

## THE BLOG

# What's the Point of Yoga?

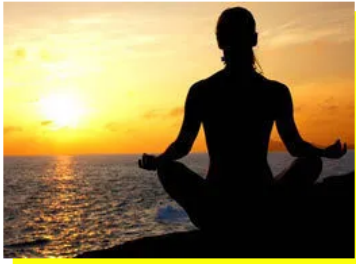
*When I say, "who you are," I do not mean your name, address, body type, favorite music, or even the type of car you drive.*

**By Olivia Rosewood, Contributor**

Author, Tai Chi Gold Medalist, Meditation Guide, Wellness Expert

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In the context of ancient yoga philosophy, realizing who you are is the ultimate goal of all yoga practices, which include not only physical postures, but also meditation, chanting, and contemplation practices. For example, in true yoga, in which the aims are happiness and truth (as opposed to the false yoga aiming toward pretense, uptight snarls, or miserable loneliness), even the reading of this blog is considered a yogic practice (yes, you are doing yoga *right now!*), because you are contemplating something other than the fulfillment of your worldly desires or your suffering: you are setting your mind on the course of exploring the realization of who you are in the context of yoga. When I say, "who you are," I do not mean your name, address, body type, favorite music, or even the type of car you drive.

To the yogi, who you truly are is pure energy, bliss, and love. The realization of this reality, or in other words, the experience of it, is considered self-realization, or enlightenment. Enlightenment can be a passing experience, or if you're extremely fortunate, it can be permanent. Yogananda Paramahansa described enlightenment eloquently this way: "I am no longer the wave of consciousness thinking itself separated from the sea of cosmic consciousness. I am the ocean of spirit that has become the wave of human life." To the enlightened yogis who have been respectfully documented in India for thousands of years, the world is perceived as one big throbbing awareness of bliss, whether in a temple or in the midst

of a battle-- to the enlightened, the experience is the same.

Naturally, you might wonder how to achieve this state of existence. Every person on this planet is capable of attaining the experience of enlightenment. Even though it may require effort on your part, it can be easy. It's even happened effortlessly in some instances. For enlightenment to happen in you, you need these two intentions: you must be ready to give up pain, violence, and stress, and you must want freedom (enlightenment) more than anything else.

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The great yogini saint, Anandamayi Ma said it this way, "Man must be ever intent on discovering the mahayoga that will reveal his eternal union with the divine." The world is well versed in distractions, especially now when the media is pervasive and seemingly ever-present, encouraging endless wanting and purchasing, requiring endless working and stress. Imagine that you've caught on fire. The need to put out the fire is urgent, pressing, a priority. If your hair is ablaze with flames and you're on your way to a fountain full of water, about to jump in, but a friend asks you to lunch or to go shopping or to see a concert, you would first put out the fire in the fountain, right? You wouldn't walk to the cafe all ablaze and in pain, would you? And this is the type of urgency and priority required for the pursuit of enlightenment. The Mahayana beautifully illuminates this principle: "If we are not hampered by our confused subjectivity, life is an act of Nirvana itself." Leaving only the question, what is enlightenment? And who are you?

The pose of the week: Vrksasana (tree pose)

This is a pose of balance. In balance poses, it is most important to set your intention and allow the rest to fall into place. Or allow yourself to fall -- this is part of learning and only requires a shred of hope to get back up. Stand with your feet together, your hands by your side. Begin by lifting your right foot and placing it on the inside of your left inner thigh. You can place it there with your hands if you need to. Bring your palms together in front of your heart. When you feel you are balanced, you can lift your palms skyward like the branches of a tree. As with all balance poses, it helps to use visualizations in maintaining balance. For example.

imagine that you have roots extending from the sole of your standing foot anchoring you into the earth. Imagine that you have branches reaching for nourishment from the sun. Hold the pose for between 30 seconds and 2 minutes, and then repeat on the other side.

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**Olivia Rosewood, Contributor**

Author, Tai Chi Gold Medalist, Meditation Guide, Wellness Expert



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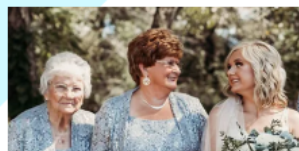
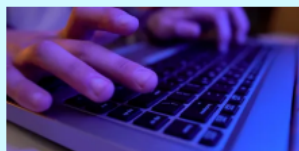
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