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The tools of yoga

As yoga teaches that the dimensions of the human system – the physical body, the breath, the mind, the personality and the emotions – are deeply interconnected, it offers a wide range of tools for use in physical practices, special breathing techniques, powerful meditative practices, symbolic gestures and use of vocal sounds, guided self-inquiry practices and more.

But, yoga is not a “one-size-fits-all” practice.

The main tools of yoga offered in the group classes I conduct are movements and postures (asana), breath (pranayama) and concentration exercises (dhyana).

1. Body movements and postures (asana)

Asana is one of the most popular tools of yoga today. Asanas are careful arrangements of the various parts of the physical body and so asana is primarily a practice for the physical body.

Asana postures can be done dynamically or statically and each posture has its own benefits.

In asana practice the postures are intended to be done with careful regulation of breath, allowing the student to experience the full benefits of the pose. So, although asana is primarily a physical practice, it influences more than our physical body.

2. Breathing exercises (pranayama)

Normally we are not conscious of our breathing. We are breathing all the time but we are not doing pranayama all the time. Pranayama is the practice of consciously regulating the different components of the breath – inhalation, exhalation and retention of breath – for a specific duration of time so that the resulting breath is long and smooth.

For example, we may exhale twice as long as we inhale; or we may want to inhale and exhale for an equal amount of time, and then hold our breath after exhaling.

Pranayama is one of the most powerful tools of yoga.

3. Finally, there is meditation which is essentially ‘concentration’ (dhyana).

Meditation is THE most important tool in yoga. A brief definition of meditation might be: an intensive process that involves choosing a focus and linking to it on a deep level. Meditation does not happen automatically. Asana and pranayama are considered good preparation for meditation.

To consciously follow the breath is a form of meditation in which one tries to become completely one with the movement.

Also, the silence in the studio and the moments the practitioner remains in a motionless sitting posture are quite radical experiences. The practice of yoga is essentially a practice of self-examination. It helps us discover certain things about ourselves.

I don't teach symbolic gestures, vocal sounds and guided self inquiry practices because I want my classes to be accessible for everybody. Yoga is a universal and objective discipline that can be helpful for a lot of people – one's social, intellectual or cultural background being unimportant. Especially here, in Gent, and generally in the West, such an approach is important. No intellectual objections can be raised against this way of practicing yoga except out of ignorance and prejudices. The reverse is true. Intellectuals and those who take care of the public health should "experience" the tremendous value of yoga.

Also, businesses can enjoy a lot of the benefits of yoga: attaining motivated and healthy managers and workers who are absent less and who enjoy their job more.

The main reason for my approach is the fact that I am a vipassana yogi. So, yoga is for me the way I try to discover and accept my own and the surrounding reality as "it" is. In the vipassana (insight) method, techniques of auto-suggestion are avoided. One tries to observe objectively and without interpreting the reality of the moment. Yoga is a conscious experience, not an intellectual activity.

As already stated: the purpose of all yoga techniques is **to establish consciousness of your own self**: to be with the body, the breath and the mind.

For an excellent vipassana meditation organisation see: www.dhamma.org