

## History of Yoga

The quest for immortality and freedom has always been a fundamental occupation of human civilization. Hatha Yoga is one of these practices. Its roots go back some five thousand years. Georg Feuerstein cites that the shamanistic civilization in the pre - Indus valley circa 5000 BC India preceded the later Yoga. This culture revered the sacred art of altering one's awareness or consciousness to enter non-ordinary realms of reality, complete with "spirits." They used rituals of loud drumming and practices of sacrifice and psychotropic drugs to create shifts in their perceptual field to communicate with the spirit world. The shaman was the precursor to the yogi.

Feuerstein cites a great Indus River valley civilization from the pre-vedic period, circa 2500 - 1800 BC. Archaeologists have proposed a goddess culture, with evidence of a terra cotta seal depicting a deity and surrounding animals as Lord Shiva, an arch yogi, lord of the beasts. Some scholars attribute this culture as the earliest form of Yoga. They have seen some evidence of a sophisticated urban people with a religious authority.

The Sanskrit speaking Aryan people from southern Russia are said to have invaded and inculturated this Indus Valley of northern India circa 1800 - 1000 BC. Most scholars credit this Rig - Vedic culture for the birth of the tradition of Yoga. The earliest of the Vedas, the Rig Veda, is this culture's scripture in the form of hymns. They describe the practice of meditation as the fulcrum of Yoga back in the Rig Veda times.

In parallel to yoga then and even today, the early Rig Veda scriptures described tapas as a form of voluntary self discipline through the practice of austerities. These practitioners were called ascetics, that would use intense difficult practices like prolonged standing in the hot sun, holding one's arm overhead, for years. These practices were developed to transform ordinary consciousness.

The Vedas are one of the earliest Hindu literature of hymns consisting mostly of prayers, invocations, and metaphysical speculations of reality. This prototype of Yoga included the elements of concentration, austerities, and regulation of the breath as concerned with the recitation of the hymns, surrender of the ego, and the encounter of a Reality greater than the ego-personality. There were meditative practices as described by the cosmologic hymns of the Vedas. The earliest form of Yoga appears to have been the practice of meditative focusing and sacrificial mysticism.

The Vratyas, nomads in northeast India, were outcasts during the Vedic times. Noteworthy is that the Vratyas were expert in magical matters. They practiced celibacy as a spiritual practice and are thought to have first designed pranayama, breath as a vehicle to life force. They seem to be the forerunners of the Jains.

Some 700 years later, around 800 BC, the secret teachings of the Upanishads still included sacrificial elements with yogic meditation practices. They invented the path of meditation as an internal sacrifice. They took the Vedic rituals of sacrifice and internalized them into intense contemplation, meditation. The Upanishads teaches that the transcendental ground of the world is identical to the transcendental essence of a human being. Brahman equals atman equals Self. This absolute Reality, Self, can not be described, but simply realized. Self is said to be realized with intense contemplation and renunciation of the body as well as of the world. One does not identify with their skin-encapsulated individuals but as the Whole, of all being of all times. As well, these scriptures brought back to light the idea of karma, the cycle of birth and death, the moral causation from past actions. These were not recognized in the Rig Vedas.

This Vedic culture later evolved into the Hinduism. From the first millennium BC to today, the tradition of Hinduism dominates the Indian subcontinent. In a broader sense Hinduism is more than a religion, it

is a culture, historically connected to the ancient Vedic culture of some 3000 years ago. Hindu culture, as many cultures, had its own yoga as its spiritual technology, a practice consistent with the Hindu world view, with its foundations in the Vedas.

500 BC saw two important historical figures in Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism and Vardhamana Mahavira, founder of Jainism. These visionaries rejected the Hindu establishment of social hierarchy convention, that is, the caste system. Buddhism and Jainism developed their own yoga, just as the Judaism did with the Kabbalah, and Christianity with the mystics. Yoga was the practical means to accomplish whatever a specific group's spiritual aspiration might be. It was the nuts and bolts of their contemplative practice.

Vardhamana Mahavira, from a group of aesthetes, outside the world of Vedic ritualism, is credited to with founding Jainism. He is said to have reached enlightenment twelve years after renouncing worldly roles and possessions, from rigorous austerities. He inspired many people of his time in the next thirty years to his death, to follow his way of viewing the world, and path to enlightenment. Jains are known for their moral code of ahimsa, non-harming. Their yoga has extreme practices of fasting, breath control, and postures to transcend the body, not cultivate it.

Contemporary to Jains' Mahavira was Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. The 45 years of his teachings inspired a complex religious and philosophical movement. His yoga was noted to be pragmatic, in contrast to the extremes of the Jains. He found a middle way between the ascetic self torture and the self indulgences of the worldly. He thought breath retention was a violence to one's self. Rather, concentration on an unrestricted breath [anapatisati] is a core practice, along with mindfulness [satipatthana]. This yoga is a self inquiry, not a ritualistic practice. The Buddha saw suffering [dukkha] as the tension, intrinsic to our effort to survive as separate egos [asmita]. He saw everything as impermanent [anicca], giving rise to our never-ending search for happiness. The suffering is caused by desire, greed, and delusion.

Yoga's classical period is considered to be from 200 - 800 AD. The longest ever poem of a war epic, the Mahabharata, described the religion and culture of the time. Yogic teachings were given their classical format through Patanjali's sutras in the second century AD. Patanjali's eight limbs to the path of self transcendence were:

1. Yama - a moral code of ethics or restraint past have developed their own yogas consistent with their view of reality.
2. Niyama - a moral code of discipline
3. Asana - the postures of Hatha Yoga
4. Pranayama - breathing practices of Hatha Yoga
5. Pratyahara - sense withdrawal
6. Dharana - concentration
7. Dhyana - meditation
8. Samadhi - ecstasy

Many disciplines would use some similar moral code [1/2]. As well they would have some sort of calming of the senses [5], concentration practices [6], and meditation techniques [7]. Few have used postures [3] and breath [4]. The posture or asanas were first used as techniques to prepare one to sit for one's meditation practice.

Circa 800 AD, a new approach to spirituality appeared. Up to this point, spiritual beliefs and practices demanded that one renounce the body and mind to realize Ultimate Reality, to be free of suffering. Tantrism saw the body as a vehicle to liberation. One did not have to leave this world or kill

nature's impulses. One has to integrate the self with the Self, the body-mind with Spirit. The liberalism of tantra was in response to the orthodoxy of Hinduism and Buddhism. It was a grass roots movement that integrated the lofty ideals of nondualism [Self and Nature are not separate] with down-to-earth practices to live a sanctified life. Tantrism attended to the feminine principle in a very masculine-oriented time. One can dwell in the flow of life, to be receptive to life's dance. Through the body, one can watch the process of mind. The world can be experienced beyond the senses and workings of the mind. There are more subtle planes of existence usually hidden to our ordinary perceptions. Tantric yoga called these the subtle body, annamayakosa. The Upanishads first mentioned the Koshas [sheaths]. Beyond the physical body there are four more subtle bodies [sheaths].

The tenth century AD began what is considered Hatha Yoga as an offshoot of Tantra. Goraksha was considered the founder of Hatha Yoga and Matsyendra, his teacher. There are many legends of these adepts who are said to be completely enlightened, possessing many siddhas [magical yogic powers]. "Ha" has one meaning of as sun and "tha" as the moon. Yogis believe that the central energy channel [sushumna] moving between the root chakra [muladhara] and crown of head chakra [sahasrara]. "Yoga" can mean union or yoke of these opposite forces. A yogi is to stabilize, then balance the two opposing life force energy [prana] : the positive, heating, solar energy through the pingala channel and the negative, cooling, lunar energy through the ida channel. The ida and pingala, ascend along the sushumna, intertwining through 7 chakras [energy centers]. Through the various postures [asanas] and breathing techniques [pranayama], a yogi can awaken the dormant kundalini [energy] in the base of the spine and move it upward through the energy channels and chakras, from the root through the crown chakra. This is considered a means to enlightenment through the Tantric vehicle of the bodymind.

Quantum physics has a theoretical framework consistent with subtle bodies. Tantra describes the subtle body as the 5 sheaths [kosha], 7 chakras [energy centers ], nadis [energy channel, and prana [life force energy]. Yoga can experience the subtle body with its asana, pranayama, and meditation practices.

There are many ancient writings about Hatha Yoga, including those from Goraksha. Hatha Yoga Pradipika is considered a classic manual on Hatha Yoga. Written in 1350 AD by Svatiarama, it describes only 15 asanas. The thrust of Hatha Yoga Pradipika taught to purify the body first through six cleansing practices [shatkarma], then to discipline the body with asana, and the breath with pranayama. Many of the postures were meditation poses, so one could not develop a full asana practice from these few poses. Using asana as meditation not of the sitting style would take more asanas. Gheranda describes 32 asanas in his writings in the 1650 AD. The Gheranda Samhita lists 102 yogic practices include 21 hygienic practices, 25 mudras, as well, pranayama and asana.

Yoga was first introduced to the United States by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1920. His work evolved into the Self Realization Fellowship. His yoga comprised of meditation, concentration, and energizing of the body. He prepared for meditation by purifying and strengthening the body. He designed his own series of body exercises. He taught concentration exercises, called Hong-Sau technique, as well as the Aum meditation techniques and Kriya Yoga.

Many other Indian yogis have opened centers in the States. Hatha Yoga has been included in the life style of these traditions. But asana and pranayama are considered only two of the eight limbs or aspects of a yogi's sadhana [spiritual journey]. In the twentieth century, these are some of the more influential yogis : Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi [Transcendental Meditation], Sri Swami Satchidananda [Integral Yoga], Swami Kripalvananda and Yogi Amrit Desai [Kripalu Yoga], Swami Rama [ Himalayan Institute], Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh [OSHO], Yoga Bhajan [Kundalini Yoga], Swami Vishnudevananda [Sivananda Yoga], Bikram Choudhury [Bikram Yoga].

Much of today's Hatha Yoga is said to have its roots in Mysore, India. The early 1800s, the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar in Mysore produced the Sritattvanidhi, illustrations of 122 asanas. This royal

family of Mysore supported the practice of yoga. An earlier text of gymnastic exercise, Vyayama Dipika, is very similar to the Sritattvanidhi. Vyayama Dipika was a compilation of the English exercise, gymnastics, trapeze, and parallel bars, and the Indian system of bodybuilding, wrestling, and the use of weapons. NE Sjoman supposes that the yoga of Mysore had its roots in English and Indian sports. In 1924, Krishnamacharya was assigned by the Mysore Palace to start a yoga school in an old English gymnasium. There are great similarities between the poses illustrated in the Vyayama Dipika and the Sritattvanidhi to the those of the Krishnamacharya tradition. As well the asanas described in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Gheranda Samhita are seen in present day Hatha Yoga. Krishnamacharya's 3 famous students, TKV Desikachar, K Pattabhi Jois, BKS Iyengar, account for much of the Hatha Yoga practiced today.

Desikachar, Krishnamacharya's son, started late but developed an individual therapeutic style of asana, once called Viniyoga. These are personalized sequences to deal with an individual's imbalances. Each pose has a counterpose to complement.

K Pattabhi Jois developed the Astanga Yoga, 6 series of vinyasa [flow sequence]. One type of vinyasa are the sun salutations. They start the entire sequence and link each asana of each series. The series are very challenging sequences of asana that may take one or two hours to complete.

BKS Iyengar, actually Krishnamacharya's brother-in-law, was also a disciple. He developed the most popular style of yoga in the world today. His mark is precision of alignment unmatched by anyone. He tends to hold the poses longer and uses props to approximate the form to explore the inner actions of asana. He uses standing poses and then inversions as the foundation of all the other poses. John Friend's Anusara yoga is an offshoot of Iyengar yoga.

Hatha Yoga has Stan Andrzewski always been a multitude of practices and orientations that varied from school to school, from teacher to teacher. But it seems that the intent of yoga in the West has switched from the spiritual inquiry of enlightenment to that of therapy or fitness. The skillful conscious and biomechanically sound movement and postures of asana can help people with musculoskeletal dysfunction. Asana is used for stress reduction. Yoga is marketed today as an exotic exercise and as spa. Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder of Shambhala meditation, would call this spiritual materialism. The original yogic intent of realization is lost in the furthering of ego identification by self improvement by asana.

Yoga can be practiced by anybody, in any way, and for any reason.

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