



Are You a Sweat-Hog or a Swami?

Not sure which style of yoga is right for your personality and body type? Our quiz will enlighten you.

By Todd Jones

As yoga's popularity swells, so does the number of hatha yoga styles. Many have been around for decades. Other styles pop up as yoga teachers try to put a personal stamp on their classes and differentiate themselves in the crowded marketplace. Sivananda Yoga, Jivamukti Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Ashtanga, Bikram, Integral, ISHTA, Kripalu—and more. How do you know which yoga style is right for you?



The range of choices can be bewildering, especially if you're a brand new student. But even old yoga hands who've been rolling out their mats in the same studio since the patchouli-and-peasant-skirts days of the 1970s can use some guidance when they want to check out other approaches to the practice. And so, mindful of our civic duty, we at *Yoga Journal* solemnly assumed tongue-in-cheek mudra and divided the hatha yoga world into four main categories, generating a self-test guaranteed to magically indicate the yoga class towards which all your past lives have been karmically pointing.

1. How much of a workout do you expect from a yoga class?
 - a. If there isn't a puddle on my mat, I feel like I've been cheated.
 - b. I don't mind hard work, but I'm more interested in learning how to use my body in specific and increasingly subtle actions than in cardiovascular challenge.
 - c. I need to be very careful because of my injured back (substitute your medical issue: strained knee, arthritis, rotator-cuff injury, heart condition, etc.).
 - d. Too much exertion disturbs my meditative focus. And I think maybe I'm allergic to sweat.

2. When you were a kid, what were your favorite play activities?
 - a. Sports, climbing the highest tree in the neighborhood, riding my bike motocross-style through the woods—anything active and maybe challenging enough to be a little scary.
 - b. I loved complicated activities—ballet, dressage, gymnastics—and detail-oriented hobbies like coin and butterfly collecting. I created complex buildings with blocks, Tinkertoys, and Legos.
 - c. I rescued wounded birds, adopted stray dogs, was fascinated when I broke my arm, enjoyed nursing my brother when he was sick.
 - d. I liked reading poetry, sitting alone in my quiet place in the garden or the woods or a park, and going to my church/synagogue/mosque to pray.

3. What's your current favorite weekend outfit?

- a. I usually just grab my cleanest T-shirt and sweats or shorts. Unless maybe you count gear like hiking boots, ski jackets, running shoes, and flotation vests?
- b. Depends what I'm up to, but my clothes match the occasion: not too flashy, well-coordinated, with appropriate accessories.
- c. Whatever fits well over my back brace.
- d. Crystal pendants, Save the Whales T-shirt, Guatemalan serape (or saffron robe accessorized with begging bowl, or maybe sackcloth and ashes).

4. You're miles from nowhere in the middle of a pristine meadow. Suddenly the ground starts to shake, you hear pounding hooves, and you realize you're being charged by an enraged bull. Do you:

- a. Grasp its horns and flip over its back, like an ancient Minoan bull dancer?
- b. Coolly assess its speed and the distance to the nearest fence, then try to dodge the bull and fake it toward the other side of the field so you might be able to eventually escape?
- c. Try to fend it off with a crutch? You'd love to be up to a long hike sometime soon.
- d. Give thanks that you've had a good life, even if you're about to be trampled to death? Whatever happens, you know it's all part of some grand plan furthering the upward evolution of the universe.
- e. Whip out your wooden flute, and quickly transform the raging bull into an adoring devotee?

5. Your heroes include:

- a. Mia Hamm, Evel Knievel, Wayne Gretsky, Tara Lipinski.
- b. Frank Lloyd Wright, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, James Watson, and Francis Crick.
- c. Albert Schweitzer, Florence Nightingale, Andrew Weil, John Bradshaw.
- d. Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus Christ, Mother Teresa, Rainer Maria Rilke, Lao Tzu, Rumi, St. John of the Cross.

6. If you were going to chuck it all for your dream job, you might become:

- a. An Olympic gymnast, bungee jumper, professional triathlete, X-Games snowboarder.
- b. Engineer, research scientist, architect, physical therapist.
- c. Psychotherapist, social worker, family doctor.
- d. Nun, priest, rabbi, monk, spirit channel for the Pleiadian masters.

7. You receive an unexpected windfall that finally allows you to buy your dream house/travel around the world/buy studio time so your band can cut a record. You and your spouse celebrate with a few too many glasses of champagne. In your yoga practice the next morning you:

- a. Crank the intensity of your asanas up a notch to make sure you sweat it all out of your system.
- b. Experiment with liver-strengthening asana sequences and study which one best relieves your aching head and querulous stomach.
- c. Berate yourself for breaking your strict macrobiotic diet.
- d. Nope. Couldn't happen. You would never sully the temple of your body with intoxicants.

8. If your yoga teacher uncharacteristically started her yoga class with a 45-minute meditation, you would:

- a. Struggle valiantly to sit still while you fantasize about advanced arm balances.
- b. Attempt to concentrate on your breath, but find yourself analyzing her possible motives and intentions.
- c. Prop yourself up with mountains of blankets and bolsters, glad for the time to baby your sore body.
- d. Feel right at home. Meditation is always part of your practice, along with prayer and chanting.

Answers

By now, it's pretty clear how we've divided up the hatha yoga world: the Kickbutt Workout; the God-is-in-the-details Approach; the Therapeutic Regime; and the Nirvana Express.

The Kickbutt Workout. A. If you picked mostly (a) answers, you'll probably be most comfortable in hatha yoga classes that provide you with a strong physical challenge. Such styles include Ashtanga (and its many spin-offs, like "power" and "flow-style" yoga), Iyengar, Bikram, Anusara, Jivamukti, White Lotus, and Kali Ray's TriYoga. God is in the Details. B. If you tended toward (b), you'll likely enjoy approaches that zero in on details and help you adjust your practice to meet your individual needs. Iyengar, Anusara, and Viniyoga are especially noted for this. The complexities of Tantra-based styles like ISHTA might also appeal to you, and some Bikram teachers may provide you with the in-depth analysis you relish.

The Therapeutic Regime. C. If most of your answers were (c), you may be interested in yoga primarily as a way of healing yourself and/or others. Viniyoga and Integrative Yoga Therapy both take a very holistic approach to healing; Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy uses poses to facilitate psycho-emotional healing; and some Iyengar teachers are highly trained in therapeutic, prop-aided application of asanas.

The Nirvana Express. D. If (d) was usually your preferred answer, you may favor yoga styles that emphasize spirit more than the physical details of asanas. You might feel most at home in Sivananda, Integral, Kripalu, Kundalini, Ananda, TriYoga, and ISHTA classes, though you can find teachers in any style who speak to your spiritual focus.

But Seriously, Folks...

Okay, we admit it: Our four-type categorization exaggerates the differences between schools of yoga. No matter what style—or styles—you choose, any good teacher will eventually help you explore the less-familiar parts of your body, mind, and spirit. You may note that this self-test pointed you toward the yoga styles to which your personality already predisposes you. But you might want to consider a more Ayurvedic viewpoint, balancing your habitual tendencies with their opposites. Are you always fiery and active? Ashtanga might be a perfect fit—but you could also benefit by occasionally exploring a more cooling, softer practice. Or if you're a kapha (slow metabolism, round-bodied) lover of Kripalu Yoga, maybe you should give a Bikram class a try. Oh, by the way, if you answered (e) on question #4—yes, we know you're Krishna incarnate. Can we get some advice from you on our yoga practice?

Yoga Journal Senior Editor Todd Jones is an (a), with lots of (b) and (d) tossed in. Come to think of it, he's had his (c) periods, too.

Winter 2000-2001

This article can be found online at http://www.yogajournal.com/newtoyoga/497_1.cfm