

Yuga

– there is only time and how
you choose to spend it.



What's the one thing we all want but money can't buy? Time. Somehow we never seem to have enough – or do we? Yoga teacher and writer Jane Wiesner looks into the yogic philosophy and practice of awareness and suggests that if we can learn to live in the present, time is right there for our enjoyment.

Time. We crave it. We can't really avoid wanting more. Most of us feel we never have enough. Aside from the air we breathe, time marks our existence. Without it, there is nothing to measure *being* in the world.

In yogic terms, *being*, in its truest form requires awareness of how we use, or misuse, time. Yoga is about living in the moment – living in a capsule of time, rather than living in the past or the future.

In Sanskrit *yuga* means time or eon (cycle/age). For yoga, the essence of a human life cycle is the breath – the breath gives us time. Yoga connects the spiritual life with the breath through the concept of *prana* (life force). *Prana* is sometimes described as 'the vibratory power that underlies all manifestation'. *Prana* echoes the Western meaning of the words, spirit and psyche. 'Spirit' (from the English word *spirital* and the Latin term *spiritus*) translates as the 'breath of life'. 'Psyche' comes from *Psukhe* the Goddess of the Soul or Spirit, personifying the breath.

Time, something to cherish and enjoy can become a chore – something that passes while we are doing what we *have* to do, what we *must* do. Western psychologist Albert Ellis maintains that words like *should*, *ought* and *must* are the reason why so many people are unhappy. It is the unrealistic demands we place on ourselves – the way we believe we *should* spend our time – that

create so much discontent. Today, in many ways, our discontent is fuelled by media inducement. Television, radio, magazines, newspapers, internet, email, telemarketing – all constantly suggest how we should spend our time (and our money). We are tempted and teased, coerced by the claim that what they sell will solve all of our problems.

Yoga – content with time as it is

In contrast to this consumer existence, yoga suggests that we need to aim to be content with life as it is, rather than as it *will* be. I once read on a bookmark, 'the meaning of life is to give life meaning'. Yet we need to be mindful of who we allow to construct that meaning. Yoga suggests that life's meaning comes from within. Yoga is about reaching a state of *being* that is without demands – without the pressure to achieve, perform or consume.

In reality, life makes demands. I'm not suggesting that we all cop out from life and avoid our responsibilities. This is far from the yogic way. Yogic philosophy is filled with discipline, restraint and order. On the contrary, I am suggesting that there is a level where what we *think* we must do, actually overshadows what is right for us; a point where our lives become focused on expectations and demands, rather than wisdom and inspiration. When we allow our time to be filled with self-judgement and criticism, we are living in the past. When we focus all of our attention on planning

and striving, we are living in the future. But if we practise mindfulness (dealing with what arises as it arises), we free ourselves from the burden of past judgements and future worries. We free ourselves from our own (often unconscious) demands and expectations.

Time to be happy – or dealing with life's demands

So how do we deal with life's demands and, at the same time, find happiness? One of the best ways to be happy is to help others to feel happy. If you're cheery and good natured, you will mirror these qualities to others. When was the last time you got really excited for someone else? When was the last time you said "well done"? Pat yourself on the back if you do it regularly. It's really vital for our own wellbeing to learn to be happy for others. Happiness is reciprocal. Other people's joy becomes infectious. When we're miserable, we affect everyone around us.

Happiness or contentment is not a selfish desire; it is our method of pursuing happiness that can sometimes cause us or others pain. This can happen when we make happiness be about acquisition, the attainment of a thing or the achievement of a relationship. In reality, the feeling of happiness is an art, something we create within ourselves, an essence found by being present in the moment. True happiness cannot rely on conditional responses or the fulfilment of perceived needs. True happiness, or joy, is timeless.

[time out for you]

Here's a simple exercise recommended by yoga teacher and therapist Leigh Blashki, who is also the national course facilitator and director of the Australian Institute of Yoga. Leigh recommends a relaxation session working with the mantra *so hum* (or *so ham*). The general meaning of this mantra is 'I am that' or 'that I am', yet Blashki suggests that, "Traditionally the meaning of any mantra is ultimately left to the inner, experiential understanding of the practitioner." This particular technique allows the practitioner to touch an inner place of peace and stillness.

Relax and experience time

Lie down somewhere comfortable, safe and warm (without distractions and away from phones). Close your eyes and imagine that your body is lying in the most comfortable position possible. Feel the sensation of total and utter comfort and ease. Use the imagination to

produce a sense of total relaxation in the body. Breathe in slowly through the nostrils, pause for a moment, and then breathe out slowly through the nostrils, making a sighing sound and fully letting go of any tension in the body. Continue this breath flow. Imagine yourself relaxing further and further – sinking into the floor with each outward breath. Do this several times. Now, allow yourself to maintain a slow, rhythmic wave of breath as you repeat the word 'so' silently to yourself with the inward breath and 'hum' with the outward breath. You may wish to reverse the mantra for the inward and outward breath in this exercise (ie *hum sa*). Let the breath be easy and free, with a pause at the end of each inhalation and exhalation. Do this for several minutes. Then, let go of the mantra and let the breath return to its natural rhythm. Breathe in deeply, stretch and yawn and allow the body to fully awaken. Now, with the eyes still closed, simply lie still and listen to the silence. I suggest that before you wake up

completely – smile. Allow your smile to create a feeling of joy or bliss within you and let that joy spread to every cell in the body. When you are ready, gradually open your eyes and allow yourself to become fully awake. Before you race back (or choose not to) into the whirlwind of reality, remember this place of inner quietness, of joy. It is a place you can visit whenever you wish.

Change your mood

There is nothing more potent for changing a moment in time than changing your mood, and smiling is one great tool. The bodily act of changing the facial expression affects the way you feel overall. The act of smiling is infectious and you will experience the joy that smiling creates. I call this type of practice 'mood yoga'. My book *Mood Yoga* is scheduled to be published in 2008. It uses yogic methods to create a positive change of mood.

Mindfulness of now

The problem is; how do we achieve happiness? Happiness relates to our perception of time. If the way time passes is unpleasant, it's hard to feel happy. The problem is that many of us spend an enormous amount of time doing things we don't actually enjoy doing. Yoga can help us with this. Yoga is about present moment awareness: devoting our whole attention to the job at hand. It is about mindfulness. Yogic philosophy and practice encourage us to be mindful about how we spend our time. When we consider that half of our waking life is spent at work, it's important to make the most of what we do.

The modern day pressure to multi-task means that present moment consciousness is even more difficult for some. Presumably a masseuse would have an easier time practising mindfulness than a receptionist who has to do four things at once. Yet, even without changing your job, there are things you can do to create a sense of *now* consciousness; for instance, you can be accepting. Time passes easily when we're not bogged down in resentment – when we accept the moment. My step-dad worked as a janitor for *The Age*

newspaper for many years. He was a happy man. He helped others to be happy. The simple truth was he enjoyed every moment of every day. He was thankful for his job. He put his heart and soul into it – even when he was just sweeping the floor. Without realising it my step-dad practised a kind of meditation: he was fully aware of the job he was doing at all times. He didn't carry around the burden of discontent.

However you decide to spend your time, instead of thinking away your time, you need to enjoy it. Even the most mundane jobs can be pleasurable if you set your mind to the task of doing them well. Unfortunately, when spending time doing something unpleasant, our minds often get bogged down lamenting the past or anticipating the future. This not only makes us inefficient at the task at hand, it also means that we waste valuable time. In essence, the past or the future can never satisfy us, only the present has the power to do that. Time is a gift to be honoured. Being aware of time gives one a feeling of slowing it down, of having more control over life. Physical yogic practice (*asana*) is a great starting point to develop awareness in the body, which can then go on to help

you develop awareness in other aspects of your life. Breath control (*pranayama*) and sense withdrawal (*pratyahara*) are also amazing tools for focusing the mind and creating a sense of stillness. A regular home practice can help foster these skills.

Time and balance – the Buddha's experience

Slowing down is not something we do easily nowadays. In a world focused on speed and instant gratification, our 'attainments' are often centred on the material rather than the spiritual. Yogic philosophy and particularly Buddhist philosophy, teaches that balance is required between the spiritual and the material worlds. It acknowledges the value of time well spent. In fact, the Buddha himself didn't become enlightened until he realised the importance of time and balance.

After leaving his palace, Prince Siddhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha (the Awakened One), sought the wisdom of yogic philosophy in his search for enlightenment (*nirvana*). Unfortunately, he swayed from the balance of yoga towards extremes. Living as an ascetic for six years, the

Buddha limited his supply of simple things like clothes, shelter and food. Six years of constant meditation and physical and mental deprivation left the Buddha unenlightened and very sickly. It wasn't until his awareness shifted that he came to choose the right path. Realising that his efforts were in vain, he sought the comforts of the material world. After nourishment and rest, the Buddha sat under a Bodhi tree and meditated – after 24 hours he reached enlightenment. What the Buddha came to understand was that by denying the body nourishment, comfort and rest, he was working against nature and against the basic principles of yoga.

By denying his needs, the Buddha was disconnected from the body. His extreme denial blocked the natural flow of prana in the body. Yet the unrestricted, free flow of prana assists us to reach enlightenment. Prana can be obstructed by both the body (the physical) and the mind (the mental/emotional). The Buddha spent six years of his life denying himself completely. Certainly, the time he spent contributed to his ultimate journey, but without a shift in his awareness, the time he spent would have been of little consequence.

Yoga is about this shift in awareness. It is about using your time to seek wisdom and to find the right path for you. It's about standing back from media hype and societal trends and creating a sense of your own space in time. Yoga is about experiencing self-mastery and discernment amid a plethora of distractions and seductions. While discussing Buddhism, the Dalai Lama once said, "A balanced and skilful approach to life, taking care to avoid extremes, becomes a very important factor in conducting one's everyday existence."

Find time in stillness

There is no denying that the demands of living often leave us reeling with exhaustion, teetering on the edge of extremes. Stillness, in the sense of peace and silence, is something that often seems quite foreign to us. Time, itself, seems to elude us. When was the last time you made 'time' for yourself? Yet, in yogic terms, to *be* is simply to exist in the moment. This is something we all

[timely hints]

- Make a daily list – this is one of the best ways of organising your time.
- Allocate 20 or more minutes every day to relax and nurture yourself.
- Smile often. It changes your mood!
- Decide the things you don't want to do.
- Evaluate your priorities from time to time: look carefully at the musts,

oughts and shoulds in your life and decide what you can let go of without harming yourself or others.

- Take time for your yoga practice – even a short 15 minute practice has enormous benefits.
- Make a habit of being present by cultivating awareness – try to be in the moment.

find hard to do. We have a glut of information whirling in our heads – a stream of consciousness making constant noise. Our own thoughts bombard us with chatter. Yoga suggests that we find peace and joy by stilling the fluctuation of thoughts in the mind. Once we touch this sense of peace and stillness, tremendous clarity ensues.

To find this inner stillness *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* propose an eight-fold path which can lead us towards using our time well. The path advises us to: take care of others (practise non-violence), look after our bodies and our minds (be disciplined), work with our postures (exercise regularly), breathe well (practice breath control), guide our senses (occasionally withdraw or distance ourselves from the sensory world), learn to focus our attention (develop concentration), be at peace in stillness (meditate) and be fully aware (*samadhi*). *Samadhi* can also mean avoiding being devoured by time. In other words, don't allow time to control you by pulling you along kicking and screaming. Instead, be the master of your mind and, therefore, the master of your time.

Embrace time through yoga

To master your time, you need to take care of 'the moment'. Be mindful of what a priceless gift life is. Whatever you're doing embrace it, experience it, live it. It's nice to remember that, like Buddhism, yoga is not about denial; it's more about embracing. It's about allowing you to embrace life and yourself. By embracing positive ways to spend your time, you can shift your awareness.

Remember, every moment in time represents a thought, every thought involves choice, and every choice creates your reality. How you spend your time

ultimately creates your future. Consider there is no demand to be met, there is no should, ought or must. There is only time and how you choose to spend it.

The only way to master the mind is to be present in time – to learn to touch that quiet silence within you, that inner core of peace and stillness. In this place, time stands still.

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