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Yoga teacher Tommy Rosen  
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Incoming editor Sarah Kent (left) with Natalya Podgorny.

## Turning Over a New Leaf

When I find myself yearning for a respite from life at the retreat center I call home, I head for the surrounding woods. One spot in particular has become my private refuge: towering arches of hemlock and maple splinter the sunlight, moss-upholstered rocks and tree roots offer themselves as perches for meditation and contemplation, waterfall choirs and a fragrant earthiness simultaneously subdue and awe my senses. Here in this forest cathedral, tranquil solitude yields to an expansive sense of interconnection.

Our relationship with forests is somewhat paradoxical. We know that they foster biodiversity, prevent soil erosion, filter water, and soak up vast quantities of carbon dioxide; yet we continue to engage in unsustainable forestry practices on a grand scale. In honor of the United Nations' International Year of Forests, this issue features a conversation with environmental activist Vandana Shiva (page 54) about the deeper lessons the forest can teach us—contentment, compassion, divinity, and even democracy. It's no wonder the Vedic sages revered the forest as the ideal setting for spiritual retreat.

In the context of the inward journey, the forest represents both a sanctuary and a crucible—a return home and a crossing into the unknown. Even in my sylvan haven, I am instinctively alert to whatever else might be prowling nearby. Spiritual literature abounds with allegory about the dark side of the wilderness experience—beasts, demons, privations, and temptations that must be overcome before one earns access to the riches of the

inner realm. The *Ramayana*, for example, follows Rama, Sita, and Lakshman into forest exile, where they encounter hardship, desolation, and fierce, flesh-eating *rakshasas* (demons). The deep forest is the unfamiliar territory where we must shed our comfortable persona—all the limiting ways in which we identify ourselves.

This can be somewhat unnerving, as founding editor Deborah Willoughby discovered when she was abruptly forced into the *vanaprastha*, or forest-dweller, stage of life. In her feature, “Enlightened Aging” (page 42), she explores how the ancient yogic paradigm for human development coaxes us into a journey of inner discovery in our later years, as we withdraw from external pursuits and identities. While the internal forest—at times more a wild jungle than a serene grove—might not

seem particularly inviting from our culture's pleasure-oriented perspectives on retirement, the sojourn ultimately leads to deep and lasting fulfillment.

Deborah is not alone in finding her way into new territory. I too am moving on: this is my final issue as *Yoga International's* editor. I am pleased to announce that senior editor Sarah Kent will be stepping into this role. Under her skillful leadership, *YI* will continue to explore the deeper dimensions of yoga while offering you timeless tools for transforming your life.

As I set off for parts unknown, I'm saddened to leave the editorship and the extraordinary team of people at the Himalayan Institute, where I've had the privilege to work, live, study, and wander in the forest for the past five years. The magazine has been both an exacting teacher and a labor of love. Even so, I look forward to discovering what the next phase of life holds for me. And this isn't good-bye—I'll be meeting you in these pages as editor at large.

Our staff may be changing, but the heart of *YI* remains the same: you, our readers. The entire magazine team welcomes—and relies on—your feedback. When you've had a chance to peruse this issue, tell us what you think by taking our reader survey at [yogainternational.com/survey](http://yogainternational.com/survey). And make time to absorb the wisdom of the woods in this season of transition. ■

**Natalya Podgorny**, Editor

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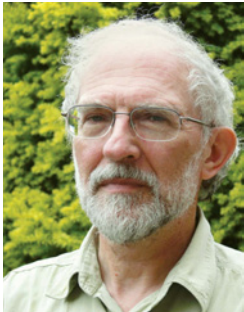


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## CONTRIBUTORS



In this issue's Art of Asana column (page 30), Anusara teacher and book author **Christina Sell** explores the concepts of unity and duality with a challenging sequence leading up to *vishvamitrasana*. "In Anusara Yoga," explains Sell, "we see the asana as embodied philosophy, and when we practice in that way, we open ourselves to know the philosophy more directly." Sell serves on three Anusara Yoga committees—Certification Assessment, Curriculum Development, and Yoga Ethics—and is in the process of establishing an Anusara training center in Texas.



About the time **Dennis Waite** received his university degree in chemistry, he realized he was never going to gain any lasting satisfaction from worldly pursuits, so he began looking into various aspects of philosophy. Eventually he found the answers he was seeking in *Advaita*, the philosophy of nondualism. Although he retains a keen interest in science, he is quick to add, "I am also aware of its limitations—hence my indignation when scientists attempt to explain away Consciousness!" His exploration of "Science and Consciousness" can be found in this issue's Vedanta column (page 62).



Los Angeles-based vinyasa flow and Kundalini Yoga teacher **Tommy Rosen** is the first man to grace *YI*'s cover in over five years. "When I look at a well-done yoga pose, I want to try it whether I am looking at a man or a woman," says Rosen. "But when I watch men practice there is a clearer point of comparison for me." Rosen specializes in utilizing yoga and meditation as tools for addiction recovery; his first book, *Recovery 2.0*, is due out later this year.

"Writing this feature opened my heart and mind more than ever to how yoga can benefit survivors," says **Linda Sparrowe**, who takes an in-depth look at overcoming complex post-traumatic stress disorder through yoga in "Transcending Trauma" (page 48). After teaching briefly in a women's shelter several years ago, Sparrowe developed a passion for helping women in crisis. Her commitment to yoga and wellness, which started in the early '90s when she was managing editor at *Yoga Journal*, spurred her on to write several books on yoga and women's health, co-launch a series of yoga/meditation retreats for women with cancer, and lead workshops for women and teens who have undergone physical or emotional difficulties. ■



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## Art of Surrender

HAVING BEEN A VISUAL ARTIST for over 11 years and an active member of Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health for almost six, I was very happy to come across “Awakening the Artist” (Summer 2011) and hear about others’ experiences with yoga and art. I especially connected with Stephen Cope’s message of surrendering the results of our actions. Just this spring I was finally able to get some space from my art practice and reflect on where I was going with it. I realized that I had become so attached to the outcome of sales that I had begun to lose some of the joy in the process. After months of focusing on my daily yoga and meditation practice, I am coming back to the art studio with a renewed sense of purpose and serenity. Seeing creative expression, global service, and surrender to the infinite all linked in Karen Macklin’s article was truly an inspiration for me.

Scott Harrington | Stockbridge, Massachusetts

### Self-Study

I enjoyed reading Swami Rama’s feature article “Know Thyself” (Summer 2011). The teachings are so clear and straightforward I felt my eyes were opening to the new possibility of befriending my mind. What a gift. Thank you for continuing to publish such deeply powerful teachings.

Nancy Choules | Santa Fe, New Mexico

### Nature Connection

Thank you for the article “Earth Action” by Richard Louv (Summer 2011). It gives voice to an issue that is simple but can be easily overlooked in our society: the importance of giving nature back to our children and ourselves. As a child growing up in small-town Texas, I spent many days roaming through the prairie and digging for fossils in the creek. The bond I felt to the earth is something I carry in my heart today. As Louv said, in this age of smart phones and video games,



it is imperative that we strengthen our connection with nature. Keep up the inspirational work!

Mary Metcalf | Plano, Texas

### Psoas You Like It

It’s been a long time since I’ve seen a column by Julie Gudmestad, so I was thrilled to see one in your magazine (“The Elusive Psoas,” Spring 2011). It was excellent—educational, easy to understand, and focused on a topic that may very well be the number one struggle for longtime yogis like myself.

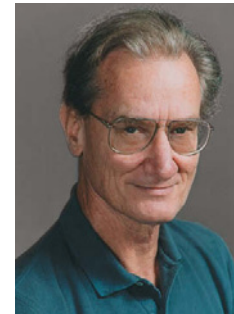
I live in Portland and feel blessed to be able to take one class a week with Julie. She has an inimitable ability to convey critical anatomy and kinesthetic realities that quite literally break old habits and take one’s practice to new levels. That’s why I get so excited to see her lifetime of wisdom again in printed form, reaching a greater yoga audience. With both the age and injury rate of yogis growing, Julie’s article couldn’t have come at a better time.

Kim Norris | Portland, Oregon

### IN MEMORIAM

H. David Coulter, PhD

We are saddened to announce the recent death of H. David Coulter, a dedicated student of *Yoga International’s* founder, Swami Rama, and longtime friend and colleague of the Himalayan Institute. Dr. Coulter is well known in the yoga



community for his comprehensive book *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga*, winner of the 2002 Benjamin Franklin Award for Health, Wellness, and Nutrition.

In the early 1970s Swami Rama encouraged David to write this book to clarify how the practices of yoga could be related to modern biomedical science. Despite David’s enthusiasm for the project, it progressed slowly over many years while he continued to teach, practice, and organize his thoughts. From 1968 to 1986 he taught anatomy and neuroscience at the University of Minnesota Medical School. He later taught anatomy to shiatsu and acupuncture students at the Ohashi Institute and the Pacific Institute. But in 1995 Swami Rama insisted that the time for contemplation was over, and David completed the 622-page book, adding instructive line drawings and photographs.

David was a frequent contributor and consultant to *YI* and taught a variety of seminars and classes during a long period of residency at the Himalayan Institute. He died at home on June 9, 2011, at the age of 71, following a lengthy and courageous battle with Parkinson’s disease. He is survived by two sisters, a son and a daughter, and three grandchildren.

We welcome your letters and comments. Send them to [mail@yogainternational.com](mailto:mail@yogainternational.com) or YI Mail, 952 Bethany Turnpike, Honesdale, PA 18431. We may edit for length and clarity.



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## Kundalini's Queen

**As Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa** finished teaching a women-only class at her Los Angeles studio one April morning, a note of regret crept into her voice. "I have to go next Wednesday for too long and too far," she said. On the agenda: classes and workshops in London, England; Antwerp, Belgium; Zurich, Switzerland; Stockholm, Sweden; Reykjavik, Iceland; and Berlin and Munich, Germany. "It may sound really romantic," said the longtime Kundalini Yoga teacher, "but I'm really wanting to stay home. I think I did my thing out there."

It's not without irony that Gurmukh (who, like Madonna, one of the many celebrities she has taught, is known far and wide by her first name) is loath to leave LA. For years, it was the last place she wanted to live.

Born Mary Mae Gibson in rural Illinois, Gurmukh has spent much of her life on the move. After leaving home at 19, the self-described "wanderer of the '60s" lived in the epicenter of hippie culture in San Francisco, hitchhiked her way through Mexico, slept on a beach on the Hawaiian island of Maui for two years, and spent a year meditating seven hours a day at a Zen Buddhist temple before a friend delivered her to a Kundalini Yoga ashram in 1970. Along the way, she'd married, lost a seven-month-old son to a congenital heart defect, and divorced. "I'd always write home to my mother saying, 'I have to find my tribe,'" recalls Gurmukh, 68. "She didn't

know what the heck I was talking about. When I walked into the ashram in Arizona, I said, ‘I’ve come home.’”

It was there that she met Yogi Bhanjan, the Indian-born Sikh who inspired legions of American hippies to trade hallucinogens, free love, and freewheeling ways for Kundalini Yoga, family life, and a strong work ethic. He gave her the name Gurmukh, which she says means “one who helps thousands across the world ocean,” and a directive: Help people. “He said, ‘If you’re depressed, find someone who’s more depressed. If you’re sick, find someone who’s sicker than you. That’s the way out,’” says Gurmukh, who peppers conversations and classes with references to her late spiritual teacher.

It’s because of her teacher that Gurmukh found herself in Los Angeles in 1977. The plan was to stay for 40 days, performing *seva* (service) at his then-headquarters, before returning to the New Mexico ashram that had become her home. “After forty days, he gave me something else to do and something else to do. I tried to get out of here for ten years,” she says between bites of a salad in the airy offices of Golden Bridge, her studio in the heart of Hollywood. Panoramic windows afford a view of the iconic Hollywood sign. “When I was living in The Haight and on Maui, we thought all the hippies in LA were fakes. They didn’t make their own bell-bottom trousers. They weren’t committed to change. We were allergic to this place.”

But LA had much in store for its reluctant transplant. It’s here that Gurmukh met Gurushabd Singh, her husband of nearly 30 years. In 1984, at the age of 43, she gave birth to their daughter, Wahe Guru Kaur, who now runs the Golden Bridge café, a post-yoga pit stop serving the likes of veggie reuben sandwiches, tempeh wraps, and *dal*, along with a host of decadent desserts. Here’s what else she found in the

City of Angels: plenty of people looking for help. “So many people here are so lost,” she says. “They’ve left their families. They’ve left their ties, for whatever reason. They have a dream to be an actor, actress, producer, screenwriter. The product is themselves, and so they have to be concerned with how they look and how they present themselves. Golden Bridge is a haven where they don’t have to look a particular way. They just come, and they get in touch with their souls.”

Gurmukh, who taught yoga out of her home before opening her first studio in 1985, is best known for helping mamas-to-be. They started flocking to her shortly after her daughter was born—at home, and after just two and a half hours of labor. Fans include Madonna, Reese Witherspoon, Rosanna Arquette, and Cindy Crawford, who wrote the foreword to *Bountiful, Beautiful, Blissful*, Gurmukh’s 2003 book on pregnancy and birth. Like her previous book, *The Eight Human Talents*, it’s packed with short exercises and meditations designed for long-lasting relief. Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhanjan is foolproof, Gurmukh insists. “It’s a science. It’s not just, ‘I sure hope this works.’ Science works. If you do a meditation to stop smoking, you will stop.”

Recently, Gurmukh stopped teaching prenatal yoga. For a while, the most famous name in Kundalini Yoga considered stepping out of the limelight altogether. “I felt like, there’s so many books out there, so many people out there. Why do I have to be out there?” Then she remembered her years spent traveling and soul-searching. “I would search out anybody who had known [Autobiography of a Yogi author Paramahansa] Yogananda. I would carry his photograph and ask, ‘Did you know him? What was he like?’ I realized I’m one of those people now. I’m one that carries the lineage of a master that’s

## WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

GURMUKH’S SPIRITUAL TEACHER, Yogi Bhanjan, left volumes upon volumes of yogic prescriptions for everything from healthy digestion to healing depression. In these changing and stressful times, or whenever people are at a loss as to what to do, Gurmukh recommends a meditation known as *gyan mudra kriya*. Deceptively simple, this meditation is said to coordinate both halves of the brain and give you powerful insight.

Start by sitting cross-legged or in a chair, resting your arms at your sides. Bring your hands to chest level and rest one palm in the other, both palms facing the chest. Cross the thumbs.

Bring your attention to the third-eye point and then direct your gaze toward the tip of your nose. Inhale through the nose, and exhale through the nose. Inhale through the mouth, and exhale through the mouth. Inhale through the nose, and exhale through the mouth. Finally, inhale through the mouth, and exhale through the nose. (When breathing through the mouth, purse your lips as if you’re whistling.)

Continue the sequence for 11 minutes. Gradually work up to half an hour.

gone. I have to keep [his] voice alive. It’s a responsibility, and it’s a destiny. But how to do it without getting on and off planes every other minute?”

The answer, she believes, is to embark on a new journey, to venture into the unfamiliar world of the Internet. “I’ve kind of resisted the progressive changes in the world,” she says. “But modern technology has potential to bring us closer together. I just had a revelation that I could fit into that program.”

So catch her on the road while you can. Then look for her in the two places she never imagined herself: sunny Los Angeles and somewhere online.

—Anna Dubrovsky >>

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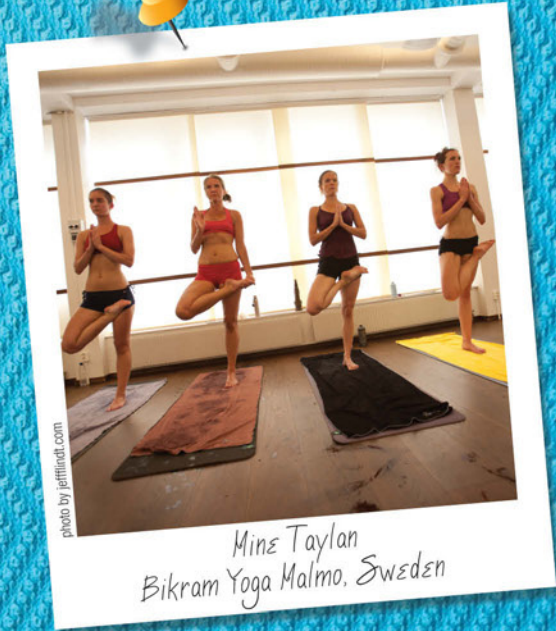
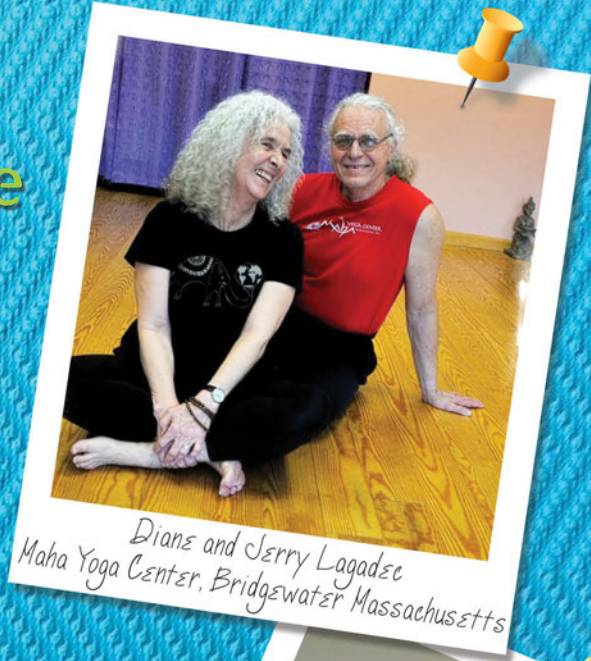


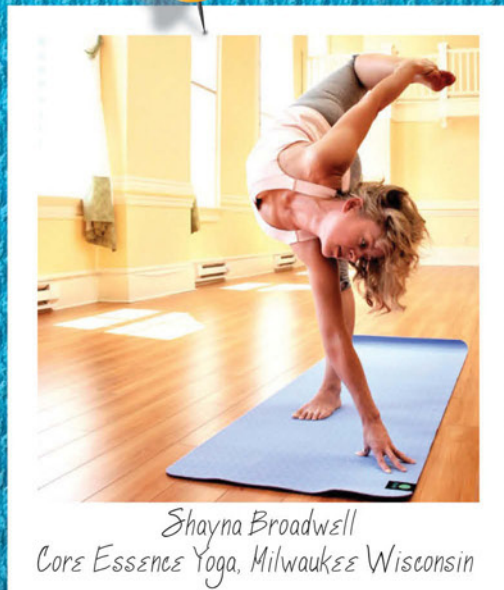
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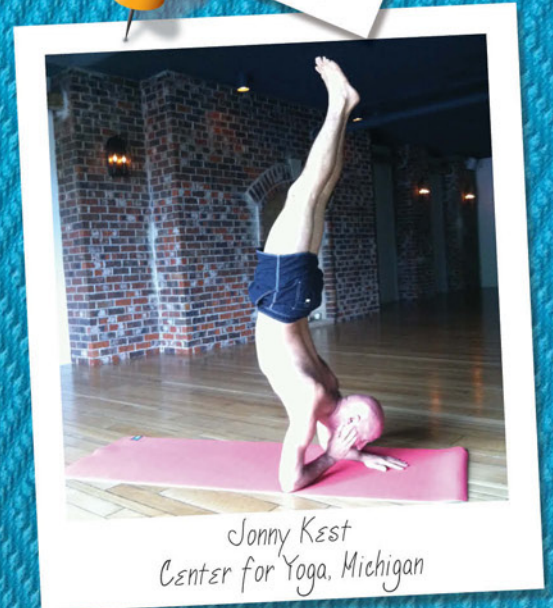
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**An individual, in whom Consciousness has contracted, consists of the universe in contracted form.**

—Pratyabhijna Hridayam, sutra 4

citi-saṁkocātmā cetanoṽpi saṁkucita-viśvamayaḥ

#### IN CONTEXT

This is the fourth sutra in the *Pratyabhijna Hridayam*, which means “The Heart of Recognition.” This text comes to us from the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism, which associates supreme Consciousness with Lord Shiva. Composed in the 10th century by Kshemaraja—a philosopher and disciple of the sage Abhinavagupta—the entire work consists of only 20 sutras. It gives us the secret or “heart” (*hridaya*) of an otherwise large volume of teachings regarding the process, by stages, through which divine Consciousness becomes the world of manifold forms, and then delights in its recognition (*pratyabhijna*) of itself, as revealed in the dynamics of our own particular consciousness.

## Commentary

This sutra succinctly explains the nature of the individual sentient being in the context of the vast universe. *Chiti* refers to “Consciousness”—a boundless field from which all things in the universe arise. According to Kashmir Shaivism, Consciousness possesses an infinite number of capabilities, or *shaktis*, but five of these are particularly significant to the process of our own spiritual awakening. Consciousness holds the inherent ability to be aware of anything (*chit shakti*). It pulsates with the power of expansive joy (*ananda shakti*). It possesses the power of effective intention (*iccha shakti*), as well as the capability to know and understand (*jnana shakti*). And it is the force behind creative, dynamic activity (*kriya shakti*). Through these powers of awareness, joy, intention, knowledge, and action, the infinite field of potential that is Consciousness takes form as the universe and all things in it.

*Chetana*, translated here as “individual,” also means “conscious being.” Our own consciousness is a miniature version of absolute Consciousness. As this sutra says, a sentient being “consists of the universe” (*viśvamaya*) “in contracted form” (*sankuchita*). Accordingly, the very same powers of awareness, joy, intention, knowledge, and action that give rise to, support, and transform the macrocosmic universe also express themselves within our own consciousness in microcosmic form.

Universal Consciousness tends to forget its true nature as it contracts into particularity. However, through the power of revelatory grace (*anugraha shakti*)—yet another of Consciousness’ inherent capabilities—Consciousness “recognizes” itself in the capabilities and movements of our own particular consciousness.

This divine Self-recognition is reflected in the dynamics of our individual spiritual lives. When illumined by the light of our own mindfulness, the contours of our spiritual seeking are themselves forms of Consciousness opening its eyes to its own reflection. As conscious beings we can increasingly allow this powerful and benevolent Consciousness to express itself more fully in our awareness, joy, intention, knowledge, and way of being in the world.

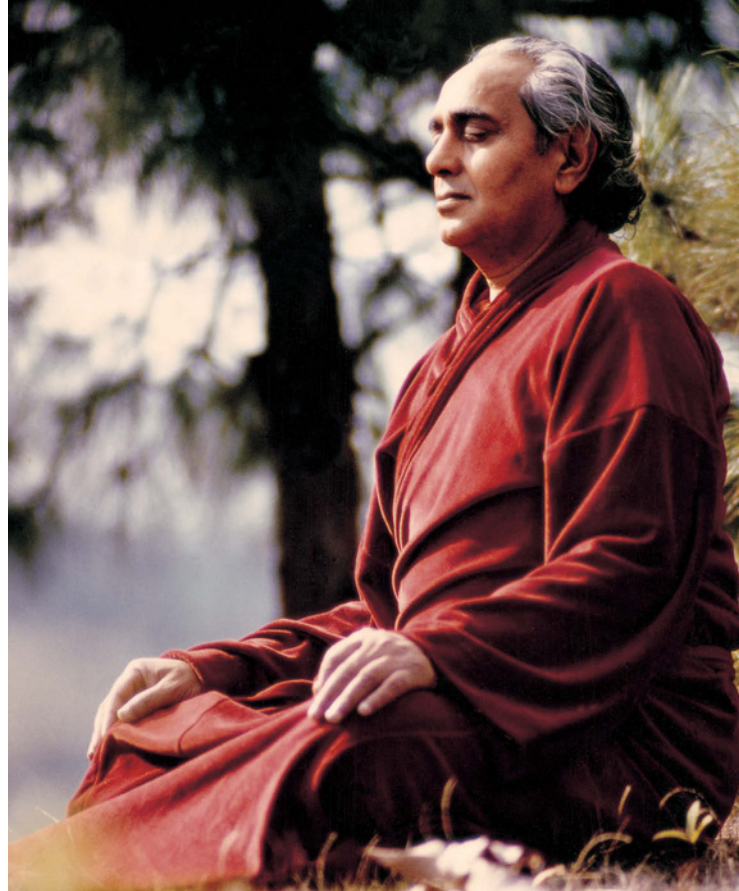
Translation and commentary by William K. Mabony, PhD, a professor and scholar of yoga philosophy ([wkmabony.com](http://wkmabony.com)). >>

🔊 Hear this sutra in Sanskrit at [yogainternational.com/scripture](http://yogainternational.com/scripture).

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# Yoga Goes to University

**Yoga scholarship in the West** used to go like this: In 1979, David Gordon White was living in Paris when someone asked him to translate a classical Indian alchemical text into French. A year later, White was studying at the University of Chicago, reading the mystic poetry (as one does there) of Gorakhnath, a 12th-century Indian saint and the leader of an order of ascetics who developed hatha yoga. The language was very similar to

the previous writing that White had studied. This led to a book, *The Alchemical Body*, and to a career as a yoga scholar. At the time, White's work was as rare as *dharmamegha samadhi*, the state of perpetual enlightenment described in the fourth *pada* of the *Yoga Sutra*—but not anymore.

As recently as 20 years ago, “yoga studies” in the West meant a lone figure translating and interpreting classical Sanskrit texts, far away from mainstream interest and caring. But the hatha yoga boom has led to an academic explosion, as scholars scramble to understand this previously obscure Eastern religious tradition and how it has overtaken American culture. The past decade has seen the publication of dozens of works that trace the current yoga craze back to its actual roots, dispelling myths and providing surprising revelations. A Yoga in Theory and Practice consultation at

the annual American Academy of Religion conference draws 70 to 100 people bursting with new ideas and research. “Yoga,” says Laura Cornell, PhD, who teaches at the California Institute of Integral Studies, “decided to take a second look at itself.”

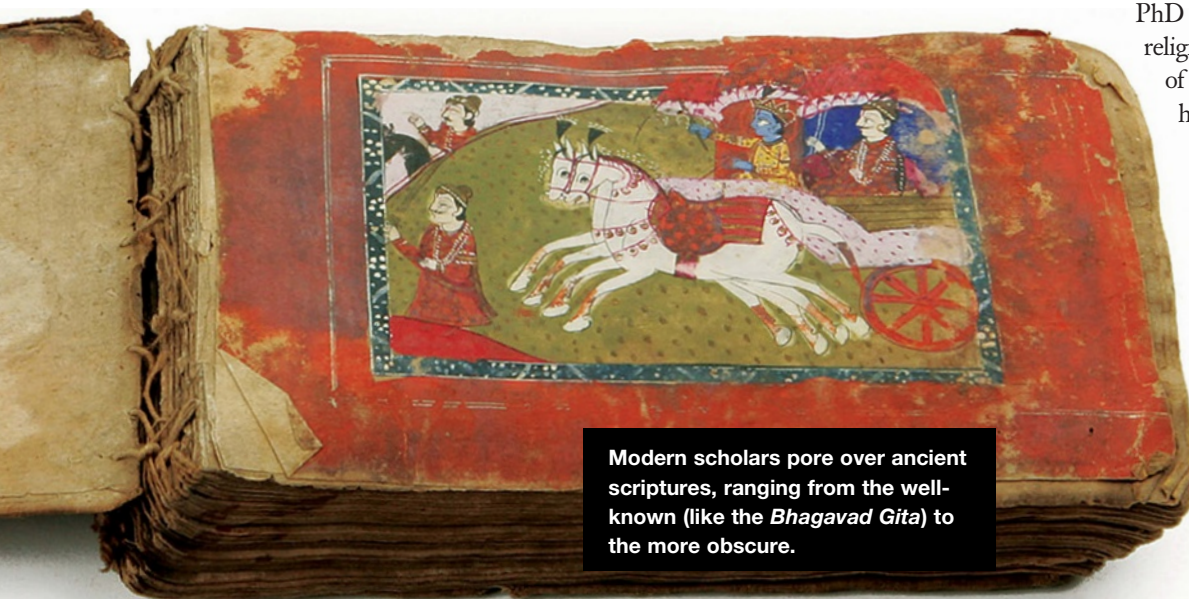
Yoga scholarship provides “a counter argument to much of the received knowledge that yoga culture assumes,” says White, now a professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In a world ubiquitous with physical instruction, it's easy for yoga devotees to get caught up in their hatha practice without understanding exactly what they're doing. The recent wave of yoga scholarship serves to “undermine the notion of asana as some kind of primordial pre-Vedic experience,” says Edwin Bryant, PhD, professor of Hinduism at Rutgers University, who provides yoga philosophy instruction at a number of

teacher trainings. “It's helping people get a clearer idea of who they are and where they fit into the practice.”

Considering the cutthroat environment that academia can breed, yoga scholars are surprisingly supportive and non-competitive. “It's wonderful to see so many people interested,” says Christopher Key Chapple, PhD, professor of Indic and Comparative Theology at Loyola Marymount University. Mark Singleton, PhD, author of *Yoga Body* who teaches at St. John's College in New Mexico, says, “I've been greatly heartened by the reception of my own academic research by the yoga community. I've overwhelmingly found a real broad-mindedness and earnestness of inquiry, and very few of the sectarian attacks that I was told I should expect.”

A new generation of yoga scholars has benefited from this atmosphere of curiosity and goodwill. Rebecca Polack, a PhD candidate in philosophy and religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies, is writing a historical biography of Swami Kunalayananda, who was instrumental in creating contemporary asana practice. When Polack started practicing yoga 25 years ago, there was no information to be found, and now, she says, sources are popping up everywhere. “I feel like I'm part of a rarified but burgeoning field of modern yoga scholarship,” she says. “It's exciting.”

—Neal Pollack >>



Modern scholars pore over ancient scriptures, ranging from the well-known (like the *Bhagavad Gita*) to the more obscure.

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# This Is Your Brain on Yoga

**We all know that yoga does wonders for the mind.** Even novices of asana, pranayama, and meditation report feeling increased mental stability and clarity during and after practice. Now, thanks to sophisticated brain imaging technologies, neuroscience is proving what teachers and practitioners have known for ages—that yoga and meditation can literally change your brain. But what exactly is going on up there? Take a peek inside—a basic understanding of brain anatomy and function can serve as a handy road map for your inner journey. —*Kathryn Heagberg*

The **frontal lobe** is the hub of higher cognitive functions—including planning, discriminating, abstract thinking, personality, and behavior. The Bihar School refers to the breathing practice of *kapal-abhati* as “frontal brain purification,” due to the rejuvenating effects it has on this area of the brain.

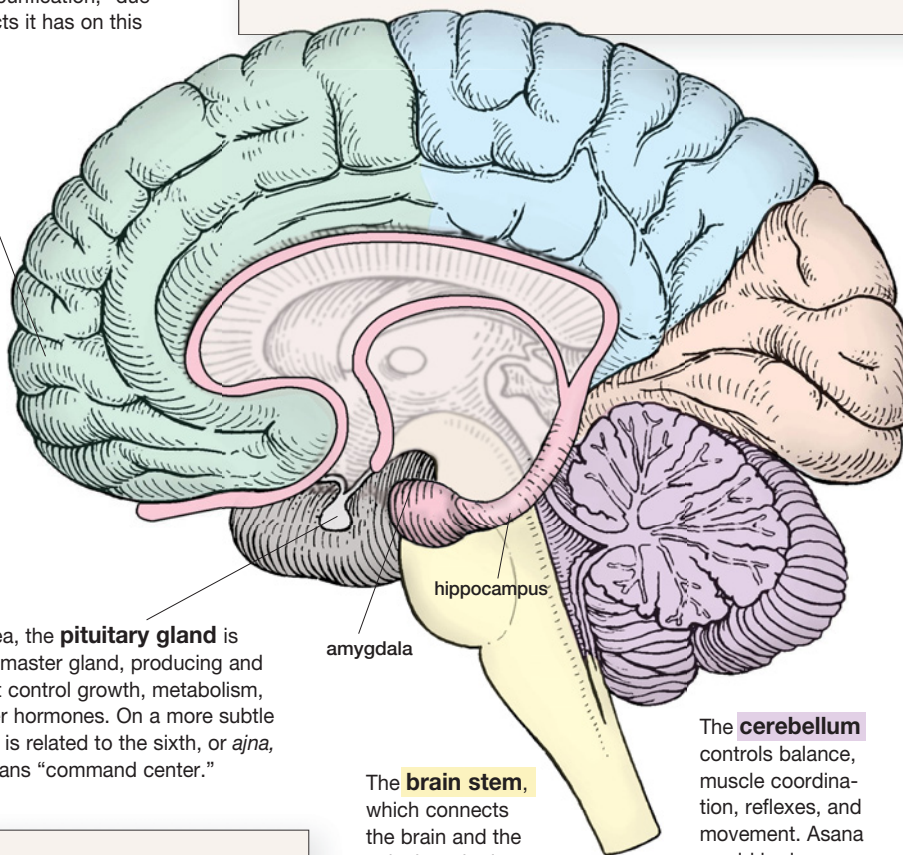
The anterior part of the frontal lobe, the **prefrontal cortex**, is the most evolved part of the brain and is responsible for positive capacities like concentration, happiness, creativity, and rational thinking. Studies using EEG have shown that meditation strengthens communication between the prefrontal cortex and other areas of the brain.

Roughly the size of a pea, the **pituitary gland** is the endocrine system’s master gland, producing and releasing hormones that control growth, metabolism, and the function of other hormones. On a more subtle level, the pituitary gland is related to the sixth, or *ajna*, chakra. *Ajna* literally means “command center.”



**Neurotransmitters** serve as the brain’s chemical messengers, relaying information between nerve cells. Neurological disorders are often the result of a neurotransmitter snafu—for instance, low levels of a neurotransmitter known as GABA are linked to depression and anxiety. Recent studies show an association between regular asana practice and increased GABA levels.

Known as the seat of conscious functioning, the **cerebrum** is the largest part of your brain. It’s divided into right and left hemispheres. On the physical level, the right hemisphere controls the left side of the body, and the left hemisphere controls the right. On the level of the subtle body, *ida nadi* (the lunar energy channel) is connected to the right half of the brain, and *pingala nadi* (the solar energy channel) is connected to the left side of the brain.



The **parietal lobe** is associated with limb movement, understanding speech, and sensing pain. According to a study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in April 2011, brain scans of this region demonstrated that mindfulness meditation can dramatically reduce sensitivity to pain—even more so than morphine.

As the primary visual processing center of the brain, the **occipital lobe** helps you follow along visually in yoga class. And you can thank the **temporal lobe** for your ability to process verbal asana cues—it’s responsible for auditory perception.

The **brain stem**, which connects the brain and the spinal cord, plays a crucial role in digestion, heart rate, and diaphragmatic breathing. Neurons found in the brain stem send a nerve impulse to the diaphragm, which causes it to contract, thereby initiating inhalation.

The **cerebellum** controls balance, muscle coordination, reflexes, and movement. Asana would be impossible without it.

The **limbic system** is comprised of structures related to memory and emotion, such as the hippocampus, amygdala, thalamus, and hypothalamus. A 2010 study found that subjects who meditated 30 minutes a day for eight weeks had a reduction of gray matter in the **amygdala**—which is linked to fear and anxiety—and an increase of gray matter in the **hippocampus**, which plays a vital role in memory formation. >>

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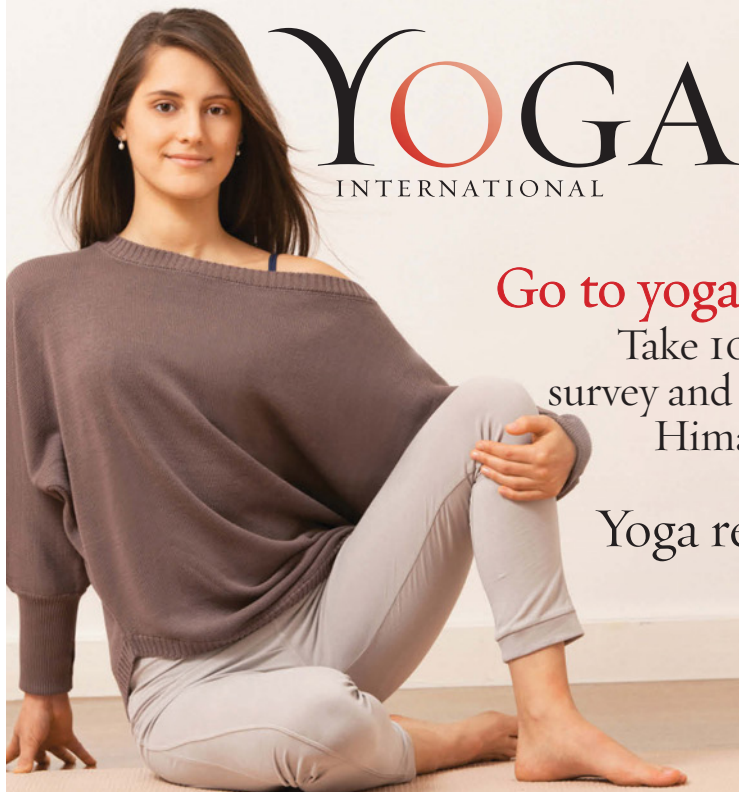


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### Workout for the Brain

In addition to upping your B-vitamin intake, you can prevent age-related brain shrinkage—and keep dementia at bay—by hitting the gym. A study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in January 2011 found that vigorous exercise can effectively reverse hippocampal volume loss and improve memory function in older adults.

## Memory Boost

It's often assumed that forgetfulness—and even senility—are inevitable as we get older. While it is true that the hippocampus, a part of the brain that is crucial for memory, shrinks at a rate of about 1 to 2 percent a year in older adults, it is possible to stop this shrinkage—and ensuing memory loss—in its tracks.

One solution may be to up your daily dosage of B vitamins. A 2010 Oxford University study found that high doses reduced the rate of brain atrophy by 50 percent for older adults with mild memory problems, and another recent study, published in the

journal *Neurology*, found that people with optimal levels of Vitamin B12 were six times less likely to experience age-related brain shrinkage.

Although B12 is crucial to our cognitive well-being, Tufts University has reported that almost half of Americans have a B12 deficiency.

One significant reason for this deficiency is that the vitamin can be extremely difficult to digest. Folks with weakened digestive strength—including people over 50 and those taking antacids—are therefore at risk. Vitamin B12 requires a large amount of hydrochloric acid (HCL) in the stomach in order to be freed from the food we've ingested. Decreased HCL is the primary cause of wheat and dairy intolerances, so if you

have trouble digesting these, you may not have the needed HCL to assimilate B12. In ayurveda, HCL levels are maintained through good dietary habits and an herb called trikatu, which helps the body reset its ability to produce its own HCL. (*Dose: one trikatu capsule 15 minutes prior to meals with 12 ounces of water for three months to enhance HCL production.*)

Vegetarians are also at risk for B12 deficiency due to the lack of the vitamin in their diet. B12 is naturally found in protein-rich foods such as meat, fish, cheese, milk, yogurt, and eggs. Small amounts of the vitamin can be gleaned from vegan sources, including sea vegetables, brewer's yeast, soybeans, hops, and alfalfa, as well as fermented foods

like miso, sauerkraut, and tempeh.

Brain shrinkage is reversible if you catch your B12 deficiency early and make a conscious effort to increase your intake. Besides optimizing your levels of HCL and eating more of the foods listed above, try taking a B12 supplement—3000 to 4000 mcg a day for three to four weeks. A sublingual supplement that combines B12, B6, and folic acid is particularly effective because it delivers the vitamins directly into your bloodstream. See if you notice a boost in energy, mood, and memory with more B vitamins in your system. —*John Douillard*

*John Douillard, DC, PhD, directs an ayurvedic retreat center in Boulder, Colorado (lifesp.com). >>*

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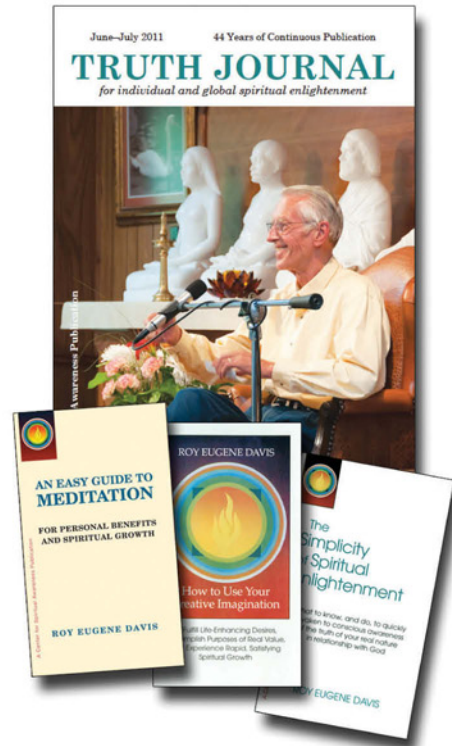
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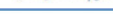
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## Pedal Power

**Remember how much fun** you had peeling out on your bike as a kid? For an estimated 57 million enthusiasts in the United States, cycling has never lost its charm. Many simply appreciate a high-intensity workout; others relish a week-end ride through the countryside. But a growing number of people are relying on biking as a healthy and eco-conscious alternative for their daily commute—and public officials, businesses, and even yoga studios are falling in line.

Municipal projects across America are bolstering the bike-commuting movement with safer and more accessible ways to ride. Initiatives range from public bike-sharing systems to infrastructure overhauls in highway-heavy cities: Washington, DC, revamped its community bicycle program last year to offer 800 percent more bikes, and New York City will launch the largest bike-sharing initiative in the country by 2012. The City Council of Los Angeles, meanwhile, recently approved a plan to establish 1,680 miles of bikeways.

Thanks to a 2008 federal tax incentive, employers can offer employees \$20

a month for regularly cycling to work. Companies from the National Geographic Society to Seattle Children’s Hospital provide added support for cycling employees with facilities and services like on-site showers, changing rooms, and bicycle storage. Clif Bar & Company throws in a \$500 bonus to buy a commuter bike or retrofit an existing ride.

The yoga community is getting behind the movement, too. The People’s Yoga in Portland, Oregon, offers a bike punch card, giving pedal pushers a free yoga class after 10 rides to the studio. Four miles away, Belmont Yoga teacher and cycling enthusiast Ellee Thalheimer offers bike-centric hatha classes, which address the specific aches and pains of bike-riding and emphasize breathing techniques, endurance, and one-pointed focus. “When you cycle, you have to be completely present in the moment, just like in yoga,” she says. “You’re not allowed to participate in the drama in your head, as much as that appeals to your brain.”

Thalheimer also cofounded a non-

### BIKING BY NUMBERS

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number of bicycles that can be parked in one car parking space

**15**

pounds of pollutants that are kept from release into the air by making a four-mile round-trip bike ride

**37%**

percentage that bicycle riding increased in the U.S. from 2005 to 2009

**\$5000**

maximum dollars a year each commuter could save by cycling to work, according to 2010 estimates by *Time* magazine (figure out your cost savings at [kiplinger.com/tools/bike](http://kiplinger.com/tools/bike))

**238 million**

gallons of gas bicycle commuters currently save per year by choosing to ride a bike to work instead of a car

profit business alliance, the Portland Society, to promote livable streets and neighborhoods by supporting bike-centric projects by other female entrepreneurs. “If people invest in cycling infrastructure, put financial backing behind incentives to ride, and combine it with education on how to cycle safely,” she says, “quality of life will go up.”

—*Dakota Sexton* >>

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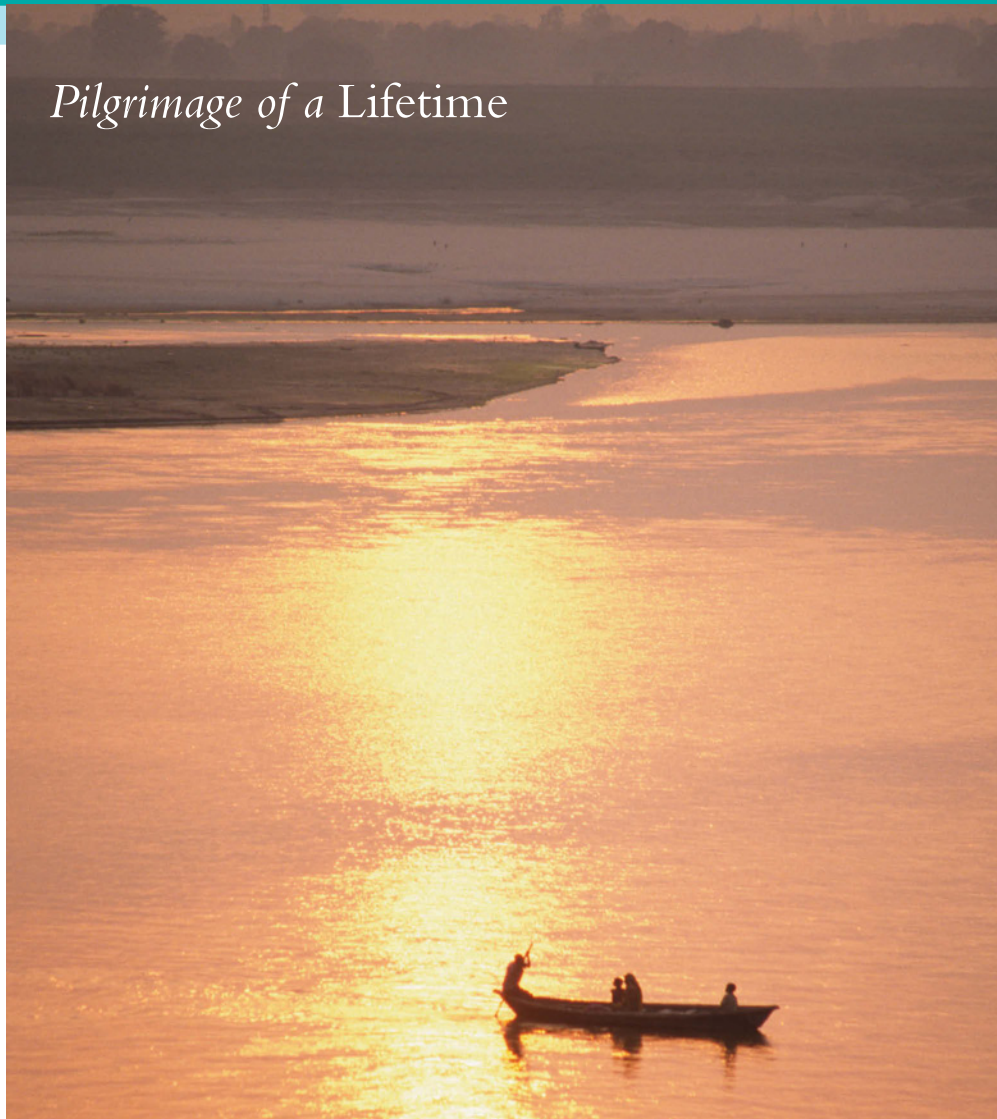
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## Chanting 101



Soulful kirtan by C. C. White and friends at last year's Bhakti Fest.

Want to energize your spiritual life? Whether you're melding your voice with a hundred others in traditional call-and-response or chanting mantras in your bedroom as a devotional prelude to

meditation, kirtan can be a powerful and surprisingly effective form of spiritual practice.

Kirtan as we know it today took shape about 500 years ago in West Bengal. A kirtan leader would sing out holy mantras and the audience would chant them back. This was not a concert; it was a participatory event in which everyone present created the music together. The audience traditionally sat on the ground around the musicians, or danced with their arms raised toward the sky—singing with abandon.

The Sanskrit root of the word *kirtan* means “to cut,” explains kirtan leader Bhagavan Das. “To do kirtan is to cut through discursive thought and subconscious gossip. It means to cut through conflicting emotions and conceptualizing. Outwardly it's the Sing Along

Club. It appears to be a concert or a show but it's really the deepest inner temple. We use the energy of our voice to transcend the energy of our mind.”

You don't need to know what the Sanskrit mantras mean to experience the full force of the practice; in fact, *not* knowing the meaning helps you steer clear of your analytical mind and stay with the *feeling* of the words. Blissfully singing the sacred sounds helps untie the knots at your heart center and clear the mental debris out of the brain's energy centers. When the music ends, sit motionlessly for several minutes and experience the living silence. The divine presence you sense is your own innermost nature. —Linda Jobnsen

Linda Jobnsen is co-author of *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Practice*. ■

## KIRTAN HAPPENINGS

As more voices flock to sacred chant, bhakti events are growing in scale and vision. Soak up the love and get your sattvic groove on at these far-flung fall festivals.

**Ecstatic Chant—The Yoga of Voice**  
September 2–5, Rhinebeck, NY;  
[eomega.org/chant](http://eomega.org/chant)

Celebrate the end of summer with 14 of your favorite performers at Omega Institute's seventh annual Ecstatic Chant retreat. Sing your heart out in an all-night session Saturday, and tack on a Labor Day program to indulge in even more chanting with Krishna Das, Jai Uttal, and company.

**Bhakti Fest**  
September 8–11, Joshua Tree, CA;  
[bhaktifest.com](http://bhaktifest.com)

Join over 50 kirtan artists and 40 yoga teachers in the desert for around-the-clock singing, dancing, and hatha. Enjoy a who's who of chant leaders and celebrity yogis—from Wah! and MC Yogi to Shiva Rea and Mark Whitwell. Workshop offerings let you dabble in bhakti and tantra philosophy.

**Kundalini Yoga and Music Festival**  
November 5–11, Rishikesh, India;  
[11-11-11yoga.com](http://11-11-11yoga.com)

If you're lucky enough to be in India on 11/11/11, consider visiting the Parmarth Niketan Ashram on the bank of the Ganga for an enchanting week of devotional practice with Gurmukh and other Kundalini Yoga luminaries.

For you bhakti yogis seeking to deepen your practice, consider becoming a kirtan leader. Study harmonium in the Big Easy over Labor Day with Sean Johnson and the Wild Lotus Band's BHAKTIImmersion. In October, go back to school with David Newman (Durga Das) and Mira at Kirtan College in the Shenandoah Valley for the finer points of Sanskrit mantra pronunciation. Or bring in the New Year with musical training at Jai Uttal's Kirtan Camp in Brazil.

✚ Get more kirtan news and inspiration at [yogainternational.com/kirtan](http://yogainternational.com/kirtan).

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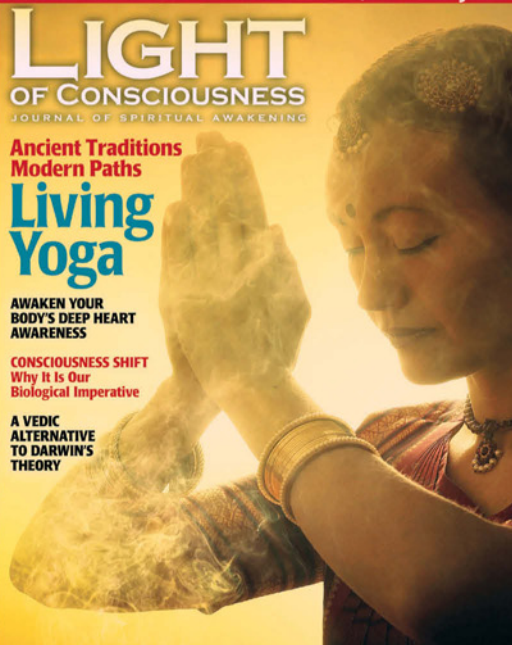
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# Strands of Life

Discover the deeper dimensions of your practice by cultivating an awareness of the *gunas*—nature’s three fundamental forces. **By Rolf Sovik**



Life’s complex journey has the potential to bind as well as to liberate. In order to navigate this dual nature of experience, the ancient school of Indian philosophy called *Samkhya* (“that which sums up”) divides reality into two categories: the knower (*purusha*) and the known (*prakriti*).

Purusha, the Self, is never an object of experience; purusha is the subject—the one who is aware, the one who knows. Prakriti, on the other hand, encompasses everything that comes before

us in the objective universe—whether psychological or material. Prakriti is all that can be known.

Unmanifest prakriti is a reservoir of limitless potential consisting of three fundamental forces called the *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—in balance with each other. Through the interplay of these forces, prakriti manifests as the universe. Therefore, all that can be known in this world, tangible and intangible, is a manifestation of the *gunas* in their various forms.

Cultivating awareness of how these

forces operate can be a valuable tool on the spiritual path. By apprehending the “feel” of each *guna* and using that knowledge as a guide, you can move toward recognition of the knower—the *purusha*—in you.

## The Gunas Close Up

The word *guna* literally means “strand” or “fiber” and implies that, like strands of a rope, the *gunas* are woven together to form the objective universe. Philosophically, the theory of the *gunas* explains what this universe is made of and how it came to manifest itself as mind and matter. But more important for yoga practitioners, awareness of the *gunas* tells us whether we are genuinely moving forward in life (*sattva*), running in place (*rajas*), or losing our way (*tamas*).

Each *guna* has its own characteristics. The essence of *sattva* is to act like a transparent pane of glass, allowing light—the light of conscious awareness—to reveal itself in the operations of the mind and in nature. *Sattva* is not enlightenment itself but it unveils what is true and real (*sat*). It shows itself as beauty, balance, and inspiration, and it promotes life, energy, health, and contentment. Cultivating *sattva*—by making choices in life that elevate awareness and foster unselfish joy—is a principal goal of yoga.

*Rajas* is the energy of change. It is distinguished by passion, desire, effort, and pain. Its activity may cause movement either toward *sattva* (increased spiritual understanding) or *tamas* (increased ignorance). Thus it may act positively or negatively. But it is most often characterized as unsteady,

agitated, and unhappy—prompting change for change’s sake alone. If freshly picked tomatoes are sattvic, spicy tomato sauce is rajasic—good for a Friday night pizza, but perhaps not an everyday meal choice. Rajas brings happiness by prompting the coupling of the senses with their objects. Thus rajas also binds us to attachment, to the fruits of action, and to sensory pleasures of every kind.

Tamas conceals the presence of consciousness. It causes dullness and ignorance through its power to obscure. Its nature is heavy and dense. One Sanskrit synonym for tamas is *stbithi*, or “steady.” In its more sattvic garb, tamas can supply a steadying influence in life—for example, bed rest can lead to healing. But tamas is primarily immobilizing; tamasic foods are lifeless, stale, or impure; tamasic entertainment is mindless and intoxicating. Tamas leads to inaction when action is required. Each of us has experienced the

ALL THAT CAN BE KNOWN IN THIS WORLD,  
TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE,  
IS A MANIFESTATION OF THE GUNAS  
IN THEIR VARIOUS FORMS.

binding power of tamas—the appeal of lethargy, procrastination, and sleep.

The three gunas are constantly interacting with one another. We can discern hints of this interplay in English phrases such as “innocent pleasure” (sattva-infused rajas) or “rabid addiction” (rajas-propelled tamas). But while the gunas themselves are permanent in essence—having emerged from primordial nature (prakriti)—their interactions are transitory and afford only a false impression of permanence. In this way, the play of the gunas obscures the real (*sat*), and attracts and binds us to what is ultimately unreal (*asat*).

### The Gunas at Work

We can begin to explore the gunas’ tangible presence on the yoga mat. Imagine you are in a class performing *janu*

*shirshasana*, head-to-knee pose, without a great degree of mindfulness. As you fold halfheartedly toward your extended leg, your back rounds, your shoulders hunch, and your foot collapses to the side. Your head falls forward and your mind sinks into a sleepy reverie. Except for a dull sense of discomfort in the pose, you might as well be taking a nap. This is tamas—a sense of lethargy and inattentiveness.

Compare this to another occasion when, determined not to be outdone by the person next to you, you find yourself making tenacious efforts in your pose. You struggle, painfully, to lengthen the back of your leg, but consequently round your shoulders as you strain to touch your toes. Meanwhile, preoccupied with the painful end of a romantic relationship, you fantasize about meeting the person three mats down. This is rajas—a generous serving of agitation, exertion,

competitiveness, pain, and enticement.

Yet, on still another day, your pose unfolds differently. The class is smaller and you are in a calm mood. Following your teacher’s cues, your attention shifts inwardly from one element of the pose to another, and you find yourself working a challenging but safe edge. Longer, more stable holds in the posture yield a subtle awareness of breathing. And while much of what you are doing in the pose is invisible to those around you, your mind is pleased and relaxed by your inner efforts. This is sattva—clarity, mindfulness, and a spontaneous sense of contentment.

Identifying the sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic aspects of a yoga pose—and then cultivating rajas and tamas in service of sattva—is a surefire method for advancing your practice. But there is

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## Everyday Awareness

*The process of working with the gunas unfolds systematically in four stages:*

1. The interplay of the gunas occurs almost entirely outside of your conscious awareness.
2. You begin to notice the gunas in the world around you (the rajasic display at the checkout counter, the sattvic sounds of a Mozart sonata), and learn to recognize the feel of their distinctive qualities.
3. You witness your own sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic tendencies.
4. Finally, you begin to sculpt your involvement with the gunas—cultivating sattva, softening rajasic urges, and engaging tamas in the service of stability and rest.

+ Find our in-depth guide to the gunas at [yogainternational.com/gunas](http://yogainternational.com/gunas).

more to these three qualities than simply improving your seated forward bends. Insert these same principles of self-observation into daily affairs, and you will have the power to transform every aspect of your life.

### The Gunas in Life

Descriptions of the gunas form an important part of one of the most revered texts of the yoga tradition, the *Bhagavad Gita*. In chapters 14, 17, and 18, Krishna portrays the gunas in marvelous detail. He begins (in verse 14.5) by describing the power of the gunas to “bind the immutable embodied One.” He goes on to provide an account of the nature of each guna. Later (in verse 18.40), Krishna dramatically summarizes the scope of the gunas’ activities:

There is nothing on the earth,  
in heaven, or even among the gods,  
that is free from these  
prakriti-born gunas.

But if the gunas are so pervasive, how  
are we to work with them? Krishna's  
advice is to sharpen our powers of self-  
observation and discernment. His recurring  
message is that with practice and the right  
resolve, we can learn to witness the activi-  
ties of the gunas and employ them with a  
sense of balance and purpose.

To make this process more visible,  
Krishna contrasts the look and feel of  
the three gunas in a variety of contexts.  
For example, he notes that:

**The food you eat may** (17.8-10):

Taste good and promote health,  
strength, and a pleasant mind (sattva)

Be oversalted, highly spiced, and  
cause illness and depression (rajas)

Be stale, unwanted by others, and not  
fit as an offering (tamas)

**The gifts you offer to others may be**  
(17.20-22):

Given at the right time, with nothing  
expected in return (sattva)

Given reluctantly, or with the aim of  
gaining a returned favor (rajas)

Given at an inappropriate time or  
place, with disrespect or contempt  
(tamas)

**The steadfastness with which you  
approach your spiritual path may**

(18.33-35):

Help you bring your mind, breath,  
and senses into harmony (sattva)

Depend on your acquiring something  
you want (rajas)

Preoccupy you with fears, grief, and  
excessive sleep (tamas)

**Your happiness may** (18.37-39):

Arise from inner discrimination and  
increase over time (sattva)

Be overly sensual; sweet in the begin-  
ning, poisonous in the end (rajas)

Arise from sleep, lethargy, and negli-  
gence (tamas)

As you read this list, or turn to the  
more extensive teachings in the *Gita*,  
don't let the stringent characterizations  
mislead you. They are not meant to  
promote self-criticism or condemnation.  
The gunas act as signposts—guides  
that indicate where you are and where  
you are inspired to be.

Samkhya philosophers say that life  
exists for the purpose of acquiring expe-  
rience and knowing the Self. The gunas  
are meant to facilitate this spiritual  
endeavor. They reveal, conceal, and stir  
us up—all for the purpose of drawing us  
closer to purusha, the knower. Krishna,  
the voice of the knower, sums up this  
relationship (in verses 14.19-20) with  
a lofty description of life's goal—one  
in which ego identification with the  
activities of the gunas is transcended  
altogether. Though challenging, this  
millennia-old teaching continues to in-  
spire seekers today:

When the seer observes  
no agents of action (no "doer")  
other than the gunas,  
and knows the transcendent  
beyond the gunas,  
such a one attains My being.

The body-bearer, transcending  
these three gunas  
which create the body,  
freed from the sorrows of birth,  
old age, and death,  
enjoys immortality. ■

*Rolf Sovik, PsyD, is the author of Moving Inward: The Journey to Meditation. He is the president of the Himalayan Institute, and serves as the co-director of the Institute's branch center in Buffalo, NY.*

*English translations of the Bhagavad Gita based on Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita by Swami Rama (Himalayan Institute Press).*

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**GEOLOGY IN ACTION** Volcanic crater in Rotorna, New Zealand.

## Contemplating Catastrophe

Painful as they are, natural disasters bring our awareness to the exquisite web of life. **By Sandra Anderson**

**E**ven those of us not immediately affected by recent mega-earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, tornadoes, and extreme weather of every kind are feeling a little uneasy. We like to assume the climate, the composition of the atmosphere and the oceans, and the position of the continents are fixed within a familiar range of variability, and basically favorable to the status quo. But we couldn't be more wrong.

Earth's species and continents come and go, and strange and wondrous worlds manifest and dissolve on a scale

of time we can hardly fathom. At the close of the Permian period, about 252 million years ago, the world's landmasses were bound together as one vast supercontinent. Voluminous volcanic activity and drastic changes in the chemistry of the atmosphere and the ocean contributed to the extinction of at least 90 percent of marine species and 70 percent of land species. Dinosaurs subsequently dominated the landscape until the end of the Cretaceous period 65 million years ago, when a meteorite impact brought on their demise with another massive climatic disruption, ushering in the era of mammals.

And so it goes: the chaos of devastation gives rise to something new. In the yoga tradition, the perennial cycles of destruction, creation, and maintenance are described as Shiva's dance of dissolution, the creative work of Brahma, and the sustaining grace of Vishnu.

### **Dynamic Fire**

Our current climatic and geologic upheavals can be attributed to two forms of fire that enliven our planet. The heart of our planet is a fiery molten-metal dynamo that creates the earth's magnetic field as well as heats circulation cells that melt the upper mantle, fuel

volcanic eruptions, create new oceanic crust, and drive continental crust across the surface of the earth. Continents collide, crumple, dive under each other, meld together—and break up and drift apart. The restless plates and constantly changing surface of the earth give us earthquakes, but also mountains, marshes, ocean basins, continental shelves, and a rich variety of ecosystems and climates that give rise to, and are nourished by, the diversity of life—from gophers, grizzlies, and vultures to orchids, pigweed, and copepods.

The other form of fire that drives events on the planet is the sun. The sun heats the earth's surface unevenly (more heat at the equator), which results in storms and the transfer of heat from the hot tropics to the poles via wind and ocean currents. The sun also drives the hydrological cycle—the circulation of all water on the planet and in the atmosphere. And, of course, plants harvest the energy of the sun through photosynthesis, creating the foundation of the food chain. The “Saura Sukta,” a hymn to the sun from the *Yajur Veda*, describes its role perfectly: “Divine and majestic, the sun causes manifestation and dissolution. It spreads greenery and clothes the whole world in darkness... Surya's rays distribute the beneficence of rain over the entire world, and by their energy, support the further creation of wealth.”

Without the restless continental plates and the wealth-bestowing energy of the sun, our planet would become a homogenous, lifeless environment in an atmosphere of spent exhaust gases. There would be no great reservoir of precious water to replenish the rain clouds, no life-giving air to breathe, no roses, rice, or milk—no place to call home.

### Sacred Interconnection

But life is not just born of the fortuitous conditions on earth; all of life actively contributes to the creation of the environment. The oxygen in the atmosphere

is sustained by the respiration of plants, which harvest the sun for energy. The carbon dioxide concentration is regulated by plants, shell-building marine organisms, the chemistry of the oceans, and numerous other interactions, which we are only now beginning to appreciate.

From the yogic point of view, and increasingly from the scientific point of view, the natural world is a continuously shifting manifestation of the subtle forces of nature forming a matrix in

## WE'RE A BIT LIKE THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE, DECAPITATING MOUNTAINS, SPLITTING ATOMS, SPLICING GENES, AND TUGGING ON A STRING THAT THREATENS TO UNRAVEL THE WHOLE FABRIC OF OUR WORLD.

which life not only arises, but which is modified and regulated by its constituents in various feedback loops. Rather than a static platform or a commodity, the planet is a living expression of subtle intelligence, which permeates us as well as everything around us, and responds to our activities. This dynamic state of exquisite interconnection is familiar to biologists as the web of life, and to geologists as the cycles of minerals and elements. To yogic philosophers this concept is known as Indra's net—an infinite web extending in all directions, with a brilliant jewel at each knot linked to and reflecting the image of all the other jewels in the net. To the Vedic seers it's at the heart of *yajna*—the grand ritual of life summarized in a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* (3.14): “Beings are born from food; food is produced through the rain god; rain is produced through *yajna* (sacrifice); and *yajna* (sacrifice) arises from action.” Our existence is part and parcel of the great *yajna* of minerals, plants, and animals and the cycles of destruction, creation, and maintenance that characterize this world.

The dawning of this realization is the true source of our unease in the

✦ Read more about the Vedic web of life at [yogainternational.com/planet](http://yogainternational.com/planet).

face of recent environmental stresses. Our activities are creating unintended consequences—from violent and erratic storms to droughts and deluges—and it occurs to us that perhaps we haven't done right by our planet. We're a bit like the sorcerer's apprentice, decapitating mountains, splitting atoms, splicing genes, inadvertently turning up the

global thermostat, and tugging on a string that threatens to unravel the whole fabric of our world. We've paved over marshes; starved deltas and swamps that mitigate and regulate the effects of storms; choked rivers with dams, levees, and dikes; and sent some 90,000 man-made chemicals into every corner of the environment without considering how they might come back to haunt us.

Painful as they are, natural disasters shake us from our complacency. They remind us that it is folly to tinker with the forces of nurturance for short-term gain while ignoring the long-term consequences. Perhaps it takes a megquake to evoke a sense of awe, to make it possible for us to stand at dawn and dusk as the Vedic sages did and offer water with gratitude and reverence, to understand that the sun and the wind bring life-giving rain, that the earth gives us minerals, soil, and structure, and that we are an inextricable part of the world around us. ■

Senior editor and yoga teacher *Sandra Anderson* has worked as a groundwater geologist for various environmental agencies and completed advanced studies in geomorphology and sedimentary geology.



## Engaged Expansion

Find stability and freedom in vishvamitrasana by embracing the inherent unity at the heart of opposition. **By Christina Sell**



**As inspiring and lofty** as yoga teachings can be, fundamentally yoga is a practical path that is applicable to the here and now. Our pursuit of the higher aims of yoga exists in relationship to our skillful participation in life *as it is*. Our longing for the Divine lives in relationship with the sometimes petty desires and insecurities of our personality. Our aspirations to be of service to others live in relationship with our personal wants, needs, and preferences.

Rather than placing these domains of practice at odds with one another, we can approach life's contrasting forces as a rich field for practice, learning to inhabit the dynamic tension of the sacred and the mundane in a manner that is meaningful, rewarding, and joyful. In this way, yoga is a path of both transcendence and engagement—one that invites us to explore our spirituality through our human experience, and uplift our humanity through our spiritual practice. My teacher Lee Lozowick called this approach to sadhana “enlightened duality.”

Our asana practice offers us myriad opportunities to consciously embody contrast and opposition in order to access the unity that is at the heart of duality. *Vishvamitrasana* is one such opportunity—a challenging pose that calls us to skillfully engage pairs of opposites. The asana is named after the Vedic sage Vishvamitra, whose name literally means “friend of the universe.” The very form of *vishvamitrasana* invites us to make friends with contrast, challenge, and the universe that exists inside and outside of us. >>

## Duality in Action

According to the Anusara Yoga system, the main set of contrasts to explore in any pose is the opposing actions of drawing in and extending out. As you draw in, you cultivate strength, integration in the joints, and increased kinesthetic awareness. As you extend out, you create space for expansion both physically and attitudinally.

A secondary set of contrasts we will examine in the vishvamitrasana sequence below is known as Inner Spiral and Outer Spiral in the vernacular of Anusara Yoga. These energetic actions create an optimal relationship between freedom and stability in the legs and pelvis by first opening the back body and expanding the space inside the pelvis, and then stabilizing that opening to anchor the posture fully.

Before beginning your practice, take a few moments to center yourself in inner awareness. Consciously embrace all of the opposites within you. As you move through the sequence, remember you are practicing to expand yourself through skillful engagement, not to force yourself into a posture. Stay in each pose between 5 and 15 full breath cycles. Challenge yourself with compassion, and pay attention to the wisdom of your body.



### 1. Standing Crescent

This pose stretches the sides of the torso and provides a great opportunity to practice the primary set of opposing energetic actions: drawing in and extending out.

Stand with your legs together and stretch your arms overhead in *urdhva namaskarasana* (upward prayer pose). On your next inhalation, firm your legs—squeezing them together—and draw energy up from your feet into your pelvis as though you are putting on stockings of energy. As you exhale, root the bones of your legs down into the earth and tilt to your right side until you feel a stretch along the left side of your torso.

Inhale, draw in with your legs. Exhale, push down through your left foot, and tilt further. Keep your legs and your arms straight. Move the sides of the rib cage back and anchor your tailbone.

When you are ready, inhale, come up to standing and repeat on the other side.

### 2. Parshvakonasana (Side Angle Pose) Variation

A great hip-opener, this pose gives you a chance to practice working your front knee and arm against each other—an important pair of contrasts that will come into play in vishvamitrasana.

Step or jump your feet wide so that your feet are under your wrists. Inhale, and turn your right foot out 90 degrees. Exhale, and soften your face while rooting your legs into the earth. Inhale, and firm your legs. Exhale, and bend your right leg until your thigh is parallel to the floor. Place your right hand on the floor on the inside of your right foot. Stretch



your left arm over your head so that your upper arm is in line with your ear, palm facing the floor.

Push your right inner knee against your right shoulder. Then oppose that action by pushing your shoulder back against your inner knee. You will feel a deeper sensation in your inner right groin and gain some leverage for bringing the outside edge of your front thigh parallel with the side edge of your sticky mat—this indicates that you have sufficiently externally rotated your front leg.

As you inhale, draw in with your legs and continue to push your knee against your shoulder. As you exhale, scoop your tailbone and draw the flesh of your buttocks away from your waistline, continuing to push your shoulder against your knee. Extend out through your legs and stretch fully through your top arm.

When you are ready, inhale, push down through your legs, and come up to standing. Repeat on the other side.

### 3. Trikonasana (Triangle Pose)

Trikonasana prepares the hamstrings for the peak pose and gives you a chance to practice Inner Spiral and Outer Spiral.

Step or jump your feet wide. Like you did in parshvakonasana, turn your right foot out 90 degrees. Inhale, and draw in with your legs until your chest lifts. Keeping that strength, exhale, and place your right hand down on the floor to the outside of your right foot.



With your next inhalation, turn your upper inner thighs in, reach the inside edges of your legs back, and widen your thighs and pelvis away from the midline until a small curve comes to your lumbar spine. From the inside edges of your big toes, stretch back to your inner heels. From the inner edges of your pubic bone, reach back to the inner edges of your sitting bones. Lift the inner thigh of the back leg away from the heel of your front foot, toward the seam between the wall and the ceiling behind you. This is Inner Spiral, which creates space in your pelvis.

To anchor and stabilize the space, you'll need to engage Outer Spiral. Keep

ing your upper inner thighs back and apart energetically, scoop your tailbone into your body, then turn your front leg out until your kneecap points straight up to the sky. Keep the mound of your big toe planted. Now move your tailbone forward and draw your hips together until they feel compact and steady.

Breathe deeply. When you are ready, inhale, root down through your legs, and come up to standing. Repeat on the other side.

#### 4. Vasishthasana (Pose of Sage Vasishtha, or Side Plank)

Vasishthasana is a great pose to test arm strength and gain the confidence necessary for the more advanced arm balance. There are two main forms of this pose: one with the hips in line with the torso and the other with the hips elevated. Because it is easy to drop the hips in the final form of vishvamitrasana, we'll practice the more buoyant variation of vasishthasana here.

From *adho mukha svanasana* (downward-facing dog pose) roll to the outside edge of your right foot and stack your feet on top of each other. Then lift your left arm off the floor and stretch it to the sky.

Inhale, tone the muscles of your legs and arms as though you are giving yourself a

friendly embrace. Exhale, push down and forward into the floor with your right hand until your hips lift and gain a little buoyancy.

Hold for several breaths. Repeat on the other side.

#### 5. Shalabhasana (Locust Pose) Variation

This pose opens the shoulders and trains the arm position that is essential for safe integration of the bottom shoulder in vishvamitrasana. In this variation, we are focusing on the work of the shoulder blades and arm bones, so keep both feet on the floor and press them down firmly



to help you gain greater access to the lift of your chest.

Lying on your belly, interlace your hands behind your back. As you inhale, broaden your elbows away from one another to create spaciousness inside. Exhale.

With your next inhalation, engage “shalabhasana arms”: draw your shoulder blades onto your back and take the tops of your arm bones back. On the same inhale, lift your torso up off the floor. Pause here, exhaling. Inhale, firm your legs strongly, press your feet into the floor, and lift your chest even higher. When you are ready, exhale and slowly lower down. >>



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### 6. Deep Lunge Variation

This pose grants deep access to the hips and gives you a chance to practice the entry used later in the peak pose.

From adho mukha shvanasana, step your right foot to the outside of your right hand. Spin your left foot to the floor like you did in parshvakonasana. Take your right hand underneath your right calf muscle and place your thumb on the flesh of your right calf. Use your thumb to roll the meaty part of your calf muscle in toward your ear. This will move it out of the way and make it easier for you to get your shoulder underneath your leg.

Firm your legs and draw in. Now engage Inner Spiral: turn your legs in, reach the inner edges back, and widen your legs and pelvis apart. With the space you have created, place your shoulder underneath your leg. Repeat these two steps; then place your right hand on the floor outside your right foot.

Now, engage “shalabhasana arms” by bringing your arm bones back. Press the right arm bone against your front leg while pressing your leg against your arm. These actions together will stabilize your arm bone in the shoulder socket and help you engage the strength of your inner thighs. With that strength established, widen your thighs out and apart once more with Inner Spiral and then add the complementary opposition of Outer Spiral in your front leg: come up onto the ball of your left foot and, keeping your right foot where it is, turn your right leg out in the socket, move your tailbone forward, and draw your hips together.

Breathe deeply. Release when you are ready and repeat on the other side.



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### 7. Supta Padangusthasana 2 (Reclining Big Toe Pose 2) Variation

This pose stretches the hamstrings in preparation for vishvamitrasana and gives you a chance to practice staying steady in your bottom leg, which is necessary in order to achieve the final pose.

Lie on your back, and place your left leg to the outside edge of your sticky mat. This wider-than-usual placement of the bottom leg more accurately simulates, and more effectively prepares, your legs for the final pose, where an extreme stretch of the hamstrings is required. Keep the left inner thigh strong and don't allow the bottom leg to externally rotate. Bend your right knee to your chest. Bring your right arm to the inside of your leg and grab hold of the outside of your right foot with your right hand. Bring your knee toward the right armpit until you feel a slight stretch in your inner right groin. Straighten your right leg out to the side. Draw the outside edge of your right foot toward the floor.

Inhale, firm your legs and draw in energetically. Exhale, extend out through your legs, keeping your hips even. Without moving your left foot, draw your left leg toward the midline of your body until you feel a tone in your inner left thigh. Breathe deeply. Release and repeat on the other side.

### 8. Parighasana (Gate Pose) Variation

This posture offers a tremendous side stretch and hip opening. It also gives you the opportunity to learn the work for the front foot and top arm of vishvamitrasana without being in a weight-bearing position.

From seated, fold your left leg back in *virasana* (hero's pose). Extend your right leg out to the side. Place your hands on the floor by the insides of your knees and squeeze your legs toward the midline.

This activates the muscles of your inner thighs and helps you effectively draw in. Keeping your legs strong, lift your hips up a bit, and take your right hand underneath your left leg to grab your left heel; then, sit your hips back down on the floor. Take your left arm over your head, place your left thumb on the inside of the arch of your right foot, and wrap your left fingers around the outside of your right foot. The pinky side of your hand will be facing up and the thumb side will be facing the floor.

While this initial set up may seem a bit unusual, this grip provides a great access point for a final set of contrasting actions we need for the peak pose: working your hand and foot against each other. Turn your left hand and arm out by turning from your thumb to your pinky finger, away from the midline, like you are turning a doorknob. Simultaneously turn your right foot against that action by moving your foot laterally, like a karate chop, from your big toe to your pinky toe. This dynamic work will help you get your left shoulder blade secure on your back and give you the stability you need in your shoulder to further turn the belly and chest toward the sky.

Repeat on the second side when you are ready.



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## 9. Vishvamitrasana (Pose of Sage Vishvamitra)

### Knee-Down Modified Form

This pose gives you a chance to practice the component parts of vishvamitrasana without the intense weight-bearing of the classical form.

From a deep lunge on the right side, exhale and soften. Lower your left knee to the floor, bend at the knee, and turn your lower leg so that your left shin is parallel to the short edge of your sticky mat. Just as you did earlier in deep lunge variation, place your right thumb on your right calf and move the flesh of your calf in toward your ear to allow more space for your shoulder. Inhale and draw in with your legs; use Inner Spiral to create space in your hips. Place your right shoulder as far underneath your right leg as you can; place your right hand on the floor a few inches to the outside of your right foot.

Lean into your right arm and, pushing your shoulder and leg against each other, sweep your right foot off the floor without using your left arm to pick your foot up. This important stage tells you that your legs are properly engaged. Place your left arm over your head and grab hold of your foot, like you did in the parighasana variation.

With your next inhalation, strongly firm your legs and use that strength to

turn them in, move the inner thighs back, and widen them apart. Straighten your right leg; if it is not quite straight, draw it in again and engage more Inner Spiral. This will activate and stabilize the hamstring muscles, increasing your ability to stretch them safely and effectively. Then add the contrasting action of Outer Spiral: turn your right kneecap straight up to the sky, move your tailbone deeper into your body, and tone your hips.

Now work your foot and your arm together as you did in the parighasana



variation: karate chop your foot to the right, and turn your hand to the left in opposition. This will allow you to further release your left shoulder blade onto your back and turn your belly and chest more to the sky.

Hold for several breaths. Release and repeat on the other side.

### Full Form

The final pose adds a greater degree of challenge—but your hips, legs, shoulders, and torso are now well equipped to greet the challenge.

From a lunge on the right side, spin your left heel to the floor. Work your right shoulder under your leg, and place your right hand on the floor. Now tone your shoulder and leg against each other, sweep your right foot off the floor, and place your left hand around your right foot. Strongly engage Inner Spiral in your legs to straighten your right leg. Then add Outer Spiral, working your hand and foot together with the doorknob and karate chop actions. Keep your left leg firm. Draw your left shoulder onto your back, and turn your belly and chest to the sky. Feel the freedom that comes from skillfully engaging opposition.

When you feel complete, release and repeat on the second side.

Conclude the sequence with *uttanasana* (standing forward bend), *adho mukha shvyanasana*, *balasana* (child's pose), and an inversion like *sarvangasana* (shoulderstand). Finally, settle into a deep *shavasana* (corpse pose), and sense into the spaciousness that lies beyond duality. ■



*Christina Sell is a certified Anusara Yoga instructor and author of Yoga from the Inside Out and My Body Is a Temple.*

For many meditators, samadhi can seem an abstract and elusive goal. But three time-tested



steps bring this heightened state of awareness within reach. **By Pandit Rajmani Tigonait**

# A Seeker's Guide to Samadhi

Samadhi is a hot topic in yoga circles. Some practitioners believe samadhi and enlightenment are synonymous. Others think samadhi leads to enlightenment, while yet another group is convinced samadhi makes the mind go blank. Some of those seeking samadhi hope it will fall into their hands if they pray hard enough, and others believe the techniques of yoga and meditation will push them toward samadhi or pull samadhi toward them. In the 30 years of my career as a teacher, I have encountered many students and seekers from different walks of life. I have found them to be good people, very sincere. All of them have an essential qualification in common—a burning desire to have a direct experience of samadhi. >>

**Trying to** attain samadhi without having a clear idea of what it is, without adopting a systematic approach, and without completing the preparatory steps is like trying to build a skyscraper when you have never seen one, do not have a blueprint, and do not know how to lay a foundation. You will waste your time and energy and reach nowhere. Just as mastery in any field—surgery, physics, music—requires prolonged, systematic preparation, so does attaining the highest

or indulge in fasting suffer from various diseases. Those who exercise too much or too little suffer from exhaustion or sloth. Those who think too much or who fail to use their mind properly become the victims of anxiety or stupor. Those who sleep too much or too little suffer from inertia or hallucinations. Those who act without a balanced understanding of their actions and the consequences of their actions suffer from doubt and fear. When we design our

enhance your understanding of spirituality by making a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash. For several weeks before you set out, your entire focus is on preparing for your journey—gathering the necessary clothes and equipment, packing, and then taking the long flight to Nepal. Once in Nepal, you shift into survival mode for the six-day jeep ride along bumpy dirt roads to Mount Kailash. You can hardly breathe because of the high altitude and the thick dust; the sun

## UPON REACHING THE SUMMIT, YOU FIND YOURSELF FILLED WITH GREAT DELIGHT. THAT SUBLIME FEELING STAYS WITH YOU LIKE A SWEET WHISPER CALLING YOU TO RETURN TO YOUR INNER SELF.

goal of yoga. This goal is attainable only for those who follow a system.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most acclaimed texts of yoga, delineates the key prerequisites. It holds that the practice of yoga is painless for those who adopt a balanced diet, balanced exercise, balanced thinking, balanced sleep, and who perform their actions with balanced understanding. These five elements are essential in laying the foundation for a meditation practice. Those who overeat

practice against the backdrop of these five elements, our vitality, endurance, comprehension, freshness, and spontaneity expand. As these qualities expand, so does our capacity to concentrate. It is on this solid foundation that you place the formal threefold practice of yoga *sadhbana*: *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (spiritual absorption).

These three are like the three stages of a pilgrimage. Let's say you decide to

is blinding and the shocks on the jeep are so bad you feel like your spinal cord is being shattered. You feel hot all day, cold all night, and weak and tired most of the time. Then comes the slow, arduous climb up around Mount Kailash and back down again. During this three-day hike, you can take only one step, one breath at a time.

At first it takes all your effort, then you find your inner rhythm, and once you do, it's as if the mountain itself lifts you up and carries you. Upon reaching the summit, you find yourself filled with great delight and a sense of fulfillment. When you return home, it takes almost a month to recuperate. But you remember the exquisite joy you felt when you reached the peak. That sublime feeling stays with you like a sweet whisper calling you to return to your inner Self. That's what this progressive threefold practice entails: first comes concentrated effort, known as *dharana*; second, the effortless flow of being there with full awareness of yourself and your entire surroundings, known as *dhyana*; and third, becoming one with that state of experience brought about by this effortless flow. This is known as *samadhi*.

The *Yoga Sutra*, the central text of yoga philosophy and practice, calls these three steps *samyama*. By stringing



dharana, dhyana, and samadhi together, the technical term *samyama* tells us that there is a natural process of starting our practice and reaching the goal of the practice. Most aspirants must follow this process. There is a rare exception—one that flows from complete surrender to God, which is not easy to come by. The grace of God has its own selection process. When it comes, it comes. And when it does not come, it does not come. Therefore let us focus on the three elements that depend on our human effort: dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.

### Step by Step

The first step, dharana, is loosely translated as “concentration.” The *Yoga Sutra* gives a specific definition of this word: “to confine the mind or fix it in a well-defined space.” Space is infinite. Because it does not have shape, color, or form, identifying space is very difficult. Therefore, to confine the mind to a space, you have to first separate it from the rest of infinite space by putting a border around it. In discussing concentration, Vyasa, the foremost commentator on the *Yoga Sutra*, advises bringing the mind to a space that is well defined, such as the area around your navel center, the heart center, the center between the eyebrows, or to a particular external point, such as a flame or a particular image.

Once you have decided to bring your mind to the center of your forehead or your heart center, for example, you must then select an object to occupy that space. The object you select—the cross, the Star of David, an image of Ganesha, a yantra, or a mantra—facilitates the mind’s ability to stabilize itself in the confines of that space. Yet when you focus your mind on that object, you’ll soon notice that it is also contacting many other objects in addition to the one you have chosen. In other words, the mind is distracted.

Distraction is the mind’s tendency to contact various objects at a fast speed and forget both the main object it was



supposed to be aware of and the space in which it was supposed to be confined. Rather than giving in to the habit of distraction, bring your mind back to the chosen object and allow your mind to focus on that. By repeatedly practicing this process of bringing the mind back, you will develop a habit of maintaining that object in your mind field for a longer period. If the object of concentration stays in your mind for a longer period of time than the objects that distract you,

you have achieved a state of concentration. Concentration and distraction flow side by side. The only difference is that one stream—the stream of concentration—is stronger, heavier, fuller than the other. That defines concentration. It’s not that your mind is no longer becoming distracted, but that the object of concentration stays in your mind longer than the distracting objects do.

As concentration matures, it turns into meditation, or dhyana. This is the

second step. Meditation begins when the process of focusing your mind on the object occupying that space is not interrupted by any other thoughts, or the mind stays on that object for a long period of time without much interruption. So dhyana is a continuation of dharana; your meditation is a more mature state of your concentration.

Students often wonder at what point

the process of concentration turns into meditation. Many saints and yogis say that if your mind remains concentrated on one object for at least 12 breaths, you have achieved a state of meditation. If within that 12-breath period, your mind shifts from one object to another object, you are still at the stage of concentration. Think of oil pouring from one container to another container. Oil is thick and

viscous so it pours out in an unbroken stream. The unbroken flow of your stream of awareness is meditation. And when this process of unbroken awareness lengthens further, it matures into the third step, samadhi.

Samadhi dawns when your mind becomes completely absorbed in the object occupying the space to which you have confined it. In samadhi, the process of concentration, the object of concentration, and the mind that is trying to concentrate or meditate all have become one. The mind is no longer focusing on the object in an objective manner. All that remains in awareness is the content, the essence, of that object. In other words, in samadhi you are aware only of the essence and not of the details. For example, if you have been meditating on the cross, you are no longer aware that it is made of the finest ebony or is covered with gold. All that remains is awareness that it is an object laden with a great sense of sanctity and divinity, that it indicates your relationship with that higher divinity. That feeling is there—that is all. And in that feeling it appears as if the object does not have any form of its own. It is totally devoid of any form. All that remains is pure awareness. That's called samadhi.

Let's examine the difference between meditation and samadhi. In meditation you are fully one-pointed, but that one-pointedness simply refers to the fact that your mind is focused on one object. When you analyze it, you see that deep down, the mind is not perfectly one-pointed. In meditation you are still aware of yourself as a meditator and at the same time you are aware of the object of meditation and of the process of meditation. So three things are going on continuously in your mind: (1) you know you are meditating, (2) you know on what you are meditating, and (3) you know you are the meditator. However, you have only one mind and that mind cannot be broken into pieces. It's not that one part of your mind is on yourself,



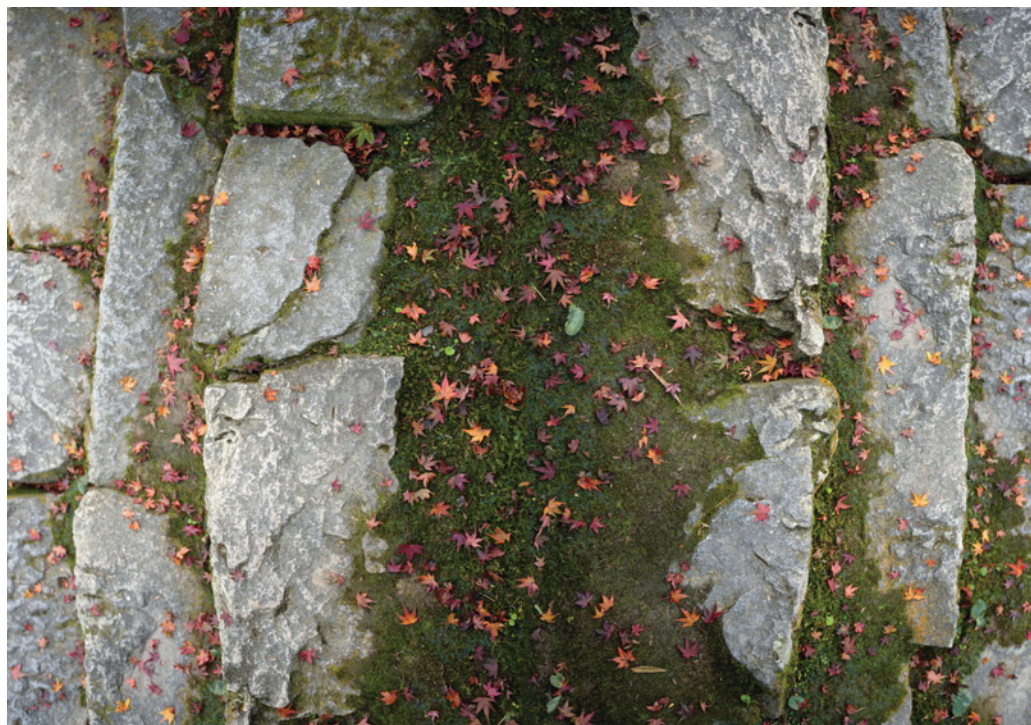
Left: Luc Pages Aquatiques / Alamy; Right: Kaz Chiba / Getty Images

and another part is on the meditative objective. It's a matter of intensity. When you are meditating you are more intensely aware of the object of your meditation, for example, than you are of either yourself or the process of meditating. So one stream is the major stream flowing in your mind field and the other two streams are secondary.

As you practice focusing the mind on the object of your meditation, eventually your awareness becomes so focused on that object that not the tiniest part is left to analyze, feel, and think that you are the meditator and this is the process of meditation. It requires an exclusive absorption in the object of your meditation for these three streams to merge. That is why in English samadhi is called "spiritual absorption." No part of your mind is left to maintain the awareness of anything other than the object of your meditation.

Then neither internal nor external causes distract you. You are simply in a state of deep stillness, tranquility. And that state may last 30 seconds or two minutes (much longer when you become well practiced), and then suddenly you become aware of some external sound, or you think of checking your e-mail, or you remember you have to meet someone, and you slip from samadhi and become outwardly oriented. You realize you are sitting on your meditation cushion and you still have some practice time remaining, so then you start all over again, making an effort to go from concentration to meditation to samadhi.

If you have been practicing for a long time it does not take too long to get back to a heightened state. It may take just a fraction of a second for you to fall from samadhi to concentration, but you can also climb back up very quickly if you have gained maturity in your practice. If



not, it may take some time, even though the memory of that joyful state of samadhi is still there, and the passage to reach there is also very fresh in your memory. Your daily practice reinforces the joyful experience of samadhi, making your memory stronger, clearer, and deeper, thus enabling you to retrieve that memory at will. The memory pertaining to the experience of samadhi empowers you to reach samadhi faster and more effortlessly. That is why consistent daily practice is the way to reach and retain the experience of samadhi.

### Signs of Spiritual Progress

Before you enter a state of samadhi, there is a thrill of experiencing stillness. And there are experiences which go with stillness that may distract you, such as clairvoyance or extraordinary sensory experiences. These experiences are called *siddhis*—yogic accomplishments for those who have never experienced sa-

madhi, and obstacles for those who have experienced it. These *siddhis*, regardless of how profound or shallow they are, how meaningful or meaningless, are signs that you are on your way to samadhi. As a practitioner, you should not be anxious about these signs nor should you have any fear if these signs appear. Simply keep your focus on your destination, your main goal, which is samadhi itself. Furthermore, anxiety regarding when you are going to reach there, doubt about whether or not you will reach there, fear of never reaching there, and worry about what will happen to you and your loved ones if you do reach there are the breeding grounds for distraction. Not making a big deal about samadhi and yet striving to reach it in the most natural manner is the way to protect the mind from all possible distractions. That is why yogis say, "Work hard but take it lightly. Achieve the highest but don't make a fuss" (continues on page 86)

SAMADHI, FAR FROM BEING A STATE OF BLANKNESS, IS A STATE LADEN WITH JOY AND WISDOM, A STATE REplete WITH CONSCIOUSNESS AND AWARENESS, SELF-REALIZATION AND SELF-RECOGNITION.



Ancient tradition and modern science agree: a profoundly expanded awareness awaits us in the third stage of life, if we choose to embrace it. **By Deborah Willoughby**



# Enlightened Aging

## BABY BOOMERS AS FOREST DWELLERS

**Five years ago**, on a picture-perfect August morning, the life I'd been living ended abruptly. A hole opened in my retina, catapulting me out of my job-centered identity into *vanaprastha*, the third, or forest-dweller, stage of life. In the yoga texts it sounds inviting—a peaceful, leafy turning away from worldly affairs to focus on moving inward. But I hadn't given it much thought and certainly didn't

imagine it applied to me—not yet, anyway. I was only 56—too young to think about retirement. And besides, I was busy.

I don't mean to imply I thought I was young. I'd been noticing a shift in my energy and preoccupations for some time, little things mostly: late nights left a deeper trail of fatigue than before; a hideous haircut was annoying but not distressing; my knees protested when I skipped asana practice. Little things. Clearly I was passing through late middle age—perhaps had even moved beyond it—but it didn't seem to matter much. Looking back, I can see I was firmly in the grip of *abhinivesha*—the ingrained desire for continuity which, to quote the *Yoga Sutra*, “is firmly established even in the wise.” I was far from wise—and about to prove it.

At the time, I was the Himalayan Institute's president, as well as this magazine's editor. In both capacities, I worked

closely with Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, the Institute's leader and my spiritual teacher. From time to time, as I moved into my mid-50s, Panditji told me I was doing too much and suggested I find and train an editor to replace me, but I'd been playing that role for 14 years and was firmly identified with it. With no obvious candidate in view I kept on doing what I'd always done. Actually, I started more of it—adding frequent three-hour commutes to Manhattan to work on the magazine's redesign, then staying up late when I got home, and putting in full days on the weekends to make up for lost time.

Troubled by how anemic my spiritual practice had become (my to-do list was goose-stepping through my head when I tried to meditate), I eventually asked Panditji for help. “You are misdirecting your attention,” he said. “You're constantly telling yourself, ‘This is what is real. These administrative problems

are real. Producing a magazine is my purpose in life.’ Your endless focus on these externals drowns out the subtle dimension.” He looked at me for a long moment, then added, “It’s time for your focus to shift and your awareness to expand, but you’re resisting.”


But then my focus did shift—not because I decided to stop resisting but because I was lucky. A defect in my left eye forced the shift from the external to the internal that is the hallmark of the forest-dweller stage of life. Though this was no leafy stroll in the woods, at least not at first.

### Age-Old Paradigm

The leading edge of the baby boom generation turned 55 a decade ago, so I have plenty of company here in this later stage of life. In a sense, it’s brand new territory. As recently as 1900, average life expectancy was 47 and only one of every 25 people born lived to see their 65th birthday. Now one in eight of us do, and with average life expectancy at 78 and rising—exceeding 83 for anyone still around at 65—a new stage is emerging in the years between midlife and full-blown senescence. We aren’t even sure yet what to call it. Late middle-age? Full maturity? Retirement? The silver years? The encore years? Second adulthood?

Part of the reason I didn’t recognize myself as having entered this amorphous phase of life is that I didn’t (and don’t) feel old. If I had, I would have blocked the feeling by any means possible. After all, we’re heirs to an ingrained belief that age-related changes are negative—harbingers of decline, disease, dementia, and various shades of loss. And this isn’t only a modern assumption—it’s been with us for centuries. One of the most quoted Shakespearean passages is the speech about the seven ages of man from *As You Like It*. Here the world is seen as a stage on which we play many parts, making our entrance as infants, wending our way through school, trying on various roles as adults, diminishing



A photograph of a dense forest of tall, slender evergreen trees, likely spruce or fir, under a heavy mist or fog. The trees are dark green and stand against a pale, hazy background. The ground is covered in a thick layer of green foliage and undergrowth. The overall atmosphere is serene and quiet.

THE YOGA TRADITION CALLED THIS THE FOREST-DWELLER STAGE, NOT BECAUSE PEOPLE LITERALLY RETREATED TO THE WOODS (ALTHOUGH SOME DID), BUT BECAUSE THEY WITHDREW FROM EXTERNAL PURSUITS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE DEEPER DIMENSIONS OF THEIR OWN BEING.

## IF WE SEE LIFE AS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF CHANGE LEADING ONLY TO DEATH, THE NATURAL IMPULSE IS TO DO OUR UTMOST TO IGNORE THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND CLING TO THE SELVES WE HAVE BEEN FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

as we age, and finally stumbling off the stage in “second childishness and mere oblivion.” In this depressing portrayal of the trajectory of life, a peak of attainment in middle age is quickly followed by a cascade of loss, reducing us, bit by painful bit, to making our exit “sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

Only in the past 25 years, as our life spans passed the three-quarter-century



mark, has a coherent counterpoint to this painful scenario begun to emerge, one in which we tell ourselves that in the years after 55 or 60 the best is yet to come—this is the time to get another degree, switch careers, start a business, maybe even take up skydiving. Although an improvement over the idea that aging is merely a prolonged slump into senility, this new emphasis on “successful aging” often boils down to an effort to flip the script back a few pages and replay the middle scenes as long as possible.

### Four Stages of Life

The yoga tradition offers a completely different script, one rich with possibility.

In this version, the play of life unfolds in a graceful arc from birth to death, becoming more nuanced and rewarding as it moves toward the denouement—perfect fulfillment, not “mere oblivion.” Here we play four distinct roles as the drama of life unfolds: student, householder, forest dweller, and renunciate. The first two are self-explanatory and accord well with our modern view. During the student years—childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood—our primary task is acquiring the knowledge and skills we will need to make our way in the world. We draw on these attainments when we become householders, immersing ourselves in the rush and roar of life as we go about earning a living, raising a family, and doing our civic duty. But here the resemblance ends. In our modern script, the third

act—retirement—defines us in terms of what we’ve left behind instead of what lies ahead. Up through our late 50s and into our 60s, our energy has been mainly focused on tangible achievements: earning a degree, building a career, raising children, acquiring property, perhaps making a name for ourselves. Now, as these familiar identities and activities fall away, we find ourselves without a clear, purposeful direction.

In the script written by the yoga tradition the direction is clear. The student and householder phases of life are a prelude to the ultimate achievement—freeing our attention from outward preoccupations and bringing it to rest at the core of our being. Here, in the third stage of

life, we have the privilege of stepping away from the external identities that so easily become all-consuming. By the time we’re approaching our 60s, we’ve lived amidst the rush and roar of life long enough to recognize the outer world is, in the words of Alistair Shearer, “a place of limited charm, a realm hedged in by restrictions and forever being eroded by transience.” We have enough experience to realize that name, fame, possessions, and power will never be a source of lasting fulfillment, and as this realization dawns, our attention shifts from what changes to what endures, pulling our focus inward.

In the traditional culture that gave rise to yoga this was called the forest-dweller stage, not because people literally retreated to the woods (although some did), but because, recognizing the transient nature of external achievements, they withdrew from these pursuits to strengthen their connection with the deeper dimensions of their own being. There was a civilization—stretching back beyond 2000 BCE—deeply immersed in the natural world. The full span of life was 100 years. Read the latest studies on the lifestyle that promotes longevity and you’ll understand why. They ate a plant-centered diet of locally grown organic foods. They walked everywhere. Their households were multi-generational and their communities were woven together in a robust web of interdependence. But above all, they had a vibrant sense of the meaning and purpose of life.

They knew that at our core we are immortal, forever untouched by decay, destruction, and death. They valued the body, senses, and mind, but viewed them in the aggregate as a vehicle for

making the journey of life. They did not confuse their core being with this vehicle any more than we confuse ourselves with our cars. Like a car, the body is well engineered for a long journey. And the purpose of this journey is not to accumulate possessions or experiences or power or fame, but to gather the tools and means to promote awareness of the luminous field of conscious energy that is the core of our being. They knew that to die without having accomplished this purpose is the greatest loss. And they saw that by the time we have reached the third stage of life, we have all the tools and means necessary to accomplish this goal. When we use these years of choice and opportunity to deepen our awareness of the inner world, the third stage merges into the fourth, climactic stage—spontaneous renunciation of the transitory for an all-encompassing engagement with the eternal.

### Science of Aging

This view of human potential as an infinitely expanding capacity unfolding across the full span of life is congruent with the inner sense most of us have as we age. At the time I was pulled up short by an unstable retina, it felt like my capacity and creativity were increasing and my outlook on life was becoming more positive. As it turns out, there's a solid biological basis for this. While it is true that muscle mass declines, reaction time slows, and short-term memory wavers as we age, in some key areas, our capacities expand rather than erode. As we move through our 60s and 70s and into our 80s, the brain and central nervous system are altered in some surprising and life-affirming ways.

For decades, all of us—scientists and laypeople alike—were convinced the brain stops developing after adolescence, and that further, we are destined to lose 30 to 40 percent of our brain cells as we move into midlife and beyond. But as it happens, the brain constantly reconfigures itself in response to experience,

forming new cells throughout life. To cite one specific example, neuroscientists now tell us that the dendrites in our brains increase in both number and length in the third stage of life. What does this mean in layman's terms? Gene D. Cohen, MD, a pioneer in the field of geriatric psychiatry and an expert on what happens in the brain as it ages, explained it in a lecture using an analogy in which brain cells are trees, dendrites are branches, and neurotransmitters are squirrels. The more branches trees have, the easier it is for squirrels to leap from one to another. "Likewise," Dr. Cohen explained, "if adjacent cells have more dendrites they form more points of contact, called synapses. Increasing the number of synapses improves communication between cells." He added that from our early 50s into our 70s, the buildup and length of dendrites is particularly robust in the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved with visual spatial processing, memory formation, and processing new memories for long-term storage.

And that's not all. Barely a week goes by without another scientific study confirming the yoga tradition's thesis that our capacities have the potential to expand in the later decades of life. For example, studies show that as we move into life's third stage, we use both hemispheres of the brain more efficiently; our ability to integrate cognitive and emotional intelligence expands, and along with it, our ability to integrate competing issues and solutions; the limbic system (the area of the brain that produces and regulates emotional response) grows calmer; and we pay more attention to positive experiences than we do to negative ones. On the whole, these changes lead to what Dr. Cohen

describes as "a maturing synergy of cognition, emotional intelligence, judgment, social skills, life experience, and consciousness" that continues well into our 70s. If we understand that life has a purpose and meaning, we can use this new capacity to find complete fulfillment in the third stage of life.

All of this assumes that our brain—and the rest of us—stays healthy. The dark underside of longevity is the specter of dementia, heart disease, stroke, Parkinson's disease, or some other malady stripping away our physical and mental vitality, leaving us to molder in the twilight. On the bright side, we now know there is much we can do to preserve and enhance our vitality, thus greatly increasing the odds that our "health spans" will come close to matching our life spans. We are no longer nearly as prone to thinking of life after 60 as an accelerating downward spiral as we were a few decades ago. There is a wealth of information—much of it based on sound research—on how to prevent disease, maintain a high level of cognitive and physical function, and remain engaged as we move toward the century mark.

But a funny thing happened on the way to this revolution in how we think about aging: in a sense nothing really changed. Rather than recognizing this as a distinct stage of life—one that has its own value and offers its own deep rewards—we seem to have embarked on an elaborate social compact to make 60 the new 40 and 70 the new 50. This is a dispiriting replay of the assumption that aging is all about loss. In its extreme form it leads to "amortality," a term coined by British writer Catherine Mayer for the trend of living as if age has no meaning, which (continues on page 87)

AS WE MOVE THROUGH OUR 60s AND 70s AND INTO OUR 80s, THE BRAIN AND CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM ARE ALTERED IN SOME SURPRISING AND LIFE-AFFIRMING WAYS.



# Transcending Trauma

Our animal friends have an instinctive capacity to rebound from fear, and so do we. Through gentle body-based practices, yoga allows trauma survivors to reconnect with their innate power to heal. **By Linda Sparrowe**





**Elaine breathes slowly**, in and out, for a few rounds of simple pranayama before she has to stop. Images too scary for her to describe race in and overwhelm her. After a few moments, with Jocelyn Jenkins, her therapist, sitting next to her, Elaine tries again. Several sessions later they move on to very basic, very slow sun salutations; she becomes aware of her muscles, noticing any resistance in her body, stopping when she gets too agitated.

Although these postures and breathing exercises sound easy and soothing for most of us, they represent enormous progress for Elaine (not her real name), who cut herself off from any connection with her body or her emotions years ago. Jenkins remembers the first time she met her. Elaine was very agitated, in a constant state of hyper-arousal, “alert to every movement in the room, every sound, even the rise of my eyebrow,” Jenkins says. But when it came to talking about her emotions, Elaine shut down.

Here’s why. As a young girl, Elaine was brutally raped. Unbelievably, no one in her family noticed—not even when she came to the dinner table covered from head to toe in bruises.

Without anyone to guide her or help her make sense of what had happened, Elaine tried to rid herself of any residual sensations she felt—she binged and purged, used laxatives, and

finally severely restricted her calories in an attempt to numb the pain, be invisible, and “yet at the same time,” Jenkins told me, “get someone to notice.” But no one did. Elaine felt alone and abandoned by the people she thought would protect her. By the time she checked into the Eating Recovery Center outside of Denver, Colorado, where Jenkins met (and noticed) her, she had a history of unsavory relationships with men, self-destructive behaviors, and no idea how to move forward.

Elaine is a survivor of childhood trauma, and her inability to control her emotions, trust her body, or form meaningful and loving relationships is a common cluster of side effects associated with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (complex PTSD), according to Judith Herman, professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard and author of *Trauma and Recovery*,



who coined the term. This particularly insidious form of PTSD affects those who suffer from chronic childhood abuse. While we often think of PTSD as the intense and unexplained symptoms military men and women experience coming home from battle, this anxiety disorder can take many forms and touch a much wider population. Being raped, getting hit by a car, witnessing a violent crime, being in a war zone, losing your best friend to cancer, or even being scared of the *possibility* of something bad happening can all contribute to PTSD. How you deal with how you feel in the aftermath of such events determines the level of trauma that gets lodged in your cells.

Yoga can make a big difference for trauma survivors like Elaine, and we are beginning to see more research that backs up her experience. A three-year NIH-funded yoga and trauma study conducted at the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute in Brookline, Massachusetts, with women who have treatment-resistant complex PTSD, has shown promising results. Bessel van der Kolk, MD, the study's principal investigator, and his colleagues presented preliminary findings at the 2010 International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies conference in Montreal last November. Initial study results revealed that participation in trauma-informed gentle yoga leads to a significant reduction (over 30 percent) in symptoms of post-traumatic stress, including fewer intrusive thoughts and less dissociation from

the body. By the end of the study (after only 10 weeks of yoga) several women in the yoga group no longer met diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Other smaller studies show yoga increases heart rate variability (HRV), a measure of how robust the brain's arousal systems are. It appears that traumatized people have unusually low HRV, says van der Kolk—who is also founder and medical director of the Trauma Center—which could explain why they are “so reactive to minor stresses and so prone to develop a variety of physical illnesses.” Yoga's ability to touch us on every level of our being—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—makes it a powerful and effective means for trauma victims to reinhabit their bodies safely, calm their minds, experience emotions directly, and begin to feel a sense of strength and control.

### All Talked Out

Most experts agree that trauma's effects live in the body—and that's why yoga works. Evidence suggests that people like Elaine respond best to body-based therapies, coupled with psychotherapy, because traditional “talk” therapy alone can dredge up old memories and reignite the pain all over again. And, while the mind may spend countless hours reliving the event and retelling the tale, it cannot undo the *effects* of what happened—the terror, rage, helplessness, and depression that then manifest in the body. According to van der Kolk, trauma is not *the story* we tell about the violence we endured

or the horrible accident we witnessed; it's not even the event itself. Instead it's the stuff we can't let go of—what van der Kolk calls the “residue of imprints” (and yogis call *samskaras*) that gets left behind in our neurophysiology (our sensory and hormonal systems). Van der Kolk, the author of numerous articles and studies on how trauma affects the brain, says that traumatized people are “terrified of the sensations in their own bodies,” so it's imperative that they get some sort of body-based therapy to feel safe again, he says, and learn to care for themselves.

Unresolved “issues in our tissues” manifest physically as migraines, nervous tics, clenched muscles in the neck, shoulders, and jaw, a sunken chest, or a heavy heart. Left unresolved, they can exact an even heavier toll in the form of heart disease, diabetes, panic attacks, ADHD in children, fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, and a host of autoimmune disorders.

### On a Physical Plane

Before a trauma survivor like Elaine can let go of any residue or feel any physical sensations, she needs to spend time getting to know her body—a little bit at a time. Dana Moore, a Santa Fe-based psychotherapist and Kripalu Yoga teacher who specializes in trauma therapy, told me adults who were neglected or abused as children “probably had no healthy way of learning about their bodies.” Most of them have neither a strong sense of self nor a keen sense of the con-



nection between the internal and the external. In his sessions, Moore likes to invite students to pendulate between movement and rest, between interoception (sensations in the body) and exteroception (stimuli outside the body). For example, he might guide trauma victims through an exploration of the left hand, noticing every muscle and movement, and then ask them to stop, rest, and feel. And then ask them to bring their attention to their ears, noticing any sounds they hear. An exercise like this reminds them that they can feel something deeply and shift the focus, coming out of discomfort, anytime they want.

Moving from one asana to another, slowly and deliberately, encourages students to stay with sensation and notice what's happening in their bodies, and to approach each movement with a sense of curiosity. The simplest of poses (standing or sitting in a chair) can produce profound results. Just feeling his feet on the floor for the very first time gave one agitated survivor a sense of balance, stability, and safety. For Elaine, who dissociated from her body and felt numb, doing gentle supported backbends began to wake up her body and get the blood flowing. Building a strong, capable body goes a long way toward developing a strong, centered mind.

No matter what poses survivors choose to do—or how much they experiment with the breathing exercises—they benefit from knowing that each exercise comes to an end, that they won't get stuck in emotional overwhelm. A pose might feel uncomfortable, a round of pranayama might bring up feelings they would much rather stuff back down, but the sensations are temporary, only around until the next posture or the next exhalation. >>

## Teaching Yoga to Trauma Survivors

*David Emerson, co-author of [Overcoming Trauma through Yoga](#), says to be a successful trauma-sensitive yoga teacher, you should be willing to examine your prior yoga training with an open mind in light of current understanding of trauma and PTSD; take feedback from students; and avoid physical assists. It is important to be highly competent in order to create a sense of safety for students, while not acting as the “expert,” so that students can find their own way within safe parameters.*

### Teacher Trainings

#### 1. Trauma-Sensitive Yoga

The Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute; David Emerson, director. Forty-hour training offered in the fall and a weekend training offered in the spring at Kripalu Yoga Center, Lenox, Massachusetts. [traumacenter.org](http://traumacenter.org)

#### 2. Integrative Restoration Institute

Richard Miller, PhD, director. Three levels of iRest yoga nidra training offered throughout the year at various locations. [irest.us/programs/trainings](http://irest.us/programs/trainings)

#### 3. Warriors at Ease

Robin D. Carnes, director. Advanced trainings and certification for teaching yoga in military settings; three levels, including one teleconference series, offered throughout the year. [warriorsatease.com](http://warriorsatease.com)

#### 4. Integrated Movement Therapy

Molly Lannon Kenny, director. Trainings and certification program combining yoga and conventional neurophysiology offered throughout the year at the Samarya Center in Seattle, Washington. [samaryacenter.org](http://samaryacenter.org)

#### 5. Breath-Body-Mind Training for Trauma

Richard P. Brown, MD, and Patricia L. Gerbarg, MD, co-directors. Five-day trainings in meditation and breathing practices. [haveahealthy.mind.com](http://haveahealthy.mind.com)

**Three-day weekend trainings** also available through Street Yoga, Portland, Oregon ([streetyoga.org](http://streetyoga.org)); Embodyoga's Veteran's Yoga Project, Newington, Connecticut ([newingtonyogacenter.com](http://newingtonyogacenter.com)); Teaching Yoga to At-Risk Youth and Adults, YogaWorks, New York ([halakhouri.com](http://halakhouri.com)). —L.S.

Many therapists and experts on yoga for trauma use body scans to help survivors find a degree of safety in their bodies—moving up through the body one muscle or body part at a time. Karen Soltes runs a program at the Washington, DC, VA Medical Center teaching iRest—a more accessible form of *yoga nidra*, developed by Richard Miller, PhD, director of the Integrative Restoration Institute—to veterans with PTSD. She says body scans can give trauma survivors “safe passage into the body, where hopefully they’ll find some degree of peace and relaxation.” Peter A. Levine, PhD, author of *In an Unspoken Voice*, calls this going “underneath overwhelming emotions” and tapping into physical sensation. Many survivors report that they are much more able to tolerate intense emotions without being swept away by them when they focus on the underlying sensation in their legs, bellies, chest, or shoulders. As with all yoga practices, survivors are encouraged

to stay with the sensation for as long as they choose, and stop when they start to get agitated or frightened.

According to van der Kolk, Western medicine doesn’t give us many tools to “master our own physiology,” so too many times trauma survivors end up self-medicating with drugs and alcohol as well as prescription drugs. Pranayama can have an energizing or calming effect on the nervous system, he says, and quiet the brain. Soltes adds that the breath can keep survivors *in* the body. Gentle pranayama that emphasizes the exhalation, she says, works well for those who chronically hold their breath or feel agitated. Alternately, focusing on the inhalation can help those collapsed in depression or dissociation, especially when paired with movements like modified sun salutations.

#### Your Brain on Trauma

So how exactly do yoga asanas and pranayama quell agitation or energize

a collapsed spirit? Before we talk more specifics, a little neurophysiology lesson is in order. Under normal conditions, the body is hardwired to protect us from danger or stressful situations; trouble ensues when its process is interrupted.

The best way to understand the human response is to look at animals in the wild. Sounds a bit far-fetched, perhaps, but Levine contends that our nervous system has a lot more in common with our four-hoofed brethren than we might think. A group of deer grazing in a meadow, for example, may appear happy-go-lucky, but they are continually on the lookout for predators lurking in the forest nearby. The very first thing the deer do when they perceive danger is to stop, stay very still, and listen. This hyper-vigilant stage of **arrest** activates the sympathetic nervous system (in charge of the fight-or-flight response to danger) and serves two purposes. One, it allows them to figure out what the threat might be and where it’s coming from (a smell in the air or a rustle in the bushes), and two, it helps them be more invisible to a predator.

The moment the deer feel a predator’s presence, they take **flight**, running to safety as fast as they can. If one falters and the coyote catches up to her, her first instinct is to rise up and **fight** back. If that fails, and she gets caught, she **freezes**, her muscles stiffening against the assault, and then **folds**, going limp and numb—helpless to protect herself. The fold or collapse state of hypoarousal activates the parasympathetic nervous system, shutting down the body’s defenses, allowing her to dissociate from the event, and preventing her from feeling too much pain. If she’s able to fool her predator and race to safety, she’ll **tremble**, literally shaking off the event, and return to the meadow in time for the next meal. While her brain registers the event and files away a “do not go near those bushes on the right” message, her ordeal is over and done with.

The human nervous system works much the same way. When we perceive

## Healing Meditation Practice

*The following mantra meditation, as taught by master teacher Sri Dharma Mittra, gives the mind an anchor to return to when sensations or memories surface.*

#### Preparation

Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position (or on a chair with your feet flat on the floor) and your hands resting comfortably on your thighs, with palms facing up.

#### Coordination

Synchronize the breath with the following syllables and *mudras* (hand gestures). Inhale to the count of four as you slowly and gently close your fingers in toward your palms, keeping thumbs soft, while silently saying the first syllable. Exhale to the count of four as you slowly and gently open your palms while silently intoning the second syllable, and so on.

HUM (inhale)...SA (exhale)...SO (inhale)...HUM (exhale)  
 SO (inhale)...HUM (exhale)...HUM (inhale)...SA (exhale)  
 SO (inhale)...HUM (exhale)...HUM (inhale)...SA (exhale)  
 HUM (inhale)...SA (exhale)...SO (inhale)...HUM (exhale)

Repeat the pattern for several rounds. —L.S.

For more on Sri Dharma Mittra, visit [dharmayogacenter.com](http://dharmayogacenter.com).

## NO MATTER WHAT POSES SURVIVORS CHOOSE TO DO, THEY BENEFIT FROM KNOWING THAT EACH EXERCISE COMES TO AN END, THAT THEY WON'T GET STUCK IN EMOTIONAL OVERWHELM.

danger, the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis mobilize the body's fight-or-flight resources. Stress hormones pour into the bloodstream so we can react appropriately. They increase our heart rate, divert blood into our large muscle groups (arms and legs), and speed up reaction time. An increase in cortisol releases sugar as fuel into the bloodstream so we can think and move faster. In the meantime, the HPA axis communicates with the rest of the body, instructing the digestive, reproductive, and immune systems to slow down and wait out the danger. All this activity creates a state of hyper-arousal and fuels the emotions and actions we need to first gain sensory information and then either fight an aggressor (anger) or, if need be, flee the scene to safety (anxiety and fear). Just like our animal friends, humans can also experience complete collapse, or hypo-arousal—when the parasympathetic nervous system activates to help us survive horrific acts of violence. Both the alert and the fold states are designed to be short-lived, functioning to keep us alive and safe from harm.

As we can see, our autonomic nervous system was designed to be on the lookout for danger and keep us safe. Problems arise when the pain and traumatic residue, or *samskara*, remains in the body long after the event is over and the brain cannot discriminate between what is in the past and what is a real, present threat. The body's posture (rigid or collapsed) continues to signal danger, so the nervous system goes in search of the perpetrator, assigning blame wherever it can. Levine says, "If frightening sensations are not given the time and attention they need to move through the body and resolve or dissolve, the individual will continue to be gripped by fear."

According to David Emerson, co-author of *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga* and director of the Trauma Center's yoga program, people who have experienced chronic or repeated trauma "find themselves alternating between being highly sensitized and easily triggered, and feeling numb or disconnected from themselves and other people."

### Calming the Waters

In addition to the recently concluded NIH study, other studies and plenty of anecdotal evidence support the claim that yoga mitigates the fight-or-flight response through a combination of active asanas, pranayama (with particular emphasis on the exhalation), and deep relaxation. It does this by decreasing the sympathetic nervous system's reactive response and increasing the parasympathetic relaxation response. Jay P., an Air Force vet from the Boston area, who experienced a brutal assault when he was stationed overseas in the early '80s—too horrible for him even to describe—shares a story that perfectly demonstrates yoga's calming effect.

One manifestation of Jay's trauma is acute anxiety, which gets triggered when he's in a crowd of people. After a particularly difficult therapy session, he says, "I was feeling a lot worse than when I came in." He got to the metro station in Boston, right in the middle of rush hour. His anxiety built as the crowd grew bigger; at one point, he says, "I felt like, 'I don't think I can do this.'" Feeling quite agitated, he turned around to leave, and then he saw a woman standing nearby holding a little child. "I put my hand on my belly and started to breathe—really focusing and paying attention to my breathing as I looked at the little kid and her mom." Suddenly the crowd *and* Jay's anxiety seemed to dissipate—everything felt more

manageable. "I had put myself into a shavasana-type pose with a sweet little kid in front of me," he says, and it worked.

### Re-energizing the Body

Less well known is yoga's ability to put the brakes on an overly active parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). Recognized for its role in the relaxation response, the PNS can also get stuck on unhealthy overdrive. As our animal friends demonstrated, the freeze-and-fold response involves shutting down the body's responses and lowering blood pressure and heart rate, all of which allows a victim to dissociate from the traumatic event, and prevents him from feeling too much pain. Unfortunately for trauma survivors, long after the event has passed, they may still feel numb and depressed, constantly tired, and completely dissociated from their feelings. Levine says chronic immobility paralyzes a trauma victim, and fear of unleashing her feelings deepens her sense of paralysis. It's important, he says, for survivors to learn to disentangle the fear and helplessness from their immobility. Elizabeth Hopper, PhD, co-author of *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga*, tells the story of Seleni to illustrate how yoga can help.

Seleni (again a pseudonym), who grew up in an African country that has experienced a great deal of violence, was trafficked into domestic servitude in the United States. Scooped up into the arms of Project Reach, a program that serves survivors of human trafficking, Seleni learned that she would be required to repeatedly tell (and hence relive) her story—to prosecutors, lawyers, judges, and therapists—in hopes of identifying and eventually prosecuting her abusers. Hopper, program director of Project Reach, says she sat with Seleni, watching and listening as she (continues on page 89)

Spirituality, geopolitics, myth, and climate change converge in the forest. An eminent eco-crusader explains why we must reevaluate our relationship with trees.

Interview by Anna Dubrovsky

# Wisdom of the Forest

## A Conversation with Vandana Shiva

**As legend has it,** the Ganges River owes its existence to the goddess Ganga, who descended from the heavens to cleanse the souls of a pious king's ancestors. To prevent Ganga from deluging the earth, Lord Shiva broke the force of her descent by capturing her in his matted hair. What emerged was the Ganges River, which Hindus regard as sacred. The forests of the Himalayas, where the Ganges originates, are sacred, too, for they represent Lord Shiva's dreadlocks, says renowned environmentalist Vandana Shiva.

Shiva grew up in the Himalayan foothills with the forest as her playground. By the time she earned degrees in physics and the philosophy of science, deforestation had dramatically altered her beloved playground. Like Lord Shiva's hair, forests capture rainfall and release it slowly as streams. As they disappeared, so did the streams that Himalayan villagers relied on for water. Floods and landslides became frequent. In the '70s, as Shiva pursued a doctorate from the University of Western Ontario in Canada, Indian village women mounted an anti-logging campaign known as Chipko, preventing the felling of trees by embracing or surrounding them. Every chance she got, Shiva flew back from Canada and lent her support to Chipko.

Now nearing 60, Shiva is one of the world's most prominent and prolific environmental activists. She has written more than a dozen books and received numerous honors, including the so-called Alternative Nobel Prize. She is the founder and president of Navdanya, a Delhi-based organization that promotes seed banking and traditional farming practices. *Asia Week* has called



her one of the five most powerful communicators in Asia.

To mark the United Nations' designation of 2011 as the International Year of Forests, *Yoga International* spoke to Shiva about the earth's forests, which are under assault around the world. Forests are essential to our survival. Not only do they soak up rainfall, feeding streams and rivers and mitigating floods and droughts, but they also absorb and store carbon. That makes them a key ally in our battle against climate change. Cutting them down—at a rate of 13 million hectares a year, an area roughly the size of Greece—sends more carbon into the atmosphere than all the world's cars,

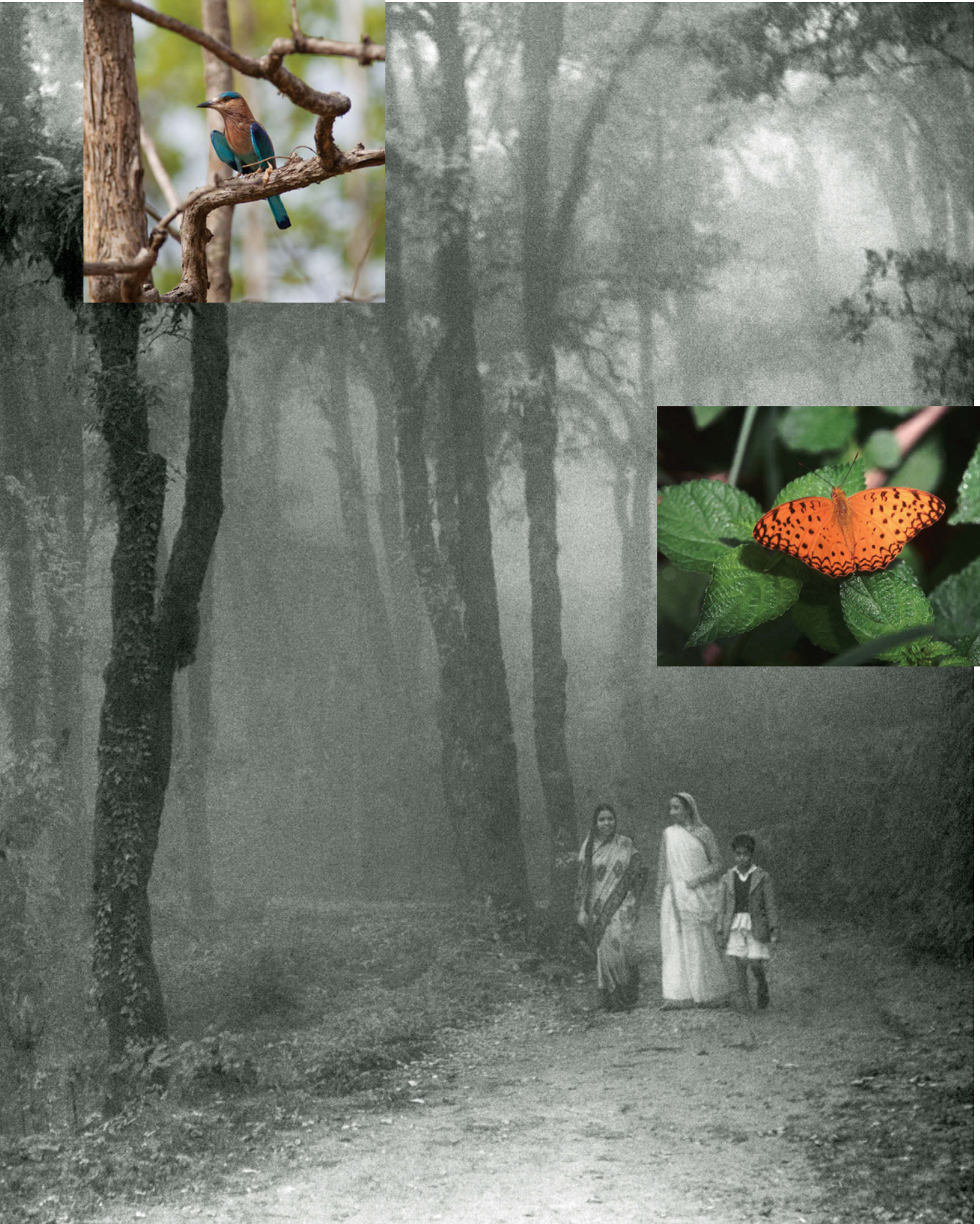
trucks, buses, airplanes, and ships. It's also devastating to biodiversity. Forests are home to more than 80 percent of the plant and animal species that live on land, many of which teeter on the brink of extinction. "We need to remember the forests even outside the Year of Forests," Shiva insists.

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**You grew up in the Himalayan woods with a forester father. What did he teach you about the forest?**

My father *and* my mother, because even though he was a forest official, she was the one who loved the forest. The nursery rhymes my mother used to write herself were all about trees and forests. And that's how we went to bed. Before we went to school, we spent all our time in the forest. And after we went to school, all our vacations were in the forest.

I've just come back from the mountains where my father used to work (and I now work with saving seeds and doing organic farming), and they're building superhighways through the mountains. But in our time there were no roads except some main arteries; often we had to





either go on horseback or walk. I remember doing 45-mile journeys in a day. When you walk, you're really intimate with the forest. You stop to pick the ferns. As children, the biggest plaything for my sister and I used to be collecting wildflowers and leaves and making art with them. Up in the forest there was nothing else. But we never felt there was anything missing. I remember later, when I became a teenager, everyone used to run off to discos, and I mentioned this to my dad.

Our parents were wonderful; they never said no. So he just got into the car, and we drove up to Delhi and went to the disco, and I realized it was so boring compared to the forest—that the forest was so much more fun.

**You're a physicist and philosopher of science by education. I understand that your transition to ecology was inspired in large part by the disappearance of the forest.**

That's it. I was going off for my PhD to Canada and wanted to visit my favorite places before I left and went to trek. And the forest was gone and the streams were dry. That's when I sought out Chipko and became a volunteer.

**What happened, ecologically speaking, in that time between childhood and your PhD?**

Development happened. The World Bank brought money to cut down forests to make apple orchards, but when you cut the trees that create the microcli-



“INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE THAT SAYS EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED—THAT’S THE REAL KNOWLEDGE. EVEN MODERN SCIENCE IS COMING TO THAT CONCLUSION.”



which became extraction systems for timber, and that accelerated the deforestation. That’s exactly when we started to see more landslides, more disasters, and the women started to organize and say no more cutting of trees.

**You’ve written that you learned your “first lessons about the value and worth of nature’s economy” from the women of Chipko. How did the movement come to be, and what did you learn from it?**

Chipko was a very spontaneous grassroots women’s movement. The first action took place in a village where loggers were coming in to cut trees, and one of the village women stopped them in their path. Other women joined her, and as the message of this action spread, women started to say, we’re going to hug trees—*chipko* means “to hug”—and you’ll have to kill us before you kill the trees. This movement spread through village-to-village communication, and wherever the loggers would go, they would face groups of women ready to

embrace the trees. And they would have to find another forest and another forest and another forest.

The government then changed the rules and said, OK, we won’t get private contractors, because private contractors were exploiting the forest for profit. So the government said, we will cut the trees. But of course they had to subcontract. I remember a particular village called Advani, where the head man of the village got the contract for cutting the trees, and his wife, Bachni Devi, led the protest to stop the cutting. And they stopped it. By 1981 we had managed to get a logging ban for cutting green trees in the high Himalayas.

**Is the Chipko movement still alive?**

Putting the life of the forest, the trees, and nature above your own life—because you depend on the earth—that has been ongoing, and I don’t think it’s going to stop. In fact, right now as I talk to you, women and children have been lying down in the hot sun to prevent the destruction of the forests and farms in

mate, you change the climate for the apples, and they don’t grow well. Dams—super, super, super dams—started to get built all over. They’re planning 500 dams in my region. There’ll be no river left. There’ll of course be no forest left.

Also, they started to build roads, and forests that had been protected because they were inaccessible started to get connected for exploitation. The big pressure really came with India wanting to build roads all along the border in response to the [India] China War in ’62. Then India made this huge network of roads,

## Outdoor Sadhana

If you have an altar or a shrine in your home, you know that sitting down in front of it—or even glancing at it throughout your day—can make a difference in your state of mind. While the weather is nice, consider creating a shrine outside, and specifically under a tree. Trees and forests have a long association with spiritual practice. Perhaps most famously, the Buddha is said to have achieved enlightenment while seated beneath the heart-shaped leaves of a fig tree. Before going on his way, he spent a week gazing at the tree in gratitude.

Tree shrines are common in India, says David Haberman, an Indiana University professor who recently completed a book about them. They typically feature a large tree contained within a kind of planter or even within a temple. Statues of gods and goddesses are often placed at its base. People bring offerings of fruits, flowers, incense, and, of course, water. “In addition to being great spots for yoga and meditation, trees are places for seeking life blessings, anything from good health to a long life to a happy marriage,” Haberman says. It’s not unusual for people to physically interact with trees, hugging, kissing, or massaging them.

Such displays of affection raise eyebrows in the West, where religious scholars and anthropologists have painted anthropomorphism—attributing human characteristics to a non-human being—as primitive. But “biologists have made it very clear that we share a great deal with other species, and if that’s the case, then anthropomorphism is not wrong,” says Haberman, who is also a forest protection activist. “There are trees that we share 70 percent of our DNA with.”

Honoring trees is “a way of seeing something you cannot see otherwise,” he adds. “When you love a being, it reveals itself to you. It’s that connection that opens up a whole world of perception and knowledge.” —A.D.

the coastal area of Orissa [a state on India’s east coast], which is being grabbed for a mega steel plant for a company called POSCO. Being ready to sacrifice your life for the higher objective of protecting nature and the forest is so much in India’s culture that I don’t think Chipko’s going to stop because we got a logging ban. New things will happen. New Chipkos will happen.

**The United Nations reports that most of the losses in forest cover are taking place in developing countries, in particular in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Is there an element of exploitation to deforestation?**

It’s very well calculated. I call it the outsourcing of pollution and degradation. All the polluting industry that causes destruction of ecosystems has shifted to the south as a result of globalization. Before globalization, Germany would want to make its own steel. Today Germany will relocate its steel plants to India and create joint ventures so that the forests of the tribals go, and they get cheap steel. Because of colonialism, because of other forms of exploitation, the south has been left poorer. Everything is cheaper. Labor is cheaper, and exploitation is cheaper. And that is why we have a global assault on the southern forests.

And then they blame the poor woman because she carries firewood. People who rely on wood for domestic fuel don’t kill living green trees. They only take dead twigs. What kills forests is mining. What kills forests is factories.

**The major cause of deforestation is agriculture, and it’s hard to argue against agriculture.**

I don’t think forests anywhere are being destroyed for agriculture. They’re being destroyed for agribusiness, and we must make a distinction. The rainforest of the Amazon is not being destroyed because the indigenous people suddenly started to colonize the forest. It’s going because



Cargill entered and started to devastate the forests to replace them with soybean. The rainforests of Indonesia are not being destroyed because the peasants started to expand into the forest but because of the global palm oil industry. So when a European drives a so-called green car with biofuel, it’s coming at the cost of the forest. We need to distinguish between agribusiness and agriculture. Agriculture is a culture. Agribusiness is a business. A culture doesn’t destroy the forest. In fact, good agriculture is based on the forest.

**Trees and forests play such a huge role in Indian culture and mythology. The heroes of the two major Sanskrit epics are exiled to the forest. The Buddha was famously seated under a tree when he attained enlightenment. And today in India one finds tree shrines—trees as places of worship. Do you find**



**DR. VANDANA SHIVA** One of the original tree-huggers.

**that you have a different perspective on forest preservation than Western ecologists and activists because of your background?**

Tagore, our national poet who won the Nobel Prize, wrote a very beautiful essay called “Tapovan” [“Forest of Purity”], and in that he writes that India is distinctive because we have treated the forest as our teacher. All our best learnings have come from people leaving the city to go to the forest and meditate.



Every great sage went to the forest. As he says so beautifully, from the forest, where every species is different, every species works in cooperation with every other species, what we learn is the deepest lesson of democracy.

I definitely feel that our perceptions on ecology are different from the theoretical perceptions of an environmentalist, whose only teachings come from modern-day environmentalism. And I would say there are three big differences. The first is that for us ecology is culture. Second, for us ecology is economy. And third, for us ecology is democracy. For a typical environmentalist in a northern country, in a Western country, the environment is an external object. It is different from the economy. It is different from democracy. Democracy is about politics, economy is about economy, and environment is in a third box. For us it's not a box. It's the very foundation of life.

Ecology is culture when you realize you're just one species among 300 million. So you shape a culture respecting all those other species. You shape a culture where we go to the Ganges and worship her as a mother. You shape a culture where you go to the banyan tree or the pipal tree and make that the Divine to be respected. You shape a culture where you get up in the morning and tell the sun, thank you and may everyone be blessed. So your everyday life and your everyday concepts are shaped by the fact that you are a member of the earth community. That is a very different kind of culture from industrial society, which defines nature as dead, women as a second sex, the third world as non-humans, and creates a license to exploit all three.

**The bottom line, it seems, is that everything is linked. Everything is inseparable.**

That's the key issue. Of course, I learned it from Chipko in the forest. But that's also what I did my PhD thesis on: non-separability in quantum theory. The latest science is telling us the Cartesian-Newtonian era was mistaken to assume everything is separated. Indigenous knowledge that says everything is connected—that's the real knowledge. Because even modern science is coming to that conclusion. (continues on page 89)

Sutra 2.21

# तदर्थ एव दृश्यस्यात्मा

tadārtha eva dṛśyasyātmā

The essence of the objective world lies  
in fulfilling the purpose of That.



# Life of Purpose

**Before delving into this sutra**, it is important to remind ourselves that there are two categories of *purusha*: special and ordinary. “Special purusha” refers to one who has never been touched by the five afflictions (*avidya, asmita, raga, dvesha*, and *abhini- veshha*), karmas, or the fruits of karmas. This special purusha is beyond time, space, and the laws of cause and effect. In this purusha lies the unsurpassed seed of omni- science; its power of seeing is not smeared by ignorance. Its ability to see and know

itself and its ability to see and know both the unmanifest and the manifest world is unrestricted, unobstructed, and un- distorted. This special purusha is ever- enlightened and ever-free. Patanjali calls this special purusha “Ishvara,” the guru of all previous gurus, the very source of knowledge. The objective world serves no purpose for Ishvara.

“Ordinary purusha” refers to the category of purushas who are under the influence of the five afflictions. They are under the influence of karmas as well as the fruits of karmas. Their ability to see and know themselves and their ability to see and know the objective world is limited. They are caught in the cycle of *samsara*. They are in bondage and thus are in need of liberation. There is a life of pain. It is for them that the world exists. The objective world—body, sen- ses, mind, ego, and all worldly objects, along with the experiences pertaining to them—has but one purpose: to help these individuals find fulfillment and liberation. They are called *jivas*, indi- vidual souls. This sutra explains that the objective world enables *jivas* to realize their pristine state of consciousness, to see themselves and the objective world clearly, and to become fully established in the knowledge of their identity as the pure seer, Consciousness.

The objective world, as the sage Vyasa explains, is a field where we per- form our actions (*karma-rupata-apannam*

*drishyam*). Life in the world is an op- portunity. The world has everything we need to achieve the twofold goal: *bhoga* (fulfillment) and *apavarga* (libera- tion). While navigating through the vast domain of *samsara*, we have acquired a long array of desires. Desires bring us back to this *samsara* again and again.

There are two ways to attain free- dom: fulfill our desires or renounce them. Normally we prefer the first option. The world is replete with the objects of all the desires imaginable. Life is fitted with all the tools for fulfill- ing desires—body, mind, and senses. Those who perform their actions wisely and skillfully attain freedom by fulfilling their desires. Those who lack wisdom and skillfulness pursue their desires only to be consumed by the desires them- selves. Thus they get further entangled in the cycle of *samsara*.

This is not as discouraging as it sounds. Each of us is endowed with the power of discernment. This power of discernment is an inherent attribute of *buddhi*, the discriminatory faculty within us. The main objective of yoga *sadhana* is to sharpen this faculty and train our body, mind, and senses to heed its wisdom. The more we use our intrinsic power of discernment, the more the ob- jective world unveils its hidden bounty of *bhoga* and *apavarga*. Then every action begins to contribute to the clar- ity and purity of our mind: every action

brings us closer to understanding who we really are and what our relationship is with the objective world.

One day this understanding becomes conclusive: we are the seer, the very power of seeing. This is when the world and life in the world has served its pur- pose. This is when, in relation to the one who has reached this conclusive under- standing, the world comes to an end.

Whether or not the world comes to an end in relation to those still caught in the cycle of *samsara* is the subject of the next sutra. ■

## Sutra 2.2 I

*tat* that; seer; consciousness; more precisely, conscious- ness fallen in the cycle of *samsara*; individual self; *jiva*

*arthah* purpose

*eva* only

*dr̥śyasya* possessive of *dr̥śya*, the objective world; life consisting of the body, mind, senses; all worldly objects and the experiences pertaining to them

*ātmā* self; core; essence

🔊 Listen to the *Yoga Sutra* in Sanskrit at [yogainternational.com/ys2](http://yogainternational.com/ys2).

*Fluent in both Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, PhD, is the author of more than a dozen books on yoga philosophy and spiritual practice.*

# Science and Consciousness

Nondual philosophy sheds light on the inherent limitations of scientific inquiry. **By Dennis Waite**



Paradoxically, both the power and the ultimate shortcoming of science as a tool for investigating the nature of reality lie in its objectivity. The scientific method of empirical observation and subsequent reasoning is something it shares with Vedanta, along with the acceptance of findings from those who have gone before (providing these findings do not contradict more recent discoveries).

Science has made a significant contribution to persuading people to consider that the world may not be as it initially appears to our limited organs of perception. At one end of the scale, the scanning electron microscope looks into the supposed solidity of the matter beneath our fingertips. At the other extreme, the Hubble telescope peers toward infinity into the swirling clouds of galaxies invisible to the naked eye. “Reality” is far more subtle than everyday experience would have us believe. The hardness of the table on which I

**D**uring the past few years, an increasing number of scientists have claimed insight into the nondual nature of reality. These claims, however, ignore a fundamental truth: Consciousness falls outside the scope of scientific investigation. Therefore, by their very nature, such claims cannot be valid.

There has always been a degree of animosity between science and spirituality. The Catholic Church’s persecution of Galileo over his insistence that the Earth was not the center of the universe comes to mind, as does the current de-

bate between Creationists and those preferring the more down-to-earth tenets of Darwinian evolution. It is encouraging, therefore, to see the growing number of books and articles written by scientists on the subject of nonduality. There is even an annual conference with the title “Science and Nonduality,” thus making it possible to explore these two avenues of knowledge in the same forum.

organs of perception. At one end of the scale, the scanning electron microscope looks into the supposed solidity of the matter beneath our fingertips. At the other extreme, the Hubble telescope peers toward infinity into the swirling clouds of galaxies invisible to the naked eye. “Reality” is far more subtle than everyday experience would have us believe. The hardness of the table on which I

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write is due to irrevocable laws regarding the spin of electrons and their sharing of orbitals around atoms. Massive energy sources in the universe result from entire galaxies being sucked into black holes. Our own senses are quite inadequate for the job of explaining the behavior of the world around us, whereas science seemingly can.

Science tells us that everything is made up of atoms, which are themselves assembled from smaller particles and those, in turn, are formed of more fundamental ones. Even light consists of packets of energy, behaving sometimes as particles and sometimes as waves. Ultimately, everything reduces to pure energy, which itself can be neither created nor destroyed but only transformed from one form into another. So everything is “one”—and isn’t this precisely what Advaita says also? And didn’t Heisenberg show that the observer and the observed are intricately linked, thus supporting this idea of nonduality?

So, at least, go the superficial arguments to illustrate how science is validating the truths embodied in the ancient scriptures and couching them in terms more acceptable to the sophisticated modern mind. Unfortunately, there is a significant omission in this neat explanation: the place of Consciousness in the scheme of things. Accordingly, science is obliged to try to explain this away as an epiphenomenon, a serendipitous side effect of the evolution of matter, once a certain level of complexity is reached. This, of course, is the exact opposite of Advaita, in which matter is explained as a manifestation of Consciousness.

On the face of it, Consciousness and matter are quite clearly separate “things.” In the Sankhya and Yoga philosophies, the material cause of the universe is called *prakriti* or *pradhana*, which is inert and quite other than the consciousness principle, called *purusha*. Another major pair of Indian philosophies—Nyaya and Vaisheshika—attributes the cause of the universe to

“atoms” or *parimanus* with, again, Consciousness as something quite separate. Only the *purva mimamsakas* and *uttara mimamsakas* (which include Advaitins) recognize Consciousness as the cause of creation.

The reason science cannot investigate the Consciousness posited by Advaita is readily understandable. This Consciousness is Brahman, the Self; the ultimate subject. As the *Kena Upanishad* (1.4–7 and 2.3) tells us: “It is That which speech does not illumine; That which cannot be thought by the mind, seen by the eye or heard by the ear. He who thinks he knows It, knows It not.”

## WITHOUT CONSCIOUSNESS, NOTHING CAN BE KNOWN. BUT CONSCIOUSNESS ITSELF CANNOT BE AN OBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE, JUST AS IN A TOTALLY DARK ROOM, A TORCH MAY ILLUMINATE EVERYTHING BUT ITSELF.

And as Shankara’s disciple, Sureshvara, wrote in *Naisbharmya Siddhi* (3.48; translated by A.J. Alston in *Realization of the Absolute*): “The Self cannot be known through the empirical means of knowledge such as perception, etc., which are but phlegm coughed up by the thirst for life. Indeed, it is not a possible object of empirical cognition, since it is the innermost Self [and is part-less and not accessible to the senses].”

The scientific method is also bound up with the notion of causality; it is constantly looking for causes to explain the observed effects. But, as Gaudapada points out in his *karika* on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, *turiya*, the nondual reality, is *karya karana vilakshana*—it has nothing to do with cause and effect. It is beyond, or prior to, space, time, and causality. Consequently, a scientifically based inquiry into reality is a contradiction in terms.

Science and the method that it embodies are excellent for looking into

objects and mechanisms in the apparent world. Its ingenuity in the most unpromising of circumstances is seemingly endless. And some of these investigations are of value in the investigation into what we are not; i.e., the *neti-neti* practice of traditional Advaita.

But even though science is good at investigating objects, even there it is doomed to fail because the essence of objects is ultimately the same nondual reality. As Atmananda Krishna Menon puts it in *Notes on Spiritual Discourses* (1386): “As long as the least trace of subjectivity remains, objectivity cannot disappear. And until objectivity disappears

completely, the real nature of the object can never be visualized. This is the fundamental error committed by science as well as philosophy, both in India and outside, in trying to approach the Truth through the medium of the mind.”

Without Consciousness, nothing can be known. But Consciousness itself cannot be an object of knowledge, just as in a totally dark room, a torch may illuminate everything but itself. Knowing requires both knower and known. For Consciousness to be known, it would have to be a knowable object, but it is the knowing subject. We “know” Consciousness because we are Consciousness. Consciousness is our true nature. The ultimate observer (which is who you essentially are) is simply not amenable to any type of objective investigation: who could there be beyond the ultimate observer to do the investigating?

This seemingly paradoxical state of affairs betokens a confusion of levels of reality. At the level of the world, which

is the domain of science, investigation is carried out by the mind (which is a reflection of Consciousness) into objects, such as the brain. The world is the province of the knower-known duality. From the standpoint of absolute reality, there is only Consciousness. The world is only

to discredit it. "I am" is not information. It is absolute and irrevocable.

The findings of science will always be subject to modification in the light of further observation. This is the nature of the method. But the recognition of the Self as nondual is not objective knowl-

berg's uncertainty principle clearly demonstrated that there comes a point in one's investigation into the increasingly subtle behavior of matter when the irreconcilable conflict between subject and object prevents any further data from being gathered. This is the terminus of

WHAT IS GAINED FROM SCIENCE IS INFORMATION RATHER THAN KNOWLEDGE. THERE IS NO END TO IT—THE MORE YOU FIND OUT, THE MORE THERE IS TO FIND OUT.

a manifestation of name and form, never actually separate from that Consciousness. But clearly Consciousness itself can never be investigated by the mind at the level of the world. What is gained from science is information rather than knowledge. There is no end to it—the more you find out, the more there is to find out. And any given theory is good only until more information comes along

edge. It is directly known, not through the medium of any sense, not requiring any reasoning process, and not subject to correction. It is final and absolute.

Science is irredeemably limited to the realm of objective investigation. This is its strength, and if some scientists wish to provide useful input to the spiritual search, they can focus their endeavors on the neti-neti stage of the path. Heisen-

scientific investigation. Consciousness itself is the subtlest of the subtle, beyond even observation, when the subject-object dichotomy itself disappears. By definition, no one goes there. ■

*Dennis Waite has been a student of Advaita for over 25 years and lives in Bournemouth, England. He has authored several books on Advaita, most recently the revised edition of The Book of One, and he is a trustee of Advaita Academy, UK.*

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## The Shaman's Gift

A scientist embarks on an Amazonian adventure to discover the shamanic wisdom behind enlightenment. **By Alberto Villoldo, PhD, with David Perlmutter, MD**



**Stinky five-gallon vats** held all kinds of brains—sheep brains, cow brains, human brains—but it was the only laboratory space I was able to wrangle from the biology department at San Francisco State University. Under the stench of formaldehyde, surrounded by hundreds of brains, I conducted my research into how the mind creates psychosomatic health or disease and how shamans are able to cure illness.

One day, two years into my research, I realized that I had been viewing the mind through the wrong lens. I had been trying to understand a spiritual tradition of indigenous America by looking at changes in brain and blood chemistry.

The following week, I resigned my post at the university and shut down my lab. And before the month was over, I had purchased a one-way ticket to the Peruvian Amazon to study the shamans in their own environment. My best friend, a medical student, gave me a very large hunting knife as a gift, with a note that said, “You might need this in the Upper Amazon.” Everyone I knew, including my own family, thought I was mad to throw away a promising career in academia to follow a harebrained dream of being an explorer and adventurer. I had my own doubts and reservations, but I shared them with no one. I was a city boy who had never set foot in the jungle. But

I was sure of one thing: I would not find answers about the mind in a laboratory.

I spent the next quarter of a century traveling and studying with the most renowned sages of the Americas. During that time, I witnessed extraordinary cures—persons whom Western medicine would have long given up on returned to health through ways I could only ascribe to a miracle or spontaneous remission. Over time, I became an apprentice to the shamans and learned their healing practices and methodologies. Yet part of me always felt like an outsider.

One old Indian I worked with for many years, a man who eventually

became my mentor, explained to me: “That’s because your God is a descending God. He comes down from the heavens on rare occasions to touch those of us here on the earth; whereas our deity is an ascending divinity who rises from the earth like the golden corn and resides among us. Our creative force is known as Pachamama, the Divine Mother.”

The Divine Mother is a force that infuses all of creation—a sea of energy and consciousness that we all swim in and are part of. I came to understand that our Western notions of the Divine are perhaps a masculine version of this life force that infuses every cell in our bodies, that animates all living beings,

PEOPLE IN THE EAST SAY THE PATH TO BRAIN SYNERGY IS THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION. SHAMANS USE THE TERM CLEAR PERCEPTION.

and that even fuels stars. The shamans helped me to develop an original and fulfilling relationship with the power of Pachamama, an energy or intelligence they were capable of interacting with to heal their patients.

The sages believed that we ourselves *are* this divine energy embodied in matter, much like ribbons of sunlight that wrap themselves around the trunks of trees and then release their light when we place a log into the fire. They claimed they were able to see emanations of this energy around the body of a person in the form of a luminous matrix. Dark spots in the matrix indicate the presence of disease, they said, even if the illness had not yet manifested in the physical body.

After many years, I learned to *sense* this luminous field and to comprehend the shamans’ concept of all life being interconnected through strands of light. In the beginning, my scientific mind had to grasp this notion by explaining to myself that we eat animals

that eat grasses that feed on sunlight. I reminded myself that chlorophyll turns light into carbohydrates, such as wheat and other grains, and that we turn carbohydrates back into light inside our cells for fuel. With time, my logical brain relaxed its vise-like grip on my awareness, and I was able to perceive more directly the luminous weave of all creation.

I learned that trauma leaves an almost indelible signature that a healer can perceive in her clients’ luminous field. Healers believe that this marks a person’s experience of health or disease for their entire life, like a cross that each of us has to shoulder. A shaman can help people

to lighten their load, perhaps even help them understand the lessons they needed to learn from the original trauma they experienced, but it is up to each person to choose whether they carry their cross lightly, discard it altogether, or become burdened and overwhelmed beneath the weight. According to the shamans, the way to clear these marks and shed this burden that defines our personality and our health is by healing our toxic emotions via energy medicine. If a person wants to be healed of disease and be truly free and enlightened, then it is essential to strengthen the feminine life force within through fasting, prayer, and meditation, combined with the use of healing herbs and plants.

### The Light Body

Shamans believe that the world seems real only because we perceive it as such and that everything we perceive is a reflection of an internal map that we ourselves, along with our culture, have constructed about the nature of reality. >>

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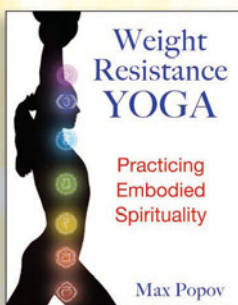
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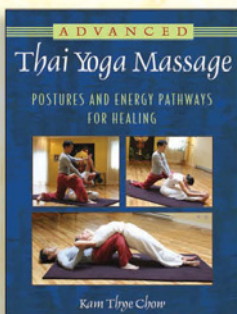
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These maps are stored in what shamans know as the light body, and what scientists call neural networks in our brain. Shamans know that if they wish to change the outer world, they must begin by changing the inner maps, by healing the imprints of disease and trauma from the light body. They believe that the light body is the blueprint that creates health or disease.

When we heal our light body, we can access knowledge that is available to all human beings. In doing so, we could interface with the biosphere in ways we've never imagined, to upgrade the quality of natural information available to us, and install it in the hardware that's been in our brains all along.

Shamans discovered that once our light body was free of trauma, our awareness could be refined to identify both favorable and dangerous events in the future. Those who developed these dormant skills were able to guide hunters to where buffalo would be grazing the following day, forewarn their villagers about an approaching tsunami, and lead fishermen to their catch—which gave them an elevated status of sages among their peers.

One of the most renowned examples of shamans foreseeing beneficial opportunities for their people occurred in the 1800s when the U.S government displaced the Osage nation from its traditional hunting ground in Missouri. The holy men of the Osage led them to settle on land in Oklahoma that consisted primarily of rocky meadows and barren hills, habitat undesirable to European settlers. Yet the Osage sages assured their people that the earth would look after them for many generations if they were to settle there.

One of the factors that made the land particularly unappealing was a black sticky substance that oozed from between the rocks and poisoned springs. Only later was it discovered that the Osage had settled on one of the richest oil and gas deposits in North America.

### The Neuroscience of Enlightenment

Shamans believe that, to interact with the vast information fields of the biosphere, you must enter a state of clear perception. Your mind must be at peace in order to perceive the true nature of the world and not merely the reflection of your own below-the-surface drama created by your destructive emotions.

In humans, the prefrontal cortex—the newest part of the human brain—takes on critically important significance as our link to the future, our key to enlightenment, and the answer to those ancient questions: How can we live long and healthy lives, unaffected by debilitating illness and degenerative brain disease? How can we turn the dense lead of human awareness into the gold of enlightened consciousness? How can we program the brain for life, health, and joy?

The prefrontal cortex is associated with loftier brain functions such as reasoning, inventing the alphabet and music, discovering science, and engaging in creative thinking. Many of the functions of the prefrontal cortex remain a mystery, but we know that it is associated with personal initiative and the ability to project future scenarios, and it is quite likely the place where our individuality and sense of self developed.

When our brain functions synergistically, our prefrontal cortex is fully awakened and we have the ability to develop the very highest form of intelligence and creativity *and* remain grounded and effective in the world. We understand who we are in relationship to our village and our history. Able to think originally, we recognize what holds us back from achieving a higher level of consciousness and what will help us to attain it. We recognize how we can survive and thrive.

On functional MRI scans, people who meditate regularly are shown to have developed brains that are wired differently than the brains of people who don't meditate: they are better able to remain calm and stress-free, live in peace, and practice

compassion. Curiously, their prefrontal cortex is the most active region in their brain during the states they describe as *samadhi*, or enlightenment.

In order for the prefrontal cortex to create functional pathways for joy and peace, the entire body and brain need to be healthy, fed with the proper nutrients, and trained with an inner discipline. We must heal our bodies and minds to empower the prefrontal cortex, which is biologically programmable for bliss, extraordinary longevity, peace, and regeneration.

Once this new region in the brain is brought online, brain synergy is possible. Synergy means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Brain synergy signifies a neurocomputer whose circuits are all turned on, tuned in, and operating collaboratively, each region attending to its functions, creating a system that cannot be defined or even described by its component parts.

People in the East say the path to brain synergy is through the practice of meditation. Shamans use the term *clear perception*. Regardless of the term used to describe the process, the challenge is to dis-identify with your limited sense of self that was created by destructive emotions.

Once you heal your emotional brain and create the state of brain synergy, the gifts of your prefrontal cortex will come online naturally. You will no longer need to pursue happiness through artificial means, because happiness will arise from you with ease. Happiness is not the result of good luck or happenstance. Happiness is a treasure of clear perception that can be eternally yours. ■

*David Perlmutter, MD, FACN, is a board-certified neurologist and fellow of the American College of Nutrition.*

*Alberto Villoldo, PhD, has trained as a psychologist and medical anthropologist, and is the founder of the Four Winds Society, where he trains professional practitioners in shamanic energy medicine.*

*Adapted with permission from Power Up Your Brain: The Neuroscience of Enlightenment by David Perlmutter, MD, FACN, and Alberto Villoldo, PhD (Hay House, 2011).*



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Maria Garre  
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# The Jigsaw Chronicles

A longtime meditator discovers unexpected spiritual insights scattered among the puzzle pieces. **By Irene Petryszak**



**A** thousand pieces of a country village scene lie strewn on the table in front of me. When I was a child I loved putting together jigsaw puzzles for the sense of order and control they gave me in an otherwise emotionally chaotic life. But as the years went by I had neither the time nor the inclination. Now here I am, decades later, turning 60, feeling this inexplicable urge to rummage through tiny shapes of various colors and patterns looking for the next right piece, puzzle after puzzle. Is it just a diversion? A way

to keep my aging mind sharp? A spiritual practice? What am I really searching for?

## Simple Strategies

I learned to start a jigsaw puzzle by assembling the edges first. After completing a few puzzles, however, I decided to step out of the box and skip the frame, piecing together random same-color areas instead—the brick-red section of

a country store, the shimmering blue of a lake. I found this approach strangely unsettling; the pieces were just floating in the middle without a way to connect to the larger whole, to ground. It reminded me of how I feel when I don't start my day with meditation. Without a solid spiritual base, I feel adrift, with no end goal. So I went back to doing the frame first; it grounded the puzzle and it grounded me.

Once I've connected the edges, I gravitate toward the easy parts, to have a sense of accomplishment. Then I work on whatever catches my eye. Each day is different with its own special rhythm or its own set of challenges—a microcosm of everyday life. Sometimes I find the right piece easily, which feels deeply satisfying, as if a missing piece of myself has also slipped into place. Sometimes nothing fits, and I wonder whether I am wasting my time.

Either way, the process itself soothes me and focuses my scattered thoughts. It creates space for my inner turmoil to begin to resolve itself. Even working on a puzzle for 10 minutes concentrates my mind, centering me so that I can more easily address the aspects of my life that feel stuck at the moment: the clutter in my closets, the creative block with my book, the plateau in my meditation practice.

Puzzles teach me to focus on one patch at a time—a corner of the sky, the roof of a house, a waterfall—until gradually the entire puzzle takes shape.

THE CHALLENGING SECTIONS TEACH ME TO APPRECIATE THE SUBTLE NUANCES OF LIFE.

When life feels overwhelming, like the 1000 pieces chaotically jumbled in front of me, I can follow the same bit-by-bit approach: sort one shelf, write one page, do the practice I can.

### Hard-Earned Wisdom

Each puzzle has its challenging sections—clusters of pieces that are practically the same shape and pattern. These can exasperate me to the point of almost giving up, but I find these sections teach me to appreciate the subtle nuances of life. In the process of examining each piece closely—this one is just a touch wider, that one has a hint of a second color—I become more observant. Afterwards, on an evening stroll, I am more appreciative of the brilliant hues of fall, more conscious of the intricate forms in nature, more aware of the patterns of my mind.

Then there are those pieces that I am convinced should fit in a certain spot but they refuse to cooperate. After many stubborn but futile attempts to prod them in, I take a deep breath and shift to a different section, allowing the puzzle to unfold in its own way. Lo and behold, when I least expect it, the right piece presents itself and everything falls into place.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote: “Be patient with all that is unresolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves...Live the questions now, and perhaps without knowing it, you will live along someday into the answers.” At work, in my relationships, and even in my practice, I’ve observed that trying to jam something into place before its time creates bigger problems. More and more I try to allow the questions to resolve themselves before taking the next step. I can’t force the process, but I can shift my focus to other practices that are supportive like prayer and contemplation.

If the jigsaw puzzle, or a problem I’m dealing with, becomes too difficult—nothing fits, no solution in sight—just setting it aside or going to sleep for the night seems to help. When I come back to it, my mind has a fresh understanding

and perception of where the pieces go—as if my unconscious mind had been working on it in the meantime.

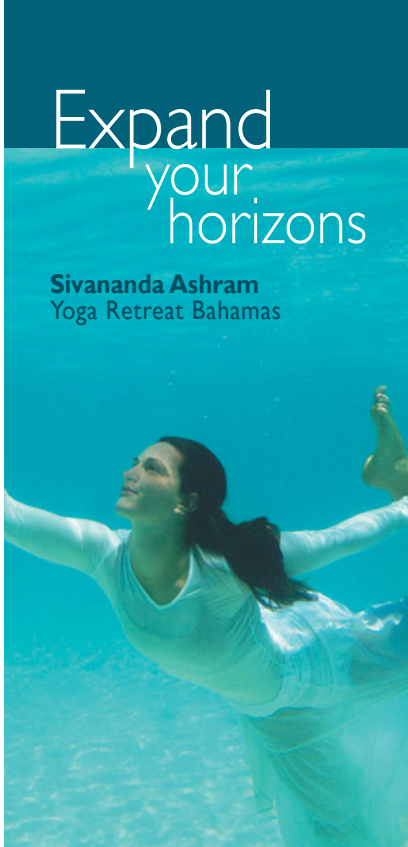
### Letting Go

The most satisfying part of doing a puzzle is the moment when my one-pointed focus takes me to a level beyond the mind. Then suddenly it’s as if the puzzle is doing itself—as if the puzzle itself wants to be completed. The pieces seem to fly into place without any mental input from me. This is like the turning point in sitting practice when the effort of concentration melts into the effortless flow of meditation. Or like a sudden feeling of upliftment in the midst of everyday activities, as if the pieces of my inner being are rearranging themselves toward wholeness—a spontaneous gift of grace that arises with steady spiritual practice.

A few days after I finish a puzzle, I take it apart. Years ago, when I was living in New York City, the Dalai Lama came to the American Museum of Natural History to create a large and intricate sand mandala. I watched as four Buddhist monks sat in silent focused attention on the raised platform—one at each direction—painstakingly sifting different colored sands into elaborate geometric patterns. Later that week I returned to the museum to see their progress and learned that they would dismantle their exquisite creation when they finished, as a ceremonious ritual symbolizing the transitory cycle of the material world.

I adopt this attitude of non-attachment as I complete each puzzle and then let it go. The puzzles serve as a practice; eventually, I will have to let go of all the problems, sorrows, accomplishments, and joys I have created in this life. For now, I am content to work on the next puzzle—creating and dissolving anew, and trusting that some deeper part of myself may get resolved in the process. ■

Senior editor *Irene (Aradhana) Petryszak* has been working on the spiritual puzzle of her life for more than 30 years.




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# Healthy Hips and Knees

Bring your lower body into balance with safe sequencing and sensible alignment. **By Marla Apt**

If you've ever experienced knee or hip pain, you know how tenuous simple activities such as walking down the stairs or squatting can feel—let alone attempting the vast range of positions and movements in a typical yoga class. Losing the spring in your step while babying a bum knee or hip can be humbling, and fear of further injury may lead you to completely immobilize yourself, which can actually exacerbate the condition. Luckily, yoga offers many tools to create space and relieve pain in the knees and hips.

Save for acute injuries, knee and hip pain are most commonly caused by wear and tear, which can be further irritated by the subtlest asymmetry. Imbalances in the hips can disturb the alignment of the knees, and vice versa. The range of motion in the hip (a ball and socket joint) is more varied than in the knee (a hinge joint). While the knee is mostly designed for flexion and extension, the hip can also be abducted, adducted, and rotated externally and internally. Limited mobility or hypermobility in any of the movements of the hip can contort and damage the knee. For example, if your upper leg doesn't easily externally rotate from the hip, you may compensate by turning the lower leg instead, which torques the knee and overstretches connective tissue around the joint. Through yoga we can stretch and strengthen the muscles around the hips and thighs in order to address the full range of motion in the hips, and in effect, protect the knees.

## Safe Sequencing for Hips and Knees

Knee problems tend to present us with more immediate feedback than hip problems, where it may take years of joint deterioration before the pain begins to express itself. When the knee is painful or swollen, it is best to start your yoga practice with non-weight-bearing asanas. Choose poses that extend the knee and align the upper and lower leg over the knee joint, such as *supta padangusthasana* I (reclining big toe pose I) and *upavishta konasana* (seated angle pose) in the sequence below.

In weight-bearing asanas, whether the knee is bent or straight, it's important to ensure that the knee is tracking properly. We'll examine this closely in *parsvrakonasana* (side angle pose), where proper external rotation of the hip allows you to safely bend the knee, and in *uttitha hasta padangusthasana* (extended hand to big toe pose), where lining up the ankle, knee, and hip in the standing leg serves to stabilize the hip.

In bent-knee poses, make sure that the inner portion of the knee isn't stretching or contracting more than the outer portion. If knee flexion is limited when bending beyond 90 degrees, as in *virasana* (hero pose), place props such as a rolled cloth or a folded blanket behind the knees to create space in the joint. Once you work on knee flexion, the knee should again be extended in straight-legged asanas.

Let's examine these principles in more detail. Hold each pose in the sequence below for one to two minutes on each side. >>





### Supta Padangusthasana I (Reclining Big Toe Pose I)

While this pose requires hip flexion, it doesn't involve rotation, abduction, or adduction of the hip, so the inner and outer edges of the knee can be stretched evenly. Lie down on your back, extend your legs, and press the thighs down toward the floor. Even though your back is in a neutral position and the lumbar spine doesn't touch the floor, the lower back should feel long. Keep your toes and knees pointing straight up toward the ceiling. Extend from your calves to your heels and broaden the soles of your feet.

Bend your right knee in toward your chest and place a belt around the ball of the right foot. Press your right hip into the floor as you raise your right leg up, perpendicular to the floor. If you can't straighten the leg, or if your right buttock lifts off the floor, take your foot further away from your head. Pull on the belt to draw the balls of the toes down toward the floor, and extend from the back of your right knee up through your right heel. Keep the bottom of your right foot parallel to the ceiling and the toes and knee of your left leg pointing straight up.

Now move the belt back to the heel of your right foot and press the inner

edge of your right heel into the belt reaching the ball of the foot toward the ceiling. Press the front of your right thigh to the back of the leg to fully straighten the leg. As you push your heel up into the belt, pull on the belt to draw the right thigh down into the hip socket. Keep the outer edge of your right hip grounded as you press the left thighbone down toward the floor. Extend from the left calf to the left heel. Make sure that the right knee is facing straight ahead as you reach up through the ball of the right big toe.

Bend the right knee toward your



chest and then extend the leg on the floor before doing the pose on the left side. You can repeat this pose several times on each side to relieve pain in the knees.

### Upavishta Konasana (Seated Angle Pose)

Sit on the floor with your legs extended in front of you in *dandasana* (staff pose), then hold your inner knees with your hands to spread your legs wide apart. With your hands besides your hips, lift your torso upright. Keep your knees and toes facing straight up toward the ceiling. If you find that your legs turn out or your lower back sinks, place a couple of folded blankets under your buttocks until you can maintain a natural concavity in the low back, and lengthen the front of the spine from the bottom of the pelvis to the top of the throat.

Press the fronts of the thighs into the backs of the thighs, and the entire backs of your legs into the floor. (If you're sitting on blankets, reach the backs of your legs downward.) Keeping your heels on the floor, lengthen your calf muscles away from your knees toward your heels. After sitting in this position for a couple of minutes, you may be able to spread your legs wider apart: press your fingertips into the floor directly behind your

hips, raise your buttocks a few inches off the floor, and push your pelvis forward so that your feet slide a little further away from each other, then lower your buttocks back down. With your legs wider apart, you may feel a stretch along the inner thighs and the inner edges of the knees. Make sure that your feet and toes are still facing straight up. Raise the sides of your waist and ribs away from the pelvis and open your chest.

To come out of the pose, hold the inner edges of your knees with your hands and pull on the legs to bend the knees; then bring your legs back together.

### **Parshvakonasana (Side Angle Pose)**


In parshvakonasana, the bent knee should track directly in line with the middle toe of the foot. Oftentimes, because of tight adductor muscles and/or limited external rotation in the hip, the knee falls in, putting extra strain on the inner knee. Turning the thigh out properly from its source, the hip, enables you to safely and evenly bend the leg. In the process, tight inner thighs are stretched while the outer hip region is strengthened, helping to stabilize the hip joint.

From tadasana, spread your legs and arms wide apart and align your feet

under your hands. Place a block behind the right foot. Turn your right foot out 90 degrees and the left foot slightly in. Turn the entire right thigh out so that the centerline of the leg, from the hip through the center of the knee and the center of the ankle line up with the middle toe of your right foot. Press the outer edge of your left heel into the floor and straighten the leg. Keep revolving the right leg as you bend the knee to a 90-degree angle, without letting the knee bend beyond the ankle. Keep the center of the right hip, knee, and ankle in line with each other.

Keep pressing your outer left heel down as you exhale and extend your torso to the right, to place your right hand on the block at the outside edge of the right foot. Bring the outer right hip forward toward the inner thigh and press your right knee back against your right upper arm. Bend your left elbow and place your hand on your left hip. Continue to root down into the left outer heel so that your weight is evenly distributed between the two legs. Roll the left shoulder back and revolve your chest and front of your pelvis toward the ceiling. To come out of the pose, press down through the left heel as you pull up through the left arm and straighten the right leg. Repeat on the other side. >>





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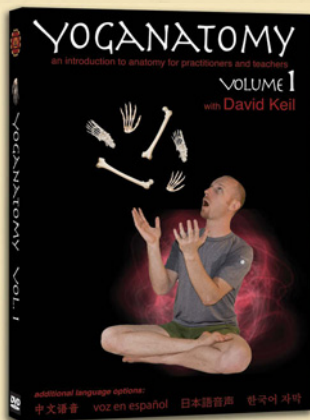


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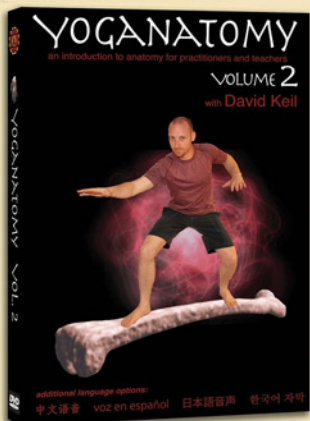


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## Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana (Extended Hand to Big Toe Pose)

This one-legged balance pose helps develop more stability in each hip through conscious alignment of the ankle, knee, and hip joints.

Find a wall, a shelf, or a ledge that is approximately hip height and stand facing it about one leg's distance away in *tadasana* (mountain pose). Place your hands on your hips and put your right heel on the ledge directly in front of you. Straighten your right leg, and make sure that your left foot is still facing straight forward. If you can't straighten your legs or keep your left foot facing forward, try a lower support. Press the inner edge of your left heel into the floor and press the front of your left thigh back toward the back of the leg, keeping the kneecap facing straight ahead. It should feel like the left hip is directly over your left ankle, so that the leg is perpendicular to the floor. Press your right thigh downward. As you stretch both legs, press back from the tops of the thighs (close to the hips) rather than from the knees. Keep

the fronts of the thighs and knees firm, and engage the quadriceps, pulling away from the kneecaps.

Don't sink into your outer left hip by allowing it to jut out to the left; instead, keep your weight balanced over your left inner heel and move the outer thigh toward the inner thigh. Without disturbing your left leg and hip, move the outer edge of your right hip down toward the floor and lift up out of the right side of the waist.

Exhale, bend the right knee and place the foot back on the floor into *tadasana*. Repeat on the other side.

In the second variation of this pose, you'll extend the leg laterally to the side. Turn 90 degrees to the left so that your feet are parallel to the wall or the ledge. Place your right foot on your support with the toes and knee facing straight up. Keep your left leg straight and pressing back from the top of the thigh. Straighten the right leg and roll the outer right hip and buttock down toward the floor. As you rotate the right leg outward to keep the knee facing upward and the hip descend-

ing, make sure that you aren't sinking into the outer left hip. As in the previous variation, press the inner left heel into the floor and move the outer left hip and thigh toward the inner leg.

Breathe smoothly and lift your waist and chest away from the pelvis. Release the pose and stand for a moment in *tadasana* before repeating on the other side.



## Virasana (Hero Pose)

Virasana can address asymmetries and stiffness in the hips, knees, and ankles, while providing deep relaxation to fatigued leg muscles. Although the classical pose can prove challenging for those with joint problems, this propped variation is accessible and therapeutic. You will need four blankets and one block.

Roll two blankets together lengthwise to make a thick roll. Roll another blanket alone to make a roll half the thickness of the first one. With your knees together and your feet apart behind you, place the bottoms of your knees and the tops of your shins on the thin roll, and your ankles on the thick roll. Lift your buttocks and place the fourth blanket, folded flat, into the backs of the knees. Your feet should be pointing straight back with the toes on the floor. Place the block horizontally underneath your

buttocks and on top of the ankle roll as you sit on it in between your heels. The buttocks should be able to settle downward; if you feel like you have to hold your pelvis up slightly out of the pose, add more support to your seat.



As the tops of the thighs and inner groins descend, lift your torso and chest up away from your pelvis. You may feel a stretch along the fronts of your legs, but there should be no pain in the knees.

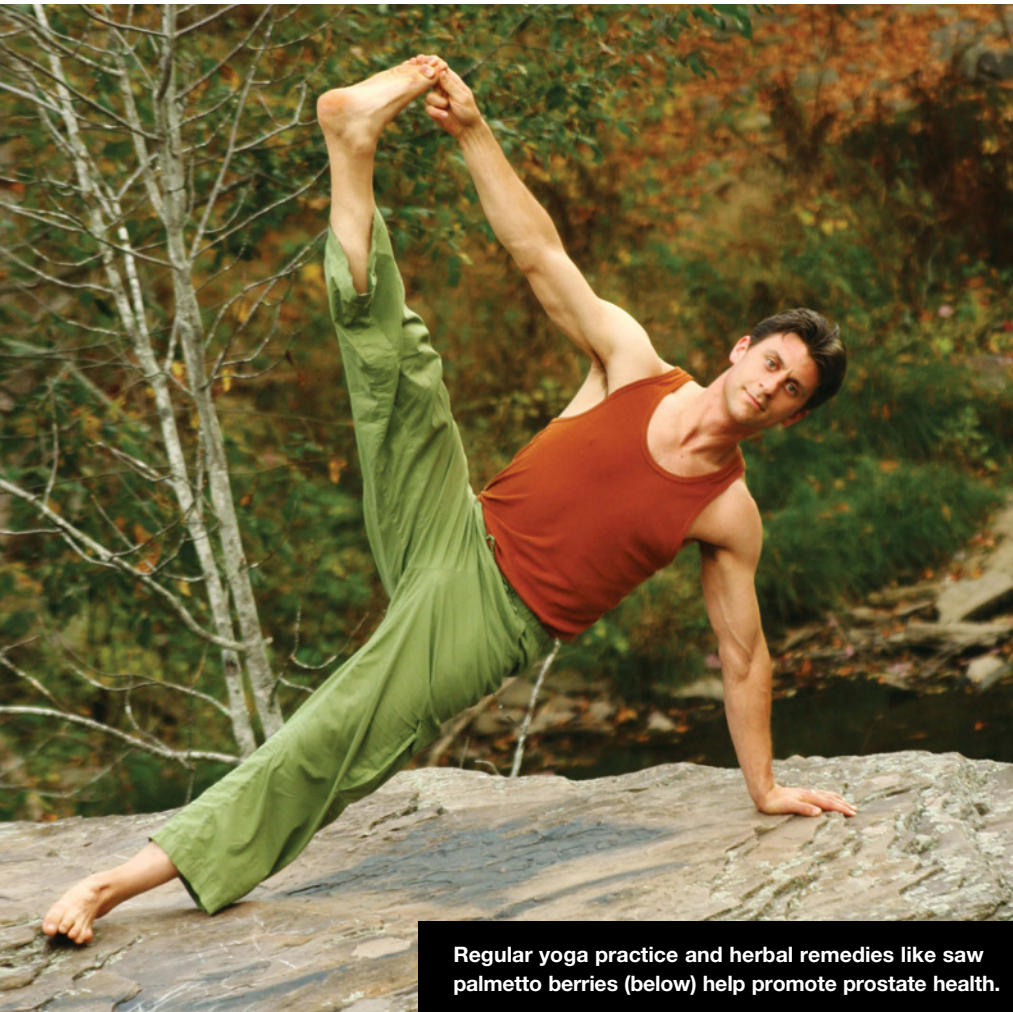
In coming out of the pose, the goal is to straighten the legs without twisting the knees. First lift your buttocks and remove the block. Place your hands on the floor in front of your knees, tuck your toes on the floor behind your blankets, and push up into *adho mukha shvanasana* (downward-facing dog pose). Firming the thighs and knees, press the fronts of your thighs toward the backs of your legs as you fully extend the backs of your knees. Lift your hamstrings toward your buttocks as you lower your calves and heels toward the floor. ■

*Marla Apt is a senior-level Iyengar yoga teacher based in Los Angeles, CA (yoganga.com).*

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# Protect Your Prostate

Get to the root of common prostate problems and prevent age-related ailments before they start with five natural solutions. **By Carrie Demers, MD**



Regular yoga practice and herbal remedies like saw palmetto berries (below) help promote prostate health.

**Judging from current** television commercials, men of a certain age can't seem to sit through a sporting event or go on a road trip without frequent need of a bathroom break. Suddenly, it seems, we're all too familiar with male urinary anatomy.

In part this is marketing pure and simple, but it also accurately portrays the degree to which men encounter prostate problems—most often the cause

of frequent and/or difficult urination. Some 50 percent of adult males (mostly under age 50) suffer from some form of prostatitis during their lives—caused by a bacterial infection,

stress, or pelvic trauma—and roughly half the men over 60 are diagnosed with benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH), a figure that climbs to 90 percent by age 85. Both conditions can cause considerable discomfort either from pain (prostatitis) or, in the case of BPH, from urinary difficulties.

As the commercials and magazine ads testify, modern medicine has developed some powerful new drugs to deal with these conditions, but while they often work well, they come with plenty of side effects—including retrograde ejaculation, decreased libido, erectile dysfunction, and even an increased risk of high-grade prostate cancer. A more natural approach, combining specific nutrients and dietary changes with yoga poses that target the pelvic region, can also produce positive effects—and possibly prevent prostate problems before they begin.

## Unintended Consequences

None of this would be an issue if not for a rather poorly designed bit of male plumbing. The walnut-sized prostate gland, which produces seminal fluid, is located in front of the rectum and under the bladder. It also surrounds the urethra, the tube that drains urine from



the bladder through the penis. Under normal conditions, this straw-through-a-doughnut-hole arrangement works fine, but as the prostate swells, either from prostatitis or BPH, it slowly squeezes the urethra and cuts down on the amount of urine that can pass through.

Whether a temporary problem or a chronic condition, this steady constriction leads to a weaker urinary stream and the frequent urge to urinate, especially at night. Over time, as the obstruction becomes more severe, men may need to urinate very frequently, straining to empty their bladder—or not be able to empty it at all.

Most mainstream physicians view the symptoms of BPH as an inevitable consequence of aging, and while they can't point to an exact cause, many at-

less than prescription drugs and have little or no side effects.

The first, saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), has a long folk tradition for treating urinary tract problems and a decades-long history of use in Europe for prostate problems. Recent research backs that up by showing that an extract of the berries decreases the intra-prostate inflammation associated with prostatitis, most likely the work of the herb's active ingredient, beta-sitosterol. Similarly, numerous studies show significant improvement in BPH symptoms, particularly with mild to moderate levels of prostate enlargement. *Dose:* 160 mg once or twice a day for 8 weeks to assess effects. Be sure to choose an extract that has at least 85 percent fatty acid content.

## SAW PALMETTO HAS A LONG FOLK TRADITION FOR TREATING URINARY TRACT PROBLEMS AND A DECADES-LONG HISTORY OF USE IN EUROPE FOR PROSTATE PROBLEMS.

tribute it to a change in the level of sex hormones—particularly an increase in estrogen, which encourages androgens to bind to the prostate, where they increase cell production (and decrease cell death). Their solution is to prescribe alpha blockers such as Flomax, Cardura, or Hytrin, which relax the muscles at the neck of the bladder to increase flow, or 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors (5-ARIs) such as Proscar or Avodart, which block the production of the prostate-stimulating hormone dihydrotestosterone, and can help to shrink the gland. In some cases the two types of drugs are combined.

### The Natural Way

Fortunately, pharmaceuticals aren't the only option for treating prostate problems. A number of natural approaches have proven just as effective. Foremost among these are two botanicals that cost



The second botanical, stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), was used as a diuretic in traditional herbalism. Research shows that it slows the growth of prostate cells and reduces the symptoms of BPH, perhaps by affecting the levels of testosterone and estrogen, or by acting directly on prostate cells. *Dose:* 500–1000 mg dried root 2–3 times a day.

Zinc, an essential mineral in human health, also plays an important role in the prevention and treatment of prostate problems. Normally the prostate has the highest zinc concentration in the body, but that level drops dramatically in men with chronic prostatitis—even though they usually have normal zinc levels in their blood. In men with BPH, rising estrogen levels decrease zinc absorption in the intestine. This aggravates BPH symptoms because zinc helps to inhibit androgen binding in the prostate. Multiple studies show that zinc supports

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prostate health and function through several mechanisms, all of which contribute to decreasing the size of the gland and lessening the severity of both prostatitis and BPH symptoms.

*Dose:* 30 mg a day. Note that zinc supplements decrease the absorption of antibiotics—most notably tetracyclines and quinolones—and of calcium, iron, and copper. Pumpkin and squash seeds, a dietary source of zinc, contain about 6.6 mg per cup.

Diet can have a dramatic effect on prostate health as well. Men who eat traditional diets—fresh fruits and vegetables, monounsaturated fats (olive oil), and fish in Italy and Greece (the Mediterranean diet); soy, fish, and green tea in rural Japan—have lower incidence of prostate cancer than men in the United States. Yet within two generations after immigrating to the West, men from these cultures show significantly higher rates of prostate cancer.

Other precautionary dietary steps include increasing your intake of soluble fiber like ground flax seed or psyllium; eating more soy, which lowers the impact of estrogen-driven androgen accumulation and has been linked to lower incidence of prostate cancer; and cutting down on caffeine, which aggravates BPH.

### Relaxing the Root

In the early 2000s, doctors in the Stanford University Department of Urology theorized that prostatitis is really caused by chronic tension held unconsciously in the pelvic musculature. To test their idea, David Wise, MD, and Rodney Anderson, MD, developed the Wise-Anderson Protocol (also known as the Stanford Protocol), which combines relaxation techniques, trigger point therapy, and some yoga-type exercises to teach men how to relax their pelvic floor muscles. A recent study published in *The Journal of Urology* (April 2011) shows that more than 80 percent of the 1116 participants benefited either significantly or mildly from following this therapy. BPH creates similar tension in the pelvic area, which suggests that the Wise-Anderson Protocol can offer relief to BPH sufferers as well.

The yogic practice of *mula bandha*, or root lock, directly addresses the pelvic floor region by gently contracting and releasing the perineum (the muscle between the genitals and the anus), and can be used to similar effect. Besides working the musculature around the prostate, this engagement circulates prana in the region. Mula bandha can be practiced in isolation or incorporated into asanas such as *adho mukha shvanasana* (downward-facing dog pose), *virasana* (hero pose), and *setu bandha* (bridge), as well as the vitalizing practice of *agni sara* (find video instruction at [yogainternational.com/agnisara](http://yogainternational.com/agnisara)).

As always, seek professional medical attention for your health when serious problems arise. ■

*Board-certified in internal medicine, Carrie Demers, MD, is the director of the Himalayan Institute Total Health Center.*

# Guilt-Free Comfort Food

Relive your childhood memories with healthy vegan-friendly versions of three American classics. **By Kathryn Budig**



**For a healthy twist on a picnic favorite, swap the hot dog for a carrot.**

Signs of autumn are in the air—from crisp mornings and kaleidoscopic foliage to rosy cheeks and curiously vocal bellies. Ayurveda tells us that seasonal shifts manifest inside of us as well as around us. As temperatures drop, our natural hibernation tendencies kick in, and we tend to crave foods that provide warmth, nourishment, and, of course, comfort.

The idea of comfort food evokes nostalgic memories of childhood. Growing up in Kansas—where calories were never counted and food came out of packages with hard-to-pronounce ingredients—I adored a good hot dog, creamy macaroni and cheese, and, of course, a chocolate chip cookie


fresh out of the oven. Now I'm all grown up and living the eco-yogic life in Los Angeles, where I've come to terms with the fact that dairy and I don't get along, gluten tends to slow me down, and the more processed my food is, the less vitality I have.

Instead of letting my health sensibilities rain on my comfort food parade, I've come up with some delicious vegan alternatives to my childhood faves. A savory and satisfying finger food, the Grilled Carrot Dog will call you back for seconds. Pick carrots that are deep orange—the bright color signals more beta-carotene, which helps keep your eyes healthy and your complexion

glowing. The creamy dairy-free goodness of Not Your Mama's Mac 'n Cheese packs a protein punch with walnuts and gluten-free nutritional yeast, while the fresh herbs in the dish provide flavonoids, which help fight free radicals in the body. The vegan Happy Hippie Cookies—contributed by Ashley Swider, founder of YesUmay Cookies in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina—takes processed sugar out of the dessert equation and is a delight for anyone who struggles with dairy sensitivities.

After all these healthful indulgences, you might find yourself giggling and feeling like you're four years old again, without a care in the world. So here's to your comfort, health, and joy! >>

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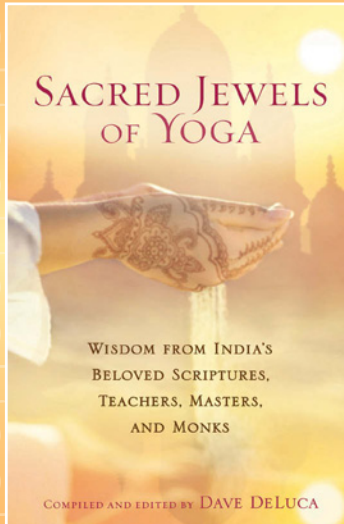
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## Grilled Carrot Dog

*Yields 6 servings*

### For Carrot Dog:

- 6 organic carrots, scrubbed
- 1 small bundle fresh sage
- 1 small bundle fresh rosemary
- 5 garlic cloves in skin, smashed
- 1 orange, peeled and quartered
- enough water to cover carrots
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons pink salt
- 1 bay leaf
- 6 brown rice hot dog buns
- spicy brown mustard

### For Coleslaw:


- 1 small head green cabbage
- 1½ tablespoons water
- 1½ tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- 1½ tablespoons agave
- pinch of salt
- pinch of red pepper flakes

Place the carrots, fresh herbs, garlic, bay leaf, and orange into a large shallow frying pan. Cover with water and add salt. Bring to a light simmer for about 10 to 15 minutes or until the carrots can be lightly pierced by a fork (be careful not to overcook or you'll have mushy carrots on your hands). Remove the carrots and pat them dry with paper towels.

While the carrots are poaching, you can prepare the coleslaw. Finely chop the green cabbage and place it into a bowl. Whisk the water, vinegar, agave, salt, and red pepper and drizzle them over the cabbage. Give the slaw a good shake and set it aside for about 10 minutes to soak in the flavors.

Lightly oil a grill pan and bring it to a high heat. Massage the carrots with a bit of olive oil and sea salt and place them onto the hot grill for about 3 to 5 minutes per side. Don't be tempted to fidget with them—you want nice dark grill marks.

Remove the carrots and place the buns facedown on the grill for 1 minute on each side to give them a golden hue. Remove and pile on the brown mustard, slaw, and carrot dog.



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## Not Your Mama's Mac 'n Cheese

*Yields 3 servings*

- ½ box brown rice pasta (penne is best)
- ½ cup walnuts, toasted
- 2 tablespoons Earth Balance spread (or butter for dairy alternative)
- 3 tablespoons shallots, chopped
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup white wine (such as a Viognier)
- 1 cup nutritional yeast (such as Bob's Red Mill)
- 1 cup rice or soy milk, plain
- 2 teaspoons spicy brown mustard
- ½ tablespoon tamari
- dried red pepper flakes to taste
- 1 lemon, juiced
- ¼ cup Italian flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- 1 bundle fresh chives, chopped

Bring a large pot of water to a boil; generously salt the water and return to a boil. Cook the pasta according to the package directions to al dente, drain, and set aside. Keep in mind that gluten-free pasta tends to cook faster than regular pasta; for optimal timing, start the pot right before you make your sauce.

Place the walnuts in a frying pan over medium-high heat. Stir the walnuts frequently and attentively (they burn easily) until a nice aroma hits your nose or they begin to slightly brown, approximately 2 to 3 minutes.

Transfer the walnuts into a food processor with the Earth Balance and a pinch of salt. Blend until all the ingredients are incorporated and the nuts are finely chopped. Set aside.

Place the olive oil into a large frying pan and sauté the shallots and pepper flakes over medium heat for 3 to 5 minutes. Add the white wine and let it cook off for 1 minute, stirring. Add the yeast, milk, mustard, and tamari, and mix. Pour in the lemon juice and walnut mixture, mixing well for about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in fresh parsley. Pour the entire contents over

the drained pasta in a serving bowl. Toss until the pasta is coated evenly, and top with freshly chopped chives.

## Happy Hippie Cookies

*Yields 20 cookies*

- ½ cup sunflower butter
- ½ cup virgin coconut oil
- 2 bananas
- 1 cup natural cane sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup dark chocolate chips

In a large mixing bowl, combine the sunflower butter, coconut oil, bananas, sugar, and vanilla until they are creamy. Then add the flour, oats, baking soda, and salt until the dough is smooth and creamy, about 30 seconds on medium speed. Finally, add the chocolate chips and mix until they are well incorporated throughout the dough—again, about 30 seconds on medium speed.



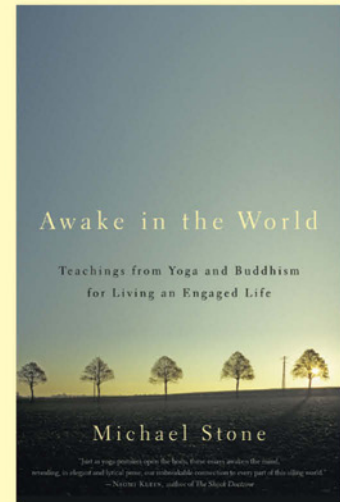
Chill the dough in the fridge for about 30 minutes. Then use a small ice cream scoop to heap the dough in two rows on a lightly sprayed baking pan (use organic coconut cooking spray, if possible). Bake for 15 minutes at 325 degrees and voilà! ■

*Kathryn Budig is an international yoga teacher by day, food wizard by dinnertime, and professional dog snuggler by night (kathrynbudig.com).*

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# Lunar Power

Honor the nurturing energy of the divine feminine with this meditative moon salutation. **By Karina Ayn Mirsky**

**M**any traditional cultures revere the moon as a manifestation of the divine feminine force in nature. According to hatha yoga, this force also resides within us. Whereas solar energy is warm, active, and outwardly oriented, lunar energy is cool, receptive, and inwardly focused.

Society typically encourages our solar, more masculine impulses, making it easy to pursue worldly achievement rather than inner awareness. Although the aim of hatha yoga is to balance our lunar and solar energies, even our asana practice tends to reflect a bias for the solar, often emphasizing sun salutations and heating practices in the interest of physical fitness. If the divine lunar force could speak, she might lovingly remind us to “chill out before we burn out.” Like a mother, the moon can teach us to

slow down, listen to our own needs, and be receptive to change.

We can invoke and pay homage to the lunar energy in nature and within by practicing *chandra namaskara*, or moon salutation. The 15 steps in the sequence below represent 15 *tithis*, or lunar days; a 16th step honors the tantric goddess Shodashi, who presides over all the phases of the moon, as well as all that is perfect, complete, and beautiful. When practiced with devotion and gratitude for the divine feminine, this version of chandra namaskara can become a full body prayer.

An inward-moving and mildly calming practice, chandra namaskara is appropriate for any time of day, including late afternoon and evening. To bring an element of ritual into your practice, try it during the new and full moon phases, or outside anytime under the moon itself. The sequence is safe to explore for anyone who practices sun salutations, and many women find it soothing during menstruation or pregnancy.

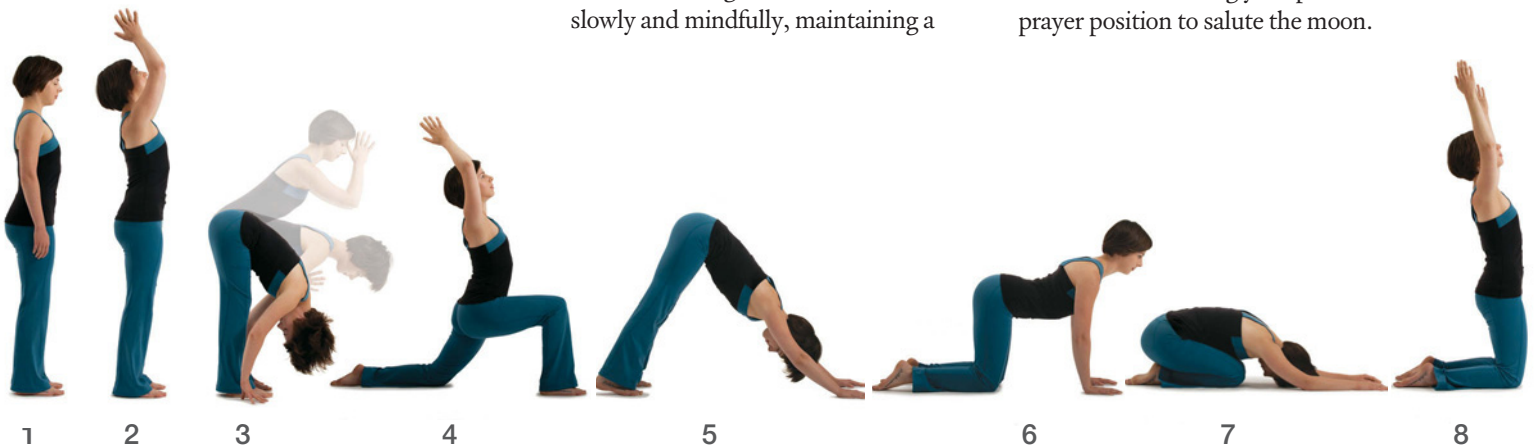
Move through chandra namaskara slowly and mindfully, maintaining a

smooth, deep, diaphragmatic breath. (Avoid using *ujjayi* breathing, which is heating). Tune into a sense of devotion as you honor all the phases of the moon and the cycles of your life.

## Chandra Namaskara

**1.** Stand tall in *tadasana* (mountain pose) and take a few moments to establish *chandra bhavana*. (A *bhavana* is a subtle feeling created through the practice of visualization.) Close your eyes and relax your jaw. Imagine that the full moon is in your mouth like a large, soft “moon lozenge.” Picture it slowly rising through the roof of your mouth just past the center of the brain, then drifting to the back of your head, where it rests steadily at a point called the *bindu*. Hold your awareness of the full moon resting at the *bindu* throughout the practice; open your eyes two-thirds of the way and maintain a soft gaze.

**2.** Inhale slowly while raising your arms overhead. Bring your palms into prayer position to salute the moon.



**3.** As you begin to exhale, touch the thumbs to the brow center. Continue exhaling and start to fold forward, touching the thumbs to the heart center. As you complete the exhalation, fold completely into *uttanasana* (standing forward bend) with your palms open to the earth. Hold the breath out as you step your left foot back into *anjaneysana* (lunge) and drop the left knee to the floor.

**4.** Keep bending the right knee to anchor into the lunge as you inhale and raise your arms, bringing the palms into prayer position overhead.

**5.** Exhale slowly as you lower your arms in front of you, touching the brow center, heart center, and then the earth. Finish the exhalation as you step your right foot back into *adho mukha shvanasana* (downward-facing dog pose).

**6.** Inhale and drop both knees to the floor into table pose, then gently look up.

**7.** Exhale and fold slowly into *balasana* (child's pose).

**8.** With the next inhalation, rise onto your knees, lift your hips up off the heels, spread your arms wide, and look up, feeling flooded with receptivity and gratitude for the sacredness of life.

**9.** As you begin to exhale, bring your palms together in prayer position overhead, then bend your elbows to touch the thumbs to the back of your neck; bring your seat toward your heels, the chest toward your thighs, and the elbows to the floor. Finish the exhalation by settling into "praying child's pose." Rest your awareness in *chandra bhavana* for a few rounds of breath. Then extend your arms and place your palms on the floor in front of you.

**10.** With an inhalation slide your chest forward between your hands and press up into a mild *urdhva mukha shvanasana* (upward-facing dog pose).

**11.** Exhale and press back into downward dog. Hold the breath out and step your left foot forward between the hands. Drop the right knee to the floor.

**12.** Keep bending the left knee to anchor into the lunge as you inhale and raise your arms; bring the palms into prayer position overhead.

**13.** Exhale slowly as you lower your arms in front of you, touching the brow center, the heart center, and then the earth; step the right foot forward and fold into *uttanasana*.

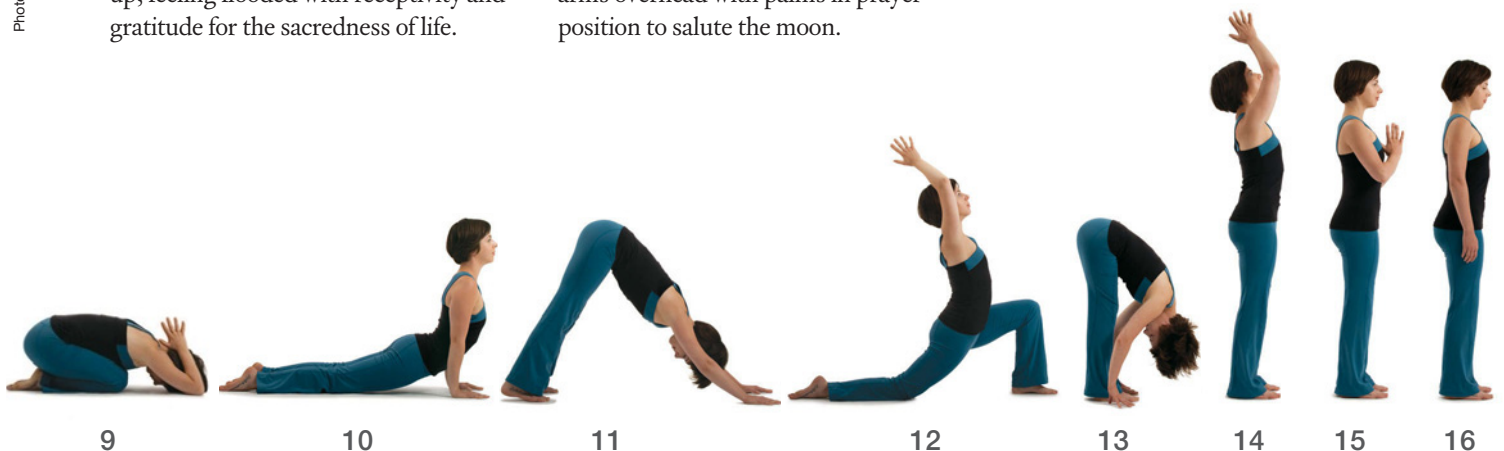
**14.** Inhale to stand up tall, raising your arms overhead with palms in prayer position to salute the moon.

**15.** As you begin to exhale, lower your palms to touch the brow center; complete the exhalation with palms in prayer position at your heart center.

**16.** Finish in *tadasana*. Close your eyes and imagine your mind as a still lake. A full moon rests at the point at the back of your head as in *chandra bhavana*, but now it shines a moonbeam onto the lake of your mind, which is then reflected out through the point between your eyebrows. Let this focused awareness shine from your calm, steady mind for a few rounds of breath.

**You may feel** complete after just one round of *chandra namaskara*, or you can choose to do four rounds, remembering all four seasons. If you have a large practice space, do one round facing in each of the four directions, beginning by facing east and moving clockwise. To complete the practice return to face east and allow yourself to linger in step 16. ■

*Karina Mirsky, MA, is the director of Sangha Yoga in Kalamazoo, MI, and a faculty member of the Himalayan Institute. She is a ParaYoga teacher, a teacher trainer, and a personal transformation coach.*



## A Seeker's Guide

(continued from page 41)

about it.” This attitude, called *vairagya* (dispassion or non-attachment), is necessary for protecting and nurturing your practice.

You have heard it said that practice makes perfect. But it is important to remember that it is only perfect practice that makes you perfect. Building a practice can be compared with building a house. A house can be small or big, simple or elaborate. A house can be fitted with lots of amenities or can lack even the most basic facilities. Such is the case with a practice. It can be profound or shallow. It can be designed to take us all the way to samadhi or simply conform to cultural expectations. The function of the practice determines the form. The loftier the form and the grander the goal and objective, the more de-

tailed the architectural plan must be.

The most important aspect of this plan is building a foundation that is capable of supporting the structure you wish to erect. The fundamentals of any fruitful practice are those from the *Bhagavad Gita* delineated earlier: balanced diet, balanced exercise, balanced thinking, balanced sleep, and performing our actions with balanced understanding. Next comes cultivating a conducive posture. The posture most conducive to our practice is one in which the head, neck, and trunk are in a straight line, the shoulders are relaxed, and the breath serene. Then comes uniting our mind and breath with each other. Uniting the forces of our breath and mind allows us to concentrate with the fewest distractions, thus enabling us to concentrate for a longer period of time on our chosen object. Prolonged concentration matures into meditation, and meditation matures into samadhi. The repeated experience

of dharana, dhyana, and samadhi deepens our memory of samadhi.

In subsequent practice sessions, this memory both pushes us toward samadhi and pulls samadhi toward us. There comes a time when this process becomes absolutely effortless. This effortless state of samadhi is called *dharmamegha samadhi*, a samadhi laden with a cloud of virtues—spiritually uplifting and enlightening experiences. From this emerges an indescribable state of awareness devoid of all desires, including the desire for any benefit from samadhi other than samadhi itself. This is the state of *nirbija samadhi*—the highest samadhi, which sages like Patanjali and Buddha experienced. May we, their students, one day also attain this luminous experience. ■

*Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, PhD, is the spiritual head of the Himalayan Institute. A teacher, lecturer, Sanskrit scholar, and author, he has practiced yoga and tantra for more than 30 years.*

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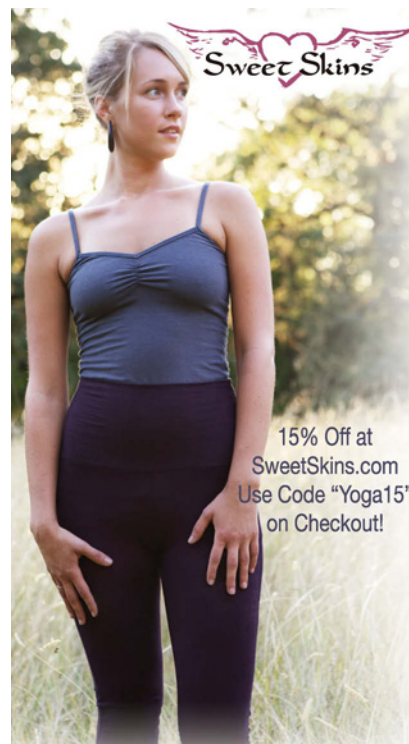
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# Enlightened Aging

(continued from page 47)

has been gathering momentum since the baby boom generation began hitting 50. As Mayer explains it, mortals “live the same way, at the same pitch, doing and consuming much the same things...right up until death.” From a certain perspective, this makes sense. If we see life as a continuous process of change leading only to death, the natural impulse is to do our utmost to ignore the passage of time and cling to the selves we have been for as long as possible. Students familiar with the deeper dimensions of yoga will recognize mortality as a vivid manifestation of *abhinivesha*, the ingrained desire for continuity Patanjali identifies as one of the fundamental ways we cause ourselves pain. Yet even when we know life has a purpose, this deep-rooted desire to hold on to the familiar poses a formidable obstacle to moving into the forest-dweller stage of life, as I was hell-bent on proving.

## The Grand Shift

There’s a saying in India that a dog walking through a cotton field doesn’t come out wearing a suit of clothes. At the time the hole opened in my retina, I had been living in a vibrant yoga community for 14 years. Intellectually I knew what matters and what doesn’t, what is transitory and what is eternal, but I hadn’t woven that knowledge into a systematic plan to accomplish the goal of life. Instead, I had become so galvanized by my identity as an editor and, to a lesser extent, by my sense of duty as an administrator, that my life had come to revolve around these roles.

At first it seemed that the hole in my retina could be patched by simple laser surgery. But within days, a bigger hole opened and I ended up lying facedown for three weeks while my reconstructed eye recovered from a complicated operation. Had I been less outwardly oriented, I would have recognized this

as an opportunity to stop acting as a full-time editor and administrator and focus instead on uncovering a deeper, more nourishing identity. Instead I went back to work, tired and a bit unnerved, but fully determined to do what I had come to see as my real job.

I might still be reinforcing that identity today if I hadn’t been lucky: the retina detached, putting me back on the operating table. A month later it detached again, and yet again. Incredibly, stubbornly, I went back to work after each operation, refusing to let go of who I knew how to be—until the retina peeled away a fourth time and I was so depleted I could barely walk across our tiny living room.

The entire ordeal—from the first sign of trouble to total collapse—took three months. The recovery—and the internal shift to the forest-dweller stage—took much longer. With nothing to do but rest, read, contemplate, and recover, I began to see why *abhinivesha* is so seductive. Our sense of self-identity coalesces around what we know how to be, and we want to go on and on being that familiar self. We know how to be outsiders—how to get things done in the material world—but we don’t know how, as Swami Rama put it, to “seek within and find within.” I knew how to put a quality magazine together and I derived satisfaction from doing it, but I didn’t know how to discover the core of my being or how to derive satisfaction from my attempts to awaken an inner awareness. Besides, deep-seated habits die hard.

As my health returned, I grew increasingly bored and restless, but Panditji resolutely refused to let me return to the office, leaving me no task other than finding my way inside. It took awhile, but as I gradually allowed my focus to shift, my damaged eye showed me how to locate my internal vision. Because I was essentially blind in one eye, I had no depth perception inside of 10 feet. For a while, I bumped into furniture or

chopped my fingers instead of the parsley I was aiming at. Then I discovered that if I slowed down, turned off the autopilot, and looked closely at what was in front of me, I could see perfectly. I began to notice this also applied to doing asana and pranayama, reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, or meditating. When I attended to the practice I was doing while I was doing it, and let go of the habit of trying to get somewhere or accomplish something tangible, I began to sense—however faintly—the presence of an infinitely subtle force, one that breathes without breathing and sees without seeing. And that glimmer sparked an internal shift from householder to forest dweller.

On the surface, my life today is much as it was before. I’m still working for the Himalayan Institute, still walking through that cotton field. The difference is that now—even when I find myself working long hours—my focus is on weaving an ever-deepening inner awareness. In a curious way, I feel younger—more energized—than I did five years ago. This seemed counterintuitive until I came across a snippet from one of Panditji’s lectures. “As long as we remain inspired to discover why we came to this world, we remain youthful,” he said. “Old age has no power over us when we are accompanied by faith that we have something precious to experience and achieve in this lifetime. This faith sparks a burning desire to know the true nature of the invisible force that lies at the core of our being, and when it wells up, nothing—not the lack of worldly resources, a limited knowledge of philosophy, the absence of a living guide, or even old age—can stand in the way of our inner fulfillment.”

This is the gift waiting for us when we embrace the third stage of life—not mere oblivion and not an encore of our 40s, but fulfillment and perfect freedom. ■

*Founding editor Deborah Willoughby teaches seminars on yoga for 50+ at the Himalayan Institute.*

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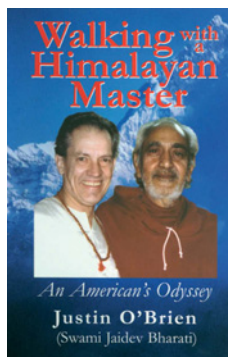


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## Transcending Trauma

(continued from page 53)

recounted the horrific details of her plight. At one point, Hopper noticed that Seleni's body began to sag forward, growing heavier and weaker until it gave way, and her head and upper body collapsed on the desk in front of her. She told Hopper that she shuts down this way when she has to talk about her ordeal; and when that happens, she knows she won't be able sleep that night.

Instead of continuing with the story, Hopper asked Seleni to stand up. They breathed together—emphasizing the inhalation—gently energizing Seleni's body and activating her sympathetic nervous system. In a slow, rhythmic way, Hopper led Seleni through a dynamic mountain pose, encouraging her to move between a posture in which she collapses (shoulders hunched forward, neck and head bowed) and one in which she lifts her chest, elongates her spine, and raises her head up. Seleni's inhalation deepened and she began to coordinate arm movements with the rise and fall of her breath. When she returned to her chair, Seleni sat up straighter and her face brightened. She even shared a few spiritual songs from her tradition that always made her feel better.

### Engaging the Mind

Meditation can also help trauma victims to bring their nervous system back into balance. But sitting in silent meditation, with just their thoughts to keep them company, can be terrifying, according to van der Kolk. He says trauma-sensitive people “have their sense of time thrown off and think something will last forever.” So he suggests those with PTSD get more comfortable with postures and breath work and learn relaxation techniques *before* moving on to meditation. Mantra meditation and yoga nidra provide two alternatives to following one's thoughts in silence. Using a mantra (see “Healing Meditation Practice” on page 52) gives the mind an anchor, a companion on the journey inward, something to return to as memories and sensations surface and dissolve. Yoga nidra or Richard Miller's iRest practice helps them stay present to what's going on—feeling the energy of the body, and exploring sensations without judgment or attachment.

While no one I spoke with believes yoga alone has the power to heal the pain trauma survivors endure, every single survivor, teacher, and expert wholeheartedly believes yoga provides a powerful ally on the journey home, and allows survivors—many for the very first time—to create a loving and nurturing relationship with their bodies. We can't predict or control what the future holds, nor can we change what the past has dealt, but we can learn to care deeply about ourselves and to embrace the present. ■

*Contributing editor Linda Sparrowe is the author of several books, including A Woman's Book of Yoga and Health with Patricia Walden. She co-leads yoga and meditation retreats for women with cancer at Shambhala Mountain Center and Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health.*

## Wisdom of the Forest

(continued from page 59)

### In a recent article you stated: “We need to turn to the forest for lessons in freedom.” What do you mean by that?

In a forest, every species is free. It's free but it's interconnected to other species. So it's an interconnected freedom. It's not an atomistic freedom. Liberalism has created an atomistic freedom: “I'm free to do exactly what I want to. I don't care about anyone else. And I won't see either the consequences of my actions on the rest or my dependence on others.” The forest teaches us, yes, every species is distinctive. It's free to be itself. But it's free to be itself with the support of other species.

### You also wrote that the forest teaches us about “enoughness,” which is a hard concept for many Americans to wrap their heads around.

A tree will not keep sucking up all the nutrients from the soil. It knows exactly how much to take up, and that's it, that's enoughness. Consumerism has kind of broken the thermostat of enoughness.

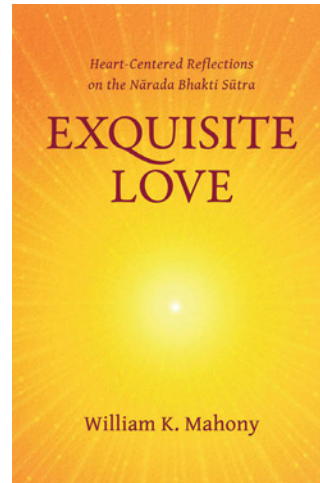
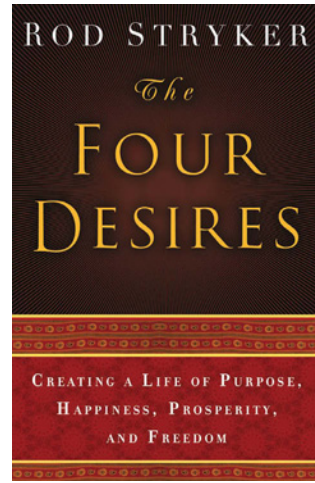
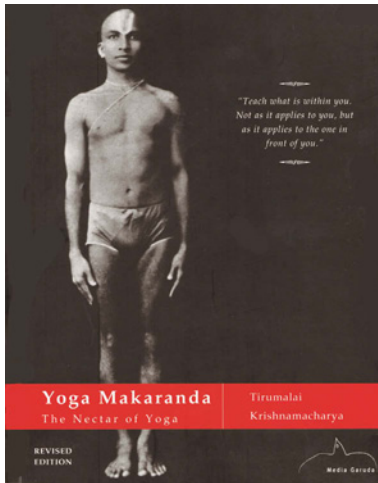
### Do you feel hopeful or fearful about the future of our forests?

I feel hopeful when I look at forest peoples and their struggles. And when I look at the power, the greed, the corruption of those who would destroy the forests for the minerals underneath, destroy the forests for the water, for energy, for power, who would chop down the trees... One of my saddest experiences in India in the last few years has been the chopping down of sacred trees along our roads, and we have ancient roads and ancient trees. They're all being cut down to widen highways. As I've written in my book *Soil Not Oil*, the sacred car has overtaken the sacred cow in India. So when I look at that mentality, I don't feel hopeful. But I throw my weight behind the forest and its protectors.

### What can individuals do to help ensure a more forested future?

The first thing is to realize that ultimately we depend on the forest and, whether it's at an individual level or at a community level, to plant trees, to create forest gardens. And at the level of consumption, start becoming much more aware of where things come from. What do they cost the earth? What do they cost the forest? At the end of it, you get totally tired of doing that calculation, and then it's best to consume less and locally. Then you know you're not destroying the land. ■

*Anna Dubrovsky writes and teaches yoga in Pittsburgh, PA. Her first book, Moon Pennsylvania (Avalon Travel, 2011), is printed on recycled paper.*



## Yoga Makaranda: The Nectar of Yoga

By T. Krishnamacharya

Modern yoga owes an incalculable debt to T. Krishnamacharya, whose research, dedication, and sacrifice in the name of yoga have influenced millions of people worldwide. With the English-language publication of *Yoga Makaranda*, his first book (originally published in the Kannada language in 1934), a great fount of yoga wisdom has been released. Translated by T.K.V. Desikachar, Krishnamacharya's son and longtime student, *Yoga Makaranda* isn't particularly fun reading, but it's essential for anyone who's curious about the roots of their practice.

Serious students have encountered this material before in one form or another. The book contains descriptions of the *yamas* and *niyamas*, pranayama techniques, and various obscure *kriyas*, such as cleaning the interior of the anus with "a moist stem of turmeric," not often tried in the West. It also features lengthy descriptions of basic and advanced asanas accompanied by nifty archival photographs of the master demonstrating them, along with more than its share of amusing archaisms, like a warning not to drink cow's milk from a vessel made from the hide of a dog.

Despite some dated material, the overall impression one gets from reading *Yoga Makaranda* is that of sitting at the feet of a great master whose wisdom needs to be heard. "A person who enters a venture of great expectations will be able to get the full results only when he is able to withstand difficulties and obstacles that come in the way," Krishnamacharya writes. "Abandoning the venture halfway is like slipping while walking." He also warns that "great difficulties arise if yoga practice is undertaken without a competent teacher." No modern teacher knew more about yoga than Krishnamacharya, and it's a blessing to have this work available at last.

—Neal Pollack

## The Four Desires: Creating a Life of Purpose, Happiness, Prosperity, and Freedom

By Rod Stryker

ParaYoga founder Rod Stryker's first book is a compelling and inspiring guide to finding happiness in every aspect of life. The title refers to the yogic idea that humans are motivated by four desires: *dharmā* ("the desire to become who you were meant to be"), *artha* ("the desire for the means to help you fulfill your dharma"), *kama* ("the desire for pleasure

of all kinds"), and *moksha* ("the desire for freedom and a connection to the Eternal"). Stryker proposes that we can achieve our spiritual and material dreams by harnessing and focusing these desires.

Filled with true stories of personal transformation, *The Four Desires* suggests that spiritual and material dreams are mutually compatible as long as they stem from *atman*—our true, limitless, and eternal Self. Not only are they compatible, they are both essential for lasting happiness.

*The Four Desires* is as much a how-to manual as a provocative interpretation of yoga philosophy. It's filled with practices, such as a meditation to increase *shakti* ("the power of the divine force within"), a writing exercise to address negative habits, and the "Dharma Code" exercise to uncover your soul's purpose. The book is divided into six parts, each of which ends with a commentary on a single yoga posture. Rather than offer instructions for doing the postures, the commentaries "shed light on how the physical practice of yoga is more than just physical," Stryker writes. For students ready to advance their practice, *The Four Desires* is a gateway to a new level of fulfillment.

—Eve M. Tai

## Exquisite Love: Heart-Centered Reflections on the Nārada Bhakti Sūtra

By William K. Mahony

The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* is a 10th-century text on the nature of spiritual love and devotion. Sanskritist, noted scholar of Indian philosophy, and yoga practitioner William K. Mahony, PhD, unpacks it with a skillful blend of academic scholarship and intuitive reflections. Divine love, he explains, is the very foundation and core of who we

## Gifts of the Gita

are—both the source and purpose of our lives. “Illumined and informed by Love, we more clearly sense the divine Heart within all beings; and we honor that Presence by acting in a manner that respects and reveres it.”

Mahony, chairman of the Religion Department at Davidson College in North Carolina, focuses on 20 of the text’s 84 sutras, lacing his commentary with insights from other ancient texts, poems, contemporary teachings, and personal reflections. He systematically defines bhakti, presents it as a yogic practice, shows how it can bring about profound inner transformation, and reflects on how it can lead us to true fulfillment. Along with informative charts, tables, and glossaries, the book includes Mahony’s translation of the entire text. *Exquisite Love* is an illuminating guide on how to enrich our daily lives by opening our hearts to the wonder, gratitude, and joy of the path of divine love. —Irene Petryszak

### Yoga Woman: Never Underestimate the Power of Inner Peace

Written, produced, and directed by Kate and Saraswati Clere

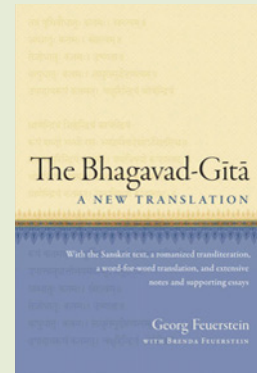
“Women have made yoga an international phenomenon and a multi-billion dollar industry,” observes *Yoga Woman*, a documentary from sisters Kate and Saraswati Clere. While yoga benefits both genders, Western women now dominate the practice, and they’re bringing issues such as body image, fertility, and balancing family and work to the forefront. The film attempts to spotlight women of every age, race, situation, and nationality (though



### The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation

By Georg Feuerstein with Brenda Feuerstein

There is excitement in opening any new translation of the *Gita*. What has been added? What insights revealed? The Feuersteins’ work has much to offer. It starts with nine moderately sized essays to give students a solid preparation for engaging with the text. These scholarly notes include an assessment of the philosophical worldview of the *Gita*, characterizations of the various incarnations of Vishnu/Krishna as well as key figures of the *Mahabharata* (the monumental epic poem in which the *Gita* is found), and a useful chronology of scriptures, events, and people reflecting recent academic findings. Then, in addition to a new English version, readers will find the full Devanagari text, an English transliteration, and (in a concluding section that allows for comparison with other editions of the *Gita*) a word-for-word translation. To this the Feuersteins add copious footnotes on both technical and practical matters, producing a book of great value to beginning and experienced students alike. —Rolf Sovik

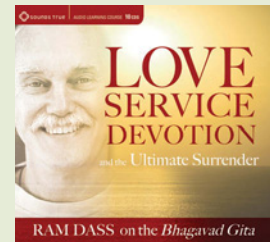


### Love, Service, Devotion, and the Ultimate Surrender

Ram Dass on the *Bhagavad Gita*

In the summer of 1974, after being fired from Harvard for his experimental research on LSD and returning from studying in India with Neem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass gave a series of inspired talks at the fledgling Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, on the sublime teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In this digitally remastered 10-CD set, the *Be Here Now* author likens the deep conflict that the *Gita*’s warrior protagonist, Arjuna, experiences to the challenges and questions that arise as we deepen our spiritual search. Ram Dass elaborates on the wisdom of Lord Krishna’s counsel to Arjuna with his own engaging—at times wild—personal stories as well as insights from teachers of various traditions, including Rumi, Basho, Ramana Maharshi, Saint Paul, and others. Dass’s instructive, uplifting, and lively teachings are as relevant today as they were in the ’70s. —I.P.



it remains U.S.-centered), and includes moving footage of pioneer teachers Patricia Walden and Angela Farmer, Seane Corn’s crew of yoginis building a birthing center in Uganda, and Indra Devi, “First Lady of Yoga,” who pes-

tered paterfamilias T. Krishnamacharya until he accepted her as his student. In the end, *Yoga Woman* is a testimony to yoga’s transcendent power to calm, heal, challenge, and transform both individuals and societies. —Joelle Hann >>



  
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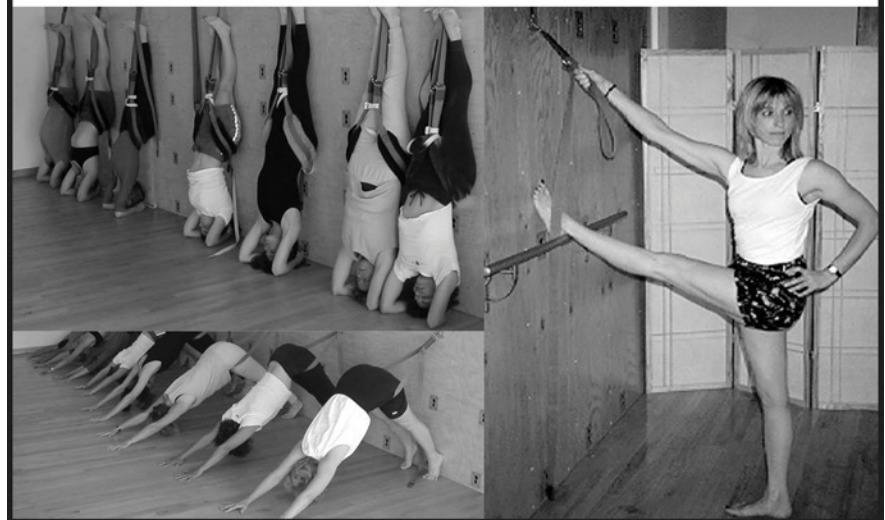
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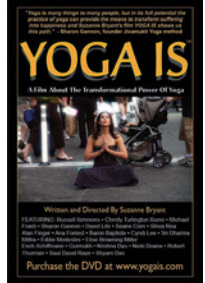
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**Yoga Is: A Film about the Transformational Power of Yoga**  
**Written and directed by Suzanne Bryant**

*Yoga Is* is Suzanne Bryant's paean to yoga, an homage to the practice that held her together while her mother was dying of breast cancer. In gratitude, the former journalist explores yoga's mysterious power—to engender love, happiness, and transformation—through interviews with such yoga world celebrities as Sharon Gannon and David Life, Alan Finger, Baron Baptiste, Seane Corn, Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa, and Shiva Rea. She also travels to India (though we see her there mostly with American teachers). Skillfully produced, the film charts similar territory to Kate Churchill's much thornier 2008 film, *Enlighten Up!* but with a critical eye. Still, this is a good documentary for newcomers unfamiliar with yoga's higher purpose, showing without a doubt that yoga is more than a sweaty workout. —J.H.

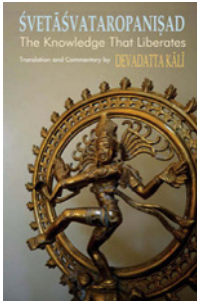


**Svetasvatropanisad:  
 The Knowledge that Liberates**  
**By Devadatta Kali**

Written more than 2,500 years ago, the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* is revered as a spiritual treasure for its masterful integration of Sankhya, Vedanta, and Yoga philosophy in the broader context of Shaiva Tantra. With its empowering vision of the nature of consciousness and our evolution toward Supreme

Consciousness, the text sheds light on the vibrant philosophy that infuses yoga practice with life.

The challenging task of translating this Sanskrit text for



the modern seeker was undertaken by Devadatta Kali (David Nelson), an initiate of Swami Prabhavananda of the Ramakrishna Order. While the translation is concise and quite readable, the much longer commentary may be challenging for casual readers as it often delves deeply into philosophical minutiae. For students of Sanskrit, Kali provides a wonderful appendix with a word-by-word translation of the original text.

One of the only English translations and commentaries of the *Shvetasvatara Upanishad* available today, this book is a valuable resource for scholars and serious students of Vedic philosophy.

—*Isban Tigunait*

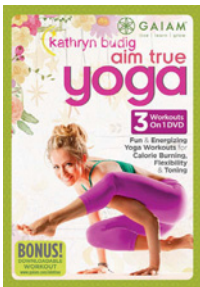
### Aim True Yoga

**With Kathryn Budig**

Yoga teacher Kathryn Budig is known for her playful, inspiring approach, and *Aim True Yoga* captures it. The 80-minute DVD includes a 25-minute

beginner's practice and a 45-minute intermediate practice. "Start by stopping," Budig instructs, suggesting that students let go of what is holding them back. Her toolbox for moving through challenging sequences—

and life—includes breath, discipline, trust, love, and, of course, a good sense of humor. The DVD also features a 10-minute "workshop" in which the famously bendy Budig breaks down her five favorite poses. Viewers craving more can download an intense 10-minute core practice. —*Judy Moulton*

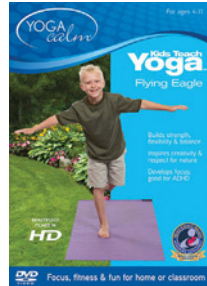


### Kids Teach Yoga: Flying Eagle

**By Yoga Calm**

"I'm bored. There's nothing to do." This refrain is all too familiar to parents with young children. Lynea and Jim Gillen, the husband-and-wife founders of the child education method known as

Yoga Calm, offer a remedy in the form of *Kids Teach Yoga: Flying Eagle*, a class led by one of their young students, Haley.



The eagle-themed practice includes traditional postures, innovatively presented pranayama, relaxation, and meditation, as well as cooperative learning techniques

not seen in adult classes. The shavasana portion features sweeping panoramas of the Grand Canyon and an original eagle song by another young student. The pint-sized Haley exudes warmth and confidence—a yoga celebrity in the making. Filmed in a lush backyard, the DVD offers rich visuals and extras like fun eagle facts from an Audubon Society naturalist. Along with a free activity guide at [yogacalm.org](http://yogacalm.org), it's guaranteed to get the kids in your life through many a rainy afternoon.

—*Suzanne M. Hoenig*

### Rahasya

**By Rahasya**

The self-titled debut album from kirtan group Rahasya presents an innovative mingling of sounds from diverse traditions. Based in Athens, Georgia, musicians and yoga teachers Surdas and Vajra Yogini draw on Sanskrit mantras, Southern gospel, Hebrew chants,

Afro-Caribbean rhythms, hip-hop, and funk. The meditative "Bala Hanuman" soothes with a descending, repetitive



bass motive. "Calm Peace" blends Hebrew and Sanskrit chants with organ for a pan-spiritual vibe. Both energizing and contemplative, *Rahasya* is a welcome dose of devotion.

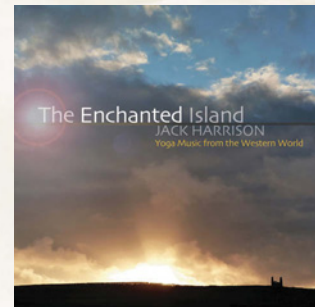
—*Rachel Cama* ■



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## Walking a Field into Evening

By Larry Smith

For learned books, I read grasses.  
For reputation, a bird calls my name.  
I cross a stone bridge with the pace of dusk.  
At the meadow gate, six cows meditate.

For decades I ran with my mind up hill and down;  
now idleness lets me see what is near.  
An arrow of wild geese crosses the sky,  
my body still, my feet firm on the ground.

We age like trees now, watch our seedlings  
take wind or grow around us.  
I'm going to mark my books lightly  
with a pencil. When someone wants  
to take my picture, I'll walk towards them  
and embrace. No more arguments  
just heart sense, or talk about nothing.  
Take walks in the woods at dawn and dusk,  
breathe in the damp musty air,  
learn to listen before I die. ■

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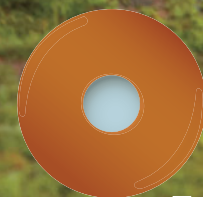


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