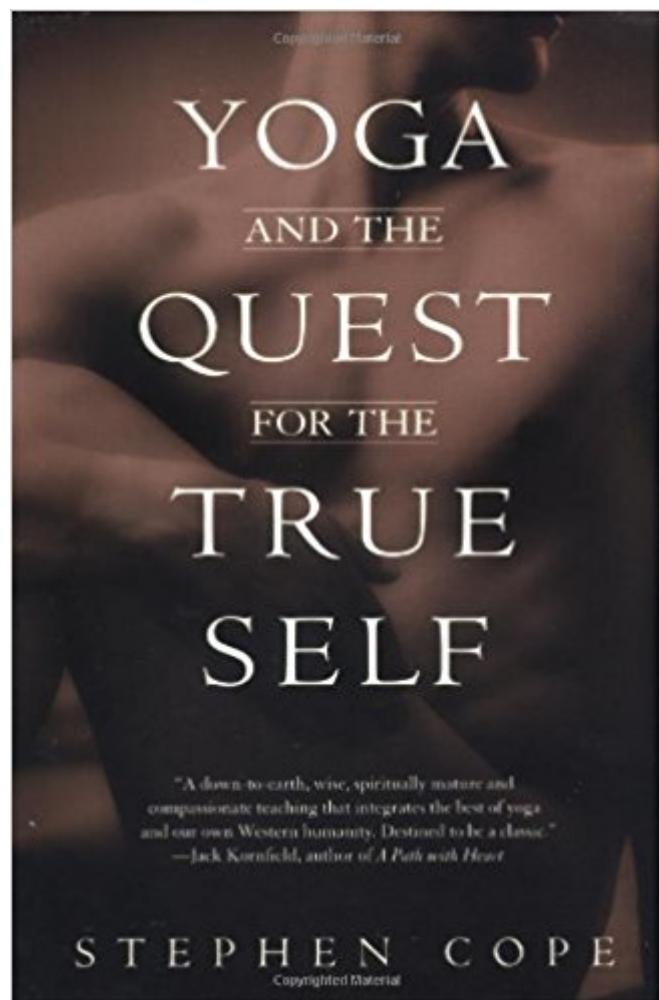


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Yoga And The Quest For The True Self



Synopsis

Millions of Americans know yoga as a superb form of exercise and as a potent source of calm in our stress-filled lives. Far fewer are aware of the full promise of yoga as a 4,000-year-old practical path of liberation—“a path that fits the needs of modern Western seekers with startling precision. Now Stephen Cope, a Western-trained psychotherapist who has lived and taught for more than ten years at the largest yoga center in America, offers this marvelously lively and irreverent “pilgrim’s progress” for today’s world. He demystifies the philosophy, psychology, and practice of yoga, and shows how it applies to our most human dilemmas: from loss, disappointment, and addiction, to the eternal conflicts around sex and relationship. And he shows us that in yoga, “liberation” does not require us to leave our everyday lives for some transcendent spiritual plane—“life itself is the path. Above all, Cope shows how yoga can heal the suffering of self-estrangement that pervades our society, leading us to a new sense of purpose and to a deeper, more satisfying life in the world.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a thoroughly engaging and refreshingly accessible treatment of yoga philosophy and practice. Perhaps most touching is Stephen Cope’s willingness to be so honest with his readers, providing an unflinching self-portrait of a modern seeker. Delving into the deepest teachings of the ancient scriptures on which yoga is based, including Vedanta, the Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali, Tantra, and even Buddhist thought, Cope’s book is at the same time completely free of pretense or idealism. He intersperses yogic and Western psychology with real life stories from his own, his students and his psychotherapy clients’ life experience. Despite his profound learning and

accomplishment, Cope never allows us to place him on a pedestal, but rather shares his disillusionment, grief, and exhaustion as well as his clarity, wisdom, and enthusiasm, providing a story which is all the more empowering and inspiring. As a yoga student and teacher of several years, I found that Cope explored many troublesome and important questions I had been asking myself. For example, how do we reconcile seemingly contradictory philosophies within the yogic tradition? Perhaps even more importantly, what are we to make of the apparent contradiction between Western psychotherapy, which tells us to honor our feelings and move into them, and yogic teachings, which tell us to recognize the fleetingness of those feelings and access the Self which is beyond these fluctuations? Cope's vision is exciting also because he finds meaning in the divine feminine-feelings and emotions, heart, devotion, and the beautiful imperfection of our embodiment-as well as the divine masculine-clear seeing and thinking, mind, wisdom, and the ecstasy of transcendence-a balance so often lacking in spiritual circles. I have been long looking for a synthesis such as Cope provides. I was profoundly moved by this book and know it will continue to influence my understanding of the spiritual path for many years.

Yoga and the Quest for the True Self is definitely one of the best (if not the best) and most useful books I've ever read. It truly speaks to developing a mature, real life approach to spirituality. Stephen Cope writes from a perspective that I feel really speaks to the Western spiritual seeker. He combines his experience and knowledge as a psychotherapist with his knowledge of Yoga and other spiritual paths. While Yoga is a path of union, it appears only too clear that without removing the layers of psychological baggage, union with the divine cannot truly manifest in ones life. All of the spiritual insights and epiphanies will never be more than a transparent veil placed thinly over the unresolved baggage. Insights without fertile ground to take root will soon fade or be used as another vehicle for ego building. The author makes clear that the mature path of Yoga is not one of renunciation, or a solitary journey, but explains that "as spiritual practice matured in India there arose a radical new understanding of the paradox of action and inaction. This was the doctrine of inaction in action, and goes further to explain that Krishna teaches in the "Gita" to "Act in the world in alignment with your true vocation, your true self etc....." Clearly not a path of renunciation or a solitary path but one that involves action IN the world. I found this book really spoke to me as a person on the spiritual path in a way that is truly transformative and not just a bunch of religious dogma. Using his own personal experiences and the experiences of other seekers throughout the book, he has woven a beautifully written guide that is really eye opening and practical. It clearly put into perspective many things that I have either personally struggled with or wondered about.

Stephen Cope makes no claims to be an enlightened master with "wisdom from on high" nor is he trying to "convert" anyone to a particular spiritual path. He explains how the various tools of yoga can help us become more in touch with our true selves. How the process and practice of Hatha Yoga for example, isn't just physical exercise but a spiritual and yet practical process that can help people grow by becoming grounded in their own bodies. At the same time one can work at developing their witness consciousness thru the process of Hatha Yoga. Of the many things I took away from the book, one particularly valuable was the "mantra" Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, Allow" which can be used in Hatha Yoga practice, meditation, or even in one's ordinary life when they are scattered and want to become grounded, focused and internally centered. Some have mistakenly concluded that the author's final assessment is that all of his spiritual practice was for nothing. While there is a "moment" in the book where Cope leaves in the middle of a retreat, a retreat that he had preconceived notions of it's outcome , that is not by any means the conclusion of the book. Actually the crux of what Stephen Cope comes to realize after refelecting on his10 years or so of practice is that "In the entire path of yoga, there is really only one lesson..... Whenever we relinquish our craving, clinging and grasping, whenever we stop the war with reality and are totally present and undivided, we are immediately in union with our true nature". The book also talks about the Kripalu Center and it's own growth, through the early years with founder Amrit Desai, to his (Desai's) fall from grace, and how this community matured rather than fell apart in the midst of this controversy. It also explains much about the "false" Guru phenomena. In particular what happens when disciples own needs for an "all knowing father" can in their own way create a monster of their own making. If you are a Yoga practitioner who wants to go "beyond the postures" as strictly physical exercise, or a spiritual seeker of any faith who wants to read a book that speaks with honesty and depth, intelligence and insight (and to "real people") then I highly recommend this book.

This beautifully written book is several books in one: an engaging memoir, a map to personal transformation and an explanation of the deeper side of yoga. As a devotee of yoga and one who has practiced it for over 30 years (beginning with a whiplash injury which doctors were helpless to cure in 1968), I found this book to be unlike anything else on the market. Stephen Cope takes us far, far beyond the postures which are only the outer manifestations of yogic practice and carries us with him to the mysterious heart of yoga. No one else that I've read can do this with such directness and (apparent!) simplicity. This book is a MUST "read" not only for those who practice yoga, but also people who want a guide through life's difficult changes. Stephen Cope is an erudite, compassionate teacher.

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