

MARTINA MITTAG

HATHA

YOGA

THE COMPLETE BOOK

MEYER & MEYER SPORT



HATHA YOGA

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Winshape[®]

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The contents of this book were carefully researched. However, neither the authors nor the publisher assume liability for any injuries or damages resulting from the advice provided in this book.

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WHERE EXERCISE IS FUN



Author's Note: This book is part of the DTB (German Gymnastics Association) series "Where Exercise is Fun". It provides a complete introduction to the fundamentals of DTB yoga training, and it also serves as a reference work. We are aware that terms like "sport" and "training" with regard to yoga may cause some confusion and may seem contradictory to the yoga philosophy. While Hatha Yoga is considered a "physical practice", the practice of yoga is neither competitive, nor is it a form of athletic training or a method for increasing athletic performance.

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PREFACE

Yoga – the “gentle way of working the body and finding relaxation”.

That is how the teaching about the oneness of all life has gained popularity in the West over the past 20 years.

This millennia-old practice from India has been credited with many positive effects on health and wellbeing, vitality, and mobility. The benefits are obvious. Interest in yoga classes at fitness studios and athletic facilities is correspondingly large. New styles of yoga have been and are constantly being created for the various target groups and their respective needs.

Inevitably, there are many misunderstandings as to the actual meaning and purpose of yoga. The interpretations and objectives of the different yoga styles are as varied as there are physical, emotional, social, creative, and spiritual needs.

The holistic teachings of YOGA facilitate many objectives. By definition, the term yoga indicates that ONENESS is the path and the goal.

Thus, the desire to stay healthy and fit and relax through simple movements that are conducive to rehabilitation and regeneration is just as valid as the urge to occasionally burn off energy through dynamic exercise sequences. To some extent, this already demonstrates yoga’s intent to integrate polar opposites.

In doing so the actual intention of yoga, namely “quieting the cognitive-mental activity” (Patanjali, Yoga Sutra: *citta-vrtti-nirodha*) and practicing in the spirit of “detachedness” (*vairagya*), can easily be forgotten. After all, detachedness means that one practices yoga absent of concern for the past and future achievements. The centuries-old, even millennia-old yoga tradition was always about reconciling the intention of practicing and the lack of intention, two seemingly irreconcilable opposites. If we fail to question the performance that we find so often on the mats, the practice of yoga can no longer live up to its original meaning of ONENESS.

Yoga is not a random form of “trendy exercise” for the masses as the media likes to portray it. In fact, yoga is based on a mindset that should be cultivated and refined in silence so that its beneficial effects can truly take effect.

Ultimately, yoga’s effectiveness does not depend on specific Asanas (physical poses) but primarily on mindfulness, inner calm, precision of execution, and the intention of the practitioner. Aspiring yoga instructors should focus in particular on developing their sense of sensitivity.

In this sophisticated foundational work, Martina Mittag has set herself to meeting all of these requirements. The book *Hatha Yoga* unveils the traditional teaching that from a philosophical point of view is often difficult for Westerners to understand.

In fact, yoga is a holistic empirical science with the goal of reconciling the seemingly opposite poles of body and consciousness, intellect and emotion, matter and spirit, and harmonizing them.

Hatha Yoga – the family name or umbrella term for all types of yoga based on the body's energy and the respective poses – begins with the physical experience, but while quietly holding an external pose, an inner mindset can develop that is focused, alert, and extremely sensitive.

Based on this understanding, the “body” in yoga isn't just the body but something comprehensive that includes subtle levels of energy, the mental and the spiritual. Thus, the integral approach of the Hatha Yoga practice goes well beyond the “modern”, functional understanding of a “body workout”.

In the 1970s/1980s, when yoga had not yet found its way into fitness studios and athletic facilities, this holistic view was still met with a complete lack of understanding in the West. It had an air of the exotic and mysterious. Staying in seemingly acrobatic poses without moving reminded many of the images of Indian ascetics on a bed of nails, an absurd image for modern man. Yoga enthusiasts were often met with suspicion as if they were followers of religious cults or at best they were derided as eccentric weirdoes.

But over the past 20 years, the image of yoga has gradually changed in the western world. Yoga became socially acceptable in Germany when adult education centers began to offer Hatha Yoga classes as part of their regular course schedule to promote and protect health.

At that time – in 1989 – I was asked to teach a yoga class at Club Meridian (later MeridianSpa) that would provide a balance between strictly physical exercise and a spiritual orientation. It was the first fitness business in Hamburg to place an unusually high degree of importance on medical fitness and ambience to provide its membership with the best conditions for regeneration and wellbeing.

Martina, dance instructor and fitness trainer, as well as area director of classes at MeridianSpa Wandsbek, attended my weekly yoga classes. Her unbiased, open attitude towards yoga and other alternative disciplines such as the Feldenkrais Method, Shiatsu, Tai Chi, and Qigong became apparent when she took over responsibility for conceiving, managing, and developing the “Spirit Center” in Wandsbek.

An active exchange took place over the course of increasing collaboration with Martina. After several yoga instructor training courses, she became a trainer for yoga instructors for the German Sports Association's VTF (Association for Gymnastics).

As a consultant and co-examiner, I had the opportunity to witness the superior quality she demanded from her aspiring yoga instructors.

Meanwhile, the demand for responsible health practices has increased in many businesses, whereby great importance is attached to the functionality of training methods. Detailed knowledge of anatomy is not only required of PE teachers but also of yoga instructors so that they are better able to assess their participants' abilities and capacities.

Martina has given lots of consideration to the active interplay between physical and cognitive-mental processes and thoroughly addressed the important aspects of the composition and effect of a pose, muscle function, the importance of breathing, and the inner attitude with respect to directing energy and consciousness. She also formulated the careful preparation, introduction, and execution of each Asana, its release, and follow-up sensation after each pose.

HATHA YOGA

In the opening chapters, Martina offers a philosophical overview of the sources of yoga, points out its major spiritual demands in terms of self-discovery and self-awareness, and offers a detailed description of the basic energy requirements within the Kosha system, the subtle body regions or realms of experience, and the chakras, the energy transformers within the etheric body.

In her description of the origin of individual Asanas, she takes into account the different key aspects of lines of tradition and thereby confirms a very generous, impartial view that makes it possible to assess the advantages and disadvantages of the effects of an exercise.

The precise, plainly illustrated instructions for 34 classic Asanas and different lesson plans that have been compiled from many different teaching units, offer extensive material to highly motivated yoga instructors for years of study, whereby both the scientific analytical side as well as intuitive creative abilities are being nurtured.

The reader is given detailed guidelines for structuring his classes that leaves nothing to be desired with respect to inspiration for different exercise sequences and specific analysis of all relevant aspects.

This primarily practice-oriented book is intended as a companion to yoga instructor training. Knowing full well that participants can't remember the entire training content of 200-500 hours of instruction, this book can also serve as a reference work to deepen knowledge on certain topics and provide the reader with the opportunity to incorporate the knowledge, in appropriate doses, into the respective class situations.

Kirti Peter Michel

Yoga instructor, instructor of psychosomatic health education, author







INTRODUCTION

This book provides an introduction to the fundamentals of yoga for aspiring yoga instructors but also works as a well-researched reference work for those interested in all yoga traditions.

The content of this book includes the first 100 hours of the German Gymnastics Association yoga instructor training. It is based on classical yoga according to Patanjali and uses the *Ashtanga Marga*, the eightfold yoga path, as a guideline. This book also forms the basis for subsequent levels of the 500 total training hours, over the course of which additional philosophical systems and concepts are taught.

Since 2006, I have been the director of the VTF/DTB's yoga instructor training in Hamburg, which since its inception, I have played a decisive role in its design and conception. During my now nearly 12 years of yoga training experience, it has become obvious to me that during the process participants develop an increasingly deeper interest in living the yoga practice. Sometimes they start out with only cautious curiosity. Over the course of their training they tend to develop a deep affection for yoga combined with a desire to learn more. The individual training modules are very dense in terms of theoretical and practical content and require processing of and immersion in the material between modules. It was from these circumstances that this book emerged.

This guide focuses on Hatha Yoga's energy concept and its practical implementation. The reader will receive an introduction in the chakra system, and complete lesson plans provide the readers with opportunities to personally experience and implement the content. The 34 most common yoga poses are explained with respect to their correct alignment, symbolism, execution, as well as preparatory and introductory exercises, which in turn provides a sound background for the lesson plans.

This book provides aspiring yoga instructors with a detailed manual on how to create a lesson plan, taking into account didactic and methodological aspects. The participant and his needs take priority at all times. People do not have to adapt to yoga, rather yoga is adapted to the respective target groups. A beginning yoga practitioner does not require certain prerequisites such as flexibility, motor skills, or strength. The practice is not oriented to yoginis and yogis with perfect bodies who accomplish seemingly impossible feats in breathtaking "poses", but it wants to encourage people to feel comfortable attending a yoga class, especially if they don't feel particularly fit or feel very stressed.

Teaching is a dynamic process. Every teacher is also a student. The longer you do yoga, the deeper you immerse yourself in the contents and always discover new aspects. As I was writing the individual chapters, I became aware over and over again how varied, profound, and insightful engaging with the individual topics really is. The book is an invitation to take a look at yourself in the mirror of the millennia-old and still highly relevant wisdom of yoga, and to recognize and embrace your own needs, essential features, and qualities in the yoga light.







1 YOGA – SIGNIFICANCE AND HISTORY



1 YOGA – SIGNIFICANCE AND HISTORY

“THE STATE OF ONENESS”

“AS I WAS WRITING THE INDIVIDUAL CHAPTERS, I BECAME AWARE OVER AND OVER AGAIN HOW VARIED, PROFOUND, AND INSIGHTFUL ENGAGING WITH THE INDIVIDUAL TOPICS REALLY IS.”

Yoga is considered one of the oldest practice regimens in human history still being practiced today. Yoga is comprised of different spiritual paths and systems intended to help people achieve the yogic state, oneness.

The Sanskrit word *yoga* means *unification, connection*. It comes from the root word *yui*, which means to *harness, unite, connect*, but also to yoke. Etymologically, yoga refers to the German word “Joch”¹ (yoke). It refers to the individual’s connection and unification with his universal primal force. The universal primal force is also referred to as “the Absolute”, “the One”, “the Source of all Being”, or the “Divine Source”.

Yoga means an individual’s state that is rooted in his true existence. The yoga practice focuses exclusively on achieving awareness that involves the integration of heart, mind, body, and spirit.

1.1 EVOLUTION OF YOGA AS REFLECTED IN INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

The evolution of yoga is a process that stretches over centuries and millennia. Summarizing it in just a few sentences does not even remotely do justice to the topic’s complexity. Since this reference and practice book focuses on Hatha Yoga, the following overview includes only basic information to provide a rough outline of the overall system and its contexts. The book’s appendix provides an overview of the more detailed literature on the evolution of yoga.

¹ Huchzermeyer, W. (2006, 6th edition. 2015). *The Yoga Dictionary, Sanskrit terms and definitions, practice styles, biographies.* (Pg. 226) Karlsruhe: W. Huchzermeyer Publishing

1.1.1 HIGH CIVILIZATION IN THE INDUS VALLEY: 3000-1800 BC

The history of yoga can be traced back to approx. 3000-5000 BCE. There is debate about the exact date. Some writings estimate the age of seals discovered in the Indus valley (today's Northwest India) as approx. 3500 BCE, others even as far back as 5000 BCE.

The seals show symbols that depict yoga poses (seated poses). One of the most famous images is "Muhlabandhasana", an Asana that affects the root center (Muladhara) in the lower pelvic area and is said to direct energy.

During the early Indus culture, people revered the female energy (Shakti force) as the Mother of all Life, placed the feminine principle above the male. The invasion of Indo-Aryans beginning around 1500 BCE, in Northwestern India ended Shaktism.



Fig. 1: This seal from the Indus valley shows yoga poses (seated poses), here the "Muhlabandhasana".

1.1.2 VEDISM: 1500-1000 BC

India's oldest texts are the Vedas. They are considered the source texts of yoga, as well as the foundation of Hinduism. *Veda* means *knowledge*. According to tradition, the "Rishis" (wise, holy men) received these texts during meditation. They are referred to as "Shruti" texts, which means "not created by man". These collections of texts (Samhitas) consist largely of hymns and mantras of which the *Rigveda-Samhita* is the oldest and most famous. For centuries, these texts were passed down orally.

The era of Vedas was characterized by deep religious beliefs and a close relationship with nature. Deities like Indra (king of the gods, thunder), Agni (fire), Surya (sun) and Vayu (wind) were worshipped and were presented with different sacrificial rituals, and loving veneration was expressed in the form of chants, sacrifice sayings, and sacred actions. But the Rigveda also says:

"Truth is ONE, though the wise men refer to it in many different ways." (Rigveda,1.164.46).

1.1.3 THE UPANISHADS

The *Upanishads* are the most recent and the final portion of the Vedas. The era of external, sacred, and ritual actions ended with the beginning of the Upanishads. *Upanishad* means *to sit close, to be close to the truth*, intending to sit at the feet of an enlightened teacher and receive guidance.²

The Upanishads are part of the Shruti texts, but they have a distinctly different character. While the Vedas emphasize the external physical world, the Upanishads focus on internalization and the meditative experience of the reality that is the basis of life.

"Hidden within the heart of every living creature there exists the Self, subtler than the most subtle, greater than the greatest." (Katha Upanishad, 1.2.20³).

1.1.4 BRAHMANISM: 800-500 BC

Old Vedic poems, the Brahmanas, are thought to be the basis. The Brahmans, the caste of priests and scholars, played an important role. As experts on sacrifices and rituals, they occupied a key position and were considered intermediaries between humans and gods. But in Brahmanism the Vedic gods, like Agni, Indra, Vayu, lost their importance.

Brahman means *growing, stretching*, that which stretches, bursting into growth⁴. Brahmanism is based on the teaching of *Atman* and *Brahman*, which was already couched in the Upanishads. *Atman* is the individual soul, man's true self. *Brahman* is the world soul, the dynamic principle that is behind all appearances. *Brahman* is not an individual god but the cosmic substance, the source of everything. *Atman* is the cosmic, divine spark in a human being.

Significant groundwork for the Indian religions was laid during this time, like the concepts of *Maya* (the world as we know it is an illusion), *Karma* (consequence of an action), *Samsara* (flow, cycle of reincarnations), and *Moksha* (redemption, spiritual relief).

"The Self is truly Brahman, but out of ignorance people identify it as the intellect, the mind, the senses, passions, and the elements earth, water, air, space, and fire". (Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, 4.5).⁵

1.1.5 SANKHYA: 800 BC-700 AD

The original *Sankhya system* (pronounced Sum-khya) is traced back to the wise man Kapila. It is a spiritual-cosmic evolutionary theory that has greatly influenced a large part of Indian spirituality.

2 Easwaran, E. (2008, 4th edition). *The Upanishads* (pg. 16) Munich: Goldmann

3 Easwaran, E., pg. 125.

4 Easwaran, E., pg. 419.

5 Easwaran, E., pg. 70.

Sankhya means *number*. The universe and everything in it is listed via 25 Tattvas (guiding principles, existence factors). The Purusha principle (pure consciousness, amorphous mind) and *Prakriti* (the sum of all tangible and ethereal natural appearances) are important parts of Sankhya philosophy. Classic, systematized Sankhya implies a dualistic worldview.

THE 25 TATTVAS ARE:

- 1) **Purusha** – amorphous mind, the silent witness, the Self,
- 2) **Prakriti** – active, primordial nature,
- 3) **Buddhi** – cosmic, higher intelligence,
- 4) **Ahamkara** – “ego maker”, awareness of the Self,
- 5) **Manas** – the thinking intellect, tied to the senses,
- 6-10) **Jnanendriyas** – the perceiving and cognitive senses: smell, taste, sight, touch, hearing,
- 11-15) **Karmendriyas** – working senses: walking, excretion, procreation, grasping, speaking,
- 16-20) **Tanmatras** – the ethereal elements: sound, touch, form, taste, smell,
- 21-25) **Mahabhutas** – the great elements: space, air, fire, water, earth.

The systematic listing is meant to facilitate better understanding of the structure of the universe and the mind. Apprehending all of these aspects of reality requires acute observation combined with an extremely refined perception.

Anna Trökes describes three major stages in the evolution of the Sankhya theory:⁶

- » **Early Sankhya precursor from 800-100 BC**
The early forms of Sankhya have a theistic focus. According to Trökes, the principal goal of liberating knowledge is for the individual to understand his innermost reality as a reflection of and sharing in the absolute or the divine, and most of all, to experience himself in this sharing.
- » **Systematic Sankhya and classic Sankhya from 500 BC-450 AD**
This way of thinking is atheistic. Classic Sankhya does not include reciprocal penetration of Purusha (the essence) and Prakriti (nature). It is a dualistic worldview.

One of the key assertions of classic Sankhya philosophy is: “The innermost being should not be confused with nature, the world of appearances.”⁷

6 Trökes, A. (2013). *Die kleine Yoga Philosophie*. (pg. 150-166). Munich: O. W. Barth.

7 Michel, K. P. & Wellmann, W. (2003). *Das Yoga der Fünf Elemente*. (pg. 45.) Bern: Scherz Verlag.

According to the Sankhya perspective, sorrow and pain exist only on the Prakriti level. Identifying with Prakriti is a delusion, and it is important to realize that Purusha and Prakriti are not one.

» **Vedantization of Sankhya and its end as a separate system**

During the final phase, the original idea of oneness comes into effect once more.

The basic elements of Sankhya theory are found in the *Bhagavadgita*, in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, and also in *Tantrism*, each in modified form.

1.2 TIME OF THE EPICS: 400 BC – 400 AD

1.2.1 MAHABHARATA, RAMAYANA, BHAGAVADGITA, GITA

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are India's great national epics. The *Ramayana* describes the life of the hero Rama and his wife Sita⁸ in 24,000 double verses. *Maha* means great. The *Mahabharata* tells the story of the Bharatas in 10,000 double verses.

The *Bhagavadgita* (the song of the sublime) is embedded in the *Mahabharata* as a sixth chapter. It is a spiritual poem and a timeless teaching document consisting of 18 chapters with 701 verses.

The *Gita* is a spiritual instruction in which *Krishna* (the sublime) explains the yoga pathways to the warrior Arjuna, who is floundering. Krishna came to earth during a dark time as a friend to men to lead them to a new consciousness.

The *Gita's* narrative framework is an imminent fight between two related families, which is preceded by a long-standing conflict. This conflict represents the conflict of a person inside of whom the enlightening mental faculties fight the dark forces of the ego for supremacy. The highly symbolic story reveals that light and shadow are not neatly separated from each other. There is always an aspect of darkness in light, and an aspect of light in darkness.

The different yoga pathways Krishna shows are not mutually exclusive. They imply that it is possible for every person to also follow the yoga pathways in everyday life according to their individual predisposition.

- » Jnana Yoga as the path of knowledge, wisdom, enlightenment;
- » Dhyana Yoga as the path of meditation, immersion;
- » Karma Yoga as the path of action, acting selflessly;
- » Bhakti Yoga as the path of love, reverence, devotion.

8 Huchzermeyer, W. (2015, pg. 157).

*"It is better to fulfill one's own law of action (swadharma) even if it is flawed, than the law of another even if it is perfect. Suffering death while abiding by one's own essential law is preferable. Following another's essential law is dangerous."*⁹ (*Yoga des Handelns*, chapter III, verse 35).

1.3 CLASSICAL YOGA ACCORDING TO PATANJALI: 200 BC-200 AD

The *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali are combinations and restatements of philosophical source texts. The sutras are considered a guideline and one of the most important standard works of modern yoga. In chapter 2 the yoga sutras are explained in more detail.

*"Yoga is that inner state in which emotional-cognitive processes come to rest."*¹⁰ (*YS*, I, 2).

1.4 TANTRISM: FROM 500 AD

Tan means *stretching*, *stretching oneself*. The term *Tantra* is translated as *fabric* or *mesh*. On the one hand this could refer to the spreading of the Tantric theory as a major movement that stretches across entire segments of society such as low castes or women. This applies particularly to groups of people who had previously been denied an active role in spirituality without a participating priest (Brahmans).

But it is more likely that the term *Tantra* refers to the supposed inseparable connection between macrocosm (the world at large, the entire universe) and microcosm (small world in its tiny components). The Tantric theory assumes that everything is inseparably connected via the energy plane. The small mirrors the large, and vice-versa. Thus everything that happens in the universe affects the whole since everything is interwoven.

In Indian spirituality Tantrism is considered a revolutionary movement. Tantrism was preceded by long phases of asceticism during which everything worldly had to be defeated. As a result, the human body with all its functions was seen as impure, particularly the female body, and sexuality.

Anna Trökes says about the Tantric revolution: "An important part of the theory was the acknowledgement that the divine can reveal itself in all its perfection in every possible form. Under this point of view the old categories of pure/impure, in which the social order and caste system had solidified over centuries, broke down."¹¹

9 Aurobindo, S. (1981). *Bhagavadgita*. chapter. III, verse 35. Gladenbach: Hinder + Deelmann Publishing.

10 Bäumer, B. & Deshpande, P. Y. (1976, 6th edition, 1990). *Patanjali. Die Wurzeln des Yoga*. (pg. 21). Bern: Scherz Verlag.

11 Trökes, A. (2013, pg. 236).

One of Tantrism's basic principles is to revere nature with all its diverse appearances and to experience it with all of one's senses. Instead of strict asceticism, Tantrism now advocated for joy, ritual pleasure, sensuality, and an attitude that embraces life and nature as a basis for spiritual growth.

The many physical rituals and practices are spiritual means on the path to liberation. The core of the theory is to unite the cosmic consciousness (*Shiva/Purusha*, the male principle) with the cosmic energy (*Shakti/Prakriti*, the female principle). The significance of Shakti as both a dynamic creative principle and the divine mother plays a central role in Tantrism. The knowledge surrounding the subtle energy centers (chakras), energy pathways (Nadis), Mudras (energy seals with the body), directing of energy (the rise of the Kundalini Shakti), breath control, reciting mantras (vibration and sound), and visualization techniques are principal elements of Tantrism.

There are different Tantric directions such as *white*, *red*, and *black Tantra*. The *white Tantra*, also referred to as the *right path*, consists of the above-mentioned elements of the cosmic principle and devotion to the divine primal force, the theory of energy and its practices to raise energy levels.

The *red Tantra*, also referred to as the left path, includes energy practices for the sublimation of sexual energy. In the western world, this Tantra arm is often erroneously reduced to sexual pleasure and thought to be the entire teaching.

The *black Tantra* works with magical formulas and mantras and is about manipulation and control, similar to black magic.

When someone enters into the state of divine energy, a meditation that knows no distinction, he becomes one with the nature of Shiva, because the opening of Shiva is called Shakti. Much as one recognizes parts of a room by the light of a lamp or the rays of the sun, one recognizes Shiva by his energy."¹² (Vijnana Bhairava, verse 20-21).

12 Bäumer, B. (2013, third edition). *Vijnana Bhairava. Divine Consciousness*. (pg. 67). Frankfurt: Insel Publishing.

1.5 HATHA YOGA: FROM 900 AD

Until the beginning of Tantrism, yoga in all its forms was viewed as world renunciation. Most important was to overcome suffering. Hatha Yoga that focuses on the body during the spiritual practice historically came from the Tantric tradition. Instead of overcoming the body as was done previously, the body now became the focus of the practice. See chapter 3.

“Wearing a special dress is not a way to achieve perfection, and neither is talking about yoga: the exercises alone are the means to achieving perfection; that is without a doubt true.”
(Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika, verse 66).¹³

¹³ Svatmarama, S. (2009). *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika. Light on Hatha Yoga*. (pg. 47). Hamburg: Phänomen Publishing.





2 CLASSICAL YOGA ACCORDING TO PATANJALI