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## **Ways to Cultivate the Consciousness: The Practice of Hatha Yoga**

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The whole idea of "cultivating" one's consciousness seems odd to some.

What is the purpose? What are the benefits? Is it possible? Is it necessary? Is it worth the time and effort?

Each one of us are caught up in our day to day activities and routines and it seems hard, if not impossible to imagine how we could change them.

Certainly, we see many examples of individuals whose consciousness had undergone a transformation, in either a negative or positive way.

And what do we mean by the word "consciousness" anyway?

Consciousness can be defined as being the energy behind all our thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviors.

Yoga defines consciousness as a combination of three things, those being the mind, the ego, and the discriminative awareness of the soul.

What about this transformation that it undergoes?

We see many people who have changed because of trauma and the bringing into their lives of habits which weaken and confuse them.

People are not born alcoholics, or drug addicts, or overeaters.

They may have some genetic predisposition to these things, but scientific evidence suggests that this is not always the case.

Their conditioning, that is the experiences that they have and how they perceive those experiences seems to be a major factor in what kind of attitudes and habits a person starts to manifest.

In addition, if we think of something as being socially acceptable or allowable within certain circles, we feel that it is alright for us to do.

When whole cultures and sub - cultures engage in various actions, we can easily be led into them also.

But what about the other way?

Cultivating the consciousness in a positive direction.

That happens also.

People can overcome self – destructive tendencies and the traumas and tribulations to make their life better.

Former alcoholics do become sober.

Former drug addicts do become clean.

Individuals who once suffered from anxiety and other emotional disorders do become more balanced and focused.

So, one's consciousness can be transformed, through delusional thinking on one's part to something less skillful and wholesome, or through conscious and applied effort on one's part, to something more skillful and wholesome.

When we talk about cultivating the consciousness, we mean to make to sharper, more focused, stronger, more relaxed, and more energized.

We mean to rid it of states that are unskillful, meaning things such as worry, restlessness, mental inertia, poor concentration and mindfulness, a critical and judgmental nature, and a host of others.

It is widely known that even though an individual may have achieved a fair or high degree of material wealth and status within a society, they may still act in ways that are harmful to themselves and to others.

They may still exhibit mental and physical actions that are reprehensible and destructive.

And what kind of states does the cultivated consciousness manifest?

Clarity, joy, concentration, consistent and wholesome energy, and loving kindness and compassion, among other things.

How can we bring this all about?

Various ways.

Sobriety is a great starting point.

Healthy food at regular times is another.

The practice of Hatha Yoga is another.

Hatha Yoga brings those who practice it a number of benefits, in both the short and long term because it works on both the mind and body in positive ways.

In the body, it releases tension in the muscular – skeletal system, massages all the organs and systems of the body so that they function at a higher level of efficiency, and enhances the quality of breathing and strengthens the respiratory system.

The mind is made more concentrated and mental states such as mindfulness and effort are cultivated.

The more relaxed, mindful and focused mental and physical state of being naturally leads one to speak and act more skillfully and wholesomely.

A spiritual awakening is brought about because the mind and body is more balanced and in harmony.

An individual's consciousness undergoes a transformation where those aspects of the ego and mind that cause confusion are weakened, and those aspects of the soul begin to manifest themselves through the spiritual awareness that is within all of us.

Individuals become more mindful as they realize that the liberating truths that they seek are within themselves, as the consciousness is cleared up.

The complexities of an individual's conditioning are more easily seen and understood, leading to acceptance, understanding and wisdom about one's past and present life experiences.

We become more mindful of the activity of the senses, and that we perceive things through them and how they can influence and disturb the consciousness.

We lose the interest in winning in every encounter, or feeling upset when things do not go our way, and have more faith in our ability to learn, enjoy and grow from whatever happens.

We start to elevate ourselves, so we can heal our own wounds, and assist others in healing theirs.

But, isn't this practice of Hatha Yoga difficult and demanding?

It may seem that way, when we are exposed to books showing advanced practitioners doing advanced postures.

It is important for individuals to understand that it is the practice that brings about the changes mentioned above, not the ability to do a certain posture.

So, one can start accessing benefits from the first day of practice.

If one's ego, or attention, or the yoga session is directed in such a way that we are looking outward, at what others can do, we are starting the practice of yoga in a way

that is building on the competition and comparison that is so prevalent in our culture, society and the world already.

We want to look within, and become mindful.

Close the eyes, feel the breath, heal thyself.

Postures do not have to be difficult or advanced.

We do not have to make videos or have our picture taken in an advanced posture, or even wear special clothing and own a yoga mat.

We do not have to attach to a certain system of Hatha Yoga or a certain teacher either.

We can start by learning a few simple postures, those that are easy and enjoyable for us to do, and then do them on a regular basis, cultivating the habit of consistency in our practice.

We do not have to visit a lot of teachers or yoga sessions, or go to India, or practice for two hours a day.

To start with, thirty minutes will be enough.

We can build on our practice, and our experience of life, and bring more of the other aspects of the Yoga path and practice into our lives, these being mental and physical actions such as non – violence, austerity, non – greed and contentment.

Hatha Yoga is a practice that opens the door to other things in life, all good and enjoyable.

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