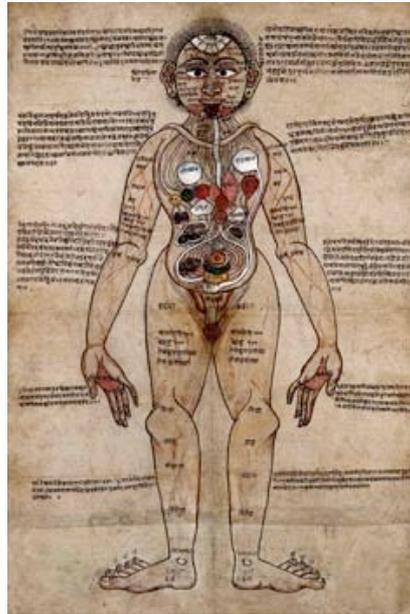


# Yoga as a View, Practice and Tool

## Part Two – Yoga as a Practice

### Haṭha Yoga – Yoga and Prāṇa



#### Yoga as Alchemy

#### – The Place and Purpose of Prāṇa, Agni, Nādī & Cakra

Another irony in the emerging role and identity of Yoga in the West today is with regard to the term Haṭha Yoga. The term is mainly used generically these days to identify and group ‘physically’ based Yoga practices.

As a teacher I am often asked in connection with the question what kind of Yoga do you teach, is it Haṭha Yoga?

The irony is that when we look at what Haṭha Yoga really is we find that the physical elements are relatively limited with very few Āsana discussed.

Furthermore within the few discussed the most important are concerned with sitting, in preparation for practice elements other than Āsana.

Primarily to facilitate a quality of being able to sit still and as if move beyond the physical body.

Here the primary concern and field of activity for Haṭha Yoga practitioners is with regard to the energetic ‘Prāṇa’ body or Prāṇamaya and its role in helping to facilitate a quality of energetic ‘clarity’ and energetic ‘stillness’, ultimately as a ladder to support the practitioners exploration of meditational states of being in terms of Rāja Yoga or the Yoga of Samādhi.

The role of Haṭha is to help take the student towards the View of Rāja and to help focus the energy necessary to refine the View.

What is important also is that we understand the various influences that exist in the West today in terms of ‘Modern Postural Yoga’.

What seems to be in danger of being lost in all of this are the 'energetic principles' that underpin Haṭha Yoga because people have become very focused on the physicality, or even gymnastic type influences.

It seems that modern Yoga practice is dominated by Āsana and the words Āsana and Yoga appears to have become sadly synonymous.

A further irony is that there is an increasing body of research suggesting that even this postural repertoire and physical style of performance is hugely Westernised in terms of both origins and emphasis.

This is especially curious when we consider one of the primary practices inherent within the teachings of Haṭha is a set of breathing practices called Prāṇāyāma.

Furthermore its role in working on the energetic matrix within the individual is often the most neglected aspect of Yoga practice.

The purpose of our teaching is to use the energetic principles and practices inherent within the techniques of Haṭha (Āsana, Prāṇāyāma and Mudrā) to bring the student more towards Rāja.

The purpose of Haṭha is to prepare the mind for the rigors of Rāja. Generally seen by modern commentators as synonymous with the meditational essence of the Yoga Sūtra, its purpose is to lead the student towards a greater awareness of and in the mind.

So what are the energetic principles that are the focus for inquiry within Haṭha Yoga? Some examples of these primary concepts are:

- Pañca Prāṇa (the five aspects of Air)
- Agni (the digestive fire)
- Tridoṣa (the constitutional characteristics)
- Dvadasa Nādī (the primary pathways)
- Ṣat Cakra (the six centres)

A purpose of Haṭha is to understand how to utilize these energetic principles as a means towards realising the view of Yoga as Samādhi, called in the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, Rāja Yoga.

A question that arises at this point is, how much do the various tools (styles or approaches) of Yoga engage, adhere and respect the principles of practice in order to help realize the view of Yoga?

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