



# Yoga Practice #1

The word yoga can be translated a number of ways— as **integration, joining, harnessing or unifying**. Yoga is the work or discipline that it takes to unify oneself with something bigger, deeper and more profound. Hatha yoga, one of many yogic traditions, is a practice that combines specific physical poses, or asanas, with breath awareness to integrate, align, and free our body, breath, mind, and heart. It brings health to all levels of the practitioner: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual.

A yoga practitioner is discovering and cultivating **health, integration and dynamic balance**. He or she is connecting deeply and expansively at the same time to a bigger and subtler field that is life. It takes work to establish and maintain this dynamic balance -- ever-moving between stillness and change. This dynamic balancing starts with and results in **flow** at every level – from a flow of breath to a creative flow of thoughts to a range of motion physically. A person who is established in a dynamically balanced state in his or herself and who extends that state of health and well being into his environment – that person is practicing yoga.

## A Meditation of Breath and Awareness

1. Start wherever you are at this very moment. There is no need to change your immediate circumstance for this yoga practice.
2. As you read this meditation, pay attention to your breath -- to your in-breath and out-breath. Your breath is the primary tool of yoga. It is the first and foremost tool in discovering and cultivating health in and around you.
3. Now use the sound and feel and movement of your breath to become aware of your body. Breathe in and feel your feet and your hands. Breathe out. Breathe into your chest and your belly. Notice your shoulders and neck. Exhale and let your breath rise through the back of your head and scalp.
4. With a slight additional effort, draw your breath down into your belly on the inhale as you relax your stomach to allow it to expand. Exhale and leave your attention there. Breathe in and out a few times slowly from your belly. You can use your breath to relax. Continuing to focus your attention in an area for a few breaths gives your body time to respond. Deeper relaxation happens over time and with practice.
5. Notice the dynamic balance of your breath. It moves in and out. It flows throughout your system. It exchanges oxygen for carbon monoxide in the process. It renews. Balance happens through continuous movement and flow. Movement is essential to health. Allow your breath to teach you about balance and flow.
6. Draw a full breath into your belly now, just below your navel. Pause there for a few seconds while your breath and your belly continue to expand. Now exhale and breathe normally. Do this again. Notice how, in the pause, your attention is drawn more deeply into your body. Now exhale and breathe normally from this deeper awareness.
7. Balance is not always attained through symmetry – an even inhalation and exhalation. At times a different effort may be necessary to access a deeper state of ease. Seeking that state, we change our breathing to accommodate the circumstance and our inner condition.
8. Close now and remain aware of your breath. Awareness allows us to use our breath as a tool. A flowing inhale and exhale brings ease and renewal.