



THE **mind-body** FITNESS COLUMN

Ask Gael...

Are you confused about what kind of mind-body fitness class is right for you? Do you want to learn more about meditation? Are you wondering if any of this stuff can really help you in a practical sense? I personally like the ever popular, "Can you really lose weight doing any of this stuff!" The questions keep rollin' in, so I'm taking it on to answer your questions large and small, and help you figure it all out.

With the kind of experience under my belt to affectionately be called, "a pioneer in the field of mind-body fitness", I can see the problem. Now I'm not Methuselah mind you, so if I see the rise in the temperature of our fitness consciousness to be dramatic, then it has also been quick. Within the framework of just forty short years, the fitness industry in America has gone from virtually non-existent to having enough permutations to support classes on every corner and certifications galore. For those of you who remember Jack LaLanne on black and white TV being the exercise venue of choice, you know what I mean! This stuff is new to our culture and really just beginning to find its way. Add in the components of mind-body programming and things get confusing fast. Take yoga for example. The most frequently asked question I answered when I began my career was, "What's yoga?" Now you have to go out of your way to avoid it - and just to confuse you, no two forms are alike.

While we're all thankfully getting in touch with our need for balance, with choice comes the need to define. So that "what's yoga" question is still a good one, for this particular form of mind-body fitness like many others is now recognized, but infrequently understood for its depth and its scope. Because we are so intent on our definition of "fitness" involving physical exercise, we've sort of lost the roots from which it has all come. "All roads lead to Rome," said the Romans - and mindbody fitness is sort of like that. All yoga leads to yoking - or that's the idea anyway. There are eight limbs in the system, with only one of those limbs (asana) involving movement. Yet within that one limb there are many schools. The other seven limbs make up the body of the tree, or the whole of the practice. They involve breathing practices, mind clearing tech-

niques, concentration exercises, consciousness raising, lifestyle choices, ritual practices, meditation techniques and the suspension of everyday consciousness into a blending with the divine source of joy. That's a far cry from a conversation limited to six-pack abs or thin thighs. I hear people comment, "Oh I can't do yoga, I'm too stiff!" You're not supposed to "do" yoga in the first place! You're there to BE yoga! Experience, surrender, give in and find yourself, and in the process of finding yourself, you'll demonstrate ever increasing levels of health, flexibility, radiance and peace.

With all the forms and choices and schools out there now, what are some of the guidelines that you can use to find the class that's right for you? I've been fortunate (and dedicated) enough to have studied with many of our living yoga masters in their journey West, and I guarantee you they all say something similar - but in very different ways. So here's the deal...if you want to engage in the true spirit of the work, beware when you hear someone say, "MY way is the right way." No one-way has a lock on all the goods. If you hit on a teacher who sounds holier than thou, run for the hills. Seriously. That hierarchy type of engagement is, in the end, quite the opposite of the mind-body fitness intended purpose.

The road you must take then, is the one that is the best fit for you. Whether you are drawn to tai chi, pilates, yoga, flow class, mat class, meditation, sacred dance or that new "whatever", here is the best advice I can give you when sniffing out your own needs.

Experiment! You are a participant in your own outcome. Get involved and enjoy what you're doing.

The very purpose of mind-body fitness is to help you get in touch with your mind, body and spirit as one.

Physical prowess is the result of the practice but not the primary goal. Peace and balance are the goals.

Observe the results, but release your attachment to the specifics. You may never have thin thighs in this lifetime and that's all right.

If it feels **bad, pushy** or **competitive**, then you're in the wrong place.

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Keep experimenting until you find the place that feels right to you AND the right teacher. Some people actually respond better to a more aerobic form of movement, others need more meditation or perhaps chanting. If you're used to kick-butt asana practice, please know it's not "wrong" to chant ...just a different form of moving your body/mind using the vibration of sound. It's all matter of balance after all.

Oh yes - the question about losing weight doing this stuff (I didn't forget). Balance is the result of practicing any worthwhile mind-body fitness program. Balance affects the human system in all ways- moods, sleep

cycles, muscle tonus, and yes, weight. This is not about calorie counting as we have been taught to believe, but rather achieving homeostasis (the natural state of balance that your body is endlessly seeking) and once achieved your natural perfect weight is a given.

Next column I'll discuss the advantages of adding meditation to your routine.



Gael Chiarella began her Professional Yoga Study with the New York Yoga Teacher Alliance in 1978. Her passion for holistic medicine led to training as a yoga therapist, certified crisis counselor, fitness trainer, hypnotherapist, and bodyworker with worldwide acclaim for her meditation programs. Honored as Woman of the Year for the development of The Yokibics Mindbody Fitness Program® Gael is an Author, Teacher of teachers, and Life Coach. You can learn more about her at yokibics.com. Contact: Gael@phillyfit.com

Way to Go, Dr. Joe!



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