

Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

Non-Violence

Dear Joan,

In a world where there is currently much violence, how nice to know that yoga teaches non-violence. If my nephews were young I'd recommend that they take yoga classes from a young age. Their lives were filled with violent skirmishes. For one it's too late. He died last year at the age of 33 of a violent act directed toward him. He was shot by someone he knew for reasons that are still unclear. Shot by someone who never learned the lesson of non-violence.

Violence ruins so many lives. It's like a spreading disease for which no one knows the cure. We all think that our lives will never be touched by violence, but odds are increasing that it will happen.

What would happen if by the age of 5 we started teaching non-violence to children. It could be a required subject from kindergarten to high school. In ten years we would need fewer policemen and more teachers to teach non-violence with yoga. It could be the physical education of the nineties.

It is time for a philosophy of non-violence in the United States.

Thanks,
Monrie Neisler

Dear Monrie,

Thank you for your heart-felt letter. My sincere condolences to you and your family for the tragic death of your nephew.

Violence is a part of this world. A time to reflect on which came first... the inner world or the outer world? Yoga teaches us that the ultimate control is within us... even when the world around us seems to be losing control.

The question arises, "How can one possibly find bliss amidst unhappiness and tragedy?" The yogic view would be to rid ourselves of judgements. Through this process compassion develops... and in turn a more loving and less violent world.

In regards to children, yes, it would be wonderful to offer yoga classes for children at young ages.

Thank you for your letter, Monrie. It is always a joy to see you in class and your beautiful, persistent light...



**Namaste,
Joan**

[Home](#) | [Asana For The Week](#) | [Yoga Philosophy](#) | [Yoga Tips](#) | [Simple Vegetarian Recipe Contest](#) | [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) | [About Joan](#)



Yoga and Music

Hello Joan,

I'm a Brazilian musician, 21 years old who thinks the world is the most stressing experience. I've been just introduced to Philosophy (I mean Plato, etc...) and talking to my philosophy teacher at College we came up with yoga. What I'm looking for is to get more and more into my subconscious (sorry if I misspell anything) and use it with my music. Is yoga what I'm looking for for this task?

Thanks in advance for your attention,

Cass Surek
Brazil



Dear Cass,

Yes! Yoga most certainly is a path in the direction you are looking for. I personally know of many musicians who study yoga (some famous like "Sting", and some not famous like "me"). I suggest you try and find a teacher in Brazil to study with. Although books and tapes are wonderful, it is always best to study with the personal attention of a teacher. Hope to meet you one day, Cass, along the musical yoga path!

Namaste,
Joan

What is Meditation?

Dear Joan

"Yoga: meditation through manipulating the body." Close? Way off? Am I dreamin'?

Really my questions pertain more to mediation, I guess. What works for you? What actual effects do you receive? or perceive?

Thanks,

Brett
Illinois

Dear Brett,

How many times have you fallen asleep with your mind racing? Perhaps you had a problem at work and you tossed it back and forth in your mind while trying to go to sleep. Somehow you fell asleep... and the next morning you woke up! Well, you may have worked the problem out in your dreams, or you submerged it, or there it was throbbing in your head when you woke up! The mind is powerful and is a workaholic. Meditation is the ability to truly clear this mind... Oh, and by the way, it is effortless.

Meditation is not visualization. Visualization, like focusing on soft music or a seashore, may help to calm the body, but it is not meditation.

Meditation is not falling into sleep, or relaxing and reflecting on the beautiful parts of life, or focusing on the terrible parts of life. Meditation is clearing the mind.

In the yoga sutras, which is an ancient text written thousands of years ago by an Indian sage named, Patanjali, the purpose of yoga is stated. I will note here Georg Feurstein's translation:

"Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness."

The question arises, "What the heck does this mean?"

Sit for a moment and try your best not to think about pink elephants... Come on, close your eyes and try it...

what you are probably discovering is this is a difficult thing to do! Your mind has a mind of its own!

Through the yoga postures, which help the body to become more flexible and strong, one is able to sit longer for periods of meditation.

What are the effects of meditation?...Wisdom. The ability to make clearer and more appropriate decisions. Meditation is the key to getting past emotions... emotions which base so many of our decisions... and can get us into such deep water.

Does this mean to meditate you have to sit every day for an hour or so like a zombie? Zombies are cool, but you do not have to do this. At the end of every yoga pose is a quiet moment of letting go... back to the breath... when the mind starts acting up, again bringing focus to the breath... For that brief moment when it is not a struggle to focus on the breath and the mind does not wander, judgments are not there... this is a meditative moment (even if it is a millisecond)! As your body becomes freer in the pose you can actually involve meditation within the pose! For many of us, this is a far cry from reality as we struggle to get in to yoga poses and often feel so far off.

Yet, Yoga is not about competition... wherever you are at is exactly where you should be. Each day you will find slight changes... the subtleties of your body and your mind will become more noticeable... and so the key to yoga comes down to one key word...
"AWARENESS"

Finally, in answer to your question of what "meditation" works for me, sometimes my mind quiets while sitting by the seashore, often it quiets while in a yoga pose, sometimes when I am sitting in my favorite chair... and it is starting to wind down now...

I hope this gives some new insights into your question, Brett.

Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

Vegetarianism, A Personal Choice

Dear Joan,

I've struggled with weight my whole life and am now trying hard to overcome. I've been reading about vegetarianism and am considering giving it a try because it seems like a naturally low-fat way of life. But I'm curious, is there a correlation between yoga and vegetarianism? Is vegetarianism an intricate part of yoga or simply a personal choice?

Rose

Glen Ellyn, Illinois



Dear Rose,

Vegetarianism is a personal choice.

Yoga is a personal study. It is non-competitive. For this reason, do not feel pressure to eat a certain way or to stretch into a certain pose if your body is saying "No!"

Vegetarianism is connected to yoga through the basic yoga observance of Non-Violence. As one becomes more aware of the ways and means animals are used as food for our consumption, it becomes very clear that they are subjected to a tremendous amount of violence and torture. As one becomes more and more established in non-violence, one becomes more aware of all sentient creatures and of personal steps that can be taken to make this world a kinder one. One of these steps is Vegetarianism. In turn, this type of diet is also kinder to one's own body. It enables the body to work in a clearer and more efficient way. Sufficient and exemplary proteins, carbohydrates, and all the necessary ingredients for a strong and healthy body can be found in a vegetarian diet.

Many people think they will become weak because they will not get enough protein in a vegetarian diet. If knowledge is gained as to which vegetables are high in protein (Broccoli for one example), it becomes easier to see that protein really is not a problem. Through meat diets, the body is usually flooded with too much protein (and toxins from the meat). Digestion becomes slow and difficult. Our bodies become sluggish. Vegetarian diets may be smaller in meal size with more frequent meals. Perhaps this is a reason why many people claim they feel light after eating a vegetarian meal. They will probably be hungry again sooner than if they had eaten a meat meal. So, a new awareness is developed in listening to one's body and when it is hungry. As sensitivity continues to increase, it becomes clearer and clearer what is necessary for the ultimate functioning of the body and what is not.

Regarding weight loss, many people turn to vegetarianism for this reason. However, sugar often becomes a main part of the diet. So, although some pounds may be shed, one's body

may become unhealthy in the process. So, my suggestion to you, Rose, would be to continue trying to eat whatever you consider to be healthy for you. And if this means eating meat, then so be it.. continuing to increase awareness for the life that was given to nourish you. And, very importantly, to continue the study of yoga and the yoga postures. As you continue, you will begin to see changes in your body... some subtle... and some profound. Through practicing loving patience (a form of non-violence to oneself) you will soon find yourself at exactly the right weight... and eating exactly the way that is right for you.

Do keep me posted, Rose. I am with you in spirit!

Namaste,
Joan

[Home](#) | [Asana For The Week](#) | [Yoga Philosophy](#) | [Yoga Tips](#) | [Ask Joan](#) | [Simple Vegetarian Recipe Contest](#) | [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) | [About Joan](#)



How does a mantra work?

Dear Joan,

I am a student at Northern Arizona University. I am currently enrolled in a Hinduism class and I have a question. We have been studying yoga this past week and I now have to write a paper on one aspect of this practice. I have chosen the mantra, "OM." My question is that I really have no idea about what this actually does to the mind while performing yoga. I have tried repeating the word several times while I was attempting to meditate, but nothing happened. I don't have any formal training on this practice nor do I really know if I'm doing it right. Can you please help me to understand the significance of this chant and possibly give some enlightenment on the mantra "OM" from your experiences?

☐

Thank You,
Nora R. Switzer



Dear Nora,

Mantras are words that help to clear and uplift the mind. The significance of using Sanskrit (an ancient sacred language that is used in yoga) mantras, like "OM", is that the particular combination of syllables are said to awaken reflexology points in the mouth which in turn energize the body to higher states of consciousness. The sound also rings true to the ears. Have you ever noticed how similar chanting the word "OM" is to singing a slow "AHMEN"? The word "Ahmen" is used in many Christian hymns.

And have you ever listened to crickets singing at night? Their voices start out separate and soon they come together into one magnificent chorus! And so goes the word "OM". The basic understanding is that the world is on a certain encompassing and positive vibrational pattern. By chanting the word "OM" we attune to this vibration... ascending to a state of oneness with the universe... developing a cosmic consciousness.

I hope this response will help with your term paper, Nora. I would really enjoy reading it! My best wishes to you for an A+ in your course!

Namaste,
Joan



Dreams and Yoga

Dear Joan,

I'm very curious as to whether dreams relate to yoga philosophy at all?

□□

Rose Sperrazza
Wheaton, Illinois



Dear Rose,

It is very important to try and understand our dreams and to understand that we ultimately can guide our dreams, as well as our body and minds. You might ask "Why would I want to guide and/or stifle my creative and passionate dreams?" Since dreams are subconscious, the decisions we make in our dreams reflect into our life. Yoga helps to increase awareness to ALL of life, and that would include our dream world. For our dream world is a world that we create (just like the rest of the world is too!) By guiding our dreams into courageous choices, so too will our physical life involve more courageous and inspiring endeavors.

For instance, if in your dream you are in an elevator that is going down, you can change it to go up! It may be hard to realize that we have this power in our dreams, but we truly do. We CAN create the world we want in our dreams. Let me give you another example: Suppose an angry rhinoceros is running after you in a dream, you can:

- 1) change that rhinoceros into a loving dove
- 2) run for your life
- 3) stop and face the rhinoceros and see what happens (this is after all a dream)

And you have many more choices than that! Try this in your next dream. And remember to be patient and kind with yourself in the process. This is not necessarily easy.

Now, some of us do not think we dream at all. Some of us are simply not AWARE of our dreams. Dreams are there. The more you continue with your yoga practice and the more your awarenesses develop, the richer your dream life will become. The richer your dream life becomes, the richer your life will become. If your life is rich without remembering your dreams... wow! It could even be richer!!!

Thank you for your wonderful question, Rose.

Namaste,
Joan

College Students and Yoga

Hello Joan!

I am a journalism student at the University of Florida and have participated in yoga classes before. I really enjoyed them. I am writing a story on yoga that is due by Nov. 4, and I was wondering if you could fill me in on why yoga is important for college students to practice and why it would be beneficial to them.

Thank you,
Elizabeth McCormick

Dear Elizabeth,

Since my classes consist of a majority of college students, I can tell you some of the reasons I find yoga to be beneficial for college students.

College brings with it an assortment of new and different experiences. Along with the new classes come new stresses. College courses are more demanding than high school classes. Scheduling time for homework can be more stressful since many people in college also work full-time or part-time jobs. Many new people come into one's life in college. Often these new people and friends come from an entirely different social upbringing, different cities, different cultures, even different countries.

Yoga involves a system of techniques that help to balance and calm the body and mind. The more stresses that come into a person's life, the more beneficial a practice of yoga can be. While yoga helps to reduce stress, it also strengthens the physical body and the immune system. It is an excellent all-around workout. Not only does Yoga work at relaxing and strengthening the body, it also helps to clear and focus the mind. This enables college students to be able to study better. Yoga is non-competitive. In an atmosphere of competition, as school can often be - where the best grades get the best scholarships, it is comforting to know that Yoga is an internal process that YOU and nobody else is in control of. Yoga is not about touching your toes. Yoga is about the process of opening and expanding... it is the journey towards your toes... what is happening along the way. Yoga is not about results, it is about processes. College students often need a way to study that reduces stress, permitting the mind to really focus on the material being studied. Yoga can be taken with you into exam taking situations, permitting your mind to work at its best.

I hope you find this response helpful to your story, Elizabeth. I will look forward to seeing you in yoga class one day soon!

**Namaste,
Joan**

[Home](#) | [Asana For The Week](#) | [Yoga Philosophy](#) | [Yoga Tips](#) | [Ask Joan](#) | [Simple Vegetarian Recipe Contest](#) | [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) | [About Joan](#)

Yoyoga



Can yoga help in weight loss?

Dear Joan,

The website is informative and pleasant to read! Thanks for putting it out there.

Here is my question: I do yoga because I like it - it is enjoyable. Well, now I am trying to lose an extra 40-50 lbs. by eating less and walking more. I was wondering if the yoga could enhance or provide support to this kind of weight loss program? Are there any specific books I could refer to? Asanas to do? Meditations?

Dianna Lord
Glendale Heights, Illinois



Dear Dianna,

Weight loss can be difficult to achieve, especially when we want it very badly. I myself once had a weight problem in the early 1980's. I ate compulsively and was in a "Yo-Yo" type pattern of binging and dieting. I resented what I saw as the constant bombardment of society and the media to look a certain way. The harder I tried to loose weight, the more erratic my eating behavior became. During this time, I read a fascinating book called "Fat is a Feminist Issue." by Susie Orbach. It revolutionized my thinking in how I regarded my body. I started to wear looser clothes and to rejoice in the freedom of movement. I began to look at my eating behavior in new ways too. I slowly started detaching, and began to watch my own binging behavior with love. Actions that at one time inspired self-hatred, began to inspire within in me true compassion.

I also increased my yoga studies. I studied the postures/asanas with yoga teachers who did not pressure me to "achieve" an end result. I started to open up to subtle changes in my body. I began to love my body and all of its nuances. I looked forward to my yoga classes with joy and wonderment. Soon I was doing yoga asanas at home when nobody else was around. I relished this quiet time of inner reflection.

I find myself today at a comfortable weight. The binging patterns of many years ago have long since gone. The patterns did not change overnight. It was a process, and a continual adjustment in behavior and thinking. The yogic path of Ahimsa (Non-Violence) played an important part of my self-acceptance (and continues to!).

I hope my sharing with you a part of my story will help you in a part of your story,
Dianna. Om - all is one.

Namaste,

Joan

P.S. And walking is great exercise, Dianna... so keep up the good walk!

Is there a right way to do meditation?

Dear Joan:

Hello, my name is Kihara. I'm having a hard time in meditation. I can't seem to do it right. Is there something I'm doing wrong? Can you please write me back and give me tips on how to do the meditation right???

Love,
Kihara ChaniQue Peebles
Colorado

Dear Kihara,

Perhaps you are trying too hard? The many vast claims of all the benefits from meditation can certainly increase one's desire to achieve "meditation." Yoga is the process of ridding oneself of attachments and desires. The harder one tries to go into "meditation," the more illusive it can become. Meditation is really effortless!

I would highly suggest, Kihara, that you begin to increase your Hatha Yoga practice (for an introductory pose see "Lightening Bolt Pose" in the "Asana of the Week" section) Through the steady and disciplined practice of the asanas, your body will continue to become more flexible and strong. This will allow your body to remain still for longer periods of time. Through the focused practice of the asanas and pranayama (breathwork), your mind will soon become quieter and you will find meditation coming to you effortlessly. Study with a Hatha Yoga teacher who inspires within you an inner reflection.

Do keep me posted on how your studies are continuing, Kihara.

**Namaste,
Joan**

[Home](#) | [Asana For The Week](#) | [Yoga Philosophy](#) | [Yoga Tips](#) | [Ask Joan](#) | [Simple Vegetarian Recipe Contest](#) | [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) | [About Joan](#) **S**

Yoyoga will be updated on the 1st and 15th of every month.



What is self-awareness?

Dear Joan,

Hi! My name is Shani and I'm an RN in graduate school. I'm writing a paper and I need several definitions of self-awareness. I'm hoping that you will share yours with me.

Thanks,
Shani Howard
Atlanta, Georgia



Dear Shani,

Thank you for asking for my definition of self-awareness. That is quite a personal question, and so I will try to answer it in kind.

Self-awareness to me is:

- Finding out the alignment of my large toe is responsible for a headache.
- Pausing before my emotions take over my actions.
- Breathing deeply and slowly.
- The sunset and the sunrise.
- Finding the sun-salutation is reflective of the ebb and flow of life.
- Seeing the clear steadiness in one's eyes as only the skin around them changes.
- Finding inner peace.

Namaste,
Joan

[Home](#) | [Asana For The Week](#) | [Yoga Philosophy](#) | [Yoga Tips](#) | [Ask Joan](#) | [Simple Vegetarian Recipe Contest](#) | [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) | [About Joan](#)

Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

Can yoga help with physical problems?

Dear Joan,

I have been living with a chronic urinary tract infection for the past two years. I have seen a few different doctors and they continue to treat me with antibiotics. Last week I found out that some of them are very toxic and are not helping me at all. So, after one month on them, I am off them and still in discomfort. I'm only 28 and they want me to go thru some tests. Are there any poses that could help me? It's embarrassing for me and sometimes it can take a toll on my marriage. The doctors don't seem to care! I'd like to think I could possibly heal myself after going to yoga classes. Have you ever heard of anything? Thank you!

Anonymous
Glen Ellyn, Illinois



Dear Anonymous,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, I have heard of helpful benefits of yoga practice regarding the kidneys. The standing postures are the ones to focus on. Check the asana of the week where I have a helpful pose for you... Downward Facing Dog Pose. In the book "Light On Yoga", by B.K.S. Iyengar, numerous poses are listed to benefit the kidneys. Triangle and Upward Facing Dog are also two beneficial poses. The important thing is to not put too much stress on the kidneys at this point. Lay low on backward bends and on inverted postures. And, in the relaxation pose of Savasana, send your kidneys loving, relaxing thoughts.

Yoga is about more than poses though, and so are your kidneys. Meat-eating puts an incredible strain on the kidneys. I would highly recommend considering a vegetarian diet or reducing the amount of meat you eat. Increase your water consumption and, in addition, try some unsweetened cranberry juice. Increase your deep breathing exercises. Increase the fruits and vegetables. At any time throughout the day, send your kidneys loving, relaxing thoughts.

These are some yogic suggestions. I am certainly not a doctor. I have gathered this information through readings I have done. I hope you will find my suggestions helpful, and that you will be feeling better very soon. Do keep me posted on how you are doing...

Namaste,
Joan