



All Hearts Hatha Yoga

Newsletter

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The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the primary, foundation writings that our yoga practices are based on. The word "sutra" is very close to our English word "suture." The individual concepts that unfold from each separate aphorism, or sutra, may give a limited insight. But the sutras are threads, small stitches meant to be woven together make a whole cloth of expanded understanding.

The first of four chapters begins this way:

"The primary principles of yoga are set forth here. Yoga is calming and quieting the disturbances that arise in the mind. When we can do this, a deeper sense of ourselves can emerge that we can experience. Otherwise, we identify ourselves with the temporary fluctuations and surface mental preoccupations."

The first chapter continues describing mental processes and actions, and gives specific recommendations for how to reach toward a more serene existence with less suffering. Sounds good!

As often is the case, simple is not always easy.

Our identification with temporary fluctuations and surface mental preoccupations tends to be a very stubborn sticking point for anyone who is human! How to develop a fluid and flexible connection to your identity as a 21st century American, living with (who is your family?), working as (what is your job?), who believes (hooo boy. . . .) gender, nationality, religion, personal history--all these ways we 'know' who we are. . . By no means, is it easy to let go of these aspects of our experience. We rely heavily on "Who we are" in these categories, to define how we act and, more importantly, how we think in this world.

What the Sutras suggest, is that the deeper, unchanging part of ourselves (maybe it helps to think of your eternal soul, or the spirit that transcends the body) is connected to these points of reference in a limited way. And by sticking closely or rigidly to these identifications, we limit ourselves.

The identifications have their purpose. No one suggests that I should suddenly give up being a wife, daughter and sister, a teacher and 46 year-old who has a job to do, and roles to fulfill.

But it is a very worthwhile effort to contemplate that the eternal aspect of ourselves has a greater value than any of this, and that we can take small steps in a consistent way, to shift the emphasis toward experiencing the deeper self.

This is the heart of our yoga practice! Our postures and breath work, our focus and concentration toward staying present-in-the-moment, can be steps to untangling the knots of mental commotion that bind us up. If you are content to get a little peace of mind & feel stronger and full of physical ease, let it be so. The potential for limitless further layers of opening is here if you would like it.