



The Balance of Effort and Surrender in Hatha Yoga

by Sadhvi Parananda

I'd like to focus on two concepts in hatha yoga as they relate to attaining mastery. They are abhyasa, and vairagya.

Abhyasa literally means "consistent, determined, disciplined effort." This concept applies to all levels of hatha yoga practice: physical, mental and emotional, and spiritual.

When dealing with the physical body in asana practice, our muscles must "work". They must contract to make a movement. For example, in a forward bend, the hip flexor muscles contract, and their effort creates movement.

On the psychological and spiritual levels abhyasa is also functioning. We make the effort in the forward bend to move in spite of the resistance we may feel. We discipline ourselves to make the effort to go into the pose, despite tight hamstrings, and we do it over and over again to develop our practice.

On the spiritual level, the consistency with which we practice our asanas helps to purify our inner chemistry. The discipline it takes to make the effort directs our mind inward, and refines us on all levels of our existence.

Vairagya, on the other hand, means surrender or letting go.

On the physical level, it's the stretching of muscles and connective tissues. Using the example of a forward bend, the hamstrings must release (or attempt to) in order to go into the pose.

Addressing the psychological and spiritual levels, the simple act of releasing the struggle we may feel within our body when attempting a deep muscular stretch is a palpable example for us of how to let go of our judgments and perceptions.

A useful hatha yoga practice must balance abhyasa and vairagya. We work in an asana and we let go. We practice and at the same time we relinquish any notion we have of attainment. Through effort and surrender we listen and hear the pulsation of Life within our bodies, within our minds and emotions, and within our inner Self. We observe the pulsation and we allow it to explain to us its own essence.

Finally, having moved into an asana, we hold the pose. While holding, we purposefully balance effort and surrender to attain a state in which we are totally still. When we reach this still point, the body, mind, and spirit are quiet for a moment. Then we begin to feel a new energy emerge inside us. And from that state, we can enter into the experience of the highest state – meditation.