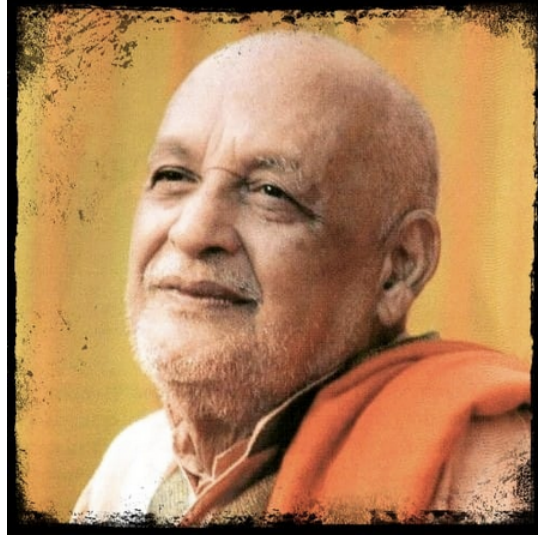


## Satyananda Yoga

### The Evolving Yoga: The Revolution in Transforming Society



**“Swami Satyananda gave yoga a new life, a new birth. He revived yoga – otherwise it would have been lost. Therefore, Swamiji Satyananda is the Patanjali of today.”**  
– Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Paramacharya, Bihar School of Yoga

Five millennia of history shrouded precious wisdom of yoga with complex teachings, conflicting lineages and myths which made yoga inaccessible to the masses. It was only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century that a movement began to unearth yogic philosophies and practices to better the lives of people by great Swamis with vision, such as Swami Vivekananda. Subsequent disciples have carried on this goal to plant the seeds of yoga around the world for the benefit of humanity, crossing cultural and religious barriers. This ambitious goal to evolve humanity one person at a time by balancing the body, mind and soul would not have been possible through the teaching of a single sage, but through a lineage of selfless Gurus.

However, one Guru stands out in his contribution in making yoga accessible to the modern man. Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923-2009) took it to heart when his Paramguru, Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati, missioned him to “spread yoga from door to door, shore to shore.” Swami Satyananda brought yoga out of philosophy and into practice and spread the understanding that yoga was a practical and scientific way to evolve people’s lives. In 1964, Swami Satyananda founded the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, India, to impart yogic training to sannyasins and householders to further his Guru’s teachings by reviving and evolving ancient yogic science to better suit the demands of those living in the current world.



## Roots of Satyananda Yoga

Roots of Bihar Yoga lie in Rishikesh where Swami Satyananda was initiated by Sri Swami Sivananda who developed the Ashtanga Yoga System, emphasizing “serve, love, give, purity, do good, be good, meditate and realize.” These principles continue to be the guiding ideologies of Bihar Yoga today. Swami Satyananda promoted and preserved the classical Vedanta tradition as a philosophy but he also saw the need of the practical benefits of Tantric yoga as means to bring relief to people suffering from physical, mental, emotional, moral, and spiritual imbalances. He was aware that yoga was not just a way to spiritual salvation for the few who have renounced the material world, but a necessary lifestyle for lay people to excel in their lives. Additionally, he understood that his integral approach to yoga must be validated by science in order to gain credibility in the modern world. Through self-discovery experimentation and scientific research conducted in laboratories in Europe and the USA, Swami Satyananda gave scientific evidence to the effectiveness of yoga. By identifying the need for change in the approach to yoga, he and his successor, Swami Niranjanananda, spread yoga across the globe.

## Integral Approach to Yoga

The Hallmark of Satyananda Yoga, Bihar Yoga, is its integral approach by incorporating various yogic traditions. Not only does this yogic system emphasize its theory in understandable and scientific terms, but designed asana, pranayama, and meditation practices so that everyone can experience the yogic process himself or herself with awareness. Swami Satyananda recognized that all yogic traditions had their benefits and limitations, and these traditions would need to be brought together in a systematized fashion for yoga to be beneficial for all people. Through self-discovery experimentation and scientific research conducted in laboratories in Europe and the USA, Swami Satyananda helped validate the effectiveness of yoga in the modern society. He designed a sequence of practices to promote physical and mental balance through hatha yoga and pranayama practices, and mental and emotional stability through meditative practices. Yoga is the state where the head, heart, and hand work in coordination. All components of Satyananda Yoga are vital in the growth of the total human being. The components represent many yoga practices and together makeup an integral whole. The sequence of practices is deliberate to attain a calculated effect on the practitioner.

There are two established schools of yoga, the Northern and Southern. The Northern school indicates the geographic area of the particular yogic traditions and focuses more on meditative practices. The Southern school originates in Southern India and emphasizes physical practices. Yogic traditions are attributed to two sources of origin, Vedanta and Tantra. Vedantic tradition is based on the ancient sacred texts, the Upanishads, which outlines the ultimate truth of the universe as non-dualistic. This tradition emphasizes the philosophical and mental aspects of yoga and the ultimate goal of the practices to be awaked to the unity of all existence. On the other hand,



Tantric tradition places more emphasis on various yoga practices, rather than philosophy, as a means to self-discovery.

Swami Satyananda's exploration of all yogic traditions leads him to identify the positive attributes of Vedic and Tantric practices and integrated the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of yoga into one complete system. Bihar Yoga adopted jnana, bhakti, karma, and raja yoga practices from the Vedic tradition.

**Jnana yoga**, the path of knowledge, is the practice of self-questioning, reflection, and conscious illumination through the study of the four pillars of knowledge, consisting of viveka, discrimination between real and unreal, vairagya, detachment, shatsampa, six virtues, and mumukshutva, yearning for truth. Jnana yoga develops the ability to observe oneself and the world with a peace of mind.

**Bhakti yoga**, the path of devotion, is useful in channeling emotions in a positive way. Karma yoga, the path of selfless service, controls the ego and reduces self-induced frustration.

**Raja Yoga**, also known as Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga, fosters awareness and understanding of human nature and encourages balance in mind, body and spirit. From the Tantric practices, kriya, kundalini, mantra and other yoga practices were incorporated into Bihar-Satyananda Yoga.

**Kriya Yoga**, once a secret practice reserved for yogis, and Kundalini yoga, practice to awaken the shakti/energy, both deepen the yoga experience.

**Mantra yoga** practice brings positive energy through alignment with sound vibrations and creates heightened awareness. Also, Hatha yoga, from the Southern school, was valuable in promoting physical and mental balance. Swami Satyananda scientifically reexamined the various yogic traditions and dedicated himself to synthesizing a comprehensive system which could accommodate everyone, regardless of age, gender, and physical fitness.

## Development & Characterization of Bihar / Satyananda Yoga Practices

The integration of all the various yoga traditions was deliberate and calculated to maximize the effect of the practices. He designed sequence of practices to promote physical and mental balance through hatha yoga and pranayama practices, and mental and emotional stability through meditative practices of pratyahara, dharna, dhyana, mantra, karma, and bhakti yoga. In effect, Swami Satyananda's integrative approach to yoga, emphasizing practices for "head, heart and hands," reflects his perception of an individual as an integral whole.

## Significant Contributions to Teaching Techniques

Swami Satyananda made significant contributions in evolving yoga to be a systematic practice yet flexible to meet the needs of all practitioners.

## Creation of Pawanmuktasana – PM Series 1-3: Accessible Therapeutic Asanas

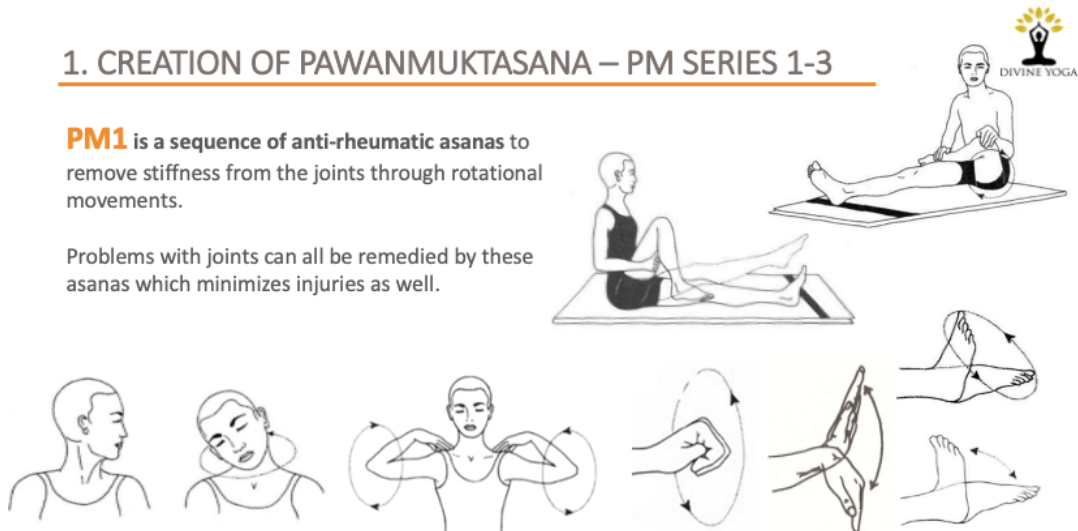
The creation of the Pawanmuktasana series (PM Series 1-3), therapeutic yogic asana practices divided into 3 groups, allowed practitioners of all physical aptitudes, to benefit from its healing properties. The word pawanmuktasana is composed of three Sanskrit words, which put together, means the posture which releases air.

### PM1

#### 1. CREATION OF PAWANMUKTASANA – PM SERIES 1-3

**PM1** is a sequence of anti-rheumatic asanas to remove stiffness from the joints through rotational movements.

Problems with joints can all be remedied by these asanas which minimizes injuries as well.

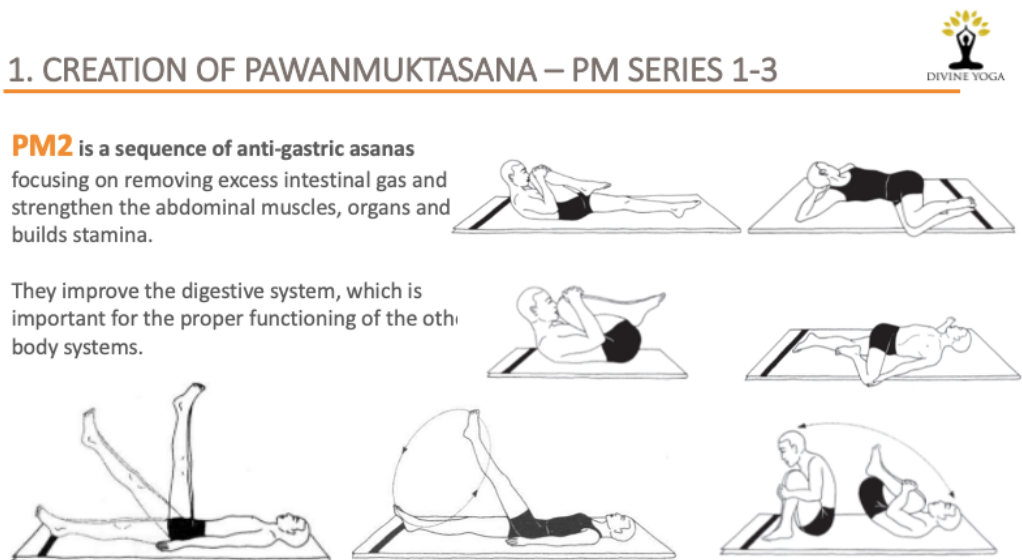


### PM2

#### 1. CREATION OF PAWANMUKTASANA – PM SERIES 1-3

**PM2** is a sequence of anti-gastric asanas focusing on removing excess intestinal gas and strengthen the abdominal muscles, organs and builds stamina.

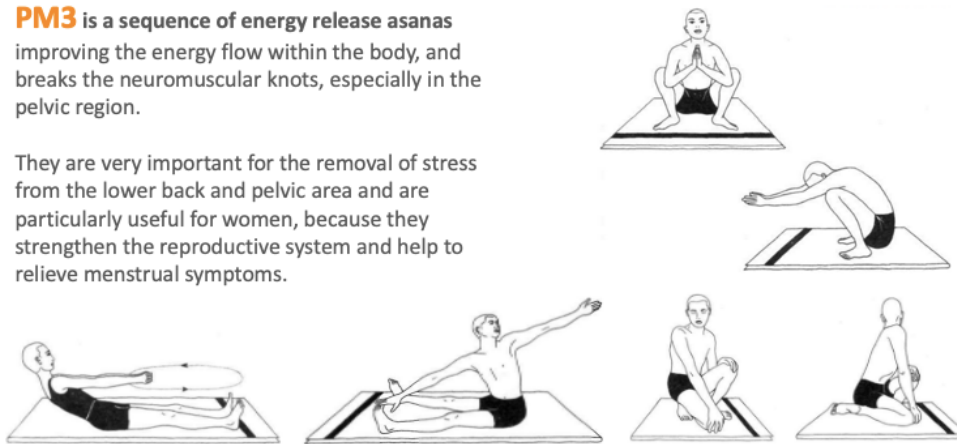
They improve the digestive system, which is important for the proper functioning of the other body systems.



## 1. CREATION OF PAWANMUKTASANA – PM SERIES 1-3

**PM3** is a sequence of energy release asanas improving the energy flow within the body, and breaks the neuromuscular knots, especially in the pelvic region.

They are very important for the removal of stress from the lower back and pelvic area and are particularly useful for women, because they strengthen the reproductive system and help to relieve menstrual symptoms.



All PM series are effective in improving the elasticity of muscles in the area of focus and thus promoting healthy circulation of blood and energy and setting forth a powerful healing force.

### Incorporating Shatkarma – 6 Yogic Purification Techniques

Six cleansing practices, shatkarma, are crucial in getting most out of asana and pranayama practices and preparing the body and mind for advanced (meditative) yogic practices. Swami Satyananda recognized the benefits of incorporating these ancient cleansing practices as a way to enhance the body's healing power and as well as a prevention against diseases. Shatkarmas consist of neti (nasal cleaning), dhauti (digestive tract cleansing), nauli (abdominal massage to promote bowel movement), basti (colon cleansing), kapalbhati (respiratory cleansing and purification of the frontal lobes) and trataka (eye cleansing through blink less gazing).

### Pranayama Sequences – Breathing Practices

Since ancient times, yogis knew that breathing practices were essential in promoting the flow of vital energy, the prana, and to control the pranic movement. The healing power of this advanced yoga practice was not well known among the general public. Bihar School of Yoga created and propagated pranayama sequences to be incorporated into daily routines to benefit all people, including invalids and the physically challenged.

### Mudras (Postures) & Bandhas (Lock Postures)

Various mudras, hand, or body postures, used during meditation and asana practices, direct energy flow to unblock specific chakras, energy centers to benefit the glands associated to the chakra. It also prevents energy loss by creating a pranic circuit.

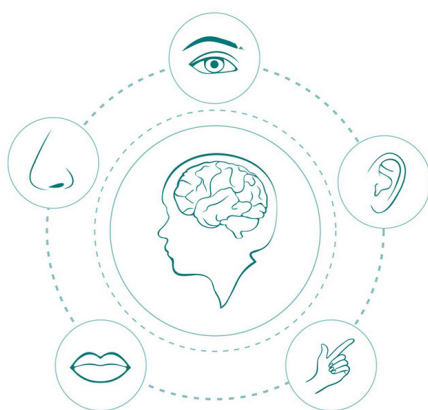
Bandhas are locks or binds incorporated in asana and pranayama practices to direct and regulate the flow of prana to certain parts of the body through a specific energy channel. For example, the chin is brought to the chest during a shoulder to create a throat lock to stimulate the thyroid gland. Swami Satyananda examined, systemized, and explained the roles of mudras and bandhas and their physiological and psychological effects on the practitioner. In combination with asana and pranayama practices, he amplified the effectiveness of the practices.

### Yoga Nidra – Yogic Sleep Practice

Yoga Nidra, also known as yogic sleep, is a unique guided pratyahara practice (withdrawing of the senses) which induces a consciousness state between sleep and wakefulness. Swami Satyananda revived, developed, and elevated Yoga Nidra from its ancient Tantric origins to bring deep and lasting relaxation to the body and mind. Benefits of this practice are multiple. The relaxation experienced during Yoga Nidra induces a meditative state and eradicates deeply rooted psychological and psychosomatic ailments. It cures insomnia and rejuvenates a person from a pranic level. Memory and learning capacity are increased to absorb external information as well as receive wisdom from within. Heightened awareness to intuition is beneficial in making the right choices in life. Yoga Nidra is one of the most important contributions that Bihar School of Yoga has made to the world and the practice has spread to all corners of the world.

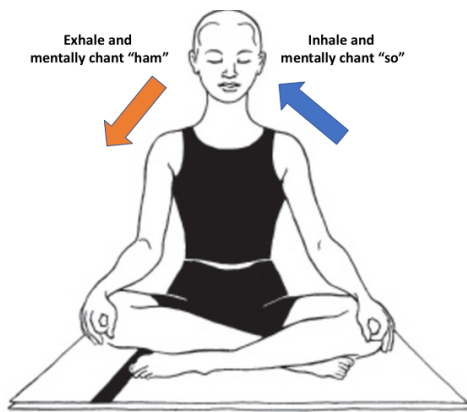
### Tantra Based Meditation Practices

Bihar yoga developed tantric meditation practices by taking a more scientific approach to spiritual knowledge. Swami Satyananda was aware that various meditation practices had different effects on people. By making multiple meditation methods available to practitioners, he increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the practices. Antar mouna, ajapa japa, dharana, prana vidya were tantra meditation practices adapted into Bihar Yoga for maximum results.



**Antar Mouna** is a pratyahara practice which is the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of the Eight Limbs of Yoga, also known as a raja yoga. Yoga Nidra was developed from this Tantra practice. Withdrawing of the 5 senses by bringing the focus to only the experience of one sense, devoid of its object, is not an absent-minded practice but a cultivation of present-minded awareness. The goal of this practice is to temporarily eliminate the external world from the mind and to withdrawal the senses. This practice, the first step towards meditation, is

done in silence, with eyes closed in a meditative posture for a length of time to restrain the awareness from going outside the self and to give full focus to the internal world.



**Ajapa japa** is the practice of conscious breathing while reciting mantra with relaxation and total awareness. Every single breath should be noticed and there should be no automatic breathing. It is a complete practice which has potential to lead to experiencing Samadhi. While sitting absolutely still in a relaxed meditative posture, the practitioner inhales air while chanting “so” and exhales while chanting “ham” consciously. The reverse practice

while chanting “hamso” is also done. The breathing must be done while visualizing the flow of prana in the ida and pingala nadis and where the two channels meet in the third eye chakra, ajna.

**Dharana** practice is the 6<sup>th</sup> stage of Patanjali’s Eight Limbs of Yoga.

It is the practice of one pointed concentration where an actual object or a visualized image in the mind is used as a focal point of awareness in order to prevent the mind from wandering. This stage of practice marks the practitioner’s arrival at “the door to the house” of meditation. A teacher can guide a student up to this stage of development. From here on forward, the student must practice and venture him or herself to the next level of meditation. An example of dharana practice is Trataka, where a practitioner stares at the tip of the wick of a lit candle flame while sitting still in a meditative posture, and later visualizing the flame with eyes closed. Through the use of visual aid to lock one’s concentration, the ability to be in the present moment, without mind chatter, can be prolonged.

**Prana vidya** practices are scientific and conscious manipulation of energy. The prana is raised through the ida and pingala nadis which correlates with the sympathetic nervous system. The prana is collected at the eyebrow center, the ajna chakra, and then redistributed by will, focusing on a particular part of the body. Vital energy can also be transferred through the recitation of mantras. Each mantra creates a specific mantra which aligns the energy of the practitioner to a higher level of consciousness and transports the energy to others.

### Integration of Kriya Yoga Techniques

Swami Satyananda’s Kriya Yoga is one of the only two Kriya systems recognized in the world along that of Paramahansa Yogananda’s practice. Originated from the secret teachings of the Tantra Shastra. The word Kriya means movement or activity and referring to the activity the practice promotes to awaken the consciousness. Bihar yoga’s Kriya system consists of pratyahara kriyas, dharana kriyas and dhyana kriyas which make up the advanced yoga practices of meditation.



## Developing Awareness

The most important aspect of Satyananda Yoga is the cultivation of awareness of the body, mind, and spirit during all yoga practices. Without awareness, asanas will be merely exercise, pranayama, only automatic breathing and meditation, a practice of daydream. Only with awareness can practitioners evolve themselves, not be controlled by their minds and to maximize the benefits of their practices. A new practitioner initially only has gross awareness of the body and obvious mental reactions such as muscle tightness or feelings of laziness may. Through dedicated practice, the gross awareness shifts to subtle awareness, detecting movement of prana energy and deeper levels of consciousness. Swami Niranjanananda developed the principal of SWAN which allows a person to meditate and keep a log of his or her Strength, Weakness, Ambition and Needs to foster self-awareness through introspection. This is a powerful and practical method to analyze one's personality and to the first step to transforming oneself.

## Emphasis on Physical & Mental Relaxation

Relaxation of the body and mind is given prime importance in order to benefit from the yoga practices. Only in a relaxed state can a person expand his or her awareness both physically and mentally.

## Explain Breathing Techniques during Asana Practices

In yoga, the coordination of the breath in asana practices enhances the flow of the vital energy to each cell in the body, and the exhalation brings deep relaxation to the physical body as well as the mind. In the Bihar yogic system, breathing techniques are verbally explained during the sequence of asana practice so that practitioners cannot forget to coordinate their breath with the movements and to do conscious breathing rather than automatic breathing. The benefits of conscious breathing are firstly, increases efficiency of the flow of circulation and thus energy. Secondly, by learning to control the breath, a person can control their personality and emotions. Just by slowing the breath, feelings such as fear and anger can be reduced. In the pranayama breathing practices, the ratio between the alternate nose breathing (nadi shodhana) and the forceful breathing (kapalbhati) are carefully considered to create a balance between their calming and energizing effects.

## Developing Drashta Bhav, Ability to Witness

Based on Patanjali's ancient text, the Yoga Sutras, Satyananda Yoga propagates drashta bhav, the ability to witness one's actions and thoughts with detachment. By cultivating awareness, the practitioner becomes the seer of his or her own actions, emotions and intents and develops personal discipline to make conscious actions rather than reacting to life's circumstances. Developing drashta bhav is the first step in understanding that your true self, the soul, is separate from your personality, and slowly begin to shed the 5 sheaths of personality, the koshas, through yogic practices.





It also fosters conscious living where people make conscientious choices daily to take charge of how they live as opposed to being victims of routine living.

## Systemized Yoga Sequences & Instructions

### Categorization of Asana & Pranayama Practices

Swami Satyananda categorized and grouped different yoga practices to create systematized and balanced sequence of practices to harmonize the body, mind, and spirit. Asana categories consists of standing, sitting, backward and forward bending, inverted and eye postures. Pranayama categories consists of cooling, heating, balancing, and tranquilizing. The categorization of the asana and pranayama practices became a valuable formula in creating an effective sequence. Although Satyananda yoga sequences were created to benefit most people, individuals with injuries or congenital disabilities must not do certain asanas. Swami Satyananda's scientific approach to yoga recognized that contraindication, physical condition that makes particular postures inadvisable, was beneficial and necessary. For example, a person with a back injury should avoid the bow pose or an individual with neck problems should not touch the chin to the neck. Thus, individualizing the sequences by giving options to postures is as important as creating a well-balanced sequence of practices in order to accommodate people of all physical conditions.

### Categorization of Class Levels

Yoga courses were structured and categorized according to students' physical aptitude to beginner, intermediate and advanced. The distinctions in these classes did not indicate the effectiveness of practices but rather the suitability for the participants. For example, a beginner class could accommodate physically untrained individuals, elderly practitioners to accomplished yogis and all of them would benefit from the class according to their level. However, newcomers may hurt themselves or feel frustrated in an advanced class where the asana practices may be too challenging for them. The time of day best conducive for yoga classes was also identified in Bihar Yoga. Early morning, while the mind is still tranquil and refreshed from the effects of night's sleep, is the best time to practice yoga. Yoga in the morning energizes the practitioner to face the day with confidence.

On the other hand, yoga class in the evening is beneficial to release the physical and mental tension accumulated throughout the day and prepare for rejuvenating sleep.

### Systemized Approach to Teaching

The approach to teaching yoga was also systematized, outlined, and explained the key points in instructing asana practices. Postures begins at a base position, which leads to a starting position, moving into a final position, then moving out of the final position back into the starting position then to the base position again, followed by a counter pose. From the base position to the final counter pose, the movements must flow smoothly without forced movements. By identifying the key points in an asana



movement, the practitioner can understand the movements and develop awareness of his or her body.

### Clear Instructions

A Teacher should give clear and consistent instructions during class to maximize the experience of yoga for the students. Bihar yoga instructions can be characterized by its awareness, approach, and attitude (the 3 A's). The instructor must identify where the student's awareness should be at any given time. The awareness should be at a particular part of the body, the breath or a chakra, an energy center. The approach to the practice must be explained stepwise so that the students understand that the practice must not be done casually but in a holistic manner. Positive attitude towards practice must be fostered in a noncompetitive atmosphere. The students should understand that the main emphasis of practicing yoga is on achieving a meditative state of mind and to live a life of excellence. The concept of conscious breathing, synchronized with movement and the scientific explanation of yogic philosophy must be explained to the students for maximum benefit. The intellectual understanding of precisely how yoga practices work deepens the experiential aspect of yoga. The physical postures and breathing practices prepare the mind to become still and free of thoughts to gain deep relaxation. In order for Satyananda yoga to transform our bodies to optimal health, to tame our minds and evolve our being, we must have firm belief and faith in this chosen path and stay committed to daily practice.

### Incorporation of Mantra

The Shanti Mantra, also known as the peace mantra, is recited at the beginning of class, along with Aum Mantra, to create a positive learning vibration between the teacher and the students. This mantra from the Upanishad also has a deeper effect on the ego and the soul of the practitioner to exist in harmony so that learning could take place. Mantra chanting also prepares the practitioner on a pranic level so that he or she can benefit more from the asana and pranayama practices.

### Yoga as a Lifestyle

Besides integrating various yoga traditions into systemized practices which are accessible in practical, safe, and effective form for everyone, Swami Satyananda also propagated the concept of yoga as a lifestyle. He said, "Yoga is not a circus. It is a lifestyle." He identified yoga as a process of continuous transformation of a person, which can be achieved by regular, systematic practices with awareness and making yoga one's lifestyle. By doing so, a person can merge with flow of his or her life and contribute creatively and meaningfully in society. Although strong resolves of the practitioners are necessary, Bihar Yoga's systemized practices made making yoga a lifestyle easier than in the past. By creating a modern step-by-step approach to yoga, Swami Satyananda triggered a revolution in transforming a society to evolve, one person at a time.



## Spirit of Evolutionary Yoga

The spirit of evolutionary yoga lives on at the Bihar School of Yoga. Swami Niranjananda Saraswati, the successor to his late Guru, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, launched a new vision for Bihar Yoga at the Jubilee celebration for the Bihar School of Yoga in 2013. The new concept of Yoga Chakra further streamlined Bihar Yoga of the past and made it even more accessible to the public without taking away from the heart of Satyananda Yoga. Yoga Chakra embodies two parts. The first half consists of the external (bahiranga) branches of yoga, comprised of hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga. The second half consists of inner (antaranga) branches of yoga, comprised of karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. Practicing only external yoga does not make yoga a practitioner's lifestyle. It is by making inner yoga one's sadhana, spiritual practice and a continuous dedication to self-evolution, that yoga becomes one's lifestyle. Thanks to Swami Satyananda's view of yoga as a process of continuous transformation in its methodology as well as of people, humanity can empower themselves through adopting the yogic lifestyle.

---

"My experience at the Bihar School of Yoga was the most transformative and precious time in my life. During my two years there, I had the privilege to gain a master's degree in Applied Yogic Science which equipped me with the medical and yogic knowledge to become a yoga teacher, specializing in yoga therapy. However, the greater gain was my personal experience of the yogic lifestyle envisioned by Swami Satyananda and the profound affect it had on me to live life meaningfully and with awareness. Since then, I have been teaching yoga for more than 13 years, dedicated to spreading the life transformative qualities of yoga.

Satyananda Yoga equipped me with the tools to teach with conviction, taught me the precise vocabulary of instruction, the confidence to design effective sequence of practices and to be able to accommodate students of all levels in a class. My trust in this system is based on my experience and having witnessed how yoga has helped students suffering from back problems, depression to serious ailments such as cancer. My faith in the teachings of my Guru, Swami Niranjananda, Swami Satyananda and their predecessors stems from their selfless dedication to refine and spread correct yoga for the benefit of all people. Their rise to prominence is a consequence of their deeds, not the goal of their actions. These Gurus have not taken any credit for themselves nor created a commercial enterprise out of their teachings. The sincerity of these great propagators of yoga gives me resolve. Their wisdom is my backbone, and I am grateful to continue teaching their legacy."



– by Master Sanjiv Chaturvedi