

THE SPIRIT OF YOGA

By Siri Dharma

“Yoga is not a belief system or a religion or even a philosophy; it is an extremely practical methodology for systematically expanding consciousness.” Yogi Bhajan

These days the ancient science of Yoga is hot. What was once a lifetime’s worth of dedicated discipline under the instruction of a Master has made its way onto the moving smorgasboard of western Culture. But the truth of Yoga is so much more than ‘another ‘self-help’ model.’

Yoga means ‘yoke’ or ‘union’. The union of mind, body and soul. The uniting - or tying - of your self to your Self and to the energy of All That Is (eg. God, Creation.) The mindful practice of Yoga can lead you to higher states of consciousness. Your very being can be transmuted.

There are many schools of Yoga, eg. Iyengar, Ashtanga, Hatha, Kundalini, and if you follow them all the way to their limits you will arrive at the same place. There’s no room here to examine their differences. All I can do is extol the virtue of applying Yoga to your every day life. Yoga is a proven sustainable resource, the practice of which can change, heal and uplift you. Seems that we live in times when a new consciousness and perspective on life might be helpful.

Most people who are attracted to yoga are looking for ‘a change’ of some kind. Many have physical problems that yoga can help. Yoga movements and meditations can indeed be applied to all manner of health issues – physical, mental and emotional. This fact makes a weekly yoga class very healing and supportive on many levels.

People often mistake the main component of yoga to be perfecting different postures (asanas). But Yoga is a system, not a posture. It’s a relationship, not a pose.

According to *Yogasana Vijnan*, p. 4, “An individual is said to have perfected an asana when he can sit in that asana for a period of 3 hours and 48 minutes at a stretch.” Since the tradition of Yoga that I love – Kundalini – doesn’t require ‘perfect’ posture, simply a ‘correct’ posture, I’ve always wondered ... ‘and then what’?

Yoga as a science has many elements (asanas, breath, mudra, focus, mantra, and meditation) all of which can be deeply empowering. It's in the combination of these elements that opens the doors of consciousness.

For example, conscious breathing (in a variety of types and patterns) is a primary component of the whole Yoga experience. Being alive on this planet depends on breathing. Apparently even the Cosmos breathes in and out. I take that to mean the breath is the spark of our connection to the Source of Creation. It is the most important gift we have. Doing yoga without attention to the breath is like visiting an ocean-front condo and staying inside.

A daily Yoga practice can change your life.... from the inside out. As it does, it will challenge you on many levels. At various points you will crash headlong into your deepest beliefs about life and yourself. You may even be required to surrender some of them. 'Surrendering' is hardly an acceptable concept these days, particularly in the West.

Conscious application of yogic techniques can also take you to that place where earth and heaven meet. What I call the spiritual realm. The West also has a hard time accepting the concept of "the Divine" outside of some kind of Religious context. Too bad. Very sad.

'Divine' can be defined as that energy which surrounds, uplifts and joyously interweaves with "All That Is". The Divine is an atmosphere of Grace where one can be held in the embrace of Love, Peace and Wisdom. (I have capitalized certain concepts to take them out of the mundane world into a more universal consciousness.)

From a yogic perspective, we all carry that spark of the Divine, whether we believe in a religion or not.

I think negative ideas about 'surrendering' and 'spiritual' keep people from going deeper with their Yoga practice.

Modern society has made us scared to go out of our comfort zone. But a steady, conscious practice of Yoga WILL take you out of that zone by stretching the limits of

your physical endurance, while simultaneously holding a deep cavern of stillness in the never-ending chatter of your 'monkey mind.' In the process of balancing your bodily systems, and stilling your mental realms, you meet your Self...your Spirit. In fact, my observation of this science over the years as led me to conclude that steady, consistent practice of Yoga and Meditation guarantees that you will connect to your Soul.

So, placing Yoga in a space of simply being a great exercise regime does both you and Yoga a disservice. You can move mountains with a deeper examination of this ancient science. A revolution can happen inside you.

It is how you live your life that determines who you are. Just as it's your thoughts which determine what you do.

The beauty of yoga as a 'dharma' – a practice – is that it depends on you to produce the results. You are responsible for your own transformation, your own healing, your own 'issues'. No body can do 'it' for you. Whatever your 'it' is. When I started doing yoga in the early 70s, my longing was to 'find myself'. Today I've found many aspects of that Self and will continue to.

When applied as a spiritual practice, Yoga invites you to live to your highest, clearest, sweetest vibration. That place inside you that sings with the Cosmos. It makes me sad to see this most ancient tradition watered down into an eclectic stew. A mish of this, a mash of that. The in depth pursuit of any one of the traditions is a challenge to mind, body and spirit. So reach in, rise up, and meet the challenge. I bet you find that piece of the Divine which resides within you, tapping at your consciousness with every stretch and breath.

Siri Dharma has been practicing, and teaching Kundalini Yoga for 34 years, 11 of those here in Grant County. If you have any questions about any aspect of what's been written here, please email her at siridk@gmail.com.