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## *Eightfold Path of Yoga*

The eightfold path of yoga, called Astanga yoga, is a discipline and practice for the cultivation of the body-mind-spirit consciousness. The practice has a purifying and liberating effect on the body, the mind and on the spirit. It leaves the practitioner with increased ability to release the effects of the stresses of life and therefore more able to enjoy, manage, and optimize their lives.

### **The Yamas:**

nonviolence  
truthfulness  
nonstealing  
chastity  
noncovetousness

### **The Niyamas:**

cleanliness of mind and body  
contentment  
fervor for the subject  
study of the self  
surrender of all thoughts and  
actions to God

### **Hatha Yoga**

The practice of Hatha Yoga includes the practice of poses called asana, and the practice of conscious and deliberate breathing called pranayama. Hatha yoga teaches the practitioner to access their inner world from the perspective and reality of body, the breath, and focused deliberate awareness and attention.

### **Asana**

While mindfully attending to inner experience the practitioner moves through a series of poses. These poses could for the outside observer look like 'warm up' exercises used in most sports and athletic disciplines used to prepare the body for activity. Some physical therapists have recognized similarities between some of the yoga moves and physical therapy sequences and moves. The yoga poses are called Asana. They are practiced with close attention to the felt experience in the body and with close attention to the breath.

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Office Address: 501 Tanner Street, Carrollton, GA 30117

Office Billing & Payment Address: 127 East Center Street, Carrollton, GA 30117  
Phone: Cell: (after hours) Email: [ingemula@thezenter.net](mailto:ingemula@thezenter.net) Alex's Cell:

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### **Pranayama**

Prana means 'life force' and yama means 'the direction of.' There is a current of energy that rides on and via the breath. In Greek the original word for breath means spirit. So Pranayama is the direction of life force and direction of spirit within. In pranayama the practitioner focuses on breath awareness, and on the conscious non-violent guiding of the process of the breath. The practitioner eventually learns to consciously access and direct various functions of consciousness via the breathing practices.

Skillful and intentional practiced hatha yoga has differential focus on the body, the breath, mindful awareness, focused attention and an ever deepening awareness of experience. The practitioner moves gradually to eradicate psycho-physical obstacles to peaceful, harmonious experiencing. As the practitioner progresses s/he has ever more deepening experiences of inner stillness and peace. S/he may be more inclined to listen to the 'still small voice within.' A skillful practice can ultimately bring the practitioner in closer contact with 'the spark of the divine within,' and with this in closer contact with an experience of the presence of God.

The upper 4 limbs of the eightfold path give direction about meditative access to mind-body-spirit unity. These four limbs are: Pratayahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

### **Pratayahara**

Pratayahara is the discipline of drawing awareness away from external stimuli in the outer world and focusing the senses inwardly. It is a discipline of turning the senses back in on themselves and focusing on the inner signs and signals of experience. This skill is used in the practice of the poses and the breath, and this skill is taught and used in the body-mind-spirit cultivating psychotherapy services offered by Inge Mula at the Center.

### **Dharana**

The practice of Dharana is a practice of focusing and maintaining awareness on a selected focus. It is concentration training. Various meditation practices teach this skill as a preliminary to and a prerequisite for meditation.

### **Dhyana**

Dhyana is another word for meditation. Here awareness is focused on one aspect of experience: a visual experience or image, an auditory experience, a tactile experience, a kinesthetic experience, thought as a sensation or just simply a felt sense in emotion, feeling and the body. The focus can be on an experience imprint or residue (called a samskara) manifesting as a tension in the body. By focusing here mindfully, with an open, receptive and unwavering mind and openness and evenness of the breath, the individual may begin to experience the release of the tension knot with or without accompanying images, memory flashes, and like bits and pieces of what the tension consisted of. Eventually when more and more of these blockages to present experience are eradicated, the practitioner may experience a greater and greater sense of Samadhi.

### **Samadhi**

As the practitioner cultivates consciousness and progresses on the path of yoga via the 7 disciplines or 'limbs' above, s/he eventually begins to experience more and more moments of

Samadhi, Oneness with life force, liberation from limiting beliefs, constricted perceptions and 'knots' of previously lived and held experience, of karma.

Mr. BKS Iyengar, the originator and principal developer of this style of yoga specifically declares:  
'Why practice yoga? To ignite the spark of the divine within.'

"Be still and know that I am" (Psalm 40.6)