

Yoga Spirit Academy E-zine

Healing body, mind and spirit
with the wisdom of Yoga, meditation and Ayurveda

March / April 2020

Volume 13, Issue 2

Yoga Asana as a Spiritual Practice By Janet W. Parachin, PhD

This is the second in a new series on Spiritual Practices. This month we look at the yoga postures we all know and love. How can practicing yoga asana be a spiritual practice?

Asana means "seat"

One clue can be found in the Sanskrit word *asana* which refers to yoga poses. The actual meaning of the word is "seat," demonstrating the close link between the yoga postures and sitting meditation. In fact, the first yoga postures were mostly seated postures used for meditation. As yoga postures became more active and varied, it became clear that moving the spine in all directions, stretching tight muscles, and lubricating tired joints were essential movements for preparing the body for longer periods of sitting still in meditation. Relieving the physical discomfort of sitting removed a primary distraction to meditation. A relaxed body paves the way for a clear, quiet mind.

Practicing yoga asana when injured

As a yoga therapist I meet a lot of people (myself included!) who have injured their body or are enduring the aches that come from working out or being sedentary. For such people yoga asana becomes a meditation of listening to the body. Rather than trying to "fix" a problem with the body, we try to learn what brought about the discomfort. By deciding to go to the source, we go on an amazing journey of self-discovery. If we are open to it, we can discover so much about our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Surprise! Sometimes what we most need is not a particular yoga posture, but rather

rest, silence, and time to integrate. Are we strong enough to recognize what we need and actually embrace it?

Uniting body and mind

Most people live mainly in their mind and only pay attention to their body when a problem arises, such as injury or illness. What we think about, decide and act upon is most real, right? The yoga tradition and modern science, too, disagree with this assessment. What is most real is what is present right now—our body, our emotions, our breath. The mind is less trustworthy because of its reliance on the ego, whose main goal is to keep us safe at all costs. A noble goal to be sure, but also a flawed one because it relies on deception. Here's something to



consider: the mind lies to us all the time in its quest to keep us safe, whereas the body never lies. Since the objective of meditation is to dissolve the ego and enable us to see things as they really are, body-centered yoga asana has more in common with meditation than mental reflection.

Breath is the key

A key teaching in the Vedic tradition is that the breath provides the link between the body and the mind. Just reflecting on how various breath exercises are helpful in calming the nervous system and reducing the effect of stress on the body demonstrates that this is true. Mind-breath-body are in intimate collaboration during yoga asana. *Continues on page two*

Yoga Spirit Academy
200-hour and 300-hour yoga teacher training
Tulsa, Oklahoma
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Spiritual practices continued

Yoga asana as a spiritual practice

Try a simple balancing pose like *Vrksasana* or Tree Pose. The body comes under stress by standing on one leg, a leg that may be weak, injured or otherwise compromised. Support that leg by using core muscles of the abdominals and back. Gently draw the navel in to strengthen the spine and stand tall. Breathe normally in the pose but visualize the breath expanding the upper torso as well as grounding the energy of the pose through the standing leg. Finally, engage the mind through *drishti*, gazing at a point that is not moving to create steadiness. Recite an affirmation, such as "I balance with ease," to activate intention. By bringing attention to ease in the body, smoothness of breath and focus of mind, yoga asana becomes much more than a physical practice. It is a spiritual practice indeed.



2019 Honors

Congratulations to the following students who received special honors in 2019:

Graduates of the 200-hour yoga teacher training: Megan Rose, Courtney Moseley, Aaron Sawyer, Elizabeth Gray-Aguirre and Jodi Howe

Graduates of Anatomy for Yoga and Anatomy & Physiology correspondence course: Charlotte Adcock, Kara Chitty, Aaron Sawyer, Courtney Moseley and Elizabeth Gray-Aguirre

Perfect attendance: Courtney Moseley and Elizabeth Gray-Aguirre

Graduate assistant: Amanda Kuhns

Student assistant: Jodi Howe

Therapeutic Yoga and Ayurveda

This 45-hour course is an advanced teacher training which explores the therapeutic applications of Yoga and Ayurveda to heal and prevent injuries and illness, therapeutic yoga for the hips and sacrum, for the shoulders and neck, for the back and spine, for the extremities, and for mental and emotional healing. The cost of the course is \$675. The prerequisite is 100 hours of yoga teacher training from any school or 300 hours of documented yoga teaching. Classes are held on Saturday and Sunday from 1:00-7:00pm on the following days:

May 23-24

June 27-28

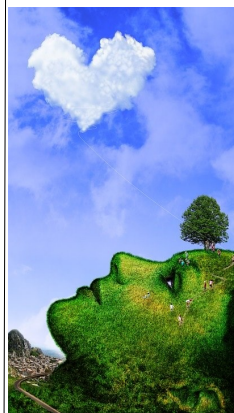
July 25-26

August 22 (make-up if needed)

For more information, contact the Director at jparachin@cox.net or visit our website <https://yogaspirittulsa.com/300-hour-training/>

"This World is the Place . . ."

"Don't depend on death to liberate you from your imperfections. You are exactly the same after death as you were before. Nothing changes; you only give up the body. If you are a thief or a liar or a cheater before death, you don't become an angel merely by dying. If such were possible, then let us all go and jump in the ocean now and become angels at once! Whatever you have made of yourself thus far, so will you be hereafter. And when you reincarnate, you will bring that same nature with you. To change, you have to make the effort. This world is the place to do it." -Paramahansa Yogananda



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