

Yoga for Everyday Living

exploring the pieces of the yoga puzzle

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Yoga means to yoke, to join, to live in harmony with the natural order of nature. It is the union of the individual soul with the universal spirit. Yoga is a process allowing for limitless possibilities for change while enhancing the creativity of the individual. It is a way of life, serving as a vehicle for an individual's growth and development. Yoga is a spiritual path to higher awareness of the divine that lies within us.

Yoga brings you into a deeper awareness and appreciation of who you are, what you are, and how to live in harmony with yourself and the world. A yoga practice includes proper exercise, breathing, relaxation, diet and positive thinking. Raja yoga, the royal path, has 8 limbs. The first two are concerned with restraints and purity and the mind & body.

Asanas, the physical practice, is the third limb in raja yoga. Asanas allow you to release the stress and stiffness in the body. Attention and focus is on drawing the mind inward allowing one to develop the discipline, and ability to concentrate and focus the mind. It is here, with the use of breath, that an inward focus develops allowing one to sit for meditation.

Pranayama, the fourth limb, involves utilizing the energy or prana (life force) in the body. This life force moves through the breath, enabling you to control the mind and body. In this stage, one learns different breathing techniques to master the respiratory system, thus mastery of the mind. This mastery also builds immunity and antibodies in your system, allowing you to fight off infections in your body with more ease and centers the mind.

Pratyahara, the fifth limb, allows you to withdraw your senses, moving you inward to gain control over them. The sixth limb, **dharana**, concentration, assists in learning to develop control over the mind.

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Meditation, the seventh limb, enables you to be still with awareness. In meditation,

you surrender your will and personality and internally observe what occurs inside. As you peel the layers of the mind and body, (like peeling the layers of an onion), you feel inner peace. Tension and resistance begins to slowly dissipate as you deepen your spiritual connection.

To assist in creating a focused mind, mantras are used. Mantras are “a combination of syllables or words, corresponding to a particular energy vibration”. A mantra is



repeated in meditation and in one's daily life to give focus to the mind. Meditation deepens with the use of a mantra. Mantras can be a phrase or a chant which is repeated mentally. The sound and its vibration can have a profound effect on you, leading to greater awareness and self-realization.

Kleshas - known as obstacles to enlightenment - are ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion and fear of death. As you deepen your practice in yoga and learn to focus the mind in meditation, you get to know yourself better and find it easier to live in the present moment. The use of meditation

and mantra help to purge the kleshas allowing us to develop a healthy outlook about our relationships and ourselves.

Yoga for everyday living is disciplining yourself to incorporate times in your day to use the asanas, the breathing, and the ability to focus and concentrate in conversations with others; this will enable you to find happiness and contentment in the everyday things you do. During difficult times, your yoga practice enables you to cope a little bit easier. It helps you become non-attached to possessions or thoughts that can cause harm and suffering. Yoga in everyday living allows you to strive to become the best you can be in yourself and in what you have to offer society.

When you see the natural order in your everyday living, you can live more harmoniously. Yoga brings a better state of mental and physical health in a slow and profound way. Yoga takes away the dull aches and physical discomforts, bringing a heightened state of awareness in all aspects of your life, including your diet. Foods affect how you feel on a daily basis. Using this awareness of how foods affect your mind and body, along with the practice of asana and meditation, allows you to see improvements in your health, contributing to your sense of overall wellbeing.

When you begin to implement yoga as a way of life, it becomes easier to focus on using its principles in everyday living. Yoga creates a state in which all the systems of your mind and body are harmonized. It soothes your soul and heals our spirit; it provides a vehicle to obtain **Samadhi**, the eighth limb in raja yoga. Samadhi is the ultimate goal of yoga allowing you to feel blissful, enlightened, self-actualized and to be one with the divine that dwells within you. ☀

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