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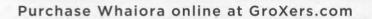




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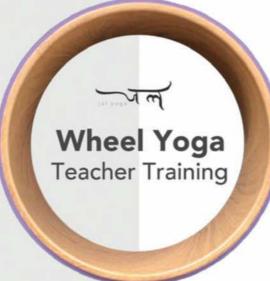
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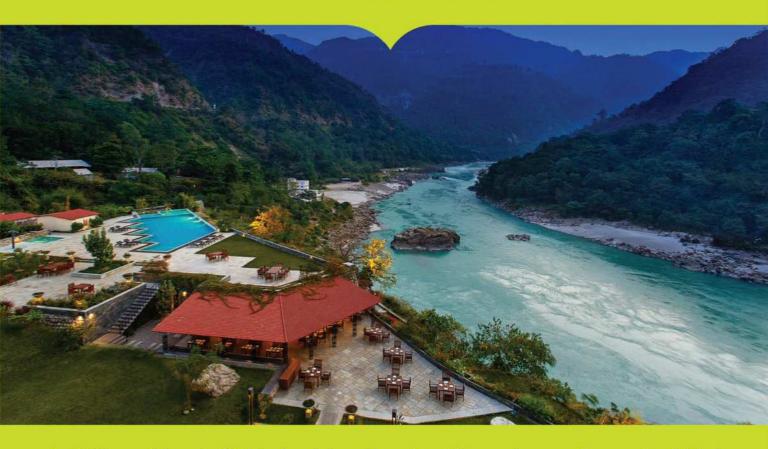
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Dear Readers,

As you will notice, this edition has a lot of pictures. The last two months have been a pictorial landscape for Yoga Journal Singapore, as we hosted our first spiritual retreat to India, where the sights and sounds of Rishikesh left each member in the group spellbound. We also interviewed a beautiful Bollywood celebrity, as she unveiled her wax statue in Singapore, and told us about her very own wellness mantra—"Love Yourself"! We also scripted a yoga dance performance for India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who visited the island recently—all of these incidents prompting irresistible clicks from the camera. And before we knew, the underlying theme of this edition became the birthplace of yoga - India!

While in Rishikesh, it was my pleasure to go to the Parmarth Niketan Ashram to meet with Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, an American sage who adopted Rishikesh as her home 22 years ago. Interviewing her was an experience I will never forget, least of all because she was just as comfortable speaking in Hindi as she was in English. It takes courage, will power and a lot of spiritual energy for a Stanford University graduate to renounce a life of luxury in the United States and embrace simplicity, selfdiscipline and asceticism in a remote corner of India. Along with her life, she renounced her American identity and her name, and "Sadhvi-ji" is how she is referred to by followers in and outside India (Page 63).

"equanimity" for me—the state of maintaining composure no matter of being in this state. "Equanimity allows for the mystery of things: the unknowable, uncontrollable nature of things just as they are," says the author.

In our "Eat Well" segment as well, we bring you traditional Indian recipes that cater to the three Ayurvedic compositions and the diets that go with them. The Kapha-Calming Apple dessert on page 44 is a must-try.

Last but not the least, we touch upon "Chanting" and how "Mantras" are an essential tool in many homes in India. The magic of mantra, and

the scientific changes as noticed in the brain when you chant mantras, are being researched and quantified by neurologists and psychologists who believe there is a natural "relaxation response" from chanting. We give you a beginner's guide to common mantras on Page 49.

As our theme about India developed, it occurred to me that this edition will be released around International Yoga Day on June 21, when yoga mats find their way to many chosen locations, be it Times Square in New York, Trafalgar Square in London, or Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur. In Singapore this year, 100 centers will host free yoga sessions from 16 June to 24 June. To register, go to www.idayyoga.com.

Happy International Yoga Day!

Enjoy the magazine!

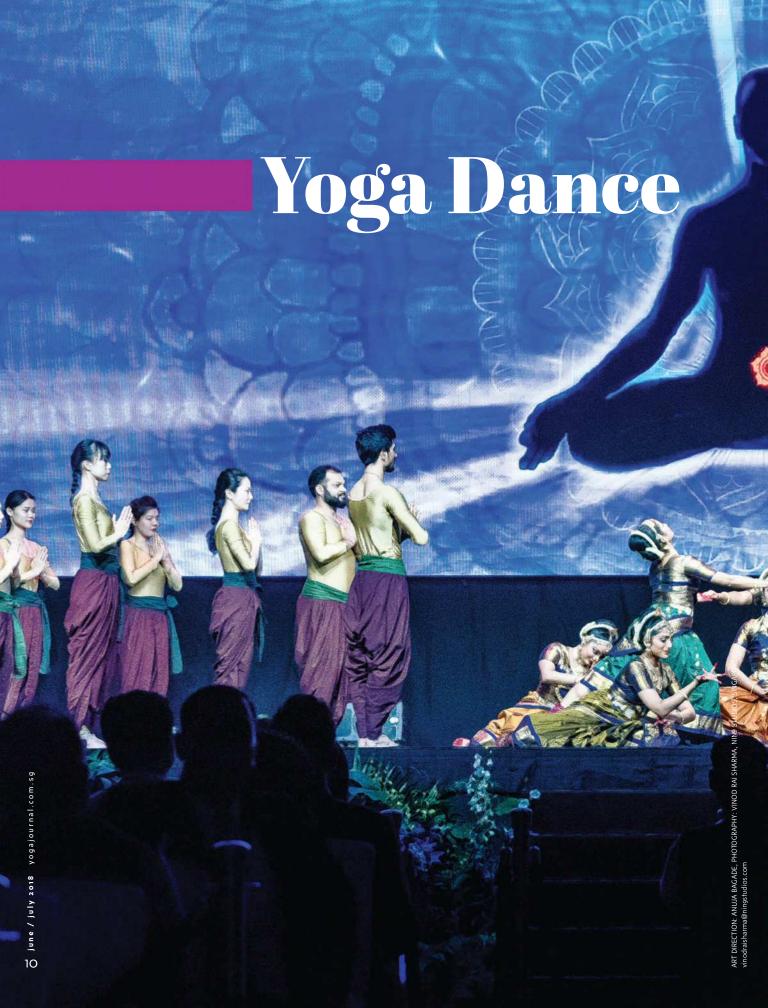
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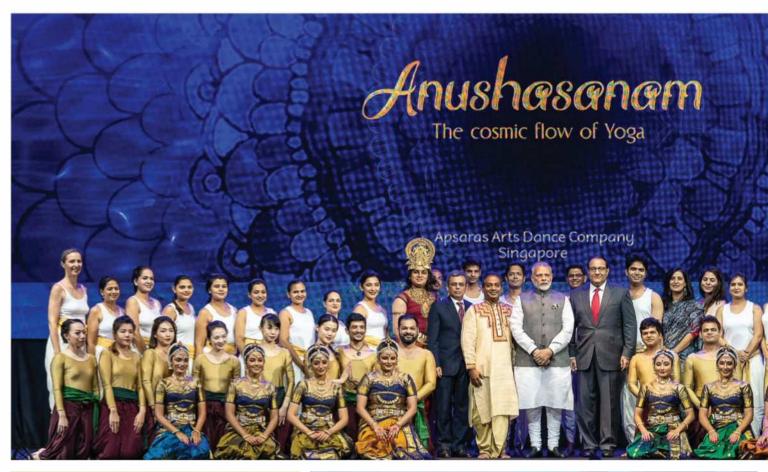
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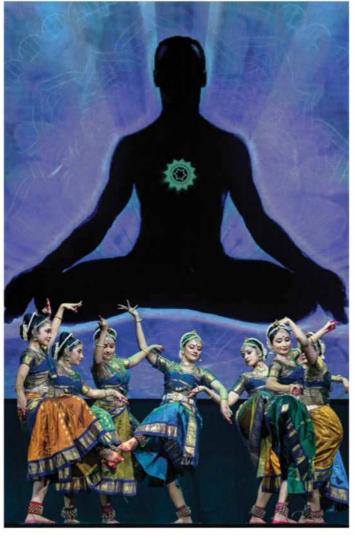


India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi was greeted with a dance and yoga performance at the Marina Bay Sands Ballroom on May 31. The show was called *Anushasanam*, that depicted the benefits of practising yoga to awaken cosmic energies that lie in the seven chakras of the human body. It was conceptualized and scripted by Yoga Journal and Apasara Arts in Singapore.









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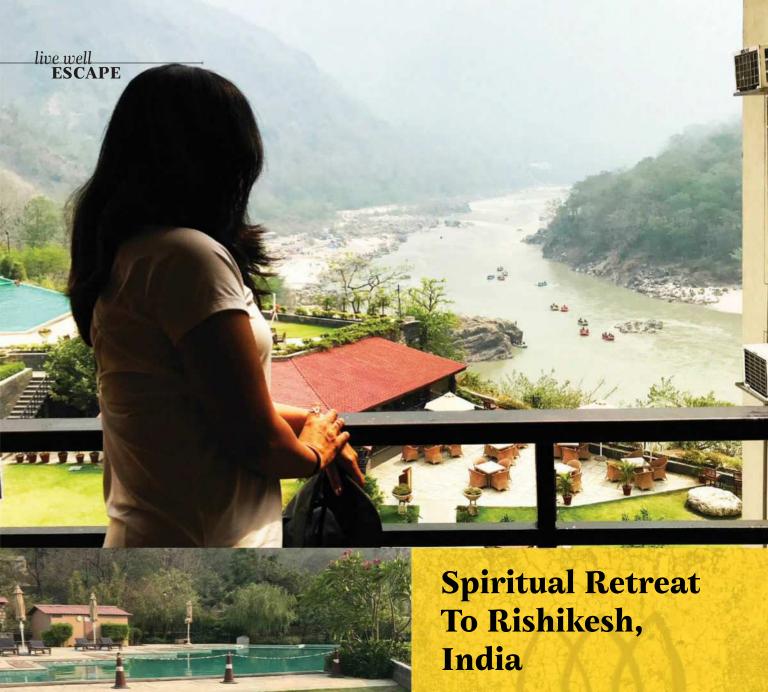


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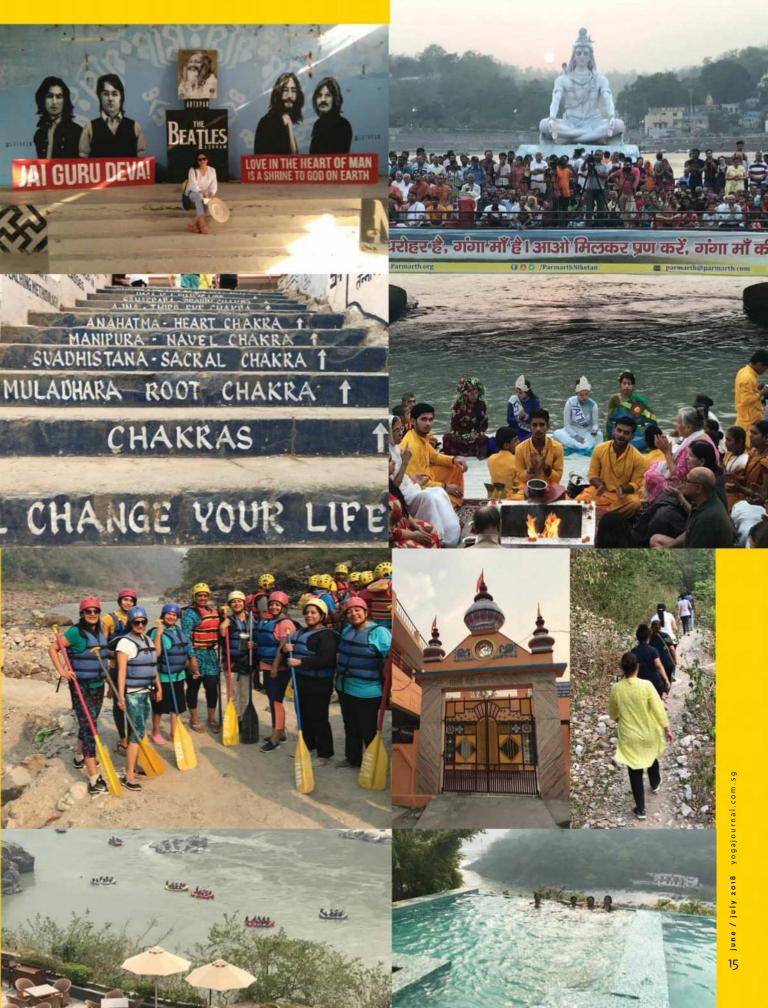


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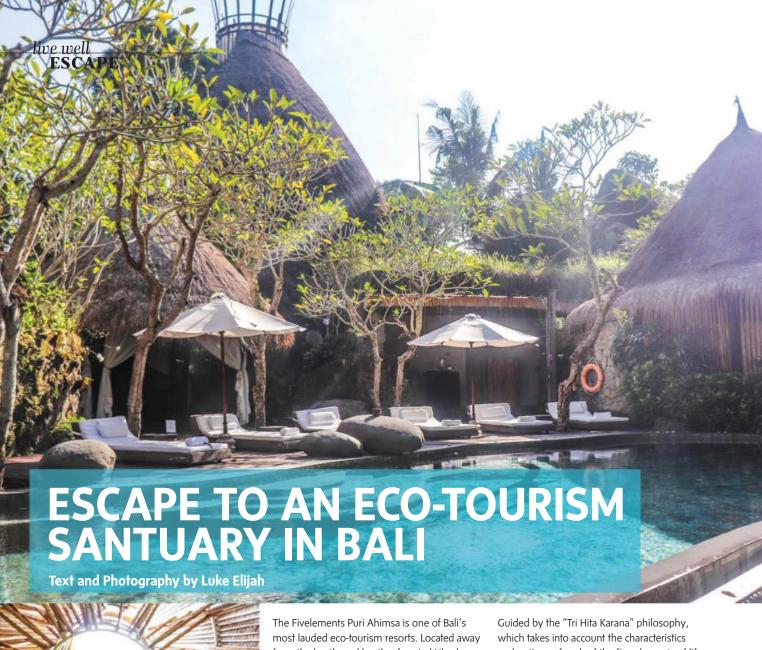
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Yoga Journal Singapore hosted its first retreat in India – one that involved yoga, meditation, river rafting, prayers by the banks of the Holy Ganga river, morning trek, swimming, delicious vegetarian food, a visit to the Beatles museum; and much more. The group of 11, led by YJSG editor Kavita Chandran, soaked in the natural beauty of the place where yoga originated. The success and positive feedback has encouraged us to plan this retreat again. Email our editor if you want to join for the next one.







The Fivelements Puri Ahimsa is one of Bali's most lauded eco-tourism resorts. Located away from the hustle and bustle of central Ubud, amid tranquil highlands that are surrounded by lush rainforests, waterfalls, rice padi fields and with the sacred Ayung River flowing through, the Fivelements is a premier eco-conscious holistic healing destination to experience inner peace and deep rejuvenation of the senses. Time honoured traditions and deeply rooted principals of the Balinese civilization pervade this natural sanctuary where modern plant-based science meets ancient sacred arts.

The name Fivelements is inspired by the revered Balinese concept of "Panca Mahabhuta" which is based on the five essential elements: air, water, fire, earth and ether. Dedicated to a motto of 'love in action', the retreat encourages guests to nurture a harmonious equilibrium through spiritual practices and wholesome organic diet.

and notions of each of the five elements of life. the architects and builders of this elemental sanctuary consulted with respected Balinese priests and involved the local community in every step of their design conceptualisation and construction process. Built with natural unprocessed materials such as bamboo, rattan, stone, timber and coconut, the Fivelements was designed to utilize passive cooling systems such as the unique "bio-mimicry" ceiling fan design and environmental shades to reduce the carbon footprint of air-conditioning. Other eco-friendly initiatives include the use of LED lighting technology and low-level wattage that leads to an impressive 95% reduction in electricity consumption.

The retreat has a lot to offer: sacred ceremonies, family friendly activities, luxurious spa treatments and appetizing organic foods.

Guests are greeted in an ambrosial sanctum comprising spacious coconut husk roof hut structures strewn over lush gardens and well-maintained courtyards teeming with vibrant tropical flora and fauna.

I felt as if I was walking through an enchanted Smurf village that had been given an authentic Balinese makeover. An amazing experience I had at the Fivelements was the highly popular Agnihotra fire purification ceremony that is led by an experienced Balinese priest. Other notable activities included water hydrotherapy, djembe drum jamming sessions, spiritual Aikido, as well as holistic yoga sessions at the two purpose built shaded bamboo framed structures.

The best part of my stay at the Fivelements was the incredible organic raw vegan food which was second to none—a plethora of scrumptiously delicious offerings jampacked with vitamins, minerals, enzymes and nutrients.

As a leading healing destination, the Fivelements appreciates and understands that food is more than simply body fuel. The retreat is centred on a philosophy that focuses on the consumption of fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds and legumes in their natural state, as much as possible. When food is prepared raw, or only lightly heated at under 48 degrees Celsius, it retains the vital life force and is full of nutrients and enzymes that are required for proper digestion and cellular regeneration.

Talented and knowledgeable chef Made Tantra supervises the Sakti dining room with his decades of experience, meticulously preparing gourmet raw food using ancient Ayurvedic principals. Chef Made prides himself with curating the most exquisite and delectable artisanal raw vegan dishes for all retreat guests and day visitors. A gastronomical trip to the Sakti dining room is guaranteed to make any raw food neophyte squeal with wonderment and amazement. Who would have thought that raw vegan food could look so appealing and also taste this good?

www.fivelements.org

Luke Elijah is a Singapore-based health coach, spiritual practitioner and professional photographer. You can reach him at lukelijah@gmail.com













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The secret to finding neutral

Yoga teachers often talk about practicing with a "neutral" pelvis and spine. But what exactly is neutral? How do you know when you're there? And why is it important? **Tom Myers** explains.

THE WONDERFUL INSIGHTS YOU FIND in asana practice need to come back to your daily life, right? Finding neutral—or what I call coming home to your body—is a practice of its own. What is your neutral? No matter what part of the body we're talking about, it's good to know the answer to this question, so you don't keep returning to a position that doesn't serve you or your yoga practice.

There are lots of differing opinions about what constitutes a neutral position. For yogis, Tadasana (Mountain Pose) describes a neutral standing position: easily resting upright, stacked up in gravity, and bearing weight on centered, balanced feet (figure A, on the next page).

A second form of neutral is called "anatomical position"—a term coined in the early 1900s to describe the version of neutral that makes sense for anatomical naming (figure D). This neutral position is expressed in yoga as Savasana (Corpse Pose): lying horizontal, resting out of gravity, and fully supported with your arms open.

My sporty friends argue that there's a third type of neutral, called "athletic neutral," which happens when you're alert: with weight resting slightly on your toes, knees and hips flexed, arms in front of your chest at the ready (figure B). "Athletic neutral" is close in shape, though not in muscle tone, to a fourth possible definition of neutral, called "floating neutral": the position you'd take if you were totally relaxed under water, like a fetus in the womb or an astronaut in space (figure C).

These four neutrals are common positions from which you move. Right now, take a moment to consider if one of these positions supports your health and helps you find a sense of calm. Can you feel yourself comfortably resting and happy in Tadasana or Savasana? Or are the neutrals you experience in these poses not actually neutral for you—therefore creating anxiety or draining your energy?

Consider Tadasana for a moment. Beginner yogis often believe this is the simplest pose; yet when you really break it down, it's actually

one of the most challenging poses to master. One of the reasons so many of us find *Tadasana* so challenging is because finding true neutral in this posture is rarer than you may think. Too often, our natural neutral—our birthright of balance—has been disturbed by accident, incident, or attitude, producing a front-back imbalance with hips jutting forward and heart falling back (figure E, on page 22).

Upright standing, as in Tadasana, with your heels on the earth, weight back, and back body lengthened, is a form of coming home to your body. Relaxed standing is calming, centering, and generally a parasympathetic stimulus, meaning it stimulates the repose, restore, renew, and repair part of your autonomic nervous system. Compare this to the athletic neutral position, which stimulates your sympathetic nervous system—commonly called your fight-or-flight system.

These days, way too many of us find ourselves halfway between the calming neutral standing position and the active athletic neutral position, which means we are neither fully at rest nor fully ready. For example, if your knees are straight and your pelvis is over your forefoot, you're neither calm nor ready, neither resting in appreciative standing nor prepared to battle your demons. Either stance—resting neutral, or ready-to-go neutral—is a valid one, depending on the state of your world. However, constantly hanging out somewhere in between is an invitation for anxiety, tension, and backache.

Gravity does not fall cleanly through your skeleton, so the soft-tissues your ligaments and muscles—have to work to keep you upright. Over time, this pattern creates pain or soft-tissue degeneration.

I see a lot of yogis and yoginis paying attention to what they do in practice, but not to what they're doing the rest of the time. How do you sit? How do you stand? When you bend down to pick up your kids' toys at the end of the day, do you return to an easy, upright neutral? Or do you return to something like the pose shown above (figure E)? Understanding your neutral will help you move from a place of structural integration as you practice yoga poses—and as you move off your yoga mat.

Four versions of neutral

Take a moment to consider if one of these positions supports your health and helps you find a sense of calm:

Can you feel yourself fully resting comfortably and happy? Or, are the neutrals you experience in some of these postures not really neutral for you—therefore creating anxiety and draining your energy?

FIGURE A

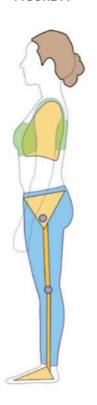


FIGURE B

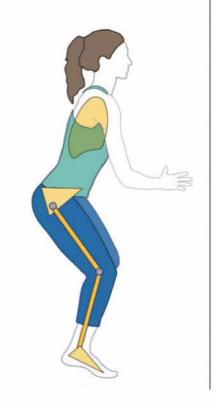


FIGURE C



NEUTRAL STANDING POSITION

You're resting upright, stacked in gravity, and bearing weight on centered, balanced feet.

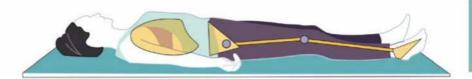
ATHLETIC NEUTRAL

You're alert, weight is resting slightly on your toes, knees and hips are flexed, and arms are in front of your chest.

FLOATING NEUTRAL

The position you'd take if you were totally relaxed under water, like a fetus in the womb or an astronaut in space.

FIGURE D



ANATOMICAL NEUTRAL

You're lying horizontal, resting out of gravity, and fully supported with your arms open.

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Why do so many of us often feel stressed?



FIGURE E

One reason: We find ourselves somewhere between standing neutral and athletic neutral: not aligned and at war with gravity. When gravity doesn't fall cleanly through your skeleton, your ligaments and muscles have to work to keep you upright. Over time, this creates pain, tension, and a near-constant revving of the sympathetic (fight-or-flight) nervous system.

Writer **Tom Myers** is the author of *Anatomy Trains* and the co-author of *Fascial Release for Structural Balance*. He has also produced more than 35 DVDs and numerous webinars on visual assessment, Fascial Release Technique, and the applications of fascial research. Myers, an integrative manual therapist with 40 years of experience, is a member of the International Association of Structural Integrators and the Health Advisory Board for Equinox. Learn more at *anatomytrains.com*

How to find your neutral

ONE KEY TO FULLY STEPPING INTO YOUR TRUE RESTING NEUTRAL, or at-the-ready neutral—rather than something in-between—is learning how to access the balls of your feet.

In Tadasana, allow your toes to rest lightly on the floor, like a piano player's fingers rest on the keys before playing. When you're standing upright, your toes may exhibit a slight prehensility, gripping the earth lightly but without grasping.

If your toes habitually lift off the floor in standing poses, this is an indication of malfunction in your feet or lower legs; some tension is pulling up the toes. See if you can let your toes go, or try some ball work on the muscles in your calves, which can help those poor, overworked toes to relax. Keep in mind, however, that when you're standing with your toes on the ground, they shouldn't exhibit a white-knuckle grip. Test this: Can you lift all ten toes and one foot without feeling your weight shift backward? If not, your pelvis is likely forward of true neutral, so bring it back until your toes relax and you feel more weight in your heels.

Your weight should be distributed between your heels, the balls of your big toes, and the balls of your little toes—a tri-point contact, three-legged stool, or a tetrahedron (if you're into geometry)—with an arch in between each of these three points. Once you find balance in your feet, come into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), and notice how the position of your foot is closer to the at-the-ready neutral position.

My hope is that this practice helps you understand this: If you're standing, really stand. Stay back where your toes are free and your hips are directly over your ankles. If you need to be ready for action, bend your knees and hips, lean into your toes, and embrace being fully prepared to move. Just don't get caught in no-man's land, which usually amounts to pretending to be calm while feeling underlying anxiety. After months and years, this creates a pattern of strain that tugs on your muscles and ligaments, leading to pain.

This is why Tadasana is such a deep and worthwhile pose to practice (and practice, and then practice some more). If you can find true neutral in this pose—and you can carry this knowledge off the mat and into how you move and stand throughout your daily life—it will have long-term benefits for your physical and psychological well-being.



FROM TOP: ILLUSTRATION: MICHELE GRAHAM; PHOTO: JEFF NELSON





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I love yoga, and I love yoga-ing. There are so many paths, and I know my path is only one of many, full of ideals and practices inspired by others. I was fortunate enough to become a student of yoga in 2007. To be able to share my passion for yoga through teaching has been one of my life's greatest gifts. It inspires change and growth in my life daily. Yoga asks us to look into the darker corners of our mind, and it helps us to see the light as well. I am on a constant search to learn more from others so that I may learn more about myself.

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COME FOR YOGA. STAY FOR FAMILY.

How to move from

Parsvottanasana to Hanumanasana

BY NATASHA RIZOPOULOS

Parsvottanasana

Parsva = Side · Ut = Intense (or superiority in power) · tan = Stretch · asana = pose

Intense Side Stretch Pose



BENEFITS Stretches your hamstrings; tones your gluteus medius (outer hip muscles); teaches important alignment principles and actions for maintaining a balanced pelvis

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose) facing the front edge of your mat with your hands at your hips. Keep your pelvis square to the wall in front of you with the two sides of your torso equally long. Step your right foot back about 4 feet. Place it at a 45-degree angle, and line up your heels (or widen your stance if you have trouble balancing or squaring your hips).
- 2 Root down with your left big-toe mound as you pin your left outer hip back and in toward your right heel. Pull up with your right inner arch, and press your right femur back as you spin your inner thiah back.
- 3 Spread your arms out wide to your sides, and bring your palms together behind your back.

Inhale, lengthen your spine, and draw the heads of your upper arms back.

- 4 Engage your quadriceps by pulling your kneecaps up, but don't lock your knees. Exhale, hinge forward at your hips, and extend out over your front thigh.
- 5 Imagine a bird's-eye view of yourself. Are the two sides of your waist equally long? Is your sacrum (the flat triangular plate at the base of your spine) parallel to the floor? You want to maintain length in your spine and symmetry in your torso. Recommit to directing your left outer hip back and in toward your right heel to lengthen your front waist; roll your right outer hip forward and down toward your left big toe to level your sacrum.
- 6 Stay for 5-8 breaths, using your final exhalation to root down through your feet. On an inhalation, use the strength of your legs to raise your torso. Repeat on the other side.



DON'T allow your back foot's inner arch to collapse, which can put strain on your knee. Instead, as you spin your back inner thigh backward (in order to roll your back hip forward) pull up with your inner arch and press down with the outer border of your foot.



DON'T let your front hip hike up toward your shoulder or swing out to the side, which will shorten your waist and distort your pelvis and spine, putting you at risk for straining your lower back or SI joint. Instead, maintain the symmetry of your torso by imagining a helpful hand at your outer hip, pinning it back and in toward your midline.

Modify Parsvottanasana as necessary to find safe alignment in your body.



If your hamstrings or shoulders are tight ...

TRY placing your hands on blocks instead of bringing your palms together behind your back. Position the blocks on either side of your front foot at a height that will allow you to straighten both legs. Engage the quadriceps in your front leg, which will enable a gentle release of your hamstrings. (When a muscle group on one side of your body contracts, muscles on the opposite side release, so using your quadriceps will facilitate lengthening in your hamstrings.) Continue to work to keep the two sides of your torso equally long. Use inhalations to lengthen your front body and exhalations to lengthen your back body.



If you hyperextend your knees or experience knee pain...

TRY placing a block at a diagonal behind your front calf. Start with the block upright on your mat, about 6 inches behind your front foot, short side down. Then, tip it forward on a diagonal, so that the other end presses against the middle of your calf. Often, people who hyperextend their knees can't figure out how to engage their quadriceps without their knees locking. In this modification, the block acts as a brake, inhibiting the hyperextension of your knees as you activate your quadriceps under new circumstances.



If you feel strain in your front leg or feel unstable...

TRY bringing more vitality into your back leg by practicing with your back heel at the wall with your foot at a 45-degree angle. Because your torso will be extended over your front leg, there may be a tendency to settle the weight of the pose into your front leg, creating an energetic asymmetry. Instead, embed your heel into the wall by vigorously pressing your back femur (thigh bone)backward. Feel how having something to press against engages your back leg muscles and balances the effort of the pose.

Powerful alignment

Tadasana can serve as a template for all other postures. If you can understand and embody its essential principles of sthira (stability) and sukha (spaciousness) and find and cultivate these qualities throughout your practice, the possibilities will be truly limitless. It's especially powerful to apply Tadasana principles in so-called advanced postures, where the temptation can be to abandon the very alignment that is so crucial to success. In these moments, returning to Tadasana alignment can help you find the balance between sthira and sukha, which is the goal of every pose.

The dynamic combination of steadiness and openness that you experience in an aligned Tadasana can be applied off the mat as well. It can teach you to be alert and have clear boundaries while remaining open and responsive to others.

Stretch your hamstrings and hip flexors in these **prep poses** for Hanumanasana.

1. UTTHITA HASTA PADANGUSTHASANA AT THE WALL Extended Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose

BENEFITS Lengthens your hamstrings; teaches the correct actions of your front leg and the alignment of your pelvis that you'll need for the final pose—Hanumanasana



INSTRUCTION Sit in Dandasana (Staff Pose) with your heels pressing against the wall, and slide a strap beneath your sitting bones. Then, come into Tadasana, facing the wall with your heels on the strap. Remove the strap, keeping your heels in the same spot. Take a moment to find a neutral Tadasana pelvis—neither spilling forward nor backward; one hip should not be higher than the other; and one hip should not be rotated farther forward than the other. Maintaining this level pelvis, place your left foot on the wall, and raise your arms into Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute). Check that your right toes are pointing straight forward so that your second toe, the center of your ankle, and the center of your kneecap are all in line. To re-establish your Tadasana pelvis, direct your outer left hip and sitting bone downward and in toward your right heel (for most people, their left hip hikes up, shortening the left side of their body and creating an imbalance in their sacrum). Now turn your attention to your standing leg and hip. Vigorously press your right femur backward as you firm your right hip into your midline. Press into the wall with your left big-toe mound and into the floor with your right big-toe mound to keep your legs alert and in a neutral position—and to help lengthen your hamstrings. Reach up energetically through your fingertips to create more space along the sides of your body. Hold for 10-12 breaths; repeat on the other side.





Maintain a neutral pelvis, and quiet your mind as you move **step by step** into Hanumanasana.



Hanumanasana

Hanuman = Monkey God/Chief · asana = pose

Monkey God Pose

BENEFITS Stretches your hamstrings and psoas and iliacus (hip flexors); the dual challenges of this pose demand a level of presence and precision that focuses and quiets your mind

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Begin in Downward-Facing Dog Pose. Step your left foot forward between your hands so your toes are in line with your fingertips. Drop your right knee to the mat, and point your toes behind you. Pin your front hip back and in to square your hips, and drop your tailbone toward the floor to lengthen your right hip flexors. Draw your hands back until they are beneath your shoulders. Come onto your fingertips (or place your hands on blocks) so that your chest can remain lifted and open while keeping your front ribs soft.

2. CRESCENT LUNGE WITH BACK HEEL AT THE WALL

BENEFITS Lengthens your hip flexors, which is crucial to protecting your lower back in the final pose; teaches the correct actions of your back leg

INSTRUCTIONS Begin in a modified Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose) with your heels a couple of inches up the wall, and a slight bend in your knees. Step your left foot forward, and establish a 90-degree angle with your thigh parallel to the floor, and your left knee stacked directly above your left ankle. Keeping your right knee slightly bent, inhale, and raise your torso and arms. Release your tailbone forward and down toward your left heel, and draw the pit of your abdomen in and up. This will help you lift the front of your pelvis while dropping the back of it, bringing it into an upright position where your lower back is not overarched. Two major hip flexors (the psoas and the iliacus) originate at the lumbar (lower spine) and the ilium (upper hip bone), and when they are short or tight, they pull your lower spine and pelvis forward, putting your lower back in jeopardy. By initially keeping your right knee bent, you'll be able to tip your pelvis backward (posterior tilt), thereby stretching your hip flexors. Maintaining the posterior tilt of your pelvis, slowly and incrementally start to straighten your right leg. Don't be overly ambitious—a half inch is a mile in this pose! As you mindfully press your right thigh up and back toward the wall behind you, continue resistance in your tailbone, pushing it forward and down toward your left heel. You'll know you've found the right proportion of each action if you feel a deepening of the stretch in the front of your right hip. Reach your fingertips toward the ceiling to bring more length into your sides without allowing your front ribs to protrude. Knit your ribs toward each other, and soften them down toward your frontal hip bones to reinforce the work of the pelvis without moving your lower back. Hold for 10–12 breaths, then release. Repeat on the other side.

3. URDHVA PRASARITA EKAPADASANA AT THE WALL

Standing Splits

BENEFITS Brings together the previous two postures; lengthens your hamstrings and hip flexors; teaches the correct actions and alignment of your pelvis

INSTRUCTIONS In this upside-down version of the final pose, you'll use the wall for guidance and support. Begin in the same modified Downward-Facing Dog Pose that you set up in for Crescent Lunge. Step your left foot forward between your hands. Put your right foot on the wall behind you at about hip height. Adjust your hands forward so they are beneath your shoulders on the floor. Glance back at your right foot and make sure it's pointed straight down, not rotated out to the right. Roll your right hip forward and down, and pin your left hip back and in toward your right heel so the two sides of your waist are equally long. Inch your right foot up the wall as you hop your left foot back toward the wall. Plug into the wall with your right big toe, and spin your right inner thigh toward the ceiling. As you work your way backward and up the wall, adjust your hands toward you so that your upper arms frame your ears. Use your arms to help maintain evenness along your sides. Move until you've reached your maximum stretch while maintaining a neutral pelvis. Hold for 10–12 breaths, then reverse your entrance, easing your left foot forward and bringing your right foot down until you can step back into modified Downward-Facing Dog Pose. Repeat on the other side.



2 Shift your hips back so that they stack over your right knee. Carefully move your left foot forward to straighten your left leg, keeping your hips squared toward the front of your mat. Extend your sternum forward and up.



3 Start to slide your left foot forward. Establish your Tadasana pelvis by pinning your left hip back into your midline, pressing energetically with your left big-toe mound to keep your left leg from externally rotating. You may also need to gently roll the right side of your pelvis forward so that your hips are squared to the front of your mat—tucking your toes will help you find this alignment. Release the flesh of your buttocks away from your waist, and gently tone the pit of your abdomen to find a lift in the front of your pelvis. Your pelvis will also travel forward in space, but it will not change position or spill forward. Don't allow your left hip to follow your left foot or your right thigh to externally rotate. Draw your lower belly in and up. Press into the floor with your right big-toe mound, maintaining a neutral right leg with your inner thigh spinning toward the ceiling and your hip rotating forward. As your legs open like a pair of scissors, use your hands on the floor beside your hips to guide the transition.



4 Keep sliding until the back of your left thigh and the front of your right thigh come to the floor, building upon the earlier work of lengthening your hamstrings and hip flexors. If you are able to maintain square hips while deepening the pose, point your right toes and raise your arms beside your ears. Expand in every direction from the integrity of your center: Press forward with your left big-toe mound as you extend back with your right toes; enthusiastically reach your fingertips toward the ceiling, lifting and opening your heart. As the energy of the pose moves outward, continue to cultivate the quality of balanced stillness (the essence of Tadasana). The ability to remain collected at your center, even as you spread your wings, is the ultimate yoga practice. Hold for 10-12 breaths, then retrace your entrance, returning to Downward-Facing Dog Pose. Repeat on the other side.

Stay safe

As your left foot and pelvis move forward and your legs straighten, it is essential to sustain your Tadasana pelvis (your pelvis is square to the wall in front of you and the two sides of your torso are equally long). When your pelvis is misaligned, either because it is uneven or spills too far forward, your SI joint and lumbar spine become vulnerable to strain. If you haven't yet found openness to bring both thighs to the floor while maintaining a Tadasana pelvis, place a block, blanket, or bolster beneath your upper front thigh, and continue to use your hands for support. Never force the pose beyond the capacity of your hamstrings and hip flexors; it can overstretch and pull these muscles.

A home practice to

work with your body's limitations

BY ERICA MATHER

THE FACT IS, our bodies age, and at some point suffer injury or stop responding exactly the way we'd like them to. When that happens, there are two options: we can fight and resist our physical limitations and annoying "spots," or we can find a way to work with them. At the core of this work is unconditional love. If we can learn to love our bodies through aging, injury, and illness, we'll inadvertently increase our compassion for ourselves—and for others.

When your body doesn't respond the way you'd like it to, it may be due

to physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual issues. Before practicing this sequence, ask yourself: Where do I feel limited in my body?

If you are working with a limitation caused by an injury or chronic, physical pain, have a licensed yoga therapist create a personalized sequence to address your body's specific needs. Otherwise, depending on your answer to the aforementioned self-inquiry, choose one spot to work with as you practice this Forrest Yoga sequence. Focus your attention there, and get curious—particularly about

your attitude. What is your intent for yourself and for the area of your body that you're focusing on?

In every pose, try to maintain an attitude of curiosity about the spot you're working with—sending your breath to, or toward, that space in your body. If you ever feel sharp pain (especially in your area of focus), back out of the pose into a modification where you can comfortably breathe without pain. There's a good chance you'll be amazed by what happens when you work with this combination of breath and attention.



1 BADDHA KONASANA WITH KAPALABHATI PRANAYAMA

Bound Angle Pose with Skull Shining Breath

From a comfortable seat, bend your knees, and pull your heels toward your pelvis. Lower your knees to the sides, press the soles of your feet together, and place your hands behind your hips. Lift your ribs as you inhale. Then, complete 50 to 100 breaths, snapping your abdomen back toward your spine with each sharp exhale—releasing and relaxing your belly with each passive inhale. After your final exhalation, inhale, and retain your breath for as long as is comfortable. If your back rounds, sit against a wall.



2 BADDHA KONASANA VARIATION

Bound Angle Pose

From Baddha Konasana, reach your right hand to the side, resting your fingertips on the ground. Inhale and stretch your left arm up and overhead. Exhale and sidebend to the right, reaching your top arm over your ear. Hold for 3 breaths, then repeat on the other side. Return to the first side and as you exhale, twist toward your right thigh, placing your hands on the floor (shown). As you inhale, traction your ribs forward over your right thigh, pulling your hands toward you isometrically. Hold for 3 breaths, then repeat on the other side.



3 ABDOMINALS WITH A PROP

Lie on your back, bend your knees, and place a block or a rolled-up mat or blanket between your thighs. Inhale and press your low back into the floor. Hold your breath, scoop your tailbone up, and squeeze the prop. Exhale and curl your head and shoulders up off of the floor, sending your elbows toward your thighs. As you inhale, lower your head and shoulders back down to the floor. Repeat 5–8 times. For more of a challenge, lift your feet from the floor and bring your knees above your hips—or straighten your legs.

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4 SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA,

VARIATION Bridge Pose

Leave the roll or block between your thighs, bring your arms to your sides, and walk your heels toward your sitting bones until they reach your fingertips. Press your feet into the mat, and lift your pelvis toward the ceiling. Leave your arms where they are, or slide them away from your torso. Either way, keep your arms relaxed, but work your legs. Inhale, and move your ribs toward your face; exhale, and press your feet down, squeezing the roll lightly. Lengthen your tailbone toward the backs of your knees. Hold for 8 breaths. To come out, inhale, and curl your pubic bone toward your navel. Exhale, and bring your upper, middle, and lower back—and then finally, your pelvis—down to the mat.

5 DOLPHIN POSE

Come to your forearms and knees, with your knees directly below your hips, shoulders directly above your elbows. Press your forearms into the floor, keeping your palms flat on the mat. Curl your toes under, then exhale. Lift your knees away from the floor, pressing your heels down. If your hamstrings are tight, work with bent knees; otherwise, straighten your legs. Inhale, and press your forearms into the floor, moving your shoulder blades away from your ears and spine. Exhale, and relax your neck. Hold steady in this pose for 8 breaths, sending your breath into the area you decided to focus on at the start of this practice. To come out, lower your knees to the floor.

6 FLASH PREP

Come back to your forearms and knees on the mat. Leave your right forearm where it is, and slide your left hand backward, lifting your forearm and stacking your left elbow over your left wrist. As you inhale, expand your ribs away from your shoulders. Press evenly through your right forearm and left hand. As you exhale, straighten your legs, and press down through your heels. Hold for at least 5 breaths, focusing on your area. Then, repeat on the other side.





From Virabhadrasana II (Warrior Pose II), bring your left forearm to your left thigh. Take your right arm overhead, reaching it behind your back so that your hand clasps the top of your left thigh. As you inhale, press your left forearm into your thigh, and lift your ribs up. As you exhale, relax your neck, and drop your left ear toward your left shoulder. Hold for 5–8 breaths, sending breath to the spot you've been focusing on.

9 EKA PADA RAJAKAPOTASANA,

VARIATION One-Legged King Pigeon Pose

From Virabhadrasana II, pivot on the ball of your right foot to come to a high lunge. Place your hands on the mat, set your back knee down, and heel-toe your front (left) foot into the space between your right wrist and hip, making a 45-degree angle with your left shin. Extend your right leg straight out behind you, and come onto your forearms. As you inhale, feel your back ribs expand. As you exhale, fold forward, and feel a release in your left hip. Hold for 5–8 breaths, then repeat poses 8–9 on the other side.



10 OSTRICH WARRIOR I

From Tadasana, step your right foot back, turn your foot out slightly, and bring your right heel down as you bend deeply into your front knee, coming into Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I). Clasp your hands behind your back, and as you inhale, lift your ribs; as you exhale, bow forward, bringing your left shoulder inside your left knee. Draw your palms overhead to a place where you can still breathe comfortably. If your hamstrings resist, rest your torso on your front thigh. Hold for 5–8 breaths, relaxing your head, neck, and shoulders, and sending your breath and attention to your area.



7 CLASSIC SUN SALUTATION

Stand at the front of your mat in Tadasana with your hands in Anjali Mudra. As you inhale, stretch your arms forward and up and then overhead. As you exhale, fold into Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend). As you inhale, lengthen your spine, and step your left foot back into Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge). Exhale, and step back into Plank Pose, then lower through Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose) to the floor. Inhale to Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose); exhale, and press back to Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose). From Down Dog, inhale to Anjaneyasana with your left foot forward, then exhale and bring your right foot to meet your left, folding forward into Uttanasana. Inhale to come back to Tadasana. Repeat 3–5 times. In Forrest Yoga, we first wake up each joint and muscle individually, and then we start to flow with Classic Sun Salutations.



11 ANJANEYASANA, VARIATION

Low Lunge

From Virabhadrasana I, turn your back heel up. Release your hands to the mat, framing your front foot. Set your back knee down. As you inhale, lift vour torso and arms overhead: as you exhale. reach your right arm across your body so your upper arm rests on top of your left thigh. Make a fist with your bottom (right) hand, and cup it in front of your chest with your left. As you inhale, press your right arm into your left thigh, and lift your chest. As you exhale, release your neck, and twist deeper into the pose. Hold for 5-8 breaths, then repeat poses 10-11 on the other side.



12 HEAD-TO-ANKLE PREP

From Virabhadrasana II with your left leg forward, place your right hand on the floor on a diagonal, about 6 inches from your right foot. Place your left hand against your left, inner thigh, halfway between your hip and knee. As you inhale, press forward on your left thigh to traction your hip. As you exhale, arc your head and chest toward your back leg, opening up the left side of your waist. Hold for 5-8 breaths, breathing into your spot.

13 EKA PADA RAJAKAPOTASANA.

VARIATION One-Legged King Pigeon Pose

Starting in Pigeon Pose, sit down on your left hip. Move your shin forward so it's parallel to the front edge of your mat, then grasp your foot with your right hand. Inhale, and pull your chest forward toward your foot; exhale and lower your chest down toward your foot. Hold for 5-8 breaths, then repeat poses 12-13 on the other side. If you feel discomfort in your hips or knees, lie down onto your back, and move into a reclining Pigeon Pose, bringing your legs to a Figure 4 position. Breathe!



14 TWISTING WARRIOR

From Virabhadrasana I, stretch your right arm and the fingertips of your right hand skyward on an inhalation. As you exhale, bring your right elbow across your body to the top of your left thigh. Make a fist with your bottom (right) hand, and cup the fist with your left hand, keeping your elbows in a straight line. Inhale, and press through your back foot to lengthen through your spine; exhale, and press your right arm into your left thigh to deepen the twist. Hold for 5–8 breaths. Find your spot.



15 EKA PADA RAJAKAPOTASANA, VARIATION Pigeon Pose

Starting in Pigeon Pose, keep your torso upright and walk your hands to the left until they frame your front left knee. As you inhale, lift up a little in your chest, and lengthen your torso over your thigh; as you exhale, drape your torso down over your thigh, and relax your neck. Rest your head on a block for support. If you feel comfortable, move your right elbow to the outside of your left leg, making a fist with your right hand and cupping your left hand over the top to press into a twist. Hold here for 5–8 breaths, then repeat poses 14–15 on the other side.



16 BADDHA KONASANA, VARIATION Bound Angle Pose

Lie down on your mat with your knees bent, and join the soles of your feet together. Lift your feet toward your chest, and clasp your hands around the outer edges of your feet. As you inhale, press your back ribs into the floor; as you exhale, pull straight down on your feet, bringing them closer to your chest. Hold for 5-8 breaths.



17 SAVASANA Corpse Pose

Lower your feet to the floor, and straighten your legs. Rest on your back with your arms alongside your body, hands by your hips, palms facing up. If you feel discomfort in your low back, bend your knees with your feet flat on the floor to encourage a posterior tilt in your pelvis. This will remove any compression from the lumbar spine or sacroiliac joint. Relax here completely for 7–10 minutes.

Teacher and model **Erica Mather** is a certified Forrest Yoga instructor and mentor in New York City. Her online program, Adore Your Body, is a system designed to help students overcome body-image challenges. Learn more at *ericamather.com*.



practice well MINDFULNESS

A LOT OF PEOPLE I KNOW avoid reading the news first thing in the morning—being confronted with all of the injustices and bad deeds in the world is an unsettling way to start the day. It's difficult to read about the latest corporate finance scam or the obscenity of human trafficking and keep your peace of mind, and it's even harder to know how to respond.

The conflict feels more immediate when you witness an unjust act firsthand or are yourself subject to one—whether your wallet is stolen, your car's broken into, or any sort of hurtful behavior is directed your way. The answer to this problem is upeksha (non-attachment), the fourth of the brahmaviharas—the qualities of true, authentic, and unconditional love.

This state of mind, taught in both yoga and Buddhism, allows us to respond to the nonvirtuous deeds of others and to all of life's fluctuations in such a way that we are, as Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey describes it, the opposite of James Bond's martini: stirred but not shaken. When we cultivate equanimity, we're moved by injustice in the world and motivated to make things better, but our deep inner serenity is not disturbed.

Sometimes commentators on the Yoga Sutra translate upeksha as "indifference" in the face of nonvirtuous, immoral, or harmful deeds of others, but upeksha is better understood as "equanimity"—a state of even-minded openness that allows for a balanced, clear response to all situations, rather than a response born of reactivity or emotion. Upeksha is not indifference to the suffering of others, nor is it a bland state of neutrality. In fact, it means we care—and care deeply—about all beings evenly!

This understanding of upeksha as equanimity stresses the importance of balance. A balanced heart is not an unfeeling heart. The balanced heart feels pleasure without grasping and clinging at it; it feels pain without condemning or hating; and it stays open to neutral experiences with presence. Insight meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg speaks of equanimity as a "spacious stillness of mind," within which we can remain connected to others and all that happens around us, while remaining free of our conditioned habit of grasping at the pleasant and pushing away the unpleasant.

Still mind

One way to experience equanimity is to experiment with mindfulness meditation. Rather than fixing attention on a single object, such as the breath or a mantra, mindfulness meditation involves the moment-to-moment awareness of changing objects of perception. Mindfulness

is like a floodlight, shining awareness on the whole field of experience—including sensations, emotions, and thoughts—as they arise and pass away in the dynamic, ever-changing flux that characterizes the human mind-body experience. Mindfulness allows you to see the nature of the unfolding process without getting caught in reactivity, without identifying with your sensations, emotions, and thoughts.

This insight changes your relationship to the mind-body. The waves will keep coming, but you won't get swept away by them. Or as Swami Satchidananda often said, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf!" This ability to remain balanced amidst ever-changing conditions is the balance of equanimity.

There's an old story that illustrates the wisdom of this state of mind: A farmer's most valuable asset is the horse he owns. One day, it runs away. All the townspeople commiserate with him: "Oh, what terrible luck! You've fallen into poverty now, with no way to pull the plow or move your goods!" The farmer merely responds. "I don't know if it's unfortunate or not; all I know is that my horse is gone."

A few days later, the horse returns, and following it are six more horses, stallions, and mares. The townspeople say, "Oh! You've struck it rich! Now you have seven horses to your name!" Again, the farmer says, "I don't know if I'm fortunate or not: all I can say is that I now have seven horses in my stable."

A few days later, while the farmer's son is trying to break in one of the wild stallions, he's thrown from the horse and breaks his leg and shoulder. All the townspeople bemoan his fate: "Oh, how terrible! Your son has been so badly injured; he'll not be able to help you with the harvest. What a misfortune!" The farmer responds, "I don't know if it's a misfortune or not: what I know is that my son has been

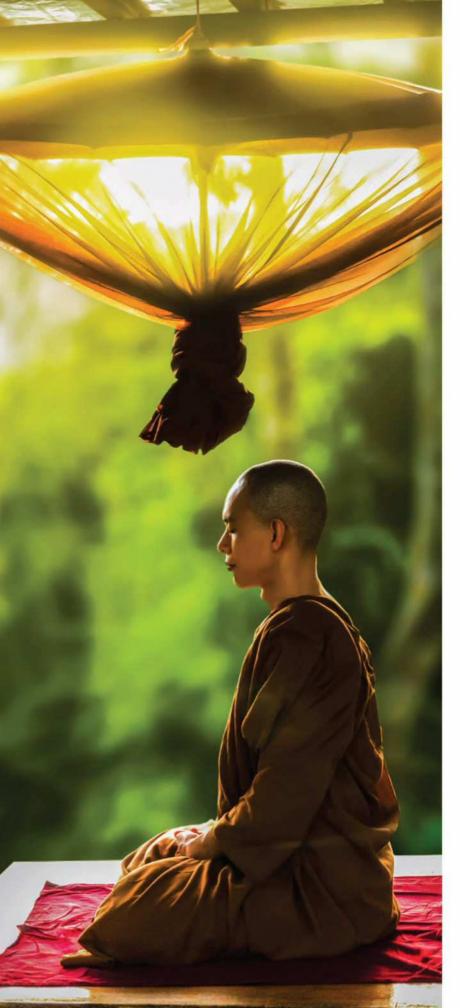
Less than a week later, the army sweeps through town, conscripting all the young men to fight in a war—all except for the farmer's son, who cannot fight because of his injury.

The fact is, you can't know what changes your life will bring, or what the ultimate consequences will be. Equanimity allows for the mystery of things: the unknowable, uncontrollable nature of things just as they are. In this radical acceptance lies peace and freedom right there in the midst of whatever pleasant or unpleasant circumstances we find ourselves in. When we open to the truth that there is actually very little we can control other than our own reactions to circumstances, we learn to let go. Cultivating the qualities of kindness, compassion, and joy will open your heart to others.

Equanimity balances the giving of your heart's love with the recognition and acceptance that things are the way they are. However much you may care for someone, however much you may do for others, however much you would like to control things (or you wish that they were other than they are), equanimity is a reminder that all beings everywhere are responsible for their own actions, and for the consequences of their actions.

Without this recognition, it's easy to fall into compassion fatigue, helper burnout, and even

Your asana practice offers an opportunity to become better at recognizing where, when, and how you get caught in reactivity, and to observe your attachment to results.



despair. Equanimity will allow you to open your heart and offer love, kindness, compassion, and joy, while letting go of your expectations and attachment to results. Equanimity endows the other three *brahmaviharas* with *kshanti*: patience, persistence, and forbearance.

So, you can keep your heart open, even if the kindness, compassion, and appreciative joy you offer to others is not returned. And when you are confronted with the nonvirtuous deeds of others, equanimity will allow you to feel compassion for the suffering that underlies their actions, as well as for the suffering these actions may cause others. It is equanimity that brings immeasurability, or boundlessness, to the other three brahmaviharas.

Comfort with what is

Your asana practice offers an opportunity to become better at recognizing where, when, and how you get caught in, or swept away by, reactivity, and to observe your attachment to results. You may even observe an attachment to results in your motivation to practice in the first place! The desire to feel good and avoid the unpleasant may very well condition your whole experience of practice. But fixating on the results can cause you to miss key aspects of the process.

As you continue in your asana practice, at some point it's likely that factors outside your control—anatomical realities, injury, aging, or illness—will affect your practice. When they do, you'll have a chance to practice equanimity by letting go of your attachment to the results you had been seeking.

Equanimity gives you the energy to persist, regardless of the outcome, because you will be connected to the integrity of the effort itself. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna that this attitude of focusing on the action without attachment to the outcome is yoga: "Self-possessed, resolute action without any thought of results, open to success or failure. This equanimity is yoga." Similarly, Patanjali tells us in the Yoga Sutra (1.12–16), that abhyasa (continuous applied effort) coupled with vairagya (the willingness to observe experience without getting caught in reactivity to it) will lead to freedom from suffering.

Sitting with equanimity

For a formal practice that will cultivate equanimity, begin with some calming breaths or a mantra meditation. Once you feel calm, reflect on your desire for happiness and freedom from suffering, both for yourself and for others.

Contemplate your desire to serve the needs of others and to be compassionately engaged in the world. Acknowledge both the joy and the suffering that exist—the good deeds and the evil ones. As you continue to breathe into your heart's center, acknowledge the necessity of balancing your desire to make positive change in the world with the reality that you cannot control the actions of others.

Bring to mind the image of someone for whom you have no strong feelings one way or another. With this person in your mind's eye, repeat the following phrases

to yourself, coordinating with the outbreath if you like:

- All beings like yourself are responsible for their own actions.
- Suffering or happiness is created through one's relationship to experience, not by experience itself.
- Although I wish only the best for you,
 I know that your happiness or unhappiness depends on your actions, not on my wishes for you. May you not be caught in reactivity.

Feel free to use other similar phrases of your own devising. After a few minutes, shift your attention to your benefactors, including teachers, friends, family, and the unseen workers who keep the societal infrastructure working. Silently repeat the phrases to yourself as you contemplate these benefactors.

After several minutes, begin to reflect on your loved ones, directing the phrases to them, and then to the difficult people in your life.

Although feeling kindness, compassion, and joy for those we love comes more easily than

it does for those with whom we have difficulty, it is often the opposite with equanimity. It's a lot easier to accept that those we dislike are responsible for their own happiness than it is for those we care for deeply, because we feel more attachment to them.

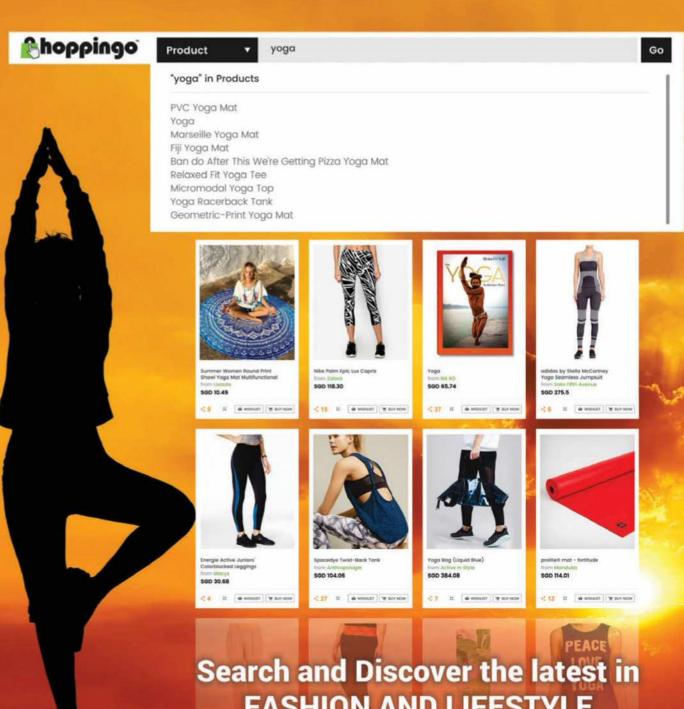
Whatever your experience, simply note any reactivity, and see if you can be equanimous with your reactivity! Broaden your reach after a few minutes to include all beings everywhere throughout the world, and then finally contemplate equanimity in regard to yourself, noticing how taking responsibility for your own happiness and unhappiness can feel the most difficult of all. Repeat these phrases to yourself:

- All beings, including myself, are responsible for our own actions.
- Suffering or happiness is created through one's relationship to experience, not by experience itself.
- Although I wish only the best for myself, I know that my happiness or unhappiness depends on my actions, not my wishes for myself. May I not be caught in reactivity.

When you cultivate the other three brahmaviharas: metta (the friendly quality of kind regard), karuna (the compassionate response to the suffering of others), and mudita (the delight in the happiness and success of others), it is equanimity that will ultimately allow you to truly expand your capacity to experience this kind of boundless love for those beyond your immediate circle of friends and family, opening to the infinite capacity of your heart to embrace all beings.

Frank Jude Boccio is a teacher of yoga and Zen Buddhism and the author of *Mindfulness Yoga*. Find him at *mindfulnessyoga.net*.





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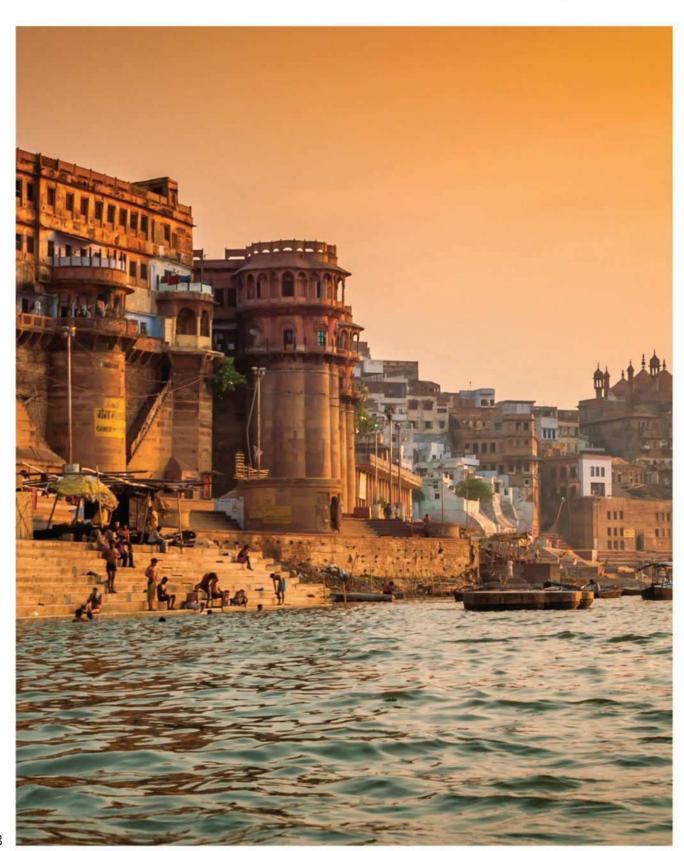








How to live more fully



A meditation on impermanence showed teacher Max Strom how to make the most of his life.

FROM TIME TO TIME, nearly all of us are prompted to reassess our priorities. The trigger is usually an event or an interaction that leads to an epiphany. In that moment, we see the essence of who we really are. This can spark spontaneous and sudden growth at a deep level, altering the course of our lives.

One of the events that helped jolt me awake happened in India, almost 15 years ago.

My traveling companion and I had arrived by train at the teeming city of Varanasi—a pilgrimage destination for Hindus of all denominations who believe that bathing in the water of the sacred Ganges River remits sins, and that dying in Varanasi ensures the release of a person's soul from the cycle of death and rebirth. Many Hindus travel to this holy city to die and be cremated on the series of steps leading down to the river, called ghats, and to have their remains scattered in the water.

On our first sojourn down the ghats, we found ourselves near billowing smoke. We were taken aback at the sight of seven bodies wrapped in muslin cloth, set ablaze. The families in mourning sat only a few feet from the flames.

My friend and I looked for just a moment, and then thought we should move away. We felt like we were intruders disturbing something very personal. But as we turned to leave, one of the attendants in charge of the burning approached us and asked us to stay. He ignored our objections and discomfort. Instead, he led us through the crowd and gestured for us to sit on the steps about 40 feet from the corpses. He left us to observe the sacred event after pointedly delivering the phrase "cremation is education"—an axiom I instantly memorized.

We both sat in silent contemplation as the afternoon sun glared through the thick smoke. I watched the attendants stoke the fire with long poles and even break off charred limbs from the bodies. As the muslin cloth burned away, I saw the feet and hands of the bodies turn black, and I felt moved by the weeping of the grieving families nearby.

I decided to use this extraordinary opportunity to engage in a form of active meditation I had read about many years earlier—a practice common in Tibetan Buddhism, Hindu asceticism, and Sufism aimed at helping one realize the impermanence of the body. The concept dictates that when a person truly understands how short mortal life

is, he or she is launched into a deeper state of reality, able to live a profoundly richer life.

The practice was simple: Imagine that the corpses were the bodies of the people you love the most. In other words, make it as personal as possible.

After focusing my imagination for a while, the vision became very real. With open eyes brimming with tears, I imagined seven of the most beloved people in my life engulfed in flames. It was profoundly moving, and I found myself grieving deeply.

The next step was to imagine that one of the corpses was my own body. I selected one of the burning bodies closest to me, and in my mind I converted its identity to that of my own. Then I watched the flames envelop and consume it. Just as this happened, a gust of wind whipped toward us, blowing smoke and ash our way. As I imagined my own body burning, the ashes from the pyre blew into my eyes, covering my face and hair, as if punctuating reality. I don't know how long we sat there—perhaps two hours—but I do know that on our walk back up the ghats, in the light of the sunset, covered in the ash of the dead, I knew that I was going to make some changes in my life.

My mortal life was running out. It struck me that even if I were to live another hundred years, my body would one day be ash on someone else's face. In that moment, I realized that there was more to do. I was being held accountable by something deep within me, and that something told me I had better get busy. As rich and meaningful as my life was, I knew it could be more so. I knew that I was being tempted by what I call the complacency of achievement. It is a well-known trap: when you achieve much of what you want, you can be tempted to stay where you are—and cease to grow. I realized I had been holding myself back from life due to both fear of failure and fear of success. I needed to learn to become truly vulnerable; I needed to take off the armor I'd been wearing so that I could fully complete my life's purpose.

Emotional transformation like this shapes our understanding of the world, often giving us sudden insight into the essential meaning of life, which can cause powerful changes. Yet you don't necessarily have to wait for life to present you with an extreme situation or circumstance to accelerate your growth. Instead, you can decide to take intentional actions that accelerate your evolution, so that you become wiser—faster.

The imperative to accomplish this is as follows: Do a daily practice of breath-centric movement, such as asana, and emphasize breathwork. Breathing patterns affect us emotionally and can heal us very quickly.

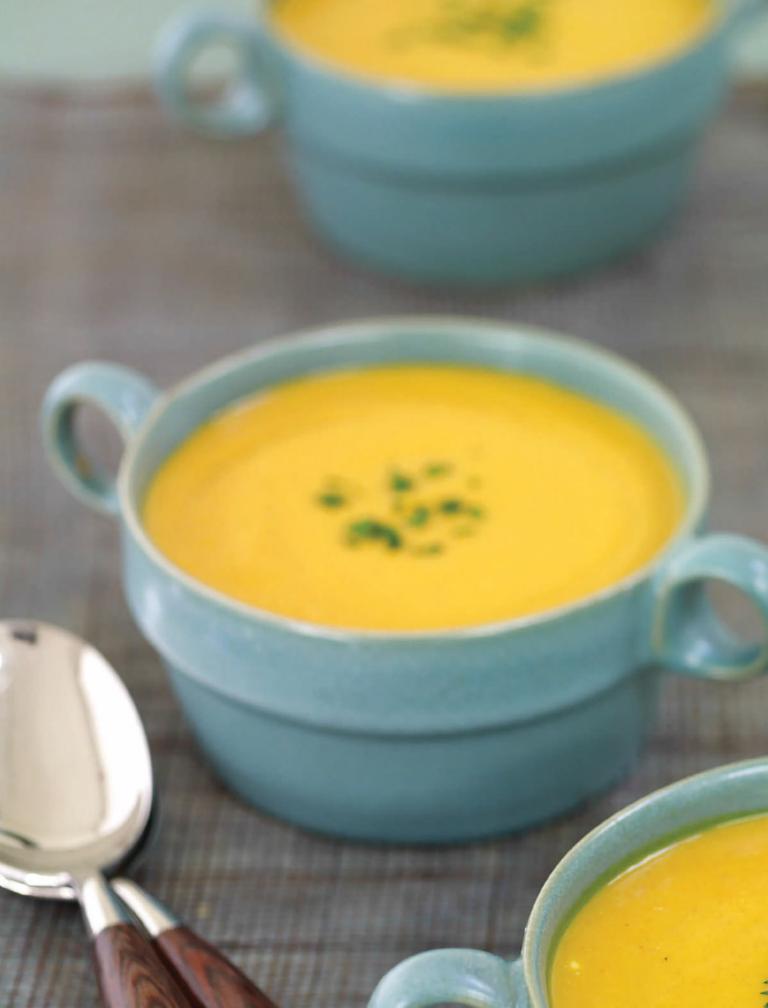
Without focusing on the breath in asana, we may become physically flexible and strong—yet remain stagnant in our internal world. And most importantly, no matter how young or old you are, live as if your time and your lifespan are the same. After all, we only have a few seconds here on this earth.

The knowledge we need to transform ourselves and our world is available. And whether you feel ready or not, the time is now. So live! Look at your life. What things do you remember? Wonderful meals—or television shows? Long chats with loved ones—or endless social media and texts? When we begin to study ourselves, we can step more fully into our imperfect, impermanent lives.

Emotional transformation like this shapes our understanding of the world, often giving us sudden insight into the essential meaning of life, which can cause powerful changes.



Max Strom is a teacher, speaker, and the author of two books. Learn more at maxstrom.com.





your best DIET

A nourishing Ayurvedic regimen naturally guides you to the body weight that's right for you.

NIIKA QUISTGARD

While living in an ashram in Northern India years ago, I loved playing auntie to two young girls—Chaya and Lakshmi—from a nearby village. When Lakshmi neared puberty, she started to gain weight. As she grew softer and wider, her mother continued her usual mealtime practice of putting balls of rice and lentils into Lakshmi's mouth, well past the point of satiety. The family became more and more delighted, parading her ahead of them as they walked to temple, showing off their daughter's fleshly abundance. "Look how round and healthy she is," they'd say. "She's going to catch quite a husband!"

Meanwhile, back in California, the women in my own extended family were worried about a distant cousin—a beautiful, creative girl who happened to be a little chubby in her elementary-school years. "We've got to help her control her weight," they'd whisper with desperation. "We don't want her to feel bad about herself for being heavy."

Despite their good intentions, both families showed more commitment to cultural norms than to understanding the needs of their

girls' bodies. A person's perfect weight can't be sized up by the eye or measured by a scale. According to the principles of Ayurveda, the ancient Indian science of health, everyone has an ideal weight that's unique to their prakriti, or constitutional nature, made up of the three life energies, or doshas: vata, pitta, and kapha. Because your ideal weight is unique, it can't be compared with your sister's, your neighbor's, your best friend's, or your own five years ago. Your ideal weight is affected by your age, the season, the climate, and—if you're a woman—your menstrual stage. The right weight has nothing to do with numbers. Instead, it's a reflection of feeling and being truly healthy—being comfortable and stable in body and mind, and having the strength and endurance to fully engage in the demands of everyday life.

Knowing your dominant dosha can help you establish healthful eating habits and dietary choices. Over time, by living and eating according to your dominant dosha, you'll settle into the best weight for you—and only you.

VATA FIND THE RHYTHM

Vata-dominant people have slight or deerlike builds. When out of balance, they might tend toward irregular digestion, usually losing weight when stressed. If vata dominates your constitution, you can become imbalanced after emotional trauma, and your weight may yo-yo up and down as your system attempts to insulate, ground, and protect itself.

You'll find balance in your weight and life by following a rhythm: eating three meals a day at regular times, with the main meal of the day around noon, when digestion is strongest. Warm, moist, and heavier foods with sweet, sour, or salty tastes will nourish tissues, emotions, and overall body weight. Foods that are bitter, pungent, or astringent should be avoided. Warming spices like cumin, garlic, or cinnamon support a stable *agni* (digestive fire, or metabolism).

You might crave sweets, caffeine, or other substances that affect the nervous system—especially if life has you running in rapid, unpredictable circles. Instead of turning to food stimulants, try developing faith through

a devotional or spiritual practice to help you disengage from anxious, repetitive thinking. Warm oil, applied externally with an all-over self-massage, can calm tense or hypersensitive digestion and bring you back toward a comfortable, stable, balanced body weight and muscle tone

Vata-Calming Soup

MAKES 3 SERVINGS

This soothing soup is simple to make and beautiful to behold.

- 2 tablespoons ghee
- 1 medium butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 medium sweet potato or 2 large carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 large onion, loosely diced
- 2 large cloves garlic, smashed
- 1-inch knob of fresh ginger, washed and finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric
- 3 cups broth or water
- cup coconut milk or half-and-half
 Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
 Freshly minced parsley to garnish



- 1 Melt 1 tablespoon ghee over medium-high heat in a large, deep sauté pan.
- 2 Add squash, sweet potato, and then onion. Sauté, stirring very little at first, then more frequently, for 7 to 8 minutes or until all the ingredients turn golden brown.
- 3 Reduce the heat to low and add garlic. Continue cooking until the vegetables are a rich caramel color, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat.
- 4 In separate soup pot, add remaining tbs ghee, ginger, and remaining spices save salt and pepper. Sauté until fragrant.
- 5 Add broth and vegetables to soup pot. Bring to a low boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for about 10 minutes, partially covered, until the squash is tender.
- 6 Purée in a blender until smooth.
- 7 Return the mixture to the soup pot. Pour in enough coconut milk so that the soup flows easily but has a thick and hearty consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste. Heat through and serve, garnished with parsley.

The pitta dosha is associated with fire energy. If you're pitta dominant and live in balance, you'll most likely sport a medium, equine, well-proportioned body. Associated with fire energy, the pitta dosha governs digestion and transformation in the body and mind.

With a propensity for ambition and hyperfocus, you might keep your nose to the grindstone far past lunch, honing your mental aim with acidic coffee and attempting to quell hunger with whatever is most easily available. Sadly, fast food usually means junk food. The salty, fatty processed ingredients, artificial flavors, and preservatives can aggravate acid

production, eventually weakening the liver, gallbladder, and small intestine.

When you do sit down to enjoy a meal, you're likely to indulge a craving. Strikingly sour and hot tastes that deliver sharp stimulation—like red wine, garlic, chilies, and vinegary pickles—just add intensity to the fire. These foods don't translate directly into weight gain, but according to Ayurvedic thought, they do lead to intestinal inflammation, which creates circulatory congestion, or fluid retention, a precursor to obesity.

To eat for balance, you must take time for regular meals, making lunch the biggest meal

of the day, as digestion is at its peak at midday. A pitta metabolism is naturally strong with high agni, which demands fuel; if the digestive fire isn't fed regularly, it overheats. Acids and enzymes then concentrate, disrupting normal digestion and contributing to the formation of ama, the toxic byproduct of a faulty digestive process that Ayurvedic theory suggests can clog various bodily channels and cause weight gain.

Fresh, light fruits, veggies, and grains with bitter, sweet, and astringent tastes (like cucumbers, green beans, apples, quinoa, and greens) calm the dosha's overheated passion and ease digestion.

Pitta-Calming Sauté

MAKES 1 SEDVINO

For a light but satisfying dinner, serve over cooked quinoa and rice.

- 1 tablespoon ghee
- 1 small head of broccoli, florets roughly cut
- 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, grated
- 2 tablespoons scallions, chopped
- 1 Heat ghee in a sauté pan over medium heat.
- 2 Add the broccoli and sauté until just cooked, about 5 to 8 minutes.
- 3 Sprinkle ginger and scallions over broccoli, and serve.



KAPHA SAVOR THE BITTERSWEET

Kapha-dominant types tend to have stockier builds and round faces. You fall out of balance slowly and are most likely to gain weight over time and hold on to it. A slide into extra weight might begin with long hours at a sedentary job. Add a few slices of birthday cake, a couple of rainy weekends sleeping in, a movie instead of yoga, and a few servings of rich comfort food, and extra pounds appear.

If kapha dominates your prakriti, you'll find a healthy weight when you eat smaller meals of fresh raw and light foods with bitter, astringent, and pungent tastes. Eating your main meal around noon is especially good for balancing digestion in kapha-dominant prakritis.

Dessert, unfortunately, is not on the menu. The sweet taste just creates an imbalance of kapha energy that can lead to weight gain. Instead, try an after-meal cup of green tea with dry ginger to boost digestion and metabolism and reduce dependence on heavy, cloying sweets. However, dried fruit and treats sweetened with the herb stevia can bring kapha energy back into balance. Fresh berries, apricots, and apples are great choices, too.

While your natural sense of stability can become stagnation that resists even healthy change, once you have made a commitment, your slow and steady nature will keep you on a sure path until you reach your goal for a naturally balanced and healthy body weight.

SIMPLY SATISFIED

How will you know when you've hit the right weight? The Caraka Samhita, a classsic Ayurvedic text, says: "The senses are fulfilled; hunger and thirst are assuaged; standing, sitting, lying down, walking, breathing, talking,

and laughing are effortless; food is digested easily by evening or morning."

Forget cultural expectations—if you nourish yourself in a way that brings you health and joy, your body will follow your lead to your perfect, balanced weight.

Satisfy a sweet tooth naturally with apples and dried apricots. (recipe on page 44)

Niika Quistgard directs a women's Ayurvedic clinic in Kerala, India *(rasaayurveda.com)*.



More Matcha

eat well
TEACHER'S TABLE

Yoga teacher Sadie Nardini, creator of Core Strength Vinyasa Yoga and Yoga Shred, shares her favorite donut recipe. These goodies are baked, not fried, and contain matcha powder for a healthy blast of antioxidants.

Sadie Nardini's, go-to glazed matcha donuts From Fit Girl Treats

MAKES 12 REGULAR DONUTS OR UP TO THREE-DOZEN MINI DONUTS



"After I started doing yoga and high-intensity interval training and especially once I hit 40—I realized my weekly donut habit wasn't going to cut it. I searched far and wide and found this amazing

recipe from Leah Boston, a plant-based food blogger and creator of Fit Girl Treats. Her donuts are baked, vegan, gluten-free, and full of antioxidantrich matcha-known worldwide for benefits like supporting heart health. They're perfect for when you're craving something sweet!"

- cup almond milk, divided
- pitted Mediool dates
- cup gluten-free all-purpose flour blend, plus more for dusting
- tbsp tapioca starch (or tapioca flour)
- tbsp organic matcha powder, plus 1/2 tsp, divided
- tsp baking powder

- tsp baking soda
- tsp cinnamon, plus 1/8 tsp, divided
- tbsp lemon juice
- tsp vanilla extract, divided
- cup organic powdered sugar
- cup coconut chips or organic shredded coconut coconut oil for greasing

Heat oven to 350°.

In a microwave-safe bowl, heat ½-cup plus 2 tbsp almond milk in 30-second intervals in the microwave until warm. Add dates and let them soak for 10 minutes.

In a bowl, mix flour, tapioca starch, 1 tbsp matcha powder, baking powder, baking soda, and ½ tsp cinnamon.

In a food processor or high-speed blender, blend date-and-milk mixture until smooth and creamy.

Make a hole in the center of your dry ingredients and add your date paste, lemon juice, and 1 tsp vanilla extract. Mix ingredients together until batter is smooth. Batter should be wetter than cookie dough but too thick to pour.

Grease donut pan with coconut oil, and dust with flour. Scoop batter into pan (either mini or regular) filling each donut cup to the top.

Bake until tops are slightly brown, 8-15 minutes. Let sit 5 minutes, then flip pan on a flat surface to remove donuts. (If donuts stick to pan, run a butter knife gently around their edges until they come loose.) Transfer donuts to a cooling rack, 60-90 minutes.

Once donuts are completely cool, make your glaze: In a bowl, mix together powdered sugar and remaining 2 tbsp almond milk, 1/2 tsp matcha powder, 1/8 tsp cinnamon, and 1/2 tsp vanilla extract. Dip donuts in glaze (it will harden, so dip right away) and then into coconut chips. Serve, or store in the fridge for up to 5 days.

NUTRITIONAL INFO 214 calories per regular-size donut, 3 g fat (2 g saturated), 46 g carbs, 3 g fiber, 2 g protein, 148 mg sodium

This recipe is from Sadie's course Fit & Fierce Over 40 (Or Any Age!), courses.sadienardini.com.





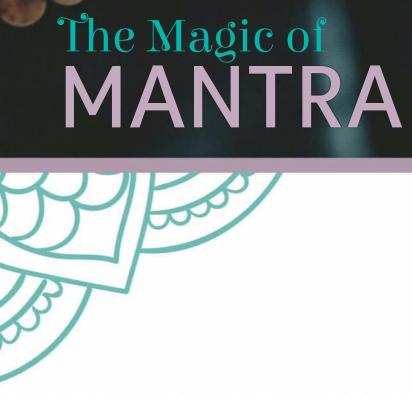




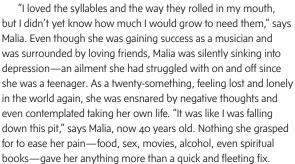


Did you ever wonder what, exactly, you're chanting during yoga class? And why it always seems to promote a profound sense of calm? Or, do you meditate using a mantra—and are you curious about the neuroscience behind how it works? Here, we look at why mantras can be potent additions to your yogic practices, and how to find one that really resonates with you.

BY SUSAN MORAN



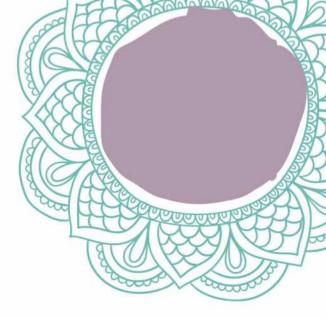




Uttal, witnessing her struggle, offered her a tool that he thought would help her deal with depression—a practice called *japa*, in which a mantra is repeated, silently or out loud, as the practitioner moves a string of beads (or *mala*) through their fingers. The mantra Uttal suggested was *Ram*, which can be interpreted as "the inner fire that burns away impurities and bad karma." At the time, Malia says, she did not fully understand the meaning of the mantra. She just wanted relief from her despair, and she was willing to try anything.

After nearly two weeks of silently reciting *Ram* for several minutes (and sometimes hours) each day, Malia started experiencing a shift in how she was feeling.

"What appeared like a small speck of light—a little spot of relief—grew and grew with every recitation of that mantra," she says. As she began to detach her true, deeper self from her thoughts, she slowly stopped acting on negative ones. "All these feelings of



LOOKING FOR A SPIRITUALLY SATISFYING LIFE AFTER

COLLEGE, musician Tina Malia moved to Fairfax, California, an artsy city north of San Francisco, and began attending sacred music concerts. Something in the ritual and the chanting moved her to tears and kept her going back again and again. Eventually, she started experimenting with the music on her own. One day, friend and fellow musician Jai Uttal invited her to sing backup in his band, the Pagan Love Orchestra, which combined chanting mantra with rock, reggae, jazz, and African music. Malia jumped at the chance to play and sing these sacred sounds and words—believed by practitioners to change states of mind and elevate consciousness.

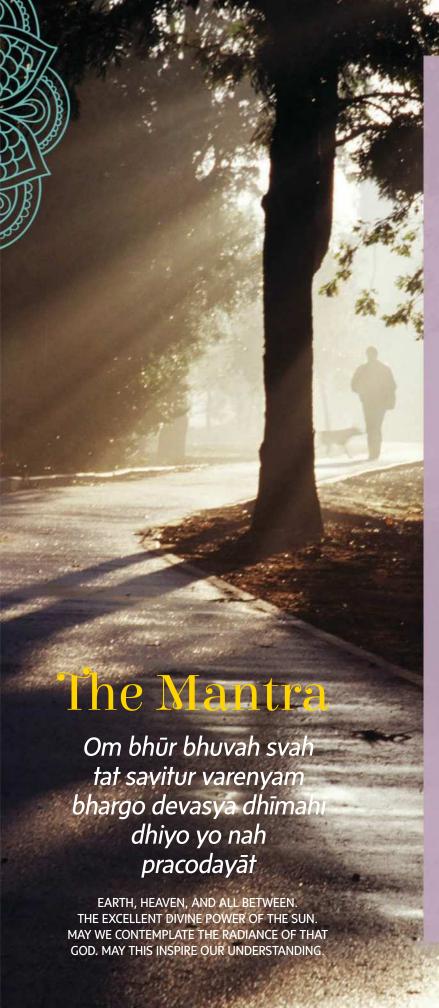
being unworthy, lonely, and lacking a purpose on earth were just thoughts," she says. "When I gave my mind something to focus on, something besides my thoughts, it gave me relief." After six months of daily japa practice, Malia says she was able to access true joy deep inside her. "In short, mantra gave me the will to live again," she says.

Your Brain on Mantra

Malia had tapped what yogis have known for several thousand years: mantra, whether chanted, whispered, or silently recited, is a powerful meditation and therapy tool. Western science is only now starting to catch up.

Neuroscientists, equipped with advanced brain-imaging tools, are beginning to quantify and confirm some of the health benefits of this ancient practice, such as its ability to help free your mind of background chatter and calm your nervous system. In one study recently published in the *Journal of Cognitive Enhancement*, researchers from Linköping University, in Sweden, measured activity in a region of the brain called the default mode network—the area that's active during self-reflection and mind wandering—to determine how practicing mantra meditation affects the brain. From a mental health perspective, an overactive default mode network can mean that the brain is distracted—not calmed or centered.

Researchers behind the Linköping University study asked a group of subjects to take part in a two-week Kundalini Yoga course that included six 90-minute sessions over the course of two weeks. Each session started with yoga exercises (asana and breathing) and



A Beginner's Guide

to Common Mantras

THE MANTRA: Om

Pronunciation: a-u-m

Translation: The primordial sacred sound

Why chant it: Om is said to be the first sound heard at the creation of the universe. When each syllable is pronounced fully, you should feel the energy of the sound lifting from your pelvic floor all the way up through the crown of your head

THE MANTRA: Om santih santih santih

Pronunciation: a-u-m shanti hee shanti hee shanti hee

Translation: Peace peace peace

Why chant it: Because we could all use more peace in our

lives.

THE MANTRA: Gayatri mantra

Om bhūr bhuvah svah | tat savitur varenyam | bhargo devasya dhīmahi | dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt Pronunciation: A-u-m bhoor bhoo-va-ha sva-ha | tut sa-vi-toor va-rain-yum | bhar-go day-vas-yah dhee-muhhee | dhi-yo yo na-ha pra-cho-duh-yat

Translation: Earth, heaven, and all between. The excellent divine power of the sun. May we contemplate the radiance of that God. May this inspire our understanding.

Why chant it: It's one of the oldest Sanskrit mantras and very sacred in the Hindu tradition. It invokes the light of the sun and helps us to transcend suffering. It should only be chanted at dawn, noon, and sunset.

THE MANTRA: Invocation to Ganesa

Om gam ganapataye namah | vakra-tunda mahā-kāya sūryakoti-samaprabha | nirvighnam kuru me deva sarva-kāryesu sarva-dā

Pronunciation: A-u-m gam ga-na-pat-ta-yay na-ma-ha | vak-ra ton-da ma-ha ka-ya soor-ya ko-tee sa-ma pra-bha | nir-vig-nam koo-roo may day-va sar-va car-yay-shu sar-va da

Translation: Ganeśha, god with a curved trunk, of great stature, whose brilliance is equal to ten million suns. Grant me freedom from obstacles, in all things, at all times.

Why chant it: Ganeśha is the god of wisdom and success and the remover of obstacles. It is always a good idea to begin

the remover of obstacles. It is always a good idea to be any new endeavor by invoking him.

YELENA MOROZ ALPERT

Translation by Zoë Slatoff, author of Yogāvatāranam: The Translation of Yoga

finished with 11 minutes of mantra-based meditation. The subjects recited the Sat nam mantra (roughly translated as "true identity") while placing their hands over their hearts.

The same group also performed a finger-tapping control condition—in which they were instructed to perform slow-paced button pressing on a four-button keypad.

The subjects' default mode networks were more suppressed during the mantra meditation than during the finger-tapping exercise—and suppression grew as mantra training increased. "The study suggests that mantra training can more effectively reduce [default mode network]—related distractions than something like tapping along to the beat," says Rozalyn Simon, PhD, who authored the study.

Research findings such as these do not profess to prove that mantra is a life-saving technique. But as Malia knows well, when we are beholden to our discursive mind, we can easily be led down the path to negative headspace—further away from our true, relaxed nature. In fact, research suggests that it doesn't matter whether you recite an ancient Sanskrit mantra such as *Sat nam*, or the Lord's Prayer, or any sound, word, or phrase—as long as you repeat something with focused attention, you'll get results.

Since the 1970s, Herbert Benson, professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and founder of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, has been researching how meditation and prayer can alter mental and physical states. He's been particularly interested in what brings on a meditative state, which he calls "the relaxation response." Benson has experimented with subjects repeating Sanskrit mantras as well as nonreligious words, such as "one." He's found that regardless of what the practitioner repeats, the word or phrase has nearly the same effects: relaxation and the ability to better cope with life's unexpected

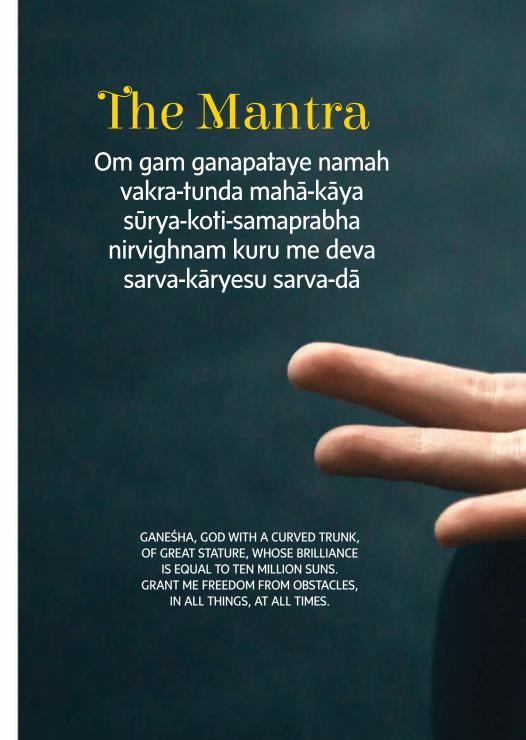
More recently, scientists at several universities and institutes have applied modern brain-imaging tools to reach roughly the same conclusions as Benson. A 2015 study from researchers in Israel found that people who silently repeated the word *echad* ("one" in Hebrew) experienced a quieting of the mind, particularly a deactivation of the

typically active default mode network in the brain. "When people said 'one, one, one,' everything that had been active during the resting state in the default mode network was shut down," says Aviva Berkovich-Ohana, a neuroscientist in the Department of Education at the University of Haifa. "Subjects reported that it was relaxing and that they had fewer thoughts."

The Roots of Mantra

In understanding how mantra works,

it can be helpful to look at its translation. The word mantra is derived from two Sanskrit words—manas (mind) and tra (tool). Mantra literally means "a tool for the mind," and was designed to help practitioners access a higher power and their true natures. "Mantra is a sound vibration through which we mindfully focus our thoughts, our feelings, and our highest intention," says music artist Girish, author of Music and Mantras: The Yoga of Mindful Singing for Health, Happiness, Peace & Prosperity. Over time, that vibration sinks



deeper and deeper into your consciousness, helping you to eventually feel its presence as shakti—a powerful, if subtle, force working inside each of us that carries us into deeper states of awareness, says Sally Kempton, a meditation teacher and author of Meditation for the Love of It: Enjoying Your Own Deepest Experience.

One of the most universally recited mantras is the sacred Hindu syllable *Aum*—considered to be the sound of the creation of the universe. *Aum* (usually spelled *Om*) is believed to contain

every vibration that has ever existed—or will exist in the future. It is also the energetic root of other, longer mantras, including *Om namah shivaya* ("I bow to Shiva"—Shiva being the inner Self, or true reality), and *Om mani padme hum* (which essentially mean "jewel of the lotus," and has been interpreted as, "By practicing a path that unites method and wisdom, you can transform into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha").

These popular Hindu mantras are in Sanskrit, but mantra has deep roots in every

major spiritual tradition and can be found in many languages, including Hindi, Hebrew, Latin, and English. For example, a popular mantra for Christians is simply the name *Jesus*, while Catholics commonly repeat the *Hail Mary* prayer or *Ave Maria*. Many Jews recite *Barukh atah Adonai* ("Blessed art thou, oh Lord"); while Muslims repeat the name *Allah* like a mantra.





How to Start a Mantra Practice

So, how do you get started finding a mantra? In some practices, such as Transcendental Meditation, students hire and study with a trained mantra and meditation leader to learn and receive specific, personalized mantras. But there are plenty of ways to practice mantra independently and free of charge. (For ideas on other mantras to try, see "A Beginner's Guide to Common Mantras," on page 49.)

Consistency is key, says Kempton, regardless of your chosen mantra. "You enliven a mantra through regular practice over a period of time—months or even years." she says. "It's a bit like rubbing a flint against a stone to strike fire. The friction of the syllables inside your consciousness, the focus of bringing yourself back to the mantra again and again, and especially the attention you give to the felt sense of the mantra's resonance inside your awareness will eventually open the energy in the mantra, and it will stop being just words and become a living energy that you'll feel shifting your inner state."

If you're interested in incorporating mantrabased practices into your yoga and meditation routines, start by asking a teacher to suggest a mantra for you to try.

Mantra and meditation teachers recommend to begin by lying down or sitting in a comfortable position and silently repeat the mantra, once on the inhalation, once on the exhalation. Don't fixate on it (you'll know if your brow starts furrowing). When thoughts or feelings enter your mind, try to simply notice them, and then return to silently reciting the mantra. See if you can set aside 10 to 20 minutes a day to practice. Several traditions suggest staying with one mantra for several months before switching to another, in order to deepen your practice and cultivate a sense of ease, presence, and peace.

"As a beginner or intermediate practitioner, it's important not to assume that you have the power to enliven a mantra through a thought or awareness," says Kempton. "You have to practice, often for quite a while, before a mantra really opens for you."

Years into her spiritual chanting practice, Malia, who credits the Sanskrit mantra Ram with saving her life, has experienced deeper connection with the mantra. "It's almost as if these mantras start to feel like your friends—even lovers," she says. As she tours the globe performing in sacred-music and yoga festivals, she shares her love of mantra and its healing effects. "Sometimes I wish I could stand on the top of a building and shout it out to the world: Mantra is free! It has no side effects! It's simple and so easy!"

Susan Moran is a freelance journalist in Boulder, Colorado.





Our beautiful baby Luna was born on the afternoon of January 2, 2018, the day of the first full moon of the year. When I wrote the column "My Story My Calling" for Yoga Journal Singapore in October 2017, I talked about how my husband and I felt the universe had aligned itself to make it possible for us to move from Peru to live in Bali. Settled in our new home, we were awaiting the arrival of our first yogi baby into the world. And now, here

How she came into this world is what I wanted to share with you.

It's hard to actually explain in words the intensity of the birthing process. I haven't experienced anything else in my life that was so profound, intense and life changing.

We decided to have a water birth at home in Bali supported by two amazing midwives. During the process, there were so many moments that I thought I just couldn't pull through. My husband, Rafael, was there every step of the way; I couldn't have done it without him. Music played an important role; I had prepared a playlist with seven songs that just looped for almost six hours.

One of them was the mantra "ONG NAMO GURU DEV NAMO", the Adi mantra which translates into "I bow to the divine presence within me". It was surreal because the chant always played at the perfect timing, allowing me to trust the process and connect with the divine inside. It continuously gave me the faith and strength to pull through.

Luna arrived into this world as we were singing the Gayatri Mantra, a powerful and sacred chant, with our midwives.

Om bhur bhuvah svah tat savitur varenvam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.

The eternal, earth, air, heaven That glory, that resplendence of the sun May we contemplate the brilliance of that light May the sun inspire our minds.

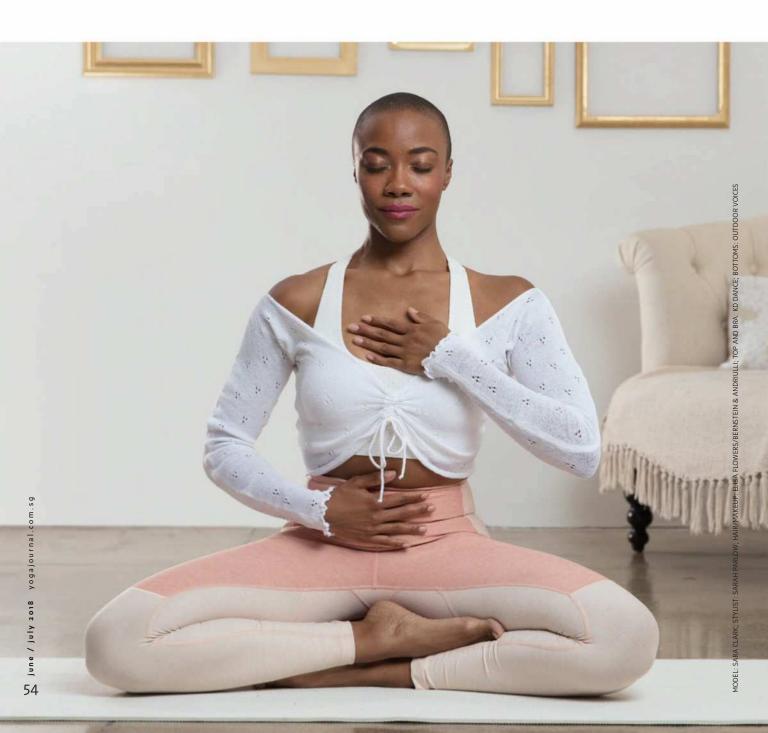
Nature is amazing, it's definitely a miracle. When I think of that moment, I still get the chills. As a new mother, when I look at Luna, I feel she represents what pure love truly means. She is a blessing. She teaches me to be present. She teaches me to enjoy every moment. She teaches me to be a better person. She teaches me that everything is okay as it is.

There is so much power in a mantra, and more importantly, in a small human being.

Jasmine Danino is the co-owner of Radiantly Alive yoga studio in Bali. www.radiantlyalive.com. (Translation of Gayatri Mantra by Douglas Brooks)



YOGA AND SELF-ACCE



PTANCE

Yoga teacher **Sara Clark** shares her journey from self-consciousness to courageousness, plus an asana practice paired with mantra to help you feel confident in your own skin.

Photography by Chris Fanning

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I became self-conscious about my body. I couldn't have been older than seven. I was wearing my favorite floral one-piece bathing suit, and

my friend's little brother told me that I had big legs. Those words felt like a punch to the gut. I was suddenly aware of my body in a way that I hadn't been before. From that moment on, my body became something others could accept or reject without my consent. That comment planted a seed of shame that would eventually grow and lead me on a long journey from selfdestruction and dysmorphic thinking to self-discovery and spiritual renewal.

At the age of nine, I transitioned from being homeschooled in a diverse suburb of Syracuse, New York, to the public school system in Bel Air, Maryland—a predominantly white community. I was not only

aware of my "big" legs, but also my hair texture, my far from European-shaped nose, and my darker skin color.

I began comparing myself to the "popular" girls, who wore ponytails that swayed from side to side as they walked the halls. In an attempt to "fit in," every few months I would

sit for hours in a salon while a hairdresser transformed my hair into hundreds of long, tiny braids, called micro-minis, in hopes of mimicking long, flowing hair.

My image consciousness wasn't helped by the fact that my loving parents, who grew up in the South during the civil rights era, were incredibly conservative. To protect me from what they viewed as a world that oversexualized black women's bodies, they made sure there were no short shorts in my wardrobe. Instead of celebrating my long limbs, I hid them, growing more and more ashamed of my figure.

Negative self-talk began to fill my head. During my senior year, I went to the prom with a white friend. After that, his friends stopped talking to him for choosing a "brown girl" as his date.

I internalized the hate until I despised every square inch of who I was. According to the Mayo Clinic, the symptoms of

dysmorphia include having perfectionist tendencies; constantly comparing your appearance with others; having a strong belief that you have a defect in your appearance that makes you ugly or deformed; avoiding certain social situations because of it (which for me meant wearing a

"I internalized the hate until I despised every square inch of who I was."

practice well DEPARTMENT

bathing suit or shorts in public); and being so preoccupied with your appearance that it causes major distress or problems in your social life, work, school, or other areas of functioning while always seeking reassurance about your appearance. I unknowingly could have checked off all those boxes.

It had been a dream of my grandmother's that I'd have a "black experience," and so for undergrad I attended a predominantly black, prestigious, private college in Virginia. It was healing in some ways, but isolating in others.

It was a relief not to stick out like a sore thumb. I even traded my long braids for my natural hair—which I wore as an afro and then dreadlocks that grew down my back—perhaps, an act of rebellion after years of conformity.

While I still hadn't made it into the "popular" clique, I did gain a tiny bit of self-confidence. My freshman year, I ended up at the same fraternity party as the handsome senior I'd had a huge crush on. He'd never paid any attention to me until then. I was flattered.

Trying hard to fit in, I consumed a lot of alcohol for the first time. What started off as a fun night with my girlfriends ended with a devastating sexual assault.

I was left feeling even more insecure about both my body and my self-worth, and I turned to the gym as an escape. I'd work out obsessively for hours. My soul knew I needed help. At the time, I felt isolated and conflicted. I had always believed that black women didn't have this problem; that curves were celebrated, not despised. And yet, skinny equaled happy in my mind.

During the summer break after freshman year, there was no gym where I could sweat out my emotions. I needed another way to feel in control. I began bingeing and purging everything I ate—a different way to cope with the lack of control I'd experienced throughout

my adolescence. But a small voice within begged me to stop, and I finally confided to my dad that I needed help.

The next day, I saw an eating disorder specialist. Soon after, I was hospitalized and began a rigorous treatment process. My breath became my anchor as I slowly began my recovery. When I would think about purging after a meal, I'd use my breath to calm my thoughts.

I had taken a yoga class with my older sister in high school. What a gift that 90 minutes had been; a break from my own self-criticism. I hadn't practiced yoga since then, but when I returned to college my sophomore year, I took a yoga mat and DVD with me. I began practicing in my dorm room. For once, I was more interested in celebrating what my body was capable of than what it looked like. Yoga wasn't popular then, but I stuck to my practice throughout college, and I took it with me to New York City after I graduated.

In New York, I started attending hot yoga classes and found confidence in wearing just a sports bra and leggings; I was even occasionally bold enough to wear shorts. While I wasn't fully free from my negative thinking, I finally felt strong in my body. I could look at myself in the mirror and greet my reflection with a smile.

As I deepened my practices of vinyasa, mindfulness, and meditation, I reached a place where I could be the observer of my thoughts, not a servant to them. The power of mantra has been profound, and I now rewrite my negative "broken records" as positive affirmations. I still battle with self-criticism; however, I now have the tools to recognize and shift my thoughts with self-compassion.

The power of words

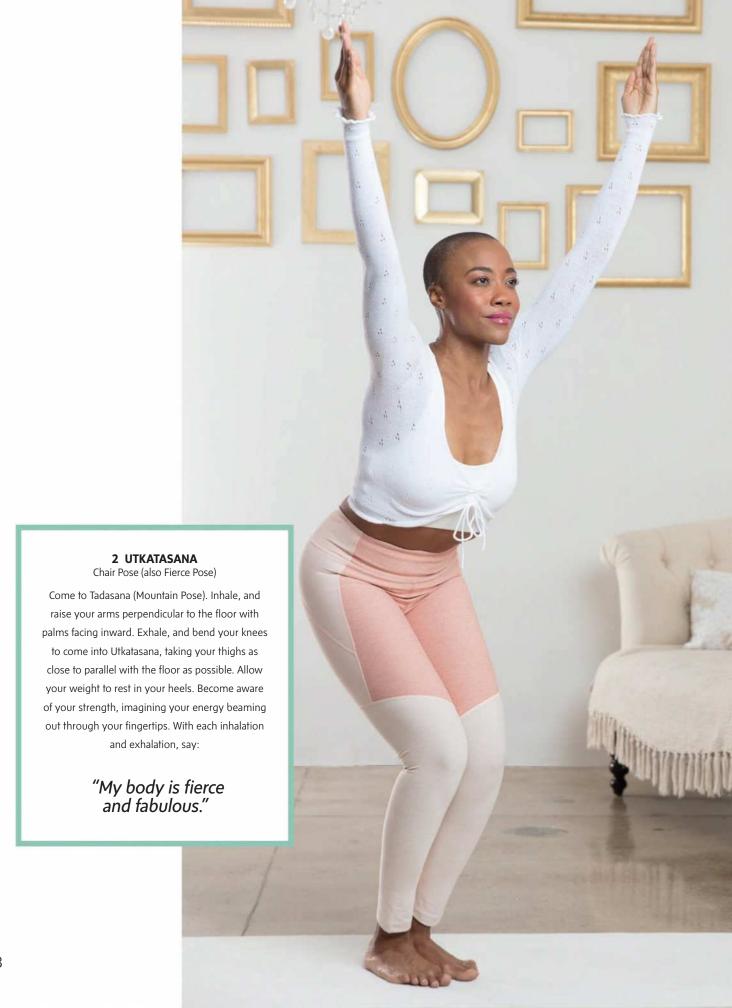
WHEN YOUR INNER DIALOGUE is repeatedly negative, it can feel like you're listening to a broken record. These self-defeating thoughts can wreak havoc on your self-esteem. Luckily, you have the capacity to turn that overplayed tune into a sacred love song. By repeating positive words or phrases, you can start to shift into a healthier state of existence. The more you practice, the more you'll be able to speak to yourself as if you are a divine being (which you are!). In the following sequence—which uses twists to help you mentally detox and lunges to help root you in your power—silently repeat the mantra for each pose, and imagine its meaning permeating every cell of your body as your breath soothes your soul!

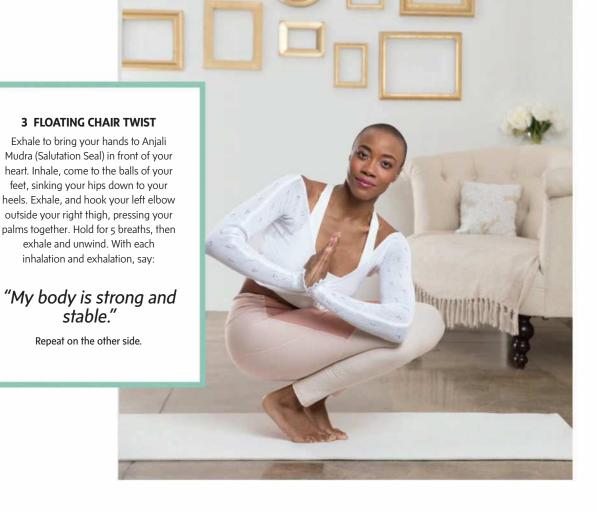


Kneel on the floor. Touch your big toes together, and sit on your heels; then separate your knees about as wide as your hips. Exhale, and lay your torso down between your thighs. Reach your hands out in front of you, resting your forehead on your mat. Bend at your elbows, and drop your hands at the back of your neck with your palms pressed together. Hold for 5 breaths. As you root down, send your awareness to your heart. With each inhalation and exhalation, say:

"My body is worthy of my love."







3 FLOATING CHAIR TWIST

exhale and unwind. With each inhalation and exhalation, say:

Repeat on the other side.

4 ANJANEYASANA Low Lunge

Come down onto your hands. On an exhalation, step your right foot forward between your hands, aligning your right knee over your heel. Lower your left knee to the floor, and slide your left leg back until you feel a comfortable stretch in the front of your left thigh and groin. Place the top of your left foot on the floor. Inhale, and sweep your arms up. With each inhalation and exhalation, say:

"My body is full of wisdom."

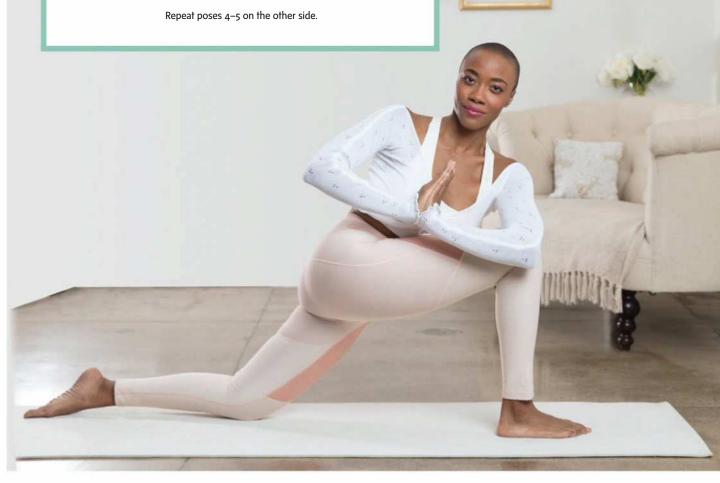
5 ANJANEYASANA, VARIATION

Low Lunge

Come down onto your hands. On an exhalation, step your right foot forward between your hands, aligning your right knee over your heel. Lower your left knee to the floor, and slide your left leg back until you feel a comfortable stretch in the front of your left thigh and groin. Place the top of your left foot on the floor. Inhale, and sweep your arms up.

Exhale to bring your hands into Anjali Mudra in front of your heart. Exhale and hook your left elbow outside your right thigh, pressing your palms together. Hold for 5 breaths, then exhale and unwind. With each inhalation and exhalation, say:







Lie down face up on your mat. Place one block lengthwise between your shoulder blades, and another (at the tallest height) beneath your head for support. Rest your arms, palms up, alongside your body as you allow your chest to open. Hold for 5 breaths. Bring your hands to rest on your belly, and feel your inhalations and exhalations as you continue to relax into the support of the blocks. With each inhalation and exhalation, say:

"Thank you, body."



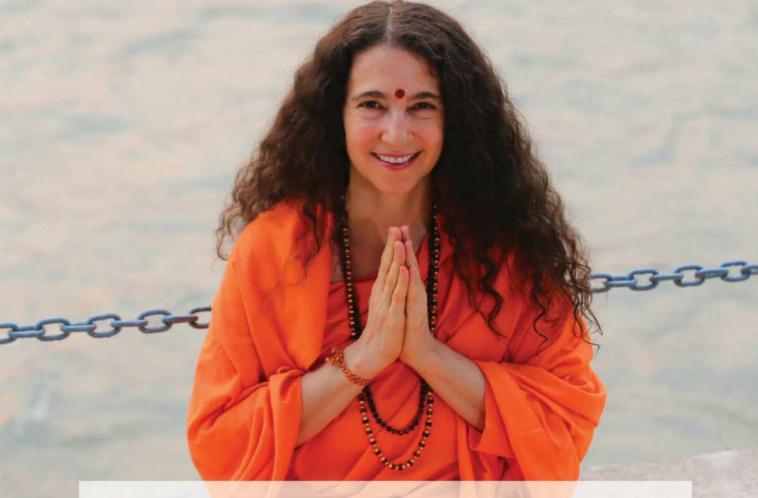
8 SIDDHASANA Adept's Pose

Slowly come up to sit in Sukhasana (Easy Pose). Place your left hand over your heart, right hand over your belly, and close your eyes as you come back to your breath. Become aware of the energy flowing through your body. With each inhalation and exhalation, say:

"I trust my body."

Teacher and model **Sara Clark** is a vinyasa and mindfulness teacher in New York City. She is a faculty member at the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health, and the creator of a series of online yoga and meditation classes for YogaGlo. Learn more at *saraclarkyoga.com*.

ON THE COVER Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati



Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati is an extraordinary woman who was leading an ordinary life before her backpacking trip to India 22 years ago. She was raised in a Jewish family in Hollywood, California, and graduated from Stanford University. She was completing her Ph.D. when she went on a holiday to India in 1996 with some friends. When she arrived at Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, her life took an unexpected and surreal turn, and she decided to make the holy place her home. She has been living there for the last two decades, engaged in spiritual practice and dedicated service. She was officially initiated into the order of Sanyas (monastic renunciation) in the year 2000, by her Guru, His Holiness Swami Chidanand Saraswati. She is now referred to as "Sadhvi-Ji" by her followers.

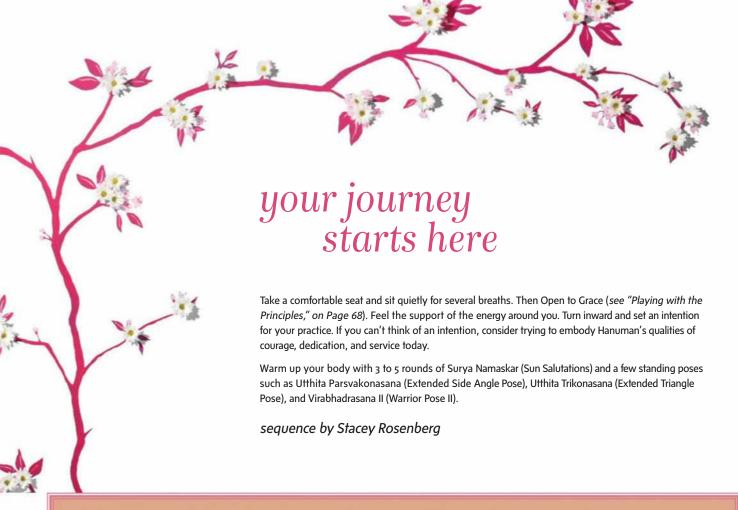
Sadhviji is a renowned speaker who gives keynote addresses at large forums on a wide variety of topics ranging from conscious business to science, spirituality and sustainable development, as well as happiness, peace and all aspects of yoga. She has also been a speaker at the United Nations, Parliament of World Religions, Women's Economic Forum and many international conferences and summits. Her talks blend the knowledge and logic of the West with the insights, spirituality and wisdom of the East. At the ashram in Rishikesh, which also hosts the International Yoga Festival every year, she gives spiritual discourses and daily satsang, teaches meditation, provides counseling and oversees myriad charitable and humanitarian projects and activities.

Read more at www.sadhviji.org

To watch her interview, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS7hETIM-WM&t=9s



by Bernadette Birney photography by Michael Winokur



the monkey's tale

To get to this fertile ground, you need to acquaint yourself with the legend of Hanuman, which is told in one of India's most celebrated texts, the Ramayana. It's a rapturous tale—an epic love story filled with outrageous characters, dramatic plot twists, and all manner of magic and superhuman feats. The unfolding dramas provide a magnificent backdrop for the protagonist, Lord Rama (a human incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu and prince of a vast kingdom), to model divine behavior, deliver philosophical discourses, and test his mettle when confronted by provocative and dire events. It is a spiritual-teaching story par excellence.

We meet Hanuman in the fourth kanda, or book, of the Ramayana. At this point in the tale, Lord Rama has been banished from his kingdom, and his wife, Sita, has been abducted by demons. Rama is searching for her all over India, unaware that she has been spirited away to the island of Lanka (modern-day Sri Lanka).

In one common telling of the story,

Hanuman meets Rama and immediately discerns his divine nature. While Rama's origins are indeed godly, his divinity is not something he wears on his shirtsleeve; many characters he meets treat him as they would any other prince. Hanuman's ability to see Rama's true nature shows he is tuned in, able to see beyond appearances.

Hanuman soon joins Rama in the quest to find Sita. After fruitlessly scouring the land, they at last learn that Sita was seen flying south in the sky chariot of the demon god Ravana. Hanuman, from the depth of his devotion to Rama, taps into an inner power that allows him to grow to many times his normal size and leap across the ocean to Lanka in a single bound. This is the moment of the tale that most yogis hear about, because the pose Hanu-ma-n-asana is named for is this bold leap of faith.

Once he lands on Lanka, Hanuman quickly finds Sita and introduces himself as Rama's servant, who has come to rescue her. Sita is grateful but refuses to go, insisting that it is her husband's duty to save her. Hanuman reluctantly leaves but begins an attack on the kingdom.

Hanuman eventually leaps back across the ocean to Rama. There, he joins an army of monkeys and bears who construct a bridge to Lanka so that Rama can march to the demon kingdom. In the end, Sita is rescued and Rama regains his happiness and his kingdom, thanks largely to Hanuman's devoted service. And not only Sita, Rama, and Hanuman, but the whole kingdom rejoices and takes comfort in the sense that all has been made right in the world.

You could interpret the story of Hanuman, then, as a parable of what happens when you recognize the divine nature of life, offer yourself in service to it, and allow it to transform you in ways you never thought possible, so that you are even more capable of serving your highest ideals. And when you approach the pose with such inspiration, you're likely to enjoy your journey, no matter how "far" you go in the pose.

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Uttanasana (standing forward bend), variation

Roll a blanket or a sticky mat into a firm, tight roll. With your feet hip-width apart and parallel, place your metatarsals (toe mounds) on top of the roll and your heels on the floor.

Fold forward over your legs and touch the floor in front of you with your fingertips, or place your hands on blocks if you can't reach the floor. Lift and spread your toes and activate the muscles on all sides of your legs. Press the mounds of your toes firmly into the roll to engage your calves and hamstrings. At the same time, extend down through your heels to stretch the backs of your legs. Breathe into the pose for at least 1 minute with full presence and commitment. Step off the roll and feel the difference in your legs.



Parivrtta Anjaneyasana (low lunge twist)

From Uttanasana, step your left leg back and set your knee on the floor, keeping your toes curled under. Lift your spine, bring your hands onto your front thigh, and take a sweet inhalation to fill your inner body. Then exhale and soften your outer body. Place your left forearm or elbow on the outside of your right leg, breathing into your back body for a few cycles of breath. With each inhalation, isometrically draw your leg muscles up into your hips. With each exhalation, send your energy back down into the foundation of the pose as you lengthen your spine through the crown of your head and spiral your torso open. Spend 3 breaths here; then lift your back thigh and straighten your knee for a few more breaths.

Keep hugging your shins toward the midline, which will not only line up the tissue of your hamstrings and widen your thighs, hips, and pelvis, but will also remind you of your commitment to your endeavor. This dedication paves the way for a more thorough unfolding later in the practice. Inhale and release the pose by lowering your back knee down and bringing your fingertips to either side of your front shin. Repeat on the other side.

playing with the principles

How do you cultivate the qualities of Hanuman in your own practice? One approach is to weave in the Universal Principles of Alignment from Anu–sara Yoga. Let's begin with Anusara's first principle, Open to Grace. This involves taking a few moments to become quiet, surrender, and connect with something bigger than yourself. Reflect on Hanuman's ability to see Rama's true identity. He could see the Divine where others saw the mundane because he was Open to Grace.

Stacey Rosenberg, the certified Anusara Yoga teacher who created the sequence on these pages, emphasizes that Opening to Grace before you begin the physical sequence is essential because it sets the stage for all of the other principles to unfold. She refers to this time of turning inward as the "inner leap"—you shift your attention away from the external world and go inside yourself. You deepen your breath, soften your mind, and discover an intention for practicing. You might dedicate your practice to easing someone's pain or to serving your highest ideals or your community's greatest needs. Or you might devote yourself to moving toward Hanumanasana with self-compassion and a

gentle attitude. Whatever arises, this first principle gives you a chance to devote yourself to the journey before taking action—just as Hanuman did

From there, you begin the physical sequence and incorporate the next four principles into each pose. The second principle of Anusara Yoga is Muscular Energy, which involves drawing power from the periphery of your body to the core to create a stable and balanced foundation for your poses. Throughout this sequence, Rosenberg offers the Muscular Energy cue of drawing the shins in toward the midline. It's a challenging action that requires strength and dedication not unlike Hanuman's, and it provides a sense of stability and integrity that will serve you well for the final pose. If you're flexible, maintaining Muscular Energy will prevent you from unconsciously flopping into Hanumanasana in a misaligned way, which can put you at risk for

The principle of Inner Spiral focuses on an ever-expanding current of energy going from the feet through the pelvis and up to the waistline. In each pose in Rosenberg's sequence, you'll engage Inner Spiral by rotating your legs inward

and drawing your inner thighs in and back.

Once you've established Inner Spiral in a pose, you apply the fourth principle, Outer Spiral, which is an ever-narrowing energy current that runs from the waistline down to the feet. Outer Spiral rotates the legs outward, moves the tailbone down and the thighs forward, and draws the thighs toward each other. You apply Outer Spiral as you maintain the action of hugging the shins in. Inner Spiral and Outer Spiral may feel like opposing actions, but they are meant to balance each other, and when applied together, they should bring you into your ideal alignment.

Rosenberg likens applying Inner and Outer Spiral to aligning all of your resources—your body, your mind, and your spirit—before you make that final leap outward in Hanumanasana. All four principles are needed. "You Open to Grace and think about your intention, your big vision. Then you pull inward with Muscular Energy and dedicate yourself to that vision," she says. "With Inner and Outer Spiral, you get yourself in alignment with the action you want to create. And then—you leap!"

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$Ardha\ Hanumanasana$ (half monkey god pose)

From Low Lunge, straighten your right leg and flex your foot. See that your back knee is underneath your hip or slightly behind it.

Press your right heel into the earth and isometrically drag it toward the back of your mat. Spread and press out through the mounds of your toes. As you inhale, engage your leg muscles, hug your shins to the midline, and draw energy from your foot up into your hips. Maintaining the dedication that you cultivated in the previous pose, take your right hand and manually give yourself an Inner Spiral: Wrap your fingers around the back of your right thigh and widen your hamstrings from

the inner thigh to the outer thigh. Keep that width and then use your hand to apply the Outer Spiral: With your fingers still pressing into the top of your hamstrings, draw your right hip back and press the hip and thigh down, toward the ground.

Scoop your buttock under, extending fully through your leg bones. Lift the front of your pelvis, shift your belly and ribs to the right, and with a long spine, pour your devoted heart over your right leg. Take 5 breaths as you stay deeply present and committed to the pose, noticing your thoughts and feelings as they arise. Move directly to the next pose.



Pigeon Pose

From Downward-Facing Dog bring your right knee to the outside of your right hand and lower your left knee to the ground. Bring your right shin as parallel to the front of your mat as your hips allow. This wider base helps to open the pelvis. It's perfectly OK for the pelvis to be off the floor here. In fact, it's better to keep your pelvis square toward the front of your mat and off the floor than to rest the pelvis on the floor unevenly.

Flex your right foot and tuck your back toes under. With an inhalation, isometrically drag your knees toward each other, and draw your power and resources into the core of your pelvis. To prepare for his leap, Hanuman first has to draw deep inside himself. Use his example to call on the strength within you to widen your thighs, hips, and pelvis. Then exhale, lengthen your tailbone down, and extend your torso forward. Let your pelvis get heavy as you root it toward your back leg.

Lift the front of your pelvis and extend your torso forward, softening your heart between your shoulder blades. Stay here for 5 breaths; then step back to Downward Dog. Move directly to the next pose.

Anjaneyasana (low lunge), variation

Inhale as you lift your torso; exhale as you bend your right knee into a Low Lunge. With your left hand on the floor (or a block), twist to the right, bend your left knee, and hold the little-toe side of your left foot with your right hand. (Use a strap to bridge the gap between your hand and foot if necessary.)

Press your right heel and left knee into the earth and energetically pull them toward each other. Bring your left heel close to your outer left hip, even if you have to move your hips back to make that connection.

Once again, with commitment and dedication, draw your shins to the midline and widen your thighs. Lengthen your tailbone down through the left knee and press your foot into your hand. To deepen the pose, keep your back hip and heel together and allow your pelvis to move forward toward the front of your mat. If it feels appropriate to your body to deepen the pose, place your left forearm on the floor.

Take a few breaths here to turn inside yourself. Soften between your shoulder blades while you release down through your pelvis. Then actively root down through your legs and extend through your torso. With your shoulder blades on your back, turn your heart to the sky.

After several breaths here, slowly release your back foot, place both hands on the ground, and step your left foot forward to Uttanasana. Then repeat the same three-pose sequence on the other side. When you've done the sequence on both sides, step back into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose).





Anjaneyasana (low lunge)

When you build this simple pose from the inside out, the outer form becomes a manifestation of your heart. From Downward Dog step your right foot forward, setting your left knee down on your mat with your back toes pointed. Look back at your left leg and make sure your foot is pointing straight back.

Pause and recall your intention as you settle into the pose. Then pull into your center and summon support on all sides of your legs. This will lift you out of the posture a little bit, but it will help you to reestablish alignment. Maintain your physical integrity as you lengthen your tailbone down and root your back leg and foot into the earth. Keep widening your back leg and hip as you extend your pelvis and front knee forward.

Place your hands on your hips and fill the inner body with breath as you lengthen the sides of your torso. Draw the heads of your arm bones back until your collarbones broaden and your shoulder blades come toward the spine. Lift your chin slightly and open your throat. Use your hands to press your hips down as you lift your heart up toward the sky. Stretch your arms overhead and shine your beauty out in all directions.

Stay here for 5 breaths. Then release and step back to Downward Dog before performing the posture on the second side.

continued from page 68...

expand and offer

With your body, mind, and heart in alignment, you radiate energy outward with a sense of expansion and freedom. This is Anusara Yoga's fifth principle—Organic Energy, an outward extension of energy from the core to the periphery of your body. It is thought to increase expansion, flexibility, and freedom.

The radiant, expansive energy you cultivate with Organic Energy is, metaphorically speaking, the same energy that enabled Hanuman to grow gigantic and perform a superhuman feat in service to something that was far greater than himself.

As you practice Hanumanasana, realize you are capable of so much effort, so much grace, so much expansion! As Rosenberg says, "It doesn't matter where the final form of the pose lies. It doesn't matter how many blocks you are lifted on. What's really important is that you've decided to take this journey. Wherever you are in the pose, remember what you're in service of. Think of the pose as an emblem of your heart."

Hanumanasana (monkey god pose)

This pose asks you to draw inward. Call upon the resources of your body, heart, and mind in order to pour your heart into the great leap of this experience.

With your right leg forward and your left leg back, place your fingertips on the floor or on blocks. Wherever you are, pause and soften. Renew your dedication to your intention.

Embody Hanuman's determination as you engage the muscles on all sides of your legs and lift slightly out of the pose. With this extra lift, you will be able to reestablish Muscular Energy, Inner Spiral, and Outer Spiral: Hug the shin bones in; widen your thighs, hips, and pelvis; and then draw your outer thighs and pelvis back and down.

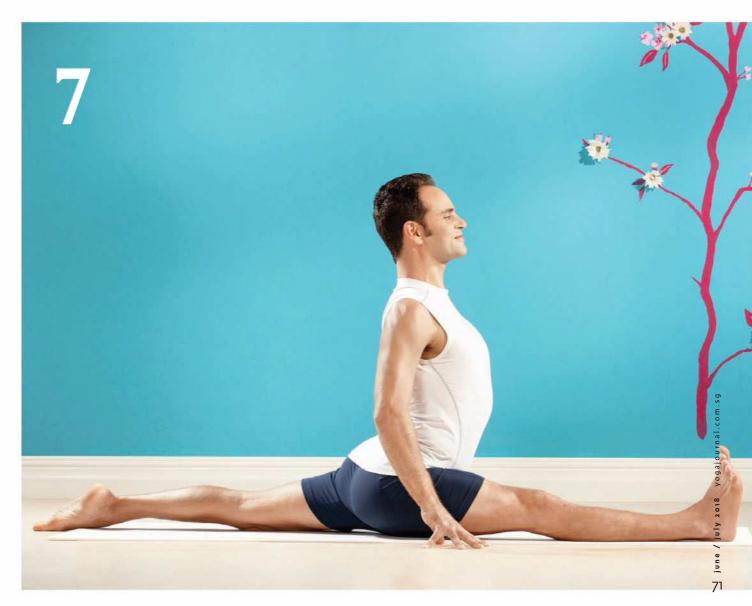
Press your hands down to lift your torso up, curling open through your courageous heart. Then lengthen your tailbone down, extending fully through your legs to lower yourself toward the floor.

Keep the muscles toned and your legs extending so you are engaging and stretching simultaneously. Take 5 long, deep breaths, allowing your pelvis to get heavy and your heart to be light. As you open your heart into the backbend, see if you can connect to the intention you set at the beginning of your practice.

Keep the full engagement of your leg muscles as you pull yourself up and out of the pose. By learning to maintain engagement through the transition, you practice staying dedicated to your vision, even in the face of your greatest challenges.

Take a few breaths in Down Dog. Then do the other side. If time allows, repeat the whole sequence 2 or 3 times; otherwise repeat Hanumanasana 3 times on each side.

Bernadette Birney is a yoga teacher living in Connecticut. Find out more about her at bernadettebirney.com.



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TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

BY COLLEEN SAIDMAN YEE

In 1984, my next-door neighbor—who was into all sorts of "weird" stuff like yoga, journaling, and meditation—made it her mission to get me to yoga class. She nagged me for months until I begrudgingly agreed. (I'm sure that there was some sort of trade or bribe involved, but I can't remember exactly what it was.) I thought that I would be giggling at all these silly people who believed there was something mysterious and magical about "stretching." I consider myself to be a pragmatist, and had always envisioned yoga as a cult and the physical activity a joke. OK, well, I was wrong. The class kicked my ass and humbled me. The feeling and experience were both magical and mysterious and—dare I say it?—spiritual. My senses were clear, my mind was present, and I had an overwhelming sense of contentment that I hadn't felt since I was a teenager. I remember walking out onto Broadway in New York City, which I had walked down hundreds of times, but the clarity of the color, sounds, and smells were so much more crisp. It is from this clarity and relaxation that decisions become less dramatic. Yoga eventually became my guide back home to myself.

I'm one of seven children, and growing up, the main emphasis in our house was on education. My brothers and sister all went on to get masters degrees and PhDs, and most are working in education. I was on the same trajectory, an A+ student in high school, but all of that changed on July 4, 1974, with screeching tires: I was run over by a car and suffered severe head trauma that left me unable to remember or process information the way I had before. I started using drugs and exercise to beat up my body, because the distractions of a high or physical pain were so much less intense than my feelings of inadequacy were

By the time I started yoga, I had already given up drugs, but the angst that was the impetus to start doing them was still there. As I kept returning to class, yoga started to address my deeper frustrations. It demanded that I sit with what I'd spent the previous decade running away from and covering up. Yoga has brought me to a place of loving my body and embracing my capabilities, and I believe that the practice has literally rewired my brain. I still have moments of feeling that I don't add up, but I can find where that's stored internally and dive into those places with asana, meditation, and breath work, and watch them lose their hold on me. This yoga stuff is quite miraculous.

I've always been a huge fan of Savasana (Corpse Pose). I don't think that I had one particular aha moment that made me decide to teach restorative yoga, but my love affair with restorative poses has grown over the years. It started with teaching a restorative pose at the end of my classes at my studio, Yoga Shanti (in New York). Then, about 10 years ago, I started teaching entire classes dedicated

to restorative poses. They are mind- and nervous-system altering. I think my age has something to do with my love of propping the body and dropping in deeper and deeper. These poses quiet the mental chatter that is nonstop—relaying all sorts of conflicting information, stories, and possible outcomes. When we set up carefully in a restorative pose, the breath becomes easy and the body relaxes so that it doesn't resist. The nervous system quiets down, and deep listening becomes possible. Clarity rises and fear dissipates.

We need to befriend, and listen to, the wisdom of the body. With yoga, I've developed a passion for exploring emotions and a method for freeing my body of the bondage caused by years of trying to protect myself. A gut reaction is a window into intuition, but many of us have become deaf to what our gut is telling us. Sometimes we want to deny the truth of a situation because we don't trust ourselves, or we want someone else to make the decision, or we just plain don't want to deal with the upheaval that could ensue. Or maybe we literally have negative feelings about our bellies because of what society has told us they should look like, and that area of the body has become hard, ignored, and shut down. Viscerally understanding and feeling the effects of restorative poses and breath work has been a game changer for me. You get in touch with what your gut is telling you, and you realize that you did the best you could; you stop beating yourself up with would-haves, should-haves, and could-haves, because that is such a useless energy drain.

My hope is that yoga will someday be at the bedside of every hospital patient and that every health care professional will use it for self-care. Ten years ago, I started the Urban Zen Integrative Therapy program with Donna Karan and my husband, Rodney. Our goal has been to put the "care" back in health care. It's a program for self-care that also offers training for health care professionals and yoga teachers who want to aid patient recoveries through yoga. Urban Zen Integrative Therapy teaches you how to apply yogic techniques when taking care of yourself or your patients. It didn't inspire quick buy-in, but we kept pounding the pavement, and now the doors are springing open. Our hope is that soon all institutions such as schools, corporations, prisons, abuse centers, and rehab centers will offer yoga classes.

Colleen Saidman Yee is the co-founder and co-director of Yoga Shanti in Sag Harbor, New York, and teaches with her husband, yoga teacher Rodney Yee, in the Gaiam Yoga Club online yoga club/virtual yoga studio. *@ColleenSaidmanYee*

MASTER CLASS



Go with your gut

Colleen
Saidman Yee's
restorative
practice for
dealing with
indecision will
open up your
mind, body, and
heart to infinite
possibility.

NOT A DAY GOES BY that you don't have to make decisions—from the big (Should I have a child? Buy this house?) to the small (What should I get my partner for our anniversary? Practice on my yoga mat?). But it's difficult to make decisions if you're living in a body with no space—in the same way that it's not easy to live in a house that's full of clutter. "Usually we don't even realize that we're being shut down by excess," says Saidman Yee, "until we clean house and find that we can breathe more easily. Yoga is the best way that I know to clean house—mentally, physically, and emotionally."

The sequence here uses gentle backbends, forward bends, and twists to help you scan your body for tension and create the space that will allow you to tune into your intuition. It is through decluttering and expansion, rather than

contracting and getting hyper focused (a common reaction to uncertainty), that you'll be able to release tension and free yourself from being stuck in indecision.

Before you begin, sit for 10 seconds and notice how much pressure is in your head. Simply noticing this will cause a softening and release. Bring this awareness to the following poses, focusing on a decision you're trying to make. Do the practice for at least four consecutive days, and if you can, follow it up with 20 minutes of journaling. There's evidence that 20 minutes of daily journaling on a decision for four days can bring clarity. Finally, remember: "Whatever comes to light while you practice, trust your gut and walk toward it; every option has something to offer," Saidman Yee says.

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MASTERCLASS



ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA

Downward-Facing Dog Pose with a block

Start in Balasana (Child's Pose) with your arms outstretched in front of you. Tuck your toes under and lift your hips up and back. Notice where your head is. Place your knees on the floor, keep one hand where it is, and use the other to place the block where your head was. Move back into Down Dog, lightly touching your head to the block at whatever height is comfortable. Stay here for 2 minutes. The block will help release tension in your head—a common symptom when a decision is weighing on you.



PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA

Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend with a block

Stand at the front of your mat and take a giant step out to your right. Reach your arms wide, then walk your feet under your palms. Take your hands to your hips, lift your chest, and fold forward. Place a block underneath your head at a height that supports your head without jamming your neck. Bring the heels of your hands in line with your feet. Your arms should be shoulder-width apart with your elbows bent. Put very little weight on your head. Engage your legs, and hold here for 2 minutes.



MARJARYASANA AND BITILASANA

Cat-Cow Pose with a soft belly

Come onto your hands and knees with your wrists beneath your shoulders and your knees below your hips. Lift your head and pelvis into a backbend, then drop your tailbone and take your head back to neutral. Keep this neutrality and release your belly. Stay here for 3 minutes, releasing the belly—be sure your tail is heavy so you don't start collapsing in your lower back. Deepen your relaxation with each breath. Surrender to your belly—and your gut feelings.



STANDING UDDIYANA BANDHA

Upward Abdominal Lock

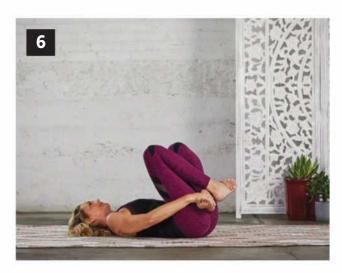
Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Inhale, and stick out your tongue, exhaling sharply through your mouth. As you exhale, bend your knees, resting your hands just above them. Keep your arms straight. At the end of your next exhalation, drop your head and draw your belly back and up for 2 seconds. Release your belly completely and let the exhalation flood it. Then inhale as you return to standing. Look past the tip of your nose to the floor and feel grounded. Repeat 3 times, letting go.



ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

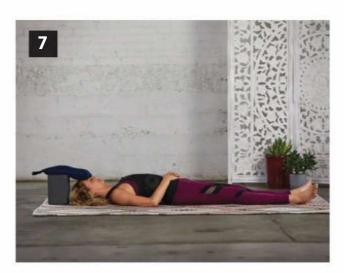
Half Lord of the Fishes Pose

From Downward-Facing Dog, step your left foot forward into a lunge, and slide your right knee to the floor outside of your left foot. Sit down, with your left foot pressing firmly into the floor. Turn to your left, wrap your right arm around your left leg, and take your left hand behind you. Your exhalations bring you deeper into the twist, while your inhalations untwist you partway. Continue squeezing and releasing for 1 minute to cleanse your organs and release your belly. Don't force the movement.



SUPTA SUKHASANA Reclining Easy Pose

Lie on your back, cross your shins, and reach around your legs to grab ahold of your feet. Rock and roll up and back. Start small and let the motion grow—you may be able to roll all the way up to sitting and then all the way down to your back. Try to keep your back rounded so that your rocking is smooth. This is one of the best ways to release stagnation. Find a rhythm that connects to your breath. Practice this for 1 minute, take a 15-second break, and then cross your shins the other way and repeat.



SAVASANA Corpse Pose with a sandbag

At the top of your mat, place a block at the highest setting. Lie down with the crown of your head three inches from the block. Rest a sandbag (or another block) on your forehead at an angle so one end reaches the top of the block behind you. Ideally, the skin of your forehead will be scrunched down toward your nose. Weight on your forehead creates relief in your brain and nervous system—like when a loved one puts their hand on your head and a calm settles in.



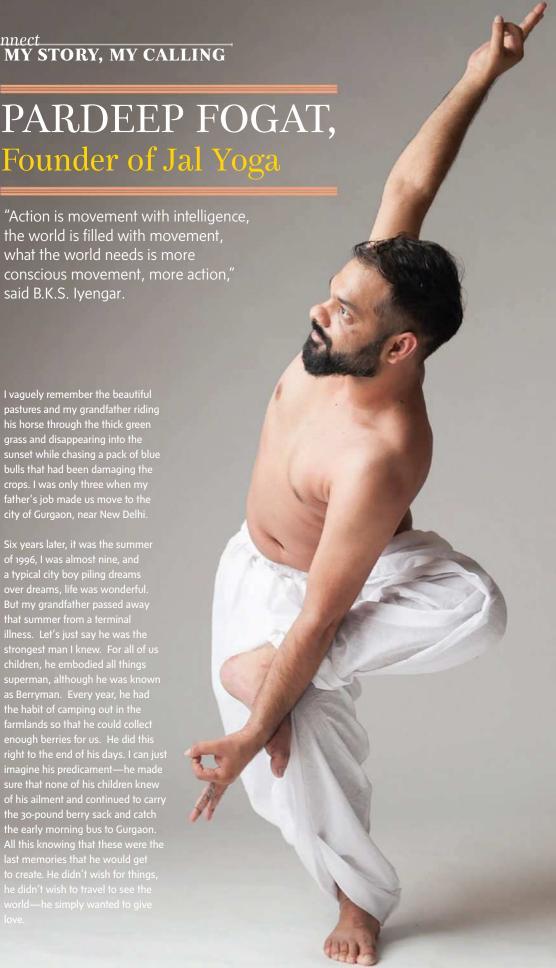
MEDITATION WITH EYES OPEN

Sit comfortably. Many of us need to sit on a blanket so as not to overuse our lower backs. Others may need to keep their backs against the wall for support or sit in a chair. Take your left hand in the palm of your right hand, and hover your hands above your lap with your elbows slightly bent away from each other. Keep your eyes open and look about seven feet ahead at a spot on the floor. With hands lifted and eyes open, you give yourself focus and keep yourself from succumbing to mental drama, clearing the cobwebs of distracting thoughts and moving toward clarity.

"Action is movement with intelligence, the world is filled with movement, what the world needs is more conscious movement, more action," said B.K.S. Iyengar.

I vaguely remember the beautiful pastures and my grandfather riding grass and disappearing into the sunset while chasing a pack of blue bulls that had been damaging the city of Gurgaon, near New Delhi.

a typical city boy piling dreams But my grandfather passed away the habit of camping out in the sure that none of his children knew the 30-pound berry sack and catch



ART DIRECTION: ANUJA BAGADE, PHOTO COURTESY: JAL YOGA





If you heard your calling, we would love to hear your story. Write to us at letters@yogajournal.com.sg

Fast forward to the year 2000, I was officially a teenager, with a Walkman playing "Bailamos" on a loop. We've all been there. This was another exceptionally tough year for my family. I was diagnosed with acute asthma: and the same year my father met with a freak accident which put him into a coma for a fortnight. After a couple of surgeries and a few titanium plates, he regained consciousness. Although all the medical staff involved doubted that my father would ever walk, Dad did beat the odds. After three years of constant home therapy and my mother's unmatched dedication, he took his first step. This was one of the happiest days for my family. My father could not drive us to school or play street cricket with us like before—but together as a family, we had a sense of achievement and contentment.

Years passed and there I was, an asthmatic overweight teenager with no drive or crave for success. The prescription steroids were taking a toll on my growth trajectory on a physical, and more importantly, on an emotional level. I decided to focus on my studies, and soon completed an undergraduate degree and an MBA (I am still pursuing a PhD).

On a subconscious level though, I never accepted the limitation my hardships had put upon me. My soul was craving for a purpose. My calling, or my realization, occurred to me nearly a decade ago. Or simply put, my soul said I've had enough.

In 2008, I found myself travelling with a colleague on a yoga vacation to the beautiful

Sivananda Ashram in Kerala.

I will never be truly able to explain my transformation in words. But everything seemed to make sense then. The truth is that the reality of life is sometimes tough, and people become so hypnotized by the levers and cogs that they forget why they are working on the machine in the first place. In Kerala, I met such wonderful people with such beautiful perspectives and philosophy. My hardships, or my limitations, seemed to pale—let's just say there is always someone dealing with something much worse than you are.

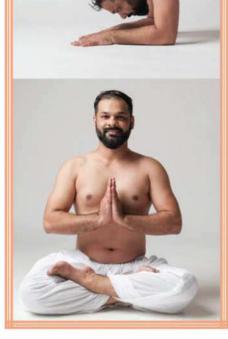
As the vacation was ending, I realized I must not become lost while operating the machine. I must find a meaningful outcome to this chaos. I was re-energized by emotions, and yoga brought everything to the surface. I set myself on a mission to try every existing physical regimen of exercise. I travelled to many countries, got certifications from Taiji to body-building, participated in National and International contests—and came to realize that Yoga is the father of every exercise, and not just physically. After learning, travelling and being part of the best ashrams, institutions and schools around the globe, my purpose became much clearer.

Whatever your profession may be, whether you are a doctor, teacher or a soldier, you want to share your knowledge and be of service to others. But you can only do that if you are aligned with the values of your profession. Yoga to me is a way of life—to be of service.

In January 2018, I founded Jal Yoga with my partner, Jasmine, for the sole purpose of providing health and wellness to prevent and to cure, to meditate and to realize, to live and not just exist. This is just the beginning for me...

Namaste.

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Visit www.jalyoga.com.sg.



REFLECTION

This is how I save my life

BY AMY B. SCHER



I WAS 28 YEARS OLD WHEN I FOUND MYSELF halfway across the world, in India, searching for something impossible to find at home—a cure. My body was falling apart. The reason: late-stage Lyme disease. Because of it, I was suffering from excruciating nerve pain, paralyzing fatigue, a broken immune system, and the list went on. Lyme disease had not only destroyed my physical self, but the rest of me as well. And in a tiny hospital on the outskirts of Delhi, a female Indian doctor was doing experimental embryonic stem cell therapy that would possibly deliver my long-awaited alternate destiny: health.

Looking at me, you might not have guessed anything was so wrong. I styled my wild, curly hair every day; painted on makeup; and faked being semi-normal. Yet inside the places that no one knew but me, I felt like a human lodged in the in-between—between living and dying. I had come to India for the treatment that might help me live again.

But it turns out, you do not go to India for what you want and carry it away with ease. And so, in my hospital room on the other side of the world, I found myself both wildly chained to my circumstances, and also freer than I'd ever been.

I'd always stuffed my feelings deep down in my body, covering up the cracks and weaknesses that I worried existed in nobody but me. But in India, an erratic, free-for-all country, even my cracks started widening—and it became clear what the crushing pressure of holding on so tightly had done to me. Not only had it made my life harder than it needed to be, but I started to really wonder how much this pattern had affected my body, too. What was the physical cost of clinging to stability and consistency?

The real me, the one I wanted no one to see, poured out uncontrollably; my defenses gone, I bared my vulnerabilities for all to witness. Looking back now, it's clear why it took India for me to feel this. My body was more than a rebellious, resistant deterrent to my hopes and dreams. My body, it turns out, is perhaps the only bold-faced, consistent truth teller in my life. And the truth my body had been speaking

through all of its symptoms was this: You are not being you, therefore this home is not for you. Get out. Find the real person who lives here in this body, this home, and bring her back. Then I will be happy, and so will you.

As if someone was slowly unblindfolding me, I began to understand why I had not been the real me. I was afraid of so many things—afraid I'd never really be well (and that it wasn't up to me); afraid that I would be totally well (that it was all up to me); and, mostly, afraid of embracing my utterly messy humanness.

Our physical bodies are the sum of our lives, and our lives are the sum of our thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. When we suppress our emotions, it can cause physical symptoms. Symptoms are how our bodies communicate with us, using their very own language. India forced me to practice letting go of how I wanted others to see me and become who I really was.

It turns out the actual stem cells were not a miracle cure, but rather the catalyst for my ultimate healing. Somewhere between the time I arrived in Delhi and the time I left, I went from an existence committed to killing Lyme to an existence committed to healing me. Saving my own life was not a single act of courage nor a random act of desperation. It wasn't even, in the end, about attaining perfect physical health. It was a long, slow, burning, uncontrollable yearning to simply meet myself once again.

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