



# Ashtanga Yoga

*as taught by Shri K. Pattabhi Jois*





*Shri K. Pattabhi Jois*  
*Do your practice and all is coming*  
*(Guruji)*

*To my guru and my inspiration*  
*I dedicate this book.*  
*Larry Schultz*

*San Francisco, California, 1999*

*Ashtanga  
Ashtanga Yoga  
as taught by  
shri k. pattabhi jois  
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By Larry Schultz*

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*I would like to express  
my deepest gratitude to Bob  
Weir of the Grateful Dead.  
His faithful support and  
teachings helped make this  
manual possible.*



## forward

**T**wenty years ago Ashtanga yoga was very much a fringe activity. Our small, dedicated group of students in Encinitas, California were mostly young, hippie types with little money and few material possessions. We did have one precious thing – Ashtanga practice, which we all knew was very powerful and deeply transformative. Practicing together created a unique and magical bond, a real sense of family.

Over the years the Ashtanga family has grown considerably throughout the world and I've had the opportunity to share the practice with many wonderful people as both a student and teacher. In Austin, Texas I met Larry Schultz 15 years ago when he was just beginning his Ashtanga practice with my teacher, Pattabhi Jois. Even though the practice was very challenging for him, Larry approached it with great enthusiasm, optimism, and gratitude. He, like so many others, recognized immediately that this was exactly what he had been looking for and was very excited by both the practice and the people involved in it.

Larry and I have become close friends over the years and together we have witnessed the profound positive impact the Ashtanga practice has had on hundreds of people's lives, particularly our own. We have developed many wonderful friendships within the Ashtanga family and feel truly blessed to be able to share the practice with others. Motivated by this desire to share the practice, Larry opened It's Yoga in 1991, which has become one of the largest and most successful yoga schools in San Francisco.

A problem that Larry and I have encountered over the years is how to keep beginning students going with the practice when they are unable to attend class due to work, travel, family, etc. For

the past 5,000 years Ashtanga yoga has existed as an oral tradition, so when beginning students asked for a practice guide we would hand them a piece of paper with stick figures of the first series postures. Larry gave Bob Weir such a sheet of paper a couple of years ago, to which Bob responded, "You've got to be kidding. I need a manual."

Thus began Larry's process of creating this manual, which has now been completed with the help of several friends. Now, happily when beginning students ask for a practice guide we can offer them this excellent, practical, and informative manual.

Tim Miller  
Senior Teacher Ashtanga Yoga



pedro kupfer :: padmasana



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## *how to use this manual*

The basics of ashtanga yoga cannot be learned enough. Because yoga practice is progressive it is important to go through this manual in the order it is presented. However, if you are having difficulty with any of the postures go back to the beginning. Keep in mind that the true source of understanding is in the basic principals underlying the asanas. Take your time and learn the fundamentals of the practice. Go slowly. Never force or push yourself into a posture, be patient, and all will come in time. What's the rush?

If you are experiencing any health problems, consult your yoga teacher or a health advisor before beginning the exercises in the manual. This manual is a guide to be used in conjunction with classes and is not a substitute for the personal attention and assistance of a teacher.

Most of all, have fun! Enjoy the process of building your yoga practice and bringing peace into your life and those around you.

*One cannot understand the  
rhythms and meanings of the  
outer world until one has  
mastered the dialects of the body.*

*Timothy Leary*



*You can't diligently practice yoga, honing the clarity of your mind, and fail to be struck by the very humorous-albeit pathetic predicament we're all in. We find ourselves chained to the wheel of karma, going round and round in our own private illusory worlds, struggling to glimpse reality and attain eternal peace. It's funny and maddeningly difficult, and sad, too, sometimes. It's also the only game in town and nobody gets out alive.*

From The Five Tibetans



## Getting It Together

Separateness causes suffering and union creates freedom. Yoga is union.

It is the separation from our Self, each other, nature, and from something greater or higher (be it God, universal consciousness, or whatever term you want to use) that causes the anxiety and chaos symptomatic of our times. It is difficult for us to experience our natural connection with each other when we don't have that connection with our own Self. Yoga connects us with an inner wisdom, in which there is no doubt as to the connection of all things.

Now is the time for yoga. Yoga is a practical method of bringing peace and connectedness back into our lives. Because we are a reflection of our nervous system, the state of our nervous system dictates how we experience the world. If the nervous system is fresh and rested, the body will be healthy and the mind alert and comprehensive. As a result, our thought will be powerful and clear and our actions, which are manifested thought, will be successful and rewarding.

Yoga strengthens and purifies the nervous system so it can reflect a greater degree of consciousness and our lives can become an increasingly positive force in the world. If the methods presented in this manual are practiced correctly the whole nervous system is revitalized, the body enjoys better health and more energy, the mind is rested and freed from the endless burdensome thought of

# introduction

future and past, and perception is restored to its primal freshness.

We can actually gain back the connection to Self and others as we are released from the restricted thinking, dull mind, and negativity resulting from a strained, tired nervous system. The healthier our nervous system, the healthier our body, mind, thoughts and actions.

The purpose of this manual is to make these techniques available to all who are interested in enhancing the quality of their lives from the most fundamental foundation, the inner source. The idea is to promote self-practice and self-responsibility, to offer a tool for reconnecting. This is the place where yoga truly begins in each of our own individual lives. Yoga helps you rise to the challenge of living.

# *the history of Ashtanga Yoga*

As the story goes, the ashtanga yoga system was reconstructed from a mysterious manuscript written on a bundle of palm leaves, the Yoga Korunta. This collection of verses on hatha yoga was discovered in the 1930's by yoga master and Sanskrit scholar Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya and his disciple K. Pattabhi Jois while researching Sanskrit texts at a Calcutta university library. The manuscript is dated to be between 500 and 1,500 year old.

Krishnamacharya and Jois translated and reconstructed the ashtanga yoga series (originally there were six sequences of postures) and Pattabhi Jois, with the encouragement of Krishnamacharya, took the instructions as the basis of his practice and teaching. He is still teaching this method today in Mysore, India at the age of 85.

Ashtanga taught by Pattabhi Jois is a form of hatha yoga which focuses on asana (posture) and pranayama (breath control). Some people call this ashtanga vinyasa yoga in order to distinguish between Patanjali's eightfold system and the ashtanga yoga described in this manual.



*It is in the very cavern of our heart that we can realize the immensity of spaces, and by controlling our own vital rhythms that we can escape the power of time. It is by reaching the source of life that we can escape the power of death. It is by exploring the unknown spheres within ourselves that we can visit the celestial and infernal worlds*

Alain Danielou.



## *awakening the fire within*

### **Vinyasa: Movement Breathing System**

Ashtanga yoga wakes up the internal fire. It ignites the dormant flame of vital life energy within all of us. The vinyasa system works with the synchronization of deep, rhythmic breathing and movement. By linking the postures it creates a continuous flow of energy that heats up the body, bringing oxygen to the blood, nourishing the glands and internal organs, cleansing and purifying the nervous system, releasing unwanted toxins through perspiration. As the heat goes up toxins are burned up and out of the system, creating a lighter and stronger body, and a clear mind. The heat is not only a physical experience, it is an internal spiritual fire that burns through the fog of illusion and ignorance.

### **Access All Areas**

As the internal heat goes up, not only do the toxins begin to exit the system, but another amazing thing happens; the body begins to bend and move. As Pattabhi Jois says “even iron will bend with heat.” With this freedom of movement we are able to open up areas of the body that had been previously restricted or blocked. There is a release, a feeling of lightness. It is in these places that we can discover what yoga truly is. Yoga is not just a physical exercise or some new way to pass the time or fill the emptiness, but a method of bringing life and vitality back into those areas, awareness of the deeper, inner parts of ourselves. It is a reunion with that innate wisdom that we all possess, but seem to have lost touch with. Yoga was developed as a means of acknowledging or returning to the source of life.

As concentration increases, the breath, mind, body, and soul come into union, to entrainment. Ashtanga yoga is a focusing technique that joins the main life forces, beating in unison to an internal rhythm, your internal rhythm. With control of the breath, the mind becomes calm, allowing one to tap into a flow

state where there is no sense of time, where externally imposed barriers dissolve and there is a sense of oneness with the universe. As focus increases, there is an effortlessness, a lightness in the harmony of movement and breathing.

# the breath of life

## Feeding The Fire

In many languages the words for spirit and breath are the same. In Sanskrit it's prana, in Latin, spiritus, and in Hebrew, ruach. In Portuguese the word for taking in breath is inspiration, or spirit-in. They believe that an infant literally breathes its spirit into its body with its first breath. We breathe in life. Breath is the source of life and vitality. It is the spirit moving in rhythm in the body.

*When the breath wanders, the mind is unsteady, but when the breath is still, so is the mind still.*

*Hatha Yoga Pradipika.*

## The Victorious Breath • Ujjayi Breathing

Breath is the fuel that feeds the internal fire, gives it life, keeps the flame going. The vital life energy, prana, is controlled by the breath. In ashtanga yoga, ujjayi breathing (victorious breath) is used to enrich prana. By breathing through the nose, with the mouth closed, the breath is felt from the throat, producing a hissing sound. This sound of the breath keeps the mind focused. As the mind begins to wander, the sound of the breath keeps bringing you back home and away from the mumbling, stumbling mind. The mind becomes focused and calm as each pose flows into the next in concert with the breath. The breath is the link between body and mind.

## Practice

### Ujjayi Breathing

1. Sit in a comfortable meditative pose or lie in savasana. Become aware of the natural breathing process and feel the air passing down through the windpipe. Slightly contract the region at the back of the throat as you do when you swallow. Inhale and exhale through the nose with the mouth closed. Make the inhalation and exhalation long, deep and controlled. Practice full yogic breathing and concentrate on the sound. Begin practicing for 3 minutes and progressively work your way up to 10 minutes.
2. Practice as above, but fold the tongue back so that the tip of the tongue presses the back of the soft palate on the roof of the mouth.
3. As you inhale say "sa" to yourself and as you exhale say "ha." Repeat ten times. Inhalation and exhalation should be of equal duration, smooth and relaxed.
4. Notice your mind wandering as you practice breathing and keep bringing your mind back to the breath.
5. Focus on the exhalation. Notice where your breath normally stops. Increase the fullness of the exhalation.

# prana

Prana is a subtle form of energy. Prana literally means “breathing forth” the universal life force. Through practicing asana and pranayama, prana is brought into and stored in the body, increasing vitality. Prana mainly flows through the body in the nadis, or nerve channels of the astral body.

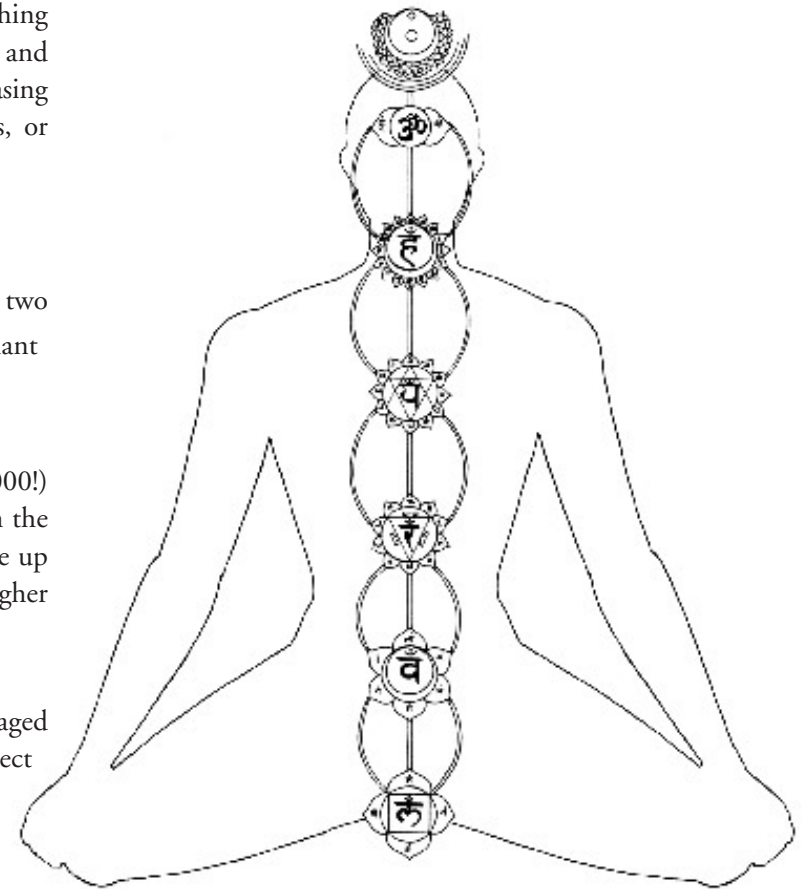
Prana exists as a negative energy as well as a positive energy.

Prana moves upward and apana moves downward. When the two unite at the muladhara chakra (base of spine) kundalini (dormant cosmic energy) is awakened.

The most important nadi, or energy channel, (there are 72,000!) is the shushumna nadi which correlates to the spinal cord in the physical body. When kundalini is awakened it starts to move up the shushumna nadi, through the seven chakras toward higher states of consciousness.

In ashtanga yoga there are three locks (bandhas) that are engaged throughout the practice to prevent the dissipation of, and direct the flow of prana in the body, and convert it into spiritual energy.

- Jalandhara bandha prevents prana from escaping the upper body.
- Uddiyana bandha forces prana up the shushumna nadi.
- Mula bandha, when engaged, prevents apana escaping from the lower body and draws it up to unite with prana.



## **the chakras**

*From bottom to top the 7 chakras:*

1. *Muladhara chakra - at the anus*
2. *Svadhishthana chakra - at the genitals*
3. *Manipura chakra - at the navel*
4. *Anahata chakra - at the heart*
5. *Vishuddha chakra - at the throat*
6. *Ajna chakra- between and behind the eyebrows*
7. *Sahasrara chakra - at the crown of the head*

# capturing prana

## The Serpent Power

*When kundalini shakti is awakened and arises from her sleep, she is the vehicle for the expansion of consciousness, enabling the individual to fully develop his innate potential and rise beyond the mundane realm of birth and death to the level of divinity.*

Chela Buddhananda.

## Raising Mula Bandha

Mula bandha is the force or energy created by lifting the pelvic floor and controlling the breath. It is the root lock and calls the fire within that causes everything to come alive, to move. Mula bandha increases flexibility and stimulates heat. By contracting the perineum and drawing the energy up from the base of the spine, one can intensify and direct the life energy, cultivating a sense of heightened awareness and increasing vitality.

Mula bandha ignites the flame of kundalini (cosmic energy), the serpent power. By bringing awareness to the core of the body, mula bandha helps prevent injury. It guides you to move from your center, grounding you so you can become light and fluid in your yoga practice.

## Practice

### Mula bandha

1. Sit in a comfortable meditative pose, preferably siddhasana (with one foot into root chakra, see diagram). Close the eyes, make sure the body is completely relaxed and the spine is erect. For men, the area just inside the perineum has to be contracted, so it is best to concentrate on this area for a few minutes. Women should concentrate on the cervix, as it is the cervix and vaginal muscles which have to be contracted. After a few minutes of concentration, start to gradually contract and release the muscles of the perineum/cervix. Contraction should last for a few seconds. Keep the breath normal. Contract, release twenty-five times.
2. Prepare as above. Contract the muscles of the perineum/cervix and hold. Hold the contraction for sixty seconds, then release. Practice five times.
3. Start off with a gentle or partial contraction. Contract just a little and hold without releasing. Then contract a little more. Continue like this, gradually increasing the tension and contraction ten times until full contraction is reached. Hold the full contraction for sixty seconds and try to breathe normally.
4. Notice what happens when you activate mula bandha. Is it possible to contract and lift the pelvic floor and breath at the same time? Try it.
5. Take about a 30 minute period during your day and try to maintain mula bandha for the full half hour. How many times did you come out of mula bandha?



### Contemplating your navel

The solar plexus is located just back of the pit of the stomach on either side of the spinal column. The name “solar” is well bestowed upon this major nerve plexus, as it radiates energy to all parts of the body. According to the yogic texts it is the great storehouse of prana, the manipura chakra.

Other Eastern cultures link it to the hara, dan tien, center of chi or ki. It's the center of our being from the umbilical cord to adulthood. It's the place where you get that gut feeling, the intuitive sense. We've got to keep it healthy, tuned in and alive.



## capturing prana

### Uddiyana Bandha • The Flying Bandha

Movement of shakti in the body is described as a bird. Shakti is the personification of the feminine form of the Divine. Through the practice of the flying bandha, the great bird (Shakti) flies upward with ease, further directing the flow of prana toward higher states of consciousness. By contracting the lower abdomen and pulling it inward and upward, toward the spine, a powerful toning effect and internal strengthening occurs. This lifting helps push up the diaphragm and expel the breath. Uddiyana bandha, the abdominal lock, also eliminates strain by helping to control the breath. Control of the breath controls consciousness. Bandhas are a means of extending control over the breath and thus are a means to extend our access to consciousness.

### Practice

#### Uddiyana bandha

1. Stand with feet about two feet apart. Bend the knees slightly and rest the hands above the knees, with the thumbs facing inwards and the fingers outwards. The spine must remain straight, not curved; the head should be kept up and eyes open. Inhale deeply through the nose, then exhale quickly through slightly pursed lips, but don't be forceful. Having fully exhaled, bring the chin to the chest ( jalandhara bandha), raising the shoulders. Pull the abdomen and stomach inward toward the spine and up. Hold for a few seconds. Before inhaling, relax the stomach and abdomen, raise the head and stand straight. Then inhale through the nose slowly and with control. Before repeating another round, breathe normally for a minute or two. Start with three rounds and over a period of a few months increase to ten rounds.
2. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position ( padmasana, siddhasana or sukhāsana, depending on your flexibility). Sit on a cushion so that the buttocks are raised. Keep the palms of the hands on the knees and the spinal cord upright and straight. Eyes may be open or closed. Begin as above, practicing three to ten rounds, concentrating on the natural breath for a minute or two between rounds.
3. Stand up and experiment moving from the middle of your body, try walking as if there is a string attached to your navel pulling you forward.
4. Practice the bandhas at different times during the day. Notice the effect on your energy level.
5. Notice any fears that arise when you're practicing the bandhas.
6. Connect the breath, mula bandha, and uddiyana bandha, and try to relax while maintaining the locks.



padmasana

# capturing prana

The combination of the breath and bandhas are all to be practiced continually throughout the yoga practice..



## Jalandhara bandha

Jalandhara bandha is the water pipe lock. It binds the network of subtle energy channels.

Engaging Jalandhara bandha is useful for alleviating diseases of the throat. It also improves the quantum of prana in the thoracic region. By pressing the chin to the chest, prana is captured, preventing it from escaping the upper body. Many major nerve fibers pass through the neck; when jalandhara bandha is performed it exerts pressure on them and the flow of nervous impulses to the brain is restricted. These impulses collect in the cervical plexus, and when the bandha is released they flood into the brain. The force of these impulses helps to activate higher centers in the brain, those that function with creativity and intellect.

## Practice

### Jalandhara bandha

1. Sit comfortably in siddhasana or padmasana (illustration p. 13). Place the palms of the hands on the knees and allow the whole body to relax. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose and retain the breath. Lower the chin so that it touches the collarbone. At the same time, straighten the elbows and raise the shoulders. Hold the breath and the position for as long as comfortable. Then release jalandhara bandha by slowly raising the head and relaxing the shoulders. Exhale in a very slow, controlled manner. Practice five rounds, breathing normally for a few minutes between each round. Then practice five rounds with external retention (exhale and hold).
2. Visualize the throat as a net that captures the breath as it comes up.
3. Notice when the chin is tucked how easy it is to see your navel.
4. Pay attention to the opening of your throat while simultaneously locking the chin.
5. Link all the bandhas and follow the flow of breath unobstructed while maintaining the locks in the body. Notice any change in energy level or effects on your thoughts.