

A walk towards our heritage

- Ankita (V-2016-03-006)

“Yoga is not a work out; it is a work in “

And this is the point of spiritual practice; to make us teachable;

To open up our hearts and focus our awareness so that we can know

What we already know and be who we already are “

Yoga is a Sanskrit word derived from the Sanskrit root “yuj” which means to connect, join or balance.

Yoga is usually defined as union: union between the limited self and the Divine Self. The aim of Yoga is not really to unite us with anything for we are already united. It is to help us realize our identity with the Divine Self, to make us know and tune into our intrinsic nature.

There are many definitions of Yoga, which apply to all levels of existence and awareness. At the physical level, we need to harmonize the functions of different organs, muscles and nerves so that they do not hamper or oppose each other. Disharmony in various body parts and systems brings about inefficiency and lethargy or clumsiness. Moreover, it manifests in diseases in the body.

In this context we can define Yoga as physical harmony & health and mental balance & peace.

Ashtanga (eight limbs of yoga)

Ashtanga, the eight limbs of yoga, is [Patanjali](#)'s classification of classical [yoga](#), as set out in his [Yoga Sutras](#). He defined the eight limbs as [yama](#) (abstinences), [niyama](#) (observances), [asana](#) (postures), [pranayama](#) (breathing), [pratyahara](#) (withdrawal), [dharana](#) (concentration), [dhyana](#) (meditation) and [samadhi](#) (absorption).

1. Yamas

Yamas are ethical rules in Hinduism and can be thought of as moral imperatives (the "don'ts").

1. [Ahinsa](#) (अहिंसा): [Nonviolence](#), non-harming other living beings
2. [Satya](#) (सत्य): truthfulness, non-falsehood
3. [Asteya](#) (अस्तेय): non-stealing
4. [Brahmacharya](#) (ब्रह्मचर्य): chastity, marital fidelity or sexual restraint

5. [Aparigraha](#) (अपरिग्रह): non-avarice , non-possessiveness

2. Niyama

The second component of Patanjali's Yoga path is niyama, which includes virtuous habits and observances (the "dos").

1. [Shaucha](#) (शौच): purity, clearness of mind, speech and body
2. [Santosa](#) (संतोष): contentment, acceptance of others, acceptance of one's circumstances as they are in order to get past or change them, optimism for self
3. [Tapas](#) (तपस्): persistence, perseverance, austerity, asceticism, self-discipline
4. [Svadhyaya](#) (स्वाध्याय): study of Vedas, study of self, self-reflection, introspection of self's thoughts, speech and actions
5. [Ishvarapranidhana](#) (ईश्वरप्रणिधान): contemplation of the Ishvara (God/Supreme Being, [Brahman](#), True Self, Unchanging Reality)

3. Asana

The meditation posture should be steady and comfortable.

Asana is a posture that one can hold for a period of time, staying relaxed, steady, comfortable and motionless. "asanas are perfected over time by relaxation of effort with meditation on the infinite". Any posture that causes pain or restlessness is not a yogic posture. Secondary texts that discuss Patanjali's sutra state that one requirement of correct posture for sitting meditation is to keep chest, neck and head erect (proper spinal posture).

4. Pranayama

Pranayama is the control of the breath, from the Sanskrit *prana* (प्राण, breath) and *ayama* (आयाम, restraint).

After a desired posture has been achieved, the practice of consciously regulating the breath (inhalation, the full pause, exhalation, and the empty pause). This is done in several ways, such as by inhaling and then suspending exhalation for a period, exhaling and then suspending inhalation for a period, by slowing the inhalation and exhalation, or by consciously changing the timing and length of the breath (deep, short breathing).

5. Pratyahara

Pratyahara is a combination of two Sanskrit words *prati-* (the prefix प्रति-, "against" or "contra") and *ahara* (आहार, "bring near, fetch").

Pratyahara is drawing within one's awareness. It is a process of retracting the sensory experience from external objects. It is a step of self extraction and abstraction. Pratyahara is not consciously closing one's eyes to the sensory world, it is consciously closing one's mind processes to the sensory world. Pratyahara empowers one to stop being controlled by the external world, fetch one's attention to seek self-knowledge and experience the freedom innate in one's inner world.

6. Dharana

Dharana (Sanskrit: धारणा) means concentration, introspective focus and one-pointedness of mind. The root of the word is *dhr* (धृ), meaning "to hold, maintain, keep".

Dharana, as the sixth limb of yoga, is holding one's mind onto a particular inner state, subject or topic of one's mind . The mind is fixed on a [mantra](#), or one's breath/navel/tip of tongue/any place, or an object one wants to observe, or a concept/idea in one's mind. Fixing the mind means one-pointed focus, without drifting of mind, and without jumping from one topic to another.

7. Dhyana

Dhyana (Sanskrit: ध्यान) literally means "contemplation, reflection" and "profound, abstract meditation".-

Dhyana is contemplating, reflecting on whatever *Dharana* has focused on. If in the sixth limb of yoga one focused on a personal deity, Dhyana is its contemplation. If the concentration was on one object, Dhyana is non-judgmental, non-presumptuous observation of that object. If the focus was on a concept/idea, Dhyana is contemplating that concept/idea in all its aspects, forms and consequences. Dhyana is uninterrupted train of thought, current of cognition, flow of awareness.-

Dhyana is integrally related to Dharana, one leads to other. Dharana is a state of mind, Dhyana the process of mind. Dhyana is distinct from Dharana in that the meditator becomes actively engaged with its focus. Patanjali defines contemplation (*Dhyana*) as the mind process, where the mind is fixed on something, and then there is "a course of uniform modification of knowledge". [Adi Shankara](#), in his commentary on *Yoga Sutras*, distinguishes Dhyana from Dharana, by explaining Dhyana as the yoga state when there is only the "stream of continuous thought about the object, uninterrupted by other thoughts of different kind for the same object"; Dharana, states Shankara, is focussed on one object, but aware of its many aspects and ideas about the same object. Shankara gives the example of a yogin in a state of dharana on morning sun may be aware of its brilliance, color and orbit; the yogin in dhyana state contemplates on sun's orbit alone for example, without being interrupted by its color, brilliance or other related ideas.

8. Samādhi

Samadhi (Sanskrit: समाधि) literally means "putting together, joining, combining with, union, harmonious whole, trance".

Samadhi is oneness with the subject of meditation. There is no distinction, during the eighth limb of yoga, between the actor of meditation, the act of meditation and the subject of meditation. Samadhi is that spiritual state when one's mind is so absorbed in whatever it is contemplating on, that the mind loses the sense of its own identity. The thinker, the thought process and the thought fuse with the subject of thought. There is only oneness, *samadhi*.

