



Integrity. Diversity. Community.

Code of Conduct

PREAMBLE TO CODE OF CONDUCT

This Code of Conduct is a summation and declaration of acceptable, ethical, and professional behavior by which all Registered Yoga Teachers (RYT) and Registered Yoga Schools (RYS) agree to conduct the teaching and business of Yoga. The Code is not intended to supersede the Code of Conduct/Ethics of any school or tradition, but is intended to be a basis for yoga ethics.

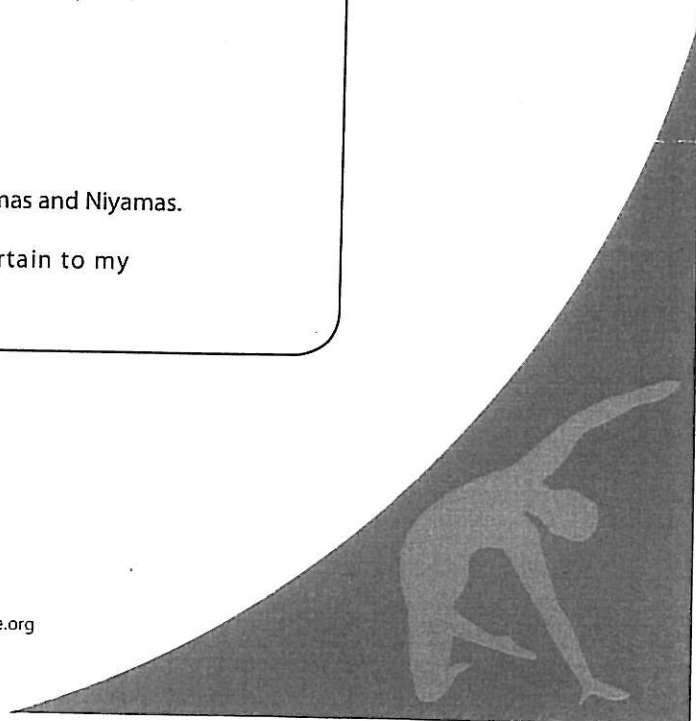
CODE OF CONDUCT

As a Registrant of Yoga Alliance and as a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) or representative of a Registered Yoga School (RYS), I agree to uphold the ethical goals set forth in the following Code of Conduct:

1. Uphold the integrity of my vocation by conducting myself in a professional and conscientious manner.
2. Acknowledge the limitations of my skills and scope of practice and where appropriate, refer students to seek alternative instruction, advice, treatment, or direction.
3. Create and maintain a safe, clean, and comfortable environment for the practice of yoga.
4. Encourage diversity actively by respecting all students regardless of age, physical limitations, race, creed, gender, ethnicity, religion affiliation, or sexual orientation.
5. Respect the rights, dignity, and privacy of all students.
6. Avoid words and actions that constitute sexual harassment.
7. Adhere to the traditional yoga principles as written in the Yamas and Niyamas.
8. Follow all local government and national laws that pertain to my yoga teaching and business.

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Helpful Suggestion for Yoga Practice

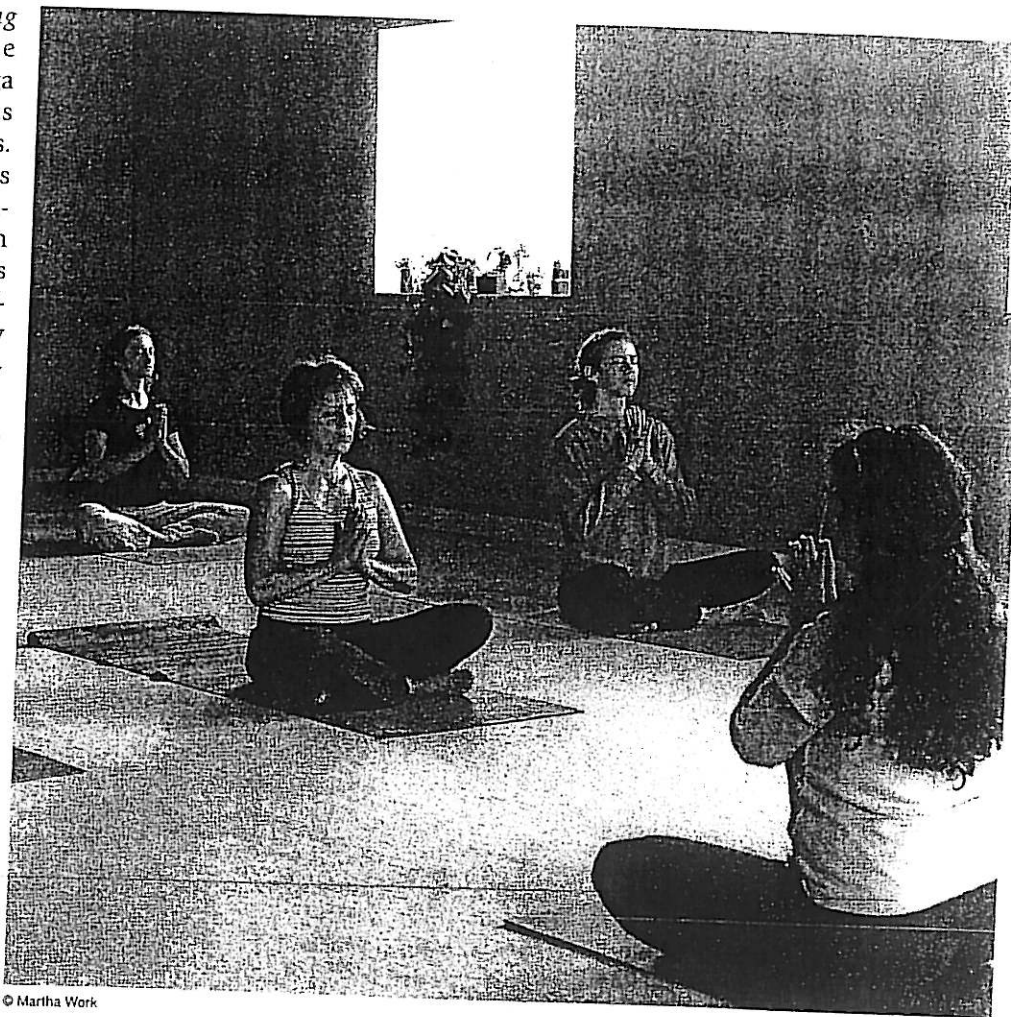
- 1) Always use caution, gentleness and common sense in your yoga practice.
- 2) Wear comfortable clothes which allow full movement. No jeans or tight waist bands. You may want to keep special exercise clothes, blanket, towel or whatever props you use for yoga practice in a certain place to establish a routine.
- 3) Please bring a mat to class. Yoga mat preferred, but any will do.
- 4) No undue strain should be felt in the body or mind during practice. If this occurs, stop and relax completely.
- 5) Yoga postures should be done on an empty stomach. Allow at least **three hours** to lapse after a **heavy meal**. Snack is OK 1-2 hours prior to yoga pending individual, but use own judgment.
- 6) Go to the bathroom prior to yoga class.
- 7) Never exercise while under influence of medications that contains narcotics, barbiturates, hallucinogenic or alcohol.
- 8) Drink plenty of water.
- 9) It is best not to drink coffee, black tea or alcohol for at least 1 ½ hr after exercising.
- 10) Mild soreness is natural if you haven't been exercising. A warm bath is helpful, following your first few classes. **Any exaggerated nervousness, headaches or dizziness should be discussed with your instructor.**
- 11) **DO NOT TRY TO IMPRESS OTHERS** with your accomplishments. It is better to direct all that energy to become established in your own practice.
- 12) Please be on time. If there is some reason you will be late, please enter room quietly. Do some light stretching on your own, and then join the class in progress.
- 13) **DO NOT** chew gum or have anything else in your mouth while exercising.
- 14) Make yoga a commitment to yourself. You deserve it! There are days that you will be more flexible than other days. Have fun, **RELAX** with it and **BE KIND TO YOURSELF!**

chapter 4

Breathing and Beyond

The most important thing is your breath. These are words a good yoga teacher should say numerous times while conducting a class. Reminding students to breathe is always a good idea. Poor breathing is an epidemic bad habit in today's society, which contributes to the high anxiety and stress suffered by many. Breathing deeply and slowly allows for greater circulation with less work. Deep, slow breathing lessens stress on the heart and enhances the entire cardiovascular system. The breath can make a significant difference in ability, comfort, and awareness during asana practice.

Asanas and the practice of proper breathing are two aspects of yoga focused on by most Western practitioners. These two elements enhance each other in creating a complete awareness within the mind and body. Although other chapters focus on the asanas, this chapter focuses specifically on breath awareness, with an overview of the anatomical structures involved



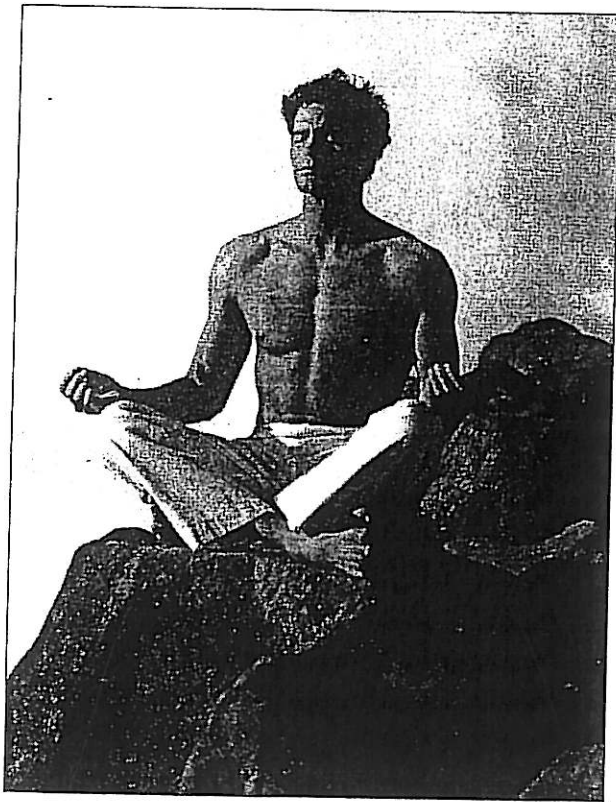
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in the breathing process. General guidelines on how to bring breath awareness and control to students during their asana practice, the most common yogic breathing techniques, and how they relate to asana practice also are discussed.

"Just as a lion, elephant, or tiger may be gradually brought under control, so is prana attended to. Otherwise it destroys the practitioner."—Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Pranayama

The yogis call the force behind life itself, which is inherent in the breath, *prana* [PRAAH-naah]. *Pranayama* [praah-naah-YAAH-muh] is breath work, the practice of which connects the mind and body with a shared consciousness. By focusing on the breath, a student can bypass the chatter in the mind and ego. When a student begins paying attention and controlling the breath, circulation improves in a



As an analogy of life, many benefits come from focusing on proper breathing.

• Jumpfoto

way that brings more blood, oxygen, and fuel to the muscles as well as enhancing concentration.

Although people usually breathe "automatically," that is, with no effort or conscious thought, it does not mean that the breath cannot be controlled. For thousands of years yogis have developed ways to bring what were once considered strictly involuntary systems of the body under control. The breath is the most essential function of the body that can be regulated. It is a relatively easy and convenient mechanism to use to tune inward because the breath can be heard, felt, and counted without special equipment. Blood pressure, brain waves, immune cells, electrolytes, and digestion are much more difficult to be aware of and to control, yet these systems usually improve in function when the breath is more efficient.

Why should one be concerned with the breath? Breath can be used as an analogy to life. Not only can breathing patterns affect physiological well-being, but they also can affect and be affected by thought processes. Emotions can be triggered negatively through shallow, labored breathing or positively with smooth, flowing breaths, which stabilize our thoughts and allow relaxation to set in.

Process of Breathing

Most people tend to breathe too shallowly, in the uppermost region of their chests. This habit is inefficient because it leads to feeling like one has to take in more breaths to feel comfortable. This type of overbreathing is a mild form of hyperventilation and is exacerbated by stress. In fact, this chronic breathing habit actually can induce the stress response in some people. When the breaths are shallow and frequent, the heart must work much harder to bring oxygenated blood to the body. If circulation is chronically compromised, it in turn leads to many other bodily systems functioning below the level nature intended. For example, the immune system is at risk when circulation is poor because toxins cannot be eliminated as efficiently and the body's overall functional capacity becomes diminished. Pranayama plays a major role in keeping the functions of the physical and energetic body healthy, preventing the physical decay that occurs when cells do not receive adequate oxygen over a prolonged period of time. Choppy, shallow breathing occurs when the sympathetic nervous system activates the body for the fight-or-flight response in actual or perceived threatening and stressful situations. When this system stays activated over long periods it can induce *general adaptation syndrome* (GAS). The negative effects of GAS stress the body and can lead to one of many causes of early death, such as heart disease.

Anatomy of Breathing

A proper full, deep breath begins from the base of the diaphragm near the pelvic girdle. This action alone helps to relax the rest of the respiratory muscles as well as some neck muscles. The relaxation effect of deep breathing is brought about by the parasympathetic nervous system, which is concerned with allowing the body to rest and conserve energy. At the same time, this effect deactivates the sympathetic nervous system, which is concerned with bodily functions involving expending energy generally for the self-protection and nurturing of the body. According to a National Institute of Health report (September 2003 Mayo Clinic Health Letter), the regular yogic practice of deep, slow breathing through the nose produces a multitude of health benefits including reducing anxiety and high blood pressure, balancing brain waves, and improving physical endurance.

Most of the body's major organs are located within the torso, fitting closely adjacent to one another. The heart resides almost in the middle of the chest, with the bulk of its mass toward the left side. As a consequence, the fist-sized heart organ leaves the left lung room for two lobes whereas the right lung has three lobes. The diaphragm, a parachute-shaped muscle, is located below the heart and lungs and attaches to the lumbar spine, the lower six ribs, and the sternum. As this powerful muscle contracts, the diaphragm allows the lungs to fill with air, and as it relaxes it moves upward and presses the air out of the lungs (figure 4.1). Below the diaphragm to the right is the liver

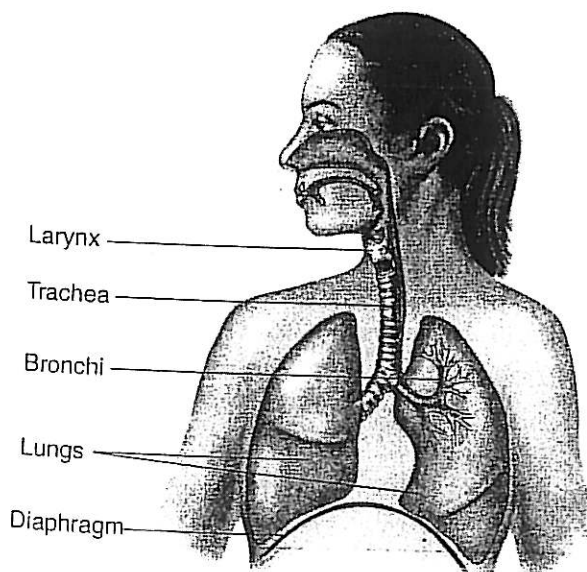


Figure 4.1 The diaphragm and lungs within the thoracic cavity.

and to the left are the stomach and spleen. The diaphragm has three openings to allow passage of the esophagus, inferior vena cava, and the aorta. As you can imagine, when the diaphragm is activated the many surrounding tissues and organs get massaged and stimulated.

When a person breathes too shallowly the lungs do not expand fully; and the air is moved only into the upper chest, which strains the neck and shoulder muscles and consequently causes more rapid and shortened breaths. A person who breathes consistently into the chest rather than into the belly creates a strain within the entire body, robbing tissues and cells of oxygen as well as creating a weakness and imbalance in the intercostal (rib) muscles and diaphragm.

Types of Pranayama

Watch a young child sleep, and you will notice the smooth, rhythmic rise and fall of the belly and the gentle expansion of the upper torso and chest. This is how all human beings begin breathing; with no worries of constantly needing to "suck in our guts" and simply allowing the fullness of prana to flow easily into and through our bodies. As a result of the stresses one picks up and begins to carry through life's journey, it is important to retrain the breathing process. The idea is to get the breath to expand below the ribcage toward the navel by engaging the diaphragm more completely.

Simply observing the breath is a type of pranayama that is often practiced during Shavasana (Corpse Pose). When breathing more efficiently, fewer breaths are needed to take in sufficient oxygen. Animals that take fewer breaths generally live the longest. For example, a tortoise breathes four times per minute and lives up to 300 years. The average human, in contrast, takes 16 to 20 breaths per minute and usually does not reach his or her 100th birthday!

It is possible for the mind to be alert while the body is resting and calm. It is also possible to be very active while breathing steadily and smoothly through the nose. Not only can we practice yoga more efficiently and easily, but also we can walk, run, and even swim at a good pace while breathing deeply and relatively slowly without taking oxygen in through the mouth, which tends to dehydrate the body.

There are many different styles and techniques of pranayama practice. The three most commonly practiced methods are outlined next: 1) deep abdominal, 2) complete yoga, and 3) *ujjayi* [oo-JAAHY-ee]

alternate nostril breath
 begin by exhaling the left nostril / inhaling
 left nostril 7-10 cycles
 exhale right - inhale right through both sides

breathing. In addition, alternate nostril breathing technique (nadi shodhana [NAAH-dee SHOH-duh-nuh]) is illustrated, which can be taught at the beginning, end, or separately from a typical class setting. All methods are easily taught; however, it is best to receive hands-on training from a qualified instructor before teaching these styles with any great depth.

Deep Abdominal Breathing

Breathing deeply into the abdomen is the simplest form of pranayama practice. Teaching this breath style gives students the opportunity to become more fully aware of their current breathing patterns and shows them an easy way to begin to control the breath. One way to teach deep abdominal breathing is to have students place their hands on their lower abdomen over the navel. Instruct them to breathe slowly and deeply so that their hands gently rise up from the expansion of their breath. This exercise can be done while standing; sitting; and, most easily, lying on the floor either supine (face up) or prone (face down). Students should feel the belly expand while the ribs and chest remain relaxed (see figure 4.2).

If the students lie prone, their hands should be placed beneath their heads for comfort. They can use the feeling of their abdomen expanding against the floor for feedback. To further aid students, ask them to imagine they are a small boat drifting on the gentle sea of their breath. They can think of their torsos rising and falling like small waves. Once people are comfortable with deep abdominal breathing techniques, they will have an easier time performing other breathing styles.

Complete Yoga Breath

A full, deep breath has three parts to it. Some refer to this breathing as *durga* breathing. It is the practice of fully inflating the lungs from bottom to top. The students begin by breathing deeply into the abdominal area and continue to inhale, filling the entire torso with breath from the abdomen to the collar bones. At the end of this deep inhalation the sternum rises (from lifting the front ribs by using mid-back muscles assisted by deep breathing) and the clavicles (collar bones) expand forward and up while the shoulders remain relaxed.

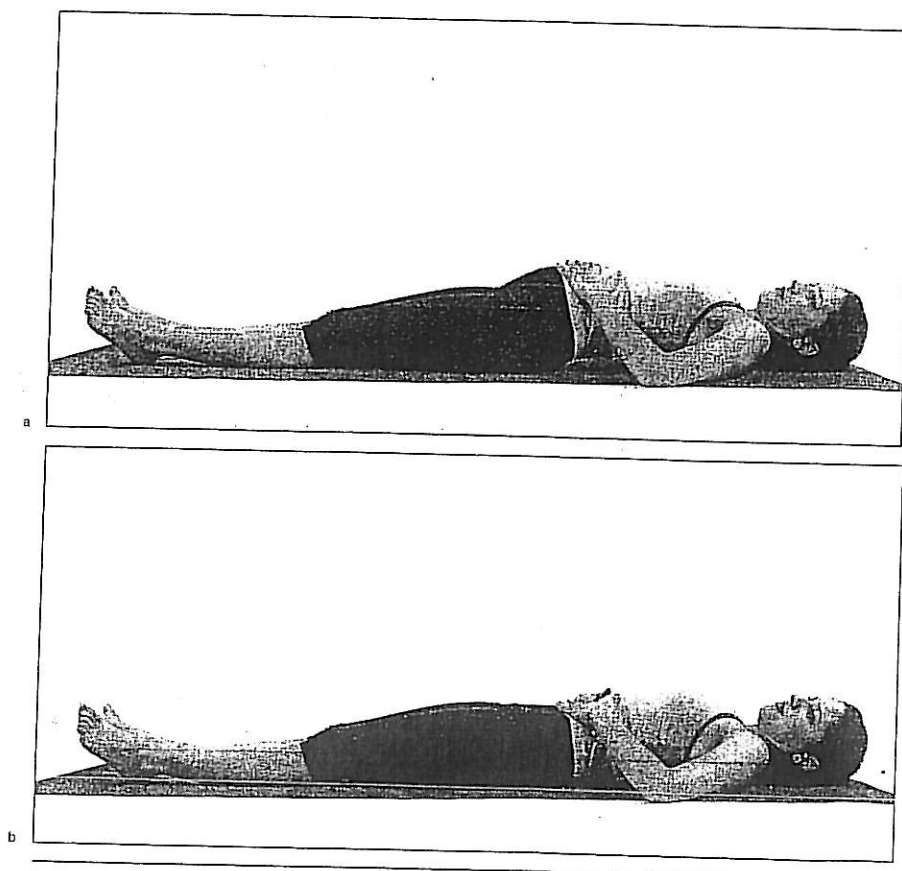


Figure 4.2 Deep abdominal breathing: (a) in and (b) out.

Repeat the cue—"Chest up, shoulders down"—when teaching this breathing technique.

The inhalation is full and deep from the abdomen, and the exhalation is equally deep and complete. When teaching this pranayama technique, direct students to release their breath from the top to the bottom of their torso, and from the chest down to the abdomen. At the end of the exhalation, instruct students to gently squeeze the abdomen in to expel as much old air as possible, thus attaining an even deeper inhalation on the next incoming breath. If students have difficulty breathing rhythmically with this technique, begin by focusing on the exhalation first.

Ujjayi Breathing

Ujjayi breathing is a more sophisticated pranayama technique and is used most often in Ashtanga yoga classes. Basic ujjayi breath expands the lungs and chest more fully and with control and can actually help to warm the body. The breath exudes a noise that resembles something like a whispering roar, producing a sound as the breath vibrates in the back of the throat and sinus areas making sibilant "ssss" on inhalation and an "hhhh" during exhalation. When an entire class synchronizes their breath it sounds like a pod of dolphins breathing together.

An easy way to introduce ujjayi breathing is to ask students to begin breathing through an open mouth while slightly tightening the backs of their throats. This action helps make the breath more audible. Instruct them to whisper as they inhale and exhale. For the more difficult inhalation sound you might have them practice making an "ash" sound while slowly breathing in. The exhalation is easier, as they can usually get a good sound if trying to whisper a prolonged "ha." Although breathing through an open mouth makes it easier to feel the breath and hear the sound, mouth breathing can be very dehydrating. As students become more comfortable with the breath pattern, instruct them to continue to breathe through their noses. As they breathe slowly and deeply through their noses, they should strive to keep and emphasize the sound vibrations.

This breathing method is very efficient and it helps students focus not only on their breathing but also on the flow of their asana movements. Because ujjayi makes such a distinct sound it automatically brings students back to the awareness of their breath. When a whole class uses this pranayama technique they become a community, much like a dolphin pod, helping each other focus through the sound they are emanating. For example, when an accomplished

ujjayi breather was absent from a class one day, the other students commented on how much they missed her audible breathing to help them stay focused on their own breathing during asana practice.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Known as nadi shodhana, alternate nostril breathing serves to increase and balance the prana flow in both nostrils and throughout the whole body. The term nadi shodhana means to clean the *nadis*, or nasal passages, which are channels for the energy, or prana, to circulate through. Chapter 5 provides more information about the energy system, but this section acquaints you with the basic technique and main benefits of alternate nostril breathing so you can practice and therefore teach it.

According to Dr. Jeanette Vos, an expert in education and brain research and best-selling author of *The Learning Revolution*, people learn five times more information when both hemispheres of the brain are active. Alternate nostril breathing engages both hemispheres of the brain as it opens up both nostrils for a better breath.

The clearing and balancing effects nadi shodhana has on both the left and right nostrils makes it easier for students to breathe through the nose overall. There are many variations and styles of the hand positions and fingering in this pranayama; however, the most traditional way is to use the ring and little finger and the thumb of the right hand to alternately close and release the nostrils. The index and middle fingers are folded inward toward the palm (see figure 4.3).

To begin, invite the students to the floor and have them find a comfortable position. Usually students are seated, but a nice way to teach this technique is to have the students supine with their legs in a comfortable cross-legged position on the floor or up against a wall. Instruct students as follows: "Begin by exhaling out the left nostril while the right thumb closes the right nostril. Then inhale through the left nostril. Use the ring and little fingers of the right hand to close the left nostril and release the right nostril. Exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril. Close the right nostril with the thumb. Open the left nostril by releasing the ring and little fingers and exhale through the left side." This process completes one breath cycle. To start, ask the students to try 7 to 10 cycles through both nostrils.

These are simple, directed breathing techniques that can be introduced to students at all levels of yoga experience. There are many variations of hand positioning and duration of the breathing cycles. Remember: The most important concept to get across

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)
(AH-doh MOO-kah shvah-NAHS-anna)

Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Handstand)
(ah-doh moo-kah vriks-SHAHS-anna) adho mukha = face

Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal)
(ON-jol-ly MOO-drah)

Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)
(are-dah chan-DRAHS-anna)

Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)
(ARE-dah MOT-see-en-DRAHS-anna)

Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)
(BAH-dah cone-AHS-anna)

Bakasana (Crane Pose)
(bahk-AHS-anna)

Balasana (Child's Pose)
(bah-LAHS-anna)

Bharadvajasana I (Bharadvaja's Twist)
(bah-ROD-va-JAHS-anna), Bharadvaja

Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)
(boo-jang-GAHS-anna)

Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose)
(chaht-tour-ANG-ah don-DAHS-anna)

Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)
don-your-AHS-anna)

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (One-Legged King Pigeon Pose)
(aa-KAH pah-DAH rah-JAH-cop-poh-TAHS-anna)

Garudasana (Eagle Pose)
(gah-rue-DAHS-anna)

Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)
(go-moo-KAHS-anna)

Halasana (Plow Pose)
(hah-LAHS-anna)

Hanumanasana (Monkey Pose)
(hah-new-mahn-AHS-anna)

Janu Sirsasana (Head-to-Knee Pose)
(JAH-new shear-SHAHS-anna)

- Krounchasana (Heron Pose)**
 (-AHS-anna)
- Mari chyasana I (Pose Dedicated to the Sage Marichi, I)**
 (mar-ee-chee-AHS-anna)
- Mari chyasana III (Pose Dedicated to the Sage Marichi, I)**
 (mar-ee-chee-AHS-anna)
- Matsyasana (Fish Pose)**
 (mot-see-AHS-anna)
- Natarajasana (Lord of the Dance Pose)**
 (not-ah-raj-AHS-anna)
- Padmasana (Lotus Pose)**
 (pod-MAHS-anna)
- Paripurna Navasana (Full Boat Pose)**
 (par-ee-POOR-nah nah-VAHS-anna)
- Parivrtta Parsvakonasana (Revolved Side Angle Pose)**
 (par-ee-vrt-tah parsh-vah-cone-AHS-anna)
- Parivrtta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)**
 (par-ee-vrit-tah trik-cone-AHS-anna)
- Pasasana (Noose Pose)**
 (posh-AHS-anna)
- Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)**
 (POSH-ee-moh-tan-AHS-anna)
- Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Forward Bend)**
 (pra-sa-REE-tah pah-doh-tahn-AHS-anna)
- Salabhasana (Locust Pose)**
 (sha-la-BAHS-anna)
- Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)**
 (sah-LOM-bah sar-van-GAHS-anna)
- Salamba Sirsasana (Supported Headstand)**
 (sah-LOM-bah shear-SHAHS-anna)
- Savasana (Corpse Pose)**
 (shah-VAHS-anna)
- Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)**
 (SET-too BAHN-dah)
- Upta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle Pose)**
 SOUP-tah BAH-dah cone-NAHS-anna)

- **Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)**
(soup-TAH pod-ang-goosh-TAHS-anna)
- Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero or Heroine Pose)**
(soup-tah veer-AHS-anna)
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)**
(tah-DAHS-anna)
- Upavistha Konasana (Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend)**
(oo-pah-VEESH-tah cone-AHS-anna)
- Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose, Backbend, or Wheel)**
(ERD-vah don-your-AHS-anna)
- Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward-Facing Dog)**
(ERD-vah MOO-kah shvon-AHS-anna)
- Ustrasana (Camel Pose)**
(oosh-TRAHS-anna)
- Utkatasana (Chair Pose)**
(OOT-kah-TAHS-anna)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)**
(OOT-tan-AHS-anna)
- Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)**
oo-TEE-tah parsh-vah-cone-AHS-anna)
- Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)**
(oo-TEE-tah trik-cone-AHS-anna)
- Vasisthasana (Side Plank Pose)**
(vah-sish-TAHS-anna)
- Viparita Karani (Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose)**
(vip-par-ee-tah car-AHN-ee)
- Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II Pose)**
(veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna)
- Virabhadrasana III (Warrior III Pose)**
(veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna)
- Virasana (Hero Pose)**
(veer-AHS-anna)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)**
(vrik-SHAHS-anna)

Surya Namaskara A



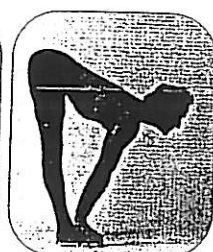
Samasthiti



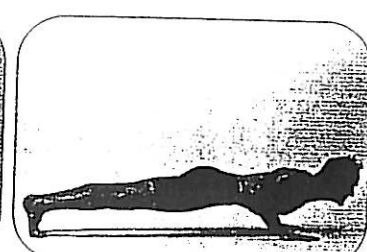
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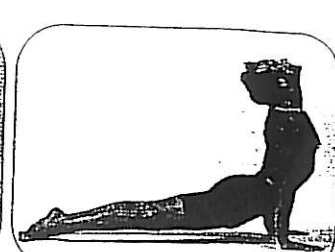
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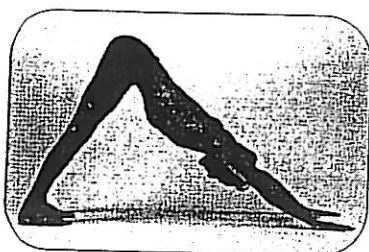
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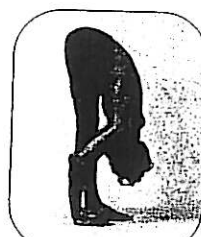
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FIVE

SIX
(Hold for 5 Breaths)

SEVEN



EIGHT



NINE



Samasthiti

vina vinyasayogena
asanadin n karayet

**"Oh Yogi, Do Not Practice Asana
Without Vinyasa."**

Vamana Rishi

Surya Namaskara B



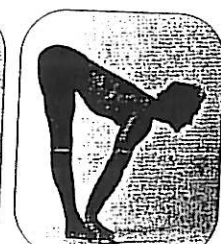
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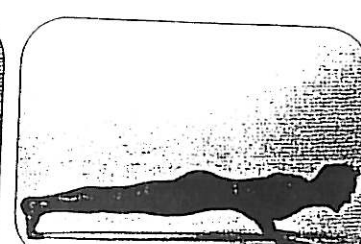
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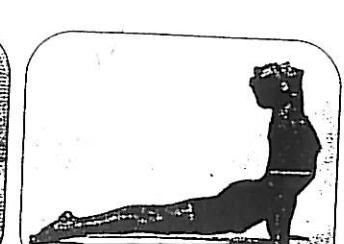
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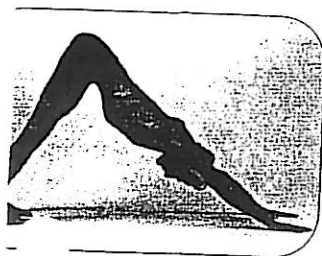
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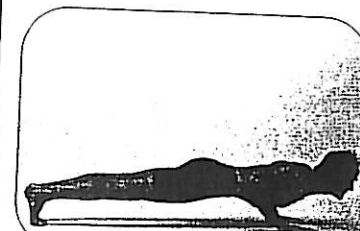
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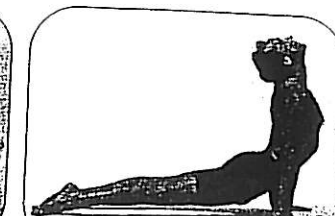
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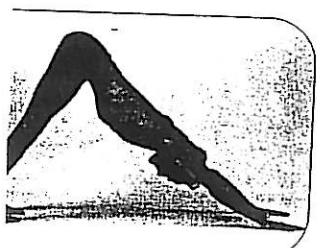
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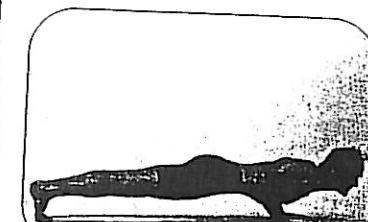
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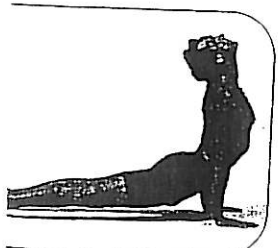
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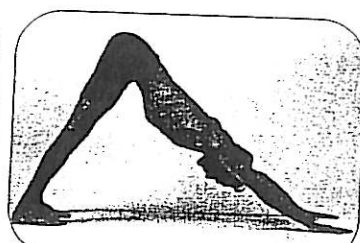
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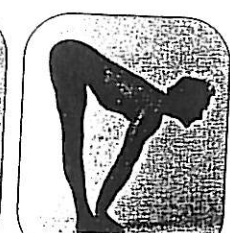
TWELVE



THIRTEEN



FOURTEEN
(Hold for 5 Breaths)



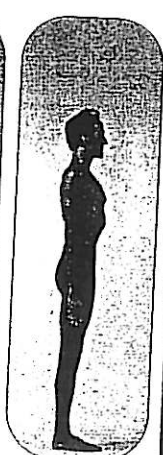
FIFTEEN



SIXTEEN

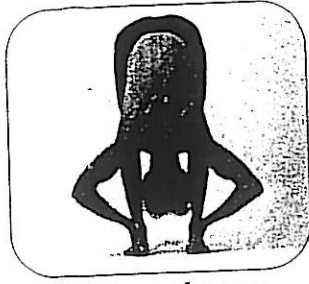


SEVENTEEN

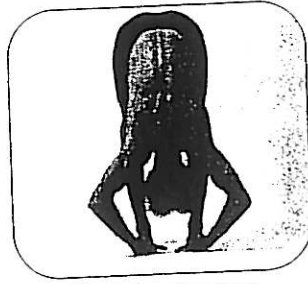


Samasthiti

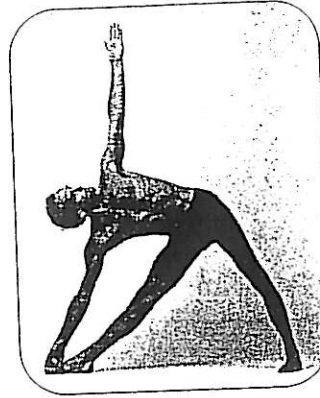
The Standing Sequence



Padangusthasana



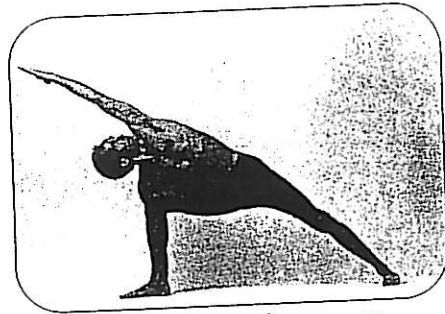
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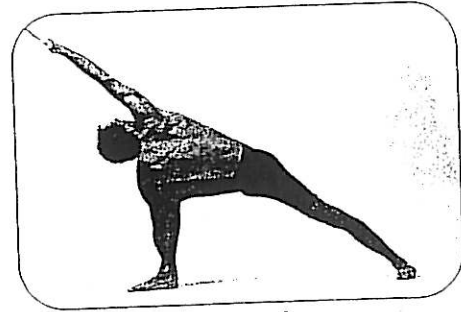
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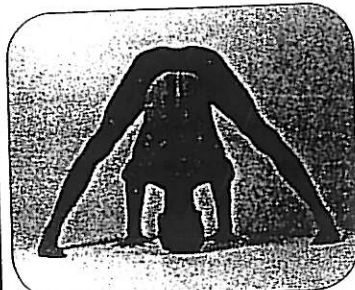
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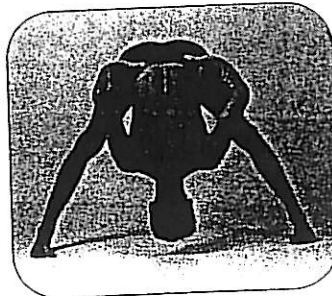
Utthita Parsvakonasana



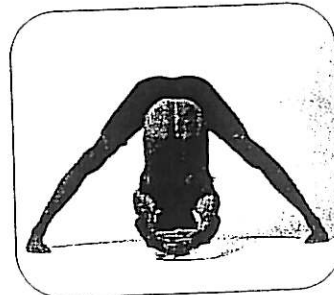
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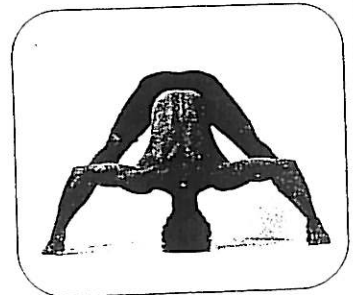
Prasarita Padottanasana
A



Prasarita Padottanasana
B



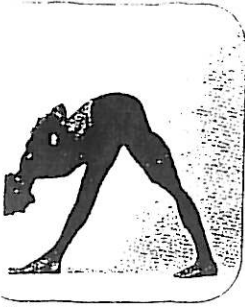
Prasarita Padottanasana
C



Prasarita Padottanasana
D

balance—a weight, force, or influence counteracting the effect of another
Webster Dictionary

The Standing Sequence cont.



Parsvottanasana



Utthita Hasta
Padangusthasana
A



Utthita Hasta
Padangusthasana
B



Utthita Hasta
Padangusthasana
C



Utthita Hasta
Padangusthasana
D



Ardha Baddha
Padmottanasana



Utkatasana



Virabhadrasana A



Virabhadrasana B

*"The Only Journey
Is The Journey Within"*
Rainer Maria Rilke

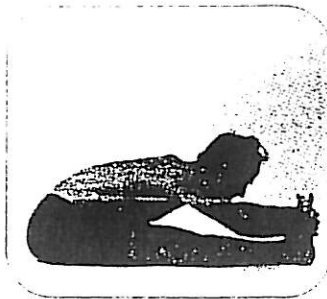
The Primary Series



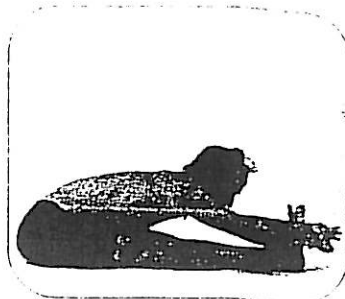
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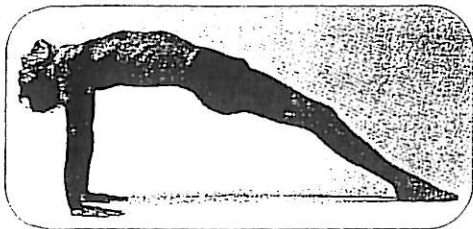
Paschimottanasana A



Paschimottanasana B



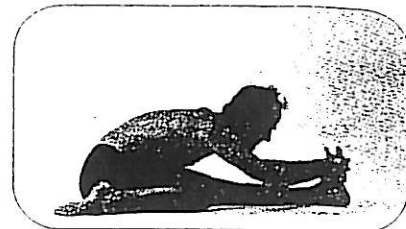
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Purvottanasana



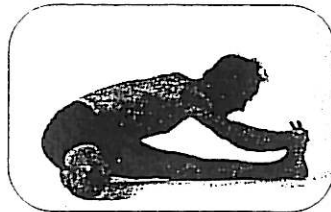
Ardha Baddha Padma
Paschimottanasana



Trianga Mukhaikapada
Paschimottanasana



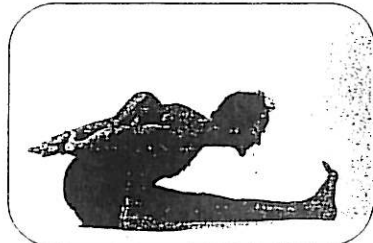
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Janu Sirsasana B



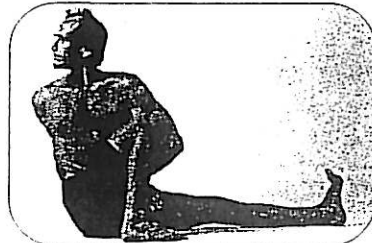
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Marichyasana A



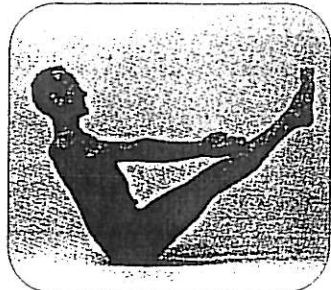
Marichyasana B



Marichyasana C



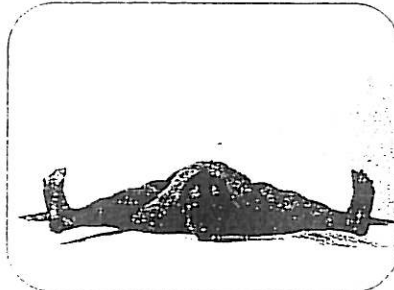
Marichyasana D



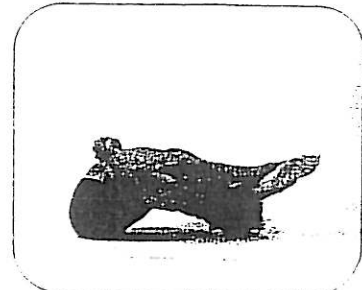
Navasana
Five Times



Bhujapidasana



Kurmasana



Supta Kurmasana

The Primary Series cont.



Garbha Pindasana



Kukkutasana



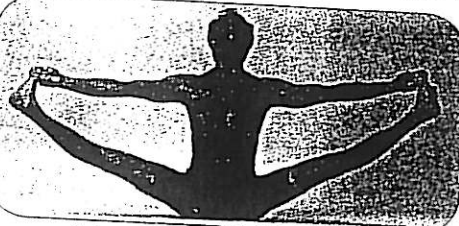
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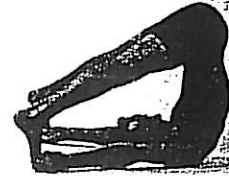
Baddha Konasana B



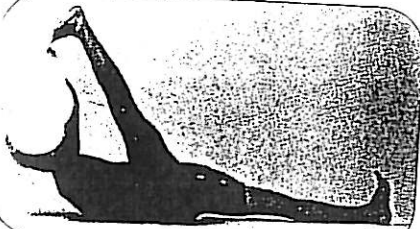
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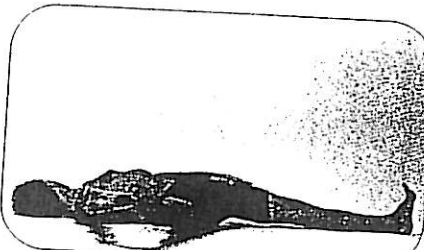
Upavishta Konasana B



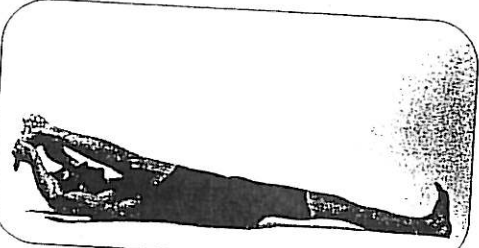
Supta Konasana



Supta Padangusthasana A



Supta Padangusthasana B



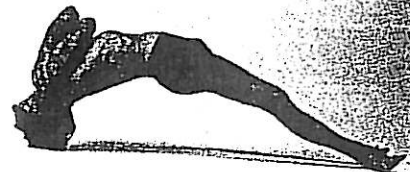
Supta Padangusthasana C



Ubhaya Padangusthasana



Urdhva Mukha Paschimottanasana



Setu Bandhasana

"99% Practice ~ 1% Theory"

K. Pattabhi Jois

Yoga as self-transformation

An American Hatha Yoga master details the common problems of daily practice and offers practical advice to students on how to persevere and enjoy working on yourself.

By Joel Kramer

For thousands of years, yoga has been a tool to open the mind and body, bringing transformation. At its core, yoga is a process that involves confronting your limits and transcending them. It is a psychophysical approach to life and to self-understanding that can be creatively adapted to the needs of the times.

Yoga transforms you by opening up the physical and mental binds that block your potential, limiting your life. Transformation is a process that brings newness and interest. You might think that changing deeply could make you so different that you'd lose touch with those you love and even yourself. Actually, the transformation that yoga brings makes you more yourself, and opens you up to loving with greater depth. It involves a honing and refining which releases your true essence, as a sculptor brings out the beauty of form in the stone by slowly and carefully chipping away the rest.

Doing yoga brings many concrete benefits: it's a powerful therapeutic tool for correcting physical and psychological problems; it retards aging and keeps you opened sexually; it gives strength and flexibility for other physical activities; it can enhance your looks, posture, skin and muscle tone, and vitality; and it can give your life a sense of grace and overall well-being.

At its deepest level, yoga involves generating energy. Energy is often thought of as a mysterious force which is either there or not, and out of your control. But through yoga, you can actually change its quality and generate more of it, by enlarging the body's capacity as an energy transformer. Everyone has experienced different qualities of energy. Sometimes you may have great energy, but it's

"scattered" or agitated—you're off in different directions at once. Yet, at other times, you may also have great energy and be very focused and calm. Yoga involves learning to generate energy, and also to focus it into different parts of your body. This enables you to break through physical and psychological blocks, increasing energy, which allows new interest to come into your life. At any instant, the quality of your life is directly related to how interested you are in it.

Yoga involves far more than either having or developing flexibility. Being able to do complicated postures doesn't necessarily mean you know how to do yoga. The essence of yoga is not attainments, but how awarely you work with your limits—wherever and whatever they may be. The important thing is not how far you get in any given pose, but how you approach the yogic process, which in turn is directly related to how your mind views yoga.

There are different basic frameworks of mind—what I call "headsets"—that people bring to yoga. One involves viewing a posture as an end to be achieved, a goal: how far you get in the posture is what counts. Another one views the posture as a tool to explore and open the body. Instead of using the body to "get" the posture, you use the posture to open the body. Whichever framework you're in greatly influences how you do each posture.

Approaching postures as goals makes you less sensitive to the messages the body is sending. If your mind is primarily on the goal, the gap between where you are and where you want to be, can bring tension and hinder movement. You push too hard and fast instead of allowing your body to open at its own pace. Paradoxically, if you're oriented toward the process instead of the end-results, progress and opening come naturally. Postures can be achieved through struggle, but the struggle itself limits both your immediate opening and how far you ultimately move in yoga.

Valuing "progress" is a deep part of our conditioning. It's natural to enjoy progress, but problems come when your yoga is attached at its core to results, instead of to the daily process of

opening and generating energy. This attachment imposes one of the real limits to your yoga. Many of you have probably noticed how your yoga is cyclical, in the sense that you're into it, then out of it, then into it again, and so on. One reason for this involves being subtly hooked into accomplishments. When you're improving, it turns you on, and you're motivated as long as you continue to improve. When you "plateau"—as we all on occasion do—you need all the energy it took to improve just to maintain where you are. If your main incentive is progress, the lack of improvement can cause you to lose interest. Consequently, you may do less or no yoga until you close up and your body complains. Then you do yoga to feel better, and again you improve until once more you hit a plateau.

The quality of mind that you bring to yoga is of utmost importance. In fact, most of the real limits that you confront in yoga live in the mind, not the body. People think they are limited by their body's endurance—that tiring is purely physical. I have found it is usually not the body that tires first, but rather, the mind which loses the stamina required for attention. When your mind tires, your attention wanes and begins to wander, and sensitivity to your body's messages diminishes. You treat the body with less care, and this tires it more quickly.

Yoga involves a balance between "control" and "surrender"—between pushing and relaxing, channeling energy and letting go, so the energy can move you. I have found there are basically two personality types in yoga. I call them the "pushers" and the "sensualists." The pushers are more into control and progress—the sensualists into surrender and relaxation. As yoga truly means balance, if your tendency is to push, you must also learn to let go, relax, and enjoy the sensuality of the stretch. If your tendency is to relax, and be "laid back," you must learn to experience the turn on of pushing your edges and using control to generate energy.

The art of yoga lies in learning how to focus and generate energy into different parts of the body, in listening to the body's messages (feedback), and in surrendering to where the energy leads you. The body's resistance should be respected, since it is useful feedback. Trying to conquer resistance and push past pain is actually another form of resistance—resistance to your own limits, to what and where you are now. When you change your focus from "resisting resistance" to channeling energy into where the limits lie, your body can follow its own flow and open on its own, with minimal resistance. Trying forcibly to push past your limits actually creates more resistance and tension, whereas surrendering to the posture ultimately draws you into far greater depth. The body will tell you when to move and deepen if you listen to it.

Another important aspect in my approach to yoga involves understanding "conditioning." Just as doing yoga is playing the edge between control and surrender, there is also an interplay between transformation and resistance to change. There's no way to remain the way you are now: you either become more rigid and crystallized, or you break out of patterns and transform. The conditioning process brings habits in the mind and body that accumulate over time. These patterns define you—the way you move, hold your body, what you think and even when you think. As you age, the habit-taking-on process makes you more rigid both physically and mentally. Your internal systems function less efficiently and your body's movements are more limited.

I am not presenting conditioning as a villain to be done away with, for it serves important functions in people's lives, as well as in the universe. Conditioning and its ensuing habits are part of the



A variation on the twist.

universal process of individuation. Individual entities, all of us, are systems with self-protective mechanisms that define boundaries and keep them intact. The way we build security in our life involves habits that we are often not conscious of. Some habits are necessary. They become dangerous if we unconsciously let them direct our lives. Repeating habits over time tends to put you on automatic like a machine, and filters how you relate to the present. If your habits are rigid and deep in the unconscious, the filter is very cloudy and you miss the present. If you miss the present, you miss all there really is.

Experience conditions you, leaving a mark, an imprint. Memory lives in the cells, in the systems of the body, in the brain, and in thought itself. The paradox of experience is that it both teaches you and limits you. It expands your horizons, and is the ground or matrix from which transformation can occur. At the same time, it also builds habits in the mind and body which narrow and confine you. For instance, if you pull a muscle in yoga, this experience can teach you how applying too much force may stem from greed or inattention. It can also create habits in your yoga. You can consciously or unconsciously avoid the area. Or, if you approach the injured muscle, the fear of hurting yourself again may bring tension that closes it further. As this is repeated, the muscle learns to close to protect itself from anticipated pain. A habit is formed.

There are habits in yoga as in everything you do repeatedly, but awareness of the nature of habits helps you avoid being automatically pushed by them. Doing postures like mechanical exercises turns yoga into calisthenics, which dulls the adventure and passion that is part of the transformative process. Resistance to doing yoga is often feedback that your practice has become stale and habit-bound.

"Feedback-sensitivity" is the capacity to listen to and understand the messages the different parts of the body are sending. This sensitivity is not only crucial in avoiding injuries or healing them, but it enables you to have greater control over the yogic process. For example, it is only through feedback-sensitivity that you can know when to move deeper into an area or when to back off the pose.

Physical Aspects

Before going into my approach to doing physical yoga, I would like to describe how yoga affects your well-being. Infants are flexible; their bodies move easily. As you age, you tighten and this tightness surrounds the nerves, glands, circulatory system, the spine and energy systems. The body then becomes less efficient; energy wanes as systems slow down or get blocked. The body is less sensitive and less in touch with itself—more coated and dulled. Since a basic dimension of life is movement on all levels, the very quality of life is dimmed.

The word "disease" means what it literally says: dis-ease. As the body becomes less "easy" in itself, it begins to break down. The process of yoga keeps the physical systems opened and energized which

prevents breakdown and illness. Yoga also has great curative potential since the postures are highly refined tools. They enable you to get into different bodily systems in very specific ways, strengthening and healing them. Yoga gives you the possibility of taking your health into your own hands.

Many people only concern themselves with health when it's gone. They lack the interest or the ability to stay in touch with the state of their various systems, until it's too late and breakdown occurs. Doing yoga can alert you when your reservoir of energy first begins to go down, as well as give you the means to replenish it. The preventative power of yoga is greatly aided by the fact that yoga builds sensitivity to internal feedback, helping you detect early warnings. You can then, through yoga, learn to heal yourself long before breakdown occurs.

Yoga has been called a "fountain of youth" because it brings health and vitality, but this is a misnomer. The search for a fountain of youth, whether through magic, drugs, or technique, indicates a resistance to the aging process. I prefer to call yoga a "fountain of life." Aging is inevitable. Yoga allows you to approach it awarably as a transformative process that can bring growth at new depths with maturation. Resisting aging, actually resisting transformation and growth. Paradoxically, the resistance to aging, which includes holding on to old, inappropriate ways of living, exacerbates the very aging process you fear.

In yoga you confront the living/dying process that expresses itself in aging. Youth is a time of innocence when the body maintains and even increases its energy fund automatically. Then there comes a time, usually in the late 20's or 30's, when this process reverses so that the body, left to its own devices, begins gradually to lose energy. It is possible, however, to age with continued increase in the power and efficiency of your energy. This does not happen by itself. You must deal consciously and awarably with the automatic tendencies of closure (entropy) in your body. Yoga not only counters the entropic process of breakdown, but it opens you up in new ways, bringing a way of maturing and developing with elegance, depth and richness.

Doing yoga in the morning puts you in direct touch with how you have been treating yourself over the previous day. You learn to read subtle differences in flexibility, endurance, and energy. The body has its own intelligence, and being able to listen to and learn from that intelligence is an essential part of yoga. Through this paying attention, yoga can align and remold the structure of your body according to an inner sense of what needs.

Techniques of Yoga

Yoga, both as an accumulated body of knowledge and as an art, involves learning and refining technique. Teachers are useful in helping expand your technical repertoire, which in turn enhances your potential for creative self-expression in yoga. Technique enables you to work the body in deeper ways, and it also helps hone focus and attention.

However, it is important to keep in mind that although technique has its own aesthetic quality—its own beauty—it is a means for transformation, not an end in itself.

Attention & Focus

The essence of yoga is focus and attention—attention to breath, to the body's messages, to energy, and even to the quality of your attention. Over the years, I have found that the way I do yoga is continually changing. Deepening your practice is not so much learning to do more advanced postures, but rather increasing your understanding of how to do yoga. Precision in technique can make yoga, even in very basic postures, more focused and exciting, and can deepen your understanding of what yoga is about.

Learning to do yoga is, among other things, learning to love doing it. Not necessarily all the time, but as a general presence in your life. You can love someone who on occasion frustrates or angers you, yet the love remains underneath. If you've been doing yoga for some time and you don't love doing it, this in itself is an indication that the way you are approaching it should be questioned. At any place in a posture, are you turned on, interested in being there? If you find you're not, this most likely means your mind is somewhere else. Perhaps you're stoically enduring the pose so you can feel you've done what you "should" or "what's good for you." You could also be struggling to achieve the final goal, which may be a completed posture, or yesterday's level of flexibility. If your attention and interest are not in the body, you are not fully present in the posture.

Attention in yoga involves letting go, a relaxation that surrenders to the "what is" of the posture. Here you are alert and watchful, but not passive. It's the body that "decides" when to hold, when to back off, when to deepen, and when to come out of the posture.

Yoga develops the ability to focus energy into specific areas, which generates energy whether you're stretching or relaxing in a pose. Learning to focus energy with great depth and precision is a vital part of yoga that is often not emphasized. This ability does not depend on flexibility, but rather on

a quality of mind that is able consciously to scan the body for tightnesses and blocks, and then focus into them.

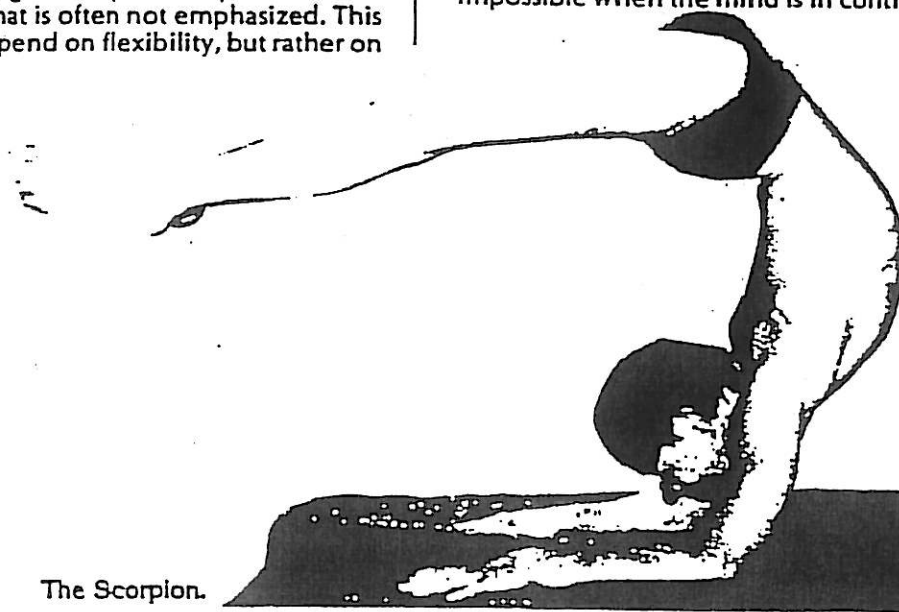
By "attention" I mean a broadening of the spectrum of awareness, which occurs when the mind lets go of control and direction. "Focus" is more one-pointed than attention and, of course, involves control. Although focus and attention are different, they are intimately connected. It is through being attentive that you learn where to focus, and deeper focus brings a capacity for a greater attention. This is another way that yoga plays between control and surrender.

Breath

Breath is the fuel of life (traditionally called "prana"). In yoga it serves as a bridge between the mind and the body, since it operates on automatic and can also be consciously controlled.

Breath is a cornerstone of technique. Learning to use it effectively is a key to deepening your yoga, since it directly increases stretch, strength, endurance and balance. I use a variation of "ujjayi," which is deep-chest breathing that lengthens the breath through glottal control. The pull of lungs across the glottis on inhale and the push of lungs on exhale help you move in the postures and deepen them, while at the same time relaxing you. In postures that involve folding, compacting, and forward-bending, you move and stretch on the exhale while holding and relaxing, or aligning on the inhale. Conversely, stretches that expand the lungs and chest are done on the inhale, relaxing or aligning on the exhale.

Breath itself is an interesting lesson in control and surrender. By using breath, instead of the mind, to guide and control movement and stretch, the body can let go, surrendering to the posture more easily. When breath and body are coordinated, so they are moving as one, energy flows into the musculature, totally changing the quality of yoga. The proper use of breath gets you out of your mind and into your body, bringing a grace and sensuality to movement impossible when the mind is in control. This way of



The Scorpion.

using breath gives a relaxed and centered attention to the whole organism, and can also be used to focus energy into different parts of the body.

Playing Edges

Another important dimension in yoga is learning how to "play the edge." The body has edges that mark its limits in stretch, strength, endurance, and balance. The flexibility edge can be used to illustrate this. In each posture, at any given time, there is a limit to stretch that I call the final or "maximum edge." This edge has a feeling of intensity, and is right before pain, but it is not pain itself. The edge moves from day to day and from breath to breath. It does not always move forward; sometimes it retreats. Part of learning how to do yoga is learning how to surrender to this edge, so that when it changes you move with the change. It is psychologically easier to move forward than to back off. But it's as important to learn to move back if your edge closes, as it is to learn to move forward slowly as the body opens.

There is a subtle psychological addiction to a completed pose, or at least to our maximum extensions. The tendency to push toward maximum extension quickly, puts you out of touch with the body's feedback and makes you come out of the posture sooner. Out of the memory of how flexible I was yesterday, I can be unconsciously pushing toward that remembered level of flexibility, being content if I meet it, enthused if I surpass it, and disappointed if I cannot reach it.

Each posture ideally involves the whole body, even though postures usually have one or more major areas where the stretch is most deeply felt. If you reach for your maximum edge too quickly, you bypass many areas. This gives the illusion of a completed stretch, but the body may not be properly aligned, nor really as open as it can be. Opening the ancillary areas of the body before you reach for maximum extension, helps insure proper alignment and ultimately deepens the major stretch.

There is another less obvious edge that is very easy to miss: I call it the first or "minimum edge." This edge occurs while moving into the posture where the body meets its very first resistance. In beginning a pose, initially you move with ease until the first hint of the sensation of blockage or holding appears. This is the first edge, and it's very important to stop here to acclimatize yourself, realign the posture, and become aware of your breath and deepen it. Your attention should be in the feeling, waiting for it to diminish, at which point the body will automatically move to greater depth and a new edge will appear. This process repeats itself until you eventually reach your final edge. By this time, your body has opened with minimal resistance or effort. Often the more slowly and carefully you treat your early edges, the deeper your final edge will be. Building endurance involves staying longer at the early edges and moving slowly toward intensity, for the closer you

are to your final edge, the less endurance you tend to have. Also learning to hold the posture at intermediary edges until you can deepen and slow the breath, enables you to relax along the way.

Playing edges slowly in this fashion has the advantage of giving you better alignment throughout the whole process, and a sharper capacity to listen to feedback, which enables you to enjoy greater levels of intensity without pain, and minimizes the possibility of injury. Edge-playing also allows you to get in touch with the sensual nature of the posture and the quality of feeling in the stretch, so that each pose can become an aesthetic experience.

Pain & Feedback

It is vital to know the difference between pain and intensity. The line between them might sometimes appear nebulous, but it is actually well defined by the state of your mind. Pain is not only physical, but psychological, too, for it involves a judgment of discomfort—not liking to be there. If you are running from the feeling, it's pain. Intensity that is not pain generates an energy and sensuous quality that turns you on.

Fear and ambition can often cloud the difference between pain and intensity. If you're afraid of hurting yourself, low levels of feeling can be interpreted as pain and therefore avoided, whereas ambition can make you ignore or tolerate pain. If you are fearful in a posture, it is wise not to try to override the fear in order to be "courageous," since this makes injuring yourself more likely, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead you can play on the edge of fear: find a place in the posture where you're not afraid, but near where the fear comes in; hold this position, deepen the breath, and wait for relaxation to come and the body to open. Only then do you move forward. If you are aware of being ambitious in a posture, I strongly recommend you stay with your first edge longer and move through your intermediary edges slower. This will bring a feedback-sensitivity that can help counter the tendency to ignore the body's messages.

Pain is often hard to recognize as it isn't necessarily sharp or intense, nor does great intensity always mean pain. If the feeling is such that you are trying to get away from it, it's pain. If you are afraid, even at relatively low levels of intensity, this is your edge, by definition. You can become less fearful by opening slowly, rather than pushing past psychological limits.

Running away from pain can take different forms: stoically enduring, waiting to get the posture over with, thinking of something else, or rushing the posture. These states are often feedback indicating discomfort. Pain causes inattention in the pose, actually increasing the likelihood of overextending the body and pulling a muscle. Most injuries in yoga are brought about by ambition or inattention—usually both. Ambition in a posture takes many forms: holding it a prescribed length of time, trying to stretch as far as someone

else, unconsciously reaching for remembered levels of flexibility, or trying to achieve or reproduce psychic states. Ambition is a characteristic of thought, and therefore a fact of life, as is comparison. You cannot eliminate ambition through effort, for the very effort is ambition. Awfully playing the different edges turns your attention away from ambition to the body's feelings. Ideally a posture should not bring pain. Pain is feedback—if you ignore it or try to push past it, you will eventually hurt yourself. Doing yoga with habitual discomfort colors your attitude toward yoga, making you more reluctant to do it. It also turns yoga into a chore, instead of the joy it could be.

Lines of Energy

In addition to breath and playing your edges, there is a third dimension to physical yoga. This dimension involves channeling energy to different parts of the body by creating what I call "lines of energy." These lines of energy are vibratory currents that move in different directions within each posture. Descriptions of internal states are approximations at best. Even the word "energy," when it is used to signify an inward level of activation, may seem vague. Yet we are aware of having more or less energy. If you pay attention, you may notice that some parts of the body seem alive and vital, while others feel dead and blocked. You may also notice subtle currents moving in the body. This should not be surprising since the body has a hydraulic (circulatory) and an electrical (nervous) system.

Most of the stretching done in postures primarily involves muscles and tendons. But there is another kind of stretching that I call "stretching in the nerves." Here you use the muscles to stretch the nerves, creating an energy flow, instead of to gain extension in the posture. The focus is on creating



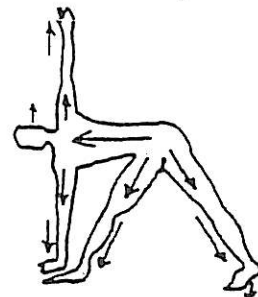
A variation on the handstand.

an internal current in the nerves that can be felt and intensified. The intensity of this current in the nerves can be controlled by the muscles and has a vibratory feeling, usually moving in an outward direction. For example, you can create an internal line of energy by holding your arm parallel to the floor and stretching it outward. This brings a vibration that moves from the shoulder out the arm, through the fingers. Each posture has its own lines of energy which can be created at different stages in the posture, and which complement one another and work together to involve the body as a whole.

These lines of energy affect your yoga in several ways by: 1) increasing energy within the posture, 2) toning and relaxing the nervous system, 3) decreasing the likelihood of injury through over-extension of muscular stretch, 4) increasing strength and endurance in postures, and 5) internally aligning the body in the pose.

Concern for proper alignment in a posture is important; however, many people exclusively use external methods to get aligned—such as having another person, who hopefully knows alignment, adjust their body, or trying to approximate a picture or ideal of a completed pose. External methods are useful at times, but I feel it is only when alignment is done internally, by the body's own intelligence, that a posture is truly "understood."

In the Triangle pose, the arrows in figure one mark the direction of five lines of energy. Strengthening the flow of the current along each of the lines automatically aligns the body from the inside. When the posture is properly aligned, the currents of energy flow



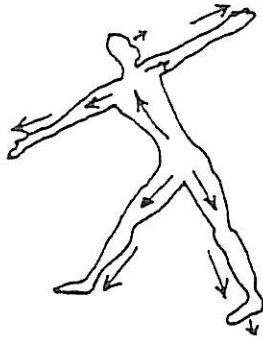
more freely. This can be felt. These lines of energy break through blocks in the body without "forcing" the posture and ultimately give greater extension.

If in the Triangle, you emphasize the line from shoulder through the raised arm to the finger tips, it opens the chest and aligns the pelvis. The back leg line moves from the hip down the leg into the outside of the foot, raising the arch. This line also aligns the pelvis and frees the hip. The front leg line moves from the buttock down the leg to the foot, aligning the front knee in a plane with the pelvis. The line moving up the spine outward elongates the spine, giving it room to move. This also unlocks the hip and works in opposition to the back leg line. The fifth line, from the shoulder down to the fingertips of the lower arm, helps keep the shoulders in the same plane as the pelvis, and also helps move the posture to greater depth.

These lines are actually moving the energy in five directions and creating different oppositions of musculature. Using muscle sets in opposition can allow you to separate different parts of the body

(and in other postures, even vertebrae of the spine) from each other, creating control, extension, energy and release. It is learning to create and channel lines of energy that makes this possible.

In figure 2 the extension is much less than figure 1. Assume this is the place of first resistance—the first edge. By deepening your breath and consciously increasing the five lines in the posture, you are doing what I call “stretching within the pose” or “nerve-stretching,” instead of muscle-stretching, which is reaching for greater extension. This aligns the body throughout the pose, helping you let go of initial resistance, and allows the body to draw you in more deeply.



Lever

There are three basic kinds of “levers” or forces that help move the muscles: 1) external levers (floor, wall, and other objects), 2) body-on-body levers (where one part of the body moves another), and 3) internal levers (where the muscles learn to lever themselves without external aid).

External levers are the easiest to use and internal levers are the hardest to learn. But it is important whenever possible to use internal levers, since they teach you how to move yourself from the inside. This builds sensitivity in the tissue and also gives the kind of control necessary to deepen your yoga. It is easiest to injure yourself using external levers because you are applying force to the body from the outside. Body-on-body levers also exert force from the outside, but allow more sensitivity to feedback. It is hard to injure yourself using internal levers because it’s difficult for the body to push itself beyond its limits from the inside. All internal levers depend on lines of energy to work properly. (However, not all lines of energy are internal levers.) Learning how to use these levers opens yet another dimension in yoga.

Understanding the Posture

I have found that a more important framework than mentally aiming to “get” the final pose, is “understanding how the posture works.” When attention and focus, edge-playing, levers, and lines of energy interweave so that these seemingly disparate elements become one, then you understand how the posture works. Understanding a posture is not just knowing with your mind how to place the body. The understanding comes when the muscles and nerves, and even the cells themselves, “know” how to work the posture.

There are many different ways of using breath, edges, lines of energy, alignment and levers in combination and separately. For example, you can focus on deepening and lengthening breath at the

first edge; when breathing becomes regular, change your focus to creating one line of energy. As soon as the body holds this in a relaxed way, you can add a second line of energy. You could also let go of one energy line and turn your attention to a different line. Another technically more difficult way of approaching the same posture is slowly to create and intensify all the lines of energy at once, using breath to control the intensity. Lines of energy bring what I call a dynamic relaxation to the muscles, for although the nerves are generating a current of energy, the muscles let go and eventually move to greater extension. When you understand how the posture works and follow where the energy of the body leads you, often you find that what you think is a completed pose has further extensions and possible variations.

Psychological Aspects

Resistance

Transformation, change, growth, actualizing potential—these are very positive-sounding ideals that most people who do yoga strive for. Yet all of us who are involved in any growth process face resistance. In yoga there is resistance in the tissue, resistance to doing yoga, resistance to changing the habits and lifestyles that impede growth. As a person who has been involved with yoga and growth-oriented activities for years, it seemingly would be nice if I could tell you that I have conquered resistance. I have not. I do not feel that it can be totally conquered, although it need not be a significant problem either. You can learn to use it as a teacher, for resistance can teach you where your habits and attachments lie. It can also teach you where you block yourself and where you are self-protective. In order to go into this, I would like to discuss more of the psychological aspects of yoga.

That the mind and body affect each other is obvious. Psychological tensions live in the musculature: when you are “up tight,” you are literally tightening the muscles and blocking energy. Through years of accumulated tensions, the body becomes a repository for the unconscious, in that it “learns” to close off different physical areas that affect emotional states. For instance, a compressed chest literally makes it harder to experience deep emotions. The strength of the emotions that may come from opening your chest can make you uncomfortable, so you may resist opening that area.

So much of what limits our yoga practice is not in the body itself, but rather mental attitudes and habits. Resistance in postures is in the mind as well as in the body. Mental resistance can take many forms—forgetting, excuses, so-called “laziness,” even illness and injuries. If you can minimize mental resistance, that is the key to eventually working through the physical resistance. As you get deeper into Hatha (physical) Yoga, it becomes increasingly necessary to get to know the nature of the mind.

Most of us totally identify with our mind, calling it ourselves, without realizing it is just one of the

systems that makes up a human being. The importance of the mind is enormous, and its power so great, that it often ignores, subverts, or overrides the other systems that have their own intelligence. Our body may tell us we're not hungry, yet we eat; or when tired, we push ourselves. Though yoga can make us more attuned to the wisdom within the tissue, it is the mind that must interpret this. How the mind interprets is directly related to its nature and its experience (conditioning). We don't usually think of the mind as structured and conditioned, because our mind is like a lens that we view ourselves and the world through—a given, that we rarely question. Yet there are principles to how the mind works, just like there are principles to how the body works. Understanding them opens up the mind and body to hitherto unimagined possibilities, and is a doorway to transformation.

Looking at resistance can reveal the nature of mind, for what we are resisting is often the very thing we say we want. Why do I do yoga at all? How much of my yoga is fueled by fear—of aging, of dying, of losing energy? How much of my yoga is driven by ambition—for accomplishment, for higher states of consciousness, for youth and health, for vibrancy? Of course, we all have fears and ambitions that we bring to yoga. The problem is not that we have them, but rather that they take over our yoga, often unconsciously. When this happens, the mind is oriented either to the past or the future, and loses contact with the living process of yoga: how the muscles feel, the energy being generated, the subtle changes which require great attention. If you become aware of how the motives that underly fear and ambition can limit your practice, this does not necessarily eliminate them or your other reasons for doing yoga. It can, however, help you put them aside during your practice, so that you can be less mechanical and more present and attentive.

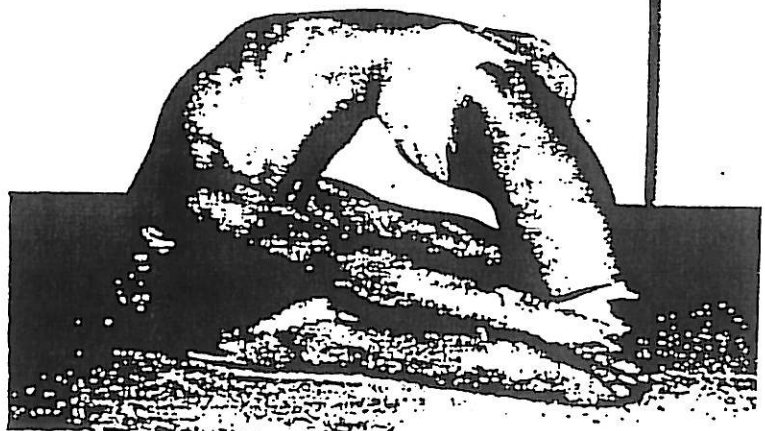
Habits

Have you ever asked yourself why you do things that you know aren't good for you? Not, "how do I stop?" but, "why do I do them at all?" Another way of asking is, "What is the nature of self-destructiveness?" Most of us think we would like to have more energy, but if we look carefully and honestly, we see that we keep our energy controlled within safe boundaries. If our energy gets too low, the fabric of our life falls apart. We need a certain amount of energy to keep it together. Less obviously, if your energy gets too high, it can push you out of your habits and the security and pleasures they are linked to. Many activities take a certain energy level—some high, others low. For example, you can't watch television if your energy is too high, for you become restless. If, for whatever reason, you are attached to TV, you may overeat to bring your energy down. Here you are unconsciously controlling your energy with overeating, which is self-destructive, in order to preserve a pleasure. Doing yoga properly increases energy, which pushes against mental and physical habits, while the habits, by their nature, resist change.

"Bad habits" can be looked upon as a way of resisting change by hooking you to immediate gratification, which is a powerful source of conditioning. The taste of food, for example, can give immediate pleasure. The power of taste makes it difficult not to let it rule you, which puts you out of touch with using food for energy and nourishment. The feeling of being out of control, unable to resist temptation, is usually a sign of physical or psychological addiction, and has mechanical aspects that keep you on automatic. Though you "know" the pleasure is not worth the pain it will cause, it is still often surprisingly difficult to resist it. Self-destructiveness involves, among other things, going for an immediate pleasure, even though the end result is pain. Part of the reluctance to let go of the pleasures within the addictions. Doing yoga awfully can unhook you from those habits and addictions.

When you recognize what an important role mind plays in yoga, you can see why exploring the mind is essential. As conditioning in the body narrows the body's movements, so do habits in the mind tend to make you more "narrow-minded." A narrow mind involves more than just being attached to a particular set of beliefs. It narrows the whole field of perception and also cuts off emotional responsiveness and empathy. Rigidity in the mind constricts mental movement and consequently limits the field of what is possible for you in life. The beliefs, values, headsets, and even the wants that live in thought create self-images that determine what you think, imagine, and therefore what you do. In physical yoga, the process of confronting and nudging the body's limits, blocks, and conditionings opens and transforms you. So, too, as you get to know your mind, how it works and where your psychological limits are, the process opens the mind and literally expands consciousness.

How much do memory, expectation, and immediate gratification affect the way you do yoga? What thoughts come up during your yoga practice? Are there postures you look forward to doing, while you avoid others? Do you hurry the ones you don't like to get them over with? Does your mind wander? Do you contemplate what posture to do next, how long you have left to go, or what you're going to do after yoga? These types of thoughts may



cross your mind while doing yoga. Naturally, they greatly influence how you do the pose and the quality of energy generated.

Most of us involved in yoga tell ourselves we want to grow. If we look honestly at this, what we generally mean by "growth" is keeping everything about ourselves and our lives that we like, getting rid of what we don't like, and getting more of what we think we're going to like. Real growth and transformation move you not only from things you don't like, but also from pleasures and habits you're attached to. You cannot be certain how you would be if you were different or in what direction growth will take you. Real growth has aspects of unpredictability in it that can not only alter your habits, but even the very likes and dislikes, or preferences, that underlie them.

People often ask this kind of question: "To do yoga, will I have to give up wine and steak?" It's important to understand that the fear of giving up or losing certain pleasures (whatever they may be) can bring the reaction of holding on more tightly, which limits your yoga and growth. There are so many pleasures and habits that define your life—your very personality. The old, by its nature, has a comfort. Even your problems and "hang ups" are a form of security against change. Some habits and pleasures are appropriate only during certain periods of life. Others can remain fitting, if modified, while still others might meaningfully stay with you over your lifespan. Whether what you are doing is in fact "right" for your life is a basic question that cannot be answered through formulas. One of the real gifts yoga gives you is more sensitivity to life, which moves you toward what is appropriate for you.

In the process of yoga, habits and ways of being can leave or modify on their own. This is not to say there is no resistance to letting go of old pleasures, or that you do not have to use intelligence to free yourself from aspects of your life that are no longer appropriate. Rather, the energy of yoga, and the awareness it brings, make more obvious what is and is not conducive to your well-being. The day-to-day practice of yoga gives you messages that are very difficult to ignore.

There is an edge that each of us must confront between growing, which is an adventure, and holding on to security. Some security is necessary as a base to move from, while too much dampens growth and dulls life by keeping newness out. One of the remarkable things about yoga is that it generates energy that opens you, while building both the physical and psychological strength to assimilate change into your life. This gives an entirely different kind of security—the security of knowing that you can respond to whatever challenges life may bring.

Competition & Comparison

Have you ever noticed how much of your day-to-day life you spend thinking? Thought can be very mechanical and repetitive. In different situations you have certain thought patterns which are so much like tapes that I call them "mental cassettes." They serve many purposes. For

example, some mental tapes reduce tension. Others channel anger to hurt or hurt to anger (depending on which you're used to and more comfortable with). Many of these tapes also evaluate and judge. How much of your life do you spend feeling either "better than" or "worse than?" What thoughts bring these feelings? We use our minds to control how we feel as best we can. Often controlling how we feel gives immediate relief or gratification, but causes more severe long-term problems. For example, if I am envious of you and also think envy is bad, or a sign of how unevolved I am, I suppress it with thought. I talk myself out of feeling it consciously, or pretend I don't feel it at all, and hide it from myself by burying it deep within the body's tissues. This is the stuff of tension.

Yoga is usually presented as being non-competitive. At its heart, this is true, but that doesn't mean yoga is free from competition at all times. As you get more deeply into yoga, the competitive aspect of mind must be looked at, for if you don't explore it, competition can occur automatically, and take you over unawaresly. Either you channel yourself toward accomplishment, ultimately resulting in injuries, or you try to suppress competitiveness, which closes you to the learning that can only come through comparison. If you subscribe to a value system that judges competition to be bad, it makes it harder to see it should it arise in you. This impedes self-knowledge, and closes and tightens you.

If you look very carefully at competition, you will find that its roots lie in comparison, which is a basic mode of thought. The very notion of "progress" implies comparison. You may say that you can be competitive with yourself without comparing yourself to others. This is partially true, but it is important to see that being competitive with yourself has aspects of competitiveness with others in it. Standards of excellence or progress do not exist in a vacuum, but arise in the context of what other people are doing.

The mind that compares is a useful and necessary tool, for day-to-day comparison is a basis for feedback. Doing yoga daily is a very direct way of tuning in on how you have been treating yourself on the previous day, as well as seeing long-range trends. Diet, emotions, conflict, stress, and relationships affect you and your yoga. These aspects of life can be used as feedback that can help you learn how things affect each other. Reading feedback of this sort is based on comparison.

Wanting to progress has a self-competitive aspect—wanting to be as good as or better than yesterday, or last year. Also, comparing yourself with others, whether you like it or not, is inevitable. Comparison, and its extension competition, cannot be eliminated through effort, no matter how much you might want to. Trying to be non-competitive is competing with yourself or others on how non-competitive you are. If you think you are succeeding, (and the mind can convince itself of anything), this can feed feelings of superiority, which is competition. The meditative state of mind that is essential for the necessary attention in yoga transcends competition, not by fighting it, but

rather by seeing its place as feedback, and also seeing its limits and dangers.

Comparison is an integral part of perceiving change, but I can subtly begin to compete — with myself or others — in how much or how fast I am changing and transforming; In this way, even the idea of transformation can become yet another goal to be achieved. Transformation is an endless process to be lived, that cannot be captured or possessed — you can only participate in it.

Evolution

Yoga, at its core, is looking within to understand the timeless question, "Who am I?" As you delve into the deep regions of your being, the knowledge that comes is not merely about you, the individual, but includes the understanding of yourself as part of the total fabric of life. When the parts of the whole open up to each other, breaking the boundaries of separateness, real communication, which is communion, occurs.

Movement is at the core of energy, relationship, growth—it is at the heart of life itself. Evolution is the way movement expresses itself throughout the universe. Evolution can be looked upon as the movement of forms toward greater complexity and adaptability. This is, however, only the external form, the skin, of evolution, which makes possible the most basic movement: the evolution of awareness. Maturation and evolution come when the spectrum of awareness broadens, becoming more inclusive.

Yoga brings opening and movement deep within the very fiber of your being, and expands consciousness, enlarging your capacity for depth of communication. This self-transformation opens you to a more profound relationship with life, and also to an aware participation in the evolutionary process. In the last analysis, these two things are one. ★

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The Eight Limbs of Ashtanga



In a direct translation from the ancient Sanskrit word *ashtanga*, *ashto* means "eight", while *anga* means "limb" or "stage". The renowned Indian sage Pantanjali, writing more than two thousand years ago, assigns eight limbs to the tree of yoga – each limb being a stage or step along the path to self-realization. In the tradition stemming from this ancient text, each limb of yoga is given in a precise order through which practitioners must progress. Starting from the bottom, these eight stages are: Yama (moral codes); Niyama (self-purification and study); Asana (posture); Pranayama (breath control); Pratyahara (sense control); Dharana (concentration); Dhyana (meditation); and finally Samadhi (contemplation, self-realization, or a state of bliss).

Heart & mind will have to be unified to do the yoga with Ujjayi

Through his writing, Pantanjali instructs us that all eight stages must be observed and practised in turn in order to purify and yoke (meaning "to unify" in this context) mind, body, and soul. At the end of the journey, the fruits of the tree of yoga are then available to be harvested.

Because the concepts underlying the first two limbs, Yama and Niyama, are initially difficult to grasp for anybody who has not been steeped in Eastern traditions and philosophy since birth, Shri K Pattabhi Jois (Guruji) first introduces his Western students to Asana, the third limb, because it is through the demanding discipline and practice of Asana that students begin to observe and understand the importance of breath control.

PREVIOUS PAGE When executed with grace, the forward bend radiates qualities of inner peace. This pose appears many times in various guises throughout the practice – balanced, as the one pictured here in Urdhva Mukha Paschimattanasana; standing, as in Surya Namaskara; or seated. The physical benefits of the forward bend are numerous, but in particular the digestive processes are stimulated and strengthened as a result.

Through the observance of the ujjayi breath (see pp. 18-21), students begin to experience clarity of mind. With this background, students then have some ability to contemplate developing the first and second limbs of yoga.

Yama (moral codes)

Yama comes from the root word *yam*, which means "to restrain". Yama can be divided into five moral codes: Ahimsa (non-violence); Satya (truthfulness); Asteya (non-stealing); Brahmacharya (preserving vital fluids); and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness).

not to be angry
not to be greedy
not to be attached to things
not to be attached to people
not to be attached to things

Yama indicates how individuals should respond and to relate to other people and all living beings, and to the environment, in order to achieve a peaceful and harmonious world. In the practice of Asana, students learn that they must first be able to observe all the moral codes in their relationship with themselves in order to relate in the same fashion to the outside world.

Throughout the practice of Asana, students must respect the limits and capabilities of their own bodies. At no point should they force a movement or impose a stretch that causes injury to themselves.

Ahimsa deals with the aspect of non-violent action. When starting the practice of Asana, students will almost certainly become frustrated at some point with the difficulty of achieving a particular posture – the lotus posture, for example, which is the classic meditation pose and requires patience and tolerance to learn. This frustration can cause students to force themselves into the posture without showing due respect for their knees. This will eventually result in injury. These difficult and potentially injurious postures are designed to teach yoga students how to relate to their own bodies, not with violence but with respect and love.

Satya teaches students to be truthful in their relationships with themselves and with others. In

the practice of Asana, you need to be honest with yourself and your practice without harbouring egotistical expectations. It is important to accept where your practice is without always striving for more. Practice requires devotion, discipline, and enthusiasm while working within reasonable limits.

Asteya teaches students not to cheat, steal, or be jealous or envious of others. Yoga Asana is a non-competitive practice, and students need to look to their neighbours for inspiration rather than to cast judgements or to make negative comparisons.

Brahmacharya is the discipline designed to prevent practitioners turning to sexual passion at inappropriate times during the month. There are times set down when it is considered appropriate for men and women to enjoy each other's bodies, and although it is unlikely that many people will want to impose what, to Western eyes, appears to be an arbitrary timetable on their sexual activity, the practice of Asana holds to the belief that squandering sexual fluids drains the practitioner's energy and weakens the body.

Aparigraha is concerned with non-possessiveness. In relation to Asana, for example, it is better to practise for the appropriate amount of time necessary to maintain your physical health rather than to push yourself too hard because you desire to be better than you are. This part of the moral code of Yama teaches you how to let go of the "attachment to progress" and to allow progress to happen spontaneously. If the demands on you increase for any reason, then allow your practice to reflect your changed circumstances, without you feeling the need to hold on to what you were able to achieve before the change. Sometimes, less is more.

Niyama (self-purification and study)

Ni can be translated as "down" or "into", while yam means "to restrain". Niyama can be divided into five codes: Shaucha, Santosha, Tapas, Swadhyaya, and Ishwarapranidhana, all of which refer to self-cleansing and can be dealt with together.

living with awareness of god's will

inner self + external cleansing

If Yama is to do with mental purification, then Niyama deals with contentment and physical cleansing – purification of the body – both internally and externally. Spiritual purification is achieved through the recital of Vedic mantras and surrender of the self to God.

Students of yoga address the concepts of Yama and Niyama gradually, certainly over a period of years. Guruji suggests that through the practice of the third limb, Asana, yoga students will begin to regulate their breath and, in so doing, begin to find some clarity of thought. This clarity allows students to relate with kindness, honesty, and respect both to themselves and to others. If these codes are not adhered to, students will not achieve the union of mind and body; instead the postures will act only as another form of exercise, and students will miss the opportunity to harvest the fruit from the tree of yoga.

Asana (posture)

From the word *as*, meaning "to sit" or "to be", *asana* encompasses the meaning of a particular posture or mode of sitting. "Seat" is the most literal translation of *asana*. Ashtanga Yoga organizes postures (asanas) into three groups. The primary series (Yoga Chikitsa – see pp. 36–135) aligns and purifies the body. The intermediate series (Nadi Shodhana) purifies the nervous system. The advanced A, B, C, and D series (Sthira Bhaga) integrates strength with grace of movement. Each series has been precisely arranged and each level must be fully developed before students progress to the next.

The primary series is, therefore, the beginning of Asana practice, and it is within this series that students are introduced to the principles and technique of breath/movement synchronicity (see pp. 20–3). This provides the roots and foundation that support the other seven limbs of yoga.

The asana poses have been carefully organized in a specific sequence to access every muscle in the body, stretching and toning them, as well as the

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nerves, organs, glands, and energy channels. But asanas are not merely exercises; they are postures and transitions synchronized to the breath. It is through *tristana* (the union of vinyasa), *bandhas* (the locks or seals that protect the body), and *dristis* (looking points) that practitioners journey inside, working deeply on the inner body, opening and clearing the *nadis*, the energy channels of the subtle body, allowing themselves to access and harness the internal life force known as *prana*. Only when this pranic energy has been accessed can the yogi transcend the physical body.

By practising asana poses in the prescribed sequence, students gain the necessary stamina, strength, flexibility, and steadiness of mind to sit in *Padmasana*, the classic lotus position (see pp. 32–3). Once they can sit in this pose for long periods without discomfort, they can begin practising the fourth and seventh limbs (Pranayama and Dhyana), which take them to higher states of mind than is possible through non-yogic exercise.

Pranayama (breath control)

Prana means “breath”, “energy”, “strength”, or “life force”, while *ayama* means “length”, “restraint”, “expansion”, or “stretching”. For most of us, breathing is an involuntary reflex action. Yogis, however, appreciate the role breath has in focusing the mind, and Pranayama was developed to control breathing as a method of controlling the mind.

Through the practice of Asana, yoga students slowly begin to learn the dynamics of breath – how to equalize inhalation and exhalation and how to synchronize movement to breath, rather than breath to movement. This requires constant concentration on the flow of breath, and this concentration is the beginning of Pranayama, Pratyahara, and Dharana.

In the early stages of yoga practice, to move into, hold, and then move out of an asana are difficult to achieve, especially while maintaining breath/movement synchronicity and without straining the breath or the body.

Pranayama is an advanced form of control over the inhalation, exhalation, and retention of the breath (holding the breath). You must treat breath control with great respect. Pranayama is a powerful tool, directing energy through the energy channels of the body. In order to work properly and efficiently, these energy channels must be cleaned and cleared and the body made strong through the practice of Asana. The breath, too, must be strong and clear when performing the asana poses before undertaking Pranayama as a separate practice. Students must attain an advanced level of Asana practice before Shri K Pattabhi Jois will instruct them in the art and science of Pranayama.

Pratyahara (sense control)

Prati means “against” or “back”, and *haara* means “take hold” – so *Pratyahara* is to “hold back”. When you are practising Asana and Pranayama, your mind can easily wander away from concentrating on the inner body to other matters – for example, some imminent social engagement or idle consideration about what is for dinner that evening or suddenly remembering that you need to pick up your trousers from the dry cleaners. Alternatively, your mind can spiral in on a pain in your knee and the pain then becomes the focus.

Pratyahara is the limb of steadiness; it operates by continually bringing the mind back to the rhythm of breath. As a result, the mind is calmed and controlled, and as the focus develops to a higher level students are able to harness and control their senses. When full awareness is achieved, the mind does not waver or latch on to passing thoughts – it simply allows the thought to pass on by. Pratyahara is about sense control. Rather than closing thoughts out, you learn not to become attached to them as they move through your mind. At all times you are fully aware of sensations in your body, and if you have a painful knee, for example, this is acknowledged or supported through releasing the pain using a deliberate, smooth-flowing exhalation.

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Dharana (concentration)

The word *dhar* translates as "to hold" or "to maintain". When practitioners achieve a high level of Pratyahara, the mind is undisturbed by stray thoughts, sounds, and sensations, such as pain. In this state, it is possible to achieve a deep level of concentration. Within the practice of Asana, when Dharana is achieved the mind reaches a single focus, concentrating purely on inhalation and exhalation and the looking place, or *dristi*.

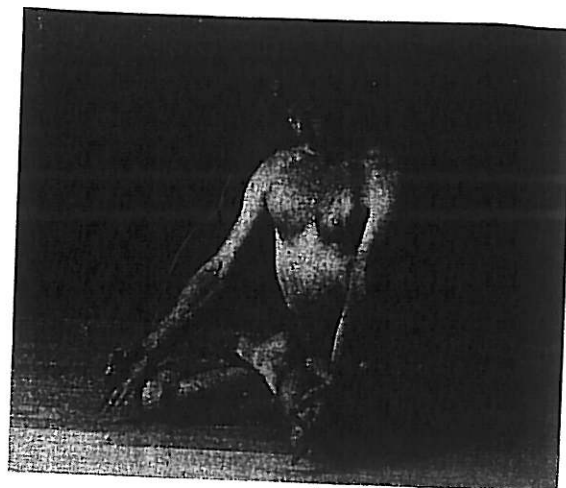
Dhyana (meditation)

Dhyana comes from *dhyati*, which means "to meditate" or "contemplate". The combination of limbs five and six (Pratyahara and Dharana) brings about a state of deep meditation where there is no thought at all. In Asana, the pranic energy of the student flows throughout the sequence of asana postures. From the beginning to the end of the sequence, the thread of the breath is unbroken. Each posture is gracefully strung on a garland of asanas, becoming, in effect, a moving meditation.

Samadhi (contemplation)

Sama means "the same", while *adhi* translates as "the highest". To reach Samadhi is the culmination of all the eight limbs of Ashtanga. It is the goal, the fruit of the tree. To reach this point you have climbed to the very highest reaches of the tree and you can see "all".

It is the fruit that creates the seed for the next generation of trees and it is the fruit that is the edible or ingestibly sweet tasting part of the tree. The fruit is for us to consume, or for us to be consumed within. To reach Samadhi is to become one with God.



The Lotus posture (Padmasana) is the classic yoga meditation pose. The spine is straight, eyes cast down to the gaze point known as nasagrai, and the focus is drawn inward - to the breath and the bandhas.

The first four limbs of Ashtanga are the external disciplines that, when practised regularly, create the necessary physical and mental state from which the remaining four internal limbs can spontaneously sprout and unfold. Ashtanga Yoga is a tried and tested system. When we seriously apply ourselves to the practice of Asana, combined with ujjayi pranayama and *dristi*, in such a systematic way, we can begin to liberate the movement of all of the eight limbs of the tree of yoga.

Observing the eight limbs in the practice of Ashtanga Yoga is crucial if you are to taste the fruits of the tree of yoga. Yogi Shri K Pattabhi Jois often says "Do your practice and all is coming". He does not mean that enlightenment will just happen if you practise; he is advising that once the seed has been planted, it has to be tended daily, nurtured, and watered through the discipline of regular practice. As a result of devoted practice, insights sprout from within, and an understanding of the tree of yoga begins to grow. The eight limbs become the tools with which to work the soil. But only if students follow the correct practice method will the tree grow to maturity.