

notes from a

yoga student

yoga heals

As a student of yoga for over 30 years and now a teacher myself, I know how beneficial yoga is in

healing the body. To me, yoga is magic. It provides a system that gives us great power over our health. In essence, yoga practice is about the mind. Ancient texts, such as Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, teach us that by controlling the fluctuations of the mind – the constant ripples of our thoughts – we can still the mind and allow it to heal the body.

Scientists say we only use ten percent of our brain. It is my belief that the other 90 percent is working overtime on an unconscious level, giving instructions to our vital forces; in other words, telling the heart to pump and the lungs to breathe. This is why yoga can help us heal. If the mind is responsible for the efficient functioning of the body, then it stands to reason that if those ripples of thoughts – you know the ones, the kind of thoughts that cause our throat to constrict, our heart to pump faster and our hands to shake – become overwhelming, then the healthy function of the body's innate healing system can become exhausted. Yoga gives us a tool to restore equilibrium and balance to the body.

Buddhists believe that there is only one substance, one energy, and that it is contained in all things. This energy could be compared to the classical yoga view regarding *prana* (life force or cosmic energy). Yogic tradition teaches that *prana* flows throughout the body via the breath. It is said that the vibration of this energy has much to do with the positive or negative attributes of our health. Yoga works with this energy, freeing the mind of anxiety and worry, therefore allowing the body to relax. Once relaxed and calm, the body's vital energy can do its work and healing takes place.

I truly believe that the practice of yoga – in particular, meditation – can help us to get well. I'm not suggesting that we should discard all other theories and treatments,

but I am suggesting that if we add the practice of yoga and meditation to the mix, we put ourselves in a much greater place of strength when it comes to fighting disease.

Dr Candice Pert, scientist and yoga practitioner and author of *Molecules of Emotion – Why you feel the way you feel*, has proved scientifically how the emotions have a chemical effect on the body. In fact, her studies show that when we are happy particular viruses cannot enter our cells. So, when we practise yoga, the breathing techniques, meditation and yoga exercises that we do help to give our emotions a rest. Emotion is a wonderful and truly amazing human quality but if we let our emotions dictate to us and let them go on a rampage of thoughts that cause negative effects on the body we can only diminish our chance of good health and happiness. Yoga allows us to control negative emotions and therefore diminish the unhealthy effects of their chemical counterparts.

I believe the Buddha was right when he said that everything we are is the result of what we have thought. I don't mean that we consciously make ourselves sick, but I do believe that our worries and our anxieties have a devastating effect on our health simply by altering our body's chemistry and depleting our immune system. When we can control the fluctuations of our mind – the ripples of thoughts that the ancient texts referred to – and as a consequence control our emotions, we put ourselves in a position of strength when it comes to health and vitality.

Another thing Buddha said was that our true nature is a state of bliss. Buddha believed that the burdens of living overshadow our thoughts and stop us from getting in touch with this sense of bliss. You only have to look at a small child to see how true this is. Babies are spontaneously happy. Their inner bliss shines through them radiantly. We can learn a lot from this. Yoga can help us to shed the outer layers of our stressors and allow us to touch the inner essence of happiness contained deep within our core.

To me, what yoga is about is opening ourselves up to the present; being in that very honest and special 'now' place, a place that is free of anger, free of sadness and, I hope for you, free of disease.

If you find yourself feeling melancholy and ill at ease with life, just remember that every feeling we have, every thought we have, every action we take is ours to choose. Let your choices be positive and health giving – one way you can help yourself to do this is to practise yoga.

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