

How Often Should One Practice Yoga, and When Is the Best Time to Practice?

Phil Milgrom, RYT, CYT ©

My teacher's mantra is "More yoga!" I know that many of you are so busy that more yoga is probably the last thing on your mind. We all have so much to do and so much ahead of us that stopping, or even slowing down, seems out of the picture. We chase after an elusive to-do list that is growing longer all the time. Caught up in the race, our attention focused ahead, we neglect to question whether the race we are running, or the way we are running it, is worth the cost of entry. Lilly Tomlin quipped that even if you win the rat race, you are still a rat!

Rama Berch writes in her book Yoga: Seeds of the Soul: "Your job in life is to find and know your essence of Greatness, and then to pour it into your life..."

Yoga helps us remember that we are much more than a frantic rat. Yoga reminds us of our real job and highest priority. When we get caught up spinning on the treadmill, forging ahead but disconnected with our essence, what are we pouring into our lives? What are we accomplishing? More important, what are we losing, and what do those we love lose as a result? How can we truly love when we are in a spin?

So to answer the original question, how often should we practice yoga, I suggest practicing whenever possible.

I know what some of you are thinking: "Oh sure! That is easier said than done!"

Honestly, I am thinking that, too! I know how difficult it can be to put aside the tasks at hand. I also appreciate that most of those many things you are doing are much more important than what a rat does on a treadmill. You have jobs, families, homes, and so forth to care for. These are certainly important, and they do require time. There are only 24 hours in a day, and we have to sleep some!

But remember that when you stop to practice yoga, you do not have to practice a full hour and a half every time, as in a typical yoga class. Even a few minutes will do! A few minutes of practice is better than nothing, and every time you practice, you are enriched. This past week or so has been March Madness, when the college basketball teams (men's and women's) vie for the national championship. This sport, as with just about every other sport I know of, has breaks built into it (after each quarter, for example). In addition, time outs can be called: whenever a team's play starts to fall apart or the momentum is lost, the team can call time out to regroup. The time out only consists of a few seconds, a minute or so at most, but it can make the difference between victory and defeat.

In the same way, I recommend that you plan for regular breaks in your day, and whenever you start spinning out of control, call time out! Just do a few yoga postures, perhaps some Ujjayi breathing, and you will get a handle on things again. Do not let the March Madness get to you, nor any month's madness!

As to when is the best time to practice yoga, I can be more specific. In the morning, yoga is especially beneficial because we tend to wake up stiff from the night of sleep. Yoga in the morning helps us loosen up and get the blood moving so that we feel better more quickly. Why wait?! It also helps quiet the mind so that when we start engaging in the day's activities, we can more easily maintain calm, clarity, and connection with our essence.

Before bed, yoga is nice to help unwind from the day and to bring better quality sleep. The yoga helps ensure that we do not carry "tension baggage" along with us through the night. It releases physical and mental tension both. (Mental tension can also go on in our dreams!) Instead of sleeping with too much of our energy consumed by tension and waking exhausted, we sleep in a way that is rejuvenating and restorative.

A daily practice is best, once or twice a day. I, for one, notice the difference when I miss a day. My body will let me know: "Hey, Phil! Did you forget something?!"

One more piece that I want to share with you. Whenever I think that I have too much to do and too little time to stop for yoga, I remind myself that yoga practice actually saves me time in the long run. Firstly, I slow down inside. I become much more focused and my actions more efficient. As a result, I end up finishing more work in less time; that is, I end up with more time! Secondly, the practice of yoga fills my fuel tank and slows down my metabolism so that I need less sleep, which translates again into having more time. Thirdly, my health improves, which means less time recovering from illnesses!

In addition, the time given to yoga is not time taken away from my responsibilities or my loved ones. The time given to yoga is time to connect with that essence of my being, from which I can pour more out into my life for others. Yoga practiced in integrity never brings neglect or sacrifice of responsibilities and family; it helps us fulfill our responsibilities more lovingly.

At the end of a Svaroopa yoga class, you are always asked to remember the best of your practice so that you can bring it into your life. Yoga is not meant to be confined to your mat; you are being encouraged to bring it home with you, to your loved ones, to everything you do.

In Rama Berch's words: "Don't ask your life to make you great, but pour your greatness into every task, every conversation, and every relationship --- for every other person is also that same Greatness that you are."

Following this principle, we can then appreciate the meaning of the greeting "Namaste." When we are connected to our own essence of Greatness, we can then start to appreciate and honor the Greatness of those we come in contact with.

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Phil Milgrom teaches Svaroopa Yoga classes and a variety of Yoga workshops nationally, including *Yoga for Your Back* and *Laughter Is a Good Stretch, Too!*. He also teaches weekly classes in Chelmsford, MA and at The Centered Place Yoga studio of Warren, MA, which he co-directs with his life partner, Nancy Nowak. For more information, call 800 815-7374, or e-mail CenteredPlace@comcast.net. Phil is also a stress management consultant, and has a web site at <http://www.philmilgrom.com>.