

## What is Ashtanga?

Ashtanga is vinyasa method of yoga that links the asanas together with the breath, as in a garland, or mala. In the mala, our body is the mantra, the asanas are the beads, and our breath is the string holding the beads together.

The true essence of Ashtanga can be achieved when the Tristana is mastered. Without Tristana, the practice can be quite difficult but when the state of Tristana is achieved, the practice becomes effortless and the asanas flow together seamlessly.

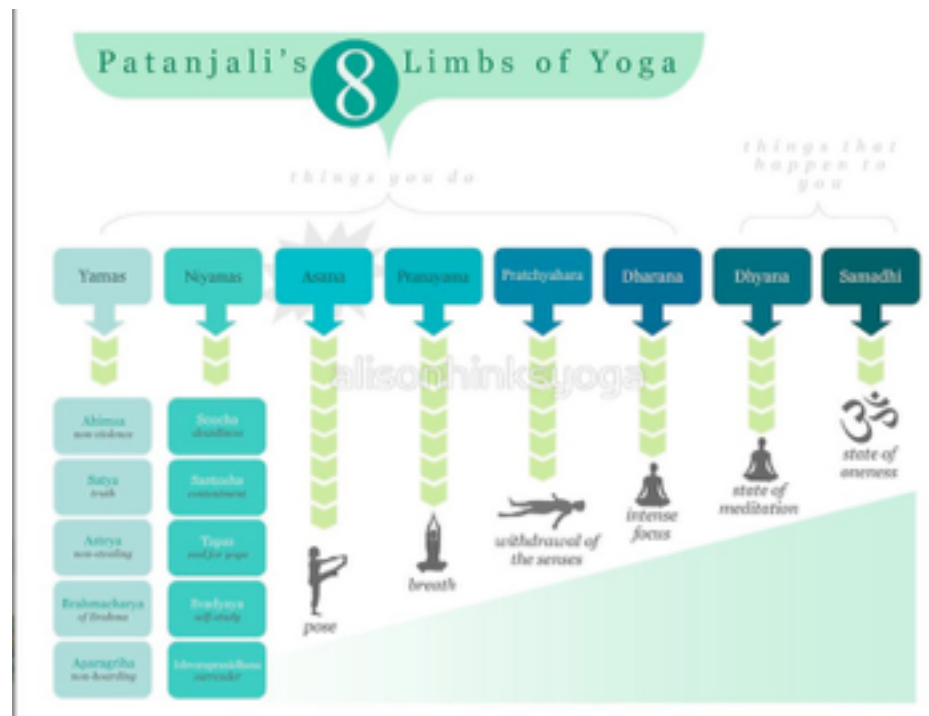
Tristana:

- Breath
- Bandhas
- Drishti

Ashtanga means “8 limbed yoga” and originates from The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, written around 400 CE. The book written by the sage Patanjali consists of 195 Sutras, or passages, divided into 4 chapters.

The 8 Limbs:

- Yama- Abstinence
- Niyama- Observances
- Asana- Posture
- Pranayama- Breath Control
- Pratyahara- Sense Withdrawal
- Dharana- Concentration
- Dhyana- Meditation
- Samadhi- Superconscious State



## Where did Ashtanga come from?

Ashtanga's roots lie in Mysore, India. It is said to have come from the book, The Yoga Korunta, texts compiled together 1000 years ago by the Rishi Vamana. The Yoga Korunta consisted of asanas and the vinyasa system, as well as the Yoga Sutras and its commentary. Krishnamacharya, a renowned guru and the most influential yoga teacher in the West today, was instructed to seek out the last remaining copy. Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) taught at the Mysore Palace and caught the interest of one very well known student, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, who we know today as the father of Ashtanga.

Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, also known as Gururji, was born in Mysore, India in 1915 and began his study with Krishnamacharya in 1931. He decided at age 13 to devote his life to yoga and became Head of Yoga at the Sanskrit College from 1937 to 1973.



In 1948, he established the Sri K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute in Mysore, India and taught there until his death in 2009. The Yoga Shala is still open today and people from all over the world travel daily to practice with his grandson, Sharath Jois.

### *Who can practice Ashtanga?*

Anyone with an interest and desire to learn this ancient method can practice. The advanced poses and rigorous practice may seem intimidating to the beginner but just remember, the most experienced Ashtangi was once a beginner. Everyone has to start somewhere.

### *What will I achieve/receive from practicing Ashtanga?*

The unique technique of combining movement and breath produces heat in the body, heat from within, and in turn produces sweat. The sweat is both cleansing and purifying, releasing toxins within the superficial layers of the body. As students progress more deeply into the practice, toxins held in the deeper layers of the muscle tissue and internal organs are also released, resulting in overall better health and well-being.

*“Practice and all is coming.”*

Ashtanga also teaches on a spiritual and emotional level. The practice trains the mind to focus, to bring the awareness inward, and quiet the external senses. The dedication required to meet yourself on the mat every morning, regardless of resistant thoughts of the mind, teaches one discipline and control. When all of this is practiced, one is able to reach a meditative state, on and off the mat.

### *Surya Namaskara A and B*

Surya Namaskara is the salute to the sun god. Surya-Sun Namaskara- Salutation

It is a way to honor the sun, practicing gratitude to the light we receive every morning. Along with honoring the sun in the sky, we are honoring the light that resided within each of us. It is traditionally practiced every morning before dawn, facing east, towards the sun. When done correctly, this practice results in physical and mental health and paves the way for spiritual awareness in all aspects of life.

Surya Namaskara A consists of 9 vinyasas (movements)

Surya Namaskara B consists of 17 vinyasas

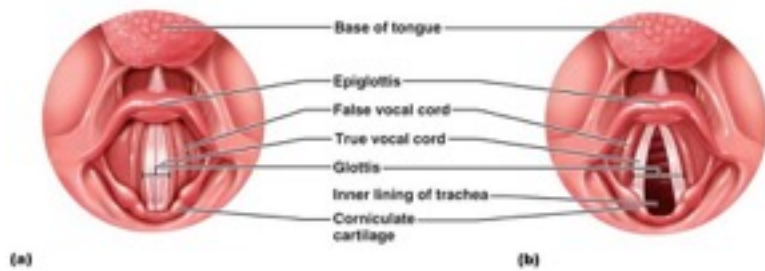
At the beginning of the Primary Series, both are practiced 5 times each, until heat in the body is achieved and sweat is produced. This may be practiced less times in warmer climate and more times in colder climate. This prepares the body for practice, mentally and physically.

### *Tristhana*

Ujjayi Pranayama

Also known as the “victorious breath,” ujjayi brings heat to the body.

Prana- life force  
ayama- extension



Engaging Ujjayi breath stretches the breath out and therefore extends the vital life force in our bodies. When the muscles around the glottis are engaged to regulate the breath, the friction of the air produces a sound. This sound is a method of Pratyahara- sense withdrawal, “going inside.”

When we listen to the sound of our breath, we also become aware and more in tuned to the integrity of our posture and our mental state.

## Bandhas

Bandhas, meaning “lock” or “seal” are controlled to increase prana in the body. They deliver prana from the source to the subtle body. The two practiced most frequently in Ashtanga are:

- Mula Bandha- Root foundation
- Uddiyana Bandha- flying upward

## Drishti

Drishti is a gaze point in which we focus our eyes. When the eyes wander, the mind wanders. Drishti keeps the eyes still in order to bring the awareness inward. There are 9 points of focus:

- Nasagrai- tip of the nose
- Angusta ma dyai- the thumbs
- Broomadhya- the third eye
- Nabi chakra- the navel
- Urdvha- upward
- Hastagrai- the hand
- Padhayoragrai- the toes
- Parsva- the far left
- Parsva- the far right

## What sets Ashtanga apart from other yoga practices?

Ashtanga has ancient roots that have been passed on for generation. Ashtanga maintains the traditional teacher to student relationship, practiced for thousands of years in India. The poses remain the same and become second nature after time. The teachers of Ashtanga don't make up their own poses but stay true to ancient texts. The practice is challenging and there is always room to deepen, physically, mentally, and spiritually. This and many reasons make Ashtanga one of the fastest growing yoga practices today.

*“99% practice, 1% theory”*