

Le Guru is You! Hatha Yoga and Beyond

by Paul Reynolds

YOLO YOLO YOLO YOLO YOLO YOLO
GAVE GAVE GAVE GAVE GAVE GAVE

More Yogas??

Karma is the yoga of action, the wings propelling the bird onward.

There is an age-old story, attributed to Buddhist teachings, of four blind men who were introduced to an elephant and asked to describe the creature. The one who touched the trunk announced, "The elephant is like a large snake"; the one who touched the tail said, "It is like a rope"; the one whose arms encircled a leg said, "An elephant is like a tree"; and the one who felt the side was certain the elephant was like a wall.

We can find a parallel between this story and our exploration into the way of being called YOGA. For most western people the term yoga relates to the physical form - the movement into and out of asanas, the practice and study of breath (pranayama), a physical exercise used to release stress, develop flexibility and strength. There are, of course, various styles and expressions which come from slightly different perceptions.

Indeed **hatha yoga** is only one of the achievements in the philosophical perception called **raja yoga**. Raja yoga is a philosophy that formed out of the aphorisms (sutras) of one Pantanjali, often referred to as the father of yoga. In one of the sutras, hatha yoga is found in a list of other practices: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi (roughly translated as observances, abstinences, posture, control of life force, turning the senses inward, concentration, meditation and super-consciousness).

Bhakti -yoga - the yoga of devotion. On the path of connection the bhakti yogi uses prayer, chanting, the study of scriptural texts and ritual. Bhakti-yoga includes devotion to the higher power in all of us and listening to the dialogue of the heart and love. For some this branch of yoga closely resembles the world's religious movements.

Jnana-yoga - the yoga of the dispelling of ignorance through the study of self and all things. Acknowledging that the human mind is indeed a limited creation the jnana-yogin through questions looks to remove the obstacles of ignorance and illusion to bring into our experience the true qualities of divine love, truth or

god consciousness. It requires that one explore and discover the true nature of being for oneself rather than rely on doctrine and mere faith alone. In that exploration the jnana-yogin realizes that relentless questioning is a powerful ally that leads us into the direct experience of the limitless aspects of creation. Jnana yoga is a means to challenge the ruts in our lives that no longer serve us.

Karma-yoga - the yoga of doing, the yoga of selfless service. Karma-yoga draws our awareness away from ourselves and brings it back into the world, the environment in which we find ourselves. Often one can recite scripture, expound endlessly in beautiful platitudes, but karma-yoga asks us to bring those beliefs into everyday practice. It points out that to transcend the ego-self, the source of most of our illusions, one must work for the welfare of others. (See inset Karma-Fit, YogaFit)

A clear metaphor for these aspects can be found in yogi-raj Ganga White's recent book *Yoga Beyond Belief*. White relates a story from a sage who likened the four yoga branches to the parts of a bird. Raja-yoga is the tail, steering, steadying and guiding the bird with control. Karma is the yoga of action, the wings propelling the bird onward. Bhakti is the heart, guiding with love and compassion. And Jnana is the head, piloting the bird toward the light with perception and vision. He asks, "Which part can we deny and still fly?"

A hatha yoga practice (physical awareness of connection) is a part of a deeper, wider more expansive yogic lens on our presence in the here and now that continues to seek the truth and answer the questions "Why am I here?" and "Who am I?"

Since yoga's emergence onto the fitness scene such arenas as the athletic club, the gym or fitness center, or the YMCA have been anathema for many teachers. Harsh lighting, gym equipment or aerobics lessons banging and blaring in the next studio, the echoes of racquetballs rebounding of the walls all run counter to the vision of a placid, quiet yoga

practice in a softly lit room, perhaps with statues of the Buddha and a running water feature that bubbles away amid choruses of "Om."

Beth Shaw, founder and CEO of multi-million dollar YogaFit, Inc, determined that part of her karma yoga, her yoga of service, would be to use the fitness center environs as the place to share her expression of hatha yoga. She provides teacher trainings focusing on what she feels are the important aspects of how a teacher can best serve his/her students:

- 1) Communicate clearly and effectively.
- 2) Emphasize safety in achieving postures (asana).
- 3) Provide a 'clean energy' in relationship with those taking the class.
- 4) Create the space and 'show up' ready to give of your knowledge and experience.
- 5) Teach from a space of compassion.
- 6) Maintain an acute awareness that one's responsibility is to give back to the community (karma-yoga).

She has created and funded the non profit Visionary Women in Fitness which provides scholarships to women-in-need to aid them in becoming fitness instructors. Indeed Ms. Shaw's five-level teacher trainings incorporate the karmic-yoga philosophy by requiring trainees to perform a number of hours of community service.

Her YogaFit organization was born in 1994 and incorporated in 1997. It has resisted outside corporate involvement and traditionalist detractors and continues to grow, training upwards of 10,000 certified teachers a year (YogaFit trainings are registered with the Yoga Alliance group).

"Yoga's future is one of ever-evolving hybrids," says Beth. "Our organization and philosophy continues to expand, develop and deepen," she continues. "I believe a big part of that success, that growth, is my desire to give back to the community that continues to support us." Spoken like the true Karma-yogi. ☪

(Those interested in exploring more about the YogaFit organization can access the website: www.yogafit.com.)

Paul Reynolds' current teaching schedule can be seen on www.unlimited-ideas.com. He can be reached at (650)-773-3422 or email paul@unlimited-ideas.com.