

Styles of Contemporary Hatha-Yoga

by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

In its voyage from antiquity to modernity, Hatha-Yoga has undergone a number of transformations. The most significant adaptations were made during the past several decades in order to serve the needs of Western students. Of the many styles of Hatha-Yoga available today, the following are the best known.

Iyengar Yoga, which is the most widely recognized approach to Hatha Yoga, was created by B. K. S. Iyengar, the younger brother-in-law of Shri Krishnamacharya. This style is characterized by precision performance and the aid of various props, such as cushions, benches, wood blocks, straps, and even sand bags, and hence is sometimes called “furniture Yoga.” Iyengar has trained thousands of teachers, many of whom are in the United States. His Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, founded in 1974 and dedicated to his late wife Ramamani, is located in Pune, India.

Ashtanga Yoga originated with K. Pattabhi Jois, who was born in 1916 but has a suitably modern outlook to draw eager Western students to his Ashtanga Yoga Institute located in Mysore, India. He was a principal disciple of Shri Krishnamacharya who instructed him to teach the sequences known as Ashtanga Yoga. By the way, this Ashtanga Yoga differs from Patanjali's eightfold path, though it is theoretically grounded in it.

Bikram Yoga is the style taught by Bikram Choudhury. Bikram Choudhury, who achieved fame as the teacher of Hollywood stars, teaches at the Yoga College of India in Bombay and other locations around the world, including San Francisco and Tokyo. This is a system of 26 postures, which are performed in a standard sequence in a room heated to 100-110 degrees Fahrenheit. This approach is fairly vigorous and requires a certain fitness on the part of students.

Viniyoga is the approach developed by Shri Krishnamacharya and continued by his son T. K. V. Desikachar, whose school is located in Madras, India. As the teacher of well-known Yoga masters B. K. S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois, and Indra Devi, Shri Krishnamacharya can be said to have launched a veritable Hatha-Yoga renaissance in modern times, which is still sweeping the world. Viniyoga works with what is called “sequential process,” or *vinyasa-krama*. The emphasis is not on achieving an external ideal form but on practicing a posture according to one's individual needs and capacity. Regulated breathing is an important aspect of Viniyoga, and the breath is carefully coordinated with the postural movements.

Kripalu Yoga, inspired by Kripalvananda and developed by his disciple Yogi Amrit Desai, is a three-stage Yoga tailored for the needs of Western students. In the first stage, postural alignment and coordination of breath and movement are emphasized, and the postures are held for a short duration only. In the second stage, meditation is included into the practice and postures are held for prolonged periods. In the final stage, the practice of postures becomes a spontaneous “meditation in motion.” Kripalu Yoga is taught by numerous teachers around the world, and the Kripalu Center in Lenox,

Massachusetts, offers a battery of classes, workshops, and retreats for beginners and advanced students. Every year, some 12,000 individuals go through the “Kripalu experience” at the Center’s 300-acre property.

Integral Yoga was developed by Swami Satchidananda, a student of the famous Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, India. Swami Satchidananda made his debut at the Woodstock festival in 1969, where he taught the Baby Boomers to chant om, and over the years has attracted thousands of students. As the name suggests, this style aims to integrate the various aspects of the body-mind through a combination of postures, breathing techniques, deep relaxation, and meditation. Function is given preeminence over form. Integral Yoga is taught at Integral Yoga International, headquartered at Satchidananda (or Yogaville) Ashram in Buckingham, Virginia, and its over forty branches worldwide.

Sivananda Yoga is the creation of the late Swami Vishnudevananda, also a disciple of Swami Sivananda, who established his Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center in Montreal in 1959. He has trained over 6,000 teachers, and there are numerous Sivananda centers around the world. This style includes a series of twelve postures, the Sun Salutation sequence, breathing exercises, relaxation, and mantra chanting.

Ananda Yoga is anchored in the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda and was developed by Swami Kriyananda, one of his disciples. This is a gentle style designed to prepare the student for meditation, and its distinguishing feature are the affirmations associated with postures. It includes Yogananda's unique energization exercises, first developed in 1917, which involve consciously directing the body's energy (life force) to different organs and limbs. The center for Ananda Yoga is the Ananda World Brotherhood Village situated in Nevada City, California, and has around 300 residents.

Kundalini Yoga is not only an independent approach of Yoga but is also the name of a style of Hatha Yoga, originated by the Sikh master Yogi Bhajan. Its purpose is to awaken the serpent power (*kundalini*) by means of postures, breath control, chanting, and meditation. Yogi Bhajan, who came to the United States in 1969, is the founder and spiritual head of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO), which is headquartered in Los Angeles but has numerous branches around the world.

Anusara Yoga was created in 1997 by John Friend, who paraphrases the Sanskrit name as "flowing with grace," "going with the flow," or "following your heart." The declared purpose of this style of Hatha-Yoga is to integrate heart (opening to grace), universal principles of bodily alignment, and "artistic expression of the heart in which muscular stability is balanced with a joyful and expansive inner freedom."

Hidden Language Yoga was developed by the late Swami Sivananda Radha, a German-born woman student of Swami Sivananda. This style seeks to promote not only physical well-being but also self-understanding by exploring the symbolism inherent in the postures. Hidden Language Yoga is taught by the teachers of Yasodhara Ashram in Kootenay Bay, British Columbia, and its various branches.

Somatic Yoga is the creation of Eleanor Criswell-Hanna, Ed.D., a professor of psychology at Sonoma State University in California who has taught Yoga since the early 1960s. She is managing editor of Somatics journal, which was launched by her late husband, Thomas Hanna, inventor of Somatics. Somatic Yoga is an integrated approach

to the harmonious development of body and mind, based both on traditional yogic principles and modern psychophysiological research. This gentle approach emphasizes visualization, very slow movement into and out of postures, conscious breathing, mindfulness, and frequent relaxation between postures.

Other styles that you may hear mentioned or see advertisements for in Yoga periodicals are **Tri Yoga** (developed by Kali Ray), **White Lotus Yoga** (developed by Ganga White and Tracey Rich), **Jivamukti** (developed by Sharon Gannon and David Life), **Svaroopa Yoga** (developed by Rama Berch), and **Ishta Yoga** (developed by Mani Finger and made popular in the United states by his son Alan).

Please note that listing these approaches here does not necessarily imply an endorsement by me.

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