

SAMADHI

When teaching a difficult pose or sequence, Noah Maze sometimes says "Start from *samadhi*." Everybody laughs. *Samadhi* -- right.

But Noah's tongue-in-cheek joke about starting from a point of enlightenment really does capture the essence of this last limb of yoga. *Samadhi* is an ecstatic state in which everything but our true, perfect nature is stripped away. In classical philosophical terms, it is the state in which the subject becomes the object.

If you have a degree in Epistemology, this probably sums it up for you quite nicely.* For the rest of us, a little further explanation is helpful. *Samadhi* can be experienced if we have honed a serious meditation practice - *dharana* becomes *dhyana* and allows us to experience *samadhi*. *Samadhi* can also come when we are so engaged in an activity that our consciousness becomes absorbed by it -- it may be music, art, sex, yoga, dancing, cooking, running, gardening, sewing, solving quadratic equations. . . Whatever. We lose our selves in what we are doing. In other words, we become unified with the object of our attention. Yoga, literally translated, means union.

In the state of *samadhi*, we suspend our egoistic tendency to label and form opinions about the world around us. We surrender our view of the world, which is colored by our stories, our failures, and our desires. As everything we call "ours" is stripped away, we are left with untainted, pure consciousness. More simply, to quote Nicolai Bachman, "In *samadhi* the ego takes a vacation."

There are several states of *samadhi*, which depend on how we get there and our level of cognitive function once we've arrived. We'll think about those later. For now, knowing there are many paths to the same end is enough.

We've barely scratched the surface here. If you'd like to learn more, read Nicolai Bachman's *The Yoga Sutras*, Georg Feuerstein's *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga*, Rolf Gates's *Meditations from the Mat*, and B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Life*.

*The subject/object definition of *samadhi* comes right from Patanjali's yoga sutras, which were written well over a century before Descartes thought and therefore was. The philosophical discourse that ultimately led to the sutras originated with the Upanishads, which date to sometime around 800-300 BCE. Humans have been trying to sort out what we think we know for a long time now.