

YOGA IS FOR YOU!

Fitness options have been growing as benefits have become obvious and appreciated. The positive impact to longevity, health, stress-reduction and happiness is both, short and long-term. I am particularly excited to see yoga gaining enormous traction, because I believe it's a holistic approach to fitness. Instead of repeating the common and positive media-coverage or research-backed literature that supports yoga, I want to share my own experience. As a Yoga teacher (student first!), I feel the urge to share my journey, so I can motivate more people to enjoy this ancient, yet always applicable way to train your body and mind.

What is Yoga? By definition, it's union. The physical practice of yoga is the union of body-movement, breath and mind. It involves moving your body into a pose (called "asana"), where the body is held steady, just at the edge of comfort, while keeping your mind and breath under your control.

Using a logical and common-sense approach, I want to first debunk few myths that may have discouraged some deserving seekers, and then focus on the incredible wholesomeness of this scientific and well-researched practice.

Myth #1: "Yoga is for flexible people." Busted!

It's like saying "I am dirty and a shower is only for clean bodies". If the body is dirty, then it needs to be in the shower ASAP! Does it make sense? Flexibility, strength, balance and endurance are essentials of fitness and are interdependent for a strong and healthy body. A flexible body without strength is dangerous as it lacks support. Similarly, a strong body without flexibility is prone to injuries. No wonder more and more elite athletes are practicing yoga. If you are looking for a full body workout that gives you strength, flexibility, endurance, balance, focus, muscle-conditioning, lean-mass, improved-circulation, cardiovascular-conditioning, stress-relief, weight-management etc. then empirical research suggests that yoga is for you!

Myth #2: "Yoga is a faith-based practice." Busted!

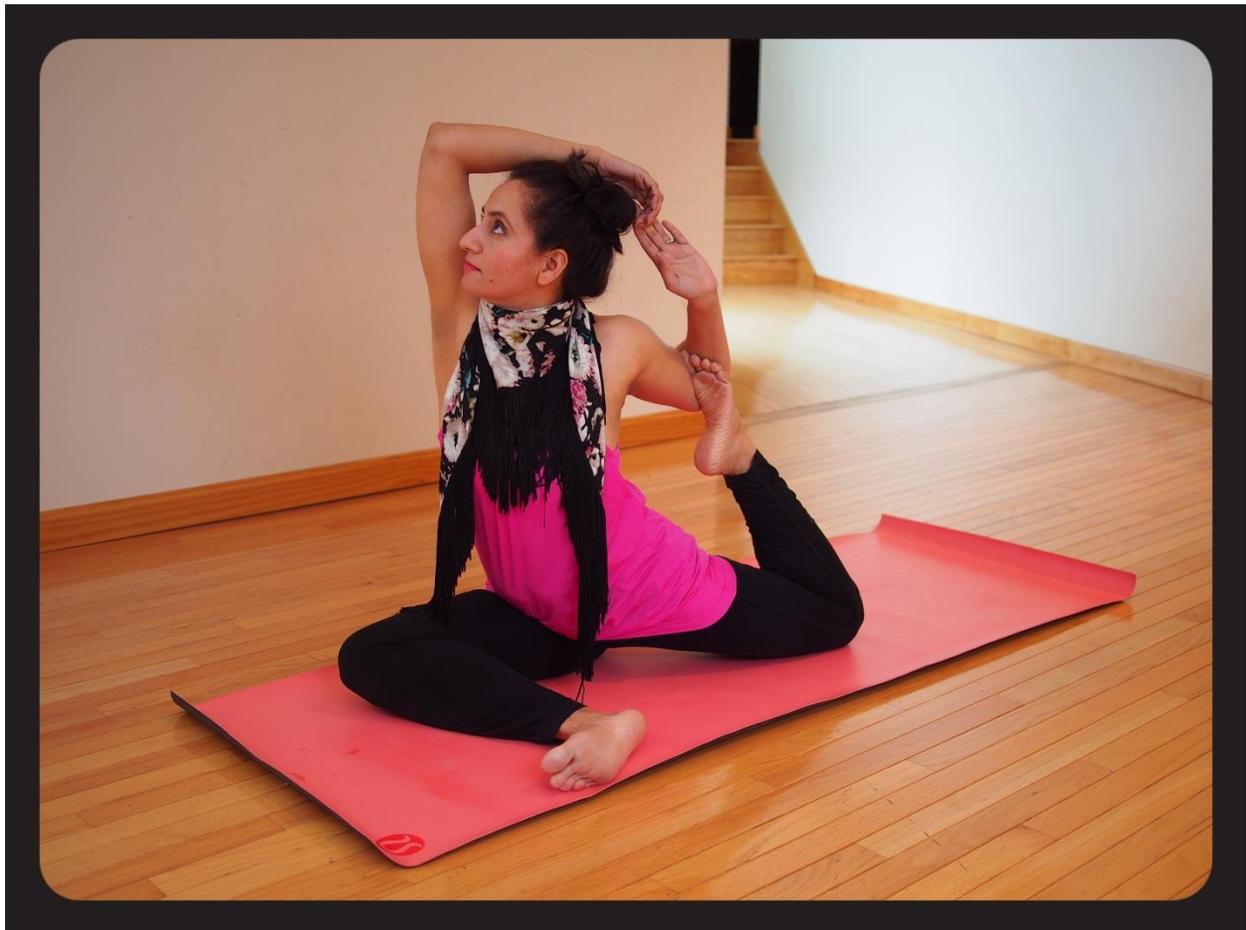
One doesn't need to have faith in any particular system to believe that there will be a morning after a night. That's natural and our experience allows us to accept it. Similarly, yoga practice brings one closer to his/her true nature and that experience is often called spiritual. One doesn't have to say words like "Namaste" and "Om" to practice yoga. Saying those words don't make anyone more spiritual than those who prefer silence or any other positive word. Another good news is that one doesn't have to belong to any lineage or know the Yoga-Sutras (main literature) by Maharishi Patanjali (the author) to explore their own body on the mat. This practice is transformative at every level of one's being and some

people prefer to name that transformation as “spiritual”; if you don’t like that label, then you can label it as contemporarily as you want.

Myth #3: “Yoga is for relaxing only and it’s not a full body workout.” Busted!

Sun-salutation or “Surya-Namaskar” is a great example of a traditional series of select poses (or “Asanas”), meant to target various systems including respiratory, nervous, digestive and cardiovascular. When done in a brisk pace, this series gets the heart-rate up and incorporates a large number of muscle groups in a controlled and graceful manner. With specific poses targeting individual body parts and based on the applied intensity, yoga practice can be very intensive, moderate or relaxing.

Now let’s take a look at what makes yoga so special. While going through yoga-poses, there is a suggested guidance for breath, alignment, and the state of mind. After the poses, there is a yogic-nap to wind-down.



Breath- While practicing yoga, the instruction in every pose, regardless of difficulty-level, is to breath with awareness and regularity. It can take a bit to become skilled at it, but even

partial success is immensely beneficial. As I am going through poses that are taking me to the edge of my composure, my mind wanders less if I am focused on my breath. A more natural breath tricks my mind that everything is perfectly alright, even if I am in a challenging yoga-posture. With this habit of staying focused and breathing properly, the next time I am in a demanding, or a stressful situation, it's a bit easier to handle stuff.

Alignment - In a yoga class, a yoga posture is attained by sequential instructions or alignment cues. In my practice, as I follow the given cues, I safely achieve the physical alignment that benefits me and brings my focus to the present moment. It forces me to be present and aware. Through my daily practice, I became so aware of my body proportions that I started to accept little imperfections. It was few years ago, while practicing I realized that my bone structure was unique, and so was I, as a complete person. I experienced authenticity at every level of my being. I learnt to honor myself and started to work within my limitations. It was the awareness of my own flaws that helped me open up towards flaws of people around me. I began to see beauty in imperfection. The constant habit of aligning myself on my mat extended in other areas of my life and I started to do things that were closer to my values. Just as in asanas, the only alignment one needs in life is something you're comfortable and steady in.

State of mind - Challenges are great learning opportunities. While practicing challenging asanas, we face a lot of demons like fear, instability, insecurities, etc. and we forget the "big-picture" in tensed bodies. The same demons rise in our day to day life during demanding situations. The constant centering reminders in a yoga class, such as "let go", "surrender" and "be kind", bring the mind to a relaxed, but focused awareness. "Letting go" doesn't mean to give up. It means to accept the present and then detach from the desired outcome. Kindness helps with releasing aggression. Once we get habitual with this approach to accept and act (instead of tense and react), we are in better control of situations in life.

I also want to share my curative experience for physical discomforts. Many years ago, I struggled with heel and back-pain, which multiple doctors diagnosed as "plantar-fasciitis" and "sciatica", with suggestions for surgery or pain medication. I remember waking countless mornings in pain, followed by limping for the early part of the day and then managing for the rest. At that time, I had an exercise routine, but not regular yoga. As I drifted to regular yoga, in a short period, I noticed a significant improvement in my symptoms and I eventually became symptom-free. I gained flexibility and strength, which I couldn't develop from other modalities. I was lucky to find relief without major intervention and your experience may vary. Please follow the advice of your medical professional.

Yogic-nap/"shavasana"- The mind-clearing nap is an integral part of closing a yoga practice. A yoga session is sealed with a mind-clearing nap, towards the end. It's conscious

relaxation, where thoughts are dropped to clear the mind. For me this one reason is good enough to show up on my mat every day!

Yoga has been time tested for thousands of years, otherwise time wears things down and concepts become irrelevant. I sincerely hope this encourages you to give it a try and enjoy the countless benefits. You deserve a complete system that stood the test of time.

(Yoga is Geeta vallecha's biggest passion and she has fully immersed herself into the discipline and practice of Yoga. She uses quality instructions in her yoga classes to integrate challenging and powerful flow of "asanas" with proper breathing, deep meditation and relaxation techniques. Geeta loves working with people and takes enthusiastic interest in helping people thrive by sharing her practice. Her certifications include - 200 RYT, PIYO, YogaFit, Balyoga, Yin yoga and classic form of Hatha yoga. She has participated in numerous yoga, meditation and breath-workshops for a deeper study of the mind and body field. She holds a Master's degree in Computer Information systems. She is also an advanced Reiki practitioner and loves to share Reiki/energy in her classes. Expect to stretch, twist, breath, laugh and sweat in her classes.)

