



# what is yoga?

by Lila Conway

Yoga is an ancient body of knowledge originating in India more than 5000 years ago. The word 'Yoga' came from the Sanskrit word 'yuj' which means "to unite". Although this term can be referred to as union between body, mind and spirit, the traditional acceptance is union between the 'Jivatman' and 'Paramatman'. That is, between one's individual consciousness and the universal consciousness.


Yoga is not a religion but a way of life. Yoga provides a practice and set of techniques that can lead to a more balanced and fulfilling life. When body, mind, emotions and spirit are in balance we are free from disease, stress and worries of life. A misconception in the west is that yoga is merely physical exercise. Although it is a starting point, the physical aspect of yoga, known as Hatha Yoga is just one part of an integral system.

There are four main paths of yoga: Karma Yoga - the path of service, Bhakti Yoga - the path of devotion, Jnana Yoga - the path of knowledge, and Raja Yoga - the path of mind control.

Because of the relationship between the mind and body, the body must first be "tamed" through self-discipline and purified through the practice of Hatha Yoga, which is a part of Raja Yoga.

## The Guru

The teachings of yoga are ancient and have been passed down from Guru (teacher) to disciple since time immemorial. Although yoga cannot be branded or owned, the approach to the practice varies according to the Spiritual Master. Essentially, the knowledge comes from one source, it is just the emphasis that is different, be it holding the postures, dynamically flowing from one posture to another or focusing on strict alignment of the body. Different approaches suit different temperaments, what is most important is the student-teacher relationship.

Through dedicated mindful practice, yoga reveals a deeper essence of our true identity. This ultimately brings peace of mind and true lasting happiness - our divine natural birthright. 

## yoga pose: Dhanurasana - The Bow

### First:

Lie on your abdomen, with your forehead on the floor and arms alongside the body. Stretch your legs out.

### Next:

Bend both legs and bring your heels towards the buttocks keeping the knees a hip-width apart. Catch hold of your ankles from the outside.

### Finally:

Inhale, lift your head, chest and thighs off the floor. Push the ankles against the hands to lift the feet as high as possible. Keep shoulders back and arms straight. Drop the head back comfortably and look up. The whole body weight now rests on the abdomen.

### Practice Tips:

Hold for at least 3 deep breaths (or as long as comfortable). Straighten the knees to bring the legs higher off the ground and give a complete arch for the spine. If you are more advanced, bring the knees closer together. On exhalation, slowly release and relax until breathing returns to normal.

Repeat the pose 3 - 5 times.

### A Few Benefits:

Increases energy, vigour and vitality. Improves spinal flexibility,

invigorates digestive organs, and strengthens abdominal muscles. Expands the chest region, aiding asthma and respiratory problems, strengthens concentration and mental focus.

**Caution:** Avoid strain. Do not practice during pregnancy. Consult your doctor if you have a history of disc/spinal injuries.

The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga by Swami Vishnudevendanda comes highly recommended for deeper study. For details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, go to [www.yogaprema.org](http://www.yogaprema.org) 