

Light on Hatha Yoga (Pradipka = Self-illuminating or that which illuminates)

Hatha Yoga comes from the ancient Tantric Tradition where after the proliferation of Buddhism in India in around 6th CE there was a movement by yogis such as Matsyendranath and Goraknath to establish a new **system of self-realization based upon the purification of the body**. This was a refinement of previous tantric practices, removing ritual, the importance of ethical observances and the primary focus upon working with the mind & meditation, so that now the **expansion of consciousness primarily became a physiological possibility**. Unlike previous paths, where the body was regarded as something intrinsically impure and to be transcended, now as in Tantra, the body was seen as divine, as a sacred manifestation which could be transmuted.

More specifically Hatha Yoga works directly with our subtle pranic energies, so it can also be called a **Science of Prana**, where it seeks to bring these into balance, so that eventually our innate store of Kundalini Shakti can be awakened and consciousness can be expanded beyond its usual limitations. This is indicated in its name where 'Ha' is the Sun (positive charge) and 'Tha' is the Moon (negative charge) indicating the potential union of polarities within the pranic system so that we can move beyond duality.

Whilst we shall explore this process in depth later in terms of pranic anatomy & physiology however here we can say when there is a balancing of our pranic energies Kundalini Shakti is awakened at the base chakra from where it rises through Sushumna Nadi (neutral charge). Upon reaching Ajna Chakra (eye brow chakra) Hatha Yoga is achieved, then as the ascending energy reaches the Sahasrara Chakra (crown chakra) we can say that Raja Yoga has been achieved where there is only 'consciousness of consciousness' or we could say there is the transcendental experience beyond any sense of 'I'. (HYP page 594) So the ultimate goal of Hatha Yoga is Moksha or Freedom where first we achieve Hatha Yoga and then Raja Yoga [see chapter 2 v76 to 77 of HYP].

In its entirety Hatha Yoga a very intensive, **forceful path** requiring special guidance however there is much to be learnt from its study especially with regards to our subtle pranic anatomy & physiology and we can most certainly benefit from its most accessible practices.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, written by Swatmarama in around C13th to C15th, is perhaps the most complete and accessible text on Hatha Yoga whereby Swatmarama effectively compiled the wisdom of Hatha yoga within its pages. It is technical work concerned with the development of evolution of consciousness. We shall study the HYP with a commentary by Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati but we can also visit other commentaries as we wish.

The HYP tells us that Hatha Yoga:

- works directly with our pranic energies because it was felt that working directly with the mind was much more difficult.
- removes the emphasis upon behavioural or attitudes as found in the yamas and niyamas of earlier traditions, such as found in Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Classical Yoga, because in Hatha Yoga it is felt that trying to follow these guidelines could create more internal mental and physical tension.
- relies upon practice itself rather than focusing upon any kind of philosophy or mental activity, considering this to be one of its greatest strengths because for any kind of deeper realization we will have to move beyond the individual thinking mind.

A brief overview of the path of Hatha Yoga is that:

- we must first purify the body and so it can also be called a **Science of Purification**.
 - **Shatkarmas:** cleansing the psycho-spiritual forces (doshas)

- **Asana:** bringing strength & lightness, good health
- **Pranayama:** regulating & increasing prana via the breath
- Through these practices the doshas, which enable our minds and bodies to function are harmonised, and **in particular the endocrine and nervous systems are brought into balance**. On a more subtle level the vayus, nadis and chakras are brought into a state of balance and certainly as stated previously Hatha Yoga can be also called the **Science of Subtle/Pranic Energies** as the theory behind the practices is firmly rooted within our pranic system.
- Then once purification or balance has been achieved the final practices of **mudra and bandha**, i.e. pranic seals and locks, are employed within Hatha Yoga to still pranic energy, generating heat so that if grace favours us kundalini shakti may rise leading us to an expanded state of consciousness.
- *“The main objective of hatha yoga is to create absolute balance of the interacting activities and processes of the physical body, mind and energy. When this balance is created, the impulses generated give a call of awakening to the central force (sushumna nadi) which is responsible for the evolution of human consciousness. If hatha yoga is not used for this purpose, its true objective is lost.”* Page 7 HYP introduction
- That said we can all practice hatha yoga according to our own capacities and there will always be great benefits to be received!

There are four chapters within the HYP:

Chapter One

Asana

Salutations to primal Guru Sri Adinath

All yogic texts begin with honouring those who gave inspiration & knowledge

Environment for practice & six causes which destroy yoga & six causes to bring success in yoga

Asana - giving steadiness and lightness of body and mind, a state of health, relaxed state, increase in freely flowing prana & vibrational rate of prana; different asana regulating different organs & systems, through balancing of different vayus & chakras

Asana for seated practices – siddhasana/siddha yoni asana (adept's pose), padmasana (lotus pose), simhasana (lion's pose) and bhadrasana (gracious pose)

Diet for practice

Chapter Two

Shatkarma (a.k.a. Kriya) & Pranayama

First the body must be regulated by asana and a moderate diet taken

The movement of prana creates movement in the mind, benefit of kumbhaka

The Vayus, the five winds pervading the body, Nadis, the subtle pranic channels & Chakras, the pranic pumping stations

Pranayama: nadis require purification, practice nadi sodhana

The practice & benefits of pranayama

Shatkarmas: are six cleansing practices used before pranayama when the doshas are unbalanced, i.e. there is an excess of wind (vata), bile (pitta) or mucous (kapha). If the dosha are balanced then they are unnecessary but if they are unbalanced and nothing is done disease will follow and our spiritual journey will be curtailed.

Shatkarma: Dauti
 Basti
 Neti
 Trataka
 Nauli
 Kapalabhati

Pranayama: The eight kumbhakas: Suryabhedana – sun breath
 Ujjayi – psychic breath
 Seetkari – hissing breath
 Sheetal – cooling breath
 Bhastrika – bellows breath
 Bhramari – bee breath
 Moorchha – swooning breath
 Plavini – gulping breath v39 to 70

Chapter Three Mudra & Bandha

Kundalini

Is the support of all practices
When awakened the kundalini pierces granthis (psychic blocks)

Mudras & Bandhas:

Maha Mudra – the great attitude
Maha Bandha – the great lock
Maha vedha mudra – great piercing attitude
Khechari mudra – attitude of dwelling in supreme consciousness
Uddiyana Bandha – abdominal lock
Mula Bandha – perineum lock
Jalandhara Bandha – throat lock
Viparita karani mudra – reversing attitude
Vajroli mudra – thunderbolt attitude
Sahajoli mudra – attitude of spontaneous arousing
Shakti chalana mudra – attitude of moving energy

Chapter Four Samadhi

Sama = equal

Dhi = reflection

The elimination of death and the experience of the bliss of Brahman, Supreme Consciousness.

Enlightenment or illumination beyond the body, mind, emotions and senses. Moving beyond Samsara, the Cycle of Death & Rebirth, beyond time & space

Achieving Moksha or Freedom.

For more information on the purpose of Hatha Yoga as described in the HYP please see:

The introduction of the HYP, pages 1 to 20

HYP chapter 1 v1 to v11

In the progression course we shall explore:

Shatkarma, asana, pranayama, mudra & bandha in greater depth

Prana, the koshas, the vayus, nadis, chakras, kundalini & the granthis