

yoga

JOURNAL

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for a **good**
night's sleep

happiness at every age

6 lifelong yogis
share their wisdom

"How I learned to
listen to my body"

page 59

Find your
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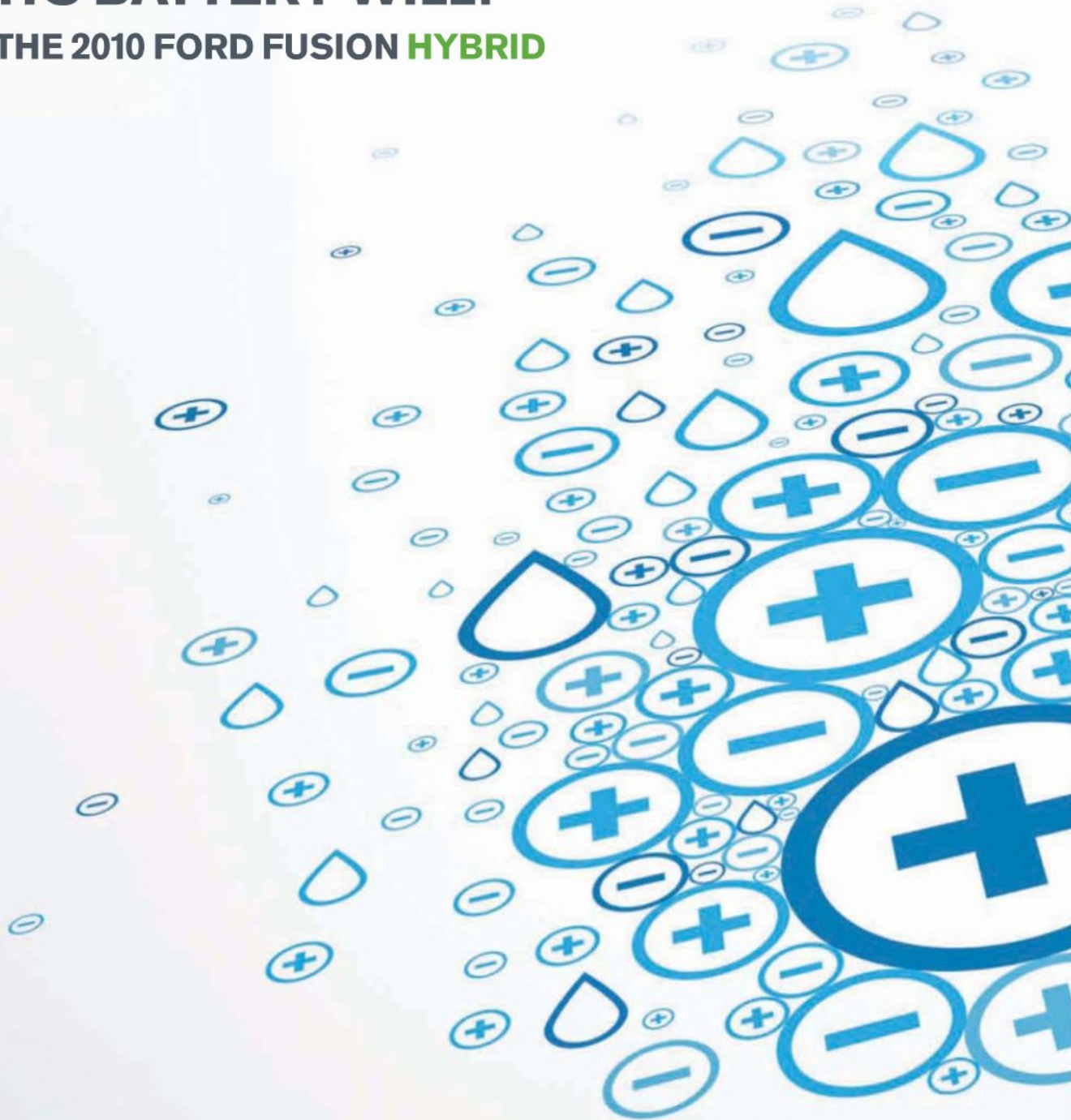
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Sianna Sherman in Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (One-Legged King Pigeon Pose), variation; stylist: Lyn Heineken; hair/makeup: France Pierson-DuShane/Artist Untied; top: Lululemon; pants: Shakti Activewear. Photographed by DAVID MARTINEZ



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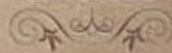
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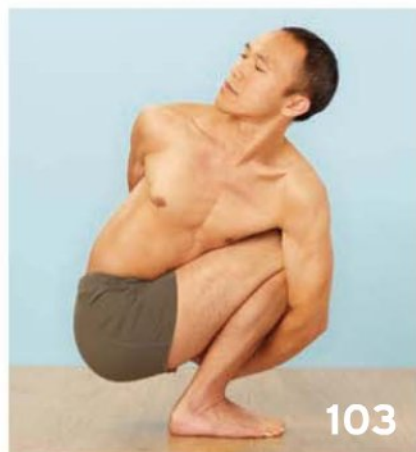
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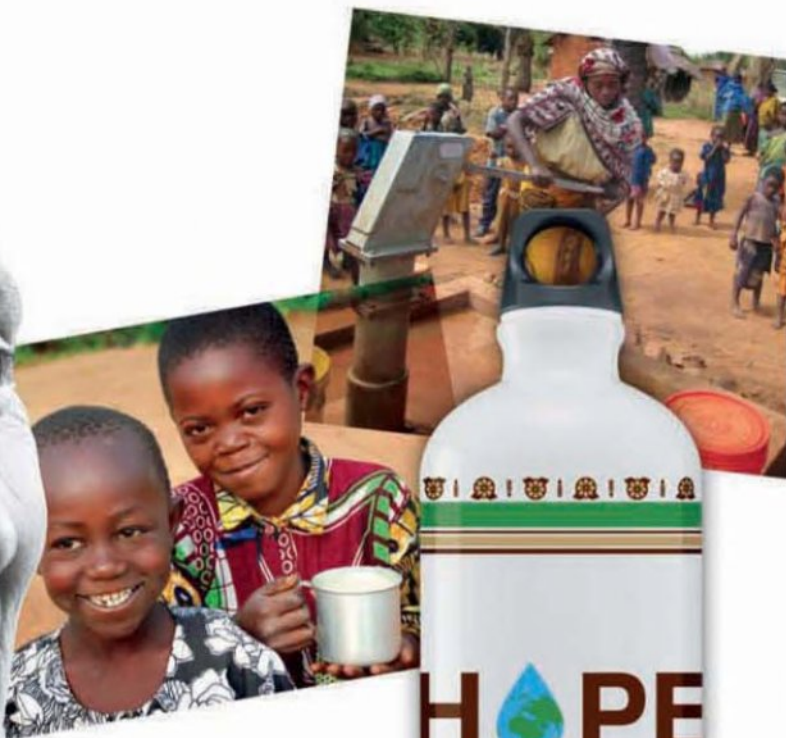


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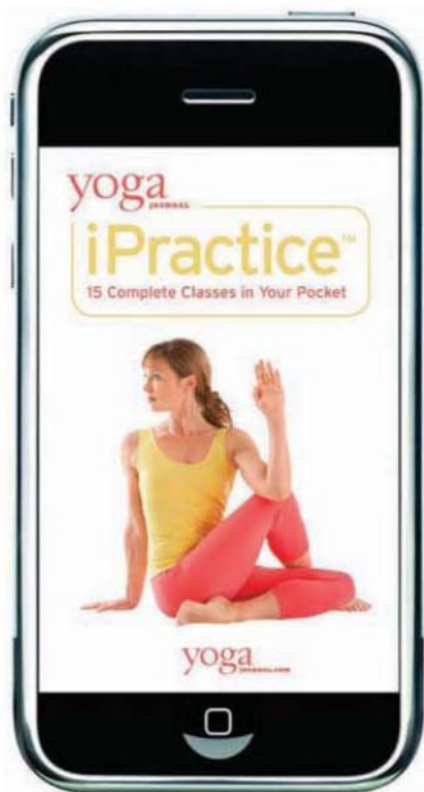


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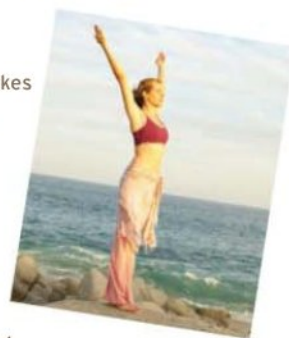


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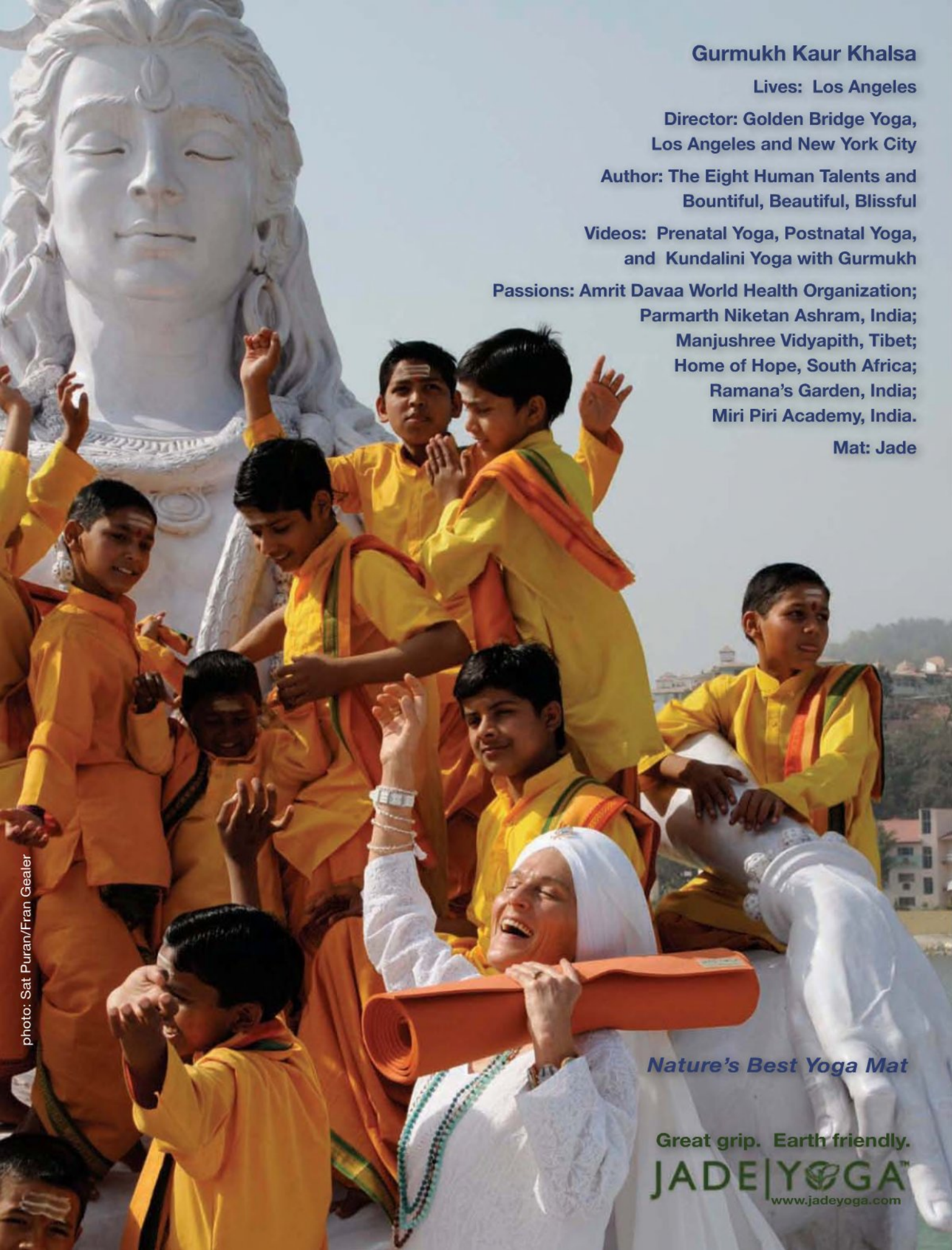


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this magic moment

Sometimes having the courage to do your part, even for just one minute, is all it takes to make the world feel a little more like home.

Driving home on a country road after a fantastic yoga class one morning, I came upon an injured bird. I had passed it before I realized what it was, and for a split second I considered just driving on. "I don't know what to do for a dying bird," I heard myself say aloud. To be present for another creature's suffering frightened me. Not knowing what to do frightened me. But I stopped.

In my head I heard the voice of Jorge, the valiant stranger who jumped out of his car and fashioned a tourniquet out of a belt to keep my nephew Gabe from bleeding to death after a terrible accident. Jorge, a courageous man with a loving heart, later told me, "Anyone can save a life if they'd just stop." I pointed out that he had medical training. "You don't have to know what to do," he said. "You just have to stop. Call 911. They'll tell you what to do."

I didn't think I'd call 911 about a bird, but I swung the car around and pulled up next to the little brown towhee. As I stepped toward the bird, a car came around the bend. I put up my hand, signaling the driver to slow down. She saw me, then the bird, and braked. "Is it alive?" she asked through her open window. "Barely," I answered. "I've got it," she said, jumping out of her car and tucking the bird into her jacket.

"Do you know what to do?" I asked. "Yes," she said with confidence, as if she rescued birds for a living. Then she leapt back into her car, let out her emergency brake, and drove off, calling out, "Thanks for stopping."

The whole experience lasted about 60 seconds, but it was a strangely magical minute. It seemed like a life lesson designed to show me the value of doing my part, even when I don't know what to do. In this case, my part was tiny, but if I hadn't stopped, the bird might well have been hit again or left to suffer, unseen by other drivers. I got a very simple taste of what Julia Butterfly Hill writes on page 25: "We don't have to know how to do something before we begin it.... Yoga teaches us to take action, to do service for the sake of service, to embody the world we want to live in." I want to live in a world where all beings are cared for; where strangers stop for each other, whether to save a life or, on easier days, to exchange a simple smile; where I am fearless and willing to take action, big or small. Fortunately, yoga offers us endless lessons in courage and moving from the heart. Enjoy the practice. ❀



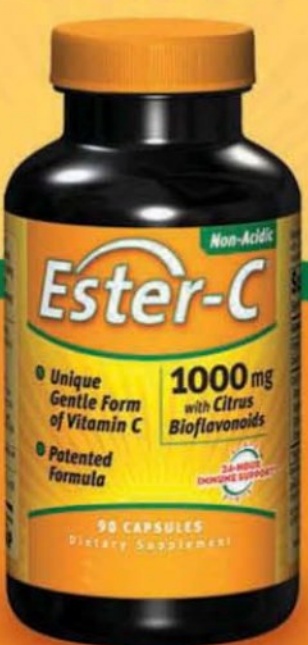
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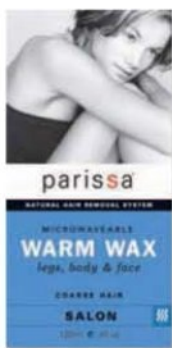
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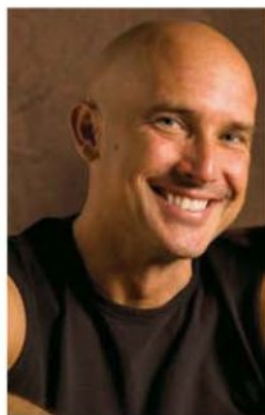
When cover model Sianna Sherman discovered yoga in 1990, she would follow up a late night of dancing in Chicago's nightclubs by in-line skating to Lake Michigan at dawn to greet the day with Sun Salutations. She ended up apprenticing with Anusara Yoga founder John Friend for four years, and became one of his first certified teachers. Today Sherman, who lives in San Francisco with her partner, Kenny Graham, teaches around the world, and is known for weaving storytelling, philosophy, and even poetry into her classes. "I practice yoga because it is truly my heart's desire," she says. "The more it becomes the art of my life, the more happy and free I feel from within."

janice kun

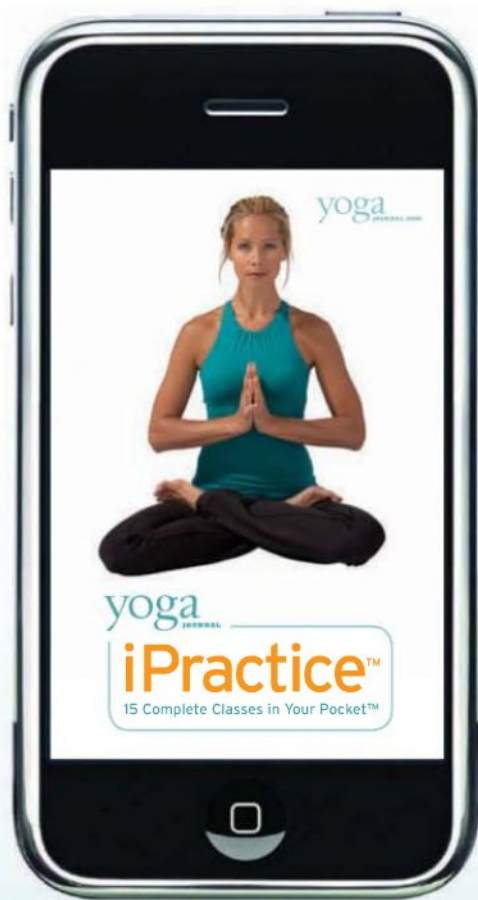
Illustrator Janice Kun jokes that when she was young, she wasn't very articulate. But where words failed her, images allowed her to say anything. So she learned to express herself through drawing, painting, collage, and later, photography. It's little wonder that this visual vocabulary became the palette that she uses in her mixed-media editorial illustrations. "I'm always thinking, 'How would I translate that visually?'" she says. For "Peace on the Inside" (page 98), Kun, who lives in Toronto, says she explored the idea of people coming out of their shells and emerging from darkness into light. "It's a very touching story," she says. "The stories that invoke emotions are my favorites."



keith kachtick



Writing "Peace on the Inside" brought back memories for Keith Kachtick. From 1998 to 2005 he was a senior instructor for the Lineage Project, a nonprofit that offers meditation and asana programs in New York City youth prisons. "I saw how coiled up with anger, frustration, and fear these kids are," he says. "I can't think of any population more in need or more deserving." Kachtick runs Dharma Yoga in Austin, Texas, and teaches yoga and meditation workshops nationwide. He has written for *Newsweek*, *Esquire*, *Texas Monthly*, and the *New York Times Magazine*, and is the author of two books on Buddhism: *Hungry Ghost* and *You Are Not Here and Other Works of Buddhist Fiction*.



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letters



Big on Love

Thank you so much for “Grow Your Love” (Aug. ’09). Previous articles involved a yoga disciple who, at some point in his or her journey, chose to walk away from a committed relationship. As a yogini and a believer in marriage, I found this distressing. Where are the yogis who can conquer their fears, open themselves to change, and remain with their partners? Marriage, like yoga, is a process of discovery that requires diligence, patience, and forgiveness. I’m delighted to see *Yoga Journal* exploring how happily committed couples use yoga in their relationships.

Jessica Young Chicago, Illinois

Natural High

I was glad to see your “Call of the Wild” (Aug. ’09). I teach a weekly hatha class near the ocean. Teaching and practicing in nature enriches and amplifies the experience. It’s joyful and satisfying to put students in Savasana and ask them to listen to the music of the birds, the sound of the waves, the wind in the trees, and to feel the stillness of the earth beneath them. And yes, we’ve had more than one ant crawling over us.

Luna Stephanson Denman Island,
British Columbia, Canada

Ab-tastic

Students often ask me how to achieve a strong core/abs, so I read Ana Forrest’s “Ab-solutely Centered” (Home Practice, Aug. ’09) with interest. It’s a nice series, but poses 2 to 6 are a problem. Hands behind the neck can compress cervical vertebrae and cause you to “cheat” by not

using your abs to come up but rather by pulling up the neck with the hands. A safer way is to clasp the hands at the wrists and place them right at C1. In addition, the elbows should be soft and heavy, and the gaze should be upward.

James Sklar Topanga Canyon, California

ANA FORREST RESPONDS: *In Forrest Yoga, students are taught to support the neck, not pull on it. Clasped hands act as a cradle for the head and neck. Instruction for the abdominal work focuses the student on working the whole abdominal wall. The intent drives the student’s attention to that area and away from using their neck or elbows to pull up. The elbow placement is shoulder-width apart. Moving the elbows up and down, to come up and release, can grind the shoulder joints; maintaining the elbows in a constant position eliminates this and the momentum for “cheating.”*

Sometimes the hands are clasped behind the neck, and sometimes behind the head and neck. I coach the hand position depending on what a student is experiencing in their neck. Students are constantly coached on how to support their necks and how to track the feeling and intensity of the abdominal work. This sort of detailed instruction is not possible in an article with a limited word count. Thanks for your concern about the precision of abdominal work.

Flex Time

Thank you for Roger Cole’s “A Mindful Stretch” (Anatomy, Aug. ’09). I don’t have a lot of natural flexibility, and gaining a good, comfortable stretch, particularly along the back of the legs, has always been a challenge. The adaptation method has

The exercise instructions and advice presented in this magazine are designed for people who are in good health and physically fit. They are not intended to substitute for medical counseling. The creators, producers, participants, and distributors of *Yoga Journal* disclaim any liability for loss or injury in connection with the exercises shown or the instruction and advice expressed herein.



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letters

been an especially good fit for me, and not only is it helping me to go deeper into poses I've always struggled with, but it's also a wonderful way to gently sync my mind and body with each other (not always a natural state for me). Bravo on a well-written, caring, and helpful article!

Rebecca Stager Corvallis, Oregon

I loved the article about the science of flexibility, "A Mindful Stretch." There are many basic physiological tools we can use to enhance our asana practice, and it was a terrific look at two of them (adaptation and anticipatory release). However, I was wondering why Cole didn't cover two of my other favorite ways to work with the stretch reflex: reciprocal inhibition and proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation. Both techniques can be used to great effect in a yoga practice.

Elizabeth Pope Cambridge, Massachusetts

Clear Skies

I just read your Guided Meditation ("Be the Sky," Aug. '09). I am a longtime yogi who has received immense benefits from the practice and who has often mindfully sat before and after. I have recently begun to practice simple seated Zen-type meditation. It has been quickly transformative. The article and three paradigms and pictures with mountain, lake, and sky brought these experiences into further clarity and union.

Sara Mason Eugene, Oregon

Love Token

Kaitlin Quistgaard's Editor's Letter ("Love Is All There Is," Aug. '09) was amazingly beautiful and touching. Thank you, Kaitlin, for such heartfelt sharing, and thank you for offering such loving wisdom. Your inspiring words are a fantastic reminder of what each and every one of us should try to acknowledge on a daily basis. My best wishes to you and your nephew. Namaste.

Melanie Cochran Nashville, Tennessee

Word to the Wise

I recently came across the Wisdom column in your magazine, and I feel I have found a new inner sanctuary for under-

standing myself and my yoga journey much better. This understanding, combined with the clarity with which Sally Kempton writes, has helped me realize many difficult concepts I have been struggling with for some time now.

Nancy Sarro Encinitas, California

Girl Gurus

It is so frustrating to have the most popular yoga magazine reinforce bogus stereotypes about male and female roles within the world of yoga. I cannot remember ever seeing a male cover model or a female teacher featured on your back page. It seems that the cover is for appearance and the back page is for gurus. You regularly feature well-known male teachers and rarely, if ever, the female ones. Please consider how your magazine affects the stereotypes within yoga and look for some of the great female gurus teaching throughout the world today and allow some men doing asana to grace your cover.

Rachel Newman Seattle, Washington

EDITOR'S NOTE *Over the past few years, we've featured more than 15 women in the YJ Interview. You'll find Sarah Powers profiled in this issue (see "The Delight of Insight," page 132). Female teachers are also well represented within these pages as the contributors of many of the practices that we offer, including the Wisdom column written by Sally Kempton (page 63), the Basics column by Marla Apt (page 70), "Yoga Sutra in Action" by Kate Holcombe (page 28), and this month's Home Practice by Claire Missingham (page 79). We also feature many male teachers demonstrating asanas (as well as offering their yoga teachings).*

CORRECTION *Due to an editing error, the article "7 Ideas to Reignite Your Passion for Practice" (Aug. '09) mistakenly indicated there wasn't a Mysore room in Sebastopol, California. The Westside Yoga Studio in Sebastopol does, in fact, hold a morning Mysore practice.*

SEND FEEDBACK TO *Letters, Yoga Journal, 475 Sansome Street, Suite 850, San Francisco, CA 94111; email: letters@yogajournal.com; fax: (415) 591-0733. Include your name, city, state, and phone number. Letters and emails may be edited for length and clarity.*



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"I was driving up I-80 when an earthquake occurred. A four-foot boulder came down the hillside and I collided with it going around 60 mph. I am lucky to be alive because I was lucky enough to buy a Subaru." -Robert P., Reno, NV.

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full embrace

To live passionately, Julia Butterfly Hill says: "Find your purpose and grow with it."

This is how we create the world we want to live in: by being bold enough to dream the impossible dream, even if it defies the status quo, or others think it is crazy. Then we have to be bold enough to live our dream in such an inspired way that others join us, saying, "That's the world I want to live in!"

How does one plan to live in a tree? I don't know. I didn't even know how to climb using ropes before I got to the base of Luna, the 1,000-year-old redwood I lived in for 738 days in the 1990s to keep it from being cut down. We live in a production-driven society rather than a purpose-driven society. We approach everything backward, looking at the result first. But we don't have to know how to do something before we begin it. People thank me for what I did, saying, "I could never have done that!" And I think, "I couldn't have either!" But passion and purpose called me to live my life in a way I didn't know was possible.

Often we feel overwhelmed and isolated and think, "I'm just one person; how can I make a real difference?" And sometimes it's easier to shut down because we're busy, and there's so much wrong in the world.

But yoga teaches us to take action, to do service for the sake of service, to embody the world we want to live in. Yoga teaches us to say, "I know the world" ➤



full embrace

> I want to live in can only come alive through me."

One of yoga's greatest lessons is reminding us of the power of union. When we are on the mat and our breath is not in union with our asana, there is struggle and disharmony, a lack of peace and joy. When breath and asana are in union, we are in that divine flow, and we can see the possibility for growth in the midst of challenges, adversity, and fear.

The same is true of our work out in the world. The greatest change happens when we are more committed to being connected than to being right. When we feel passionately about something, it is easy to become self-righteous and what I call "granolier than thou." But while we might feel good about how "right" we are, what are we changing in the world around us? Connection and union translate to peace, power, and joy in our activism, just as they do on the mat. This is why yoga is so important for a life of activism. Yoga is what makes the difference between becoming worn out and discouraged that the world is not what we want, versus being happy, lit up, and at peace, knowing we couldn't have lived any other way. It's the difference between living life as a reaction against what we don't like, and living in alignment and connection with the vision we hold for the world.

Consciousness alone won't change the world. Consciousness in action will. So uncover your purpose by asking, "Who am I supposed to be in my life?" There is a symbolic tree for every single one of us on this planet. What do you want your legacy to be? JULIA BUTTERFLY HILL

Julia Butterfly Hill is an activist, author, life coach, and co-founder of the Engage Network (engagenet.org).



passion in action

Yoga teacher and activist

Seane Corn does this journaling

exercise with students and in her Off the Mat, Into the World workshops. Try it, and ignite your fire for making positive change in the world.

- 1 Write down two or three words that someone who loves you would use to describe you. Choose the qualities you think others appreciate about you, whether it's that you're spunky, smart, playful, funny, or grounded.
- 2 Write the ways that you express those qualities in the world. Maybe it's through cooking, or teaching yoga, or knitting.
- 3 Write down your ideal vision of the world: Maybe it's "I envision a world that's free of violence" or "where everyone has organic food to eat" or "where people are open-minded."
- 4 Put it all together into a single statement: "I will use my intelligence, spunkiness, and humor, through cooking food for the people that I love, teaching, and making art, to create a world that is peaceful and free of violence and in which everyone has an open mind." Then, do it!

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tree of life

It's never too late to begin a yoga practice.

In the past five years, I have seen some wonderful changes in my body and mind. My daughter calls me

"buff." My golf game has improved dramatically. I romp freely with my grandchildren. My mental attitude has transformed, from hard-nosed and militaristic to what I think of as a more accepting kind of perfectionism. I find that my zest for life has been renewed.

Five years after I retired from the Air Force and four months before my 60th birthday, I joined a group of colleagues at a yoga studio after work. It was a Bikram Yoga class, and my first thought was, "Vietnam was hot. This is hell." But I returned the next day, as much because I hated the idea of quitting as because I was intrigued by the ideas expressed by the teacher. I stayed with it and never sweated so much while learning so deeply about myself.

Bikram Yoga was a good start, but I wanted a more inclusive approach. Thus began a search. Vinyasa proved to be interesting and challenging, because the flow was like dancing. Power Yoga almost killed me, so I left that to the 20-somethings. In Forrest Yoga classes, I discovered a fear of flying (in Handstand, of course). Finally, in Anusara Yoga I found a home. In July, I celebrated my 65th birthday, and I practice with a Level II–III Anusara class, filling in with an almost daily personal practice and classes at a recreation center near my home. I plan to start my teacher training later this year. Today, better aligned and speaking a soft, new language, I tell my friends and colleagues that one is never too old to begin a yoga practice. LEN BRADY



YOGA DIARY Share your personal stories with us at yogajournal.com/submissions.

ready when you are

*Yoga Sutra I.1
Now we undertake
the study of yoga.*

One of the fundamental principles of yoga is that you start where you are. In the first Yoga Sutra, I.1, "Atha yoga anusasana," Patanjali begins with the word *atha*. Often translated as "now," *atha* can also mean a blessing, turning point, or commitment. It implies that regardless of what we were doing before, now that we've made a decision to practice yoga, yoga can meet us and serve us right where we are, whatever our age, interest, or ability.

In addition to meeting us wherever we are, yoga is designed to keep serving us throughout our journey, as long

as we choose to take it. The last word in the sutra is *anusanam*. *Anu* can be translated as "continuous," and *sana-* indicates a practical experience.

Though yoga is designed for the mind, the practice is not merely a mental exercise. We are meant to apply the principles and incorporate the practices into our everyday lives for as long as we choose to practice.

We can begin our practice at any time, at any age, and yoga will continue to serve us until our very last breath, if we so wish. It is truly a universal practice. KATE HOLCOMBE

Yoga Sutra in Action

Kate Holcombe's teachings apply the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali to daily life. She is the founder and co-director of the Healing Yoga Foundation in San Francisco.



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jaws for life

Awareness is the first step in releasing painful tension in your jaw.

When you're stressed, chances

are you can feel it somewhere in your body. "The nervous system creates neuromuscular habits in response to stress," says yoga therapist and chiropractor Tom Alden. "Some people hold or metabolize tension in the jaw. Others hold it in the neck and shoulders, or low back." In yoga class, "Relax the jaw" is a common instruction for bringing awareness to unconscious tension in the body. But for the millions of people with temporomandibular joint disorders, or chronic tension in the jaw, mouth, and tongue, that simple instruction can seem as daunting as being asked to put a leg behind the head.

Temporomandibular joint problems, a collection of conditions characterized by pain or stiffness in the jaw and surrounding tissues, can be caused by stress or misalignment

of the teeth, and can cause headaches and painful tension in the neck and shoulders. Alden says that deepening the awareness of the tension and getting to the root of the stresses that cause it can help, but he advises that what works for one person might not be as helpful for the next. Therefore, he recommends using the following poses to explore the source of the tension and experimenting with releasing it. If a pose provides relief, you should keep doing it, but be mindful that you aren't creating additional tension. ERICA RODEFER



Supine Ujjayi Pranayama
(Victorious Breath)

Lie on your back with a bolster or thinly folded blanket under the length of your spine, adding support under your head if you need it. Practice Ujjayi Pranayama, with awareness of the sensations in the chest, neck, base of the skull, and jaw.



Simhasana
(Lion Pose)

Sit on your shins. Open the jaw and extend the tongue toward your chin as you exhale intentionally. Then, synchronize the movement of the tongue and eyes as you move them down, up, and to the sides.



Ustrasana
(Camel Pose)

As you come into Ustrasana, observe the interplay between chest, neck, base of skull, and jaw, noticing if you're holding tension in any of those areas. Open the mouth and extend the tongue. Repeat Simhasana or move on to Down Dog.



Adho Mukha Svanasana
(Downward-Facing Dog Pose)

In Downward-Facing Dog, rest your forehead on a block or bolster. Observe the interplay between chest, neck, base of skull, and jaw. Repeat Supine Ujjayi Pranayama.

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quick kimchi

MAKES ABOUT 1 GALLON

This is a variation of the most popular variety, the traditional *baechu* (Napa cabbage) kimchi. You'll need a one-gallon glass jar with a tight-fitting lid.

- 2 Napa cabbages
- 1 medium daikon radish
- ¼ cup coarse sea salt
- 1 cup water
- 4 green onions, cut into 2-inch lengths
- 7 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons minced or grated ginger
- 2 tablespoons Korean chili powder (available at Asian markets)

1 Rinse cabbages and cut crosswise into 2-inch lengths. Peel the daikon, cut lengthwise into quarters, then into pieces about ½-inch thick.

2 Dissolve salt in water. Place cabbages and daikon in a large bowl and pour the salt water over them. Let sit at least 6 hours or overnight.

3 Drain the vegetables, reserving water. Return the cabbages and daikon to the bowl and add green onions, garlic, ginger, and chili powder. Mix well. Pack the mixture into a 1-gallon glass jar. Slowly pour the reserved salty water over the vegetables to cover, leaving about 1 inch of space on top. Tightly close the jar.

4 Place the jar in a cool, dark place for 2 to 3 days, depending on how pickled you like your kimchi. Refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

Adapted with permission from Quick and Easy Korean Cooking, by Cecilia Hae-jin Lee (Chronicle Books, 2009).

probiotic powerhouse

Spicy Korean kimchi has compounds that can stave off colds and flu.

In many South Korean households, a meal without kimchi is unthinkable. Koreans eat

more than 1.5 million tons of this pickled vegetable dish annually, alongside everything from rice dishes to pizza. A staple for centuries in Korea, kimchi is becoming more widely available in American supermarkets. It's also easy to make yourself, just in time for cold and flu season.

There are as many reasons to include kimchi in your winter wellness arsenal as there are ingredients. Cabbage is loaded with vitamin C and phytonutrients. Crushed garlic, thought to have decongestant properties, contains powerful antioxidants linked to boosting the immune system and reducing infection. Vitamin-rich hot pepper is high in capsaicin, believed to kill harmful microbes. Rounding out the list, ginger is an Ayurvedic remedy for coughs and colds.

But kimchi's real cold-fighting power lies in its fermentation process, which produces high levels of beneficial bacteria, or probiotics. Our intestines are home to trillions of beneficial microbes that can be decimated by illness, stress, poor diet, and antibiotics, creating an imbalance in which harmful bacteria reign. Probiotics are said to encourage the growth of friendly microflora, restoring the balance. Though probiotics have proved most effective in treating digestive disorders and yeast infections, evidence suggests that they may boost immunity and shorten the duration of cold symptoms. Some doctors suggest that eating a few bites of probiotic food a day can be beneficial.

For kimchi to be most effective, scientists say, it should be properly fermented and eaten two to three weeks after it's made, when the lactic acid bacteria and vitamin levels peak. LAVINIA SPALDING

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paws and breathe

Yoga helps blind and visually impaired adults work better with their guide dogs.

Kandy Evers was making her way down the city sidewalk, hand on the

harness of her new guide dog, when the dog stopped short and backed up three steps, forcing Evers back. "A Prius had swung into the driveway right in front of us," Evers said. "The car was so quiet, I wouldn't have known it was there."

That evening, on the 11-acre campus of Guide Dogs for the Blind in San Rafael, California, Evers unwound from the tense traffic practice by going to yoga class. This nonprofit center, which matches blind and visually impaired adults (and some children) with guide dogs free of charge, added yoga classes to its residential program three years ago. Since then, hundreds of participants have gone through the requisite training program with greater ease.

"This is an intense learning environment," says staff nurse Helen Brackley. Participants spend up to four weeks becoming attuned to their dogs as they learn to work together as a team, something that requires extreme focus. The program can also be physically demanding. "Residents here are getting more exercise and walking faster than they're used to," Brackley says.

In an effort to reduce stress and prevent injury among the program participants, Brackley brought in Suzanne Kanner, a veteran Iyengar Yoga instructor and co-founder of the Yoga Center of Marin in nearby Corte Madera. Kanner's popular classes at Guide Dogs for the Blind have made a big difference. "We used to see maybe three cases of shin splints in a class of 25," Brackley says. "Now we get about one case every four classes."

Evers, who lost her sight two years ago and is a recent graduate of the program, found that besides offering stress relief, yoga helped ease the transition to working with a guide dog by conditioning the body. "Yoga definitely helps strengthen and relax all the muscles you use daily with the dog," she says.

While Kanner adapts the class for her vision-impaired students by choosing poses that can be done safely and announcing her intentions before laying a guiding hand on a student, she says her classes at Guide Dogs for the Blind, with their emphasis on awareness and alignment, are little different from those she teaches to sighted students. "Yoga requires keen concentration and strength as well as flexibility, and it brings balance, poise, and a deep sense of inner tranquility," Kanner says. "Sighted or blind, this is what students are gaining from their practice." ELLEN KARREL



Program participants bond with their new canine friends at Guide Dogs for the Blind's San Rafael, California, campus.



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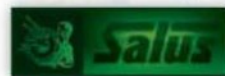
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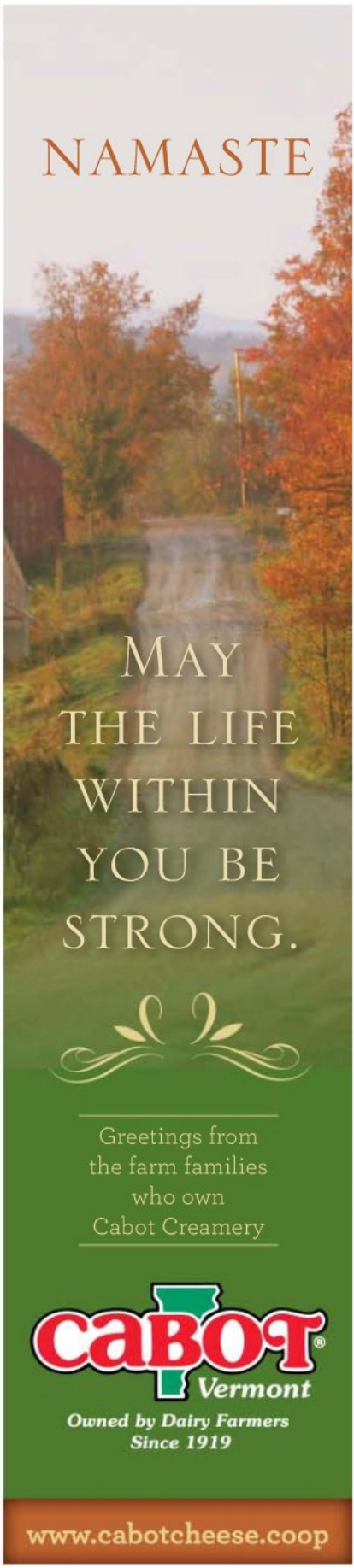
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breakfast of yogis

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It's **early morning**, and the nutty aroma of hot cereal wafts through Ayurvedic doctor David Frawley's kitchen in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he's director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies. He drinks a cup of soothing chai, then enjoys a traditional Indian breakfast of *uppma*, or toasted farina. Cooked with vibrant orange carrots and bright green peas, the cereal is flavored with ghee (clarified butter) and spices like cumin, ginger, and turmeric. "This kind of breakfast **keeps my mind clear** and gives me an even release of energy," he says. But

BREAKFAST TEA AND
COCONUT OATMEAL PORRIDGE
(RECIPES ON PAGE 46)



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eating wisely

before Frawley eats his breakfast, he typically follows various morning rituals to stimulate his *agni* (digestive fires): rinsing his sinuses with a neti pot, scraping his tongue to remove *ama* or toxic buildup, practicing pranayama (yogic breathwork) and a few gentle yoga postures, and drinking spiced breakfast tea. According to Ayurveda (India's 5,000-year-old approach to health), *agni* is the metabolic energy that helps the body assimilate

If *agni* is healthy, you have tremendous energy throughout the day.

nutrients, eliminate what it doesn't need, generate warmth, and transform physical matter into the subtler forms of energy that the body requires for vitality.

At the start of the day, sometime between 6 and 10 a.m., *agni* is quite low, and it's not easy for most bodies to digest a big breakfast. Ayurvedic practitioners recommend an easily digestible meal that nourishes the body by giving it the fuel it needs, without overwhelming it.

"If you eat breakfast according to Ayurvedic principles, you will have more energy throughout the day," says Marc Halpern, founder and director of the California College of Ayurveda, located in Grass Valley, California. "As a result, you'll be more productive at work and have healthier relationships."

BURN BRIGHT

Think of it this way: Your metabolism is like a wood-burning furnace that needs careful tending so it can heat the house (your whole body) and support all of the activities going on inside. In the morning, there may be warm embers left over from the previous day, but to have a healthy fire, you need to gently rekindle the flame.

Haphazardly throwing a lot of fuel (like a rich piece of quiche) into your digestive furnace upon awakening could suffocate the embers. And filling it with quick-burning food (like a sweet pastry) will make it burn furiously for a bit, but then

the flames will die out. Without a strong fire, your body might make it through the day, but it's likely to surge and crash, or to tap into its precious fuel reserves, which can leave you feeling, well, burned out.

"If *agni* is healthy, you have tremendous energy throughout the day," says Ayurvedic physician Vasant Lad, founder of the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "But if *agni* is not healthy, you cannot go so fast. The energy is *agni*, and *agni* is energy."

So, in addition to self-care morning rituals that aim to ignite *agni*, Frawley follows some basic Ayurvedic dietary guidelines to ensure that his first meal of the day gently stokes his fires throughout the morning. This means eating warm, well-spiced, easy-to-digest foods, with an emphasis on hot cereals and cooked fruits, rather than cold cereals and raw fruits or heavy meals like the classic American bacon and fried eggs with toast and a plate of hash browns. The Ayurvedic approach both feeds the body and helps the mind achieve a sharp but calm sense of focus.

HOT STUFF

Our tendency to go for sugary cold cereals or a pastry eaten in haste before work doesn't do much for creating sustained, even energy. "These foods are of very low quality," Halpern says. "They provide quick energy, but it will not last." And cold, uncooked milk and refined sugar are considered to have "cooling" properties, acting like buckets of water thrown over the embers of your digestive fires.

Ayurvedic theory suggests that slowly building digestive heat will help you feel balanced all morning and prepare your body to digest a complex meal by lunchtime. "*Agni's* strength follows the path of the sun," says Faith Stone, former head cook at the Shoshoni Yoga Retreat in Rollinsville, Colorado, and co-author of the cookbook *Yoga Kitchen*.

"In the morning, it's still heating up. At noon, when the sun is highest, is when *agni* is the strongest. In the evening, it's cooling down. A hot breakfast as the first meal of the day decreases the disturbance

of waking from deep sleep and respects the quieted agni and the newly awakened digestive system.” Cooking your breakfast, says Stone, spares your agni some of the work of breaking down the food.

A balancing morning meal might consist of stewed apples, pears, and dates, stirred into hot cereal cooked with some warming spices. “Warming spices are those that stoke agni and make it stronger,” Halpern says. “They increase metabolism.” Examples are allspice, basil, black pepper, cardamom, cayenne, cinnamon, cloves, fenugreek, fresh ginger, green chili, mustard, nutmeg, rock salt, rosemary, and turmeric. (On the flip side, says Halpern, spices like coriander, fennel, and mint can mildly cool down agni.)

Spices are adjusted according to the dominant *dosha* (life energy) in your *prakriti* (constitution), says Stone. Ayurveda takes a highly individualized approach to eating, so it can be helpful to take into account your dominant dosha and modify your meal accordingly. (To learn about your constitution, visit yogajournal.com/prakritiquiz.)

For slow-moving *kapha*, Stone suggests adding warming spices such as chili or hing (asafoetida) to get you going; for airy *vata*, she recommends cumin seeds with grounding foods like cooked milk and yogurt; and for fiery *pitta*, she offers oatmeal with cardamom.

It's easy to make a balancing breakfast by simply cooking grains with spices and adding cooked fruits or veggies. A staple in some yoga centers is a porridge made of millet or oats, boiled with chopped onions, tomatoes, dates, green chilies, and fresh ginger, plus shredded coconut, ghee, cumin, and fenugreek.

For something simpler, try the Coconut Oatmeal Porridge on page 46. Or consider a more unusual breakfast of mashed

WHEN TO BREAK THE FAST

Some Ayurvedic practitioners such as Vasant Lad suggest that if you're not hungry, your agni isn't ready for food yet, so it's best to delay or even skip breakfast until your agni fires up.



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BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

Makes 4-6 servings

- 2 pounds butternut squash, peeled and cut into chunks
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 cup sour cream (low-fat or regular)
- ½ cup **Cabot Extra Sharp Cheddar**, grated (about 4 ounces)
- 2 Tablespoons salted butter
- ¼ teaspoon ground red pepper (cayenne)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon sugar (optional)
- Several chives, cut into 1-inch pieces

1. In large saucepan, combine squash and broth. Bring to boil, then reduce heat to medium. Simmer until squash is very tender, about 20 minutes.
2. Remove from heat and let stand until slightly cooled; puree in batches in blender.
3. Return puree to saucepan and place over medium-low heat. Stir in sour cream, cheddar, butter and red pepper.

- Season with salt and pepper.
4. Stir until heated through (do not allow to boil). Taste soup, adding sugar if squash was not particularly sweet. Serve sprinkled with chives.

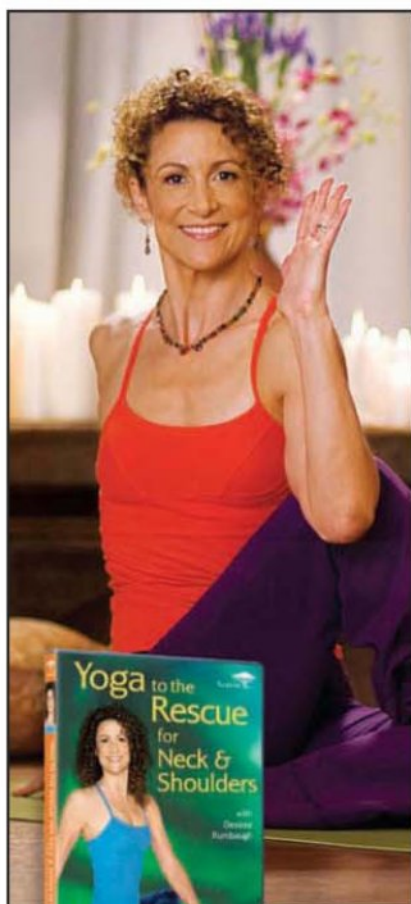
Recipe courtesy of Chef Jon Ashton

Nutrition Analysis

Calories 183, Total Fat 12g, Saturated Fat 6g,
Sodium 1073mg, Carbohydrates 14g,
Dietary Fiber <1g, Protein 6g, Calcium 110mg



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eating wisely

sweet potatoes with cinnamon or a soup of lentils, winter squash, and cumin. And though it might take some getting used to, especially if your current breakfast is something you throw in the toaster and eat in the car on the way to work, try starting your day with well-cooked vegetables like carrots, peas, or broccoli as an accompaniment to a spiced hot cereal like Cream of Wheat.

Though lighter fare is generally on the Ayurvedic breakfast menu, it's important to gauge how much energy you'll truly need. "If you will be doing more physical labor, you'll need more of a strong breakfast," Frawley says. "If you are going to sit in an office in front of a computer, a heavy breakfast will set you back."

FIRE STARTERS

To give your agni a proper start to the day, try a few Ayurvedic morning practices 30 minutes before your meal: Drink an herbal tea made of cinnamon, clove, ginger, and black pepper; do a few minutes of invigorating pranayama; get your

body moving with a bit of yoga or walking. Not only will these simple acts start to move toxins out of your body and activate your agni, they'll also awaken your hunger. "If you're hungry, your digestive fire is active," says Halpern. This is your body's way of telling you it's ready to eat.

With your appetite awakened and digestive fires strong, it's time to say grace, which serves the dual purpose of focusing your attention on the food in front of you and relaxing the body, Halpern says. "A relaxed body digests food better than one that is tense and distracted." Another tip for supporting healthy agni in the morning is to refrain from drinking anything during the meal, which is thought to douse your internal fires.

Most important, eat slowly and savor the wonderful breakfast before you. Enjoy each delicious bite, knowing there's no better way to fire up your body's furnace and start the day right. ❖

Nora Isaacs (noraaisaacs.com) is a freelance writer in San Francisco.



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Apple Spice Muffins

MAKES 12 MUFFINS

To give these muffins more warming qualities, add a teaspoon of chopped fresh ginger and/or ¼ teaspoon ground cardamom and cloves to step 3.

- 2 cups whole-wheat pastry flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk or buttermilk
- ⅔ cup Sucanat or other natural sugar
- 2 eggs
- 6 tablespoons ghee, melted
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 peeled fresh apples or pears (about 1½ cups), cut into bite-size chunks
- 2 pitted dates, chopped (optional)
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

- 1 Preheat oven to 375°. Oil 12 muffin tins or line the tins with muffin cups.
- 2 Combine the flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.
- 3 In a separate bowl, whisk together the milk, Sucanat, eggs, ghee, and vanilla extract. Pour into the dry ingredients and mix gently until evenly moistened.
- 4 In a third bowl, combine the fruit, maple syrup, and cinnamon.
- 5 Spoon muffin batter into the prepared muffin tins, filling them only halfway. Add a heaping tablespoon of the fruit mixture to each cup, and then top with the remaining batter. Bake for 30 minutes, or until browned on top.

Adapted with permission from Yoga Kitchen, by Faith Stone and Rachael Guidry (Book Publishing Company, 2004).



FRESH MUFFINS
MADE WITH
WARMING SPICES
AND COOKED FRUIT

Coconut Oatmeal Porridge

MAKES 2 SERVINGS

The boiled soy milk in this hot cereal (pictured on page 41) is comforting to the body, says Mother Maya (Maya Tiwari), and increases your ability to eliminate toxins in the morning.

- ¼ cup shredded unsweetened coconut (fresh or dried)
- 1 cup soy milk
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup rolled oats
- Pinch of cinnamon
- Pinch of rock salt
- Maple syrup to taste (optional)

- 1 Roast the shredded coconut in a skillet over medium heat until the edges begin to brown.
- 2 In a saucepan, bring the milk and water to boil.
- 3 Add the oats and roasted coconut to the liquid. Simmer for 5 minutes; add

the cinnamon and salt.

- 4 Sweeten with maple syrup if desired.

Reprinted with permission from Ayurveda: A Life of Balance, by Maya Tiwari (Healing Arts Press, 1995).

Breakfast Tea

MAKES 1 SERVING

Vasant Lad says this tea is good for all constitutions, but someone with a pitta-dominant dosha might add ¼ cup of milk.

- 1 cup water
- ½ teaspoon fresh ginger, grated
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 pinch cardamom

- 1 Boil the water and add the spices. Cover, turn off the heat, and let sit for a few minutes.

Reprinted with permission from Ayurvedic Cooking for Self-Healing, by Usha Lad and Vasant Lad (Ayurvedic Press, 2006).

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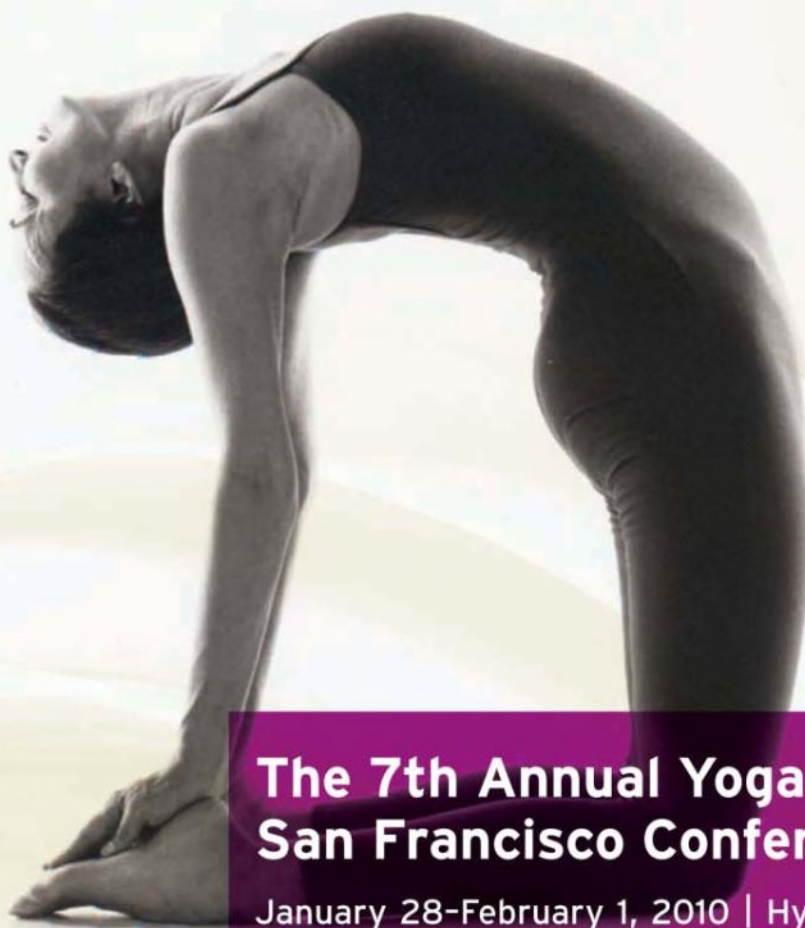
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mantra

morning prayer



Karagre vasate Lakshmi
Kara-madhye Saraswati
Kara-mule sthita Gauri
Prabhate kara-darshanam

On the tip of my fingers is prosperity and abundance (goddess Lakshmi); in the middle of my hand is eloquence and learning (goddess Saraswati); at the base of my hand is divine power (goddess Gauri or Parvati). In the morning, a vision of energy in my hands.

The repetition of this mantra is an ancient morning practice in India, and saying it first thing in the morning sets an elevated tone for the day. It asks you to think of all of the actions you will perform as the work of God done through your hands. Upon awakening, after placing your feet on the floor, look at your hands and say this verse. Afterward, run your hands lightly over your face to awaken it. Then stand and begin your daily practice.

This mantra acknowledges the divine powers of the different forms of the Goddess that are present in your being and that operate (in part) through your hands. By invoking Lakshmi, you honor your capacity to manifest abundance and beauty in your life. By invoking Saraswati, you enhance your

capacity to speak and write eloquently. By invoking Gauri, another name for the great goddess, the *shakti* at the root of your whole being, you honor the Source of all.

Honoring the power that exists within you means first seeing your life as an expression of divine grace. This mantra helps you to offer all your actions back to their divine source. ❀

Interpreted by Christopher D. Wallis, Sanskrit scholar.

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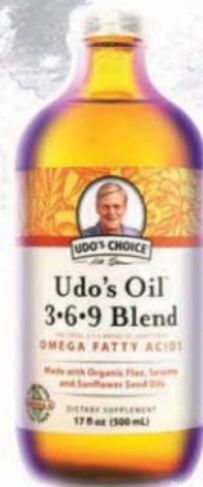
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sweet dreams

Get a good night's sleep by retiring old habits and starting a gentle bedtime yoga practice.

For years Jamie Moscovitz lay awake in bed every night, often for hours. There, in the dark, her mind would spin. She cut out caffeine and even took sleeping pills to see if that would ease her insomnia, but neither remedied the problem.

Then, about a year ago, Moscovitz, who lives in New York City, attended a workshop offered by yoga-for-sleep specialist Ann Dyer. Participants were asked to examine their daily exercise and dietary patterns that might affect sleep and to describe how they typically spent the last few hours of the day. Moscovitz emerged with a new understanding of how her habits—such as staying up late working on the computer or falling asleep in front of the television—were fueling her sleeplessness. And she discovered something that sleep scientists have verified: Insomnia can be managed, even cured, with behavioral changes and relaxation techniques such as yoga.

The key to healing sleep disorders, Dyer says, is to cultivate healthy habits. “Regularity and rhythm are friends to sleep,” she explains. “Going to sleep and waking up at the same time each day, eating at the same time each day, doing yoga at the same time each day. The more rhythmic your life is, and the less scattershot it is, the easier it is to sleep well.”

Moscovitz now follows some steadfast rules. At 9 p.m., she turns off the computer and, for the next hour, focuses only on relaxation, steering clear of the TV and telephone. She heads to bed at the same



time every night and practices a yoga sequence designed to calm the nervous system and turn her attention inward. (Based on a sequence Dyer teaches, it includes Legs-up-the-Wall Pose and a series of gentle, supported forward bends.) At last, Moscovitz is sleeping through the night.

SLEEP MEDICINE

According to the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health, 10 to 15 percent of American adults suffer from chronic insomnia, which is defined

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as sleeplessness lasting for more than a month. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of the U.S. population experiences some form of insomnia each year, most commonly chronic-intermittent insomnia, in which periods (days or weeks) of insomnia alternate with periods of good rest.

Researchers have discovered that behavioral changes, including relaxation techniques designed to increase body-mind awareness, can be a balm for restless sleepers. Unfortunately, sleep medicine is not extensively taught in medical schools, says Sat Bir Khalsa, an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a yoga and sleep disorders researcher at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Khalsa is troubled by the tendency of many doctors to prescribe insomnia medication. "Drugs may not treat the underlying problem; when people stop taking pills, often the insomnia returns," Khalsa says. "Pills have their place in certain situations, but behavioral treatment is often a permanent fix."

WHAT'S KEEPING YOU UP?

Many roads lead to insomnia. Often the cause is obvious, such as the stress brought on from relationship woes or the loss of a job. Stimulants like caffeine and some medications can also bring about sleeplessness. And other factors, such as diet, lifestyle, room temperature, even bedding, can contribute as well. But sometimes the causes of a person's insomnia are unclear. In those cases, researchers and doctors don't fully understand why something as natural as sleeping can become so elusive.

During a bout of chronic insomnia, the nervous, endocrine, and cognitive systems are in a high state of arousal. People typically experience this in the form of whirling thoughts, short or uneven breathing, and muscle tension. Sometimes you can fall asleep even with those symptoms, but after a few hours, when the extreme,

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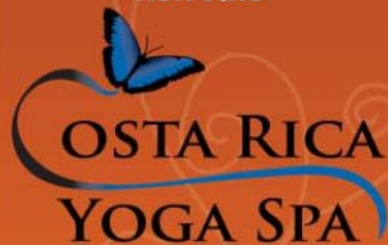
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well being

ease into sleep

Whether you experience chronic or intermittent insomnia, a program of relaxing asana and easy meditation performed at bedtime can help you slow down mind and body and ease the transition into slumber, says yoga teacher and sleep scientist Roger Cole.

Cole suggests starting in Salamba Paschimottanasana (Supported Seated Forward Bend). Sit on several folded blankets or a bolster, facing a chair. Place a blanket or other padding on the chair, and lean forward, resting your head and arms on the seat. Stay there for three to five minutes. If you have time, experiment with other supported forward bends (seated or standing), with your head resting on a chair, block, or pillow. Or fold over your hips in Balasana (Child's Pose), with your head supported.

head-nodding exhaustion wears off, you wake up. The response is physiological—if you're tense and your body is aroused, it's difficult for the parasympathetic nervous system, which regulates relaxation, to override the stress-reactive sympathetic nervous system.

To address this, Roger Cole, a sleep research scientist and Iyengar Yoga teacher in Del Mar, California, designed a program that uses yoga and behavioral changes to help train the body to sleep.

"If you are going to fall asleep, you have to set up local conditions for sleep," says Cole, who also writes *Yoga Journal's* Anatomy column (see page 111). This means keeping your sleeping space adequately dark and comfortable, and your skin warm but your core cool. Also, you must feel calm. Anxiety activates the amygdala, a part of the brain involved with the regulation of emotions. And that can signal other parts of the brain to trigger physical stress reactions, such as a racing heart, high blood pressure, and tense muscles,

Next, slowly move into supported Viparita Karani (Legs-up-the-Wall Pose), using a folded blanket or two to support your pelvis and sacrum; let the tailbone hang off the edge of the blanket. Relax here for 10 to 20 minutes.

Before lying down to sleep, sit cross-legged in Sukhasana (Easy Pose), with your pelvis elevated on one or more folded blankets and your back against a wall, spine long, and shoulders relaxed. Allow your thoughts to arise and just watch them float by. When you notice that you've begun to follow a thought, simply notice that this has happened. This thought-watching becomes your new thought to watch, without judgment. Start with five minutes and try sitting for longer periods over time.

And then, when it's time to sleep, cover your eyes with something that provides both darkness and very gentle pressure, like an eye bag.

Cole says. This activation keeps your internal systems buzzing and, literally, warm. For the body's internal temperature to cool enough to encourage rest, brain activity has to slow down. That's where behavioral training comes in.

BASIC TRAINING

Cole recommends that people with insomnia do a vigorous yoga practice that builds up a sweat in the late afternoon or early evening. Vigorous exercise heats the body. But from the time the exercise is finished until bedtime, the body gradually loses heat. By bedtime, the core has cooled but the skin is still warm, promoting the ideal body-temperature balance to encourage sleep.

Like Dyer, Cole recommends taking a few minutes right before bed to do a gentle yoga sequence designed specifically for sleep and meditation to calm the mind and help ease the transition to slumber. For some chronic insomniacs, Cole also advises a program of sleep restriction

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well being

combined with cognitive therapy, which helps calm the overstimulated amygdala and trains the brain to associate bed with restful sleep.

SCHEDULED TO SLEEP

The program requires estimating how much time you spend actually sleeping each night, as opposed to the time you spend tossing, turning, and, perhaps, praying for sleep. Stay in bed only for that amount of time, sticking to a strict schedule and refraining from napping during the day. If, for example, you've managed to sleep no more than four hours a night for a while, your assigned sleep time is four hours. If you wake up during this time and can't get back to sleep quickly, you get out of bed and do something relaxing in another room. When you feel ready to sleep again, head back to bed, but only until your assigned wake-up time, no matter how little sleep you've had.

If you are that four-hour sleeper and your assigned bedtime is 11 p.m., then you'll get up at 3 a.m. Keep this up for a few days and you'll retrain your body to sleep until your designated time. Once you've slept solidly for three or four nights in a row, you can gradually increase those designated sleep hours as needed. Cole says that people who stick to this program experience insomnia relief within a couple of weeks and usually see lasting results after about six weeks.

Others have remedied their sleep troubles with less extreme measures, by breaking sleep-robbing habits and forming more healthful ones. Moscovitz says she immediately felt the effects of the simple lifestyle changes she made; she began to feel less anxious, and her body felt more open and relaxed. And if she did wake up, she didn't worry as much. "I remember the first time I went to bed at 10 p.m. and slept through to 5 a.m. I felt so proud of myself!"

Keeping to her new schedule isn't always easy, but Moscovitz knows it holds the cure for her insomnia. "If I don't stick with it, I really feel the difference." ❀

Writer Rachel Brabinsky is based in San Francisco, California.



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lightness of being

*In a quest to be slim, one woman
loses more than mere pounds
and, through yoga, finds herself.*

I'm lying on the floor of a hotel on the island of Roatan, Honduras. We're just finishing class and have taken Savasana.

Moments earlier, standing in Warrior II, I looked out over my fingertips at the Caribbean. Our teacher urged us to listen to our bodies. I thought, "Are you kidding? Listen to my body? This body cannot possibly be trusted."

The thought surprised me. Wasn't I finished with all that? I had accomplished something many would consider extraordinary: I lost 85 pounds, weight that I'd gained throughout my 20s and early 30s. I'd been well equipped to survive any potential famine but was unable to fit into airplane seats, shop in regular clothing stores, or walk up a slight incline without being winded.

One day, I'd had enough. I signed up for a popular weight-loss plan and learned that to lose weight I just needed to consume fewer calories than my body burned. Over two years, I tracked what I ate, tracked my exercise, and tracked my weight. It was an analytical process, not an intuitive one. The last thing I did was listen to my body, which wanted less extreme treatment.

As I settled into that Savasana, I realized, with great sadness, I still hated my body. It looked fine. But I hated it because I couldn't trust it—or myself.

NO LIMITS

When I lost all that weight, my entire life changed. It changed for the better, in the expected ways: new clothes, compliments galore, my doctor beaming during physical exams. But it wasn't all rosy. Being overweight had given me an excuse to avoid trying new things

and to stay within a limited comfort zone. Post-weight loss, those boundaries disappeared, as did my sense of safety.

I backpacked through the Wyoming wilderness, strapped myself on a rainforest zip-line, skied in Aspen. It was exciting and fun, but honestly, I was often terrified. Although every part of my body was tense leading up to these activities—my brows were knotted, my teeth were clenched, my stomach churning—I wouldn't allow myself to back away from a challenge. I didn't know what my physical limits were, so I didn't set any. In my quest to be



reflection

the new-and-improved me, I put myself in scary and uncomfortable situations. When I ran into people whom I hadn't seen in a long time, they'd ask, "Don't you feel great?" I'd always say yes; it seemed impolite to be more honest and say, "I wake up each morning to a person I don't really recognize in the mirror, living an unfamiliar life."

LEARNING TO SHAPE SHIFT

All this led me to Honduras and a week-long yoga retreat at an eco-lodge called Hacienda San Lucas, in Copán Ruinas. It was to be a fusion of Mayan philosophy and Kripalu Yoga, created by yoga teacher Leah Glatz and Aum Rak, a Mayan shaman. The Mayans believed that a person could live many lives within one lifetime, which seemed to mirror my experience. I figured the yoga would provide a familiar framework for understanding this body-mind transformation. I hoped the retreat would help me refresh my spirit and come to terms with the unexpected ways my life had changed as I became lighter.

Each morning we gathered under the roof of Gaia, an open-air yoga-practice pavilion. After the final Savasana, the warm-hearted Aum Rak led our meditation. In the afternoon we'd have excursions. In the evening we'd return for dinner, then retire early to rest and reflect.

On the first day, Leah led us through gentle poses to help us recover from the rigors of travel. As we descended into Sphinx Pose, Leah encouraged us to draw our bellies up toward our backs. Her instruction meant a tiny little move, yet this slight adjustment was new for me. The shift meant that the energy of the posture ran through my entire body in a completely different way than it did when I usually practiced the pose. One small change can lead to a whole new experience, I thought.

After practice, I retreated to a hammock overlooking lilac bushes, with a glass of iced hibiscus tea and a notebook to reflect on that insight. I had made major changes in my body while expecting the rest of my life to stay the same.

Or at least, expecting all the changes to be for the better.

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

But losing 85 pounds and expecting that I'd stay the same in all other ways, that nothing would be difficult again? Impossible. I know that the first step toward *santosha*, or contentment, is to clearly see and accept the reality of your life as it is in the moment. I had to accept that the physical change I'd made created shifts in other areas.

A clap of thunder interrupted my thoughts. I looked up to see dark rain clouds gathering over the mountain. I went to my room and sat cross-legged on the bed to continue my journaling as the afternoon storm clattered down. The next step, I realized, was that I needed to admit to myself how those changes really felt—not how I thought they should feel.

My lighter self was making decisions based on how I thought a slim person should behave. A thin, fit person would want adventure, so I had gone for that,

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without giving credence to my own feelings of fear or need for balance. I'd lost weight by adopting the eating and exercise patterns of a healthier person. But I'd overextended the lesson.

No wonder I didn't trust myself anymore. I'd gotten so good at playing my new role as a thin woman that I was ignoring my true feelings, dismissing them as relics of a past I'd rather forget. But even after I'd shed extra weight, my lighter self had anxieties about new physical challenges. I was ignoring my instincts.

One morning, toward the end of the retreat, we entered a quiet corner of the Mayan ruins. Aum Rak conducted a smudging ceremony and asked us to honor the lives and the spirits of those who had once lived on that very spot. Afterward, Leah led us through a series of yoga postures that looked like the poses struck by the figures carved on the stelae, or stone pillars, in the ruins.

In meditations, Aum Rak had urged us to let go of our anger and to practice forgiveness. "Please forgive me," she asked

us to say to ourselves. And then, "I forgive you." I made myself say the words each day, but I didn't mean them. I was still mad at myself, angry that in my quest to lose weight I hadn't magically created a totally perfect life. I realized I was mad at myself for "wasting" time being heavy and that part of my quest for adventure was a desire to make up for all that "lost" time.

"But darling," Aum Rak told me, "everything happens just as it's supposed to." While I saw my time "before" as a mistake, she saw it otherwise. I had to have that experience for my own development. And until I dropped my anger about it, I'd never trust myself—you can't trust someone you're angry with.

Her teaching started to click. Maybe it came from standing on those ancient ruins, where thousands of lives, with all their dramas, had played out. Maybe it came from realizing that an entire civilization had come and gone, but I could still learn from the rich traditions it had left behind. I don't know. But as we moved

through our poses that day, I understood that I could choose to be angry at myself, choose to let that anger suppress my true emotions so I'd have no choice but to continue feeling untrustworthy. Or I could choose to stop, listen to my true reactions

I could choose to listen to my true reactions...and to trust myself again.

to the very real changes in my life, and trust myself again. I realized I was ready to embrace change.

We stood in Mountain Pose, hands in prayer position, and I found myself thinking, "I forgive you." I folded into a forward bend. "Let the suffering, anger, and pain roll off your back," Leah urged. And, in that moment, I think I did just that. ❖

Alison Stein Wellner is a New York freelance writer who travels whenever she can.



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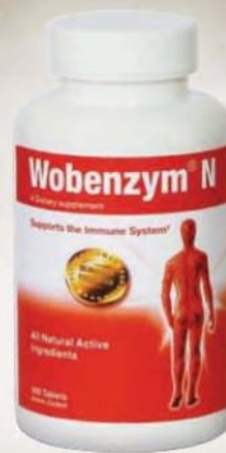
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it's all in your mind

Your imagination is a powerful and creative tool for life transformation.

"Does this kind of thing really do any good?" Julie asks me. She's looking for a new house to rent. Along with all of the usual methods, like asking friends, looking at Craigslist and the classifieds, and calling agents, she's also visioning: imagining herself happily puttering around in a sun-filled, spacious two-bedroom house with a country view at a price she can afford.

Julie raises an important question: Is it really possible that imagination can influence outcomes in the "real" world? In other words, is what Julie is doing a genuinely effective act, or is she just indulging in plain old fantasy?

The answer? It could be either.

Despite Picasso's famous statement that "**anything you can imagine** is real," most adults recognize a fundamental distinction between "real" and "imaginary." "Real" is the consensus reality that most people live in, where what goes up must come down and where two objects can't occupy the same space at the same time. Unlike the residents of the Hindu and Buddhist heaven worlds or the Jet Li character in the film *Hero*, who fights an entire battle in his imagination, few of us can manifest our intentions simply by imagining them into existence. No amount of wanting or imagining will get you a new job or cure your ulcer if you don't take practical steps to make that happen.

But even a skeptic knows that the reverse is also true. Imagination always precedes transformation. Every important change you've made in your life, inner or outer, started with an act of imagination. The journey that led my friend Greg to a radical spiritual

awakening began when he read a novel about Tibetan yogis and imagined what it would be like to have extrasensory powers. We could say that he was fantasizing—but his fantasies led him to begin a meditation practice.

Even an escapist fantasy can be life transforming: In her memoir, *Infidel*, the Somali-born women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali describes how her journey beyond Islamic fundamentalism began when, as a schoolgirl, she



read Harlequin romances and for the first time began to fantasize about the possibility that a young woman could live a life not determined by her family and clan, and by the strictures of religion. Years later, escaping from an arranged marriage, she sought asylum in Holland. There, despite bad academic test scores, she fantasized about studying political science at a university—and she did.

MAKE THE LEAP

Imagination—our ability to create images not available to the sensory system—is arguably our greatest faculty for evolving human consciousness. In order to transform ourselves and our world, we need to be able to leap out of the familiar and into the unknown. The first step in doing this is to imagine a future different from the past, a self-sense different from the one we have now. Of course, we are shaped by our memories, our karma, and the patterns woven into our neurons and cells. Undeniably, we're also influenced by culture and physical circumstances. Some of these factors are hard to change. But the imagination can help us begin to replace our internal patterns, especially the ones that keep us limited and stuck. If we can reimagine our sense of who we are, we can change our experience of life. Yoga is all about what happens when we recognize this truth. If you can imagine yourself, say, free of suffering, you've taken the first step toward that freedom.

In *The Biology of Transcendence*, Joseph Chilton Pearce writes: "Physiologically superior to ordinary 'eye-seeing,' imagination comes in from higher up the 'evolutionary stream' of vision, and even employs a higher, purer form of light. ... Rather than the senses impacting the mind with imagery, as in ordinary seeing, through imagination the mind impacts the senses with imagery."

What Pearce means by "higher up the 'evolutionary stream'" is that the subtler levels of imagination sit relatively close to the original source of creativity. That source has been described in a number of ways: as the great mind, the collective unconscious, the field of all possibility, divine intelligence, the Tao. Acts of

Set aside half an hour.

Begin by calling to mind a sage or saint, or another human being you deeply admire. It should be someone you have a feeling for and whose teachings you understand—Jesus, or Buddha, Gandhi, St. Teresa of Avila, the Baal Shem Tov, or your own teacher, if that teacher has been a reliable example of enlightenment.

If no one comes to mind, choose one of the qualities of enlightened consciousness—such as compassion or love.

Now, think deeply about that person or the quality you want to embody. Consider how it might be to look through that person's eyes. If it's a quality, ask yourself, "How would it be at this moment to look through the eyes of love?" Ask yourself, "How did this being treat others?" How might he or she behave while living your life? (Yes, what would Jesus do?) Imagine facing a challenge, a big conflict, the desertion of someone close. How would that person handle it?

imagination can connect us to that place where insight and inspiration arrive unbidden—as an out-of-the-box idea, the first line of a poem, or a direct recognition of who we are beyond our ordinary self-definition. Imagination links us to infinite possibility, the realm from which all genuine creative insights arise.

IMAGINING OUR WORLD

Great poets and scientific thinkers have repeatedly described the mystery of breakthrough the way John Keats did, when he said that his greatest poems were "given to me" by a "power like magic." Spiritual voyagers have similar experiences of the power of that inner realm. Imagination is the doorway into that realm beyond ordinary consciousness.

According to the ancient Tantric master Abhinavagupta, imagination is not just powerful; it is power itself. The human capacity to imagine, according to

imagine yourself as an enlightened sage

Now, close your eyes and imagine that the spirit of that person (or that quality) inhabits your body. Inhale, thinking to yourself, "Christ's love lives within me, as my love," or "Buddha's state of enlightenment is my enlightenment," or "The courage of Gandhi is my courage." Exhale, thinking, "That inner state fills my body."

Do this for a few moments. Then ask yourself, "How would I move through the world if I truly embodied the qualities of this being? How would I treat myself? How would I be with my partner? my kids? my parents? the people on the bus? What would it be like to interact with others?"

Let your imagination completely open to this practice, imagining yourself enlightened, saturated with love.

For the remainder of the half hour, act out of that experience. Be the great being you're imagining yourself to be. Act out the quality you want to imbibe. Do this for half an hour a day for a week and see if you notice the effect.

Tantra, is simply our individual form of the power of the infinite consciousness, the infinite mind. That great mind imagines worlds within itself and brings them into existence, say the Tantric sages. Our own imaginations do the same thing on a smaller scale.

Yoga Vasishtha, a key text of Vedanta that prefigures quantum physics and string theory, describes our so-called real world as a creation of imagination, made of solidified consciousness, or subtle energy, which each of us holds in place by believing in it. The Shiva Sutra consistently maintains that a yogi who understands this principle and cultivates it can rearrange these particles of consciousness and manifest just about anything. Most of us aren't operating at anywhere near that level, of course. More likely, our imagination operates unconsciously, as unexamined fantasies and stray thought constructs. By practicing what I call the

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wisdom

yoga of imagination, we can learn how to use our divine gift for fantasy as a creative tool for transformation.

Sanskrit, the original language of yogic transformation, excels at finding precise words for the subtle nuances of consciousness. To understand the yogic wisdom on the imagination, it helps to look at four Sanskrit words that distinguish between types of imaginative experience. Taken together, these ancient terms can be used as a map that shows how the imaginative faculty works and how we can engage it, train it, and receive its gifts.

The four Sanskrit words for imagination are *vikalpa*, a random image or fantasy; *kalpana*, an intentional mental creation; *pratibha*, spontaneous visionary insight; and *bhavana*, yogic contemplation and visioning. *Vikalpas*, or basic mental fantasies, account for most of your imaginative experience. *Vikalpas* are the images, thoughts, and mental static that play randomly in the mind. The sexual fantasy that shows up at the wrong time. The fear of burglars in the closet. The things you imagine your friends are saying behind your back. In fact, most of the contents of your mind belong in this category. Yogic texts warn against falling for these stories, and they all have the same advice: Let the *vikalpas* go. Classical yoga practice aims to dissolve them. Some of the ways of doing this are through meditative focus, or through a practice like recognizing the *vikalpas* as essentially empty.

CREATIVE FORCE

With *kalpanas*, we enter the realm of deliberate creation. A *kalpana*, because it's intentional, has far more purpose and power than an idle or uncontrolled *vikalpa*. *Kalpanas* are the foundation of human art and science, mythology, religious constructs, political and military strategies, and the fictions that sometimes seem to drive our culture.

Since *kalpanas* can take on a life of their own (those who write fiction know that moment when the characters start speaking for themselves), we often find we have to untangle the threads of what seemed at first like an innocent mental creation.

Thus the old saying “Be careful what you wish for” might be better rephrased as “Be careful what you imagine!”

The Tantric traditions are especially skilled at this type of constructed imagination. They use visualization for opening your inner centers (“Imagine a full moon in the center of your head”), for removing psychological impurities (“Visualize anger leaving your body as a stream of black smoke”), for creating intimacy with higher energies (“Find yourself on an island where the trees have jeweled leaves; you see, sitting on a throne under a tree, a wise and beautiful guide”).

Nowadays, of course, we have lots of exposure to the idea of using the imagination in this way. We take guided journeys to inner worlds, do life-visioning processes like Julie’s, and visualize light filling our bodies to strengthen our immune system. Studies increasingly confirm that these imaginative constructions are good for our health and even for developing skills: Young basketball players are instructed to practice their jump shots in their mind, and it turns out that this imaginary practice improves their performance on the court. Similarly, studies have shown that piano students who imagine themselves playing scales improve their playing as if they had been doing physical practice.

The psychologist Carl Jung taught a method of *kalpana* that he called “active imagination,” meant to integrate the conscious and unconscious elements in the human personality. His patients would construct mythical journeys or conversations between inner characters. Then, they would consciously take part in the fantasies and, by making them active and conscious, evolve the hidden aspects of themselves to a higher level.

At the third level, imagination frees itself from the personal mind and begins to open up to the higher realms. In Sanskrit, this level of imagination is called *pratibha*, which literally means “insight.” *Pratibha* is the inspiration that arises from beyond the conscious mind.

Pratibha is the true creative imagination. This is the imagination that Keats

experienced. Einstein, the great chemist Kekulé, and the mathematician Poincaré all received major insights in this manner. Mozart would famously hear music playing within and simply take dictation. We’ve all experienced moments like these. The sentences of your term paper or grant proposal begin to flow on their own. You’re struggling to understand a difficult problem, when suddenly you simply, inexplicably, understand it. A brilliant light shows up in your meditation. Your perspective enlarges until you’re able, in the poet William Blake’s words, to “see the world in a grain of sand.”

One way you know you’re experiencing *pratibha* is through the quality of its content. It is different from the imaginings

Bhavana works with the power of your emotions to reorder your internal experience of yourself.

we make up for ourselves. An image or vision may be infused with brighter color and light. An insight may come with the force of authority. The poem or the story unfolds as if it were being dictated. Sometimes, when we have a vision in meditation, we wonder, “Was that real, or did I make it up?” When it comes from the *pratibha* level of imagination, the vision or insight seems to arise from a realm that you don’t ordinarily access.

POWER TOOLS

Visionary imagination comes to us on its own. But yogis encourage it through visualizations—*kalpana* practice and, especially, *bhavana*, or creative contemplation. *Bhavana* is the most powerful tool we have for internal self-creation. It lets us reimagine the Self.

The term *bhavana* comes from *bhava*, a Sanskrit word meaning “feeling” or “emotional flavor.” *Bhavana* works with the power of your emotions to radically reorder your internal experience of yourself. In Tantra, where the power of the mind is recognized as identical with

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the universal creative power, bhavana is used to create a sense of identity with the Divine. A true bhavana combines idea, vision, and feeling. It's the emotional quality that gives bhavana its power.

IMAGINE THAT

A famous Tantric bhavana asks you to imagine being in the presence of someone you love, then focusing on the feeling that the image brings up in you. You take that further by imagining the feeling of love filling your body, dwelling strongly in the felt sense of love. Then, you might anchor yourself in the feeling and act from it. The power of that combination of visualization and emotion will shift your inner experience, at least while you are practicing it. This is why a practice like remembering a happy moment or cultivating a sense of gratitude has such power to create well-being.

But the yogic sages take the idea of bhavana much deeper. My teacher used to say that when you hold the bhavana that you are a limited person with limited options, you will continue to experience yourself as limited by your body and personal history. When you replace your ordinary self-imagining with the highest and most sublime one you can find, you'll begin to experience yourself as filled with divine qualities. This is why, in the Tantric tradition, you always start your practice with a radical reimagining of the Self. You imagine your body as made of light, or infused with mantra, or filled with infinite compassion, and then from that place, you begin your practice.

The ultimate Tantric bhavana is to imagine yourself as the incarnation of grandeur, the very form of God. The affirmations "I am the Absolute," "I am That," "I am Divine love itself" are imaginative constructions, but they work because they encourage you to identify yourself with a higher truth, and then to feel how that affects your inner experience, your body, and your sense of self.

A truly profound imaginative bhavana lets you rehearse what it would be like to live and act as the Self you know in your heart you really are—a divine Self,

a Self whose power comes naturally from within, and who acts for the sake of the good. If you're spending time during your day imagining yourself as filled with compassion, it doesn't take you long to notice that you speak to people differently and even treat yourself with much more subtlety and kindness.

A student of mine who became overwhelmed by a heavy schedule of work and child rearing began imagining herself as Hanuman, the son of the wind, whose strength could literally move mountains. When she's practicing that bhavana, she finds it no big deal to juggle the demands of her life. She feels that she taps into a universal source of strength, a power that goes beyond the personal. In the months since she began working with that bhavana, she's been getting up early to practice, reconnecting with friends she hadn't spent time with in years, and doing volunteer work with a local mentorship program. "I'm so much bigger than I thought

By training the imagination, harnessing its power, we can use it for creating beauty and truth in the world.

I was," she told me. "It's not just that I can do more. I can hold more people in my life. My mind has expanded. There are days when my heart feels huge, big enough to hold the world."

Yoga at its heart is a practice for evolutionary spiritual growth—growth into our own highest possibilities. Imagination lets us find our way into those possibilities. By training the imagination, harnessing its power, we can use it for creating beauty and truth in the world. Then our acts of transformative imagination become genuine acts of power. They can change our inner state, for sure. But they can also change the world. ❀

Sally Kempton is an internationally recognized teacher of meditation and yogic philosophy and the author of The Heart of Meditation. Visit her at sallykempton.com.



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basics

seated forward bend

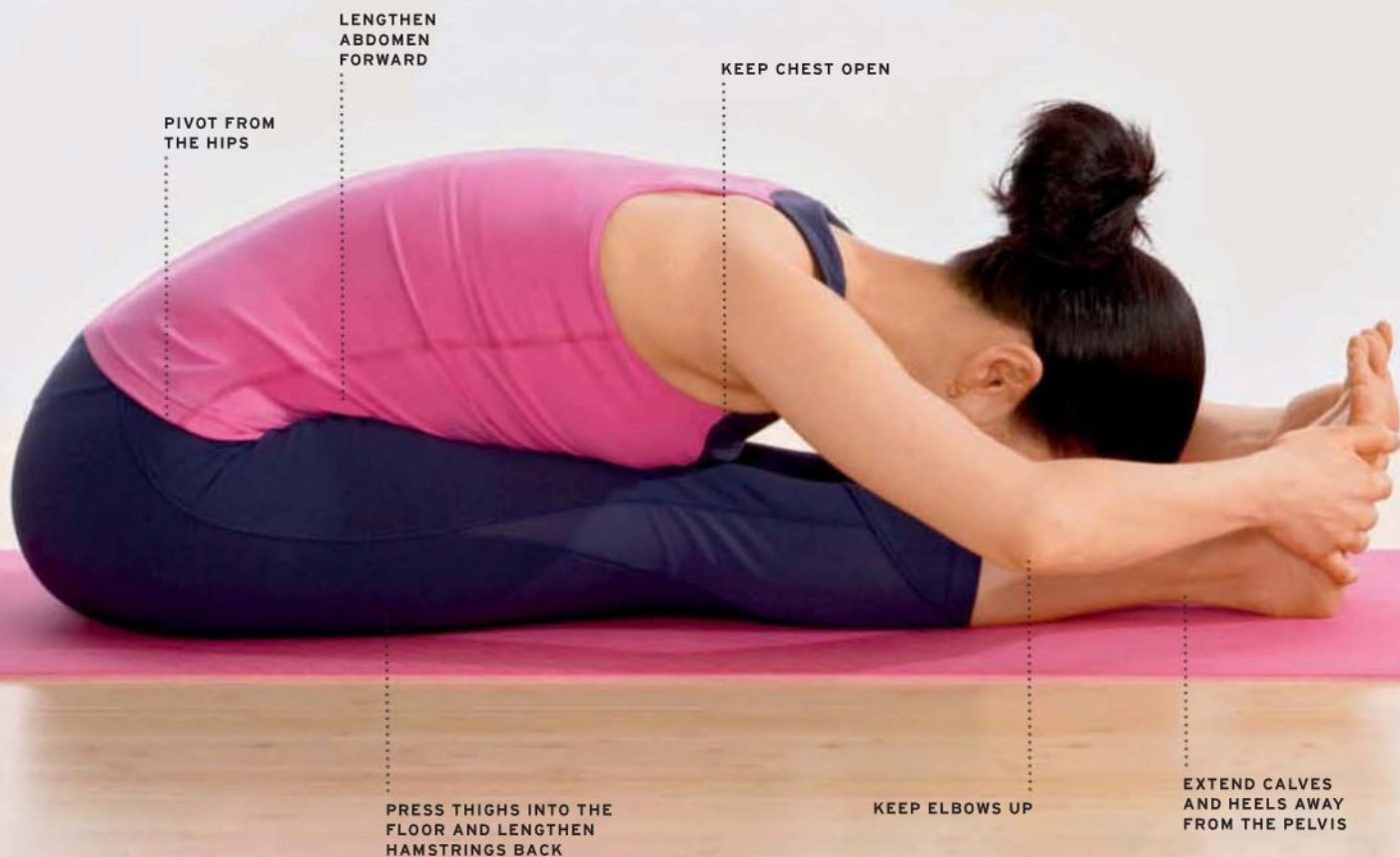
paschimottanasana

paschima = west

ut = intense

tan = stretch

asana = posture



The act of folding over yourself in a pose like Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend) is like retreating into your own personal cave. Distractions recede from your awareness, making way for introspection. Paschimottanasana is also thought to improve digestive function, calm your mind and nerves, relieve headaches and menstrual cramps, and increase agility in your hips, legs, and lower back.

Its gifts are many, but for years Paschimottanasana was my husband's nemesis. When Paul began a serious yoga practice in his 20s, he had very stiff hamstrings that barely let him nudge his torso forward. It took months of sitting almost upright with a strap around his feet and diligently lifting his back before he could let go of the strap and catch hold of his feet. That should have been celebrated as a great milestone, but Paul was all too aware that he had a long way to go before he brought a long torso over his legs without hunching his back.

Paul put intense effort into his practice and tried to go deeper in the pose, but it wasn't until he began to **apply nonattachment** that he could work on Paschimottanasana without a painful struggle. The seemingly opposing concepts of effort or perseverance (*abhyasa*) and nonattachment (*vairagya*) appear early in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra (I.12), and they are often referred to as the two wings of yoga practice. You need to apply both to find the peaceful stillness that yoga promises. Abhyasa is informed effort with the goal of self-understanding. Vairagya is detachment from the final results of your actions; it involves reflection, stillness, and surrender. For example, if you're sufficiently flexible in the final version of the pose, the entire front



DON'T round your back, drop your elbows, or hunch your shoulders to get your head down.



DO lengthen the front of the torso and pull your shoulders away from your ears.



of the torso and head rest on the legs. But if you're stiff, you may have to surrender the idea of taking your head down and instead put your effort into working patiently on folding from the hips and keeping a long spine so that the front and back of your torso lengthen evenly.

When you're able to balance effort and surrender and apply this approach to Paschimottasana (or to any other asana), your frustration with your limitations will lessen, and you'll experience the pose's physical and mental benefits.

Distracting thoughts and mental agitation will decrease, and you'll be able to enter your personal refuge, that is, a calm, wakeful state of pervasive attention.

LIFTOFF

The first phase of Paschimottasana (see figure 1) stretches tight hamstrings and teaches you how to lengthen your lower back and move forward from the hips. Lengthening the spine is crucial in this pose: If you bend from the spine to come forward, you risk putting pressure on the

pose benefits

Stretches hamstrings and back
Relieves menstrual cramps
Reduces headache

contraindications

Sciatica and lumbar disk problems
Depression
Pregnancy

muscles and disks of the lower back—a recipe for injury. Instead, you want to lengthen forward from your hips and create a concave shape with the back.

Before starting, prepare your legs, hips, and spine with some standing poses and Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose). Then sit on the edge of two neatly folded blankets in Dandasana (Staff Pose). If you can't straighten your legs, or if your sacrum or lower back is rounding, sit up higher on more blankets. Once you have your foundation, place your hands on the ground by your hips, press your thighs into the floor, and lift the sides of your torso.

Place a strap around the arches of your feet and hold an end of the strap in each hand. Come back into an upright position, press your legs firmly into the floor, and on an inhalation, lift the entire front of your torso from the bottom of the pelvis to the throat. Pull on the belt, drawing your arms back into the shoulder sockets, and lift your chest up as if you were trying to raise your bottom ribs above the level of the arms. Then on an exhalation, walk your hands down the strap and closer to the feet, maintaining the lift of the front body. Keep your arms straight. If any part of your back begins to round, apply a little vairagya and take a measured, considered



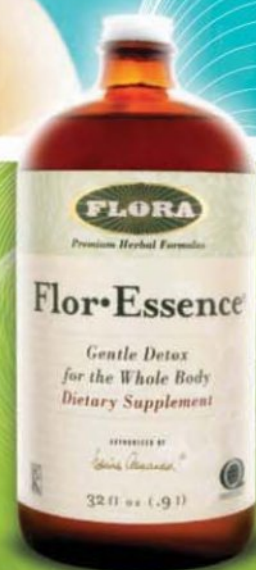
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basics

walk back up the strap. That might mean your forward fold is more upright, and that's perfectly OK.

Sometimes the knees and feet turn out or become loose in this pose, which can tighten the lower back. To keep the legs firm, press the inner edge of each leg into the floor and extend the back of your heels away from your pelvis. As the calves reach forward in the direction of your heels, the hamstrings stretch back toward your buttocks, as if you were pushing the blankets behind you with your buttocks.

Stay in the pose for another minute, with your hands about shoulder-width apart so that your chest doesn't narrow. Move the shoulder blades and back ribs forward toward the chest, and spread your collarbones apart. Employ abhyasa as you engage the middle back, where you may especially feel the effort of the back muscles contracting to support the lift of your chest. To come out, let go of your belt, inhale, and sit up straight, returning to Dandasana. If you suffer from lower-back problems, are very stiff, or otherwise find this variation challenging, continue practicing this version before going on to the next phase.

THE LOWDOWN

In this second phase (*see figure 2*), you hold the sides of your feet to get more extension in the sides of your torso while broadening across your chest and shoulders and moving farther toward your feet.

Begin in Dandasana as you did previously. Inhale and extend your arms straight up overhead. Lift the sides of your rib cage and waist. On an exhalation, reach forward and clasp your outer feet. Pull on your feet and draw your arms back as you did in the first variation to make your back concave. Flatten your thighs into the floor and move the buttocks back as you inhale and lengthen the abdomen forward. Broaden the top of your chest so that the shoulders, collarbones, neck, and throat remain soft.

On your next exhalation, begin to bend your elbows out to the sides, and lengthen your torso toward the feet. Don't drop the elbows, but keep them level with the shoulders. Push through your inner heels

as you continue to widen your elbows, keeping the top chest broad. Spread the shoulders away from each other so that your upper back feels wide as well.

Now that your torso is broad, create more length. Pull the sides of your waist forward toward your side ribs, the side ribs toward your armpits, and the armpits toward your elbows. This will help you maintain the length of your front torso so that your back doesn't form a hump.

If you find that your abdomen is tightening, your effort has become aggressive. Balance your perseverance with *vairagya* by coming up slightly, extending your legs, and lifting your ribs away from your abdomen. Otherwise, continue to extend deeper into the pose by drawing your chest closer to your feet for up to a minute. Then, on an inhalation, let go of your feet, lift your arms to the ceiling again, and return to Dandasana.

DEEP FOLD

If you were able to keep your torso long while going forward in the previous variations, you can now attempt the final pose, which involves folding down while lengthening forward. Starting in Dandasana, inhale and lift the arms skyward to open your front body. Exhale, lengthen forward, and clasp your heels with your hands. Lift your chest and make your back concave again. Pull the outer edges of your feet toward your pelvis as you push forward through your inner heels. Broaden the soles of your feet.

On the next exhalation, bend your elbows to the sides and begin to pull your torso forward. Turn the tops of your thighs inward and press them strongly down so that you feel your hamstrings lengthen and widen on the floor. Even though you are working to spread your hamstrings and buttocks, your hips should feel compact. Cut your outer thighs and hips down into the floor. Lengthening the hamstrings and spreading the buttocks will help

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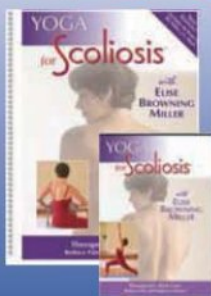
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basics

you pivot from the hips and release the lower spine forward, away from the hips. Compacting the hips can propel the sides of your waist forward and protect your hamstrings from overstretching. From the top of your buttocks, lengthen your entire lower back toward your head. Ideally you'll feel as though your hamstrings go back while your spine moves forward.

As you take your head down, keep the sides of the neck long. If your head doesn't reach your legs, or if you find that the throat is constricted, the chest is closing, or your head is much lower than your chest, place a blanket, bolster, or block on top of your shins to support your head. Keep the back of the neck parallel to the floor, not diagonally slanting downward.

FEEL FREE

Now that you have gone deeper in the pose, observe what is happening along your spine. If you feel as though your bottom ribs are stuck to your abdomen, you are folding from the waist rather than the hips. So, come up slightly to free your lower abdomen, spread the diaphragm, and lengthen the front of your torso from the pelvis toward your chest. To refine the pose, move your back ribs down to bring your front ribs closer to your thighs.

It's a lot to keep in mind, but be patient. If you find yourself getting frustrated, work intelligently with the breath. On the inhalation, focus on lengthening the front of your torso and working your legs. On the exhalation, focus on lengthening forward. During and at the end of the exhalation, you may also experience tension being released for a few moments, allowing you to go deeper into the pose without aggression. This release is an important component of forward bending with abhyasa and vairagya, as it helps you create inner space and freedom. With your forehead resting, your brain can relax from the activity of constantly processing information. In this position you can enter a sanctuary for a stressed mind and rest in a deep sense of peace. ❀

Marla Apt (yoganga.com), a certified Iyengar Yoga instructor, teaches yoga and leads teacher trainings in Los Angeles and abroad.

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new mama on the mat

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A few months after giving birth to a child, you may be eager to get to your mat. But you are likely to discover that pregnancy and childbirth have weakened your abdominal muscles, so they'll probably need reconditioning. **When your body is ready** to be challenged again, try the sequence on the following pages created by vinyasa flow yoga teacher (and new mom) Claire Missingham.

This practice will get you in touch with the manipura chakra, which governs the navel and solar plexus area. "This energetic force can be weak, not just physically but psychologically, too, after the sheer willpower that giving birth requires," says Missingham. Working the core in Plank and Paripurna Navasana (Full Boat Pose) can reignite a sense of strength and self-confidence. Other poses in the sequence gently release tension all through the body. A supine Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose) can be a balm to the outer hips and gluteal muscles. Bridge and Eagle are great for relieving the tension in the chest, shoulders, and upper back that builds as you carry a new baby around.

Wait at least six weeks after delivery before you try this practice (you may need to wait longer if you've had a cesarean section). Get approval from a health care practitioner before you begin. When you choose to begin, be sure to allow yourself to do fewer repetitions or shorter holds if you need to, and frame the practice as a way to nurture yourself. DIANE ANDERSON

Breathe deeply Do Ujjayi Pranayama (Victorious Breath) to bring your attention to the present moment.

to begin

Use music Pick something uplifting and energetic, or calming and introspective, to reconnect with your unique inner rhythm.

Create an altar

Place a photo of a person who inspires you, and one of your baby, on an altar to honor your achievement in creating new life.

to finish

Rest Take Savasana (Corpse Pose) for at least 10 minutes, so that your body gets to completely let go.

Enjoy the quiet Sit with your hands in Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal) at your heart. Appreciate all that you have.



1 Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), variation

Start with your feet together. With each exhalation, draw the navel to the spine in Uddiyana Bandha (Upward Abdominal Lock) to engage the pelvic floor muscles and draw them up. Stay for 10 breaths. Once you feel stable, separate the feet hip-distance apart.

2 Plank Pose

Inhale and shift into Plank. Align shoulders over your wrists. Press back firmly through the heels and gaze between the thumbs. Relax your jaw and stay for 20 breaths. Then flow from Down Dog to Plank 10 times, inhaling to Plank and exhaling to Down Dog. Step your feet to your hands and fold in Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend). Lift your arms to stand, then exhale into Tadasana (Mountain Pose).

3 Garudasana (Eagle Pose)

Wrap your right leg over your left and hook your toes around your lower leg. Place the left arm over the right and touch your palms together. Stay upright and bend the supporting knee. Lift the elbows up and move the hands away from the face. Gaze gently out at a fixed point. Stay for 10 breaths on each side. Return to Tadasana.

4 Paripurna Navasana (Full Boat Pose), variation

Sit with your legs together and back straight, lift your legs off the floor, and bend your knees. Stay here for 5 breaths. Hold the back of your thighs or reach your arms forward, palms facing in. Engage your core, exhale, straighten one



leg; inhale, release back; exhale, switch sides. Repeat the change of legs 10 times, then release your feet onto the floor, hold your shins, and open your chest to the sky. Repeat twice, and then lie on your back.

5 Jathara Parivartanasana (Revolved Abdomen Pose)

Bring your knees to your chest, draw your navel in, and keep the pelvic floor engaged. Place your arms, palms up, on the floor. Bring your knees over your hips so your legs form a right angle. Exhale, press the shoulder blades into the earth, and lower the legs to the right, almost touching the floor. Inhale up and repeat to the other side. Continue for 20 breaths. Hug your knees and breathe deeply.

6 Elbow-to-Knee Pose

Interlace your fingers behind your head and bend your knees. Exhale, lengthen the right leg, draw your left knee toward your chest, and lift up to touch it with your right elbow. Inhale, release; exhale, change sides. Press your low back into the earth. On exhalations, pull your navel back and feel your pelvic floor lift up buoyantly. Do this 4 times on each side, then rest and repeat it one more time.

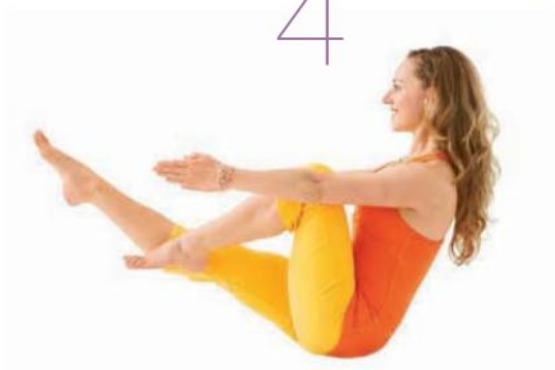
7 Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose), variation

Bend your knees and press into Bridge Pose, and then breathe there for up to a minute. Exhale and roll back down to the floor, vertebra by vertebra. Inhale and roll back up. This time, take your arms overhead as you root the shoulder blades down. Exhale to roll down. Repeat 10 times, opening your chest more each time.





3



4

5

8 Supta Gomukhasana (Reclining Cow Face Pose)

Cross your left leg over your right, stacking the knees on top of each other. Hold your outer ankles firmly. As you exhale, draw the feet toward the floor on either side of your waist, and you'll feel a deep release in the hips and buttocks. Stay as long as it feels good, then switch legs. Take a moment to relax on your back.

9 Supta Garudasana (Reclining Eagle Pose), variation

From your back, bring your legs into Garudasana with the right leg on top. Drop the legs to the left, gently drawing the right knee toward the earth. Reach the right arm to the right until you are in a deep spinal twist. On the exhalation, deepen the twist from the navel, keeping the pelvic floor active. Close your eyes and remain here for 10 slow breaths, then change sides.

10 Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

Stretch your legs in front of you. Inhale and press your forearms and elbows down as you lift your chest and head away from the floor. Release your head back onto the floor. Either the back or the crown of your head will rest on the floor. This pose opens the heart. Stay for 10 breaths.



6



7



8



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the art of staying young

Lifelong yogis share their secrets on how to age gracefully.

by Diane Anderson



Western yoga's master teachers can make the practice seem so effortless: performing challenging asanas in youthful-looking bodies while offering up profound wisdom and playful camaraderie. But the inevitable changes that come with getting older aren't always easy to handle. We talked with six inspiring yogis—all of whom happen to have had at least 58 birthdays—to gather their insights about what decades of yoga practice can do for your body and mind.



Patricia Walden

[AGE 62]

Patricia Walden has studied yoga with B. K. S. Iyengar for more than 33 years. As the star of the ever-popular *Yoga for Beginners* DVD, she's been teaching in people's living rooms for years, as well as at her Boston studio and around the world.

Sometimes I'll wake up stiff and wonder what my body will feel like if I start doing backbends. Then I begin practicing, and I forget that I'm 62. Twenty minutes into my practice, I feel younger. Inevitably, the power of yoga takes over and you feel ageless!

About 10 months ago, I went to my mat with the intention of doing a series of dropbacks from Tadasana (Mountain Pose). I thought, "Gosh, I'm over 60. I don't know if I'm up to it." Then I remembered Iyengar's 80th birthday. He did 108 dropbacks. His feet were planted; they didn't move. I realized it was my mind, and not my body, saying I couldn't do it. As we get older, we have to be careful of the tricks our minds can play on us. Sometimes your mind tells you to be careful for good reason, but sometimes it's telling you that your body can't do something that it *can* do.

I look at films of the demos I made when I was in my 30s and 40s. I did a demo for my 50th and 60th birthdays. My poses are better, more integrated,



than when I was younger. My flexibility and strength are more balanced, as are my effort and relaxation. I try to never take my body for granted. One of the things that comes with the aging process is that we feel such gratitude that yoga came into our lives and that our bodies still enjoy bending forward and backward.

I also enjoy more mental freedom now. My mind is much more expansive than it was in my 20s. I was judgmental and critical and narrow-minded. Things roll off my back now in ways they didn't when I was younger. I experience more contentment, and I don't have that obsessive thinking or cling to things like I used to. Asana, meditation, and pranayama are great, but the philosophy really pays off, and you start looking at things from a yogic point of view.

The *yamas* and *niyamas* [restraints and observances, the first and second of the eight limbs of ashtanga yoga] are really in your cells. I don't think about whether I should tell the truth; there's no choice. And I allow other people in my life the freedom to be exactly as they want to be. Even though we know it isn't effective, we often try to talk people into what we think they should be doing. That's a prison. It takes time to plant new *samskaras* [patterns]. There is such freedom in letting people do what they want to do. You and they will be happier if they're doing what they want to do. Practicing yoga is a way to free yourself from suffering.

When I was younger, I would think, "When X happens, I'll be happy." When, when, when. At a

certain stage in practice, you see that you can't base your life on contingencies. Things can change at any moment. Why not be happy now? Yoga has helped me go through really challenging times with grace and ease. You can say, "OK, things are hard right now, but everything changes." When everything is great and integrated, that will change, too. You savor good times and don't get as thrown with the changes. You just ride the wave. It's so much less stressful.



Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa

[AGE 67]

Kundalini teacher Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa and her husband of 27 years, Gurushabd, started Golden Bridge Yoga in Los Angeles and New York. Her passion is to help raise money for various orphanages around the world.

I get up at 3:30 a.m. I have a 2½-hour meditation and chanting practice. My guru told me to rise in the ambrosial hours in the morning: "Clean your mind, get empty. Work hard and share what you have. Go serve for the rest of the day." The greatest energy is when night turns to day. No other animal sleeps through sunrise. The cows and chickens are up and about. But humans sleep in! Getting up early will keep you young.

And service is another great way to stay young. If you have no idea why you are here, if you are confused, you won't feel fulfilled. We all have a purpose. Ask what it is that you are supposed to do. If you



serve, you don't have to worry and you'll always be taken care of. You can do yourself in worrying about yourself. Because you are worrying about death. But look outside yourself! There's so much work to be done. I want to teach and stay young and vital. Serving others is one of the best ways to stay young.

Try new things out. I read lots of books. I swim, run, do weights, dance. I try a lot of things. And I am quite attentive to what I eat. So many people are depressed and



suffering. When you ask about their diets, you find there's a lot of sugar or fast food and not enough greens. Eating whole foods—organic veggies and fruits—is best. Having a garden and growing things keeps you connected to life. We have four dogs, so I think having pets is great. And stay social. It's important to celebrate and connect. We like to have people over all the time.

The yoga is just part of the practice. Yoga is like cake without the

frosting: Something's missing. You need meditation. It's the frosting.

Gratitude is another really important practice—seeing how even challenges are part of your path. Everyone has had tragedies and traumas. I've gone through hard stuff. But I'm grateful that all of that happened. Instead of saying, "Why me, God?" I can now say, "Thank you." Learning forgiveness is key. If you hold grudges and resentments, then you get bitter. It shows on your face and in your

organs. And you get old in your mind. So be grateful and forgiving. That's the only way to truly stay young and happy.

There are upsides to getting older. Now that I'm 67, I get a 10 percent discount on Wednesdays at Whole Foods. That's great. And I really like getting a discount at the movie theaters, too.



David Life and Sharon Gannon were performers and artists in New York City who discovered yoga and became deeply committed to practice. They created the Jivamukti Yoga method in 1984.



Sharon Gannon

[AGE 58]

My teacher, Sri Brahmananda Sarasvati, said, “Yoga is that state where you are missing nothing.” I like the sound of that. Yoga practices should help you to get over otherness and become more connected to life. I have come to realize that I am more than my physical body and mind. I have come to realize my eternalness, and that, I suppose, is related to youth or agelessness. This has occurred for me, more or less, because the yoga practices have helped me to realize what my body and mind are actually made of. They are made of unresolved issues that I have had with others.

When you get an understanding of how karmas have shaped your body, you begin to act in a new way toward others and yourself. Your daily life becomes exciting, and like a child, you can hardly wait for the next opportunity to encounter an aspect of your past that needs to be resolved back into the emptiness of your own heart. I feel like this. The nature of a body is to change. All bodies start out young and then get older as the years pass.

I am committed to the practices that Patanjali outlines as the

ashtanga system, which includes the five yamas. The fourth yama is *brahmacharya*, and it is the most important aspect of my daily yoga practice in regards to health and aging. The practice of *brahmacharya* means to respect the creative power of sex and not abuse it by manipulating others sexually. I have been a vegan for 26 years now, and so have not been involved with the sexual abuse of animals as practiced in the breeding of animals by the industrial livestock industry. That seems to have accelerated the benefits of

being established in the practice of *brahmacharya* for me.

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, when you practice *brahmacharya*, you obtain enduring vitality, resulting in good health. I am in pretty good health, and I am blessed with lots of energy and vitality, so something is working.



David Life

[AGE 59]

WHAT IS YOGA, ACCORDING TO YOU?

According to me? But “Who am I?” is the question! That’s the question that usually gets you, and in pursuit of the answer, a few of us blessed souls find yoga. Yoga is both my vocation and my avocation. Practicing yoga and teaching yoga are different packages, and both provide vital input into my life. Yoga has provided most of the “aha!” moments of my life. It has been my refuge in many difficult times and has provided me with community, empowerment, and sustenance.

HOW HAS YOUR BODY CHANGED?

You’re kidding, right?

Monday: tight. Tuesday: limber. Wednesday: strong. Thursday: weak. Friday: injured. Saturday: injury free. Sunday: uninspired. And that’s just an example of a single week!

Do you really want the old list that we all know: less hair, more gray, fewer teeth, thinner skin, and so on? I’ve got all that. Duh.

HOW ABOUT YOUR MIND?

Sometimes I wonder. I have this image of my mind as a meeting room with a long table. Seated at the table are me at each age: child, teen, and so on. The board considers each topic of the day and registers their point of view. When the vote is taken, the mind turns different ways. Sometimes mature, sometimes immature, sometimes wise, other times impetuous.

I guess the main advantage of the yoga practice is that (sometimes) I know that I am the one observing the board of directors, whereas before yoga I *was* the board of directors.

Angela Farmer and Victor van Kooten have been teaching yoga together for 25 years. They teach internationally and have their own studio, Eftalou Yoga Hall, on the Greek island of Lesbos. Angela has created two DVDs—*Inner Body Flow* and *The Feminine Unfolding*—and Victor has published four yoga-related books.



Angela  Farmer
[AGE 71]

It has been through my yoga practice that I've come to listen internally to myself. It used to be that I was out to prove something, to improve and challenge, and do better asana—and battle with myself and beat myself up to get somewhere. I used to have a strict-training type of yoga, but it isn't about that anymore. A shift happened for me 30-some years ago, and I started to listen to my inner energy. It was an unknown path. But I learned that each part of the body has a voice. And trauma is hidden,

especially in places that have been hiding, like little creatures that don't want to be seen. If I can be gentle with those places and communicate with them, they slowly shift and change and open up. So now I'm exploring and unfolding rather than going out and trying to achieve something.

Now, rather than do the same old donkey-work yoga—"right foot in, left foot out"—I go into a class and feel the atmosphere. I see if a student has a question or problem. In no time at all, it becomes like

ANGELIQUE SIDERIS



Victor van Kooten

[AGE 69]

As I've gotten older, I go beyond the body and connect with the sky and the ground. I'm more patient with myself. I used to be tough on myself in my practice, but I've learned to be receptive to the feminine side. Rather than doing, I try to open up. I find myself doing things but don't make myself do things. Once you are more receptive, you realize that even little things are as important as big things.

We humans take for granted that life is this way or that way. Parents, teachers, voices, tell us we are supposed to live life a certain way. But I learned that I need to listen to myself and rethink everything I was trained to do. It's undoing. Let it go. Doubt as much as possible. See what is true and what is not true for you. You come to your own path and your own personal yoga practice, basically. Come in contact with what you are. Change from what you *were* into what you *become*.

My advice is to be curious and objective. Why do we restrict ourselves and each other? The creative process is doing things that you aren't supposed to do. We are all free. Experiment. Be as free as possible. Get interested in the space inside you. Do quiet listening. Our classes aren't about telling people what to do, but rather letting students speak up and accept the difficulties they have.

And you can learn by observing many different things. Angela has the particular habit of feeding all the cats that come by our place in Lesbos; there are 17. It's such fun to see the characters. We feed the cats, and the cats feed us. We have too little time left to do nothing or to be bored.

And Angela and I like each other a lot. You can have a lot of love, and a relationship doesn't have to become stuck. Yoga helps. Look at yourself, listen to yourself. And really look at each other, too.

a playground. Everyone feels safe enough to listen to their own bodies and their own needs. It's great when you learn to trust yourself and play.

I think yoga can be a fountain of youth. People think yoga is standing on your head. Of course, that keeps you fit, but the fountain of youth has to do with the spirit. As you peel away the debris, you peel parts of you that have been scared, and you trust what's coming from inside by just listening. If you have a practice, instead of doing a routine, just sit and slowly go forward. It could be

in any stretch, but notice the parts of the body that are not connecting with the ground. Feel the ground supporting you. When your body resists, watch the tiny places where you have a fraction of resistance. Wait, listen, and be with it. See how long it takes to release and go further. Never mind if everyone else in class has moved on. That is the beginning of self-trust.

My practice has slowed down to the outer eye. There's less happening to the outside eye but more happening deeper inside. I'm more

tolerant and mentally flexible. I have more focus and more patience. I respect my body a lot more. I let myself sleep more when I need to. I eat, play, and have more inner joy. I follow the young kid of eight who lives inside me. She gets to swim in the wintertime. She gets to play plenty. That keeps you young. ♣

reinvent your wheel

By targeting your tight spots, you can go deep
and discover your best backbend ever.

AH, BEAUTIFUL URDHVA DHANURASANA. As the arms and legs press strongly down into the ground like pillars, the entire length of the spine curves into a deep, even arch. It's striking, it's inspiring, and it's ... well, everywhere. Walk into nearly any hatha yoga class at any time of day, and you're likely to encounter the pose that is also known as Upward Bow or Wheel Pose.

It's easy to feel simultaneously seduced and humiliated by Urdhva Dhanurasana. The pose might evoke a burning desire to achieve and conquer this backbend, but if you're a beginner, you might feel fearful that you won't make it up. And if you're a more experienced student who has pressed up dozens of times, you might find yourself wondering, "Is it still supposed to feel like this? Am I supposed to feel the lower-back twinges, the shoulder soreness, and the occasional after-class sacral aches?"

In either case, when fear or frustration about Urdhva Dhanurasana arises, the first impulse is often to rely on pure force to muscle yourself into the pose. When you do, there are a few telltale signs that this is happening. You hear yourself grunt as you go up. You feel your knees and feet kick out. You push up quickly

and pop your shoulders out of joint, overstretching the delicate rotator cuff muscles. A large, pulsing vein bulges out on your forehead. Do any of these things sound familiar? Such a brutish approach to Wheel not only puts your muscles and joints at risk for injury, but also unravels all the hard work you've done maintaining the integrity of your breath.

Fortunately, you can strike a balance between yearning and frustration. To do so involves the yogic concept of self-study, known as *svadhyaya*. Instead of pushing yourself into the pose, you can apply *svadhyaya* by refining your awareness of what is happening in your body and mind. One way to do this is by breaking down the pose into three components and assessing how your body responds to each. Urdhva Dhanurasana requires openness in the shoulders and chest; flexibility in the front of the hips, legs, and abdomen; and suppleness in the back body. It also requires arm and leg strength, but if you're able to hold a

photography by Rory Earnshaw
by Andrea Ferretti and Jason Crandell



On the following pages, we give you poses that are efficient at opening the legs, shoulders, and back. Use them to explore your body, noticing areas of tightness and areas of ease. You can incorporate these poses into your practice as an excellent preparation for Urdhva Dhanurasana. Or, if, for example, you notice that your thighs are disproportionately tight, you can incorporate the poses for your legs into your daily practice—whether sequencing to Wheel or not.

well-aligned Plank for five deep breaths, you're probably strong enough to do the pose. When muscular tightness releases, the pose requires less force.

Armed with this knowledge of the architecture of the pose, you can create sensible, thorough sequences that open your shoulders, hips, and trunk before practicing Urdhva Dhanurasana, allowing you to backbend more deeply and comfortably.

You can also begin to notice where you get hung up in the pose. Many practitioners are disproportionately restricted in one region. You might be surprised to find that your shoulders are naturally very open, but your thighs are so tight that you can't lift your hips without your feet splaying out. If that's the case, then you have a clear starting place from which to work—you can spend time in your daily practice cultivating openness along the front of your legs, abdomen, and hips. Or you may find that your shoulders and hips are plenty malleable, but there is stubborn resistance in your mid-back. Spending more time opening the torso will allow you to develop more ease in Urdhva Dhanurasana. In essence, refining your awareness will enable you to make choices that will create transformation.

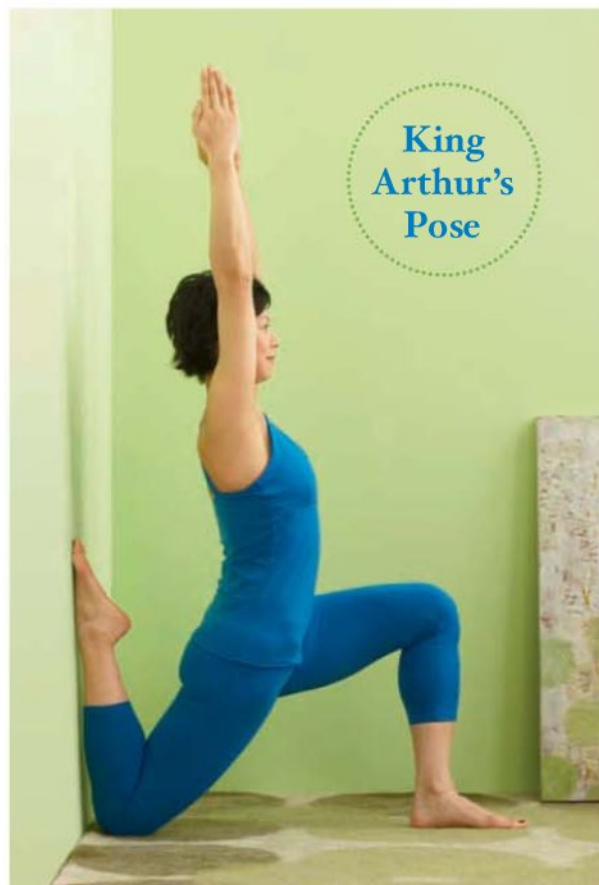
As you practice breaking down the pose this way, don't be disappointed if you're one of those folks for whom each component is difficult. A deep pose may be beautiful, but the depth of your Urdhva Dhanurasana is not the most important thing. What's most important is that you develop a method that forgoes ego and force in favor of exploration and awareness. If you can do that, you can build a backbend that works for you—one that exhilarates, stretches, strengthens, and soothes you all at once. Ready to begin?

lengthen your thighs

Most students know that a healthy forward bend requires suppleness in the back of the legs. This type of flexibility enables you to rock the pelvis forward over the thighs, allowing the spine to lengthen and release. A similar principle applies to backbends. A healthy backbend requires suppleness along the front of your legs and abdomen. In order to arch your spine into a backbend without crunching your lower back, you need to open the front of the thighs so you can rock the pelvis backward over your legs.

If you spend much of your day sitting, this can be difficult to accomplish. Sitting flexes the hip joints, which can make the muscles along the front of the hips tight and may impede your ability to move your pelvis into backbends.

King Arthur's Pose and Bridge Pose are perfect preparations for Urdhva Dhanurasana because they help release tension from the front of the thighs and hips. Bridge Pose will give you adequate practice with the positioning of your feet, legs, and hips for Urdhva Dhanurasana.



Love it or loathe it, **King Arthur's Pose** will elongate your tight thighs efficiently. Start by folding your sticky mat in quarters and placing it next to a wall. Kneel with your back to the wall, place your right knee on your sticky mat, and extend your right shin (foot pointed) up the wall. Step your left foot forward two to three feet so that you are in a lunge, with your left knee situated directly above your ankle.

Place your hands on your hips and observe the angle of your pelvis. Your hips will probably tilt forward, since this allows your body to avoid stretching your thighs. To improve your alignment and facilitate greater opening, lift the front of your pelvis and lengthen your tailbone and buttocks toward the floor. Increase this stretch by bending your front knee deeper as you draw upward through your abdominal core. If you really want to challenge yourself, press the top of your right foot against the wall. This will engage your thigh muscles as you stretch them, creating more intensity.

To enter the second phase of the pose, vigorously extend your arms up toward the ceiling. As you reach up, lengthen your spine and lift your ribs further away from your hips. Complement this by bending your front knee and lowering your hips further. Remember to draw your tailbone toward the floor and retain the neutral position of your hips.

Breathe slowly and deeply into your abdomen. After 10 to 15 breaths, release your hands to the floor and take your right shin off the wall. Pause for a moment before you switch sides.



Setu Bandha Sarvangasana

An ideal way to continue opening the front of your thighs and hips is to take Setu Bandha Sarvangasana, or **Bridge Pose**, which offers a blueprint for the leg and foot positions in Wheel.

To begin, lie back, bend your knees, and place your feet hip-width apart. Bring your feet close to, but not touching, your hips, and align your arms alongside your body. See that the outer edges of your feet are parallel and that your toes are pointing straight forward.

Initiate the pose by gently pressing your lower back into the floor so that your tailbone curls slightly upward. Root down through your feet and begin to peel your hips away from the floor. Mindfully, roll up, vertebra by vertebra, and lengthen your tailbone toward the back of your knees. Tuck your shoulders underneath your chest. Interlace your fingers—or hold the outer edges of your sticky mat—and burrow downward into the mat with your arms.

Continue to lengthen your tailbone and your lower back, and shift your attention to your legs. Align your thighs so that they are parallel to each other, and position your knees directly above your ankles. Keep your shins vertical. This is the way you set the feet and legs for Wheel. Breathe slowly and deeply into your abdomen. After 8 to 10 breaths, walk your feet away from your hands and slowly lower to the floor.



Bridge
Pose



free your spine

In a comfortable, healthy backbend, your entire back—lower, middle, and upper—will have a similar degree of sensation. In an uncomfortable and poorly distributed backbend, parts of your back will have intense sensations, and other parts will feel dull. Most people immediately feel the sensation in the lower back (because it's more flexible and often bears the brunt of the curve) and less sensation in the middle and upper back. In order to bring the spine into greater harmony during Urdhva Dhanurasana, you will need to awaken the thighs and shoulders, and prepare the torso and spine. Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana with a chair and Bhujangasana will teach you to distribute the curvature of your back evenly.

Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana, variation

Support your weight on a chair in **Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana** (Two-Legged Inverted Staff Pose) to open your chest and shoulders, stretch your abdominal area, and encourage length in your spine. When the chair is in the correct place, this pose will distribute the sensations of the backbend evenly along your spine, providing a somatic reference for what an ideal Urdhva Dhanurasana feels like.

Place a chair close to a wall (not on a sticky mat), facing out. Roll up your sticky mat and set it beside the chair. Sit with your legs through the back of the chair and place your feet on the floor a few inches away from the wall. Slide your buttocks all the way to the back edge of the chair (toward the wall). Place your rolled sticky mat on the chair seat so that one end touches the back of your hips (against your sacrum). The sticky mat should be positioned lengthwise down the middle of the chair seat. Slowly lower your spine onto the rolled mat and adjust your position on the chair so that the bottom tips of your shoulder blades are in



line with the front edge of the chair. (If you have a longer torso, your pelvis may slightly hang off the back edge of the chair.) Finally, press the balls of your feet against the wall and straighten your legs.

From there, interlace your fingers underneath the rolled mat and place them behind your head. Hinge at the bottom tips of your shoulder blades, allowing your upper back to hang off the chair and arc into a backbend. Simultaneously root the

balls of your feet into the wall by lengthening through your thighs as you reach your upper arms and elbows toward the middle of the room. Depending on your comfort in the pose, you can stay anywhere from a few breaths to several minutes.

To come out of the pose, bend your knees and put your feet flat on the floor, place your elbows on the chair seat, and lift your torso up. Pause for a few breaths and enjoy the aftertaste of the pose.





Bhujangasana

All backbends will ease open your spine and cultivate flexibility in your torso. But **Bhujangasana** (Cobra Pose) stands out because it allows you to strengthen and stretch the spine and torso without demanding flexibility in the shoulders and thighs.

When you do the pose, focus on lengthening your spine and observing the sensations in your back.

Cobra Pose

To begin, lie on your belly and place your fingertips in line with the middle of your chest. Establish the basic foundations of the pose by rooting down through the top of your pinkie toes, the base of your fingers, and the pubic bone (this will help you lengthen your tailbone toward your heels). Slightly dome your lower abdomen away from the floor.

Initiate Bhujangasana by slowly peeling your forehead and chest away from the floor. As you begin to rise, create a “pulling” action by drawing your fingertips toward the wall behind you as you traction your spine and trunk forward. Complement this movement by reaching back through your legs strongly (avoid squeezing your glutes). As you continue to lengthen your body in opposite directions, draw your shoulder blades away from your ears and hug your elbows toward your sides.

From where you are, take a moment to observe the sensations in your back. Do your lower, middle, and upper back all have a similar quality of sensation? Are they all working a similar amount? Make subtle adjustments in your body until these regions feel harmonious.

Begin to intensify the pose by reaching back through your elbows. Continue to lengthen your spine upward and press the bottom tips of your shoulder blades against the back of your ribs. Lift the middle of your breastbone, widen your collarbones, and draw your chest forward. Breathe into your back. After 5 to 10 breaths, slowly lower your torso to the floor, keeping your spine long. Observe the sensations of your back as you appreciate the rise and fall of your breath.

why we do backbends

Whether they come naturally or not, backbends are well worth your effort.

Here are a few reasons why:

They stretch and strengthen

Backbends stretch the entire length of your front body and strengthen your back, arms, and legs. This adds up to better posture. The stress of sitting and of doing day-to-day tasks hunch you forward; when done well, backbends open the upper back and chest, and stabilize the shoulders so that your posture feels integrated.

They help you breathe Since backbends stretch your breathing apparatus—the diaphragm, the lungs, and the intercostal muscles between each rib—they can help you breathe deeper in daily life.

They lift you up Energetically, backbends are uplifting, stimulating poses. If your energy feels down or low, a backbend practice can shift your energy in a positive direction.

They empower you Backbends help you connect to the mysterious intricacies of your back body, an area that is usually neglected—out of sight, out of mind. Learning more about your body and its abilities is always confidence boosting. When you press up into your first Wheel or you balance in Scorpion Pose, you will undoubtedly feel empowered.

The key to enjoying all of these benefits is to seek a pose that suits your body—you’ll know you’ve succeeded if you feel clear, open, grounded, and pain free after practice.

Downward-Facing Dog Pose



Adho Mukha Svanasana, variation

This version of **Down Dog** will help unravel the tightness in your shoulders and upper back that can make straightening your elbows in Urdhva Dhanurasana difficult.

To begin, bring your sticky mat to a wall. Come onto all fours and place your forearms on your mat, shoulder-width apart. Place your hands on the

wall so that your fingers turn away from each other and your thumbs point to the ceiling. Notice how the combination of these actions rotates your arm bones externally. Root down through your forearms, lift your knees, and draw your body into Downward-Facing Dog.

Step your feet far enough away from your elbows that you can elongate through your shoulders. If your feet are too close to your elbows, you will feel boxed in, and your shoulders will press toward the wall. Instead, lengthen through your arms and make a single diagonal plane from your elbows to your hips. If you notice that the pose feels mild, walk your feet toward your elbows until you feel a thorough stretch. Make sure that your shoulders don't move toward the wall as you step in.

Now that you are positioned, focus on the actions of your upper body. Root down through your forearms and press your hands into the wall as you draw your shoulders away from the wall. Draw your hips upward toward the ceiling, and firm your thighs. Move the inner border of your shoulder blades away from your spine. If they narrow toward each other, you'll internally rotate your arms. But if you broaden, you'll get a much-needed stretch in your upper-back muscles. Without trying to change anything, observe the location and intensity of the stretch in your shoulders and arms. Breathe into the sides of your rib cage and feel your upper body expand. After 8 to 10 breaths, bring your knees to the floor and enjoy the ease of Balasana (Child's Pose).

open your shoulders

Downward-Facing Dog and Chair Shoulder Stretch will prepare you to extend your arms overhead in Urdhva Dhanurasana by elongating key muscles in your shoulders, upper back, and arms.

These poses also extend your arms overhead while keeping your arm bones externally rotated. It's important to maintain external rotation when you do Urdhva Dhanurasana. If you're not open enough to get this action, you put yourself at risk for damaging the delicate muscles of your rotator cuff.

As you practice these poses, it's OK if your shoulders feel tight; begin where you are and notice the sensation of your arm bones externally rotating. Practice enjoying the process rather than trying to achieve an end goal.



Chair Shoulder Stretch

The feeling of space and freedom in your shoulders that **Chair Shoulder Stretch** elicits makes rounding up the props well worth the time.

Place the back of a chair against a wall. Fold your sticky mat in quarters and set it on the chair seat. Place a blanket on the floor two to three feet in front of the chair. Kneel down, and place your elbows shoulder-width apart on the front edge of the seat (on the folded mat). Hold a block between the base of your palms to keep your hands separated. Slowly walk your knees away from the chair until they are on the folded blanket and your shoulders are parallel with the chair seat.

See that your pelvis and lower back are in neutral. Don't let the abdomen sink toward the floor, allowing too much curve in your lower back. Lengthen your tailbone and dome your abdomen so that the front rim of your pelvis is parallel to the floor.

Now that your pelvis and lower back are neutral, you will feel a stretch in your shoulders and arms. Deepen this sensation by rooting your elbows down into the chair and gently squeezing the block between your hands. Lengthen your elbows toward the wall and draw the inner border of your shoulder blades toward your tailbone. These actions are subtle and won't amount to much actual movement. They will, however, deepen the stretch and inform your body of the nuances of the pose.

Breathe into the sides of your rib cage and feel the expansiveness of your upper body. After 8 to 10 breaths, walk your knees toward the chair (keeping your elbows on the chair), and lift your shoulders away from the floor. Once all of your weight is off your shoulders, sit back on your heels and take your forearms off the chair.



Urdhva Dhanurasana

Now you're ready to practice **Urdhva Dhanurasana** (Wheel or Upward Bow Pose) with more awareness and ease. To begin, lie back, bend your knees, and place your feet close to your hips. Bring your hands to the floor next to your ears, shoulder-width apart. Steady your breath. Inhale and lift onto the top of your head. Pause here, preparing the initial actions of the pose: Draw your elbows in toward the midline until they're parallel to each other, gently press the top of the head into the floor, engage your back muscles, and root down through the base of your big toes. Now that you're well aligned, lift up on an exhale by extending strongly through your arms and legs.

Bring your awareness to your thighs and hips, focusing on the actions that you developed in the preparatory poses. As you did in King Arthur's Pose and Bridge Pose, lengthen your hip flexors by drawing your tailbone toward the back of your knees. This movement—though difficult in the midst of Urdhva Dhanurasana—will help elongate your lower back and prevent it from compressing. Complement this work by gently spiraling your thighbones in (while keeping your thighs parallel) and rooting down through the four corners of each foot.

Next, shift your focus to your spine and torso. Remember, a healthy backbend is one in which the sensations are well distributed and you're playing your edge without overworking. Just as you did in Cobra Pose and Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana, notice if your lower, middle, and upper back each has a similar quality of sensation. Make small adjustments until your whole torso feels equally engaged.

Continue deepening your pose by re-creating the external rotation in the arm bones that you cultivated in the Down-Dog variation and the Chair Shoulder Stretch. Keep weight on the bases of your index fingers. Lengthen through your arms strongly and press your hands into the floor. Although this pose takes a fair amount of work, practice being nonaggressive. Cultivate patience and acceptance where you are as you wait for your body to open. Continue breathing deeply for 8 to 10 breaths before lowering to the floor. Take time to savor the sensations after the posture. ❖

Upward Bow Pose



Andrea Ferretti is Yoga Journal's deputy editor. Jason Crandell lives in San Francisco and teaches yoga around the world.



Peace on the Inside

For kids in the juvenile justice system, yoga and meditation programs offer the rare and life-changing opportunity to find calm and comfort within.

Seventeen-year-old J. D. Alfonzo has been locked up more than once. Most recently, it was for a charge of assault with a deadly weapon and violation of probation, after he was implicated in a park shooting in Oakland, California. Having to spend up to 18 hours alone each day in his cell at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center left him feeling isolated and tense. In the few moments he was around others, his rage made him combative.

"I was like a gun. Someone just had to pull my trigger, and I'd snap," says Alfonzo, who fought at the slightest provocation. When he noticed a few other inmates coming from a group session with smiles on their faces and brownies in hand, he became intrigued. He asked around and learned that if he followed the prison rules for one week, he could earn the privilege of attending the thrice-a-week gatherings conducted by a group called the Mind Body Awareness (MBA) Project.

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● BY KEITH KACHTICK AND DIANE ANDERSON

● ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANICE KUN





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There, the boys grapple with philosophical questions such as Who am I? Am I separate from what I do? They investigate basic goodness, identity, and forgiveness as well as develop listening and empathy skills. Leaders also introduce simple meditations to help prisoners learn how to calmly be with whatever emotions arise in the present moment. The boys count their breaths and do body scans to get into their bodies, relax, and find freedom from reactivity.

The idea of spending less time in solitary (along with the promise of brownies) may have lured Alfonso initially, but once he started attending the MBA meetings, he looked forward to them. Each session offered a brief respite from isolation, a glimpse of self-awareness, and a chance to connect to others who had similar lives filled with drugs and gangs. "I always thought that I was trapped, and I always blamed everyone else for my problems. Thinking it over and talking with others, I was able to sort out my ideas. It really opened up my eyes," he says.

Now at home on probation and wearing an ankle monitor, Alfonso talks about how he still uses a breathing technique, which he learned in group sessions, to control his temper. "My anger and other people just don't mix," he says. "So I breathe and count to get bad thoughts out of my head. My eyes are more open now, and I realize what's really important: My daughter [nine-month-old Malia Natalia] needs me to be cool."

The gifts of both yoga and mindfulness—tuning in to one's experience, learning to distinguish one's perceptions from reality, controlling one's mind, connecting with others, holding positive thoughts—are especially helpful to ease the stress, fear, and pain that troubled youths so often experience. Unfortunately, not every at-risk youth gets such exposure. But a handful of nonprofits are looking to introduce more kids to contemplative practices in order to offer them valuable tools for dealing with life in new ways.

A REAL NEED

"At its worst, the structure at many programs is punishment, not treatment," says Jon Oda, a senior instructor with the MBA Project. "We meet people where they're at and let them have their space. We introduce a straightforward method of meditation, an easy breathing practice that helps them to sleep at night. They are so stuck in a circle of stress, of uncertainty and powerlessness, that most of them are willing to try it." The simple gift of quieting down the internal chatter in a safe environment is invaluable to kids who are spending time behind bars.

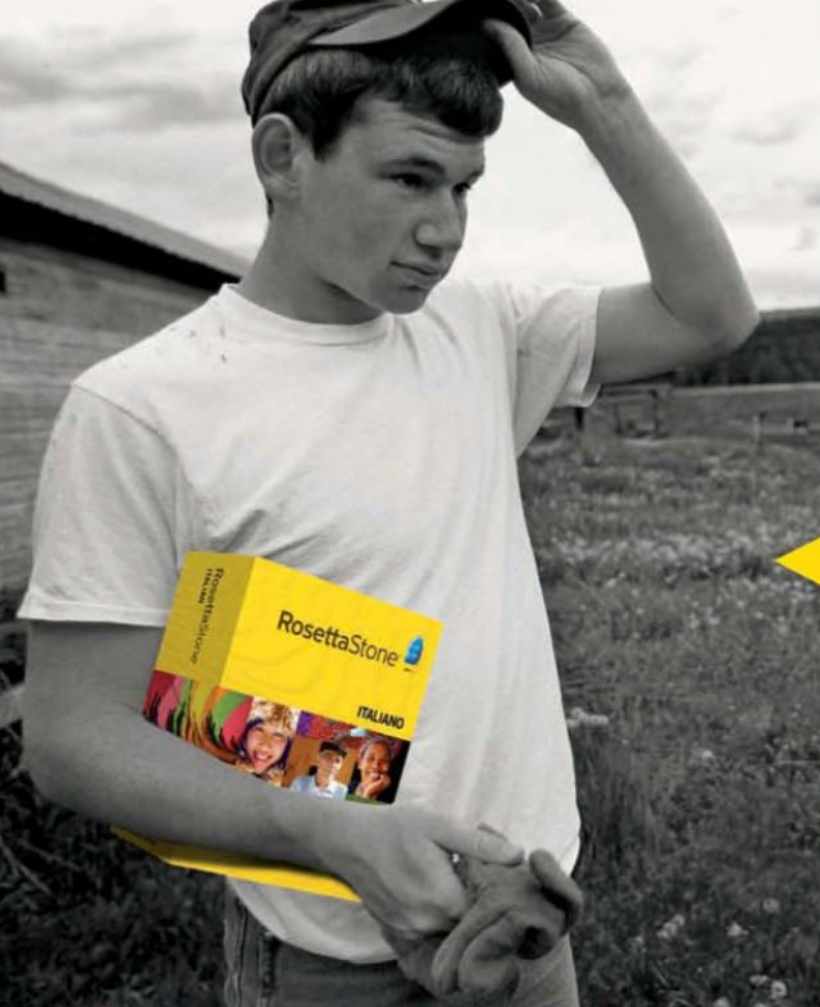
The United States incarcerates more of its youth than does any other country in the world. In 2007 alone, U.S. law enforcement agencies made an estimated 2.18 million arrests of persons under age 18. A third of America's juvenile halls report being at or over capacity, and one in 12 youth prisons has more residents than beds. Up to 70 percent of jailed

teens are serving time for nonviolent crimes. Most of the locked-up teens have forgotten what a healthy, deep breath feels like.

A decade ago, there was considerable wariness in America's juvenile justice system about offering foreign-seeming yoga to its teenage residents. Soren Gordhamer, founder of the Lineage Project, an award-winning nonprofit that offers yoga in juvenile halls in New York City, began teaching inside youth prisons in 1997. With no funding, he and the other volunteer instructors supplied all the sticky mats and left the Sanskrit terminology at the prison's front door, calling the hour of hatha yoga and meditation an "inner martial arts" class. Warrior Pose II became Staring Down Your Devil. Dharma lessons were delivered via a boom box blasting Michael Franti's hip-hop lyrics.

Gordhamer discovered early on that teens in juvenile halls are hungry for practices like yoga. "With all their outward stuff taken from them—their families and friends, their clothes, their public identity, even their choice of food—juvie kids are left with nothing but questions," he says. "Why I am here? How can I wake up from this nightmare? What can nobody take away from me?" Incarcerated teens can be precociously inward looking. Call it what you will, yoga teaches these kids they're alive right now. A light comes on, and they discover how being present can free you from fear."

continued on page 120



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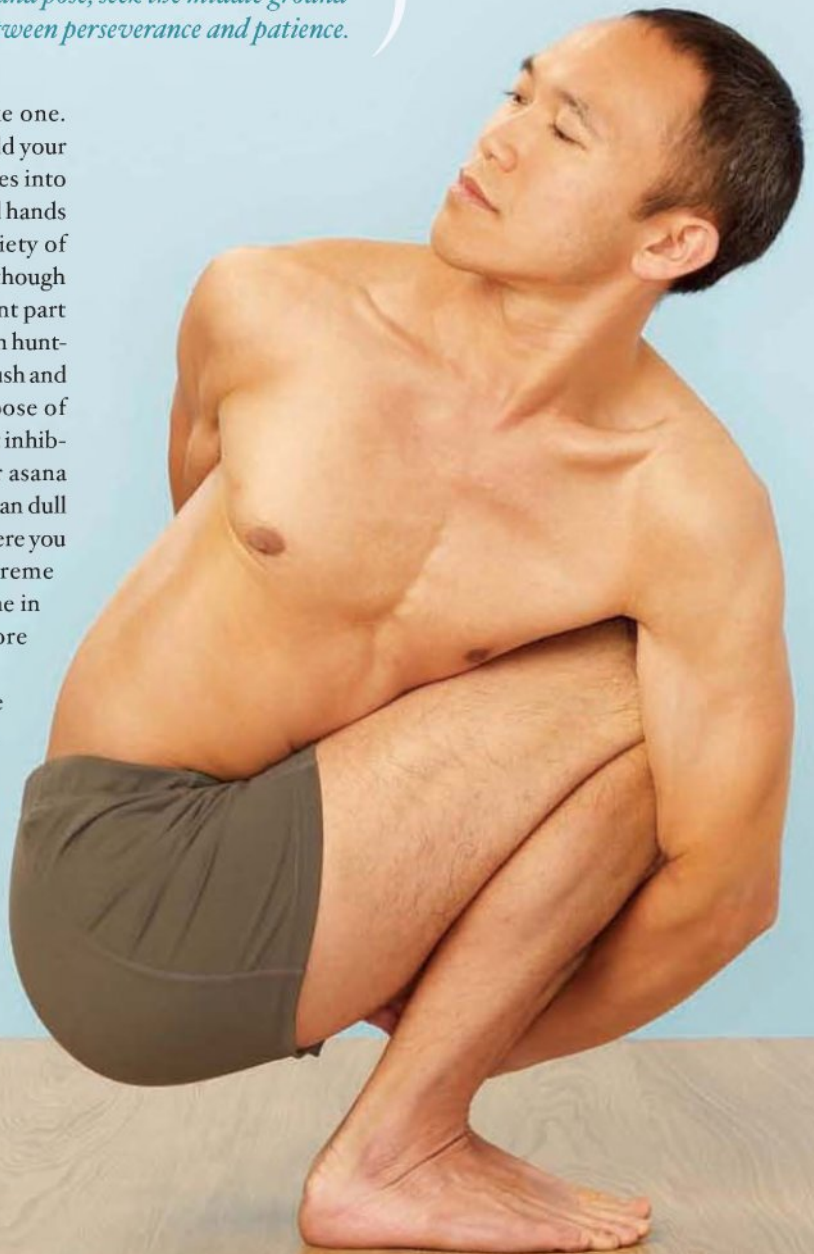
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a beautiful bind

To move with grace into this bound pose, seek the middle ground between perseverance and patience.

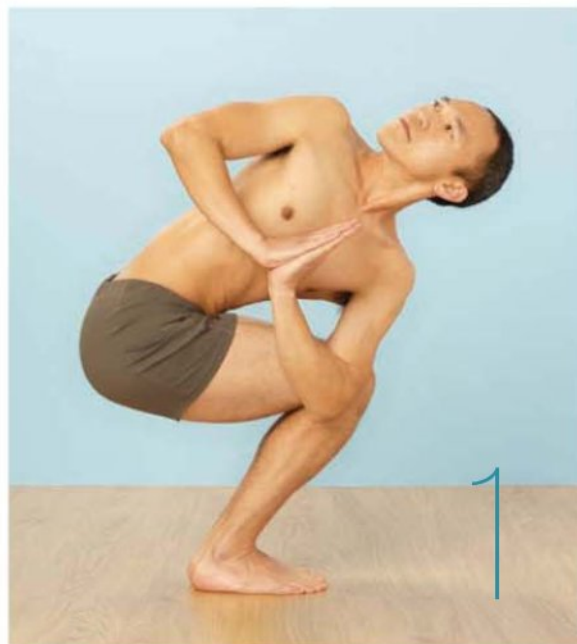
Pasasana is translated as Noose Pose, but just because it looks like a noose doesn't mean it should feel like one. Still, you can be sure that when you fold your legs like a grasshopper, bend your ankles into a superlow squat, twist in half, and hold hands with yourself behind your back, a variety of sensations and emotions will arise. Although examining those feelings is an important part of the yogic process, beware of sensation hunting. Notice whether you instinctively push and pull on yourself until the grasping noose of your arms becomes like a scary vice that inhibits your breathing. Struggling in your asana practice like this leads to injury, and it can dull your natural sensitivity to the point where you don't feel anything at all without extreme effort. The whole idea of yoga is to tune in to yourself so that you can create more **sensitivity to subtlety**—not less.

At the same time, Pasasana is a pose that requires some perseverance. If you are too passive as you practice, you will miss the vibrant aspect of juicy exertion that strengthens your muscles and bones and increases your ability to stay focused. Put simply: If you don't put enough oomph into it, you'll never touch your hands behind your back. ➤



1 Parivrtta Utkatasana (Revolved Chair Pose)

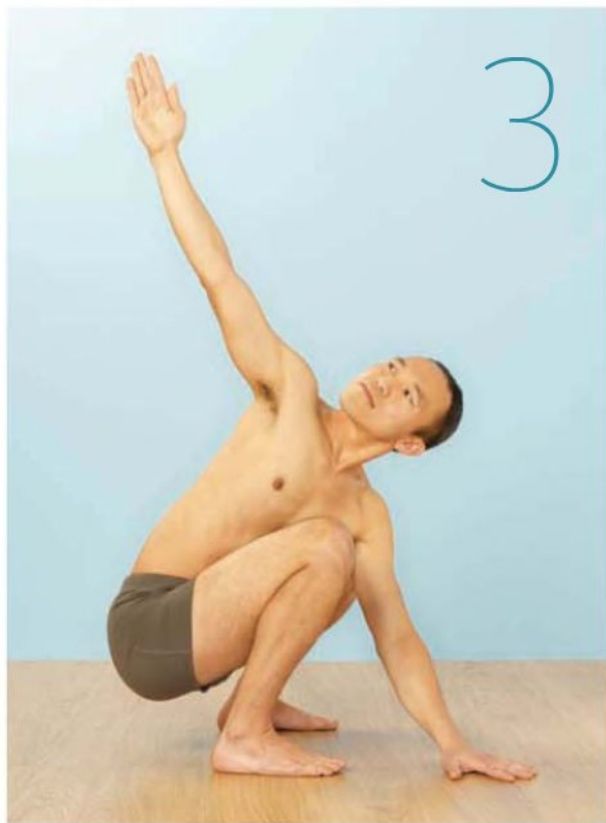
Explore the clarity of your feet and legs here. That's what will allow your spine to be fluid, your back muscles to broaden, your belly to scoop around, and your twist to... twist! If you feel that your twisting motion has hit a dead end, check in with the seat of the pose by recreating precision in the feet, legs, and hips. It's fun to discover where that takes your spine, including your neck and your gaze.



2 Baddha Parsvakonasana (Bound Side Angle Pose)

As you lean your torso to the side, create the feeling of rotating around the axis of your spine, as if your ribs were the spiraling colors around a barber's pole. If your bottom hand doesn't easily reach the floor, place it on a block to get a bit lower in the pose. How amazing that you can hold hands with yourself like this! Or can you? Either way is just fine. A healthy mix of patience, curiosity, honesty, and ambition is the recipe for this pose.





(benefits)

Strengthens ankles

Lengthens calves and Achilles tendons

Creates suppleness in the spine

Improves digestion

(contraindications)

Ankle injuries

Pregnancy

3 Malasana (Garland Pose), variation

If this pose is easy for you, then commit yourself to staying engaged in mind and body. If it's challenging for you, create the support you need—place a block under your seat or a blanket under your heels, or widen your stance—to be able to truly inhabit the experience of Malasana. This pose provides valuable work in preparing the legs for Pasasana, so it's important that you are present with what's happening in your body.



4 Marichyasana I

Before you fold over, review the internally and externally rotating actions of the arms here. The internal rotation is key to finding your bind. It's OK if the hip of your bent leg comes off the floor a little bit. Don't worry about that. Over time—or over a lifetime—it will eventually come back down. If it is so far up that you feel you might tip over, put a blanket under it.



5 Pasasana (Noose Pose)

After all your preparation, take the time to carefully construct this pose. Start by sitting on a block near the wall. First, twist with one arm between your legs and one hand on the wall. Stay there and clarify the precise work of the lower body. When you feel that your breath, spine, abdomen, shoulders, and attitude are not too tight and not too loose, go to the next stage in your process of growing Pasasana.

➤ The solution then, is to look for the middle path, the place where you walk the line between too much effort and complete passivity. You tap into the middle path by listening to your body, moving with sensitivity, and engaging with what's happening. You often hear the phrase "being present to the moment." What this really means is being part of the moment. This happens through the middle path of commitment, patience, and listening.

The Buddha offered insight into this process. The story goes that a musician asked the Buddha how he should meditate. The Buddha replied, "How do you tune your instrument?" The musician said, "Not too tight, not too loose." The Buddha said, "Exactly like that." If you learn to apply this to Pasasana, your noose will evolve into a warm feeling of being held and supported by yourself and by your healthy, wakeful, engaged practice.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you begin this practice, sit in a comfortable cross-legged position for 5 to 10 minutes. Place your attention on your natural breath to create a home base for your mind. Whenever your attention strays, bring it back to the breath.

Make the transition from meditation to Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Begin with two Ardha Surya Namaskars (Half Sun Salutations), continue with three Surya Namaskar As, and three Surya Namaskar Bs, incorporating Virabhadrasana I and II (Warrior Pose I and II). From there, do two more Sun Salutations, moving from Warrior I to Warrior II, then into Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose). After five breaths in Triangle Pose, come back to Warrior II, and then bring your hands to the floor and drop your back knee down into Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge). Stay there for five breaths, letting your front knee move ahead of your front heel. Step back into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), then jump forward and finish your Sun Salutation until you come all the way back to Tadasana. Repeat the sequence on the other side, starting with Warrior I and ending with Anjaneyasana.

PARIVRTTA UTKATASANA

(Revolved Chair Pose)



Stand with your feet together, toes and heels touching. Lift your toes and spread them wide. Place each toe back on the floor individually, letting them touch each other as you press them firmly into the floor. From this clear connection to the earth, begin to soften the knees, moving the shins forward as the upper thighs move down and back. Lift your arms up alongside your ears.

Your spine, ribs, and pelvis will maintain the alignment of Tadasana, except that you will be leaning forward on a slight diagonal. If you notice that your front ribs are popping out, don't tilt or tuck your pelvis; instead, move your upper arms slightly forward on a diagonal. Rest your gaze on something right in front of you so that your forehead can be soft.

Now imagine you had to stay in this pose for an hour! What would you change? What would it take to make this situation workable? Would you breathe more steadily? Release muscular tension? Ask these questions to help you find a middle-path approach to this powerful pose.

Sensitively fold your palms together in front of your chest. Inhale, and as you exhale, twist to the right. On your next inhalation, untwist. Repeat that action, twisting and untwisting two more times. Discover how much is truly available to you today without using your arms to crank into the twist.

The next time you twist, place your left elbow on the outside of your right knee and stay there. Instead of reacting by trying to fix or change your position, treat whatever is happening as something interesting. Take a look down at your feet and align your nose over your big toes—that's how you can tell if you are accurately rotating around the axis of your spine.

Check to be sure that your knees are even, and if your left knee is in front of your right knee, draw your outer left hip crease back. When your body is organized, turn your head and look to the side or up to the sky.

This pose is considered a closed twist because you are turning in on yourself—closing your front toward your legs and creating a slight forward bending action in the spine. To balance this with more heart opening, allow the part of your spine between your shoulder blades to absorb into your body; that, in turn, will broaden your chest. Press your palms together just enough—not too hard—to spread your collarbones.

Check back in with your feet. Are they still firmly planted? Try to center your weight on the middle of each foot. Press your inner heels down, and at the same time, lift your inner ankles up, since they tend to collapse in this position. Perhaps you can breathe some softness into the front of the ankles so they bend a bit more, lengthening the calf muscles and the Achilles tendons.

Stay here, breathing evenly for a few more breaths, and observe if there is any opening or softening that allows you to twist around more. Inhale to untwist.

BADDHA PARSVAKONASANA

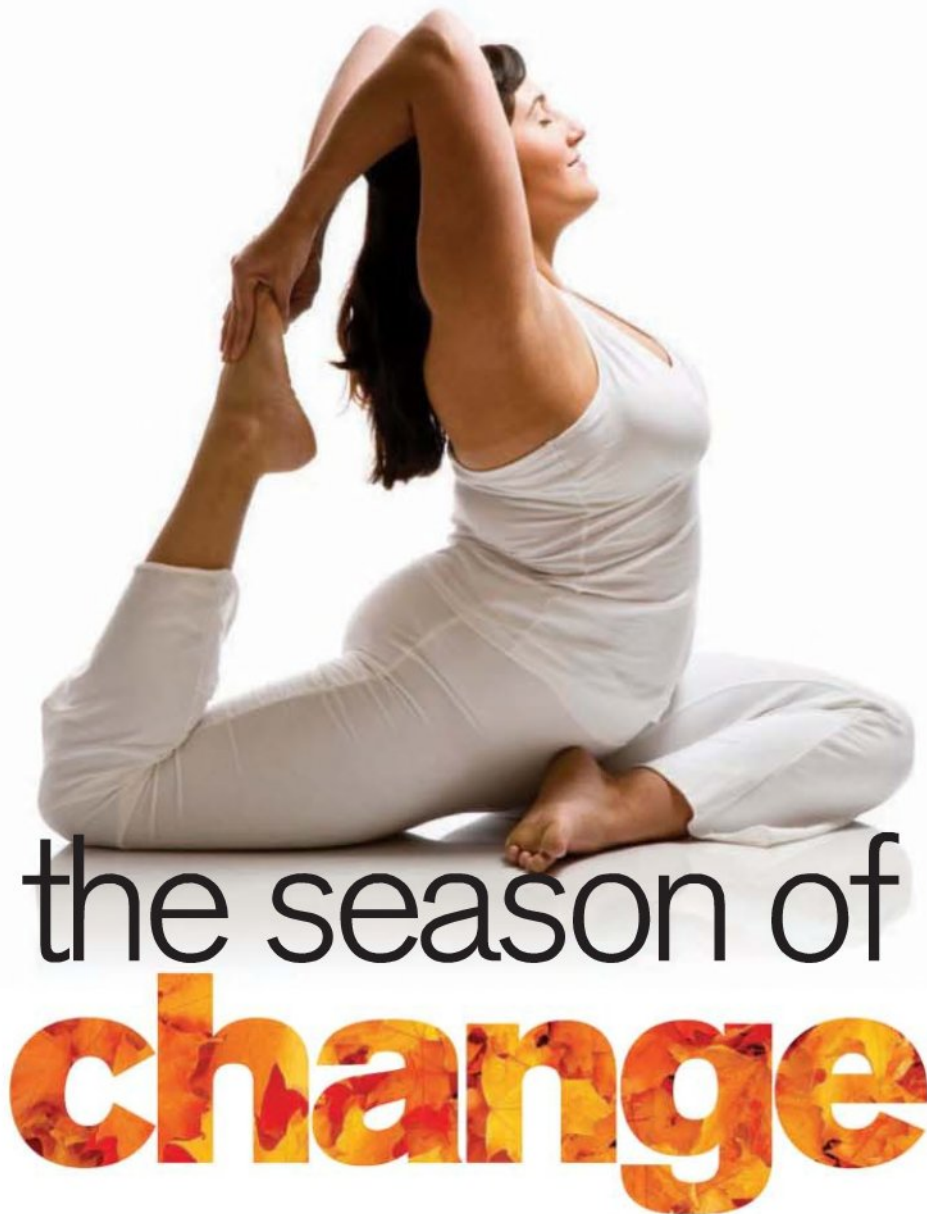
(Bound Side Angle Pose)



From Utkatasana, inhale and step your left leg straight back into a lunge. As you exhale, open into Virabhadrasana II. It's a pose you've probably done a zillion times, but you haven't done this specific Warrior II before, so stay alert.

Once again, take a moment to feel the weight of your feet on the floor. Soften your neck and jaw. If you find just the right amount of exertion—not too much and not too little—you might feel as though you could stay here forever, sitting confidently in the saddle of your warrior seat.

Before moving into Baddha Parsvakonasana, you'll need to create some fluidity, awareness, and precision in your shoulders, chest, and upper back through a series of arm rotations. Rotations of the arms and legs always begin at the root of the limbs. Invite the inner lower edges



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of your shoulder blades to move toward each other, lift your armpits, and roll your shoulders back to create external rotation of the arms. Your palms will rotate up, and your chest will feel more expansive. Reverse that by separating the shoulder blades and rolling the shoulders forward, turning the palms back. This is internal rotation, which closes off the chest and broadens the upper back.

Continue the rotations, inhaling as you externally rotate your arms and exhaling as you internally rotate them. Notice which way is easier for you and if that changes as you repeat this action 6 to 10 times, ending in external rotation.

Straighten your legs for a moment as you exhale, and rest here for two more breaths. Then inhale back into Warrior II. Exhale, bend to the right, and place your right forearm on your right thigh. Extend your left arm straight up to the ceiling and internally rotate it. Bring your left arm around your back and hold on to the top of your right hip crease. If this is too intense, place your hand on your sacrum instead. If this is easy for you, dip your right shoulder under your right knee and internally rotate your right arm. Reach up between your legs, and try to take hold of your left wrist with your right hand.

Go only as far as you can without distorting the lower-body alignment of Virabhadrasana II. So, if you have to stick your bum way out to reach under your leg, it means that binding the pose is not available to you today. If that happens, it's OK. Just notice it, rewind, and find a middle path that balances your ambition with healthy sensation.

MALASANA (Garland Pose), variation



Slowly unbind out of Baddha Parsvakonasana by spinning your chest toward the floor and placing both hands to the inside of your right foot. Lift your left heel and bring your foot forward, coming into a wide variation of Malasana.

If your heels don't touch the ground, place a folded blanket underneath them.

Fold your palms together in front of your chest. Imagine that you have a giant yoga block between your lower legs. Squeeze that block. At the same time, press your thighbones away from each other—this is more an action than a big movement. Feel how these actions release your back muscles and give you a sense of lift and support in your spine.

Move your breath through all the nooks and crannies of your legs. Imagine your wind energy is like a warm, friendly breeze blowing through the grand canyons of your groins. Can your breath help you find the middle path within a challenging position? Maybe it can create space in your mind, which in turn can create space in your hips.

Breathe in and place your left hand on the floor a few inches in front of the right foot. Exhale and twist to the right as your right arm floats up diagonally away from your left. Make a fist with your right hand. Then spread your fingers wide. Harden them together like you're doing a karate chop. Collapse them like wet pasta. Now find your middle-path hand that feels alive but not aggressive, not too tight and not too loose.

Exhale back to the center, roll back onto your sitting bones, and have a seat.

MARICHYASANA I



Extend your legs in front of you and roll them in and out a few times. Then sit up tall with your hands by your sides in Dandasana (Staff Pose). If your pelvis tucks under, sit on a block or blanket so that you feel your sitting bones rooting down into the earth. Bend your left leg and place your left heel on the floor as close to your left sitting bone as possible. Make sure there is some space between your left foot and right thigh. You can measure this by making a fist with your left hand and placing it in the space between your left foot and right thigh.

Lean forward and extend your left arm way out in front of you, creating a lot of

length along your left side. Internally rotate your left arm and wrap it around your left leg. Reach your right arm out to the side, internally rotate it, and twist to the right slightly, taking your right arm around your back. If possible, hold on to your right wrist with your left hand. If you can just barely touch two fingers, then forget it. That's too much tension, and all your attention will be centered on that little finger drama, which will eventually turn into a shoulder drama, neck tension, jaw gripping, and—well, you see where this is going. Find the middle path of connection without grasping. If you can't reach, use a strap and wait for your body to open naturally in the pose.

Stay here for a few deep breaths, finding stability and equanimity. The abdominal work in this pose is an essential part of the preparation for the deep twist of Pasasana, so let's take a moment to create some clarity around this process.

From where you are, completely relax your belly. Observe what that feels like. Then activate your abdominals as strongly as you can and feel that. You will probably notice that both of those experiments feel imbalanced. When you completely harden your belly or don't use it at all, there is no movement available. Now try to engage the outer abdominal wall of muscles just enough to allow the inner belly—organs, fluids, connective tissue—to be mobile. A middle-path belly is healthy and useful.

Begin to fold forward over your long right leg. Take your time and feel how, with each breath, you might be able to go a little farther, even if the distance covered is invisible to the human eye. Review the work you did with the feet in Utkatasana, and make sure that your left foot is evenly centered on the floor and not rolling out to the left.

After five to eight breaths, inhale and release the pose. Rock forward onto your hands and step into Downward Dog. Step or jump forward into Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend). Inhale to Utkatasana, and repeat the whole sequence to the other side, doing Parivrtta Utkatasana, Virabhadrasana II to Baddha Parsvakonasana, Malasana, and Marichyasana I.

PASASANA (Noose Pose)



Extend your legs into Dandasana, and send some refreshing breaths into your ankles, knees, and hips. Bring your knees into your chest, rolling back on your exhalation and forward on your inhalation. The last time you rock forward, come up onto your feet into a low squat.

Start by doing a variation of the pose. Squat with a block or a wall about one foot behind you. Organize your legs and feet just as you did in Utkatasana, heels and toes touching. If your heels do not touch the ground in this position, slip a folded blanket underneath them.

Exhale and twist to the right. Place the outside of your left shoulder between your legs. Internally rotate your left arm and wrap it around your left leg. Reach your right arm behind you and place it on the block or touch the wall. After a few breaths, untwist and try the other side. Continue to work this way until you feel an opening to go farther.

To develop the full pose, use your abdominals to twist to the right again, but this time place your left shoulder on the outside of the right thigh. Strongly activate the inner thighs and cinch your legs together. Internally rotate both arms and reach around behind your back to bind. Use a strap if you can't reach. Eventually, you will hold your right wrist with your left hand. Try to find a way to hold hands with yourself so the noose can be more a garland of flowers. After a few breaths, release the pose and do the other side.

As you work on Pasasana, take time with every step of the process. Listen to your muscles, bones, connective tissue, breath, and mind. They will all have valuable suggestions for when you should engage more effort, let go a bit, or perhaps just stay where you are, waiting to see what unfolds. Eventually your experience of physical feelings in your asana practice will evolve into an evenness of sensation throughout your entire body.

Often when you feel intensity in one particular area, it draws all your attention there. The entire mind becomes occupied

by the little drama of the right shoulder, and you may forget you even have a whole body. Doesn't that sound similar to how we sometimes live life, getting stuck in the small stuff and missing the big picture? When we do that, we have a harder time keeping things in perspective and making smart choices.

Rather than going for extremes, see if you can discover subtle shifts that might begin to even out your various sensations as well as your responses to sensations. Find balance by letting your awareness spread through your whole body. Observe what happens with your breath and your mind as your body finds balance and creates a container—not too tight and not too loose—of equanimity.

FINISHING YOUR PRACTICE

After Pasasana, have a seat, extend your legs in front of you, and roll them in and out a few times. Have two blocks and a blanket nearby. Come into Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose). Place the folded blanket on the floor behind you and slowly lie back on it. Tuck the back of it under your neck so that your forehead is higher than your chin. Place the blocks under your thighs and relax here for at least two delicious minutes.

Use your hands to draw your thighs together, and remove the blanket from underneath you. Bend your legs and place your feet flat on the floor. With your arms alongside your body, inhale and lift up into Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose). Stay for three breaths and exhale down. Do either Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose) twice or Bridge two more times. Then take Happy Baby Pose, pressing your sacrum into the floor. Rock side to side for a back massage. On an inhalation, rock up to sitting. Organize your blanket setup for Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand) and stay for 10 breaths. Slowly roll down, and then lie in Savasana (Corpse Pose) for 10 minutes. ❀

A longtime hatha yoga and Tibetan Buddhism practitioner, Cyndi Lee created OM Yoga in 1998. She has written several books and teaches around the world. For more information, visit omyoga.com.

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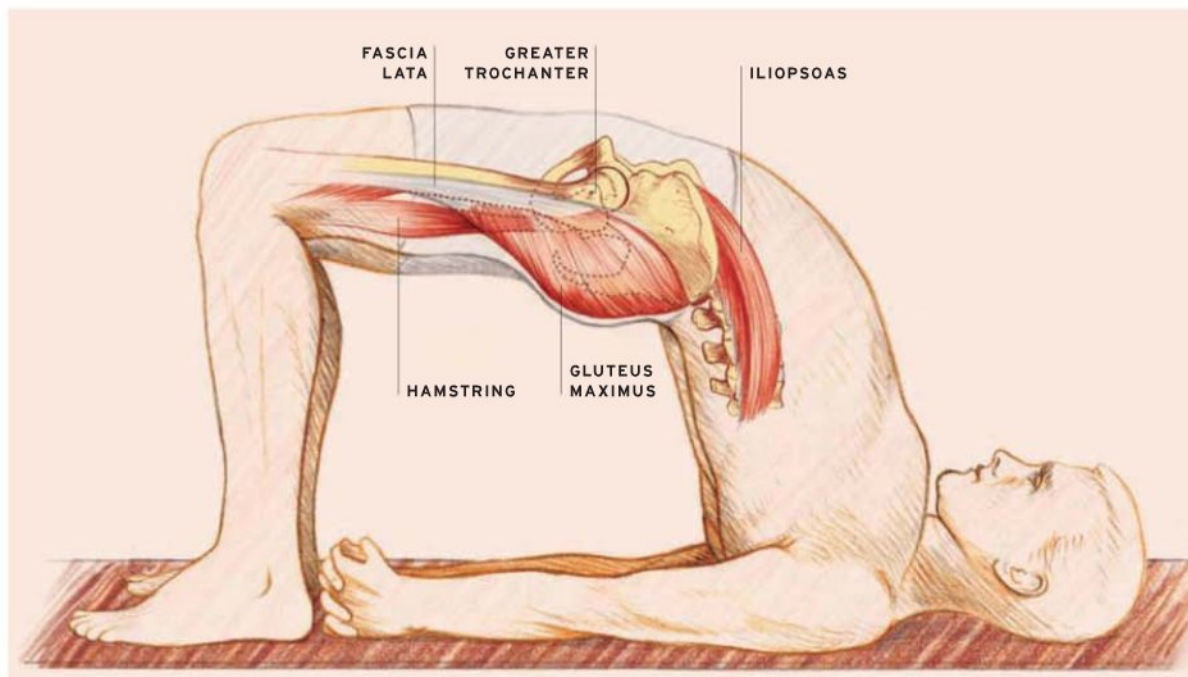


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the max factor

What are you supposed to do with your gluteus maximus in backbends? Squeeze or soften?



There's a great divide among yoga teachers about the correct way to use the gluteus maximus—the main muscle of each buttock—in backbends. Some teachers are “Grippers,” who urge their students to contract the gluteals as hard as they can; others are “Soft Pedalers,” who try to sell their students the idea that they must always keep the muscles completely relaxed; and still others are “Peacemakers,” who try to find some compromise between the two.

Common sense favors the Grippers. Just about any yoga student can tell you that **bending backward** can cause a painful pinching sensation at the base of the spine, and that tightening the buttocks often takes that pain away very quickly. Usually, the more you tighten, the less your back hurts and the deeper you can move into the pose. This works in almost any backbend.

Case closed, it would seem: You should obviously contract your gluteal muscles in backbends, right? Not according to hard-core Soft Pedalers, who insist that you must never engage your buttocks while bending backward. But how could anyone even think such a thing when your direct experience so clearly tells you otherwise? What sort of incense have they been burning? It would be easy to dismiss those teachers out of hand—except that many of them are

crazy-good backbenders, and their gluteus maximus muscles are perfectly soft and relaxed even when they are deep in the throes of a crazy-good backbend. So who's right?

The answer is: It depends. People who have tight hip flexors (the muscles that pull the thighs toward the chest) can benefit from contracting their gluteals in a backbend, if they do it the right way. Those with loose hip flexors are usually better off keeping their glutes relaxed.

TIGHT LOGIC

Backbends require maximal extension of the hip joints. Extension is the action of opening the hip joint in front. To understand this action, move into a lunging pose like Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I). The hip joint of your back leg is in extension. In order to achieve extension, the hip flexors have to stretch. The primary hip flexor is the iliopsoas muscle. The top end of



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the iliopsoas attaches to the lower spine and upper front pelvis, while the bottom end attaches to a bony projection on the upper inner thighbone (the lesser trochanter). When you extend your hip, you lengthen the iliopsoas. If the muscle is tight, it prevents your hip from extending as far as it should and instead pulls your lower spine and upper pelvis forward. This exaggerates the arch of your lower back and creates the painful and all-too-familiar lumbar pinch.

Some people have long, loose hip flexor muscles. When they do backbends, their hips move virtually unopposed into deep extension, so they can easily get far into the pose without overusing the lower back. Other people have short, tight hip flexors. They cannot advance safely into backbends unless they find a way to make their hip flexors longer. One way to do this is to actively stretch them by contracting the hip extensor muscles.

GLUTE TOLERANCE

The strongest hip extensor is the gluteus maximus. Its upper end attaches to the back of the pelvis and the sacrum. Its fibers run diagonally downward and to the side, and its lower end attaches to the back of the upper thighbone and to the fascia lata, a strong band of connective tissue on the outside of the thigh. When the gluteus maximus contracts, it does three things: It extends the hip joint, it rotates the thighbone outward, and it pulls the thighbone out to the side (abduction). Of these three actions, only one—extension—moves you deeper into a backbend; the other two create misalignments. This mixed effect is the main source of the confusion about whether and how to use the gluteal muscles when bending backward.

Teachers in the Gripper camp seem to see only the positive effects of contracting the glutes in backbends. They argue that it decompresses the lower back by tilting the top of the pelvis and sacrum backward, stretches the hip flexors by extending the hip joint, and strengthens the buttocks. Therefore, the Grippers conclude, everyone should squeeze the gluteals when they bend backward.

THE SOFT APPROACH

But Soft Pedalers are quick to point out that contracting the glutes can make it impossible for highly flexible yogis to move completely into the deepest backbends. For a maximal backbend, the pelvis has to tilt backward. When you tighten your gluteus maximus, it tilts your pelvis back at first, but when it reaches full contraction, it forms a hard lump of muscle that sits between the back of the pelvis and the back of the thigh. In extreme backbends, this lump physically blocks the pelvis from tilting back any farther, so a flexible practitioner can't extend to his or her full capacity.

To make matters worse, if a flexible yogi allows the gluteal muscles to pull the thighs apart and turn them out, as the muscles naturally tend to do, this jams the greater trochanters (the knobby part of the upper outer thighbones) against the back of the pelvis, further impeding backward pelvic tilt. It's no wonder, then, that many extraloose backbenders choose to be Soft Pedalers: Hard glutes prevent them from moving 100 percent of the way into their favorite poses.

Those in the Gripper camp might retort, with good reason, that these are problems of an elite minority of freakishly flexible people. For the average Joe Yogi, tight hip flexors stop the pelvis from tilting back long before it runs up against the gluteal lump or the greater trochanters. Shouldn't Joe have the right to tighten his buttocks if it gives him a fighting chance of extending his hips and saving his back?

Undaunted, the Soft Pedaler would counter that contracting the glutes is bad in backbends for all people. Even though the gluteus maximus does give some stretch to the iliopsoas by extending the hip, it then takes part of that stretch away by pulling the thighs apart and rotating them outward (this combination of movements shortens the iliopsoas by moving the lesser trochanter closer to the pelvis). The same abducting, externally rotating action also wastes much of the glutes' energy by directing their muscular force out to the sides, rather than using it to pull the thighs straight backward in the direction of the backbend.

RECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

Before the Grippers and the Soft Pedalers come to blows, the Peacemakers step in, citing pros and cons on both sides. They agree with the Soft Pedalers that hardening the glutes can prevent superflexible yogis from reaching their full potential in backbends, but they also note a weakness in their other arguments: Every one of them is based on the assumption that tightening the buttocks will pull the thighs apart and turn them out. Like the Grippers, the Peacemakers believe that engaging the glutes has the potential to help the average yogi, so they ask, "Isn't there a way to contract the gluteal muscles in backbends without allowing the thighs to fly outward? Wouldn't this give Joe Yogi the benefits of these powerful muscles without the downside?"

The answer is yes, and the method has three parts: Selectively contract those parts of the gluteus maximus that produce the most hip extension with the least abduction and external rotation, contract helper muscles that add to the hip

extension, and contract guiding muscles that can help hold the thighbones in.

OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

The upper fibers of the gluteus maximus produce the most abduction and external rotation, and the lower fibers produce the most extension; so if you contract your gluteal region in backbends, you should focus on tightening the lower half and keeping the upper half soft. The hamstrings and, to some extent, the adductor magnus (a large muscle of the inner thigh) are hip extensors that can help the gluteus maximus. You target these muscles by tightening the area just beneath your sitting bones. The adductor magnus also helps you keep your thigh rolled in, with the help of other inner thigh muscles and one outer hip muscle (the gluteus medius).

In reclining backbends with bent knees like Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose), your front thigh muscles (quadriceps) can help deepen the pose in its later stages because the more you straighten

the knees, the higher your pelvis will lift.

To learn how to isolate and target the lower glutes, hamstrings, and adductor magnus, stand near a wall for balance, rotate one leg far inward, and then, keeping the knee straight, lift the foot off the floor and move it back a little so its toes point toward the opposite heel. Touch the muscles below the sitting

Shouldn't Joe Yogi tighten his buttocks if it gives him a fighting chance in the pose?

bone. They are now hard, but the buttocks are still soft. You are contracting your hamstrings and adductor magnus but not your gluteus maximus. Keep the leg straight and rotated as far inward as you can and lift it backward a few inches more, just until you feel the lowest fibers of the gluteus maximus contract while all the fibers above remain soft. Now,



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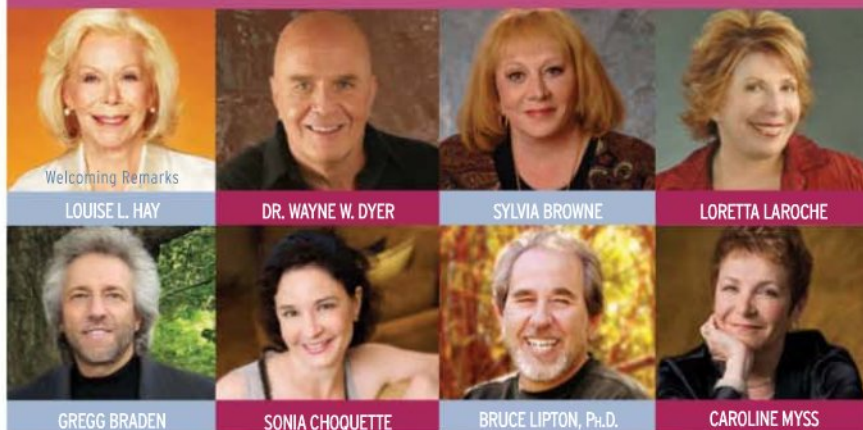
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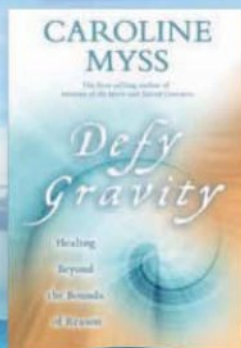
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without leaning your trunk forward or arching your back, slowly lift the leg straight back to contract the muscle fibers higher and higher up the buttock, but don't contract more than halfway up, and don't allow your foot to turn out at all. Remember this sequence of muscle recruitment; the next step is to re-create it in Bridge Pose.

BUILD A BALANCED BRIDGE

To do this, lie on your back with your knees bent. Place your feet hip-width apart and turn them in slightly. Keeping the buttocks soft, contract the muscles just below the sitting bones and use them to tilt the sitting bones up off the floor while the sacrum remains on the floor. Now, just as you did while standing, contract the lowest gluteal fibers. Use all these muscles to lift the pelvis off the floor, leading with the sitting bones. Keep your upper buttocks soft, but contract more and more lower gluteal fibers the higher you lift. Although your thighs will roll out slightly, tighten your inner thigh and outer front hip muscles to limit this.

Maintaining all these muscle contractions, imagine a line that connects your knees to your shoulders. When your hips reach that line, begin to contract your quadriceps as if to straighten your knees, to lift your pelvis still higher. When your hips are as high as they can go, try this: Contract your quads as hard as you can to maintain as much lift as possible, then completely soften the glutes, hamstrings, and adductor magnus. Your pelvis will probably drop a little. Now, keeping the quads just as active, contract the hamstrings, adductors, and lower buttocks from bottom to middle. Notice how this tilts your sitting bones up and lifts your pelvis higher. Any extra lift, tilt, and stretch you got from this contraction demonstrates the power of using the gluteus maximus and nearby extensor muscles to enhance your backbends. But that's the easy part. Now, can you find peace in this position? ❀

Roger Cole, PhD, at rogercoleyoga.com, is a certified Iyengar Yoga teacher and sleep research scientist in Del Mar, California.

media



generation yoga

Baby boomers were early adopters of yoga in the United States. Now Beryl Bender Birch adapts the practice for their changing bodies and minds.

BY TODD JONES

American baby boomers fueled yoga's worldwide explosion—first, by embracing a number of Indian gurus like Integral Yoga's Swami Satchidananda; Siddha Yoga's Swami Muktananda; and the Beatles' Transcendental Meditation mentor, Swami Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Then they enthusiastically adopted vigorous athletic styles of asana practice (think Iyengar Yoga, Pattabhi Jois's Ashtanga Yoga, and Bikram Yoga).

But now, as Beryl Bender Birch notes in *Boomer Yoga: Energizing the Years Ahead for Men and Women* (Sellers), this generation is passing through middle age. Many find that the practices that have long provided them with **strength, stamina, and equanimity** now sometimes bring discomfort, injury, and disappointment. In addition, says Birch, many boomers may discover that their life focus and motivations for practicing yoga shift away from doing, getting, and achieving and move toward acceptance, contentment, and matters of the

Lisa Black's playlist



Silence is powerful, says Lisa Black, owner of Shakti Vinyasa studios in the Seattle area, but music,

too, can be inspiring. Black, a Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga instructor, begins with a grounding track to calm the mind. Next are upbeat songs, perfect for Sun Salutations. More-reflective tunes follow for balancing poses, and then the pace picks up again for backbends and core work before slowing down with inversions, floor poses, and Savasana.

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by Sheila Chandra

Joi by Tumbara

The Awakening by Sheila Chandra

Prana Shakti by Desert Dwellers
Down Temple Wave

Reaching Motherland
by Cybertribe

There Is So Much Magnificence
by Steve Gold

Nungabunda by Ganga Giri

Soft Music Under Stars
by Fila Brazillia

Gayatri Mantra by Nada Shakti
and Bruce BecVar

Chandra by Michael Mandrell and
Benjy Wertheimer

MORE ONLINE To download Lisa Black's playlist, go to yogajournal.com/multimedia.

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spirit. In *Boomer Yoga*, Birch sets out to provide a guidebook to this generation of yogis, from seasoned practitioners to complete beginners.

Given the popularity of vinyasa-based yoga, Birch's book may be a godsend to thousands who worry about not being able to continue to receive and deepen the physical benefits of a yoga practice as their strength, stamina, and flexibility fade with age. For such students, Birch's attitude—an often hard-won embrace of inevitable physical changes and losses—may be even more valuable than her practical advice on modifying asanas.

Four of the ten chapters outline a version of Power Yoga—the vinyasa-style practice (grounded in Ashtanga Yoga) that Birch has been teaching since 1980. It's all there—Ujjayi Pranayama (Victorious Breath), *drishti* (gaze), *bandhas* (locks), Sun Salutations, standing poses, seated poses, backbends, and simple inversions—albeit in a somewhat stripped-down practice that omits some of the more challenging poses.

Whether she's discussing asana, pranayama, meditation, ethics, or the interconnectedness of all things, Birch focuses on using yoga to quiet your mind and bring yourself into a direct experience of the present moment, rather than losing yourself in memories of the past or anticipation of the future. Only by having a deep awareness of what is truly in each moment, she writes, can you stop resisting reality and begin to act in harmony with it—and thus be happy.



LOVE SONGS TO THE DARK LORD,

by Bhagavan Das. Nutone; nutonemusic.com

Don't be alarmed by the album's title—this isn't satanic heavy metal. The Dark Lord is a name traditionally applied to the Hindu deity Krishna, who is sometimes depicted with dark, blue-black skin, particularly in Southern India. This

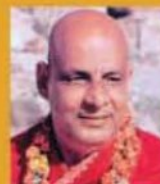
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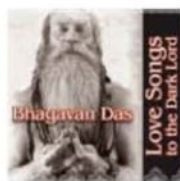
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entrancing CD is *raw bhakti*, the yoga of devotion, as expressed through music and Sanskrit chanting, here presented in a simple, traditional style.

Mantra veteran Bhagavan Das's vocal pitch wavers sometimes, but his devotion remains steady. There's no mistaking the sense of meditative stillness in his voice or in the minimal droning and hypnotic instrumentation that supports it. Tablas and other drums enhance some tracks, but the rhythms serve to calm and center, rather than excite. ALAN DI PERNA

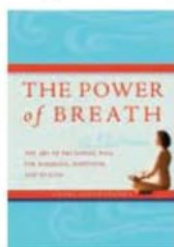


(books)

THE POWER OF BREATH, by Swami

Saradananda. Duncan Baird; dbponline.co.uk

Take a deep breath and dive into Swami Saradananda's exploration of pranayama. Saradananda, former director of Sivananda Yoga centers around the world, goes beyond fundamentals, organizing her book around the five *vayus* (winds)—*prana*, *samana*, *vyana*, *apana*, and *udana*—responsible for, respectively, inhalation, digestion, distribution, exhalation, and expression. Each *vayu* gets an introduction, a simple visualization practice, and an illustrative fable (with three drawn from the Upanishads), followed by breathing exercises and an asana sequence to enhance the pranayama.



Saradananda includes plenty of exercises that address such concerns as releasing stress, generating positive energy, and enhancing one's self-image. She also includes traditional pranayamas and supporting techniques like Jalandhara Bandha (Chin Lock) and Uddiyana Bandha (Upward Abdominal Lock). There's a lot of information packed into this small book, but go slow, and you might ignite a regular pranayama practice. RICHARD ROSEN

(video)

KUNDALINI YOGA FOR ENERGY AND

SUPER RADIANCE, with Ana Brett and Ravi Singh. Raviana Productions; raviana.com

As is typical of Kundalini Yoga, the nine sequences here step outside the traditional hatha box: There's lots of repetitive movements consisting of belly

rolling, arm waving and stretching, up-and-down squatting, sidebending, and twisting. At one point, Ana Brett models something that looks a lot like jumping jacks. Brett's exuberant demonstration of these exercises is backed by Singh's familiar little-soul-train-that-could instructional style that inspires you to get up and move. R.R. ❖



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Yoga teacher Kathryn Budig photographed by Jasper Johal

peace on the inside

continued from page 101

Today, various programs are offering young offenders life tools. These groups might come at asana and meditation in different ways, but they share a common goal: to help troubled teens look at themselves and consider alternative ways of being. The programs aim to offer insight into human psychology and help kids reflect on their habitual patterns, in hopes that they'll open up to new approaches. Or, at the very least, that they'll be calmer as they return to their turbulent environments after serving time.

ON THE INSIDE

Most yoga classes in juvenile halls are voluntary and segregated by gender, though rival gang members might be stuck next to each other in a meditation circle or on neighboring yoga mats. Boys often have to be coaxed to remove their shoes and socks, because it makes them feel exposed. It's often the kid in the back pretending to snore who's paying the most attention. It's the rare juvenile hall class

get involved

Several programs across the country are hoping to make a difference in young people's lives. To make a donation or volunteer your time, visit these websites and find out how to get involved:

The Art of Yoga Project

Northern California
theartofyogaproject.org

Lineage Project

New York lineageproject.org

Mind Body Awareness Project

Northern California mbaproject.org

Niroga Institute

Oakland and Berkeley, California
niroga.org

Street Yoga

Portland, Oregon
streetyoga.org

Vajra Yoga

New York vajrayoga.com

Yoga Behind Bars

Seattle
yogabehindbars.com

Y.O.G.A. for Youth

Los Angeles
yogaforyouth.org

that makes it to the closing Om without interruptions from alarm bells, a pickup basketball game at the other end of the gym, or an emergency lockdown caused by a fistfight elsewhere in the prison.

Perhaps it's this challenging atmosphere that leads yoga to touch the lives

of incarcerated youth in unexpected ways. Gordhamer recalls how a co-teacher was listening closely to a resident talk about the many difficulties in his young life. The instructor was intently focused on the young man, who seemed uncertain about the attention he was getting. "Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" the teacher responded.

"You were looking at me strange."

"I was just listening to you."

After a long pause, the young man responded, "I guess no one has ever really listened to me before."

Gordhamer describes teaching a youth named Jamal, a heavily tattooed 17-year-old who was a bit of a loner. Although he attended yoga class every week, the boy never really participated.

"I couldn't figure him out," says Gordhamer. "I wondered, Why does he keep coming to class if he's not interested in yoga? I even got a little frustrated with him. Yet, week after week, Jamal showed up to class, went through the motions, and always thanked me and gave me a hug afterwards. The hugs were the juvenile hall kind—quick, with a pat on the back—but they were still hugs. And then it hit me: That's why Jamal came every week. For the hug. What he really needed was some care and human touch."

Shawn Kent, the founder of Green Dharma, a nonprofit based in Austin,



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Texas, has seen the same thing in yoga classes he offers at Gardner Betts Juvenile Justice Center. "In cultures where people don't touch each other much, there's significantly more aggression," he says. But not everyone in juvenile hall is going to ask for a hug.

"I use anatomy charts and discuss with the kids in scientific terms how stretching and mindful touch relax the body," Kent says. "Bottom line, yoga works."

REINVENTING SELF

Girls make up about 15 percent of the youth-prison population. The Art of Yoga Project, founded in 2003 by nurse practitioner and yoga instructor Mary Lynn Fitton, serves girls in San Francisco and Bay Area juvenile detention centers.

"Sharing yoga with these young women has been the most profound, rich, and rewarding experience of my life," Fitton says. "We aspire to help them rediscover a deep respect and reverence for their bodies. We team-teach in groups of three or four adult women, role-modeling female connection rather than female competition. And we usually start a class by setting the space with flowers and other inspirational items."

The yoga offered usually includes Warrior poses and partner stretches, breathing exercises, and guided meditation. Fitton says the teachers always offer the girls a chance to work hard with a vinyasa flow, which the teens love because it really relaxes them. "And we'll invite the girls to teach some of the poses, too."

After yoga, the girls work on a creative project, such as drawing, making a collage, or writing. "It gives them a new identity. They've been labeled bad, but now they get to be a yogi, a writer," Fitton says.

When asked shortly before her release from youth prison what came to mind when she heard the word "yoga," one 15-year-old girl who took classes with the Art of Yoga Project wrote in her closing evaluation, "I think of being calm. And prepared. There's a light. A bright light like the sun. And strength of character. Stuff like love, just loving yourself. Yoga has made me realize that when you do yoga, you learn to depend on yourself."

Seventeen-year-old Gabriella (a pseudonym for a girl who asked that her real name not be used) agrees. "Yoga really does help," she says. "It helps you learn to relax and be nice to other people and balance your life better."

Last January, in an unprecedented show of support by a youth prison for the value of yoga, Gabriella and two other residents from the Margaret J. Kemp Camp for Girls in San Mateo, California, were escorted by institution counselors to Berkeley to attend a fundraiser for the Art of Yoga Project hosted by Anusara Yoga teacher Desirée Rumbaugh. "It was exciting," says Gabriella. "At first I was like, what the heck, we're going to go practice yoga for two hours? But it was fun."

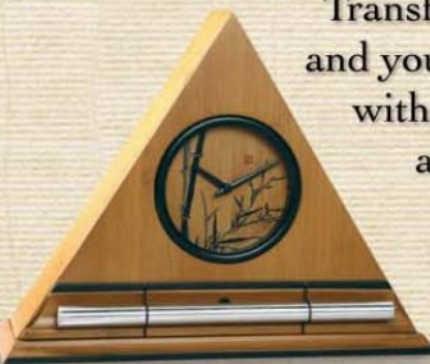
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

More and more these days, raised eyebrows about teaching yoga to jailed teens have given way to good press and praise from the judicial system. "The Art of Yoga is likely the most valuable program offered at Camp Kemp," says director

Glenda Miller. "We feel very fortunate that our residents receive the benefits of this powerful yet peaceful practice." The Probation Department in San Mateo County, California, has even committed its support to youth-prison yoga and meditation classes with \$50,000 of its budget.

Gabriel Kram, the MBA Project's director of consulting services, is pleased to see the growing acceptance of contemplative practices as effective tools to help at-risk kids. "We routinely evaluate youth and probation staff after running our intervention programs," he says. "Through these evaluations, we've been able to pinpoint several consistent benefits: Youth tend to have greater control of their emotions; there's a marked increase in peaceful resolution; and they're more likely to ask for help when they need it."

While the work done inside institutions is important, many kids need help after they get out. Alfonzo thrived when he learned meditation at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center. But now, on the outside, he feels a bit lost. "When



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I was inside and working with the group, it was good," he says. "But now that I'm out, I feel kind of alone."

This is exactly why the MBA Project hopes to get funding for its proposed "aftercare" program that will offer support and resources to kids once their sentences have been served. But the most long-term thinking may be to offer yoga and meditation classes to kids before they get too deep into trouble.

Andre Lackner never served time, but he was well on his way. He grew up in a turbulent neighborhood in Inglewood, California, and his alcohol use, destructive behavior, and lackluster academic performance got him kicked out of high schools twice and then placed in a continuation school called Del Rey, where yoga teacher Hala Khouri taught him yoga poses as well as some yoga philosophy. Lackner, then 16, discovered new ways of managing his emotions and interacting with the world.

"After that first yoga session, I got stopped by some cops. As a minority in Los Angeles, you have a lot of hostility

toward cops," says Lackner. "But instead of getting angry or nervous or panicking, I took a breath to calm myself down. I noticed that I can calm myself down and get superchill. 'Wow,' I thought. 'I can make myself relax at will. That's tight!'"

Lackner loved the yoga practice so much that he regularly crossed Los Angeles—a trip that required him to take four different buses—to practice with Khouri at the Exhale studio in Venice. Now 20, Lackner has finished Santa Monica College (a community college) and trained this summer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York. His future is looking brighter than ever.

Lackner says that yoga helped him react less to stressful situations and even helped him to stop using drugs. He says with a laugh, "I realized I could get high off of doing yoga instead." ❖

Keith Kachtick is the founder and director of Dharma Yoga, a Buddhist school of hatha yoga based in Austin, Texas. Diane Anderson is senior editor at Yoga Journal.

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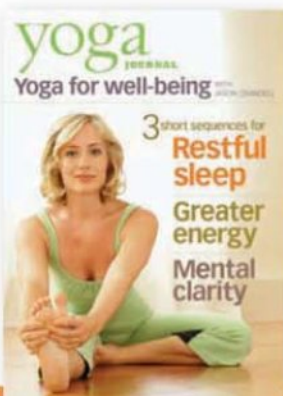
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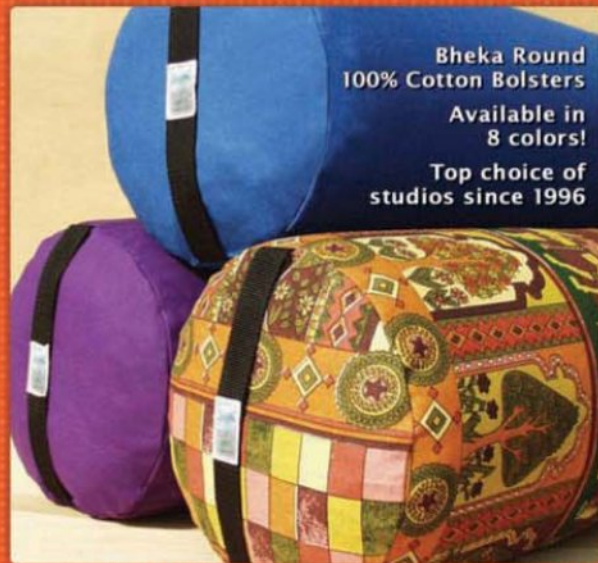


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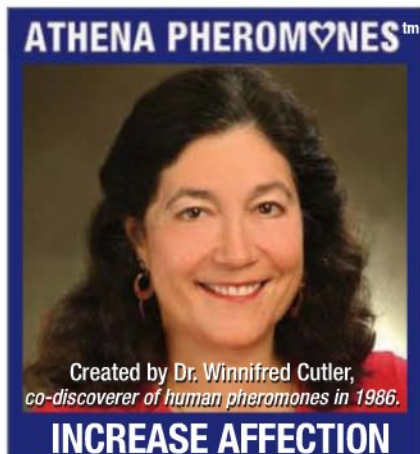


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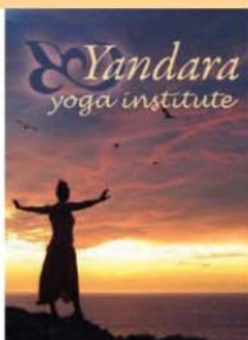
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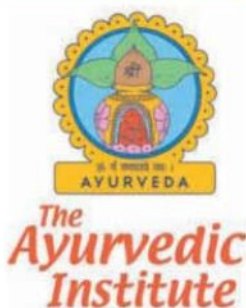
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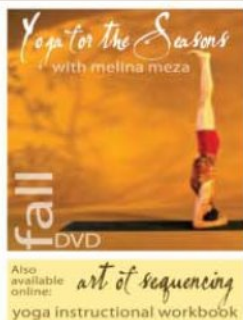


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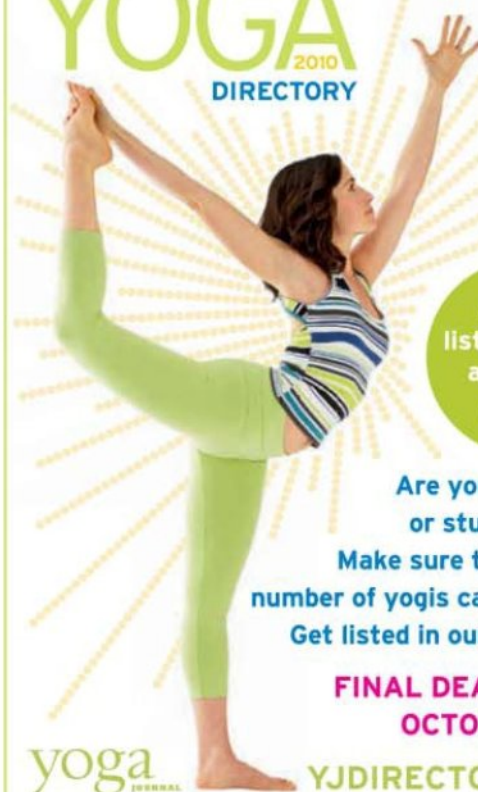
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the delight of insight

Through meditation, mindfulness, and Yin Yoga, Sarah Powers champions inner stillness, without giving up active practice.



Having studied many forms of yoga—Ashtanga, Iyengar, and Viniyoga—and popularized Yin Yoga, Sarah Powers has created a **custom practice** that she calls Insight Yoga, which weaves together yoga, Buddhism, Chinese medicine, and transpersonal psychology. Her classes combine active, flowing postures with long, receptive holds of Yin postures. She emphasizes the importance of silence and the benefits of interpersonal dialogue.

Why have you started to include interpersonal dialogue in your workshops? I have a background in transpersonal psychology. Meditation helps us see what is truly going on in our hearts and minds, and the interpersonal dialogue work creates a bridge for sharing our inner life in our outer relationships. When we share with others in a safe practice space, we heal the wounds of isolation.

What would you like people to know about Yin Yoga? Yin is a wonderful way to become more still and relate to silence. You tap creative features within yourself that you can't through constant activity. Silence is an amazing teacher. Regions of our nature are unlived in until we investigate what it's like to drop the habits of the conceptual mind that comments on life. In that quiet we find the universal quality where we can connect with each other even though we're not connecting through language. Sustained silence is extremely nourishing.

How do you view the relationship between asana and meditation? Meditation training helps us find ease in discomfort. If asana practice is always about movement, it's helpful to have a practice that teaches you how to be still and less reactive to internal discomfort. Suffering comes up in our reactivity, not so much in our experience of pain. And yoga and meditation are important vehicles for self-exploration. You climb into your experience in your body, in your emotional realm, so that you actually get to know your mind and body.

How do you balance traveling, teaching, and family? My practice life feeds a mentality of feeling grateful for the privileges I have. And I travel with [my husband] Ty, so there's a lot of time to feel at home because he is my home. If he hadn't made himself available to come with me all these years, I would have just stopped it. When we homeschooled our daughter, Imani, she was always with us, and we chose to travel to places that would give Imani a global perspective. We're extremely close, the three of us.

What is the essence of what you hope to convey to students? They are more magnificent than they know, and this path to self-discovery will help them love themselves and life more. ❖

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