

## **A Brief History of Yoga**

***Pre-Vedic period (before 3000bc, aprox)***—archeologists discovered statues and paintings of figures representing what we see as Shiva, in various meditation and asana poses. Yoga is ageless-time eternal holds secrets we are tapping into with our breath, body and passion.

***Vedic Period (around 2000bc)***—The development of Yoga begins here. The Aryans, a group of Indo-European travelers, settle in the heart of the Indus River Valley region mixing with the local inhabitants. Both groups share their culture and religion; beliefs in the power of Nature hold their imaginations and hearts and the beginnings of the practice of Yoga and Hinduism begin. (The term Hindu is actually taken from others' accounts of the Indus River Valley people, calling them first Indus, later to be called Hindu, so Hinduism is actually the practices of the Vedas rather than a specific religion.) Even in the earliest hymns and prayers it is evident that the people believed in one Divine Being, and that "Truth is One." The Sages, much like the prophets in the Middle East, heard divine teachings and illuminations directly from God on the Nature and Way of being. These are the Vedas, first heard in deep meditation and passed on to students (*shruti text*-that which is heard.) The Vedas were the description of direct experience of God and the many ways to form a relationship through prayer, ritual, song, etc.

Over time, these lessons were forgotten and students began writing them down as they were heard. From these sessions came the Vedanta, lit. end of Knowledge (anta=end, Veda=Truth), in the form of the Upanishads. These poems contain the knowledge of God, the experience of the Divine. However, because the mind is so dull and ego-centered, even the most diligent and still students had difficulty understanding these teachings, so the Brahma Sutras were written. And yet again, people could not grasp the Infinite with their limited thinking and so the *Mahabharata* was written to illustrate these Vedic teachings. And from the *Mahabharata* came *The Bhagavad Gita*, or "The Song of God", one of the most beautiful and illustrative stories of devotion and spiritual growth in the history of scripture. Here we first learn about the distinct paths of Yoga and our responsibilities as students of the Yogic Way. *The Bhagavad Gita* was the instrumental text that inspired Gandhi's vision and service and is still read today by devoted students of Yoga.

### ***Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (estimated around 600bc)***

Using the Vedas as the foundation, Patanjali wrote the Yoga Sutras as the definitive text and practice manual of Raja Yoga. In the Sutras (which means "thread") Patanjali describes the ultimate goal of Yoga as Samadhi, the state where the knower, known and knowing become one. The goal of Yoga, according to Patanjali, is expounded in the second sutra of the first chapter, "Yoga is the cessation of the activities of the mind." All of Yoga centers on this premise, that when the mind is still the Heart is open and we hear its wisdom, and there we find peace and union with creation and the Divine. He describes the stages of Samadhi and the process for traveling down this life long road of practice, including the famous 8 limbs of Yoga. The Sutras are divided into 4 chapters or *padas*; the first chapter, Samadhi Pada, describes the stages, obstacles and theory of Samadhi; the second chapter, Sadhana Pada, describes Yoga practice, beginning

with a definition of Kriya Yoga, which is the model for all of the modern Hatha practices; the third chapter, Vibhuti Pada, describes the benefits of a deep practice, including supernatural gifts; and the fourth chapter, Kaivalya Pada, deals with the more metaphysical aspects of Yoga.

### ***Post Vedic-Modern Yoga (The birth of Hatha Yoga)***

The Sutras were supposedly written around the time of the Buddha, a time in our spiritual history when the mind was used as a tool for observing the truth of Nature and where the teachings directed us to sit meditation for long periods of time to soften the mind and open the Heart to the ultimate reality of our unity with Nature and that the mind causes our suffering and limits us on our search for Truth. The Buddha, along with other Raja Yogis, taught that first we control our selves with discipline and self-control before going deeper into other practices. Buddhism was spreading throughout India and many monks were forsaking their physical practice for the more settled one of meditation. However, as most humans are not capable of using the mind to understand and control the mind, many students were lost in their own neurosis and complications. Matsyendranath, a yogi sage, brought the practice of Yoga back to the physical and with his school of Nath focused the practice back on the body. He taught controlling the mind was too difficult and that unless the body was clean, balanced and pure the mind would not settle and Samadhi could not be achieved. So the asanas became a larger focus in the practice.

Around 200AD Swami Swatmarama wrote the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the quintessential guide to hatha practice. Swami Swatmarama believed that asanas must be practiced first to balance the Nadis and open the chakras before students could enter deeper meditative practices. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is a manual for doing just that; using asana, pranayama, mudra, bandhas, and shakkarmas the body is first made pure allowing the mind to settle. Yamas and Niyamas are only focused on once these first practices are mastered.

From this perspective and using this text many Yogis now began teaching asanas as central to the practice and from this shift comes the modern approach to teaching Yoga.

### ***Modern Yoga Lineages***

Although Hatha Yoga fits into the greater path of Raja Yoga and can be traced back hundred of years, most of the modern practices, at least in the West, are based on several teachers' understanding of Yoga.

Sri Krishnamacharya and Sri Sivananda are instrumental for transmitting Yoga throughout the world, making Yoga a household name and practice. From Krishnamacharya come Desikachar and his Vinny Yoga, BKS Iyengar, and Pattabhi Jois, whose intense Astanga Yoga is widely practiced among type A's and gymnasts! Sivananda, whose style of Yoga that includes service and love has change many lives in the West and has given us Vishnu Devananda, who started the International Sivananda Center, Satchindananda of Intergral Yoga that teaches Raja Yoga and Swami Satyananda whose Bihar Yoga focuses mainly on Traditional Hatha Yoga.

And from each of these teachers comes the more familiar names like Bikram, Lee, Griley, Shaw and other Western Yogis that have helped create a space for disciplining the body and stilling the mind through their teachings.

However, we should never forget and sever the roots of Yoga. Without a strong understanding and gratitude for the teachings and Sages of the past, whose knowledge is timeless and carries the seeds of Peace, our own practice could be a shallow interpretation of our True Nature. We should practice knowing that Union and Transformation are possible and within our grasp and that limiting our Yoga practice to the physical is limiting and partial. A whole, balanced practice and understanding of our Yoga depends on the realization that Yoga is our whole lives, the way we breath, what we eat, how we talk, the people we associate with, our service to people in need, our disciplined asana and pranayama practices and the love and devotion to God in each moment.

## **Hatha Yoga**

“First most, we must give salutations to the origin of Hatha Yoga, Sri Adinath (Shiva), who instructed the knowledge of hatha yoga which shines forth as a stairway for those who wish to ascend to the highest stage of yoga, raja yoga.” (*HYP*, v.1)

During the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> AD, about 900 years after Lord Buddha’s enlightenment and teachings, yogic sages were questioning Buddhist thought and practices, which were based on moral conduct and self control found in the Eightfold Path, *vipassana* and *anapanasati* or contemplation. Until that point in time Buddhism and Raja Yoga (mainly meditation) were the central practice throughout Asia. Yogic Sages like Matsyendranath and Gorankhnath noticed students of the Way were having difficulty finding Peace of mind through meditation and following a strict code of being. They believed there was a lack of focus on preparatory practices that ready the body and mind for the deeper and more difficult task of controlling the mind. Many students were unable to maintain long periods of stillness and awareness in meditation because their bodies were unable to stay in a restful state. The sages also noticed that the mind reflected when physical health was unbalanced and so the physical practice of asana and the shatkarmas became central to the Yogic lifestyle.

Hatha Yoga is the practice of cleaning the impurities from the body, opening energy channels and finally releasing the primal energy, located in the root of the spine, to meet up with its source in the crown of the head.

According to the introduction of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, “The main objective of hatha yoga is to create an absolute balance of the interacting activities and processes of the physical body, mind and energy. When this balance is created, the impulses generated give a call of awakening to the central force (sushumna nadi) which is responsible for the evolution of human consciousness. If hatha yoga is not used for this purpose, its true objective is lost.” (*HYP*, pp. 6-7)

In Swami Satyananda's main manual for hatha practice, *Asana, Pranayama, Mudra Bandha*, he states,

The main aim of hatha yoga is to bring about a balanced flow of prana in ida and pingala nadis. The word hatha is comprised of two beeja mantras *ham*, representing the sun or solar force, and *tham*, representing the moon or lunar force. To bring about a balance between these two forces, the body must first be purified by the shatkarmas. The aim of hatha yoga is to balance these two flows so that neither the mental nor physical faculties are dominant. . . . When ida and pingala nadis are purified and balanced, and the mind is controlled, then sushumna, the most important nadi, begins to flow. Sushumna must be flowing for success in meditation. If pingala flows, the body will be restless; if ida flows, the mind will be overactive. When sushumna flows, kundalini awakens and rises through the chakras. (*APMB pp. 522-523*)

### ***Break down of Hatha Yoga***

#### *Ham*

Surya (sun)

Pingala

Right side

Physical energy (prana)

When dominant—the body is restless

#### *Tham*

Chandra (moon)

Ida

Left side

Mental energy (manas)

When dominant—the mind is overactive

#### ***Main practices:***

Shatkarmas

Asana

Pranayama

Mudra

Bandha

Hatha Yoga occurs in *ajna* chakra, when both the nadis are balanced and prana arises freely into the 6<sup>th</sup> chakra located between the eyebrows. The union, or Yoga, of these

two energies allows kundalini to arise into the sushumna nadi, through the chakras, and into its own union with Shiva, in the Sahasrara chakra in the crown of the head. The union, or Yoga, of Kundalini Shakti with Shiva, or *Prakriti* (nature) with *Purusha*, is the Yoga of Raja Yoga as well: *Samadhi* is reached, when all blends into One and the knower, the known and the knowing merge.

***This is the ultimate goal of Yoga, the merging of our small self with the Greater one. The goal of Hatha Yoga is to balance the main nadis so union of our physical and mental energies is possible, thus allowing our Primal energy to flow freely into its original container and source. The goal of Raja Yoga is to control the mind so the Heart is free to lead us into union with the Divine through its silence and wisdom.***

## **Vedas**

1. Rig-world and natural reality
2. Yajur-rituals
3. Sama-music, songs
4. Atharva-magic, ceremonies with fire

## Subsections of each Veda

1. Mantra Samhita-invocation to knowledge
2. Brahmana-cosmic sacrifice; interaction between divine/self
3. Aranyaka-meditation/internalization of experience
4. Upanishads-end of all knowledge; root experience of the Divine

## **6 Hindu Philosophies (*aastika*)**

### Reality

1. **Nyaya**-how to analyze reality through perception, inference, comparison and testimony; system of logic
2. **Vaisesika**-knowledge of material world through perception and inference alone

### Mind

1. **Samkhya**-deep knowledge of course of evolution; Ayurvedic understanding
2. **Yoga**-study of the mind focusing on liberation and freedom (*moksha*)

### Unity/Oneness

1. **Purva Mimansa**-dualistic approach using ritual, mantras; a rigorous belief of and practice of the Vedas.
2. **Uttara Mimansa**-non-dualistic (*Vedanta*); more mystical approach to living through meditation, self-discipline and concentration on Oneness.