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### What is a Yoga Group? What is the point of a Yoga Group?

Yoga as defined by Collins dictionary is “a philosophy which first developed in India, in which physical exercises and meditation are believed to help people to become calmer and united in spirit with God.” (COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary). A philosophy can be understood as a very deep and meaningful explanation of an experience or a way of thinking. Yoga is a philosophy combining both physical and mental aspects of the human body, it is most commonly used as a method of spiritual connection with God or oneself. “Yoga is a globally popular mind-body practice used for health.” (Ayala Ghosh et al. 5p.) So, Yoga is also practiced for its many health benefits. Its not an unpopular opinion that exercise is necessary to lead a healthy life since it is a very important aspect of physical fitness, so saying that yoga can be practiced for just that makes sense. What I aim to accomplish in my research is to identify the main reasons normal yoga group members practice yoga for. I will not be interviewing a very sophisticated yogaasna ashram or spiritual arena but just an ordinary yoga group in the local gym, to prevent receiving any biased answers or reasons. I’ve attended yoga classes in its country of origin, i.e., in India so, I will add my point of views and reasons for practicing the ancient exercise to compare the various ideologies.

My research report will first address the origins of yoga and what is was first created for. I want to impress upon you the main ideas of it and why it could be practiced. Many of our gyms

have yoga as an integral part of the fitness scheme and many places conduct yoga classes, so, considering yoga as a physical exercise is not incorrect. I'll address how yoga began to be considered as an exercise in other countries and how it flourished. And the finally since my report is modelled around the research question of "A case study on an individual striving to fit into a discourse community", I'll write on the experience that I had in my first beginners yoga group meeting in the gym I go to. The point to my research is to educate you on how yoga is beneficial and how it came into light in the states of late. The case study will enlighten you on what a yoga group is like and what most people attending the class for the first time should know about it.

## YOGA AS AN EXERCISE

Yoga has been practiced for several centuries dating back to around 500BCE (History of Yoga para1). Being Indian, there are plenty of sacred texts that I am accustomed to hearing about. India has a very rich culture and the "Vedas" form an integral part of it. Yoga was first mentioned in the Rig Veda as my Yoga instructor in Bangalore had taught us. I cannot forget certain other mentioning's that he had informed us about, like how different asanas target different parts of the body and even possess the power of healing certain ailments if done regularly and properly. Patanjali is at the center of the pre classical yoga period, "Patanjali organized the practice of yoga into an "eight limbed path" containing the steps and stages towards obtaining Samadhi or enlightenment." (para3.). The eight limbed path is the physical efforts that yoga requires to attain the peace of mind or enlightenment that most yoga doers seek. Patanjali still has great influence and is still very present in the modern yoga that is practiced globally. "A few centuries after Patanjali, yoga masters created a system of practices designed to rejuvenate the body and prolong life. They rejected the teachings of the ancient Vedas and

embraced the physical body as the means to achieve enlightenment. They developed Tantra Yoga, with radical techniques to cleanse the body and mind to break the knots that bind us to our physical existence. This exploration of these physical-spiritual connections and body centered practices led to the creation of what we primarily think of yoga in the West: Hatha Yoga.” (para4.). Patanjali included the citing from the holy scriptures to achieve enlightenment, Modern yoga practiced in foreign countries have yoga groups and classes with more physical work and less chanting of mantras. But most of the asanas and poses are derived from the same source. In depth, the only difference is the lack of chants. “The importation of yoga to the West still continued at a trickle until Indra Devi opened her yoga studio in Hollywood in 1947. Since then, many more western and Indian teachers have become pioneers, popularizing hatha yoga and gaining millions of followers. Hatha Yoga now has many different schools or styles, all emphasizing the many different aspects of the practice.” (para5.) Hatha yoga is very popular and several celebrities follow it to stay fit. Indira Devi was a very influential yoga enthusiast and her efforts to spread awareness, led to yoga becoming more practiced in the United States.

## YOGA IN THE UNITED STATES

Once yoga began to be more practiced in the United States, it gradually adapted and changed to suit the needs and abilities of the people practicing it. In the yoga group session that I attended on 23 October 2019, I met with one of the members of the yoga class and asked them their opinion of yoga as an exercise, “Yoga keeps me calm and helps with my wheezing, I ask our instructor to teach us some exercises that target the respiratory system and will help me cure my asthma and continue to practice these exercises on a timely basis as instructed to.” They said “Yoga is like a doctor’s prescription to me now. I do the poses not only to maintain a sane mind and attain inner peace, but also to cure my ailments and stay healthy and disease free.” After

talking to them, I noticed that we did certain breathing exercises in the class which they had requested the instructor in advance to teach us. Yoga can be adapted to suit ones needs. My earliest memory of yoga is the sun salutation exercise or what I call it “Surya Namaskar”, it is an exercise practiced early in the morning preferably at dawn or during sunrise. In this exercise there are 12 steps, and each step has a specific significance both physically and spiritually. It can also be considered as a method of showing gratification to the sun and the world by performing these poses and exercises. I have not seen any yoga classes practicing the sun salutation. It may be because it is more like a prayer and is quite vigorous, I’m not sure. But there have been a few poses that I had not learnt before in India, that I have recently discovered in the yoga class that I attend in the United States. Another important observation I made was the way the asanas are introduced to the class. In the class I attended here, our instructor says it in both English and in its original Sanskrit form. When we do the resting pose, he called it the “shrava asana” which directly translates to corpse pose. I was impressed with the teaching method and how genuinely interested the members of the group were to learn the names of the poses in its mother language. Yoga may not be American but they certainly have embraced it whole heartedly and are well aware of its rich culture and Indic roots

#### CASE STUDY OF AN INDIVIDUAL STRIVING TO FIT INTO THE COMMUNITY

For the individual attempting to fit into a discourse community, the totality of the experience can be evaluated and explained from a completely new and different perspective by the individual attending the communities meeting for the first time. As they are unknown to the practices and customs, rules, beliefs, language and situations that the community consist of, the way the individuals write about it is interesting and genuine. So, for the case study part of my research report, I attended a Yoga group meeting in my gym. The yoga classes happen in three different

tiers, a beginner's class called the "Roots" where the foundations of yoga are taught, a Pilates fusion class and an advanced class. I attended the "Roots" class as it fit best in my schedule. The class took place in a dimly light room and everyone had already gathered in the class before the time the class was scheduled at. All the yoga group members were punctual, suggesting they have great value for time, and respect their own, the other members and the instructor's presence as they do not like to disturb the class by arriving late. Another point to be noted was how the class was so peaceful and calm, no one had their phones on, everyone waited patiently in line to clean their yoga mats with the spray and immediately passed it around when they were finished cleaning. The entire vibe of the class was stress free and relaxing. When the instructor started the class, he first greeted us with the common yoga greeting "Namaste" with the palms together over heart center and everyone in the class greeted him back in the same way. So, knowing this greeting is mandatory for the yoga class. Then after we did a few minutes of sitting meditation, everyone had their eyes closed and the instructor told us when to inhale and exhale. He guided us through the meditation with some really calming words, which he said will relax our minds and help us remove the tensions. Having a calm and open mindset entering this class is important, because if you aren't willing to sit down and think of nothing for a good 10 minutes it'd be tough to adjust and attend the class. Following the meditation, we did a few basic yoga poses, the easiest breathing exercises and the stretches that most people do as a part of their pre-workout regime. The instructor made sure everyone was doing the poses in their own time and according to their own comfort level. He'd repeatedly tell us how everyone has their own pace and how everyone knows their own body best so they shouldn't push it to limits it can't withstand. This made me understand how patience is another value that people in the yoga community respect. Patience is critical for the learning process in almost any field, only through trial and error can

anything be completely understood in the right way. The instructor would let us take breaks between the poses and discuss with us the benefits of the poses and their mechanisms. Understanding and analysis of the poses is something that the group enjoys and is interested in learning. Being knowledgeable on what they're being taught to do instead of mindlessly practicing what's taught is another key point I observed in the class. Once the poses were completed, the instructor allowed us to lie in the corpse pose "shravaasna" which is the way every yoga class ends. It's the time meant for reflection and for clearing the mind to just focus on ones breathing. Relaxation and peace are requirements and goals at the same time for the yoga group. Most people in the class seemed to relax more as the class progressed while some people exited the class as peacefully as they had entered.

Yoga foundation classes are peaceful and anyone without any prior knowledge on yoga can attend it. If they have an open mind and are prepared to relax and try new poses and stretches and respect their own limits without being competitive with the other participants. Yoga group was a peaceful experience and I highly recommend joining or attending a class to destress yourself and to achieve your fitness goals, or to strengthen yourself mentally and spiritually.

## CITATIONS AND SOURCES

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