

~~yesterday~~

NOW

~~tomorrow~~

shantarām

HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

YOGA

a little summary



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HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

YOGA

In yogic literature we have a number of reliable texts on hathayoga. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika by Yogi Swatmarama is a very wellknownone. Another by Yogi Gorakhnath is known as the Goraksha Samhita. A third text is Gherand Samhita by the great sage Gherand. Besides these there is a fourth major text known as Hatharatnavali which was written later by Srinivasabhatta Mahayogindra. All these texts are considered to have been written between the 6th and 15th centuries A.D.

There are also minor references to hatha yoga in the ancient Upanishads and Puranas. The Upanishads date back earlier than the Buddhist period, which was around the 6th century B.C. The references made in the Upanishads indicate that the science of hatha yoga was known well before this period. There is another very important text known as Srimad Bhagavatam, the story of Krishna. In that voluminous book, there are references to hatha yoga in several chapters. Evidence of hatha yoga has also been found in the pre-Colombian culture of the Americas. Even now, at St. Augustine, a southern province of Colombia in South America, there are large stone figures and carvings depicting hatha yoga practices. However, the systematic form of hatha yoga began to emerge in India sometime in the 6th century A.D.

This gives us a glimpse of the historical aspect of hatha yoga. For centuries these books have guided spiritual aspirants. Many sects were also formed in India, Nepal and Tibet on the basis of hatha yoga. What is the subject matter of these books? Is it just to maintain a youthful body, or to obtain psychic powers (siddhis), or is it to develop the capacity to awaken the potential energy (kundalini) and attain supraconsciousness (samadhi)? As we analyze these texts carefully the purpose becomes very clear.

In ancient times hatha yoga was practiced for many years as a preparation for higher states of consciousness. Today, however, the real purpose of this great science has been forgotten altogether. The hatha yoga practices, which were designed by the rishis and sages of old for the evolution of mankind, are now being understood and utilized in a very limited sense. Often we hear people say, "Oh, I don't practice meditation, I only practice physical yoga, hatha yoga." Now the time has come to correct this point. Hatha yoga is a very important science for humanity today.

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HATHA YOGA

By the 6th century A.D. a lot of spiritual evolution had already taken place in India over many centuries. Two great men were born in India in the 6th century B.C. One is known internationally as Buddha and the other was Mahavir, the founder of the Jain sect, a tradition in Indian culture. Both of them performed severe austerities and both also preached 'non-violence,' ahimsa.

Finally, Buddha formulated his teachings, which are known as the 'Four Noble Truths.' Two of Buddha's systems became widely known all over the world. One is known as vipassana and the other is anapanasati, 'contemplation.' For this Buddha laid a basic foundation called the 'Eightfold Path,' which was a system of ethics more or less like the yama and niyama of raja yoga. As a result of Buddha's popularity, meditation became the main form of spiritual practice on the entire subcontinent. However, the preparatory practices were ignored. Ethics and morality were very much overemphasized. It was at this time that the thinkers of India began to reassess Buddha's system.

Indians believe that meditation is the highest path, but they disagree on one point – that one can start meditation immediately. Instead they believe one has to prepare oneself. Five hundred years after Buddha, and one hundred years before Christ, in India, at Nalanda in Bihar, a great university was established in the Buddhist tradition, devoted to the Hinayana system. Hinayana means the 'narrow path,' i.e. the orthodox Buddhist system. Many thousands of students from all over the known world came to study religion there.

However, there was another group amongst the Buddhists who did not agree with the orthodox interpretation of the teachings. They thought that it was not what Buddha himself had preached. So they established another university called Vikram Shila, eighty miles east of Munger, in Bihar, which became the teaching center of the Mahayana tradition. Mahayana means 'great path.'

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They were not orthodox Buddhists, but open-minded, liberal Buddhists. In that Mahayana tradition they also began to include tantra; however, this was not something Buddha had directly preached about, so orthodox Buddhists did not believe in it. From Vikram Shila a sect arose known as Sahajayana, the 'spontaneous way,' and Vajrayana, which includes the sexual matters between a man and woman. So, the practices of the tantric sects were very much misinterpreted by orthodox people.

After about five hundred years or so, the popularity and influence of Buddhism declined and so did these tantric sects and their practices. Then in the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries A.D., after the period of Buddhist decadence in India, some great yogis took the science and set out to purify the tantric system. Matsyendranath, Gorakhnath and a few other yogis in the tradition found that this important science was being ignored by serious-minded people and being wrongly taught by others.

So they separated the 'hatha yoga' and the 'raja yoga' practices of tantra from the rest and left out the rituals of tantra altogether, not even mentioning them. When they culled the practices, they picked up the useful, practical and noble practices of yoga from the tantric system. At that time it became necessary for them to classify some of the unclassified instructions in tantra.

Although Buddha was a great personality, his teachings later remained merely what we can call psychological experiences. Therefore, it became necessary to reintroduce a proper system of meditation. That is how the system of hatha yoga was established. It was at this time that Matsyendranath founded the Nath cult which believed that, before taking to the practices of meditation, you must purify the body and its elements. This is the theme of hatha yoga.

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SCIENCE OF PURIFICATION

Of the many authorities on hatha yoga, one outstanding personality is Swatmarama who compiled the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. It can also be translated as 'Light on Hatha Yoga.' However, the term pradipika actually means 'self-illuminating' or 'that which illumines.' It is a text which illumines a multitude of physical, mental and spiritual problems for aspirants. Gorakhnath, the chief disciple of Matsyendranath, had earlier written books, poems and prose on the hatha yoga system in the local dialect, but Swatmarama compiled the entire wisdom of hatha yoga in Sanskrit. In common with the other texts, he has expounded techniques such as asana, pranayama and shatkarma.

The beauty of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika is that it solves a very great problem faced by every aspirant. Swatmarama has completely eliminated the yama (moral codes) and niyama (self-restraints) which are the starting points in the Buddhist and Jain systems, as well as in Patanjali's raja yoga. Patanjali was a contemporary of Buddha and his system of yoga was influenced by the Buddhist philosophy of yama and niyama. In the Yoga Sutras he divided raja yoga into eight steps. Yama and niyama are the first two, followed by asana and pranayama. Then come pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, which are the final four.

Patanjali's contention is that you have to first perfect yama and niyama, otherwise asana and pranayama may fail to give desirable results. What are yama and niyama? Self-control, rules of conduct and observances: truth, non-violence, celibacy, non-stealing, nonaggrandizement, external and internal purity, and contentment, are some of the regulations. However, the authors of texts on hatha yoga, such as Swatmarama, were very much aware of the practical difficulties every person faced in relation to yama and niyama. Moreover, yama and niyama have more to do with religion than with a person's spiritual life. Experience has taught us that in order to practice yama and niyama, discipline and self-control, a certain quality of mind is needed.

Often we observe that when we try to practice self-control and discipline, we create more mental problems in our mind and personality. If we were to take the statistics of patients in mental hospitals, we would find that most of them are religious, because self-discipline and selfcontrol split the personality. Therefore, before you try to practice selfdiscipline and self-control, you must also prepare yourself.

If harmony is not created in the personality, then self-control and self-discipline will create more conflict rather than peace of mind. Therefore, the principle of antithesis should not be taught to everybody. It has always been expounded as a philosophical or religious principle, but from the spiritual standpoint it has mercilessly failed to assist man when confronted with the dilemma of his own evolution.

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EMPHASIS ON SHATKARMA

In the Hatha Yoga Pradipika the first thing we see is that Swatmarama does not worry at all about self-control and self-discipline in the form of yama and niyama. The order here is very different. He begins by saying that you should first purify the whole body – the stomach, intestines, nervous system and other systems. Therefore, shatkarma comes first, i.e. neti, dhauti, basti, kapalabhati, trataka and nauli. Hatha yoga begins with these practices.

However, shatkarma alone does not constitute the whole of hatha yoga. After shatkarma you should practice asana and pranayama. Selfcontrol and self-discipline should start with the body. That is much easier. Asana is discipline; pranayama is discipline; kumbhaka (retention of breath) is self-control. Sit in padmasana (lotus posture) for fifteen minutes. That is self-discipline. Why do you fight with the mind first? You have no power to wrestle with the mind, yet you wrestle with it, thereby creating a pattern of animosity towards yourself.

There are not two minds, there is one mind trying to split itself into two. One mind wants to break the discipline and the other mind wants to maintain the discipline. You can find this split in everybody. When this split becomes greater, then we call it schizophrenia.

This danger was clearly realized by the authorities and masters of hatha yoga. Therefore, they said, first discipline the body. They explained what they meant by the body. The subtle elements (tattwas), the energy channels (nadis), within the body should be purified. The behavior of the vital force (prana), the entire nervous system and the various secretions in the body should be properly maintained and harmonized.

After this one should go on to practice mudras like vajroli, sahajoli, khechari, shambhavi, vipareeta karani and others. In this way it will be possible to develop deep meditation. These practices will induce pratyahara and lead into dharana, dhyana and samadhi

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OBJECTIVE OF HATAH YOGA

In order to purify the mind, it is necessary for the body as a whole to undergo a process of absolute purification. Hatha yoga is also known as the science of purification, not just one type of purification but six types.

The body has to be cleaned in six different ways for six different impurities. When you clear the body of these impurities, the nadis function and the energy blocks are released. Then the energies move like wave frequencies throughout the channels within the physical structure, moving right up to the brain.

Therefore, we consider hatha yoga as the preliminary practice of tantra, raja yoga, kundalini yoga and kriya yoga. When the rishis discovered the science of hatha yoga, they did not have yoga therapy in mind. Although yoga has proved to be very effective in the treatment of many impossible and incurable diseases, the therapeutic effect of yoga is only a byproduct and incidental.

The main objective of hatha yoga is to create an absolute balance of the interacting activities and processes of the physical body, mind and energy. When this balance is created, the impulses generated give a call of awakening to the central force [sushumna nadi] which is responsible for the evolution of human consciousness. If hatha yoga is not used for this purpose, its true objective is lost.

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INNER ENERGY

In order to make the subject clear, it was termed hatha, i.e. **ha** and **tha** yoga, a combination of two beeja mantras. It has been explained in hatha yoga that ha represents prana, the vital force, and tha represents mind, the mental energy. So hatha yoga means the union of the pranic and mental forces.

When union between the pranic and mental forces takes place, then a great event occurs in man. This is the awakening of higher consciousness. Prana shakti, the life force, and manas shakti, the mental force, are the two fundamental creators. Every object in the universe, right from the smallest atom to the largest star, is composed of these two shaktis or energies. When they interact with each other, when the interplay of these two shaktis takes place, then creation begins to unfold. When the two shaktis are separated from each other, or they are dissolved back to their source, then creation is dissolved. That is the great pralaya, i.e. the total annihilation of matter. In the field of physics also they speak along the same lines.

All matter in this creation is alive. This is the first point. It is also conscious. This is the second point. Therefore, everything has potential consciousness and everything is alive.

In yoga, **life** and **consciousness** are known as prakriti and purusha; in tantra they are known as Shakti and Shiva. In hatha yoga they are called ida and pingala; in Taoism, yin and yang, and in physics, matter and energy. They have their own names in different times, in different philosophies. This physical body as it is seen is the gross perception. If you look at this body with psychic eyes, or with the eyes of specialized and sophisticated electronic equipment, perhaps you would understand that it has its own subtle counterpart also.

What happens internally whenever you start to think? If you have never thought about it, please start thinking now. What is thought? What happens within us when a thought is emerging, and a thought is diminishing, and when one is superseded by another, or when thoughts intercept each other?

This is called the interplay of shakti.

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HARMONY & CONCENTRATION

In hatha yoga there is the concept of harmonizing the twofold shaktis or energies in man, because they normally remain in an unbalanced and unharmonized form. Either the prana shakti is predominant and the mental shakti is subservient, or the mental shakti is predominant and the prana shakti is subservient. Due to this imbalance, either physical diseases occur or mental diseases manifest. When prana is subservient to mental shakti, then people are driven to bouts of insanity. They are admitted to mental hospitals and lunatic asylums. This is because they have too much mental shakti, and too little prana shakti to balance it. When prana shakti is predominant and the mental shakti is subservient, then you will find people becoming angry, quarrelling, creating wars, causing murders, committing crimes and all sorts of violent behavior. This is the effect of unbalanced prana shakti.

The concept in hatha yoga is, therefore, to bring about a harmony between these two great forces known as ida and pingala. In hatha yoga, first of all the purification of the whole bodily mechanism, the physical complex, takes place.

You should always keep in mind that the body, the mind and the spirit are not three, they are one. At one level of existence you see the body. At another level you perceive it as the mind. You should never consider spirit as different from body and body as different from spirit. They are one.

Concentration depends on purification

These then are the basic hatha yoga kriyas which tend to purify the energy patterns and bring a balance between them. When these patterns are well under control, then you can force your mind onto one point. Otherwise, what happens when you try to concentrate on a circle? You start to get a faint image of a circle, but then it starts to change its shape. It becomes elongated; it becomes oval; it starts to break asunder, and starts to go completely out of order. You are not able to form a perfectly steady image of the circle, because the nature of the pranas is fluctuation and the characteristic of the mind is motion. Prana can never be motionless. The pranas are always moving, and the mind is ever-changing as well. These two highly mobile energies have to be brought into a steady state. You can barely imagine how difficult it is. Concentration is extremely difficult. You may say anything. You may say that you can forget yourself completely, but that is not concentration. You may be able to steer yourself with ease amongst the visions, but that is not concentration. Concentration is unbroken awareness of one point at all times, like one line stretching into the far distance. It does not break, it does not turn, it does not reverse, it is not intercepted. It is unbroken and steady. One idea, the same idea, no other idea, no other thought. That is concentration, and it should happen by itself.

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TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH TRAINING

The basis of this body is divine, and therefore, through the practices of yoga, a process of transmutation of the physical elements of the body into non-physical elements takes place. Matter is convertible into energy, and vice versa. This is the underlying concept. Similarly, this body is convertible into spirit and spirit is convertible into matter. **This is the eternal play of maya (power of illusion) and creation.** It has been happening eternally. Therefore, there is no reason why anyone should think that this body is impure, and say that he will not meditate. This is a very unscientific way of thinking. We have examples in history, which you may or may not believe, of great saints, who, at the time when they wanted to leave this earthly existence, transmuted their body into light particles, and then completely disappeared. There was nothing left of their gross physical body. This body is not just flesh and bone, nor just marrow and myriads of secretions, but it is a gross manifestation of the very subtle shakti, polarized into prana and manas shakti.

Therefore, in hatha yoga, first of all we take care of the body and purify it by six methods. The most important point is that the nadis have to be purified for the purpose of meditation. Our body functions along very simple lines. Just as a machine produces wastes, likewise our body continuously produces wastes. These wastes are of three types: **mucus, gas and acidity.** If we cleanse the body internally from time to time, the excesses of these three metabolic products are removed, and their formation is regulated and balanced. It is in this sense that the shatkarmas are of very great importance. Cleansing the body of the three types of imbalance in the system is an important aspect of hatha yoga and therapy. In the process of hatha yoga, total training has to be imparted to every part of the body – to the nose, heart, respiratory system, circulatory system and so on. For example, the body has to be made free from any erratic behavior of the heart; the cardiac behavior has to be changed. As a preliminary to meditation there has to be change in the unconscious response of the heart. Otherwise, if you are a good meditator, and if you concentrate on one point, then the moment meditation takes place the coronary behavior will change, and certainly the body will have to suffer. Not only that, but the nervous system must also be trained, because it is the carrier of impulses through the sensory and motor channels. For an uninterrupted flow of energy to pass throughout the body it is vital that all blockages are removed, because if they are not, then in meditation you will have all sorts of abnormal manifestations. Many people who have these experiences say, “What is all this?”

Meditation should be full of beauty and serenity; meditation is supposed to be graceful and very attractive; it is not supposed to be frightening or annoying or disturbing. If it is as beautiful as flowers and as serene as a full moon, then why don't I experience it like that?" Meditation is blissful. It is total bliss, inside and outside also, providing that the correct approach to purification has been made. There are other people who say, “Oh, I am spiritual. I don't care about the physical body; hatha yoga only makes you body-minded.” What is this nonsense? When you are spiritually-minded and you sit for meditation then, when meditation is taking place, you will become aware of your body very forcibly. You may even have to go to a doctor because you may not be able to control it. To transcend the body does not mean to just forget about it. You have to purify it. Therefore, these six kriyas of hatha yoga (neti, dhauti, basti, nauli, kapalbhati and trataka) are necessary for spiritual aspirants.

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NETI, DHAUTI, BASTI, NAULI KAPALBHATI AND TRATAKA

Clavicular breathing is the final stage of total rib cage expansion. It occurs after the thoracic inhalation has been completed. In order to absorb a little more air into the lungs, the upper ribs and the collar bone are pulled upwards by the muscles of the neck, throat and sternum. This requires maximum expansion on inhalation and only the upper lobes of the lungs are ventilated. In daily life, clavicular breathing is only used under conditions of extreme physical exertion and when experiencing obstructive airway diseases such as asthma.

Clavicular breathing exercise

Lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.

Perform thoracic breathing for a few minutes. Inhale, fully expanding the rib cage.

When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collar bone should also move up slightly. This will take some effort.

Exhale slowly, first releasing the lower neck and upper chest, then relax the rest of the rib cage back to its starting position.

Continue for a few more breaths, observing the effect of this type of breathing.

UNION

An important point which has been omitted by the commentators is that hatha yoga is not only the union of prana and mind. In fact, it means the union of prana and mind with the Self. Now let's clarify this. In the spine there are three major nadis known as ida, pingala and sushumna.

Nadi here does not mean nerve. It is not a physical channel. Nadi means flow, like the flow of electricity within a cable. One wire carries the negative force and another carries the positive force of electricity. So, in hatha yoga, **ida** nadi represents the negative force, **the flow of consciousness**, **pingala** represents the positive force, **the flow of vital energy**, and **sushumna** nadi represents the neutral force, **the flow of spiritual energy**.

The union, the connection between these three flows occurs in ajna chakra [the eyebrow center]. Therefore, let's revise the literal meaning of hatha yoga. Commentators have stated that union between ida, pingala and sushumna is hatha yoga. When this union, takes place there is an instant awakening in mooladhara chakra at the base of the spine. This is the seat of primal energy or kundalini shakti. The awakening of kundalini is the subject matter of hatha yoga. Through the practices of hatha yoga, union is brought about.

As a result of that union, the awakening of kundalini takes place. When awakening occurs, then kundalini ascends to higher realms of consciousness, and finally it is established in sahasrara chakra at the crown of the head. When kundalini is established in sahasrara chakra, that is called yoga, not hatha yoga. This is the difference between yoga and hatha yoga. Yoga means union of Shiva [consciousness] and Shakti [energy]. Shakti is kundalini energy; Shiva is the supreme consciousness seated in sahasrara chakra. When awakening takes place in mooladhara at the base of the spine, then kundalini starts ascending. She ascends through sushumna, not through ida and pingala. Sushumna is the highway for kundalini. It passes through various chakras, sometimes all of a sudden and sometimes very slowly. When it unites with ida and pingala in ajna chakra, that is called hatha yoga. Then, after this first union, it forges ahead to sahasrara chakra. There it unites with the supreme consciousness, Shiva.

That is called yoga, which means ultimate union. Therefore, the ultimate object of hatha yoga is to experience yoga.

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POTENTIAL ENERGY

Awakening of kundalini is a fact, but more important than that is awakening of sushumna. Much more real and important is awakening of the chakras. People do not understand this difficulty at all. Awakening of the chakras must take place first, because the chakras are the junctions through which energy or shakti is distributed to 72,000 circuits.

If the chakras are not functioning properly, if there is a blockage somewhere, then the energy cannot penetrate. If the junction somewhere in your building is faulty, you will not get electricity there. For the whole complex there may be many, many circuits, not merely one or two. Maybe all are intact, but the basic connection may be wrong somewhere near the main switch. Then what will happen? Even the junctions that are intact will not be able to supply electricity. So, purification and awakening of the chakras is essential.

This can be accomplished through the practice of pranayama. Supposing you have purified the nadis **by asana and pranayama**, and you have also awakened the chakras by pranayama and a few asanas, there then remains the awakening of sushumna [the central channel]. Sushumna flows from mooladhara chakra [at the lowest circuit] to ajna [the highest circuit] and it is a very important nadi. The awakened kundalini shakti has to pass through sushumna, but if this highway remains closed, kundalini cannot penetrate beyond mooladhara.

Therefore, before awakening kundalini, sushumna should be awakened.

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HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

PRANA MISSION CONTROL

There is another difference between Patanjali's system of raja yoga and the traditional system of hatha yoga. The authors of the hatha yoga texts were very much aware of the difficulty in controlling the fluctuations of the mind. You may manage it for some time, but still you will not be able to succeed all the time. So they adopted another method. The hatha yoga texts state very clearly that by controlling the pranas, the mind is automatically controlled. It seems that prana and mind exert an influence on each other. When the pranas are restless, it affects the mind and vice versa. Some people find it easier to control the mind than to control the prana.

Perhaps a few people may succeed, but most people cannot control the mind by the mind. The more they try, the more the split grows. There is another important point to be noted. Sometimes you are inspired. You feel very well, very one-pointed, but it does not happen every day. Therefore, the authors of hatha yoga struck another theme: "Don't worry about the mind. Ignore it. Practice pranayama." By practicing pranayama correctly, the mind is automatically conquered. However, the effects of pranayama are not so simple to manage. It creates extra heat in the body, it awakens some of the dormant centers in the brain, it can alter the production of sperm and testosterone. It lowers the respiratory rate and changes the brain wave patterns. When these changes take place, you may not be able to handle it. Therefore, hatha yoga says that the shatkarmas must be practiced first.

The purpose of emphasizing shatkarma is to prepare a base for the higher practices of pranayama. Shatkarma purifies the whole system and removes blockages on the paths of ida and pingala. When there are no mental or vital blockages, the breath in both the nostrils flows systematically. When the left nostril flows it means ida is active and the mind is dominant. When the right nostril flows it means the breath in pingala is active and the pranas are predominating. The flow of the breath in alternate nostrils indicates the state of balance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

If ida is flowing and you are practicing meditation, you will go to sleep and your brain will produce delta waves. If the right nostril is flowing and you are trying to meditate, your brain will produce beta waves and you will be thinking many thoughts at the same time. When both the nostrils are flowing equally, that means sushumna is flowing. When sushumna flows you can meditate without any difficulty. Awakening of sushumna, making sushumna nadi flow, is the most important process in yoga which precedes kundalini awakening.

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HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

BE LIFTED

Shat karma is the preparation for pranayama. Most people think of pranayama as breathing exercises but it is far more. Ayama literally means 'dimension,' not 'control.' So pranayama is practiced in order to expand the dimensions of prana within you. Within us are planes of existence, areas of consciousness, which are in absolute darkness. These planes are much more beautiful and creative than the ones we live on now.

However, how are we going to penetrate and illuminate them? It is useless to talk about the different stages of consciousness. You must be able to experience them, even as you experience the state of dreams or sleep. When the pranic energy is aroused and awakened through the practice of pranayama, it is circulated to these dark areas of consciousness. Then the inner city is illuminated and man is reborn into a new dimension of existence, a new area of experience.

practical aspect

If you want to achieve this transcendental experience, the practices of hatha yoga and pranayama should be perfected. The rules and recommendations should also be observed. This does not mean giving up all the pleasures in life, but as you well know, "you can never have your cake and eat it too."

So, once you have decided to step into another dimension of consciousness, you must be ready to sacrifice some of those things which are definitely detrimental to the practice of pranayama and hatha yoga. Therefore, remember that the practices of hatha yoga, asana and pranayama are ultimately intended for developing the quality of human consciousness, **not just the mind or body**. Philosophy is intellectual and you can never reach the point of evolution through intellect. Intellect becomes a barrier to spiritual awakening, and we have to find a powerful means of transcending it. Hatha yoga is most effective because you are working on the prana and bypassing the mind.

Hatha yoga is a great science which everyone can practice according to his or her own capacity. Maybe not all, but at least a few techniques can be practiced each day. Hatha yoga techniques, along with asana and a few pranayama, are sufficient for most people. It is necessary to practice these preparatory limbs first. Then you may go farther. If the preparation is perfect, there will be no need to learn meditation from anyone. **One fine morning while practicing pranayama your mind will be lifted into a new realm of consciousness.**

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HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

THERAPEUTIC ASPECTS

Hatha yoga is a method of preparing the system for spiritual awakening but it is also a very important science of health. Since ancient times it has been used by yogis and rishis for the relief and elimination of all kinds of diseases and defects. It is true that the practices require more time and effort on the part of the patient than conventional therapies, but in terms of permanent, positive results, as well as saving the enormous expenditure on medicines, they are certainly more worthwhile.

What makes this method of treatment so powerful and effective is the fact that it works according to the principles of harmony and unification, rather than diversity. The three important principles on which physical and mental therapy is based are as follows:

- 1. Conferring absolute health to one part or system of the body thereby influencing the rest of the body.**
- 2. Balancing the positive and negative energy poles [ida/pingala, prana/apana].**
- 3. Purifying the body of the three types of wastes [doshas].**

If you have fifteen grandfather clocks together on the same wall, all with pendulums of identical length and weight, you will notice that after some time all the pendulums become synchronized in their movements. This occurs quite naturally according to the law of mutual rhythms and vibrations.

In this physical body, the various organs and systems all have their own functions to carry out. But there should be complete coordination between them. If any of the organs or systems of the body are not able to coordinate with each other, it means that not one but all the systems and organs are unbalanced. Thus, in any sickness, whether physical or mental, every system is out of coordination. According to the law of mutual rhythms, all you have to do in order to regain the health of the whole system is to bring one organ or system to a state of health. Then all the others will naturally follow suit. Ill health of one system creates ill health in the rest of the both.

You cannot say that your stomach is bad and everything else is alright. Therefore, a sick person with a number of ailments should generally be given treatment for only one of them. If you are able to create health in one system of this body, gradually the whole body begins to improve.

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HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

THERAPEUTIC ASPECTS

Most yoga teachers today, however, do not follow this system. Depending on their knowledge of medical diagnosis, they make a very long list of practices — one for constipation, one for nose-bleeds, one for something else. They think that by teaching a sick person various hatha yoga techniques for his different ailments, he will get better. Their system is based on the popular concept that various diseases belong to different groups, which does not take into account the interrelationship of all the organs and systems.

Conserving energy in this physical body is another important aspect of health which has been ignored by most of the healing sciences. We have given so much importance to nutrition, but we have missed the real source of energy, which is inherent. This energy is something like positive and negative electrical charges pulsating throughout. The correct balance of these opposite forms of energy creates good health. Whenever these positive and negative flows are suppressed, blocked, dissipated or poorly distributed, **disease inevitably results.**

The different organs and systems of the body do not subsist merely on food and vitamins. The main source of energy in life is these plus/minus or positive/negative charges. Therefore, the science of physical and mental harmony is known as hatha yoga.

Physical and mental therapy is one of the most important achievements of hatha yoga. So far, hatha yoga has succeeded in diseases like asthma, diabetes and blood pressure where modern science has not. Besides this, hatha yoga has proved very effective in cases of epilepsy, hysteria, rheumatism and many other ailments of a chronic and constitutional nature. In fact, we have found that most diseases of a chronic and constitutional nature can definitely be reversed through hatha yoga.

The psychic and mental diseases which human beings are suffering from are nothing but a state of disharmony in the energetic system. In order to alleviate them we will have to take a new look at our body and enlarge the dimension of modern medical science. We will have to redefine the body, the classification of disease and the system of diagnosis.

What is being discovered more recently is that asana and pranayama are more powerful and effective ways of controlling the whole body. They are the first steps in allowing us to not only alter the mechanisms of one element, but to gain control over the total structure of the brain and mind, the controlling system which allows us to direct every aspect of our lives, and the energy within that.

shantarām

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SO WHY?

In the last forty years hatha yoga has been accepted as a therapeutic science all over the world and many scientific studies have been conducted in this field. Today we teach yoga to people because it is very necessary. Man has become sick and medical science is not able to meet the challenge. Hatha yoga, however, has been helping everybody.

Therefore, we should not forget what hatha yoga really stands for.

Behind every sick man there is a spiritual man. Behind a diabetic there is a yogi. Behind a man suffering from depression there is an aspirant. When a patient comes for help, teach him yoga and make him better. Treat his sickness, but do not stop there. Take him further into the spiritual domain of life. This is the mistake that most yoga teachers make in the West.

They just take a patient with arthritis, rheumatism or insomnia, teach him a few exercises and that is it.

Hatha yoga has not been used to treat the total personality. Just to improve the physical health is not enough. The mental health must also improve, the nature must change, the personality must change, the psychological and the psychic framework also has to change.

You should not merely feel freedom from disease, but freedom from bondage and from the vagaries of the mind.

shantarām

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PATANJALI'S EIGHT LIMBS OF YOGA

In the second century C.E., Sage Patanjali compiled 196 aphorisms in four books, or chapters, called the Yoga Sutras. In these passages, Patanjali describes the eight aspects of a Yogic Lifestyle and called it Ashtanga Yoga or the Eight Limbs of Yoga. The Eight Limbs of Yoga are guiding principles on how to live a meaningful and purposeful life. They provide a foundation of moral and ethical behavior, self-discipline, personal development, attention toward one's well-being, and they help bring awareness to how we define and integrate spirituality into our lives on and off the mat.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga are a pathway that can lead to physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and human flourishing.

Yama

Moral code of conduct, the way we interact with others ~ in thoughts, words, and behaviors;

Ahimsa	non-violence, not harming, kindness, compassion for all
Satya	truthfulness, honesty, integrity
Asteya	non-stealing, not taking from others, big-heartedness
Brahmacharya	non-excess, awareness of energy
Aparigraha	non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-attachment, awareness of abundance

NiYama

Self-observation, self-study, self-discipline ~ integration of body, mind, & spirit;

Saucha	purity, cleanliness
Santosha	contentment, embracing the moment for what it is
Tapas	discipline, training the senses of the body & mind
Svadhyaya	sacred self-examination, contemplation Isvara Pranidhana surrender to the Divine

Asana

Physical posture In the West, asana is the most commonly recognized limb of Yoga. Yoga Sutras 2.46-2.48 are related to the body being steady and at ease, which can contribute to decreasing the fluctuations of the mind.

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Pranayama

Energy control Prana means life force or energy. Pranayama practices (breathing exercises) have a positive effect on the Parasympathetic Nervous System (rest and digest system) and contributes to a calm and focused mind. The length of inhalation and exhalation of the breath, and the specific Pranayama practices, are chosen based the practitioner's experience with the practice and/or the imbalance in body and/or mind. The goal is to strengthen and cleanse the nervous system and increase our prana.

Pratyahara

withdrawal of the senses Pratyahara occurs when the practitioner is so focused on the practice (Asana, Pranayama, or Meditation) they become unaware of outside distractions. When the body becomes more readily still and the movement of prana is noticeable, the practice of sense withdrawal becomes possible. This stage of practice is akin to the ripples on a lake becoming stilled. External objects, be they desires created by the mind or anything else, are seen clearly as only temporary. When we no longer cling to these objects and nonattachment becomes possible, our true nature turns inward.

Dharana

Is a state of refined concentration, with the movement of prana stable. This state is a precursor to meditation.

Dhyana

This is the deep state of meditation where the Yogi is wholly immersed, and senses are stilled. The lake of individual consciousness is so still it reflects clearly the ultimate reality, that all is One.

Samadhi

Here Classical Yoga states that individual consciousness and Universal Consciousness merge. The bliss experienced here is said to be millions of times that of the experience of the ordinary, separate mind. Bliss in this context is outside of normal experience and beyond all words.

shantarām

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