

The concept of hatha yoga

The term *hatha yoga* appears in some of the classical yoga texts, especially *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Siva Samhita* and *Gherandha Samhita*, among others.

The way the authors used this term in these texts is quite different from the way it is understood today.

The word *Hatha* is derived from two syllables: *ha* and *tha*. *Ha* and *tha* represent the dual energies that dominate our lives. Because *ha* and *tha* are not united (or balanced), we are affected by extremes, like excitement and suffering, heat and cold, etc.

According to the classical texts, when a person has reached the state of *yoga*, the dual energies meet and the person becomes balanced, calm and serene. Such a *yogi* is no longer agitated or excited; he or she is basically unaffected by the extremes. This is what is called *hatha yoga*. It is the *yoga* (union) of *ha* and *tha*.

Interestingly, many of the classical texts including *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, mention that this merging of energies happens because of *pranayama*, not *asana*. Of course, the texts talk about *asanas* being used in preparation for *pranayama*, but ***pranayama* is always referred to as the main tool for merging the two energies.**

It is probably the case that many of the writers and *yoga* practitioners who describe *asana*-oriented practices as *hatha yoga* do so, because **one dictionary definition of the word *hatha* is “forceful”**. Performing *asanas* with intensity or force then, some might conclude, must be *hatha yoga*.

This is not correct. *Asanas* must never be done forcefully. When we see people forcing themselves into *asanas*, they are not calm or serene. They are often agitated, stressed, or aggressive. This is not consistent with the concept of *hatha yoga*.

It is my guess that this translation “forceful” refers to a practice that should be done with **great will power and strength**, which is true for any *yoga* practice.

Source: **THE YOGA OF THE YOGI**
THE LEGACY OF T KRISHNAMACHARYA
p 177
by **KAUSTHUB Desikachar**
published by *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram*
Chennai, India
ISBN 81-87847-24-7