

## **YOGA AND STRESS MANAGEMENT**

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What is yoga?

Yoga means “union” and refers to the state of consciousness where in one is immersed in the clarity and contentment that come when the body, mind and spirit are in harmony. The energy that flows when one is in such a unified state of awareness brings a sense of well being, peace and power. This is our natural state of being, but we have gotten away from ourselves through the various distractions of life that depletes our energy and cause us to become fragmented. Our habits, beliefs, desires and expectations push us in scattered directions and drain our energy. It is in returning to our true essence at the core of our being that we can reorient ourselves and find the source of energy, meaning and fulfillment in life. Once we change directions from searching outside of ourselves for happiness and fulfillment, to bringing our inner state of happiness and fulfillment to our outer lives- we can live creatively in harmony, balance and joy.

Although the yoga tradition derives from ancient India, it is not culturally or spiritually limited, but is a system of personal mastery for all human beings. It is both a science and an art. As a science, it employs the basic physiological functions of the body, such breathing, to affect a positive physical, mental and emotional state that enables us to function from a place of stability and balance. As an art, it allows each individual to work with their own nature in order to explore and express their talent, creativity and unique vision.

Yoga practices begin with the most identifiable and concrete aspect of our being – the body. From this outer place, gradually our awareness is brought internally to the more subtle mental and emotional aspects of our being. Moving still more inwardly, ultimately our awareness shifts beyond the body and the mind to the source of energy at the core of our being – to the ‘Life Force’ itself. Once we are in touch with this center, we can affect physical, mental and emotional changes within ourselves and bring the consciousness to our outer life circumstances to create our lives in a more whole and positive manner.

### **Yoga Posture for the Body:**

Yoga postures, or ‘Asana’ as they are termed in the ancient Sanskrit language, are positions of the body which identify areas where energy has become blocked, causing stress and disease. Using breathing practices, the muscles are stretched, the bones are adjusted and the internal organs are stimulated to release those blocks and the tension that they create. The result is a body that is well – toned and an optimal flow of energy to all the vital organs and structures of the body, creating health and well-being. When the body is healthy, calm and tension free, then more subtle stages of awareness can be experience.

### **Breathing Practices for the Mind:**

Breathing practices for the mind called ‘Pranayama’ in Sanskrit, yogic breathing practice utilize the most basic life function – breathing to calm and quiet the mind and emotions. The state of mental and emotional clarity and equilibrium that is achieved when the right and left hemispheres of the brain are balanced enables the brain to function in an optimal manner, opening new pathways within the consciousness. Whether, it is to stimulate and intellect for productive work, or to relax the mind for meditation pranayama providing the energy that the brain needs to master the task at hand.

**Meditation for the Spirit:**

Once the body and mind have become relaxed and focused, meditation can begin. Meditation is a journey to the innermost core of our being. It is a place beyond the mind where we are ever free, whole and complete. In the state of meditation, there is nothing to do, we have just to be immersed in our true nature, beyond distractions of body, mind and environment, aware and at peace in the present moment, and we are rejuvenated from the inside out. From this inner well, we can draw upon the energy and resources we need to live creatively in harmony and balance.