

My Hatha Session overview

Tutor: Philomena Breen

Welcome to my Hatha yoga class. The theme for this month is Hatha yoga. Forgive me for any shortcomings in endeavouring to explain such a vast philosophy on one mere side of A4. I am of the mind that Hatha Yoga is mostly yoga that prepares the body for the spiritual path via physical and breathing exercises. It prepares and conditions the body so that the mind can practice relaxation and meditation more or less without obstacles. In the sessions the main component of Hatha yoga, which has a special application to the spiritual path, is yoga postures, or, in Sanskrit, asanas. The word *asana* means *comfortable, stable pose*. Asanas are exercises of a special kind. The form that they have taken is the result of a thousand years of experience: trial and error, experiments, and scrupulous observation. The yogis have discovered that certain positions of the body can give human beings qualities that they do not know they have. Asanas are usually named in honour of their inventors (Matsyendra), certain bodily structures (a triangle), tools (a plow), birds (a peacock), or animals (a lion, e.g.) and reflect physical or psychological effects that these asanas have on a person. For instance, a snake pose makes the spine flexible and helps develop emotional and physical energy.

Yoga postures should not be confused with mere exercise, which help strengthen and develop muscles. Asanas are special positions of the body that strengthen, purify and balance the endocrine, nervous and circulatory systems. While asanas are rarely prescribed to treat illnesses, they have been claimed to have healing properties. If you practice asanas regularly, your body should gradually achieve greater endurance, your spine should become more flexible (we only use our spine to 75% of it's flexibility). Your body should come to its natural weight and rid itself of toxins, you will breathe more easily, you should gain energy, your circulation and blood pressure should improve. You should have an easier time coping with stress providing people do not overburden you. Hatha Yoga is the gateway to physical and emotional health. This has been validated with clinical tests in America. For example 15 minutes in Savasanna combined with breathing exercises lowers blood pressure. Yoga will increase your inner awareness and alert you to be more proactive to disease. You should feel the body/mind connection, e.g. the effect of stress on blood pressure levels and the long term detriment if left undetected.

Most of us, especially when we begin relaxation and meditation practice, become surprised to what extent the mind is restless, unstable and full of various thoughts and desires. Emotions of anger, fear, hate and their derivatives torture us, while emotions of enchantment and attachment delight us. Both kinds of emotions do not allow us to relax or enter deep meditative states. Such mental disturbance happens due to the effect of mental modifications (*vritti*), which are trying to find external expression through the sensory organs and the nervous system (*indriya*), and therefore creating emotional confusion. Since *vrittis* are derivatives of endocrine glands, if you can regulate their (hormonal) secretions through asanas and other special yogic techniques, you will be able to regulate and control the emotions and the mind and be proactive to modern disease detection. Let me explain, asanas squeeze and stretch glands, and thus invigorate and balance their secretions. This should help regulate endocrine defects and improve emotional and physical wellbeing. Gradually the mind becomes more calm and focused, i.e., ready for relaxation and deep meditation. We shall further explore all of the above in our weekly sessions and monthly themes. Enjoy the gift of yoga. Patience is the key. Namaste

Students often ask if my class is hard or soft, for beginners or advanced. You can work with the asanas, pranayama and meditation to suit your needs either with the modifications or more advanced postures. You will find your level and progressively develop your potential. Namaste