

YOGA - A Unique Understanding of its Benefits to America's Culture

(I)

The question of real, lasting world peace concerns human beings, so basic human feelings are also at its roots. Through inner peace, genuine world peace can be achieved. In this the importance of individual responsibility is quite clear; an atmosphere of peace must first be created within ourselves, then gradually expanded to include our families, our communities, and ultimately the whole planet - Tenzin Gyatso

During the latter part of the 20th Century, western civilization made a major impact on Indian society. Today it appears that the impact of India's culture and philosophy has in turn, influenced much of western culture, more specifically in this research paper, American society. How does India's philosophy, particularly the sense of well-being, influence western society into living a more conscious filled life?

Firstly, at the heart of well-being is a healthy lifestyle. Recently I traveled abroad and spent time speaking with different people from different cultures to try to understand the meaning of healthy living. What I discovered was that people from different walks of life have different ideas of what healthy living means. For example in America, it seems that healthy living is tied with how much exercise one gets whereas in Italy, I am told healthy living has to do with your diet and sleeping. If you speak to someone over the age of forty, you may hear that healthy living has to do with your focus and how you stimulate your mind. In fact, this is the belief system of those who incorporate Ayurveda into their daily lives. The ancient science of Ayurveda, (living a long and healthy life), dates back over 5,000 years ago and may be the oldest known health care system. Ayurveda stimulates both mind and body by promoting well-being and good health through a variety of practices. This research paper is meant to show how such practices have influenced the world. What began mainly as a belief system in Asia and India has now surfaced in western societies and in particular in America. This cultural influence can be seen through the study of yoga and all of its benefits to the human body. Throughout my research I have discovered how much influence yoga truly has had and I will not only prove its benefits but share the true meaning of what the term yoga means.

In order to bring light to India's cultural influences in America and more importantly, how it pertains to this research paper, it is necessary to distinguish the two differences. To begin with, India's belief system includes both religions and philosophies that explain basic questions of human existence. In fact, in order to understand the magnitude of influence it is important to note that many of today's influences began during the Foundation Era (8000 BCE to 600 CE). There are two major religions of India, Hinduism and Buddhism. "Hinduism assumes the eternal existence of a universal spirit that guides all life on earth. A piece of the spirit called the atman is trapped inside humans and other living creatures. The most important desire of the atman is to be reunited with the universal spirit, and every aspect of an individual's life is governed by it." (History Haven) Buddhism began later during the 6th century BCE by its founder Siddhartha

Gautama, better known as the Buddha. In Buddhism's basic tenets are the belief in The Four Noble Truths and The Eightfold Path to Enlightenment. "The ultimate goal is to follow the path to nirvana, or a state of contentment that occurs when the individual's soul unites with the universal spirit. The eight steps must be achieved one by one, starting with a change in thoughts and intentions, followed by changes in life style and actions that prelude a higher thought process through meditation. Eventually, a "breakthrough" occurs when nirvana is achieved that gives the person a whole new understanding of life." (History Haven).

"Yoga is a path to undo the root of all types of misery through the direct experience of deep, clear, open awareness." – Richard Freeman

What's not to like about stretching your muscles, sprawling out on a comfortable mat, and losing yourself in tranquility? Not only does practicing yoga tone your body and refresh your mind, it also improves your immune system, helps lower your stress level, and provides so many more health benefits. Yoga has been around for more than 5,000 years, and we're still fine-tuning the practice. Today, aside from having a yoga studio around every corner, we have many different styles of yoga. Even though they're all based on the same poses, each style has a particular focus. For example, one style has a purpose to improve flexibility, while another style primarily strengthens your core. With many different types of yoga being practiced today, it may be difficult to figure out which style benefits your mind and body the most. It's important to find out which type of yoga meets your needs, so I've included a quick explanation of five of the most common yoga styles practiced everywhere.

Hatha

Hatha originated in India in the 15th century. This type of yoga is slow-paced, gentle, and focused on breathing and meditation.

- Purpose: To introduce beginners to yoga with basic poses and relaxation techniques
- Benefits: Relieves stress, provides physical exercise, and improves breathing
- Good for: Beginners and people wanting to learn the basics of yoga

Vinyasa

Much like Hatha, Vinyasa covers basic poses and breath-synchronized movement. This variety of Hatha yoga emphasizes on the Sun Salutation, a series of 12 poses where movement is matched to the breath.

- Purpose: To link the breath with movement and to build lean muscle mass throughout the body
- Benefits: Helps improve strength and flexibility, tones the abdominal muscles, and reduces the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes
- Good for: Beginners and advanced yogis alike seeking to strengthen their bodies

Ashtanga

Ashtanga yoga metaphorically focuses on eight limbs, considered a form of power yoga; Ashtanga is fast-paced and intense with lunges and push-ups.

- Purpose: To help improve one's spiritual self
- Benefits: Relieves stress, improves coordination, and helps with weight loss
- Good for: Fit people looking to maintain strength and stamina, and those who want to get in touch with their spiritual side

Iyengar

Iyengar covers all eight aspects of Ashtanga yoga and focuses on bodily alignment. Different props like straps, blankets, and blocks are used to assist in strengthening the body. Standing poses are emphasized, and are often held for long periods of time.

- Purpose: To strengthen and bring the body into alignment
- Benefits: Helps improve balance, speeds up recovery from an injury, and builds up body strength
- Good for: Beginners who want to learn the correct alignments in each pose and those with injuries, balance issues, and chronic medical conditions like arthritis

Bikram

Also known as hot yoga, Bikram is practiced in a 95 to 100 degree room. It's typically a series of 26 poses that allows for a loosening of tight muscles and sweating.

- Purpose: To flush out toxins and to deeply stretch the muscles
- Benefits: Speeds up recovery from an injury, enhances flexibility, and cleanses the body
- Good for: Beginners and advanced yogis alike who want to push themselves and those with physical injuries

(II)

Religion or spirituality plays an important role in yoga and the basic underlying meanings behind its purpose are drawn from some form of belief system. For most yoga followers there is a large influence stemming from the beliefs of both Hinduism and Buddhism. The basic similarities between both religions as to how they pertain to this subject and research are as follows; In Hinduism, attaining the highest life is a process of removing the bodily distractions from life, allowing one to eventually understand the Brahma (God) nature within. In Buddhism, one follows a disciplined life to move through and understand that nothing in ourselves is "me" such that we dispel the very illusion of existence. In so doing one realizes Nirvana (state of being free). On the other hand, America is filled with an assortment of religions and philosophies

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

brought into the country in stages over a short period of time. Statistics show that recently, America is under-going drastic religious changes. 44% of adults have either switched religions or dropped religious traditions completely. Although groups account for over a dozen major religions, the amount of distinct religious groups can top into hundreds. The one religion I found surprisingly low on the chart was Judaism at only 1.7%. As vast as America is, the Geographic's can play a very important role when surveying small groups.

This survey was completed in 2007 of 5,000 adult Americans, places Christianity at over 75% while other religions make up only 4.7%. 

“If you’re really spiritual, then you should be totally independent of the good and the bad opinions of the world...you should have faith in yourself.” Deepak Chopra

The purpose of showing this chart is to see the influence that religion has on the practice of yoga. In many cases if certain religious groups are highly influential in certain areas of America, then it is likely that yoga and its benefits may or may not be seen as beneficial. For that matter, it may be likely that the practice of yoga is more prevalent where the practice of Hinduism and Buddhism exists. This leads me to inner-self-purification and its benefits.

What is inner self purification? According to the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Al Tazkiyah or better known as inner-self-purification of the heart and soul, is the essential gift that one gives to practice a life of compassion, mercy, generosity, and many more virtues of Tazkiyah. Much like their middle-eastern neighbors, India too practices the same virtues by incorporating a fasting exercise in self-discipline. During the months of Ramadan, the believer abstains in the daytime from food and drink of their own free will. By practicing restraint for one month in a year, they are able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year. The philosophy of purifying oneself is no stranger to human-kind; in fact Christ practiced fasting to purify himself for God. Inner-self-purification simply allows one to exercise constraints. It not only is healthy for your body as a purging stage but also your mental state of well-being. Many Americans are practicing one form or other of fasting and

Major Religious Traditions in the U.S.

	Among all U.S. adults %
Christian	78.4
Protestant	51.1
Evangelical churches	26.3
Mainline churches	24.8
Hist. black churches	0.1
Catholic	23.2
Mormon	1.7
Jehovah's Witness	0.2
Orthodox	0.2
Greek Orthodox	0.1
Russian Orthodox	0.1
Other	0.1
Other Christian	0.1
Other Religions	4.7
Jewish	0.2
Reform	0.1
Conservative	0.1
Orthodox	0.1
Other	0.0
Buddhist	0.7
Zen Buddhist	0.3
Theravada Buddhist	0.2
Tibetan Buddhist	0.2
Other	0.0
Muslim*	0.6
Sunni	0.5
Shia	0.1
Other	0.0
Hindu	0.7
Other world rel.	0.1
Other faiths	0.1
Unitarians and other liberal faiths	0.0
New Age	0.0
Native American rel.	0.0
Unaffiliated	16.7
Atheist	4.0
Agnostic	2.7
Nothing in particular	10.0
Secular unaffiliated	0.0
Religious unaffiliated	0.0
Don't Know/Refused	0.1

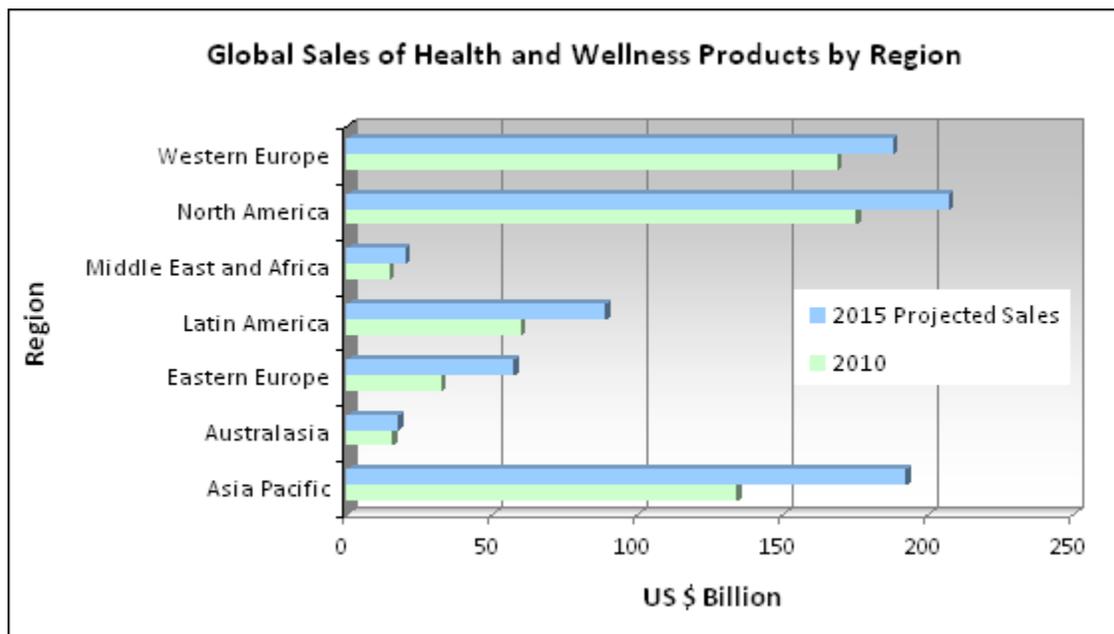
Due to rounding, figures may not add to 100 and nested figures may not add to the subtotal indicated.

* From "Muslim Americans: Class and Mostly Mainstream" by Pew Research Center, 2007

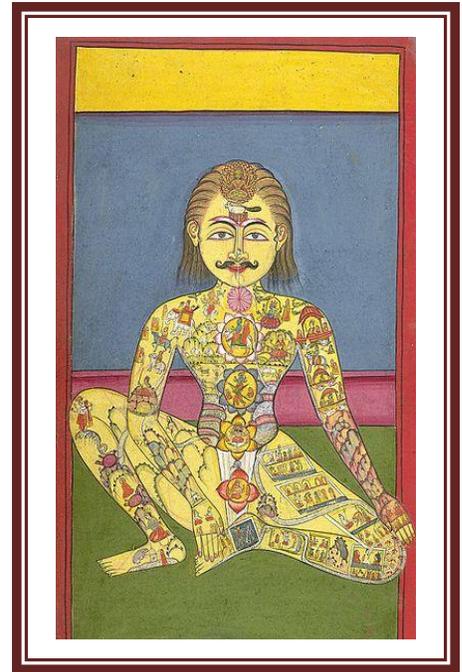
doctors are promoting certain forms of purification to their patients. Dr. Oz recommends a 48-hour weekend cleanse which consists of certain “detoxifying” foods that will keep your system running smoothly. All of this is in some way a form of inner-self-purification which ultimately leads to a healthier lifestyle. According to Google search engine, when typing as a search the physicians who recommend fasting for purification, there are over 131,000,000 results. What that tells me is just how much energy is being spent on this topic for discussion.

(III)

Over the past five years the Indian Nutraceuticals Market has been growing at a rapid pace. The Indian Nutraceuticals market is the fastest growing sector among other sectors of Indian food and Pharmaceuticals market and is expected to sustain its growth in the coming years”. The chart below spells out just how much we spend on wellness products. Although this chart is globally focused, it does point out how important alternative wellness has become in America. This is all part of the entire package of yoga’s benefits. Once indoctrinated into the full benefits and knowledge of what yoga and Ayurveda stand for, an entire wellness program opens a person up to other benefits that should be included in this regimen. In America, the sales of wellness and vitamin supplements that coincide with the benefits of yoga and practices derived from this culture are in the billions. This is by far the greatest example of the influence that India’s medical and spiritual philosophy is having on the average population of America.



Now that the awareness factor is at its highest level, how does one live in our society with self-awareness that continuously benefits the mind, body, and spirit? I believe it starts with finding your silent soul; the place that only you can reach. It begins much like life does for a child. It begins with the knowing that love surrounds us and that the love has to begin within. Yet, there is this silent destruction developing not only in America but all over the world. It is the necessity we have for instant gratification. Our world is changing at an extremely fast pace and with this speed change brings a certain dilution of humanity. Our need to interact with others has diminished in quality. At the helm of healthy living is a healthy mind. A healthy mind consists of positive energy that keeps the harmonic balance for the body and spirit. It is a negative mind that creates a mental impurity and this cannot coexist with peace and harmony. I find that with all of this extreme living there may be an unnecessary amount of self-inflicted pain that over a period of time can cause undue stress and damage to our bodies that in many cases is life-threatening. I find it hard these days to hang on to a peaceful stress-free life especially when I turn on the television, which I seldom do. Anger is such a powerful force that I find it difficult to avoid and only in a peace state can I dismiss the notion. After all, I am only human and it is only natural that I verbalize my frustrations which ultimately harm's me more than others. It seems that today Americans use the yoga mat as a therapist's couch and often as a church pew. It is only through meditation and yoga that I am able to be calm and allow my chakra to nurture. Hindu teaches us that our Chakras correspond to vital points in our physical bodies and within each point there is a connection to our nervous system all of which through meditation will give us positive energy to live the healthiest way possible. It only requires each person to recognize the importance of caring for the mind, body and spirit.



“Today I will nurture the world so as I may nurture myself.” – Deepak Chopra

We invest so much in our minds so why is it that we don't invest more into our bodies? It's not that it is easier to invest the time and energy in the brain it's a form of laziness that I believe has to be due to a lack of balance; a moderation that has been lost in this fast-paced lifestyle of our times. Even still, it is this form of laziness or lack of concern that can defeat any purpose we think we have. Educating ourselves on the ever-changing environment so that we can accept what life throws our way without causing undue stress to our bodies is as important as how to write a research paper. In fact, if we balance our lives and place greater importance on this vital issue of well-being then our immune system would have an easier time deciphering the difference between negative and positive energy. Positive energy is truly a force to be reckoned with. It comes in the form of how we transmit to others as well as our own self. The greatest breakdown of positive energy is when we allow anxiety to manifest inside and cause our positive

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

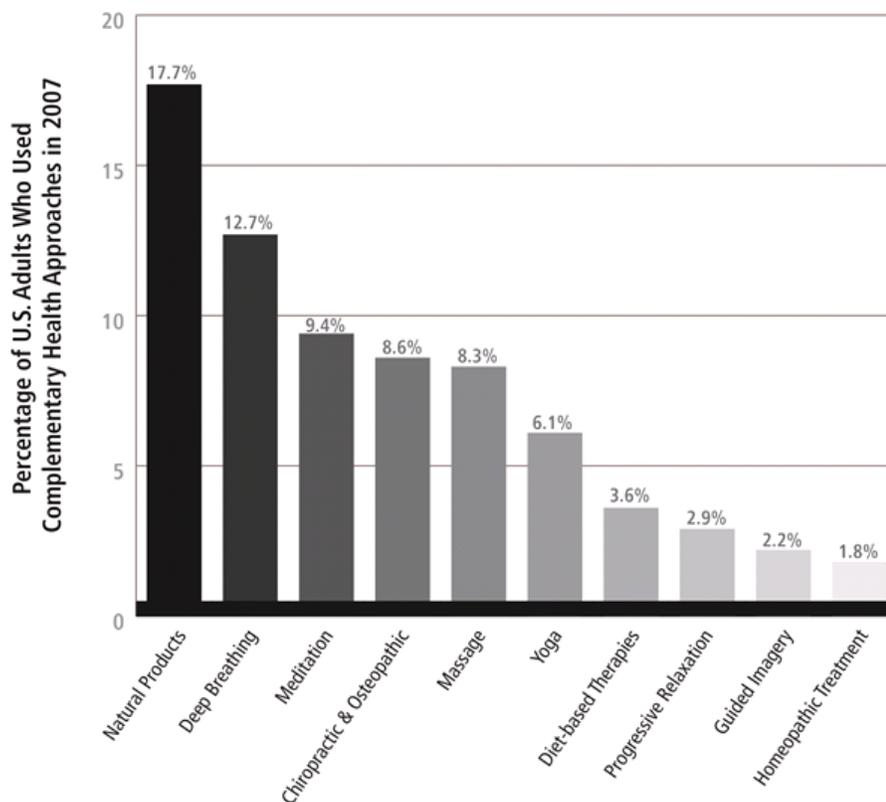
force to eventually loose direction. This is when depression takes over your entire existence and you are rendered helpless. How we handle the outside influences dictates how we handle anxiety.

What do we really know about our physical beings? It seems today that too much emphasis is on our brain and not enough energy is focused on our body. I think the importance of how well we care for ourselves is dismissed as something we will deal with after we have squared away the ever important brain. Yet the energy we put into our brains, such as, fear and worry are funneled through our physical self at some point. As humans, our complexities are as far-reaching and stressful as they are whole. How we deal with our stress, fear, and worry will dictate our life expectancy. Which brings me to dependencies and there aging effects. India's influence on American culture is marked by the growing demand for inner peace. According to the yoga jo/urnal, the latest "Yoga in America" study shows that 20.4 million Americans practice yoga compared to 15.8 million from the previous 2008 study. That is an increase of 29 percent. In addition, practitioners spend \$10.3 billion a year on yoga classes, products, and additional related items. The previous 2008 study showed \$5.7 billion. "The number of practitioners and the amount they spend has increased dramatically in the last four years," says Bill Harper, vice president and group publisher of Active Interest Media's Healthy Living Group.

The chart below was taken from a CDC National Health Statistics report prepared by the Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use among Adults and Children in 2007. It indicates that almost 20% of those surveyed use some form of natural product for health. The likelihood of the information given by the Yoga Journal added to this chart would indicate that to some extent, from 2007 to 2012 the numbers for certain, if not all, categories should have doubled. The numbers on natural products is staggering and today, the average pharmacy stocks more natural vitamins in their isles than any other product. In fact, the average person today can explain the benefits of many of the herbs used in India and Asia. Unlike just ten years ago, the average person didn't even know what they were or their benefits. How does this play into the research on yoga? This is exactly my point. What began as a simple alternative to traditional medications and physical exercise has now become natural herbal alternatives with yoga practices combined to meet the full Ayurveda experience which includes yoga practices alike. Notice of the top ten health approaches for adults in America, four are of Indian influence including yoga, deep breathing, meditation, and natural products. Since 2007, the growth has continued at the same pace.

"How can you know God if you don't know your big toe?" - B. K. S. Iyengar

10 Most Common Complementary Health Approaches Among Adults–2007



Source: Barnes PM, Bloom B, Nahin RL. Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Adults and Children: United States, 2007. CDC National Health Statistics Report #12. 2008.

Some would liken this time in our lives as the age of anxiety. In fact, statistically over the past ten years, one in five Americans is treated for anxiety related illnesses which would account for the plethora of pharmaceutical drugs on the market today. The explosion of stress-related health concerns has affected western society in such a way that the medical profession has related much of our physical ailments to stress. Such conditions as heart disease, chronic fatigue, high blood pressure, and cancer are linked to these unhealthy levels of stress hormones. To curb the enthusiasm of our hormones it is necessary to prevent unnecessary inflammatory activity in the body, in essence, make our bodies, not our minds a priority. My discovery of the Indian influence has taught me to turn off the brain once in a while and practice my breathing and yoga exercises, to find my inner Chakra, and focus more on the well-being of my inner-self.

Stress is a killer. Plain and simple, that is what stress is. So how do we deal with this killer when we don't know where its next move will be? The simple fact is stress is ever-present and like many things in life, how we handle it will determine the outcome or our destiny as we choose it. Stress is Omni-present but we can teach ourselves how to curb the stress levels through courage, acceptance, forgiveness, and generosity. I know that when I practice any of these processes, my stress levels diminish. In fact, just exercising even one of these a day will

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

lower the level of anxiety within and give you a sense of purpose. A sense of purpose is a remedy for an unhealthy life cycle.

“Cancer is like a weed,” according to Donald Abrams, M.D., chief of oncology at San Francisco General Hospital and director of the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. “You need to tend your garden carefully to make the soil as inhospitable as possible so it can’t take root in the first place.” This is the one subject I am most passionate about and as much as I have studied it, I still am startled at how little I understand. The problem is it manifests itself in us as just a cellular arrangement until we fertilize the cells. What I know is that stress is the water and what I put inside my body dictates whether the cells like or dislike the food. Fast food is certainly a like for cancer cells and mostly because as we gain weight our insulin levels rise which ultimately can produce tumor growth. What we must stay away from if we do not want chronic illnesses is inflammation. It appears that inflammation is one of the benefactors of cancer because it ties up the immune system.

I speak of consciously living my life in the healthiest way possible. What that entails is much more than what I put inside my body, although this is an integral part of the healthy process, it requires a mind flush, a defragging or disk cleanup to put it in today’s context. Modern medicine has finally begun to accept that, alternative ways of treatment for life-threatening diseases have worked in harmony with traditional methods and in fact, many Cancer centers across the United States have begun to implement treatments of such therapies. This new way of treating patients is called Integrative Medicine and according to Dr. Esther Stenberg, “Patients want to be considered whole human beings in the context of their world,” A National Institutes of Health senior scientist and author of *The Balance Within: The Science Connecting Health and Emotions*. In fact, that is the appeal of Integrative Medicine. It’s the dissatisfaction with the current health care system that has doctors feeling as if they cannot practice and patients feeling like numbers. Integrative medicine seems to promise more attention and a broader scope of healing that western medicine doesn’t allow. Since we began to realize the value of alternative treatments, many individuals are seeking treatment from other countries and the American Medical Association is quickly realizing its value.

(IV)

I was surprised to learn that the American Indian also had similar wellness beliefs. For over 10,000 years, the aboriginal cultures in North and South America used the medicine wheel as a symbol of the circle of life. They used it in prayer and to bring balance to one’s life. The circle of the Anishinaabe medicine wheel is continuous, with no beginning and no end. Everything in life is sacred – the earth, animals, plants, everything affects one another.

The diagram below shows the four colors of the medicine wheel which are spirits. Each one is associated with a life stage. **Yellow** is the beginning, the spring and the newborn. **Red** is childhood, the summer and the afternoon. **Black** is adulthood, autumn and the evening, and **White** is wisdom, the elderly and the night.

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

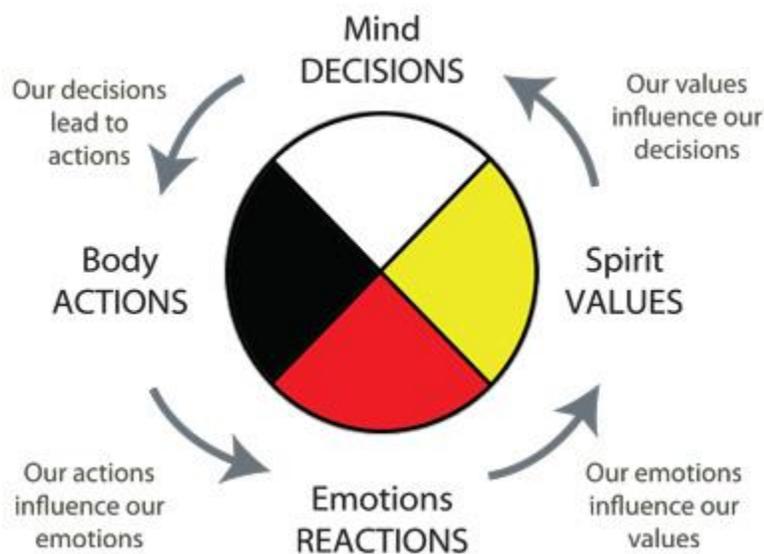
Since this wellness belief dates back so long ago, I thought this would be a great test today to see just how purposed it may be to my research. I asked seven of my co-workers what their birthdays were. The following are the results;

Two people were born in the spring, representing the – Yellow Spirit

One person was born in the summer, representing the – Red Spirit

One person was born in the autumn, representing the – Black Spirit

Two people were born in the winter, representing the – White Spirit



I suppose what I took from this little exercise was that we are all balanced. Even with a small group, the circle was complete. We are all born with different spirit colors and the balance represents order to the circle. Much like our Chakra maintains its order. The influence that India has on the aboriginal's from the America's only proves that these values that are placed on the mind, spirit and emotions are of greater importance to mankind than any other belief system. It is an important discovery that our society has come "full circle".

Our minds can take us to infinite complex environments that through learning allow some of the most amazing experiences. On many occasion I find myself deep in thought, almost in a trance that consciously or not, allows me to be in two separate places in my mind. I've somehow managed to hone in on this process and it has brought me to such a state of well-being that even today as I write, I find myself wandering off to a special place where I can be with this form of harmony. It is powerful, silent, and it is golden.

Some signs and symptoms of inner peace:

- ✦ A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.
- ✦ An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
- ✦ A loss of interest in judging other people.
- ✦ A loss of interest in judging self.
- ✦ A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- ✦ A loss of interest in conflict.
- ✦ A loss of the ability to worry. (This is a very serious symptom.)
- ✦ Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- ✦ Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- ✦ Frequent attacks of smiling.
- ✦ An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
- ✦ An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

How do I relate silence and spirituality to healthy living and in what case do I expect changes to occur if I practice certain rituals for a healthy life? First and foremost I believe that in order to achieve this awareness, one must learn to let go of the fear.

Fear is by far the most debilitating drug that as humans has caused some of mankind's greatest catastrophes. Angela Gunn stated in *Let Go of your Fear* that, "For a very long time fear has controlled me. It has paralyzed me, kept me living in desperate situations, and stopped me from living the life of my dreams." Many people are living in some sort of fear and as long as you allow fear in your life you will never be able to truly find the meaning of healthy living. This is by far the key ingredient to a healthy mind, body and fear means to have the spirit. A life without things that cannot change. In fact the anger that we bring upon our spirit is out of courage to let go of the fact the anger that we article written by Catalyst Yogi. The Five Ways to Overcome Fear and Despair with Kundalini Yoga. Kundalini

"Silence is the great teacher and to learn its lessons you must pay attention to it. There is no substitute for the creative inspiration, knowledge, and stability that come from knowing how to contact your core of inner silence." Deepak Chopra

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

yoga is a school of yoga called by practitioners “the yoga of awareness”. Its primary focus is on the expansion of sensory awareness and intuition in order to raise an individual’s consciousness. Kundalini Yoga consists of active and passive meditations which target the whole body system and mental faculties, to develop awareness, consciousness and spiritual strength.

The longer I live the less confidence I have in drugs and the greater is my confidence in the regulation and administration of diet and regimen. – John Redman Coxe

For the purpose of my research, I’m interested in what types of people are drawn to a sense of well-being that involves the traditions of India, more specifically to this research; is the exercise of yoga. There are many sides to India’s influences. I’ve discussed Hinduism and Buddhism and their influence as well as the practice of Ayurveda. Ayurveda believes that any disorder or imbalance occurring in the mind, body and soul are due to the blocked energy forces within one’s chakras. The term chakra, refers to the energy centers in our bodies and in fact there are seven chakras in our bodies in which energy flows through. Yoga is an avenue in which a person releases the seven chakras. More specific to this form of release is the practice of Vinyasa yoga. The term Vinyasa yoga refers to the alignment of movement and breathing; a method which turns static asanas into a dynamic flow. The length of one inhale or one exhale dictates the length of time spent transitioning between asanas. Asanas are then held for a predefined number of breaths. In effect, attention is placed on the breath and the journey between the asanas rather than solely on achieving perfect body alignment.

I recently interviewed a woman who described her experiences since beginning yoga as her exercise. The following interview is a current ongoing process with which I have been monitoring her warm Vinyassa yoga. As previously stated, the term Vinyasa refers to the alignment of movement and breath. Breathing is a huge part of Vinyasa yoga which is in sync with the methods discussed through Ayurveda. She had never been in a yoga class before and for reasons that involved more than just exercising the muscle skeletal system, she began attending classes. The following is my conversation with this individual who for confidentiality purposes, I will refer to as Ms. M.

JW: What was it about yoga that attracted you to start this regimen?

Ms. M: I have been feeling weak and lacking energy. I had always worked out with aerobics, Pilates, and other vigorous forms of exercise but I was really looking for something that would get to my core and help me with both my physical and mental sense of well-being.

JW: Since you began the classes, how have you been feeling?

Ms. M: My first class was so intimidating, I mean everyone in the class had literally zero fat and they were able to position their bodies in ways I couldn’t imagine. I was over-whelmed with the whole thing. But the experience was so intense that I wanted more.

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

JW: Today marks three weeks since you started, do you feel any different since then?

Ms. M: Oh yes I do. There is a sense of calmness that I feel. In fact, I used to get upset about little things and since I began Vinyassa, I'm more relaxed and my body feels stronger. I sleep better and have fewer headaches. I'm not sure if this is because of the classes but whatever the case, I'm not planning to stop any time soon.

“Laughter opens your heart and soothes your soul. No one should ever take life so seriously that they forget to laugh at themselves.” – Robin S Sharma

With yoga, our bodies become stronger, more flexible, and deeper body awareness develops. It is the mind that is given focus and the awareness that draws back into the present self. Posture and breathing are both important disciplines in yoga and in fact, builds self-confidence in oneself by the perception of how one holds themselves erect. There is a new form of yoga today that breaks out into a different remedy of stress and anxiety. It is called Laughter Yoga and it offers an opportunity for us to get out of our minds. To break free from that “bitchy resting face”, laughter yoga helps elevate our sense of well-being, allowing us to feel freer more joyful and therefore more peaceful. Is this not the goal of Yoga?

Asana (posture) is where you begin to see the development of your strength, flexibility; it is how you focus your mind into an enhanced awareness through asana. Great posture is essential to the understanding of yoga. With Laughter Yoga there isn't any beginning or advanced stigma, it is just a state of where you are in that moment and how to express yourself by just allowing the joy to flow. Now I would like to share my feelings on this new discovery of Laughter Yoga. I went to a few classes this past week, as an alternative to my standard yoga class and also for research purposes. But before I delve into this discipline, let preempt my purpose with the issue that has been in the news lately. I was watching the news one morning and the anchor spoke of a term referred to as Bitchy Resting Face (BRF). It caught my attention so I decided to find out how real it was. I was surprised to find that this is actually diagnosed as a disorder. This got me thinking about my research on yoga and how yoga would help those with whatever issue that caused BRF. I have been discussing thus far the benefits of yoga with those who have high-stress levels but it never occurred to me that there might be another avenue to research.

Laughter is something that all of us need but rarely is there a proper place to express our laughter. I think about the countless times I have been in a meeting and everyone seemed overwhelmed with the challenges or at least the perception of these challenges. It was always a thought for me in those moments where I wanted to break out into a full blown laughing spell just to remind us of what life is really about. I am not alone in this thought and in fact not only is yoga taking a direction toward laughter disciplines, but a network of doctors, spiritual leaders, and yoga instructors are promoting its benefits. In fact there is actually a World Laughter Day. It was created in 1998 by Doctor Madan Kataria who is the founder of the worldwide Laughter Yoga movement. “The celebration of World Laughter Day is a positive manifestation for world peace and is intended to build up a global consciousness of brotherhood and friendship through laughter.” (laughteryoga.org). The multiplier effect: people leaving Laughter Yoga sessions and

interact with others, through work and home. Once contact is made, the varying degree in which this powerful emotional state manifests itself causes a huge chain reaction. If I think about the enormous stress levels of today, whether through trying to keep my family unit purposed, or my work fulfilling, not to mention my creative flow for class work, I've come to realize that laughter has always been that one denominator which provided me the relief I needed in the most dire situations.

A 2009 documentary film directed by Albert Nerenberg called Laughology is the first feature length documentary about laughter. The documentary gives power to laughter and states its case on how laughter is the original peace signal. He states that laughter may have been the key to the rise of human civilization. Nerenberg's inspiration for the movie came from his own tragic loss of a loved one to Cancer. It was his thoughts of depression and how it would affect his child that promoted the need for laughter as a healing tool. The movie also highlights the contagiousness of laughter. Certain styles of laughter can be more contagious than others but the benefits of laughter whether through the discipline of yoga or just watching comedy is by far the greatest form of healing the mind, body, and spirit. The universal benefits of laughter to mankind cross all race, creed, spiritual, and ethnic boundaries.

“When you laugh, you change and when you change the whole world changes around you.” – Dr. Madan Kataria

The following is a short list I discovered in my research of some basic Laughter Yoga exercise that if coupled with thirty minutes of exercise per day will likely change not only our energy levels, (eliminating the need for so much caffeine), as well, physically strengthening the body core, (enhancing social experiences), but also mentally stimulating our minds for better work performance. If nothing else, try this exercise at work or at home and see everyone's reaction. It will be contagious and fun!

- Cell Phone Laughter: Hold an imaginary cell phone to your ear and laugh.
- Gradient Laughter: Fake a smile; giggle, then laugh slowly and gradually increases in tempo and volume.
- Greeting Laughter: Greet everybody the way you normally greet (e.g. shake hands) and replace words with laughter.
- Hearty Laughter: Spread your arms up, look up and laugh heartily as you direct your laughter to come straight from your heart.
- Think of a socially awkward situation and laugh at it (e.g. shoe laces untied, shaving cream behind your ears...)

Finally, are there any substantial long-term benefits to Laughter Yoga? The only real evidence to this question lies with those who understand how to laugh and enjoy the feeling it brings to them. Laughter Yoga is simply an opportunity to learn to laugh without being dependent on something to stimulate our ability to find laughter. In other words, it is the

empowering of ourselves to connect to unconditional joy and because joyful laughter inherently bonds people together, it moves us toward the possibility of a peaceful existence.

(V) – Conclusion

What I am seeing more and more in today's society is the need for three major components of good health; the mind, body, and spirit. What does it take to bring harmony to all three? One of these is a deep understanding of your individual happiness. The author and spiritual speaker, Deepak Chopra has shared for years his inspirational conversations. He simplifies this topic of well-being by stating, "There are no extra pieces in the universe. Everyone is here because he or she has a place to fill, and every piece must fit itself into the big jigsaw puzzle." (Synchrodestiny). What I believe it takes to build your own three components to maximum strength is faith. Faith is the knowing who you are, and where you want to be. Faith is in oneself as well as those that one chooses to have faith in. All of these components of good health only signify that as we evolve, we cannot change the inevitable but we can change ourselves in the way we chose to exist. It has been through the learning and educating of my mind that I have found my greatest silence. My voice has suddenly been allowed to be free and spring hope, eternal. It is never too late to find your happiness. Even for a moment, if that is all you have. Carol Lynn Pearson wrote in her "Consider the Butterfly", "According to Vedanta, there are only two symptoms of enlightenment, just two indications that a transformation is taking place within you toward a higher consciousness. The first symptom is that you stop worrying. Things don't bother you anymore. You become light-hearted and full of joy. The second symptom is that you encounter more and more meaningful coincidences in your life, more and more synchronicities. And this accelerates to the point where you actually experience the miraculous."

After a lengthy and frankly, exhausting research study on India's philosophies with particular attention to inner-self and well-being, I found the source of its influence on society today to be a necessity and not so much a luxury. Simply, health and wellness is not a fad, it is a way of life and most people pursue some form of health and wellness. The extent of their interest and engagement varies considerably. Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects all play a part in the contribution. Every day I see and read more and more of India's influences marked by a society that seeks a personal freedom, a place where one can find happiness within. I see it in major branding of products as Americans are willing to partner with brands and companies that help them achieve their wellness goals. I see it in leaders who express their own personal journeys through yoga. It is an undeniable growth that can only get greater as long as we seek alternative ways in which to live.

If there is one thing I take from this research it is learning to simplify life. Where do we start when trying to simplify life and build a sense of self purpose? It is truly a puzzle at first but the unraveling begins with letting go. At least for me that is what I had to do. I had to let go and allow myself the freedom to just be. Some of the most influential moments in this process have been through spiritual readings. Not necessarily through organized religion but through the knowing that there is something greater than myself; something more powerful that I need to be a part of. This feeling is quintessential when learning the culture of Hindu. There is a calming

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

affect that allows me to meditate in a way that fills my soul with an awakening of all my senses and allows me my youth, my wisdom of knowing that I can be just as I am. It is the knowing that the four-letter word, "fear" can no longer be part of my life. In fact, with this spiritual awakening through yoga practices I have discovered happiness in my business and personal life is often a matter of subtraction, not addition. The simple truth is that yoga is addictive. The reason is simple. It makes you feel better than any other form of exercise, any other form of an addictive product. When talking to people from all walks of life, the one thing they all share is that since yoga, their lives are not the same. The feeling is something that cannot be explained. It is spiritual, physical, and mental. Yoga is a way of life. It is ancient and deeply rooted in our core. It is the one true form of expression that aligns the human race with our planet and our solar system.

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Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

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Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

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Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

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Appendix:

B. K. S. Iyengar

Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar, is the founder of Iyengar Yoga and is considered one of the foremost yoga teachers in the world. He has written many books on yoga practice and philosophy. Iyengar yoga classes are offered throughout the world. Iyengar is one of the earliest students of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, who is often referred to as "the father of modern yoga." While modern yoga has arisen from the teachings of Krishnamacharya, Iyengar has been primarily responsible for popularizing yoga around the world.

Deepak Chopra

Deepak Chopra, M.D is the author of more than 65 books, including numerous New York Times bestsellers. His medical training is in internal medicine and endocrinology, and he is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians, a member of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, and an adjunct professor of Executive Programs at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. He is also a Distinguished Executive Scholar at Columbia Business School, Columbia University, and a Senior Scientist at the Gallup organization. For more than a decade, he has participated as a lecturer at the Update in Internal Medicine, an annual event sponsored by Harvard Medical School's Department of Continuing Education and the Department of Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

John Redman Coxe

John Redman, physician, born in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1773; died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 22 March. 1864. He was educated in Philadelphia, completed his classical course in Scotland, returned home in 1790, studied medicine and after receiving his diploma in 1794, studied in London, Paris, and Edinburgh. In 1796 he settled in Philadelphia, and in 1798, during the visitation of yellow fever, was appointed by the Board of health physician to the port. He was for several years one of the physicians of the Pennsylvania hospital, and also of the Philadelphia dispensary. In 1809 he was elected professor of chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Coxe was the first to practice vaccination in Philadelphia. He published a treatise on "Inflammation" (Philadelphia, 1794); "Importance of Medicine" (1800); "Vaccination" (1800); "Combustion" (1811); "American Dispensary" (1827); "Refutation of Harvey's Claim to the Discovery of the Circulation of the Blood" (1834).

Madan Kataria

Madan Kataria, M.D. is a qualified Physician in Allopathic system of medicine, practicing in Mumbai (India) for the past 20 years. He was ex-registrar Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre Bombay in Internal Medicine and Cardiology. Popularly known as the merry medicine man from

Jannette Winstanley
Jw3097@nyu.edu

India, the Guru of Giggling (London Times), he is the pioneer of laughter clubs movement all over the world has developed a new technique of group Laughter based on yoga.

Richard Freeman

Richard Freeman has been a student of yoga since 1968. He has spent nearly nine years in Asia studying various traditions which he incorporates into the Ashtanga yoga practice as taught by his principal teacher, K. Pattabhi Jois of Mysore, India. Richard's background includes studying Sufism in Iran, Zen and Vipassana Buddhist practice, Bhakti and traditional Hatha yoga in India. Starting in 1974 he also began an in-depth study of Iyengar yoga, which eventually led him to Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga. Richard is an avid student of both Western and Eastern philosophy, as well as Sanskrit. His ability to juxtapose various viewpoints, without losing the depth and integrity of each, has helped him develop a unique, metaphorical teaching style.

Robin S. Sharma

Robin Sharma is one of the world's premier thinkers on leadership in business and in life. He is the author of numerous books, including the #1 international bestseller *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*; its bestselling sequel *Leadership Wisdom from The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*; *Family Wisdom from The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*; *Who Will Cry When You Die?*; *The Saint*, *MegaLiving*, and *The Surfer*, and *The CEO*. Sharma is also in constant demand across the globe as a keynote speaker for organizations dedicated to developing leaders at all levels and as an executive coach to people ready to create extraordinary work and personal lives.

Tenzin Gyatso: 14th Dalai Lama

Tenzin Gyatso, born Lhamo Dondrub, July 6, 1935 is the 14th and current Dalai Lama, as well as the longest lived incumbent. Dalai Lamas are the head monks of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, and is also well known for his lifelong advocacy for Tibetans inside and outside Tibet. The Dalai Lama was born in Taktser Qinghai and was selected as the rebirth of the 13th Dalai Lama two years later, although he was only formally recognized as the 14th Dalai Lama on 17 November 1950, at the age of 15.