

# A practical approach to **Classical Yoga**



The Yoga Institute



## our legacy



### **PARAMHAMSA MADHAVADASJI (FOUNDER'S GURU)**

His Holiness Paramhansa Madhavadasji was born in 1798 to a Mukhopadhyaya family in Bengal. His environment and his parental influences inspired in him a devotional attitude and faith. A lawyer in the courts during the British Raj, he left his home at the tender age of 23 in search of higher pursuits. His early association with Bhakti rituals could not satisfy the reformist concepts he was looking for. He learnt from different traditions and after traveling in Assam, Tibet, the Himalayas, etc., he was able to get a first-hand knowledge of technical yoga.

In 1916, at the age of 118, Paramhansa Madhavadasji was in Mumbai at Madhavbaug for a discourse where he met Yogendraji (then known as Mani). A strong bond developed between the teacher and student, and he personally guided and trained Mani on the path of yoga.



### **FOUNDER SHRI YOGENDRAJI**

Shri Yogendraji was born as Mani Haribhai Desai in 1897 in Gujarat. Through a chance meeting, he found his Guru, Shri Paramhansa Madhavadasji, and learnt all about yoga from him. With the blessings of his Guru, Yogendraji went on to spread what was then considered the secret knowledge of yoga among the masses, as he believed it could improve the lives of householders.

He founded The Yoga Institute at 'The Sands', the residence of Dadabhai Naoroji in Versova, in 1918. At The Sands, he used therapeutic yoga to cure various ailments. Later, he traveled to America and founded a Yoga Institute in Harriman, New York, in 1920. A lot of research work, along with doctors and scientists of repute, was carried out under his guidance on the subtle physiological and psychological effects of yoga.

Shri Yogendraji then returned to India and, following the wishes of his father, married and remained a 'householder yogi'. He has written many authoritative texts on yoga based on ancient scriptures. Some of his books are preserved in the Crypt of Civilization for posterity; they are to be opened after 6000 years. Along with his wife, Sitadevi Yogendra, he continued to teach and spread awareness of authentic classical yoga at The Yoga Institute, Santacruz, until his death in 1989.



## our legacy



### **SMT. SITADEVI YOGENDRA (FOUNDER'S WIFE)**

Smt. Sitadevi Yogendra, fondly known as Mother, married Shri Yogendraji in 1927 and joined him in his mission of spreading the knowledge of yoga in the world. She began teaching women and children at The Yoga Institute and has written many articles and books on the subject. Her book *Yoga Physical Education for Women* is also preserved in the Crypt of Civilization, to be opened 6000 years later. Mother Sitadevi passed away in 2008 at the age of 97.



### **DR. JAYADEVA YOGENDRA (PRESIDENT OF THE YOGA INSTITUTE)**

Born in 1929, Shri Yogendraji's son, Dr. Jayadeva Yogendra, was a simple man and a true Yogi. Having seen his complete dedication to a life of discipline and simplicity, the sadhakas of the Institute considered him as their true Guru. Born in a family of Yogis, he was spiritually inclined since childhood. Until February 2018, when he passed away, as President of The Yoga Institute, he carried on the Founder's legacy in his silent and sincere way. He was also the Editor of the Institute's monthly Journal, "Yoga & Total Health," published since 1933. Dr. Jayadeva completed his Masters in Samkhya and Yoga at the Bombay University in 1952. In 1955, he was awarded the Hargobindas scholarship for a Ph.D (Dr. of Philosophy) for his thesis on 'Moksha Parvan'. At the Institute, he introduced several courses, and did pioneering work in Yoga Education and Therapeutics. Students at the Institute still continue to draw inspiration from his wisdom, compassion, wit, and unflinching commitment to truth.



## our legacy



### **SMT. HANSAJI JAYADEVA YOGENDRA (DIRECTOR OF THE YOGA INSTITUTE)**

A dynamic and charismatic personality, Smt. Hansaji, wife of Dr. Jayadeva Yogendra and present Director of The Yoga Institute, has dedicated her life to the running of the Institute and to teaching yoga as a way of life in a completely practical way. She is perhaps best known throughout the nation due to her involvement in the popular television series 'Yoga for Better Living', first aired in 1980.

She was recognized for her contribution to Women's Health through the award presented by SPARC. She has conducted several seminars and lecture tours in India and in Europe, Australia, Canada, Pakistan, Hong Kong and United States of America. She has also authored many Yoga books and articles. She was invited by the National Council for Education Research and Training along with Dr. Jayadeva to advise on formulating a Yoga education syllabus for schools nationwide.

The Bharat Gaurav award was given to Dr. Hansaji Yogendra (Director- The Yoga Institute) for extraordinary contribution and excellence in the field of yoga. The honours were conferred at the UK House of Commons in British Parliament in London on July 19th, 2019 by Sanskriti Yuva Sanstha which was graced by many luminaries from the UK government and the yoga fraternity worldwide.

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The Yoga Institute



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## preface

Yoga, once considered esoteric and far removed from the masses, has now become a household word. This is a good thing and also a bad thing. Good because it allows large numbers of people to be responsible for themselves, and bad because the message of yoga has got diluted. For most people, yoga is a set of postures meant to be practiced to stay in good health. But this is not yoga; these are yoga asanas, just one limb of the eightfold path. If we are to get the maximum benefit out of yoga, to increase both our outer and inner spiritual well-being, it is essential now to go back to the drawing-board.

This book is meant to introduce the reader to yoga as it was meant to be. It dwells on the very essence of yoga. It would take a very large tome to delve into the entire essence, and this book will hopefully be a stepping-stone for those who wish to delve deeper.

The Yoga Institute was founded in 1918; it is over a hundred years old. It has always been our aim to retain the heart of yoga, to maintain the essence of yoga, and now we believe the time has to come to rekindle the fire of classical, authentic yoga which is at the risk of vanishing into obscurity.



## origins of yoga?

The origins of yoga are enveloped in obscurity and uncertainty due to the fact that all Vedic and post-Vedic knowledge usually wasn't attributed to a single author or written down in text. The knowledge was attributed to various individuals who had acquired this knowledge through Āgama or "that which has come down", which meant that the source was unknown and divine.

Śrutis (the Vedic literature which also had yogic teachings as a part of it) had no particular author and were transmitted verbally across centuries. To ensure the accuracy of these orally transmitted texts, a certain amount of secrecy had to be maintained. Many of the early sacred notes on yoga were written and rewritten on fragile parchment paper, which was easily damaged, destroyed, or lost.

Yogic history has various stages of knowledge-transfer that we know of and is considered much older than the Indus-Sarasvati civilisation. The four stages of knowledge transfer are : Vedic (from unknown origins and embedded deep in the ritualistic mystic hymns of Vedas), Pre-classical (interpreted and transformed into various secret forms of knowledge by hermit yogis who lived in jungles), Classical (polished and refined for daily practice by all, a minor version of the Pre-classical), Post-classical (New forms of yoga developed and also developing, but are more of an outward, physical form of the classical).

Prior to 400 CE, in the classical age of yoga, Patanjali synthesised the Vedic knowledge of yoga from older traditions and multiple schools of thought, to create the Yoga Sūtras. Patanjali wrote 196 Sūtras and divided them into 4 chapters i.e.-padas. Chapter 1 with 51 sūtras -- Samadhi Pada, Chapter 2 with 55 sūtras-- Sadhana Pada, Chapter 3 with 56 sūtras – Vibhuti Pada, Chapter 4 with 34 sūtras – Kaivalya Pada.

While there are many other schools of thought on yogic practices - Hatha Yoga, Gyana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Tantra-Mantra Yoga and many more, Patanjali's Yoga



Sūtras are the most widely read and are considered one of the prime sources of knowledge for modern yoga practices.

Yogic ideas and practices have been derived from almost all dharmic traditions; it is a philosophy which has its basis in ancient sciences. The roots of yoga can be found in prominent ancient and classical scriptures from the Vedas, Samkhya, Upavedas, Vedangas, Upanishads to Vedanta; also in the Gita and the Mahabharata.

**The history of Bharatvarsha (Indus-Sarasvaticivilisation) is largely a culture of yoga.**





# introduction to classical ashtanga yoga

## **The true meaning of yoga is 'Union'**

Yoga stems from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj', which means 'to unite.' To practice yoga is to unite the practice of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual self, and the ultimate union of all three leads to self-realisation. As Patanjali says in his Sūtras, yoga is the eradication of the ego-led life; it is a life where one detaches oneself from the world and finds the infinite within. For any human being the ultimate path of joyousness is the path that leads inwards.

The entire essence of yoga for a householder yogi is to work with and on the mind, to ultimately be in control of it, and to recognise that the mind is the only obstacle that prevents humans from knowing their true nature.

## **Story of Patanjali**

Patanjali was the greatest exponent of yogic knowledge; he lived sometime between 500 and 200 B.C. Mythology portrays Sage Patanjali as an incarnation of Anantha (Shesha-Naga), the celestial serpent on whom Vishnu reclines in Yoga Nidra. Patanjali's origins are an enigma to modern historians.

Legend says Sage Patanjali was the son of Gonika (a powerful yogini). She found Patanjali in the palm of her hand in the form of a small snake that changed into a little boy. Sage Patanjali was a blessing for the *tapa* she did for an offspring, and she was to pass on all her knowledge and wisdom to him. Gonika thus named her child Patanjali – 'Patta' means 'falling' and 'Añjali' means 'joining the palms of the hand.'

Patanjali is said to be '*swayambhuv*' -- self-manifested or self-incarnated in a human form to help humanity.

Sage Patanjali teaches yoga as a *Darshana* -- to look into a mirror (that shows us



our true self). *Yog-Darshanam*, which is a divine philosophy or divine truth, also means 'realisation of truth'. Sūtra literally means "a thread". Sūtras of Patanjali are like a threaded mala, embodying the beads of divine truth.

### **Brief Introduction to yoga Sūtras**

The Yoga Sūtras are short and brief, as most texts in ancient times were. Each word was carefully chosen to create a sentence that was potent with meaning. . The sūtras themselves are difficult to interpret yet, on interpretation, reveal themselves as the scientific and systematic monograph of the yogic philosophy. The sūtras are divided into four chapters (*pada*) as follows:

#### **SAMADHI PADA**

With 51 sutras, Samadhi Pada offers an insight into a possible blissful state of mind that can take one to a pure meditative state. This state of being is believed to be so beautiful that anything we know or can imagine falls short of it; there is only the pure bliss of truth. This first chapter provides a definition and the purpose of yoga -- enlightenment, concentration, and pure meditation. It outlines the process of become unwavering, of steadiness, and of oneness. The sutras outline the obstacles one faces in achieving the true state of meditation i.e. *Samadhi*, and the role of *Abhyasa* (uninterrupted practice) and *Vairagya* (detachment from worldly existence).

#### **SADHANA PADA**

With 55 sūtras, Sadhana Pada outlines the practice and implementation of the yogic system in daily life. *Sadhana* means divine practice or system and Sadhana Pada means the system of enlightenment or path of divine practice. The second chapter teaches us to systematically grow on our path to self-discovery through the knowledge of Kriya Yoga (a technique of controlling energy) and Ashtanga Yoga (8 limbs of Yoga).

#### **VIBHUTI PADA**

With 56 sūtras, Vibhuti Pada dives deeper into the last three limbs of yoga, together referred to as *Samyama* or Raja Yoga. This chapter teaches one to integrate the last three limbs and practice them all at once; a combined



simultaneous practice of *Dhāraṇā* (Concentration), *Dhyāna* (Meditation) and *Samādhi* (Oneness). It also defines the various stages of *Samadhi* and the supernatural powers (*siddhis*) that a masterful yogi may be able to attain on the path of reaching such a state. It also warns against the temptations of these *siddhis* that hinder a yogi from achieving higher levels of Raja Yoga.

## KAIVALYA PADA

With 34 sūtras, Kaivalya Pada gives us a glimpse of an inner experience and an elevated spirit; a state of absolute enlightenment. It helps understand how yogic practice leads to the beginning of true wisdom and meaning of reality. These sutras unmask the concept of consciousness and a blueprint of its construction. It also attempts to examine and explain what occurs when the union of *Prakriti* (the worldly you) and *Purusha* (the divine you) happens. The state of oneness and nothingness are known as *Kaivalya*.

## Eight Limbs of Yoga

In the second chapter, Patanjali outlines the path to *Kaivalya* through Ashtanga Yoga -- Eight limbs of Yoga. Ashtanga Yoga is considered the fundamental system to travel the path of yoga. Associating *Asana* and *Pranayama* with yoga is not a very modern concept, yet one will not read about a single *asana* or *pranayama* in Ashtanga Yoga. In essence, it is a master plan for life and beyond. The eight limbs serve as an instruction for one's morality, ethical conduct, and self-discipline, which ultimately leads to universal realisation.

## The Eightfold Path of Yoga:

**Yamas** help us govern our external relations, our social behaviour, how we treat others, and the world around us. *Yamas* are social principles, the do's and don'ts: *Ahimsa* -- non-violence, *Satya* -- truthfulness, *Asteya* -- non-stealing, *Brahmacharya* -- abstinence, and *Aparigraha* -- non-hoarding

**Niyamas** help us govern our relation with ourselves; discipline, duty and responsibility. They define how we treat ourselves: *Saucha* -- cleanliness of body and mind, *Santosha* -- contentment, *Tapas* -- Austerity or self-discipline, *Svadhya* -- self-study or contemplation, and *Ishvara-pranidhana* -- devotion to the divine.



**Asanas**, the third step, are the various postures and their right practice in yoga. Our body is a temple for our consciousness. It is our primary duty to take care of our body and this is an important stage on our yogic path. Through the practice of asanas, yogis prepare their body for meditation. When we master our *asanas*, we reach a state of '*Sthiram Sukham Asanam*'. When *asanas* are mastered and done with steadiness and ease, both the body and mind are in a consistently pleasant state.

**Pranayama** is the expanding and regulating of breath. *Prana* is also known as the life-force or energy that exists everywhere and flows in our bodies, riding on the breath. '*Prana*' means 'bio-energy'. and '*Ayama*' means to control or regulate.

There are various types of *pranayamas* and their benefits in daily life are unlimited. The rhythmic breathing in *pranayama* gets us in touch with the rhythm of the universe. *Pranayamas* abolish distractions of body and mind, paving the path for concentration and meditation.

**Pratyahara** is a very interesting stage and it leads us to to our inner self. '*Prati*' means to go towards your own source. It is a means to lean towards our consciousness, to exit the external world/stimuli by withdrawing the use of our sensory organs, namely our eyes, ears, our sense of touch, taste, and smell. This withdrawal allows one to objectively observe one's desires: when we detach from our senses, we detach from our desires, and stop them from interfering with our inner growth.

**Dharana** means concentration for a short term with conscious effort. *Dharana* in daily life helps to execute each task with ease and saves time because when one is focused, one tends to make fewer errors. In the practice of concentration, which presages meditation, one has to slow down the thinking process by concentrating on a single object or objective through mantras, chanting, or an image or a goal. In the course of practicing *Dharana*, one's focus shifts constantly and an effort has to be made to realign it. We naturally become self-aware and use this awareness to control our mind.

**Dhyana** means 'meditating for a long period of time by rejecting the external object or external perception and meditating purely on the internal self'. When *Dharana* is done for a long period of time, it becomes *Dhyana* or meditation. *Dhyana* is how we slowly train our mind to remain without thoughts for a long



period of time and this relaxes the mind. This spills over into everything one does. You experience bliss in every state of awareness.

**Samadhi** is a state of blissful, joyous, detached ecstasy. The second sutra says that to reach to that blissful stage of *Samadhi*, you must first have the *bhavana*, the desire to cultivate *Samadhi*. Your state of mind is balanced, peaceful, full of wisdom because it is only in this state that wisdom comes. With *Samadhi* comes discriminative knowledge. This is the most beautiful stage of Yoga. When *Samadhi* becomes ripened (*Paripakva*), it is the final stage of *Samadhi*. The difference between the material world and consciousness is realised.

### Types of Chitta

*Chitta* is the mind/ or personality complex -- conscious mind and the sub-conscious mind; it is beyond the definition of conventional mind. It is the seat of our *samskaras* -- past and present impressions, memories of our consciousness and *vasanas* -- desires. It is one of the four internal sense organs (*Antahkaranas*) 'that help us think, feel, access our intellect and imagine.'

*Chitta* is defined and affected by the universal three *gunas* viz: *Sattva* (Purity), *Rajas* (Activity), and *Tamas* (Intertia). As we grow in the practice of Yoga, the *chitta* moves from *Rajas* and *Tamas* to a *Sattvic* state of mind. When the three *gunas* are in effect, a person shifts between various states of the *chitta*.

*Mudha* is a dull state of mind, primarily governed by the *Tamas guna*. A person with *Mudha chitta* will constantly be sleepy, delusional, fearful and lazy. They may suffer from lust, anger, greed, and a constant state of addiction and vice. They are at the lowest state of *chitta* and have a superficial, outwardly outlook in life.

*Kshipta* is a distracted state of mind, primarily governed by the *Rajas guna*. A person with *Kshipta chitta* will constantly be in pain, worry, be fickle-minded and selfish, they may suffer from attachment, hatred and selfishness. They will be on a quest of virtue but will be inflicted with vices. They are at the general state of *chitta* and have a superficial outwardly outlook in life.

*Vikshipta* is a partially concentrated state of mind, partially governed by the *Sattva guna*. A person with *Vikshipta chitta* will constantly feel joy, patience, have virtuous qualities, and indulge in selfless actions. They may experience selflessness and



righteousness. They will be on a quest for knowledge, virtue, and spiritual prosperity. They are at the aspirant state of *chitta*, and have an inwardly outlook in life and are at the beginning stage of *Samadhi*.

*Ekagra* is a one-pointed state of mind, completely governed by pure *Sattva guna*. Persons with *Ekagra chitta* will constantly feel an increased state of detachment and dispassion. They may experience discriminative wisdom. They are at the yogic state of *chitta* and are one-pointed in life and are at the stage of lower *Samadhi*.

*Niruddha* is a controlled state of mind, the beginning of the involution of the *gunas*. A person with *Niruddha chitta* will constantly be abiding in the self and in a state of supreme dispassion. They may experience *Kaivalya* or Liberation. They are perfected yogis with extreme self-control and are at the highest level of *Samadhi*.

### **Types of Vrittis**

*Vrittis* are the various fluctuations of our *chitta*. The *gunas* affect the states of *chitta*, and they create *vrittis* in our *chitta*. The highest state of *chitta* has no *vrittis* and the lower state of *chitta* has maximum *vrittis*. To stop or minimise the *vrittis*, we first need to know what they are:

*Pramana* is right knowledge and is the *vritti* of the highest state of *chitta*. A person with *Pramana* is at the highest state of knowledge and this knowledge is acquired in the following ways: *Pratyaksha* -- direct experience using our five senses; *Anumana* -- inference by applying logic and reasoning; *Upamana* -- inference through comparison; *Arthapatti* -- knowledge through supposition of facts; *Anupalabdhi* -- knowledge through non-apprehension; *Sabda* -- knowledge through verbal testimony.

*Viparyaya* is wrong knowledge and is the *vritti* of the lowest state of *chitta*. A person with *Viparyaya* is at the lowest state of knowledge and this knowledge is acquired by wrong usage or interpretation of our five senses. Such knowledge can be misconstrued and *Viparyaya vritti* can give us a deceptive concept of reality.

*Vikalpa* is our imagination and is the *vritti* of the general state of *chitta*. A person with *Vikalpa* is constantly imagining the future in various circumstances without having any knowledge. It is governed by *Tamas guna* and is constantly leaning towards the negative. If we make our imagination positive, we can harness the



power of imagination and visualisation to manifest its outcomes.

*Nidra* is a state of deep dreamless sleep and emptiness, and is the *vritti* of the higher state *chitta*. A person with *Nidra* can experience deep and restful sleep. If one's night sleep is disturbed, it reflects on one's awakened state. Our sixth sense works when all our senses are in control and this is possible with true peaceful sleep.

*Smriti* is our memory. Memory is an amalgamation of impressions gathered from our past and present life, sensations and emotions which are stored in our subconscious mind and are responsible for our belief systems, habits, fears, and storing and retiring of knowledge.

### **Chitta Vritti Niroddha**

This is the ultimate goal of yoga. The meaning of this sutra is -- '*chitta*' meaning '*personality complex*'; '*vritti*' meaning '*fluctuations*'; and '*nirodha*' meaning '*cessation*'. It is not just about doing away with the negative but also cultivating the positive; becoming un-opinionated and egoless is the first step towards unveiling your true consciousness.

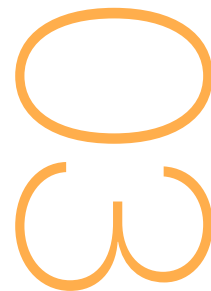
All human beings are part of the divine super-consciousness. We tend to forget that due to our constant association with *maya*, the existential world. While our external world including our human form is truly exciting and wondrous, our true consciousness is even more so. To get in touch with our true selves we need to understand *maya* for what it is, and let go of our attachment to it. When you get to the state of '*Chitta Vritti Niroddha*', you do not leave *maya* behind, you just go above it, it becomes even more blissful as you learn to see it all as an observer and not a participant.

The world becomes more beautiful and blissful with yoga.



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## making of a yogi



**One pursuing the path of yoga can create an inner universe of bliss by the mastering of the body and mind, which is the first step to starting a spiritual journey.**

A yogi is a master of his life, hence mastering of the self becomes the foundation for spiritual advancement. The first step is the most difficult -- a sense of self -- awareness at all times; we tend to linger in the past or think about the future most of the time. We use our sub-conscious more than the conscious mind. Our conscious mind, the seat of awareness, is needed at all times to practice yoga. Just like our spiritual practice, the path of mastery of the self unravels throughout our life. Our inward journey is dependent on our ability to stay in the present and be aware of each living moment. This will determine a yogi's true progress.

### **Qualities of a yogi**

We take the word 'yogi' too lightly in our daily lives. When people practice difficult *asanas* with ease, they think they have mastered yoga. A yogi is so much more than one who practices *asanas*. The *Bhagavad Gita* has a wonderful description of what a yogi is; a yogi is a human with qualities that are divine.

A yogi is a child inside, always blissful and happy. A yogi observes the world with unbiased and unattached eyes. All are equal for him and there is no pain, only bliss.

For a yogi, the smallest of things are great and the greatest of them is immaterial.

When a human acts with complete detachment from the fruit of his action, he is a yogi. Yogis don't stop to consider the outcome of their actions in the future, they just concentrate on performing the right action in the present. A yogi doesn't shy away from taking action in the world, nor does he need to take shelter in the





serenity of the Himalayas. Instead he finds divinity in doing the right action in society itself. A yogi is one who doesn't need riches to make him comfortable, he finds his rest, happiness, and peace immersed in his inner world. Fortitude is the primary quality mentioned by Krishna in the *Gita*. Fortitude comes from right knowledge, from right action, detachment from results, and constant awareness of the present. Fearless fortitude leads to a true steady and calm self.

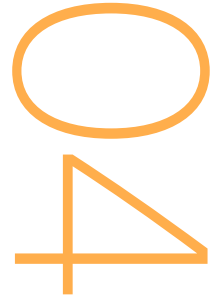
A yogi is aware that all suffering comes from the self. When we blame the world for our sufferings, we are ignorant of our own *karma* and we are giving in to the *maya* of the external world. A yogi is self-contained and knows nothing is lasting--neither suffering nor happiness. All emotions and suffering are worldly, the only one true feeling in the world is a sense of bliss, which comes from knowing who we really are.

Understanding the qualities of a yogi is a step towards becoming one.



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## who can practice yoga?



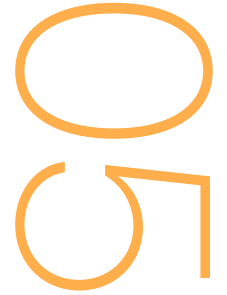
Many misapprehensions exist about yoga and yogic practice that mar the introduction and eventual induction of yoga in one's life. Some of the most common ones are: 'I can't do yoga because I am not flexible enough' or 'Yoga is only for young people' or 'I am not fit enough for yoga'. One of the common misapprehensions or excuses for men is that yoga is only for women.

But have you ever wondered why yoga is so popular around the world? Because it is meant for all. It is an empowering practice that offers something to everyone, regardless of one's age, gender, race, size or shape. Yes, it is for you even if you are overweight or suffering from a cardiac problem. Yoga is for all those who care for themselves and even if you are not at your best in life-- mentally or physically. Yoga helps you to create a calm and balanced mind that in turn creates a strong and able body to live your life to the fullest.

Yoga provides you with something that no other form of exercise in the world provides you -- getting to know yourself. Initially, it may be difficult to inculcate into one's routine, but if you keep at it it provides you with many rewards. Many people are stuck in their lives, always wondering how to get out of the difficult situations they find themselves in -- lack of physical, mental or emotional well-being. Most of the time the best way get to the desired state of well-being is to stay still and spend some time with one's own self. Yoga practice in your daily life is the key to experiencing that. Yoga is unique and different from any other form of physical exercise.

People dissipate their physical and mental energy, thinking about the past or the future -- in a state of regret, worry, or just planning, or escaping into their gadgets and social media. Yoga enables you to unclog your mind and focus on the "right now" of life. Joy and satisfaction can only be found in the present.

Yoga is for everyone who wants to live a fulfilling, joyous life, irrespective of their present life conditions.



# yoga practice for mental and physical well-being

Yoga has the ability to help resolve both physical and mental problems. Also, if you practice it long enough one can fall back on it should any obstacles present themselves in your life.. More recently, medical researchers have provided further insight into the effects of daily yoga practice in overall human well-being -- better sleeping patterns, heightened body awareness, weight management, and, in general, better mental health.

Yoga induces mindfulness naturally and effortlessly. When done right, it stimulates compassion and gratitude. Evidence also supports the fact that yoga can slow ageing at the cellular level, perhaps help a person reverse many of the ageing factors over time.

Basic practices of yoga to add to your daily routine:

## **Kriyas**

*Kriyas* are purification techniques used to cleanse one's body and mind. Yogic hygiene includes 'Sauch', one of the most important *Niyamas*. *Kriyas* open up the invisible energy pathways of our body known as *nadis*. When our body and mind are purified, it enables *prana* to flow freely through our body and strengthen our heart which regulates energy flow throughout our body.

These *kriyas* are hatha yoga techniques and are known as *Shat-Kriyas* or *Shad-Karmas*. Hatha yoga is a balancing practice, it balances the breath and in turn balances the body. *Kriyas* help cleanse eyes, sinuses, esophagus and digestive tract, internal organs, excretory tract, nasal passage, and also balance our *doshas*.

*Kriyas* are performed before you start your *Asana* and *Pranayama* practice.



## **Asanas**

*Asana* (yoga postures) is the third limb of Asthanga Yoga. While *Yamas* and *Niyamas* help us create better relationships with self and others, *asanas* help our body and mind create synchronicity.

Yoga postures were designed to improve bodily functions and strengthen our spine and muscles. Through mindfulness of breath along with *asanas*, a person can maintain equanimity of mind while the body establishes itself in the specific poses. When we master a posture, it is almost meditative; it clears the mind and allows one to focus on the important things in life and channelises universal positivity in everything we do.

Some of the primary benefits of daily *asana* practice are -- improved flexibility, correction of faulty posture, strengthening of the spine and abdominal region, stress relief. *Asana* practice is preventive as well as curative for various ailments etc. *Asanas* are a must for a well-planned wellness regime.

## **Pranayamas**

It is said that we are all born with a finite number of breaths -- one of the main reasons yogis have learnt to master their breathing techniques. *Pranayama* is a way to control our breath, it empowers a person to deepen their breathing. The ones who can control their breath can control their minds and bodies; they can control their *prana* and ultimately control the world around them.

*Pranayama* activates sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system as also the autonomic nervous system. This, in turn, helps to ease fear, stress, anxiety and tension; it also provides relief from depression, dullness, and lethargy.

In our daily lives, our breath determines the state of mind and body we are in. When we are angry, our breath is fast and our heart pumps faster and our mind is all over the place. When we are calm and happy, our heart rate is naturally slow. To always be in a state of bliss we need to first control our breath and then slow it down, which will shut down the chatter in our brain.

*Pranayama* also stresses upon the sense of 'breathing in' the positive energy of the universe and 'letting go' all the negativity. When you breathe out, you should



release and let go of all attachments, fears and the past.

When you breathe in, you should be in a positive state of mind and concentrate on the present. Initially, it can help resolve all the problems of life and eventually not let them arise.

### **AVAV**

Balancing our life requires us to look at life holistically. Through the practice of balancing the 4 pillars *AVAV* -- *Ahar*, *Vihar*, *Achar*, *Vichar*, one can lead a good life.

To start with, ***Achar***, one's behaviour with others and themselves, should be loving, caring, and filled with compassion at all times. These are the first two limbs of Asthanga Yoga -- *Yamas* and *Niyamas* are the foundation of a wholesome life.

Also important are your ***Vicharas*** -- your way of thinking should not be negative, but should be positive or neutral. We should convert our negativity to positivity and if we are unable to be positive then we should try to be neutral, but never to allow circumstances in life to pull us down.

***Ahar*** defines what we eat, how much we eat, where we eat, and how we eat. Ayurveda talks of how food has the power to control your well-being and your lifespan, and also the person you become.

*Sattvic* food (freshly cooked light meals) should be the dominant part of your daily meals. It creates a sense of balance and calm. Foods permitted are milk and milk products, fresh fruits, seasonal and local vegetables, unrefined staples, grains and pulses, spices like ginger, black pepper, turmeric, honey, jaggery, ghee, and oil.

*Rajasic* food provides restless energy but is also required for people who are lazy or have a tough physical life. These foods are difficult to digest -- non-vegetarian food, garlic, onion, un-sprouted beans and pulses, unseasonal vegetables, spicy and rich food.

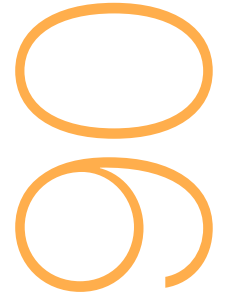
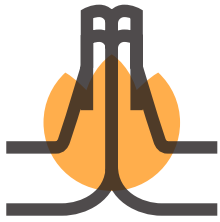
*Tamasic* food provides lethargic and lazy energy but is also required for all to calm *Rajas* and induce a sense of inertia and restfulness. These foods are processed and are not fresh; pickles, jams, beverages, deep-fried dishes, alcohol, frozen foods and refined ingredients. *Tamasic* food is the least desirable of all food types.



Spending some time in recreational activities -- which one enjoys and help calm the mind-- is best suited to practice good **Vihar**. These activities relieve depression, fear, and anxiety. They uplift one's mood and induce a feeling of well-being.

Creative activities like listening or playing musical instruments, gardening, painting, volunteering, engaging in *karma yoga* (selfless deeds) reset all our senses and recharge our mind. Non-competitive sports provide blissful exhilaration and contemplative long walks help elevate stress and create a meditative experience.

We have to cater to all the four pillars equally to be able to lead a healthy and wholesome life. Even if one of them is ignored, our life will go out of balance. There is a noticeable mention of this not only in the Yoga Sutras but in Ayurvedic Texts and the *Bhagwad Gita* as well.



## how to bring a yogic mindset into your life?

*Chitta-Prasadanam* is a blissful and serene state of mind also known as the yogic mindset. This can be achieved by following some basic principles in life.

Start by consciously cultivating the quality of friendliness (*Maitri*) towards the happy (*sukha*), compassion (*Karuna*) towards the unhappy (*dukha*), cheerful (*Mudita*) with the virtuous (*punya*), and be indifferent or uninvolved (*Upeksha*) towards the wicked (*apunya*), and your mind will be disposed towards benevolence all the time (*chitta-prasadanam*).

In our origins, our inner self (*mahat*) is unclouded and joyous. With the help of *mahat*, our *chitta* (mind) discovers the infinite splendor of our consciousness. A blissful state of mind naturally accompanies a yoga practice. This is even true for individuals not actively seeking such an experience. Most people begin the practice of yoga for purely physical results, but land up pursuing it for their whole life. This is because they inadvertently start to experience a spiritual transformation.

How does Yoga stimulate a state of bliss? Even if unanticipated, it is inevitable to have a brush with a state of bliss in the pursuit of Yoga. This is the first glimpse of one's deeper state or our inner self. When one experiences the denunciation of their ego, it is the first time they experience what it is like being an observer. Since the ego is a strong force, it will make an individual return to it again and again. But once one has tasted the nectar of egoless inner self, one will spend their whole life trying to experience it over and over again.

Friendliness towards happy people has an unequivocal outcome i.e. a tranquil mind. Compassion provides us with a tool that helps us deal with the outside world with a steady, unwavering mind that is calm and tranquil. Lack of compassion will create a karmic cycle that will trap you in a loop of negative engagement with the external world and keep you from realizing your inner self. Our desires always defeat us as it is these desires that keep us from pursuing a

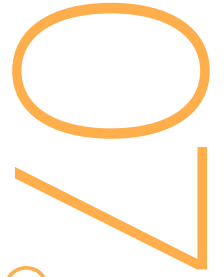


spiritual existence. Identifying oneself with the virtuous can help us enhance our understanding of spiritual dominion. This in turn pushes us to measure ourselves with those who are well ahead on the path of spirituality..

Sage Patanjali in sūtras 1.33 very categorically says it is necessary for a person who desires a yogic mindset to cleanse their minds through the cultivation of a cheerful outlook towards people spiritually superior to themselves. But one should also remember that they cannot always escape the cunning and wicked in this world, one must strive to avoid them at all costs. It is very important to be able to distinguish the virtuous from the wicked. One must rely on their intuition and discriminatory prowess to select the right people as companions.

It is important to know that developing a blissful state of mind is the most important step in your journey of yoga.





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## cultivate - discipline. relaxation . equilibrium

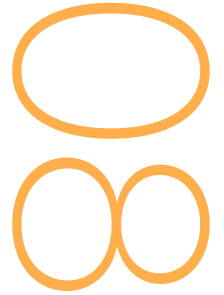
Practice or Effort (*Abhyasa*) and Dispassion or Surrender (*Vairagya*) are the two balancing sides of the scale of life. To cultivate discipline, one needs to practice regularly but also be detached or dispassionate about its outcome. The day we start to expect results from our practice, we start to lose our discipline. Similarly, we can achieve a state of relaxation and equilibrium when we harmoniously practice both together. *Abhyasa* and *Vairagya* are the two foundations of yogic life.

*Abhyasa* means consistent effort without interruption, and not letting any distractions or boredom discourage you from consistent and continuous practice. To become well-established in a yogic state of mind, the scales of life need to be balanced for a long period of time persistently. Continuous practice or effort is not only necessary during your yoga routine, but also in the everyday actions you do.

*Abhyasa* also means being mindful in your everyday actions. The more focused one is in every action (*karma*), the more expeditious will be their spiritual advancement.

*Vairagya* means being dispassionate towards the materialistic world, letting go of your ego, false identities, fears, complexes, and all the things that are out of your control. We do not need to go to the jungle and renounce the world, you can be surrounded by materialistic objects, friends and family, but one needs to recognize the impermanence of the materialistic world and to be able to be dispassionate about it. *Vairagya* leads you on the path of spiritual progress. To practice *Vairagya*, one needs to learn to discriminate between the indispensable and dispensable things of life.

It is the combination of expectation-less effort and letting go of our passions that make it possible for a person to be disciplined in all aspects of their life, relaxed in any situation (dire or happy), and attaining a state of equanimity between their body, mind, and soul.



## how to practice contentment and gratitude daily?

When a person can be happy with what they have within without looking at the external world for more, that person is experiencing true contentment. Contentment doesn't mean relinquishing the world and becoming complacent. It simply means accepting and appreciating who we are and what we have at the moment and moving ahead from there.

**Santosa** is the second *Niyama* of Patanjali's Eight-Fold Path of Yoga. The *Niyamas* help us build a complete and positive relationship with ourselves, and contentment is one of the most difficult to achieve.

The world around us, our experiences and desires are constantly changing as they are part of the ever-changing world, whereas the true you is unchanged and always constant. To find steadiness in this ever-changing world, we need to practice contentment. A direct outcome of practicing contentment is a sense of gratitude towards life and all you have and are. By practicing gratitude, your level of contentment can be enhanced. By practicing both, you can experience this beautiful reciprocity that is difficult to find.

Gratitude can be practiced every day by making a list of what you are grateful for. Thanking the people in your life and the universe for who you are can significantly augment your mental and physical well-being.

What stands in the way of your practice are deep-rooted fears and beliefs. To overcome these, one needs to start by taking care of themselves, to show gratitude towards life and one's self.

Begin with fresh meals, good daily physical and spiritual activities, regular sleeping habits. To add to these, try some of these *asanas* and *pranayamas* to achieve the correct practice of gratitude and contentment.

*Asanas* like *Balasana*, *Paschimottanasana*, *Setubandhasana*, *Uttanasana*, *Talāsana*, *Ustrasana* and *Savasana* help in evoking a sense of contentment.

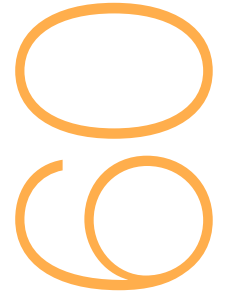
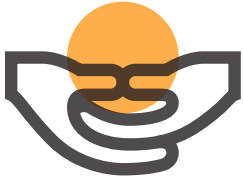


Practicing *Anulom-Vilom* (Alternate Nostril Breathing) and *Pranayama* No 4 (Diaphragmatic Breathing) help achieve a well-balanced mind.

Chanting OM 108 times in a meditative posture can prove most effective.

Try and write a gratitude journal. Write 5-6 new things you are grateful for every day, try not to repeat the list. Writing such a journal helps one burn the negativity deep within.

It is very important to remember that the yoga of gratitude and contentment cannot be forced. If you are in a balanced state of mind, it will emerge naturally from within.



# building and managing relationships with yoga

Most relationships today are under a strain of complex human emotions and conditions. Yoga as a philosophy advocates righteous, moral, and an ethical approach to life. Yoga encourages us to turn to our inner self and accept responsibility for who we are, what we do, and how we feel. In the majority of cases, this translates into acceptance of self. The practice of yogic principles also develops a thoughtful attitude and mindset in conflict situations, which leads to symbiotic, fruitful relationships.

Firstly, the central principle of maintaining good relationships in life is 'Awareness'. Yoga advocates the practice of awareness throughout our life at every moment. We should become self-aware first and subsequently become aware of our surroundings and the people in it. Through this mindful awareness comes acceptance.

Acceptance is the second central principle to creating and keeping good relationships. Change is an integral part of our life. To succeed in life, we should not resist change but embrace it. Similarly, circumstances and life events change us and people around us; it is vital to accept yourself and others and let life flow naturally, and to not impose our thoughts and expectations onto others

As we grow in life and explore the complexities of our connections through the yogic lens, we invariably encounter a distinct possibility that what we are truly seeking won't be achieved from the external. We can only find all that we are looking for inside of ourselves. Through awareness and acceptance, we can achieve this state of understanding, which in turn affords us a chance at growth in both personal and interpersonal relationships. One realizes that it is because of these yogic traits that every relationship in our lives is truly fruitful.

While we think we are being kind to others we tend to make two common errors. If kindness is not from deep within, it is false kindness. If the kindness is only in your words and not in your actions, then it is false kindness. Secondly, we give up too easily.



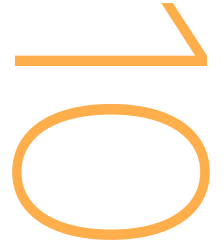
When we are trying to build healthy relationships with people around us, we make an effort, but we give up after a few tries because sticking to one's resolve is hard work. One must practice genuine kindness and patience with the people they care about.

Last but not the least, you must believe that it is your karmic connection with others that brings them into your life, and to pay your karmic debt it is essential to make an effort every day. You must love yourself and others as they are, that is the key to successful relationships.



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## bhavas



We need to cultivate and imbibe in every activity of ours the four *Sattvic Bhavas*. When we do this imbibing and strengthening of the four *Sattvic Bhavas* in every thought, word and deed; we begin to live yoga as a way of life.

As humans, if we do not have a proper direction to our life we remain at a very low, dull level which is a *tamasic* or lethargic level. This is also the level where all kinds of diseases manifest in the body. To rise above these difficulties and problems of life, we need to remain at the *sattvic* level. It is at this *sattvic* level that we also now begin to activate and imbibe the four *sattvic* subconscious traits or *bhavas*. Every time the *tamas guna* is strong in us and we are confused and lethargic, then the four *tamasic bhavas* automatically become active and get strengthened.

The first *sattvic* subconscious trait or *sattvic bhava* is called *Dharma*. Most of the time we tend to interpret *Dharma* as religion. However, in terms of our own *buddhi* or *chitta*, *Dharma* in this context means that trait which is capable of giving us a direction in life. This self-direction is enabled through what we call duty. So the word 'duty' comes very close to the concept of *Dharma*. At every point in life we need to understand what one's duty is in that given situation. Prioritize the task and then move ahead. It is believed that one who is always on the path of *Dharma* is saved from all sorts of pain and suffering in life. Therefore, yoga even outlines the hierarchy of duties which should be our priorities in life.

One's first duty is to our own self, towards our physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Then comes duty towards family and immediate friends. Third is duty towards place of work and finally comes duty towards society and humanity at large if you have the time, energy and inclination. Quite often, we tend to neglect this hierarchy. For example, overworking without eating on time or eating the wrong kind of food, not resting sufficiently, indulging in social work without looking after the family etc-- neglecting this hierarchy leads to several conflicts and problems at the intra and interpersonal level. In order to be clear about our duty, it is important that we attain a calm, quiet and balanced state of mind-- that would



be another dimension of *Dharma*.

How do we cultivate a calm, quiet and balanced state of mind? This is where Yoga and its techniques and processes help us. All meditative *asanas* therefore belong to this *bhava* of *Dharma* because they help us in conditioning our mind to quietness, calmness and balance that will enable us to become clear about our duties and our priorities and execute them with the right frame of mind.

The other components of *Dharma bhava* that will then allow us to practise and strengthen this first *sattvic* subconscious trait are discipline, conditioning, acceptance as well the techniques of the *Yamas* and the *Niyamas*. All of these give a certain direction to our lives and therefore *Dharma* is self-direction and duty. Acceptance and Faith are two important corner-stones of *Dharma* that give direction to our life. These in turn quieten our mind and give us the inner capability to go in the direction that one has set for himself on the path of Yoga.

The opposite *tamasic bhava* of *Dharma* is *Adharma*. So every time we are unable to point our lives in the right direction, every time we fail to do our duties or are confused about our duties and priorities, we strengthen *Adharma*. Every time our mind is in a state of disturbance, restlessness, unsteadiness, or when our mind is imbalanced, our understanding and clarity of our duties becomes unclear, as a result of which we indulge in *Adharma* and strengthen this *tamasic* trait. Every time we are indisciplined, we fail to follow the right kind of routines in life and life itself becomes imbalanced. Everytime we are unable to accept the realities of life, people, situations as they are, we are in a state of disquiet and we are again strengthening the first *tamasic bhava* of *Adharma*.

*Adharma* is therefore the exact opposite of *Dharma*. What is right and what is wrong is a question that we need to resolve for our own selves, and yoga through its guidelines of the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* shows us the way. The *Yamas* lead us on the path of righteousness, on the path of right conduct, on the path of *Dharma*, and, therefore, the ethics, principles and morality of the *Yamas* is an extremely vital component of the *Dharma bhava*. For example, yoga encourages us to practise *Ahimsa* and gives a direction to our mind and to our life, to practice *Satya*.e. non-stealing, to practice *Aparigraha* i.e. non-greed, and to practice *Brahmacharya* i.e. control of the senses and sensory attractions. All of this gives direction to our life and that is why these fall under *Dharma*. Our inability to practise these *Yamas* is therefore *Adharma*.



Any kind of action, whether it is inner or outer, requires concentration. Concentration is the attention centered at a given point or given task. It is the natural ability of the mind to grasp knowledge. The foundation for such concentration comes from the attention paid or the interest that we have in a particular object, thing or area of knowledge. This prior conditioning of the mind and the subsequent concentration is what allows us to be focused on a particular object. This is a necessity for us to acquire any kind of knowledge . (*Jnana*)

The knowledge of yoga is all that one needs for a meaningful life, and the ability to acquire this knowledge is actually present within each one of us. However, it is covered due to the second *tamasic bhava*, that is a trait of *buddhi*, *Agyan*. This is why we keep ourselves busy in the world outside looking for some purpose or some meaning in life. Most of the time this leaves us confused and frustrated. *Jnana* (knowledge) in yoga begins with awareness about ourselves at all levels-- the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. We therefore need to acquire *gyan* about how we can actualize our abilities at each of these levels.

The various components of the *Jnana bhava* therefore will be concentration, one-pointedness, body awareness, co-ordination, synchronization, training of the breath, and training of the senses. *Asanas* for extremities of the body involving upper as well as sideward stretch and the *asanas* that involve twist of the spinal cord all belong to the *Jnana bhava*. The *pranayamas* and the *kriya* of *Tratak* are also included in this *bhava*, because they generate in us *Jnana* at different levels.

The second *sattvic* subconscious trait or *bhava* of *buddhi* is *Gyan* or *Jnana* according to the Sankhya Yoga system.. This *Jnana* aspect of *buddhi* consists of both internal and external knowledge. External knowledge helps us in living our worldly life while internal knowledge of our own self, of our own mind, our nature, our spirit leads to a complete and total understanding of self .Often, the intellectual tendency leads us to a complete neglect of deeper aspects of our mind and intelligence. Traditionally, as far as the Yoga and the Sankhya system is concerned, the intellect is not information-oriented or whatever it is that intelligence tests measure. Intelligence or intellect in terms of *sattvic bhava* includes holistic development and for that we need *Vidhya* or knowledge which is what the *Jnana* constituent of *buddhi* is all about. The Yogic procedure of obtaining *Jnana* is through *Ekagrata*-- the steady one-pointed state of mind.





The third *sattvic* subconscious trait or *bhava* is *Vairagya*. *Vairagya* means to let-go, surrender, humble oneself before a Higher Reality. Forward-bending *asanas*, and various yogic relaxation techniques come under this *bhava*. When we hold our muscles tight, rigid and tense, we are not able to bend forward easily. We need to let go of the tension and rigidity, and only then will we be able to relax. When we bend forward, we are supposed to relax and let go. If we hold them tight, we can't go down. If we let our body 'fall with gravity' rather than 'try hard to bend', we find it easier.

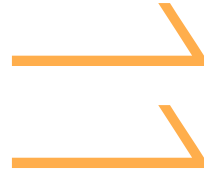
Similarly, when we perform some action, we tend to take the entire credit for it, and we forget about the innumerable people as well as factors involved in getting that action done. When you achieve something, it is not you alone who has accomplished it. This feeling is required to be inculcated in oneself to practice humility and let go of one's ego. We must remember we are a part of the whole. Gratitude and humility are necessary if we want to progress. We hold on tightly to our past, to our thoughts, our ideas, opinions, and all these things cloud our mind, and as a result, we are unable to enjoy the present moment. We are not focused on the present at all. Therefore, we need to let go of these thoughts and the past and become freer and lighter.

The essence in *vairagya* is letting go of all the pettiness and useless cravings that cloud our minds. It is the principle of non-attachment that accepts the world as it is, performs actions whenever and whatever is needed according to one's capabilities. It allows a peaceful existence in the world without causing undue stress to oneself or others, resulting in a larger perspective of life. *Raga* or attachment is the greatest vice and is the opposite of *Vairagya*. It is a senseless clinging on to things, people and even one's thoughts. It inhibits growth of one's own self as well as others' around. Deep attachments in different relationships create un-resolvable conflicts. *Raga* creates aversion when expectations are not met. When these expectations remain unfulfilled, aversion and anger build up. The mind becomes dull or agitated when situations go out of control.

The fourth *sattvic* subconscious trait or *bhava* is *Aishvarya*. *Aishvarya* means self-reliance, self-confidence. Once you have done your duty with knowledge and surrendered yourself, you experience self-confidence, a rise in will power; and you have a greater understanding of the world. So the challenging backward bending *asanas* and *kriyas* come under this '*bhava*'. These make us self-reliant and keep us disease-free. If we have a headache or a backache or a cold, we know how to



handle it. When we practice any *asana*, understand the *bhava* behind the *asana*, and keeping that *bhava* in mind will give us a different type of experience from the *asana*. Try it and experience it -- Yoga is all about experiencing. *Aishvarya bhava* is revealed in clarity of thought and purpose. It is attainment of physical, mental, moral and spiritual knowledge. *Aishvarya bhava* manifests as assertiveness devoid of arrogance. *Aishvarya bhava* is reflected in the determination, strength, courage, self-confidence and power of the will of the individual, which arises from perceptive wisdom. When *adharma*, *ajnana* and *raga* dominate your mind and actions, there can be no peace. There is fear, insecurity, lack of faith, low self-esteem resulting in depression. The integrated practice of the four positive *bhavas* encompasses every action that you perform in life, irrespective of how insignificant or how great the action may be.



## breathing and management of emotions

All things in this universe have natural rhythms of their own. The planets, sun, moon, and all the stars have a cosmic vibrational rhythm. Earth's day and night have a rhythm too. Our mind, body, and our heart have a rhythm. As mentioned in the Vedas and now ratified by quantum physics, we and the world around us are vibrations.

When we successfully go within and pay attention to our mind and body, we can notice our natural rhythm and this comes from our breathing and pranic flow around our body. Once we sit quietly and start to pay attention to our breath, we come in touch with our calm and centered emotions, and the conscious voice deep within. When we let our emotions get the better of us, our natural rhythmic breathing changes and that affects our awareness and level of consciousness we spend our day in. When we let our emotions rule on a regular basis, the body accepts this agitated and non-rhythmic way of breathing as nature and this hampers our cognition, awareness and pushes us into lower levels of consciousness.

To gain real power over one's mind and in turn over one's body, we need to control our breath. *Prana* is the quintessential force that gives us life and keeps us alive. We can extend this life force by practicing *pranayamas*. The techniques of *pranayama* or breathing exercises help in controlling the life force in our body and also help every cell in our body to function at its optimum levels. Research shows that controlling breathing and mindful breathing patterns can help resolve mental, physical and especially emotional issues, and expand our control on our mind and body.

Here are some of the techniques that can help control the mind and in turn your emotions:

*Anuloma Viloma*, also known as *Nadi Shodhanam*, is an alternative nostril breathing technique and has an extremely strong balancing effect on your body.



When you perform this *pranayama* every morning and evening, it helps in having an alert and aware state of mind during the day and a relaxed deep sleep during the night. This balance in the body's rhythm helps balance your emotions.

*Pranayama* Number 4 or diaphragmatic breathing is a simple but ingenious *pranayama* devised by The Yoga Institute. It provides both the mastering of breath along with deep relaxation. This is a very powerful *pranayama* that helps in resolving diseases related to the abdomen, lower abdomen, lungs, and the back. It also helps in resolving deep-rooted emotional problems.

Other mentions are *Bhastrika* (Bellow Breath), *Shunyak* (Prolonged Suspension) and *Kumbhak* (Retention of Breath). Our breath is the tool that can help us control and mould ourselves. Start your practice of *pranayama* today to become the most balanced and best version of you.



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## practicing awareness all day

As we practice Yoga every day, it is natural to have a sense of our surroundings and inner self. *Swadhyaya* is a very important part of the *Niyamas*, the second limb of *Ashtanga* yoga. *Swadhyaya*, as Patanjali suggests, is prescriptive for personal growth through the observance of self -- ‘*Sva*’ means ‘self’, ‘*adhyaya*’ means ‘inquiry’.

Some people try to learn hidden aspects of themselves through the practice of concentration on breath and contemplation. The process that cultivates self-reflective behavior can be considered *Svadhyaya*. It is important to intentionally find self-awareness in all of our activities and thoughts, this will lead to self-acceptance. *Swadhyaya* leads us towards being centered and non-reactive to our environment and people in it, by becoming aware of self-destructive behaviour and thoughts. *Swadhyaya* means finding your own process for self-inquiry and daily practice, despite all the ups and downs of facing distractions and the negative chatter of your mind.

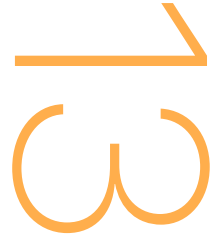
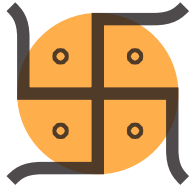
Another way to establish a connection with self is to become more aware of the choices you make every day, and how they affect you, your family, and the world around you. Self-awareness starts with basic things like taking better care of your body, helping people. You can also go beyond this and think of the impact your daily activities have on our planet. Yoga practice empowers your body and senses to be more in tune, to bringing more conscious awareness to your practice and life situations. Whatever your intention, when you make positive changes grounded in self-awareness, you can connect with the truth of who you are and why you do what you do.

You can incorporate *Swadhyaya* into your daily yoga practice combining *asana*, *pranayamas*, and meditation with an objective in mind, to help bring into focus yourself and eventually your environment. Try to find a quiet, tranquil space with some sounds of nature around you. Sit in *Padmasana* or *Sukhasana*, whichever makes you feel more comfortable. Start with concentrating and taking deep, equal



breaths, slowly close your eyes and place your hands on your lap. Think of specific details about yourself or your environment and concentrate on it and contemplate on how it affects you, positively or negatively. Continue to concentrate on that detail until you can let it go.

Practicing this every day will help you become more aware and establish oneness with yourself and your environment.



## yoga can help you find your purpose in life

Have you ever wondered why you were born? What is the purpose of your life?

We are all born with our *samskaras* (impressions from previous lives), *vasanas* (pre-conditioning desires) and *Prarabdha* karma (a small part of the *Sanchita karma*-- past life karma bank that is lined up to manifest in the present lifetime). To add to these we have the conditioning of our childhood and our surroundings. These combine to create our personality complex, our perception of self and the world. It also gives us a sense of separation from the external world. Yoga can help to shed these impressions and pre-conditioning that hold us back from understanding who we really are and our 'purpose of life'.

When we don't realise our purpose in life, a feeling of being directionless or meaningless sets into our life, which is one of the leading causes of depression and many other mental diseases. All of us are here for a reason and every individual has a role to play in the grand scheme of things. When we are connected to what we do, how we live our life and mindfully practice positivity, our life is beautiful. But when we are in discord with our surroundings and our self, everything seems grey; there is no ebullience, just complacency. Discovering and living your life with a purpose in mind comes with the practice of self-awareness.

With self-awareness, you gain clarity about your passions. Combining that with a sense of duty--*dharma*, will lead you towards the true purpose of your life. You will soon feel the drive to start purpose-driven, duty-driven, and passion-driven activities and enterprises that benefit not only you but society as a whole. *Dharma* i.e. Duty is purpose that is balanced, virtuous, and advocates well-being of all, it means 'rooted in stability and perseverance'.

Just like threads woven together to create a beautiful carpet, every step we take towards self-awareness and *dharma* creates an opportunity to practice the true purpose of our life. Living a purposeful life helps us to find what moves us and enriches our spirit.