

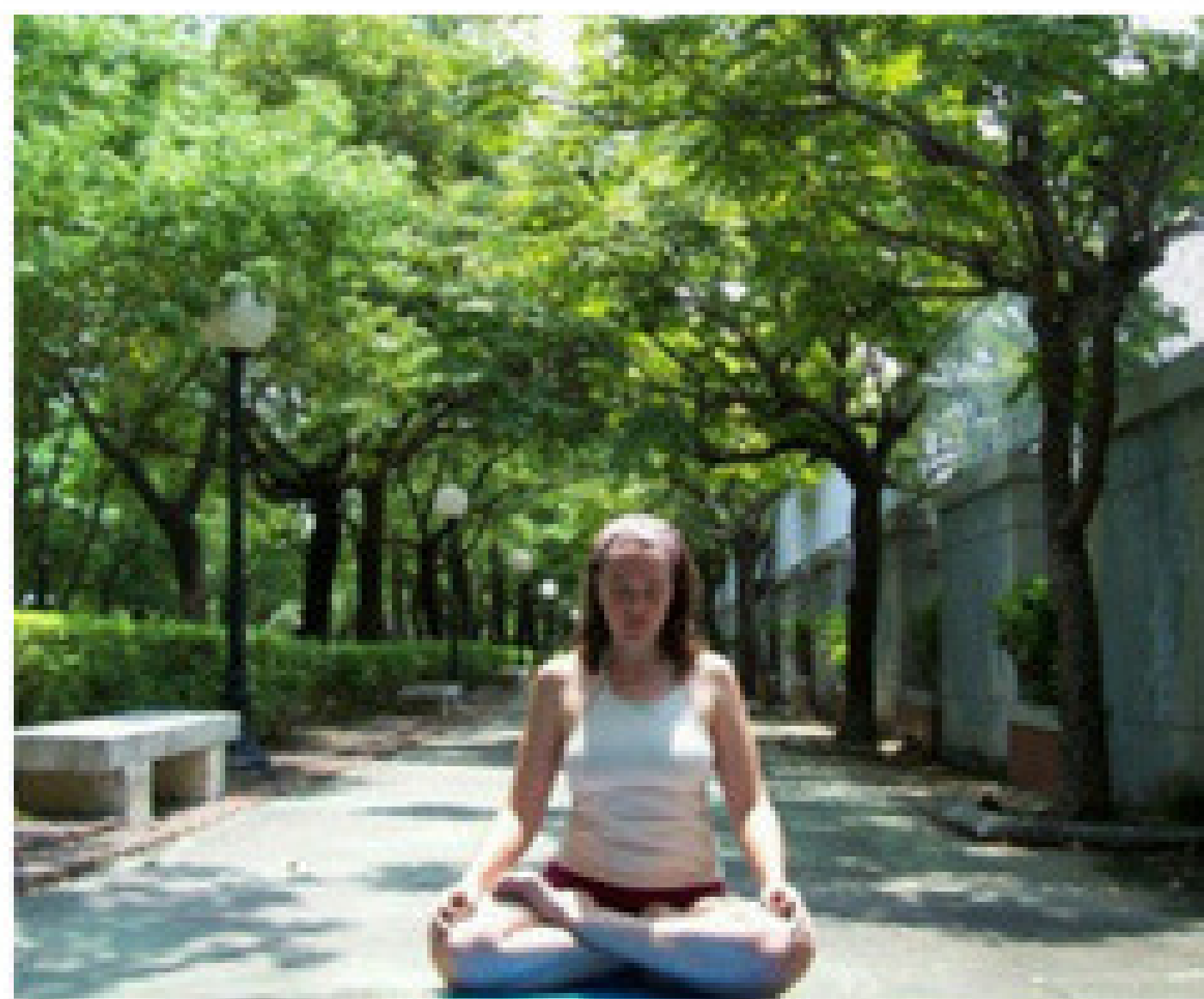
INTRODUCTION TO YOGA



THE FOUNDATION ROOTS OF

AMARA VIDYA

A COMPENDIUM



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A M A R A V I D Y A F O U N D A T I O N S

INTRO TO AMARA VIDYA

A FOUNDATION PRACTICE FOR ALL

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P R E F A C E

Welcome all.

This is a compendium for anyone looking to get a better understanding of what the Amara Vidya approach looks like.

This guide is meant to take you through a step by step process of building a home practice, no matter how experienced in yoga you are.

A warning:

There are a lot of terms contained within that may be intimidating for a first time yoga practitioner. Just let the terms wash over you initially, then later feel free to get out a journal and write down some of the terms you find intriguing for later study. Once you engage in the work of inquiry, you are practicing yoga. In being curious, you begin to get a better handle on what it means to practice yoga. Leave what doesn't serve you, and come back whenever you feel ready to try again.

Let us begin with an offering:

Prayer of Lovingkindness

May all beings be peaceful.
May all beings be happy.
May all beings be safe.
May all beings awaken to
the light of their true nature.
May all beings be free.

Aum shanti.



I N T R O D U C T I O N

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICE

What is the meaning of Amara Vidya? Let's look at the English meaning of these two words.

Amara - pure, undying, universal, eternal.

Vidya - light giving, spiritual knowledge, science, and understanding. Thus, Amara Vidya is the study of Universal Understanding; or, The Science of the Universe.

In Hindu teaching, one can look to Narayana (the ultimate soul), and the twin brother of Lord Vishnu, who created prana (life force) and chitta (the consciousness), who uses amara vidya for the preservation of dharma or righteousness.

Amara also has Western roots that have ancient Greek and Latin roots. In Greek there are associations with eternal grace, as a spiritual association.

Vidya is associated with the Goddesses Lakshmi (wealth), and Saraswathi (education). Vidya-Lakshmi is the Goddess of that knowledge which generates wealth through skill. This is different from the Goddess Saraswati, who is the goddess that enables us to have a better understanding of our world and ourselves. Vidya-Lakshmi helps generate wealth

while Saraswati helps us to become wise. She has domain over the five major, and the five minor vidyas (ten vidyas). Vidya is Sanskrit that is used in different contexts to mean many things. Taken literally, it represents the opposite of ignorance which is avidya or darkness. You might say that Vidya then represents the essential truth of everything or all that is bright and good.

The five major vidyas are the silpakarmasthanavidya (craftsmanship vidya), the cikitsavidya (healing vidya), the sabdavidya (sound vidya), the hetuvidya (causality or Buddhist logic vidya), and the adhyatmavidya (inner realization vidya). The five minor vidyas are rhetoric, ornate diction, prosody, drama, and astronomy. These five major categories are much more complex and subtle than these headings would suggest. To think of them as just five categories would be incorrect.

The five vidyas in the Buddhist context represent the underlying principles of the universe. These vidyas are described as encompassing everything in the universe with life or without life, the spiritual and the material. All dharmas (cosmic laws)—are contained in the five vidyas. All animate and inanimate, conditioned and unconditioned phenomena in the entire universe are manifest in the vidyas. It is essential that they be understood and mastered, if one is to obtain the full power of the Buddha-dharma (teachings of

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the natural order of the universe, or truth). You could even say that they are the Buddha-dharma. However, strictly speaking, these truths are not exclusive to truths that belong to Buddhism. They are the underlying principles of truth and the original nature of all phenomena. They represent the entire interrelated Truth of the Universe. The Buddha's teaching is that only a Buddha (awakened being,) can understand these universal truths in their entirety. This knowledge is the Buddha's awakening— or “Enlightenment.” Vidya is the essence of Dhamma (the nature of what is).

Thus, the term amara vidya is meant to be inherently known to you. In many ways, this is about the essential nature of reality, one that is universal and not personal, and can be studied using the scientific method as one means of understanding. In order to interpret it, we teach a 9 stone and 3 pillar philosophical template that can be used in ANY yoga style (or not just in what you may perceive as typical yoga.... for one can discern that all you do is yoga. More on that later.

Therefore, any practitioner comes into this with options. You do not have to focus exclusively on Eastern origins and techniques; instead you can practice in a secular fashion, weaving in your own religion.

Western philosophy, and your own sociocultural experiences.

In our approach to Amara Vidya, Western philosophy is encouraged (which includes the philosophy of the Middle East and Islamic teachings). From Marcus Aurelius, to Joseph Campbell, the West offers development in meditation - the goal of traditional yoga out of which one makes progress. Historically, the discipline of Science is a branch of Philosophy. Philo - ancient Greek for "love", and sophos - "wisdom", literally translates into the Love of Wisdom. It is this branch of learning that gives rise to modern Scientific method, and much of the rich tapestry that has influenced global culture. It is important to honor your own traditions; the culture, religion, philosophy and social mores that guide your decisions and help you become aware of your own biases; to learn what works for you, and what doesn't. I assert that what constitutes a "real yoga" practice is something that can be taken off the mat, beyond physical practice, and become woven into daily living. A living, breathing yoga practice that weaves into the ebbs and flows of living - riding the waves of challenges and ease. Being able to pause and reflect, serve the higher Self, be a functional member of community, and embracing one's Dharma is the yoga of Amara Vidya.

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In some circles, having roots of health and wellbeing is a vital part of what it means to practice yoga. In the Amara Vidya school, the teachings of Ayurveda as self-care is encouraged. Beyond that, anyone with a greater interest ought to seek out a licensed Ayurvedic doctor for more depth of experience. For anyone looking to grow their practice in a way that accepts a wellness model, we assert that it is key to understand Ayurveda as the traditional approach to yoga and healthcare. We believe a symbiosis of evidence based research, modern movement and biomechanical practice, and receiving Ayurveda from a licensed expert is ideal.

It is this weaving of understanding - the biological, psychological and sociological influences - of your own personal lens that will guide not only what draws you onto the mat, but what will influence how you practice. We believe its important to honor your own heritage and background and to use it as a mirror to guide your own journey.

I chose the teaching of Amara Vidya as a practice of embodied Philosophy, one that marries the love of learning to the Undying Truth of existence. The biopsychosocial model that is increasingly popular in current healthcare practice, is a model of care that brings definition to

yoga as therapy in self care. I believe a secular practice is a necessary component of current yoga teaching, but for the practitioner it is important to honor whatever religious or spiritual practices you have. My background and training was rooted in Kripalu first, which current movement research techniques and practices are only now beginning to affirm and adopt. I also agree with Swami Satchidananda's Integral yoga practice of combining the six branches of hatha, raja, bhakti, karma, jnana and japa improves the quality of practice and understanding of amara vidya. From this, a call to better service emerges, moving one from that of a personal practice into the service of others. The 9 stones of the Amara Vidya Philosophy result in the personal path of practice, and the Pillars are those that define the act of being in the world and participating in community living.

As a result, I speak of Amara Vidya as something that transcends any style or way of practicing yoga. It is intended to get at the heart of what brings anyone to the yoga mat. It came out of a deep desire to connect with my ancestry, and a keen interest in searching to better understand myself and the world around me. This means Amara Vidya, practiced as a form of yoga, is the examination of the Self, and a way into service of others.



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YOUR
HOME BASE

CHAPTER TWO

For any beginning practitioner the question arises above all else is "What exactly do I do in yoga? Where do I start?"

Begin by familiarizing yourself with the Eight fold path, originating in the Patanjalyogasastra (or, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali). These methods are: yama and niyama (ethical practices), asana (physical), pranayama (control of energy through breath), pratyahara (going inward), dharana (concentration or holding focus), dhyana (thought control), samadhi (bliss state, or, equanimity). Many refer to the use of the eight fold path as a reason for offering more than just a physical - or asana - based practice. Some traditions have a student seek out a teacher for small group and even private classes. Periods of immersion and dedicated practice were required, and it would be many years before someone would be considered an experienced student much less a teacher. Now that learning is considered a

commodity, far removed from the observant eye of an experienced teacher, it is increasingly difficult for someone to discern measurements of progress as originally intended. As we begin to isolate ourselves and practice without the benefits of human connection, the isolation can lend oneself to seeking out people who may not always have a depth of practice or knowledge that comes from true wisdom. Even so, there still exists a universal learning that is fundamental to every practitioner. No teacher can command or subjugate a seeker's individual experience. It is this personal journey, combined with the accrued wisdom and scholarly studies of a multitude of teachers spanning generations, that constitutes universally applied knowledge (Amara Vidya).

Is there an "Amara Vidya style"? No. You can still practice Hatha, Yin, Restorative, Kundalini, Sivananda, Power, Hot... anything. That said, the mat practice of Amara Vidya comes directly from the Kripalu yoga lineage; emphasizing a more organic movement and compassionate approach with a focus on preparing and holding the space. It also draws on its roots in Moksha Yoga practice - that one can practice different forms of yoga with a core series of postures as a touchstone beginner practice. Then an emphasis on making it as accessible and inclusive as possible, as no two bodies or minds are alike; this

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means no two practices are alike. The main focus of Amara Vidya is on the student, not the teacher. This is unique to many current modes of practice. The school of Amara Vidya was established in 2015, and is an attempt to develop an ongoing discourse between both the teacher and student, whose roles become fluid and oftentimes interchangeable. Anyone who is a teacher is in reality a student for life - continuously seeking to learn.

How does one practice Amara Vidya philosophy on a mat? Ideally you begin in a private interview with a certified Amara Vidya teacher first. The teacher first asks you: "What is your goal in yoga?" This, is where you begin. For more on this, consult "My Yoga Year".

Once you have determined your goal, and are ready to start your journey, Amara Vidya advocates a home based practice with a 9 stone and 3 pillar template. There is also something called the HAND technique, that guides the work toward achieving your first goal. Once you have this, you are welcome to practice any style of yoga anywhere. You are even welcome to practice any online class, and use the "My Yoga Year" as a way to better integrate the Amara Vidya philosophy. At some point, eventually, you do need a guide or a peer to observe you.

accessible. Without an opportunity to be observed, challenged, engaged from a receptive external source of input, a home based practitioner of yoga can slide into injury, monotony, and ultimately without the benefits of a community. We are, after all, social creatures, and we thrive in contact with other people.

So have fun with prerecorded material, and also seek guidance in private or semi-private instruction. A minimum of 3 privates per year is a good starting point. Attend group classes when possible to receive the benefits of group dynamic psychological and social benefits. No matter what, self-evaluation toward appropriate integration is the key ingredient in a successful path as the Amara Vidya practitioner.

How does one set up a home practice?

This can mean something different to each individual. Whatever you create, keep these tips in mind:

- Practice in the same place.
- Set up your yoga practice in the same or similar fashion
- Ensure you have all your supports (blocks, straps, blankets) close at hand
- Keep a journal or recording device present
- Option: include a reading
- Option: Select what sensory stimulation you want

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The idea of ritual in your practice helps to set a pattern in your brain that helps adapt to the changes and benefits you are working toward. Small, regular shifts to your daily routine have been proven in research to show long term benefits to attaining personal goals. Instead of the crash diet, or austere measures that in the end prove unsustainable without extreme support, we emphasize a simpler and more digestible approach to practice. Even if you are only able to practice 20 minutes, 3-4 times a week, it can suffice to bring you the desired goals you seek in your practice. Just know that the more you invest in your practice, the more you can gain.

Setting up a routine in the same place also creates an atmosphere. When walking into a group class, having a sense of the right atmosphere can change everything. It's tough when chaos reigns around, you - try to find a time when the chaos settles and you have something worthy of a time you can focus inward.

Ensuring you have enough space to move beyond the standard 24 x 68 inches of mat will improve your chances of keeping safe. Adding good props, including a chair and a wall can really help you explore aspects of practice that are supportive. Making a decision to practice anywhere from a

movement (vinyasa) type class, or in the range of a more relaxed (restorative) class will be determined on your experience, your condition and your needs.

Next, do you want low or bright lighting? Do you want music or no music? Do you want the room to be cold, warm or hot? Are you someone who is sensitive to scents, or is an aromatherapy a practical option for you? Do you prefer visual stimuli such as symbols or inscriptions? Play with what works.

Hatha yoga is a practice of the body cultivation (physical practice on a mat). This typically includes mantra, (sacred sounds), pranayama (breath control exercises), mudra (gestures of the hands or body), asana (physical postures), seated mediation, and savasana (corpse pose).

Another important teaching to consider is the focus on neutrality. In non-reactivity, a major component in any secular approach to yoga, cultivating awareness on where we find ourselves in neutral spaces can be where the best progress can occur. In control over the positive and negative fluctuations of the mind is where freedom lies. More on this in "My Yoga Year".

Practicing savasana, or "Corpse pose", is an advanced practice, and requires support if done right. This pose is not ideal for

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everyone, and yet can arguably be the most accessible. For more on understanding how this practice requires special consideration, please consult "My Yoga Year". The question arises as to whether or not a teacher or therapist can offer savasana in your practice.

What is "Yoga Teacher" and what is a Yoga Therapist"? At the time of writing, the line is blurry. Many teachers and therapists are currently hotly debating what their Scope of Practice is, and how to differentiate between the titles. At Amara Vidya, we currently define each title and Scope of Practice here:

- Yoga Teacher: is one who can assess and evaluate progress based on the goal set by the student. A teacher will use tools in a learning setting to further adapt and augment the objectives set to measure the learning outcome and achievement of the student's original goal.
- Yoga Teacher Scope of Practice: "Teachers are dedicated in their care and commitment to students. They treat students equitably and with respect and are sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. Teachers facilitate the development of students as contributing to the ongoing nature of Yoga in the World".

- Yoga Therapist: is one who can assess and evaluate progress based on the patient's progress based on the condition and dysfunction challenging the patient's ability to function. A therapist prepares a treatment plan utilizing research based methods and secular tools measuring the return to physical and mental wellbeing.
- Yoga Therapist Scope of Practice: "Therapists perform the assessment, the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction and pain of the soft tissue and joints in the body. Therapists prepare personalized exercise programs designed to improve your strength, range of motion and function; they provide airway clearance methods to assist people with breathing difficulties; and management of incontinence including pelvic floor re-education. They assist to restore functional activity and tolerance testing and training. Therapists prescribe, fabricate and apply assistive, adaptive, supportive and protective devices and equipment for patient care, including hydrotherapeutic modalities to reduce swelling, speed up the healing process, and improve movement and function."

In Amara Vidya we maintain that only regulated healthcare professionals, that are accountable to safeguarding the Public, may practice Yoga Therapy. That means any medical doctor, manual therapist (such as a

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Physiotherapist or Massage Therapist), or Mental Health worker (such as a Social Worker or Psychologist) may practice as a Yoga Therapist. All other unregulated practitioners fall within the Scope of a Yoga Teacher, and are prohibited from anything that might be seen as a diagnostic tool. A teacher must ensure you receive support, and referring out to a therapist when appropriate. It is incumbent upon your teacher to ensure you consult with a qualified professional, who can assist in ensuring your yoga remains safe.

How does yoga become a spiritual or healing practice if not provided by a teacher?

- Healing can only occur within, no one can claim to "heal" you. A yoga teacher and a yoga therapist can facilitate healing, depending on what needs to be healed by you. It is important to discern for yourself which discipline you seek out, and both can be consulted simultaneously. A teacher is no less qualified than a therapist depending on the specifics of your needs at the time, provided you remain safe.
- A teacher may choose to implement their own personal lens, bringing their ideas of culture, social norms, and religious perspectives into play. Ask a teacher about their practice to determine if that can work for you.

- A teacher can still train in anatomy, physiology, movement and biomechanics for appropriate Hatha yoga. This means, if significant conditions and diseases are an encumbrance to practice, a yoga therapist is a better option. Once you are aware of your limitations and challenges, and have a healthy boundary with your yoga teacher, it is safe to continue practicing with them.
- Teachers are still able to provide supportive assists and touch adjustments, which may relieve pain and stress. The question is whether or not it supports your goal and refrains from being "corrective" or teacher-framed focus.

It can get tricky when the benefits of yoga can vastly improve wellbeing. This is evident in working with neutrality, and the concept of working to eradicate negative emotions and experiences, or to understand how the mind resists suffering. It can spark a deeper curiosity in exploring what it means to probe understanding of "What Is". A practical, anywhere, anytime, experience of living philosophy emerges. In the Sutras, Patanjali outlines the "path to liberation". In order to be liberated, one must first grapple with the five obstacles ("kleshas") that block the path.

The Five Kleshas are:

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- Avidya (ignorance of reality)
- Asmita (ego projections)
- Raga (attachment, clinging)
- Dvesha (aversion, repulsion)
- Abhinivesha (fear of death/
fear of ostracism or being
different)

Once again, this is where a deeper examination and understanding of this can be found in other Amara Vidya publications, and also in the reference texts in Chapter 4. Becoming aware of the kleshas, and studying texts to boost your knowledge of what goes beyond the Hatha yoga practice can produce a significant depth of understanding on how you show up on your mat and in your life.

Going beyond Hatha yoga is a main objective of the Amara Vidya approach. Exploring the nature of "What Is" can also be defined as a purposeful approach to jnana yoga. A great definition of a jnana yogi is better explained through Integral Yoga:

"Jnana Yoga is the path of wisdom. It is suitable for people of an intellectual nature. A Jnani Yogi acts with the feeling, "I am not the doer; Nature is doing everything. The body and mind are moving among the objects. I am the silent witness of all that is happening...."

Other practices of the yoga tree as mentioned in the previous chapter, is combined according to the personal approach of the Amara Vidya trained teacher.

The reason for this is that you will resonate with the teacher that also sings to what works for you. One Amara Vidya teacher may focus more on hatha and japa disciplines, whereas another Amara Vidya teacher may focus on raja yoga and bhakti. Another Amara Vidya teacher may exist and teach purely in the karma yoga discipline.

As you learn more about yoga, you will discover none of these branches can truly exist in isolation from one another, especially if one chooses to keep a more traditional, Indian based cultural practice of yoga.

How does one go about finding "the right" teacher?

First, you want to check their credentials. You also want to discern what organization and means of representation they offer. In more traditional forms of yoga, some teachers do not hold "certifications"; rather, they are granted permission to teach from their original teacher. There is nothing wrong with this practice, so long as it works well with meeting your goal. As with those who enter our teacher training we request all practitioners of the Amara Vidya philosophy agree to a set of guidelines. These are:

- A commitment to student-centered focus: A teacher who chooses to "correct" your "mistakes" without explanation or consent in the moment, and fails to receive your feedback is a red flag.

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- Informed Consent: this is based on the moral and legal premise of your autonomy: You as the yoga student or patient have the right to make decisions about your own learning, health and medical conditions. You must give your voluntary, informed consent for lesson and/or treatment plans
- Outside mentor: No matter what style of yoga you choose to practice, it is good to have someone in your network who is removed from that particular style. This ensures that you can seek out someone who is relatively objective, and can ask you questions based on whether or not you are remaining safe and can adhere to your goals.
- A range of "tools": a teacher who can adapt to you as opposed to forcing you to conform to them is key to your autonomy.
- A commitment to inclusion and accessibility: a teacher who excludes you from participating fully may not be the ideal teacher for you. There are teachers that seek to make you feel inadequate, weak, or incapable. These are more red flags for you to consider seeking someone else to nurture your short and long term practice goals
- Willing to receive feedback and open dialogue: A critically thinking teacher invites you to deliver feedback and encourages dialogue to ensure their tools are appropriate for meeting your goals.
- Someone who has good boundaries (trained in transference and counter-transference.

What can I expect in a typical "Amara Vidya" yoga Hatha class? An Amara Vidya teacher will conduct classes that follows the Kripalu approach to include:

- An opening, or "centering"
- Warm Up or Joint freeing, in a chair or on a mat
- asana, postural practice
- pranayama, or breath exercise
- mantra and mudra
- an element of restorative practice
- meditation
- a closing, or offering

A fully trained Amara Vidya teacher will be able to augment your practice according to your goals and needs. Ideally the options of transition to more ease or challenge occurs with the following:

- Restorative yoga: fully practiced in Yoga Nidra, effective evidence based relaxation techniques, and supportive assists. They are trained in trauma-informed yoga and have learned appropriate protocol for gentle and consensual touch.
- Yin: able to take and combine the root practices of Taijiquan, subtle movement and contemplative awareness
- Flow: capable of understanding and combining spontaneous movement, evolutionary development, functional transition, and sequential processing
- Accessible Yoga/Yoga for All: specifically trained supportive practices to ensure each class offers inclusive and diverse Hatha based options

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Now that you are this far into the guide, consider seeking out an Amara Vidya teacher to establish that first interview and to lead you through those first stages of Hatha yoga. After a few private sessions, check out different styles of yoga. You may discover that a typical Hatha yoga may not be enough. You may find yourself drawn into more combinations of the yoga tree as mentioned previously. Most people currently are familiar with the Hatha class. Let's look at the components a bit closer from an Amara Vidya approach as descended from the Kripalu yoga practice:

CENTERING:

A way for you to come into a space, and settle. To prepare both mentally and physically to spend time in a focused manner, ideally free from all distractions. The goal in an opening in a group class is to ensure each person ready to practice feels safe, prepared, and comfortable with undertaking what may be a challenging class. In Kripalu, a dialogue was encouraged between the guide and the participants; an invitation to get curious about what each student was undertaking for the next hour or more.

WARM UP OR JOINT FREEING:

This exploration of movement is the "strong container" experience of the body. Currently teachers who practice variations

of Kripalu or similar styles will use this time to invite practitioners to explore a more organic movement that is pain free and encompasses an experience of the full range of free movement each person can achieve. It is a time to explore the limitations and potential of the body. Regular, normal breathing is emphasized, but breath awareness is fundamental to any serious practice of yoga currently offered.

Students are invited to practice their first drishti - a focused gaze. In Amara Vidya, we emphasize the importance of understanding what it means to practice and cultivate drishti. It is directly related to the fifth limb of yoga - pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses to go inward), and even more related to the sixth limb - dharana - translated often as focused concentration.

There are lots of other interpretations and techniques for adapting these two limbs, we simply ask a practitioner to experience two forms of focused gaze, or drishti:

- A central, point of focus about a foot beyond the tip of your nose. Or, if unable to sense that point in space, to focus on an inanimate object before you
- A space within that is comfortable for you if you are ok with closing your eyes

We stress the importance of remaining sensitive to what is accessible and adaptable for you.

A word of warning on drishti:

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People suffering from anxiety, trauma, or a physical restriction, might find this practice uncomfortable or unattainable. Cultivating drishti during the warm up part of a class invites a practitioner an experience of the mental discipline of yoga, and this may require assistance from a health worker or support. It's also something to try out and practice in a short amount of time; a way to include enough people in a group class to experience the teaching without feeling lost or excluded.

Depending on the experience and training of the guide or facilitator, a warm up can include a more current Western organic movement approach, or offer traditional techniques. It's important to explore an approach into the practice that invites you into safe physical function and introspection. Seek out ideas that can be a unique expression and also try some of the more conventional ideas to adapt to a practice that makes sense. This is an area where an Ayurvedic approach can also be useful.

ASANA, OR, POSTURE PRACTICE:

In Amara Vidya, we teach an introductory sequence that offers a step into not just the third wheel of the eight fold path, but an experience of the first three parts of the 9 stone path. These stones are:

- Stability
- Strength
- Flexibility
- Precision
- Diversity
- Metta
- Sustainability
- Pure Action
- Equanimity

As you can see, the first three stones can be translated into a very literal sense when constructing a class. Focusing on aspects of the body that are not just flexible, but also ensuring you are stable and strong is important. Right now, the current trend is to experience organic movement or strengthening. These trends are not meant to be practiced in isolation, and are not meant to be divorced from asana. This is where the current modern research on movement can become important to learn. Many schools emphasize breaking the asana into smaller pieces, to spend time on functional movement, and learning to move in pain-free ranges of motion.

This practice can take time, and what is revealed are the body's own samskara (habits or grooves) that may be working counter-productively.

It is a long and slow process to spend time learning to develop your observance of the body's connectivity. If you are patient, you will be rewarded.

In Amara Vidya, we recognize that for some, many years might be required to stay at this foundation body level, or even returning to this level at multiple times. This is why a

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bank of poses are provided in all Amara Vidya classes, so that traditional asana that can be practiced in a variety of adaptable formats. If you choose to practice the poses as a series, remember it doesn't have to stay stagnant. For a sense of full movement, make certain you practice in all three planes of movement - sagittal, frontal, and transverse. Even in a more functional, organic movement class, all three planes are important. The conscious awareness of playing with the edge of what's safe and what's challenging is key.

PRANAYAMA, OR BREATH EXERCISE:

As the fourth limb of yoga, the stress on when and where to practice breathing exercises, and which technique to practice is highly variable. We take a very simple form - that breath awareness, and gentle experiments in optimal breathing techniques is an access to improved meditation. In practicing control of the breath, or, more importantly, simple breath awareness, the body-mind connection is strengthened. Right now, Buteyko breathing offers a vast array of similar exercises without the traditional spiritual implications. Whichever method you pursue, it's important that you receive some measure of benefit from it.

Pranayama can offer the physiological health benefits of exercise, or it can offer more traditional metaphysical benefits. The six foundation pranayama exercises we instruct in foundation classes are

- So-Hum
- Ujjayi
- Bhramari
- Nadi Shodhana
- Khapalabhati
- Bhastrika

MANTRA AND MUDRA:

In a Foundations Amara Vidya Class, the teacher offers you the mantra ("an instrument of thought"/ "a sacred praise" / "a consultation") or the mudra ("gesture" or "sign") for a three-fold purpose:

- to offer connection to the thread of oral tradition as old as the Vedic culture of Hinduism from which yoga gains its roots;
- to explore the possibility of where the original goal may branch out, and deliver opportunities for growth beyond the physical plane of existence; and
- to ground a practitioner in a more symbolic expression of yoga that doesn't have to reside exclusively in Hindu religious meaning, but can incorporate other religions and philosophical practices that offer techniques of physical symbolic prostration to gain control of one's fluctuating mind.

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This practice is also entirely optional. For more on this, consult "My Yoga Year".

AN ELEMENT OF RESTORATIVE YOGA:

There are many reasons why an Amara Vidya teacher must include restorative yoga, especially for beginners. One is because the practice of savasana as the fear of death can be potentially triggering for some. Many teachers thus choose to offer more comfort instead. Another reason for offering restorative yoga is due to modern lifestyle. We are electronically connected more than ever before. We are expected to be more "productive" than ever before. Our modern technologies are still untested on our evolutionary mammalian form; technology has quickly outpaced our capacity to put it into appropriate context. More evidence and research is pointing to a need to rest the brain from screen time and the frenetic pace of our culture. Traditional yoga is about removing oneself at the end of one's life, away from the buzz and chaos of living to a more reclusive and ascetic preparation for shuffling off of the mortal coil. Giving oneself the time and space to recoup from the constant demands we place on ourselves is one of the biggest draws of yoga for mental health and well being.

MEDITATION:

Can be done with or without a mudra (gesture), can be done seated, walking or laying down. Guided meditation is recommended at first for those who are new to mediation. For those who are learning to set up their own meditation for the first time, please consult our eBook, "Cultivating a personal mediation practice".

CLOSING:

This is when you can experiment with a wide array of ideas for closing your personal practice. In Amara Vidya, what is most important is to take a moment to integrate all the things you experienced in your practice, and prepare to transition out of your time spent in yoga. Take the time to "seal" the practice; providing that sense of completion and accomplishment. For ideas and more information on this exploration, please consult "My Yoga Year".

No matter how you set up your practice, remember that it needs to work for you. If it is not benefiting you, if you are not getting measurable results from it. Change it up. Try something different. work with what resonates with you. It might not look like ANYONE else's practice, but it is your life and your time.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding three smooth, rounded stones. The stones are of various colors and patterns: one is dark blue with white circular spots, another is light tan with purple and red speckles, and the third is purple and yellow with dark spots. The background is a blurred, rippling body of water.

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T H E
T W E L V E
P R A C T I C E S

CHAPTER THREE

The Twelve Practices are:

The Stones of personal practice:

- Stability
- Strength
- Flexibility
- Precision
- Diversity
- Metta
- Sustainability
- Pure Action
- Equanimity

The Pillars of practice beyond the mat are:

- Accessibility
- Strength
- Sustainability

Imagine you are on a path, and you carry tools with you to help you along the way. Which tools serve you on this path? What lights your way? If you see this path as a method to go inward for self examination, and discovering ways to support how you move in the world- this is the teaching of Amara Vidya. We believe in the concept of the Higher Self, and use techniques of yoga to ensure that which serves the practitioner best. We believe in using a combination of techniques that cultivate balance in living, to foster and nurture the stability and strength to reach out and help others. In Amara Vidya, we also recognize that as we journey, along the way we discover ideas that guide us to stay the course. We see stones as a representation of tools to help us find those great ideas on our quest.

This description of the Stones and Pillars are suggestions only. We encourage each practitioner to spend time with these tools in a way that is meaningful for them. We learn that some tools do not serve us at this time, but later become integral to our daily routine. We teach a more thematic approach to these stones and pillars in a way that can be personal to each seeker. Stability – Our first stone on the path. In a physical practice, that we maintain the health of our joints and ensure we only perform that which respects our body. Off the mat, that we

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work toward that which supports us: recognizing the people, places and things that protect us from harm. That we can explore risk and challenge from a safe point of stability, and permit a freedom of exploration from a stable foundation.

Strength – The second stone that operates in tandem with stability. From a physical practice perspective, muscles must be strong in order to stabilize and move joints well. The recognition that vulnerability to other perspectives isn't weak, it's strength- strength of morals, strength of care, strength of an ability to challenge oneself and to remain humble.

Flexibility – A practice both on and off the mat. In Amara Vidya, we learn to approach improved range of motion and more open-chain kinetic practices AFTER we have built stability and strength. That the goal in any physical aspect of yoga is not to strain, but to challenge with a careful applied effort. We respect appropriate Range of Motion, and everyone's natural ability or adaptive ability is OK.

Precision – A deliberate act of focus in thoughts, words and action. When communicating, to recognize that there is different meaning in the words we use. Intent is key, and striving to impart your intent clearly is the goal. We

emphasize the understanding of “filters” or “lenses”. These are both impediments and opportunities for insight, depending on how and when they are applied. Precision also means focus, and can be applied in a more traditional Hatha sense (eg: dristhi)

Diversity – This personal practice differs from the Amara Vidya Pillar. We promote and support the acceptance of who you are and your background is fundamental to your journey. This maintains autonomy, and thus there is no need to adopt another person's cultural identity or religion in order to practice yoga. That said, sometimes going deeper into learning the roots of Indian culture and practices can resonate with you on a genuine and authentic level. Practicing traditions that may differ from yours with understanding, acknowledgement, and respect. To recognize that life is more like water, and that harmony is achieved through recognition that different things, ideas, even people will add to how you balance your life and your practice. Respecting that other people may find value in different forms and expressions is a simple way to promote diversity.

Metta – A Buddhist concept meaning “Loving Kindness”. It is not passive but rather an active process. Kindness is an active form of compassion, and to use

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metta is a form of service performed with a loving/nurturing attitude. A simple offering of metta is finding ways to operate in your relationships to yourself and others with kindness. This is a way into bhakti and karma yoga.

Sustainability – Different from the Pillar, we recognize that building a sustainable practice takes time and effort. This does not mean an austere or rigorous practice, and may ebb and flow depending on your position in your life cycle. appreciate sustainable practice. To learn how to sustain is to choose a path of “everything is already ok”. Learning when to recognize what it means to live seeing the world as “good enough”. Doesn’t mean you stop striving, or times of great challenge and pain may arise; practice cultivating the recognition that everything you use is meant to serve you.

Pure action – An active form of Saucha (a niyama in Patanjali’s 8 limb teaching), it is approached as more than physical cleanliness. It is also an act of examining relationships to people and things in ways that serves you and those around around you, and that which is does not serve you or those around you (eg: what is “polluting” or unnecessary). It is also a call to recognize that which we cling to (or hoard), and not to be confused with avoidance or aversion.

Equanimity – “is a state of psychological stability and composure which is undisturbed by experience of or exposure to emotions, pain, or other phenomena that may cause others to lose the balance of their mind.” – hence, why it is at the end of the path. The purpose of using the 9 stone path is to cultivate an ability to tap into Equanimity when needed. More on this in "My Yoga Year"

THE THREE PILLARS:

These are best defined as a social, or community practice. If the 9 stones are a template to emphasize your personal approach to practice, the pillars are how you show up in the world in group or communal yoga practice.

These pillars are:

- Pillar of Accessibility: please join the global non-profit, Accessible Yoga that networks and advocates for greater accessibility in yoga
- Pillar of Diversity: please join an environmental or The Yoga Service Council to promote either biodiversity initiatives or representation and other vulnerable sector practice support.
- Pillar of Sustainability: Join the growing work with the Yoga Service and Accessibility Canada for research and job creation initiatives

A hand is shown in a prayer gesture, with the palms facing each other and fingers pointing upwards. The hand is silhouetted against a bright, warm sunset sky. The background is a gradient of orange and yellow, with some blurred greenery and a small purple flower visible in the lower right corner.

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R E C O M M E N D E D
R E A D I N G

CHAPTER FOUR

For those interested in practicing yoga seriously, consider spending more than 2-3 hours a week in a drop in group class. Ideally, commit yourself to a year of dedicated, immersive study (whatever that looks like for you). For more on our approach, please consult two other publications, "Cultivating a Personal Meditation Practice", and "My Yoga Year". For a list of other great resources, please take a look below. We hope this list will offer a great leap into growing a more meaningful practice for you.

Books:

- Yamas & Niyamas, Deborah Adele;
- Roots of Yoga, James Mallinson and Mark Singleton;
- Inner Tranquility, Darren Main;
- Teaching Yoga, Donna Farhi
- Yoga Ph.D, Carol Horton;
- Relax and Renew, Judith Lasater;
- Yoga for Emotional Balance, Bo Forbes;
- The Art of Slowing Down, Susi Hatelly;
- Yin Sights OR The Complete Guide to Yin Yoga, Bernie Clark;
- The Living Gita, Swami Satchidananda;
- Engaged Yoga, Christopher Gladwell;
- Living Your Yoga, Judith Lasater;
- The Heart of Yoga, TKS Desikachar;
- Hatha Yoga Pradipika, (trans.) Brian Dana Akers;
- Move Your DNA (expanded), Katy Bowman;
- Yoga Biomechanics*, Jules Mitchell;
- Overcoming Trauma Through Yoga, Emerson & Hopper;
- Studying Ayurveda: A Manual in Progress, Matthew Remski;
- Ayurveda: The Science of Self Healing, Vasant Lad ;
- Prakriti, Your Constitution, Robert Svoboda;
- The Inner Tradition of Yoga, Michael Stone;
- Awake in the World, Michael Stone

- Anatomy Trains, Thomas Myers;
- Yoga for Pain Relief, Kelly McGonigal;
- Kripalu Yoga, Richard Faulds;
- Waking, Matthew Sanford;
- Yoga and Body Image, Klein & Guest-Jelley;
- Threads of Yoga, Matthew Remski ;
- Eastern Body, Western Mind, Anodea Judith;
- Tai Chi Ch'uan. Horwitz, Tem and Kimmelman;
- Yoga for Body, Breath and Mind, AG Mohan;
- Light on Pranayama, BKS Iyengar;
- Yoni Shakti, Uma Dinsmore;
- Functional Anatomy of Yoga, David Kiel;
- The Secret Power of Yoga, Nischala Joy Devi;
- Yoni Shakti, Uma Dinsmore-Tuli;
- Mudras, Gertrud Hirschi;
- Healing Mantras, Thomas Ashley-Farrand;
- A Sanskrit Dictionary, John M. Denton;
- Introduction to Sanskrit, A. M. Ruppel;
- Meditations from the Mat, Rolf Gates;
- Stars at Dawn: Forgotten Stories of Women in the Buddha's Life, Wendy Garlin

Online Courses:

- Whole Body Immersion, Kathryn Bruni-Young
- Evolution of Movement Research Intensive, Diane Bruni;
- Yoga Anatomy, Jason Crandell;
- Yoga Anatomy with Leslie Kaminoff;
- Yoga for All, with Dianne Bondy;
- Business of Yoga, Yoga Alliance;
- Mettaversity: 1) Yoga Biomechanics and Asana; 2) Beyond Yoga Alignment; 3) Healing Trauma Through Yoga; 4) Realigning Yoga: Anatomy through Movement Research
- Ayurveda with Matthew Remski

I entrust these resources to you as a blessing for your deep dive into a grounded and profound exploration into your personal journey of yoga. Feel free to connect with Amara Vidya to join our community.

Jai Bhagwan. Om Shanti, shanti, shanti.

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