

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND PRACTICE OF YOGA

R SOVIK • A BALAYOGI • BHAVANANI

Historical background, antecedents, and development of the eight-limbed path

Yoga is both a process and a goal. In this respect, it is a *moksha shastra*, a teaching (*shastra*) leading to gradual freedom (*moksha*) from the various forms of human suffering. The word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit verb root *yuj*, which means “to yoke, unite, or bring together.” Yoga can be defined both as the effort to restore harmony within the body–mind complex and as the effort to reunite the individual human spirit with its essential nature (Schweig, 2007). Although the practice of yoga does not exclude any religion, creed, or race, it is helpful to recognize that its teachings have sprung from the spiritual soil of ancient India and even now bear the title in India of *sanatana dharma*, “eternal way” (see Box 2.1).

Although yoga has been practiced in India since well before recorded history, it was in approximately the second century BCE that the seminal figure Patanjali united many already-existing practices and

writings into a unified text known as the *Yoga Sutras*. Patanjali’s masterful Sanskrit work contains a series of 195 terse aphorisms (*sutras*, or “threads”) that convey the most essential ideas of yoga theory and practice. These sutras present the essence of yoga in the form of eight divisions, or limbs (*ashtanga yoga*) (Bryant, 2009). The first five limbs of this system are termed “external” because they address relationships with the world and with the body, breath, and senses. The “internal,” or “mental,” rungs of yoga, the last three of the eight limbs, comprise three increasingly refined stages of concentration.

At the heart of Patanjali’s text is the message that every human being is by nature balanced and whole (Gitananda, 1999). Yoga is a method for aligning oneself with this sense of inner balance. In the process, multiple levels of human experience—body, breath, and mind—are given thorough attention, and the mind is gradually freed for deeper concentration and reflection.

Many modern practitioners have become interested in yoga as a means for improving health. Patanjali recognized imbalances in health as a significant obstacle to personal progress (Aranya, 1983) and approached the task of promoting good health in two ways: by removing obstacles that block the path to health and by promoting alignment with healing forces within. As we shall see, these two strategies are manifested in a wide variety of approaches to self-management.

It is important to recognize that the modern, almost exclusive, identification of yoga with physical exercise is just that—a recent development. As Patanjali illustrates, yoga practices in earlier times embodied a thoroughly integrated approach. They combined in one system the goals of improved health, self-discovery, and spiritual self-understanding.

Box 2.1 Yoga briefly defined

What is yoga?

- Mastery of the roaming tendencies of the mind – *Yoga Sutras* (1.2)
- Skillful, dispassionate action – *Bhagavad Gita* (2.50)
- Equanimity of mind – *Bhagavad Gita* (2.48)
- A skillful and subtle process of calming the mind – *Yoga Vashistha* (3.9.32)
- Dissociation from the painful union with suffering – *Bhagavad Gita* (6.23)
- Unity of breath, mind, and senses, and the abandonment of distracting thought – *Maitri Upanishad* (6.25)
- Union of the individual self (*jivatma*) with the Universal Self (*paramatma*) – *Yoga Yajnavalkya* (1.44)

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Major historical time frames

Vedic period (circa 1500–600 BCE)

In the period before written texts, teachings were transmitted orally from teacher (*guru*) to disciple (*shishya*). The earliest of these teachings are found today in four compilations: the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda*. The age of these works has been a matter of some uncertainty (Bhavanani, 2010). It is estimated that although the oral tradition extends far back into prehistory, the Vedas as they are organized today date from circa 1500 BCE, with later additions extending to 600 BCE (Panikkar, 1977). Each Veda (from the root *vid*, “to know”) consists of four parts. The *Samhitas*, collections of hymns used in Vedic rituals, form the oldest portion. The *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas* comment on and expand the *Samhitas*, while the *Upanishads* form the final portion of the texts. The Vedas promote harmonious relationships with nature, appeal for peace in human interactions, petition for health and protection, and most importantly, bring awareness to the meditative dimensions of human life.

Post-Vedic era (circa 600 to 100 BCE)

In the period following the compilation of the Vedas, an enormous collection of teachings was recorded and made available for practice and study. Twelve *Upanishads* and their comprehensive interpretation, the *Brahma Sutras*, began the shift away from Vedic rituals to the highly personalized yogic goals of self-development, balanced living, and Self-realization. A diverse literature emerged that included two epic texts, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the latter’s well-known quintessence, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Yoga practices were codified in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali (c. 200–100 BCE), and Patanjali’s writing was accompanied by an authoritative commentary added by the sage Vyasa.

One hundred BCE and through the seventeenth century CE

During the common era, devotional works, histories, and teachings of yogic adepts all provided a resource

for practicing yogis. The renowned philosopher Shankaracharya (eighth century CE) had a profound influence on the thought of this period. He revived the doctrine of *advaita vedanta*, nondualism, and wrote authoritative commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and 10 major *Upanishads*. During this period, many types of yoga emerged from within the diverse traditions of India. Georg Feuerstein (2003) has listed 40 types of yoga ranging across a broad array of practice approaches. Among these, the three main ones surviving into the modern age are the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali; the hatha yoga teachings of the *Natha* sect of yogis (in particular, a fifteenth-century work by Svatanmarama, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, and a seventeenth-century work of Gheranda, the *Gheranda Samhita*); and the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Modern era

In the modern period, yoga and its teachings traveled from East to West, a phenomenon embodied first by the arrival of Swami Vivekananda in the United States in 1893. Drawing on the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, he wrote on each of the four paths found there: raja yoga (meditation), karma yoga (selfless action), bhakti yoga (devotion), and jnana yoga (metaphysics). In the early twentieth century, Swami Kuvalayananda of the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute, as well as Yogendraji of the Yoga Institute in Mumbai, initiated systematic practice and research in yoga. Since then, various traditions have spread worldwide. These include teachings set in motion by T. Krishnamacharya (who inspired well-known practitioners of yoga such as B. K. S. Iyengar, T. K. V. Desikachar, and Pattabhi Jois); Swami Shivananda Sarasvati (and his disciples Swamis Satyananda, Vishnudevananda, and Satchitananda); the Himalayan tradition (Swami Rama, Pandit Tigunait, and Swami Veda Bharati); the Kundalini Yoga tradition (Yogi Bhajan); the Self-Realization Fellowship (Swami Yogananda); and the Rishiculture of Swami Gitananda Giri (Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani). Yoga practitioners and scientists such

as H. R. Nagendra and R. Nagarathna of S-VYASA (Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana) University in Bangalore continued the early efforts of Swami Kuvalayananda with a special emphasis on yoga as therapy. Since 2002, Swami Ramdev has popularized yoga throughout India as well as initiating research to study its effectiveness in health care. Other recent schools of practice are listed in the final part of this chapter. Notably, while yoga teachings have been derived from many written sources, it is the presence of a living lineage of teachers (a *guru-parampara*) that provides assurance that a particular teaching is genuine.

Foundations of yoga practice

In the initial stages of yoga study, most students focus on postures (*asana*), voluntary regulation of the breath (*pranayama*), and relaxation skills (*pratyahara*). Integrated with contemplation of the *yamas* and *niyamas* (described below), these form the foundation for the development of an effective practice. However, it is helpful to broaden the focus here in order to provide a philosophical context and illustrate the manner in which yoga techniques expand into daily life. Yoga is indeed a way of life, an experiential investigation into human nature (Bhavanani, 2013). (See Table 2.1.)

The essence of yoga is self-observation. It is through self-observation, for example, that the refinement of yoga postures occurs. In the course of *asana* work, self-observation brings with it a sense of psychological distance from the body—a perception that there is space between the witnessing mind and the movements and alignment of the physical self. A unique sense of objectivity develops—an awareness that the observer, the process of observation (carried out in the mind), and the object being observed (the body and its movements) are distinct parts of an integrated inner experience. This, in turn, leads to a deep sense of physical self-mastery and the feeling that one's body has become “like the wide expanse of the sky” (*ananta samapatti*) (Aranya, 1983, p. 229).

Table 2.1 The eight limbs of Yoga

AshtangaYoga — the eight limbs		
1	Yama <i>Ahimsa</i> <i>Satya</i> <i>Asteya</i> <i>Brahmacharya</i> <i>Aparigraha</i>	Restraints Non-harming Truthfulness Non-stealing Control of lifestyle Non-possessiveness
2	Niyama <i>Shaucha</i> <i>Santosha</i> <i>Tapas</i> <i>Svadhyaya</i> <i>ishvara pranidhana</i>	Observances Purity Contentment Self-discipline Self-study Trustful surrender
3	Asana	Steady posture
4	Pranayama	Expansion of vital energy
5	Pratyahara	Sensory withdrawal
6	Dharana	Concentration
7	Dhyana	Meditation
8	Samadhi	Self-realization

A similar but more subtle process occurs when the breath becomes the object of attention. In this regard it is often declared that without the breath there is no yoga. Observation of the breath calms emotional reactivity, heightens awareness of the energetic dimensions of human life, and awakens the witnessing mind. Breath awareness begins with the continuous awareness of the flow of exhalation and inhalation. Each exhalation provides a pleasant sensation of cleansing, while each inhalation offers an equally pleasant sense of nourishment. Attention to these streams of air results in the development of effortless, relaxed breathing.

The most refined development of self-observation occurs in meditation. There, the process of witnessing lies entirely within the mind itself. The ever-present stream of thought, emotions, memories, sensations, and states of consciousness forms an object of attention. Gradually, as the observation of the mind is steadied through concentration, the individual's identity as the inner witness is revealed and consciousness rests within itself (Tigunait, 2014).

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The eight limbs of yoga

The *ashtanga* (“eight-limbed”) yoga system of Patanjali, as described in the *Yoga Sutras*, provides the discipline, guidance, and vision necessary for an understanding of yoga. Although the first five limbs form steps leading to meditation, practitioners are not expected to perfect these before proceeding on. Learning yoga is an organic process, and the various practices of yoga mutually clarify and support one another until the higher limbs can be achieved.

The first two limbs of practice consist of strategies devoted to self-regulation. They begin with the *yamas*, or “restraints,” a list of five approaches (see Table 2.2) for controlling negative habit patterns that diffuse energy in the individual and foster human discord. The *yamas* offer a concise approach to self-inspection. By identifying negative tendencies

and fostering positive ones, practitioners can recognize underlying motivations that disrupt behavior. Thus, while at one level these restraints supply a set of ethical disciplines for practice, at a deeper level they are a tool for self-understanding, enabling practitioners to recognize the excessive attractions and aversions that so easily become ingrained in daily life.

The second rung of the *ashtanga* system is a list of observances (*niyamas*)—positive habit patterns that guide yoga practice. These principles form a framework that can be embraced at beginning levels as well as more advanced ones. For example, beginning students learn such techniques as nasal irrigation. Advancing students address purification of the mind. The practices associated with the five observances are multi-dimensional. *Svadyaya* (self-study), for example, includes not only efforts

Table 2.2 Forms of yoga

Ashtanga yoga	The eight-limbed system outlined by Patanjali and forming the basis for all classic approaches to Yoga practice
Hatha yoga	The initial stages of <i>ashtanga yoga</i> practice emphasizing right attitudes, asana, breath work, and relaxation
Raja yoga	The meditative stages of <i>ashtanga yoga</i> leading from resting the senses to deep states of relaxation, concentration and meditation
Karma yoga	A yogic path focusing on selflessness and non-attachment. A path that accompanies all other disciplines of practice
Bhakti yoga	A devotional path, often demonstrated through chant, poetry, ritual, pilgrimage and expressions of love for the Infinite
Jnana yoga	A path dedicated to philosophical clarity and self-observation. This approach integrates self-analysis and meditation
Tantra yoga	A highly integrated, holistic path; the umbrella for much of the practice now taught in yoga classes and depicted in yoga texts
Mantra yoga	An approach emphasizing the use of internal <i>mantric</i> sounds for mental support and the refinement of awareness
Kundalini yoga	A path dedicated to arousing dormant spiritual energy (<i>kundalini</i>) and directing it upward along the spinal axis
Laya yoga	A method contributing to kundalini awakening through the systematic integration of lower energies into higher ones
Svara yoga	An advanced yoga practice dedicated to the study of <i>pranic</i> rhythms and internal paths of energy

to practice introspection but also the repetition of mantras, contemplation of philosophical ideals, and attention to teachings of accomplished teachers.

The remaining six rungs in the *ashtanga* system are composed of increasingly refined disciplines leading toward inner stillness. Patanjali famously defines the culmination of asana work as a posture that has become “steady and comfortable” (Bryant, 2009, p. 283). Breathing reaches its apex when it becomes a means for revealing inner awareness. And the senses, paradoxically, become a source of insight when they can be turned away from their objects and rested. Each of these stages of practice is itself a goal of yoga—each contributing to the awakening of a state of consciousness that transcends normal awareness.

The processes of yoga culminate in freedom from the wandering tendencies of the mind (Tigunait, 2014). This is achieved through the implementation of two interwoven practices: concentration and non-attachment. Together these lead an aspirant to self-mastery. Patanjali teaches that concentration practice bears fruit when it is continued over time and without interruption. But concentration is not, in this context, the result of labored attention. It is the outcome of resting awareness in a supportive focus, an *alambana*, and returning to that focus with regularity. With modest effort, periods of concentration become a natural part of daily life.

The companion to concentration, *vairagya*, or non-attachment, is a concept that has proved puzzling for Western students. In the West, attachment is generally considered to be a desirable thing, an indication of love and respect. These virtues, love and respect, are equally valued in yoga. But in yoga the term “attachment” is unrelated to qualities of endearment. Attachment is seen as an imbalance, a craving leading to sickness or to mental distraction. Non-attachment is its opposite, a sense of equanimity and emotional balance.

The highest state of meditation, and the eighth rung of the *ashtanga* system, is termed *samadhi*. It is described

as a state of mental purity arising from one-pointed attention. In that state, consciousness is revealed as something more than a quality of mind. Consciousness is the nature of one’s being (Aranya, 1983).

The vedantic model of the self

Yoga is an inward journey, a centering movement within the human personality. The fifteenth-century text *Vedantasara* (The Essence of Vedanta), written by Sadananda, a monk in the Shankaracharya order, describes five layerings of human experience that surround the essential Self (Nikhilananda, 1931). These layerings act as covers, or sheaths (*koshas*), that veil pure consciousness. As yoga practice proceeds, each of these layers is gradually integrated and transcended.

The physical sheath, or anatomical level of existence (*annamaya kosha*)

The body is the most visible aspect of personality. It is the form consisting of food (*anna*), through which identity first shows itself. Despite the body’s substantial appearance it experiences continual change, shaped by four instinctive drives: the urges for food, sex, sleep, and self-preservation. Thus, working with diet, developing healthy sleep patterns, and cultivating periods of physical rest all function as important yogic lifestyle factors.

Six varieties of cleansing practices (*shat kriyas*) assist in maintaining physical health and well-being. They play an important role in the elimination of physical wastes (*mala shuddhi*) as well as the elimination of wastes accumulating at more subtle levels of functioning (*nadi shuddhi*). These six practices include *dhauti* (gastric cleansings), *basti* (colonic cleansings), *neti* (nasal cleansings), *nauli* (abdominal cleansings), *trataka* (gazing), and *kapalabhati* (cleansing of the energies of the skull) (Bhatt, 2004). It is important to remember that the *shat kriyas* are not simply physical cleansing techniques. They also utilize body mechanics to remove emotional and mental blockages. In the process of detoxifying, they allow positive, healing energies to flow. Thus, they serve as

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powerful synergists in the purification, activation, and regeneration of the body–mind.

Yoga postures, the focus of the third of Patanjali's eight limbs, are by far the most widely practiced techniques for managing the *annamaya kosha*. Practice of asana has evolved at a fast pace over the last half-century under the influence of a variety of teaching styles. Nonetheless, the core elements of posture work remain the same: sequenced variations of movement (*vinyasa krama*) leading to stillness in a prescribed pose, coordination of physical movements with the flow of the breath, and continuous mindfulness of breath and body. (See Box 2.2.)

The sheath of vital energy, or physiological level of existence (*pranamaya kosha*)

Like iron filings influenced by a magnetic field, the body is said to be formed along lines of internal energy (*prana*). The sheath consisting of this energy is internal to the physical body and is more subtle. It is often described as the interface between the body and mind—a force that holds the two together, thus sustaining and regulating life. Prana is not simply mechanical energy but a force that animates both body and mind. Every movement and thought is a demonstration of its presence. Access to the *pranamaya kosha* is through the breath, and its study is divided into two parts: breath training, which leads to full understanding of the basic mechanisms of breathing, and *pranayama*, the regulation and expansion of prana. (See Box 2.3.)

The classical techniques of pranayama are powerful elements of practice and are represented in the fourth of Patanjali's eight limbs. Vyasa, Patanjali's commentator, has avowed that “there is no austerity superior to pranayama; it removes impurities and makes the light of knowledge shine” (Aranya, 1983, p. 243). Practice of pranayama magnifies awareness of the subtle dimensions of energy. For example, *nadi shodana*, an important practice of pranayama, brings attention to the shifting patterns of breath—the

Box 2.2 Asana – a functional classification

- **Cultural postures:**
 - postures for health and well-being, such as:
 - *bhujangasana* (cobra posture)
 - *shalabhasana* (locust posture)
 - *dhanurasana* (bow posture)
- **Contemplative postures:**
 - postures for meditation, such as:
 - *padmasana* (lotus posture)
 - *sukhasana* (comfortable posture)
 - postures for relaxation, such as:
 - *shavasana* (corpse posture)
 - *makarasana* (crocodile posture)

Box 2.3 Classical pranayama

- *Surya bhedana* – sun-piercing breath
- *Ujjayi* – the victorious breath
- *Sitkari* – hissing breath
- *Sitali* – beak tongue breath
- *Bhastrika* – bellows breath
- *Bhramari* – bee-sounding breath
- *Murccha* – swooning breath
- *Plavini* – floating breath

nasal cycle—flowing in the two nostrils. Throughout the day and night, the flow of breath in the nostrils shifts from one side to the other (Bhavanani, 2007). Regulation of this cycle is thought to have positive effects on mood and on various aspects of daily functioning.

The flow of pranic energy is also regulated by the use of *mudras* and *bandhas*, neuromuscular seals and locks respectively. Hatha yoga mudras facilitate conscious control of energy by directing it to flow along the lines of energy channels (*nadis*). There are numerous gestures using the hands, feet, body, and head that enable conscious regulation of these psychophysical energies. In addition, three

locks, the *bandhas-jalandhara* (jugular), *uddiyana* (abdominal), and *mula* (anal)—accompany the practice of certain pranayama techniques, preventing the uncontrolled elevation of pressure in the thoraco-abdomino-pelvic cavities. These locks are of great spiritual value also, since they help in facilitating the flow of energy along the spinal column and thus deepening meditation.

The conscious mind, or the psychological level of existence (*manomaya kosha*)

Subtler than the breath is the conscious mind (*manas*). It is the mental screen on which inner experience is projected. The *manomaya kosha* receives sense impressions from the outer world. It also acts as the coordinator of outer actions, making it possible to manipulate the world with one's hands, move about with one's feet, and communicate through the power of speech. It is the *manomaya kosha* that makes mental associations, brings memories to awareness, carries out thought processes, and presents objects of imagination to the self for its enjoyment. Thus, much of what we think of as human experience takes place on the screen of the conscious mind.

However, the functioning of this layer of the self is limited. For the most part, operation of the mind at this level is automatic and habitual. It is unable to arrive at a sense of value. Using the everyday mind we may be able to categorize events in the world with great sophistication, but we will not be able to determine their worth.

The seat of wisdom and discernment, or the intellectual level of existence (*vijnanamaya kosha*)

The short verb root “*vi-jna*,” from which the name of the next *kosha* is derived, means “to discern, to know rightly, to understand.” As awareness deepens through concentration, it is possible to acquire a clearer and more accurate vision of one's self and one's relationships with the world. The practice of

yoga, and in particular the practice of Patanjali's first two limbs, helps to establish alignment with this vision. At the level of the *vijnanamaya kosha* it is not unusual to sense a subtle pulling away from the nervous excitement of the conscious mind toward a deeper and more peaceful state of awareness.

A distinct feature of yoga is the recognition that the human mind is an inner instrument. The mind provides experience (*bhoga*), as well as the peaceful revelation of consciousness (*apavarga*). The aspect of mind capable of discerning such states of consciousness is termed the *buddhi*, which may be translated as “awareness.” It is the functioning of the *buddhi* that is awakened through yoga relaxation and meditation methods. Through these practices, awareness is turned back upon itself, expanding, as we have seen, from a state of obscurity to one in which it witnesses body, breath, and everyday mental life. This leads, finally, to a state of “awareness of awareness itself” (Gitananda, 1976).

The sheath of bliss, or the universal level of existence (*anandamaya kosha*)

Enshrouded by the previous four coverings is the sheath named after the Sanskrit word for “rapture” or “bliss”: *ananda*. It is the most-subtle aspect of personality and represents a state of consciousness well beyond the distractions of daily life. This is described as blissful because when meditation has progressed to a certain level of subtlety, the mind is said to reflect a sense of deep-seated and spontaneous joy or bliss (Nikhilananda, 1931).

Language can become an obstacle to experience at this stage. That fact has led to the practice of silence, which makes it possible to explore parts of experience that otherwise pass unacknowledged and unobserved. With this in mind, asana classes are often taught without a musical backdrop, instructions are carefully presented but kept to a minimum, and attention is shepherd to the quiet activity of self-observation (Anderson & Sovik, 2000).

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The core of one's being (*atman*)

The core of inner life is said to be beyond the reach of thought and words, yet it has been depicted and praised in many yogic texts. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, it is said to be self-illuminating, the source of joy, and a state “unshaken even by heavy suffering” (Schweig, 2007, p. 97). In the *Katha Upanishad* it is described as “the life force that animates everything” (Tigunait, 2008, p. 129). And in the *Mundaka Upanishad* it is said that “the Self pervades the entire external and internal world ... it is perfect and unalloyed” (Swami Rama, 1990, p. 83). Such examples reaffirm that the nature of yoga is to uncover an enduring core of health, peace, and well-being.

The practice of *tantra* yoga

Much of what is currently practiced in yoga classrooms, and described in contemporary yoga texts, is derived from the *tantric* tradition of yoga. Among *tantra's* central tenets is the notion that the body is not, as taught by more ascetical schools, an obstacle on the path to enlightenment (Goswami, 1999, p. xiii). In contrast with visions of spirituality that emphasize renunciation of life, early tantric adepts cultivated a positive physical awareness that later served as the source for the development of hatha yoga. The body was conceived of as an instrument for self-realization, and thus fully integrated into spiritual practice.

Tantra grew out of the principle that all the dimensions of life—the creative cycles of nature, the interplay of wildlife, the shifting climate, the powerful forces of galactic energies, the birth and sustenance of living beings, and the centrality of consciousness itself—are interconnected. To find one's place in this broad network of life experience one must look within and with an eye to the whole.

The interplay between mind and body is an example of the holistic nature of life. The understanding that mind and body influence each other and are not separable is increasingly permeating contemporary culture. For healing to take place in the

functioning of one, it is necessary to seek balance and healing in the other.

Further, the forces that govern the operation of the universe are the same forces that govern the functioning of the individual. This is expressed in a well-known Sanskrit axiom, *yatha brahmande tatha pindande*—“that same reality which exists outside us as the macrocosm is present within us, the microcosm.”

The essence of tantra is self-transformation. Practitioners seek to make changes within themselves in order to establish health, bring about a sense of self-empowerment, and awaken spiritual well-being. To do this, a practitioner of tantra makes use of energies already available (prana) to awaken energy lying dormant and unexpressed within (*kundalini*). While this is often described as “the awakening of kundalini,” it might equally be articulated as the awakening of human potential and growth.

Among the methods used to cultivate such an awakening are many of the very tools we have previously encountered. Physical yoga (asana), pranayama exercises, sense withdrawal, concentration, contemplation and meditation all play central roles in the tantric model of practice. Indeed, both Patanjali and Shankaracharya were themselves fully acquainted with the tantric tradition. However, in addition to these, tantra integrates a wide variety of other practices, adding such tools as devotional expression, mantra science, ritual, and even the use of traditional herbs into the broad picture of yoga methodology.

It is perhaps necessary to mention that tantra has developed an association with sexual practices in some settings. Tantra, while not ignorant of sexual life, is far from interested in its mindless pursuit. Tantra offers a comprehensive vision of all dimensions of human life and spirituality.

The architecture of tantric practice

The tantric vision of human personality is organized around the alignment and distribution of inner energies. The central axis of these energies lies along

the spinal column. Thus, the arms and legs serve as appendages, while the spinal column acts as the primary locus of attention. Tributaries of the central column of energy branch out to the complete body-mind complex. Neither the streams of energy (nadis) within the body nor the energies themselves can be seen. They act as subtle components of human functioning, experienced through yoga practice.

Where *nadis*, which are energy streams, intersect, they serve as the underlying support for physical structures and for glandular functioning. For example, *marma sthanas*, points of intersection, lie at the core of many joints. There they may become the focus of massage therapy, the center of attention in a series of yoga postures, or a locus of meditative concentration. (See Fig. 2.1 on p. xxx.)

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The intersection of energies along the spine is of primary importance. These intersections are termed *chakras*. The word *chakra* means “wheel,” and each chakra, like a wheel, consists of various elements that function together. Consciousness serves as a hub, while psychological and physical structures surround it. These wheel-like vortices of energy along the spinal column act as avenues for self-awareness and anchor a wide variety of meditative practices.

The practical aim of tantra in regard to this system of energies is to awaken dormant potentials, said to be “sleeping” within. Awakening these dormant capacities while directing their energies for higher purposes is the goal of tantric practice. For example, energies resting at the base of the spine share the common theme of survival. Once “awakened,” they offer a sense of security and stability. Awakening is accomplished through a skilful combination of the practices already described.

Energies linked to the second chakra above the base of the spine share a more evolved theme. They evoke awareness of likes and dislikes, pleasures and related pains. One aim of practice at this level is the development of equanimity. And thus, in a similar way, awareness of each of the chakras from the base of the

spine to the crown of the head calls for an integration of more primitive functioning and the development of creative and intuitive capabilities. (See Table 2-3.)

A tally of nadis is listed in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* as 72,000; in the *Prapanchasara Tantra* as 300,000; and in the *Shiva Samhita* as 350,000 (Saraswati, 1985). But the number of primary nadis ranges from just 10 to 14. Among these, it is agreed by all sources that three are of particular significance, spanning the length of the spine by weaving upward to end at the base of the nose where the nostrils meet the upper lip. The nadi ending at the base of the right nostril is termed *pingala* and is associated with outward-moving, masculine energy. The nadi ending at the base of the left nostril is termed *ida* and is associated with inward-moving, feminine energy. The stream of energy ending at the base of the nose in the center is termed *sushumna*, meaning “joyous mind.” Thus when, through a highly evolved practice of yogic concentration, *ida* and *pingala* are united, the practitioner experiences great contentment and joy.

Schools of tantra yoga

We have already noted that tantra yoga practices overlap significantly with classical yoga. In particular, the internal practices of tantra revolve around the use of sounds called *mantras*. These sounds act as supports for meditation, harnessing distracting energies. The science of mantra is extensive and the repetition of mantras can form a central aspect of self-training. In addition, tantra has spawned a variety of other schools of practice. Kundalini yoga, svara yoga, mantra yoga, and laya yoga, as well as hatha yoga, all exist under the tantric umbrella.

Conclusion

The scope of yoga practice and its philosophical framework is much larger than most students realize in the beginning. This chapter has presented only the main themes of teachings that have emerged from many thousands of years of practice and exploration. Nonetheless, a glimpse is helpful. It offers support

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Table 2.3 [Chakras and their correlations in the human body](#)

Yoga style/school	Key characteristics	Related URLs
Ananda yoga	A system of <i>hatha yoga</i> established by Swami Kriyananda, a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, and based on his <i>Kriya yoga</i> teachings. Emphasizes self-awareness and <i>pranayama</i> , enhanced by initiation	www.ananda.org
Anusara yoga	A school of yoga oriented around tantric teachings. <i>Hatha</i> poses are developed from a creative and devotional inner feeling. Principles of alignment underlie postures and connect to spiritual growth	www.anusarayoga.com
Ashtanga yoga	A <i>Hatha yoga</i> system taught by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (1915–2009). It involves synchronizing the breath with a series of postures—producing intense heat, detoxification, a light, strong body and calm mind	www.ashtanga.com
Bihar School of Yoga (India)	The Bihar School of Yoga has been the source of many modern publications, translating essential yoga texts. Its teachings and practice focus on the integration of <i>Vedantic</i> , <i>tantric</i> , and yogic practice	www.biharyoga.net
Bikram yoga	A system of 26 <i>Hatha yoga</i> postures selected and sequenced by Bikram Choudhury and practiced in a heated room. Heat is supplied in order to soften body tissues and prepare them for purification	www.bikramyoga.com
Gitananda yoga (India)	Also called “ <i>Rishiculture Ashtanga yoga</i> ,” this school was founded by Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri. While including the full range of classical yoga practice, it gives special emphasis to <i>mantra</i> , <i>tantra</i> , and <i>yantra</i>	www.rishiculture.org
Hatha yoga	A large number of yoga studios and schools function without particular school affiliation or branding. The primary form of yoga they teach is <i>hatha yoga</i> , drawing on teachings from a variety of sources, and ranging from gentle to challenging.	
Himalayan Institute yoga	A school directly linked to the meditative traditions of yoga and <i>tantra</i> . Emphasizes Patanjali’s eight-fold path along with the development of a thorough integration of yoga philosophy and practice	www.himalayaninstitute.org www.yogainternational.com
Integral yoga (Sri Aurobindo) (India)	Focused on the teachings of noted, twentieth century Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo. Dedicated to the integration of one’s lower and higher natures through meditation and daily action	www.auroville.org www.miraura.org
Integral yoga	Following the teachings and inspiration of Swami Satchidananda, students of this school integrate six forms of yoga: <i>hatha</i> , <i>raja</i> , <i>bhakti</i> , <i>karma</i> , <i>jnana</i> , and <i>japa</i> (repetition of <i>mantra</i>)	www.yogaville.org
Iyengar yoga	Based on the teaching of Sri B.K.S. Iyengar, this practice style emphasizes precision and alignment. A variety of props assist in making postures accessible. Careful sequencing of postures is cultivated	www.bksiyengar.com

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND PRACTICE OF YOGA

Table 2.3 – continued		
Yoga style/school	Key characteristics	Related URLs
Jivamukti yoga	A vigorous, <i>vinyasa</i> -based hatha yoga style with mindful adherence to five tenets: <i>shastra</i> (scripture), <i>bhakti</i> (devotion), <i>ahimsa</i> (non-harming), <i>naada</i> (music), and <i>dhyana</i> (meditation)	www.jivamukti.com
Kripalu yoga	Distinguished by an emphasis on bringing awareness to the physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts that arise in practice. Kripalu teachers describe this as “inquiry-based” learning	www.kripalu.org
Kundalini yoga (3HO)	A vigorous practice dedicated to spiritual awakening through the active integration of a wide variety of yoga techniques. Known for integrating posture work with pranayama and mantra	www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga
Kuvalayananda/ Kaivalyadhama (India)	A research Institute, Kaivalyadhama, founded in 1924 by Swami Kuvalayananda. He envisioned bringing modern science and traditional yoga together. Now contains a college, hospital, and a research facility	www.kdham.com
Patanjali yoga (India)	Patanjali yoga promotes the spread of yoga through the work of Swami Ramdev, a leading Indian teacher. The organization has reached most parts of India. It includes a university, a hospital, a training center, and research facility	www.divyayoga.com
Power yoga	A vigorous, fitness-based practice of <i>Hatha yoga</i> . Drawn from the teachings of Patabhi Jois, it focuses on flexibility and strength. Class sequences vary and have been imported into a variety of fitness settings	
Self-realization fellowship	SRF is an organization founded by Paramahansa Yogananda to convey the teachings of <i>Kriya yoga</i> . It offers a meditative path, taught in four steps, combining pranayama, mantra, and initiation	www.yogananda-srf.org
Sivananda yoga	Begins with a traditional, slow paced, meditative class that helps encourage proper breathing, flexibility, strength, and vitality in the body while calming the mind	www.sivananda.org
S-VYASA (India)	Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana (founded in 1970s) is a yoga University (2002) promoting the fourfold message of Swami Vivekananda: <i>karma</i> , <i>bhakti</i> , <i>jnana</i> , and <i>raja</i> yoga. It also includes a hospital and research facility	www.svyasa.edu.in
Viniyoga	A therapeutic approach that adapts methods of practice according to the unique condition, needs and interests of each individual. A gentle practice tailored to a student’s changing condition	www.viniyoga.com
Vinyasa yoga	Traditionally, <i>vinyasa</i> practice is distinguished by its attention to transitions, both within an individual posture and in posture sequences. <i>Vinyasa</i> yoga is now identified with vigorous styles of practice	

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Table 2.3 – continued

Yoga style/school	Key characteristics	Related URLs
Other Western styles and teachers	Agni yoga; Anahata yoga; Amrit yoga (Amrit Desai); Dru yoga; Forrest yoga (Ana Forrest); Hot yoga; ISHTA yoga (Alan Finger); Kriya yoga; Para yoga (Rod Stryker); Prana Flow yoga (Shiva Rae); Restorative yoga; Samatva yoga; Sampoorana yoga (Yogi Hari); Shanti yoga; Shiva yoga; Siddha yoga; Svaroopaa yoga (Swami Nirmalananda); Triyoga (Kali Ray); White Lotus yoga (Tracey Rich and Ganga White); Yin yoga; Mount Madonna Center (Baba Hari Dass)	
Other Indian schools of yoga	Art of Living Foundation; Isha Institute of Inner Sciences; Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya; The Divine Life Society; Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust; The International Centre for Yoga Education and Research; Isha Foundation; Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram; Sannidhi of Krishnamacharya Yoga; Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga; Sri Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; The Yoga Institute, Santacruz; Vipassana International Academy	

Table 2.4 [Styles and schools of yoga](#)

Chakra	Centre	Petals	Physical	Plexus	Endocrine gland	Qualities
Muladhara	Root support lotus	4	Base of spine	Sacral	Gonads	Integration, solidarity, cohesiveness
Swadhisthana	Lotus of one's own abode	6	Pelvis	Hypogastric	Adrenals	Flexibility, diplomacy, equanimity
Manipura	Gem city lotus	10	Navel	Solar	Pancreas	Power, passion, motivation
Anahata	Lotus of unstruck sound	12	Heart	Cardiac	Thymus	Compassion, tolerance, understanding
Vishuddha	Throat/purity	16	Throat	Pharyngeal	Thyroid	Freedom, communication;
Ajna	Brow/intuition	2	Brow	Cavernous	Pituitary	Wisdom, intuition
Sahasrara	Crown	1000	Top of the head	Coronal	Pineal	Transcendence

for the assertion that yoga's ability to enhance health and foster healing emerges from a deep and systematic understanding of human affairs.

There has been an enormous surge in the worldwide growth of yoga in the past few decades, and it is now a multi-billion dollar industry. Many of the popular approaches to yoga visible today are included in

Table 2.4, a list of styles and yoga schools both in the United States and in India.

As time passes, yoga is finding a broad audience. This is happening quite rapidly in the United States. A report from the National Center for Health Statistics notes that overall use of yoga among adults increased from 5.1% in 2002 to 9.5% in 2012 ($p < .05$),

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with use among adults 65 and over almost tripling (1.3% to 3.3%, respectively). Yoga use was most prevalent among adults 18 to 44, jumping from 6.3% in 2002 to 11.2% in 2012 ($p < .05$) (Walker, 2015).

In an interview, Josephine Briggs, MD, director of the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), a division of the National Institutes of Health, noted that health care trends typically tend to remain stable, so the rapid growth in yoga's popularity is especially noteworthy. Briggs suggested that the increased prevalence of yoga is likely due to its role in pain management (particularly musculoskeletal pain), an important area of awareness for health care providers (Walker, 2015).

The degree to which students of any approach validate it with their feet is important, for foot traffic is certainly one practical measure of the usefulness of a teaching. Another is the extent to which yoga philosophy and practice have been carefully examined and wisely fused. Finally, as this book illustrates, claims about yoga are also being investigated by controlled experiment and clinical observation. Since introspection and observation have long been the heart of yoga practice, perhaps these investigations will make it possible to envision a world in which wise use is made of the therapeutic tools of both East and West.

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