

Changing India and the world through yoga

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Do you consider yourself a morning person?

How do you usually start your day? Do you simply get up and get ready or do you go for a run, do some yoga, stretch, call someone, read the paper...?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

ascetic
coercion

holistic
devoid of

hardline
trappings

credentials
discipline

teeming
subtle

scores
practitioner

1. a large number _____ (para 5)
2. qualities that make something suitable for something _____ (para 5)
3. someone who lives a very simple life, especially for religious reasons _____ (para 8)
4. someone who does a particular activity _____ (para 8)
5. based on the idea that you should take care of your whole body and mind, rather than just treating a part of the body that is ill _____ (para 9)
6. a branch of knowledge _____ (para 10)
7. strict or extreme in your beliefs or opinions and not willing to change them _____ (para 11)
8. indirect in a way that prevents people from noticing what you are trying to do _____ (para 11)
9. the use of force or threats to make someone do something _____ (para 11)
10. consisting of large numbers that are all moving _____ (para 12)
11. lacking, especially a good quality _____ (two words, para 13)
12. the outward signs or features of something _____ (para 13)

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Modi's plan to change India and the world through yoga angers religious minorities

Police, pupils and civil servants get lessons on ancient techniques ahead of mass yoga gathering in Delhi

Jason Burke, Delhi

6 June, 2015

- 1 Every morning, before the temperatures in India's capital start to rise, a handful of old friends gather. On the parched grass not far from the India Gate monument at the centre of Delhi, they stretch, breathe and meditate.
- 2 "It is the only healthy way to start the day. Much better than an egg or a sandwich or a cup of tea," said Arvind Singh at 6.15am as he did his breathing exercises on a bench.
- 3 Singh, a 42-year-old salesman, and his friends are far from alone. All across India, in the overcrowded cities, on whatever green space is left, similar scenes are being played out.
- 4 On 21 June – the new International Day of Yoga – Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, hopes the world will join in. The grass near India Gate will be transformed into the venue for what, it is hoped, will be the biggest single yoga session ever held, with up to 45,000 people running through a 35-minute routine.
- 5 The participants will include 64-year-old Modi, most of his government and, they hope, a range of celebrities. Officials have been sent to round up volunteers from scores of countries to reinforce the international credentials of the ancient Indian practice.
- 6 Getting Indians, and others, stretching has emerged as something of a focus for Modi, who led his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to a landslide election victory in 2014. In May 2015, schools were directed to make sure students attended yoga events timed to coincide with the big demonstration in Delhi, even though it is being held on a Sunday.
- 7 Officials have already signalled the introduction of compulsory yoga for India's famously out-of-shape police officers and said that daily yoga lessons would be offered free to three million civil servants and their families. Air India, the national carrier, has also said it will introduce yoga for trainee pilots. More controversially, senior politicians in India have suggested more widespread practice of yoga could bring down soaring levels of sexual violence in the country.
- 8 Modi, an ascetic who is a committed vegetarian and an enthusiastic yoga practitioner himself, suggested an international yoga day when speaking to the United Nations on a visit to New York in 2014.
- 9 "Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action, restraint and fulfilment, harmony between man and nature, a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. It is not about exercise but discovering the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and nature," Modi said at the time, adding that yoga could help in tackling climate change.
- 10 The discipline is between 3,000 and 6,000 years old and originated somewhere on the Indian subcontinent, possibly among religious ascetics. Its meditative practices, as well as its physical exercises, have long been associated with local religious traditions including Buddhism and Jainism, as well as the Hinduism practised by 80% of Indians.
- 11 Modi, who started his career as an organizer for a hardline Hindu nationalist organization, has been previously criticized for promoting a view of Indian culture that has little place for other traditions. One commentator called the event on 21 June "a mix of cultural nationalism, commercialization and subtle coercion".
- 12 Novelist Ajaz Ashraf wrote on India's Scroll website: "Underlying it is the hope of bringing into the BJP tent the modern-day gurus and their teeming followers, who largely constitute the urban middle classes."
- 13 Others, however, point to a recent US court ruling that said yoga was not inevitably linked to faith. A court in California ruled that: "While the practice of yoga may be religious in some contexts, yoga classes as taught in the [San Diego] district are, as the trial court determined, 'devoid of any religious, mystical or spiritual trappings'." This came after two parents claimed yoga in schools promoted Hinduism and inhibited Christianity.
- 14 Amish Tripathi, the author of best-selling novels set 4,000 years ago in India that retell stories

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from Hindu mythology, said characters in his books practise yoga.

- 15 "In ancient India, it was part of daily life, both the physical and the mental aspects. Every culture has gifted something to the world and this is our gift," Tripathi said.
- 16 Suneel Singh, a guru in south Delhi, agreed that yoga did not belong to any one religion: "Is t'ai chi just Chinese? Is football just English? Same with yoga. It is a complete package for everybody's body and a cheap way to keep you hale and hearty."

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3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions, if possible, without referring back to the article.

1. What is the venue for the world's largest yoga class (place, city, country)?
2. Provide at least four facts about India's prime minister.
3. Which section of society, which is notoriously unfit, are officials keen to introduce to yoga?
4. Who else will be offered free yoga classes?
5. What does the prime minister say about the benefits of yoga?
6. Why have some groups criticized the campaign to introduce yoga to more people?
7. What did a recent US court ruling say about yoga in schools?
8. How long has the discipline of yoga been in existence?

4 Expressions

a. Find the following expressions in the article.

1. certainly not the only ones (3 words, para 3)
2. bring people who are willing to do something to one place (3 words, para 5)
3. a situation in which a political party wins by a very big majority (3 words, para 6)
4. arranged so that it will happen at the same time as something else (4 words, para 6)
5. in bad physical condition (3 words, para 7)
6. strong and in good health (3 words, para 16)

b. Use the expressions in sentences of your own.

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5 Vocabulary – word families

Complete the first four rows of the table. Then, complete the rest of the table by choosing other words from the article and adding their related forms.

noun	verb	adjective	adverb
harmony			
	meditate		
		enthusiastic	
			controversially

6 Discussion

- Is yoga or any other kind of sport or exercise offered at your workplace or school?
- If so, do you attend any classes? Why? Why not?
- If nothing is offered, do you think it should be? If so, then what would you like to see offered?
- Who benefits from these kinds of offers?
- In the article, Indian author Amish Tripathi says, 'Every culture has gifted something to the world and this is our gift.' What has your culture or country gifted to the world?

7 Webquest

- What yoga events were held around the world during the most recent International Day of Yoga (21 June)? Where were they? How many people attended?
- Find out more about the International Day of Yoga and its connection to the United Nations General Assembly.

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KEY

Teacher's note: At some point during the lesson, find out whether any of your students practise yoga. If they do, get them to tell the others what a typical yoga class is like. If no one in the class can tell the others about yoga, look up some yoga poses (asanas) on the internet, for example here: www.yogajournal.com/category/poses/.

2 Key words

1. scores
2. credentials
3. ascetic
4. practitioner
5. holistic
6. discipline
7. hardline
8. subtle
9. coercion
10. teeming
11. devoid of
12. trappings

3 Comprehension check

1. the grass near the India Gate monument in Delhi, the capital of India
2. His name is Narendra Modi. He is 64 years old. He is the leader of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). He is a vegetarian, an ascetic and an enthusiastic yoga practitioner.
3. India's police officers
4. school children; civil servants and their families; Air India also plans to introduce yoga for trainee pilots.
5. He says it is not about exercise but discovering the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and nature.
6. It is associated with religious traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism.
7. It is not always linked to religion.
8. for between 3,000 and 6,000 years

4 Expressions

1. far from alone
2. round up volunteers
3. landslide election victory
4. timed to coincide with
5. out-of-shape
6. hale and hearty (old fashioned)

5 Vocabulary – word families

noun	verb	adjective	adverb
harmony disharmony	harmonize	harmonious disharmonious	harmoniously disharmoniously
meditation meditator	meditate	meditative	meditatively
enthusiasm enthusiast	enthuse	enthusiastic unenthusiastic	enthusiastically unenthusiastically
controversy	–	controversial uncontroversial	controversially uncontroversially