

A glance of mental and spiritual health by ayurveda with eight limbed yoga: a review article

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Abstract- Ashtanga Yoga, rooted in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, represents an eight-limbed path to spiritual and holistic well-being. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian science of life, places immense importance on Swasthya (health) for achieving the Purusharthas—Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. This review article explores Ashtanga Yoga in the light of Ayurvedic principles, emphasizing its role in physical, mental, and spiritual health. The integration of Yogic practices such as Yama, Niyama, Asana, and others with Ayurvedic concepts like Dinacharya, Sadvrutta, and Achara Rasayana underlines their shared vision of complete wellness.

Index Terms- Ayurveda , Ashtang yoga , yoga

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda and Yoga are ancient Indian systems of knowledge that aim toward holistic health, well-being, and spiritual liberation. Ayurveda is the science of life, focusing on maintaining health and curing disease through balanced lifestyle, diet, and medicine, while Yoga is the science of self-realization, seeking inner purification through ethical conduct, mental control, and spiritual practices. Both systems recognize the mind-body-spirit connection and work synergistically to promote Swasthya (health). In Ayurveda, achieving balance in Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), Dhatus, and Malas, along with control of senses and mind, is essential for longevity and Moksha. Yoga, especially Ashtanga Yoga prescribed by Maharshi Patanjali, provides a path to achieve this inner and outer balance through its eight limbs. This review explores each limb of Ashtanga Yoga from the Ayurvedic viewpoint, supporting the explanations with Ayurvedic classical references.

1. Yama

Patanjali Yoga Sutra

"अहिंसा सत्यम् अस्तेयं ब्रह्मचर्यं अपरिग्रहः यमाः॥"

Yama consists of five ethical restraints that form the moral foundation of Yoga:

a) *Ahimsa (Non-violence):*

Ahimsa means non-injury in thought, word, and deed. It promotes peace of mind and emotional clarity. Sadvrutta emphasizes non-violence as a key behavioral trait.

"क्षमाये कायमानाम् न कुर्यात्मानं न कामेना क्रोधेन कालेन न च" (C.S. Su. 8/18)

Ahimsa, or non-violence, extends far beyond simply refraining from killing. While the literal meaning implies not harming or taking life, Yoga interprets Ahimsa in a much broader and deeper sense. According to Yogic philosophy, true Ahimsa involves avoiding harm on all levels—**physical**, **verbal**, and **mental**. This means not only abstaining from physical violence but also from speaking harsh words or causing emotional pain. Even harboring negative thoughts or ill-will toward others is considered a form of **mental violence**. Thus, Ahimsa is a comprehensive principle that requires one to maintain compassion, kindness, and harmlessness in thought, speech, and action. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras highlight the profound effects of practicing Ahimsa, indicating its essential role in the path of spiritual growth.

A person who sincerely practices **Ahimsa** gradually eliminates feelings of hostility—not only within themselves but also in those around them. With consistent observance over time, even others who come into contact with the practitioner begin to shed enmity. Ahimsa, therefore, is not just about avoiding physical, verbal, or mental harm; it also involves cultivating an atmosphere free from hatred and

conflict. The transformative impact of such a practice extends beyond the individual to influence their entire environment.

In the study of Yoga, this profound and all-encompassing form of **Ahimsa** is considered essential, especially for those seeking higher spiritual attainment like **Samadhi**. However, not every Yoga practitioner aims for such advanced stages.

Many people practice Yoga for health or peace of mind, and for them, maintaining absolute Ahimsa in all aspects of life may not always be practical.

Take, for example, the case of a fisherman. His livelihood depends on catching and selling fish. If he were to strictly follow the principle of non-violence, he would have to abandon his work entirely, which is unrealistic in his context. Hence, such individuals are not necessarily expected to follow complete Ahimsa.

That said, anyone who aspires to evolve on the Yogic path should aim to gradually reduce harmful actions. Even if one cannot fully adopt non-violence at once, it is important to keep the true meaning of Ahimsa in mind. One should regularly reflect on their actions to identify whether they cause harm—physically, verbally, or mentally. Through this introspection, it becomes possible to recognize avoidable instances of violence and make conscious efforts to eliminate them. This process of mindful observation and correction is the foundational step toward embracing Ahimsa in its truest form.

अहिंसाप्रतिष्ठायां तत्सन्निधौ वैरत्यागः॥

A person who consistently practices **Ahimsa (non-violence)** gradually removes all feelings of hostility within themselves. Over time, this peaceful influence extends to their environment—those who interact with such an individual also experience a transformation, as animosity disappears from their minds too. Therefore, **Ahimsa** goes beyond avoiding physical, verbal, or mental harm; it also involves eradicating the root of enmity itself. Such a practitioner not only transforms themselves but also fosters harmony and peace in their surroundings.

b) Satya (Truthfulness):

Speaking and living truth is central to mental purity.

Honesty is linked with mental Dosha balance and Satvavritti.

Satya goes far beyond merely telling the truth. True **Satya** lies in the alignment of thought, speech, and perception. It means that what we perceive or

understand—through sight, hearing, or experience—should be accurately reflected in our words and thoughts. In this sense, truth is not just factual correctness but also clarity, intent, and usefulness. When we communicate with others, if our words create confusion, mislead, or serve no meaningful purpose—even if factually correct—they cannot be called *true* in the Yogic sense. Truth must be constructive. As per dharmic philosophy, our speech is meant to uplift and support others, not to harm or destroy. Therefore, truth that causes pain, destruction, or conflict is not considered true in spirit, even if it is technically accurate.

The **Mahabharata** provides a thoughtful classification of speech:

- **Silence** is better than meaningless speech.
- **Truthful speech** is superior to silence.
- **Speaking truth aligned with Dharma** is greater than mere truthful speech.
- And the **highest form of truth** is that which aligns with Dharma and is also pleasant and beneficial to others.

By consistently adhering to truthfulness in both speech and conduct, a person attains **Vāk Siddhi**—a spiritual power where their words carry inherent effectiveness. This means that even without performing specific rituals or ceremonies, their speech alone can bring about desired outcomes, both for themselves and for others, as their words gain the potency of blessings and manifest naturally into results.

Patanjali Rishi has stated the truth as follow :

सत्यप्रतिष्ठायां क्रियाफलाश्रयत्वम्॥

By consistently practicing truthfulness in both speech and behavior, a person attains **Vāk Siddhi**—the power of speech that manifests results. This means that without needing to perform specific rituals or religious ceremonies, their words and blessings alone begin to bear fruit, positively influencing both themselves and those around them.

Avoiding theft or exploitation promotes contentment.

अस्तेयप्रतिष्ठायां सर्वत्रलोपस्थानम्॥

Asteya, meaning non-stealing, extends far beyond the simple act of refraining from theft. It encompasses the ethical principle of not taking or keeping anything that does not rightfully belong to oneself. Even if an item appears to be ownerless—like money found on a deserted street—claiming it

with the thought that “someone would take it anyway, so why not me?” still qualifies as theft in the deeper sense.

The real test begins in the mind. On spotting something valuable that doesn’t belong to us, conflicting thoughts arise—one rooted in ethics, cautioning restraint, and another driven by desire, urging action. If the ethical voice is ignored, one may pick up the item, but not without consequence. The inner turmoil causes a spike in heart rate, mental unrest, and persistent guilt. Often, to alleviate the psychological burden, the item might be donated, but even that act is accompanied by hesitation and anxiety about how others might perceive it.

This emotional and physical strain affects not just the mind but also the body, disrupting inner peace and even disturbing physiological functions. **Asteya**, when practiced sincerely, spares the individual from this turmoil. True observance of this Yama ensures mental clarity, peace, and emotional stability.

Moreover, the philosophy of Yoga goes a step further. It teaches that even harboring a thought of stealing—without acting on it—can impact mental and physical well-being. Scientific tools like brainwave monitors can detect significant disturbances during such mental conflicts. Therefore, Yoga advises not only abstaining from theft but also maintaining purity in thought by avoiding even the idea of stealing.

Encouraged in Achara Rasayana to maintain harmony in society.

d) Brahmacharya (Celibacy):

A Yoga practitioner is encouraged to follow **Brahmacharya**—self-restraint in sensual pleasures—but this **does not imply abandoning family life or becoming a renunciate**. Yoga does not demand celibacy in the form of complete detachment from worldly duties. Instead, as a practitioner advances in spiritual discipline, the desire to disengage from worldly distractions may arise naturally. However, not everyone needs to take this path. **Brahmacharya, in its practical sense, means maintaining control over one's desires** while living within the ethical and spiritual boundaries of **Dharma**.

Desires and pleasures are a natural part of household life, but they must be **balanced and regulated**. The key principle is that **we must govern our desires rather than being governed by them**. When desires

become overpowering, they can disturb our mental and physical harmony. Moderation and awareness in thought, action, and lifestyle help maintain inner peace and foster spiritual growth.

While strict observance of Brahmacharya might seem difficult initially, with thoughtful reflection and gradual effort, it becomes manageable. It is recommended to **avoid stimulants**—like provocative literature, imagery, or food—that might incite excess desires. Ancient scriptures provide detailed guidance on this restraint.

For those who have chosen a path of renunciation, certain **disciplines are advised**, such as refraining from:

- Mentally fantasizing about others
- Listening to tales about romantic or sensual acts
- Engaging in flirtatious or suggestive conversations
- Gazing at others lustfully
- Smiling suggestively
- Being alone with someone in a tempting context
- Physical contact outside of ethical bounds
- Sexual relations outside of marital commitment

However, **in modern life, complete avoidance of these situations is often unrealistic**. Instead of rigidly enforcing these rules, one should **understand the underlying intent—to preserve mental and physical well-being by limiting indulgence and cultivating awareness**.

In essence, **Brahmacharya is about mindful engagement** with life’s pleasures without letting them dominate the self.

"ओजास्त्वै क्षीणमान् ब्रह्मचार्या च" (C.S.chi ,1/4)

According to Maharshi Patanjali, a person who steadfastly follows **Brahmacharya** (continence or celibacy) develops great inner clarity and strength. Through this disciplined observance, the practitioner attains **lightness of being, vitality, and spiritual powers (siddhis)** that arise naturally from the preservation and proper direction of energy

ब्रह्मचर्यप्रतिष्ठायां वीर्यलाभः॥

e) Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness):

Non-attachment to possessions cultivates inner peace.

Greed (Lobha) is considered a mental dosha (Adharma), leading to imbalance.

Aparigraha refers to non-hoarding or non-possessiveness—refraining from collecting or storing items beyond what is necessary. It implies detachment from material accumulation. For example, when one is thirsty, a single glass of water suffices to quench the thirst. However, collecting an entire pot of water not only requires unnecessary effort to find the pot and water but also creates new concerns—where to store the extra water, how to maintain its purity, and the mental strain of guarding it. These worries are avoided by simply using what is needed in the moment. This analogy applies to other areas of life as well.

Nature provides enough for our needs—roots, fruits, and natural produce. Still, humans invest time and energy into growing, processing, and preserving food, often consuming more than required to justify those efforts. This cycle of excess leads to dependency and imbalance. Yoga advises us to **break this cycle by living simply and consuming only what is essential**.

Of course, common sense must guide our practice of Aparigraha. The principle is not about renouncing all material comforts but about recognizing what is truly necessary. For instance, eating more food than what the body needs—just for taste—may disturb digestion and lead to diseases like constipation or indigestion. In contrast, eating mindfully supports physical health and mental clarity. A true yogi strives to apply this moderation to all aspects of life, gradually cultivating detachment from unnecessary possessions or desires.

Patanjali Maharshi, in the **Yoga Sutras (P.Y.S. 2.39)**, states:

अपरिग्रहस्थैर्ये जन्मकथंतासंभोधः॥

This reflects the spiritual depth attained through Aparigraha. It clears mental clutter and opens the door to higher consciousness.

Following this, **Patanjali further emphasizes** that the Yamas are **universal ethical principles**:

जातिदेशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमा महाव्रतम् ॥

This indicates that Yamas—including Aparigraha—are not restricted by cultural, social, or temporal factors. They are applicable to everyone, everywhere, and always. These principles are the foundational vows (Mahavratam) for all Yoga aspirants.

2. Niyama :

Niyamas are internal disciplines necessary for purifying the self.

शौचसंतोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्चरप्रणिधानानि नियमाः॥

a) Shaucha (Cleanliness):

Both internal and external cleanliness.

Emphasized in Dinacharya and Panchakarma procedures.

"शुचिर्यात्मान् ज्यो नित्यम् युक्ति कायमा च" (su.S. Su. 24/6)

Shaucha (Purity) refers to cleanliness or purity, which—like *Ahimsa*—has physical, verbal, and mental dimensions. Physical purity is further categorized into external and internal cleanliness. Although *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras* do not elaborate extensively on these aspects, *Hatha Yoga* texts provide detailed instructions for achieving such purification.

For **external physical cleanliness**, Hatha Yoga mentions practices starting from oral hygiene, including specific herbal powders (*churna*) for brushing teeth.

Internal purification is addressed through the six classical *Shuddhi Kriyas* or cleansing techniques:

1. **Dhauti** (cleansing of the digestive tract),
2. **Basti** (yogic enema),
3. **Neti** (nasal cleansing),
4. **Trataka** (gazing technique for mental purification),
5. **Nauli** (abdominal massage through muscular control),
6. **Kapalbhati** (forceful exhalation for respiratory purification).

Each of these methods is designed to remove bodily toxins and improve the overall functioning of internal organs, which directly impacts the mental state.

For **verbal purity**, Yoga advises restraint in speech. Excessive and unnecessary talking is discouraged, as silence conserves energy and aids in internal awareness. Yama, the first limb of Ashtanga Yoga, supports this restraint and contributes to purification of the tongue.

Since Yoga recognizes the deep interconnection between the **body and the mind**, any practice aimed at purifying the body simultaneously influences the mind. For instance, **Trataka** not only purifies the eyes but also steadies mental focus and clears emotional clutter.

According to Patanjali's aphorism: "शौचात् स्वाङ्गाजुगुप्सा परिसंस्पर्गः" (P.Y.S. 2.40), once purity is attained, the practitioner develops a sense of disinterest in bodily indulgences and avoids unnecessary contact with others' bodies, focusing instead on inner development.

Another Sutra explains the psychological outcomes of purification: "सत्त्वशुद्धिसौमनस्यैकाग्र्येन्द्रियजयात्मदर्शनयोग्यता च" (P.Y.S. 2.41), which states that purification leads to clarity of mind (*Sattva Shuddhi*), inner joy, concentration, mastery over senses, and readiness for self-realization

b) *Santosha (Contentment)*:

Promotes mental calm and reduces stress.

Happiness is a component of Swastha Purusha.

Contentment, often overlooked, is a crucial virtue. We observe the constant struggles of all living beings, and their underlying purpose is to achieve mental peace and satisfaction. Yet, we mistakenly seek contentment from external sources, unaware that true contentment is an internal state of mind, independent of external events. It's not a reaction to incidents, but a controllable state.

Yoga subtly implies that learning to be content with what one has can significantly reduce life's pain and suffering. This requires mental preparation. When the mind adopts this attitude of contentment, perpetual happiness follows, for it is the very root of happiness. Conversely, the root cause of suffering is "Trishna" (thirst or desire).

This "Trishna" is beautifully described in the following Sanskrit shloka:

आशा नाम मनुष्याणां काचिदश्चर्यशृङ्खला । यया बद्धाः प्रधावन्ति मुक्तास्तिष्ठन्ति पंगुवत् ॥

This translates to: "Hope is such a chain that when tied with it, the creature starts running, and when released from it, the creature stands peacefully like a lame person." Chasing desires only leads to pain and suffering.

Patanjali, in **Yoga Sutra 2.42**, elaborates on the benefits of contentment:

संतोषादनुत्तमसुखलाभः ॥

This aphorism means: "From contentment, supreme happiness is obtained." One who consistently practices contentment finds their desires weakening, their inner purity (*sattva*) increasing, and experiences

a bliss so profound that even the pleasures of heaven or the realm of Indra pale in comparison

c) *Tapas (Austerity)*:

Voluntary endurance to purify body and mind.

Enhances willpower and Dhi (intellect).

Tapa signifies the willing endurance of difficulties with a positive intent. It's about persisting in one's actions despite physical or mental discomfort. For example, in the pursuit of Yoga, one might encounter physical challenges. Embracing these challenges with a cheerful disposition and continuing one's practice is an act of Tapa.

Types of Tapa

The Bhagavad Gita, in its seventeenth chapter, categorizes Tapa into three types:

- **Sattvic Tapa:** This is performed with faith, without any expectation of results or rewards. It's a selfless endeavor.
- **Rajasic Tapa:** This type of Tapa is undertaken with the desire for status, recognition, or honor. The motivation here is external validation.
- **Tamasic Tapa:** Arising from delusion, Tamasic Tapa involves self-torture and is often performed with the malicious intent of harming others.

The Fruits of Tapa

Patanjali, in the **Yoga Sutras (2.43)**, describes the profound outcomes of practicing Tapa:

कायेन्द्रियसिद्धिरशुद्धिक्षयात्तपसः ॥

This aphorism translates to: "By Tapa, due to the destruction of impurities, perfection of the body and senses is gained."

Here, **Ashuddhi** refers to impurity or unrighteousness, which is a characteristic of the Tamas Guna. These impurities veil or obstruct the attainment of various **siddhis** (yogic powers or perfections), such as Anima (the ability to become as small as an atom). Consistent practice and study of Tapa lead to the removal of these impurities. Once Ashuddhi is eradicated, siddhis like Anima, Mahima (the ability to become infinitely large), and Laghima (the ability to become weightless) can be attained

d) *Swadhyaya (Self-study)*:

Study of spiritual texts and introspection.

Encouraged under Achara Rasayana.

In the context of **Swadhyaya** (self-study), the Ishwar Gita highlights **japa** (repetition of mantras or sacred sounds) as a key practice. This involves both **shravana** (listening) and **manana** (contemplation). Japa can be **oral** or **mental**. Oral japa can be **audible** (loud chanting) or **inaudible** (whispers). Mental japa can be performed **with** or **without dhyana** (meditation), with japa **without dhyana** being considered the most effective. For common individuals, Swadhyaya broadly means reviewing what has been learned.

The Fruits of Swadhyaya

Patanjali, in **Yoga Sutra 2.44**, outlines the results of Swadhyaya:

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासंप्रयोगः

This aphorism signifies that through Swadhyaya, one achieves communion with their chosen deity. Upon the completion of a specific mantra's recitation (anushtan), the deity associated with that japa becomes pleased and may manifest before the practitioner, offering a "darshan" or divine vision

e) Ishwar Pranidhana (Surrender to God):

Devotion to a higher power reduces ego.

Forms the basis of Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa.

Ishwar Pranidhan embodies complete faith and surrender to the existence and greatness of God, without any expectation of personal gain. It's the recognition of a divine, unimaginable power underpinning the universe and the act of completely dedicating oneself to it.

There are nine traditional forms of devotion to God:

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् । अर्चनं वंदनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥

These encompass listening to divine glories, chanting, remembering, serving the feet of the Lord, worshipping, prostrating, serving as a servant, befriending, and complete self-surrender. In life, even our persistent efforts sometimes fall short. At such times, divine grace, attained through Ishwar Pranidhan, can resolve our difficulties.

Patanjali further emphasizes the power of Ishwar Pranidhan in **Yoga Sutra 2.45**:

समाधिसिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात् ॥

This sutra states that through Ishwar Pranidhan, the ultimate state of **Samadhi** (union with the divine, or profound meditative absorption) can be attained.

2. Asana (Posture)

"स्थिरसुखमासनम्"

— *Pātañjal Yoga Sūtra 2.46*

The term "Asana" originates from Sanskrit, literally translating to "seat" or "sitting." In its classical interpretation, particularly within early yogic texts, asana primarily implied a stable sitting pose maintained for an extended duration, serving as a prerequisite for deeper meditative practices and the cultivation of stillness. This original emphasis was on achieving comfort and steadiness to facilitate prolonged periods of introversion and mental calm.

Over time, particularly with the advent of Hatha Yoga and the subsequent development of modern yoga as exercise, the understanding and practice of asana underwent a significant expansion. The term broadened to encompass a wide array of physical positions, including reclining, standing, inverted, twisting, and balancing postures. This evolution reflects a notable shift from primarily meditative postures to a more comprehensive physical culture. This historical development in the understanding and practice of asana indicates a fundamental divergence between its classical yogic intent, which prioritized meditative stability, and its popular modern physical application, often focused on athleticism and movement. This divergence necessitates a careful re-evaluation of asana's purpose when integrated with Ayurvedic principles, as the traditional Ayurvedic texts primarily interacted with the earlier, more static definition

Stable and comfortable postures that prepare the body for meditation. In Yoga, **asana** (Sanskrit: आसन) refers to a body posture or pose. While its original meaning in ancient texts like Patanjali's Yoga Sutras was primarily "seat" – specifically for seated meditation – its scope expanded significantly in Hatha Yoga and modern practices.

Today, asanas encompass a wide variety of positions: standing, sitting, reclining, inversions, twists, and balancing poses. The essence, as Patanjali states, is that an asana should be "**sthira sukham asanam**" – steady and comfortable. It's not merely about physical contortion but finding a stable and effortless posture that allows for stillness of body and mind.

Asanas offer numerous benefits, including increased flexibility, strength, balance, improved circulation,

and stress reduction. They are a crucial component of yoga practice, preparing the body and mind for deeper states of concentration and meditation.

Asana Maintains Vata balance and supports physical Sthirata (stability). Asanas enhance circulation, aid in digestion, relieve muscular tension, and promote awareness.

Types of Asanas

1. Meditative Āsanās (ध्यानार्थ आसनानि):

These are meant for long sitting in meditation.

- पद्मासनम् (Padmāsana) – Lotus Pose
- सिद्धासनम् (Siddhāsana) – Perfect Pose
- स्वस्तिकासनम् (Svastikāsana) – Auspicious Pose
- वज्रासनम् (Vajrāsana) – Diamond Pose

◆ Helps maintain spine erect, stabilizes body and breath for Dhyāna.

2. Relaxative Āsanās (विश्रान्तिकारक आसनानि):

These provide deep rest and relaxation.

- शवासनम् (Śavāsana) – Corpse Pose
- मकरासनम् (Makarāsana) – Crocodile Pose

◆ Used after intense practices to normalize heartbeat, breath and restore energy.

3. Cultural/Physical Āsanās (शारीरिक आसनानि):

These improve flexibility, strength, and balance.

Examples:

- भुजङ्गासनम् (Bhujāṅgāsana) – Cobra Pose
- त्रिकोणासनम् (Trikoṇāsana) – Triangle Pose
- पश्चिमोत्तानासनम् (Paścimottānāsana) – Seated Forward Bend
- सर्वाङ्गासनम् (Sarvāṅgāsana) – Shoulder Stand
- हलासनम् (Halāsana) – Plow Pose
- मयूरासनम् (Mayūrāsana) – Peacock Pose

◆ Supports digestion, circulation, glandular function, muscular tone

Benefits of Āsana

"ततो

द्वन्द्वानभिघातः॥"

— *Pātañjal Yoga Sūtra 2.48*

By mastering Āsana, one becomes free from the disturbances caused by dualities (heat/cold, pleasure/pain, etc.).

- Increases **Sharīra Sthiratā** (bodily stability).
- Brings **Chitta Ekāgratā** (mental concentration).
- Corrects **postural defects**.
- Facilitates proper **breath control**.
- Stimulates **endocrine glands**.

□ Detoxifies **Nāḍī Mārgas**.

4. Pranayama :

"तस्मिन् सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोगतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः॥"

Pātañjal Yoga Sūtra 2.49

Regulation of Prana through controlled breathing. It purifies the Nadis (energy channels), balances Doshas, improves lung capacity, and enhances mental clarity.

Pranayama, a cornerstone of yogic practice, translates to "control of breath." "Prana" signifies both the physical breath and the vital life force or energy within the body, while "ayama" means control. Therefore, Pranayama is the deliberate regulation of this life-sustaining energy through breath.

By mastering the rhythms of pranic energy, one can cultivate a healthier body and a more serene mind. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras highlight Pranayama as a pathway to elevated states of awareness, emphasizing breath retention as a key technique for reaching **Samadhi** (a state of profound meditation). Hatha Yoga further details eight distinct types of Pranayama, each designed to foster physical and mental well-being.

The body's various pranic activities are governed by five primary pranas: **Prana**, **Apana**, **Vyana**, **Udana**, and **Samana**. Among these, **Prana** (upward flowing energy) and **Apana** (downward flowing energy) are considered the most crucial. Consistent Pranayama practice aims to balance the interplay of these pranas, leading to optimal health and a harmonious mind.

Types of Pranayama:

According to classical Yoga texts

1. पूरक (Pūraka) – Inhalation

The process of taking air inside in a controlled and conscious manner.

- Enhances **Prāṇa Vāyu**
- Nourishes **Rasa Dhātu** through proper oxygenation
- Stimulates **Hridaya (heart)** and supports **Chetana**

2. रेचक (Rechaka) – Exhalation

The process of expelling air out of the lungs completely and slowly.

- Removes **Doṣa (toxins)** via expulsion of stale air
- Balances **Apāna Vāyu**, aiding in detoxification
- Helps relieve anxiety and mental tension

3. कुम्भक (Kumbhaka) – Retention of Breath

There are two types:

- अन्तः कुम्भक – Retention after inhalation
- बाह्य कुम्भक – Retention after exhalation
- Increases **Ojas** and enhances **Agni**
- Deepens **mental stillness** and **Dhyāna sthiti**
- Balances all **Tridoṣa**, especially **Vāta Doṣa**
- Trains the **Nāḍīs** for higher yogic purification

Pranayama Types and Ayurvedic Applications

For Balancing Vata Dosha (Air & Ether): Vata, characterized by its cold, dry, light, and mobile nature, benefits from grounding, calming, and warming Pranayama.

- **Nadi Shodhana Pranayama (Alternate Nostril Breathing):** Highly recommended, this rhythmic and soothing practice harmonizes the *ida* and *pingala* nadis, calming the nervous system, reducing anxiety, and fostering mental clarity.
- **Ujjayi Pranayama (Victorious Breath):** While generally balancing, its gentle warming effect and ability to steady the mind make it excellent for Vata imbalances, easing restlessness and promoting inner peace.
- **Bhramari Pranayama (Humming Bee Breath):** The soothing vibrations and sound help ground scattered Vata energy, alleviate stress, and improve sleep quality.

For Balancing Pitta Dosha (Fire & Water): Pitta, with its hot, sharp, and intense qualities, requires cooling, calming, and soothing Pranayama.

- **Sheetali Pranayama (Cooling Breath) and Sheetkari Pranayama (Hissing Breath):** These are specifically designed to reduce excess body heat, soothe inflammation, and calm fiery emotions like anger or irritation.
- Gentle **Nadi Shodhana** can also benefit Pitta by balancing and calming an agitated mind, particularly when irritability is present.

For Balancing Kapha Dosha (Earth & Water): Kapha, known for its heavy, slow, cool, and moist attributes, thrives on stimulating, warming, and energizing Pranayama.

- **Bhastrika Pranayama (Bellows Breath):** This vigorous, heating practice invigorates *agni* (digestive fire), clears congestion, and combats the lethargy typical of Kapha imbalances.
- **Kapalabhati Pranayama (Skull Shining Breath):** While often considered a cleansing *kriya*, its rapid, forceful exhalations effectively clear respiratory passages, energize the mind, and reduce feelings of heaviness by generating internal warmth.
- **Surya Bhedana Pranayama (Sun Piercing Breath):** Involving inhalation through the right nostril, this practice is heating and stimulating, boosting energy and vitality for Kapha individuals.

Ayurvedic View: Balances Prana Vata, enhances Agni, and aids in managing conditions like anxiety, asthma, and indigestion.

"औझास्य टान्दुलो वायु च प्राण योगम् च" (C.S. Su. 1/137)

5. Pratyahara :

"स्वविषयासंप्रयोगे चित्तस्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणां प्रत्याहारः॥" (Pātañjali Yoga Sūtra 2.54)

Withdrawal of the senses from their respective objects and their turning inward, imitating the mind.

Pratyahara, the fifth limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga, is a critical step in the yogic journey, often described as the **"withdrawal of the senses."** It forms a vital link between the external practices (like ethical restraints and physical postures) and the internal disciplines of meditation.

The term "Pratyahara" combines "prati" (against or away) and "ahara" (food or external intake). This "ahara" refers not just to physical nourishment but to the constant stream of information our senses consume from the outside world. Essentially, Pratyahara is the deliberate effort to gain control over these external influences and direct our awareness inward.

Imagine a turtle pulling its limbs and head into its shell for protection. Similarly, Pratyahara involves consciously disengaging the mind from the endless

external stimuli that bombard us. It's not about blocking out sensory input entirely, but rather about choosing where our attention goes. The senses still function, but their power to pull the mind outward is minimized.

Why is Pratyahara Essential?

In our modern, overstimulated lives, our senses are constantly overwhelmed, leading to mental clutter, distraction, and often, energetic depletion. Pratyahara helps by:

- **Conserving Mental Energy:** By reducing external distractions, the mind saves vital energy, which can then be used for internal focus.
- **Calming the Mind:** When the senses are less engrossed in external objects, the constant flow of thoughts and emotions (known as *vrittis*) naturally subsides, fostering a quieter mind.
- **Preparing for Meditation:** Without the ability to withdraw the senses, deep concentration (*Dharana*) and meditation (*Dhyana*) are incredibly challenging. Pratyahara creates the necessary internal environment.
- **Cultivating Inner Peace:** By shifting attention from the outer world, practitioners begin to connect with their inner self, discovering inherent peace and stillness.

How is Pratyahara Practiced?

While not a physical pose, Pratyahara is developed through various approaches:

- **Sensory Withdrawal (*Indriya Pratyahara*):** This involves intentionally reducing external input. Examples include practicing in quiet spaces, closing your eyes during meditation, or focusing intensely on an internal point like your breath.
- **Control of Prana (*Prana Pratyahara*):** Since *prana* (life force) drives the senses, controlling its flow helps in sensory withdrawal. This is closely linked to Pranayama, where breath control is used to internalize vital energy.
- **Control of Action (*Karma Pratyahara*):** This involves acting without attachment to results, as in Karma Yoga. By letting go of

expectations for personal gain, the mind isn't pulled outward by desires.

- **Withdrawal of Mind (*Mano Pratyahara*):** This is the advanced stage where the mind itself is consciously directed away from unhelpful or distracting thoughts and turned inward. It's about actively managing your internal responses to external events.

Ultimately, Pratyahara is the practice of redirecting your mind's focus from external sensory engagement to internal awareness, empowering you to regain control over your perceptions and embark on a deeper journey of self-discovery.

7. Dharana (Concentration)

"देशबन्धश्चित्तस्य धारणा॥" (Pātañjali Yoga Sūtra 3.1):

Fixing the mind on a single object or place. It marks the beginning of Antaranga Yoga (internal practice).

Sharpens Dhi (intellect), Smriti (memory), and Buddhi (discriminative power). Useful in Manasika Roga management like anxiety and attention disorders.

Example Practices: Trataka (gazing), focus on breath or mantra.

8. Dhyana :

"तत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम्॥" (Pātañjali Yoga Sūtra 3.2):

Uninterrupted flow of concentration toward a single object

Continuous flow of awareness toward a single point. Dhyana leads to mental purification and increased Sattva Guna.

Enhances Ojas and promotes balance in the mind-body matrix. Recommended for treating psychological imbalances (e.g., Unmada, Apasmara).

"मनो धारण्यम् च चित्ता औझानाम् च" (ch. Sa. Chi 1/27)

9. Samadhi :

"तदेवार्थमात्रनिर्भासं स्वरूपशून्यमिव समाधिः॥" (Pātañjali Yoga Sūtra 3.3)

When only the object of meditation shines forth and the self is absent, that state is called **Samādhi**.

Ultimate absorption into the object of meditation, where duality disappears.

Represents peak Sattva dominance. A state of Nirvikalpa (non-dual awareness), Samadhi is

synonymous with Moksha. When this is achieved, all Tridoshas are balanced, and Purusha becomes independent of Prakriti.

Types of Samādhi

Samādhi is the eighth and final limb of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga. It represents the ultimate state of meditation, where the duality between the observer and the observed dissolves.

Patañjali classifies Samādhi into two broad categories:


1. Savikalpa Samādhi (सविकल्पसमाधिः)

Also called Sabīja Samādhi or Samprajñāta Samādhi.

“सर्वार्थतैकाग्र्यं सविकल्पः।”

Characteristics:

- The meditator is still aware of the object of meditation.
- There is still mental activity (vikalpa), such as reflection, perception, and joy.
- Involves gunas and ego, and has a beginning and end.

 *Subtypes :*


1. Vitarka Anugata Samādhi – Meditation with reasoning (on gross objects, e.g., idol, body).
2. Vicāra Anugata Samādhi – Meditation with subtle thought (on subtle elements like tanmātras).
3. Ānanda Anugata Samādhi – Absorbed in blissful experience.
4. Asmitā Anugata Samādhi – Absorbed in sense of pure “I-am-ness”.

In this state, Sattva predominates, but Rajas and Tamas are not fully dissolved. It's still useful for mental purification and psychosomatic balance.

2. Nirvikalpa Samādhi (निर्विकल्पसमाधिः)

Also known as Nirbīja Samādhi or Asamprajñāta Samādhi .

"तस्यापि निरोधे सर्वनिरोधान्निर्बीजः समाधिः॥"

 *Characteristics:*

- No object remains in awareness.
- Total dissolution of mind; no thoughts, emotions, ego.
- The practitioner becomes one with pure consciousness (Purusha).
- It is the state of Kaivalya (liberation).

CONCLUSION

Ashtanga Yoga provides a comprehensive framework for spiritual development and mental peace. From an Ayurvedic perspective, it is deeply intertwined with principles like Swasthavrutta, Achara Rasayana, and Satvavajaya. Both systems aim at complete health and liberation through ethical living, physiological balance, and mental purification. The detailed practice of each limb harmonizes the physical body (Sharira), the mind (Manas), and the spirit (Atma), fulfilling Ayurveda's definition of Swastha Purusha.

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