

## ***What is Yoga?***

“Yoga is a technology for arriving in this present moment”--Donna Farhi

The word *yoga* comes from the ancient Sanskrit language of India. It means “to yoke” or “to unify” or “to harmonize.” Yoga, then, designates a group of methods, practices, and techniques that share a common goal: unification. The saying, “one goal, many paths” is a good way to characterize yoga. It is not a religion, but an art or means for conscious living.

Yoga unifies on several levels:

1. Yoga brings harmony to the physical body. Practicing asana (postures) tones muscles, stimulates the internal organs and circulation, regulates the glandular system, and stabilizes the nervous system.
2. Yoga also brings harmony to the mind. Meditation and relaxation help minimize what the yogic sage Patanjali calls the “whirls of the mind,” the seemingly ceaseless chatter of thoughts. The focus and concentration of the physical practice also contributes to this centering process. You will feel less fragmented, and you will be able to see and think with greater clarity and awareness.
3. Yoga unifies body and mind. Most of us spend our days living from the neck up, that is, wrapped up in our thoughts, concerns, and plans. This can lead to a neglect of your body’s needs, causing you to feel disconnected and out of touch. Through yoga, you’ll bring your awareness back to your breath and body. You will reconnect your mind and emotions to your body, enabling you to live life more fully.
4. Self and Activity: According to T. K. V. Desikachar, one of the meanings of yoga is “attentiveness.” We often go through the day accomplishing our tasks with one eye on the next project. Our attention is divided. But when we act with complete awareness, we are joined with each activity, engaging it whole-heartedly and with awareness. We begin by cultivating attentiveness in our yoga practice, and over time, this attentiveness will begin to play a role in our daily lives.
5. Self and world: As the waves of the mind begin to settle, you’ll find that you are more in touch with your environment and the individuals around you. You will be able to cope with situations in a more open and flexible way.

Finally, Yoga “unifies” in that it allows each individual to pursue his or her own path. It allows you to be where you are, and helps you to work patiently with your present needs. Moreover, it encourages you to have this attitude of acceptance toward yourself. By respecting the person you are at this moment, you cultivate that which brings a sense of harmony and unity to both you and your world: compassion.