

Yoga

Perfect balance

Awakening the Bodymind

Christopher John Walker ©1998Dedication



To my three children,
the three greatest Yogis I know;
- my teachers, my friends, my blood...
Thank you from the depths of my heart,
I love you - wherever you are.

Also a special thank you
to a friend and inspired Yogini,
Eileen.



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Foreword

There is a magic available to all of us; a magic of health, vitality, awareness, success fulfilment and a truly better way of life. This magic is Yoga and it offers us a means to simply get more out of life. This book is our tiny contribution to the thousands of years of Yoga that precedes us in supporting a better quality of life. We are all children of the one universe, we are all members of the same world, and we are all deserving of love no matter what we have or have not done.

We wish to show you the sciences of love, gratitude and life; all of which are an integral part of Yoga and have been since it was first documented some 2,000 years ago. We wish to show you that the Yogic way of life does not mean austere practices of detachment or social withdrawal. The greatest meditation of all is life. Walking down the street, meeting life face to face and learning truth is the deepest meditation. Some of the most magnificent testimonies to the creation of the universe can be seen in the depths, beauty and darkness of life on the street, just as it is seen in the great temples of the world.

In this book we journey through and beyond the physical elements of Yoga to explore the deeper riches of what it embraces. Our aim is to share with you a broader definition of Yoga, life and the universe while debunking myths and simplifying the teachings of Yoga.

Yoga can benefit the homekeeper, spiritual aspirant or corporate suit. It can support, heal, confront and move us. It is pain and pleasure, it is stretching and contracting, it is active and passive—Yoga is simply a reflection of life.

Underlying all of this is the belief that every individual has the right to live life to the fullest: enjoy the fruits of success, participate in relationships, interact socially and be fit and healthy. Every individual has the right to live an inspired and heart driven life. As you will see, the Yoga philosophy has this message, and it has been the same message for thousands of years.

A full breath is a full life. Taking that breath to the edge is the practice of Yoga. It moves our career and relationships, and brings us success to the fullest.

We hope that this book helps you as our classes, seminars and training programs have helped others.

Yoga; A Way of Life



Christopher Walker.



Fit is not Necessarily Healthy

My first Yoga class was in a church hall in Manly. It was a rude awakening for someone who had a fairly high opinion of their state of health. At 35 I thought I was healthy. I ate well, ran every day, swam regularly and kept my body in good shape at the gym.

However, there were some telltale signals that were none too pleasing. First, my back. At least once every six months I'd end up flat on my back with spinal problems for a day or two followed by at least six weeks at the chiropractor under serious remedial care. The discs in my lower back had been compressed in my younger years and now served as an unwelcome reminder of my less than perfect sports training.

My ankles were yet another unfriendly reminder of yesteryear. Football injuries in and around my ankles on both feet had left scar tissue and weakness. On a pleasant jog or walk in the bush my ankles would twist and sprain over some minuscule stone or meandering tree root, and as a result be turned into swollen blocks of untouchable nerve.

The hit list could go on but it was my need for a different perspective on life that finally led me to Yoga. Call it a mid-age crisis, or call it a blessing, for me it was the beginning of a journey into another way of 'seeing'. Stress and repetitive habit had run my life long enough. I had searched for and been frustrated by illusions long enough. Marriage, business, sport and wealth had done little to satiate a deeper hunger that dwelled within me.

So it was that I went to my first Yoga class. First, in the hope of finding health to offset the sudden onset of middle age, and second, for answers to some of life's deeper questions. I found neither.

As the rest of the class bent forward to put their head on their knees, I was barely able to touch my knees with my legs bent. As the rest of the class pushed up into a back arch, I lay flat on the floor looking more like a builder's plank than a bridge. It was obvious from the first class that I had a lot of catching up to do. A radical change would have been nice, a complete body exchange would have been the ideal!



Six years later and I can now put my head on my knees and my back arches are getting better. Also, my back now requires minimal external adjustment and my ankles are flexible and strong. These factors in themselves have had a radical impact on my life and completely justify the effort I have put into Yoga. But in addition to these changes something even more profound has happened as a result of my Yoga practice.

My breathing, my cardiovascular rate and my ability to handle stress has changed, and my interest in the deeper intrigues of life has been fuelled. In the process of practising Yoga and learning to re-open my body to flexibility and strength, I have detoxified 35 years of relative abuse.

As a survivor of the 60s and 70s, my body has been subjected to quite a vast array of substances not normally prescribed in healthy diet books. Needless to say it was enjoyable at the time, however, the pay back was looming upon me larger than life. Kidneys, liver, lungs and most other bits were, it seems, functioning at about 50% capacity.

Yoga will have a major impact on your life too. This is valid for all people in all walks of life. From the alternative lifestyle, to performer or the world of the corporate business professional. Yoga is ancient but its application to today's lifestyle is totally appropriate. It offers the means to help us advance our capacity to do more, the science to help us adapt to increasing levels of stress and the insights to help us better do what we do. And we do not have to sacrifice our core values. We can maintain ambition, aspiration and the challenge of career. Yoga is a tool to be used in the present for the creation of our future.



The Mobile Gym, Temple, and Centring Studio

Most of us lead busy lifestyles. Travel, social life, business and sports. Attending a gym or sports club demands time, time we have less and less of. Furthermore, if jogging is your daily thing, you will need snow shoes, a body guard and an oxygen mask in most cities of the world.

Yoga is portable. Whether at home or on the road, it takes only the space of your yoga mat. It's the only thing you need for a daily workout that keeps your mind clear, cleans out waste and maintains your whole body/mind in a constant state of awareness and growth. Your daily practice is independent of your emotional space. It gives you objectivity which is a rare commodity, stills you when you're ruffled and ruffles you when you're stilled. Your Yoga practice can be like a best friend.

Your Yoga practice travels with you everywhere you go. A daily session takes from ten minutes to two hours and can be done in a hotel room, sunlit balcony or office. You work up a slight to heavy sweat each time. You stretch, twist, lengthen and strengthen, and you get to breath consciously and deeply. While all this is happening you get to focus on the bigger picture.

These few moments in a busy life really help. You get to feel the silence within, be humble and grateful, and remember what is really important in your life.

The Yoga we practice is called Ashtanga, and it is demanding. You will probably go through considerable discomfort and confrontation. As your body opens and detoxifies, you will let go of old patterns. It isn't easy, but through this process you will grow to enjoy incredible shifts in the quality of your life.

Ashtanga Yoga can be a vital ingredient in supporting the life we lead. Living an inspired life we love living to the fullest, working hard, being supported by a healthy body and keeping as focused and aware as we possibly can. Ashtanga and your daily practice are critical in helping us to achieve this. Even 10 minutes a day is great. For those ten minutes you breathe deep, focus on being present and get to open the body—it's a great way to balance the day.



The Mind

In the *Yoga Sutra* Pattanjali dedicates one whole section to the mind. This section deals with the concept of perception. It suggests that we see an event and create a perception. This then becomes our reality, however, we may well have deceived ourselves in the view we took to gain that perception. Yet although we may perceive an event quite incorrectly, these impressions in the mind can be very difficult to change.

Perceptions become unconscious responses to events. They run our lives, sabotaging relationships, businesses, health and success.

The *Yoga Sutra* acknowledges that all we see, hear and think in our mind is real—there is no difference between reality and imagination: all combines to make up our perception of life. These perceptions of life, whether experienced in reality or in our imagination, are not differentiated. We are therefore run by perception.

There are two levels of perception, the external and the internal. One from the mind or subconscious and the other from a deeper place. The goal of Yoga is to clear aside the surface perceptions of the subconscious mind long enough for the inner perception to become clear. This inner perception is referred to as truth, inner knowing or higher self. It creates certainty, knowing and fulfilment in our lives.

Four main elements create our outer perceptions.

- The ego, or comparative perception, which always wants to be better than another.
- The demanding perception which seeks pleasure, wanting to re-create good feelings and pleasurable situations,
- The avoiding perception which tries to keep away from pain. Stems from a belief that something bad has happened and tries to avoid it ever happening again. This causes us to reject things we know little about.
- The fear perception which is afraid that we will be judged, may be wrong, will grow old, or may miss something. This all culminates in a feeling of uncertainty and doubt.



These are the perceptions Yoga helps us to see more clearly. They are in fact elements that run our lives. Fear and guilt both draw us outside the moment to either the future or past. We fear only the future, we have guilt only of the past. Yoga's objective is to bring us into the moment where we are fully present. In this state, neither fear nor guilt exist.

When we act on the basis of these outer perceptions we will make moves that do not come from our heart. It is called unconsciousness, or being in the head or out of the moment, ie not present. Such action creates chains of events which eventually bring us to question the basis on which we are making decisions and living our lives, and this leads us eventually back to our heart.

When we see and feel from within we experience no tension and no agitation. We feel calm and unmoved; our heart can stay open and we are therefore free to be fully present. We are, in that time, our true self.

This inner perception has many labels: each belief system or faith has a name for it and a different definition of its source. Ultimately, however, rhetoric aside, it is the moment when we are neither in fear or guilt, past or future. Instead, we are in the present moment and in our heart.

In our heart there is an inner spring of energy, vitality and inspiration. We are able to act with certainty and our work flows. In the moment there is certainty, calm and no stress.

Yoga's aim is to decrease the influence of outer perception and increase the inner or present perception, thus freeing us to live more inspired and productive lives.

As we deepen our Yoga practice, resistance in the physical body becomes more obviously connected to the mind. Getting to know the nature of the mind becomes a significant element of Hatha Yoga practice.

The body and mind are intrinsically linked. That ancient fact has now been accepted unanimously. It follows therefore that change in the body will correspond to change in the mind. Or is it so?

Resistance to change is a significant factor in personal growth. We are creatures of habit: we seek pleasure and avoid pain, we adhere to beliefs which make life safe, and we can easily be sold to a promised land.



Tension in muscle structure is a reflection of tension in mind. Which came first is a chicken and egg argument, but there is no doubt that a person who is uptight and in fear will have an uptight and resistant tension in their body.

Resistance in Yoga comes in many forms, and as teachers we see them repeated over and over. Resistance to a different teacher, different adjustment, different pace, different movement, etc. These resistances are the psychological blocks that keep us safe and secure, and during times of trauma are the natural home state of the nervous system.

Memory is stored in the body. These are electrical charges that have been created through perception of a particular event in our life. That electrical polarity is ultimately stored as tension or 'tense ion'. Specific body parts store specific emotion, or memory, and when this is a trauma-based memory, the body will block off feeling and sensitivity to that area. It becomes a blockage, a null area, tight and inflexible, and just as an unresolved fear may create an avoidance of certain activities, so too the body memory will create resistance.

In many books on Yoga there are innumerable references to disciplines. Eat this, think that, do this and don't do that. These are for the most part literal interpretations of ancient writings which had vastly different meanings. Truth for example. One of the interpretations of an ancient Yogic text is that if you tell the truth with all your words you will be able to still wild animals. Truth in the ancient times of the mysteries is a reference to one's connection to the soul. When aligned with the soul the duality of existence on the planet is eliminated; we are at one in harmony with the higher source. In this state there is truth because we are actually not in time nor space, we are, as it were, connected to a timeless and spaceless dimension of life—the immortal dimension. The wild animal is our senses.

While we are in mortal form and driven by emotions, we are in the illusion of good and bad, right and wrong. This is the essence of life—learning to love things and events as they are. This is the process of evolution to a higher state of consciousness where we are continually confronting the next illusion and judgement must be confronted. While we are in mortal form, we are in illusion, and while we are in illusion we are unable to have continuous truth of the soul. Such a state takes us beyond the need to live on Earth. This is aptly described in the Bhagavagita.

Disciplines are the literal interpretations of mysteries. Such interpretations are a substitute for self-awareness until that level of growth and sensitivity can be internalised. The consciousness of the masses needs rules, while higher consciousness has guidance from the higher self, the soul, and is able to listen to those messages and act accordingly.



Balancing Body. Mind and Spirit.

If you can breathe you can do Yoga. Yoga is not about flexibility or what you can or cannot do. Yoga is about awareness and the mindset you bring to life. Poses are intended for the exploration of the body, and our capacity to do each pose varies widely given our body type, strength and age. Doing poses will create change, but when this becomes the sole objective then we miss out on many of the wonderful opportunities Yoga offers.

Yoga is an exploration: a mirror into the beliefs and attitudes that determine your life. If you believe you are too stiff, strong or accomplished, or are in a class that is too slow, fast or easy, Yoga will help you to explore the belief systems that underlie these beliefs.

Focus, attitude and attention are important in our lives. In Yoga, focus, attitude and attention are the most critical elements of practice. To stimulate these constantly changing elements we explore each pose in deeper detail and complexity. When we master one pose we move on to another to challenge the edge of focus, attitude and attention. Attitude is attention, attention is awareness, awareness is focus, the three are intimately interconnected.

One critical element of Yoga practice is the ability to focus energy to different parts of the body. Ancient sages could stop their heart beating, or even stop breathing for long periods of time simply to demonstrate their ability to focus and maintain that focus in finite detail. In our Yoga practice we learn to focus on those areas of our body that are stiff or blocked. This is a vital part of Yoga practice, one which is often overlooked in the search for more quantity rather than quality.

Approaching postures as goals is helpful for progress but can make people less sensitive to the messages the body is sending. If you are continually focussed on where you want to be rather than where you are, it breeds an attitude of ungratefulness and a state of tension. The body has its own pace for opening and developing. Going too fast or too slow are both mindsets which, no doubt, reflect the cause of stress in many other areas of life.

The evaluation of progress is a very ingrained part of our social structure. Schooling, sports and work systems all value progress so it is quite a contradiction when, in midst of all this, Yoga infers something quite different. Progress in Yoga is the ability to be right where we are, and in being there finding the gratitude and thankfulness for what is. Progress is the ability to be who we are and appreciate what we have exactly as it is. Yoga offers a deeper way of measuring who and what we are.



It is easy to get caught up in the complexity or difficulty of the practice you perform. When you translate Yoga into a performance-based system it can give a sense of worth. This level of self-worth is unfortunately transient and is a detour on the path to personal growth. The role of the teacher in this situation is to help the student recognise this confusion and return to a more real state of constancy of practice.

Burnout is another consequence of an over enthusiastic approach to Yoga. Too much too soon can drain energy from career, relationships and social life. This is a total contradiction to the objective of Yoga practice which is to build the stamina for an improved quality of life. Yoga practice is a long term experience, it is not suited to the 'quick fix' and therefore usually kicks back when treated as such.

If the enthusiasm is there for personal development, we recommend that individuals take a broader approach to Yoga than just the asana practice. Studying the other limbs of Yoga, mastering financial, mental, career, relationship, social as well as the spiritual areas of life is a far more integrated approach to growth.

Most of the great Yogi masters, even the fathers of the current Hatha Yoga practice, were scholars of diverse and complex areas of life. Astrology, astronomy, physiology, psychology, the mind, and materialism. Yoga is more than simply a physical practice.

Yoga offers a total connection with the truest self. Our self-worth is truly developed through the love of self as it is. In seeing the perfection of what is, we can begin to develop a more universal perspective, expand our vision and begin to understand freedom. Being humble to a greater power opens our world to energy, vitality, love and the infinite. This is the objective of Yoga practice.



Be in a Position to Change your Life.

Yoga is about change, getting closer to our full potential, being more present with what we do and becoming more conscious and attentive to our actions. Are these not the attributes of inspired employees and in turn inspired companies? Commitment, inspiration and self-motivation are the basis for improvement in productivity, performance, fulfilment, stress reduction, quality improvement and health. The very elements of Yoga, transcribed some 5,000 years ago, are the essential ingredients of 21st century corporate success.

Change in business is initiated and implemented through personal change—the willingness to do something different and step outside the square. Yoga provides the catalyst for self-development and subsequent corporate change. Now with automation, computerisation, digitisation and employee training reaching extremely high standards, self-development is the most logical and potent opportunity for growth. Change and growth in productivity are essential today, and Yoga is one of the prime building blocks for that process.



The Benefits of a Yoga Practice

There are as many reasons for doing Yoga as there are people. Our survey of over 4,000 students who have attended courses at our school in the past 12 months, indicate that over 50% come for relaxation and stress relief, 20% are interested in improved health, body tone and quality of life, and the remaining 30% are a blend of people interested in personal growth, the advanced study of life and self-awareness.

Flexibility

We are born flexible. Our bodies at birth move with ease. Nerves, circulatory system, bones, muscles, glands and organs become restricted and function less efficiently as we get older. As a result energy and vitality decreases, and the body becomes less sensitive and has less capacity to move.

Health

Disease is the dis-ease of the body. The functional systems break down creating illness and lack of energy. Health is one of the prime objectives of Yoga. Postures are the tools for maintaining and improving the body's function. They give people the ability to open, stretch, clean and heal their body from the inside out.

Awareness

Good health requires a total perspective—internal as well as external. Yoga poses help in the development of flexibility and movement. Increased sensitivity through Yoga can provide people with early warnings. The Yoga feedback systems help us to focus on areas that need special attention through either diet or stretch. This is a far wiser way in which to look after ourselves rather than waiting for some breakdown to occur.

Eternal Youth

Aging is inevitable. Yoga cannot prevent the inevitable decay of the body, but it can provide a huge enhancement to the quality of life in the meantime. For some, quality of life begins to wane in their 20s and by age 40 serious restriction to physical and internal function has occurred. This process of early decay is not inevitable and can, through the subtle process of Yoga, be reversed without an invasive procedure.



The entropy of the body is the process of life. Managing that process affects our life. As we age we rely less on the physical and focus more on the mental and spiritual, but they are intrinsically linked. Opening to change requires the sensitivity and awareness that asana practice develops

Relaxation.

One of Yoga's prime objectives is to help people relax and de-stress. There are so many ways this can be achieved.

- Yogic breathing calms the nervous system and provides an intense counter-position to any activity causing stress. Both the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems respond to Yogic breathing exercises.
- Yoga practice can support and strengthen a higher metabolic rate which in turn aids in immune function and stress management. Specific poses are used to sedate/stimulate the body/mind.

Meditation.

We cannot meditate: we only provide situations and conditions which enable the body to become present enough for meditation to occur. Lying flat on the floor, warm and supported, with appropriate props is an excellent meditation position. Deep relaxation can occur in this position. The reason this position is not used in classical meditation is because lying flat in such comfort our mind begins to wander and typically we doze off (well, I do anyway) after a relatively short period of time.

Emotional balance.

Tension held in the body grips tissue, muscle, bone structure and organ function. Emotions held in the body result in imbalances. Imbalances breed imbalances and these are stored in the body. Yoga postures can re-open channels to free stuck emotions, release blockages and, through the body, transform the mind. This is a vital factor in health care and stress management.

Stress management



It is far wiser and more productive to manage stress when it occurs rather than on a month by month or year by year recuperation basis. Holidays and free weekends are special. However, in the period between these de-stressing times, stress and tension can hinder a full and productive life. Yoga teaches stress management through breath, body and mind control. These are invaluable resources in a busy and productive life, and they can be used right at the moment when stress arises.

Yoga is a great antidote for a stressful lifestyle. The less we tic-toc between extremes the more balanced and fulfilled our life can be. Yogic breath is the ideal way to maintain the balance both after and during work. We breathe all day yet it is only when we focus our attention on the breath that we truly “breathe”. Focussing on the breath at different times during the day and adjusting that breath to the circumstances can have a major impact on our performance and enjoyment of life. During your practice

As well as the physical stress relief, Yoga offers a different mental perspective on stress management. When we are able to see our world with a clearer perspective, many stress-causing situations evaporate. Our perceptions of events usually polarise things into good and bad, right and wrong, pleasure and pain. This is how stress is caused. The more we learn to see things with a broader mind, the more stabilised we are when we find ourselves in the eye of a storm, and the less stress affects us, the more we stay on track.

Health and wellbeing

- Yoga offers considerable benefits in improving and stabilising health. Through focused and consistent practice, Yoga has been used to help heal cancer, kidney problems, weak heart, asthma, bronchitis, urinary problems, prostate inflammation, constipation and migraine. The list goes on. There are in fact few “illnesses” that cannot be assisted through Yoga. Sports injuries, chronic back pain and emotional instability are also common concerns that bring people to Yoga.
- In Ashtanga Yoga practice significant internal heat is generated through breath and body movement, and this begins a deep and thorough detoxification process.
- Maintaining flexibility and the body’s functions becomes an issue for most people when they enter middle age, or when they are injured. Flexibility of the body is essential for waste removal and the efficiency of other fluid systems, and for the easy flow of blood. Opening stiff and tightly bound muscle areas in the body contributes to an improvement in health and greater mental flexibility.



- Recovery from post-operative stress is also a common goal for people joining Yoga classes.

Self—actualisation

- The drive for personal development and self-actualisation is natural. Most people eventually ask the bigger questions of life. When an individual's quest goes beyond the basic instincts, Yoga offers a path to universal answers.
- Yoga practice contributes to a deeper self-awareness and an understanding of the change process for personal growth. To this end, Yoga, with the appropriate teacher, can help us to grow and develop deeper self worth and a more creative self-expression.



Where do I start?

Although there are numerous aspects to Yoga, including philosophy, meditation and breathing practices it is wisest to start with the postures. (Asana's). The reason is simply that the body is the vehicle through which we live, breath, meditate and create. It's condition usually determines our capacity to achieve higher states of awareness.

Ashtanga Yoga incorporates a progression of poses (asanas) from extremely easy to extremely complex. At one end of the spectrum a practice can begin with finger movements, small foot rotations and relaxation. At the other extreme Yogis slow their heartbeat, are buried for days on end and have been known to drink their own urine (not taught at our school).

From school to school the level of demand and complexity of courses changes enormously.

At our school, Ashtanga Yoga Moves, we offer a three-level progression from introductory to general classes. We believe in the concept of building a very solid foundation and approaching Yoga practice with a long term perspective in mind. Our beginners' courses are about understanding the fundamental principles of Yoga. We also teach breathing exercises, relaxation techniques and basic poses. We will typically take students through Salute to the Sun and a few critical poses in the early stages of the course.

Ultimately there is no substitute for a solid background and deep understanding of the basics. In the long term it will be absolutely essential to know the fundamentals, especially when students begin practising on their own. This is why we believe it is important to develop great habits from the start.



Need more energy ?

Hatha Yoga is the movement of energy, prana, through channels known as the nadi's. They are not visible channels but are the electrical fields around the body through which energy flows. Hatha means the merging of the sun and the moon, the light and the dark. The two opposites merge to create one single line of flow. The merging or uniting of the various nadi's (there are 72,000) is the uniting of the two sides of the body, the light and dark, male and female.

These two sides of our body also represent judgements of right and wrong, good and evil, pleasure and pain. The merging of duality is considered the central position, Yoke or Yoga. When we can see order in creation we move beyond judgement to love. Love is therefore the ultimate mission of all Yoga.

Hatha Yoga is designed to remove the blocks in our energy flow. Although the focus is initially on physical asana, the philosophy is critical. Blockages are not purely physical, they are a function of the physiology and psychology of the body. What we eat, drink, think, say, see, do and how we breathe affects the path of energy through the body. This is the science of Hatha Yoga.

The primary blockage to the flow of energy through the body is called the Kundalini. This is the coiled snake; coiled in such a way as to absorb and block flow. It is the mirror of emotional and physical beliefs. The elimination of Kundalini blockage is a vital focus of Hatha Yoga practice. The specific focus on the energy wasted through the Kundalini is called Tantra Yoga, where the connection between body, energy and the cosmos are interconnected and mastered.

This technique is a meditative process in itself, bringing us more into the present with our bodies to the exclusion of all that is around us. It is an important learning process; an external one which eventually gives way to a deeper more intuitive form of energy management—the internal feel of the subtle flow.

In Ashtanga Yoga there is not a lot of emphasis on the external alignment of the body. Once again the student is taught to work with internal energy, the body's own internal intelligence, to create a true and inner alignment.



The benefits of this internal focus on energy movement are significant: it increases the control and management of energy within the pose, tones and relaxes the nervous system, decreases the likelihood of injury, increases strength and endurance in poses, internally aligns the body in the pose from the inside, and prepares the body, breath and mind for pranayama.



What food and drink is best?

Yoga allows you to be the best judge of what is right in food and drink. As you become more sensitive to your body's requirements through the practice of Yoga, you will make wiser, less need driven choices. We eventually change eating habits because of Yoga, but these are personal choices that we take as we become more sensitive to inner guidance and to changes that will enhance our quality of life.

In Yoga there is a continuous path on which to travel; a path that will open awareness to a more balanced way of being. The development of mastery in all areas of life enables us to become totally present with life. We become inspired and heart driven with an open mind and a sense of gratitude for what is, we can become more inner directed, self-motivated individuals.



What is important for my Yoga practice?

Breathing

Inhale you inspire, exhale you relax. Balancing the breath is balancing the mind. Yoga without breath is simply exercise, unconscious but beneficial. Breath is the single most transformative element of Yoga. Listen, watch, monitor and focus on this alone and there will be an incredible change in your life. Always breathe through the nose, the mouth is for eating.

In keeping with many traditional schools of Yoga, we believe that the single most important element of Yoga asana is breath. Breath links body and mind. Every movement of the body can be linked to the breath and every breath to a state of mind. This flow, the connection between body and mind consciousness, is one of the most beneficial elements of Yoga practice. This is the essence of asana and the preparation for deeper practice.

Breath affects strength, stretch, endurance and balance. Breathing techniques are critical in the development of whole lung breathing instead of the typical half breath or shallow breath we develop through our unconscious lifestyle. Breath is the fuel of life. Ninety per cent of our physical energy comes from breath, our mental state is influenced by breath and, as Yogis believe, the length of our life is determined by the length of our breath.

By using the breath, and not the mind, to guide us through asana we are able to surrender, soften, strengthen and develop awareness more easily.

A full breath is a full life.

Posture

Your body is unique, you know it better than anyone. Approaching the physical practice of Yoga should be done mindfully. Knowing your body and its particular traits gives you the opportunity to focus on specific areas to strengthen, clean, break down and in some instances protect. You will enjoy the physical experience of Ashtanga Yoga, especially the very cleansing body heat developed through special breathing and movement combinations.



There is an edge, a fine but distinctive edge, between pain and intensity. The body has its feedback systems and to ignore them is insensitivity. These feedback systems are both psychological and physiological. Which is functioning to create the specific sensation of pain is rarely discernible. The edge between pain and intensity is therefore the edge on which to play in a Yoga asana.

Yoga asana is a mirror: a reflection of the process we use to live our lives. Some people will ignore the feedback of pain in the interests of ambition, and in doing so will break through their barriers. Others will ignore the pains and break the body. Either way these attitudes reflect an insensitivity associated with the asana practice.

The edge is the border which a point of questioning and a point of respect for truth. Moving to that edge is the constancy of growth. In asana the questions that arise as a result of that edge are the food from which we grow.

The edge is the playful point of the asana practice. It is an exploration of the mind and the body through which deeper insight can be attained. Force and will are functions of the mind dominating over the body; retreat and avoidance are the functions of the body dominating over the mind.

Most importantly, go slowly. There are as many Yoga postures as there are stars. Slowly you will develop awareness as well as flexibility and strength. Slowly progress and make it yours.

Dristi

Eye positions are called Dristi. Every posture and every movement between the postures has a specific Dristi. To focus the eye is to focus the mind. Dristi focus deepens the meditation, concentration and mind control aspects of the Ashtanga Yoga practice.

Where does the mind begin and the body end. Changing our posture changes our mind, changing our mind changes our body posture. Change confronts and because emotions are stored in the body there is resistance to change both physically and mentally. Tension in the body is usually tension in the mind.

Know these factors and it becomes obvious that one of the major challenges to performing a Yoga asana is mental. To move certain body parts and to open and stretch certain areas is to confront, sometimes years of blockage in the mind.



Resistance is simply a desire to stay. It is a reflection of an infatuation about where we are. We may fear the unknown in letting go, we may feel a lack of security, or perhaps have a past remembered emotion about certain movements or mind states.

Confronting these through body, mind and breath is a gradual process. A sequenced asana practice will help us to face and move through the blockages faster than an asana practice in which we are free to choose the poses.

Relaxation

At the end of your asana practice relax in the most difficult Yoga pose of all, the corpse pose. Lie still, no movement at all, still your mind and allow your whole body metabolism to bask in the transformations you have created through the practice. Allow the mind to be still.



Getting it right

We can easily become attached to the idea of a good Yoga practice. This is based on a judgement measured by the requirements of our mind. However, this does not serve us well in Yoga. Asana practice is not orientated to pleasure and pain, rather it focuses on the development of the many diverse facets of body and mind. Good and bad practice are simply the construct of an ego in search of pleasure.

In Asana practice you are required to confront those areas that are blocked—the areas you would naturally withdraw from. One of the great aspects of Ashtanga Yoga is the fixture of the asana sequence. By following the sequence we untie the knots that make us uncomfortable.

Ashtanga Yoga offers the benefit of a pre-determined sequence, and as long as we don't get caught up in thinking that simply finishing the sequence is a goal, it is an ideal process of asana development. The ultimate objective of asana practice is union. Union of the one to the many, the body to the soul. You are welcome to surrender to this union at any time, even in the first beginner's pose.

Yoga poses require a combination of surrender and control, effort and relaxation, and application and submission. Excess of any element will be reflected back in the practice, which in turn is a mirror of our emotional and physical wellbeing. Through constancy and application to asana practice we become more in harmony with our body, and we surrender from attempting to change what is and begin to respect it. It is from this position that true change can occur.

The most thorough book on Hatha Yoga poses is *Light on Yoga* by B.K.S Iyengar. It is a truly technical, detailed and highly sophisticated book—a must for every Yoga student.

In Ashtanga Yoga practice there is less emphasis on asana (pose) technique and more on the breath. In contrast to some schools of teaching where highly refined technique and alignment is the primary focus, Ashtanga relies more on the inner symmetry of asana than the outer. There is actually room for both. Technique is important, as is the development of a meditative practice and the co-ordination of breath.



Do I need a Teacher ?

There is no substitute for a great teacher. “When the student is ready the teacher appears, when the teacher is ready the student appears”. Developing a relationship with a Yoga teacher in the early stages of Yoga is very important, in fact, it is one of the most important elements of your early Yoga practice.

Finding the right teacher may take some time. Each teacher will interpret Yoga in their own way. It will depend on their background, their emotional history, the personality and their own ambition. Some teachers are great practitioners and lousy instructors, some are lousy practitioners and great instructors, some emphasise the spiritual and others the physical only.

It is wise to meet the teacher and at least read their personal bio before committing to the class. We will be drawn to people who exhibit the traits we love about ourselves and repelled from people who exhibit the traits we don't like in ourselves. Objectivity in determining your best Yoga teacher comes from asking their history, qualifications to teach and their objectives for the class. The judgement about their personality is usually your stuff and very secondary. A Yoga class is as good a place as any to face that.

Contradictions in our way of thinking can be an essential part of the Yoga journey, and that is why it is better to evaluate the teacher on their style rather than personality. The word guru in Sanskrit means one who takes you from darkness to light. Therefore, in truth any person who teaches you something about yourself is a guru and as you will discover later in this book, everybody can teach you something. The highest guru of all is you—**gee you are you.**

Experience can be the best measure of all. Try a class here and there. Attend a beginners' course and meet the teacher with direct and appropriate questions. A teacher who does not get to the point quickly may not value their own time, and therefore may not value yours. After all, your time is a very precious and irreplaceable commodity, why not spend it well?



Must I go to a class?

Yoga can be a way of life. There are practices for cleansing, stretching, healing, expanding our mind and making life more meaningful. We breathe continuously, think continuously and grow whether we try or not. Doing Yoga can be continuous, affecting the way we breathe, move, think and relate to others.

When students first begin they say, “I am doing Yoga this morning at 7 am”, and after they pick up their mat from the floor they say, “I am finished Yoga now”. This is a reference to the practice of asana which after a time can expand to include the other wonderful Yoga practices.

The more we do and understand Yoga, the more we apply it to our daily life. Yoga is not only a physical practice but a way of seeing and thinking. It is a way of breathing, caring and achieving success. Ancient as Yoga is, the tools it offers us are timeless.

Ashtanga Yoga practice is often done in the morning before the working day begins. It is a great process for connecting within and opening the mind and body to the possibilities of the new day. Afternoons are equally fine, the body is certainly more flexible at that time, however, there are usually other things to do which can take priority. A regular morning practice can become an essential part of your day.

Yoga practice requires consistency, regularity and patience. The body opens at its own rate, so too the mind. Our limitations concern are our ability to let go and move on, and that is a very individual thing.

Sri K Pattabhi Jois, the father of Ashtanga Yoga, is renowned for his response to enthusiastic and impatient westerners visiting his home studio in Mysore, India, asking for insights into the asana practice. His response is classic as he avoids buying into the Western exaggeration of Yogic philosophy. He says, “Just do the practice and all is coming”. In other words, just do it without expectations or limitations and with regularity. Expansion and growth occurs without external force. To this end he has no book on the philosophy or rules of Ashtanga practice, nor does he expect any austere disciplines to be adhered to. Pattabhi Jois is one of the first great Yoga masters of India to let go of the literal translation of the ancient texts of Yoga and focus on the inner development that Yoga itself offers.



So the suggestion we have for budding Yogis and Yoginis is “Do the practice, do it daily, do it well, do it consistently and above all do it for the love of life”.



Time out for me ;

The ideal place to do an asana practice is somewhere relatively quiet and warm, where there are no chill breezes. Don't practice Ashtanga Yoga under the direct sun as it is quite dangerous.

In a Yoga school wooden floors are helpful. The amount of sweat and dirt held in carpet would be extremely unhealthy. Low-lighting is also important to help deepen the practice and make it more internal.

Music works. Although it can be distracting, many people love it as a way of helping them focus and relax. Whatever works for you is fine.

Interruptions, however, would be best avoided. The practice is a progression into deeper and deeper levels of heat, focus and concentration. To break this by answering the phone and having a conversation is an inevitable loss in focus, and more importantly for the Ashtanga practice, loss in body heat.

When travelling, the hotel room is perfect. Turn the air-conditioning off, the heater up and create your own special space.

Your Yoga mat can create a special space and presence automatically. Your own Yoga mat is a vitally important element of Yoga practice. Not only is it more healthy, it is a means of creating an atmosphere conducive to practice. This combined with the need to have the sticky mat under your feet to grip and help position the feet, makes a solid argument for owning your own mat, even two, one for home, one for travel, and why not one for Yoga school?



How do I get in the Yogi Mood.

You can be in the best head space for practice by doing some basic rituals beforehand.

- Shower before practice. It seems appropriate to enter the practice space clean and fresh.
- Do a short thank you prayer before you begin to bring body, mind and spirit into the space. Go through a list of all the things that come to mind in your day, week, year and life that you are grateful for. Thank the higher order of life for these things and then begin the practice.
- Use your own Yoga mat. First, because it's more healthy. Second, because it's familiar and when you lay your mat out you automatically get into a certain head space.
- Some people light candles, others have a photo of someone special nearby, some say a Yogi prayer and the list goes on. Anything that brings you to your centre and creates a specific mindset is appropriate.
- An empty stomach becomes more and more vital as the asana practice deepens. (Another good reason for the morning practice time). We recommend students don't eat for at least three hours before their practice.
- An empty bladder and bowel are also important (preferably before the morning shower). However, if this does not yet coincide with your daily rhythm it soon will. Mid-way through the practice, the Yoga twists and breath movements move deeply into the abdomen; cleansing soon follows if it hasn't already.
- Clothing: tights, leotards or running shorts and short sleeved T-shirts are the standard uniform for Yoga. Anything that will not restrict movement is good. When you begin Yoga practice you are going to sweat: a T-shirt and cotton shorts help soak it up. No socks, tracksuit, sunglasses or jewellery are required. A large towel or shawl is good for keeping yourself warm during relaxation at the end.
- When you sweat in Yoga the heat comes from deep within. It is advised that you don't wipe the sweat off your body with a towel. It is to rub it over the skin with your hand to encourage further perspiration.





Is Yoga just another Fad?

Yoga comes from the 5,000 year old Indian school of metaphysics known as Darsana, “a certain way of seeing”. Its specific objective was to explore deeper and clearer ways of seeing the world, life and the whole.

The written lineage of Yoga is doubtful at best. Pattanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*, written in Sanskrit in about 150 BC, has been the subject of huge study and interpretation. The first translation was some 300 years after it was written; a period most historians agree causes significant interpretation errors.

An even older text is referred to, *The Sastitantra*, but no manuscript remains.

Hatha Yoga’s first noted text is the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, written between 1400 and 1800 AD. There were only 15 asanas in the Pradipika and no asanas in the *Yoga Sutra*. It would appear that the original intent of asana was to make it possible for people to sit in meditation for long periods of time comfortably.

Krishnamacharia, a magnificent student and teacher of Yoga, undertook the most thorough exploration of Hatha Yoga in modern times. He was a great master of the physical, medical, remedial and metaphysical elements of the Yoga practice. His four most renowned students were Indira Devi, Desikachar, B.K.S Iyengar and Sri K Pattabhi Jois.

Each student was taught by the same teacher, yet each has gone on to teach a vastly different methodology of Yoga with fundamentally the same asanas. Each has birthed their own lineage of asana practice and has become a spiritual and commercial success in their own right.

The Ashtanga Yoga System, as described in detail in the book, was reconstructed from a mysterious manuscript written on a bundle of palm leaves, the *Yoga Korunta*. This collection of verses on *Hatha Yoga* was discovered in the 1930’s by Krishnamacharya and his disciple Sri K Patthabi Jois while searching Sanskrit texts at a Calcutta University library. The manuscript is dated to be around 1500 years old.

Krishnamacharia and Jois translated and re constructed the Ashtanga Yoga series (six sequences of postures) and Patthabi Jois with the encouragement of Krishnamacharya, took the instructions as the basis of his practice and teaching. He is still teaching this method today in Mysore at the age of 83.





Yoga Means to Unite

Ashtanga taught by Jois is a form of Hatha Yoga which focuses on Asana (posture) and Pranayama (breath control).

The word Yoga itself has many translations but all of them ultimately mean to **unite**: to merge to the one, to tie things together. Focusing our thoughts in one direction, undertaking anything we do with purpose and clarity, and the ability to master any discipline is Yoga.

A primary objective of Yoga is change: to constantly improve what we do, the way we feel about doing it and the way we do it. To see with a deeper clarity and less cloud, to think with more focus and deeper concentration, and to do what we do with more intensity and direction is the final goal of Yoga.

The fundamental philosophy of Yoga stands as a real testament to the wisdom of the ages. Pattangali's *Yoga Sutra* is totally in alignment with today's philosophy and psychology of life.

“When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds, your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

Pattangali.

Yoga's simple message is, and has always been, one of truth. In order to connect with the higher power of life we need to practise listening. The practice of listening to our deeper voice requires us to clear the clouds and noise that disguises it.

Yoga is about living in the present. Yoga offers health and support for change. It also offers maintenance and growth in today's society within the conditions of our chosen lifestyles and in total harmony with all seven areas of life: health, wealth, success, relationship, social life, spirituality and mental capacity.

Few people wake up in the morning saying 'I want less out of life'. They want more, and they want to do what they do better. Working from the heart, doing what we love and loving what we do—these are the ingredients of an inspired life. They are also the 5,000 year old Yoga messages, and they are being taught today as they were taught then.



Aligning

Body, Mind and Spirit



Aligning Body, mind and Spirit . Asana.

What is a Yoga Asana?

Asana translated means posture.

Yoga incorporates stretching movements to open specific parts of the body. You warm up before Yoga just as you would before a race or a performance. This would include hamstring movements, shoulder openings, even certain breathing techniques to calm nerves or clear the throat . However, these would not be referred to as Yoga asanas.

What then separates a Yoga pose from a simple body stretch? It is the application of the movement and the focus of the mind: applying yourself with total awareness of both inner and outer movements and following the way your breath moves. Allowing yourself special time in a sacred space, having no attachment to the outcome of what you do, and learning to surrender and relax during this time is the essence of Yoga practice.

Too many times we do things out of 'have to', 'got to'. Doing things out of 'love to' is to be inspired. The results are unattached, and the heart opens to share what you have experienced. Just think back to the times you loved doing something—a movie you saw, a book you read, a holiday you went on, and how eager you were to share the experience with another person. This is how a Yoga practice can be applied.

Yoga asana is about listening to the needs of your body and not the wants. It's about recognising the strengths and weaknesses of the physical, emotional and mental self, but most important of all, it's about doing the practice with an open heart and with love.

Yoga asanas can be divided up into 4 categories

- Standing poses. This includes poses done on the feet .
- Forward bends. Here the poses are done on the floor bending forward over the legs, or sitting in the classical lotus position. Also included are spinal twists.
- Backbends are as they sound, done either with support or without.
- Inverted poses. These include handstands to headstands with all sorts of variations.



Creating Peace of Mind

The forward bends work the external body in lengthening hamstrings and the torso. They are very much the 'surrender' of all the asanas. They create peace of mind. To push and pull in forward bends creates tension in places that need to surrender. The internal body experiences enormous benefit from the forward bends: the liver is squeezed, pressure is applied to the ascending and descending colon resulting in freer bowel movements, the mind is left quiet leaving little space for mind chatter, and the eyes are rested. Forward bends done under the guidance of a qualified teacher can have remarkable recuperative results for people suffering from headaches, nervousness, insomnia and migraines.

Bending over backwards.... Opening up to life.

Backbends are the gem of asanas, awakening the spine and nervous system, and giving vigour to the whole body. These poses take time and patience to master. Standing poses are a must before attempting the more advanced back-bending poses. Significant results can be achieved by supported backbends. Mild arches, achieved by placing firm pillows or bolsters under the spine, shoulder or lower back, require little effort from the student but create an opening and awakening of the spine.

There are very few moments in our life that cause us to bend backwards. Most of our daily routine is spent bending forwards over a desk or computer. In fact, if you think about it, as we age our body seems to take on a downward curve of the spine as gravity and stress take their toll.

Backbends are excellent for drawing life to the whole body. The backward arch has a huge squeezing effect on the kidney, spleen and abdominal organs, opening the lungs both front and back. Tension around the shoulders can be relieved in this position, freeing the neck and allowing the mind to think more clearly.

Restoring the vitality of youth; Going upside down,



The inverted poses are usually for more advanced students of Yoga. To help the novice experience the benefits of inverted poses without the risk of injury, certain supported inverted poses have been developed. The classical upside down pose is the head stand, known as sirsasana in Sanskrit. To stand on the head as though you were standing on two feet can take many years of practice. To eventually feel as though there is a fine silk thread running from the crown of your head through the centre line of the body out through the soles of the feet is the mark of a refined practice. Because you cannot move the head or look around, the headstand is an intuitive pose. The main benefit of all inverted poses is the reversing of gravity, allowing the blood, organs and skin to freely move in the opposite direction.

Shoulder stand, Sarvangasan, works more on the glands, especially the thyroid and parathyroid glands which play a huge role in the body's metabolism. These poses are excellent for creating stronger circulation in the legs, and done with different variations, inverted practice can be extremely restorative.

For beginners an ideal inversion pose is "leg up the wall". A simple movement of swinging the legs up the wall while the torso remains flat and lying on the floor. To remain in this pose for 10 to 15 minutes each day can revitalise the body and freshen the mind. It can be done at any time as a great pick-me-up.

Yoga is for the individual. It must be changed as the pupil evolves, as work loads change and as outside commitments change. A pregnant woman would not be expected to perform the same practice throughout her pregnancy as she would have done prior to falling pregnant. A business person whose workload suddenly included travelling once or twice a week would also have to modify their Yoga practice. The seasons of the year and the oncoming of age are also variables for managing practice.

Getting it all together.... Relaxation

The resting pose is one of the most difficult Yoga poses to learn. To simply lie still for 15 minutes allowing every muscle and fibre of the body to be supported by the earth is a challenge few people can comprehend. We teach students the process of releasing muscle tension one muscle at a time, then we teach breath relaxation and finally the ability to slow the chatter of the mind. .

Resting poses are done at the end of every Yoga practice to allow the body to cool and stabilise before returning to the outside stimulation of our lives. It is better to cut short the time for doing Yoga poses than to finish the practice without the normalising effects of a lie down resting pose.



Real time Meditation for the Active Person

“Asana done without integration of breath is simply exercise.”

Meditation retreats usually teach only one asana, the sitting posture. You will learn the breathing, focussing and pranayama techniques. In the Ashtanga practice you learn all of these as you move from one posture to another. You are undertaking a meditation practice with variation in posture. In this way you are being challenged in many different ways to maintain breath and steadiness. You are being confronted by the variation in asana, and because the practice is fixed you are challenged to practice the full range of postures irrespective of your preferences and flexibility.

Great meditators do not necessarily do great asanas, however, they will do extremely integrated asanas. This means they will be totally present with mind, body and breath. The body and mind move as one until they confront some movement within the body that disturbs their rhythm. When this happens, they need to face the turbulence, transcend it and move on until the next confrontation. In this way, through practicing asana of a fixed sequence, pose and counter pose are automatically sequenced. We are faced with poses that challenge us and others that are easy. This forces us to confront ourselves because we are revealing the blockages within our body/mind system. In Ashtanga Yoga you confront your blockages very quickly, whereas in other practices that are self-designed you may avoid your blockages for 30 to 40 years.

No matter how beautiful we may do an asana, or how flexible our body may be, if we do not achieve the integration of body, mind and breath we are not doing Yoga. Yoga is after all an internal experience; one of personal development and exploration. To practise it from the outside is purely a sport or exercise. What others see as a result of our Yoga practice is minimal compared to what we experience on the inside; a change in body shape, healthier skin, clearer eyes—these are truly external results but they are more a reflection of internal change. When the breath is the focus of the practice we are drawn inward towards the centre, towards the stillness of no space and time, to a place that ultimately must be identified as truth, love and Soul.

Follow the breath, inhale to inspire, exhale to surrender. In doing so the heart will stay open, and the idea of a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ practice will evaporate and something more profound will take its place.



Time Out' for Body Awareness:

An Office Yoga Practice

Expanding your body is more than just stretching muscles, it is opening your body like a flower opens to the sun; it is opening your body to goodness and nurture. As the expansion cycle begins, vital nutrients will be released and allowed to flow into muscles and joints often starved of energy. With the increased flow of energy, you'll experience an expansion of range of movements for each joint.

As well as increased suppleness and movement you'll find stretching your body:

- ◆ keeps you young and healthy
- ◆ removes toxin and waste
- ◆ builds body awareness
- ◆ circulates lymph
- ◆ builds strength
- ◆ heals old injuries through increased oxygen flow
- ◆ prevents new injuries

Oxygen - petrol for your body.

Stretching and deep breathing puts life-giving oxygen into your body.

Just as your car will cough, splutter and eventually die without fuel in the tank, so too it is with oxygen and your body.

As you open your body you can begin to appreciate the reach of your arms, the length of your spine, the height of your grasp and the spread of your span. Being aware of your expansiveness is a wonderful reminder every day of the beauty and wonder of 'being'.

For initial clarity, we've broken the practice into sections, beginning here:

1. Expand your arms outward
2. Turn your head first to look at the left finger tips then the right. Really make an effort to grow yourself out.
3. Expand yourself upward. Reach your arms up to the sky. First the left hand and then the right. Really reach.
4. Looking up notice that you can actually reach another 4 cm if you make an effort to separate your shoulder joint. Reach from the ribs and under the arm.



5. As you look up breathe into your abdomen. Take this opportunity to fill your abdomen and allow the diaphragm to expand.

Because you are looking up, you won't see your tummy expanding, building a pot belly and therefore you won't feel so guilty.

1. Raise arms breathe in.
2. Lower arms breath out.
3. Repeat 4 times.
4. Then raise arms and hold.
5. Reverse palms lower arms to the sides.
6. Breathe in as you raise arms again, look up stretch right hand then left hand.
7. Breath into abdomen 5 times.

1. Lower right arm to right side of thigh, just above the knee.
2. Look up to left hand reach right arm down, left arm up.
3. Look up, hold and breathe 5 breaths into abdomen.

1. Raise right arm, lower left arm to left thigh.
2. Reach up with right and look up. Stretch arms apart.
3. Lower both arms to shoulder height.
4. Push right arm away with breath, push left arm away with breath.
5. See if you can expand your width.
6. Look straight ahead and see if you can see both hands at once.
7. Bring your hands forward until you can see them both.
8. With feet hip width apart and parallel keep arms at shoulder height.
9. Rotate slowly to the right. As far as possible.
10. Now reverse slowly without jerky movements.
11. Now back to centre.
12. Bring arms to front palms together.
13. Interlock the fingers, and reverse the hands with palms facing out. Push away.
14. Raise arms above your head.
15. Lower left arm, then raise it.
16. Lower right arm then raise it.
17. Take both arms back behind your head, don't jerk.
18. Raise again, then lower in front.
19. Bend your knees as if you are skiing. Hold the imaginary stocks in each hand.
20. Now begins to squeeze everything. Feet, calves, knees, thighs, buttocks, abdomen, shoulders, arms, fists, neck, eyes, jaw and head. Go on squeeze.
21. Then hold your breath
22. Suddenly let go!



23. Stand straight, let your arms and legs hang loose shake them.
Now you should feel relaxed and energised.



Salute to the Sun ... Suryanamaskara

During the practice of the *sun salutation* or as it's known in its traditional form - *Suryanamaskara* - nearly every muscle, organ and tissue of the body is activated, stimulated and awakened. Energy flows, vitality is stimulated, heart rate is increased and the vital forces of life are distributed throughout the body. This is a great motivation for the practice of the sun salutation series in the morning, and a magnificent way to wake and honour the body both internally and externally.

During this practice, the body is opened and closed in a sequence of forward and backward bends which massage our internal organs, improving digestion and tone of the abdomen.

Salute to the Sun - the Practice...

As we draw our arms to the sky we look up to acknowledge the intelligence beyond, the greater order, the truth, creation and love. We salute the source and acknowledge its passage through our body.

*We draw down our arms, palms together, touching our heart Centre as we pass to touch the floor. Here we have drawn the power of creation from the above and beyond to the below and within. We humble ourselves to the source as we hold our hands to the earth acknowledging that: “**nothing comes from me, only through me**”.*

We jump back into the crocodile and here honour nature, the animal world and the essence of life stored within. We raise our body bending our back into an upward dog pose opening the chest and in so doing freeing the heart to the flow of love from the sun, the entry source of life forms, flow within and birth love in our hearts.

We roll back into the downward dog again humbling ourselves to creation before jumping forward and completing the cycle with the same positions holding meaning.

“I bow to the source of all creation acknowledging that what is within me is a gift, a true gift of life and ultimately, love.”

Traditionally, a salute to the sun is done at dawn, the Brahman hour. This is the time before sunrise, a time we can take to reflect on the source of life. The sun gives life force and vitality to us all, it is the best metaphor for unconditional love reflected in nature.



Our thoughts are reflected in our body, our thoughts reflect our consciousness which in turn is a reflection of our attitude. Attitude has the power to transform our lives, to change the very essence of our experience of life. During the sun salutation we have the opportunity to focus on an attitude of Gratitude, the opportunity to use the focus of the sun to transform these movements from mere exercise to a prayer.

When our heart is filled with gratitude for nature - in this specific case the sun - we open ourselves to a consciousness beyond and in these moments we bathe in universal love; in the fullness of life. Therefore in the practice of Surya Namaskar , as in all Yoga Asana, the thoughts we have are as vital an element as is breath as the physical movement.

This is an opportunity to stop; to appreciate what has been given to us in our lives; to open to the greater truth and to the magic and order of this universe, this world, this country, this city, this family and this life. Here in the act of movement and breath is the opportunity to unite body, mind and thought (spirit) in a celebration of life and in so doing absorb universal essence.

Power Within and Without

This salute to the sun is one of the most powerful of all Yoga movements. Practiced every morning it moves, stretches, strengthens and activates every muscle in the body;

The salute to the sun is an amazing exercise and a Yoga session in itself and the benefits as listed below are so numerous and all encompassing that just reading through them is cause for excitement; excitement that these body restoring benefits are easily within our reach.

The Practical Benefits of Salute to the Sun

- ◆ May be practice by anyone and everyone, singly or in a group, and it can be practiced any time in the year, inside and outside.
- ◆ It takes about three to ten minutes a day.
- ◆ It acts on the whole body, the total organism.
- ◆ Does not cause fatigue or breathlessness.
- ◆ It costs nothing there is no need for burdensome equipment.
- ◆ All you need is a space measuring two square metres.
- ◆ It helps to promote sleep.
- ◆ The memory improves.

Health and Higher Plane Benefits



- ◆ It can be used to prepare you for asanas or it completes them.
- ◆ It tones up the muscles.
- ◆ It strengthens the respiratory system
- ◆ It tones the cardiac rhythm.
- ◆ It tones up the digestive system by the alternate stretching and compression of the abdominal region;
- ◆ It massages the liver, stomach, spleen, intestines and kidneys.
- ◆ It activates the digestion and gets rid of constipation and dyspepsia.
- ◆ It strengthens the abdominal muscles and by doing so holds the organs in place.
- ◆ Blood stoppages in the abdominal organs are eliminated.
- ◆ Thoroughly ventilates the lungs
- ◆ Oxygenates the blood.
- ◆ Acts as a detoxifier.
- ◆ It gets rid of an enormous quantity of carbon dioxide and other toxic gases.
- ◆ It steps up cardiac activity and the flow blood throughout the system
- ◆ Builds incredible health of the body.
- ◆ It combats hypertension and stress.
- ◆ It warms the extremities and improves blood circulation.
- ◆ It tones up the nervous system by stretching and bending the spinal column;
- ◆ It regulates the functions of the sympathetic and the para- sympathetic systems.
- ◆ It reduces worry and calms anxiety.
- ◆ It stimulates and normalises the activity of the endocrine glands including the thyroid.
- ◆ It refreshes the skin so that it takes on a youthful glow.
- ◆ It eliminates toxin through the skin with slight internally generates sweating.
- ◆ Profuse sweat can be induced for significant health development.
- ◆ It improves the muscles structure throughout the body; neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, back, abdominal wall, as well as the feet, calves and ankles, without inducing hardening hypertrophy in the muscles.
- ◆ It strengthens the back.
- ◆ Changes the appearance and shape of the bust in women. The breast develops normally and becomes firm, regaining any lost elasticity.
- ◆ It stimulates chest and breast glands and strengthens pectoral muscles.
- ◆ It controls activity in the uterus and ovaries.
- ◆ It suppresses menstrual irregularity with its accompanying pain.
- ◆ It normalises weight
- ◆ It counter balances the effects of high healed shoes.
- ◆ It prevents flat feet and strengthens the ankles.



- ◆ Suryanamaskara gets rid of any fat especially the excess around the stomach, on the hips, thighs, the neck and chin.
- ◆ Suryanamaskara reduces abnormal prominence of the Adam's apple;
- ◆ It eliminates unpleasant smells produced by the body by getting rid of toxins naturally through the skin, lungs, intestines and kidneys.
- ◆ It increases immunity to disease.
- ◆ It refines the proportions of the body.
- ◆ It reduces excess fat.
- ◆ Suryanamaskara builds grace and ease to the movements for the body.
- ◆ It adds resilience and flexibility for sports of all kinds.
- ◆ It maintains a spirited usefulness.
- ◆ The Sun salute produces health, strength, efficiency and longevity which is the right of every human being.
- ◆ It builds a superb health and vibrant energy.
- ◆ It creates youth in the elderly

The Integrity of the Salute to the Sun

If Suryanamaskara is practiced with integrity and perseverance your life and the lives of those dear to you can be enhanced with vigour and happiness.

If you already know and practice Salute to the Sun, now is your opportunity to perform it more honestly and more often than ever before.

Even expectant mothers may practice Suryanamaskara at least until the beginning of the fifth month. After the birth seek advice from the doctor and gradually reinstate your practice.

Concentration is essential and a conscious mind must play an active role in every movement. You must not think of any thing else and you should avoid all distractions and interruptions. Maintain an uninterrupted rhythm through the succession of salutations. The first ones, especially in the morning may be slower and less developed as muscles may be sluggish.

It is advisable to face the rising sun, or at least, to turn towards the east. Think of and concentrate on the sun, which is the great source of life. Your entire energy springs from its rays.

At some given moment, every atom of your body was once part of a sun. Focus your mind on the cosmic forces radiated by the sun. In this state of mind the benefits of the salutation is heightened. You are filled with a spirit that transforms a seemingly ordinary muscular exercise into something which involves the whole personality.

It is essential to coordinate and synchronise the breath with the movements.



Breathe

A Full Breath is a Full Life



A Full Breath Is A Full Life

The Yogi Philosophy of Breath

What determines health? Are the body and mind separate entities? Where does one end and the other begin?

In the ancient texts of Yoga, body and mind are inseparable; the psyche and the soma intrinsically linked.

Thus we begin to understand the Yogi Philosophy of Breath.

We breath 15,000 to 25,000 times each day. To breathe is to live. And yet it is so much more: Our breath determines our emotional state, it determines our health, our appetite and it determines which side of our brain is in dominance at any one time. Of course the reverse applies - our emotions determine our breath, our appetite, which side of the brain we are using and our health determines our breath.

Action and reaction.

As we've determined that Prana is among other things, the breath of the soul and vital energy source, naturally the lungs are important to the Yogi philosophy. As with all organs, the avoli of the lungs transfer some Prana, yet this passage of Prana to the blood depends on specific blood and lung condition. Again, action and reaction.

Using the diaphragmatic Breath.

In the act of inhalation the muscles expand the lungs so that a vacuum is created and the air rushes in, in accordance with the well known law of physics. Success is dependent upon the muscles concerned in the process of respiration which we may term the "*respiratory muscles*". Without the aid of these muscles the lungs cannot expand, and the Science of Breath largely depends upon the proper use and control of these muscles.

This "*proper control*" of these muscles will result in the ability to attain the maximum degree of lung expansion and the greatest amount of the life giving properties of the air into the system.



Let's examine some breathing practices

High Breathing

High Breathing is probably the worst form of breathing known to man and requires the greatest expenditure of energy with the smallest amount of benefit. The ribs are elevated and collarbone and shoulder become raised, at the same time drawing in the abdomen and pushing its contents up against the diaphragm, which in turn is raised. A minimum amount of air enters the lungs and the diaphragm expands minimally.

Mid Breathing

During Mid Breathing the diaphragm is pushed upward and the abdomen drawn in. The ribs are raised somewhat and the chest is partially expanded.

Low Breathing

Otherwise known as “Abdominal Breathing”, “Deep Breathing” or “Diaphragmatic Breathing” this type of breathing is often wrongly considered to be ‘complete breathing’. The diaphragm is the great partition muscle, which separates the chest and its contents from the abdomen and what happens is that when we practice “low breathing, we fill only the lower and middle parts of the lungs.

The Complete Yogi Breath

Complete Breathing brings is a co-ordination of the entire respiratory apparatus - every part of the lungs, every air-cell and every respiratory muscle. The entire respiratory organism responds to this method of breathing and the maximum benefit is derived from the minimum expenditure of energy. One of the most important features of this method of breathing is the fact that the respiratory muscles are fully called into play, whereas in the other forms of breathing only a portion of these muscles are so used.

When breathing completely, the lower ribs are controlled by the diaphragm which draws them slightly downward. While other muscles hold them in place, the intercostal muscles force these lower ribs outward and this combined action then increases the mid chest cavity to open to its maximum expansion. In addition to this muscular action, the upper ribs are also lifted and forced outward by the intercostal muscles which in turn increases the capacity of the upper chest to its fullest extent.



Taking the air

Despite the fact that breathing is not a conscious response, as we noted above, our bodies are not necessarily proficient at it. Speaking generally, our participation is passive, particularly as the air passes through the nasal passages. We should concentrate on widening our nostrils during inhalation. To allow them to remain passive lets the lobes of the nose to close which in turn causes static, uneven and limited flow of air. Even minor irritation to nasal nerves triggers the complete respiratory system into life, and unbelievably, even a 10% increase dilation of nasal passage means about half a million more litres of air per year to circulate through your body.

“Breath is Life”

Life is absolutely dependent upon the act of breathing. The Oriental and the Occidental agree upon these fundamental principles.

To breathe is to live and without breath there is no life. Not only are the higher animals dependent upon breath for life and health but even the lower forms of animal life must breathe to live and plant life is likewise dependent upon the air for continued existence.

From the first faint breath of the infant to the last gasp of the dying man, it is one long story of continued breathing. Life is but a series of breaths.

Breathing may be considered the most important of all functions of the body for all other functions depend upon it.

Not only are human beings dependant upon ‘breath’ for life and to continue to live, but they are largely dependant upon correct habits of breathing for continued vitality and freedom from disease. Sadly, the actual act of breathing is generally taken for granted, therefore many people remain unaware of the potential for this greater health and vitality.



Taking intelligent control of our breathing power will:

- Lengthen your Life.
- Increase vitality and freedom from disease.
- Increase powers of resistance
- Strengthen physical health and well being
- Increase rationale and mental power
- Increase happiness
- Increase self control
- Strengthen clarity and clear sightedness.
- Deepen and hasten spiritual growth.
- Strengthen and invigorate organs.
- Oxygenate the blood.
- Bring harmonious vibration with nature.
- Aid in the unfolding of latent powers.
- Cure disease in self and others.
- Dispose of fear and worry and the baser emotions.



THE POWER OF BREATH

Why is breathing so integral to life?

The Organs of Respiration consist of the lungs and the air passages to them.

The lungs occupy the pleural chamber of the thorax one on each side of the median line being separated from each other by the heart, the greater blood vessels and the larger air tubes. Each lung is free except at the root which consists chiefly of the bronchia, arteries and veins connecting the lungs with the trachea and the heart. The lungs are spongy and porous and their tissues are very elastic. They are covered with a delicately constructed but strong sac, known as the plural sac, one wall of which closely adheres to the lung and the other to the inner wall of the chest and which secretes a fluid which allows the inner surfaces of the walls to glide easily upon each other in the act of breathing.

The air passages consist of the interior of the nose, pharynx, larynx, windpipe or trachea and the bronchial tubes.

When we breathe, we draw in the air through the nose which is warmed by contact with the mucous membrane which is richly supplied with blood. The air passes into the trachea or windpipe which subdivides into numerous tubes called the bronchial tubes (bronchia) which in turn subdivide into and terminate in the millions of minute subdivisions of small air spaces contained within the lungs. *One informed writer claims that if the air cells of the lungs were spread out over an unbroken surface they would cover an area of fourteen thousand square feet.!*

The blood is driven by the heart, through the arteries, into the capillaries thus reaching every part of the body which it vitalises, nourishes and strengthens. It then returns by means of the capillaries by another route, the veins, to the heart, from whence it is drawn to the lungs .

The blood starts on its arterial journey bright red and rich, laden with life-giving qualities and properties. It returns by the venous route, poor, blue and dull, being laden with the waste matter of the system into the right auricle of the heart. When this auricle becomes filled, it contracts and forces the stream of blood through an opening in the right ventricle of the heart which in turn sends it on to the lungs, where it is distributed by millions of hair-like blood vessels to the air cells of the lungs.



The foul stream of blood is now distributed among the millions of tiny air cells in the lungs. A breath of air is inhaled and the oxygen of the air comes in contact with the impure blood through the thin walls of the hair-like blood vessels of the lungs, walls which are thick enough to hold the blood but thin enough to admit the oxygen to penetrate them. When the oxygen comes in contact with the blood, a form of combustion takes place and the blood takes up oxygen and releases carbonic acid gas generated from the waste products and poisonous matter which has been gathered up by the blood from all parts of the system. The blood thus purified and oxygenated is carried back to the heart, again rich, red and bright and laden with life-giving properties and qualities. Upon reaching the left auricle of the heart, it is forced into the left ventricle, from whence it is again forced out through the arteries on its mission of life to all parts of the system.

It is estimated that in a single day of twenty-four hours, 35,000 pints of blood traverse the capillaries of the lungs.

When we consider the minute details of the process just described, we are lost in wonder and admiration at Nature's infinite care and intelligence.

The Consequences of Poor Breathing Habits

Unless fresh air in sufficient quantities reaches the lungs, the foul stream of venous blood cannot be purified and, consequently, not only is the body thus robbed of nourishment but the waste products which should have been destroyed are returned to the circulation and poison the system and death ensues.

Impure air acts in the same way, only in a lessened degree. If one does not breathe in a sufficient quantity of air, the work of the blood cannot continue at optimum level and the result is that the body is insufficiently nourished. Disease can then ensue or at the least a state of imperfect health is experienced. The blood of one who breathes improperly is a bluish, dark colour, lacking the rich redness of pure arterial blood. This often shows itself in a poor complexion rather than a clear, bright complexion.

If the blood is not fully purified by the regenerative process of the lungs, it returns to the arteries in an abnormal state, not only insufficiently purified but imperfectly cleansed of the impurities which it took up on its return journey. These impurities, if returned to the system, will certainly manifest in some sort of disease either in a form of blood disease or some other resulting from impaired functioning of some insufficiently nourished organ or tissue.



When the oxygen comes in contact with the blood, it unites with the haemoglobin of the blood and is carried to every cell, tissue, muscle and organ which it invigorates and strengthens, replacing the worn out cells and tissue by new materials which Nature converts to her use. Arterial blood, properly exposed to the air, contains about 25 per cent of free oxygen.

Not only is every part vitalised by the oxygen but the act of digestion depends materially upon a certain amount of oxygenation of our food. This can be accomplished only by the oxygen in the blood coming in contact with the food and producing a certain form of combustion. The entire body receives nourishment from the food assimilated and that imperfect assimilation always means an imperfectly nourished body. ***It is therefore necessary that a proper supply of oxygen be taken through the lungs.***

Because this supply is not always as complete as it should be, this explains why conditions such as weak lungs and poor digestion are so often found together .

The lungs themselves are no different from any other organ in that they depend upon the same source for nourishment, and if through imperfect breathing the assimilation becomes imperfect and the lungs in turn become weakened, they are rendered still less able to perform their work properly and so in turn the body becomes further weakened. Every particle of food and drink must be oxygenated before it can yield us the proper nourishment and before the waste products of the system can be reduced to the proper condition to be eliminated from the system. Lack of sufficient oxygen means imperfect nutrition, imperfect elimination and imperfect health.

“Breath is health - Breath is Life”

The combustion arising from the change in the waste products generates heat and equalises the temperature of the body. Good breathers are not apt to “take cold” and they generally have plenty of good warm blood which enables them to resist the changes in the other temperature.

The act of breathing also gives exercise to the internal organs and muscles . Imperfect or shallow breathing requires only a small portion of the lung cells to be called into action therefore a great portion of the lung capacity is idle causing the system to suffer in proportion to the amount of under-oxygenation.

Man’s only physical salvation is to “get back to Nature”.



Nostril-Breathing Versus Mouth-Breathing

Humankind boasts two methods of breathing - through the mouth or through the nasal tubes. However there is a huge and vital difference - only one method ensures health and strength. *The other brings disease and weakness.* It should go without saying that we should all avoid mouth breathing.

Let's look at the reasons:

- Many contagious diseases are contracted by the habit of mouth-breathing.
- The only protective apparatus, filter or dust catcher for the respiratory organs is situated in our nostrils.
- When breath is taken through the mouth, there is nothing from mouth to lungs to strain the air or to catch the dust or the foreign matter in the air.
- This leaves the respiratory system unprotected and admits cold air to the organs which can cause them damage .
- By allowing cold air, dust and impurities in through the mouth, no protection is afforded to the respiratory system which leaves the system open to disease.
- The refining, filtering and straining apparatus of the nostrils renders the air fit to reach the delicate organs of the throat and the lungs. It is important to understand that the air is not fit to reach these organs until it has passed through nature's refining process.
- The impurities which are stopped and retained by the sieves and mucous membrane of the nostrils are thrown out again by the expelled breath and sneezing which violently ejects the unwanted matter.
- We should no more breathe through our mouths than attempt to take food through our noses.



Nose Cleaning

Keeping the nasal passages clean is a necessary part of the Complete Breathing Process. There are several methods that can be used, however some may take more expertise than others. Begin with the simpler procedures.

- A favourite Oriental method of keeping the nostrils clean and free from impurities, is to snuff a little water up the nostrils and allowing it to run down the passage into the throat and then ejecting through the mouth.

Some Hindu Yogis immerse the face in a bowl of water using a suction-like method to draw in quite a quantity of water, but this method requires considerable practice .

- Open the window and breath freely, closing one nostril with the finger or thumb and sniffing up the air through the open nostril. Then repeat the process on the other nostril.
- If the breathing is inhibited by ailments such as catarrh, it is well to apply a little vasaline or camphor ice or similar preparation to the outer nasal area. Or alternately, sniff up a little witchhazel extract once in a while and this should afford a marked improvement.
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The Complete Yogi Breath - The Practice

- ◆ Stand or sit erect.
- ◆ Breathing through the nostrils, inhale steadily, first filling the lower part of the lungs, which is accomplished by utilising the diaphragm, which when descending, exerts a gentle pressure on the abdominal organs, pushing forward the front walls of the abdomen.
- ◆ Then fill the middle part of the lungs, pushing out the lower ribs breast, bone and chest.
- ◆ Now fill the higher portion of the lungs, expanding the upper chest, thus lifting the chest, including the upper six or seven pairs of ribs.



- ◆ In the final movement, the lower part of the abdomen will be slightly drawn in which gives the lungs support and also helps to fill the highest part of the lungs.

- ◆ This inhalation is continuous, the entire chest cavity from the lowered diaphragm to the highest point of the chest in the region of the collar bone, being expanded with a uniform movement.

N.B. Avoid a jerky series of inhalations, and strive to attain a steady continuous action. Practice will soon overcome the tendency to divide the inhalation into three movements and will result in a uniform continuous breath.

- ◆ Retain the breath for a few seconds.

- ◆ Exhale quite slowly, holding the chest in a firm position and drawing the abdomen in a little and lifting it upward slowly as the air leaves the lungs. When the air is entirely exhaled, relax the chest and abdomen.

As you can see, this method of breathing brings all parts of the respiratory apparatus into action, and all parts of the lungs, including the most remote air cells are exercised. The chest cavity is expanded in all directions.

Health benefits of the COMPLETE BREATH

Imperfect breathing allows a considerable part of the lungs to remain inactive and such portions offer an inviting field for bacilli, which having invaded the weakened tissue soon produce havoc. For example, colds or consumption are due principally to lowered vitality directly attributable to an insufficient amount of air being inhaled. The impairment of vitality renders the system open to attacks from disease germs. Good healthy lung tissue will resist the germs and the only way to have good, healthy lung tissue is to use the lungs properly.

Colds may often be prevented by practising a little vigorous *Complete Breathing* whenever you feel that you are being unduly exposed. When chilled, breathe vigorously for a few minutes and you will feel a glow all over your body.

As with the entire body, every organ and every part, is dependant upon the blood for nourishment, impure blood must have a serious effect on the entire system. Impure blood as we've stated numerous times, is a direct result of under-oxygenation. Complete Breathing allows optimum oxygenation to occur.



The stomach and the other organs of nutrition suffer greatly from improper breathing . Not only are they ill nourished by reason of the lack of oxygen but as the food must absorb oxygen from the blood and become oxygenated before it can be digested and assimilated, it is easy to see how digestion and assimilation is impaired by incorrect breathing. And when assimilation is not normal, the system receives less and less nourishment, causing the appetite to fail, bodily vigour to decrease, and the ultimate diminishment of natural energy.

Even the nervous system suffers from improper breathing , in as much as the brain, the spinal cord, the nerve Centers and the nerves themselves, when improperly nourished by means of the blood, become poor and inefficient instruments for generating, storing and transmitting the nerve currents. As the indirect result of a lack of proper breathing, the nervous system can actually be rendered inefficient as an instrument for conveying nerve force.

The reproductive functions are strengthened and vitalised by a sympathetic reflex action echoing a rhythm produced by The Complete Breath and thus giving tone to the whole system. This is Nature's way.

Advanced Yoga Breathing techniques

Ujjayi Breath

This is the breath used throughout Ashtanga practice. It is throat breathing: a narrowing of the throat's air passages to create a resonance of noise from the breath in the upper sinus of the pallet. This breath is best taught by your teacher. The inhalation and exhalation are through the nose and make the same sound.

Nadi sodhana

Alternative nostril breathing is a deeper more focussed breath. We use specific hand positions to regulate the breath, and the idea is to inhale through one nostril and exhale through the other. But there are many patterns, including variation on length of breath, retention and choice of nostril, all of which have a specific effect on the mind/body.

Bhastrika



In Bastrika breathing we use the diaphragm of the abdomen to create a bellows effect. This breath is used for many purposes including cleansing of sinus, lungs and airways. It is also used in the development of prayer to lighten and open the mind for gratitude exercises (see below). Be mindful that excessive strain on the breath may cause dizziness. Always finish the practice with slow, steady and deep breaths.

Prana

Breath of the Soul



Prana --Breath of the Soul

Occultists have always taught that a substance or principle existed in the air from which all activity, vitality and life was derived. Thus we now focus upon “*Prana*”, the Sanskrit term meaning “Absolute Energy”.

We understand **Prana** to be the principle of energy exhibited in all living things - the characteristic which distinguishes them from a lifeless thing. We refer to it as the *Vital Force*. It is found in all forms of life, from the amoeba to man, from the most elementary form of plant life to the highest form of animal life. Prana is all pervading.

Prana must not be confused with the Ego – that bit of Divine Spirit in every soul, around which clusters energy and matter. When the Ego leaves the body, the Prana, being no longer under its control, responds only to the orders of the individual atoms or groups of atoms forming the body. With the Ego in control, cohesion exists and the atoms are held together by the Will of the Ego.

Prana is the name by which we designate a universal principle. This principle is the essence of all motion, force or energy. It is manifested in gravitation, electricity, the revolution of the planets, and all forms of life, from the highest to the lowest. It may be called the soul of Force and Energy in all their forms.

The Hebrew writer of the book of Genesis knew the difference between the atmospheric air and the mysterious and potent principle contained within it. He speaks of “*neshemet ruach chaytm*”, which, translated, means “*the breath of the spirit of life*”.

We are constantly inhaling the air charged with Prana and are constantly extracting the latter from the air and appropriating it to our uses. In ordinary breathing, we absorb and extract a normal supply of Prana, but by controlled and regulated breathing (generally known as Yogi breathing) we are able to extract a greater supply which is stored away in the brain and nerve centers to be used when necessary. Simply put, we may store away Prana just as the storage battery stores away electricity. One who has mastered the science of storing away Prana, either consciously or unconsciously, radiates vitality and strength. It is a magnetism which is felt by those coming into contact with that person, who in turn unconsciously bestows increased vitality and health to those in their aura. What is called “magnetic healing” is performed in this way, although many practitioners are not aware of the source of their power.



Just as oxygenated blood is carried to all parts of the system and constantly building up and replenishing, so is the Prana carried to all parts of the nervous system, adding strength and vitality. The supply of Prana taken up by the nervous system is exhausted by our thinking, willing and acting, making constant replenishing forever necessary.

Prana is cosmic energy, the dynamism of life.

According to the Yogis, Prana is present not only in the air, but in our food, in our water and in our sunlight. It has no chemical or physical form but it is our true nourishment, for without Prana there can be no life.

Not only does this energy exist, but it can be stored in the nervous system and through yoga the current of Prana can be directed at will. The science of controlling Prana is called Pranayama. To interpret this as breathing exercises would be severely limiting the scope of the practice and its true purpose.

Worry, stress, anxiety, nervous tension, mind noise and over-exertion lead to the dissipation of Prana from your body. Continual abuse of the body through these mechanisms leads to the blockage of the nadis and therefore an incapacity to recuperate and remain vital.

Kundalini is the force of fire, Prana the power of the Sun. Can you imagine what would happen if the body were not prepared for such force? If, for example one of the chakras were not cleared and through some teaching process the full forces of prana were awakened?

Prana obeys thought.

One of the most remarkable discoveries of the Yogis is that Prana obeys thought.

To put it another way concentrated thought allows us to absorb a larger amount of Prana. In this connection Hatha Yoga, of which Pranayama is the backbone, combines with Raja Yoga, the Yoga of the mind, since the mind can consciously direct absorption, storage and distribution of Prana in the body.

Prana is the sum total of all the energy of the universe.

**Prana is undifferentiated universal energy,
magnetism, electricity, gravity.**

**We exist in an ocean of Prana where every living
thing is a vortex.**



Reinforcing the understanding of Prana

- ◆ Thought is a subtle form of Prana
- ◆ Prana exists in food, water, air, sunlight
- ◆ Prana penetrates where air cannot reach
- ◆ Without Prana there can be no life
- ◆ Vitality is a subtle form of Prana
- ◆ Prana plus spirit is manifest
- ◆ Prana is stored in the nervous system, in the solar plexus
- ◆ Yoga can direct prana
- ◆ Pranayama is the science of controlling Prana
- ◆ Prana is apparent everywhere there is movement - electrons around an atom, or the muscle of force.
- ◆ Life force is Prana.

Prana is not the raw material of life but the energy that activates it.

Conducive and Anti Conducive Elements

The Yogic theory is that Pranic quality is not dependant on the amount of oxygen or nitrogen but rather the amount or ratio of small to large ions. Therefore smoke, dust, chemical and any other airborne additive reduces Pranic energy transference.

The main source of smaller ions is from that electromagnetic generator, the sun. Also, rocks, earth, water etc but to a lesser degree. Cosmic rays are another source and these do not fluctuate day and night like the sun.

Sea air is also highly ionised especially during evaporation, which leads into the subject of Sunbathing which is highly beneficial in helping to vitalise Prana.

While sunbathing, we shed positive ions through the vaporisation of water:

Sweat Cellular breathing @ionisation also occurs.

Tired?

Each cell is the seat of important Pranic manifestations. Thus we can consider each cell a dynamo and the human body as a vast bio-electric system. With the help of measuring apparatus Wilhelm Reich proved that transmission of bioelectricity is not limited to the nervous system, but follows the path of all membranes and fluids of the body. Therefore living tissue can be compared to an infinity of minute batteries.

In the simplest terms, being tired is the equivalent of having flat batteries.



Understanding Nature's Plan.

The Yogis ideal is a body strong in all its parts, under the control of a masterful and developed Will, animated by high ideals .

In the practice of the Complete Breath, inhalation exerts a gentle pressure upon the liver, stomach and other organs, which in connection with the rhythm of the lungs acts as a gentle massage of these organs and stimulates their actions and encourages normal functioning. Each inhalation aids in this internal exercise and assists in causing a normal circulation to the organs of nutrition and elimination.

As mentioned, the internal organs also need exercise and Nature's plan for this exercise is proper breathing. The diaphragm is Nature's principle instrument for this internal exercise. Its motion vibrates the important organs of nutrition and elimination and massages and kneads them at each inhalation and exhalation, forcing blood into them and then squeezing it out.

Any organ or part of the body which is not exercised, gradually atrophies and refuses to function properly, and lack of the internal exercise afforded by the diaphragmatic action leads to diseased organs.

"The stone which the builders reject is the real cornerstone of the Temple of Health."

The Nervous System and the Yoga Connection

Our nervous system is divided into two great systems; the *Cerebro-Spinal System* and the *Sympathetic System*.

The **Cerebro-Spinal System** consists of all that part of the nervous system contained within the cranial cavity and the spinal canal - the brain and the spinal cord - together with the nerves which branch off from the same. This system presides over the functions of animal life known as volition, sensation etc.

The **Sympathetic System** includes all that part of the Nervous System located principally in the thoracic, abdominal and pelvic cavities and that which is distributed to the internal organs. It has control over the involuntary processes such as growth, nutrition etc.



The **Cerebro-Spinal System** is sensory, it attends to all the seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling etc. It sets things in motion; it is used by the ego to think – to manifest consciousness. It is the instrument with which the Ego communicates with the outside world. This system may be likened to a telephone system, with the brain as the central office, and the spinal column and nerves as cable and wires respectively.

The **Solar Plexus** has been referred to as the “*Abdominal Brain*”, situated at the back of the stomach on either side of the spinal column. It controls the main internal organs of humans and is the great central storehouse of Prana. The Solar Plexus radiates strength and energy to all parts of the body, even the upper brains which depend on it as a storehouse of Prana.



Stairway to Heaven

The Whole Story

.



Stairway To Heaven; The Eight Limbs of Yoga

The great sage Pattanjali referred to the eight limbs of Yoga as Ashtanga.

All eight limbs of Yoga develop simultaneously. Therefore, as we progress, our interest in a wider and more diverse approach to Yoga grows. We are inspired to look deeper at ourselves, know ourselves better and become less caught up in the illusions that distract us. To transcend illusions is to learn to love the whole: to see order in chaos, pleasure in the pain and pain in pleasure. In so doing we are free to be ourselves in the fullest possible way.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga are;

- **Yama:** the attitude toward things outside ourselves.
- **Niyama:** the attitude toward ourselves.
- **Asana:** the practice of developing poise and health in body and mind and the ability to handle opposites.
- **Pranayama:** use of breath to increase the prana in the body. Breath and mind control.
- **Pratyahara:** the ability to withdraw from the nourishment of the senses. The ability to see order in chaos.
- **Dharana:** to hold concentration and focus in one direction and at one object.
- **Dhyana:** to concentrate on an object with such intensity as to become one with it.
- **Samadhi:** to experience all that is on the outside, on the inside. To experience love for the object. This is total presence: no space and time exist and we truly experience love and gratitude for what it is.



Limb 1 ----- The Yamas.

As the ten commandments are to Christians, as the noble truths are to Buddhism, the Yamas are to Yogis. They are the fundamental precepts of living. Simply put they state.

- **Ahimsa:** don't be cruel, be considerate.
- **Satya:** be truthful.
- **Asteya:** don't steal or take anything that is not yours.
- **Bramacarya:** don't be distracted by the sensual pleasures on the search for truth.
- **Aparigraha:** don't take more than is appropriate.

Further explanation:

Cruelty: the only cruelty that exists is to act against the calling of the heart, without soul-guided consciousness.

Truth: the only truth is that which comes from our heart and soul.

Stealing: the only one we can truly steal from is our self.

Sensual pleasures: our sensual pleasures are those things we have illusion about. When we listen to the heart and soul we are not distracted by the lower mind, the senses which take us in the direction of learning the truth.

That is why they exist.

Taking: don't take more than is appropriate. Moderation is the middle path. Only infatuation and resentment will incline us to take more than we need.



Limb 2 ----- The Niyamas

These are the rules or laws offered by the Yoga sutra in relation to ourselves and our attitude. This complete set of instructions relates to self-worth.

- **Sauca:** cleanliness both inner and outer.
- **Samtosa:** humbleness and gratitude.
- **Tapas:** the use of proper body function to burn out and dispose of rubbish (including thoughts).
- **Svadyaya:** self-examination, study and exploration.
- **Isvarapranidhana:** to be humble to a greater power than the self.

A great monk sat in one of the most austere temples of the world, feet bare and pointed directly at the idol which represented God for this faith. A high monk stepped forward and said, “O reverend sir, we are your humble servants, yet we are unable to turn our eyes from your feet. You point them toward God and this, in our temple, is considered highly disrespectful. We pray that you move them.”

The monk smiled and turned his eyes to those of his questioner. “Kind sir, it is beyond any dream or thought that I may have to be disrespectful in any temple or place where the idol of God may exist. I shall move my feet to another direction, but first I must ask your instruction. Please inform me, where is God not, so I may point my feet there.”

Judgements of good and bad, right and wrong are reflections of our own ignorance. These are the lessons we are set to learn. Humbleness and gratitude therefore relate to the willingness to step out of emotionally charged events and learn through understanding, freeing us from the bond of these events. When we are able to love the universe for its perfection in all things created and enacted, we are free to move to the next illusion of judgement.



Limb 3 ----- Asana

Comfort, steadiness, alertness, awareness and lightness are important elements in a vital and fulfilled life. Asana offers these specific elements as well as the ability to locate knots in the body and release them.

In performing asana we must proceed carefully. If we attempt to force the body, we lose the breath control and in turn the steadiness of mind control. The body can accept an asana at its own predetermined rate, beyond which there will be a loss in physical and physiological health.

Emotions such as fear resist the development of asana. When a student is being adjusted in an asana they may be saying to themselves, “I cannot do this”, or “I am too stiff”. These are affirmations which create determined pathways and attitudes of the mind. The teacher cannot respond to such restrictions, but through sensitive expression can move the student beyond these self set limitations. In the process, especially in Hatha Yoga practice, many emotions are experienced: anger, fear, resentment and wonder. The asana in this case is a reflection of a mental-script which is a blockage to the individual’s personal fulfilment in broader life.

Visualisation of asana is a very important element of practice. Our body and breath reflect our mind. Our mind reflects our body and breath. Therefore, our mental state during asana practice is a critical factor in undertaking an asana correctly.

Not only do we visualise the finished asana, but we visualise the energy flow within the body. We may even visualise the release of tight, knotted areas and the corresponding blood flow through those starved tissues.

Asanas are not only meditative, they are a valuable tool for the maintenance of health and circulation throughout the body. They also make sure day-to-day life and necessary body functions are optimised. Different asana perform different functions, yet they all make the body and mind more adaptable to changing circumstances, and this is a vital factor in a changing and dynamic environment.



Limb 4 ----- Pranayama

When we breathe we take in both the chemistry and physics of the air. Electromagnetic particles bind together to create chemical compounds and elements. In their cellular state they are protons, neutrons and electrons. Our body, too, is constructed from these sub-cellular components. Prana, the energy of the body, is the constituent element of the electromagnetic construction of a cell. As we take in prana we build the potential energy of the body, and as we express this energy we convert its potential into kinetic energy. So the more prana the body can hold the more potential energy we have. To store this potential energy, the electromagnetic and chemical construction of the body must be in balance.

Emotions, toxic foodstuffs, negative thoughts and physiological disturbances are all stored in the body, and for want of a better analogy, are referred to as toxic waste. They are held in the body's cells as electrical charge—positive or negative ions. This stored charge is referred to as Apana in Yogic terms.

Prana, the intake of potential energy, is blocked by rubbish. Illness, lack of drive and motivation, depression and listlessness are reflections of blocked prana.

Pranayama is the Yogic process of removing rubbish (Apana) and replacing it with Prana—balanced potential energy.

Our breath influences our state of mind: the more content we are the smoother we breathe while the more disturbed we are, the more our breath becomes unstable, short and without rhythm. Fear, shock, hesitancy, uncertainty, depression and frustration are all reflected in individual breathing patterns.

Pranayama is therefore the process of managing this relationship between mind and breath to influence our wellbeing. Pranayama, through breath control and particular patterns of breath movement, is able to change consciousness through the body mind.

In Ashtanga Yoga practice particular emphasis is placed on breath, the bandhas and focus. Ashtanga Yoga therefore incorporates all the core elements of pranayama within the asana practice.



Limbs 5, 6, 7,& 8 ----- Gratitude and Love- Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadi

These four limbs represent an ever increasing control of mind, body and emotions.

Pratyahara

We are all given a purpose in life: something that is significant for us to work toward, that we love to do and would love to get paid for. It matters little what people think about what we are doing, it is a calling and a higher purpose to our life.

A purpose is not achievable, the goals along the path are achievable. Purpose is something beyond a simple goal such as to teach universal laws or to create a different consciousness in business. In Sanskrit, Vairagya is to be completely absorbed in what we are doing; absorbed to the point where we are consumed in time and space by the activity. In this space our senses function to support us and we are unattached to the outcome of what we do—we simply love doing it. This is inspiration and it relates to these four limbs.

An excellent example of this can be seen in our asana practice when we are faced with discomfort. We can try to shut down this sense of pain, but this will have substantial impact on our nervous system. We can try to take our mind elsewhere and focus on another object or thought, but in doing so we are moving with the objective of getting away from something and are thereby locked into the connection to it.

The alternative is to be practicing asana with our consciousness focussed on gratitude and love. When our heart is opened through the steadiness of breath and when our mind is focussed on a higher cause, the discomfort of an asana can be completely missed by the senses. As we progress in asana practice we develop a deeper connection to the idea of a higher cause and focus less on the discomfort. As a consequence the edge upon which we walk this fine line is constantly moving upward. Just like a high jump bar must be moved up to challenge an athlete, so too the asana is moved up.

This edge we walk in life is our ability to focus on ever larger realms of life and to understand and love those realms that are smaller. Therefore, the goal is not to transcend life, but to take on ever larger degrees of responsibility and to keep ourselves on the edge whereby we can focus our single most dominant thought on a higher purpose in the face of ever increasing distraction.



Performing an asana is the same. If we are focussed on breath, eye position, sound and steadiness, we will not notice the discomfort unless it is so much in need of attention that it breaks through the consciousness of thought and draws our attention.

When we find a purpose in life that is higher than the instantaneous gratification of the senses, we will be willing to let go of one gratification for the constancy of a higher purpose.

It is written in the *Sutras* that “anything that does not follow its higher purpose will be brought to do so”. Nature has a mind: if animal species are not evolving she makes it so they do, and if trees are not keeping pace with changing environmental conditions she gives them a guiding hand. So it follows, if a person is not fulfilling their purpose, nature creates the circumstances to ensure they do.

Lopsided perception creates emotional charge. Our ultimate purpose is to transcend these perceptions or emotions and find the love of creation—the order in the universe. Disease, illness, desperation, emotional stress, and so called accidents are universal guides to steer people to purpose. Pratyahara is the state of existence in which inspiration for doing what we love, loving what we do and accepting both the pains and pleasures of doing so, transcends the perceived pleasures of sensory gratification as a life focus.

“I would rather have the whole world against me than my own soul.”

Dr John Demartini

Dharana

If we take pratyahara one step further we achieve dharana, which is the ability to hold that inspiration for ever longer periods of time, and in so doing we become one with the object of our activity. In this state we become fully present with what we are doing. If we are washing dishes we are washing dishes without thoughts of attraction or resentment. When we are speaking, reciting poetry or singing, we become the object, the song and the words. We lose the sense of self: our focus is fully present with the audience, the music and the heart of what we are doing.



Samadhi

In our seminars we take people through a process until their perception of any one single event is perfectly balanced. The event is no longer good or bad, right or wrong, it is simply perfect as it is. At this point amazing experiences occur for the person undergoing the collapse process. With a perfectly balanced perception of the event, the individual is free to acknowledge the order in that event. They are then free to become grateful to the person, persons or thing that caused the event, and in so doing release love.

Samadhi means to merge—bring both sides of duality and judgement to one at which time, in perfect symmetry, love is birthed.

In each of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi we can experience the concept of no space and time. Here, one minute, one hour or many hours may transpire, and we have no concept of space. It is a similar state to sleep with the exception that we are fully and completely aware and conscious. The state of samadhi is totally achievable through many means available today, but few are so powerful as Dr John Demartini's "Collapse Process" to bring this state into the real world of relationship, work and social life.

Samadhi is not separate from life. We do not need to sit in the mountains, or in remote ashrams to achieve samadhi: it is within us always, waiting to be awakened through the release of illusion and the acknowledgment of the universal life truths. Samadhi is the mastery of all seven areas of life: spiritual, financial, mental, career, relationship, health and social. It is a state of presence where we become at one with the object in acknowledgment of the phrase "Where is God Not?"

When we constantly focus on the object of our doing we achieve a state referred to as Samyama. This is the state of an insatiable search for ever finer detail and ever more intense mastery of one topic, subject or art. Whether it be the cosmos, astrology, archaeology, asana or the powers of the mind, Samyama is that quest. Mastery is not however limited to specialisation in any one area. All the great masters and spiritual teachers of history have been masters of at least seven areas. Mathematics, astrology, physiology, art and cosmology have been the core topics. Now we can include finance, business, medicine and thousands of other topics for which detail study will harness the mind of the individual in pratyahara—inspired focus.



Mind

All Is Mind



Finding the Road to Happiness

Yoga suggests that the road to happiness can be found through the control of the mind. To do this the ancients recommended that the mind be continually focussed on God. It takes hard work to achieve this. Left untethered the mind responds to its conditioning, then the individual becomes driven by this directionless mind and remains in a state of uncertainty, the most common human experience. However the motivations to reach a higher plane can be very strong.

The ancient Yogi's invested in the discovery of means to change the distracted mind to one of focus and clarity. The single determinant of this quest has been the focus on God. The creation of a single point of interest. For some cultures it is the icon, for others it is the planets, others it is money and for us it is our life purpose.

With as little guidance is possible, our minds can be made to quieten for the moment to absorb the higher order. It takes education and practice to free this powerful reception. When it is functioning higher ideals are achieved. Life becomes an ordered event. You become the prophet. It is very dependent on the correct function of the nervous system.

To help us to remain focussed, we must remember that *pleasure is the magnet of the lower mind*, our animal instinct. The road is rough for no sooner do we achieve the state we wished when the discomfort of old sets in and the urge for the journey renews. The teachers of the journey are those who have struggled along it. For those to whom it is given without struggle there is little to teach.

False security lies in pleasure.

True security lies in the investment in higher ways, the ways of Yoga.

The results of this work are twofold.

◆First the person sees a lot more of their personality and will understand their strengths and weaknesses. It will reveal their hidden potential. They will discover deep inside themselves the element of Godhood.



◆Second, they will be less and less bothered by events that previously affected them. Their attitude will remain strong and clear. Their need for instant gratification will diminish in favour of longer term horizons. Their actions will be based on certainties, energy will be conserved, actions more efficient and less exhausting.

Under these circumstances a certain confidence emerges that can only be found in awareness of deeper realities. The chaos will turn to order; the concept of life purpose and service will emerge and responsibility as a global citizen will escalate.

Prayer is action not words.

What you do with your time, energy, thoughts and deeds are the truest prayer of all. What you do comes through you - *take no credit, take no blame* - because within those emotional states lies the truth - *you and the creator are one*.

Obstacles or results of unconsciousness

Being unaware of your potential higher state is a peripheral response to modern conditioning. Though on a conscious level you may not comprehend your body's agitation, your mind and body crave that higher plane, and the manifestations of that craving can show themselves thus:

- A feeling of discomfort toward a loss of presence
- Memory may fail
- Nervousness and agitation
- Nervous sleeplessness
- Bad dreams
- Voice may fail; Speech may falter
- Fear may overpower you
- Find it hard to sit still, quietly or walk firmly
- Feeling of suffocation
- Hot flushes, hands unsteady
- Body heaviness
- Disease
- Lack of direction
- Doubts
- Low energy
- Attraction toward objects



- False perception
- Failure to obtain perfection



Emotions and the Yoga Connection

The senses have always been condemned as the source of all troubles and distractions, - however they *are* the source of distinction. Without them we would not know shape, taste colour size etc. The real culprit is the mind. It has the capacity to be drawn and repelled by events. The senses give an opportunity to witness the order of creation at every opportunity. The mind often resists.

The only place the universe can be out of balance is in the mind of the human.

Unknown to our conscious state, there are moments when we experience great relief. Sleep is that moment - when all turbulence of the mind is extinguished, and the mind is the link to the creator.

Flexibility is necessary for progress. Where the 'why' is big enough the 'hows' take care of themselves. Great inspirations are those of a divine nature. Seeking achievement and smaller goals leads always to the exhaustion of motive.

One who knows the intensity and strength of the creator is rare. It is beyond faith and law, it is a knowing beyond all knowing. It is a certainty that, for those who experience it is beyond words.

When this individual leaves the state of oneness he can return through specific means to see the order, content and character as it was created. There are no flaws. The earlier calculated perceptions of good and bad are transcended and replaced by a perception that only one who is near God can achieve.

Complete happiness is illusive to the vast majority. Despite knowing that the only source of this happiness is in the oneness with the creator, many try to achieve it elsewhere. Wealth, fame, children, success and the removal of disease and worry - even after all these are achieved, complete happiness is absent. The objects of desire are unfulfilling once received and the reason being that these temptations are one sided in their appeal.

There is no greater power than the power that created mankind and the earth he or she inhabits. Even though on the pinnacle of their state, they must stay focussed and take care that they don't lose their balance and fall - a surety if they should try to oppose the natural forces of life.



Gratitude exercises

A useful utilisation of the pranayama technique creates a morning and evening ritual of about three to five minutes in duration.

Just before retiring or on waking, sit, stand or even lie down in a comfortable position. Begin abdominal breathing—inhaling to fill the abdomen, exhaling to contract it.

If necessary use the arms as wings to help develop rhythm. Inhale and exhale at a steady rate and after say 10 breaths increase the rate of your inhalations and exhalations, always keeping the length of inhale and exhale the same.

After 10 more breaths slow down for 5 breaths, then gradually increase the speed to very fast. Then reduce it again over 5 breaths. When breathing slow, take two large inhalations and exhalations, relaxing any tension.

Raise the head 45 degrees and raise the eyes a further 45 degrees so you are now looking vertically up. Now begin thinking of all the gifts and blessings in your life you can be thankful for: brother, sister, father, mother, what you have learnt, the house you live in, your children, their children, the shoes you have, the Yoga class you have experienced, the health you have, etc.

After say one minute or so of gratitude for your gifts in life, speak these words to your self, “Oh soul, do you have a message for me today?”

You will, with practice, connect and receive messages of a parent to child nature. When the message is complete write it down. Collecting these messages is the best form of prayer you can have. It is an acknowledgment of your higher self, a prayer of gratitude for what you have and a heart opening experience to open and close the day.

Affirmation

The mind is a powerful tool. It can either work for or against us.

When we perceive the world to be against us, when we think that all is to our detriment, we reinforce our perception and see most events as dark and down on us.



We all have those days. We bang our toe on the end of the bed, can't find the car keys, seem unable to concentrate at work, and then someone comes into our day to remind us of our inadequacies.

Such days often happen when there is a full moon. When the moon is full our energy is disturbed, our mind is restless and our connection to our body seems less than usual.

On such days we do not practice Yoga. On these days we are more vulnerable to injury and to lower-minded thoughts, and as a consequence we are not sensitive to our physical feedback systems.

New moon days are similar; not as strong as full moon days but certainly turbulent. On these days our energy may sag and we may feel listless and half-hearted about what we are doing. Ashtanga Yoga takes both new moon and full moon days off from asana practice.

As we have described in this book, Yoga is more than the physical movements of asana. It is the conscious awareness of breath, action and thought. It is a shift of emphasis from the self to a higher power in life.

Affirmations are a means of maintaining constancy of thought as the energy systems around us constantly change. We may feel down, elated, happy or sad, all of which are states of transience in life, which, if given reign, will take us on a journey away from our love, purpose and inspiration.

You go in the direction of your single most dominant thought. Affirmations are statements which, by repetition, superimpose higher-minded states on illusioned lower-minded states. We affirm where we are going next.

Affirmations are written in the present tense. Words such as 'I am', 'I do', 'I have' and 'I see' are appropriate beginnings to affirmations. 'I will', 'I want' or 'I wish' place the proposition in the future, and as we all know, the future may never come.

At first affirmations may feel like a lie, or an exaggeration. That is why it requires written expression and repetition. What at first may seem like a lie will eventually become a repeated expression of truth. At the same time affirmations should express enough detail and relate to the universal laws.



Universal laws include:

- There is pain and pleasure in all events.
- Death is the lever arm of life.
- Love is the synthesis of all emotion.
- Love cannot be rejected, expectations can.
- There is a blend of war and peace in all existence.
- Nature never throws away old mechanisms, she simply builds new ones on top.
- Our commitment to love another is not bound by mortal contract.
- There is order in all events until we judge it otherwise.
- Maximum evolution occurs at the border of order and chaos.

Affirmations are an opportunity to express the future now. They enable you to tap into your ability to manifest and help you create the life you are capable of, and no matter where you are at the present time they acknowledge your ability to transcend pain and pleasure and see from within.

A life lived from the heart is a life of affirmation. Success is always affirmed and held in gratitude. When we affirm we are acknowledging the presence of some law which is beyond our scope of sensory perception.

Affirmation provides a golden opportunity for the corporate world to utilise one of the most powerful resources available to humankind which for the greater part has been left untapped—consciousness.



To keep the heart open and to follow our true path is a commitment to constancy. This is not rigidity but an emphasis on the ability to transcend the mundane mindset of victim, or blame, and to seek the truth, the order beyond the chaos, from which we are able to synthesise the emotions surrounding an event and move towards gratitude and love. Affirmations are a vital tool in this process.



Yoga

More Details

Life, Yoga and the Universe



Life, Yoga and the Universe

“As above so below.”

The following is a summary of a summary of a summary of the Yogic belief in the function of existence. It correlates directly with the mysteries and principles of both the ancient Egyptian and Myan cultures.

Yoga texts divide the universe into two distinct areas, above and below, or purusa and prakrti.

Purusa is above. It is unchanging, constant and that part of us capable of ‘real’ seeing and perception.

Prakrti is below. It is that part that is ever changing—our mind, memories and emotions.

All material things, matter and life is prakrti, the source of which is the one—the original matter from which all things are formed.

We have a soul—a timeless, spaceless entity which is outside our body. This soul (pupusa) is unchanging, constant. We are the higher mind, and that is our being which has the ability to listen to the soul, or the material world, of prakrti. The material world is a reflection, a mirror, of the soul and as a consequence we are challenged to see the perfection of creation in our lives as they are in the material world.

It is therefore a challenge to be in the material world, to interact and participate with others and to master, rather than escape from, the seven areas of life.

If we are run by the senses then we listen to and are the slave of Prakrti, the material world. If we listen to our soul we are free of the illusions of the material world and are empowered to master and use these illusions without attachment or emotion.

We are the higher mind, which has the choice of listening to the soul or the senses. While we exist on Earth, we are able to glimpse the soul but cannot stay in tune with it. In learning to love the Earth, its peoples, their actions and inaction's, we learn to love ourselves. “As above so below.”



While we exist in human form we have not mastered and loved the seven areas of life. The closest we get to enlightenment is therefore a momentary glimpse of the soul—periods of awareness. The more we transcend the illusions of emotion, the more time we spend connected to higher consciousness.

The role of Yoga is, and has always been, to help our higher mind glimpse more and more of the soul's certainty. Yoga does this through the stilling of the senses, mastery of breath and ritual of prayer in which we can open our heart to the material world, transcend the fears and guilt's that run our lives and be totally present in our higher mind. This is the process of Yoga.

It is therefore our objective in Yoga to integrate the whole universe in our very being, and by doing so transcend the judgements of right and wrong, good and bad. In this state we are free to participate to the maximum in the material world; we are neither attached nor detached to the life we lead, we are, in the simplest terms, purely in gratitude for it.

Yoga is not separated from the material world, it is in fact the essence of our ability to participate in it. Yoga simply assists us to connect to higher powers than those of the lower-minded illusions of emotion, infatuation and resentment. The goal is the freedom to co-exist within the world, love it as it is, understand the creator's construction, and to reach higher and higher levels of complexity and vision



The Higher Self

Duality is a reflection of that part of the universe we have yet to understand. We see this as right and that as wrong, this as good and that as bad. We are in other words playing judge to the creator. This is the realm of the lower mind: the mind of emotion, righteousness and judgement. This is the mind that leads us to experience that which we have as yet been unable to understand and love.

We need simply to ask the question, “Where is God not?” to understand that our lopsided perception of events and situations is a result of our illusioned perception which is a reflection of what we have as yet not learned to love.

Certainty and love come from a gratitude for the creation of life as it is. It is an understanding that there is no pleasure without pain nor pain without pleasure, that there is no right or wrong; that there are only events until we judge them otherwise.

To find this certainty we must become present in the moment, at which time we are no longer in time or space, but truly connected to the soul. In the present moment there is no fear or guilt.

The Yogic definition of the three states of mind are the gunas—rajas, tamas and sattva. Rajas is the active, fiery part of the mind responsible for causing us to act. It is responsible for excess, too, and in excess it prevents us from sitting still and is agitation and restlessness. Tamas is quite the opposite. It is the fixed, steady immobile state of the mind responsible for contemplative and repetitive pattern. In excess it will cause sluggishness, listlessness and depression. Sattva is the third guna, responsible for clarity, lightness and inspiration. In this state neither tamas nor rajas predominate. Our goal in Yoga is to reduce the tamas and rajas and achieve a state of sattva.

The lower mind, the illusions of fear and guilt, are the rajas and tamas. They are either in excess or deficiency. They are the judgements. The higher mind is the state of sattva, the state of clarity that exists when we listen to the soul, or higher self. Here there is no duality, no excess or deficiency, there is simply unity and love.

The lower-minded states always exist for without them action would be limited to inspiration and this would require the highest of evolution. Until then the lower-minded states take us to where we must face our next illusions.



These are the universal laws, as above so below. The ultimate journey is the opening of the heart to love and the awakening of the truest calling from within. We all have this inner voice and at the moment when that inner voice becomes stronger than the outer voices we are said to be inspired.

My hope is that this book has been of some small contribution to your own journey in the growth of your consciousness and the awakening of your heart to the strength, harmony and balance that is love.