

Yoga, Wellness, and Self Discovery - part 3 Hatha Yoga Postures

Most people come to yoga for the physical work; the exercise aspects of yoga. The poses themselves are more than mere exercise; they are vehicles for self discovery. Your mind and body are intimately connected; perceiving, reacting and expressing the way you experience the world around you. Everything that you experience every moment of the day is affecting you mentally and physically; we are physiological beings experiencing the environment around us.

As you practice physical postures in yoga, called asanas, your attention is naturally directed toward what you're feeling in your body. The asanas bring your body into an expression of your physiology. Your mind and your body communicate back and forth and because your attention is focused on what you're presently experiencing, you notice the correlation between what your body is doing and how you think about it. As you become aware of something, it changes its behavior. As you become aware of your Self, you begin to change.

In classical yoga the goal is not to exhaust your strength or deplete your energy, but to restore mental and physical balance and harmony in your life. All the practices of yoga work on the human system in unique ways. The asanas bring your body into positions that affect your overall health by detoxifying tissue (lymphatic movement), stimulating, irrigating and helping to normalize the function of the glands, organs and bodily systems. For example, in a simple belly down back bend your body could receive the following benefits; strengthen the back muscles, stretch the abdominal muscles, expand the chest facilitating deeper breathing, align the spine, tone and irrigate the kidneys and stimulate the organs of reproduction. Every pose has a physical benefit, so just by practicing you become healthier. But there is more to creating balance in your life; the way you think and how you perceive things is also a factor. The asanas also provide an opportunity for psychological change.

When you move into an asana your brain receives feedback as to how you are doing and/or what you are experiencing. Your muscles have an intelligence; they know when they are safe and when they are in trouble, and they react accordingly. Your muscles are capable of relaxing and/or contracting if the conditions are right. The muscles are what brings the body into the expression of the asana, and the way you think influences that expression; hence, the mind body connection. We all have issues, right? We know that these issues are stored in our body, so it makes sense that our issues are in our tissues. The asanas provide an outlet for the stored psychological stressors in our life and make it possible for physical, mental and emotional balance.

Yoga really is something that anyone can do. You should always honor your body, respect it and take good care of it. While practicing yoga you should always remain steady and comfortable. If you do, then you will be able to do anything.

Here is where the real work comes in. As you go into an asana and you encounter resistance, you will come to a point that is called the "edge." The edge is where you stop moving for whatever reason when you experience resistance. It could be that you stop moving because of physical compression or tension, or it may be for emotional or mental reasons. We all encounter resistance at some point, and then we stop. If you are steady and comfortable and your body isn't

reacting negatively, as you hold the asana you begin to experience things; sensations, old memories and what you believe. If while you're holding the asana you find yourself witnessing what you are experiencing, and you feel safe enough, there is a possibility for transforming your limitations and becoming more. The asana brings you into a situation that you experience your physical and mental edge, and if the conditions are right, metaphorically you become more flexible physically and mentally. You change, and that change happens every time you practice yoga. This is why yoga is so profoundly life changing.

Yoga is amazing and everyone can do it with the right teacher. Let today be the day that you become more. Find an experienced yoga teacher in your area and start taking classes right away. It will change how you live your life!

In future articles we will continue to look at yoga-related practices and explore how they can become a vehicle for real change in our lives. You can't do yoga and not change.

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