



ASTANGA YOGA

In the tradition of SHRI K PATTABHI JOIS

Yoga is a philosophy of life, which also has the potential to create a vibrantly healthy body and mind.

Astanga Yoga, practised in its correct sequential order, gradually leads the practitioner to rediscovering his or her fullest potential on all levels of human consciousness ... physical, psychological and spiritual. Through this practice of correct breathing (ujjayi pranayama), postures (asanas), and gazing points (drishti), we gain control of the senses and a deep awareness of ourselves. By maintaining this discipline with the regularity and devotion, one acquires steadiness of body and mind.

Astanga literally means eight limbs. They are described by Pantanjali as Yama (abstinences), Niyama (observances), Asana (postures), Pranayama (breath control), Pratyahara (sense withdrawal), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (contemplation). These eight branches support each other.

Asana practice must be established for the proper practice of pranayama, and is a key to the development of the yamas and niyamas. Once these four externally orientated limbs are firmly rooted, the last four internally orientated limbs will spontaneously evolve over time.

Vinyasa means breath synchronised movement. The breath is the heart of this discipline and links asana in a precise order. By synchronising movement with breathing and practising Mula and Uddiyana Bandhas (locks), an intense internal heat is produced. This heat purifies muscles and organs, expelling unwanted toxins as well as releasing and circulating beneficial hormones and minerals, which can nourish the body when the sweat is rubbed back in the skin. The breath regulates the vinyasa and ensures efficient circulation of blood. The result is a light, strong physical body.

There are three groups of sequences in the Astanga system. The Primary Series (Yoga Chikitsa) detoxifies and aligns the body. The immediate series (Nadi Shodhana) purifies the nervous system by opening and clearing the energy channels. The Advanced Series, A, B, C, and D (Sthira Bhaga) integrate the strength and grace of the practice, requiring higher levels of flexibility and humility.

Each level is to be fully developed before proceeding to the next, and the sequential order of asanas is to be meticulously followed. Each posture is a preparation for the next, developing the strength and balance required to move further.

Breath: The continuity of deep, even breathing cannot be over-emphasised in the Astanga Yoga System. When breath feeds action, and action feeds posture, each movement becomes gentle, precise, and perfectly steady. According to the teachings of Shri T Krishnwnacharya and Shri K Pattabhi Jois, "Breath is Life". Breathing is our most fundamental and vital act and holds a divine essence; exhalation a movement towards God, and inhalation and inspiration from God. Our last action in life is to exhale, which is, in essence, the final and total surrender to God.

Practice: It is said that where there is no effort there is no benefit. Strength, stamina, and sweat are unique aspects of this traditional system of Yoga, seemingly contrary to Western perceptions of Yoga. This demanding practice requires considerable effort and taps into and circulates a vital energy (Prana) throughout the body, strengthening and purifying the nervous system. The mind then becomes lucid, clear and precise; and according to Shri K Pattabhi Jois "Wherever you look you will see God". Only through practice will we realise the truth of what our Guru often says.....

"Everything is God"

Please note the importance of learning the Astanga method only from a traditionally trained teacher. Only a qualified teacher can provide the necessary guidance to assure safe, steady progress without injury to body or mind!

Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute
Yogasana Visharada Vedanta Vidwan
Shri K Pattabhi Jois. Director
R Sharath. Assistant Director
876/1 1st Cross, Lakshmiapuram
Mysore 570004
Karnataka State, South India.

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Astanga Yoga Centre - 308 Great North Road - Auckland - New Zealand - Ph (09) 536 5240 - www.astangayoga.co.nz