

## BELLA YOGA

### Eight Limbs of Yoga

The eight limbs of yoga were created by Pantanjali over 2,000 years ago. True or False?

Ashtanga means \_\_\_\_\_.

Each stage of Ashtanga precedes the next. In correct order, name the eight limbs of

Ashtanga Yoga:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 6. |
| 3. | 7. |
| 4. | 8. |

Please write 10 sanskrit terms for postures that you know:

- |    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |

Ahimsa can be used frequently when practicing Asana. Please identify Ahimsa and give an example of its relation to Asana.

Niyama works with the purification of the body while Yama works with mental purification. True or False?

Which moral code of Yama expresses the letting go of "attachment to progress"? How does this relate to Asana?

Please fill in the blanks:

"It is through \_\_\_\_\_ (the union of vinyasa), \_\_\_\_\_ (the locks or seals that protect the body), and \_\_\_\_\_ (locking points) that practitioners journey inside, working deeply on the inner body, opening and clearing the \_\_\_\_\_ (the energy channels of the subtle body), allowing themselves to access and harness the internal life force known as \_\_\_\_\_. Only when this pranic energy has been accessed can the yogi transcend the \_\_\_\_\_."

Match up the corresponding Yama with the correct definition:

Satya	Non-violence
Ahimsa	Preserving vital fluids
Asteya	Truthfulness
Aparigraha	Non-possessiveness
Brahmacharya	Non-stealing

Into which three groups does Ashtanga Yoga organize its Asanas?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Tapas	Internal/external cleanliness
Swadhyaya	Study of sacred texts
Santosha	Austerity
Ishwarapranidhana	Contentment
Shaucha	Living with awareness of God's will

**What do the following Sanskrit terms mean?**

Navasana:

Padangusthasana:

Halasana:

Lolasana:

Tadasana:

Urdva Mukha

Svanasana:

Vrksasana:

Bhujanghasana:

Malasana:

Trikonasana:



Quiz Workshop #3

14 THE WAY OF ASHTANGA YOGA

# 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, or a state of bliss).

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).

*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

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.

Heart & mind have been unified and the yogi to be with life

when you are not attaching to the pleasures of the flesh

not to be greedy



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 Jai's will

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. Gururji 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

internal + external cleansing

content austerity study of texts



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.



### 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*.

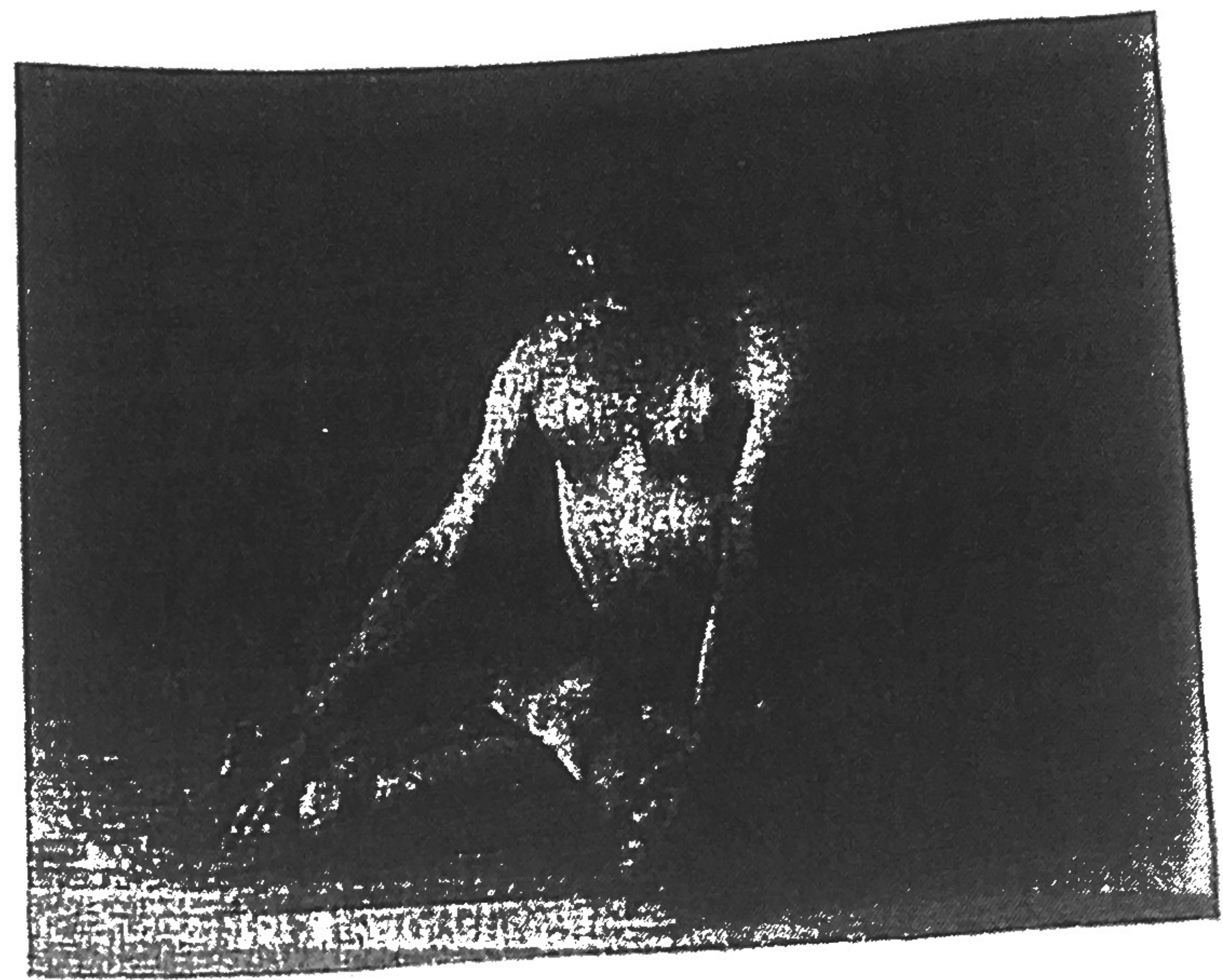
### Dhyana (meditation)

*Dhyana* comes from *dhyai*, 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.