



# The Aim of Yoga...

## Meditation, the Key to a peaceful Mind

by Health & Wellness Professional, Virna Lisa

Contrary to popular belief, yoga is not solely about postures or particular breathing practices. Until about 1,000 years ago yoga philosophy focused primarily on the benefits of meditation. Many certified instructors fully understand how to put postures into sequence for a great, renewing workout. At the same time, it seems there is less emphasis on the philosophy behind yoga and how to integrate it into everyday life. The system based on Hatha Yoga, which most people practice, is only one step on a ladder encompassing far more than striking a pose.

*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (self-illuminating), is said to be the

oldest surviving text on Hatha Yoga. Written some time between the 6th and 15th century AD by Yogi Swami Swatmarama, it stated that Hatha Yoga, which is comprised of the postures, breathing and cleansing practices, is simply preparation for Raja Yoga. Raja Yoga (Royal Path), sometimes referred to as Ashtanga Yoga (The Eight-fold Path), entails working with the mind, body and higher states of consciousness. It includes lifestyle management (yamas and niyamas), postures (asanas), breath control and expansion (pranayama), withdrawal of the senses (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation practices (dhayana), and the last rung of the ladder, Self Realization (samadhi).

### What is Meditation?

The Latin root of the word meditation is similar to that for medicate or medication and implies the sense of “attending to” or “paying attention to” something. Swami Rama, founder of The Himalayan Institute, defined meditation as “...a practice for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness that is totally different from the normal waking state... a practical, scientific and systematic technique for knowing yourself on all levels... a simple method of exploring the inner dimensions of life and finally establishing oneself in one’s own essential nature.” We gain higher states

of consciousness through meditation. Given these thoughts and how healing this practice can be, it’s a wonder that everyone isn’t meditating on a daily basis.

The mind needs useful anchors to keep it focused. There are two things that can be utilized to accomplish this. The first anchor is the breath. Mind and breath are intrinsically connected. The qualities of our breath are directly linked to our nervous system, which affects the mind and internal organs. A second anchor is a mantra, “a word that protects the mind by virtue of being repeated.” The power of each mantra can differ. A knowledgeable teacher will often give a specific mantra to assist each individual’s process.

Yoga postures are a key part of preparing the body, mind and nervous system. Many students come to yoga complaining of aches and pains. Constantly struggling to sit comfortably is a distraction, so we take care of the body in order to work with the mind. Without well bodies it’s hard to complete anything else.

### Why begin a Meditation Practice?

We have plenty of distractions in our lives offering excuses for forgoing meditation practice. Yet, when I don’t meditate it’s clear something vital is missing. The time I take to rest my mind each morning sets the tone for the whole day. Bumps may still appear in the road, but how I handle them has changed markedly.

Among meditation’s benefits are quality time and richer relationships. Meditation practice can also enhance focus, enabling quicker and more efficient action. A relaxed mind can shift gears and handle whatever comes with a greater sense of ease. Since practicing meditation, my awareness has increased, providing the necessary clarity and edge to handle life’s inevitable difficulties. I also spend less time focused on unhealthy relationships or dwelling on the past. Old thought patterns have transformed. My self talk is gentler and more compassionate. It took a while for me to notice these changes and everyone’s disposition is different. Patience and sincerity are key components to starting a meditation practice and allowing yourself time to create a new, healthy, life transforming habit.

### To begin a meditation practice

- Prepare yourself by doing yoga postures, breathing and cleansing practices on a regular basis. Limbering exercises that release the upper and lower back, hips, thighs and knees are helpful for feeling comfortable in a seated pose.
- Eat wholesome foods that leave you nourished and satisfied.
- *The Science of Breath* by Swami Rama and *The Breathing Book* by Donna Farhi are excellent resources

for learning about the qualities of the breath required for a relaxed mind, body and nervous system. Find a quiet space and devote time each day to just breathing and relaxing. Quality is more important than quantity. 5-10 minutes a day is a great start.

- Find like-minded people also wanting to learn or already in a practice that works for them.
- Take time to reflect and journal. Consider it a sincere and practical approach to learning more about yourself and determining what resonates with you.
- Among inspiring beginning meditation books are *Meditation and Its Practice* by Swami Rama, *Meditation is Boring* by Linda Johnson, and *Moving Inward* by Rolf Sovik.
- To connect with the right teacher for you, try attending classes at a studio or organization where you feel comfortable. Knowing yourself (and what rings true in your heart and mind) is a step toward being led to a competent teacher, as are heartfelt prayer, discernment and humility.

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