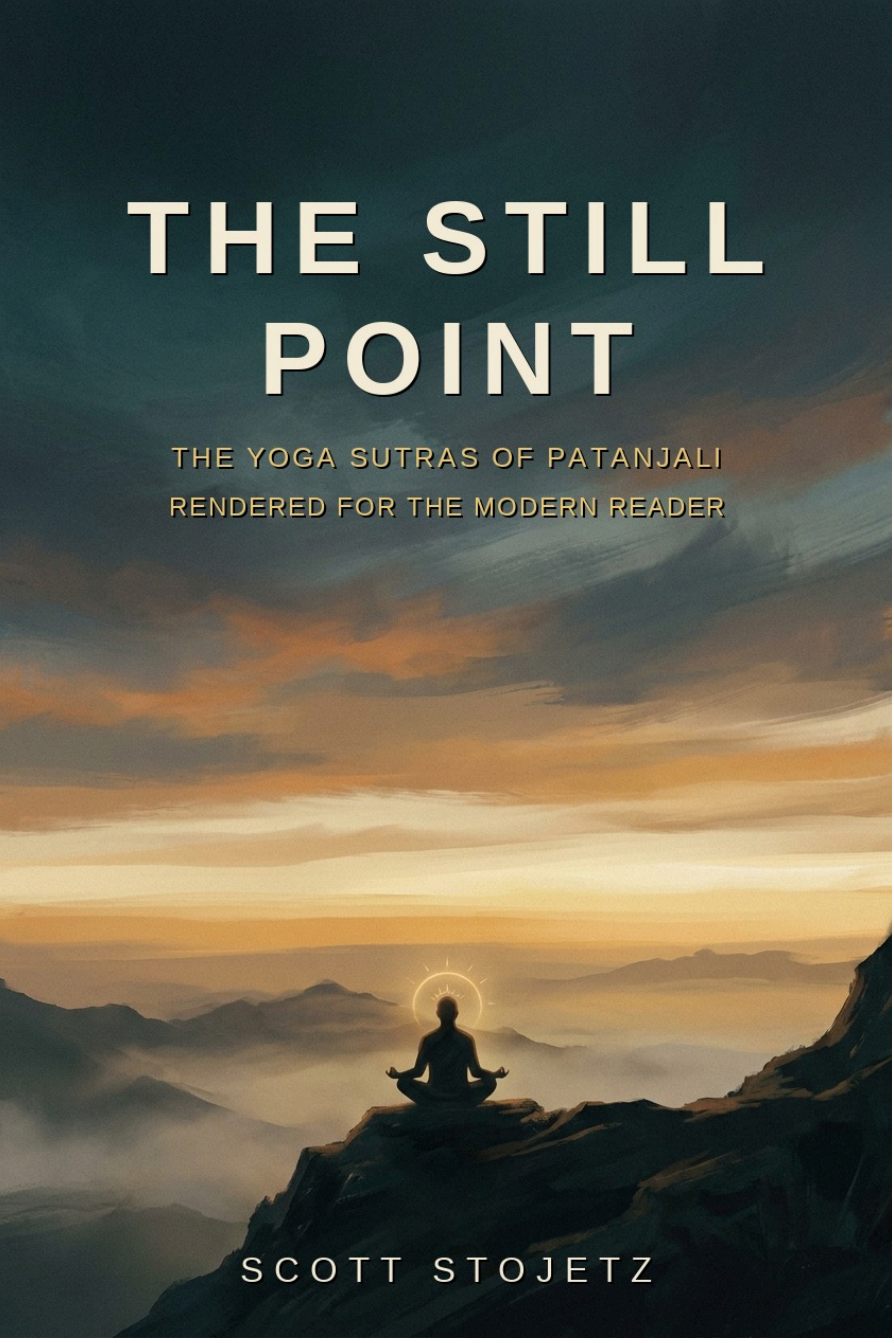
THE STILL POINT
THE YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI
RENDERED FOR THE MODERN READER
SCOTT STOJETZ



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Rendered in love and light,
and dedicated to Swami Vivekananda —
the man whose fierce wisdom has brought me to the still point
over so many dawns.

Thank you, Master. Namaste.

"Yoga is the stilling of the turnings of the mind.
Then the seer rests in its own true nature."

— Patanjali, 1.2–1.3

An original rendering in plain modern English — faithful to the threads.
Patanjali gives the map; the Swami carries it to the West; a student reads it at dawn.



BEFORE THE ROAD

A WORD BEFORE THE STILL POINT

What you are holding is, in my honest estimation, the oldest instruction manual ever written for the human mind. Long before anyone in the West had a word for "psychology," a man named Patanjali sat down and, in a few hundred short lines, laid out exactly how the mind works, why it suffers, and how to bring it to rest. The lines are called *sutras* — and the word just means *threads.* That is what this book is: a couple hundred threads, each one tied tight, that together weave the whole practice of yoga. And understand what yoga actually means here, because the West sells it back to you as stretching. It is not stretching. It is the science of stilling your own mind.

Roughly two thousand years after Patanjali, a young Indian monk named Vivekananda carried these threads to America. He stood up in halls full of skeptics and taught them in language a working person could use, and he called it *Raja Yoga* — the kingly yoga, the direct road home. I am standing a long way behind that man, holding his coat. What I have done in these pages is take Patanjali's threads and render them into plain American English, the way I read them at sunrise, with the Swami's directness at my shoulder the whole way.

The same honesty I always give you, up front: I am not a scholar of Sanskrit, and no lineage authorized me to touch this text. I am a student who practices it at dawn. I rendered it — with the help of AI, honestly used and honestly credited — into plain modern English, so the Western reader can hear what Patanjali actually said, without a dictionary and without a robe.

And what he said matters more to your Tuesday than almost anything I know, because it is not about a mountaintop. It is about the one problem sitting underneath every other problem you have: your mind will not sit still. It races, it rehearses, it replays, it reaches. Patanjali says that racing *is* the whole trouble — and then he shows you, thread by thread, how to quiet it, until what you actually are shows up underneath the noise. Read one thread at a time. Let it do its slow work. — Scott Stojetz

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BEFORE THE ROAD

HOW TO WALK THIS ROAD

A word on how to actually read what follows, because this is not a book you race through, and it will not reward being raced. It is a manual, not a novel. The 195 threads ahead are dense on purpose — each one is a knot tied tight around a whole teaching — and if you swallow them by the dozen they will slide right off. So take them the way I do: one or two at a dawn. Read the thread, read my note underneath it, and then close the book and let it work while you go live your day. Come back tomorrow. A single thread, truly chewed, will feed you longer than a whole chapter skimmed.

Do not worry if some of it sails over your head, especially in the back half. It sails over mine, too, and I have been at it for years. This is deep water, and deep water does not teach by being understood all at once; it teaches by being returned to. What is opaque this year turns clear the next, not because the words changed but because you did. That is the whole design. Let the hard threads be seeds. They will open on their own schedule, not yours.

And a plain word on what this rendering is and is not, because I owe you the same honesty I put in everything. This is not a scholar's translation. I do not read Sanskrit, and I make no claim to the exact word. What I have done is carry the *meaning* across into plain American English — the sense a practicing person needs — standing on the shoulders of the great translators and, above all, on Vivekananda's own commentary in *Raja Yoga.* Where I had to choose between the literal and the clear, I chose the clear, every time, and I used AI honestly to help me say it clean. If you fall in love with these threads — and I hope you do — go find the scholars next. Let this be the door, not the whole house.

One last thing. Read it with a pen. Argue with me in the margins. The commentary in these pages is a friend talking, not a priest ruling — take what feeds you and leave the rest on the plate. The threads are Patanjali's. The notes are just mine.

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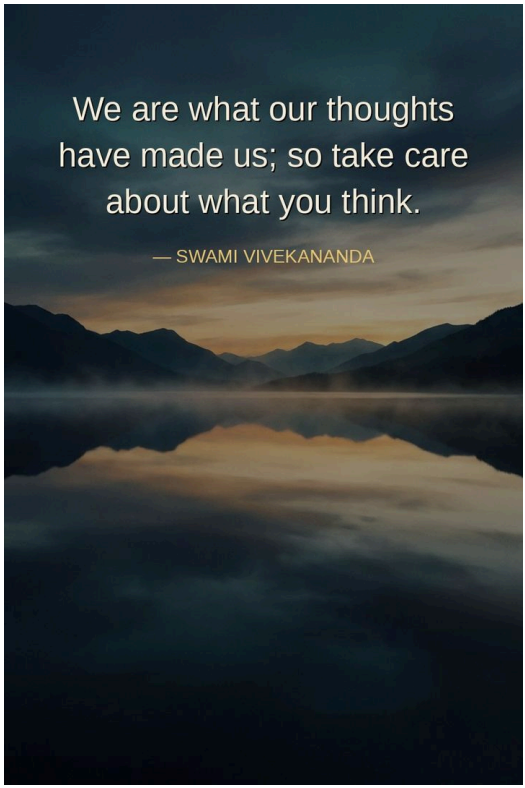
> *Patanjali does not warm up, friend. He tells you what yoga is by the second line, and spends the rest of the book on that one thing. Watch how fast he gets to the center — and notice there is no incense in it, no robe, no mountain. Just the plainest description of your own mind you have ever read.*

The name of this first book, *Samadhi Pada,* means the chapter on absorption — on the settled, gathered mind. And notice where Patanjali chooses to begin: not with a warm-up, not with breathing or postures, but with the destination itself. He shows you the mountaintop on the very first page, before he has told you a thing about the climb. That is deliberate. He wants you to know, from the start, what all the work is *for.*

And what it is for is this: a mind gone quiet enough to show you what you actually are. The Swami's image never leaves me — the mind as a lake, every thought a ripple across its surface. While the water churns, you look down and see nothing true, only your own face broken into a hundred anxious pieces. Let it settle, and the same lake turns to glass, and you see clear to the bottom. Book One is the whole science of settling the water. Everything after it is detail hung on that one frame.



1.1 Now — the teaching of yoga begins.

1.2 Yoga is the stilling of the turnings of the mind.

1.3 Then — and only then — the seer rests in its own true nature.

1.4 The rest of the time, you are your turnings. You become whatever your mind happens to be doing.

> *There is the whole book in four lines. Your mind turns — churns, spins, replays — and as long as it turns, you think you* are *the churning. Still it, and something underneath the churning stands up: the one who was watching the whole time. The Swami said the mind is a lake, and every thought a ripple; you cannot see the bottom until the water goes calm. That is all yoga is — letting the water go calm, so you can finally see what is down there. And what is down there is you.*

1.5 There are five kinds of turning, and each one is either painful or not painful.

1.6 They are: right knowing, wrong knowing, imagining, sleep, and memory.

1.7 Right knowing comes three ways — by seeing a thing directly, by reasoning it out, and by trustworthy testimony.

1.8 Wrong knowing is a false picture mistaken for the real thing — a knowing laid over what is not actually there.

1.9 Imagining is a thought built on words alone, with nothing real underneath it.

1.10 Sleep is the turning that rests on the sense of nothing being there.

1.11 Memory is the mind refusing to let go of something it has already lived.

> *Look how exact he is. He does not wave at "thoughts" the way we do. He counts them — five kinds, no more — and he tells you the honest thing nobody wants to hear: even your memory is a kind of turning. Even the past running on a loop in your head is just the lake refusing to go still. And notice he says each turning can be painful* or not. *The goal was never to kill your mind. It is to stop being dragged around by it.*

1.12 These turnings are stilled two ways: by steady practice, and by non-attachment.

1.13 Practice is the effort to stay settled.

1.14 And it takes firm root only when you keep at it — for a long time, without breaks, with your whole heart.

1.15 Non-attachment is the mastery of a person who no longer thirsts for what he has seen or heard about.

1.16 The higher non-attachment is finer still: freedom even from the pull of nature itself, once you have glimpsed the Self.

> *Two wings, and the bird needs both.* Practice — *the daily, unglamorous, long-haul repetition; and* non-attachment — *loosening your grip on the things you crave. And hear how he defines practice in line 14: a long time, without breaks, with your whole heart. That is not a weekend. That is a life. This is the same thing I have been telling you all along, friend — you do not wish your way to a still mind. You build it, on purpose, one dawn at a time.*

1.17 The first kind of deep absorption still keeps some company — a little reasoning, a little reflection, a quiet bliss, and the simple sense of *I am.*

1.18 The other kind comes after long practice at letting even those go; nothing is left running but the faint seeds of old impressions.

1.19 For a rare few, this state arrives by birth — those already dissolved into nature.

1.20 For everyone else, it is reached by a road, and here is the road: faith, then energy, then mindfulness, then absorption, then clear seeing.

1.21 The more whole-hearted your effort, the nearer it is.

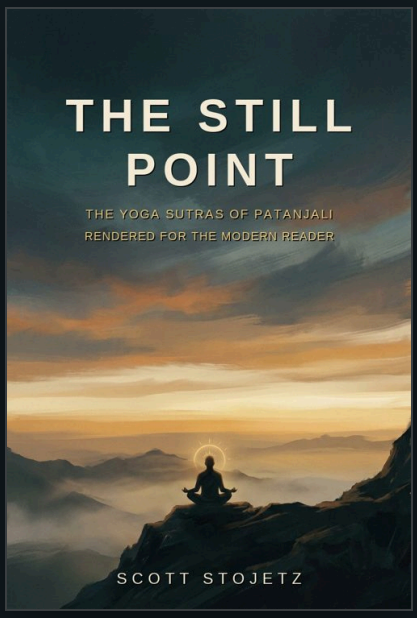
1.22 And even among the whole-hearted there are degrees — mild, medium, and fierce. The fiercer the wanting, the closer the shore.

> *Line 20 is a staircase, and I want you to keep it in your pocket:* faith, energy, mindfulness, absorption, clear seeing. *It starts with faith — not blind belief, just enough trust to begin — and it ends in seeing clearly. Everything real is built in that order. And then line 22, pure Vivekananda before Vivekananda: how bad do you want it? Mild wanting, mild results. Fierce wanting, and the far shore comes to meet you.*

1.23 Or — the whole thing can open another way entirely: by surrender to God.

1.24 God is a special Self, untouched by the afflictions, untouched by action and its fruits, untouched by the marks they leave behind.

1.25 In Him the seed of all knowing is complete — beyond anything in us.



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