

Meditating in Asana

BY ED BROWN

Here are some pointers for doing yoga (or meditation) with a more “meditative” feeling. Keep in mind that meditation or yoga is not about “getting it right,” but an ongoing study of entering more deeply into your life as it unfolds.

BALANCE The definition of “asana” is a good place to start: asana is strength and firmness without tension or rigidity, balanced with repose and stillness without dullness. Study this by noticing what *your* tendency is: do you over-effort? Do you drift off? Sometimes you can more fully notice your tendency by over-working or under-doing on purpose. Go in the direction *you* need to go.

EFFORT LESS Study how little effort is needed to accomplish the pose. We associate effort with accomplishment or getting somewhere (no pain, no gain), but just imagine you’ve *arrived!* You can let the body’s tightness and hard-headedness dissolve into “soft mind.” One simple way to practice this is, “Don’t do yoga with your face.” Notice your eyes, mouth and jaw, and to the extent you can, let them soften and “effort less.”

ENJOY MORE This is another way to say, “Slow down.” If you try to caress someone while running past them, it will be a slap. Let your experience “touch” you instead of having it rush by you—or you rush by it. You can learn to appreciate your experience and resonate with it. Perhaps while doing yoga you could, as Mary Paffard suggests, “Listen to the song that is uniquely you.”

TASTE YOUR EXPERIENCE Do not go out to your senses, telling them what to do or what they should be experiencing. Let the senses come to you. The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Do not colonize yourself.” Experience your experience and let it be what it is: pleasant or painful, hot or cold, concentrated or scattered.

USE FORMS AS A VEHICLE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION It is easy to get caught up in “attaining” the form or “perfecting” the pose, but you could also use it for developing self-awareness. The whole teaching is there each moment, so whatever happens, study and see what you can learn.

*Yoga Class. Sculpture by
Patricia Sullivan.
Photo by Ed Brown.*

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME IN THE NOW Don’t project yourself into some future to be attained or realized. Perhaps this is another way of saying not to overexert yourself. If you over-stretch, your muscles tighten up to protect themselves. This is not a place you can be at home. Back off. On the other hand, you will find it useful to make yourself at home in a variety of less-than-usual circumstances. In other words, don’t hold your breath waiting for things to return to normal.

RESTORE CHOICE, REDUCE COERCION Choose to do what you are doing. Practice the forms carefully enough to make them yours. There is no exactly right thing to do or exactly right way to be, so allow choice rather than coercing obedience. *Explore.*

REALIZE STILLNESS You don’t need to do anything. In fact, you cannot do anything. Rest. Repose in the pose. Listen to the vastness, rather than continuously telling yourself what to do.

LET YOUR BREATH TAKE THE POSTURE Do not struggle between taking the posture and trying to maintain your usual way of breathing. Let your breath take the posture. Let your breath expand to fill the posture.

LET FLOW Being where you are (spatially and temporally congruent), watch out for the flood of gratitude and thankfulness.

EAT IT If worse comes to worst and your experience is just plain awful, “Eat it.” Chew and swallow, chew and swallow, and let yourself *digest* the experience over time. Any real food takes a while to digest—to extract the nutritive essence, distribute it throughout your being, and discard what remains. ♦

