

weekend 1:

yang yoga

centering, warming up  
& sun salutations

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## introduction

Just as all journeys have a beginning, a Vinyasa yoga practice must have a beginning. We begin by centering. It is the way we transition from our outside lives to a tranquil place within. Pranayama is central to the process of breathing. During this weekend, we will explore the process of breathing, the benefits of Pranayama and learn a basic Pranayama technique. We will begin to warm up the body by moving the spine in its various ways. Our warm up will become more vigorous and multi-layered as we progress into Step Backs or Sun Salutations and the Dancing Warrior sequence. The Step Backs or Sun Salutations bring greater attention and awareness to the body. The Dancing Warrior sequence builds more mobility and heat in the body.

## learning objectives

Students will be able to understand:

- The benefits of centering
- How to sit for meditation
- The six movements of the spine
- The importance of breathing and what happens during breathing
- Durga Pranayama
- When to inhale and exhale during poses
- Proper alignment of asanas
- How to flow gracefully and efficiently through the asanas of the Sun Salutations
- The benefits of Bandhas and how to perform hasta & pada Bandhas in various poses
- The benefit of Drishtis and how to perform Drishtis in various poses

# 1. introduction to yoga history & philosophy

“Nearly all of our popular assumptions about yoga theory date from the past 150 years, and very few modern-day practices date from before the 12th century,” David Gordon White, a professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, writes in his paper, ***Yoga, Brief History of an Idea***. “This is not the first time that people have ‘reinvented’ yoga in their own image.”

We can try to delineate the history of yoga — at least a brief one. However, a practice so rich in religious, spiritual, and physical meaning would take years or even a lifetime to fully understand, grasp, and manifest.

## The Indic Trilogy (Trimurti, Three forms):



Brahma – the Creator (not to be confused with Brahman).



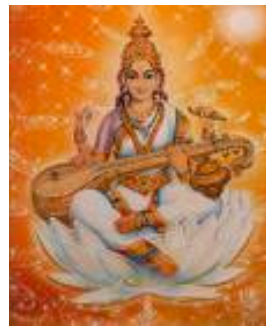
Vishnu – The Sustainer



Shiva – The Destroyer (the Lord of Yoga)

Their consorts (female counterparts):

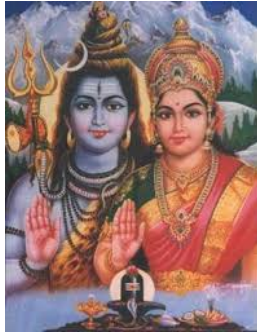
Brahma's counterpart – Sarasvati (the Goddess of knowledge, speech and the fine arts).



Vishnu's counterpart – Lakshmi (the Goddess of good fortune, wealth, she attracts the minds of yogis by her beauty).

Shiva's counterpart – Parvati also known as Uma (the mother of Ganesh. She represents Shakti, the feminine energy of the Universe. Parvati is another word for the highest mountain peak in Sanskrit). Ganesh is the pot belly, elephant face God and the removal of all obstacles. Her son is Ganesh.





Shiva-Shakti: The masculine-feminine force of the Universe, the fundamental creative principle of existence. “Shiva without Shakti is unable to affect anything.” “Just as the moon does not shine without moonlight, so also Shiva does not shine without Shakti.”

## 1.1 history of yoga

### Vedic Period

**3300-1500 BCE.** Historians are not entirely sure when the notion or practice of yoga first appeared, and it’s often left to debate. The term “yoga,” however, is found in ancient India’s earliest known scriptures — the Vedas. They date from the Vedic period, which began in 1500 BCE. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the Vedas are the oldest writings of Hinduism and Sanskrit literature.

White notes in his paper that the term “yoga” in the Vedas actually refers to a “yoke”, as in the yoke over animals — and at times a chariot in the midst of battle. Interestingly, in some of these very early writings, yoga was used to describe a warrior dying and transcending into heaven, being carried by his chariot to reach the gods and higher powers of being.

During the Vedic period, Vedic priests who were ascetic — severely self-disciplined and avoidant of any forms of indulgence — conducted sacrifices, or yajna, in poses that some researchers believe are precursors to the yoga poses, or asanas, we experience now.

### Pre classical Period

This period comprises of almost 2000 years until the time of the 2nd century BCE. By this time, many texts like the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata had made their appearance. All these texts contained various kinds of yoga teachings that in some way or another expounded upon the ultimate universal truth about the unity of everything. These texts spoke about the coming of the dark ages. Through stories they inspired people to stand up for what is right and actively fight the evil. Yoga teachings of this time focused on meditation, self-realization, and connection with the universal one.

**BHAGAVAD-GITA:** meaning the Lord’s song.

Composed in the 3rd-4th century BCE. One of the episodes of the Mahabharata (Great story). The most famous of all Indic scriptures where Krishna teaches his main disciple Arjuna lessons of life through Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Jnana Yoga.

Karma Yoga: The path of right action

Bhakti Yoga: The path of Devotion

Jnana Yoga: The path of Wisdom

#### THE RAMAYANA: meaning the Life of Rama

Considered the most popular romantic story in all of India. To this day there are adaptations and television shows of the Ramayana being watched by millions. It was written by one man, Valmiki, who was connected to this story. Basically, Rama with the help of Hanumat (also known as Hanuman), the monkey god, slays the forest demon, Ravana, and rescues Rama's wife, Sita.

#### THE BHAGAVATA PURANA: Ancient stories of God

This story of Krishna. It's the tale of the God-man Krishna, also known as Govinda (cow-finder), and his 16,108 gopis (cow-girls). In this story, he gives 10 sons and 1 daughter to each of them. The Bhagavata Purana accepts Patanjali's Eight Limb Path but rejects his dualistic approach.

### Classical Period

Also known as the age of the eightfold yoga or Raja Yoga, this is the time when the great sage, Patanjali, lived and expounded upon his own version of yoga and its practice. He did this through his text the 'Yoga Sutras', which contains 200 sharp and intelligent statements that sparked the interest of many yoga practitioners and masters in the centuries that followed. It is speculated that Patanjali's Yoga-Sutra was written in the 2nd century CE. The earliest commentary on it is found in 'Yoga-Bhashya', which was supposedly written by Vyasa in the 5th century CE.

Patanjali: Pat; Fallen Anjali; palms in prayer or Divine offering. The author of the Yoga Sutras and the Eight-Limb Path. Patanjali was the first to systematize the teachings of yoga and gave the tradition its classical form. Patanjali spoke about yoga as being useful in the separation of the matter and the spirit, of which each individual is made up. This, he said, was essential in the re-establishment of the purity of the soul and spirit.

Yoga Sutras: Sutra means "suture" or "thread". The Yoga Sutras consist of 195 aphorisms which cover many aspects of yoga, including the transformation of consciousness, paranormal powers or (Siddhis), the eight-limb path (Ashtanga), and higher stages of yoga, such as liberation. They were written on palm leaves and tied together by sutures or sutras, hence the name.

Arguably the most famous Sutra: **Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodhah.**

Yoga is the restriction (Nirodhah) of the whirls (Vritti) of consciousness (Chitta).

Dvaita Vedanta (Dualism): Patanjali favored a dualistic philosophy that separates Consciousness and Matter, or Purusha (Spirit), and Prakriti (Nature): Yogis of the time believed in two separate realities. While still in the physical body the yogis can only glimpse upon the Divine, but only in higher levels of spiritual awakening can they achieve Savikalpa Samadhi. The Classical Yogis did not believe in a deep exploration of the physical world. They considered the body to be a distraction from their spiritual path (Sadhana). Even though they practiced asanas as a preliminary step to stay healthy, they frowned upon the Tantric approach of Hatha Yoga, which uses the body as vehicle to reach enlightenment.

### 3rd century, BCE

In the 3rd century BCE, references to the term "yoga" became more common in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist writings. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the notion of yoga as a spiritual or meditative practice as we know now was referred to as Yogachara (Yogācāra). Yogachara, which involved eight steps of meditation, was known as "calmness" or "insight".

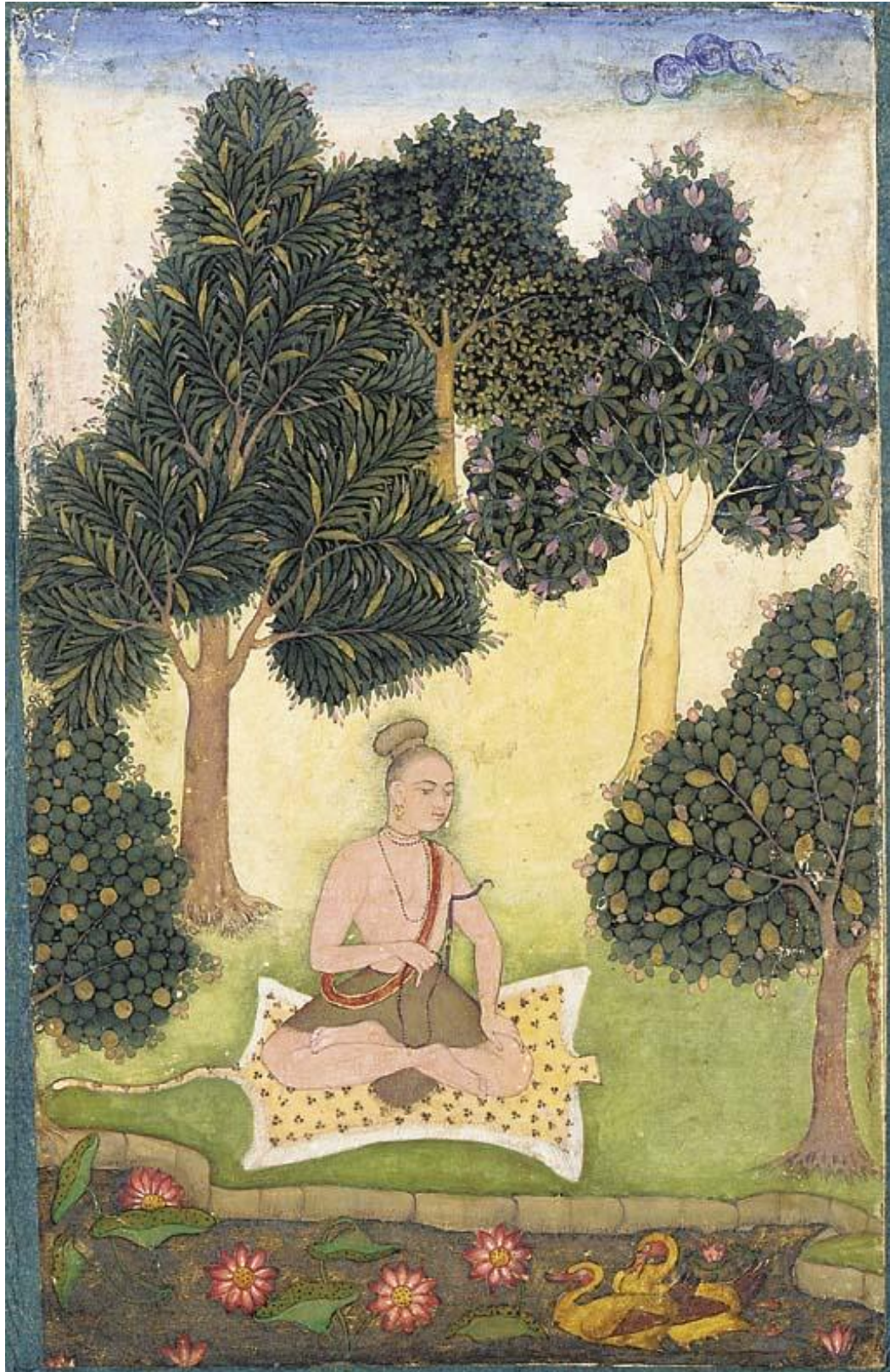
**5th century, CE**

For a while, yoga was a loose notion, its meaning difficult to pin down. It was more a notion of meditation and a religious practice than a form exercise as we know today. However, around the 5th century CE, yoga became more of an established core idea among Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. First and foremost, these ancient versions of yoga were mostly spiritual practices, revolving around several core values.

The first value involved analyzing one's own perception and cognitive state, understanding the root of suffering, and using meditation to solve it. The mind was to "transcend" bodily pain or suffering in order to reach a higher level of being. The second value aimed to uplift or broaden consciousness. The third value involved using yoga as a path to transcendence. The fourth was using yoga to enter other bodies and act supernaturally — perhaps the strangest and most mystical one.

This is also where the difference between "yogi practice" and "yoga practice" is conceived. Yoga practice, as described by White, "essentially denotes a program of mind-training and meditation issuing in the realization of enlightenment, liberation, or isolation from the world of suffering existence," at least in ancient terms. Yogi practice, meanwhile, lies more in the supernatural — i.e., when yogis are able to enter other bodies to expand their consciousness.





*A yogi seated in a garden, North Indian or Deccani miniature painting, c.1620-40 Wikipedia*

## Post Classical Period

During the medieval era, different schools of yoga emerged. Bhakti yoga is a spiritual pathway within Hinduism that appeared during this time, and was focused on living through love and devotion toward the Divine

Tantra yoga was also a genre that arrived around the 5th century CE and was observed in medieval Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions. White notes that the Tantras, the medieval scriptures that discussed a new yoga ideology, outlined new goals for those practicing yoga: “No longer is the practitioner’s ultimate goal liberation from suffering existence, but rather self-deification: one becomes the deity that has been one’s object of meditation.”

Interestingly, Westerners today have often associated “tantra” with a sexual form of yoga, which isn’t a truthful description of the system of Tantra Yoga as a whole. However, some Tantric beliefs involved yogis having sexual relations with women whom they believed were yoginis, or women who embodied Tantric goddesses. It was believed that these sexual relations would lead to transcendent levels of consciousness. Today, however, gurus who go about doing such things in their yoga classes are not exactly known for their moral or spiritual accomplishments.

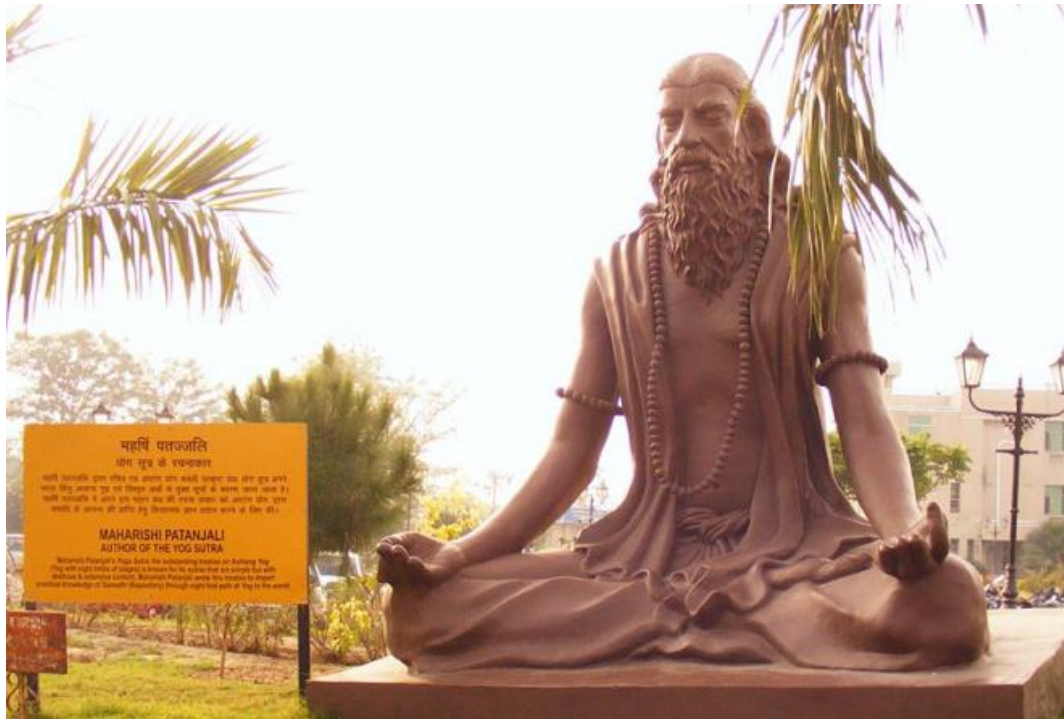
Hatha yoga appeared in Buddhist texts around the 8th century CE, and it emerged from Tantra. Hatha yoga is known as the common “psychophysical yoga,” a combination of bodily postures, breathing, and meditation — possibly the closest to what we today associate with yoga. The postures in Hatha yoga are called “asanas”.

## Modern

So, when did yoga become the regiment of health fanatics? For thousands of years, the term “yoga” encompassed many things, most of them religious and/or spiritual. But in the mid-19th century, yoga came to the attention of Westerners, who at the time seemed intrigued by Indian culture. We can perhaps attribute yoga’s popularity in the West to Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu monk who toured Europe and the U.S. in the 1890s to spread knowledge about Hinduism among intellectuals.

Vivekananda was also responsible for bringing the Yoga Sutras more into the mainstream. As discussed above, these were writings of Patanjali, comprised sometime around 400 BCE to describe what he believed were the main yoga traditions of his time. The Yoga Sutras focused mainly on removing all excess thought from the mind and focusing on a singular thing; but they were later incorporated more heavily than any other ancient yoga writings in modern, “corporate” yoga.





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Statue of Patanjali: referred to as the "father of yoga,". However – no one truly knows what Patanjali looked like or if he even took the human form.

### 20th century

Hatha yoga as a practice (what we are most familiar with now) did not become a commonplace exercise in the U.S. until the 1930s and 1940s, and finally reached a peak in the 1960s, when Hindu spirituality became far more popular among young Americans. Numerous Indian yoga teachers taught classes in the U.S., and in the 1980s it became even more popular due to the first health benefits being reported. This was the first time that yoga was seen as a practice with purely physical benefits, something that can improve your health and general fitness, rather than bring you to a place of transcendence.

### 21st century

The popularity of yoga in the U.S. has increased throughout the decades, rising from 4 million in 2001 to 20 million in 2011. Since then, plenty of scientific studies have found that yoga comes with a flurry of health benefits, including the reduction of high blood pressure, depression, chronic pain, and anxiety. It also improves cardiac function, muscle strength, and circulation of blood and lymph.

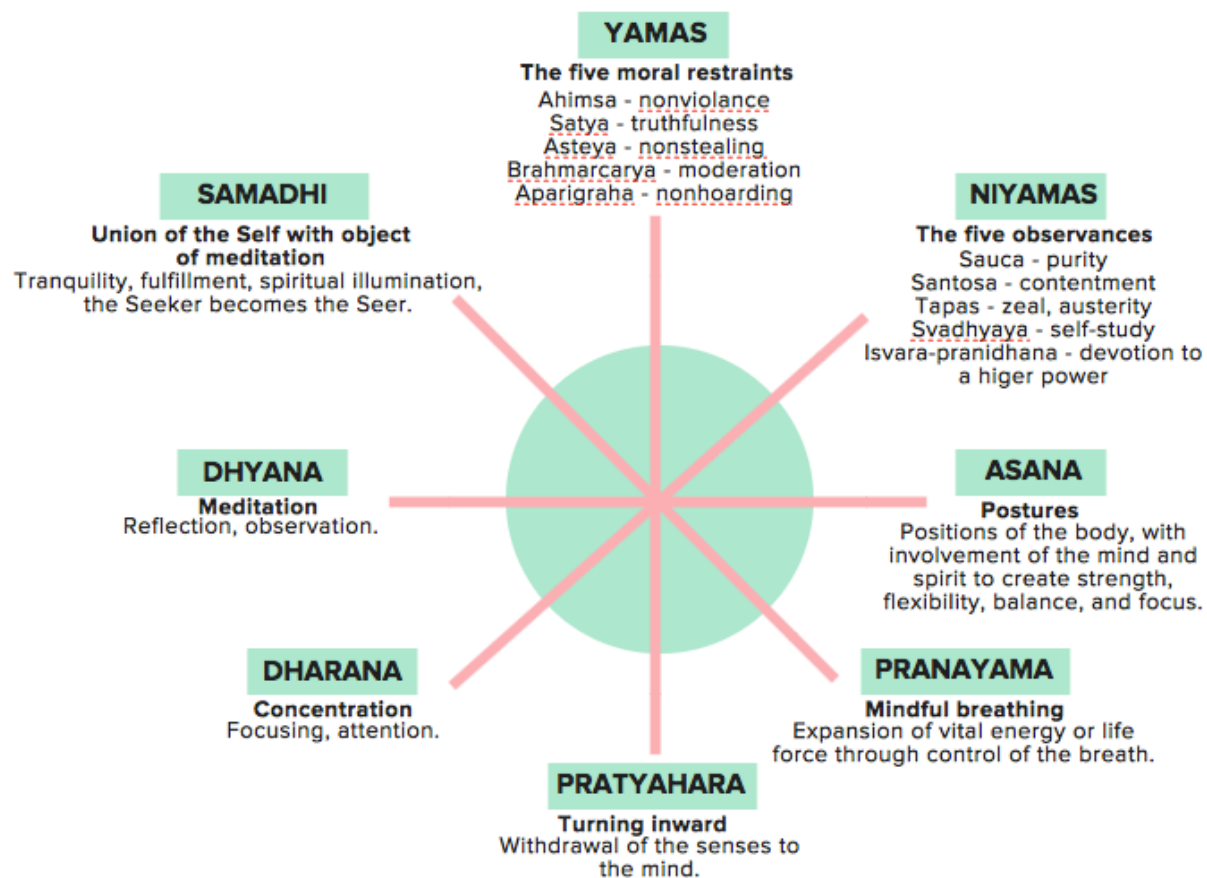
Yoga is now an international trend, seen as both ways to reach spiritual enlightenment and a form of exercise. At least in the Western world, yoga is seen as another exercise class to take at the gym, with all its physical benefits. However, knowing at least a little bit about yoga's ancient spiritual origins — something that has lasted thousands of years — and experiencing this ancient wisdom yourself through continuous practice, will help you glean something even more from it.

## 1.2 the eight limbs of yoga

The practice of yoga is an art and science dedicated to creating union between body, mind, and spirit. Its objective is to assist the practitioner in using the breath and body to foster an awareness of ourselves as individualized beings intimately connected to the unified whole

of creation. In short, it is about creating balance and equanimity so as to live in peace, good health, and harmony with the Self as well as the greater whole. This art of right living was perfected and practiced in India thousands of years ago and the foundations of yoga philosophy were written down in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali. This sacred text describes the inner workings of the mind and provides an eight-step blueprint for controlling its restlessness so as to enjoying lasting peace.

The core of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is an eight-limbed path that forms the structural framework for yoga practice. Upon practicing all eight limbs of the path it becomes self-evident that no one element is elevated over another in a hierarchical order. Each is part of a holistic focus that eventually brings completeness to the individual as he/she finds connectivity to the Divine. Because we are all unique, a person can emphasize one branch and then move on to another, as they round out the understanding.



In brief the eight limbs, or steps to yoga, are as follows:

- **Yama:** Universal morality
- **Niyama:** Personal observances
- **Asanas:** Body postures
- **Pranayama:** Breathing exercises, and control of prana
- **Pratyahara:** Control of the senses

- **Dharana:** Concentration and cultivating inner perceptual awareness
- **Dhyana:** Devotion, Meditation on the Divine
- **Samadhi:** Union with the Divine

The first two limbs that Patanjali describes are the fundamental ethical precepts called Yamas and Niyamas. Yamas and Niyamas are the suggestions given on how we should deal with the world around us as well as our attitude toward ourselves. The attitude we have toward things and people outside ourselves is understood under the term Yama; how we relate to ourselves inwardly is understood under the term Niyama. So, they can also be looked at as universal morals and personal observances. Both are mostly concerned with how we use our energy in relationship to others and to ourselves.

The Yamas are broken down into five "wise characteristics". Rather than a list of dos and don'ts, "they tell us that our fundamental nature is compassionate, generous, honest and peaceful." They are as follows:

## yamas (universal morality)

### 1. Ahimsa – Non-violence

The word ahimsa literally means not to injure or show cruelty to any creature or any person in any way whatsoever. Ahimsa is, however, more than just lack of violence as adapted in yoga. It means kindness, friendliness, and thoughtful consideration of other people and things, so it has to do with our duties and responsibilities too. Ahimsa implies that in every situation we should adopt a considerate attitude and do no harm.

### 2. Satya – Commitment to Truthfulness

Satya means "to speak the truth", yet it is not always desirable to speak the truth on all occasions, for it could harm someone unnecessarily. We have to consider what we say, how we say it, and in what way the statement could affect others. If speaking the truth has negative consequences for another, then it is better to say nothing. Satya should never come into conflict with our efforts to behave with ahimsa. This precept is based on the understanding that honest communication and action form the bedrock of any healthy relationship, community, or government, and that deliberate deception, exaggerations, and mistruths harm others.

### 3. Asteya - Non-stealing

Steya means "to steal"; asteya is the opposite – meaning to take nothing that does not belong to us. This also means that if we are in a situation where someone entrusts something to us or confides in us, we do not take advantage of him or her. Non-stealing includes not only taking what belongs to another without permission, but also using something for a different purpose to that intended, or beyond the time permitted by its owner. The practice of asteya implies not taking anything that has not been freely given. This includes fostering a consciousness of how we ask for others' time for inconsiderate behavior. In this way, demanding another's attention when not freely given is, in effect, stealing.

### 4. Brahmacharya – Non-excess

Brahmacharya is used mostly in the sense of abstinence, particularly in relationship to sexual activity. Brahmacharya suggests that we should form relationships that foster our understanding of the highest truths. Brahmacharya does not necessarily imply celibacy. Rather, it means responsible behavior with respect to our goal of moving toward the truth.

Practicing brahmacharya also implies that we use our sexual energy to regenerate our connection to our spiritual self. Besides this, it means that we don't use this sexual energy in any way that might harm others.

### 5. Aparigraha – Non-possessiveness

Aparigraha means to take only what is necessary, and not to take advantage of a situation or act out of greed. We should only take what we have earned; if we take more, we are exploiting someone else. The yogi feels that the collection or hoarding of things implies a lack of faith in God and in oneself to provide for the future. Aparigraha also implies letting go of our attachments to things and an understanding that impermanence and change are the only constants.

The Yoga Sutra describes what happens when these five behaviors outlined above become part of a person's daily life. Thus, the yamas are the moral virtues which, if attended to, purify human nature and contribute to health and happiness of society.

## niyama (personal observances)

Niyama means "rules" or "laws". These are the rules prescribed for personal observance. Like the Yamas, the five Niyamas are not exercises or actions to be simply studied. They represent far more than an attitude. Compared with the Yamas, the Niyamas are more intimate and personal. They refer to the attitude we adopt toward ourselves as we create a code for living soulfully.

### 1. Saucha - Purity

The first niyama is saucha, meaning purity and cleanliness. Saucha has both an inner and an outer aspect. Outer cleanliness simply means keeping ourselves clean. Inner cleanliness has as much to do with the healthy, free functioning of our bodily organs as with the clarity of our mind. The practice of asanas or pranayama is essential to attending to this inner saucha. Asanas tone the entire body and remove toxins while pranayama cleanses our lungs, oxygenates our blood, and purifies our nerves. However, "more important than the physical cleansing of the body is the cleansing of the mind of its disturbing emotions like hatred, passion, anger, lust, greed, delusion and pride."

### 2. Santosha - Contentment

Another Niyama is santosha, modesty and the feeling of being content with what we have. To be at peace within and content with one's lifestyle means finding contentment even while experiencing life's difficulties. In this way, life becomes a process of growth through all kinds of circumstances. We should accept that there is a purpose for everything – yoga calls it **Karma** – and we cultivate contentment 'to accept what happens'. Santosha means being happy with what we have rather than being unhappy about what we don't have.

### 3. Tapas – Disciplined use of our energy

Tapas refers to the activity of keeping the body fit or to confront and handle the inner urges without outer show. Literally, it means "to heat the body" and, by so doing, to cleanse it. Behind the notion of tapas lies the idea we can direct our energy to enthusiastically engage with life and achieve our ultimate goal of creating union with the Divine. Tapas helps burn up all the desires that stand in the way of reaching this goal. Attention to body posture, attention to eating habits, attention to breathing patterns – these are all tapas.

### 4. Svadhyaya – Self study

The fourth Niyama is svadhyaya. Sva means "self" adhyaya means "inquiry" or "examination". Any activity that cultivates self-reflective consciousness can be considered svadhyaya. It

means to intentionally find self-awareness in all our activities and efforts, even to the point of welcoming and accepting our limitations. It teaches us to be centered and non-reactive to the dualities, to burn out unwanted and self-destructive tendencies.

### **5. Ishvarapranidhana - Surrender**

Ishvarapranidhana means "to lay all your actions at the feet of God." It is the contemplation on God (Ishvara) in order to become attuned to God and God's will. It is the recognition that the spiritual suffuses everything, and through our attention and care, we can attune ourselves with our role as part of the Creator. The practice requires that we set aside some time each day to recognize that there is some omnipresent force larger than ourselves that is guiding and directing the course of our lives.

## 2. theory: centering, breathing, and pranayama

### 2.1 centering, attention and intention

**Benefits:** centering helps us establish an inner connection and awareness of our state of being. Through awareness of our inner world and a deeper understanding of self, physical, mental, energetic and emotional, we find a sense of stability, calm, and clarity.

**Aspects of centering:** the three main aspects of centering are breathing (pranayama), creating attention and setting intention.

Creating attention allows us to cultivate awareness of our inner world, our thoughts and emotions. Awareness grows insight and understanding of ourselves, our conscious decisions and our subconscious thoughts and emotional patterns. It helps us identify our samskaras (patterns) and areas of growth. The cultivation of awareness done through the application of attention, allows us to initiate and work towards the changes we want to make in our lives.

An intention is a mental focus that represents a commitment to carrying out an action or actions in the future, in the cultivation of a certain quality, or state of mind. The commitment to the changes we seek to grow and evolve. Your intention helps to crystalize your vision of how you want your life to be so you pay attention to everything that lies in line with this vision, as well as everything that does not.

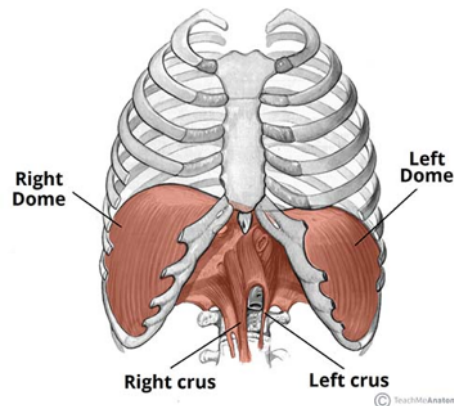
### 2.2 breathing and durga pranayama

Breathing is the process by which the body ventilates itself. It is the essential driver of the circulatory system. The constrictor muscles in the throat control the flow of air and allow the making of sounds and swallowing. It is important that we breathe through the nose instead of the mouth. When we breathe through the mouth, the mouth and throat can dry out and the breath isn't filtered well before it enters the lungs.

There are two types of breathing: chest breathing and belly breathing. With chest breathing, the belly is stable and the ribs expand and contract. It is easier to work with Mula and Uddiyana Bandha when we use chest breathing. With belly breathing, the ribs are more stable and the belly expands and contracts.

Diaphragm is a Latin word that means "partition". The diaphragm separates the thoracic and abdominal cavities from one another. It is the essential muscle of breathing. The lungs are sponges and cannot move themselves. It is the diaphragm that moves them.





Each breath is made up of  
This is what happens

an inhale and an exhale.  
when we breathe:

- Inhale: Diaphragm contracts and moves downward, the ribs expand, and the volume of the chest increases. The inhale is associated with Shiva, the masculine principle, expansion, the sky, and Yang energy. We inhale when we want to rise up or when we want to expand in a position.
- Exhale: Diaphragm relaxes and moves upward, the ribs contract, and the volume of the chest decreases. The exhale is associated with Shakti, the feminine principle, contraction, the earth, and Yin energy. We exhale when we want to move towards the earth or when we want to contract in a position

Pranayama is a Sanskrit word that is made up out of the words Prana and Yama, with Prana meaning life energy or breath, and Yama meaning restraint or guidance. Pranayama can thus be translated as “breath restraint”. Pranayama is a tried and true method for focusing the mind. There are many pranayama techniques and we will explore several of them over the upcoming weekends. In this weekend, we will work with Durga Pranayama.

Durga Pranayama is also called the “Three Part Yogi Breath”. It is a basic pranayama technique in which we breathe into three parts of the torso. Durga Pranayama combines chest and belly breathing.

***“You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don’t know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don’t know who your friends are, you don’t know what you owe anybody, you don’t know what anybody owes to you.***

***This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen.”***

- Joseph Campbell

## 2.3 bandhas and drishti

### Bandhas

Bandha is a Sanskrit word meaning, “lock” or “seal”. We will explore several bandhas over the upcoming weekends. In weekend I, we will explore Hasta Bandha and Pada Bandha.

- Hasta Bandha, the energetic lock between the hands and the mat
- Pada Bandha, the energetic lock between the feet and the mat

#### Benefit of Bandhas

Practice these bandhas to help:

- Activate the inner and outer legs in standing positions
- Activate the shoulders and serratus muscles in arm balance positions



Image Source:

<http://yogabycandace.com/blog/2014/1/14/how-to-avoid-wrist-pain-in-yoga?rq=wrist>

## Drishti

Drishti is a Sanskrit word meaning, “sight, direction or gaze”. The drishtis are tools used to create Dharana and Pratyahara. Dharana is concentration and Pratyahara is sense withdrawal. Drishti is not a piercing look. Rather, it is a soft gaze.

### Benefits of Drishtis

Practicing drishtis help to:

- Control the wandering eyes
- Limit intake of external stimuli
- Manage your mind
- Preserve and direct energy
- Enhance alignment
- Deepen asanas

In the Ashtanga system, there are 9 different drishtis. Different styles of yoga use the drishtis differently.

### Nine Drishtis

Nastagre	Nose Drishti
Angushtamadhye	Thumb Drishti
Hastagre	Hand Drishti
Parsva	Sideways Drishti (left and right)
Urdhva	Upward Drishti
Nabhichakra	Navel Drishti
Padayoragre	Toes Drishti
Bhrumadhye	Third Eye Drishti

## 2.4 warming up: spine and other joints

Warming up comes after centering and setting an intention.

### **Purpose of warming up**

- Bring awareness to the body
- Link movements with breath
- Prepare the body for the rest of the practice

### **Six movements of spine**

- Rotation right and left
- Flexion and extension
- Lateral extension (side bending)

### **Importance of moving spine**

- Builds flexibility, mobility and control
- Promotes flow of spinal fluid

Movements become more vigorous as the warm-up progresses and can include Step backs/Sun Salutations and Warrior positions. The Warrior poses build strength, flexibility, and stability throughout the lower body and upper body. The Warrior positions are the epitome of Yang, masculine energy. The qualities of the Warrior are purposefulness, assertiveness, boldness, and expansion.

## 3. practice

### 3.1 centering

#### Alignment for sitting up

- Cross legs at the ankles, remove flesh from the sitting bones. This creates a stable foundation upon which to sit.
- Sit up tall, open the chest, skull is balanced in the center, and the crown of the head reaches up. The extensor muscles along the spine help us axially extend the spine.

#### Durga pranayama

Durga Pranayama is also called the 'Three-part yogi breath'. This pranayama technique encourages you to breathe into three parts of the torso. It combines both belly and chest breathing.

- Inhale, feel the lungs, the belly and chest expanding
- Exhale, feel the lungs, the belly and chest contracting

***“The length of one’s life is not measured in years, but the number of breaths we take. To live long, breathe slowly and deeply.”***

- Author unknown

#### Attention and Intention setting

Attention is created by withdrawing from external stimuli and bringing focus to our internal world. It allows us to get familiar with the process of 'checking in' with the various areas of our consciousness and to assess the state of each of our bodies, physical, mental, emotional and energetic. The consistent practice of attention breeds awareness to our patterns and the default states we subconsciously return to. It's a way to check our baseline, every time we practice asana.

There are many ways to set an intention. Your intention can be a statement of what you want to receive from your asana practice. It can be a statement of characteristics and qualities you want to cultivate in yourself. It can be a statement of the life experiences you want to have. You can also set a dedication instead of an intention. Dedicating your practice to someone or something is a beautiful way to make your practice about something more than yourself.

## 3.2 warming up

Spinal movements can be done seated, in table top position, and while standing. The following practice positions include Table top, Cat and Cow, Thread the Needle, and Gate pose.

### Table Top – Ardha Purvottanasana

Come onto hands and knees with the shoulders over the wrists, fingers spread, and hips over the knees. Spine is neutral. Gaze downward.



### Cat and cow – Marjaryasana and Bitilasana

From Table top, exhale, flex your spine as you draw your belly upward. Gaze at your navel. Inhale, extend your spine as the belly moves downward. Gaze upward. Pressing the hands firmly into the mat, allows you to flex and extend even more deeply.



### Thread the needle – Parsva Balasana

From Table top, inhale and reach the right arm up, thread the right arm under the left arm, bring the right shoulder to the mat, keep the hips aligned. Exhale to deepen, then inhale up to table top. Repeat on the other side.

**Alternative: Bring left arm across lower back, reach for right inner thigh for deeper twist.**



### Gate pose – Parighasana

From Table top, stand on your knees. Step the right leg out to the side. The leg is straight and the foot points forward. Inhale and reach the arms up, then rest the right hand on the right leg, exhale and lean to the right. Inhale up. Repeat on the other side.



### 3.3 sun salutation

Step backs and Sun Salutations begin and end in Mountain pose. Mountain pose is the foundation of all the standing asanas.

#### Mountain Pose – Tadasana

Root and ground down through the four corners of the feet, pay special attention to the big and pinky toes and press them firmly into the mat. Lift the lateral and medial arches of the feet to activate the inner and outer legs. This is Pada Bandha. The big toes can be together, the feet can also be hips distance apart. Lengthen the tailbone down by creating a slight posterior tilt of the pelvis. It is important to maintain the natural curvature of the spine. The crown of the head reaches up as the chin stays balanced in the center. The gaze is soft.



#### Forward Fold and Half Forward Fold – Uttanasana and Ardha Uttanasana

Inhale, reach the arms overhead, exhale, fold forward and gaze towards nose, inhale, half forward fold and gaze forward. The arms can extend outward or you can trace the midline of the body as you fold forward. Line up the fingers and toes. The knees can bend if the hamstrings are tight. Inhale, lengthen the spine, lifting it half way up, creating a 'flat back' position.



### Low Lunge – Ashwa Sanchalanasana

Exhale, step the right foot back. The left thigh is parallel to the mat. The ankle is over the knee. The right leg is straight. The toes of the right foot are over the heel. Draw the right heel back and the left knee forward. Square the pelvis by drawing the left hip back and the right hip forward. Rise on to the fingertips to create length in the spine and reach forward through the crown of the head. Lift the hands off the mat, to activate the left quadriceps. Move the hips towards the mat to activate the iliopsoas. Gaze forward.



### High plank – Utthita Chaturanga Dandasana

Inhale, step the left foot back into High Plank. Hands are shoulder distance apart. Middle fingers point forward and the fingers are actively gripping the mat. This is Hasta Bandha. Gaze downward to keep the neck neutral. Lengthen the spine and engage the abdominals by a slight posterior tilt of the pelvis. Legs and glutes are engaged.



### Knees-Chest-Chin – Ashtangasana

Exhale, place the knees on the mat, tilt the pelvis forward, extend the spine, place the chest and chin on the mat. The fingertips are under the shoulders and the elbows are lifted off the mat and hugged in to the side body. The toes are curled under the feet and on the mat. Gaze at tip of nose.





**Baby Cobra – Ardha Bhujangasana**

Inhale, lay flat on the mat, point the toes. Lift the shoulders and chest from the mat. Reach the chest forward and draw the lower part of the shoulder blades together. Tighten the glutes and the hamstrings to lengthen the lower back. Gaze forward.

**Full Cobra – Bhujangasana**

From Baby Cobra, straighten the arms as much as possible. Lift up from the belly to the crown of the head and reach back from the belly to the toes of the feet. Keep (a milder) activation in the glutes to decompress/stabilize the lumbar spine. Hands can be under the shoulders or further forward.

**Upward Facing Dog – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana**

From Full Cobra, activate the quadriceps and lift the thighs and knees from the mat. Just as in Full Cobra, reach from the belly through the crown of the head and through the toes of the feet and activate the glutes. Gaze forward.



### **Downward Facing Dog – Adho Mukha Svanasana**

Exhale from Upward Facing Dog into Downward Facing Dog. Hands are shoulder distance apart. If shoulders are tight, then let the hands be further apart. Check the “How to Avoid Wrist Pain in Yoga” photo for a guide on placement of the hands and the action of the fingers and palms. Squeeze the forearms toward the midline, externally rotate the upper arms and shoulders. Draw the belly in and allow the spine to lengthen. The neck is neutral. Gaze at nose. Lift the sitting bones and internally rotate the femur bones. Drop the heels down. The feet are hip distance apart unless the hamstrings are tight, then the feet can be further apart. Knees can most definitely be bent here.



### **Downward Facing Dog Split – Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana**

From Downward Facing Dog, inhale the right leg up. Square the pelvis by pointing the right ilia bone downward. The extended leg is straight and the toes may point downward, pressing the heel away from the body, or the toes may point backward, activating the back of the leg. Continue dropping the heel of the left foot. Both arms are active. Gaze at nose. Exhale, step the right foot through, place it in between the hands. Then step the left foot through, returning to the Forward Fold position.



***\*Ideally the hands stay in the same spot throughout the Step Backs. Keeping the hands stationary creates a more grounding practice that allows you to move more efficiently and fluidly.***

### 3.4 dancing warriors

When the Warrior positions are linked together to create a vinyasa, they are called the Dancing Warriors. The asanas of the Dancing Warrior sequence include: Warrior I, II, III, and Reverse Warrior. They can be linked together with other asanas in a variety of ways.

The Warrior poses build strength, flexibility, and stability throughout the lower body and upper body. The Warrior positions are the epitome of Yang energy. The qualities of the Warrior are purposefulness, assertiveness, boldness, and expansion.

#### Warrior I – Virabhadrasana A (high risk\*\*)

From Down Dog Split, exhale, step right foot in between hands. Step the back foot in and ground the foot. Let the back foot point out at a 30 – 45 degree angle. Firm pressure downwards through the outer blade of the back foot. Hips point forward and the thigh of the back leg internally rotates. The back leg is strong straight and active. Front thigh moves towards parallel to the mat, as the knee moves toward the pinky toe. The arms reach overhead and shoulders stack over the hips. Shoulders relax and externally rotate. Palms can face each other, be together, or fingers can interlace. Gaze upward or straight ahead.



**Alternative: If the back knee hurts, lift the back heel, moving into high lunge**

**\*\* The alternative position is adapt to injury prevention. High lunge alternative is practical and safer for majority of practitioners**

#### Warrior II – Virabhadrasana B

From Warrior I, exhale, widen stance. The back foot is parallel to the back of the mat, the back thigh externally rotates and the pelvis opens to the side. Posteriorly tilt the pelvis (lengthen the tailbone down), to get it back into a neutral position. The arms reach out at shoulder height with the palms pointing downward. The chest is opened, the bottom of the shoulder blades move together, and relax trapezius. Continue bending the front knee so the thigh remains parallel to the mat. Gaze at hand.



**Alternative: If there is compression in the back leg and hip, then slightly tilt the upper body forward.**

## Reverse Warrior – Parivritta Virabhadrasana

From Warrior II, inhale, place the left hand lightly on the back leg. Reach the right arm overhead. The palm is facing downward. Keep the back leg strong. Continue bending the front knee and guiding the knee towards the pinky toe. For a backbend, rotate the upper body forward, and extend the spine. Gaze at hand.



## Warrior III – Virabhadrasana C

From Warrior I, exhale, lift the back heel then balance on the right leg. Lift the left leg and the upper body, creating a 'T' shape with the body. The left leg is active and the toes point downward. Square the pelvis by pointing the left hip downward. Arms reach forward with palms facing each other or stretch out to the sides. Hands can also move into Anjali mudra (prayer position at the heart), rest on the hips, or hold the elbows behind the back. Gaze downward.



**Alternative:** *Place the hands on a block in front of you.*

## 4. going deeper

- Practice 15-30 minutes daily including: pranayama, centering, warming up, and sun salutations.
- Read the story of Virabhadra, the Warrior (sent via email).
- Reflection on the qualities of the warrior and when and how to bring warrior energy to one's life.
- Reflection on the first two Yamas, Ahimsa (Nonviolence), and Asteya (Nonstealing); how the concepts can be applied to make your life and the world in general a better place.

## 4.1 sample home practices

### Practice I: Beginning

Length: 15-30 minutes

- Warm up including:
  - Childs Pose
  - Table Top, Thread-the-Needle
  - Cat-Cow motion
- Step backs (3 times)
  - Low Lunge to High Plank
  - Knees-Chest-Chin and Baby Cobra
  - Downward Facing Dog
- Surya Namaskara A (3 times)
  - Plank
  - Knees-Chest-Chin or Half Chaturanga
  - Cobra or Upward Facing Dog
  - Downward Facing Dog

### Practice II: Intermediate

Length: 30-45 minutes

- Warm up including:
  - Mountain Pose
  - Standing Cat and Cow
  - Standing Side Bend
  - Forward Fold with Twist
- Step backs (3 times)
  - Low Lunge to High Plank
  - Knees-Chest-Chin and Baby Cobra
  - Downward Facing Dog

- Dancing Warriors (3 times, becoming progressively more challenging)
  - Plank
  - Knees-Chest-Chin or Half Chaturanga
  - Cobra or Upward Facing Dog
  - Downward Facing Dog
  - Warrior I, Warrior II
  - Warrior I, Warrior II, Reverse Warrior
  - Warrior I, Warrior II, Reverse Warrior, Warrior III