Hata Yoga is a very powerful way of living. Power, not over somebody else, but power to access life.

SADHGURU

Unfortunately, in the West, if you utter the word yoga people think you must twist yourself like a rubber band or stand on your head. Yoga is not an exercise form. The word yoga means union.

Modern science has proved that entire existence is just one energy. If that is so then why are we not experiencing it that way? If you can break the limitations of this illusion of being separate and begin to experience the oneness of existence, then that is yoga. Religion has always been talking about God being everywhere. Whether you say God is everywhere or everything is one energy, is there any difference? It is the same reality.

When mathematically deduced, we call it science, and if you believe it, we call it religion. When you find a method to get there, we call it yoga.

So what then is yoga and what is not yoga? There is no such thing.

If you use any process of life to transcend your limitations then that is yoga. Everything - the way you breathe, sit, stand, eat, walk and work - can be yoga.

To lead you towards the experience of yoga - of union and boundlessness - we manipulate energy and move the system in a certain way. Physical postures are one aspect of this. Understanding the mechanics of the body, creating a certain atmosphere, and then using the body or body postures to drive your energy in specific directions is what Hata Yoga or yogasanas are about. Hata Yoga is not exercise. Asana means a posture. If I sit in one way, it is one asana, if I sit in another way, it is another asana. So a number of asanas are possible. Out of these innumerable postures that the body can take, eighty-four fundamental postures have been identified as yogasanas.

To simplify it, there are other dimensions to this. When we observe the posture we can understand the emotion behind it. Similarly, if you know yourself and have observed yourself, you will notice how postures change. When angry, you sit one way; if happy, you sit another way.

For every different level of consciousness or mental and emotional situation that you go through, your body naturally tends to take certain postures. The converse of this is the science of asanas. If you consciously get your body into different postures you can also elevate your consciousness.

Hata Yoga is a preparatory process of yoga. You can also explore Hata Yoga in ways that take you beyond certain limitations, but, fundamentally, it is a physical preparation - preparing the body for a higher possibility. If we want to do Kriya Yoga, we always prepare people with Hata Yoga because without the body being prepared it will not be able to take on a higher dimension of energy; it will break.

I am incapable of being depressed or else I would be depressed looking at the way Hata Yoga is being practiced around the world with people believing that it is the correct method. The practice as you see it - the mechanics of it, is simply that of the body. You have to breathe life into it or else it will not come alive. This is why in the traditions there has always been much stress on the presence of a live Guru - to make it alive. The yogic system is a subtle manipulation of your system to allow it to rise to a different level. Yoga means that which allows you to attain your higher nature. Every asana, every mudra, every way of breathing - everything is focused towards this. Though it is taught in frivolous ways around the world, the health benefits are still undeniable. If Hata Yoga is taught in a proper atmosphere with a certain sense of humility and inclusiveness about the whole process it is a fantastic process for shaping your system into an incredible vessel, a fabulous device to receive the Divine. It is a very powerful way of living. Power, not over somebody else, but power to access life.

(Sadhguru is a spiritual leader. www.ishafoundation.org)