



## Yoga Glossary

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One of the toughest things about yoga is talking about it. Sanskrit words abound, and all of them look and sound so foreign to most of us. This is a quick guide to yoga and meditation terms. We have intentionally kept the definitions brief and jargon-free.

- Ahimsa:** Noninjury, nonviolence, harmlessness (*one of the yamas*).
- Ananda yoga:** Gentle, inward yoga that uses silent affirmations while in the asanas (*postures*).
- Aparigraha:** Nongreed (*one of the yamas*).
- Asanas:** Yoga postures. Translation: to sit, or to stay. The asanas came about originally to assist the yogis to sit in meditation for longer periods of time. Pronounced AH-sah-nahs.
- Ashram:** Retreat or secluded place, usually where the principles of yoga and meditation are taught and practiced.
- Ashtanga yoga:** Physically challenging yoga to build strength, flexibility, and stamina. Power yoga grew from Ashtanga yoga.
- Asmita:** Ego, individuality, I-am-ness.
- Asteya:** Nonstealing (*one of the yamas*).
- Bhakti yoga:** The path of devotion.
- Bikram yoga:** A rigorous yoga performed in a hot environment.
- Brahmacharya:** Purity, chastity, nonlust (*one of the yamas*).
- Brahman:** The absolute. Divinity itself, God as creator. When Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "Brahma" appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in 1857, most of the readers were bewildered. Emerson chuckled. "Tell them," he said, "to say 'Jehovah' instead of 'Brahma' and they will not feel any perplexity." (*from Autobiography of a Yogi*).
- Buddhi:** The intellect.



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- Chakras:** Centers of radiating life force or energy that are located between the base of the spinal column and the crown of the head. Sanskrit for "wheels." There are seven chakras that store and release life force (*prana*).
- Dharana:** From the word dhri meaning "to hold firm," this is concentration or holding the mind to one thought or object.
- Dharma:** Self-discipline, the life of responsibility and right action.
- Dhyana:** Meditation or contemplation. The process of quieting the mind.
- Guru:** Spiritual teacher, described as "the one who helps bring us from the darkness into the light."
- Hatha yoga:** Many yoga styles spring from hatha. It is the yoga of physical well-being, designed to balance body, mind, and spirit through the practice of yoga postures, breathing exercises and meditation.
- Integral yoga:** This yoga style places almost as much emphasis on pranayama (*control of breath*) and meditation as it does on postures.
- Ishvara-pranidhana:** Center on the Divine (*one of the niyamas*).
- Iyengar yoga:** This yoga style focuses on the body and how it works. It is noted for attention to detail, precise alignment of postures, and the use of props.
- Jnana yoga:** The path of knowledge or wisdom.
- Karma yoga:** The path of action.
- Kripalu yoga:** This yoga style emphasizes proper breath, alignment, coordinating breath and movement, and "honoring the wisdom of the body."
- Kundalini:** A cosmic energy in the body that is often compared to a snake lying coiled at the base of the spine, waiting to be awakened. Kundalini is derived from kundala, which means a "ring" or "coil."
- Kundalini yoga:** Chanting and breathing are emphasized over postures in this ancient practice designed to awaken and control the release of kundalini energy.



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- Mandala:** A circular geometric design that represents the cosmos and the spirit's journey. It is a tool in the pilgrimage to enlightenment. One of the most famous mandalas appears on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France. It is not uncommon for churches in the United States to recreate well-known mandalas and call them labyrinths. Spiritual pilgrims literally walk the labyrinth to attain spiritual insight.
- Mantra:** Sacred chant words.
- Meditation:** Technique of inward attention. Psychologist Lawrence LeShan offers a down-to-earth definition: The goal of meditation is "to enable you to get more out of life and to move more completely in whatever directions you choose." Those directions can range from moving toward inner peace and higher spirituality to losing five pounds before Christmas.
- Mudras:** Hand gestures that direct the life current through the body.
- Namaste:** This Hindu salutation says "the divine in me honors the divine in you." The expression is used on meeting or parting and usually is accompanied by the gesture of holding the palms together in front of the bosom. Pronounced NUM-ah-stay.
- Full translation:* I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides.  
I honor the place in you which is of peace, light, love and truth.  
When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are one.
- Neti pot:** A small ceramic pot used to irrigate and cleanse nasal passages.
- Niyamas:** In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali defined five niyamas or observances relating to inner discipline and responsibility. They are purity, contentment, self-discipline, study of the sacred text, and living with the awareness of God.
- Om or Aum:** Mantric word chanted in meditation. Considered to be the first sound there was, therefore, the mother of all sounds. Paramahansa Yogananda called it "the vibration of the Cosmic Motor." This one word is interpreted as having three sounds representing creation, preservation, and destruction.



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- Prana:** Life energy, life force, or life current. We also like Yogananda's description of prana as "lifetrans." These finer-than-atomic energies have inherent intelligence, according to Yogananda, as opposed to atoms and electrons, which are considered to be blind forces. The Chinese call this life force chi.
- Pranayama:** Method of controlling prana or life force through the regulation of breathing.
- Pratyahara:** Withdrawing the senses in order to still the mind as in meditation.
- Raja yoga:** The path of physical and mental control.
- Santosha:** Contentment (*one of the niyamas*).
- Satya:** Truthfulness and honesty (*one of the yamas*).
- Samadhi:** State of absolute bliss, superconsciousness. Yogananda called this the "state of God-union."
- Shauca:** Purity, inner and outer cleanliness (*one of the niyamas*).
- Shodhana:** Yogic cleansing ritual.
- Sivananda yoga:** Relaxed and gentle yoga that encourages a healthy lifestyle: proper exercise, proper breathing, proper relaxation, proper diet, and positive thinking with meditation.
- Svadyaya:** Self-study. The process of inquiring into your own nature, the nature of your beliefs, and the nature of the world's spiritual journey (*one of the niyamas*).
- Swami:** Title of respect for a spiritual master.
- Tantra yoga:** Known as the Yoga of Love, Tantra uses visualization, chanting, breathing, individual and couples asanas, and sensory awakening practices to enhance the energy flow in the body and connect mind, body and spirit.
- Tapas:** Self-discipline or austerity (*one of the niyamas*).
- Ujjayi:** Breathing exercise that produces sound in the throat with the inhalation. Pronounced ooo-jai-ee.



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- Viniyoga:** A gentle form of flow yoga in which poses and flows are chosen to suit the student's abilities.
- Vinyasa:** Steady flow of connected yoga postures linked with breath work in a continuous movement. For example: sun salutation.
- Yamas:** In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali defined five yamas or ways to relate to others — moral conduct. They are nonviolence; truth and honesty; nonstealing; moderation; and nonpossessiveness.
- Yoga:** Derived from the Sanskrit word for "yoke" or "join together." Essentially, it means union. It is the science of uniting the individual soul with the cosmic spirit through physical disciplines (*postures*) and mental disciplines (*meditation*). Patanjali offers the best definition: "Yoga is the calming of the fluctuations of the mind."
- Yogi or Yogini:** Someone who practices yoga. Yogini is the feminine form.