

THE ORIGIN OF YOGA

WHAT IS YOGA?

In the modern western world, 'yoga' most usually refers to a discipline that moves practitioners toward optimal health and all-round well-being through the mindful execution of physical yoga poses (also referred to as postures) accompanied by conscious breathing. A more complete practice will also involve further breathing and meditation techniques. (*Note that each of these elements is the practice of 'yoga' in its own right. For example, if you are practicing meditation, you are practicing 'yoga'.*)

More traditionally, yoga is a more complex discipline intended to support practitioners on their journey towards liberation or enlightenment. Ultimately, all yoga practices direct the student's attention inwards, thus taking individuals on an intimate personal journey of self-exploration.

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF YOGA?

Yoga originated in ancient India. An Indian sage, 'Patanjali', has been credited for the yoga principles and traditions on which modern day yoga is based. In the classical work, the 'Yoga Sutra' (a 2,000-year-old collection of writings by philosophers that provide a guidebook for dealing with the challenges of being human), Patanjali outlined 8 principles (also known as the '8 Limbs of Yoga') to provide a framework for achieving the ultimate goal of yoga - 'enlightenment'.

The '8 limbs' of yoga include:

1. Five moral codes (YAMAS) - nonviolence; truthfulness; non-theft; abstinence & moderation; non-greed/non-possessiveness
2. Five life principles (NIYAMAS) - purity of mind, speech, & body; inner contentment; self-discipline; self-study; dedication
3. Physical practice (ASANA)
4. Controlled breathing exercises (PRANAYAMA)
5. Attention inward (PRATYAHARA)
6. Practicing focus (DHARANA)
7. Maintaining concentration (DHYANA)
8. Enlightened union (SAMADHI)

Today, yoga predominantly focuses on the elements of breathing, meditation and the physical practice to nurture the body and mind, and bring a sense of emotional balance and wellbeing into our lives.

WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘YOGA’ MEAN?

The word 'yoga' is a Sanskrit word that translates as 'union'. This can be seen to be a union of the body, mind, and breath; of the individual with themselves; of the individual with the moment; of the individual with all of existence; of the spirit with the 'divine'.

SANSKRIT - THE LANGUAGE OF YOGA

Sanskrit is an ancient Indian language and one of *the* oldest human languages, and of which, many modern Indian languages are derived. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras were written in Vedic Sanskrit (which is the oldest form of Sanskrit dating back to the 2nd millennium BCE). Over time, as Patanjali's Yoga Sutras were passed down through the years, so too was the Sanskrit terminology which is traditionally still used in many yoga classes today.

IS YOGA A RELIGION?

Three religions arose from the ancient Vedic texts (in which Patanjali's Sutras were found). These are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It is no wonder then that each of these religions incorporate yoga in their teachings. It is because of this that people often link yoga to Hinduism and note an overlap in to Buddhism. However, yoga itself is not a religion but a tool for practitioners to apply their own unique intentions.