

# Yoga Philosophy, Lifestyle & Ethics

## **The Origin and Goal of Yoga**

Yoga originated in India. It is impossible to say exactly when, however the earliest mention of yoga is recorded in the Vedas, four spiritual books that date back to somewhere between 4500 – 2500 BCE. And prior to the documenting of the Vedic philosophy, the belief systems documented in the Vedas have their origins in an oral tradition that dates back quite possibly to the prehistoric era of Indus Valley shamanism. The practice of yoga has been influenced by a variety of philosophical belief systems throughout the ages, such as:

**Pre-Vedic Age (7500 – 4500 BCE):** It is in this era that yoga may have its roots in shamanism.

**Vedic Age (4500 – 1500 BCE):** The time period of the writing of the four sacred scriptures – the Vedas. These scriptures provide the spiritual and philosophical foundation of Hindu culture and are the earliest documented signs of ‘yoga’.

**Upanishadic Age (1500 – 1000 BCE):** The origin of non-dual philosophy and the sacred scriptures of the Upanishads.

**Epic Age (1000 – 100 BCE):** The age of heroes and their epics...namely Arjuna and Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the first purposefully ‘yogic’ text.

**Classical Age (100 BCE – 500 CE):** The age during which the sacred text of the Yoga Sutras was considered written.

**Tantric Age (500 – 1300 CE):** The practice and philosophy of Tantra is birthed during this time, making yoga more accessible to the masses while also outlining the concepts of the ‘energy body’.

**Empiric Age (1300 – 1800 CE):** The arrival of the imperialist Mughals and the British Raj in India which birthed the wandering, ascetic, yogic warrior.

**Modern Age (1800 – Present CE):** The birthing of the global phenomenon of ‘Global Culture’ and ‘Spiritual Exercise’ as well as the continuously growing variety of yoga styles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The word ‘**yoga**’ is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘yoke’ or ‘union’. Sanskrit is the sacred language of the Hindu oral tradition. The meaning of ‘yoga’ has been elaborated over time to mean the union of complementary opposites: left/right; moon/sun; feminine/masculine; matter/spirit; small self/Universal Self, etc. The earliest mention of yoga is in the Vedas where it is described as a *spiritual discipline*. In the Upanishads, yoga is described in more esoteric ways as the ‘*coming-into-being, as well as the ceasing to be*’. By the time we reach the Bhagavad Gita, yoga is described as encompassing *many spiritual paths that lead to an experience of the Divine*. In one ancient yoga scripture, yoga is described as ‘*ecstasy*’ – in Sanskrit this is *Samadhi*. Samadhi is defined as “*both the technique of unifying consciousness and the resulting state of ecstatic union*”

*with the object of contemplation*". ("The Yoga Tradition" by Georg Feuerstein, pg. 3) Georg Feuerstein defines it as "the technology of ecstasy, or self-transcendence".

Many people ask whether yoga is a religion. Although it is definitely influenced by Hindu religion, Hinduism and Yoga are not synonymous. Hinduism is a composite of many Indian religious and cultural traditions that trace their origins back through the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the Vedas. Yoga started off as one of those traditions, with the goal of guiding the practitioner to spiritual enlightenment.

Today, yoga is often described as a physical form of exercise that helps to make the body feel limber and strong. The understanding of yoga is mostly limited to the physical asana practice. However, yoga can be described as a lifestyle and spiritual discipline that develops gradually through practice of various techniques such as asana, pranayama (breathing techniques) and meditation. In the classical tradition of yoga, the practices were intended to help the practitioner finally shed the physical body and disengage from the material world. This view stems from the non-dual philosophy of Vedanta that claims that all of reality is made of one substance, Brahman. Anything else is considered 'not real'. And so, the goal of the yogic practitioner was to leave the non-real behind and ascend to the *true* reality.

The meaning of yoga has transformed over time as it continued to be influenced by spiritual traditions that challenged this non-dual belief. One might perceive yoga as the yoking or union of the body with the mind. This perception challenges the Western and European philosophy of 'mind over matter' which is, perhaps, why millions of people world-wide have been drawn to the age-old practice of yoga.

Perhaps the primary goal of yoga is to improve our well-being: physically, emotionally and mentally. A strong, supple body, an expansive and mature emotional palette and a sound mind are the outcome of a disciplined practice. When we bring harmony to our thoughts, emotions and actions we develop the ability to witness both our inner and outer worlds and create a foundation for spiritual growth. Connecting to our inner spirit, or 'Atman', and subsequently recognizing its connection with 'all that is', or 'Brahman' is the ultimate goal of yoga.

## **The Historical Roots of Yoga**

The earliest documented mention of yoga is noted in the **Vedas**. The Vedas are four sacred yogic scriptures that were passed down orally through various families in the *brahmin* caste. Early vedic culture included the practice of rituals and sacrifices to appease the gods and goddesses and maintain cosmic order. The four Vedas outlined the ways to do so.

The **Rig Veda** is the oldest and longest of the four Vedas. Rig means 'praise' and Veda means 'knowledge'...so the Rig Veda is about *knowledge of prayer*. Most of the over 10,000 verses are invocations and prayers to the deities but some are mythological and creation stories.

The **Sama Veda** translates to *knowledge of song* and contains verses that are chanted during sacrificial rituals.

The **Yajur Veda** means *knowledge of sacrifice* and contains the hymns used in sacrificial rituals.

The final scripture, the **Atharva Veda**, was added much later to the Vedas. It contains magical incantations for healing, protection, and wealth as well as discussions regarding prana and pranayama. The science of Ayurveda derives from this spiritual text.

It is from the Vedas that we learn about the earliest creation myths in Hindu spirituality. One of these myths tells us that in the beginning, there was neither Being nor Nonbeing and then, at some point, *The One* emerged from its own internally generated heat and created the world from the seed of **kama** (desire). The One lays the foundation for non-dualism followed by most branches of yoga philosophy.

In another key creation myth we learn about the four major classes/castes of Hindu society: the **brahmins** or priests; the **kshatriya** or warriors; the **vaishya** or merchants; and the **shudra** or servant class. Below the shudra class and separate from the four main castes are the outcasts or **untouchables**. The caste system was woven through Hindu culture and although it was legally abolished in 1950, it still influences societal perception and behavior.

It is from the Vedas that we introduced to the earliest deities in the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses. The most mentioned gods are **Indra**, god of thunder; **Agni**, god of fire; and **Soma**, god of the soma drink. The most important goddesses are **Vac**, goddess of speech; **Ushas**, goddess of dawn; and **Sarasvati**, goddess of the great river. The many gods and goddesses are considered various aspects of The One.

The Vedas also introduce us to three groups of mystics: the **rishis**, the authors of the Vedas who, through contemplation and ritual made contact with The One and returned with the verses of the Vedas; the **keshins**, long-haired ascetics who lived on the fringe of society and were quite possibly the earliest shamans in Indian culture; and **vratyas**, mystics who lived far outside cultural boundaries and yet are considered by some to be the forerunners of yoga. They practiced pranayama (breathing techniques), believed in a non-dual philosophy, worshipped a god and chanted OM.

Yoga didn't really become systematized until approximately the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE by **Patanjali**, the purported author of the **Yoga Sutras** – quite possibly the most popular spiritual text quoted by yogis world-wide. The Sutras set down methods and techniques for attaining connection with the Divine through a system called the **Eight-fold Path of Ashtanga Yoga** (not to be confused with the style of yoga also called Ashtanga).

## Yoga Philosophies

There are *six traditional schools of Hindu philosophy*, all of which express that there is only one reality. The different schools of philosophical thought simply perceive and express this reality in different ways. These schools are:

1. **Mimamsa**: Focuses on the sacrificial rituals of the Vedas
2. **Vedanta**: Based on the belief systems documented in the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita.
3. **Samkhya**: Teaches various categories of existence and emphasizes the discipline of discernment over meditation.
4. **Yoga**: Refers to the Classical Yoga of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

5. **Vaisheshika:** Focuses on experience through observation and teaches that everything in the physical world can be reduced to atoms.
6. **Nyaya:** Explores rules of logic and the art of rhetoric

### **Non-dualism**

The Hindu philosophical school of **Vedanta** receives the most attention by practitioners of yoga primarily because of its affiliation with the **Upanishads** and the **Bhagavad Gita**. Vedanta literally translates to 'end of the Vedas' which refers to the *Upanishads*, a collection of stories about how to find spiritual liberation. The various schools that were birthed out of the philosophical school of Vedanta strove to systematize the ideas of the Upanishads. Although the schools vary in their interpretations, they all share three common beliefs:

1. Brahman is 'all that is' and created the Universe.
2. Everyone has an individual soul or 'atman'.
3. Knowledge is a necessary part of gaining liberation.

The oldest and most influential school of Vedanta is **Advaita Vedanta**. Advaita means 'not two', referring to the 'nondual' philosophy that Brahman and atman are one and the same and really knowing this leads to spiritual liberation. The primary goal for practitioners of this school is to transcend limitations of self-identity and to realize union with Brahman. The philosophy of Advaita Vedanta forms the basis for modern schools of Hindu philosophy.

The most well-known teacher of this tradition is *Shankara* who taught that there are two levels of the individual self or jivatma:

- The body/mind or the little 's' self
- The eternal/infinite 'Self' or Atman, which is the Brahman consciousness in an individual.

A common analogy used for this is to think of us as waves of the ocean; waves are not separate from but are the ocean itself. And so, our essence and the essence of the Universe are one and the same. The caveat here is that only the eternal is real; everything else is an illusion or 'Maya'. Life then becomes a problem to be solved and the answer lies in transcending our worldly existence and identifying with Spirit. This philosophy is often described in Hatha Yoga classes as 'you are not your body; you are not your mind; you are not your feelings; you are Eternal Spirit'.

### **Dualism:**

Dualist philosophy believes that a supreme deity created the universe out of its own substance but is *separate from its creation*. It is out of this philosophy that two very important teachings developed: Buddhism and Classical Yoga (the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali). Both traditions teach about Purusha (Sacred/Creator) vs. Prakriti (Creation/Nature) and that complete transcendence only happens if you transcend the physical form by escaping from the cycles of reincarnation.

There are many similarities between the Buddhist and Classical Yoga traditions. Both **Buddha** and **Patanjali** asked such questions as "What are the roots of human suffering"? "Can humans learn to be happy and free even in the midst of this difficult life"? This philosophical view of the world sees the natural world, or Prakriti, as suffering; a continual cycle of pain and pleasure led by a desire that can never be truly satisfied on the material plane. Both Buddha and Patanjali

also developed an 'Eight-fold Path' to liberation. Both offer a solution to overcome suffering by transcending the body/mind through disciplines and austerity and teach that true yogi's want liberation from the body, even though life is a gift from the Creator.

Perhaps the most influential text for yoga practitioners is ***Patanjali's Yoga Sutras***, possibly written sometime around 200 CE. Very little is actually known of its author as there were many individuals who possessed that name and lived at the time it was likely written. And so, because of this lack of information, a myth was created regarding his divine birth as the incarnation of Ananta, the thousand-headed ruler of the serpent race that guarded the hidden treasures of the earth. Tradition has it that a yogini, named Goniki, was praying for a son to whom she could pass on her wisdom. As she was praying with her hands together in Anjali mudra (Anjali = offering), she felt something stir between the palms of her hands. When she opened her hands, she discovered a tiny snake who then transformed into a human child.

It consists of 195 ***sutras***, meaning ***thread***. The sutras are aphorisms or statements that collectively summarize the main ideas of Classical Yoga and are meant to be deliberated, memorized and lived. The work describes two schools of yoga: ***Kriya Yoga*** and ***Ashtanga Yoga*** (not to be confused with the 'power' style of yoga, also called Ashtanga). Kriya means action that is specifically focused on spiritual development and Ashtanga means *eight limbs*.

The Yoga Sutra is in four chapters, or ***padas***, as follows:

- Chapter 1, *Samadhi-pada*, is comprised of 51 sutras on 'ecstasy'
- Chapter 2, *Sadhana-pada*, is 55 sutras on the 'path'
- Chapter 3, *Vibhuti-pada*, is 55 sutras on yogic 'powers'
- Chapter 4, *Kaivalya-pada*, is 34 sutras on 'liberation'

Early commentaries on the meaning of the sutras are lost and hundreds of years passed before the first collection of writings were completed. However, if it was written during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, scholars know that the worldview within which the text was written believed that life is full of suffering because we mistake that which is unreal/temporary (Prakriti) to be real/permanent (Purusha). It is this ignorance of 'all that is' that leads to attachments and aversions, to karma and repeated reincarnations. Patanjali believed that engaging in spiritual practices and cultivating an attitude of detachment helped to overcome ignorance and extinguish suffering.

### **Integration of Non-dualism and Dualism**

There are many paths and principal forms of yoga that one can explore as part of their sadhana (yogic practice) to achieve spiritual liberation, such as: *Jnana Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, *Tantra Yoga* and *Hatha Yoga*. Of these, ***Tantra Yoga*** blends the philosophies of Non-dualism and Dualism. Tantra means 'loom' or 'web' and so one can think of Tantra Yoga as a practice that weaves the best of both philosophies together. It is non-dual because it claims that 'All is One' and dual because it believes that since All is a manifestation of the Sacred, then the material world is also Sacred. I.E., there is the Creator and the Created...and both are Sacred.

Tantra Yoga emerged in the first millennium and was developed in a culture of 'householders' rather than monastic yogis. Tantra helped to bring yoga to the masses, regardless of caste or gender, social rules or taboos. The underlying belief of Tantrikas is that everything is a manifestation of the Divine, that life is good, that we, are innately good and life is meant to be

celebrated, not necessarily transcended. In Tantric philosophy, God and Nature are One; creation is a manifested form of the Creator. Tantrikas strive to recognize the Divine in all aspects of life, both the sacred and the profane, the highs and the lows, both waking and dreaming.

The primary goal of Tantra Yoga is to turn the individual life experience into an expression of the Divine and offer that gift of grace to uplift others. In this way of being in the world, the body is viewed as a manifestation of the Divine's wish to experience itself. This is a fundamental shift in philosophy from Classical Yoga in that Tantrikas believe we can achieve liberation within the body, rather than trying to transcend it. Birth/rebirth is no longer considered a cause of suffering but rather an opportunity to experience our divine nature.

Tantric practices include **mantra** (repetition of sacred sounds), **mudra** (energy seals performed with either the whole body or only the hands), **yantras** and **mandalas** (symbolic diagrams) and **rituals**. The primary deities that are honoured by Tantrikas are the **Goddess Shakti** (representing the feminine, creative form of the Sacred) and **Siva** (her partner and mate, representing pure consciousness).

An important principle of Tantra Yoga is the **subtle body or energy body**. This energy body is made up of **prana** (life force energy) that flows through energy channels (**nadis**) – the primary one being the **sushumna**, which aligns with the physical spinal column. Shakti energy lying coiled at the base of this column is referred to as **kundalini** energy and is essentially dormant until we engage in the spiritual practices that help it to awaken and flow freely up the sushumna to connect with Siva energy at the crown of the head.

**Hatha Yoga**, although heavily influenced by the eight-fold path of the dualist Ashtanga Yoga tradition, is considered the offspring of Tantra Yoga in that it follows the non-dualist philosophy of 'All is One' with a heightened focus on the body as the aspect of the Sacred that we inhabit and are responsible for maintaining. Hatha Yoga practices are both physical and mental and keep the body strong and healthy so it can endure long periods of meditation and the force of kundalini rising. Pronounced 'huh-tuh', Hatha means 'forceful' and refers to the intensity of this path of yoga. It blends elements from Classical Ashtanga Yoga, Advaita Vedanta and Tantra while adding some unique physical practices from the Siddha Movement of the first millenium which focused primarily on physical perfection and immortality.

The first Hatha yogin was *Matsyendra* who lived in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. Three texts are considered primary resources of Hatha Yoga: the **Hatha Yoga Pradipika** (14<sup>th</sup> century); **Siva Samhita** (15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century); and **Gheranda Samhita** (17<sup>th</sup> century). The Gheranda Samhita tells us that Hatha Yoga is comprised of seven practices:

- *Shat Karma/Kriyas*: six actions of purification
- *Asana*: postures
- *Mudras*: seals and energy locks
- *Pratyahara*: sense withdrawal
- *Pranayama*: breath control
- *Dhyana*: meditation
- *Samadhi*: union with the Divine

## **Brahman, Brahma and the Three Gunas**

In the Vedantic traditions **Brahman** is the creator of everything in the universe. Whatever we perceive is simply the activity sustained by Brahman - always expanding, infinite and eternal.

**Atman** is this same Brahman consciousness within individuals. It is the aspect of the self that is unchanging and without limitation.

**Jiva** is the individual soul. It is the part of us that needs to identify with something. The parts of ourselves that separate us from others are called the Upadhis, such as our bodies and our minds.

**Brahma** is the Creator aspect of the Hindu Trinity which also includes **Vishnu**, the Preserver and **Siva**, the Destroyer. The Trinity consists of creation, preservation and destruction, represented by these masculine aspects. This Trinity is also expressed by the feminine aspects of the deities Saraswati (creation/partner to Brahma); Lakshmi (preservation/partner to Vishnu); and Durga (destruction/partner to Siva).

**Maya** is the feminine aspect of Brahman and its manifestation (Earth, Nature, life, etc). In the Vedas, Maya was perceived as the power of a deity to create an illusion a human would believe. In the Upanishads, it came to mean the sense of illusion where the world is not what it seems. In non-dualist philosophy, the world of illusion (i.e., everything in nature) is created by Maya through the interplay of three different qualities of Nature called the **Gunas**: *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

- **Sattva**: lucidity, purity and knowledge, stability, harmony, virtue, lightness, luminosity, joy, an inward and upward motion that awakens, the principle of INTELLIGENCE.
- **Rajas**: dynamism, destruction, turbulence, activity, mobility, motivation, outward motion, disintegration, pain, suffering, the principle of ENERGY.
- **Tamas**: inertia, dullness, darkness, resistance to change, heaviness, obstructs reality, downward motion, decay, principle of MATTER.

Creation is only possible when these qualities remain *out of balance*; i.e., in everything we observe, one Guna will predominate but the potential for the other two is always there. Because of these three forces, we experience attachment and aversion. For example, increased Tamas may prevent us from getting out of bed, taking risks; increased Rajas makes us strive for connection, recognition; increased Sattva inspires us to seek spiritual growth and experience inner peace.

## **Karma and Reincarnation**

There is a universal law of 'cause and effect' from which **Karma** is derived. Karma means 'action' and any intentional physical, verbal or mental action that creates Karma. Our thoughts are the most powerful of these three types of action. When we begin to understand this, we recognize the importance of taking good care of our thinking.

**Reincarnation** means the rebirth of a soul in a new body. According to many ancient philosophies, we incarnate into a new body over many lifetimes in order to develop and evolve spiritually. Once we understand the Law of Karma (the relationship between our actions and their effects), we experience joy because we understand how we can aid our development and spiritual growth. How we reincarnate depends upon our Karma that we accumulate over

previous lifetimes. The Hindu tradition suggests it is a good birth if one is born into a wealthy and spiritual family. It is very rare, but even better, to be born into a family of yogis.

Our actions can be good, bad or neutral, depending upon the intention or motivation behind the action. Good, virtuous actions lead to a higher evolution; bad actions impede spiritual growth and can create many obstacles in our path of enlightenment. It is important to note that we always retain the level of consciousness we have developed from one lifetime to the next, even if we stray from a spiritual path.

Every action leaves an imprint on our subtle mind. Repeated actions can create deeply entrenched habits of thought and actions or *samskara*. Karma, our actions and their consequences can accumulate and work for or against us in our spiritual journey. Liberation comes from overcoming karma with spiritual discipline and deconstructing our *samskara* by experiencing the Sacred.

According to this philosophy, there are *three types of Karma*:

- ***Sanchita Karma***: the seeds that are still lying dormant within us that have been accumulated over past lifetimes. Conditions as yet have not been right for these seeds to be realized.
- ***Prarabhdha Karma***: the karma we are living now. We have created certain conditions in this lifetime to allow accumulated seeds to ripen. When we use up all the seeds planned for a lifetime, we die.
- ***Agami Karma***: the seeds we are gathering right now by our physical, verbal and mental actions. It is the karma we create, moment to moment, by our free choice.

Once we begin to realize the Law of Karma, we strive first of all to purify karma from the past, accepting fully our lives and what they bring to teach us. Secondly, we try not to commit negative karma by trying to keep our physical, verbal and mental actions pure with virtuous intentions. The 'Paths of Yoga' can help us to achieve this goal.

The purpose of karma is not to punish us but rather to point us in the right direction towards perfection. Understanding this can help us to relax into our lives, trying to do our best in each situation and knowing we are evolving by our own actions and our understanding of those actions. Sometimes we have to repeat certain things many times before we can fully understand what is going on and how to change the situation (if needed). Ultimately, at the point of Realization, all accumulated karma is destroyed.

### **The Eight-fold Path of Ashtanga Yoga**

In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, we are promised that "through the performance of the limbs of Yoga, and the dwindling of impurity, [there comes about] the radiance of wisdom (*jnana*), [which develops] up to the vision of discernment." These limbs comprise the Eight-fold Path of Ashtanga Yoga.

### ***The eight limbs are:***

- Yamas: moral restrictions or restraints
- Niyamas: moral observances
- Asana: postures (in Patanjali's time, this was simply meditation posture)
- Pranayama: breath control
- Pratyahara: sense withdrawal
- Dharana: concentration
- Dhyana: absorption/meditation
- Samadhi: union/ecstasy

The eight-fold path provides for the entire evolutionary process of the spiritual path. The limbs build upon each other, leading the practitioner from the 'common life of self-involvement to the uncommon realization of the Self beyond the ego personality'. (Feuerstein, pg. 245) The entry point is the yamas and niyamas. These comprise the basic, universal codes of behavior and give important guidelines for daily living and personal discipline. Patanjali spoke of the 'three poisons' that can undermine our spiritual evolution: *greed, hatred and ignorance*.

### ***The Yamas and Niyamas***

In a yoga lifestyle, embracing a code of ethics is essential for healthy living and is our first step on our spiritual journey. To have a successful meditation practice, we need to have a certain level of mental balance and harmony where our words, thoughts and actions are congruent. If the *head-mind* thinks one thing, but the *heart-mind* feels another, and the *belly-mind* knows yet another, this creates an imbalance within, making it difficult to live peacefully. Only by attempting to live an honest and authentic life can the mind begin to settle without confusion and pain.

The Yamas and Niyamas are ethical precepts that lay a foundation in which we begin to develop wisdom. Each one has five principles: Yamas deal with our behavior and how to choose healthy, life-affirming ways of being. The Niyamas helps us to create a supportive environment in which we can grow and develop to our full potential.

### ***Yamas***

Yamas cover *interpersonal*, ethical behavior or moral disciplines; they teach us how to treat one another and maintain social harmony. They are meant to bring our instinctual life under control by checking the powerful survival instinct and rechanneling it to serve a higher purpose. These precepts apply not just to action but to thoughts and words as well, harmonizing relationships with other beings.

### ***The five Yamas are:***

- ***Ahimsa***: Non-violence or compassion.
  - Violence arises out of fear, ignorance, anger, selfishness.
  - Practice love, understanding, patience, worthiness – for self and others.
  - All the other 'virtues' are based on this most important one.
- ***Satya***: Truthfulness or honesty, with ourselves and others
  - We need this quality in our speech, thoughts and actions.
  - Practice honesty, owning feelings, honest communication, forgiveness, letting go of the 'mask', non-judgment.

- **Asteya:** Non-stealing or responsibility.
  - Stealing can be seen as theft but is also using others, avoiding responsibility, carrying grudges, taking on too much responsibility.
  - Practice respecting other peoples boundaries and possessions, self-sufficiency, letting go.
- **Brahmacarya:** (Originally 'celibacy'); now sensual moderation.
  - Not over-indulging in mind, body, speech.
  - Practice moderation in all you do, relax into life, choose to believe you are guided by a higher power, practice humility, surrender to love.
- **Aparigraha:** Greedlessness or simplicity.
  - Avoid grasping, trying to control, denying needs, fear-based beliefs in scarcity possessiveness in relationships and with things.
  - Practice believing in love and abundance, releasing control and accepting responsibility, detachment from material goods...living simply.

### **Niyamas**

Niyamas are *intrapersonal* attitudes and actions in pursuit of developing internal peace. They are sometimes referred to as 'self-regulation' or 'healthy personal practices' and are concerned with the 'inner life' of yogins. The five precepts of the Niyamas harmonize the yogins' relationship to life on earth and to the transcendental Reality.

#### **The five Niyamas are:**

- **Shaucha:** Cleanliness or purity/clarity.
  - Being disorganized, irresponsible about personal hygiene and environment creates confusion/chaos.
  - Practice good health habits, take steps to clean up personal environment leads to mental clarity.
  - Shaucha is about both external and internal purification; treating your body as a 'temple'
- **Santosa:** Contentment or acceptance.
  - Acceptance is a powerful attitude and comes from not coveting more than what is at hand. Detachment from outcome
  - Practice gratitude and joy, experience success or failure, pleasure or sorrow with unshakable equanimity.
  - Meditation and contemplation are good tools to bring about an attitude of contentment.
- **Tapas:** Austerity or sacrifice.
  - The willingness to do what is necessary to reach a goal with discipline.
  - Cultivate determination for daily practices (sadhana).
  - Practice joyfulness with outer discipline – this will bring inner discipline.
- **Svadhyaya:** Self-education or study.
  - Practice a willingness to learn, expand knowledge and understanding through reading, pondering the meaning of scriptures.
  - Learn from personal experience through reflection and meditation.
  - Develop the desire to know the Truth.

- **Ishvara-pranidhana:** Devotion/surrender to God/Spirit.
  - To 'take shelter in the Supreme'.
  - Practice joyful surrender of ego-will to Divine-will, make spirituality the point and purpose of life.
  - Cultivate faith, dedication, sincerity, and patience to transcend the ego.

### Paths of Yoga

Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning union between the individual soul and the God within (Atman). Yoga provides many paths to meet this end. Each path is designed to purify the individual, like polishing a fine gem, bringing to the surface the most optimal attributes of the person. Traditionally, the Guru would choose a particular path for the disciple/student. The path chosen would depend upon the attributes of the student. Many factors would be taken into account; however, Western practitioners of yoga might be best served by incorporating a little from each path into their practice while making one path their main focus.

Some of the principal forms or paths of yoga are:

- Jnana Yoga
- Bhakti Yoga
- Karma Yoga
- Tantra Yoga
- Hatha Yoga

**Jnana Yoga** (pronounced 'gyaana') means 'wisdom' or 'knowledge'. Jnana Yoga falls under the non-dualist philosophy that all of reality is made out of one substance – Brahman...and anything that is not Brahman is an illusion. The central practices of Jnana Yoga are meditation, study, and renunciation (i.e., giving up everything that is a distraction to enlightenment). The goal of Jnana Yoga is to have a direct experience of the Sacred and live with that experience always in mind.

This path is suited to an 'intellectual temperament'. The path of Jnana Yoga is designed to purify the mind of ignorance. It is difficult to become self-realized. Knowledge dissolves ignorance but one must develop their receptors to receive knowledge. This is a path of purification and typically one would prepare the mind by practicing first Karma Yoga, then Bhakti Yoga and finally Raja Yoga (also known as the Eight-fold Path of Ashtanga Yoga).

The practices of Jnana Yoga are *seven stages of learning* (also called the **Seven Bhoomikas**), as follows:

- **Subecha:** Longing for the Truth; burning desire to be free from bondage. The aspirant must be an able vessel; must contain discrimination (viveka) and dispassion (vairagya) as well as the Six Noble Virtues:
  - *Sama:* Tranquility
  - *Dama:* Mastery of 5 Senses
  - *Uparama:* Withdrawal of Senses
  - *Titiksha:* Endurance
  - *Sradha:* Faith
  - *Samadhana:* One-pointed mind
- **Vicharana:** Right Inquiry. One must practice deep listening (*Sharavana*), reflection (*Manana*), deep meditation (*Nidhiyasana*). With these practices, the veil of ignorance becomes thinner and we begin to see the Truth.

- **Tanumanasa:** With continued Sadhana, the mind thins even more as it is purified, the Truth begins to shine, but at this stage it is still a dualistic experience.
- **Sattvapati:** At this stage, the practitioner develops extra powers (siddhis) but it is a spiritual test as they must transcend these powers and the ego to evolve to the next stage of the spiritual path
- **Asamsakti:** At this stage, the aspirant is unaffected by anything, from this stage onwards there is no distinction between subject and object.
- **Parathabhavani:** The view of the world has changed completely; the practitioner sees Brahman in everything.
- **Turiya:** Union, All is One

**Bhakti Yoga** is the yoga of devotion. It is a path of total self-surrender and develops a supreme love of God. This path is suited to an 'emotional temperament'. An individual immersed in Bhakti Yoga practices devotion to a chosen deity, called an **ishtha devata**. Bhakti metaphysics can range from 'qualified non-dualism' to 'dualism'. In 'qualified non-dualism', there is only ONE supreme deity that is greater than the universe it created...part of it but greater than it. The 'dualist' philosophy holds that the deity created the universe, but is separate from its creation. The practices of Bhakti Yoga include: contemplation, meditation on the chosen deity; kirtan-style chanting, ritual worship and prostration.

There are nine techniques of Bhakti Yoga, as follows:

1. Shravana: listening to stories about God through Satsang, nature, etc.
2. Kirtanam: singing the glories of God through chanting.
3. Archanam: worshipping God through rituals (offerings of flowers, incense)
4. Bandanam: surrendering oneself to God
5. Sakhsakhym: cultivating a feeling that God is your friend
6. Dasyam: becoming a servant of God
7. Smaranam: remembering God is in everything
8. Padasevanam: worshipping the Lotus Feet of God by serving humanity
9. Admanivedanam: total self-surrender; your will is elevated to that of God's

The path of Bhakti Yoga helps to purify the aspirant of false 'ego' and also to purify the outgoing tendency of the mind which makes it constantly turbulent. When one finds fulfillment through Bhakti, the mind becomes peaceful and the person becomes the embodiment of love.

### **Karma Yoga**

This is the yoga of selfless, self-transcending action. We practice Karma Yoga by serving humanity without any expectation of results of this service. When we practice, we try not to feel we are the 'doer' but, rather, an instrument of God. We also practice as an offering to God. This path is best suited to an 'active temperament'.

According to this path, we all must live according to our 'dharma', duty or nature. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna advises Arjuna that it is best to live our own 'dharma' poorly than to try and do another person's well.

In today's world, we can do Karma Yoga by offering one-two hours week volunteering. Also, we can practice by engaging in daily, simple acts of kindness with a meditative attitude. This path helps to purify the heart by removing the quality of selfishness.

## **Tantra Yoga** (see *Integration of Non-dualism and Dualism*)

### **Hatha Yoga**

Hatha literally translates as '*force*'; Hatha Yoga is a combination of physical and mental practices or disciplines. On the *physical* side, there are purification rituals called the *shat karma*, as well as *asana*, *mudra*, and *bandha* (energy locks). Spanning the physical and mental are *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal), and *pranayama* (breath control and extension exercises). On the mental side, we have *dhyana* (absorption in meditation) and *Samadhi* (union). Liberation in Hatha Yoga includes clearing the energy body of the seeds of karma and moving kundalini up the central channel of the sushumna.

### **Adhikara or Studentship**

As yoga teachers and students it is important to recognize our own level of commitment to the practice and the level of commitment of our students. Adhikara is the Sanskrit word that defines studentship and our level of commitment.

Every individual is a unique expression of all 5 elements that move from formlessness to form in the following order with the associated qualities:

- Space/Ether/Sky: Freedom/Spaciousness/Unbounded
- Air: Transport/Quick/Directional/Movement
- Fire: Heat/Transmutation
- Water: Fluidity/non-rigidity/fluid form
- Earth: Bounded/Limited/embodied form

### **AKHIKARA: How to become an excellent student**

WE can become excellent students by evaluating where we are now in terms of the level of our commitment and by determining which elements need to be strengthened within us. In order to be effective teachers, we need to continue to be students.

#### ***There are 3 levels of students:***

1. *Mild*: Mildly interested in yoga; may attend 1 class/week or irregularly
2. *Medium*: Increased interest; may attend 2-3 classes/week
3. *Intense*: May purchase unlimited passes to attend 3+ classes/week; practices on their own daily as well

We can determine how each Element plays out in an individual's nature if there is a lot of:

- Sky energy: openness, humility, beginner's mind, purity of intention to align
- Air energy: intellectual dexterity, can grasp concepts quickly
- Fire energy: very high aspiration, full of drive, intense desire and longing
- Water energy: more accommodating/flexible
- Earth energy: student is steadfast, practices regularly, is reliable

### **CONTEMPLATION**

1. What level of student are you? Mild, medium, intense?
2. What are your strong elements; what elements need enhancing?