

## Raja Yoga The Mystics Path

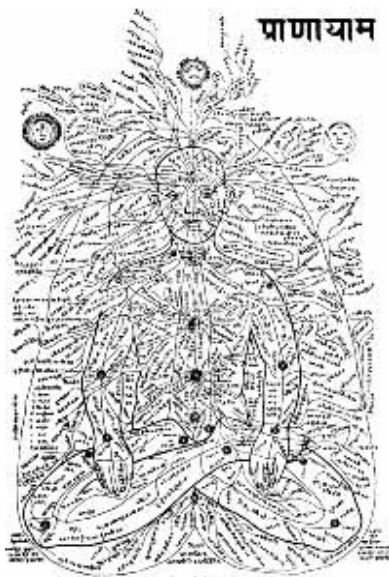
**Raja Yoga** is one of the four *Yogas* of Hinduism (the other being *Jnana*, *Bhakti*, and *Karma*). The term, “raja” is derived from the Sanskrit, "royal union" or "king," referring to principal concern of *Raja Yoga* with the cultivation of the “mind” (hence “king” aspect of one’s being) through meditation (such as *pranayama* and *dhyana*) to reach a meditative state of *samadhi* – quiet state of blissful awareness. It is the most esoteric *yoga*, actively practiced by the fewest Hindus. It is referred to throughout the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and especially in chapter 6.

As with the other forms of Yoga, the ultimate goal of *Raja Yoga* is to seek to have one achieve a state of liberation and obtain *Moksha*. But *Raja Yoga* encompasses and differentiates itself from other forms of *Yogas* by using meditation to avoid mental obsessions and false mental states – to limit the oscillation of the “mind.” One’s thoughts and feelings, one’s perceptions and memories can just as easily distort and veil the true Self, becoming obsessed with attachments and desires. As a meditative method, *Raja Yoga* seeks to dissolve these mental barriers in order to further one’s acquaintance with Reality, and control the life-forces of the Universe to better realize the universal Self.



Statue of Shiva in the yogic  
lotus position - Bangalore, India

Underlying this meditative strategy is an awareness of the relationship of the “mind” to the life-force that permeates the Universe, as well as the doorways and pathways within one’s Self through which this force flows. It is a strategy that attempts to penetrate the various levels of overt material reality, such as the physical body and consciousness, the levels of the *Maya*, and to realize the infinite and eternal Self, the *Atman*. *Prana* is the Sanskrit word for this vital, life-sustaining force, present in all living beings, the vital energy in the Universe. *Chakras* are the doorways and centers of activity in the human body through which *prana* is received, assimilated and expressed. The Sanskrit word, “*chakra*” literally translates as *wheel* or *disk*, and refers to a spinning sphere of *prana* bioenergetic and metaphysical activity emanating throughout the Self. There are seven of these “wheels” aligned in a column from the base of the spine to the top of the head. *Nadis* are the pathways of this *prana* energy. Sanskrit for “channel” or “vein,” *nadis* are the channels through which the *prana* energies of the subtle body are said to flow and are connected at the seven points of intensity, the *chakras*. To become aware of the metaphysical and biophysical energy flowing through these pathways and intersecting at these doorways is an essential key to understanding the Ultimate Self, and the health and well-being of the human self.

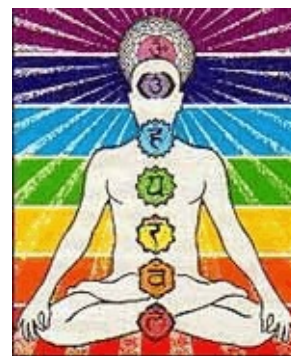


Ancient symbolic representation  
of the Yogic 'Nadi' model

## Raja Yoga

There many Raja Yoga techniques aimed at controlling the mind, two of which are *Pranayama* and *Dhyana*. ***Pranayama***, referred to in the *Bhagavad Gita* 4:49, focuses on regulating one's breath to integration of mind and body. "Yama" means "to gain control" over or even "suspension" of breath to control the life-force, *Prana*. As a *Raja Yoga* technique, *Pranayama* is composed of two parts, the *Prana* and *Apana*. The *Prana* is the inhaling of a breath, converting the oxygen into life force, while *Apana* is the exhaling of a breath, removing the impurities from the body. In these very controlled exercises, only to be done under the guidance of a master teacher, one is able to begin to focus the mind on curtailing attachments and realize the Self, and manifest the life-force of the Self.

***Dhyana***, referred to in chapter 6 of *Bhagavad Gita*, is a meditative technique in which one obtains a non-dualistic state of consciousness in which the mind becomes still though the person remains conscious. Assuming the "lotus position" and concentrating on the *Aum* (Om) sound is one such *Dhyana* technique. Use of *Dhrupad music* to access the *chakras* is another technique. In so doing, one seeks to reduce his or her wants – attachments to objects, subtle desires and cravings, laziness, gluttony – all obstacles in meditation, and to cultivate dispassion.



The seven *chakras*

The ultimate meditative state sought in Raja Yoga is ***Samadhi*** – the quiet state of blissful awareness, a superconscious state. The etymology of this Hindi word comes from *sam* (together or integrated), *a* (towards), and *dha* (to get, to hold), thus referring to an acquired integration, truth, or awareness.

In his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda (1883-1952), a spiritual saint of India gives this stirring description of *Samadhi* consciousness:



My body became immovably rooted; breath was drawn out of my lungs as if by some huge magnet. Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage, and streamed out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore. The flesh was as though dead, yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body, but embraced the circumambient atoms. People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery. The roots of plants and trees appeared through a dim transparency of the soil; I discerned the inward flow of their sap.

The whole vicinity lay bare before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical sight, simultaneously all perceptive. Through the back of my head I saw men strolling

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far down Rai Ghat Road, and noticed also a white cow who was leisurely approaching. When she reached the space in front of the open ashram gate, I observed her with my two physical eyes. As she passed by, behind the brick wall, I saw her clearly still.

All objects within my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion pictures. My body, Master's, the pillared courtyard, the furniture and floor, the trees and sunshine, occasionally became violently agitated, until all melted into a luminescent sea; even as sugar crystals, thrown into a glass of water, dissolve after being shaken. The unifying light alternated with materializations of form, the metamorphoses revealing the law of cause and effect in creation.

An oceanic joy broke upon calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless Bliss; His body is countless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth, solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes. The entire cosmos, gently luminous, like a city seen afar at night, glimmered within the infinitude of my being. The sharply etched global outlines faded somewhat at the farthest edges; there I could see a mellow radiance, ever undiminished. It was indescribably subtle; the planetary pictures were formed of a grosser light.

The divine dispersion of rays poured from an Eternal Source, blazing into galaxies, transfigured with ineffable auras. Again and again I saw the creative beams condense into constellations, then resolve into sheets of transparent flame. By rhythmic reversion, sextillion worlds passed into diaphanous luster; fire became firmament.

I cognized the center of the empyrean as a point of intuitive perception in my heart. Irradiating splendor issued from my nucleus to every part of the universal structure. Blissful amrita, the nectar of immortality, pulsed through me with a quicksilver-like fluidity. The creative voice of God I heard resounding as Aum, the vibration of the Cosmic Motor.

Suddenly the breath returned to my lungs. With a disappointment almost unbearable, I realized that my infinite immensity was lost. Once more I was limited to the humiliating cage of a body, not easily accommodative to the Spirit. Like a prodigal child, I had run away from my macrocosmic home and imprisoned myself in a narrow microcosm.

It is of interest to note the name of the final state of realized *samadhi* is when the person's consciousness departs from the physical body at death and is liberated in a state of *Moksha*. It is ***Mahasamadhi***, literally meaning "*great samadhi*." Every infinitesimal piece of attachment or *karma* is completely surrendered and dissolved into the Ultimate. The individual transcends to worlds beyond *karma* and *maya*, and returns to *Brahman*, merging into the transcendental Bliss of *Atman*.