

I Do a Little Yoga, and I Feel Fine

Many people are using Hatha Yoga today as a means to relax and cope with stress, and increase their flexibility. Through this ancient practice, these people are also being introduced to Cosmic Sphere spirituality, perhaps without a real understanding of what this entails, or what the potential impact of what could happen if they diligently pursue development at this level.

Like many of our webinars, this webinar began with questions about Hatha Yoga from some of our Mudrashram® students. I posed these questions to Swami, and I will share with you his comprehensive and thorough reply.

Question and Answers with Swami on Hatha Yoga

Q: Is Hatha Yoga a beneficial practice for the spiritual aspirant? Are there potential harmful effects?

A: To answer this question, we have to first study the effect of what Hatha Yoga does, using a [modified] spiritual technique analysis. These are summarized below.

Level of Analysis	What Hatha Yoga Does
Anatomical effects	Stretches muscles, places gentle pressure on organs, slows breathing, enhances flexibility
Psychological effects	Releases stress, engenders pride at being able to perform advanced postures, increases the sense of efficacy that one can take actions that relieve stress
Vital (etheric body) effects	Moves life force through the channels (nadis), meridians, and chakras of the etheric body; sustained Hatha Yoga coupled with selected breathing exercises (Pranayama) and Yoga Bandhas can awaken the Kundalini Shakti energy and raise it to Cosmic Consciousness

Level of Analysis	What Hatha Yoga Does
Astral body effects	Focuses energy in the astral body from the navel center to the sacral chakra, which is the reflection of the First Cosmic Initiation in this vehicle
Mental body effects	<p>Discharge of energy from unconscious mind impressions, with progressive awakening of selected vehicles of consciousness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Chakras of the Subconscious mind [stage one] 2) Subtle Physical vehicle [stage two] 3) Psychic Realm vehicle [stage three] 4) The third vehicle of the Astral Soul [stage four] 5) The chakras of the Cosmic Physical body [stage five] 6) The Cosmic Man or Woman, whose brain center is Brahman [stage six] 7) The Form of the Astanga Yoga Yogi Preceptor [stage seven]
Volitional effects	Withdrawal of the energy of volition from the ego, activation of the etheric octave of the will that governs habit; with sustained practice coupled with Cosmic Sphere meditations, this can turn on the octave of will present in Cosmic Consciousness
Attentional effects	Attention is progressively absorbed into the bands of the mind that Hatha Yoga activates [as described in mental body effects]
Attentional principle effect	Sustained Hatha Yoga to the fourth stage awakens the third vehicle of the Astral Soul—this creates a corridor of attunement between the black point center and the attentional principle, which leads the attentional principle up into union with Cosmic Consciousness. When the vehicle of the Yogi Preceptor is awakened during the seventh stage, one can guide the attentional principle of others up to the Yogi Preceptor form that dwells in the eighth Cosmic Chakra within them.

Level of Analysis	What Hatha Yoga Does
Effects on the spirit	Awareness is shunted away from focus on the spirit, and ultimately lifted into union with Cosmic Consciousness. At this stage, one becomes identified with this nucleus of identity, and establishes a spiritual relationship with the Yogi Preceptor supervising one's spiritual development, and the Divine Father (Yogeshwar) who empowers this Initiate—this relationship can become deeply devotional.
Effects on the ensouling entity	Sustained practice progressively shifts identification away from ego (Ahamkar), Soul Spark (Jivan Atma), Soul (Atma), and Monad (Paramatma), and re-identifies with Cosmic Consciousness

The Purpose of Hatha Yoga

From this analysis, you can see that sustained practice of Hatha Yoga will activate the Cosmic Consciousness nucleus of identity, and lift attention and awareness into the First Cosmic Initiation.

This is actually Hatha Yoga's intended purpose: to awaken Cosmic Consciousness and activate this zone of the mind. In practitioners, who do Hatha Yoga intensively with Pranayama, plus mental concentration and contemplation upon Cosmic Consciousness, it leads to identification with this essence.

Spiritual Work Outside the Cutting Edge of Spirituality

One concern we have, from the standpoint of Integral meditation, is that Cosmic Consciousness is not the cutting edge of spirituality; to activate and cultivate this state of awareness is to remain in an altered state of consciousness that is outside the cutting edge of spirituality.

This creates a false sense of identification that is outside the innate core of identity that the Divine Life and Will—which we call the Alaya—animates. [By making Cosmic Consciousness the focus of meditation] one does something different than the innate Purpose of the Soul; one pursues an alternative spiritual objective.

Instead of attainment of the seed of calling aligned with the cutting edge of spirituality, [this Cosmic-focused work] pursues union with Brahman, and assumption of the form of Mastery of the First Cosmic Initiation, the Yogi Preceptor.

Visiting Cosmic Consciousness

There is no harm in familiarizing oneself with the Cosmic Consciousness nucleus of identity that occurs during longer sessions of Hatha Yoga, as one might perform during intensive practice at an ashram or Yoga Retreat, provided that this is framed within the larger objectives of meditation. *In Integral meditation, we unfold the Cosmic Consciousness nucleus of identity in conjunction with the Astral Soul, when this becomes established as the cutting edge of spirituality.*

As part of the Mudrashram® Advanced Course in Meditation, we show aspirants, Cosmic Consciousness, the Astral Soul, and each higher octave of spirituality up to Satchitananda, the Infinite Consciousness within. *We do not recommend that aspirants practice Hatha Yoga, and related breathing exercises and meditation techniques to the point where their attention becomes fixed upon and identified with their Cosmic Consciousness nucleus of identity.*

Optimal Uses of Hatha Yoga

Using Hatha Yoga for its anatomical, psychological, and vitalizing etheric effects can assist the aspirant prepare the body for meditation; and it can promote the circulation of life force (Prana), which can enhance health and vitality, and temporarily elevate the mood. *Short-term practice of Hatha Yoga in a daily routine should not be harmful, if it is delimited to these aims and purposes.*

Potential Risks of Sustained Hatha Yoga Use

Another concern we have about Hatha Yoga is that it needs to be correctly practiced to avoid injury to the joints and spinal column. Anecdotally, we have heard of several instances where people have injured themselves doing Hatha Yoga over-zealously—and these injuries can persist for many years after the original trauma.

We also caution that those who do Hatha Yoga in conjunction with intensive Pranayama, and techniques that actively unfold Cosmic Consciousness along its track—such as mantras, Kriya Yoga, and Kundalini Yoga methods—can run the risk of interfering with or suppressing personality expression, and precipitating kundalini syndromes.

This dark side of this First-Cosmic-Initiation-focused work is seldom discussed; it is a genuine concern when many young people lose touch with their life direction and purpose, and pursue the horizons of bliss consciousness instead. Those who awaken the kundalini prematurely and lift it to the heights of the Cosmic Consciousness [through injudicious use of Hatha Yoga and related meditation techniques] can experience full-blown kundalini syndromes.

Please note, it is not our intention to frighten anyone away from doing Hatha Yoga. Rather we urge you to understand what you are doing when you perform these practices. We wish to reveal to you the underlying purpose, these practices were originally disseminated, and to provide to you some guidelines to practice these powerful methods safely.

Levels of Involvement with Hatha Yoga

Those whose cutting edge of spirituality is at the Subtle and Planetary bands of the Great Continuum may certainly want to practice Hatha Yoga; they can be involved with this practice to different degrees. We characterize five levels of involvement with Hatha Yoga, ranging from low to high. These are described on the next page.

Intensity of involvement	Markers of this level of involvement
Low	Physical stretching and relaxation only, using Hatha Yoga to develop flexibility and relieve stress
Low-Moderate	(a) Activation of the chakras of the Subconscious mind, with stimulation of the Kundalini Shakti; (b) experiencing deep relaxation and mental stillness and serenity; (c) getting into the habit of doing Hatha Yoga daily
Moderate	(a) Involvement in Vedic teachings, such as becoming a practitioner of Ayurveda or Vedic Astrology; (b) gaining knowledge of Yoga terminology and learning Sanskrit; (c) learning about Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses; (d) embracing lifestyle changes, such as wearing new Yoga clothing, re-making the home environment to be like an ashram, or modifying the diet; (e) adoption of East Indian culture in behavior, such as removing shoes, greeting others with a Namaste, and using Indian terms as part of their vocabulary; (f) taking a new Hindu “spiritual” name; or (g) they may seek to become a teacher of Hatha Yoga at this level of involvement
Moderate-high	Through moderately intensive practice of Hatha Yoga, their astral body awakens and they enter into states of deep trance (Samadhi). During these states of trance, they may activate their psychic powers, and begin to do psychic readings. They may have contact with guides; or receive revelations, visions, and intuitive insights during their Hatha Yoga and meditation sessions. They may describe having visions of the Yogi Preceptor or Guru, or of different gods and goddesses.
High	Through sustained intensive practice of Hatha Yoga, they experience union with Cosmic Consciousness and higher centers of the First Cosmic Initiation. With continued practice, this leads to absorption into Cosmic Consciousness, and identification with it. These ones may remain in this altered state of consciousness for extended periods, and may come to view the world and their lives as an illusion or a dream (Maya).

The first two levels of involvement [low and low-moderate] are certainly benign, and have little impact on the aspirant.

Moderate involvement marks the incorporation of cultural and lifestyle elements, and is associated with individuals becoming involved in a Yoga community. This does not usually involve problems for the aspirant, provided they do not live in a part of the world where there is intolerance, ill will, and outright suppression of these Yogic beliefs and lifestyle.

At the moderate-high stage, the psychic centers are activated. Here odd admixtures of New Thought and New Age beliefs are amalgamated with Astanga Yoga philosophy, which gives rise to creative and syncretic adaptations of Hatha Yoga, and highly imaginative understandings of Yoga teachings.

Since aspirants must spend some time in the Psychic Realm as part of their spiritual journey—and many dance with its illusions—using Hatha Yoga and breathing exercises to raise their attention into the Psychic Realm usually does not present a problem.

Until the Soul rises above the Psychic Realm, however, and develops the requisite discernment to separate the wheat of genuine spiritual wisdom from the chaff of imagination, those subject to Psychic Realm illusions can adopt beliefs that range from odd to frankly delusional. [We recommend that those who are interested in learning more about the challenges of this realm, and how to overcome them, read our book, *Finding Safe Passage through the Worlds of Illusion.*]

Where problems do arise is when aspirants reach the level of high involvement with their Hatha Yoga practice, and become re-identified with Cosmic Consciousness. Those [whose cutting edge of spirituality is in the Subtle or Planetary Bands of the Continuum of Consciousness] who reach the deepest stage of involvement with Hatha Yoga, use it as a means to gain egress to the First Cosmic Initiation.

This can lead to a variety of outcomes affecting personal functioning, including:

1. Some aspirants remain in an altered state of consciousness for extended periods of time, with dissociation and detachment from their human life.
2. Some experience interference with personality functioning, which can result in shutting down of reality testing, numbing of feelings, difficulties with thinking and solving problems, abandoning personal goals, and trouble with making independent decisions [Individuals in this state may be unduly influenced by their spiritual preceptor, who can re-shape these aspirants' entire lives].
3. In some susceptible individuals, kindling of the symptoms of kundalini syndromes, ranging from mild to incapacitating, can occur.
4. Some may go through derealization and depersonalization experiences, where their body, their life, or the entire world, seem unreal.
5. [If Hatha Yoga is combined with transformational methods that transform Cosmic Consciousness along its track], some may have marked difficulty in returning their attentions to the waking state of awareness—these ones may sense that they are locked or fixed in Cosmic Consciousness, and cannot separate themselves from this state.
6. Some may increase their devotion and love for God; have a yearning to have the inner vision, or be in the presence of, their spiritual Master; or an overwhelming desire to draw near to God and gain union with the Divine. This complete focus on spiritual aims leads to a profound lack of interest in worldly pursuits.

7. Some may develop a worldview based on this state of consciousness, by which they utilize Yoga Philosophy to explain the world. [This may contribute to a sense of alienation from others in society, who cannot relate to or understand this worldview.]

Perhaps only one to two percent of aspirants take Hatha Yoga to the extreme of high involvement. For those that do take it to this level, we commonly see a marked impact on their personal functioning. [We note that similar patterns arising from remaining in altered states of consciousness appear in members of religious cults, who evidence similar interference with their personal functioning. We discuss the experiences of those who get involved with religious cults in our book, *Religions, Cults, and Terrorism: What the Heck Are We Doing?*]

Appropriate Levels of Involvement with Hatha Yoga

Since Hatha Yoga comprises the third step of the Astanga Yoga system that Sage Patanjali developed, and it is anchored in the Plenum of the First Cosmic Initiation, intensive immersion in this practice may not be suitable for those whose cutting edge of spirituality dwells in the Subtle and Planetary Bands of the Continuum of Consciousness.

We recommend that aspirants do not let their Hatha Yoga practice envelop their lives to the state of high involvement until their cutting edge of spirituality has moved into the First Cosmic Initiation. When this occurs, these Cosmic Sphere practices can be integrated into the Soul's consciousness without personality disruption seen in those who jump ahead into Cosmic Consciousness.

Other levels of involvement [low to moderate-high] usually are not problematical, and can be readily accommodated within the Soul's sphere of integration and oversight.



Q: What about some of the other practices that go along with Hatha Yoga, such as chanting, breath techniques (Pranayama), meditations, mantras, and worship ceremonies (Arati).

A: Chanting lifts your attention and ultimately unites it with the spiritual essence you invoke with the chant. So if you do a chant invoking Shiva, you'll go into union with a form of Shiva. If you do a Sufi chant, you'll have visions of Islamic spiritual realms.

Chanting is not a problem, unless it is keyed to unfold to unfold an aspect of your spiritual nature, using a seed (bija) mantra. So there are certain bija mantras that you can activate through chanting that will unfold your Cosmic Consciousness, or a Supracosmic seed atom upon one of the Supracosmic Path. [If you activate these aspects of your nature and develop them to a high degree, they can introduce significant spiritual imbalances].

Invocations of different gods and goddesses, or aspects of the Divine contained within these chants do not present a problem, if your conscience permits you to invoke other aspects of the Divine than that worshipped in the religion with which you affiliate. For example, if you are part of a monotheistic faith—Judaism, Christianity, or Islam—you might have a major conflict about calling upon a Hindu or Buddhist deity. [We teach chanting in the Mudrashram® Master Course in Meditation and the Accelerated Meditation Program to show course participants how chanting can direct attention to very different inner spaces.]

We introduce students to Pranayama in the Mudrashram® Advanced Course in Meditation, noting that many of these practices are also imbedded in the Plenum of the First Cosmic Initiation. As such, they are designed to lift your attention into union with Cosmic Consciousness.

As we have previously discussed, there is nothing wrong with visiting Cosmic Consciousness in meditation, provided you do not remain there for extended periods of time.

In general, short 10 to 15 minute periods of Pranayama can be used beneficially to charge up the etheric body, to promote relaxation and stress release, and to calm the mind. Sustained use of Pranayama, with sessions lasting 15 minutes to an hour or more, with long cycles of practice, invariably will lift and fix attention in Cosmic Consciousness.

The capstone of Pranayama, Kriya Yoga, is a transformational technique designed to unfold Cosmic Consciousness. [We introduce Kriya Yoga in the Mudrashram® Advanced Course in Meditation.] We recommend that you do not utilize Kriya Yoga practices until your cutting edge of spirituality is established in the First Cosmic Initiation.

[Kriya Yoga should not be confused with the Hatha Yoga kriyas, which are methods designed to cleanse the stomach, intestines, nasal passages, and respiratory tract.]

Meditation, particularly the practices of fixation or concentration (Dharana), monitoring (Vipassana or mindfulness), contemplation (Dhyana), absorption into and union with the object of meditation (Samadhi), or using the breath to unite with a spiritual essence (Laya) that are taught in the Yoga schools are beneficial. These methods, once learned, can be adapted for spiritual work at any level of the Continuum of Consciousness. [In Mudrashram®, we train you in these practices, and show you how to apply them at your cutting edge of spirituality.]

Mantras have many usages. [Chants are actually a variety of mantra practice.] So what we have said about chanting, we can say about mantras. If you use a bija mantra, it will unfold a nucleus of identity or an ensouling entity; if this doesn't operate at the cutting edge of spirituality, it can introduce imbalances.

As for worship ceremonies (Arati or Puja), invocation and worship of Yogi Preceptors, Supracosmic Gurus, Sat Gurus, and different aspects of the Divine, this is a matter of personal conscience. Just as electricity flows through any socket that taps into a live electric current, however you worship God—in whatever form—draws down the Divine Light and Grace.

People have had their desires fulfilled, their prayers answered, have had healings, and have had resolutions of intractable problems calling upon the God of the Jews, of the Christians, of the Muslims, of different Buddhist and Hindu deities; and invoking various Yogi Preceptors, Cosmic Masters, Gurus of different Supracosmic Paths, or Sat Gurus upon one of the Transcendental Paths.

So if that is the way you love God, continue to love God in that way. As you spiritually evolve, you will see the many beautiful forms of God at each level of the Continuum.



Have you ever experienced merging with Cosmic Consciousness while practicing Hatha Yoga? What was that like? How did you react to this?

What is the deepest stage of mental body absorption you have experienced doing Hatha Yoga?

What's the greatest intensity of involvement with Hatha Yoga you have had in your lifetime? If you are still practicing, where are you now in your intensity of involvement?

Have you ever entered union with Cosmic Consciousness using the other methods that Yogi Preceptors teach?

Have you ever experienced any of the outcomes that affected your personality functioning, as a result of practicing intensive Hatha Yoga or these other Cosmic-level techniques?

Did you recover from any negative impacts? Or are you still dealing with them?

Thank you for attending our webinar today!

