

Yoga: What For?

by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

You can practice Yoga for all sorts of reasons: to remain fit; to stay healthy or recover your health; to balance your nervous system; to calm your busy mind, and to live in a more meaningful way. All these goals are worthy of our attention and pursuit.

Yet, traditionally, Yoga has for several millennia been employed as a pathway to liberation or enlightenment. Long ago, the masters of Yoga recognized that we can never be completely satisfied with life until we have found the source of happiness beyond pleasure and pain. Even when we are completely fit and healthy, enjoy a relatively balanced nervous system, and live in an apparently meaningful way, deep down we still feel ill at ease. We just have to dig deep enough to go past all the layers of limited satisfaction—the kind of satisfaction that depends on having just the right sort of external circumstance. We can easily discover whether we are truly content and happy when we lose our job, have our marriage break up, or have a good friend suddenly turn against us. In the case of a great Yoga master, these events will not cause as much as a ripple in his or her mind.

Upon enlightenment, when consciousness is free from all mental conditioning, neither pleasure nor pain will diminish our inner freedom. We are pure consciousness and one with the Source of all things. This is what the Hindu Yoga tradition calls “Self-realization.” The Self, or Spirit, is superconscious, immortal, eternally free, and unspeakably blissful. From a yogic point of view, there is no higher attainment than this; nor is there a pursuit more worthy than this. For when we have realized our true nature, as pure consciousness, whatever we do will be infused with the bliss of Self-realization. We are all right in any circumstance, and because of our inner freedom and bliss, we can enrich all situations with wisdom and compassion so as to benefit other beings.

Whatever your personal reasons for practicing Yoga may be, it is good to bear Yoga’s traditional goal in mind. This will prevent you from getting stuck with a particular achievement. Yoga seeks to recover your *highest* potential.

For further reflection on the question of this short article, see my books *The Path of Yoga* and *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga*, both published by Shambhala Publications.

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