

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

Paths of Yoga

A Beginner's Guide

Bhakti, Jnana, Karma, Raja and others:
what they are and how to choose

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General education only. Not medical advice. Speak with your doctor before starting any new practice.

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1. What the paths of yoga is

Traditional yoga is described as several paths that lead toward the same aim of steadiness and insight. The paths suit different temperaments: some people are drawn to devotion, some to study, some to action, some to meditation.

The four most often named are Bhakti, Jnana, Karma and Raja yoga. Hatha yoga, and Tantra, are often added. Teachers describe the paths in slightly different ways, and most people blend them.

The short answer

The paths of yoga are different routes that suit different temperaments: devotion, knowledge, action and meditation. You do not have to choose one forever. Many people combine them.

2. Before you begin: safety first

General education only. Check with your doctor first if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, a heart, lung, joint or spine condition, osteoporosis, an eye condition such as glaucoma, or have had recent surgery or injury.

Stop and rest if you feel:

- sharp, pinching or burning pain (a mild stretch is fine, pain is a stop sign);
- dizziness, nausea or breathlessness;
- numbness or tingling, or pressure in the head or neck.

This is a reading and reflection guide, not a medical guide. If you try any practice you read about, do it gently, and talk to your doctor first if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or live with anxiety, depression or trauma.

3. The paths compared

Path	Focus	Suits people who...
Bhakti	Devotion and love.	Feel drawn to prayer, music and service.
Jnana	Knowledge and inquiry.	Like to study and question.
Karma	Selfless action.	Learn best by doing.
Raja	Meditation and the eight limbs.	Like structured, inward practice.
Hatha	Postures and breath.	Want to start with the body.
Tantra	A varied tradition of ritual and practice.	Wish to study its texts with a qualified teacher.

Tantra covers many different traditions, and popular ideas about it are often inaccurate. Learn from a qualified teacher.

4. Choosing a starting point

- If you prefer movement, begin with Hatha.
- If you prefer quiet, begin with simple breathing and meditation.
- If you like study, read the Gita or the Yoga Sutras.
- If you like service, try volunteering with attention.

5. Your four-week plan

Week	Focus	Length	What to notice
1	Read about two paths	15 min	Which feels more natural?
2	Try one small practice from it	10 min	How did it feel?
3	Try a second path	10 min	Compare.
4	Combine what works	15 min	Keep a note of what helps.

6. Choosing a class or teacher

Different teachers lean toward different paths. Ask about the focus of a class or centre before you join. A good teacher respects your pace and does not demand belief.

- Ask which translation or commentary the teacher uses.
- Notice whether ideas are presented as tradition or as proven fact.
- If a teacher dismisses your questions or health needs, find another class.

7. Practising at home

At home, you can blend a few minutes of movement, breathing, reading and kind action. There is no required order.

8. Honest expectations

The paths are traditional spiritual routes, not health treatments. Claims that one path is the only right one, or that a path cures illness, are not supported.

9. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	Fix
Thinking you must choose one forever	Blend as you grow.
Ranking paths	They suit different people.
Treating all teachers as equal	Check training and ethics.
Rushing into advanced practice	Build a base first.
Believing popular ideas about Tantra	Study with care.

10. Questions people ask

How many paths of yoga are there?

Commonly four main paths are named, with others added. Counts vary.

Which path is best?

The one that suits you. There is no best.

Is Hatha yoga a path?

It is often listed as one, focused on the body and breath.

Can I follow more than one?

Yes. Many people do.

11. A pre-session checklist

- Have I eaten lightly, at least two hours ago, and had some water?
- Is my space clear, warm and free from interruptions?
- Do I know what I will practise, and how long I have?
- Is there anything in my body today (pain, tiredness, illness) that means I should do less?
- Do I know my stop signs: sharp pain, dizziness, breathlessness?

Running through these five questions takes less than a minute and prevents most beginner problems.

12. Your first week, day by day

Day	Suggestion
1	Read this guide. Try just the warm-up and the final rest.
2	Rest, or a five-minute walk.
3	Repeat day 1 and add one new pose or step.
4	Rest.
5	Practise a short version. Notice how you feel afterwards.
6	Write a few lines in the practice log.
7	Rest. Plan next week from what you noticed.

Three short sessions a week are a good start. Regular, gentle practice builds confidence, and rest days let the body adapt.

13. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Bhakti	Devotion.
Jnana	Knowledge.
Raja	The royal path of meditation.
Tantra	A diverse group of traditions.

Reminder

This guide is general education and not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or cure any condition. If you have a health concern, speak with your doctor before starting a new practice.

Practice log

Print this page and keep a short record. Notes help you see patterns over time.

Day	Minutes	Practice done	How it felt	Notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				