

Partner Yoga or Individual Practice?

By Elysabeth Williamson

This is not a question most people consider. Whether to practice yoga individually at all is for most, a more relevant question. Having spent over twelve years exploring and developing Partner Yoga practices, this is a question that I have often considered. There was a period of time while writing my book that Partner Yoga was my sole practice. I asked myself “Why do an individual practice when Partner Yoga fulfills the purpose of Yoga with much less effort and much more pleasure?” My understanding of the purpose of Yoga is - to expand my being and open me to experiencing union between my separate self and the larger whole. In Partner Yoga practice, the larger whole is accessed through connecting with others.

Over time I realized that it was very important to maintain a steady individual practice. During my exploration of the principles of Partner Yoga I came to see that it is only to the degree that we can define ourselves as separate, unique and whole unto ourselves, that we are able to safely join with others. It is from an ongoing committed self-practice that we develop the personal awareness and distinction of self that leads to harmonious relationships and eventually to union with the larger Whole. Our relationship with ourselves is the foundation upon which all others rest.

One of the paradoxes of spiritual development is that although we are moving away from ego and attachment to self-image, if the separate self is not cultivated and continually refined, the result will be confusion and negative projections in our relationships. We experience this as co-dependence, or the part of us that believes we need others to be whole, safe or happy. For those of us who have experienced co-dependent relationships, we know this kind of dependence leads to anger, shame

and addiction. These relationships mirror negative beliefs such as “intimacy with others is dangerous”. We begin to shut ourselves off from the richness and joy of intimate relationships and to our most basic human need for authentic connection with others.

In observing human dynamics of relationship through Partner Yoga, I've noticed that most of us gravitate toward one of two relational patterns; the first is to become so solidly identified with ourselves that we have difficulty attuning to and connecting with others. The second pattern is becoming so overly identified with others that we have difficulty discerning our own thoughts and feelings from the thoughts and feelings of others. My own pattern is the latter and I've learned it is particularly important for those of us with this tendency to have an individual practice in order to strengthen our own energetic boundary. I have also seen and experienced how Partner Yoga practices shifts these patterns and has a healing, balancing effect on both - those whose tendency is toward rigid boundaries learn to soften and safely open to the energies of others. Those who tend to unconsciously merge with others



have an opportunity to use the presence of others to deepen into their autonomous sense of self.

Like many questions in life it is not an either/or between Partner Yoga and individual Yoga practice. Instead I see how mutually supportive they can be. Some practitioners find individual Yoga practice to be their path of preference and are content with the use of props if additional support is needed. I have found the healing qualities of Yoga become greater when consciously practiced with others. Partner Yoga practice has the potential to take what we cultivate on

our own and magnify it, accelerating our spiritual and emotional growth. The experience of safety and support, love and acceptance that comes with Partner Yoga affects us in ways beyond what we can imagine bringing us into a state of comm-union with each other and our self.



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