



## introduction



*Yoga is balance (samatva) — Bhagavad Gita (2.48)*

The ancient Indian practice of yoga has become incredibly popular today, with the number of new practitioners growing daily. One reason for the great interest in this extremely venerated practice is that it creates a great path for personal growth and an opportunity to increase awareness, strength, and relaxation.

The world has always been demanding for human beings, for one reason or another. To meet the challenges we are faced with, we've been forced to find ways to survive and develop the energy needed to get through each day. The ancient text *Bhagavad Gita* describes the world as a battlefield, where it is crucial to hold onto functioning morals and ethics. At the same time, people must reflect on their norms and values so that they—and their surroundings—can thrive in each situation while maintaining the natural, the noble, and the good. It's pretty much the same today; to be happy and feel good in life we need to be in harmony with ourselves and with our surroundings. It is here that yoga offers the opportunity to strengthen ourselves and to grow both as individuals and as a species.

To a great degree yoga is about life, life force, and how to reach our maximum potential as human beings. The techniques of yoga are designed to bring increased awareness and harmony, both within and without, for the individual who practices them on a regu-

lar basis. When we accept our own nature and improve our health, we also create lasting and harmonious surroundings and communities, instead of discarding them the minute they aren't convenient. Morals, ethics, communication, reflection, and respect for life are essential elements that enlightened people in northern India realized early on were essential for growth as a group and for individuals to reach their full potential. Still today we struggle with maintaining tranquility, peace, harmony, and our world.

To practice yoga means to always be present in the moment, in everything you do, and to act from a self-awareness and an awareness of the outer world, with the goal of finding joy, happiness, and harmonious development. It requires training as well as discipline and reflection. You have to take one step at a time. Hatha Yoga is a way to good health and universal well-being.

This book is an attempt at a comprehensive presentation of classic Hatha Yoga with its various elements. It is not easy to fully explain physical yoga's roots and to show the yogic way the respect it deserves all in one book. We were thus forced to limit ourselves; so we decided to give preference to the asanas—what they consist of and how to position the body—since it is this dimension we often come in contact with first in yoga. The other aspects we've highlighted on a smaller scale. By no means do I mean to imply that asanas are the most important or leading part of yoga. But you have to start somewhere. Working with the body, breath, and focus is a good way to begin.

Producing Hatha Yoga were: Ulrica Norberg (concept/copy), Andreas Lundberg (photography), Alexandra Frank (design), and Lars-Erik Carlsson (editor). We have tried to come up with a richly illustrated book that we hope you experience as relevant, inspiring, and enriching. This book is intended for all, independent of previous experience with yoga, but above all it is meant for those that are curious and want to know more about Hatha Yoga. However, this book isn't meant as a substitute for a yoga teacher who can give individual instruction and guidance.

My advice to anyone just entering the world of yoga is to have an open mind while reflecting on this philosophy, even if some of the ideas seem complex, challenging, and even difficult for the time being. You do not have to agree. Just reflect on what is said and give it a try.

*Om Shanti,*  
Ulrica







## hatha yoga



*Neither through action or by abstinence from action does one achieve peace; nor by renunciation alone can one attain perfection.—Bhagavad Gita (3.5)*

To clarify what yoga really is, we can start with looking at what it *isn't*.

Yoga isn't a religion, cult, or New Age fad. It's not a modern fitness regime that takes a little here and a little there from Asian or Indian training systems. Yoga isn't a lifestyle choice with some predetermined number of values which must be adhered to. You don't need to light incense or wear spiritual necklaces to practice yoga. You don't need to believe in any god or live a religious life. Yoga doesn't require any blind faith, specific prerequisites, or knowledge. There also aren't any requirements for penance or confession, humiliation, or self-denial. You don't have to give up any specific food, alcohol, sex, or money. You don't have to be nimble, young, rich, skinny, beautiful, or trendy. You only have to be yourself, just as you are. The only things yoga recommends are moderation, openness, and regular reflection about what is happening inside you.

The word “yoga” has a broad meaning. The basic definition is “yoke, join, unify” in Sanskrit. Yoga is about joining together two dimensions; humanity (brahman) and an individual's true self (atman) to find balance between the two.

## Yoga's historical background

Yoga is one of six schools of thought that together are called *Darsana* (the way to see). These can be seen as different perspectives on how life, living, and energy work together in different ways in time and space as well as outside and inside every living thing. That which distinguishes yoga from the other schools of thought is that it deals entirely with human potential. Yoga highlights and even describes the methods that can increase life force and harmonious development in life. All the techniques deal with insights and wisdom about humans and their nature.

Yoga is not one tradition but the result of many traditions that overlapped each other and between which there was even some exchange. In any case, yoga is still completely vibrant today and is still developing, especially in the western world. Yogic philosophy has developed through wisdom and experience and has thus kept pace with society's needs and changes. That's why you'll find a different approach in the east than in the west. New dimensions of yoga are attributed to different encounters with novel environments and peoples, but the principles remain the same. This is what is fascinating about yoga—that it is so enduring. One of my first yoga teachers said to me that what keeps yoga so strong is that in the end it concentrates on the essence of life and what is human. As she went on to say: “There is only one truth but many roads to reach it.”

To develop deeper insight and knowledge of yoga, it is helpful to read the history and philosophy from the ancient yogic literature such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and *Yoga Sutra*.

## Yoga sutra—the source of yogic understanding

The Sanskrit text *Yoga Sutra's* 196 aphorisms or verses point to a method that can help yoga practitioners strengthen mind, body, and soul. *Yoga Sutra* describes the royal path of yoga, *Raja Yoga*, as a meditative yogic path to happiness and harmony in life through strengthening and balancing the mind. *Raja Yoga* incorporates *Karma Yoga* (deeds and destiny), *Bhakti Yoga* (devotion and humility), *Jnana Yoga* (knowledge/wisdom), and *Kriya Yoga* (active, cleansing deeds and exercises). *Yoga Sutra* is considered by many yogis to be the heart of yoga and the source of yogic understanding. *Yoga Sutra's* author, Patanjali, defines yoga as “yoga citta vritti nirodah,” which can be translated as “yoga is