

## **The Purpose of Yoga**

**Hatha Yoga (the science of yoga asanas or postures) is taught from a standpoint of its benefits to the body in many schools. From this point of view, yoga postures, as a system for achieving longevity and radiant health, stand supreme.**

**Old age and sickness settle first in the joints and the spinal discs. Medical studies have revealed that these spinal discs often begin to show signs of degeneration as early as thirty years of age. Yoga postures make the joints flexible, stretching and irrigating the spinal vertebrae, keeping them youthful even late into old age.**

**The postures promote the free flow of energy throughout the nervous system and assist in the elimination of toxins and poisons from the joints and body parts, where these foreign elements tend to settle, sometimes permanently. These yoga postures exert a beneficial pressure on varied glands and internal organs, flushing and stimulating them. Even a small amount of practice can produce amazing improvements in one's health.**

**For these reasons Hatha Yoga is growing in popularity in the West. However, more is involved in asanas than just the promotion of physical health. Through yoga postures one can improve mental outlook, achieve a more harmonious emotional life, and develop more spiritual awareness.**

**Certain body postures are associated with certain mental attitudes. When one is discouraged the shoulders tend to roll forward. When feeling stubborn a person may jut the chin out. Even the pattern of breathing is affected by mental attitude. Suppression of natural feelings can be indicated by tension in the upper chest. Just as mental attitudes affect the body so can body postures affect the mind. Tense abdominal muscles can induce mental anxiety. A bent spine and slumped shoulders can induce moodiness. In a Hatha Yoga class the instructors utilize these relationships. As a benefit of learned relaxation serenity is introduced to a worried mind. Working on oneself physically to influence the mind is a simple undertaking, e.g., change the breathing pattern and one's mental outlook may be changed as well.**

**The yoga asanas are very different from familiar exercise. They emphasize relaxation as well as making one aware of tension. Unlike most exercise they do not excite; rather, they eliminate excitement from the system. A yoga posture is not "done" because the physical position has been assumed. It is resting in the pose that develops the physical health and calms the system. One acts always from a center of calm mental and physical awareness. It is not Yoga if one strains or forces oneself into a suggested position.**

**In summary, the yoga postures are not only a series of physical positions but exercises in mental awareness. The Yogi is deliberate in every movement, feeling every muscle. Only through conscious awareness of one's own body can tensions be felt – once felt they can be eliminated with yoga practices.**