

PRACTICE

Hatha Yoga: The Complete Traditional Practice

The hatha session as it is taught in the ashrams of Rishikesh, linked to its texts, in three timed sessions of 30, 60 and 90 minutes



योग

yoga

YOGIDE

Free sample

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teacher or medical advice. Questions: administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

At first light in Rishikesh, before the tea stalls on the ghats are fully awake, many halls along the Ganga already hold a hatha class. Students sit on their mats; the teacher begins with a few rounds of om̐ or with silence. Then come the same gestures, in roughly the same order, that you will find in hundreds of schools across India: the small joint movements, the salutations to the sun, postures held for several breaths, a few minutes of breathing, and a long rest lying still. Nobody hurries. A posture is a place where you stay, not a step on the way to the next one.

This book gives you that session, complete, and tells you where each piece comes from. It does four things.

First, it explains what "hatha" really means. The word haṭha (हठ) means "force". The famous reading "ha = sun, ṭha = moon" is a later teaching image, not the origin of the name. Chapter 1 shows how we know.

Second, it tells the history briefly and honestly: the Nāth yogis, Svātmārāma's Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (fifteenth century), the Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā and its seven limbs, the Śiva Saṃhitā, and the twentieth-century teachers who shaped what we now call a hatha class. What is ancient is called ancient; what is modern is called modern.

Third, it gives you a complete practice: the joint series, the sun salutation with its twelve mantras, the held postures, the breathing, the final rest and a short guided relaxation, assembled into **three sessions you can follow tonight: 30, 60 and 90 minutes**, minute by minute, with gentler options.

Fourth, it helps you find hatha in India today, with published facts and dates only: no ranking, no recommendation of a school.

About the translations.

All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation. Older translations named for comparison (Srisa Chandra Vasu, 1914–1915; Pancham Sinh, 1914) are in the public domain.

Health first.

Hatha yoga is physical. Talk to your doctor before you start if you are pregnant or have recently given birth; if you have heart disease, high or low blood pressure, glaucoma or a detached retina, epilepsy, a hernia, osteoporosis, a recent injury or surgery, a spinal problem, or a psychiatric condition. Stop at once and seek help if you feel chest pain, breathlessness out of proportion, palpitations, faintness, a sudden severe headache, or numbness or weakness on one side. Emergency numbers: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India), 000 (Australia). Chapter 5 gives the precautions in full; each technique has its own.

How the texts are numbered

- **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP)**: we follow the electronic text of GRETIL (Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages, version of 31 July 2020), as in our companion book *Hatha Yoga Pradipika Explained*. Where the public-domain translation by Pancham Sinh (1914) numbers a verse differently, we say so.
- **Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā (GS)**: we follow the GRETIL text, typed from Peter Thomi's edition (Wichtrach, 1993). For every verse quoted here, the number is the same in the public-domain translation by Srisa Chandra Vasu (*Sacred Books of the Hindus*, 1914–1915), which sometimes groups two verses under one number ("10–11"). We checked each one against Vasu's printed text on the Internet Archive.
- **Śiva Saṃhitā (ŚS)**: there is no GRETIL text. We refer to Vasu's public-domain edition (1914) and its numbering, and we paraphrase rather than quote, because editions and manuscripts of this text differ considerably.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 4 once: they take an evening and they change the way you will practise. Read Chapter 5 before your first session. Then learn the pieces (Chapters 6 to 11) one by one, and practise the 30-minute session of Chapter 12 for two weeks before moving to the 60-minute one.

This book does not repeat our verse-by-verse reading of the Pradīpikā: if you want the text itself, its four chapters and its sixty-six key verses, that is the role of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika Explained*. Here, the text serves the practice.

Chapter 1. Ha and ṭha: what the word means, and what it does not

"Force"

In ordinary Sanskrit, haṭha (हठ) means force, violence, obstinacy. The adverb haṭhāt (हठात्) means "by force", "forcibly", "against resistance", and that is how it is used in many texts that have nothing to do with yoga. Haṭhayoga (हठयोग) is therefore, literally, "the yoga of force".

What kind of force? The historian Jason Birch studied exactly this question in an article published in 2011 in the Journal of the American Oriental Society. He looked at the earliest definitions of the word and at every use of haṭhāt and haṭhena ("by force") in yoga texts older than the Pradīpikā. His conclusions, summarised in our words:

- The word haṭhayoga first appears in **Buddhist tantric texts**: in the eighteenth chapter of the Guhyasamājatantra (dated by him to around the eighth century), and with a first definition in Puṇḍarīka's Vimalaprabhā (eleventh century).
- In the medieval yoga texts, haṭha is almost always paired with rāja yoga, the yoga of meditative absorption. One text, the Amanaska, even looks down on haṭha as effortful and unnecessary; others, like the Dattātreya yogaśāstra, place it among four yogas (mantra, laya, haṭha and rāja).
- The word haṭha is never used in these texts for violent means or forceful effort; they ask for care, often śanaiḥ śanaiḥ, "slowly, slowly". In Birch's reading, the "force" qualifies the **effect** of the techniques, not the effort they demand: they make the vital energy (kuṇḍalinī, the breath, the vital essence) rise forcefully through the central channel, where it does not go on its own.

So when a teacher calls hatha "the yoga of effort", keep the nuance: the texts do ask for diligent, daily practice, but the force in the name is what the practice does, not how hard you push. Both readings are closer to the history than "gentle hatha" on a studio timetable.

The sun and the moon

The other explanation is beautiful and you will hear it everywhere: ha is the sun, ṭha is the moon, and haṭha yoga is the union of the two. It is a real teaching from the Indian tradition. It is simply later than the word. Here is the verse, as quoted by Birch from the Yogabīja, a text attributed to Gorakṣanātha by the Nāth tradition:

Yogabīja (as quoted in Birch 2011)

हकारेण तु सूर्योऽसौ ठकारेणेन्दुरुच्यते । सूर्याचन्द्रमसोर्योगाद् हठयोगोऽभिधीयते ॥

hakāreṇa tu sūryo 'sau ṭhakāreṇendur ucyate / sūryācandramasor yogād haṭhayogo 'bhidhīyate

Translation. By the syllable ha the sun is meant, by the syllable ṭha the moon. Because it unites the sun

and the moon, it is called haṭha yoga. (Our translation.)

According to Birch, the Yogabīja is the oldest known source of this definition, and it is itself partly a compilation of earlier verses; the attribution to Gorakṣa is not supported by any manuscript colophon. The definition was taken up by later works (the Yogaśikhā Upaniṣad, the Haṭharatnāvalī, the Haṭhatattvakaumudī), and by Brahmānanda in his nineteenth-century commentary on the first verse of the Pradīpikā, the Jyotsnā. Birch's conclusion: the sun-and-moon reading was probably conceived several centuries after haṭha yoga arose.

Why both readings are useful

There is no need to choose a winner. The historical meaning, "force", tells you what kind of practice this is: physical, methodical, strong enough in its effects to move what does not move on its own. The symbolic meaning, "sun and moon", tells you what the later tradition thought the practice was for: balancing the two currents that the haṭha texts place on the right and left of the body (piṅgalā and iḍā), so that the energy can enter the central channel and the mind can become still.

In this book we use the sun-moon image as an image. It is the reason the right nostril is called "solar" in nāḍī śodhana and why a session is said to balance heating and cooling practices. We never present it as the etymology.

Practise: the word in the body

Sit for three minutes. For one minute, notice the effort in your posture: what holds you upright? For one minute, notice the breath in the right nostril and in the left: is one more open? For one minute, rest the effort and keep only the attention. Write one sentence below about what you noticed.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 46 pages.

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