

what is yoga?

'Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness.' Yoga Sutra I:2

'The restriction of these fluctuations is achieved through practice and dispassion.'

Yoga Sutra I:12

'The projection of friendliness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity towards objects – be they joyful, sorrowful, meritorious or demeritorious – bring about the pacification of consciousness.'

Yoga Sutra I:33

'Evenness (samatva) is called Yoga.'

Bhagavad-Gita II:48

'There is nothing [on Earth] equal in purity to wisdom.'

Bhagavad-Gita IV:38

'One should practice Yoga for the purification of the self.'

Bhagavad-Gita VI:12

'Yoga is an art, a science and a philosophy. It touches the life of man at every level, physical, mental, and spiritual. It is a practical method for making one's life purposeful, useful and noble.'

As honey is sweet from any part of the honeycomb, so is yoga. It enables every part of the human system to become attuned to its essence, the conscious seer within. Yoga alone enables the practitioner to perceive and experience the world within and around himself, to touch the divine joy of all creation, and then to share that nectar of divine wealth and happiness with his fellow beings.

Yoga is a friend to those who embrace it sincerely and totally. It lifts its practitioners from the clutches of pain and sorrow, and enables them to live fully, taking a delight in life. The practice of yoga helps the lazy body to become active and vibrant. It transforms the mind, making it harmonious. Yoga helps to keep one's body and mind in tune with the essence, the soul, so that all three are blended into one.'

B. K. S. Iyengar,

Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

'The complex five-thousand-year-old tradition of yoga is about a very simple thing: happiness (ananda). Yoga tells us that in order to realize lasting happiness, we must discover our true, spiritual nature. This requires that we commit ourselves to nothing less than self-transformation and self-transcendence. For although our true nature, or spiritual Self, is always the same, it tends to be obscured by our conventional thoughts, emotions, and patterns of behavior. The yoga tradition compares this circumstance to the brightly shining sun, which is ever radiant but periodically hidden from our view by drifting dark clouds.'

Yoga helps us to remove all obstructing (mental) clouds, so that we may come to enjoy the sunshine within. It is an extensive program of reeducation through which we learn, step by step, to live in the light of our true nature. Only when we have truly found ourselves will we be able to live in peace, harmony, and happiness in the world. This is what is sometimes called the sacred life.'

Georg Feuerstein, Preface to *Living your Yoga*

'The practice of Yoga induces a primary sense of measure and proportion. Reduced to our own body, our first instrument, we learn to play it, drawing from it maximum resonance and harmony. With unflagging patience we refine and animate every cell as we return daily to the attack, unlocking and liberating capacities otherwise condemned to frustration and death.'

Each unfulfilled area of tissue and nerve, of brain or lung, is a challenge to our will and integrity, or otherwise a source of frustration and death. Whoever has had the privilege of receiving Mr Iyengar's attention, or of witnessing the precision, refinement and beauty of his art, is introduced to that vision of perfection and innocence which is man as first created – unarmed, unashamed, son of God, lord of creation – in the Garden of Eden. The tree of knowledge has indeed yielded much fruit of great variety, sweet, poisonous, bitter, wholesome according to our use of it. But is it not more imperative than ever that we cultivate the tree, that we nourish its roots? And furthermore how dangerous is that knowledge to those who, ill at

ease with themselves, would rather apply it to the manipulation of other people and things than to the improvement of their own persons.

The practice of Yoga over the past fifteen years has convinced me that most of our fundamental attitudes to life have their physical counterparts in the body. Thus comparison and criticism must begin with the alignment of our own left and right sides to a degree at which even finer adjustments are feasible: or strength of will will cause us to start by stretching the body from the toes to the top of the head in defiance of gravity. Impetus and ambition might begin with the sense of weight and speed that comes with free-swinging limbs, instead of with the control of prolonged balance on foot, feet or hands, which gives poise. Tenacity is gained by stretching in various Yoga postures for minutes at a time, while calmness comes with quiet, consistent breathing and the expansion of the lungs. Continuity and a sense of the universal come with the knowledge of the inevitable alternation of tension and relaxation in eternal rhythms of which each inhalation and exhalation constitutes one cycle, wave or vibration among the countless myriads which are the universe.'

Yehudi Menuhin, Foreword to *Light on Yoga*

'The word yoga means union. This applies both to the practice and the goal of yoga. By uniting the different aspects of the human body/mind the individual is brought into direct relationship with the flow of reality. This is achieved in different ways, all of which are designed to overcome the habitual sense of isolation that characterizes individual consciousness.

This sense of isolation is replaced by a sense of identity with the vast sweep of reality, which is found to be nothing other than the true nature of the individual. This realization brings about a freedom from the ignorance that is the root cause of human suffering. It therefore brings about liberation: from ignorance, from recurring patterns of suffering, or from the wheel of life and death.

No matter which approach one follows it is important to realize that the methods of yoga are not sacraments. They are simply means to an end

which must, though, be constantly reasserted by the means. They are designed to quieten the compulsive activity of the mind and its habit of limited identification with transient aspects of reality; to change our consciousness from one of apartness and separateness to one of identification and union.

In the different systems the state of union is developed through a different process of gradual unification. The final stages always involve the creation of states of deep inner concentration and absorption, or meditation... In the case of those systems that use the yoga postures... yoga as union applies also on other more tangible levels. Initially there is a unifying of the various aspects of the anatomical body: a restructuring of the musculo-skeletal system. Then, as one goes deeper, there is a harmonizing of the function and relationship between the vital organs of the physiological body. This is followed by a unifying of the body as a whole with the mind, and by the harmonization of the often conflicting tendencies and energies of that mind. In the final stages the process of union becomes more and more similar across the range of yogas.

This process of internalized unification of the various aspects of the human being flowers in the spiritual union of the individual consciousness with the universal reality, or God. The centring of the energies of mind on to very subtle levels harmonizes, resolves and quietens them, bringing about deep inner union. It is then that yoga begins to bear its deepest fruit. Within the quietness that results from a focused mind is revealed the inner quality of human consciousness which is normally hidden. This quality of consciousness is yoga, and has many characteristics. They include peace, joy, compassion, discrimination, energy, ease and detachment. When they begin to flower in the consciousness of the practitioner they result in a life that becomes more and more harmonious, joyful and generous.'

Godfrey Devereux, *The Elements of Yoga*



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