

Hatha Yoga

The Essential Dynamics

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USAGE OF THIS MATERIAL

This manual shows essential, but often forgotten, dynamics to apply while you are in the Yoga postures. Conscientious application of this knowledge helps you achieve maximum results from your time and effort.

Read the first dozen pages carefully, and review them occasionally to get a clear idea of what is involved in the study of Yoga. Doing one program per year offers a safe and easy approach to what could become a lifetime of yoga. That means for the first year you need only spend a fleeting 10 minutes a day. Done conscientiously, this will naturally lead you to where you truly want to be. That long-term result concerns us most here. After you have established your long-term practice, be sure to review the particulars of each posture you are doing, at least every decade (or sooner), to spot what will have certainly lapsed over time.

At some point, photocopy the diagrams of either the program or cycle you are developing, and arrange them in a binder in the order in which you practice them. This puts the information at your fingertips. It helps a lot not having to stop and thumb through the book (and cool down) to find useful tips. In addition, video yourself a few times to expose your 'blind spots' (see what you're missing).

DEDICATION

I dedicate this manual to the Bhagavad Gita, Tao Te Ching and to other ancient scriptures. These provide a foundation in wisdom that makes Hata Yoga more than just contortionist gymnastics. I deeply appreciate the sound practical approach to Hatha Yoga that the Iyengars (B.K.S., Prashant and Gita) gave me. I thank Ingela Abbott, my ex-wife, for her early support and for the artistic grace she gave to the illustrations. I am grateful to my wife Leslie for help throughout, from the little booklet version of 1980 to this final product, and finally to my sons, Luke and Kyle, for giving me reason to finally finish this book.

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PRINCIPLES

(from an older and perhaps wiser point of view)

I wrote this Yoga manual in 1979. Now, 30 years later, it still holds up well. I've decided to leave the original introductory pages mostly as is, especially *PRINCIPLES (from a younger point of view)*. These reflect my youthful belief in *free will* : that anything is possible if I set my mind to it. Naturally, it reads a bit strident, naively so from my point of view today. Yet, its message may offer a useful perspective.

Ideal Free Will

Soon after I finished the manual, I began to question my faith in free will*, and I began earnestly searching for evidence of it. So far, I've found nothing in human behavior that cannot be explained by a simpler motivation—the biological push-pull force of need/fear. In the end, free will appears to be a case of wishful thinking more than fact. It seems that I just *needed* to believe in free will. Why?

Conflicting needs (or fears) was the problem, and free will promised a solution. If, as it now appears, free will is no more than a promise, what can I do? Ironically, I've found hope lies in knowing that the strongest need (or fear) I feel each moment determines what I do (or don't do). Paradoxically, this makes 'free will' and need/fear almost synonymous, i.e., need and fear determine what I want, and about what I worry. Need and fear, wanting and worrying are as interdependent as muscle and bone.

Actual Free Will

Happily, the resolution of conflicting needs (or fears) depends largely upon me being mindful of what I *truly* want of life. And what is that? Honestly, I've always known deep down what I want. We all have and do, intuitively anyway. It is just that short-term desires and worries keep distracting us. We forget repeatedly, turning over one new leaf after another as we wander and stumble down life's very short road..

* <http://centertao.org/essays/core-issues-of-human-nature/free-will>

Prioritizing desires counteracts this distraction by diminishing the impact of desire (and worry) on us. In doing this, we are effectively desiring not to desire. As the *Tao Te Ching* puts it: "*Therefore the sage desires not to desire, and does not value goods which are hard to come by*" [64]. See also, Buddha's Fourth Truth, page 175.

Watch Your Self

If I had to sum up the secret of yoga, I'd say it all comes down to watchfulness—or as Buddha said, *Right Mindfulness, Right Attentiveness, Right Concentration*. In a yoga posture, this means watching your body, mind, and emotion moment to moment. Are you pushing too hard, (too 'Ha'), or taking it too easy (too 'Tha')? All you need do is watch for these lapses from the 'middle path', and go the other way... towards balance.

Watching oneself honestly couldn't be easier or more straightforward. This is a level playing field, perhaps the only one in life—no knowledge, skill, teaching, or innate talent is required. Yet, as the *Tao Te Ching* says, "*Our words are very easy to understand and very easy to put into practice, yet no one in the world can understand them or put them into practice*" ... [70]. Okay, that may be an over-statement, but not by much. Living in watchful self-honesty is most difficult.

Why? Because every innate advantage we have has its downside. I can't emphasize this enough; every plus we enjoy has a minus we suffer. Worse yet, what we *think* is so gets in the way of knowing what is actually so. We fool ourselves. As the *Tao Te Ching* puts it, "*To know yet to think that one does not know is best; Not to know yet to think that one knows will lead to difficulty.*" [71].

Balance

Individually, we are on both sides of balance's happy medium—over-doing some areas, under-doing other areas. Clearly, balance lies in under-doing the former and over-doing the later. Fortunately, and despite fears to the contrary, there's little chance of overcompensating in either direction. Why?

An iceberg makes a good metaphor. Its tip is like our more fickle outer nature. The ways we under-do or over-do life are actually symptomatic of our more primal inner nature. That means, unlike the iceberg's tip, our inner nature changes little. Sure, we may *think* we change, but that's just the tip of the iceberg talking. Like free will, the ideal of true change is more likely a case of wishful thinking. Getting to know and accept our inner, 'original' nature is the shortest path to balance.

Is It Karma?

Our primal nature is like an iceberg below the water line, massive and unseen. As it bobs and tilts one direction, we react by 'over-doing' or 'under-doing' in the opposite direction to counterbalance. Deeper down our primal nature may itself be counterbalancing still deeper currents. Who knows—it's a little murky down there.

This whole balancing process may represent a kernel of truth in the myth of Karma—not a cause and effect chain of Karmic past and future, but of 'karmic' layers of cause and effect... moment to moment. This is where balance lives, without memory, past or future. Only now!

One practical consequence of seeing life this way is that you soon realize all your perceptions and actions are merely reflections of yourself. In other words, what you perceive or do 'out there' is merely symptomatic of your own needs/fears (a.k.a. loves/hates) deep down 'in here' right now.

Self-honesty floods awareness; the judge becomes the judged. Judging books by their covers becomes increasingly difficult when you realize that you are just perceiving symptoms of a deep, less definable other side. Such a blurring of distinction ("*mysterious sameness*" as the Tao Te Ching puts it) can really help you avoid being knocked off balance by self-serving judgments and biases.

Thinking Beats the Drum

Of human emotions, desire is the one with which all religions take issue. As the Tao Te Ching puts it, "*There is no crime greater than*

having too many desires; There is no disaster greater than not being content"... [46]

However, I say desire is not the real problem, per se. Viewed more closely, desire seems to be an amalgamation of instinctive emotion ('gut' need) and thinking. Without that thinking side, we would be moved by spontaneous need just like all other animals. Need (and its source spring, fear) is the driving force behind all action. Without it, we're dead—literally. It is the thinking side of desire we should have misgivings about. Thinking beats the drum of emotion, easily making mountains out of molehills (of need and fear).

Just look at the world: From political and religious extremists at one end, down to the little neurotic quirks, opinions and biases that are common to everyone at the other end. All illustrate the consequences of overly trusting that what we think is true. However, when we take thought with a grain of salt, it becomes easier to calm down and preserve emotional equilibrium.

But, who am I kidding? This is a tough nut to crack. Those primal emotions (need and fear) drive thinking. To make matters worse, thinking feeds back into and reinforces emotion. It is a vicious cycle. Still, contemporaneously knowing this is going on *as I think* helps me distrust thinking, even as I'm thinking. This lack of faith in thought weakens its ability to feed into and re-enforce emotion. Now, this situation can reverse and become a virtuous circle instead.

Civilization's Price Tag

One of the primary functions of civilization is providing the means to achieve our goals and satisfy our desires. To meet this end, civilization must side-step nature's wild ruthless side—a side which happens to help keep life balanced. It's not surprising that our nearly obsessive avoidance of nature's uncomfortable side increases the difficulty of maintaining balance. No wonder we easily swing from one extreme to the other. Civilization's endless blind pursuit of safety and comfort comes with unforeseen, unwanted, and unpleasant consequences. We

only think we've conquered nature; the negative consequences prove otherwise.

I have a motto to help me counteract civilization's safety and comfort bias and keep me more grounded: "Short term pain leads to long term pleasure. Short term pleasure leads to long term pain". Civilization is biased towards the later. Balance lies in accepting the former. That is the principle essence of yoga for me—balance.

The Spirit of Yoga

Through these Principles I've tried to convey the *spirit of yoga*. Yoga done amid this spirit is truly yoga no matter how stiff, weak, or far from the ideal form you are.

Conversely, doing yoga without this spirit is not yoga... no matter how much it looks like yoga. It is merely exercise, which isn't bad; it's just not yoga. Naturally, no one else will know. Only you can know when you are too 'Ha', or too 'Tha'. Only you can fear your imbalance and feel the need to tilt yourself in the other direction—towards balance and what you truly want.

PRINCIPLES

(from a younger point of view)

All living things strive for homeostasis. This is the state of physiological and psychological equilibrium produced by a balancing of the life process. The Yogi realizes this is a cornerstone of contentment. This involves having both good health and an ability to avoid the turmoil of compulsive emotions that inevitably cause confusion, anxiety, stress, and depression.

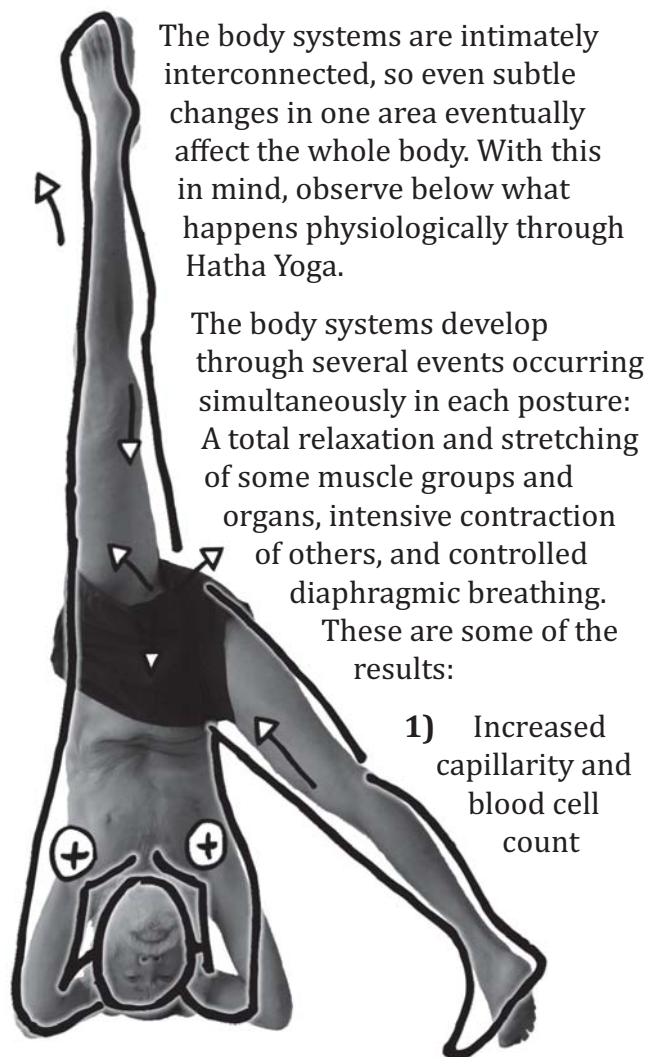
Beyond this, the Yogi yearns for a deep and broad awareness of life. As this awakens, his main objective is maintaining this awareness under all conditions possible. Clearly though, to achieve and sustain this quality of perception, the mind must be free of its over-reactive nature. Indeed, how can the mind be aware of the subtle while it is being continually agitated by emotions of anger, fear, and compulsive desire?

Sound physical health aids in the process of increasing awareness and control.

Consciousness, manifested through the nervous system, is influenced by the vitality of the other body systems. Unfortunately, modern living causes atrophy of the original health you were born with. The natural animal vitality as seen in the wilderness begins disappearing in the human even by the time he starts school.

Significant recovery of original vitality depends upon the efficient functioning of each body system. This depends upon one fundamental evolutionary law:

Development follows the utilization of potential. For example, increasing use of a weak heart through exercise develops micro-circulation in this muscle. This helps keep it disease-free. In Hatha Yoga, better health is achieved by challenging all weaknesses. This increases the efficiency of all major and "minor" parts of the body.





improves the blood circulation in the critical glands, nerve networks and other organs and tissues of the body, thus increasing metabolic efficiency.

2) A toned endocrine and nervous system produces a more responsive feedback loop for the various body functions.

The body's physical and mental harmony relies on the efficient functioning of this loop and its associated system, circulation.

3) A massaged lymphatic system drains the body of dead cells and toxins, and improves inter-cellular circulation and absorption of body nutrients.

4) A massaged digestive system speeds up and improves nutrition absorption and waste elimination in the intestines, thus helping to avoid illnesses of the digestive tract.

5) A toned, strong, and limber muscular system gives you a comfortable, well-functioning body for the rest of your life.

In addition, each posture is a physical "mantra" that, through watchful practice, pulls the mind into a meditative state. This aligns billions of cortical synapses into better-integrated neural matrixes that facilitate memory, concentration, relaxation, and even depth of awareness.

The unique thing about Hatha Yoga is the condition under which this meditation takes place. To sit calmly and meditate is one thing; to remain calm and meditate even under difficult active conditions is a unique and valuable kind of meditation.

Developing psychological health depends on the same evolutionary law governing physiological

health. In Hatha Yoga, both physical and mental powers are developed simultaneously, and assist each other in the process. The meaning of Hatha Yoga tells us why.

Hatha is actually two words, Ha and Tha. **Ha** (sun) is work, the "burning fire" of the body radiating energy, and **Tha** (moon) is the reflective quality of mind; the deepest root of awareness that watches. **Yoga** means a merging or joining. So this is the Yoga of Ha and Tha; the union of the reflective, still mind and the creative, active body.

The mind is always agitated to some degree, especially when confronting difficulty. In Hatha Yoga you go to your physical limits. This demand for perfection in action brings you to your mental and emotional limits. Thus, you are brought head on into the usual emotional reactions that disturb daily life, i.e. compulsive expectations, frustration, insecurity, and confusion. These reactive psychological states upset homeostasis, and hinder contentment

In Hatha Yoga, you voluntarily face up to, and gradually deal with these reactions. Your objective is to work hard while maintaining the subtlest awareness: to watch but not get emotionally dragged into the battle of life. This challenge brings all the major and minor powers of the mind into play.

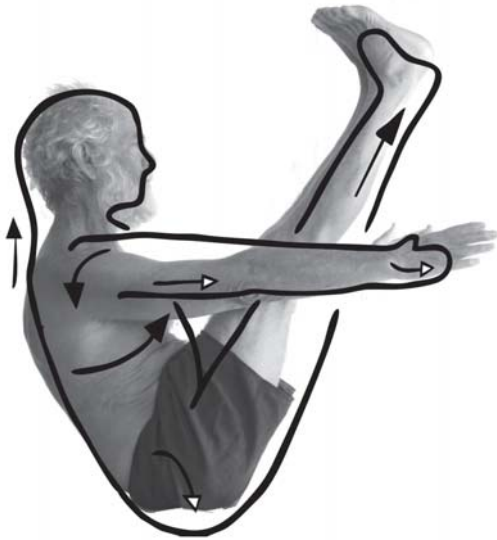
Hatha Yoga deliberately sets up a situation in which you can discover, use, and (over time) strengthen these aspects of self-harmony: reason, vitality, patience, carefulness, attention, and a peaceful sense of "self-surrender".

These powers help you keep perspective that calms restless desires and destructive reactions.



This liberation of the mind, along with good health, helps bring deeper contentment within reach.

“Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from compulsive desires, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind - a peace that is ever the same”. Bhagavad Gita 2-48



PRACTICE

To develop vitality, you must use it. Therefore, direct your 'energy flow' from toes to fingers. Constantly challenge the weak and dull areas of the body, emotions, and mind. Let the life force surge through you. Without expecting perfection, work with perfection. Sweat!

To develop a watchful mind you must surrender and devote your self to every moment of every activity. Live in the fire of the senses and watch the nature of activity and the attitude behind it. Notice the quality. What is in the activity that "shouldn't be", and what isn't in the activity that "should be". Finally, let go of thoughts and feel the silence and stillness. Watch!

Here are more points that help you attain a balanced use of mind and body. Development depends on the extent to which you remember and use them.

Do You:

- 1) Practice daily and sufficiently.
- 2) Extend spine from sacral to cervical.

- 3) Extend the base of the neck (the root of watchfulness).
- 4) Extend the ribs and raise the sternum.
- 5) Roll the shoulders back and down.
- 6) Contract or open the buttocks as required.
- 7) Straighten and lock the arms and legs as required.
- 8) Keep beauty and symmetry in the form.
- 9) Completely relax facial muscles; jaw, around eyes and mouth, forehead, throat, tongue, temples, and any part of the limbs or trunk not working for the posture.
- 10) Keep the mouth shut with the teeth just lightly touching.
- 11) Keep the eyes open with the gaze steady but not strained.
- 12) Keep your gaze at nose level (usually), and never cross-eyed.
- 13) Hold postures for a set time, 15-60 seconds (6 - 18 breaths).
- 14) Maintain as even a diaphragmatic breathing as possible under the conditions and avoid holding the breath.
- 15) On the exhalation, extend and move into the posture.
- 16) On the inhalation, return from the extension.
- 17) Breathe through the nostrils and avoid grunting.
- 18) Avoid cheating in the postures to make them easier.

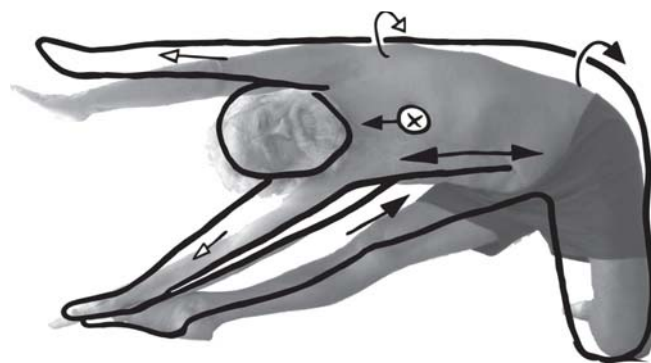
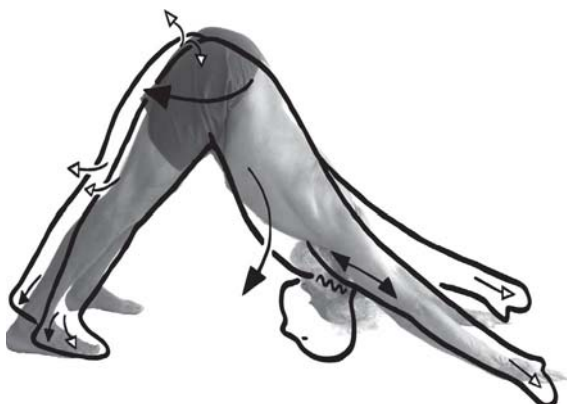


- 19) Remember that if a posture is easy or boring, it is being done wrong.
- 20) Remember that body heat is proportional to challenge.
- 21) Watch for, challenge, and patiently extend your limits without overworking them.
- 22) Apply the most effort/time to your weakest areas.
- 23) Avoid ALL rushing. Take deliberate care in activity and in attitude.
- 24) Use long, even exhalations to deepen the extension. This is especially true for painful postures.
- 25) Use appropriate effort, i.e., strive to decrease involuntary actions and reactions and increase voluntary ones.

Many of the points listed above could be practiced in ALL your activity throughout the day. Look carefully at your own life actions and attitudes.

How do you sit, stand, or walk? Do you lean against things? Why? How do you eat, put on shoes, wash the dishes, brush teeth, deal with people, or get out of bed? Why do you sleep too much or too little? Why aren't you always honest? Do you maximize consumption of fresh vegetables, and fruit, and moderate your consumption of grain, meat and dairy?

How do you deal with success and failure? Do you expect things of others, while you blindly (or knowingly) repeat essentially the same "sins"? Are you irritated (a subtle anger) by the faults of others or by unpleasant events? Why? Is your mind flitting about on trivia? Are you



a pawn in the grip of compulsive desire and worry? Do you let endless petty fears dictate your life?

Why aren't all these aspects of your life guided by watchfulness to develop a more appropriate and balanced response? There can be no real contentment or fulfillment in life with this left unattended.

The degree of self-balance you achieve in this life hinges on watchfulness. Watchfulness enables you to notice the seeds of compulsive reactions, which helps you avoid subsequent over-reaction. This active but non-attached attention can and should be practiced throughout the day, moment to moment, in the most "boring" and mundane to the most "important" and stimulating matters. Only then can it become a significant force in your life.

"A harmony in eating and resting, in sleeping and keeping awake. A perfection in all that one does. This is the Yoga that gives peace from all pain", Bhagavad Gita 6-17

HINTS AND PRECAUTIONS

- 1) It is wise to begin Yoga with a realization that years of physical and mental neglect cannot be overcome by a few months or even a few years of Yoga practice — especially if not done conscientiously. In Yoga, you work step by step with daily effort, dealing with the deep causes of your "problem" and not just with the relief of symptoms.
- 2) Practicing the postures in the early morning when the body and mind are fresh and the determination is strong will do much to set the whole day going well. In addition, the postures are best done when the bowels,

bladder, and stomach are empty, which is more likely before breakfast. Otherwise, the postures can be done from 2-6 hours after a meal, depending on what and how much you have eaten and the type of postures you do.

3) People with high blood pressure may have to take precautions in the inverted postures. Ask your doctor. Women perhaps shouldn't do the inverted postures during menstruation. No one should do postures during fever, headache (severe), or with other acute symptoms.

4) The graph (next page) is a tool for directing your forgetful and scattered mind. It can work as a mirror to show you how much your daily life reflects the actions and attitudes which you feel contribute to self-balance.

It reminds you of your priorities and allows you to keep a record of practice that cuts down on self-deception. It helps you begin to see yourself in a truer perspective. Without that, you end up repeating the same old straying from what you truly want of life.

You can change the five aspects I list there to anything you believe to be important for your life. Some miscellaneous factors to keep track of might be: posture, brushing teeth, doing responsibilities, speech, smoking and eating habits, being too tidy or too sloppy, being too frank or too deceptive, being too lazy or overworking, being too friendly or too reserved, etc. The idea is not to 'change' any of these. Merely being aware of them is enough; true change happens naturally.

The graph area with the numbers 1-5 allows you to plot an in-line graph. After a few months you'll have a good indication of the "flow" of your life.

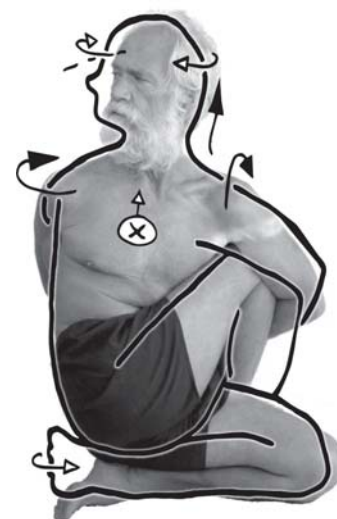
5) Daily practice is vital for Yoga to be effective. Beginners during the first year should spend at least 10 minutes a day on their home practice. Those who wish to realize the full potential of Hatha Yoga must work towards the advanced postures. As you do this, your practice will gradually increase to about an hour a day. If this seems a bit much, think of all the "wasted" moments of the day, i.e., idle talk, drifting thoughts, indecision, procrastination, trivia.

Yoga can transform such dead-and-gone-before-you-know-it moments into awakened ones. In fact, due to increases in overall life efficiency, you will end up with more time than you had before.

6) Initially you will have difficulty getting into and holding some of the postures. Try some of the "impossible ones" each day as best you can. They are certain to come in time. Don't expect results, just work with full energy and be patient. Working with full energy, however, doesn't mean over-exerting yourself! Take it easy in the beginning. Try easier variations (Var:) first.

To avoid injury, always be wary of sharp, acute pain. Back off if you feel that. Good pain is sweat pain, the soft smooth agony / ecstasy of hard work. Speaking of work, you can browse through the all the posture illustrations and try ones that look like they'd be just plain old work. No "proper" sequence is necessary. Do what suits your body at the time. As the body changes (flexibility, strength, or weight) you'll adjust your practice to suit.

7) Scriptures can help cultivate how to approach Hatha Yoga to achieve truly 'yogic' results. Study a verse from the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, Buddha, the Tao Te Ching, Christ, etc., every few days. Reflect on it during your Yoga practice and throughout the rest of the day in all activity. Reflecting does not necessarily mean verbatim repetition. If possible, just recall the feeling the verse gave.



	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
Yoga																												
Scripture																												
Diet																												
Work																												
Contentment																												

1																												
2																												
3																												
4																												
5																												

In reading, try to see through the mystical, simplistic, or rigid language peculiar to each Scripture. On the other hand, avoid rushing through and dismissing too much as irrelevant. There is often a more profound meaning to discover when reading between the lines.

In a sense, this means interpreting the passage in such a way that "its" message makes you feel good. Regard scripture as a mirror of your own mind, instead of a prescription for what you 'should do' or proscriptio for what you 'shouldn't do'

Mascaro's translation of the ***Bhagavad Gita*** (published by Penguin Classics) is one of the clearest available. The ***Tao Te Ching*** by D.C. Lau (Penguin Classics) is one of the more faithful translations of the original Chinese.

8) By comparing the nutritional content of the basic foods (see next page), you can see that fresh vegetables are the only foods which contain sufficient, and indeed abundant amounts of the known substances the human body needs, without giving excessive calories, proteins or fats which, in large quantities, can be detrimental to health in the long run.

Therefore, it is wise to eat as much of these as possible or practical and then to fill out the rest of your diet with fruit, grain, nuts, beans, and/or animal products.

9) For help in learning how to move into or out of the Yoga postures, take a Hatha Yoga class from a competent teacher and/or refer to B.K.S. Iyengar's most excellent book - ***Light on Yoga***.

10) The basics of Pranayama are learned naturally, in due course, through Hatha Yoga practice. Insights into the principles of breath harmony are found in the scriptures.

11) The length of time spent on any of the various techniques of formal meditation is not nearly as useful as bringing meditation (watchfulness) into every aspect of your daily life.


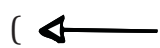



Insight on this constant meditation is found in the scriptures. For example see - ***Bhagavad Gita*** 4-18, 6-24, 15-9 ; ***Tao Te Ching*** 16; Matthew 24-42, 26-41 (the ***Bible***); and ***Buddha's Four Noble Truths*** (see page 175).

ILLUSTRATIONS

The dynamics of each posture, as indicated in these illustrations, are best learned gradually. In the beginning, concentrate on the large black arrows. After you feel you are applying those, begin working on the small white arrows. Finally, search the posture and see if you can

Daily Need Food Type	Calorie 2000	Protien 40-g.	Fat 2-g.	Calcium 0.5-g.	Iron 10-mg.	Vit. A 700-u	Vit. C 75-mg.	Vit. B1 1.2-mg.	Vit. B2 1.7-mg.	Niacin 18-mg.
0.5-Kg Meat	2000	150-g.	150-g.	1.0-g.	40-mg.	150-u.	—	1.5-mg.	1.5-mg.	30-mg.
0.7-Kg Grains	2000	70-g.	21-g.	0.2-g.	21-mg.	—	—	2.1-mg.	0.8-mg.	21-mg.
4.0-Kg Green Veg.	2000	160-g.	2-g.	20.0-g.	1000-mg.	24000-u.	6000-mg.	3.2-mg.	10.0-mg.	40-mg.

come up with some 'small white arrows' of your own.

- () Area of **principle** concern*
- () Area of **perfecting** concern
- () Total **relaxation**
- () Thrusting **out** of the page
- () Thrusting **in** to the page
- (*Var:*) Variation for beginners.

The holding time is indicated for each posture (60s., 5min., etc.). Of course, you may stay longer or shorter than this time. Listen to your body; it will tell you.

Most of the postures from 1 - 48 are covered in detail in the Step By Step Lessons, beginning on page 178. If a posture is covered in those lessons, its page number is given on its full-page illustration.

Don't be too concerned if you don't understand what a particular arrow is trying to show. Just watch and explore your body in that area. Be sensitive to it and you will eventually find out. Some of these "energy" areas are not possible to feel until after some years of practice.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Advancement to each higher program depends mostly on how much time, interest and effort you put into your practice. Technique, strength and flexibility are much less important. These come naturally, in due course, with conscientious work.

* Only Programs 1-3 have this black arrow. After that you must determine the "concern".

Programs 1 - 3 require 10-30 minutes to run through once you know what you're doing. Taking on new postures one by one gradually keeps you in that content, 'you know what you're doing' realm. As the Tao Te Ching says, *There is no disaster greater than not being content.* [46]

Programs 4 onward can require about 60 minutes to run through. The postures become more challenging, but learning just one or two new ones a month will keep it manageable. As Program 4 has 27 new postures, you will spend a year or two on it before going on to Program 5. With steady practice then, you may reach Program 8 in eight years. But who cares? After all, this is a lifetime journey; walk it step by step!

When you can do the majority of the postures in a particular program fairly well, you can incorporate new postures from the next program into your daily practice. When starting a new posture, do it after a similar but easier posture that you already do. To know where you should include a new posture, study the routine from the next program to see where this new posture is done relative to the postures you have been doing.

Step By Step Lessons (Page 177)

These are a series of detailed lessons on most of the postures in Programs 1-3. Everyone, from beginners to the more advanced should at least take a look at these, especially if you are learning the postures on your own.

'Do It Yourself' Program

Note: The following several pages reflects my now 'older point of view'.

No matter what program you are on, it can be very useful to read ahead and study the

instructions given for the more advanced postures. Much of what is said about these postures also applies to the basic postures you will be working on.

In fact, there is nothing *truly* special about posture placement in the programs. I can easily see other ways to arrange them. Each person is different physically, emotionally, and mentally. Thus, feel free to change the sequences to suit your particular needs. If done with careful consideration there is no danger.

Done recklessly, you could well regret it. For example, when first trying out one of the advanced head stands, I began goofing off and fell. I 'tweaked' my neck, and took over ten years to fully recover. Don't goof around. Pay attention and all will be well.

Finally, keep track of self-discovery by sketching in any dynamics you feel missing, or annotate the arrows already shown. If you feel it's an essential, tell me so I can incorporate it in the next edition. I don't know what I missed, but I'm sure I missed 'it'. Find 'it' and let me know.

Getting Old and a Little Feeble Are We?

Well I sure am. The older I get the more quickly the years fly by, and the more real physical decline becomes. So far, arthritis is my only big issue. Were it not for Yoga, I'd be in such worse shape. As always, I strive to come right up to my edge, but now I must be more watchful than ever to avoid going over the edge.

MORE UNSOLICITED ADVICE

The Ideal Journey

Incorporate the principles conveyed in all the postures to your daily activities throughout the day, in every way, according to ability. This is the *ideal* long-term objective

That said, be wary of the ideal. Real life is what you actually do; the ideal is merely where you want to go. Whether you 'arrive' or not doesn't matter. Indeed, thoughts of 'arrival' get in the way of the day-to-day, step-by-step journey. As the Tao Te Ching puts it, *A journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath one's feet.* [64]

The Feet and Shoes

Speaking of feet, one of the worst aspects of modernity is the ubiquitous use of shoes. The feet "die". Don't believe me? Just try wearing stiff thick gloves throughout the day, in every activity. The resulting loss of tactile stimulation from the environment is profound. The same is true for the feet, but we don't tend to notice this because we are habituated to shoes, almost from birth.

This loss of tactile stimulation has a real, if subtle, effect on balance. As one gets older, loss of balance becomes a serious issue. Lose the shoes and live longer, I say.

Doing the Posture the Proper Way

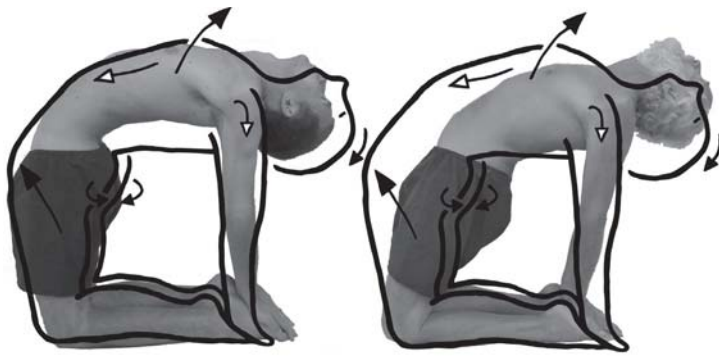
There is no truly "proper way" in regards to how a yoga posture looks. In yoga, watchful self-honesty is the only "proper way".

The illustrations show you an ideal to aim for, and not where you must actually be. Eventually (perhaps years from now), you may be able to match the illustration. At that point, you'll just have to figure out a way to put the ideal just beyond your reach.

For example, the photo (next page) is of my son Luke and I doing Ustrasana, a back-bend. He is fully extended so the advanced back-bends are the *ideal just beyond his reach*. On the other hand, I have my hands full. Honestly, I'm also less inclined to develop back-bends. I regard them the least useful ('natural') direction of movement in the wild. However, for the pure yoga of it, they are truly what I need to work on most (obviously). The stiffer you are, the "easier" yoga is, because the *'ideal just beyond your reach'* is obvious. As flexibility increases it is easier to coast and just 'look good', without actually doing Hatha Yoga.

Feeling Hopelessly Stiff or Weak?

Watchfulness is the standard for success, *not how the posture looks*. Eventually you will enjoy a "pseudo-yogic" success as improving strength, flexibility, and balance allow your postures to look 'good'. That's the icing on the cake. Truth is, success and failure must coexist in each



moment. Yoga is a dynamic process where you exist at the limit of your strength (success) and weakness (failure) each watchful moment. It is not how skillful you are that counts in yoga. It is how self-honest and watchful you are. Only then are you able to balance success and failure.

Again, These Are the Essentials

- 1) Watch what you are doing carefully.
- 2) Do what you can, not pushing too hard or slacking off.
- 3) As you become able to do what you can, gradually extend what you are doing toward the 'ideal' as depicted in the drawings. This can take decades! This may be your current stumbling block. The trick is to remember that this is a lifelong practice. Simply doing what you can is all you need do. That means compromise any way possible to adapt the posture to your particular bodily circumstance.

Taking a long-term view is difficult. We naturally look to 'fix' things 'now'. In truth, time pretty much takes care of everything. All we need do is 'show up', work and be attentive. Do that and you can't fail!

Ha Ha, Tha Tha, and the Balanced Between

Yoga, like life, follows a natural course. First comes the challenge of facing down fear: fear of hard work, pain, and failure of meeting your expectations. There is also the fear of embarrassment and censure, either in your own eyes or in the eyes of others. This initial exercise phase ('Ha') is the essential beginning step. It can be a hurdle. Next, you integrate the more subtle, spiritual 'Tha' into this base. This 'Tha' is the watchful, mindful, careful side of the Hatha Yoga coin. For some, it is easy to keep slogging

away, like a bull in a China shop, on the 'Ha' side. Others get bogged down on the spiritual 'Tha' side, avoid jumping in, and instead passively watch life go by. Balance is the key.

I regard the *Bhagavad Gita* as the guide on yoga. One reason I stopped teaching was that many wanted to learn yoga as a body exercise instead of as spiritual practice. It boiled down to being gymnastics instead of 'Ha Tha' meditation. Folks doing yoga for 'body training' were overly on the 'ha' side of balance. Similarly, those doing yoga as a 'spiritual' practice tend to be overly on the 'tha' side of balance. Neither were very inclined to stretch to the other side toward balance, *at least not by anything I'd say or do*. I imagine balance comes to each of us over time naturally, if it comes at all.

I find we all tend to fall on either side of the 'happy medium'. We either push too hard (yang) or slack off soft (yin). Watch where you are in the moment and either 'relax' or 'work'. That is the essence of 'Ha' 'Tha' Yoga.

You are on the right path if you can integrate physical work (action) and spiritual rest (attentiveness) into a balanced practice. This is the only way to get the maximum benefit for body, emotion, and mind.

Yoga Classes vs. a Private Practice

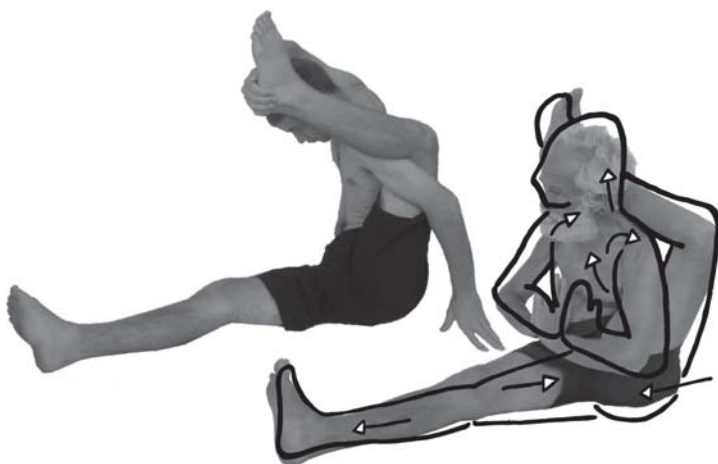
Doing yoga with other people has great benefit. It is both a social joy and a way to gain insight into your own practice by observing others. One caution though: Take the opinions you hear with a grain of salt. I find 'the why' behind what people say far more revealing than 'the what'.

Doing yoga with others is the only way many people can do it at all. A private personal daily practice is difficult. Over the years I've advised people wanting this to just do a posture or two daily. This will grow into an optimum practice naturally. Who cares whether this takes years. No matter! Interestingly, I've never known anyone who could do that. It seems we are innately driven to do "all or nothing". I expect this "all or nothing" presents one of the greatest barriers to a balanced approach.

Social instincts are powerful forces (e.g., the pressure to show up, keep up, compete, and avoid shame). These emotions keep our nose to the grindstone in a group practice. However, private practice lacks most of this. Absent these social forces, you alone are the witness of your life. Then your yoga (and life) really come down to the essence... *what do you truly want out of life?*

Tat Tvam Asi

Tat Tvam Asi is an ancient Hindu spiritual "motto". It means "that thou art". This speaks to the oneness of all. I see something else between



the lines though in the word order: 'that' (otherness) is primary; the 'thou' (yourself) is secondary. Placing 'that' before 'thou' is humbling; it is one key to honestly know what you *truly want of life*.

Reaching for the Ideal Just Beyond Reach

My wife's sister asked her awhile back, "Why does he put his head behind his neck (photo above)? That's weird". The reason I do is that my limit exists there—the *ideal just beyond reach*. I must go to my limit to work in the 'Ha Tha' zone. Only there can I experience 'grace under fire'. Both son Luke and I are at our limit; we are experiencing exactly the same yogic reality despite the different and superficial 'look' of it.

By the way, I may be more innately flexible in bending forward, while Luke is more innately flexible in bending backward. In addition, I've not done the advanced back-bends for 30 years,

so I've lost some previous, hard-won flexibility. Now is a perfect time for me to resume doing them; advanced back-bends can give me an *ideal truly beyond my reach!*

Video Yourself

One very useful 21st century advance is the ability of anyone to video their yoga practice. Doing this occasionally can reveal your 'blind spots', i.e., general errors and ways you may be cheating yourself.

Alas, the Word 'Limit' Limits

The difficulty with the word limit, and words in general, is the emotional bias they impart. Expectations (desire, want, crave, wish) of achieving an ideal, like "reaching my limit", becomes your Achilles' heel. Instead of thinking about limit in terms of 'strength limits', view it in terms of 'weakness limits'. You'll never have trouble reaching your 'weakness limit'; it is the foundation. As the Tao Te Ching puts it, "*Turning back is how the way moves; Weakness is the means the way employs.*[40]" When you feel lazy and just lie in bed, you are at your 'weakness limit'. When you're working with maximum effort, you are at your 'weakness limit'. You can't lose when *weakness* becomes your ideal.

Don't let thoughts, names or words, trap you! Words and thoughts easily mislead. Because we trust what we think is true, we don't realize it until we reach a truly dead end. Be wary of how thought bubbles up from, and serve to rationalize, emotion. Again:

To know yet to think that one does not know is best; Not to know yet to think that one knows will lead to difficulty.

It is by being alive to difficulty that one can avoid it. The sage meets with no difficulty. It is because he is alive to it that he meets with no difficulty. - Tao Te Ching [71]

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