



WHY WE PRACTICE

BEFORE WE

UNDERSTAND

Asana: the Gateway to the Eight Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga.

There is a quiet wisdom in beginning before we fully understand. Many of us step onto the mat for the first time with little knowledge of the depth of the tradition we are entering. Yet somehow, without explanation, the practice begins its work. Something shifts. Something awakens. Transformation begins before understanding arrives.

The word Ashtanga means “eight limbs,” as taught in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. And yet, in this lineage, we begin not with philosophy or ethics, but with the third limb, asana. It may seem unusual to start in the middle, long before we grasp the fullness of the system, but there is a reason for this.

In Ashtanga, asana is far more than physical movement. It is sadhana, a sacred, embodied discipline that prepares the body, steadies the mind, and softens the heart. Through breath and movement, something internal begins to align. The body becomes an honest guide, leading us toward a deeper, quieter understanding.

In this sense, asana becomes the most accessible entry point, the place where discipline becomes tangible and where the journey becomes real.

In the teachings of Pattabhi Jois, asana always came first. His well-known words, “Practice, and all is coming,” were never meant as a promise of mastering postures. They point to something subtler, that through steady practice, clarity, insight, and inner freedom arise naturally, not by analysing or striving, but by taking action, showing up, and surrendering to daily discipline.

Through consistent practice, the resistance of the mind fades. The body becomes purified, the energetic channels strengthen, the nervous system stabilises, and the whole being becomes receptive to deeper work. As the body is gradually cleansed and steadied, the path opens for the remaining limbs to be understood and lived.

The Eight Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga

1. Yama – ethical foundations
2. Niyama – personal observance
3. Asana – physical postures
4. Pranayama – regulation of breath
5. Pratyahara – withdrawal of the senses
6. Dharana – concentration
7. Dhyana – meditation
8. Samadhi – liberation, pure awareness

How the Whole System Lives Inside Asana

Although each limb of Ashtanga holds deep, individual practices meant to be explored both on and off the mat, something remarkable happens through asana. We begin to touch every limb without even realising it.

The Eight Limbs form a complete spiritual path, beginning with Yama and Niyama, ten guiding principles shaping how we relate to the world and to ourselves. The Yamas invite Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (wise use of energy), and Aparigraha (freedom from grasping). The Niyamas cultivate Saucha (purity), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (disciplined effort), Svadhyaya (self-study), and Ishvarapranidhana (surrender).

Yet these teachings do not remain separate from asana. They quietly awaken through it. When we step onto the mat with honesty, respect, and non-violence toward our body’s limits, we embody the Yamas. When we approach practice with devotion, contentment, discipline, and self-reflection, we live the Niyamas. As the breath becomes steady, pranayama is already present.

As our attention draws inward, Pratyahara arises without force. A soft, unwavering drishti becomes Dharana. Movement and breath merging into a single rhythm become Dhyana. And in the rare, sacred moments when everything inside becomes still, we glimpse Samadhi.

In this way, the Eight Limbs are not steps to master before practice. They reveal themselves from within through practice. They unfold naturally through sincerity and repetition. They are lived rather than learned.

Asana may be the doorway into this lineage, but it is never the final destination. The whole system, when practiced with devotion, becomes more than philosophy, it becomes a way of being. And through this way of being, we influence others not by teaching or explaining, but simply by embodying what we have learned. Peace becomes visible. Love becomes natural. Freedom becomes possible.

