

What is Yoga?

Yoga is a Sanskrit word that means unity, joining or "bringing together." Yoga refers to the unification of all aspects of the self: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

Hatha Yoga concentrates on the physical body. The first syllable, *HA*, refers to the sun and indicates positive or masculine energy, and also the sound of an indrawn breath. The second syllable, *THA*, refers to the moon and indicates negative or feminine energy, and also the sound of an exhalation, or outgoing breath. Hatha Yoga practice promotes the nurturing of vital energies within the physical body by assuming various postures (*asanas*), proper breathing (*pranayam*), and meditation.

The purpose of Hatha Yoga is to discipline the physical body and increase strength and flexibility which, in turn, promotes health and vitality.



The Mind Controls the Body

One of the basic tenets of Hatha Yoga is that the mind influences and controls the body. If the mind is not strong, the body can develop disabilities affecting the body's structure, functions, circulation and elimination. Toxins are retained in the body instead of being cleansed. These toxins can cause damage and ill health. Daily life in modern society introduces stress to the body and distractions to the mind, causing the mind and the body to disconnect, leading to physical and mental health problems.

Postures (Asanas)

The various postures or positions assumed in Hatha Yoga practice are called *Asanas*. *Asana* is a Sanskrit word that means "a firm seat." Holding the body in a particular position encourages stability to the body, poise to the mind, and purity to the channels that conduct vital energy. *Asanas* keep the internal and external parts of the body in good health. They promote the elimination of waste matter from the body, and increase flexibility and strength.

Breathing (Pranayam)

Without breath, the body dies. The proper flow of oxygen to the blood is absolutely necessary to maintain life and health. *Pranayam* comes from the root word *prana*, or life force. *Pranayam* is the control of breathing and of the life force within you. Breathing exercises are used in aid to meditation, cleansing the body and mind, and also to maximize the effectiveness of *asanas*.

Meditation

Meditation is a deep concentration on a particular subject or topic that can induce a state of consciousness different from our normal, waking state. During meditation, one can find themselves in a trance state where deep relaxation and/or healing work can take place. Meditation is an excellent way to reduce stress from daily life, to calm the body and mind, to increase concentration and mental power, and to remove toxins from the body through the use of proper breathing.

In the context of Hatha Yoga, meditation is conducted while maintaining an *asana*, and concentrating on breathing.

