

## The Essence of Yoga Series – An Introduction to Yoga

“Yoga is not an ancient myth buried in oblivion. It is the most valuable inheritance of the present. It is the essential need of today and the culture of tomorrow”

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Yoga is the science of living and, as such, is intended to be incorporated into daily life. It works on all aspects of the person: the physical, vital, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual.

The word ‘yoga’ means ‘unity’ or ‘oneness’ and is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘yuj’ which means ‘to join’. This unity or joining is described in spiritual terms as the union of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. On a more practical level, yoga is a means of balancing and harmonizing the body, mind and emotions.

The science of yoga begins to work on the outermost aspect of the personality, the physical body, which for most people, is a practical and familiar starting point. When imbalance is experienced at this level, the organs, muscles and nerves no longer function in harmony, rather they act in opposition to each other. For instance, the endocrine system might become irregular and the efficiency of the nervous system decrease to such an extent that a disease will manifest. Yoga aims at bringing the different bodily functions into perfect coordination so that they work for the good of the whole body.

From the physical body, yoga moves on to the mental and emotional levels. Many people suffer from phobias and neuroses as a result of the stresses and interactions of everyday living. Yoga cannot provide a cure for life but it does present a proven method for coping with it.

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh explained yoga as an “...integration and harmony between thought, word and deed, or integration between head, heart and hand”. Through the practices of yoga, awareness develops of the interrelation between the emotional, mental and physical levels, and how a disturbance in any one of these affects the others. Gradually, this awareness leads to an understanding of the more subtle areas of existence.

There are many branches of yoga: Raja, Hatha, Jnana, Karma, Bhakti, Mantra, Kundalini to name but a few. However today Hatha yoga has become the most well known and widely practiced of the systems. However, the concept of what constitutes yoga is broadening as more people take it up, and this knowledge is spreading.

(Excerpt from Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, Bandha by Swami Satyananda Saraswati)