

The Science of Upanishads – Part 24: Four Popular Yogas:

Hatha, Ashtanga, Kundalini, and Samavritti Yogas

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The history of yoga with references in various Upanishads have been discussed last week. In continuation of the discussion on Yoga, listed herein are the four popular yogas: **(1) Hatha Yoga**: The word “Hatha” is a Sanskrit word meaning “Force”. Since it is generally the first yoga that everyone starts with, and when, more often than not, one has to “force oneself” to do the first yoga, the title name was given by ancient Indian Rishis. Hath Yoga emphasizes physical exercises to master the body along with mind exercises to withdraw it from external object. emphasizes proper diet, processes to internally purify the body, proper breathing and its regulation particularly during the yoga practice, and the exercise routine consisting of **Asanas** (bodily postures). The methodology sometimes includes sequences such as the **Surya Namaskara**, or "salute to the sun", which consists of several *asanas* performed as a fluid movement sequence. **(2) Ashtanga Yoga**: The word “Ashtanga” means **eight limbs or branches** in Sanskrit, of which asana or physical yoga posture is merely one branch, breath or pranayama is another. **The first two limbs - *Yamas* and *Niyamas* - are given special emphasis to be practiced in conjunction with the 3rd and 4th limbs (*asana* and *pranayama*).** ***Pratyahara*** (Withdrawing of the Mind from the Senses), ***Dharana*** (Concentration), ***Dhyana*** (Meditation), and ***Samadhi*** (Union with the Object of Meditation, *i.e.* God) **are the remaining 4 limbs.** **(3) Kundalini Yoga**: “Kundalini” is a Sanskrit word that literally means **“coiled serpent.”** It was believed that each individual possessed a divine energy at the base of the spine. This energy was thought to be the sacred energy of creation. This energy is something we are born with, but we must make an effort to “uncoil the snake,” thereby

putting us in direct contact with the divine. Kundalini Yoga is the practice of awakening our Higher Self and turning potential energy into kinetic energy. By using proven techniques to gradually awaken this benign serpent and safely deploy its amazing beneficial powers, your life will be transformed into one of health, happiness and harmony. You will enjoy an elevation in consciousness, promotion of physical well-being and an expansion of awareness. You will feel more relaxed and at ease with yourself than you have ever felt before. **(4) Samavritti Yoga:** The word “samavritti” consists of two component Sanskrit words, “Sama”, which means “equal”, and “Vritti”, which means “fluctuation”. *Samavritti* yoga is a breathing technique (*pranayama*) that ensures that the inhalation is of the same length as the exhalation. It is a soothing, calming and focusing practice, which helps to calm the mind and frayed nerves. It is also referred to as the “**Restorative Yoga**” as it is believed to fill one’s heart with a fresh breath of positive, restorative energy following strenuous times. It is said that Samavritti promotes balance and evenness in the natural flow of consciousness. This enhanced level of equilibrium can help reduce agitation and anxiety, and helps the yogi to transition into a more relaxed, restorative state.

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