

THE MEANING OF YOGA

Yoga originated in India perhaps as far back as 3,500 years ago or more. According to its original and traditional meaning, yoga was not meant to merely be performed on a mat once or twice a week. In fact, we find among what are known to be the most authoritative texts on yoga—the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita—very little mention of yoga postures.

In the Yoga Sutras, for instance, which many prominent schools of yoga today consider to be the ‘heart of yoga,’ yoga is defined as a ‘way of connecting’ one’s individual consciousness with universal consciousness. Such connection, claims the yoga tradition, ultimately constitutes the ‘way of liberation’ from all forms of human suffering, be it personal or collective.

When understood and practised in accordance with its original and holistic meaning and intent, yoga may be the way of realizing and actualizing our true human potential.

The word ‘yoga’ comes from the Sanskrit root *yūg* which means ‘link,’ ‘connect’ or ‘join.’ What yoga seeks to link, connect or join is what we *perceive*—through our senses and dualistic thought—to be fragmented and separate. Most significantly, what we perceive to be separate and fragmented is our very own self.

Through our senses, we perceive the world as being made of innumerable *separate* things, and ourselves to be separate from each other and from the world. According to the yoga tradition, this is but an illusion created in our minds, and is due to the way our senses are *biologically* configured.

In actual reality, prior to perception, nothing in the universe is separate from anything else. Only our senses make it seem that way. Many in the fields of ecology, biology, quantum physics, and other sciences, are now becoming well aware of this, and are able to appreciate the wisdom of the rishis and other ancient seers of our past who correctly intuited that the universe is one.

According to the yoga tradition, the root cause of most human suffering is our uninvestigated belief that our *perception* of things is equivalent to their actual reality. In other words, our anguish, our stress, our unhappiness, be it personal or global, is fundamentally due to our ignorance concerning the nature of our perception and who we truly are.

Through yoga—through linking, connecting, joining the fragments of our perceptual reality—we may in effect *radically* understand and realize the oneness of our being and the universe.

That is not to say that we lose touch with our individuality or stop functioning normally in our every day living and work. It simply means that, being free from the illusion of our separateness, we are now able to see things just as they are. We are able to respond (instead of compulsively reacting) to the only demand that life has upon us which is to live up to our true and full human potential.

