

Yoga Course Recommendations for Kids and Youngsters

- Sudhanva Char

Yoga is for all people regardless of age. However, there is a compelling need to impart instruction in Yoga to children in the age group of 5 to 16 years. We can start even earlier, if they can understand the instruction and can do the exercises. If they see adults do them, this will have a demonstration effect on them, just like if the father does *sandhya* and *thiruaradhana* the children try to imitate him. Sooner they learn, better it is for them because they learn about the anatomy and physiology of their mind and body at a very young age. This knowledge of how *Sriman Narayana* has engineered the mind and body in an astonishingly smart way, how He has structured them and how the mind and the body function as an integral unit, together with the Spirit, is really awesome! In view of this, the very First lesson in any Yoga curriculum should therefore be this holistic way of looking at ourselves, the mind, body and the spirit working together seamlessly like a melodious million-piece orchestra that still makes great music.

When children and others acquire and own this knowledge, they get empowered like never before. Later in life, it will be very helpful to them in preventing themselves from falling sick. And in case they do get sick, they will be in the know of what simple exercises they can do to get well sooner than later. A regular Yoga practicing student will be able to develop a robust immune system that is better equipped to repel vigorously viral, bacterial or fungal attacks on the physique. Also in sickness, it promotes the body's self-correcting efficiency through a process known as homeostasis, with or, even without medication and interventions. Children would be able to fall back on this wisdom and learn for themselves how simple it is to remain in robust mental and bodily health. They will also learn how quickly and effortlessly they can return to health in case they get sick. This is the reason *A:pasthamba Rishi* prescribed that *brahmmo:pade:sham* should be imparted ideally by the age of 7 or 8 years of age which includes the elements of *pra:naya:ma* or breathing exercises and *hatha yoga* or physical exercise.

It is advisable not to go for any brand names in Yoga at the

beginner level. It should be generic, (plain vanilla!) yoga as it has come down to us for several millennia. There are of course many individual outstanding teachers with their own distinct styles and *ghara:anas*. It is sagacious to combine the best features of all great teachers and offer Best Practices Yoga that is steeped in tradition.

The Second imperative lesson in a Beginner's Yoga class should be one of acquainting him or her about *Ashta:nga Yoga*. There are eight limbs of Yoga and each one is important: *Yama, Niyama, A:sana, Pra:na:ya:ma, Pratyaha:ra,Dha:rana, Dhya:na, and Sama:dhi*. The last three are intuitive and a yoga practioner will learn them instinctively after acquiring the first five. Each one of the first five is a prerequisite for the next limb. For instance, *Yama* and *Niyama* are prerequisites for a sound learning and practice of *A:sana*. *Yamas* are the moral imperatives such as *Satyam vada, dharmam chara*, and they number five: *Ahimsa, Satya, Astheya, Brahmacharya, and Aparigraha*. These are the rules of conduct in dealing with the external world. To deal with oneself there are another five *Niyamas* are rules: *Santo:sha, Soucha, Sva:dhya:ya, Ta:pa, and Iswara Pranidhana*. Learning the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* is the most difficult part of Yoga. The rest, relatively speaking, are much easier.

In the area of *A:sana*, it is good to keep in mind that there are hundreds of *a:sanas* and numerous variations of each. One can spend an entire life-time learning them and that is not necessary. Yoga for children can definitely go for some exercises that are more difficult than for less flexible adults. Once children acquire proficiency in those *a:sanas* their bodies will remember them because the memories are embedded in the mind. For want of practice, if the students forget even the names of those exercises, and they can start doing them decades later too.

For a beginners' yoga course, besides the fundamentals outlined above, we recommend the following **syllabus** for *Prajna* kid's classes:

A: Introduction to Yoga

Start each class with *A:cha:rya Thanian, an invocation poem of our graceful Spiritual Teacher* .

Explain *Ashta:nga Yo:ga* including Lesson 1 and Lesson 2 explained above just in the First class. *Bhakti Nivedana* articles already published on the subject should prove handy to explain this.

B: Simple Standing Yoga Postures

(Do 2 or 3 of the following per class depending on class duration, but keep the sequence)

Sama sthithi- Namaste with a smile.

Tha:da:sana and *Bhangi* – Standing poses, with *Bhangi* involving a lumbar twist

Vriksha:sana - The Tree

Uttha:na:sana mudra – Bend forward with hands crossed and fingers raised above head

Utkata:sana - Chair position with hands raised above head and fingers clasped

Tula:da:anasana - The Weighing Balance

Triko:na:sana – The Triangle

Pa:rshva ko:anasana - Body slanted from heel to tip of finger in a 45° angle

Veera Bhadra:sana – The Warrior

Hanuma:sana – Sri Hanuman

Adho:mukha Svanasana - The Downward Dog

C: Sitting Postures

(Do 2 or 3 of the following per class depending on class duration, but keep the sequence)

Nauka:sana - The Boat

Shashanka:sana - The Rabbit

Narasimha:sana - Man-Lion

Upavishta ko:na:sana - Forward bend with legs spread out in front

Paschimo:tta:anasana - Forward Bend

Go:da:na:sana - Balance on one folded leg, another

stretched, hands above head

Badha ko:anasana: Butterfly

Vakra:sana - A form of lumbar twist, one leg stretched out and other over it, knee folded

Ardha Matsye:ndra:sana - Lumbar twist with hands wrapped around knees

Oushtra:sana - The Camel

D: A:sanas done Lying Down

(Do 2 or 3 of the following per class, but the sequence is important)

Bhujang:asana - The Cobra

Sva:na:sana - The Dog

Shalaba:sana - The Locust

Dhanura:sana - The Bow and *Urdvamukha Dhanurasana*: The Inverted Bow

Sarva:nga:sana - The shoulder Stand

Hala:sana - The Plough

Shirsha:sana - The Headstand

E: Pranayama - the Breathing Exercises (All classes)

Bhastrika - the Bellows

Na:di-So:dhana Pra:na:yama - Alternative nostril breathing

F: Sava:sana - The Corpse (All Classes)

The three stages in *Shava:sana* are important to make it effective

Disperse every class with a chant of OM in a melodious way, first raising the O to a chorus crescendo and vibrating the M on the lips, for a little long .

In the coming up articles, let us also learn the significance of the main exercises and their significance for both general fitness as well as for curing health problems.

Jai Srimannarayana !