



COULD YOU (unknowingly) ALREADY BE DOING YOGA?

BY OLIVIA MEAD

Tactical combat breathing, neuromuscular efficiency, proprioception, accuracy, elimination of micro movements, awareness of self and surroundings, and quick, true judgment calls: These concepts are expected to be understood and developed from the time one is a recruit. Yet when the pressure is on to perform basic firearms drills in front of instructors, recruits will commonly display such challenges as:

- Loss of voice with command authority (higher pitched)
- Loss of dexterity in removing holstered weapons
- Loss of controlled balance (lack of grounded presence in space)

Physical and mental demands for police officer training can be comprehensively addressed and met by traditional/Eastern origin yoga methods. That traditional discipline of yoga provides proactive training for recruits in psycho-physiological resilience in order to reliably and predictably perform a protocol of techniques even when faced with high-stress situations. Traditional yoga can also be used to regulate the nervous system after action, helping

lessen the high statistics of burnout and mental and physical injuries. It was interesting that when I pointed out the elements of yoga to police recruits across the country, it was their academy instructors who noticed I was speaking the same didactic language they were using.

There was also an agreement with these instructors that no matter how skilled one is on a tactical and physical level, if the mental training isn't there, the entire drill will fall apart under pressure. Sports psychologists have recognized the power of the mind to make or break a high-stakes situation.

With correct training, higher stakes can often lead to better performance. This is the concept of "flow" or being "in the zone." Most of us have experienced it at one time or another whether the high stakes were physical, environmental or emotional: We were completely present, with an activated and heightened awareness, giving us a sharp-as-a-tack gut instinct to guide our next move. What most people don't realize is that the ability to achieve flow can be obtained through

the mindfulness training techniques in traditional yoga.

David Goggins, an ultra-marathon runner and retired Navy SEAL and USAF Tactical Control Party member, says, "It's so easy to be great nowadays, because everyone else is weak. If you have *any* mental toughness, if you have any fraction of self-discipline; the ability to not want to do it, but still do it; if you can get through to doing things that you hate to do, on the other side is greatness."

Traditional yoga training embodies all the principles of the warrior mindset, including patience, respect for others and self-awareness. Specifically, it comprises the disciplines of tactical breath work for optimal functioning of the nervous system, physical drills for strong stabilizing muscles and mobility, and built-in recovery methods to withstand the stress and trauma of life. It asks you to be still, quiet, and perform radical self-study and observation even in the most difficult and uncomfortable tasks. For many who love only physical challenges, the required stillness may be the one thing you "hate to do." But it is that very thing that leads to mental and physical triumph.



★ PROPPER®
RIGHT TO THE CORE

TACTICAL GEAR THAT MAKES SENSE

For over 50 years, Propper has made the gear front line warriors depend on:

- Tactical Pants
- Uniform Shirts & Polos
- Outerwear
- Boots
- Range bags
- Rifle cases
- Body armor

SAVE 10%
AT PROPPER.COM
WITH PROMO CODE: NTOA10

VISIT US
at the NTOA conference
booth #425

f t in y i
#wearpropper

PHYSICAL FITNESS

In order for the benefits of yoga listed above to be effective and successful in the culture of law enforcement there needs to be a re-education on what traditional yoga is, as well as an understanding of the misconceptions of yoga in the West, misconceptions brought about and perpetuated by commercial marketing and branding that equate success with some unobtainable physical ideal. To the contrary, when the “subtle bodies” such as the nervous system and mental capacity are out of shape, the physical body will suffer. The body does what the mind and nervous system command of it, whether it is awe-inspiring feats, or crumbling failures. In essence, the health of the commander (the mind) must be the priority in order for the goal of the team (the body) to be achieved. Such re-education must then be followed by a structured delivery system that formalizes the overlap of law enforcement training and traditional yoga training.

Yoga is a mindfulness-building technique. Practicing mindfulness can also be thought of as having “alert presence.” When the following three ingredients are present during a task or situation, “alert presence” is achieved:

1. Intention or goal
2. Action toward that intention (where the mind, body and nervous system are all working in coherence)
3. Awareness surrounding the action

When the stakes are high, alert presence (mindfulness) is automatic. Yet,

when high-stake situations are encountered repeatedly, such as police scenarios, that edge of alert presence can become dulled and eventually lead to poor performance. Formalized training in mindfulness can teach the brain and nervous system how to maintain control and communicate effectively for accurate assessment and decision-making in any scenario, even when the stress feels constant or overwhelming. Controlled, measured breathing techniques are the foundation for all mindfulness training including yoga, yet these same techniques are also taught in firearms training typically known as “combat breathing” or “tactical breathing.”

THE BODY DOES WHAT THE MIND AND NERVOUS SYSTEM COMMAND OF IT, WHETHER IT IS AWE-INSPIRING FEATS, OR CRUMBLING FAILURES.

When the three ingredients for alert presence are combined with formalized breathing techniques, anything can be considered mindfulness training. Shooting, cycling, lifting weights, meditation, incident command and crisis negotiation can all be practices of mindfulness if they are introduced as such. Yoga and other mindfulness training can help you get there by demonstrating that the language, concepts and purpose are the same even if the approach is different.

Yoga training for law enforcement specifically targets these similarities and

focuses on the techniques that will be crucial for the mind, body and nervous system to survive short-term incidents and long-term sustainability of a career.

Those who have already prioritized time and effort for specialized training on optimizing performance in high-stress situations may find it useful to seek out yoga classes that are job-specific for law enforcement to complement overall training. The most intriguing revelation these classes may offer is that if you are a tactical athlete, you may unknowingly already be practicing yoga and mindfulness through the drills on the range or gym. Yet if you want those elements to lead to more effective results in the field, you will need to recognize and understand the skills that job-specific yoga is providing, along with the ability to summon them with purpose. This will lead to the internal warrior mindset and the sharp edge required for ultimate human performance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olivia Mead, ERYT 500, YACEP, founder and CEO of Yoga For First Responders has been teaching yoga since 2003, and studied with master teachers around the country, as well as in Rishikesh, India. She is trained in specific yoga practices for active military and veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress. Mead adapted that work to the first responder population by working directly with the Los Angeles Fire Department and special workshops for high-ranking command staff of the Los Angeles Police Department. She continues work with LAPD’s Behavioral Sciences Services by partnering for special training events including The Smart Detective for the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Mead currently teaches YFFR classes for several fire and police departments, Iowa Army National Guard, the Army Reserves, United States Air Force Leadership School and FBI Office of Victims Assistance. She has been a guest instructor for the Chicago Police Academy, the City of Las Vegas Department of Public Safety, and the Austin Department of Public Safety. She is a member of the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association.

