

Yogasanas and Health

“In this respect, yoga is far from simply being physical exercises; rather, it is an aid to establishing a new way of life which embraces both inner and outer realities. However, this way of life is an experience which cannot be understood intellectually and will only become living knowledge through practice and experience.”

(APMB p. 6)

Whether reading Iyengar’s *Light on Yoga* or Swami Satyananda Saraswati’s *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* it has been made clear that asanas remain the basic tool for regaining balance within the body’s systems, thereby creating an optimal state of health for the practitioner. The prayers addressed to Shiva, thanking him for the creation and guidance of Hatha Yoga, usually end with the statement that one’s practice and discipline in Hatha Yoga will lead him or her to the greater understanding and practice of Raja Yoga.

“I salute Adishvara who taught first the science of Hatha Yoga—a science that stands out as a ladder for those who wish to scale the heights of Raja Yoga.”

So for our learning and understanding of the processes of Traditional Yoga, let’s begin with the idea that Hatha Yoga is used to create a body and mind capable of doing the deeper work and investigation that Raja Yoga requires. And let’s consider that asanas are used to treat specific ailments, diseases and discomforts in the body.

All postures can be included in the following categories:

Standing, Forward Bends, Back Bends, Inversions, Seated, Balancing, Twisting, Restorative (of course poses can fit into various categories, these are generalized)

Each category serves specific purposes for the physical, subtle and causal bodies; meaning, the postures either affect the physical body including muscles, bones, ligaments, tendons, organs and deep tissues; or the subtle body made of energy channels, chakra system, and the deep seated energies of the 5 Pranas; or the causal body made of consciousness and soul. Asanas can affect the whole anatomy of a person and should be practiced with this in mind. Those who teach or learn the asanas solely for the physical miss an integral offering of a whole practice.

Traditional Hatha Yoga teaches that asanas are the entry point for experiencing wholeness of mind and body. And they claim that without a solid and holistic practice of the asanas, Raja Yoga, or stilling the mind (the ability to concentrate the mind on one object) cannot be reached. The asanas offer a tangible way of balancing the tremors of the mind by first controlling the prana flow within the body. Hatha yogis believe that if prana can be controlled, using methods like pranayama, bandhas, mudras and asana the mind will be easier to work with. Raja yogis understand the importance of asana for balancing the energies of body and mind but focus more on practices of concentration, meditation, prayer, service and intuitive discovery to gain the ability to still the mind and ultimately experience samadhi.

Journal Time!

Here we ask you to choose one posture from each category and hold it for up to 5 minutes.

Be aware of feeling and sensation in the body, your breath and be conscious of any emotions that arise during your practice. Please do not journal during the experience. Stay with what comes and be present with your feelings. Once you finish the pose then write about your experience.

Standing Pose: (write the name of the posture, and journal your experience here including the feelings, emotions and thoughts)

Forward fold:

Back bend:

Seated:

Twisting:

Inversion:

Balancing:

Restorative (including supine and prone postures):