

YOGI RAMACHARAKA



HATHA YOGA

**THE YOGI PHILOSOPHY OF
PHYSICAL WELL-BEING**

Hatha Yoga

The Yogi Philosophy Of Physical Well-Being With Numerous Exercises, Etc.

Yogi Ramacharaka

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Hatha Yoga

Chapter I - What Is Hatha Yoga ?

THE science of Yoga is divided into several branches. Among the best known and leading divisions are (1) Hatha Yoga ; (2) Raja Yoga ; (3) Karma Yoga ; (4) Gnani Yoga. This book is devoted only to the first named, and we will not attempt to describe the others at this time, although we will have something to say upon all of these great branches of Yoga, in future writings.

Hatha Yoga is that branch of the Yogi Philosophy which deals with the physical body its care its well-being its health its strength and all that tends to keep it in its natural and normal state of health. It teaches a natural mode of living and voices the cry which has been taken up by many of the Western world : " Let us get back to Nature," excepting that the Yogi does not have to get back, for he is already there, for he has always clung close to nature and her ways, and has not been dazzled and befooled by the mad rush towards externals which has caused the modern civilized races to forget that such a thing as nature existed. Fashions and social ambitions have not reached the Yogi s consciousness he smiles at these things, and regards them as he does the pretences of childish games he has not been lured from nature s arms,

but continues to cuddle close up to the bosom of his good mother who has always given him nourishment, warmth and protection. Hatha Yoga is first, nature ; second, nature, and last, NATURE. When confronted with a choice of methods, plans, theories, etc., apply to them the touchstone: " Which is the natural way ? " and always choose that which seems to conform the nearest to nature. This plan will be a good one for our students to follow when their attention is directed to the many theories; " fads " ; methods ; plans and ideas, along health lines, with which the Western world is being flooded. For in stance, if they are asked to believe that they are in danger of losing their " magnetism," by coming in contact with the earth, and are advised to wear rubber soles and heels upon their shoes, and to sleep in beds " insulated " with glass feet, to prevent nature (mother Earth) from sucking and drawing out of them the magnetism which she has just given them, let the students ask themselves " What does Nature say about this? " Then, in order to find out what nature says, let them see whether nature s plans could have contemplated the manufacture and wearing of rubber soles, and glass feet for beds. Let them see whether the strong magnetic men, full of vitality, do these things let them see whether the most vigorous races in the world have done these things let them see whether they feel debilitated from lying down on the grassy sward, or whether the natural impulse of man is not to fling himself upon the grassy bank let them see whether the natural impulse of childhood is not to run bare foot ; whether it does not refresh the feet to take off the shoes (rubber soles and all) and walk around barefooted ; whether rubber boots are particularly conducive to " magnetism " and vitality, and so on. We give this merely as an illustration, not that we wish to waste time in discussing the merits or de merits of rubber soles, and glass bed feet as a preservative of magnetism. A little observation will teach the man that all of nature s answers show him that

he gets much of his magnetism from the earth, and that the earth is a battery charged with it, and is always willing and anxious to give forth its strength to man, instead of being devoid of it and to be dreaded as being anxious and likely to " draw " the magnetism from man, its child. Some of these latter day prophets will next be teaching that the air draws Prana from people, instead of giving it to them.

So, by all means, apply the nature test to all theories of this kind our own included and if they do not square with nature, discard them the rule is a safe one. Nature knows what it is about she is your friend and not your enemy.

There have been many and most valuable works written on the other branches of the Yogi Philosophy, but the subject of Hatha Yoga has been dismissed with a brief reference by most of the writers upon Yoga. This is largely due to the fact that in India there exists a horde of ignorant mendicants of the lower fakir class, who pose as Hatha Yogis, but who have not the slightest conception of the underlying principles of that branch of Yoga. These people content themselves with obtaining control over some of the involuntary muscles of the body (a thing possible to anyone who will devote to it the time and trouble necessary for its accomplishment), thereby acquiring the ability to perform certain abnormal " tricks " which they exhibit to amuse and entertain (or disgust) Western travelers. Some of their feats are quite wonderful, when regarded from the stand point of curiosity, and the performers would be worthy applicants for paying positions in the "dime museums" of America, indeed their feats being very similar to some performed by some of the Western " freaks." We hear of these people exhibiting with pride such tricks and acquired habits as, for instance, the ability to reverse the peristaltic action of the bowels and intestines, and the swallowing movements of the gullet, so as to give a disgusting exhibition of a

complete reversal of the normal processes of those parts of the body, so that articles introduced into the colon may be carried upwards and ejected from the gullet, by this reverse movement of the involuntary muscles, etc. This, from a physician's point of view is most interesting, but to the layman is a most disgusting thing, and one utterly unworthy of a man. Other feats of these so-called Hatha Yogis are about on a par with the instance which we have reluctantly given, and we know of nothing that they perform which is of the slightest interest or benefit to the man or woman seeking to maintain a healthy, normal, natural body. These mendicants are akin to the class of fanatics in India who assume the title "Yogi," and who refuse to wash the body for religious reasons ; or who sit with uplifted arm until it is withered ; or who allow their finger nails to grow until they pierce their hands ; or who sit so still that the birds build nests in their hair ; or who perform other ridiculous feats, in order to pose as " holy men " before the ignorant multitude, and, incidentally, to be fed by the ignorant classes who consider that they are earning a future reward by the act. These people are either rank frauds, or self-deluded fanatics, and as a class are on a par with a certain class of beggars in American and European large cities who exhibit their self-inflicted wounds, and bogus deformities, in order to wring pennies from the passer-by, who turns his head and drops the coppers in order to get the thing out of his sight.

The people whom we have just mentioned are regarded with pity by the real Yogis who regard Hatha Yoga as an important branch of their philosophy, because it gives man a healthy body a good instrument with which to work a fitting temple for the Spirit.

In this little book, we have endeavored to give in a plain, simple form, the underlying principles of Hatha Yoga - -

giving the Yogi plan of physical life. And we have tried to give you the reason for each plan. We have found it necessary to first explain to you in the terms of Western physiology the various functions of the body, and then to indicate Nature's plans and methods, which one should adhere to as far as possible. It is not a "doctor book," and contains nothing about medicine, and practically nothing about the cure of diseases, except where we indicate what one should do in order to get back to a natural state. Its keynote is the Healthy Man its main purpose to help people to conform to the standard of the normal man. But we believe that that which keeps a healthy man healthy will make an unhealthy man healthy, if he follows it. Hatha Yoga preaches a sane, natural, normal manner of living and life, which, if followed, will benefit anyone. It keeps close to nature and advocates a return to natural methods in preference to those which have grown up around us in our artificial habits of living.

This book is simple, very simple, so simple, in fact, that many will most likely throw it aside because it contains nothing new or startling. They have probably hoped for some wonderful recital of the far-famed freak tricks of the mendicant Yogis and plans whereby these feats could be duplicated by those who would read it. We must tell such people that this book is not that kind of book. We do not tell you how to assume seventy-four kinds of postures, nor how to draw linen through the intestines for the purpose of cleaning them out (contrast this with nature's plans), or how to stop the heart's beating, or to perform tricks with your internal apparatus. Not a bit of such teaching will you find here. We do tell you how to command a rebellious organ to again function properly, and several other things about the control over an involuntary part which has gone on a strike, but we have mentioned these things only in the

line of making man a healthy being not to make a " freak " of him.

We have not said much about disease. We have preferred to hold up to your gaze the Healthy Man and Woman, asking you to look well at them and see what makes them healthy and keeps them healthy. Then we call your attention to what they do and how they do it. Then we tell you to go and do likewise, if you would be like them. That is all we try to do. But that " all " is about everything that may be done for you, you must do the rest yourself.

In other chapters, we tell you why the Yogis take care of the body, and also the underlying principle of the Hatha Yoga that belief in the Intelligence behind all Life that trust in the great Life Principle to carry on its work properly that belief that if we will but rely on that great principle, and will allow it to work in and through us all will be well with our bodies. Read on, and you will see what we are trying to say to you will get the message which we have been charged to deliver to you. In answer to the question, with which this chapter is headed : What is Hatha Yoga ? " we say to you : Read this book to the end, and you will understand some little about what it really is to find out all it is put into practice the precepts of this book, and you will get a good fair start on the road to that knowledge you seek.

Chapter II - The Yogis' Regard For The Physical Body

To the casual observer, the Yogi Philosophy presents the apparent anomaly of a teaching which, while holding that the physical body is material and as nothing when

compared to the higher principles of Man, at the same time devotes much care and importance to the instruction of its students in the direction of the careful attention, nourishment, training, exercise and improvement of that physical body. In fact one whole branch of the Yogi teachings, Hatha Yoga, is devoted to this care of the physical body, and goes into considerable detail regarding the instruction of its students in the principles of this physical training and development.

Some Western travelers in the Orient who have seen the care which the Yogis bestow upon their bodies, and the time and attention which they devote to the task, have jumped to the conclusion that the Yogi Philosophy is merely an Oriental form of Physical Culture, a little more carefully studied, perhaps, but a system having nothing " spiritual " in it. So much for seeing merely the outer forms, and not knowing enough to look " behind the scenes."

We scarcely need to explain to our students the real reason for the Yogis care for the body, nor need we apologize for the publication of this little book which has for its end the instruction of Yogi students in the care and scientific development of the physical body.

The Yogis believe, you know, that the real Man is not his body. They know that the immortal " I " of which each human being is conscious to a greater or lesser degree, is not the body which it merely occupies and uses. They know that the body is but as a suit of clothes which the Spirit puts on and off from time to time. They know the body for what it is, and are not deceived into the belief that it is the real Man. But while knowing these things, they also know that the body is the instrument in which, and by which the Spirit manifests and works. They know that the fleshly covering is necessary for Man s manifestation and growth

in this particular stage of his development. They know that the body is the Temple of the Spirit. And they, consequently, believe that the care and development of the body is as worthy a task as is the development of some of the higher parts of Man, for with an unhealthy and imperfectly developed physical body the mind cannot function properly, nor can the instrument be used to the best advantage by its master, the Spirit.

It is true that the Yogi goes beyond this point, and insists that the body be brought under the perfect control of the mind that the instrument be finely turned so as to be responsive to the touch of the hand of the master.

But the Yogi knows that the highest degree of responsiveness on the part of the body may be obtained only when it, the body, is properly cared for, nourished and developed. The highly trained body must, first of all, be a strong healthy body. For these reasons the Yogi pays such great attention and care to the physical side of his nature, and, for the same reason, the Oriental system of Physical Culture forms a part of the Yogi science of Hatha Yoga.

The Western Physical Culture enthusiast develops his body for his body's sake, often believing that the body is He. The Yogi develops the body knowing it to be but an instrument for the use of the real part of himself, and solely that he may perfect the instrument to the end that it be used in the work of Soul growth. The Physical Culturist contents himself with mere mechanical movements and exercises for developing the muscles. The Yogi throws Mind into the task, and develops not only the muscle but every organ, cell, and part of his body as well. Not only does he do this, but he obtains control over every part of his body, and acquires mastery over the involuntary part of his organism

as well as over the voluntary, something of which the average Physical Culturist knows practically nothing.

We trust to point out to the Western student the way of the Yogi teachings regarding the perfecting of the physical body, and feel assured that he who will follow us carefully and conscientiously will be amply rewarded for his time and trouble, and will acquire the feeling of mastery, over a splendidly developed physical body, of which body he will feel as proud as does the master violinist of the Stradivarius which responds almost with intelligence to the touch of his bow, or as does the master artisan over some perfect tool which enables him to create beautiful and useful things for the world.

Chapter Iii - The Work Of The Divine Architect

THE Yogi Philosophy teaches that God gives to each individual a physical machine adapted to his needs, and also supplies him with the means of keeping it in order, and of repairing it if his negligence allows it to become inefficient. The Yogis recognize the human body as the handiwork of a great Intelligence. They regard its organism as a working machine, the conception and operation of which indicates the greatest wisdom and care. They know that the body IS because of a great Intelligence, and they know that the same Intelligence is still operating through the physical body, and that as the individual falls in with the working of the Divine Law, so will he continue in health and strength. They also know that when Man runs contrary to that law, in-harmony and disease result. They believe that it is ridiculous to suppose that this great Intelligence caused the beautiful human body to exist, and then ran away and left it to its fate, for they know that the

Intelligence still presides over each and every function of the body, and may be safely trusted and not feared. That intelligence, the manifestation of which we call " Nature " or " The Life Principle," and similar names, is constantly on the alert to repair damage, heal wounds, knit together broken bones ; to throw off harmful materials which have accumulated in the system ; and in thousands of ways to keep the machine in good running order. Much that we call disease is really a beneficent action of Nature designed to get rid of poisonous substances which we have allowed to enter and remain in our system.

Let us see just what this body means. Let us suppose a soul seeking a tenement in which to work out this phase of its existence. Occultists know that in order to manifest in certain ways the soul has need of a fleshly habitation. Let us see what the soul requires in the way of a body, and then let us see whether Nature has given it what it needs.

In the first place, the soul needs a highly organized physical instrument of thought, and a central station from which it may direct the workings of the body. Nature provides that wonderful instrument, the human brain, the possibilities of which we, at this time, but faintly recognize. The portion of the brain which Man uses in this stage of his development is but a tiny part of the entire brain-area. The unused portion is awaiting the evolution of the race.

Secondly, the soul needs organs designed to receive and record the various forms of impressions from without. Nature steps in and provides the eye, the ear, the nose, the organs of taste and the nerves whereby we feel. Nature is keeping other senses in reserve, until the need of them is felt by the race.

Then, means of communication between the brain and the different parts of the body are needed. Nature has "wired" the body with nerves in a wonderful manner. The brain telegraphs over these wires instructions to all parts of the body, sending its orders to cell and organ, and insisting upon immediate obedience. The brain receives telegrams from all parts of the body, warning it of danger ; calling for help ; making complaints, etc.

Then the body must have means of moving around in the world. It has outgrown the plant-like inherited tendencies, and wants to "move on." Besides this it wants to reach out after things and turn them to its own use. Nature has provided limbs, and muscles, and tendons, with which to work the limbs.

Then the body needs a framework to keep it in shape, to protect it from shock ; to give it strength and firmness ; to prop it up, as it were. Nature gives it the bony frame known as the skeleton, a marvelous piece of machinery, which is well worthy of your study.

The soul needs a physical means of communication with other embodied souls. Nature supplies the means of communication in the organs of speech and hearing.

The body needs a system of carrying repair materials to all of its system, to build up; replenish ; repair ; and strengthen all the several parts. It also needs a similar system whereby the waste, refuse matter may be carried to the crematory, burned up and sent out of the system. Nature gives us the life-carrying blood the arteries and veins through which it flows to and fro performing its work the lungs to oxygenize the blood and to burn up the waste matter.

The body needs material from the outside, with which to build up and repair its parts. Nature provides means of eating the food; of digesting it; of extracting the nutritious elements ; of converting it into shape for absorption by the system ; of excreting the waste portions.

And, finally, the body is provided with means of reproducing its kind, and providing other souls with fleshly tenements.

It is well worth the time of anyone to study some thing of the wonderful mechanism and workings of the human body. One gets from this study a most convincing realization of the reality of that great Intelligence in nature he sees the great Life Principle in operation he sees that it is not blind chance, or haphazard happening, but that it is the work of a mighty INTELLIGENCE.

Then he learns to trust that Intelligence, and to know that that which brought him into physical being will carry him through life that the power which took charge of him then, has charge of him now, and will have charge of him always.

As we open ourselves to the inflow of the great Life Principle, so will we be benefited. If we fear it, or trust it not, we shut the door upon it and must necessarily suffer.

Chapter Iv - Our Friend, The Vital Force

MANY people make the mistake of considering Disease as an entity a real thing an opponent of Health. This is incorrect. Health is the natural state of Man, and Disease is simply the absence of Health. If one can comply with the laws of Nature he cannot be sick. When some law is

violated, abnormal conditions result, and certain symptoms manifest themselves, and to which symptoms we give the name of some disease. That which we call Disease is simply the result of Nature's attempt to throw off, or dislodge, the abnormal condition, in order to resume normal action.

We are so apt to consider, and speak of, Disease as an entity. We say that "it" attacks us that "it" seats itself in an organ that "it" runs its course that "it" is very malignant that "it" is quite mild that "it" persistently resists all treatment that "it" yields readily etc., etc. We speak of it as if it were an entity possessed of character, disposition and vital qualities. We consider it as some thing which takes possession of us and uses its power for our destruction. We speak of it as we would a wolf in a sheepfold a weasel in the chicken roost a rat in the granary and go about fighting it as we would one of the animals above mentioned. We seek to kill it, or at least to scare it away.

Nature is not fickle or unreliable. Life manifests itself within the body in pursuance to well established laws, and pursues its way, slowly, rising until it reaches its zenith, then gradually going down the decline until the time comes for the body to be thrown off like an old, well-used garment, when the soul steps out on its mission of further development. Nature never intended that a man should part with his body until a ripe old age was attained, and the Yogis know that if Nature's laws are observed from childhood, the death of a young or middle aged person from disease would be as rare as is death from accident.

There is within every physical body, a certain vital force which is constantly doing the best it can for us, notwithstanding the reckless way in which we violate the cardinal principles of right living. Much of that which we

call disease is but a defensive action of this vital force a remedial effect. It is not a downward action but an upward action on the part of the living organism. The action is abnormal, because the conditions are abnormal, and the whole recuperative effort of the vital force is exerted to ward the restoration of normal conditions.

The first great principle of the Vital Force is self-preservation. This principle is ever in evidence, wherever life exists. Under its action the male and female are attracted the embryo and infant are provided with nourishment the mother is caused to bear heroically the pains of maternity the parents are impelled to shelter and protect their offspring under the most adverse circumstances Why? Because all this means the instinct of race-preservation,

But the instinct of preservation of individual life is equally strong. " All that a man hath will he give for his life," saith the writer, and while it is not strictly true of the developed man, it is sufficiently true to use for the purpose of illustrating the principle of self-preservation. And this instinct is not of the Intellect, but is found down among the foundation stones of being. It is an instinct which often over rules Intellect. It makes a man's legs "run away with him " when he had firmly resolved to stand in a dangerous position it causes a shipwrecked man to violate some of the principles of civilization, causing him to kill and eat his comrade and drink his blood it has made wild beasts of men in the terrible " Black Hole " and under many and varying conditions it asserts its supremacy. It is working always for life more life- for health more health. And it often makes us sick in order to make us healthier brings on a disease in order to get rid of some foul matter which our carelessness and folly has allowed to intrude in the system.

This principle of self-preservation on the part of the Vital Force, also moves us along in the direction of health, as surely as does the influence within the magnetic needle make it point due north. We may turn aside, not heeding the impulse, but the urge is always there. The same instinct is within us, which, in the seed, causes it to put forth its little shoot, often moving weights a thousand times heavier than itself, in its effort to get to the sunlight. The same impulse causes the sapling to shoot upward from the ground. The same principle causes roots to spread downward and outward. In each case, although the direction is different, each move is in the right direction. If we are wounded, the Vital Force begins to heal the wound, doing the work with wonderful sagacity and precision. If we break a bone, all that we, or the surgeon may do, is to place the bones into juxta-position and keep them there, while the great Vital Force knits the fractured parts together. If we fall, or our muscles or ligaments are torn, all that we can do is to observe certain things in the way of attention, and the Vital Force starts in to do its work, and drawing on the system for the necessary materials, repairs the damage.

All physicians know, and their schools teach, that if a man is in good physical condition, his Vital Force will cause him to recover from almost any condition excepting when the vital organs are destroyed. When the physical system has been allowed to run down, recovery is much more difficult, if, indeed, not impossible, as the efficiency of the Vital Force is impaired and is compelled to work under adverse conditions. But rest assured that it is doing the best it can for you, always, under the existing conditions. If Vital Force cannot do for you all that it aims to do, it will not give up the attempt as hopeless, but will accommodate itself to circumstances and make the best of it. Give it a free hand and it will keep you in perfect health restrict it by irrational and un natural methods of living, and it will still try to pull

you through, and will serve you until the end, to the best of its ability, in spite of your ingratitude and stupidity. It will fight for you to the finish.

The principle of accommodation is manifested all through all forms of life. A seed dropped into the crevice of a rock, when it begins to grow either becomes squeezed into the shape of the rock, or, if it be strong enough, splits the rock in twain and attains its normal shape. So, in the case of Man, who manages to live and thrive in all climates, and conditions, the Vital Force has accommodated itself to the varying conditions, and, where it could not split the rock, it sent out the sprout in a somewhat distorted shape, but still alive and hardy.

No organism can become diseased while the proper conditions for health are observed. Health is but life under normal conditions, while disease is life under abnormal conditions. The conditions which caused a man to grow to a healthy, vigorous man hood are necessary to keep him in health and vigor. Given the right condition, the Vital Force will do its best work, but given imperfect conditions the Vital Force will be able to manifest but imperfectly, and more or less of what we call disease ensues. We are living in a civilization which has forced a more or less unnatural mode of life upon us, and the Vital Force finds it hard to do as well for us as it would like. We do not eat naturally ; drink naturally ; sleep naturally ; breathe naturally ; or dress naturally. We " have done those things which we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and there is no Health within us " or, we might add, as little health as we can help.

We have dwelt upon the matter of the friendliness of the Vital Force, for the reason that it is a matter usually overlooked by those who have not made a study of it. It

forms a part of the Yogi Philosophy of Hatha Yoga, and the Yogis take it largely into consideration in their lives. They know that they have a good friend and a strong ally in the Vital Force, and they allow it to flow freely through them, and try to interfere as little as possible with its operations. They know that the Vital Force is ever awake to their well-being and health, and they repose the greatest confidence in it.

Much of the success of Hatha Yoga consists of methods best calculated to allow the Vital Force to work freely and without hindrance, and its methods and exercises are largely devoted to that end. To clear the track of obstructions, and to give the chariot of the Vital Force the right of way on a smooth, clear road, is the aim of the Hatha Yogi. Follow his precepts and it will be well with your body.

Chapter V - The Laboratory Of The Body

THIS little book is not intended for a text-book upon physiology, but inasmuch as the majority of people seem to have little or no idea of the nature, functions and uses of the various bodily organs, we think it as well to say a few words regarding the very important organs of the body which have to do with the digestion and assimilation of the food which nourishes the body which perform the laboratory work of the system.

The first bit of the human machinery of digestion to be considered by us are the teeth. Nature has provided us with teeth to bite our food and grind it into fine bits, thus rendering it of a convenient size and consistency to be easily acted upon by the saliva and the digestive juices of