

The Noncompetitive Approach

The practice of yoga was established approximately 4000 years ago and with writing instruments coming into existence about 2500 years ago, we find a very distinct paper trail of yogic history, knowledge, and wisdom. For thousands of years, yoga has been engaged in as a noncompetitive practice. That's right, each time a Yogi places his or her feet on the mat, it's not in relationship to others but is in relationship to the self, an inward focus that helps join mind, body and spirit, and bring us into full balance and alignment.

When we stand on our mat or sit for meditation or pranayama, our focus moves inward to discover our feelings, emotions, thoughts, and/or breath, allowing us to live in the present moment. Then with what we discover, we can respond to what we have observed. The noncompetitive approach, which could also be thought of as nonjudgmental awareness, plays a vital role when we choose to respond to our observations with compassion.

This is a unique action in our present society. Can you imagine watching a basketball game for the sheer joy of watching the athleticism rather than the scoreboard? To be excited for an athlete's skill and agility, no matter which team the player is on, and not be excited because they may win or lose in relationship to others, would offer such a different perspective. We would then be able to focus on the preparation of the game, the athleticism, the desire to participate, the humor, and the sheer skill that the athlete possesses. When the ball leaves the shooter's hands, we let it go and do not count whether it goes in the basket or not. Just imagine.

Unfortunately, a basketball score lets us know how we did in relationship to our peers but does not always let us know how we did in relationship with the self.

Yoga, on the other hand, does. For instance, when we participate in a group yoga session, the focus is within and not with our actions in relationship to others. We might see a pose done beautifully and marvel at it, but beyond that, we have no concern that the pose is better, equal to, or worse than ours or others'. The pose just is.

What is important is that we show up on the mat and devote ourselves to our practice. Some days the practice may be full and rich and easy. Other days may be full of struggle, questioning, holding back, and just getting through the normal poses. With yoga, we live in the moment, we focus on the execution of the poses,

meditation, or pranayama, and then we let it all go. There is no win. There is no loss. There simply is experiencing... and we don't keep score.

Non-competitiveness opens us to freedom of expression, less worry about the outcome, and more sharing and camaraderie. It also encourages excitement for others when they do well and allows us to be fully joyful for them.

Just imagine.