

# LE GURU IS YOU! HATHA YOGA AND BEYOND

BY PAUL REYNOLDS

## WHAT IS YOGA?

*"Since you, like me, have always been and always will be, now ease into your duty and be that which you must be for this time and place right now."*

... THE BHAGAVAD GITA

So the Lord Krishna spoke to Arjuna, and he might as well have been talking about the entity called hatha yoga as it exists in today's society. Indeed, yoga has had many incarnations over the ages. In the present time it might seem, at least in Western cultures, that it is simply another fad for keeping physically fit. However, a deeper look reveals that yoga then and now has not changed so much in practice or in our sense of what it is.

Hatha yoga's roots grew from a philosophical branch of Tantrism that sought to counter the teachings of many of the Brahmins of the day, that attention to the body was counterproductive to spiritual liberation. As Georg Feuerstein, one of the West's best known yogic scholars, writes, "The ultimate purpose of Tantra-Yoga is to bring about the reunion of the polarized energy and consciousness, the merging of God Shiva and Goddess Shakti, which yields the blissful nectar of immortality in ecstasy."

It was said that hatha yoga was a vehicle or tool to prepare the being initiate for transcendence to the higher realms without leaving this body, to produce an adamant structure that could withstand the sometimes cataclysmic rising of the kundalini (serpent energy) during long periods of meditative practice. In many texts it was described as part of the journey to gain immortality.

Is it so different now as we try to sweat and groan our way to six-pack abs and rock-hard glutes? In truth are we, too, trying to stave off the body's eventual breaking down and the death experience just a little longer?

So the beat goes on - the dance between the seen and the unseen, the spiritual and the physical, the form and the non-form. Can we ever truly and fully answer the question "What is yoga?"

We are blessed with a variety of



practitioners and practices of the art form/discipline here in the islands. I asked this broad question of the various teachers from a few of the schools of hatha yoga, and their answers are enlightening.



Patricia Howard, a teacher of 10 years in the vinyasa (flow) expression of the practice from her art studio/yoga studio in Kapahi, considers herself a latecomer to hatha yoga. She found it in her forties, thinking that a little stretching would be good for her real passion of running. Since then her yoga practice has become "soul-food." "Yoga is life! It is my way of connecting with spirit, with the moment to moment fluctuations of energy in my own body, with my loved ones, students and, in a sense, with every being on the planet."

Samantha Fox is a teacher of the Anusara expression of hatha yoga, and shares her passion for the practice on the east and north side of Kauai. "Yoga is the everyday practice of becoming who



we are. Yoga is the constant practice of stepping into the flow of grace. Yoga is remembering our connection to ALL things. It can be practiced on a yoga mat, felt on a nature hike or when riding a wave. It is given to us in the embrace of a child and in the enjoyment of the laughter of a stranger. It's even hidden (waiting to be found) in the limitations of our bodies, in all of the struggles that we endure. Yoga is living with an open heart and embracing all of life. This truth is yoga, and it is alive in every moment of our lives."

Judy Louie is the owner of Kapaa's



Bikram Yoga and Movement Center, and teaches there. "To me, yoga is everywhere and in everything. Yoga is about mindfulness, connection and balance. Anyone at anytime can be doing yoga - wash-

ing dishes, mowing the lawn, eating - because when you are focused on that one thing and it brings contentment and joy, I call that yoga. It incorporates all your senses, sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste and a sixth sense, the spirit. Yoga is the complete alignment of body, mind and spirit in what you are doing, or not doing."

Jan Roberts has been teaching Iyengar-based yoga on the Big Island for over 21 years. "Hatha yoga is the spiritual awakening of the physical body. The main purpose of yoga is to recognize the divine light within, and connect to that source. A good yoga practice will give one calm, strength and flexibility so that one's direction in life becomes illuminated."



The west side of Kauai is home to



Amrit yoga teacher, Evan Silberstein. "According to Swami Satchidanada, a sage of the Hindu tradition, the actual meaning of yoga is 'the science of the mind.' As the mind

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begins to quiet, we move into a felt sensation beyond the thinking mind and a deep sense of beingness is experienced beyond the act of doership. It is like a dancer who becomes the dance or the musician who is played by the music. We merge totally and completely so that there is no one left to perform the action; instead we are immersed in the realm of effortless action. It is in this sacred space where the true meaning of yoga is revealed."

Bhavani Maki was a prime mover in establishing Yoga Hanalei on Kauai some seven years ago. Her core study is in the Ashtanga school of yoga as taught by Sri Pattabhi Jois.



"In the yoga sutras, Patanjali expounds on the definition of yoga: 'Yoga Chitta

Vrtti Nirodha.' Yoga is the intentional calming of all self defeating, self negating, and self deprecating thoughts, tendencies and practices within the individual's consciousness. Clearly he is emphasizing that yoga is an internal process, in which the individual makes a conscious choice to take personal responsibility for his or her well-being. Yoga begins when we come to that point in our lives. And in the words of my beloved teacher, 'Yoga is for everyone, just not the lazy person!'"

Ashtanga practitioner, Eagle, teaches in the Mysore tradition six mornings a week out of the Moloaa dairy studio.

"Yoga is the acceptance of what is. It is just that simple."

This small sample of these teacher/students of life brings to mind an old saying;



"We choose the illusion that best fits our temperament. Embrace it (yours) with passion!" And so they do. What truths they have derived from their experience with Hatha Yoga are very, very similar, yet the expressions they follow have a unique look and flavor; much like our life experience here on the 'ol earth plane' of which our hatha practice is but a reflection. This small survey of the island's hatha yoga facilitators illustrates that we (yoga teachers, students, human beings) are essentially all painting from the same palette. The picture we paint is up to us and the results are infinite in variety.

We conclude with a young yoga teacher's answer when asked to define yoga

during training. The answer came forth in the form of a haiku.

LAKE'S FROZEN OVER  
PATIENT BLANKET OF BREATH  
SPRING'S VOICE IS HEARD. ❶

"May we realize a peace  
that depends on ...  
...Nothing"

## NAMASTE

PAUL REYNOLDS

Next issue -Asana (posture) and the Teacher/student relationship

A STUDENT OF YOGA FOR THE PAST 13 YEARS AND A TEACHER FOR 10, PAUL NOW TEACHES ON THE ISLAND OF KAUAI, SHARING AN ECLECTIC VINYASA VERSION OF HATHA YOGA. HE IS ALSO A CARTOONIST, GRAPHIC ARTIST, WRITER AND FATHER OF A 17-YEAR-OLD (HIS GREATEST YOGIC FEAT TO DATE). HIS CURRENT YOGA TEACHING SCHEDULE CAN BE SEEN ON [WWW.UNLIMITED-IDEAS.COM](http://WWW.UNLIMITED-IDEAS.COM), OR CALL HIM AT (808)823-8051 WITH QUESTIONS, CONCERNS OR REQUESTS FOR PRIVATE INSTRUCTION AND GROUP FACILITATION.