

# Raja Yoga

**There are four main paths of Yoga:**

1. **Raja Yoga**, The Science of Physical and Mental Control
2. **Karma Yoga**, The Yoga of Action
3. **Bhakti Yoga**, The Path of Devotion or Divine Love
4. **Jnana Yoga**, The Yoga of Knowledge or Wisdom

As we have repeated more than once, Hatha Yoga is but a preparation and is often practised without any admixture of religious or even only philosophical considerations. The exercises which we have described have as their purpose the conscious control of physical and mental activities which ordinarily are not subject to such control. The goal is to teach us to perceive directly what is going on within us, in our inner physical and mental world and to direct these activities in a conscious, voluntary and beneficial manner.

**Raja Yoga (Also referred to as Ashtanga Yoga. Not to be confused with the Hatha Style of Ashtanga Yoga)**

## **The Eight Limbs of Raja Yoga**

According to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, one of the ancient texts that is the basis for the philosophy behind Yoga, there are eight “limbs” (Ashtanga in Sanskrit) of Yoga. Each limb relates to an aspect of achieving a healthy and fulfilling life, and each builds upon the one before it. You may be surprised to hear that only one of the limbs involves the performance of Yoga postures, and these are sitting meditative asanas. Here is a description of the eight limbs.

1. Yama: Five ethical guidelines regarding moral behaviour towards others:

Ahimsa: Non violence  
Satya: Truthfulness  
Asteya: Non stealing  
Brahmacharya: Non lust  
Aparigraha: Non acquiring

2. Niyama: Five ethical guidelines regarding moral behaviour towards oneself:

Saucha: Cleanliness  
Santosa: Contentment  
Tapas: Sustained practice  
Svadhyaya: Self study  
Isvara pranidhana: Surrender to life



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3. Asana: Practice of Yoga postures.
4. Pranayama: Practice of breathing exercises.
5. Pratyahara: Withdrawal of the senses, meaning that the exterior world does not affect the peace within us.
6. Dharana: Concentration, meaning the ability to focus on something uninterrupted by external or internal distractions.
7. Dhyana: Meditation. Building upon Dharana, the concentration is no longer focused on a single thing but is all encompassing.
8. Samadhi: Bliss. Building upon Dhyana, the transcendence of the self through meditation. The merging of the self with the universe. Sometimes translated as enlightenment.

A lovely Indian fable tells of a king to whom his subjects daily brought presents. These were carried to his treasure house. Among the people who thus offered their gifts there was a Yogi who every day presented the king with a beautiful fruit. The king did not estimate this offering any too highly, but accepted it nevertheless and with the other presents accumulated the fruit in his treasury. Now it happened that one day a child was with the king when the Yogi arrived to make his offering, a beautiful apple. The king, smilingly, gave the apple to the child, a little girl, who immediately began to eat it. All of a sudden she gave a cry of surprise: her teeth had struck on something hard. Carefully she took a few more bites and, lo and behold, she uncovered a glittering jewel, a wonderful sapphire. The king was struck with wonder and commanded his treasurer to see what had become of all the other fruit. It had all rotted away. Where it had been stored, there rose a glittering heap of precious jewels. The treasury is our unconscious mind.

But, alas, not all the impressions and memories that lie in that storehouse are jewels, although many of the impressions slumbering there are recognized at their real value only after we have made them conscious again. Into this storehouse we must, above all, bring some order, and then we must see that we do not, in the future, store in it anything without having first carefully examined it. We must learn to live attentively, consciously.

*And there is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness and truth. Leo Tolstoy*

