

## What is Yoga and *Why one should practice Yoga*

*Yoga* is a Sanskrit word that generally translates to *union* in English. Union in this sense refers to one of many ideas, the most common of which are: the union of male and female polarities in the body, the union of consciousness and energy, the union of yin and yang, the merging of individual ego with Universal Ego, or merging of Individual self with Universal Self. It is perhaps best explained as an applied science aimed at achieving equilibrium between thought and action, body and mind, and between potential and kinetic energies within the human body. It is also described as union with God, although no belief in a supreme being is required, and one need not be religious. Yoga is a science that works for all - the religious, the spiritual, the wanderer, the agnostic and the atheist.

Though the Science of Yoga has been there from the time of Rig Veda, It is Maharishi Patanjali has made it a separate branch of study and formulated the Sutras based on the knowledge available in his time and his practical experience in practicing the methods that were in vogue at that time.

Lets us discuss in depth the methods that are used to achieve the state of Yoga, with reference to Maharishi Patanjali.

The very first Sutra of Maharishi Patanjali sheds light on what is the essence of yoga: ***Atha yoganushasanam.***

***"Atha"*** means now, it is the eternal present , that which only exists. What is existing is the present, neither past nor future.

***"yoganushasanam"*** , the instruction of yoga that should restore / reveal the true essence of Oneness. The universal Oneness is intact and in no time it is separate, but due to the veil of ignorance it is felt

that there is separation. So, the practice of Yoga should remove that veil to realize the Oneness. That is the essence of 'Yoga Sadhana' (practice of Yoga). Then, what is Yoga?

***yogah citta-vrtti-nirodah:*** Cessation of vagaries / oscillations of intelligent consciousness of the mind, which are a result of internal / external influences.

To reach that stillness to keep the mind in eternal present there are various steps given by Maharishi Pathanjali are to be followed.

### ***Why one should practice yoga***

Yoga is an applied science, and if practiced regularly it enlightens our lives like a Guru (dispeller of darkness). It is impossible to enumerate the many benefits yoga bestows upon the Sadhaka. Whatever may be our problem, it can be solved with the practice of yoga. It is useful for people of all walks of life and of all ages. Here are some of the benefits of practicing yoga:

- ***Best Exercise for Physical Fitness:*** The yoga asanas and pranayamas are more effective to keep us physically fit, and in less time, than other fitness regimes. We don't need any equipment, nor much space or a separate facility for the practice of yoga. A small space of 3x6 feet and a mat or blanket is sufficient. A daily 30-minute practice keeps us in good physical health.

- ***Removal of Toxins from Our Bodies:*** We live in a highly polluted environment, and in most cities it is worse. Even the food we eat contains heavy toxins, which are a major cause of many diseases, including cancer. By regular practice of yoga we remove these toxins from our bodies and become healthier.

- ***Improving the Function of the Brain:*** The practice of Yoga funnels more prana to the brain, which in turn enhances its function. It improves our memory power, concentration, clarity in thinking and conceptual understanding. We know these things are very important in all walks of life and at all ages. When these functions are improved, we can perform our duties faster and with more efficiency, whether it is academic study, office or household work, athletics, or living life in general, and through this efficiency we free up more time for other activities.

- ***Eradicating Lifestyle Diseases:*** The human body depends upon the glandular system for its proper functioning. If any of our glands are impaired, whether from the foods we eat, unhealthy habits, sedentary lifestyle or inborn defects, we are then prone to disease. By practicing yoga regularly, one can keep his or her glandular system in optimal condition and thus can become disease free.

- ***An Aid to Reduce and Manage Stress Effectively for Increased Health:*** Stress is everywhere in our modern lives. There is no escaping it in our schools, workplaces, and even when we are at play. By practicing the Astanga Marga Yoga of Maharishi Patanjali, one can reduce and manage stress effectively and can live in joy and happiness.

***HOW TO PREPARE ONESELF FOR THE PRACTICE OF YOGA*** When we understand the benefits of yoga for physical, mental and spiritual wellness and improvement, we then decide to make yoga practice a part of our daily routine. It is our human nature that once we choose to

undertake a certain activity; we plan how to do it, whether consciously or unconsciously. If the planning is on the right track, it is very easy to perform the task; otherwise we fail to achieve the required results. For success with any task we need to have a lucid plan and yoga is not an exception. The first and foremost step in planning our yoga practice is to decide on the amount of time we want to allocate for it and at what time of day. It is highly advisable to choose a daily fixed time for practice, preferably early morning, one and a half hours before dawn. This is the time the air is fresh and the surroundings calm and serene, and the mind is rested after a good night's sleep. Next, formulate a practice based on the results one desires to achieve. That is, decide if the practice is only for fitness, overall physical and mental health or for spiritual enlightenment, or perhaps for all of these things. In any case certain things are important to be followed such as arranging the practice area and having a positive frame of mind. The place selected for practice of Yoga should be free from dirt and dust with good ventilation for free flow of fresh air. Arrange your seat facing east or north. Before the start of the session, remember the Yamas and Niyamas and re-affirm your commitment to practice them in your daily life.

-Ramachandra Raju kalidindi



Om Tat Sat