

[The Jois of Yoga](#)

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YOGA

The Jois of Yoga

The most physically demanding and increasingly popular yoga system is propagated worldwide by Sri Pattabhi Jois and his familial successors

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He is touted as the man who brought the ashtanga yoga practice to the masses. He is the teacher of the teachers that earnest yoga enthusiasts around the world seek out. His 29-year-old grandson, Sharathchandra Rangaswamy (Sharath), has been hailed as "the most advanced ashtanga yoga practitioner in the world." He is Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (pronounced "Joyce"), and he is quickly becoming the foremost name in yoga. ["Ashtanga Yoga" is the name given to the system of hatha yoga currently taught by Sri Jois].

In the summer of 2000 in New York, over 800 people thronged to a month-long workshop led by Sri Jois, his son Manju and Sharath. The intensive was part of a four-month world tour which included seminars in Hawaii. Between classes on Kauai island, Sri Jois visited Hinduism Today with his daughter, Saraswati, Sharath and a small group of students. The following synopsis of Sri Jois' extraordinary life was written for Hinduism Today by Eddie Stern, a student of Sri Jois and a

senior teacher.

R.I. Krishna Pattabhi Jois was born on the full moon day of July, 1915, Guru Purnima day. His ancestral village, Kowshika, near Hassan in Karnataka State, is inhabited by maybe 500 people and has one main street. At one end of the street is a Vishnu temple, just next to Pattabhi Jois' home. At the far end of the street, just 100 yards away, lies a small Ganapati temple, and just opposite, a Siva temple. Both are several hundred years old, and are the focus of the village.

Pattabhi Jois' father was an astrologer and priest, who acted as the pujari for many of the families in the village. From an early age, as with most brahmin boys, Pattabhi Jois (Guruji) was taught the Vedas and Hindu rituals.

When Guruji was 12 years old, he attended a yoga demonstration at his middle school in Hassan. The next day he went to meet the great yogi who had given the demonstration, a man by the name of Sri T. Krishnamacharya, who had learned yoga for nearly eight years from his guru, Rama Mohan Brahmachari in a cave in Tibet. For the next two years, Guruji learned from his guru every day. When Guruji turned 14, he had his brahmin thread ceremony. Krishnamacharya left Hassan to travel and teach, and Guruji left his village to go to Mysore.

Guruji wished to attend the Sanskrit University of Mysore. With two rupees in his pocket, he left with two friends. They traveled the 100 plus kilometers by bike, over dirt roads. For

the first year or two, life was very difficult. With very little money, he begged for his food from some of the brahmin houses. Guruji attended classes and did his studies. Then, around 1930, he went to a yoga demonstration and saw that it was his guru. He came forward and prostrated, and they recommenced their relationship, and Guruji his yoga studies.

The Maharaja of Mysore, Krishna Rajendra Wodeyar, had fallen ill. He learned that there was a great yogi who had come to Mysore. Krishnamacharya was called to him, and duly cured him. The Maharaja became a great patron of his and built him a yogashala (school) on the grounds of the Palace Art Gallery. Guruji was also beckoned to teach the Maharaja on occasion, and was called upon several times to give yoga demonstrations. The Maharaja, who had taken a liking for Guruji, told him, "I want you to teach yoga at the Sanskrit college. You teach. I will give you a scholarship to go to school, free food in my mess hall and a salary." Guruji, very happy, asked permission from his guru. Krishnamacharya approved, and the Yoga Department of the Sanskrit College began on March 1, 1937. He continued as the head until his retirement in 1973.

From 1937 up until 1973, Guruji earned his professorship at the University, granting him the title of Vidvan. He married, in a love marriage, Savitramma, who came from a long line of Sanskrit scholars. Her grandfather was the Sanskrit and philosophy teacher to the last Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati. They had three children, Manju, Ramesh and Saraswati. Saraswati is the mother of Sharath, born in 1971, who is now Guruji's codirector of their school in Mysore.

In 1964, Andre Van Lysbeth became the first Westerner to study with Guruji. Soon after that, more Europeans came. Around 1972, the first Americans came, after meeting Manju at Swami Gitananda's ashram in Pondicherry. It was at that point that ashtanga yoga began spreading in America, starting in California, and then later emerging in Hawaii. In 1975, Guruji and Manju made their first trip to America. Over the next 25 years, the practice spread through the United States, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, Israel, Chile, England, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Guruji has, for 63 years, been teaching uninterruptedly this same method that he learned from his Krishnamacharya in 1927.

Sharath began his studies with Guruji at the age of 12 (in 1983), but did not take up yoga as a serious practitioner until he was about 19 or 20, after completing his engineering degree at Mysore University. His daily routine consists of getting up at about 2:00 am and practicing until 4:00 or 4:30. He then helps his grandfather (Guruji) teach classes in their yogashala from 5:00 am until the last student has finished practicing--anywhere from 8:00 to 11:30 am. The afternoons are spent doing whatever tasks have to be done, eating at 1:00, and resting from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. At five o'clock they return to the yogashala for an informal satsang. At around 6:30 they head back home. Guruji follows the same schedule as Sharath, except he does not practice yoga anymore. His mornings are spent chanting the Vedas and Upanishads until 4:00. When they return from teaching in the morning, he worships his Ishta and Kula Devata before eating or resting. [Guruji told Hinduism Today, "My Ishta Devata is Ishvara (Siva). Near Hassan there is a small village where there is a svayambhu (naturally formed) Linga called Rameshvara."]

Last year Guruji completed a restoration project in his village of the Rameshwara Linga and Ganapati Mandirams, in the memory of his wife, Savitramma Jois, who passed away three years ago. This year he completed the construction of a Shankaracharya temple in his village. The consecration is scheduled for February of 2001. There will also be a patashala, or youth training school.

Ashtanga Yoga: The historical definition of ashtanga yoga is "eight-limbed yoga," as originally outlined by the sage Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras. Ashtanga Yoga as taught by Guruji began with the rediscovery, early in this century, of the Yoga Korunta, an ancient manuscript describing a unique system of hatha yoga practiced and created by the sage Vamana Rishi. Under the direction of Krishnamacharya, Guruji helped decipher and collate this system. He named it Ashtanga Yoga, believing it to be the original asana practice as intended by Patanjali.

The Yoga Korunta emphasizes vinyasa, a method of synchronizing progressive series of postures with a specific breathing technique. The process produces intense internal heat and a profuse, purifying sweat that detoxifies muscles and organs. The result is improved circulation, a light and strong body, and a calm mind. On a practical level, the vinyasa continuous flow aids the practitioner, under the guidance of a qualified instructor, in integrating the eight limbs of yoga described by Patanjali.

Guruji stresses, "If you take practice, practice, practice--ninety-nine percent practice, one-percent theory,

automatically you will get mind control; then, union with the Atman (soul). One birth is not enough."