

The History of Yoga

Yoga is thought to date back around five thousand years. Some have even stated that it's a product of shamanic practice in the Stone Age, because of cultural similarities between Neolithic settlements at Mehrgarh and modern Hindu beliefs. Many modern Hindu practices, including ideas, symbols, and rituals, do appear to relate to evidence found at Mehrgarh, causing some people to speculate that the two groups had similar intentions – healing and advancing beyond the human condition.

Archaic Yoga is said to have been community oriented, and to have attempted to determine the nature of the world and how its order can be applied to daily life. Over time, yoga has progressed to become regarded as the innermost experience. Yogis have attempted to improve the enlightenment and salvation of individual people.

The first archaeological evidence of yoga is a series of stone seals found in the Indus Valley. These seals feature images of people in yoga postures. These artifacts have been dated to 3000 BCE, and are linked to the Indus-Sarasvati Civilization, one of the largest in the ancient world. This society had thriving exports to the Middle East and Africa, and had many amenities that seem to belong in the modern world, including sewage systems, paved roads, and high buildings.

This civilization is known to have created the Vedas, which are possibly the oldest scriptures in the world. These texts are a compilation of hymns, and include the oldest records of yoga practice. These records are stated as divine revelation, recorded from a higher power. This type of yoga is called pre-classical or Vedic Yoga. It's made up of a series of ceremonies and rituals intended to surpass the mind's limitations. However, yoga's history does not stop here.

After thousands of years, yoga has split off into many forms. Some standardization has come into being, starting with the Yoga-Sutra, written in the second century CE by Patanjali. This standardized yoga is referred to as Classical Yoga. After this came Postclassical Yoga, including Hatha yoga, the most popular type currently, and Tantra. Postclassical yoga is the origin of this practice as it's known in the West, and was brought to Europe and America in the late nineteenth century. Over time, yoga has evolved significantly, and spread to many people.

In recent times, the evolution of yoga has been much faster than before. Swami Sivanada is a prominent yoga guru, responsible in part for this phenomenon. He serves as a doctor, in addition to operating yoga schools in America and in Europe. Many other types of yoga, some divorced from spiritual practice, have also evolved. However, no matter what kind of yoga you're interested in, or why you want to practice this ancient art, knowing about its history can help explain some of the practices. A great deal is easier to understand when you look back at yoga's long history.

About the Author

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