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## INTRODUCING YOGA

More and more people are wanting to know about yoga and the benefits it provides. To assist those who may have been desiring information on yoga, consider this introduction.

Yoga means the 'act or process of creating union, yoking or joining'—in order to induce health, fitness, happiness, peace and wellbeing for those who practice it. Yoga has no religious connections or connotations.

Yoga originated in northern India several thousand years ago. During its long development, it has influenced the philosophies of many of the wisdom traditions of the world, including all the major religions.

Although there are a variety of methods attributed to yoga, primarily in the A.C.T, hatha yoga is taught. Hatha (from Sanskrit, meaning by the use of force, strength or willpower) yoga is used to maintain or improve body health through discipline—by extending flexibility, strength, coordination, breathing exercises and balance. Other aspects of hatha yoga include diet and cleansing the body.

Incorporated in normal hatha yoga classes in the A.C.T are breathing exercises (prânâyâma) and relaxation techniques (yoganidrâ). Besides improving aerobic capacity, the various breathing exercises improve immune function, reduce emotional stress and aid concentration. The relaxing techniques of yoganidrâ (literally: 'the sleep of Yoga' in which the body is placed at rest—as if in sleep—while the conscious aspect of the mind is alert and observing, even though all its activity reflects stillness and tranquillity).

Besides teaching hatha yoga, some schools teach other aspects of yoga such as mantra, laya, jnâna, karma and râja roga (including meditation). These techniques are usually well advertised in the publications of these schools.

No branch of yoga exists in isolation, each is integrated within the elements of another. Yoga is based on the infinite variations of human nature and thus its appeal is as universal, as fundamental and beneficial as is love and compassion. Its practice is common to all the great philosophies from the simplest to the most sophisticated and whether consciously recognised or not, its discipline is responsible for the wondrous achievements of the great artist, the musician, the scientist and the normal person when they find themselves striving for excellence in their everyday lives.

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