



## READER FAVORITE: The Ancient Art of Yoga, and Why It's Relevant Today

**Robin Mizrahi**

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*There's a reason this ancient practice has endured. Yes, it burns calories and tones muscles, making you lean and fit. Yes, taking the time out from a crazy day to meditate and stretch will cultivate mental calmness. But it's so much more.*

Yoga is arguably the oldest form of mental and physical therapy. The **practice** was first developed about 5,000 years ago in Northern India by the Indus-Sarasvati civilization, and, according to ancient texts, it was included in the Vedic priests' collection of songs, mantras and rituals.

Over the centuries, and especially the past few decades as the western world embraced the ancient practice, yoga has evolved to include both quiet meditation and strenuous workouts — and everything in between.

The word yoga means the unification of the mind and body, and the practice is meant to strengthen the mind-body connection. This sounds new-agey, but it's actually very practical.

For example, a strong mind-body connection helps sharpen reflexes, which in turn prevents falls. By developing a keen awareness of your body, your muscles will correctly align your skeleton to maintain good posture and prevent backaches. Even sharpshooters I spoke with said that yoga helps them focus by stabilizing the body, and shortens the time it takes for their brains to tell their fingers to squeeze the trigger.



It took me ten years to acquire the balance, strength, and trust in gravity to master this Eight-Angle Pose

A good yoga practice, led by a knowledgeable and talented instructor, will ultimately teach you about life. The following are a few gems I've learned from my years of practice.

**Don't rush the poses; the transitions are equally important.** Just as in life, it's not only the events that count but the journey towards and through those events. There is joy in anticipation. Yoga teaches you to take your time, savor the delicious body stretch on your way to Half-Moon Pose.

**Don't compare yourself to others in class.** Comparison will only throw off your own balance and confidence. In life, it's unhelpful to compare yourself to others who seem more effective or successful. Everyone has a different path. Focus on your own practice, and you will progress.

**How you do one thing is how you do everything.** If you are in yoga practice but your mind's going over your list of to-dos or worries, you might learn that you're multi-tasking through most of your life instead of being in the moment. If you cut corners doing poses, you're probably cutting corners in your personal life.

**Remember to breathe.** It sounds odd – who forgets to breathe? But the tendency during a difficult pose is to hold your breath, which unnecessarily puts extra strain on your body. Part of the practice is learning that strong, steady breathing fuels your body – and your spirit. A deep inhale on the yoga mat is as useful as taking a moment to breathe and regroup before reacting to life's bumps and jolts.

There's a reason this ancient art has endured. Yes, it burns calories and tones muscles, making you lean and fit. Yes, taking the time out from a crazy day to meditate and stretch will cultivate mental calmness. But it's so much more.



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