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LOOKING GOOD

HEALTH, BEAUTY and FITNESS

Sahaja: A kinder, gentler yoga

Daneeta L. Saft discovers Sahaja yoga, a practice recognized both east and west for its healing powers



Sahaja yoga is not what I expected. It's not stretching and breathing. It's not a process of meditation and seeking awareness that takes years. It's a sort of yoga for the lay person, but can be practiced by "seekers" of the highest order.

Founded by 77-year-old grandmother Shri Mataji ("respected mother"), Sahaja yoga professes two profound tenets which are alarmingly simple: 1) we are, at the core of our being, pure spirit and, 2) there is a natural, pure and divine energy with which we can consciously connect through the yogic practice.



Shri Mataji

Shri Mataji believes, as do many of her contemporaries, that we

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are poised at the beginning of a new age of holistic awareness - the age of Aquarius, as it were - which will bring about integration of cosmic truths, connection with each other and the universe, balance and awareness. She teaches that we must go within to establish peace, and bring our spirit into "thoughtless awareness."

An energy thing

Paul and Colleen Keetley, Sahaja yogis, arrived in Tokyo a few short months ago to spread the word. "What sets us apart from other practices is that Sahaja is based on experience rather than dogma. And, as much as Shri Mataji is revered, she encourages people to become their own gurus, shunning blindly following her or other yogis." The experience is the key, and only the individual can create the experience. In addition, the practice differs from other guru-based teachings in that, "they [the teachings] are offered at no cost, and the technique shows immediate and promising results in proper trials in recognized hospitals in India and Australia," says Paul.

Results indeed, specifically with regard to those suffering from asthma, hypertension and stress. In traditional eastern medicine, all disease is attributed to imbalance of the chakra (spiritual energy sources) which are connected by meridians or channels. To restore health, the patient must re-balance by clearing blockages in those meridians. Lately, this idea of using energy balance to restore proper function of the physical, mental and spiritual systems has been backed up by western medical science. Sahaja yoga, according to Dr. Ramesh Monocha at the Royal Hospital for Women in Australia, seems to balance the system quickly and, with regular meditation, keeps it balanced. In fact, one hospital in Sydney has requested that Sahaja yoga be made available as part of its standard treatment options for all its patients.

The purpose of the meditation is, at the very least, to eradicate fears and tensions, improve health and resolve difficulties in a "relaxed and spontaneous way." Followers profess that the meditation on a higher spiritual level "opens a new stage on the path of our evolution [and] offers a synthesis of all the truths of the world's great religions, a way out of our limited notion of selfhood, and a direct experience of participation in the universal life of the cosmos." In laymen's terms: it's an energy thing. Tapping into the universal energy assists in increasing personal energy and clearing the chakra channels.

It's a breeze

So what is the practice? It's pretty simple and not time consuming at all. Keetley says the experience is "verifiable, demonstrable and repeatable," which sets it apart from what he calls "cults of the gurus." I tried it and, although I did not experience intense spirituality manifested as a "cool breeze sensation," I did feel much more relaxed and balanced after the meditation.

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The goal of meditation is self-realization and an enlightened self-knowledge. The first step is awakening the kundalini, or core spiritual energy. Next, the meditation focuses on an awareness of the vibrations of the universe, which manifests itself in the "cool breeze sensation" that emanates from the top of the head and the fingers. Harmonizing or balancing yin/yang energies and clearing constrictions or purifying the chakra follow. Lastly, one establishes silence through a peaceful union and joy of spirit. It all sounds a bit esoteric, but, in practice, it is very simple and can be done without the presence of a guru or leader.

The Experience is the key, and only the individual can create the experience.

Prerequisites for meditation are simply a lack of satisfaction and a desire for fulfillment, a willingness to look within for the truth, openness to new ideas and experience, and a respect for the self and others. Keetley says that people who come to Sahaja yoga are seekers. They generally have run through a lot of other experiences, both spiritual and base, in their search for self-awareness. Seekers should contact Paul and Colleen Keetley who hold meditation sessions at their home in Gakkogai-Daigaku on Sunday and Wednesday nights. They are currently teaching a six-week course on Sahaja yoga and preparing for a future visit from Shri Mataji. Contact them for more information on 03-3760-4434 (English), or [TOP](#) 042-367-6044 (Japanese).