

## **Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga**

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**Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga**, also known as Ashtanga Yoga, is a style of yoga founded and popularized by K. Pattabhi Jois, and which is often promoted as a modern-day form of classical Indian yoga. Pattabhi Jois began his yoga studies in 1927 at the age of 12, and by 1948 had established an institute for teaching the specific yoga practice known as Ashtanga (Sanskrit for “eight-limbed”) Vinyasa Yoga. Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is named after the eight limbs of yoga mentioned in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

**Power Yoga** and **vinyasa yoga** are generic terms that may refer to any type of vigorous yoga exercise derived from Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga

### **Principles :**

The term vinyâsa refers to the alignment of movement and breath, a method which turns static asanas into a dynamic flow. The length of one inhale or one exhale dictates the length of time spent transitioning between asanas. Asanas are then held for a predefined number of breaths. In effect, attention is placed on the breath and the journey between the asanas rather than solely on achieving perfect body alignment in an asana, as is emphasized in Hatha yoga.

The term vinyasa also refers to a specific series of movements that are frequently done between each asana in a series. This vinyâsa ‘flow’ is a variant of Sûrya namaskâra, the Sun Salutation, and is used in other styles of yoga beside Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. A standard vinyâsa consists (for example) of the flow from caturanga, or plank, to caturanga dandâsana, or low plank, to ũrdhva mukha ũvânâsana or upward-facing dog, to Adho Mukha Svanasana, or downward-facing dog.

The breathing style used in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is Ujjayi which is a relaxed diaphragmatic style of breathing, characterized by an ocean sound which resonates in the practitioner’s throat. Throughout a practice, this specific breathing style is maintained in alignment with movements. The steady cycle of inhales and exhales provides the practitioner with a calming, mental focal point. Additionally, vinyâsa and Ujjayi together create internal heat, which leads to purification of the body through increased circulation and sweating.

Another major principle of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is the bandha, or muscle locking/contraction, which focuses energy in the body and is closely tied to the breath. There are a variety of bandhas (see below).

Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is different from many yoga classes in the west in that the order of asanas is completely predefined. A practice will comprise four main parts: an “opening sequence,” one

of the six main “series”, a back-bending sequence, and a set of inverted asanas, referred to as the “finishing sequence.” Practice always ends with savasana. The opening sequence begins with 10 Sun Salutations and then several standing asanas. Next, the practitioner will do one of the six main series, referred to as the Primary series (Yoga Chikitsa), Intermediate series (Nadi Shodhana) or Advanced A, B, C, or D (Sthira Bhaga) series level. Newcomers to Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga practice the primary series, after learning the standing sequence. The Primary Series is the most important series as it forms the basis of the entire system. Practitioners may advance to more difficult series over a period of years or decades, but the goal of this style is not to learn the more difficult asanas but rather to learn to maintain internal focus throughout the practice. A simplified version of the practice being taught to public schoolchildren has been challenged as an unlawful promotion of religious beliefs.

Daily or regular practice is highly emphasized in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is traditionally taught in Mysore style (supervised self practice, named after the city in India where Ashtanga originates), where each student moves through the practice at his or her own pace and level. An individual with an established Ashtanga practice might take between an hour and two hours, depending on his or her own personal speed, but a beginner will likely have a shorter practice. Yoga studios which teach Mysore practice are hard to find and these classes are often only taught by those authorized to teach by the Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute. It is more common to find classes devoted to a specific series, often at a standardized pace, and guided by an instructor. However, even traditional Mysore-style teachers offer “led” classes either weekly or monthly.

#### **History and legend :**

The **Yoga Korunta** is a purported ancient text on yoga, transmitted by oral tradition to Tirumalai Krishnamacharya by his teacher Ramamohana Brahmachari in the early 20th century, and further to Sri K. Pattabhi Jois beginning in 1927, who then used it as the basis of his system of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga introduced in 1948.

The existence or historicity of this oral transmission cannot be verified, and the text itself has not been preserved. It is said to have been made up of stanzas using rhymed, metered sutras, in the manner common to texts transmitted orally in the guru-shishya tradition.

The text is said to have described several lists of many different asana groupings, as well as highly original teachings on vinyasa, drishti, bandhas, mudras and general teachings.

The name Yoga Korunta is the Tamilized pronunciation of the Sanskrit words Yoga grantha, meaning “book about yoga”.

Ashtanga series is said to have its origin in an ancient text called the Yoga Korunta, compiled by Vamana Rishi, which Krishnamacharya received from his Guru Rama Mohan Brahmachari at Mount Kailash in the early 20th century. The story of the Yoga Korunta though finds no evidence in any historical research on the subject. It seems that no text with this name has ever been written. In addition, there is evidence that the Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga series incorporates exercises used by Indian wrestlers and British gymnastics. Recent academic research details documentary evidence that physical journals in the early 20th century were full of the postural shapes that were very similar to Krishnamacharya’s asana system. In particular, the flowing surya namaskar which later became the basis of Krishnamacharya’s Mysore style, was not yet considered part of yogasana.

Krishnamacharya has had considerable influence on many of the modern forms of yoga taught today. Among his students were many notable teachers of the later 20th century, such as K. Pattabhi Jois, B.K.S. Iyengar, Indra Devi, and Krishnamacharya’s son T.K.V. Desikachar. Krishnamacharya was well known for tailoring his teachings to address specific concerns of the person or group he was teaching, and a vinyasa series for adolescents is a result of this. When working under the convalescing Maharaja of Mysore, Krishnamacharya set up a shala, or yoga school in the palace grounds and adapted the practice outlined in the Yoga Korunta for the young boys who lived there. Ashtanga

Vinyasa Yoga has since been thought of as a physically demanding practice, which can be successful at channeling the hyperactivity of young minds. This system can also be used as a vessel for helping calm ongoing chatter of the mind, reducing stress and teaching extroverted personalities to redirect their attention to their internal experience.

**Eight Limbs of Ashtanga :**

The sage Patanjali outlined eight aspects—or “limbs”— of spiritual yogic practice in his Yoga Sutras:

The first four limbs—yama, niyama, asana and pranayama—are considered external cleansing practices. According to Pattabhi Jois, defects in these external practices are correctable while defects in the internal cleansing practices—pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi—are not. Pattabhi Jois thought these internal defects to be potentially dangerous to the mind unless the correct Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga method was followed.

Sanskrit	English
Yama	Moral codes
Niyama	Self-purification and study
Asana	Posture
Pranayama	Breath control
Pratyahara	Withdrawing of the mind from the senses
Dharana	Concentration
Dhyana	Deep meditation
Samadhi	Union with the object of meditation

**Higher level practices within Ashtanga :**

**Bandhas :**

There are three bandhas which are considered our internal body locks, prescribed in the different asanas. The bandha is a sustained contraction of a group of muscles that assists the practitioner not only in retaining an asana but also in moving in and out of it. The Mûla Bandha, or root lock, is performed by tightening the muscles around the pelvic and perineum area. The U??iyâna Bandha, often described as bringing the navel to the base of the spine, is a contraction of the muscles of the lower abdominal area – this bandha is considered the most important bandha as it supports our breathing and encourages the development of strong core muscles. Jâla?dhara Bandha, throat lock, is achieved by lowering the chin slightly while raising the sternum and the palate bringing the gaze to the tip of the nose.

**Drishtis :**

Drishti (drsti), or focused gaze, is a means for developing concentrated intention. The most common is Ūrdhva, or upward gazing, where the eyes are lifted, with the spine aligned from crown to tailbone. This technique is employed in a variety of asanas.

There are, in total, nine drishtis that instruct the yoga student in directing his or her gaze. Each asana is associated with a particular drishti. They include:

- Angustha madhyai: to the thumb
- Bhrûmadhya: to the third eye, or between the eyebrows
- Nâsâgrai: at the tip of the nose (or a point six inches from the tip)
- Hastagrai: to the palm, usually the extended hand
- Pârûva: to the left/right side

- Ūrdhva: to the sky, or upwards
- Nābhicakra: to the navel
- Pādayoragrai: to the toes

**Mantras :**

The Ashtanga practice is traditionally started with the following Sanskrit mantra:

vande gurūnām caranāravinde samdarūitasvātmasukhāvabodhe  
nīh sreyase jāngalikāyamāne samsāra hālāhala mohauāntyai  
ābāhu purusākāram sankhacakrāsi dhārinam  
sahasra sirasam svetam pranamāmi patañjalim

which is roughly translated into English as:

I bow to the lotus feet of the gurus,  
The awakening happiness of one's own self revealed,  
Beyond better, acting like the jungle physician,  
Pacifying delusion, the poison of samsara.  
Taking the form of a man to the shoulders,  
Holding a conch, a discus, and a sword,  
One thousand heads white,  
To Patanjali, I salute.

and closes with the mangala mantra:

svasti prajābhyah paripālayantām nyāyena mārgena mahīm mahīūāh  
gobrāhmanebhyah subhamastu nityam lokāh samastāh sukhino bhavantu

which is roughly translated into English as:

May prosperity be glorified,  
may rulers (administrators) rule the world with law and justice,  
may divinity and erudition be protected.  
May all beings be happy and prosperous.

A more literal translation:

May it be well with the people.  
Let Earth's rulers protect the Earth with the path of law and justice.  
May good fortune always befall cows and Brahmins.  
May all the worlds be happy and comfortable.

**Power Yoga :**

Power Yoga, taking from its Hatha Yoga roots, consists of both a standing and sitting sequences of movements linking the usage of physical movement, breath-work or pranayama (Sanskrit: ?????????) and meditation. Power Yoga strikes a balance between the originating values of yoga (Sanskrit: ???) found in India and the North American societally driven demands for physical exercise.

Power Yoga is often practiced in a hot room held at a temperature approximate to 105°F or 40.6°C (László and Smith, 2009).

Power Yoga has been argued to be the fundamental style of Hatha yoga that allowed for cultural acceptance of yoga in North America. According to the North American Studio Alliance, 30 million people are practicing yoga in the United States of America<sup>1</sup> This includes practitioners not just of Power Yoga, but the entire practice of Hatha Yoga. Its popularity has led the sharing of sequences and movement across all of the following forms of Hatha Yoga.

Power yoga aligns with the Hindu Philosophy of Asana (Sanskrit: ???). Asana is one of the eight limbs of Astānga Yoga (a system similar to but distinct from the Eightfold Path developed by the Pathanjali).

Power Yoga sequences can vary dependent on the other Hatha Yoga knowledge held by the teacher, sometimes adhering to the Ashtanga Primary Series or working into variations thereof. Popular schools of Power Yoga were founded by the following people:

- Brothers Doug and David Swenson based in the USA are early Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga practitioners. They each teach extensively around the world. Doug is the author of several books on yoga and holds popular Yoga Teacher Training Programs in Lake Tahoe. David Swenson is recognized today as one of the worlds foremost practitioners and instructors of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga.
  - Anne-Marie Newland, based in Leicester, UK, creator of Sun Power Yoga, which is a blend of Ashtanga, Sivananda and Iyengar styles.
  - Baron Baptiste, founder of Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga
  - Beryl Bender Birch, author of the books Power Yoga, Beyond Power Yoga and Boomer Yoga, based in New York.
  - Bryan Kest, based in Los Angeles
  - Larry Schultz, creator of Rocket Yoga
  - P90X YogaX: a part of the popular P90X exercise program.
- Birch, Kest, the Swenson brothers and Schultz were all once students of K. Pattabhi Jois.

#### **High risk of injuries :**

In an article published by The Economist, it was reported that “a good number of Mr Jois’s students seemed constantly to be limping around with injured knees or backs because they had received his “adjustments”, yanking them into Lotus, the splits or a backbend.” Tim Miller, one of Jois’s students, indicates that “the adjustments were fairly ferocious.” Injuries related to Jois’s Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga have been the subject of discussion in a Huffington Post article and a Vanity Fair article. In Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, pain and injury during the practice is often referred to as “opening.” “Adjustments” by some teachers of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga have been known to leave a trail of injured bodies in their wake.

In The Science of Yoga, William Broad’s findings on yoga injuries include a case where a patient was diagnosed with a bulge in one of the vertebral discs causing numbness and pain as a result of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. In 2008, yoga researchers in Europe published a survey of practitioners of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga indicating that 62 per cent of the respondents had suffered at least one injury that lasted longer than one month.

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