

JOY: The Journal of Yoga

investigating the philosophy, science and spirituality of yoga

Introduction to the Online Yoga Manual

This Yoga manual, Yoga is for Better Health and Living: An Introduction to the Path and Practice of Yoga was compiled and written by John C. Kimbrough, a teacher of Yoga currently living in Bangkok, Thailand.

Its purpose is to give those who are interested in learning about Yoga or have just started practicing it an overview of what it's holistic practice consists of.

This Yoga manual is given free to those who come to John's Yoga sessions in Bangkok because it can give Yoga practitioners more of an in – depth look at and understanding of those things that make up the practice of yoga, things that sometimes can only be briefly covered or given a superficial reflection on while teaching a Yoga class.

This online manual has recently been updated to include a second section which covers in more detail some aspects of the practice of Yoga.

Just being presented with information about what Yoga is may not be enough for some people to deal with understanding and practicing it effectively year in and year out.

This manual is free for your use as you see fit though John requests that he be acknowledged as the writer of it if you make any reproductions or other use of it.

You may download it, reformat it and print it out for your own personal use or to share with friends, family, and work colleagues.

If you have any questions or comments about the information about Yoga given here, or any other questions about the practice of Yoga, you can contact John at johnckimbrough@yahoo.com.

He will always answer your E-mails.

If you can have a good understanding of the material covered in this manual, you will have a firm foundation for a fruitful practice of Yoga.

Yoga is something that will improve your mental and physical health and give you short and long term benefits that will always make you thankful that you took up its practice and put forth the effort to learn and practice it.

Good luck with your journey of life and with Yoga!

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June 30th, 2004
Bangkok, Thailand

Yoga is for Better Health and Living: An Introduction to the Path and Practice of Yoga

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Section 1

1. Introduction

Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning "union". It refers to the union of the individual soul with the universal soul and the path and practices we engage in order to achieve that union. Yoga is not a religion.

The practice of Yoga consists of the understanding and application of various disciplines in thought, word and action to ourselves and others. The understanding and practice of these disciplines directs and channels energy in a specific manner in the body and consciousness which weakens unhealthy, unwholesome and unskillful states of being while at the same time cultivating states of being which are healthy, wholesome and skillful.

This handout attempts to give those who read it a brief overview of what those disciplines are.

Yoga originated in what is now known as the Indian sub – continent and is based on the teachings put forth in a number of ancient scriptures, such as The Bhagavad Gita, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, The Hatha Yoga Pradipka and The Upanishads, among others. These scriptures were written by ancient wise men in order to articulate and pass on the teachings of Yoga to those who wish to gain the benefits from its practice.

There are various kinds of Yoga. The five most commonly referred to are Hatha Yoga (The Yoga of physical postures and breathing techniques), Jnana Yoga (The Yoga of knowledge), Karma Yoga (The Yoga of action), Raja/Astanga Yoga (The royal way/The Yoga of the eight limbs), and Bhaktha Yoga (The Yoga of devotion).

Each Yoga consists of various ways of thinking and living in order to achieve a greater sense of personal fulfillment and a spiritual awakening and enhancement.

What are the various practices of Yoga? For the sake of simplicity, convenience, and ease in understanding, we can categorize them into six disciplines or components. These are relaxation practice, meditation practice, posture practice, breathing techniques, morals and ethics and wholesome and healthy attitudes as regards one's diet, sleep and leisure activities. When one understands and practices these components of Yoga in their entirety one is practicing all of the Yoga's listed above.

And what are the benefits of this kind of practice? They are immediate and ongoing, affecting us both mentally and physically.

Individuals who practice Yoga will experience greater clarity in thinking and greater balance in their lives as they perform various activities and actions with greater skill and mindfulness. With increased clarity and balance, there are changes in our perspectives, actions and attitudes, as regards ourselves and as to how we relate to and interact with others. Individuals who practice Yoga experience better mental and physical health and build and live on that health in ways that are joyful and satisfying.

This handout will give those who want to learn about Yoga a comprehensive foundation for its understanding and useful guidelines for cultivating their own practice.

If you have any questions or comments about Yoga and the material covered in this handout, you can contact its author at johnckimbrough@yahoo.com

2. The Philosophy of Yoga

There is in modern times a lack of understanding and interest among many as to what the purpose of the path and practice of Yoga is and what the philosophy behind its practice is. Most individuals think of it as being a primarily physical practice which can weaken and alleviate various mental and physical imbalances and disorders. This in itself makes it worthwhile to learn, understand and practice.

However, these affects of the physical practice of Yoga are not the primary objective of Yoga. In fact, they are only one benefit from its practice. The philosophy that Yoga is built around goes much deeper than this.

The science and practice of Yoga is built around the philosophy that the mind has defilements which lead to ignorance, suffering, confusion and pain. This ignorance, confusion, suffering and pain leads to debilitated states of consciousness that can harm ourselves and others. The purpose of the various practices, techniques, disciplines and components of Yoga is to weaken and alleviate these defilements.

These mental defilements are five in number. They are spiritual ignorance, attachment, aversion, egoism, and clinging to Life

The manifestation of these defilements is affected by the quality of our mental and physical energy. In Yoga, this quality of mental and physical energy is known as the gunas. There are three gunas. They are lazy, dull, inert (Tamas), active, passionate (Rajas) and balanced, harmonious, luminous (Sattva)

The various teachings and practices of Yoga make an individual balanced and harmonious, thereby weakening these defilements. We achieve this sattvic state through the holistic practice of yoga, that is, practicing the six components that are looked at in this manual.

For many of us, the quality of the energy, these gunas, fluctuates throughout the day and throughout our life. The things that have conditioned this quality of energy involve many things. This includes our upbringing, our past and present experiences, our patterns of thinking and feeling, our habits regarding sleep, diet and leisure activities and our attitudes to others and the world.

As the state and quality of this energy is changed through the practice of Yoga, the defilements are also weakened.

The teachings, disciplines, practices, and components of Yoga recondition the consciousness so it is more concentrated and skillful. When the consciousness is concentrated, those things that darken and disturb it are weakened. What darkens and disturbs the consciousness are the defilements. It is the weakening and eventual

alleviation and ending of these defilements that is the objective of the path and practice of Yoga.

3. An Overview of the Components of Yoga

The Practice of Yoga consists of the understanding and application of various disciplines in thought, word and action to ourselves and others. The understanding and practice of these disciplines directs and channels energy in a specific manner in the body and consciousness which weakens unhealthy, unwholesome and unskillful states of being while at the same time cultivating states of being which are healthy, wholesome and skillful.

This can be a long and drawn out process which as one practices it, one gradually experiences an enhancement of their life energy in all aspects of their being.

Individuals experience greater clarity in thinking and greater balance in their lives as they engage in various activities and actions. Individuals have greater skill and mindfulness as they reflect on their life experiences while at the same time engaging in them. Individuals experience better mental and physical health and build on that health in ways that are joyful and satisfying.

In looking at the practice of Yoga, it is sometimes helpful to those who want to get the full benefits from their practice and at the same time have an ease in understanding what it consists of to have the teachings presented to them in an easy to comprehend manner.

One way to achieve this is to look at the various aspects of Yoga as being components. With this in mind, we can think of Yoga as consisting of six components. They are diet, sleep and leisure activities, relaxation practice, breathing techniques, postures, meditation practice and morals and ethics.

In essence all of these various components fall under the teachings put forth as morals and ethics, but for some, this path to understanding the teaching seems more complex, especially as nowadays most of what is perceived as being Yoga and practiced as such is primarily physical.

Individuals sometimes will ask which of these components is most important. They are all important and a tendency to focus more on one than another may lead to a compromising of the ability to access the full benefits of practicing Yoga.

At the same time, it is worthwhile to understand that what people think and feel as being most important to them at a particular time in their practice will depend on various factors, basically summed up as to where they are in their practice.

Generally speaking, those who are new to Yoga tend to focus on the postures of Yoga and the breathing techniques.

As we progress in Yoga, meditation and the morals and ethics of Yoga tend to become what one builds their practice of Yoga around, with the posture performance becoming more of a periphery aspect of practice.

We can think of diet, sleep and leisure activities, breathing techniques, relaxation and postures as being those things that balance and prepare us so we can practice meditation and the morals and ethics of Yoga, though from the first day of one's introduction to Yoga, they should be made mindful of all of these components and try to understand and practice them.

If one can see Yoga as consisting of these six components, it may be easier for one to grasp what Yoga and its various aspects are. For some, this will make their understanding and application of it easier.

Below is a brief introduction to and overview of these six components of Yoga.

Diet, sleep, leisure activities - Our life involves many actions and activities that we perform on a routine and daily basis. In order to access, cultivate and achieve the optimum balance and health that we desire, our approach to diet, sleep and leisure activities is important. Briefly, we should eat healthy, fresh and wholesome food at regular times, be mindful about our habits regarding sleep, especially our pre and post sleep activities, and make sure that we do not engage in leisure activities which over exert and weaken the spirit. Many of our leisure activities, though sensually stimulating or enjoyable, can, if approached with a lack of mindfulness or over - indulged in, unbalance and weaken the body and mind.

Relaxation practice - Relaxation according to Yoga is a consciously performed activity that it is recommended that individuals practice each day. It does not consist of engaging in a pleasing sensual experiences that may be made more pleasing through the use of drink or drugs. It involves a period of consciously performed stillness and silence while the body is configured in a specific posture, known as The Corpse Pose (Sanskrit: Savasana). It should be performed each day at the same time for a minimum of ten minutes. While one performs the posture, one should gently and mindfully watch the inhalation and exhalation of the breath, through the nose only.

Breathing techniques - Breathing techniques may be simple or advanced and performed in conjunction with any of the postures of Yoga. Breathing techniques in Yoga are referred to as pranayama, a Sanskrit term meaning expansion of bio - energy. Some of these techniques can be quite advanced, while others are simple to understand and practice. They cultivate concentration and mindfulness as the bio - energy of the body flows more freely and strongly.

Postures - The postures of Yoga are tremendously therapeutic in both subtle and overt ways as tension in the muscular - skeletal system is released, the respiratory system is strengthened and the other organs and systems of the body are massaged in such a way that they function more efficiently. In practicing the various postures of Yoga, we bend the spine forwards, backwards, sideways and twist it left and right. These postures are called therapeutic or cultural postures and many times when an individual says that he or she practices Yoga, they mean that they do these postures on a regular basis. They cultivate and maintain mental and physical balance, strength and health. They are most beneficial when practiced on a regular or daily basis and at the same time each time they are practiced.

Meditation practice - Meditation practice should be performed each day at the same time in a posture that is comfortable and steady, keeping the spine and back straight

yet relaxed for a period of time as one is mindful about and concentrates on a specific phenomena, such as the breath of the rising and falling of the stomach

Morals and ethics - The morals and ethics of Yoga comprise and encompass all of the teachings of Yoga. They work to lessen tendencies of thought, word and action that may compromise our mental and physical health and joy and are performed in thought, word and action to ourselves and others. They are not always taught, looked at and understood as being important and necessary in these modern times with the way that Yoga has been promoted and taught in some environments. However B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the foremost teachers of Yoga in the world over the last 50 years says that "mastery of Yoga would be unrealizable without the observance of the ethical principles of yama and niyama" (yama and niyama are Sanskrit translations for universal vows and personal observances, the morals and ethics of Yoga)

4. What we achieve from the understanding and practice of Yoga

It is sometimes difficult for us to see or understand what it is we are working to, aiming for and experiencing from our practice of Yoga. Generally, individuals who practice Yoga experience a sense, energy, feeling and experience of life enhancement.

The constituents make that up can be clearly defined and understood as consisting of what is known in Buddhism as The Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

They are states of consciousness that are already within us but hindered by various things, such as our conditioning, experiences, current habits, actions and routines, genetics and hereditary factors. These Seven factors of Enlightenment are gradually accessed, strengthened and cultivated through the understanding and application of the various disciplines and components that make up the holistic practice of Yoga.

These states of consciousness, existence and being are mindfulness, concentration, tranquility, equanimity, energy and effort, Joy and an investigative nature. Below is a brief introduction to and overview of the seven factors of enlightenment

1. Mindfulness - Mindfulness means to be more aware of those things that we are thinking, feeling and experiencing, both internally and externally at any particular moment. It involves the technique of observing without allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by any aspect of the phenomenon of thinking, feeling, doing and reacting. Mindfulness includes constituents such as preparedness, sense restraint, detachment, morality and faith.

We can reflect on what kind of thoughts, feeling, verbal and physical patterns of behavior may occur if we lack mindfulness.

2. Concentration - Concentration is a focused presence on what is happening or the task that one is performing at any particular time and moment. With the accessing and cultivation of concentration, mindfulness, tranquility, equanimity, energy and effort, joy and an investigative nature are also accessed and cultivated.

We can reflect on how a lack of concentration can make our life less meaningful and enjoyable and what habits we may have that hinder or weaken our concentration?

3. Tranquility - Tranquility refers to a calm state of consciousness. Its constituents include loving kindness, skillful speech, humility and a tendency to refrain from anger in any form.

For reflection: Can we pinpoint those things in our lives that take away our tranquility? May we be accessing a short-term feeling or experience of tranquility through some artificial means which may have long-term affects which are not so healthy for us?

4. Equanimity - Equanimity refers to a consistent and balanced state of consciousness, not overly influenced or disturbed by fluctuations from within and experiences from without. Its primary constituents are sobriety, balance, integration and co-ordination, steadiness, self-confidence, self-esteem, flexibility in thinking and the ability to share with others in an honest, respectful, open and vulnerable manner.

For reflection: What benefits does equanimity bring to those who consciously try to cultivate it or have cultivated it into their lives? Can you pinpoint those things in life that interfere with your ability to be equanimious?

5. Energy and effort - Energy and effort refers to the ability to have the energy required and the ability to apply it as needed to any task or experience. Its constituents include determination, will power, self-control, and an understanding, acceptance and skillful performance of one's duty.

For reflection: How may we hurt ourselves and those that we love and have responsibilities to if we are not functioning at our greatest energy and fullest effort?

6. Joy - Joy is a state of satisfaction from within, based on energy, balance, wisdom, concentration and mindfulness. When the mind experiences states of concentration and tranquility, it radiates joy within itself. With Joy, we have more enthusiasm for the experiences of life, looking at them as welcome challenges and opportunities to learn and apply the morals and ethics that we abide by.

For reflection: Can a consistent joy be more fulfilling than a happiness dependent on external factors? What are some of the things that can rob of us of Joy?

7. Investigative nature - The enthusiasm and ability to look at more closely the issues regarding internal and external phenomena and the teachings that instruct us in ways to understand and develop them to a new and higher state. We are more open to new ideas from inside and outside of us and have the ability to explore them more skillfully.

For reflection: How can an investigative nature make our life more fulfilling? Through an investigative nature, can we become more skillful in how we live? What are some of the things worth investigating in your own life?

5. Relaxation according to Yoga

When individuals think of relaxation, they usually think of something that they enjoy doing and find sensually stimulating, exciting or interesting. This may include socializing, partying, watching a movie or television, reading, going to a play or sports event, or the beach or mountains and a host of other leisure activities that may be part of the modern and technologically driven world.

In the path and practice of Yoga, relaxation is understood to be a conscious activity where one slows down the metabolism in order to let go of mental and physical tension.

Many of the leisure activities mentioned above do not help us let go of mental and physical tension. Instead, they may actually be producing more, especially if we over indulge in drugs, drink or sex. We may be putting overt and subtle pressure on our mind and body, trying to live the ideal, conform, impress and perhaps trying to be something or someone we are not, instead of learning more about who we are.

Yoga understands that tension in the body and mind can bring about emotional, behavioral and physical disorders which keep us from realizing our full potential in life and enjoying all that life has to offer. Even if we are not aware of experiencing any physical disorders, we may be engaging in emotional states (anxiety, worry, etc.) or behavior (drinking, smoking, substance abuse) which may have short and long term negative health effects. Yoga understands that being consciously still each day for a set period of time is the best way to become more relaxed and develop and improve our concentration and energy.

The benefits of regular Yoga relaxation practice are numerous. They include:

- Better overall physical and mental health.
- Relieves and delays the onset of fatigue and makes up for lost sleep.
- Helps us access and cultivate the skillful and healthy elements of the unconscious mind. This brings about a spiritual unfoldment and leads to better mind-body integration and harmony and effortless living.
- Helps us minimize and alleviate illusions, fatigue, confusion, inessential burdens and develops a living that is more skillful which allows us to let go of disturbing thoughts and feelings. It helps us deal with the life stresses we experience and brings about greater freedom from negative conditioning and repressed memories.
- Prepares the mind, body and breath for sitting concentration/meditation practice.

Practice Yoga relaxation techniques at least one time a day. Suggested times are:

- Before or after lunch or upon returning from work and before dinner
- Before going to sleep at night
- After experiencing any situation which creates fatiguing or stressful feelings
- After the Hatha Yoga posture session and before meditation practice

Relaxation technique #1

1. Lay on your back on a firm flat surface. Have a blanket or mat beneath you.

Pillows, towels or blankets may be used to support those areas of the body that experience discomfort, tension or pain.

2. The feet are 18 to 24 inches apart, and the hands are equal distance from the hips, about 6 to 12 inches. The palms are facing up and the fingers are slightly curled. The head is line with the spine, not twisting or bending in any direction. The eyes and mouth are closed.

3. Stay in the posture for 10 to 20 minutes, concentrating on equalized inhalation and exhalation through the nose only. Follow the breath, not the wanderings of the mind.

4. When coming out of the posture, slowly turn and lay on your left side, with the legs slightly bent, the right arm resting along the right side of the body and the left arm supporting the head. Lay like this for 2 minutes or more before slowly opening your eyes and getting up slowly. Use your left arm and elbow, and right hand to support yourself as you slowly get up.

Relaxation Technique #2

1. Lie down on the stomach. Have the chest and abdomen in contact with the ground. Have the legs about 18 to 24 inches apart Have the left hand on the floor palm down, resting the right hand palm down on top of it. Then turn the head either left or right and lay the cheek on the back of the right hand. Close your eyes and mouth and breathe equally through the nose only.

2. Lay like this from five to 20 minutes.

Relaxation Technique #3

1. Lay against a wall. Have the legs open 18 to 24 inches, hands resting in the tops of the thighs, palms facing the ceiling with the fingers slightly curled. Listen passively to sounds in the distance and Lay in the posture for 10 to 15 minutes

Relaxation technique #4

1. Sit in a chair and have the feet about shoulder width apart and rest the hands on the tops of the thigh, palms down. Close your eyes and listen passively to sounds in the distance for five minutes or more

6. Breath, Breathing and Prana

The breath is something that some individuals never become fully mindful about in their whole life. This is unfortunate, because the breath is our greatest friend and most important attribute and makes our flesh, matter and energy alive. Without breath there is no life. Breath is the first and last thing we experience in our life. It has been a major aspect of man's spiritual and religious understanding and practice throughout history and most religions and disciplines have incorporated some respiratory exercises into them.

Through the science and practice of Yoga we develop the understanding and awareness that the breath is a tool which we use to develop calmness, energy, and concentration. We learn to use the breath as a tool to better deal with the internal and external challenges of life and living and access and maintain physical and mental health.

The quality of our breathing is very important in the practice of Yoga. Breath is the vehicle for bio – energy (prana) the vital force that makes all life possible. If an

individual's breathing is fast, shallow or blocked in any way an individual will lack vitality, energy, and clarity of thought that could lead to mental, behavioral and physical health problems. If the quality of breathing is not good, there will be an inability to live and meet the challenges of life fully and head-on with wisdom, strength, and happiness.

There is a relationship between the mind/consciousness/awareness and breath. Breathing is the most vital process of the body system. Breath affects the hypothalamus which effects the functioning of the endocrine and autonomic nervous systems and our perception of things within and without us. In addition, the nerves in the mucus membrane are connected to visceral organs. If the breath is disturbed (shallow, erratic, blocked) it effects the functioning of the hypothalamus and the functioning of the Visceral organs.

Poor quality breathing may be caused by a number of factors. These include:

- Difficult, traumatic or stressful experiences in our past and present and unresolved emotional conflicts.
- Mental confusion, stress, worry, tension anxiety and depression.
- Our overall physical health.
- Habitual postures we sit, stand and sleep in.
- How often and what sort of exercises we do on a regular or daily basis.
- The quality of our diet.
- Our sleep habits and routines.
- Other habits, behaviors and routines, such as smoking, drinking, substance abuse, and addictive tendencies and actions.
- Environmental factors such as pollution, noise smoking, crowds, busy places, and work.
- Genetics and hereditary factors.
- Respiratory conditions such as cold, allergies, asthma and foods which create blockages or mucus in the nostrils.

Bio – energy, hereafter referred to as prana is defined as the energy that holds things together and in place and the power which enables the movement which guides, controls and energizes the movements and knowledge of the living being. It is the central biological energy of our being. Prana is in the food we eat and the air we breathe. It is the driving, motivating and creative force behind our consciousness and the quality of Prana determines the quality of our consciousness. If Prana is diminished, stagnant, hindered or blocked it hurts our bodily/mental state. Prana is a life force in all life, at all levels, from the microscopic to the macroscopic. It is the elixir of life. The intent of the breath is not the breath, but the prana of the breath. Through breathing and prana, we feel all the movements of the body and mind which we otherwise may not feel.

To establish and maintain the vital processes in our body at a balanced and healthy level, we must be mindful and skillful in all our mental and physical actions and behaviors. This includes:

1. Be aware of the quality of our food and water intake
2. Be aware of our physical activity
3. Develop refinement in our breathing
4. Be aware of our behavior, what we do alone and with others

5. Be aware of our emotional disposition, that is, how we act and react
6. Practice Yoga and its component aspects and disciplines

Shallow breathing leads to a poor inhalation and assimilation of Prana. When the Prana flows unhindered, the body elements are balanced and equalized which leads to an awareness of, and minimization of disturbances in an individual's consciousness. The spirit can be more fully realized through the unhindered flow of Prana.

Yoga postures and techniques done with breath synchronization and co-ordination, plus specific breathing techniques develop the flow of prana in the body.

As mentioned above, prana is a Sanskrit word that means vital energy. Yama is a Sanskrit word that means expansion. Pranayama means expansion of bio - energy. Pranayamas are breathing techniques and practices where prana is controlled, managed, and developed and its quantity and quality enhanced to a higher level. This affects us physiologically and psychologically. When we practice Pranayama we are working on ourselves, helping ourselves evolve intellectually, emotionally, behaviorally, physically and spiritually. Through Pranayama we develop a state of centeredness, balance and calmness.

Pranayama techniques consist of a set of respiratory practices in which we use the mind to control the inflow, outflow, retention, and suspension of the breath in a regular and rhythmic pattern. When Pranayama techniques are practiced on a regular basis the internal pranic State is increased, expanded, understood, and controlled. Any time spent during the day on these techniques is time, effort and energy well spent. Pranayama should be done with the same idea of necessity as eating is, as air is food and the breath and the food we eat are the sources of prana. In Yoga there are guidelines for eating and guidelines and techniques for breath lengthening and balancing. Pranayama techniques can be done sitting in a meditative posture or in the relaxation posture (Savasana). They involve working with the inhalation, retention, exhalation and suspension of breath in various patterns and ratios alternating between left and right nostril or using both nostrils.

The breathing apparatus is an energy system. Working with the breath activates, harmonizes and balances this energy system, which makes it function more efficiently.

The flow of breath through the left and right nostrils alternates about every 90 minutes in individuals. That means that either the left or right nostril will have the predominating flow of breath through it every 90 minutes or so. There is an alteration in the predominating flow of breath 16 times a day. According to yoga, there is a relationship between our mental and physical state and what nostril the breath is flowing more smoothly through, is predominating through.

Upon knowing this, we can be more aware of our own and others mental states and engage in certain activities that are naturally brought about by the nostril in which the breath is flowing .

Left nostril (moon breath, yin, & tha) – The body is cooled and relaxed when the left nostril flows. The parasympathetic nervous system and mind dominate. The right hemisphere, which relates to art, music and intuition predominates. There is a good

flow of energy along the left side of the body. It is the time for resting, sleeping, and engaging in activities that require mental creativity. An individual who because of acute and chronic conditions may have a predominating breath flow through the left nostril most of the time may exhibit tendencies such as passivity, dullness, laziness, inertness, be overly shy and introverted and be fearful and compulsive.

Right nostril (sun breath, yang, ha) – The body is warmed and energized when the right nostril flows. The sympathetic nervous system and energy dominate. The left hemisphere, which relates to words and logic predominates. There is a flow of energy along the right side of the body. It is a time for eating and those activities which require physical activity. An individual will be active, excited, enthusiastic and passionate about things. An individual who because of acute and chronic conditions may have a predominating flow of breath through the right nostril most of the time may exhibit tendencies such as impulsive and compulsive thoughts, actions and behaviors, be overly extroverted, excited, easily led to anger, lustful, greedy, and deceitful.

Both nostrils flow (temperate, Tao, union) - The body is balanced and harmonious when both nostrils flow smoothly. The central nervous system predominates and both hemispheres are balanced and harmonious in their functioning. An individual reaches a superconscious state involving heightened awareness of themselves, others and their environment. This state is brought about through Hatha yoga postures and breathing and is a state which is best for concentration and Meditation.

It is to our benefit to be mindful of our breathing, understand that it is a tool for improving ourselves, and understand the various ways that it's functioning is compromised, and ways to enhance it.

7. The Postures of Yoga

Most Individuals, when they hear the word Yoga, associate it with various bodily postures. These are known in Sanskrit as Asana. Nowadays, postures have become, in most people's minds, what Yoga and its practice consist of.

The practice of the postures of Yoga is tremendously beneficial to one's mental and physical health. These postures can be categorized according to what their purpose is. These are:

Relaxation postures – These are postures which bring about a state of physical relaxation and mental calmness. There are four of these, of which one is the most important and recommended to be practiced on a daily basis. This posture is known as the corpse posture (Savasana). This posture relaxes the body, meaning that tension in the body is alleviated. This brings a state of calmness to the mind. Calmness in the mind is healthy and wholesome for individuals to access and experience.

Meditative postures – These are postures in which an individual sits for meditation practice. These postures consist of a body configuration where one sits on the floor, with the legs configured below the body or crossed in front of them. Meditation practice is the central aspect of both Yoga and Buddhism, therefore the practice and cultivation of a meditative posture is important.

Therapeutic postures – These are postures which have a therapeutic effect on the mind and body. They are also referred to as cultural postures. They bend the spine forward, backwards, twist it left and right, bend it left and right, and bring the body into an inverted position. These therapeutic postures are done from a standing position, sitting position, prone or supine position. Therapeutic postures get the body and mind more balanced and harmonized so that one can sit for meditation practice for an extended period of time.

The practice of the therapeutic postures of Yoga releases tension and energy in the muscular - skeletal system and massages all organs and systems of the body increasing their ability to function at high levels of efficiency. Postures done in synchronization and co-ordination with controlled and rhythmic breathing develop body - mind co-ordination and increase respiratory capacity. One of the many purposes and benefits of the practice of the postures of Yoga is to release, change and balance the bio – energy (prana, chi, ki) in the mind and body, so it begins to flow freely, making an individual more relaxed, concentrated and energized. This transforms and expands the consciousness manifesting itself mentally, emotionally, physically, behaviorally and spiritually.

Posture practice is one facilitator, among others, for individuals to cultivate healthy and positive sub-conscious states of mind. These are known as the Bhavas. Bhavas are the sub-conscious tendencies that are always present in all beings, but are overshadowed by the complexities of the ego and personality.

There is a relationship between the development of these Bhavas and the postures that we do. These states of minds and the postures that bring them about are mentioned below.

1. Duty (Dharma) - developed by practicing meditation and applying healthy and disciplined routines and habits in our life. Duty consists of:

- Consistency, steadiness in attitudes and acceptance.
- Regulation of desires and the ability to restrain impulses.
- The ability to accept internal authority and achieve mastery over oneself

2. Knowledge (Jnana) - developed by practicing the standing postures. Knowledge consists of:

- Wisdom, mindfulness and concentration
- Mind, behavior and body awareness
- Healthy and skillful cognition of mental and physical phenomena
- A broader and deeper understanding of our inner selves and the ability to apply ourselves better to the world through that knowledge

3. Objectivity (Vairagya) - developed by practicing forward bending postures and relaxation. Objectivity consists of:

- Letting go, renunciation and detachment, egolessness humility and dedication
- Desirelessness and dispassion
- Selfless work and actions
- Absence of sensual cravings and desires

4. Faith (Aishvarya) - developed by practicing backward bending postures and cleansing techniques. Faith consists of:

- Self-reliance, self-confidence, self-esteem, will power and mental strength
- Training of and control of the mind

Through the practice of the postures of Yoga, an individual will have more mental and physical energy, greater mindfulness of internal and external phenomena, and function from a more relaxed and calm state.

It is important to understand that Yoga is a path to freedom and that the postures are one of many components in its practice. To be too concerned about the perfection, extension or length of time in posture or think that proficiency in postures is what yoga is may be in error. Too much emphasis on postures can develop the ego, where we evaluate or feel good or bad about ourselves based on our ability to do or not do a posture. We also may be competing with and comparing ourselves to others. This is not what Yoga wants to cultivate in individuals.

If postures are done alone, with no attention to, and understanding and application of the other aspects and teachings of yoga, they alone may strengthen negative tendencies and behaviors. The mental, emotional, behavioral and physical states which keep us from achieving a balanced and peaceful state of mind need to be worked on through postures and attention to the other aspects of Yoga, specifically the morals and ethics (yamas and niyamas) and meditation practice.

The benefits of Yoga and posture practice have to be experienced. In order to access this experience, one needs to be patient, diligent, disciplined, mindful and make a sincere effort.

8. Meditation

Though much of the emphasis in the practice of Yoga in modern times seems to be related to postures and their practice and performance, it is meditation that is the real foundation and core of the practice of Yoga.

Meditation can be thought of as being a discipline of mental training and enhancement in which we develop one-pointedness and mental collectedness. Through the habit of regular meditation practice, we can overcome mental conditioning which may be unskillful and sustained and enhanced by its own unskillful momentum. We are engaging in a process of purifying the mind through the use of various techniques, such as observing its tendencies and movements, experiencing stillness and silence, and by concentrating on a specific object.

Both Yoga and Buddhist teachings and philosophies state that the mind is "defiled" and that it is made less pure because of these defilements. These defilements are the source of our confusion, suffering and mental and physical discomfort and pain. These defilements manifest themselves in all aspects of our being, in thoughts, emotions, words, actions and habits.

There are five mental defilements, according to the science of Yoga. They are spiritual ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. There are

three mental defilements according to the philosophy of Buddhism. They are attachment, aversion and delusion. These mental defilements are not independent from one another. They manifest themselves in subtle and overt thoughts, emotions, habits, routines and verbal and physical actions. A closer study and comparison of the mental defilements of Yoga and Buddhism shows that they represent the same thing.

Through the path and practice of Yoga or Buddhism, with its emphasis on regular meditation practice, one is engaged in a process of weakening those defilements, those mental tendencies which cause us suffering on a mental, emotional, physical and behavioral level.

In order to meditate, we start with the practice of concentration. Concentration is defined as "the consciousness' fixation on a particular space". This "space" can be thought of as some object, seen or unseen. In both Yoga and Buddhism, this object frequently is the breath. The mind moves, or fluctuates from thing to thing, sometimes out of necessity in dealing with life's duties and responsibilities to ourselves and others, sometimes out of fear, anxiety and suffering, and sometimes out of boredom.

We try to minimize these movements through the concentration on the breath or other concentration objects such as the rising and falling of the stomach, the tip of the nose (with the eyes closed or half-closed), the space between the eyebrows (with the eyes closed or half-closed), the lotus of the heart, or a mental or verbal mantra.

For cultivating concentration, one can not be disturbed or distracted by the body.

What makes the integration of concentration – meditation practice into one's life so difficult is cultivating the ability to sit still in what is known as a meditative posture. These postures consist of sitting on the floor with the legs configured in various ways, either crossed or positioned below the body.

Relaxation practice, with attention focused on the breath, is an excellent cultivation technique for concentration and meditation practice. This is why it is recommended as a daily practice for all individuals. Through the practice of relaxation, concentration and meditation one will be more mentally and physically healthy and focused. One's mental and physical energy is fine-tuned, so that, like an automobile that has been tuned up, we, as individuals, run better.

Meditation can be practiced anytime of the day, though most individuals recommend that it be practiced early in the morning, when the mind is clear and free from distraction. Another good time to practice is in the evening, before bed.

Meditation should be practiced in a clean and quiet environment. Low lighting or darkness is desired by some. The length of time to sit can be whatever one feels comfortable with. What is more important than length of time in the practice is regular and daily.

Individuals need to make time for practicing. If one has children and family responsibilities, this may take more time and effort to bring about.

As with all aspects of Yoga practice, this time and effort is well spent and beneficial.

9. Diet, sleep and leisure activities

Our attitude and habits regarding diet, sleep and leisure activities make up an important aspect of the holistic application of Yoga to life and living. If we have unhealthy habits as regards these three things, our progress from the understanding and practice of Yoga will be compromised.

It is easy to see and understand that if we stay up late every night, drink or use drugs, become obsessed with engaging and indulging in certain sensual pleasing experiences and desires, and over eat or eat as a way to escape from the anxieties, fears and stresses of life, we will continue to remain in a states of mental and physical confusion or imbalance.

Many of the leisure attitudes and habits that individuals have learned and adapted over the years, from reading, study, education, intuitive wisdom and from their own experience regarding healthier living are in line with the teachings of Yoga in this regard.

Regarding Diet

There is a relationship between the food we eat and our state of mind. With a healthy awareness of eating and what we eat, food can generate positive and good feelings and shift the mind to a better state. The vital life force known as prana is assimilated into our system through the food we eat and the air we breathe. A disciplined, and habitual approach to eating and a diet consisting of pure wholesome food will purify, calm, and develop the mind and body. The five aspects of diet which are considered in Yoga are:

1. What we eat – Yoga recommends a diet based on vegetarianism and a basic knowledge about the nutritional value of food. Yoga recommends pure and freshly prepared home cooked food, such as; milk and milk products, curd, fruits and dry fruits, honey, dates, figs and raisins, vegetables that are in season, Dal, lentils, sprouted cereals, brown rice, corn, barley and whole wheat bread and chapatis.

Yoga recommends that individuals avoid the following; meat, fish, eggs, chicken, all non-vegetarian products, garlic, onions, salt, vegetables not in season, tea, coffee, liquor, sugar, jams, sauces, and soft drinks, polished rice, white bread, biscuits and chocolate, processed frozen food, stale food, food kept over 24 hours, artificial, de-vitaminized or sprayed food and food that has had flavors, coloring, and vitamins added to it and any food that is difficult to digest or heavy, that leads to excessive phlegm in the nasal passages or throat, or leaves a lethargic feeling after eating.

2. When we eat - Eat four times a day, every 4 hours. Do not eat in between meals unless medically advised, or if very hungry, fruits, fruit juices and limewater could be taken. The suggested timings and menu are listed below. They may have to be adapted to individual lifestyle demands and schedules, but use them as a guide to work from.

Breakfast(8 A.M.) - Milk, herbal tea, fruits in season, yogurt, porridge, cereal, whole wheat bread and honey

Lunch(12 noon) - Rice, vegetables, salads, milk, juice, pulse, whole wheat bread, chapatis

Snack(4 P.m.) - tea, juice, milk, seasoned fruits, fruits in season

Dinner(8 p.m.) - Milk, herbal tea, fruit, whole wheat bread, chapatis, rice, vegetables in season, salads

3. How we Eat - Yoga emphasizes that food be eaten in a positive frame of mind with a cheerful disposition. Avoid criticism of the food as negativity will generate stress. In a stressed person even healthy food may result in increased levels of sugar, cholesterol and tricyclerites. Instead, an attitude of gratitude to God and to those who helped prepare the food will contribute to a healthy, cheerful and positive state of mind. Try to rise above likes and dislikes for a particular item of food. Be thankful for what you have.

4. Where we eat - Eat in a clean and quiet atmosphere.

5. Why we eat - Eat in order to provide nutrition for the body, not sensual pleasure for the senses or escape from anxiety and stress. We can enjoy food and the pleasure of eating, and socializing with others while we eat, but we are not eating for pleasure as much as we are eating for nutrition.

Regarding Sleep

Some of the individuals who practice Yoga are suffering in some way in their lives, emotionally, behaviorally and physically. One manifestation of an imbalance in an individual's life is difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. In addition, poor sleep habits will exacerbate mental, physical and behavioral disorders. The following are some suggestions which may be helpful for those individuals who suffer from sleep problems

Pre-sleep activities:

- Have a warm bath. Scrub and massage the soles of the feet.
- Read scriptures or philosophical writings for about 15 minutes before going to sleep.
- Do not have any large or heavy meals for three hours before sleep.
- Do not take any coffee, cigarettes or alcohol in the evening or before going to sleep as they will interfere with the brain sleep centers. Avoid getting into the habit of taking medication to assist in going to sleep.
- Do not watch television until you fall asleep and do not fall asleep in front of the television set.
- Lay in the relaxation practice or sit in a meditative posture for 15 minutes before going to sleep.

Sleep

1. Go to sleep at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning
2. Sleep on a firm, flat surface and dress accordingly
3. Have a good circulation of fresh air. If possible, have a pleasing environment, and keep noise to a minimum

4. Taking a short nap in the early afternoon may be helpful. Avoid long naps as that may interfere with the night's sleep.

Post-sleep activities

1. Have a glass of warm water upon awakening. Do not have coffee or tea.
2. Take a shower and do your bathroom activities.
3. Be aware and careful about your post-sleep activities. Avoid too much stimulation, through food or drink, through television, newspapers or radio.
4. Try to practice Yoga postures and meditation for 30 minutes to one hour after bathing and putting on fresh clothing and before breakfast.

Regarding Leisure Activities

Yoga recommends the two m's, mindfulness and moderation in leisure activities. The technological advances made in the last twenty years give us many distractions in our daily lives. These technological advances, and all technologies can be used as tools or toys. The same holds true for how we use our body and mind.

Yoga regards activities that include the use of stimulants or intoxicants as being counter – productive to healthier and more skillful living. If something is worth doing and enjoying, it can be done in a sober and mentally and physically clean state. Leisure activities where one is over indulging in drinking or sexual activity should be looked from a more balanced perspective. Do we really need so much sensual stimulation in order to live in a joyful way? Is the over indulgence in these activities bringing up other mental and emotional states which make us feel out of balance or angry and hurt?

Again, mindfulness of the motivation behind, and the affects of our leisure activities is important, as is a moderation to the length of time, and degree of intensity and attachment we have for them.

10. The Morals and Ethics of Yoga

The morals and ethics of Yoga provide a comprehensive set of mental and physical practices which when understood and applied in conjunction with regular meditation practice work to weaken the defilements of the consciousness and elevate it to a state of enlightenment.

Their purpose is not to impinge upon an individual's freedom of choice and to live life as they want to, but instead to give them an opportunity to cultivate a state of consciousness where that life can be lived in a healthier and more skillful manner, and where there is joy and appreciation, regardless of what one experiences or has experienced through the senses.

When individuals are new to Yoga and experiencing the joys and challenges of working with the body and mind through the postures and other techniques of Yoga, these morals and ethics may be overlooked or not thought of as being important or necessary to an individual's practice.

This is understandable, however, if one's exposure to Yoga and its teachings does not call attention to this very important part and practice of Yoga, they risk not

getting the full benefits from their effort and practice of Yoga or developing a practice and understanding of Yoga that is too one – dimensional, too physical.

We already have the capacity to practice and apply many of these disciplines and we do so on a regular and daily basis, in fulfilling our responsibilities to ourselves and others, at home, at work and when we go about our daily activities and various social interactions.

What are the various disciplines that make up the morals and ethics of Yoga? They are non – violence, honesty, non – stealing, celibacy, non – greed, contentment, purity, austerity, self – study, surrender to a higher power, loving kindness, compassion, joy in another's joy, virtue and success and equanimity.

The first and most important thing to understand about these various disciplines is why we learn and apply them. We learn them in order to bring about harmonious living and interaction with others, and balance and harmony within ourselves. They assist us in cultivating a stronger, wiser and more concentrated and mindful state of consciousness.

We do not learn and apply them in order to please God or any specific deity or gain access to heaven or avoid going to hell. We do not learn and apply them in order to follow the wishes of, or please a leader of a cult or gain the favor, respect and admiration of other people. We do not learn and apply them in order to feel more spiritually advanced or superior to other people.

When our thoughts, words and actions are directed to others and ourselves within the context of the disciplines of Yoga, we are constantly engaged in a process and practice that is bringing us growth and an enhanced mindfulness and concentration in all the things that we do each day. It means that the practice of Yoga is not just the practice of relaxation, meditation, postures and breathing techniques, once or three or five times a week, but something that involves all aspects of our life and the life experience.

Among some, when they are first exposed to these various teachings, there may be an aversion, feeling that their individual freedom is being impinged upon or they are being told how to think, feel, behave and act. This is a common response.

What we are trying to achieve in Yoga starts with exposure to the teachings, and one's interest in and seeing the need for learning the teachings and applying them may and will vary from individual to individual. If one does make an attempt to cultivate an individual practice of Yoga, implementing all of its teachings, one will be building a foundation for a more wholesome, insightful and healthier life, now and in the future.

In taking a closer look at the disciplines and morals and ethics of Yoga we can remember that each one had a two – fold objective. One is to cultivate states of consciousness and being that are positive, skillful, wholesome and healthy such as patience, mindfulness, self – control, and compassion, among others. The other is to weaken and alleviate states of consciousness and being that are negative, unskillful, unwholesome and unhealthy such as resentment, impatience, jealousy, envy, anger, anxiety, worry, depression, and critical and judgmental attitudes.

We take a closer look at the moral and ethics of Yoga below.

1. Non – violence - The practice of non – violence refers to how we how we react to and act on others in thought, word and action. We all are generally non – violent in action but we are not always mindful of the power and subtleties of our words and thoughts that may be rooted in violent and aversive feelings to other individuals, and situations or experiences.

For reflection: What kinds of problems can be created in our interactions with others and within ourselves if we have a tendency to violence in thought, word and action?

2. Honesty - Honesty is something that we generally think of being the truth in speaking to others. This truth needs to be said in a compassionate manner. Something that can take a degree of mindfulness and skillfulness that not all possess. In other words, when speaking the truth, we need to be mindful of how and what we are saying will be taken by others.

For reflection: How does dishonesty create problems in our relationships with others? Can we be habitually dishonest with ourselves about the dynamics of a situation and our own life experience and situation?

3. Non – stealing - Non – stealing is something that manifests itself in not only in our physical actions and behaviors, but also in the stealing of ideas and words from others also.

For reflection: What might be some of the results when individuals and societies habitually engage in dishonest behavior?

4. Celibacy - Celibacy means the reduction of those sensual tendencies rooted in sexuality in thought, word and action. For some, it means the total abstention from sex in any manner. For others, it means the control and management of sexual desires in such a way so they are not abusive or aggressive to others.

For reflection: What may be some of the short and long - term results when individuals and societies are unable to understand, manage and control their sexual desires in a mindful and healthy manner? Can we see how at times our own tendency to indulge or overindulge in sensual desires has caused us and others pain?

5. Non – greed - The lack of a tendency to go after things with an extreme or unwholesome lust as the motivating force. It also includes the ability to live a life that is simple and unencumbered.

For reflection: How does greed and lust create problems for ourselves and other? Do we ever become obsessed or overly attached to something, either mentally or materially, that we can live without?

6. Contentment - The ability to feel satisfaction with past and present life situations, environments and experiences. It includes states of consciousness such as understanding and acceptance.

For reflection: When we lack contentment, what kind of actions may we engage in? Is our acute or chronic lack of contentment rooted in a lack of understanding and acceptance of our life situation? Are there ways that we might abuse our mind and body when we do not experience contentment, through the use of drugs or drink, or other stimulants, intoxicants and sensually pleasing experiences?

7. Purity - The practice of purity means that we structure our energy in ways so that it will manifest itself in purity in thinking, speaking and acting. The practice of purity includes those activities that we usually associate Yoga with (relaxation practice, meditation practice, posture practice, breathing techniques). It also includes mindfulness and wisdom in our approach to diet and eating, and our habits regarding sleep and all of our leisure activities.

For reflection: Is it possible to see those tendencies in oneself that are not pure? What might they consist of? What has caused them?

8. Austerity - This involves the discipline, will power and self – control to do those things that we need to do in order to live in a healthy and skillful manner and make changes that bring about growth and maturity. The practice of austerity includes those activities that we usually associate Yoga with (relaxation practice, meditation practice, posture practice, breathing techniques). It also includes cultivating wisdom as regards our diet and our habits regarding sleep and all of our leisure activities. Austerity does not include severe or fanatical forms of sacrifice or self – torture. It is what we can think of as being skillful and consistent self – control in order to bring about a change in how we think, feel and live.

For reflection: When we lack self – discipline and the ability to put forth an effort, what problems may develop as far as tendencies of thought, word and action?

9. Self – study - This involves making a conscious effort to get to know oneself and one's conditioned and spiritual nature better. It can involve mantra practice, study and reflection of spiritual scriptures, reading, honest sharing with others and therapy sessions. The practice of self – study includes those activities that we usually associate Yoga with (relaxation practice, meditation practice, posture practice, breathing techniques).

For reflection: What benefits can come about from looking and learning about oneself? What keeps us from doing these things?

10. Surrender to God - This means the acceptance of things as they happen, realizing that all things that we want and experience in life may not be under our control or will be unable to receive.

For reflection: What mental and physical manifestations may come about when we are unable to accept things as they happen? Frustration, resentment, anger? Have we ever experienced something bad or unpleasant that in the long run was for the better or not as terrible as we first thought that it would be?

11. Loving Kindness - To look at and act on and respond to all beings in a spirit of love, kindness and understanding.

For reflection: What are the benefits of looking at others with loving-kindness? What may make it difficult for us to achieve this?

12. Compassion - Understanding the experiences and sufferings of other people and acting on that understanding in ways that may bring others some relief and benefits.

For reflection: What does looking at others and ourselves with compassion consist of? What might be some of the benefits if we can look at others in this manner? What may happen if we are unable to look upon others in this manner?

13. Joy in another's success, joy and virtue - The practice of this teaching works to eliminate feelings of jealousy and envy to others. If we are jealous or envious about the joy, virtue and success of others, it can give rise to states of resentment, feelings of being victimized or unloved, poor self - esteem and self - confidence and a critical and judgmental attitude

For reflection: How do feelings of jealousy, envy and resentment create problems for us in thought, word and action towards ourselves and others? How are we likely to feel if we have a tendency to feelings of jealousy and envy? Maybe we will be unappreciative of what we have already and the gifts and opportunities that life offers us each day.

14. Equanimity - Equanimity is a state that is consistent and gains in strength once it is accessed. It is rooted in balance, understanding, mindfulness, strength and harmony within and with others. In knowing about it, we can work to attain it and engage in those actions and activities that can bring it about.

For reflection: What may be some of the things that cause us to lose our equanimity? What may be some of things that bring about equanimity? What may be some of the thoughts, words and actions that disturb the equanimity of ourselves and others? What are the reasons for engaging in these thoughts, words and actions in the first place? What changes may we have to make in our lives in order to cultivate equanimity?

11. Frequently asked questions about the path and practice of Yoga

1. What is Yoga?

Yoga is an ancient philosophy, path, practice and holistic approach to life and living which through it's application helps to balance and purify our consciousness and awareness, making us more concentrated, relaxed, energized, healthy and at peace. Yoga is not a religion and it will not conflict with an individual's religion or religious practice. With more energy and the greater sense of relaxation that yoga can bring an individual, some will understand, appreciate and practice their chosen religious path better.

2. What are the benefits of Yoga practice?

The practice of Yoga addresses the five main areas of an individual's life.

Mentally it calms the mind, keeping an individual alert yet relaxed, more intellectually clear and concentrated. Because of this, we can relax, study and know

ourselves better, developing a more balanced state of mind and not be at the mercy of our emotions, old habits and unhealthy conditioning.

Emotionally it frees the mind from anxiety, worry and tension and transforms negative emotions, traits and behaviors into positive and higher states. It makes an individual more sensitive, caring and compassionate to the needs of others. It helps in all personal relationships at home, at work and in society and improves an individual's work efficiency and professionalism.

Behaviorally the practice of Yoga redirects energy which might otherwise be wasted or unwisely used in behaviors that are health compromising and harmful to ourselves and others. It leads to a more balanced and harmonious interaction with others and peace of mind. It helps us make use of our freedom and energy with honesty, accountability and wisdom.

Physically Yoga makes the physical body healthy, strong, fit, flexible and immune to disease, alleviating those physical disorders which have a psychological or system imbalance cause to them

Spiritually Yoga helps an individual evolve spiritually as it enables an individual to understand and accept their life situation and experiences from a broader perspective, thereby increasing faith in a higher process of life and faith in God and the goodness of life. We experience a spiritual awakening because we make a deeper connection with other human beings, the natural world and ourselves.

3. Who should not do Yoga?

Yoga is suitable for all individuals regardless of age or physical condition. Classes can be adapted to suit an individual's need. However, If you have had recent back surgery or injury, you should avoid yoga until consulting with your doctor. Some individuals may need to work with teachers on an individual basis depending on their age, personality, and mental and physical state.

4. What may be some of the side effects of practicing Yoga?

When we practice yoga we are releasing and redirecting physical and mental energy. Therefore, we may experience physical and mental changes which we find new or unusual. This may include shaking or warmth in the body, changes in eating, sleeping and elimination habits, and different mental states as they get more in touch with their deeper or repressed feelings. Some individuals may take these symptoms as being a reason to not continue with yoga, instead of understanding that they are part of the balancing and purifying process involved in Yoga. There will be some soreness, fatigue and stiffness from the practice, but an individual will also be more relaxed, concentrated and energized

5. Does an individual have to be flexible and in shape to start yoga?

No, an individual can start from wherever they are. Yoga will make an individual more flexible in mind and body.

6. Is Yoga is about accomplishing advanced and difficult postures?

The ability to perform a particular pose is not what Yoga is about at all. This misconception has been fostered by many Indian and Western teachers. Goal-oriented yoga isn't yoga at all. Yoga is a process-oriented activity in which what you experience is much more important than what you achieve. Postures, breathing,

relaxation, and meditation and the movement and stillness that are involved in these activities, in addition to the understanding and implementation of the moral and ethical teachings of Yoga, and skillful living regarding diet, sleep and leisure activities all work together, because they address all aspects of our being, to facilitate the process. Some individuals can practice and make progress in Yoga with little or no physical practice, instead just through their understanding and integration of the teachings into their lives and actions.

7. Is Yoga is easy or not easy?

It is challenging on many levels -- physically, emotionally and mentally. There are different styles and forms of the physical yoga (Hatha Yoga), some being demanding and vigorous, others being gentle and less demanding.

8. How should I choose a yoga class and instructor which is suitable for me?

There are many different styles of Yoga though they all have the same objective. Besides the different styles, the teacher's personality and experiences with yoga and life will influence how the class is done. It may be best for some individuals to observe or try a number of different styles and teachers, until you feel comfortable with the style, class and the teacher's approach to the class.

9. What should be the objectives of a Yoga Education Program?

- To give the participants the guidelines for practicing various postures, techniques and breathing so they may develop their own Yoga practice on a regular basis and to become more aware of the breath and its effect on our energy, concentration, relaxation and mental and physical health.
- To become more aware of the philosophy behind Yoga.
- To become more aware of their own emotional and behavioral habits which may be hurtful to themselves and others.

10. Are these objectives usually covered in Yoga classes and such?

This depends on various factors such as interest of the students, knowledge and tradition of the teacher, time and place. The deeper study, understanding, and application of Yoga would usually take place in an Ashram or retreat setting, where there is more time to study and reflect on the teachings of Yoga, and put them into practice, through the disciplined approach to daily life that is common to Yoga Ashrams. Buddhist meditation centers are also very good for instilling this knowledge and discipline.

11. What are the best times to practice Yoga. What places are suitable for practice?

Early morning, before breakfast, beginning around 7 a.m. Late morning, before lunch, beginning around 10 a.m. Early afternoon, about three hours after lunch, around 3 p.m. Late afternoon, before dinner, beginning around 5 p.m. Early evening, before dinner, beginning around 7 p.m. Sessions should not begin after 7:30 p.m. as the release of tension and energy may interfere with one's sleep. Sessions should not be held immediately after breakfast, lunch or dinner, or after eating a large or heavy meal.

The best venues would be a large hall, a Yoga studio, large rooms or a health/fitness room in one's home, apartment, condominium or office building. Shady areas with flat, firm surfaces on rooftops or near pools are also good. Ideally the area for

practice should have plenty of fresh air. Flat grassy areas near trees and water, outside in nature. Once one is familiar with and well established in their practice, the practice can take place almost anywhere and in any environment.

12. How should an individual prepare for the session? What else may be needed?

Individuals should wear loose cotton clothing and practice with bare feet. Do not eat any large or heavy meals for three hours before practice. If possible, take a bath or shower and use the toilet before the practice. Practice on a thick towel, blanket, rattan mat or non-slip yoga mat. Extra blankets, towels, and pillows may be helpful in performing some postures and techniques. Chairs and the wall may also be used in the performance of some postures/techniques.

13. Are there any other tips you can give me that will assist me in cultivating my own practice?

- Be aware of what you do when you first get up in the morning. Try to get up at the same time everyday. Upon arising, drink a glass of warm water and do all your bathroom needs. Then put on some clean, fresh, loose clothing. Applying talcum powder under the armpits and in the pelvic area may be refreshing. Find a quiet place to sit and sit in a meditative posture and watch your breathing for as long as possible. This place should be free from insects and other potential distractions and have a flow of fresh air.
- Try to start sitting at the same time everyday. 6 a.m. is a good time to start at. This will begin your day with a firm and healthy foundation. The process of sitting quietly will calm and focus the mind so the day's activities can be done in an efficient and enjoyable way. After sitting quietly for as long as possible, do some Hatha Yoga postures.
- This entire morning practice can last anywhere from 15 to 90 minutes. You may prefer to do the yoga postures before sitting quietly. Try to avoid getting into the habit of just doing yoga postures which bend, twist, and stretch the spine and body without some attempt at concentration-meditation practice. The Yoga postures release the energy. The meditative postures and meditation practice starts to redirect and focus the energy. Meditation is the most important aspect of Yoga practice.
- PRACTICE EVERYDAY no matter what, for as long as possible each day. You will start to notice changes in your thoughts, feelings, behaviors and action. You will be better able to identify and deal with what agitates your mind and body.
- The routine described above may be applied to other times of the day, such as before lunch, or before dinner.
- When integrating Yoga into your life, don't force yourself physically or mentally. Try to spend some time studying and reflecting on the teachings put forth in The Bhagavad Gita, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and The Dhammapada, or the scriptural authority of your own religion.
- Be aware of, and reflect on the wisdom of the moral and ethical teachings of Yoga, and attempt to implement them into your thoughts and actions throughout the day and life

14. Is there a relationship between Yoga and Buddhism?

Yoga and Buddhism are both systems of mental and physical purification and enhancement that originated on the Indian sub - continent. Both systems are built

around an understanding and practice of various morals and ethics and meditation which purify the consciousness and enhance one's state of being. The way Yoga has been taught and perceived in modern times, with its emphasis on postures and posture performance has weakened the understanding of its holistic approach and main objective which is to reach a state of enlightenment and liberation, just as in the practice of Buddhism.

The physical practices of Yoga make an individual mentally and physically healthier. Healthiness here means mental and physical balance and harmony. The purpose of them are multi-dimensional, though their most important objective is to prepare the mind and body so one can practice meditation within the context of a spiritual path and discipline. The path and discipline that Hatha yoga was designed to prepare an individual for it the Yoga known as Raja Yoga. This translates as the Yoga of Kings, or The Royal Way. It is also known as Astanga Yoga, or The Yoga of The Eight Limbs.

Morality and virtue (Sila) of The Noble Eightfold Path are similar in scope and practice to the morals and ethics (yamas and niyamas) of The Yoga of the Eight Limbs.

The practice of both of these paths, The Yoga of the Eight Limbs(Astanga Yoga/ Raja Yoga) and The Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya Antangikka Magga) consists of study and practice. Study means learning and understanding what is being taught, and practice means the application, and eventual integration into one's being of those techniques, specifically meditation, that are put forth in the path. Regardless of which path one chooses, their understanding and practice do bring results and benefits. These include insight, wisdom, inner strength and joy.

12. Scriptures for Better Health and Living

The science of Yoga is based on the teachings put forth in scriptural authority, written in what is now known as the Indian sub – continent. These scriptures were written from about 500 BC to 1500 AD and include The Bhagavad Gita, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, The Hatha Yoga Pradipika and The Upanishads.

Like the scriptures of Buddhism (The Dhammapada), Islam (The Quran), Christianity (The Holy Bible), and Judaism (The Torah), the teachings about the science and practice of Yoga were written and are referred to in order to teach and guide us on a path of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth implies healthier and happier living, not the blind following of teachings, and adhering to some dogma, a teacher, organization or group.

Since study of these scriptures is an important aspect of the Yogic path, we have included some relevant scriptures for your reading and reflection on. In addition, we have listed relevant and related scriptures from the Dhammapada and The Holy Bible. The Dhammapada is a major discourse on the Philosophy of Buddhism and The Holy Bible contains the major teachings of the prophets and Jesus and his disciples. From a closer study and reflection on these scriptures, we can see that they give us guidance and instruction on the same issues and topics, related to life and day to day living, and progress on the path of spiritual awareness and growth.

It is recommended that all spiritual practitioners spend some time involved in scripture study on a regular or daily basis.

Scripture about practice, concentration and meditation

Gita 2:66 - "There is no pure reason for the non-harmonized, nor for the non-harmonized is there concentration; for him without concentration there is no peace, and for the unpeaceful how can there be happiness".

Gita 5:27-28 - "Shutting out all external objects, fixing the vision between the eyebrows, making even the inward and outward breaths moving within the nostrils. The sage who has controlled the senses, mind and understanding, who is intent on liberation, who has cast away desire, fear and anger, he is ever free".

Gita 6:35 - "Without doubt, O mighty-armed (Arjuna) the mind is difficult to curb and restless, but it can be controlled, O son of Kunti, by constant practice and non-attachment".

Yoga Sutras 1:2 - "Yoga is stilling the modifications of the mind"

Yoga sutras 1:12 -14 - "By practice and detachment these(mental modifications) can be stopped. Exertion to acquire Sthiti or a tranquil state of mind devoid of fluctuations(movements) is called practice. That practice when continued for a long time without break and with devotion becomes firm in foundation".

Yoga sutras 1:33 - "The mind becomes purified by the cultivation of feelings of amity, compassion, goodwill and indifference respectively towards happy, miserable, virtuous and sinful creatures.

Yoga Sutras 2:28 - 29 - "Through the practice of the different accessories of Yoga, when impurities are destroyed, there arises enlightenment culminating in discriminative enlightenment. Yama (restraint), Niyama(observance), Asana (posture), Pranayama (regulation of breath), Pratyahara (withholding of the senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation) and Samidha(perfect concentration/enlightenment) are the eight means of attaining Yoga"

Yoga Sutras 2-43 - "through destruction of impurities, practice of austerities brings about perfection of the body and the organs"

Yoga sutras 3:1 - " Dharana (concentration) is the mind's fixation on a particular point in space"

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 1:17 - "Prior to everything, Asana is spoken of as the first part of Hatha Yoga. Having done asana, one gets steadiness(firmness) of body and mind, diseaselessness and lightness(flexibility of limbs)".

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 2:76 - "There can be no perfection if Hatha Yoga is without Raja Yoga or Raja Yoga is without Hatha Yoga. Therefore, through the practice of both, perfection is attained".

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 4:58 - "The entire world is only a fabrication of thought. Play of mind is only created by thought. By transcending the mind which is composed of constructed thought, definitely peace will be attained, O Rama".

Dhammapada 1:8 - "Just as a storm cannot throw down a rocky mountain, so Mara can never overpower the man who lives meditating on the impurities, who is controlled in his senses, moderate in eating, and filled with faith and earnest effort".

Dhammapada 2:5 - "By effort and heedfulness, discipline and self-mastery, let the wise one make for himself an island which no flood can overwhelm".

Dhammapada 7:2 - "...the mindful ones exert themselves".

Dhammapada 20:10 - "Wisdom springs from meditation. Without meditation, wisdom wanes. Having known these two paths of progress and decline, let a man conduct himself that his wisdom may increase".

Dhammapada 22:8 - "If anything is to be done, let one do it with sustained vigor. A lax monastic life stirs up the dust of passion all the more".

Dhammapada 22:10 - ".....do not let slip this opportunity(for spiritual growth)".

Hebrews 5:14 - "For those whose faculties are trained by practice to discern good and evil".

1 Timothy 1:5 - "The aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good

conscience, and a sincere faith”.

James 1:4 -“Let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”.

Romans 12:2 - “Do not conform to this age. But be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect”.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 - “To aspire to live a tranquil life, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your (own) hands, as we instructed you, that you may conduct yourselves properly towards others and not depend on anyone”.

2 Peter 1:5-7 - “...make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love”.

Galatians 5:22-25 - “but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, Against such there is no law and those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, if we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit”

Proverbs 2: 10-11 - “...Wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will please your soul, discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you”.

Proverbs 4:13 - “Hold fast to instruction, never let her go; Keep her, for she is your life”.

Proverbs 5:26 - “He will die from lack of discipline, through the greatness of his folly he will be lost”.

Proverbs 15:30 - “A tranquil mind gives life to the body, but jealousy rots the bones”.

Scripture about Mental Defilement’s

Gita 3:34 - “Enveloped by wisdom, O son of Kunti, by this insatiable fire of desire, which is the constant enemy of the wise”.

Gita 3:34 - “Affection (attachment) and aversion for the objects of senses abide in the senses: Let none come under the dominion of the two. They are obstructions to the path”.

Gita 16: 21, 22 - “The gateway of this hell leading to the ruin of the soul is threefold, lust, anger and greed, therefore these three one should abandon. The man who is released from these, the three gates to darkness, O sun of Kunti, does what is good for his soul and then reaches the highest state”.

Yoga Sutras 2:3 - “Avidya (misapprehension about the real nature of things), Amstar(egoism), Raga(attachments), Dives (aversion) and abhinivesa (fear of death) are the five kleshas (defilements/afflictions)

Dhammapada 1:13 - “.... Passion penetrates an undeveloped mind”

Dhammapada 3:10 - “Whatever harm an enemy may do to an enemy, or a hater to a

hater, an ill-directed mind inflicts on oneself a greater harm”.

Dhammapada 6:13 -“...the wise man should cleanse himself of defilements of the mind”.

Dhammapada 18:11 - “There is no fire like lust; there is no grip like hatred: there is no net like delusion: there is no river like craving”.

Dhammapada 19:7 - “Not be mere eloquence nor by bodily beauty does a man become accomplished, should he be jealous, selfish and deceitful”.

Mark 7: 20-23 - “But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles from within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. All these evils come from within and they defile”.

Romans 8: 5-6 - “For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the

things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit are concerned with the things of the spirit. The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the spirit is life and peace".

2 Corinthians 1: - "...Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God".

2 Timothy 2:21 - "If anyone cleanses himself of these things, he will be a vessel for lofty use..."

James 4:1 - "Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? is it not from your passions, that make war within your members".

Galatians 19-21 - "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like: of which I tell you beforehand, just as I told you in the past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of god"

1 Peter 1:14 - "Do not act in compliance with the desires of your former ignorance".

1 John 2:15 - "Do not love the world or the things of the world".

Scripture on the subject of anger and the unskillfulness in judging others

Dhammapada 17:1 - "One should give up anger, renounce pride and overcome all fetters. Suffering never befalls him who clings not to mind and body and is detached"

James 1:19, 20 - "Know this my dear brother: Everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God"

2 Timothy 1: 24-25 - "A slave of the lord should not quarrel, but should be gentle with everyone, able to teach, tolerant, correcting opponents with kindness..."

Ephesians 4: 31-32 - "All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you..."

Galatians 5:15- "but if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another"

Dhammapada 4:7 - "Let none find fault with others; let none see the omissions and commissions of others. But let see one's own acts, done and undone"

James 3:13 - "The judgement is merciless to one who has not shown mercy: mercy triumphs over judgement"

James 4:12 - "Who then are you to judge your neighbor"

Romans 2:1 - "Therefore, you are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgement. For by the standard by which you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same thing"

Gita 18:61 - "The lord dwelleth in the hearts of all beings"

Gita 16:54 - "Having been one with Brahmin, and being tranquil in spirit, he neither grieves nor desires. Regarding all beings as alike, he attains supreme devotion to me"

Scripture on the importance of being thankful, humility, love and nurturing and encouraging others

1 Thessalonians 5:18 - "In all circumstances give thanks".

Romans 12:6 - "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them".

1 Peter 2:2 - "Love one another from a pure heart".

2 Thessalonians 11, 14 - "Encourage one another and build one another up.

Admonish the idle, cheer the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient with all”

Galatians 5:10 – “While we have the opportunity, let us do good to all”

1 Peter 4:10 - “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace”

Proverbs 11:25 – “He who confers benefits will be amply enriched, and he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed”

Galatians 5:13 14 – “for you brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

13. Resources for further Information on Yoga and it’s Practice

Books

- Nath, Pandit Shambhu Speaking of Yoga: A Practical Guide to Better Living New Delhi, India: Sterling Publishers 1991
- Brandjes, Sophia On the Gentle Path of Yoga in Sickness and in Health Thornleigh, N.S.W. :Gerard and Sophia Brandjes 1993
- Hewitt, James Teach Yourself Yoga London, England: The English Universities Press 1960
- The Sivananda Yoga Center The Book of Yoga: The Complete Step - by- Step Guide London, England: Ebury Press 1983
- Iyengar, B.K.S. Light on Yoga New Delhi, India: Harper Collins Publishers India 1992
- Chidananda, Swami. The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga. Tehri – Garhwal, U.P. India: The Divine Life Society. 1991
- Iyengar, B.K.S. Light on The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali New Delhi, India: Harper Collins Publishers India. 1993
- Prabhavananda, Swami. Patanjali Yoga Sutras. Mylapore, Madras. Sri Ramakrishna Math. Copyright date unknown
- Taimni, I.K. The Science of Yoga Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1961
- Hariharananda Aranya, Swami. Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali Calcutta: University of Calcutta. 1981
- Pandita, Sayadaw U In This Very Life Kandy, Sri Lanka:The Buddhist Publication Society 1991
- Piyadassi, Thera The Buddha’s Ancient Path Kandy, Sri Lanka: The Buddhist Publication Society 1964
- Nyanaponika, Thera The Heart of Buddhist Meditation Kandy, Sri Lanka:The Buddhist Publication Society 1962
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu The Noble Eightfold Path:Way to the End of Suffering Kandy, Sri Lanka:The Buddhist Publication Society 1984
- Radhakrishnan, S The Bhagavad Gita New Delhi, India: HarperCollins 1993
- Vivikenanda, Swami Raja Yoga Calcutta, India :Advaita Ashram 1998
- Muktibodhananda, Swami Hatha Yoga Pradipka Mungar, Bihar, India Bihar School of Yoga: 1985
- Wood, Ernest Yoga Aylesbury, U.K. Peligan 1962

Websites

www.yrec.info/ (Click on the forums button for a wealth of information and opinions about Yoga, Buddhism and spiritual practice)

www.stress.about.com/ (Type Yoga in the search box if this is the subject that you want to research. This website also offers a number of well - thought out articles on other aspects of stress and how to manage it)

www.sprit-works.net (This website offers a number of articles relating to bring a greater spiritual presence into our being, through Yoga, Buddhism and the inherent spiritual qualities that we all already possess)

www.journalofyoga.org (This website offers a number of scholarly articles on the science and practice of Yoga)

www.accesstoinight.org (This website has a wealth of information about Buddhism and its practice that can be downloaded for your individual learning and study. We recommend accessing and downloading the book by Bhikkhu Bodhi mentioned below, The Noble Eightfold Path: A Way to the End of Suffering)

14. Posture Sequence and Guidelines for Practice

The posture sequence on the following page offers those who are new to Yoga a good selection of postures and techniques to learn and practice and provides a firm foundation for them to cultivate their own future practice around.

Initially, one should practice those postures and techniques that one finds easy to do, and then go on to those that are more challenging and difficult.

This sequence and the various postures that make it up can be done three to seven days a week, one or two times a day, from thirty minutes to two hours duration depending on the time, energy, enthusiasm and flexibility of the practitioner.

These postures and techniques should be performed with the following guidelines in mind.

1. Practice on a flat surface in a clean, quiet, airy, and insect - free place.
2. Before breakfast is the best time to practice. Practice on a blanket, towel or mat. Empty the bowels/bladder and take a shower/bath before practice. Wear loose, comfortable cotton clothing. Do not eat any large or heavy meals for three hours before practice.
3. Move into and out of all postures slowly and smoothly. Exhale through your nose only as you move. While still in the posture, equalize your inhalation and exhalation through your nose only. You may close your eyes. Hold the posture/technique for as long as comfortably possible.
4. Always breathe equally and smoothly through your nose only and be mindful of your breathing. Try to do the complete practice in synchronization with your inhalation and exhalation.

Caution - Be mindful of your present and past physical condition before and during the practice session. Especially be mindful of any operations, injuries or illnesses you have had. Approach each posture or technique with awareness of your physical

limitations. Do not force yourself into any postures or hold them for longer than you feel you can.

Section 2

1. Only 30 Minutes

If we are new to the discipline of Yoga and meditation, we are sometimes confused or wonder about how long and how much we should try to practice each day.

Establishing any kind of a practice at home and on our own can be challenging, but it is a challenge that we have to meet in order to make Yoga and meditation a part of our life and make progress in and gain benefits from their practice.

A good starting objective to aim for in practicing Yoga and meditation at home and one's own is only 30 minutes, five to seven days a week.

The posture practice can last twenty minutes and the meditation practice ten minutes.

Thirty minutes is an amount of time that any person, in any environment and situation can find or make available to themselves each day.

For some, the best time to try to cultivate such a short practice would be before going to work in the morning, or after returning home at night and before dinner.

During the weekend, one usually has more or ample time to do such a practice.

The twenty minutes of postures can consist of those postures that one finds enjoyable and easy to perform and do.

The ten minutes of meditation practice should be done in an area that is clean and quiet and in a posture that is comfortable and steady. If one participates in some kind of individual or group sport activity during the weekday or weekend, that provides an excellent time and opportunity to practice Yoga and meditation.

The best time to do such a practice would be before one engages in their individual or group sport.

It does not take much wisdom and insight to know that a thirty minute program of posture and meditation is going to be thirty minutes better used than sitting in front of the television as many of us have got into the habit of doing far too much with our time and life.

As one makes this kind of short yet therapeutic practice part of their life, they will experience healthy mental and physical benefits and also provide for foundation for a stronger and more comprehensive practice in the future.

2. The First Year Is The Hardest

In overcoming our addictions to drugs, drink, behaviors and ways of thinking and feelings, we have to make a change. This experience and process of change can be very demanding.

It seems that if the change is being brought about in an institutionalized environment such as a shelter, ashram, facility for a 12-step program, rehabilitation clinic or prison it may be more demanding.

This may not be true though as one's ability to adapt and understand the need for a change very much depends on the individual nature of a person.

Having been in and experienced various environments that are designed to help facilitate changes, it is easy to see that the people who attend these programs and facilities do not fall into the extremes forms of attitudes and behaviors that are seriously looked at or jokingly made fun of in movies.

Any kind of change in life can be a demanding one because we are experiencing emotions and feelings that may be difficult to have and we may also be denied those ways and means that in the past we used to overcome or escape from those unpleasant thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Perhaps part of the problem stems from the fact that we think we deserve to be happy all the time but have not been taught that that may not be the case and a realistic understanding of life, or that we have to put forth some sort of effort so we can be happy.

If happiness is only a sensual thing, when we experience something pleasurable, or get our way, we can see that life offers us a number of hindrances and pitfalls that will stand in our way of achieving such a thing.

The message that we want to share with people is that the first year of anything, getting sober or clean or practicing meditation and Yoga is going to be the hardest. There are too many thoughts and feelings and experiences of mental and physical discomfort that will make us want to give up and run back to the things that make us feel good or we are familiar with.

Another message is that even after the first year, there will be new challenges to face in practicing Yoga, Buddhism or just being sober and clean. These things that we have got used to or addicted to in thought or action we perceive as being comfortable or a reality and getting away from them is not an easy thing to do.

Sometimes another person can assist us, but that is not always the case either.

If that person is a knowledgeable and trained professional, his or her assistance will be there for us to learn from, but if it is another individual who we are intimate with or a part of our family and social circle, they may not be so dependable as they may have issues that keep them from offering us the guidance and input that we need.

Sometimes, when we are in a rehabilitation environment we are being taught in harsh and challenging ways how to get to a better state.

If we are open and receptive to this and see the need for it in our lives, we are more likely to get something out of it and appreciate the opportunity for a new way of living that it can bring us to.

If we are there because we have been forced to by some law enforcement or legal situation, we may be defensive, resentful and reluctant to approach any of the therapeutic methods being offered in such a way that we will get something out of them.

What Yoga and Buddhism offer a person is that they do not stress some much about how we should not be, but instead show us how we can be and tell us the benefits and reasons from being such a way.

Generally, those who want to learn and practice either Yoga or Buddhism are people who are interested in them and open to making the sacrifices and effort that are involved in them.

Mental, environmental and physical discomforts and inconveniences are understood to be part of the learning process.

For people such as these, the first year of practice can be demanding, not because of what we are being asked to give up, but instead the kind of discipline and mindfulness that we are being asked to bring into our lives.

3. Yoga is NOT a "New Age" Practice

Over the years of learning, studying, and practicing Yoga and teaching and sharing this discipline with others, this writer has been exposed to a variety of reactions to Yoga and what others think of it.

If you are a practitioner or teacher of Yoga yourself, you have probably been exposed to a number of reactions to your interest in, practice of and enthusiasm for Yoga also, and I would assume that to a large extent, they have been similar to mine.

I have heard of some people in some places being exposed to some very critical and harsh ridicule because they practice Yoga, from members of their community or even those in their family.

Some elements of various countries and cultures can be very narrow – minded, thinking that their belief and their way is the best and anyone who does not walk or work the way that they do are inferior, doing the work of the devil, and deserving of their judgment and abuse.

Such a perception and attitude is most unfortunate and it is sad to say that it is based on prejudice, biases and ignorance.

Having lived in Asia for a number of years, I one day looked up and discovered that there had been what was referred to as a "new age" movement started and strengthened in the United States and the west.

A superficial examination of it seemed to suggest some things.

Some of its proponents and practices seemed to be offshoots from the hippie and counter – cultural movements of the 60's. While some of its practices seemed to involve feel good and mystical experiences involving oils, cards, and massage therapies.

It seemed to ask little of us as far as looking at our overall behaviors and attitudes to ourselves and to others.

It seemed to integrate various practices and disciplines into something eclectic and sensually pleasing but not always demanding of one in terms of effort or self – discipline.

It seemed do condone the use of marijuana and drugs to some extent as being acceptable and an effective way to access and maintain a higher state of consciousness.

It did not ask us to follow any specific moral or ethical code, perhaps thinking that such a request would impinge on our freedom or imply that we were not perfect and righteous in our actions, attitudes and behaviors already.

If these assessments of what 'new age' practices are is in any way correct, it would be impossible to say that Yoga is a new age practice, as some seem to have done.

And it would be a misperception for those who want to learn Yoga or have started to practice it to think of Yoga as being such.

Yoga is an ancient discipline and practice, older than Christianity, older than Buddhism and older than Islam.

The scriptural references of Yoga were giving guidance and advice to help people attain a better place in their lives thousands of years ago.

And Yoga was found to be effective and therapeutic in dealing with a number of mental, behavioral and physical imbalances just as long ago.

In addition, Yoga asks a lot of those who practice it. It does not suggest or condone the use of drugs among those who practice it.

A major part of its practice emphasizes the understanding and practice of morals and ethics, some of which go against the self – indulgent attitudes and actions of some who adhere to new age philosophies and practices. It does not involve the use of any oils, or cards for telling about the past and one's character or predicting the future.

The point of all of this has not been to criticize new age practices and those who are interested in them, believe in them or practice them, but to remind us that Yoga is not a new age practice and to define it as such may demean it, confuse some, and invite many to not give it the examination and investigation that it deserves, before deciding whether they want to learn and practice it or not.

4. The Correct Approach to Learning and Practicing Yoga

Over the last ten years, the practice of Yoga, especially in the west, seems to have exploded in popularity. This is a good thing, as anyone who has been involved with Yoga and its practice for any period of time will testify to its many benefits. In Yoga sessions, it is not unusual for individuals to ask questions about the various systems and practices that make up the discipline and science of Yoga.

It seems difficult for some people to build on their initial interest and enthusiasm for Yoga in ways that lead to further benefits from its practice. Some people might say that these people are not yet "ready" for the practice of Yoga, while others will just say they can not make put forth the constant effort that is involved. Many Yoga teachers sometimes suffer from a crisis of self - confidence and self - esteem because attendance in their Yoga classes may fluctuate so wildly.

Different people are coming to learn Yoga, at different stages of their life experience, at different ages, and with different expectations.

Some have serious mental and physical health issues, disorders and addictions to work on. Others want to lose weight or be fashionable or have a crush on their Yoga teacher. Others hope to gain some kind of spiritual enrichment and deeper insight into their lives and the experience of life.

It is understandable that the physical practice of Yoga is so immensely popular and what most people associate Yoga with and to be. As individuals, we seem much more capable of working with the body then in working with our thoughts, mind and consciousness.

In most situations and cases, individuals begin their practice of Yoga and exploration of themselves through it with the physical practices of Yoga, in what is known as Hatha Yoga.

They are then expected to further learn and understand Yoga through an examination, study and practice of the morals and ethics of Yoga, what are known as the Yamas and Niyamas, in addition to cultivating the practice of meditation.

Yama means universal vows and niyama means personal observances.

These morals and ethics are not always examined in any great detail in some Yoga sessions. Some teachers have come to a point where they think that the practitioners who come to their classes are not interested in learning them. There may be some truth to this.

In being exposed to the Yamas and Niyamas, some Yoga practitioners may resent this, thinking or feeling that they are being lectured or preached to.

Others think that the postures are most important and their regular and diligent practice, and progress in them, plus a regular meditation practice, will bring about all of the changes that the yamas and niyamas will.

A better way to learn Yoga and the correct way would be to teach, learn and understand the Yamas and Niyamas first and then from there go to the postures and meditation practice.

As a result, instead of seeing the practice of postures and meditation as something that leads into the yamas and niyamas, their understanding and practice, one would be exposed to the fact that postures and meditation are actually one of the practices that makes up the yamas and niyamas.

This approach introduces the potential Yoga aspirant and practitioner to Yoga and it's practice in a more holistic manner, so in addition to learning and practicing the standing or sitting forward bend, they also learn and understand the importance of contentment.

In addition to learning and practicing the standing or sitting spinal twist, they also learn and understand the importance of non – greed.

In addition to learning and practicing the bow, cobra and camel poses, among others, they also learn and understand the importance of austerity, non – violence and self – study.

It is understandable that those people who are new to Yoga may find this a bit too much to explore.

We live in countries and cultures that allow us to be individuals and for better or worse, we grow on that experience of individuality, so we are living a skillful and compassionate life, or a life marked by unskillfulness and an insensitivity to the life experiences of others.

Some people are just confused and lost and can only make a connection to something higher through the senses.

Yoga is easy to learn and practice.

5. Is He a Famous Teacher?

Some years back this writer taught Yoga in a ballet school here in Bangkok.

The experience was, initially a good one, but like many things can be in life, changes come as we have a better idea and understanding of the environment in which we are and who we work with and for.

Like so many experiences have been in working a health clubs and schools in Bangkok, I sadly noticed and realized that there were little cases of dishonesty, which is actually fraudulent and very much against what yoga teaches, talking place again and again.

Things like promoting the teacher as having twenty years of teaching experience when he only had two or three years.

Other things such as falsely or incorrectly promoting what the benefits of yoga are and can bring or what yoga really is.

Maybe another had to be organizing and teaching the classes in one with what the owners of the school or health club wanted instead of what was most effective for the teacher and learner.

One day, the owner of the ballet school asked me about my teacher in India.

"Is he a famous teacher"? was the question.

I could see that my answer would have a determination of how he was going to advertise and promote the Yoga that was being taught at his ballet school.

My reply was that he was famous in India, but not so well known in the west, but that all this did not really matter.

The owner of the school was perplexed and frustrated by my answer, perhaps realizing that there was nothing in it that would be useful to promoting and advertising the instruction of Yoga at his school.

My answer was not intended to do that, but was intended to be honest and insightful.

It is good to have a famous teacher and many of us seek them out and after we have learned and grown under them, are not hesitant to talk about it perhaps, as a way of to give ourselves a better reference or impress another.

And sometimes, it is an experience that we should talk about and we should and can refer to our teacher with love, admiration and respect.

But at the same time, we have to be mindful of what it is we have been taught, or have we just been skillfully awakened to and had our attention redirected to something that was within us already and we had just lost sight of.

Many will say, and out forth ideas about what the essence of Yoga is.

Some say it is the physical postures and techniques that make it up.

Others will say meditation.

Some might say loving kindness and compassion.

Some of these things we may need to be taught, and others are already very much a part of our being and just need to be enhanced.

Some may need a teacher, some may need a famous or the most famous teacher, and others may just need a time of stillness and silence, and quiet reflection on where they have been, what they have done and experienced and who they are now.

Some years back, there was a conference of Yoga teachers held in New Delhi.

One aspect of the conference that was interesting and disturbing was that these well known teachers from all over India got at times bogged down on questioning the ability and the quality of the practice of other teachers.

Have we ever seen this in our own Yoga environment and community?

One of these teachers even owned a gun factory, which seems like a very unlikely thing for a teacher of Yoga to engage in.

But he was famous and well respected throughout India.

For some of us, we might eventually realize that the most famous teacher is that quiet and sincere determination within us that keeps us interested and enthusiastic about practicing, a teacher that is humble, open, vulnerable and honest.

Others may find a famous teacher in a book written by someone who is long dead, or in the few casual words shared with someone at work or during chance meeting while travelling.

Others may awaken to the wisdom of someone long forgotten in their past, a teacher at school, a relative, a friend, and see what was wise about their insight and actions at the time.

If we desire to be famous, may we not engage in fraudulent or dishonest practices in order to achieve that?

Could the desire to be famous be another thing that attaches us to the world and its workings?

Could it even be a hindrance to strengthening our personal practice of Yoga and what that involves?

There are and have been many great teachers, yes famous, in how they have assisted others in discovering and growing with Yoga.

Perhaps B.K.S. Iyengar stands at the pinnacle of these people, but that is not so important to reflect on.

Swami Sivananda certainly made a great and concerted effort to educate all about the practice of Yoga.

So has Swami Satyananda, as has Shri Yogendraji and his son, Dr. Jayadeva Yogendra.

Rodney Lee and others have done much good in bringing Yoga more into the consciousness and lives of everyday Americans in the last ten years.

Bo Lozoff has done much to initiate the teaching of Yoga and meditation to people who can benefit from it, that is the convicted felons and criminals in American prisons, through his prison ashram project.

It is worthwhile to see and understand that not all of the people are from India, or recite the scriptures, or stand on their head and make videos.

They show their fame through honest and sincere effort, based on loving kindness and compassion.

This is something that we are all capable of doing and achieving, perhaps in not teaching others Yoga, but at least in being an asset to our family and the community that we live in.

We do not have to be a famous teacher or learn from a famous teacher.

We just have to make an effort to learn and understand the teachings of Yoga, and then apply them.

Results will come from that.

Any sincere and diligent effort put forth in learning and practicing it will be beneficial to the aspirant, as they will be cultivating a tool, that is their mind, body and consciousness, that will be an asset to them as they continue down the path of life.

6. Struggling with the Practice of Yoga? You are not Alone.

Many people who know that Yoga is a worthwhile thing to explore, understand and practice sometimes feel a sense of frustration in their attempts to learn and bring it into their lives as they would like to.

The reasons for this vary.

They may be very busy with other activities revolving around their family, their work and their leisure time.

They may have been exposed to difficult, painful, challenging and intimidating learning environments and experiences with Yoga. They may not have the self-discipline to practice as they have been told to or know that they should. They may find that many of the more subtle aspects of Yoga to be difficult to grasp or think that they are not practical or necessary to their lives. They may be people that are easily distracted or not concentrated, or the negative forces within them are too powerful to deal with, overcome or weaken at this time in their life.

These are struggles that almost everyone who has come to and brought yoga into their lives have had to deal with at one time or another in their practice. So if you are at any one of these stages in your attempt to bring Yoga in to your life, do not let it frustrate you. You are not alone in the experiences and feelings. Like other aspects of the life experience, we have all been there.

But what can you do to make your learning and practice of Yoga less threatening or difficult?

A few suggestions are given below and briefly expanded on.

1. Try not to think of Yoga as being something undoable or unreachable. Yoga is nothing more than a down to earth and common sense approach to life and living. Many of the mental and physical aspects of Yoga that it teaches us are already within the realm of our consciousness and being. These include things such as working with the body as a way to enhance our mental and physical health and consciousness and the understanding that various morals and ethics that Yoga teaches us and reminds us of are good for us to know and apply as a way to improve our life and the lives of those around us.

2. Try not to put too much pressure on yourself in progressing too quickly in your ability to do the various postures and techniques of yoga that you have learned. The body and consciousness can stay stiff and rigid for a long period of time after you have started your practice of Yoga. Changes will come about slowly and if you are in too big a hurry, you may push yourself in such a way that you injure yourself, feel like a failure, burn out and can not see the other, perhaps subtler and more important changes that are taking place.

3. Never get into a state or habit where you consciously or unconsciously compare yourself with or compete with other practitioners. Since Yoga does involve what we can do with our body, something that can be seen, be photographed, be marveled at, it can be something that brings about feelings of inferiority or superiority. Sometimes books, teachers, videos and such will also promote this way of looking at Yoga. The greatest yogis are not those who stand on their head for hours on end, but those who have fully realized their ability to be wise, loving and compassionate to all beings and themselves.

4. Take some time and make some effort to learn and apply Yoga in its most holistic form. You can improve your health and cultivate the consciousness through your attitude to eating, sleep and what you do with your leisure time. Yoga also asks that we look more closely at how honest we are in all things, and whether we can practice non -- violence in thought, word and action, not only to others, but to ourselves also.

5. Take some time to look at what the teachings of Yoga, put forth in the scriptures of The Bhagavad Gita, The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, among others, share with us.

6. Take some time to reflect on how your yoga teacher teaches you and perhaps find one who is more suited to what it is you want.

Perhaps you want someone who is older, of the same or opposite gender than you, less demanding and aggressive when it comes to doing the postures, is gentler or more developed in other aspects of the practice of yoga, or willing to take the time and make the effort to talk with you in an interested and sincere manner outside of the classroom environment.

Yoga is a path, practice, science and discipline that is worth learning and practicing.

Do not let your confused or bad experiences with Yoga or one Yoga teacher or Yoga session, or your own confused feelings about yourself and life keep you from learning and practicing something that in both the short and long - term will bring you greater health and joy.

7. Some Reminders for Practicing Yoga: Don't Compare Yourself to Others

Much of what affects us the most in life each day is what we see.

It leaves impressions on us, creates desires in us, makes us fearful and apprehensive, and may make us feel more fortunate or superior or unfortunate and inferior to others.

In the practice of the science and discipline of Yoga, it is understood that what we see and how we perceive what we see can many times be a source for fluctuations of the consciousness that create disturbances of all kinds and take away our peace of mind and consciousness that we are striving for.

It is worthwhile to understand that when we are practicing the physical aspects of Yoga, the postures, meditation and such, we do not get too caught up in thinking that they signify something that we need to show others or make us better or more or less spiritual than others.

Postures are a facilitator, among other things, for bringing about a change in one's consciousness, in how it works and operates, and in how it influences and motivates us to say and do certain things.

With this in mind, regardless of where we are at with our physical practice of Yoga, as practitioners or as teachers, we need to be mindful in what our intentions are behind how we teach and perform our postures.

Perhaps it is more important for those new to Yoga to not get caught up in comparing themselves to others, though anytime we consciously or unconsciously engage in such an activity, we are taking ourselves off the path of Yoga.

Yoga is not about comparison, it is about compassion.

Yoga is not about competition, it is about caring.

Anytime we get caught up in any tendency of comparing ourselves to others, in subtle and gross forms, we are creating a fluctuation of our energy and being that goes against what it is we want to achieve in Yoga.

We need to avoid comparing ourselves to others in our practice of any aspect of Yoga, and life as a whole also.

We benefit from remembering that if we are consistent and sincere in our effort and practice, in both life and Yoga, results will come that will have made our journey worthwhile and fulfilling.

8. Some Reminders about Practicing Yoga: Don't Push Yourself

Most people believe, whether they have any experience with Yoga or not, that it is something that will bring them better mental and physical health.

So many, at one time or another in their life, will try to learn and do Yoga.

They may take a short course and then find that it is very difficult for them to integrate what they have learned into their lives and they do not practice anymore.

Others may join a class for two or three sessions and find it too demanding and they will give up.

Some will find that the effort and discomfort, and yes, pain that they experience from practicing brings them an enhanced feeling of calmness and balance, something that they find worth putting forth the required effort and discipline in order to achieve.

I, like many who have come to Yoga, found that for the first year of coming to Yoga, I almost dreaded my morning practice session, but always welcomed and found beneficial the results of it.

Others who have experienced such a refreshment and enhancement of their energy find that they are willing to put forth the required effort of themselves as needed in order to make progress with their practice.

But we do see some people who almost become obsessed with their practice and embark on a practice session that is greater than is needed.

This is something to be admired, but it is not uncommon for such people to risk experiencing two things because of such an approach.

One is that they risk injuring themselves as they want to learn as much as they can and progress as quickly as possible.

The other is that they may burn out from practicing intensely and frequently or may experience some frustration because they can not achieve what it is they want to achieve from practicing.

It is important that all practitioners of Yoga, whether they are new or old to it, refrain from pushing themselves excessively.

There is no real point or purpose to such a way of practicing.

We may be overly influenced by some teachers, books and videos to think that we need to push ourselves, when really what is most important is that we practice consistently and do what our schedule and current mind and body state allows us to do.

We do better becoming disciplined in practicing, say thirty minutes once or twice a day, those postures that we find enjoyable and are comfortable with, instead of pushing ourselves to practice for one or two hours, but find that such a way of practicing is not something that we can do on a consistent basis.

If you are interested in learning and integrating Yoga into your life and getting its benefits, understand that it is going to be something that will be with you forever.

There will always be growth and enjoyment from your practice.

If you push yourself too much initially, you may sacrifice the ability to make it part of your life in a long - term and healthy manner.

9. Some Reminders about Practicing Yoga: Our Life is our Practice

When we are new to Yoga , we tend to look at it from a very narrow focus, that being, that it consists of physical practices only.

For some, their whole practice of Yoga will be built around the performance of these postures.

Others will, through a natural evolution, their own effort and interest or through being reminded by those who teach and guide them on the Yoga path will move onto seeing the other aspects of what Yoga is.

But the reality of what Yoga is that our life and how we live it is our practice.

Yoga asks that not only do we practice postures, breathing techniques, relaxation and meditation each day, but that when we go about our daily business, work, errands, chores and pleasures, we adapt an attitude that is in line with what Yoga teaches us.

Yoga reminds us that what it is we want to gain in its practice, greater health, more skillfulness in living, more wholesomeness in our actions as individuals and with others is something that every moment, activity and action in life provides us with an opportunity to do.

To bring us to this kind of mindfulness, that our life is our practice requires that we have an understanding of what those morals, ethics and human and life values are that Yoga suggests that we practice.

Many of these values are already concepts, ideas and actions that we have been made familiar with somehow in our lives already.

In fact, they are the same values as all of the great religions of the world teach us about.

And at the same time, if we violate the practice of some of these values in the most extreme manner, we will be breaking the law and could be arrested and sent to jail or prison.

These are things such as non - violence in thought, word and action, honesty and non - stealing.

Of course, we can be violent, we can be dishonest and we can steal and never get caught or go to jail or prison for it at all. We have all done these things in small amounts or degrees at times in our lives.

In fact, though we may be physically non – violent to others, we may be violent to them in our thoughts and words.

We may tell small or big lies in order to protect ourselves from the reprimands of others, hide things from them or satisfy our desires.

And we may steal another's idea or once in a while take a few pencils from the office.

The other teachings of Yoga ask that we try to live as simple and as pure a life as possible. This would reflect partly in what we eat and drink and direct us to actions that enhance rather than debilitate and degrade us. Perhaps we have all engaged in some kind of intoxicants or stimulants that while we were doing them, we felt pleasure, but afterwards caused us to feel unbalanced. And perhaps we have all engaged in some action or activity that satisfied our desires at the time but later was a cause for shame or guilt.

These teachings would also ask that we live a life with a minimum amount of possessions and perhaps involvement with things and people.

It asks that we try to be content with what life and daily living has given us and that we live within our means.

It asks that we try to take some time to look more closely at ourselves, the motivations behind what we are thinking, saying and doing and what affect these same things will have on us and others.

The postures of Yoga plus meditation give us a mindfulness and strength so we are better able to apply all of the values that make up Yoga.

It is easy to see that how we relate to ourselves and the world and others is going to have an influence on how we think and feel in both the short and long - term.

Yoga gives us a set of values to use as individuals and in our interactions with others so that we can make our life our practice.

10. Some Reminders about Practicing Yoga: Practice Everyday

If we want to make Yoga part of our life, we need to put forth the effort to practice everyday.

This is for many new to Yoga the hardest thing to do, in addition to being able to practice away from a Yoga class and a Yoga teacher.

People do have alot of problems with developing this habit of practicing everyday on their own.

We can develop this habit in a gentle and undemanding way by just trying to practice each day at a time that is most convenient for us and with a use of no more then thirty minutes.

In cultivating our own practice everyday on our own, we can do those postures that we enjoy the most and we find easiest to do.

We do not have to be doing advanced or difficult and in some cases dangerous or overly demanding postures when we are on our own at home or in the neighborhood park.

It is generally recommended that the best time for people to practice is early in the morning before the daily routine, activities and errands of the day take over.

So instead of getting up at 7 a.m., one might have to try to get up 6:30 a.m.

It is also helpful for some in trying to establish this habit to prepare their practice clothing and place of practice the night before, so they will not have to deal with it in the morning.

One needs to find a good place to practice in their home or area where they live and practice there each day.

Clothing that is needed for practicing in should be laid out the night before so it is easily accessible and ready to wear.

In order to practice in a skillful and diligent manner each day, all we need is to think of it as a new habit that we bring into our life and work to the goal.

Soon, the initial effort that is required from one will become a habit and routine and the effort needed in doing it will not be so great anymore.

11. Some Reminders about Practicing Yoga: Understanding that it Involves more than Just the Body

The practice of Yoga consists of a wonderful and healthy set of mental and physical teachings which when understood and applied enhance our approach to life and living and purify the energy behind all of our mental and physical actions.

But for many, the practice of Yoga is thought to consist of nothing more than a set and series of postures and bodily and breathing techniques that they find interesting, exhilarating and sometimes difficult and challenging to perform or do.

With such a limited understanding of what Yoga is they risk deceiving themselves in one way, that is, that they will base their whole understanding and idea of what Yoga is and what kind of progress they are making in it based on something physical.

Because we are flexible does not always mean that we are more loving to others.

Because we practice the physical aspects of Yoga everyday does not mean that we are living skillfully in other aspects of our life.

Because we have mastered a new posture, or at least feel comfortable with practicing it, does not mean that our ability to change tendencies of greed and impatience within ourselves has been strengthened.

However, the postures are one of the things that brings about changes within ourselves that in addition to the other teachings of Yoga, elevate us so those things that are negative within ourselves are weakened, while those things within ourselves that are positive are strengthened.

If someone is new to Yoga, they will benefit from at least taking a look at what the other teachings of Yoga share with them and suggest.

They will find that they do not recommend anything that is too hard to understand and practice, and that many of these teachings just focus on things that we have always been vaguely mindful about, but may have lost sight of in our day to day living.

There is nothing in these teachings and the changes that they recommend that we pursue that will rob us of the fun and satisfaction in life that we are now experiencing.

If we try to be more content, less greedy, more honest and take some time to look at who and how we are, in the light of what we have done and what the teaching suggest that we aim for, we will only be embarking on a way that brings us more in terms of an understanding of ourselves and an understanding of others.

This kind of understanding can be the foundation for greater joy as individuals and more harmonious and fruitful interactions with others.

12. Some Reminders about Practicing Yoga: Vary Your Posture Practice

For many individuals, their practice of Yoga initially revolves around the regular performance of various postures and bodily and breathing techniques.

As we continue to practice these things, we undergo a transformation and enhancement of our mental and physical energy and being.

One's attitude to these postures and techniques and the changes that they bring may vary.

At times, they may be performed and experienced with great enthusiasm, interest and discipline, while at other times, the effort that is asked from us may seem too much and we may not seem to be getting the same benefits or sense of satisfaction and fulfillment from our practice that we did on other days and at other times.

Some people actually start to feel a sense of boredom with their practice and doing the same postures and sequence again and again.

It is always worthwhile to understand that if we practice too much, we may actually need to take a break from practicing or may just be experiencing a temporary burn out or energy let down.

It is important to take breaks in one's practice and not to practice too much and too often, instead understanding that time away from the physical practice of Yoga allows the results of our practice to be assimilated nicely into our being.

Another thing that we can do in order to maintain an enthusiastic attitude to our practice is to vary our posture practice.

Instead of doing the same postures, sequence and routine each time we practice, we can instead work on one particular sequence that we find enjoyable or effective, or have short posture sequences that focus on doing postures from one position only.

In other words, we can on a Monday morning do a 20 minute posture practice consisting of those old and new standing postures that we want to work on (Padahasthasana, Uttanasana, Trikonasana, Garudasana, etc.) and then if we practice again that day, say in the late afternoon, do a number of postures that start from the supine position (Savasana, Setu Bandhasana, Chakrasana, Supta Vajasana, etc.)

Then the following morning, if we practice again for twenty or thirty minutes, we can do postures that originate from the sitting posture or with the legs stretched out in front of us (Paschimottasana, Vajrasana, Ustrasana, Katikasana, etc).

If we vary our posture practice in such a way, we will find that we can avoid feeling and experiencing a sense of boredom or burn out with our practice and at the same time be able to develop a variety of postures that we feel comfortable with doing and enhance our overall being in the way that the practice of Yoga should.

13. Why do People Fail at Yoga? - They do not feel they are Achieving Progress from It

Yoga teachers everywhere, regardless of the country that they teach in, the situation and environment in which they teach, their age and gender and their training and qualifications or lack of training and qualifications have similar experiences and perceptions from the act of teaching.

Probably a common one is that students come and go.

An individual will come to one class or two or three and exhibit enthusiasm and an interest in learning and then all of a sudden disappear, to be never seen or heard from again.

And when people tell others that they are involved in the teaching and propagation of Yoga as being a healthy thing for all to do, they will frequently be met with a response such as "I took a Yoga course once", or "I practiced Yoga for a while a few years ago but stopped".

My response to a statement like this will be to ask them why they stopped.

Reasons will vary.

Not enough time or energy.

Not enough self – discipline.

Unable to be motivated to practice on one's own.

A feeling that they were not making progress in it or getting the desired results that they hoped for and expected from it.

I have always told people that have attended the Yoga sessions that I have done to try to come to at least three sessions before reaching any decision about continuing one's practice.

I have also tried to inform people that it is not unusual for an initial interest and enthusiasm for Yoga and its practice to wear thin and lead some to stop its practice all together.

In coming to and practicing Yoga, we hope for or expect certain things from it.

These may be realistic or unrealistic.

Generally videos and advertisements may make us perceive something in an unrealistic way, whereas an honest and gentle lecture from the teacher to a group of students or one individual student will help them perceive it in a realistic manner.

And we generally feel less comfortable when being exposed to something in a realistic way, because it may be more challenging or less fun.

Maybe all of life has been promoted through our own ego, television and the media, and advertisements in an unrealistic manner. Maybe that is why so many people find aspects of it challenging and stressful and suffer from various stress - related and emotional disorders.

Many times we are not clear about what it is that we should achieve from our practice of Yoga.

Generally we think it is to be able to go onto doing more advanced postures and techniques.

This is true to a certain extent though if we look at our practice of Yoga in terms of that, we may be missing more subtle changes that happen from its practice.

And of course, to achieve any progress from it, we have to be consistent with practice, perhaps practicing at times and days when we do not feel like it, or putting aside other activities and sensually pleasing things in order to practice, and just sticking with it.

Again, like so many things in Yoga, it is the responsibility of the teacher to remind practitioners about the various dynamics of the practice of Yoga, what we achieve from it and what stands in our way of achieving those things.

Yoga needs to be taught in a gentle and holistic manner, so individuals understand that they are achieving things just through constant effort, even if some postures are painful or come more difficult for them.

They need to understand that many of the thoughts, words and actions that they have had or put forth in their life before ever being made aware of Yoga are very

much in tune with the teachings of Yoga and that progress in Yoga has more to do with our overall approach to life and living and how we manifest that approach than by what we are able to do or not do with our body.

Those new to Yoga are more likely to see what they can achieve from it if they are made aware of those things from their very first session with Yoga.

And what are those things that we should achieve from it?

A purer and clearer state of mental and physical energy consisting of greater mindfulness, concentration, equanimity, tranquility, effort and energy, joy and an investigative nature kind of sums it up.

And most people if they are guided skillfully and practice diligently, both with a teacher or various teachers or on their own will see these things arise as a result of their practice.

14. Why do People Fail at Yoga – Unhappy with the Teacher's Attitude and Approach

Perhaps it is not correct to use the word "fail" when discussing why people stop practicing Yoga. It is hard to see how anyone could "fail" at Yoga as long as they continue to practice and practice sincerely.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that people lose interest in it or give up on practicing it.

There are a number of reasons as to why an individual may give up the practice of Yoga or not apply themselves to practicing it.

One reason that I have seen has been dissatisfaction with the teacher's attitude and approach or being exposed to teachers with unwholesome attitudes about teaching and to the practitioners.

I read about one such example in a book some year's back where a new student to a Yoga session was ridiculed by the teacher in front of the class before the Yoga session began.

Many people who come to Yoga are coming for reasons that may be very important for them to deal with and in some cases involve serious issues.

To ridicule someone who has decided to make an effort to learn Yoga, in private or in front of the class, and is spending their time, energy and money to learn Yoga is a gross disservice, impolite and far removed from Yoga is teaching us.

Another student that I was familiar with talked about how she was ridiculed by other practitioners in the class.

In a situation such as this, the teacher should have had better control of the class, reminding the practitioners to work with their own body and breath and not to compete with or compare themselves to other practitioners, or really make any comments about another practitioner.

A Yoga session is many times most effective when it is done in silence, except for any points about Yoga and it's practice that need to be made by the teacher.

This writer, like so many people who are interested in Yoga has made more than one journey to India in order to work with and learn from teachers there.

These experiences have for the most part been disappointing, as I have been to more than one teacher and class where the teacher was impolite and intimidating to those who attended his session.

One example consisted of individuals new to yoga being exposed to and asked to perform postures that were far beyond their need or capability.

This seems to be a common experience among some new to Yoga.

Another session consisted of an experience where one practitioner was ridiculed in front of the class because he could not fully see the posture from the back of the Yoga studio, nor was the posture explained to him and demonstrated in an easy to understand and observe manner.

In both this example and the example mentioned above, where a young girl was ridiculed by a fellow practitioner, the Yoga class and session was attended by too many people.

Sometimes such a situation may be unavoidable while at other times it may be a result of the teachers desire to get as many students as possible into one session, thereby bringing him or herself greater profit or status and notoriety.

In still another situation, a practitioner was ridiculed by the teacher in public because of a question that he asked.

Those who teach Yoga are just like other human beings and even though they do teach, they are evolving, working on themselves and trying to fully apply what they have learned about and from the practice of Yoga into their lives and teaching.

Teachers make mistakes also in teaching and hopefully they can be mindful and skillful enough to see these mistakes and make adjustments so they do not happen again.

But if an individual is new to Yoga, they need to be exposed to a teacher who will be skillful enough to not allow them to be or feel threatened by other practitioners or by the teacher's method of teaching.

They need to be looked at as individuals who may have mental and physical conditioning that has been unwholesome and have issues to deal with, if nothing more than just being able to relax better.

Perhaps some teachers need to set limits on how many practitioners should come to their sessions and be less forceful in teaching.

Those who wish to learn Yoga do not need to see the teachers ability to do advanced or difficult postures, though in these modern times and in some contexts, this idea of what postures we can do seems to be for some a sign that they have made progress in Yoga or are qualified and suitable to teach Yoga.

Some teachers may benefit in remembering that their experience with Yoga and ability to do some postures is not something to build up their own ego or allow them to ridicule or intimidate those who come to them for instruction and guidance.

Gentleness and mindfulness in teaching will help those new to Yoga to get firmly on the path of Yoga and assist them in cultivating their own practice in a manner that is strong, skillful and balanced.

15. Too Many Times We Are Looking For Signs

Over the years this writer has met more than a few people who look at their spiritual practice not in terms of the effort, and skillful and accountable mindfulness that is involved in working on oneself and being more compassionate to others, but instead in terms of what kind of mystical experiences, feelings, sightings and powers they have had.

I remember the woman who frequently talked about her out of body experiences but who also frequently got angry easily.

I remember the man who incessantly read and talked about Buddhism and meditation but did not have the patience to listen to another's thoughts and experiences on the same subject with an open heart and mind.

Kind of like the "my practice and perception of the practice is right and your practice and your perception of the practice is wrong" mentality and attitude.

And on a daily basis, I saw people who made merit to the Buddhist monks in Bangkok and Thailand as a way to get something from their offering, some good fortune involving a relationship, money or material or social status, instead of with a real understanding of the Buddhist path and practice.

In seeing these things in others, I also became more mindful of the fact that they had all been something that I had thought at one time or another.

Wherever we are with and in our practice, there are still those states of ignorance that keep us from seeing things as clearly as we are capable of.

Many times we have thought that our effort to study and practice a spiritual path and discipline should be rewarded in some way.

We should more easily get those things that we wish for and desire and that others should look upon us as being wise and kind, and love us, just because we practice Yoga or Buddhism or any other religious or spiritual discipline.

Probably one thing that we all would like is just some respect that we are putting forth such an effort, but many times we may be met with challenging and derisive statements and questions because of what we practice.

But one thing that we need to remember is that we are not trying to change others and the world to suit our desires, hopes and wants, but instead working on changing ourselves.

People will still be impatient and unfairly judgmental, ridiculing and quick to anger with us.

What it is that we are trying to do is change ourselves so when we are confronted with those people and ways of being, we are more understanding and skillful in our response.

The understanding manifests itself in seeing that perhaps the person who is acting or reacting to us in such a way is confused by some past or present experience and conditioning themselves.

They have lost their way as we have and we all have at one time or another.

They may be tired, hungry, confused or hurt and pained about something.

It does not mean that we have to allow ourselves to be constantly abused or attacked by them though.

That makes up part of a skillful response. That if we are able to, we can expose ourselves to such a person less frequently or not at all.

If it is an abusive parent, child, boss, co – worker or spouse, that may be more difficult to do or easier said than done, but we still may have options to explore and act on instead of allowing ourselves to continue to be exposed to such a person and situation.

Another aspect of a skillful response is to be more mindful of our own gifts and attributes and what we are capable of.

If we respond to something that another says or does with a gentle question or insightful observation, we may be learning something about ourselves while not allowing them to continue to get away with their own excessiveness on a regular basis.

Too many times we react to anger and impatience with anger and impatience and things just get out of control and worse.

In addition, if we are a practitioner of Yoga or Buddhism we have an understanding of those things within and that we do that may be creating an unbalanced and unskillful state of being.

Is it our diet that may be a factor, or how we have been sleeping, or some of our leisure activities that are creating problems.

And we also are mindful that if we are practicing the various physical techniques and postures of Yoga in addition to meditation, we are strengthening ourselves to face the day to day challenges of living with more acceptance, understanding and appreciation.

People who are looking for signs, the manifestation of some desire or power, or a mystical experience may eventually become disappointed in the specific spiritual practice they are involved in.

This year it may be Yoga, then to Buddhism and Reiki, then to Aromatherapy and Tai Chi, and then back to the faiths of their youth, be they Islam, Christianity, Judaism or Catholicism.

All religions and spiritual practices ask us to make an effort and exert the discipline to bring the teachings and apply them into our lives.

That can be a lot of work, sometimes work that is hard in that it challenges the current state of our ego and forces us to look at ourselves in ways where we may feel shame or guilt because we have thought, said or done something.

But that is what these paths, practices and religions ask of us to do.

It is not a blind obedience based on the idea that we will receive some reward, experience or power but instead a skillful understanding and application of what they have taught us to do, in all situations and with all people, and when we are alone with ourselves.

16. The Sound of Relaxation

When one lives a life based on sobriety, meaning a life that does not include the use of any beer, alcohol or drugs, one can become very naïve or unmindful about just what an important part of many people's lives drinks and drugs are or have become.

And just prior to sitting down to write this, I listened to a news feature from the United States that stated that the sound of relaxation to many in America is the opening of a beer bottle.

Certainly, many if not most people in the world do associate the use of drink and soft drugs with relaxation and the experience and feeling of enjoying oneself.

And there are many overt and subtle forces in our cultural and social environment that encourage us to drink and use drugs.

This is part of the reason why so many people who have reached a stage in their use of drinks or drugs that is addictive, debilitating, self – destructive and against the law have a hard time quitting them.

But the sound of relaxation should not be the opening of a beer bottle, or the inhalation of a tobacco or marijuana cigarette.

Instead the sound of relaxation should be the thing that we were born with and given long before we ever knew about beer or drugs.'
It sustained us from the moment of birth and will sustain us to the moment of death.

It is the breath.

In both Yoga and Buddhism we cultivate the breath as a tool for calming ourselves and gaining insight about how we think, feel, speak and act through our practice of postures, relaxation and meditation.

In Yoga, there are even special breathing techniques that strengthen the quality of our breath and breathing apparatus.

When we look at and attempt to manage the breath in gentle ways, it assists us in letting go of disturbing, stressful and anxious physical and mental states.

When we combine such mindfulness of the breath with a posture that promotes a smooth and unhindered energy flow in the body and consciousness, the ability to get relaxed and focused is enhanced.

When we use drink or drugs to get relaxed, we may be actually hurting ourselves in a number of ways such as damaging or potentially causing damage to organs and systems in the body, such as the liver, heart, and lungs.

We may be also cultivating an addiction to these things and think and feel that we can not enjoy life or have fun without them,

We may be wasting time, money and energy that could be better used and spent in other ways.

We may be neglecting our health and our responsibilities to ourselves and our loved ones.

We may be eventually getting to stage where we break the law, either in getting funding for our habit or acting in some disrespectful or violent manner while under their influence.

When we work with the body and breath as prescribed by Yoga and Buddhism that will not happen at all.

In fact, all of those states that we may be cultivating in the use of drugs or drink would be the opposite in Yoga or Buddhism.

We will be bringing a greater health to all the organs and systems of the body and the mind and consciousness also.

The practice of Yoga and Buddhism costs little or nothing and is done in an environment that is clean, quiet, supportive of who we are and our practice and gives us the opportunity to meet like - minded people.

It does not lead to any addictions or obsessions. In fact it helps us become more mindful of what some our very overt and subtle addictions and obsessions may be and gives us the room and strength to let go of them.

It will bring us benefits in both the short and long term.

We will be cultivating greater mindfulness, concentration, equanimity and tranquillity which we be an asset to our work and home life and a path to happiness and enjoyment regardless of our situation and circumstances.

If you think and feel that the sound of relaxation is the sound of a beer bottle being opened, or beer being poured into a glass, or the lighting up and inhalation of another marijuana or nicotine cigarette, you may be doing nothing more then experiencing a temporary escape, high or pleasure that in reality is leading you down the road to addiction and ill – health.

If your sound of relaxation is the breath, watching it, managing it in gentle ways, listening to what it brings you and seeing how it focuses you, you will be experiencing a relaxation that is deep - seeded, builds on itself, and is a path to a consistent and high state of health throughout your life.

17. Yoga Consists of Enriching Ourselves So We Can Enrich Others

Some of us may come to or did come to Yoga with a very self – centered attitude and outlook on life.

And initially, our specific reason for coming to Yoga may have been something such as wanting to be better looking or feel like we were being fashionable or to feel that we were special or unique in some manner.

We may have for some period of time used our practice of Yoga as a way to continue looking down on the world and others.

It may take alot of time, energy, effort and practice for people to get to a state in their Yoga which is beyond that self – centered attitude and outlook that they started out at and with.

But there is nothing about this evolution, where we started out at and where we are at now and going, to look at with any kind of negative feeling.

It is just how we can be as human beings.

We have all been there, or will be there again in the future.

Even if we practice Yoga for many years, we may find ourselves at times swing back into old ways of thinking and acting.

Old habits and ways of thinking, feeling, acting and speaking have been deeply conditioned into us and a part of our lives for many years, and these ways of living and being do not and can not disappear overnight.

Yoga does not solve all of our problems in life or make the challenges that we may face any less problematic or difficult.

It just makes us more physically and mentally sound so we can deal with them from a better state and in a better way.

Yoga really consists of making us more wise and compassionate, a process which is one of self-enrichment instead of self – centeredness.

When we are and have been self - enriched, we will naturally be someone who can enrich others.

It may be in what we say.

It may be on how we listen and respond.

It may be in what we do.

The teachings of Yoga frequently point out to us that its practice is very much an approach to living based on a two things.

How we are to ourselves, and how we are to others.

Perhaps we can easily think of it as being a path that consists of actions directed inwardly and outwardly.

And those who may mistakenly think that Yoga is an alien religion or foreign discipline and practice that is a threat to their own way of life or goes against their own religion and religious beliefs fail to see that many of the things that yoga advises us to do are already very much a part of how we are as human beings already or are very much a part of the teachings of the religion that we are following at any particular time in our lives.

With the practice of Yoga, as with the diligent and knowledgeable practice of any spiritual discipline or religion, we should see a state of being and living that involves a daily process of self – enrichment and the enrichment of others.

18. Yoga Consists of Living a Life Governed by a Set of Values

What many of us need in life is a set of values to live by that will not be the subject of ridicule or mockery by others, be they friends, family, co – workers and colleagues, late night talk show hosts, movies and the media and a general cultural climate that makes fun of anything or anyone that is really interested in living a morally and ethically sound life.

It does seem to some that there is a tendency to think that we should not be too serious, or too stern, or too energetic, or anything else.

Many times some people may ridicule us if we do nothing more than not fit into their agenda and way of living or perceive us as a threat to them in some manner.

It does seem that we can often be too quick to make fun of others or ridicule them, then to look at the more serious side of their life and who they are.

There may be nothing wrong or bad about such an attitude, except that it may not allow us to really be helpful or compassionate to them when they truly need our help.

But why we can not be that way may be more significant than we want to see or admit.

Is it because we have lost touch with that softness, wisdom and compassion within?

Is it because we do not know how to respond in any sort of manner other than one that is not involved or that we just feel too cut off from them as being other human beings?

Perhaps we are in a hurry to get somewhere or overwhelmed by our own anxieties and stresses or the need to escape from everything in our own way.

Maybe we have secrets that we do not want to let others know.

But to practice Yoga does mean that we are making an attempt to live our life based on a set of values.

This set of values may go against the agenda and emotional fluctuations of our friends, loved ones and family.

They may be misunderstood by our co-workers and work colleagues.

They may go against what the culture, country and society as a whole says is enjoyable or best for us to think, feel, say and do.

And long after we have become familiar and comfortable with the regular and daily practice of the postures of Yoga and meditation, we may still find ourselves wrestling with bringing these values into all aspects of our being.

It may not be unusual to even find that the postures of Yoga and sitting meditation practice are unleashing forces, intentions and motivations that swing us in the opposite direction from where the values of Yoga ask us to go.

But the practice of Yoga is basically one that revolves around living life based on a set of values.

These values are in many respects built upon many of the things that we generally are taught in Christian societies, and if we violate them, we may be looked down on, demonized and even arrested by law enforcement agencies.

These values consist of things such as honesty and non-stealing, two values that are commonly looked upon as being part of how we should be in all cultures and societies, while other values require more examination from us, and more effort to see how they are beneficial to us.

This would include things such non – greed, contentment, celibacy and austerity.

These things go very much against how we are conditioned to think and act in materialistic and growth-orientated cultures, countries and societies.

And it does seem that the world and all the countries that make it up these days, in this era of globalization and free trade agreements, that we do think that materialism and growth is the most important thing to pursue.

But it is not unusual for us to find people who have so much in terms of money and material wealth, and success and comfort, to be stressed out, judgmental, angry and bitter.

So all can benefit from having a set of values to live by.

The poor and the wealthy can still pursue their daily lives and desires within the context of a set of values.

Living within a set of values or the set of values that Yoga suggests may just make all people who adhere to and practice them healthier, happy and balanced.

That is what Yoga says they will do.

19. Yoga Consists of Ministering to Others

In an essay written some time back, this writer suggested that instead of promoting Yoga through pictures and videos that show people doing difficult and advanced postures and practices, we instead should and can promote it through those aspects of our life that may be more realistic and part of our day to day activities, actions and experiences.

Instead of showing someone doing the scorpion, it might be better to see a mother listening to her children.

Instead of showing someone doing the lotus posture, it might be better to see a father carrying his sleeping son or daughter to bed in his arms.

Instead of showing the headstand, it might be better to see a picture of an individual man or woman, or a family, or child working to clean up the environment in which they live, be it their home or neighborhood.

We sometimes are so caught up in postures and techniques that we forget the big picture of what we are trying to cultivate through our practice.

If we were to try to simplify it, we could say that we want to be a person who is always understanding and compassionate to all, and is able to practice loving kindness to all people.

That may sound unrealistic, or impractical, or even foolish, but it is not so. It is just a way of being so that any time we interact with another, we are mindful

about and naturally interact with them based on the ways of being that I just mentioned.

One of the major aspects of the practice of Yoga is being able to minister to others and should be one of the fruits of our practice of discipline and effort in Yoga.

One of the things that interferes with our ability to minister to others is our state of consciousness.

We are burdened by fear, anger, impatience and the workings of our ego.

We may use what could be an opportunity to minister as an opportunity to put down or look down on another.

We may use what could be an opportunity to minister to think that we are better, wiser and more important than another and voice our thoughts and feelings based on those states of consciousness.

We may use what could be an opportunity to minister as a way to put forth our own selfish, manipulative or exploitive agenda.

But if our understanding and practice of Yoga has been a skillful and consistent one, this will not be the case.

We will understand and see that each time we interact with others there may be an opportunity or need to minister.

We may be able to minister just by saying "please" and "thankyou".

We may be able to minister by just giving a smile and saying "good morning".

We may be able to minister when we understand that it is better to listen and offer only a few words in response at the moment.

We may be able to minister by asking a question that does not imply anger, judgment or ridicule, but instead directs the person who is sharing with us to the wisdom within that they may have lost sight of.

We may be able to minister by sharing our own experiences which may have been similar in some respect.

We may be able to minister by letting another person know what options there are available to him or her to assist them in their quest for greater peace and understanding, and wiser and more skillful actions.

Yoga, like Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism and Islam says that our actions show the fruit of our knowledge, understanding and practice.

The ability to be able to minister to others is one of the pre - eminent states of living that we accomplish through any religious and spiritual path and practice.

If we have not cultivated that ability, we need to look at the quality of our practice and where we are going with it.

We may need to make more of an effort to understand the other teachings of Yoga or our particular religious or spiritual path and practice and make more of an effort to bring them into our life experiences with others.

20. Yoga Consists of Not Ridiculing the Weak

One's practice of Yoga can be easily summarized and thought of as consisting of practices directed internally and externally for the good of oneself and all of mankind.

Many times we have been conditioned into thinking that the good of oneself means that we have as much money, comfort and pleasure as we can have in a day or our life.

Certainly, these things have their place in our life experience.

But even when we have these things, we still have to face the same challenges in life, getting older, seeing how we and our relationships change, and understanding our past, present and future life experiences in a light that does not disturb us or cause us sorrow or lead us into mental and physical actions that hurt ourselves and others.

And if we are too caught up in chasing money, comfort and pleasure, we may start to lose sight of the fact that there are other things that we can do each day, that will bring us something greater than the three things just mentioned.

That is a balance and peace, where we are not overcome and overwhelmed by attachments, aversion and egoism.

When we are overcome and overwhelmed by these things, we will find us always having to deal with anger, resentment, and the feelings that arise when we consciously or unconsciously compare ourselves to others or compete with them.

Another thing that we must do in order to maintain personal balance and harmony is to not ridicule those who we think of as being weak or weaker than us.

Sometimes it may be a co – worker.

It could be a spouse or our child.

It could be a homeless man on the street or someone that we see who has a serious drug or drinking problem.

If we ridicule them, we make a mistake that hurts both ourselves and them.

As far as ourselves, it keeps us from understanding how close to being like the person we ridicule we are or could be ourselves.

It keeps us from being more understanding and appreciative of the many mental, physical and material attributes that we have in our own life.

It keeps us from growing in a way that we could as individuals if we would instead look at the person behind the weak tendency or tendencies that we think we see in them.

It keeps us from making any effort to realize that this person, in the perceived weakness that we see in them on our part, has the potential to be something better and greater and evolve from their present state.

It keeps us from taking the time to investigate why they have got this way and seeing what gifts and attributes they may have.

It keeps us from seeing that there may be something in their present and past life experience and state that we may learn from.

And how does it hurt them.

Instead of taking the time to nurture them and bring some light into their life, we may be instead further damaging and confusing them, making them feel shame or anxiety in their confusion and weakness.

We may be doing nothing more than being another person who sets up a hindrance to them accessing and cultivating a way to better health and living.

Our simple use of thoughts, feelings, words and actions can easily hurt them or inspire them, and we should have the mindfulness and ability to know that and act on it in the skillful and wholesome way.

If not, and we think of ourselves as being practitioners of Yoga, Buddhism or some other religious or spiritual discipline, we may have to look at how we are going with our practice of Yoga and take a closer look at how the teachings of Yoga advise us to live and behave.

The bottom line is that if we feel we should or need to ridicule the weak, we are still weak.

It is better to continue to learn and know about ourselves instead of take any time or effort to ridicule others, who though they may be weak, are not ridiculing us at all.

It is always wiser to be still, listen, love and nurture than to use one's life time and energy to ridicule another.

21. Yoga Consists of Not Sealing The Book of Learning

It is not unusual for people to think that they have more knowledge about life or living than others, regardless of what their educational background, social standing and achievements are.

Humility is for some a hard way of being to cultivate and be, and we can be doing a life sentence in the state penitentiary or working on our Ph.D. at the state university and live a life based on extreme pride and arrogance or gentleness and humility.

And this writer, having spent some time at both the state penitentiary and state university can testify that people are not as different between the two institutions as one might first think and believe.

The same emotions are at play in all human beings regardless of what they do and where they live.

I am sure that all of us have bristled with frustration and perhaps resentment when someone talked to us as if we did not know anything at all, or reacted to our thoughts, words and actions in ways that were judgmental or ridiculing.

One thing that life and Yoga teaches us is that we are never too old to learn and that the book of learning is something that should never be sealed.

In fact, it is learning that is one of the great joys and pleasures in life.

What Yoga can do for many of us is get us more balanced, harmonious and open enough so that we can continue to learn and experience the joy that comes from that.

Yoga also points us in a direction of learning where we see that it is not primarily book learning or formal education that is the only source for our learning experience.

There can be interesting and stimulating learning experiences when we sit for meditation practice or bend and twist the body in the various Yoga postures that make up the science and practice of Hatha Yoga.

There can be interesting and stimulating learning experiences when we take a second look at some long forgotten memory.

There can be interesting and stimulating learning experiences when we take the time to talk to another and listen to what they have to share with us.

There can be interesting and stimulating learning experiences when we just look more closely at what is happening in our surroundings each day, in seeing other people with the understanding that they are very similar to us in what they think and feel.

We do find many who are angry and judgmental of the world and others.

They seem to live in a world of impatience and intolerance, only thinking of their own needs and lust for comfort and pleasure.

What has made them or us that way?

A build up of mental and physical tension?

Not feeling like they are loved or appreciated?

Have they lost touch with something soft within themselves?

If we are interested in learning Yoga, we may face many challenges.

These range from the pain and discomfort of working with the body to the fact that others in our family and social circle may not understand or make fun of us pursuing this experience.

This writer remembers that some 22 years ago, when he finally saw that it was best for him to live a life free from drink and drugs, most of the people who he knew and he considered to be his friends were the most derisive to him in making such an attempt to change.

Sometimes, when we want to learn Yoga, we may also experience such derision from others.

But we benefit when we understand and remember that any attempt at change or growth is a good one, and being able to put forth such an effort, at any age, shows that we are people who can keep that book of learning open and still experience the joy that comes from that action.

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