

## About Yoga

The primary aim of yoga is to restore the mind to simplicity and peace, to free it from confusion and distress. This sense of calm comes from the practice of asanas (postures) and pranayama (breathing). Unlike other forms of exercise which strain muscles and bones, yoga gently rejuvenates the body. By restoring the body, yoga frees the mind from the negative feelings caused by the fast pace of modern life. The practice of yoga fills up the reservoirs of hope and optimism within you.

*B.K.S. Iyengar*

Yoga is a Sanskrit word that means union or to join. There are many different styles of Yoga, but in general is interpreted as the union of mind, body and spirit. The practice of Yoga has a number of benefits, but the main goal is to use the breath and the body to still the relentless activity of the mind. In most westerner's minds, Yoga is associated with Yoga poses (Asana) but in fact Asana is just one aspect of Yoga. The practice of Yoga is thought to be between 4000 and 6000 years old and has its origins in the Indus valley. The sage Patanjali codified Yoga around 150 to 200 CE in the Yoga Sutra's and he describes eight limbs to Yoga:

**Yama** - Yama comes from the root word 'yam' 'to hold' or 'to rule', yama yoga represents the behaviours that 'control' certain negative tendencies (the 'animal/instinctive nature') that occur in all human beings.

- Ahimsa (non-violence)
- Satya (truth)
- Asteya (non-stealing, or non-cheating)
- Brahmacharya (continence, involving self-restraint and moderation in all you do)
- Aparigraha (non-coveting, including no envy, jealousy or unhealthy competitiveness).

**Nyama** - The niyamas are the general actions that are necessary if we truly want to achieve a condition of health and deep balance within ourselves. The Niyamas ask us to aim for:

- Purity (Sauca)
- Contentment (Santosha)
- Ardour (Ishawar-pranidhana)
- Discipline (Tapas)
- And study of the Self (Svadhyaya)

**Asana** - posture

**Pranayama** - breath-control

**Pratyahara** - sense-withdrawal

**Dharana** - concentration

**Dhyana** - meditation

**Samadhi** - full absorption

Hatha yoga is generally interpreted as the yoga of (physical) action and is practised in most Western Yoga classes. These include styles of yoga such as Yin, Yang, Ashtanga, Iyengar, Bikram etc.

Hatha Yoga is a form of Raja or Royal Yoga and usually 'Hatha' Yoga classes consist of the following elements:

- Limbering postures
- Asanas
- Some pranayama/breath awareness
- Some meditation
- Some theory and philosophy
- Relaxation

Hatha means forceful implying that a strong practice will help prepare the body for further practices such as meditation and long periods of sitting. Hatha also means balance - Ha means the sun and Tha means the moon and can represent male and female energies. Much Hatha work is on the physical body as a preparation for the deeper practices like meditation which are more often experienced as part of the Raja Yoga pathway.

### The importance of breath in Yoga

Breathing is one of the simplest things we do, it is an unconscious bodily function and our breathing is regulated by our physical need for oxygen. But the breath is also regulated by our moods and by our emotional state. Just as the breath is regulated by the mind, we can use this process in reverse and use the breath to control the mind. Breathing in a conscious and controlled manner allows us to relax, to control our emotions and to help develop body/breath/mind consciousness.

“Breath is life. And life is breath. So long as the breath remains in the body, so long there is life. Hence by the means of the breath one attains immortality in this world.”

*Kaushitaki Upanishad*

### Guidelines for personal comfort

To gain maximum benefit from your yoga you should consider the following:

- It is advisable not to eat a heavy meal within 2 hours of the start of your class, or a light meal within one hour
- Yoga is best performed with empty bowels and bladder
- Wear loose comfortable clothing, and remove any dangling jewellery
- Ensure all phones are switched off or on silent for the duration of the class
- Please bring a yoga mat, or a blanket to lie on. You may also find cushions and blocks useful we will have some spares of both blocks and mats
- An extra blanket may be useful for relaxation in the cold weather
- If you have a heavy period or a bad cold, head down and inverted postures may be uncomfortable - you will learn plenty of alternatives to use

### The British Wheel of Yoga

Established in 1965 the British Wheel of Yoga is the governing body for Yoga in the UK and incorporates teachers from many different backgrounds and styles. Classes usually start with relaxation, meditation, limbering postures, classical asanas (e.g. from Hatha Yoga Pradipika) and pranayama. BWY teachers have met or exceeded the National Occupational Standard to teach yoga.