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Yoga and Jiu-Jitsu

The Yin and Yang

Yoga and jiu-jitsu, both thought to have originated in India more than 4,000 years ago, are historically intertwined and contain many common elements which can greatly benefit the practitioners of both arts

Jiu-jitsu, the oldest style of martial arts, is believed to have originated in ancient India more than 4,000 years ago before spreading through China and eventually establishing in Japan where it developed into the fine martial art it is today. Yoga, too, winds back thousands of years to its native India. They also share similar philosophical principles, as well as physical skill requirements, such as flexibility. Hence, the roots of jiu-jitsu and yoga are historically intertwined as if they were sibling arts from the same genealogical tree. Aware of this powerful connection, the serious jiu-jitsu practitioner who also commits to practicing yoga can refine their art considerably, and will likely bend the back of the competition—literally.

As jiu-jitsu and yoga evolved and became popular in modern Western societies, they have shown convincing characteristics of being the yin and yang of the grappling martial arts. They seem to blend naturally into each other's essence. As in the striking martial arts (karate, taekwondo, etc.), the grappling martial arts also require a specific type of training in order to enhance the effectiveness of techniques. Thus, what *kata* (rehearsed moves) represents to the *karateka* (the karate practitioner) for training fluid attack motions, yoga can - and should be - the indispensable supplementary training of the dedicated jiu-jitsu practitioner, because flexibility is a physical condition of paramount importance in the martial arts of jiu-jitsu. In fact, even the etymological context of

By Sebastian de Assis

3

of the Grappling Arts

Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand) For Improving *Sankaku-Jime* (Triangle Choke)

The traditional *Sarvangasana* is performed with the legs straightened up. But when practicing this posture for jiu-jitsu purpose, this variation is ideal (1). Start by lying flat on your back and slowly move your legs up, supporting your body weight on your arms and shoulders. Bring your feet together while bending your knees.

Then, after maintaining balance and posture, move your arms to the front of your body as if holding an imaginary opponent's arm and switch your legs to the triangle choke position (2). Hold this position for 5 to 10 seconds breathing slowly and rhythmically through your nose. Always remember that proper breathing is a fundamental component in yoga practice, Zen meditation, and jiu-jitsu *randori* (sparring). This practice will surely enhance your ability to apply the triangle choke (3).

Dhanurasana (Bridge) For Improving Escape From The Mount (*Upa* In Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu)

***Dhanurasana* is a simple posture to practice. Lying flat on your back, bend your knees pressing your feet firmly against the floor. Breathe in through your nose and exhale while arching your back as far as comfortably possible. This *asana* is very beneficial to improving the motion and the back arch necessary to dislodge an opponent from the dominating mounted position (1). It also helps to strengthen the lower back muscles, which is a crucial body section of a grappler. This *asana* closely resembles an attempt to dismount an opponent (2).**

the word "jiu-jitsu" demonstrates this physical necessity: *Ju* means pliability, flexibility, or to give way. *Jitsu* means a fighting form or practice (unlike *do*, which is a more spiritual form of martial training).[1]

Indeed, yoga practice can be extremely beneficial to all martial artists, but it is particularly advantageous to the jiu-jitsu practitioner because of the nature and relationship of jiu-jitsu techniques and various yoga *asanas* (poses). But before exploring the benefits of integrating yoga practice in jiu-jitsu training, it is important to have a basic understanding of yoga.

What is Yoga?

Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy and was first mentioned in the *Upanishads*, the Indian scriptures written between 2500 and 600 B.C. The word "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root *yug* meaning to bind, join, attach and yoke, to direct and concentrate one's attention on, to use and apply. It also means union or communion.[2] It is a system of techniques and disciplines for self-development involving the body, the intellect, the mind, the emotions, and the will. In short, yoga is a system of physical and psychical skills the *Yogi* (the yoga practitioner) uses in order to reach specific predetermined goals for self-development.

There are various classifications of systems of yoga: *Jnana Yoga* (union by knowledge), *Bhakti Yoga* (union by love and devotion), *Karma Yoga* (union by action and service), *Mantra Yoga* (union by voice and sound), *Yantra Yoga* (union by vision and form), *Laya and Kundalini Yoga* (union by arousal of latent psychic nerve-force), *Tantric Yoga* (union by harnessing sexual energy), *Hatha Yoga* (union by bodily mastery), and *Raja Yoga* (union by mental mastery).[3] However, the two particular categories that can mostly benefit the martial artist are *Hatha Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*, the two most widely practiced types of yoga in the Western world. The former works through the body upon the

References

[1] Doug Musser and Thomas A. Lang, *Jiu-jitsu Techniques & Tactics* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999), 13.
[2] Iyengar, B.K.S., *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 21.
[3] Hewitt, James, *The Complete Yoga Book* (London: Cresset Press, 1990), 5-6.
[4] Slater, Wallace, *Raja Yoga*, (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1985), 2.
[5] Nitobe, Inazo, *Bushido* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1969), 96.
[6] Hyams, Joe, *Zen in the Martial Arts* (New York, Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1979), 9.
[7] Musser and Lang, *Jiu-jitsu Techniques & Tactics*, 19.
[8] Deshimaru, Taisen, *Questions to a Zen Master* (New York, Penguin Books, Inc., 1985), 105.
[9] Kogler, Aladar, *Yoga for Athletes* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), 159.
[10] Kogler, *Yoga for Athletes*, 160-161. (For more comprehensive suggestions on developing you own yoga routine, refer to pages 160, 161 and Chapter 16).

mind and the latter works through the mind upon the body. Together they can contribute to physical, mental, and emotional equilibrium, while increasing flexibility, strength, concentration, and self-control; all of which are invaluable attributes to the dedicated jiu-jitsu practitioner - and martial artists in general.

Hatha Yoga is considered the most practical of all types of yoga. It focuses on the promotion of good health while expanding the latent energies in the physical body, as the postures are executed with tranquility and purpose. Thus, Hatha Yoga practice envisions preparing the body to become an energized center in which effective mental control can develop in a supple healthy body, which makes it closely associated with Raja Yoga.

Raja Yoga, also known as Royal Yoga, is directed toward the control of the mind. It has also been called the "Yoga of Will," for it develops will through concentration and meditation by tuning the nervous system to be in harmony with higher vibrations.[4] Meditation, therefore, is one of the most important elements in the practice of Raja Yoga. And for the jiu-jitsu player who incorporates the practice of Hatha and Raja Yoga into their training routine, they are sure to develop a nimble body and a quick and serene mind that will give them an absolute edge on the mat - and in self-defense on the street.

What is Jiu-Jitsu?

According to the great Japanese scholar Inazo Nitobe, "Jiu-jitsu may be briefly defined as an application of anatomical knowledge to the purpose of offense and defense. It differs from wrestling in that it does not depend upon muscular strength. Its feat consists in clutching or striking such part of the enemy's body as will make him numb and incapable of resistance. Its object is not to kill, but to incapacitate one for action for the time being."[5] In essence, it is a martial art that heavily relies on the principles of leverage, balance, and patience to seize the opportunity to turn the opponent's strength against themselves.

Halasana (Plow Posture) and *Karnadipasana* (Plow Posture Variation) for Improving Resistance to an Opponent Attempting to Pass the Guard

Start with the Plow Posture lying flat on your back. Take a deep nasal breath as you begin lifting your legs off the floor. Slowly exhale while moving your legs back as far as comfortably possible (1). Then, switch to *Karnadipasana* by bringing your knees close to your shoulders and hold your feet with your hands while pushing them against your body for extra extension (2-3). The practice of this *asana* will give you the flexibility necessary to endure the pressure of an opponent trying to stack you up in order to pass the guard (4). Royce Gracie showed how important this ability is in UFC IV against Dan Severn who stacked up all of his 250 pounds-plus on Royce's neck before succumbing to a triangle choke by the great champion.

Yoga Resources

Books

- *Yoga for Athletes*, Aladar Kogler, Ph.D., 1999 (ISBN 9781567183870). An excellent book on how to integrate yoga practice into sports training.
- *Light on Yoga*, B.K.S. Iyengar, 1972 (ISBN 0805203532).A comprehensive book on various aspects of yoga with 602 photographs of different *asanas*.
- *The Complete Yoga Book*, James Hewitt, 1983 (ISBN 0091772214). This book is an encyclopedia of yoga covering both the philosophical and practical aspects of yoga. It has more than 400 illustrations of postures.

Videos

- *Yoga and The Martial Arts*, Dr. Dan Layne (Black Belt Videos, 1-800-581-5222 code 7790). This video shows how yoga and the martial arts are compatible in both practice and theory. It covers limbering exercises and stretches, as well as yoga techniques that will benefit the martial artist.
- *Power Yoga for Beginners-Flexibility*, Rodney Yee, 1999 (ASIN B00000JPRS). This dynamic videotape by renowned yoga instructor Rodney Yee covers the essentials of developing flexibility, strength, and concentration, with relaxation and meditation at the end.
- *Yoga Conditioning for Athletes*, Rodney Yee, 2000 (ASIN B00004Z4S0). This is an excellent video designed to promote overall balance, enhance athletes' physical conditioning and focused concentration, while minimizing the likelihood of injuries.

Web Sites

www.evonline.net (Evolution's Yoga Magazine). This is an excellent site with a variety of information on different types of yoga, directories, news, etc.

www.yoga411.com. Here you will find resources of yoga studies, schools, teachers, supply companies, etc.

www.yogajournal.com. This is the Web site of the most popular yoga publication in the United States, Yoga Journal. There is a wealth of information for anyone interested in yoga, beginner or advanced.

Jiu-jitsu, which is spelled in a number of different ways, is deceivingly known as "the gentle art." Although it is speculated that it originated in India, it is virtually impossible to determine the precise origin of jiu-jitsu - and most martial arts in general - because of lack of written historical records. However, the history of the development of jiu-jitsu in Japan is fairly well documented.

The known origins of jiu-jitsu can be found in the distant days of Japanese history, which can be divided into eight periods ranging from the Ancient period (before 650 A.D.) to the Modern or Meiji period (from 1868 to the present). However, it was during the Muromachi period (1337 to 1563) that the development of jiu-jitsu as an unarmed combat strategy began to be methodically developed by the *Bushi* (the samurai warrior class), whose sole purpose in life was to fight for

Sirsasana (Leg Behind The Neck) For Improving Escape From Headlocks

***Sirsasana* is a posture that has to be developed gradually according to the flexibility level of the practitioner. Start lying on your back and bring your legs backwards as far as comfortably possible (1). For jiu-jitsu purposes, you can practice by lying on your side and bringing only one leg over your neck or as far as you are able, though you should try to stretch up a little more with each practice (2). This is a great *asana* to improve escaping from headlocks from the "one-hundred kilo position," as it is called in Brazilian jiu-jitsu (3).**

his lord. As the art of jiu-jitsu developed, the samurai quickly seized upon the system of Zen (usually translated as concentration or objectless meditation), and it became "the religion" of the warrior class. This awareness of the need for meditation and concentration power that the samurai found in the practice of Zen, the modern jiu-jitsu fighter can rediscover, and perhaps even more comprehensively, in the practice of yoga. Notwithstanding, Zen should not by any means be disregarded altogether, on the contrary, it should be carefully observed.

Before it became a popular style of martial arts in the late twentieth century (largely because of the success of Brazilian jiu-jitsu in NHB events), jiu-jitsu reached its apex from the late 1600s to the mid-1800s. Then, with the rise of industrialism in Japan and the advent of modern warfare tactics that relied on firearms, jiu-jitsu faded away while giving birth to the new art of judo created by Jigoro Kano, who was a jiu-jitsu practitioner himself. Today, there are many specific forms of jiu-jitsu that specialize in certain aspects of the art (e.g., Aiki Jitsu, Goshin Jutsu, Hakko Ryu, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, etc.).

Yoga and Jiu-Jitsu as Yin and Yang

The arts of jiu-jitsu and yoga can be intertwined as if they were interdependent, like the yin and yang of one common art. Although often practiced separately as the distinct activities they are, there are some mutual characteristics in their philosophical approach and physical requirements of their practice - particularly the need for developing flexibility - which could bring them closer together for the benefit of both arts. Let's see how a parallel can be delineated between yoga and jiu-jitsu.

Despite the fact that martial arts in general and jiu-jitsu in particular are perceived as either sports or self-defense training, there is an extraordinary self-development and spiritual component in the practice of jiu-jitsu. This third dimensional aspect of jiu-jitsu (martial arts) should not be neglected, for it is an intrinsic principle of mastery and was fundamental in *Bushido* (the way of the samurai). There are several *ryus* (schools) and *senseis* (instructors) who emphasize the philosophical and spiritual discipline, as well as the sport and self-defense elements of jiu-jitsu. In fact, some martial artists will practice for several years before becoming aware - and some never will, unfortunately - that "martial arts are essentially avenues through which they can achieve spiritual serenity, mental tranquility, and the deepest self-confidence."[6]

Professor Henry Okazaki, one of the most distinguished jiu-jitsu instructors in the United States, named his *dojo* (a place where martial arts and meditation are practiced) the *Kodenkan*, which can be translated as "The School for the Transmission of Esoteric Zen Teachings." In his *dojo* he preserved classical jiu-jitsu techniques as well as the practice of martial arts as a spiritual discipline.[7] Also, Japanese Zen Master Taisen Deshimaru emphatically stated that "if you want to study Zen you should practice a martial art first."[8] No wonder the traditional

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Japanese samurai took up Zen practice as a means of improving their overall skills. And it is in this philosophical stance and the development of flexibility in the physical body that jiu-jitsu and yoga blend together.

Yoga is a form of spiritual discipline that utilizes physical exercises to facilitate the expansion of consciousness while promoting good health. Before becoming popular in the West, it had been practiced in Buddhism and Hinduism for millennia. Through conscientious and regular practice, the yogi strives to achieve physical, mental and emotional balance, and ultimately *Samadhi* (perfect, total concentration), all of which are important training goals for martial artists.

In addition to the philosophical and spiritual attributes of yoga, the oldest known science of self-development, practicing the physical postures (*asanas*), the breathing exercises (*pranayama*), and meditation (*Dhyana*) can be the most perfect supplemental activity for the *jiu-jitsuka* who wants to reach the zenith of their grappling skills. And as male needs female, positive depends on negative, and yin is the inseparable element of yang, jiu-jitsu and yoga can, indeed, be a naturally perfect combination that should lead the practitioner toward excellence in the martial art of jiu-jitsu.

Practicing Yoga with Jiu-Jitsu in Mind

When you practice yoga with the purpose of enhancing your jiu-jitsu skills, it is important that you create your own program based on your specific needs and goals. Firstly, you should acquire a yoga book or video (see resources for suggestions) and choose a specific selection of *asanas* that will assist your reaching your goals. However, before determining what batteries of *asanas* you want to incorporate in your training, you should keep in mind certain guidelines. Aladar Kogler, Ph.D., a renowned expert in training athletes through yoga practice recommends the following:

"Consider your experience in yoga. Are you a beginner or advanced student? Set your goals. What is the primary goal you want to achieve with the battery of *asanas*? (e.g., relaxing your body-mind, increasing flexibility, etc.) Remember with yoga you can simultaneously achieve more than one goal.

Starting the routine with a short meditation will lead to heightened concentration during the entire practice. This meditation will be a transition to the concentration required for your training or competition. It will enhance clear thinking and eliminate anxiety and stress.[9]" In addition, Dr. Kogler also recommends establishing a general yoga routine taking the following elements into consideration.

Start with *asanas* that stretch and relax the limbs and strengthen the muscles, ligaments and joints. Self-suggestive verbal phrases and mental imagery should be used to affect the body. Yoga *asanas* are 80 percent mental and 20 percent physical. Practicing yoga *asanas* is like meditation. Start your routines with easier *asanas*. Rotation to one side should be practiced

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YOGA AND JIU-JITSU

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with rotation of the opposite side. Do not practice sooner than one-and-a-half to two hours after eating.[10] Several *asanas* are demonstrated in the photo techniques. As with any martial art, there are numerous functional benefits that you will find out for yourself once you start to practice. Yoga offers limitless applications to its many postures.

Conclusion

Today, both jiu-jitsu and yoga are two of the most popular Oriental arts practiced in the Western world. They have infiltrated mainstream society and even become trendy in various circles. What does not seem to have been realized yet is how they perfectly supplement each other, both in their philosophical nature and physical practice. Thus, the serious jiu-jitsu practitioner who integrates yoga practice into their training will certainly develop flexibility, endurance, strength, concentration, and, ultimately, self-confidence. Namaste! Grappling

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Jiu-Jitsu and Grappling Resources

Books

- *Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu: Theory & Technique*, Renzo and Royler Gracie, 2001 (ISBN 1931229082)
The best book on the market in the art of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. High quality color photographs that illustrate BJJ techniques from blue to black belt levels.
- *Jiu-jitsu Techniques & Tactics*, Doug Musser & Thomas A. Lang, 1999 (ISBN 088011830X)
This is an informative book on the art of jiu-jitsu. In addition to techniques, it covers some historical and philosophical background of the art. It has a good glossary of Japanese terminology used in jiu-jitsu schools.
- *Gene LeBell's Grappling World*, Gene LeBell, 2000 (ISBN 0967654319)
LeBell's grappling expertise and sense of humor comes alive in this book. It features more than 1,000 finishing holds. This is an informative and entertaining book.

Videos

- *Pedro Carvalho BJJ First Series 1-8* (World Martial Arts 1-800-682-9842). This is an outstanding video set by a relatively unknown BJJ black belt. These videos cover every major aspect of jiu-jitsu: shoot-in, takedown, mount, and submission. Each tape is 35 minutes of non-stop techniques.
- *Grappling Master Video Training Series*, Gene LeBell (Panther Production 1-800-332-4442)
This is an excellent video series by the legend of the grappling world, Gene LeBell. Includes numerous ground fighting techniques and finishing holds.
- *Gracie Intermediate Video Set*, Rorion and Royce Gracie (Brajitsu 1-800-432-7097)
Rorion Gracie is one of the best instructors in the business and he delivers on these videos. The techniques are explained from all angles and he shows how the moves should flow according to the reaction of the opponent. This is an excellent set.

Web Sites

www.grapplersworld.com
This is an excellent Web site with much information about the grappling martial arts (Aikido, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Judo, Jiu-jitsu, Pankration, Sambo, and Sumo).

www.bjj.org
This Web site is designed for those interested in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu as developed by the Gracie family. It contains a wealth of information, including quality photographs, excellent articles, book and video reviews, interviews, etc.

www.martialinfo.com
This is a comprehensive Web site that serves as a bulletin board and directory for various martial arts. Here you can find schools, supply companies, publications, tournaments, expert opinion, etc.