

BOOK REVIEWS

Paramahansa Yogananda. *God Talks With Arjuna—The Bhagavad Gita: The Royal Science of God-Realization*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1995. 2 volumes. Cloth, 1173 pages, \$42.00.

Reviewed by Richard C. Miller, Ph.D.

Add this one to your reference library now! I am happy to report that my wait of twenty-eight years for Yogananda's interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* ("Lord's Song") has been worth it. Yogananda's illuminating commentary is a treasure to behold, and I would even go so far as to say is a must for every Yoga teacher and Yoga therapist to read, digest, and put into practice.

Paramahansa Yogananda has unlocked the hidden psychospiritual meanings of this ancient text through his years of spiritual study with his lineage of gurus and his insightful meditative wisdom. He simultaneously unfolds the many layers of complexities of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, while at the same time introducing us to the highly readable storyline of Arjuna's epic journey and spiritual discipleship with Krishna.

It is to our benefit that Yogananda combines his native disposition as an East Indian spiritual disciple with his knowledge of Western Judeo-Christian religious understanding. His East-West integration reveals the *Gita* as an investigation into the nature of human psychology and spiritual awakening that is accessible to both the Eastern spiritual seeker and the Western student of Consciousness.

Yogananda makes every verse come alive with meaningful interpretation. He quickly unfolds, in the opening lines, the hidden significance behind the cast

of characters that are lined up on opposite sides of the battlefield. (The *Gita's* teachings were delivered on the morning of one of the fiercest battles fought in ancient India.) Within each character lies a psycho-spiritual component. On one side are the likes of Yuyudhana, who represents divine devotion; Chekitana, who stands for spiritual memory; Drupada, for dispassion; Kuntibhoja, for right posture; and Kashiraja, for discriminative intelligence. On the other side of the battlefield are the likes of Kripa, who represents individual delusion; Bhishma, stands for the ego; Karna, for attachment; and Ashvatthaman, for desire.

Yogananda unravels layer upon layer of complexity. Each of these characters not only represents an intrapsychic element, but movements within the different "bodies" of consciousness, including the *koshas*, the *cakras*, the bodily energies, the five elements, and the different sensory functions, and the bodily activities. Yogananda is very thorough in his interpretations and breaks down the Sanskrit roots of words he translates, so that we can follow his trail, allowing us an in-depth view of his insights.

Yogananda shows how all the various teachings of Yoga—from Samkhya and Patanjali's *ashtanga-yoga* to *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana*, and *advaita*—are embedded in the *Gita* in often cryptic ways. He explains the teachings in a clear, precise, and very practical manner.

Take, for example, Yogananda's interpretive explanation of stanza 29 in chapter 4—a verse that is usually obscure to even the advanced practitioner. It reads, "Other devotees offer as a sacrifice the incoming breath of *prana* in the outgoing breath of *apana*, and the outgoing breath of *apana* in the incoming breath of *prana*." In proffering his interpretation, Yogananda delves deeply into an extended study of

the *vayus* (winds), *pranayama* (breath control), *kevala-kumbhaka* (absolute suspension of the breath), and the *sutras* (aphorisms) of Patanjali, giving the reader a detailed and practical understanding of the real meaning of this stanza. He also weaves this stanza into others to show how each verse supports and adds depth to all others. It is because of his in-depth translations of verses such as this that Yoga students, teachers, and therapists alike will find this book invaluable for their own study.

Paramahansa Yogananda's words are not just to be read, but to be digested and put to the litmus test of practice. Herein lies Yogananda's most beautiful gift. He has given us both a story to be read and enjoyed, as well as a guidebook for the exploration of Consciousness. Those of us who have studied his weekly lessons and earlier writings will find a treasure chest of deep insights. Those unfamiliar with his writings will gain an immense appreciation for his depth of insight into the human condition. All of us will be able to use this work to deepen our self-understanding and understanding of the spiritual path.

Yogananda, Krishna, and Arjuna all exclaim, "Consciousness is One and You are That." Yogananda's beautiful exposition is presented in such a masterful way that upon reading it you also will be able to glimpse something of this profound truth.

Georg Feuerstein. *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy, and Practice*. Prescott, Ariz.: Hohm Press, 1998. Paperback, 720 pages, \$39.95. Cloth, \$49.95.

Reviewed by Prof. Edward Brennan, Ph.D.

In his foreword, Ken Wilber describes this book as "the finest overall explanation of Yoga currently available." It is a volume to which every serious student of Yoga, indeed everyone personally interested in this topic, might seek access. Its generous size need daunt no one. For Feuerstein's acclaimed scholarship, informed by long-standing personal practice, combines with his gift for clear and elegant writing to invite readers at very diverse levels of knowledge and experience to enjoy reflecting on the vast spiritual tradition of Yoga.

Those who are touched by celebrated spiritual personalities will be rewarded by learning the names, the places, and the influences that brought great spiritual transformation into the lives of mortals like us. The historically interested scholar will delight in having at his or her fingertips the titles, the time frame, and the provenance of the innumerable major texts that comprise Yoga's body of literature. The systematic mind will enjoy the layout and interrelationships of the numerous schools or traditions that are associated with Yoga.

Most important, however, as I see it, is this book's value for actual and potential spiritual practitioners. Every spiritual teacher acknowledges that, in addition to a good heart, there must be an informed knowledge of what one is doing, for one's spiritual practice to be effective. "Study, study, study," they always advise. In this book, Feuerstein makes the fruit of his decades-long study of Yoga easily available to serious students. He elucidates the meaning, the actual practice, and the effects of the various kinds of yogic discipline. Students are given a genuine sense even of spiritual practices for which they may not yet be ready. This is as it should be. In a spiritual environment, knowledge of advanced practices already enables a sort of participation in them, which enhances a student's present practice. This knowledge is an important preparation for engaging such practices.

Another characteristic of great spiritual masters has been their openness to, appreciation of, and often engagement with spiritual traditions beyond their own. Spiritual chauvinism is alien to their being. It is in this spirit of open availability and practical usefulness that Feuerstein finds Yoga's resonance with other great spiritual traditions, including Christianity. He has included an extended review of Buddhism, which is generally viewed either as a reform movement within the greater Yoga tradition or as an offshoot from this tradition. In any case, his informed discussion of Buddhism is a valuable part of this work, which will be particularly helpful to many who want a more in-depth understanding of this religious movement, which is gaining increasing prominence in the West.

Although his book is not a how-to manual, Feuerstein's work clearly provides the kind of knowledge that is a necessary preliminary to actual spiritual practice. Thus he does not hesitate to discuss his own experience, when he feels that his experience may be of practical use to readers.

Those who are sensitive to language will appreciate this author's command of Sanskrit, which enables

a subtle communication of the deeper meaning of teachings as they are often contained in the root words of the original language. Furthermore, the book's glossary of technical terms is a fine tool for interested readers.

Feuerstein's book can be recommended to just about every person who has embarked or wishes to embark upon, or who is at least seriously interested in, authentic spiritual practice.

Erich Schiffmann. *Yoga: The Spirit and Practice of Moving Into Stillness*. New York: Pocket Books, 1996. Paperback, 357 pages, \$14.00.

Reviewed by Richard C. Miller, Ph.D.

This book is wholly worthy of our attention even if we were only to read and absorb Erich Schiffman's opening chapters on his personal discovery of Yoga. It is even more fortunate for us that he then goes on to explicate in great detail his understanding and approach to Yoga in a format that is pleasing to read, as well as easy to assimilate and put to the test in our own personal day-to-day practice.

To our benefit, Erich has taken many years to bring his formulations into print. His ideas are clearly presented and written in an attractive style. I found myself absorbed while reading his personal history and early discoveries with his teachers and practices of Yoga. I think readers will find a bit of themselves in Erich as he recounts how he fell in love with Yoga and gradually discovered the riches of Yoga unfolding in his own mind and body and leading him to a deepening understanding about self, others, and life in general. He is openly grateful to his many teachers—T.K.V. Desikachar, B.K.S. Iyengar, T. Krishnamurti, and Joel Kramer, whom he credits with finally bringing him home into his practice of Yoga.

Erich's approach is at once personal as well as technical, but without being mechanical or repetitious. Yoga is a constant discovery for him, and he regards the postures, breathing, and meditation as tools for mining the gems waiting to be discovered moment to moment in a dynamic, unconflicted stillness, which

he views as being at the heart of yogic practice. In his own words, "Yoga is a way of moving into stillness in order to experience the truth of who you are. Moving into stillness in order to experience your true nature is the primary theme of yoga simply because everything about you—every thought, feeling, and emotion, as well as every aspect of your behavior—is predicated on the way you feel about yourself."

Yoga is not an intellectual affair for Erich. It is a feeling inquiry that utilizes all aspects of one's body, mind, emotions, sensations, and being. It is an exploration that takes us into the unknown. In fact, he encourages us to "let go of everything you think you know about who you are, and see what's left . . . When you let go of everything you think you know about yourself and stay with what's left, when you willingly abandon the contradictory evaluations of who you are and courageously reach deeply into yourself in order to experience yourself directly, you will come upon a new experience of who you are. You will sense the creative energy that is the life of you, and you will then define and think about yourself in a new and expanded way. And since the way you think about and define yourself is central to your perception, behavior, and experience of the world, your world will spontaneously change as your self-concept changes and comes into closer alignment with what's really true."

Erich writes with an authoritative style derived from his years of daily practice. He is not some yogi "over there" but "one of us." He invites us into his experience. He makes his experience understandable and accessible while extending an invitation for us to make it our own. And herein lies my only criticism of the book.

It is evident from the opening chapters that Erich's approach is meant to be for everyone, whether young or old, stiff or flexible, facile or rigid of mind. He is an explorer who is not attached to doctrine or tradition. He draws on tradition, but goes beyond it in his discovery that Yoga is forever new, and he invites everyone to be at and explore his/her unique "edge" with Yoga, or life.

Unfortunately, however, the illustrations of the yogic postures found in the book do not convey this understanding. They may even invite readers to go beyond their personal edge, thus leading them to practice Hatha-Yoga in a destructive manner by trying to emulate Erich's natural gift of a flexible body. Only a limited percentage of Yoga students will ever come close to his flexibility. In a future edition of Erich's book, I would like to see the addition of poses that

can be practiced by students who do not enjoy his natural flexibility.

If Yoga is indeed for everyone, which it is, then illustrations also should be representative of everyone. Since pictures speak louder than words, in a book that conveys such a powerful message as Erich Schiffman's, one would expect images that graphically depict "what is," so that we don't have to continue the struggle after what the mind "would like to be."

With this caveat in mind, go purchase the book and revel in Erich's perspective of Yoga's timeless art of Self-knowing.

Esther Myers. *Yoga and You*. Boston, Mass.: Shambala Publications, 1997. Paperback, 244 pages, \$17.00.

Reviewed by Steven Kleinman, M.D.

One of the major aims of this book is to present the principles of Yoga practice as taught by Esther's teacher, Vanda Scaravelli. What are these principles? They include working with the breath in a relaxed and nonforceful manner, allowing our muscles to yield to the force of gravity, releasing the spine in a natural wavelike motion, and allowing the process of undoing to manifest itself throughout all aspects of one's Yoga practice.

Esther writes, "Release happens. It is not something that you can manufacture or create. It occurs spontaneously as a gift. The aim of our practice is to create conditions which are conducive to release." She also observes, "Giving oneself over to gravity and the breath teaches us the meaning of surrender in a way that is direct, concrete, and immediate."

In addition to describing these principles in the first four chapters, Esther provides a well-written summary of the roots of traditional Yoga. While the spiritual basis of Yoga is presented, Esther indicates that many benefits can be derived from asana and pranayama practice even if the student does not consciously choose to explore the spiritual dimension of the practice.

She also discusses how the Indian cultural roots of Yoga may need to be modified to address the reali-

ties of men and women raised in twentieth-century Western culture with its emphasis on repressed feelings and emotions, as well as the abusive use of authority. She strongly acknowledges how psychological and emotional issues may arise when the body is released and that they need to be handled. This is where the "you" in the book's title is emphasized; Esther stresses that each practitioner has to take responsibility for deciding which aspects of the practice and which instructions are right for him or her. To further illustrate this, she shares some of her personal experiences in applying Yoga in her life during a period of recovering from a mastectomy.

Esther has succeeded in describing the basic principles of her approach to Yoga practice in simple, clear language that can be understood by the novice Yoga student as well as, on a deeper level, by the experienced Yoga teacher. She also is very clear that it is difficult to remember to incorporate these elements in one's practice. Therefore, she lays these principles out sequentially; she first describes them in general terms and then elaborates on them. This helps to firmly establish the importance of this foundation in the reader's mind. The sequence of practice, as laid out in chapters 4–8, reemphasizes the order in which the principles are to be applied. The sequence begins with a deep relaxation, continues with breathing, progresses to the rooting feeling of standing, and then goes on to some simple stretches.

The remainder of the book provides instruction for performing a large number of yogic postures grouped into the commonly recognized categories of standing poses, inverted poses and arm balances (including advanced headstand and shoulder-stand variations), back bends, sitting poses, forward bends, and twists. General guidelines are provided for each group of postures and then instructions for individual poses are given.

When reading this section of the book, it is important that readers remind themselves that the instructions for positioning body parts in a given posture need to be related back to the general principles of release, working with gravity, and working with the breath that are emphasized so heavily in the first part of the book. While the reader is specifically given this reminder in some of the poses, there are many poses where it is not explicitly stated (nor could it be due to limitations of space).

One limitation of this section of the book is in its visual presentation of the poses. There are relatively few photographs of models in the various postures;

instead the poses are most often accompanied by drawings. Although these drawings are well executed, they lack the dynamism of a human model and often do not provide multiple views of the pose or a view of the various steps involved in entering and exiting the asana.

In summary, I believe that this is a well-written book that clearly describes the approach that Vanda Scaravelli has developed toward Yoga practice. It also reflects Esther Myer's understanding and teaching of the approach, as well as her contribution to its development during the last decade and a half. This work is a valuable asset for any student or teacher who resonates with the principles of this approach to Yoga.

Dennis Lewis. *The Tao of Natural Breathing: For Health, Well-Being and Inner Growth*. Foreword by Master Mantak Chia. San Francisco: Mountain Wind Publishing, 1997. Paperback, 208 pages, \$17.95.

Reviewed by Richard C. Miller, Ph.D.

I like this book. It is a simple, clear, and easy-to-read exposition of the basic principles of breathwork from the Chinese Taoist perspective. Dennis Lewis has drawn from his wide experiences with the breath through his years of involvement with teachers in the Gurdjieff Work, in Advaita Vedanta (notably with Jean Klein), and from his in-depth studies with Mantak Chia from the Chinese perspective of the Healing Tao.

"... The work with breathing starts with sensing the inner atmosphere of our organism—the basic emotional stance we take to ourselves and the world." Lewis views breathwork not merely as an enterprise of learning new approaches to breathing. For him it is a "matter of perceptual reeducation, of learning how to experience ourselves in an entirely new way, and from an entirely new perspective." As he also states, "The process of breathing shows us the way to let go of the old and open to the new."

As he sees it, natural breathing is not concerned with changing ourselves to fit some new image, but begins with a "welcoming" of everything that we are.

This welcoming, which is an awareness and acceptance of all that we are, "lies at the heart of deep, inner quiet and relaxation—an organic release from the stranglehold of our self-image, and from the excessive tension, stress, and negativity of our inner and outer lives." It is this welcoming, Lewis points out, that is the foundation of our wholeness and real health and is the beginning point of learning about the breath.

Lewis opens his book with an examination of the physiology and anatomy of breathing. Following G. I. Gurdjieff's and Karlfried Durckheim's lead, he makes the point that "giving breathing exercises prematurely grafts new tensions onto already established ones, and brings about an artificially induced vitality." He goes on to make the skillful observation that "lasting, effective work with our breath requires clear knowledge of the mechanics of natural breathing and its relationship to our muscles, our emotions, and our thoughts."

Consequently, in the early chapters of his book, Lewis walks the reader through clear and concise descriptions of the anatomy of the lungs, diaphragm, and muscles of respiration, basic principles of physiology including acid/alkaline blood balances that are influenced by the breath and that have profound effects on health, and descriptions of the role breath plays in emotion and perceptual self-sensing.

Following these introductory chapters, Lewis lays out the Taoist vision of breathing and includes chapters on whole-body breathing, spacious breathing (how breath connects us with inner and outer physical, psychological, and spiritual spaces of the world and universe), the smiling breath, circulation of the breath through the body utilizing the Taoist approach of acupuncture meridians including the microcosmic and macrocosmic orbits, breath and its relationship to prana, chi or energy, and a number of other specialized breathing practices.

Although Lewis's desire is to provide the reader with an in-depth intellectual comprehension of the breath, his approach is experientially based, which keeps the reader in a personal relationship with the breath. Each chapter unfolds exercises for the reader to live out in practice what Lewis describes in theory.

Traditional approaches to pranayama often infer great amounts of effort and striving. There are inherent dangers and difficulties in this approach to the breath. When an idealized image of breathing is projected, the mind will find a way of achieving its goal. But at what cost and sacrifice? Patanjali, in the *Yoga Sutra* (4:3-4), makes the point that Yoga is not the product of effort, and any attempt to introduce a trans-

forming influence only erects one more barrier to true understanding. Dennis Lewis's approach, which is based on careful study and observation, supports Patanjali's assertion. As long as we remember that maps are designed to show us the way, but are not the way, we remain on firm ground. The Taoist map, like the yogic map of breath awareness, is a useful guide in the learning stages of understanding the breath and its function in health and spiritual awakening.

I admit that I would have liked to see more attention being paid to the spiritual use of the breath for Self-awakening. However, the Taoists have always reserved this for direct teacher-to-student transmission, and so I was not surprised when it was not forthcoming. All in all, this is a book to be read, studied, and—most of all—practiced. The author describes many of the ancient Taoist roads for attending to the breath in ways that increase self-awareness, bodily health, and vitality.

Shyam Sundar Goswami. *Layayoga: The Definitive Guide to the Chakras and Evoking Kundalini*. Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions International, 1999. Paperback, 361 pages, \$25.00.

Reviewed by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

The first edition of this work was published in England and has long been out of print. This reprint is to be welcomed by all students of the closely related approaches of Laya-Yoga, Hatha-Yoga, Kundalini-Yoga, and Tantra-Yoga, as well as anyone wishing to get a reliable sense of the Hindu Yoga teachings about what Mircea Eliade has called "subtle anatomy": the subtle winds (*prana*), the subtle energy currents (*nadi*), the psychoenergetic centers (*cakra*), the "knots" (*granthi*), and not least the serpent power (*kundalini-shakti*).

Shyam Sundar Goswami (1891-1978), the founder of the Goswami Institute of Yoga in Sweden, was a disciple of the great Yoga master Balak Bharati and was himself an adept of Laya-Yoga. This unique volume is a very precious distillate of the author's fine scholarship and practical esoteric knowledge.

Layayoga: The Definitive Guide to the Chakras and Evoking Kundalini focuses on one of the most recon-
dite aspects of Tantra: the esoteric process by which the ordinary human body is transmuted into a "divine body" (*divya-deha*). In such a body, every cell is suffused with consciousness and endowed with extraordinary capacities (*siddhi*).

Goswami sifted through no fewer than 282 Sanskrit texts to gather all the relevant information about the process of absorption (*laya-krama*) into one volume. This book is a testimony to his spiritual stature and tremendous scholarship, but also to the yogic heritage of India. Nowhere else on earth can one find such profound knowledge about esoteric anatomy and the subtle energetic work necessary to achieve full enlightenment.

At the heart of Tantra is Kundalini-Yoga, and at the core of Kundalini-Yoga is Laya-Yoga. Tantra, or Tantrism, is a spiritual tradition that crystallized in the opening centuries of the first millennium C.E. and reached its zenith around 1000 C.E. It represents a remarkable synthesis and understands itself as *the* teaching for the present age of darkness (*kali-yuga*). Among its central tenets is the notion that the body is not, as taught by more ascetical schools, an obstacle on the path to enlightenment. Rather, it is a manifestation of the ultimate Reality and hence must be fully integrated into one's spiritual aspirations. The early Tantric adepts (*siddha*) developed an approach that is body-positive and epitomized in the concept of "body cultivation," or *kaya-sadhana*, which in due course led to the creation of Hatha-Yoga with its many purificatory practices (*shodhana*), postures (*asana*), and techniques of breath control (*pranayama*).

The purpose of these practices is not merely to acquire physical fitness and mental health, but primarily to awaken the body's dormant psychospiritual power called *kundalini-shakti*. When this power, which is a form of conscious energy, is fully aroused it begins to transform the body. It leads to the ecstatic realization of one's true identity as the pure, universal consciousness (*cit*), and it also progressively renders the body transparent to that supreme consciousness.

This alchemical process of transmutation of the very constituents of the body is the domain of Laya-Yoga. *Laya* refers to the absorption of the elements (*tattva*) constituting the body, which occurs when the *kundalini* power rises from the psychoenergetic center (*cakra*) at the base of the spine toward the center at the crown of the head. In its ascent along the spinal axis, it must pierce a series of psychoenergetic cen-

ters, each of which relates to specific psychosomatic functions and also anatomical structures. As it passes through each center, the *kundalini* absorbs each center's elements and correlated function. This induces a deepening state of mental concentration and conscious lucidity, but at the same time decreases physical animation. Thus the outside observer would notice a drastic decrease in metabolism and spontaneous suspension of breathing. In a way, the ascent of the *kundalini* amounts to a consciously undergone death process.

If the yogin remains long enough in this state of suspended animation, the body simply dies. But this is not the intended outcome of Tantra. Rather, the successful practitioner of Tantra-Yoga must next skillfully guide the *kundalini* from the crown center back to its home at the base of the spine. This restores all the bodily functions, yet brings a new element into play: the gradual suffusion of the body with consciousness. For the Tantric adept, enlightenment is nothing unless it includes the body. Thus the delicate process of Laya-Yoga is designed to bring enlightenment down to earth, into the body—a quite literally breathtaking adventure.

I hope this volume will help correct prevalent, especially New Age, misconceptions about the *cakras* and *nadis*. The information locked away in the Sanskrit scriptures and presented here comprehensively for the first time is based on actual yogic experimentation and realization, which makes Goswami's compilation an extremely valuable gift to all who endeavor to practice authentic Yoga.

Stephan Bodian. *Meditation for Dummies*. Foster City, Calif.: IDG Books Worldwide, 1999. Paperback, 380 pages, \$19.99.

Georg Feuerstein and Larry Payne. *Yoga for Dummies*. Foster City, Calif.: IDG Books Worldwide, 1999. Paperback, 398 pages, \$19.99.

Reviewed by David Dykstra

With 50 million *For Dummies* books in print after only seven years in business, IDG Books Worldwide

has demonstrated that any subject can be distilled down into a format that is suitable for tyros—from computing and tax preparation to sports and fitness training and now also to meditation and Yoga. Although the title of this series is quirky and somewhat unappealing, the books themselves have made a name for themselves for being reliable and efficient didactic tools for beginners. They are written in down-to-earth plain English by experts and always have a primarily practical orientation, which certainly works well for meditation and Yoga.

In his foreword to Stephan Bodian's *Meditation for Dummies*, Dean Ornish remarks, "The title of this book is a little misleading, because learning to meditate was one of the smartest choices I ever made." He also notes that Bodian "has distilled the best of [many different approaches to meditation] and gently leads you step by step to discover a form and style of meditation that works best for you." I agree. Bodian, who for many years was the editor of *Yoga Journal*, has succeeded in taking the mystery out of meditation and making it accessible for the beginner.

Bodian promises his readers that they can learn the basics of meditation in five minutes, but also indicates that there is a lot more to the art of meditation, which requires commitment and the time to develop the necessary mental skills. His treatment definitely provides the nuts and bolts of meditation, yet does not ignore the subtleties either and provides ample guidelines for deeper exploration.

Bodian's step-by-step instructions are easy to follow and include preparing the body and one's environment for sitting. He describes the journey of meditation as beginning with the cultivation of awareness, or attention. He provides a whole range of techniques, but rightly focuses on mindfulness, or moment-to-moment attentiveness, as the key practice. He also does not bypass the inevitable stumbling blocks along the way—the encounters with the shadow—and his recommendations for dealing with the emergence in meditation of anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, depression, and grief are very valuable. Bodian also shows practical ways for handling sleepiness, restlessness, boredom, fear, doubt, procrastination, hypervigilance, self-judgment, attachment, pride, and other obstacles that especially beginners are bound to encounter.

Yoga for Dummies has a similar level-headed practical orientation that yet includes spiritual considerations. Georg Feuerstein and Larry Payne have created a beginner's book that appeals for several reasons. First, it is designed for neophytes, both in terms

of the range of postures and breathing exercises given and the simple explanations offered for Yoga's spiritual and philosophical underpinning. Although the majority of the book deals with postures that anyone can learn, the authors make it clear from the beginning that Yoga's treasure chest holds many more riches than the asanas. Throughout the book, they remind readers of the spiritual side of Yoga and its potential as a transformative discipline that yields its best benefits when practiced throughout the day.

They present the various schools of Yoga and also identify the most prominent styles of Hatha-Yoga practiced today, which allows readers looking for the right teacher or class to look in the right places. The book includes chapters on relaxation, breathing during asanas and as a separate discipline, and postural sequencing. The postures are carefully described and organized into sitting postures, standing postures, balancing postures, postures for the abdominals, inversions, forward and back bends, twists, and dynamic postures (i.e., the sun salutation).

The authors then recommend several routines, focusing on an eight-week course that comprises two levels. Next, in a separate chapter, they provide readers with all the building blocks for creating their own routines, including a 15-minute and a 5-minute routine. They also talk about the use of props, popularized by B.K.S. Iyengar.

For those wanting more than asana practice, the authors have included chapters on applying Yoga throughout the day (including during sleep), during sex, and at the workplace. They also have an excellent introduction to meditation and have paid proper attention to the moral foundations of Yoga. Some consideration is given to Yoga for special situations (such as back problems, pregnancy, menopause, etc.), but this is more by way of letting readers know that Yoga can be helpful in such matters. One of the book's strongest points is its detailed resource section, which provides readers with plenty of leads for further exploration.

I recommend equally both *Yoga for Dummies* and *Meditation for Dummies* as excellent introductions that also can serve as refresher courses for more seasoned practitioners.

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