

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Islam: Body and Mind



By Soumy Ana

<http://www.ummah.net/islam/taqwapalace>

Foreword: This story is not an encouragement to start a Yoga program, but a reflection on what is halal and haram in the way we take care of our body and look for spirituality. The aim was to teach that Islam is not all black or all white, but a Muslim must exercise his intelligence while dealing with the world.

Allaah does not like extremism: *"Thus have We Made of you an Ummah justly balanced"* [Al-Baqara 2:143]

In Al-Maidah 5:12, the Qur'an refers to the path it shows as **Sawaa-As-Sabil**. Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains: "The Arabic word Sawaa signifies smoothness as opposed to roughness; symmetry as opposed to want of plan; equality or proportion as opposed to want of design; rectitude as opposed to crookedness; a mean as opposed to extremes; and fitness for the object held in view as opposed to faultiness."

At the same time, we ask Allaah at least five times a day to: *"Show us the Straight Path."* [Al-Fatiha] *"But if any of you, after this, resists faith, he has truly wandered from the path of rectitude."* [Al-Maidah 5:12]

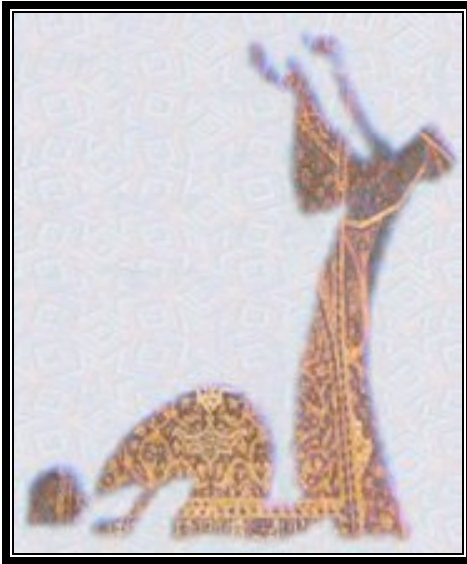
The purpose is to open to means of feeling better, to understand that natural medicine has been used for many centuries and encouraged by Islam; the purpose is not to give license to sects to go beyond the boundaries of Islam.

It is always easier to stay away from something unfamiliar than try to see how it fits in Islam. Some people never come close to what they do not understand, and for good reasons. However, for those who tackle with new ways at looking at life and our environment, the experience is enlightening and is bond to make us grow.

Abu Huraira (RA) reported that the prophet (SAAS) said: "Allah does not look to your faces or towards your riches but He sees your hearts and (the nature of) your deeds."

Allah says: *"O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former; nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former..."* (Sura Al-Hujuraat 49:11)

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allaah is that (believer) who has taqwa (i.e. is one of the muttaqeen – the pious). Verily Allaah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Sura Al-Hujuraat # 49, ayah #13)



"Indeed the Believers are successful, those who are humble in their Prayer." [Sooratul-Mu'minoon 23:1-2]

And the basis of humility (khushoo') is softness, gentleness, tranquility, subservience, subjugation, and burning of the heart. So when the heart is humble, all of the limbs and body parts follow it in humility. Because they are followers of it; as he ﷺ said, *"Verily there is a small morsel of the body, if it is rectified, the whole body is rectified; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed it is the heart."* [1]

So if the heart is submissive, the eyes, ears, head, face, and the rest of the limbs are submissive; the same goes for whatever emanates from them, to the extent that it reaches the speech. Due to this, the

Prophet ﷺ used to say in the rukoo' (bowing) of his Prayer, *"My sight, hearing, mind, and bone are subservient to You."* And he said in another narration, *"And whatever is carried upon my feet."* [2]

And someone from the Salaf saw a man fiddling with his hand during the Prayer, so he said, *"If his heart was submissive, his limbs would have become subservient."* [3]

And Ibn Shawdhab said: From al-Hasan (rahimahullaahu ta'ala) who said, *"They used to have khushoo' in their hearts, so due to that, they lowered their gaze in the Prayer."*

[1] This is part of a long hadeeth related by al-Bukhaaree (1/117), Muslim (no. 1599), Ibn Maajah (no. 3984), ad-Daarimee (2/245), and Ahmad (4/269); from Nu'maan Ibn Basheer radiallaahu 'anhu.

[2] The first narration is related by Muslim (no. 771), at-Tirmidhee (no. 3417), Aboo Daawood (no. 760), an-Nisaa'ee (2/130), Aboo Ya'laa (no. 284, 574), and Ahmad (1/94); from 'Alee radiallaahu 'anhu. And the second narration is related by Ahmad in al-Musnad (1/119), also from 'Alee radiallaahu 'anhu.

[3] Shaykhul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah attributed it to 'Umar Ibnul-Khattaab radiallaahu 'anhu in Majmoo'ul-Fataawaa (18/273).

“My ummah is like the rain, I do not know whether the first of it is better or the last of it.”



All sanity depends on this: that it should be a delight to feel heat strike the skin, a delight to stand upright, knowing the bones are moving easily under the flesh”

Doris Lessing [1]

Zia [2] was impressed by what she had just watched on her favorite channel.

She had to meet this sister, she thought. What was her name? O yes, Munira [2], sister Munira. Here was someone who understood what Zia had already experienced in her search for spirituality.

A few days later, the woman arrived at the Center for Meditative Expressions or C-ME.

There was a mosque in the middle of the gigantic building. Beside its walls made of unclear glass walls, there was a huge Japanese fountain trickling agreeably. She could see shapes by transparency, people praying or reading Qur’aan. It was mostly silent. Here and there she could see sisters in long *hijabs* and brothers wearing the traditional *Izaar* [3]. The building looked like a palm tree. The interior column separated at one point to diverge. The branches formed arcades that ended into round rooms reminders of date fruits. Zia remembered that one day the prophet (saas) had told his companions (may Allaah be pleased with them all) that the believer looked like a palm tree [4]; he is straight and tall; he does not deviate.

She lengthened her spine in order to feel as tall as she could. Yes, she thought, a Muslim should feel so straight that he is not afraid of anything anymore and does not experience distress.

She looked up at the inscriptions over the rooms, and after a few seconds, she found it: “Yoga: Miss Munira.”

She pushed the French door to the side and stepped inside after having removed her sandals.

The teacher had already began the lesson.

She hesitated, then modestly said: “*Assalam Alaikum*” in an almost imperceptible voice.

The closest women smiled at her and their lips moved silently, some waved at her to come quickly and others put their right hand over their heart as salutation as the view of the newly arrived was noticeable behind the teacher.

Zia gracefully walked around the group and slid to the floor, pooling her notebook from the backpack she was trying to hide behind her back.

She started to take notes immediately; she was not going to miss any word.

Miss Munira was saying:

“Your lungs get more elastic by regular exercise. They resemble twin balloons that gather energy, oxygen to give it to your entire body. The more they can inflate, the more they become useful to you. When you are inactive for a long stretch of time, you tend to breathe in a shallow way, using only the upper part of your bust. This often makes you feel tired, listless and anxious, sometimes even out of breath.

Regular physical exercise improves their ability to expand, allowing you to inflate them with much greater ease, using also the bottom part of your bust.

In Yoga, we breathe within our belly; that’s the most complete breathing technique you can find, including poses in between inhaling and exhaling, allowing our chest to expand.

So, when you feel tired, lethargic or below par, you can use an alternate nostril breathing technique. I will show you.

Now, lie down on your back. Forget about all that is around you.

Everybody close your eyes. Now, nobody is watching you; you are yourself with yourself, within yourself, alone.

You can also sit comfortably with your back straight. Breathe only through your nose, drawing the air deep down into your abdomen. You can put your other hand over your belly button in order to feel it expanding.

Breathe first only through your left nostril, closing the right one. Close both nostrils using your fingers and nostrils as flaps. Count slowly to sixteen. Release the right one and breathe out slowly. Alternate for a few minutes.”

Zia tried to follow the directions, but she discovered rapidly that it was almost impossible for her to inhale or exhale for sixteen counts. Ten counts were the maximum she could manage with great concentration. Teacher Munira continued talking while the students were doing their exercises, some of them looking at each other as the teacher tried to avoid looking at them, shrugging their shoulders. Others tried forcefully to perform the task. For a few others, it was easy to follow the instructions. Munira continued, undisturbed:

“Energy is everywhere in the body, the breath is a flow of energy. Do not force it. Let it come and go. Tiredness occurs when we are blocking this energy. To clear its pathway, you can also rub your ear lobes or pull the toe adjacent to the big toe and rub it vigorously. See, you have to imagine your body as a tree, and the energy circulating through its sap. Without sap, no life! This is why dehydration is a common energy drainer; dehydration slows down the sap, i.e., the blood flow, in your body. Breathing helps it go. If you cannot count as many times as sixteen, count as much as you can. The important part here is for you to feel the flow of energy opening your chest and filling your belly and coming out from deep inside.”

Zia saw that not many were able to follow the directions, and she felt a little relieved. However, everybody soon tried to practice the new skill without feeling embarrassed or overwhelmed by the difficulty of the task. The young girl shifted her attention to her own body, less mindful of herself, and tried to let go. After fifteen minutes, she was feeling relaxed and imagined herself in a pool of light near a lagoon.

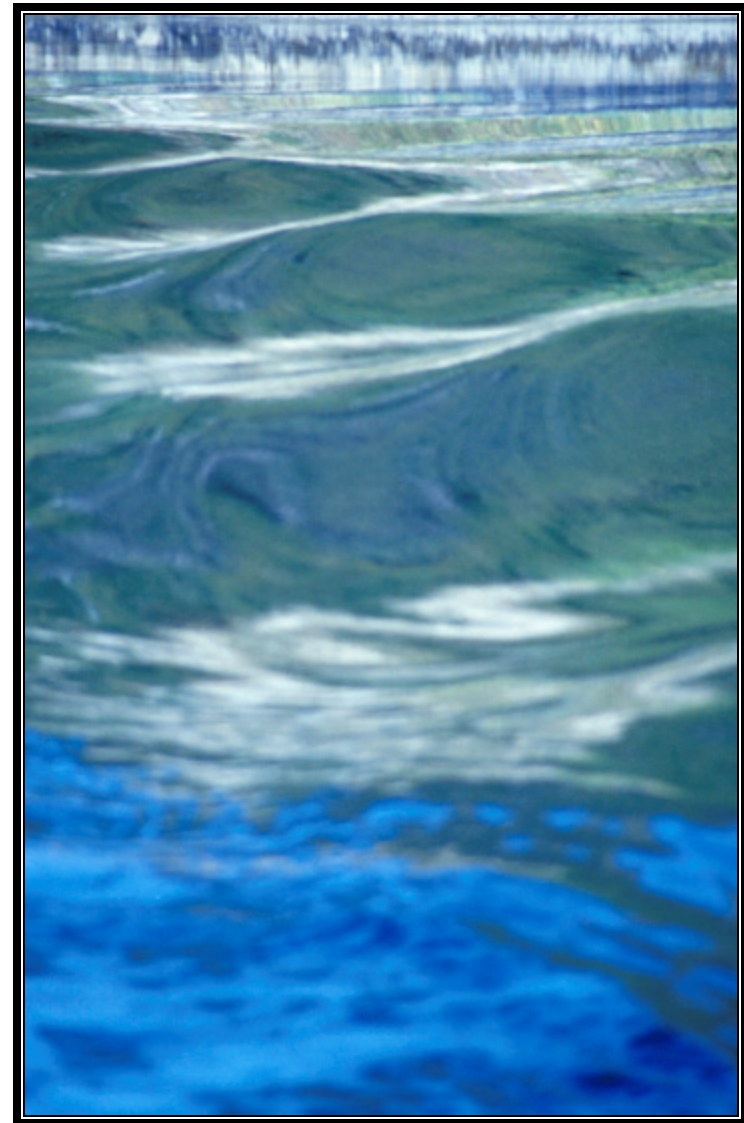


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The session continued like this for a few more minutes, then Miss Munira added:

“TKV Desikachar [5] once said that: *“The breath is the intelligence of the body”* because it reflects and influences our moods and state of health. You might want to think about it. Take it as your homework.” She smiled gently, saluted her students and retired to another corner of the room, checking the number of registrations and the number of people in the room. Meanwhile, Zia slowly stretched as she came back from her relaxation. She felt sleepy but good. Zia disliked the end of any class when the tension stopped and everybody was taking her life back where she had left it. It felt like coming back to earth with a fall. She did not want to leave the new world she had entered. She felt elevated by it.

As she gathered her backpack and retied her scarf, she tried to avoid the other women’s eyes, but quickly found some were smiling at her or gazing with curiosity. Some came towards her to introduce themselves and sister Munira approached them as they stood up and tried to make some acquaintances. Others adjusted their *jilbabs* while laughing and discussing the lesson. Nobody was left on her own. And sister Munira tried to move towards everyone. They reconnected.

When Zia came back home that night, her husband inquired inquisitively:

“Where did you go today?”

“Well, you don’t want to know,” she replied mischievously. He stopped, smiled and came closer.

“Ok, I know what that means. It means you want to tell me something special and you want all my attention. Ok, you got it.”

“What do you think of meditation, Aymen?”

“What do you mean by meditation? Not in my vocabulary.” She smiled at the joke.

“You know, “A calm lengthy intent consideration”...”

They laughed, then Aymen declared: “you are my meditation.”

“Thank you. How sweet...”

“I mean it.”

“Allaah be praised. But, you know, meditation, ‘transcendental meditation’ as people say; what do you really think of it?”

“Isn’t it that thing Sufis do? You know: *“O Allâh, make me live in poverty, and make me die in poverty, and raise me up along with the poor.”*”

“Well, beware, that’s an authentic hadeeth, Hube. It was a *Du’a* recited by our prophet (saas). It was related by at-Tirmidhee (2/56), and al-Bayhaqee (7/12). The poverty mentioned in the hadeeth is humility and submissiveness before Allaah SWT, in other word, *Taqwa!*”

“Astaghfirullaah.”

“Astaghfirullaah.”

Zia thought for a few moments, then decided to come back to the subject.

“When you train in running, what is the most important thing for you? What helps you keep your pace?”

“Let’s see... Well, my legs!”

“But if you are pumping iron, what helps you go on?”

“My breathing, I think. That’s what sets up the rhythm, how many repetitions I can make and so on.”

“Exactly!”

“So, I won?”

“Yes, you win. Imagine how important breathing is! When we walk up stairs to the third floor or when we swim, breathing or being out of breath surely helps us going or stops us from going further. Breathing is a must.”

“The breath is the brain!”

“Precisely! That’s what our teacher told us today! How did you come up with that?”

“This is not for nothing that the word “inspiration” in English means both “meditating” and “breathing in”. Inspire or expire...” Aymen teased. “It is well known that people who have best quality of life and energy are those who can breathe longer and deeper. If you want to measure your level of fitness, you should measure how much intake of air your lungs can hold and subtract by

how much in inches your lungs can deflate. The bigger the difference, the more in shape you can claim to be. We have been doing this test since the first year of training.”

“But you know what, Aymen?”

“What?”

“Breathing is more than that! It is the key to well being. Not convinced? How is your breath when you panic? Shorter, uneven, isn’t it? And when you are stressed? Maybe higher up in the chest, uneasy. And when you are anxious? Uh?”

“It is certainly fitful, but not Fit--full.”

Zia enjoyed Aymen’s jokes because she knew that it did not stop him from being very attentive to what she was saying. She continued, excited:

“On the contrary, when we are calmer or happy, how is our breathing? Who wants to answer this?”

Aymen denied with his both hands raised. She resumed:

“Doesn’t it disappear when we are concentrating? Don’t we say ‘holding one’s breath’?”

Aymen smiled and nodded assent. She continued:

“Because our feelings and emotions are expressed in the way we breathe, Aymen dear, any change of mood becomes apparent in how we arrange and move our hands, shoulders, neck, head, and legs. In performing certain poses, we can learn how we feel; we can improve how we feel. That’s what I was trying to learn this afternoon. That’s why I went to my first Yoga class today.”

“So, this is what you were hiding?”

“No, not hiding.”

“But isn’t Yoga against Islam? [6] Isn’t Yoga a form of prayer to Hindou gods? Are you sure it is *Hala!*? I do not trust these things, you know.”

“O, no, Aymen! Not at all! I mean, I went to the C-ME Gym, you know, it is this gym that is entirely based on Islamic teachings. I trust them. They would never do anything *Haram*. But I will ask my teacher in any case, if this can put your heart at peace. See, Yoga can de-stress, restore energy by using slow and controlled movements as *Salât* can help us relax and feel uplifted if practiced correctly. It is,

yes, a form of meditation, but I think that there are no evil tools, just evil users. A pick axe is a pick axe; if one uses it to climb mountains, it is a blessing, but if one uses as a weapon, then it becomes a source of danger.”

“Just let me informed, will you?”

“O, I will, dear. I am myself not eager to make Allaah Ta’alaah angry at me.”



Zia had come to class early. She knew that Miss Munira would be there to prepare her class. She pushed the door slowly and approached the younger woman.

“*Assalam Alaikum*, Miss Munira. May Allaah lightens your path. Ameen.”

“*Wa Alaikum Assalam wa Rahmatullaah wa Barakatuh*, student. What a beautiful greeting. *Al huda*, the light of guidance, be upon you too. *Ameen*.”

They smiled. They both knew that this was not their usual way to greet each other.

Miss Munira was stretching gently with the help of the bars that covered an entire wall. Zia came next to her and explained:

“Only dancers, I mean professional dancers, can stretch with bouncing movements; for the ordinary person, it is very harmful.” Munira agreed silently, then she asked with a deep voice that was the extension of her breath:

“How do you know that, sister?”

“I have been dancing for many years, but I can tell that dance somehow did not help my feet or my joints. I am looking for a more gentle way to exercise now that I have become a Muslim. This is why I am here. I am also looking for something spiritual, like dancing was for me. I have trained a lot, but I always felt peace in dance despite the suffering. There is balance in dance.”

“Then welcome to my class, my sister. You have found what you were looking for, Insha Allaah. And may Allaah gives you

Jannah and guides you to be a true Muslim. *Ameen*. Please, pray for me and my family, sister, because, you know... you are now very close to Allaah.”

“*Insha Allaah*, I will. I wanted to see you because I had a question. Please, do not feel offended by my ignorance, but how come a Muslim takes Yoga as a part of his discipline when we know that the *Âsanass* of Yoga mimic prayer poses to non-believers gods?””

Sister Munira thought deeply as if careful of what she was going to say, then explained casually:

“*Âsanass* are one of the best exercises men have discovered. They loosen, stretch and relax the body as prayer poses involve also every joint of the body, every muscle in a gentle way. *Âsanass*, as you said, is very close to a prayer and Yoga is not very far away from the Muslim prayer. This is why it is beneficial. To know that something is beneficial for us is enough to make it ok as long as one does not intend to defeat Islam and one does not pray to other gods than Allaah, the One and Unique God, in the process. Not my Fatwa, sister.

If you look at the way western exercises treat the body, you will understand why some Muslims prefer gentle exercising. Aerobic sports tighten and compact the joints and muscles. This is why we do not adopt them in the C-ME. Plus, people involved in these activities might be taken away from Islam by the spirit of competitiveness and the heroes figures attached to its practice like football fans, gym competitions and the like.

Yoga postures are slow and rhythmical, so are the prayer stations. They do not involve any competition and the person works in harmony with his body. On the contrary, western movements are fast and mechanical, without feeling or concentration. That’s what we found in our fitness research.

Aerobics exercise is a good example. Even if it has been proved that aerobics is good for health by strengthening the heart and cardiovascular system, it is not the only way to achieve these goals. The problem is that westerners think that we need to pump the heart hard by running and jumping in order to build up strength. We forget

that energy is depleted that way. Aerobics tense spinal muscles, especially running, because at each impact you put on the ground, you have to lift several times the weight of your body. Running compresses the bones towards the ground, this is why it is very important for runners to cross-train and stretch in order to release the tension in their body.

Aerobic exercise is good, I do not deny that, but practicing it exclusively, we block the flowing energy of the body in order to concentrate it to our muscles; we deplete this energy just by using it up to keep the muscles tight. This is why aerobics instructors advise to spend a long time stretching before, during and after exercise for optimal health, advise that few people follow.

Well, gentle exercise massages the body and stretches it while improving the organic functions.

Silent meditation techniques like T’ai Chi or some forms of martial arts do just the same.

Witr prayers or *Tahajjud* and also the *Taraweeh* prayers during *Ramadhan* improve our health significantly through gentle exercise. It is a form of Yoga.

In *The Medical Benefits of Taraweeh Prayers* written by Br. Ibrahim B. Syed, Ph.D, we learn that “*the Taraweeh prayers help in expending the extra calories and improve flexibility, coordination, reduce stress-related autonomic responses in healthy persons, and relieve anxiety and depression [...] It was noted that the five daily prayers (Salat) produce the same physiological changes without any undesirable side effects as those produced by jogging or walking at about three miles per hour.*”

So, what about *Tahajjud* that is performed several times a week?

If we could perform long *Witr* prayers (up to thirteen *Raka’ahs*) or regular night prayers, we would not really need Yoga or T’ai Chi. However, all these forms of meditation are complementary and actually add diversity into our lives. This is why we are attracted to them.”

“I was thinking about that the other day, Miss Munira. Why cannot we take our acts of worship and turn them into gentle exercise

practices? Our prophet (saas) didn't say that the only *Halal* sports were running, archery, and riding horses?

I cite:

The Prophet (peace be on him) raced with his wife 'Aishah in order to please her, to enjoy himself, and to set an example for his Companions. 'Aishah said, "*I raced with the Prophet (peace be on him) and beat him in the race. Later, when I had put on some weight, we raced again and he won. Then he said, 'This cancels that'*" (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Daoud.), referring to the previous occasion.

The Prophet (peace be on him) once wrestled with a man called Rukanah who was well-known for his strength, throwing him down more than once. (Reported by Abu Daoud.)

The Prophet (peace be on him) once said, "*Practice archery; that is good for you.*" (Reported by al-Bazzar and by al-Tabarani on good authority.)

The Prophet (peace be on him) allowed some Abyssinians to display their skill with spears in his mosque; he let his wife 'Aishah watch their show and encouraged them by saying, "*Carry on, O Bani Arfidah,*" (as the Abyssinians were known to among the Arabs). 'Umar, with his serious disposition, wanted to stop them but the Prophet (peace be on him) prevented him from it. It is reported in the two *Sahibs* of al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurairah that while the Abyssinians were performing their show with spears in the presence of the Prophet (peace be on him), 'Umar entered. He picked up some pebbles and started throwing them at them but the Prophet (peace be on him) said, "*Leave them alone, O 'Umar.*"

He also said, "*Practice archery and horseback riding.*" (Reported by Muslim.)

And again, "*Any action without the remembrance of Allah is either a diversion or heedlessness excepting four acts: walking from target to target (during archery practice), training a horse, playing with one's family, and learning to swim.*" (Reported by al-Tabarani on good authority.)

So, what about Yoga, Miss Munira? I wonder..."

"Congratulations. I see that you did your homework. Well, practicing sports of various kinds that do not go against the rulings of the *sharee'ah* and that fulfil the aim of worshipping Allaah is one of the things that are encouraged by Islam, so as to attain physical strength and mental health. The evidence of the Qur'aan and Sunnah indicates that this is allowed in *sharee'ah* and is in fact encouraged. The basic guideline concerning permissible things according to the scholars is that whatever distracts one from obligatory duties or becomes a means of committing forbidden actions thereby becomes *Haraam*. Whatever does not distract from either obligatory duties or *Mustahabb* (encouraged) actions is permissible in principle. The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "*Your body has a right over you.*" (Reported by al-Bukhaari, 4800).

Now, Yoga as practiced by Hindous is *Haram* to Muslims. This is clear.

Traditional Yoga consists of a number of "*Āsanass,*" or body positions, which one retains for a desired length of time while either reciting "*mantras*" or breathing in a rhythmic manner. These "*mantras*" are *Haraam* because it is a sort of dialogue with spirits and a form of Shirk.

However, modern forms of Yoga like the Hatha Yoga have completely abandoned the religious side of Yoga and have adapted to the needs of Western people, some of them being atheists.

The benefits of Yoga have been researched by many doctors who now recommend it to their patients, by many medical schools such as Harvard, and by many foundations such as the Menninger Foundation.

Funny enough, in Islam, we have a pure form of Yoga that has provided Muslims for fourteen centuries with some of yoga's same and even superior benefits while reciting Qur'an and *Adhkar* (remembrances) instead of "*Mantras*". [7]

Studies have found that different areas of the body, when activated by touch, movement or thoughts, evoke specific emotional and physical responses. You see, all parts of the body are connected to each other.

The Islamic *Salât* awakens some of these areas, benefiting the entire body.

However, Yoga awakens some areas more deeply and is able to heal by accupressure.

The *Takbir* (standing tall) and *Al Qiyyam* (hand on chest) together are very similar to the Mountain Pose in yoga, which has been found to improve posture, balance, and self-awareness. This position also normalizes blood pressure and breathing, thus providing many benefits to asthma and heart patients.

The mountain Pose is acquired by the Muslim especially during the *Taraweeh* or the *Witr* prayer when he stands for many minutes straight and immobile. [8]"

"What is the significance of the Mountain Pose, Miss Munira?"

"Let's see... It looks like a mountain in the clouds. The person stands tall. He spreads his toes wide apart and slowly fans them out on to the floor. It is like he is taking roots in the earth. Interesting enough, the first Muslims did not use carpets but prayed directly above the rough earth, making contact with the earth. After some time in this position, he naturally feels the need to draw his knees towards his hips by a few inches by the action of firming his thighs. This is how he keeps his balance. Some people sway from side to side, but it is called fidgeting and not proper. In order to stop feeling aches on his back, he pushes his lower ribs away from his hips elongating the sides of his body, feeling very tall and rolling his shoulders down and back. He takes time to breathe; this posture helps him to breathe."

The same day, Miss Munira started her class by explaining the similarities between the Muslim prayer postures and the Yoga *âsanas*. She made her students gather near a series of posters that showed each posture in details, and explained:

"Yoga is an ancient form of exercise and healing that originated in India 5,000 years ago. It was not a religious thing at its beginning. The sages found that sitting in meditation for hours was difficult, therefore they had to find a way to prepare their body for it.

They began to look around them, how the cat stretched after a nap, what the bird did with its legs after sitting in its nest. They had plenty of time before them and tried to learn from their environment. So they tried to move in the manner of the animals, which they found strengthening and revitalizing. This is how Yoga, or *hatha*, was born. "Hatha" means "force, "power". Yoga is opening up these doors of energy of power that we have inside our body. They flow along the spine and open the heart, the mind, etc., when stimulated. It is very close to the Asian therapeutic of acupuncture but without the needles. All parts of the body are linked with nerves like an immense tree which trunk is the spine.

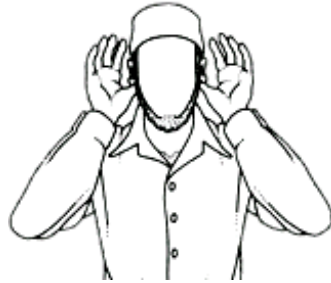
Using the "prana", the breath, that stimulates blood circulation, we relax and invite beautiful images inside ourselves: mountain tops, sea landscapes, etc. Our body is the place we take as a safe harbor. We feel safe inside ourselves; we feel happy. When we learn to tune out the past and the future, we quiet our mind. That's the spirit of Yoga." She paused, then added:

"The root meaning of the word *salât* is "to bend", "to bow", as in Hatha yoga; the Persians translated this concept with the word *namâz*, meaning "to bow" that is a word related to the Sanskrit word *namaste*.

The position of Ruku is very similar to the Forward Bend Position in yoga. Ruku stretches the muscles of the lower back, thighs, legs and calves, and allows blood to be pumped down into the upper torso. It tones the muscles of the stomach, abdomen, and kidneys.



The placement of the hands on the chest during the Qiyyam position are said to activate the solar plexus “chakra,” or nerve pathway, which directs our awareness of self in the world and controls the health of the muscular system, skin, intestines, liver, pancreas, gallbladder and eyes. When the hands are held open for *Du’a*, they activate the heart “chakra,” said to be the center of the feelings and emotions. It governs the health of the heart, lungs, thymus, immune system, and circulatory system.



The Mountain Pose (*TâDâsana*) is the foundation for all standing *âsanas*. It is the first pose we begin with and it is the last one we do. It is similar to the standing posture of *qiyyâm* in *salât* and the standing pose called "Return to Mountain" of T'ai Chi Chuan.

The Islamic prayer includes a pose, called *sujûd*, where the head is placed below the heart, helping the blood to go to brain and to oxygenate the brain. Since 20% of the oxygen absorbed by the body is used by the brain, it is not surprising that this pose has been discovered to enhance brain's capacities.

The Yoga's *âsanas* called the Shoulderstand (*sarvangâsana*, the 'whole body pose') and the Headstand (*sirSâsana*) play the same role in pumping the blood into the brain and upper half of the body including eyes, ears, nose and lungs.



The word *âsana* means “to seat”. It is a basic posture of meditation. It is an essential posture in *Salât* too. The Diamond Pose (*vajrâsana*) is practically identical with the seated position of *salât* called *jalsah*. Swami Sivananda in his book *Yoga Âsanass* writes: “*This Âsanas resembles more or less the nimaz pose in which the Muslims sit for prayer*”.

It is interesting to know that both *vajrâsana* and *jalsah* are the same as the *zazen* posture of Japan, a posture that is held for countless hours by traditional Japanese. Not only this posture is good for the body, but it prepares the body to seat on a hard floor and helps the limbs to acquire sufficient flexibility to enter easily into the pose.



As for meditation, *trâTaka* is a yogic technique to focus the attention on a single point. While standing in Islamic prayer, we practice *traTaka* by fixing the gaze on a spot on the ground where we Sujûd. It helps keeping the balance, concentrating in *Salât* and forgetting about the world around us by focussing inside the oneself.”

As soon as they had a pause, Zia went back to Miss Munira who greeted her with a smile.

“Another question, Zia?”

“Yes. First of all, *jazak Allaah Khairan*, Sister Munira. I did not know about all this. I am glad to know it is safe and *halal* to use Yoga in our daily life. *Sub’anallaah*. I guess we are never too cautious about those things. My family asked me about something. I assure you that I will not try to put your commitment and sincerity into jeopardy.”

“You are welcome to ask any question you wish, sister Zia. I do not feel my practice threatened in any way.” She added with a large inviting smile.

“Thank you. May Allaah bless you for your patience.”

“I am here for that and besides asking is not offending. It is important that you remove any fear or doubt from your head before you can commit to my class.”

“You are right. Well, my question is: why should we prefer Yoga to *Salât*?”

“Hmm! We do not prefer Yoga to the Islamic prayer; we just complement it. This is not to say that Islam is incomplete and needs to be enhanced, but we can add flavor to our religion like we add rose water to our pastries. It does not spoil the flavor of the eggs or the flour, but enhances it. Understood?”

“Yes.”

“There is a principle in Islam. There is what is *haram* and what is *Halal*, and there is a panoply of things that we are ensure about. Also, there are things that are *Bi’dah* (invented matters) but among the *Bid’ah*, there is the reprehensible *Bi’dah* that is not acceptable, and the good *Bid’ah* that is praised by Islam, and things that are neither good, neither bad but tolerated. There are things that

were not practiced at the time of Rasulullaah (saas), but if they are useful and beneficial, they are considered good. *Taraweeh* for instance was not practiced by our prophet (saas), but since our prophet (saas) did it a few times and stopped for fear Muslims would take this practice as an obligation, his companions (may Allaah be pleased with them) instated the *Taraweeh* prayer as a Sunnah only after his death.

Because *Tahajjud* and *Witr* cannot be prayed in *Jumuah* (congregation), and they require saying special words and strictly follow one single pattern of movements, some people prefer other forms of gentle exercise that are less demanding and more varied. They want to be able to experiment, make mistakes without worrying if their worship is accepted or not.

As Muslims, we should not reject the benefits from hundreds of years of knowledge just because it is part of other traditions and other religious or spiritual concepts.

Fortunately, modern forms of meditation have removed the religious significance of Yoga that is at its origin a way to worship. In my opinion, there is nothing wrong with using it to improve our health and well-being as long as it is used only as a form of meditation and a way to train ourselves to gain more *Khushoo* (concentration) in our *Salât*.

Khushoo is learned by practice. So is Yoga.

Yoga or T’ ai Chi can be ways to master this practice in a relaxed, free atmosphere where the energy of the working group is in itself self-motivating. When one has acquired this discipline, he often feels more ready for Sunnah prayers he may never have performed before. The discipline of Yoga is transferred into the discipline of the Muslim. I myself pray more since I do Yoga and I feel less tired during long prayers therefore I have a good experience each time I pray a lot and I want to renew this experience more.”



“When the five senses and the mind are still, and reason itself rests in silence, then begins the Path supreme. This calm steadiness is called Yoga. Then one should become watchful, because yoga comes and goes.” Katha Upanishad.

Zia read from her notes to Aymen while resting on the sofa.

“Listen: ‘*Salât* quiets the mind; it focuses our words that bring peace and confidence. Doing it at the same time everyday or so, brings discipline that prolongs our ability to pray more, to spend more time with Allaah without seeing time passing by. Our prophet (saas) used to say that the *salât* refreshes his mind.

Performing *salât*, you learn to trust; you learn to be as confident as the child in his mother’s arms, without fear. You enjoy being alive and gratitude springs up from within a mere self-gratification. We give ourselves to serenity, to a still point at the center of ourselves.

If we concentrate properly, have proper *Khushoo*, and we perform *Nafeelah* (encouraged extra prayers) on a daily basis, the words of the *imam* touch us more deeply and are renewed; we bring them at another plane of consciousness. We feel more ready to be a better Muslim.’

Imagine, Aymen, the power of the words!

The Noble Qur’an is a recitation that brings us closer to Allaah. It is The Powerful Word!”

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ

Aymen made a sound with his throat as a way of acquiescing. Zia continued, feeling encouraged:

“I believe that sounds have a lot of power. See, Aymen, we may feel utterly stressed by a repetitive sound; we may feel deeply touched by a *Nasheed* (islamic religious song without instruments), but it is the beating of our mother’s first voice that we hear first



when we are craddled in her womb: boom.. boom-boom, boom.. boom-boom. It is her voice that we hear most often among all the sounds that reach the womb because her voice is inside and outside her body. It resonates all over and through the bones.

The voice has a great influence on our well being.

It is by the voice that the Noble Qur’aan came to us, by its recitation.

The word “Qur’aan” in fact means “recitation”.

We hear. We listen to it. We shut our eyes in order to see. We develop an inside eye.

It is the control of the thought waves of the mind.”

“I understand what you mean, dear, but I still do not trust your Yoga that much. Maybe the commands of your teacher help you to relax and feel good, but still some people use this voice thing and the meditation for power and to find weird experiences. This is wrong.”

“O, yes, this is really wrong. Imagine that our prophet (saas) when he heard Jibrael (as) almost cast himself from a cliff because he thought he was possessed! Using this power in a wrong way is a sure way to develop psychosis. On the contrary, meditation opens a road to clarity and equilibrium; it works along with the body natural rhythms, not against it.”

“So *Salât* is a way of meditating, eh?”

“Yes! Some people call it also: “The silence in motion”.”

“Well, now, you lost me, dear.”

“Listen. We tend to go all over places in our minds when we have a minute of quiet, right? having regrets, planning, remembering...

When we pray, we slow down, we talk to our *Llaah* (God) directly, with our emotions, our concentration. Our mind becomes attentive to the words of the unseen while our body naturally sinks into poses that we learned since childhood which repeated over and over again: *Ruku*, *Sujood*, etc.

The dancer says that when he has finished training, his body is his teacher because he has repeated the same movements so many times, it becomes second nature; he becomes the student of himself. His life becomes a dance; dancing inhabits him.

The same way, *salât* (prayer) is constantly in motion inside us. Allaah says that everything that exists glorifies Him, that includes the electrons, the cells that make our body, the microbes, etc. They all pray.

For a long time I thought that cells were round things that looked like balloons; actually some cells look like fish or lesser forms of life you can see in the oceans. They are very beautiful. They are completely living beings!

Not only our body (or the living things inside it) is praying, it is also a witness of what we do before Allaah. At the time of the *Quiyyama* (End of the world) it will speak. Our *Duaas* and *Dhikrs* are prayers. Whatever submits to Allaah or does an act of submission is actually praying or worshipping. When we seek religious knowledge, we are also praying; we do an act of worship.



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"See you not that whoever is in the heavens and the earth, and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees and all living moving creatures, and many of mankind prostrate themselves to Allaah. But there are many men on whom the punishment is justified. And whosoever Allaah disgraces, none can honour him. Verily, Allaah does what He wills." (Al-Hajj 22:18)
"And the stones and trees both prostrate themselves to Allaah" (Ar-Rahmaan 55:6)



Flower bearing the name of Allah on one of its petals

Praying is to set the silence inside us in motion; it is also called *Khushoo* (deep concentration)."

"You are right, Zia. If we do not cultivate our *Khushoo*; we lose it. If we do not cultivate our *Eeman* (faith); we lose it. If we do not cultivate the *sakeenah* (profound peace) that comes with *Khushoo*, we also lose it. The purpose of *Duas* or prayers is to increase our meditation, our worship. And I believe that the one who finds this moment of silence inside him, who meets this moment of meditation, of deep silence has increased his degrees before Allaah and has increased his confidence and well-being."

"Reading Qur'aan, making *Duaas* (supplications), praying *Tahajjud* (night prayer) are all means to increase our *Eeman* (faith) and *Sakeena* (peace). They come and go; it is hard to keep the going at the same rate, but it is more pleasing to Allaah. *Eeman* comes and goes as Yoga comes and goes."

"Well, as long as you take it as a means to gain more *sakeenah*, there's nothing wrong with that. I hope it comes and goes though."



“People travel to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering” St Augustine.[9]

Zia had woken up very early. She called Aymen and prepared his prayer outfit before going to the mosque. He asked:

“Are you going to the C-ME today?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want me to pick you up on my way back from Masjid?”

“What a good idea! Yes, I’d like that very much. Thank you. What don’t you pray with the brothers there instead of going to the Noor Mosque? I could come fetch you as soon as I am done. What do you think?”

“Why not. I am curious about this building anyway. I’d like to investigate.”

A few minutes later, they entered the huge hall and a word of admiration sprang from the lips of Aymen: “Allaah!”

Zia was excited to know that her spouse was a few inches from her; she could not concentrate. She thought that she ought to tell him about everything they did in class and try to encourage him to do some exercises with her. ‘This is going to be tough,’ she thought, ‘but Aymen likes to do things with me, whatever it is. I am so blessed, Alhamdulillah. He wants to help so much, and even when he is sceptic, he tries to be open. I am surprised he proposed to come with me today.’

Meanwhile, Miss Munira had started the class and explained:

“The basic Yoga posture resembles closely to the way we practice our *salât* as I explained before. Just do what I do.”

Rows of young girls, mothers and elders stood up in a flush of colors.

Miss Munira stood in the middle of them. She raised her hands to the side, then up, opening her chest, inhaling slowly. Zia followed.

She then bent forward, advising the students to make sure their back was flat, their knees soft and their bellies tucked in, abdominals tight in order to support the spinal cord.

“Feel the lengthening of the spine” she said “your neck is in the alignment of the back. The muscles in the back of your thighs are gently stretching.”

Then she came back from the *rukoo* position, looking up, the arms raising up straight forward, she instructed:

“Exhale slowly as you come up. Let the breathe take away all your bad feelings and take in positive feelings as you breathe in again. Feel the breathe carrying the oxygen to your blood and all over your body in a circle.”

At the end of the circle, she bent until she reached the ground, hands reaching first.

“We are going to stay in this position for a little while” she warned, “imagine that you are a pyramid. Push your heels into the ground and your head towards your knees as much as you can.

Gently release, then go back into a more relaxed position again. Inhale. Exhale. Abs tight. Now gather your knees under your body. Let your forehead gently reach the ground. Stay there, your arms along your sides, you body at peace.

See, even the way we move our hands during *sujuood* reminds the hand position of the Yogi when he meditates.”

She demonstrated, forming a fist, then a circle with her thumb and major finger.

“‘*Hâsanat*’ in Arabic means “good deeds”; in the Sanskrit, “*âsanas*” means “postures”, which means “to stay” “to be” “to sit”. What is interesting here to know is that praying is considered a good deed for Muslims. Doing good deeds require the involvement of the body and performing *salât* is charity.

Abu Hurairah (radiyallaahu 'anhu) said that Allaah's Messenger (salallaahu 'alaihi wa'sallam) said: “*Charity (sadaqah) is due upon every joint of a person on every day that the sun rises. Administering justice between two people is an act of charity; and to help a man concerning his riding beast by helping him on to it or lifting his luggage on to it is an act of charity; a good word is charity; and*

every step which you take to prayer is charity; and removing that which is harmful from the road is charity.” Reported by al-Bukharee (Eng. Trans. 4/146/no.232)

The essential component of breathing accompanies each body movement, as the essentials of good deeds is to precede it by good intention and action.”

Munira came to Zia and corrected the pose as she was still trying to reproduce the exercise.



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She advised:

“Do not strain into the position, Zia. Let go of your tensions. You should learn how to relax all muscles at the same time, isolating one after the other.”

Zia looked at Munira after she finished the pose and declared:

“In dance, we learn how to isolate each muscle with the aim to acquire grace, fluidity. There is always a side of the body that pulls and the other one that follows. So I think I understand what you are trying to say. I always think about my back legs muscles stretching while my antagonist muscles contract.”

“*Asanâs* are balanced, controlled, relaxed, Zia; they are not a question of contracting or releasing muscles. They are not achieved by gripping and pulling the body, but by finding our roots. Yoga should be done without the slightest effort like when we hum a song,

it has to come from deep inside completely relaxed; it is the song of the body. It is like a flower. The flower unfurls from within as it grows, slowly, rhythmically. *Asanâs* should feel organic.”

Zia nodded assent understandingly. Munira added:

“Now, curl yourself under as in the *Pin dâsanâs* pose, the foetus position. Imagine that you are in that secure pouch inside your mother’s body or somewhere in a calm place.



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As when you lie down on the beach or you rest in an outside parc, noises reach out to you only from very far away, all muffled down. You are warm as the evening sun that has lost its bitterness and gained in softness curls on your body. Don’t you feel like everything inside is settling down?”

Munira sat on her heels and faced all the women, asking:

“Don’t you think that the *pin dâsanâs*, our last posture, resembles the *sujood* position?”

Some nodded assent.

“You have to remember it; we will be using it often, Insha Allaah. The *Pin dâsanâs* is a gentle interlude in Yoga between two poses. “*Opinda*” actually means in sanscrit “embryo”; it mimicks the position of the foetus in the womb.



Zia looked around the room as she took her time before leaving the C-ME. She had gone fetch Aymen when she was sure no sister was in the room anymore.

She said:

“O Aymen, look at these beautiful posters! I want you to see this by yourself.”

There were many posters all around the room with beautiful illustrations. She began to read systematically and Aymen joined in, moved by a few of them:

- In Yoga, the cardiovascular system is massaged, the bloodstream is oxygenated, the spine is lengthened and stretched, restoring the nerve and energy impulses to the vital organs.
- In Yoga, we bring our attention to the breath which will settle us in our position and reinforce the connection with the ground. Then the body can begin to release and lengthen.
- In Yoga, we focus gradually on Gravity, breath, lengthening and spine. It is a circuit. You can do the same in your *salât*.
- Your body is the witness of the way you treat it. The aim is to bring it under tension in an organized way. It is like spinning wool. If you jerk the wheel, you will get uneven threads.

If you are too careful and hold the tension too tightly, you will break the wool. If you are too lax, your wool will become a mess. Actually, this is like life. The way you practice Yoga or you pray reflect the way you go on by your life.

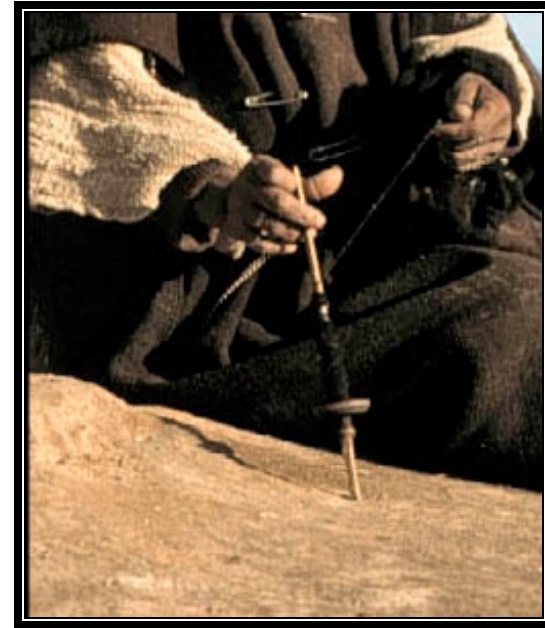


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- Smoothness and concentration is the only answer to a happy life as it is only the only answer to meditation.
- Set the silence into motion: pray!
- What you put inside your body can have a great influence on your health . What you put on your mind can have a great effect on your life. The way you treat your body, giving it exercise, washing it, massaging it, giving it time to meditate, will influence strongly your moods, your discipline in worship, your readiness for others and for Allaah. The way you treat it is the way it will treat you back.
- It was found that performing *Salât Taraweeh* is most beneficial for health. Dance is most beneficial for health. Tai'Chi is most beneficial for health. Walking is most beneficial for health. To smile and laugh are most beneficial for health. These are just different kinds of meditation. Any form of meditation is most beneficial for health.

When they finished reading, Zia took Aymen;’s hand and declared feverishly:

“O, Aymen dear, how great is the mercy of Allaah! See, He gives us a body that can heals by itself, and an intelligence in order to discover how to use this power inside us.”

“You believe in spontaneous healing?”

“Of course, I do, Aymen. Take the Zamzam water for example:

“The water of Zamzam fulfils the purpose for which it has been drunk” [10].

“Zamzam water fulfils the purpose for which it has been drunk, if you drink it for getting cured Allah cures you, if you drink it for stomach satisfaction Allah will satisfy you and if you drink it for quenching thirst Allah will quench your thirst.” [11]

If you face the *Qibla*, praise Allaah, make *Duas*, and drink *Zamzam* water, your ailments disappear! *Sub’anallaah!* There are *Du’as* that we make when we hurt somewhere and, *Insha Allaah*, the hurt disappears.”

“Yes, I remember, Zia. You are right. There is also these Haadiths:

Jabir bin AbduUah reported that Prophet Muhammad (swas) said: *“For any disease there is a cure, and when the cure matches the disease, the person recovers by the will of Allah”*

And it was reported by Abu Hurairah that the Prophet (saws) said: *“Allah never inflicts a disease unless he makes a cure for it.”*

So our role as human beings is to find this cure, to strive to find it and ask Allaah to help us find it. He is All Merciful indeed.”



“To perform the âsanass”

says B.K.S. Iyengar in **The Illustrated Light on Yoga**,

“one needs a clean, airy place, a blanket, and determination.”



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“To pray, we need a sutra, a carpet, a clean place, and *khushoo*.

Yoga is standing, sitting still while breathing and lengthening the spine; it is rooting like a tree.

“Trees receive their nourishment from both above and below, from sunlight and from the water in the earth, ” says Judith Harris [12]. That is true.

When we pray, we are doing our own *“âsanass”*. We receive the *Noor* (light) from Allaah, from somewhere above, and the physical benefits from the earth. We are rooting and the most we root into our *Salât*, the most benefits do we feel.”

“If praying is like doing Yoga,” asked Zia, “then, why don’t we stick to *Salât* and forget about other forms of meditation?”

“That’s because we need to learn, answered Miss Munira; we need to understand how to hold our own body, how to trust it, how to use it as a tool towards enlightenment, to use it to focus. Linda Myoki Lehrhaupt said: *“Resting in stillness gives us space and time to let emerge what we have learned.”* [13] I agree with that. Yoga has for principle the “Yama” which is non-violence, not harming others in thought, word or deed. Our life rests in peace.

In Islam, we do have the same principle. Islam comes from the root “*Salam*” which is “Peace”. In Islam, we practice non-violence by caring for our neighbors, whether from our religion or from outside our religion.

One day someone asked: “*Which of the Believers is best in his Islaam? Our Prophet (saas) replied: "He from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe."* [14]

Another principle is cleanliness. The Yogi would pass water or a cloth from one nostril to the other or inside his stomach for the sole purpose of cleansing it.

Islam stresses the importance of *Wudoo* (ritual ablutions before prayer) and *Ghusl* (bathing). *Ghusl* is even made compulsory on Fridays and after intercourse, and *Wudoo* about five times a day or more. A Muslim is like a person who washes in a river constantly.” She smiled.

“Also, in Islam, one has to be very careful not to defile his body by removing any impurity around him. Actually, the world is a Mosque as long as the place where one does his devotions is clean. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “*Cleanliness is half of faith*” [15]

One of the companions said: “*I heard the Prophet (saas) saying, ‘On the Day of Resurrection, my followers will be called Al-Ghurr-ul-Muhajjalun from the traces of ablution and whoever can increase the area of his radiance should do so (by performing ablution in the most perfect manner).’*” [16]

In Yoga, man faces destiny without emotion and devotes his complete attention to the meditation process. In Islam, we follow the same principle. We accept our destiny as the decision and will of Allaah. Whatever happens to us, whether good or bad, we accept it as a necessary trial that brings good to us; we accept that our lives are a loan from Allaah, which it is given to us only for a certain period of time.

This is why patience, *Sabr*, is a major word in Islam and directs everything a Muslim does. Yogi too must learn patience from

practice, oblivious of time, always attempting to complete the *Āsanas* in the best manner possible.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “*Strive for that which will benefit you and seek the help of Allaah, and do not be helpless. If anything (bad) happens to you, do not say, ‘If only I had done such-and-such, then such-and-such would have happened.’ Rather you should say, ‘Qaddara Allaah wa ma sha’a fa’ala (Allaah decrees, and what He wills He does),’ for (the words) ‘If only’ open the door to the Shaytaan.*” (Narrated by Muslim).

Concerning trials, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “*If Allaah loves a people, He tries them, and whoever has patience will have patience, and whoever is anxious will be anxious.*” [17]

According to a *saheeh hadeeth* narrated by ‘Ayaad (may Allaah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “*Allaah has revealed to me that you should be so humble that no one oppresses another or boasts to another.*” (Reported by Muslim, 2865).

Abu Hurayrah (ra) and Ka'b Bin Maalik (ra) reported that the Prophet (swas) said:

"The parable of a believer is that of a fresh and moist plant; the wind tilts it this way and that way; and so is the believer; he continues to be subject to affliction. And the parable of a hypocrite is that of a firm cedar tree; it does not shake - until it is uprooted all at once." (Bukharee and Muslim)

In Islam as for the Yogi, struggling, trying without being discouraged, feeling humble and submitting are very important values.

An Eastern philosophy says:

*“To understand others is to have knowledge;
To understand oneself is to be enlightened.
To conquer others requires strength;
To conquer oneself is even harder”*

Lao tze

Islam says

They said, *“Is there any greater jihaad than jihaad against the kuffaar?”* he said, *“Yes, jihaad al-nafs (jihaad against the self).”*”



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Everybody in the room smiled at hearing the very common saying. Then some faces became grim as some of the ladies remembered how hard this discipline was and how poor they had done on some occasions.

Miss Munira added, smiling:

“Smile everybody because Allaah loves to see your teeth!

Everything is judged by intentions and it is enough to try as hard as one can to please Allaah. He likes those who make mistakes and ask for forgiveness, and he is actually angry at those who do not ask and do not humble themselves.[18]”

Some ladies smiled again in agreement.



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Miss Munira had brought a video this time. It contained images near the seaside. Gulls flied around and the waves of the sea constantly came and went, strong waves closely followed by small ripples: BIG.. small – BIG.. small.

She projected it upon a huge white wall that was used for this purpose as it suddenly struck everybody.

“Beautiful, eh?” she asked. “Look at those birds that try their best to fly and obey Allaah’s orders. Think! When you are trying to add power to your throw when you play ball, do you ask someone to throw it with you or do you try to fine tune your technique?”

A sister laughed and replied: “I try to get more muscles.”

“But what if you get more muscles but you do not know how to use them? Worse, what if you get a lot of muscles and see that children are more successful than you are? What about that?”

Jalaludin Rumi said: *“Tie two birds together, they will not be able to fly, even though they now have four wings”*”

Everybody laughed. One sister said:

“Tie two sisters together and Rumi will not be able to fly.”

More laughs. Munira laughed as well, adding:

“Of course, but if only your common effort is adapted to your goals. You must aim the quality of your acts, not the quantity.” The ladies were suddenly intrigued as they were thinking about it. Munira resumed:

“To meditate requires patience, time, practice like these little chicks trying to fly for the first time. To acquire *Taqwa* and *Khushoo* requires patience, time, practice and failing and trying again. And you know how it all begins? What is the first thing a baby does when he sees the daylight for the very first time?”

“He cries.”

“Exactly! All begins by the breath. Listen to what Doctors and specialists have said about breathing:
“Deep breathing techniques which increase oxygen to the cell are the most important factors in living a disease free and energetic life. . . . Remember. Where cells get enough oxygen, cancer will not, cannot occur.” [19]

“According to scientists, extra oxygen along with a cleansing diet can return balance to the body.” [20]

“When the body is totally deprived of food, the metabolism slows and life can be sustained for several weeks. However, when the body is totally deprived of oxygen, metabolism comes to a halt immediately and life can only be sustained for a few minutes. Does it not make common sense that the way we breathe day-to-day has the most dramatic effect on our body's health and metabolism than any other single process?” [21]

Look at this video. Life and water. Breathing and rippling. The inexorable ebb and flow of the waves is like the tide of the natural breath. Don't you think so?”

Some nodded and some remained pensive.

“It has been proven that cleansing rituals that cure sickness begin with the breath. A woman delivers with less pain by focussing on and controlling her breathing. Stress or anxiety is cured by learning how to calm down and breathe properly, not with the upper part of the chest, but with the whole of our lungs.

Sandra Sabatini explains: *“Movements are like waves, you have to go with them.”* [22]

In yoga, the body forms perfect triangles, the *Āsanas* describe geometric figures, except for one.

When we grow upward as far as our height allows, the only way to gain lengthening is to bend backward like a wave. We feel light as we breathe into our belly and blood goes to the head. We feel rejuvenated. We let more air come in.



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Now, try this pose, not standing, but with your belly flat on the floor. Your hands stand on both sides of your chest.

Tuck your belly in. Make sure the small of your back becomes perfectly flat before you push your bust up by pushing first on your hands, not using your arms. This pose is called the cobra.

There is the half cobra where you rest on your elbows, and there is the full cobra, where you push all the way up and rest on your hands; your arms are fully extended; they become your roots.”

She approached one of the young girls who was curving up her spine following the instructions, and she demonstrated while showing the shape of the little girl's back:

“The curve of your spine does not allow you to fall into a geometric pattern, but the body follows the natural cursive line of the spine when fully extended. It is actually impossible to give a geometric pattern to our back even if we can do this with the rest of our body.

Your spine describes a wave like the wave of the sea. See on the video: the wave builds up gradually before it falls. The same for you. You have to build up the lengthening of the spine before you can think of ascending, and while you ascend, you have to build up this lengthening by pushing forward and up slowly. You feel tall first, then you curve. You also follow the waves of the sea when you *Salât*. You have to build the lengthening of the spine as you bow down and while you bow for *Rukoo* or *Sujood* but your back must stay straight; it is very important that your back stays straight. And as in Yoga, we have to stay into the pose until the bones rest and come back into place, the time for few *Du'as*...

You can see the same curve and bowing possibilities in two other parts of your body. Who can tell me which ones they are?"

A long silence began, then someone declared:

"Our nose and hear lobes are very flexible!"

"True, but that's not the answer; they cannot bend on their own."

"The abdominals?"

"They can bend but they are muscles, thus they cannot do it on their own. Without the action of the spine, they can do nothing."

"Well, our hands can bend on their own on both sides."

"True enough. That's the first part of the answer."

"So you must mean the feet."

"Yep. Our feet are incredibly flexible; they actually have a natural arch as our spine has a natural arch, which our hands do not have. All of this is made permissible by fifty two bones, each one bound by four layers of muscles! And they have enough strength and flexibility to maintain body balance, propel it into motion and absorb shocks.

Because high heels force women to walk with their buttocks out and swaying hips, it has been the symbol of femininity while in fact it puts women off balance and causes feet deformity and back pains as well as impeded blood circulation. Feet are flexing like lungs filling with air. They are also part of the wave of meditation. When we pray, they are like the little ripples at the feet of the bigger waves. You should imagine them to be little waves whenever you pray. Then you

will feel in harmony; you will feel like the sea that obeys Allaah's commands without stopping. You will understand your prayer as being a breathing technique.



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You will realize, Insha Allaah, how small you are and how every breath that you take is already calculated, written; that you cannot escape it, and that's all right; it is good to feel like a wave of the sea; it is reassuring."



"If my mind isn't quiet, I can't believe my experience. I'm so busy listening to and believing in my mental chatter (always tied to the past and future) that I am unable to focus on my present experience, let alone believe in it." Ruth Zaporah [23]

Zia decided to take a stroll in the parc near the C-ME. It was a beautiful parc with greenery everywhere patched with flower trees and alleys of exotic flowers. There were also Chinese women who had gathered near a pond and rolled their hips and busts in a block as a way of warm up. The girl decided to stop to watch what they intended to do next. She seated cross legged on the floor, her head resting on the trunk of a tree, lost in meditation as she waited.



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The Chinese population has traditions coming from hundreds of years ago, she thought, usually developed by monks who were looking for wisdom and sound knowledge. How did they reach the whole population? Why did people included it as part of their traditions? By conversion?

She watched as the group swelled slowly, a group a silent women, coming for the same purpose, repeating the exact same moves over and over again, passing them on to their daughters. Silent women who did not smile, who just looked and looked closed inside themselves, not coming for socialization, not coming to communicate but to experience together. This reminded her of leaves blown by the wind in the same direction as they hold on to their

branches, doing the same things, but completely being individual. This reminded her of thousands of Muslims praying everyday towards the same point, but not communicating, just being silent and talking with their Lord.

Old people had time to exercise, she thought further, they have time to exercise their body and teir mind, to search for answers. Some are suddenly drawn to art in their sixtees, some to genealogy, some to knitting, some to mild physical activity.

Suddenly an old man made his appearance, and a group a women followed him. They did not look like particularly graceful like dancers can be even when they walk. They did not look like different from any other women. They were actually quite common but they had a sort of lightness about themselves. Then the man said a few curt words in Chinese or so it seemed, and it all began; the magic began. The old and middle age women suddenly were transformed by the graceful and slow gestures of T'ai Chi. The old man was leading and was not paying attention to anyone. They followed, rounding and bowing and sliding in the air. Zia was amazed. There was a natural grace in T'ai Chi that did not exist in any other sport. It was captivating and moving at the same time. And what she liked most was that the people who praticed it wore long and concealing black outfits that made them look like weeping willows in the wind. Zia approached the group and turned her back on the other women who were still exercising on their own, then she began trying to imitate. She said silently: '*Bismillaahi*. Ya Allaah, I am only seeking health and knowledge. Make my moves *halal* and chase Satan away so that I might not be a temptation for those who might happen to watch. *Ameen*.'

The course did not last long; it seemed like fifteen minutes had passed until the old man stopped, thanked the women, showed them a picture of a very young girl contorting her body in a dangerous manner, then left.

One of the women smiled at Zia and Zia felt an irresistible desire to smile back from the deepest of her heart. She felt calm and relaxed, a few tingling sensations passed through her hands and arms and she

rubbed them while stretching delicately. The woman was staring at Zia and she said without any introduction:

“Will you come back again?”

“Maybe. I do not live in this part of the town. I take classes at the C-ME.”

“Really? You know T’ai Chi Chuan?”

“No. But I tried any way.”

“Good! You know, Tai Chi Chuan has its origins based on legend. Chang San Feng was a monk during the 12th century. China, you see. Chang traveled mountains of central and northern China, where he learned many martial arts.

One day, he observes flying bird. Bird stare down at snake. Snake is coiled with its head facing up the bird. The bird wants to strike the snake with its beak. The snake rolls.

Chang sees that snake is clever. He tries the same. He learns that softness overcomes hardness only by flexibility of body. T’ai Chi is like snake posture, bird posture, any animal posture. We reproduce. See?”

Zia nodded, intrigued by what the woman was saying. She continued:

“It is Yin and Yang. You see, the bird and the snake are friends now. Nobody kills anybody. Nobody can. We live different, together, one make the other. Understand?”

“I am not sure,” answered Zia embarrassed but eager to know more. “Go on please.”

“You do not know. I know. I teach you. The leaves fall from trees so that buds can grow and fruits too. Many things in nature like this, like days and seasons, changing, like a cycle. But T’ai Chi is known to belong to Chen’s family. Many generations... Yang Chen Fu's Tai Chi Chuan is T’ai Chi now, long and relaxed postures, slow, even movements, deep breathing. Only three centuries ago!”

“I understand,” exclaimed the girl with happiness, “yes, I do understand.”

“Mm,” confirmed the Chinese women with a quick nod. “It is like an organ. Sometimes sick, sometimes good. Sickness is important; it makes organ good. Body likes to feel good and likes to

heal itself. But no sickness, no good health. See? T’ai Chi heals sickness. T’ai Chi is good for stomach, blood, tranquillity.”

Another women, younger came to join them and introduced herself:

“Assalam Alaikum.”

“Wa Alaikum assalam wa Rahmatullah wa barakatuh. Are you Muslim?”

“Yes. *AlHamdulillaah!* Many Chinese are Muslims and many Muslim Chinese learn T’ai Chi and Kun Fu, the “violent” version of T’ai Chi.”

“*Alhamdulillaah.* I was wondering, if you do not mind answering my questions. What do we gain at learning T’ai Chi?”

“Ah!” she said thoughtfully, a light smile on her face. There is a sage who said: *‘The ultimate purpose of learning Tai Chi is to live forever in the spring season of your life.’*”

They laughed discreetly. Zia in the end asked:

“What does that mean? If we live longer in the young years of our lives, we push the old age further, so we live longer?”

The first woman answered:

“T’ai Chi makes you live longer as young. No live older than God decides.”

“I guess you’re right, Ma’am. This is why you come here to learn T’ai Chi?”

The second lady answered this time:

“Learning is not about learning; it is feeling good about our world, our convictions, ourselves; it is experiencing in a different way and becoming wise about the world and ourselves.

We learn in order to be happy as we learn to be a better Muslim to feel happier, *Insha Allaah.*”

“*Insha Allaah.*”

“Learning means nothing if it is not better for you,” added the first lady. “First happy, then understand. If happy, understand!” Zia was stuck by what she had just heard. That was simple.

However, she had never thought of it that way. Yes, she thought, why learning if it is to impress or to just know. No. Learning is to reform one’s life, otherwise it is a waste of time. She smiled,

contented as something loosened in her mind and made her see a whole new world in a different light.

The second lady explained:

“What she means is that you have to be the learning that you do. In other words, if you do not apply your knowledge, you do not deserve this knowledge. Then, you will lose it because you do not feel it making its place inside you somewhere where it is important. If you do not feel relaxed while doing T'ai Chi, stop! See, when you swim, if you think you are water, you cannot drown. When you do T'ai-Chi, if you think you are air, you let the air carry you. Some people say that Tai-Chi is “swimming in the air”; they are right! If we were not solidly grounded on the earth, we would float away, eh? Isn't it? The footing is essential in Tai-Chi; we have to feel the gravity when we switch our body weight slowly, from leg to leg.” She demonstrated, moving slowly, walking exaggeratedly a few steps as if walking on the moon.



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It is like a root that comes from the ground and grows inside you until it reaches the fingers. Imagine that this root is made of flexible wire someone is stretching and moving around with great efforts. Then you will start to feel your body, to feel the Chi.

“See, lady, trees are secure and stable; roots give them longevity. An oak can live hundred of years, cover twenty miles worth of roots and branches. Roots also give the tree stability so that it can lengthen high and higher into the sky.”

Zia stays a few more minutes, then left the ladies with the promise she would return and learn more with them, *Insha Allaah*. She felt exhilarated, so exhilarated in fact, that she ran into Munira without seeing her.

“I apologize miss Munira. I was daydreaming.”

“*Assalam Alaikum* my student.” She smiled teasingly.

“*Wa Alaikum Assalam*, my teacher,” answered Zia with the same tone.

“What took away your mind, sister Zia?”

Zia explained her encounter and describes her feelings and sensations, then stopped out of breath.

Munira smiled again, looking at Zia very pleased with herself.

“T'ai Chi is a very good form of meditation, Zia. You should go again and learn from these ladies. It seems that Allah has blessed you in your relationships. Be grateful because it is rare.”

“I will be thankful,” promised Zia.

“Well, there is a same principle in Yoga and T'ai Chi if you look closely at both practices. Yoga can also heal. Any gentle exercising actually has a healing effect because it opens the body. After a long and stressful day, a ten minutes shoulder stand pose can restore energy by massaging the thyroid glands, for example.”

“Really?” exclaimed Zia, “I need this for my family badly.”

“Then come, I'll show you.”

“If I am not taking too much of your time.”

“You are, but it is my pleasure.”

They both arrived in the gym room. They dropped their bags and went to the mats. Munira directed:

“Begin by lying down on your back, then slowly pick your knees up. Breathe into your roots which will be your elbows that hold your back in place as you raise your legs up into the air or over your head. Take time to lengthen before going into the pose.

As in dance, you can imagine that all your joints are attached to strings and a puppeteer is manoeuvring them carefully. You will begin to feel the necessity of keeping certain joints on top of others when you move. You will start feeling the antagonist muscles stretch and the pulling muscles gradually tightening. You will start feeling a resistance, the resistance of gravity, of the air, of the space over your body. You will feel like moving into a pack of mud. As you will start having a kinesthetic awareness of your body, your soul will begin to lighten and feel elevated. Deep and soft sensations and emotions will put you in another world. You will start to relax. You will be in control, *Insha Allaah*. Can you feel it?"

"Yes, I do. There is a great pleasure in controlling our body."

"Certainly is... When we master a skill, we are exuberant. When two people run on the same log in a river and compete for the one who will make the other fall down in the river, here is the pleasure of being in control of one's body, the pleasure of being able to keep one's balance much better than all the others and better than someone else. This is being in control. It is rewarding."

"Yes, that's an area where I am 'in control', sis Munira.

That's what dance is all about. [24] Focusing on a body part with the intention of moving it surely creates energy or if you want moves energy, chemicals, in the body that supports the movement. If your intention is not clear in your head; if you haven't visualized this move inside your head already you might do the opposite of what you want; it is chaos, you lose your concentration.

Feel the space braced when you move, "*carve a place for yourself in space*" says Horosko, 1991 [25]. Space enfolds and carries you through the air when you dance; the air becomes vibrant, almost tangible like the wind passing through can lift roofs or uproot trees and it is almost tangible, but not quite. Visualization and concentration in dance is very important. But it is very hard. For example, touch creates a kinesthetic image. We also use touch a lot in dance. Actually dance is first of all a human contact. If you touch someone eyes closed and you try to reproduce the position he or she

is in, you will create the impression the position gives you, rarely the position itself.

While you sag, no, that's not the word, while you rest into the pose, yes, that's the word for it, while you do this, you also have to lengthen. You rest on your bones as when you do Yoga or *salât* and you must wait until all your bones take back their place in your body before you move to the next pose. But in Yoga it is obvious while in dance it is fluid and almost not perceptible. We work a lot with gravity. You see, Munira, the earth will counterthrust because of gravity.

Remember the *hadiths*? One should be at ease in *sujood*, distributing his weight equally on the parts of the body which should be in contact with the ground.

The Prophet (sallallahu `alaihi wa sallam) said to the one who was rushing through his *salât* without observing the proper tranquility: '*Go back and make salât because you have not made the salât.*' And in the hadeeth of Rifaa'ah on the story of the one who prayed badly it goes on explaining what is required: "*Then he makes takbeer and bows and puts his hands on his knees until each joint is settled and relaxed. Then he says `sami'allahu liman hamida' (Allah hears the one who praises Him) then stands up straight until each bone is in its place.*"[26]



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So, if you think of your muscles hanging on your bones, not controlling, and your bones thrusting upward. Maybe you can imagine they are fresh morning dewdrops dropping along your

bones. After feeling the weight of each limb, your balance will be easier, the joints freer and the breathe deeper. Now, you can make room for the beat. Music follows the beat of the heart or the beat of the drum; let it sweel up within yourself; focus on it and forget your body or rather let your body take over. You are now dancing.

The first and most persistant sound a child ears in the womb of its mother is certainly the beating of her heart. The sound of the ocean waves has the same rhythm and insistance and so does modern music. No wonder the music of Africa and from other world traditions is based on the drum. All movements of meditation are contained in the prostration of the ocean tides.

When you do Tai-Chi, it is like you are pushing waves away.

I will show you, sister Munira, how to graduate from T'ai Chi to dance, *Insha Allaah*.

Stand erect for a minute standing your feet at shoulders width. Now place your hand on your belly button, on top of the other. Breathe. Relax your shoulders. Feel tall but relaxed. Now, push your first hand to the front and round your arm as if you were holding a huge baloon. Got it? Feel how your hand is spushing your chest away, at one moment you might cess feeling the attaction and your hand and arm feel like they are free to stretch even further on their own. You actually have cessed to use your bicep muscles. Your arm and hand are now free; they are on their own. Because they have smaller muscles, you do not feel the effort anymore.

Now do the same thing but slowly round your upper back at the same time you are rounding your arms as if you were holding a heavy baby or a larger baloon.

You have just emigrated from Tai'Chi to dance."

"You are right, sister Zia professor. Tai-Chi takes the waist for point of stability in all its movements. Tai-Chi is the co-ordination of body, breath, and balance with a meditation in motion. Each series of movements is called a form; each form is slow, fluid, continous, with the weight very solidly grounded in the feet so that the Chi of the practitioner can move freely from the centered starting point.

Qi Gong is a traditinal medicine. It is also very close to Tai Chi, but it is more therapeutic. The movements are small and performed slowly. Qi Gong means "The curing of illness through muscle movement". And the cure starts from the spine, by oxygening the spine."



Image © 2003 www.clipart.com

"Classical dance takes the spine as rotation point, Munira, this is why it looks geometrical like Yoga postures that emphasize triangular forms and full strecth of muscles.

On the contrary, corporal expression and jazz dance take the solar plexus as center of balance and center of rotation. But I know we are not allowed to dance in Islam, that's why I quit."

"O, no, Zia! You must not see dance as a haram thing prohibited to Muslims! Dance can be a powerful therapy too when it is used as a medicine and when women practice it in close doors and men practice it away from females. It is particularly effective with children.

The relationship between mind and body is strong as you know it. Students have reported that dance improvisation increased their sense of mental clarity; other felt a relief from stress or anxiety. If

you want someone to heal, give him an imagery to focus on, and space to spit out his emotions, to express all that is contained inside. Some people manage it by violence, anger, meditation, dance, etc., the body needs to take over and heal itself.

We are wrong to underestimate the power that our body, our hormones, our muscles, our blood have over our welfare. Women are known for their mood swings while pregnant; their body is moving differently and let them know about it. Remember how a sauna or a massage can relax; our mind did not do anything but it has been soothed by making our body feel happy. And vice versa.

Some women have reported having forgotten the pains of labor while watching comic movies! Other while taking a nap! [27] On the contrary, other women who started labor with anxiety or in bad conditions experience extreme pains [28].

Our mind and our body are tightly intertwined; they act upon each other.”

“That’s true, Munira. When we feel poorly or stressed, our hair and skin become oily; our complexion loses its luminosity, our posture lags; when we go for a jog, even if we felt depressed before running, we come back vitalized, happy, relaxed; it changes our mood. In dance expression, you can try to imagine you are a leaf or a stone an infant picks up to show it a garden he is walking in. You can identify yourself to an object and leave yourself been moved around, slipping, falling, finding your equilibrium, trembe under the force of the wind, etc. It is therapeutic because it rocks; it is like been craddled in someone’s arms, but your body actually does the rocking in a perfectly relaxed atmosphere.

When you dance as in modern or jazz dance, it is as if you are constantly tied to an elastic band by your chest. It is as if you are rolling around a huge ball. This pulling and pushing is very close to the rocking that we experienced in our mother’s arms; it is always soothing no matter how old we are.

“Not only that, sister Zia, but the same concentration that we find in Tai Chi, or Yoga, or dance, we find it in *khushoo*, the Muslim concentration during prayer.

It is the same rocking and stretching of the muscles.

It is the same type of awareness we experience.

The Qur’aan says: *"Indeed the Believers are successful, those who are humble in their Prayer."* [Sooratul-Mu'minoon 23:1-2]

And the basis of humility (*khushoo*) is softness, gentleness, tranquility, subservience, subjugation, and burning of the heart. So when the heart is humble, all of the limbs and body parts follow it in humility. Our prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, said: *"Verily there is a small morsel of the body, if it is rectified, the whole body is rectified; and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Indeed it is the heart."* [29]

So if the heart is submissive, the eyes, ears, head, face, and the rest of the limbs are submissive; the same goes for whatever emanates from them, to the extent that it reaches the speech. Due to this, the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam used to say in the rukoo' (bowing) of his Prayer, *"My sight, hearing, mind, and bone are subservient to You."* And he said in another narration, *"And whatever is carried upon my feet."* [30]

It is a way of relaxing. Putting oneself in the hands of Allaah is relaxing. We do not worry anymore; we are plainly confident, open and ready for anything with trust.

When we worship, taqwa is very important. We perform actions that strengthen our worship. When you make Du'as, Zia, you raise your hands at the level of your face; when you say Dhikr, you use your fingers to keep track of the counts; when you perform *Salât*, you wash yourself, you bow, you prostrate. You work with your body in harmony, in control.

Each act of worship is accompanied by a body response. When you read Qur'aan, you cry. When you say *Salaam Alaikum*, you take the hand of your sister in your own. When you pray over someone for recovery, called Ruqia, you breathe into your hands then pass your hands over the body part that hurts. When you go to bed, you make *Du'as* after breathing into your palms, then you wipe them all over your body.

We should never underestimate the role of the body language and the relationship between our body and our acts of worship.

As giving intercourse is a *Sadaqah* (charity), giving yourself time to discover your body through soft exercising is also *Sadaqah* upon yourself. And in Islam *Sadaqah* begins by one's self. [31]
Dancing is forming a silent language, it is expressing what is inside and expressing what is inside is liberating, whatever the means that we use: talking, writing, punching a bag, hugging someone...
Dancing is forming a silent prayer. If it helps you becoming a better Muslim, why not? At the condition you do it in the limits of Islam, not in contradiction with what Islam says.

"Reduced to our own body, our first instrument, we learn to play it, drawing from it maximum resonance and harmony"
Yehudi Menuhin [32]

"Learning is acquired by imitation, reflection. In the Noble Qur'aan, we are asked to think, meditate, reflect in many instances. We are asked to learn the rites of Islaam by watching the prophet (saas). If you watch the tides of the ocean, you will notice two sets of waves: small rippling ones, and giant rolling ones that come and retrieve.

When we give ourselves totally into an activity, we lose the sense of who we are; we forget that we are hungry, tired, that someone is waiting for us at home, etc. We are totally into what we are doing; we become what we are doing.

Performing *Salât*, we become *Salât*.

Our ears become *Salât*; our tongue becomes *Salât*; our body becomes *Salât*; our mind and soul become devotion to Allaah. This is the definition of true taqwa, a person who fears Allaah so much, he behaves as if he sees Allaah. We are one with our actions, in spirit as in act.

We are totally focussed on something that is not us: Allaah.

We feel refreshed.

We feel in harmony. We feel in control of our desires; we win our major *Jihad*. We feel also loved:

"Allah says:

"When a worshiper of Mine seeks to approach Me through an obligation that I like best and continues to advance towards Me through voluntary prayers, I start to love him. When I love him I become his ears by which he hears, and his eyes with which he sees, and his hands with which he grasps, and his feet with which he walks. When he asks Me I give him and when he seeks My protection I protect him."

Our soul sheds its coating of stress, worries, illusions and purifies itself; it is ready to absorb the light.

H.W. Longfellow *once said: "If you would hit the mark, you must aim a little above it; Every arrow feels the attraction of the earth."*

The same way we cannot expect to see a plant emerge from the soil the day after we have buried a seed, the same way we cannot expect to feel perfectly comfortable inside our body after a few sessions of Yoga or Tai-chi. We cannot master all the rules and words of *salât* in a few days. It takes time, even years, to grasp the arabic words, to understand their profound meaning, to stop making mistakes. And that is what makes it interesting; we slowly, deeply grasps all this! It doesn't mean we cannot feel the benefits right away; it means that we have to grow into it.

Like the rays of the sun are gradually absorbed by our skin, the teaching slowly sinks in; the enlightenment sips in and gradually grows. Humans are not made for what is fast. It takes time to grow..."

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"Religion is to seek after that which you have never lost...

It is to find that which was always there...

It is stopping to be that which you never were...

It is to meet anew that which never left...

It is to return to that place you have never left...

It is to return.

It is to return to the Divine..."

Har Tzion

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References:

[1] Ms. **Doris Lessing** is an Iranian writer: her complete bibliography can be found, at: <http://lessing.redmood.com/> as well as portraits and biographies.

[2] Meaning of Bible Name: *Zia*: Sweat; swelling

In Hebrew, it means to tremble, a kind of grain.

Zia is also a masculine Arabic name derived from 'ziya' meaning "**splendor, light**".

Muneera or Munira is a feminine *Arabic name, the feminine form of Muneer or Munir* which means "bright, shining", "illuminating; shedding light."

[3] Abu Hurairah (radhiAllaahu 'anhu) reports that a man stood up to the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) and asked him about praying in a single garment. So he (sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said, "**Unless you find two garments.**" Then he asked 'Umar (radhiAllaahu 'anhu) who said, "**When Allah is generous, be generous yourselves. A man prayed in a lower garment (izaar) and an upper garment (ridaa), a waist wrapper (izaar) and a shirt (qamees), in a lower wrap (izaar) and an outer garment with full length sleeves (qaba`), in trousers (saraaweel) and an upper wrap (ridaa), in trousers and a shirt (qamees), in trousers and upper garment (qaba`), in tubbaan and qaba`, and in tubbaan and qamees.**" [Bukhaaree, Maalik in al-Muatta, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Nannisai, Ibn Maajah, al-Humaidee, Ahmad in al-Musnad, at-Tayaalisee, at-Tahaawee, al-Baghawee, Abu Nu'aim, al-Khateeb]

[4] Al-Bukhari recorded that 'Abdullah bin 'Umar said, "We were with the Messenger of Allah when he asked, "Tell me about a tree that resembles the Muslim, the leaves of which do not fall in summer or winter and gives its fruit at all times by the leave of its Lord."

Ibn 'Umar said, "I thought of the date palm tree, but felt shy to answer when I saw that Abu Bakr and 'Umar did not talk. When they did not give an answer, the Messenger of Allah said, "It is the date palm tree."" [Fath Al-Bari 8:228]

'Abdullah bin 'abbas said that, **as a goodly tree**, is a tree in Paradise [At-Tabari 16:573].

"Giving its fruit at all times," means by day and by night and that describes the believer as a tree that always has fruits during summer and winter, by night and by day.

[5] **Health, Healing and Beyond: Yoga and the Living Tradition of Krishnamacharya** by T. K. V. Desikachar.

[6] **Yoga:**

The word "Yoga" means two different things for the modern people:

- 1) The physical practice linked to a religious commitment to the Hindou religion
 - 2) It means a form of gentle exercise that is completely disconnected from its origins and taught as a means to gain more health.
- 1) In the first case, practicing Yoga is **haram** because it is an indoctrination, as the following Fatwas will clarify.

Fatwa: www.islamonline.net

"With regard to your question, Sports are basically Halal and permitted in Islam as long as they do not encompass forbidden acts. As for Yoga, it contains certain religious rituals aiming at educating and disciplining the soul. Moreover, those who practice it claim that there is a spiritual contact between them and some hidden spirits in which they themselves believe. Given all this, practicing Yoga by Muslims is Haram."

Fatwa by Mufti Ebrahim Desai , question 5464

<http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/>

"Yoga, according to the World Book lexicon is, 'A system of Hindu religious philosophy that requires intense mental and physical discipline as a means of attaining union with the universal spirit.' (World Book p. 2421). Hence even though Yoga is used only as a fitness programme, it is not permissible due to its close links with the Hindu religion."

2) In the second case, Yoga is **halal or allowed**, it is just another way to feel good and the teacher is not instructing his students about any of the Hindou doctrine. It is reduced to a series of physical activities without special meaning. This series of exercises resemble stretching techniques, relaxing and massaging techniques. As long as the postures are not extreme and are not harming the body of the person who practices it, it is safe to use it.

But Muslims should consider only as a hobby to feel better, something that they do for pleasure, not by conviction. Yoga can thus help them to sleep better, to feel more in tune with their body, to relax, etc.

In the same spirit, Muslim Chinese as a means of finding balance and defending themselves use martial arts.

There is no proof in Islam that it is forbidden.

Our prophet (saas) would ask the help of people from other religions to educate Muslims in writing, or to master a skill. In Islam, we are allowed to learn from the non-Muslims as long as we do not imitate them and do not follow them and as long as the teaching is not in contradiction in any way with the Muslim creed. Chanting in Yoga is therefore prohibited. We do not want to imitate the *Kufar*, but incorporate what is good from their teachings into our daily practices. Hatha Yoga is a combination of traditional teachings into a modern setting. It is a mild form of Yoga that is completely reduced to purely physical poses.

Fatwa from: <http://islamhelpline.com/>

Q-1: My question is can a Muslim do yoga?

Dear Brother, Islam encourages Muslims to take care of their health and body. Healthy body allows individuals to enjoy all the bounties of Allah and fosters a healthy mind and soul.

According to one of the companions of Prophet Mohammed narrated by Al-Tirmidhi

When we were sitting together, Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) appeared with a trace of water on his head, and when we told him that he appeared to us to be in a happy frame of mind, he agreed. The people then began to discuss wealth and Allah's Messenger (saws) said, "There is no harm in wealth for him who fears Allah, Who is Great and Glorious, but for him who fears Allah, health is better than wealth, and a happy frame of mind is one of Allah's favours."

Ahmad transmitted it. (5290 – Al Tirmidhi Hadith)

Any type of exercise that conforms to Shariah, is permissible and encouraged in Islam. However, we need to determine whether this exercise involves anything Haram, or leads to Haram, or ignores the doing of an Islamic deed. If, for example, it involves that there is no separation between men and women and/or that the Salah is not performed on time or missed because of it, etc. then this exercise would be forbidden and should be avoided.

Q-2: In yoga there are some exercises in which a person has to say Om. Is it allowed in islam.

Well, there are three aspects that needs to be understood.

1. The meaning of the word should not be against the teachings of the Islamic Shariah. For example the word should not be such that it denies the Oneness of Allah (the Wahadat), or believing in the Angels, or His Prophets, or Prophet Mohammed as the last Prophet, or the integrity of Quran, etc.

2. The second aspect is perhaps the word might not have any specific meaning, but indicates a slogan which is against the teachings of Shariah. For example, slogans that indicates asking guidance/help/supplication from anyone other than Allah Subhanah. Some people also tend to use Prophet Jesus Christ's name in anguish and anxiety, that is against the teaching of Islam.

3. The third aspect is if the word indicates a gesture/customs which is specific to certain nations other than Islam, is also forbidden. The Messenger of Allah (saws) said that if we imitate other nations then on the Day of Judgment we would be raised along with these people. Sunan of Abu-Dawood Hadith 4020 Narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar The Prophet (saws) said: "He who copies any people is one of them." Beloved brother, we need to verify whether the word "Om" falls under any of the above criteria mentioned. If it does, then you should avoid using this word in all circumstances.

The most sacred syllable in Hinduism is OM.

It stands for *Brahman*, both as personal and impersonal God. The passage below is one of the clearest of the countless references to OM in the Hindu scripture.

The goal which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities aim at, and which men desire when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly: it is OM. This syllable OM is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires. This is the best support; this is the highest support. Whosoever knows this support is adored in the world of Brahma.

-- Katha Upanishad I, ii, 15-17 ¹

The sound OM is Brahman. The rishis and sages practiced austerity to realize that Sound-Brahman. After attaining perfection one hears the sound of this eternal Word rising spontaneously from the navel. "What will you gain', some sages ask, 'by merely hearing this sound?' You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. By following the trail of OM you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol. That Brahman has been described by the Vedas as the ultimate goal."

-- **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna** ²

(To Mahima) "You explain 'Aum' with reference to 'a', 'u', and 'm' only."
Mahima: "'A', 'u', and 'm' mean creation, preservation, and destruction."
Master: "But I give the illustration of the sound of a gong: 'tom', t-o-m. It is the merging of the Lila in the Nitya: the gross, the subtle, and the causal merge in the Great Cause; waking, dream, and deep sleep merge in Turiya. The striking of the gong is like the falling of a heavy weight into a big ocean. Waves begin to rise: the Relative rises from the Absolute; the causal, subtle, and gross bodies appear out of the Great Cause; from Turiya emerge the states of deep sleep, dream, and waking. These waves arising from the Great Ocean merge again in the Great Ocean. From the Absolute to the Relative, and from the Relative to the Absolute. Therefore I give the illustration of the gong's sound, 'tom'. I have clearly perceived all these things. It has been revealed to me that there exists an Ocean of Consciousness without limit. From It come all things of the relative plane, and in It they merge again."

-- **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna** ²

"The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in samadhi. It is like the sound of a bell: t-a-m. The yogi, by following in the trail of the sound Om, gradually merges himself in the Supreme Brahman."

-- **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

It is evident from the above passages of the Hindu Scriptures that 'OM' is apparently the most sacred symbol in their religion, and it stands for their 'connotation' of Brahma or god! Thus if one recites the word 'OM', it would be calling on a god other than the One True Lord of the Worlds; and that would be considered a manifest form of Shirk or associating other gods with Allah Subhanah!

There is absolutely no harm if one does yoga as an exercise, but it would be absolutely forbidden for a believer, who sincerely believes in Allah and the Last Day, to recite 'om' or any other term of shirk while doing so. Whatever written of Truth and benefit is only due to Allah's Assistance and Guidance, and whatever of error is of me. Allah Alone Knows Best and He is the Only Source of Strength.

Your Brother in Islam, **Tauseef Ahmed**

[7] **The "Yoga" of Islamic Prayer**, by Karima Burns, MH, ND.

[8] **Islam and Yoga, A comparative study of congruence between two traditions** by Tauseef Ahmed.

[9] From **Confessions, Book X, chapter 8**. Saint Augustine (354-430) was a roman religious figure

He also said: "The world is a book, and those who do not travel, read only a page."

[10] Refer to Misnad **Ahmed**

[11] Refer to El-Dar Gatni and El-Hukm and Zad.

[12] **Nurture Assumption** by Judith Rich Harris.
See bibliography, at: <http://home.att.net/~xchar/tna/>

[13] Linda Myoki Lehrhaupt, **T'ai Chi as a path of wisdom**, p.154.
Useful insights and practical guidance for the practice of tai chi,

[14] Reported by Ibn Nasr al-Marwazee in *Ta'zeem Qadris Salaat* (no. 639)

[15] Sahih **Muslim** Book 2, Number 0432.

[16] Sahih **Al-Bukhari**, Vol. 1, Hadith No. 138.

[17] Reported by Imaam **Ahmad**; *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 1706.

[18] The Prophet said: "Allah is angry with those who do not ask Him for anything" (Tirmidhi).

[19] **Dr. Otto Warburg**, President, Institute of Cell Physiology, Nobel Prize Winner (Dr. Warburg is the only person to ever win the Nobel Prize twice in medicine and he was nominated for a third.)

[20] Elizabeth Baker, **The Unmedical Miracle: Oxygen**. Drelwood Communications, p.80.

[21] Jill R. Johnson, Author: **The Oxyce! System**.

[22] Sandra Sabatini: **Breath the essence of yoga**, a guide to inner stillness (Thorsons, 2000).

See also Elizabeth Irvine's website:
<http://www.truewellbeing.co.uk/start.php>

[23] Ruth Zaporah **ACTION THEATER, The Improvisation of Presence.**

She is a master of improvisational dance performance; she is a pre-eminent solo performer.

Also see website, at: <http://www.actiontheater.com/>

[24] **Fatwa: Music and Dance Between Women:**

www.islamonline.net/fatwa/english/

“If singing does not impede you from doing mandatory activities such as praying, studying or doing other obligations, and it does not coincide with unlawful things such as bad words, then it’s lawful. Everything is permissible unless there is a clear statement of prohibition. Similarly, dancing is also allowed especially among women unless it impedes carrying out mandatory obligations or coincides with unlawful acts.”

[25] **Martha Graham, the evolution of her dance theory and training** by Horosko, Marian, 2002

[26] **The Magnifying Glass on clarifying many common errors Al Minthaar Fee Katheer Min Akhtaa’ Ash -Shaa’ah** by Saalih Ibn Abdul-Azeez Ibn Muhammad Aalish-Shaykh.

[27] **Sexology**, Sex in the news, 33:421, 1967

[28] **Human sexuality** by James Leslie Mc Cary, D. van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1967.

[29] This is part of a long hadeeth related by al-Bukhaaree (1/117), Muslim (no. 1599), Ibn Maajah (no. 3984), ad-Daarimee (2/245), and Ahmad (4/269); from Nu'maan Ibn Basheer radiiallaahu 'anhu.

[30] The first narration is related by Muslim (no. 771), at-Tirmidhee (no. 3417), Aboo Daawood (no. 760), an-Nisaa'ee (2/130), Aboo Ya'laa (no. 284, 574), and Ahmad (1/94); from 'Alee radiiallaahu 'anhu. And the second narration is related by Ahmad in al-Musnad (1/119), also from 'Alee radiiallaahu 'anhu.

And someone from the Salaf saw a man fiddling with his hand during the Prayer, so he said, "If his heart was submissive, his limbs would have become subservient."

[31] "Nafaqatur rajuli ala ahlihi sadaqah."

"A man's spending on his family is a deed of charity."

Reporter: Hadhrat Abu Masud al-Badri (r) Source: Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 5, #343

[32] Violinist **Yehudi Menuhin**, became a devoted pupil of Iyengar. He helped a lot in bringing Iyengar’s yoga to the Western public, in the 1950s. Here is his story: Menuhin was suffering from insomnia and cysts on his wrists, which prevented him from playing violin. He met Iyengar who taught him a specific yoga posture which relaxed him so much that he fell in a repairing sleep for the first time in months. His cysts also disappeared. As a token of gratitude, Menuhin arranged for yogi Iyengar to visit the UK and practice there. Iyengar began to teach during the Menuhin Music Festival in Gstaad, Switzerland, then in London.

In Iyengar book’s foreword to **Light on Yoga** Menuhin explains:

“The practice of Yoga induces a primary sense of measure and proportion. Reduced to our own body, our first instrument, we learn to play it, drawing from it maximum resonance and harmony... By its very nature it is inextricably associated with universal laws: for respect for life, truth, and patience are all indispensable factors in the drawing of a quiet breath, in calmness of mind and firmness of will.”

Other references:

1. Jean Déchanet , **Christian Yoga** (New York: Harper, 1960)
Ashraf F. Nizami **Namaz, the Yoga of Islam** (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala, 1977).
2. Article: **Reconcilable Differences** by Alan Reder:
http://www.yogajournal.com/views/309_2.cfm
3. Set of photos for Yoga postures online with English name and original name : <http://www.santosha.com/asanas/>
4. Yoga basic postures with a lot of photos: <http://yoga.org.nz/>
5. Yoga animated postures : <http://www.hathayogalession.com/index.htm>