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Isha yoga emphasizes breathing to elevate consciousness

Posted by

Amanda Hamon | The Ann Arbor News April 29, 2008 12:40PM

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Alan Warren | The Ann Arbor News

Michael Snodgrass, left, and his wife, Siobhan Donnelly, posture for Shambhavi Maha Mudra, a practice that is learned during the first level Isha yoga classes, at their home in Ann Arbor. An isha yoga program is being held in Ann Arbor starting Wednesday.

Think yoga exclusively involves physical activity?

Take a deep breath and think again, say local isha yoga practitioners.

While Westerners are most accustomed to hatha yoga, or the activity of posturing the body, [isha yoga](#) emphasizes kriya yoga, or energy yoga, which uses breathing exercises to elevate individual consciousness.

Isha yoga also allows practitioners to experience a deeper dimension of life, said isha yoga instructor Sheela Rajdev. And although it doesn't require agility or flexibility, isha yoga has amazingly calming properties, said Ann Arbor resident Siobhan Donnelly.

"It's more of a breathing, meditative yoga," said Donnelly, who volunteers for the non-profit Isha Foundation. "It helps you to become more meditative in your life, so if something stressful happens you can deal with it and get past it. It makes you more resilient."

Isha yoga is gaining popularity locally, said Donnelly, who is a psychotherapist with [St. Joseph Mercy Health System](#). About 2,000 people have participated in the

More isha info

A free talk tonight followed by a weeklong program tomorrow will allow Ann Arbor-area residents to learn about isha yoga.

Tonight

Sheela Rajdev, a certified isha yoga instructor, will give a free talk from 7-8:30 p.m. at the Crazy Wisdom book store on South Main Street.

Wednesday through May 6

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights from 7 p.m.-10 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; Sunday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; Monday and Tuesday 7 p.m.-10 p.m.

The program includes an introduction, discussion, meditations and isha yoga lessons. Participants are asked to complete all days of the class, although the first hour of the first day is a second free introduction talk.

Detroit-area isha programs since 1999, she said.

An isha yoga program will be held in Ann Arbor from April 30 to May 6 and will be taught by University of Michigan alumna and full-time Isha Foundation volunteer Sheela Rajdev. The program costs \$260 for 27 hours of instruction.

The Isha Foundation, with headquarters in India and Tennessee, is not religiously affiliated and is completely volunteer-run, Donnelly said.

• Where: The Michigan Information Technology Center, 1000 Oakbrook Drive, Suite 100.

• Cost: \$260.

• More information: Call 866-424-4742 or go to ishafoundation.org and search for "Ann Arbor."

Attendees will learn the shambhavi maha mudra practice of isha yoga, which doesn't require any previous experience of yoga, Rajdev, the program instructor.

The Ann Arbor isha yoga program includes group discussions, guided meditations and a transmission of the shambhavi maha mudra, which is "a step-by-step process of looking at yourself like you've never looked at yourself before," Rajdev said.

"If somebody makes use of it, they can experience everything yoga has to offer," she said.

With the information learned in the program, practitioners can make isha yoga a part of their daily lives, Rajdev said.

Donnelly said she practices isha yoga daily with her husband, University of Michigan psychology researcher and private practitioner Michael Snodgrass.

"The big thing that really bowled me over when I got involved in isha is that as I did the practices, I could reliably feel something happen," Snodgrass said. "There was absolutely no question about it."

Beside being calming, isha yoga may have some healing properties, Donnelly and Snodgrass said. Before she started doing isha yoga, Donnelly had a chronic hypo-thyroid condition that caused her fatigue and depression.

A few months after she began isha yoga, her symptoms began to clear. After eight months, doctors said her thyroid was normal and she was taken off her medication. She credits her recovery to practicing isha yoga.

A natural outcome of correctly practicing isha yoga is physical and mental well-being, as well as the relief of chronic ailments, Rajdev said.

Snodgrass, a researcher, said he is connected with an ongoing study that will examine and document the physical and psychological impacts of practicing isha yoga.

Although that study isn't complete, he said his own experiences with the practice lead him to believe it has legitimate benefits.

"I definitely think that it does help both mental and physical well-being," he said.

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