

Introduction to yoga



Retreat Handbook 2017

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The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.
- Rumi

DEVENDRA KUMAR DIXIT

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Dedication

To all my relations, to the beautiful communities in Bali, Thailand and beyond that nourish, support and inspire me to no end with your magic and medicine. To all of the friends, family and teachers, seen and unseen, all over the world, you are integral on my journey towards awakening. I love you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oceans of love and gratitude to Lily and Ramananda, the founders of the Blooming Lotus Yoga school, for teaching me, being patient with me and for creating this opportunity for me to shine my light and share love and truth with so many beautiful beings. Thank you to the wisdom and support of my teacher's teachers, Ramana Maharishi and Amma Sri Karunamayai. And to all of the Yogis who come through this magical journey with me with such open hearts and open minds, thank you for the privilege.

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!

Thank you for your presence on this journey,

With Love & Blessings,
Francie

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.

Respect for the Space:

Yoga Shala - Please make yourselves at home. **Take initiative** to care for the space, helping to maintain the cleanliness and clear flow of energy within the space. Please keep all doors to the bathrooms, yoga shala and closet closed at all times.

Introduction to Yoga Philosophy

Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah

Translation: Union or yoga arises when the fluctuations /waves of thoughts in the mind /consciousness cease. - From Patanjali's Yoga Sutras)

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.

Our Spiritual Identity:

The practice of yoga is based on the idea that we are eternal spiritual souls or **atman**, traveling within the vessel of this physical/emotional body. The physical body is considered the temple of the soul, an instrument through which we can access the internal divinity, our true self, and to align, connect and serve the divine wisdom.

As manifestations of the supreme divine consciousness in the material universe, we have the opportunity to awaken to our true nature of **sat chit ananda** – being consciousness bliss, **through the main practices of asana, pranayama, meditation, and chanting**. Yoga **asana**, the physical postures or exercises that have come to be known as Yoga are really only the most superficial aspect of this profound science.

Yoga Philosophy: Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga

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

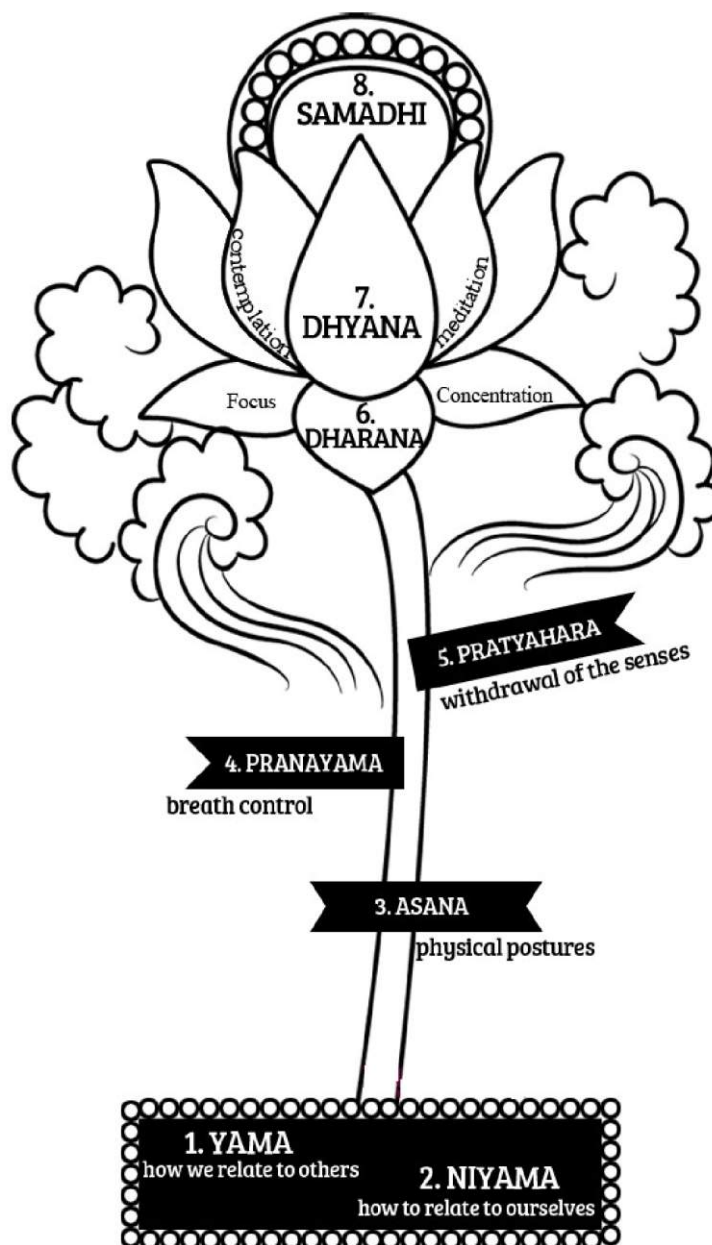
Svadhyaya: study of the sacred scriptures and of one's self

Isvara pranidhana: surrender to God

3. Asana

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

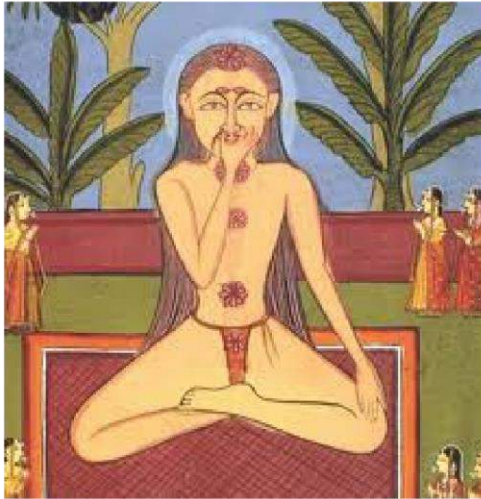
8 LIMBS OF YOGA



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

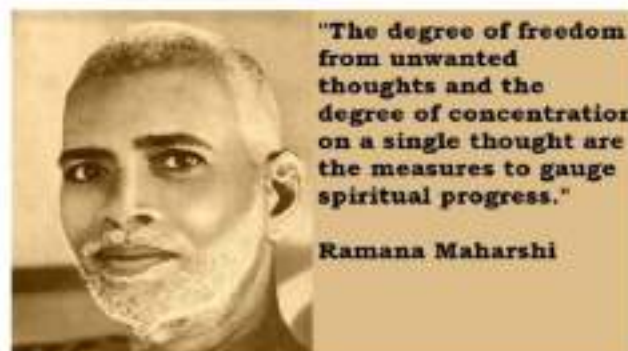
Meditation or contemplation, the seventh stage of ashtanga, is the uninterrupted flow of concentration. Although concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*) may appear to be one and the same, a fine line of distinction exists between these two stages. Where dharana practices one-pointed attention, 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 interconnectedness 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.

(Adapted from <http://yogajournal.com/wisdom/459>)

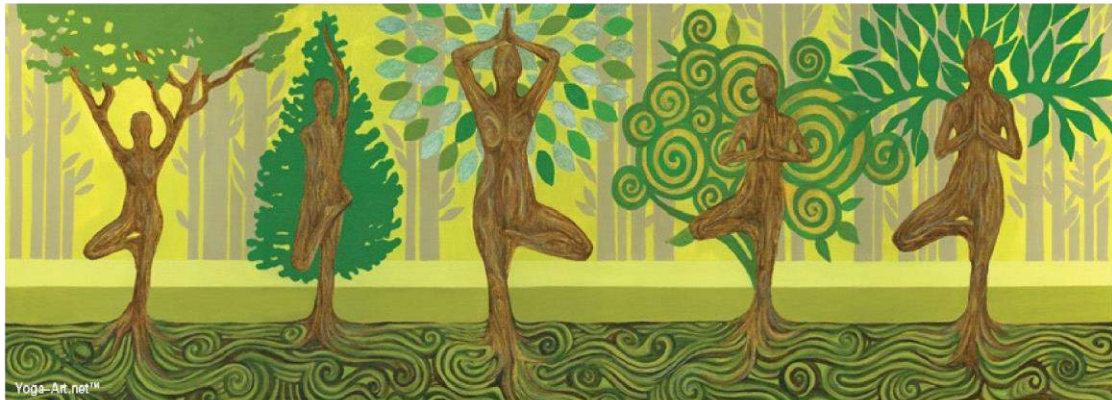


Progress on the Path

"Instead of measuring success in practicing a yoga posture by how far we go, we can ask how present we are in each moment. How aware are we of the movement of our breath, the sensations in our body, and the thoughts that pass through us? Instead of judging the correctness of a yoga posture by how we look, we can inquire what positioning makes us feel most integrated and honors rather than injures our unique physical body. If we are ill or emotionally overwhelmed, how skillfully can we make this challenge grist for the mill? Instead of, "How many hours did I spend meditating today," we can ask, "How did I live my practice in every moment of the day?" Something is tragically missing in our spiritual practice if through our most diligent efforts we manage to become a perfect yoga posture, rather than a person."

~ Donna Fathi

Asana



Hatha Yoga (Ha = sun , tha= moon) is an umbrella term for the systems of physical postures that our culture today has come to associate the term Yoga. It is the path of bodily discipline, whose highest purpose is to purify the body to give one awareness and control over the internal states, rendering the body/mind fit for meditation.

The physical practice of yoga is called **asana** – physical postures linked with breath and movement to build internal heat, called **tapas**, which cleanses the internal organs and glands, oxygenating blood and joints and clearing the mind of disconnected thoughts which can lead to anxiety, stress, anger or depression.

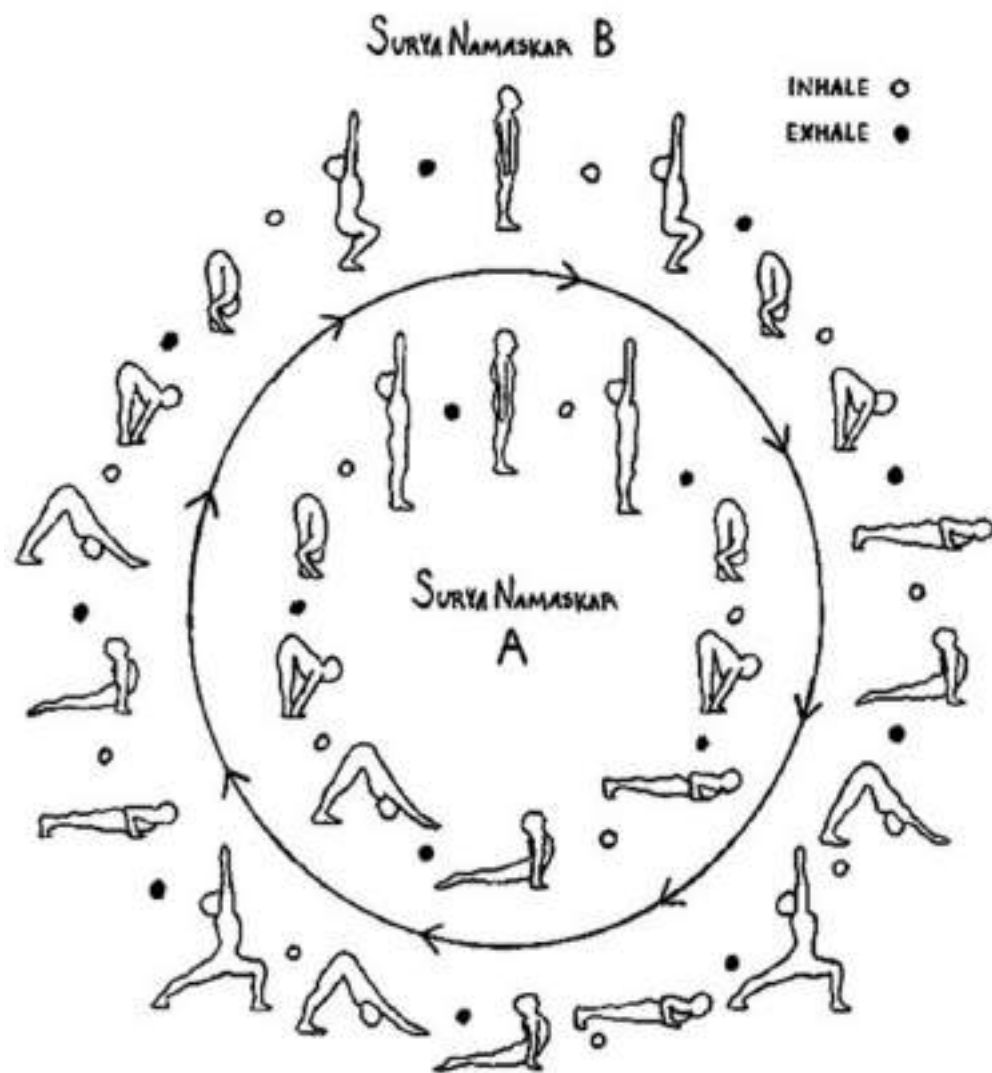
Asana is essential to life force control – it supports the ability to invoke divine energy in preparation for pranayama and meditation, by alleviating strain, tension, restlessness, laziness and bodily attachment and bestowing bodily control, mental and physical calmness.

Through our practice of asana, our aim is to align physical, personal, emotional and spiritual with the natural order, or Supreme Divinity, to come to the remembrance, understanding and trust that we are guided by grace, that from a superior perspective, all is working in synchrony with a perfect and universal plan, and that even the so called “bad” or negative experiences have a positive quality and can be used to teach us something. The practice of asana can be used to **elevate consciousness**, help us feel more aligned, happier, more well being and more balanced than before our practice.

Sun Salutations

Sun Salutations, or ***Surya Namaskar***, is a specific sequence of 12 or so poses linked in a series to lengthen and strengthen, flex and extend the spine and many of the main muscles of the body while distributing the prana flow throughout the body's systems. Sun salutations mobilize the spine in all directions strengthening hundreds of muscles, stretching and enhancing flexibility of the entire body, increasing the respiratory capacity of the lungs, rhythmically stimulating and relaxing the nervous system, eliminating a lot of stress and leaving us feeling more vibrant and healthy! Sun Salutations can be taken as a complete asana practice in and of itself and is an excellent starting point for creating your own home practice.

Home Practice Tip: Use the sun salutations as a template from which to be creative and build your own home practice according to your body's needs.



Basic Alignment Guidelines

Guidelines for Practice from Patanjali's yoga Sutras:

Shrtire Sukham Asanam

Asana (posture, seated position, physical practice) **is steady** (strong; steady, stable, motionless) **and comfortable** (ease filled, happy, light, relaxed). Performed with willingness as well as acceptance. Firm as well as pleasant. Strong as well as relaxed. Maintained with effort as well as ease.

Focus on the Breath. Relax.

Avoid pushing yourself or damaging the body.

There are many principles of alignment in yoga asana from many traditions. Here are just a few very basic ideas to keep in mind throughout your practice:

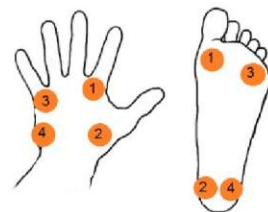
Alignment of the Physical Body:

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

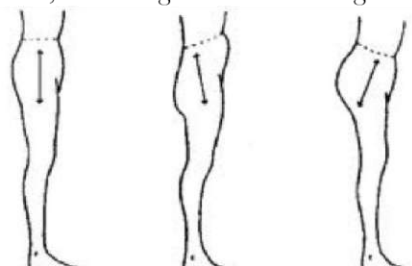
We begin by setting up and aligning the foundation of the poses. Spread your hands / feet wide to create the most stable foundation possible to support our being, plant down through the 4 corners of your hands and feet, especially the big toes, then draw the energy in and up through the body through 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 3rd eye or our hearts, encourage stability and inward looking.

Tips for Transitioning between Poses in Alignment:

- Connect and synchronize movements with the breath
- Breathe into the back body while transitioning
- Move with steady graceful flowing rhythm
- Maintain steady moment to moment awareness
- Take your time and move from stability and integration first
- Activate stability before active expansion
- Adjust alignment of back leg first, then front leg

Develop a Successful Home Yoga Practice

One of the most beautiful and liberating aspects of yoga is that you don't need any fancy equipment or a designated building or field to practice. Yoga is accessible. The practice meets you where you are – as long as you are willing to approach it.

Developing a home yoga practice and committing to it is a profound tool for deepening into your own personal relationship with yoga. Here are some tools that have helped me in my home practice of Yoga:



1. Create a foundation for your practice with a set sequence. Practicing the same poses every day repeatedly is a powerful way to keep consistent with your practice. This repetition offers you a clear vantage point from which to watch yourself grow and change. The nature and sequencing of Ashtanga Yoga offers this beautifully. You don't have to think about what pose you want to do next, so instead you can focus on your breath and **drishti**, or focus point. This takes you into a deeper meditative and focused place, so that you will step off your mat feeling more present and peaceful.

2. Require a minimum of practice for yourself each day. Even if it's just 15 minutes, make yourself a promise that you will do your 15 minutes. That's your practice - just that - everything else is bonus time! Start small (baby steps!); this way you can stick with your commitment and feel positive about your practice rather than guilty if you don't have a lot of time/energy that day.

3. Prioritize and sanctify your practice. Make a specific spot in your home/hotel/dorm room that is specifically reserved for your practice. When you roll out your mat, you are in your own little yoga studio, so be there! Don't roll it out and then walk away and get on Facebook (guilty – I've done that – it does not benefit your practice!). **Creating a small altar** or having a special picture, token or candle there to mark this as a sacred space for intentional practice will help you. When you practice, make practice your sole focus. Turn off the phone, music and computer. **Honor your practice time as sacred and important.** Make boundaries around yourself for your practice time. If you are in a house with other people, you will need to gracefully practice conscious communication with them in order to protect your uninterrupted practice time and space.

4. Take the time to sit and be still. Always include time in your practice just to BE – to breathe and to be present with yourself. Perhaps picking a gentle pranayama practice will help you, or mantra meditation or japa. Finding stillness in your practice will make you feel very nourished and peaceful, and this will then make you want to practice with more consistency and devotion! Just three minutes of conscious deep breathing can work wonders! Practicing meditation will benefit your asana practice, because it will help you build your powers of concentration. The inverse is true as well; practicing asana, especially with an intense focus on controlling prana through drishti, bandhas and breath, will make you a better meditator.

5. Invert! Go upside down every day! Shoulder-stand, headstand and viparita karani are all fantastic practices. There are so many wonderful health benefits from inverting. Plus, it's a great way to clear your head and get a new perspective on things. I always feel happier and better about life after a few minutes of hanging out upside down.

6. Go in for regular tune-ups. Occasionally, give yourself the treat of working with a great teacher. Go in for a few classes or a workshop. This will help bring attention to areas of your practice that need

assistance, and it will also provide you with new inspiration and motivation for your daily home practice.

7. Use the resources around you well. If you are feeling a little stuck all by yourself, look around for some help and a break in the routine. Find a local donation-based community yoga class to attend occasionally. Learn from reading blogs and yoga websites, or even take an online yoga class if that's what is most available to you.

Tip: *Some of the online resources I like to use when I am travelling are YogaGlo / See Hear Be Nwe / Yogadownload.com – all of which offer free trial memberships and classes with great, experienced teachers.*

8. Be smart about sequencing. I like to just “play” Yoga on my mat by really listening to what my body needs in that moment. If that's what you are going to do, make sure your practice is balanced!

Tips for smart sequencing:

Start by getting in touch with your breath. Ujjayi Pranayama in child's pose or seated position

1) Warm up the spine and backs of the legs slowly with some nice gentle stretches – cat/cows, rag doll forward fold, gentle lunges are all good options.

2) Sun Salutations – ESSENTIAL! Both Surya Namaskar A and B. Really follow the breath. Be precise through the vinyasa positions – don't skimp on your Chaturangas!

3) Standing and Balancing poses – Personally I like working with the **Virabhadrasa** or Warrior poses - Virabhadrasa I, II, III, Exalted Warrior – (you can type in these names to Google images to cue you memory. Trikonasana (Triangle Pose) and Parsvokonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose) are also great as are the twisted variations of each of these poses. Give your hip flexors some attention with runner's lunge/lizard or a low lunge with the arms arching up overhead for a nice heart opening sensation.

4) Seated poses – Include forward folds, twists and hip-openers. Always practice equally on the left and right sides. Include focus on **building core-strength** with strong, long Chaturangas and poses like Navasana (boat pose), forearm plank and side plank.

5) Backbends – When you are properly warmed up, practice *backbends* – maybe just start with a Bridge pose. Locust, Bow and Camel are all great poses to build strength around the spine and to really open the chest. It is important to stay really engaged with your bandhas in all your backbends. Having a strong lift at the navel will help make space in your lower back for deeper and safer back bending. *Always practice a gentle forward fold to neutralize the spine after back bending.*

6) End with inversions and other quieting poses, like some passive forward folding or restoratives.

7) Savasana – Let your mind and body relax and be receptive as you give your body the time to integrate all of the energetic movement that you facilitated through asana..

8) Sit and Meditate.

(Adapted From MindBody Green: <http://www.mindbodygreen.com/003/fitness-fundamentals>)

Pranayama - Art of Breathing

*“When the Breather wanders, the mind is unsteady,
but when the Breath is still, so is the mind still”.*
– Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Pranayama is the extension of life force energy in the body, which supports health and longevity. Pranayama is the breathing practice of yoga and is the disciplining of our life force energy (prana), to remove blockages within our physical and energetic system, to clear illness and pain and ignite the spine to help regulate the nervous systems, so that we may achieve higher states of consciousness and awareness.

Understanding and controlling prana is the key to health mind/body balance. Conscious breath control is the key to realizing the benefits of asana as it brings us into a deeper connection with our inner self.

“Prana” is the subtle energy or life force that links matter and spirit, the astral and the physical. This vital energy or life force, located in the body’s **nadis** or energy channels, is in all life forms and is central to all yoga practices. **Prana is a subtle force of energy carried in food, air, water, sunlight, the atmospheres we spend time in, the people we surround ourselves with,** and it animates all form of matter.

“Ayama” means extension, expansion, to stretch, lengthen, prolong, regulate

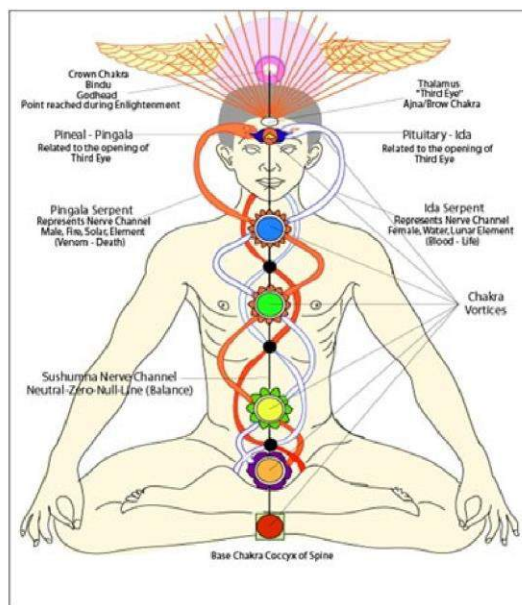
Benefits of Pranayama - Pranayama helps reduce stress, quiets the mind, enhances concentration, memory and focus, and invigorates, heats and purifies the body.

Nadis: According to ancient tantric texts, our bodies contain over 72,000 nadis or energetic channels, which in essence are like the bodies irrigation system, channeling prana to every cell. The 3 main nadis are Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadi.

Sushumna is the central channel and is associated with the river Saraswati. The purpose of hatha (ha – sun, tha- moon) yoga is to balance the sun moon energies, the right and left brain, male and female, the rational and intuitive, which leads to the rise of **kundalini energy** and the awakening of higher consciousness. It is said that along the spine is the direct highway that the earth mortal must follow in ascent to liberation.

Ida is the left channel. Ida is white, feminine, cold, and represents lunar energy. Originating in Muladhara Chakra, Ida ends up in the left nostril.

Pingala is the right channel. Pingala is red, masculine, hot, and represents the solar energy. Originating in Muladhara Chakra, Pingala ends up in the right nostril.



Kundalini, derived from “kundla” meaning a ring or coil, is known as ‘cosmic energy’ or ‘serpent power’ and represents our consciousness. It is depicted as a hungry snake who lies dormant, coiled 3.5 times around the base of the sushumna nadi, until we get the fires of spiritual practice going to initiate the process of spiritual evolution, rising up through the levels of consciousness present at each chakra point. The awakening of kundalini is marked by a balance of dualities – inner/outer, left/right/, sun/moon, practice/play.

Our evolution, kundalini energy rising, is marked by an elevated or evolved perspective on life's challenges, seeing them as integrated and integral parts of our lives; As opposed to simply “getting over” our problems, we rid ourselves of the poison of delusion and ignorance, gaining clarity of spiritual awareness. A clear sign that the poison is removed is when we can respond to internal cues, thoughts and emotions, to inform decisions about what uplifts us and allows for an elevated state of mind.

Key Pranayama Techniques:

Ujayi Pranayama - Ujayi means “**triumphantly uprising**” or “**victorious**” **breath**, so called as it refers to the triumphant uprising of prana through the sushumna nadi. Also known as “Oceanic Breath” or “Darth Vadar Breath” as we create an audible sound as we close and tone the epiglottis muscles at the back of the throat.

Benefits: Inner peace, calms mind and emotions, clears phlegm, reduces anxiety

Nadi Shodhana - **Alternate nostril breathing** (minor variations called Sukha Pranayama & Anulouma Viloma). Clearing the “Ida” and “Pingala” nadis, or the sun and moon energy channels that spiral around the sushumna channel, intersecting at each chakra.

Always begin by inhaling from the left nostril, closing the right nostril, close the left nostril, and hold the breath with the awareness at the 3rd eye, exhale from the right nostril. Inhale from the right nostril, close the right, hold the breath at the top, release and exhale from the left nostril

Benefits: Calms, balances, increase oxygen in the blood, cleanses major energy channels

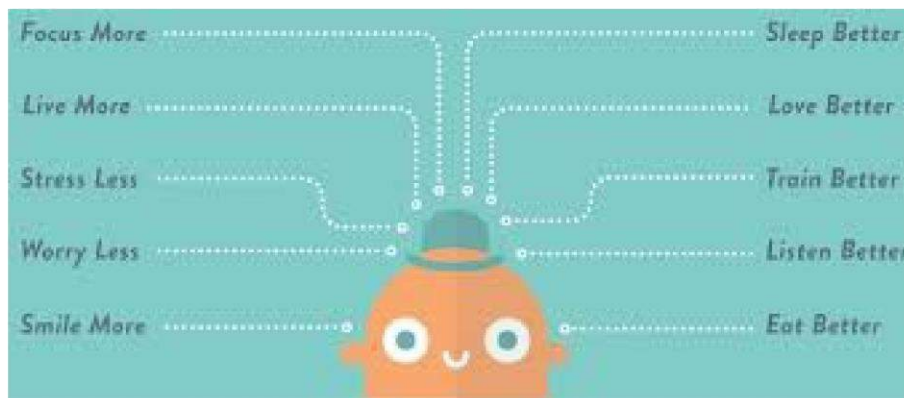
Kapala bhati – “**Shiny Skull**” **Breath**. This breath increases return of blood from heart to the rest of the body, purifying the lungs and developing their vital capacity through a rhythmic diaphragmatic pumping focusing on the exhale.

Benefits: Cleanses energy channels in the head, calms the mind, oxygenates, increases focus, decreases unwanted thoughts

Meditation/ Dhyana

“From whatever and wherever the mind wanders dues to its flickering and unsteady nature, one must certainly withdraw it and bring it back under the control of the self” – Bhagavad Gita

Why Meditate?!
Inner silence = Inner strength.



{HeadSpace app}

Why do we bother spending time alone with ourselves?! Meditation allows us to have a complete, simple and direct relationship with who we are. The power of introspection allows us **to cultivate our witness**, strengthening our ability to **see things as they are**, without masking or veiling our ego's fear and hopes, preferences, likes and dislikes. Meditation leads to intuition, inner awareness of our true self and a state of peace and bliss. Meditation helps us focus the mind and keep it positive, helping us transcend fear, desire, longing, negative emotions and ever positive attachments. It gives us the immediate knowledge that unites the individual soul, **jiva atman**, with the Supreme Soul, **atman**.

Meditation opens the metaphorical 3rd eye, or **Ajna chakra**, allowing us to see that the spiritual world and material world are not separate so that we can transcend the ego to concentrate on a broader awareness of the universe and one's relation to it. Seeing more clearly through our daily habits, our stories, our illusions, **Maya**, leads us to a life of wisdom, peace & equanimity.

Buddha said that **all beings suffer** (this is the first noble truth of Buddhism) and that suffering arising from our feeling of separation and lack of understanding of our true nature; when we are not aligned with the natural order, we create pain and struggle. Pain is a sign that we are moving out of alignment, against the natural order. Instead of fighting the pain and considering it negative we can align ourselves with the whole. The more we align ourselves, the more freedom we feel.

Meditation Techniques

Yoga is the method of victory. "The human body and mind are veritable battlegrounds for the war between wisdom and the conscious delusive force manifesting as vidya, ignorance. Every spiritual aspirant, aiming to establish within himself the rule of King Soul, must defeat the rebels, King Ego and his powerful allies" (Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita, p.24)

Meditation is a practice of finding balance between effort and surrender; balancing the will power to sustain concentration and detachment from distraction to remain in the heightened state of awareness, and the ability to relax, surrender and let go of all expectations and desires. There are many simple techniques for meditation to bring the mind into focus, returning it to stillness; Slow and steady Pranayama can always be engaged to refresh and revitalize the mind if it's feeling tired, fatigued or unfocused. Here are a few examples of meditation techniques:

Awareness – Breath or the space between breaths/the 3rd eye/ the sacred space of the heart / sounds of the environment

Prayer / Gratitude – Connect with the highest source and get clear on the feeling you wish fulfilled. "Prayers go up, blessings come down". Gratitude is another powerful form of prayer that breeds contentment with life.

Chanting Mantra– Vibration, Aum/Sacred sounds (see section on chanting mantra)

Who Am I? – The main practice of **Self-Inquiry** as taught by Ramana Maharishi.

Affirmations – Purifying thoughts, using words that benefit and cultivate our highest good

Yantra/Mandala – 2 or 3 dimensional spiritual/Ritual circle that represent the universe, used to focus meditation and create sacred space

Guided Meditation – e.g. Yoga Nidra, Visualizations

External Objects – e.g. Japa mala (with 108 mala rudraksha or other beads), candle gazing, moon, rituals

Active Meditation– e.g. Asana, walking, dancing, Qi gong, breath observation

Vipassana - Insight meditation, watching the space between breaths

Metta Meditation –Buddhist practice of Loving Kindness - Compassion for Self and Others

Chakra Meditation – Chanting *bej* or seed sounds of the chakras or simply focusing on the physical counterpart location and glands associated with each chakra

Key Meditation Practice Points

- **Be Consistent and Create a Habit**
- **Create a Sacred Space and/or Alter Space**
- **Time** – Most ideal for practice is dawn and dusk, especially *Brahmamuhurta* between 3 - 6am when the atmosphere is most clean, charged and unruffled by the activities of the day
- **Establish a comfortable sitting position**
- **Be in the Present Moment**

Mantra / Chanting

"The aim is spiritual, not denominational. The power of mantra lies in the vibrations, and these vibrations work on many levels, whether the sayings are pronounced out loud or silently ... The simple act of saying a mantra will still bring the heart and mind into alignment with its subtle goal, which is to bring heightened self-awareness and a deeper sense of peace and calm." – Alanna Kaivalya

In **Bhakti Yoga**, or the **yoga of devotion**, we surrender the ego, our intellect, our doubts, judgments & fears, and we harness the power of our emotions to help fuel our connection with the divine. In opening our heart in this way we create greater awareness and understanding of our true nature, bringing us into deeper levels of contentment, sweetness, compassion, light and energy.

Mantra Yoga – Man – thinking mind, Tra – to protect or expand. Mantras are powerful sound vibrations that have the ability to alter consciousness. Through the practice of chanting, we center consciousness on Spirit through the repetition of powerful incantations and seed sounds of universal sounds. The power of mantra lies in vibrations, and it works on many levels, both subtle and overt. We can invoke an intention or the quality or essence of a particular deity.

Chanting - Chants are uplifting compilations of vibrations that can be used as prayers for peace, health, wellbeing, to focus the mind and empower whatever we want to give energy to. Chanting has the power to awaken our physical and energetic bodies. It can be used to loosen mental chatter to still the mind, becoming one-pointedly focused, and bringing the heart into alignment.

Check out this incredible video on **Cymatics**, the study of visible sound vibration that effectively shows us how sound affects matter;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3o1pVa9fj>

In **kirtan**, or call and response devotional singing, we lift our voices to heal our spirits and raise our vibrations by repeating mantras over and over, shifting our awareness from our heads to our hearts. Singing reminds us of our essential nature: joyful, openhearted, centered, and blissful.



"If you want to find the secrets of the Universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and

Mantras

Aum is the most universal of Hindu symbols and its sound is used in most yoga traditions to promote body-mind harmony. We often begin and end each yoga asana class with 3 Aums, to bring each individual and the collective into this harmony. The sound of Aum spans the full range of the human voice, beginning at the base of the spine, moving up to the navel and slowly vibrating up to the 3rd eye chakra and beyond.



Aum is said to be the primordial sound of creation; the sound of all things in the universe vibrating simultaneously. Aum is used to symbolize the universe and the ultimate reality, representing the three aspects of God: Brahma – Creator (A), Vishnu - Sustainer (U) and Shiva – liberator/destroyer (M). Aum is also said to be a prayer of protection, representing: “a” – the waking experience, “u” – the dream experience, “m” – the deep sleep experience. Many traditions use this sound to seal or confirm a prayer, for example “Amen” is used in Judeo-Christian cultures and “Aho” in Native American tradition.

Asatoma Prayer:

Aum Asatoma Sat Gamaya Tamasoma Jyotir Gamaya Mrytor ma Amritam Gamaya
May we be led from untruth to truth, from the darkness of delusion to the brilliant light of true wisdom, from worldly death to the immortality of the soul

Lokah Samastha Prayer:

Lokah Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu
Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi
*Vedic prayer for light, truth and universal peace:
May all beings in all realms be peaceful, content and free from all suffering
Om peace peace peace*

Gayatri Mantra:

Om Bhur Bhuvah Swahah / Tat savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi / Dhiyo yo nah pratchodayath

Gayatri Mantra: May the infinite power of Gayatri, Mother Sun Goddess, pervade the entire universe, filling all realms with the nectar of divine light and bliss. May the infinite power of her unlimited cosmic energy illuminate my intellect and purify my inner heart so I may lead a life of pure divinity and virtue

Saraswati Mantra:

Om aim shrim hrim saraswati devyai namaha
I offer my reverence to the divine goddess Saraswati, the embodiment of all sound, light, wisdom and divine energy

Ganesha Mantra:

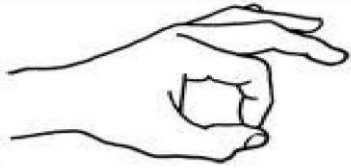
Om Gan Ganapataye Namaha
May our paths be clear of obstacles and barriers to auspiciousness and universal good

Buddhist Mehta-Loving Kindness Meditation

*May I be peaceful and at ease/ May I be happy
May I be full of love and compassion/ May I be well*

Mudra

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>Anjali Mudra ‘Seal of Honouring’</p> <p>Symbolism - Honouring, worshiping, balance, union of dual nature, humility, internal focus</p>	
<p>Jnana Mudra ‘ Seal of Wisdom’, Contains energy in a closed circuit which is conducive to inner focus</p> <p>Symbolism: Wisdom, knowledge, introspection</p>	
<p>Chin Mudra ‘Seal of Consciousness’, Gesture of Receiving</p> <p>Symbolism: Represents the interrelated nature of consciousness, the union of Shiva & 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>Dhyana Mudra ‘Seal of Meditation’ Gesture of Concentration and Healing</p> <p>Symbolism: 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>Vishnu Mudra</p> <p>Symbolism: 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>Lotus Mudra – Heart chakra opener</p> <p>Symbolism: 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>	

Sadhana Practice Guide

There are many different methods and techniques to practice Pranayama, Meditation, & Chanting. The key is that it is a **PRACTICE**, even if it is just for 5 minutes a day!

The journey IS the destination.

I. Ground & Tune in

1. **Find a comfortable seat** (literal meaning of "asana")
2. **Pratyahara - Withdrawing the senses from the external, drawing awareness within** - Bring awareness to the sounds and sensations all around you, to the Natural/Organic Breath, follow the natural pause at the beginning and end of each breath, Bring awareness to your heartbeat, how you feel today, scan your body for any place of tension or holding, observe the functioning of all 5 senses...
3. **Chanting the Sacred Sound "Aum" - 3 x**, followed by mantra

II. Pranayama

1. **Ujayi - Ujayi" triumphantly uprising" or "victorious" breath**, so called as it refers to the triumphant uprising of prana through the sushumna nadi. Also known as "Oceanic Breath" or "Darth Vadar Breath" as we create an audible sound as we close and tone the epiglottis muscles at the back of the throat.

Practice:

Rhythmic Breath - Equalize the lengths of inhales & exhales, for example, Breathe in for four counts and breathe out for a count of 4.

Extending the Exhale - Lengthen the exhale, working comfortably towards twice the length of the inhale, a ratio of 1:2, so for example, breathe in for a count of 4, then breathe out to a count of 8. You can also include a light breath retention, or "kumbhaka" after each breath.

2. **Nadi Shodhana - Alternate nostril breathing** (minor variations called Sukha Pranayama & Anuloma Viloma). Clearing the "Ida" and "Pingala", or the sun and moon energy channels that spiral around the sushumna channel, intersecting at each chakra.

Practice:

Take **Vishnu Mudra**, bringing the index and middle finger to the center of the palm, closing the right nostril with the thumb and the left nostril with the ring finger.

One complete round = Left to Right, Right to Left. Complete 5, 9, 12, or 16 + rounds

III. Meditation - E.g. Breath awareness, 3rd Eye, Sacred Space of the heart, mantra...

Practice: Start with prayer, asking for guiding or offering gratitude, then watch the breath, watch the spaces between the breaths, witness and label each arising thought.... Begin with 5 minutes, and then gradually extend the time you spend in stillness each day ☺

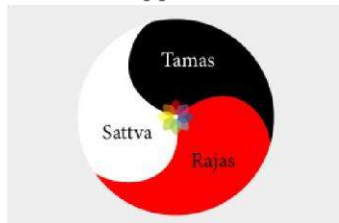
IV. Closing Prayers/Gratitude:

1. **Reflect on the Intention** and on how the body/mind/spirit is feeling
2. **Cultivate Gratitude**
3. **Chant Om** 3 times followed by Mantra

Energy Anatomy

Living in Balance: The Gunas

In Classical Yoga, karma is the interplay of 3 distinct energies. All of creation and its process of evolution can be categorized into these 3 qualities or **Gunas**. The balance of the three Guna's is vital for our health and our happiness.



Our basic nature is **Sattva** (positive creative force) with just enough Rajas (dynamic force) and **Tamas** (negative force) to bring about fruition. A Sattvic mind lends itself to clear, calm, creative thinking and allows us to create solutions. We need Rajas to implement these solutions and Tamas to bring them to an end when the solution has been resolved. To overcome the force of karma – e.g unconscious words, thoughts, actions, and to experience being established in health and in oneself, we need to follow a sattvic lifestyle with a deep connection to our diet. Food not only nourishes the body, it nourishes the mind and our conscious state.

Sattva – Light & Purity, Equilibrium, knowledge, (associated with creation)

A state of balance and harmony, peace, tranquility, sattva is the naturally arising state originating from being true to your inner teacher, guru, god. By purifying body, senses, and mind, the yogi can experience natural self.

Rajas – Activity, Passion, Action (associated with preservation)

When we identify ourselves with actions, with the roles we play in life, with praise received from others, we are in a rajasic state when the mind is identified with the concepts of karma, that which we sow and what which we reap.

Tamas – Darkness, Inertia, Lethargy, Ignorance (associated with destruction)

