

# Introduction to Yoga

## Namaste & Welcome

**Namaste** – A gesture of greeting, meaning, I bow to you, as the divine light in me salutes the divine light in you and I know that we are one. We are so happy to have you here with us on this journey into the self! This is an inspired opportunity to enjoy the benefits and bliss of being in beautiful nature, as deepen your connection with your body and mind, community and your practice. **Yoga** literally means “union” or “to yoke” our everyday selves with our highest most divine selves. Yoga is a powerful tool that teaches us how to live a life of balance, peace, harmony, strength and flexibility on all levels.

**A disciplined practice** of yoga has the transformational benefits of deepening our connection to the body, mind and spirit, supporting us in living and loving long, vibrant, happy, healthy and fulfilling lives.

## Our approach:

The practices we share are educational, engaging and appropriate for all levels, and are designed to help strengthen and deepen connections between nature, body, heart & mind. Our aim is to provide you with high quality, safe, balanced, playful instruction of yoga asana, pranayama (breath-control techniques), meditation, philosophy, karma yoga and the bhakti devotional practices of singing & dancing. We want to help you step into the fullness and beauty of your life and visions, to refine your personal practice, and help you discover ways of maintaining balance in every facet of your life.

## Gratitude & Enjoy!

We are so happy to have you on this journey with us. Please feel welcome to connect at any point throughout the retreat if you feel you need support, have a request, would like to share your experience or just want to ask any question. **Important to remember is that this retreat is for you, so please just take away with you what resonates and leave the rest.** Thank you for participating in this transformation yoga retreat. We hope you enjoy this opportunity to immerse yourself in being a student, to have fun, to be barefoot in nature and to make friends from all over the world!

## Respect for Yourself:

This retreat is for you! Throughout your time here, we invite you into a spirit of **openness** and **playfulness** as you explore and discover your personal edge. Most importantly, we invite you to **cultivate presence, curiosity, inquiry, consciousness and mindfulness** in your actions and really honour and listen to your body and mind.

## **Attitudes of Yoga:**

**Willingness** – Transformation is a reflection of our willingness to connect, to let go, to aspire to realize oneself. In other words, you get out what you put in. Use this as an opportunity to go deeply into self-reflection so that you can empower yourself to recognize and begin shifting patterns that no longer serve and integrating ones that do.

**Beginners Mind** – According to Zen Buddhism, when our rice bowl is full, so to speak, there is no room for more. Thus in order to stay open and keep learning, we must continually empty our bowls, so to speak. Throughout your time here, we invite you to meet each moment with a child-like sense of awe and wonder, in a spirit of openness, curiosity and playfulness as we explore and discover our personal patterns and edges.

**Mindfulness** - We invite you to be conscious and mindful in your actions, taking advantage of this time to really honour and listen to your body's messages, using this as an opportunity to be mindful and discerning of the food and substances you consume, remembering that attitudes and behaviours 'off the mat' are just as important, as those on 'on the mat'.

**Saucha & Ahimsa** – Cleanliness & Non-Violence - A vegetarian diet is recommended, as well as avoiding drugs and alcohol for the duration of the retreat.

### **Respect for others**

**Sangha** – We are a community of seekers on this journey towards knowing ourselves more. Throughout this process, it is normal to feel expansions and contractions in the body, mind and heart and we are all here to support each other and cultivate a safe place to release, experience, and simply be.

**Punctuality** – As a gesture of respect for the group, please ensure that you arrive a **minimum of 5 minutes early** to each class to ensure a prompt start.

**Attendance** – We are on a progressive journey together and all of us matter and affect each other. Please be mindful. If you have to miss a class, please let us know so that we are not left waiting or wondering - you can tell your teacher or let your karma-yogi partner know.

### **What is Yoga?**

The word **yoga** literally means “to yoke” or “union”. More than just a practice of physical exercises, Yoga is the coming together of the individual self or consciousness, with the infinite universal consciousness or spirit. Yoga is a method of inquiry in to the nature of the mind, which emphasizes **practice and direct experience**.

### **The “Goal” of Yoga:**

The “goal” of yoga is to align to the universal consciousness in order to experience joy, freedom and the stillness of full consciousness. **Alignment**, is related to mind and body, and refers to how various parts of us are integrated and interconnected. The world is what think and believe it to be. It is subjective in essence - a projection of what we feel it is, based on past experiences and conditionings. What we see in others is what we have inside, like a mirror that is only projecting what is inside. We have the potential, using conscious intentions, thoughts and words, to co-create the life we want, to go beyond our limitations and fears, to surrender and open, to choose the type of person we want to be, to flow with the divine grace, to see the beauty in and all around us.

### Yoga Philosophy:

There are various paths of yoga that lead towards the ultimate goal of union, each a specialized branch of a comprehensive system, the main four being Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Each, with their own world of techniques, supports people with different temperaments and approaches to life. All of the paths lead ultimately to the same destination - to union with Brahman/ God/ Oneness/ the Universe...- and the lessons from each need to be integrated if true wisdom is to be attained. For our **sadhana**, or spiritual practice, it is often suggested that we practice a balanced integral yoga, incorporating practices from all 4 paths.

#### **Raja Yoga – Path of Self - Discipline**

The "royal" or highest path of yoga, formalized by the sage **Patanjali**, is a comprehensive method for controlling the waves of thought by turning our mental and physical energy into spiritual energy. The chief practice is self-discipline, including **Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga & Meditation**.

#### **Bhakti Yoga – Path of Self-Surrender**

The path of devotion is one in which we offer and surrender to the divine through a devotion in which one sees the divinity in every creature and all things. **Mantra meditation** is one form of Bhakti.

#### **Jnana yoga – Path of Self-Awareness**

The path of wisdom applies discriminative intelligence for spiritual liberation – reflecting and developing awareness of one's own sense of Being. The chief practice of Jnana Yoga is meditation & Self-Inquiry – *Atma Vicharya* – inquiry

into the source of the “I” thought -  
“*So Hum*”: **Who am I? / I am that.**

### **Karma Yoga – The Path of Selfless Action**

Karma is the universal law of cause and effect. All actions have consequences. Karma Yoga is the knowledge that deals with how to come into harmony with these forces, by being in full awareness with actions while letting go of the outcome or results. Seva is a practice of karma yoga, selfless service to others as part of one’s larger Self without thought of gain or reward, as it is an act of sublimating ego through having no attachments to the fruits of your actions, offering them up to the divine. Balancing the **3 Gunas**, through mindful efforts, helps up to live in the bliss of the present moment, navigating through the endless obstacles that arise from the pull of karma.

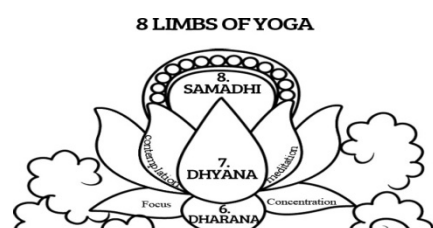
*Ashtanga Yoga (Ashta – 8, Anga – Limb) is the path to enlightenment that offers guidelines for a peaceful, meaningful and purposeful life.*

The first four stages of Patanjali’s Ashtanga yoga concentrate on refining our personalities, gaining mastery over the body, and developing an energetic awareness of ourselves. They are preparation for the next 4 limbs. The second half of the journey deals with the senses, the mind, and attaining a higher state of consciousness.

The Yamas and Niyamas can be approached individually or they can be seen as a progressive system towards Realization.

#### **1. Yamas**

Ethical standards relating to the Golden Rule of “Do unto others



as would have them do unto you.

The five yamas are:

**Ahimsa:** nonviolence

**Satya:** truthfulness

**Asteya:** non-stealing

**Brahmacharya:** non-excess

**Aparigraha:** non-attachment

## **2. Niyama**

*Niyama*, the second limb, has to do with self-discipline and spiritual observances. Regularly attending temple or church services, saying grace before meals, developing your own personal meditation practices, or making a habit of taking contemplative walks alone are all examples of niyamas in practice.

The five niyamas are:

**Saucha:** cleanliness/purity

**Santosha:** contentment

**Tapas:** heat; spiritual austerities

**Svadyaya:** study of the sacred scriptures and of one's self

**Isvara pranidhana:** surrender to God

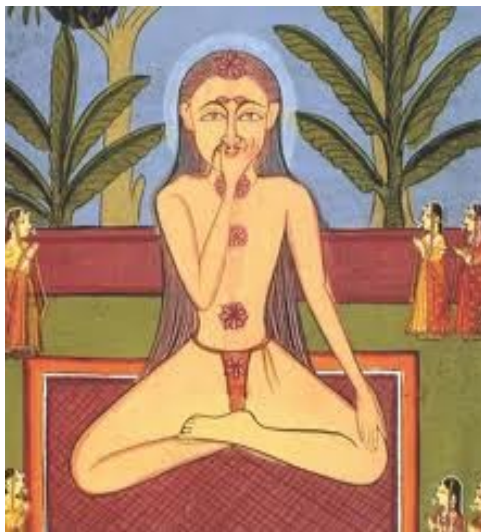
## **3. Asana**

*Asana*, the postures practiced in yoga, comprise the third limb. In the yogi

view, the body is a temple of spirit, the care of which is an important stage of our spiritual growth. Through the practice of asana, we develop the habit of discipline and the ability to concentrate, both of which are necessary for meditation.

#### 4. Pranayama: Breath Control

Generally translated as breath control, this fourth stage consists of techniques designed to gain mastery over the respiratory process while recognizing the connection between the breath, the mind, and the emotions. As implied by the literal translation of *pranayama*, "life force extension," yogis believe that it not only rejuvenates the body but also actually extends life itself. You can practice pranayama as an isolated technique (i.e., simply sitting and performing



a number of breathing exercises), or integrate it into your daily hatha yoga routine.

#### 5. Pratyahara: Sensory Transcendence

Pratyahara, the fifth limb, means withdrawal of senses, or sensory transcendence. It is during this stage that we make the conscious effort to draw our awareness away from the external world and outside stimuli. Keenly aware of, yet cultivating a detachment from, our senses, we direct our attention internally. The practice of pratyahara provides us with an opportunity to step back and take a look at ourselves. This withdrawal allows us to objectively observe our cravings: habits that are perhaps detrimental to our health and which likely interfere with our inner growth.

#### 6. Dharana: Concentration

As each stage prepares us for the next, the practice of pratyahara creates the setting for *dharana*, or concentration.

Having relieved ourselves of outside distractions, we can now deal with the distractions of the mind itself. No easy task! In the practice of concentration, which precedes meditation, we learn how to slow down the thinking process by concentrating on a single mental object: a specific energetic center



in the body, an image of a deity, or the silent repetition of a sound. We, of course, have already begun to develop our powers of concentration in the previous three stages of posture, breath control, and withdrawal of the senses. In asana and pranayama, although we pay attention to our actions, our attention travels. Our focus constantly shifts as we fine-tune the many nuances of any particular posture or breathing technique. In pratyahara we become self-observant; now, in dharana, we focus our attention on a single point. Extended periods of concentration naturally lead to meditation.

### **7. Dhyana: Single-Pointed Concentration/ Flow**

Meditation or contemplation, the seventh stage of ashtanga, is the uninterrupted flow of concentration. Although concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*) may appear to be one and the same, a fine line of distinction exists between these two stages. Where dharana practices one-pointed attention, dhyana is ultimately a state of being keenly aware without

focus. At this stage, the mind has been quieted, and in the stillness it produces few or no thoughts at all. The strength and stamina it takes to reach this state of stillness is quite impressive. But don't give up. While this may seem a difficult if not impossible task, remember that yoga is a process. Even though we may not attain the "picture perfect" pose, or the ideal state of consciousness, we benefit at every stage of our progress.

## **8. Samadhi: Total Absorption/Bliss** ☐

Patanjali describes this eighth and final stage of ashtanga, samadhi, as a state of ecstasy. At this stage, the meditator merges with his or her point of focus and transcends the Self altogether. The meditator comes to realize a profound connection to the Divine, an inter-connectedness with all living things. With this realization comes the "peace that passeth all understanding"; the experience of bliss and being at one with the Universe. On the surface, this may seem to be a rather lofty, "holier than thou" kind of goal. However, if we pause to examine what we really want to get out of life, would not joy, fulfillment, and freedom somehow find their way onto our list of hopes, wishes, and desires? What Patanjali has described as the completion of the yogic path is what, deep down, all human beings aspire to: peace. We also might give some thought to the fact that this ultimate stage of yoga—enlightenment—can neither be bought nor possessed. It can only be experienced, the price of which is the continual devotion of the aspirant.

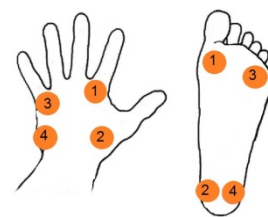
### **Alignment of the Physical Body:**

#### **Spine**

Yoga asana focuses on elongating the spine and increasing its range of motion. Because Yoga is ultimately of practice of working with subtle energies, maintaining alignment and length in the Spine is of the utmost importance in yoga asana alignment.

#### **Hands /Feet: Our foundation**

We begin by setting up and aligning the foundation of the poses. Spread your hands / feet wide to create the most stable foundation possible to support our being, plant down through the 4 corners of your hands and feet, especially the big toes, then draw the energy in and up through the body through the domes or "nostrils" of the hands and feet. *Mantra: Spread out. Plant Down. Draw in.*



**Soft Elbows / Knees** – There are no straight lines in nature and thus considering we are a creation of nature, this goes for our bodies as well. We can always maintain softness in these joints, ensuring that we are not hyper-extending, as this compromises the integrity of alignment in the pose. Teachers will often remind us to “micro-bend” or to have soft elbows and knees as this helps us to **yield** into the earth or whatever surface we are upon. Actively yielding to the Earth creates a rebound effect, elongating the body upwards into space.

**Shoulders / Hips** – These are the gateways for the arms and legs to connect with the torso, and two common areas in which we commonly experience tension in the body. When the shoulders are hugging the ears, the body is being sent messages of stress! So think about relaxing and softening the shoulder, rolling your shoulders away from



your ears creating as much space as possible in the neck. Keep the hips level, ensuring that their height is equalized.

**Neutralize Pelvic tilt** – Think of the pelvis as a bowl filled with water. In standing and balancing positions, we want to keep the bowl level so that we are

not tipping forward and hyper arching our low back, spilling the water out the front, or tilting it too far up, as is common in people with tight hips doing seated postures, spilling the water out the back. Make sure the hips and pelvis are level. If you find your low back rounding and your pelvis tipping up, then help yourself to a cushion or two or three so that you can be aligned and comfortable. We also want to make sure we neutralize the front to back placement of the hips so that it rests just atop the legs.

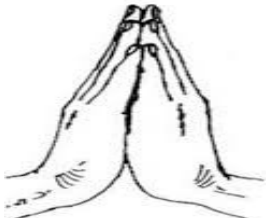
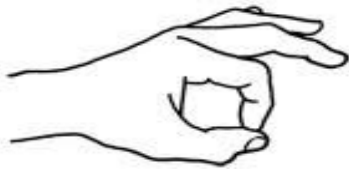
**Neck and head** - In most active styles of yoga asana, the general principle is to keep the head and neck long and in line with the spine, bringing the chin back in if heads are jutting forward. I know a body worker who tells his clients: “Take the head away from the computer!”.





**Soft Face & Eyes** – Make sure your eyes are soft, your jaw is relaxed and soft, and your face is nice and released. Having a soft controlled gaze or focus, or **Drishti**, helps us to develop concentration, and focused consciousness to see the world as it is. When we are beginning our practice of yoga, we often lose balance by looking around and paying attention to all of the stimulation and distraction outside of ourselves. Focusing the attention inwards, by holding a soft gaze point either to our 3<sup>rd</sup> eye or our hearts, encourage stability and inward looking.

## **Mudra**

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Mudras are sacred gestures, or “energetic seals” that are symbolic of the rest of the body and are used as symbolic expressions of inner states. Mudras are often used in conjunction with pranayama, meditation and asana to stimulate different parts of the body involved with breathing and to affect the flow of prana in the body. Here are a few basic mudras:

<p><b><u>Anjali Mudra</u></b> ‘Seal of Honouring’</p> <p><b>Symbolism</b> - Honouring, worshiping, balance, union of dual nature, humility, internal focus</p>	
<p><b><u>Jnana Mudra</u></b> ‘ Seal of Wisdom’, Contains energy in a closed circuit which is conducive to inner focus</p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> Wisdom, knowledge, introspection</p>	

<p><b><u>Chin Mudra</u></b>  ‘Seal of Consciousness’, Gesture of Receiving</p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> Represents the interrelated nature of consciousness, the union of Shiva &amp; Shakti. The thumb represents the teacher and the index finger the student, the ego, the mind. Joining these aspects together helps silence the mind.</p>	
<p><b><u>Dhyana Mudra</u></b>  ‘Seal of Meditation’  Gesture of Concentration and Healing</p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> Hands and fingers form the shape of a triangle, which is symbolic of the spiritual fire or the three jewels of Buddhism. Also resembles an empty/full bowl, a key reminder for maintaining Beginner’s Mind</p>	 <p>DHYANA MUDRA</p>
<p><b><u>Vishnu Mudra</u></b></p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> the Conch of Vishnu, waking us up from the illusion of Maya. Used in nadi shodhana or alternate nostril pranayama, the index and middle finger are tucked into the palm of the hand. Right hand is associated with giving, and the left with receiving</p>	
<p><b><u>Lotus Mudra – Heart chakra opener</u></b></p> <p><b>Symbolism:</b> In Buddhism, the lotus blossom represents heart opening, growth and enlightenment. The lotus is rooted in mud and darkness, and grows up through water, surfacing beautifully toward the sun. Like the lotus we have our struggles and dark places, and through experience we grow toward the light to finally emerge and blossom. Like the flower, with this mudra, we open ourselves to divine source, receiving whatever we need and much more.</p>	

THANKING YOU