

“THE EXPERIENCE YOU WANT IS
IN THE PROCESS OF GETTING IT...”

An Alexander Teacher's reflections on
Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga in the tradition of
Pattabhi Jois

Aino Klippel, January^{23rd} 2011

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In this essay I describe how to teach the basics of the Alexander Technique in a way that would be approachable to a student of ashtanga yoga. Yoga, especially ashtanga, has become a popular pastime (Singleton, 2010, p.211) and my questioning of the teachers of the Alexander Teacher Training School reflected that popularity. All of them told, they had pupils who were involved with yoga, while some had negative experiences of working with yoga teachers. I will point out similarities and differences between the two disciplines, with a purpose of providing tools of communication to Alexander Teachers unfamiliar with the conventions of yoga.

In 1997 I started to practise yoga while training as a clarinettist, and took on ashtanga and the Alexander Technique almost simultaneously in 2003. Alexander Technique and ashtanga seems to be a challenging combination, prejudices prevailing in both disciplines. My approach to yoga is one of practical exploration and I write here about the philosophy of yoga in a simple form that is easily understandable for Alexander teachers. Writing this essay has demanded me to look carefully at my yoga practice, in order to see how the principles of the Alexander Technique have become part of it.

The essay will start with reflections on the shared history of the Alexander Technique and yoga. This is followed by general remarks about teaching ashtangis, persons who practise ashtanga yoga. In order to cover all the essentials, the remaining text is structured around the five items that Patrick Macdonald was listing as the features that together “*make the Alexander Technique unlike any other*” (Macdonald, (1989) 2006).

During the process of writing I found myself weighing some of Alexander's key concepts that are not in Macdonald's list. These include the polarities of 'end-gaining' versus 'means-whereby' and 'mind-wandering' versus 'concentration', as well as psycho-physical unity and positions of mechanical advantage. Because of the all-embracing nature of the Alexander Technique, I was able to weave those concepts, as they apply to an ashtangi, into the text. At the end, there is a listing of books and articles that may be of interest.

Alexander Technique and yoga – a short history

“I may have been unlucky, as may F. Matthias Alexander before me, in having pupils who came to me after incorrectly studying yoga. They were rigid both in neck and brain...”

P. Macdonald, Alexander Technique teacher ((1989) 2006)

“A good use and healthy alignment is the natural state of the body. Connecting to this innate state unravels habitual patterns and untangles energy, enhancing well-being, vitality and effortlessness.”

T. Feldman, ashtanga yoga teacher (2008)

Alexander himself being a performing artist, the Alexander Technique became well established among musicians and actors. Performers are generally grateful for achieving a more efficient way of working. A yoga student may look at their practise as an exercise that should be difficult, and perceive lessening of effort as cheating. Ashtanga yoga teachers can also be wary about combining

other disciplines with ashtanga, because mixing approaches might confuse the student as well as affect the authenticity of the yoga practise. Authenticity refers to the idea that yoga is an ancient tradition passed through generations from teachers to students (Räisänen, 2009 p. 17-19). From a yoga teachers point of view the Alexander Technique is a minor discipline, with only a hundred years of history.

Some Alexander teachers think that Alexander didn't like yoga because of the challenges presented by asana, the practise of yoga poses. It was although only after Alexander's time that yoga in London became largely associated with performing asana (Singleton, 2010, p. 5). Alexander did not comment asana practise, either. He actually used the case of an Indian Yogi who was able to stop his heart beat to demonstrate the extend to which conscious control could eventually be applied. Naturally, he was advising his readers not to seek out this sort of *"dangerous trickery"* ((1910)1957 p.56). In *Man's Supreme Inheritance* Alexander also reveals his keen interest in acrobatics: *"Continual readjustment of the parts of the body without undue physical tension is most beneficial, as is proved by the high standard of health and long life of acrobats"* ((1910) 1957 p.167).

At the beginning of the 20th century there was a trend of teaching breathing exercises for children at schools. Alexander was working against this trend. Considering the photo of a boy demonstrating "deep breathing" in *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, it is unlikely that any ashtanga yoga teacher would disagree with Alexander about the potential harm of the drill the boy was doing (Alexander, (1910) 1957).

One of the hallmarks of ashtanga yoga is that breathing exercises (pranayama) are generally not being taught. With the words of P. Jois, the late ashtanga guru: *"According [to the] Ashtanga Yoga method, pranayama teaching [is] some[what] difficult. Difficult means that primary postures and intermediate postures, asanas are perfect, after advanced postures a section perfect. After I will take it teaching pranayama."* (Donahaye, 2008) and *"If you want to practice the correct breathing system, you must have a straight spine"* (Anderson, 1994). Alexander also observed that *"deep breathing"* is usually done by hollowing the lower back and pulling the chest out. He was not against respiratory re-education, but he pointed out that general malconditions like breathing difficulties, should not be mistaken for a specific defect (Alexander, (1923) 2000 p.194).

The first popular yoga breathing manual in English (Atkinson, (1903) 2003) was published the year before Alexander arrived to London (Rosen, 2010). It was not written by an Indian yogi but the questionable origin does not prevent it from influencing yoga students who attempt to do it's exercises. Even today the book is advertised by the Ashtanga Yoga Shop in Helsinki as *"the indispensable guide to everyone interested in first-rate breathing."* (Astangakauppa, 2010, my translation). This book could be the source Alexander is referring to as the *"well-known system of breathing practised and taught by [the yogis]"*, which he thought was *"not only wrong and essentially cruel, but also exaggerating the defects of which people suffer in the 20th century"* (Alexander, (1910) 1957).

It is common for yoga teachers who have heard about the Alexander Technique to know that it has something to do with a free neck. According to the positive or negative image they have of the Technique, they may ask their students either to avoid or to exaggerate the movements of the head. Also bending or not bending the knees in certain postures can be a question of principle, as the Alexander Technique is being associated with bending the knees. This posture orientated view of the Alexander Technique probably stems from Alexander teachers having advised pupils to modify asanas in order to achieve greater mechanical advantage (Moyer, 1987). When teaching yoga teachers one needs to bear in mind that they might pick up anything from the lesson and attempt to teach it forwards to their own students.

When the number of somatic methods has risen, Alexander Technique is often being compared in yoga magazines with an array of bodywork. If this is done properly, it can actually help people to get a better picture of what makes the Technique unique (Knaster, 2000).

How to teach Alexander Technique to ashtangis?

"Teach what is inside you, not as it applies to you, but as it applies to the other".

T. Krishnamacharya, P. Jois' guru (Arora, 2004)

"'Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah.' This means that yoga is control over the modifications of the mind."

Patanjali 1.2, translation P. Jois (Anderson, 1994)

For yogis, it will make sense to emphasise the concept of psychophysical unity and the attention Alexander paid to breathing. Also, Alexander was using his reasoning to recognise and systematise universal laws of human behaviour. He didn't set out to develop a new technique but had to learn to think independently, because even the best available teachers and doctors were not able to help him to recover his voice (Alexander, (1932) 2001). Becoming aware that how one understands instructions is dependent on their way of perceiving them can be a new discovery for a yogi. Yoga being an ancient tradition, students may feel they have to follow instructions without engaging their own ability to think (Balk, 2007, p.27).

Sometimes Alexander teachers resort to convenient short-cuts: we talk about a free neck or a strong back, when actually meaning the whole person. When teaching practitioners of ashtanga yoga, the teacher needs to be clear that it was not only a disembodied, idealised free neck, Alexander found himself misusing. It is easy for an ashtangi to assume that someone who can't put their leg behind their neck does not understand how much the whole body is involved in their practice. Therefore it can be practical to speak in terms of reactions, rather than starting by explaining terms like 'inhibition' or 'directions'.

When Alexander started to observe his reciting, he first didn't notice anything special, but when he compared normal speaking to reciting, the difference was obvious (1932) 2001). What he noticed was his reaction to the stimulus of speaking. A parallel to this experiment for an ashtangi could be to stand normally, compared to standing on their mat before practice.

The stiffening of the neck is the key factor of a total pattern which includes pulling every part of the body into it's nearest joint. This is a problem for someone who is trying to move their joints. Alexander's reaction to reciting was to pull the head back and down, to compress the larynx, to gasp for air, to pull his chest out and to over-arch the lower back. He also grabbed the floor with his feet, which was *"exerting the most harmful tension over the whole body"* ((1932) 2001). For a yogi a this list of Alexander's habitual reactions will help to grasp the idea of a total psycho-physical pattern, and it will provide a point of reference when learning the classic Alexander directions.

The Alexander teacher should not get too much involved in their pupil's yoga. The ashtanga yoga "practise" is like playing through a musical composition: the movements have to follow the rhythm of the breath and one has to keep warm in order to stretch safely. Just like an Alexander teacher would not tell a musician to change the awkward notes Mozart wrote, it does not help to criticize

details of an asana practise without understanding them in their context. If I am asked how to do an asana “the Alexander way”, I let the yogi tell what they think they are doing, and feed back what they actually do. This method helps me to avoid stepping on the toes of their yoga teacher.

Often grown-up persons start to practise and teach ashtanga with little experience of exercising and not much psycho-physical awareness (Mikkonen, 2008). Nevertheless they consider themselves as specialists in their field, and an Alexander teacher will probably look in their eyes like somebody not very flexible. Even if ashtangis are quick to recognise an Alexander Teacher's habits of stiffening, they would benefit from a concept of alignment that includes the whole person, mind and body.

Because yoga teachers are working with their hands-on, they might need help to realize that teaching the Alexander Technique is not just a matter of learning where to put their hands. The Alexander teacher's touch is delicate, placing an untrained hand in such a sensitive area than a person's neck can have the opposite effect than intended. The best way for a yoga teacher to transmit the benefits of the Alexander Technique is to look after themselves, while teaching yoga the idiomatic way. It is simple to give a demonstration on how it is the quality of touch that really matters, by placing hands on different parts of the yoga teacher's body, while moving them.

Attention to breath makes a direct link between Alexander's discoveries and an ashtangi's daily practice. Alexander was developing his Technique to enable him to recite Shakespeare, which requires remarkable breath control. Running out of breath means not just problems with the voice, also muscle tone and the brain's ability to think are impaired when there's not enough oxygen.

Ashtangis appreciate smooth and even breathing through the nose. Alexander took pride of being able to recite without gasping air through the mouth (Alexander, (1932) 2001). Later he was known as “the Breathing Man” because his teaching was based on the discovery that improved breathing is connected with balance and overall coordination. Instead of trying to manage breath directly by breathing exercises, he paid attention to the conditions that enable breathing to happen naturally. “*Guruji divided the breath into two categories: ‘free breathing’ and ‘stiff breathing’.*” (Garrigues, 2010a)

Recognition of the force of habit

“It's easy to teach complete beginners but hard to teach experienced students that have deeply ingrained faulty habits.”

G. Maehle, ashtanga yoga teacher (Morales, 2010)

“The experience you want is in the process of getting it. If you have something, throw it away. It's getting it not having it what you want.” F.M. Alexander (2000)

The habits that the Alexander Technique is designed to change can be described as “*both permanent and unrecognised*”(Alexander, (1910) 1957), and as “*reactions to any given activity.*” (Alexander, (1941) 2004). Good habits from the Alexander Technique's point of view are those that are conscious and that can be changed by choice. When a person becomes used to react in a certain way, it starts to feel normal and right. Even with reasonable discomfort, it can feel more of an effort to

stop and change a habit than to keep going the usual way. The stronger the stimulus to do something right, the bigger is the temptation to stick with a familiar response (Alexander, (1941) 2004 p.76).

Ashtangis repeat a challenging exercise up to 5-6 times a week. In an enthusiastic and ambitious yoga environment, determination is needed in order to not get driven away with the class energy. Regular practising does not only improve a yogi's aptitude to perform asana, it will also make the ashtangi to exaggerate habitual miscoordination that is not so pronounced in everyday life. Sometimes in yoga, end-gaining takes the form of being so non-attached that the yogi is hardly practicing anything demanding at all. As people often do their asana practice before going to work, there can also be an element of haste in their practice.

There is a force even behind habits that are generally considered to be good. Waking up early and practising daily starts to feel normal, if the routine is repeated regularly. As a person gets accustomed to a certain level of exercise, there is more room for considering the means of how to perform it. The postures in ashtanga might seem exhilaratingly difficult for someone who is not familiar with them, but for more seasoned practitioners a real challenge is to *“prevent the familiar from becoming mechanical”* (Balk, 2007).

Ashtanga yoga, like any sportive activity, bears a risk of overstraining (Mikkonen, 2008). It requires a high level of sensitivity to notice something going wrong during practice, since tiredness and the heat produced by rigorous movement can mask symptoms of poor coordination. The Technique not only increases sensitivity, it also empowers the Alexander pupil with an ability to use their kineasthetic sense to enhance coordination. It is although possible for an Alexander teacher not being able to perform asanas that their pupils can do. Even if the Alexander Technique generally helps to prevent injuries, it can in some cases give a false sense of security. One should bear in mind that learning the Technique is not a substitute for regular practicing.

Working with asanas by paying attention to the process of learning them, enables the ashtangi to accurately modify the level of practice according to the situation. When one knows the means whereby an asana has been learned, the habitual way of doing it can also be retraced, if one realizes having gone wrong after all. This can help when recovering from injuries, or when the yoga student experiences plateaus, where the familiar expression of an asana seems to be the only possible. Rather than just trying to grasp for something that is not quite at reach yet, the yogi will have tools to unravel their harmful, habitual reaction patterns.

While the solid structure of ashtanga yoga is giving opportunities to recognise habitual reactions, the Alexander Technique is providing concrete means of getting into terms with them. One way of dealing with a challenging yoga routine is to take a calm moment before the practise, and make a decision about what to practice and where to stop.

What Alexander wrote about posture in general, can be readily applied to yoga: *“A correct position or posture indicates a fixed position, and a person held to a fixed position cannot grow, as we understand growth. The correct position today cannot be the correct position a week later for any person who is advancing in the work of re-education and coordination.”* (Alexander (1923) 2000 p.174). This attitude is in line with the description of asana in the yoga sutras of Patanjali: *“Sthirasukhamāsanam (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 2.46) Sthira means perfect. Sukha means happiness. That posture you sit and very happy you, don't anyone pain: That is Sthira Sukham. That is called asana. You can understand.”* translation P. Jois (Donahaye, 2007).



summer 2004

Unconscious, habitual patterns can carry from one activity to another. The habits I have sitting at the kitchen table are largely the same than those, I take into my practice of yoga. Being a clarinetist, the jaw and the arms are dominating my manner of use.

Inhibition and non-doing

“Don't you see that what you call the impossibility never arises unless you do the thing you are not supposed to do?” F.M. Alexander (2000 p. 41)

“Don't hurry, this practice take time, the more you try to rush it, the more you will miss what it is actually about...” S. Rangaswamy, ashtanga yoga teacher and P. Jois' daughter (2008)

The Alexander Technique is not about learning to do things right. Rather it brings attention to the ways a person interferes with the natural, free functioning of mind and body. We are all the time reacting to life, both to what comes from the outside and to our own inner thoughts (Alexander, (1923) 2000). This happens whether an individual is aware of it or not. If these reaction-patterns are automatic and unconscious, it is not possible to choose an appropriate way of responding to situations in life.

Non-doing can be confused with doing nothing. Alexander's directions are essentially preventative, encouraging one not to do what is harmful. This does not mean, a person should never challenge themselves. Alexander put it nicely in the term ”satisfactory use”. As long as we are able to maintain a satisfactory level of coordination we have hope of increasing our capacities. Satisfactory for me in this connection means, that the way a person is practising is helping them to become more aware of their habits. An Alexander student can also have a habit of worrying too much about their coordination.

In ashtanga, the asana practice consists of a dynamic exercise followed by lying down on the back. It is although very difficult to just lie down, and many ashtangi's are struggling to rest efficiently during the five to ten minutes of lying-down after their practice. The Alexander Technique can help an ashtangi to find more quietness in activity, and to rest without drifting into sleep or mind wandering, thus bringing these two extremities closer to each other's. *“Practice means choosing, applying the effort, and doing those actions that bring a stable and tranquil state”*. Patanjali 1.13 (Bharati, 2008)

By allowing time for Alexander thinking before and after yoga can reduce over-straining in asanas.

A yogi needs to avoid imposing the Alexander Technique on top of their practice as one more set of rules to be followed. Ideally, the Technique is used to bring a person back to a state where they can do yoga in the way they intend to do it.



Photo Rodrigo Quiñones 2006

The photo shows me sitting cross-legged and arms behind the back: a position of mechanical advantage compared to a lotus variation.

Working with positions of mechanical advantage when not under pressure, can help the ashtanga student to identify critical moments when going into an asana and coming out of it. A habitual response to an asana often starts earlier than one would assume.

Recognition of faulty sensory awareness

“Identifying with thought patterns translates into me reacting to sensations and experiences in automatic and habitual ways rather than with receptivity, flow, and with what is appropriate at this very moment.” D. Garrigues, ashtanga yoga teacher (2010b)

“He gets what he feels is the right position, but when one has imperfect co-ordination he is only getting a position which fits his defective co-ordination” F.M. Alexander (2000)

Observing a yoga class it always strikes me, how different peoples practices are. Even if everyone is following the same precise sequence of asanas, each breath connected with a designated movement, their interpretations vary. This becomes more obvious when students react to the touch or instructions of the teacher. While Alexander teachers explain their pupils how they want them to respond, this is not usually the case in a yoga class. Yoga teachers may not even be clear that their manner of being has a profound impact on their pupils.

The manifestations of faulty sensory awareness can be divided into two categories. Firstly a person might be using more effort than needed to perform a task, for example by making themselves feel strong and in control by tightening all over the body. Secondly they might be doing something completely different than they think. A common case would be someone trying to get a foot into lotus by collapsing their weight into the hip joints, thus diminishing the range of movement in the legs.

For serious yoga practitioners it can be hard to face the possibility of actually not knowing what they are doing. This can be a very sensitive issue; a yoga teacher may have developed a high level of skill in performing asanas, despite not using themselves efficiently. Being able to endure strain and pain can also be a cause of pride, and the Alexander Technique perceived as a threat which undermines all the hard work they have been doing. Relying on how an asana should feel can be misleading: there will be no room for allowing greater ease, since the level of perceived effort becomes the norm according to which the asana should be performed. The familiar can thus be the

standard by which the yoga practice is judged as right or wrong (Balk, 2007 p.39).

An approach that does not take faulty sensory awareness into account tends to concentrate on the outer form while ignoring sensory information that is not perceived to be relevant to the correct performing of an asana (Barlow, 1978 p.107-8). Petri Räisänen makes a distinction between the shapes oriented “*Western*” yoga, and the “*Indian*” yoga that is concerned with the “*flow of energy inside the asana*” (2007, my translation). In the former approach the form of an asana has become more interesting than the manner of use of the person performing the pose.

Alexander went to length in explaining the extent to which the phenomenon of faulty sensory awareness affects the human population ((1923) 2000). It is not just the physical performance; also thinking and feelings are affected by the standard of perception. For example a person who is trying to concentrate, will be not only tightening and staring, but also undermining their reasoning. They might be judgemental towards an other person, because of the awareness of both their inner and the outer world has been distorted. “*Sensory appreciation conditions conception - you can't know a thing by an instrument that is wrong*”. (Alexander, 2000)

The ashtanga practice has in-built feedback mechanisms to reduce the impact of faulty sensory awareness. It is just a matter of learning to use them. An ashtangi can gather feedback of their manner of use from their ability to keep looking out towards a gazing point. The act of seeing is often accompanied by moving the head with the eyes, which tells the degree of freedom in the neck. The sequencing of the asanas contrasted with repeated simple movements between asanas, give information about the yogis ability to maintain the good working of the primary control during an increasingly challenging series of postures. Ashtanga teachers are frequently communicating with their touch. Even if ashtanga teachers with a profound touch are rare, in a difficult pose it can help to have contact with a person who is being in a mechanically much more advantageous position.

The “ujjayi-breathing” in ashtanga yoga is related to the “whispered Ah”. The whisper on the out breath enabled Alexander to hear his voice while putting minimal strain on it. The sound a person is producing is giving feedback about their use: including muscle tension, emotions and the quality of thinking. It is not uncommon that ashtanga yogis become hoarse due to the way they breathe during their practice, although some develop a beautifully resonant voice. It is vital for an ashtangi to make a connection between breath, voice and use.

Sending directions

“*'What is this direction,' I asked myself, 'upon which I have been depending?' I had to admit that I had never thought out how I directed the use of myself, but that I used myself habitually in the way that felt natural to me.*” F. M. Alexander (1932 p.22)

“*People imagine that their bodies are disobedient and unreliable in carrying out their wishes, whereas nothing could be further from the truth.*” W. Carrington, Alexander Technique teacher (1994)

In an ashtanga yoga class, verbal instructions tend to be scarce and position-oriented: typically telling where to place the hands and the feet, and which way to look. A skilled teacher will then give

the right experience with their touch. Alexander's directions are supporting this method of teaching because they are targeted to liberate postural reflexes, and the practitioner doesn't have to know, how the body is sorting out all the details. While most yoga manuals are filled with photos of "correct" postures and minute explanations of how they should be achieved, keeping directions simple is practical in ashtanga where the asanas are performed in flowing sequences, rather than static postures.

Telling myself where I want the hands and feet to be while the eyes are looking out, allows me to let go of trying to control the body by contracting it. Often just asking "Am I shortening myself in order to reach better?" is working wonders. Occasionally I need to remind myself about the orientation of the body. For example up is opposite the floor, not opposite the feet, when going into an inversion. In asanas that are likely to trigger a strong reaction, I use more specific directions. For example to keep not pulling the knees into the hips, when the challenge is increasing.

It can be discouraging for an Alexander student to find out, that it is impossible to maintain the same level of ease during a session of yoga than during an Alexander lesson. Sometimes Alexander Teachers use this phenomenon as proof of yoga being too big of a stimulus for them and their pupils. I find it helpful to take a non-judgemental approach. If I notice myself making too much effort, it is because I have an experience of doing less. Not so many years ago, I interpreted feeling heavy as me not being strong enough. Somewhat later I realized the feeling was connected with the way I was using myself, and nowadays I find myself increasingly able to work through that heaviness, not to sink deeper into it.

In a way it is easier to apply the Technique in movement. There is no time to start feeling out if the directions are working. I'm often surprised by the effectiveness of just noticing misuse patterns and not trying to change anything. The awareness itself, supported by an understanding of what I don't want to do, seems to be nurturing my practise and allows me to enjoy it. I find the skill of directing myself in activity getting stronger with practise.

Introducing the classic Alexander directions too early can be confusing for a yogi. They will ask how the neck can be free, if they put a leg behind it, or how to apply directions like "... to let the head go forward and up", when the head is actually moving back and down in space. Some yoga teachers are convinced that the back should be shortening and narrowing when bending backwards, and the knees should be pushed together.

Alexander used the terms primary and secondary directions. The primary being the preventative ones that support optimal coordination, and the secondary being the directions to actually move in space. When put into words, the primary and the secondary directions can sound like they are contradicting each others, even if any combination of them can be performed simultaneously.

While practising yoga one frequently needs to think in terms of what I call absolute and relative directions. These are originally musical terms: the absolute ear denotes the "perfect pitch" way of listening, and the relative hearing a way of orientating according to the relationships between the notes. The absolute up is always the opposite direction of gravity, the relative being where the crown of the head is pointing at. When the head is not pointing up, one needs to know where the absolute up is in order be organised in terms of gravity. The relative up would then be to let the head release away from the feet, through the body, in a way that does not interfere with the breathing. This will generate a lengthening and widening regardless of the shape the body is taking.

In this connection it is helpful to clarify the preventative nature of the Alexander directions. For example in a back bending “*to let the neck be free, to let the head go forwards and up...*” can simply mean not starting the movement by actively pulling the back of the head into the shoulder blades. The directions will be growing in accuracy and meaning, when they are being practised. Bending backwards can be a good learning experience when a pupil starts to be able to discriminate between harmful and beneficial patterns. In this movement it is easy to notice how heavy the head becomes, when it is pulled out of balance - and how light it feels, when it is left balancing on top of the spine.



"There is no such thing as right position, but there is such a thing as right direction"
F.M. Alexander (2000)
Photo: source missing, K. Macgregor on the left

Direction and shape:

Two persons pose in a similar shape but direct themselves in opposite ways. The teacher on the left is expanding into the pose: not pulling her head back, not squeezing the arms into the ribcage and not compressing the lower back. Her feet are firmly and softly on the ground. The whole body is forming a smooth curve, with visibly more space in the neck and the lower back, than her student is able to create.

The person on the right is not a beginner, either, but she is contracting herself in this photo. She might be doing it by purpose, in the effort of trying to feel herself making a steep curve.

The primary control

"... In this method you must be completely flexible and keep the three parts of the body – head, neck, and trunk – in a straight line. If the spinal cord bends, the breathing system is affected..."

P. Jois

(Anderson, 1994)

"...the person who learns to use himself properly by relying upon the correct employment of the primary control of his use of himself will breathe to the best possible advantage..."

F.M. Alexander

((1941) 2000 p.144)

Ashtangis can be overly focused in their flexibility or lack of it. Introducing the idea of primary control will give them a measure of improvement that is not related with increased flexibility. Primary control refers to the idea that looking after the relationship between the head, neck and back can control human movement. With the back Alexander teachers mean the torso or a bigger entity, not just the backside of the spine.

In small children the primary control is usually working beautifully, and some cultures are better than others in preserving their people's ability to maintain a balance in their coordination. When we lose the optimal working of the primary control, partial patterns of the limbs start to dominate over the head, neck and back relationship.

A good working of the primary control is characterized by smoothness and ease in movement. There is a spring in the muscles, and the body can seamlessly apply the optimal amount of effort to any given activity. This is accompanied by a sense of enjoyment and alertness. If the primary control is not able to work efficiently, movements become jerky or sluggish, sometimes over quick. There is a feeling of heaviness or not being grounded - even dizziness - accompanied by too hard concentration or mind wandering. Balancing becomes a matter of muscular effort, of holding rather than releasing. Restoring the functioning of the primary control is hard work. A yogi might feel more tired, fragile and emotionally vulnerable when practising with improved coordination, even if moving is effortless and enjoyable.

Ashtanga yoga encourages practitioners to use their full range of movement. There are constant demands to reach with the arms, the head and with the legs, as well as focusing with the eyes to certain gazing points. If the ashtangi is not careful about their overall coordination, they will forget about the central importance of the head, neck and trunk. Trying to do an asana at any cost is not an unknown phenomenon in an ashtanga yoga class. By applying the Alexander Technique, each asana can become an opportunity to research habits of end-gaining. Instead of just doing lots of postures, the practise starts to reveal more delicate details. There are phases of critical moments, and there are moments of stillness.

2005

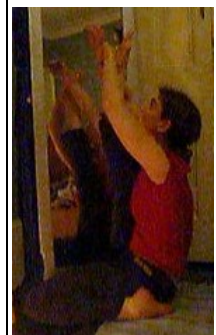
My whole spine and the breathing are compromised to allow the movements of the limbs and the head. The pelvis is moving like a part of the legs. The eyes stare at the toes, which is reflected in the tension of the neck.



Krounchasana in 2005 and 2010

2010

My back is much more integrated, which encourages the limbs to actively take part in performing the posture. The eyes are focused and alert, and the head more balanced on the top of the spine. There is an overall sense of presence and strength.



Further information

"We are forced in our teaching at every point to translate theories into concrete processes."
F.M. Alexander (2000)

"Yoga is 99 percent practice, one percent theory." P. Jois (Garrigues, 2008)

Books

***Master the Art of Working out*, by Malcolm Balk**

This book is about applying the Alexander Technique to various exercises and it includes three case studies about yoga.

***The Art of Changing*, by Glenn Park**

The first half of the book offers a great introduction to the Alexander Technique, and the meditations in the other half might appeal to some yoga students.

***Anatomy of the moving body*, Theodore Dimon, Jr**

Written by an Alexander Teacher, this book emphasises the connections between anatomical parts of the body.

Articles written by Alexander Teachers

***Of one mind: Alexander and Ashtanga*, by Suzanne Faulkner**

This article is featured in the yoga issue of the Direction Journal. It is probably the only article published about ashtanga yoga and the Alexander Technique. www.directionjournal.com/journals/

***Yoga and the Alexander Technique*, by Clare Maxwell**

This article is written by a dancer and Alexander Teacher, who has practised yoga for 16 years
<http://www.alexandertechnique.com/articles/yoga2/>

What has the Alexander Technique to offer the student of yoga?

by Anne Finlay, IYTA and Martin Finnegan

An Alexander Teacher's and a yoga teacher's joint effort
<http://www.alexandertechnique.com/articles/yoga/>

***Why yoga and the Alexander Technique?* by David Moore**

<http://www.alexanderschool.edu.au/the-alexander-technique/articles/82-why-yoga-at>

***Tradition and Authority in Yoga and AT*, by David Moore**

<http://www.alexanderschool.edu.au/the-alexander-technique/articles/80-tradition-yoga>

***The Alexander Technique: A Tool For Dancers and Yoga Practitioners To Reclaim Full Use of Their Postural Reflexes* by Cécile Raynor**

<http://www.alexandertec.com/bwj.htm>

Alexander through the eyes of an ashtanga teacher

Tim Feldman combines Alexander Technique and other disciplines with ashtanga yoga. His writings include phrases commonly used in Alexander lessons, although not mentioning the Technique.

<http://www.yogajoy.org/tim.htm>

A pupil's point of view

Yoga, posture and the Alexander Technique by Mary Albro

A story about an Alexander pupil searching for a yoga book that doesn't instruct to "to lift, pull, push, knit, or tuck anything" <http://www.alexandertechnique.com/articles/albro/>

Short comparisons between yoga, Pilates and the Alexander Technique

How does the Alexander Technique differ from yoga and Pilates by Marcia Claesson

<http://alexandertechnique.suite101.com/article.cfm/how-the-alexander-technique-differs-from-yoga-and-pilates>

Somatics: Yogas of the West by Larry Sokoloff in the Yoga Journal

<http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/201>

Videos featuring ashtanga yoga

Pattabhi Jois teaching. This video shows how the guru of ashtanga yoga is looking after himself while being engaged in teaching.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exiq_SGuoqg

B.K.S. Iyengar demonstrating in 1938. Even a physically demanding sequence can be performed with grace.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmOUZQi_6Tw

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Practice Makes Perfect

An Interview with K. Pattabi Jois

By Sandra Anderson

Happiness on the face, light in the eyes, a healthy body—these are the signs of a yogi, according to the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the classic Sanskrit text on hatha yoga. Such a description fits K. Pattabi Jois, who at the age of 78 has the straight spine and smooth face of a much younger man. He laughs easily, beaming when we are introduced in a steamy New York studio, and asks if I would take yoga with him. According to the *Pradipika*, hatha yoga is taught for the attainment of *raja yoga*, also known as *ashtanga yoga*, the complete, eight-limbed path to self-realization, but few emphasize the importance of attaining perfection in posture and breathing as a means of achieving the other limbs as clearly as Jois does.

Born in 1915 in southern India, K. Pattabi Jois met his guru, Krishnamacharya, who was also B. K. Iyengar's teacher, while still a young boy. He has been teaching yoga since 1937, and students from all over the world come to study with him in his home in Mysore, India. He has visited the United States several times, and although this is his first visit to New York, most of the students in this morning's class seem to know the sequence he teaches.

It's hot. The windows are closed, and the already humid air is thick with the labored breathing of 35 sweating bodies. The students groan and sigh. For some, the sequence appears to unfold effortlessly, but still their bodies glisten with sweat. Jois is everywhere encouraging—a hand here, a foot there, a joke wherever it is most needed. He calls out the sequence of postures in a strong deep voice, using their Sanskrit names.

There's no laziness here: only determined hard work and a grace born of strength and flexibility, as the class moves from one posture to the next, pausing only to hold the pose, and linking the postures with a spine-flexing sequence reminiscent of the sun salutation and similarly coordinated with the breath. "Exhale, *chatwari* (*chaturanga dandasana*), inhale, *pancha* (*urdhva mukha svanasana*)." Jois establishes discipline but tempers it with gentle humor and affection, as he teases students, verbally and physically, into places they didn't realize they could reach.

And if the coaxing, the energy in the room, and the peer pressure aren't enough, there's the heat. In spite of the mats, there's hardly a dry spot left on the crowded hardwood floor at the end of this rigorous two-hour session. The sequence of postures continuously flowing with the breath is designed to stoke the fire of purification—to cleanse the nervous and circulatory systems with discipline and good old-fashioned sweat. "Practice, practice, practice," Jois says later, addressing a small group of students gathered in a loft in Soho. He spoke at length about the method he uses, emphasizing that he has added nothing new to the original teachings of his teacher and the *Yoga Sutra*.

Where did you learn yoga?

From my guru, Krishnamacharya. I started studying with him in 1927, when I was 12 years old. First he taught me asana and pranayama. Later I studied Sanskrit and *advaita* philosophy at the

Sanskrit College in Mysore and began teaching yoga there in 1937. I became a professor and taught Sanskrit and philosophy at the College for 36 years. I first taught in America in Encinitas, California, in 1975. Now I'm going all over America. I will teach anyone who wants the perfect yoga method—*ashtanga yoga*—just as my guru taught me.

Do you also teach your Western students Sanskrit?

No, only *asana* and *pranayama*. You need Sanskrit to understand the yoga method, but many people, even though they would like to learn Sanskrit, say they have no time. It is very important to understand yoga philosophy: without philosophy, practice is not good, and yoga practice is the starting place for yoga philosophy. Mixing both is actually the best.

What method do you use to teach *asana* and *pranayama*?

I teach only *ashtanga yoga*, the original method given in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*. *Ashtanga* means "eight-step" yoga: *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*. The *Yoga Sutra* says "*Tasmin sati svasa prasvasayor gati vicchedah pranayamah* (II.49)." First you perfect *asana*, and then you practice *pranayama*: you control the inhalation and the exhalation, you regulate the breath, you retain and restrain the breath. After *asana* is perfected, then *pranayama* can be perfected. That is the yoga method.

What is perfect *asana*, and how do you perfect *asana*?

"*Sthira sukham asanam* (YS II.46)." Perfect *asana* means you can sit for three hours with steadiness and happiness, with no trouble. After you take the legs out of the *asana*, the body is still happy. In the method I teach, there are many *asanas*, and they work with blood circulation, the breathing system, and the focus of the eyes (to develop concentration). In this method you must be completely flexible and keep the three parts of the body—head, neck, and trunk—in a straight line. If the spinal cord bends, the breathing system is affected. If you want to practice the correct breathing system, you must have a straight spine.

From the *muladhara* [the chakra at the base of the spine] 72,000 *nadis* [channels through which prana travels in the subtle body] originate. The nervous system grows from here. All these *nadis* are dirty and need cleaning. With the yoga method, you use *asana* and the breathing system to clean the *nadis* every day. You purify the *nadis* by sitting in the right posture and practicing every day, inhaling and exhaling, until finally, after a long time, your whole body is strong and your nervous system is perfectly cured. When the nervous system is perfect, the body is strong. Once all the *nadis* are clean, prana enters the central nadi, called *sushumna*. For this to happen, you must completely control the anus. You must carefully practice the *bandhas*—*mulabandha*, *uddiyana bandha*, and the others—during *asana* and *pranayama* practice. If you practice the method I teach, automatically the *bandhas* will come. This is the original teaching, the *ashtanga yoga* method. I've not added anything else. These modern teachings, I don't know...I'm an old man!

This method is physically quite demanding. How do you teach someone who is in bad shape physically?

Bad shape is not impossible to work with. The yoga text says that yoga practice makes you lean but strong like an elephant. You have a yogic face. A yogic face is always a smiling face. It means you hear *nada*, the internal sound, and your eyes are clear. Then you see clearly, and you control *bindu* [the vital energy sometimes interpreted as sexual energy]. The inner fire unfolds, and the body is free of disease.

There are three types of disease: body disease, mind disease, and nervous system disease. When the mind is diseased, the whole body is diseased. The yoga scriptures say “*Manayeva manushanam karanam bandha mokshayoho,*” the mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. If the mind is sick and sad, the whole body gets sick, and all is finished. So first you must give medicine to the mind. Mind medicine—that is yoga.

What exactly would mind medicine be?

Yoga practice and the correct breathing system. Practice, practice, practice. That’s it. Practice so the nervous system is perfect and the blood circulation is good, which is very important. With good blood circulation, you don’t get heart trouble. Controlling the bindu, not wasting your bindu, is also very important. A person is alive by containing the bindu; when the bindu is completely gone, you are a dead man. That’s what the scriptures say. By practicing every day, the blood becomes purified, and the mind gradually comes under your control. This is the yogic method. “*Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah* (YS: I.2).” This means that yoga is control over the modifications of the mind.

We’ve been talking mostly about yoga practice as asana and pranayama. How important are the first two limbs of ashtanga yoga, the yamas and niyamas?

They are very difficult. If you have a weak mind and a weak body, you have weak principles. The yamas have five limbs: *ahimsa* [nonviolence], *satya* [truthfulness], *asteya* [non-stealing], *brahmacharya* [continence], and *aparigraha* [non-possessiveness]. Ahimsa is impossible; also telling the truth is very difficult. The scriptures say speak that truth which is sweet; don’t speak truth which hurts. But don’t lie, no matter how sweet it sounds. Very difficult. You tell only the sweet truth because he who speaks the unpleasant truth is a dead man.

So, a weak mind means a weak body. That’s why you build a good foundation with asana and pranayama, so your body and mind and nervous system are all working; then you work on ahimsa, satya, and the other yamas and niyamas.

What about the other limbs of ashtanga yoga? Do you teach a method of meditation?

Meditation is *dhyana*, the seventh step in the ashtanga system. After one step is perfect, then you take the next step. For dhyana, you must sit with a straight back with your eyes closed and focus on the bridge of the nostrils. If you don’t do this, you’re not centered. If the eyes open and close, so does the mind.

Yoga is 95 percent practical. Only 5 percent is theory. Without practice, it doesn’t work; there is no benefit. So you have to practice, following the right method, following the steps one by one. Then it’s possible.

The term vinyasa is used to describe what you teach. What does it mean?

Vinyasa means “breathing system.” Without vinyasa, don’t do asana. When vinyasa is perfect, the mind is under control. That’s the main thing—controlling the mind. That’s the method Patanjali described. The scriptures say that prana and apana are made equal by keeping the ratio of inhalation and exhalation equal and by following the breath in the nostrils with the mind. If you practice this way, gradually mind comes under control.

Do you teach pranayama in the sitting postures also?

Yes. When *padmasana* [the lotus sitting posture] is perfect, then you control your anus with *mulabandha*, and also use the chin lock, *jalandrabandha*. There are many types of pranayama, but the most important one is *kevala kumbhaka*, when the fluctuations of the breath—the inhalation and exhalation—are controlled and automatically stop. For this you must practice. Practice, practice, practice. When you practice, new ways of thinking, new thoughts, come in your mind. Lectures sound good; you give a good lecture and everyone says you're so great, but lectures are 99 1/2 percent not practical. For many years you must practice asana and pranayama. The scriptures say "Practicing a long time with respect and without interruption brings perfection." One year, two years, ten years...your entire life long, you practice.

After asana and pranayama are perfect, pratyahara, sense control [the fifth limb of ashtanga yoga], follows. The first four limbs are external exercises: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama. The last four are internal, and they automatically follow when the first four are mastered. Pratyahara means that anywhere you look, you see God. Good mind control gives that capacity, so that when you look, everything you see is Atman (the God within). Then for you the world is colored by God. Whatever you see, you identify it with your Atman. The scriptures say that a true yogi's mind is so absorbed in the lotus feet of the Lord that nothing distracts him, no matter what happens in the external world.

What is your parting advice for those who have a desire to pursue yoga?

Yoga is possible for anybody who really wants it. Yoga is universal. Yoga is not mine. But don't approach yoga with a business mind—looking for worldly gain. If you want to be near God, turn your mind toward God, and practice yoga. As the scriptures say "without yoga practice, how can knowledge give you moksha [liberation]?"

Yoga International senior editor *Sandra Anderson* is co-author of [Yoga: Mastering the Basics](#) and has taught yoga and meditation for over 25 years.

<http://www.lifepositive.com>

Yoga - YOGA is a complete complementary system

by Nishant Arora

For T.K.V. Desikachar, a leading authority on yoga and son of the legendary yoga master T. Krishnamacharya, the most important thing is the individual, not the teacher. An exclusive interview

My father (Krishnamacharya)'s knowledge of yoga was so extensive that he taught each individual differently. He strongly believed that yoga should be adapted to the individual, never the individual
[More >>](#)

In November 1888, a legend was born at Muchukundapura in Chitradurga district, Karnataka—a legend whose [life](#) spanned a century; whose core of spirituality endowed him with the power to heal; and whose scholastic prowess made thousands of people revere him as their guru.

It will not be wrong to say that T. Krishama-charya became the single-most important factor in the revival of [yoga](#) in the 20th century. What he focused on was the adaptation and application of the ancient discipline of [yoga](#) to contemporary lifestyles, thereby enhancing health, longevity and quality of life.

Some of his world-renowned disciples are B.K.S. Iyengar (Iyengar's elder sister was married to Krishnamacharya), K. Pattabhi Jois and Russia-born late Indra Devi, also known as the First Lady of yoga. At the age of 16, Iyengar received basic instructions in asana practice at the [yoga](#) school run by Krishnamacharya in the palace of the Raja of Mysore. Even at the age of 85 today, Iyengar continues to teach [yoga](#) and Iyengar [yoga](#) is known all over the world.

Son and student of Krishnamacharya, TKV Desikachar, is today one of the world's leading authorities on yoga. Starting his career as an engineer, he decided to carry the legacy of his father and became a [yoga](#) teacher. Hence was born Krishnamacharya [Yoga](#) Mandiram(KYM), a nonprofit [yoga](#) centre in Chennai in 1976, to propagate the teachings of his father.

Desikachar has written several books, the most prominent among them is Reflections on [Yoga](#) Sutras of Patanjali. Other works include Health, [Healing](#) and Beyond and The [Heart](#) of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice. His latest work, The Viniyoga of Yoga, co-authored with Kausthub and Frans Moors, deals with the application of asanas and pranayam to various needs of life.

The [yoga](#) master took some time off during his recent trip to New Delhi to talk to [Life](#) Positive on various aspects of [yoga](#) and the role of his organisation in spreading the message of yoga:

T. Krishnamacharya said that “teach what is inside you, not as it applies to you, but as it applies to the other”. Elucidate.

My father had strong principles. His knowledge of [yoga](#) was so extensive that he taught each individual differently. He strongly believed that [yoga](#) should be adapted to the individual, never the individual to yoga. Being his student, I also believe that each individual has his own constitution... his own principles. One should first look into the person, his culture, constitution, resources and teach in such a way that it becomes a beautiful experience for him. For example when I go to America I say thank you; in India, I keep my hands together. In Japan, it is a different style altogether. But the idea is same: to give respect to the person. And one should also experience it because experience instills confidence that if we do something good to others, we will also be rewarded. This is what my father taught and this is what KYM is based upon.

KYM has promoted [yoga](#) as a holistic system and a profound science, what is the nitty-gritty of your style?

Our style is to teach the person what suits him the most. Like when a Muslim comes, we teach him what is convenient to him. Similarly, when a Brahmin comes, we ask him to do [yoga](#) in sunlight, as sun is good for the practice of yoga. So in the Mandiram we approach a person in his/her totality. The most important thing is not the [guru](#) or the acharya but the person who is here to learn. So we meet everyone with the same approach. A senior teacher is always there to help. If he is not there, then I am available. KYM today is involved in transmitting Krishnamacharya's teachings through [yoga](#) classes, [healing](#) through yoga, [yoga](#) education and other such programmes.

You have said [yoga](#) is not reductionistic in its outlook. What do you mean by that?

There is a difference between [yoga](#) and science. The focus in [yoga](#) is that human being is not just a dead body. It takes care of the person's physical structure, energy structure, emotional structure, intellectual aspects and his personality. For example, there is a man who is a right-hander and plays tennis with the right hand. And there is another person who plays tennis with the left hand. In the case of the latter, we have to focus on his left side not the right side and vice versa in case of the

former. I believe the most important thing in [yoga](#) is relationship. If the student does not like the teacher, he won't learn. And if a teacher does not like his student, he won't be able to deliver what is good for his student. The first step in [yoga](#) is to cultivate the relationship. That is why we need to have a human angle while teaching yoga.

The motto of KYM is Heyam Duhkhamanagatam (avoid the suffering which has not yet come). How can one achieve it?

Heyam Duhkhamanagatam means two things: avoid the suffering, and there may be something good waiting for you tomorrow so be prepared for that. People come to us to get comfort, to have some positive thinking, positive growth. We should not have an intention to sell our product but to help them transform into positive human beings. Here, the question arises: how should you go about this? If you cannot make a person positive, send him to somebody else who is better than you. The important thing is that the goal should be achieved. For example, people come to me with various problems. When I find I cannot help them, I say to them: you people need more energy and self-confidence so go to B.K.S. Iyengar. I believe if I cannot treat them, let the other, more qualified person handle the job. One should not stand on one's prestige. This is the lesson of Heyam Duhkhamanagatam.

Krishnamacharya had a dream to send the message of [yoga](#) far beyond India. Today, the world has accepted the importance of yoga. Has the dream been fulfilled?

My father started practising [yoga](#) in the 1920s to create awareness among people. To achieve this, he would even stop his heartbeat, in the presence of a doctor, for nearly two minutes. He did several such things and finally people started rediscovering yoga. He travelled all over the country to disseminate the message of yoga. People from across the world also came to learn [yoga](#) from him. For example, in 1947, a Russia-born lady named Indra Devi came to my father to learn yoga. The then Raja of Mysore told my father to teach her. My father said first she has to leave nonvegetarianism. She agreed to learn from my father, and went on to teach [yoga](#) in China, Mexico, Russia, Argentina and the US.

I agree that things are changing fast today. I was an engineer and my family was not at all happy at my decision to shift to yoga. They had the feeling that if you have nothing to do, become a [yoga](#) teacher. But if we see that even during my father's time, there were several great [yoga](#) teachers. Today, the coconut tree has grown up. It was they who planted the tree, nurtured it and today, we are enjoying the fruits.

You founded KYM in the [memory](#) of your father. Have you been able to fulfill your vision behind establishing such a centre? What are your plans in future?

In our society, some people are suffering so much that they have lost any hope of recovering. I had a gut feeling that in this case, my father's teaching would surely help. Being able to help those suffering brethren has been the greatest benefit and experience in my life. Today, we have a team of over 40 teachers whose motto is to spread the message of [yoga](#) everywhere.

In future, we need more and more qualified teachers who could play a sensible role in disseminating the essence of yoga. I also have a concern for mentally-retarded people who get confidence once they attend our workshop and get absorbed in the society.

What are the other programmes that you conduct at KYM?

There are several: the post-graduate diploma in yoga, weekend workshops, corporate [health](#)

programmes, off-campus workshops, summer [yoga](#) course for children, etc. Then there is Kym-Mitra, a course to teach [yoga](#) to the underprivileged. To achieve which we will take up special projects both independently and in collaboration with other social organisations. A number of such projects are already underway.

What is KYM's [relationship](#) with BKS Iyengar, your father's world famous student?

Iyengar, who is also my uncle, has been supportive throughout my dream of establishing KYM. I respect him a lot, not only as a teacher but also as a good human being. He has created a niche for himself in the field of yoga.

With which complementary systems [yoga](#) gels well? Or is it a stand-alone, complete system?

[Yoga](#) is a total complementary system. For me, [yoga](#) is like a catalyst for medicine. It contributes. With yoga, a belief is instilled in you that you can take care of your self. It produces self-confidence. Suppose a person takes 10 tablets for a particular ailment. After practising yoga, the intake would reduce to eight. Or if I have a back pain, I will do asanas and will be fine. But in acute conditions like spondylolysis, [yoga](#) cannot help. Surgery would be the right step.

[Yoga](#) supports all systems. Practising [yoga](#) in the right way, knowing your students and his constitution would help. There are no side-effects of yoga.

Yoga is very popular in the West. You and your son Kausthub regularly teach there. But hasn't it been turned into a mere physical exercise there?

I am disappointed to say that wind here always blow from the West. [Yoga](#) being a physical exercise has become a general opinion among the public today thanks to the western approach to it. I am a bit embarrassed to explain why it is like this. Some famous people in the field of [yoga](#) I met were introduced to me by the foreigners. The reason might be the lack of self-confidence in us, something the Japanese or Chinese don't suffer from.

Has [yoga](#) finally returned to India?

The time has already come. I am stunned to know about the popularity of [yoga](#) in our country. So many [yoga](#) centres, so many [yoga](#) teachers today! People are shifting from management, engineering to teach yoga. In my time, becoming a [yoga](#) teacher was considered to be a shame. Today, people are very proud that I am practising yoga.

During your programmes at Studio Abhyas here in Delhi, you delved into deepening one's [yoga](#) practice. What are the salient points and dos and don'ts?

My humble request to all is—do not practise [yoga](#) by learning it from books or CDs. Find a good [yoga](#) teacher and then practise it. Enjoy a [relationship](#) with your teacher. Only then you can learn [yoga](#) in its true sense.

Contact: (044) 24937998, 24933092 E-Mail: admin@kym.org, Website: www.kym.org

<http://www.astanga.fi/kauppa>

Hengittämisen Taito

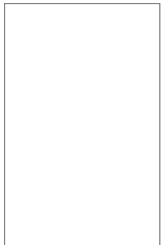
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Kirja käsittelee hengittämisen fyysisiä, psyykkisiä, mentaalisia ja henkisiä puolia. 84.sivua. Kirj. Yogi Ramacharakan suom.Biokustannus Oy.

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Yoga Sutras 1.12-1.16:

Practice and Non-Attachment ([Previous](#) [Next](#) [Main](#))



Two core principles: Practice (abhyasa, [1.13](#)) and non-attachment (vairagya, [1.15](#)) are the two core principles on which the entire system of Yoga rests ([1.12](#)). It is through the cultivation of these two that the other practices evolve, by which mastery over the mind field occurs ([1.2](#)), and allows the realization of the true Self ([1.3](#)).

1. **Abhyasa/Practice:** Abhyasa means having an attitude of persistent effort to attain and maintain a state of stable tranquility ([1.13](#)). To become well established, this needs to be done for a long time, without a break ([1.14](#)). From this stance the deeper practice continues to unfold, going ever deeper towards the direct experience of the eternal core of our being.
2. **Vairagya/Non-attachment:** The essential companion is non-attachment ([1.15](#)), learning to let go of the many attachments, aversions, fears, and false identities that are clouding the true Self.

They work together: Practice leads you in the right direction, while non-attachment allows you to continue the inner journey without getting sidetracked into the pains and pleasures along the way.

Supreme Non-attachment: Gradually, non-attachment expands to the depth of the subtlest building blocks (gunas) of ourselves and the universe, which is called paravairagya, supreme non-attachment ([1.16](#)). Eventually the three gunas resolve back into their cause during deep meditation, leading to final liberation ([4.13-4.14](#), [4.32-4.34](#)).

1.12 These thought patterns (vrittis) are mastered (nirodhah, regulated, coordinated, controlled, stilled, quieted) through practice (abhyasa) and non-attachment (vairagya). (abhyasa vairagyabhyam tat nirodhah)

- abhyasa = by or with practice, repeated practice
- vairagyabhyam = non-attachment, by desirelessness or dispassion, neutrality or absence of coloring, without attraction or aversion
- tat = of those, through that of
- nirodhah = control, regulation, channeling, mastery, integration, coordination, understanding, stilling, quieting, setting aside of

Two practices: Abhyasa and vairagya are companion practices, and are the means of mastering (nirodhah, [1.2](#)) the many levels of mind, so as to experience the true Self ([1.3](#)). All of the many other practices of Yoga rest on these two principles.

Two directions: There are two directions that one can go in life as well as individual actions, speech, or thoughts. One direction is *towards* truth, reality, Self, or spiritual realization. The other direction is opposite, and involves those lifestyles, actions, speech, and thoughts that take one *away* from the higher experiences.

Abhyasa means cultivating the lifestyle, actions, speech, and thoughts, as well as the spiritual practices that lead in the positive direction (rather than going in the opposite direction, away from the positive, and towards the negative).

Vairagya is the practice of gradually letting go of the mental colorings ([1.5](#), [2.3](#)) that lead one away from the spiritual (rather than going in the opposite direction, giving in to the attachments and aversions).

Discrimination is key: To be able to do the practices and to cultivate non-attachment, it is necessary to become better and better at discriminating between what actions, speech, and thoughts take you in the right direction, and those which are a diversion ([2.26-2.29](#), [3.4-3.6](#)). This discrimination is both a foundation practice and also the subtler tool of the inner journey.

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1.13 Practice (abhyasa) means choosing, applying the effort, and doing those actions that bring a stable and tranquil state (sthitau). (tatra sthitau yatnah abhyasa)

- tatra = of these two (abhyasa and vairagya)
- sthitau = stability, steadiness, stable tranquility, undisturbed calmness
- yatnah = effort, persistent exertion, sustained struggle, endeavour
- abhyasa = by or with practice, repeated practice

Two words for practice: There are two different words that are often translated into English as *practice*. One is abhyasa and the other is sadhana, which is the title of [Chapter 2](#) of the Yoga Sutras (Sadhana Pada). It is important to understand the difference between these two words.

Abhyasa means practice, but in a very general, all encompassing way. It means choosing (with [buddhi](#)) the wiser of alternative courses of action. It means making decisions on the basis of what will bring greater tranquility or peace of mind, as these are the preparation for the deeper, subtler practices leading to Self-realization.

Sadhana also means practice, but is more specific, relating to the direct practices one does. These include the specific methods or techniques of working with the body, breath, and mind, as well as the specific principles applied in working with

the external world and other people. For example, the eight rungs of Yoga (2.29) are all a part of sadhana.

Stithau has two parts: Abhyasa is defined in this sutra as choosing or cultivating that which leads to *sthitau*. To understand the meaning of *sthitau*, it is necessary to combine two principles. First is that of tranquility, calmness, or peace of mind. Second is that of stability, steadiness, or being of firm ground. Thus, *sthitau* means a *stable* form of tranquility. In other words, it is the pursuit of an equanimity that is with you at all times.

This stability is not just a matter of regaining peace of mind when it has been lost, like having a weekend away from work or taking a vacation. One might be able to temporarily have some tranquility while avoiding the core decisions of lifestyle, attitudes, and practices. However, to have *stable* tranquility, which is with you all, or most of the time, it is necessary to take the extra steps in life planning that supports meditation. This is the meaning of *sthitau*.

Exercise with Abhyasa: Abhyasa is the practice of choosing that which brings *sthitau*, or a stable state of tranquility. It applies to all levels, ranging from the most external, worldly actions, speech and thoughts, to the most subtle aspects of our being. To practice Abhyasa, it is easiest to start with the gross and gradually work towards the subtle.

One simple way to enhance this practice is to sit quietly and reflect on what actions, speech or thoughts lead you either *towards* or *away* from *sthitau*, that state of stable tranquility. Put two columns on a piece of paper and write down your personal reflections from your own life:

Actions, speech or thoughts which lead me towards steady, stable, undisturbed calmness or tranquility; I need to do <i>more</i> of these:	Actions, speech or thoughts which lead me away from steady, stable, undisturbed calmness or tranquility; I need to do <i>less</i> of these:
--	--

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____

In the *away from* column, you'll probably be listing some of your negative habits that are not useful to you on your journey. In the *towards* column, you may be listing some of the practices related to yoga, as well as other positive actions that you already know are useful to you on your journey. Such simple exercises can be quite insightful and helpful in building a solid foundation for meditation.

By increasingly taking charge of your choices in life and the ways in which you use your personal energy, and increasingly focusing on doing what is in the *left* column, you gradually watch that which is in the *right* column weaken and fade away.

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On Vinyasa

[Sri K Pattabhi Jois Public Talks on Ashtanga Yoga - France 1991](#)

Written by guy

Saturday, 01 December 2007

Samedi/Saturday 24.8.91

Guruji: Every asana you take one by one. That is good method. That is real method. You don't do asana without vinyasa. You don't asana. Why?

Without vinyasa you don't do asana. Why? One part (of body) you bending - you can understand? For example, paschimottanasana, Ardha baddha padma paschimottanasana, you doing one leg, bend one leg, and take back your foot. How long? Long time. After little (restricted) blood circulation, every joint stopping. After again take up, jump back again, next posture, next leg you put it. After your jumping time, tight your whole body, don't loose, tight it (for vinyasa, the body should be engaged, not relaxed). After blood circulation automatically is going (moving). That pain quickly is going.

You without vinyasa, you do every pose (without vinyasa), all the joints so blood circulation so blood circulation not correctly. Circulation is not coming, stopping there (in the joint). After sitting posture you do completely, all body sick, gradually sick(nes is) starting. "Oh! Yoga is given (making me) sick - not liking" (i dont like it). People is not liking. That some asana - "Oh! It is very bad. Very pain is coming. Oh! left it (I dont want to do it). That asana don't do!" Some people is telling. Why that? This is method you don't understanding (why? because they dont understand the correct method). That is why you this method you follow - no trouble! Body also is very perfect. You can understand? That is the method.

Question: In the class with beginners, is it correct to teach and ask students to do little vinyasa? Not so many vinyasa and gradually ask to do more. Is it correct? For them not to be too much tired.

Answer: No, no. I telling beginners you start one suryanamaskar 3 times, 2nd suryanamaskar 3 times. You do first day, one week stop! Don't take asana. You complete stop. Tomorrow take. One week same suryanamaskar. After some better (some improvement). Second (week) padangusthasana standing position; padangusthasana, pada hastasana, utthita trikonasana, parsvakanasana, standing positions you do. Stop it one week. After utkatasana, virabhadrasana include, suryanamaskar, trikonasana, parsvakanasana, all including utkatasana, virabhadrasana, stop it one week. Again take with paschimottanasana, purvottanasana you do - stop it! Next day take next.

Same method you take practice. Only for one place I am coming for one month or one and half month, one week or two weeks I will be staying, that is why that method I will take (if I am only coming to teach for a short time, I conduct led classes). That is why you come India. I take it same method. You can understand. That is why, different here teaching and India teaching different. But one asana is perfect, next asana I am telling (teaching): this one asana is not perfect, next asana I am not telling (teaching).

Question: When is it good to do full vinyasa? That is come back to Samasthiti after each asana. Is it correct?

Answer: Yes correct. Take one asana, finish it. After full vinyasa you do, standing position you come. Again next. Your strength how is you use (depending on your strength you should do half or full vinyasa). Without strength chat (sixth vinyasa) stop (If you are not strong stop at the sixth vinyasa eg do half vinyasa). Increasing your strength, you full vinyasa you take. Now there is no time (too many students).

That is why I am telling. One asana, for example paschimottanasana (has) 16 vinyasas, Purvottanasana - 15, Ardha baddha padma paschimottanasana, tiriang mukeka pada paschimottanasana, janu sirsasana A, B, C, marichyasana A, B, all 22 vinyasas. Full vinyasa .

You doing full vinyasa all - that is the best. Secondary you with sixth vinyasa all the asanas is coming. That you changing, this time (when) your strength is more, you changing that time. Sixth, seventh (vinyasa) paschimottanasana you do. After 8 – 9 then jump again. “sat” (six) position you go. I every day I teaching now. Same method you do. Both is no problem

Method is good no problem. Work is there. He is going work. (for a working man half vinyasa method is good) Your yoga practice, you take one hour. One hour or two hours your expanding your time. That time all the asanas taken one day full vinyasa you do at least five hours also you want you can understand (if you take full vinyasa, you need 5 hours to complete practice). One primary asanas doing, 5 hours also you want. That is why. You (are a) working (man). You not spending all the time on the yoga practice.

You can understand. Full time you take, full vinyasa you doing. Only for (completing) primary asanas takes 5 hours. 5 hours primary postures (with) full vinyasa. 50 asanas is there completely primary postures. That 50 asanas you doing taken 5 hours, with full vinyasa. You working. Another place is working. Yes you take money, you eating food, all you want. That only for your spending (free) time only for yoga, very rare (little time), very difficult also yourself. That is why you short cut you take. That is one or two hours. Two hours spent your yoga practice. That is good. That is also is good. Yes OK. That I tell you.

Question: In the vinyasa, practicing vinyasa should the student go deep into the asana or should he go gently through it? For example from chatwari, going to urdhva mukha svanasana, should it be slight or strong bending?

Answer: No no strong, stiff bending. Same. Vinyasa means (should be same as asanas) same not loose. Does it mean vinyasa as perfect as one asana? Yes, that is why I am telling all the asanas perfectly you do, taken 3 hours. You can understand? That is why you take short time. You do short time. You take practice. That is also benefit you get is possible. Shastra (scripture) is telling about vinyasa:

“Without vinyasa don’t do asana!” Without vinyasa don’t do asana. That is very bad practice. That bad practice is not giving good knowledge.

Patanjali is telling:

"yogāṅgānuṣṭhānād aśuddhikāśaye jñānadīptir āvivekakhyāteḥ (YS 2.28)"

(through the practice of the limbs of yoga, there is a diminishing of the impurities and cultivation of the light of discriminating wisdom)

That is real. But *ásuddhikśaye* means: your inside poison completely is gone, going out. You loose your body you do (if the body is not engaged when practicing). One hour you do. Not sweat is coming. Only for posture he is doing what use?! You want real yoga, same method you follow. That is method.

Question: Doing vinyasa is it correct to stop for example in urdhva mukha svanasana for more than one breath?

Answer: Only one breath, inhale one breath, exhale. Inhale, exhale only one breath. Inhale 10 seconds or 15 seconds then exhalation also 10 seconds or 15 seconds. This is 10 times I am telling, you don't understand!

Question: Yassin is asking if he should stay longer in kurmasana or in back bendings. You give some timing like 10 breaths for kurmasana. You give 3 times five breaths for urdhva dhanurasana. Yassin is asking if he should stay longer. He wants to stay longer sometimes.

Answer: I telling: all the asanas you take practice how long your strength is so there, you take. Long time he is doing, 100 asanas you do - 1 asana is perfect. Long time sitting all the asanas he is doing time, you 1 take 10 breath or 15 breathing. You count it. Practice, that is all. You long time you sitting, kurmasana is long time, 3 hours is possible. One asana is perfect, taken 3 hours. Now practice how much your strength is there, you take. That is no problem. Your strength is 10 breathing is doing possible, you do 10 breathing, 15 breathing you possible, you do 15 breathing. One hundred possible, 100 you do. 5 you do, 5 is possible, 5 you do. Take practice, that is all. I am telling only for practice. Fix completely perfect. Asana, one asana siddhi, you do hundred asanas, one asana is coming, one asana perfectly is coming. That is real.

Sthirasukhamāsanam (YS 2.46)

Sthira means perfect. Sukha means happiness. That posture you sit and very happy you, don't anyone pain: That is Sthira Sukham. That is called asana. You can understand.

... one asana is perfect perfect perfect. There is one link from one asana to one asana. Link is there. Those asanas you take, all. One by one. One by one, all perfect it. After you do back bendings. That is back bendings asanas. Primary asanas, not much back-bendings is coming - you know! Intermediate asanas little, little starting: Ustrasana, laghuvajrasana, kapotasana.

After that is very perfect, take advanced postures. Advanced postures is more back bendings asanas: triang mukha uttanasana, padangustha dhanurasana, eka pada raja kapotasana, raja kapotasana, all is back-bending asanas. There is advanced postures is coming, more back-bendings asanas. But that time one by one you do, after no problem.

You first try primary. "Oh my body is bending! That is why I will take back-bendings. I will put it only for back, complete back bending. That is how it is better engaged." (my back is flexible so I will emphasise back bending in practice) After starting sick (you become sick). You don't walk also! Many people suffering this one.

You take Gary. I am telling one example. Gary Lapodota.. Gary is taken a book. Iyengar book. From that book he has taken practice completely. After that he became my student. Yes, I telling I don't

know that man, oh very good. After primary intermediate and starting back pain, now also suffering. "What did you do? - real fact you tell me". I telling (asking) one day. "Oh I take, I looking that book and take back bendings all..."

Completely, you take primary! after you take intermediate. Perfect it. After take advanced and make perfect. No sick anymore. Long time living possible. That is method.

That is why he is telling, all the shastras, yoga shastra. One by one, you take. Only one asana, another one asana. Link is there. Without link, finished...

I looking one student now. That student is taken yoga practice, that student did back bendings - back bendings he did. Back bendings did, after put it his back here, supta uttana salabhasana. Did triang mukha uttanasana he did. Serge is teaching: after I looking primary postures. That man baddha konasana, upavishta konasana he has not perfected. (Knees) going up completely. That man one day came here. After, no class. To class is not coming. One day I looking here - after here also is not coming. Where is this student? I do not understand. I looking - ah yes, suffering more. Suffering more diseases after 40 years.

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On Pranayama, Bandha and Drishti

[Sri K Pattabhi Jois Public Talks on Ashtanga Yoga - France 1991](#)

Written by guy

Saturday, 05 January 2008

Question: Yann is asking if you are teaching pranayama.

Answer: According Ashtanga Yoga method, pranayama teaching some difficult. Difficult means that primary postures and intermediate postures, asanas are perfect, after advanced postures a section perfect. After I will take it teaching pranayama.

Why? Many nervous system inside. Many nervous system. They all you take pranayama. (The body is filled with thousands of minute energy channels - pranayama moves prana through all these channels) You taken pranayama means inhalation, exhalation is controlling. Inhale control, exhale control. They all is coming that time, nervous system different is coming. Breathing is all the nervous system is reaching. That time you anyone part is not easy (during pranayama the energy moves through the entire system, if there is any part where the energy is blocked), there that place blood circulation stopping completely. After body dangers.

That is why shastra also is telling: Tasmin Sati asana siddhi sati

You do pranayama. Not (for) siddhi, don't do. Pranayama. (do not practice pranayama for the purpose of gaining powers) You can understand. Same sutra also is telling. Shastra. Shastra is very important. That is why first your body you take control. Now is not your body your control, is not coming (your body is not under your control). You can understand.

One, paschimottanasana you do, then I pushing. Oh! Pain. Your body is not controlled, is not

coming in your control. You first you take your body control, second nervous system automatically is coming. Third take pranayama. Your mind control is coming. Body control, nervous control, mind control. That is 3 very important. Anamaya and second pranayama - five covers (sheaths) whole body. You know five covers?

Annamaya – food body (physical)

Pranamaya – prana body (energetic)

Manomaya – mental body

Vijnanamaya – wisdom body

Anandamaya – body of bliss

One cover, first cover, Anamaya, your looking body. This body Anamaya. You are eating, it is growing. Food eating, (it) is growing - that is all. Second (body) - Pranamaya. First you take your control (of physical body), after pranayama. That is after is controlled your breathing system. Now you doing time (now, when you practice), not one level is coming. Inhalation, exhalation is not coming one level (breath is not even - inhalation is not the same as exhalation), you first take one level. One level means your body control, after breathing control. You take after your breathing control. With breathing control automatically is coming your mind control: *cale vatam cale cittam*.

Vata means air, breathing. Breathing control is very difficult. You can understand. Breathing control not easy. Taken all more practice, practice. That after you take control. Your mind automatically is controlled is coming. Breathing is always is coming going, coming going; your mind is also coming going. That is method. Yes!

Question: (something about use of bandhas and dristi)

Answer: with all yes, without no use, you can. Asanas you take practice with including bandhas and postures, breathing, looking. All including. Not without. That is not separate. All including - without including - nose. At teaching time you tell same! You self practice time, you follow, you can understand. Teaching time you look. Some position you take. Breathing same you look. 5 times, or 10 or 8 anyone you take breathing you teach. After self-practice long time you take. That is method you practice. One by one, one by one. Long time you take practice. That is method. Yoga practice method.

End of interview

Thursday After-class.

Question: Is there a specific method to control Mulabandha? Is it possible to do Mulabandha with breathing in and release with breathing out, so that he will slowly control?

Answer: Mulabandha complete exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, complete exhale you take mulabandha. That time it is coming. You can take practice. All the asanas, Paschimottanasana, Ardha baddha padma Paschimottanasana, all the primary postures, all you take Mulabandha, easy the asanas (with mulabandha asanas are easy). Is not without mulabandha very difficult. This is why exhale, exhale, exhale, control mulabandha.

Rechaka means exhalation. Complete exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, exhale, after take mulabandha.

You complete exhale, take mulabandha, after inhale starting that time you take uddiyana bandha. Both bandhas is very important. Don't leave it all finishing asanas (do not release bandhas during finishing postures) - after don't leave it (after practice do not release them). After you can take bandha - bandha take it up, leave it, that is all. You take practice, always, walking, talking, sleeping, walk is going time, always you control Mulabandha. You take practice.

Some take long time. In one month, 2 months, one year, 2 years is not coming. Very difficult mulabandha. That is why this mulabandha you take long time practice, practice, practice. Take your mind there. Take practice, after little is coming. That is yoga method. Yoga technique. You want take it yoga practitioner (you want to be yoga practitioner) - then always you mulabandha you take. (When) Mulabandha is complete, your mind control is coming. Without mulabandha is not coming mind control, is difficult. That is real.

<http://www.yogajoy.org>

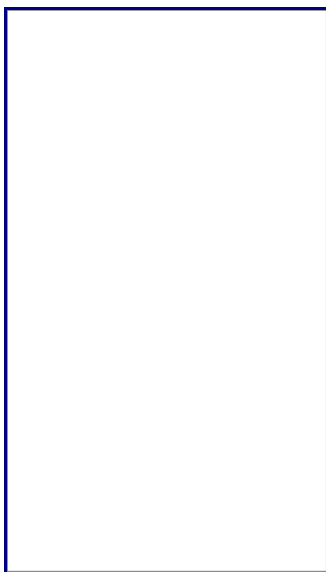
why alignment - why anatomy?

A good use and healthy alignment is the natural state of the body. Connecting to this innate state unravels habitual patterns and untangles energy, enhancing well-being, vitality and effortlessness. The means is to practice with a simple yet profound kinesthetic awareness and understanding of the architectural structure of your individual body.

<http://davidgarrigues.com>

Ashtanga Foundations:Ujjayi Breathing Part 1

Posted on [March 29, 2010](#) by [admin](#)



Hello everyone and thank you all for checking out my blogs! I really

appreciate your positive feedback and hope that you continue to learn and get inspired from them. I encourage you to respond to these posts with comments and/or questions; let me know things that have helped you in your practice or vexed you or turned you on. This week I'm returning to fundamentals and discussing the breath in practice. Enjoy! Hari Om, David.

There is a layering of complexity that happens in the development of Yoga practice. In order to progress without getting overwhelmed or stagnant, it is important to consistently identify and work at the level of layering that harmonizes with where you are. It can take several years to develop a strong Yoga practice and also takes a long, patient, highly observant study to understand and work with the depths of the breathing system that forms Ashtanga Yoga. Not because the breath work is difficult; breathing in sync with each asana position comes easily enough if you apply yourself. In fact each technique used in the practice starts very simple. For example when you begin practicing, you get out your mat and start with sun salutation A. You learn each of the nine positions and whether to inhale or exhale when moving through them. If you practice Ashtanga, daily you work with this same beginning whether you are just starting or you've just completed your 40th consecutive year.

When Guruji said: "Vinyasa means breathing and movement system," he summed up what to focus on in practice no matter what level you are at. To establish the link between movement and breathing is to comprehend practice. And yet consider how formidable an endeavor it is to learn to travel with the breath, consider what it takes to bring your self into a consistent flowing awareness of the vastness of mind, the dynamic range of mental turnings thru movement and posture. It's a humorous paradox that the person who starts on day one works at the exactly same thing as the person who has been working for decades. Yet due to the complex nature of the subject, more and more layers are revealed as you return each day and renew your focus. Thus basic practice and comprehending breath are both utterly simple and virtually impossible at the same time!

Quotes from Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (Guruji) about breathing:

..."the breath (can be) brought under control, little by little, by the strength of one's practice, difficult though this is, it is possible"

"Focusing the mind in a single direction is extremely important. To enable it to stay fixed and in place, Pranayama is essential."

"Through the practice of Pranayama the mind becomes trained in a single direction and follows the movements of the breath."

"Vinyasa means "breathing and movement system."

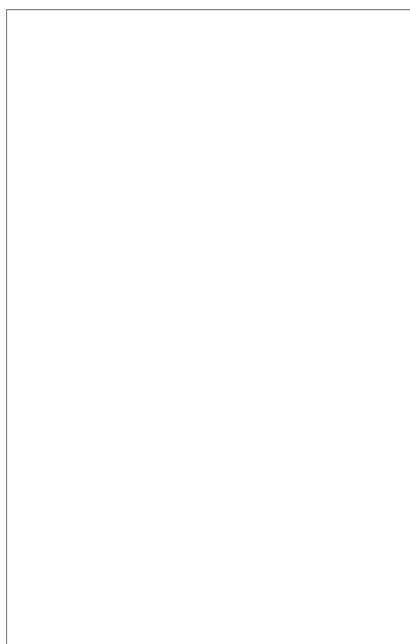
Guruji divided the breath into two categories: 'free breathing' and 'stiff breathing'. At times when he would begin an adjustment on me, I would start to freak out and tighten up. **My face would become distorted and I would start to use the 'bull in a china shop' version of ujjayi. He would say: 'Free breathing you do, No stiff breathing.'** As he moved forward with the adjustment there was no choice but to let go, free the breath and relax into the depths of the position. A huge part of working with breath is to soften and become receptive to the ebb and flow rhythm as if you are being extended an invitation move with the flow of the breath's tidal rhythm. The torso also needs to soften and become receptive to the free flow of breath. As you focus on breath, the lungs, ribs, diaphragm, organs, muscles within the abdomen and pelvis all need to expand and contract easily like sea plants on the ocean floor that are rooted and yet sway back and

forth with the wave patterns.

Ujjayi means upward, expansive and victorious. Guruji called Ujjayi ‘breathing with sound’. The sound is produced by partially closing the space between the vocal folds (the glottis). The constriction in the throat happens in the notch between the collarbones. One way to experience it is, you can imagine that the breath comes in through a hole in the throat, not the nose or mouth, like a far gone smoker who has to take in smoke through a hole in this area. Alternately you can imagine that Prana is a thick nectar milkshake and that you have to pull on the straw to get the nectar. (To try this open the lips slightly and draw in breath in a thin steady stream). As you practice, cultivate a lazy, wandering yet steady sound that carries and resonates like the long lasting tone when you strike a bell. When you create a soulful tonal quality, the inner ears become receptive and you feel invited in to listen to and follow the sound. Be present, enjoy and allow your self to explore the breath’s sound and rhythm. Free flowing breath can heal ailments throughout the mind and body.

Hamsa

The sound of the breath can be further classified. The out breath is aspirant and associated with the syllable ha or ham. The in breath is sibilant and associated with the syllable sa or so. When you breath the exhalation produces the sound ‘ham’ and the inhalation produces the sound sa. Hamsa, Hamsa, (or also so’ham so’ham) repeats as you breath. Tuning into these sounds enables you to better find your own unique, soulful patterns of movement that lead to centered and receptive asana. Also using the syllables ham and sa while breathing in practice amplifies your ujjayi, the breath emerges from the background into the foreground, enabling you to tether the mind to the breath and meditation commences.



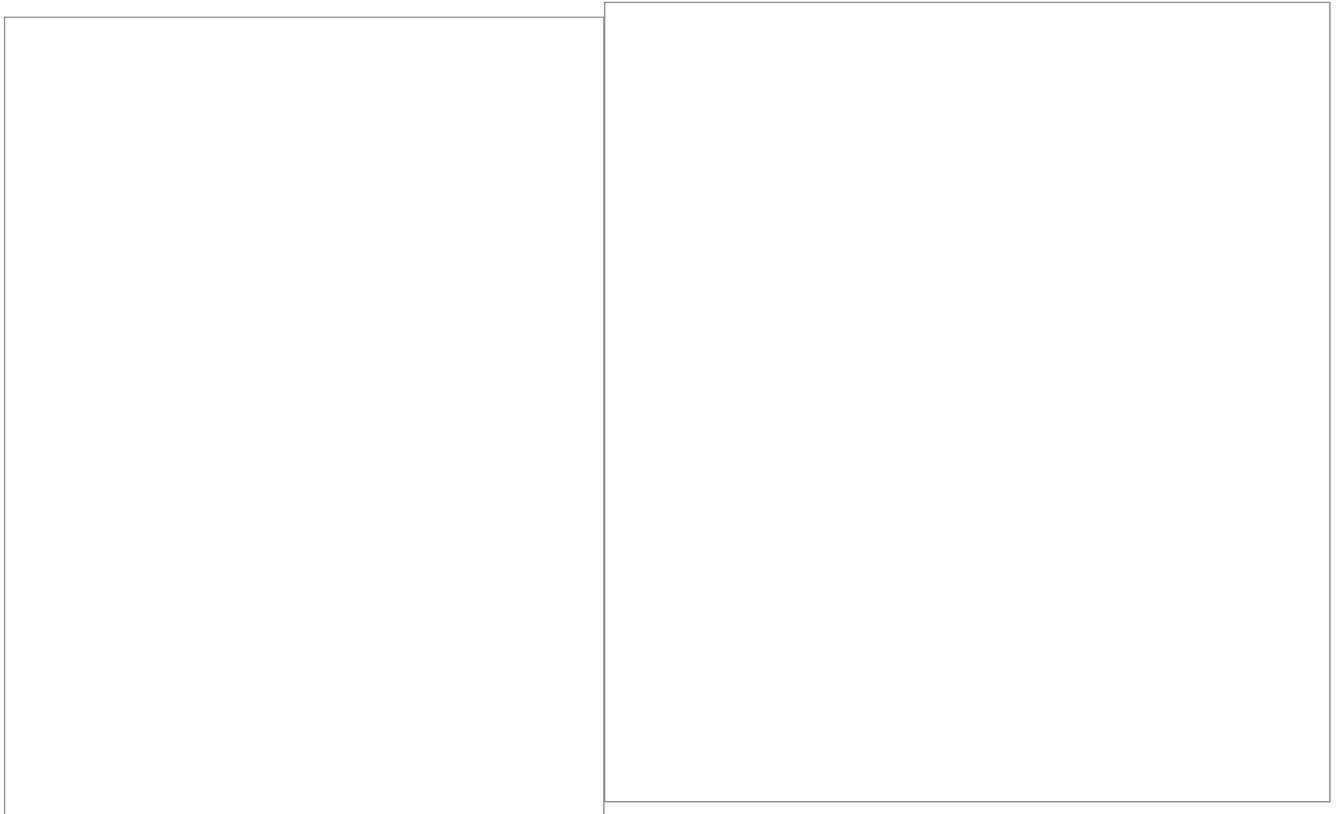
Sri K. Pattabhi Jois said ‘Pranayama means taking in the subtle power of the vital wind’. Pranayama (Prana=life force, ayama=not restrained) means to work with breath in such a way that you free your life force and access your subtle power. The vital wind refers to the five divisions of Prana inside the body called Vayu (see picture). Prana Vayu and Apana Vayu are the two prominent Vayu’s whose patterns are directly involved in the cycle of the breath.

Apana Vayu governs the region of the torso from navel to the pelvic floor which includes the lower abdomen and the entire pelvic basin. Linked with the outbreath, the Apanic pattern is a downward, cohesive, centripetal force that has rooting and grounding propensities. Apana is the source of a woman pushing a baby down and out of her womb. Apana is the force in the free fall of water in a

tall waterfall. By tuning into the pattern of Apana Vayu, you are more connected to the earth, better able to create grounded, robust, energetically alive movement. You are more apt to be mentally agile and stubbornly ride the often bucking, wily, mischievous and potentially harmful mind.

Prana Vayu governs the region of the torso from the diaphragm to the collarbones and includes the lungs, ribcage, and the entire upper torso. Linked with the in breath, the Pranic pattern is an upward, expansive, centrifugal, opening pattern. You can see Pranic force in play in the funnel of a whirling cyclone, or in the blossoming and flowering of plants as they reach expansively upwards towards sunlight. Working with the Pranic pattern during inhalation elongates the spine and encourages spaciousness and receptivity within the torso. Developing awareness of Prana Vayu allows you to open to receiving the gift of shakti, life force that is carried on the breath. If these concepts are new to you, initially I suggest you take time to get to know each of these patterns separately. Tune into either the in or out breath and see if you can tap the potent forces of the patterns of Prana and Apana Vayu's. You can work with the imagery when you are practicing and at other times. Additionally, I've included two short informal video exercises that work with the principles presented above.

Sunday, July 11, 2010



Developing Practice with Yoga Images

As a way of developing my understanding and going deeper into my Yoga practice, I collect and study myths, stories, and pictures of Indian deities. This week I've provided a few images and written some reflections on their possible meanings. These images are full of devotion and often connected to sacred stories that contain Yogic teachings. I've found that studying Yoga imagery and stories clarifies and shows the depths of the basic techniques of ashtanga practice: asana, pranayama, bandha, vinyasa rhythm, dristi, japa mantra, and meditation. Using Imagery allows you to withdraw inwards with more ease during practice. The myths and images of Yoga are meant to help create internal maps that show how to orient within the body to optimize awakening consciousness.

The scenes convey Yogic symbols that are powerful visual cues that are meant to be absorbed within the body and within the deeper mind. They are purposely not meant to be absorbed in a merely intellectual manner, that is why they are presented as stories and images, and why they make so much sense as they occur to you when practicing. Using the stories and imagery helps you absorb the deepest aspects of practice but also there is a fun aspect to it, contemplating a story or an image

is playful, sleuth like--absorbing, and fascinating; It's vexing and enlightening to muse over possible meanings and applications to practice. My hope for this post is to spark a curiosity in you, that you'll become steeped in the imagery of Yoga to the point that when you're practicing these images will arise from within your posture, from within your flow, from within your receptivity and concentration and guide you into how to orient your self with more wisdom, ease and soul.

MAN IN LOTUS RIDING FISH

I love this image because it gives you a playful, powerful, accurate image of an Asana's flow. Yoga postures are about striking firm, clear, rooted positions and becoming fiercely immovable. But also when you find 'the immovable spot', there is such a fluidity to it; it's much more like a ride than becoming immovable like a statue. But perhaps most important is I want you to take this picture literally, what if you were in the sea working on your seated asana's riding on an amiable fish. What would you feel? You would have to connect to the ground in an entirely different way. You would have to connect to the ground as not static--but in motion-- alive and with a fluidity not unlike the course of fish swimming in the sea. Depth in asana work requires you to tune into this kind of subtle motion of the ground under you. The image of riding a fish is a perfect analogy for how to tune into the 'fluidity of rootedness'. The earth is constantly in motion under your feet or seat and this will effect how you do your asana work. If you can become aware of this vibratory movement it will effect your entire practice. I also appreciate that this work was carved centuries ago, and thus shows that the animal energy and flow aspect of asana practice is ancient yet continues to thrive, is still developing, and will be passed along to the future generations of passionate Yoga artists.

This image must be unique in connecting seated asana's with swimming fish!--until now I never quite made the connection that fishes swimming in the sea are serious Yogi's!

DURGA RIDING TIGER

According to the yoga sutra's when thoughts or feelings cause attraction or aversion within me, forces go into play that obscure my ability to discern and really be present. When I learn to concentrate and settle my mind then I see reality. During the times the mind is not settled, I don't see reality, but instead I identify with the various thought patterns. My mind continually spins out reality obscuring patterns. Even though their qualities are phantom like and illusory, somehow I'm repeatedly fooled into thinking that these patterns are substantial and real. Identifying with thought patterns translates into me reacting to sensations and experiences in automatic and habitual ways rather than with receptivity, flow, and with what is appropriate at this very moment.

It seems so simple to wake up, to see, to be alive and to respond creatively in each new moment. And yet the image of Durga riding a tiger shows how difficult it really is to live in a state where my mind is settled and I see things as they really are. Consider the tiger she's riding. The tiger represents illusion, desire, aversion, the powerful, root forces that cause the reality obscuring patterns of consciousness. The forces that cause me to misperceive reality are as powerful and dangerous as a wild tiger.

And the triumph of seeing through my illusions is on a par with taming and riding a tiger. As a goddess Durga has conquered illusion within herself, she has made peace with the forces within that cause thought waves to spin forth. This image reminds me of the mastery that can come to me so naturally when I orient as I'm meant to. Energetically Durga represents the source, wisdom, the hidden knowledge lodged in my heart. Her image shows me that my animal powers are meant to serve my heart wisdom. She shows me the proper relationship between the energetic forces within

me where my Self (Durga) commands and (the tiger) my mind and senses serve my heart.

Symbology of the weapons:

Trident: symbol of the 3 guna's the primary strands or qualities (sattva, rajas, tamas) that make up all material phenomenon. Durga has achieved the ultimate Viaragya (detachment) in that the guna's do not push or pull her any direction. she has gone beyond the guna's and thus she can conquer even the most fierce demon.

The sword: the sword is a symbol for discrimination. Progress in Yoga means being able to think clearly and to see things with accuracy. Often in my lack of clarity, I misread my experience and so my mind causes me unnecessary pain. I place value on things that are not worthy and I undervalue the treasures that are right in front of and within me. My deep Self as Durga wields the sword of discrimination and thus is able to cut through this fog of ignorance.

The severed head: The real Self in my depths is fierce and symbolically severs my head from my body. This means my ego, my wrong ideas's about who I am and the petty self absorbed feelings and thoughts that normally rule my inner world must be killed. The locust of power within has to dramatically shift from a small ego centered place to a deep, large, powerful center that creates and embraces my self and others and realizes everyone's integral part in the cycles of existence that lead to Consciousness.

Posted by David Garrigues at [4:24 PM](#) _

Questions to Gregor Maehle

Ashtanga Yoga has fascinating yoga practitioners in modern times since 1964 when Andre Van Lysbeth became the first Westerner to study with Sri Pattabhi Jois who received this ancient system of yoga from Sri T. Krishnamacharya as it was taught in the Yoga Korunta. From 1964 Vinyasa Ashtanga yoga has been taught all over the world.

Gregor Maehle studied the many branches of yoga under various masters, including K. Pattabhi Jois, B.N. S. Iyengar and B.K.S. Iyengar. In 1996, with his wife, Monica, he founded 8 Limbs Ashtanga Yoga in Perth, Australia. He has published two books: Ashtanga Yoga: Practice and Philosophy, and Ashtanga Yoga The Intermediate Series.

Here are his answer on Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga.

YS: Tell us how did you find yoga and the style you practice now?

GM: Already in my youth I was very attracted to mystical experiences and



studied the scriptures of most religions including the Bible, the Qu'ran and the Upanishads. I started practicing yogic meditation techniques as a means to make the attainment of these states more reliable. As soon as I had finished high school I travelled to India to get to know authentic teachers first hand. The first few years in India I ran from ashram to ashram and guru to guru. I cast every offer aside that demanded more than a few months of my attention and focused instead on “instant enlightenment” approaches. After a while I noticed two things: 1. Apart from fleeting experiences I didn't get anywhere and 2. my body wore out quickly. Since I was traveling off the beaten track and food and accommodation was very basic to say the least I seemed to attract any infectious tropical disease imaginable. I dropped 55 pounds and at age 25 looked trice my age.

I became interested in yoga disciplines that included not only exercises for mind and soul but for the body too, when I met some people who practiced Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. What struck me most about, apart from that it tunes your body like that of a racehorse, is the fact that it is a perfect application of the Ashtanga Yoga of the Yoga Sutra, only that it constitutes an introductory level thereof.

YS: What is the goal of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga?

GM: To realize that you are not the body, not the mind, not the intelligence but the eternal, infinite, immutable consciousness. The Sufis called that “The Beloved” and in the Bible calls it “to know yourself as a child of God”. The road to that goal may be long or short and depending on your existing conditioning you may encounter groups of obstacles (Yoga Sutra I.31) related to the gross anatomical body, subtle pranic body, mind and intellect. Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga rightly tackles those in ascending order, meaning those in the gross body first, then those in the pranic sheath and so on.

YS: In your book “Ashtanga Yoga” you make it clear how important anatomy is, what would you recommend to a beginner student?

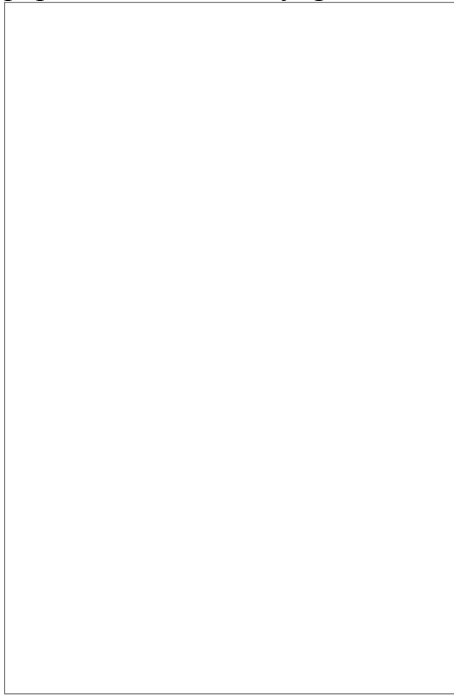
GM: Read both of my books first before you start. If you don't know where you are going you will end up somewhere else instead. Find an authentic teacher. Use books and DVD's only as a back-up. Progress slowly. Don't do anything that you don't understand. It's easy to teach complete beginners but hard to teach experienced students that have deeply ingrained faulty habits.

YS: Many Ashtanga Vinyasa practitioners and teachers seem more interested in mastering the physical aspect of the poses, are they missing the point?

Yes and no. Let's deal with the no-section first. Scriptures like the Mahabharata, the Manu Smriti and the Yoga Bhashya state that human society breaks down due to the influence of entropy, in India

called time. In ancient Vedic society most people were fit to practice Jnana Yoga (yoga of knowledge). Later on Buddhi Yoga (yoga of intellect) became more en vogue, taught in the Samkhya texts. In the previous world age before our time, the so-called Dvapara Yuga, Bhakti Yoga, as described in the Puranas, was practiced by most people. Our current age is called Kali Yuga and its effects are excessive attachment to family, tribe, nation and also excessive attachment to ones body and wallet. Please note the use of the term “excessive” as a reasonable amount of attachment to all of the above helps us to fulfill our duty to family, society, etc.

During all of these ages yoga had to morph to adapt itself to the needs of society. The Kali Yuga has popularized forms of yoga such as Tantra-, Hatha- and Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga.



One may romanticize about the good old days of the Veda and say that these modern yogas constitute degenerations, however, the ancient texts stated already millennia ago that exactly this would happen. In other words, everything is going to plan. In our age average students will have to go through the full course of the eight limbs starting with posture (assuming that we don't have to instruct about Yama and Niyama as most people will be familiar with the 10 commandments as received by Moses on the mountain and their equivalent in the other religions).

However, modern yogis do miss the point if they take postures as an end in themselves. One of my teachers used to say to keep practicing postures and not move on to higher limbs is like continuing to wash your shirt and never wear it. Postures are there to purify the body but then you need to use it. Another teacher used to tell me “Westerners are always abusing the power they get through yoga”. I'm not sure about the “always” but certainly the recent use of asana for bodybuilding (in case of the boys) and body-beautifying (in case of girls) makes one think again. We need to use the energy gained to propel our spiritual evolution otherwise yoga practice becomes the equivalent to using a spaceship capable of warp drive to take you down to the shops.

YS: How do you integrate the other limbs of yoga into your practice?

GM: Currently I start my day with meditation to use the deep silence of the early morning, called brahmi muhurta by the Indians, the divine time. I then move on to asana to prepare my body for pranayama. The Ashtanga Vinyasa practice is ideal here as all postures are automatically transformed into mudras by simultaneous application of Ujjayi breathing and the bandhas. Once I

enter my pranayama session I utilize mantra and chakra visualization during kumbhaka (breath retention) to practise the higher limbs such as dharana etc. I finish off with another short meditation on the Divine and with some Sanskrit chants.

About the author:

Gregor Maehle has studied history, comparative religion, philosophy, and Indology. He gained his understanding of anatomy by obtaining a health practitioner license. During the 1980s and 1990s he lived for several years in India, where he studied the many branches of yoga under various masters.

<http://www.saraswathiashtanga.com>

insights

Don't hurry, this practice take time, the more you try to rush it, the more you will miss what it is actually about.... Everything has its own time.

Let everything come in it's own time. A plant and tree needs proper time to grow under right conditions, why should we human beings be any different. To grow into yoga means growing into life, proper conditions need to be there, but when start to feel it; you'll come to know it is real.

Don't look for God or the Goddess outside of you. Learn to listen from within and explore a new energy within you.

A stiff body has a good potential for learning Yoga. A flexible body is usually more caught up in Bhoga.

Let life guide you by listening to your own heart.

Everybody speaks about the greatness of my father. Yes now he is great, but does anybody know what sufferings he went through in order to come to where he's at today?

My son is a nice boy.

<http://www.piedmontyoga.com>

YOGA INSTRUCTION MANUALS BI (BEFORE IYENGAR: 1886-1966)

What was the first yoga book you ever picked up? Do you remember? Many of us cut our teeth on that remarkable book by BKS Iyengar, Light on Yoga, initially published in 1966. I still have an early copy of this book, its binding now gone to shreds and the pages separated into several sections of unequal size. I keep it because the famous photos of the 200 asanas included in the book are printed alongside the instructions—later editions put all the asanas in the back of the book in one section, necessitating constant flipping between word and picture.

LoY represented a new stage in printed yoga instruction. Nobody had ever seen anything quite like it before, not only the look of the poses but their scope as well. Actually yoga instructional manuals have been around for hundreds of years, one of the oldest HY texts, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, is about 650 years old. Modern instructional manuals started showing up very late in the 19th century.

TIMELINE

- 1886 Warren Felt Evans, *Esoteric Christianity and Mental Therapeutics* (combines New Thought with Hindu religious concepts)
- 1890 Rama Prasad, *Nature's Finer Forces: The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tattvas* (Prasad is a Theosophist and Sanskrit scholar; the book's 15 chapters are based on a series of eight essays published in the Theosophist between November 1887 and March 1889; includes the Shaiva Agama)
- 1894 Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*
- 1897 WH Williams, *Vibration the Law of Life*
- 1898 William Flagg, *Yoga or Transformation*
- 1902 Swami Abhedananda, *Vedanta Philosophy or How to be a Yogi*
- Swami Rama Tirtha, *In Woods of God-Realization*
- Richard Ingalese, *History and Power of the Mind*
- Books by YOGI RAMACHARAKA (William Walker Atkinson, 1862-1932)
- 1903 *Hindu Science of Breath*
- Fourteen Lessons in Yoga Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*
- 1904 *Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism*
- Hatha Yoga, or the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being*
- 1905 *Hindu Yogi Breathing Exercises*
- 1906 *Series of Lessons in Gnani Yoga*
- Series of Lessons in Raja Yoga*
- Science of Psychic Healing*
- 1907 *Bhagavad Gita or the Message of the Master* (compilation)
- Mystic Christianity or the Inner Teachings of the Master*
- Spirit of the Upanishads* (compilation)
- 1908 *The Inner Teachings of the Philosophies and Religions of India*
- 1909 *The Hindu Yogi Practical Water Cure*
- The Life Beyond Death*
- 1908 Ella Adelia Fletcher, *Law of the Rhythmic Breath*
- 1909 Hashnu Hara, *Practical Yoga and Persian Magic*
- 1911 Swami AP Mukerji, *Yoga Lessons for Developing Spiritual Consciousness*
- James Ingall Wedgewood, *Meditation for Beginners*
- W.J. Colville, *Ancient Mysteries and Modern Revelations*
- 1913 Mabel Collins, *Transparent Jewel*
- 1915 Walter Gorn Old, *The Yoga of Yama: What Death Said*
- 1918 Theron Q. Dumont (William Atkinson), *The Solar Plexus*
- Franz Hartman, *Yoga-practice in the Roman Catholic Church*
- 1920 Hereward Carrington, *Higher Psychical Development or Yoga Philosophy*
- Edward Gall, *Mysticism through the Ages*
- 1921 Brian Brown, *Wisdom of the Hindus*
- Charles Wase, *Inner Teaching and Yoga*
- 1922 Swami AP Mukerji, *Doctrine and Practice of Yoga*
- 1923 Hereward Carrington, *Yoga Philosophy*
- 1925 JFC Fuller, *Yoga: A Study of the Mystical Philosophy of the Brahmins...*
- 1926 Elizabeth Towne, *Just How to Wake the Solar Plexus*
- Yogi Hari Rama, *Yoga System of Study*
- 1927 L. Adams Beck, *A Beginner's Book of Yoga*
- Yogi Wassan, *Secrets of the Himalayan Mountain Masters and Ladder*

to Cosmic Consciousness

1928 Cajzoran Ali, *Divine Posture Influence upon Endocrine Glands*

Swami Nilyapadananda Abadhut, *Philosophy of Union by Devotion*

Harold Werner, *Self-mastery Through Self-taught Yoga*

Yogi Bhikshu, *Karma Yoga*

1929 C. Jinarajadasa, *Gods in Chains*

? Vasant Rele, *The Mysterious Kundalini*

Books by ERNEST WOOD

1927 *Raja Yoga*

1931 *The Occult Training of the Hindus*

1948? *Practical Yoga, Ancient and Modern*

1959? *Yoga*

1930? Elizabeth Sharpe, *Tantric Doctrine of Immaculate Conception*

1931 Swami Kuvalayananda, *Popular Yoga Asanas*

Swami Kuvalayananda, *Pranayama*

Delta Samadhi, *The Master Key to Psychic Unfoldment*

1933 Claude Bragdon, *An Introduction to Yoga*

Michael Juste, *A New Yoga System*

Francis Yeats-Brown, *The Eight Steps to Yoga*

Hamish McLaurin, *Eastern Philosophy for Western Minds*

1934 Sita Devi Yogendra, *Yoga Physical Education*

Yogi Wassan, *Book of Nirvana*

Geraldine Coster, *Yoga and Western Psychology*

Paul Brunton (1898-1981), *A Search in Secret India*

1935 KV Mulbagala, *The Popular Practice of Yoga*

1937 Francis Yeats-Brown, *Yoga Explained*

Charles Haanel, *Amazing Secrets of the Yogi and the Gateway to Prosperity*

Felix Guyot, *Yoga for the West*

Felix Guyot, *Yoga: The Science of Health*

Josephine Ransom, *Self-Realization Through Yoga and Mysticism*

Sri Krishna Prem, *The Yoga of the Bhagavat Gita*

Kovoor T. Behanan, *Yoga: A Scientific Evaluation*

1938 Vera Stanley Alder, *The Finding of the Third Eye*

TRANSLATION: George Weston Briggs, *The Goraksha Shataka* (in *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, Motilal Banarsidass)

1939 George Arundale: *Lotus Fire: A Study in Symbolic Yoga*

1943 Claude Bragdon, *Yoga for You*

1946 Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*

1947 Sri Deva Ram Sukul, *Yoga Navajivan*

1949 Alain Danielou, *Yoga: The Method of Re-integration*

Books by THEOS BERNARD

1940 *Yoga Gave Me Superior Health*

1947 *Hindu Philosophy*

1950 *Hatha Yoga*

Books by INDRA DEVI

1948 *Yoga for You* 13

1953 *Forever Young, Forever Healthy*

1959 *Yoga for Americans*

1963 *Renew Your Life Through Yoga*
 Books by DESMOND DUNNE
 1952 *Yoga for Everyone*
 1953 *Yoga: The Way to Long Life and Happiness*
 1961 *Yoga Made Easy*
 Books by HARVEY DAY
 1953 *The Study and Practice of Yoga*
 1954 *About Yoga*
 1965? *The Breath of Life*
 1967 *Practical Yoga*
 1969 *Practical Yoga for Women*
 1970 *Practical Yoga for Businessmen*
 1972 *Karma Yoga*
 1973 *The New Yoga Exercise Book*
 1974 *Yoga for the Athlete*
 1950 Swami Narayanananda, *The Primal Power in Man, Or the Kundalini Shakti*
 1953 Selvarajan Yesudian and Elizabeth Haich, *Yoga and Health*
 1954 Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*
 Books by PAUL DUKES
 1954 *Yoga for the Western World*
 1960? *The Yoga of Health, Youth, and Joy*
 ??? *On a Single Breath*
 1956 Selvarajan Yesudian and Elizabeth Haich, *Yoga: Uniting East & West*
 1957 Yogi Vitahaldas, *The Yoga System of Health and Relief From Tension*
 Health Research, ed. *The Practice of Yoga as Taught in the East and the West*
 1958 Yogi Gupta (Sri Swami Kailashananda), *Yoga and Long Life*
 1959 Clara Spring and Madeleine Goss, *Yoga for Today*
 Books by RAMMURTI MISHRA
 1959 *Fundamentals of Yoga*
 1967? *Dynamics of Yoga Mudras*
 1971? *Textbook of Yoga Psychology*
 1960 Arthur Liebers, *Relax with Yoga*
 James Hewitt, *Yoga*
 1961 Yogi Gupta, *Yoga and Yogic Powers*
 1962 Hilton Hotema, *Awaken the World Within*
 1964? K. Chodkiewicz, *First Steps in Modern Yoga*
 1965 Haridass Chaudhuri, *Integral Yoga*
 Books by Swami VISHNU-DEVANANDA
 1960 *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*
 ??? *Mantras and Meditation*
 ??? *Learn Yoga in a Weekend*
 ??? *The Hatha Yoga Pradipki*
 Books by RICHARD HITTLEMAN
 1962 *Yoga at Home*
 1964 *Yoga, Philosophy and Meditation*
 UNKNOWN DATES
Richard Hittleman's Yoga
RH Introduction to Yoga

Yoga for Health
RH Guide to Meditation
RH 30 Day Yoga Meditation Plan
Yoga: The 8 Steps to Health and Peace
Weight control through Yoga
RH Guide for the Seeker
RH Yoga for Total Fitness
The Yoga Way to Figure and Facial Beauty
Be Young With Yoga
Yoga for Physical Fitness
Yoga for Personal Living
The Yoga Way
Yoga USA
Yoga for Special Problems
1965 William Zorn, *True Yoga*
Jess Stern, *Yoga, Youth, and Reincarnation*
Jean-Marie Dechanet, *Yoga in Ten Lessons*
1966 Wallace Slater, *A Simplified Course on Hatha Yoga*
Clara M. Codd, *Introduction To Patanjali's Yoga*
1966 BKS IYENGAR, *LIGHT ON YOGA*