

# HATHA YOGA: THE SADHANA OF KALI YUGA

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"YOGA" is an ancient Sanskrit word which, in only two syllables, encompasses the entire body of spiritual experiences and experiments of thousands of Realised Masters. These Masters have discovered the **Ultimate Reality, Sat**, and in their infinite compassion, carefully marked a path for others to follow. The **Upanishads** exclaim: "*Lo! Ye who suffer know! A way has been found! A way out of all this darkness!*" That way .... is Yoga!

Yoga is as old as the Universe, for it is both the Path and the Goal. The Goal is realisation of the **Innate Nature of the Universe, the Highest Being: Atman, Purusha, Shiva, Devi, Sat...** whatever word we wish to use to describe its essence. In Sankhya and Yoga, that **Highest Being** is called **Purusha** - and the manifestation of That Spirit in the world of matter and senses is called **Prakriti**. It is through experiences in the **Prakriti**, or manifested world, that the **Jiva**, individual soul, returns to the **Paramatman**, or **Universal Soul**. Hence, **Purusha** and **Prakriti** are one and the same: **Purusha** is the Goal and **Prakriti**, the path to that Goal.

The word "**Yoga**" is often described as "**union**". It implies that the individual is united with the Universe, the personality with the Universality. The root of the word "**Yoga**" is the Sanskrit Bija "**Yuj**" which means "**to join together.**" The English word "**yoke**" is directly derived from the Sanskrit "**Yuj**". In fact, the English word "**Union**" has a sound similar to "**Yuj**". Perhaps one could more correctly say, Yoga is "**re-union**". The **Upanishad** says, "*That which was One became the many.*" **Purusha** unfolded into the multi-splendrous material creation through **Prakriti**. The science of Yoga accelerates the "*return of the many to the One*", the re-union of **Purusha** and **Prakriti**, **Shivan** and **Shakti**, **Ram** and **Sita**. Thus, Yoga is both the Goal (**Purusha**) and the path to that Goal (**Prakriti**).

In this Cosmic Drama, Play, **Leela**, the sense of **Dwaitam**, the sense of separateness rose. From this **Dwaitam** (duality, two-ness) rose **Bhayam**, fear. The **Upanishad** says, "*Where there are two, there is fear.*" This primordial fear rising from the sense of separateness is the root cause of all man's sufferings. That primordial fear can be destroyed when the Highest Sense of Oneness is once more achieved. The sages call this reunion, **Moksha**, **Samadhi**, **Kaivalya** or **Mukti**. This is the true goal of Yoga.

Mankind according to the Hindu world view degenerates physically, mentally and emotionally as the Wheel of Time revolves downward from Sat Yuga, through Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and into the present age known as Kali Yuga. Kali Yuga is marked by the degeneration of human and social values: men are said to be "25% good and 75% evil". The description of this age in the scriptures is that families fall apart, the leaders are corrupt, institutions decay and men are no longer virtuous. The sages also advised that since in Kali Yuga, mankind is preoccupied with his body the best Sadhana is *Hatha Yoga*, or

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the Science of Achieving Higher Consciousness through disciplines of body and breath. Since *Hatha Yoga* has its origins in *Tantra*, the *Tantra* was also considered the *Sadhana* of *Kali Yuga*.

### **BALANCING THE ENERGIES THROUGH HATHA YOGA:**

According to Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj, founder of ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India, the word "**Hatha**" is composed of two syllables: "HA" which refers to the solar, positive, warm, activating energies and "THA" which refers to the lunar, cooling, negative, inhibitive energies. "**Hatha Yoga**" thus becomes a method of creating a harmonious interaction or polarity between these two powerful, dialectically opposed primordial universal energies. The dominant right side of the body is harmonized with the more passive left side. The creative, intuitive, visionary right side of the bi-cameral brain is "yoked" harmoniously with the logical, rational, mathematically inclined left side of the brain. A polarized duality is transformed into a harmonious unity and the human personality becomes integrated. Then, real **Yoga** or Union occurs spontaneously. All this can be achieved by an aware, step-by-step, conscious, intelligent approach to *Asanas*, *Kriyas*, *Mudras*, *Bandhas*, *Pranayama* and *Jattis*, which are the technology of *Hatha Yoga*. Only when the being exists in a perfect Polarity of Prana - Apana, can the highest experience - Samadhi - occur.

**HATHA YOGA: A TOOL OF CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION.** Hatha Yoga is the perfect tool to help man evolve efficiently out of his animal tendencies into human qualities and then, to obtain transcendence into Divine realms of being. Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri taught his students the concept of "Four-Fold Awareness". One must, he said, first become aware of the body. The Second Awareness is awareness of emotions, senses and energy. The Third Awareness is awareness of mind. And the Fourth Awareness is of awareness itself". Good Hatha Yoga fosters deep awareness of the body inside-outside, right-side, left-side, to side, bottom side. The practices stimulate deep consciousness in every cell. This awareness "spills over" into an awareness of emotions, sensations, and energy, (prana flows). The awareness deepens into an awareness of the working of the mind, and how body, emotions, sensations and Prana are inseparably linked together. This deepening of consciousness enables the practitioner to direct the course of his own life activities, rather than be a victim of haphazard Karmic forces. Consciousness is the key to control and Hatha Yoga fosters consciousness. One becomes deeply aware of old reptilian and animal instincts lurking in the primordial sub-conscious. The various practices purify and exorcise these old animal / reptilian conditionings. Swamij Gitananda ji often explained this by saying, "*All of the evolutionary history of life on this earth planet is contained in your brain. You have a reptilian brain and a mammalian brain, in common with those lower life forms and all their primordial instincts for survival: sexual drive, dominance, territoriality etc. are also active there. Then, you have the cerebral cortex, the human brain, which is no longer bound by instinct, but can make conscious choices. The problem facing man today is the lack of communication between this "old, unconscious brain" and*

*the "new conscious brain". Hatha Yoga is the superb technology which enables man to bridge that gap."*

This is the reason why the ancient Rishis taught their disciples to put their bodies into positions resembling lower life forms like trees, mountains, insects, birds and animals. The *body remembers* those past incarnations *consciously when locked back into a form resembling those physical structures*. By becoming "*conscious of the unconscious*" the Jiva develops the perspective necessary to view with *Vairagya* (detachment) all the old animal and reptilian conditionings. This detached witnessing puts space between stimulus - response and one can choose consciously how one will respond to situations rather than react with the animal response of "flight or fight".

**HATHA YOGA AND ITS TEXTS:** In Vedic times the goal of the refined human was to seek Moksha, freedom from human birth and mergence in Cosmic Consciousness Asana meant a seated position or a seat. The word Asana is found in the **Bhagavad Gita**. In this sense it means simply "a seat", "a place to sit" or a seated position. The only physical instruction Lord Krishna gives Arjuna is "to sit straight, with head and neck erect". Indian Pandits date the **Bhagavad Gita** at least 5000 years ago. The next time the word "Asana" appear with significance is in the **Yoga Sutras** of Patanjali about 800 BCE. Patanjali simply says that *Asana* is the third of eight steps to liberation and is a body posture which is *sthira sukham* (comfortable and steady). The original meaning of the word *Asana* could be derived from the root "*Asi*" which means "*to be*". Hence, *Asana* is a body position which enables the seeker to discover his true Being (God head) by remaining still and silent.

About 500 A.D. the emphasis of spirituality and Yoga started to shift more and more to physical practices and techniques in keeping with the materialistic, sensual, body-oriented nature of mankind in Kali Yuga. Certain "Yogic practices" evolved out of the **Atharva Veda** and the *Tantric* tradition which used the body itself as an instrument of *Sadhana*. Though these "techniques" were written down, they were written in a "coded language", making it impossible for the uninitiated to understand them. From about 500 A.D. to about 1500 A.D, several scriptures were recorded which are commonly known as the "Hatha Yoga Scriptures." These include the **Goraksasatakam**, the **Gheranda Samhita** and **Hatha Yoga Pradipika**. These three can be said to be the most prominent though many others exist.

**GORAKSASATAKAM:** This scripture was composed in 100 verses by the **Rishi Goraksha** who perhaps lived about 1500 years ago. Goraksha was a disciple of Matsyendra Nath, a wild mystic Tantric. Rishi Goraksha was a widely traveled Yogi with a towering personality who greatly influenced the masses of his day. He traveled the country challenging people to "breathe, breathe, and live". He is a representative of the Natha School and in his work, are many practical techniques of Yoga written down for the benefit of seekers. He preached the ideal of "**Samaradhya**", or the *sweetest and most perfect adjustment and harmony in one's life experience*." Verse 4 defines the subject matter of Yoga: "Asanam pranasamyamah pratyaharoath dharana dhyanam samadhiretani yoganjgani bhavanti sat." "*The six limbs of Yoga are Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyanam and Samadhi*". The entire text describes how these limbs may be achieved. Goraksha comes close to the

Vedic ideal by emphasizing complete control of the physical organism and mental steadiness as the prelude to experiencing non-duality on the highest spiritual plane. He says there are 84 lakhs of Asanas. This idea is also found in THE SHIVA SAMHITA which says that the particular form of each living creature is an "Asana", as Lord Shiva holds still for a moment in his Cosmic Dance. Thus, there are 84 lakhs of species. Shiva has enumerated 84 important Asanas. Sage Goraksha says that of these, two Asanas are important, namely, **Siddhasana** and **Kamalasana**, which are both sitting meditative poses. Rishi Goraksha gives detailed information on the Chakras, or vortexes of spiritual energy located in the human energy field. He also teaches that there are thousands of Nadis, which serve as the pathways for Prana. Of these pathways, he says 72 are important. The three most important Nadis are **Ida** (left side and deity is moon); **Pingala** (right side with deity as sun) and **Sushumna** (centre with deity as Agni or fire). He also describes the types of Prana, circulating in various parts of the human force field.

Rishi Goraksha also teaches of Kundalini, "*She lies above the Kanda, folded eight times, always closing up by her mouth the entrance to the Brahmarandhra*". "Kandordhava kundalisaktirsatadha kundalikrita brahmdrarmukham nityam mukhenavrtya tishtati. (G.S. 30) Rishi Goraksha also describes Pranayama practices, emphasizing **Puraka**, **Rechaka** and **Kumbhaka**. This is also dealt with in the system of concentration or Dharana taught by Rishi Goraksha which includes contemplation on the various Mandalas for the Pancha Maha Bhutas of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Samadhi or Cosmic Consciousness is also dealt with by the sage. He defines this highest spiritual state as, "*When the Prana becomes stilled and the mind is absorbed, there result the identification of Jivatma and Paramatma which is called Samadhi*". "Yada sanksiyate prano mausam ca vitiyate, tada a samarsaikatvam samadhirbhidhiyate. (G.S. 94). The measurements of the time duration needed for the state of Dharana to slip into Samadhi is also given in detail.

**THE GHERANDA SAMHITA:** The basis of Indian spirituality is the negation of the **Ahamkara**, the ego, the sense of self, I-ness and mine-ness. Thus it is that for many of our greatest works of art in temples, sculptures, and scriptures, the author or creator's name is unknown. So it is with the GHERANDA SAMHITA. This self-abnegation of the Indian spiritual mind has made it very difficult for historians to accurately pinpoint time and place of both the various scriptures and the lives of the Masters. This scripture is in the form of a dialogue between *Gheranda*, the Preceptor, and *Chandakapali*, the disciple. Though it is a treatise of *Hatha Yoga*, it does not use the word "**Hatha**". Instead, it calls the type of Yoga discussed in the treatise, "**Ghatastayoga**". This term is not found in any other text on Yoga. "**Ghata**" in this sense refers to the "**body**", and its literal meaning in Sanskrit also is "**a pot**". This suggests that the malleable "clay of the body" can be formed and fired by the practices of Yoga to make it a fit container to hold the "**waters of liberation**".

A beautiful statement by this Rishi occurs in G.S.1.4 "*There are no fetters like those of illusion (Maya); No strength like that which comes from discipline (Yoga); there is no friend higher than knowledge (Jnana) and no greater enemy than egoism (Ahamkara)*."

Whereas Yogamaharishi Patanjali calls Yoga as "**Ashtanga**", (Eight Limbs) and *Rishi Goraksha* calls Yoga as "**Shadanga**", (Six Limbs) *Rishi Gheranda* enunciates "**Saptayoga**" or "Seven Limbs" of Yoga. According to this Rishi the seven exercises for making the body fit for Divine Wisdom include: purificatory, strengthening, steadying, calming and those leading to lightness, perception and isolation. (Sudhanain dradhata caiva sthairyam dhairyam cal lagharam, pratyaksam ca nirilipatm ca ghatasya sapta sadhnam. G.S.1:9). *Rishi Gheranda classifies the Yoga practices as 1. Kriyas: Dhautis, Bastis, Neti, Trataka, Nauli, Kapalbhatis 2. Asanas 3. Mudras 4. Pratyahara 5. Pranayama 6. Dhyana 7. Samadhi. Great emphasis is given to the purificatory practices which are quite elaborate.*

**Asanas** have been described in great detail in this work. Again we find the concept of 84 lakhs of *Asanas* enumerated by *Lord Shiva*. There are as many *Asanas* as there are creatures on earth. "Asanani samasthani yavante jivajantavah, caturasiti laksaru sivena kathithanica" (G.S.2.1). Among these, says the Rishi, eighty-four are best, and of those eighty-four, thirty-two have been found useful for mankind. The thirty-two *Asanas* recorded by *Rishi Gheranda* are:

1. Siddham (Perfect Posture); 2. Padmam (Lotus Posture); 3. Bhadram (Gentle Posture); 4. Muktam (Free Posture); 5. Vajram (Adamant Posture); 6. Swastika (Prosperous Posture); 7. Sinham (Lion Posture); 8. Gomukha (Cow-mouth Posture); 9. Vira (Heroic Posture); 10. Dhanur (Bow Posture); 11. Mritam (Corpse Posture) 12. Guptam (Hidden Posture); 13. Matsyam (Fish Posture); 14. Matsendra; 15. Goraksha; 16. Paschimottana; 17. Utkatam (Hazardous Posture); 18. Sankatam (Dangerous Posture); 19. Mayuram (Peacock Posture); 20. Kukkutam (Cock Posture); 21. Kurma (Tortoise Posture); 22. Uttana Manduka; 23. Uttana Kurmakam; 24. Vriksha (Tree Posture); 25. Manduka (Frog Posture); 26. Garuda (Eagle Posture); 27. Vrisham (Bull Posture); 28. Salabha (Locust Posture); 29. Makara (Dolphine Posture); 30. Ushtram (Camel Posture); 31. Bhujangam (Snake Posture); 32. Yoga Mudra (gesture of Yoga).

Twenty five *Mudras* are discussed, and afterward, *Lord Shiva* is quoted as telling *Devi*, "*O Devi. I have told you all the Mudras. Their knowledge leads to adeptship. It should be kept secret with great care and should not be taught indiscriminately to everyone. This gives happiness to the Yogis*". Again we see the idea that *Yoga* knowledge should be kept secret.

This great *Rishi* also discusses **Pratyahara** and **Pranayama** techniques laying emphasis first on the purification of the *Nadis*, asking, "*Vayu cannot enter the Nadis so long as they are full of impurities. How then can Pranayama be accomplished? First, the Nadis should be purified*".

*Sage Gheranda* also discusses **Dhyana** and **Samadhi** in detail. He divides **Dhyana** into three types: "*Dhyana or meditation is of three kinds; gross, subtle and luminous. When a particular figure, such as one's Guru or Deity is contemplated, it is Sthula or gross; when Brahman or Prakriti is contemplated as a mass of light it is called Jyothi meditation; when Brahman as a Bindu (point) and Kundali force is contemplated, it is Sukshma or subtle meditation*". (G.S. 6:1).

**HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA:** The HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA is of later authorship, perhaps written about 500 - 700 years ago. Even today, **Hatha Yoga Pradipika** is claimed to be the source book of instruction by many Yoga teachers. It was authored by Yogi Swatmarama Suri. It is divided into four Chapters. The first chapter is on **Asanas**; the Second Chapter is on **Pranayama**; the third chapter is on **Mudras** and the fourth chapter on **Samadhi**. Sage Swatmarama Suri in his second verse proclaims that "*Swatmarama Yogin, having saluted his Lord and Guru, teaches the Hatha Vidya solely for the attainment of Raja Yoga. (Chapter I, V.2)*" In 389 verses the sage gives fairly detailed instruction in Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras and means of attaining Samadhi. Sage Swatmarama Suri describes only fifteen Asanas, of which a few resemble those common in today's Hatha Yoga. He describes four of these Asanas, as the "best among postures". They are **Siddha Asana, Padma Asana, Simha Asana and Bhadra Asana** (Verse 33 Chapter One).

The Asanas described by Swatmarama Suri in Verse 19 through 32 of Chapter One are as follows: *Swastika Asana, Gomukhasana, Vira Asana, Kurma Asana, Kukkut Asana, Uttana Kurma, Dhanur Asana, Matsyendra Asana, Paschimotana Asana, Mayura Asana and Shava Asana*. In Verse 33 of Chapter One he says, "*The Asanas propounded by Lord Shiva are eighty-four in number. Of these I shall describe four which are the quintessence*". In Verse 34 he continues, "*These four are Siddha, Padma, Simha and Bhadra (Asanas) are most excellent. Of these four, the most comfortable, Siddha Asana, can always be assumed. In the remaining verses of the first chapter, the Guru also discusses which foods are to be eaten. He recommends, filling half the stomach with food, one quarter with water and leaving one fourth of the stomach free as an offering to Lord Shiva*". (H.Y.P. Chapt, I, V.58).

In Chapter Two entitled PRANAYAMA the Shat Karmas or "Six Purificatory Acts" are described. They include Dhauti, Vasti, Neti, Trataka, Nauli and Kapalabhati. However, the Guru says in Verse 21. Chapter II "... *One who is flabby and phlegmatic should first practise these six acts. Others who do not have these defects should not practise them*". In Verse 44 of Chapter Two, he lists eight kinds of **Kumbhakas** (Pranayamas). "*The different Kumbhakas are now described: There are eight Kumbhakas, namely Surya Bhedana, Ujjayi, Sitkari, Sitkali, Bhastrika, Bhramari, Murcha and Plavini*".

*In Verse 76 of Chapter II, he says, "One cannot obtain perfection in Raja Yoga without Hatha Yoga, nor perfection in Hatha Yoga without Raja Yoga, so both should be practised till perfection (in Raja Yoga) is obtained."* In Chapter Three, Sage Swatmarama Suri describes the **Mudras** in Verses 6 and 7. "*Maha Mudra, Maha Bandha, Maha Vedha, Khecari, Uddiyana, Mula Bandha, Jalandhara Bandha, Viparitakarana, Vajroli and Shaktichalana, these are the ten Mudras. They destroy old age and death*". He also gives instructions in arousal of Kundalini. Chapter Four is devoted to instructions in obtaining Samadhi. In Verse Five of Chapter Four, he says, "*Samadhi is explained: As salt in water unites and dissolves with it, a likewise merging of mind and self is Samadhi*". Verse 6. "*When Prana is without any movement in Kumbhaka and the mind is absorbed in the Self, the state of harmony is called Samadhi*".

Swatmarama Suri also mentions 72,000 **Nadis** and claims only **Sushumna Nadi** is of importance. He describes many methods of achieving the Samadhi state. He puts most emphasis on the use of **Nada**, or Inner Sound. He says in Verse 66, Chapter Four, "*The primeval Lord Shiva has expounded one crore and a quarter of effective ways for the attainment of Laya (absorption) but we think that one thing, devotion to Nada, alone is the most important of all these ways*".

Again in Verse 94, Chapter Four he says, "*Nada is like the net which ensnares the deer (the mind) and it is also the hunter who slays the deer within (the mind)*." He describes many aspects of Nada Yoga and also Samadhi. Swatmarama Suri concludes his work with Verse 114 of the Fourth Chapter, "*As long as the Prana does not flow in the central way (through Sushumna) and enter the Brahmarandhra, as long as the semen does not become steady through restraint of breath, so long as the mind does not in meditation reflect the natural state (of the object contemplated upon, i.e. Brahman), so long as those who talk of spiritual knowledge indulge only in boastful and false prattle*" (there is no success in Yoga).

In the HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA, unlike other texts discussed thus far, much practical instruction is given in Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras and even in methods of attaining Samadhi. Yet, the instruction given is couched in difficult and deliberately obscure language. It is not a textbook on Yoga and Yoga practices could not be undertaken merely on the basis of studying the text. The references are far too obscure and too ambiguous. The Guru himself makes many references throughout the work, for the need for the practices to be kept secret. If he intended his work to be used as a practical guide to practices, he would never have written them down, violating his own cautions. Like all ancient Gurus, the written aspect of the teaching was only the tip of the iceberg, a "jolt" to the memory of the student, a reminder of the whole and not containing the whole within itself.

In Chapter One, V.11, for example, he says "*The Yogic desirous of obtaining Siddhi should keep the Hatha Yoga very secret. For it is potent when kept secret and ineffective when injudiciously revealed*". In Chapter III, V.9, he says, "*This should be kept secret like a casket of precious gems. It should not be spoken of to anybody as in the case of intercourse with a well born woman*". This theme of secrecy runs throughout his work. He also stresses time and again, the need for the direct guidance of the Guru. Verse 78 of Chapter Three: "*There is an excellent Karana by which the sun is duped. This should be learnt from the Guru and not through the study of the Shastras*". In Chapter Four, V.8 he says, "*Who really knows the greatness of Raja Yoga? Jnana, Mukti, Sthiti and Siddhi are obtained through the teaching of the Guru*".

Thus though this text does appear to give quite detailed instructions in Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras and means of practicing Dhyana, in reality the references are very obscure and deliberately kept ambiguous, forcing the sincere aspirant not to rely on the text alone, but to seek the guidance of a qualified Master.

Hatha Yoga is the appropriate Sadhana for Kali Yuga, an age when the woman or man has lost control over his her body, emotions and sensual organs, and often lives a life hardly

better than a beast. Hatha Yoga allows the practitioner to use the body as a stepping stone towards higher evolutionary levels. The body then becomes an instrument, rather than a hindrance towards achieving the noble aim of life - Moksha.

### IN CONCLUSION:

Consciousness is the key to control and intelligent Hatha Yoga makes the practitioner conscious in every cell! It may be said that the motto of Hatha Yoga is, "**Exercise to Exorcise.**" Intelligent Hatha Yoga purifies body, mind and emotions of primordial reptilian / animal instincts. A rule of the human organism is "*Use it or lose it.*" Hatha Yoga aids the practitioner to attain skill in right-use-ness of the body. Lower animal passions are exorcized by using the unconscious animal-like areas of the body in a conscious human manner. Essential body functions are used systematically, bringing normally autonomic functions under the conscious control of mind. In this way, the Jiva takes control of its own evolutionary trajectory. Instead of being a puppet dangling on the strings of the primordial nervous system, locked into the "4 F" Response Syndrome:-*Fright, Flight, Fight or Freeze*", the Jiva is able to use its cerebral cortex to consciously determine the proper response to each situation. In other words, one learns to act in the proper manner, rather than re-act in an unhealthy unconscious knee-jerk manner.

*"There can be no Raja Yoga without Hatha Yoga, and no Hatha Yoga without Raja Yoga"* declares Swatmarama Suri, in his **Hatha Pradipika**. When the entire array of Hatha Yoga practices such as Asana, Pranayama, Kriya, Mudras and Bandhas are practised extensively within the correct wholistic framework of Yoga as an entire life style, great peace, serenity, strength and happiness springs eternal in the heart and soul of the Yoga Sadhaka. May all attain such a state through the benevolent blessings of the great Masters who continue to guide sincere seekers on the path of Yoga.

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