YOGA IS THE LATEST BALL GAME
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When we were children, we played a game called “hot potato”. This consisted of throwing-hitting a ball around a circle. The idea was that the ball was “so hot” it could not be held and had to be immediately passed to someone else like a “hot potato”. Perusing Yoga magazines and even the vernacular media, I feel the word “Yoga” has become a “hot potato”. No one want to hold it very long before passing it on to the next person. One could also extend the metaphor further. The “meaning” of the word “Yoga” has become so hot it has to change constantly as it is tossed from one mind to another. One can also mention that there is a style of Yoga called “Hot Yoga”.

A recent headline in the Times of India (April 30, 2012, pg.13) stimulated this train of thought. It read: Meditation back on the mat. (Was it ever on the mat? I thought it was on a tiger skin!)

What’s that again? The author Caren Osten Gerszberg’s lead paragraph made my Chitta go Ultra-Vritti!

Seated cross-legged on a black cushion atop a Yoga mat, I struggled to keep my eyes closed and repeat the Sanskrit Mantra in my head: Ham-Sa I am That. Outside, on Third Avenue, police sirens wailed and cars honked as I tried to sit still in a room with eight other meditation students, keeping my breath slow and steady. Just as I was about to lose the focus on my breath a soothing voice nearby chimed in: “You can hear the noises without getting attached to them. The attention comes from the inside”.

The writer explained that the trend for years was towards thinking of Yoga as body postures designed to keep fit. She noted (optimistically) that the modern trend is to include meditation in keep fit sessions. Hence, the headline: Meditation back on the Mat!

One teacher recalled the “old days, the “dark ages of Yoga” “The Yoga community in New York City has matured,”. She said. “I remember a time when we started with five minutes of meditation and a woman got annoyed and said: “I want to move. I want to sweat. Now they want to meditate”.

What is this mediation everyone is now going “ga-ga” over? Here are a few answers

“When people come in after a day of work or wake up in the morning, they are happy to shift their attention to something that’s a little more relaxing,” said Carla Stangenberg, who owns a New York Yoga studio... “Focusing on the breath and some phrases just calms you down, especially in New York City, where every-thing is just spinning around”. “Meditation is kind of like a dance class in that it’s better with other people,” said David Grotell, a student at New York Ishta Yoga class. “There’s something about the energy. It would seem that if you’re not talking to people you’re not in contact, but you somehow feel close to others when you are meditating in a way that is not obvious.”
Another “profound” comment on meditation is offered by a popular Yoga teacher Sharon Salzberg, a meditation expert and teacher in New York, began giving meditation workshops at Tibet House in the Flatiron district in 1999, about 30 people were in attendance. This winter, her class filled the room to its capacity, 135 people, with the overflow crowd finding space to sit on the floor. “Meditation is no longer seen as fringe, esoteric and weird,” Ms. Salzberg said. “Its main association is now its link as a stress-reduction modality, and not just for coping, but also for flourishing.”

But it is not just the metaphysical aspect of Yoga which has made the word Yoga “a hot potato”. There is the growing trend to create “niche” Yoga-s, individualized, creative, personalized approaches to Yoga. So now one hears of Aqua Yoga, Ci-Yo, Yoga on a Paddleboard, pure Yoga, me first Yoga (that’s a joke!) and even Nude Yoga. Some of these have an eastern philosophical resonance, such as Qigong, Shiatsu, or Zen. Others find a common physiological ground in practices like dance, Pilates, Feldenkrais, or physiotherapy. Some popular “New Yogas” include Calligraphy Yoga (CY) is a fusion of Yoga, Qigong, and Tai chi, with a three dimensional approach to movement that is inspired by Chinese calligraphy. It is a flowing style, with elements of vinyasa and a strong emphasis on coordinating breath and movement. Dancing Warrior Yoga is style that holds say it true to Yoga’s essence, but looks for means to incorporate practices that give more scope to the body’s innate capacity for movement. Zen Ki Yoga based on Zen Shiatsu, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the principle of yin and yang, macrobiotics, the five element theory, and the seasons,” It works on the 12 meridians as an acupuncturist or shiatsu practitioner would, but using movement to make the energy flow instead of needles or tactile pressure. Traditional Hatha Yoga poses are used but also movements that are nothing like them.

Yoga is “so hot” it’s hard to hold. Chill Yoga may be a good name for a return to basics! Upanishadic Vedic thought, classical approaches to techniques: mergence in a lineage; emphasis on Yama and Niyama, moral and ethical living which involves at least some austerity of life style after all, Yoga originated in Himalayan peaks and its pretty cold up there.

There is a place, however, where everything is hot! And it looks like Yoga is going there!