

# Your Body is the Doorway to Freedom

From the Kripalu Center archives

KRIPALU YOGA is a way of using your body as a doorway to consciousness. In Kripalu Yoga, you use your practice of traditional yoga postures to learn how to transcend the acquired conditioning and concepts that prevent you from living life consciously.

To be conscious is to recognize and remove what is imaginary so that you can experience what is real. Through the conscious practice of Kripalu Yoga, you train yourself to respond with neutrality to perceived fear and pain in your life and to release any judgment about those experiences so you can live in the joy of each moment. Every posture consciously performed carried you closer to that freeing experience of reality.

For example, if you do a yoga posture and feel stiffness in your knees, that stiffness is an experience of your body in the moment. If, however, before entering the posture, you recall knee stiffness from a past injury that no longer exists and feel afraid of re-injuring yourself, your fear is based not on what's happening in the moment but on a memory of the past.

If you can let go of fear from the past and allow your body to flow according to what it can do in this moment, you will experience only what is present in your body now, rather than a fear of imagined, future pain. Eventually, while doing postures, you'll be absorbed only in the sensations of the moment.

There is a crucial difference between sensations and the labels we assign to them. Sensations are the pure, direct experience of energy flowing through the body. We react to those sensations by labeling them: "Ah, this feels wonderful" or "Ouch, this stretch is hurting me" or "I love this one" or "I can't stand that one." Our labels are by-products of past decisions about similar sensations. Our continual mental commentary blocks our direct perception of reality. It keeps us out of the bliss of being fully absorbed in the energetic experience of the postures.

To experience sensations truly, you must decondition your mind from its habit of assigning labels. When you don't assign "good" and "bad" labels to your experience, you stop projecting particular experiences onto your body. Once you are not judging or criticizing your experience of yoga, your capacity to feel sensation grows, because you aren't dulling it by resisting certain sensations.

We all go back and forth between reality and the personal, self-created version of reality we superimpose on our moments. We carry around a load of this superimposed reality and we drop it onto every moment and every interaction. Life keeps trying to show us the true reality, and we keep struggling to push it away. We suppress or deny it so we can cling to our imaginary reality where we feel safe and secure. In the process, we become only half alive to the full possibilities of life.

Experiencing reality means experiencing all sensations – including pain. If you experience fully all the sensations and feelings you have while practicing Kripalu Yoga, you will be able to drop the self-created need to protect yourself from sensations you've labeled as unpleasant. As a result, your body will relax more and you will be drawn more fully into the moment, where reality resides. Acceptance of your feelings thus frees you from the self-created trap of denied reality and prevents the shut-down of sensor awareness that accompanies denial.

When you embrace the experience of all your sensations during Kripalu Yoga, you align with reality. Then all reality stands behind you and supports you. You access the divine consciousness that is around you always, whether you recognize it or not. The moment you step into reality, that consciousness becomes available to you.

As you drop the personal interpretation of your experience, you enter into pure experience as it is manifesting in and through your body in the moment. Whatever experience you have then becomes fully integrated in you and your labeling, past-derived mental dialogue ceases to dominate it. As the superimposed filters on the moment are stripped away, you fall into deeper levels of contact with your inner source. Your self-awareness and sensitivity to everything increases, so that you take life in more fully, and experience all of your life more completely.

Resistance induces tension. Awareness induces relaxation. As you learn to become fully conscious of everything taking place in your body, you relax into your experience. Being fully conscious means transitioning from your initial reaction into a non-reactive, non-controlling mode of being. You remain fully aware, but you do not make choices for or against the experience begin revealed to you.

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