

# JOY: The Journal of Yoga

August 2003, Volume 2, Number 8

## **Tools, not Rules**

John C. Kimbrough

The teachings and practices of Yoga and Buddhism are tools to be used to elevate the consciousness and access the peace and joy that is attained through that elevation.

They are not rules that one is ordered to follow, and judged as being sinful or inferior in some manner if they do not follow them.

When individuals are exposed to rules, they can sometimes feel and act defiant towards them and rebel.

This is especially true when they feel that the rules are being pushed on them in an aggressive and obnoxious manner or that they do not see or feel any need for them at this time in their lives. They feel like they are being pressured and feel uncomfortable or resentful because of that.

In addition, they may feel shame or guilt if they are unable to understand them or implement them.

Add to that the possible stigmatization and ridicule that they may and can be exposed to by others, and one can become very confused and disturbed about how to be and how to act when exposed to teachings that promise great things.

Yoga and Buddhism do not judge individuals as being sinners, or tell them that they risk judgment, eternal damnation and the fire of hell if they do not practice these teachings.

They just state in the simplest terms that you will feel better and interact with others in a more skillful manner.

One does not have to bow down and worship another, or pray to a divine being or icon, or make pilgrimages to various places, temples and such.

In Buddhism and Yoga, this practice of rites and rituals has developed over the years, because people enjoy it, or have been conditioned in to thinking that it will bring them merit, good luck and good fortune, or because it makes them feel like they are religious, special and holy.

This seems to be more true and common in Asia than the West.

In Thailand, many Thais say that it makes them "feel good" when they go to a temple, and make donations to a monk or temple.

Unfortunately, this kind of devotion and loyalty can be exploited by unscrupulous monks and it has been, just as many Catholic Priests have taken advantage of those that were placed in their care or they had some influence over in the West.

But just being exposed to tools does not mean that we know how to use them.

We have to have some experience with them in order to understand how to use them effectively and understand how they benefit us.

If we have some fear or apprehension about understanding and using these tools, we need to have a friend, teacher or mentor to encourage us and assist show us in seeing the way.

This basic rule applies to all things in life, whether in cooking, working, cleaning the house, or just in life in general.

Life is a growing and sharing experience and when we understand this and work from this understanding, things proceed more harmoniously and efficiently.

These teachings in Yoga and Buddhism that we so frequently refer people to in our writings are also tools that we have to be introduced to and brought to a level of understanding about how to use.

When working with a hammer and saw in working with wood, or a cutting with a torch and a welding machine in working with steel, or a keyboard and computer when with the written word, we can see the results of our effort.

The results from working with the tools of the are sometimes harder to see and experience.

In working with wood, steel or the written word, we can see a finished product, and we can also go back and make corrections and improve on it.

But in living each day, can we say that we as human beings are finished products?

Hopefully, we can be evolving products, meaning that we are moving on and growing to something and someone healthier and happier.

Perhaps all of us at one time or another have experienced an evolvement to something or someone less focused, less healthy, and less happy.

What might be some of the things that we can and hope to evolve to when we practice Yoga or Buddhism?

One would be an improvement in our relationships with others.

This can include the ability to listen with patience and speak and share with wisdom and love.

It may also include knowing when to be open to a person who is sharing sincerely, or to change a relationship with a person who is habitually impatient, given to anger and abuse in words and actions.

Even if our intentions are honorable in dealing with others, they may still be overly influenced by their own moods, emotions and unresolved or misunderstood conflicts within themselves.

In understanding and working on ourselves, we can see that there is no finished product on the spiritual journey.

There is an ongoing change and mindfulness that can have its high points and low points.

Maybe it is better to think of what we achieve in our use of these tools of the teachings is becoming a more balanced individual, incorporating concentration and mindfulness, which can be added to and built upon.

Is one of the teachings more important than another?

Some people will say yes.

Some will say that meditation practice is the most important tool of the teachings.

It certainly seems to be the tool that brings about the most deep seeded changes.

There are other tools also that we need to be aware of and use.

The tool of loving kindness.

The tool of compassion.

These tools open us more to the life experience of others and provide an avenue for interacting with them in ways that are built on understanding and a desire to share in ways that are meaningful and helpful.

What the teachings or tools as we have referred to them as being today give us is something that we can learn, understand and use in our daily lives and activities.

They are tools that sharpen our energy, mindfulness and concentration.

What can be bad or harmful about that?

---

John teaches Yoga, Buddhism and English and lives in Bangkok, Thailand. He can be reached at [johnckimbrough@yahoo.com](mailto:johnckimbrough@yahoo.com)