



October 1993 Contemplation Theme

How Does It Work?

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Yoga gives you more than exercise does. While you get all of the benefits of any other type of exercise program, yoga also:

- relieves stress
- provides mental clarity
- grants inner peace and serenity
- promotes healing on all levels
- creates personal transformation
- bestows the natural bliss of being alive
- explains the goal and purpose of life, and helps you get it.

It always does all of these things. That is quite incredible. Yoga strengthens your body, makes you more flexible and gives you all of these additional benefits every time you do it. It's called instant gratification. Plus, the effects are cumulative. Each time you do yoga, your starting point has progressed. You have the benefits from all the previous classes or sessions already there, so the effects of your new session are even more obvious and enjoyable. How does it work?

If you turn on your kitchen faucet, the water flows out on its own. You do not have to pump the water out. When you get in a pose, yoga flows through you—as if the water has been turned on. Yoga classes work from this basic principle. This water-like flow is the “juice of life.” When it flows through your body, you experience bliss. When it flows through your mind, you have unparalleled mental clarity. When it flows through your heart, you experience all-encompassing love. But tensions on any level restrict the flow.

The purpose of yoga is to turn on the tap again. It works on all the levels of your existence, all at the same time. This is very easy to recognize. Tension in your mind creates tension in your body. It blocks your ability to relax. If you have ever lain awake at night, you know how your mind can keep you from getting needed rest. When life changes and that worry is gone, your great sigh of relief is more than a deep breath. It lets your whole mind and body relax. You feel younger and lighter. Yoga uses this relationship by turning it around: Your body is used to release mental tensions. Some of those deep seated tensions have become so familiar that you no longer notice them. Now you notice because they are gone!

The collected tensions are actually the physical expression of mental and emotional constrictions. They lodge in your body. You may notice them settle in your shoulders, low back or anywhere else. They may constrict your breathing, impair your digestion or give other discomfort. They leave you in a state of fatigue and depression. But they are not a never-ending curse over which you have no control. The practice of yoga gives you choice about how you feel.

The difficulty is that many of the poses are hard, if you are more than two years old. Back then, you could still chew on your toes and turn somersaults with ease. Your energy level was limitless; you exhausted the adults around you. Where did it all go? You can get your body moving again. Regular yoga practice does this gradually and compassionately. It takes time to develop your ability to do some of the poses, but you are getting all the benefits all along the way.

The amount you get is in direct proportion to the amount you do. If you want to get more from yoga, it does not mean you have to “work harder.” Yes, you will sweat in yoga class sometimes, but more sweat is not the goal. More bliss is the goal. What you need to do is to get rid of the tensions in your body, mind, heart and the deeper levels of your being. You do not have to force your body to do a pose; you finesse the pose so your body can reclaim its original flexibility.

The poses that are initially hard become surprisingly easy when you don't have to work through tensions that prevent full range of movement. Does a two-year-old child have to work hard to reach his or her toes? Not only does that two-year-old have a more open body, but also a more open mind and heart. Their souls shine through their eyes so clearly that you easily fall in love with them.

The key is to stay in the pose by aligning yourself so that it is easy. Then you can stay long enough for the yoga to flow. You do not have to compel the changes. You can concentrate on the physical level, and you will get all that yoga offers. Our classes aim at the full yoga experience. So, how does it work? If you want more out of life, you will find it inside.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the letter "a" is a small heart symbol containing the number "311".

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