

10 Minute Presentation on The Benefits of Hatha Yoga for Blue Zones 2/11/16 *Maya Parish Yoga*

Yoga has evolved in the west as a non-denominational, or perhaps better said, a multi-denominational practice. While yoga originated in India and has long and strong ties to Hinduism, and Buddhism, yoga is now practiced and embraced by practitioners of every world religion, and by agnostics and atheists as well. You do not have to subscribe to any particular series of beliefs in order to enjoy the life changing benefits that yoga has to offer.

Let's first dive into some background on the meaning of the word yoga and the different paths of yoga, in order to provide context for a discussion of its benefits.

• Definition of Yoga

- Sanskrit language - Two potential roots
 1. Yujir yoga - to unite, to bind, to yoke. This can be understood and experienced as union for the individual practitioner - the union of Body, Mind, Spirit all in one place and also as Union for the collective - or a Non-dual experience of self, fellows, and world. Here, the perspective we often hold of "us and them" or "this and that" falls away and we open to the knowledge that the multiplicity we perceive all around us is and comes out of a singularity. Or, more simply put, that we are all one.
 2. Yuj samadhau (to concentrate) - yoga incorporates many meditative practices, and these deep concentration practices can open you up to an experience known as samadhi, which translates to absorption in oneness, one-pointedness of mind, fully aware of the present moment.

Hatha yoga is what most of us in the west know as yoga, but there are several different paths of Yoga. They all lead to unity, to that absorption in oneness, known as Samadhi.

- **Bhakti Yoga** - Yoga of love and devotion
- **Jnana Yoga** - Yoga of knowledge.
- **Karma Yoga** - Yoga of service or action.
- **Hatha Yoga** Physical Practice of yoga. (Sanskrit translation = "force" and also as "sun - "ha" and moon, "tha")
 - By devoting your awareness to your breath, and to the sensations in the body as you hold and flow through a series of asana (postures, or poses - Sanskrit translation = seat), practitioners experience unity.

I teach Hatha Yoga, and there are a number of different styles of Hatha Yoga to suit any body type, any age, and any level of flexibility and strength that a practitioner may have. Some styles of Hatha Yoga include Vinyasa Flow (an athletic practice of flowing through sequences with the breath), Gentle Yoga (soft and easy aimed at gently opening, stretching, and strengthening the body), Restorative Yoga (long holds of deeply restorative postures, usually supported by many props - blankets, bolsters, blocks, straps), and Yin yoga (long holds of deep poses with the muscles relaxed that allow the tendons and ligaments to stretch.)

Benefits:

Hatha Yoga has many benefits for the physical body - some of the major ones include:

- Increased flexibility - improved flexibility eases and prevents aches and pains, reduces stiffness, allows us to enjoy life to the fullest with our fullest range of motion.
- Stronger muscles - strong muscles can help prevent arthritis and other aches and pains, giving us the freedom to do what we want to do
- Protects joints, cartilage, and spine - the forward bending, back bending, and twisting postures in yoga scrunch our joints and cartilage around, which is important for them to be soaked by

blood and good nutrients to stay healthy. The spinal discs between our vertebrae, which can bulge or herniate and cause significant pain by blocking nerve pathways, need nutrients to stay healthy. The way they get nutrients is by squishing around through movement.

- Promotes bone density - prevents osteoporosis, sprains, and breaks

Hatha Yoga also benefits the various systems in the body:

- Nervous system - Sympathetic and Parasympathetic responses
- Fight or flight - when a tiger's chasing you, a threat is perceived, and there is a physiological response in which our other systems shut down somewhat in order for us to be able to fight the perceived threat.
- Tunnel Vision
- Sweating
- Heart Pounding
- Nausea and/or diarrhea
- Trembling
- Difficulty breathing
- - Hatha Yoga promotes the parasympathetic response - rest and digest
- Lymphatic - lymph system is a fluid system in our body, that fluid is connected with our immune system - movement allows lymph system to flush and flow, building immunity and fighting infection
- Circulatory - movement gets blood flowing to all parts of the body increasing overall function, and can raise heart rate, increasing heart and lung function
- Digestive - Yoga regulates adrenal glands, reducing levels of cortisol (the stress hormone). Our digestive system works better when nervous system is in rest and digest and when our cortisol levels are lower

Hatha Yoga Benefits our mental and emotional function:

- There have been a number of different studies on the effects of meditation on the brain (yoga is a form of meditation through movement, and also has seated meditative components) that show larger left pre-frontal cortexes and new neural networks and pathways forming in the brains of meditators vs. non-meditators. Larger left prefrontal cortexes and increased neural pathways have been correlated with increased resilience, mental flexibility, and happiness.
- Mindfulness as a pathway out of our habitual mental patterns - old tapes playing over and over in our minds - as we learn to develop the witness observer within ourselves
- Slowing down and watching our thoughts, so that we can learn to respond rather than react.
- Clearing emotional traumas that may have lodged in the physical body. Working with the energy body - Chakras.

Hatha Yoga benefits us by allowing us to find community and fellowship.

- Sangha - "A group of people coming together to explore the highest truth". One of the biggest causes of the high level of dis-ease in our culture is loneliness. Practicing yoga offers us chance to find a community of likeminded fellows, which can do much to increase the quality of our lives.

Hatha Yoga offers us the opportunity to stretch and strengthen our bodies as we cultivate our capacity for conscious awareness. Through focusing our attention on the breath and on the sensations in the body as we practice yogic asana and meditation we increase our ability to be present. As our awareness and presence grow our lives can unfold and shift in ways we might never have imagined possible.

The benefits of Hatha Yoga can begin with just one conscious breath and any kind of conscious movement. Let's flow and breathe together for 1 minute to close, so we can get started right here and right now.

Closing breath awareness and gentle movement exercise.