

# YMCAfit – Yoga Journal Guide

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As you can see, yoga is much more than a physical exercise system. The benefits of asana are undeniable, but yoga also offers us guidelines on how to live our lives in a kind, loving and compassionate way, bringing inner peace and radiant health.

Keeping a yoga journal, with the eight limbs of yoga written in front, is in itself a yoga practice. Your journal will help you record your thoughts and feelings about your daily practice. Daily reflection will bring you insights that will enable you to empathise with and offer guidance to your students. You may have been told that honey is sweet but without actually tasting it how would you know?

During a class, every student is likely to have a different experience of his/her practice on any given day and knowing this through your own daily self-practice will keep reminding you that the lessons to be learnt keeps changing for all of us, all of the time. Your journal will become your teaching assistant with thoughts, feelings and reflections of your journey through the asanas and pranayama, recorded for your reference.

Here is an example of a possible entry:

Mon 6<sup>th</sup>

Practiced at 7.00am before breakfast today, felt hungry but reminded myself it would do me no harm. Had slept well and awoke feeling refreshed and happy. Anuloma Viloma (breathing technique) was a struggle, my right shoulder ached at first but I soon let go of the tension and relaxed into the 5 rounds. Sitting in half lotus felt very comfortable today, hardly moved during the pranayama, a huge difference to when I first started practicing. Sun salutes felt really stiff at first as my body hadn't moved around much since waking so I took it slow and did half postures for the first 4 rounds and just focused on my breathing. Exhaling the stiffness out of my body really helped. Did 12 rounds and was very warm by the final round. Cobra is still a struggle as I really feel it in my middle back but not so much tension in the feet. Triangle felt really good, the shape was there I felt the energy flow. I focused on both legs holding my weight and found pushing down the back leg whilst relaxing the feet helped me stay still with ease. The flow from posture to posture was strong today and standing postures were very still, hardly any twitching in the body and I felt the room dissolve as I focused within. Seated postures weren't as easy, my forward bend is still very stiff along my hamstrings and I know my back curves rather than pivoting from the hips. Removing the flesh to feel the sitting bones helped and I relaxed more focusing on the abdominal massage with the full yogic breath. I still need to accept where I am with this and not be so impatient to lie flat like I did before then tension came. Halasana was better today in the neck area and I felt an energy flow when I pushed

my knees up and heels away. Savasana was actually very nice as I guided myself through a medication of light and surrender, imagining light in and out of my body. I felt calm but energised afterwards. Practise time 1hr 15mins. The rest of the day was good. I ate well and felt so good teaching. There were two absolute beginners and they responded well to my requests to miss out postures, I hope they come back, Sarah and Jane.

## **The eight limbs of yoga**

Also known as Ashtanga yoga, The Sanskrit word “*Ashta*” means eight and “*Anga*” is translated as limbs.

### **Limb 1**

Yamas – guidelines for ethical standards and moral restraints listed by Patanjali.

### **Limb 2**

Niyamas – observances and disciplines; our attitude towards ourselves.

### **Limb 3**

Asanas – physical postures. For many this is the first inquiry into yoga. The body is the temple of the spirit. Practice of Asana brings discipline and concentration, both necessary for medication.

### **Limb 4**

Pranayama – control of life force or energy through breathing techniques (see pranayama chapter, page 65). Practice of pranayama helps to gain mastery over the respiratory process, connecting the breath, the mind and the emotions.

### **Limb 5**

Pratyahara – sensory detachment/withdrawal of the senses; control of the mind to focus within. The practice gives us a chance to step back and take a look at ourselves from within, to check and observe any habits and cravings which may interfere with our spiritual growth.

### **Limb 6**

Dharana – concentrating the mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts; the path to the seventh and eight limbs. Once Pratyahara is practiced we can relieve ourselves from outside distractions and move onto the distractions of the mind itself. Dharana helps to slow down the thinking process by concentrating our thoughts to one point. Silent repetition of a sound, focusing on a deity or energy point in the body will help in long periods of concentration. This naturally leads us into Dhyana / meditation.

**Limb 7**

Dhyana – meditation/contemplation; an unbroken flow of thought inwards and thus to the higher self. Dhyana is the uninterrupted flow of concentration leading to the meditative state.

**Limb 8**

Samadhi – enlightened state of bliss transcending the self and becoming one with the Divine. The ultimate goal of any human being is to find peace. During meditation the yogi joins with their point of focus and transcends the self altogether. With this comes a connection to the Divine and an understanding of all living things.

Meditation brings a state of bliss and being at one with the Universe. Enlightenment cannot be possessed or brought, it can only be experienced, and the price of this is discipline.