

## Sanskrit Terms

(Sanskrit: An ancient Indic language, and possibly the oldest language, which many Indo-European languages are based.)

**Asana:** Usually translated as seat, pose or physical posture. All poses in yoga end with "asana".

**Hatha Yoga:** A major branch of yoga developed approximately 5,000 years ago. The word hatha means willful or forceful. Hatha yoga refers to a set of physical exercises (known as asanas or postures) and sequences of asanas, designed to align your skin, muscles, and bones. The postures open many channels of the body—especially the main channel, the spine—so that energy can flow freely.

**Hatha** is also translated as ha meaning "sun" and tha meaning "moon." This refers to the balance of masculine aspects—active, hot, sun—and feminine aspects—receptive, cool, moon—within all of us. Hatha yoga is a path toward creating balance and uniting opposites. In our physical bodies we develop a balance of strength and flexibility. We also learn to balance our effort and surrender in each pose. Yoga is the art which brings a scattered mind to a reflective and coherent state. Hatha yoga is a powerful tool for self-transformation. It asks us to bring our attention to our breath, which helps us to still the fluctuations of the mind and be more present in the unfolding of each moment.

**Namaste:** "Nama" means bow, "as" means I, and "te" means you. Therefore, Namaste literally means "bow me you" or "I bow to you." To perform Namaste, we place the hands together at the heart, close the eyes, and bow the head. Although in the West the word "Namaste" is usually spoken in conjunction with the gesture, in Asia, it is understood that the gesture itself signifies Namaste, and therefore, it is unnecessary to say the word while bowing.

For a teacher and student, **Namaste** allows two individuals to come together energetically to a place of connection. Ideally, this gesture is done both at the beginning and at the end of class. The teacher initiates Namaste as a symbol of gratitude and respect toward the students.

**OM:** This mantra, or vibration, is traditionally chanted at the beginning and/or end of class. Yogis often meditate on the four "measures," or parts, of om. Though commonly spelled Om, the mantra actually consists of three letters, a, u, and m. Each of these three parts has numerous metaphysical associations, which themselves serve as meditative tools. For example, **a** (pronounced "ah") represents our waking state, which is also the subjective consciousness of the outer world; **u** (pronounced "ooh") is the dreaming state, or the consciousness of our inner world of thoughts, dreams, memories, and so on; and **m** is the dreamless state of deep sleep and the experience of ultimate unity.

By contemplating the meaning of each of these letters as we chant them, we are led through the three states of our ordinary consciousness to the mantra's fourth part, the anusvara (after-sound): Om. The vibration slowly dissolves into silence, symbolic of the transcendent state of consciousness. This silence is the crown of the mantra; allowing the

practitioner to be tranquil, soundless, fearless, sorrowless, blissful, satisfied, steadfast, immovable, unshaken, enduring.

**Pranayama:** Prana means to breathe forth, vitality, vigor, energy, power, and spirit. Ayama is translated as to stretch, extend, restrain, stop, expand, lengthen either in space or time, directing, and regulation. We practice pranayama because of its effects on the body. By simply using your breath you can heat or cool the body or calm or energize it. Pranayama provides a focus for our minds freeing us from the everyday chatter and anxiety inside.

**Yoga:** The word yoga, from the Sanskrit word yuj means to yoke, connect, add, bring together and is often interpreted as "union" or a method of discipline. A male who practices yoga is called a yogi, a female practitioner, a yogini.

The Indian sage, Patanjali, is believed to have collated the practice of yoga into the Yoga Sutras an estimated 2,000 years ago. The Sutras are a collection of 195 statements that serves as a philosophical guidebook for most of the yoga that is practiced today. It also outlines **eight limbs of yoga**:

- ✓ the yamas (restraints),
- ✓ niyamas (observances),
- ✓ asana (postures),
- ✓ pranayama (breathing),
- ✓ pratyahara (withdrawal of senses),
- ✓ dharana (concentration),
- ✓ dhyani (meditation), and
- ✓ samadhi (absorption).

Today most people practicing yoga are engaged in the third limb, asana, which is a program of physical postures designed to purify the body and provide the physical strength and stamina required for long periods of meditation.