

The 5 Principles of Yoga

Until few decades ago the science of Yoga was considered to be very mysterious and difficult to follow. The five principles of Yoga were summarized by Swami Vishnu Devananda, disciple of Swami Sivananda. The purpose was to make the Hatha Yoga philosophy simple and understandable for western students who didn't know the proper meaning and purpose of Yoga.

Proper Exercise

In contrast to many modern physical exercise systems which focus on developing the muscles through mechanical movement, Yogic physical exercises are designed to **develop the body, calm the mind and to lead to spiritual growth.**

Yoga asanas (Yoga poses) are steady poses which are held for some time. The goal is primarily to increase the spine flexibility, strengthen the muscles and improve the concentration.

The body is only as young as it is flexible. **Yoga** exercises focus on the flexibility and strength of the spine. In the spinal column the all-important nervous system is located. By maintaining the spine's healthy state of flexibility and strength the circulation is increased and the nerves receive the needed supply of nutrients and oxygen. This also has positive effects on the internal organs and the endocrine system.

Proper Breathing

Most people use only a fraction of their lung capacity for breathing. They breathe shallow, mostly till the chest. Their shoulders are hunched, they have painful tension in the upper part of the back and neck, and they suffer from lack of oxygen.

Yogic breathing is **deep abdominal breathing.** It brings air to the lowest and largest part of the lungs. It ensures that the body receives its supply of oxygen. It prevents painful muscle tension in the body, headaches and breathlessness. Controlling the vital energy of breath, Prana. Yogic breathing exercises help to calm and control the mind.

Proper Relaxation

Even while trying to rest, the average person wastes a lot of physical and mental energy through tension. In the course of one day, our body usually produces all the substances and energy necessary for the next day. But it often happens that all these substances and energy may be consumed within a few minutes by bad moods, worry and unnecessary tension. This leads to tiredness, headaches, and exhaustion and over a long period it may lead to serious illness.

During proper relaxation, there is practically no energy being consumed or expended. Only a little of the energy is used to keep the body in normal condition while the remaining portion is being stored and conserved. **This relaxation recharges physically,** mentally and spiritually and leads to more abundance and vitality.

Proper Diet

The diet has profound effect on the physical, mental and spiritual body. What you eat is what you become. The quality and nature of food affects the body as well as thoughts directly. The unhealthy diet brings disease, laziness, inertia and negative thinking.

The yogic diet consists of **vegetarian, pure, simple and natural** foods which are easy to digest. The purpose of eating is to supply the body with the life-force, the cosmic energy "Prana". The best nutrition plan for a yoga student is the simple diet of natural, fresh foods, avoiding foods which are overly stimulating like meats, fish, eggs, onions, garlic, coffee, white sugar, tea (except herbal), alcohol and drugs.

Meditation

When the surface of a lake is still, one can see to the bottom very clearly. This is impossible when the surface is agitated by waves. In the same way, when the mind is still, with no thoughts or desires, you can see the "Self" this is called "Yoga". The mental ability to concentrate is inherent to all; it is not extraordinary or mysterious. Meditation is not something that a Yogi has to teach us; we already have the ability to ignore the thoughts. We can control the mental agitation by two means: by concentrating the mind either externally or internally. Internally, we focus on the "Self" or the consciousness of "I am".

In order to achieve true and lasting state of happiness and peace we must first learn to calm the mind, to concentrate and go beyond the mind. All happiness achieved through the mind is temporary and fleeting; By turning the mind's concentration inward, upon the self, we can deepen that experience of perfect concentration and feel long lasting peace. This is the state of "Meditation". The goal in meditation is not to become thoughtless but to ignore the thoughts arising from our five senses.