



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Awesomeness of Various Types of Yoga & Their Pervasive Benefits For Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is a form of exercise that originated in ancient India and is practised widely across the world today. Yoga not only enhances your physical strength but also contributes largely towards your mental health and spiritual growth. Yoga not only keeps you fit but also has a lot of long-term benefits when you make it an integral part of your lifestyle. Some benefits of yoga include: Yoga helps in keeping the spine erect, enabling you to sit straight and not slouch. It also helps alleviate the stress on your spine, exerted through incorrect posture. Consistent practice of Yoga helps in keeping the spine strong and prevents fatigue. Many postures in yoga require you to lift your own weight which helps in making the bones stronger and helps ward off osteoporosis. The inverted and twisting nature of Yoga poses wring out the venous blood from the internal organs and allow oxygenated blood to flow. This also boosts the haemoglobin and RBCs . When you practice Yoga regularly, you get your heart into the aerobic range. This not only lowers the risk of heart attack but also relieves depression. The savasana (corpse pose) helps people with hypertension. This pose is said to be have resulted in great improvement in people with high BP. Yoga involves focusing on holding postures for extended periods of time. This helps in improving your body balance and developing muscle tone. Yoga can help you relieve the stress of modern life and helps you sleep deeper. Yoga encourages you to relax and slow your breath and to focus on the present. It shifts your focus from sympathetic nervous system to parasympathetic nervous system. Restorative asanas and meditation also encourage a turning inward of the senses, which relaxes the nervous system. Yoga draws attention to your breathing pattern and makes you aware of breathing correctly which filters the air, warms it and humidifies it removing the pollen and the dirt, supplying fresh oxygen into the lungs. Yoga like any other physical exercise can ease constipation and lower the risk of colon cancer. The movements that Yoga involves, improve the transport of food and remove waste through the bowels. This helps in getting rid of the waste from the system more effectively. Yoga can ease your pain and help people who suffer from arthritis, back pain and other chronic conditions. When you relieve pain, you're in a much better mood and are inclined to be more active. In this paper, various types of yoga exercises and concerning pervasive benefits are precisely described with adorable illustrations.

Keywords: Meditation, Stress, Hypertension, Spiritual growth, Restorative asanas

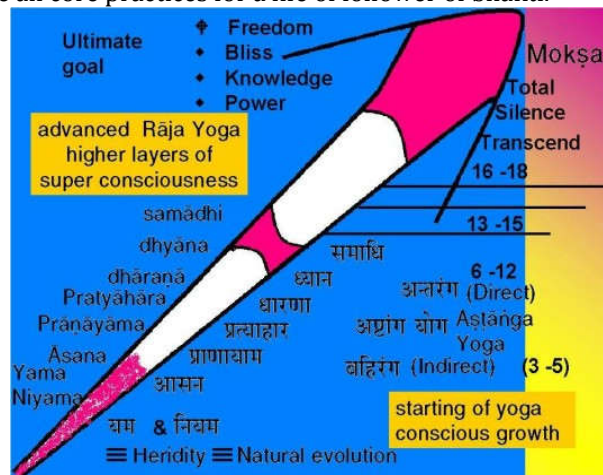
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INTRODUCTION

The word "yoga" essentially means, "that which brings you to reality". Literally, it means "union." Union means it brings you to the ultimate reality, where individual manifestations of life are surface bubbles in the process of creation. Right now, a coconut tree and a mango tree have popped up from the same earth. From the same earth, the human body and so many creatures have popped up. It is all the same earth. Yoga is more than just a physical exercise. The word "yoga" comes from the Sanskrit root Yuj which means to link up with, or combine. Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit word bhaj, which means - loving

service. Bhakti-yoga means to connect to the Supreme by means of loving devotional service. The *Bhagavad Gita*, the core spiritual text for ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), describes variety of yoga practices. Among them are karma-yoga (the practice of conscious action), jnana-yoga (philosophical study and contemplation), and hatha-yoga (the practice of yoga-asanas and breathing exercises). Today, some yoga practitioners consider the physical benefits of yoga to be the end in themselves. But according to the traditional yoga systems, physical exercises are just one step on path of God realization. The *Gita* ultimately prescribes bhakti-yoga (the path of dedication and love) as the culmination of other yoga practices. Bhakti-yoga focuses on developing our dedication, service and love for the Divinity, Lord Krishna. The path of bhakti-yoga is developed through a variety of activities. These include mantra meditation, or the chanting of the names of God. The chanting is done either individually on beads (japa) or in community by chanting mantras accompanied by music (kirtan). The study of sacred texts such as the *Bhagavad-gita* and *SrimadBhagavatam*, associating with like-minded spiritual aspirants, eating sanctified vegetarian food, and living in a way that upholds the principles of truthfulness, mercy, austerity, and cleanliness, are all core practices for a life of follower of bhakti.



The Indus people were probably familiar with some aspects of yoga. Followers of the Samkhya school used yoga as the means to liberate themselves from the hold of Prakriti. The Samkhya philosophy was probably the oldest of the Indian traditions to use yoga for spiritual liberation. The Jain yoga is also considered to be one of the most ancient yoga systems practiced in the Indian subcontinent. It focused more on self-denial and restraint to the extent of self-mortification as the means to liberation. The Buddha was against hurting the body for spiritual aims. He advocated a softer approach or the the middle path in which the emphasis was more on using right means to achieve right ends. The ancient Buddhist yoga consisted of the practice of dhyana or meditation and becoming aware of breath and body sensations to cultivate mindfulness.

The Rigvedic people had some vague notions of yoga. They were familiar with Munis, the hermits, Vratyas, the austere ones and Kesins, the long haired ones, who practiced different ancient forms of Yoga. The Kesins had the ability to hold breath and levitate in the air. The Upanishadic seers or Rishis practiced yoga and used it as the means to practice equanimity and overcome death. One of the earliest references to meditation is found in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

The practice of yoga in the vedic tradition was as a result of the internalization of the vedic ritual and its elevation symbolically from the material plane into the mental plane. This is evident in the Katha Upanishad, where outward and insincere ritual of Vajasravasa is discounted by the more honest and austere approach of Nachiketa towards the subject of liberation. The Katha Upanishad is the first vedic scripture to use the word "yoga" and define it as the control of senses to achieve the supreme state.

When young Nachiketa went, according to his father's wishes, to the world of Yama, the lord of death, Yama taught him the fire meditation and the contemplation of self (adhyatma yoga). The Svetasvatara Upanishad is more graphic in its details on how to practice yoga. It suggests how a yogi should hold his body erect, fix his mind and senses in his heart and practice breath control. The Upanishad lists some of the images a yogi may see in his meditation and the experiences he may undergo as he practices yoga. Yoga is described in this Upanishad as the best means to overcome sickness, old age and death. The Maitri Upanishad speaks of six fold yoga, which is probably a variation of the eightfold yoga elucidated in the Yogasutras. Some of the Upanishads can be best described as yoga Upanishads because they deal with the subject of yoga exclusively. The Yoga Chudamani, Yogasikha and the Yoga Tattva upanishads are good

examples of yoga Upanishads. They list the techniques and practices associated with various types of yoga and their relative importance in achieving liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

The Yoga Upanishads identify four types of yoga. They are mantra yoga, laya yoga, raja yoga and hatha yoga. In the Bhagavadgita we find karma yoga, jnana yoga, karma sanyasa yoga, buddhi yoga and bhakti yoga. Mantra yoga involves continuous mental repetition of a mantra or some sacred syllable till the mind become completely absorbed in it. Japa yoga is a variation of mantra yoga. Sabda yoga is its opposite in which a yogi attempts to listen to an internal universal current of sound passively by withdrawing into himself. Laya yoga involves the dissolution of the lower self and the mental activity and the rising of the kundalini energy from the base of the spine to the tip of the head. Its more extreme version is Hatha yoga practiced by some schools of Saivism such as the Nath yogis and the Kalamukhas. It involves the practice of some extremely difficult bodily postures, breathing practices and use of certain chemicals to gain complete mastery over the body and the mind. Similar to Hatha yoga is the Siddha yoga made popular in recent times by Swami Muktananda. Raja yoga or the king of the yogas is the most standard form of yoga, described by Patanjali in his Yogasutras. It involves the practice of eight fold yoga which is described below. Karma yoga means performing desire less actions as an offering to god. Jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, buddhi yoga involve the use of knowledge, devotion, intelligence in a divine centric life as the means for the highest purpose of achieving liberation. They do not focus on the techniques but suggest a way of life in which the sole purpose is liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, by developing equanimity, detachment, purification of the mind and the body and increasing the quality of sattva or purity. Some of the yoga systems that became popular in modern times are Kriya yoga of Paramahansa Yogananda, integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo, Siddha yoga of Swami Muktananda, Sabda yoga of Radhasoami Satsang and Sahaja yoga of Mata Nirmala Devi.

The Yogasutras of Patanjali describes the ashtanga yoga or the eight limbed yoga. It is also popularly known as Raja yoga or the king of yoga. As the name implies it involves eight different practices, which are considered as the eight limbs of the body of yoga. The eight aspects of ashtanga yoga are: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

Yama means practice of restraints or precepts. Some call them abstentions. The five restraints suggested by Patanjali are: not to be violent, not to lie, not to steal, not to indulge in sex and not to be greedy. One can see some parallels among the five restraints of the yoga system, the four noble truths of the Buddha and five great vows or maha vratas of Jainism. Niyama means rule or observance or discipline or practice. Patanjali suggested five rules or observances for the practitioners of yoga. They are practice of purity, (saucha), happiness or contentment (santosha), austerities or asceticism (tapas), study of the scriptures (svadhyaya) and surrender to God (Iswara Pranidhana). Asana means method of seating. It involves assuming various bodily postures as the means to make the body supple and fit enough to receive higher energies and sustain higher consciousness. Pranayama means control of prana. It is done by regulating the in breathing, out breathing and holding the breath in between for certain periods of time to calm the mind and relax the body to experience higher states of consciousness. Pratyahara means withdrawal of the senses from the sense objects. This is usually done by closing eyes, looking inwards and by focusing the attention on the area between the eye brows or on the thoughts and feelings that arise in the consciousness. Practice of pranayama also leads to withdrawal of the mind from the sense objects.

Dharana involves concentrating the mind on a single point or object such the image of a deity so as to overcome the sense of duality to which we are usually subject. In the final stages of dharana a practitioner experiences oneness with the object of his meditation by losing the distinction between the knower and the known or himself and the object of his meditation. Dhyana means meditation, which can be either passive or active. Constant practice of dhyana leads to equanimity, tranquility and inner happiness. Samadhi is a state of self absorption in which the movements of the senses and the mind cease and all distinctions between the knower and the known disappear. It is a state of unity and subjectivity in which mind comes to a complete rest while the practitioner remains conscious but absorbed in himself. Samadhi is further categorized into savikalpa samadhi and nirvikalpa samadhi. In savikalpa samadhi the state of self-absorption is not complete and some activities of the mind are still going on, where as in nirvikalpa samadhi the mind is completely and utterly at rest and one has lost all notions of distinction or differentiation. Each of these states are further divided into different categories.

Constant practice of yoga leads to several benefits and many transcendental states of consciousness and experiences. These benefits and states of consciousness are enumerated in the third chapter of the Yogasutras. The highest and ultimate result of yoga is samadhi or the state of unity.

Leading to God realization and liberation. Some of the immediate benefits of yoga are increased health, body vigor, longevity, youthfulness, intelligence, inner peace, relaxation, self-control and mindfulness. Claims are made now a days that mass yoga practices will lead to world peace, reduce crime rate and contribute to the overall welfare of the mankind. Yoga which was originally meant for the liberation of

individual souls is now presented as a solution for our global problems. While there is always an element of skepticism associated with such claims, there is no harm in practicing yoga for the welfare of the world or for the welfare of society. By thinking good about others no harm will ever come. Even if we assume that they do not do any real good, at least they will make people who participate in them feel better about themselves.

The yoga tradition recognizes several benefits of practicing yoga of which eight are considered to be the most important. One of the most important outcomes of practicing yoga is the attainment of supernatural powers or siddhis, which are listed below.

- Ability to become extremely small
- Ability to become extremely light
- Ability to become heavy
- Ability to move freely every where
- Irresistible will power
- Complete mastery over the body and the mind
- Control over the elements
- Ability to fulfill all desires

Other benefits mentioned in the Yoga sutras are knowledge of the past and future, intuition or pratibha, ability to read other people's minds and thoughts, knowledge of past lives, knowledge of the time of death, friendship, elephant strength, knowledge of the sun and the planets, knowledge of the body, steadiness of mind, extra sensory perception, ability to enter other bodies and body luster.

The purpose of yoga is inner transformation leading to the liberation of individual souls. In the modern world it is increasingly used for physical and mental purposes rather than spiritual. Some practice yoga under the delusional belief that they can gain magical powers to attract wealth and other benefits. If one is merely interested in physical relaxation, better health and inner peace, there is no harm in practicing yoga purely for material reasons. One can remain contented practicing simple yoga postures, breathing exercises and meditation techniques after learning them from a qualified teacher and enjoy whatever good that may come out of them. But those who take to yoga for spiritual reasons, should always keep its ultimate purpose in their minds. They should be careful about their attitude towards siddhis or the magical powers because they are a trap and a great hindrance, which can reverse their spiritual evolution and throw them into great confusion. The yamas and the niyamas of the ashtanga yoga are more important than the exercises themselves because they build the character and integrity which come handy when the siddhis or the spiritual powers begin to manifest themselves. Yoga is therefore a serious discipline and should be practiced with equal seriousness.

TYPES OF YOGA AND THEIR BENEFITS FOR HEALTH CARE

1) Ashtanga Yoga

Ashtanga Yoga is one of the oldest kinds of yoga. This branch of yoga has been mentioned in the Patanjali, a Sanskrit verse book. This type of yoga has 8 branches, which is why it is called Ashtanga yoga. It includes processes such as yoga positions, postures, breathing, concentration on objects, withdrawal of senses, meditation etc. The main benefit of this kind of yoga is the fact that it is supposed to purify the body and the mind at the same time and it is recommended for those people who are looking for a branch of yoga that would let them become physically and mentally fit as well. The postures and stances practiced under this type of yoga have to be done in different sets. There are six such sets. These sets are supposed to increase the heat of the body, hence remove impurities from the body, which will eventually lead to mental and spiritual wellness. The well-known sun salutations or the "Surya Namaskara" form a part of this type of yoga. This is how Ashtanga yoga has to be started, followed by the sets that the person is practicing at that point of time. The first stage of Ashtanga yoga is known as "Yoga Chikitsa" or Yoga Therapy. The second stage is known as NadiShodana or Nerve cleansing and the last stage is StirahBagah, which is steady strength. The new fad in yoga- Power Yoga is actually adapted from this kind of yoga. It is also one of the most popular yoga types right now.



This dynamic, physically demanding practice synchronizes breath and movement to produce an internal heat designed to purify the body. Ashtanga yoga, with its many vinyasas, is great for building core strength and toning the body. Prepare to sweat as you briskly move through a set sequence.

AshtangaVinyasa Yoga is a traditional method of Yoga that involves synchronising the movement of the body with a breathing technique known as Ujjayi Breath (breathing with sound) and the use of internal locks or Bandhas. This approach – the combination of the breathing, the use of internal locks (bandhas), as the practitioner moves dynamically through a series of postures (asana), is understood to activate internal heat which purifies the body's internal organs & nervous system. Apart from increased flexibility, stamina & strength, regular practitioners enjoy many health benefits on many different levels of well being.

2) Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga is a branch of yoga that emphasizes physical exercises to master the body along with mind exercises to withdraw it from external objects. The word haṭha literally means "force" in Sanskrit, and may have this association because the early Indians believed that its practice was challenging and "forced its results to happen" on the yogi.[2] The term "Hatha yoga" connotes a system of supplementary physical techniques within the broader concept of Yoga.[3]



The Hatha yoga origins have been credited by some scholars to the Nath yogi tradition of Shaivism, particularly to Gorakhnath. However, according to James Mallinson, Hatha yoga has more ancient roots and the oldest known twenty texts on Hatha yoga suggest this attribution to the Naths is incorrect. Hatha yoga was a broad movement that developed over a range of sectarian yoga traditions in India, one that was available to all and in some formulations and could be practiced by the householders (grihastha). Important innovations in Hatha yoga, for example, are associated with the DashanamiSampradaya and the mystical figure of Dattatreya.

The Hatha yoga practice emphasizes proper diet, processes to internally purify the body, proper breathing and its regulation particularly during the yoga practice, and the exercise routine consisting of asanas (bodily postures). The methodology sometimes includes sequences such as the Surya Namaskara, or "salute to the sun", which consists of several asanas performed as a fluid movement sequence.

The aims of Hatha yoga have traditionally been the same as those of other varieties of yoga. They include physical siddhis (special powers or bodily benefits such as slowing age effects) and spiritual liberation (moksha, mukti).[5] In the 20th century, techniques of Hatha yoga particularly the asanas (physical postures) became popular throughout the world as a form of physical exercise for relaxation, body flexibility, strength and personal concentration. It is now colloquially termed as simply "yoga". It has also developed into new movements and styles, such as the Iyengar Yoga, but these are not same as the traditional Hatha yoga.

Hatha yoga relies extensively on postures and asanas for its benefit. In fact, the combination of the syllables ha and tha itself is supposed to awaken the two governing energies of life. Of all the types of yoga, this is the one that focuses on the need of advancing the life forces, energy, the chakra and the kundalini the most. Hatha Yoga is all about promoting the spiritual and mental well-being of a person. It consists of asana, that is followed by the six shatkarmas. Both these put together form the physical and mental detox. It also includes Pranayama, bandhas, which are spiritual awakening and energy revealing practices. Hatha yoga is done in combination, by combining all these practices.

The asanas are supposed to rid the body of diseases, following which one can focus on making the body and the mind fit. The shatkarmas aid in cleansing the body, so that none of the energy is restrained or kept back. The Pranayama helps in spiritual awakening, which would definitely help a person lead a healthier and happier life, mentally and emotionally. However, it is suggested that people practice Pranayama only while under the guidance of a guru or a teacher.

3) **Mantra Yoga**

Mantra Yoga is the type of yoga that is practiced through the chanting of mantras. Thousands of mantras exist and it is believed that the vibrations released by these mantras can really help a person achieve their dreams and even cure diseases. What mantra yoga focuses on is learning these mantras in the right way. These mantras are believed to have a lot of power and it will not do for people to just chant them any way they want. Some guidance is required in this sphere, to practice this branch of yoga in an effective manner. Practice of mantra yoga requires some items as well- such as incense sticks, rosaries, etc. There are two ways in which the mantras in this type of yoga are divided.

What is Mantra Yoga?

Mantras are codified forms of the various facets of the Truth.

Mantras are seen by rishi's in their transcendental mental states, in higher realms of consciousness.

Every mantra has a rishi, a meter and a deity indicating a facet of the Ultimate.

Mantras are sound symbols and are all codified.

Mantras consist of one or more letters. A letter in Sanskrit is called aksharam. Na ksharati iti aksharam: one who does not perish is called aksharam. The ultimate Truth also is called as aksharam.

a. **Tantric Mantra**

Thousands of Tantric mantras exist and these are the mantras that people can use to attract wealth, health, money, success, etc. for themselves. But these mantras have a lot of restrictions on them, because of the power they have. It is suggested that people learn the Tantric mantras only with the guidance and help of a guru.



b. **Pouranicmantra** : These are simpler mantras that can be practiced by people without any guidance. These are basic mantras that are used for salvation and better emotional life of the people.



In the Yogic world, mantras or chants are highly important elements, and practicing these chants can have a significant impact on all three levels of life; the physical level, the mental level and the spiritual level. The repetition of mantras is used to engage the mental faculties and for producing positive vibrations, which can bring about a variety of benefits for those practicing the chants and in some cases, even for people who are listening to the chants.

According to the fundamentals of Mantra Yoga, each individual mantra has a deity that presides in it and constant chanting of a mantra can help an individual in absorbing the power of that particular deity. Positive vibrations are generated within the mind of the practitioner, which leads to an overall positive outlook towards life and every living thing in the world. Devotion to Mantra Yoga can yield significant results by awakening the divine energy within the practitioner, which is vital in keeping both body and mind cleansed.

A religious teacher, to whom a mantra is disclosed for the very first time. The teacher then takes it upon himself to reveal it to aspiring practitioners. Each mantra consists of a meter, and aspirants should always recite the mantra as it is meant to be. There are presiding deities for each and every mantra. A seed or a 'bija' is a common element in every mantra. Every seed gives the mantras a special power. Mantras are full of energy. Every mantra has a plug, but with constant repetition, the plug can be removed. In this way, practitioners can see the presiding deity.

Bhakti Yoga

Bhakti yoga is classically defined as the path of devotion, and it's often referred to as the yoga of love. Bhakti is one of the three primary paths to enlightenment laid out by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (the two other paths being jnana, the path of knowledge, and karma, the path of action, often interpreted as service to others). David Frawley, the director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies, calls bhakti "the sweetest of the yoga approaches" in his book *Yoga: The Greater Tradition*. He describes the practice as one of concentrating one's mind, emotions, and senses on the Divine in order to merge into the reality of divine love. Essentially, bhakti yoga is the cultivation of unconditional spiritual love.

Traditionally it involves devotion to a guru or a deity or deities, though Frawley points out that yoga teaches that there are infinite forms of the Divine: "Yoga gives us the freedom to worship the Divine in whatever form we like, or as formless." Whether you direct your love and devotion to a god, a guru, or the Divine in all things, as you cultivate a sense of love, gratitude, and devotion for something seemingly outside yourself, you essentially fill yourself with love. In the act of giving love, you receive it. The bhakti remedy for when you're suffering a broken heart, in other words, is to fill in the cracks with a love that is more permanent and transcendent. Practice long enough, and the subject-object love relationship (whether with a guru, a deity, or the Divine in some other form) disappears, and you become completely immersed in the love you are giving and receiving.

This branch of yoga is based completely on faith and belief. While practicing yoga, it is generally suggested that the person place their faith and belief on some supreme power such as God or any higher consciousness. One of the most important prerequisite for doing this kind of yoga is to be actually interested in it and invested in it.

People have to believe in this kind of yoga when they are doing it or the emotional flow and the energy derived from the yoga will not be beneficial at all. The biggest benefit of practicing Bhakti Yoga, out of all types of yoga is the fact that this can help cure a person's mental and emotional problems in such a way that their relationships with other people can also be improved. Emotional benefit is something one can gain from all branches of yoga, but with Bhakti yoga, it is different. One can reduce the attachment they have with any negative entities with the help of these kinds of yoga. They can also prevent any excess ego,

fickleness or any negative emotion or character **trait**, because the meditator or the yoga practitioner is relating themselves to a higher power, which will cause realization and inner peace as well.

Jnana Yoga

Jnana yoga is not a new fangled concept in the world of yoga. You can trace down the existence of this practice to the Vedic ages and the age of Bhagavad Gita. Hindu Lord Shri Krishna is believed to be the pioneering proponent of jnana yoga in the ancient age. However, the same practice has been modified and altered with the passing ages. Nevertheless, the flavor and the objective of this yoga have not faded over time and jnana yoga is still considered to be the path toward enlightenment. Jnana yoga is awareness, not realization. Jnana Yoga is the understanding of the laws of existence and the awareness of a means to synchronize with them. In Jnana Yoga one ceases to be attached to forms of expression and becomes drawn to the essence, the process of insight.

Jnana Yoga

Jnana Yoga—Yoga of Wisdom; or Cultivation of Discrimination

Jnana Yoga is the path of knowledge, ...
wisdom, introspection and contemplation

Jnana involves deep exploration of the nature our being by systematically exploring and setting aside false identities.

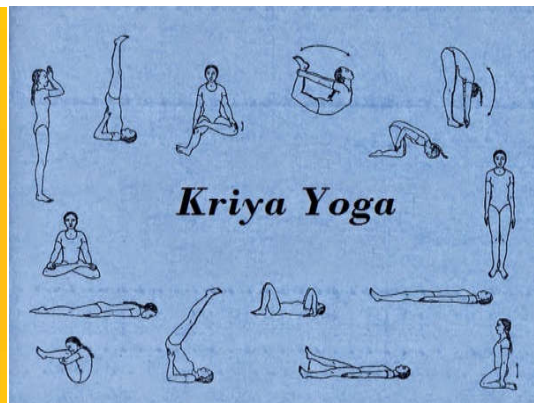
This kind of yoga is something related to the knowledge and the wisdom derived from practicing yoga. It is the tradition that is used to achieve meditative strength and wisdom as well. In Jnana yoga, a person derives his knowledge and his awareness through meditation. Meditation will help the person introspect and find rational answers to all questions that plague the body and mind. Of course, Jnana Yoga can be practiced by people alone or with the help of a guru.



The basic goals that this branch of yoga wishes to achieve is the experience of knowledge, developing wisdom and inner peace, realizing the truth and one's own nature and self- awareness. There is no need for any materials or things to practice this kind of yoga, for it is almost entirely about the mind and the soul.

Kriya Yoga

“We need laws to uphold the conduct that we do naturally when we are humans in the adult state. Kriya Yoga is a way to become a human in the adult state.” Swami Jayananda



This type of yoga focuses on bodily activities or physical activities. It's main intention is also to achieve inner peace and realization, but it does not really do much to calm mental tension or issues. Kriya yoga is a kind of yoga that would help people maintain some amount of physical fitness or even lose weight. There are around 70 kriyas that are a part of this kind of yoga, but only 20 of them are commonly known and practiced by people- for they are the ones that are the easier ones. Pranayama is a popular part of this yoga as well. This is not really a popular kind of yoga, even though there are mentions of it in Puranic texts. It has been revived recently and hopefully the revival is here to stay. People who are doing yoga for physical as well as mental and emotional fitness can combine this yoga with any other kind for the optimum benefit.

Swara Yoga



This is also not a popular kind of yoga, but it is highly important. Swara, in Sanskrit means a sound or a note. Yoga means union. So the combination of Swara and Yoga depicts a cosmic consciousness through which people can learn how to control their breath and thus lead a better life. Yoga is based on the belief that if people learn how to breathe properly, half their problem will be solved. This is true to an extent- breathing exercises are a part of all branches of yoga. But this is a form of yoga that focuses primarily on the breathing and the manipulation of the swara through breathing. This type of yoga also ties people with the nature around them, so it is very vital in today's world. Swara yoga is not tough to do and it can calm a person easily. It can also improve their concentration. People of all ages can indulge in these breathing exercises.

Kundalini Yoga

Kundalini Yoga is one of the most practiced branches of yoga. It deals with the psychic centers in the body or the "chakras" that are in all individuals. There are six such chakras in the body and Kundalini yoga hopes to reach all of them. Kundalini yoga believes that there are no other chakras in the body than the six main ones- the Sahasrara, Ajna, Visuddhi, Anahata, Manipura, Swadishtana and Mooladhara. These are the chakras that connect us to the realms of our mind and heighten our consciousness. The Kundalini yoga concept says that all these chakras can be awakened if there six centres are awakened through Pranayama, bandha, asanas, mudras etc. In fact, it is suggested that people practice this kind of yoga with some other branch of yoga- such as Mantra Yoga or Swara Yoga to get the most benefits.



Kripalu Yoga

This is the yoga that deals with the consciousness. Of all the branches of yoga, this is the most relaxed one- it is there to make sure that people release all the emotional and spiritual blockages that are stopping them from achieving their goals. As a result of this, the main focus of this kind of yoga is not getting perfect stance or procedure, as in Ashtanga yoga, but it is getting the right kind of emotion. There are three stages in this kind of yoga- learning the postures and your body's limits, holding these postures and developing awareness of one's own self and body and the last stage is a meditative one in which the

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person learns how to shift from one posture to another fluidly, without disrupting their mental processes or thoughts.

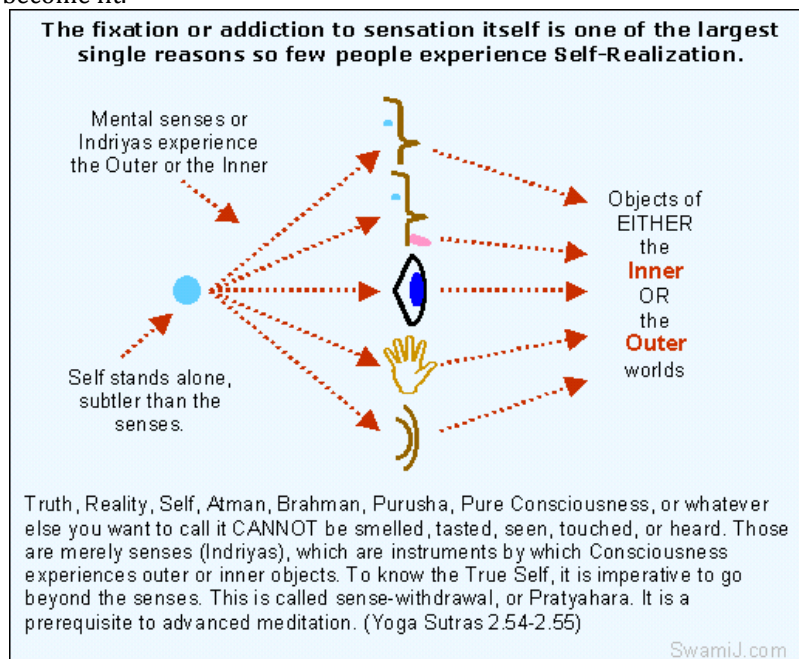


Raja Yoga

This is yoga that was initiated by the Sage Patanjali. This branch of yoga consists of eight stages, all prescribed by Patanjali. Raja Yoga is a yoga system that deals with the personality and the body. It deals in the practice of pranayama, asanas, yamas (restraint) etc.



After the physical fitness of the body is achieved through asanas, this branch of yoga deals with mental and emotional benefits through pratyahara (Sensory withdrawal) and dharana (concentration). This is followed by dhyana (meditation) which finally leads to samadhi (or absorption with the universal conscience). This type of yoga is concerned with mental and physical well-being. It's basis is the fact that humans will be able to achieve spiritual fitness or emotional fitness only after their body is devoid of diseases and has become fit.



CONCLUSION

The word yoga comes to us from the Sanskrit root word "yuz", It means to yoke, to unite. In the most ordinary sense yoga means uniting the body and the mind with the soul. In a dualistic sense it also means uniting the soul with the supreme self. In yoga, through a step by step process we try to dissolve the ego consciousness in the soul consciousness. We practice yoga by withdrawing the mind and the senses from the myriad distractions of the world in order to obliterate the boundaries of identity and form we create for ourselves. In a true sense, yoga is the means to reverse the process of creation and our bondage to the cycle of births and deaths. In the Bhagavadgita we see a much broader approach to the concept of yoga. According to the scripture, yoga means not just doing some mental or physical exercises, but uniting your actions, your thoughts, your life and yourself with the divine or a divine purpose. In other words you use your very life as the means to salvation, living every moment of it not for your selfish or egoistic goals and desires but as an offering to God and for the sake of God. Our knowledge of yoga comes to us mostly from the Yogasutras of Patanjali, who lived some time during the early Christian era. The Yogasutras is the most authoritative ancient scripture on yoga. However Patanjali did not invent the system of yoga. It was practiced in the Indian subcontinent much before Patanjali by the followers of Jainism, Saivism, Buddhism and many ascetic traditions some of which were later integrated into the vedic religion. Essentially in the tradition, once we attach the word "yoga" to anything, it indicates that it is a complete path by itself. If it is a complete path by itself, how should it be approached? If it was just a simple practice or an exercise, you could approach it one way. If it was an art form or just entertainment, it could be approached another way. Yoga means to move towards an experiential reality where one knows the ultimate nature of the existence, the way it is made. Yoga refers to union not as an idea, a philosophy or as a concept that you imbibe.

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