



RECOVERY TODAY

Yoga: A physical path to reshaping your mind and moving your spirit

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The early founders of AA recognized that Alcoholism is a 3-fold disease affecting us physically, mentally and spiritually. The 12 step program has proved to be highly effective in addressing both the mental and spiritual aspects of the disease, while relatively little emphasis has been placed on the physical aspects. The ancient yogis knew that in order to sit and meditate for long periods of time, our bodies need to be in good physical condition, thus yoga is a natural complement to the 12 step program.

Yoga means “union with a higher power,” and it is comprised of much more than physical movement and postures (asanas). It may also include hand positions (mudras), conscious breathing (pranayam), sound (chanting) and meditation. As a lifestyle it includes things like being truthful, disciplined, non-violent and serving others. It involves bringing conscious awareness to all that we do, and the end result is to move the infinite supply of energy within us, so we can live in balance and harmony with the energies around us. When we live in harmony, we can be happy, which is our birthright. Thus, the physical components of yoga are necessary and integral in helping us to maintain balance mentally and spiritually. As with any movement (even breathing) both the nervous and glandular systems are affected, and these two systems have a significant impact our state of mind and health.

I remember the first time I really learned to sit in meditation. There was no struggle, no effort, and no chair to support me - only the earth below and the sky above. For a few moments, my thoughts gave way to a neutral contentment. My breath flowed in and out. Neither past, nor present entered my mind. It so happens that I was in New York City, but I could have been anywhere, and in my mind I was nowhere.

The ability to sit and be without thinking did not happen all at once. In fact, I had spent years going to various yoga and meditation classes, experiencing, enjoying, but never really certain if I was actually doing it right. Then one day, a few months after a rather traumatic event that caused me to shift my modus operandum from that of determination and struggle to that of acceptance and simply being, my meditation changed. It was a form of surrender, but not in the sense of giving up; it was more in the sense of trusting that I was exactly where I needed to be in that moment. I felt both energized and connected to something greater, and to this, I surrendered. So there I was, sitting, breathing, adjusting my posture, noticing the sensations of tightness in my knees and hamstrings, reaching up through the top of my head, chin tucked toward my lifted chest, so the back of my neck and spine were as long as possible without straining. In that position, I allowed my breath to pause at the top of the inhale and the bottom of the exhale until it became a rhythm that no longer needed thought or control. As if my breath and body were a pendulum, I allowed my mind to relax and float. Time was no longer a factor, and in those pauses between breaths, I searched for the place where the waves of pain disappeared, and then I focused only on those, like an optical illusion – only in sensation. Then I let the rhythm of my breath rock me to stillness until there were no thoughts...

In that moment, I was at point zero, a new starting point. Can you imagine? Of all the places we've been in our lives, both physically and mentally, what if we have the ability to simply wipe the slate clean and start over? With all the knowledge, experience, and memories, of course, but without the attachment to anything that we've done in the past or to whom we once were? Could it really be possible to simply be without the grip, triggers and control that past experiences or future worries have on us?

Something happens to the brain when we go inside to this nowhere place. The nervous system, which includes the brain, spinal cord and peripheral nerves, is the communications network for the body. When we shift our mental focus from the sensations outside our body to the sensations within, the brain sends signals to the glandular system that releases hormones that have a calming, relaxing effect. The problem is getting there, and getting there takes practice. Once you're there, the feeling doesn't necessarily last, but over time and with practice, meditation can have positive lasting results on your physical, mental/emotional and spiritual well-being. Oftentimes - especially early on - we experience and release thoughts, memories and emotions. Once cleared, we may then be able to have an experience that is, quite literally, blissful.

By the time a habit becomes an addiction, the neural pathways in the brain become so deeply engrained that the road to recovery, regardless of the addiction, requires significantly more effort. This is especially true on an intellectual level when we attempt to use our mind, the very organ that has become impaired, to pull ourselves back to a state of non-addiction. Treatment almost always involves some sort of mind exercise and/or medication that affects the brain. But what if we could help reshape those neural pathways through yoga?

In 1968 a man named Yogi Bhañan came to North America from India to teach yoga in the West. His original intention was to teach Hatha Yoga, which is most known for its focus on "asana" or postures. But during this dawning of the "Age of Aquarius" when the flower children and people of love were calling for freedom from oppression, and while the wonders of technology and transportation were making it easier than ever to share ideas, information and substances, we entered an unparalleled era of substance abuse. People were dying because they sought connections and altered states of consciousness equal to bliss through external means, and he knew that these people needed to experience a reconnection to their inner self, to balance their inner energy, and to connect with the universal energy through meditation. Thus, he made it a mission to get these people off of heroin, marijuana and alcohol. In 1969 he moved to Los Angeles, and so the teachings of Kundalini Yoga in the United States began. Of meditation, he said,

- "Meditation is nothing but taking a mental shower."

- "Meditation is when you empty yourself and let the universe come in you."

- "Through meditation, you can calm the mind and develop what is important to you." - "Prayer is man talking to God; meditation is God talking to man."

According to The Teachings of Yogi Bhañan, it takes 40 days to change or break a habit; 90 days to confirm or establish a new habit; 120 days for the new habit to be integrated with who you are as a person (in ways that other people will notice); and 1000 days to truly master the new habit. In Kundalini Yoga, there are specific meditations to achieve specific results, and certain meditations are well suited to support people in breaking habits and overcoming addictive behaviors. In today's world where we are subjected to sensory overload, we need more than ever to remember to attend to our physical bodies so that we can better attend to our mind and spirit.

Because of this integral connection, Chooper's Guide (www.choopesguide.com) recently began listing yoga professionals, programs and events that supports addiction treatment. If you are looking for ways to take your mental and spiritual practice to another level, then by all means, do not ignore your physical body; consider a yoga class or try it at home!

Here's an introductory breathing exercise you can do at home: Lock your eyes on the tip of the nose, almost closed. Inhale through your nose for 5 full seconds. Hold your breath for 15 seconds. Exhale fully through the nose for 5 seconds. Continue this for 3-31 minutes. If you feel so inspired, you can extend the inhale, holding and exhaling to 20 seconds each, for a "One Minute Breath."

About the Author

Satjeet Kaur (Tammy Lee) has been practicing yoga since 1991 and began teaching Kundalini Yoga and meditation in 2007. She has studied the Teachings of Yogi Bhajan since 2000, including "SuperHealth® - Yoga to Overcome Addictive Behaviors" with Mukta Kaur Khalsa, and "Bringing Yoga and Meditation into Healthcare Settings" with Shanti Shanti Kaur Khalsa. Her True Victory Yoga™ classes, workshops and healing retreats on the coast of Maine focus on addiction, chronic illness, pre- natal and stress relief and often include the symphonic gong. Satjeet is also a member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT). She can be found on Chooper's Guide, the internet's most comprehensive substance abuse treatment directory, under Maine professionals. She can also be reached via email at pemaquid@me.com or follow her on [Twitter@Satjeet](https://twitter.com/Satjeet).

Chooper's Guide is committed to the recovery of individuals who suffer from the disease of alcoholism and drug addiction. We are active in the recovery advocacy movement in the State of Florida and host an addiction treatment and addiction information resource site with over 30,000 treatment provider listings for treatment programs, methadone clinics, suboxone doctors, drug and alcohol counselors and interventionists. Additionally, we post addiction treatment and research articles and national and international addiction related conferences and recovery events. Our Event area, which enjoys over 300 page one rankings in the US with 5 search engines, contains addiction related conferences and events worldwide segmented into eight categories: Addiction and Community Advocacy Events, Addiction Intervention Conferences, Addiction Prevention Conferences, Addiction Recovery Events, Addiction Treatment Conferences, Addiction Webinars, Addiction Workshops and Seminars and Eating Disorder Conferences. If you would like to see a category added or have a comment, please contact us. We are here to serve you.