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Dhyāna-Moolam Gurur-Murthih
Pujā-Moolam Gurur-Padam |
Mantra-Moolam Gurur-Vākyam
Moksha-Moolam Gurur-Kripa ||

*The Root of Meditation is the Form of the Guru,
The Root of Worship is the Feet of the Guru,
The Root of Mantra is the Word of the Guru,
The Root of Liberation is the Grace of the Guru.*

From The Editor's Desk

As the curiosity to know the subject of Yoga is increasing all over the world, let us think about the ways of understanding the subject in its real essence. When it comes to understanding a subject each one of us will comprehend and understand the same subject in multiple ways. This depends to a certain extent on our prior knowledge about the subject as well as on the way the same is being presented. As far as the subject of Yoga is concerned, the latter has utmost importance. The physical aspect of yoga when is presented and imitated repeatedly one feels exalted and the experience improves. For a few, when the memory of the previous wisdom awakens it helps them to go further into the path of yoga. However, if the crux of the subject is misrepresented, neither will there be any progress, nor will the subject produce any desired result. This will eventually result into the subject itself getting slowly diminished from society. Keeping the above facts in mind, let us have an overview of how Hatha yogic practices are imparted in the current era. This misunderstanding was first reflected when the vast and deep subject of Yoga was merely brought down to the level physical yoga postures. It got presented in such a way as if this was the only means to attain the state of yoga. Additionally, by completely ignoring the principles of Hatha yoga, which is the basis of all yoga postures, people continuously attempted to link and name all sorts of gimmicks like ariel acrobats and nude practices under the banner of Hatha Yoga. Eventually this great wisdom which belonged to the entire of mankind was portrayed as being associated with a particular religion by vested interests; thereby isolating it and attempting to diminish and eliminate it. This cannot be ignored by the real aspirants of yoga.

The only way to counter such misrepresentations is to bring awareness about the basic principles of the subject and provide such practicing platforms for yoga enthusiasts. This was the ideology which led to the emergence of the establishment called Hatha Vidya.

The knowledge of Hatha yoga, which has been passed down from generations to generations, when presented in an unblemished manner, gets widely accepted across the boundaries and this has been proven by our past experiences.

Together, with those who have tasted the real sense of yoga, let us actively promote the idea of “Traditional yoga revival movement” this year onwards.

Acharya Bala



SIX LIMBS OF YOGA

-A holistic view on Hathayoga



Vijesh Ravindran

Yoga leads to complete transformation in the way life is perceived. A change that will enable one to live wisely, consciously, intensely, and helps to sail through the mundane troubles and hurdles faced in life. There are multiple paths and approaches to yoga, among these Hatha Yoga provides a systematic and comprehensive system to pursue and experience Yoga. Although widely practiced across the world in one form or other, the understanding about Hatha Yoga and its methods of practices appears to be very limited.

This edition of Tradition Speaks throws light on the key components of Hatha Yogic practices on the basis of an important verse from Goraksha Paddhati. Through this edition of Tradition Speaks, we aim to provide an outline of what and how Hatha Yogic practices aims to achieve.

āsanaṃ prāṇa-saṃrodhaḥ pratyāhāraś ca dhāraṇā |
dhyānaṃ samādhir etāni yogāṅgāni vadanti ṣaṭ || GP 1.6 ||

“Body position (asana), breath control (pranasamrodha), withholding (of the inner nectar, pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and contemplation (samadhi) – these are called the six (shadh) limbs (anga) of yoga .”

The above verse, is from Goraksha Paddhati, a very important hatha yogic text known to contain the teachings prescribed by Gorakshanath, one of the most revered masters in Hatha Yoga. The word ‘Paddhati’ implies systematic plan or scheme of execution and as such Goraksha Paddhati is meant to serve as a comprehensive practical manual for Hatha Yoga to attain the ultimate goal of yoga which is liberation.

Asana (posture), Prana Samrodha or Pranayama (regulation of prana), Pratyahara (sense withdrawal), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (Union) are prescribed as the six limbs of yoga. Among these, the first three limbs of Asana, Pranayama and Pratyahara are considered as Bahir Anga sadhana (external oriented practices) and Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi are considered as Antar Anga sadhana (internal oriented practices).

The six limbs of Hatha Yogic practices are also mentioned in Patanjala Yoga Sutras but along with Yama and Niyama which are not considered as separate limbs under Hatha Yoga. The practices of Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi are also considered as practices of Raja Yoga. While these involves internalization and working on the mind directly, Hatha Yogic literature provide advanced practical methods for applying Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

An overview of the six limbs of yoga:

Asana: Asana practice involves bodily postures to condition the body and ultimately the mind to prepare for higher practices. It is important to ensure the physical body is functioning well. Steadiness of body is a prerequisite for steadiness of mind; body should be purified before purification of mind. Asana practices ultimately works on subtle elements and needs to be practiced appropriately with awareness of the flow, coordinating breathing, focusing of relevant areas, being steady and in a relaxed state. At an advanced level asana practices ultimately works on the subtle internal elements and hence requires understanding of these such as the key energy centers and its locations within the body.

Prana Samrodha or Pranayama:

Regulation of the prana through regulation of the breath is Pranayama. Understanding of the nadis, pranas, and application of bandhas are essentials for the practice of Pranayama. Asanas prepares one for Pranayama practice. Pranayama practice helps purification of pranic channels and ultimately applied for awakening of dormant energy within us by uniting prana and apana i.e. invoking the ultimate energy & consciousness inherent in every human being.

Pratyahara: Pratyahara literally means withdrawal from intakes implying withdrawal from the senses objects. As per Patanjala Yoga Sutras pratyahara involves withdrawal of mind from the mental modifications created through various sensory inputs. Whereas in the Hatha Yogic text Goraksha Paddhati pratyahara practices prescribed are in the context of withdrawal of the nector flowing from the moon (palate) which otherwise is consumed by the fire at

naval. These include advanced methods of practices for pratyahara such as Vipareeta Karani. These practices requires understanding of Adharas.

Dharana: Dharana is the process of holding or fixing the awareness on one object. Those who are accomplished in Asana, Pranayama and Pratyahara can practice Dharana. Goraksha Paddhati prescribes the practices of Pancha Tatwa Dharana which requires the understanding of the five elements within the body.

Dhyana: Constant awareness or total absorption in the object of focus is Dhyana. Dhyana cannot be explained as a practice; while Dharana can be practiced as a method, Dhyana happens on its own. Hatha Yogic texts prescribes advanced methods of contemplation on internal and external focal points for the practice of Dhyana.

Samadhi: The state of equipoise is the state of oneness with the supreme universal consciousness. The mind and the ripples generated through the senses are totally dissolved in the awareness of one's consciousness in the state of Samadhi. The state of Samadhi will eventually lead to Kaivalyam i.e. complete liberation.

The components of Hatha Yogic practices described thus far only provides a high-level outline. Goraksha Paddhati is for advanced practitioners and hence it does not provide the details regarding the practices of Shat Kriyas (cleansing practices) as covered in other Hatha Yogic texts such as Hatha Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita. There are also other practices such as Mudras and Bandhas, and Nadanusandhana which are applied within the various limbs explained above.

Essentials of the practices:

It is important to have clear understanding of fundamental purpose of yoga and that the practices are meant to elevate human consciousness and awareness to live a better life. In order to awaken one's inherent consciousness, the practices start working with physical body, then moves on to regulation of breath to control prana, and then further advanced subtle practices are applied to turn the mind inwards and ultimately invoking the dormant energy within us. Application of the yogic practices requires deeper understanding of the body and the subtle constituents within. As per Hatha Yogic literature human body is a miniature representation of the cosmic universe. Through the understanding of the body and its internal subtle elements beyond the physical realms, it is said that one can understand the universe. It is essential for the practitioners to have sound understanding of chakras, nadis, pranas, its nine gates in body, 16 adharas, five tatwas (elements), and focal points for meditation. Not only the practice methods, the subtle but powerful concepts underlying the practices needs to be known to apply the hatha yogic methods to achieve success. The sequence of the practices also plays a significant role wherein the practice methods complement each other and needs to be applied depending on the aim of the practice.

Importance of Guru:

The role of a Guru or Guide is of at most importance in treading the path of Yoga, especially Hatha Yoga. Apart from the practice methods, the sequence of practice, the subtle nuances involved, and the underlying essence of the practices can be learned only from an Acharya or a Guru who is established in such practices. There are several other considerations such as the practitioner's health, food patterns, living conditions etc. needs to be factored in the application of the practice of Hatha Yoga. Thus, the role of a guide is indispensable. Yogic teachings are passed on through the lineage of the masters, therefore knowledge and understanding of the practices can be gained only if learned under a master who is part of a lineage.

Conclusion:

The six limbs of Hatha Yoga provide a comprehensive and systematic path for the true seekers of yoga. We are in the era of artificial intelligence, virtual reality and much more advancements, but nevertheless the needs and challenges of human beings have remained the same over centuries. Therefore, the path of yoga, especially Hatha Yoga is still relevant and provides a clear-cut program wherein one can progress gradually under proper guidance.



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-Transmuting the power

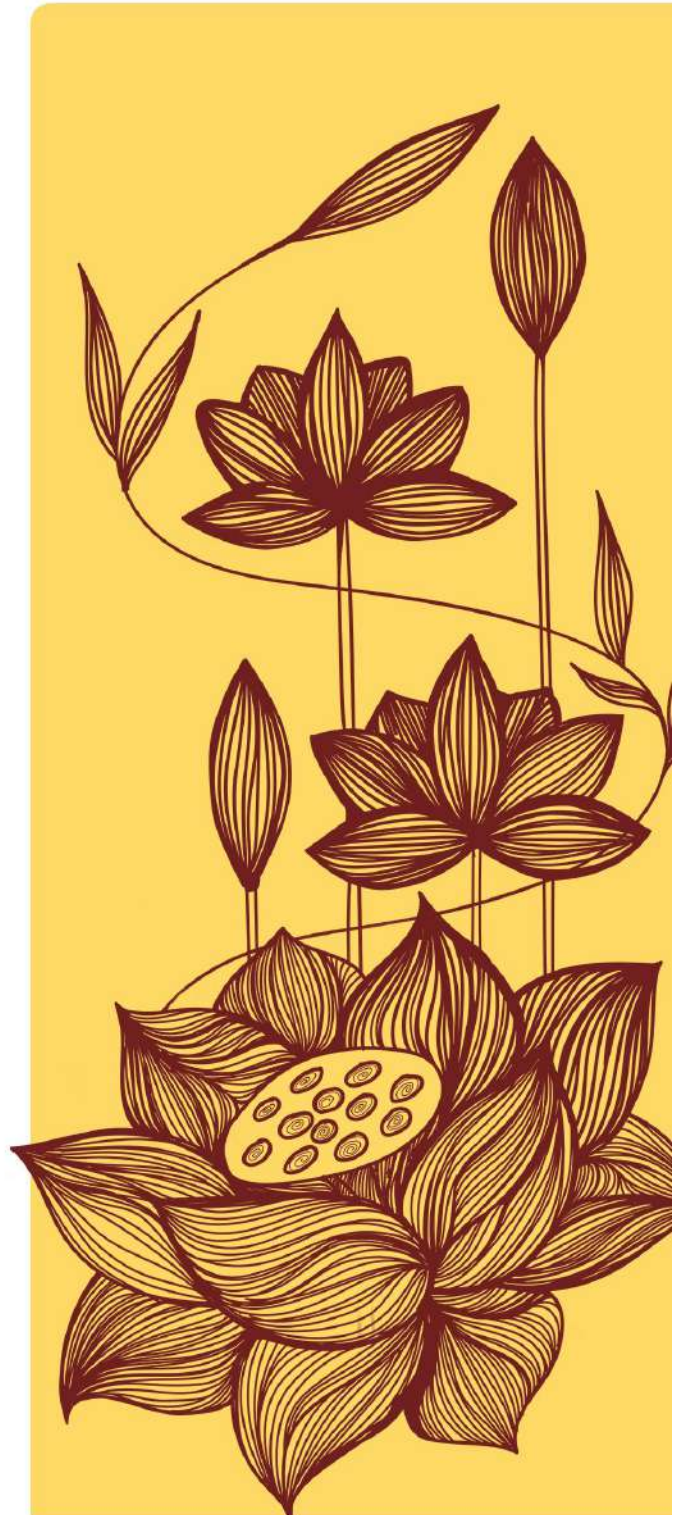


 Acharya Bala

Among Hathayogic practices, Vajroli mudra is one of the most advanced and most secret practices. It is also one of the component of gross level tantra practices of Pancha Makara Sadhana. In both forms of practice, this method is kept very secret and is imparted only to the most deserving practitioners directly from the Guru (master) that too only if needed. Long term sustained practice is essential for achieving success and perfection in Vajroli. Given these facts, rather than dwelling deep into the details of the practice methods and techniques, in this edition, we will try to provide an overall basic understanding around this practice.

The base of the energy that is needed for effective functioning of all walks of life is inherent in the sexual energy within human beings. Its external expression through various facets is what that determines the course of one's life. It is the energy that is expressed in common man through kama (desire), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (attachment), mada (Ego) and matsarya (jealousy) and is also the same energy that is invoked by those taking the path of yoga to illuminate the self-essence through control of the senses.

This energy is inherent in rajas and shukla, one of the Sapta Dhatus (seven constituents) of the human body which is also the most subtlest. This energy is also known as Retas. The union of this energy that exists within both male and female, is powerful enough to create another form of life. Such potent energy is usually wasted by common man through various sensual expressions such as kama, krodha etc. in pursuit of short-term momentary pleasures.



Whereas an intelligent yogi, by nurturing, internalizing, and redirecting the path of the energy within himself, conquers the various level of consciousness and thereby paves way for acquiring everlasting bliss.

As a first step in this practice, through systematic and disciplined efforts of controlled food intake, practice of yoga asanas, and control of breath, the practitioner should gain control to apply the organ of reproduction and the related muscles at will.

In the second stage, with application of the Hathayogic methods of Bandhas, one gradually gains control over urination to acquire ability to hold the urine and to completely release the urine at will. These methods require long term sustained practices that should be done with utmost care and if mishandled will result in significant negative effects both physically and mentally.

The third stage involves the process where water and specially curated oil are inserted into the body through the reproductive organs. For this purpose, a specially prepared tube is generally used. This practice, when applied by men is known as Vajroli and when applied by women is known as Sahajoli as per Hathayogic texts. Hatha Ratnavali, an ancient text, includes several verses that points to these practices.

The practitioners of Hathayoga and Tantra are not required to renounce family life, however, at the same time depletion of the Veerya (the energy) is also not recommended. Usually while common people indulge in sexual intercourse for progeny and/or for sensual enjoyment, the practitioners of Hathayoga and Tantra use the methods of Vajroli and Sahajoli to withhold the Veerya,

and transform that energy to Ojas (ultimate vigor) and experience the higher consciousness. These practices which are only meant for realizing one's own ultimate potential, are guarded secretly due to the potential dangers in application of these advance methods and the possibility of misuse for personal gains.

Masters impart these techniques only to those disciples who, after long term careful observation and assessment, have gained complete trust, and are completely in tune with their teachers. Hathayogic literatures repeatedly cautions against imparting such techniques to those who are immature and those not gained control of the senses, as the potential negative consequences could bring disgrace to the lineage and the teachings.





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SAMKHYA DARSHANA

-An Introduction



 Devanjana Chatterji

Part - I

All human beings desire happiness and the ultimate aim of all our efforts in life, is solely to gain happiness. No one is okay to suffer pain or distress even for a short period of time. Misery or pain has always been considered as unfavourable and avoidable, while pleasure or happiness is considered as favourable, and thus sought after.

Pleasure though, we must understand, is only momentary. The ultimate bliss that provides everlasting peace and solace, is possible only through self-realization. Our ancient masters understood this reality and therefore worked towards realizing their true nature. They also guided others towards this path.

It is these approaches and means to self-realization as prescribed by the ancient masters, that represent what in the Indian philosophical system is known as 'Darshanas'.

All the Darshanas deal with enquiry into the understanding of that one supreme consciousness, which forms the basis of the whole existence. And all of these Darshanas through diverse methods, show the path to achieve that ultimate bliss through self-realization.

Man realised that as long as there is pain, there is no space for pleasure. Relief from pain was thus essential to discover and experience happiness and hence pain was an unnecessary thing that needed to be eradicated.

However, in order to deal with any subject, a thorough understanding of it is very essential. Thus accordingly a clear comprehension and indepth knowledge about pain was essential. In such a scenario it became necessary to find answers to questions such as- What is pain in reality? What is the relation or relevance of pain in human life and this existence? What are the ways one can completely root out pain? and so on.

In the above context, the 'Samkya Darshana' provides thorough clarity on the nature of suffering and how to overcome it. And it is this element which makes this Darshana distinct from the others.

MAIN AIM OF SAMKHYA

The main premise of the Sankhya darshana is eradication of suffering.

As per Samkhya, sufferings are categorized into three types-‘Dukhatray- abhighata’. These are - Adhyatmika, Adibhautika and Adidaivika.

- 1) Bodily ailments that are known to be caused by vata, pitta and kapah and mental disturbances that are caused by kama, krodham, lobham, madam, moham, and matsaryam are considered as Adhyatmika dukkham.
- 2) Disturbances caused by human beings, animals, birds, and other living beings around us are referred to as Adibhautika dukkham, and
- 3) Disturbances that are caused by super-natural forces such as yakshas, raksahas, and similar other-wordly forces are referred to as Adidaivika dukkham.

All these sufferings primarily originate from lack of clear knowledge and understanding of the worldly objects. Thus relief from these sufferings and pain can be achieved when one is established in absolute comprehension about the worldly objects. And Samkhya Darshana provides us with the necessary fundamental principles and knowledge to do so. This cognizance then paves the way for attaining permanent and everlasting relief from pain and suffering.

In Samkhyam, this fundamental knowledge is referred to as - ‘Satta Purusha Anyatha Khyati’ or ‘Prakriti Purusha Viveka Khyathi’

SAMKHYAM OR SANKHYAM?

This Darshana is known by 2 names namely-

'Samyak Khyayate iti Samkhya.

It refers to that accurate knowledge, which comprehensively presents answers to all questions. It aims to take the seeker closer to a correct understanding of things and the self, whereby one gets ‘VivekaKhyati’ or the knowledge of discrimination, to know what is true and what isn't.

‘Sankhya’

Another interpretation, refers to this darshana as ‘Sankhya’, meaning - Number or Enumeration. It is considered a philosophy of numbers, as it deals with 25 principles or fundamental constituents of the universe.

THE AVAILABLE WORKS ON SAMKHYA

As per the traditional information available, it was Sage Kapila who formulated the Sankhya system. In due course of time a lot of commentaries, interpretations and expositions were written on this system.

Unfortunately, even though Sankhya has percolated the Indian spiritual thought deeply, not many works have survived in the purest of sense. Infact the original ‘Sankhya Sutras’ by Sage Kapila is also no longer available. The only complete work available today, is the ‘Sankhya Karika’ by Ishwar Krishna.



The Sankhya Karika consists of 72 shlokas in the Arya meter (the basic rhythmic structure of the verse); the last verse asserting that the original Samkhya sutra had only 70 verses. The most popular commentary on this Karika is Gaudapada's- 'Samkhya Karika Bhashya'.

DUALISTIC VIEWPOINT

The Samkhya school is dualistic. It talks about 2 ultimate opposing realities:

1. Purusha, the conscious principle and
2. Prakriti, the dynamic principle

PRAKRITI

Prakriti is the dynamic Principle, which is eternal and co-existing with Purusha. Prakriti can thus be defined as 'Pradhan' or the primal cause or potency, that brings forth the empirical world in its manifested form. Prakriti is essentially made up of 3 factors, the 'TriGunas'. These are – Satwa, Rajas, and Tamas. The whole material world arises only from these TriGunas.

PURUSHA

Purusha is nothing but pure consciousness. It is the Self, the Spirit, the Knower. It is the self-illuminated, uncaused, unchanging, all pervading eternal reality. Purusha is the pure witness; solitary, neutral, a spectator and non-agent, and thus very different from Prakriti, the principle of matter and manifestation.

Purusha, the witnesser, is said to be the first stimulus for creation. The sole reason for Prakriti to manifest itself in the form of the empirical world is for the benefit of Purusha. This proves that evolution is purposive.

In our next episode of the series we will explain Purusha and Prakriti in more detail in light of the Samkhya school of thought and provide a small glimpse into the Evolution theory of Samkhya.

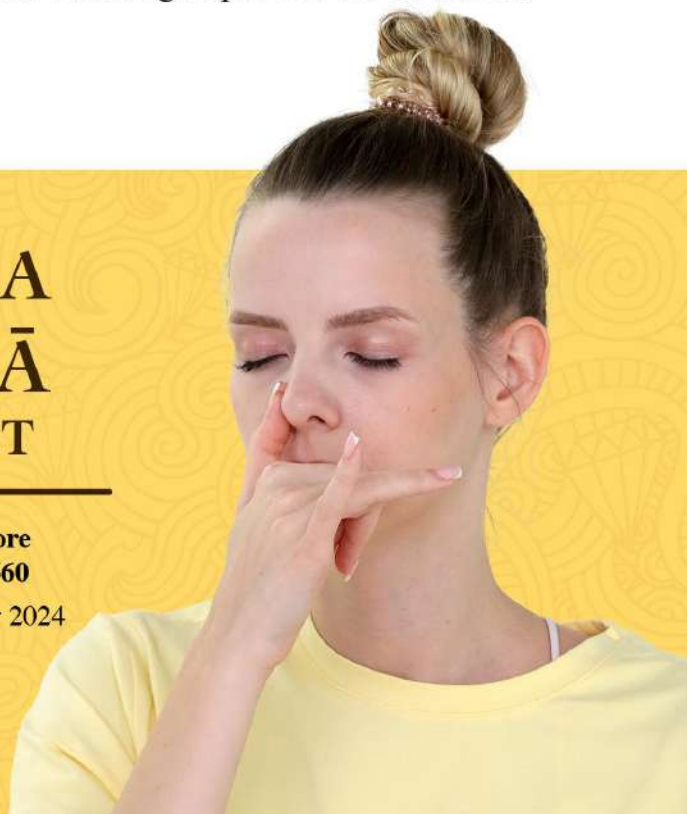


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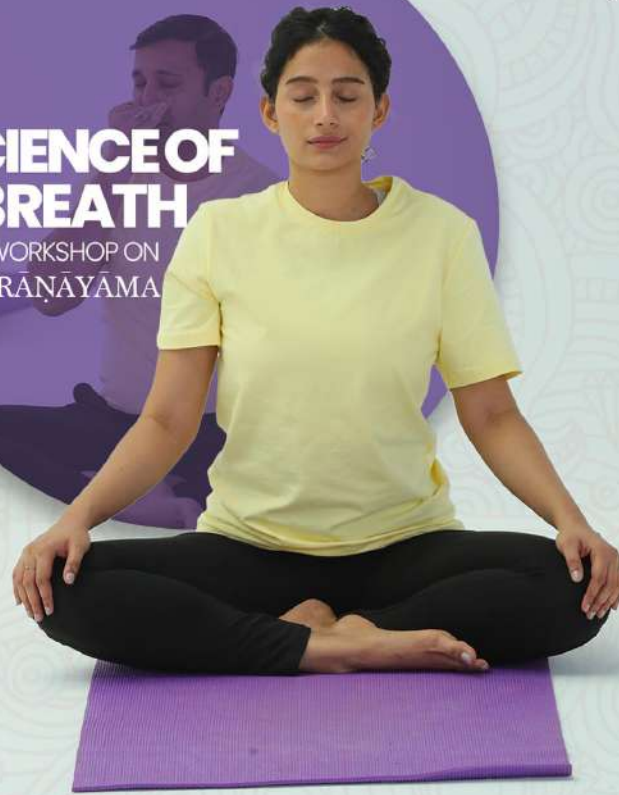


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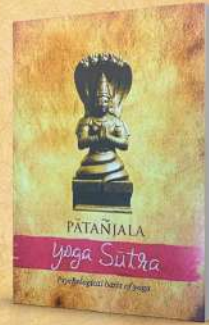
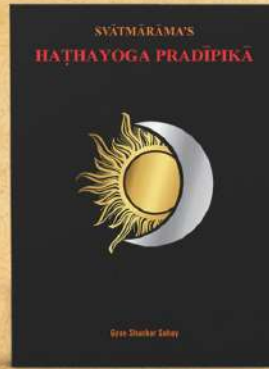
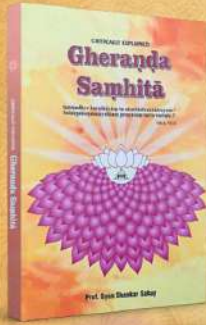
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LAYA YOGA

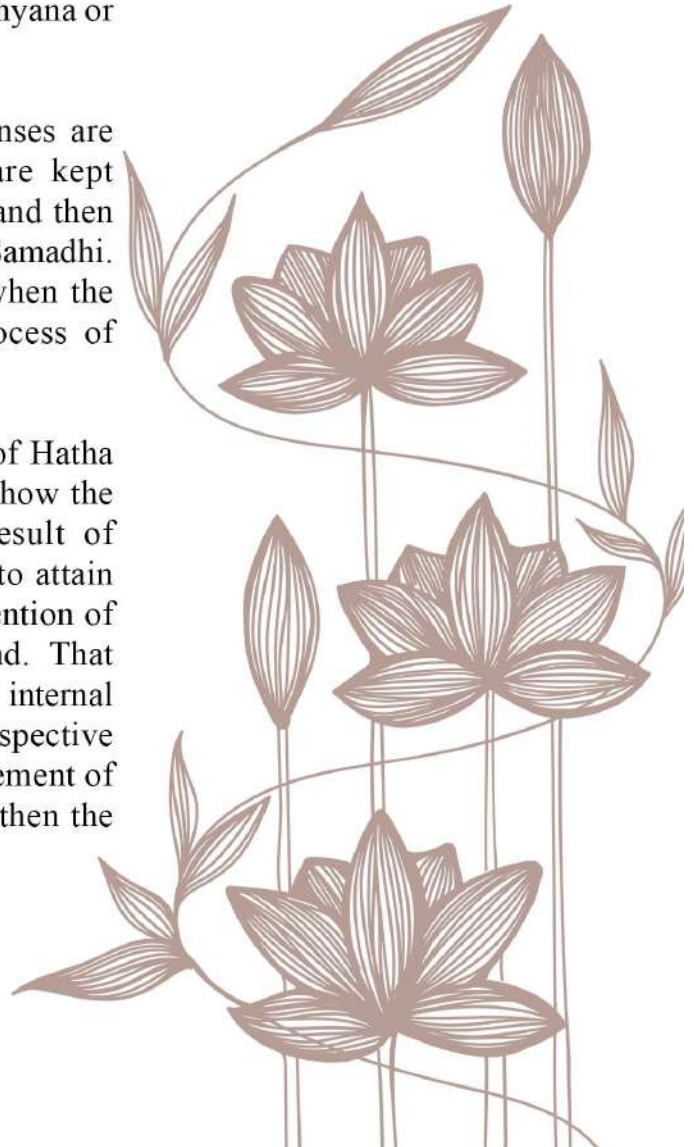
-Path to oneness

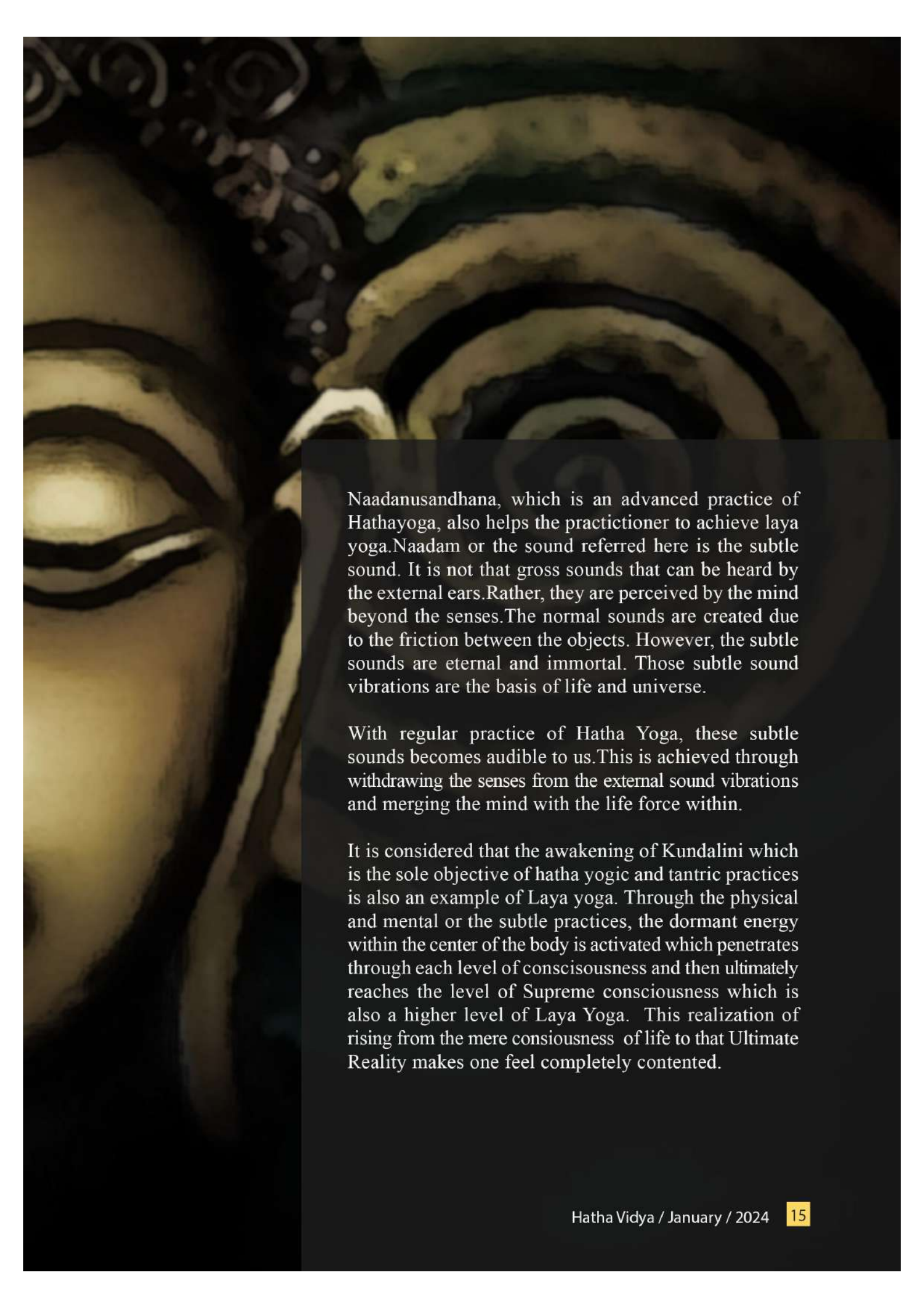


The term “Laya” is closely related to “Yoga”. If it’s subtle characteristics are noticed, we can understand that both are one and the same. But the impression that these terms are different amongst the yoga practitioners is due to the various processes or stages required for attaining the state of Laya. The sakhya bhava or the friendly attitude in bhakti yoga, the practice of pranava mantra which is one of the practice in Raja Yoga and the nadanusandhana practice in hatha yoga are all various techniques to attain Laya. All these above-mentioned practices ultimately lead to dhyana or meditation.

If observed in depth, we can see that the senses are withdrawn from the external stimuli and are kept connected to a focal point, which stays there and then dissolves there itself. This can be understood as Samadhi. In other words, we call the state of samadhi when the person, the object or the subject and the process of meditation merge into one.

Now, we can understand Laya yoga in terms of Hatha Yoga. First and foremost, we will understand how the effect of Kevalakumbhaka, which is the result of practice of Pranayama, helps the practitioner to attain the state of Laya. As a result of prolonged retention of breath, the prana gets absorbed in the mind. That means, when the prana, which is the basis of all internal activities of a human, is withdrawn from the respective spheres of activity and when the outward movement of the mind through the senses is also restricted then the phenomenon of mind ceases.





Naadanusandhana, which is an advanced practice of Hathayoga, also helps the practitioner to achieve laya yoga. Naadam or the sound referred here is the subtle sound. It is not that gross sounds that can be heard by the external ears. Rather, they are perceived by the mind beyond the senses. The normal sounds are created due to the friction between the objects. However, the subtle sounds are eternal and immortal. Those subtle sound vibrations are the basis of life and universe.

With regular practice of Hatha Yoga, these subtle sounds become audible to us. This is achieved through withdrawing the senses from the external sound vibrations and merging the mind with the life force within.

It is considered that the awakening of Kundalini which is the sole objective of hatha yogic and tantric practices is also an example of Laya yoga. Through the physical and mental or the subtle practices, the dormant energy within the center of the body is activated which penetrates through each level of consciousness and then ultimately reaches the level of Supreme consciousness which is also a higher level of Laya Yoga. This realization of rising from the mere consciousness of life to that Ultimate Reality makes one feel completely contented.



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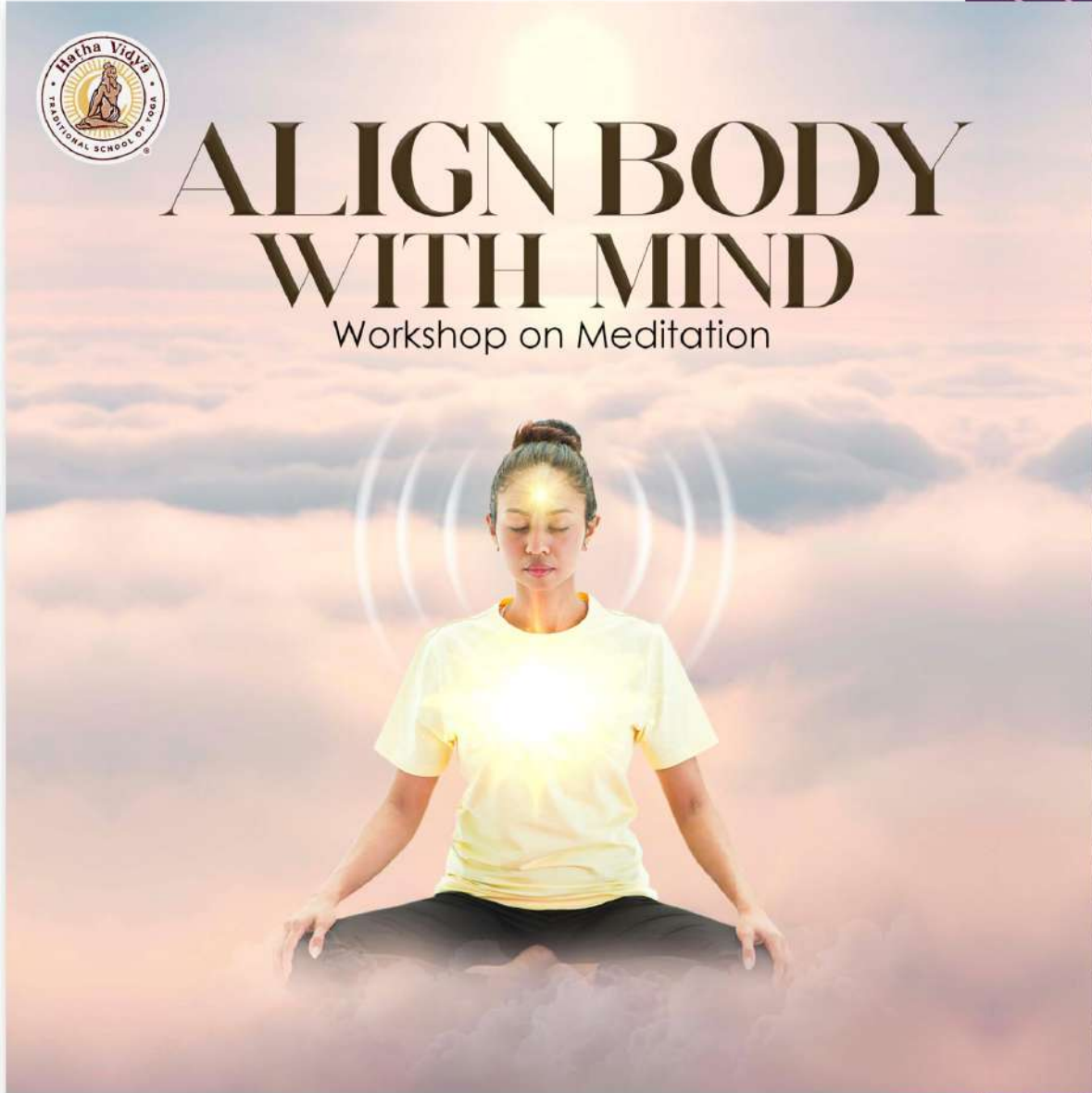


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BASTI KRIYA



 Dr. Gita Balan

-Colon Cleansing Explained

Ghatashta Yoga of Gheranda Samhita mentions seven limbs of yoga and under them, cleansing processes – Shatkarmas, have been given the first position in the order of the limbs. Through Shatkriyas or Shatkarmas, purification of the body is achieved. This includes six types of practices through which the body can be made clean, pure and free from diseases. One of the cleansing processes among the six cleansing practices is Basti.

Basti

Basti, actually means washing. According to yogic texts Basti Pradesha or Basti region starts from the anus and ranges up to the region of the navel. Any means for cleansing this area from inside or outside is called Basti and therefore the name. This is an advanced yogic practice aimed at cleansing the lower abdomen, specifically the colon. Basti practice is considered a crucial element in maintaining physical and mental well-being.

Here's an overview of Basti from a yogic perspective:

Types of Basti:

There are two types of Basti, Jala Basti and Sthala Basti as described below:

1. Jala Basti: Jala basti is done with water. This involves sucking water into the large intestine through the anus. This practice helps cleanse the colon and has therapeutic effects on various ailments.

2. Sthala Basti: Also known as Sushka Basti involves sucking air into the body without the use of a catheter or tube. This practice also aims to cleanse the colon and is performed by drawing air into the bowels, holding it, and then expelling it.

Jala Basti Procedure:

Jala Basti can be performed effectively once the practitioner has gained control over the abdominal walls and is able to incorporate proper sphincter muscle involvement during the practice.

- **Preparation:** Sit or squat over a tub filled with water or fresh flowing water area and adopt the position of Utkatasana. The water level should reach the navel. As a preparatory practice, Bhastrika Pranayama and Uddhiyana Bandha are a must, in order to perform Jala Basti properly.
- **Technique:** Suck water into the large intestine through the anus, expand the anal sphincter muscles, and perform uddhiyana bandha to create a vacuum-like suction to encourage the inward flow of water.

- **Retention:** Stand up holding the water inside the bowel for 2-5 minutes. Advanced method includes the practice of Nauli, after which the water can be expelled out properly from the body.
- **Exhalation:** Exhale and expel the water through the anus. Repeat for 3-5 rounds until the bowels are cleansed.
- **Complimentary Practice:** For efficient evacuation of the matter from the intestines, practice of Mayurasana can be undertaken.

This practice is equated with the variation of Jala Basti called Enema. However there is a significant difference. Under Enema, the spout of the tube is inserted into the anus, and keeping the water level higher, the gravitational force is used to let the water get inside the larger intestine. When the spout of the tube is removed the waste matter along with the water comes out. Whereas under Jala Basti, the water is sucked up against the gravitation pull, and held up inside the intestines for some time and after performing Nauli evacuated willfully out of the anus, cleaning the tract and colon.

Sthala Basti Procedure

- **Technique:** Adopt the position of Vipareeta Karani and draw the knees toward the chest, apply Udhiyana Banda and simultaneously do Aswini mudra by pushing the sphincter muscles out and in to fill the air into the bowels. Retain the air for a few minutes and then expel it through the anus. Repeat for 3-5 rounds.
- **Breathing:** While inhaling the anus is pulled in and up and the sphincter muscles

contracted. On exhalation the anus is expanded. While inhaling expand the chest and consciously pull the diaphragm upwards. This creates a vacuum inside the abdomen and the negative pressure helps the air sucked inside the abdomen.

Important aspects of Basti Kriya

- Beginners may use a tube for Jala Basti, lubricated with beeswax or non-irritating oil or butter.
- Always perform the practice on an empty stomach, preferably in the morning. Avoid basti kriya in certain conditions like high blood pressure, hernia, severe digestive disorders, and specific weather conditions such as extreme cold or heat.
- Although the practices look easier to describe, this should always be undertaken under the guidance of a competent and qualified teacher.
- Elaborate reference of both the Basti Kriyas is found in one of the Hatha Yogic Texts called Hatha Ratnavali.

Benefits of Basti Kriyas

- **Colon Cleansing:** Removes toxins, harmful bacteria, and accumulated stool from the colon.
- **Digestive Health:** Stimulates digestive organs, improves digestion, and helps in treating digestive disorders.
- **Dosha Balance:** Balances Vata, Pitta, and Kapha doshas, bringing equilibrium to the body.

- **Skin Enhancement:** Improves skin tone by purifying the body internally.
- **Solar Plexus Stimulation:** Strengthens the solar plexus, influencing the nervous system positively.
- **Other Benefits:** It enhances energy and helps develop control over the abdominal muscles. Blood circulation takes place efficiently, waste matter is optimized and the blood is purified. The internal organs are massaged, making the nadis healthy.

Conclusion: Basti Kriya is viewed as an advanced yogic cleansing technique with profound benefits for physical and mental health. Its significance in maintaining balance among the doshas and promoting overall well-being makes it a valuable practice in the yogic tradition.



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SURYA BHEDANA PRĀNĀYĀMA

-The heating principle



Ulpala Das

Prana is the subtler aspect of breath, and it requires a continued & focused practice to recognize its movements within the body. Prana can be understood as 'energy or 'vital force' and as per the yogic terms, the entire universe – Samasthi, is throbbing with this Prana. On an individual level – Vyasthi, the vital force is supposedly required to flow freely, without any interruptions across the several nadis or channels in the human body. Out of these the three main nadis – Ida, Pingala & Sushumna are of utmost importance. In its attempt to realize the cosmic consciousness, the prana at the Vyasthi level must elevate itself through the process of awakening the bodha or consciousness, popularly known as kundalini awakening.



The fundamental quality of Ida nadi is to cool the body and Pingala nadi has the heating effect; the tatwam or the principle of Ida nadi is Chandra – Moon and that of Pingala nadi is Surya – Sun. This means that both the sides are responsible for these effects depending or irrespective of the inhalation or exhalation. For eg. If the left nostril is used to inhale, the cooling principle enters the body and if the same nostril is used to exhale, the same effect is exiting from the body and vice versa.



Also if the inhalation is happening from the right nostril, the heating principal is enhanced in the body and simultaneously if exhalation is done from the left, the cooling principal leaves the body. The end result is heat. When the Prana flows freely through these two nadis, using certain methods it can be redirected to the Sushumna Nadi. This means that the Prana is able to pierce through certain granthis or knots and allowing the dormant Kundalini at the base of the spine to move upwards.

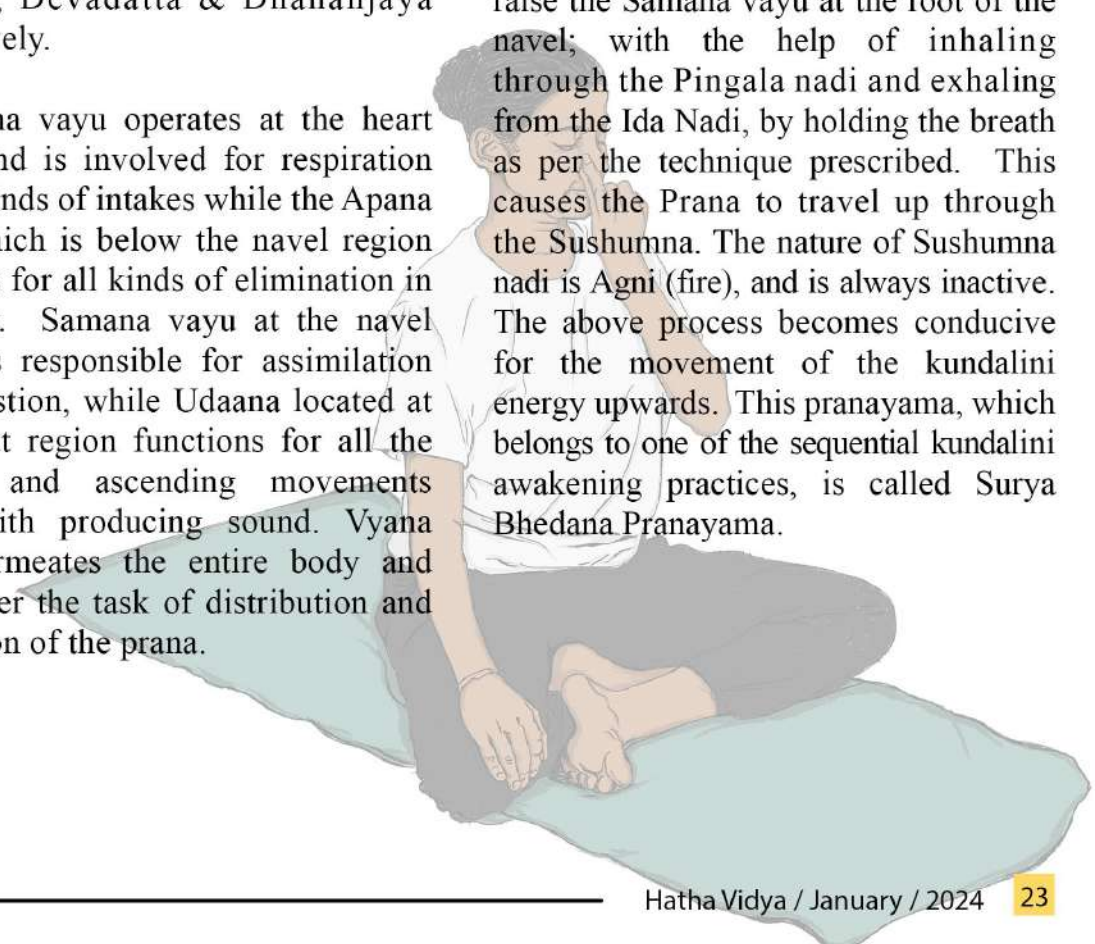
Pancha Pranas & Upa-pranas

The reference here is towards the Varishta Prana Vayu, which is broadly classified into five – Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and Vyana. There are five Upa-Vayus or sub-vayus as well, and these are directly connected to the main Pranas viz., Naga, Koorma, Krikara, Devadatta & Dhananjaya respectively.

The Prana vayu operates at the heart region and is involved for respiration and all kinds of intakes while the Apana vayu, which is below the navel region functions for all kinds of elimination in the body. Samana vayu at the navel region is responsible for assimilation and digestion, while Udana located at the throat region functions for all the upward and ascending movements along with producing sound. Vyana vayu permeates the entire body and looks after the task of distribution and circulation of the prana.

The five Prana vayus are connected to the Upa vayus in the following manner. Prana vayu is connected to Naga vayu which creates belching; Apana vayu is connected to Koorma vayu through which the tasks of blinking of eyes, opening and closing is fulfilled. Samana vayu is connected to Krikara vayu that controls sneezing, thirst and hunger while Udana vayu has its Upa vayu as Devadatta, which is responsible for yawning. Dhananjaya, which is connected with Vyana stays in the body even after death of the physical body. This is the last prana to leave the body.

Our ancient texts like Gheranda Samhita and Hatha Yoga Pradipika have elaborated methods for channelizing these vayus in a proper manner. Gheranda Samhita mentions that at the time of practice, separating these prana vayus, one should raise the Samana vayu at the root of the navel; with the help of inhaling through the Pingala nadi and exhaling from the Ida Nadi, by holding the breath as per the technique prescribed. This causes the Prana to travel up through the Sushumna. The nature of Sushumna nadi is Agni (fire), and is always inactive. The above process becomes conducive for the movement of the kundalini energy upwards. This pranayama, which belongs to one of the sequential kundalini awakening practices, is called Surya Bhedana Pranayama.



Surya Bhedana Pranayama

One of the Astha Kumbhakas as mentioned in the Gheranda Samhita and Hatha Yoga Pradipika is Surya Bhedana. The Sanskrit word surya means the 'Sun' and word bheda means to 'Pierce'. This is described as the best kumbhaka as it cleanses the frontal sinuses and destroys all the diseases caused due to the imbalance of the vata dosha. The practice of Surya Bhedana affects the Pingala nadi and result is that it increases the heat element in the body.

कुम्भकः सूर्यभेदस्तु जरामृत्युविनाशकः ।
बोधयेत् कुण्डलीशक्ति देहानलं विवर्धयेत् ।
इति ते कथितं चण्ड सूर्यभेदनमुत्तमम् । 5.68 ।

The Gheranda Samhita rightfully mentions that the practice of Surya Bhedana on a regular basis prevents old age and death, increases the body heat and awakens the kundalini.

धारयेद् बहुयत्नेन कुम्भकेन जलन्धरैः ।
यावत् स्वेदं नखकेशाभ्यां तावत्कुर्वतु कुम्भकम् । 5.59 ।

As per the Gheranda Samhita it is also noticeable that the mention of Kumbhaka, that is retention of the air, after inhaling from the right nostril has to be maintained until the sweat starts emanating from the nails and hair. Here the text is glorifying the effects of Surya Bhedhana Pranayama.

One must understand that too much of the dominance with one side of the nostril breathing will have adverse effects on the functioning of the body. These practices are meant for higher & advanced results and accordingly must be done under the guidance of an eminent teacher. Also this should be followed by different complimentary practices.





In pranayama sadhana for the awakening of higher consciousness, the sadhaka prepares to become a channel. Therefore, the guidance of a guru is essential, not just to correct the mechanics of the practice but to transmit intuitive knowledge. With the establishment of a link with the guru, the sadhana becomes the means to receive the direction for spiritual growth and the final goal is reached. One should be able to continue the practice irrespective whether the practice yields any progress, without having an inclination to give up under unfavorable circumstances.

The Siva Samhita mentions in Chapter 3 verse 11:

भवेद्वीर्यवती विद्या गुरुवक्त्रसमुद्भवा ।
अन्यथा फलहीना स्यान्निर्वीर्याप्यतिदुःखदा ॥

Only the knowledge imparted by a guru, through his lips, is powerful and useful; otherwise it becomes fruitless, weak and painful.

फलिष्यतीति विश्वासः सिद्धेः प्रथमलक्षणम् ।

Siva Samhita also reiterates that a firm belief in the practice itself is most essential, this is the first condition.

Even if all the conditions are favorable, the sadhaka will not be able to achieve the goal without the grace of the Guru. The devotion of the sadhaka towards the Guru has to remain indispensable.



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PADAHASTASANA

- Traditional Approach



Hetal Takkar

In recent years, Asanas have become the global face of yoga. Though Asanas is a significant limb of Hatha yoga, it has reduced to just a physical form of practice. The practice of doing difficult asanas, or doing them at a faster pace, or in a challenging environment is gaining popularity. The purpose of practicing Asanas has turned into narrow, which can be seen and captured in beautiful photographs and videos shared on social media.

However, not all yoga practitioners have been able to understand its true intention and meaning. As a consequence of many misinterpretations and misrepresentations of traditional yogic scripture, dilute true essence of Yoga.

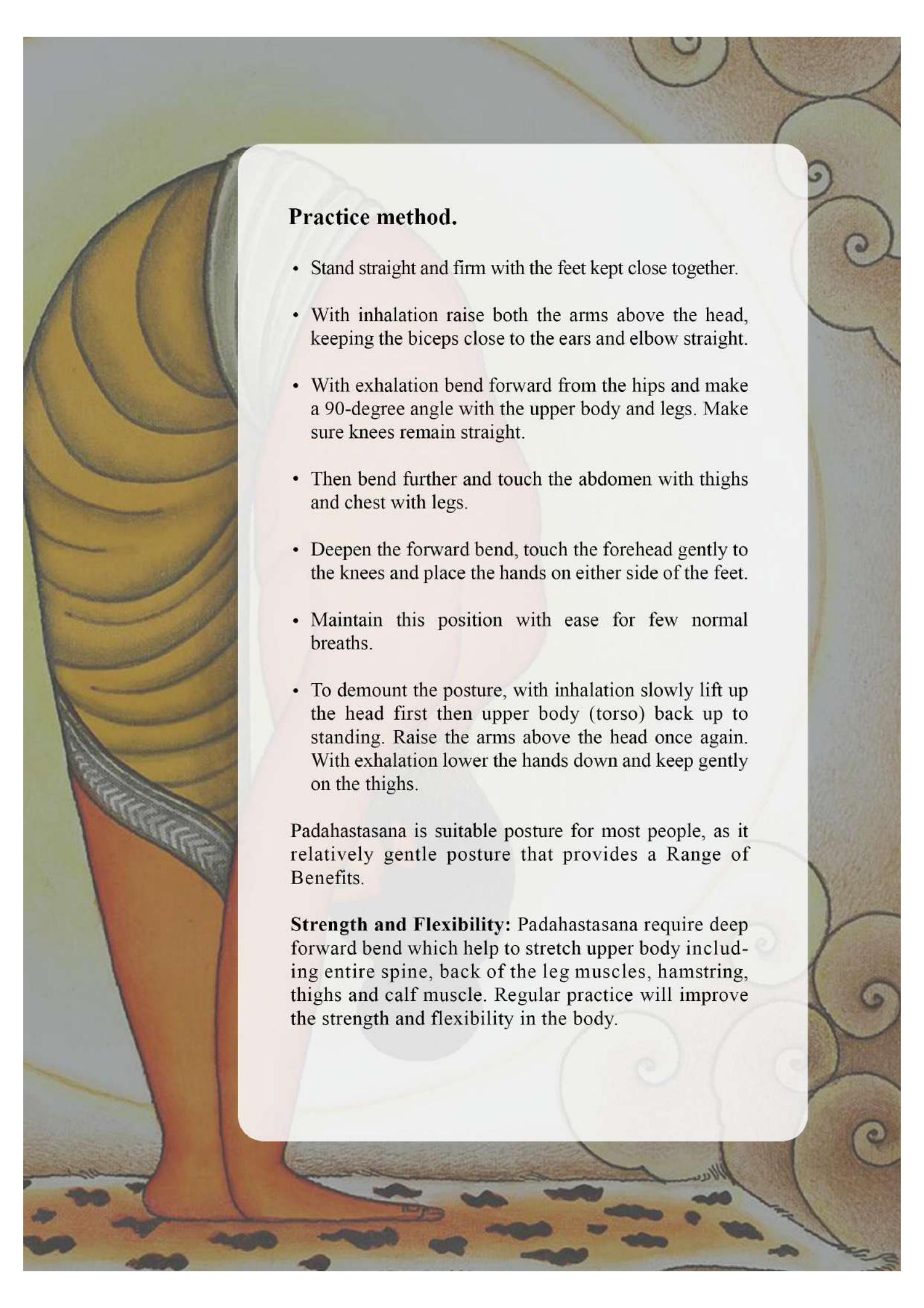
Rather than focusing on a short term result (Preyas Karma), such as a higher calorie burn, toned body, fat reduction, flexibility or social media likes, if Asanas can be practiced for self-discipline, self-study (swadhyay), with reverence to improve or develop one's inherent potential power in a stabilized manner, which extend the means to attain complete self-realization (Shreyas karma).

In this series of Insight into Asana, let us understand practice method, benefits and precautions of PADAHASTASANA.



Padahasthasana also called as Uttanasana is one of the popular forward bending traditional asana that has amazing physical and trans-physical benefits. Padahasthasana means 'Hand to foot posture' involves draping of upper body over the legs.

Though Padahasthasana is a gentle and easy posture, if it can be learned and practiced under the guidance of competent teacher, it will help practitioners to nourish the physical and mental health.



Practice method.

- Stand straight and firm with the feet kept close together.
- With inhalation raise both the arms above the head, keeping the biceps close to the ears and elbow straight.
- With exhalation bend forward from the hips and make a 90-degree angle with the upper body and legs. Make sure knees remain straight.
- Then bend further and touch the abdomen with thighs and chest with legs.
- Deepen the forward bend, touch the forehead gently to the knees and place the hands on either side of the feet.
- Maintain this position with ease for few normal breaths.
- To demount the posture, with inhalation slowly lift up the head first then upper body (torso) back up to standing. Raise the arms above the head once again. With exhalation lower the hands down and keep gently on the thighs.

Padahasthasana is suitable posture for most people, as it relatively gentle posture that provides a Range of Benefits.

Strength and Flexibility: Padahasthasana require deep forward bend which help to stretch upper body including entire spine, back of the leg muscles, hamstring, thighs and calf muscle. Regular practice will improve the strength and flexibility in the body.

- **Alleviates Flatulence, Constipation and Indigestion:** The forward bending motion compresses the abdominal organs which helps in stimulating and improving the functioning of the organs. It helps to promote the better digestion and prevent the occurrence of other digestive issues like gas, flatulence, bloat, etc. Regular practice of this asana helps to eliminate the disorders of the organs like spleen, liver, gall bladder, pancreas, uterus and kidneys and prevent toxins in the body.
- **Improve the Metabolism and Reduce the Body Fat:** Padahastasana is considered as a very effective yoga posture for weight loss as it enhances the metabolism and reduce the fat accumulation around the waist and abdomen.
- **Improve the lung Function and Immunity:** Forward bend allows blood to flow to the upper sections of the body will boost the vitality of the lungs and help in improving the immunity system.
- **Reduce the stress, fatigue and sluggishness:** By lowering the upper body and stretching the entire body release the tension in the neck and shoulder, calms the mind and keep anxiety at bay. Blood circulation improves throughout the body and will make one feel more active. Regular practice of this asana promotes relaxation and better sleep.
- **Raise concentration and sharpen the memory:** When performed regularly, by focusing on the breath and movement of the body, this asana can help to improve the mental clarity and enhance the memory.
- **Benefits for Women:** It is a beneficial asana for balancing the menstrual cycle by improving the hormonal secretion. It also aids in reducing the painful signs of menopause.



Precautions and contraindications associated with Padahastasana:

- People suffering from serious back pain problems should not perform this asana, as this posture can put pressure on the lower back and aggravate the back pain.
- Padahastasana involve folding forward which increases blood pressure and hence those with heart disease, hypertension, and high blood pressure should avoid this Asana.
- Forward bend is not advisable if the person is suffering from migraine, vertigo, cervical spondylitis slipped disc or sciatica.
- In the case of recent abdomen surgery, hernia or ulcer related problem Padahastasana should be strictly avoided as it may worsen the condition.
- If you have suffered from serious injury or are experiencing the pain in the spine, hips, thigh, knees, ankles etc. better to refrain from the practice. Let your self heal properly before performing Padahastasana.
- Person who has undergone an eye surgery recently or having glaucoma should avoid this practice as it can increase the in ocular pressure and exacerbate glaucoma.
- Women can avoid this forward bending asana during menstrual cycle.
- During pregnancy, women should avoid this asana from their practice as forward bend can put the pressure on abdomen and interfere the baby's growth.

We need to be mindful of the fact that doing an asana does not just mean getting into a difficult pose. How you get into asana, how comfortably and steadily you stay in that posture with what intention are equally vital. Then only Asana leads to spiritual illumination by offering physical health and mental clarity.

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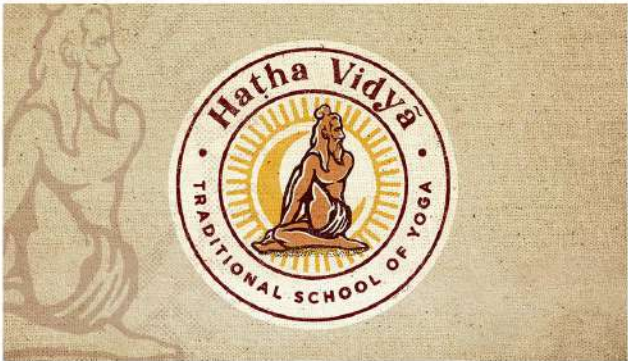
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