

## The Eight Limbs of Yoga

There are eight limbs, or steps, in the practice or on the path of yoga. They are:

1. *Yama*, the restraint or control of our behavior. There are five *yamas*:

*Ahimsa* (non-violence)

*Satya* (truthfulness)

*Asteya* (non-stealing)

*Brahmacharya* (non-lust)

*Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness)

2. *Niyama*, personal observance and the way we relate to ourselves. There are also five *niyamas*:

*Saucha* (cleanliness)

*Santosha* (contentment)

*Tapas* (austerity)

*Svadyaya* (study of sacred text and one self)

*Ishvara-pranidhana* (surrender to God or universal consciousness)

3. *Asana*, physical posture or pose. *Asanas* are used to free the mind and body from tension and stress to provide a sense of stability and comfort. The reason and importance of practicing the *yamas* and *niyamas* before *asanas* are so that we treat our minds and bodies with loving-kindness and not to feed the ego, which generally tries to create pain or suffering, whether it be physical or emotional.

4. *Pranayama*, the restraint or control of the breath. *Pranayama* is also used to free mind and body from tension and stress, but also to assist in focusing the mind and provide clarity. *Pranayama* assists us in recognizing the connection between our mind and body.

5. *Prathayara*, the withdrawal of the senses. *Prathayara* allows us to look deep within ourselves, while be aware of but not distracted by what or who surrounds us. It's an excellent practice to remember that we are not our mind, we are not our body, but deep within us resides our true self or identity.

6. *Dharana*, concentration. *Dharana* is a practice of one-pointed concentration; focusing on anything from a mantra or sound to an energy center within the body. It is separate of *prathayara* and a preparation for meditation. It is the place where we come after centering ourselves and before we are able to free the mind for meditation.

7. *Dhyana*, meditation. *Dhyana* is concentration without focus; a slowing down of thought process or freedom of the mind into a flow of uninterrupted concentration. It is a practice to heighten one's self-awareness and connection to the universe.

8. *Samadhi*, enlightenment. *Samadhi* is last limb of yoga practice and ultimately the place where we try to reach. It is a position in which we find peace and contemplation without the distraction of ego, without attachment to things or feelings, a place of ultimate awareness and compassion. *Samadhi* is a place where we unite our individual consciousness with the universal consciousness, recognizing to the fullest extent our connection with all beings, everywhere.

We can practice yoga everyday, in every moment. Be aware and responsible for your thoughts, for your actions, and for your speech. This is yoga.