

Yoga For The Non-Spiritual

For a lot of people the first image that will pop into their head when they think of Yoga is a little old man in a loincloth sitting on top of a stone pillar with his legs crossed and his arms on his knees. He's probably chanting, humming or got a look of relaxation and serenity on his face. I'm not a person who likes to sit still and I hate any minute that I feel is wasted so this idea of sitting around doing nothing all day was not something that appealed to me. I've changed that initial perception quite a lot and in this article I want to tell you about the personal journey that taught me about the benefits of yoga for a very non-spiritual person.

The first yoga class I ever went to I spend a lot of time sitting in silence with a bored expression on my face and thinking, "This is so dumb". I listened to the instructor drone on about inner peace and harmony and balance and energy flowing through my body and I was pretty close to never going back again. Then I got lucky.

One of the guys in the class was a professor at the local university and it struck me as a little strange that a professor of biology would be doing this spiritual Yoga thing. I got an opportunity and speak to him briefly. Actually he singled me out and observed I looked bored. He explained he had felt the same way when he began and then he translated the instructors talk into biology terms and it was all very sound.

That hit me like a ton of bricks. As I thought on it more and more I could see this from a purely scientific point of view. For instance take the 'energy' that flows through our body. A lot of people are turned off when they start to hear talk like that, but it's a very core component of Yoga. I substituted 'blood' for energy and looked at this thought process again.

I know that blood carries nutrients and oxygen around our body. I know that if our cells don't receive these nutrients and supplements they become weak and we can become ill. I know that people can become sick if they have high or low blood pressure. The regular healthy flow of blood is clearly a very important factor in us staying healthy. Of course, Yoga was first used many hundreds of years ago and while it would be arrogant to assume that we know everything about circulation and blood flow, we certainly know more than the average Chinese peasant from that time. "Energy" is just a nice word that anyone can understand for blood flow.

Yoga stretches out certain muscle areas and allows our blood to flow more freely and bring the nutrients to all parts of the body which need them. That

is a nice scientific explanation I am quite happy to accept. You can do the same with the other 'alternative' terminology you don't relate to when you hear the instructor talking about it. Inner peace, oneness, emotional calm - it's all just a very dressed up way of saying concentrate on one thing - your blood flow and the health it is bringing you, or your breathing and the supply of life giving oxygen it brings you. Concentrate on that just for this one small part of the day and make being alive and healthy your only goal. Forget about what's happening at the office because you cannot do it from here. Forget about what your husband or wife is doing or whether the kids are being bullied at school and just concentrate on being you, being alive and being healthy.

Now stress has been attributed as a major factor in over 40% of all medical issues. Stress, in a nutshell is caused by thinking too much. This practice shows us how to let all those worries be something we can think about later and leaves the brain free to concentrate on doing all it's vital health giving functions.

It's strange that as I've done more and more Yoga I have developed a spiritual side that I never had before. It's not a religious thing but more a case of recognizing that my own health and wellbeing are important and worthy of being made a priority. Whether the same happens for you is yet to be seen, but if you've been putting off learning Yoga or giving it a try because of all the spiritual talk I can assure you there are scientific reasons behind it and that if you give it a chance you may just be surprised.

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Word count 788