

## The Hatha Yoga

excerpts from the work of Sir John Woodroffe(Arthur Avalon) 1918

Attention is paid to the physical body, which is the vehicle of the Jiva's existence and activity. Purity of mind is not possible without purity of the body in which it functions and by which it is affected. Purity of mind is here used in the Hindu sense. According to English parlance, such purity merely connotes absence of irregular sexual imaginations. This, though creditable, particularly in a civilisation which almost seems designed to fan every desire, is yet obviously insufficient for the purpose in hand. Proper thought and conduct in all its forms is but the alphabet of a school in which they are merely the first steps to the conquest of greater difficulties to follow. What is here meant is that state of the mind or approach thereto which is the result of good functioning, clear thinking, detachment, and concentration. By these the Manas is freed of all those mental modifications (Vrtti) which enshroud the Atma from Itself. It is turned inward on the Buddhi which becomes dissolved (Laya) in Prakrti, and the Atma-tattva or Brahman.

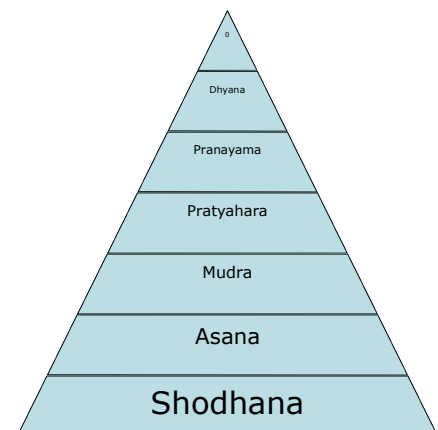
Provision therefore is made in respect both of Asana (posture) and Pranayama or breath development, both of which are shortly dealt with later in connection with Hathayoga, of which they are particular processes.

Hatha-yoga comprises those Sadhanas, or prescribed methods of exercise and practice, which are concerned primarily with the gross or physical body (Sthula-sarira). As the latter is connected with the superphysical or subtle body (Suksma-sarira), of which it is the outer sheath, control of the gross body affects the subtle body with its intellection, feelings, and passions. In fact, the Sthula-sarira is expressly designed to enable the Suksma-sarira to work out the Karma it has incurred. As the former is constructed according to the nature of the latter, and both are united and interdependent, it follows that operation in and upon the gross body affects the subtle body; the physical processes of this Yoga have been prescribed for particular temperaments, in order that, that physical body being first mastered, the subtle body with its mental functioning may be brought under control. These merely physical processes are auxiliary to others. As the Kularnava-Tantra says: "Neither the lotus seat nor fixing the gaze on the tip of the nose are Yoga. It is the identity of Jivatma and Paramatma, which is Yoga." (see Reflexive Self-consciousness by Eugene Halliday)

The word Hatha is composed of the syllables Ha and Tha, which mean the "Sun" and "Moon" - that is, the Prana and Apana Vayus. (More on Vayus later.)

The practice and exercises connected with Hatha-yoga are divided into seven parts or stages (sapta-sadhana) – namely:

1. Cleansing (Sodhana) by the six processes (Sat-karma);
2. Attainment of Strength or Firmness (Drdhata) by bodily postures (Asana);
3. Of Fortitude (Sthirata) by bodily positions (Mudra);
4. Steadiness of mind (Dhairya) by restraint of the senses (Pratyahara);
5. Lightness (Laghava) by Pranayama;
6. Perceptive clarity (Pratyaksa) by meditation (Dhyana);
7. Transcendence (Nirliptatva) in Samadhi.



Those who suffer from inequality of the three "humours"( Vata, Pitta & Kapha) are required to practise the "six acts" (Sat-karma) which purify the body and facilitate Pranayama. For others who are free from these defects they are not necessary in such case, and according to some teachers the practice of Pranayama alone is sufficient. These form the first steps in the Hatha-yoga. On this cleansing (Sodhana) of the body and Nadis, health is gained, the internal fire is rendered more active, and restraint of breath (Kumbhaka) is facilitated. Recourse is also had, if necessary, to Osadhi-yoga, in which herbal preparations are administered to cure defective health.