

7 STAGES OF HATHA YOGA

the Natural Progression

P R E P A R A T I O N

1. PURIFICATION - the fewer toxins in the body, the more free you feel. The more pure the system, the less hard it has to work, the more efficient it is. When the body is healthy, we are "*Sva asta*" = self-established, that is the word for "healthy". It is easier to be established in one self in a healthy body. The minute we get sick, we become body-identified (bound). When the body is in perfect health - we feel our selves. We are free. We get pure with:

- diet (eat pure, uncomplicated food that is easy to digest) - AYURVEDA
- Hatha purification techniques - *sat kriyas* - YOGA + PRANAYAMA
- *asana* (postures) which purify organs - AYURVEDA + YOGA

2. STRENGTHENING

- *asana* for body (physical strength) and *will power* for mind (mental strength & discipline)
To build strength we go against the grain, we challenge ourselves.

Preliminary stages - over the last 30 years they got the most popularity. They are physical - **body**.
But... they are only the 1st chapter of practice: preparation.

M O O N

3. CALM

Yoga is a game of perception. We all look at the same world, but each of us is having a different experience, we see it differently. Our freedom hinges on perception. So, if we want better perception we have to start with MIND. Buddha: "One Moon = 10,000 Moons". Mind is a lake - and once it is calm, it reflects one single moon clearly, without distortion. A disturbed mind (lake) will reflect 10,000 moons. With a calm mind we can get the accurate picture. Getting the mind to calm down is a start. Calming down is easy with Hatha tools: *1:2 breathing, Forward bends, twists...*

4. STABILITY

Can we stay calm? The ability to stay in ease, clarity, knowingness and certainty is STABILITY. This the goal of *asana* (seat) in yoga tradition - I AM CALM. When I am here, I am here. Yoga tradition values stability over flexibility. The more stable we are, the more calm we are. Stability = security.

Hatha tools: *Long holds, mulabhandha* (root lock) *during exhale, 1:1 breathing.*

Mental stage - **mind**.

Once the Moon (Mind) is made steady, the Sun (Energy) can be made to rise!

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5. DAWNING OF HIGHER PERCEPTION - on average we only perceive 10% of reality. Yet the world beyond what we normally perceive is teeming with life. The capacity to perceive life force is a dawning of higher perception. Becoming more sensitive to that realm beyond our bodies. All 5 senses now are refined to perceive more subtle reality. This stage culminates in "*prana samvedana*" = sensitivity to life force

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6. EXPANSION

Establishing a secure connection to *prana* (life force).

Sun is Life. The food we eat is condensed sun light. The SUN is ALWAYS SHINING, even when we don't see it. SUN = PRANA. *Prana* is always sustaining us, even if we don't perceive it. 3rd stage is about **energy**. Body and mind need to be taken care of first, because energy does not discriminate. It empowers everything. So, if we introduce *prana* to impure and weak body and mind - what will be empowered? ... Our impurities and weaknesses... everything gets empowered - our good AND bad. That's why we start with preliminary (purification + strengthening) and moon (calm + stability) stages first. Hatha tools: *Bhandas, Laterals, Backbends, 2:1 breathing, breath retentions.*

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7. ILLUMINATION (ABSORPTION)

"Agni" = fire, that which moves me to full capacity, full power, fuel.

There is fire in center of every spiritual tradition, denoting sacredness of what's at the heart of it. Fire is at the source of every creation. Fire is what allows me to see life as sacred. Jesus and Buddha saw it that way - their fire was awakened. Once we awaken our own fire, we see the sacredness of Life. Fire is the end and the means. Once I activate my own inner potential (fire) to burn away my own lethargy - "I" ends, and all-pervading Reality begins. There is no boundary between "I" and "IT". I wake up to Divinity. This is the goal of yoga. Hatha tools: *Nadi Shoddana* (alternate nostril breathing), *prana/apana* convergence at navel, inversions, breath retentions on both ends, *Treta Bhandas, Maha Mudra*, meditation

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HA = Sun

THA = Moon

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HATHA Yoga is the union of Mind and Energy. When they are merged, then we move into awakening of our spiritual potential which is **Fire**

How do I know what I need? Learn to listen to the signs:

- if you feel *sick, heavy, dull, lethargic* - you need PURIFICATION and STRENGTHENING
- if sleep is poor, easily disturbed, anger and mood swings get the best of you - you need more MOON
- if you are fairly stable - build *prana (bhandas)* - SUN
- you have balance, sensitivity, good relationships, and are stable - FIRE, meditation becomes key