



Easing Your Stress With Yoga

**take a deep breath
and relieve your tension**

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Chapter 1: What Is Yoga?

Time and again we hear the word yoga. Often people think it is some sort of exercise with funny poses, right? The left leg stretches upwards and the hand goes behind the body to hold the leg, no? But yoga is not just about stretching, maintaining a posture, breathing or even merely a form of exercise. It is much more than just that. It is a spiritual practice but not a religious one that helps you to maintain a fine balance between work and a healthy mind!

Not to worry, you are not the only one who doubts this! Many people have questioned how something like this could help them to maintain a balance between work and a healthy mind or even establish a healthy, lively and balanced approach to life. And to understand this better and to know how yoga actually works, you need to get a better understanding of what yoga is all about.

Yoga originates from the language Sanskrit and it means “union” or “merger”. And the essential purpose of it is to achieve a stable balance between the mind and the body and to also to achieve self-enlightenment. And to accomplish this, yoga applies movement, breathing, pose, relief and meditation as various means of maintaining a healthy, lively and balanced approach to life.

Yoga is believed to be a physical exercise that is the oldest still being practiced. Thus, yoga signifies stability in every area of life. In earlier times, the logic behind yoga practice was to achieve constancy and relaxation so one could get ready for the severity of meditation - that is, to stay sat still and remain alert for a long period of time. From today's perspective too, yoga has a crucial role in achieving a fine equilibrium between work and a healthy mind.

Even though yoga is a systemic philosophical approach, yoga is not a religion, being more about attaining a spiritual balance than any code of beliefs.

And yoga is not solely about staring at candles and breathing incense or for flexible young people just to lie around relaxing either. Anyone, irrespective of body type, age, experience or physical abilities can practice yoga.

Chapter 2: History Of Yoga

The adage, "What's in the past should stay in the past" does not really work here. You might have a vague perception of what yoga is, but to appreciate it better, you have to know where it all started and what it has become today. A peek into the history of yoga will make it easier for you to understand and recognize the values of its rich tradition and maybe this will help you integrate yoga into your daily life.

At present, lots of people take up yoga for some sort of body exercise and lots of them do not even know the past of yoga. Yoga is defined to be more than a technique of body exercise for health. Yoga is an ancient route to spiritual growth and started in India. This is where Induism is practiced. You should not mistake Induism for Hinduism. The traditions and purpose of yoga date back to the Upanishads. Upanishads were written in 1000-5000 BC.

The Upanishads are the most fundamental and most significant Hindu scriptures. Each and every orthodox schools of Hinduism establishes their principles on the facts found in the Upanishads. Though there is a relationship between yoga and the Upanishads, yoga is not specifically related to Hindusim and the connection to Induism (which is not a religion) exists merely because the history of yoga is originated in the civilization of the Indus Valley.

Yoga methods were and are applied by the Indus to encourage spiritual growth. They promote the coming together of the transitory self with the unbounded unending self. This phrase defines God by the Hindus. By and large, yogis believe that God is a formal and divine substance. This principle is known as the Pantheism, which considers that every single thing is God.

Since the yogis consider everything to be God, therefore it is also believed that man is God.

Yoga's outlook towards a man's problem is essentially with regards to lack of knowledge. Man just does not recognize that man is God. Therefore, the key is explanation, or to undergo a coming together or merger with God. For you to achieve that objective, you have to have lots of strength of mind.

Can the approach that is utilized in the yoga methods be distinctive from the beliefs? The explanation to this question would typically be "no" since yoga is regarded as a system of a psychosomatic type of workout, so these two cannot be separated.

It is believed that for you to perform yoga to the fullest, and get the maximum benefits, you must feel and go through the effect of

“kundalini” within meditation. This indicates that for you to comprehend the sacred teachings and for it to be sensed by your soul within you, the various chakras or locations within one’s body where a loop of biophysical or metaphysical force exists should come concurrently in the course. Kundalini arouses the center of the chakra to unlock and discharge the force that is apprehended within. If this is not done correctly, some devotees consider that you can damage their brain!

By knowing the past of yoga, you will quickly learn that yoga is, essentially, about caring for your soul and spirit, as Yoga trains you to concentrate on yourself and your own failings.

Chapter 3: Why Do Yoga?

We do various different forms of exercises to meet different needs. We do weight training to acquire strength. We go for jogging or perform aerobics to get a cardiovascular workout. We perform tai-chi to improve our sense of stability and harmonization. We do stretching to achieve suppleness. For peace of mind and relaxation, we meditate.

At some point, you may therefore have wondered if there is one single type of training that would meet all your different needs. One that will give you a full and complete workout that does everything from helping you to achieve strength to gaining endurance, improving balance, gaining flexibility and one that finally also helps you to relax. There definitely exists one such complete and perfect form of exercise that helps achieve everything! What else, but yoga?!

Yoga is without a doubt more than mere stretch outs and relaxing. It is the definitive mind and body test and a superb means of achieving body and mind alertness.

A typical session of yoga will make you feel a sense of pure energy and relaxation. You get to work on your physique and align your bones correctly, as well as learning to breathe deeply, thus providing adequate oxygen for your lungs, blood and brain.

You will also experience relaxation in its purest and most profound form, because by making your body aware and working on the muscles, you will be able to relax more easily than other forms of exercises might allow.

Thus, the main reason why you feel really good and totally relaxed after a proper yoga session compared to either a cardiovascular workout or weight training (or for that matter any other form of exercise) is because you are getting to develop self-awareness and also appreciate your own body.

Chapter 4: Who Should Do Yoga?

In short the answer to this question would be anyone and everyone!

Irrespective of whether you have never done any physical exercise or whether you are a world class athlete, you can still gain huge benefits from yoga.

So, do not fret even if you have never lifted your finger to carry a pen, yoga will do you good and will gradually become as comfortable as it would be to someone who jogs an hour a day or works out daily.

Plus, the mental acuity and alertness that comes with yoga will lead you to enjoy a remarkable growth, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well.

As the age old saying goes, "practice makes perfect", but for you to become skillful and competent in yoga demands effort, determination and practice. However, as another saying has it, you reap what you sow.

Therefore, you must put in enough effort to achieve the full satisfaction that you are looking for. If you are looking for a quick fix, you cannot hope to achieve full satisfaction and fulfillment in yoga.

Alternatively, if you want to maintain or regain your health, energy and strength or simply want to feel younger, stronger and more energized, then yoga is exactly what you are looking for.

Also, if you are looking for a perfectly balanced and complete form of exercise that can be practiced by anyone and everyone, in any condition or state and you are ready to accept fresh new challenges as you progress, then again, yoga is your perfect choice!

Chapter 5: The Aims Of Yoga

Some have said that the fundamental intention of yoga is to attain emancipation or the ultimate freedom that is known as the "Kaivalya".

Basically, this equates to an understanding of your innermost being or soul.

Subsequently, you would be free from the chains of cause and effect, which is the Karma that binds you to continual reincarnation.

It is said that in Kaivalya, you exist in peace and harmony after achieving complete wisdom and understanding of the difference between the spiritual (which is eternal, static and free of sorrows) and the material, which is not.

It is therefore suggested that this must be attractive as life is generally seen as something that is filled with sorrow and pain. Even happiness and bliss leaves pain and loss when they are gone, since nothing is considered permanent in the material world.

As a result of this non-material focus, yoga is believed to be a spiritual pursuit.

Nevertheless, along the path of yoga you can also achieve health, contentment, harmony and wisdom which will stimulate your spiritual growth and support your efforts to apply everything that you learn along the way.

Chapter 6: Types Of Yoga

There are many different forms of yoga that are practiced.

The best known and most widely accepted formats are:

- Bhakti Yoga;
- Hatha Yoga;
- Jnana Yoga;
- Karma Yoga;
- Kundalini Yoga;
- Mantra Yoga;
- Purna Yoga;
- Raja Yoga.

Each of these individual formats of yoga serve a different purpose and some types are more popular than the others. Each type of yoga has its' own distinctive qualities.

In general, Bhakti Yoga highlights love and devotion, whilst Hatha Yoga is a simple and uncomplicated style and is very popular in many Western countries. The practice of Jnana Yoga shows you to use your mind in a way which you do not use it. Karma Yoga emphasizes selfless action and service. Kundalini Yoga utilizes sexual experience as a channel to enlightenment and wisdom. For Mantra Yoga, one has to chant a word or a phrase until one surpasses mind and emotions. Purna Yoga accentuates the significance of Karma in our day to day life, and finally, Raja Yoga offers explanation for complete and holistic healing.

Bhakti Yoga

In the practice of Bhakti Yoga, love and devotion are emphasized. However, several forms of Bhakti Yoga do not preach the traditional method of yoga as they place more importance on the love of God, the love of God in man and submitting to God's will. Basically, some people are naturally prone by their nature and character to be devotional and to love God, but Bhakti Yoga recommends that you should maintain a balance. Possibly, we all apply Bhakti Yoga in our day to day life, as, for example, its application can be found in your day-to-day contact with other people.

There is no fixed or predetermined method of performing or applying Bhakti Yoga. It varies from individual to individual.

Some people might seek external assistance to support their prayer and meditation. This external assistance may consist of pictures of saints or messengers of God, the chanting of mantras or the singing of hymns.

No matter what you do, if it works for you in the long run, it is absolutely and perfectly acceptable, albeit the same method may not work for or interest another person. There are a large number of people who choose singing the names of God or singing hymns to raise awareness and charge the surroundings with absolute energy. For those who have difficulty in focusing during meditation, prayer and chanting are likely to be of great benefit.

Hatha Yoga

Hatha Yoga is a simple type of Yoga and is again very popular and well-established in the West. This form of yoga is said to be the core of all yoga techniques.

The word Hatha is made of two words, "Ha" and "Tha", which mean "sun" and "moon" respectively. Hence, the idea of Hatha Yoga lies in its reference to the positive current which it is believed comes from the sun and the negative currents that come from the moon.

The most appropriate way to practice Hatha Yoga is to start with a relaxed and meditative frame of mind. You should sit in silence for a few moments and relax.

From then on you can start with the Hatha Yoga practice, gradually at first with both restraint and poise. While performing this form of yoga, you must bear in mind that you should not bite off more than you can chew. Remember that this is not a competition or a battle. However, done correctly, Hatha Yoga is a comprehensive and total fitness program that releases endorphins in the brain just like any other exercise program.

Hatha Yoga is the physical exercise aspect of yoga practice, and places emphasis on what are known as asanas, pranayama and dhyana, which are all different aspects of meditation.

Yoga targets harmonizing different energy flows within the human body and almost half of the 200 or so Hatha Yoga asanas (postures) are popular in the West. These postures vary from the simple and easy ones to some very complicated and demanding ones. Each and every step in yoga is carefully considered and, as a result, every step should also be invigorating and healthy for both the mind and the body. Hatha Yoga movements are aimed at relaxing tense muscles, as well as tuning up the internal organs and improving the body's flexibility and suppleness. 'Perfect' yoga practice will help develop flexibility and strength of the body, so that when this is done together with proper

breathing techniques, Hatha yoga postures encourage all internal bodily systems to be more efficient and effective at doing their job.

Jnana Yoga

Another common type of yoga is called Jnana Yoga, which shows you how to use your mind in ways that you would not normally do. Thus, the objective of Jnana Yoga is to work until you discover wisdom, and then to achieve liberation through that wisdom without any rituals or ceremonies. Wisdom comes through Jnana Yoga by means of appreciating and recognizing the intrinsic value of judgment and experience in life.

Not everyone has or can attain wisdom. Wisdom is only for certain individuals who are able to understand and judge the nature of Consciousness. An individual who decides to set out on the path of knowledge and wisdom through Jnana Yoga will acquire and work with information acquired over thousands of years. But, the individual can only observe and filter this wisdom in the light of their own intelligence and it is only in this way that realization can become a reality. So, it is only after experiencing the demanding course of action that is an intrinsic part of this form of yoga that the wisdom seeker acquires insight and complete awareness.

Karma Yoga

Karma Yoga accentuates selfless action and service, as the primary idea is simply that humans must always work in harmony with the great power that controls and runs the universe. And if you follows this principle appropriately, then the idea is that you would no longer be egotistically motivated.

Nor should you retain obsessive and compulsive desires and wishes with regard to the future, because it is only through the eradication of these desires that you can learn to survive the present-day whilst beginning to plan and prepare for the future in a proper fashion.

Karma Yoga shows you that that every rational and reasonable desire bears within it the motivational strength to make it happen, which means even as you are doing different things, you are not likely to lose sight of your ultimate objective. Such Yogic thinking is not in contradiction to considered intelligent planning ether, as it only focuses on surrendering and giving up egotistic desires and wishes. As you work with a cheerful approach on those things that you are best at, you will find a harmony and an inner peace which can never be known to those who strive and struggle with tasks that they do not enjoy.

Kundalini Yoga

Many believe that the thinking behind Kundalini Yoga technique runs contrary to the beliefs of many of the major religions, because most of these religious beliefs are founded on the sacred nature of celibacy as a way of achieving spiritual growth. It is essentially because of this quasi-religious outlook that the belief that pre-marital sexual attachment is harmful to the development of true self has come into being. Kundalini Yoga, however, suggest that sexuality can be a very positive influential force that should be channeled for improved self-awareness and realization. As a consequence, Kundalini Yogic thinking encompasses not only sexual feelings, thoughts and contact, but also utilizes sexual understanding and experience as a method of attaining enlightenment and wisdom.

As essential part of Kundalini Yoga is what is known as the 'Tantra' method that suggests that the vast energy that is trapped in sexuality is released from the lower end of the spine, from where it can flow up the spinal column to carry divine and blissful enlightenment to the brain. According to these principles, Kundalini energy flows in the interior of spine, together with an energy outlet called shushumna. The Kundalini force is considered to be the most dominant of all supernatural and mystic energies.

Subsequently, by discovering their complete self by calming bodily tensions, quieting mental 'chaos' and overcoming energy blockages, an individual is all set to unite with a partner that has the same energy intensity. Then, by working together, they will develop a "whole". In order for anyone to achieve this, the partners must attain a highly developed consciousness of one another within their being.

In Maithuna, sometimes known as Tantric lovemaking, the partners attempt to experience a diversity of meditation before making a physical connection. It is of extreme significance that all the way through the lovemaking process the partners must sustain this spiritual connection. It is fascinating to understand that in the Tantric Yoga, the partners do not aspire to reach an orgasm, nor do they try not to have any orgasm at all. So the methodology of maithuna is not intended to bring sexual liberation as a conclusion, but rather views sex as a means of expression by which the development of the self may go ever further.

Mantra Yoga

Mantras are words, phrases, or syllables which are chanted or recited thoughtfully but repeatedly to achieve a specific objective. In Mantra Yoga meditation, you have to chant a word or a phrase until you have gone beyond your conscious mind and emotions. This causes the super conscious to be revealed and attained. The sequence of mantras will

eventually merge and force the mind safely back to the point of meditation, where the advanced awareness or the exact spiritual focal point will become recognized.

Different syllables, phrases, expressions and words possess distinctive healing and curing properties. That is why these syllables, phrases or words are chanted or recited at a particular time. As an instrument to realize tranquility, the mantra is to be stopped at the instant that the required calmness is attained. Every now and then, these mantras are also used to transform situations. In chanting or reciting these mantras, it is of immeasurable significance that they are pronounced, chanted or recited accurately or else the entire projected outcome would not be as anticipated. For such an objective to be achieved, it is imperative that the appropriate pronunciation is used.

Purna Yoga

Purna or integral yoga is an improvised form developed from the traditional yoga techniques of India. The traditional yoga system was considered to revolve more around salvation and the next life than the present one. Purna yoga however puts emphasis on the significance of Karma in your daily life and is therefore an optimistic and vigorous yogic form. This yoga also has three stages of integration, those being the integration of the inner, the integration of the human psyche with its external surroundings and the integration of the psyche with its eventual spiritual background.

According to this form of yoga, the crucial purpose of life is absolute self-integration. This self-integration includes other key fundamentals like action, love, knowledge and peace. Purna Yoga supports the idea first suggested by the Bhakti form that love is the primary human accomplishment and an important factor in salvation. Purna Yoga does not detach love from knowledge and selfless action. Love in its divine fundamental nature is an aspect of knowledge. Purna Yoga suggests that wisdom is indivisible from love and action, but that any particular action is not in itself a method of self-purifying in order to find salvation.

Raja Yoga

Raja Yoga is the 'catch-all' branch of yoga. It is like a universal answer and solution that enables absolute and holistic healing. It demonstrates the positive powers of both healing and calming all aspects of life for all human beings. It harmonizes the physiological approach so that it becomes a whole, and represents a genuinely 'whole-being' holistic type of yoga, as it cures the basic problems and ailments of the whole person. Raja Yoga assists an individual to ease emotional and mental

differences and helps bring about long-term peace and fulfillment in anyone's life.

All of these qualities make Raja Yoga a way of living.

If an individual is not fit from inside, they cannot be said to be absolutely healthy individual, and so, Raja Yoga cures a person from within. Every part of human beings and all of their systems become changed or transformed through the benefits of Raja Yoga, as it not only changes the body but also the brain, which then serves to harmonize the individual.

This being a self starting method, Raja Yoga assists by 'kick-starting' health encouraging physiological and biochemical developments in the body. It is also worthy of note that during the course of performing this form of yoga, an individual draws closer into harmony and synchronization with other human beings and surroundings.

Raja Yoga enables an individual to accomplish and attain achievements and meet their responsibilities in a balanced, steady and progressive way.

Chapter 7: Eight Limbs Of Yoga

Maharishi Patanjali decreed in the Yoga Sutras that yoga has Eight Limbs, and that each of these limbs was just one of a progressive sequence of steps or disciplines which cleanse the body and the mind and eventually lead anyone who practices yoga to enlightenment. While the physical aspect of yoga is without doubt of significance, it is only one of the eight typical aspects of yoga practice, all of which have meditation of God as their *raison d'être*:

Asanas

"Asana" can be defined as staying or abiding. Through the asanas an individual can attain the harmony of body and the mind. In the West, asana is generally called "posture" or "pose". The asanas in yoga have been developed to determine ease and persistence during meditation and pranayama. The standard posture for meditation is where an individual is seated in an upright posture.

While an individual adopts a posture or pose, there is a matching mental balance between movement and stillness. Each posture also indicates a mental approach. Through the action and practice of these various asanas, one can learn to cope with complicated and demanding conditions. This happens because the individual is in a much improved position to know their body. It has been mentioned before that the biggest advantage of asana is that it assists us to get used to different conditions and be able to cope with different demands.

Another vital area of asana is that it brings peace and relieves the mind of all worries and reservations. This 'silencing' of your mind also encourages and supports the balancing of your mental purposes and objectives. Indeed, this calming and comforting outcome of asanas on the brain has been scientifically proven by EEG data taken from people performing meditation. This also indicates that asanas have immense healing properties, and the practice of asana and the pranayama can certainly help bring on a much improved state of health, and helps to control your breathing too.

Dharana

Literally, the word "Dharana" means fixed attentiveness of mind. The key notion that brings about dharana is the awareness or focus of concentration on one thing or object. Dharana is the particular type of meditation that is also known as receptive concentration. By using it, the idea is that you can create a set of conditions wherein the mind concentrates on just one object, rather than trying to focus on many different things.

Dharana's objective is to fix the mind by concentrating on some stable and constant entity. Even though it is easy to say it than to do it, nevertheless, after beginning with little steps you will be able to attain the desired outcome. A good way to start off this practice would be to roll one's eyes up and then down, before starting to focus on only one thing. The objects that are chosen to practice dharana have no connection with the meditation aspect of it, as the whole idea is only to prevent the mind from drifting through memories, dreams or philosophical thoughts.

The mind is then able to focus better on one subject after the mind goes through purification by practicing yoga. When you reach such a point, then you have the ability to enjoy a great possibility for internal curing. If, for example, you choose to concentrate on the chakra of your flow from internal force, then you can at once discover all of your bodily and psychological shortcomings and differences that remain in your bodily system. This capability and power to focus depends on tremendous psychological fitness and adaptation and is not intended to be an escape from realism, but rather represents progress toward awareness of its true quality.

Dhyana

Dhyana can be defined as worship, or philosophical and conceptual religious meditation. This is a perfect thought and includes concentration upon a point of focus with the objective of knowing the truth about it. While performing dhyana, the awareness is further heightened by the ability to gain clear insights into the dissimilarity between objects and the delicate layers of veils that encircle perception.

Whilst in a state of dhyana you will gradually start to distinguish between your own mind, your channel of awareness, and the objects perceived, between words, their definition, notions and between all the stages of nature's growth. You must become capable of perceiving both subject and object in order to distinguish their connection, and to establish a clear understanding of the intrinsic difference between the two.

Niyama

In Sanskrit language, Niyama means rules or laws, and refers in particular to rules for governing how you live your life, so niyama symbolizes far more than just an outlook. They are primarily concerned with the approach take to ourselves.

Basically, there are a few forms of niyamas. The first one is referred to as sauca, which is cleanliness. Sauca has an inner as well as an outer feature. External cleanliness can be defined as keeping ourselves clean.

And, as much as internal purity deals with the healthy and free functioning of our bodily organs, it also deals with transparency of our mind. In order to attend to the inner *sauca*, it is essential for one to practice *asanas* or *pranayama*.

Another *niyama* is *samtosa*, which is humility and the feeling of being satisfied with what you have. The word *samtosa* literally means happiness. On some occasions we strive to achieve something, and maybe we get very frustrated when we don't get what we want. Some will get very depressed or 'down' as a result of this, and some may even contemplate suicide if the situation is important enough. This occurs because the person concerned does not have the inner ability to be satisfied with what they have. Rather than doing this, however, you should acknowledge and understand that there is an objective for everything, which is called *karma* in yoga.

The actual definition of *samtosa* is 'to acknowledge what happens', with the basic underlying idea being that God has a plan, and so you should acknowledge what God has given you with modesty and contentment. Be content with what you have rather than being miserable about what you do not. Instead of getting angry about things that do not work, you should accept what has taken place and gain knowledge from it. *Samtosa* includes our mental actions, physical efforts and even the way we earn our living. It is all about ourselves, what we possess and how we feel about what God has given us. It deals with our attitude to life.

Another form would be *tapas* which refers to the concept of maintaining a healthy body or dealing with inner yearnings without any unnecessary external display. The literal definition is to warm up the body and by so doing, to cleanse or purify it. The idea behind *tapas* is that we can get rid of the rubbish in our body by using *asanas* and *pranayama*.

Another form of *tapas* is to pay attention to what you eat. For example, eating when you are not hungry would be contrary to *tapas*. Concentration on body posture, eating habits, and even breathing patterns are all forms of *tapas* that help to prevent the build-up of rubbish in the body, including excess weight and difficulty in breathing. *Tapas* makes the entire body healthy and fully functional. It also provides you with the right discipline to improve your diet and stops you from getting high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart disease.

One more form of *niyama* is called *svadhyaya*. The meaning of *Sva* is something akin to "mine", "self" or "belonging to me", whilst *adhyaya* is generally said to refer to "inquiry", "question" or "examination". Therefore, literally the word *Svadhyaya* means, "to get close to something." It refers to getting close to yourself and then analyzing

what it is that makes you 'tick'. It could refer to meditation or thought as well. It teaches you to be centered, focused and non-reactive to your troubles so that you get rid of unnecessary and damaging ideas

Anything that helps you to learn more about yourself is known as svadhyaya. From the perspective of the niyama, the term svadhyaya is frequently interpreted as "the study of ancient texts" because yoga can train you to read the ancient texts since you cannot just spend your whole life imagining things. You must have a point of reference, and since mantras are often chanted for this purpose, you will also find that svadhyaya is translated as "the repetition of mantras."

Finally, another form of niyama is called Isvarapranidhana which means "to lay all your actions at the feet of God". It is all about realizing that everything happens for a reason, and that you must accept the fact that you will not forever get all that you want. At times you may get disillusioned, as things do go wrong and not everything happens as you want. This is the reason why samtosa or modesty is essential, because if you have done the best you could, you should leave the rest to the supreme power.

Pranayama

Pranayama refers to the assessment, control and direction of your breath. Pranayama powers the energy within you to restore and maintain health and to encourage growth. Pranayama helps you to control the breathing processes and thus your control of your vital energy. When the inflowing breath counteracts or unites with the outflowing breath, then absolute relaxation and harmonious body activities balance are achieved. In yoga, we are concerned with harmonizing the flows of vital energy and then guiding them inward to the chakra system and upward to the crown chakra.

Thus, these breathing techniques are absolutely essential in yoga. It works together with the postures, which means pranayama goes hand in hand with asana. The practices of pranayama and asana are thought to be the greatest form of cleansing and self discipline for the mind and the body, in that order. The exercise generates the real physical feeling of heat, which is called tapas, or the inner fire of purification. The heat is considered to be an essential element of the course of purifying the delicate nerve paths of your body, which enables you to maintain a healthier and fitter condition and allows your mind to keep on being calmer and more peaceful.

Pratyahara

Pratyahara which means drawing back or retreating. The word ahara defines "nourishment" and the translation of pratyahara is "to retreat oneself from that which nourishes the senses." And in yoga, this refers to how your senses must withdraw from connection to external objects. This can be further explained as stopping your senses living off the things that excite, so that your senses do not depend on these stimulants any longer and are not fed by them.

For example, when you see a full moon, your eyes are attracted to it first and then the eyes send a message to the brain. Next, the brain 'computer' will absorb the data sent by the eyes and form the picture of the glowing full moon. This is how our senses work. But then, there is also the likelihood that the most stunning glowing full moon on a beautiful night might not attract your attention at all, and thus not connect to your senses. This is because we are all usually deeply engrossed in something else. You could be focusing on something without even being aware of what is going around you, because your senses usually inform your mind: "Look at that! Smell this! Touch this!" The senses record an object and then your mind is attracted to it at once.

In this 'limb', you detach this connection between mind and senses. Then, the senses withdraw.

Each and every sense perception has a certain characteristic to which it associates. The eyes associate to the form of something. The ears relate to the sound and the vibration that it makes. The nose relates to its smell. Things seem to be spread out with all their appeal before your senses in pratyahara.

But they are disregarded and the senses continue to be indifferent and uninfluenced, so that your brain, in effect, chooses to ignore whatever is otherwise established by the various bodily sensory organs and will merely acknowledge and then deal with the signals sent by those organs. Therefore, we have control over our senses rather than being controlled by the senses.

For instance, when you allow yourself to become absolutely engrossed in your breathing during the course of pranayama, then pratyahara takes place quite naturally. Your mind is so deeply engaged with breathing that all connections between mind, senses and external objects that have nothing to do with your breath are disregarded. For that reason, pratyahara is not a state of sleep, as the senses are still capable of reacting, but they do not do so because they have retreated or withdrawn.

Samadhi

The next limb that we take a look at is called samadhi, which is the final level of the limbs of yoga. When you finally manage to become so engrossed in something that your mind becomes absolutely one with it, then you have reached the state which is called samadhi. Samadhi can be defined as "to bring together or to merge." In samadhi, your personal identity - name, profession, family history, driver's license number, bank balance, all cease to exist entirely. During samadhi, none of that is present anymore.

While samadhi takes place, you become conscious of what it is to be a being without meaning and how an enlightened soul can get pleasure from this revelation. The conscious mind delves back into that unconscious state from which it first came, and so, this final level concludes at the very moment the soul is liberated. This complete and limitless liberation of the unbodyed soul is the most complete state of yogic relaxation, and, once the soul is liberated, it does not go back to bodily bondage.

As a result of this, samadhi refers to the fact that the division of viewer and viewed, like the polarization of opposites, does not matter anymore, and your mind will no longer differentiate between self and non-self or for that matter between the object that is meditated and the process of meditation. There are numerous phases of Samadhi, and it all depends upon whether you still recognize and are of the object being viewed, or whether you have gone beyond the object of contemplation and are wrapped up in the very experience of being.

Pratyahara, dhahrana, dhyana and samadhi are not things that you can train for or practice. You cannot make a decision to sit down and then say, "I am going to practice dhyana now."

What you can do is to generate the right setting to help bring about a state that is desired for dhyana, for instance. For example, you can practice asanas and even pranayama and produce a situation that will help your mind to enter the desired state. But in order for you to undergo for example dhyana, your mind must first be both calm and peaceful.

If the mind is too active in countering external stimuli, it cannot enter into your desired state, and trying to force the state to occur can get you into difficulty. Therefore, it is suggested that asanas and pranayama are practiced for you to prepare yourself to enter the state of dhyana. This is so because this influences mental actions and generates a 'space' in the congested place that is your mind. But, once one state takes place, the others will follow, so, for example, once dhahrana occurs, dhyana will eventually take place too.

Yama

Yama has different meanings in different situations. It could mean "curb, bridle, leash, discipline or restraints." In the present-day perspective, it is utilized to define "self-control, tolerance, or any great rule or duty". It can also be construed as "attitude" or "behavior". Undoubtedly, a certain attitude can be expressed as discipline, which then has an impact on your conduct. There are five different yama, which are considered as behavior patterns or associations between the individual and the outside world:

- The first yama is called ahimsa. Translated literally, this word means not demonstrate cruelty to any person, animal or creature and not to harm or injure them in any way or manner at all. Ahimsa is more than just the general lack of violence that is most commonly associated with yoga. It signifies kindness, friendliness and considerate reflection of other people and things. It also refers to our duties and responsibilities as well. It might even suggest that a person should fight if their life is in peril. Ahimsa implies that in each and every condition, you should assume a well thought-out attitude and position.
- The second yama is satya, which means "to speak the truth." In spite of that, it is not about always telling the truth in all situations as it could hurt someone unreasonably. You therefore have to take into account what you say, how you say it and in what manner it could have an effect on others. If communicating the truth has damaging consequences for someone, then it is better to remain silent. Satya should never come into disagreement with your efforts to conduct yourself in accordance with ahimsa.

Even in the great Indian epic 'The Mahabharata' it says: "Speak the truth which is pleasant. Do not speak unpleasant truths. Do not lie, even if the lies are pleasing to the ear. That is the eternal law, the dharma." However, it does not advocate you to tell lies, as maintaining a dignified silence and telling lies are two different things.

- The third yama is known as asteya. Asteya can be defined as "to steal." Asteya however, actually means the opposite, which is to take nothing that does not belong to you. This also means that if you are in a situation where someone assigns something to you or confides in you that you should not take advantage of that individual. You must abstain from taking something that does not belong to you because of karma.

- The fourth yama is known as the brahmacharya, which is advancement towards the indispensable truth. It is often utilized in the sense of self-restraint, specifically in relationship to sexual activity. Brahmacharya proposes that you should form connections that cultivate your personal awareness of the greatest truths. If physical contentment is part of those connections, you must make certain that you keep your direction and do not get lost.

Avoid people and relationships that cause you to diverge from discovering the eternal truths. Understand that during the course of the inevitable search for what is true, that there exist specific ways of keeping both your perceptual senses and your sexual desires under control. Brahmacharya does not essentially imply celibacy, but it does mean adopting sensible behavior and showing respect for your objective of moving towards the truth.

- The last yama is known as aparigraha. This word is translated as "not taking an opportunity" adopting a "hands off" position. Aparigraha is to take only what is required and not to take advantage of a situation or to act greedily. You should only take what you have earned, because if you take more, it means that someone else has been exploited. In addition to this, unearned and undeserved rewards can bring with them commitments that might cause you problems later on.

The yoga sutra has described what happens when all these five behaviors that have been mentioned above become part and parcel of an individual's daily life.

For instance, if you become sympathetic and selfless, your presence will generate satisfying and friendly feelings in people all around you. And if you continue to be true to the notion of satya, everything that you say will be truthful. You will also become reliable. For instance, in India, your word is generally regarded as your biggest asset. The sutras also mention that an individual who is steadily attached to the notion of asteya will obtain all the jewels of this world. Such a person may not be attracted to material wealth, but that particular individual will be able to enjoy the finest things in life.

The more you acknowledge and attempt to uncover the meaning of the fundamental truth, the less likely it is that you will be sidetracked by other things. Whilst it definitely calls for great strength to walk this path, the sutras also teach that the more faith you have, then the more energy you will have too.

And at the same time you will also have more strength to seek out and follow your goals and objectives. So the more you pursue the truth in the sense of brahmacharya, the more energy you will have to do so.

Parigraha refers to the desire for materialistic things towards material things and so, if you cut down parigraha and increases aparigraha, you are orienting yourself more inwardly and spiritually. The less time you spend on material belongings, the more you have available to spend on exploring yoga, and you will discover that it is possible to derive great pleasure from what you already have rather than persistently pursuing things you do not possess and never being satisfied in life. It is a scientific reality that the more money and material possessions one has the more stressful and tense you are likely to become.

Chapter 8: Paths Of Yoga

According to one of the holiest scriptures of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita, there are four main paths by which you can accomplish the crucial aim of yoga, which is called "Kaivalya."

There is the path of knowledge that is called Jnana Marga in which you learn to distinguish between what is genuine and what is deceptive. Then there is also a path of selfless work that is known as Karma Marga. Another path is the path of devotion, which is referred to as the Bhakti Marga. And finally, Yoga Marga is the path of control of the mind where all the actions of the mind and awareness are analyzed and brought under control.

From these have come all of the diverse paths of yoga which can be pursued.

Raja Yoga includes mastery of the mind and senses in samadhi, which is fundamentally the advanced facet of yoga.

Hatha Yoga is the yoga of the will which includes refining ones energy to stimulate Kundalini, mainly by means of asana and pranayama.

Mantra Yoga comprises chanting sacred phrases or words to attain perfection. Laya Yoga includes assimilation in god to undergo fundamental pleasure.

Bhakti Yoga calls for complete attachment to god to attain the definitive aim.

Karma Yoga accomplishes this through noble work devoid of the consideration of personal compensation.

Jnana Yoga is known as the yoga of wisdom educating the discrimination between spiritual certainty and the false impression of the material world.

Chapter 9: Benefits Of Yoga

Introduction

Yoga has many benefits. With regards to energy, yoga is like a universe in itself. Some of the vital yoga benefits comprise of anti-ageing, balance and flexibility of your body, increasing your knowledge and wealth, improvement in mental health and development of personal and social values. And this is not all. Yoga also helps in improving your strength, sexual life and reducing weight. In general, yoga makes you feel good and assists you in relaxing, as it both energizes as well as strengthens.

The curing benefits of yoga are so immense that one feels better at the end of each and every yoga session. Life is simply smoother and easier when you keep up a firm discipline than when you do not. Yoga improves your understanding of life, and will often alter your point of view about life too. After beginning to practice yoga, you will most likely adopt a broader outlook to life. Yoga will guide you to know who you truly are, how life operates, who is God and so on and so forth. You will begin to look at things in a different way with less uncertainty, more peace of mind, better health, more enthusiasm for life and an ever-growing sense of internal well-being.

As you begin to practice yoga, the constructive effects of yoga will quickly begin to be seen and felt as the sense of feeling good surrounds you. This emotion is so normal and so real that it will fit perfectly in your life and in this manner, it helps to explain your deepest desires, motivations and objectives, thereby reaffirming your self-belief, aspirations and your basic reasons for living. We all obviously like to feel good, to have peace of mind, to be happy, serene, energetic and composed, but the sad part is that most of us are unaware that we are not feeling as good as we should.

The motivating force of yoga is laser-targeted at the significant, life-changing discovery of who and what you actually are. This is exactly how yoga works and how it makes you feel good. Yoga helps you to experience the truth, and the truth that you discover in this way is essentially righteousness. The repercussions of being aware of this truth are unfathomably great, and so yoga gives you the strength to get to the bottom of the truth so that you can start to live with self-confidence, assurance and inner psychological harmony. The benefits and properties of yoga truly are this great!

Anti-Ageing Benefits Of Yoga

There is a very prominent notion in yoga philosophy that suggests that a person's age is established by the flexibility of their spine and not the

number of years the person has lived. Yoga helps in causing the aging process to decelerate by granting elasticity to the spine, toning the skin, reducing stress and tension in the body, strengthening and toning abdominal muscles, reducing the chances of acquiring a double chin, improving the overall structure and tone of weak and flabby arm muscles, counteracting incorrect posture and much more. Therefore, it follows that, of the numerous and varied benefits of yoga, anti-ageing stands as a particularly outstanding and important one.

Yoga also helps to imbue you with a younger spirit and feelings, whilst also helping to increase mental capacity. If there is a way of behaving that might grant you a longer life, yoga is definitely it, as longer life regularly results from practicing yoga. Yoga possesses the strength to fight internal as well as the external ailments and threats, hence it is very likely that an individual who practices yoga will live longer. Hatha Yoga in particular is good at helping people live longer. So, some of the anti-ageing properties of yoga are longer life, improved resistance to illness, increased energy and strength, rejuvenation of glands, looking young, improvement in vision and hearing and many other mental and emotional benefits. It is also said that inverted yoga posture can sometimes 'switch' hair that long since went grey back to its initial color, whilst also deferring the onset of grey hair and that by doing so, this naturally helps a person look younger.

Balance & Yoga

One of the major benefits of practicing yoga is improving your balance. Improved balance is not just about your strong physical synchronization but also about the balance between the left and right, front and back as well as the high and low characteristics of your body. Not many of us can claim perfect body balance, as it is relatively common for a person to have both one side that is weaker counterbalanced by the other that has more strength. For example, it might be possible to turn your head or twist your spine in a different or in more ways compared to another individual. You can bend forward with ease but the same cannot be done backwards.

This asymmetry and lack of balance in different parts of the body causes stresses and strains, often leading to injury, pain, discomfort and uneasiness. Yoga helps in generating balance and synchronization in the body. Yoga promotes a natural symmetry throughout your body, which in turn helps you to remain both strong and flexible whilst also obviously being more balanced. Yoga also aids you when you try to set the mental desire to push and be self-confident against the need to surrender to life whilst also submitting to life and remaining passive. In

this manner, yoga helps you to achieve a balanced attitudinal symmetry and stability as well.

Flexibility & Yoga

Flexibility and yoga go hand in hand. When flexibility increases, many tensions and conflicts are wiped away almost immediately. The more flexible and supple you are, the better it is for you, that almost goes without saying. It protects the body from uncalled for ache and pains, which can be classified as types of blocked, jammed, or misplaced and misused energy. When you have greater flexibility, this serves to break down these energy blockages which thus help to free your energy circulation. As the blocked energy is allowed to run free, your whole body will feel renewed and cleansed because the previously ensnared elements have been liberated. That is why yoga helps in making your body absolutely flexible and at ease.

Neglect and lack of care is the original cause of most pains. Problems such as headaches, toothaches, aching joints or backaches are all symptoms of such lack of care or abuse. These problems must be attended to as soon as possible and not ignored. The healthier you are, the less troubled you will be with your body. This liberates your mind to rediscover itself. At the beginning, yoga makes you more aware and more conscious of your body, or else, due to the lack of care, misuse or abuse, pain is felt within your body. Your body is just like a mechanism or a machine that tends to worry most people when it does not run as it should do. Yoga has the influence and ability to set right every wrong which threatens your body, and so yoga assists the body to be more supple, flexible, fit and healthy.

Yoga & Personal Values

Besides all the other benefits, yoga also helps you to increase and achieve your personal values, and tends to remove a number of ills from all of us. These could, for example, be the feelings of frustration, harassment and lack of self-confidence. Yoga lends a tremendous helping hand in the growth of personal values. Personal values can be referred to those principles and ideals which an individual develops and lives by all through his or her life. The essential objective of life is to take pleasure in each and every moment and yoga can serve an extremely important function with regards to this. Basically, yoga makes your life better. Yoga is not something that you do for a short period of time and then stop practicing it. It is an ongoing process and one that lasts a lifetime. No matter who we are, we all make every effort for enhancement throughout our lives, as it is a sign of our resolution to advance and continue to be healthy. Yoga helps us to achieve these objectives.

Remember that your body is the medium that carries your mind and it is here that yoga takes on the greatest significance. Personal Values are completely essential as they identify your nature and expand your character. Your individuality is the approach that others see you taking to yourself, and the golden rule is that if you do not respect yourself, then no-one else is likely to respect you either. Therefore, it is upon you to earn the respect of others, and not only by mere empty words but through your actions as well. Yoga also helps you in your determination to be a better person. Bear in mind that your personal values are the basis of your life and that you have to constantly nurture and develop them for the rest of your days!

Yoga & Love

Yoga also plays a vital factor in shaping your love life. There is no doubt that your life is influenced by your belief and the way you construe things and situations. All your thoughts, feelings and emotions display in one form or another in your body and in every aspect of your life. As you become more sensitive to your internal feelings, you begins to find pleasant thoughts coming to your mind, and such nice thoughts create good feelings as well. And the most important major theme of yoga is that of learning to love and be loved. Yoga guides the energy of love to flow without restraint through all of us once we start practicing it.

The influence of love is so strong that you can begin to see things in a different perspective. In the modern world, when the whole of mankind is seemingly speeding aimlessly ahead and dog-eat-dog competition is increasingly the norm, yoga can take on an ever increasing responsibility. Through the influence of yoga, you can advocate love and reality to people all around the world. You need to have that flexible and approachable mind to know the appeal of love and care in life, and practicing yoga helps you to do this. It is indeed possible to envisage a fresh new world vision with yoga on your side. Yoga makes you feel that there indeed is a sincere reason for having faith and a hopeful viewpoint. The more practical and reasonable you are the more optimistic and confident you will become. The strength of love sweeps all falsely held beliefs, misapprehensions and delusions clean out of your life forever, and (one more eminent advantage of yoga) is that you are likely to discover far greater patience within yourself and thus acquire the ability to forgive others far more readily.

Yoga & Mental Health

Yoga and mental health are very closely interconnected. Anyone who practices yoga can undergo incredible changes that result in a deeply improving effect on their mental health. The reduction of tension and a restoration of suppleness are just a couple of the mental health benefits

that you can achieve from yoga. Yoga has the magical power to restore your ability for awareness, focus and willingness to handle problems. Yoga also offers a setting or mood of well-being and a guarantee that you will obviously benefit from. Therefore, yoga possesses a great healing power which is proven to benefit the physical as well as mental well being of any individual.

Yoga & Social Values

Yoga and social values also go hand in hand. Social values can be referred to as a set of philosophies and beliefs that an individual adheres to all their life. Yoga has a tremendous power to instill those principles that go a long way in making a human complete. You are able to handle any tricky and problematic situation that you come across in your day to day life with yoga on your side.

Yoga For Beauty

Yoga and beauty are interrelated. Yoga not only improves the physical strength but also the grace and beauty of the face. By practicing yoga, you can actually enhance the beauty of your figure, give you a graceful carriage, melodious voice, glowing face and a charming smile. If the asanas of yoga are practiced on a regular basis, it can help you to attain a figure that enhances your beauty and gives you far greater flexibility as well. Beauty that is allied with suppleness gives you an allure and a grace that shows itself in every body movement. Individuals that practice yoga are often gifted with an inimitable glow on their faces. Yoga develops a certain aura around people, which fascinates and draws other people to them. To look attractive and pleasing you just have to remain free of all worries, stress and tensions!

Yoga Healing

Yoga has also been known to heal various minor disorders and ailments such as

- acid stomach;
- indigestion;
- constipation;
- insomnia;
- asthma;
- heart disorders;
- hypertension;
- cancer;
- bronchitis;

- menstrual disorders;
- obesity;
- sinus complaints

and many other illnesses.

The power to heal within yoga is so great that it is being reviewed for its ability to assist in treating some far more serious medical conditions like cerebral palsy, and osteoporosis and various sclerotic conditions.

One more example of yoga's healing power is that it can enable people to control a variety of body functions, which include

- blood pressure;
- body temperature;
- heart rate;
- metabolic functions;

and others. It has been proven that those who practice yoga on a regular basis have reduced anxiety, are more resistant to stress, have lower blood pressure, efficient heart function and overall improved physical health.

Yoga & Sex

Yoga has proven beyond doubt that a satisfying sexual life is essential to lead a happy life. Yoga refers to sex as a completely natural bodily and spiritual function, one that is a vital part of any loving relationship and of course, very important for the continuation of the human race on the earth. Yoga has a clear cut border line - do not over-indulge in sex as it may weaken the force and pace of life. But, you can learn to control your sexual activities through different yoga postures, and, as we have already seen, a complete form of yoga called Kundalini Yoga deals with controlling your sexual desires and powers.

Yoga & Knowledge

Yoga also assists an individual to not only realize their own self but also to appreciate other issues around them. The practice and theory of yoga leads to increased self-knowledge. Practicing breathing and posture exercises helps in achieving and maintaining health, physical and mental as well as relaxation. The wisdom achieved through yoga is not merely that of the practical kind relating to methods of exercise, for example, but also of a spiritual nature pertaining to comprehending something about your own nature self too.

Yoga For Weight Reduction

One more great benefit of practicing yoga is its capability to reduce weight. By practicing different asanas or postures of yoga, it really is possible to effortlessly reduce unwanted fat from your body. Some of the postures will, for example, stimulate sluggish glands to increase their hormonal secretions. For instance, the thyroid gland has a huge effect on your weight as it influences your overall body metabolism. Postures like shoulder stand and the fish asanas are specifically for the thyroid gland and, as a consequence, these postures increase fat metabolism and in doing so converts fat to muscle and energy. Therefore, yoga will not only help you to lose fat but also you will have a better muscle tone and more strength as well.

Chapter 10: Guidelines & Conclusion

There are certain things that you must take care of when you want to start practicing yoga. Some of these basic guidelines would benefit beginners, in particular, although anyone can sometimes use a refresher!

- Yoga is best practiced in the morning. This is because the mind is at its calmest and in the most composed frame, still fresh and rested. And the body movements too can be done with ease and proper energy. In order for you to start practicing yoga, you must have the desire and self-confidence to do so.
- The place where you intend to carry out your yoga practice should be taken into consideration too. It would be best to choose a place that is peaceful, serene, has proper ventilation, dust free, moisture free and where one cannot be distracted easily.
- Before you starts practicing yoga, you must clear your bowels and bladder if necessary; as well as clearing your nostrils and throat of all mucus, and it would be good to drink a glass of lukewarm water. This may sound strange, but as you stars to practice yoga, you will realize the importance of such minor things.

After doing all this, you should wait for a few minutes in order to fully relax once again and then you can begin practicing yoga.

- As you would do with any other form of exercise, you should begin with easy asanas or poses and only advance to tougher ones when you have mastered them, and feel ready to move on. You should be logical and systematic, and bear in mind that you should start with light movements and if at any time you start to feel tired or weary, you should stop your yoga practice until you feel vital and energized once again. Yoga should energize and revitalize you, not cause you to feel any kind of tiredness or depression.
- You must take breaks in between if you find a certain step is especially tiring for you. If you intend to practice yoga, you should follow a balanced diet and it is ideal for you to eat after an interval of at least four hours following your session of yoga. The quantity of food should satisfy your appetite and you should totally avoid over eating or starving yourself. At the same time, you should completely avoid eating stale or old food as well, as it may well not be that healthy to do so.

- The clothing that you wear while practicing yoga is very important and you must make sure that it is loose and comfortable. Form-fitting cotton or Lycra pants and shirts are the best choice.
- While you are performing your yoga, your breathing should be long and deep. You must remember to keep your mouth closed and inhale and exhale only through your nose, and you should also have a yoga mat that is made of comfortable materials, especially if you practice on an otherwise hard floor

Do all of this, and your yoga practice will be enjoyable and bestow the maximum benefits on you. And, as we have already established, no matter how cynical you might be about the benefits of yoga, the undeniable truth is that no matter how old or young you are, or what shape you might be in, yoga is good for you!

And, now that you have finished reading this book, no doubt you too will be seeing that yoga is something that you should be considering, if for no other reason that it will make you a stronger and better person to do so.

So, now that you know you should start practicing yoga, all that remains is for you to take action and start doing so!