



Unit 3.5. Cause of Success and Failure in Hatha Yoga Sadhana

Unit 3: Foundations of Haṭha Yoga — Texts, Principles, and Practice

Unit 3.5: Cause of Success and Failure in Haṭha Yoga Sādhana

3.5.1 Orientation: Why some practices flourish—and others don't

Haṭha Yoga is designed as a **reliable pathway** from bodily steadiness to mental stillness. Yet outcomes vary widely between students. Classical manuals diagnose **specific habits** that quietly erode practice, and name **precise antidotes** that make progress stable and safe. This unit gathers those teachings and translates them into **clear, semester-level guidance**.

3.5.2 Classical touchstones (original lines with simple sense)

Causes of failure (traditional six)

“अत्याहारः प्रयासश्च प्रजल्पो नियमाग्रहः ।

जनसङ्गश्च लौल्यम् च षड्भिर्योगो विनश्यति ॥” (traditionally taught in Haṭha lineages; HYP I.15 in common recensions)

Over-eating, over-exertion, useless talk, rigid/ill-timed observances, crowding with distracting company, and fickleness—by these six Yoga is ruined.

Causes of success (traditional six)

“उत्साहात् साहसाद् धैर्यात् तत्त्वज्ञानात् निश्चयात् ।

जनसङ्गपरित्यागात् षड्भिर्योगः प्रसिद्ध्यति ॥” (commonly taught as HYP I.16)

By enthusiasm, intelligent courage, patience, knowledge of principles, firm resolve, and leaving unhelpful company—by these six Yoga succeeds.

Moderation principle (Bhagavad Gītā 6.16-17)

“नात्यशनतस्तु योगोऽस्ति ... युक्ताहारविहारस्य ... योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥”

Yoga is not for one who eats to excess or starves; for one balanced in food, recreation, action, sleep and waking, Yoga becomes a destroyer of sorrow.

Practice tenure (Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra 1.14)

“सा तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितो दृढभूमिः ॥”

Practice becomes well-rooted when cultivated for a long time, without break, and with reverence.

Together these verses define the **ethic of steady, moderate, principle-guided practice**.

3.5.3 The six causes of failure—mechanisms, examples, remedies

Cause	What it looks like in student life	Why it derails sādhana	Practical antidote
Atyāhāra (over-eating/poor diet)	Heavy late dinners; frequent fried/reheated foods	Sluggish breath, poor sleep → unstable praṇāyāma/dhyāna	Mitāhāra : early light dinner; ½ solids + ¼ liquids + ¼ space; sāttvic emphasis

Cause	What it looks like in student life	Why it derails sādhanā	Practical antidote
Prayāsa (over-exertion)	Daily max-intensity flows; chasing extreme ranges	Sympathetic overdrive; injuries; aversion to mat	“Minimum effective dose,” sthira-sukha pacing; peak → neutralize → Śavāsana
Prajalpa (idle talk/screens)	Scrolling/chatting before practice; gossip	Fragmented attention; agitation in sitting	10-minute digital sunset pre-practice; begin with 6 slow breaths
Niyamāgraha (rigid/ill-timed observances)	Fasting + strong kumbhaka; strict rules despite illness	Metabolic/pressure stress; burnout	Appropriate niyama: conserve energy when unwell; gentle ratios; respect contraindications
Jana-saṅga (distracting company)	Practising in noisy, competitive settings	Comparison & showmanship override interoception	Quiet corner; non-competitive peer culture; brief check-in, longer check-out (silence)
Laulya (fickleness)	Hopping methods/teachers weekly; no log	No adaptation window; random stimuli	8–12 week plan , one anchor method; maintain a simple practice journal

3.5.4 The six causes of success—how they work in you

Success factor	Inner mechanism	How to cultivate it this semester
Utsāha (enthusiasm)	Positive affect sustains repetition	Choose a pleasant , achievable sequence you look forward to
Sāhasa (intelligent courage)	Willingness to meet edges safely	Try a <i>new but safe</i> variation weekly; respect red flags
Dhairya (patience)	Allows slow neuro-muscular learning	Measure progress by breath smoothness and after-feel , not feats
Tattva-jñāna (knowing principles)	Prevents harmful myths/practices	Study core ideas: sthira-sukha , mitāhāra , contraindications
Nīscaya (resolve)	Reduces decision fatigue	Fix practice times , kit, and room; 1% done > 100% planned
Jana-saṅga-parityāga (leaving noise)	Removes comparison pressure	Practise without mirrors/metrics once a week; cultivate silence before/after

3.5.5 Early signs of success vs warning signs of failure

Domain	Early success indicators	Warning signs—course-correct now
Body	Less morning stiffness; fewer aches; steadier seat	Joint pain >48h; chasing end-range; repeated strains
Breath	Even nasal flow; easier lengthened exhale	Mouth-breathing in holds; frequent sighing/gasping
Mind	Quicker settling; kinder self-talk; post-practice clarity	Irritability after sessions; comparison, showmanship
Daily life	Better sleep onset; calmer responses	Wired or depleted evenings; caffeine dependence rising

3.5.6 Risk management in Haṭha Yoga (what the manuals imply)

- **Ahiṃsā**: never injure to progress. If breath destabilizes, **scale down**.
- **Contraindications**: avoid strong inversions/bandhas/kumbhaka with uncontrolled hypertension, glaucoma, pregnancy, hernia, acute GI/respiratory illness.
- **Cleansings**: for first-semester students, **jala-neti** and **trāṭaka** suffice; naulī, basti, advanced dhauti need expert supervision.
- **Recovery**: always **close with Śavāsana**, then a brief seat; integrate before screens or meals.



3.5.7 Two brief case vignettes

A. The enthusiastic over-doer (Prayāsa + Laulya)

Week 1-3: daily intense vinyāsa; adds kapālabhāti, long retentions; by Week 4, knee pain, insomnia, aversion.

Turnaround: 4-week stabilization—reduce load; switch to breath-paced āsana; nāḍī-śodhana without holds; no late caffeine; early dinner. Sleep restores; attention steadies.

B. The scattered starter (Prajalpa + Jana-saṅga)

Practises in living room with TV noise; toggles between apps/teachers; irregular meals.

Turnaround: sets a **silent corner**; 25-minute fixed template; logs 3 feelings (breath/mood/body) post-practice; adopts **mitāhāra** evenings. Settling improves by Week 2.

3.5.8 A simple correction flow (chart)

Noticing struggle →

Check: Sleep? Meal timing? Screen load? Pain?

↓

If breath not smooth → reduce intensity / shorten holds / simpler shape

If mind noisy → 6 rounds nāḍī-śodhana → brief seated focus → then āsana

If body sore >48h → rest 24–48h; replace peak with restoratives; consult if persisting

Always end → Śavāsana (5–8 min) → quiet sitting (2–5 min)

Unit Summary

Classical Haṭha wisdom is **practical**: Yoga falters with excess, strain, distraction, rigidity, noisy company, and fickleness; it thrives with **enthusiasm, intelligent courage, patience, principle-knowledge, resolve, and simplicity of setting**. Moderation in **food, sleep, effort, and speech** protects prāṇa and clears the mind. Anchored in **long-term, uninterrupted, respectful practice**, Haṭha methods become what they were meant to be: a **physiological bridge to psychological stillness** and **equanimity**.

Key Terms

- **Atyāhāra** — over-eating/ill-timed eating
- **Prayāsa** — over-exertion / pushing beyond wise dose
- **Prajalpa** — idle, distracting speech/screens
- **Niyamāgraha** — rigid/ill-timed observance (missing context)
- **Laulya** — restlessness/fickleness
- **Utsāha / Sāhasa / Dhairya / Tattva-jñāna / Niścaya** — six success qualities
- **Mitāhāra** — measured diet; **Sthira-sukha** — steady-easeful posture

Self-Assessment



MCQs

1. Which pair belongs to the **six causes of failure** in Haṭha sādhanā?
a) Utsāha & Dhairya b) Atyāhāra & Prajalpa c) Niścaya & Tattva-jñāna d) Maitrī & Karuṇā
2. According to **Gītā 6.16-17**, Yoga thrives with:
a) Extreme fasting b) Balanced food, activity, sleep and waking c) Night-only practice d) Constant travel
3. **YS 1.14** emphasizes that stable progress requires:
a) Variety every day b) Long-term, unbroken, respectful practice c) Peak performance weekly d) Only weekend retreats
4. A reliable **early success** marker is:
a) Persistent joint pain b) Compulsory intense sweating c) Breath smoothness and quick post-practice settling d) Social media likes
5. The **success factor** that reduces decision fatigue is:
a) Laulya b) Niścaya c) Prajalpa d) Jana-saṅga

Answer key: 1-b, 2-b, 3-b, 4-c, 5-b

Short Answer

1. Explain how **mitāhāra** and **prajalpa-reduction** support prāṇāyāma and dhyāna.
2. Describe **prayāsa** with one bodily and one mental consequence, and propose a correction.
3. In 5-7 sentences, relate **utsāha-dhairya-niścaya** to the idea of “**dirgha-kāla-nairantarya**” (YS 1.14).

Reflective Prompts

1. Identify two personal risk factors from the **six failures** and design a one-week micro-plan (environment, timing, diet, pacing) to neutralize them.
2. After a fortnight, write a brief note on whether your **after-feel** (calm alertness vs wired/depleted) has shifted. Which single change contributed most?

End of Unit 3.5: Cause of Success and Failure in Haṭha Yoga Sādhanā