

Yoga Has Been Hijacked by the Fitness Industry

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Without question, the popularity of yoga has seen a dramatic rise in the last decade or two. From a whimsical practice by out-of-the-box artists and celebrities to today's modern-day soccer mom, yoga has arrived as a mainstream experience. Nobody knows for sure how old yoga is. Some say yoga is a thousand year old practice while others insist it is less than one-hundred years old. Despite this uncertainty about its origins, yoga has transpired into the ordinary person's existence.

As yoga has risen in popularity it has continued to evolve as many have added their own individual brand to it. There are now many modern day styles and tastes of yoga to choose from. While there are no two teachers or classes alike, we embrace the fundamental principles of yoga to be the same. Unfortunately, over the last several years yoga has taken a diversion that has shifted this classic practice off-track. This diversion was precipitated as yoga became more popular.

The popularity of yoga has enabled non-yogic thinking and practices to capture and subdue the essence of yoga. The heart of the matter is that yoga has been hijacked by the fitness industry and many of the core beliefs and principles have been eliminated as yoga is now often seen as just another way to "work out." While it might look like yoga on the outside and even use similar names and language, the unfortunate truth is that in many cases yoga is being misrepresented and spoiled because of the fitness industry's attempt to capitalize on this modern day yoga revolution.

Nobody owns yoga. While some third party groups seem to believe that they can be the gatekeeper of yoga, the reality is that yoga is a free and independent enterprise that continues to be morphed by those who participate in it. Just like an open-source internet program continues to be changed by those who use it, yoga acts much the same. Every yoga teacher who creates a new pose or sequence adds to yoga. Every new style or philosophy that evolves adds new dimensions. Yoga as a whole continues to evolve and grow as its members evolve and grow. Yoga is not static but an ever-evolving and changing system.

The difference between an open-source computer program and yoga can also be quiet dramatic. While the computer program most often keeps its primary basis intact as it evolves, yoga has alarmingly

lost much of its true meaning in many realms of practice. As the fitness industry grabbed on to yoga to make it its own, the sad reality is that yoga has morphed into aspects that are quite contrary to yoga teachings and yoga can look very un-yoga like. Yoga has become more of a workout and less of a holistic wellness experience due to the influences of the fitness industry

In many instances, yoga has lost its congruency with purpose. What is important to remember is that as concepts evolve the original core beliefs must remain intact. The true core of yoga has become lost as more and more fitness magazines have shaped yoga into a workout. Even many traditional yoga magazines have gone off track as the editors, writers and teachers have all fallen into the illusion that yoga is more of a workout than anything else. As the violence in our culture has rapidly increased with more aggressive contact sports, video games, boxing, mixed martial arts and other war-like behavior, the perception of the human body has become more of a numbed-out warrior than anything else. This element of warrior training and violence is a mainstay of the fitness world and has crept rather sneakily into the yoga world.

Many aspects of yoga and the basic premises of yoga have been violated and polluted as a hard-body warrior mentality has taken over the mainstream consciousness. As photo-friendly as it might seem, the picture of a hard body weight lifter doing yoga on the cover of a fitness or yoga magazine is about as congruent as a vegetarian chomping on a grass-fed, hormone-free cheeseburger.

We can even witness this idea portrayed as many celebrity driven workout videos now include sections on yoga. The astute yogi will have a difficult time viewing these portions of the dvd program. It is as if a trained opera singer is now expected to teach vocal lessons to people who cannot sing. There are long-time health club managers, owners, and employees who have shifted over to the yoga world, only to pollute yoga into a workout craze. Some gym fitness teachers have spent a lifetime training in the gym, only to take a weekend yoga training and end up teaching a workout based yoga experience. While there are highly trained yoga teachers who do teach at gyms and health clubs, most often you have a fitness trainer teaching fitness yoga. These weekend warrior yoga trainings that have turned fitness professionals into yoga teachers in as little as two days have convoluted the true purpose and values of yoga.

Yoga studios have traditionally been the heart and soul of many communities. The heart and soul has been lost as yoga has shifted into another fitness routine. Yoga has become another lifeless adrenaline driven exercise to keep one stimulated. While many people have been looking for a place to calm down and get quiet they are getting just the opposite—a bee hive of stimulus that would put a high energy drink to shame.

Imagine if NASCAR (*The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing*) purchased the PGA (*Professional Golfers Association*). Now you might have golfers riding around in golf carts as fast as they can trying to finish the eighteen holes of golf with the fastest time. Golfers would not be allowed to leave the cart and must make shots while sitting in the cart. The golfer who finished with the fastest time and with the fewest shots would win. Many would still call this golf. As things evolve though, when they lose their core values they are no longer congruent.

Much of the yoga world has gone this direction. As fitness has crept into the yoga practice it often becomes more about the fitness and less about the core concepts of yoga. The classic yoga body is not a chiseled warrior but a soft, flexible and energized body. The traditional fitness body is a hard body that is lacking in vitality and flexibility. The connective tissue in the fitness body has hardened and glued together while creating more mass and density. Unfortunately, living in a "muscle culture" has favored hardened bodies over balanced and energized bodies.

A yoga experience is much more likely to activate the *Relaxation Response* whereas the warrior fitness practice is more likely to facilitate the *Stress Response*. Through slow and deep breathing the *Relaxation Response* has more chance to be activated in yoga while the warrior workout will create more adrenaline, testosterone and cortisol which are indicators of the *Stress Response* being activated.

Someone might feel better when they leave the gym after a fitness workout but that is only because the stress hormones (testosterone, adrenaline and cortisol) have taken over. In essence, the classic yoga practice, while it can be very athletic and aggressive at times, is more apt to create a relaxation experience while the classic fitness workout will most likely keep one in a state of pumped up war. You lose the *Relaxation Response* and are heading for a war state when you cross too much fitness into the yoga practice. This is where something might look similar on the outside and be completely different on the inside. The intent is what matters.

Yoga also is blessed with many more health benefits that include such elements as teaching a student how to breathe fully, learning to balance, focus, twisting, anti-aging and so much more. The fitness movement is limited to two basic concepts: cardio fitness and strength. A hard fit body with a lowered resting heart rate might not be as beneficial in the long term as most people think. Hardness is not necessarily health.

Yoga will continue to evolve. As yoga evolves it is important that the core principles of yoga remain the same. As fitness has wrapped its hands around yoga it is vital that yoga not detour too far from its center. Yoga will continue to be like a ship at sail in the vastness of the ocean. Without a captain or designated course the ship will sail off

into an obscure direction. Let's hope that yoga remains on course to fulfill its divine purpose.