

SPIRITUALITY

Firstly, I don't think any one thing is inherently any more spiritual than anything else. e.g. comparing whether one style of hatha yoga is more spiritual than another, although interesting, doesn't really address the main issue. The same can be said comparing meditation to asana practice, or playing music vs yoga practice vs dance etc etc.

True spirituality is based on awareness, and is not dependent on any "thing", whether that be music or yoga or basket weaving. It is in recognizing that there is a subject (self) and an object, that which you are aware of.

So basically any technique, whether it be music, hatha yoga, or meditation practice is an object. You are aware of it. You are aware of doing it and feeling it. So none of those things are inherently spiritual. So to say "Ashtanga Yoga is a spiritual practice", to my mind is inherently untrue. The practice is an "it" it is not the true subject, that which you are. Only that which you are, self, is spiritual, and true spirituality is universal.

Therefore Ashtanga Yoga is not spiritual (and also not universal). Neither is Yin Yoga, Bikram, Vipassana, Transcendental Meditation or any other technique. Or to put it another way, Ashtanga yoga practice is potentially spiritual, but so is any activity, equally. It is not "more" spiritual, how can any "thing" be more spiritual than any other "thing"?

It is your experience while you are "doing" that defines a greater or lesser degree of spirituality. Which is to say, a greater or lesser degree of awareness, of complete loving absorption in the moment. The playing of music and the practice of yoga did not "create" that for you, rather they were the car that you drove in order to experience that which you are. True spirituality is a journey of the self looking outside of itself for the self, but eventually simply coming back to itself.

True spirituality is a state of being, not the object of your attention. This is why so many people have died going to war over a religion. They have made a spiritual practice external to themselves and then denied that an opposing or different religious "practice" is spiritual at all. It is the same comparing different asana practices.

Each one can help you practice letting go, being in the moment and being aware. Each one can also be an obstacle to that opportunity depending on "how" you practice it. It is in arguing over "how" to practice that people get quite passionate, defensive, and at times judgmental and even violent (verbally or otherwise).

So here are some points on "how", that most authentic practitioners agree on.

Any practice that helps you to be aware, to stay in the moment, to let go of attachments, to be open and kind and generous to others, to let go of judgments, to lean into your learning edges and embrace change - is good and leads to greater depth of spirituality.

Any practice that begins to make you contract (for example, through repetition, ignorance or blind faith), any practice that causes you to be resistant to change, to be goal oriented, to focus on anything outside of you - including ultimately the body! and including tradition and technique - does not serve you.

I think that overly focusing on "tradition" and buying into the belief that tradition = spirituality can also be really limiting. On the one hand a tradition helps to define ones boundaries and to focus on the elements the tradition is advocating. Tradition can help you to be aware, but often it leads to blind faith and a religious attitude versus real openness, awareness and true spirituality.

As long as you are not completely absorbed in self, then we practice these methods to help see what "I" really am. You practice a technique to be aware and to realize what you are not. I am not

this body, I am not this mind, I am not this "spiritual practice". Therefore we are each ultimately learning to let go of the mind, let go of the body and let go of what you are practicing. This may take some time, so in the meantime, we practice to learn how not to practice. It is wonderful contradiction.

Having said all that, I do believe, having experimented and experienced these things, that some methods are definitely of greater advantage than others for practicing awareness, and being in the moment. For example, I have found Ashtanga Vinyasa practice helps me with my physical and mental health, and helps with focus, consistency and discipline, and to some extent on letting go, and surrendering to the method and teacher.

Furthermore I have found various meditation practices such as Vipassana, which led to practice of the Buddhist eight fold path, and also Advaita Vedanta "non-practice" much more precise and clarifying. For example, the four noble truths of Buddhism:

1. life involves suffering
2. attachment leads to suffering
3. letting go of (all) attachments leads to the absence of suffering
4. the path of letting go involves various practices, for example; discipline, non-attachment, mindfulness, restraint etc

Through meditation and the practice of these truths, I have begun to understand and experience what I am not, and what self is. Hatha yoga has helped me greatly but meditation is exponentially of greater advantage to my spiritual life.

Now this is just my experience, someone else may have a different experience. But by evidence gathered, most long term meditators and spiritual philosophers and historians agree. Hatha yoga is a great step towards spiritual life, but a baby step none-the-less. It is through a combination of meditation, interpersonal work and letting go of my blind faith and unnecessary belief systems that I have begun to discover the many dimensions spiritual life has to offer.

What you experience is spiritual

What you practice is not

On that note here is a great piece from Terrence Mckenna... I like to think of my articles as (gently as I am able haha) goading the ox that some people are holding onto.

<https://www.facebook.com/terencemckennagroup/videos/1025470447490143/>

Peace and love

Matthew Sweeney