

yoga is more than stretching

BY **DR. BOB BUTERA**

Yoga postures or stretches are one part of a hundred types of Yoga. The psychophysical branch, named Hatha Yoga, comprises the yoga stretches or postures. Well-trained, experienced Yoga teachers do not teach the techniques of Yoga without first covering some basic behaviors like non-violence and purity of mind and body. Teaching a student to treat others with respect, eat well, rest and exercise are all prerequisites to the practice of authentic Yoga.

In the old tradition, a Classical Yoga student followed a strict regimen. To master a posture meant remaining still in a pose for three hours. The goal was not limited to technical mastery however, as Classical Yoga was preparation for further spiritual practice. This lifestyle incorporates all aspects of the personality (physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual) with the aim of freeing a student from any blocks that limit him/her from higher pursuits.

Perhaps living a healthy lifestyle in the modern world is today's posture to master. The integrated approach to life presented by Classical Yoga helps one cope with stress. The essence of Classical Yoga can be applied to modern life by integrating theory into practices that transform one's attitude toward interactions.

To begin, the philosophy of Yoga is applied to each part of our lives, but let me apply the first step in doing a Yoga pose as an example. Each morning when I wake up and feel the normal stiffness after sleep, I think that taking a short walk and performing a few Yoga poses will make me feel great and make the day ahead a good one. While my thoughts are not negative, they are not enlightened Yogic thoughts. "I want" a specific outcome to occur. If I am really honest, I don't want to

hear anyone complain, I don't want to see anyone suffer and I certainly don't want to remember any unsolved problems. This type of attitude, again while optimistic, lacks the spiritual dimension.

If I approach Yoga for guaranteed success, I would say, "Ah, today I will enjoy some stretches and clear my mind so that I might be a shining light in the midst of whatever the day brings". This spiritual attitude accepts life for what it is. There may be pain, suffering, joy or love, but whatever happens, I maintain an accepting attitude. This approach can now be applied to everything. If you exercise today and want to feel good, then you are going to be trapped by your "wanting". If you exercise and just accept life for what it is, you will be successful no matter the outcome.

This one example of how an accepting attitude shows you the power of Yoga when it is taught in its proper manner. Below are the eight main steps that comprise the Classical Yoga system in relation to yoga poses and meditation.

The Eight Steps of Classical Yoga:

1. Restraints: Non-Violence, Truth, Non-Stealing, Moderation and Non-Greed.
2. Observance of Virtue: Purity, Contentment, Fortitude, Study, and Recognition of a Higher Reality.
3. Physical: Yoga Postures, Hygiene, Diet, Exercise, Rest.
4. Bio-Energy Control utilizes breathing exercises to develop an understanding of the body's use of life force.
5. Sensory Awakening: Sight, Smell, Touch, Taste and Hearing.
6. Concentration focuses the mind on one topic and returns to the topic when the mind jumps. Most meditators are in a stage of concentration during their practice.

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- 7. Meditation means thinking on only one thought for a prolonged period of time. Traditionally, 28 minutes is distinguished as the time to transform concentration to meditation.
- 8. Trance Consciousness is a mystical state of consciousness that occurs to a person but cannot be consciously manifested.

A Yoga Lifestyle is a path that can lead to, a positive belief system, reduction of stressful behaviors, nutritional awareness, yoga poses and breathing, relaxation, meditation, yoga psychology, a hobby / creative outlet, group support, and an individualized home program.

A common beginner question is how will Yoga benefit someone who is out of shape. Yoga practices can be modified for all conditions. Beginner or Gentle Yoga classes are helpful for those who need to move very slowly. Beginner classes are non-fatiguing and concentrate on learning the fundamentals of Yoga poses. When proper breathing and alignment is learned, the benefits of Yoga poses accrue. Students who are fit will find a vigorous class (vinyasa class) to be a challenge, especially for those who have not patiently learned the basics of Yoga poses. For best results, first study in the slower beginners class to learn proper breathing and form. Many who are fit but new to Yoga often skip beginner levels and are prone to injure themselves as the mixture of toning, stretching breathing and relaxation needs to be understood first.

Those suffering from a health condition should work together with their health professional's guidance. Yoga may support health by reducing stress and motivating the student to practice the principles of healthy living. However, do not look to the Yoga teacher to know the limits of your activity. Ask your Doctor for your limits and then bring that information to the Yoga teacher. A Yoga teacher cannot diagnose nor recommend what is best for a particular condition. However, the teacher should know how to adapt exercises if you tell them your limitations. Conditions that can be improved through healthy living and a thorough Yoga program include, addiction support, anxiety, asthma, back ache, depression, diabetes, emotional integration, high blood

Bob assists in hero's pose



Eva Arriaga in a seated twist pose

pressure, insomnia, life changes, meditation training, pain management, prenatal exercise, preventative health care, stress management, and weight loss.

The practice of these ideas is not easy. Bad habits are ingrained from childhood. Society teaches competition, not balanced living. Stress producing ideals are ingrained in the fabric of our thinking; be a millionaire, be famous, change the world. These materialistic goals do not bring health or happiness.

Classical Yoga can provide expert guidance in proper intention and technique. Then, the practitioner experiences how the meaning of Yoga relates to the meaning of life. Yoga does not define life; it illustrates ways of creating a balanced state of mind. Clarity of mind allows one to know reality from within and remain unaffected by the stress of society. Slowly, these practices develop into a routine of healthy living.



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