

THE FINE ART OF YOGIC AWARENESS WITH LINDA LANG

A PRESENTATION FOR SMITHSONIAN ASSOCIATES
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Ancient texts from India, as well as paintings and sculptures of yogic art, convey a worldview that is infinitely expansive, a sense of life that is simultaneously human and divine, providing more than a glimpse of what it might feel like and be to merge with the infinite. Merging with the infinite represents a realm of metaphysical connection and “spacious awareness” that is deeply rooted in the heart of all yogic practices.

Simultaneously, each of us has our very own modern narratives, stories with ancestral wisdom, artifacts and images that can reinforce a sense of separateness that contemplative practices seek to harmonize and blend with an over-arching awareness of our “being a part of something greater.” This awareness brings about a heightened, illuminated or enlightened sense of self and allows us to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

You can think of it this way: Our everyday awareness with a lower case “a” is a natural part of seeing ourselves as individuals in relationship with the world(s) around and within us, as we learn and experience, remember and imagine. Awareness with a capital “A” is that elevated, transcendent identity with all that has ever been, is now and might ever be: an unchanging undifferentiated energetic being(ness).

This is a realm of ineffability, that for which there are no words. With this observation foremost in our minds, we will employ an essential and perhaps novel approach to adult learning styles: a playfulness, with curiosity and wonderment.

Imagination arises from memory and experience, commingled with curiosity and wonderment.

Before we can achieve that heightened state of spacious or expanded awareness, we have to imagine that it is possible to do so and only then might we soften into a receptive frame of mind that is free of self-limiting thoughts, a state of liberation from anything that might separate us from the sheer delight of beingness.

If this sounds too abstract, think of moments when you felt the impact of awe and mystery.

Remember moments when you simply had no way to describe something astonishing, heard music that was otherworldly and totally transporting, or had an transcendent experience, a sense of timelessness.

This handout is intended to introduce yogic language and philosophical fundamentals. Read, let the ideas marinate, entertain yourself with some of the recommended readings, or simply immerse yourself in stillness as you ponder curiously, with wonderment, the possibilities ...

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THESE CLASSES?

To prepare for these two sessions, leave your serious demeanor at the door. Make it your intention to surrender your analytical mind, listen with curiosity, open your heart so that you can absorb the content by opening to possibilities without self-limiting thoughts.

During our time together, you will be invited into a series of contemplations and meditative practices that involve:

- exploring embodiment and a felt-sense of being embodied, by examining that which changes (transforms) and that which does not change
- revealing the symbolism of the Sanskrit sacred syllable “Om” and
- learning more about yoga’s paths to an enlightened and illuminated sense of self.

Must I be able to meditate in order to benefit from this webinar? Of course not, in fact, I am not convinced that “meditation” is a requirement to experience expanded awareness.

If you already have one, enjoy your ongoing meditation practice and bring your perspectives with you to share! And if not, you can easily cultivate a practice of sitting quietly for five to ten minutes a day, simply focus on something beautiful, or the breath, or the beating of your radiant heart.

Recommended Reading

I promised a supplementary reading list including links to relevant texts, neurobiology, and physiology. What follows is an unabashed list of some of my favorite books (some more accessible than others), along with an equally impressive short list of links to relevant research. Out of enormous, enduring respect for my teachers and colleagues, I've also added a few website links for you to learn more about all-things-yogic.

Favorite Books and Essential Sources

I'd love to know what books you'd recommend! It is so difficult to choose among the many on my bookshelves. If you'd like more suggestions, please let me know.

◆ **The Wisdom of Yoga: A Seekers Guide to Extraordinary Living**, by Stephen Cope
An enjoyable and deeply meaningful series of personal stories, enormously educational, easy to read, hard to forget. A brilliant presentation of complex ideas in a compelling and satisfying context. All of Cope's books are winners, and may be available in your local library. I heartily endorse (and own) them all.

◆ **FLOW: The Psychology of Optimal Experience**, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
An uncommon exploration of the flow state, an optimal state of being totally absorbed by an experience, a common state of mind that allows us to experience life the fullest.

◆ **Into the Magic Shop: A Neuroscientist's Quest to Discover the Mysteries of the Brain and the Secrets of the Heart**, James Doty, MD. Just that, an autobiography of the founder of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE)

◆ **The Yoga Tradition**, by Georg Feuerstein. Encyclopedic, all encompassing; if you only want one book, this is IT. I cannot tell you how frequently I refer to it, quote it, delight in it.

◆ **Yoga Nidra**, by Swami Satyananda Saraswati
The governing principles leading to turiya, the 4th state of awareness, that in which one might experience a sense of infinite spaciousness, supreme stillness, in the presence of peace and loving-kindness.

◆ **Yoga Nidra**, by Richard Miller
Similar to the book above.

- ◆ **The Yoga of Kashmir Shaivism**, by Swami Shankarananda A book for aspiring scholars, yet a lucid guide for the eager student. It is a comprehensive overview of Tantric philosophy, having the complete text of the Shiva Sutras, the Pratyabhijnahridayam and Spanda Karikas.
- ◆ **The Splendor of Recognition: An Exploration of the Pratyabhijna-hyrdayam, A Text on the Ancient Science of the Soul**, by Swami Shantananda and Peggy Bendet For students wishing to go more deeply into the esoteric, mystical dimensions of individual identity and our dance with the Infinite. It reveals "the secret of self-recognition."
- ◆ **The Bhagavad Gita**, translated by Eswaran, the Bible of Yoga, illuminating, awe-inspiring
- ◆ **Chândogya Upanishad**, focuses on the symbol and meaning of OM (also aum)

On-line Research and Resources

Have fun!! And please let me know if you have articles you'd like to share!!!

Consciousness, Awareness and Presence: A Neurobiological Perspective, by Vinod Deshmukh, MD in International Journal of Yoga

A scientist and researcher by training and astute observer of Life, Dr. Deshmukh is a mentor, a guide, an escort into the lofty realms of yogic thought and experience.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9623886/>

Understanding the Nature of Oneness Experience in Meditators, in Frontiers in Psychology, a journal with a wealth of material on the merger of science and metaphysics. This is a fascinating introductory article filled with ideas in a very thoughtful research context.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02092/full>

Alpha and Theta Oscillations are Inversely Related to Progressive Levels of Meditation Depth, from the Neuroscience of Consciousness Journal, great perspective on brain wave activity

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8633885/pdf/niab042.pdf>

The Mind's Tapestry: Weaving the Neurological Threads of Imagination, from NeuroscienceNews, I don't know a great deal about the website, but I totally enjoyed this particular article and the video.

<https://neurosciencenews.com/imagination-neuroscience-23435/>

Potential Self-Regulatory Mechanisms of Yoga for Psychological Health

For an extremely in-depth review of yoga, and insights into meta-awareness, dive in.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00770/full>

How DO the Brain's Time and Space Mediate Consciousness and its Different

Dimensions?, from Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews. This is fantastic and more than a little overwhelming to me, but there just might be someone out there who is going to love it.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0149763417300635?via%3Dihub>

If you wish to focus upon OM:

You may search the web for explanations of OM, this one is quite lovely, deep yet extremely understandable. <https://www.thesilentway.org/the-meaning-of-om>

Things to Know about O

<https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/5-things-to-know-about-om>

A summation of the Mandukya Upanishad with a description of four states of awareness and reference to Om https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/disc/disc_74.html

On-Line Offerings (a few of my favorites)

The Mohans, Svastha Yoga

<https://www.svastha.net/> Exquisite master teachers

Doug Keller, Hatha yoga therapeutics and philosophy

<https://www.doyoga.com/>

Indu Arora , all things yoga plus Ayurveda

https://www.yogsadhna.com/content/indu_arora

Compelling and beautifully organized web content about Advaita Vedanta, nondualistic philosophy. <https://www.thesilentway.org/the-meaning-of-om>