

See The Ways You Fight Yourself: Learning To Respond To Hurting To Heal

By David Garrigues

One important foundation of yoga is that it exists to address suffering. You do yoga because you're in pain.

To an onlooker it is a pretty negative way to address suffering. The way that yoga is being presented today is that yoga is bliss. It feels good and that is why you do it. You go to yoga class to feel good. When really in a more root way it is simply a training to help you when you are suffering.

That's all, that is what yoga is. Just think of how much better that feels in a way. It's not like you're doing it to "feel good", no, you do it because you are hurting and that is your response to hurting.

You need training in order to respond to your hurting in an effective way that heals you. This is not easy because of our culture and human nature.

We avoid suffering. We avoid suffering with indulgence. We medicate. We try to avoid and not feel, not experience. In that sense we use material wrong.

We use the outer world in a way to try to alleviate suffering, and within a reasonable degree material things can help. I went to a "hippie" college where they didn't have grades and you could write your own program. One of my teachers – that I loved – would come in and say, "When I'm feeling down, a good piece of my mom's pound cake does me some good." and he'd eat the cake right there on the spot. So you can use material to alleviate suffering, it can help. It's not that it is evil.

It's that we overuse it. There is a limit to what it can do to help us with our pain. Yoga is giving you a training, another means, an internal means, an independent means, a means within yourself and that is the foundation.

It often takes a traumatic event to even recognize our suffering and each of us spend some portion of our day suffering with worries, fears, thwarted desires, problematic encounters, and yet, we don't talk or even think about it.

You have to acknowledge and see in the moment that you're suffering. You have to turn your attention inward and notice what is going on inside of you – **what you are feeling?**

That is your training of yoga; to get real and perceptive about how you are feeling. That in itself is potentially empowering. You are your own ally. When you know you are suffering and square on it, rather than projecting it, something happens within you – something soothing, something that at least makes it more manageable.

Life will not throw something at you that you can't handle if you embrace and undergo this training. If you understand this foundation, then you have a much easier time practicing because that is how you encounter your suffering in a wholesome way. It is a big part of your arsenal, the mother's pound cake is a part of it as well but so is you breathing or doing a downward dog.

This also brings context to technique. I do believe that the way you do your backbend matters but at the same time part of what you are building in yoga is a place of forgiveness, compassion, and self-care. These would seem to be obvious and automatic but they are not.

Self-care is not automatic; we often forget to take care of ourselves. We are bullies, dodgers, egoists. And forgiveness is so key in that aspect. Forgiving our mistakes, ignorance,

anger, carelessness, character flaws. That is challenging and at the same time represents the reason why it is a training and why it is so hard because you get thrown up against yourself. You see the ways you fight yourself.

And that is why Yoga is a spiritual practice and why it is so hard. It is not a physical rule; no one has to do this. You can go through life not doing this. It is a big choice to practice Yoga. The man who is conscious is cursed – consciousness itself is a curse. It is so much easier to be oblivious. When you start looking in it gets scary. To look in is courageous.

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [The Tapping Solution: A Revolutionary System for Stress-Free Living](#).

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