

The Fundamentals of Yoga

1041 Administrator Tue, Jun 9, 2020 [Yoga](#) 0 2200

Yoga works on the level of one's body, mind, emotion and energy. This has given rise to four broad classifications of Yoga: Karma Yoga where we utilize the body; Jnāna Yoga where we utilize the mind and intellect; Bhakti Yoga where we utilize the emotion and Kriya Yoga where we utilize the energy. Each system of Yoga we practice falls within the gamut of one or more of these categories.

Every individual is a unique combination of these four factors. Only a guru (teacher) can advocate the appropriate combination of the four fundamental paths as it is necessary for each seeker. All ancient commentaries on Yoga have stressed that it is essential to work under the direction of a guru.

Yogic Practices for Well-Being

The widely practiced Yoga sadhanas are: Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prānāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇa, Dhyāna, Samādhi, Bandhās and Mudras, Shatkarmas, Yuktāhāra, Mantra-japa, Yukta-karma etc.

Yama's are restraints and Niyama's are observances. These are considered to be pre-requisites for further Yoga practice. Āsanas, capable of bringing about stability of body and mind, "kuryattadasanam-sthairyam", involve adopting various psycho-physical body patterns and giving one an ability to maintain a body position (a stable awareness of one's structural existence) for a considerable length of time.

Prānāyāma consists of developing awareness of one's breathing followed by wilful regulation of respiration as the functional or vital basis of one's existence. It helps in developing awareness of one's mind and helps to establish control over the mind. In the initial stages, this is done by developing awareness of the "flow of in-breath and out-breath" (svāsaprasvāsa) through nostrils, mouth and other body openings, its internal and external pathways and destinations. Later, this phenomenon is modified, through regulated, controlled and monitored inhalation (svāsa) leading to the awareness of the body space getting filled (puraka), the space(s) remaining in a filled state (kumbhaka), and it getting emptied (rechaka) during regulated, controlled and monitored exhalation (prasvāsa).

Pratyāhāra indicates dissociation of one's consciousness (withdrawal) from the sense

organs which connect with the external objects. Dhāraṇa indicates broad based field of attention (inside the body and mind) which is usually understood as concentration. Dhyāna (meditation) is contemplation (focussed attention inside the body and mind) and Samādhi (integration).

Bandhas and Mudras are practices associated with Prāṇāyāma. They are viewed as the higher Yogic practices that mainly adopt certain physical gestures along with control over respiration. This further facilitates control over mind and paves the way for a higher Yogic attainment. However, practice of dhyāna, which moves one towards self-realisation and leads one to transcendence, is considered the essence of Yoga Sādhana.

Śatkarmas are detoxification procedures that are clinical in nature and help to remove the toxins accumulated in the body. Yuktāhāra advocates appropriate food and food habits for healthy living.

Yuktahara (Right Food and other inputs) advocates appropriate food and food habits for healthy living. However practice of Dhyana (Meditation) helping in self-realization leading to transcendence is considered as the essence of Yoga Sadhana. However, 'a judicious combination of practice of asana, pranayama and dhyana daily, keep individuals healthy and disease free'.

The knowledge aspect of Yoga Sadhana is being extensively researched, with advantage to Yoga practitioners. Psychological, Anatomico-physiological, Bio-chemical and philosophical phenomena underlying Yoga Sadhana have been commendably understood by us today. It is a matter of satisfaction for the entire humanity. So also, elaborate and effective means of its transmission, such as internet across the globe, is a great stride for propagation of yogic knowledge. Teaching methodology in Yoga has also ingrained modern educational methodological rigours into it. There is also a worldwide growth of teaching schools of Yoga across the globe. An earnest scientific and philosophicoliterary research has also caught up globally and is yet another encouraging sign of evolution of Yoga further.

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