



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

TOPIC OF THE MONTH

AUGUST 2011

Drishti

Gazing points

Drishti is our gazing point in a pose, in Ashtanga Yoga each pose has a specific gazing point, but the external sight is not what drishti is about. Drishti comes from the root drsh which means "to perceive". . . so drishti is not just our sight, but our perceptions and understanding as well. I love this about yoga — what seems external or physical always has an inner depth — an inner meaning to it. Drishti relates to how we perceive our world. Using our yogic sight or drishti gazing through the happenings in our life seeing the real meaning — the lessons behind our circumstances.

On our mats, one of the elements of the Ashtanga practice is the training of the mind to focus by use of gazing points. Drishti is for the mind. Drishti eliminates visual distractions and develops concentration. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who eyes were darting about? Did you feel as though they were listening to you?

The point of drishti has little to do with our external sight. Those of us with sight are easily distracted (fuzz on our toes, clock, what someone else looks like in a pose, body parts, or someone's wardrobe choices . . .) these distractions pull us away from yoga. Where the gaze is directed our attention naturally follows and then so does our energy. Wherever we send our attention through our senses we also send our prana or energy.

In the Yoga Yajnavalkya (version translated by A.G. Mohan) on the verses about pranayama, Yajnavalkya explains that by focusing our mind on certain points in the body it gives us control over the energy movement in our body. He names three distinct places to put your attention — These three points just happen to be three of our nine drishti points (outlined below) in our Ashtanga practice:

- ॐ Nose Tip = energy control
- ॐ Navel = removes all diseases
- ॐ Big Toes = body attains lightness

Practicing Drishti helps us to keep our energy in our control. When we follow the aimless senses — and mind — we send much of our energy away from what we are working on. For example off the mat; when we are trying to focus on a task at hand (like writing this little piece), and we take our gaze off what we are doing (I stop looking at what I am writing to look outside :) , we stop what we are doing to engage the mind in something else (my mind wanders to that beautiful landscape . . . hence I lose the flow of what I am writing as my mind conjures up some scenario . . .).

Practicing Drishti will help you stay in "the zone". Drishti develops focus--not only on our mats, but in life as well. Practicing drishti on our mats will help strengthen our ability to keep our focus no matter what people or situations are swirling around us off our mats. You will be better equipped to keep



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

your focus on what you want to do in life without distractions — this keeps your energy (or prana) in your body, giving you the power you need for your direction in life.

“Don’t look around to see where everyone else is, *it won’t help!*”

Might as well focus on your drishti — what someone else looks like in a posture won’t help you get there. It only distracts you from your own internal yoga. When we look around to see how someone else looks in a posture . . . we don’t mean to . . . and we don’t want to . . . but sometimes we build up little resentments about what our body can not do — then we place another little veil between ourselves and others. So best to mind your own body ;)

Drishti is a nice way to “mind your own business” and this applies to off our mat as well. I went through a period of time a few years ago in a sutra study where my meditation practice was “minding my own business”. We create a lot of suffering for ourselves when we let our drishtis mind other people’s business — and we have no right to judge or give advice as we are not in that persons shoes and past karmas! So we will be much happier minding our drishtis and our own business . . .

And then there is the “other” drishti . . . In the eastern cultures women keep themselves covered, minding the mens drishti for them . . . in the western cultures women show themselves so men must learn to mind their own drishtis — especially in yoga classes with woman wearing yoga clothes designed by men . . . ;)

The Physical Benefits of Drishti

It’s been fun talking about the esoteric side of drishti, but there is a science behind it as well. Using your drishti during asana will improve vision by exercising the eye muscles and increasing blood flow to the optic nerve.

Anatomy

We do not actually see with our eyes . . . We see with the part of our brain that is capable of interpreting the visual signals sent from the eye. Information is transmitted from the eyes to the brain via our optic nerve. These nerves exit the back of the eye at what is known as the “optic disc”. Each optic nerve is fed blood by the ophthalmic artery. Loss of blood supply to the optic nerve or the optic disc results in slowly deteriorating vision and glaucoma.

Turns out yoga in general is good for your eyes! Relaxing your eyes while you softly gaze is one of the best ways to improve blood flow to the optic nerve. Relaxation and deep breathing exercises benefit the optic nerve as well as the rest of your body. **This emphasizes the importance of a soft relaxed gaze.** It turns out eye health is greatly related to stress levels. In Ayurvedic medicine they like to treat glaucoma with with an herbal remedy called trifolia, which is a blend of three herbs — a laxative or a parasympathetic stimulant that relaxes the body.

Much information abounds about high blood pressure effecting your eyes, so too beware if your blood pressure is too low. People who take blood pressure meds may experience eye problems — at night most people blood pressure naturally falls, so too for those on blood pressure meds — the natural reduction in blood pressure that comes when we sleep coupled with blood pressure lowering medications usually means the optic nerve does not receive enough blood flow all night long.



References:

http://www.drpasswater.com/nutrition_library/abel_2.html
http://www.drpasswater.com/nutrition_library/abel_1.html

In addition to yoga, there are lifestyle factors that can keep your eyes healthy as you age, before I go over those I had to laugh at what I found on WebMD: “Most of the factors that influence the chances for developing glaucoma are beyond your control, but there are things you can do to protect yourself with early diagnosis. Begin by scheduling an [eye exam](#).” I think WebMD is in cahoots with Monsanto . . . Remember you do not have to deal with cataracts, glaucoma, or poor vision due to old age . . . these eye changes are most likely due to stress and lack of nutritional foods. Outside of your yoga practice here are few other habits and foods that keep your eyes healthy:

ॐ **Palming** - Palming is an excellent way to relax your eyes and improve blood flow to the optic nerve. Just simply rub your hands together for about 20 seconds and place your palms gently over your eyes with your fingertips overlapping your mid forehead.



ॐ **Temple Massage** - Massaging your temples at eye level can improve blood flow to the optic nerve.

ॐ **Vision Exercises** - If you have vision problems there are vision exercises you can do that are quite beneficial. I struggled for years because the eye doctors kept telling me my daughter needed glasses . . . and I would get them for her year after year for her only to complain they didn't help and she would not wear them. Finally I found an eye doctor in Dillsburg that had her do a couple eye exercises . . . and they worked :) I am wondering if eye exercises could replace glasses . . . The exercises are out of the scope of this article but are easy enough to find with google or a good alternative eye doctor.

Foods that keep your eyes healthy:

- ॐ **Essential Fatty Acids** — both omega3s and 6s. Omega6s are readily available in our diet, most of us need to pay more attention to increasing our omega3s at this time. Omega3s are in grass fed animal products, nuts, seeds, fish, etc.
- ॐ **Carotenoids** — Colorful vegetables are loaded with carotenoids that are good for your eyes. As my Naturopath in Maui used to tell me “eat rainbows”.
- ॐ **Bilberry** is known as the vision herb, if you can find this fruit it can help your eyes. Many recommend it in supplement form, although I am cautious about supplements and prefer not to use them if food is available.
- ॐ **Lutein** is an anti-oxidant that protects your eyes from free radical damage. Good sources are broccoli, spinach, lettuce, mustard greens.
- ॐ **Astaxanthin** - is a fat soluble carotenoid that helps in reducing cataracts, retinal detachments, and macular degeneration. Good sources are shrimp, lobster, salmon, crab, carrots, and red pepper.
- ॐ **Zeaxanthin** - an anti-oxidant that protects the eye by absorbing the blue light of UV rays and reducing glare that damages the lens. It helps in reducing macular disorders and degeneration — zeaxanthin is found in the center of the macula. Good sources; saffron, kale, spinach, kiwi fruit, broccoli, lettuce, oranges, peas.
- ॐ **And Cysteine, taurine, quercitin and rutin** are the essential amino acids which help in preventing several harmful effects that cause various eye disorders. These antioxidants protect the eyes from



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

free radical changes and assist blood circulation to and within the retina. Good sources are grass fed milk, pastured eggs, fish, meat, onions, garlic, oats, apples, cherries, citrus fruits, pears, and the list

goes on . . . JUST EAT YOUR VEGETABLES!!

Drishti and Alignment

Drishti helps to align your head in neck in the poses; reaching upward into the sun salute, for example, the gaze is at your thumbs, this requires your arms to be in correct alignment, if your arms are behind your ears (stressing your shoulder joint) you won't see your thumbs. Some positions may strengthen the neck as well (trikonasana gaze point).

The gaze point for any asana is the one that most benefits the energetic movement of the asana. For example, back bending postures the gaze is downward toward our nose--this is not intuitive, usually back bending makes you want to look upward — however back bends energize your nervous system so looking downward is calming. And vice versa in forward bending postures the gaze is most often toward the toes; forward bending postures pull us inward so the gaze outward helps to keep us in balance.

But the main purpose of drishti is mind control. By training your eyes to not dart about the room during practice you will improve your concentration and therefore meditation and therefore health.

Your gaze should be a soft, hazy-out of focus gaze.

There are 9 drishtis:

1. Nasagrai – nose tip, center of ida and pingala nadis, used most often (the nose drishti helps draw us inward, controlling our senses and energy).
2. Broomadhya – Ajna Chakra, third eye
3. Navi Chakra – Navel as in Adho Mukha Svanasana (the navel drishti helps our body burn toxins)
4. Hastagrai – Hand as in Trikonasana
5. Padhyoragrai – Toes (focusing here gives us a feeling of lightness)
6. Parsva Drishti – Far Right and
7. Parsva Drishti – Far left as in Ardha Matsyendrasana
8. Angusta Ma Dyai – Thumbs as in the start of Surya Namaskara
9. Urdhva Drishti – Up to the sky as in Utkatasana (sometimes called antara drishti--antara means inner gaze where we close our eyes and gaze upward to the light of the 3rd eye).

The gaze points are not to be directly looked at, but rather gazed beyond--and some gaze points you will not see, for example if your head is all the way to your knee or shin in paschimattanasana you will not be able to see your toes but you still gaze in the direction of your toes.

To keep it simple here are a few tips to help you remember where your drishti is:

ॐ most forward bending postures the gaze is toes--although many prefer the nose gaze here

ॐ most backward bending postures the gaze is our nose (or i like to cue 'down your cheeks' to help keep from crossing your eyes).



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

ॐ twisting postures have a side drishti, your eyes look out the corner of your eyes in the direction you are twisting--its like a yoga pose for your eyes . . .

ॐ inversions are nose drishti

Other Areas in Yoga Drishti is Used

Drishti is also commonly used in meditation to focus and concentrate the mind. Internal drishti points can be the breath or the third eye center, etc. External focal points can also be used, such as a candle or mandala. If you find closing your eyes during meditation leads you to focusing on the dramas or perplexities of life, re-establish an outer gaze. On the other hand, if the outer gaze becomes a distraction to your concentration, perhaps an inner-directed correction is necessary.

In bhakti (devotional) yoga, drishti is used in a slightly different way: a constant loving and longing gaze is turned toward the concept, name or image of God.

And in our ashtanga practice, gazing is not the same as looking, looking is dual, there is a looker and an object being looked at. Gazing in contrast is "looking" beyond the mundane objects, gazing toward that **hazy realm of perception** beyond the clearly focused. If you are "looking" at the tip of your nose for the Nasagrai Drishti, then your eyes will cross, if you are softly gazing toward the tip of your nose, your eyes will not cross.

Remember drishti in a broader context; of having perspective of one's life. Think of your drishti as giving you x-ray vision to see through the illusions of life.

When we view the world and others with our yogi vision (or yogi eyes) we don't see differences or separation we see Love.



Bobbi Misiti
 2201 Market Street
 Camp Hill, PA 17011
 717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

Pose	Drishti
Surya Namaskar	
Samasthitih	Nasagrai
Uttana Padasana (inhale reach up)	Angusta Ma Dyai (thumb)
Uttanasana (exhale forward bend)	Nasagrai (nose)
(inhale head up)	Nasagrai
Chaturanga Dandasana	Nasagrai Head forward
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana	Nasagrai
Adho Mukha Svanasana	Nabi Chakra
Standing Poses	
Padangusthasana	Nasagrai (nose)
Padahasthasana	Nasagrai (nose)
Utthita Trikonasana	Hastagrai (hand)
Parivritta Trikonasana	Hastagrai (hand)
Utthita Parsvakonasana	Hastagrai (hand)
Parivritta Parsvakonasana	Hastagrai (hand)
Prasarita Padottanasana A	Nasagrai
Prasarita Padottanasana B	Nasagrai
Prasarita Padottanasana C	Nasagrai
Prasarita Padottanasana D	Nasagrai
Parsvottanasana	Nasagrai
Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana	Padhayoragrai (toes) Parsva (side)
Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana	Nasagrai
Utkatasana	Urdhva (upward)
Virabhadrasana I	Urdhva
Virabhadrasana II	Hastagrai
Primary Series - Yoga Chikitsa	
Dandasana	Nasagrai
Paschimattanasana A & B	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Purvattanasana	Nasagrai (nose!)
Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottanasana	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Triang Mukhaekapada Paschimattanasana	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Janu Sirsasana A / B / C	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Marichyasana A	Padhayoragrai (toes)



Bobbi Misiti
 2201 Market Street
 Camp Hill, PA 17011
 717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

Marichyasana B	Nasagrai (nose)
Marichyasana C	Parsva (side)
Marichyasana D	Parsva (side)
Navasana	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Bhujapidasana	Nasagrai
Kurmasana	Broomadhya (ajna chakra)
Supta Kurmasana	Broomadhya
Garbha Pindasana	Nasagrai
Kukkutasana	Nasagrai
Baddha Konasana	Nasagrai
Upavistha Konasana	Broomadhya
Upavistha Konasana - balanced	Urdhva
Supta Konasana	Nasagrai
Supta Padangusthasana	Padhayoragrai (toes) / Parsva (side)
Ubhaya Padangusthasana	Antara (upward)
Urdhva Mukha Paschimattanasana	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Setu Bandhasana	Nasagrai (nose)
Urdhva Dhanurasana	Nasagrai (nose)
Paschimattanasana	Padhayoragrai (toes)
Finishing Asanas	
Supta Samasthitih	nasagrai
Salamba Sarvangasana	Nasagrai
Halasana	Nasagrai
Karnapidasana	Nasagrai
Urdhva Padmasana	Nasagrai
Pindasana	Nasagrai
Mathsyasana	Nasagrai/Broomadhya
Uttana Padasana	Nasagrai
Sirsasana	Nasagrai
Baddha Padmasana	Nasagrai
Yoga Mudra	Broomadhya
Padmasana	Nasagrai
Tolasana - Utplutih	Nasagrai



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717/443-1119 www.befityoga.com

Intermediate Series – Nadi Sodhana	
Pasasana	Parsva
Krounchasana	Padhayoragrai
Salabhasana	Nasagrai (nose!)
Bhekasana	Nasagrai
Dhanurasana	Nasagrai
Parsva Dhanurasana	Nasagrai
Ustrasana	Nasagrai
Laghuvajrasana	Broomadhya
Kapotasana	Nasagrai
Supta Vajrasana	Nasagrai
Bakasana	Nasagrai
Bharadvajasana	Parsva
Ardha Matsyendrasana	Parsva
Eka Pada Sirsasana	Nasagrai
Dwi Pada Sirsasana	Nasagrai
Yoganidrasana	Broomadhya/Nasagrai
Tittibhasana	Nasagrai
Pincha Mayurasana	Nasagrai
Karandavasana	Nasagrai
Mayurasana	Nasagrai
Nakrasana	Nasagrai
Vatayanasana	Urdhva
Parighasana	Urdhva
Gomukhasana	Nasagrai / Urdhva
Supta Urdhva Pada Vajrasana	Nasagrai / Parsva
Mukta Hasta Sirsasana	Nasagrai
Baddha Hasta Sirsasana	Nasagrai
Urdhva Dhanurasana	Nasagrai (nose)