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The Roots

Yoga, the latest rave across the world, comes from the root Yug, Jug which means to align.

It is the same root as for the word “Yoke” which is used to align bullocks to pull a cart.

The shloka 5.81 from Rig Veda, states,

युंजते मनं उत्त युंजते चिद्यो विष्मय बृहतो विप्रश्चितः।

-Rigveda 5.81

The learned yoke the mind, also yoke the thoughts in wisdom's vast inspiration.

Another Shloka from Katha Upanishad, 2.6.11 says,

तां योगामिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम्। अप्रमल्लस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवायो।॥ ११ ॥

-Katha Up 2.6.11

Yoga is this firm holding back of the senses. One is then calm, for Yoga is the source and the meeting.

The root of the word Yoga and its practice, lies in India.

The Practice

Yoga is not just exercise or postures.
**Yoga**, as the name suggests, is the practice by way of which mind, body and breath are aligned to achieve a state of harmony with each other and to become homogeneous with the cosmic consciousness - a state that brings with it a sense of freshness, energy and calm, a sense of balance of the various senses and emotions.

The extent of harmony and balance maintained, defines the depth of insight the *Yogi* has gained.

In a simplistic form, it is a structured combination of

**Asana** - exercise postures for the body, which brings in physical health and shapes our personal attitude

**Pranayama** – regulating energy through control of the breath and

**Dhyana** - meditation for the mind, along with maintaining physiological, psychological and sociological hygiene through *Yama* (control / abstinence), *Niyama* (adherence) and other guidelines.

**Child – An Expert in Yoga**

*Yoga* comes to us naturally right from our childhood.

Many of the different poses that a child does in its antics are yogic poses. As we grow from childhood into youth, we need to continue our practice of *Yoga*.
Key Aspects of Yoga and its Practice

Words associated with Yoga
There are many words in Samskrut associated with Yoga, indicating its larger context. These words include,

1. Yogi – A Sincere Seeker
2. Sahayogi – A Helpful Person
3. Udhyogi – A skilled professional
4. Tyagi – One who can sacrifice selflessly
5. Nirogi – A Healthy Person

Ashta Marga
The Indian scriptures speak of 8 paths of Yoga, Yoga Marga

1. Karma yoga
2. Bhakti Yoga
3. Jnana Yoga
4. Hatha Yoga
5. Purna Yoga
6. Tantra Yoga
7. Maha Yoga
8. Ashtanga Yoga
9. Raja Yoga

6 Qualities of a Yoga Practitioner
A Subhashitam in Samskrut speaks about 6 qualities of a Yoga student. Su meaning good and Bhashita means spoken. A Subhashitam is aphorism, a maxim contained in a shloka, giving a message.
In the above shloka, it is said that a yoga student shouldn’t much time in bath. A crow is known to take very little time in getting wet. A yoga student should not take more time than this. He should sit erect while meditating, as erect as a crane. Sleep should minimal, like that of a dog. Eating just what is enough, preferably once in day, which is the trait of a yogi, who meditate on the Self, Atma.

**Daily activities as Yoga**

In our life, the various activities that we perform are also various aspects of Yoga. For example,

1. When we greet each other with Namaste, it is Anjali Mudra.
2. When we sit down on the floor to eat, the sitting position is called Sukhasan, one of the asana, postures of Yoga.
3. After eating, the asana, posture that is suggested for easy digestion is Vajrasana.
4. The sleeping posture is Shavasana. The act of sleeping with awareness is known as Yoga Nidra.
5. The common punishment asana is called Palikarsha. In Hindi it is called Baski and in Tamil Topukaranam. It is the act of crossing one’s arms and holding the opposite side ear lobes and performing situps.

Mistakes usually happen due to lack of knowledge and awareness. The Palikarsha posture stimulates the nadi, nerve which helps enhance neuron cells, their perfect connectivity and thus improves knowledge acquisition and transfer process within the body. It also helps to internalize whatever is learnt and to become more aware.
Like this, every simple activity is linked to one of the yogic postures or the other.

**Yoga and Asana – The 7 good qualities**

_Yoga_ and _Asana_ lead to 7 good health qualities.

1. Flexibility
2. Efficiency of Lungs
3. Efficiency of Heart
4. Efficiency of Kidneys
5. Efficiency of Liver, Spleen and Digestive System
6. Balanced Hormonal Secretions
7. Strong Nervous System
Pranayama Yoga

Our modern understanding of the body is that, it is because of the working of the organs such as heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, intestines etc. we live. When they cease to work, our life ends.

The Pancha Prana

Life comprises of 5 basic life forces concerned with the basic pumps of the body –

1. **Prana** which controls respiration
2. **Apana** which controls excretion
3. **Vyana** which controls circulation
4. **Udana** which controls ingestion
5. **Samana** which controls digestion

Between them, they maintain exchange of air, water, food and wastes with the outside world and circulation of gases, fluids, enzymes, minerals and nutrients in the form of blood internally to keep the muscles, tissues and bones in good condition for the body to be able to act and react on its own. All of which make up the signs of life.

**Prana**

Let us take **Prana**. While, we may be wont to say that the lungs expand during inhalation to fill itself with air and contract during exhalation to empty itself, the same is viewed as the action of the **Prana** force, which makes the lungs expand to take in fresh air and contract to empty the waste air. Hence the control of this controlling force, breath control is called **Pranayama**, **Yama** meaning to control, to regulate.

**Apana**

Likewise, in the case of **Apana**, while, we may be wont to say that the intestines or bowels move to excrete wastes, the same is viewed as the action of the **Apana** force which makes the bowel and bladder push the wastes out of the body. It comes from **Pana** in **Sanskrit** meaning to keep, to hold. Hence the word **Pana** in Hindi for acquire and keep, or **Panai** in Tamil, Malayalam for a pot or vessel as it keeps or holds. **A-pana** thus is the opposite of keep, meaning to throw out, let go.

**Vyana**

**Vya** means to spread. **Vyana** thus means to circulate. **Vyana** is the force that makes the blood vessels and other capillaries, circulate blood and other secretions.
Udana

*a Ud* means to rise up, the upper part. *Udana* is to do with the upper tract of the digestive system, movement of food in upper tract as well as movement of food going up and down i.e. swallowing, reflux, regurgitation and vomiting.

Samana

*a Sama* means good, balanced, equal, mid, whole, right etc. *Samana* is that, which holds the middle, which is in good, correct measure, which is the whole etc. *Samana* is the force that works between the *Udana* and *Apana*, maintains balance between hunger and fullness, between eating and excreting, which directs all the intake from outside and secretions from inside, to assemble and blend together, in the right measure, in the stomach, to create the right broken down form of the food, for the good of the body. *Samana* force is the whole, sole and soul of the process of digestion.

Pranayama – A form of Yoga

*a Pra* means special and natural. *Prana* is the naturally born and special life force, which is the ultimate as far as life is concerned. The presence of absence of this force determines the presence and absence of life in a body. Only this force is under conscious control of a human and a *Yama* or regulation of this force can effect a balance in all the other forces of the body. Since this control comes with the alignment of mind, body and breath, to bring in an alignment of all other life forces too, it is a form of *Yoga*, as *Yoga* means a union.

Pranayama is a process of breathing which is vital for sustaining life. It is the foundation for a wholesome development, representative of the subtle vital forces inside the body. If *Prana* is stopped, then mind cannot move, and a state of still, *Manonasha* is reached.
Three stages of Pranayama
A Pranayama breathing comprises of

1. Puraka – Inhaling
2. Rechaka – Exhaling
3. Kumbhaka – Retaining Breath

Three Naadis
Naadi are the etheric channels in the body through which Prana flows. The three main Naadi being,

1. Sushumna Naadi
2. Ida Naadi, Chandra or cold Naadi
3. Pingala Naadi, Surya or hot Naadi

Two Types of Pranayama
Pranayama is of two types,

1. Hyper, Fast
2. Hypo, Slow

Hyper and Hypo Pranayama are done in cohesion to clear the blockages in the etheric layer, including the three main Naadi, and distributing Prana where there is excessive collection.
The three Naadis are churned with the help of Pranayama, which results in Yoga, Atma Sakshatkara. It is equal to obtaining *Amrit*, Nectar of Immortality.
Yoga and OM

Yoga and OM intrinsically connected. Any practice of Yoga should commence with the Ucharan of OM and conclude with the Ucharan of OM.

At the time of the Brahmanda Visphotak or the Big Bang, the sound created by this Big Bang has been described by the ancient Indian seers as the sound "OM", which has since been reverberating through the universe. It is therefore the breath of the universe.

This OM is called Pranava. Pranava means the leader or always new, i.e. never gets old or never fades away, always remains fresh. It is therefore the primordial sound.

A very big breakthrough in the understanding of the workings of the Universe came about when two physicists Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson in 1978, discovered an ever pervading Cosmic Micro Wave Background Radiation.

Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson

This lent credibility to the view that we are all mere remains of an event which happened far beyond our comprehension of space and time.
This Cosmic MicroWave Background, is the reverberation of that event and therefore serves as a constant reminder of that event.

There seems to be a similarity between *OM* and the Cosmic MicroWave Background.

Yoga gets the necessary impetus by connecting with this Omnipresent sound, through the Ucharam of Om.

More on Om in our book and film, *Creation – Srishti Vignana* and short film *Om*.

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**Bharath Gyan Short Film – Om, The Echo of Big Bang:** [https://goo.gl/pnd6nf](https://goo.gl/pnd6nf)
Yoga and Food

Asana – Posture in which we eat

Sitting on the floor and eating has been one of the important traditions of this land and is a part of Yoga in Eating Food.

The posture of sitting down while eating is called Sukhasana. There are some benefits in sitting in this pose while eating.

1. In this posture, each time we take a mouthful, we have to bend over. In this front and back movement while bending, we activate the enzymes in the stomach, to be released for the digestion of the food.

2. It also facilitates blood circulation from heart to the digestive organs.

3. In this pose, we can eat only what we can, because of this front and back movement, and we cannot stuff ourselves with food, beyond our digestion capacity.

Pankti Bhojan Sitting in Sukhasan

Yogi Bhogi Rogi

Apart from Eating in proper pose, taking in the right kind of food, and for appropriate number of times is also Yoga, because it deals with the appropriate Union of Food with the body.

Eating food the right way and in right quantity will ensure a good health. There is a popular saying which says,

“Those who eat once in a day is a Yogi. Those who eat twice is a Bhogi. Those who eat thrice is a Rogi.”

There is a Tamil saying Marinde Unavu, meaning,

“If you eat properly, food itself is a good medicine that will keep you healthy.”
The act of consuming food is known as *Bhog*. By following the above the right process of eating, we convert *Bhog* into an *Yog*, so that we are not effected by any *Rog*, disease.
**Yogasana and Namaz Postures**

There are interesting similarities between *Yogasana* Postures and the Muslim practice of *Namaz*. *Namaz* Postures have their equivalent names and poses in *Yogasana* as can been in this chart.

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<th>Namaz Postures</th>
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<td>Ardha Uttanasana</td>
<td>Ruk’u</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vajrasana</td>
<td>Julus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balasana</td>
<td>Sujud</td>
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**Similarities of Yogasana and Namaz Postures**

The similarity of *Yogasana* and *Namaz* Postures shows unison. For, *Yoga* itself means to unite, to come together.
Yoga Guru connect

In the Indian thought, all the lofty texts have been expressed in the form of poetry, starting from Veda, Ramayana, Mahabharata to Bhagavad Gita to all the Purana, and also texts like Kalidasa's work and Tiruvalluvar's work, all have been in poetic form. It is a unique feature of Indian way of writing classics, including most of Ayurvedics texts also.

An intrinsic connect between Guru and Yoga

Similarly, this land has been blessed with so many enlightened people, spiritual masters, Acharya and Guru. Most of them have all been Yogis, through the land and through the time. The way the knowledge is in poetry form, all noble persons have practiced Yoga in some way. There is an intrinsic connect between, Guru and Yoga.

Guru

Guru is the One who has attained Union with Divinity, and shows the path to His Shishya, disciple. A Guru, is a person who is heavy and full with knowledge and one who influences our minds and our lives, by teaching and guiding us. A person, who draws and pulls people towards him because of his positive influence. Here Guru denotes the union and influence on the subtle, sukshma mind.

Guru Tattva

Similar to “The Bhagavad Gita”, the dialogue between Shiva and Parvati on various subjects, including the Universal laws of nature is available to us today in the form of Guru Gita.

Here Parvati asks Shiva,
Guru Tattva is revered as it is the Union with the Highest. Yoga is this process of Union with the Highest.

**Yoga Through Guru Shishya Parampara**

The route to attaining Yoga is through a Guru, as Only One who knows the way can show us the path.

The Gurus of this land have also been Yogis, who have passed on their knowledge to their Shishya, forming the Guru-Shishya Parampara.

The Indian education system has leveraged the principle of Gurus to keep the system of education and knowledge transfer going through millennia. It came to be called the Guru Sishya Parampara, where each successive generation traces its knowledge to a lineage of Gurus, all the way back to one or the other of the many Vedic Rishis, who had lived many millennia ago and left behind schools of learning and guide to living.

All Ancient Gurus were Yogis

All the ancient Gurus and Rishi, including Vasishta, Vishvamitra, Bharadwaja, Agastya, Veda Vyasa, Gautama, Parashara, Brighu, Buddha, Mahavira, Neelakanta were all Yogis, who had their Ashrams across India, where they passed on the tradition of Yoga to the next generation.

Adi Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhavacharya, Patanjali, are other names who came later and were all Yogis.
Recent Yogis

In recent times Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurbindo, Sri Ramana Maharishi are popular names of Yogis.

Thus we see that there has been an inseparable connect between Guru and Yoga, through this land.
Yoga and Kumbh

The Kumbh Mela is one of the oldest and largest congregations of Indian civilization. In a sense, it is a congregation more than a festival. The Kumbh is a festival where larger number of Yogis congregate, to have a sacred dip in river, and also perform yoga.

Yogis at a Kumbha Mela

Indian thought and practices over time immemorial have commemorated certain days and festivals as ways and means for people to understand, remember and reunite with the Universe and the scientific divinities of the Universe. These festivals become gateways for people to reach out and be in communion with these divinities.

This union and communion with Divinity and the Universe can only happen through Yoga, and one cannot keep Yoga away from any Kumbh festival.

There are 4 main Kumbh, and innumerable other Pushkarams that celebrated on the banks of various rivers in India, in different years.

Purification is one of the key aspects of Yoga, and this outer and inner purification is undertaken during the Kumbh through the Pancha Snana.

Snana, is a prominent ritual involving any Kumbh. Snana in Samskrt has a wider connotation, apart from just bath. It also means washing, purification, immersion etc.

This Snana is not just at physical level involving Jala, water.

Pancha Snana

In a Kumbh or Pushkaram, Snana is performed at multiple levels,
1. **Jala Snana**

2. **Mantra Snana**

3. **Prana Snana**

4. **Nada Snana**

5. **Dhyana Snana**

**Jala Snana**

*Jala Snana* relates to the bath we take using *Jala*, water. At the *Kumbh*, this bath is performed when we immerse ourselves in water.

The reciting of this *Mantra* made *Jala Snana* a sacred ritual, lending sanctity to the act of bathing.

**Prana Snana**

*Prana* is life energy. *Prana Snana* involves purification of the *Prana*, through *Pranayama*. *Pranayama* is regulating energy through the control of the breath, *Yama* meaning to control, regulate.

**Mantra Snana**

In the Indian ethos, apart from body cleansing, purification of the mind is also given important. The cleansing of mind from the unwanted thoughts that have left unnecessary impressions during the course of the day. For this, *Mantra Snana* is advocated.

*Mantra Snana* is performed by people using a *Mantra*, for purifying and giving focus to the Mind, and is an aspect of Yoga.
Nada Snana
Nada is the primordial music of dawn of Creation. The subtle inner sound perennially flowing in the cosmos which is intrinsic to the very creative process.

Focusing one’s attention on Nada, gives freshness to our intellect, *vignana*. 

*Nada Snana* is one of the ways of replenishing our discerning abilities, and is a part of Kumbh.

Dhyana Snana

*Dhyana* refers to meditation. Meditation involves withdrawing from all activities and thoughts, and immersing oneself in the bliss of the Self, *Atma*. This has been termed as *Dhyana Snana*, and is one of the important *Snana*, that is practiced during a *Kumbh* or *Pushkaram*.

*Dhyana* is a form of *Sadhana* that is practiced by *Sadhaka*, spiritual seekers to attain *Mukti*. This *Sadhana of Dhyana* has been an ancient ethos of this land. A brand that India has given to the rest of the world. The practice of Dhyana is known as Dhyana Yoga.

Yoga is an integral part of Kumba, as these Pancha Snana are nothing but different facets of Yoga, and are practiced during the Kumbh.
Yoga – A Continuous Practice Over 7 Millennia

India - An Ideational Country

Rabindranath Tagore had said,

_This Country is not territorial but ideational_

Rabindranath Tagore

It is about a cultural bonding of the land that the Nobel laureate, poet Rabindranath Tagore, who is referred to reverentially as Gurudev, is speaking here.

Yoga – One of the invisible threads

India is a nation that is ideational. It is bound by invisible threads. One of these invisible threads has been Yoga.

From the timeless _Veda_, we can see that Indians have been in the habit of this continuous practice to keep both mind and body fit. Antiquity can be seen both in art and text. As far as texts go, across the times, illumined minds have given structure to this practice, through a large body of texts, thereby giving _Yoga_ practice, a breath of fresh air every few generations.

Mohenjodaro and Harappa

In art, we can see a continuity of _Yoga_ practice right from Mohenjodaro and Harappan times in the form of terracota _Yogic_ posture figurines.
**Shiva-Adi Yogi**

Shiva who is not a historical personage, but a divinity, a *tattva*, a principle, is depicted in meditative Yogic pose.

With the aim of making it easier to relate to and to indicate that we need to sharpen our minds to a subtle state to understand Shiva and also to re-emphasize the presence of Shiva in all bodies including man, we have Shiva as Shankara, depicted as a meditating Yogi.
**Indus Valley Pashupathi Seal**

Probably one of the earliest representations, can be found in the Harappa – Mohenjodaro seal of Pashupathi, where Shiva or Pashupathi is shown seated in a *Padamasana* pose with all the animals surrounding Him.

![Pashupathi seal from Harappa](image)

**Gundestrup Cauldron**

A very interesting archaeological find in Denmark, of a very ancient bowl, at a place called Gundestrup, throws new light on Pashupathi and His following. This bowl, now called the Gundestrup Cauldron, bears in one of its panels, an image very similar to the Pashupathi seal unearthed from the Harappa – Mohenjodaro sites.

![Gundestrup cauldron, Denmark, Unearthed in 1891 Dating back to 150 BCE & Pashupathi](image)

**Indo-Euro Yogic connect**

This shows that this yogic form was prevalent not only to the Indus Valley sites but even to far away Denmark in North Western Europe.
Yoga Narasimha

Yoga Narasimha is a form in which Lord Narasimha is depicted. In this form, Lord Narasimha is seated in a Yoga Pose, popularly known as Sukhasan. One of the well-known sculptures of Yoga Narasimha is found at the archaeological excavations of Hampi.

![Yoga Narasimha](image)

Yoga – From 5100 BCE

Yoga as a structured practice by the adults can be traced to India to at least beyond 7100 years ago.

The general opinion is that Yoga is 5000 years old. But we can see the trace of Yoga even during Ramayana times, 7100 years ago. Yoga was a specialized practice then too and hence must date to times before Rama as well.
Yoga Vasishta – 5100 BCE

Rama's spiritual Guru, Vasishta, counselled and groomed Rama's mind through the treatise *Yoga Vasishta*. One of the longest texts in Sanskrit after *Mahabharata*, *Yoga Vasishta* forms an important text for Yoga and Advaita Vedanta (Non duality).

Rama's birth datable to 5114 BCE, makes *Yoga Vasishta* and the concept of Yoga, atleast 7100 years old.

Krishna – Yogeshwara – 3100 BCE

Sri Krishna was an exemplary Jnana Yogi. Krishna also speaks about other Yoga such as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Raja Yoga to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. One of His names is Yogeshwara, meaning, “the Lord of Yoga”.

The *Gita Upadesha* was given on 22nd November, 3067 BCE. How we have conclusively arrived at this date, is discussed in our book, “Historical Krishna”.

This implies that Krishna and His Upadesha, counsel on Yoga are historical and real.
This means that Yoga and its benefits are also real.

This positions Yoga as not just exercise postures, Asana, but as knowledge, action, devotion, all coming together, to verily become a harmonious way of life.

**Rishi Patanjali and Yoga - 3100 BCE**

*Rishi* Patanjali, one of the earliest pioneers of Yoga was born in the land known today as Afghanistan. He is revered as an incarnation of Adi Shesha, the bed of Vishnu.

When *Rishi* Gonika was praying to Surya, Sun with cupped hands – an *Anjali Mudra*, a yogic posture, a baby fell into his hands. The child was thus named Patanjali, meaning one who fell into cupped hands.
Rishi Patanjali had his education at Takshashila University, the premier centre of advanced learning then, which is near present day Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Takshashila was a sought after centre for higher studies in *Yoga, Ayurveda* among many other subjects.

Rishi Patanjali attained his *Samadhi* in Rameshwaram in South India.
Rameshwaram Temple

Rama installs Rameshwaram Lingam
Rameshwaram is one of the hallowed places of India, where Rama installed and worshipped a Shiva Lingam, before his battle with Ravana.

More on Rama installing the Lingam at Rameshwarm in our book ‘Historical Rama’.

Rameshwaram – A Jyothir Linga
The Lingam at Rameshwaram is one of the 12 Jyothir Lingas. We discuss the significance of Jyothir Linga and Rameshwaram in our book ‘Understanding Shiva’.
Understanding Shiva

It is in such a holy place that Patanjali lived, practised and propagated Yoga and eventually attained samadhi.

Rishi Patanjali Samadhi, Rameshwaram

Patanjali Yoga Sutra

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra composed by Rishi Patanjali, which goes back by many millennia, has been a forerunner and guide for the practice of Yoga in all these years.

Patanjali defines Yoga as Yogacittavrittinirodha, meaning that which blocks patterns of Consciousness.

Traditional Yoga as in Yoga Sutra is about meditation and mantra (OM-pranava). Asana had a secondary role. Yoga must lead to meditation and Samadhi to achieve its true goal of self-realization.
Patanjali Yoga Sutra consists of 195 Sutra divided into 4 chapters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samadhi</th>
<th>Pada: 51 sutra</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sadhana</td>
<td>Pada: 55 sutra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vibhuti</td>
<td>Pada: 54 sutra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaivalya</td>
<td>Pada: 34 sutra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195 Sutra</td>
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*Rishi* Patanjali recorded, systematized and expounded *Yoga* through the entire stretch of land from north-west Afghanistan, where He was born, to Rameshwaram in south-east India, where He attained *Samadhi*.

Thus the structured practice of *Yoga* was not limited to north India alone, but has stretched from north-west India to south-east India, covering the whole civilization of India.
**Buddha – 1800 BCE**

Buddha practiced Dhyana Yoga in the process of attaining Nirvana.

![Lord Buddha](image)

**Adi Shankara – 509 BCE**

Adi Shankara was the saint who propounded the Advaita Vedanta, which speaks of the unity of Atma and Brahman. He unified the various thoughts of Indian philosophy, as He travelled across the country, conducting discourses, and taking part in debates with other philosophers, while defeating many through His arguments. Thus He established Advaita philosophy, which establishes the existence of one formless Divine Reality – Brahman, while considering the universe and its creatures to be an illusion.

Adi Shankara advocated Jnana Yoga for the realization of Brahman. While being a Jnani, He was also a Karma Yogi, who travelled extensively during His short 32 years life span.

![Adi Shankara](image)
**Swami Vivekananda – 1900 CE**

In recent times, Swami Vivekananda was the one who spread Yoga to the west. The preliminary to the revival of Yoga was his speech of 11th September 1893.

This short speech recreated an interest about India in the west, in the 20th century. It also helped Indians discover Swami Vivekananda and through him discover themselves, the strength of their tradition, culture and the respect for their own spirituality. The awakening of Indians among the American intelligentsia had resonance back in his homeland in India.

This strength later paved the way for the Indian independence movement which was fulfilled in 1947.

This speech also gave impetus to Indian yoga and spirituality. Today, yoga is a thriving industry in the west but its seeds were laid by Swami Vivekananda in the west.

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**Vivekananda, the harbinger of Yoga in the West**

**Yoga, Now a Global Brand**

After Vivekananda, it was Paramahamsa Yogananda and then Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Sri. Krishnamacharya, Sri B.K.S.Iyengar, their disciples and Gurus such as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Baba Ramdev, who have literally taken Yoga to the world.

In the below image, we have our first Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru doing Yoga.
International Yoga Day - 2014

Today, International Yoga Day is celebrated all across the world on 21st June, indicating the vast popularity and spread of Yoga.
Yoga World Over

This structured practice of Yoga has now travelled and become popular world over as one of the preferred forms of keeping body and mind fit with one move.

Yoga to Near West

A look into the past shows that even Sufi saints from the Near West, Sultans and Mughal kings have interacted with Yogis, with an open mind inorder to learn of the good aspects of Yoga from its master practitioners.

Yoga to Far West

USA

The visit of Swami Vivekananda to USA in 1893 was a kick off point for Yoga in the modern international arena.

1930s ladies doing Yoga in America

Yoga kicked off and spread as a big in the USA and worldwide. As of today, there are 18000 Yoga schools in USA.
**An Art of Living Yoga Session on Yoga Day in USA**

**Germany**

Germany is another country where Yoga is popular. There are innumerable Yoga training centres in Germany.

**A Yoga Training Centre in Germany**

**Brazil**

Brazil has a strong bond with India, even though it is far away from the sub-continent. Both the countries are part of BRICS.
The country of Brazil is 3 times the size of India. In the whole world, among the landmark, Brazil gets highest rainfall, while India gets the second highest.

The bond between these two faraway lands in the modern world is Yoga.

In the Sao Palo city of Brazil, there are over 1000 registered Yoga schools.

Many Brazilians travelled to India, over the last few decades, mostly to Rishikesh, learned Yoga there, went back to their own country Brazil, and started their own Yoga schools. Yoga is really the connecting factor between these two far of lands.
It was Brazilians who had seen value in Yoga and come here to India on their own, at their own initiative and cost, to learn Yoga for themselves, and open Yoga schools for the betterment of the health and well-being of the Brazilian populace. It is to be noted here that Brazil is the largest Roman Catholic religion following country. This sprouting of Yoga schools over last few decades, in thousands, as an organic initiative shows that Yoga transcends not just countries and continents but religious boundaries too.

**Yoga to the East**

**Buddha – Dhyana Yoga**

*Yoga* went to the East from India along with Buddhism more than 2000 years ago, for *Dhyana*, meditation lies at the heart of Buddhism.

**In Bangkok**

A sitting example is at the west entrance of Wat Phra Kew, the main temple attached to the Grand Palace at Bangkok, Thailand, in the form of a bronze statue popularly called “The Hermit Doctor”.

The locals refer to this statue as their patron of medicine, an Indian hermit Jivaka, who gave them *Yoga* and herbal medicine and hence offer prayers and other offerings here, to get cured of illnesses. This Jivaka was none other than the personal physician of the Buddha.
This statue at the front of the temple is placed on a stone pedestal, with another pedestal in front, bearing a stone mortar and pestle - an indication of how he practiced medicine with herbs, he used to grind.

**Jivaka, Patron Hermit of Yoga and Medicine, Wat Phra Kew, Grand Palace, Bangkok**

Further more, many *Yoga* postures can be seen displayed by statues in the gardens of Wat Pho, the temple adjacent to the Grand Palace in Bangkok, which houses the Reclining Buddha and is home to the original Thai massage. Housing many plaques with inscriptions on the pressure points in the human body, this temple from a long time has been renowned as a study centre for *Ayurveda* including Thai style of massages and *Yoga*. 
More on Buddha in our Book, **Dating of Buddha**.

**Statues depicting Yoga Postures at Wat Pho Temple in Thailand, Bangkok**
The statue, 2nd from left in the 2nd row, just under the large leafed plant can be seen doing Pranayama, breathing exercise, with his hands on his waist.

**In Japan**

In the medieval period, around 760 CE, there was a great Buddhist monk by the name Bodhidharma, Daruma as he was called in Japan, who travelled from Kanchipuram in South India,
over the seas, eastwards taking with him the teachings of Buddha and meditation, *dhyana*. The *dhyana* he took with him came to be called *Chan* and then *Zen* when it travelled to Japan.

His teachings reached Japan through Master Hui Neng.

From this was born Zen Buddhism, a very happening thought of the modern world. Zen Buddhism has its roots in India.

More on the Yoga connect between India and China in our Book, 

**Indo China – A Connect Over Millennia.**

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**Yoga to the North – Russia**

The idea of Yoga reached Russia during the time of Ivan the Terrible i.e in 1530 to 1584, along with the first copy of the Bhagavad Gita to reach Russia, which was presented by the Moghuls of India, to the Tsar. Its first translation into Russian (from English and Sanskrit) however, came out only in 1788 by the Imperial decree of Catherine the Great.

This manuscript of the first Bhagavad Gita is preserved in Moscow, in an archive within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Even so, not many were initiated into the practice of Yoga until the turn of the 20th century. During this time window, some Russians took to Indian philosophy and knowledge and brought out translations of Indian works or their own writings, along with kindling an interest in Yoga among Russians.
Georgy Ivanovich Gurdjieff was one such proponent of Yoga and Indic thought with his book, “Fourth Way”, which contained teachings from yogis, Sufis, Tibetan Buddhism etc. including Mongol traditions. With the start of the Revolution and Civil War, Gurdjieff left Russia for Europe and popularized Yoga in Europe, which made him a name in Europe in the early days of Yoga.

Few others like this, such as Elena Roerich also introduced Yoga to Russia but emigrated to Europe.

**Under Stalin**

Under Stalin regime, the interest in Yoga that had been kindled, grew under cover. Yoga was practiced by many who were sent to Camps and it helped them endure the harsh living conditions of camp life.

Some of these practitioners include,

- philosopher and writer Dmitry Panin, who spent 17 years in labour camps and managed to survive because of the inner and outer strength built due to his sustained Yoga practice.
- Tatiana Okunevskaya, a famous and beautiful movie actor who managed to go through 6 years of labour camp due to her Yoga practice, which she continued right until her old age.

Some were sent to Camp because of their leanings towards Yoga, while some leveraged Yoga to go through their Camp life.

**Post Stalin Era**

Post Stalin’s period, in the 1960s, seeing the effect Yoga had brought about on those in camps, Yoga acquired an aura of mysticism and novels were written based on the principles of Yoga.

One of the persons to expound on the therapeutic aspect of Yoga was Anatoly Nikolaevich Zubkov who was an Indologist and a Hindi specialist. He is considered as the first certified teacher of yoga in the USSR.

This is because, Zubkov came to India on business and got the opportunity to learn to practice Yoga under Guruji Shri Ram Kumar Sharmoy, the pupil of Swami Sivananda himself. On his return to USSR then, he started spreading Yoga with a missionary zeal.

He even wrote the script for a Russian documentary film on yoga, titled, “Indian Yogis. Who are they?”

**Post Soviet Era**

By the end of 1980s when the Soviet Union was showing signs of collapsing, Yoga surfaced from the underground, secretive practice, into the open. It became a science to be studied and researched.

Academics and researchers were sent to India to conduct various studies. These interactions led to Shri. B.K.S.Iyengar, a Yoga doyen of India being invited to USSR in 1989 for a conference on Yoga.
This opened the floodgates for Yoga in Russia as Russians were now coming into contact with a proper Indian, Yoga Guru and that too one, as accomplished as Shri. B.K.S.Iyengar.

The popularity of Iyengar Yoga grew from strength to strength in USSR and then in post-Soviet Russia. Soon Kundalini Yoga and other formats of Yoga also entered Russia.

**Practiced By Medvedev**

With relations between India and Russia opening up, Yoga came to be practiced by even the former President and present Prime Minister of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, who wanted it to become a common practice. A boost to Yoga was received during his time.

**From Modi to Putin**

Subsequently in recent times, the Yoga practicing Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, personally extolled the virtues of Yoga to Russian President, Vladmir Putin during their meeting in Ufa, Russia during BRICS 2015, which made Putin promise Modi that he would explore as to how he could adopt Yoga for himself.

All these have catapulted Yoga into centrestage in Russia and Yoga today is even being used in prisons to help prisoners maintain good health as well as to help them reform.

**From Focus on Health To Stress Free Lifestyle**
In the last couple of decades, Yoga in Russia has also taken on the trend of becoming a lifestyle with spiritual Gurus from India, taking both, the *asana* practice in Yoga along with meditation, to Russia along with integrated Ayurvedic diet and cleansing practices.

One such significant influencer has been Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder Art of Living, who has taken such an integrated form of meditation and Yoga to over 156 countries worldwide.

Such a lifestyle change includes adoption of vegetarian diet, support to social causes, friendly attitude towards one and all irrespective of race and religion, stress relieving activities such as singing and working in groups, being close to Nature and so on, besides the practice of Yogasana, cleansing practices and meditation.

![Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar](image)

Art of Living not only has centres across Russia for regular classes but also has *Ashrams* in Russia for residential rejuvenation courses. In 2002 Art of Living sent instructors to North Ossetia to help victims of the school hostage-taking in Beslan, come out of their traumatic experience. In 2008, post Russia’s war with Georgia, help was given to victims of Tskhinvali in South Ossetia to come out of trauma.

Art of Living in Russia has also worked with the Russian military and prisons. With 1000s of people in Russia, who have taken to this integrated form of Yoga, Art of Living, through its volunteers is striving to help create a stress free society in Russia using India’s age old techniques of Yoga with meditation.

**A True Indo-Russian Collaboration For Furtherance Of Yoga**

**Eugenie Peterson-Labunskaya**

It was a Russian woman by birth called Eugenie Peterson-Labunskaya, who can be called the “Mother” of Yoga for the West, for, she was literally called *Mataji*, meaning mother.

Escaping from the Russian revolution, Eugenie Peterson, a lady from a Russian noble family, reached Berlin eventually, only to be drawn towards a Theosophical camp at Oman in her search for India and Yoga. This camp turned to be the turning point in her life when she heard the singing of *Samskrt* prayer songs by none other than Jiddu Krishnamurthi.
Guru Shri T. Krishnamacharya

She finally came to India to learn Yoga under the renowned Guru Shri T. Krishnamacharya. She learnt Yoga from him, along with other prominent students who went on to become Yoga veterans such as Shri B. K. S. Iyengar and Shri Pattabhi Jois. Later, gaining her master’s confidence, she was asked by her master to start teaching Yoga.

Indra Devi

Taking on the Indian name “Indra Devi”, Eugenie taught Yoga in China to Chinese, as well as both Russians and Americans who took it back to their respective lands. She later went on to setup her Yoga studio in America and then in Argentina.

Indra Devi is credited as the one who took Yoga to Hollywood and in a way popularized Yoga among the fashionable too.
Known as the “one who put the world on head”, Indra Devi embodied the spirit of a true Indo-Russian collaboration at a people to people level, for the furtherance of Yoga.

**Russia’s Enduring Path To Yoga**

History of Yoga in Russia has thus gone through 3 main stages –

- a century of official animosity towards Yoga
- a later softening into indifference and
- now an acceptance of Yoga into mainstream.

Russia has now reached the stage where Yoga can officially be propagated as a subject of cultural exchange.

However, the way the Russians see and have taken to Yoga is far different from the way Yoga was taken to, in many parts of the world.

For Russians, Yoga was a discipline, which showed the way to endurance.

Yoga itself has thus endured in Russia and made its mark in Russia over a century of trials.

Yoga in Russia is a story of the determination of the Russians to connect with Yoga and through Yoga, with India.

The spontaneous and elevated connect between India and Russia, through Yoga, shows a predisposition between the 2 cultures for a union of minds and spirits at a higher plane of existence.

International Yoga Day

His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar gave a clarion call to have a World Yoga Day declared in 2011, to raise awareness of keeping mind and body fit through Yoga.

"There is World Toilet Day, but no World Yoga Day. We will write to the UN to recognize June 21 as World Yoga Day" - Sri Sri

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi in his address to UN Assembly in September 2014, made a request to formalize a World Yoga day. The UN body adopted this resolution and passed it with a overwhelming majority in December 2014.

The world now has a new day to observe and celebrate – A World Yoga Day!

"It is very difficult for any philosophy, religion or culture to survive without state patronage. Yoga has existed so far almost like an orphan. Now, official recognition by the UN would further spread the benefit of yoga to the entire world."

June 21st of every year, which is the day of Summer Solstice, i.e. the day when the Sun is seen longest in the sky, the day when daylight is maximum, was declared by UN on 12th December 2014, as World Yoga Day.
It is an apt day to be chosen as a World Yoga Day for every Yoga session typically starts with Surya Namaskar, the reverence to the Sun. What could be a better day than a Summer Solstice, the day when the Sun is in its peak to revere and celebrate the connection between our body and the Sun. It is the connection which drives the very metabolism clock in our bodies.
What is even more amazing is that, the proposal from India to the UN, to declare June 21st as World Yoga Day was seconded and co-sponsored by an unprecedented number of 175 nations out of 193.

This is indeed a remarkable feat. Normally, so many countries coming together in the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution for a commemorating day is rare.

For the 1st time so many nations have unanimously voted for a declaration in the history of UN General Assembly and that too within a record 3 months of the proposal having been put up in September 2014.

This in itself is proof of the universal acceptance of Yoga.

The popularity of Yoga and universality of Yoga, is what led so many countries to come together to jointly announce a World Yoga Day.

"Yoga embodies

- unity of mind and body;
- thought and action;
- restraint and fulfillment;
- harmony between man and nature;
- a holistic approach to health and well being."

were the words with which India described Yoga and garnered this support.

No wonder then that people across the globe, across times have therefore held and continue to hold Yoga in high respect and demand. The need for Yoga and the benefits of Yoga are as universal, as is our breath and our desire to be in union with the divine.

Yoga is a universal offering from India which has the potential to align all bodies and minds, across the world, towards the common goal of self realization, oneness, unity and peace.

A continuous practice coming down from at least 7 millennia.
Connect with Environment