

A Beginner's Guide To Yoga

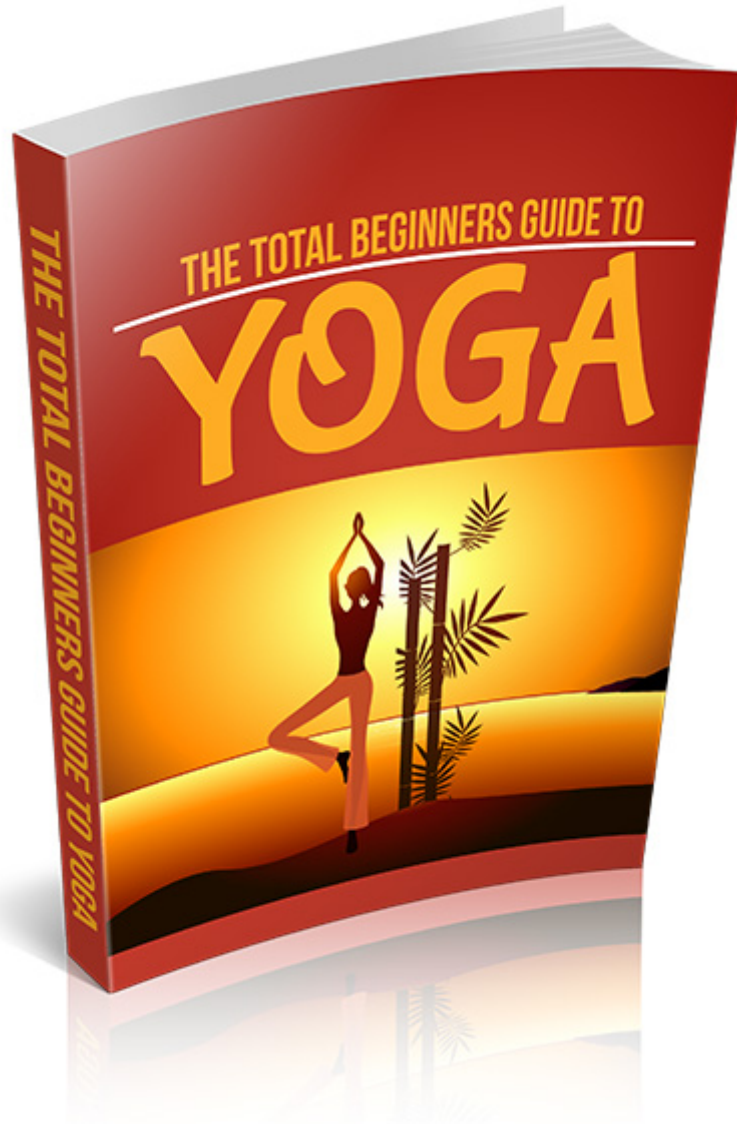


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1

ONCE UPON A YOGI

Today's world is full of options for keeping in shape. Fitness methods pass through various phases of interest. There is always some "new" form of keeping the body in shape or toned appearing on the marketplace. There are the older muscle- or bulk-building exercise involved in weight and strength training. There are also other forms appealing to women such as jazzercise, and NIA. However, one of the constants over the past 4 decades has been yoga.

People are turning to yoga for many reasons. These range from managing stress to preventing health issues. Yoga is used to help heal the body from addictions. There are also those who decide to do yoga simply because it is "trendy." They attend yoga classes in yoga studios because a celebrity chooses to endorse it. There is also the lure of achieving a "yoga body."

Yoga is about the physical – about improving and toning the body. Yet, yoga is also about the spiritual development of an individual. In truth, yoga is a combination of movements and positions designed to develop the link between the head and the consciousness. Depending upon which form of yoga you choose, and there are many different forms, the focus will be on the exercises or positions (asana) or the development of the consciousness. Yoga intentionally includes aspects of conscious development of both the physical and the spiritual. This is an integral part of an ancient tradition that cannot and does not separate the body from the spirit/mind/soul.

The following chapters will open up the world of yoga. It will explain and simplify what can become a complicated subject. This book's intent is to expose the beginner to the different aspects of yoga. It will look at the typology of yoga as well as the basics. Chapters will examine the different approaches to yoga, as well as the bare essentials you will need to practice.

In doing so, this book will provide the information necessary to get any beginner started on the right path. To start off on the right foot, however, it is necessary to understand where the practice of yoga originated and the traditions. As a result, you will begin your journey by first looking briefly at the history and philosophy of yoga.

2

IT ALL STARTED IN INDIA

The art of yoga has an ancient and revered history. It is indeed one of the oldest recorded systems of exercise. Like so many other types of alternative traditions of combining mind and body together in a single form, it is a practice perceiving the body and mind as a single entity in pursuit of perfect health. However, perfect health is achieved only through physical and spiritual recognition. The body must have balance. The rationale behind this unification dates back to the origins of yoga in ancient India.

EARLY HISTORY

The history of yoga may be divided into periods:

- Vedic,
- Pre-Classical,
- Classical and
- Post-classical.

The origins of yoga date back to approximately 5,000 years ago to India. In the 6th century BCE, Siddharta Gautama received enlightenment at age 35. This was the beginning of the close connection between Buddhism and yoga. In fact, in Buddhism, meditation and the physical postures of yoga are an integral part of most practices.

At first, the tradition was oral. The practitioners wrote and spoke in Sanskrit within the walls of the monasteries. Writings mentioning yoga did not appear until about 2,500 years ago. This official mention of yoga provided the oldest recorded cataloging of a conscious development of the human spirit and body.

The early period of yoga is referred to as the pre-Classical period. During this time, 1000 to 100 BCE, yoga debuted in the writings of the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Lord's Song* (dating ca 500-300 BCE). This epic poem referred to yoga as "skill in action", "equanimity," and "balance." Another work from this period was the *Yoga Darshama* or *Yoga Sutras*. This work linked

forever to the legendary Pantajali was written around 200 BCE. This work and the teachings of Pantajali were responsible for founding the Classical approach to or school of yoga.

The Classical school of yoga focused and continues to focus on the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is currently the oldest form of yoga instruction. The 195 threads (sutras) attempt to standardize the various approaches to the practice. All practitioners are to follow the Eight-Fold Path of Yoga. This is also known as the 8 Limbs of Classical Yoga.

Behind the purpose of these 8 limbs was the new concept of the separation of matter (prakati) and spirit (purusha). Pantajali felt the individual practitioner needed to separate the 2 in order to achieve the cleansing of the spirit.

YOGA HISTORY UNTIL THE 1940S

Post-Classical Yoga focused more on the present. From the 7th to the 17th century, the approach became non-dualistic. The new practitioners of yoga did not see a separation between the transcendental self and the transcendental reality or absolute. This resulted in the creation of Hatha Yoga.

In the Thai Kingdom and throughout Asia, the practice waned and grew in accordance with the temper of the times. While remaining alive in various monasteries, it only ventured out publicly under favorable rulers. This was the case in the 18th century in Thailand under King Rama I and later under his predecessors King Rama III in the 19th century. They kept the practice of yoga alive through the construction of statues depicting the poses of yoga.

In the 19th century, yoga began its migration to the west. It was examined first as part of an Eastern philosophical approach. Lecturers at universities during the 1800s in England looked at it as a manifestation of Asian religion. The focus was on its health aspects and implementation of a vegetarian or vegan regime. By the late 1890s, it was on its way to becoming a part of North American intellectual life as well.

The actual practice of yoga arrived in the United States between 1920 and 1924. The restrictions on Indian immigration slowed it down after 1924 until the 1930s. Paul Brunton introduced readers to the subject in 1934 Jiddu Krishnamurti provided guidance in Jhana yoga. He was joined during this period by Iyengar and Desikachar, to name a few.

MODERN YOGA HISTORY

The 1940s, 1950s and 1960s saw further growth in the United States and Europe. Theo Barnard wrote his classic on the subject – *Hatha Yoga: The*

Report of a Personal Experience in 1947. Richard Hittleman penned *The Twenty-Eight-Day Yoga Plan* in 1961. He was a disciple of Ramana Maharashi. It was also the 1960s that saw a major influx in various yoga masters including the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. His association with the Beatles guaranteed the public's interest.

Between 1960 and 1980, the interest in yoga and its various approaches soared. Yogi Bhajan opted to break with the traditional approach and openly taught Kundalini Yoga. Swami Vishnudevananda wrote the *Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga* while Swami Satchitananda inspired the Woodstock generation. Yoga also became available to television viewers. Lilas Folan had a series "Lilas Folan – Lilas, Yoga and You" which ran from 1970 to 1979.

From 1980 onwards, more and more schools teaching yoga became the norm. Hatha yoga became the most common form, but others have also made inroads into what is now part of a holistic fitness industry. Yet, yoga is more than a study of body postures and motions. It is a meditative practice and a way to unify the various aspects of the human form. Not simply a physical method of body toning, it is also a philosophy.

YOGA PHILOSOPHY

Yoga is a practice that allows an individual to improve both their body and spirit. The philosophy of yoga is to direct the individual on a journey to discover the unity of their parts. It may do this through separating the aspects and working on 1 or the other. It may also consider the honing of 1 the perfecting of another.

Yoga is but 1 of the 6 systems comprising Indian philosophy. It is an ethical discipline. It offers a way for an individual to live his or her life neutrally. Yoga philosophy strongly reflects Buddhist teachings on the nature of existence. According to this religious philosophy, the world is essentially an illusion. External realities are not the truth. Nothing actually exists outside of or beyond the mind and its state of consciousness.

Yoga philosophy encourages the yoking or connecting of the body through the rituals and specific practices to seek eternal, universal truths. The mind uses the fine toning of the body to make this leap from the mundane, restless and practical world to the mystical, calm spiritual realm. Yoga calms a restless mind and helps the individual to redirect his or her energy from the boring and useless practices of life into productive pathways. It teaches people to live life without excess, freeing them from both pain and sorrow.

The philosophy of yoga is not focused on an individual obtaining physical strength. Its true direction is toward the spiritual and metaphysical. It is concerned with inner strength. By toning the body and honing the mind, yoga seeks and helps its practitioners find a union between the physical, emotional, mental and intellectual aspects of life. It opts for creating from

the lack of harmony and purposeless life path, an integrated, purposeful, useful and even noble life and lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

The history of yoga is one of humanity in search of a philosophical approach to the concept of a mind-body union. It is an ancient attempt to align the different components of humanity to create a unified whole. Originally an integral part of a religious practice, yoga has become a separate entity. It exists by and for itself.

Yoga is now a spiritual path as well as a physical fitness regime. It is the union of the individual self with the universal self as well as a means of getting in shape. Everyone expects something different from modern yoga practice. Practitioners offer up tantalizing promises. Schools focus on one or many aspects. In the end, what a student derives from their own yoga experience depends upon their choice of teacher and type of school. There are many paths to follow in yoga. The 4th chapter will consider some of the major and a few of the minor ones. Before this, however, you need to consider why you should do yoga or why not.

3

WHY YOGA? WHY NOT

Many different individuals seek to find an answer in yoga. Whether he or she seeks the meaning of life or an ideal body, he or she looks to find their own solution in the practices. Part of the average individual's belief in yoga lies in the perceived benefits.

BENEFITS

There are many claims made in the name of yoga. They range from the ultimate unification between body and the universal truths to a healthy body. In essence, the essential benefits of practising yoga lie in 2 areas: physical and spiritual. The physical affects may be listed as following:

- Yoga develops physical strength
- Yoga has a positive effect on the spine
- Yoga features special exercises that may help in a variety of sicknesses and health complaints
- A healthy body helps create a healthy mind
- Yoga practices increase life expectancy
- Yoga strengthens the entire core system through improved blood circulation
- Yoga lowers blood pressure decreasing problems of stroke and heart disease
- The use of breathing results in increased lung capacity and greater endurance
- Stretching reduces stiffness of muscles by releasing lactic acid
- Yoga can help reduce weight
- Yoga can aid in decreasing depression
- Yoga is also beneficial in addressing issues of the female reproduction system, e.g. menopause, menstrual cycle

Yoga's claims to physical benefits are based on a regular implementation of a regime of specific yoga positions. By stretching the body, yoga helps the individual straighten the spine. Stretching the spine also increases elasticity of the spine and other body parts. This increases body flexibility and helps the individual to relax and concentrate. At the same time, stretching reduces stiffness and helps the individual avoid or decreases instances of pain, tension, fatigue and stiffness.

The body movements required of yoga also increase the flow of the blood. This increased circulation ensures the body maintains a healthy flow while improving the general sense of well-being. Improved blood circulation also helps in relieving minor pains and helps with certain health problems. In particular, yoga can reduce short-term pain. Yet, studies indicate the lowering of blood pressure through yoga exercises can impact, in a positive fashion, on such things as hypertension, stroke and heart disease.

Perhaps the best thing about yoga is its lack of side effects. Yoga encourages relief from minor problems. It does so over a short time period. Because yoga works with the body by inducing the release of certain beneficial naturally occurring chemicals, there are no unpleasant side effects.

As a result, yoga can provide an individual with a positive body experience while providing certain health benefits. It can also encourage mental and even spiritual development. If a practitioner decides to move beyond the physical promises of yoga, he or she may experience a form of personal development or even enlightenment.

- Yoga is part of a philosophical path. It open the mind to explore the inner world
- Yoga provides the basic tools for an intense inner journey.
- Yoga is about empowerment of the individual
- Yoga is also about the personal path from the individual to unification with the universal
- Only if the individual has complete mastery over his or her body can he or she be free in spirit or soul

AVOIDANCES

Indeed, yoga does intend to purify both the body and the mind. Yet, yoga is not for everyone. There are those who need to tone down their practice or avoid yoga all together. Certain types of yoga, in particular are not suited for everyone.

Yoga in the Thai tradition may seem to be a cure-all, but it is not a practice suited for cardiac problems. It is not useful for those with hypertension. This is particularly true if the individual plans to do inversions. This is counterproductive and can lead to further complications.

If you have a slipped disc or osteoporosis, do not practice Thai Yoga. If you have a fracture do not practice any form of yoga unless it has become calcified. Individuals with other bone problems such as degenerative discs and degenerative bone diseases are not good candidates for yoga. The asanas place too much stress upon these fragile bones.

Certain types of yoga require modification. This is true in the instance of pregnant women. Once they reach a certain stage, yoga asanas require adjustment to prevent health issues. Furthermore, practitioners do not recommend it for high levels of psychological or emotional stress.

Overall, remember this. Yoga is not a cure-all. If you are sick, see a doctor. If you have any doubts, talk to your doctor and a qualified yoga practitioner. These individuals can help you decide whether you can or cannot do yoga.

CONCLUSION

For many, the reason to take yoga is simple. They want a great and flexible body. Others choose this form of corporeal practice to help fend off certain health or physical problems. For others, however, yoga is but a single rung on a ladder. It is the first step on a path leading to self-knowledge. There are indeed many motives for taking yoga. Fortunately, different types of yoga currently provide individuals with the varied answers they seek. Chapter 4 will provide you with the essentials on the basic types of yoga.

4

PATHS TO YOGA

It is truly possible for any individual, religious or atheist, young or old, in perfect shape or not, physical or spiritual in nature, to find and enjoy yoga. There are many different types taught in different fashions towards different goals. From slick physical to ethereal spiritual, yoga practices cater to the many and varied needs of modern and traditional thinkers alike. Below is a concise look at the current offerings as well as their place within the spectrum of yoga philosophy.

TYOLOGY – OVERVIEW

Some experts say you can divide yoga into 2 basic types:

- classical and
- post-classical.

Others subdivide the overall form by origins:

- Tibetan,
- Japanese and
- Chinese.

Other people consider all strains of modern yoga to be a school of Hatha yoga. Indeed this is true of Astanga Yoga, Astanga Vinyasa Yoga, Iyengar Yoga and Kundalini Yoga. This is not true for Bhakti Yoga that predates Hatha Yoga.

Another way of differentiating or classifying yoga is in accordance with their purpose. Integral Yoga, for example, is intended to help the individual develop every aspect of his or hers being. Mantra Yoga, however, focuses on the importance of sound while Jnana Yoga concerns itself with the philosophy of yoga. Kripalu Yoga emphasizes a willful approach while Bikram Yoga takes place in studios heated to 100°F with 70% humidity. There is yoga to improve your sex life and yoga to address issues of self-esteem. You can find books on yoga for computer users,

teens and toddlers. There is truly a yoga suited to the character and purpose of each individual.

ANANDA YOGA

Ananda Yoga is a classical form of Yoga. It is a variation of Hatha Yoga. Proponents of this Ananda Yofa claim it is returning Hatha Yoga to its spiritual fundamental nature. They feel its movements focus on the true internal quintessence that defines yoga,

The process of Ananda Yoga is a gentle one. The asanas (Yoga postures) are intended to aid the body in its search for harmony. The movements help to push the flow of energy from within the physical to the brain. Here, it helps create the ideal condition for meditation. The postures also help the practitioner to realign the body. The practice demands attention is paid to breathing properly.

To reach the ultimate level of integration and harmonization of the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of your being requires dedication to the following practices:

- The use of Asana or yoga postures
- The practice of Pranayama or special breathing techniques

ANUSARA YOGA

Anusara has several different meanings or interpretations. These include "Flowing with Grace, "Following your Heart" and "Flowing with Nature." Anusara came into existence in 1997. Its founder was John Friend, an American. It, like many of the current forms of yoga, is a variation or version of Hatha Yoga. The philosophical approach finds its source in Tantric teachings. This results in an emphasis on the positive aspects of life as well as on physical alignment.

Unlike many types of philosophy, the approach adopted by Ansuara Yoga holds tightly and reinforces the premise in the inherent goodness in all living beings. This adds a light touch to the classes. Some refer to Ansuara Yoga as a playful yoga. Yet, the open approach is contained within a very strict conformation to strict principles governing the alignment of the physical body. These are called the Universal Principles of Alignment.

Anusara is 1 of several yoga types that utilizes props during the practice. It all relies on what are the 3 As: "Attitude, Alignment and Action." A standard class is as follows:

- Invocation
- Assignment of heart-oriented theme
- Attention paid to the Universal Principles of Alignment
- Postures or poses can comprise any of the 250 poses of Anusara Yoga
- Savasana or Meditation concludes the class

The practice of Anusara Yoga has a singular intent. It is to help students become open with their hearts and minds. In doing so, it is hoped they will be able to make a complete connection with the ultimate divine found in themselves and within others.

ASHTANGA/ASTANGA) YOGA OR ASTANGA VINYASA YOGA

The name Astanga Yoga is derived from the 8-limbs or astangas. Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga owes its existence to Tirumalai Krishnamacharya. He developed a version of this form of yoga in the 1930s. He began with a classical version of yoga and transformed the classical poses into 3 standardized sequences. These are primary, intermediate and advanced. Each grouping allowed students to proceed according to their own ability. This Krishnamacharya taught this in his own school or yogashala in Mysore until 1950. His focus was on the demanding vinyasa or connecting postures unifying the flow from yoga posture to yoga posture while tying all together with the proper system of breathing.

Two of the more renowned teachers to come out of this school were Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi and B. K. S. Iyengar. Each went on to found a school of yoga Jois became the new leader of the practice of Astanga/Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. It became more popular under the name Astanga Yoga.

Astanga Yoga is 1 of the more physically challenging forms of yoga. It is demanding. While meditation is a component, the focus is elsewhere. The practitioner must synchronize breathing actions – in and out, inhaling and exhaling in a specified pattern, with particular movements. These postures proceed in degrees and complexity from 1 to the next. The pace and intricacy of the postures builds up quickly as 1 action flows into the other. This is comparable to a workout as the movements take a physical toll on the body. The body heats up and sweats out the inner toxins.

Astanga Yoga is all about increasing strength, stamina and flexibility. This does not make it a good match for beginning practitioners. A complete novice should look elsewhere. If, however, you have some basis in yoga, you can move through and master some of the various demanding poses, moving 1 level to the next.

While a questionable practice for novices, Astanga Yoga is ideal for athletes. It pushes hard to extend the boundaries as 1 series of poses flows into the next. Once mastery is achieved, the practitioner moves on to the next level. Yet, all begin with the same fundamental practices. These include

- Mantra
- Breath control using ujjaya breathing, mala bandha and uddiyana bandha
- Focusing the eyes Drishtis – 9 variations are possible
- Start the series off with the Sun Salutation
- Flow through the sequence within each of the series
- Cooling down at the end of each sequence with poses, meditation and Savansa

The combination of focusing, breathing and posture forms what is called the Tristhana. The movement from 1 series to the next helps to unlock. Frequently, Astanga Yoga takes place in a heated or warm room. This reduces the chance of muscle strain from the intensity of the practice. The heat of the room also symbolizes the inner or internal spiritual fire. As the body heats up during the practice of Astanga Yoga, the spiritual fire within burns away the cloak of delusion, fantasy and ignorance to destroy the very source of trouble within – the ego.

BHAKTI YOGA

Bhakti Yoga is also known as "devotional yoga." It predates Hatha Yoga. Bhakti Yoga focuses on the surrender of the self to the divine. It is a devotional form of yoga. In some North American practices, Bhakti Yoga has become an exercise.

The practitioner of Bhakti Yoga may use many ways to achieve his or her goal. In fact, there is no specific way to reach the ultimate goal. Yet, no matter what the position, the use of meditation and visualization helps the practitioner to work towards the ultimate aim of love and devotion to the Divine Power or Almighty One. It is necessary to focus on the existence of this being. It is also essential to use the practice to learn how to obtain true faith and love and compassion for all beings.

BIKRAM YOGA

Another name for Bikram Yoga is Hot Yoga. This reflects the environment in which the yoga occurs. The practice takes place in a room in which the temperature ranges from 95 to 105°F. The ideal humidity should be a minimum of 40%. The rationale behind implementing such levels includes a simulation of the temperatures found in India, its place of origin, and

the desire to increase flexibility while averting injuries. Increased levels of heat also produce higher volumes of sweat resulting in detoxification. Bikram Yoga, therefore, is a cleansing or purifying practice for the body.

The founder of Bikram Yoga was Bikram Choudhury of India. A former National Champion of India in weight lifting, Choudhury was also a disciple of Bishnu Ghosh, the brother of the revered author and Yogi, Paramahansa Yogananda. He established his practice of 26 exercise – consisting of both asanas (postures) and pryanas (breathing exercises). These are culled from the traditional practices but applied in a modern sense. Bikram moved on to create his own school in the 1970s.

Bikram Yoga is only for the fit. It is tough for veterans let alone beginners to perform the 26 exercises in a heated room. In fact, some medical professionals and exercise gurus question the positive effect the heated room may have. Some perceive the impact to be possibly be deleterious for certain individuals. Bikram Yoga is for the physical form. Requiring focus and discipline, it nevertheless has the aim of physical rather than spiritual wellness.

CHOCOLATE YOGA

Chocolate Yoga is a young newcomer. It is a child of the 21st century. This yoga is a variation on Hatha yoga. It combines Hatha Yoga techniques with vinyasa flow. Alignment receives careful attention.

Chocolate Yoga focuses on relaxation of the mind and toning of the body. It helps to strengthen and stretch the muscles of a practitioner. Yet, Chocolate Yoga also has the intent of helping the mind to unwind, relax then recharge. It a yoga gentle on its practitioners since it believes the user and teacher should modify the poses, adapting them to the individual's physical restrictions.

To help the practitioner move a step closer to the goal of healthiness, the teacher supplies a small piece of chocolate. This is raw cacao. Its purpose is to help the mind and body find happiness and health.

FORREST YOGA

The founder of Forrest Yoga is west-coast teacher Ann Forrest. Forrest Yoga is a vinyasa-style form of yoga. It focuses on breathing and abdominal work. This is the core of each person. Its intent is to help each practitioner to strengthen the physical entity while finding a nucleus of freedom within. By connecting with the core of their being, the practitioner becomes centered and stronger.

Forrest Yoga uses a vigorous and physically demanding series of asanas to achieve this end. Each pose is part of a progression that becomes

increasingly demanding. Forrest Yoga also utilizes heat to help remove toxins from the body. The practice works with the modern body type to cleanse the body while freeing the individual from any pain, anxiety and emotional. Forrest Yoga is a healing yoga. Its mainstays are stated to be *Breath, Strength, Integrity and Spirit*.

Forrest Yoga helps you connect to your core - getting strong and centered. It uses heat, deep breathing and vigorous sequences to sweat out toxins. The long holds in the pose progressions help you flush, oxygenate and rejuvenate every cell.

HATHA YOGA

Hatha Yoga is a generic term for many different types of physical yoga. It is arguably, the foundation of a wide variety of different schools or kinds of yoga practiced in the North America and elsewhere. It is also one of the more popular and well-known forms of yoga practiced in the United States. In part, this is the result of its easy, relaxed and even gentle introduction to the poses and stylings of yoga.

Hatha Yoga incorporates the higher profiled and generally understood systems of yoga. These are

- Asanas or physical postures (poses or positions)
- Pranayama or controlled breathing or relaxation techniques,
- Meditation or Dharana and Dhyana
- kundalini or Laya Yoga

Hatha Yoga also uses yamas, niyamas, mudras and bandhas to obtain control over both the physical presence or human body and the somewhat elusive life force or prana.

The name "Hatha Yoga" consists of 2 parts: Ha or Sun and Tha or Moon. This focus on 2 related but separate aspects reflects the concern of this system in harnessing the prana or life force to achieve the goal of enlightenment or self-realization. IF a practitioner is able to harness the life force, placing it firmly under control, meditation becomes easy and the result is awakening of the true or inner self.

Hatha Yoga is and refers to any system of yoga utilizing a physical practice to work towards a spiritual goal. Schools based on Hatha Yoga include Astanga Yoga, Iyengar Yoga and Kundalini Yoga. All incorporate the core essentials of Hatha Yoga in their individual schools. All find the core of their teachings in the traditional paths of Hatha Yoga.

INTEGRAL YOGA – SRI AUROBINDO

See Purna Yoga

INTEGRAL YOGA

Integral Yoga is a form of traditional yoga. It is a variation of Hatha Yoga. Integral Yoga is based on the teachings of Sri Swami Sachidananda. He arrived in the United States in the 1960s. He opened up several schools and established the basis for the system.

Integral Yoga follows 6 specific practices. These are

- Raja Yoga
- Hatha Yoga
- Bhakti Yoga
- Japa Yoga
- Karma Yoga
- Jnana Yoga

This full or complete Yoga seeks to find and reveal the spiritual unity that exists in the Universe. It is yoga attempting to produce harmony among all living beings. Integral Yoga classes tend to follow a set program this includes:

- Kirtans or chanting
- Asanas
- Pranyamas or breathing exercises
- Relaxation techniques
- Silent meditation

Integral Yoga uses all these techniques to reach its stated goals. The exercises are mild. Soul-searching and selfless work are encouraged as part of a lifelong approach to selflessness and harmony with all creation.

ISHTA

The founder of ISHTA (Integral Science of Hatha and Tantric Arts) was Kavi Yogi Swarananda Mani Finger of South Africa. He and his son, Alan Finger, created and then popularized it. Alan was responsible for introducing it into the United States. ISHTA is an eclectic combination of traditional yoga practices. Its intent, however, is to present a method through which its practitioners can incorporate the "best of yoga" in a fashion that is suitable to their own specific path.

ISHTA bases its approach on:

- Hatha Yoga

- Tantra Yoga
- Ayurveda

IYENGAR YOGA

Iyengar Yoga bears the name of its founder, yoga master BKS. Iyengar. He started the development of this particular practice approximately 60-years ago. This is a traditional or classical form of yoga – a variation of Hatha Yoga. It is also the most recognized form of this yoga.

Unlike many other forms of yoga, Iyengar Yoga is meant for beginners. In fact, it is ideal for this purpose. Iyengar Yoga teaches the basics of yoga. It moves slowly through the asanas, holding each position longer than resting between, breathing and meditating before moving into another. There is extensive attention paid to the small details. The teacher ensures you realize the importance of awareness of the body, of the self. This helps you to reach an awareness of other parts of your life. This may seem difficult, however, the different levels of difficulty are abetted by the use of props.

Iyengar Yoga utilizes cushions, pillows and straps. A practitioner may draw upon sandbags, blocks and chairs. This helps those who lack flexibility safely perform the necessary movements. It also makes it possible for individuals with back problems and restricted mobility. In other words, Iyengar Yoga makes the practice accessible to the many and not the few.

Iyengar Yoga has several purposes. It introduces the basics of classic yoga. This includes both the physical and spiritual aspects of the practice. It also helps tone muscles, reduces or removes tension and relieves instances of chronic pain.

JIVAMUKTI YOGA

Jivamukti Yoga is a new form of yoga. It dates to 1986. While in New York, Sharon Gannon and David Life formulated Jivamukti Yoga, with its links to Ashanta/Asanta Yoga. It has since become popular with several celebrities including Sting.

Jivamukti Yoga is a method of asana practice that comprises a physically demanding workout. Of particular importance are the elements of chanting, meditation and prayer. Jivamakuti Yoga consists of the following:

- Vinyasas
- Devotion
- Yoga scripture
- Meditation
- Asanas
- Pranayama
- Music
- Animal and political activism
- Non-violence
- Vegetarianism

The Jivamukti Yoga method is a combination of intense physical practices with spiritual intent.

JNANA YOGA

Jnana Yoga refers to the “path of true knowledge or wisdom.” Some consider it to be the most difficult path. The intent of Jnana Yoga is to experience unity with the Divine or God. It attempts to do so by removing the obstacles. It works to break up the various layers of ignorance that encompass the individual.

The philosophy of Jnana Yoga perceives all knowledge lies within us. Practicing Jnana Yoga will allow the practitioner to achieve this reality. In practicing Jnana Yoga, the individual obtains a tranquil state. He or she reaches a place where self-control, concentration and endurance are able to predominate over the mundane and temporary matters of life.

KARMA YOGA

The description of Karma Yoga lies overtly within its name. Karma Yoga is the yoga of action. It is the dedication of an individual’s actions (or karma), and all it entails, to the Divine, Almighty or God. Karma Yoga purifies the heart by teaching its practitioners to act without thought to gain, fame, power, respect, honor or any other type of reward. This is a selfless practice. In it, the individual learns to sublimate the ego.

Standard components of Karma Yoga are:

- Yama – attitude towards the environment
- Niyama – personal attitude
- Asana – postures or positions
- Pranayama - breathing

KALI RAY TRIYOGA

Kali Ray TriYoga is a product of the 1980s. It was developed by Kali Ray in the United States. It obtains its name from the intent of the founder to emphasize the triple nature of the individual. TriYoga perceives each person to consist of the physical, the mental and the spiritual. It is the purpose of TriYoga to unify the diverse parts to create a harmony within and without.

The sequences of TriYoga reflect a Kundalini Yoga influence. They flow from 1 into the other. These are synchronized movements in which the following play key roles at all times:

- asana (positions)
- prayanayama (rhythmic or regulated breathing exercises)
- Mudra (focus)

TriYoga appeals to all levels, physical conditions and ages. Its function is to reduce stress, harmonize the individual's parts and provide increased energy and clarity of mind.

KRIPALU YOGA

Kripalu Yoga is the yoga of consciousness. It is also the "willful practice." The developer of Kripalu Yoga, Amrit Desai, arrived in the United States from India in 1960. He started teaching Kripalu Yoga in 1966 in Lenox, Massachusetts. It has as its basis the postures of Hatha Yoga.

The goal of Kripalu Yoga is both physical and psychological. It is introspective in its emphasis on listening to your own body for feedback before proceeding to the next posture. This requires the retention of the postures longer than in other forms of yoga.

Each practice session begins with meditation followed by centering, breathing and warm-up exercises. The actual path of Kripalu Yoga goes accordingly:

- Learn the postures
- Explore your body's abilities while learning the poses
- Begin to hold the poses for a longer period of time
- Increase your concentration
- Continue to develop your awareness of how your body feels
- Develop a calm meditative state as you flow subconsciously from 1 movement into the next

Kripalu Yoga is a means of discovering the self as well as a way to self-empower.

KUNDALINI

This form of yoga is often referred to as the Yoga of Awareness. The kundalini is literally the curl of the lock of hair. It is a serpent coiled at the base of the spine. The practice of Kundalini Yoga was kept a secret until 1969. In that year, Yogi Bhajan made it accessible to the public.

Kundalini Yoga is an invigorating practice. Its focus is about discovering the prana or life force (breath) within each individual. It concentrates on arousing the prana from the base of the spine and allowing it to move upwards. While asana practices always involve pranayama, in Kundalini Yoga this method is essential. The use of asanas in conjunction with pranayama helps the practitioner to release the life force energy found in the spine. This helps him or her heal the body and purify the mind and emotions.

To achieve this, those in Kundalini Yoga move quickly from 1 pose to the next. There is repetition of the positions but no sustained holding of the asanas. A typical class in Kundalini Yoga involves the following methods or elements:

- Chanting of mantras
- Pranayama or breathing control
- Asanas or positions
- Meditation
- Hand and finger motions

MANTRA YOGA

Mantra Yoga is the Yoga of sacred or potent sound. In Mantra Yoga, the repetition of certain sounds helps achieve peace and increase concentration in meditation. A practitioner will chant mantras in a purposeful fashion to help them reach a specified goal. This is usually liberation. Common mantras are "OM," "hum," or "ram." OM is a universal mantra. There are also mantras you can select through a dream, by personal choice or with the help of a Guru. A Mantra may also be tantric or pouranic.

Repetition of a mantra is japa. As a result, Mantra Yoga may also be Japa Yoga. During the practice, the practitioner may chant the mantra aloud (baikhari), in whispers or a soft voice (upanshu) or inside the head (pouranic). All methods have their advantages and disadvantages. During the process, the individual usually

- Sits in an asana with a mala (string of 108 beads) in hand
- Recites the mantra
- Fingers the beads while doing so with middle finger and thumb only
- The beads do not need to be visible to others

- The practitioner may practice vinyasa – the fluid movements from asana to asana

Mantra Yoga intends to provide release of the negative thoughts by freeing the mind to explore these emotions. It also builds up a source of energy for channelling or rechanneling for the personal and collective good.

MOKSHA HOT YOGA

Moksha Hot Yoga draws upon the teachings of Bikram Choudhury. He espoused Hot Yoga or Bikram Yoga. Moksha Hot Yoga is a modification of this form of Yoga. It is the creation of Ted Grand and Jessica Robertson.

Moksha stands for enlightenment, liberation or even freedom. The intent of Moksha Hot Yoga is to liberate and strengthen certain tight and restricted parts of the body. These include the shoulders and neck, the knees, the hips and the lower back. It accomplishes this through executing various asanas in a heated room. At the same time, the poses combine with the heat to relax, detoxify and calm both mind and body.

The pattern of a session of Moksha Hot Yoga follows a specific sequence. This goes as follows:

- Savasana or corpse pose
- Intention setting – usually through a theme
- Standing series of postures
- Floor series of postures
- Savasana – final posture

Moksha Yoga is an environmentally conscious group. The studios try to be as earth-friendly or green as possible. Furthermore, Moksha Yoga has a social conscience. They provide Karma Classes. These allow those who do not have the funds attend a class at a cheaper rate. The money from these then goes to various charities.

POWER YOGA

Power Yoga is a variation of Astanga Yoga. The earlier adapters of Astanga Yoga into Power Yoga, Beryl Bender Birch and Bryan Key, had studied under Sri K. Pattabhi Jois. These men, along with Baron Baptiste, turned yoga into a fitness method.

Power Yoga is about power, strength and brawn. It is also about flexibility. It is an intense practice with no exact, cross-the-board procedure or method. Each teacher and studio follows his or her own course. Asanas

and pranayama remain integral to the study of Power Yoga. Nevertheless, in this adaptation, yoga becomes more calisthenics than a physical road to enlightenment. The pace is fast and furious without the pauses between each asana.

PURNA YOGA

Purna Yoga is the creation or development of Sri Aurobindo. He started the study of Purna or Integral Yoga in the 1900s. This form of Yoga relies on other schools or types, but its focus is on the seeking of the Divine. The physical is the tool through which the individual can reach this synthesis.

The word "Purna" means complete or whole. It utilizes the entire wealth of yoga knowledge to obtain a unity of the 3 parts of a human: body, mind and soul. It feels the need to reach an integration of these components – a synthesis of the various aspects to create a complete entity. Purna Yoga attempts to do so through using

- meditation – Purna-based
- pranayama
- asanas
- nutrition
- Yogic philosophy

The modern schools of Purna Yoga have adapted to modern lifestyles, yet base their teachings on traditional yoga systems. At the heart of the teachings is the writings of Sri Aurobindo. In addition, practitioners and schools call on the feminine aspect of the Divine – the Mother as well as the Vedics, the masters Patanjali and BKS Iyengar and various traditional and modern systems of nutrition. Purna Yoga also owes much to the modern founders, Aadil Palkhivala and Mirra.

RAJA-YOGA

Raja is the word for "king." Raja Yoga is a path often called the "Royal Road." This system of Astanga yoga utilizes the concept of the Eight Limbs. Its intent is to utilize this concept to achieve complete mental control. The emphasis, however, is not on the physical but on the spiritual. Its goal is for the practitioner to realize liberation through the practice of meditation. Meditation is of primary importance but in order to reach this goal, it is also essential to control the body, energy and the senses. Only through doing so can practitioners control the mind and connect with the "king" within. In finally freeing him or herself, the individual arrives at a harmony between him or herself and the environment.

RESTORATIVE YOGA

The name – Restorative Yoga, aptly describes the purpose of this form of yoga. The intention of this type of yoga is to totally relax the body and provide it the means through which it can restore its energy and life force. To accomplish this, the practitioner lies upon the floor of the yoga studio space. He or she uses a variety of props to abet total muscle relaxation. These include straps, blankets, mats, blocks and bolsters.

Restorative Yoga is therapeutic in nature. The execution of all poses is helped by the use of the yoga aids.

SIVANANDA YOGA

Sivananda Yoga is a traditional form of yoga. It bears similarities to Integral Yoga. The founder was Swami Vishnu-devananda. He opened the initial Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center in 1959. The purpose of this form of yoga is to help the body retain and maintain its health.

The practice consists of 12 different poses and focuses on 5 principles. The points consist of:

- Pranayama – breathing exercises
- Asanas – yoga postures
- Savasana – relaxation techniques
- Diet – vegetarian
- Vedanta and dyhana - meditation

SVAROOPA YOGA

Svaroopaa Yoga is the product of Rama Berch (Swami Nirmalananda). The name means “bliss of your own being.” This is a form of Hatha Yoga. Svaroopaa Yoga is designed to help all levels of practitioners, but is particularly suited to beginners. Its intent is to help promote healing of the body by releasing spinal tension. Movements work on starting release of stress through the tail bone then work slowly up the spine.

The intent of Svaroopaa Yoga is for the practitioner to listen to what the body actually needs. It helps the student to focus on the physical reality and through it to achieve the inner reality.

Props are often utilized in Svaroopaa Yoga. These include chairs. The practitioner may also use blocks and blankets to facilitate the poses. This

is to help the practitioner achieve svaroopaa through compassionate means.

TRADITIONAL THAI YOGA

Traditional Thai Yoga comprises 1 portion of Thai medicine. Other components are Thai Massage and Thai Herbal Medicine. It has its roots in the practices of Jivaka Kumarabhacca, a friend of Buddha. Another term for Traditional Thai Yoga is Ruesri Dat Ton – Hermit’s autocure.

The basis of Thai Traditional Yoga is the Sen Energy System. These 10 energy channels are responsible for the flow of sen (energy or life force). The use of yoga postures is to ensure the energy flows freely and in balance. Thai Yoga is all about establishing, restoring and/or maintaining a balance of the flow of energy in the Sen.

This is a preventative and therapeutic approach. Each posture combines with specific breathing techniques. This evokes and channels energy. It remains in the system to ensure the proper function and balance of the life force.

VINIYOGA

Viniyoga is a therapeutic form of yoga. It owes its existence to the studies of T.K.V. Desikachar and T. Krishnamacharya. It is gentle in its approach. Its intent is to address the health issues of those who have been injured or undergone surgery. This is a very individualized type of yoga. It tailors itself to meet the needs of each practitioner. It adapts to their health issues and physical condition, altering as they improve and advance along the path towards wellness.

In addition to those with actual physical injuries, there are others who prefer this form of yoga. Viniyoga is a favorite of seniors, beginners and people suffering from chronic pain. In some practices, Viniyoga refers to the use of yoga techniques to address the individual needs, interests and condition of any practitioner.

VINYASA YOGA

Vinyasa is a term referring to the fluid sequence of poses or postures. It is “breathe-synchronized movement.” Vinyasa Yoga focuses on this aspect of yoga. Its roots lie in the teachings of Krishnamacharya. He passed this form to Pattabhi Jois. As such, Vinyasa Yoga is a variation on Astanga/Ashtanga Yoga. Currently, the term refers to different types of yoga methods. Yet, the overall focus remains on the relationship between breath and movement.

Vinyasa Yoga is very physical and vigorous. In the practice, each posture has a specific breath. The teacher may shuffle the series of vinyasa. They are not constant in a set series as in Astangai Yoga. The teacher usually begins, however, with Sun Salutations. The most common are:

- Plank
- Chatunanga
- Upward Facing Dog

ZEN YOGA

There are various forms of Zen Yoga in existence. In 2002, Aaron Hoopes came up with his approach to what is a holistic practice. Zen Yoga combines Traditional Chinese Medicine with martial arts and certain yoga practices. Asanas and breathing techniques are all important in helping the practitioner relieve stress, maintain a healthy physical and mental character and aid the individual in moving towards a Zen concept of life.

The different types of Zen Yoga may include

- Taoist Yoga
- Hatha Yoga
- Qigong
- Shanti Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Zen meditation
- Stretching

CONCLUSION

Yoga provides individuals with a wide variety of choice. The selection caters to those who wish to tone their body, hone their mind or reach a synthesis of mind-body unification. There are different forms of yoga to reach out and stretch everyone. The most common and adopted form has been Hatha Yoga. It is to this that many modern types of yoga turn to for the basics. The next chapter will consider another type of basic – the bare essentials required to participate in yoga and yoga classes.

5

THE BARE ESSENTIALS: YOGA WEAR AND OTHER NECESSITIES

Yoga is like many sports, exercise systems and life itself. It requires certain types of clothing in order for you to enjoy an effective workout or session. As with other forms of recreational and lifestyle enthusiasms, an industry has grown up around it. It is now possible to obtain professional yoga wear. There are also specific yoga-aids or props. Below you will find a brief look at the different types of props and clothing available and suitable for the yoga practitioner.

APPAREL

Apparel falls into different categories. There are formal yoga wear commercially available and regular clothing. In essence, the division of clothing falls into 2: tops and pants. The clothing may differ in weight and bulk according to the type of yoga and its setting.

TOPS

Tops need to be loose enough to provide movement. They must be comfortable. Yet, the shirt should not be too loose or baggy. If it is fitted, the instructor can better view the alignment. Opt for a sleeveless T or top. This is particularly prudent if you are going to do any form of "Hot Yoga."

The most common and preferred material is cotton. Environmentally friendly materials top the list with most yoga instructors. Natural fibers such as cotton, linen or hemp are available commercially in many sports, department and specialty stores.

PANTS

Pants must be loose and never too tight. Avoid something that is too full at the knee or ankle. If you must, use elastic cuffs to contain the extra

material. Knee length pants e.g. capris, are ideal in some respects. They are not too long.

Avoid drawstrings if you are worried about them coming undone or getting in the way. Do not use fleece sweats – pants or shorts. Shorts may be a good choice but not if they ride up the buttocks and interfere with either the movement or your concentration.

PROPS

There are many different types of yoga props. Not every type of yoga practice requires its practitioners to use them, but several do. Among the most common are mats, straps and balls. A practitioner may also want to use a blanket, bolster or block. In some instances, the use of a chair is helpful.

MATS

Mats are the most common and recognizable type of yoga prop. They come in varied sizes and are constructed of different material. The most common types are

- **Foam**
These are simple, thin and inexpensive. Foam mats are durable, come in a wide variety of colors and stick easily to wooden floors. They are all-purpose in their usage and very simple to clean.
- **Natural Fiber**
These are mats of various thicknesses. They are of cotton or linen. They are environmentally friendly and often green. These types of mats absorb sweat easily. They have little to no odor. Unfortunately, some are slippery on wooden floors. This is a problem if you practice Bikram or Hot Yoga. Rectify the problem by using a non-slip mat beneath. Another problem is a tendency to stain easily.
- **Rubber**
These come in different thicknesses. They are easily wiped clean. They are available in different colors and are very durable. While more expensive than other types of mats, rubber mats grip the floor tightly providing a steady surface for your practice.

BLANKETS AND BOLSTERS

Besides mats, the practitioner may require blankets. These are often folded to place under the knees or used to support the head. A bolster can also act in this capacity. Both blankets and bolsters are used to provide

extra support. They help a practitioner ease into the various poses or increase the comfort level of beginners and those with injuries.

STRAPS

A yoga strap is a long cotton band. It is for use when the individual cannot reach a particular body part e.g. feet. A yoga strap or belt comes in a 6' length and is approximately 1.5" in width. This may or may not have a buckle. If you do not have or simply wish to try using a yoga strap, substitute a soft cloth strip or regular belt.

There are 2 other possible tools for some yoga practices: the ball and the chair

CHAIRS

A yoga chair should be sturdy. It must have a flat seat and strong back. It does not and should not have any arm rests. Chairs are for yoga that requires seated poses. It is also used in instances of people recovering from specific injuries or surgery and with limited mobility or flexibility.

BALLS

A Yoga Ball is utilized in a specific type of yoga. A yoga ball provides stability and helps improve various postures when practicing yoga. Yoga balls are also balance balls or exercise balls. They come in several sizes.

CONCLUSION

Yoga clothing and accessories come in many sizes and prices. They can be culled from an individual's wardrobe and home. They can also come from a department store, big box store or specialty shop. Depending upon the type of yoga and the instructor, an individual may or may not require props. Almost all practitioners will, however, need a yoga mat.

Mats, like the clothing, come in different materials and colors. They are expensive or inexpensive. Some are environmentally friendly; others are not. Your choice of clothing, mats and props will depend upon several factors. This will include your financial situation, your level of devotion, your form of yoga and your instructor. It will also rely on your own personal taste. With the amount of choices available on the market, you should easily be able to find clothing and accessories that are suitable to your needs and taste.

6

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT

YOGA BASICS

As we have seen above, there are many different types of yoga. Each places an emphasis on certain aspects of the practice. This could be the asanas, the breathing technique or the connecting flow in between. Yet, in spite of the differences, there are certain commonalities among the many and varied forms of yoga. Below you will find some yoga basics – what you need to know and understand before you take yoga.

ASANAS

The term asana literally means seat. In yoga, asanas are poses or postures. They are positions the practitioner places his or her body into to reach the goal of the practice. Asanas comprise the 3rd limb of the Astanga. Many may argue that yoga starts and ends with the asanas. They are essential elements of many types of yoga including Hatha Yoga and its offshoots.

Various asanas are practiced in yoga. Some include the Bharadvajasana (an asymmetrical twist), the Gomukhasana (Cow-face pose) and the Utthita Parsvakonasana (an abdomen muscle toner). There is also the Parivrtta Parsvakonasana or revolved side angle pose. Some basic asanas include the Dhanurasana or Bow, the Parvatasana (Mountain), the Jataro Parivartanasana or Crocodile for fat reduction and pelvis stretching Supta Virasana.

In many types of yoga, asanas combine with pranayama (breath). A common example of this is the Sun Salutation. This, as the name suggests is the greeting of the sun. It consists of a number of movements interconnected into a series and linked through the breathing techniques.

BHAKTI

Bhakti is love or devotion. It is the root of some forms of yoga, including Bhakti Yoga. Those who opt to focus on Bhakti are choosing to follow a religious path. It is a route with the aim of achieving union with the Absolute.

DYHANA

This is the term for meditation. It comprises the 7th limb of the Astanga. Dyhana is a form of mind control. It is a means of stopping and realizing through the meditative state all existence. IT is a step along the path towards Perfection

MANTRA

A Mantra is a sacred sound or word. It is repeated in yoga verbally or internally to achieve a meditative state. A Mantra is a tool to help the practitioner obtain spiritual transformation. The word, syllable or sound is usually simple and short. The best-known Mantra is OM. OM or Aum is also the most sacred of Mantras. Whatever the choice of Mantra, there must always be intent. A practitioner chants with willfulness.

MUDRA

A Mudra is a symbol. In yoga, this is a specific and symbolic hand gesture (hasta mudras). There are many different types of hand gestures. Traditionally, there are 24 mudras. Yoga may have an infinite number.

Hand Mudras are based on Hindi concepts of the flow of energy and the 5 elements. These are fire, air, ether, earth and water. Each digit on the hand represents an elemental force with the power to help conduct and direct the flow of energy. The thumb is fire, the forefinger air, the middle finger is ether, the ring finger is earth and the little finger or pinky is water.

NIYAMA

Niyama is the personal attitude of the practitioner. It is the 2nd limb of the Astanga. Traditionally, there are 10 Niyamas. Others state there are 5. These are personal codes for living your life. They involve

- Saucha or purity of the mind and body
- Samtosa or contentment with your lot or reality in life
- Tapas or balance and strength of being
- Svadhyana or self-examination
- Isvarapranidhana or the celebration of the Spiritual or the Divine

PRANAYAMA

Prana means life force or energy. Anayama means stretch, expand or regulate. Pranayama combines these 2 terms to indicate control of the breath. Pranayama is the 4th limb of Astanga. It is the control of breath or breathing. It usually works in close relationship with the practice of Asana. Pranayama techniques or methods vary according to the asana as well as the type of yoga a practitioner chooses to follow. There are 5 traditional breathing techniques:

- High Breathing
- Low Breathing
- Middle Breathing
- Complete or Total Breath

There are also different types of breath. These include

- Ujayyi or victorious breath – full-lung breathing
- Kapalabhti or breath of fire – a cleansing breath
- Nadi shodbana or alternate nostril breathing
- Sitali Pranayam or cooling breath

All forms of breath and techniques are to help the student achieve the goal within the specific form of yoga. Yogic breathing is an aid in both understanding how we breathe and helping us tap into the vital life force of breath. As is the case with much of yoga, breathing is and should be mindful

VINYASA

Vinyasa is the term used to describe the fluid movements from 1 asana to the next. It is the sequence of asanas. Vinyasa is breath-synchronized movement. The term may mean to place in a certain way. It is also mindful movement in most forms of yoga. Vinyasa can also refer to various movements that comprise a Sun Salutation Sequence. Vinyasa is part of Hatha Yoga. In Vinyasa Yoga, emphasis is on this particular aspect.

CONCLUSION

There are many things to learn in order to be able to understand yoga. The basic terminology can be confusing. The implementation of terms and their application may also vary within the different forms of yoga. There are, however, commonalities that bind the diverse types of yoga together. They provide a commonality that is stronger than the differences. Understanding this will help a beginner grasp the basics clearly before moving further along the path.

7

A FINAL TWIST: CONCLUSION

Yoga is a popular system in modern North America. It is extremely common in the United States. In the past several decades Yoga schools, teachers and classes have been busily popping up all across the country. There are several reasons for this.

The nature of Yoga is holistic or individualistic. It arrives and is shaped in many different forms. Yoga is a method or a vehicle used to explore any of many things. These range from the perfect body to inner peace, self-empowerment to union with the environment or the Divine. If you want to devote yourself to seeking the Sublime Divine, there is a yoga for you. If you want to work out to obtain inner calm – there is a yoga for you. In fact, there is possibly a yoga type designed to meet the needs of almost everyone.

Yoga may be traditional or classical such as Hatha Yoga. It may be exercise-oriented such as Power Yoga. Yoga may also involve its followers and practitioners in a search for their meaning in life, unity with the Divine or in activism. While Hatha Yoga provides the basic essence for many North American Yoga practices, there are inspirations from other Asian countries. Thai and Zen Yoga are but 2 of an ever widening approach to a singular process. Yet, in spite of the varied groups who urge individuals to practice yoga in accordance to their concepts and methods, yoga remains constant in its affinity to its origins. In it, the importance of the breath of life is paramount. It is only through breath that the energy of our life and the reality of our life is manifestly obvious.

Yoga utilizes breathing and all that it entails and symbolizes. Even when reduced to physical exercises, breath remains important and significant. When a practitioner combines the breathing techniques of pranayama with asana (movements, postures or even motions) and meditation, the result is complete. It is as individualistic or group encompassing as yoga, the practitioner and teacher permit. It is not surprising yoga remains popular and continues to build a strong basis. It mutates and adapts with the times while keeping its central truth at the core. There is no surprise here. In turning to yoga, some find the means to tone their body and strengthen their inner core; others find a way to reach an inner peace and uncover the true meaning of spiritual.