



BRANCHES OF YOGA

*Whether you are devotional or intellectual in
nature, yoga has a path for you. – Mara Carrico*

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Version 4.5

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Name five or more branches of yoga.
- What is the primary focus of Bhakti Yoga?
- What are the underlying principles of Karma Yoga?
- What is the primary tool of Jnana Yoga?
- What is another name for Raja Yoga? What text describes it?
- What philosophies did Tantra arise in response to? What is a primary philosophical underpinning of Tantra?
- How is Hatha Yoga distinguished from other branches?
- How are Hatha Yoga, Tantra, and Raja Yoga related?
- Which path is a good fit for individuals who are drawn to meditation?

BRANCHES OF YOGA

BHAKTI YOGA: THE PATH OF DEVOTION



Bhakti Yogis see the Divine in all. They invoke love and a feeling of closeness to the Divine through thought, word and deed. Practices include *mantra* and *kirtan*.

RAJA YOGA: THE ROYAL PATH



Also known as Classical Yoga. Typically considered the Eightfold Path of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. Practices are designed to take awareness inward.

KARMA YOGA: THE PATH OF SERVICE



Also known as the Yoga of Action. Karma Yogis take actions intended to transcend self. Principles are to act responsibly, unselfishly, without attachment, and with integrity.

HATHA YOGA: THROUGH THE BODY



Hatha Yogis focus on working through the body, rather than through the mind or emotions. Primary practices include *asana*, *pranayama*, *bandha* and *mudra*.

JNANA YOGA: YOGA OF WISDOM



Also known as the Yoga of Knowledge. Jnana Yogis use intellect and reasoning to transcend limitations of the "I" mind and discover the natural state of yoga.

TANTRA



As with Samkhya, Tantra is an underlying philosophy upon which yoga branches and styles may be based. At times, it is also referred to as a branch of yoga.

Some listings of yoga branches will also include Guru Yoga (dedication to a master) and/or Mantra Yoga (using sound to focus the mind).

OVERVIEW

- "Tan" means "to extend", "expansive," or "whole."
- Tantrikas seek liberation in the world. Tantric practices are designed to realize through experience that everything is divine and connected.
- Tantra arose in reaction to patriarchy, dualism, and atheism.
- A key philosophy of Tantra is nondualism, or the idea that "one's true essence exists in every particle of the universe."
- Practices include *pranayama*, *mantra*, *mudra*, and *yantra*.

RELEASE SHAKTI TO MEET SHIVA

Tantra arose out of the seeds of Samkhya, Classical Yoga, and Buddhism... Where the earlier schools were patriarchal and either dualistic or atheistic, Tantra embraced the feminine, the principle of unity, and offered a way for anyone to practice... The goal of the practice of Tantra Yoga is, fundamentally, to release Shakti, and move her... to meet with Shiva... The tools mostly used to awaken and move the sleeping Shakti are the tools of pranayama... Pranayama, however, is not the only tool available. Tantra has a broad offering of techniques and practices. They include mantra, mudra, yantra, and and pancha-makara (the Five-Ms).

— Bernie Clark

PASSED ON THROUGH SIDDHA YOGA

Until as recently as a hundred years ago, Tantra was a practice that was shrouded in mystery because it was passed down orally from teacher to initiated student... But the second half of the 20th century brought a group of dedicated teachers who started to make the teachings better known... Swamis Muktananda and Chidvilasananda spread their approaches to Tantra through the Siddha Yoga tradition in the West. Today their students—like Rod Stryker, Sally Kempton, and John Friend...are fervently leading a Tantric renaissance in the West, and translations of influential texts such as Spanda Karika, Vijnana Bhairava, and the Shiva Sutras have become widely available in English.

— Nora Isaacs



RAJA YOGA

OVERVIEW

- Raja means "royal" and thus this is known as the Royal Path.
- The practices are often called the Eightfold or Eight-Limbed Path: *yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana* and *samadhi*.
- The Eightfold Path is referred to by its Sanskrit name, *ashtanga yoga* (different from the style, Ashtanga Yoga, founded by Pattabhi Jois).

Raja yoga attracts individuals who are introspective and drawn to meditation. – Maria Carrico

PRACTICES THAT TAKE AWARENESS INWARD

Raja yoga is the path of union through practices that take your awareness inward. The essence of Raja yoga is an integration of body, mind and soul through procedures that enhance mind-body coordination... Raja yoga helps you practice the other yogas with greater ease, effortlessness, and joy. When you feel physically vital, emotionally stable, and psychologically centered, your ability and desire to love and express authentic compassion expand.

– Deepak Chopra & David Simon



HATHA YOGA

- Hatha Yoga is the branch of yoga that works through the body, rather than through the mind or emotions.
- Primary practices of Hatha Yoga include *asana*, *pranayama*, *bandha* and *mudra*.
- Much of the popularized yoga in the West today is Hatha Yoga.
- Mark Stephens notes that many Hatha Yoga traditions attribute their roots to Raja Yoga when in fact, he proposes, the origins are more tied to Tantra. Bernie Clark agrees, noting that "Hatha kept many of the practices that Tantra developed, but just as Tantra discarded what it didn't like of Classical Yoga, Hatha also dropped the unsavory parts of Tantra. Hatha Yoga focused its practices on building a healthy body, one that would be perfect for the higher practices of meditation and *samadhi*."

MEANING OF HATHA

'Ha' and 'tha' mean the union of the sun and the moon, union of prana and apana vayus. 'Hatha' means any tenacious practice till the object or end is achieved.

— Swami Sivananda

PURPOSES

According to the original texts, there are three purposes of Hatha yoga: 1) the total purification of the body, 2) the complete balancing of the physical, mental, and energetic fields, and 3) the awakening of pure consciousness through which one ultimately connects with the divine by engaging in practices rooted in the physical body.

— Mark Stephens

PREPARATION FOR RAJA YOGA

- "Traditional Hatha Yoga is intended to lead to Raja Yoga, 'Royal Yoga,' the goal of which is the highest state of consciousness known as *samadhi*."
(swamij.com)
- Swami Sivananda writes, "Hatha Yoga prepares the student to take up Raja Yoga."