ASHTANGA YOGA

Ashtanga Yoga is an ancient system of Yoga that was taught by Vamana Rishi in the Yoga Korunta. This text was imparted to Sri T. Krishnamacharya in the early 1900’s by his Guru Rama Mohan Brahmachari, and was later passed down to Pattabhi Jois during the duration of his studies with Krishnamacharya, beginning in 1927. The current Ashtanga Yoga system has 6 series and is designed to be taught one asana at a time by an experienced teacher.

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Ashtanga Yoga is based on the Vinyasa system, focusing movement on breath.  For each movement, there is a corresponding inhalation or exhalation, and the postures are maintained for a specific number of breaths.  The purpose of vinyasa is for internal cleansing.  The heat created from yoga cleans the blood and makes it thin, so that it may circulate freely. The combination of the asanas with movement and breath make the blood circulate freely around all the joints, taking away body pains. When there is a lack of circulation, pain occurs. The heated blood also moves through all the internal organs removing impurities and disease, which are brought out of the body by the sweat that occurs during practice. If the method of vinyasa is followed, the body becomes healthy and strong, and pure like gold.

After the body is purified, it is possible to purify the nervous system, and then the sense organs.  After this is accomplished, mind control comes automatically. Vinyasa creates the foundation for this to occur.

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Ashtanga Yoga uses a system called tristhana, the three places of attention: posture/asana, breathing system and drishti. These three are very important for yoga practice, and cover three levels of purification: the body, nervous system and mind. They are always performed in conjunction with each other. Asanas purify, strengthen and give flexibility to the body. Breath is steady and balanced between inhalation and exhalation. Breathing in this manner purifies the nervous system. Dristhi is the place where you look while in the asana.  Dristhi purifies and stabilizes the functioning of the mind.

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Ashtanga Yoga also teaches the use of bandhas, particularly mula and uddiyana bandha. These are the anal and lower abdominal locks which seal in energy, give lightness, strength and health to the body, and help to build a strong internal fire. Without bandhas, breathing will not be correct, and the asanas will give no benefit. When mula bandha is perfect, mind control is automatic.

Ashtanga Yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois and his family has the potential to free the practitioner from the poisons of desire, anger, delusion, greed, envy and sloth. When yoga practice is sustained with great diligence and dedication over a long period of time, the heat generated from it burns away these poisons, and the light of our inner nature shines forth.

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