



The Essence of Yoga

In a well-known scene from the Bhagavad Gita, the warrior Arjuna stands above a battlefield on the eve of an epic war between two clans of the same family. He feels paralyzed by his inner conflict and confused about what to do. On one hand, he believes that it is his duty to fight his relatives who have created havoc in the world. On the other hand, he feels tremendous compassion for the uncles and cousins he grew up with and who have played an important role in his life.

As Arjuna wrestles with his moral dilemma, he turns for advice to his charioteer, who is actually Lord Krishna in disguise. What follows are seven hundred verses that describe the essence of yoga — awakening to our true Self, which is infinite, unbounded consciousness. Krishna tells Arjuna to go beyond the duality of good and evil: “When your mind has overcome the confusion of duality you will attain the state of holy indifference to things you hear and things you have heard. When you are unmoved by the confusion of ideas and your mind is completely united in deep samadhi, you will attain the state of perfect yoga.”

Arjuna’s story is a metaphor for the classic conflict between heart and mind, between internal warring forces. Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna that good and evil, pleasure and pain, loss and gain are two aspects of the same force – an eternal,

undivided, limitless consciousness. Ultimately, the purpose of a yoga practice is to awaken to this state of pure awareness, beyond the drama of space, time, and duality.

It must be emphasized that the awakened person still retains a conception of good. It is the force of evolution that underlies birth, growth, love, truth, and beauty. The awakened person also retains a conception of evil, which is the force that opposes evolution – the entropy leading to disintegration, dissolution, inertia, and “sin” (defined as anything that thwarts our evolution). In a state of deepened awareness, however, you realize that both forces are aspects of the same universal field of consciousness. The illusion of duality falls away and you know that you are not separate or isolated but are part of the infinite field of all possibilities.



Connect to the Pure Awareness Within

Yoga is a timeless practice for connecting with your true nature, the pure awareness at the core of your being. The physical postures help release the obstructions to the free flow of intelligence into the body, and also serve to establish the experience of pure consciousness in your physiology. The spiritual effect of yoga asanas is heightened when you do them in conjunction with a meditation practice. You can also expand your consciousness as you practice yoga and throughout the day by doing the following:

1. **As you move through each pose, focus on the inhalation and exhalation of each breath, cultivating stillness in your body and mind.** After performing your postures, sit in silent meditation or shavasana for approximately 20 minutes. Meditation helps you enter the field of pure awareness, where everything is inseparably connected.

2. **During your postures and each day, practice shifting into a witnessing mode of awareness.** Turn your attention to the silent witness within – your soul – and take time to commune with the intelligence in all living things. Listen to the crash of the ocean waves, see the smile of a loved one, or watch a beautiful sunrise. Established in the peace of your inner silence, you will experience joy and reverence for nature and life in all its manifestations.
3. **Practice non-judgment.** At the beginning of the day, tell yourself, “Today I shall judge nothing that occurs.” Throughout the day, remind yourself of this statement whenever you catch yourself judging. Judgment comes from the ego’s need to control and is based on fear. Your true Self, which is your soul or spirit, is completely free of these things because it recognizes that everyone is the same spirit in different disguises.