

TEACHING HATHA YOGA

Teaching Hatha Yoga

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Daniel Clement with Naomi Clement

Illustrations by Naomi Clement

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Preface: My Story

Before I began teaching yoga, I worked for a time as a night emergency driver picking up sick and injured animals. The job was physically demanding, as I was sometimes required to hoist large, injured, or vicious dogs (or at times coyotes, sheep, and once even a beaver) into the back of an animal ambulance. I worked the graveyard shift so sleep deprivation was also a problem. I began searching for something to alleviate the emotional stress and the back pain caused by my work. One day I walked into an Ashtanga Yoga class in Vancouver not knowing what to expect and ended up doing part of the Primary Series in my street clothes. Covered in sweat afterwards, feeling ridiculous yet happy, I knew that yoga held something special for me.

For the next three years I practiced regularly, and when David Swenson came to town, I signed up for his Ashtanga teacher training. Soon I was dedicated to teaching yoga. I found a job assisting classes in Vancouver but did not know what to do next. I heard through friends that a crazy yoga teacher by the name of Larry Shultz was coming to town to open a studio, and that he was looking for teachers. He hired me and sent me down to his studio in San Francisco to complete his training. For a month I slept in the studio on top of the open-air office; I learned more about yoga during the day and practiced my guitar in the empty studio at night. Larry taught me to question some of the approaches to yoga, especially the formal postural sequences of the Ashtanga Vinyasa method. His guerrilla approach to yoga was fun, unconventional, and refreshing.

After returning to Vancouver, I worked at Larry's studio and started thinking about opening my own in my living room. The seaside town I lived in was a quiet bedroom community, inhabited by a population quite a bit older than the twenty- to thirty-year-olds I had been teaching Vinyasa Yoga to in Vancouver. When I started teaching at home, I realized the sequencing of postures and the method I had been teaching was not going to work for these students. I was at a loss as to what to do. Over time, exploration of a variety of styles of yoga revealed essential similarities as well as important differences in approach. In this manual I offer a practical way of teaching yoga to a broad spectrum of students using an "Open Source" approach. The principles and methodology are influenced by a Tantric philosophy of non-duality, in which everything – every cell in our body, every leaf on every tree – is recognized as a manifestation of Source. It is my sincere hope that the information contained within this manual will awaken your inner wisdom and creativity and allow you to find your own voice as a teacher.

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About This Manual

The information contained in this manual is designed to give the teacher-in-training a comprehensive and concise foundation for the practice and teaching of Hatha Yoga. This manual is inspired by a non-dual, Tantric philosophy that all of us, in all our various forms, shapes and cultures, are, at heart, forms of the Divine. The information within also complies with Yoga Alliance standards for 200-hour Teacher Training. It is my hope that it will give you the tools to teach a safe, fun, and effective yoga class and inspire you to continue your study of yoga in whichever direction your heart leads you.

“When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bounds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”

—Patanjali, the *Yoga Sutras*

About Owning Yoga

The materials presented in this manual represent a personal composition and interpretation of yoga. Yoga is both a science and an art of a deeper understanding of the human condition. In my inquiry into this subject, I have had the good fortune of meeting great teachers, whose wisdom has shed light on my own search for greater understanding. Such an approach will, in turn, benefit students and teachers alike. Whatever the style of your practice, yoga is a practice of revelation. What is revealed is our true nature as an aspect of Source.

This Source, like the sea, underlies all of our individual qualities. One of the qualities of the individual ego is the notion of ownership. Ownership is manifested in the form of: deeds to land that has been here millennia before we put a fence around it; the desire to accumulate goods in our name; or the branding of ideas. Ultimately, we leave everything behind except the understanding we cultivate, and it is our privilege as teachers to share that understanding.

Yoga cannot be owned because yoga, as a form of conscious inquiry, is an intrinsic part of our nature. Every time you have taken a deep, conscious breath you have experienced yoga.

Namaste,

Dan Clement

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PHILOSOPHY, LIFESTYLE & ETHICS

Why Yoga May Have Happened

Imagine Yourself 10,000 Years Ago...

You awake to the smell of the earth as the sun warms and begins to evaporate the dew. Your simple portable dwelling provides some shelter from the elements. Your tribe rises at dawn; children scamper around playing. You know everyone in your tribe, and they all know you. When later that day game is brought back from the hunt to be cooked, it is shared by all. When the sun sets, a fire is made and you observe the wood turning into heat, light, and ash. The smoke rises into the sky where the stars are so clear due to the lack of any ambient light that you can recognize constellations like old friends. When it is time to sleep, sleep comes easily to a body in tune with the rest of nature. When the tribe moves on, you look behind and all that is left of your presence there are the folded grasses where your shelters were, and a fire-pit. In a few weeks even this will become invisible.

The idea of “having relationships” with others in your tribe is not a concept anyone understands. You have known these people all your life. Some you like more than others, but there is no getting into and out of the relationship you have with them. They literally are your relations, just as are the animals and plants. The children around you are everyone’s responsibility, and they learn different skills from others in your tribe as they move freely around.

This is a gift economy. Currency does not exist, and the natural response to the abundance of life on the earth is one of gratitude. No one has the idea that human life should try to be prolonged, or that youth is better than maturity. The spirits of humans and animals inhabit the earth.

The scenario above may sound utopian. That is largely because through projection and some quite unscientific studies by 19th century Europeans, we have been led to believe that life for our ancestors was “brutish and short.” This was not the case. Nor was it the case that our ancestors were less healthy than we are today. Eating a varied “organic” diet, sugar in any form being quite hard to come by, and walking miles daily, our predecessors were generally fit, healthy, and competent at a variety of skills.

Our nomadic ancestors' deep integration with the natural world made recognizing the continuity of all things their first nature. Only when we began to coerce nature to supply us with more than we could readily consume, through the advent of agriculture, did we remove the idea of spirit from nature, for a gift can never be demanded, and once demanded, it is no longer a gift.

Leaving behind a state of recognition of the sacred nature of all things, a hierarchy of spirit evolved. Once removed from the earth, spirit was moved to the mountains—the domain of ancient gods—and then the heavens. Up is better than here, down is even worse. To ascend

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toward is good, whereas to descend into is bad. This “verticalism” also diminishes our horizontal connection with one another. When you look at the history of organized religion, the representative of god is “higher up”—on a platform, a throne, or if you are walking about, a very tall hat.

The muddy, fecund ground of everyday life was now not sacred, and along with a vertical model of spirit came another model—purity: white, translucent, unstained. Our instinctual, carnal human nature became less than spiritual and finally sin, as well as an abstract idea of heaven, pursued. Man’s purpose in life was now not only to restrain outward nature via the cultivation of land and domestication of animals, but also to restrain his inward nature. That is, to become cultivated.

The creation myth of Adam and Eve flung out of the garden of Eden has been inverted. A garden is the natural world, cultivated by man. Adam and Eve were flung *into* a garden, where they had to till the soil by the sweat of the brow.

The origins of yoga are somewhat mysterious, with the tradition being largely oral in nature. Carvings found in the Indus river valley civilizations of Harrapa and Mohenjo-daro depicting a figure seated in what may be a yoga pose are dated at 2500 BCE.

The origins of agriculture begin approximately 5,000 years before this. The practice of yoga arises *after* the agricultural revolution. Most, but not all hunter-gatherers became farmers cultivating the land. Farmers must protect their crops, build fences, store excess food, and be able to trade that excess. So agriculture precipitates ideas such as ownership, control, currency, policing, and law. Stratification of society ensues. Farmers eat a mono-diet of planted crops and domesticated animals, as opposed to the varied diet found in season by hunters and gatherers. The negative effect on health and lifespan in many cultures was enormous. The practice of yoga may have arisen as a cure for this new lifestyle: a way of reconnecting with natural forces and rhythms that were becoming forgotten.

The tools of yoga are the ones we already have: body, breath, and mind. Some of the later yogas' view of the body is much different than the idea of the self divided from spirit that has become embedded deep in our culture, attitudes, and behavior.

The word *yoga* can mean “union,” or an application of means; in this case, it signifies the means to reconnect something. Let’s remember that *something* is already here. There is no separation of spirit from nature except in our mind. Any dedicated outward searching will ultimately lead us back to a remembrance of this ground of being. The ideas of the mind drop into the heart and body, and like any thing rooted to the earth, the flowering of our awareness is related to how much nectar is drawn up from our connection to the primal elements from which we grew.

A Brief History of Yoga Philosophy

Yoga's exact origin remains a mystery. There is some evidence to indicate that early forms of Yoga may have existed as far back as 2500-1500 BCE, in the Indus Valley region of India. Sculptures of figures seated in what look like lotus postures have been found from this era, but because the script accompanying the figures is unknown, it is not possible to determine with any certainty if the sculptures are representations of a yoga posture, or simply one way of sitting on the floor. What is clear is that since earliest times there has existed an understanding that human consciousness is vast, can be explored, and from that exploration insights unfold as revealed wisdom about the human condition, the universe, and our place in it.

In the early centuries of the first millennium BCE, two streams of culture existed in India: Vedic and non-Vedic. The *Vedas* contained sacred texts of revealed wisdom, or Sruti, meaning “what is heard from a higher source.” The four *Vedas* comprise the oldest scriptural texts of the Hindu faith. The non-Vedic Indian culture included Jainism and Buddhism, neither of which accepted the authority of the *Vedas*, and consequently evolved into separate faiths. It is important to remember that, within the Indian culture, wisdom was passed down orally from Guru to student: the Guru weaving threads of his own wisdom into something meaningful and appropriate for that student. Given this method of transmission of knowledge, different schools of philosophy intertwined and influenced each other in a way much less rigid than we may imagine.

It is unclear whether yoga evolved from Vedic or non-Vedic culture. Scholars have noted that during this period Sramanas (literally, “those who exert themselves”) were involved in austerities—activities practiced by individuals who were renunciates and ascetics from the non-Vedic culture.

The first millennium BCE onward was a period of dramatic social and cultural change in India. Around the seventh century BCE, large urban centers began taking shape in northern India. Urban centers grew where there was an abundance of food and means to store it. Not entirely dependent on agriculture, other goods began to be produced, commerce evolved along trade routes, and ideas as well as goods were exchanged. During this period of rapid change, philosophy was also evolving. Possibly as a result of epidemics spreading from isolated villages to major urban centers, that resulted in widespread death, philosophies began questioning the very meaning of life and the nature of existence. Around the seventh century BCE the oldest Upanishads were written, and were known as “Vedanta,” — the end, or culmination, of the *Vedas*. Upanishad literally means “to sit down near”; this gives a clue as to how this wisdom was transmitted, from teacher to student in close proximity. The teacher or Guru might practice the technique of reciting information to a student, then reaching over, taking his head and shaking it and asking the student to repeat the exercise to make sure he did not forget.

Two important beliefs that influenced the development of yoga arose during this period of change and reflection, notably Samsara (the eternal cycle of birth, disease, old age, and death) and Karma (the belief that all actions bear fruit). It follows that if every action bears fruit, and if you cannot experience the fruits of all your actions in one lifetime, then you are reborn. Thus evolved the concept of existence as a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The next major philosophical question asked was, “Is there anything else?” Is there a way out of this endless cycle of rebirth? Life, in the notion of Samsara, is seen as an endless and often painful experience, a fundamentally negative world view of something to transcend, to escape.

At this time in history, Indian culture was characteristically masculine. Although references to female sages in the Upanishads were not uncommon, by and large the yoga traditions of this time were dominated by austerity and asceticism, and a martial character of domination of the mind and body. Part of the great, sustained effort and sacrifice made by the Yogis of this period required withdrawing from the world—the world of distraction. One of the persistent questions householders raised was whether a cave-dwelling Yogi is doing anything of benefit for the world. By the same token the ascetics asked, “Why live in a madhouse?” So one can see that the question of whether it is possible to integrate yoga into our lives has been there from the start.

Around the fifth century BCE, the pre-classical period, three main streams of the yoga tradition had developed: the Upanishadic traditions, Buddhism, and Jainism. The *Bhagavad Gita* was written shortly after the fifth century, and was probably completed before the end of the millennium. Within this sacred Indian text, there is nothing short of a revolution in Yogic philosophy. There is a broadening of the practice of yoga. Different forms of practice are described: Karma Yoga, or the yoga of action; Bhakti Yoga, or the yoga of devotion; and Jnana Yoga, or the yoga of study and wisdom. In this way, yoga practice and the highest states of consciousness are made available to everyone and renouncing the world and moving into a cave is not necessary. It is also implied within the text that women are not excluded from this practice, a first in the yoga tradition.

In the beginning of the first centuries of the Common Era, a synthesis of Indian philosophies was born. This is Classical Yoga, or the Yoga of Patanjali. The *Yoga Sutras* authored by Patanjali are an organization of Yogic philosophy into short aphorisms, or verses. Patanjali is often equated with the Ashtanga Yoga system, or the Eight Limbs of Yoga, but what Patanjali is primarily interested in is neither a sequential approach to enlightenment, nor a system of limbs of ascending subtlety. Patanjali is interested in one thing: Samadhi. Samadhi is the highest meditative state in which a person transcends their individual ego and merges with the universal. In the *Yoga Sutras*, he gives the definition of yoga in the second sutra, “Yoga citta vrtti nirodhah” or “yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of consciousness.” He then goes on to describe various ways to achieve this state. In Patanjali’s view, there are only two things to consider: the Self, or the inner witnessing consciousness called Purusa, and everything else that is perceived by that witness. Everything else—thoughts, emotions, even memory—resides outside this witnessing consciousness. This is called Prakriti, or nature.

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Patanjali tells us that at some point, in some way, we forgot our essential nature. We became identified with the physical world, which is called “Prakriti.” We develop ways of thinking, attachments to our ideas, we see we are male or female, large or small, and somehow these things become our identity. The inability to see the difference between our essential nature (Purusa) and everything else (Prakriti) is called Avidya, or ignorance. How do we overcome this fundamental ignorance? Patanjali says the only way to see the difference between our witnessing consciousness and everything that consciousness perceives is to create stillness. Like a calm lake with no waves or ripples—in that stillness we can again see our essential nature, undisguised by the movements of the mind.

From the time of the Yoga Sutras, there was a period of great interaction and creativity in Yogic philosophy. Around the sixth century, Tantric Yoga was born. In the eighth century a teacher called Sankara formulated a non-dual (Advaita) school of Vedantic philosophy. Sankara looked back at the large and disparate collection of the Upanishads and organized them in a way that made sense. Sankara’s world view, however, was still far from rosy. His belief was that, although there is only one reality, because of our own ignorance (Maya), we superimpose limitation and separation onto what we see, and like a man walking in the dark seeing a coiled rope and thinking it to be a snake, we are deluded by our inability to see clearly. The only way to see clearly in the darkness is to bring light, so in Sankara’s view a thing can only be cured by its opposite; darkness by light, ignorance by knowledge, and not by anything else. The world of form and multiplicity is still not valued in and of itself in this philosophy; it is seen as an illusion.

The practice of Tantra Yoga evolved over a period of centuries, and found a later articulation in the school of Kashmir Saivism around the eighth century CE. Tantra Yoga, evolving when it did, had the benefit of centuries of development and therefore was able to look back and weave the previous knowledge into a more sophisticated tapestry. Kashmir Saivism agrees with the non-dual philosophy of Sankara’s Vedanta but asks the question, “If there is only one reality, what then is this thing called ignorance?” Vedantic philosophy cannot answer this question because ignorance, to Sankara, is not a thing in itself, but simply the absence of knowledge. Kashmir Saivism’s answer is that if there is only one reality, it has to follow that anything happening (or appearing to happen) to that reality has to be an *operation* of that reality *itself*. So the reason we see diversity of form even though there is only one ultimate reality is that this is what that reality has created—not an illusion, but a physical world vibrating into being. We are seen as a condensation of Source, containing the full power of this Source. The practice of yoga is then ultimately one of remembrance of this potential. We do not have to run from the world. The world is where our yoga takes place.

Kashmir Saivism philosophy dictates the need for the grace of a guru to bestow the spiritual jump-start called ‘Shaktipat.’ Without this transmission of energy, the student cannot attain enlightenment. This somewhat problematic dilemma is addressed by yet another school of Tantra called “Shri Vidya” or auspicious wisdom. The most recent (that I know of) form of this approach is currently being taught by Dr. Douglas Brooks (2010). Douglas learned a form of yoga called “Rajanaka” from his teacher Gopala Aiyar Sundaramoorthy. Rajanaka

can be translated as “Little Prince” or “one who is sovereign unto themselves.” In this horizontal model of yoga, there is no singular attainment of an enlightened state but a continual expansion of understanding and appreciation. As yogis—ones who have decided to engage with the gifts and opportunities life presents—our sensitivity and intimacy with ourselves and others increases through the sharing of experiences, unique gifts, and insights.

The Upanishads

The Upanishads are a collection of over two hundred teachings including stories, metaphors, and instruction on meditation. This non-homogenous array reflects the orally transmitted nature of the teachings. The wide variety of information in the Upanishads does not reflect a unified Yogic philosophy. Nevertheless, deep consideration concerning the innate divinity of humanity is clearly present.

The roots of the word Upanishad “Upa, Ni, Shad” mean literally “Near, down, sit.” The implication is that these teachings were given from teacher to student in close proximity. It also implies the teachings may not be immediately obvious and require studentship and dedication to absorb. The Upanishads were teachings given by the highest classes of society—the warrior/ruling class and the priest class. These teachings were not available to others in society.

Although the Upanishads are part of the Vedic corpus, they carry quite a different message. Veda literally means “knowledge,” so the *Vedas* were books of knowledge. The focus of the earlier Vedas is on how to live a good life and the explanation of the correct performance of rituals. Early Vedic teachings do not show a clear interest in spiritual liberation or yoga. The Upanishads, forming part of the later Vedic teaching, speak of the concepts of transmigration and re-birth.

The process of embodying the teachings of the Upanishads is also given:

- Listening
- Contemplation
- Meditation

This methodology of learning is not casual. In first listening to a teaching—really listening—we open to the teachings fully, with a beginners mind. It is said in the Upanishads that we should listen “like a deer listens to music.” If you can imagine the sensitivity of a deer’s ears and the alert quality of the animal, the nature of this sort of listening is apparent.

After listening fully, we contemplate the teaching. We should contemplate the teachings “like a cow chews grass.” A cow will continue to chew the same mouthful of grass, preparing it for digestion for quite a while. During this process, we start to make the

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teachings relevant to us, to embody them as wisdom and not just information—chewing them over, looking at them from different viewpoints.

Finally, we assimilate the teachings “the way a swan can separate milk from water in a lake.” If milk is poured onto a lake, a swan can separate out only the milk to drink, and leave the water behind. In this way we take the essence of teachings that are relevant to us.

The key teaching of the Upanishads is simple:

Atman = Brahman
Or
Individual self = Universal Self

In Sanskrit, the phrase “Tat tvam asi,” or “You are That,” says it all. You *are* that which you seek. Consciousness is ever-present, not a state of mind or being to be attained. Rather, our true Self simply needs to be revealed by identifying, and then putting aside, all that is not our true nature. As the artist Michelangelo said, in order to make a sculpture he simply had to “remove all the stone that was not a part of the statue.”

The Upanishads also transmit the teaching that this Universal Self can in fact take human form. This teaching is profound in that it allows a respect for any other religion, as Supreme Consciousness can take any form, or no form at all. This is an inclusive way of looking at the variety of spiritual practices we pursue.

The *Bhagavad Gita*

Written in approximately 400 BCE, the *Bhagavad Gita* tells the story of Arjuna, a great warrior and archer poised and ready to fight in a battle between two armies led by warring cousins—the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Arjuna asks his chariot driver, who happens to be Krishna—a manifestation of God—to drive his chariot between the two armies so he can see who he is going to fight. He scans the opposing army, the Kauravas, and sees in the ranks his relatives, friends, and teachers. Disheartened by the prospect of killing his revered teachers and friends, he drops his bow and collapses to the chariot floor in dismay—he cannot bring himself to fight.

It is in these circumstances that Krishna, who up until now has been Arjuna’s friend, becomes his teacher and explains why Arjuna must fight. Arjuna is a warrior and it is his dharma, his work, to fight. Arjuna’s skillful actions in battle will only bring about an ending of life in a specific form, as in fact all beings are immortal and have had many incarnations before and will have many after.

Krishna goes on to explain how the practice of yoga can free Arjuna from the karmic bonds of his action. He clarifies that the fruits of actions, any action, are not under our control. It is only the actions themselves that we have authorship or power over. There is a subtle but important difference here between attempting to be unattached to outcome—truly an impossibility, as any action we take, even brushing our teeth, we do to effect a result—and simply directing our attention to the work itself, understanding that causality is often beyond our present limited understanding.

Krishna also outlines different forms of yoga: Karma Yoga, or the yoga of action; Bhakti Yoga, or the yoga of devotion; and Jnana Yoga, or the yoga of wisdom. Krishna states that any of these practices can lead to a complete understanding of who we really are.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a revolutionary text in that it opens the doors of yoga practice to everyone, in any class of society. As far as we know this had never happened before in the yoga tradition. Yoga had until now been reserved for only the upper echelons of society and excluded women. Monastic traditions were exclusive in their own way as well. Not only is yoga now made inclusive, but also the need for an intermediary between man and God, such as a priest, is removed. Krishna explains that even a humble offering from the heart like a leaf or a little water can be a devotional offering.

The *Bhagavad Gita*'s allegorical significance is illustrated at the end of the fourth chapter, as Krishna inspires Arjuna to take action, "Kill therefore with the sword of wisdom the doubt born of ignorance that lies in thy heart. Be one in self-harmony, in yoga, and arise, great warrior, arise."

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Around the second century of the Common Era, the *Yoga Sutras* were composed by Patanjali. Patanjali means "fallen angel"—the idea being that he came to assist humanity. The *Yoga Sutras* are a collection of 196 short verses, or sutras, organized into four chapters. In the first chapter, Patanjali gives his definition of yoga almost immediately. The next three chapters outline practices and approaches to help the students of yoga who have difficulty following his initial teaching without more guidance, as well as describe some of the experiences the Yogi might encounter.

All enlightened masters transmitting teachings through books or otherwise, start with the highest teachings first. The sutras are incredibly condensed packets of wisdom, meant to be unpacked and considered, if possible, with the help of a teacher. Often even the verb is left out of a sutra to make it smaller and easier to remember. At the time Patanjali composed the sutras, they were not written down—they were transmitted orally. When considered this way, the organization of the sutras makes more sense. His teaching at its most concise is given first. Then the text expands on the essential teaching. Some non-linear repetition and revisiting of concepts is part of the way we speak, not necessarily the way we would write, and

this is reflected in the sutras. Rich with wisdom, they can be interpreted in the light of our present culture and circumstances. Let's unpack the first sutra:

“Atha yoganusasanam” – Now we begin the practice of yoga.

The word “Now” is often seen in Yogic scripture as an invocation—an auspicious beginning. The word “Now,” used at the very beginning of these sutras implies that whatever else we may have done prior to this study, now we begin in earnest the study of yoga. This study is not to be put off any longer, for now is the time to begin. The time to understand our human condition is now.

“We” – Patanjali informs us that this study is not meant to be done in isolation. The support of a community of people with a common aim is indispensable in creating a momentum for study and an exchange of ideas. Any community with the ability to exchange ideas freely evolves those ideas more rapidly than when there is the impediment of distance, or a self-centered and fearful hoarding of information.

“Yoga” – The term *yoga* has meant different things at different times. For Patanjali, Yoga means *Samadhi*. *Samadhi* is a state of being in which Supreme Consciousness flows unrestricted through us. The individual ego dissolves in this river of clarity.

“Yogah cittavrtti nirodhah” – Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of consciousness.

In this sutra Patanjali gives us his definition of *yoga*, “Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of consciousness.” This is the most famous of all the sutras. Patanjali gives us his definition of *yoga* right here, immediately after his welcome. *Yoga* occurs when the movements (*vrttis*) of the mind (*citta*) are still (*nirodhah*). In this stillness, in the absence of distraction and mental pre-occupation, our true nature can be experienced. A “*vrtti*” is anything that turns or moves.

So movement of the mind includes thought, emotion, and memory. Anything that is a disturbance to the quietude of the mind requires restraint.

One can see why Patanjali has another 194 sutras to help explain how to achieve this. Stilling the mind is not an easy thing to do. In the next sutra Patanjali explains why we would want to undertake this vast task.

“Tada drastuh svarupe vasthanam” – Then the seer dwells in his own splendor.

So, when the movements of the mind are still, we live in that place of Supreme Consciousness. That is the essence of Patanjali's teachings. The remaining sutras go on to help us understand how this state of being can be achieved.

Vedanta – The Non-Dual Philosophy of Sankara

History

Between the second and sixth centuries CE, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as well as other philosophies including Jainism and Buddhism, evolved in a very intellectually fertile period, fueled by patronage of schools of higher learning. As far back as the second century BCE, a text was written by the teacher Badarayana called the "Brahma Sutra." Within this text Badarayana attempts to systematize the Upanishads. Systemization of a text as broad and varied as the Upanishads is very difficult to do, especially since some teachings of the Upanishads suggest a dual nature to the universe, and some suggest total union, or non-duality. However, varied interpretations of Badarayana's Brahma Sutras opened up even more creative discussion amongst scholars as to the nature of the universe.

The Life of Sankara

Sankara lived for only thirty-two years, between 788–820 CE. In his short life, Sankara systematized the previous teachings of the Upanishads and the *Vedas*, created four Mathas, centers of learning, in the four corners of India, making each one a custodian of one of the four *Vedas*, and assigned to each Matha one of his four main disciples, ensuring the continuation of his teachings. These Mathas continue to this day. Sankara was an extremely prolific writer, offering commentaries on the major foundational yogic texts as well as his own articulation of the nature of the universe.

Sankara is seen as a manifestation of Shiva—an aspect of the Supreme. As the legend goes, Sankara's parents were childless and went to pray for offspring. They were given a choice by the gods: they could either have many children who would be completely unremarkable and dumb, or one child who would be brilliant, but live a very short life. They opted for the second choice, and Sankara was born. Sankara's father died early, so Sankara was raised by his mother. Very soon, he expressed his desire to become a renunciate. Being the only child, his mother would not allow it—one who renounces must leave the family home forever.

One day while playing near the river, a huge crocodile emerged from the water and seized Sankara's leg. Sankara cried out to his mother "Let me renounce NOW!"—it is understood that if one renounces at the time of death, he will achieve liberation. His terrified mother agreed. As soon as she had spoken, the crocodile released Sankara's leg and receded into the waters. Sankara could now embark upon his path, helped along by some meddling from the gods.

Advaita Vedanta

Sankara's philosophy of the nature of the universe was informed by the foundational texts of the yoga tradition—the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Upanishads, and also by the Brahma Sutras. But he refined his philosophy by borrowing an idea common to Buddhism—*maya*. *Maya* means illusion. In Sankara's philosophy, there is only one reality. But because of *maya*, our perception is flawed. We experience the world from an un-awakened perspective, and therefore do not see reality clearly. We both project illusions—like a man seeing a rope in

the dark and thinking that it is a snake—and are fooled by a veil of ignorance. If we could see clearly, we would see there is only one unchanging reality that resides above this phenomenal world.

In this articulation of reality, Sankara is able to refer to the previous teachings of the Upanishads to support his philosophy. The Upanishads, as a collection of yogic wisdom compiled over time from a variety of teachers, sometimes refer dualistically and sometimes non-dualistically to the nature of things. In Sankara's view, the non-dual teachings were spoken about from the perspective of the Supreme, and the seemingly dualistic teachings were given from the lower perspective of everyday life, so there is still only one reality, just two ways of perceiving it—a very clever way to harmonize the broad teachings of the Upanishads. There is, however, one major problem in Sankara's philosophy: *maya*. In the view of Advaita Vedanta, *maya* is neither real, nor unreal, as it does not exist on its own, but its effects can be felt. It is not *something*, but the *absence* of something—it is the absence of knowledge. Still, Sankara states that there is ultimately only one reality—so where does that leave *maya*? Is it part of reality, or is it illusion? Sankara says it simply cannot be spoken about—a somewhat unsatisfactory answer. The idea of *maya* and its inherent challenges to a truly unified philosophy would be explored a few centuries later in the teachings of Tantra Yoga, in the region of Kashmir.

Tantra Yoga

The roots of the practice of Tantra could be traced back to the prehistoric period, where representations of worship of the female, or the female aspect of the Supreme, can be found. Somewhere around the fifth century CE, the practice of worship of this feminine energy became more systematized. These rituals and practices, and an articulated philosophy meant to bring about a transformation of consciousness, is what is known as Tantra Yoga. Early Tantric practitioners were very different in their approach to spirituality—using a human skull as a begging bowl or meditating in a cremation ground were common practices for one branch of Tantra. Eating meat or fish, engaging in ritualized sex, using wine or parched grain were other ways of attempting to transform consciousness by illustrating that the Supreme can be found everywhere—even in the places where others see only impurity. Later, many of these practices became sublimated into ritual—much like the eating of a wafer and drinking a sip of wine in a Catholic mass is symbolic of the eating of Christ's body and the drinking of his blood. Tantra's aim was to use *everything* around us as a means to increase consciousness, rather than denying the world of form.

Tantra Yoga, like all traditions, evolved over time. Tantra incorporates many of the earlier teachings of the Upanishads, the *Vedas*, and even the Classical Yoga of Patanjali. One sure way to differentiate a Tantric approach from some other schools of yoga is that Tantra always affirms our reality. Tantra states that this world we live in is real. As everything in the universe is a manifestation of the divine, everything has an innate sacred quality. Tantra does not deny relative value—good, better, appropriate or inappropriate—but always seeks to see the ultimate divinity in all things. In this way, this philosophy is radically life-affirming—quite different from the teachings of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta.

Kashmir Saivism

Tantra Yoga found a more refined articulation in the region of Kashmir, India, between the ninth and twelfth century of the Common Era. It may not be a coincidence that this sublime and embracing philosophy of life arose in one of the most beautiful and enchanting places in the world. Although there were different teachers and schools of thought informing one another concerning principles and practices of Tantra (and it is important to note that the term “Tantra” was only applied later by western scholars to this development of Yogic philosophy), the greatest of these teachers was certainly Abhinavagupta, who lived between 975-1025 CE. Extremely prolific in his writing, his most important offering was the *Tantraloka*—literally meaning “Light on Tantra.” This treatise systematizes and summarizes the foundational texts of Tantra.

Kashmir Saivism and the Tattvas

The teachings of Kashmir Saivism are truly sublime. Not only does this view of reality affirm this world as part of Supreme Consciousness, Kashmir Saivism actually offers a map of reality called the “Tattvas.” This map, beginning at the top, illustrates how Consciousness unfolds itself in 36 steps into the world we see, hear, feel, touch, smell, and experience in all other ways. This understanding is in many ways beyond words, and was revealed through meditative states. Essentially and very briefly, Supreme Consciousness vibrates with creative energy, which is called “Spanda.” This vibratory energy has an innate desire to create, and when it does, it unfolds itself into form. The forms it creates are limited in understanding, action, and power, but like a drop from the ocean, they are still part of the ocean of Consciousness itself. So a human being is seen as a condensation of Supreme Consciousness. Although a more limited form of the Supreme, we contain all the ingredients—like a limited-time demo version. To take the analogy a little further, this demo version actually contains the whole program in its entirety—we need only discover the key. The only journey necessary is the journey to a deeper understanding of who and what we really are.

Maya and Kashmir Saivism

Earlier, in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara, maya was seen as a veil of illusion, or a lack of knowledge that obscures true reality. In Kashmir Saivism, maya is seen as the play of Consciousness. What we experience here in the world is not illusory—it is what Consciousness, out of its own free will and joy, has created. We can experience reality by closing our eyes and going within, or by opening our eyes and looking at what Consciousness has created. The more we look, the more we see the signature of divinity everywhere. The pattern within a leaf is a miniature of the tree itself. The movement from day to night, inhalation to exhalation, are all forms of this vibratory creative energy present in all things.

Modern Yoga

The movement of yoga from East to West began in earnest with Swami Vivekananda in 1893. Vivekananda was invited to speak at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago that year. His message of tolerance and compassion to all living things was received with a standing ovation. He stayed in America much longer than he had intended, spreading his teachings informed by Advaita Vedanta. From then on, the 20th century saw a continued movement of wisdom from India to the West. But the most influential yogi of all was Tirumalai Krishnamacharya. Krishnamacharya was a master of yoga, Ayurveda, Sanskrit, and Logic. He was responsible for creating Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, teaching Pattabhi Jois, who continued to teach this style throughout his life, as well as B.K.S. Iyengar, Indra Devi, and his own son Desikachar. Krishnamacharya himself never crossed an ocean, but his influence is responsible for the incredible spread of asana practice in the West. He was the first Brahmin to teach a woman yoga, and a western woman at that. He lived to be 100 years old, still vital and teaching even late in life.

The yoga we are familiar with in the West is largely the asana practice—the physical practice of performing postures. The arrival of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, with its intensity, heat, and level of difficulty appealed, and still appeals, to body-conscious practitioners. For many people, this practice in its entirety is impossible to perform based on bone structure limitations. For this reason, many teachers began to teach Power Yoga, or a flow-based derivative of Ashtanga Yoga based on the idea of “Vinyasa”—the linking of one posture to the next using breath and movement.

As yoga continues to grow in popularity, it is also evolving. Teachers such as B.K.S. Iyengar have explored deeply the therapeutic benefits of the practice and its specific application to illness and injury. John Friend has researched modern biomechanics and applied his knowledge to an inclusive school of yoga called “Anusara,” which means “to be in the flow of Grace.” New authentic schools of yoga are emerging such as “Dru” and “Vijnana.” Yoga is also being “branded” as a marketing device. As yoga moves from East to West, it is also losing its original cultural and religious context. Some see this as unfortunate. What needs to be considered is that any system of ideas needs to be relevant to the culture practicing it. Joseph Campbell reminds us that whatever symbols we are using—whether a crucifix or a dancing Shiva—are always meant to point us toward our own experience of divinity—not someone else’s. We are at a point in the evolution of this practice of yoga where we are able to apply the magnificent teachings of the past to our present situation. The yoga practice will adapt itself—it always has. But it is up to us to create meaning within the practice that is appropriate to our present situation.

Chronology of Yoga

In India

Exact dates are extremely difficult to pinpoint when looking at yoga's ancient history as many teachings were orally transmitted. The dates below form a rough guide:

- 2,500 – 1,500 BCE – Indus Valley civilization, where carved figures depicted in what may be seated meditation postures were found. Untranslatable text accompanies the figures.
- 1,000 BCE – The *Vedas* are composed. “Veda” means knowledge. These teachings describe rituals, hymns, practices, and spells.
- 700 BCE – The oldest Upanishads are written. A collection of orally transmitted teachings.
- 500 BCE – The *Bhagavad Gita* is written. Concepts of rebirth and a broadening of the practice of yoga are clearly explained.
- 200 CE – The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali are composed. Short, well-organized verses explaining the nature of the Self and an approach to self-realization.
- 600 CE – The beginnings of Tantra Yoga.
- 800 CE – Sankara's “Advaita Vedanta” school of non-dual philosophy is formulated.
- 900 CE – Kashmir Saivism. One of the more clearly articulated non-dual yoga philosophies, reliant on the transmission of grace from guru to student, called “Shaktipat.”
- 900 C.E (?) –Rajanaka Tantra. Horizontal model of yoga without the concept of a singular, fixed attainment or enlightenment.

Contemporary Yoga

- 1900s – Hatha Yoga. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya was responsible for preserving, evolving and popularizing Hatha Yoga. Teacher of B.K.S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi and his son Desikachar, among many others.
- 1950s – B.K.S. Iyengar develops his system of yoga based on physical alignment and therapeutic benefits, using props to make postures more accessible.
- 1960s – Hatha Yoga begins to take root in the West.

Teaching Hatha Yoga

- 1970s – present – Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois gains popularity.
- 1980s – present – Flowing styles of yoga based on the physically demanding form of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga become widely popular.
- 1997 – present – John Friend’ interpretation of Tantric philosophy joined with modern bio-mechanical alignment principles into a school of yoga called “Anusara” – a Sanskrit word meaning “to be in the flow of grace.”
- ? – present – Dr Douglas Brooks’ offering of the Southern Indian teachings of Tantra, which he refers to as “Rajanaka.” This is a horizontal model of yoga with no fixed attainment as a goal. Enlightenment is self-conferred, not dispensed by a guru.

Diet & Lifestyle

It is hardly necessary to meditate in a remote cave in order to create a lifestyle that supports your practice. The practices of yoga presented in this manual are meant to be integrative and adaptable to the modern world. Between 1000–1400 CE, in India, the region of Kashmir saw a revolution in Yogic thinking. These yoga practitioners were, in reality, householders, husbands and wives who embraced the practice of yoga and wove it into the fabric of their lives. The approach was one of non-renunciation, among other practices, and was later called Tantra, which literally means to weave. The Yogis took the more classical understanding of yoga and re-created it, refining it into a meaningful practice for themselves.

“A sharp mind, a soft heart and vibrant body” (John Friend) are among the qualities of a competent yoga teacher. Such qualities are supported and encouraged by:

- adequate rest;
- supportive relationships;
- appropriate diet; and
- self-practice and study.

Teaching a class while tired, agitated, hungry or disconnected from your practice is not an uplifting experience. If you are properly prepared, nourished with food, full of prana after a good yoga practice, well rested and feeling supported, you are assured to teach a good class. The business of yoga and your lifestyle cannot be separated as may be possible in some other occupation. As a teacher, you are a living example of whether yoga practice works.

Diet

Equanimity of mind has always been regarded as one of the keystones of yoga. “Yoga is not for those who eat too much, or do not eat” (Upanishads). Diet directly affects our moods and our bodies. Simply paying attention to what we eat and how much we eat is another practice of yoga, embedded into the larger practice. Extreme austerity regarding diet can be a form the ego takes to create more separation. However, eating a balanced diet with lots of vegetables and fruit is accessible to almost anyone. Cutting down on stimulants such as alcohol, sugar, and possibly caffeine will create a more stable mood and create a bodily environment where mindfulness is easier to attain. Eating a vegetarian diet is considered to be purifying by many streams of the yoga tradition. Eating the flesh of an animal that has been kept in non life-affirming conditions will at the very least be of less nutritional value than free-range animals. We, as sentient beings, are able to choose what is life affirming for ourselves, and how those choices affect other beings. Eat with friends or loved ones as much as possible, giving blessings before eating.

Sleep

There is a fundamental pulsation in the universe called “Spanda.” From this pulsation comes the dual nature of manifestation — cold and heat, male and female, light and dark. A cool and quiet dark place and a comfortable bed to sleep on restores the body’s vital energies and is the natural complement to physical activity. The cycle of one day is a model of life, just as a yoga practice and the resting posture Savasana is a model of one day. Live fully and sleep deeply. Allow the previous day to dissolve, bringing your attention as fully as possible to the present moment.

Practice

Teaching yoga requires the assimilation and embodiment of the teachings, presented in your own voice and in your own way. As we grow as teachers, we add our own voice to the lineage of teachers. This is how the yoga tradition stays alive and evolves. By practicing on your own, your inner wisdom begins to emerge. By embracing knowledge that has been revealed and by also honoring your teachers, you grow individually as a teacher, and simultaneously become more connected to the universal energy. Pick a time and place to practice daily. The body changes from day to day. Some days our energy is high and the body feels like a feather. Other days the body’s energy is less available and we feel like wet concrete. On the days of higher energy, your practice can be a celebration that is dynamic and challenging. On the harder days, develop a sequence of more restorative postures to help alleviate fatigue. Thus there is never a reason to miss a practice, and your skill in teaching a variety of students will increase.

Relationships

Everything in the universe is innately Divine. Open up to this reality first and then make skillful choices. The practice of yoga is not something that happens just on a mat. Remaining fully conscious in relationship with other human beings is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of practice. Here is the place where our ability to remember our innate divinity and the divinity of others is revealed. Notice patterns in your relationships. Notice your habitual reactions and habitual desires. Embrace relationships as a part of, not separate from, your practice. In this way you will affirm the sacred nature of others. Honor those you love and those you have loved.

The Principle of Attraction

The principle of attraction simply states “like attracts like.” As beings who often forget, temporarily, our connection to the source of everything we see in this physical world, we have the power of co-creation. So does everybody else. The fundamental process of creation, in our human experience, is that what we focus on most becomes our reality. Everything from a sound wave, a color, an emotion or a thought carries a vibration. Incompatible waveforms cancel each other out or create confusion and dissonance. Compatible waveforms increase. It does not matter whether the waveform you are transmitting through thought is “good” or “bad,” deliberate or unconscious—you will attract similar waveforms of thought, which filters your experience into that vibration. If you have ever owned a car and then found yourself noticing a lot more of those cars, this is the same process. What we experience inwardly, we see outwardly. As fog condenses into drops, which create small streams that then run into rivers and then into the powerful and immense oceans, our thoughts condense into our experience.

Yoga and the Principle of Attraction

Thoughts are fast-moving, easy to create and easy to forget. Yoga practice is a powerful way to take a thought, an intentional thought, and to literally embody it. Conscious yoga practice is a good way to manifest your intentions. If the thought is the seed, the practice of yoga is the soil into which you deliberately plant the seed. Regular practice hones both your ability to focus on an intentional thought, and your ability to feel it—to make it real physically and emotionally. This is done by taking a few moments to create an intention for practice that is in alignment with your desires—with what you want to attract, and what you would like to be attracted to. As you practice asana, or the physical postures of yoga, every inhale and every exhale becomes a physical manifestation of your intention. Every time you root your feet into the ground and reach up, you remember the intention you planted. As a sapling grows into a tree, the roots of your desires become stronger and the branches and leaves extend up and out from that firm foundation. In this way you not only think about what you want to create, you feel it in the body—you literally make the non-physical real. Your yoga practice should be enjoyable to you, whether you are a physically able Yogi or new to the practice. Breath and movement combined with your deliberate intention is what is important to the process of creation.

Receiving

For most of us, the idea that we can create something out of nothing is both exhilarating and not completely foreign. We see examples of creation all around us in nature. Being part of nature and having the human ability to discern, feel, move, remember, and reflect, it becomes clear that we are powerfully creative beings. The tough part for many of us is not

actually creating, but allowing ourselves to receive. Think about the discomfort involved in receiving a compliment without somehow re-directing it or diminishing it. When we do not allow ourselves to receive, we do not allow others to give. Giving and receiving are not two different things, they are simple two aspects of the current of life. A tree is nourished by the sun and rain so that it can enjoy itself and it turn give shade, beauty, and nourishment back. A tree never tells the sun to stop shining on it. In order to complete the cycle of life, you must be willing to receive.

Practice

Take some time every day, preferably in the morning, to consciously create what you would like to experience. The principle of attraction is always aligning itself with the vibration and the emotion you are sending out. Practice seeing value in every situation. If this sounds like a lot of work, consider how many things are affecting your thoughts and beliefs by default – watching T.V., listening to fear-invoking nightly news, worries about the future, and regrets about the past. If unexamined, we store this input as thoughts and beliefs of lack, and disconnection to our source. Resolve to take a few minutes every day to reconnect with your inner wisdom and guidance—it will always feel good.

Ethics

The Yamas and Niyamas of the classical Ashtanga Yoga system provide concise and still very applicable guidelines for teachers.

Yamas and Niyamas

Yamas (Ethical Disciplines): These ethical guidelines pertain to our relationship with others, our outer environment, and nature.

Ahimsa (Non-harming): kindness to others; compassion; non-obstruction of the flow of nature; gentleness and non-violence to others and ourselves.

Satya (Truthfulness): being true to ourselves; having integrity and honesty; not concealing the truth or downplaying or exaggerating.

Asteya (Non-stealing): not taking what is not your own; not hoarding; giving another their full due.

Bramacharya (Walking or having ethical conduct like God): relating to others with full integrity and lack of manipulation; being mindful of sexual desires and directing that energy appropriately.

Aparigraha (Non-clinging): having an open hand and an open heart; living simply and without undue attachment to our possessions of any kind.

Niyamas (Internal Restraints) — These are ethical guidelines that include daily activities, actions, attitude, and communication.

Saucha (Purity): cleanliness, clarity, balanced outlook, equanimity of thought.

Santosha (Contentment): acceptance of circumstances; peace with self and others.

Tapas (Heat): self-discipline to achieve a deeper connection with our divinity; a purifying internal fire.

Svadyaya (Study of the self): the search for divinity through mindful study of ourselves and study of scriptures; an open-minded inquiry into the nature of the universe and ourselves as a microcosm of it.

Ishvara Pranidhana (Devotional offering to the Lord): surrender to the higher power of Consciousness and a willingness to serve.

More on the Ethics of a Teacher

As teachers we occupy a place of honor and thus have a responsibility to our students. With humility we offer our own individual voice as part of a lineage of our teachers. Every teacher is also a student. As teachers we seek to inspire and also create boundaries to direct the student's energies. Anything we do that detracts from the student's ability to focus on the art of yoga should not be a part of our teaching. Creating a connection with students is natural, honorable, and to be expected. In the student-teacher relationship there is a discrepancy of power. If attraction between a teacher and a student occurs, such feelings should not be acted upon immediately. Finding another qualified teacher for a student with whom you feel an intimacy might develop may be the best option to follow.

Light & Dark

*“I see skies of blue and clouds of white,
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night.
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.
The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,
Are also on the faces of people going by.
I see friends shakin’ hands, sayin’ ‘How do you do?’
They’re really sayin’ ‘I love you.’”*

*“What a Wonderful World”
- Bob Thiele and George Weiss*

When we look around, we see that almost everything consists of pairs of opposites. Heat and cold, joy and grief, hard and soft—the list goes on. This duality is an aspect of Shiva/Shakti—the singular force from which the entire universe is made manifest. When we contemplate a pair of opposites, as a little example of the way the whole universe works, it gives us insight into the principles that underlie creation. In complete blackness, nothing can be seen. The dark obscures our vision, and our ability to comprehend reality totally. One would think that the remedy for this would be light. However, if in order to eradicate the blackness, we shine an all-encompassing light, something else very interesting happens. We find that without some darkness, nothing can be seen either. Like walking from a dark room into a blazing summer day, we cannot see clearly. It is the subtle play of the dark and the light that creates contrast. Contrast, the relationship between two polarities, allows us to see clearly. What takes place is not a mere merging of light and dark—that would create a uniform grey—but an ever changing and dynamic relationship of opposites. We need both the dark and the light.

Exercise:

With a friend, write down three or four pairs of opposites. Explore their relationship and outline a skillful use of these apparent opposites.

Mantras

A mantra is an invocation of sacred sounds, and as such is yet another form of vibration in the form of organized sound. Repeating a mantra is a form of yoga in itself and is the primary practice in Mantra Yoga. Vibration affects matter. Even a musical instrument, if made of living material such as wood, will absorb the vibrations resonating through it. If the instrument is kept in tune and played regularly, the instrument's tone deepens, becomes more beautiful and able to carry the musician's song fully and accurately. The human body in the case of mantra repetition, is the instrument, which plays the song of the Divine.

The Gayatri Mantra is first recorded in the *Rig Veda*, written in Sanskrit about 2,500 to 3,500 years ago, and, according to some sources, may have been chanted for many generations before that.

The Gayatri Mantra:

Om bhûr bhuva sva
tât savitûr vârenyam
bhârgo devâsya dhîmahî
dhîyo yó na prachodâyât

Phonetic Pronunciation:

Om burr buva-ha sva-ha
Tat sa-vi-tour vara-en ya-hum
Bar-go de vas-ya de my-hee
De yo-yo na pra-show-da-yat

Word-for-word translation:

om 'the sacred sound'
bhû 'earth'
bhuvas 'atmosphere'
svar 'light, heaven, space'
tat 'that'
savitûr 'of Savitr the god' (genitives of savitr-, 'stimulator'),
'rouser'; name of a sun-deity and deva—'god' or 'demi-god'
varenyam 'fit to be worshipped' *varenya*— 'desirable, excellent'
bhargo 'glory effulgence' (radiance, luster, splendor, glory)
devasya 'of God'
dhîmahî 'may we attain'
dhîya na 'our prayers'
yâ prachodâyât 'who may stimulate'

Literal translation:

"I invoke the Earth Plane, the Astral Plane, the Celestial Plane, the Plane of Spiritual Balance, the Plane of Human Spiritual Knowledge, the Plane of Spiritual Austerities, and the Plane of Ultimate Truth. Oh, great Spiritual Light, which is the brilliance of all Divinity, we meditate upon you. Please illumine our minds."

Overview of Yoga Styles

A variety of paths of yoga continue to intertwine and inform each other. Some examples are:

- **Anusara Yoga:** Developed by John Friend in 1997; unifies a heart-centered Tantric philosophy with bio-mechanical principles of alignment.
- **Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga:** Developed by T. Krishnamacharya and his student Pattabhi Jois; systematic and sequential approach to the asana practice where the postures are stratified into series. Vinyasa, an energetic linking from one asana to another, is used to create and maintain heat and a moving meditative state.
- **Ashtanga Yoga:** Called so by Baba Hari Dass, after Patanjali's Eightfold Path, not to be confused with Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga.
- **Bikram's Yoga:** A sequence of twenty-six postures in a room heated to over 100° Fahrenheit.
- **Iyengar Yoga:** B.K.S. Iyengar, another of Krishnamacharya's students, refined his understanding of his Guru's teachings after moving to Pune. He abandoned the Vinyasa style and focused his teaching on health, structural alignment, and therapeutic benefits of the postures.
- **Kundalini Yoga:** Awakening energy; Kundalini Yoga arrived in the West in 1969, when Sikh Yogi Bhajan challenged tradition and began to teach it publicly. This practice is designed to awaken Kundalini energy, which is stored at the base of the spine and often depicted as a coiled snake. Kundalini mixes chanting, breathing practices, and yoga exercises. The emphasis is not on asana, but rather on chanting and breathing.
- **Mysore Style:** Named after the city in India where Pattabhi Jois teaches the Ashtanga Vinyasa method: a self-led practice with supervision and physical adjustments by an instructor.
- **Vijnana Yoga:** A Hatha Yoga practice developed by Donna Holleman and Orit Sen-Gupta, based on seven "vital principles" designed to use the body to explore the deeper layers of our being.
- **Viniyoga:** This gentle form of flow yoga places great emphasis on the breath and coordinating breath with movement. Viniyoga's flowing movement or Vinyasa is similar to Ashtanga's dynamic series of poses, but performed at a greatly reduced pace and stress level. Poses and flows are chosen to suit the student's abilities. It teaches the yoga student how to apply the tools of yoga: asana, chanting,

pranayama (control of breath), and meditation, in individual practice. Developed by T.K.V. Desikachar, the son of Krishnamacharya (teacher to some of the great yoga instructors including Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois), Viniyoga places less stress on joints and knees as postures are done with slightly bent knees. Viniyoga is considered excellent for beginners, and is increasingly used in therapeutic environments.

- **Yin Yoga:** A term coined by Paul Grilley to describe a form of practice with an emphasis on long-held postures, usually seated, supine or prone. Yin Yoga's focus is on strengthening and lengthening connective tissue, which in turn, through meridian lines, have an effect on optimal organ function.

Seeing the Big Picture

In *The Splendor of Recognition*, Swami Shantananda describes his experience of looking at a fragment of a hologram. Within the structure of a hologram, there is a three-dimensional image. If that hologram is smashed into a thousand pieces, each piece will still contain the original image in its entirety, only smaller. This is the vision of a Tantric, non-dual philosophy. Each of us is a fragment of the big picture, namely, Consciousness. Consciousness has, through its own choice to limit itself, created diversity, making many from the One. Through our eyes as humans, we often forget the big picture and we see only our separateness, like fragments of the hologram. The practice of yoga is the revelation of ourselves as individuals containing the big picture perfectly within each of us.

The various approaches of yoga are all paths to this inner destination. Depending on our nature, we may find an entry point into the practice through postures, meditation, selfless service, study, or the vibratory quality of sound. Whatever our entry point, the highest goal of yoga is a reunification with our true nature as both the individual piece of the puzzle and the whole picture.

The Business of Yoga

February 26, 2008 (San Francisco, CA), the latest “Yoga in America” study, just released by *Yoga Journal* (yogajournal.com) shows that Americans spend \$5.7 billion a year on yoga classes and products, including equipment, clothing, vacations and media (DVDs, videos, books, and magazines). This figure represents an increase of **87 percent** compared to the previous study in 2004—almost double of what was previously spent.

The 2008 study indicates that 6.9% of U.S. adults, or 15.8 million people, practice yoga. (In the previous study, that number was 16.5 million).

Of current non-practitioners, nearly 8%, or **18.3 million** Americans, say they are very or extremely interested in yoga, three times the number from the 2004 study. And 4.1% of non-practitioners, or about **9.4 million people**, say they will definitely try yoga within the next year.

The study also collected data on age, gender, and other demographic factors. Of the yoga practitioners surveyed:

- 72.2% are women; 27.8% are men
- 40.6% are 18 to 34 years old; 41% are 35 to 54; and 18.4% are over 55
- 28.4% have practiced yoga for one year or less; 21.4% have practiced for one to two years; 25.6% have practiced two to five years; and 24.6% have practiced more than five years
- 71.4% are college educated; 27% have postgraduate degrees
- 44% of yogis have household incomes of \$75,000 or more; 24% have more than \$100,000

“While the yoga population has stabilized, spending among practitioners has nearly doubled,” says Patricia Fox, senior vice president and group manager of Active Interest Media's Healthy Living Group, “Yoga practitioners are a devoted consumer group supporting a thriving and vibrant market.”

The 2008 study also indicated that almost half (49.4%) of current practitioners started practicing yoga to improve their overall health. In the 2003 study, that number was 5.6%. And they are continuing to practice for the same reason. According to the 2008 study, 52% are motivated to practice yoga to improve their overall health. In 2003, that number was 5.2%.

“Yoga is no longer simply a singular pursuit but a lifestyle choice and an established part of our health and cultural landscape,” says Bill Harper, publisher of *Yoga Journal*. “People come to yoga and stick with it because they want to live healthier lives.”

One significant trend to emerge from the study is the use of yoga as medical therapy. According to the study, 6.1%, or nearly 14 million Americans, say that a doctor or therapist has recommended yoga to them. In addition, nearly half (45%) of all adults agree that yoga would be a beneficial if they were undergoing treatment for a medical condition.

“Yoga as medicine represents the next great yoga wave,” says Kaitlin Quistgaard, editor in chief of *Yoga Journal*. She explains, “in the next few years, we will be seeing a lot more yoga in health care settings and more yoga recommended by the medical community as new research shows that yoga is a valuable therapeutic tool for many health conditions.”

Questions for your Yoga business

1) What is the main reason quoted for interest in yoga?

Canada has about 1/10 the population of the United States. There are about 4 million people in BC, mostly in the Lower Mainland. If the statistics per capita are similar, we have 15% of this population either already practicing yoga, or very interested in trying it—that is 600,000 people in B.C.

Density – 1 city block in the Vancouver area is home to about 200 people. 15% of 200 is 30. How far would a yoga student walk or bike to a studio in your home? How many potential students would that be?

What do you think the carbon footprint of a yoga studio where the participants drive 10-15 minutes each way, two or three times per week would be? Is encouraging this an ethical business practice?

Using the demographic breakdown from the above study, answer the following:

- 2) Where do these people shop?
- 3) What do they do for entertainment?
- 4) How many of them are probably internet-savvy?
- 5) What kind of clothes do they buy?
- 6) What kind of language would resonate with them in advertising?
- 7) Are they fit and flexible?
- 8) What kind of an introduction to yoga would make them feel comfortable and curious to learn more?

Teaching Hatha Yoga

- 9) What time of day would suit their schedules for a yoga class?
- 10) How many times per week do you think they would like to attend yoga?
- 11) What would be the main determining factor in choosing a class—price, convenience, connection with the teacher, class times?
- 12) List five reasons that would stop someone who is interested in yoga from attending a class or workshop.
- 13) What percent of students are probably beginners?
- 14) Pre-registration or drop-in classes?

It is a historical reality that only a very small percentage of Hindus in India were able or permitted to practice yoga. In our society, anyone has access to the teachings of yoga, though it appears from the demographics above that primarily the well-to-do and educated are participating in yoga. There could be many reasons for this, however Douglas Brooks looks at the question in an interesting way. He says (and I'm paraphrasing) "it takes a certain amount of bourgeois complacency before one asks the question, 'Is there anything *else*?'"

The question now is how to make available the practice of yoga in a way that stimulates the student's own discriminating understanding, so it is possible for them to engage in their practice in the richest possible way.

Marketing

Internet marketing, in particular Google Adwords, is a very effective and inexpensive tool to market your website to the local community—you can choose your ads to show globally, within a province, or even within a few blocks around where you teach. Ads will show up on a search related to keywords you choose, like "yoga studio Vancouver" or "yoga for back pain."

Well-placed, high-quality print ads in your local community as well as symbiotic relationships with massage therapists, chiropractors, health food stores, and athletic clothing stores will provide good visibility. Remove all the obstacles between your potential students and a mat in your class. Then inspire them with good teaching and a chance to meet others in the community. Offering tea after class is a good way to encourage conversation and get to know everyone.

Yoga at home

A home studio provides a simple, almost totally free place to begin your teaching career. It is often financially more rewarding than teaching for a studio, and eliminates travel time and expenses for the teacher. Without the stress of paying a lease on a commercial space, the teacher can concentrate on honing her skills and offering excellent classes –whether to two or ten students.

Some final questions to ask:

- What am I selling?
- What are my gifts?
- How will my students experience my gifts?
- What do I *not* want to teach?
- What kind of students do I want?
- Part-time or full-time?
- How and where do I want to be teaching in one year? three years?

The Eight Limbs of Ashtanga

Patanjali's Classical Yoga refers to the "Eight-Limbed Path" of yoga practice. Like a tree with different branches that extend from the same trunk, the eight limbs are different forms of practice, but lead to the same goal of reunification with Consciousness. The consciousness with which we seek unification is our own true nature as embodied spirit.

Although the imagery of branches on a tree implies a sequential approach, in practice the limbs can work simultaneously to draw us closer to our essential nature. A detailed description can be found in B.K.S. Iyengar's "Light on Yoga." The limbs are:

<i>Yamas-</i>	ethical disciplines
<i>Niyamas-</i>	self-observation
<i>Asana-</i>	posture
<i>Pranayama-</i>	participation with life energy via breath
<i>Pratyahara-</i>	withdrawal of the senses
<i>Dharana-</i>	concentration
<i>Dyana-</i>	meditation
<i>Samadhi-</i>	identification with Supreme Consciousness

Yamas

The Yamas are universal ethical disciplines referring to qualities that are supportive of yoga practice and which yoga practice cultivates: Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Self-restraint, and Non-hoarding. A spontaneous practice of Non-violence to every sentient being is indicative of an understanding that we are all connected. What we do to another we are doing to ourselves, as we are all forms of the One.

Niyamas

Niyamas are individual disciplines which include Purity, Contentment, Dedication, Self-study, and Devotion. These qualities can be cultivated—perhaps a better word would be "revealed"—within the Yogi. All the Yamas and Niyamas can be thought of as disciplines which reveal our true nature. Sustained effort and devotion is necessary however, since our unconscious habits and predilections will otherwise remain unseen.

Asana

The asana practice promotes physical strength, flexibility, health, a stable nervous system, and an ability to sit for periods of time without discomfort, which a necessary prerequisite to meditation. Patanjali, in his *Yoga Sutras*, only refers to asana as a posture for meditation, and probably never foresaw the present emphasis on physical ability and fashion as part of asana practice. Each of us is a little different in physicality, bone structure, and affinity for aspects of yoga practice. Many of us would be unable to sit in meditation, as the body's energies are scattered and one-pointed concentration is difficult at first. Mindful asana practice creates a

physical and energetic body capable of withdrawing into itself, as performing postures is an exercise of moving prana consciously. Without this awareness, yoga practice would not be able to “Cure the body of that restlessness which is a sign of its inability to contain without working them off in action and movement the vital forces poured into it from the universal Life-Ocean” (Sri Aurobindo).

Pranayama

Pranayama is not simply breath control. Prana, or the essential life-force, is responsible for all functions of the body—heart, organs, brain, and breath. The breath is our most obvious link to prana, and the one that we can influence the most. Practicing pranayama brings us another step closer to refining our internal awareness of the movement of prana. The practice of becoming more sensitive is not to be approached with an attitude of domination, control, or athleticism, but an opportunity to set the ego aside and simply notice.

Pratyahara

When the body becomes more readily still and the movement of prana is noticeable, the practice of sense withdrawal becomes possible. This stage of practice is akin to the ripples on a lake becoming stilled. External objects, be they desires created by the mind or anything else, are seen clearly as only temporary. When we no longer cling to these objects and non-attachment becomes possible, our true nature turns inward.

Dharana

Dharana is a state of refined concentration, with the movement of prana stable. This state is a precursor to meditation.

Dyana

This is the deep state of meditation where the Yogi is wholly immersed, and senses are stilled. The lake of individual consciousness is so still it reflects clearly the ultimate reality, that all is One.

Samadhi

Here Classical Yoga states that individual consciousness and Universal Consciousness merge. The bliss experienced here is said to be millions of times that of the experience of the ordinary, separate mind. Bliss in this context is outside of normal experience and beyond all words.

Voluntary Simplicity

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler.”

—Henry David Thoreau

Part of the loving embrace of the world, a hallmark of Tantric philosophy, is non-attachment. Like a hand that remains open, what is held can be allowed to leave if it becomes unnecessary. That same hand remains open and inviting for what is helpful to us. In contrast, the hand that is always tightly closed both constricts what we hold dear and is closed to new experiences. The mindful observance of this process is just another part of yoga practice. In asana practice there is a systematic approach to managing this energetic flow of drawing in and letting go.

In order to live a full life of simplicity, it is necessary to clarify what is of value to us, and what is not. We see beauty in many things, and those things remain beautiful whether we own them or not. Running from, renouncing or reacting against beauty because we cannot own it does not solve the problem of the ego’s desire for ownership. One of the qualities of ownership is that a thing belongs to us, and not to anyone else. In this way ownership can create more separation — the opposite of union — and more suffering. In practice we could look at a beautiful lawn or garden and appreciate its beauty fully, and likewise consider the process at work when we begin to covet it as our own.

We are at best stewards of what we temporarily possess. The earth we build our homes upon had been here for millennia before we put up fences to enclose it. The earth will likely be here a long time after we are gone. This broad understanding relates directly to our daily lives. Simplicity creates clarity. Clarity allows inner wisdom to reveal itself. By living simply, more time becomes available to enjoy nature and other people. Things that are often taken for granted such as the ability to walk, to eat and digest food, to be able to listen fully to another and to understand our own motivations, are all appreciated more fully. In the absence of distraction we see more clearly our habits, the things we gravitate toward, and the things we tend to avoid. A set of dogmatic rules pertaining to simplicity would be contrary to the aim of yoga, which is to deepen inner wisdom and connection to our source.

Principles of Simplicity

- Question what is of true value to you.
- Engage in work that is in alignment with what you truly value.
- Live close to your place of work.
- Decide what you need per year monetarily to live well and experience life fully.

Exercise:

With a friend, outline your day-to-day life, including spending habits, cooking habits, entertainment, and transportation. Take your friend's information and create more simplicity. Compare notes and see if there is at least one thing you can implement consistently.

Example:

Roxanne lives in a one-bedroom apartment in a fairly large city. She loves yoga and has tightness in her hips and weakness in her back. She commutes twenty minutes by car to her job at the other end of town. Roxanne would like to practice yoga more and teach it, but feels she does not have the time or money and does not know where to begin teaching. Roxanne usually grabs a slice of pizza after work and eats it in her car on the way home.

Approach to Simplify

Roxanne moves close enough to work so she can walk or bicycle. With the money she gets from selling her car and the monthly savings on fuel, insurance, and repairs she can afford to create a website for her home studio, which she operates out of her empty living room. Sitting on the floor instead of her leather couch (which she sold along with the other living room furniture to pay for yoga teacher training) allows the connective tissue in Roxanne's hips to lengthen and her back to strengthen. She can comfortably fit six students in her home studio. She starts out by inviting her friends and everyone has a blast. One of her friend's friends loves the practice and asks Roxanne if she can pay for her classes by bringing a vegetarian dish each week for her teacher and showing her how to make it. Roxanne happily agrees. Soon Roxanne's little yoga class is regularly full, her confidence as a teacher has increased, and she adds some more classes, pre-registered this time.

A Look at the Financial Picture

Roxanne's monthly income before simplifying:		
<i>Income from office job</i>		\$2500
Monthly expenses:		
<i>Car</i>	\$300	
<i>Dinners out</i>	200	
<i>Total monthly expenses</i>		<u>500</u>
Net income		<u>\$2000</u>
Roxanne's monthly income after simplifying:		
<i>Income from office job</i>		2500
<i>Income from yoga classes:</i>		960
<i>6 students x \$10/session = \$60/class</i>		
<i>4 classes/week (Tues, Thurs, 2 on Sat) = \$240/week</i>		
<i>Assuming 4 weeks per month, 4 x \$240 = \$960/month</i>		
<i>Total income</i>		\$3460
Monthly expenses:		
<i>No car</i>	\$0	
<i>Dinners out reduced</i>	100	
<i>Total monthly expenses</i>		<u>100</u>
Net income		<u>\$3360</u>
<i>BENEFIT OF SIMPLIFYING</i>		<i><u>\$1,360</u></i>

“Discard the false notion that the material universe is separate from spirit. A single creative force emanating from omnipresent Consciousness produces various aspects of itself to manifest and sustain the universe. Knowing this, be firmly resolved to live with enlightened understanding in this world.”

—Roy Eugene Davis

TECHNIQUES OF TRAINING AND PRACTICE

Asana Techniques

Alignment Fundamentals

The human body has an optimal alignment. When the body is moving closely toward or in optimal alignment there is increased freedom of movement in the joints and more available energy in the body, since the body is not fighting itself and can thus move freely. Pain is also greatly reduced or eliminated when the bones and tissues of the body are in a cooperative relationship.

The ability to perform asana may vary greatly, depending on factors such as bone structure, previous injuries, age, energy level, and ardency of the student. Approaching asana practice as a discipline of mindfulness and non-violence (especially to the practitioner) is a fundamental starting point to a pain-free practice.

Holistic Biomechanics

- Holistic – “to view as a whole, to integrate.”
- Biomechanics – “the study and application of beneficial physical forces in sentient beings.”
Or: “Don’t use the body to get into the pose...use the pose to get into the body”

Holistic Biomechanics in a nutshell:

- Recognizes that every part of a human being—body, mind, and emotion—is involved any activity, be it a yoga posture, a discussion, or eating a meal.
- Recognizes the potential for health through appropriate application of awareness and force to create harmonious relationships in joints, muscles, bones, mind, and emotions.
- Recognizes the structural limitations of the body and works within those limitations.
- Recognizes that every person is different—bones, muscles, mind, and heart. The application of any technique must be adaptive to that individual’s needs.

A primary obstruction for students of Hatha Yoga (physical yoga) is attempting to interpret the language of a teacher as they verbally direct the movements of certain of your body parts in specific ways. Teachers from a variety of approaches to yoga asana can sometimes give conflicting verbal instructions to students. The following work attempts to empower you as a student in understanding the workings of your body in action.

Since the work of yoga master T. Krishnamacharya and others from the 1930s onward, the potential to heal the body and reclaim full range of motion and physical vibrancy through the practice of Hatha Yoga has been recognized. Good alignment and the application of

appropriate force in of the physical body is the key. Attuning the mind to the body and even the emotions is what I call “Holistic Biomechanics.”

Holistic Biomechanics takes the view of the later articulations of yoga called “Tantra,” and agrees that the body is not simply an inert vehicle for a separate spirit, but an intelligent universe in miniature. Forces in our universe play out in certain predictable ways which are mirrored in the body, the mind, and in our emotions. The seeming separation of the body, mind, and outer world is an illusion.

The movements and directions of energy, or prana, in the body have been described as far back as the Upanishads, an ancient compilation of yogic wisdom drawn from many authors. Many modern schools of yoga utilize the ancient understanding of the subtle energies in the body, and describe them in different ways.

The eastern view of subtle energetics and how prana moves beneficially within one’s body, coupled with a modern (generally western) understanding of the relationship of muscles and bones, informs holistic biomechanics.

Methodology

When performing the grounded stretching we call “asana,” any shape the body can take has the potential to beneficially stretch and strengthen, or cause injury. If we do nothing, just sit on the couch, for instance, there is almost no chance of immediate trauma to the body.

There is also a very high chance of eventual ill health due to atrophy of the tissues of the body, and corresponding contraction of the mind and emotional body. Health lies somewhere between doing nothing, and doing too much. When the body is moved with skill and harmony, the intensity of an exercise can be increased safely and the benefits increase as well. An exercise done without awareness has a higher potential for injury and less potential benefit, because we get better at what we practice.

The following sequence of actions is a synthesis, drawn from the work of yoga masters, western physical therapy, watching animals, and personal practice. These techniques belong to no one, they are part of our cultural and intellectual commons. How can you tell if a physical therapy technique is working? It feels good. That recognition is innate, as is the desire to stretch and to rest, and that knowledge is intrinsic in all beings. (Opposites of sedentary and over-active)

Samasthiti (pronounced, sama stee tee hee)

Samasthiti is a Sanskrit work meaning, “to spread the light of awareness throughout the body.” Samasthiti is the state of awareness within the initial pose of standing ready at the front of your mat, and in any pose, demonstration a stance which enables luminous, compassionate concentration.

The emotional and intellectual result of this action is a receptivity, physically a lack of outer armoring yet a firm foundation through the parts of the body that touch the earth.

Integration

As a literal “condensation of consciousness,” the practitioner draws the tissues of the body together and toward her physical center, located along the axis of the spine, between the shoulders and hips.

The shoulders and hips move back to their structural “home”:

- thighbones move toward the hamstrings, softening the front of the groins; and
- shoulders rest comfortably and strongly on the back of the body.

(Tadasana again, energy moving in)

Expansion

Once integration has been performed, the subtle energy of the body which is distinct from, and relies on, prior muscular integration, flows from the physical center along the axis of the spine, down through the legs like the roots of a tree, up through the spine, arms and head, like the branches of a tree.

(energy moving out)

Put simply, practice these three actions: Soften, Flex, and Stretch. These actions can be performed in any pose, position, or activity within a formal yoga practice or in daily activities even, including washing the dishes.

The benefits of increased strength, range of motion, and a sense of stable serenity appear because the body, mind, and emotions, are woven into the fabric of our world, our universe. We are not separate from all that we see, so when we recognize our fundamental connection—and behave as all things in our universe do—pulsating with expansion and contraction—we settle into a harmonious relationship. Not a relationship of inactivity or disengagement, but one of participation in life.

Pain vs. intensity:

For a beginning practitioner, the sensations felt during asana practice are often unfamiliar. With more experience, a differentiation can be made between pain and intensity. Pain in the form of a sudden, jarring sensation, especially in and around joints should not be ignored. The body is sending a signal that there is a misalignment or disconnection that could be injurious.

Sensations of an intense stretch to muscle can be interpreted as pain, but the sensation is much different. Often the practitioner is in control of the amount of sensation felt, as in a seated forward bend. This sensation of intensity is an intrinsic part of practice. Often breathing into the intensity draws the mind back into the body and resistance decreases.

Structural therapy

Structural therapy is the mindful application of holistic biomechanics by a practitioner to a client, with the full participation of that client. Touch energetics establish resonance between the practitioner and client before and during hands-on adjustments. With practice, the practitioner learns to differentiate between types of resistance: compression, tension, muscle, and connective tissue. Along with physical resistances, there can be and often are patterns of resistance in the emotional and mental bodies.

Hands-on adjustments would be of little value in the long run unless they illustrate to the client how good alignment, with appropriate integration and expansion, feels. The hope is that the client will gain a kinesthetic awareness of how to create healing alignment for themselves.

How Much Pressure?

When applying an adjustment, first connect with the part of your client's body you are going to adjust with a confident, even pressure. You will be moving skin, muscle and bone as a unit. Too little pressure will be ineffective. The adjustment should start on the lower end of intensity and build toward full intensity over a period of 3 or 4 seconds, the adjustment itself can last anywhere from 5 seconds to over a minute.

Keep your eye on the client's face for signs of discomfort, pain or ease. When working with the legs and hips, your hands and arms are usually less strong than what you are working on. Every body is different and sensitivity to sensation is different person to person. Stay in communication with your client as well, checking to see if they are experiencing pain or relief.

Key Areas of Imbalance

Misalignments occur where bones meet. Habitual misalignments occur through lifestyle: sitting for long periods, repetitive movements that create muscular imbalance, and possibly our upright standing and walking position itself.

It is possible that from an evolutionary perspective, we are still physically evolving and have not fully adapted to an upright orientation. The head of our thighbone fits best into the hip socket at a steep angle rather than in a vertical orientation, our outer legs are tighter when standing upright as well. Our inner thighs are difficult to muscularly engage to rebalance the common outward rotation of the thigh bones due to tightness in the outer legs.

The muscle groups that engage to draw our shoulder blades toward the center line of the body include the rhomboids. These muscles are also more difficult to engage than others. It is possible this muscle group is a relatively recent development in our evolution and still not mapped well in the brain. These potential imbalances that manifest near the axis of the body can create more imbalances at the periphery, including knees and wrists.

Compression and Tension

There are two physical forces that limit range of motion in the body; these limiting forces include tension in the tissues of the body (muscle and connective tissue) and compression. Tension is easy to recognize; it is the “stretching” aspect of hatha yoga. Compression, on the other hand, occurs where two bones meet. An easy example is your elbow joint. If you extend it fully, the ends of the bones meet and no matter how supple you are, your range of motion in that joint will not increase. By applying appropriate force to a bone, its density will increase, so some compression is good if the aim is to stimulate bone density. Trying to force any joint beyond where it is compressed to achieve an exterior body shape can result in injury and pain.

Everyone’s bones are different in length, shape, and density. Bones can have twists within the shaft that make, in the case of the thigh bone, one foot turn in or out more than the other, while the femur (thighbone) head is still well aligned. The eventual limitation to the depth of any yoga pose will be the shape and size of the bones. Bones can increase or decrease in density, adapting to the stress put upon them, but adult bones do not change size or shape as far as we know.

Shoulders—Anatomy and Function

The shoulder girdle includes the clavicle, scapulae, and humerus bones as well as many muscles within and around it. It is easiest to view as a functional unit. The design of the shoulder girdle allows us great range of motion at the expense of some stability, compared with the hip joint for instance. The only place of bony connection is at the sterno-clavicular joint, located on the front of the body. If you could unbutton this joint you would almost be able to take your shoulders off like a cloak.

The most advantageous placement for the shoulders is on the back of the body. When on the back of the body:

- the shoulder blades will be smooth on the back, without significant “winging”;
- the collarbones will be almost invisible on the front of the body; and
- the arms will hang from the shoulders with palms turned slightly forward.

Hips/Low Back—Anatomy and Function

The hips as a functional unit include the pelvic bones, thigh bones and lowest part of the spine, which is sandwiched between the pelvic bones. This area bears the weight of the upper body and transfers it down through the legs, much like an arched stone bridge bears weight from above. The range of motion in the hip socket is limited by the depth and width of the hip socket, the shape and angle of the thigh bone, and possible tissue tension.

The most advantageous position for the hips and low back is to stand tall with feet parallel and shoulders on the back plane of the body. This reinforces the natural curves of the spine and helps to ground the lower body.

The most common misalignment in the hips and low back is a lack of curvature at the base of the spine. This flatness creates pressure on the nerves between the vertebrae and decreases range of motion. This flatness is also related to external rotation of the thigh bones and weighting the outer edges of the feet, which in turn flattens the low back even more.

Conversely, too much inward curvature, and not enough elongation of the spine, can also create pain due to pressure on the nerves between the vertebrae. An excessively curved low back is related to inward rotation of the femur bones and excessive weight on the inner edges of the feet, rotating the knees inward.

Wrists—Anatomy and Function

The wrist joint includes the two arm bones and the small, irregularly shaped bones in the hand called “carpels.” The complex construction of the wrists give us incredible dexterity and range of motion in the fingers.

Good alignment for the wrists is important when weight-bearing on the hands. When on all fours, place the hands approximately shoulder distance apart with fingers comfortably spread and the creases of the wrists parallel with the front of your yoga mat. Muscularly engaging the hands will create a dome in the center of the palm and provide structural support.

Because we use our hands constantly, wrists are susceptible to repetitive strain which inflames the “carpel tunnels.” This repetitive strain occurs often in jobs where the same motion of the hand and arm is done again and again—grocery cashiers are an example.

Outer body alignment:

This refers to the basic structural alignment of the body in a given posture. The major joints of the body (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and neck) are the places of greatest range of motion, and therefore most tending toward misalignment. In asana practice, the body takes various forms. Physically, the tissues of the body must strengthen and lengthen to adapt to these forms.

The alignment of one part of the body (knees, for example) affects the alignment of every other part, just as an uneven foundation in a house will create an uneven first floor, second floor, and so on. Adjustments to the outer form of the posture naturally begin at the foundation and move sequentially upward.

Setting the foundation:

In any posture, there is a foundation, or that part of the body that connects to the earth. We exist within a field of gravity, a constant force that exerts a downward force on the body and provides the stability from which to rise up, physically and energetically. Asana practice would not really be possible or beneficial without gravity. Gravity roots the body, providing the resistance that creates strength in muscle tissue. It is this compressive, condensing force from which we expand.

Aligning the feet:

There are four corners to each foot:

- 1) the mound of the big toe
- 2) the back of the inner heel;
- 3) the mound of the little toe; and
- 4) the back of the outer heel.

Creating connection to the earth through the feet should follow this sequence.

In Tadasana (mountain posture), draw an imaginary line from the center of the ankle to the middle of the second toe. Make this line on each foot parallel with the other. The feet are outer hipbone's distance apart.

Aligning the hands:

When the hands are part of the foundation, as in down dog or Chaturanga Dandasana, and most arm balances, they too must be aligned and connected.

The four corners of the hands are:

- 1) index finger mound;
- 2) inner heel of the hand;
- 3) pinky finger mound; and
- 4) outer heel of the hand.

Spread and root the fingers and rim of the palm to the ground, creating a dome shape in the center of the palm.

When the hands are part of the foundation, the creases of the wrists align with each other and the front plane. If you are facing forward on the mat (as in down dog) the creases of the wrists should be parallel to the front edge of your mat. The hands are placed shoulder distance apart.

Aligning the knees:

In Samasthiti (Tadasana), the upper leg bones (femurs) and lower leg bones are vertical and in line with each other. The knees are not bent or hyper-extended (bent back beyond a straight line). The four corners of each kneecap are square. The sides of the kneecaps are vertical. In standing postures, the knee (if bent as in a posture such as Parsvakonasana and Virabhadrasana 1 and 2) tracks directly over the ankle, and not beyond.

Aligning the shoulders:

The shoulder girdle (collar bones, upper arm bones, shoulder blades) should be placed so that the shoulder blades set into the back of the body. To achieve this, standing in Tadasana, elongate the sides of the torso upwards, lift and roll back the shoulders, relaxing the arms to the sides of the body.

Aligning the head and neck:

In the head there is more mass forward of the spinal column than behind it. This is readily apparent if viewed from the side of the body. For many of us, the head is held forward of its anatomically neutral position, creating a shortening and a tightness in the shoulders and neck. To release this habitual tightness and bring the head to a neutral position on top of the spinal column, move the top of the throat (where the neck meets the head) back and slightly up. This can be encouraged by elongating the back of the head upward. A landmark indicating a neutral position is achieved is when the upper and lower eyelids meet in the same vertical plane (viewed from the side).

Alignment study: downward facing dog

To create the outer form of down dog, first find your body's optimal distance from hands to feet:

- Stand in Tadasana, step back into a lunge and lie down prone (on your belly).
- Place your hands under your shoulders.
- Tuck your toes under so the toe pads are under your heels.
- Without changing the placement of feet or hands, come to a kneeling position and then push off the knees into down dog.

This will give you an approximate optimal length for your posture based on your height. Width of your foundation:

- The hands are shoulder distance apart.
- The feet are hipbones' distance apart.
- The head is allowed to hang naturally, and the eyes are soft.

The above establishes the outer form of the posture.

Asana Techniques: Posture Categories

Postures are classified dependent on their function:

- Standing postures
- Backbends
- Forward bends
- Twists
- Inversions
- Hip-openers
- Restoratives
- Arm balances

Standing postures:

These postures are essential for developing body awareness, muscular strength (especially in the legs) and balance. The entire body is affected strongly by the force of gravity and therefore has to work strenuously. Circulation is encouraged as well as a balanced flow of prana. To find the proper stance width (the distance between your feet), it is helpful to start in a lunge, using that posture's optimal placement of feet as a template to build the standing posture.

Backbends:

Backbends open the front of the body. Gravity and habitual closure of the front body due to posture can round the back and close off the front body, both physically, emotionally, and causally (the realm of thought). Backbending invigorates the nervous system and can help to release held emotions. As these postures enliven the nervous system, time of day should be considered for intense backbend practice as they can create insomnia if practiced too late in the evening.

Forward bends:

These postures stretch the back of the body, closing the front where our organs of perception are oriented. The effects are generally more introverted, soothing, and calming to the nervous system. In order for a forward bend to have a beneficial effect, the lower back should be slightly concave and the spine extended, tipping the pelvis forward, before folding the torso forward. It may be necessary to have students sit on a block or blanket to achieve this. If standing, keep legs firm and simply fold partway, with hands supported on legs.

Twists:

Twists encourage the internal organs to detoxify and are both somewhat invigorating and balancing to the nervous system. To be of most benefit, one part of the twist must stay stable while the other part moves, articulating the vertebrae in the spinal column. The most mobile part of the spine, the neck, will often unconsciously move before the less mobile parts of the spine. Move the torso, both left and right sides equally, into a twist and allow the chest to initiate the depth of the posture. Keep a firm foundation throughout the twist.

Inversions:

Being upside down literally changes your point of view. Inversions encourage circulation by allowing gravity to reverse the flow of blood. If a student has high blood pressure, inversions such as headstand should be approached cautiously. There is generally some fear connected to being upside down since it is disorienting initially. Encourage students to move slowly into postures such as headstand and avoid kicking up or throwing their legs against the wall.

Hip openers:

Hip openers encourage root chakra function and can release lower back pain and misalignment in the legs. Because of our preference for sitting in chairs, the muscles and connective tissue of the hips tighten over time and limit range of motion. This coupled with weak abdominal muscles (again, the back support of the chair does not encourage

engagement of the abdominal area) creates a situation where it becomes difficult for many adults even to sit comfortably on the ground. In order for the front and back of the hips to open, a balance of strengthening and flexibility is key. Standing postures such as Virabhadrasana 1 and 2 as well as Parsvakonasana provide an accessible way to begin to open the hips. New or very tight students may find traditional seated hip openers such as Rajakapotasana extremely challenging and difficult to approximate. Bone structure in the pelvic area (femur heads, length of greater trochanter and shape of the acetabulum) can vary greatly from student to student also, allowing some great freedom of movement and others restriction.

Restoratives:

These postures are by nature designed to relax and restore energy. Savasana is the ultimate restorative posture, in which the challenge is allowing true relaxation—a release of muscular tension and of controlled breath while remaining conscious. The body has an innate ability to heal itself. Restorative postures allow a greater flow of prana in the areas targeted. Because of the total relaxation needed, restorative postures should be primarily supine (on the back) and possibly supported by props.

Arm balances:

Requiring courage, strength, and stamina, arm balances are perhaps the most exhilarating class of postures. Because of their intensity, they can often be attempted by “muscling” into them. A key point to remember is that the entire body is active in an arm balance, providing stability and distributing the work throughout the body, not just the arms.

Form & Action

When you observe a posture, the general shape or form of the posture is what is apparent first. Within the form of any posture, there are also the internal actions of the body—the muscles, bones, breath, and movement of prana. The outer form and the internal action within a given posture can be different and even opposite, to create balance.

Asana practice is a practice of bringing disparate parts of the body together to achieve a common goal. We use form and action together to help achieve this.

Taking a basic lunge posture as an example, the outer form is clear. However, what may not be visible is the stabilization occurring as a result of applying equal muscle energy on all sides of the leg, centering the femur (upper leg bone) in the hip socket. If the outer form was held without this muscular action, in this case to keep the femur of the back leg moving upward, the force of gravity would eventually begin to move the femur toward the ground and toward the quadriceps muscles, therefore, away from its optimal placement.

The body, sensing this misalignment, has a bag of tricks to utilize to protect the body from injury. Contraction (or seizing) of the muscles around the femur may occur with associated

discomfort and limited range of motion, exactly the opposite of the aim of performing the posture in the first place.

Form and action occur any time the muscles of the body are being used to perform a given asana. The yoga practitioner uses awareness to achieve a state of ease within the posture, blending appropriate action within the form of the posture.

Navigating the Mat

Using their individual body as the guide for proper stance width and length will allow students to take the outer form of a posture which is appropriate for them.

For standing postures with separated legs like:

- Trikonasana
- Parsvakonasana
- Prasarita Padottanasana
- Virabhadrasana 1 and 2

General form refers to the general shape. In other words, it is a good approximation of what the posture looks like from the outside. An effective teaching tool to get students into the general form of a posture is to have them approach the posture from a lunge, as below:

This basic shape is an excellent template from which to begin building a standing posture:



- Back leg is straight with toes under heel.
- Front leg is parallel to floor with knee over heel.
- Fingertips or palms are on the mat directly under the shoulders.
- Hips are level.
- Spine is long and neutral.

Exploring movement of energy within a lunge posture:

From this basic template, the pulsation of energy in the body can be explored:

- Release tension, take a deep smooth inhalation, soften your skin, smile, and become sensitive to the earth with your fingertips. Deepen the connection between your foundation (fingertips and feet).
- Condense energy in toward your core on an inhalation, feeling a stabilization in the arms and legs. As you exhale, extend expansive energy back out, allowing the tissues and even the bones of the body to dynamically elongate.

Teaching Hatha Yoga

Using the breath to encourage the movement of prana, the whole posture comes alive from the inside out. From the basic outer shape, the flow of energy in the body is encouraged to move along its optimal routes, bringing integration and ease within the human body. We move from a contracted to a more expansive state on every level, or layer of our embodiment.

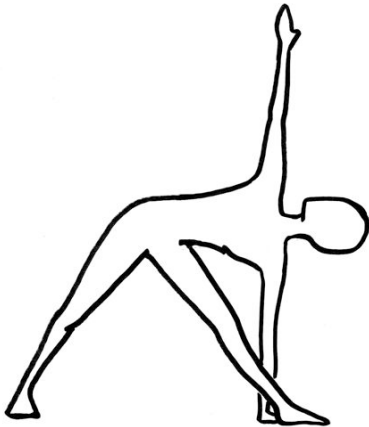
This approach of seeing the asana not as individual forms disconnected from one another, but as shapes to creatively direct attention and energy through, allows the practitioner's practice to be guided by universal truths expressed within the human body.

Building standing postures from a lunge:

Once the form of a lunge is established, and by keeping breath and focus on the practice, the transition is made to the standing posture.

Trikonasana

Right Side



- From the lunge, turn your back (left) foot towards the front of the mat 90 degrees. Keep the front (right) foot facing forward.
- Keeping your right fingertips on the mat directly under your right shoulder, place your left hand on your left hip and turn your torso to the right.
- Re-establish a strong foundation in the feet and begin to straighten your right leg.
- Extend your left arm toward the ceiling.
- Inhale and draw into your core.
- Exhale and extend back out.

Transitions between postures:

Once the mind, body, and breath have been harnessed in asana practice, the mindful state established can be maintained even between postures. Vinyasa means “a series of movements linked together by breath.” Vinyasa also implies a fluidity of concentration through change. Yoga methods such as Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga incorporate this transition between postures. Sun Salutations are a form of Vinyasa, as they link together by movement and breath the postures contained within them.

The benefits of Vinyasa are increased cardiovascular levels which produce heat and sweat. Heat allows the muscles to stretch more easily. Sweating, when coupled with the wringing out of the body's tissues and organs that the postures encourage, can be detoxifying. Incorporating Vinyasa into your practice or teaching will increase the level of difficulty as far as endurance and strength are concerned. Vinyasa-style yoga also can be an accessible

way for newer students to engage in practice. A faster paced class is fun and engaging. At the end of a Vinyasa practice, often no encouragement is needed for students to sink into a deep Savasana.

The drawback of Vinyasa is simply that it is not effective if you can not do it. The jump-through transition from a seated posture through Vinyasa requires a certain ratio of arm to torso length to move back smoothly without one's feet getting stuck on the way. For older students, the fast-paced movement may be too demanding and sometimes dangerous. Students with injuries or misalignments may not be able to pay attention to optimal alignment when in a posture for only one breath.

When planning a class, you could choose to incorporate Vinyasa, you could choose to give it as an advanced modification, or choose to leave it out entirely. Refer to your intention for practice and see if Vinyasa is a fit for that intention.

Stepping up, stepping back:

Another way to transition from one posture to the next, or from the right side to the left side (when there are two sides of a posture, as in Trikonasana) is by stepping up towards the front of the mat after re-establishing a lunge.

After stepping up to the front of the mat, step back into a lunge and form the second side of the posture from the lunge.

This approach allows movement to link with breath in standing postures and requires less strength and stamina than a Vinyasa to transition. It also allows the student's orientation to remain forward, facing the front of the room. Observation, demonstration, and verbal instruction are all easier when the student can see you and you can see the student. This method of transition is appropriate for many students and is more inclusive than Vinyasa, although not as heating and aerobic.

The jump-switch:

This is a quick, easy, fun, and accessible way to transition.

- Starting from a lunge shape again, keep your hands positioned under your shoulders, shift weight into your arms.
- Keeping your arms straight, jump the back leg up and the front leg back into a lunge on the opposite side.

Within your teaching you could offer a blend of these three transitions throughout a class, or use them as modifications to intensify (Vinyasa) or decrease (step up and back) the level of difficulty.

Tailbone/Sacrum

The sacrum is the triangular-shaped patch of fused vertebrae near the base of the spine. The tailbone comprises the last few vertebrae at the very end of the spine. The place where the sacrum meets the tailbone is the horizontal line that divides upper and lower body energetically. The energy above this line moves upward, toward the head, and the energy below this line moves downward, toward the feet. There is no perceptible movement of the tailbone and sacrum away from each other. In other words, the sensation of the two energies moving opposite directions is a function of energy in the body.

This sacrum/tailbone split is like the roots and trunk of a tree. From a single seed, a tree moves in two directions. Reaching up it extends, seeking light. Extending down into the earth, it roots, providing stabilization.

In asana practice we exploit this polarity of energies to create dynamic balance.

Example: Sacrum/Tailbone in Uttanasana:

The first stage of Uttanasana encourages an elongation of the spine. With fingertips on the ground or on the legs, the gaze moves forward and the chest extends forward. With feet rooted and legs firm, the “fold” forward happens at the crease of the hips, encouraging the spine to stay neutral.

Establishing the form of Uttanasana, move the energy from the tailbone downward, toward the feet, and from the sacrum upward, toward the head.

The Asana Practice

Asana practice is, among other things, a practice of embodying the philosophical understandings of yoga. When we are presented with information, true assimilation requires a process in order for information to become knowledge. Some information should be quickly dismissed and forgotten, like a ticket number you take indicating your place in line. Other information requires a process of intellectual study and examination. Moving through this process, information becomes knowledge. For knowledge to, in turn, become wisdom, an embodiment of some kind takes place. In Asana practice, we take information about alignment principles, breath and the movement of energy in the body and put it into practice. The yoga mat then becomes a laboratory, and the science of yoga begins. If we are taught that the human body contains two basic forms of energy, one condensing and one expanding, we can put that information to the test again and again to find out for ourselves. If we are taught that a meditative state is easier to maintain when supported by asana practice, we can see for ourselves if this is true. Through this process our own innate wisdom is revealed. Asana practice can also be used as a purification of the body and attunement of the senses, or simply to have fun, share, and celebrate.

Beginning asana practice:

Before beginning your asana practice, ask yourself why you are doing yoga today. The reasons may be physical discomfort or lethargy in the body. The reasons may be emotional in nature: to calm the energy in the body, for example. Your intention for practice may be a blend of the physical, emotional, and spiritual. The highest purpose for engaging in yoga practice is to reconnect with our essential divinity. The peace, clarity, and contentment we often feel after Savasana is our true nature unveiled. Take a seat and create a meaningful intention for practice. After practice, a helpful tool is to journal your practice, taking notes on your experience that day.

Yin & Yang

Yin and Yang refer to a duality of energies. Yin, like the moon, is reflective, cooler and more feminine. Yang is active, heating, and dynamic. We contain both energies and require a balance of both for optimum health. Dynamic asana practice such as Sun Salutations, up-tempo back bending and arm balancing is Yang in nature. Yin refers to a style of practice that focuses on long-held postures, usually seated, that focus not on heating and stretching muscles, but on elongating and strengthening connective tissue. Yin Yoga practice can be very intense, as sensations move through the body and mind. In this way Yin Yoga can also prepare us to face adversity with steadfastness. The key principles of Yin Yoga are quite simple:

- Find an appropriate edge in the posture after aligning muscle, bone and connective tissue.
- Move as little as possible so the muscles of the body relax and the connective tissues begin to stretch.
- Remain still.

The simple beauty of this practice is in itself very Yin in nature. Good times to do a Yin practice are early in the morning, later at night, or before a Yang style practice. Yin is an excellent counterpoint to a regular dynamic asana practice.

Properties of Yin and Yang

The term “Yin” refers to things that contain qualities of the feminine aspect of nature: more receptive, cooler, slower to move, and less visible. “Yang” refers to things that embody a more masculine aspect of nature: visible, hotter, penetrating, and faster. The terms Yin and Yang only make sense within a given context. Paul Grilley’s example is the heart. In location, the heart is “Yin” to the breastbone: it is less visible, and hidden. The breastbone is “Yang” in location to the heart: more visible and external. But if the context of function is applied instead of location, then the heart is Yang to the breastbone in its function: it is hotter, it moves rhythmically. The breastbone does not move, and is cooler than the heart, so

it is Yin. Context is key to making the terms Yin and Yang relevant. Below are some examples of Yin and Yang qualities:

Yin

Dark
Moon
Cold
Passive
Inside
Solid
Slow
Dim
Downward
Water
Female

Yang

Light
Sun
Hot
Active
Outside
Hollow
Rapid
Bright
Upward
Fire
Male

Yin cannot exist without Yang, and vice versa. They are complimentary polarities; their binary nature reflects the terms of physical embodiment.

Yin Yoga has become recognized in recent years largely because of the work of Paul Grilley, who wrote a small book called, *Yin Yoga: Foundations of a Quiet Practice*. In a Daoist analysis, things are generally reduced to two polarities—Yin and Yang. In this way, a contrast between the two can be easily made and an inquiry into a subject can progress. In the human body there are many tissues, organs, blood, and other fluids and solids. Using yoga practice as the context, there are two main tissues that we can work with in asana practice: muscle tissue and connective tissue; Yang and Yin.

Two types of tissue

Muscle tissue has been extensively researched in the West and the effects of exercise on this type of tissue are well documented. We know that muscle tissue responds to rhythm and repetition of movement by strengthening and lengthening. We also know that after a good workout, the muscles are temporarily weaker than before working them. We understand that after a day or two, the muscles respond to the stress put upon them by becoming stronger. Interestingly, even after all the research that has been done on muscle tissue and exercise, no one knows exactly how the muscles get stronger—we just know that they do.

Yin tissue, or connective tissue, is everywhere in the body. It wraps around muscles and organs, it is interwoven into the muscle tissues, it helps to hold muscles to bones. Connective tissue is much different than muscle tissue. It does not have the blood supply that muscle tissue does, it is dryer, and it does not respond well to the Yang style training of rhythm and repetition. It is much more plastic than elastic, meaning if it is pulled back and forth vigorously it could break rather than snap back like elastic muscle tissue. It is

generally understood that trying to “exercise” connective tissue is dangerous for this reason—the dominant paradigm here being Yang style exercise. What needs to be understood is that Yin style training is fundamentally different than Yang exercise. To exercise Yin tissues, postures need to be held for a longer duration—two to twenty minutes—and without engaging the muscles around that area, in order for connective tissue to respond to this appropriate stress by strengthening and lengthening. Finding an appropriate “edge” in a given posture is also very important: the edge between no sensation of stress on the tissue, and an inordinate amount of stress.

Appropriate stress

All living things require appropriate stress and rest to function optimally. Yin, or connective tissue, has often been seen as “inert” tissue by western medicine—meaning it does not have the ability to move on its own. Applying Yang style training to Yin tissue is indeed dangerous, and since all studies of training applied to Yin tissues were Yang in nature, attempting to train Yin tissues was seen as unsafe. What the studies failed to understand was that appropriate training for Yin tissue was needed. Because of this lack of understanding, “safety” in training the body generally has been understood as “don’t stress the joint tissue”—joint tissue is Yin tissue. However, connective tissue is always shortening and lengthening, therefore not inert. If it is not stressed at all, it will atrophy just like muscle tissue does. A good example of this is setting a broken arm bone, and putting it in a sling for protection. When the cast comes off, the bones have healed, but the shoulder that was immobilized by the sling is now “frozen.” The connective tissue has shortened to the minimum it thinks it needs to for that new environment; that is, the environment of immobilization created by the sling. This same principle is at work when we sit at a desk all day. The result is tight hips—the connective tissue in that area has shortened, and will stay that way unless appropriate training of the connective tissue (and muscles) strengthens and lengthens it again.

Yin Yoga methods

Almost all Yin Yoga postures are done in a seated, prone or supine orientation. This is because the muscles of the body need to be relaxed in order to target the connective tissues. When a muscle engages, it pulls the bones it is attached to closer together and shortens the distance between them. When this happens, the connective tissues around that joint get shorter, not longer. When the muscles around a joint are relaxed, and some stress to that area is applied in the form of a yoga posture or a pull of some kind, the connective tissue will be targeted and encouraged to respond to the stress by strengthening and lengthening. (Try pulling on your right index finger with your left hand, with the muscles of your right hand relaxed. You should feel the bones of the finger separate and bump back together as you release the tension on the finger. Now try the same thing with the muscles of your right hand fully engaged. You will not be able to pull the bones apart). The sensations are quite different than a Yang style practice. There is often quite a bit of intensity of sensation during the posture, and a temporary feeling of fragility upon exiting the posture—this is normal in Yin practice. Yin and Yang are not absolutes—just like the Yin/Yang symbol, there is always

an element of Yin within Yang, and Yang within Yin. It may not be possible to completely relax all the muscles of the body in a given pose, but relaxing the targeted area will result in the connective tissues of that area experiencing the majority of the stress.

Yin Yoga asana

Many poses are similar if not the same in external shape as Yang style asana; the difference is a muscularly contracted and controlled pose versus a Yin approach. Paul Grilley has deliberately given the Yin postures English names in order not to confuse a Yin posture with a Yang posture. If you experience numbness or tingling in any area of the body during a Yin (or any!) posture, adjust the posture to relieve that sensation—it is indicative of nerve impingement.

Some Yin Postures

- Ankle stretch
- Butterfly
- Half butterfly
- Cat pulling its tail
- Childs pose
- Frog
- Happy baby
- Lying twist
- Shoelace
- Snail
- Sphinx/seal
- Square
- Seated forward bend
- Sleeping swan
- Toe squat

Teaching Yin Yoga

A Yin Yoga class feels very different than an active, or Yang class. There can be components of both Yin and Yang within a Yin class, and there are no “rules” for sequencing Yin postures. Yin postures can be held anywhere from 2-20 minutes. After 20 minutes, research so far seems to indicate diminishing returns as far as stimulating connective tissue goes. Generally, some Yang movement between postures is beneficial in moving energy in the body and to “clear” before the next Yin posture. Yin Yoga is not Restorative Yoga. The sensations are often intense. A student with injuries should take care practicing Yin Yoga, and not all Yin Yoga poses are right for everyone. Students should be encouraged to find an appropriate edge and remain still, using any props they find helpful, and moving deeper into any posture as appropriate for them. Yin Yoga is a quiet practice, and a great introduction to the principle of “Pratyahara” or sense withdrawal. Students who have difficulty sitting in

mediation might find Yin Yoga a great tool to move deeper within as preparation for a sitting practice. As a teacher, you will find that there is lots of time and space to talk. Observation and physical adjustments are not as essential as in a Yang style class. The nature of the practice allows the teacher time to talk about the effects of Yin, or introduce and expand on philosophy related to this practice. Allowing space for silence is also very nice for the student—space to truly experience the practice.

Yin Yoga versus Restorative Yoga

If you walked past a Yin Yoga class, and then walked past a Restorative Yoga class, you might think the same thing was going on in both classes. Both Yin and Restorative Yoga use props to support the body, both are done mostly in seated, supine or prone positions, and both require the postures to be held for a relatively long duration. The difference is Restorative Yoga's aim is to create an environment where the body's "relaxation response" takes over. When this happens the organs of the body are stimulated to health and the nervous system also benefits in an environment of decreased agitation. The goal of propping the body in Restorative Yoga is to make sure there is total comfort so the Relaxation Response kicks in. Yin Yoga's aim is to target the connective tissue and stress it appropriately. This usually involves a certain amount of discomfort.

Four reasons to stress the joints:

- 1) Degeneration
- 2) Contracture
- 3) Fixation
- 4) Hyaluronic Acid

Degeneration

As has been stated, connective tissue needs to be stressed appropriately as does muscle tissue. Without periods of stress and rest this tissue is in a state of immobilization and will degenerate—meaning it will become less massive and weaker. Degeneration is often seen in older people, and the accompanying fragility, especially in the spine, is visible in an older population.

Contracture

Connective tissue shortens without movement or stress, and lengthens with appropriate stress. To maintain the body's maximum mobility, this tissue, as well as muscle tissues, needs to be stimulated regularly. In our modern daily activities such as sitting, driving, sleeping, there is almost no articulation of the joints of the lower back.

Fixation

Fixation occurs when two smooth surfaces are compressed and surrounded by a fluid, like a cold glass of water on a coaster on a hot day. The water drips down the glass and creates a seal between the bottom of the glass and the coaster. When you pick the glass up, the coaster comes with it. The pressure from the glass on the coaster and the fluid around the bottom of the glass creates fixation. It takes force to pop the coaster off the bottom of the glass. (Try pushing your palms together, wrapping your fingers around the back of your hands and squeezing all the air from between your palms. Then as you pull your palms apart quickly, you will hear a “pop”—this is de-fixation). This example is mirrored in the joints of the spine. If not articulated regularly, the joints of the spine are in an environment where they can easily become fixated. Compressed due to gravity and the surrounding fluid, once fixated they require movement and tension to become de-fixated. As we age, it becomes more difficult to de-fixate the joints of the spine, the connective tissue and muscles become too short and too tight due to immobilization.

Hyaluronic Acid

Hyaluronic acid is the major constituent of synovial fluid, and is produced in the connective tissue of the body. This coiled molecular structure draws over 1,000 times its own weight in water to itself. As we age, we literally dry out: hyaluronic acid production decreases. Stimulating connective tissue has been shown to increase production of this important lubricating molecule. In ancient Yogic teachings, vast numbers of “Nadis,” or meridians of energy, are mentioned. Of these innumerable nadis, we are told three are of interest to the Yogi—Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. The Nadis, according to modern meridian theory, are water-rich phases lying within the connective tissue of the body. These meridians are not visible to the eye, as they are not encased in a tube structure like a vein. Upon death, all fluids dissipate from the tissues of the body, so these nadis, or meridians, are almost impossible to locate when dissecting a corpse. It is possible that the ancient Yogis invented Hatha Yoga intuitively, in order to keep this energetic and communicative system of the body healthy.

The Future of Yin Yoga?

Both Yin and Yang Yoga are important to maintain optimal function of the body, both physically and energetically. Many students experience great benefit from Yin Yoga, and some postures can create discomfort to an inappropriate level in some students. It is possible that employing alignment principles and appropriate propping of the body before surrendering into a Yin posture may alleviate this discomfort, thus helping to align the connective tissue and optimizing the benefits of Yin Yoga. The practice is still fairly new to many, and time will reveal the possible articulations and interpretations of the practice.

Recommended reading:

Paul Grilley– Yin Yoga, Foundations of a Quiet Practice

Bernie Clark–Yin sights: A Journey into the Philosophy & Practice of Yin Yoga
www.yinyoga.com

Other sources:

Sarah powers - DVD - Yoga, Yin and Vinyasa and Insight Yoga
www.sarahpowers.com

DVD's - Yin Yoga: The Foundations of a Quiet Practice
- Anatomy for Yoga
- Chakra Theory and Meditation

www.paulgrilley.com

Polarities of Physical Energy

In asana practice, finding the outer form of the posture is what takes place first. This in itself is no small task. But if the practice were to stop there, it would never fulfill the goal of spreading the light of awareness throughout the body and re-connecting us with our essential nature. Sensitivity to the movement of prana within the physical and energetic body and the conscious direction of that energy is a hallmark of deeper practice.

The outer form of the posture must be present before deeper work in the asana can begin, just as a canvas needs to be prepared before the creative and transformative process of art can begin.

Opposing Forces

The human body is a microcosm of the universe. Gravitational forces, which draw matter together, are opposed by forces which extend back out such as light, heat, and the radiant energy of the sun. The universe is always seeking balance, and this is also a goal in asana practice: to seek balance through the use of opposing forces.

One force at work in the body is condensing energy. Condensing energy can be experienced as a drawing in to the body's center, just as gravity on our planet draws everything towards its core. Connecting this "drawing in" with the in-breath is helpful, as the inhalation is in itself a "drawing in" of energy. Condensing energy is stabilizing and integrative.

Another force is condensing energy's opposite: reactive, expansive energy. Physically, there always exists a potential energy inherent in what is drawn in. The condensation of matter on our planet creates the potential for expansion, life, and growth. In the breath, the lungs fill with a deep inhalation. The exhalation is the counterpoint to the inhalation and must occur before another inhalation takes place.

The exhalation is a giving back of what was taken in. Examples of this balance of forces can be experienced everywhere:

Financially, there must be a deposit in a bank account before a withdrawal can be made. Food is eaten, which gives the body energy. Streams fill with rain and move toward the ocean, and are again replenished with rain from the sky.

These two forces are called "Muscular and Organic Energy" in Anusara Yoga. Other yoga systems such as the work of Donna Holleman and Orit Sen Gupta refer to the two energies as "Rooting and Recoiling."

When an imbalance in this system of give and take occurs in the body, it will be experienced as a blockage of energy, discomfort or possibly injury. Within our practice we seek to

achieve a dynamic balance of forces to stabilize and create dynamic expansion. Physically, this expansion is experienced as a stretching and opening of muscle, connective tissue, joints, and increased circulation.

Exercise:

In Trikonasana, establish the outer form of the posture from a lunge. Notice the breathing—inhale and exhale. Surrender to this pulse as it permeates the cells of the body. On an inhalation, condense energy into your core from the periphery of your body. On the exhalation, expand back out from your core, back to the periphery and out through the foundation of the posture. Participate consciously in this universal pulse of opposites. Notice any differences physically, emotionally, and in your thought process.

Cleansing Techniques

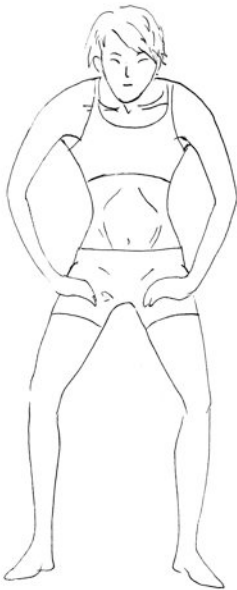
Traditional yoga practice includes cleansing techniques to rid the body of impurities. Some of these techniques are quite extreme, including the practice of Sutra Neti—the passing of a soft thread through the nose and nasal passages and out the mouth. This may put off students new to yoga. Below are two techniques that can be done as a regular part of yoga practice, usually before asana practice.

Jala Neti

A more accessible practice for the modern Yogi is Jala Neti, that includes the passing of warm water with a touch of non-iodized salt through one nostril and out the other. This removes mucus, maintains healthy drainage from the sinuses and can ward off colds and infections. A specific vessel called a “Neti Pot” is ideal for this purpose. The slightly salted water is poured into one nostril and allowed to drain out the other. Do this over a sink, and breathe through the mouth during the cleansing. Repeat with the second nostril.

Nauli Kriya

This is a cleansing technique for the intestines which simultaneously tones the abdominals.



- Stand with your feet about 2 feet apart. Bend the knees and place your hands above the knees, bearing some weight on them. Inhale deeply through the nose and exhale forcefully out the mouth while drawing the abdomen up and in, performing Uddiyana Bandha—the Abdominal Lock—and maintain the exhalation. Release the abdominal lock and inhale. Take a round of normal breath and repeat twice more.
- Practice Nauli Kriya as in the first example, but this time allow the belly to move downward and then pull it up again quickly, bouncing the belly and massaging the organs.
- Practice the same as above and contract either side of the abdomen, creating a visible bump in the middle of the abdomen. Press on alternate hands, and the muscle will move from one side to the other. This can be practiced daily before asana.

Meditation

“The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science.”

—Albert Einstein

Meditation can be challenging for many of us attracted to a physical and dynamic form of yoga. The ability to sit still is an art that seems to be disappearing in a culture where multi-tasking is the norm. Much of the distracting behavior we seek is a response to an aversion, perhaps even a fear, of spending any time with oneself. Possibly, we feel that if we go within we will not like what we find. Expectation is another block to developing a meditation practice. We are conditioned to expect certain tangible benefits from spending time in study. Progress on the path in the form of meditation requires both individual effort and great surrender. We may have no experience with clarified states of consciousness and may have no context for what to expect in a meditation practice. Results may vary.

Meditation can calm the nervous system, bring equanimity to thought, and can reduce the effects of stress. The ultimate purpose of meditation is to connect to our source, the sea of Consciousness in which we habitually see ourselves as only a wave, forgetting we are also the ocean itself.

Just sitting

This form of meditation is simplicity at its most simple. The Zen tradition’s approach is Spartan and concise. Just sit. Sitting, you begin to notice more about your internal environment. The mind, always working, appears to be racing in contrast to the stillness of the body.

Questioning

In the state of questioning, one can notice a response such as aversion after a time of sitting, and begin to question the source of the aversion. Following the aversion, or whatever else appears, to its source is a powerful form of self-study which proves to be quite humbling.

Dynamic meditation

Osho favored this form of meditation, believing the modern mind to be too unfocused to perform traditional seated meditation. Dynamic meditation can include movement, free movement, incomprehensible babble, laughter, and dancing.

Nada

Nada is the sound of our internal environment. Closing the small flaps of the ears with the thumbs, you may hear an internal ringing sound. Concentration on that sound reveals sounds which underlie it, moving attention and concentration into more subtle layers.

All is Consciousness

The mind is Consciousness. While simply sitting, notice the movements of the mind with neither impulse to stop nor to suspend the movements. Let the mind do what it will, and recognize this as the play of the Supreme.

Exercise:

Take a comfortable seat so that your hips are at the same level or slightly higher than your knees. This will prevent the back from rounding uncomfortably, allowing you to sit without unnecessary difficulty or distraction from low back tension. Place your hands on your knees and bend your elbows so your shoulders relax.

Close your eyes softly and allow them to set back in the sockets.

Bring your attention to the breath and notice its pulsation. Using the breath as the focus of the meditation, simply stay present in the moment for a time, anywhere from three minutes to thirty minutes. Begin with a duration that is comfortable to you.

Find a time and place to build the habit of meditation. This space should be a place where you will not be disturbed. Anywhere that you find inviting and relatively quiet will do. You may also make an altar on which photos of loved ones or inspiring teachers can be placed.

Pranayama

There are a variety of ways to utilize the breath: to calm the nervous system, to strengthen the energetic body, and to aid in meditation. Pranayama, meaning control or participation with prana (Life Force), creates stillness in the inner body. Like a pond without the slightest ripple, reflection becomes clearer and more focused. Pranayama is not simply “breath control.” The breath is one thing which we have some voluntary control over. However, we have no access initially to controlling other bodily functions, such as the function of organs like the heart. These functions are autonomic. By subtle manipulation of the breath, noticing its pattern, paying attention to the spaces between breaths, we can begin to notice the movement of prana, the Life Force itself. This is the proper goal of Pranayama—not increasing lung capacity or holding the breath for a long duration.

Nadi Shodhana

The Nadis are energetic channels within the subtle body. Shodhana means “to clean.” Within the subtle body there are around 72,000 Nadis (how did they count them?). Ida (left) and Pingala (right) Nadi run on either side of the spinal column. The central Nadi, called Sushumna, lies energetically along the spine. In this Pranayama practice, the idea is to balance the energies of Ida (moon energy) and Pingala (sun energy) Nadi. Because the breath is the link to prana, and the Nadis are the channels for prana, the breath moderates the flow of prana along these two channels. This breath practice is suitable for beginners or advanced practitioners.

Benefits

Nadi Shodhana calms the mind, soothes anxiety and stress, balances the left and right hemispheres of the brain, promotes clear thinking, and relieves insomnia.

Procedure

- 1) Hold your right hand up and curl your index and middle fingers toward your palm. Place your thumb next to your right nostril and your ring finger and pinky by your left. Close the right nostril by pressing gently against it with your thumb, and inhale through the left nostril. The breath should be slow, steady, and full.
- 2) Now close the left nostril by pressing gently against it with your ring finger and pinky, and open your right nostril by relaxing your thumb and exhale fully with a slow and steady breath.
- 3) Inhale through the right nostril, close it, and then exhale through the left nostril. You have now completed one round of Nadi Shodhana.

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To summarize:

- 1) Inhale through the left;
- 2) Exhale through the right;
- 3) Inhale through the right nostril; and
- 4) Exhale through the left.

Begin with 5-10 rounds and add more as you feel ready. Remember to keep your breathing slow, easy, and full. You can use this breath as a precursor to meditation to help calm the mind. You can also do it as part of your centering before beginning an asana or posture routine. Also try the exercise throughout the day.

ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY

Chakras

A chakra is a center of activity that receives, processes, and expresses life-force energy, or prana. The Sanskrit word chakra translates as “wheel” or “disk” and refers to a spinning sphere of bio-energy. There are, in this particular model, seven chakras positioned in a column of energy from the base of the spine to the top of the head. The seven major chakras that correlate with basic states of consciousness. Like energy transformers, they step down the universal energy of consciousness to the physical plane. In this way we are at once connected to the source of energy, and it is also available to us in different forms. Similar to plugging appliances into an electrical outlet, different forms of energy are appropriate for different uses.

The colors associated with the chakras are also a form of energy. Color is energy expressed as a light wavelength we can see (there are wavelengths of light energy beyond our ability to see with the eye as well). There is also a corresponding sound, or note, associated with each chakra. Again, sound is simply another form of energy vibrating at various wavelengths.

Chakra One: Muladhara

Earth, physical identity, oriented to self-preservation. Red in color. Located in base of the pelvis. This Chakra forms our foundation. It is related to our survival instincts and to our sense of grounding and connection to our bodies and the physical plane. Ideally this Chakra brings us health, prosperity, security, and dynamic presence.

Chakra Two: Svadhisthana

Water, emotional identity, oriented to self-gratification. Orange in color. Located in sacral area. This chakra is related to the element water, and to emotions and sexuality. It connects us to others through feeling, desire, sensation, and movement. Ideally this chakra brings us fluidity and grace, depth of feeling, sexual fulfillment, and the ability to accept change.

Chakra Three: Manipura

Fire, ego identity, oriented to self-definition. Yellow in color. Located in solar plexus. It rules our personal power, will, autonomy, and our metabolism. When healthy, this chakra brings us energy, effectiveness, spontaneity, and non-dominating power.

Chakra Four: Anahata

Air, social identity, oriented to self-acceptance. Green in color. Located in the heart. It is related to true compassion and is the integrator of opposites: left and right, up and down, male and female, expansion and contraction. A healthy fourth chakra allows us to love deeply, feel empathy, and have a deep sense of peace and centeredness.

Chakra Five: Vishuddha

Sound, creative identity, oriented to self-expression. Blue in color. This is the chakra located in the throat and thus related to communication and creativity. Here we experience the world symbolically through vibration, such as the vibration of sound representing language.

Chakra Six: Ajna

Light, archetypal identity, oriented to self-reflection. Location—brow (third eye). Indigo in color. It is related to the act of seeing, both physically and intuitively. As such it opens our psychic faculties. When healthy it allows us to see clearly, in effect, letting us “see the big picture.”

Chakra Seven: Sahasrara

Thought, universal identity, oriented to self-knowledge. Violet in color. Located in crown of the head. This chakra relates to consciousness as pure awareness. It is our connection to pure Consciousness at the universal level. When developed, this chakra brings us knowledge, wisdom, understanding, spiritual connection, and bliss.

Appropriate asana practice can help to bring a balance to these subtle body energies. Chakras become balanced by bringing the energy of Siva (Consciousness) and Shakti (Creation) together. When balanced, each chakra works optimally, giving us spontaneous access to all forms of the body's energy. Chakra meditation is an excellent way to refine your understanding of these centers, as well as proper diet and lifestyle choices.

The Seven Chakras



The Vayus

The yogic understanding of the body is experiential rather than theoretical. The fundamental understanding is that the body is an expression of universal source, like a wave is an expression of the ocean. Within this individual expression there are ways that life energy flows, like currents in a body of water. The yogis gave names to these currents, and various schools of yoga sometimes name these expressions of energy differently. The essential animating force in the body is known as prana—the smallest unit of life force.

Prana and the breath are intimately tied. Prana moves the breath. Without life force, there is no breath, not the other way around. We can participate to a degree with this life force known as prana by feeling and manipulating the breath (even suspending the breath for a period of time). Within the cycle of breath, prana becomes noticeable.

The five main Vayus:

- Prana – the upward flow of energy, which can be felt on an inhalation
- Apana – the downward flow of energy, felt on the exhalation
- Samana – the current of energy that digests as it draws toward our center
- Udana – the current of energy that eliminates as it expands outward from our center
- Vyana – the integrative current of energy that maintains equilibrium

As a beginner moves the body in asana practice, it is at first usually an “outer body” experience. Basic shapes of poses, feelings of tightness or fatigue in parts of the body are noticeable. As practice continues, more subtle sensations move into awareness. This is when work with the vayus can begin.

Prana can be felt as an upward moving force on an inhalation when the arms are lifted overhead.

Apana can be felt moving downward on an exhalation when the arms are brought back to the sides of the body.

Samana can be felt as an integrative force, drawing tissues of the body toward the core.

Udana can be felt as a subtle expression of expansive, or outward moving energy from the core of the body.

Vyana can be experienced by spreading awareness throughout the body, noticing how different parts communicate and are held together.

Compression and Tension

When we stretch in yoga practice, we are attempting to lengthen and strengthen muscle, and in the case of a Yin approach, connective tissue as well. This stretching is working with tension. As tension can limit our range of motion, we actively work to expand out from that limitation.

Compression in yoga practice occurs when two things, meet, namely, bones and soft tissue, or the body and the floor. An example of practicing compression is:

- Hold out your right arm in front of you, palm and inner elbow facing the ceiling.
- Bend your elbow to 90 degrees.
- Holding your right upper arm with your left hand to stabilize it, lower your right forearm until you cannot move it any farther.

This is a clear example of compressive force limiting range of motion. There is no “stretch” or tension involved. The muscles of the arm are already long enough to accommodate the full range of motion. The sensation felt when the forearm bone hits the notch of the upper arm bone is compression. The two bones have met and compressed against each other, and no further range of motion is possible.

Compression will occur when the bones of the body or the soft tissue limit the range of motion. There is nothing in yoga practice that we can do to increase the range of motion once compression occurs. The thing to remember is that at some point in yoga practice, once the limiting tension within a posture has been stretched out completely (as in forward bending the body, the tension, or stretch, is felt on the back side of the body), what stops further movement or depth in a posture is compression.

Every human’s bones are different in length, orientation, shape, and thickness. Within any class, no two student’s postures will look the same, or feel the same. Students will have varying degrees of tension in muscle groups, particularly the hamstrings, shoulders, and the muscles of the back. Yoga practice is very effective in the long term in releasing and lengthening these muscles, and allowing entry into the full range of motion. On that day when a student has released the limiting tension and hits the point where the tissues or bones are compressing, and that compression is stopping further range of motion, they must understand that as far as stretching goes, it has done its work. More stretching, or working with tension, will not increase range of motion or add more depth to the posture.

The orientation of the bones within a particular student may limit their range of motion. For example, some students are at their full range of motion before their arms become vertical when asked to reach up. Other students are able to raise their arms fully over their heads and take them back behind their ears as much as six inches. Bone structure can account for this critical difference, nor will or muscular flexibility. Watch for these differences in structure and remember not every posture is possible or appropriate for every student.

Functional Anatomy

The human body is the means to experience the world and our physical yoga practice.

The physical systems—nervous system, digestive, endocrine and circulatory systems, and so on—serve as a barometer of this experience. You may notice, for example, your ability to remain calm, maintain space between yourself and stressful circumstances as a symptom of a regular yoga practice. Stress hormones are less agitated, the nerves remain calm as a result of the balancing effects of yoga and meditation.

The musculoskeletal system responds to your practice in a variety of ways. You may experience less back pain as a result of the balancing effects of asana. As ranges of motion through the shoulders and chest increase, the ability to receive a full breath of air improves, and the incidence of shoulder and neck discomfort may decrease. A greater sense of wellbeing, clarity of mind, and absence of the distraction of pain may very well lead to the ability to approach life with more openness and humor.

Understanding the workings of the body provides a foundation for communicating the body's intelligence to others. By developing your fluency in functional, physical anatomy, your eloquence and creativity as a yoga teacher develops.

Skillful instruction balances science and art. This section provides a brief overview of the musculoskeletal system as it applies to functional movement and asana. A basic understanding of functional anatomy will aid you as an instructor to orchestrate a creative, fun and effective yoga class.

Bones & Joints

Bone Characteristics:

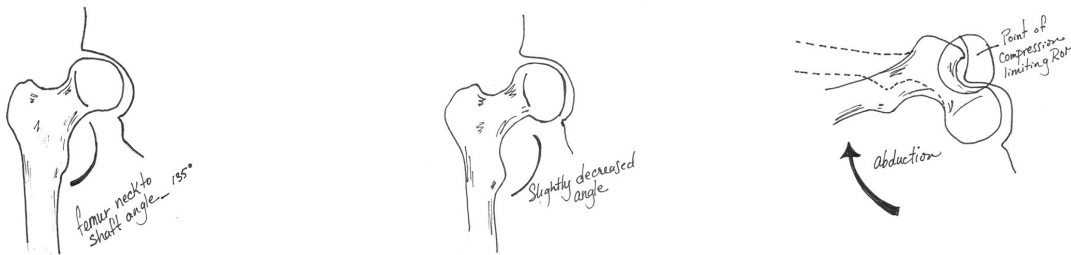
Bone is an organ, a living, vascular structure comprised of organic matter and mineral compound. Due to the balance of organic and inorganic material of bone tissue, bones have amazing tensile strength. If bone were void of their mineral component, you would bend like pasta cooked al dente. Without collagen, bone would be brittle like uncooked spaghetti.

Your bones, though seemingly hard and unchanging are relatively adaptable. It is not uncommon for an elderly Japanese person to have bowed shins—essentially creating a portable chair from years of floor sitting with legs folded neatly under their bottoms. Consider the ancient Chinese tradition of foot binding where the metatarsal bones actually collapse together to accommodate petite footwear.

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A more common adaptation for the bones is the ability to reverse the effects of osteoporosis by applying resistance and stress to bone tissue. A consistent and appropriately weight-bearing yoga practice can increase bone density.

Bone shape is unique to individuals. We all have slightly different bone structure in our face, different lengths of limbs, hip bone width, and so on. This is easy to see. It makes sense, then, that bone structure in less visible parts of our bodies are also different. The size and shape of the bones of the spine can differ radically from person to person, affecting twisting, back bending, and forward bending. The angle, length, and orientation of the femur neck is not always the same, which can affect every yoga pose you do. For example, variations in femur neck to shaft angle (the shaft of the main length of the thigh bone) is one variable that affects range of motion in abduction of the femur (lifting the leg to the side). Imagine the thigh bone and hip socket with no muscle, tendon or ligaments. Full abduction is reached when bone meets bone, that is when the top of the thigh bone meets the top edge of the hip socket. The lesser the inner angle from femur neck to femur shaft, the sooner this point of compression will be reached as illustrated below.



Some range of motion restriction may be due to bone structure. This does not have to be the end of the road for any given posture, however. One may be able to make up for lack of mobility in one junction by implementing a safe, supportive opening from surrounding joints as well as improving joint alignment and stability. As an instructor, first and foremost remain open to the potential of a student's practice. When we start with a "yes," the possibilities become available.

Bone Function:

Bone functions as:

- A support structure—the body's framework.
- An anchor for attenuating musculature—ligaments, tendons, muscle.
- A nutritional reservoir—source of calcium.
- A site for blood cell development.
- Protection—the skull, sternum and pelvis are examples.
- Leverage—consider the long bones of the body.

Joints:

Muscles move bones on joints. There are three types of joints: **fibrous joints** are fixed (sutures of skull, teeth); **cartilaginous joints** are immovable or partly move (rib attachment to sternum), and muscles move bones on freely moving **synovial joints**. A synovial joint is incased in a joint capsule and allows friction free movement with synovial fluid and bursa, a type of cushion within the joint. Types of synovial joints are:

- Ball and socket—hip, shoulder.
- Saddle—thumb (carpometacarpal joint).
- Hinge—elbow, ankle, finger.
- Ellipsoid or reduced ball and socket—wrist, knee, jaw.
- Pivot—radiohumeral, C1-C2.
- Gliding—acromioclavicular, vertebrae.

The Spine

The spine consists of twenty-four moveable bones and 8-9 fused. The irregular shaped bones of the spine, or vertebrae, are joined and separated by intervertebral discs. The spinal column, like the spine of a book, is the axis around which peripheral movement occurs. The spine also plays the vital role of protecting and housing the central nervous system. The spinous and transverse processes of the spine provide attachment sites for ligaments and tendons, allowing expressive movement while providing quiet support. The nerves in the vertebral column transmit subtle body energies as well as muscular stimulation. Consider the frequency of incidents where financial worry and low back pain occur in conjunction, or the postural expression through the spine of emotions like pride or a diminished sense of self.

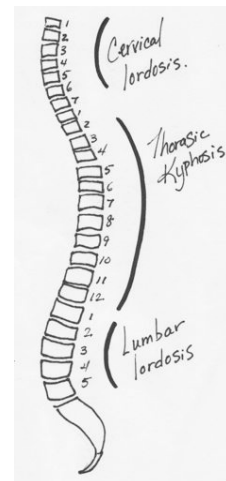
Curves of the spine

The vertebral columns consist of seven neck bones (cervical vertebrae: C1-C7), twelve upper and mid back bones (thoracic vertebrae: T1-T12), five low back bones (lumbar vertebrae: L1-L5), and finally the two fused sections of the spine (the sacrum and coccyx).

A healthy spine has four curves:

- 1) a concave curve through the cervical region;
- 2) a slightly convex curve through the thoracic region;
- 3) a concave curve through the lumbar region; and
- 4) a convex curve through the sacrum.

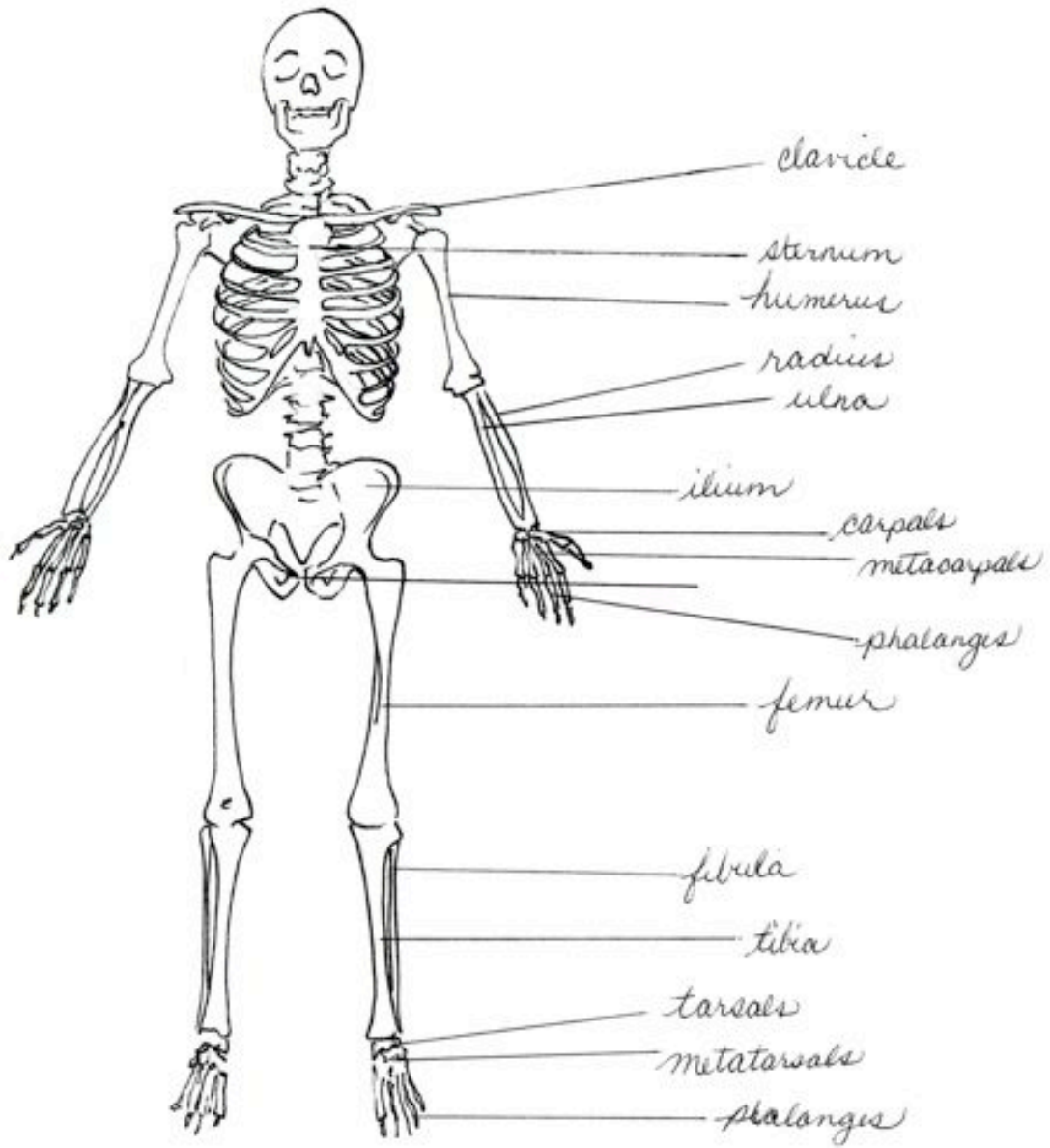
The spine enjoys optimal weight-bearing capability, range of motion (ROM), disc health, energy flow, and general health when these four curves are present. The curves are maintained through balanced action, from a sound foundation, up through the hips and shoulders. We will see how the muscles contribute to this balanced action in the “Muscles” section.



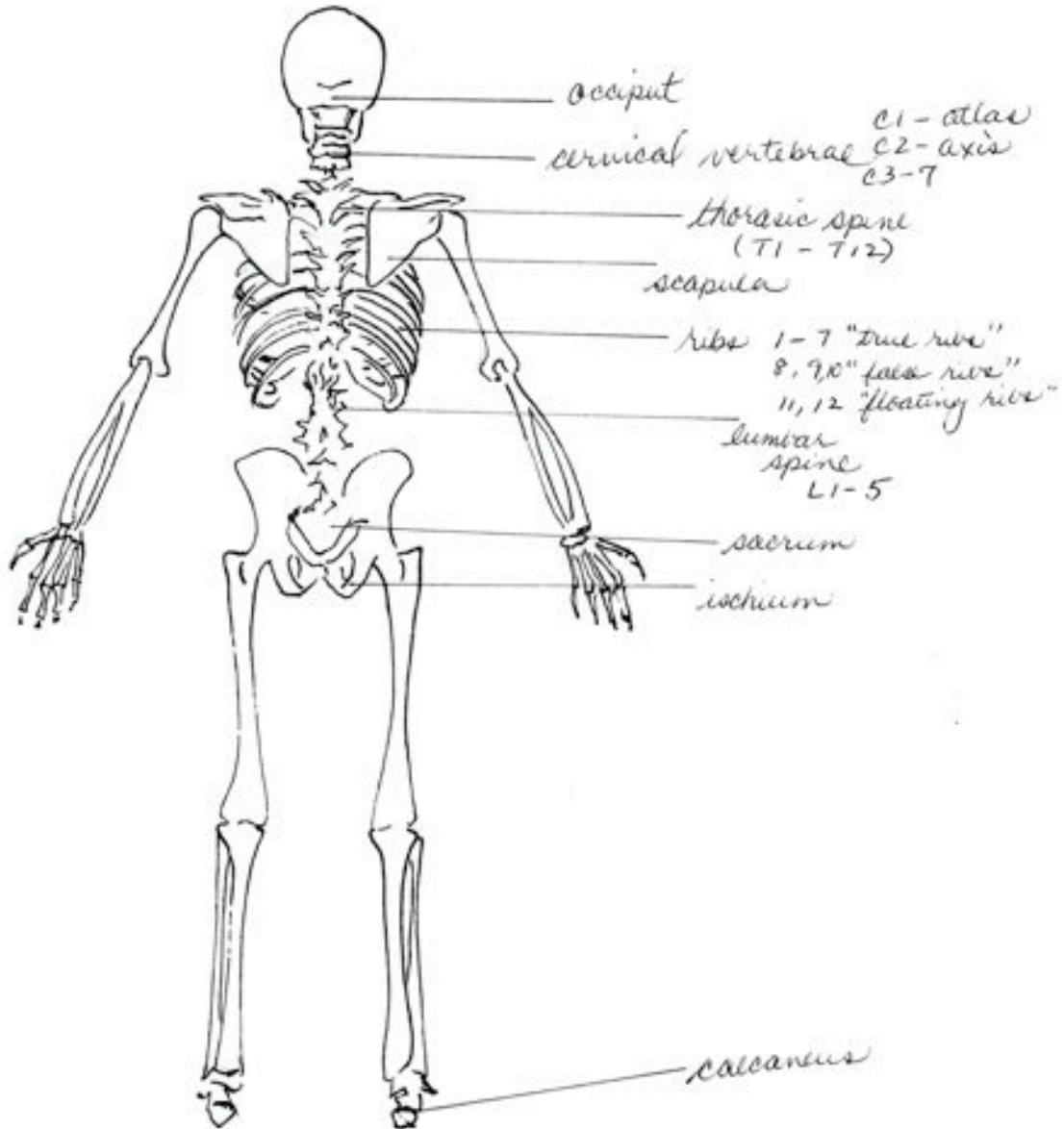
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Between each vertebrae is an intervertebral disc. The exterior of an intervertebral disc is composed of layers of fibrocartilage, like the layers of an onion, called the annulus fibrosus. Within these rings is the central nucleus pulposus, a gelatinous shock absorbing substance. Each disc is attached to vertebrae above and below, providing cushion as we walk, jump, lift, twist, and bend. When the spine is aligned, the discs receive equal pressure throughout. If, for example, the low back is chronically flat, the anterior portion of the disc receives the majority of pressure. Like squeezing a tube of toothpaste, the nucleus pulposus responds to this continuous compression by moving toward the back of the spine where the central nervous system descends. Sharp pain in the lumbar region is often the result of this postural pattern.

Skeleton: Anterior View



Skeleton: Posterior View



Muscles

Muscle essentially controls all movements of the body. Muscles move bones at the joint. When a skeletal muscle contracts or shortens, the two bone surfaces it is attached to (by a tendon) come closer together. Muscle cells are a highly organized structure held together and separated by connective tissue called fascia. This fascia allows for the smooth movement of muscle fibers and is continuous throughout the body. Within the muscle cell are striated bundles that may be likened to little train box cars on tracks referred to as filaments. When a contraction occurs, the box cars come closer together (myosin filament = train tracks; actin filament = box cars). Muscles pull; they never push. Due to this linear structure, one can deduce the direction of movement by noting the attachment sites of the muscle tendons. As the muscle contracts, the distance between these two points will decrease.

When a joint is in ideal alignment, where there is adequate space, minimal friction, and harmony with the rest of the body, it is largely due to the balance of complimentary opposing muscles working together in union. In biomechanics, these complimentary opposites are referred to as agonists and antagonists. For example, as the scapulae (shoulder blades) are drawn onto the back in high plank (middle trapezius and rhomboids), they are simultaneously pulled slightly away from the spine and flush to the ribcage by opposing muscles (serratus anterior and pectoralis minor). These two actions allow strength in the posture, room for the humerus (upper arm bone) and cervical vertebrae (the neck) to move into place.

Muscle & Posture

While this miraculous activity occurs on a microscopic level, we enjoy freedom of movement with less than the blink of an eye.

Each joint has an agonist (primary mover) and an antagonist (opposing muscle). The body aligns through the complimentary opposite muscles balancing their actions on joints. The following are common posture types and muscle groupings that affect posture anteriorly (to the front) and posteriorly (to the back). Deviation from ideal postural alignment is rarely isolated to one area. For example, forward head carriage is usually the result of imbalance through the shoulders, thoracic area, low back or hips. Muscular imbalance causes a chain reaction throughout the body.

Lateral and rotational deviation from neutral is also not uncommon. For example, tightness through the left lower back may result in elevation of the left pelvis. Often, rotation also occurs with unilateral imbalance. In this example, the left hip may rotate forward as a result of the tight lower back muscles.

Particular yoga postures may appear very difficult, or even injurious for certain posture types. Often, this is the perfect posture for re-alignment. For example, a student with an extremely round upper back (kyphosis) and forward head carriage will have great difficulty achieving Bhujangasana (cobra posture). Here, the instructor needs to remember that the practice isn't about the final form of the posture, but the intention—an ideal opportunity to discover muscular support, joint and muscular mobility through the thoracic spine, chest and shoulder girdle, typically restricted areas for a student with a kyphotic back. The posture can be broken down in steps. First, finding openness through the chest and front of shoulder girdle as well as strengthening the muscles in the middle/upper back. This could simply be Tadasana with hands interlaced behind the back, lengthening through the sides, expanding and lifting the heart, elevating the arm bones then drawing them back as the scapulae draw together toward the spine.

By understanding common tightness or lack of mind-body connection to a particular muscle group that may result in misalignment, you can provide specific instruction to your students so they may attain greater alignment in their yoga practice and daily life.

Four Types of Posture:

“The ideal skeletal alignment used as a standard is consistent with sound scientific principles, involves a minimal amount of stress and strain, and is conducive to maximal efficiency of the body” (Florence Peterson Kendall, *Muscles, Testing and Function*, Fourth Edition).

The following four postures serve as a template for an initial assessment of areas of imbalance in the musculoskeletal system. In assessing posture while standing, a plumb line is often used as a reference. In “ideal posture” from the front or back view, the plumb line will bisect the body equally.

From the side, the plumb line will intersect the ear lobe, center of the acromion (shoulder), greater trochanter (hip), slightly anterior to the mid-line of the knee, and slightly anterior to the lateral malleolus (ankle bone).



1. **Kyphosis-lordosis:** hyper-extended neck causing the head to shift forward, roundness through the upper back (kyphosis), extension or inward curve through the lower back (lordosis), anterior tilt in the pelvis, knees slightly hyper-extended, weight shifted slightly forward in the feet.

	Possibly short and strong	Possibly long and weak
Cervical spine	Neck extensors	Neck flexors
Shoulder girdle / thoracic spine	Pectoralis minor/major(chest), medial rotators of shoulder	Upper back, (rhomboids, middle trapezius, low trapezius), erector spinae
Lumbar spine	Low back	External obliques, possibly rectus abdominis
Pelvis / hips / legs	Hip flexors	Hamstrings



Teaching Hatha Yoga

2. **Sway-Back:** Head is slightly forward, neck slightly hyper-extended, upper back slightly shifted back and slightly rounded, posterior tilt in the pelvis, hips forward, knees hyper-extended, weight shifted slightly forward in the feet.

	Possibly short and strong	Possibly long and weak
Cervical spine		Neck flexors
Shoulder girdle / thoracic spine	Chest & medial rotators	Upper back
Lumbar spine	Low back, internal obliques	External obliques
Pelvis / hips / legs	Lateral rotators of hip, hamstrings	Hip flexors



3. **Military:** Hyper-extended through low back, knees slightly hyper-extended, weight shifting slightly forward in the feet.

	Possibly short and strong	Possibly long and weak
Cervical spine		Neck flexors
Shoulder girdle / thoracic spine	Upper trapezius	Upper back
Lumbar spine	Low back	Abdominals
Pelvis / hips / legs	Hip flexors	Hamstrings



4. **Flat-Back:** Head carriage forward, neck is slightly extended, upper back slightly “hunched,” flat low back, pelvis posteriorly tilted, hips forward, knees extended, but sometimes slightly flexed (imagine the Pink Panther), weight shifting slightly forward in feet.

	Possibly short and strong	Possibly long and weak
Cervical spine	Neck extensors	
Shoulder girdle / thoracic spine	Upper trapezius, Pectoralis minor	Middle and lower trapezius
Lumbar spine		
Pelvis / hips / legs	Hamstrings	Hip flexors



Yoga & Posture

Let’s observe two posture types in yoga poses, and how the spine is affected in each.

The scapulae and kyphosis

When the scapulae are chronically sliding forward and off the back, roundness in the upper back, or kyphosis will result.

Rotation – seated twist:

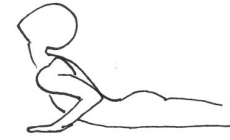
As illustrated here, the result of abducted scapulae in rotation results in the arm bones medially rotating, the cervical spine deviating forward, and most likely the low back flattening ROM is considerably compromised in the twist.

By rolling the thighs in and toward the back of the femur, lengthening through the sides and drawing the scapulae back toward the spine, rotational freedom and comfort in this posture will improve as lordosis increases and kyphosis decreases.



Extension – Bhujangasana:

The thoracic spine extends very little. The apparent movement in this part of the spine occurs by *adducting* the scapulae. If the scapulae are *abducted*, additional pressure will move into the neck and low back during an extension posture.



Here again, while maintaining a strong foundation, lengthening through the sides, drawing the scapulae on to the back as well as taking the humerus to the back plane of the body, freedom to extend will increase as well as comfort in the pose.

Flat low back

Tightness through the hamstrings (muscles in the back of the thighs) is common with a flat lower back. Forward head and neck carriage occurs to compensate for the transfer of weight forward, a result of flatness in the lower back or lumbar spine.

Rotation – Parivrtta Utkatasana

If the lower back is flat, the scapulae will abduct in an effort to find movement in rotation. The result is very similar to rotation with kyphosis.



Considerable attention to hip opening and hamstring lengthening postures will allow the practitioner to express the rotation more comfortably. As a flattened lumbar will cause the thighs to laterally rotate and move forward, an emphasis on keeping feet parallel, moving inner thighs back to create lordosis will allow for greater ROM.

Flexion – Dandasana

Flexion or forward bending is almost always a challenge for the flat back body, but also one of the most therapeutic movements as the hamstrings are likely tight on this posture type.



Tight hamstrings are placed under considerable strain when the hips are flexed at 90 degrees. The resulting compensation is that the knees bend, thighs roll open, sit bones drag toward the heel, tipping the hips posteriorly, creating flexion, or roundness in the lumbar spine.

Flexion at the hips while maintaining neutral spine will eventually alleviate tightness in the back of the legs and compression in the lumbar spine. Start Dandasana with a wider angle than 90° at the hips by walking the hands behind you and hinging the torso back slightly. Root the heels, draw the sit bones away from them as you roll your thighs inward and down toward the floor. Close up the hip angle only as far as neutral spine can be maintained.

Extension – Urdhva Hastasana

The hips tip posteriorly in flat back posture resulting in the femurs (thigh bones) drifting forward. As arms lift overhead, this tendency is often exaggerated. Contributing to this deviation is the likelihood of restriction through the anterior shoulder joint, preventing the arms from completely moving overhead. Shifting the hips forward and leaning back through the upper body creates the illusion that the arms are indeed moving over head. This maneuver certainly does take the arms to a more vertical plane, but they are not in line with the ears as they would be if the body was aligned.

Emphasize an opening through the heart, draw the humerus (upper arms) back while they are yet at the yogi's side, create awareness and evenness through the weight-bearing foundation, move the thighs back. Take the arms up while maintaining joint alignment. This will alleviate compression through the lumbar and cervical spine opening the body for a more pleasurable experience.



Aligning the body increases the flow of energy, or prana, in the body. When aligned, the body does not have to work against itself. Consequently, the muscles of the body relax. The nervous system, sensing this state of equanimity, also relaxes. It is this state of balance that encourages a similar mental state and is instrumental to sustaining a seated meditation practice, asana practice, or simply moving about one's day with ease. As our internal environment becomes habitually less agitated, states of mind that this agitation encourages, such as anger and irritability, wane. This increases the likelihood of living according to our true nature, and we notice and appreciate our external environment more fully.

The Bandhas

Bandha means “lock.” This kind of lock, rather than a closure, like the kind of lock a key is needed to open, was actually a farming term. These locks are like an irrigation ditch used to direct water to different parts of a field. Bandhas in the body are used to direct energy both physically and energetically. Physically, the bandhas work to maintain the lift and tone of our internal organs. Energetically, they assist the movement of prana, or energy, in the body. There are three main bandhas used in the asana practice:

Mulabandha

Located between the anus and genitals, it is the perineal muscle for men. For women its location is near the top of the cervix. The engagement of Mulabandha is not a hard contraction by force of the muscles surrounding it—it is more subtle than that. Mulabandha can be experienced by setting the thighs back, increasing lumbar curvature in the spine, then allowing the tailbone to grow heavy, encouraging the abdomen to tone and the base of the pelvis to lift.

- Setting the thighs back sets the femur heads back and creates expansion in the pelvic area.
- Dropping the tailbone firms the buttock flesh. The lower abdomen lifts from the pubis to the navel.

The synergy created by these two complimentary, yet opposing forces, creates Mulabandha. Rather than a hardening or bearing down on the pelvic floor area, a lift is created akin to drawing the last half-inch of a milkshake up a straw.

Uddiyana Bandha

Located a little below the navel, *Uddiyana Bandha* means “flying upward” referring to its effect on prana. This second bandha is best approached in the same manner as Mulabandha, with a minimum of outer hardness or contraction. In the process of performing this lock, the center of the solar plexus is drawn in and up and an abdominal lift and tone takes place. In full expression it is performed by exhaling fully and then drawing the lower belly inward and upward while lifting the diaphragm. This level of Uddiyana Bandha would be used in the practice of exhalation retention in Pranayama, but due to the inability to inhale while performing it to this level, simply maintaining a stillness about three fingers below the navel allows space for the diaphragm to drop during each inhalation. As the diaphragm drops, the breath is encouraged to move into the side ribs, back and chest. On each exhalation the abdominal muscles encourage a complete emptying of the lungs. The procedure takes

practice, and the subtleties of the relationship between breath and bandhas need to be explored experientially.

Jalandhara Bandha

This lock is created by lifting and rolling the shoulders back to first broaden and lift the chest. Next the back of the head extends toward the sky and the chin itself moves into the notch, which is formed where the two clavicle bones meet. The lock occurs spontaneously in some postures such as shoulder-stand, but is not used as extensively as the other two locks.

The Breath

The breath is our connection to our source. It is a physical, visceral manifestation of the two complimentary energies inherent in all things: inhalation (a taking in), and exhalation (giving back). We can participate in and align with the breath. We can modify it and direct our attention to it, even allow it to grow or diminish. In the end though, it is the breath that breathes us, not we who control the breath. We inhale our first breath as we come into the world and give back our last exhalation as we leave.

Understanding and honoring this pulsation, and bringing our attention to it, reveals a natural and often forgotten unity between body, mind, and breath. The drawing together, or yoking, of body, breath, and mind is yoga. When the breath is steady, the inhalation and exhalation equal and smooth, the mind and nervous system relax. If you have ever watched an animal that is frightened, the breath, coming fast and short, reveals their anxiety. We co-participate in balancing our energy by first noticing the breath and then bringing equanimity to it.

Ujjayi Breath

In yoga practice, one way to notice the breath more easily is to give it sound. By lifting the upper palate in the mouth (like the beginning of a yawn with the mouth closed) and keeping the tongue and nostrils soft and passive, we create a sound like water on rocks, or wind through the trees. It may be easier at first to create this sound on an inhalation. The volume of sound and breath should be even on inhalation and exhalation and not so loud that it disturbs the mind. The sound allows the practitioner to gauge intensity level in asana practice. If the breath becomes ragged or forced, individual willpower may be dominating. Conversely if the breath is inaudible or weak, more effort is needed. Balanced action is the key to finding the place of the middle. Noticing the sound of the breath brings the attention to the force (prana) behind the breath.

Breath and Movement

Coordinating movement with breath allows asana practice to become a moving meditation. In traditions such as Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, there are also specific numbers of breaths per posture. This approach can give form and consistency to yoga practice. Inhalations are generally connected to opening and expanding movements, where the lungs can fill naturally. Exhalations are generally connected to folding or closing movements, when the position of the body assists the exhalation.

The Elements of Nature

The universe is supremely elegant in its organization. Like a seed from which a tree grows, it begins from a fundamental unit. From that one thing that embodies two polar energies, called Shiva/Shakti, grows the diversity of our world. This cosmology, or explanation of the organization of the universe is called the “Tattvas,” meaning “that-ness.” Shiva is unmanifested energy—like the ink in a pen. Shakti is the energy that is creation, like the words the pen writes. The energies steps themselves down in vibration like an electrical transformer, to create the diversity we see all around us. Imagine a family tree with Shiva/Shakti as the first roots.

At the end of the root system of this tree is the physical world, containing five basic elements. Like a pallet of colors, these elements mix and separate to create the diversity we see in nature and in ourselves. These five elements are:

- Earth
- Water
- Fire
- Air
- Space

Each element contains qualities that make it unique. Because human beings are a microcosm of the full splendor of the universe, we also contain and embody these five elements.

Characteristic Qualities of the Five Elements

EARTH

- Steadiness
- Patience
- Strength
- Endurance
- Stability
- Masculine energy
- Contraction

WATER

- Yielding
- Freedom
- Movement
- Relating
- Feminine energy
- Openness

FIRE

- Determination
- Transformation
- Heat
- Austerity
- Aspiration

AIR

- Spaciousness
- Speed
- Extension
- Change

SPACE

- Encompasses the other four elements
- The division between the individual self and the universal self

In the human body, the earth element is predominant from the feet (our literal connection to the earth), up to the knee area. From the knees to the waist, the element of water is strongest. The spine (the axial skeleton) embodies the fire element. Air is contained and processed by the lungs, in the chest. Space wraps around us, contains, and gives context.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda means the Knowledge of Life. This philosophical and medical system is a branch of Vedic understanding dating back at least four thousand years.

Every being contains a slightly different blend of the five elements. To somewhat simplify things, Ayurveda distilled the five elements into three *Doshas* or qualities, within a living being. These three doshas contain a mixture of the five elements.

The Three Doshas

Kapha—earth and water **Pitta**—fire and water **Vata**—air and space

As humans, we contain a mixture of these three doshas. Usually two of the three are predominant, creating genetic differences in personality, energy levels, and appearance. In Ayurvedic understanding, when the energies in the body are out of balance, disease can follow. The cure for disease is to restore the body's natural harmony through lifestyle appropriate for the particular dosha, and of course yoga practice.

Determining your dosha can help you understand your natural tendencies and plot a course of action to stay as balanced as possible. As an example, someone with a Kapha constitution (strong in earth and water energies) may have great patience and endurance and not get rattled if they miss a meal, but cultivating speed and determination may be a challenge. Yoga practice for this constitution might emphasize the fire and air elements of a dynamic practice rather than slow, restorative postures. This type of practice may not be initially appealing to a constitution strong in Kapha energy. Those of us with plenty of Vata in our constitution might find long holds in *asana* practice irritating and challenging in the same manner. Balanced practice includes working with your weaknesses as well celebrating your strengths.

As a yoga teacher, embodying these five energies, observing them in students and employing them specifically toward encouragement, are all part of the art of effective teaching. The strongly Pitta student may need to be reminded not to go beyond her edge into injury. The Vata student should be encouraged to keep his feet rooted. The Kapha student may need to be awakened from Savasana regularly.

The Five Koshas

A *Kosha* is a layer, or a sheath. One of the teachings of the Upanishads is that there are five sheaths surrounding the Self, the individual Consciousness. In the Tantric viewpoint, these layers are not simply maya (illusion). They are, yet again, another form that Consciousness has taken to see itself in a different way. The koshas move from the gross physical plane to the most subtle plane, each layer with its own qualities.

Physical: Annamaya Kosha

Anna means food. All of the physical aspects of life come and go and are consumed by another aspect of external reality. Thus, the outermost Kosha is called the sheath of food, or *annamaya kosha*.

Proper diet, asana practice, and rest all contribute to optimal functioning of the physical body, the health of which influences our ability to become sensitive enough to experience the deeper layers.

Energy: Pranamaya Kosha

Prana means energy. It is the vital force that produces the subtle vibrations related to breath and is the driving force behind the physical aspect of the senses and the operation of the physical body.

For both a healthy life and practice, our prana needs to be smoothly regulated, utilizing the practice of Pranayama and asana.

Mental: Manamaya Kosha

Mana means mind. It is the level of processing thoughts and emotions. It is in direct control of the operation, through prana, of the physical body and senses, and organization of ideas. It is dependent on the previous sheaths for well-regulated energy (prana) and a healthy physical body. It functions clearly when connected to the deeper koshas that inform it.

Wisdom: Vijnanamaya Kosha

Vijnana means knowing. It is the sheath of wisdom that is underneath the processing, thinking aspect of mind. It knows in a different way than manamaya kosha, embodying wisdom rather than mental acuity.

Bliss: Anandamaya Kosha

Anandamaya kosha is the most interior of the koshas, the first of the koshas surrounding the *Atman*, the eternal center of consciousness. *Ananda* means bliss. However, it is not bliss as an emotion experienced at the level of the sheath of mind. Ananda is a different order of reality from that of the mind. The bliss experience here is said to be millions of times greater than our conditioned mind's ability to grasp.

Self: Atman

Atman is the Self, the eternal center of consciousness, which was never born and never dies. Like a pure light shining through various lampshades (koshas), Atman is the light itself, where subject and object (observed and observer) are seen as one.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Learning to Instruct

Before talking about yoga philosophy within a class or even teaching a pose, you must be able to direct a student's movement with clarity and a minimum of words.

Exercise:

Pick an everyday activity like opening a door, taking off a shoe, or scratching your leg. Write a script for that action so that it can be carried out without interpretation. An example of an instruction with a *lack* of clarity would be:

“Walk up and grab the door handle and open the door.”

This instruction would work, but only because the person you are instructing has opened many doors before and knows how. A better instruction would be:

“Standing one arm's length away from the door, step your left foot forward and grasp the handle of the door in your right hand. Turn the handle clockwise until it stops, then bearing more weight in your right foot, smoothly pull the handle toward you, opening the door.”

Teach a friend using different everyday objects and movements, making sure your friend does not interpret your instruction, but does exactly what you have instructed. The experience may illustrate just how difficult it can be to be both clear and strident with your words.

Adding Content

Begin simply. Simple is clear. Clear is good. Practice your teaching by simply instructing the breath through your own performance of Sun Salutations, one breath per movement. From there, layer on instruction so that the fundamentals of your teaching are so well established you will have the freedom to be creative.

Level 1—Breath

As you verbally instruct the breath in your own practice, listen to the tone of your voice. Notice the timing and pace of the simple instruction to inhale, exhale. Create a steady flow in your body and your words. Speak the word “inhale” just slightly before you initiate the first movement into Urdhva Hastasana, and “exhale” just before the second movement into Uttanasana. Notice your own tendencies to shorten the breath.

When you feel comfortable instructing your own breath, visualize the sequence of movements of Surya Namaskara instead of actually performing them, and instruct the breath audibly. When you are comfortable with that level of instruction, walk around a room and instruct the breath, keeping a steady pace of visualized movement by noticing your own inhalation and exhalation. Embody the teaching of the breath so completely in this way that if you “freeze-framed” any part of the Sun Salutation you would know which part of the breath, inhalation or exhalation, connects with it.

Level 2—Outer Body Movement

Next is teaching outer body movement. Duration within a posture is dependent upon the style of class you are teaching (such as upbeat, restorative, meditative, and so on). As a starting point, time your own number of breaths over one minute, using your breathing to mark duration. Teach postures at 45 seconds per side for a medium paced class, one minute for a slightly slower paced class.

You will need to write a script to instruct entrance into a posture. Starting your entrance to most standing postures from a lunge gives you a “home base” reference point. Here is an example of a bare-bones outer body instruction for Parsvakonasana (side angle posture) entered from a lunge:

“From your lunge (performed with the right foot forward, left foot back) turn your back foot 90 degrees and press all four corners of the foot to the earth. Place your right forearm on your right thigh and your left hand on your hip. Turn your torso to the left.”

This is a very basic instruction, free of unnecessary words. This instruction takes about fifteen seconds, allowing time for students to perform each part of the instruction. Once they have taken the basic form, the duration is five breaths or approximately one minute. The posture is repeated again on the other side for the same duration. Write a basic outer body script for all the standing postures you will be teaching and practice speaking them as you perform the asana, using your own body movements as a cue for timing. Speak first, then move.

When you feel comfortable at this level, instructing your own body, try standing still as if you were teaching a class from the front of the room and speak through one standing posture at a time. Then time yourself, eliminating anything unclear or unnecessary.

Level 3—Physical Alignment/Energy Movement

Building upon the breath and the basic form of the posture, aligning the body optimally is next. Basic outer body alignment (length of stance, body position) should already be taken care of in your outer body movement instruction. Now you can begin to describe the movement of prana, connected to the inhalation and exhalation to align the student with the pulse of nature. Connect the inhalation to condensing energy, the exhalation to expansive energy. Here is an example, building upon the previous instruction for Parsvakonasana:

“From your lunge (performed with the right foot forward, left foot back) turn your back foot 90 degrees and press all four corners of the foot to the earth. Inhale as you draw energy from the earth into your center. Place your right forearm on your right thigh and your left hand on your hip. Turn your torso to the left. On your next exhalation, send that energy back through the legs into the earth.”

This enhanced instruction now takes about twenty-five seconds to verbalize. At this point, you are beginning to introduce philosophical intention. By simply describing the flow of energy, the student’s attention is drawn to this universal pulsation of opposites. Depending on the student, this physical embodiment may be an “Ah, Ha!” moment, or it may not resonate at all. Keep teaching. Practice this with all the standing postures again, as you perform them, and then standing still.

Level 4 —Embodying Intention

Here, your teaching throughout the class should refer to your initial class intention introduced briefly at the beginning of class. You could use a poem, or share a personal experience, recite a yoga *sutra* or utilize any other inspiring material to introduce an intention. Whatever it is, weave the intention through the postural instructions in your class. Because what we experience physically in asana practice is also related to the greater pulsation of life, the essence of the teachings become self-evident, leading to a deepening of

wisdom within the student. Skillful and creative teaching in this way elevates the asana practice from a physical workout to its potential as an experience that reveals our wholeness. Here is an example, again building on the previous instructions. The intention for this class, reflected in the postural instructions, is “non-attachment.”

“From your lunge, turn your back foot 90 degrees and press all four corners of the foot to the earth, reconnecting with it. Inhale as you draw energy from the earth into your center, knowing that what is taken must again be given back. Place your right forearm on your right thigh and your left hand on your hip. Turn your torso to the left and with gratitude, expand fully on the inhalation. On your next exhalation, send that energy back through the legs into the earth, and allow this pulse of energy to move through you like a river, its flow keeping it clear, without stagnation.”

This level of instruction can be very inspiring if it comes naturally from a place of true embodiment in the teacher. You must decide what level of instruction with which you are comfortable. Make sure you have the fundamentals of instruction absolutely solid before moving on. There is no point in attempting to transmit subtle aspects of our true nature when half the class is in another posture.

Your intention will work more effectively if it is an intention that can be embodied. The above example works in asana practice because releasing the breath is clearly a physical form of non-attachment. You may have a great class intention that is difficult to embody. An intention such as “study of scripture to increase wisdom” is a great thing to dedicate one’s efforts towards, but it is difficult to weave that kind of intention into the body during asana practice.

Instructing Specific Postures

Being an effective yoga teacher is like being a good waiter. You direct the students to take their seat, describe to them what is on the menu, possibly modifying a dish or two to better serve them, and occasionally check back to see how things are going. Each course of the meal needs to be brought out and presented, and then the waiter allows the guests to enjoy.

Using effective and clear language, the students you are teaching must be instructed in and out of the basic form of every posture you teach. Advanced students may be familiar with the names of many postures, but beginners will require instruction as to how to approximate every posture. These basic instructions are essential before refinements of alignment are taught. To do this, you will need to write a script for every posture you intend to teach—the full syllabus at the end of this book is a good place to start.

This work is made a little easier as many postures share similarities. Stance width for many standing postures is the same. Many seated postures also share similarities in their general

form. The artistry of teaching once the basic form of a posture is approximated by your students is to then creatively illustrate the differences between the postures.

Some examples of possible scripts:

Surya Namaskara — Sun Salutation

“Inhale and raise your arms, exhale and fold forward, touching the floor.
Inhale and look forward.
Exhale, step back and lower down to a low plank, called Chataronga Dandasana.
Inhale, sweep your body forward and up into Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (upward dog).
Exhale and move back into an upside-down V, or Adho Mukha Svanasana.
Hold this posture for five breaths, feel the connection to the earth through your fingers.
Bend the knees a little, stretch back from the hands and elongate the spine.
On your 6th inhale, step up and gaze forward.
Exhale and fold forward again.
Inhale back up to standing, raising your arms to the sky.
Exhale to equal standing.”

Due to the speed of Surya Namaskara, moving at one posture per breath, it is not possible to instruct much more than the basics of entry into each posture. Surya Namaskara is an excellent place to begin instructing postures precisely because of this.

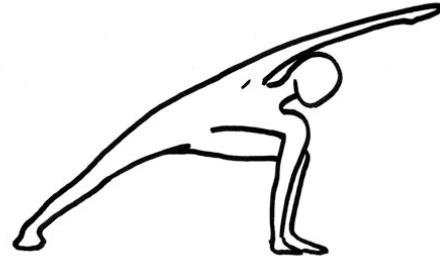
Exercise:

Write a script for Surya Namaskara in your own words. Your own use of grammar, colloquial language and choice of words is like a signature. Your natural way of interpreting the practice is uniquely your own. Make your teaching your own, not a copy of anyone else's. At the same time, keep the number of words to a minimum while still giving clear instruction.

Example scripts continued...

Parsvakonasana

“From down dog, please step your right foot forward between your hands. Placing your right forearm on your knee, turn your torso to the left as you turn your back foot 90 degrees toward the front of your mat. Keeping your back foot strong, track your right knee directly over your ankle. Reach your left arm 45 degrees up to the ceiling, palm facing down. Breathe fully, keeping the eyes soft. Remain here for five breaths. On your next inhale, place both palms on the mat, exhale and step back to downward dog.”



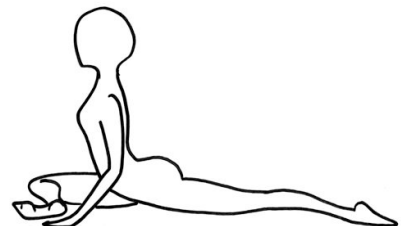
Janu Sirsasana



“From Dandasana, bring your left leg in and place the sole of your foot against your right thigh. Keep the fingers on the ground beside you and firm the muscles of your legs. From this foundation, extend your spine up and tip your pelvis forward. Take your leg, ankle or foot with your right hand. Using your connection to the ground through your left fingers, inhale and square your shoulders, exhale and fold forward into the posture. Every inhale, extend your spine. Every exhale, surrender more deeply into Janu Sirsasana. Take five long breaths here. Keep your straight leg firming toward the floor and on your next inhale, rise back up from the forward fold and place the legs in Dandasana again.”

Rajakapotasana

“From down dog, sweep your right foot forward, crossing it over the front of the mat so your right knee is wider out than your hip, and the outer shin and ankle lie on the mat. Keep your left leg engaged while you lay the toenails of that foot on the mat, stretching back. Fingers or palms under your shoulders, inhale and draw the spine long, keeping your foundation strong in both legs. Exhale and curl back, taking to the top of your throat back. Continue firming the legs and fill the back ribs with breath. After five breaths, place the palms down firmly and push back to down dog.”



Savasana



“Now the effort of the asana practice is over. Lie down on your mat, allowing your palms to open and the legs and feet to relax. Take one more long inhale through the nose and sigh out through your mouth. Allow the eyes to rest back into the sockets as you bring the lids of the eyes over them. Feel the

connection between your body and the floor and sink deeper into the experience of surrender.”

Every word you use should be specific and not easily misinterpreted. Remember, your students will be exerting themselves physically, undergoing some discomfort and trying to hear your voice above their own internal dialogue. Use direct, active language to instruct the basic form of postures.

These examples are simple and direct, and constitute the “nuts and bolts” of instructing postures. Your own energy, words, and intention for the class you are teaching will blossom from a clear foundation of basic instruction, and allow you to truly bring your own voice to your teaching.

Becoming adept at basic instruction will also allow you to fully relax as you teach. This tangible ease and confidence will encourage your students to relax and also accept the teachings more completely. When you are skilled at instructing simply, then you can begin also to teach to what you observe, adding appropriate verbal and physical adjustments when necessary.

Exercise:

Write a script for five standing and five seated postures. Instruct the entrance into standing postures from down dog. Instruct the seated postures from Dandasana. Be as brief as possible for now, remembering the student needs to find the posture and then spend five long breaths experiencing it.

After writing your script, read it aloud in a natural voice and see if it sounds like something you would say. Avoid unfamiliar anatomical descriptions or jargon the general population would not understand.

Teaching to What You Observe

Now that you have the tools to teach at a level of subtlety that is appropriate for you, you must actually teach to the class you are leading. Observe the following:

- the foundation of the posture (usually feet) for alignment and connection;
- the quality of breath—listen to the rate, the ease, the depth; and
- the basic form of the posture—placement, alignment, energy flow.

Be ready to adjust your class depending on what you see. If the sequence you are teaching is clearly too difficult or physically demanding for the majority of the class, adjust accordingly without letting them off the hook completely.

Verbal adjustments

After observing, you can give adjustments to postures verbally. Remember that every student is different, from the structure of the bones to their ability. Not every posture is appropriate for every student, and no two students will look the same in a posture. There is no ‘perfect’ posture in terms of what it looks like on the outside. Perfect posture is one that is balanced in its action, with the full light of awareness of the practitioner illuminating the body, and results in an expression of creativity and joy.

There are ways to create more opening, a deeper flow of prana and safety for the joints in a posture. When you observe a student and have determined that their posture could be adjusted to reveal more awareness, or to align them to practice more safely, you make a choice to verbalize this.

To the group

If, after determining the place that offers the best sight lines, you observe the entire class from this optimal position in the room and notice a general misalignment, energy flow or body positioning that could be changed to deepen the experience of practice, address the whole room in a manner reflective of your intention to uplift and support their efforts. Be concise. Use direct wording. An example of indirect, wishy-washy wording would be:

“Okay...ummm hmmm... I see that maybe, if you feel like it today, and it’s appropriate for you, and you feel like listening to me, that possibly everyone could maybe push their right foot onto their left thigh just a bit harder, again (laughs nervously) ... or not.”

This kind of direction is simply irritating. This teacher is wasting the students' valuable time in an effort to avoid offending anyone. The reason the students are in your class is to take direction from a qualified teacher. Offer this direction to them directly, with a minimum of chatter, and in a way that supports their efforts and is not demeaning:

“Everyone, please push your left foot to your right thigh more deeply.”

To an individual

When verbally instructing an individual student to make an adjustment, you could lower the volume of your voice to speak only to that person, again remembering you have a class to teach and limited time. Do not engage in a conversation with the student. Simply direct their attention to what it is you would like them to adjust, and ask them to do it. Use their name if you know it. If you do not know their name, now is a good time to ask:

“Hi—what’s your name? O.K.,—Deb,—move your hands back two inches—that’s great.”

Not:

“Hi, hey, your practice is looking great. How long have you been practicing? I’m noticing something going on here in your hands, and I’m wondering if you know about it? You don’t? Oh, well let me sit down here and tell you some stuff.”

And so on. Deb has now been in down dog for two minutes and the rest of the class is bored and beginning to chat amongst themselves. Remember the big picture, be concise, and let the students know that you are available to answer questions before or after class.

Physical adjustments

Through observation, you may determine that a student would benefit from a physical adjustment. Before adjusting physically, you need to know if it’s o.k. to touch a particular student. If you have the opportunity to do a new student intake, you can ask them at that time. If you are substitute teaching an ongoing class, you can ask the students before class begins to come up and let you know about any injuries or if they would not like to be physically adjusted.

Forms of contact

When you adjust, your touch should be reassuringly firm, not feathery or indistinct. Until you have experience with a particular student, keep the intensity of the adjustment on the low side of a scale of 1-10. There are times when a deep adjustment is therapeutic, but there is also higher risk of injury.

Touch can be used to direct a student’s attention to a specific area of the body, to manually assist in movement, to re-assure (as in a friendly touch) or to assist relaxation, as in adjustments for Savasana (corpse posture). Be aware of zones of the body that are “high voltage.” Never use touch in a sensual or sexual manner. Keep your attention on the highest purpose of teaching yoga, which is to assist in the re-connection with the Divine.

Timing a Class

Most yoga classes are between 1 –1.5 hours, generally 1 hour and 15 minutes. Your class should consist of:

- Greeting and centering/taking a seat
- Introducing intention
- Basic warm-up
- Standing postures
- Seated postures
- Meditation
- Savasana
- Closing

You need to distribute that time between these categories. Using the basic template for self-practice outlined in “Sequencing Fundamentals,” we can establish the amount of time that a class would take. Keep in mind:

- Duration per posture can be anywhere between 30 seconds to 1 minute per posture. Postures that have a left and right side would then take 60 seconds to 2 minutes to teach. You can use a watch to time your breath over 1 minute, then use your breath to pace the class.
- Your greeting and introducing intention should be somewhere between 2-5 minutes.
- Basic warm-ups can include seated shoulder and hip opening, breath work, Sun Salutation, or another repetitive movement designed to get the students “into” their bodies, before detailed postural instruction begins (5-10 minutes).
- Standing postures could take about half the remainder of the time allotted for asana, seated postures the next half, leaving time for meditation and relaxation.
- Savasana (relaxation) should be between 5- 10 minutes.
- Closing can include a final prayer, thanking the students for their attention, tea, and answering questions.

Greeting/Centering

- Seated posture (legs crossed, half or full lotus)
- Introduce intention. Begin Ujjai breath. (5 min)

Sequence

- *Supta Padangustasana* (hands behind thigh) (2 min)
- *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (down dog) (1 min)
- *Lunge* (fingers on floor) (2 min)
- *Surya Namaskara* (modified) x3 (6 min)
- *Surya Namaskara* (full) x2 (5 min)
- *Trikonasana* (triangle pose) (2 min)
- *Parsvakonasana* (side angle) (2 min)
- *Parsvottanasana* (2 min)
- *Prasarita Padottanasana* (wide leg standing forward bend), A and C (2 min)
- *Utthita Hasta Padangustasana* (hand-to-big-toe balance) (2 min)
- *Rajakapotasana* (king pigeon posture) (3 min)
- *Bakasana* (crow) (2 min)
- *Balasana* (child's pose) (2 min)
- *Navasana* (boat) x3 (3 min)
- *Virasana* (hero) (1 min)
- *Supta Virasana* (supine hero) (1 min)
- *Ustransana* (camel) (1 min)
- *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (full wheel) (2 min)
- *Marichyasana C* (twist) (2 min)
- *Dandasana* (staff posture) (1 min)
- *Upavistha Konasana* (wide leg forward bend) (1min)
- *Janu Sirsasana* (one leg forward bend) (1 min)
- *Pranayama/meditation* (4 min)
- *Savasana* (10 min)

The above sequence is timed at 65 minutes. Allowing for some demonstration and collecting the class into a group before entering another posture, the total class time should be roughly 75 minutes. This would be a class paced fairly briskly.

Exercise:

Using the basic template for class planning (see “Sequencing Fundamentals”), write your own sequence of postures and time them depending on your intention to create an upbeat, more restorative, or meditative class. Restorative postures including supine and supported postures take longer to set up and the duration is usually longer as well (2-10 minutes). Therefore, there would be fewer postures over the same class time.

Partner Work

Pairing up students can be fun and informative, lightening the mood of class, and is an opportunity to create community. Students need to understand what the purpose of the partner work is, and how to do it safely. Some people will not be interested in partner work for their own reasons, which could include injury, illness, disinterest in communicating at the end of a long day, or many other reasons. Be judicious in your use of partner work.

Before pairing students for partner work, demonstrate clearly what you want them to do, using a student to aid with the demonstration. Ask the student you worked with whether the work was effective in its purpose. Before the partner work begins, ask the class if they have any questions. Make sure everyone has a partner, and if not, partner with the unpaired student.

Themeing

“Each class has a heart-oriented theme, which has a meaningful connection to the grand spiritual purposes of the asana practice. The theme usually centers on cultivating a virtue—a quality of mind or heart, which is a microcosmic reflection of our Divine nature. Each theme gives a direction for the attitudinal energy that infuses every action and breath in the poses. Effectively, all the poses in Anusara Yoga are expressed from the ‘inside out.’ The theme is intertwined with the postural instructions throughout the class.”
– John Friend

An example of a theme would be “Playfulness”:

“Playfulness is seen in those who approach life with a light, fearless attitude. This attitude stems from an underlying understanding that we are, at a fundamental level, perfectly o.k. We may like or dislike certain qualities that we possess, but the practice of yoga allows us to see beneath them to our true nature. Today when we practice, have fun with the postures—allow your innate creative nature to percolate through the practice.”

Playful is a combination word including *play* and *full*. There is an expansive feeling when we let go and allow ourselves a little silliness. Many themes may contain a polarity—seeming opposites, like effort and surrender, Stability and freedom—one which yields to the other and they actually work together.

Themeing a Specific Posture

If you decide to apply a theme to your class, it will be much more effective if you can refer to it within the context of the postures, not just at the beginning and end of your class. For example:

Bakasana:

“From downward dog, bend your knees and spring lightly toward your bent arms, pretending you will land on them with you knees. See this happening in your mind’s eye first. Release any ideas of impossibility!”

This is a simple theme, really just one word. In order to keep things interesting for the students it is a good idea to write down some synonyms that describe your theme: Playfulness: lightness; expansiveness; with no fear; with wonder; with a smile; unrestrained.

Most effective themes will describe qualities of the heart and or mind: courage, steadfastness, determination, compassion—there are many others.

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If you have a personal story that relates to your theme, this will resonate with your students more strongly than just referring to a vague virtue or emotion that does not resonate with you.

There are many ways to begin brainstorming for themes—all you have to do is think about an experience you have had and how you related to it, then discover the virtue or quality of heart that was necessary to skillfully negotiate that circumstance. Make it personal, and then make it relate to your student’s experience. For example:

“I just came back from teaching a workshop in Tofino. When I arrived the night before, I was exhausted and had to drag myself to my host Natalie’s regular class. I really didn’t feel like teaching the next morning, but in talking with Natalie after her class and seeing her incredible enthusiasm for the workshop the next day and all the work she had done to prepare, something in me changed. I realized that my own fatigue could wait until I got home, and the student’s collective experience was more important. The resiliency I felt carried me through, and we had a great workshop. When I got home I slept for 12 hours.

Today, when you practice, tap into the deep reserves of stamina and power you have. This time we have together is pretty short. Let’s make this practice vibrate with energy, and at the end take a very deep Savasana.”

Then, when teaching a pose, relate the virtue you spoke of—in this case resiliency—and weave it into the postural instructions. Choose poses that work well with your theme; for example, include lots of standing poses held a little longer than normal:

“From Tadasana, jump to the side of your mat, feet spread wide for Prasarita Padottanasana—wide leg forward bend. Take a deep inhale and feel the pulsation of power in your breath as you soften your skin. Inhale and draw in power through your feet into the core of your body. Clasp your hands behind your back as you bend your knees slightly. Knees bent, move the top of your thighs back as you fold forward. On your next exhale, draw down your tailbone and send that reservoir of energy back through your legs and arms. With determination, extend a little further.”

If you are having a tough time coming up with a theme, you could reflect on:

- The hardest thing you’ve ever done.
- The most fun you’ve ever had.
- An experience that has touched you deeply.
- A time when you could have acted better, and which quality was missing at the time.

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Write a sentence or two about each one of those experiences, then find the central virtue or emotion. For example, in the statement, “The hardest thing I’ve ever done was telling my younger brother, who was 11 at the time, that our father had died,” the central feeling or virtue necessary was compassionate stability.

Take some time to write out a theme for a class, share it with your group and give each other feedback. Your class theme should connect your own experience to the collective experience of the group, illustrate a concept that can be embodied physically, and be simple and memorable.

Classroom Organization

In order to teach effectively and to give verbal and physical adjustments, the teacher needs to see the students. Although this sounds obvious, observation is one of the hardest parts of teaching Yoga. It may be quite easy to observe an individual student and give encouragement and supportive clarification of your instructions. It can be much harder when teaching a class of twenty to thirty students. Thankfully, there are techniques that can make the job a little easier.

Sight Lines

In order to scan quickly around the room to check for general form of the posture you have instructed, placement of feet and/or hands, and to see that the posture is being performed on the side (right or left) you have directed, do the following:

- Have the students line up their mats perpendicular to the longest wall in the room.
- If you have a large class, arrange another row in front of the first.
- Repeat as necessary.
- Arrange the second row so the mats are staggered in front of the first row, like movie theatre seats. This will allow you to make eye contact with each row from the front of the room, where you will be beginning the class.

Your ability to see a group of students easily will allow you to make efficient verbal adjustments to the group or to an individual within the group based on your observation. Eye contact—the ability of the students to also see you comfortably—will allow you to communicate and inspire them through facial expressions. Seeing the students faces, you can also determine their state of mind more easily and note signs of discomfort and skin color

When beginning the class, you will teach from the front of the room, where your mat is placed. For postures oriented facing forward like Tree posture, Equal Standing, and Chair posture, teach from the front of the room. When teaching postures that are oriented to the left and right, like Triangle, Side Angle, and Warrior Two, move to the side of the room the students are facing. From here, you can maintain better eye contact and communication. Use this approach for both standing and seated postures.

Postures that are oriented facing backwards like downward dog and standing forward fold are challenging, if not impossible, to maintain eye contact in. These postures can be used as an opportunity to give more physical adjustments.

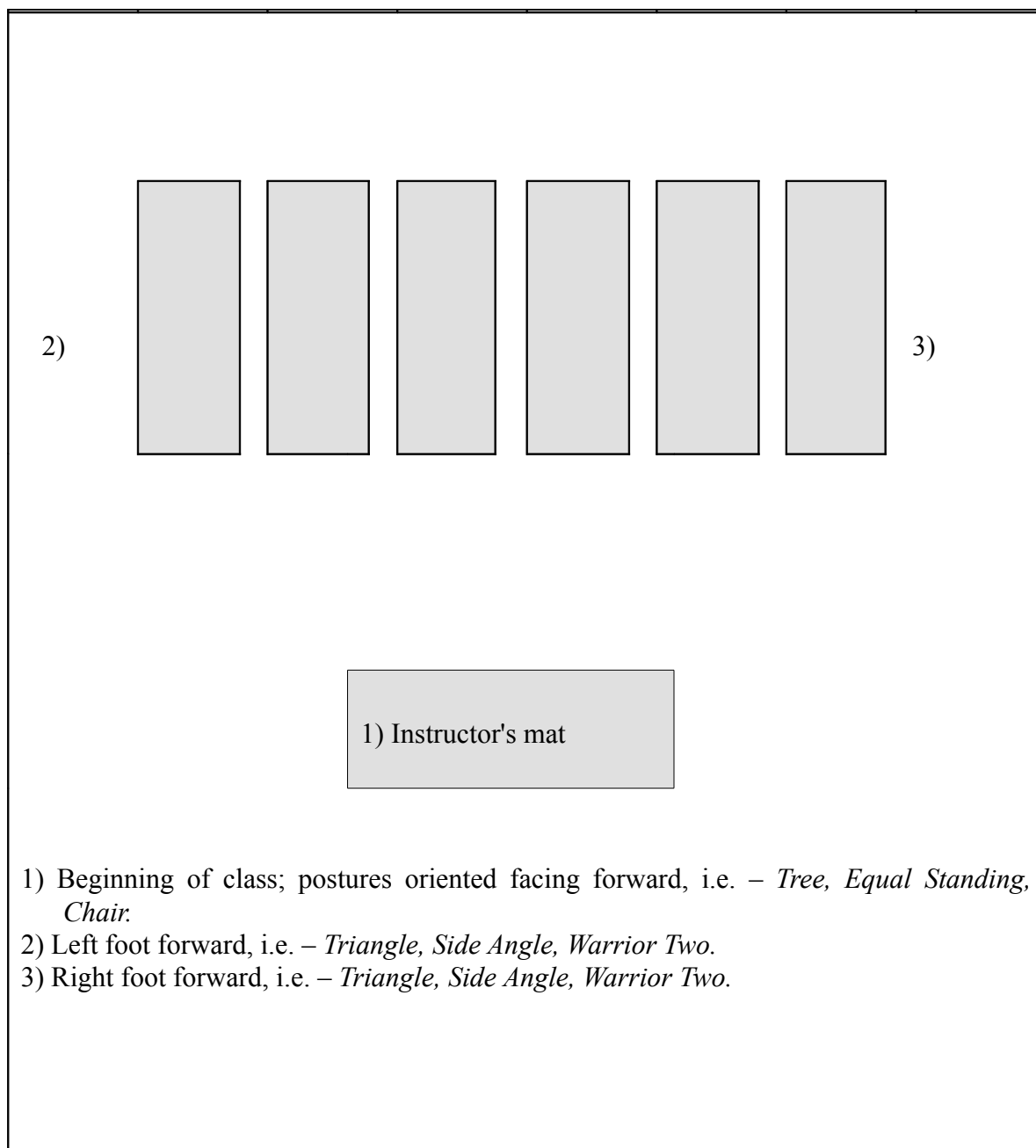
When the students are supine (lying on their backs) it is easiest to move through the group slowly to create better eye contact, using observation, verbal and physical adjustments.

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Regardless of the size of the room, keep the students no more than one mat width apart from each other. Students have a tendency to spread out, making it difficult for the teacher in terms of making observations and adjustments. Keeping students closer to one another will encourage more attention and energy from the class, and allow you to moderate your voice without having to project in more than one direction. Make sure you have enough room to move between the mats to make physical adjustments, if necessary.

Class Layout

Students set up mats to face the instructor's mat in this class layout example. There should be enough room for the instructor to move around the group, observe the class as a whole as well as having the ability to provide individual adjustments.



Offering Props

Decide beforehand in your class planning if you wish to perform postures that may require props. If so, set up a template, or example, of the props required for the class beside your own mat at the front of the room. When you greet students as they come in, indicate what props will be required. If you are teaching a course of classes, take the time at the beginning of one class to explain the use of props and get the students to see whether or not they could benefit from using a block or strap in their practice.

- Straps can extend the reach of a student, making it possible to use upper body strength to move more deeply into a forward bend. In this case, the strap is passed around the feet and grasped at either end. In such a manner, the spine can remain extended instead of overly curved.
- Blocks can be used to help tilt the pelvis forward into a neutral position for seated postures. Such devices can also be used to support the spine in a supine backbend.

There are a variety of uses for props. Although they are helpful, their use can also slow the class down considerably. If you are teaching a flow class, choose postures where the need for props is minimal.

Demonstration

Use demonstrations wisely. Demonstrating a posture or an approach can be very instructive, because a student cannot see the form of their own posture. Viewing the posture from another perspective is very helpful and can often explain what words alone cannot.

Nevertheless, demonstrations have the effect of breaking the continuity of flow within a class and altering the direction of concentration for the student. When you decide to use a demonstration, make sure it counts by doing the following:

- Make sure every student can see and hear you. Ask them to gather near you.
- Be concise as you explain the approach you want them to employ, or the focus of the posture you are demonstrating. Stay with one or two main points.
- If you are using a student to demonstrate on, quietly ask their permission first.
- When you have finished the demonstration, thank the students for their attention, and the student you have demonstrated on.
- Have the students go back to their mats and perform the same pose again, employing what was highlighted in the demonstration.

Silent Demonstration

It is an interesting and powerful phenomenon that the part of the brain used to control a given part of the body will also respond to a visual cue—if it is demonstrated in silence. Bypassing the language center of the brain can result in a deeper kinesthetic understanding. To perform a silent demonstration, do the following:

- Tell your class you will be demonstrating in silence, and tell them why.
- Ask them also to be silent.
- Move into the posture you are demonstrating with the breath.
- Point to the part of the body that is the focus of your demonstration and perform the approach you are highlighting.
- Move out of the posture before you begin speaking again.

Health Concerns

When teaching a new student, an intake form should be filled out by the student, listing any known health concerns. If the condition is serious, or you have reservations about the appropriateness of your class for that student, have them visit their doctor to have the condition diagnosed. Asana practice can be very beneficial for many common conditions but contraindicated for some. Refer students who wish to practice, but who also have serious health concerns, to a qualified yoga therapist, if you know one. Always carry insurance.

Injured Students

When teaching a student with a specific injury or ailment, observe closely their breathing, skin color and ability to approximate the poses. Be prepared to offer modifications to decrease the intensity for that student and remind them to always listen to indications of pain or discomfort within their body first, before following instructions given to the class as a whole. Working with an injury can be frustrating. Take the time to assess whether or not there is a real benefit for a particular student to participate in a supervised class or not, and do not allow an injured student to perform asana with misalignments that will create pain and possibly more injury. Suggest a private class as an alternative.

Using Props

The judicious use of props to support the body can be tremendously helpful to bring the body toward optimal alignment. For example, for students with restricted low back and hips, sitting on the height of a firm block will allow the bowl of the pelvis to tip forward enough for the spine to extend more fully upward, allowing a more optimal forward bend or twist to be performed. Bear in mind that the regular use of props will also slow the pace of your class down considerably. If you will be using props (blankets, blocks, straps) introduce the prop and explain the benefits of using it. Often students see a prop as a crutch and a criticism that they are not as able as other students. If they understand that a prop can help to align the body and move their practice forward, they will be more apt to use a prop if needed.

Specific Health Concerns

Chronic Fatigue

Use restorative postures and gentle inversions to stimulate circulation. Stay within the student's energy level without pushing their limits. Some active postures are helpful in strengthening muscles.

Headache

Remind the student to stay hydrated, as this is often a contributing factor to headaches. Release the shoulder and neck muscles with appropriate postures. While practicing simple Pranayama, emphasize long, smooth exhalations, closing the eyes to relax the nervous system and release tension.

Heart conditions

Tuning into the breath and simple front body opening, such as gentle back bends, can stimulate blood flow. A gentle practice is recommended in order to lessen strain on the circulatory system, building intensity slowly.

Constipation

Releasing the pelvic floor area where naturally downward-flowing prana can get stuck is key. Hip openers with an emphasis on release of energy and, again, lots of water is helpful.

Insomnia

Insomnia is often caused by an agitated nervous system. Postures that emphasize cooling and release are of great benefit to persons suffering from this condition. Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) and Halasana (poison-removing posture) are great for this. If the student is otherwise able, a relatively vigorous practice to release nervous energy, followed by a long Savasana to encourage relaxation, is beneficial.

Low back pain/Sciatica

The legs, our connection to the earth, are closely related to the health of the low back. The thigh bones need to ground and move energetically back toward the hamstrings to seat themselves at the center of the hip socket, and thereby allow low back tension to release. Perform standing forward bends, emphasizing elongation of the spine, while simultaneously moving the top of the thighs back. Physical adjustments using a strap draped over the crest of the hips and threaded through the legs and pulled firmly, will encourage a neutral spine and draw the thighs back.

Wrist pain

Check alignment of the crease of the wrists in down dog. Make sure the student is practicing asana on a firm surface. Emphasize strong muscular connection to the earth through all fingers and the rim of the hand. Padangustasana (hands under feet, standing forward bend) can release the wrist joint as well.

Yoga for Arthritis

Arthritis, literally “joint inflammation” affects 1 in 3 North American adults and is the leading cause of disability. To adapt yoga for arthritis, we need to understand what arthritis is, and distinguish between types of arthritis.

Osteoarthritis

This is essentially “wear and tear” on the joints. There are many possible causes for osteoarthritis, including trauma, overuse, chronic misalignment, deficiencies in chemical structure of the tissues of the joints, and more. Over the course of a lifetime, the cartilage that covers the joints can begin to wear away. Too much activity can injure the joint, too little, and adequate circulation and good stresses are not applied to the joint.

Over time, as cartilage is worn away it can be replaced by less effective forms of cartilage and eventually the bone itself is exposed. Rubbing “bone on bone” is extremely painful as bones are sensitive.

A joint in the body is an area where two bones come together, connected by tendons which attach muscle to bone, ligaments which attach one bone to another, and the ends of the bones themselves. The ends of the bones are covered with articular cartilage—a tough, shock-absorbing padding with a slick surface which enables the ends of the bones to glide easily past each other. This gliding is facilitated by a viscous lubricating fluid called “synovial fluid.” This entire mechanism is enclosed in a joint “capsule”—a sheath of connective tissue filled with joint fluid.

Muscles work in opposing pairs in order to move and stabilize each joint. Each joint in our bodies is, in essence, a relationship. We need these relationships to give us the ability to move in many different ways. Imagine having no knee joint, just one long bone from your hip to your ankle. Like any relationship, care and attention must be given to the joints in order for them to work optimally for a long time.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

This is the next most common form of arthritis after osteoarthritis, affecting about 2.5 million North Americans. This form of the disease is not caused by wear and tear, but by the body's own immune system turning against itself and destroying healthy tissue. Imagine cleaning a wooden floor: you can scrub just hard enough and just often enough to keep the floors clean, or you could scrub so hard you wear away the surface of the floor.

In rheumatoid arthritis, the main targets of attack are the linings of the joints, which become infiltrated with white blood cells which then attack healthy tissue.

The causes of arthritis are still not fully understood. If we turn the lens of Ayurvedic medicine toward this disease, it is clear both forms of the disease are inflammatory (pitta imbalance) but vata dosha is imbalanced (too much “space”) and a decrease in kapha dosha may contribute to a decrease in the amount of synovial fluid.

Keeping the body moving in a pain-free way is certainly a good idea for anyone, especially those suffering from arthritis in either form. Asana practice with a focus on appropriate postures, a practice that does not overheat the body or mind, and attention to precise

alignment will be of benefit for those suffering with this condition. Diet and lifestyle may also play a role.

Working one-on-one with the student is preferable, as well as having props available, such as a chair, blocks, blankets, and straps. Ask some questions about their goals for yoga practice, what parts of the body are problematic, also what they enjoy doing and what does not hurt! Start by teaching a smooth, audible breath as you would any student. Work with no pain, adapting simple postures with keen observation—both visual and auditory.

The key to working effectively and therapeutically is communication. Ask your client how they feel when working with a joint. Use “on a scale of 1 to 10” for pain, or “same, better, worse.” Maximum healing occurs when the joint is weight-bearing as much as possible, with no pain.

Yin Yoga may be effective as long as it can be applied with no pain. Yin Yoga theory states that stressing the connective tissue may increase the production of hyaluronic acid, the major constituent of synovial fluid—joint fluid.

Work within the clients abilities. Give simple exercises as homework. End with a restorative posture. Make sure they enjoy the process of yoga.

Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia describes a set of symptoms that include muscle and connective tissue pain and tenderness, loss of sleep, depression, decreased ability to concentrate, fatigue, and joint stiffness. Western medicine has not yet found the cause of the condition. Stress, genetic predisposition, and a major depression are believed to be possible causes.

From a Yogic/Ayurvedic perspective, (Ayur-Veda meaning Knowledge of Life) the cause of the symptoms referred to as fibromyalgia is a dis-integration. This dis-integration has mental, emotional, and physical components. The tissues of the body are not in a harmonious conversation. The cause may lie in a circumstance, memory or event that has not been completely received, digested, and assimilated. There may be a lack of belief that healing can occur. If this condition (or any condition) is enabled—meaning the client has any vested interest in remaining unwell—the possibilities for healing are decreased. Any healing modality requires the participation of the client to be ultimately effective.

More specifically, the elements of air and space within the individual’s constitution, may be out of balance, or increased. Ayurveda sees five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) distilled into specific constitutional traits called *doshas*. The Vata dosha contains air and space. As these elements are the least dense, most quick-moving of the five elements, conditions like Fibromyalgia may stem from an increase in this dosha. Thoughts move away from the cause of the depression, pain and discomfort instead of engaging with the cause of

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suffering. It is not so much the event, lifestyle, injury, or memory itself that is the cause, but rather the interpretation, or reception of it.

Therapy for Fibromyalgia would start with a conversation with the client, a history of events preceding the condition, and the full participation and enthusiasm of the client in their own healing, which would include homework and self-practice in asana, pranayama, and meditation.

The approach to asana for fibromyalgia starts with acceptance of zero pain during practice. When pain is present, the body/mind will again move away from rather than towards integration. Practice should begin with breath awareness and simple movements, with the focus on relative comfort in asana practice. Pranayama and meditation focus on integration of the body and mind, with a guided relaxation with blankets to provide more grounding.

Language

The human voice communicates many things: tone of voice, number of words, rapidity of speech, volume of voice, and, of course, content. In teaching yoga, the instructor uses all these things to communicate with the students, affecting brain, body, and heart.

Tone of Voice

Possibly the most important, tone of voice sets the mood for the class. Modulate your voice so it does not remain monotone. If you are excited about something, communicate your enthusiasm with your voice. If you are not genuinely excited about something, do not contrive to be. Such a pretension will become quite apparent to others. In an upbeat class, draw on the energy created by the asana practice to enliven your voice so as to encourage the class. In a more restorative class or slow-paced class, your voice and pacing should fit the intention of a more relaxed pace.

How Much to Say?

The more we learn as teachers, the more knowledge we want to transmit to others. Ultimately, great teaching is about facilitating a connection with your student's own inner wisdom. For beginner students, keep your instruction simple and empowering. Do not be afraid to repeat the same instruction more than once. Instruct one or two main points in a pose, relating it occasionally to your main teaching intention for that class. When referring to a body part or position, it is helpful to name it in more than one way. For example: "From the lunge, turn your back foot—your left foot—out 90 degrees. Place your right fingertips under your right shoulder and rotate your torso to the left."

Be Concise

A great author once said in a letter to his friend, "I wrote you a long letter because I did not have time to write a short one." It is challenging to be concise in your speech. Your student's undivided attention is a precious thing. Honor their focus by saying only what is necessary in your class as you teach. Create some occasional silence to allow them to reflect and embody the instructions.

Volume/Content

Stand in the room you will be teaching in when it is empty. Speak in a natural voice for yourself, no different than if you were talking to a friend at the other end of the room. You

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can practice by reading aloud, or rehearse teaching a posture. Your voice should comfortably fill the room without shouting. When you teach you will be moving around the room, not standing on your mat, so practice this as well. Get an audio recorder, place it at a corner of the room and practice teaching for 10 minutes. Listen to the recording and see if it is understandable and loud enough to hear comfortably. Listen for often repeated words like “O.K.,” “Nice,” “Good.” Record again, and eliminate any unnecessary words.

Now that you have listened to your speaking style, keep it natural. Continue to refine how you say what you say so it is as easy to listen to as possible. Now you can begin work on the content of what you are saying.

Posture Modification

When teaching a posture, consider its appropriateness for the particular class. Keep in mind that, due to bone structure differences, some students will be able to approximate an advanced posture with little or no experience, but others may never be able to perform it, given the proportion and structure of their arms, legs, and torso. In your class planning, using the template of posture categories, include fundamental postures first before adding complex postures requiring binding of the hands around legs or extremely deep forward or back bends. Ultimately, the student should leave your class feeling empowered. The asana practice is not a gymnastic competition.

When teaching a mixed-level class, highlight postures that could be modified up or down in difficulty, such as giving the option of *Balāsana* (child’s pose) as an alternative to down dog. Watch for full breath and optimal alignment rather than encouraging potentially injurious activity. Every student should be encouraged to approach their limitations mindfully.

In postures where the arms are bound around the legs, as in *Marichyasana-C*, simply instruct the pose without the hands bound as an alternative. Straps can be used to make seated forward bends accessible to tighter students.

When you instruct a class and give modifications, remember that a modification is meant to facilitate a deeper experience of yoga for those who choose it. To reflect a deeper experience, be mindful of the language you use.

Poor language:

“O.K., everyone should grab their toes in this seated forward bend... and if you can’t do that, then put your hands on your legs, and if you can’t even do that, then just sit up straight with a long spine...”

Better language:

“Take a seat with legs stretched out in front. Breathe deeply and extend your spine. Keeping your spine long, stretch the back body by reaching the crown of your head forward. If you like, take the toes.”

You are instructing the same posture, but the emphasis has switched from outer body position to the breath and the anatomical benefits of doing the posture.

Observation: Individual Student

Foundation

After scanning the room to notice that the basic form of the posture you are teaching has been approximated by the students, turn your attention to the foundation of the postures. Without a foundation that is stable and well-aligned, there is no point in giving instructions to align the rest of the body. Optimal expansion and extension cannot occur within the rest of the body from an unsteady foundation.

Distance between the student's feet in standing postures may vary somewhat depending on width of hips, length of legs and height of the student. Stance width can also be modified depending on the focus of the posture. A wider stance often offers more freedom of movement but less stability. The teacher's goal is to educate the student so they attain an optimal foundation for their body. Once a student knows their best width and length of a stance, you can turn your attention to the orientation of the feet.

Orientation of the feet:

In most traditional standing postures (Trikonasana, Parsvakonasana, Parsvottanasana, and the revolved versions), the front foot (the foot closest to the front of the mat) is positioned parallel to the side edges of the mat. The rear foot (the foot closest to the back edge of the mat) is turned out 45-90 degrees, depending on the posture. The student's abilities and bone structure play a role in determining an optimal angle and stance length.

Connection of the feet:

All four corners of the foot remain connected to the earth. Balanced action (the conscious engagement of muscle, condensing energy inward, and the reciprocal expansive force back to the earth) will create the ability to stretch out from the firmness of the feet, affecting the entire body.

Look for muscular activity in the legs of a student. If they are wearing shorts, that helps. If not, you can ask the class to roll up their yoga pants a bit so the ankles and shins are visible. Watch for aligned ankles that do not collapse inward or outward in Adho Mukha Svanasana (down dog). The four corners of the feet remain active even if all four corners are not physically connected to the earth i.e. the back foot in a lunge.

Knees:

The knees track directly over the ankles when the knee or knees are bent. This is crucial for the health of the knee.

General Mood

Watch for circulation in the skin, general expression, and eyes which should be alert but not bulging. Listen for smooth, deep breath. Ask how an individual student is doing if you are in doubt, but do not engage in long conversation and lose connection with the class.

Observe closely before giving specific verbal or physical adjustments. Observe the posture from the foundation up. Adjust the core of the posture (torso, hips, shoulders) before the periphery (fingers, arms, head). Start the adjustment by addressing the student by their first name: “Sally, firm the muscles in your legs and sink deeper into your right knee. Good.”

The Role of the Teacher

As a teacher, you occupy a sacred place. What you say and do will have an effect on every student in your class. Remember that you are there to serve the students. Cultivate personal integrity, honesty, humor, humility, and compassion in your life and in your class. Be ready to answer questions before or after class. Show up for your class early and prepare properly. Greet your students when they arrive and refer to them by name. Honor the unique qualities of every student as a manifestation of the Supreme. If you make a mistake in your teaching, for example, referring to a posture by the wrong name, mixing up left and right, go ahead and laugh with them about it. Ultimately, although you will be doing all the talking, it is not about you. Honor your teachers and commit to your role as a lifelong student, as well as a teacher of yoga. Treat all students with the same integrity and respect, following the ethical guidelines of the Yamas and Niyamas.

Remain committed to your personal yoga practice. Devotion will develop your teaching to a degree no amount of external training or workshops can. When possible, share your practice with friends and teachers and share your knowledge and joy for the practice. As time goes on, your practice will evolve and change. Some things will no longer feel appropriate as you become attracted to other aspects of practice. Notice this natural evolution and apply it to your teaching.

Sequencing Fundamentals

The sequence of postures you incorporate into your asana practice should relate to your initial intention for your practice or class. For example, doing a high-intensity, back-bending practice is not a great way to embody the intention of restoring energy to a tired body. A sequence of restorative postures, gentle twists, and hip openers would be more appropriate. First create an intention for your practice or class, then decide which asana will help achieve that intention.

In the beginning of practice, the body is tighter and more resistant. A general class outline creates a logical sequence to systematically open the body's major joints before attempting advanced postures.

Postures can be classified into categories related to their orientation and anatomical effect on the body. The categories are:

- Standing postures
- Hip openers
- Forward bends
- Backbends
- Twists
- Inversions
- Leg balancing
- Arm balancing
- Abdominals
- Restoratives
- Yin

Fixed and Variable Sequencing

There are a number of specific postures to work with within each category listed above. Some systems of yoga such as Ashtanga Vinyasa follow a specific sequence without variations. After the student completes one sequence of asana proficiently, they move to the next sequence, or series of postures.

The benefits of a fixed sequence are:

- The practitioner has a flow to follow that can be memorized and internalized.
- Progress can be measured against a fixed variable—the sequence being practiced.
- Self-led practice in a group or with friends is easier, as everyone knows the flow.

The drawbacks are:

- Postures within the fixed sequence may be difficult or impossible for some students to accomplish because of bone structure limitations.
- Following a fixed sequence may create a robotic approach to asana practice.
- Following a fixed sequence does not provide an opportunity to creatively sequence appropriate postures in personal practice or teaching.

As a new teacher or practitioner developing a self-practice, it is valuable to have a sequence to follow, and then begin to introduce a variety of postures to suit your own practice and to vary your teaching.

Principles of Sequencing

In general, class should begin with some form of centering and progress through a logical sequence of postures that move from simple to more complex and challenging. After the apex of the class, use postures that re-balance and quiet the body and mind before Savasana.

Sequence of posture categories for a balanced class:

- Seated posture–centering
- Warm-up (simple, accessible postures or movements i.e. cat/cow)
- Downward facing dog
- Sun Salutations
- Standing postures
- Inversions (headstand or variations)
- Arm balances
- Reclining hero posture (prep for backbends)
- Backbends
- Shoulder-stand
- Twists
- Forward bends
- Savasana

To create a class using this template, move down the list sequentially, picking the categories of postures that fit your class focus that day (a balance of postures, a focus on back-bending, forward-bending, arm balancing, and so on).

Entrainment – Centering the Class

There is a principle called “Entrainment” discovered by the physicist Christian Huygens in 1666. Essentially, the strongest energetic force within a given area will have the effect of

drawing the lighter, or weaker forces into its energetic pattern. An example of this can be seen in a clock with a pendulum. If several pendulum-driven clocks are placed in the same room and given a period of time to entrain, the heaviest pendulum will draw the lighter pendulums into its rhythmic pattern. This principle is also at work within any group of people, and is essential in creating a class environment where a transmission of true teaching can occur. As the teacher, you are in the role of the “heaviest pendulum.” This requires your energy to be as bright as possible: well rested, prepared, and connected to your inner teacher. Take the time to greet students as they come into class and have them sit comfortably, using props if necessary. Centering the class could include a short period of meditation, noticing the breath, performing an invocation or a simple OM. As you introduce yourself you can also provide a context for the class, using your intention or theme to add meaning. When you begin to give postural instructions, pause to observe that your instructions are being heard and followed before moving to the next posture. This will also create entrainment and provide a safer class environment.

Sequencing a Mixed Level Class

All classes are really mixed level, as no two students will have exactly the same ability, energy level, and physical limitations. Making the class accessible to all students and challenging enough for the most able of students is one of the goals of a successful class. Utilize the options of Vinyasa, jump-switch or step up and back for transitions.

Use the following sequence for your self-practice. Internalize the sequence before you teach it: this will allow you to place your attention on the students rather than on trying to remember the next posture.

- Seated posture (legs crossed, half or full lotus).
- Introduce intention. Begin Ujjayi breath
- *Supta Padangustasana* (hands behind thigh)
- *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (down dog)
- *Lunge* (fingers on floor)
- *Surya Namaskara* (3 times)
- *Trikonasana* (triangle pose)
- *Parsvakonasana* (side angle)
- *Parsvottanasana*
- *Prasarita Padottanasana* (wide leg standing forward bend) A and C
- *Utthita Hasta Padangustasana* (hand to big toe balance)
- *Rajakapotasana prep* (king pigeon posture prep.)
- *Agnistambhasana* (double pigeon)
- *Bakasana* (crow)
- *Balasana* (child’s pose)
- *Navasana* (boat) variations
- *Virasana* (hero)

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- *Supta Virasana* (supine hero)
- *Ustransana* (camel)
- *Setu Bandhasana* (bridge posture)
- *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (full wheel) variations
- *Marichyasana-C* (twist)
- *Dandasana* (staff posture)
- *Upavistha Konasana* (wide leg forward bend)
- *Janu Sirsasana* (one leg forward bend)
- *Meditation/Pranayama*
- *Savasana*

Creating Intention

Before teaching, create an intention for your class. This intention should serve the student's highest good and reflect your own understandings in your practice and life. An intention can be specific, and have an effect physically, emotionally, and philosophically.

The Intention of “Releasing Tension”

Physically

Choose postures and an approach that lend themselves to this intention. An emphasis on smooth breath, stable foundation and approaching postures without aggression will reinforce your intention of releasing tension. Teaching difficult or unfamiliar postures would be contrary to the initial intention for this class.

Emotionally

Consider the emotional qualities that a release of tension engenders. Qualities such as surrender, openness, lack of fear, and resiliency are examples of emotionally embodying this intention.

Philosophically

The realm of thought is affected by the physical body and the state of the emotional body. All three bodies, in fact, exert and affect each other. Reflect upon what qualities of thought a release or lack of excessive tension promotes. These qualities might include curiosity, self-examination, seeing things with less initial judgment, and a less fearful and more open-hearted approach to others.

The art of embodying an intention when you teach a class is the ability to weave your intention into the physical postures so that thought, emotion, and physicality resonate together and the practice becomes an experience of reconnection and revelation.

The Practice and Service of Teaching Yoga

“There is a fundamental purpose for our lives. To know it, we must understand where life comes from and where it is going. We must consider life’s highest potential for development and look beyond our immediate goals to what we ultimately want to accomplish.”

— Paramahansa Yogananda

Yoga is the scientific art of understanding the Self. It begins with simple things like noticing the placement of hands and feet on a mat, and the movements and actions of the body. As the practitioner’s mindfulness and skill increases, perception increases as well. Yoga becomes both the stone that sharpens the edge of the tool and the tool itself. As Yogis, our ability to see more clearly, to notice not just the forms of postures and flow of the body’s energy, but to see our own moods, desires, and fears will also become honed. This is why a regular self-practice of yoga is essential as a teacher. We cannot help our students without first honoring ourselves.

Teaching yoga is one of the highest forms of service there is. Yoga can heal the body, bring equanimity to the mind, and re-connect people with their true nature and with each other. Blending compassion with non-attachment and self-honoring, a teacher’s abilities will grow and refine over the years. However, teaching too many classes, neglecting personal practice, or allowing the ego to become overly attached to praise or criticism can lead to a decreased connection with the Self and, in the end, pose great difficulty for a teacher. Teaching yoga can be one of the best ways to remain a dedicated student.

Teaching yoga is challenging. Creating a sacred space, inspiring students to give their best, and balancing determination with playfulness all require practice. Noticing the initial mood of the class and meeting the students where they are takes a high degree of observation. As a teacher, you must create a lifestyle that supports your yoga practice, and your teaching practice.

PRACTICUM

Homework

You must fulfill your non-contact hours in study and practice. It is understood that throughout this course you will develop a personal yoga practice that includes asana practice, meditation, Pranayama and study of philosophy. Below, please answer the questions in your own words and in paragraph form:

- 1) Describe your experience of asana practice, the differences between self-practice, practice with friends, and led practice.
- 2) Describe how to set the foundation in the feet, and why it would be important before beginning asana practice, physically, and philosophically.
- 3) Explain the difference between asana practice with bandhas, and without.
- 4) Why is Savasana important?
- 5) Describe muscular tension and compressive forces within the body. Explain why it might be important to be able to differentiate between the two.
- 6) Write a sequence of postures for a fifty-five-year-old new student with very tight hamstrings.
- 7) Write a sequence of postures for a twenty-year-old flexible, but muscularly undeveloped student.
- 8) Prescribe some postures for a forty-year old body-builder who would like a ten-minute daily routine she can do herself to provide more mobility in her shoulders.
- 9) Why is the knee joint one of the most injured joints?
- 10) Describe your experience, if any, of the energetic body and its affects on your moods and thoughts.
- 11) Who is B.K.S. Iyengar and who taught him yoga?
- 12) How many elements are present in the human body in Tantric philosophy?
- 13) Who was Patanjali, what is a “Sutra,” and what is “Citta”?
- 14) What is the most important role a yoga teacher plays?
- 15) Describe a physical adjustment to aid a student with low back pain, who is otherwise uninjured.
- 16) Describe your experience of a 5-minute meditation, a 15-minute, and a 30-minute.

Class Sequences

- Write a sequence of postures for a 15-minute class, leaving some time for centering and a brief relaxation. The class is an introduction to yoga for new students.

- Write a flow of postures for a fast-paced, 30 minute class with a focus on twists and forward bends.
- Write a sequence of more restorative postures, spending up to 3 minutes in each posture. Class is 45 minutes long.

Develop Intention for Classes

- Create an overall class intention based on the idea of strength. Consider the various ways we experience strength: physically, emotionally, and psychologically.
- Create an intention based on the concept of receiving and giving.
- Create an intention based on the concept of Yin and Yang, or any two polarities.
- Create your own intention for self-practice, write a series of postures that work well with it.
- Choose a poem or song and relate the words to a class intention.
- Choose a book (preferably related to yoga in some way) that resonates with you. Write a brief synopsis of the book, why you like it, and how it could benefit someone.
- Tell someone some detail you notice that reveals an innate quality they possess.

Class Preparation Sheet (You are not required to teach 36 postures per class. Fill in what you will teach).

Name:		Date:	
Type of Class (<i>all levels, beginner, flow, etc</i>):			
Intention (<i>What is your class about?</i>):			
Duration:			
Props needed:			
Demonstration focus (<i>if applicable, a specific posture or approach</i>):			
Asana Practice (<i>Chose postures that work well within your overall class intention</i>)			
Posture	Time held or breath count	Posture	Time held or breath count
1		2	
3		4	
5		6	
7		8	
9		10	
11		12	
13		14	
15		16	
17		18	
19		20	
21		22	
23		24	
25		26	
27		28	
29		30	
31		32	
33		34	
35		36	

Self-evaluation

- How did your intention/theme for class work with the postures?
- How was:
 - your timing?
 - your voice?
 - your general observation of the class?
 - your movement around the room?
 - your verbal adjustments?
- Describe your physical adjustments.
- Describe your demonstration. Was it simple and effective?
- How did you feel while teaching (elated, nervous, calm...)?

SANSKRIT TERMS

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

Advaita (“non-duality”): the teaching that there is only one reality (Atman, Brahman), especially as found in the Upanishads; see also Vedanta

Ahimsa (“non-harming”): non-violence to self or others in thought or action

Ananda (“bliss”): the condition of divine joy, which is an essential quality of the ultimate reality

Anga (“limb”): a fundamental category of the Yogic path, such as the eight limbs of Ashtanga—asana, dharana, dhyana, niyama, pranayama, pratyahara, samadhi, yama

Angustha: big toe

Asana (“seat”): a physical posture originally meaning only meditation posture, but subsequently, in Hatha Yoga, this aspect of the Yogic path was greatly developed

Ardha (“half”): used often in descriptions of asana; “Ardha Chandrasana” or half-moon posture

Atman (“self”): the transcendental Self, or Spirit, which is eternal—our true nature or identity

Avidya (“ignorance”): the root cause of suffering (Duhkha)

Ayurveda (“life knowledge”): one of India’s traditional systems of medicine

Baddha: caught; restrained; bound

Bakasana: crow posture

Balasana: child’s pose

Bhakti: (“devotion”): the love of the Divine or the Guru as a manifestation of the Divine

Bhakti Yoga: (“yoga of devotion”): a major branch of the yoga tradition, using emotions to connect with the ultimate reality

Bhujangasana: serpent posture

Brahmacharya (from brahma and acharya—“brahmic conduct”): the discipline of self-restraint, pertaining to sexual conduct

Brahman (“that which has grown expansive”): the ultimate reality

Chakra (“wheel”): a psycho-energetic center of the subtle body

Chaturanga Dandasana: four-limbed staff posture

Cit (“consciousness”): the super-conscious ultimate reality

Citta (“that which is conscious”): ordinary consciousness, the mind, as opposed to cit

Danda: (“staff”)

Dandasana: staff posture

Drishti: (“view/sight”): a point of gaze such as at the tip of the nose or the spot between the eyebrows

Gayatri-mantra: a famous Vedic mantra, one of the oldest in the yoga tradition

Guna (“quality”): refers to any of the three primary “qualities” or constituents of nature – *tamas* (the principle of inertia), *rajas* (the dynamic principle), and *sattva* (the principle of lucidity)

Hasta: hand

Hatha Yoga (“forceful yoga”): a major branch of yoga emphasizing the physical aspects of the path, notably postures (*asana*) and cleansing techniques (*shodhana*), but also breath control (*Pranayama*). Hatha refers to the relationship of opposites

Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika (“Light on Hatha Yoga”): one of the classical manuals on Hatha Yoga

Janu: knee

Jivan-mukti (“living liberation”): the state of liberation while being embodied

Jnana (“knowledge/wisdom”): both worldly knowledge and world-transcending wisdom

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Kali: a goddess embodying the fiery aspect of the Divine

Kali-yuga: the dark age of spiritual and moral decline, said to be current now. An age where light is needed desperately

Karma (“action”): activity of any kind

Karma Yoga (“yoga of action”): the liberating path of self-transcending action

Karna: ear

Kona (“angle”): as in Baddha Konasana (bound angle pose)

Kosha (“casing”): any one of five “envelopes” surrounding the transcendental Self

Kumbhaka (“pot-like”): breath retention during Pranayama

Kundalini-shakti (“coiled power”): the serpent power or spiritual energy, which exists at the lowest energetic center of the body which must be awakened and guided to the center at the crown to awaken fully

Kundalini Yoga: the yogic path focusing on the kundalini energy as a means of liberation

Mantra: a sacred sound or phrase, such as om or om namah shivaya, that has a transformative effect

Mantra Yoga: the yogic path utilizing mantras as the primary means of practice

Matsyendra (“Lord of Fishes”): an early Tantric master—the seated twist is named after him

Maya (“she who measures”): the illusory manifestation of Consciousness

Muhka: face

Nada (“sound”): the inner sound, as it can be heard through the practice of Nada Yoga by closing the flaps of the ears

Nadi (“conduit”): one of 72,000 subtle channels along which the life force (prana) circulates, of which the three most important ones are the ida-nadi, pingala-nadi, and sushumna-nadi

Nadi Shodhana (“channel cleansing”): the practice of purifying the conduits, especially by means of breath control, which moves the body’s subtle energies (Pranayama)

Namaskara: greeting or salutation

Nava: boat

Niyama (“self-restraint”): the second limb of Patanjali’s Eightfold Path, which consists of purity (saucha), contentment (santosha), austerity (tapas), study (svadhyaya), and dedication to the Lord (ishvara-pranidhana)

Om: the original mantra symbolizing the ultimate reality

Pachima: west

Pada: foot

Padma: lotus

Patanjali: compiler of the *Yoga Sutras*

Prana (“life/breath”): the life force sustaining the body

Pranayama (from prana and ayama): the practice of movement of prana by the use of the breath

Pratyahara (“withdrawal”): sensory inhibition, the fifth limb (anga) of Patanjali’s Eightfold Path

Parsva: side

Parivrtta: twisted or revolved

Prasarita: spread out

Purusha: the transcendental Self (atman) or Spirit

Raja: king

Sadhana (“accomplishing”): spiritual discipline leading to siddhi (“perfection” or “accomplishment”); the term is specifically used in Tantra

Samadhi (“putting together”): the state in which the meditator becomes one with the object of meditation, the eighth limb (anga) of Patanjali’s Eightfold Path

Samsara: The inconstant world of change, as opposed to the ultimate reality

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Samskara: the subconscious impression left behind by each act of volition; akin to a predisposition for certain behaviors which results in Karma

Sarvangasana: shoulder-stand posture

Sat (“being/reality/truth”): the ultimate Consciousness

Satya (“truth/truthfulness”): truth, a designation of the ultimate Reality; also the practice of truthfulness, which is an aspect of moral discipline (yama)

Shakti (“power”): the ultimate Reality in its feminine, creative aspect

Shakti-pata (“descent of power”): the process of initiation by means of the transmission of shakti by an advanced or even enlightened adept (siddha)

Shankara: the eighth-century adept who was the greatest proponent of non-dualism (Advaita Vedanta)

Sirsasana: headstand

Shiva (“He who is benign”): the Divine, the unmanifested energy

Shiva-Sutra (“Shiva’s Aphorisms”): like the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, a classical work on yoga, as taught in the Shaivism of Kashmir; authored by Vasugupta (ninth century C.E.)

Shodhana (“cleansing/purification”): a category of purification practices in Hatha Yoga

Shraddha (“faith”): a pure and constant state of faith

Siddha (“accomplished”): a Tantric adept

Siddha Yoga: a designation applied especially to the yoga of Kashmiri Shaivism, as taught by Swami Muktananda

Spanda (“vibration”): Kashmir’s Shaivism’s understanding that ultimate Reality itself “vibrates”; a non-sequential pulse of creation

Supta: sleeping, lying down

Surya: sun

Sushumna-nadi: the central prana current in or along which the serpent power (kundalini-shakti) must ascend toward the crown chakra

Sutra (“thread”): a short verse; a work consisting of aphoristic statements, such as Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* or Vasugupta’s *Shiva-Sutra*

Svana: (“dog”)

Tantra (“loom” or “to weave”): Sanskrit work containing Tantric teachings; the tradition of Tantrism, in which the human body is seen as a condensation of the Supreme

Tapas (“glow/heat”): austerity, a purifying heat of discipline

Tattva (“thatness”): a fact or reality; a particular category of existence; the manner in which universal consciousness has stepped itself down in vibration to create the physical world—the “Tattvas”

Tri: three

Upanishad (“sitting near”): a type of scripture representing revealed wisdom

Upavistha: seated

Urdhva: upward

Utthita: extended

Vairagya: (“dispassion”)

Vasistasana: side arm balance

AN EXAMPLE WORKSHOP

An Example Workshop – Chair Yoga

As you gain skill teaching regular classes, you may want to offer workshops on specific aspects of yoga—the ones you understand and enjoy teaching the most. Here are a few examples of handout materials for specific workshops. Generally, the duration of any one workshop works well at 2.5 hours. More than this and both the students and you will begin to fatigue and get hungry. You can offer workshops through a studio, generally splitting the income, often 70% instructor, 30% studio.

Chair Yoga Workshop

In this workshop, we will explore how to adapt yoga postures, breath and meditative techniques for those with limited mobility, and how to use a chair as a prop for inversions and backbends for students with a regular asana practice.

For many folks, getting down and back up onto a mat on the floor poses a real difficulty. These yogis may not be in their later years—people can experience limits in their range of motion at any age. This can be due to accident, sedentary lifestyle, arthritis or a host of other causes.

Working with a chair has great benefits. A chair provides a prop to help balance, a surface to bear weight so the body can safely and comfortably shift into alignment, and of course, a comfortable seat.

For those with limited mobility, the following sequence of poses will provide an opportunity to move breath and energy into parts of the body that may not see much action. If you are teaching Chair Yoga to students in their later years, remember a few key points:

Older students may be unfamiliar with names of postures, and may have difficulty hearing you. For safety, arrange the chairs on top of a mat so they do not slip. Position the chairs in a circle, and use a chair yourself to demonstrate as you teach.

Take a few minutes to point to and name the parts of the body you will be asking them to move (big toe, shin, shoulder-blade, collarbones). This will clarify your teaching and give you an opportunity to see if the students are responding to these simple requests before getting more complicated.

Balance may be an issue, as well as blood pressure, eyesight, and osteoporosis. Some students may not tell you what, if any, conditions they have. If you are working through a care facility, let the administration know what will be involved in your class so they can register the appropriate students.

Keep it light and fun. These students often need a laugh, connection with others, and an afternoon to look forward to more than philosophical analysis or detailed yoga history.

Make sure none of the chairs are broken or flimsy, and that students who cannot rest their feet comfortably on the floor have blocks or another prop to raise the floor high enough for them.

When you begin your Chair Yoga class

Take a few moments to introduce yourself and have the participants introduce themselves. It is always fun and interesting to see why they may be interested in yoga. It also gives you an opportunity to micro-adapt your sequence to today's class.

You may also want to set an intention or a theme for the class, or ask the students to take a moment to set their own intention. This intention could be as simple as feeling better by the end of class or expressing gratitude to someone they love by caring for themselves. It is said the best thing you can do for your kids is take care of yourself.

Begin with introducing yogic breath. Moving with a subtle and determined nasal inhale and exhale allows each student to reconnect with their life-force, and move within the envelope of the breath. This will calm the nervous system, introduce more oxygen into the body, and give the students an auditory focal point.

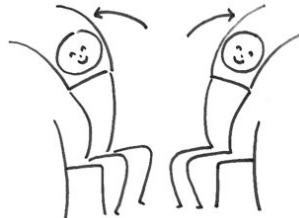
Start with simple movements to warm the body and engage the breath. If you have a chance to learn the student's names, refer to them by name. Look for the positive aspects of what they can do and occasionally give specific praise, " Rhonda, you are reaching up so smoothly–nicely done!"

Sequence for students with limited mobility

Yogic breath



Swaying Palm



Teaching Hatha Yoga

Movement with the breath



Simple twists



Forward bend with one leg



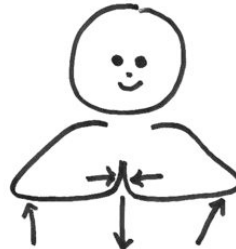
Backbend – heart to the sky



Fingers interlaced,



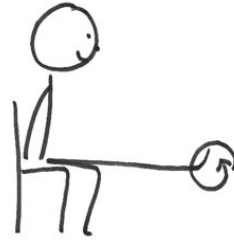
stretching forward then up



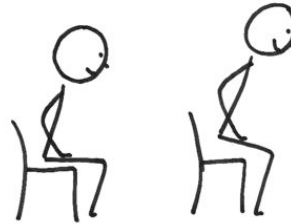
Wrist strength and align – press palms lift elbows

Teaching Hatha Yoga

One leg lifts, circle ankles and open toes



Chair pose – hands on thighs and lift off chair



Hip opener cross ankle over knee, lean forward



Downward dog on back of chair

Warrior one on back of chair



Push-up on back of chair



Modified Sun Salutation

From behind chair, step back, lunge, both sides.
Downward dog, push-up
Step forward warrior one, both sides
Step up, rest.

Standing twists – foot on chair



Warrior two – seated

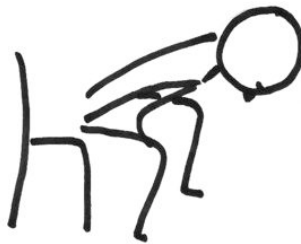


Side angle – seated



Forward fold, wider legs

seated



To end the practice:

- Deep breath (pranayama of your choice)
- Yoga for the eyes (looking up with eyes closed to strengthen eye muscles)
- Sitting quietly

When you are finished your Chair Yoga class, thank everyone for attending and make yourself available for questions.

Chair yoga inversions and backbends

The yoga master B.K.S. Iyengar developed the use of the chair to assist with postures for even advanced yoga students. Below are a few examples you can use in your practice or when teaching a regular class. Many of the Iyengar chair poses require the use of a folding chair with no back.

Backbends over chair with blanket



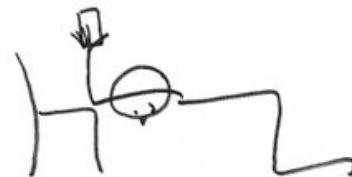
Shoulder-stand using chair



Legs up inversion



Shoulder opener – kneeling with block



ILLUSTRATIONS

Posture Flows

Surya Namaskara



1. Tadasana



2. Urdhva Hastasana



3. Uttanasana

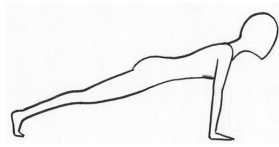


4. Uttanasana (extended)

5.



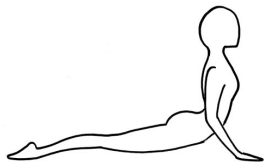
Adho Mukha Svanasana



6. High Plank



7. Chaturanga Dandasana



8. Urdhva Mukha Svanasana



9. Adho Mukha Svanasana
(5 Breaths)



10. Step Up/ Uttanasana
(extended)



11. Uttanasana



12. Urdhva Hastasana

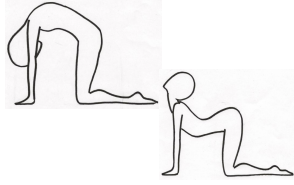


13. Tadasana

All Levels Asana Practice



1. Supta Padangustasana



2. Cat/Cow



3. Adho Mukha Svanasana



4. Lunge



6. Trikonasana



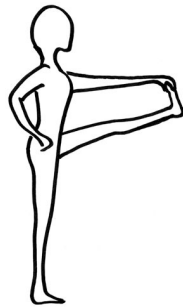
7. Parsvakonasana



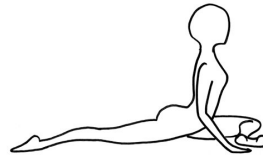
8. Parsvottanasana



9. Prasarita Padottanasana-A



10. Utthita Hasta Padangustasana



11. Rajakapotasana



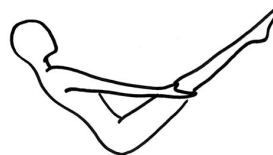
12. Agnistambhasana



13. Bakasana



14. Balasana



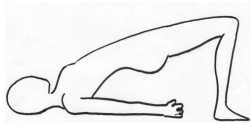
15. Navasana (variations)



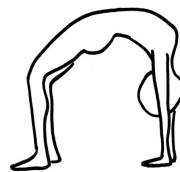
16. Virasana



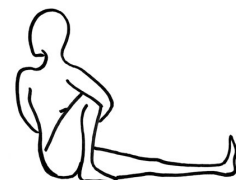
17. Supta Virasana



18. Setubandhasana

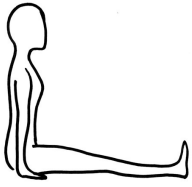


19. Urdhva Dhanurasana



20. Marichyasana-C

Teaching Hatha Yoga



21. Dandasana



22. Upavistha Konasana



23. Janu Sirsana



24. Salamba Sarvangasana



25. Meditation/Pranayama



26. Savasana

Posture Syllabus

Your notes here:



Adho Mukha Svanasana



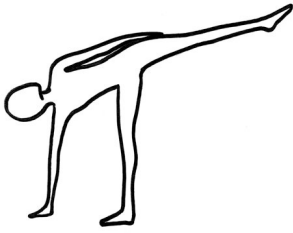
Agnistambhasana



Ardha Baddha Padma
Paschimottanasana



Ardha Bhikasana



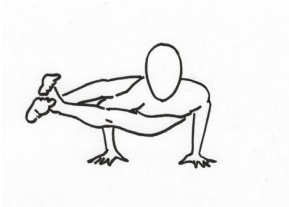
Ardha Chandrasana



Ardha Matsyendrasana



Ashtangasana (eight-point pose)



Astavakrasana



Baddha Konasana-A



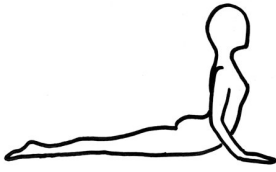
Baddha Konasana-B



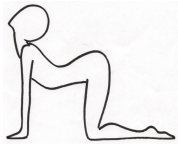
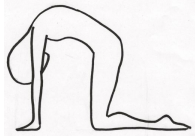
Bakasana



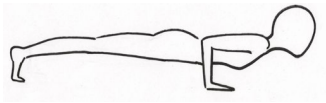
Balasana



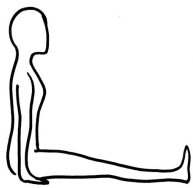
Bhujangasana



Marjaryasana (Cat/Cow)



Chaturanga Dandasana



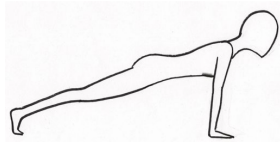
Dandasana



Halasana



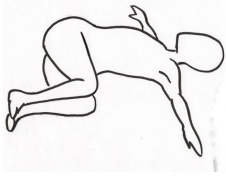
(Handstand) Adho
Mukha Vrksasana



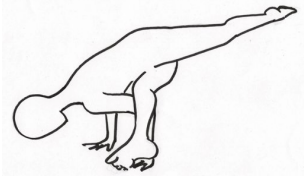
(High Plank)
Phalakasana



Janu Sirsasana



Jathara Parivartanasana



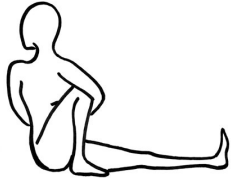
Koundinyasana



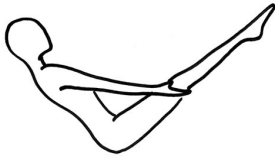
Lunge



Marichyasana-A



Marichyasana-C (Twist)



Navasana



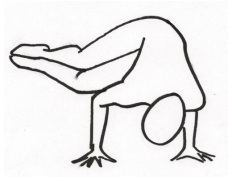
Padahasthasana



Padangusthasana



Padmasana



Parsva Bakasana



Parivrtta Trikonasana



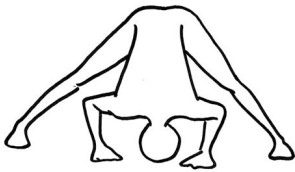
Parsvottanasana



Parsvakonasana



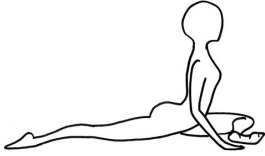
Pinchamayurasana



Prasarita Padottanasana-A



Purvottanasana



Rajakapotasana



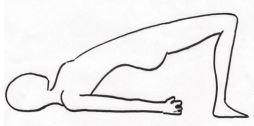
Salamba Sarvangasana



Samasthiti/Tadasana



Tolasana



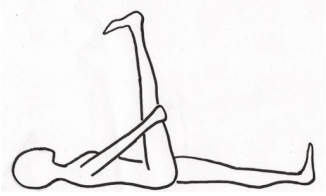
Setu bandhasana



Sirsasana



Supta Balasana



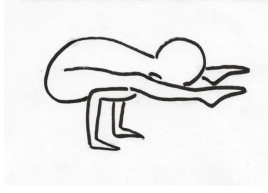
Supta Padangustasana



Supta Padangusthasana-B



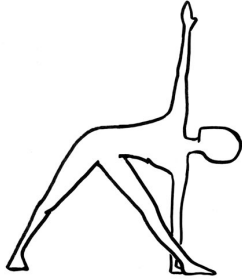
Supta Virasana



Tittibhasana



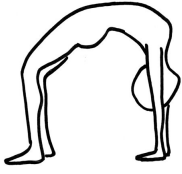
Trianga Mukhaikapada
Paschimottanasana



Trikonasana



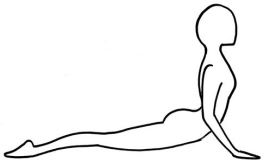
Upavistha Konasana



Urdhva Dhanurasana



Urdhva Hastasana



Urdhva Mukha Svanasana



Ustrasana

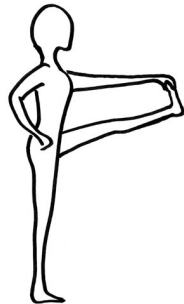
Utkatasana



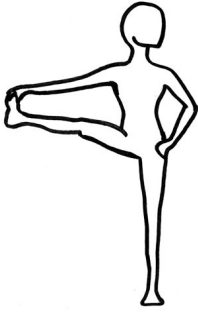
Uttanasana



Uttanasana – spine extension



Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana-A



Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana-B



Utthita Padangusthasana-C



Vasisthasana



Virabhadrasana-A



Virabhadrasana-B



Virasana



Vrksasana

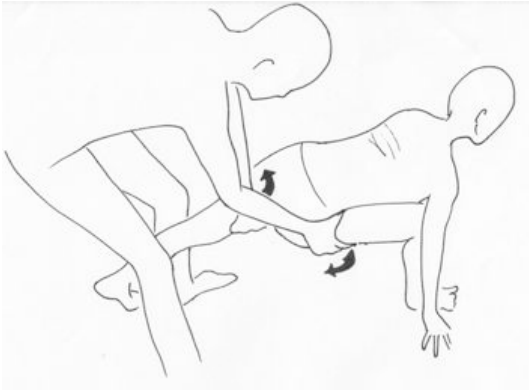
Hands-on Adjustments

Your notes here:

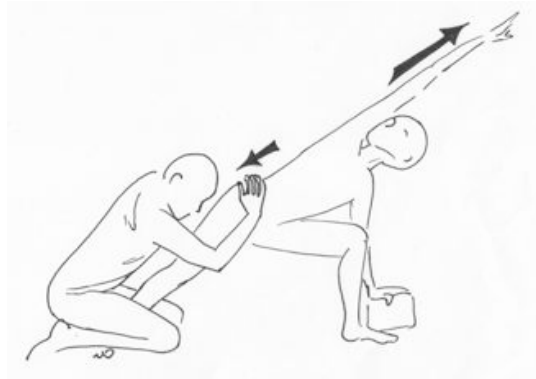
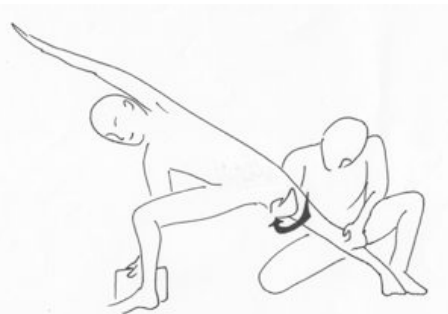
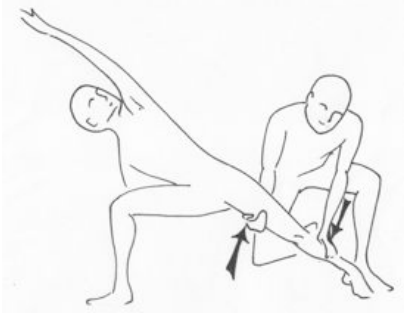
Adho Mukha Svanasana



Lunge



Parsvakonasana



Paschimottanasana



Rajakapotasana



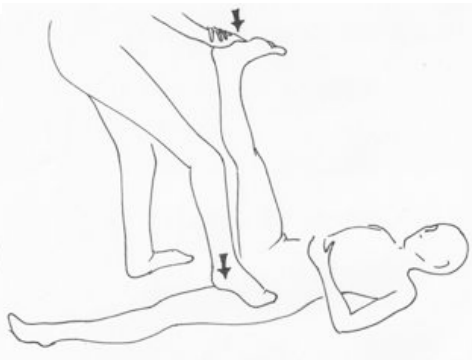
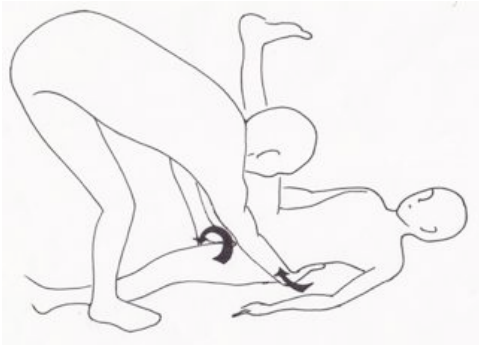
Savasana



Setu Bandhasana



Supta Padangustasana



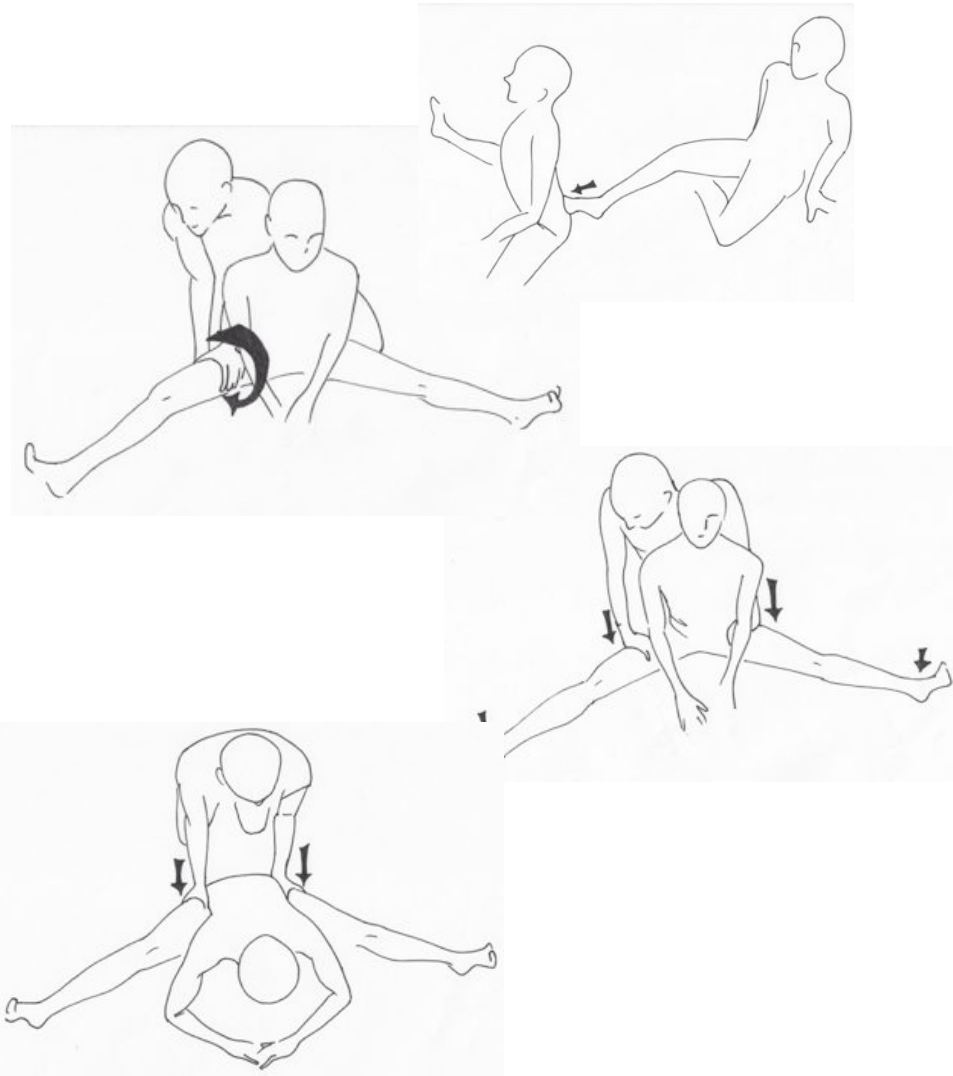
Tadasana



Trikonasana



Upavistha Konasana



Uttanasana

