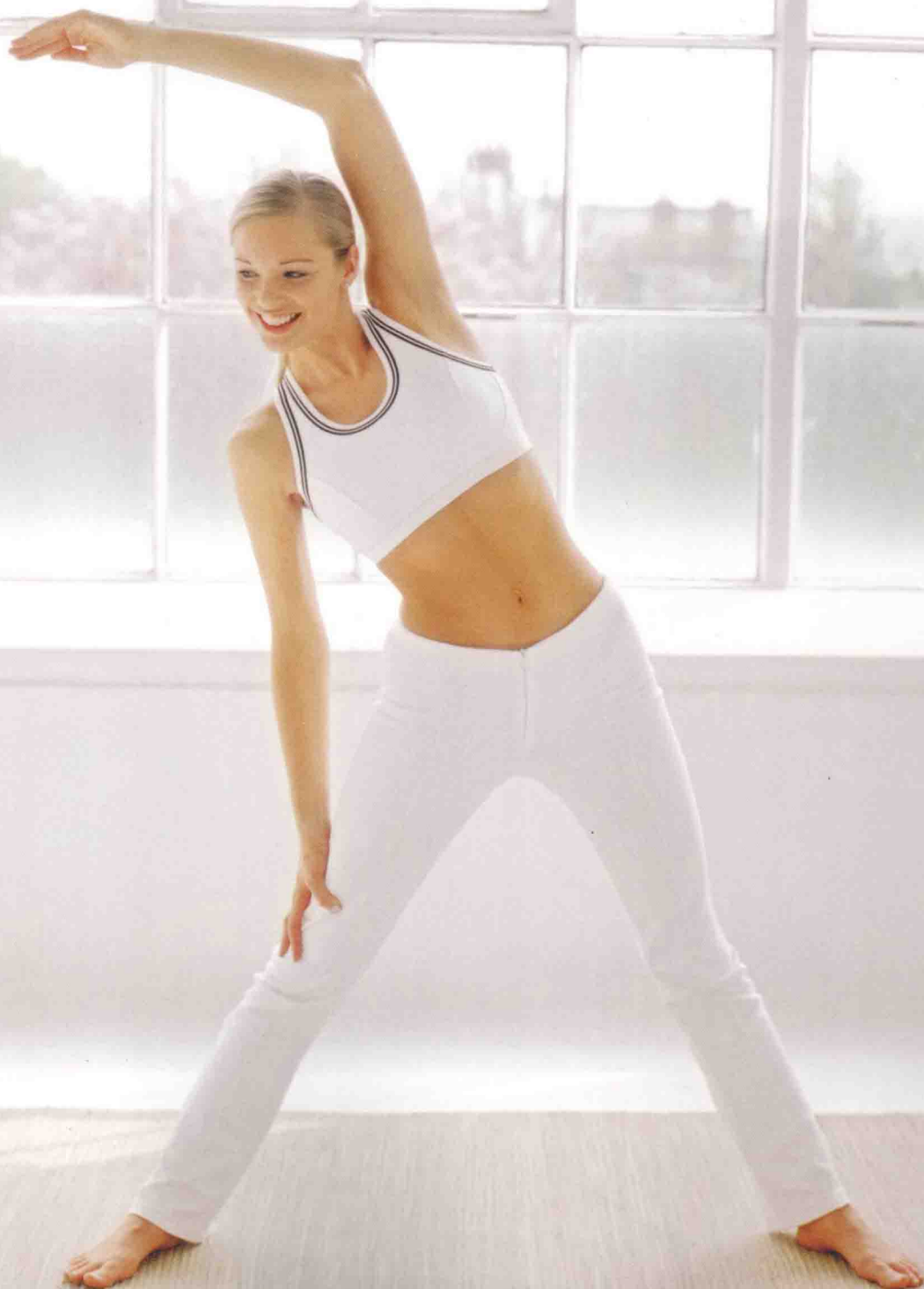


Yoga

For Fitness and Wellness

Ravi Dykema



SECOND EDITION

Yoga for Fitness and Wellness

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Ravi Dykema

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Preface

This book is mostly about you—your body and its sensations, your mind and thoughts, your feelings and aspirations. Yoga is the tool we will be using to help you explore these aspects of yourself. Not only does Yoga help you explore yourself, but it can also help you to become healthier, to feel less beaten down by stress, to feel more alert and focused, to sleep better, to gain muscle tone and flexibility, and to feel more alive and energized. When you walk out of a Yoga class, the sky can seem bluer, the sun warmer on your hair, the breeze fresher on your cheek, and your step lighter. You may even feel a gladness and fullness in your heart that just *is*, that doesn't seem to be a response to anything that's happening, such as getting an *A* on a test or thoughts of an upcoming trip. When you feel such fullness you may notice that your attention is on your immediate experience—your sensations, your vision, your hearing—and you may notice that your mental chatter is quieter than usual. That is the goal of most traditional Yoga: to quiet your mind so your present experience becomes more vivid.¹ To achieve this goal, Hatha Yoga uses movement and breathing exercises, combined with concentration. The less physically oriented Yoga systems use methods such as meditation, devotional practices, contemplation, and ethical living.

Yoga exercises can be helpful to you whether you work out or just walk from the student union to the chemistry building; whether you are as limber as a cat or as stiff as a bicycle;

whether you are broad or narrow, old or young. In short, Yoga adapts to your body's fitness level, size, and shape. And if you are athletic, Yoga enhances your other fitness endeavors and helps you avoid injuries. It is a common conditioning regimen for a number of professional sports teams, including members of the Denver Broncos football team, Stanford University's basketball team, and the Ottawa (Canada) Senators' hockey team.²

With origins in India as early as 5,000 years ago, Yoga has undergone changes and adaptations over time and has spawned hundreds of different "schools." The school of Yoga we will mainly be concerned with in this book is *Hatha Yoga* (pronounced hut-ha) and its modern offshoots, which emphasize the benefits of Yoga-style exercise.

For us to understand how Hatha Yoga works and the variety of practices that have been incorporated into modern Yoga systems, we need to understand other Yoga schools. And we need to learn about Yoga's rich history and philosophy.

In Chapter 1 we ask, "What is yoga?" and explore the history of Yoga. In Chapter 2 we explore the philosophy of Yoga. Then, in Chapter 3, we focus on the theories of Hatha Yoga. Chapters 4 through 7 are about the exercises of Hatha Yoga: breathing, poses and moving exercises, and also relaxation and meditation. Chapter 8 and Appendix B help you continue your study of Yoga.

I sincerely hope that this text, along with your Yoga class, will inspire you to include Yoga as one of

¹ "Yoga is stilling the mind," (my paraphrase) is the second sentence in the famous *Yoga Sūtra* of Patanjali. Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga-Sūtra of Patanjali: A New Translation and Commentary* (Inner Traditions International, Rochester Vt., 1989).

² Ira Dreyfuss, "Athletes Say Yoga Stretches Abilities," *Boulder Daily Camera*, March 17, 2003., and Hurn, *Raleigh Examiner*, September 22, 2009.



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Swami Gitananda (center, with beard) and students in front of Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India, 1974. The author (then age 22) is in the back row, far right.

the things you do to stay healthy for the rest of your life!

My Own Story of Finding Yoga

I found Yoga when I was in my early twenties. Before that, in my senior year of high school (1969–70), I took a philosophy class. This class woke me up to the possibility that I wasn't seeing the whole picture—that the world I inhabited, with me as the flawed boy around which the world revolved, was a distortion. I desperately wanted to see more clearly.

In particular, I wanted to understand myself. I had a strong hunch that I was quite different from who I had concluded I was. What started out as a hunch grew into a conviction when I discovered writings by people who felt as I did, people who had studied and practiced systems, such as Yoga, that satisfied their yearnings to see themselves more clearly. Some described a dazzlingly clear kind of seeing that made them feel ecstatic happiness. The writers who most influenced me were Teilhard de

Chardin, Alan Watts, Ram Dass, Jack Kerouac, Paramahansa Yogananda, and the author of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

After high school I pursued my quest for self-understanding at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. At age 20, in 1972, I traveled to Pondicherry, India, to study Yoga with a renowned teacher, Swami Gitananda.³ I took Gitananda's six-month teacher training course four times. Swami Gitananda taught traditional Raja Yoga, Tantra Yoga, and Hatha Yoga. In 1974, Gitananda bestowed on me the title *Yogiraj*, which means "master of Yoga."

Over the last 35 years I have maintained a private practice in Yoga therapy. For the last 30 years I have also been a journalist and a magazine publisher covering the fields of holistic health and human potential.

I was an adjunct professor of Yoga at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, where I taught for sixteen years (1990 to 2005). My Yoga students, especially those at Naropa University, were and are my main inspiration for writing this textbook. You will find quotes from my Naropa students throughout the book.

A Note on Words Used in This Book

I use the term *yogin* (pronounced yo-ghin) to denote both male and female practitioners of Yoga, although in the Sanskrit language the word means "male practitioner" and the word *yogini* means female practitioner. When I write about a person or a yogin, I alternately use the pronouns his and her.

The word *Yoga* appears in scholarly writings both uncapitalized, as in "yoga," and capitalized, as in "Yoga." In the dictionary it is uncapitalized. I choose, as did the great historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, to capitalize

³ Georg Feuerstein, *Encyclopedia of Yoga*, p. 105, Shambhala Publications, Boston Ma., 1997.

it. This is in keeping with the convention of capitalizing names of other great wisdom teachings such as Buddhism and Taoism.

Using the Footnotes

The footnotes throughout this book offer serious students of Yoga valuable ways to learn more about the subject. They explain where certain ideas in the text came from, pointing you to authoritative writings on Yoga. And they sometimes further explain a word or concept mentioned in the text. Feel free to skip right over the footnotes if reading them breaks your flow or hinders your understanding of the text.

Changes to the Second Edition

I have made numerous changes to the text since I first wrote it in 2005, making it more useful to you. These include a new summary in Chapter 3, numerous updates in the text and in footnotes, new descriptions of Yoga lineages in Chapter 8 to reflect changes to them since 2005, and a completely new Yoga Resources section (Appendix B). You will also find this new color edition easier and more fun to read and use!

Acknowledgments

Writing a book such as this requires many people's efforts in addition to the author's. Therefore I am indebted to a community of others, with whom I will feel forever linked through these pages.

My highest appreciation to my late Yoga Guru Swami Gitananda Giri, who took me on as a disciple when I was 20 and gave me my first opportunities to teach Yoga; also to Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, who carries on the Gitananda Yoga lineage,

for offering me a fabulous teaching post in Colombo, Sri Lanka, when I was but a pup, and for her ongoing support.

I have been a devoted student of the writings of Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D., for many years and found his work invaluable in the creation of this book. I appreciate Dr. Feuerstein for his kind permission to quote him frequently throughout this volume. This book would never have been written without the seed encouragement of my colleague, Donna Farhi.

I feel great appreciation for my colleagues at other universities who reviewed my manuscript and offered much help, including: Lori J. Head, Idaho State University; Susan Gillis Kruma, University of Pittsburgh; Kate Olafson, Saddleback College, Mission Viejo, CA; Jim Salber, California State University, Chico; and Diane Stevens, Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

My special thanks to Leslie and Dan Goodman for their beautiful photos of the āsanās; also to Crystal Hinton and Tyrone Beverly for their time and awesome talent modeling the poses. And thanks to Mike Speer for his photographic magic with bronze statues, and to Elizabeth Bailey for modeling for the photo on page 140.

For her wonderful illustration and artwork, heartfelt thanks to Kelly Burton. Thanks to Stacey Dykema and Shay Longtain for help with the appendixes, and to Judy Moss for help with the bibliography.

My family lived through deadline after deadline for the three years of this project, and I so appreciate and love them all. Thank you Stacey, Cleo, Kryn and Stephanie.

Finally, thanks to the team of people who produced this book at Cengage and also at Matrix Productions and PreMedia Global, especially my Edition I editor Nedah Rose, and production coordinators Aaron Downey at Matrix (Edition I) and Sushila Rajagopal at PreMedia (Edition II).

Contents

Preface vi

1 Yoga: From Its Beginnings to Today 1

What Is Yoga? 1

The Big Question, “Who Am I?” 3

Yoga’s Beginnings 6

Seven of the Most Important Yoga Systems 8

Bhakti Yoga 8

Mantra Yoga 8

Karma Yoga 10

Jnana Yoga 10

Rāja Yoga 11

Tantra Yoga 12

Hatha Yoga 13

What Is the Same in All Yoga Systems? 15

A Short History of Yoga 16

How Old Is Yoga? 16

The Earliest Roots of Yoga 17

The Yoga of Patanjali: Classical Yoga and the Yoga Sūtra 18

A New Era of Befriending the Body, Tantra Yoga 21

Contemporary Yoga: Hatha Yoga and Āsana Yoga 22

2 Yoga Philosophy 23

The Goal of Yoga 23

The Ordinary vs. the Extraordinary vs. the Out of This World 24

The Core Questions 25

Yoga Morals and Ethics 25

Yama, Restraints 26

Niyama, Disciplines 27

Other Lists of Yoga’s Ethics and Morals 31

Completing the Journey to One’s True Self 31

Conditioning and Habits 32

The Dawning of Wisdom 33

Applying Tantra Yoga Philosophy 33

3 Hatha Yoga, the Yoga of Balanced Energy 37

Overview of the Theory of Hatha Yoga 37

The Energy Body and the Five Bodies 38

Clarity 39

Control 40

Surrender, Letting Go 42

“Letting Go” in the Practice of Yoga Poses and Yoga Breathing 43

	The Anatomy of Awakening: Kundalinī and Chakras	44
	<i>The Serpent Power: Kundalinī</i>	45
	<i>Chakras, Wheels of Energy, and Kundalinī's Ascent</i>	45
	<i>Special Exercises to Move and Enhance Subtle Body Energy</i>	46
	<i>Summary of Kundalinī's Journey</i>	47
	Applying Hatha Yoga Theory in Your Yoga practice	49
4	Yoga Breathing	51
	Introduction to Yoga Breathing (<i>Prānāyāma</i>)	51
	Yoga Breath Practices (<i>Yoga Prānāyāmas</i>)	52
	<i>Practice Guidelines</i>	52
	<i>Basic Proper Breathing</i>	54
5	Postures, Āsanas	69
	The Benefits of Practicing Yoga Poses	69
	<i>Muscles and Joints</i>	70
	<i>Strength and Extensibility: Healthy Muscles</i>	70
	<i>Cardiovascular Benefits</i>	72
	<i>Feelings and Relaxation</i>	72
	<i>Mental Focus</i>	77
	Guidelines for Practicing Yoga Poses	78
	<i>Safety</i>	78
	<i>Breath in the Performance of Poses</i>	79
	<i>Slowing Down, Going Nowhere, Paying More Attention</i>	79
	<i>Parasympathetic Nervous System</i>	79
	<i>Using Props</i>	80
	The Poses of Hatha Yoga	80
	<i>Lying Down Poses</i>	81
	<i>Sitting and Kneeling Poses</i>	95
	<i>Standing Poses</i>	106
	<i>Inversions</i>	119
6	Relaxation and Meditation	123
	Relaxation	123
	<i>Benefits of Relaxation</i>	124
	<i>Relaxation Exercises</i>	125
	Meditation	129
	<i>Benefits of Meditation</i>	129
	<i>Guidelines for Meditation</i>	131
	<i>Preparation for Meditation</i>	133
	<i>Practices of Meditations</i>	134
	<i>Using Meditation Practices Already Presented in This Book</i>	137
	<i>Integrating Meditation into Your Life</i>	138
7	Yoga for Special Needs	139
	Yoga Classes Are for Everybody	139
	<i>You Can Do It</i>	139
	How Yoga Became a Healing Tradition	140

Practicing Yoga Safely, Whatever Your Condition	140
<i>Practicing Yoga Poses</i>	140
<i>Practicing Yoga Breathing</i>	141
How to Adapt Yoga Poses and Yoga Breathing to Specific Needs	141
<i>Adjusting Poses for When You Are Overweight or Out of Shape</i>	141
<i>Adjusting Poses If You Are Experiencing Chronic Pain</i>	143
<i>Adjusting Poses for When You Have Back Pain</i>	143
<i>Adjusting Yoga Poses for Pregnancy</i>	148
<i>Adjusting Yoga Poses If You Are Menstruating</i>	149
Summary	151
8 How to Continue Your Study of Yoga	153
Taking Other Yoga Classes	153
<i>Choosing a Class</i>	153
<i>Choosing a Yoga Style or Lineage</i>	156
Practicing at Home	160
<i>Designing Your Own Class or Practice Session</i>	160
<i>Choose Your Goals</i>	160
Living the Yoga Lifestyle	162
Reading about Yoga	163
<i>Instruction in Many Aspects of Hatha Yoga</i>	163
<i>Refining Your Performance of Āsanās</i>	163
<i>Yoga Therapy</i>	163
<i>Scholarly Writings on Yoga</i>	164
<i>Essays and Stories about Using Yoga Every Day</i>	164
<i>Reference Books on Yoga</i>	164
<i>Biography</i>	164
<i>Yoga Periodicals</i>	164
<i>Correspondence Course in All Aspects of Yoga</i>	165
Training to Become a Yoga Teacher	165
<i>Personal Fulfillment or Professional Skill?</i>	165
<i>The Economics of Teaching Yoga</i>	165
<i>How Long Does It Take to Become a Yoga Teacher?</i>	166
<i>How Does One Become a Yoga Therapist?</i>	166
<i>How Does One Choose a Yoga System or Lineage in Which to Become a Teacher?</i>	166
Conclusion	166
Appendix A: Pronunciation Guide to Sanskrit Words	167
Appendix B: Yoga Resources	169
Glossary	176
Bibliography	179
Index	181

Yoga: From Its Beginnings to Today



Goodman Photography.

OUTLINE

What Is Yoga?

The Big Question, “Who Am I?”

Yoga’s Beginnings Seven of the Most Important Yoga Systems

Bhakti Yoga

Mantra Yoga

Karma Yoga

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Tantra Yoga

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The Yoga of Patanjali: Classical Yoga and the *Yoga Sūtra*

A New Era of Befriending

the Body, Tantra Yoga

Contemporary Yoga: Hatha

Yoga and Āsana Yoga

What Is Yoga?

The word *Yoga* has come to mean many things (Figure 1.1). People who hear the word *Yoga* may think it refers to an exercise system that originated in India and that is characterized by pretzel-like positions and stretching. Others think *Yoga* also includes breathing and relaxation practices. Someone who has taken a class in one of the relatively new systems at an athletic club may think *Yoga* is a sweaty, effortful endeavor designed to build stamina and strength. A person who has been to see a *Yoga* therapist, perhaps at a health spa, may think *Yoga* is a complementary healing system¹ for eliminating back pain or helping with recovery from an illness. Still others think *Yoga* is a religious practice that involves gurus (spiritual authorities) and hymns sung in a foreign language. All of these definitions of *Yoga* are accurate, and there are many more.

The Sanskrit word *Yoga* derives from the root, “*yuj*,” to yoke, harness, or join together. So *Yoga* is commonly translated to mean “union.”² In many

¹ Also called complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), and holistic medicine. Sometimes the word *healing* replaces the word *medicine*.

² Some other definitions of *Yoga* are spiritual endeavor—especially the control of the mind and

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Kelly Burton/Cengage Learning

FIGURE 1.1 “*Yoga*” written in Sanskrit script.

Yoga traditions, the union referred to is that of your individual self with your universal self. Or, put another way, it means the union of the ordinary you, the you who says, “I think,” or “I am reading these words,” with the you who is much bigger, much more a part of everything else. This bigger self is sometimes called your “spiritual self,” your “true self,” or your “soul.” The Sanskrit words that connote this union are *jīva-ātman* (living self, individuated self), which unites with *parama-ātman* (supreme self).

A more general description of what is joined or united through *Yoga*

senses, a Hindu tradition of spiritual discipline, self-realization, union with God, and even “separation.” Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*.

BOX 1.1

Meditation Defined

Meditation is the practice of sitting quietly with one's eyes closed or open and focusing attention on one thing, such as the breath, a sound, or an imagined image (for example, the image of the sun). According to many Yoga teachings, as a result of doing a practice like this repetitively one can open and expand one's view and perception.

This expanded perception feels good, reduces stress, and brings one insight into issues such as who one is and what the world is. In all Yoga systems, meditation is a step to *Samādhi* (pronounced sum-ahd-hi), which happens when one's perception is perfectly clear, when one sees oneself and reality completely accurately.

practice is taken from *The Essentials of Yoga* by Sarley and Sarley: "Yoga is . . . designed to balance and unite the mind, body and spirit."³ A renowned Yoga teacher from India, B.K.S. Iyengar (1918-present) writes in *Yoga, The Path to Holistic Health*, "The primary aim of Yoga is to restore the mind to simplicity and peace, and free it from confusion and distress."⁴ Another great Yoga teacher, Swami Vishnudevanda, writes in the foreword to *The Shivananda Companion to Yoga*, "Yoga, the oldest science of life, can teach you to bring stress under control—not only on a physical level, but on mental and spiritual levels too."⁵

You see, defining the word Yoga isn't simple. Most people in the Western world who use the word mean an exercise system. Yet many others refer to a *meditation* system (see Box 1.1) or a spiritual lifestyle.

There really is no handy answer to the question, "What is Yoga?" because Yoga has been evolving and changing throughout its history, and especially recently. Since about 1999, Yoga has rapidly become a more and more popular offering at fitness clubs and recreation centers, colleges, and universities. A 1994 Roper

poll, commissioned by *Yoga Journal*,⁶ found that 6 million Americans practiced Yoga regularly.

Fourteen years later in 2008 a Harris Interactive Service Bureau survey found that 6.9 percent of U.S. adults, or 15.8 million people, practice yoga, over two-and-a-half times as many as the number stated in the Roper poll.⁷

With so many newcomers to Yoga, the system itself is changing, further complicating the answer to, "What is Yoga?" Teachers adapt their teachings to the people who are showing up for class, and Yoga practitioners who are looking for training as teachers seek schools that present the kind of Yoga they are used to.

This change means that Yoga is morphing into something so different from the traditions from which it arose that Yoga experts who studied the discipline just 30 years ago don't recognize it as Yoga. Veteran journalist Anne Cushman writes in a 2002 *Yoga Journal* article, "Certainly, the form in which Yoga is practiced has altered so radically in the West that it is almost unrecognizable to a traditional Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain practitioner."⁸

⁶ Cushman, Anne "The New Yoga," *Yoga Journal*, no. 151, Jan-Feb, 2000.

⁷ Harris Interactive Service Bureau Survey, for *Yoga Journal*, Feb 26, 2008.

⁸ Cushman, "The New Yoga," *Yoga Journal*.

³ Sarley and Sarley, *The Essentials of Yoga*, 4.

⁴ Iyengar, *Yoga, The Path to Holistic Health*, 9.

⁵ Lidell, *The Sivananda Companion to Yoga*, 7.

Some Yoga experts and scholars say that modern fitness-style Yoga is an unfortunate distortion of a valuable tradition. Renowned Yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein writes in an article in *Yoga International* magazine, “If we want to ensure a healthy future for Yoga . . . we must not only look ahead, we must also look back into the past. We must remember Yoga’s traditional roots, for without a proper alignment with India’s profound spiritual heritage our contemporary Yoga practice is bound to be watered down more and more until it is ineffective as a tool for personal transformation.”⁹

Another well-known Yoga teacher, Donna Farhi, writes in the introduction to *Yoga Mind, Body and Spirit*, “Like the botanist who finally breeds the perfect rose only to discover that in the process he has lost the fragrance of the bloom, when we strip Yoga to its mechanics, we also lose something essential. The task of today’s teachers and students is to reclaim the essential spirit and intentions behind these practices.”¹⁰

But other leaders in the Yoga community disagree. They say that Yoga has adapted to the needs of people today (by focusing almost exclusively on the body), just as it has adapted for millennia, and they believe that this most recent adaptation is appropriate. Yet a third group of influential teachers says that the popular physical practices are an important entry point into Yoga’s broader methods of self-improvement, and that in time many students will become interested in the spiritual and mental aspects of Yoga.¹¹

You may wonder what this disagreement among Yoga teachers

has to do with your study of Yoga; what does it have to do with your forward bending flexibility, for example? I and many others believe that you, the student, can understand Yoga better and use forward bending poses more effectively if you know why such poses were developed to begin with and how other Yoga practitioners may be using them. When we understand something of Yoga’s context, how it has developed over thousands of years into the remarkable systems we have today, we can benefit more from our practice.

The Big Question, “Who Am I?”

The word *Yoga*, you learned earlier, means an exercise system and a method to achieve the union of your individual self with the you who is much bigger, such as your spiritual self, your true self, or your soul, called *parama-ātman*. The methods Yoga has prescribed for achieving that union have varied greatly over the 5,000 years of its history, but the goal, the state of consciousness (which is also called “Yoga,”) appears to have been quite consistent: to answer the question “Who am I?” There is even a school of Yoga, *Jnana Yoga* (described later in this chapter), that teaches as its primary practice the continuous asking of this question.

Who am I? Am I my body and its tasting, touching, and smelling? Am I my mind and its thoughts and memories? Am I my dreams and aspirations? Am I what other people think and feel about me? Am I a spiritual being? These are the sorts of questions yogins have been asking for millennia. But to be fair, so have millions of non-yogins. I asked, “Who am I?” when I was a teenager. So did most of my friends. Perhaps you wonder sometimes about who you are, too.



Kelly Burton/Cengage Learning

FIGURE 1.2 The goal of Yoga is to answer the question, “Who am I?”

⁹ Feuerstein, “The Lost Teachings,” *Yoga International*.

¹⁰ Farhi, *Yoga Mind, Body and Spirit*, xv.

¹¹ Cushman, *The New Yoga*, Russell Wild; “Yoga Inc.,” both from *Yoga Journal*.

One way people have historically found answers to that question, and satisfied their curiosity, is by looking outside of themselves. They have found answers from religious authority such as that represented by a scripture, a priest, or a dogma. Another way people satisfy their curiosity about who they really are is from parental teaching and example; again, outside of themselves. Yet another way is by adopting the answers common to their society's traditions—still another external source of answers.

But there have been some, in nearly every society, who seek answers to the question, "Who am I?" from within their own experience.¹² They are saying to their priests and parents and schoolteachers, "What you say makes some sense, but I want to see for myself; I want to *know* with more certainty who I am." These people are called mystics.¹³ They all share a doubt that what they have heard or seen is the whole story. That doubt inflames their curiosity and inspires them to explore, to search, to reach into the unknown. In the case of yogins, millions have undertaken this inner exploration. An ancient and modern practice that most captures the spirit of this kind of inner searching is meditation (see Box 1.1). Meditation is the most common practice among most of the old Yoga schools.

You might wonder what these yogins and mystics are exploring—what I mean by "their own experience" or "inner exploration." Please try this exercise before you read on, and I think you will understand better what

I mean. Read the whole exercise first, and then try it.

Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your back pretty straight. Close your eyes, and focus on your body. Relax your arms and legs. Relax your lower jaw and your tongue. Now take five slow, deep, easy breaths through your nose, unless it is clogged, in which case breathe through your mouth and nose. For all five breaths sense your body, your sensations of breathing. Afterward, keep sensing your body and open your eyes. Does the world seem any different? Is your vision or hearing any different? Does your body feel different than it did before the exercise? Just notice. Whatever you are experiencing is OK. There is no right way to do this exercise (Figure 1.3).

You may have noticed, as I did when I just did the exercise, that the world does seem a little different afterward. I find it hard to say exactly how it is different. Sharper, maybe, or brighter. Yogins have written that when our world seems to change in these ways, it is really our perception that has changed, not the world. Just imagine what would happen if your perception changed a lot! You might open your eyes after focusing on your breathing and burst into tears at the utter beauty surrounding you. You might see a color as if for the first time, maybe the brilliant green color of the bush outside your window. Here's how a modern mystic and scholar, Ken Wilber, describes one such state:

Resting in that empty, free, easy effortless witnessing, notice that the clouds are arising in the vast space of your awareness. The clouds are arising within you—so much so, you can taste the clouds, you are one with the clouds, it is as if they are on the inside of your skin, they are so close. The sky and your awareness have become one, and all

¹² Alain Daniélou writes in *Yoga, Mastering the Secrets of Matter and the Universe*, "Shaivite philosophy [another name for a school of Yoga] reveals a profoundness of mind which refused to dogmatize or systematize conclusions further than observation would allow them to be verified. Every effort was aimed at developing the human mind's means of perception, of which Yoga techniques became the basis." (p. 10).

¹³ Crim, ed., *The Perennial Dictionary of World Religions*, 508.

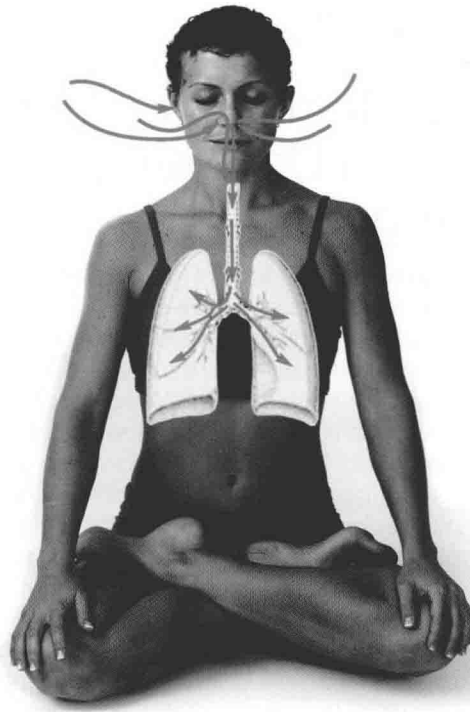


FIGURE 1.3 Focus on your sensations of breathing.

Leslie Goodman; Illustration: Kelly Burton

things in the sky are floating effortlessly through your own awareness. You can kiss the sun, swallow the mountain, they are that close.¹⁴

An experience such as that described by Wilber answers the question, “Who am I?” When “the sky and your awareness have become one,” to reiterate Wilber’s image, you are experiencing Yoga.

In ancient India, many people were asking, “Who am I?” and some were finding answers like the one Wilber describes. We know this from Sanskrit writings from that time, such as the *Upanishads* (pronounced oo-pun-ish-uds), which are among the earliest writings on Yoga. The historical record suggests that these “seers,” these yogins, developed systems or methodologies to help other people perceive reality directly and fully. Since there were lots of seers, yogins, and inner

explorers using Yoga’s methods, these different people with their different needs developed many diverse Yoga systems. No one kind of Yoga worked for everybody, according to some old Sanskrit writings.¹⁵ But whatever Yoga system a person used, the goal was the same: the direct apprehension of the Self, with a capital S. Or, as I like to state this goal in my classes at Naropa University, Yoga helps us see who we are and what the deal is. Put another way, Yoga helps us *really* answer the question, “What’s up?”

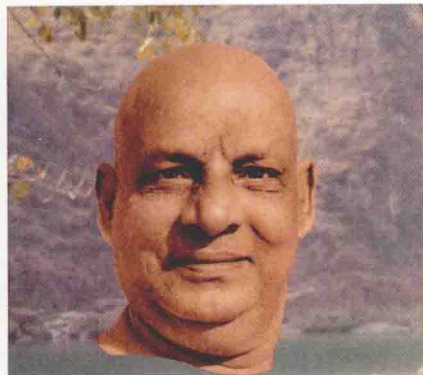
We’re seeing that Yoga was a method to help a person clarify and expand their awareness and their consciousness.

How did Yoga go about changing a practitioner’s awareness? It did so in many ways, but one school of Yoga, and the one we are most concerned with in this book, Hatha Yoga, used the body and the breath, along with, of course, the mind, to change awareness. Hatha Yoga’s focus on the body was controversial because most previous Yoga schools viewed the body, with its appetites and sensations, as a huge impediment to awakening awareness, an impediment to achieving the goal of Yoga. But Hatha Yoga’s founders discovered that a strong and balanced *flow of energy* in one’s body, as they put it, improved awareness, and made it clearer and brighter. And a balanced energy flow helped one to control one’s mind, enabling one to focus attention on one thing for a long time, which they viewed as a necessary skill for opening one’s perception.

Let’s fast-forward again to Yoga in the United States today. How did a method to change awareness become a method to strengthen abdominal muscles and reduce stress? The exercises that yogins developed to balance energy in their bodies turn out to impart many other benefits, such as increased stamina, more peaceful

¹⁴ Wilber, Foreword, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, x.

¹⁵ Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, 19.



Divine Life Society

PHOTO 1.1 Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh (1887–1963), founder of an influential Hatha Yoga lineage.

BOX 1.2

Systems, Traditions, or Schools: What Do We Call the Varieties of Yoga?

The diverse teachings of Yoga are called many names. Some words that I (and other writers) use are *system*, *school*, and *tradition*, all of which mean a coherent body of knowledge that is distinguished from others in significant ways. Another word I use to delineate one type of Yoga from another is *lineage*. This word means “direct descent from an ancestor,”¹⁶ and alludes to the traditional way Yoga knowledge has been passed from generation to generation. This passing of knowledge is called *paramparā* (pronounced, pa-rum-pa-rah’), literally “from one to another.” It is a system of oral transmission in which a master of Yoga, a *guru* (pronounced goo-roo) adopts a disciple, a *shishya* (pronounced shish-ya). The master teaches the disciple his or her unique understanding of the Yoga way to awakening. Eventually the disciple may become a master (*guru*) to new disciples, and on and on.

Yoga lineages are sometimes named after a prominent master, living or dead. An example is Shivananda Yoga, named after Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh, India (1887–1963). Another is Iyengar Yoga, named after B.K.S. Iyengar of Poona, India (1918–present).

Occasionally a person becomes a master, or *guru*, without having a human teacher, through a process of spontaneous awakening to the truth. They then start a new lineage, or they may claim an affiliation with an old one. An example is Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, India (1879–1950), a great adept of *Jnana Yoga*¹⁷ (see below).

sleep, and stronger muscles. So those latter benefits are the ones most Yoga students today are after. And yet, I have heard even the most physically oriented of students say that they feel more contentment since starting their Yoga practice, and they aren’t quite sure why. Could it be Yoga’s wise ancestors?

Yoga’s Beginnings

Yoga developed over thousands of years in response to a perennial hunger in humans to know and understand themselves.

¹⁶ Webster’s New World Dictionary, Third College Edition.

¹⁷ Maharshi, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, xv–xix.

This has led people to create religions, myths, the science of psychology, and mystical systems. Mystical systems are sophisticated methods of investigating one’s mind or inner reality. One group of systems of mysticism is called Yoga.

Yoga systems vary greatly from one another. Most people in Western countries are familiar with the posture practice (*āsana*) aspect of Hatha Yoga (for a detailed description of Hatha Yoga, see “Hatha Yoga” later in this chapter). But even that tradition evolved over perhaps 1,000 years from earlier Yoga traditions, and in the company of other evolving Yoga traditions. Like tree branches starting at the trunk and growing toward the sunlight, some long and some short, Yoga schools may be young or old, traditional or modern. All trace their

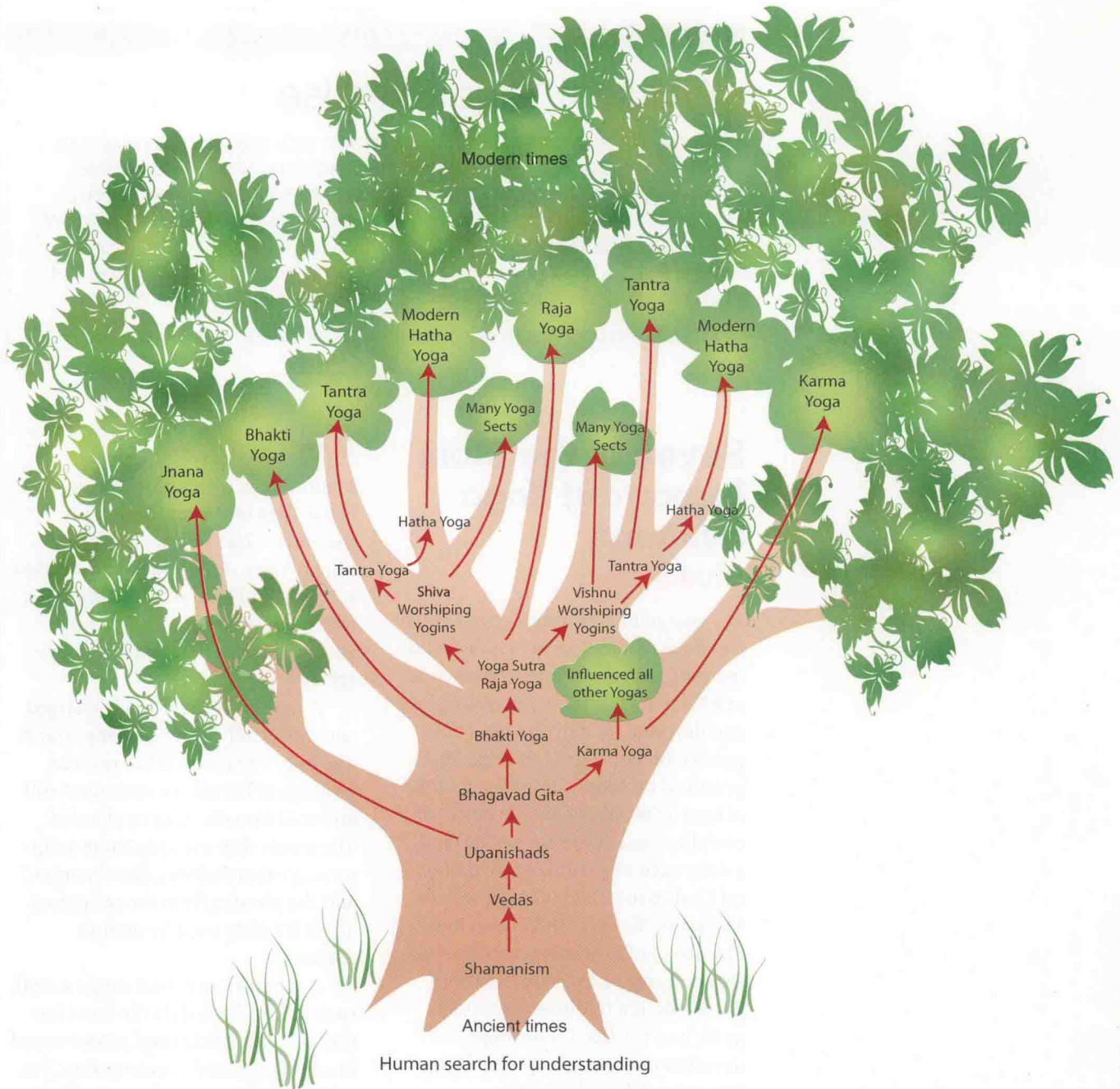


FIGURE 1.4 Like tree branches, some of which are long and some short, Yoga schools may be young or old, traditional or modern.

roots back through the trunk to the human search for understanding. They all are part of the same Yoga tree, and so influence each other (Figure 1.4).

To understand Hatha Yoga and its history, the part of yoga with which we are most concerned in this book, we need to understand at least a little about the other main Yoga systems. I have simplified the list to

seven of the most important ones. They are, in approximate order of their historical development, Bhakti Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Rājā Yoga, Tantra Yoga, and Hatha Yoga. After you know about these seven Yoga schools, you can better understand the story of Yoga's development from ancient times to the present.

BOX 1.3

A Bhakti Yoga Exercise

Here is a Bhakti Yoga exercise to try. Sit with your eyes closed and picture the wisest person you can imagine, the most loving and compassionate person you can think of. He or she could be someone you know or someone you hope you might meet someday, a great spiritual figure or a vision of a historical figure such as Jesus. Keep picturing this person as if he or she were sitting in front of you. Hold this image in your mind and send love and appreciation to this person. Continue the exercise for five to ten minutes.

Benefits: An open heart, more compassion for others, and contentment.

Seven of the Most Important Yoga Systems

Bhakti Yoga

The goal of Bhakti (pronounced bhuk-tee) Yoga is communion with or total merging with the divine. The essence of Bhakti Yoga is the act of feeling love and devotion for a divine object or person. Bhakti Yoga is the Yoga most practiced by people in India, and it is at least 3,500 years old. The object of one's love and devotion may be God, a deity such as Krishna (a mythological God-man), Devi (Goddesses), or Vishnu or Shiva (both Hindu Gods). The object of love and devotion could also be a spiritual person, such as a guru, who is a traditional spiritual guide and teacher. Or the object of devotion may be the supreme being, beyond words and concepts.

Bhakti yogins experience the anguish of longing for the divine. It is the Yoga of the heart. Bhakti Yoga practices include singing songs of praise (called *kirtan* and *bhajana*), meditation on the form of the divine, and acts of service. Bhakti Yoga is closer to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in temperament than are any of the other Yoga schools.

Please try the exercise in Box 1.3.

Mantra Yoga

Mantra Yoga (pronounced mun-tra) is the Yoga of potent sound. It is the oldest Yoga system, along with Bhakti Yoga, dating back to the oldest scripture in Hinduism, the *Rig Veda*, which was composed about 5,000 years ago. (This date is debated by scholars.)

A mantra is a spiritually charged and powerfully mind-altering sound. The four Vedas and other revered writings of Hinduism were (and still are) traditionally sung or chanted. The words that make up these scriptures are themselves called "mantra," and the phrases from the scriptures are still widely used by mantra yogins.

A mantra could be a single sound, such as "om," which is the most important and widely used power sound in all of Yoga, and connotes the One, or the absolute. A mantra could also be a sentence like "Om namah shivaya," which loosely means, "I merge with the essence of goodness."

Mantras are chanted either out loud or silently in one's mind, sometimes repeated continuously all day, or for hours. Mantras are also used in rituals in temples, at home altars, and at reflective moments during the day, the way some Christians say grace before eating. In the use of