



Can One Achieve Self-Realization Through Asana Practice? | Dharma Mittra

 by [Dharma Mittra](#)

June 13, 2013



“A qualified yoga teacher will know which practice is fit for each student.”~ Yogi Sri Dharma Mittra

Some Answers From Yogi Sri Dharma Mittra – Interview By Adam Frei

Adam Frei: For many practitioners today, yoga seems to mean Asana practice. Are you concerned over this trend? Can people achieve Self-realization just through Asana practice?

Dharma Mittra: Asanas are an aid to facilitate the journey to Self-realization within the yoga system. The postures are designed to induce a specific state of consciousness according to their geometric shape. In actual practice, certain Asanas are combined with Mudras, Bandhas, Pranayama, visualizations and intense attention on some of the **Chakras** or glands, etc., thus enhancing mental abilities (concentration).

But, Asanas are unable to destroy the subtle impurities of the mind that only keeping **Yama** (the Ethical Laws) and **Niyama** (the Yogic Observances) can. Yama and Niyama are the first and second steps of Ashtanga or Classical Eight-limbed Yoga and, without keeping them, there can be no Self-realization or true success in yoga.

Based on what I've observed teaching for almost 50 years now, I would guess that only 1 out of 10 yoga students are really seeking Self-realization. The others are busy and very active with the Asanas just for the sake of improving their health, physique, mental powers and, up to some degree, their self-control also. All of this activity is engaged in for one purpose: so that they can better cope with their personal stuff so as to reduce their overall pain and suffering. In the beginning when I first began practicing yoga, I was seeking for G-d, good health, psychic powers and the realization of the knowledge of reincarnation and the Laws of Karma, and not seeking for my True Self yet.

AF: Why are you always advising people to hold the postures longer? Is there some added benefit to doing so?

DM: One of the secrets to making progress is to hold the poses long enough. How long, well, for some Asanas, it's at least 2 or 3 minutes. For others, it might be 10 minutes or longer. This also varies based on the tendencies of the person practicing the particular pose. In most cases though, in my experience, the students do not hold the poses long enough.

Various Asanas cause basic changes on a physical and subtle level when properly executed and held long enough. Some Asanas are designed to increase blood circulation overall. Others shift pressure from one area of the body to another or cause contraction where normally things are at rest, toning muscles in the process. Still others twist or bend the spine and the musculature supporting it, or stretch specific tendons, muscles and nerves. There are postures that warm or cool the entire body, or that do lots of other things such as normalizing the flow of Prana. Some poses improve balance, while others promote concentration that leads to enhanced mental abilities.

When poses are held long enough, according to their geometric shape, they induce in the mind a specific state of consciousness. Just like when we are dealing with dirty dishes in the sink or dishwasher or clothes in the washing machine, old, dried dirt cannot be removed right away without any effort. Can a car that's un-tuned, broken and out of gas be repaired, filled and fully restored in just 10 minutes? No! So, the poses must be held long enough. Then, the blood can have time to wash away the accumulated "dirt" and more subtle impurities.

Also, the muscles, tendons and nerves need time to stretch and grow. To balance the flow of Prana and blood takes time also. If the pose is shaped like a camel, after holding it for a specific length of time, the qualities of a camel are imparted to you, i.e.: endurance – the ability to stand on the hot desert sand baking for hours without moving. This quality of endurance is like the reverence for the teacher that is an essential part of yoga practice. You must hold the pose long enough to gain the benefit – you must endure. Think also of Scorpion – fearlessness, or Cobra – kingliness and fearlessness.

In most cases, the postures are not held long enough because the student is nervous and/or they lack patience or true discipline. Also, remaining there in the pose is not comfortable, and then the concentration on a specific location is not held either. Finally, the student may be stuffed with junk food, especially non-vegetarian food items, and this may lead to an overall lack of enthusiasm. All of this must be addressed and rectified if one is to make real progress in yoga.

AF: If someone is extremely overweight, can they still practice Asana? What yoga techniques should they start with? What if someone is extremely weak like after suffering through a long illness?

DM: If someone is extremely overweight, I recommend simple Asanas that are really comfortable for the body and breath. *No* Headstand, Shoulderstand, Plough, or Bow poses. The Pranayamas must be done without retention. **Meditation** should be done on a nice soft chair. Meditation and Pranayama should be constant and a vegetarian diet with very little fat should be adopted immediately. No solid food should be eaten before 12 p.m. and also none after 6 p.m. if at all possible.

If someone is extremely weak, most of the Asanas should be avoided except Cobra (on the elbows – the Sphinx Pose), easy stretches and Shavasana (Corpse Pose). A Yogic diet (no meat, chicken, fish, eggs or dairy) must be part of the practice. One should drink lots of fresh mostly vegetable juices and no solid food should be eaten after 6 p.m. or before noon. The colon must be washed, plenty of opportunity for relaxation should be taken, one must practice at least some Pranayama and one should engage in frequent meditation.

AF: What if a student is always nervous?

DM: The teacher should encourage them to be constant with their practices. Eventually, all nervousness will cease as a result.

AF: Is yoga practice appropriate for children?

DM: I think that after age 5, simple Asanas can be practiced and a vegetarian diet can be adopted. After age 14, simple Pranayamas, concentration and any Asanas may be practiced. A qualified yoga teacher will know which practice is fit for each student regardless of their age.

AF: Anything else you would like to mention about the importance of or achieving success in the third step of yoga?

DM: Remember the well-known dictum: "Healthy body, healthy mind"? Self-realization is attained by a sharp and healthy mind, and good health can be obtained through the Asana practice. Enlightenment does not depend on Asanas, but I recommend for all that a sitting position should be practiced. Additionally, one should engage regularly in sports or other activities that promote good health such as swimming, ballet, weight training and Pilates.

Remember also what I said before: Asanas are unable to destroy the subtle impurities of the mind that only keeping Yama and Niyama can. Without keeping them (Yama and Niyama), there can be no true success in yoga.

  Like 180  Share  Tweet

