



## Yoga Basics, 4-week Series

*"The ultimate goal of yoga is to always observe things accurately, and therefore never act in a way that will make us regret our actions later."*

-T.K.V. Desikachar

# Pre-Workshop Questions

What are you hoping to learn during the workshop?

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Are there any aspects or parts of yoga that you would like to understand better?

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What benefits have you heard about yoga?

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# WHAT IS YOGA?

According to the “Heart of Yoga” by T.K.V. Desikachar, there are several meanings of the word yoga. Although yoga has its roots in Indian thought, the content is universal because it is about the means by which we can make the changes we desire in our lives.

- To come together; unite
- To tie the strands of the mind together
- To attain what was previously unattainable
- Acting in such a way that all of our attention is directed toward the activity in which we are currently engaged
- To be one with the divine

## WHAT IS VINYASA YOGA?

*Vinyāsa* is a charming Sanskrit word; it indicates the bringing out of the beauty of an artistic activity. We might also refer to this as ‘flow state’ and seek it throughout our experiences, not just in the world of yoga.

Most modern Western Yogis are familiar with this word which Sri Krishnamacharya used quite extensively while teaching yoga, especially when teaching *yogāsana* (the physical, postural practice). Vinyasa yoga means to “place in a special way”.

In the “Heart of Yoga”, vinyasa krama is described as: a correctly organized course of asanas progressing appropriately toward a desired goal. An important concept in vinyasa yoga is decide on a goal at the start of the practice and then pick steps that bring us closer to that goal. Two important concepts in Vinyasa Yoga are *Sthira* and *Sukha*. To gain a deeper understanding of this, it is important to start with attention on the breath and the body. The yoga sequences should be sensible and well structured so that as we advance through the practice, we can notice both stability and ease in the asanas (poses).

# YOGA BENEFITS

How does yoga affect mental health?

There's evidence that yoga may be helpful for anxiety associated with various life situations, such as medical conditions or stressful educational programs, and for depressive symptoms. The evidence on yoga's impact on diagnosed mental health conditions is less promising.

More

- In a 2013 review of 22 studies (involving 1,728 participants) of yoga for anxiety associated with life situations, yoga seemed to be helpful in some instances but not others. In general, results were more favorable for interventions that included at least 10 yoga sessions. The studies were of medium-to-poor quality, so definite conclusions about yoga's effectiveness couldn't be reached.
- In a review of 23 studies (involving 1,272 participants) of people with depressive symptoms (although not necessarily diagnosed with depression), yoga was helpful in reducing symptoms in 14 of the studies.
- A 2018 review of 18 studies (1,532 participants) of people who had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder or depression found that hatha yoga was not more effective in relieving symptoms than treatment as usual or most of the other interventions examined in the studies. However, it was more effective than psychoeducation programs at relieving symptoms of depression. Most of the studies included in the review were not of high quality.
- A 2018 evaluation of 7 studies (284 participants) of yoga for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) found only low-quality evidence of a possible benefit.
- A 2021 study of Kundalini yoga for generalized anxiety disorder (226 participants, 155 of whom completed the study), supported by NCCIH, found that Kundalini yoga improved symptoms but was less helpful than cognitive behavioral therapy, an established first-line treatment for this condition.

What are the health benefits of yoga?

Research suggests that yoga may:

- Help improve general wellness by relieving stress, supporting good health habits, and improving mental/emotional health, sleep, and balance.
- Relieve low-back pain and neck pain, and possibly pain from tension-type headaches and knee osteoarthritis.
- Help people who are overweight or obese lose weight.
- Help people quit smoking.
- Help people manage anxiety or depressive symptoms associated with difficult life situations.
- Relieve menopause symptoms.
- Help people with chronic diseases manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.

Although there's been a lot of research on the health effects of yoga, many studies have included only small numbers of people and haven't been of high quality. Therefore, in most instances, we can only say that yoga has shown promise for particular health uses, not that it's been proven to help.

What does research show about yoga for wellness?

Studies have suggested possible benefits of yoga for several aspects of wellness, including stress management, mental/emotional health, promoting healthy eating/activity habits, sleep, and balance.

- **Stress management.**
  - A 2020 review of 12 recent studies (672 total participants) of a variety of types of yoga for stress management in healthy adults found beneficial effects of yoga on measures of perceived stress in all the studies.
  - Of 17 older studies (1,070 total participants) of yoga for stress management included in a 2014 review, 12 studies showed improvements in physical or psychological measures related to stress.
- **Mental/emotional health.** In a recent review of 14 studies (involving 1,084 total participants) that assessed the effects of yoga on positive aspects of mental health, most found evidence of benefits, such as improvements in resilience or general mental well-being.
- **Promoting healthy eating/activity habits.** A 2018 survey of young adults (involving 1,820 participants) showed that practicing yoga regularly was associated with better eating and physical activity habits. In interviews, people who took the survey said they thought yoga supported healthier habits through greater mindfulness, motivation to participate in other forms of activity, and eating healthier. In addition, the yoga community itself was characterized as a social circle that encouraged connection, where healthy eating was commonplace.
- **Sleep.** Yoga has been shown to be helpful for sleep in several studies of cancer patients, women with sleep problems, and older adults and in individual studies of other population groups, including people with arthritis and women with menopause symptoms.
- **Balance.** In a 2014 review, 11 of 15 studies (688 total participants) that looked at the effect of yoga on balance in healthy people showed improvements in at least one outcome related to balance. An additional study, published in 2016, showed that both yoga and stretching-strengthening exercises were effective in improving balance (as well as strength and flexibility) in healthy, previously sedentary older adults.

# Week 1 Poses



Week 1 Breathing:

Pranayama is conscious breathing meaning where mental attention is placed directly on the breath. There are a variety of forms of pranayama that have different impacts on the body and mind. When practicing these forms of breathing, the yoga philosophy states that it could help cleanse the body and mind in a way that allows freer flowing prana thus creating increased sense of wellbeing.

### Ujjayi Pranayama (Throat Breathing)

We teach ujjayi pranayama with a six second breath for our beginner's classes. This style of breathing is audible and rhythmic creating a pace for the dynamic movement in the poses. This is typically done with a "sa" sound on the inhale through the nostrils and a "ha" sound through the nostrils.

### Week 1 Meditation: Guided Breathing

# WEEK 2

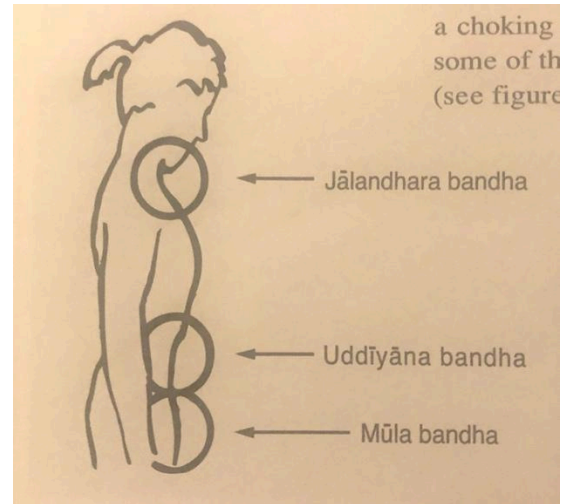
## BANDHAS

Bandha = to bind or tie together, to close, to lock

In a yoga posture, when we use a bandha we lock certain areas of the body in a particular way.

### 3 Main Bandhas

1. Jalandhara Bandha: Starting with a lengthened spine, the head is pulled back slightly so the neck is stretched and the chin is lowered. As long as the chin is down and the back is straight, we are in Jalandhara Bandha. Jalandhara Bandha should be introduced first and practiced for a while before moving onto Uddiyana Bandha.
2. Uddiyana Bandha: the diaphragm and lower abdomen are raised; contraction and relaxation of the abdomen occur slowly. Uddiyana Bandha should be practiced for some time before introducing Mula Bandha.
3. Mula Bandha: Develops out of Uddiyana Bandha when we release the upper abdomen and diaphragm but keep contraction in lower belly.



## DRISHTI

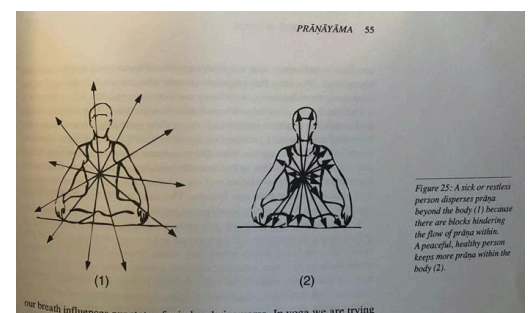
Known as focused gaze, Drishti is a technique for developing concentrated focus.

In Sanskrit, drishti can also mean a vision, a point of view, or intelligence and wisdom.

The use of drishti in asana serves both as a training technique and as a metaphor for focusing consciousness toward a vision of oneness.

## PRANA

Prana can be defined as life force energy or "that which is infinitely everywhere." (Desikachar, 1995). It can also be thought of as vitality or the state of mind that starts within each human being center and expands outward. When a person is feeling well in the body and mind, it could be because the prana is flowing well within the body. If a person is sick or lethargic, prana could be leaking out past the person's body.





# 8 LIMBS OF YOGA

Yamas  
how to treat others

Niyamas  
how to interact with ourself

Asanas  
physical poses or postures

Pratyahara  
withdrawal of senses, inward focus

Dhyana  
meditation, mindfulness

Ahimsa: non-harming

Satya: truthfulness

Asteya: non-stealing

Brahmacharya: right use of energy

Aparigraha: taking more than you need

Saucha: cleanliness in body + mind

Santosha: contentment

Tapas: heat, passion, desire for change

Svadyaya: self-study, self-inquiry

Ishvarapranidhana: release control

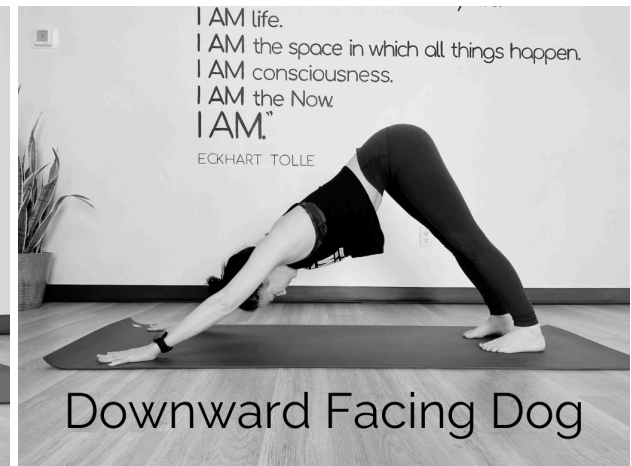
Pranayama  
yogic breathing

Dharana  
concentration, focus

Samadhi  
bliss, presence, surrender

# Week 2 Poses

(second half of sun salutations)



## Focus:

- Hand and foot placement: purpose and importance
- Modifications
- Transitioning with the breath

# Week 2: Yogic Breathing + Meditation

## Continued practice with Ujjayi Pranayama

- benefits
- purpose
- why it is audible
- consistency

## Meditation: Focused

Choose a word, phrase, or visible object like a candle, and concentrate on the item for the duration of the meditation. Choose an amount of time to focus such as 3-5 minutes and then release the focus and notice what occurs after the release. Consider practicing each day this week to notice any changes and/or benefits.

# WEEK 3

## What is a yoga pose (asana) all about?

ASANA = pose, posture, “to take a seat”

American yoga classes typically focus mostly on the physical aspects of yoga including the poses and transitions between them. Although the asanas are only a small part of the yoga system, it will be important for a yoga instructor to understand the different poses, modifications, enhancements, and how to sequence the poses to create a well-rounded practice.

Asanas are typically grouped into families: Base, Standing, Seated, Forward Bends, Balancing, Twists, Arm Balances, Hip-Openers, and Inversions. Some of the asanas have contraindications that yoga instructors should be aware of before teaching a class. Poses that are done repetitively can become problematic and should be taught with an explanation of their benefits and risks. As an instructor, it will be important to get to know your students and any limitations that are showing up on the yoga mat.

### Energetic Awareness:

Understanding the energy usage that each part of the body is using both independently and in collaboration with the rest of the body will begin to become easier through a yoga practice. Due to the mindful nature of vinyasa yoga, increasing awareness of the energy being used in the body will increase over time allowing for more efficiency in the movements.

### Preparing for the asanas:

Vinyasa yoga is known for the process of “kramas”. These are steps that are taken to prepare the body and mind for a particular asana or set of asanas. In addition to the steps towards a pose, there are compensation poses known as “pratikriyasana” that will release tension from the poses.

### Moving with the breath:

An important aspect of vinyasa krama yoga is the focus on each breath. Using the breath as a foundation of the practice, each person is encouraged to begin by regulating the inhale and exhale using ujjayi pranayama. In this yogic breath, practitioners breathe at a variety of rates depending on the teacher, studio, or facility preferences. According to *The Heart of Yoga* by T.K.V. Desikachar, it is recommended to breathe in for five seconds and out for five seconds making each breath approximately 10 seconds long. Using this as a basis of the asana practice, an individual can hear their breath like a rhythmic beat that helps keep a steady and consistent pace to move throughout the practice.

# SUN SALUTATIONS

Putting it all together

## SUN SALUTATION A



inhale

exhale

inhale



exhale



inhale



exhale



inhale



exhale



inhale



exhale

# Week 3 Yogic Breathing + Meditation

## Alternate Nostril Breathing

Focus on keeping your breath slow, smooth, and continuous. Focusing on your breath will help you to remember where you are in the cycle. You should be able to breathe easily throughout the practice.

To practice alternate nostril breathing:

- Sit in a comfortable position with legs crossed.
- Place left hand on left knee.
- Lift right hand up toward nose.
- Exhale completely and then use right thumb to close right nostril.
- Inhale through left nostril and then close left nostril with your fingers.
- Open right nostril and exhale through this side.
- Inhale through right nostril and then close this nostril.
- Open left nostril and exhale through left side.
- This is one cycle.
- Continue for up to 5 minutes.
- Always complete the practice by finishing with an exhale on the left side.

## Lovingkindness Meditation

Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) is a popular self-care technique that can be used to boost well-being and reduce stress. Those who regularly practice loving-kindness meditation can increase their capacity for forgiveness, connection to others, self-acceptance, and more.

During your meditation, you generate kind intentions toward certain targets including yourself and others. The following is a simple and effective loving-kindness meditation technique to try.

- Carve out some quiet time for yourself (even a few minutes will work) and sit comfortably. Close your eyes, relax your muscles, and take a few deep breaths.
- Imagine yourself experiencing complete physical and emotional wellness and inner peace. Imagine feeling perfect love for yourself, thanking yourself for all that you are, knowing that you are just right—just as you are. Focus on this feeling of inner peace, and imagine that you are breathing out tension and breathing in feelings of love.
- Repeat three or four positive, reassuring phrases to yourself. These messages are examples, but you can also create your own:
  - May I be happy
  - May I be safe
  - May I be healthy
  - May I be at peace

Repeat this phrase for several minutes and then sit and notice what it feels like to be in the moments that follow.

# Week 4 Poses







# Week 4 Yogic Breathing + Meditation

## Abdominal Breathing:

Start by taking a few normal breaths and notice the quality and speed of each breath. Take one breath with a big sigh out of the mouth. Then slowly start to elongate each breath with a goal of finding the longest inhale and longest exhale that is comfortable. Consider making the exhale slightly longer than the inhale to increase calm. As you are breathing, notice the inhale moving in through the nose, past the chest, and into the belly and then reverse that process on the exhale. Once a comfortable pace is established, stay in the breathing pattern for 2-3 minutes.

## Single-Pointed **Meditation**



Choose a word/phrase, image, or an object such as a candle to focus on during the meditation. Start with 4-5 deep breaths to clear the mind. Then bring your attention to the desired object and focus on the object with 100% attention. As the attention fades or wanders off, gently nudge it back to the object repeatedly noticing how it feels to be connected with the desired object and noticing how it feels to feel the attention slip away. Stay in the meditation 3-5 minutes.