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Different paths of yoga ^[1]



There are many different paths of yoga, many of which have little to do with physical postures that are emphasised in the yoga generally taught in the West.

Bhakti yoga 'yoga of the heart' where one opens one's emotions and feelings to a higher principle, whether with form or without. This path requires surrender, non-expectation, trust, renunciation, awe, remembrance, caring and respect for others. It involves meditation ^[2], kirtan ^[3] (group chanting), reflection and satsang ^[4] (sharing ideas with like-minded people).

Buddhi yoga 'yoga of awakening Awareness' as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita - one of the classical yogic texts - where one specifically works on opening up the agya chakra (third eye or eye of intuition).

Dhyana yoga 'yoga of meditation ^[2]'.

Gyana yoga 'yoga of realisation' also known as Vedanta (the culmination of knowledge) or Advaita (non-dualism). This path requires constant questioning and enquiry. One investigates the fundamental nature of one's own being, together with the study and reflection on the

sacred texts, such as the Upanishads. One treads the path where one considers nothing as real versus everything is real. Meditation [2] is a vital aspect of this path.

Hatha yoga 'yoga of balance' which harmonises the body and its vital energies to bring balance and thereby open us up to the meditative state. It emphasises asana [5] (physical postures), pranayama [6] (breath control), mudra [7] (symbolic body positions/ hand gestures), bandha [8] (physio-psychological locks), shat karma [9] (cleansing practices), correct diet and a balanced attitude to life.

Karma yoga [10] 'yoga of awareness in action'.

Kriya yoga 'yoga of energy flow' a form of kundalini yoga which is designed to awaken the kundalini (primal transformative energy). It is a practical means of bringing direct and transformative experience and insight. There are over 70 different practices including asanas [5] (physical postures), pranayama [6] (breath control), bandha [8] (physio-psychological locks), mudra [7] (symbolic body positions/ hand gestures) and mantra [3] (chanting).

Kundalini yoga 'yoga of primal energy' which comes from Tantra (a practice and philosophy which expands the mind and liberates potential energy to bring spiritual awakening). On this path, one works on the chakras (energy centres) so that they awaken and function at a higher energy level. This allows the kundalini (primal transformative energy) to rise upwards to awaken dormant potential and insight into our fundamental identity.

Mantra yoga [3] 'yoga of sound vibration'.

Nada or laya yoga 'yoga of inner absorption' where one listens to inner sound as a means of going deeper. As preparation, the body and mind need to be purified on all levels (using hatha yoga) so that it becomes so one-pointed that bliss is generated in the brain. One realises the nature of the bindu (the point, the threshold between this world of form and Consciousness). Often this path is confused with mantra yoga.

Raja yoga 'regal yoga' which includes Patanjali yoga or Ashtanga yoga - the eightfold path of yoga described in the classical text Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. Special attention is given to a step-by-step inward process towards samadhi (mystical absorption in Consciousness), starting from yama and niyama (guidelines for life) and progressively moving through asana [5] (sitting posture), pranayama [6] (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal from the senses), dharana (mental concentration) and dhyana (meditation [2]).

Swara yoga 'yoga of rhythms' where one tries to understand the relationship between nature's rhythms and our own physical, emotional and mental functioning, as well as our moment to moment activities.

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