

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Complete Yoga Book

James Hewitt

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About the Book

The Complete Yoga Book is an encyclopedia of yoga practice and practical yoga as well as of the philosophy and background of yoga. It is divided into three sections.

The first of these is concerned with raising the levels of health and energy through breathing. The second section constitutes one of the most important guides ever published of the *Asanas*, or postures of yoga. Clear, easy to follow instructions and drawings accompany Hewitt's descriptions of over 400 postures. The author includes warm-ups and many modifications of basic postures for beginners or those with specific problems. The third section deals with the history and philosophy of yoga and surveys in depth the various meditative methods including transcendental meditation. He discusses the possession of psychic powers and the potentialities of bio-feedback and relates all these developments to the classic techniques of meditation and yoga.

About the Author

James Hewitt is a former Fleet Street journalist who now writes full time. He has had thirty-five books published including; *Teach Yourself Yoga*, *Teach Yourself Meditation* (Hodder and Stoughton) and *The Complete Relaxation Book* (originally published as *Relaxation: East and West*) (Rider).

Also by James Hewitt

Teach Yourself Yoga (*Hodder and Stoughton*)

Teach Yourself Meditation (*Hodder and Stoughton*)

The Complete Relaxation Book

(originally *Relaxation: East and West*) (Rider)

THE COMPLETE
YOGA
BOOK



The Yoga of Breathing,
Posture, and Meditation

JAMES HEWITT



RIDER

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Preface

The philosophical, metaphysical, and religious bases of Yoga may be accepted or denied, in whole or in part; but there can be no gainsaying the rewards of greater health, vitality, and psychophysical poise that result from Yoga practice, as many thousands of men and women have discovered recently in the West. In the East yoga has been practised for thousands of years. Only in this century has it been introduced into Europe and America, but it is now firmly established. It has proved to be no passing fad, simply because it fulfils its promises, supplying the results expected of it at whichever level it is practised.

It is on the *practice* of Yoga, and also on the *practical* in Yoga, that I have concentrated in writing *Yoga of Breathing*, and in writing two complementary works, *Yoga of Posture* and *Yoga of Meditation*. The three volumes together comprise what is virtually an encyclopedia of Yoga practice and of practical Yoga. This practical approach is aimed at enriching the health and consciousness of people going about the complicated, stress-beset activity of present-day living. Yoga has always provided for the needs of 'householder Yogins' - men and women practising Yoga without withdrawing from family life and responsibilities.

In making a practical approach to Yoga we satisfy the demands of students who consider the rewards of psychophysical health and poise worthy aims in themselves. We also provide the aspirant who wishes for 'higher consciousness' and mystical experience with the groundwork which equips him for the climb. The analogy with mountain climbing is apt, for the postures, breath controls, cleansing processes, and healthful eating habits

and diet of physiological Yoga, called Hatha Yoga, prepare the aspirant for the subtle disciplines of psychical Yoga, called Raja Yoga. Raja Yoga refines consciousness and aims at the pinnacle of intuitive enlightenment (*samadhi*).

The three volumes are concerned mainly with these two Yogas, Hatha and Raja - the Yogas most widely practised in the West and most easily adaptable to occidental needs.

Yoga of Breathing is intended to establish the student securely in Yogic practice; to raise levels of health, energy, and psychophysical poise, through control of breathing, posture, hygiene, relaxation, and diet. Breath control (*pranayama*) is at the heart of the Yoga of breathing. It has been neglected in much of the literature of Yoga for Westerners, but in this book it is given the emphasis it deserves. An example of our direct and practical approach is that the *bandhas* and *mudras* of Hatha Yoga, which are special postures and muscle controls, are employed not for prolonged breath suspension and the arousal of mysterious energies, but for the enhancement of sexual health and fitness. *Yoga of Breathing* also includes a balanced programme of general postures.

Yoga of Posture presents by far the largest collection of postures (*asanas*) ever published - over 400. They include warm-up and limber-up exercises, which most Western students need before embarking on a programme of posturing; and modifications and simplifications of postures which can lead to full performance of the classic *asanas*. Thus there are programmes to suit any stage of suppleness.

Yoga of Meditation describes the most direct and practical techniques of meditation, including the traditional method of *Patanjali*, the transcendental meditation of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and recent Western experiments in auto-control of the involuntary nervous system using electrical biofeedback apparatus.

Each of the three volumes - *Yoga of Breathing*, *Yoga of Posture*, and *Yoga of Meditation* - stands on its own, but the

three combine to make a clear and practical guide for practitioners of Yoga who wish to garner its many benefits for body and mind, and to improve the whole quality of everyday life. For Yoga is a life-science and a life-style.

Finally, a point concerning the printing of this book and of the two complementary volumes: I have followed the practice of many works written on Yoga for a mainly Western readership by omitting diacritical marks in the printing of words in Sanskrit, the classic language of Indian Yoga.

JAMES HEWITT

Volume I
Yoga of Breathing

I Yoga and Yogas

WHAT IS YOGA?

CONFUSION WILL BE avoided if we at once point out that there is Yoga as an end-goal and Yoga as a system of techniques and disciplines to reach the end-goal. Not only that: there are several systems, and therefore several Yogas. But the aim in each case is the same, though it is talked about in the language of a variety of religions and cultures. Strictly speaking, Yoga is Indian and Hindu; and for the Hindu mystic the supreme goal in living is absorption in *Brahman* - 'I am that.'

Who or what is *Brahman*? In the purest Yoga, which is that of the *upanishads*, *Brahman* is impersonal and imageless, and should not be confused with Brahma, a deity of the Hindu Trinity (the other members are Siva and Vishnu). *Brahman* as the One of world mysticism can be written about in a variety of ways, not all of them religious. Mysticism does not belong solely to the world religions, though it is linked closely with them. How does one classify Buddhism, which has no god, and looks on its founder, at a sophisticated level, as an enlightened man? Each age and culture finds its appropriate vocabulary for the One. In the West today, a psychological orientation makes Being, Self beyond empirical ego, and levels of consciousness the terms in which the loftiest aims of Yoga are most meaningfully discussed.

The Self to be realized beyond the ego in Indian Yoga is the *Atman*. Find the *Atman*, which is pure consciousness, through Yogic practice, and you find (the intuitive enlightenment called *samadhi*) that individual being and Cosmic Being have the same ground, and that *Atman* and

Brahman are one. This realized union is called Yoga – the word comes from roots meaning ‘union’, and, the English ‘yoke’ is etymologically related.

A Yoga is also a system of physical and psychical controls whose aim is to make the practitioner aware of the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman*, or the ground of Being, or whatever concepts are found congenial. And even if you remain agnostic or sceptical towards the whole mystic concept, there remains such value in the bodily exercises and meditative techniques in terms of psycho-physical well-being that thousands of people practise Yoga with barely a thought for Yoga as a mystical goal. Their concern is with Yoga as practice.

THE SVETASVATARA UPANISHAD

The above points become clearer if we look at a concise description of Yoga practice and its powers found in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, 11, 8-15 (155)

If a wise man hold his body with its three erect parts (chest, neck, and head) even, and turn his senses with the mind towards the heart, he will then in the boat of *Brahman* cross all the torrents which cause fear.

Compressing his breathings let him who has subdued all motions, breathe forth through the nose with gentle breath. Let the wise man without fail restrain his mind, that chariot yoked with vicious horses.

Let him perform his exercises in a place level, pure, free from pebbles, fire, and dust, delightful by its sounds, its water, and bowers, not painful to the eye, and full of shelters and caves.

When Yoga is being performed, the forms which come first, producing apparitions in *Brahman*, are those of

misty smoke, sun, fire, wind, fire-flies, lightnings, and a crystal moon.

When, as earth, water, light, heat, and ether arise, the fivefold quality of Yoga takes place, then there is no longer illness, old age, or pain for him who has obtained a body, produced by the fire of Yoga.

The first results of Yoga they call lightness, healthiness, steadiness, a good complexion, an easy pronunciation, a sweet odour, and slight excretions.

As a metal disk [mirror], tarnished by dust, shines bright again after it has been cleaned, so is the one incarnate person satisfied and free from grief, after he has seen the real nature of the self.

And when by means of the real nature of his self he sees, as by a lamp, the real nature of *Brahman*, then having known the unborn, eternal god, who is beyond all natures, he is freed from all fetters.

In the above quotation we see Yoga as goal (absorption in *Brahman*); Yoga as postures and breath controls; and Yoga as meditation and contemplation. The two most widely practised Yogas in the West are here indicated: the physiological Yoga, called Hatha Yoga, and the Yoga of mental mastery, called Raja Yoga. We will sometimes refer to them as the Yoga of Vitality and the Yoga of Meditation respectively. The Yoga of Posture is part of Hatha Yoga, or the Yoga of Vitality.

CLASSIFYING THE YOGAS

When it comes to classifying and grouping the systems of Yoga, one finds differences of opinion among the scholars. The reason for this is that the Yogas overlap and interpenetrate to such an extent that several classifications have validity. It is possible to use a system that

incorporates several Yogas directly, and several others indirectly. And some people attempt nothing less than a synthesis of all the main Yogas. Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo have expounded this approach eloquently in their writings.

In *Yoga of Breathing* we will be describing methods taken from Hatha Yoga, which some people do not consider a Yoga at all, but a system of exercises that can serve other Yogas. But the main tradition sees it as purificatory preparation for Raja (Royal) Yoga. Hatha Yoga is the most widely practised Yoga in the West: it includes the well-known postures and breath controls.

The Yogas other than Hatha are mainly meditative and more directly aimed at Yoga as end-goal and union. Their practices will appear later in *Yoga of Meditation*. For the present it is sufficient to name them and indicate their nature briefly. However, even in performing the physical techniques of Hatha Yoga, to some extent one cannot avoid practising other Yogas.

At this stage the main Indian Yogas may be discerned as follows:

Jnana Yoga	Union by knowledge
Bhakti Yoga	Union by love and devotion
Karma Yoga	Union by action and service
Mantra Yoga	Union by voice and sound
Yantra Yoga	Union by vision and form
Laya and Kundalini Yoga	Union by arousal of latent psychic nerve-force
Tantric Yoga	A general term for the physio- logical disciplines. Also union by harnessing sexual energy
Hatha Yoga	Union by bodily mastery (principally of breath)
Raja Yoga	Union by mental mastery

Jnana Yoga

This is the path of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, suited to the intellectual temperament, in which the intellect penetrates the veils of ignorance that prevent man from seeing his True Self (*Atman*), which is other than the empirical ego. The disciplines of this path of the well-honed intellect are those of study and meditation.

Bhakti Yoga

This is the Yoga of strongly-focused love, devotion, and worship, at its finest in love of the One. The Hindu may concentrate his devotion upon a worshipped deity (Krishna is the most popular) or upon the divine principle as incarnated in a *guru*. Bhakti Yoga is accessible to Westerners with highly devotional temperaments; others are made to feel uncomfortable by some of the excesses. This could be said to be the favourite Yoga of the Indian masses. Its disciplines are those of rites and the singing of songs of praise. St Francis of Assisi is often mentioned as an example of a Christian *bhakti*.

Karma Yoga

This is the path of selfless action and service, without thought of the fruits of action. Its most eloquent exposition is the Lord Krishna's instruction of the young prince Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of modern India, could be looked on as a Karma Yogin.

Mantra Yoga

The practice of Mantra Yoga influences consciousness through repeating (aloud or inwardly) certain syllables, words, or phrases (*mantras*). A form of Mantra Yoga is being practised by many thousands of Westerners, in the form of the Transcendental Meditation taught by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Rhythmic repetition of *mantras* is called *japa*. The most highly-regarded *mantras* are 'OM' and 'OM MANE PADME HUM'.

Yantra Yoga

As Mantra Yoga influences consciousness through the vibrations of the voice and sound, so Yantra Yoga employs sight and form. The colourful *mandalas* of Northern India and Tibet are objects of contemplation to Yogins. The visualization may be with the inner eye, just as listening to a *mantra* may be with the inner ear. A *yantra* is a design with power to influence consciousness: it can be an objective picture, an inner visualization, or the design of a temple.

Laya and Kundalini Yoga

These combine many of the techniques of Hatha Yoga, especially prolonged breath suspension and a stable posture, with intense meditative concentration, so as to awaken the psychic nerve-force latent in the body, symbolized as serpent power (*kundalini*), which is coiled below the base of the spine. The force is taken up the spine, passing through several power centres (*chakras*), until it reaches a *chakra* in the crown of the head, when intuitive enlightenment (*samadhi*) is triggered. The physiological and concentrative disciplines are severe, and this is a Yoga best practised with personal supervision by a teacher.

Tantric Yoga

'Tantric' is applied as a general term to distinguish physiological systems from those that are non-physiological. Tantrism is also a form of Yoga, found mainly in Northern India and Tibet, in which control of the sexual energies has a prominent part, and the union of male and female (Yogi and Yogini), either actually or in an act of imaginative creation, has a ritualistic role. Tantric Yoga, of all the Yogas, guards its teachings and techniques most closely. This sexual Yoga may be looked upon with a

measure of disapproval by adherents of some of the other schools.

Hatha Yoga

The word Hatha derives from two roots: *ha* means 'sun' and *tha* means 'moon'. The flow of breath in the right nostril is called the 'sun breath' and the flow of breath in the left nostril is the 'moon breath'. Central to all Hatha Yoga disciplines is the regulation of breath, the harmonizing of its positive (sun) and negative (moon), or male and female currents. Another meaning of the word Hatha is 'forced', but the term Forced Yoga would not do justice to the poised and gentle nature of most Yogic controls.

This is the Yoga best known and most widely practised in the West, and the subject of the majority of popular manuals on Yoga. Its best-known feature is posturing - in particular sitting with the legs crossed and the feet upturned on the thighs (Lotus Posture or *Padmasana*) and standing on the head (Headstand Posture or *Sirsasana*). *Asana*, which now means a Yogic posture, originally meant 'seat' or 'sitting method', an indication that the wide range of postures developed from a few basic positions for sitting in meditation.

Hatha Yoga exercises are practised extensively in the West for their practical benefits to the health of the nervous system, glands, and vital organs. When it is practised similarly in India it is sometimes called Ghatastha Yoga; but there physiological Yoga is less often separated from its over-all mystical setting and purpose.

Hatha Yoga may be viewed as a hygiene which takes into account the purification of the total organism. It may sound quotidian to some people to call this Yoga a hygiene, but there is a mainstream tradition that sees Hatha Yoga as a purificatory preparation for Raja Yoga, which is work upon consciousness itself. Such mental disciplining can best be

effected in a healthy, relaxed body in which the energies have been equalized.

The French writer C. Kerneiz, writing under the pseudonym 'Felix Guyot', opened his book *Yoga: the Science of Health* (37) with these words:

Keep well, remain young a long time, and live to a good old age, such is the threefold wish that the men of every race and country have, at all times, formulated at the bottom of their hearts. This threefold wish is a very natural one, for it is simply the expression of the most powerful and the most tenacious of instincts: self-preservation. Live! We want to live with the greatest amplitude possible.

To fight against disease, when it comes, and to avert, as far as is possible, the threat of death which is in its train; to defer old age, and, by doing so, put off death itself, we have hygiene, which is only, it is true, an autonomous but not independent province of the medical kingdom.

But there exists a science, practised in India and Tibet, and more or less throughout the whole of China, which is somewhat mysterious, for it is not taught to all comers. This science is traditional and its origin is lost in the night of time. It has precisely the same object as hygiene in Western countries: to keep its adepts in health and strength and to ward off old age and death for the longest time possible. This science of Life, which is only a branch of the secret of the Yogis, is called the Hatha Yoga.

Raja Yoga

Hatha Yoga is the most practical of Yogas, with its emphasis on promoting vibrant health and tapping the organism's latent energies. It has, too, an integrating and calming influence on the mind. But the direct work of

mastering consciousness and stilling thought so as to become aware of the Ground of Being belongs to Raja or Royal Yoga. Raja Yoga is considered royal because the Yogin who practises this Yoga thereby becomes ruler over his mind.

Raja Yoga is closely associated with the systematization of Yoga techniques by Patanjali (who lived about the third or second century BC) in his *Yoga Sutras*. He lists *asanas* (postures) and *pranayama* (breath controls) among his 'eight limbs' of Yoga, and such classic texts as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Gheranda Samhita*, and the *Siva Samhita* follow Patanjali in seeing Hatha Yoga practices as providing a physiological hygiene that prepares the body for effective mental control. According to this view, Raja Yoga includes Hatha Yoga within its system.

Hatha Yoga works upon the body, purifying and perfecting it, and through the body upon the mind. Raja Yoga works upon the mind, refining and perfecting it, and through the mind upon the body. But just as some people practise the physiological Yogas with little or no thought for mental disciplines, so there are exponents of the mental Yogas who consider that the body will respond beneficially to control of consciousness without having to resort to anything more 'physical' than a stable posture in sitting for meditation. But a great number of Yogins combine the physiological Yoga of Breathing with the psychical Yoga of Meditation.

OVERLAPPING OF PATHS

From examination of the brief summary of the main Yoga systems just given, you will perceive that it would be difficult to practise any one of them without to some extent incorporating elements from others. Concentration, a central feature of Raja Yoga, operates in all the other paths