

Yoga Philosophy, Poses and Aquatic Therapy

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Millions of people have embraced the physical discipline of yoga and the many benefits that it can bring such as calmness, greater flexibility and mental clarity.

The physical practice is known as hatha yoga or the union of body and breath through conscious movement, awareness and self-reflection. My spiritual teacher used to call Kriya Yoga, *"The art of balanced being."*

Kriya could be translated as a conscious, volitional, engaged, spiritual action and can bring an individual to a place of acceptance and responsibility for what has come into our lives and of course for what is yet to come.

Aquatics. The law of the gravitational field is cause and effect, and as aquatic enthusiasts already know its potentially destructive characteristics such as weight bearing, can be minimized in the more viscous water environment whose law is buoyancy. Falling for example in the water happens in slow motion and gives people an opportunity to self-correct and stand up once again without injury, mobilizing and re-educating perhaps weak muscles.



Pain. We all need a place to grieve, heal and gain more balance throughout our lives, and the water hosts a very sympathetic environment to do just that. The instantaneous feedback we get from the water on our skin can mean that students who may have had no previous experience of hatha yoga, can progress in a meaningful and mindful way within the first few private or group sessions. They seem to gain better awareness of their own body.

Two vital components of Kriya Yoga are '**constant practice and continual dispassion**' which are outlined in the yoga text called "*The Yoga Sutras*" of Patanjali. They are thought to have been around since 200 B.C. The endless cycle of birth and death brings about the only thing any of us can be sure of, and that is **change**. What I love about bringing yoga to the aquatic environment is that in spite of the many twists and turns life presents to us, we have a 'supportive place' to contemplate, rebalance and move on with the rest of our lives. We don't have to focus on the '**why**' we are being challenged in a certain way. Kriyananda used to remind us that at some point the philosopher within us should ask '**how**'. How can I pick myself up, dust myself down and get on with life?

He used to call life a school for the soul. It is not so much about what comes into our life but our ability to respond rather than react. For our clients and students, I think it means that we can try to inspire and encourage them to improve their lives from where they currently are.

The magic formula for adapting yoga poses to our diverse populations is:

$I \times D = F$ (intensity x duration = force), and this meets the varied exercise/rehabilitation needs we encounter.

Yoga. Yoga is not so much a destination but a journey of self-awareness and study that can lift us outside of our 'ordinary mind'. Patanjali recognized that we all have varying abilities to concentrate, but that it is important to cultivate as it helps to remove the perceived problems in our life. The need to develop concentration means that in a class setting, social chit chat is discouraged. It does not mean that we don't engage with one another, but that it is in a mindful way that fosters a sense of acceptance and belonging.

Goswami Kriyayanda was the preceptor of the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago and left his physical body last year. He was very happy about the prospect of diverse and under-served populations being able to begin a mindful practice in the water, and hoped that some of his disciples would take up the practice.

The journey of the mystic or yogi is not just an outward one, but has its foundation focused on inner transformation that requires some control of our mind. It is a valuable practice because throughout the many ups and downs of life, we need a coping mechanism. Not so much for the accident or degeneration that can happen and brings pain to the body, but for how our mind reacts or responds to those circumstances and causes potential suffering. And suffering he reminded us is optional.



Other Health Concerns. The problems in our life according to Patanjali are thought to include:

Disease, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, worldliness, delusion, non-achievement and instability.

Cause and effect (gravity) dictate that along with these problems are physiological problems such as pain, depression, nervousness and erratic breathing. Sound familiar?

Hatha yoga is not a 'one size fits all' philosophy at all, and the problem in our 'collective mind' is the notion that being able to stick your right toe in your left ear whilst chanting OM equals mastery of yoga, but is a misunderstanding. Mystically we are all perfect, whole and complete but have just forgotten our true nature. Life's journey through our experiences is an opportunity to see how balanced we are...or not. Our hatha yoga practice gives us all an opportunity as a barometer to see how we are doing. It does not mean we have to be thin, bendy or young. Sri Gravity is a hard task master!

Take heart, here are the only references to the physical discipline of hatha yoga in the Yoga Sutras:

2:45 Postures should be done with comfort and stability

2:46 Postures can be mastered by practicing the pose calmly and with steady effort while focusing the mind.

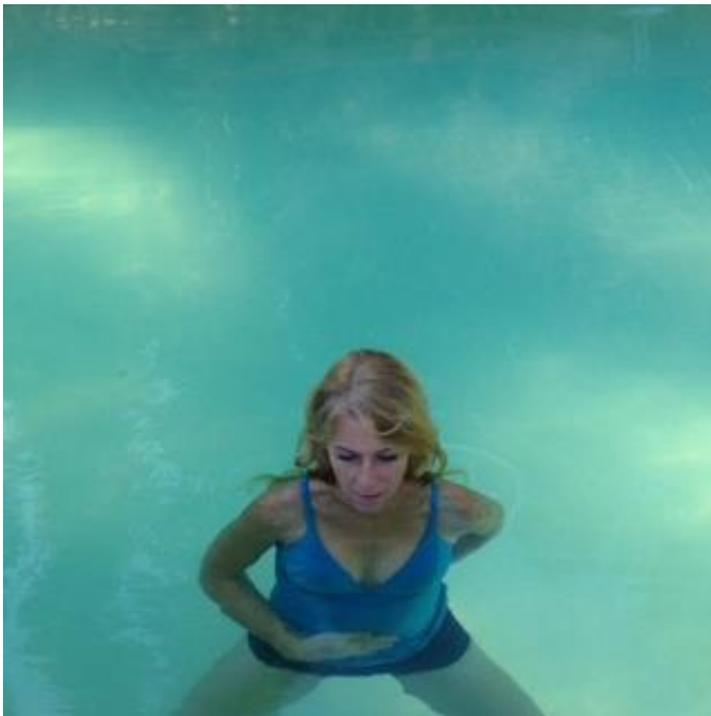
2:47 Having mastered posture and becoming established in it, one is no longer troubled.

2:48 When posture has been mastered, there can be guidance of life currents, (Prana) by mastering the rhythms of inhale and exhale.

In terms of stability in yoga poses, building a strong foundation from the ground up is vital as many of the so called 'poisons of the mind' are associated with an unstable body, and therefore mind.

Fear, greed and anger are associated with the first 3 chakras or energy centers linked subtly to the tail bone, sacrum and navel. (earth, water and fire elements)

Practicing yoga poses is so much more than just an external expression of what is possible. Well-articulated, they become a platform to see where we need to gain greater balance in life. Simple awareness requires the femur bones to be grounded, tail bone to be heavy and navel to move back towards the spine. When this occurs, the pelvic area or center of gravity is balanced. This is translated through re-educating muscle memory from the water to land.



Navigation of what we are not aware of, or mystically have forgotten requires a 'road map' and the broader aspect of yoga philosophy teaches us to learn more about ourselves. As Kriyananda told us, there is a thin line between the psychotic and the yogi. They are both trying to swim and navigate the unconscious and subconscious mind. The only difference between the two is that one uses self-awareness to navigate through life with skill whilst the other drowns.

Developing self-awareness and discipline in the water through mindful practices such as yoga, empowers people to move ahead, maybe one step at a time but certainly in the right direction. Within the buoyant water environment, upwards.

In the Kriya Dharma

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