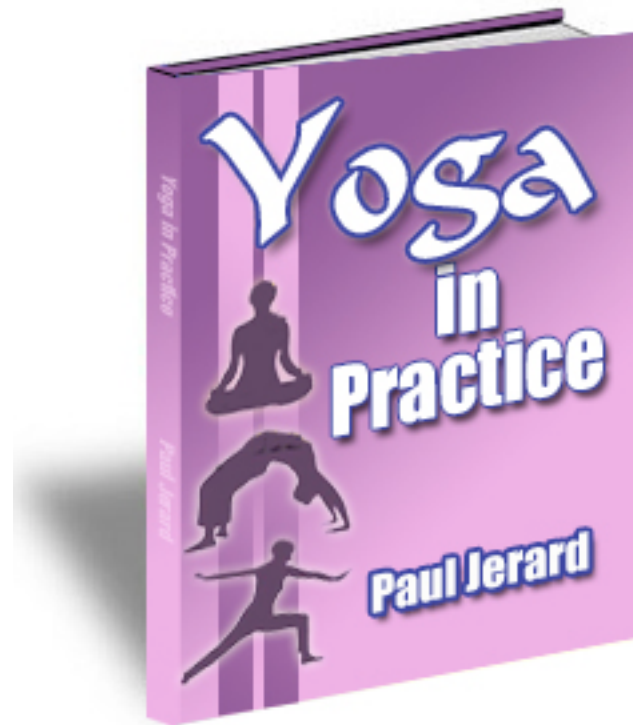


Yoga in Practice



**Improve Your Mind,
Body, and Spirit.**

By Dr. Paul Jerard, E-RYT 500

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Thank you and Namaste,

Dr. Paul Jerard, E-RYT 500

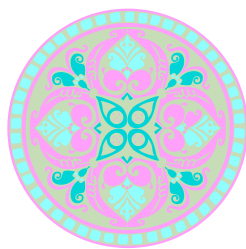


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Purpose of this Book

This book is free, and you can send it to your friends. My only request is that you do not alter it in any way, shape, or form.

When you think of Yoga, what is the picture you see within your “mind’s eye?” Many people still think of Hatha Yoga, and its many sub-styles, as the only Yoga around. This is due to the fact that outside India, Hatha Yoga (Union by Physical Mastery), is most commonly seen.

Therefore, this is understandable - except there are many forms of Yoga, and many are much less physical forms that are sometimes misunderstood. Yoga does not have to be practiced in an Ashram or on a Yoga mat. To be beneficial, Yoga can be practiced anywhere, at any time, in any shape or form.

Just by giving people help, without asking for anything in return, you are practicing Karma Yoga. By praying, you are practicing a form of Bhakti Yoga. Also, by seeking and finding the pure, but unobvious truth, you may be practicing Jnana Yoga.

Yoga literally means “Unity” or “Union,” but each Yoga style has within itself a unique way to achieve the union of mind, body, and spirit. Yoga is non-confronting, non-conflicting, and can be integrated with many physical disciplines and religious practices. Any style of Yoga will integrate with other forms of Yoga and healing methods.

Yoga teachers “spread the word,” but they must teach the more popular physical aspects of Yoga, if they want to keep their students. This is why many people get an incomplete picture of a complete health maintenance system for the three aspects of mind, body, and spirit. All three aspects of health are of equal importance, but the physical aspect is more easily realized.

Whether you are a beginner, long-time Yoga practitioner, or a Yoga teacher, your knowledge will make a difference for the best. Just by showing loving kindness and mindfulness to your friends, co-workers, and family, you will alter this world.

Therefore, the proliferation of Yoga is a miracle and a gift to mankind. By helping others, you will feel gratification that is helpful to your own mental, physical, and spiritual health.

This is the key to good health and well being: Give to others and you will feel much better about yourself. There is a teacher within all of us, even if you only share the gift of Yoga with one friend.

Teaching Yoga

When most people consider the idea of teaching Yoga, they usually perceive the superficial physical requirements of a Hatha Yoga instructor. There are many styles of Yoga, and Hatha Yoga is just one of them. In fact, within the sub-styles of Hatha Yoga, there are a number of “gentle” styles. So, being really flexible, young, and having the body of a super model, is not required in order to teach Yoga.

The above attributes can be used to your advantage, if you have them, but let's go over a prime ingredient within all Yoga teachers. “In a nut shell,” it is the passion to help others. This is the common denominator among Yoga instructors, regardless of which style of Yoga is taught. Teaching others the benefits of Yoga becomes a “calling” for students who aspire to teach Yoga.

A Yogic lifestyle will improve any person's life. Interestingly, a quality life is founded upon positive thought. Therefore, Yoga has “all the bases covered,” when it comes down to helping people.

When you look at your own life - reflect on the following questions: How do you want to be remembered? Do you feel complete satisfaction in your accomplishments, so far? What do you stand for?

We are remembered through our actions. This relates to Karma Yoga: Union by selfless service. When we help people, that action helps people who we never meet because a single action creates a chain reaction. Just look at all the coincidences that add up to you reading these words, at this moment.

What we accomplish in life is, for the most part, based upon our own actions. There are exceptions to this, such as: poverty, illness, and bad luck. However, the person who never gives up will realize achievement, success, and goal realization. We “short circuit” our potential when we stop trying to succeed.

Satisfaction, within your life, depends upon finding your purpose (dharma). When you have found your purpose, you are living a fulfilled life. Whatever you do in life, helping friends, family, and associates, will give you the greatest satisfaction.

If you are feeling incomplete at this time - write down your passions, reflect on them, and notice that one will stir an overriding desire within you. This is most likely your dharma. When we leave this life, it is gratifying to know that we helped people along the way, as this also gives us a deeper sense of purpose.

Getting back to teaching Yoga - there are many excuses to avoid becoming a Yoga teacher, but when you feel the calling, all you have to do is share the gift of Yoga with others to find out if that is your purpose in life.

The Impact of Yoga Teachers on Society

In the West, there was a time when practicing Yoga was kept secret. When I was a child, it was considered, “a bit strange.” During the 50’s and 60’s, Yoga practice was associated with being part of counter culture movements, such as living the life of “beatniks” or “hippies.” Interestingly, I was told by a school teacher that I would some day grow up to be a beatnik.

Well, time has passed and Yoga has “come out of the closet” in a giant wave. Yes, Yoga has gone “Global.” The world society, as a whole, has been affected positively by Yoga classes and Yoga teachers.

Let’s look at some of the ways Yoga teachers, Yoga classes, and the many styles of Yoga, have gently changed the world today. There is much more to Yoga than “meets the eye,” at first glance. In fact, there is a Yoga style for every need, purpose, and personality.

When you consider the number of Yoga students, who want to change their lives on the physical level, union by physical mastery (Hatha Yoga) is easy for most students to grasp.

This is why you are seeing so many people gravitate toward Hatha Yoga, but I predict that Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Raja Yoga, will become more popular in the near future. So, there is much more to Yoga, beyond exercises; but let’s continue with the benefits Yoga teachers make available in a typical Hatha Yoga style.

Pranayama, or breathing techniques, are commonly taught in many Yoga classes. Yoga students learn to take control of their lives and regulate their health, just by breathing correctly. This is a form of preventative medicine, when you consider proper breathing as a practical deterrent to panic attacks, high blood pressure, chest pains, and many more stress-related ailments.

Yoga and Ayurvedic medicine address dietary needs based upon your “dosha” or constitution. If a Yoga student wants to pursue this subject further, he or she can take a dosha test and develop a sensible, practical, and moderate Ayurvedic diet.

Kriyas or Shatkarmas are traditional Yogic cleansing techniques for detoxifying the body. Detoxification is needed more than ever - with so many unnatural foods available. At the very least, students of Yoga should be consuming eight glasses of quality water per day.

Now, let’s cover the next issue of Anti-Aging and Yoga. With regular Yoga practice, your health will be the best it can be. Joints are lubricated, muscles are toned, bones have to bear weight in strengthening postures (asanas), and internal organs are massaged. This activity also aids the immune, digestive, and elimination systems.

However, the physical aspect of Yoga is often considered to be the lesser of the three main aspects, when compared to the mental and spiritual aspects. Yoga styles - such as, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Jnana Yoga, offer much more in relation to the spiritual and mental facets of Yoga.

Selfless service, or Karma Yoga, is the ability to give and help others without expectation. You give and forgive people because it is right to do. If good things happen to you as a result, this is fine, but you do not seek rewards for giving.

Jnana Yoga: Union by knowledge – requires a Yogi who is pure of heart and the intelligence to find the “real truth.” The real truth may not be “politically correct.” This is especially true when history is most often recorded by the victors.

Meditation creates rational thought and is one of the keys to Jnana Yoga. This will also aid you in your connection to spiritual health. Meditate on God long enough, and you will realize our petty human differences are an illusion held together by the ego.

The multitudes of religions that worship God are worshipping the same Supreme Being. It does not matter if you call this God, Allah, Brahman, Jehovah, Yahweh, or something else. However, this is truly ironic when we choose to kill others in the name of God.

Therefore, let's get back to other ways that Yoga teachers and Yoga practitioners have changed, and will continue to change, the world. It is by becoming living examples of tolerance and non-judgment. If all you do is display loving kindness, forgiveness, and mindfulness to others, you are a living example of integrity.

Yoga teachers have the ability to influence humankind toward world peace on a small scale. When you are kind to others, you set a chain reaction into motion. Loving kindness is contagious and makes the world a better place.

Much like the counter-culturists of the past, Yoga teachers and Yoga practitioners do not have to operate within the confines of a system. A social worker, or school teacher, may feel like, “their hands are tied by the system,” but Yoga teachers have much more freedom to change the world - one person at a time.

Speak with Mindfulness

Within the average Yoga class, or ashram, the principles of mindfulness are mentioned for the benefit of Yoga students, their friends, and the people they associate within the course of a day. Mindfulness is living in the moment, and putting the wisdom you have learned, during Yoga class, into practice.

Therefore, mindfulness is carried into everyday situations. What good is learning Yoga, if you cannot apply it to “real life?”

If all you learn, in your Yoga class, are postures, then you have missed out on the vastness of Yoga and its many aspects. With that said, we will discuss the aspect of mindfulness, as it applies to our communication with others.

Whenever you engage another person in conversation, always think before talking. This may sound simple, but everybody knows someone who does not think before talking.

Hence, there is a saying, “Putting his/her foot in his/her mouth.” Children do this, but it is innocent, and they do not yet understand all the rules of etiquette.

Your mind has many random thoughts, and there is no need to expose them to the world. Good politicians, sales people, and diplomats, are masters at saying enough to stay out of a conflict, but still manage to get a particular point across. What is the technique they use? In a “nut shell,” it is mindfulness.



Try to avoid conversation when you are not focused, tense, or not in the present moment. If a situation seems potentially volatile, you should pick the time to engage the other party in conversation. Set the tone of the conversation by using a relaxed approach and listen carefully.

When you maintain an air of good will and positive thoughts, it becomes difficult to pursue a conflict with you. Be aware that when you slow down and relax, most people will respond the same.

Therefore, you can control a meeting by radiating thoughts of kindness. You do this by showing respect and thinking positively about the other person, despite your differences.



There are exceptions to every rule, and I do not endorse complete surrender, unless you are wrong. However, when you listen emphatically, and are fully present for the other party, you will most likely resolve, or avoid, a conflict.

All of us need to learn to laugh at ourselves and develop a sense of humor. This will give you a completely different perspective of yourself, and you won't worry about feeling embarrassed or making a mistake. This perspective will also allow you to be mindful of yourself and your words.

If you take the time to speak with gentleness, mindfulness, and loving kindness, the world will respond in kind. At the same time, you won't waste energy defending your ego. Always remember the old saying, "Life is too short to waste time fighting."

Projecting Happiness

We are all human - living life with its many “ups and downs,” but how can we keep our spirits up in difficult times? There are many types of Yoga, and not all are physical styles, such as the many popular Hatha Yoga sub-styles. To name one that is not Hatha, and classified as one of the nine main Indian Yoga styles, there is Bhakti Yoga - the union of love, devotion, and worship.

The principle of Bhakti Yoga is universal to all people of all religions. A person who sings, prays, worships, and helps another person, is practicing this form of Yoga - whether they have heard of Bhakti Yoga or not. It does not matter what religion you are because singing, praying, worshiping, forgiving, and helping, are morally right.

To quote one of the most enlightened men of the 20th century, **“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” - Mahatma Gandhi**

Therefore, life is a daily Yoga practice, even if you do not attend a Yoga class. When you help others, you are practicing Yoga. It could be argued that you are practicing other forms of Yoga, but that is not the purpose of this article. It is more important to understand that you can help others in many ways, and it does not have to cost you a fortune.

Projecting happiness is free and does not require a lot of money. Here are some ideas that will help you to be happier, and hopefully, more worry free. Whether you are a beginner, Yoga practitioner, Yoga teacher, or Master teacher of Yoga, you should spread happiness to everyone you meet.



Listen to everyone, regardless of his, or her, social status. Let go of judgment; it makes fools of all of us. Pre-judgment is prejudice, and this is the one thing that prevents world peace. To some degree, we all have felt it, but you must discard it, suppress it, and never teach it.

You cannot listen if you are talking at the same time. The wisest and most educated person has learned that the purpose of listening is to understand; understanding is knowledge, and knowledge is power.

There are times, when you cannot listen. This could be due to time restraints, the fact that you may have heard it all before, or possibly you do not consider this person's opinion to be important.

My grandfather had a saying, "Even the court jester can teach you something about life." Sometimes, we take the help, or opinions of others, for granted. How many times do we seek more information in order to make the best decision?

The final decisions you make, in any given situation, are entirely up to you, but when you can sit back and listen, that is time for learning.

Try to avoid arguments and stay the course of peaceful co-existence. You may not always be able to do this, but you should try to improve. You could keep a log of daily situations that end peacefully and those that did not.

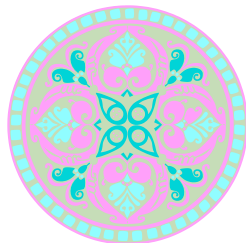
This is not meant to make you feel guilty, but it is a course in self-improvement.

You will then see your daily shortcomings and your success. Learn to develop your power of influence for the common good.

It does not matter who is right, especially, if your intention is to proliferate happiness. Related to this, I share one more quote by Mahatma Gandhi.

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?" - Mahatma Gandhi

Think about these words, and how you can make the world around you, a happier place. This concept is contagious, but it has to come from within and spread worldwide.



Living in the Present Moment

When one of us decides to pursue the study of Yoga, we find ourselves living and learning Yoga every day. On, or off the mat, Yoga students can apply their practice to the many lessons life has to offer. The result of all this learning, and applying Yogic principles to life, is a major leap in self-improvement.

You can learn from your past, live the present moment in harmony, and plan your future, with an improved perspective of each. Past, present, and future are valuable, but each is important in a different way.

Let's first address the past. Many people are "prisoners" to their past. When you look at past lessons, mistakes, and set-backs, each is as valuable as any form of higher education.

This becomes life experience, and you should make the most of any form of education; otherwise you are wasting your life experiences, twice - first by learning them, and then later by regretting, blaming, and second guessing yourself.

On top of this, you can create poor mental, physical, and spiritual health. This is the exact opposite from what you are taught in a Yoga class.



Yoga teaches you to unify these three components of health, and this will enable you to improve your entire being. Put past worries, adversity, and pains behind you.

You can save them in a "mental file," much like a valuable book. This teaches you not to repeat the same mistake twice.

Remember that the past is filled with accomplishments, too. If you can read these words, you must be accomplishing quite a bit.

Be fair with yourself and try not to be so critical. Let go of guilt and forgive yourself for being human. If you start to sink into deep, dark past regrets, practice pranayama; breath awareness is the key to bringing you into the present.

This is much similar to what you might do when holding an asana for an extended time during your Yoga practice. This will also allow you to focus on the most important time of all – the present moment.

The present is the time for action, and you must be proactive in order to succeed in life. Good reactions will save your life, but proactive behavior requires planning, innovation, vision, and perseverance.

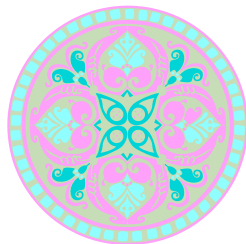
You must focus on the present to see opportunities which are right in front of you.

Life is filled with many obstacles, and you have to be ready for the daily challenge. You cannot change the past, but you can change the present and future. Every successful person has faced criticism, failure, and self-doubt.

When you let negative thoughts into your heart and mind, you cannot think clearly. You cannot act now, and this affects your ability to plan for the future.

How can you visualize success, if you are letting fear and self-doubt control your life? Fill your mind with passion that motivates you to step forward and plan your future.

When you meditate, take the time to visualize your success, achievements, and goals as vividly as possible. When you practice meditation and Yoga in this way, you will find yourself enjoying life, helping others, and on your path to success.



In Search of the Perfect Yoga

What is the perfect Yoga? Is it hot Yoga, based on correct alignment; Vinyasa Yoga, only to be performed with props; or do props take something away from Yoga practice? What about Yoga styles which are not from the Hatha Yoga tree? So - what exactly is the right Yoga for you?

Below, I will cover some of the ironic statements I have heard over the years. Some of these statements are straight from the ego, self righteous, and a bit intolerant of other styles of Yoga. Please don't be offended, and please try to understand – we are not all the same.

“Yoga should be hot; otherwise you're getting nothing out of it.”

Interesting - I heard Bikram make similar claims on the television show, “60 Minutes.” I am in deep admiration of Bikram, and his wife, Rajashree. They have trained many good Yoga teachers, Yogis, and Yoginis.

However, there are many Yoga practitioners, who practice at moderate temperatures, and receive fantastic health benefits from their daily practice. When people make statements, such as: “Yoga should be hot; otherwise you're getting nothing out of it” - they scare off those potential Yoga practitioners who believe them.

This could be a person who would have improved their life through the practice of Yoga. Let's stop the “my way or the highway” mentality. If you truly care about people, tell them the whole truth and give them options. If I can't please someone with the Restorative and Vinyasa styles taught in our wellness center, I will find someone who can meet my student's expectations of Yoga.

Lastly, I do personally like the heat. However, in New England, I know many people who don't. Even at moderate temperatures, many students get quite warm in a Vinyasa class.

“If your alignment is not perfect, why bother to practice Yoga?”

Without a doubt, alignment is very important, but some of us really need to use props to find the best alignment for our bodies. Yoga teachers need to encourage all of their students to practice more often and accept some limitations that come with each body.

Yoga teachers should be careful not to discourage those students who have limited range of motion. Again, props can be used by any Yoga practitioners, and with the careful guidance of a compassionate Yoga teacher, progress is made.

One last note on this point: No two bodies are alike, so let's be more understanding of ourselves and those around us. This applies to Yoga and life.

“Mine is the best Yoga style and all others are inferior.”

Many students make this claim and I “set them straight,” right away. If you are getting a lot out of your Yoga practice, don't be so quick to “put down” other styles of Yoga. It is ironic when people practice something that literally means “unity,” and then they let the ego get in the way.

Shouldn't we just be happy that someone else is trying, or practicing, Yoga - instead of sitting on the couch? If you are a Yoga teacher, do not encourage this kind of thinking. Yoga teachers are very often familiar with many styles of Yoga, so we should know better.

If you are a student, please open your mind by trying other styles of Yoga. You will find more treasure each time you visit a different Yoga class. Always come back to your root practice, and teacher, but leave your mind open.

“Are seniors really getting anything out of Chair Yoga?”

The very first person who said this to me is now a Chair Yoga teacher. You can imagine the convincing I had to do, including her participation in Chair Yoga classes. The energy, and enthusiasm, within Yoga classes with seniors, is priceless and contagious. Some participants feel improvements right away, and their attendance to Yoga classes is much more regular than any other age group.

Chair Yoga is not only for seniors, but for those who are wheelchair bound, in physical rehabilitation, or going through a healing process. The positive results of Chair Yoga practice are quite dramatic. Anyone who witnesses the healing effect of Chair Yoga practice is an instant believer.

For me, Chair Yoga is a God given gift that I happily pass on, and it improves everyone's health in the process. Anything this good, should not be kept a secret.

“If you need to use props, you are a beginner.”

Absolutely Wrong! Your style may not use props, and you may not know how to use them, but props do help with alignment. Most of us mere mortals do not have perfect bodies, so a prop can make a tremendous difference with alignment.

If you want to know more about props, visit an Iyengar Yoga, Restorative Yoga, or Kali Ray Tri Yoga, class. There are also a number of books, and a few videos, available.

The guidance of a compassionate, and competent teacher, will help you learn so much about props to help your practice, and that of others, who feel intimidated by Yoga.

“You can’t teach me anything about Yoga, I already know it.”

You are absolutely right. There is an old Chinese saying, “A closed mind is like a closed book: just a block of wood.” In other words, a closed mind still must go through a deep awakening process to reach its complete potential.

However, I am getting on in years, and do not have the desire to teach the intolerant, or those who already know everything. My answer to this student is: You are right, and please stay with your current Guru.

It should come as no surprise that, very often, the student who says he or she already knows everything, does not, and never had, a Guru. If intolerance cannot be purged from within a particular Yoga student, he or she should be banished by any self-respecting Guru.

Life is too short to waste your time teaching those who don’t want to learn. In talking to my colleagues, I have found similar sentiments. Who among you wants to waste your time?

“What could I get out of Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, or Jnana Yoga?”

Each of these styles has so much to offer, but they could be classified, for the most part, as non-physical styles of Yoga. Let’s briefly take a look at each one.

Bhakti Yoga is most often practiced within India. Bhakti Yoga literally means - unity through devotion to God. Therefore, this is a sectarian practice, most often practiced by Hindus. However, there are Jews, Christians, and Moslems, who practice Yoga exclusively with members of their own religion. The practice of Bhakti Yoga is deeply spiritual.

Karma Yoga is unity through selfless service; also known as the Yoga of action. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. could be considered Karma Yogis. Both were men of peace and action, who ultimately gave their lives for what is right.

Jnana Yoga is unity through knowledge or the path of wisdom. Through Jnana Yoga, you will discover truth without delusion or bias. Jnana Yoga requires the serious student to meditate often.

So, now you see the “big picture,” and the need to keep the Yoga community together. Yoga literally means unity or union. Therefore, we must be living examples of it.

Helping Negative People

Do you know someone with a perennial dark cloud over his or her head? You're thinking: "I want to avoid negative people, not waste my time helping them out." What if this person is a family member, or loved one, who has turned bitter for some reason? You care deeply for this person and want to help.

Helping people is an example of selfless service, without seeking a reward of any kind. We also know this as Karma Yoga. Mahatma Gandhi is a classic example of a Karma Yoga practitioner.

However, how many of us can be as kind, or as enlightened, as Mahatma Gandhi? You really don't have to; all you have to do is your personal best. Isn't this what Yoga, or "Unity," is all about? We accept that we have limits in our Yoga practice, but we are persistent in our efforts to do better next time.

Some of the most negative people I have met - have everything, but they don't see the "field of diamonds" in their own backyard. Everything is always better somewhere else. No matter how much love they get, or how many possessions they acquire, they are never happy. Some of these people create their own environment and cannot see it. Through observation, you will notice that "money cannot buy happiness." The saddest people on this earth are the extremely poor and the extremely wealthy. This is not a rule, and there are exceptions. Some of the extremely wealthy people practice Karma Yoga, by helping, and giving, to the less fortunate.

Jesus once said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Why is this philosophy so close to Karma Yoga? There is a simple answer: We are obligated to help the less fortunate because it is morally right. This is a universal principle in every religion.

Helping the poor, and giving to the poor, will make the wealthy person sleep better at night. If you follow any religion, you will notice that there is a price to be paid in the next life, or in the after life, for gluttony. However, the price is being paid now, in this life, and on this earth.

How can I say this? The only people of great wealth, who are happy, are the givers. Those who do selfless public service and help others have found a way to put their status and money to work for the common good.

As Andrew Carnegie once said, "Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community."

Selfishness, hoarding, and gluttony, are hard to sleep with. Greed drives us insane, and over consumption causes grief. Helping others does not require money. Selfless service will help those in need just fine. Sometimes an encouraging word, a thank you, or a compliment, is worth more than money. This is because you showed recognition and gave a feeling that becomes self worth.

How many times do people hold back on giving thanks, praise, and mutual respect to others? No wonder the divorce rates are so high in some cultures. It is because no one wants to give, forgive, or try to understand anyone, including their wife, husband, or family members.

No one wants to accept the blame for anything. Everything is the fault of some 'wrong doer.' We are living in the new age of blame. How often do you hear about teachers and parents blamed for trying to do their job?

When you see someone change his or her attitude around for the best, it does restore your faith in humanity. If we cannot forgive, we become negative and hostile, too. Below is a formula for helping negative people, and you may learn a little more about Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga, (the path of devotion), in the process.

Smiling is contagious and puts the unhappy person "off guard." Remember that negativity is also contagious, but smiling is an "equalizer." It is very hard to get mad at a happy person. Think pleasant thoughts and do not let yourself come under the spell of gloom. It is easier for most of us to smile than to frown all the time.

Listen emphatically, but do not take problems that are not yours to heart. I know a person whose favorite saying is, "It's not my problem." Always remember that you do not have to take on the problems of the world, on your shoulders, to be a good listener.

If you feel this person is dragging you down, give yourself a break. Just because you want to help - that doesn't mean you have to write a suicide pact with him or her.

You have to know your own tolerance level for being around pessimism. Too much pessimism, and negativity, can have an adverse effect on anyone.

Look at "wartime behavior" as a prime example. People are scarred for life by atrocities, brutality, poverty, starvation, battle fatigue, constant fear, and imprisonment.

This is a haven for negativity to flourish in - much like the mind-set of a pessimist.

You do not have to lecture, or criticize, to cause a change within a person, but you would be wise to teach him or her by your own example. This is truly stronger than any words. Some people refer to it as, "Walking the talk." This is because talk is not enough.

Remember the saying, "Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime." You can always give away material, but what is more valuable than knowledge and acquired skills?

Education is the key to building positive attitudes. It allows us to learn Yoga, better our lives, and help others. You cannot help people by simply throwing money at them, and you cannot buy your way into heaven either.

Do not allow yourself to be compromised by negativity. Gently encourage him or her to attend a church, temple, mosque, ashram, or shrine for spiritual support.

Praying, chanting, Japa, music, and singing, lift the spirits and make us all feel better. It does not matter which religion you are; the concept is universal.

Forgive offenses, but make it clear when there is an infringement on your rights. You do not have to be a "human pin cushion" in order to help another person.

When you elect to help someone, at a time of need, you deserve mutual respect, at the very least. Never "play the fool" because this will not stop negativity.

Negative energy loves fools and wants to make fools of all of us. Sometimes you will have to make a firm stand and draw a line of acceptable behavior. If you always allow yourself to be abused by a negative person, you are feeding a "spoiled child."

Become a loyal and trusted associate by keeping your integrity intact. When conversations turn negative, "spin them around," and point out the "silver lining in every dark cloud." Every "bad situation" can be a valuable lesson, if we choose to learn from it.

Lastly, remember the saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." You cannot help someone who refuses to be helped.

Also, know that negative energy is like the ocean; you can possibly save another from drowning, but you cannot afford to drown yourself in the process. If you drown in negative energy, all of the selfless help you could give will be for nothing.

Excuses for Lack of Practice

At one time, or another, we all think, “Why am I here?” Sometimes we think, “Why do I even bother?” Thinking about giving up is a temptation for all of humankind, but we continue to pursue our goals just like our ancestors did.

My wife, Marie, puts it bluntly, “You have two choices, push forward or give up.” Sometimes, it is a joy to sit in the back of her Yoga classes, so I can listen to a candid approach to life and teaching Yoga.

Look at how far we have come as a species in regards to Yoga, art, holistic health, medicine, technology, and much more. It is easy to look at the downside of humanity, but many of our ancestors did not give up. In fact, they recorded past failures and achievements from which we could learn.

As a Yoga practitioner, or Yoga teacher, you have the ability to learn a complete health maintenance system, “loaded with archives.” The archives of Yoga are so plentiful that none of us will be able to study, digest, and practice it all in one lifetime. We know that knowledge is power, and Yoga will improve our lives exponentially.

In getting back to making excuses: Everyone makes them now and then. Some Yoga practitioners have stated they are too old, too stiff, and too weak, to continue practicing with intensity. Most Yoga students, interns, and Yoga teachers, will admit to being distracted by life. Sometimes, this is a good thing because your body, or mind, needs a rest - and a little change is harmless.

However, this is not an endorsement to avoid the benefits of steady Yoga practice. Also, this is not an endorsement to become a “couch potato.” Having worked with Yoga students, who have a variety of physical disabilities, Yoga can be practiced on your couch, on the floor, in your bed, or sitting down.

Granted, some of the vigorous styles of Yoga would have to be modified, but there is still no reason to abandon Yoga practice for long. Having seen the improvement of Yoga students in wheelchairs, and hospital beds, there is no reason why the study of Yoga should be, “put on the back burner.”

There is a saying that, “Seeing is believing.” This is true for most of the world, but the evidence of improved health, from steady Yoga practice, is obvious. If you want to worry less, become stronger, become more flexible, or clear your mind, Yoga does all of these things and much more.

There is no excuse for keeping the gift of Yoga to yourself. If you have seen Yoga improve your life, you are a “witness,” and you have the ability to help others improve their lives. Almost every obstacle, which life throws in front of us, can be overcome - unless we give up.

Bhakti Yoga

If Yoga were like fine wine, Hatha Yoga would surely be the wine for export. It could be said that Raja Yoga, and Kundalini Yoga, have a fairly strong foothold outside India, as well. All of these forms of Yoga have many aspects, but the physical aspect, is what lures most Yoga students - outside of India.

Bhakti Yoga, on the other hand, is a spiritual form of Yoga and is very commonly practiced within India. Bhakti Yoga is union by love and devotion to God. Therefore, this is the form of Yoga that really does have a deep spiritual aspect and a connection to Hinduism. This spiritual, and religious, aspect is possibly the reason why Bhakti Yoga has not managed to proliferate as well as Hatha Yoga - which is Union by physical mastery.

Could Bhakti Yoga be practiced by a Yoga practitioner who is not a Hindu? Let's ask, for example, could a Christian, Moslem, or Jew, practice Bhakti Yoga and stay within the confines of his or her religion? Some already do.

This could be considered sectarian Yoga, when a number of Yoga practitioners, of the same religion, gather to worship, meditate, pray, sing, or chant. Attachment to God is not reserved to any one specific religion. Therefore, in principle, Bhakti Yoga can be practiced by members of any religion.

There are many more types of Bhakti classifications, but I will name two basic classifications. Nishkama Bhakti is praise to God for all that you have. This is appreciation and acceptance of all your situations, relationships, and everything else. Instead of being a seeker, you are now a "finder" of all that is good in your life. In turn, you will easily be able to project loving kindness to others.

In contrast, there is also Sakama Bhakti. This is devotion to God, with the desire for gaining something. The objective could be material gain, to free yourself from an ailment, or to gain power of some kind. Most people pray to God in time of need. This is a common thread in all of us, and surprisingly our prayers are answered in a positive way.

It is important to understand that Bhakti Yoga is much more complex than this simplified explanation that I have presented. However, the principles of Bhakti Yoga are there for all Yoga students of every religion.

Interestingly, I have heard strong arguments against "oneness" with God. The theory is that God will only let us so close, as we are imperfect. It is true that humans are imperfect, but there is no harm in self-improvement or Yoga.

Anger Management

Yoga has been able to help many of mankind's ailments; but what about anger management? How can Yoga prevent rage and the burning desire for revenge? Many people say: "Don't get mad, get even." Is this what we are talking about?

As any Yoga practitioner knows, Yoga has nothing to do with "getting even." However, revenge has become "the special of the day." Many people feel revenge is justified, and we all know that revenge is a result of anger - whether it is slow burning or instant.

As I have mentioned before, Yoga does not stop when you roll up your Yoga mat. Most of what you take care of on your Yoga mat is the physical aspect of Yoga. This is a wonderful thing, but the rewards of your practice should be carried with you wherever you go.

Very few of us can say we have not felt anger. Many people, who know me, think I do not feel anger. However, that is pure myth. The fact is anger can be held in check, and managed, by using the following methods from Yogic philosophy and the many different styles of Yoga.

See "attachment" for what it is, and remove yourself from it. In reality, we own nothing. We are attached to money, possessions, relationships, and loved ones. Does this mean we own them or have control of them? Only on a temporary basis do you have control - if the universe permits.

What am I talking about? If you faced a catastrophic disaster today, you could lose some, or all, of your perceived possessions. Restrain your feelings of possessiveness for everything. You are only the temporary custodian of your possessions in this life. Once you clearly see this, you can prevent anger that is wrapped around attachment.

Be aware of desire. It is good to better yourself, but do not let reckless desire run your life. There is nothing wrong with the desire to succeed; this is healthy, but when desire incites anger, we must place restraints on our desires.

This task will take some self-observation, and we must be honest with ourselves. For example: We have the desire to get to work on time, but should we use our car as a weapon on the way?

At first, this may sound ridiculous, but many people risk their lives, in a frenzy of anger, just to get to work on time. They also risk the lives of everyone else on the road. This is only one small example of how anger and reckless desire are linked.

The next obstacle is self-righteousness or delusion. This is the belief that you are right, even though the universal laws of morality say you are wrong. How can genocide be justified? How can one race, or religion, justify alienating another? How can innocent civilians be slaughtered for retribution?

Sorry to bring up such extremes, but self-righteousness and delusion are the tools of intolerance. Intolerance always justifies itself, no matter how many martyrs perish. If you want to control anger, please discard intolerance and judgment of others.

Very often, anger is created within the ego and is a response to imaginary threats. This is most ironic, when a full-blown conflict erupts over a perceived threat, which did not really exist. So how can this violent chain of events, within the mind, be prevented?

How can the ego and intolerance be controlled? - Through self-realization - also known as, "Vichara." This is not meditation, but a realization of, "I am." This is rational or logical thought, but true self-analysis requires time. For mankind to grasp collective sanity, is a never-ending battle, but there is another way around this impasse.

This is the path of compassion or "Karuna," forgiveness (Kshama), loving kindness, and friendship. Most people will respond in a similar fashion, but always be prepared to defuse hostilities with those who want to take every advantage and mistake kindness for weakness.

This is another form of awareness, so be vigilant and observe others around you.

It is believed that when your brain becomes hot, you will not think logically. Drinking water and Pranayama will cool your brain. You may also want to engage in regular practice of Japa, meditation, prayer, and eat Sattvic food.

What about Hatha Yoga for anger management? In my experience, adolescent males have the greatest difficulty with anger management, but vigorous asana practice, or Vinyasa, helps them deal with rage and anger much better.

For two years, I taught Yoga classes within a local juvenile correctional facility. Some members of this group had serious issues with rage and anger. At first, there was some outright resistance to learning Yoga, even though they knew it would improve their lives.

Pranayama, relaxation, and meditation were difficult to teach, under these conditions, but they immediately caught on to Vinyasa. After the first two months of Vinyasa Yoga practice, many were able to relax and did meditate on their own.

A Healthy Planet

As a Yoga practitioner, you should be aware of your personal health and that of planet Earth. Why should you care, or take action, for a healthier and cleaner planet? With acid rain, toxic waste, mercury, and PCP's in our backyards, where do we start the clean up?

What can one Yogi do about the planet's health? We must all take action together, in order to be truly effective. It should be a concerted action.

Eating for a better environment is a reality. If vegetarians were the majority, this would change our environment and feed all the people of the Earth with grain that is used to fatten livestock.

However, the majority of the world's population will not be vegetarian any time soon. This will contribute to a rise in the world's temperature, as forests are cut down for ranchers. All forests serve us as the "world's lungs." Tree and plants naturally convert carbon dioxide to oxygen.

Combine this with a sudden increase in fossil fuel emissions, and you have a recipe for increased global warming. The greenhouse effect is a natural way for the Earth to keep itself warm. Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, naturally hold the heat and energy of the sun within our atmosphere.

The world would be a much colder place without the natural greenhouse effect. Some say, without the greenhouse effect, our Earth would be an "ice planet." However, fossil fuel emissions, and deforestation, may tip the balance and cause a "global warming effect."

What should a Yogi do? We have to write our legislators now and request action. If we keep quiet, all of our governments will stick with business as usual. Here are a few more actions we can take right now.

Buy or use organic products, when possible. Yes, it is more expensive, but you are sending a message to the agricultural industry that pesticides in your food, and in the food chain, are not acceptable. The world would be healthier without some of the chemicals we manufacture.

Support peaceful environmental activists, as long as they are ethical. Environmentalism is one thing, but violence is quite another. Greenpeace International is the current "front runner" of environmental action. They are not the only group, but this is a good one to start with.

A Peaceful Planet

Non-practitioners often accuse Yoga practitioners of too much self-indulgence. The common concern is that too much self-awareness will cause the Yogi, or Yogini, to worship the inner being. Before you get too excited – you and I know this is not true, but the world needs some time to adjust to Yogic philosophy.

You are thinking: “How can the world need more time? Yoga has been around for over 5,000 years and that is plenty of time for people to adjust. The answers must be found within, and then projected outward.”

This is true, but warfare, ignorance, and intolerance, have been around longer than Yoga. As a species, we have become much better with systems for the common good of humankind, but we have also become more efficient at suppressing our neighbors and killing each other.

What can a Yogi do to help? Allow friends, family, and associates, their space, and do not speak harshly of any religion or culture. We know that Yoga practitioners are from many religions, and some have no religion at all. It would be fair to say the majority of today’s Hatha Yoga practitioners are not Hindus.

However, all branches of Yoga are perceived as religious insurgency by religious fundamentalists. You cannot stop fundamentalist philosophy. Much like the ego within us, fundamentalism spends most of its time protecting itself from perceived threats. It does not matter whether the threat is real or pure fantasy.

As a Yoga practitioner, you are an ambassador of Yoga to any non-practitioner. Therefore, try not to judge, look at issues from at least two sides, and listen. Listening with empathy is the beginning of truly understanding your neighbors.

Recognize the right of another to defend himself or herself. Do not back someone into a corner with your philosophy, morality, or religion. Be tolerant and seek diplomatic solutions to problems before retreating into self-defense mode.

If pushed hard enough, even a mouse will bite back. Therefore, do not push your religious or political ideas on others. World peace is not just a catch phrase. It can be attained through knowledge, mutual understanding, respect, courtesy, diplomacy, and tolerance.

Every act of intolerance, no matter how small, sets an equal chain reaction in motion. This is the law of Karma. Look at the prospect of world peace today. We desperately need more people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela.

Ten Solutions for Depressed Yoga Students

Yoga teachers often struggle with methods for helping their students deal with a variety of ailments. Depression is serious, and is one of many ailments, but much like stress, it can be the “root cause” of many more problems. So, let’s look at ten ways to turn a Yoga student’s life away from depression.

Obviously, severe cases of depression really need professional counseling. Therefore, it is advisable to point some Yoga students in that direction; but all of us have our “dark moments,” so these are solutions for milder cases of depression.

Meditate using Visualization or Affirmation: When you teach Yoga classes, always encourage your students to be self sufficient in their meditation practice. Some Yoga teachers have preferred methods of meditation, but visualization and affirmation are easy methods for all Yoga students to learn and master.

Yoga students should learn to envision something that gives them deep gratification and causes no harm to anyone. Often this is something very easy for them to visualize. It could be a loved one, a vacation spot, or an accomplished goal. Within this practice, the Yoga student learns to accomplish his or her vision.

Affirmation is a method that any Yoga teacher can learn to guide. This builds self-esteem and creates positive energy. There are many affirmations CD’s to choose from; we carry them in the pro-shop for Yoga students to work with at home. These two methods create constructive use of solo time, and depression will be purged from the mind, body, and spirit.

Relaxation Techniques: Teach your Yoga students a variety of relaxation methods. We are all familiar with stage-by-stage relaxation techniques, but there are many more methods to teach. There are also self-hypnosis CD’s that cover guided relaxation methods. These are great for bedtime or quiet time.

Walking Time: Many of us might prefer to do Sun Salutations, but Yoga students can benefit from a walk, just like anyone else. This could be at any part of the day - before work, at lunch, after work, and weekends will help. The fresh air is a needed break from daily drudgery. Strategic use of walking, to break up the day, has extraordinary health benefits.

Sleeping Patterns: Getting to bed earlier will help Yoga students, or anyone else, get the optimum amount of sleep needed. This will also give them a positive start on the following day. Yoga students, who start the day earlier, will have time for all of the above-mentioned solutions or have time to see the sun rise.

Sun Salutations, and meditation, on the following morning, after a good night's sleep, will definitely keep depression "at bay." Yoga students who start with these methods will positively charge themselves and feel the strength of self-empowerment.



Get away from being self-centered: There is no reason to isolate ourselves; we are interconnected with all things, people, nature, the universe, and God. We need to be in harmony with our life and everything we come into contact with.

Accomplish what you can in a day and sleep on the rest. The universe will still keep running after our lives are up, so let the universe worry about it. Stop thinking in terms of "I" and you will have much less burdens to carry around.

Set Goals: Life would not mean much without goals, so write them down and go after them. These should be "heart felt" goals that are morally sound and yield gratification. This one solution stops many Yoga practitioners from feeling depression most of the time.

Appreciate the little things: Look at what you already have and do not worry about what you don't have. A rich man who worries about what he does not have is living in self-created poverty. His wealth could be put to something useful, but he dwells on protecting his assets and worries about acquisitions.

What a shame this is, but it is not an isolated case. The rich struggle to find love, real friends, and rewarding relationships. So, "be careful what you wish for."

Food: The irony is that food sustains life and can also cause death. One of my teachers pointed this fact out to me, when I was about nine years of age. My reaction was amazement, at first, but then reality settled in. Most people are in denial about food, and this is obvious by the obesity around us. Our waistline has to be monitored, constantly, throughout adulthood.

To keep it simple, Yoga students should adhere to a sattvic diet. Put limits on caffeine, alcohol, and sugars. There are times when most of us fall short, but still maintain awareness about what you eat and drink.

Of course, water should be consumed in fair quantities at all times. Eight glasses per day of quality water will aid your skin, digestion, elimination, muscles, vital organs and more. Water consumption will also give your skin a youthful appearance. Isn't this also why we practice Yoga?

Put Ideas into Action: Procrastination in, and of itself, can cause many poor outcomes. Setting goals, and writing them down, was discussed earlier, but those steps are worthless without putting your plans into action.



The “dreamer” who comes up with a great idea, and watches someone else put a similar idea into action, is truly depressed. Sometimes, great ideas are being worked on at the opposite side of the Earth, and it's just a matter of who puts the idea into action first.

There are also co-workers and supervisors who will gladly take the credit for your ideas. Therefore, do not waste time or procrastinate in any way. If you make a mistake, use it to your advantage and learn from it, but don't “sit on an idea.”

One last point to cover on this subject is how often we judge ourselves harshly. In my Yoga classes, I often mention “non-judgment” of others, but we are our own worst critics in this life. No one else will ever be as harsh as we can be to ourselves. So, stop criticizing your own ideas, before they get started, and put them into action.

Pranayama: Simple breath awareness alone can help relieve anxiety and depression. When you combine this with meditation, Pranayama can be a powerful tool. As a Yoga practitioner, you know many Yogic breathing techniques, but students should have a few “go to” Pranayama techniques for daily stress and some for severe stress.

Ujjayi Pranayama would be the first selection; translated to English this means, “victory or victorious breath.” Therefore, it is no accident that this particular Pranayama will purge depression and inner fears. As a matter of fact, Ujjayi Pranayama will instill confidence.



If Yoga students practice Ujjayi Pranayama, with an Asana sequence such as Sun Salutations or a Vinyasa series, they will conquer mild depression and develop new-found confidence in themselves.

There are many more Yogic solutions for anyone to get rid of depression and gain confidence in himself or herself, but these ten methods are familiar to Yoga teachers and most Yoga students.

Yoga practice needs to be taken home, just like homework. If a Yoga student truly wants to see results, the practice of Yoga has to be maintained on a regular basis.

Within Yoga are many facets, but all of them lead to good health. A Yoga student who practices “once in a while,” is better off than never having practiced at all, but should not expect to see significant results. This is why Yoga teachers have to tell their students the truth about expectations.

Do not “sugar coat” a Yoga student’s responsibility to practice Yoga on an almost daily basis. This is also how a medical prescription works. Can you imagine what would happen if patients took their prescribed medicine once in a while?

Continuity is the key to good health, and a steady Yoga practice will yield good mental, physical, and spiritual health. This is also true for everything worth attaining in life.

Train Your Mind for Empowerment

Recently, there have been some objections to using words like empowerment, abundance, success, and achievement, within Yoga writings. However, it would be much more difficult to open the doors of my wellness center, in North Providence, if I were homeless. Imagine the number of children, teens, adults, and seniors, who could not reap the benefits of Yoga, if every Yoga teacher took a vow of poverty.

The fifth Yama: Aparigraha (Non-gathering) is clear to Yoga practitioners, but it would be difficult to contribute to charities, research Yoga, write, teach under-privileged people, or make a contribution to mankind, if you are starving in the back alleys of New England, or anywhere else. If you have nothing to give, you can give nothing; therefore, you must acquire and give to others to help mankind.

You should not abandon the concept of empowerment to help yourself, in order that you can help others - in turn. This is not about hoarding material, but accumulating, and re-distributing, to those in need. You only have a temporary hold on any material wealth in this life, so why not help people, while you have it? This is a principle of Karma Yoga: Union by selfless service.

Where do you start with training, or re-training, your mind for empowerment and success? It is within the basic programming of your mind that you must start. You must learn to “eat, sleep, and drink” positive energy every day.

To eat correctly, a diet should, for the most part, consist of sattvic foods, such as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. There is much more to this dieting aspect, but it is difficult to find these foods at a fast food restaurant. However, it is worth the effort to research the sattvic diet and make small changes to your current eating habits.

When you sleep, try to get to bed earlier and be in your best frame of mind. You can do this by meditating or by practicing a stage-by-stage relaxation before bedtime. There are also many good meditation, self-hypnosis, and relaxation CD's to choose from. Sometimes, dreams can be negative; but with the above-mentioned methods, you can change the programming of your mind.

Drink plenty of pure water and gradually observe how your behavior changes. Many people consume too much caffeine every day. Can you imagine if a negative person walked up to you, in a positive mood, and said, “I’m sorry, for what I said before - I had one coffee too many, today?” This sounds like a “lame excuse,” but in reality, there are too many everyday conflicts due to caffeine.

With these first three steps, you will gradually train your mind for empowerment.

Let's look a little deeper into training your mind for empowerment and success. The mind spends much of its time evaluating and categorizing everything. This is an automatic early warning system to react to daily situations and potential emergencies.

However, the mind should be "wired" to automatically find solutions in all situations, instead of "freezing up." One method is to realize when you should engage in facets of Yoga for more productive use of your time. For example: When you are too busy for Pranayama, Asana, and meditation, this is the point where you need to practice Yoga the most.

The most productive people I know make an appointment for themselves. You could write an appointment down on your daily schedule to make "solo" time for yourself. This is time that you set aside for yourself - just like an appointment for your hair stylist. That is also why some people have a personal coach, life coach, personal trainer, or Yoga teacher.

However, this time should be used wisely, and you should be living in the present moment when you practice any facet of Yoga. After a few days, you will see your productivity increase and your sleep patterns will improve. This is possible because you are now in control of your own schedule. You will not accomplish as much - if you spend most of your time running around in circles.

Therefore, your Yoga practice should be performed on a daily basis. If you cannot do it alone, you should seek out Yoga classes or a competent Yoga teacher. Be honest with yourself and do not postpone a change of lifestyle that is in your best interest.

With reference to training your mind - you should also take the time for self analysis. How much time do you spend "second guessing" yourself? Researching a situation is one thing, but giving up, due to obstacles, is quite another. Learn to recognize, and expect obstacles, as they are on every path of life, including the Yogic path.

Affirm the positive aspects of your life every day. Let your family know that you love them. Appreciate what you have, and give thanks to God for your existence. There is always someone who has a harder life than we do. Appreciate this fact, and show loving kindness to every person you meet, regardless of their status.

Do not draw comparisons about material wealth. Most of the materially affluent people I know are very unhappy and worry about money all the time. The sad fact is material wealth does not equate to empowerment.

Sometimes, the pause in time, between intention and action, is the best time for Yoga practice. This gives you time to rationally focus on your intention.

Of course, if this is an emergency, there will be no gap in time, and your action will most likely be reaction. Therefore, our reactions are not always rational, or positive, but with regular Yoga practice, that will change.

Earlier, I mentioned that you should “eat, sleep, and drink” positive energy. However, with the practice of meditation, and/or Yoga, you can always develop a state of tranquility (Santosha). There are many reasons for this, but one of the first among them is non-attachment to the outcome of your plans.

This does not mean you should give up, but the best laid plans are subject to change, at any moment. We cannot control nature, or the universe, so we have to “roll with the punches.” Whether the outcome is good or bad, we have to adapt to this life the best we can, and we should be creative along the road of life.

Life is a journey, but we are not entirely in control of it. When we learn to accept what we cannot control - that is also Santosha. This state of acceptance is also a form of surrender to a “higher authority;” but to some people, this causes a feeling of helplessness.

You should always maintain the frame of mind that - success is “just around the corner.” Coincidentally, many students have this same positive feeling of hope and aspiration about their lives after a Yoga session.

If you are not in total control, how can success be so close? Life has “ups and downs,” but innovators become achievers - when they recognize opportunities within their grasp. This is why you train your mind to react instantly to situations with sound solutions. There will be situations where you have control over the outcome, and this is the time when a trained mind has an advantage.

In order to second guess yourself about a decision, you need to have time. While you have that time for “soul searching,” practice Yoga, meditate, pray, and come up with the best rational decision possible. When you have applied logical thought to the outcome, you cannot look back at decisions with regret.

Lastly, instant decisions depend upon how we have previously trained our mind. Yoga and meditation help you train your mind at all times. When you train your mind for empowerment, you will be able to make the most rational decision in an emergency. You will also be able to help those you love most.

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