

## The meaning of “Ha” and “Tha”

As you are probably familiar with, the term “hatha yoga” is generally used to refer to the physical branch of Yoga.

The syllable ‘ha’ denotes the pranic (vital) force governing the physical body and ‘tha’ denotes the chitta (mental) force, thus making Hatha Yoga a catalyst to an awakening of the two energies that govern our lives. In a subtle way, this is what many of the practices of hatha yoga aim to do—systematically awakened (through our physical body) and control (with our mental force) the flow of the life force (prana) through its many channels (nadis).

When water is channeled through canals to irrigate fields, increasing the hydraulic pressure in any given channel washes out the debris blocking the flow, and when all the channels are clear and flowing equally, the whole earth starts to bloom. Likewise, when all the subtle channels of the pranic fields (nadis) are clear and responsive, our life force can flourish. Nadis are psychic passages of energy which can be compared with nerves in the physical body, which irrigate our nervous system and allow the body to respond to impulses appropriately, in a balanced way.

In the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Svatmarama speaks of how the physical yoga practices can be seen to impact the flow of energy in the body. In particular, he discusses how they relate to what some Yogis considered the two primary energy channels of individuals prior to enlightenment. These main channels are known as *ida* and *pingala*, and can be compared to the complementary forces that make up life: male and female, generative and receptive, hot and cold, etc. Svatmarama then goes on to explain that part of what the hatha yogi is doing can be thought of as balancing these two energies – in a sense, he says, uniting the “solar” and the “lunar” elements of the body. This is probably what leads to a common mistake, which is to think that “Ha” means sun and “Tha” means moon. It is a linguistic non-sense.

Hatha really means balance of Ida and Pingala Nadis, or balancing of mental energy of Ida and Vital energy of Pingala. Ida Nadi can be compared with Parasympathetic Nervous system and Pingala Nadi can be compared with Sympathetic Nervous System. So Hatha Yoga practices result in balancing the entire nervous system.

To summarise, the basic purpose of Hatha Yoga is to purify the Ida (ending in the left nostril) and Pingala (ending in the right nostril) and then uniting these 2 forces with the third Psychic Nadi Sushumna, which carries Kundalini to Ajna Chakra (the eyebrow center or “mind eye”).”

At a practical level, in an ideal natural yogic lifestyle, we would wake up just before the sun does. We would then (and this is the part we can still carry through!) notice which nostril we are breathing most freely through – and here we would have it. Then each morning, we would step out of bed with the foot corresponding to the active flow, reminding ourselves that ‘as we breathe so shall we act’ – whether consciously or unconsciously. Will it be the right nostril, and Pingala Nadi, the river of energy related to the sun, our left brain hemisphere functions, sympathetic nervous system and practical masculinity which is most influencing us today at “sunrise”? Or will it be the left nostril, Ida Nadi, the river of energy related to the moon, right brain, the parasympathetic nervous system and psychic femininity which is going to dominate today? We would then clear our bodies and minds of

accumulated waste products through various purification practices, practise a few postures (sun salutation is a good sequence); and then settle for breakfast. Just let's try it!

In hatha yoga we are fully aware as we breathe in and we breathe out. Some attitudes and actions are most successful when Pingala Nadi is dominating our personality and energy level, more reflective attitudes and actions are more fruitful with Ida Nadi; and if we maintain awareness, we can synchronise our own internal rhythms with the macrocosm.

Finally, according to Michael Lloyd-Billington, the word "hatha" also means "effort," "force," or "exertion. So "hatha yoga" technically refers to an approach to Yoga which begins with exertion or physical effort. Traditionally, we would start with conspicuous effort (i.e., the poses), then work toward more subtle practices, (breath-work, muscular and energetic "locks" designed to guide the flow of energy, etc.), before finally moving to the more internal level of meditation. We do need to apply a consistent effort if we hope to advance in our practices.

*Hatha is the branch of yoga in which we use the physical practices – including postures, breath work, dietary selection, and other "external" means – to build better control of our thoughts in order to move ultimately toward one-mindedness. As part of this, we strive to balance the seemingly-dualistic aspects of body and mind, with the understanding that these polarities are a natural part of life and are always in fluctuation. In this awareness, we strive to move toward greater harmony while also increasing our understanding of and identification with the greater principles that transcend these dualities....*  
(OCTOBER 15, 2015 , MICHAEL LLOYD-BILLINGTON)

