

The Stages of Yoga

The right means are just as important as the end in view. Patanjali enumerates these means as the Eight Limbs of Yoga for the quest for the soul.

They are: Yama (universal moral commandments), Niyama (self purification by discipline), Asana - (posture), Pranayama (rhythmic control of the breath), Pratyahara (Withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and exterior objects), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (A state of super-consciousness brought about by profound meditation, in which the individual aspirant becomes one with the object of his meditation).

The top 3 reasons new students are drawn to Yoga are: stress, to gain flexibility, or because of a physical ailment possibly doctor or therapist recommended.

Today I will talk about how the first Yama relates to the posture of our bodies.

There are 5 Yamas: Ahimsa (non-violence, non-harming), Satya (truth), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (continence), and Aparigraha (non-coveting).

Let's consider Ahimsa (non-harming) in relation to our bodies. We all hold what my teacher calls "an optimal blueprint" of the human body. Throughout the years we sometimes move away from that and can end up harming ourselves in that process. At first it may be unintentional, and then through continued repetition (through our daily activities and quite possibly even ego related) we continue to harm ourselves.

I'm telling you this simply because it is never too late to feel better! An experienced yoga teacher can guide you towards that "optimal blueprint", and be of service to you during that process. Backing up a bit, I can tell you from experience that on the very day I met one of my wonderful teachers (John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga). I had a tear in one of my hamstring muscles, and the closest I can explain that to those lucky enough not to ever dealt with that is it simply felt as if I were hit on the back of my leg with a baseball bat. John Friend being the amazing teacher that he is noticed my discomfort and asked about it. I of course told him what happened, and that I would take it easy and do what I could. Now if he walked away and left me with my discomfort he would have not been a very good teacher. Instead, he simply took my injured leg and physically internally rotated my thigh, and through a much better alignment I was able to fold towards it with no pain! I was amazed by how such a simple movement helped so much!

This note is for all the teachers out there that may have walked away and think that an injured student knows what to do to protect an injury that they in fact may have created. Please, teachers go back to school and learn how you can help and be of service. Remember there are many yoga tapes on the market that can offer the same un-personalized instruction that you may be offering.

Now for all of the students that are interested in taking yoga class or May already be in a yoga class keep in mind Ahimsa. Listen to your bodies! If something doesn't feel right it's probably not right. Find a class that fits, most studios offer different levels. I am always happy to see advanced students attending one of my chair classes, simply because the basics can give you what is needed to go to the next level with your practice.

Peace, love & namaste, Christina