HATHA YOGA THE SCIENCE OF BALANCE

Yogacharya Dr Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

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The ancient art and science of yoga, yes, it is an art and it is a science. Art is something of our right brain and science is something of our left brain and yoga does look at integration and balance between both the right and the left brain. It is often said in a jovial manner that when you are all in your left brain there is nothing right about it and if you're totally in your right brain there is nothing left. Now, when we look around the modern world today the human race seems to have jumped into its left brain totally, forgetting that there is something called the right brain at all. We are so involved with money, prestige, what we can get out of it than what we can give. How can I contribute to the betterment of society, how can I contribute to the betterment of humanity, so that the future generations will look back and say with happiness, 'my ancestors were wise'. Do we think that? How many can say that? Today I can look back and say that, the ancient ancestors of India the great Rishis, Munis, those great Seers who had that gift of the foresight, they saw what would happen in the future. They looked into the future and realised that we, as human beings needed something, the humanity needed something, to guide us back home. I often say 'Om, sweet home', I like to say its 'Om sweet home'. Om (A U M). That integration which re-integrates us to be one with the Divine. We have lost it and then we find that vacuum, that emptiness within us and start to try to find something to fill it. And that is where the whole problem of depression (?) and so many things comes in you. Trying to find something to fill up that emptiness, the big hole, that great black hole. And what is that hole? That sense of loneliness because we have lost the connection. And what is yoga? It's all about re-connecting, re-integrating, re-uniting. Often Yoga is described as Union. It's not that we have never had a union. We have a unit of universality which is Oneness. In Yoga we call it Advaitam, non-duality; whenever we hear the word 'A' it means 'the opposite'. Dvaitam means duality, 'A' makes it non-duality. Advaitam.

Now along the way different aspects of yoga have developed and I often say that yoga was not invented, it was discovered. It is something that goes back into time immemorial. In India it's thought that Lord Shiva taught Parvati yoga. Now that's going back. In India we don't say you have mythology and history, you have
historical mythology and mythological history. You cannot separate them; they are so much one and the same. They just flow seamlessly one into the other. But along the way an aspect of yoga has developed which we know today as hatha yoga, more correctly Ha-THa yoga , it is haTTHa. But when you write it out in English we write h-a-t-h-a so the word is hatha yoga. But it is known as haTTHa yoga. What is haTHa yoga? HaTHa yoga is the science ... I would even put a word before that: the physical science of psycho-physiological balance. If you want to add spiritual it is that also. It is the physical science of balancing the equal and opposite energies we experience in our bodies. We have energies that are on the right side of the body, we have energies on the left side of the body. Energies of the right side of the body are in tune with the solar energies, energies that are known by the term 'Ha', as the Surya, as Pingala. Pingala refers to a certain energy channel that runs down the right side of our body. When I say body I'm going to have to take a step back, not just the physical, please remember we have the physical (Sthula), we have the subtle (Sukshma) and we have the causal (Kaarana). The physical exists as a result of the subtle, and the subtle exists as a result of the causal. Please remember it is not because we have a physical body that we have a subtle body and causal body, but the fact that we have a physical body is because we have a causal and a subtle body. Now in this subtle body of ours we have three aspects: we have an aspect called the Prana that is the energy, life energy. In so many of our Indian languages, Prana is equated with life, and often you'll find parents sort of when they get very irritated with their children saying, 'don't take my Prana.' 'Pranana vangadey:' To put it in colloquial terms. What does it mean? It doesn't mean don't take my life away but, don't be such a pest that you know you're sucking my life out by your naughtiness. Even in such a colloquial expression, we have that word Prana coming in. That is so much part and parcel of our Indian culture that these concepts are there in our day to day life. Well, modern India is losing a lot of it. That is something why we try to work with our young Indian youngsters restoring their own culture to them, helping them to understand the beauty that is inherent in their culture.

But coming back to the point, Prana which is the life force that vital catalyst without which you are nothing more than an anatomical body, you know what an anatomical body is, a corpse. You have two hands two feet, two eyes, but something is missing, that life force is missing. The moment that life force is there in it, you become a living entity. You become alive. That is why I like to say it is the physiological body, it is your physiological existence. You have a physical existence which is just the body, the physiological existence, that which makes the physiology work, creating homeostasis in the body, that is what Prana is . But is it enough to have two hands that work, two legs that work, a tongue that tastes the lovely food or the ear that hears or the nose that smells, the eyes that see, the wonderful creatures that we see, the unique creatures we see only in Australia. (personal anecdote)
The mind, Manas; and the higher mind, the Buddhi; that intellect which knows what is right what is wrong, what is real, what is not, what is to be done what is not to be done. All of these are part of our subtle existence which in yoga we term our subtle existence and all these subtle channels, the Nadis they're called. Some people say there are 72 thousand some say 720 thousand, some say, 350 thousand, my father: I use the word father just so that you know who I'm talking about; Swamiji. Swamiji for me is my Guru and father: Guru first, father second. Swamiji used to say that there are 729,000 nadis. He loved the word 729: 729 points in the body, 729 sounds for each point in your body, 729 channels running throughout your psychic entity energising each and every cell. We have so many. We can talk about billions and trillions as if we know what it means. I often say if you want to know what a million ,is walk a million steps, and you'll know what it is.

These energy channels: the Nadis that run throughout our body, however many, 72,000 or 729,000 whatever number you want to keep. It is said there are 12 important ones, then 10 important ones, and then there are the three most important ones. The three flows of which the central flow which can be co-related with the canalis centralis running down our spinal column in the middle of the spinal cord, that hollow canal that is the psychic link with that central axis, the Sushumna Nadi, the grand central pathway of energy, that is why so much importance is kept in yoga about the spine: how you sit, how you twist, how you bend forward, how you bend back. If you look at most of the Yogasanas, the Yogic postures, they begin with the spine, keeping the spine healthy, culturing our spine; which we call as the Brahmadanda, the walking stick of the Divine, and if the Divine is to walk using that stick, it better be in good health, it better be strong, because the Divine needs you - the Divine needs you because you are the tool for the Divine to manifest itself. We are the tools and so the spine should be healthy (the basis of the cultural Asanas).

On either side of the spine we are working with the energies that are called the Pingala running up and down the right side, and the Ida nadi on the left side. The Pingala and Ida nadis, these are often depicted in our yogic tradition, tantric traditions of India, as serpents, and so you have these two serpents going from the right like this, coming out and the left going like this coming out and you have these two interlocking serpents, and the centre you have the Sushumna which is this giant cobra that surfaces, rises (?). What a beautiful depiction!!! You know you look at that and you look at our modern symbol of modern medicine and you start to realise that something else is happening. The stuff that we have is nothing like what we had, we realise that ... (voice drops)

Our ancients knew something more than we know. They have shown they were better scientist than we are today because they had the inner vision, we only have the external vision, we lack the inner vision,
The flow of energy on the right that is the Pingala Nadi terminates at the right nostril as Surya Nadi: the Surya energy channel. Whereas the left side, the Ida, terminates on the left nostril at what we call the Ida Nadi coming and terminating as the Chandra Nadi, Chandra means, moon. The lunar, subtle, energy channel. The solar channel, the lunar channel. What is the sun, heat; what is the moon, cold. Hot, cold; warm, cool. We bring in another aspect of the Prana at another level. Whereas on the right side we have Prana as warm, golden, energy and on the left side we have the cool, silvery Apana- equal and opposite energies. Take it another step. You have a positive flow of energy on the right, and a negative flow of energy on the left. Positive, negative, please don't think it as the good and the bad. Not positive and good, and negative and bad, but two equal and opposite forms of energy just as we have in the electrical circuits, doesn't matter whether you go and touch the positive terminal or the negative terminal you are going to get a shock. You cannot come back and say, I touched the positive terminal; I should not get a shock. There are people who do that. These are just equal and opposite energies. The energies of the masculine nature are on the right hand side, energies of the feminine nature on the left side. Each man has half a woman, within them and each woman has half a man, and finding the balance of these qualities, finding a way to balance these qualities within us is what Hatha yoga is about: balancing the HA, and the THA, the sun and the moon, the man and the woman. We are not just balancing down here, (points down) but we are balancing up here also (points up). And that is why I started off saying right and left brains.

Everything that happens on the right side of your body can be related to your left brain, and that which happens on the left side, is to do with the right brain. There is this beautiful criss-cross. As a medical student it used to be one of the topics that I really loved. Well the first thing I learned was that when we went for vivisection. In those days we had real human bodies for vivisection, okay. And I realised what a gift I’d been given to have that opportunity. We would just marvel at the greatness of the Divine. Creating and putting together this stupendous body of equal and opposite energies put together, that is the point.

Now when we start thinking about the brain, the brain explodes in its complexity? ... The brain has so many such complexities... We have trouble understanding a simple computer, but the brain is mind boggling. Anyway I used to learn these criss cross, because suddenly this helped me understand that what I had been learning from my very childhood sitting around playing in the garden while my father was teaching the classes hearing this teachings going on in suddenly I thought ah ha this is what this is all about. Suddenly suddenly it came to me... and that is why the right energies are very similar to the left side of the brain. And the left energies to the right side of the brain. This criss cross and that is why yoga, when we say in yoga whenever you do the right side of the posture please always do the left side of the
posture too. Don’t just do one side or you end up with imbalance. There is in the Bhagavad Gita a definition of Yoga, ‘Samatvam yoga uchayate’ Lord Krishna says to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita: he says, ‘Yoga is equanimity’. You could just say equanimity of mind. Please remember equanimity of mind and homeostasis at the physical level. Homeostasis at the physiological level is what Samatvam means. Balance. Equally balanced between the right and left energies, between the right and left sides of our body. The right side of the body when you work on it you are working with energies that are to do with our activation nature, they are the activating energies, whereas the left side of the body you are working with the relaxatory nature, relaxative energies and so that is why whenever you do a yoga posture we say do the right side first, get yourself activated, and then do the left side - deactivate and create balance.

Often I get questions usually from the West. Not much from India because in India it is so much a part of the culture that nobody asks why should we do right first and left second. It doesn’t even come up because it is so much a part of the culture. But I get questions why can’t I do left first ...Well if you do left first you are deactivating first, and then you do activation. You walk out of the yoga class and you know what you do with the first person that comes up in front of you and says Hi? You punch them in the face and then you say yoga is not good, it doesn’t work. That’s not true. Yoga works.

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My father used to say – you don’t have problems you are the problem. I didn’t know what he was talking about then. I realised it later. If you are not in the equation suddenly the problem evaporates. You know how easy it is when you are, when somebody comes to you, counsellors and doctors, we see this all the time. People come to us and start talking about their problems and you are sitting there like ,come on this is nothing really, you know, what is this, this is nothing this is the child’s play and... Why, because it is not your problem, it’s their problem. And so you could be objective and give them the answer. But then the same thing, the very same thing happens to you ...ah (throws hands in the air and says) why has God done this to me....the earth’s opening up under me ... you see. Well as a doctor in India we say, don’t treat your own family members. Maybe there is something there. Because you know as soon as you treat your family members you lose all objectivity. My daughter was born and I looked at her, this was a few months later you know I was looking at her, I saw the gluteal fold was sort of not so normal immediately I thought congenital dislocation of the hip, it must be this and what if it is this, and what if she does not walk, and what if she has to have an operation ... finally I took her to my professor and he said come on, stop being such a nervous wreck. He said where’s this congenital dislocation ... But you know it was my daughter ...and after that my mother doesn’t listen to me if I say anything about the children.
Because I would just take them out of school. To have such a mother I'm blessed in this life.

Anyway coming back to this when you work on the right side of the body, why do you work on the right side of your body, so that you are working with the flow of energy that is there, not just because you want a healthy right side of the body, that you want the muscles to be good. The whole aspect of hatha yoga is when you work with the body you are working with the grossest level of existence possible. But you are influencing the subtle too. To influence the subtle, that is the goal, the aim towards which you are working. When you influence the subtle and get in tune, dis-ease disappears and ease resurfaces. What is ease, well being, what does the WHO the official world health organisation define it as? I don't really like that definition and I'll tell you why ... The state of well being that's basically the gist of what health is, a state of well being. So now when I say a state it sort of implies that I get to that and then I will be healthy for the rest of my life. But that doesn't really happen. We say dynamic state, but you don't have that in the definition, please look at it, when you say the physical, mental, emotional, even they may add, spiritual to it but they will not change that thing of that state.

I have so many of my patients who come, can you teach me one Asana or Pranayama that I do today and then for the rest of my life I should be ok. I say I'm a musician not a magician. And I often tell my students, if you want to be the richest person on earth (and then they smile). And I say just find a way that you do the yoga practice and you will earn so much money because everybody is willing to pay you. That you do the yoga and I get the benefit ... and I pay you whatever you want for that. It is such a lazy ... attitude?

You know in the studies on hypertension we found that one month of certain practices and the person's blood pressure was down to normal. To such an extent they were guys who were working in our hospital and so they were very happy because we collected them for yoga classes 45 minutes before the work started, so in work time, they didn't have to work, if I'd said come after the working hours, none of them would have come but because I gave them an appointment during work hours, they were very happy to come. We had these guys, 14 guys and did the study and things came to normal to such an extent that there were I think twelve of them who stopped the medication. And that is something very nice, where you can get out of 14 hypertensives on medication, 12 of them out of medication like that. We wound up our study in which interestingly enough, I have to point that out we found that not only does it reduce the heart rate and the blood pressure of all those patients, but before they started the study we did also the hand grip test to see the sympathetic reactivity and at the beginning of the study their sympathetic reactivity was low and at the end of the test their sympathetic reactivity was high. So on one side you had the blood pressure, heart rate, coming down which is more like the parasympathetic nervous system which is more on the left side the ida nadi,
all those concepts of the moon, the lunar on the other side you had when they
needed to react to a stress or do something that is sympathetic reactivity came
back to normal. (Because subnormal reactivity came to normal) It is not that doing
the yoga is reducing the sympathetic and increasing the parasympathetic - this is
like a common thing. I often say yoga is balance. Samatavam Yoga ucchyate, yoga is
balance. Another way to look at it is equanimity, homeostasis. But you know at the
end of the one month we concluded the study we had done, told them they should
do the practices on a regular basis, wrote down a nice paper, got it published,
everyone was happy. Six months down the line I'm in the canteen and meet a few of
these guys and asked them- say, how are you? They say we're fine. How's your
hypertension, well, you know its back up and we are on medication again. ... I said
what happened. They said well- it's your mistake, your fault. It is always my fault.
... It's your fault; you stopped the project meaning you stopped the classes, so we
stopped doing the yoga practices. And now we are back to where we were. And I'm
like these are guys who saw that with scientific evidence it works for them, not
even somebody else, it was the subjects themselves who saw it. We showed it to
them, but even with these few the tendency was so lazy that they said well you
know I get free medication so I started taking it. You know it's free medication and
you know just once a day I have to take a tablet with water. It's easier to take a
tablet with a cup of water than to do what we had shown them? That's the
difficulty (voice very low). No matter what you find out about yoga how to beat
that human laziness, to take the easier way out. They always want to take the easy
way. That's why people are always looking for that - never do Asanas, never do
Pranyamas, but they just have to do once. The miracle is that you make the
effort with your disciplined dedication that is the miracle. So in hatha yoga when
we are working with the right side we are working with part of the sympathetic
nervous system, the sympathetic nervous system that is so important for us to
survive. I think many people seem to think that the sympathetic nervous system is
so bad (shakes hand, and sighs) If it were not for the sympathetic nervous system
you would not survive. I had a lovely professor in medical school. He had some
lovely stories... (low voice) very lucky to have had him. He used to talk about the
sympathetic nervous system and say it is very sympathetic to you!!! He used to give
us an example that when you are in class and you know you have to go to the toilet,
but your sympathetic nervous system contracts all the sphincters so that you can
hold long enough to get you through the class. this is the example he used to give ...
just to get our brains open I don't think the sympathetic nervous system is bad, it
keeps you alive. At the same time too much, that's a problem, again something which
we as a modern society I won't say east and west I'll just say modern society,
because every place is the same. We tend to think that if a little of something is
good, more is better, anybody get (loud noise) lots of it, it is best. In Tamil we have
a beautiful saying. We say... Alavukku minjinaal, Amirthamum nanju. (Tamil quote)
...'that if it goes beyond the limit even nectar becomes poison.' Even that nectar
becomes poison when it goes beyond a limit. As you know, poison in dilution is medicine and medicine in concentration is poison. When you give nectar in concentration it becomes poison.

So working on balancing the sympathetic and the parasympathetic, the sympathetic nervous system is correlated with the Pingala nadi, the right flow, whereas the Ida is correlated with the parasympathetic, the left flow. I think working in balancing bringing our autonomic balance so that when you need to be active you are, when you need to be non-active you are. So what was that study we did on hypertension? What did it show us? It showed that, when they needed to have their heart rate and blood pressure come down, it was possible to come down but then if they were subjected to a certain stress that demanded the sympathetic nervous system to respond, yoga made them more ready to respond. They did a similar study with diabetes where they found that after their yoga practice their insulin level drops, but then when you gave those people a glucose load as we do a GTT (glucose tolerance test). When we gave them glucose they were able to respond better because their insulin level would shoot up faster in order to react to the low blood that they had. When they didn't have the load it was getting them down and when you have the load you are ready to meet the challenge. You are in a restful, yet ready state. That is what we are looking at. That is what Hatha yoga does and to produce this they used the different Asanas, the different static postures. Asanas are static postures. Patanjali tells us that, and in the second part of the talk we’ll be talking about Patanjali a lot. He says, 'Sthiram sukham asanam'. That which is steady and comfortable. That is what Asana is. What does it mean? Steady and comfortable doesn’t mean that you sit on a nice cushion and a temperature friendly place, but it means that, internally you are stable and comfortable. There is a balance. And that is what Asana is supposed to be. So you have the static postures, you have dynamic actions, the Kriyas - you have practices which work with the breathing - alternating with the breath patterns. Working with that which links the external to the internal medium. Yes, that’s the best name (Exchange): it links the external with the internal. It links the conscious and the subconscious/unconscious activities. One of those few activities that is good. Normally unconscious or subconscious activity to the conscious realm? You are linking - so the Asanas, the Pranayamas, the Kriyas, and then Mudras which are gestures where we are connecting different points in order to create closed circuits (flows) of energy. All of these come under the Hatha yoga? And what does Hatha yoga aim for? Balance. Right and left balance and that is why we have a form of Shiva in India, that form is called Ardhanarishvara: Ardha means half, Nari means a woman, Ishvara means the lord. The lord who is half woman. And so the right side of Shiva is depicted as being Shiva the masculine guy and then you have the left side which is Parvati which is the feminine nature. And now if you just put this together you start to get the point. Right side pingala nadi, the solar energy,
activation, excitation, the sympathetic activity, masculine, working with your left brain, what is your left brain all about? Quantity, what can I get, how can I get it, what to do, how to respond, all of that is there, and then you have the other side you have this beautiful feminine energy, linked with the right brain and the right brain what is its aim? How can I make this a better place, what is the quality of life that is there. Looking at the good things of life. This balance between the right and left, and some of the Pranayama practices which use the alternate nostril breathing, (they do this extremely well). When you breathe in your right nostril (‘shew’) and out through the left (hand action), and you breathe in your left and out through the right. And just imagine this beautiful pattern through one and the other and the other and the other, (makes figure of eight). You know what are you doing when you do this, you are working on the corpus callosum. The corpus callosum that is linking your right and left so that the right knows what the left is going; the left knows what the right is doing. You are doing integration. You are re-integrating the person’s brain’s neurological connections. That is something, something as simple as breathing can do that, isn’t it amazing? It seems so simple really. We would like to have something complex, difficult technically. ... (voice drops) Now the big phrase in the universe is super brain yoga, have you heard of that one, super brain yoga. Old Indian traditional thing that they have taken and you find a hilarious video on Youtube, Super brain yoga and they have a big book out on it and dvds and ....? I’ll tell you what it is, catch hold of your left ear lobe with your right hand, right ear lobe with the left hand. And then what you do as you stand and you go into squatting? And then from the standing to the squatting you just go up and down, generally we call it ‘topukaranam’? ‘Topukaranam’ is the word used and this is done before the Ganesha Shrines and all the temples, the Ganesha temples where you go and knock your head laid against the bricks and then you do this a few times. You know if children were naughty at school not studying well this is what they make them do in schools to make them study. Now a days if you do that in schools, the parent teachers’ association meeting would condemn this inhuman activity that is doing this to the child? But then when the children are playing and they go and, they show each other you catch your left lobe with your right hand your left brain is stimulated and this is happening and that is happening and you catch this and that is happening and wow you know - sounds like the greatest discovery ever on earth. This activity the children did all the time Now its a trade mark in the USA they call it super brain yoga. They take it one step further they have the people breathing in as they go down breathing out as they go up whereas that will only cause down the line .... permanent ...? and you’ll find super brain yoga is dangerous and you will need insurance cover. Laughter?

My father used to say that real yoga is as safe as mother’s milk . You know the danger today is that your mother’s milk is not safe - we have corrupted even the safest thing that was ever created by the Divine (mother’s milk) - even that we
have spoiled. Super brain yoga. Maybe during our workshop part we’ll try it out and then show how it should be done in the proper way without harming yourself and then we will patent it as super super brain yoga .....laughter. So with that part of it we come to an end because I’m very much trying to stick to the time - very difficult for me because my father and mother who both talked talked and were both physical and spiritual genius and they talked talked talked ..... and my son does the same .... voice fades and personal anecdote... so with that overview of hatha yoga and balancing the energies... I’ll come back to this we are moving to different segments but they are all one and the same. They are all one - Yoga is all one and just so that you may have and if you think that Dr Ananda will come and talk talk talk and you’ll think what’s that. And so Sri Bala has very kindly put it in a framework which I will follow and try my best.