

Dear Yoga Students,

This file is huge because the practice of yoga is huge. If you follow even some of these suggestions, you will have a dependable practice that will overcome many human problems and will last a lifetime. Do a little reading every day. Pace yourself. Don't rush this wonderful process, but rather, savor it.

Love,

John (Prem)

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GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR YOGA PRACTICE

REGULARITY

In any spiritual practice, especially one as intense as yoga, regularity and consistency are very important. Choose a time when you will be undisturbed (and not a disturbance to others) and stick to that time. The ideal time for this work is before sunrise. If you consider yourself a "night person", this will require a bit of determination. Your biological clock needs about 2 weeks to adjust to a radical change in body rhythm, but if you are patient and gradual and go to sleep early enough, you will manage to adjust to your new rising time. You may be astonished and grateful for the way you feel when you have done yoga and meditated before the rest of the day.

THE COMPANY AND ENVIRONMENTS YOU CHOOSE

Being on the Path is enhanced when we have friends of like mind with whom to share our experiences and support. This is the very helpful aspect of being a member of a yoga class. We naturally want to gravitate toward friendships and deeper relationships that are good for us and to which we can contribute in a natural way. This includes television, movies and other materials that can have influences upon us.

TIMING OF MEALS

The most effective yoga practice is on an empty or nearly empty stomach. If you have breakfast or other meal after your yoga session, wait until you are really ready to eat. Eating at the same time each day based only upon the clock is not the most healthful way to eat. Your body will signal when you need food. Of course, for people with hypoglycemia or diabetes or other medical conditions which require specific nutritional attention, a physician's advice should be sought.

AN IDEAL MORNING ROUTINE

Awaken gently. Arise slowly. Empty the bladder and colon--after some practice, you will be able to empty the colon almost at will. Brush and floss your teeth and scrape your tongue with a scraper available at some Indian supply stores--this foul matter must be removed. When you see what comes off your tongue, you will know why it is recommended and you will do it regularly.

Take about a half glass of water, the juice of half a lemon, some honey, blend together and drink before breakfast. This is a refreshing and healthful way to prepare the stomach for a meal later.

Next, center the mind and perform the postures you have chosen, balancing the routine with standing, sitting, back-bending, forward-bending, twisting and inverted postures. If your time is limited, you may have to choose just two or three from each type, but perform a varied selection.

Then comes your meditation. Do some alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhanam) for a couple of minutes, let your mantra or other procedure start naturally without pushing, and continue for at least ten minutes, preferably twenty minutes. Allow yourself about two minutes to come out of the meditation slowly.

OTHER TYPES OF EXERCISE

Hatha yoga is best placed before meditation. If you need to put some jogging, swimming, bicycling, skiing or other vigorous exercise into your health program, these activities are best at times apart from the yoga and meditation sessions. If you wish to practice yoga after a cardiovascular workout, wait until you are cool and relaxed before you do Hatha yoga. The effect of a vigorously accelerated heart rate is not desirable immediately before meditation. Also, give yourself enough time after a meditation to mentally and physically adjust to vigorous activity before beginning the workout.

STRUCTURING YOUR OWN YOGA CLASS

Empty the bladder and colon before your session. Take a few minutes to relax and center your attention before practicing. Decide upon your overall goals, and emphasize your goals with the postures you choose. For example, if you choose greater back flexibility as a goal for yourself, then make sure to include both forward and backward movements to prevent injury and to balance the energy centers of the body more effectively. Whatever your goals in yoga, make sure to include a wide variety of postures in the following body configurations: standing postures, sitting postures, backward bending postures, forward bending postures, twisting postures, inverted postures and a relaxation session at the end of the session.

KNOWING YOUR LIMITS

Breathe freely in the postures. If your breathing is labored or heavy, you are probably working too hard. Move carefully into postures with which you are unfamiliar. Stay out of positions that are painful. Modify some postures to accommodate your limitations and know what the difference in sensation is between muscles that can be stretched over time and tendons or ligaments that are being stretched unreasonably. Remember that if you have any past injuries, you should ask a physician or other health professional for guidance in your choice of postures or other practices. Use common sense and pay attention to what your body is telling you.

Of course, your time limits are as important as your physical limits. If you know you have just half an hour, make sure you allow for a quiet time for contemplation after the session. If you finish your session feeling frustrated and rushed, then it is probably better to wait until you have enough time to do justice to the practice. On this point, if you are falling asleep during your meditation, you need more sleep at night. Although an effective meditation can be worth about two hours of sleep, meditation is

not a substitute for sleep, so you can't cut out a portion of your rest in order to make time for yoga or meditation.

Every question you have is important and deserves an answer. Write down your questions as they come up and make a point of looking up your own answers. Start a library of reference books to which you think you will be using and go to them frequently. If you are a member of a yoga class, make sure you share the questions and answers with your classmates. The answers may help others in the class as well.

An Outline of the Practice of Raja yoga, The Classical Yoga of Patanjali (also known as Ashtanga yoga, the Eightfold Path)

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SOME DEFINITIONS

What is yoga?

According to the second aphorism of Patanjali, "YOGAS CHITTA VRITTI NIRODHA" – "Yoga is the control of the fluctuations of the mind." The fluctuations of the mind are: right knowledge, wrong knowledge, fancy, sleep and memory.

What are the Nine Obstacles to Progress?

Sickness, incompetence, doubt, delusion, sloth, non-abstention, erroneous conception, non-attachment to the goals of yoga, inability to stay in yogic state.

Kleshas (afflictions) and their Associated Fears

Avidya: Ignorance of our true, spiritual Self. Fear of God.

Asmita: Egoism, "I-ness". The true, spiritual Self is experienced as the personality. Habits govern the body and mind. We fear others because we see them as being separate from ourselves.

Raga: Attachment to material objects. Confusion between what we want and what we need. Harmony within is neglected. Fear of the loss of happiness that material objects bring.

Dvesha: Aversion in the material world. Physical objects are feared as sources of pain. Fear of being harmed.

Abhinivesha: Ignorance of the immortality of the Self. Resisting change. We see the true, spiritual Self as vulnerable. Fear of death or change.

The five energy sheaths of the body, the Koshas.

We overcome fear by strengthening the Koshas.

Annamaya Kosha: The physical body sheath, our tool for awareness of the world. It is strengthened by building the physical health and general wellness. Birth and death, sleep and delusion belong here.

(The following three Koshas co-exist as the astral body and cannot be separated)

Pranamaya Kosha: The breath sheath governs activities such as movement, balance and concentration. Hunger and thirst belong here.

Manomaya Kosha: Organization center of the mind: perception, language, emotions and habits. Exhilaration, depression, passion, anger and greed belong here.

Vijnanamaya Kosha: The knowledge sheath. Discrimination, decision-making, thinking critically, relationships between cause and effect.

Anandamaya Kosha: Center where inner harmony, peace and knowledge of God are perceived. Unwavering self-confidence, balance in the personality.

THE EIGHT STEPS OF RAJA YOGA

External Practices

1. Yamas - Restraints

Ahimsa – Non-Violence: Being kind, taking turns, not ridiculing, not retaliating, not carrying grudges, not abusing the environment, not hurting another's feelings, not interrupting in conversation in order to feel important.

Satya – Non-Lying: Not exaggerating, not deliberately omitting details, not allowing others to be misled.

Asteya – Non-Stealing: Not taking things without permission, not taking credit for the work of others, not pretending in order to be more impressive.

Brahmacharya – Moderation: Returning things on time. Not wasting resources. No sexual misconduct. Not abusing intoxicating substances. Respecting limits.

Aparigraha – Non-Possessiveness: Encouraging others to do well and giving praise, being a good sport and being gracious in losing. Not needing a lot of possessions in order to be happy, being grateful for what one has.

2. Niyamas - Observances

Saucha – Purity: Physical cleanliness, eating healthfully, raising the spirits with meditation and prayer, thanking others and doing thoughtful acts for others without being asked.

Santosha – Contentment: Being able to adjust to disappointment. Being happy with what is happening in the moment.

Tapas – Austerity: Adhering to a schedule. Choosing movies, books and friends that are beneficial to the mind and spirit. (This is emphasized in Kriya yoga.)

Svadyaya – Self-Observation: Being able to take advice, learning from our experiences and not having to repeat our mistakes. Seeing what makes us happy and what our most healthful direction is.

Ishwara Pranidhana – Surrender to God: Looking at ourselves as being part of the greater picture of the Universe and definitely part of the rest of humanity. Trusting the opportunities to serve as being the most precious of opportunities. . (This is emphasized in Kriya yoga.)

3. Asana - Postures – The practice of cultural and meditative postures of Hatha yoga for the purpose of strengthening and prolonging the meditative posture. This is the element that comprises most Hatha yoga classes.

4. Pranayama - Breath focus

The breathing practices which balance the nadis, relax the mind and body, or concentrate prana in the vayus:

Udana: moves in the throat.

Prana: moves in the heart.

Samana: moves in the navel region.
Apana: moves in the anal region.
Vyana: moves throughout the body.

5. Pratyahara - Sensory withdrawal

Separates the mind from the physical sensations in order to prepare for meditation.

Internal Practices

6. **Dharana:** The practice of repeatedly returning the concentration to a spiritually significant physical object or anything which is of spiritual significance to the meditator, such as a symbol, chakra, yantra or mantra.

7. **Dhyana:** The effortless flow of the meditator's mind to the object of contemplation.

8. **Samadhi:** spiritual absorption, transcendence. Consists of two broad stages: **Samprajnata samadhi**, meditation with the presence of seed thought, and **Asamprajnata samadhi**, meditation without seed thought.

How can we further intensify the practice of Raja yoga?

Practice *Abhyasa*, making an effort to sustain the practice, and *Vairagya*, clearing the mind of unwanted content.

Kriya yoga (Yoga of action), is practiced to get rid of the Kleshas. Tapas and Ishwara Pranidhana are emphasized.

THE CHAKRAS

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The subject of the chakras has been one clouded with much ambiguity and hearsay, especially in the popular and unresearched literature. Consulting the authoritative sources of yoga science and philosophy is the remedy for misinformation.

The way to maintain the balance among the chakras is through dietary improvement, yoga, proper meditation and possibly techniques related to Biofeedback. There is no gadget or apparatus that can facilitate the balancing of the chakras better or faster than the practices and principles of yoga when they are understood and taken internally. In the following pages, the references to the elements are to be interpreted as states of matter, not the literal objects.

This information was assembled from various sources:

[HI] Himalayan Institute Teacher Training in 1993

[GF] Feuerstein, Georg. The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga. New York: Paragon House, 1990.

[HYP] Muktibodhananda Saraswati, Swami. Hatha Yoga Pradipika with commentary by Swami. Munger, Bihar, India: Bihar School of Yoga, 1985.

[DWS] Sivaya Subramuniaswami, Satguru. Dancing With Siva: Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism, fourth edition. Concord, California: Himalayan Academy, 1993

[SR] Rama, Swami, Rudolph Ballentin, M.D. and Swami Ajaya, Ph.D. Yoga and Psychotherapy: The Evolution of Consciousness. Honesdale: The Himalayan Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy, 1976.

[PY] The teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda.

[SP] Premananda, Swami. Light on Kriya Yoga: Kaushitaki Upanishad, The Mystic Way; Mundara Upanishad, The Mystic Ritual; Taittiriya Upanishad, The Mystic Revelation. Washington, D.C.: Swami Premananda Foundation, Inc., 1969.

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1. Muladhara Chakra

Psychological aspects: personal survival, security, self-protection, very primitive fears. This is the home of the sleeping Kundalini. Condition when distorted: Fear of not surviving or tendency to inflict harm on others. Condition when undistorted: Fearlessness.

Location: Perineum or base of the spine

Gland or organ association: Stomach, spleen, epithelial tissues (they make the boundaries in the body.)

Achievement of balance: Root lock, locust posture, horse mudra. Strive to eliminate ignorance, go after self-knowledge and lose our attachments to outcome.

Element: Earth (solidarity). Color: Yellow.

Bija mantra: LAM.

HYP: p. 178: "The lowest chakra is within the perineal floor in the male body and the cervix in the female body. It is a four-petaled red lotus called *mooladhara*, and it influences the excretory and reproductive organs, reproductive glands and hormonal secretions. Mooladhara is directly connected to the nose and sense of smell, and with our animal instincts. At mooladhara human evolution begins and kundalini emerges."

DWS: memory/time/space. Four petals in lotus symbol. Sanskrit letter: NA.

PY: Sound: Bumblebee, "Baby OM".

SP: p. 31, self-mastery

2. Swadisthana Chakra

Psychological aspects: Sexuality, survival of the species, sensual pleasures. When distorted: Greed, envy, sensual and sexual obsession.

Location: approximately 2 inches above the muladhara chakra.

Gland or organ association: Bladder, kidneys, reproductive glands, endocrine system, nervous system, pathways of flow.

Achievement of balance: Inverted Postures for the draining of the pelvic area, rocking, churning, knees to chest, cross patterns like swimming, walking. Seek internal sources of joy. Yogis develop sexual energy to increase the upward flow of kundalini for spiritual union.

Element: Water (ability to move). Color: Blue-gray or creamy white.

Bija mantra: VAM.

HYP, p.178: "Two fingers width above mooladhara and closely associated with it, is *swadhithana* chakra, a six-petalled vermillion lotus. It is connected to the sacral plexus, urinary and reproductive organs and glands. Swadhithana is associated with the tongue and the sense of taste. Its influence on the deeper personality arouses a selfish sense of ego."

DWS: faculty of reason. Six petals in the lotus symbol. Sanskrit letter: MA.

PY: Sound: Krishna's flute.

SP: p. 31, serenity.

3. Manipura Chakra

Psychological aspects: Center of physical power, i.e., digestion leading to transformation of food into energy. Dominance and submission issues. Competence, mastery, survival of the ego. Making things happen in the world. When distorted: Anger, jealousy, material attachments, loss of personal power or preoccupation with dominance over others, emergence of the authoritarian personality. The pot belly development is from a sense of powerlessness.

Location: Solar plexus, navel.

Gland or organ association: adrenal glands, digestive glands, small intestines, heart, lymphatic system immune system.

Achievement of balance: Uddiyana Bandha, agnisara, leg raises, sun salutation. In the interest of sexual harmony, focus the thoughts on this chakra to cure premature ejaculation. Strive to clean up our lives so we are not disturbed by anything.

Element: Fire (Power, transformation). Color: Red-orange.

Bija mantra: RAM.

HYP: p. 179: "The next chakra is behind the navel, within the spinal column. It is a ten-petalled yellow lotus called *manipura* and it is associated with the solar plexus. Manipura influences the digestive process and the assimilation of food and prana. It is also connected to the eyes and sight. At the level of manipura the consciousness is still bound by the grosser levels of existence and sensualities, ambition and greed."

DWS: faculty of will power. Ten petals in the lotus symbol. Sanskrit letter: SI.

PY: Sound: Harp.

SP: p. 31, fortitude

Between the Manipura and Anahata chakras is the diaphragm, the balance point between all of them. Through proper breathing we learn to balance the issues of Self-preservation and working for others.

These first three chakras are concerned with the very basic maintenance needs of the body: survival, procreation and getting along in the world.

The balance point between the upper and lower chakras is the diaphragm and the next chakra, which transcends the needs of the individual.

4. Anahata Chakra

Psychological aspects: Nurturing, providing mentoring, working cooperatively in external relationships. Expansion of the Self into working for others altruistically. Balance point between the upward flowing and downward flowing energy. When the breath is focused here, the feeling is one of balance. If there are imbalances in the lower chakras, the effect is felt here. When distorted: Selfishness, grief, inability to feel emotions. Knowledge of the Anahata and Ajna chakras gives you knowledge of all the other chakras.

Location: Heart center

Gland or organ association: Milk secreting glands, thymus gland, skin, hair, lungs, large intestine.

Achievement of balance: All standing postures, also the cobra, camel, all postures using arms, Surya Namaskara, (the Salutation to the Sun). Working with non-attachment. Focusing of the breath.

Element: Air (compassion, feeling). Color: Smokey gray.

Bija mantra: YAM.

HYP: p. 179: "Above manipura in the proximity of the heart, is *anahata* chakra, with twelve blue petals. It is connected to the cardiac plexus, heart, respiration and thymus gland and is responsible for emotions of love/hate, compassion/cruelty, etc. Anahata is also connected to the sense of touch and the hands."

DWS: faculty of direct cognition. 12 Petals in the lotus symbol. Sanskrit letter: VA.

PY: Deep Gong Bell.

SP: p. 31, devotion

5. Vissuddha Chakra

Psychological aspects: Acceptance of nurturance, creativity, the voice, increasing evolution of the higher self. When distorted: Inability to accept nurturing. No sense of trust or belief or knowledge of a personal deity.

Location: Throat

Gland or organ association: Thyroid, parathyroid, liver, gall bladder.

Achievement of balance: All limbs pose (shoulder stand), headstand, plow, all "head and neck" postures, all thought processes. We must accept the love around us, but overcome any additions to external relationships.

Element: Akasha (ether). Color: Smokey purple.

Bija mantra: HAM.

HYP: p. 179: "Within the middle of the throat is the fifth chakra *vishuddhi*, with sixteen purple petals. It is associated with the cervical plexus and thyroid gland and it maintains purity in the body and mind. Vishuddhi is connected to the ears and sense of audition, throat and speech. It arouses acceptance of the adversities of life, mental balance and sensitivity to the needs of others."

DWS: faculty of divine love. Sixteen petals in the lotus symbol. Sanskrit letter: YA.

PY: Sound: Rushing waters, distant sea.

SP: p. 31, purity

6. Ajna Chakra

Psychological aspects: Contact with the source of direct knowledge, knowledge from the inside, intuition. Also called The Third Eye. Undistorted: Visionary ability of cause/effect relationships. Need for external relationships disappears. Duality disappears. Knowledge of the Ajna and Anahata chakras gives you knowledge of all the other chakras.

Location: Center of the head

Gland or organ association: pineal, pituitary (the Master Gland)

Achievement of balance: Meditation.

Element: Space, Mind. Color: White.

Bija mantra: OM.

HYP: p. 179: "At the top of the spinal column, at the medulla oblongata, is one of the most important chakras, *ajna* chakra, which has two silvery grey or clear petals. Above vishuddhi the chakras are mainly concerned with higher intelligence. Some authorities do not even consider them as chakras because, as the veiling power of prana shakti decreases, manas shakti becomes more predominant. Ajna chakra is the command center. It operates in conjunction with the reticular activating system, medulla oblongata and the pineal gland. Ajna chakra is the third eye through which the whole subtle world can be perceived. It is known as the gateway to liberation."

DWS: faculty of divine sight. Two petals in the lotus symbol. Sanskrit letter: AUM.

PY: Symphony of all other sounds, oceanic roar, cosmic OM.

SP: p. 31, "At the spiritual eye profound joyousness engulfs the tranquil mind. This joyousness of tranquility should not be confused with the bliss of Brahman, which is the transcendental peace of God-realization. The notion of time fades away and a feeling of everlasting self-existence pervades the consciousness when the self becomes established at Ajna. The concepts of virtue and non-virtue, and all other dual and negative thoughts and impressions are completely transcended as only the qualities of righteousness bring greater revelation of innate divinity when the self remains absorbed in the effulgence at the spiritual eye.

7. Sahasrara Chakra

Psychological aspects: Enlightenment. Yogis leave the body by opening the fontanelles. They decide when they will die. When opened: Sense of individuality disappears. Awareness of the course of future events.

Location: above the head or at the very top of the skull.

Gland or organ association: No association for this chakra.

Color: White.

Bija mantra: OM

HYP: p. 179: "When kundalini shakti passes beyond ajna, duality and ego cease to exist. It reaches the highest center, *sahasrara*, the thousand petalled lotus. Sahasrara is situated at the crown of the head and is associated with the pituitary gland. When this chakra is fully activated by kundalini it is the highest experience of human evolution."

"Between ajna and sahasrara there are three other chakras which are briefly mentioned in the tantras. Opposite the uvula is *lalana* chakra which is a twelve-petalled lotus. Above ajna is *manas* chakra, a six-petalled lotus, and above that, at the mid-cerebrum is soma chakra of sixteen petals. These chakras are concerned with the flow of nectar from bindu visarga (which is discussed later [in the book]), and they are responsible for higher states of consciousness and intelligence."

DWS: faculty of illumination. One thousand eight petals in the lotus symbol.

PY: Sound: Symphony of all other sounds, oceanic roar, cosmic OM.

SUN SALUTATION--SURYA NAMASKARA

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Here is my understanding of the Sun Salutation, first taught to me at the Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy, founded by Swami Rama, where I was initiated as a yoga teacher.

Some general points to remember: The breath should flow freely through the nose—both inhaling and exhaling through the entire yoga session. Do not strain from one movement to the next, but use the breath and the skeletal muscles together in a cooperative effort.

Also, when you notice a particular challenge or a position where you are feeling there is something you have to learn in the posture, pause there. Don't move.

Rather, see if you can hold the position and use your open mind and spirit to let your feelings and thoughts come forward.

Here is the series.

1. Stand with the feet slightly apart, i.e., not firmly together and not as wide apart as the hips or shoulders. The hands are palms together at the level of the heart.



2. Raise the arms overhead, hands close together, palms in any comfortable position. If your back is well warmed up, you may lean back slightly, but not holding the breath.

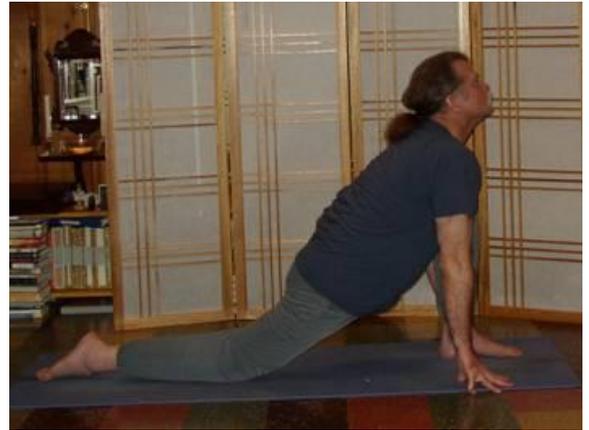


3. Bend forward with the knees slightly bent. This is done on an exhalation of the breath. The arms may be lowered down the sides of the body, bent, or in the advanced form, the arms may be extended toward the front. The hands are placed next to the feet, the head is down. This is the forward bend. If necessary, the knees may be bent and the hands may be forward of the feet, but if

possible keep the hands to the sides of the feet.



4. Step back with either foot first. The knee goes to the floor, toes extended, head up, mouth closed. The palms may be either flat to the floor, or you may be up on your fingertips. The alternate position is to have both arms to the inside of the forward leg in order to have more space for the leg.



5. Step back with the forward leg, going into the “push-up” position. The hips, shoulders and ankles should be in a straight line, i.e., the hips are not sagging, nor are they held higher in the air than the shoulders.



6. Lower the knees to the floor, moving the chest and shoulders forward so that the chest touches the floor. Pull the face inward so that the forehead is on the floor. The abdomen is off the floor so that you can feel the freedom of the movement of the abdominal muscles. If you cannot keep the chest in contact with the floor, then extend the chin forward as in the second photo.



7. Using the strength of the arms, chest and shoulders, slightly lift the upper body off the floor and shift the weight forward to the cobra posture. The feet stay on the floor, heels together. The buttocks muscles are held firm. The upper back is strongly engaged to lift the chest. Elbows are in against the sides. The palms have not moved from their positions, the head is back, mouth closed.



8. Lift the whole body, keeping the hands and feet in place. The hips are now the highest point of the body. The neck and head are down, but not vigorously pointing down. You are now looking roughly in the direction of the feet. The chest and shoulders are pressed down to feel an extension in the chest area. The hips are flexed downward to feel the stretch through the hamstrings. The ankles are bent in order to feel

that the calf muscles are stretching.



9. Draw the right leg forward so that you are in the low lunge position again. Now, this low lunge position will have the opposite leg forward. Do this with the exhalation of the breath. Beginners or people with limited motion: go down to both knees first, then step forward with the right leg, then help the right foot forward to the low lunge position.



10. Now, step forward with the rear leg, returning to the forward bend, exhaling as you do so.



11. Rise, bending the legs if you need to, inhaling, rising to the stick posture, bending back slightly as you do so.



12. Finally, allow the arms to come down to the starting position.

When you repeat the series, begin by extending the opposite leg. In this way, we will exercise the left and right sides of the body alternately, performing the series in an even number of repetitions.

If you have questions, please email me. I am at your service.

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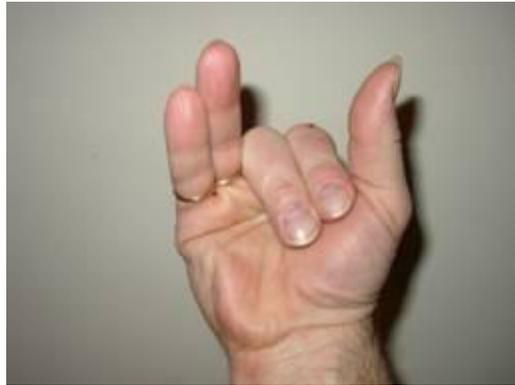


Nadi Shodanam

Alternate nostril breathing, a basic pattern

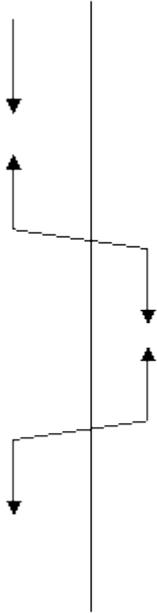
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Use this position of the right hand. The right hand is the hand of activity. The thumb closes the right nostril, the ring finger closes the left nostril.



- 1. Test each nostril, determine which nostril is more open.**
- 2. If the right nostril is more open when you begin, you will first exhale through the right nostril.**
- 3. If the left nostril is more open, exhale first through the left nostril.**
- 4. If both nostrils are open equally, exhale through the right nostril first.**
- 5. Begin Nadi Shodanam by breathing in through both nostrils.**
- 6. Exhale through the starting nostril, i.e., the more open nostril, then inhale through the same nostril.**
- 7. Switch the fingers to block the other nostril.**
- 8. Exhale through the second nostril, then inhale through the same nostril.**
- 9. Continue this pattern for about 5 to ten minutes or as long as desired, and anytime you desire.**

Key: exhale = ↓ inhale = ↑



INSTRUCTIONS FOR MEDITATION

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This article will take you through the steps of preparing the body and mind for meditation. The requirements of a meditation practice are simple: patience, consistency without attachment, a relatively quiet space and a comfortable, still and strong sitting posture.

A sound and healthy body is the starting point and is the best vehicle for the practice of meditation. Hatha yoga was designed by ancient sages who knew that in order to be feel closer to the Divine, they had to be in optimal health. If you are reading these instructions without being enrolled in a yoga class, then you may use any warm-up exercises you know from a sensible aerobics class, provided that you do not work up too much aggressive energy. Remember that yoga is a system of exercise for relaxing the body while strengthening it and making it more flexible.

There is a meditation technique for every person in every philosophic or religious persuasion, to include secular humanists, agnostics and atheists. The simple Buddhist practice of Vipassana meditation, or Mindfulness Meditation is a wonderful way of feeling clarity of mind and inner

peace and is suitable for everyone. There is no conflict in Buddhism with any religion. You may be a Catholic, a Jew or a Muslim and still practice some aspects of Buddhism.

For people who have a belief system with a deity (God, Brahma, Allah, Ahura Mazda, Factor X, etc.) you may use prayer or a mantra to facilitate spiritual transcendence, or Samadhi.

1. Decide on a time of day that you will use when you can sit quietly, undisturbed for at least five minutes, ten minutes, or a maximum of twenty minutes. Regularity is the most important aspect of success in meditation.
2. It is very important that you plan for time alone, with a door to close and the phone turned off. It is not necessary to have complete silence, but you must be undisturbed.
3. Do some warming up, such as rotations of all of the joints of the body. Follow a sequence recommended by your teacher, or follow your own intuition. The best preparation you can make is to have a complete yoga class.

4. Use a sitting position that is comfortable and not extreme. If you cannot sit on the floor, you may also sit in a comfortable chair that does not allow you to slouch. The spine must be straight and the breathing must be steady, deep, relaxed and must primarily use the abdomen and diaphragm.
5. If you feel particularly stressed, use a breathing exercise such as Nadi Shodanam—Alternate Nostril Breathing for about 3 to 5 minutes in order to get the breathing apparatus into a regular and quiet rhythm of movement and to balance the emotions.
6. For every meditation technique, the mindfulness phase comes first. Allow yourself to observe the inner peace of the mind. Go to a place within yourself that is free from judgment and free from evaluation. Simply appreciate each breath quietly. You may say in your mind, “Now I breathe in,” And, “Now I breathe out.” Any stray thoughts are simply allowed to move on without elaborate consideration. It is very important not to become impatient with yourself with unwanted thoughts. It is common for beginners to have to deal with unwanted thoughts many times per minute until the proper technique for releasing thoughts is established.
7. You may feel that you can follow this mindfulness phase for long minutes at a time. If you feel that you are falling asleep, it is a sign that you need more sleep at night, so plan your day accordingly. (see the article, “Your day of yoga”)
8. If you have troublesome thoughts and determine that you need assistance with your technique, contact a teacher in the technique you have chosen to help you process this material.
9. This combination of Hatha yoga, breathing and mindfulness meditation can be practiced regularly for long periods of time. The simpler your practice, the easier it will be to sustain it. A total of even just a half hour in the morning can make a big difference. N.B.: If you are interested only in the Mindfulness practice of meditation, skip down to steps numbered 13, 14 and then 16.
10. If you feel ready for the use of a mantra, there are several approaches you may use. If you know of a tradition in which you would like to be initiated, it is recommended that you see a teacher who is able to give you an initiation into that tradition. Some people choose their own mantra, a sound that is used to achieve transcendence, or Samadhi. There are meditation techniques in Judaism, Islam (Sufism) and Christianity as well as in yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism.
11. When you use the mantra, sit quietly and LISTEN for the mantra, rather than SAYING the mantra. This is very important. We want to be receptive to the mantra. It must come “down” to us from the higher mind, which has received the mantra from God. Allow the mantra to come into the mind at its own volume and at its own speed. Do not try to change the tempo of the mantra or change the sound of it. Try not to move the tongue or lips, but let the mantra “roll forward” on its own.
12. There are four possibilities of thought-and-mantra combinations in the mind while you are sitting in meditation: 1) thoughts without mantra, 2) mantra without thoughts, 3) mantra and thoughts together, 4) neither thoughts nor mantra.

13. Whatever happens during the meditation, we want to remember that all of it is beneficial. There may be times of stress during which you may sit for a long period, perhaps completely absorbing your time with restless thoughts and release of stress. At the end of such a period, simply remember to express some simple thought of gratitude. Treat every period of meditation with gentle appreciation, because the opportunity to meditate is very precious.
14. Let all thoughts drift through the mind without giving them any importance. Simply say in your mind, "When I am finished with this thought, I will return to meditation."
15. At the end of your meditation, allow the mantra to go back to its source, back through your higher mind, back to God. Sit quietly and use the next one or two minutes to slowly come back to activity. Watch the mind come back as though it is someone else's mind. Resist the temptation to cut this period short. This is the most important part of the meditation. If you cannot give your meditation this patient and slow period of return, it is better not to meditate.
16. When you are genuinely ready for activity, then—and only then—leave your meditation space to continue your day of contentment and tranquility.

Remember to be regular in your personal practice of meditation. It takes persistence in the beginning to make sure you are scheduling the quality time that is necessary. Meditation is not something that we should feel guilty about not doing. If we are feeling the benefits, then we will always look forward to our meditation sessions.

This is a set of instructions that will last a lifetime. If you desire personal instruction or have doubts, please contact me to arrange some personal attention.

BETTER SLEEP

Question: What does yoga have to help me sleep more soundly without interruption?

My reply: Occasionally I am asked for suggestions for inducing sound, uninterrupted sleep.

Yoga has some very good tools which, in the right combination and timing, can be of great benefit. I would suggest the following. None of these suggestions involve the use of drugs or herbs. That information is available elsewhere.

1. Finish your last big meal not long after sunset. Have only a light snack, if anything, close to bedtime, and no simple sugars! In this way you will be able to have an empty stomach during the night and your body will not be burdened with the hard work of digestion during the night.
2. Organize your next day's activities. Write a list of the things you need to have when you leave the house in the morning. Write another list of things you need to do. Make the lists complete so that you can clear your mind for a restful night's sleep.

3. Before going to bed, do a couple of sun salutations (Surya Namaskara) to get the body moving, but not enough exercise to become completely energized.
4. Next, sit with the alternate nostril breathing exercise (Nadi Shodanam) for about 2 minutes.
5. When you are ready to lie down, get very comfortable and go through the 61 points exercise, or any form of the "Progressive Relaxation" exercise.
6. Plant the suggestion in your mind that you will have a complete, restful night of uninterrupted sleep.
7. Lastly, take long slow breaths, lengthening the exhalation slightly. At the end of each breath, pause with the body completely relaxed before breathing in again. Do this for as many times as you can. Do not expect to fall asleep, just perform the breathing in a way that invites sleep to come.

It may come as a surprise in the morning that you do not remember inhaling again!

You may omit or rearrange some of the steps above if your temperament is better suited to a different sequence.