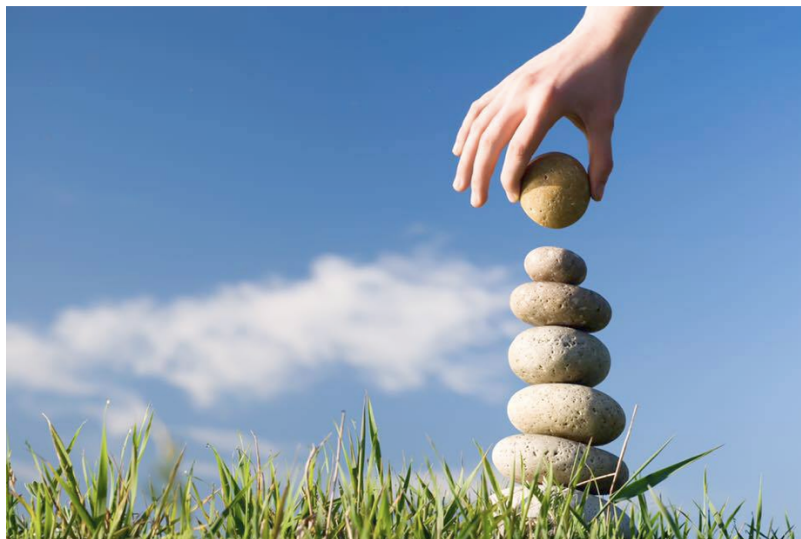
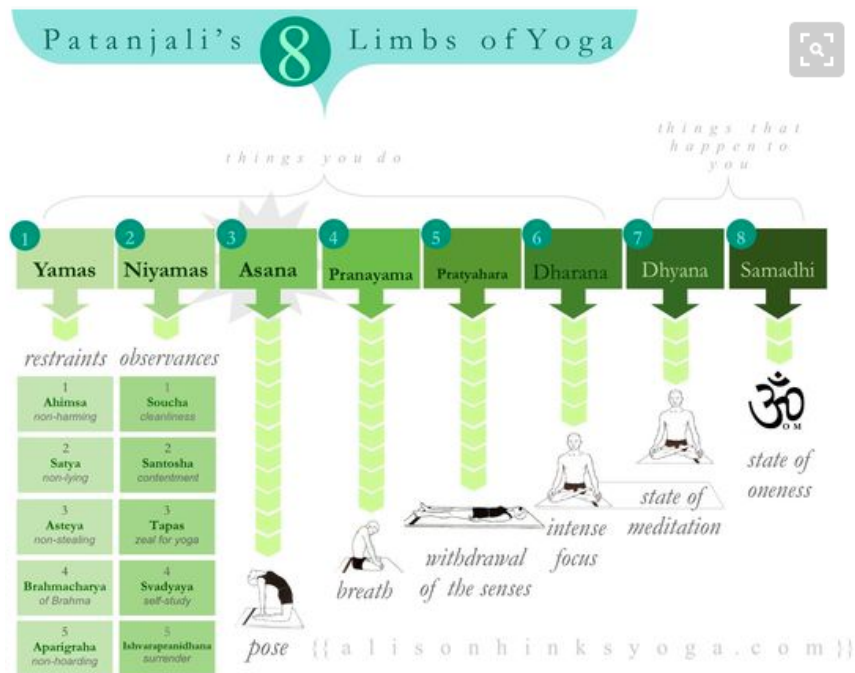


Basic concepts of Yoga



Although the tradition of yoga is 5,000 years old, it is mainly attributed to the Sage **Patanjali** as the father of yoga, who transcribed the book, ***The Yoga Sutra***, over 2,000 years ago. This sacred Sanskrit text is a compilation of 196 aphorisms in four chapters which outlines the **Eight Limbs of Yoga** (see ashtanga diagram 1), offering wisdom and guidelines for living a meaningful and purposeful life. The origin of yoga itself precedes the Yoga Sutra and is attributed to Lord *Shiva* as the first yogi (*adi yogi*) and *Parvati*, his wife, as the first student. The union of Shiva (consciousness and wisdom) and *Parvati* (creative energy *shakti*) symbolizes the completion of the whole through the fusion of the male and the female energies.

It is also symbolic of the balance that the practice of yoga creates within ourselves. To this day, ***The Yoga Sutra*** and ***The Bhagavad Gita***, another sacred Hindu scripture gives deep insight on yoga, are capable of transforming one's personality, and are sources of inspiration to countless self-help books published around the world.



The United Nation's designation of June 21st as the International Day of Yoga in 2015 is a testament to the global popularity of yoga as the path to attain good health and happiness. Modern science has provided ample evidence to validate the benefits of yoga and thus perpetuated the yoga movement across cultural and religious barriers. The Western medical world has come to acknowledge the effectiveness of yoga on managing various physical, mental and emotional illnesses to improve quality of our life.

Modern Medicine and Yoga

Although modern medicine and yoga are complementary to each other for the wellbeing of the society but there are some differences in their approach. The difference between Western medicine and traditional yogic methods lie in the distinction of understanding the meaning of health. In the English language, the word health is defined as "the state of being free from illness or injury." However, the Sanskrit word, **swastha**, means "to be established within oneself".



Therefore, according to the Western definition, a person is healthy as long as he or she is not ill or injured. It is purely a physical and negative definition, not taking into consideration the imbalances in a person, which might be causing the ailment. In contrast, the concept of swastha highlights the root of a problem and never isolates the symptoms from the entire person. Simply put, Western medicine is based on suppressing the symptoms of the disease with the use of external intervention or drugs, whereas the practice of yoga unifies the body, mind and spirit to create an internal balance, which is healing in itself. Yogic approach is holistic and all inclusive.

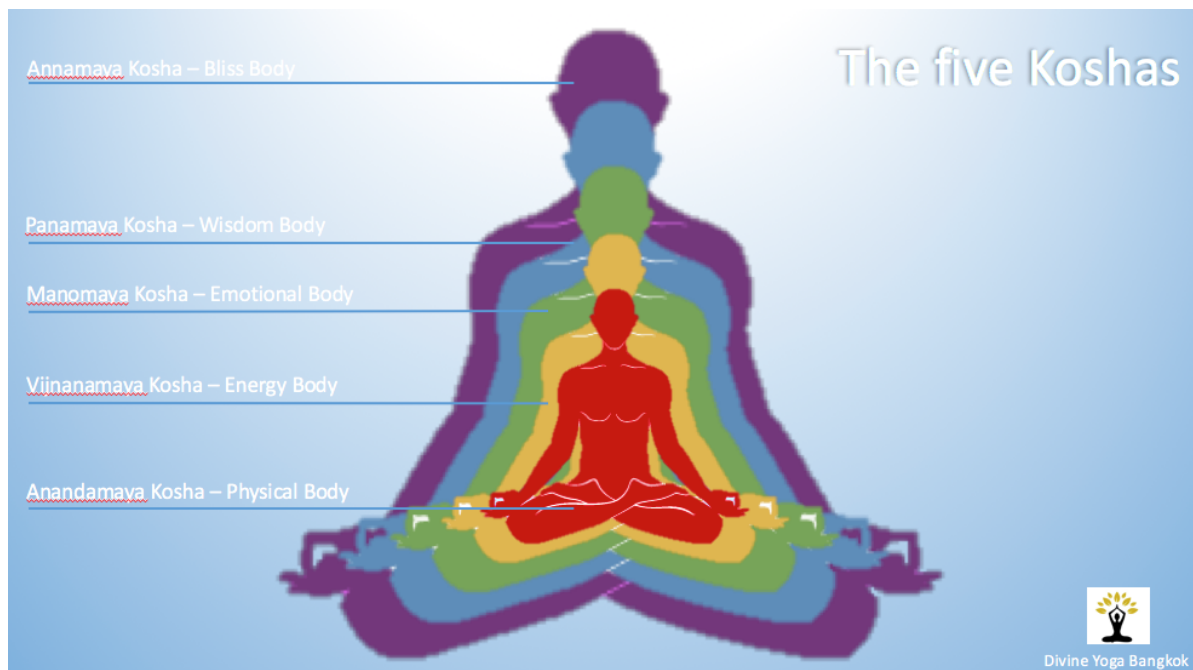
Yoga as a Discipline

Yoga begins with the practitioner taking a resolve to dedicate him or herself to the discipline. A daily hour practice in the morning of *asana*, *pranayama* and meditation will slowly change the personality (see koshas diagram 2). In the evening, a quiet reflection of our actions of that day also increases our awareness to live consciously.

The very first stanza of The Yoga Sutra (1:1) states, “AthaYoganushasanam.” “Atha” means now, “anu” is atom and “shasanam” means to govern, signifying our responsibility to govern subtle (every) part of our own body, down to the atomic level. This is the quintessential difference between yoga and Western medicine. Yoga develops self discipline to live with mindfulness to prevent outer or inner illness and face the challenges of the society with confidence. Yoga teaches us to take charge of our entire being where as modern medicine delegates the responsibility to doctors and drugs. Yoga empowers us to create a union and balance within ourselves which allows *prana*, the universal life force and energy, to flow in our bodies for our physical and mental wellbeing. There are times where we need to rely on modern medicine. In such a case, smooth flow of prana would even enhance the effectiveness of the medication, which results in rapid healing.

What is Yoga?

Patanjali defined yoga as “Yogachittavrittinirodhah,” which means “Yoga is the removal of the fluctuations of the mind.” “Chitta” is mind or consciousness, “vrittis” are thought impulses and “nirodah” is removal. In other words, cleaning the mind of emotions and thoughts is yoga. Through meditation we can still the mind and get to know who we really are. As we transform and balance our personality, our **koshas (the sheath)**, we also change on a cellular level, which positively influence our blood and energy flow.



It is a scientific fact that our cells change every seven years and our bodies are renewed. On average, it takes approximately 23 to 60 seconds for blood to make a complete circuit in our bodies. When prana through blood reach each and every cell then it creates natural balance in whole system. Yoga says that imbalance or illness in our personality is due to imbalance or disruption or lack of flow of *prana*. Through physical practice we try to encourage blood and *prana* to reach everywhere by creating space and *pranayama* used as a carrier and coordinator between body, mind and emotion.



When the blood circulation is too fast, we unnecessarily exhaust ourselves and age faster. Yoga slows down the process through controlling the breath and relaxing the mind and the body. Only in a relaxed state healing takes place. No modern exercise can relax us in the way yoga can. Modern medicine tries to replicate this state of relaxation by prescribing sleeping pills to patients. In contrast, yoga allows us to create a healing state of mind and body ourselves.

Yoga requires discipline in order to achieve a stilled equanimity within ourselves so that we may know who we are, the purpose of our lives and to face life's challenges. Many students misunderstand yoga as only a physical practice of asanas. Such false knowledge is the responsibility of the teacher. The practice of asana is only a warm up for the main practice of breathing because it is the pranayama that can bring the deep relaxation to the body and mind. It is important for the student to seek a good teacher who is capable of teaching yoga in its totality and should be able to diagnose any imbalances in the student's koshas.

Through our practice of yoga, we strive to sharpen our awareness, which is distributed 70-75% to our bodies, 20-25% to our minds, 4% to our emotions and only 1% to our divine, higher self. These precious, but fleeting moments of awareness in union with the divine within ourselves, is the source of creativity and godliness. There is no "god" but the divine resides in godly actions. Through the practice of yoga, we try to govern the subtle qualities of ourselves to spread godliness. Spending hours on the yoga mat but displaying inconsiderate or hurtful actions to others defeats the entire purpose of this lifestyle. Yoga is an experiential study through self-introspection. We can start the discipline from the body by having different movements then to breath management then to the mind management with the integrated and holistic approach to evolve as a better human being. It transforms us and as we benefit from the changes, we must become goodwill ambassadors of yoga so that others may also benefit.

"Yoga is the need of today & will be the culture of tomorrow. Yoga will immerge as the mighty world culture and will direct the events of the future." - Swami Satyananda Saraswati, The Bihar School of Yoga.