



Yoga for Life

(Guide Lines for Student and Teacher)

Pam & Gordon Smith

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Introduction

Yoga is a unique art form suitable for all ages as it speaks to both young and old alike. It improves health and extends life, linking all that is best both East and West. It also awakens each person to their own individual centre of creativity, uniting and bringing out all that is best in each. Modern day living pulls in different directions, creating stress and giving rise to the sense that our Mind, Feeling and Will is no longer our own, but only there to serve the demands of a world that at times may seem to be spinning out of control.

The Yoga class provides the space in which we can exercise, improve health and flexibility, and coordinate our activities in such a way that brings Mind, Feeling and Will into harmonious relationship. This has profound psychological benefits as it brings all our scattered energies back under control.

For children Yoga is fun as the ancients saw that every aspect of nature was a window into the energy which is life itself. Hence there are many postures named after birds, animals, trees and which children can take delight in copying as they stretch and grow.

The elderly, who lack mobility, become more fearful with the passing years, as their limbs stiffen and bones become brittle; they can be shown how to tap into the source of life itself and regain some of their lost youthfulness. It takes a lot of energy to protect oneself in a cage of tightened ligaments and the experienced teacher can show the way back to health.

Yoga is not confined to exercise, as unique and beneficial as is this aspect of Yoga, as it has a profound spiritual basis, that links the best spiritual philosophies both East and West. There is nothing to join, in the religious sense, as it awakens that which is good and profound and will without doubt strengthen one's own belief system and not weaken it.

It can be said that there are almost as many types of Yoga as there are of teachers who teach it. Never be put off if your first class does not meet with your expectations, always try others until you find one that is exactly right for you. It may be that you just require some light exercise coupled with deep relaxation, and of this type of class there are many. We will now provide for the beginner, an overview of the broad spectrum, which is yoga.

The following not only highlights what may be expected in a Yoga class, explains some of the terms and aims, also give hints as to more advanced working. This will be useful not only for the beginner, but also a reminder for the teacher of some of the areas of Yoga they may have forgotten. This does not include pages of Yoga Postures but rather tries to capture the essence of that which is Yoga.

Your First Class

The first thing the beginner will notice is the non competitive nature of Yoga, and yes of course, there will be some who are naturally flexible, having been practising for some time. What is important is that the ultimate aim of the teacher is to awaken the Guru (teacher), within the student. This means that the student becomes more Self-Response-Able and does not have to rely on too much support outside of themselves.

Most classes will include two types of movement that is continuous and static. The continuous movements, usually gentle and flowing, will be for warm ups and preparing the body, before holding a posture. The so called 'static' pose requires focus and attention, and helps to bring together all the scattered energies in the body.

The movements are designed to bring balance and harmony to the body that is forward bends (flexing), side bends (Lateral flexion), and back stretching (hyperextension) and rotation. A balanced and toned musculature helps support the skeletal system and can be helpful in relieving lower back pain.

Hatha Yoga is the type of Yoga which places its emphasis on movement and exercises for health. Yet this is an over simplification as Hatha cannot be divorced from other types, which form different parts of the holistic study which is Yoga. It is interesting as there is always something new to learn week by week and Hatha has its roots firmly established in thousands of years of practical experience, and its branches extend upward and outwards into every area of human experience.

Sanskrit is the ancient spiritual language of Yoga and most teachers like to introduce the Sanskrit names of Postures, coupled with plain English and demonstrate what needs to be done; so the occasional use of Sanskrit words should not cause any problems and only bring a little more light, as the meaning of the words become clear. To give a couple of examples, the Sanskrit

word Hatha has two components, Ha meaning Sun and Tha Moon. The reference to the Sun is to light and initiative; and the Moon to inertia, as the Moon does not generate its own light and only reflects the light of the Sun. Therefore Hatha Yoga is about awakening to the light and intelligence within ourselves, and overcoming the inertia that can impede progress.

Posture and Asana are two words used frequently in class, and usually have the same significance. However, there does need to be some clarification; exercise can refer to any form of physical movement, and postures can either be standing, sitting or lying, and a pose, any particular stance; as in children's Yoga when adopting the pose of a tree or a lion, etc. Asana is a Sanskrit word meaning seat and originally was a reference to one of the seated postures adopted for meditation, and now used extensively in the Hatha Yoga class. To use the word asana, implies use of the mind when adopting a posture, and can help channel feeling, by invoking calm and steadiness, as with the Tree Posture, or the strength and courage of the lion etc. Although now not in general use, the word asana can also be the small mat or rug upon which one sits during meditation.

The Yoga Mat, in addition to suitable clothing, is part of the basic and essential equipment of any Yoga student, as the modern mat is usually designed to prevent slipping on wood block or polished floors and can provide some ease when lying down for relaxation. Most importantly, particularly when practising at home, it represents your sacred space and gives rise to a sense of anticipation when placing your mat at your set time, either for meditation or Yoga. For many beginners to practise at a set time may at first seem a bit like work but soon evolves into a joyous necessity. It is interesting that when visiting a strange town, to attend a Yoga seminar and unsure of directions, we have often looked for and followed rolled mats, tucked under arms, straight to the venue.

Yoga Ethics It may seem strange reading about ethics in relation to what may seem to be Yoga exercises for health and yet they are the very foundation on which the whole structure of Yoga rests. What is unique about Yoga is that the Postures combined with periods of Relaxation, and breathing exercises, bring an increase of vitality to the body, and without a sound ethical philosophy, the energy generated can feed the lower nature and be counterproductive to Yogic aims and even prove harmful. High moral standards are linked to the Yoga practitioner and some like the Swamis or Yoga Monks remain celibate, as indicated by their traditional orange robes.

Diet is also considered to be an important part of Yoga practice, and many Yogis are vegetarian, eating pure foods so as not to feed their animal nature, and if possible try to eat food produced as near to natural sunlight as possible.

In the ashrams of India the preparation of food is also considered important, as food prepared by someone without the highest spiritual standards, and purity of motive and action, will taint the food that is being prepared for the Guru and his followers.

Grace before Meals is not the first thing that will jump to mind when joining a Yoga class. Yet a meal eaten in anger, or rushed and eaten without thought or consideration is likely to feed that anger than otherwise. Therefore a few quiet moments of reflection and stilling the mind, will help the energy of the food feed the higher centres within. Many Yoga teaching centres of note will always spend a few seconds in quiet reflection, before commencing a meal.

The Breath of Life – Prana

The breathing exercises of Yoga fall into three categories, those which have a sound physiological basis and are designed to increase the depth and action of the lungs, those which calm and relax, and a little more advanced those which tap the underlying energy of the cosmos.

The Full Yogic Breath includes Upper, Mid Chest and Abdominal Breathing. This is normally taught in stages and commences with an exhalation, when as much air as possible is discharged from the lungs. The abdominal breath requires that air is drawn slowly and evenly into the base of the lungs, at the same time extending the abdomen, so that the diaphragm lowers. It can help if the palms of the hands are placed on the abdomen and it is imagined that air is drawn into the space under the hands. This technique can be particularly helpful to asthmatics, as control of the abdomen helps with breathing out, which some Asthmatics find difficult. Abdominal breathing is also calming as it helps with the venous return to the heart, which slows the heart beat and has a calming effect.

Mid Chest or lateral breathing also helps to increase control and is an exercise in expanding the lungs laterally and helps are either yourself or a partner, placing hands at the sides of the rib cage to check the degree of side movement on inhalation.

Upper Chest breathing carries the air into the top part of the lungs and oxygenates the Hilar lymph Nodes. Helps are lifting the shoulder blades slightly as the air reaches into the top part of the lungs.

It is important to remember that the breath and the emotions are closely linked and that to forcibly disturb the natural sequence of the breath can lead to emotional breakdown. There are a variety of breathing techniques within the Yoga system, therefore it is recommended to work with an experienced teacher when practising the breath restraints that is the pranayamas.

Efficiency can be defined as achieving your aims with the least amount of energy expenditure, and this applies to the breath. The best form of breathing when upset or angry is calm peaceful breathing as this calms the emotions. Also with the full Yogic breath, which links together, Upper, Mid, and Abdominal breathing, it is likely that the breathing will slow as it becomes more efficient. It is said that between birth and death we are given a set number of breaths, and that by calming, slowing and making the breath more efficient, we prolong life.

Prana is the Infinite Manifesting Energy of the Universe, which means that all matter is a manifestation of power. This is not at odds with modern physics which has split the atom; the apparent un-splittable, and observed primary energy formations appearing as if by magic, out of the no-thing of infinite space. Prana is the energy that actively posits life and therefore is intelligent and has given rise to intelligent life. None of this is unknown or strange to the yogi who has discovered the subtle link between Prana and the Breath, and who is able to recharge his/her batteries.

Definition of Yoga -Yoga is defined as Union with the Self and this has caused controversy and speculation among many. The Self is simply that in us which knows we are here. It is none different to that which we call the Soul, and is not something which we have, but which we are. Some religious groups are opposed to Yoga simply through lack of understanding. As the word Yoga and Religion are synonyms. The word Religion means to bind back to the Source and Yoga Union with the Source that is the source of everything that exists.

Yoga is Whole that is holistic with many levels of application from a simple pursuit for health, into profound levels of spiritual and depth psychology. Many who take the first steps by joining a Yoga class will find it is based on

truth and a level of realism, and will naturally want to take the next step. Every part is linked to every other part and we will now continue to dip into what is 'Yoga for Life'

The Self in Yoga is often referred to by its Sanskrit name Atman, and when written in English, and referred to in this sense, is written with a large 'S'. This is important as the self most people refer to is the egoic self, which is very much related to 'self image' and the way we respond to the world. A clue as to what the Yogi means by the Self is indicated by the often quoted reference that Atman = Brahman. The Atman is the Self or Soul of an individual in its non egoic and eternal sense, and Brahman is God or Allah, that is 'All Life'. The Atman or soul in its pure essence is a solo zone of the pure essence of life, unpolluted by time.

The Evolving Student with daily practice, will little by little come to understand what is meant by such abstract terms like Atman = Brahman. There is of course always a choice, we can simply enjoy the exercise and do no study, and to use the words in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, "Ever come out by the same door as we came in", leaving none the wiser. With understanding comes growth and the means to deal with all the complexities of life, and eventually a life beyond this one. To the beginner, this idea may seem absurd, but eventually will come the knowledge that death is simply a door from one level of reality to another. The journey starts with the Yoga Asana or Posture.

Yoga Asana implies the Conscious use of the mind and is the development of a meditative approach to exercise, rather than otherwise. This means learning to Exercise Self control right at the start, and by having a clear image in the mind, as to what needs to be achieved, for example the perfect posture. This sets the target, which may take several months to achieve, as Self guidance is about being aware of one's limitations and guiding the body wisely and safely toward its objective. There is a great deal to learn about ourselves when first practising Asana. Such as learning to overcome negative impulses and discovering the difference between inclination and Will, as inclination usually implies a preference for the easy way out, and Will is very much about being awake, taking charge, and developing initiative.

Posture Coordination is cooperation between the different levels of being, that is between Head, Heart and Will. Often in life our head indicates one thing and our feelings another, with resulting confusion and a loss of energy. Yoga Asana or Posture provides the focus and the opportunity to practise an Integral

approach that will help unify the scattered energy in the body, which when carried into daily life makes for increased efficiency at every level.

Patanjali is often referred to as the Father of Yoga and lived approximately 300 AD, and codified the practice of Yoga. He is famous for his Yoga Sutras; The Eight Limbs of Yoga, and his definition of Yoga, which is 'Yoga is stilling the activities of the mind'. To someone who relies on their 'mind stuff', this will seem a strange statement. When the mind is still, it is like the clouds moving away from the face of the Sun, and the Self as Consciousness starts to see clearly, no longer confused by numerous thoughts. To focus on a Posture with a still mind and practising living in the 'Here and Now', will help awaken the intuitive faculty in dealing with life's problems.

Positive Thinking – every thought in the mind has an emotional charge and to carry negative thoughts, adversely effects body chemistry. Yoga is very much about positive thinking and developing a body of truth, which is life enhancing and provides a sure foundation in this world as well as the next, This Yoga is Jnana Yoga to which we will again refer to later.

Health and Longevity

Yoga lays the foundation for a long and healthy life, with exercise, relaxation and centring exercises, which not only improve health and a sense of well being, but also places the student back in charge of their own destiny. At the heart of this life and underlying all the forms that exist, is a subtle geometry or pattern that determines the shape of things. This is the sonic geometry or sound pattern of the universe; which forms the basis of Mantra Yoga. Most people are out of touch with this underlying wisdom and distort the pattern of their own lives, by the decisions they make, which are often out of touch with reality. The Yogi by learning to consciously coordinate their movements, can gradually take control of the mind and reduce the chatter associated with external activity, and by further refinement of feeling, eventually attune themselves to the underlying template of life itself.

Posture Alignment is a process of attunement to the eidetic that is the perfect form that underlies creation. This requires a few moments of preparation, by first placing the Yoga Mat, stilling the mind and quietening and refining the breath. The breath and feeling at its most peaceful, provides the link to what is sometimes referred to as our original face; or the life force that patterns the way we are. It is by feeling for this pattern, and sharpening up a little on this that gives rise to its ideal form in the mind, as all ideas are formal packets of

energy. The breath and the visualised image in the mind then provide the key to a younger and healthier body. There should be no effort or tension involved in perceiving oneself in the mind's eye, and then feeling into and directing the transforming energy into the whole body.

Savasana – the Corpse is the pose of complete relaxation and is basic when practising the relaxation techniques of Yoga. No one can be more relaxed, than when dead, and of course we are not referring just to the physical body, as the subtle body freed from the encumbrances of all bodily tension experiences sublime freedom. The way to approximate to this experience is by first tensing and relaxing muscle groups, playing suitable music, and visualisation techniques.

Relaxation for Health requires that we get in touch and communicate in a positive way with different parts of the body. For example by sending feelings of love and appreciation, first to the bones of the body, that is the skeletal system and really appreciating them for the good job they do in supporting your weight, and providing the levers for movement. Next, sending good feeling and appreciation to the digestive system, the heart and lung system, pulmonary circulation, circulatory system, and integument. Finishing with relaxed peaceful breathing, and perhaps with the affirmation of a governing concept, such as affirming that happiness and health are my real nature.

Relaxation technique is a skill that is developed and grows with experience and is just as an important aspect of Yoga as the physical practices.

It can be said that there are almost as many different Yoga's as there are Yoga teachers, as each brings something different, because of their background, personality and area of interest. We will now consider some of the specific areas of Yoga all of which will overlap and will, at some time, become part of the popular Hatha Yoga class.

Kriya Yoga is a word that signifies action and generally refers to the discipline of cleanliness and diet and the avoidance of intoxicants. The early Yoga texts refer to some methods of cleansing that will seem alarming to the modern reader, such as washing the intestines by standing in a river up to the waist, and removing and washing the lower intestine, or swallowing a length of cloth, then churning the intestine, before removing the cloth to remove bile etc. It is easy to select the bizarre, from early writings. Yet modern day hygiene is very effective and can be linked to what has gone before. Like clearing the mouth and nostrils, cleaning the teeth and gums, bathing and generally cleanliness; in

this section on Kriya we will be concentrating on the subtle, rather than the physical aspects of cleansing.

Posture (Asana) is an important aspect of this, as purity of heart is to will one thing, and to focus the whole being on what is perceived to be the perfect posture has a unifying affect. It is also important to note, that if suffering from a cold or bout of flue; when the energies of the body are scattered in different directions, that to hold a single posture for a few seconds, will be strengthening by focussing the energy of the body.

Mudra means gesture and in its most expressive form is seen in Indian dance, where hand, eye and face, capture the essence of what is meant in a single moment. There is also a moment when the perfected Asana can be called Mudra, and this would be for example, when the Lion Posture (Simhasana), captures the strength and courage of the lion, or the calm, steadiness and durability of the Tree (Vriksasana). More familiar are the meditative hand gestures which can be attributed to each level of being.

Physical body is no doubt the weakest of all the bodies and is referred to as the body of food (mana maya kosha), and can be equated with the little finger; therefore if meditating at the level of the physical, the tip of the thumb would lightly touch the tip of the little finger; the thumb is representative of the Will in the highest sense of that word. Therefore if meditating and directing one's thought and healing toward the physical, the thumb would be conjoined with the little finger.

Emotional Body is the next finger up (the ring finger), and is equated with the energy body, and our feelings of liking and disliking. This body of life force (prana maya kosha), is essential for the nature and life of the body. Then if meditating, or focussing on calming the emotions, the tip of the thumb would lightly touch the tip of the little finger.

Mental Body is our body of thought (Mano maya kosha), therefore if our focus is on the thought process in the mind, the tip of the thumb lightly touches the tip of the middle finger, and is a steady reminder of the level at which we are working, and helps prevent the mind from wandering. These lower three fingers, middle, ring and little finger, represent the animal nature as even the animals are to be able to count, know when it is meal time and experience emotion. The levels above this are the realms to which the Yogi aspires and which are to become natural to his life.

Higher Mind is Buddhi or Intelligence and is the level we associate with wisdom. This is why when we see Yogis meditating their hands are in Jnana Mudra, the wisdom seal, that is thumb and forefinger lightly touching. This level is Vijnana Maya Kosha, and interestingly maya kosha, means illusory sheath, as reality is said to transcend even these levels.

Undulating Field like a running serpent is the Ananda Maya Kosha which when it turns and catches its own tale gives rise to the forms in creation, which as rotatory forms of energy give rise to the illusion that somehow they are separate from the field. The Yogi refers to this as the sheath of Bliss which arises because of the uninterrupted motion of the Will; the Will is represented by the thumb. All the levels (fingers) arise out of the palm, which represents God or Brahman, or for those of a scientific disposition, the energy field.

Namaskara is the Indian greeting (in a spirit of worship), in which the palms and fingers are brought together in a traditional greeting, and which signifies “I salute the light within you”.

Trataka is a cleansing technique for the eyes, in which one gazes steadily at an object without blinking, until tears begin to fall, so that the eyes are both strengthened and cleansed. While avoiding eye strain, it certainly requires an act of will trying not to blink. All these techniques including Mudra and Trataka may seem somewhat superficial on first reading about them, but they are the essential basics to later Yoga practice, having the effect of strengthening and steadying in preparation for what can best be described as turning base metal into gold; that is a process of spiritual transformation. We will now continue with three Trataka exercises.

Inner Trataka is inner gazing and usually starts with the transference of an external image into the mind's eye. For example the still light of a candle flame or conversely the image of a lamp in a draught free room, with the light peaceful and steady, here we include a quote from the Bhagavad Gita Ch6:v18:19. When the mind of the Yogi is in harmony and finds rest in the spirit within, all restless desires gone, then he is a Yukta, one in God. Then his soul is a lamp whose light is steady, for it burns in a shelter where no winds come.

Intermediate Trataka requires that an object is placed about eight feet away, or as is more usual, *a candle is used, and the class sit in a circle with the lighted candle in the centre. This is usually a preliminary to later meditation, as the experience is peaceful and relaxing and gives rise to a sense of class unity.

Outer Trataka is as the name suggests, is gazing at a distant object such as a distant star. All these methods will give rise to unique experiences. As with outer trataka, the earth can suddenly feel incredibly small as one grasps the significance of the incredible distances between us and the distant planets.

Yoga of the Householder is the name given to Kriya Yoga by Yogananda in his book 'Autobiography of a Yogi' and in this sense is one of the most difficult Yogas, as to keep one's own spiritual discipline (Sadhana) and maintain unity in a busy household can be far from easy. It requires a great deal of 'Self' effort and right application, whether cleaning, preparing a meal or relating to others. This does not mean that one becomes subjective and like a door mat, but rather responsible in the sense of response-able, able to respond adequately in every situation.

Jnana Yoga is the Yoga of knowledge and every Yoga class of note should be able to set aside some time to answer students' questions and explain the truth that is Yoga. Truth is intellectual apprehension of form and without spiritual insight can be likened to the story of the blind men, who met an elephant on the road, each describing the truth of what they experienced differently, some by placing their hands on the trunk, others on the side, and some by grasping the tail.

Often the truth of a thing is self evident, as when holding an object in the hand, and it is when we try to describe in words, that we move away from the reality of what a thing is, and get caught in the intellectual apprehension of the terms. Jnana in its highest sense is best described as intuitive wisdom, and Buddhism has a name for this which is Prajna. It is this level of intuitive wisdom that gave rise to the Sanskrit alphabet; as the ancient seers of India perceived that the universal life force Prana was patterned intelligently and gave rise to the manifest universe. These sound formations which exist throughout the manifest universe are known as Shabda Brahman, another term with which you will become familiar when studying Mantra Yoga.

There is a difference between apparent knowledge and real knowledge, as most apparent knowledge is based on hearsay, and has been taught to us by

our parents and educators, this knowledge is transient, and at the end of a life will disappear into oblivion like the body itself. There is a level of knowledge that will not disappear and that is the level of universal truth, it is the same truth as spoken by Christ, when he said “I am the way, the truth and the life”. This level of truth is at the level of the higher mind and is the level at which the Yogi works towards. It is the level which when achieved healing becomes possible, and for the Yogi the development of the angelic body. This can be helped by working with a spiritual name.

Your Spiritual name has been with you throughout eternity and represents the true pattern of your spiritual nature. Many Yoga Teachers adopt a Sanskrit name which shows their commitment to Yoga. If adopting the prefix Swami it is an indication of adopting the role of a monk and with this celibacy. Many Names that we adopt in life are according to custom and tradition. Your true spiritual name is sacred and therefore kept secret and can be arrived at by a process of intuitive reasoning. Once you have the name, each time you discover a universal truth, it is affirmed in this name. This way it is possible to develop a spiritual body that cannot be harmed by the second death. The Meditation process, by which this name is arrived at, is by meditating on the letters of the alphabet. The vowels are not initially included as they represent pure spirit, as there is no closure of the lips when pronouncing them, and the consonants are the form, or the body of language. The process is to discard all consonants that you feel you have no affinity with, until arriving at only three or four. The vowels are then introduced which breathes life into the word, and this is then your spiritual name. The reason for not disclosing the name is that it is wise not to cast your pearls; as it is easy to open yourself to attack when putting your head above the parapet, prematurely. Jnana Yoga is one of the ways to liberation, as truth (Satya) is the foundation and part of the first limb of Patanjali’s Raja Yoga and part of the study, and life of both student and teacher.

Bhakti Yoga – A Bhakta is a devotee and lover of God and follows the path of love and devotion, which is often religious in its form of devotion. What we love we tend to become; just like couples who have spent a lifetime together tend to grow alike. In India there are many Gods and Goddesses, considered worthy of worship, and all represent functions or intermediaries between God and Man; as God may often seem to be beyond the reach of mere mortals. Mankind loves at many levels, such as at the level of Eros (Greek Love God); that is at the level of the erotic. A higher level could be considered as Ethos,

the level of morality and ethics; and finally, Agape, the level of selfless and spiritual love, this latter is the aim of the Yogi.

Spiritual Love (Agape), to quote the definition used by my own Guru (Eugene Halliday), is working for the development of the potential of all beings. This transcends the image of a loving being who always gives you what you want rather than what you need. When we love we embrace more than ourselves and God's love is all embracing, hence the Governing Concept held close to the heart of a Bhakta (devotee) is, God is Love.

Shasta is part of a tradition that regards the female as supreme and in this sense; she is the universal love or power from which all life springs forth. When worshipped as a Goddess she is Shakti, and her male consort Shiva.

Shiva and Shakti are two aspects of the Hindu pantheon, which are central to Indian thought and which may frighten religionist and confuse some Yoga beginners. These two deities are central to tantric thought and simply represent Male and Female. Shiva is often defined as the destroyer of illusion, and is regarded as the representative of Truth. At the highest level there is a Divine marriage between Love and Truth. They are indeed not separate and Shiva is the soul mate of Shakti and in the act of creation, Shakti responds to the truth within her. This is very much a Yogic concept and is expressive of the reality of life; as when two people marry, if the male is not true to her, there arises in her heart a divine dissatisfaction with the relationship; just as when a relationship is true, it can be creative and rewarding.

Self Healing of oneself and others becomes possible when feeling and motive are perfectly aligned. It is right feeling toward Posture that gives rise to the perfect form in the mind. Which when directed toward and felt within the body affects body chemistry and mobilises body energy in a positive way. Yoga in the course of time heightens consciousness and increases sensitivity, so that it is possible when practising massage, or the laying on of hands to sense the distortion in the energy field; which has given rise to problems. It then becomes possible to see the person with which you are working, as perfect, and be guided by this formative level of energy and consciousness. It is important to remember that it is not possible to impart healing to another person, if it is contrary to their will. As strange as it may seem, some people can actually perceive a benefit in being less than well.

Bhakti Group Meditation is based on the word love, in which a circle is formed with the joining of hands. The letter 'L' represents the linking of the whole circle and the 'O', the circle itself. The 'V' represents the potential for development, and is much like a set of compasses which can transcribe wider and wider circles. The letter 'E' is a symbol for energy and the life force of the whole group. Start with peaceful breathing, stilling the mind, and bringing peace into the whole circle. Then with love in the heart, impart love with each breath into the circle, for the benefit of the whole. With an increase of positive Feeling, direct this love to family and friends alike and little by little into healing for the troubled areas in the world. Then letting the love work, gradually return the energy back to the circle, and enjoy a few moments of peace and inner stillness. Commit the feeling to memory so that it can be called back whenever you are feeling upset or distressed.

Karma is the accumulated effect of past actions, whether initiated by thought word or deed. Black actions cause sorrow. While white and partly black a mixture of happiness and sorrow. Karma has links with Kama which is the Goddess of desire; and desire filled action is much like throwing stones into a lake, as this creates waves, and then we have to sail through the waves of our own making. If we read the Bhagavad Gita CH2.V22; "as a man leaves an old garment and puts on one that is new, the spirit leaves the mortal body and wanders on to one that is new". It is the Yogic belief in reincarnation and karma that prompts a reply from Krishna; when asked, what if a man strives and fails. As we read in the Gita Ch.6v40, 41- 43; "Neither in this world or the world to come does this man pass away; for the man who does the good my son, never treads the path of death. He dwells for innumerable years in the heaven of those who did good; and then this man who failed in Yoga is born again in the house of the good and great. He may even be born into a family of Yogis, where the wisdom of Yoga shines; but to be born in such a family is a rare event in this world. And he begins his new life with the wisdom of a former life; and he begins to strive again, ever onwards towards perfection".

Throughout the spiritual literature of the East persists this idea of rebirth, and of a life that does not end at death. Karma Yoga is also considered superior to Jnana Yoga as it based on action, without which our ideals could not be attained, and just as waves persist long after a storm has subsided, so do the results of those actions continue to be felt as the energy plays itself out.

Karma Yoga is sacred action and includes any selfless work done for the good of society or to help others, this includes work on oneself and developing the

spirit of friendship when dealing with others. Every form of Yoga is karmic and requires action of some sort, and every form considered here, flows effortlessly into every other sort, and Yoga is also Union in the sense of discovering the link factors between each. Karma Yoga is sometimes called Kriya Yoga; what is important to remember is that all Yogic action is Self transcending action, which means not identifying with work done, or standing back and admiring the results of those actions.

Atman Yoga is the essence of Yoga practice, as to know the atman is truly to know oneself. There is something in all of us that knows we are here, and has looked out through our eyes as children, as teenagers and then as adults. This is the Self (Atman) experiencing its journey through life, it is the observer that witnesses and watches life's changing experiences. At times it gets caught and becomes fascinated or bound by what it is witnessing, and feels that it is enmeshed by the problems of the world, and then experiences a form of hell, as it loses its sense of freedom, and becomes identified and held in by life's problems. Yoga is about becoming free, and breaking identification with those things that bind us, so that we once again regain freedom of choice. These choices are not inclinations, or leanings toward whatever is expedient at any given moment, but acts of initiative and consciously willed intent.

What we call the Lower Mind, is the product of our five sense organ level of activity, and the Yoga Mind is the Higher Mind, that receives its information directly from spirit. The Yoga mind, is a mind free of inertia, and is open to truth at the highest level, and Wills what God Wills for it. These beings of the Higher Mind are the Sons of God, and called Avatars by the Yogis; Avatars having free will can choose to be born at any time; entering the world of time when specific work needs to be done or new functions introduced.

Self Realisation is awakening to the reality of the Self (Atman), as the true guide and indestructible centre, in a changing and impermanent world. This awakening is opening the eyes to each new dawn, and the problems presented by the world, while maintaining the peace and innocence of the centre. The knowing Self, which exists within us all, is like the wise child, who retains its youthfulness and is not closed to the wisdom of the Eternal, the Ancient of Days.

Continual Self Remembrance is required if we are to resist the tendency of getting caught up in an appetival world. It is the getting caught in different areas of self interest that distorts the reality of who we truly are, and is the

cause of such things as premature ageing, ill health and psychological problems. To help rediscover the refreshing nature of the true Self we now introduce two preliminary meditation exercises.

Watching the Monkey Jump is watching the dream like processes that continually occur in the mind, particularly as tension and stress rise to the surface, expressing themselves in a variety of forms and fantasies. The mind is like a monkey as thoughts continually jump as if from one branch to another, sparked by impulses and feelings that circulate through the neural network.

The watcher or observer, which is the Atman or Self, by maintaining a calm detachment, can simply observe with interest the ever changing patterns of thought, some of which will no doubt be subjective and others psychic. Gradually with peaceful inflowing and out flowing breath, it becomes possible to control the mind. This is not unlike getting hold of the reins of a runaway horse and gradually bringing it under control

Mind Control can be improved by meditative visualisation. The images chosen here are of a man, a horse and a cart. Start with a clear mind, much like a blank TV screen. Then imagine that a man walks from left to right into your field of vision, as he walks on, you see that he is leading a horse; the horse is followed by a cart. Then at your command, the man, horse and cart stand still. You then reverse the sequence, so that first the cart leaves your field of vision, then the horse and finally the man. Next exercise control by changing the sequence into any order that you will. Finally enjoy a few moments of silence with a clear untroubled mind. There is revelation in stillness, and the Atman draws from that stillness, new insight, and a new way of doing things

Meditative Asana is the practical way in which the Atman Yogi develops their spiritual approach to life. Commence each Posture by first becoming still, and whether standing or sitting, by balancing the head, lengthening the spine, so that there is a sense of uprightness and being in the Here and Now. Mind, breath and Asana then follow in a slow expressive movement, in which one feels and intuitively what is to be the perfect action. The movement is continued in full awareness and control, which is terminated at what is felt to be the right moment, so as to avoid strain or injury. It is the Self directed and Conscious approach that becomes the basis from which we deal with all of life's problems.

Namaskara is the Indian greeting, which is familiar to the Yoga student, as it may be used in a Yoga class when greeting a visiting Swami. As a greeting, the hands are brought together in the prayer mudra, accompanied by a slight bow. The meaning is that I bow to the light that is within you.

Surya Namaskar is more popularly associated with twelve dynamic exercises, executed in early morning when facing the rising Sun. This remarkably efficient group of exercises is often practised in the Yoga class at any time of day or evening. First we need to be clear about the principle source of light and heat, the Sun (Surya), as without the Sun it is unlikely that there would be life on earth. Sun worshippers are not without merit, as the Sun is recognised as a step down transformer of the Infinite Power and Intelligence of the Absolute. It is the Sun that makes the Power and Light of God assimilable to us here on earth. The Surya Namaskar exercises are not only an opportunity to bathe the body in the not so fierce early morning light, but also to circulate the light within.

Circulation of the Light is an ancient meditation technique known, known to the Chinese religion of light, in which the light is apparently allowed to spill into the eyes, underneath the partially lowered eye lids, bringing peace and tranquillity to the mind. This backward flowing method can be healing as well as uplifting, as it is a backward flowing and circulating of Consciousness into the entire body. It may take a little time to start the light flowing backward, as the energy of the gaze is naturally outward, and we have to turn the gaze inward. Helps are to encourage the backward flow with the breath, as if drawing the breath and the light into the eyes. The experience is unmistakable as the light brings peace and clarity to the mind. The light should be encouraged to flow backward with the breath, into the heart and lungs. The Chinese write about the Secret of the Golden Flower, this is far from myth as the light has the ability to awaken the heart chakra. The experience will be unique to each, not unlike as when the Sun's light, touches the earth and the response is life, and then a variety of beautiful flowers spring forth from an apparently lifeless earth. With time and experience the light should be encouraged to flow backward and circulate deep within the body. The light will reveal all when the student is ready.

Meditation: Love and Light Perfect Love casts out fear. When you love you embrace more than yourself and there is a subtle link between love and all embracing light. The love that we see in the manifest world is light. Without light we would be in darkness and only illumined by the distant stars. All life

responds to the light of the Sun which is love manifest; for those with eyes to see and the heart to perceive. Meditate on light as love, and let your inmost light guide you. During the light of the day, feel that love is the reality which gives life to the world. Open your heart to light and love as the reality that embraces all.

Before sleep look to the light within and your remembrance of sunlit glades, still waters reflecting light, distant memories of image filled light from early childhood and beyond. Whatever your difficulties, and when darkness threatens always look toward the light. Feel the light to be the love within you, and direct that light towards yourself and into your life, as you continue on the path of the Sun and the journey of life.

Raja Yoga is Royal Yoga, the Yoga of Kings and implies Self rulership. It is considered far nobler to be able to rule oneself, than rule a kingdom. There are two aspects to Yoga that is the practical or Hatha Yoga with its daily practise of exercise and spiritual discipline (sadhana), and the higher meditative practices which increase the level of one's Self understanding and control. The earliest and renowned writer of Raja Yoga text, was Bhagwan Shree Patanjali who lived somewhere between 200BC and 300AD, his Eight Limbs of Yoga being the most well known among students, these consist of the outer phase i.e. Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, and the inner phase of Concentration, Meditation and Contemplation.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga can be viewed as progressive steps on a ladder starting with the disciplines or ethical principles, followed by a unique form of exercises for health, which from the start can form the basis for further integration and development. The next step, the breathing exercise can be linked to Asana practice, as well as being health giving in their own right. Pranayama means breath restraint and is often misunderstand to mean forcibly imposing sequential breathing patterns on the breath. This can be harmful and dangerous, as any change in the breathing rhythm has to come from the intelligence and the life giving Prana that forms the basis of existence. Pratyahara is the detachment which comes with loss of confidence with the information received via the five sense organs, and an increasing trust with oneself and inmost spirit. The next phase is meditation and developing the means of mediating with that intelligence which is the basis of all life.

Concentration is the start of the process we call meditation and means with one centre, as to allow the mind to lose focus and wander from one subject to another defeats the purpose of meditation. Helps are the gazing exercises

(cleansing), called Trataka, to which we referred to earlier and includes any exercise in steadying the gaze. It may be helpful here to suggest a meditation technique that will be of help both in the class, and in the day to day coping with life's problems.

Be Here Now are three words that can act as a constant reminder and help in returning the attention back to the matter in hand. It is also a safeguard against day dreaming and the words should never be far from the mind. When meditating, interest can be maintained by altering the pattern of the words, for example the words "Here Now", can be changed to "Now Here", and then brought together to form the word "Nowhere", this allows the meditator to step into the refreshing stillness experienced when the mind is still.

Meditation is defined as discursive reasoning, which means running from one thing to another, in the sense of one thought following another. To the Yoga meditator, this is not an inertic process, as at all times there is Conscious control of the mind, so that the mind is not allowed to wander but keeps to the central idea.

Contemplation means with pattern and occurs when the mind has exhausted the subject for meditation and holds the pattern of the thought processes as one simultaneous reality.

Sanyama is threefold and is when Concentration, Meditation and Contemplation are held simultaneously in the mind as one fact.

Samprajnata this means with seed and is a stage in Contemplation (Samadhi), in which the principles on which one is meditating are permanently retained. There are many meditational techniques and all have an effect and colour the Consciousness of the meditator.

Asamprajna means without seed and is the stage when the mind is still and there is no Consciousness of any object, only the experience of the limitless.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga is often presented as a pyramid structure that evolves upward a step at a time, yet the reality is that each step flows and supports every other step. The Yamas and Niyamas which form the basis on which Patanjali's Yoga rest, have been arrived at through the deepest levels of meditation and have been divined as principles of truth, interwoven throughout creation.

The Essence of Raja Yoga is Will, and Will can be defined as the “law of being”, As it is at the level of Will that determine who we are. If we constantly Will the pleasurable we will be at the mercy and passive to certain kinds of stimulus, that comes from the outside. Constant stimulation is no stimulation, and repetitive behaviour without a break can soon become painful. To Will happiness is to be Self-determined and make decisions based on the wider picture. The highest level of Will is discovered in the words of Jesus when he says “I and my Father are one”, the Father being representative of the generative power of the whole universe. Will is Consciousness initiating in each moment of time, whether it is to adopt a Yoga Posture or perform any action at any level. The effort has to be progressive as the following play on words may indicate, as we in a sense, start at the level of the great unwashed, and then become the washers, and then hopefully the clean, before the final step of becoming the God like.

The Sutras are the short thread like and illuminating statements that define the Yoga of Patanjali, from the level of the practical, with references to the siddhis (powers), to the level of liberation or attainment. A siddha is someone who is accomplished and perfect. That is an adept who may have acquired powers, but may refrain from using them. There is a warning given to those who make progress in Yoga, that the siddhis (powers) are distractions that may prevent progress. For example, the gift of psychic powers may lead one to spend the rest of their life, sitting at the end of the pier telling fortunes, and make no further progress than this.

The Siddhis arise as a result of discipline and meditation, and the meditation techniques in Patanjali’s Raja Yoga are unique, some of which we reproduce here:-

Concentrate on the form of your body; suspend the power of another to see it: and as the light of his eye cannot reach you, become invisible.

Concentrate on friendship, mercy, joy; excel in them.

Concentrate on the pole-star; know the motion of the stars.

Once the Yogi is convinced that Self and intellect are two, he masters the qualities, masters their results, knows everything.

Concentrate on the light in the head; meet the masters.

The Two Paths (Sun and Moon). There are two paths; the path of the Sun is the path of Consciousness, that is the path of light and referred to as the right

hand path. This is the path of initiative and spontaneity and is ever bringing new emergents and ways of doing things into every sphere of activity, and is the path of the Yogi. The left hand path, or path of the moon, is the path of reflected light and simply follows what has gone before. It is the path of the ancestors and of inertia. We all have a body of food that is coloured by much of what has gone on in the past, and inevitably we all at some time go on to automatic pilot and respond to situations as dictated by past events. The path of the Sun can be dangerous as it constantly looks at things with new eyes which may be disturbing to the establishment, as it was with Christ who walked the path of the Son/Sun.

Tantra Yoga implies the interweaving of spirit and matter, like the warp and weft of a closely spun garment. The illusion is that matter is solid and devoid of spirit, when the reality is that matter is a modification of power (spirit), and needs the contact of free unbound spirit to remind it of the reality of its own existence. Tantra Yoga blossomed with the spiritual insights of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Prior to this time we had the shamanistic practices of the European and Mediterranean people, who clothed their ancient practises with the new spiritual insights and revelations of the mystics. The old symbols that expressed male and female fertility, the lingam and yoni, took on new meaning and the sensual intertwining of the male and female figure, shown on many Indian Temples, symbolised the ecstatic union of Shiva, as the pure creative force of Consciousness, with the receptive mother principle, that is love as the all embracing field of life. Man still contains within his being the inertia of the past that has become compounded throughout aeons of time, forming established patterns and locks (granthis) that have to be transcended by the awakening spirit. There is a great deal in mans lower nature that has been suppressed and pushed down out of sight and is now coiled, serpent like at the level of the base chakra.

The Chakras are wheels or discs of rotating energy, initiated within an infinite field, yet localised and coloured by the beings in which they are located;

Over a period of time the Yogis have located seven of these spiritual centres (chakras), as they are popularly conceived of today.

These established chakras have links with the physical autonomy of the body, as well as the psychological and physical make up of the human being.

The Yogi traditionally refers to the coiled serpent, or potential energy, at the base of the spine as kundalini; and kundalini Yoga is the release of this energy to the higher spiritual centres. Tantra Yoga details a somewhat complex methodology for the release of this energy, describing its journey from the base of the spine, via two channels pingala and Ida. These subtle nerve channels (nadis) start at the base of the spine; pingala on the right and Ida on the left, both on their awakening and ascent, intersecting at the chakras, pingala terminating at the right nostril and Ida at the left nostril. Central to this movement, is a subtle conduit, a much finer channel that carries the energy more directly to the higher centres. (chitrini-nadi)

The Western Yogi familiar to some degree with western philosophy and psychology, is likely to be confused by the symbology and Sanskrit lettering that is associated with the chakras. This symbology has been built up over generations by an ancient culture, and is worthy of study by those with the time and inclination. Without departing from this symbology we now present a practical way of working that is based on experience, using the seed mantras (bija), and Yantra, the geometric forms associated with the chakras.

Muladhara Chakra is called the root chakra and lies at the base of the spine between the Anus and the genitals. It is associated with the element earth, and contains the symbol of a yellow square. Most modern Yogis relate the colour Red to the Base Chakra. The square however, has most useful associations with right angled behaviour, and yellow or Gold is its positive aspect; Gold symbolises purity and Will, and is a good indicator as to the best form of meditation at this level. This root chakra also has links with the long body of the ancestors and our physical nature, particularly the bones, and its seed (bija) mantra 'LAM', is a useful medium for sending good feeling, and for helping resolve some of the difficulties that we may have inherited from ancestors and past lives. The mantra LAM, if voiced and felt as a vibration at the root chakra, will be more effective if intoned with meaning. The letter 'L' signifies all linking and joining together and is representative of Love. The letter 'A' represents the Absolute and all beginnings, and the letter 'M' substance and the material universe. When intoning the mantra 'LAM', send good feeling and love into the base chakra and let this be felt in the bones and the legs; continue to send this good feeling toward those who have gone before, as it is the ancestors who have laid the foundation of whom we are today. Continue to purify the base chakra until the energy of the centre starts to prefer the light and the peace of the higher centres, and moves upward.

Svadhishthana Chakra situated six inches above the base chakra, has the symbol of the white crescent moon, and the bija mantra 'VAM'. The Crescent Moon signifies the phasic nature of the energy at this level and the colour white, purity of intention. Yet the modern teacher will often represent this chakra with the colour orange due to its worldly and biological aspect.

The significance of the mantra rests on the letter 'V' which represents vitality and energy (verve), coming in to a point, as well as reaching out to a circumscribed zone of activity. Intone the mantra stressing the letter 'V' and focussing energy at the pelvic chakra. Concentrate on the white of the moon and purity and feel that your body is being charged with pure vibrant energy.

Manipura (Navel Chakra) is represented by an inverted red triangle and the seed (bija) mantra 'RAM'. The food we digest at this centre provides the energy we need for survival and largely feeds the belly, and drive centres in the body. The mantra 'RAM' contains 'RA', signifying rulership and the Egyptian 'Sun God'. All the natural foods that we eat are packaged Sunlight and repetition of the mantra helps purify function at this level, which can be assisted by Grace before meals, to which we have previously referred. It is the purity of the breath and function at this level that helps the energy turn up rather than down. The innovative teacher may also include abdominal toning coupled with breath (Bhastrika), to help improve and purify function at this level.

Anahata (Heart Chakra) contains an image rich in symbolism the six pointed star, and the bija mantra 'YAM'. The upward pointing triangle is essentially male and reaches upward to spirit. The downward pointing is female and earth orientated. These triangles, as do the functions they represent, are not in isolation from each other. As the male triangle looks upward toward spirit, the female looks earthward to nurture and bringing up her children, so that eventually they can aspire to spirit.

A Yantra such as the hexon or six pointed star, provides a particular way of looking at reality. It has been recorded that these two triangles would be drawn on the ground and a Yogi would stand or sit in the centre and meditate on its significance. The centre represents immanent spirit, and by standing at the centre and feeling the tensions around a Yantra, you are open to the information from spirit, yet if you isolate a tension and identify with it, you cannot be immediate, and get caught in only one aspect of the whole. Yantra work is only briefly mentioned here and represents an area of work that has the potential for further development.

The heart chakra represents the half way point between heaven and earth and is the intermediary between both. To harmonise both aspects of Male and Female is to become the Divine Hermaphrodite as represented by Adam in which both 'Ma' and 'Da' exist together in perfect harmony. The seed mantra Yam when repeated is to affirm 'YA,' the descent and interweaving of spirit with matter 'M', which is pure Tantra. The Sanskrit word Anahata, means unstruck or unbeaten, and is a reference to the inner sound or resonance of the ancient name of God 'OM'. It is the subtle levels of sentience at the level of the heart chakra which provides the insight and stepping off point to higher levels of spirit; unlike the head which is often cluttered and pre-occupied with worldly thoughts.

Vishuddha is the chakra at the level of the throat and its symbol is a white disc and the seed mantra 'HAM'. The lotus which represents this chakra has sixteen petals; each petal carries one of the Sanskrit vowel sounds. The reason the lotus is mentioned here, is that this lotus has a special significance. The other chakras are characterised with consonants on the lotus, while the throat when pronouncing them is a centre for purity of speech,

The seed mantra at the throat is 'HAM' and the letter 'H' provides the clue as to its significance. The 'H' is representative of a ladder that reaches between heaven and earth and words at this level have great significance. To speak falsely is to fall, and in order to cross the abyss between matter and spirit we need an integrated body of truth. The work done and understood up to this point will provide that, and the love in your heart will be expressed as truth on your tongue.

Ajna Chakra is the Command or Guru Centre, and is situated just above the centre of the eyebrows and about one inch back, and is the seat of the observer and who with training can observe the changing scene before it with complete detachment. It is important that when centred at the level of the Brow Chakra that it is done without strain. The brain is quite sensitive and by focussing energy at this level over a long period of time it can cause dizziness and other problems. It is usual when practising disciplines such as the martial arts that you are taught to centre down to the Hara (Belly) centre. This is to focus energy at the level of the drive centres and gives a sense of stability.

Detached Observation can be helpful when preparing for sleep, particularly when stressful thoughts are keeping you awake. With eyes closed simply observe the train of images that pass before your gaze. These images and thoughts will be numerous, some will jockey for position, simply let them go and gradually you will drift into sleep.

The Pranava is the original primeval word OM, ascribed to the level of the Ajna Chakra, and means humming. All the sounds at the level of the sound geometry of the Universe (Shabda Brahman) make a humming sound represented by the mantra OM. The spirit represented by the sound can be represented by all the vowels AEIOU (Purusha), and their appearance in nature is represented by the consonant 'M' (Prakriti), when phonetically shortened they become 'AUM', OM.

Sahasrara Chakra or Thousand Petalled lotus is the topmost spiritual centre which is the aim and focus of the energy of the lower chakras. This transformed energy in the guise of Shiva, can be described as Truth Consciousness, which joyfully re-unites with Shakti, the pure Cosmic Power and energy of the Universe. This union blossoms into the experience of pure joy from which is exuded amrit, the nectar of immortality.

The Thousand Petalled Lotus is purely a figurative statement and is a reference to the infinite number of possibilities which exist at this level of transcendence. The nectar which is released from the Union of Shakti and Shiva then descends transforming and rejuvenating the life and energy of each chakra.

The mythical language associated with the energy of the centres may be confusing to western readers and dismissed as superstition. There is however, a sound psychological basis for what is being described; the Gods and Goddesses represent different functions. It is up to the western Yogi to look at what is being described with new eyes, and adapt much that has gone before into a practical and developmental way of working.

Laya Yoga is the Yoga of mergence or absorption, which occurs when the obstacles to merging with spirit are removed. These meditative practices rely on the descent of spirit or Divine Nectar from the top chakra down. Interferences are removed by stilling the mind and creating a feeling of openness and receptivity to spirit, this is assisted with the practice of pranayama techniques. Sri Aurobindo writes in his Integral Yoga of the

transformation that occurs with this type of descent. He also writes that this is something you cannot be certain about, as you can only do the preparation and maintain openness, and to use a biblical expression, as the spirit listeth where it will.

Transformation is at every level once an opening occurs and Aurobindo describes this as due to an act of Grace, in which occurs transformation at the level of Mind with an awakening to a new level of understanding; there is also transformation at the feeling level, and also deep within the vital nature. Finally there is transformation of the physical as spirit re-patterns one's nature in the light of truth.

Nadi-Shodhana is a well known alternate nostril breathing technique for clearing the subtle nerve (nadis) channels. What is well described elsewhere is the technique of breathing air through first one nostril and then the other. What needs to be emphasised is the subtle nature of Prana and Breath, as the rule is more breathing less Prana, less breathing more Prana. There has to be awareness of the breath which is long and fine, with the sense that light flows inward with each inhalation. With experience the Pranic breath can be followed along the nostril to the Ajna Chakra, down into the lung and to the base of the spine. This purification technique is beneficial when practising Kundalini and Laya Yoga techniques.

Mantra Yoga is the repetition of sacred sounds which helps focus the mind on that which is sacred. This includes prayers and words of a devotional nature, these words in Sanskrit, form a direct link with the creative principle of the Cosmos, and many teachers will tell you that it is not necessary to know their meaning, as these creative sounds will have an effect simply by repeating and intoning them. This may well be, but the writer suggests that it is better to understand the significance of the words used than otherwise. There are two types of words, these are Passive words over which we have little control, because we do not understand their meaning, and Active words, which can be clearly defined and used intelligently for a specific purpose. An example of the use of passive words is the advertising or salesperson using a liberal sprinkling of adjectives to make something appear more of a bargain than it is.

Letters and words are like wave patterns on the surface of an ocean which day by day, change and shape the pattern of the sea. Our own words are similar and can change the pattern of our own lives by enabling us to take control, or be controlled by the persuasive words of others.

Healing Mantras are an excellent way of getting to grips with and understanding mantra as they are short simple and effective and provide the opportunity of understanding the sound structures which make up the word. These sounds can be used either individually as a form of meditation or with a partner on a one to one basis. It is important to work with both breath and sound, the breath carrying the energy into specific areas of the body. As a guide the letter 'H' is linked to the breath, the vowels and diphthongs to spirit and the energy of the whole field, and the letter 'M' to the body and ground of our being. All the healing mantras are expressions of Consciousness and if used with the laying on of hands, assist and direct, the vibrating power of consciousness toward specific areas of the body.

HRAUM is a very rounded sound, similar to when making the sound of surprise 'WOW'. This sound is felt at the level of the lower abdomen and is for healing throughout this area of the body.

HRUM rhymes with 'room' and directs energy to the digestive and mid areas of the abdomen. First inhalation, then the mantra is intoned on the out breath.

HRAM rhymes with calm and is felt in the heart and lung areas of the body

HRIM is sounded similar to 'HREEM' and is for the upper chest and head.

Hraim is for the area of the kidneys and is a similar sound to 'RHYME'

HRIH is a very important sound, particularly in Tibetan Mysticism as it represents the inner voice of wisdom, and the voice of Conscious. The sound is whispered or intoned quietly and emerges out of an apparent stillness. Healing can be assisted by standing behind a receiver; placing the hands lightly on the crown of the head and letting sound and Consciousness emerge as if from the centre of your being. Consciousness is catalytic and produces change when it is present.

Colour and Sound is a useful combination in a class situation and used in combination with stretching of hands and arms, as if collecting sound and colour from the ether, then focussing the sound and colour by bringing the hands back to the area with which you are working. Colour may vary slightly according to preference and what the teacher is feeling at any particular moment. Russet and Gold are the colours for earth and the lower abdomen,

orange for the digestive system and upper abdomen, White for the heart, Purple for the kidneys. Gold a symbol for the Will is helpful in strengthening the nervous system; this is helped by standing upright with the palms of the hands on top of the head and intoning the mantra HRIM, and feeling for the vibration down the length of the spine and imagining golden sunlight reaching down to the base of the spine. The sensation is as if the body were like a tuning fork, gently vibrating from head to feet. On completion of Mantra spend a few moments returning to the Here and Now, with still mind.

Om Mani Padme Hum is the best known and most widely repeated mantra in the world. It is a mantra of the heart and if repeated consciously will reveal different levels of meaning, and transform heart and mind of the practitioner. OM (AUM) is the most ancient name of God and signifies the eternal. It is pure Gold (AU) and with the consonant (M), is Purusha and Prakriti, that is spirit and matter as pure creativity.

Mani is a jewel of crystallised knowledge as revealed in the light of the heart. Padme is a lotus and the play of light with the opening of the heart chakra. HUM is closure in the sense of integration and establishment of the spiritual energy at a tangible and physical level.

Mantra and Prayer are closely associated, as both when repeated channel the energy of our thought process in a particular direction. Thought is the focus of spiritual energy and is not devoid of emotion, and the way we feel affects body chemistry as well as the environment in which we live. Often a carefully chosen form of words prior to sleep can organise the energy of the body in a positive way. For Example “Let all that is irrelevant to the healing of this body during sleep be banished”

Gayatri Mantra - *Om bhur bhuvah svah tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yon naha pra chodayat.*

Known as the Gayatri, it is a hymnal Vedic mantra, and extremely well known and therefore it would be remiss not to include it here, as it is held to be the most sacred mantra of the Vedas. It is also known as the Savitri as it is addressed to the Sun as the generator of life.

“We meditate on the adorable light of the radiant Sun. May he stimulate our intellect”. This is supposed to be recited morning, noon and night.

Japa is the repetition of a mantra, as when continually reciting the name of God, this can be done aloud, whispered or repeated mentally. The natural vibration of the Self, that is said to occur with each inflowing and out flowing breath is the mantra, Hamsa, which means 'I Am He'; by breathing out 'Ham', breathing in 'Sa'. Alternatively So'ham, i.e. breathing in 'So', breathing out 'ham'.

Governing Concepts these short statements can be used either for meditation or as affirmations during relaxation and focus the mind in a positive way. Such as:-

'Strength is my real nature' - 'Truth is my real nature'
Happiness is my real nature' - 'Love is my real nature'

The Sound of One Hand Clapping, is unstruck sound that is the sound which is sensed rather than heard, it is potential sound rather than actual. In Yoga the most powerful mantras are envisaged to have form and structure within the mind of God. These forms when not yet manifest and in the process of manifestation start to expand and vibrate into the formal geometry that patterns creation. In the less able and the elderly these mantric forms can form the basis on which a being is able to restructure themselves; by first becoming still and heart centred, and then with a still mind and relaxed upright spine, feeling into their own inner space for the reality and truth that lies within.

Before attempting to guide the body into Asana, practise a few moments of stillness, and awaken to the Conscious reality of the moment, and let the form of the Posture appear in Consciousness. When the Yogi is truly centred, ideas and forms appear out of the wisdom of the eternal, which carries with it the guidance and feeling that will guide the Yogi back to health. There is no effort involved here, only a gentle flow of energy, with a gradual movement back towards perfection.

* Please note, unfortunately, candles are no longer permitted in public places.