

Opinion: Beyond The Mat - Yoga, The Return To The Centre

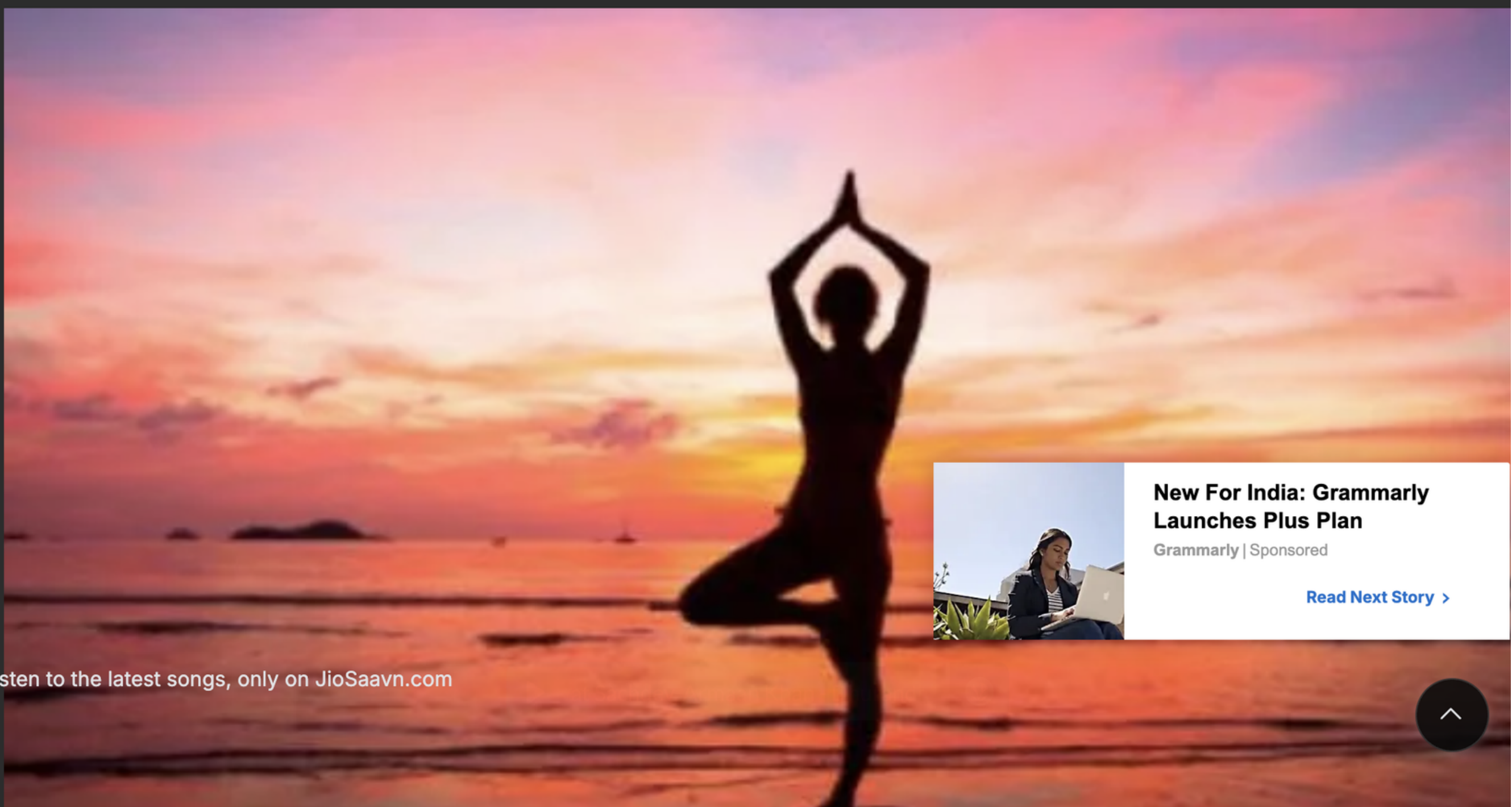


Acharya Prashant

Opinion, Updated: Oct 08, 2025 11:11 am IST

Add NDTV As A

Share



Listen to the latest songs, only on JioSaavn.com

About Us Advertise EPG Services Channels Disclaimer Feedback Investors Redressals Privacy Policy Terms & Conditions Partner Content Archive

This website follows the DNPA Code of Ethics

© Copyright NDTV Convergence Limited 2026. All rights reserved.

What is Yoga?

You hear a familiar answer: a way to stay fit, reduce stress, or maybe a sequence of well-practised postures. You see glossy images: flexible bodies on Yoga mats, people meditating with closed eyes and calm faces. The worn-out cliché rings hollow: the union of mind, body and soul.

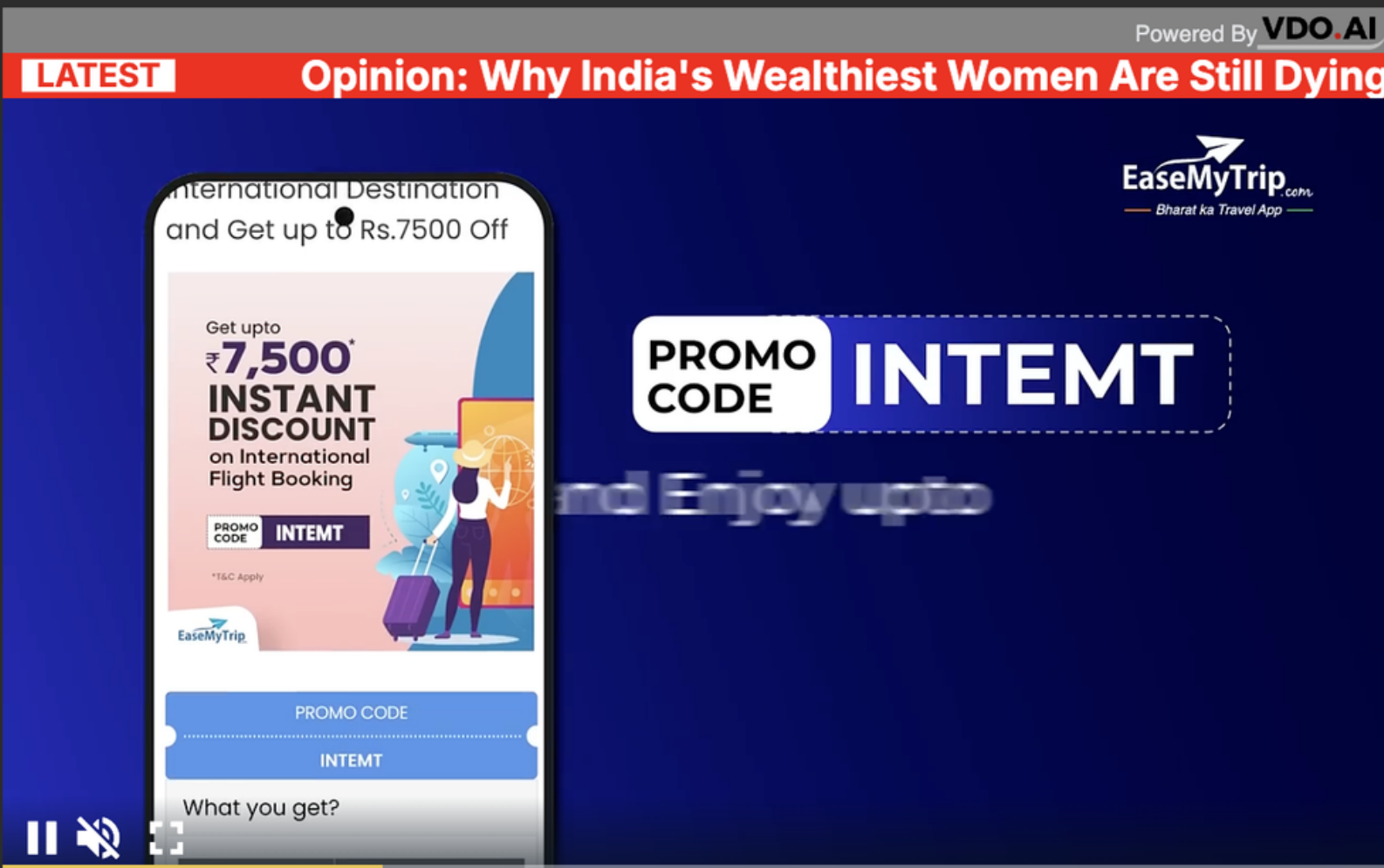
Suppose Yoga were about the physical demonstrations that we are incessantly subjected to. Why would Arjuna, one of the physically fittest and finest warriors of his time, stand helpless on the battlefield? Why would Shri Krishna, the Yogeshwar, speak at length about Yoga not to someone physically unfit or unwell, but to someone already as physically competent as Arjuna?

Yoga must mean something else.

Yoga Through Krishna: Five Foundational Verses That Define It

Let's turn to the Gita, not through interpretations, but through Shri Krishna's own words. These five verses open a different window into what Yoga truly means.

1. Renouncing attachment, and keeping the same attitude towards success and failure, you must act. This equanimity of mind is Yoga.



Krishna isn't saying, "Accept whatever happens." He's asking us to drop the idea of winning or losing altogether. Not detachment after chasing goals-but freedom from the need to chase at all.

Yoga here is about being free of the inner compulsion to chase outcomes, unaffected by inner turbulence.

2. True Yoga is when action comes from inner clarity - when actions are performed with equanimity and wisdom, they do not bind one.

This "clarity" Krishna speaks of isn't about being sharp or strategic. It's the freedom to act without the ego pulling the strings.

Even admired actions, if done with self-interest, stir up inner noise. But when action flows from detachment and understanding, it leaves no scar. Whatever quietens the ego is virtue. Whatever feeds it is sin. Yoga is when your core remains undisturbed, even as you act.

3. He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a Yogi and a true performer of all actions.

Krishna redefines action here. Most of our "doing" is reactive, compulsive, anxious movement without clarity. Though outwardly busy, we're inwardly inert. That's inaction in action.

And when something shifts quietly inside - not out of emotion, but out of understanding - that's action in inaction. Yoga begins when we're no longer taken in by appearances and start looking at what's really driving us.

4. When the renunciate, having given up all desires and resolves, is no longer attached to sense objects or actions, then he is truly said to be established in Yoga.

A yogi doesn't fight urges, he just sees through them. There's no rush to get something or become someone. He acts when there's clarity, and stays still when there is none. It's not suppression, it's the absence of inner pressure. The one who used to be driven is simply not there anymore.

5. He who is satisfied by knowledge and realisation, who is steady, self-controlled, and regards a lump of clay, a stone, and gold alike-he is a yogi.

Here is Krishna's complete image of the yogi: one whose knowledge is not academic, but alive. He is not pretending to be calm - there's nothing left in him to be agitated. He doesn't crave applause, nor does insult shatter him.

What's valuable or worthless to the world doesn't disturb his vision. His eyes don't flicker. His mind doesn't chase. That's Yoga.

So, What Is Yoga?

Yoga is not something you do - it's what remains when falsehood falls away. It is the union, through conscious ascendence, of your current (ordinary and lowly) state with your highest possibility.

You can hold a pose, repeat a chant, or study scripture. But if your actions are still driven by fear, comparison, or insecurity, it's not Yoga - it's ego in disguise. Even spirituality can become another of the ego's tactics. That's why Yoga begins in honesty:

"Why am I really doing this?"

"Is it freeing me, or feeding my image?"

Yoga is Not an Isolated Practice - It Must Pervade Your Entire Life

It's tempting to treat Yoga like a morning ritual: before coffee, before emails. But it's not a wellness hack. Yoga is a fundamental shift in perception - when you begin seeing through the false.

You can't spend your day driven by restlessness and expect peace from a few minutes of breathwork.

Yoga isn't an act of willpower. It is submission to truth by way of resolute rejection of the false. Not greater effort, but deeper honesty. That honesty must inform your conversations, decisions, and relationships. Otherwise, it remains just another ritual: comfortable, but hollow.

The Ego Can Hijack Yoga

The ego is cunning. It will use anything, even Yoga, to sustain itself.

You may start with good intent. But soon you want to "master" poses, impress others, be admired for being 'spiritual'. And Yoga becomes another project, another chase.

But Yoga isn't here to refine the ego. It is here to dissolve it. When you start asking honestly - What am I chasing? That's when the real practice begins.

The Inner Victory

Krishna uses the term 'vijitendriya', who has conquered the senses. But victory doesn't mean suppression. You don't overcome the senses by fighting them; you outgrow them.

When the ego stops craving pleasure and approval from the world, the senses stop rebelling. When the heart finds something real, the rest naturally settles. It's not denial, it's dissolution. When the false drops, nothing remains to control.

This Yoga Day, Don't Just Celebrate. Inquire.

Mass gatherings will happen. People will pose, chant, and post hashtags. But real Yoga doesn't begin in a group. It begins with honest observation.

So take a moment, not to just display stillness, but to truly understand it. Ask:

"Am I more at ease than last year?"

"Have I moved toward simplicity or complication?"

"Do my actions reflect deeper clarity?"

If the answer is yes, even hesitatingly, then something false is already dropping. Stay with it. If not, just see that clearly. That seeing itself is the beginning.

Because Yoga isn't a display. It's the quiet undoing of all that is false.

(Acharya Prashant, a modern Vedanta exegete and philosopher, is a national bestselling author, columnist, and founder of the PrashantAdvait Foundation. An IIT-IIM alumnus, he is a recipient of the OCND Award from the IIT Delhi Alumni Association for outstanding contribution to national development.)

Disclaimer: These are the personal opinions of the author