

A Modern Approach to Yoga

Talks by Joel Kramer & Diana Alstad

Humanity is at a cusp point in its evolution, perilously suspended between the beliefs and habits of adolescence and the urgency of becoming adult. In our world of vast changes, traditional roles and rules are shifting causing old securities, both personal and social, to be fraught with uncertainty. As old ways of being become part of the problem, we must forge new awareness and meaning into life, evolving both individually and socially. Part of this endeavor involves translating the wisdom of the ages into modern, meaningful terms. Yoga itself can contain blocks and rigidities, for it developed in authoritarian social contexts that teachers and practitioners took for granted. Since spiritual hierarchies upheld rigid belief systems, much of yoga became deeply bound by tradition and authority.

But tradition can be used as a stepping stone to grow from rather than as a vice to squeeze the present into. Yoga can be approached as exploration and its unique tools used to foster conscious living and change. An integral part of yogic tradition is reinterpreting what yoga is. People have always re-examined and redefined the thrust of importance of yoga, which later became tradition – to be redefined again as times and consciousness evolve. This flexibility at the heart of yoga has allowed yoga to be meaningful throughout its long history.

Yoga as Transformation: Body, Mind, Relationship

Yoga is a transformative process. The heart of yoga lies in learning and exploring—finding out how you work and how universal patterns express themselves in you. It's an approach to life and self-understanding that offers tools to open the mind and body. By helping break through the habits of mind and body that bind us, yoga brings newness and interest. It can allow us to assimilate change and pioneer new ways of relating to others and the world.

The yogic process is both simple and profound. At its core, it involves confronting yourself, discovering and working with your limits. Just as physical yoga loosens tight areas, bringing energy and emotional stability, so too yoga of the mind. The mind has conditionings and habit patterns—"edges"—that filter information, rigidifying its beliefs, ideals, self-images and behavior. Yoga of the mind offers ways of examining one's inner dramas to see how thought works, expanding inner freedom, self-understanding and potential.

Relational differences are also "edges" everyone confronts. Approaching relationships as a yoga through exploring their blocks and patterns brings yogic awareness and openings to intimacy and the social arena. Exploring the body, mind and relationships consciously and creatively can be an on-going source of discovery and deepening connection.

Heart of Asana

Joel discusses his mind/body approach to *asana* and to yoga as self-exploration. A key to yoga is how awarely you listen to your body. For this, postures need to be utilized as tools for exploring the body instead of as goals to achieve. The quality of mind that you bring to your practice is of utmost importance, for many of the limits that you confront in yoga live in the mind and its resistances. Through becoming sensitive to feedback you learn to listen to your body's messages. Breath is the key that coordinates body and mind. Part of the art of yoga involves learning and refining technique. At its deepest level, yoga involves generating energy. This entails balancing pushing and relaxing—an intricate dance between control and surrender.

An asana session usually follows this talk. Instead of leading a continuous series or workout, Joel uses key postures to help people experience from the inside "how a posture works." This includes how to: deepen postures with breath, interpret feedback, play different "edges," channel lines of energy, use body leverages, and develop cycles. Participants can bring up any posture or issue they wish to explore.

** The asana session is for those already familiar with yoga – at any level.*

Yoga of the Mind

This magical evolutionary gift, our mind, can develop greater clarity and wisdom through inner inquiry and sensitivity to feedback. Being conscious with a capacity to self-reflect is a doorway to growth and expanding human potential that each of us can tap into.

Physical yoga offers a way to loosen physical patterns and bring balance. The mind also takes on conditioning and habit patterns that filter the way information is perceived, internalized, and acted upon. Many of the assumptions, values, worldviews and very identities people operate from become more rigid over time. Exploring and opening the mind can be approached as a yoga, broadening awareness and bringing more flexibility, insight, and an adventurous quality to life.

Yoga of Relationship

The spiritual quest to “Know thyself” is usually presented as an inward activity—but as social beings, one cannot fully know oneself in isolation. The Yoga of Relationship reveals what can only be discovered in relationship, bringing openings and insights that deepen connection. It offers new frameworks and practices for breaking out of limiting patterns and reactions, unraveling “knots,” and resolving control issues. Like physical tightness and blocks, differences and conflicts become edges to explore with interest and sensitivity to feedback. Dealing consciously and creatively with the unavoidable issues of control, power and self-centeredness can be an on-going source of discovery and mutual growth that foster intimacy and passion over time.

Yoga for These Times

The burgeoning of yoga globally has barely begun to tap into yoga’s multi-faceted relevance for modern living. At the heart of yoga is the quality of awareness that one brings to the multi-faceted venture of life. Our minds and bodies are extraordinary instruments that yoga can hone and refine to touch into deep reservoirs of energy and wisdom. In physical yoga one can confront in a direct way many choices, uncertainties, and even risks found in life’s other arenas. This can build a foundation for learning and for a creative approach to living.

Like the body, the mind and relationships have patterns and blocks that can be explored and opened. The yogas of mind and relationship both deal with discovering and moving beyond the limits imposed by conditioning. This brings more awareness and newness into intimacy and daily life. Learning to tune into the wisdom of your body and mind and the feedbacks of relationships is a key to putting vitality and well-being in your own hands.

Yoga & Evolution

Yoga is remarkable in its capacity to transcend the beliefs and attitudes of its origins. It can be creatively adapted to the needs of the times and foster conscious evolution. Approaching yoga as exploration helps break through the habits of mind and body that bind us, freeing and expanding consciousness. Growth comes as awareness, empathy and identity broaden, becoming more inclusive.

Yoga at its core aims at understanding the timeless question “Who am I?” If you delve into the deepest regions of your being, you learn not merely about you, the individual, but about yourself as part of the total fabric of life and an active participant in evolution. Yoga can explore and open boundaries between people bringing real communication, which is communion. This allows you to touch into the existential reality of others and share deeply in the movement of life. Yoga can transform you deep within the fiber of your being, freeing you for a more profound relation with life and more aware participation in the evolutionary process.

Our talks are followed by discussion.

Each talk can be a separate event or combined with others into a longer seminar.

This could include any of our talks on spirituality: Bringing Spirituality Down to Earth, Unmasking Spiritual Authoritarianism, Spirituality & Evolution, Bringing East & West Together