




पवनमुक्तासन ः

Yogasana Fundamentals

Workshop conducted at Bangalore
16th to 20th December 2019

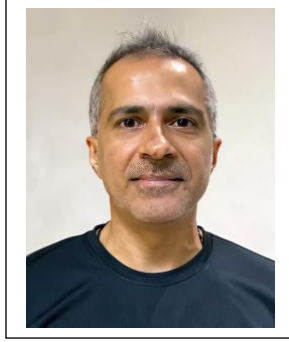


Yoga Fundamentals

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He reads and writes English, Hindi, Kannada, German, French, Spanish and Sanskrit with varying degrees of proficiency, and speaks Saraiki (Punjabi). He has developed learning and teaching techniques for languages and textual analysis.

His doctoral thesis was on a model of interpersonal communication and pragmatics, and his M.Phil. dissertation was on pedagogy of the German language to foreign students.

Besides localization & language services, his work also includes interpersonal communication, linguistics, education and psychology. He has published several articles on these topics and are available on his LinkedIn account:

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Slowing Down

When we slow down, we allow the body to

- self-observe and correct
- relax in the final pose
- release the breath, let go
- allow itself to stretch
- synchronize breath and movement

Few Asanas

Be patient. You may feel that we are learning very little at first. **This is deliberate.**

Explore the depths of each posture and the mysteries that lie within.

Day 1

Postures

1. toe bending
2. ankle bending
3. ankle rotation

Reflection & Exploration

What is Prana?

Slowing Down

The paradox of slowness is that you will find you accomplish the task more quickly (and more efficiently) * and with less effort because you are not wasting energy.

quoted from
The Practicing Mind – Thomas M. Sterner
New World Library, 2012
Page 97

** parentheses added by me*

Less is More

We may not learn the vast variety of asanas and practices in 5 days. But with just the few practices we learn, we can achieve the benefits that we require.

Day 2

Postures

1. toe bending
2. ankle bending
3. ankle rotation
4. knee bending
5. knee rotation
6. spinal stretch
7. forward bending

Reflection & Exploration

What is the need for observation?

Day 3

Postures

1. toe bending
2. ankle bending
3. ankle rotation
4. knee bending
5. knee rotation
6. spinal stretch
7. forward bending
8. knee / thigh flexing
9. forward bend with knee / thigh flexing
10. finger spread and clench
11. wrist bending
12. wrist rotation
13. elbow bending
14. elbow rotation
15. neck bending - up and down

Reflection & Exploration

- slow
- breathe
- relax in each pose
- observe the after-effects of each practice

Day 3

We discussed several aspects of asana practice:

- a) The **physical**
- b) The **energy** - prana
- c) The **awareness** - observation

In our practice, we learned how to

- a) engage the **body parts**,
- b) experience **prana**,
- c) **observe** the effects

bringing together body, prana and mind.
a b c

This is **Yoga** or **integration**.

Integrating various aspects of our being.

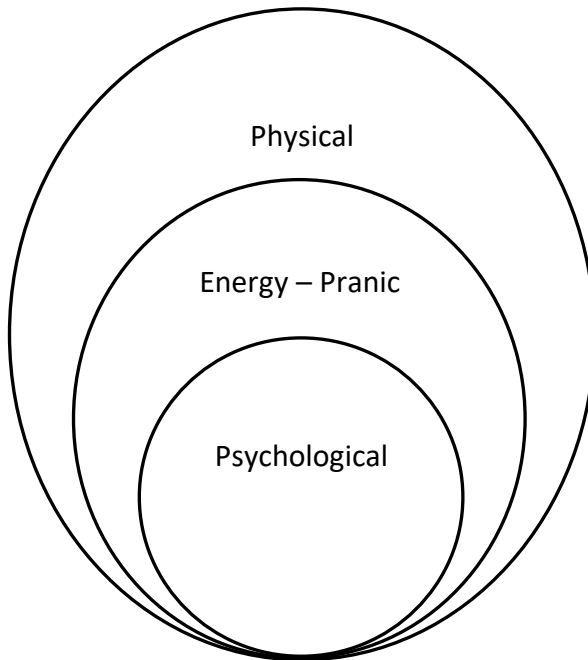
Day 4

Recognize the various aspects of our being:

Physical

Energy flow – Prana

Mind – thoughts, emotions



Observe how these aspects get increasingly subtler.

Day 4

Different practices in Yoga

1. <i>Shatkarmas</i>	cleansing
2. <i>Asanas</i>	physical postures
3. <i>Pranayama, Mudra & Bandha</i>	regulating prana
4. Psychological techniques	harnessing the mind
5. Psychic practices	

Complete List of Practices

A. Legs

1. toe bending
2. ankle bending
3. ankle rotation
4. knee bending
5. knee rotation
6. knee / thigh flexing

B. Hands

1. finger spread and clench
2. wrist bending
3. wrist rotation
4. elbow bending
5. elbow rotation
6. shoulder rotation

C. Neck

1. neck bending - up and down
2. neck bending - sideward
3. neck twisting
4. neck rotation

D. Spine

1. forward bend using table (with thigh flexing)
2. spinal stretch
3. sideward bend

E. Yoga Nidra

Sanskrit Vocabulary

Body Parts

toe	पादाङ्गुलि
ankle	गुल्फ
knee	जानु
fist	मुष्टिका
wrist	मणिबंध
elbow	केहूनि
shoulder	स्कंध
neck	ग्रीव

Movements

bending	नमन्
rotation	चक्र
clenching	बंधन्

Use the above list of words to give the Sanskrit equivalents of the various practices:

toe bending	
ankle bending	
ankle rotation	
knee bending	
knee rotation	
knee / thigh flexing	
finger clench	
wrist bending	
wrist rotation	
elbow bending	
elbow rotation	
shoulder rotation	
neck bending	
spinal stretch	
spinal side bend	

Assignment & Reflection

1. What is Prana?

2. What is the importance of observation?

3. How many aspects of your being are you able to recognize?

4. Classify them as gross or subtle.

5. Explain some of the main guidelines for practicing asanas as learned in this course.

[illegible]

Asanas

Detailed Instructions

Toes

Name	Padanguli Naman पादाङ्गुलि नमन्
English Name	Toe Bending Posture
Base Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Legs straight on floor.ii. Torso upright, or slightly reclining, hands on floor facing backward.iii. Feet flopping to the sides.
Starting Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">iv. Bring feet together.
End (Holding) Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">v. Inhale: pull toes towards body.vi. Exhale: bend toes outward.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">vii. Observe effects after practice.
Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Slow movement, knees straight.▪ Rest of body relaxed. Back straight.

Ankles

Name	Goolf Naman गूल्फ नमन्
English Name	Ankle Bending
Base Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Legs straight on floor. ii. Torso upright, or slightly reclining, hands on floor facing backward. iii. Feet flopping on the floor.
Starting Position	iv. Bring feet together.
End (Holding) Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v. Inhale: Pull back foot. Ensure knees are not locked. vi. Exhale: Push out foot at ankle. Knees relaxed & straight
	vii. Observe effects after practice.
Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knees straight. ▪ Observe muscles used. ▪ Back straight.

Name	Goolf Chakra गूल्फ चक्र
English Name	Ankle Rotation
Base Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Legs straight on floor. ii. Torso upright, or slightly reclining, hands on floor facing backward. iii. Feet flopping on the floor.
Starting Position	iv. Bring feet together.
End (Holding) Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> v. Inhale: Rotate ankle clockwise upward. vi. Exhale: Rotate ankle clockwise downward.
	vii. Observe effects after practice.
Key Points	Knees straight and relaxed. Back straight.

Knees

Name	Janu Naman जानु नमन्
English Name	Knee Bending
Base Position	i. Legs straight on floor. Torso upright, or slightly reclining, hands on floor facing backward. Feet flopping on the floor.
Starting Position	ii. Bring feet together. iii. Fold one leg at knee. iv. Clasp hands below thigh.
End (Holding) Position	v. Exhale: straighten leg.
	vi. Inhale: fold knee again, bringing leg towards stomach.
Key Points	Ensure thigh and knee muscles are relaxed.

Name	Janu Chakra जानु चक्र
English Name	Knee Crank
Base Position	i. Legs straight on floor. Torso upright, or slightly reclining, hands on floor facing backward. Feet flopping on the floor.
Starting Position	ii. Bring feet together. iii. Fold one leg at knee. iv. Clasp hands below thigh.
End (Holding) Position	v. Inhale: rotate lower leg at knee clockwise going up.
	vi. Exhale: continue downward rotation. vii. Then do this anti clockwise. viii. After few rounds, repeat with other leg.
Key Points	Back straight. Other muscles relaxed.

Name	Janu Falak Akarasan जानु फ़लक अकरासन्
English Name	Knee Flexing
Base Position	i. Legs straight on floor. Torso upright, or slightly reclining, hands on floor facing backward. Feet flopping on the floor.
Starting Position	ii. Bring feet together.
End (Holding) Position	iii. Inhaling – iv. flex or tighten the thigh muscles of right leg. v. hold for a few seconds
	vi. Exhaling release the flex. Repeat on other side.
Key Points	Back upright and relaxed. Other organs relaxed.

Hands - Fingers, Wrist, Elbow, Shoulders

Name	Mushtika Bandhan मुष्टिका बंधन्
English Name	Fist Clenching
Base Position	i. Sit crossed legged or in any comfortable seated posture.
Starting Position	ii. Raise hands parallel to floor.
End (Holding) Position	iii. Inhale: Spread fingers apart. iv. Exhale: Bring fingers together and wrap fingers around thumb.
Key Points	Back upright.

Name	Manibandh Naman मणिबंध नमन्
English Name	Wrist Bending
Base Position	i. Sit crossed legged or in any comfortable seated posture. ii. Raise hands parallel to floor.
Starting Position	iii. Inhale: Raise palm upward. iv. Exhale: Bend palms downward.
Key Points	Back upright. Slow meditative breathing.

Name	Manibandh Chakra मणिबंध चक्र
English Name	Wrist Rotation
Base Position	i. Sit crossed legged or in any comfortable seated posture.
Starting Position	ii. Raise hands parallel to floor. iii. Clench fists, thumbs inside, fingers wrapped around.
End (Holding) Position	iv. Inhale: Rotate fist clockwise upward. v. Exhale: Rotate fist clockwise downward. vi. After a few rounds, repeat anticlockwise.
Key Points	Back upright. Slow meditative breathing. Use deep breath as timer.

Name	Kehuni Naman केहुनि नमन्
English Name	Elbow Bending
Base Position	i. Sit crossed legged or in any comfortable seated posture.
Starting Position	ii. Raise hands parallel to floor. iii. Turn palm upwards.
End (Holding) Position	iv. Inhale: Fold the elbow and touch the shoulders with fingers.
	Exhale: Straighten the arm.
Key Points	Do this slowly. Feel the triceps. Relaxed movement.

Name	Kehuni Chakra केहुनि चक्र
English Name	Elbow Rotation
Base Position	i. Sit crossed legged or in any comfortable seated posture.
Starting Position	ii. Raise hands parallel to floor. iii. Turn palm upwards. iv. Hold one elbow with the other hand.
End (Holding) Position	v. Inhale: Rotate forearm at elbow clockwise upward.
	vi. Exhale: Rotate forearm at elbow clockwise downward. vii. Repeat second round anticlockwise. viii. Repeat entire set with other hand.
Key Points	Slow movement. Focus on elbow, biceps and shoulder.

Name	Skandha Chakra स्कंध चक्र
English Name	Shoulder Rotation
Base Position	Sit crossed legged or in any comfortable seated posture.
Starting Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Raise hands parallel to floor. ii. Turn palm upwards. iii. Raise hands parallel to floor. iv. Turn palm upwards. v. Inhale: Fold the elbow and touch the shoulders with fingers. vi. Join the elbows straight ahead of the chest, upper arms parallel to the floor. vii. Exhale and prepare to start.
End (Holding) Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> viii. Inhale: Raise elbows upward, going apart from each other, bringing them over the head. ix. Continue by spreading them wide and bringing them to the side. x. Exhale continue to drop the folded arms downward to the waist. Drop the shoulders down so that arms reach the waist. xi. Then continue rotational movement forward to come back to starting position, bringing elbows together.
Key Points	Slow, relaxed, especially shoulders.

Neck

Name	Greeva Sanchalanasan ग्रीव संचालन्
English Name	Neck Rotation
Base Position	Vajrasan or Padmasan
Starting Position	i. Eyes closed. Close eyes. Exhale – bend neck down bring chin down to chest.
End (Holding) Position	ii. Inhale - Raise head in circular motion clockwise in a way that the ears are taken towards the shoulders and not allowing the chin to move too much. Continue motion till neck is raised and head is raised up. iii. Exhale – continue circular motion of neck downward bringing chin back to starting position.
	iv. After 5-10 rounds, repeat anti clockwise. v. After practice neck straight and relax and observe for a minute or two.
Key Points	Slow movements. Chin movement to be restricted to small circle. Discontinue at the slightest indication of vertigo or dizziness and OPEN YOUR EYES immediately.

You can split the practice into

- upward and downward bend
- sideward bend
- sideward twist

All three combined become the neck rotation.

Spine

Name	Tadasan ताड़ासन
English Name	Spinal Stretch - Tree Pose
Base Position	i. Standing upright, legs hip-width, toes forward
Starting Position	ii. Bring hands above head. iii. Interlock fingers. iv. Place hands on head with palms facing upward. v. Fix gaze straight ahead, slightly above eye level.
End (Holding) Position	vi. Inhale: Raise arms, shoulders, chest and heels.
Returning to Starting Position	vii. Exhale: Bring down arms over head, shoulders, chest & heels.
Variation 1	viii. Look up to raised hands and gaze at interlocked fingers while in final position.
Variation 2	ix. In final position, extend and raise one leg forward or backward.
Variation in Breathing	x. In end position, breathe normally a couple of times, maintaining and relaxing in the end position.
Benefits	Physical & mental balance. Spinal stretch & loosening. Stretch to rectus abdominus muscles. Useful for first 6 months of pregnancy .

Name	Tiriyak Tadasan तिरियक ताड़ासन
English Name	Spinal Side Bend - Swaying Tree Pose
Base Position	i. Standing upright, legs hip width, toes forward.
Starting Position	ii. Spread legs shoulder width apart. iii. Bring hands above head. iv. Interlock fingers. Face palms upward. v. Fix gaze ahead of you, slightly above eye level. vi. Inhale: Raise arms above
End (Holding) Position	vii. Exhale: Bend sideways, comfortably.
	viii. Inhale: Return to starting position. ix. Exhale: Bend to the other side.
Key Points	x. Release stress in other parts of body. xi. Knees straight. Body in straight vertical plane.
Alternative	Keep one hand resting on hip.
Benefits	Loosens the sides of the waist.

Yoga Nidra

1. Relaxation of the Physical Body

- 1.1. Squeeze & relax.
- 1.2. Listen to external sounds & the silence between them.
- 1.3. *Sankalpa* – resolution.
- 1.4. Rotation of consciousness around the body parts.

2. Relaxation of the Mind

- 2.1. Breath observation.
- 2.2. Reverse counting of breath - at the navel, heart, throat, nostrils.

3. Visualization [Chidakaash Dharana]

- 3.1. Observe what emerges in the *chidakaash*.
- 3.2. Visualize the *ishta*.
- 3.3. Repeat the *sankalpa* before the *ishta*.

4. Externalization

- 4.1. Breath awareness.
- 4.2. Awareness of body and surroundings.
- 4.3. Micro movements.
- 4.4. End practice.

Guidelines

1. Slowly
2. First round:
 - a. stay within range of comfort,
 - b. **relax, breathe.**
 - c. observe,
 - d. correct the posture.
3. Second round onward:
 - a. once relaxed
 - b. use breath to deepen the bend or stretch;
 - c. increase depth of pose 5% at a time.
4. Do fewer rounds – but stay longer.
5. Focus on **correctness** and **relaxation** in each pose.

Planning your Practice

Weekly schedule:

1. Day 1 – Legs
2. Day 2 – Hands
3. Day 3 – Neck
4. Day 4 – Spine + body part of your preference
5. Day 5 – Body part of your preference

Guidelines

1. Plan 15-20 minutes a day. **LESS is MORE**
2. If you feel **lazy** on one day – just do **ONE posture** for 2 minutes.
3. Take one break mid-week and another end of week.
4. If you take a break, ensure that the break day does not extend to a second day.
5. Go slow. Do few practices each day.

Acknowledgments

Bihar School of Yoga

The Bihar School of Yoga was founded in 1964 by Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati to impart yogic training to householders and sannyasins alike.

The Yoga techniques developed there are a synthesis of many approaches to personal development, based on traditional vedantic, tantric and yogic teachings in conjunction with contemporary physical and mental health sciences. Today, these techniques are taught by Bihar Yoga Bharati.

<https://www.biharyoga.net/>

Atma Darshan Yogashram - Bangalore

Located at Kumaraswamy Layout at Bangalore, the ashram was set up to disseminate the teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati and have ongoing classes, satsangs and other activities.

<https://atmadarshan.net/>

Appendix

Reflections

What Yoga Is

What I believed Yoga to be

The word “yoga” was synonymous with physical postures and sequence of exercises. And this is what I too believed yoga to be.

What It ALSO is

And when I started to study it systematically, I learned that Yoga ALSO includes many profounder practices of cleansing, breathing and meditation.

Yoga, in Sanskrit, means synthesis, total or aggregation, depending on the context. In the simplest interpretation, you can understand yoga to mean the bringing together of the body and the mind in harmony with each other. Mind you - this is a very simplistic definition. And by the end of this article you will have developed a more detailed interpretation.

So, now let's see what it means to synthesise the body and mind. Well - not just the two - I mentioned only two aspects - to catch your attention and to abide by my language teacher's diktats. Because I am not allowed to mention 3 or more things in a sentence with 2 commas and one 'and'. So I played a trick. Now that I have your attention - know that you have more aspects to yourself.

1. your body - your flesh, bones and blood

2. the energy that circulates in your body (energy that you get from the food you eat and which is released when you digest and burn the food with the oxygen that you breathe in - remember your biology class? - that's why you breathe out CO₂)
3. your mind - your thoughts, intellect, your feelings

Now that's THREE parts of you.

Three Parts of You

A. The Physical

Not to forget that your physical body has several organs and systems – and there are postures that address them jointly and individually. Again - remember your biology class

1. your muscles
2. your bones - the skeletal system
3. your heart, arteries and veins - the circulatory system
4. your blood - that flows in the circulatory system
5. your tummy, intestines, - the digestive system
6. your organs of expulsion and the liver, kidney - the excretory system
7. your nose, lungs - respiratory system
8. the glands that secrete hormones and fluids for the normal function of your body - what they

call the endocrinal system - wait - don't lose me yet -

9. the brain, spine and nerves - the nervous system

B. The Energy System

Your energy system is the body of energy that animates you, your organs and your life system. Right? Without energy you wouldn't be alive and kicking. The energy system permeates both the physical AND mental bodies. The energy system is a subtler aspect of the gross body and a grosser medium of the mental body. But ignore the last sentence if it's too heavy for you.

Now that you recognise that you are AT LEAST made up of THREE main aspects.

C. The Mental

Your **mind** - in Yogic psychology, ALSO has many different aspects

1. the **intellect** -
2. the **memory** - short and long term
3. **your thoughts**
4. **your emotions** - every paid attention to them? Yoga does.
5. DNA code - something you have no "conscious" cognition of - but it's memory nevertheless - archaic cumulative collective memory of your

species, race, and ancestry that goes back several millennia - the collective unconscious, if you will. Got it? Yes, that's mapped under your MIND in yogic science. Mind it!

Now, why am I dissecting your being? A little more patience. Let us first discuss number

the **physical** body
the **energy** body AND
the **mental and emotional** body

(and all the layers thereof)

let me now show you that Yoga has something for each of these.

1. For the body - yogic science has 2 sets of practices

a. cleansing techniques - for cleaning the nose, sinus, intestines etc.

b. postures and physical exercise -

So, you see the physical postures or asanas are only ONE set of practices among many other.

Now, let's continue.

2. For the energy system - we have another two sets of practices:

- a. breathing exercises - commonly known as pranayama
- b. gestures of fingers and hands

These practices regulate and harness the flow of energy in your body.

Finally, for

3. the mind -

a. there are practical tools and techniques that help quieten the mind, regulate emotions and alleviate psychological afflictions. They include NOT ONLY meditative practices but also psychologic techniques.

So now you see, there are several practices APART FROM POSTURES. Here's a quick overview.

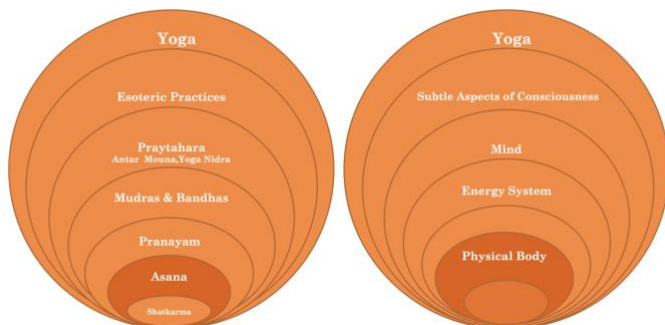
A	Physical Body	Cleansing Practices	Shatkarmas
		Poses, Postures, Sequences	Yog-Asana
B	Energy Body	Breathing Techniques	Pranayama
		Finger Gestures & Locks	Mudras & Bandhas
C	Mental & Emotional Body	Mindfulness Techniques	Pratyahara

And to think that we believed that Yoga was only Yogasana! That's only ONE of the several sets of practices.

Interesting to note how 1, 2 and 3 get less and less physical. The mental body is practically non-physical. It's like the operating system, apps, the software that work ON hardware. The energy system has some physical attribute - we can perceive and measure biochemical energy. That's the basis for the yogic science to distinguish between the GROSS and the SUBTLE "bodies". Well - I forgive them for using such jargon - after all yoga is a highly technical subject. But let's understand that gross means more physical and subtle means less or non-physical.

Also, note that we have till now only touched upon the aspects of your being that you are aware of or wish to believe exists. Body, energy and mind. I dare not delve into the subtler aspects of yourself - the consciousness. Dare I? It really depends on the reader's acceptance and beliefs. But if you are willing to go a step further, yes, there are practices for the soul or consciousness or whatever you want to call it. Those for another day. *(I actually still have to understand that myself.)*

So, let me complete the picture in the interest of academics and the FULL picture - so that you have a roadmap of the path to enLIGHTenment. Said on a LIGHTer note.



(Hanuman was known to have access to both the physical and non-physical world – he is in a way a metaphor of this phenomenon – he is also the son of the Wind God – Pawana-putra).

My Teachers' Training Course

Today was the graduation ceremony of the two-year yoga teachers' training. As the Vedic incantations of the sacred *homa* permeated the ambience, I scanned my memories of the previous two years and recalled that I had had insightful experiences that were truly transformational.

The measure of success for any course is to gauge whether the goals and objectives set at the beginning have been achieved. Although I did not undertake my internship and although I did not get certified, I believe I have successfully graduated from this course on this momentous day, because all the goals that I had set out to achieve and most of the goals that our teachers had envisaged for us, I see having been achieved.

Personal Transformation

At the start of this journey, we were constantly reminded that the course was not about certification and asana and pranayama alone, but a journey of personal change that we were called upon to experience in the larger design of the universe of which we are a part. This seemed far-fetched at that time, and yet today, on graduation day, I see the foresightedness of the *guru-tattwa* that spoke through our teachers giving new direction to our lives.

New Horizons

I believe the course has brought about deep transformations and at different levels and in different spheres of our lives. Yes, we have learned many asanas and advanced pranayama techniques. Yes, we learned much about meditation and esoteric practices, a variegated and eclectic menu of relaxation and meditation techniques to suit our varying needs, moods and tastes. Yet, the course gave us much more than mere techniques. It opened windows to a new horizon of knowledge, concepts, ideas and philosophies that have enriched our intellect and given a new meaning to existence.

योगःश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः Cessation of the Conditionings of the Mind

The single most important and concept that permeated the course and which emerged recurrently in the teachings was that all the paths of yoga, be they *asana*, *pranayama*, *shatkarma* or the seemingly diverse wings, such as *hatha yoga*, *raja yoga*, *karma yoga* or *bhakti yoga*, are aimed directly or indirectly towards the primary objective of ***chitta shuddhi***, the cleansing of past conditionings that date back several millennia. That we bring forth our past conditionings and create realities and situations in a constant process of evolution that is aimed towards this eternal cleansing.

The Witness Within

The second most important learning was the understanding of who we are. I do not claim to have found the answer to this existential question, but I have certainly progressed on the path towards insightful realizations. Certainly, by a process of elimination, I understood that we are not this body, nor the mind. The Self HAS the body, and a mind. The understanding of the separation between the observer, the *sakshi-drshta* and its experiences, both internal and external, was life-altering.

Awareness

This leads on to the next very potent concept of Awareness. In the Bihar School tradition, great emphasis is laid on developing awareness in all practices, be they physical or esoteric. It is when the observer can be free from the afflictions of the mind and body and achieve a level of stillness, that **awareness** can allow past conditionings to arise and be exhausted, facilitating and perhaps accelerating the evolutionary process of *chitta shuddhi*.

Yogic Psychology

The introduction to *raja yoga* may appear irrelevant to a “yoga” training. But nothing could be more relevant than understanding the underlying principles of Yoga that are enshrined in the spiritual science that is *raja yoga*. It is thanks to the teachers’ training course

that I learned fundamental concepts of spirituality, the nature of consciousness and the order of the universe in a scientific manner.

The course debunked the myth that *raja yoga* is a religious text fraught with the arcane and supernatural practices. We learned that the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali were a thesis written by a great sage, a spiritual scientist, who taught techniques to master the mind and its deeper realms, bordering with the spiritual dimensions. With just a rudimentary introduction to the sutras, I was greatly influenced at once by the simplicity and profundity of eastern psychology.

Action & Personal Excellence

Karma yoga, both as a practice and a theory at the ashram has taught me a few very valuable lessons that have contributed to the way I manage my time, family, business and studies and multi-task with much more ease and fluidity than in the past. I learned firstly the importance of efficiency and excellence in one's work, more than the importance of selfless service.

Further, I realised that goals change and goalposts move forward with time, and that rather than obsessing over goals and living in an imaginary future, it's wiser to be present to the process and not get too attached with the outcome, using goals merely as a direction in which to move forward.

Acceptance

That brings me to an equally important idea of **acceptance** – acceptance of the self as one is, knowing that our flaws and our shortcomings are not us; they are temporary afflictions that can be overcome; acceptance of the outcome of our work, our karma; acceptance that we are not entirely in control, to be able to drop self-blame without repudiating responsibility – understood in the right sense; acceptance that in this evolutionary process, time stretches and that there is ample scope for self-improvement and redemption.

Simplicity

At Atmadarshan Yogashram, I learned an important lesson in simplicity. We are not a swanky upmarket yoga school; our *asana*-postures are taught simply yet scientifically. We were taught less at a time, with emphasis on repetition and more repetition, and even more practice. And I learned that less is in fact more. Our teachers set high standards, and yet they taught us only as much as we could digest; they raised the bar without diluting the significance of what was taught.

A course such as the YTTC at Atmadarshan is a rare combination of various disciplines. It gave us the opportunity to see Yoga in a broader light and in the right context. The teachers at the ADY Bangalore have put together this course that has not only informed and educated us but also enriched our lives with

insights and practical techniques to make ourselves better students and fellow practitioners of yoga.

My First Yoga Teaching

In December of 2019, I had the opportunity to apply my knowledge of yoga and use my training as a teacher to conduct a free five-day workshop. The workshop benefitted me in various ways, giving me the occasion to structure my free time creatively and helping me develop certain strengths as a facilitator.

Purpose Mission Vision

Swamiji has initiated the second chapter of Yoga. He has said that the phase of propagation of Yoga is complete and it is now time to deepen our understanding of yogic science. In his lectures and messages, he has stressed the importance of slowing down and understanding the nuances of *yoga-vidya* and *prana-vidya*.

This workshop was an attempt in that direction.

My objective in conducting the program was to present Yoga in the right perspective, dispel certain misconceptions and **try** to correct the distorted and limited view that people may have of it.

Approach & Class Structure

In the program, I stressed the understanding and experience of what *prana* is. It was my attempt to take the lessons beyond lectures and focus on experiments, observations and reflections to encourage an understanding of the various levels of our being. The

students were at the end of the course able to distinguish between the physical body and the psychological (non-physical). My idea was to make the idea of the non-physical relatable and comprehensible, and to encourage the participants to discern physical from non-physical, gross from subtle. To be able to realise that *prana* lies in between and permeates both the gross and subtle aspects of our being, further cemented their understanding of *prana*.

My approach was:

1. firstly, to initiate a discussion about *prana*, keeping it open throughout the week;
2. secondly, to help them identify *prana* after each *yogasana* practice, also incidentally encouraging them to practice self-observation;
3. progressively intensifying their experience of *prana* with each day's practices and
4. finally, consolidating these observations in a written document and repeated discussions about *prana*.

It was important to anchor their learning and help them revisit the discussion, rather than allowing a concept to be relegated to a lecture in theory.

Concepts Covered

We discussed the following concepts and what is meant when we use these words.

- *prana*
- subtle and gross body

- the meaning of Yoga – word meaning and in application
- *pawanmuktasana* (anti rheumatic postures) series I
- simple spinal stretches and bends
- introduction to yogic psychology and Yoga Nidra

Class Structure

I identified the following aspects of a yoga session:

- i. converging attention to class
- ii. prayer, setting intentions
- iii. theory
- iv. asana
 - demonstration
 - practice with supervision
 - observation, reflection, rest
 - alternating practice
- v. questions, discussions
- vi. short relaxation
- vii. prayer and conclusion

Deviations

I remember having heard or read Swamiji talk about innovation and originality in teaching. I took that as a permission to introduce my personal pedagogical style into the sessions.

I deviated from the traditional classroom guidelines in the following ways:

1. **Breath:**

- a. I professed free and relaxed breathing in all postures and did not insist on the purity of linking in- and out- breaths with the initial and final positions. Rather I stressed on **releasing** the breath and **ensuring** natural and free flow of breath.
- b. I extended the duration of holding in the final positions. This necessitated free and natural breathing as professed above.
- c. The coordination of in- and out- breaths was taught in later classes (days 4 and 5) but not stressed upon.
- d. The awareness and auto-correction of posture and relaxation in the end-position was my primary focus rather than the coordination of in- and out-breaths with the movements.

2. **Invocation**

At the beginning of class I used *bhramari* or silence to anchor the attention to the class instead of Om-chanting and shanti-mantras. This was done respecting the diverse religious and cultural beliefs of the participants. Another reason was lack of confidence. I concede, however, that I ought to have stuck to tradition and will do so in my subsequent workshops.

3. **Compilation**

I compiled a concise booklet by typing each day's notes and practices. To this we added the

participants' hand-written reflections. We used A5 size stationary for their writings as well as for the printed notes, such that they could be bound together on the final day. This gave the students a handbook of knowledge already acquired and a permanent reference for continuing practice.

Insights

With every workshop one facilitates, one's knowledge is reinforced, and experience is gained. At the same time, one is humbled by challenging questions and situations in class.

At a personal level, this workshop firstly helped me overcome my hesitation and lack of confidence. Having completed it successfully, it gave me a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, it was a reminder that my knowledge in Yoga is still limited and that knowledge is vast. Conducting a workshop or teaching a class is a constant check on the ego and a steady reminder that we are seekers and learners just like the participants.

Gratitude

With humility I accept the gift of confidence and learning that this program provided. I am grateful to the guiding force of the universe.

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Reflections on Yoga

Naadi Shodhan Pranayam

We are aware that we have different aspects of our personality, many of them have a complementing and conflicting aspect. We all have shadowed parts of our personalities which we disown or do not acknowledge. A difficult aspect of growth is to learn to accept these disowned selves.

Sometimes the conflicting aspects are purely extreme and conflicting temperaments. Some exceptionally joyful and compassionate, while the others vile, jealous and spiteful.

When I practice Nadi Shodhan Pranayam, I experience energising and thereby accepting the conflicting extremes of my SELF, thereby balancing out the extremes and diminishing the oscillation between them. It is like drawing from one extreme and feeding to the other, an osmosis of energy that seeks to balance both sides.

Bhramari – a system reboot

When I practice *bhramari*, I experience that with the vibrations in our brain and skull I am able to erase all the undulations in our mind that were caused by the

entire day's thinking and unbridled (or perhaps directed) activity of the mind. Many meditative practices of Yoga seek to silence the mind. Bhramari seems to me a quick erasure of the mind's hectic before we can sleep or meditate.

On Ageing

We learned during Yoga class that regular practice arrests ageing. I feel that the corollary is actually true. In my observation, an effortless or even a light practice of Yoga only helps us live and function naturally – keep the body closer to its natural functioning. Most people actual undo the natural pace and functioning of the body by breathing shallow and allowing their bodies to slouch and remain inactive. Simple deep breathing and stretches without any complicated postures are enough to remain close to the natural ways of the body. I see people all the time around me breathing shallow – their diaphragms are not getting pushed down but rather their shoulders will rise with the shallowness of their breath. With this small but consistent change in their breathing they are inviting unknowingly a host of complications which will have a cumulative and far-reaching impact on their overall health and physiology. By reclaiming our natural breath, we have already arrested the unnatural harm that most people inflict upon themselves. Hence it is not correct that Yoga slows down the ageing process. It is apt to state that most people's lifestyles hasten or accelerate the ageing process.

An analogy of Yogaasana and Karma-yoga

Just as to get an asana correct, we break it down into step by step sequential movements coordinating breath and integrating awareness, in the same way, to accomplish a larger task we must break it down into smaller steps, execute them timely and in logical sequence, mindfully and slowly. The goal then moves towards us just as the asana simply comes about.

*Gratitude to our teachers and
the guiding intelligence of the universe*

Vikram Malhotra
planet Earth