

## How to attain balance with yoga

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DO NOT BE SURPRISED IF you were to receive different answers to the question, "What is yoga?" Even with regular practitioners, the answer may be varied, even unrelated. Yoga is a series of postures, yoga is meditating, yoga is levitation, yoga is breathing.

It reminds of the story about how six blind men feeling different parts of an elephant begin to perceive and describe according to whatever body part they are holding. The legs, the elephant is like a tree, the tusk, it is a weapon, and so on. Each description correct but unfortunately incomplete. So is the case of yoga. There are millions of practitioners the world over but the clarity of what yoga is and its ultimate aim is possibly known to a few. I may not be one of these few but I will make an attempt.

Let us first begin with its roots. Ancient yogic text says that at the beginning of civilization, Lord Shiva taught yoga to his wife Parvati. Having a closer look at these scriptures, yoga is defined as the yoking or union of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. Its aim is Moksha, freedom from the cycles of birth and death, where the individual soul merges with the cosmic soul.

The Bhagavad Gita is replete with references to yoga, defines it as (sammatvam yoga uchyate) yoga is equanimity. Lord Krishna then states that (yogah karmasukshalam) skillfulness in action is the means of attaining yoga.

The great sage Patanjali defines it as yoga citta vrittih nirodaha. Yoga is the restraint of fluctuations of the consciousness. Later stating, tapas svadhyaya ishvara pranidhanani kriyayoga, intense zeal, self-study, practice and surrender to God is kriya yoga.

### Many definitions

So even as far back as 2,500 years ago there were many definitions. Without further study, it would be difficult to connect the dots.

On the one hand, the Bhagavad Gita states that yoga is equanimity. What is equanimity if not a balance in thoughts, emotions, acts and deeds? How can one attain equanimity? Like everything in life, skill is needed. Skill however can only be developed through concerted effort. The skill of self-study (svadhyaya), for example. Whether it is the study of your physical, mental, psychological and spiritual self.

On the other hand, Patanjali's "yoga is the restraint in the fluctuations of the consciousness" furthers and enhances the prescribed idea of equanimity. We all know what

unconsciousness is but are we certain we understand consciousness? In Sanskrit, consciousness is made up of three components: mind, intelligence and ego. When there is a state of equanimity between the mind, intelligence and the ego, stability is its fruit. Therefore permitting a union to take place.

Yoga's aim is union. Its objective is equanimity and its means of attaining it is in the Patanjali's eight steps/petals or aspects of yoga. 1) Yama (social disciplines); 2) Niyama (personal disciplines); 3) Asanas (molding of the body into various positions to be able to channel the flow of energy); 4) Pranayama (regulation of prana—life force); 5) Pratyahara (involution of senses of perception); 6) Dharana (concentration); 7) Dhyana (meditation); 8) Samadhi (ultimate state of bliss). These steps do not work independently. Each step supports the next in preparing the soul toward its ultimate aim, Moksha.