

Yoga Affect: A Primer for a Beautiful Life

Sandra Zuidema

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This guide to yoga accessibly and concisely bridges the viewpoints of ancient traditional systems and modern science.

Despite the immense popularity of yoga in the United States, Sandra Zuidema says that little attention is given to how and why yoga works. Her *Yoga Affect: A Primer for a Beautiful Life* traces the evolution and influence of yoga from its ancient roots to today, blending science, religion, spiritual knowledge, and personal experience to inspire today's yogis to move beyond physical poses and open up the whole panorama of benefits that yoga can provide.

Zuidema shows why it isn't enough to merely perform a perfect yoga pose or engage in mystical fantasies; in fact, she says that these approaches may add to the narcissism so characteristic of Western society. "The fact that I could practice yoga for years without learning the key elements of yoga science is an example of the state of yoga today," she writes. When a series of painful life events brought her to seek something deeper from her practice, she undertook a study of yoga's ancient teachings and there found healing and a more balanced and healthy perspective on life.

Beyond the history of yoga and the manner in which it spread throughout the world, Zuidema covers the best ways to take advantage of its healing effects, how ethics and spirituality distinguish yoga from regular exercise, and how yoga differs from religion. This last topic is especially relevant in the United States, where, despite the support of leading-edge scientific evidence, fear that practicing yoga would conflict with religious beliefs has kept many from experiencing its many benefits to health and well-being.

Zuidema's book, a companion book to *Yoga Affect: A Guided Journal*, bridges the viewpoints of ancient traditional systems and modern science to cover a wide-ranging and complex subject in a way that is comprehensive yet concise. Written in an academic tone interspersed with more conversational, experiential reflections, it offers ample resources for those who wish to expand on the information presented in the text.

In focusing attention on traditional yoga's ability to build character and ethics, which Zuidema calls "glaringly absent" from most yoga as practiced in America, the book supplies what is missing in so much of religious practice—knowledge of the self. It is this self-knowledge, tempered by compassion, that can bring forth a culture of care, empathy, and responsibility that can grow outward from the individual practitioner to transform the world. "Since yoga promotes integrity and love, it may be the road to unifying people on our planet," writes Zuidema. "Rather than looking for wealth, beauty, and power, yoga shows the divine quality of all things."

Despite the overall worth and interest of the information provided, issues with grammar and syntax make reading cumbersome. The occasional use of fragmentary sentences, as well as incorrect words and dates, is also distracting.

Yoga practitioners, teachers, and anyone seeking a fuller experience of traditional yoga's potential to enhance physical and mental capabilities and deepen spiritual growth will benefit from Sandra Zuidema's *Yoga Affect*.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November 25, 2016)

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