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Yoga is the keystone term of a profound worldview, and grasping its meaning is essential to understanding Kripalu's mission and activities as a cohesive whole. Because it is such an important term, yoga has several meanings, each of which adds a critical element to a comprehensive understanding.

Basic Definitions of Yoga

In a historical sense, yoga refers to the enormous body of spiritual teachings and techniques developed by the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent over the last 5,000 years. While Westerners often assume that yoga is a homogeneous tradition, there are hundreds if not thousands of sects and schools of yoga, each with its distinctive doctrines and practices.

From the perspective of a beginning practitioner, the term yoga describes the goal sought through practice. Yoga means union. Under this definition, one practices postures and meditation—two common disciplines of yoga—to harmonize body and mind.

Seen in this light, yoga is described as a spiritual path, often broken down into the following eight stages as delineated by the sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras:

1. Yama/Restraint: Actions best avoided
2. Niyama/Observance: Positive actions to cultivate
3. Asana/Posture: Releasing tensions from the body
4. Pranayama/Breath Regulation: Harmonizing body, mind, and breath
5. Pratyahara/Introversion: Withdrawing attention from external distractions

Instructions

6. Dharana/Concentration: Focusing the mind on a single point
7. Dhyana/Meditation: Accessing a state of flow
8. Samadhi/Oneness: Effortless, integrated being

Delving Deeper

From the perspective of an adept practitioner, yoga can be understood as a way of being accessible in each and every moment. In this light, the disciplines of yoga can clear obstacles that prevent us from being who and what we truly are. As the fruit is already present in the seed, yoga is not the result of any action to attain a goal. It is simply a return to our natural state.

Out of this understanding, Kripalu uses four definitions that describe the qualities of a person acting from a state of yoga. Each is drawn from an ancient and authoritative yoga text:

1. Yoga is skillfulness in action, a reference to a yogi's capacity to act dynamically in ways that reliably produce positive life results. (Bhagavad Gita)
2. Yoga is equanimity and equilibrium, a reference to a yogi's capacity to sustain evenness of mind while confronting inner limitations and outer challenges. (Bhagavad Gita)
3. Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind, a reference to a yogi's capacity to see life and reality as it is, without the filters of fears, fantasies, or other distortions. (Yoga Sutra)
4. Yoga is freedom, a reference to the bliss of well-being experienced whenever one steps into one's natural rhythm of being. (Yoga Bhashya)

The Multidimensional Self of Yoga

Yoga teaches that there are six layers to our being and that each giving rise to a specific sense of self. The first and most obvious is the physical body, beneath which lies the second and less apparent energetic circuitry of the nervous system. Together these constitute what is sometimes called the sensorimotor self. One layer deeper is the thinking mind and protective emotions, which comprise the egocentric self needed to function well in a competitive world. Beneath that is the intuitive mind and expressive emotions that make up the authentic, creative, and artistic self. Beyond that is a layer of subtle energy called prana that flows unceasingly from the deepest layer, the pure spiritual presence that yoga calls the Self. (The less complete but more common phrase used to describe these levels of being is body, mind, emotions, and spirit.) Yoga views health and wellness as the harmonious resonance of all six layers of the self.

So Much More Than Postures

Most people see yoga as synonymous with yoga postures, breathing exercises, and meditation. While popular and powerful, these disciplines are only a few of the tools employed to heal, harmonize, and awaken the whole person. Outlining the major branches of yoga will give you a feel for the breadth and depth of the ancient tradition.

- Karma Yoga: the yoga of dynamic action and service
- Jnana Yoga: the yoga of discriminative wisdom
- Bhakti Yoga: the yoga of devotion
- Hatha Yoga: the yoga of postures and breathing exercises
- Raja Yoga: the yoga of concentration and meditation
- Tantra Yoga: the yoga of integrating the polarities

Kripalu Yoga, like many other contemporary schools, integrates tools and techniques from all of the above classical schools, promoting yoga as an integrated lifestyle versus any stand-alone practice.

All Kripalu's Activities Reflect Some Facet of Yoga

Kripalu offers an immersion experience of a yoga lifestyle. What do morning posture and meditation practice, wholesome eating, study and learning in the program room, and deep-tissue massage have in common? In the context of the Kripalu lifestyle, each is a facet of yoga. As a person becomes steeped in the practices and lifestyle, their innate skillfulness, equanimity, clarity, and joy naturally come forth.

Nondogmatic and Nondenominational

Swami Kripalu was a kundalini yoga master renowned for the intensity of his spiritual practice and the depth of his compassion. In 1977, he came to the United States and spent four years at the original Kripalu Center prior to his death in 1981. Maintaining his schedule of 10 hours of yoga and meditation per day, Swami Kripalu also taught a small number of close disciples and made weekly public appearances that catalyzed the growth of the Kripalu community. In these ways, Swami Kripalu played an essential role in the transmission of a spiritually potent yoga tradition to a large community of Western practitioners. His teachings on yoga practice and holistic lifestyle continue to inspire Kripalu's work in the world.

The Kripalu tradition is founded on what Swami Kripalu called Sanatana Dharma, or the Perennial Wisdom. This is the recognition that yoga and all the world's wisdom traditions stem from a single universal truth that human beings can experience directly through a variety of disciplines, techniques, and practices.

While based in yoga, the Kripalu tradition is decidedly not a fundamentalist mindset. It is a nondogmatic and nonsectarian approach to life that celebrates diversity and recognizes that all approaches are valuable and venerable, all practitioners worthy of respect, and that truth is freely

available to members of every nationality, race, and religion.

As an institution, Kripalu is dedicated to an honest and unfettered inquiry into all practices, philosophies, techniques, and approaches that produce thriving in the individual, family, community, society, and the planet. This includes the teachings of all the world's religions and spiritual traditions, together with the amazing knowledge gained from science, psychology, and other endeavors.

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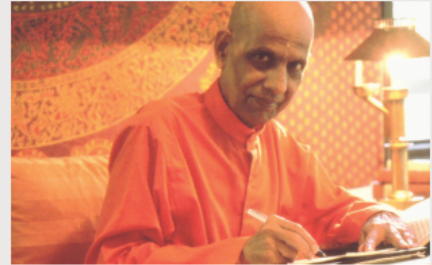
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866.200.5203

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Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health
PO Box 309
57 Interlaken Road
Stockbridge, MA 01262

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