

The Art of Living Yoga: Honoring Yoga's Roots in Philosophy & Practice

Christine Lily Kessler

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The personalized guide The Art of Living Yoga is an appealing starting point for yoga practitioners to find their own motivation and reasons to learn.

Christine Lily Kessler's thorough manual *The Art of Living Yoga* describes yoga's historical development while introducing exercises and reflections for practice.

Addressing the history that's lost as interest in yoga grows, this book seeks to ground contemporary yoga practices in historical and philosophical context. The chronological chapters build upon one another and return to concepts introduced earlier throughout. Each stage of yoga is introduced as embodied and available for use at all times. Diet and lifestyle advice, prayer tools, personal examples and artwork, and visual representations of poses are included.

Encouraging engagement in the wider yoga community, this is a complementary text that's designed to be used in concert with a class or with the guidance of a teacher. Its structure is consistent: each chapter situates its yoga information in the timeline and includes an outline of the information to come; each ends with reflection questions. Internally, there are clear considerations of topics including Purusha, Prakriti, Atman (pure consciousness), and Brahman (ultimate reality). While concepts like the three gunas (ways of living) and three doshas (mind/body composition) are similar, they are well distinguished from one another herein. This systemic work is done with retention and application in mind. However, the book's work of summarizing ideas sometimes means that the concepts are distilled too far and that deeper details are absent.

Self-examination proves crucial to putting the book's recommendations into practice. The opening chapters advise clearing one's slate and naming one's biases and preferences for the sake of change. And the final chapter warns against contemporary tendencies that make yoga practice difficult, if necessary. But the text is visually busy, switching between font sizes and styles and including illustrations on most pages. And its sourcing is quite extensive, with near equal space devoted to original work and passages from other texts. These outside texts are interpreted, and their terms are defined, for greater accessibility. However, the book's more personal work deviates from this explanatory path too much. There are pictures of Kessler's dog and studio; the language becomes intimate, verging on confessional and muddying the book's delivery.

Indeed, the book's tone and presentation prove too uneven throughout. Poems are cited in support of certain points without including information about the poets, while elsewhere, the writers of the film *The Wizard of Oz* and the book *The Hero's Journey* receive write-ups. While this seems to complement the notion that "your individual experience with the tradition is your personal key to what it is," it also makes the book feel esoteric and opaque at times.

The Art of Living Yoga is a vibrant yoga resource for people of all skill levels that combines historical facts with practical advice.

MARI CARLSON (July 30, 2024)

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