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The *TRUE* meaning of
YOGA

By
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Overcome the Myth,
Discover the Truth!

PREFACE

The whole world is talking about Yoga. It is considered to be some mystical, Divine Indian concept that gives instant Peace. People say it is the Union of body, mind, and Soul. But is this what Yoga truly is?

Yoga today is primarily taught as a set of body postures or *asanas*. Some take it a step further and include breathing exercises referred to as *pranayama*. But this is not *true* Yoga! This may be good for our physical well-being and excellent as breathing exercises, but *true* Yoga is something completely different.

Foreigners flock to the Yoga capital of the world – Rishikesh on the foothills of the Himalayas in India to learn Yoga. There are hundreds of Yoga institutes and thousands of Yoga teachers, each teaching Yoga in their own unique way, based on certain ancient principles, but not many know what the *true* meaning of Yoga is.

Yoga is so popular that it has spread its influence globally. There are many Yoga journals, Yoga institutes and several million Americans, Europeans and others around the world who practice Yoga on a regular basis and the numbers are growing. Unfortunately, while they enjoy a good workout of body and mind, they have not discovered the Divine truth about Yoga.

Most people think of Yoga to be a magical exercise that promises good health and well-being through proper control

of the body and breath. In reality, Yoga has very little to do with physical and breathing exercises. In fact, Yoga is all about transcending the body and mind. Unfortunately, we think of Yoga as a Yogic activity that circles around the body and we have become prisoners of the myth called Yoga.

Those who think that Yoga is just about stretching the body will be in for a big surprise when they read this book. It will trigger their mind and help them overcome the misconceptions about Yoga.

Yoga has become a global fashion with manufacturers producing special clothing, unique mats, and yogic music to facilitate the practice of Yoga. The commercialization of Yoga has reached its peak with special Yogic teas and decoctions. The creativity in Yoga merchandise is truly amazing!

All this is perfectly ok and there is certainly no harm in following and practising these body postures. In fact, it is good to perform these physical exercises and breathing practices for our general health and wellbeing as they help strengthen our physical and mental state. However, these twin practices that have become a global fad, in no way represent what Yoga *truly* is.

Yoga, in reality, is a Union with the Divine. There is no doubt that as part of the entire Yogic experience, some saints advocated certain body postures and breathing exercises to be a part of the overall Yoga practice, but most definitely, these by themselves are not Yoga.

True Yoga is a Soulful and Divine Experience and doesn't necessarily need one to do *Asanas* and *Pranayama*. These physical and breathing exercises are not mandatory to experience the benefits of Yoga.

Unfortunately, now that Yoga has become a fashion, people are blind to its *true* meaning. It has become so commercial that many hotels in India advertise Yoga sessions to lure foreign tourists to stay in their hotels. In fact, there are thousands of Yoga retreat centres that have mushroomed all over India and many parts of the world that boast of teaching Yoga and assure guests of a Yogic transformation after their Yoga retreat.

It is not only foreigners who have been carried away by a wrong understanding of Yoga. Most Indians too say that they are doing Yoga when they stretch their body a bit and when they perform asanas or *pranayama*. This breath control along with physical exercises, without the other aspects of Yoga, are ineffective in achieving the true objective of Yoga. It is only the tip of the iceberg.

Those who think Yoga is just asanas and *pranayama* do not realize that an essential and a large part of Yoga is missing and this results in ignorance - the *true* meaning of Yoga remains elusive as it continues to remain unknown to the world. In reality, the true meaning of Yoga is no secret, but because of the mass commercialization of the myth that is called Yoga, the truth about Yoga has lost its importance and significance.

Yoga is the key to unlock the ultimate goal of life - “Liberation”, but to do so, we must understand the *true* meaning of Yoga. We must bust the myth about Yoga that is circulating all around the world and discover the *true* meaning of Yoga.

This book attempts to explain everything about Yoga, its *actual* meaning and significance, how it must be practised and how through Yoga, one can be liberated and experience ultimate Divine Peace and Bliss. Come let us discover the truth about Yoga.

*Yoga is not just moving your hands and legs,
Yoga has a different Goal.
Yoga is realizing we are not body and mind,
Yoga discovers we are the Soul.*

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CHAPTER 1: The Myth called Yoga

Yoga is a global phenomenon. Today, it has crossed the Indian borders and become more popular than *biryani*, *tandoor*, and *chai*. Yoga has entered the homes of the citizens in the east and west. People all over the world are doing Yoga every day and its followers are growing with each passing year. Some records suggest that billions of people around the world are doing Yoga. While there is no exact count of the number, there is no doubt that with the thousands of Yoga studios spread across the United States, the several Yoga institutes in the UK and the countless Yoga centres all over India, Yoga has taken the entire world by storm, crossing all bars of religions, cultures, and nationalities.

A Divine concept like Yoga has now evolved into not just body Yoga and mind Yoga, but also laughter Yoga, silence Yoga, naked Yoga, and Zen Yoga. The names are innumerable and several Gurus and many self-styled Yogis have created their own methodology of Yoga, only to complicate the subject further.

Their belief that Yoga is just about physical postures and breathing exercises is no doubt an absolute myth and our objective is to bust this myth as we realize the truth about Yoga. As we eliminate what Yoga is not, our goal is to discover the *true* meaning of Yoga. By doing so, we will reap the benefits of a Divine Activity, that will unlock the door to our ultimate goal of Life and then show us a way to everlasting peace, joy, and bliss.

Most of Yoga in the world today is about physical exercise, popularly known as *Yogasana*. While these are body postures that were originally designed to create a sitting posture so that one could remain in a state of silent meditation, *Yogasanas* have modernized into something else. Modern Yoga encompasses all kinds of physical exercises which include stretching of the body, reclining, standing, squatting, inverting and twisting the body. While these physical exercises may help improve flexibility and wellbeing, they have nothing to do with *true* Yoga. The most exotic *Yoga asanas* today seem to be *Tadasana*, or mountain pose, *Vrikshasana* or tree pose, *Adhomukhoswanasana* or downward facing dog pose, *Trikonasana* or triangle pose, *Kursiasana* or chair pose, *Naukasana* or boat pose and *Bhujangasana* or cobra pose. These unique postures are the brainchild of man, who started with simple postures like *Sukhasana*, a comfortable cross-legged position, *Vajrasana* or sitting on the heels, *Padmasana* or lotus position and ultimately, *Shavasana* or the corpse pose where one ends a Yoga session lying down, face upwards with body and mind focussing on nothing. Yoga has promised the world not just peace of mind, but the wellbeing of the physical and mental faculties that ultimately lead to the union of body, mind, and Soul. How these physical postures will take us to such a union, remains a mystery!

Another myth about Yoga is that one has to be flexible when in reality *true* Yoga has nothing to do with the physical self. No doubt a sick body cannot be in Yoga, but this myth that having a flexible body is a must to do yoga is an illusion. It confuses people about Yoga's *true* goal of Enlightenment. Instead of using the body and its physical presence as basic

preparation for the advanced spiritual activity called Yoga, most of the world is just going around in circles and reaching nowhere. A *true* Yogi must be physically fit because a sick body cannot achieve the true objective of Yoga. To that extent, certain physical postures may be relevant for practicing Yoga, but they will not form the essentials of Yoga.

Those who go beyond physical exercises have made Yoga a set of breathing techniques, popularly known as *Pranayama*. *Pranayama* is all about controlling the breath. *Pranayama* advocates that the purpose of Yoga is to regulate *prana* or the vital life energy which is our very source and if we can control it, we will be blessed with peace and tranquillity. There is no doubt that breath control is important for our mental wellness and helps us achieve a state of momentary peace, but this by itself is not Yoga.

Today's Yoga, promises the sky as followers perform *Asanas*, *Pranayama* and evolve further into several Yogic practices like *Bhramari*, *Anulom-Vilom*, and *Bhastrika Pranayama*. By themselves, these unique breathing exercises might have their own benefits, but they cannot take one into a state of Yoga.

A very famous form of Yoga known as *Kundalini* Yoga, a school of Yoga influenced by Tantra focuses on awakening the *Kundalini* energy which rests like a coiled serpent at the base of the spine. *Kundalini* Yoga causes this energy to flow upward through our 7 *chakras* or energy centers that leads us to a state of spiritual consciousness, often referred to as the *Kundalini* awakening. While the practice of *Kundalini* exercise may very well have some physical benefits of

concentrated energy rising upwards, towards the heart and the brain, it still doesn't qualify to be Yoga. Many people use *Kundalini* energy for other purposes but fail to achieve the real objective of Yoga.

Originally, Yoga used breath-control as a method to control the mind, just as it used right postures to tame the senses. These two aspects of basic Yoga activities have evolved to become Yoga in the world today which in reality they are not.

Yoga today is nothing more than gymming with traditional ideologies concocted into spiritual exercises of body and mind. Today's Yoga, using the promise of eternal bliss and peace, offers its followers good physical wellbeing and momentary peace, but in the bargain, masks the real meaning and benefit of Yoga which in reality is far more enriching and in fact, the ultimate goal of life.

This concocted Yoga and its modernization, that makes it both attractive and convenient to the world, has created a huge market. Starting with Yoga mats, a prescribed essential to do *Asanas*, it has grown into Yoga attire and enchanting music that can probably put one to sleep. As such, there is nothing wrong with these products, but they, in no way, help us achieve Yoga. In fact, they confuse us and we tend to say we are doing Yoga when in reality we are just doing some physical gymnastics.

Isn't it a shame that people say they are doing Yoga for weight loss? There is absolutely nothing wrong in doing physical exercises to lose the calories we have gained, but

calling this Yoga is a pity. Yoga is a Divine activity and only a few are blessed or graced to develop the art. This wrong definition of Yoga attracts people and unfortunately does not stop millions and billions around the world from misinterpreting the meaning of Yoga.

In fact, it has become a fashion to say, “I am doing Yoga.” People talk of Yoga like it is cooking or gardening. Yoga is not a mundane subject. Just stretching hands and feet doesn’t constitute Yoga. Some people have become experts in quoting yogic terms like *Suryanamaskar*, salutation to the Divine Sun and think they have mastered the art of Yoga when in reality, they know nothing about it.

Yoga teachers who teach in several Yoga centres and institutes publish various Yoga journals. But is all this Yoga? While it has become Yoga in the context of today's understanding of the world, it is quite different from real Yoga. These two aspects of Yoga, the body postures and breath control, find their place in the ancient *Patanjali* Yoga known as the *Ashtangi* or the 8 limbs of Yoga. These are amongst the 2 preliminary activities of the above Yoga. Along with certain restraints and observances, these are supposed to help us control or withdraw our senses, take charge of our mind and then reach the ultimate goal of Yoga, popularly known as *Samadhi*. Unfortunately, we misunderstand Yoga and let it be considered as something very mediocre.

The myth of Yoga is so deeply embedded in the corporate world that several companies now have Yoga workshops to bring mindfulness in employees through a wellness

programme. Yoga is used for stress control and to improve performance. However, just outside the workshop venue, soon thereafter, people are aggressively manipulating strategies to be successful in the business world. They then re-enter a Yoga workshop to purify the body and mind. They enjoy a moment of stillness and then jump back into the rat race of the world. This quick-fix method is not Yoga. It may be a good wellness programme but should be titled differently. It is unfortunate that we undermine the term Yoga and think of it to be some magical, stress-relieving strategy.

Unfortunately, the champions of today's Yoga have not only left Yoga to remain a myth but also misled the world, by allowing this Divine activity to be misunderstood as harmful. People perform crazy postures, exert their body to such an extent that Yoga is now considered dangerous and one that may cause injury. It is not uncommon to find injured knees, pulled hamstrings and dislocated joints due to Yoga. True Yogis find this to be strange that a Divine activity like Yoga has been so mythicized that it has completely lost its meaning and instead of it being a solution for stress and anxiety, it has become a cause of distress.

When will we end this mythical story of Yoga? When will we realize the true meaning of this Divine activity? When will we stop using the Divine term Yoga and understand its deep spiritual significance? There is no doubt that Yoga is one of the most profound activities in the world today. Not just 2 billion people as it is reported, but rather all 8 billion people in the world should learn the art of Yoga, not Yoga as it is understood today, but the true form of Yoga. Yoga is the

ultimate goal of humanity. It is the way, not just to momentary peace but everlasting bliss and tranquillity. Come let us discover the *true* meaning of Yoga.

*Stretching hands and legs is not Yoga,
Breathing exercises too are just a myth.
When will we overcome our ignorance,
And all the myth that go with it?*

SUMMARY CHAPTER 1 : The Myth called Yoga

CHAPTER 2: What is the *True* meaning of Yoga

The word Yoga comes from the word *Yuj* which literally means Union. The actual meaning of Yoga is the Union of a human being with the Divine. It implies the unification of our Soul with the Divine Cosmic Universal Soul. Yoga is all about being ever-connected with the Divine. It is a rare state which carries with it the gift of eternal joy and everlasting peace.

Have you noticed how a SIM card is always connected with the network? Wherever we go, our mobile phone is connected to the satellite. This is a simple example of a good union. Yoga calls for us to be ever-connected with the Divine, but does this happen? Unfortunately, we are so connected with the illusionary earthly sentiments that our heavenly connection is disrupted. Yoga is both an art and science of being ever-united with the Divine. This is easier said than done and we must work hard to acquire the state of being a *true* Yogi, one who lives in Yoga, ever-united with the Cosmic Consciousness.

Yoga is being in union with the Divine. It is being connected to our source. Any human being can be in Yoga. All they have to do is to disconnect from the world and connect to the Creator. This is not very easy to do. Therefore, Yoga is considered to be a challenging practice. Yoga, for the *true* lover of God, is all about living with devotion and prayer, being connected with the Divine. Yoga for some may be seeing God in the poor and the downtrodden. For some, it may be seeing God in animals and being compassionate,

loving, and kind. Still, others do Yoga through meditation and contemplation. Whatever be the method of Yoga, as long as it builds a connection, and unites us with the Divine, it is Yoga.

Normally, we human beings live in *Bhoga*, instead of Yoga. Instead of being united with the Divine, we are slaves of our own cravings that seek to indulge in sensory pleasures, *Bhoga*. Yoga is transcending the pleasure of body and mind, as it involves living with a strong connection with the Divine, thus experiencing Divine ecstasy and Bliss.

Yoga is a connection between an individual Soul and the Universal Soul. It is Union of the energy within us with the Cosmic Energy. It comprises several actions that ultimately help us to be liberated from the body-mind complex and to become one with the Divine.

It is unfortunate that people have confused Yoga with *Asana* and *Pranayama*. These are just two tiny fragments of the overall Yogic practice but they dominate the understanding of the term Yoga. For a seeker on a spiritual journey, what is the *true* meaning of Yoga? We human beings are so engrossed in the material world that we are lost in this race to become an ace, in a chase for material possessions. It is sad that we get caught in the maze and we suffer. Yoga is all about slowing down our pace and living with grace. What does this mean?

Every human being wants to be happy. For this, people chase success and achievement. Although they are successful, they are not content. Their desires make them miserable. Then they go to God to solve their problems. Sometimes prayer works

and sometimes it doesn't. A *true* Yogi's life, however, is very different. A Yogi, one who is always in a state of Yoga, is a person of Realization. He realizes that we are not the body and mind but rather the Divine Soul. The Yogi lives with this Realization in Yoga or in Divine union with the Cosmic Consciousness. Far more than any physical and any mental discipline, the Yogi spends his life in several spiritual practices that help him remain in Yoga or in Divine union.

How does one become a *true* Yogi? When our individual consciousness unites with the Universal consciousness, that is called *being* in a state of Yoga. This starts with a quest of realizing the truth of who we truly are and why we are here. Once we achieve this state of self-Realization, transcending body-mind-ego, then we are qualified to remain in Yoga or in Divine Union. As long we don't realize the Truth, that we are not this ego, mind, and body, it is very difficult to be in Yoga. To achieve this state one has to realize the Truth and be liberated from the prison of the body-mind complex.

Very few people, probably less than 1% of the world's population, understand the *true* meaning of Yoga. They are the ones who pay more attention to uniting with the Divine than on *Asanas* or *Pranayama*, just physical exercises and breathing techniques. They realize that *true* Yoga is more about spiritual practice than about physical and mental wellbeing.

Why is it that the world gives so much importance to physical postures and breath control? This is because human beings believe that we are the body-mind complex. We also believe

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