

Taking Yoga Further - Excerpt from Yoga for Every Body

Students often ask: How do I progress? How do I know when I've progressed? Does it mean staying longer in a posture? Does it mean practising more often or for a longer time? What are the next steps? and so on.

These questions can be explored by looking at Yoga from three different viewpoints. They can help us appreciate what it means to change the unhelpful patterns of behaviour which cause us problems and difficulties time and time again.

The three viewpoints are: 1) Practice 2) Lifestyle 3) Attitude

1) Practice

Our first contact with Yoga is generally through a Yoga class or book or DVD. We experience the idea that Yoga is to be practised rather than talked about. So the first step or challenge is to establish a regular or consistent practice.

How we do this depends on our approach. For example trying to find time may not work. It is better to say how can I make time? What do I need to put aside or give up in order to have more time for practice? Maybe watch a little less television, or get up a little earlier or put time aside to be with your practice as you would to visit a friend.

Yoga is a relationship and to deepen the link your practice needs to be a friend, a support, a place to be, rather than a chore or task to be finished with. Practice is the first step in a journey towards knowing who we really are rather than the roles we play.

2) Lifestyle

Our attempts to practise, by making time at home, or going to classes, bring us to the next step. As our relationship with practice deepens, we come to appreciate the many ways it is affected by our lifestyle. The issues of food, sleep, leisure activities, social and medical drugs, stress-inducing activities, negative pastimes, can all be brought more into focus and we have greater freedom of choice.

We come to appreciate that our eating patterns can be both helped by practice and can help how we feel about practice. The same applies to sleep in terms of quality and perhaps in being able to rise a little earlier in order to have time for a short practice before the demands of the day take over. Practice can offer space for reflection on how our lifestyle patterns support or hinder its progress. This evolution is one of well being and an increased ability to cope with stress and difficulties.

3) Attitude

From making time to practice we have more strength to look at our lifestyle and how we can make positive choices around helpful and unhelpful patterns. We feel more inclined to improve the quality of our relationship, whether it is with food, work or our fellow beings.

So we evolve towards the third step, that of reflecting on our attitude towards others and ourselves. We can become more able to allow ourselves and others space to make mistakes. We can become more able to see that the mind is not always our friend. It has its own agenda based on our past experiences. We can also come to appreciate that we can influence and, with consistent awareness born out of practice and lifestyle, change our relationship with these patterns and the way they can sabotage our life. Here the help of a teacher can be of great value in setting priorities and a direction.

To summarise, these three aspects offer an integrated direction for our journey. Making time to practise helps in looking at lifestyle. The well being that arises from practice and a more positive lifestyle supports the longer term goal of transforming unhelpful attitudes by being able to stay open hearted within the difficulties that life inevitably presents.

Yoga is a journey for the better. Travel well!