

Hatha-yoga

The ultimate goal of Hatha-yoga, like all forms of yoga is to transcend the self and realize the ultimate reality (*atman*) (Feuerstein 38). It is different from other forms of yoga because of its focus on using the body and developing its potential so that when the person achieves *atman* the body is able to withstand the onslaught of ultimate reality (Feuerstein 38). Therefore, Hatha-yoga is designed to help achieve the Ultimate Reality in a finite human body. The practitioner of Hatha-yoga wants to design and construct a divine body (*divya-sharira*) for themselves that would guarantee immortality once *atman* is attained (Feuerstein 39). Hatha-yoga is also considered to be an offshoot of Tantrism as it deals with both the body and the mind, two key aspects in the Tantric practice (Feuerstein 505). The term Hatha-yoga can be explained as the union (*yoga*) between sun and moon or the two different aspects of the body-mind union. Most Hatha-yoga practitioners use and follow the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*, as it is the most popular Hatha-yoga manual (Feuerstein 38).

Hindu teachings associate the creation of the Hatha-yoga tradition with Goraksha Natha and his teacher Matsyyendra Natha (Feuerstein 510). They are thought of as the founders of Nathism. Siva is considered to be the father of the Natha lineage and thus is considered to be the ultimate yogi (Feuerstein 510). Other masters of Nathism include: Jalandhari, Bhartrihari, Gopicandra, and Caurangi (Feuerstein 513-514). As well as references to these masters in Hindu traditions, there are also references to the same people in Tibetan traditions (Feuerstein 513).

In Tantric practices, the life force (*prana*) is divided along the spinal axis “where the dynamic pole (represented by Sakti) is said to be at the base of the spine and the static pole (represented by Siva) at the crown of the head” (Feuerstein 518). The practitioner of Hatha-yoga works to unite these two poles. For this to happen he/she must first stabilize the alternating life current that flows up and down both the left and right side of the body (Feuerstein 518). The primary objective is to intercept the left and right current and bring the energy into the central channel which starts at the anal center (*muladhara*) (Feuerstein 518). It is at this anal center that the *kundalini* [could be considered the manifestation of primordial energy (see Feuerstein 473)] is believed to be asleep (Feuerstein 518). By regularly trying to redirect the life force into the center the *kundalini* is mobilized (Feuerstein 518). This action could be considered forceful, hence the meaning of the word hatha as “force”. “Hatha-yoga is a forceful enterprise in which the body’s innate life force is utilized for the transcendence of the self” (Feuerstein 518). According to the Sage Gheranda, there are only seven limbs of yoga. He divides the *asanas* (postures) and the *mudra* (locks) into two different limbs while he does not regard the moral rules (*yama* and *niyama*) as independent features (Feuerstein 521).

The first step in affecting the channel of the life force into the center is breath control (*pranayama*), the fifth limb of yoga (Feuerstein 518). However, before working on this breath control one must undergo intense and extensive purification (Feuerstein 518). Thus, the Sage Gheranda describes six purification practices. They are as follows: *dhauti* (cleansing) is broken into four different techniques: *antar-dhauti* (inner-cleansing), *danta-dhauti* (dental cleansing), *hrid-dhauti* (heart cleansing), and *mula-shodhana* (root purification) (Feuerstein 519). The second purification practice is called

vasti or *basti* (bladder) (Feuerstein 519). This is followed by *neti*, *lauli* or *lailiki* (to and fro movement), *trataka*, and finally *kapala-bhati* which in itself contains three different practices. These are: *vama-krama* (left-process), *vyut-krama* (inverted process), and *shit-krama* (*shit* process) (Feuerstein 520) [for a more detailed description of each of the purification techniques see Feuerstein 519-520]. Once purification has been done, the yoga practitioner may start to work on their breath control (*pranayama*). Sage Gheranda describes eight different types of breath control which he calls retentions (*kumbhaka*). These different retentions are as follows: *sahita-kumbhaka* (joined retention) -broken into two parts: *sagarbha* (with seed) and *nigarbha* (without seed)- *surya-bheba-kumbhaka* (sun –piercing retention), *ujjayi-kumbhaka* (victorious retention), *shitali-kumbhaka* (cooling retention), *bhastrika-kumbhaka* (bellows retention), *bhramari-kumbhaka* (bee-like retention), *murccha-kumbhaka* (swooning retention), and finally *kevali-kumbhaka* (absolute retention) (Feuerstein 527-528) [for a more detailed description of the different breath control techniques see Feuerstein 527-528]. According to Gheranda there are three different levels of *pranayama* control. The lowest level of control generates heat in the body, the second level causes tremors in the limbs and the third level actually causes levitation (Feuerstein 528).

Along with *pranayama* is a focus on different bodily postures (*asanas*), which is the second limb of yoga. These different postures also help prepare the body for the realization of *atman*. Siva the founder of yoga is believed to have taught these postures (Burley 73). There are a few different accounts of how many were taught (see Feuerstein 521), the *Gheranda-Samhita* describes the following thirty two: “*siddha-asana* (adept posture), *padma-asana* (lotus posture), *bhadra-asana* (auspicious posture), *mukta-asana*

(liberated posture), *vajra-asana* (diamond posture), *svastika-asana* (*svastika* posture), *simha-asana* (lion posture), *gomukha-asana* (cow-face posture), *vira-asana* (hero posture), *mrita-asana* (corpse posture), *gupta-asana* (hidden posture), *matsya-asana* (fish posture), *matsyendra-asana* (Matsyendra's posture), *goraksha-asana* (Goraksa's posture), *pashcimottana-asana* (back-stretch posture), *utkata-asana* (extraordinary posture), *samkata-asana* (dangerous posture), *mayura-asana* (peacock posture), *kukkuta-asana* (cock posture), *kurma-asana* (tortoise posture), *uttana-kurmaka-asana* (extended tortoise posture), *uttana-manduka-asana* (extended frog posture), *vriksha-asana* (tree posture), *manduka-asana* (frog posture), *garuda-asana* (eagle posture), *vrisha-asana* (bull posture), *shalabha-asana* (locust posture), *makara-asana* (shark posture), *ushtra-asana* (camel posture), *bhujanga-asana* (serpent or cobra posture), and *yoga-asana* (Yoga posture)" (Feuerstein 521)[for a more detailed explanation of the postures as well as pictures of them see Feuerstein 522-523 and Burley 258-271]. While some of the postures are designed to help with sitting for long periods of time while meditating, others are designed for helping to regulate the life force within the yoga practitioner's body (Feuerstein 521).

Linked with the postures are seals (*mudra*) and locks (*bandha*), the third limb of yoga. The seals signify far more advanced techniques and at times merge with some meditative practices. The locks are special maneuvers that are supposed to help restrict the life force within the trunk and thus stimulate it (Feuerstein 523). The seals (*mudra*) and locks (*bandha*) are named as follows: *maha-mudra* (great seal), *nabho-mudra* (sky seal), *uddiyana-bandha* (upward-going lock), *jalandhara-bandha* (Jalandhara's lock), *mula-bandha* (root lock), *maha-bandha* (great lock), *maha-vedha* (great penetrator),

khecari-mudra (space-walking seal), *viparita-kari* (inverted action seal), *yoni-mudra* (womb seal), *vajroli-mudra* (thunderbolt seal), *shakti-calani-mudra* (power-stirring seal), *tadagi-mudra* (pond seal), *manduki-mudra* (frog seal), *shambhavi-mudra* (Shambhu's seal), *ashvini-mudra* (dawn-horse seal), *pashini-mudra* (bird-catching seal), *kaki-mudra* (elephant seal), *bhujangini-mudra* (serpent seal), and finally the five concentrations (*dharana*) on the five elements-earth, fire, water, air, and ether (Feuerstein 523-525)[see Feuerstein 523-525 for a detailed description of all the locks and seals].

The fourth limb of Hatha-yoga according to Gheranda is detachment from the senses (*pratyahara*). This involves removing attention from external- sensory objects (Feuerstein 525-526).

The sixth limb is in regards to meditation (*dhyana*) which can be understood as visualization (Feuerstein 528). The *Gheranda-Samhita* talks about three types of *dhyana*: “visualization having a ‘coarse’ (*sthula*) object, such as a carefully visualized deity; visualization having a ‘subtle’ (*sukshma*) object, namely the Absolute in the form of the transcendental point-origin (*bindu*) of the universe, as explained in connection with Tantrism; and contemplation of the Absolute as light (*jyotis*)” (Feuerstein 528)[for a more detailed description see Feuerstein]. According to Gheranda, with contemplation, the attention is inverted onto the inner essence of Self (*atman*). He explains it as the process of awakening the *kundalini* and it merging with *atman* and then rising to the center at the crown of the head bringing one to *samadhi* (Feuerstein 528).

Samadhi according to Gheranda is the seventh and final limb of yoga. It is liberation from the states of consciousness and separation of the mind from the body.

Reaching this point is reaching the ultimate level and thus *moska* for the Hatha-yogin (Feuerstein 528-529).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING:

Burely, Mikel (2000) *Hatha-Yoga: Its Context Theory and Practice*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited.

Feuerstein, Georg (2002) *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. New Delhi: Bhavana Books & Prints.

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Sivananda Radha, Swami (1987) *Hatha Yoga: The Hidden Language: Symbols, Secrets and Metaphor*. Porthill: Timeless Books.

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<http://www.5min.com/Video/A-Guide-To-Hatha-Yoga-24861271>

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<http://yoga.about.com/od/typesofyoga/a/hatha.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatha_yoga

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