

Precautions and Disclaimer

Yoga is not a one-size-fits-all exercise program. As with all physical sports and exercise, yoga poses are not suitable for everyone and the exercises in this manual could result in injury for some individuals. By not straining or forcing your body beyond its comfort zone, you can reduce the risk of injury. Yoga does not teach that we should strain or force our body into a position. Consult your physician before beginning this or any exercise program. The exercises offered in this manual are intended for healthy and physically fit individuals. The options in the manual are based on the traditional Yoga and Ayurveda mind-body approach to wellness and is in no way intended as a substitute for medical advice from your doctors or mental health professionals.

Section 1

Modern and Ancient Yoga Overview

What is Yoga?

Yoga is a Sanskrit word that means “union”. Yoga is a state or experience where we are no longer bound to feeling that we are isolated as a small individual. The state of Yoga is always occurring inside of us and all around us. Yet we don’t notice it because our mind is clouded and misidentified with our limited ego (ahamkara) or sense of I-ness. Experiencing Yoga is called Samadhi, or deep absolute absorption, where the lover and beloved merge or the individual self merges with the entire universe. Yoga is not a selfish state of self-absorption: it is absorption of our little individual self into the feeling of universal consciousness. In Yoga philosophy it is explained with specific technical terms. Yoga is joining the individual self (jivātman) with the universal self or entire cosmos (paramātmān). Every authentic Yoga practice works towards this goal.

Yoga is a multidisciplinary mind-body practice. We often think of Yoga as a physical practice, and it is, but it is also so much more. Yoga in its essence, is a state of awareness. All of the various practices under the umbrella of Yoga are intended to reveal the state of Yoga which means union. The state of yoga is the natural state of awareness, which is the experience of fullness and perennial joy. Yoga practice can include but isn’t limited to physical postures (asana), breath work (pranayama), meditation (dhyana), chanting (mantra), and concentration techniques (dharana). Philosophy (jnana Yoga), self-inquiry (vichara), and study of ancient text and one’s limited self-identity (svadhyaya) are often grouped together for those who have more of a mentally curious and psychological intellectual nature.

Two of the other major groupings of yoga practice that often go hand in hand include service work or being unattached to outcomes of our actions (karma yoga) and devotional practices (Bhakti Yoga). Each Yoga tradition uses a hybrid of approaches and aims to uncover the different states one experiences along the path of Yoga including physical strength, flexibility, stress relief, relaxation, better focus, inner peace, detachment from thoughts and emotions controlling our actions and reactions, and a general conscious relationship to our emotions. In advanced states along the path of Yoga, we expand our consciousness to higher vibration feelings like love, compassion, bliss, spiritual ecstasy, and a feeling of connection to Spirit or the Universe.

What Yoga is and isn’t

As aspiring Yoga teachers, we need to learn how to share with the public what Yoga is. While Yoga has become very popular today, there is also a lot of misinformation about Yoga. Below is a layout to help with understanding for ourselves what yoga is and what it is not. While Classical Yoga is a diverse spiritual path leading to spiritual union with the cosmos, we can also celebrate Yoga’s many benefits for those looking into practice for more basic reasons like stress reduction or physical fitness. Here are some descriptions that can be useful when communicating with students about what Yoga is:

Yoga is a state ...
... of consciousness first and foremost.
... that is experienced or attained through a variety of practices, lifestyle routines, and attitudes.
... where the body and mind are still, peaceful, and relaxed.

... of calm, clear, alert awareness.
... that results from raising our energy and consciousness through breath, exercise, and concentration techniques.
... that refers to union of the practitioner with a larger sense of self.
... where we learn to still the emotional turmoil of our thought waves and emotions.

Yoga is a practice...

... that is non-sectarian, and for both religious and secular people
... for spiritual aspirants and those looking for health and wellness.
... to discipline the mind and body that is commonly expected to increase health and vitality
... that can teach us how to become absorbed in the bliss of our unconditioned inner reality.
... with mental benefits that can bring us a sense of freedom from the stress of our conditioned mind's thoughts and emotions.
... that brings us larger understanding of who we are in the cosmos.
... which can help us develop a sense of deep stillness and peace.
... that works on all levels of our being: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.
... of going beyond our false sense of separateness.

The Roots of Yoga - Yoga as an Enlightenment Path

Today we find most students come to Yoga for exercise and stress relief. You might be shocked to learn that Yoga is an enlightenment path similar to Buddhism. Both Yoga and Buddhism are ancient paths seeking enlightenment. Buddhism is a religion or dharma that uses yoga practices, particularly meditation. Yoga is a plug-in that can be used by anyone.

Yoga is also considered a Dharma, meaning path of righteousness or path of support. While the word enlightenment can be intimidating, we need not look at it like that. It is our truest self and getting in touch with the fact that we are in-lightened. There is light within us that is also in all other things. When we say "Namaste", we are acknowledging that inner light that is in all things.

Enlightenment has various names in different yogic traditions. Nirvana, Moksha, Kaivalya, Turiya and Samadhi are the main names. Different Yoga traditions use different terms. Each term has nuanced differences that relate to the system of yoga it relates to. We will explore that more in philosophy classes; for now the most important points will be reviewed.

Yoga as explained by Sage Patanjali in his famous Yoga Sutras uses the words Samadhi and Kaivalya, whereas Buddhist forms of yoga talk about Nirvana. The Hindu forms of Yoga focus on Moksha or final liberation. The Yogic path to enlightenment involves taking care of the body and mind while cultivating deep relaxation; it is non-sectarian and can be used by anyone.

Due to Yoga's excellent healing capacities, the health and mental benefits of a Yoga and meditation practice are very relevant for the fast paced, sedentary lifestyle so many people are living today. Researchers are diving deep into the physiological benefits and doctors are encouraging people to pick up practice. Yoga is experiencing a major boom worldwide.

Most people are interested in yoga for wellness more than for becoming an enlightened Yogi. Buddha was considered to be a great awakened yogi. If you practice enough with the right attitudes and a bit of grace, you might be the next awakened one (Buddha means "awake"). It's more common than people think to taste small bits of awakened awareness.

In time, an authentic yoga practice can lead to higher states of awareness. One step at a time some people are accidentally following an ancient enlightenment practice. As teachers we need to understand the tools we are working with, their historical relevance, and how they are being altered in the modern world. We will explore these topics in great depth throughout this course.

For now it's important to understand that Yoga is the path to Super Conscious Bliss (samadhi) and that touching any part of the system (poses, meditation, etc.) brings us in direct contact with the whole system. To touch an elephant we simply put one hand out. The elephant is large, yet one hand connects us to the whole elephant. Like this, touching into one part of the Yoga system brings us into connection with the whole ancient healing path of Self Realization.

What Yoga Is Not

As mentioned above, today there are misconceptions about Yoga. As teachers you need to be able to address them with clarity. All the information above is useful, but here is some more for you to work with to be able to first be clear with yourself and then with your students.

Yoga is not ...

- ... a cure-all to every life problem
- ... going to make your body image go away in and of itself
- ... an escape from any of life's difficulties which must be addressed
- ... a religion
- ... a one-size-fits-all exercise program (if it's being sold this way, it might have left a lot of what yoga is out of the picture)
- ... going to make you never need to see a doctor again (although it might make your doctor visits less frequent)
- ... going to fix every ache and pain in your body (although it might help a lot!)
- ... meant to be defined by Instagram or other social media
- ... meant to only be an exercise program
- ... going to save you from having to do other mental, spiritual, and psychological work (but it might give some useful shortcuts to save you from a lot of mental, spiritual, and psychological confusion, as well as the endless marketplace of self-help.)

Who is Yoga Practice For?

Yoga is for EVERYBODY who is open to exploring the system. Yoga is for people of all ages, body types, mental natures, spiritual inclinations, religions, lack of religious affiliations, and social classes (etc.). Yoga IS NOT one-size-fits-all.

Yoga practice needs to be tailored to the individual based on age, injury history, body type, and goal of practice. For aspiring teachers this takes a lot of study over the years.

In this 200-hour training you will learn the basics of these skills and you will be well on your way to being able to work with individuals per their needs for general yoga as wellness and introductory yoga as a spiritual practice.

Yogas Postures - Major Branches Today

Today yoga is in three major categories in the Western world: 1) wellness, 2) spiritual growth, and 3) Yoga Therapy. These three aspects are ultimately not different and all one, yet they can present as very unique approaches with important and noteworthy differences.

- Yoga for wellness is a broad category. It is using the health and healing aspects of the yoga system. If your doctor has suggested you do yoga for low back pain, heart problems, stress relief, etc., this is yoga for health and healing. It is contained in the other two divisions of yoga. Yoga for wellness is the most popular form of yoga today. General exercise and basic meditation for stress reduction are in this category.
- Yoga for spiritual growth is part of ancient whole system yoga. Yoga for wellness can leave out some of the nuanced details of what, where, and how to grow spiritually from yoga. While increasing our wellness is generally good for our spiritual lives, we should not confuse general yoga for wellness as a focused spiritual path. To take up a spiritual path, either Bhakti (devotional practice) or jnana (self-inquiry into the nature of the mind and soul) are needed. Tapasya, or intense fire of practice, that leads to transformation of mind and body must also be included. Ethics and lifestyle practices are a must to embody the spiritual aspects of yoga. Surrounding oneself with like-minded seekers (satsang or sadha sanga) is incredibly important for one aiming to make yoga more than just a physical practice. This is important to understand. Some people think doing physical yoga puts them on a spiritual path, and for them it is an important first step. However, to honor the highest potential yoga has to offer you, we must understand what the full system has to offer. Then we can get the most fruit from the ancient yoga system. Many exercise-based yoga people hybridize yoga for wellness with various New Age and modern psychological approaches. While the New Age practices, modern self-help, and psychology often share much in common with authentic spiritually-based yoga practices, the differences should be noted by anyone aiming to have authenticity and integrity around what yoga is and isn't. We can distinguish Yoga in its classical Indian form from westernized hybrid yoga. To be clear, we should not criticize other yoga practices even if they are only based on the physical aspects of the yoga system. We do not ever want to condemn the various western hybrid forms of yoga. We should aim to understand where yoga comes from and how it has been altered in the west. Yoga practices are always changing and hybridizing. We see this through Indian history both modern and ancient. Keeping to the heart of yoga, which is Self Realization and meditation, is the most important aspect to keep intact.
- Yoga Therapy has three main branches.
 1. Today an exciting new field of Yoga Therapy which is based on research and evidence from modern science is emerging onto the world's stage. It is based loosely upon the next two categories with modern academic rigor. This is not to say the old traditions did not have rigorous standards. Yoga for health and healing has been used and experimented with for thousands of years. Just because we are using new information technologies does not mean we are getting anything better in regards to yoga. We are putting it into a modern intellectual context which is important for yoga's development in the western world.
 2. Ayurveda is the ancient mind-body medicine of India. It is vast and full of details. I strongly suggest looking into Dr. David Frawley's (Vamadeva Shastri) work on the subject. It is too vast to cover here. Ayurveda contains Yoga Therapy in its traditional form. The basics of Ayurveda will be covered in this course. I offer Hatha Yoga with a specific focus around Ayurveda. Reach out to learn more.
 3. Yoga Chikitas is the Sanskrit name for Yoga Therapy. Yoga Chikitas is not always directly tied to Ayurveda. Chikitas vary according to what an individual teacher (Guru) shares with the students in regards to health and healing. Each Guru has a unique approach to their system Chikitas (therapy). Often based out of Ayurveda and local folk medicine, Yoga Chikitas is a fascinating and diverse topic. Hatha Yoga has its own therapeutic practices laid out in the

yogic text. These cross over with Ayurveda as well as Western Naturopathic medicine and herbalism.

Yoga Social Class & Spiritual Inclination

In the Pre-Industrial Age, finding a Yogi to study with was not easy. Even if you found a great Yogi, they might not teach you if they didn't think you were a committed student. In the old days of yoga, money didn't matter. Yogis all lived simply, and to chase after a lavish and comfortable lifestyle was considered distracting to the relaxed and mellow yogic lifestyle (sattva). Only in the modern era has yoga become easily accessible to most people. This has to do with yoga entering the market place. Yoga as a wellness routine is selling all over the world. Yoga as wellness is for everyone, and as yoga teachers we should always try to make yoga accessible to lower income individuals and populations. Setting up work trades and giving discounts should be part of every yoga teacher's offerings. Learning how to work with diversity in age and body type is incredibly important as well.

Finding a Yoga teacher who understands Yoga as a whole system and has a focused spiritual path is more common than it used to be, but still difficult. Whole system yoga is not what we find in many gyms and recreation centers. Individuals seeking the spiritual aspects of yoga have often been considered socially unique, or outcasts. In many cases, teaching the spiritual aspects of yoga in an exercise setting is not appropriate in our secular culture. While it seems like yoga is spreading deep, authentic yoga is small compared to market driven wellness and exercise-based yoga practice. Even with free yoga classes spreading all over the Internet and ease and accessibility on the rise, who is ready to give their whole life to yoga practice? Who would meet the ancient yoga masters' criteria for becoming a student? Someone with the temperament to please the ancient master can come from any section of society and have any outer appearance. Yet these people are rare even in the yoga boom.

Happiness and Yoga

The pursuit of happiness is what drives us on a deep level. We all want to be happy. People seek happiness based upon their conditioning, access to information, and social resources. In our own unique ways, we seek to relieve our suffering, but often that which we seek is what is causing us to suffer. Or, what we think will bring us joy is actually causing us pain. Sage Patanjali explores this in the Yoga Sutra. Most of our externalized approaches to life don't bring us lasting happiness. Over and over we think taking an action will relieve our suffering. Yet that action often only gives temporary relief or an illusion of relief. Often we continue to make the same choices which cause stress, anxiety, sadness, and confusion.

Yoga is a system that can help us break the habits that cause us to suffer. On the deepest level of Yoga practice we can find perennial joy. When we do yoga poses (asana) we feel good but it is temporary. Feeling good from a work out is a fleeting sensation. It is good to have the experience of happiness from healthy activities. Yet yoga offers us both the temporary pleasure of healthy mind and body and much more! Even more than working out our physical and psychological stagnation and blurriness, yoga can bring us happiness even in suffering. This may sound confusing. How can we have joy and happiness while we are suffering? Why are we longing for and seeking happiness so deeply, yet the joy comes and goes?

We seek happiness in healthy and unhealthy ways. We are looking to find ourselves because beingness, consciousness, and bliss (satchitananda) is the essence of our being. It is actually our only true reality. You're most likely thinking, "If bliss and joy is my essence, why am I not

constantly experiencing it?” Our nature of unconditional bliss is so close to us that we don’t notice it. We don’t notice it because we are stuck on the level of I, Me, Mine..., thinking our thoughts, feelings, and opinions are who and what we are. However, it is only one level of who we are.

AWARENESS EXERCISES

Slow down and feel your breath. Settle into the moment. Sit with the breath for 1 to 3 minutes.

Begin to look at your thoughts and feelings while keeping your awareness on your breath.

As each sensation comes and goes, find where the “I” is located. With every thought and feeling, stop and feel the sensation fully and ask yourself who is perceiving? Where does my sensation of “I” connect to this present story line and emotion? Once you notice it, simply breathe, observe, and surrender to the feeling of being larger than ideas and feelings. Keep breathing. Keep coming back to the moment. Continue asking yourself where the “I” sense or thought of “I” is coming from.

If done well, this will slow you down and bring you into the moment and give you a glimpse of something larger than the stories that limit the reality of your vastness.

Yoga and the Technological Era

The increase in modern technology is observable by all of us. With this increase of technology three things are happening that most everyone would acknowledge:

1. Communication is moving faster and speeding up.
2. Information is more open source than ever.
3. Environmental toxins are on the rise.

These three byproducts of the internet and Industrial Age are making yoga almost a required life skill. The communication overload is fatiguing people. The environmental toxins are causing strains on our body we have never experienced in human history. Open source information is causing us to be overwhelmed with information. We are marketed at endlessly. Today we need yoga to keep us strong and from becoming overwhelmed with the electrical waves and constant demands of fast-moving communication. Meditation and yoga are needed to help us hit reset and unplug from the modern machine that we are creating.

Some Yogis believe that human awareness has transitioned from an age of dense, slow matter to an age of electric energy¹. In the past we saw earth as fixed and flat. Information was hard to get. We had to go to the priest or professor to get the small amount of information they had. We only saw on the surface. Now we have come to a time where microbiology, electricity, and even abstract realities like quantum physics are opening us to the world and life as an all expansive energy. This change is altering religious and spiritual practices across the world. Before we would simply follow what societies’ leaders and teachers said. Now we need and

¹ Swami Sri Yuketwars Holy Science

want to have a direct experience of spiritual realities. Information is at the tip of our fingers. With this change, blind dogma can't stand. Yoga offers us direct experience.

The trick is new spiritual energies are available to us, but they can't be searched on Google. We need to go inside to taste the nectar.

As communication is speeding up, on a positive level there is a new access to creativity, freedom, and possibilities. As yoga and meditation spreads, individuals are breaking free from conditioned awareness that we are simply material, and feeling instead that we are pure consciousness. Within the scientific communities many are beginning to see evidence that there is a consciousness behind matter.

With our newfound freedom of information and communication, many negative feelings have also arisen. People are feeling overstimulated, disoriented, cut off from nature, and from human communities; with this is coming anxiety, depression, restlessness, stress, and insecurity.

As the Internet and electric age continues, the energy levels will continue to rise. This higher energy makes life move faster. This can help us by giving more freedom and access to information, and on the other hand, it can increase agitation, blurriness and confusion.

The change in time periods makes it a perfect time to commit to your own yoga and meditation practice and ideally begin sharing it with others.

Section 2

Preparing For Yoga Practice

Practical Preparations for Yoga and Meditation Practice

Understanding and living the following guidelines of practice are important for both you and your future yoga students. Embodying these practices will help you develop the mood and energy of an authentic yoga practitioner. Your students will feel it radiating off of you and you can teach them to follow the same steps to help spread the joys of the yogic lifestyle.

Create a Yoga and Meditation Space

If you can, it is best to practice in the same space every day. Set aside a whole room if you can, or a corner of a room. If possible, you can use a shoji screen or a tapestry to define the area that is for your personal yoga and meditation practice only.

Find a quiet space where you can have uplifting colors, sounds, and smells. Many Yogis create a small altar that they face while they practice. The altar is not required for people who are not moved by sacred imagery, but for those of us who are, we can fill the space with photos and paintings of saints, sacred geometry, gems, flowers, and other uplifting items which remind you of your highest potential. Make it unique and let it inspire you. Do your practice there as often as you can, even more often than at a local yoga studio or gym. This will help to establish your personal practice (a requirement for yoga teachers) and it will bring a healing vibration into your home.

When you sit down in your cozy spot, your senses will associate it with practice, and over time when you enter that part of your house it will help support you going deeper into your yoga and meditation practice. It is also advised to have a natural fiber yoga mat and meditation cushion that only you use. Your energy will be on these special items that you use for your sadhana (spiritual practice) every day.

Earplugs are great to deepen meditation. You can also use them if there is a lot of noise in your house or neighborhood. Have a shawl and/or blanket to wrap yourself in during meditation and to cover yourself with during shavāsana. It's always recommended to cover yourself during shavāsana. It's a practice many yoga studios leave out today, but once you get into it, you will find it comforting and soothing and really miss your body cover when you don't happen to have one. Keep a little light in the room but don't have it too bright as that will add to restlessness and distractibility. Natural candles or a ghee lamp bring a wonderful atmosphere, as we can also learn how to meditate on the flame.

Traditional yogic practitioners work with the earth's subtle energies. Each of the four directions have their own unique quality. Facing east is best for yoga and meditation practice. East is the direction of new beginnings and holds the energy of enlightenment. It is a creative and clear direction that supports our practice. West or north are also good. In Yoga and Ayurveda, south is considered to be an active place. A room that faces south will be the hottest. In Indian sacred home design often the kitchen would be in the south. If you can't set up your practice so you are facing east, don't worry. Placing an altar where you practice and infusing the space with sacred intentions helps to transcend whichever direction you are pointing. If you choose to

have an altar with photos of saints and sacred objects, it will help you go beyond any undesirable influences that could be in the layout of the location where you practice. Things become sacred when we make them so; set your intention and cultivate a beautiful practice space.

Clothing, Mats & Meditation Cushions

For many reasons it is strongly recommend we have natural fabrics for most all of our needs. Natural fibers are preferred by Yogis for clothing, mats, shawls, meditation cushions, and all fibers. This might make you wonder about the popular petrochemical sticky mat we see all over the world today. Sticky mats are new in the history of yoga practice. Plastics and other materials made from petrochemicals that off-gas are considered to be slightly agitating to our subtle bodies and not ideal in general, particularly when we are practicing. The industrial process of making them is also lacking in general yogic ethics.

Yoga and Ayurveda are the life sciences of living in alignment with nature. Yoga ethics points towards nonviolence towards ourselves and others. This includes what kind of products we buy. Today there are millions of yoga mats that are made of non-biodegradable materials. There is no recycling them, only down cycling or repurposing. As conscious yogic consumers we should aim to avoid these products whenever possible. We also want to avoid fanaticism.

On the other hand, nothing can beat a nice waterproof jacket so we make exceptions here and there. Keeping synthetic material off our body and out of the environment is important for all beings on planet earth. Keeping synthetic fibers off our body should be a general lifestyle goal for yogis but is most important during meditation practice due to the negative prana (energy) coming off of clothing and mats made from petrochemicals and plastics.

At the end of our yoga practice we can use a wool or silk shawl to keep our body's energy contained. A natural fiber covering also acts to keep us warm. Get a shawl or blanket you only use for yoga and meditation. Wool and silk are considered to be the best for insulating against the earth's magnetic field. Cotton is a good option, but if we can have our yoga and meditation supplies covered in either silk or wool, we will get subtle benefits.

When to practice Yoga & Meditation

There are a few considerations on this topic. The most important thing is to do your practice at the same time every day. This will help you get momentum. Let consistency be your main goal. With that in mind early morning is the best time to practice yoga and meditation. From the Yoga and Ayurveda view early morning is the time where air and ether elements are the highest point. This is helpful for spiritual expansion and clearing the subconscious mind. It is also best because you have all night to digest your food and your stomach is empty. We have also gone into an introverted space during sleep. Doing practice first thing in the morning gives a chance to go inwards before getting caught up in outward activities. Starting your day with yoga and meditation will set a joyful and harmonious mood as you start your day.

The other ideal time to practice, particularly meditation and mantra, is right before going to bed. Meditation before bed helps us to settle down, clear our mind, take a little inventory, and let go. For more advanced Yogis the state of mediation and sleep can become no different. Going to bed with a meditative mood helps us in many ways.

How Often Should a Yoga Teacher Practice

As aspiring teachers, we want to both be realistic and to challenge ourselves. At the same time depth is more important than quantity. One hour a day is a good minimum for a committed yoga teacher. Two to three hours a day will help you deepen your personal experience and help you ripen (advance?) on the path of yoga. Practicing twice a day gives us the most benefit. Thirty or 40 minutes in the morning and 20 or 30 in the evening is a good foundation. Regularity is more important than the amount of time. We are better off to do 20 minutes a day than 3 hours once a week or once a month. We can save a little extra time one day a week to do more than our regular weekly routine. Pick a day when you have more time and really get into the depth of your practice then.

Meditation or mindfulness is a continuous practice. As we deepen into what being mindful and consciously aware of prana or life force feels like, we can let this overflow into all aspects of our life. As we embody yoga more and more, we will walk, talk, and vibrate like a yogi on every level. Using the moments between activities for breath awareness and meditation is priceless.

Today we have more distractions than ever. Cell phones and computers pull us away from feeling our inner reality. Learn to detach from needing your device. Instead of reaching out to Facebook or Instagram, dig inward to commune with your sense of life force.

Coming back to the breath over and over is the most simple, profound, and difficult practice we find at the core of yoga. The question is not, "When do we do our daily time on our mat or meditation cushion?" but, "Are we being conscious and aware, breath by breath and moment to moment?" Truly yoga is in everything and every moment.

Satsang - a Gathering of Yogis

Satsang or Satsangha means fellowship of truth seekers. Satsang is often organized by a highly qualified teacher and his or her students. It is one of the most important aspects of Buddhist Yoga, but they called it the Sangha or other people on the path. Gathering with other like-minded yogis is one of the most powerful things we can do to keep our practice on point. Group meditation and yoga practice builds a group energy. Consciously catch this energy! Use it to your advantage. If you know you are falling behind on your personal practice, go spend time with someone, or a group of people, whose practice is more "lit" than yours. Just hanging out with people with strong practices can transform us and help to stabilize our practice.

Today we find a lot of yoga gatherings that are not under the category of Satsang. Often these events are one part music festival, one part psychedelic experience, and one part yoga inspired exercise. There is nothing wrong with these kinds of gatherings. These events can often lead us towards the deeper aspects of yoga. However, for those of us who are looking for the deeper aspects of yoga, we will need to find a community where the high ideals (Yama and Niyama) are practiced, lived, and modeled. Yoga posture alone is a hollow shell missing the essence and heart of yoga as yoga is a living and breathing community of practice.

Personalized Ritual and Prayer

Again, to be clear, yoga is nonsectarian. At the same time it is believed that for those who have religious practice, yoga has a powerful enhancing quality to our spiritual life. Offering ritual or prayer has a power that can foster a deeper meditative vibration. Special mantras are offered in some yoga traditions to use before practice. You can also chant or pray in any way that you

have learned and love. Let the vibrations of devotion fill your heart as you go deep into your practice of yoga.

Some common practices that are nonreligious include striking a chime or meditation bell, lighting a candle or incense, and setting positive intentions or focusing on a healing and uplifting affirmation. We can take this time to send healing energies to others. Secular or religious people can all improve their meditation practices with the power of conscious will and intention.

When we start or complete our practice, we can also lean on yoga traditions by using mantra or using any form of prayer, affirmation, or intention setting that fits with you. Make sure to end your practice by acknowledging the sacredness of life and the gifts we have. This is an important bridge as we transition out of practice on the mat and out into activity.

“Om” is the simplest yoga mantra and its meaning is universal. “Om” is simply the sound of the entire universe. We can also join our hands and bow, thinking or saying aloud “Namaste,” which means, “I bow to the light that is in you and in me which makes us one.”

When you complete your practice and head out into your day, infuse your actions with the healing vibrations of peace, relaxation, and joy that you cultivated in yoga and meditation.

We can eat breakfast in silence after our morning yoga and meditation practice. Consuming food in silence helps us develop the sense of activity with inner stillness. Eating meditation is a basic foundation of mindfulness. As you head out to work or school, listen to uplifting music and drive with clarity, calmly and mindfully. Bring the peace you cultivated into your day as much as you can. That is what yoga is really all about. It's not about hiding from the world on our mat or meditation cushion. It's about bringing love and joy to others. The more you go into your practice, the more you will glow and shine as a yogic practitioner. This is what being a yoga teacher is all about. It's not about how flexible you are, how good you look, or how many followers you have on Facebook. It's about feeling, breathing, and living love every moment.

General Practice Guidelines

1. Wear loose and comfortable natural fiber clothing and no socks. This helps with keeping prana (life force) positively charged. Use props as needed, but don't let them distract you from your inner experience.
2. If possible, remove glasses or contact lenses particularly during shavāsana and meditation.
3. When practicing Classical Hatha Yoga, rest on your back equal to the amount of time each posture is practiced. In other formats make sure to take shavāsana at the end of the class for 7 minutes minimum.
4. Practice each posture 1 to 3 times. (In classical format)
5. Practice each posture for 1 to 3 minutes (in classical format)
6. Don't practice with food in your belly. Wait 2 - 4 hours after eating a heavy meal and 1 hour after lighter meals before practice.
7. Early morning is optimal time to practice but anytime is good
8. Try to practice in the same place daily in a room that is quiet and warm with even floors, ample ventilation, and out of direct sunlight.
9. If possible, bathe before practice.

10. Set positive intentions or use prayer and chanting to open and close your practice. Mantra is powerful and helps set the mood for practice and to purify yourself and the location of practice.
11. Listen to the space between the thoughts.
12. Let go of every thought, feeling, and emotion. Dive deep into your inner self.
13. Heavy pranayama, belly down poses (prone), pressure on the abdomen, and inversions should not be practiced after the third trimester of pregnancy begins or during heavy menstrual flow. Once the menstrual cycle begins to slow then practice can be re-initiated.
14. Do not practice while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
15. Only practice and teach what you have learned from a knowledgeable teacher. Yoga asana is best learned under the supervision of a properly trained yoga instructor.