

I have chosen to write this heartfelt piece with no jargon and entirely in my own words. This is what has come out of my mind and on to the page!

I often wonder why people aren't queuing outside the Yoga local class. Do you wish for benefits similar to those gained from practising Pilates or mindfulness



and yet with many **more** benefits? It is likely that there are misunderstandings about what yoga entails. Yoga is a life science and there are many facets to it. Have you thought about attending the local yoga class but feel that you just don't want to get off the couch especially in the winter? It is the responsibility of the yoga teacher to choose a hall that will be warm all seasons and in fact, practising yoga postures can make you feel warm as your circulation gets going as you move.

Once you have experienced the many benefits of yoga, you won't need willpower as you **will look forward to** your weekly class – you won't be 'throwing yourself around' and you will feel calmer and be able to sleep better, particularly after an evening class. The practice of yoga makes you feel well and motivates you to be



more energetic than you would otherwise be. After a time, you may even find yourself starting to practise for the odd ten minutes at home (a journey always starts with a 'first step'). You may remember those days gone by when your School teacher used to open the window and get everyone to stretch – you breathed in energising oxygen and you felt more awake – in addition, your mood lifted. The life-force that we ingest in a concentrated way and use so

much more efficiently after practising yoga heals us and enhances our being in myriad ways. Once you get into practising yoga, you may find that you are the person that can walk up hills without getting out of breath, that you feel more like participating in sports (if any are of interest to you) and in general, being active and productive.

Of course, you will need to try out several yoga classes until you find the one that is just right for you – so many factors to consider such as how do you find the

Yoga Kind

pace of the class, do you feel comfortable in the room where the class is held and can you listen to the teacher's particular voice. A good yoga teacher is a facilitator, helping to empower you to reach your goals.

You can lengthen and strengthen your muscles, you can improve your breathing so that you are using all or most of your lung capacity - instead of the usual 20% - and your mood will lift.

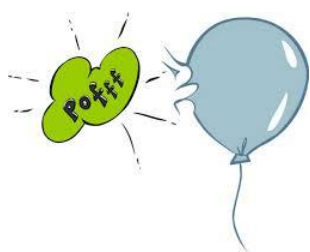
Do you feel you are too stiff to attend a yoga class and are afraid of showing yourself up? Be aware that yoga is not at all competitive – you don't need to look at anyone else during your class – you can socialise before and after class if you wish to. During class, the aim is to keep your awareness focused on your own body, the sensations and the feelings experienced within. Ultimately you will find that yoga is not about thinking but rather it's about body wisdom and you will come to know which way to move and when. You will *know* your body - becoming aware, in day-to-day life, of any changes in your breathing – for the better or worse (such as shallow breathing, holding your breath when tense as well as times when your breath is barely discernible. This happens when you are relaxed). The bones and joints of yoga teachers feel stiff some days – they are mere mortals, too; genetics and all sorts of factors can play a part in how we feel. But we can undo the uncomfortable feelings, mental and physical knots with yoga and change them to comfortable feelings – **after just 15 minutes of yoga we can transform our whole mood; practising yoga 'gives you the years back'** as you **squat down to the bottom shelf at the supermarket and effortlessly stretch up to the top one.**



If you are very stiff to start, just aim for small improvements and remember that you **can sit on a chair** for the breathing or relaxation practices. Yoga is not an 'ought to' and 'should do' activity . Once you actually get along to a class and experience even a fleeting moment of feeling good or enjoying one particular posture or breathing practice – you have yoga in your life. You can specialise in the postures or the breathing or both and you can tip the balance in favour of more relaxation time at home – if that is what you need. Yoga relaxation is based on the withdrawing of the senses and the aim is to stay awake and aware during this practice.

You can specialise in the classic yoga texts. A fascinating allegorical text is the Bhagavad Gita in which a battlefield scene in which Arjuna is required to fight his own kith and kin is about 'the war within'. We learn that the fundamental experience of human suffering is an alienation from the 'self' and through that text and the "Yoga Sutras" we learn about all human beings' predisposition to wrong knowledge, illusion, attachment and desires that cause us mental pain. And we can make our life into a war with constant conflict (letting negative moods and thoughts spiral out of control) or we can trust in the journey that life takes us on (even embracing bad as well as good occurrences) and ultimately see life as a support and a friend. Yoga will help you to find the latter scenario. Somehow, the introspection of the yoga practice brings clarity to one's life – clarity of thought and a general feeling of joie de vivre, and an inner strength to help through difficult times.

Going back to the comparison with Pilates, we can obtain a strong bodily core through practising yoga postures and become more supple, flexible (physically and also in ourselves), strong, better able to balance/be co-ordinated. If we went to be more active, we can practise yoga sequences repeatedly and make these "aerobic" in order to work the cardiovascular system. There is no need to fear yoga classes. Very few western classes spend time chanting or meditating deeply – those practices are either to be sought out at specialist venues or can be practised privately. The benefits of meditating – which could be a regular 5-10 minute 'sit' following a short breathing practice - have been proven to help with mental health and well-being.



Being 'in the now' is not **being 'in the now' is scary** – chattering mind takes over –
bombarded with endless,
tiring thoughts. **"Pop" all of**



scary. **Not**
when the
and we are
pointless,
those

invasive thought bubbles and be in the now looking at a beautiful lake, the sand and the sea, the forest, the wonders of life, ultimately being comfortable in oneself!

I often find analogies to describe yoga and yoga principles. During class, I weave the yoga philosophy into the session so that the class members learn and understand yoga - and are not just moving into postures on an "auto-pilot" type of basis.

I started to play the saxophone during the late 80's. As I had been able to read music from a young age, I learnt quickly but I stopped playing a couple of months after starting up. *And I took up yoga in January 1989.* I took up the saxophone again later that year and **I could not believe the difference in my playing** – all, of course, owing to the breathing work that I had been practising at yoga classes; improvements in the capacity and elasticity of my lungs. I have just finished reading a scientific article about the improvement in professional swimmers' breathing after practising yoga.



My posture had, no doubt, improved, too. Yoga is such a miracle – it can help the wind instrument player or singer operate at the top of his/her game, it can help the office worker deal with the tensions of sitting at a computer all day (that was the case for me, too) and it can 'sort out your head'; it can help you and me. I often think of yoga when I Hoover behind my sofa – sucking up all those grey cobwebs. When we practice yoga breathing and/or yoga poses we are effectively acting as the Hoover clearing out the dross and blockages (blockages in the body lead, of course, to disease). I also remember that I used to use a big soft brush to clean out my saxophone so that the air that I blew down it could have a clear path and that clear path is opened up to our lungs when we practice yoga breathing.

If you commit to a yoga class, you may not become as bendy as some but you will be a lot less stiff than you will be if you stay on the couch.

There is no need to be suspicious of yoga if you are religious – yoga is not a religion but if you are religious, the chances are that it will deepen your spirituality. If you are not religious, you may develop your spiritual side a little even if that means just being able to get along better with a difficult colleague.

Yoga is union, balance, clarity, humility, healing, love and 'all the good things'.

Namaste,



Polly

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