

Yoga In Today's World

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adapted from "Yoga and Ayurveda in the Material World"

Inside Ayurveda Magazine, Spring/Summer 1999

Thirty years ago, as a stay-at-home mom with three kids, I bought two show-quality Dalmatians to begin breeding and selling puppies. To raise their value, we needed show ribbons, so I learned to train dogs for both conformance and obedience. I also discovered that popularity is the worst thing that can happen to a breed. Backyard breeders begin producing puppies without selectivity, so breed quality goes downhill.

I sometimes question if the same thing is happening to yoga in America. A survey by IDEA Health & Fitness, Inc. (IDEA Fitness Manager, October 1998) shows that 53 percent of all U.S. athletic clubs now offer yoga. Many club members want a yoga workout as part of their cross-training regimen. But they may never hear from their yoga teacher that:

- yoga is the science of consciousness,
- the asanas (poses, stretches, exercises) are a small part of yoga's incredible technology
- yoga's true purpose is to cultivate a deepening experience of your own eternal boundless essence as Consciousness-Itself.

Though I am thrilled that there are now 20 million Americans practicing yoga, I am concerned that too many are coming with the intention of creating eternal youth and beauty, or hoping that yoga will heal the injuries or illnesses that modern medicine cannot cure. I would love to be able to offer every yoga student the healing they seek, but some physical conditions may not improve. Yet yoga offers true healing, which is the rediscovery of your own essence as Consciousness-Itself.

Hatha Yoga techniques are most effective when they open the student to the awareness of Consciousness, through clearing away the tensions in the body. Consciousness is the most powerful healing agent of all. So we get miracle stories and showy images, which the media loves, because it helps them sell their publication. But when do the gymnastics take over and distort people's understanding of yoga? Some yoga poses photograph well, while meditation does not.

The major schools that train yoga teachers have created the national Yoga Alliance, as trailblazers in setting standards for yoga teachers. A teacher with training in physical techniques only does not qualify as a Registered Yoga Teacher (R.Y.T.). A teacher must have training in anatomy and supervised teaching experience, along with courses in yoga philosophy and meditation. As the first President of Yoga Alliance, I feel strongly about bringing Consciousness back into yoga. I pray that all yogis remember the goal — to know your own Divinity. Do more yoga.

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