

20th  
Anniversary  
Issue

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## Conscious Creativity

THE PAST THREE SUMMERS, I've enrolled in a pottery class and enacted a twice-weekly creative ritual: I knead a lump of clay; I stare at the lump contemplating its potential; I try to drop into the space where inspiration resides; and then I throw the clay into a bowl, a jug, or (more often than not) a misshapen debacle that is quickly reconsolidated into a new lump of clay. Along the way, the clay reminds me to stay focused, non-attached, and fully present. (Attempting to center clay when you're feeling off-kilter, by the way, is as futile as starting a fire with wet kindling.)

I don't consider myself an artist, but I savor these small opportunities to dip into creative awareness and observe the degree to which I am able (or unable) to serve as an instrument for its expression. In her feature on yoga and creativity (page 48), Karen Macklin explains that the process of invoking inspiration is akin to—and significantly bolstered by—spiritual practice. Creativity, after all, is intrinsic to Consciousness—the abode of pure awareness and joy, and therefore the ultimate source of all inspiration. In order to become a conduit for creative intelligence, we first have to enter the spaciousness beneath the whirling mind, just as we do in meditation.

Tapping into this supreme field of Consciousness is the goal of all yoga practice, and the focus of this issue's three philosophy columns—Yoga Sutra, Vedanta, and Yoga Threads/Scripture. In addition, to celebrate the magazine's 20th anniversary, our lead feature by founder Swami Rama (page 34) considers the practical side of how to connect with Consciousness, introducing an oft-overlooked technique for gaining mastery over the mind and discovering our true selves.

Swami Rama also taught that yoga is not about spiritual attainment alone; it involves skillful action here on earth. As always, these pages are brimming with insight on how to integrate higher awareness into every aspect of your worldly life, from healing your hands (“Wrist Relief,” page 68) to healing the environment (“Earth Action,” page 60) to healing your relationships (“Sweet Forgiveness,” page 52).

As Rod Stryker writes in “Destiny and Desire” (page 22), “The science of yoga teaches us how to shape our lives with a commanding sense of purpose, capacity, and meaning.” We are like the potter, and the yoga tradition is the wheel: if we cultivate a clear mind, we can open ourselves to divine inspiration and mold our life into an expression of higher Consciousness. Enjoy the creative journey! ■

**Natalya Podgorny**, Editor  
[editor@yogainternational.com](mailto:editor@yogainternational.com)



## 20th Anniversary Issue

*Yoga International* was born from one man's concern for the preservation and transmission of what he called “the profound, beautiful, and powerful science of yoga.” It was 1991—years before yoga hit the mainstream—but already Swami Rama could see that it was being trivialized and watered down, and he was determined to create a counterpoint. His instructions were simple: Serve as a

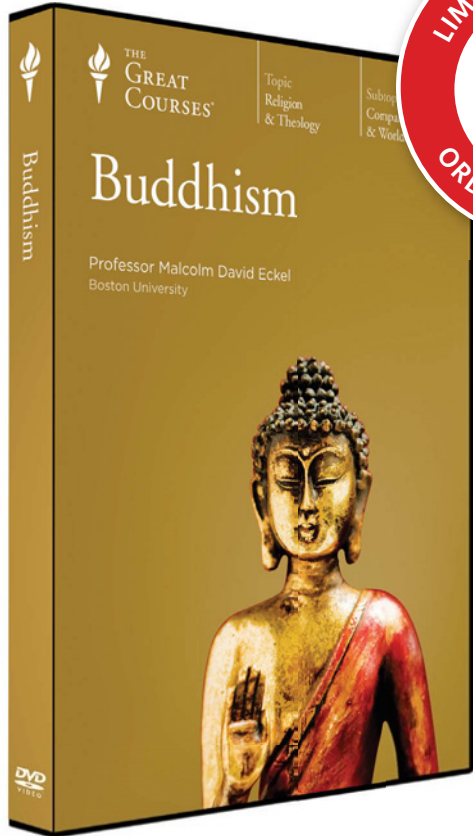


resource for those who want to explore the deeper dimensions of life. Do it by presenting the teachings of this venerable science in a manner accessible to modern students. Inspire people to practice—and help them find the means to make their practice fruitful.

Swamiji's only other instruction was a firm reminder that the teachings of yoga endure because they flow from the deep insight of the sages. “Their message is as fresh today as it was thousands of years ago,” he said. He encouraged us to focus on the teachings rather than on the teachers. Messengers, however great, come and go, he explained, but the message itself is eternal—it has been handed down to us in an unbroken transmission from master to disciple for centuries.

Now Swami Rama is gone and yoga has morphed into a \$5.7 billion industry. But through the years and all the changes they've brought, *Yoga International* has remained true to its original purpose: to bring the message of the sages to the fortunate few who are drawn to discover the deeper dimensions of themselves. We count ourselves—and all of you—among them.

**Deborah Willoughby**  
 Founding Editor



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## CONTRIBUTORS



**Karen Macklin** was deeply inspired by the writers, visual artists, musicians, and actors she interviewed for her feature “Awakening the Artist” (page 48). “Creativity exists for all of us,” says Macklin, a yoga teacher and writer whose articles have appeared in *Tricycle*, *Yoga Journal*, and the *New York Times*. “It simply gets obscured by the stresses of daily living. Yoga helps us remove the distractions of the mind so that our natural artistic impulse can reveal itself.”

“The shape of the posture is an external manifestation of the love we all have within us,” says **Kathryn Budig** of wild thing pose, which she models on our cover. “It pushes us out of our comfort zones into this big beautiful expression.” In addition to leading workshops around the world, Budig teaches vinyasa flow at YogaWorks Santa Monica and online at [yogaglo.com](http://yogaglo.com). She is also the cofounder of Poses for Paws, an organization that uses yoga to raise funds for no-kill animal shelters.



Renowned yoga teacher trainer and author of *Teaching Yoga*, **Mark Stephens** continually reminds instructors to approach teaching “with fresh eyes, ears, and heart.” He took his own good advice while writing this issue’s Art of Asana column (page 26), plunging into tantric research to explore the connection between *natarajasana* (king dancer pose) and *lasya tandava*, the gentle, joyful dance in which Shiva reveals the tender aspects of existence. “When I find something that I have some fascination about,” Stephens says, “I dive in deeply.”

As *Yoga International*’s creative director since 1996, **Jeanette Robertson** (pictured left) says her approach has been “to establish a visual identity that speaks to the natural elegance of authentic yoga, and to reflect the spiritual quiet that practice brings.” Now, she has decided to take the next step and become our visual consultant, letting go of day-to-day operations to focus on the magazine’s overall creative vision. “YI has always presented the core truths of yoga,” she says. “I’d love to continue nudging the images and design to echo the same—the elimination of the extraneous and the superficial.”

Jeanette will be handing the creative director reins to **Jackie Bogdan**, our senior designer. The two have worked together closely for over a decade and envision a smooth transition. ■



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## Anusara's Optimist

**On a sunny Saturday** in February, 70 people crowded into a Denver studio for something out of the ordinary: a public class with senior Anusara teacher Amy Ippoliti. For several years, Ippoliti had been living the yoga superstar life, traveling the world to lead hours-long workshops and days-long Anusara immersions, teacher trainings, and retreats. She couldn't remember the last time she'd taught a 90-minute class open to anyone who walked in the door.

Cameras rolled as she explained the theme of the class and her 2011 tour, Turn Up Your Volume, chanted the Anusara invocation, and guided students through pose after pose, leading to a pinnacle: *urdhva dhanurasana*, the heart-opening backbend better known as wheel or upward bow pose.

"Any problems?" she asked, as 70 spines lowered to the floor.

An "I can't" came from a woman up front.

"If you say, 'I can't get up,' you will not," Ippoliti responded. It might have sounded like an admonishment except that Ippoliti oozes conviviality, an *I've been there, sister* relatability. "'Up until now, I have not been able to get up.' How about that? Say that to yourself." >>



Amy Ippoliti at the 2010 Anusara Yoga Grand Gathering.

“Up until now, I have not been able to get up,” the student said.

“However, now I’m going to *so* get up,” Ippoliti added, and the room erupted in laughter—not for the first or last time. “Now close your eyes. If you had trouble getting up and you told yourself, ‘I can’t get up,’ tell yourself a different story. That’s a way of leaning into the experience with more positivity and more hope. If you never push to the boundary, you never learn to be a superstar, a superhero.”

Talk like this is part of the reason for Ippoliti’s superstardom. The long-time student of tantric philosophy

and Sanskrit puts ancient teachings in delightfully modern terms. Her youthful vernacular (“the bomb,” “super-stoked”) is a frequent source of humor and, along with her playfulness, belies her 41 years. Students also love that she doesn’t put on airs. “What you get in the street is exactly what you get in the classroom,” says Denver yoga teacher Michelle

Marchildon, who has studied with Ippoliti since 2007. “She is so authentic.”

Ippoliti was only 16 when she took her first yoga class at a New York City gym. Ten years later, she enrolled in OM yoga founder Cyndi Lee’s first teacher training—with no intention of teaching. “I just want you to know, I’m only here to deepen my practice,” Ippoliti remembers telling Lee on the first day. “And she was like, ‘Shut up! You’re going to teach yoga.’ From then on, I knew that I was going to teach. I needed somebody to believe in me.”

The following year, at a yoga conference in Albuquerque, she overheard peo-

ple raving about John Friend, founder of the then-nascent Anusara system. She wasn’t registered for his workshops, but she strode past a door monitor and sat in the front row like she belonged. When he began talking, a tear rolled down her cheek. “I knew: that’s my teacher.”

For the next several years, she left New York almost every weekend to study with and eventually apprentice under Friend. Today she chairs the Anusara Yoga Curriculum Committee, overseeing a famously rigorous teacher-training program. The Anusara Immersion, a 100-hour prerequisite to teacher training, was her brainchild. She designed the first immersion in 2002 because she wanted people to learn the intricacies of yoga before learning the intricacies of teaching it.

Her recent public classes were part of a new brainchild: 90 Minutes to Change the World, a course designed to address what she sees as a decline in the morale of local yoga teachers and the quality and popularity of public classes. “I noticed that teachers were under the impression that success as a yoga teacher is becoming an international traveling rock star,” she says; 90 Minutes shows them how to be wildly successful in their own communities. More than 200 teachers from across the United States, Europe, Australia, Thailand, and elsewhere participated in the online version of the course in February.

Ippoliti enjoyed being able to connect with yogis around the world without leaving the comfort of her home near Boulder, Colorado. But don’t expect this yoga superstar to quit traveling. She lives for that “super-high” look in people’s eyes when they come down from their fifth *urdhva dhanurasana* or sit up from *shavasana*. “That euphoric feeling is you at your best. It’s you at your most authentic,” she told her hometown crowd. “That’s like full volume, man.”

—Anna Dubrovsky >>

## ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

IF YOU KEEP A JOURNAL, chances are it’s filled with tales of sadness and woe. There’s nothing wrong with that; expressing those feelings in writing can be cathartic. But Ippoliti suggests starting a second journal. “One of the things that has really helped me turn up my own volume is to keep a journal where I write the things that are going well. What happens, I’ve found, is that because your mindset is on what you’ve been doing well and what’s been going well for you, more stuff goes well for you.” Ippoliti advises writing in your “success journal” immediately before meditation practice. “It sets the tone really nicely.” Jot down victories large and small, whether it’s kicking up into handstand for the first time, resolving a conflict with a coworker, or spending quality time with your honey.

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# Cool Your Senses

In ayurveda, the three doshas—*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*—represent a constellation of qualities that govern an individual's physical, mental, and emotional constitution. *Pitta*, the dosha associated with fire and water, intensifies in the hot summer months, with its oily, penetrating, hot, light, and liquid characteristics. In moderate amounts, these benefit the body and mind—and make a summer day magical—but in excess they can lead to problems. For example, if you spend time outdoors during the hottest part of the day eating spicy food and having a vigorous debate with someone, heat can build in your system and cause symptoms of high *pitta*, such as heat rash, migraines, heartburn, or irritability.

To get more pleasure from the summer months, counter the effects of excess *pitta* by treating the five senses—sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell—to the following balancing tactics.

**SOUND** Listening to sweet, soothing sounds—like ocean waves, water flowing in a fountain, or soft, pleasing music—can calm and ground fiery *pitta*. So, too, can a pleasant conversation with agreeable company. Hard-driving music, construction sounds, arguments, or business negotiations, on the other hand, are likely to increase your *pitta*. It's best to keep these to a minimum.

**TOUCH** Soft, gentle touch soothes *pitta*. For some people, a massage with a small

amount of cooling oil—like coconut oil—can work wonders, but if that lacks appeal, allow soft, cool breezes to dampen your *pitta*. You can also spray a cool cloth with natural rose water and place it over your eyes. If your *pitta* runs high, cut back on sunbathing and hot baths.

**SIGHT** Colors from the cool side of the spectrum—light blue or green—tend to pacify *pitta*. Plant some flowers around your house, or even bring them indoors, treating your sense of smell as well.

Full-moon walks have a positive effect on *pitta*, too. The combination of the moon's cool energy, a soft breeze, and pleasurable company will most assuredly lower your doshic thermostat. Phase out violent films and avoid wearing red to keep *pitta* in check.

**TASTE** Ayurvedic physicians reduce excess *pitta* with bitter, astringent, sweet, and cooling foods and herbs. These include greens, especially bitter varieties like kale, broccoli rabe, or

collards; fruits and vegetables; milk; ghee; some beans; sweet grains like barley, oats, rice, and wheat; and anti-inflammatory herbs like amalaki.

As a general rule, cut down on sour, salty, or spicy foods in the summer. And, of course, if certain foods that theoretically pacify *pitta*, like milk, don't agree with you, give them a pass.

**SMELL** The sense of smell relates to the earth element in ayurveda and helps ground *pitta*'s light quality. Apply cooling, sweet, bitter essential oils like natural rose, vetiver (*khus*), or ethically sourced sandalwood to

your neck, palms, and solar plexus. Alternatively, use these same fragrances as incense or aromatherapy or, as mentioned above, adorn your home with fresh, fragrant flowers. Stay away from strong pungent or chemical smells to keep *pitta* subdued.

—Claudia Welch >>

## SUMMER SOOTHER

Refresh yourself with a *pitta*-dousing glass of homemade watermelon juice: Liquefy two cups or so of chopped, seedless watermelon in a blender (no need to add water), strain and *voilà*, a tasty—and nutritious—summer cooler. If you suffer from skin rashes in the summer, rub the fleshy part of the rind on the affected area to soothe and help heal the skin. (Turn to page 74 for more skin-soothing tips.)



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**Two identical birds that are eternal companions perch in the very same tree. One eats many fruits of various tastes. The other only witnesses without eating.**

—Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.1; translation by Swami Rama

dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā  
samānaṃ vṛkṣaṃ pariśasvajāte  
tayoranyaḥ pippalaṃ  
svādvattayanaśnannanyo abhicākaśīti

## Commentary

According to non-dualistic philosophy, the entire world is manifested from pure consciousness in a constantly changing parade of forms. The two birds referenced in this verse symbolize two aspects of the same reality. The bird who eats and enjoys the fruit is *jīvatman*, the individual soul, while the bird who does not partake in eating, but rather sits and observes, is *paramatman*, absolute Brahman, or pure consciousness.

In the process of manifestation, the individual soul mistakenly identifies itself with the mind, body, and senses it inhabits, forgetting its true nature. It is only when it recognizes its other self, the bird who stays non-attached, free of all desires and cravings, that it can remember and liberate itself.

This is true for all of us, each in our own way. Our lower self becomes involved in the dance of life, getting lost in the charms and temptations of the world. When we get what we want, we are temporarily happy, but then we become obsessed with anxiety and fear that we might lose what we have. When we do eventually lose it, we are overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. As long as we identify ourselves with being the doers of our actions, we become attached to their fruits—some of them sweet and some of them bitter.

To be free, we need to identify with our higher self—the bird that merely observes, neither attracted nor repelled by the objects of the world. The subsequent verses in this Upanishad explain how to do this through spiritual practices—specifically, meditation, truthfulness, and performing selfless actions. By understanding and being mindful of what we think, say, and do, we can fully enjoy all that the world has to offer without becoming entangled in it. In this way, we free ourselves of the ties that bind us to our lower self and come to know our true nature. —Irene Petryszak >>

### IN CONTEXT

Considered one of the most important Upanishads, the *Mundaka Upanishad* has 64 mantras, divided into three chapters. *Mundaka* means both “a shaving razor” and “a person with a shaven head.” The higher knowledge taught in this Upanishad removes the veil of ignorance that obscures Atman, just as a razor removes the hair covering the head.

Like other Upanishads, the *Mundaka Upanishad* takes the form of a dialogue—in this case, between Angiras, the preceptor, and Shaunaka, his fully prepared disciple. Shaunaka humbly asks, “What is that by knowing which all this becomes known?” Angiras, seeing that Shaunaka has a burning desire to have the knowledge of absolute truth, Brahman, begins to teach him.

This Upanishad, which comes from the *Atharva Veda*, is an illuminating guide for both householders and renunciates. By diving deep into the inner significance of each verse through long contemplation and constant meditation, the student gains knowledge and realization of the supreme truth.

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# Eco-Conscious Nesting



A yurt marks the beginning of Seane Corn's adventures in green building.

Like many people who've shopped for a home in the Los Angeles area, Seane Corn was dismayed at how much you pay for so little—until last June, when she saw a 14-acre property that made her heart beat faster. “I feel like I’m going to live here for the rest of my life,” she told her fiancé as they stood on a sandstone boulder, gazing at the ocean from 2,200

feet above sea level. Just a few weeks later, they closed on the Topanga property. Only one thing stood in the way of their moving immediately: There’s no house.

The globe-trotting yoga teacher and activist had set out to buy a house, not build one. “I’ve never been a part of building anything, and I’m on the road

over 200 days out of the year,” she says. “But something in my heart told me this is an opportunity to really create a sanctuary for my family, and maybe learn something along the way about how to develop a space that’s not only sacred to us but that’s mindful and respectful to the planet.” She hopes to keep the land out of developers’ hands, not just in her lifetime, but for generations to come. “I didn’t want it becoming one of those tract communities.”

Corn’s vision for the land, which serves as a winter home for monarch butterflies, is ambitious. It includes an eco-friendly house, a permaculture garden and fruit grove, a sandstone labyrinth, and a system of trails that follow existing deer paths. She can see teaching yoga in the house, teaching people about organic eating in the garden. “I’m about to find out how hard it is, when you’re a normal person on a normal budget, trying to create a conscious environment. I recognize that I’m going to make some mistakes and that there are going to be some compromises. My hope is that I can make the mistakes and share the information, so that someone else doesn’t have to.”

Corn’s most valuable asset may well be patience. In no rush to break ground

## RECOMMENDED READING

Corn has been poring through books devoted to eco-conscious living. Here are a few of her favorites:

*The Sustainable Home: The Essential Guide to Eco Building, Renovation and Decoration* by Cathy Strongman: This generously illustrated book covers a broad range of topics, including insulation, solar panels, lightbulbs, and kitchen counter-tops. “It’s specific but easy to follow,” Corn says.

*GreenSense for the Home: Rating the Real Payoff from 50 Green Home Projects* by Eric Corey Freed and Kevin Daum: “An excellent book for those who want a reality check when determining the balance between eco-sustainability and financial practicality,” according to Corn.

*The Self-Sufficient Life and How to Live It* by John Seymour: The lifestyle and attitude shift needed to live in harmony with nature can be challenging, Corn says. Seymour’s guide breaks down all the intricacies of “back to basics.”

on a house, she has set about building a yurt, a tent-like dwelling usually associated with nomads in central Asia. The temporary structure will have many of the green features she hopes to incorporate into her future house, including solar power, cisterns for collecting rainwater, and a graywater system that recycles wash water for garden irrigation. It's a test lab of sorts; if an experiment blows up in her face, she won't repeat it on a larger scale. When the yurt is complete, it will serve as a guesthouse, personal yoga studio, and office for Off the Mat, Into the World, the activist training program Corn founded in 2007.

The process has already presented difficult choices. Corn would have liked to cover the yurt with natural textiles but settled on vinyl because it will better withstand the elements, and the yurt manufacturer will recycle it when it's no longer usable. But when a builder recommended Styrofoam for insulation, she dug in her heels. Her father, who owned a Styrofoam factory like his father before him, died of kidney cancer last August. "Whether or not he got it from the factory is undetermined, but it's hard for me to believe that inhaling polystyrene for 40 years doesn't have an adverse effect on your kidneys. I don't want to contribute to that kind of toxic burden." Corn and the builder threw themselves into research and discovered an ecofriendly alternative that costs no more than Styrofoam.

Corn has also discovered things about her relationship with her fiancé. "When you're building a home, it's your foundation, your stability, your life force, in a way. A lot of stuff has come up that we never had to talk about before. It's definitely deepened our relationship, although I'm sure there will be moments when it stresses our relationship. We're learning about our values, what we're committed to, the places in which we're willing to compromise and the places in which we are not. For me, this is a spiritual practice." —*Anna Dubrovsky* >>

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# The Healthy Side of Stress

In a recent study comparing organic versus non-organic produce, organic veggies outperformed their conventionally grown peers when it came to vitamins and beneficial micronutrients like antioxidant flavonoids. Why? Apparently stress, like fending off bugs or surviving a dry spell, triggers plants to generate defensive compounds which enrich their nutritional value. Crops grown with fertilizer and pesticides have a cushy life and don't produce as many of the stress-

induced micronutrients. Interestingly, some of these defensive compounds add flavor, so that blemished peach is not only healthier for you, but it may taste better, too.

Scientists have also been exploring the positive side of stress in human health. Research shows that mild stress stimulates cells to repair damaged proteins, fortifies the immune system, keeps bones strong, and may improve memory. While chronic stress can damage internal organs and lead to a host of health problems, short bursts of stimulation help the body and brain develop and maintain healthy function.

Yoga is much touted for its role in restoring balance to the overactive sympathetic nervous system responsible for the stress response. But yoga also stimulates and stresses the body, nervous system, and mind in ways that build strength and fortitude. Asana challenges weak muscles and structural irregularities, gradually increasing resting muscle tone and improving energy. Pranayama and breath training challenge habitual states of being, building inner resiliency and gradually allowing us to tolerate higher states of energy without anxiety, anger, or aggression. Meditation and related self-reflection practices can bring up painful emotions or memories, providing us with an opportunity to master our reactions and, with regular practice, free ourselves from depleting cycles of chronic negativity.

Crops encounter stressors like the potato beetle, fungus, weeds, and the vicissitudes of weather. But for modern humans, stress usually has less to do with our physical circumstances and more to do with how we interpret it. Memory, association, expectation, emotions, and

intellectual analysis all contribute to the perception and assessment of stress and danger. When we feel threatened, we respond with the instinctive reflex of the limbic brain—the classic stress response. But, if we interpret the stressor as a challenge instead of a threat, different physiological reactions take place: we experience stimulation without the negative hormonal effects of a full-blown stress response, such as fear and elevated blood pressure. The rational, thoughtful skills of the prefrontal cortex—our unique human brain—allow us to respond creatively rather than reflexively, so emotionally challenging situations don't derail us.

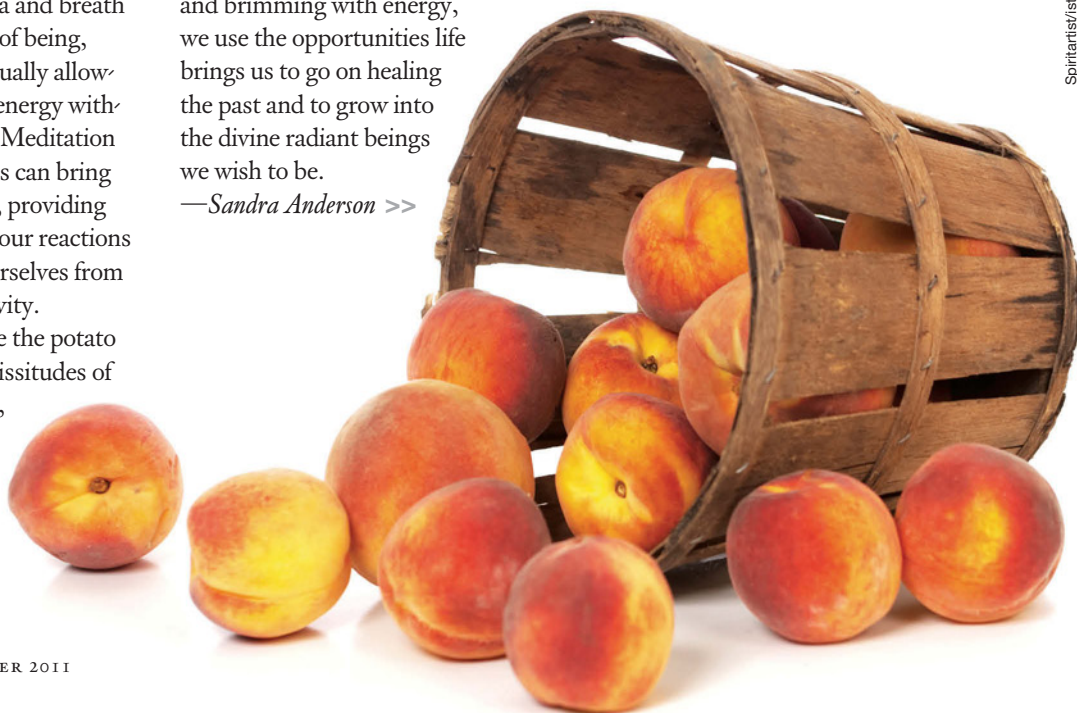
Yoga practice teaches us to catch ingrained reactions that may no longer be appropriate, and to respond instead in fresh, new ways that free us from dysfunctional patterns and destructive emotions. Like the organic peach, we marshal our full potentials to create richer, juicier lives for ourselves. Robust, resilient, and brimming with energy, we use the opportunities life brings us to go on healing the past and to grow into the divine radiant beings we wish to be.

—Sandra Anderson >>

## YOGA FINDINGS

Researchers from Boston University School of Medicine recently found that subjects who practiced yoga for one hour, three times a week, over a 12-week period, exhibited increased levels of GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid)—our nervous system's primary inhibitory transmitter. (Low GABA levels have been linked to anxiety and mood disorders.)

A separate study published in the January 30 issue of *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* found that participants in an eight-week meditation program showed marked changes in gray matter concentration in areas of the brain associated with learning, memory, self-perception, and emotional regulation.





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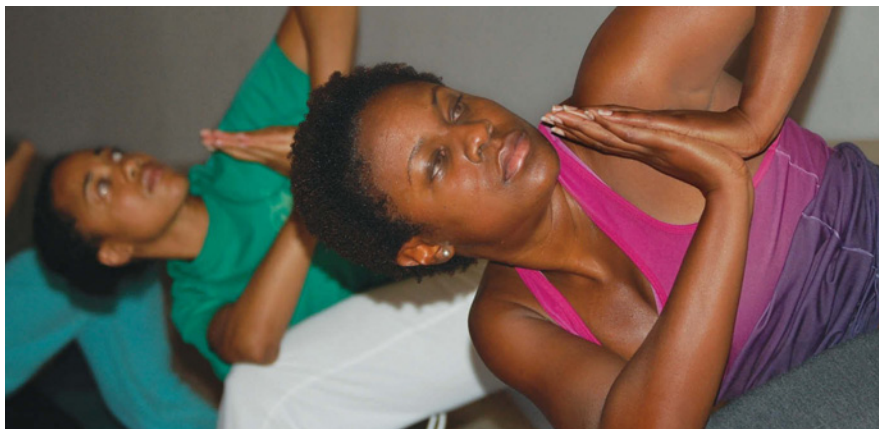


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# Yoga for the People



Teacher training at Niroga Center in Berkeley, CA, is changing the face of yoga.

At a 2010 graduation ceremony, students of the Niroga Institute's teacher-training programs talked about how grateful they were for the opportunity to deepen their practice, the hurdles they overcame along the way, and

how much they learned about themselves through yoga—the usual good stuff of concentrated study. But then they spoke about the people they wanted to teach, and the ceremony veered from the script: torture survivors, traumatized students, mental-health clinicians working in prisons, senior citizens, pregnant teens, and domestic violence survivors topped the list. These were no yoganistas.

Many of the newly minted teachers were Integral Health Fellows, part of a Niroga teacher-training program for people of color. In exchange for the fellowship (most of which are fully subsidized), students commit to 100 hours of community service following graduation. From Niroga's inception in 2005, its focus has been on getting therapeutic practice to as many people as possible—not just to those who can afford it. "This is supposed to be a universal practice," says Niroga's charismatic founder, Bidyut "B.K." Bose, with a chuckle. "It's not just for young, white, wealthy female pretzels."

Bose, who learned about yoga and

the *Bhagavad Gita* at a young age, had been working in Silicon Valley for years when he started looking at the effects of stress on chronic illnesses, emotion regulation, attention control—and, by extension, dropout rates, substance abuse, binge eating, juvenile violence and recidivism, and innumerable forms of interpersonal conflict. He knew that yoga was an effective treatment for stress. "What would happen," he wondered, "if most people in a community could regulate themselves most of the time?" He started Niroga to find out.

The Institute conducts free classes across the Bay Area for schoolkids, people fighting cancer and drug addiction, incarcerated and at-risk youth—including a whopping 27 weekly classes at Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center—and senior citizens. (Even straight-up studio classes are, at \$10, designed to be accessible.) Self-realization and selfless service, says Bose, have a complementary relationship: "I serve more effectively if I develop my self-realization, and my self-realization increases

if I serve more selflessly." Hatha yoga, he maintains, is just one part of yoga.

But the issue of homogeneity among teachers and practitioners remained—an "elitism" that, as Bose saw it, limited yoga's accessibility. The Integral Health Fellowship was started four years ago to "empower communities with their own leaders," and graduates are now fanning out across the region. Bose sees Niroga's mission as not just a karmic one but one that has the potential to affect a massive societal shift. "If we can manage chronic stress, we could make a significant social change, a major system change." John Adams, one of the program's 2010 graduates, may have put it best: "To the community I say, 'Look out, we're coming.'" —Amy Karafin ■

## COMPASSION IN ACTION

Several groups across the country are reaching out to underserved communities. Here's a small sampling to get you started—or, better yet, to give you ideas for new programs in your own community.

**Give Back Yoga Project** ([givebackyoga.org](http://givebackyoga.org)) offers grants to serve populations ranging from vets in Washington DC to street children in Kenya.

**Prison Yoga Project** ([prisonyoga.com](http://prisonyoga.com)) conducts classes for incarcerated adults in California and distributes prison yoga manuals worldwide.

**Street Yoga** ([streetyoga.org](http://streetyoga.org)) works with traumatized urban youth on both U.S. coasts.

**Yoga Activist** ([yogaactivist.org](http://yogaactivist.org)) connects teachers with social service organizations looking to implement yoga programming.

**yogaHOPE** ([yogahope.org](http://yogahope.org)) offers courses for women in Boston-area transitional facilities.

"I am amazed what tremendous healing happens with each session." — Hanna Kluner



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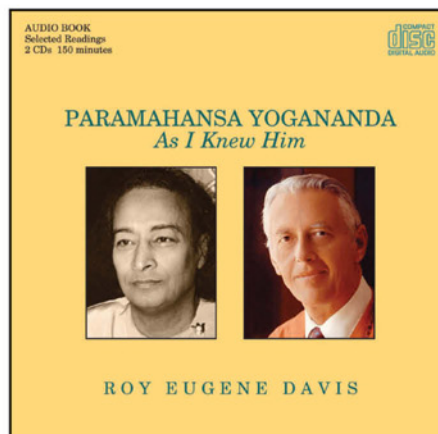
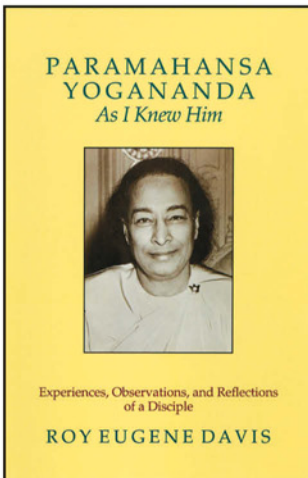
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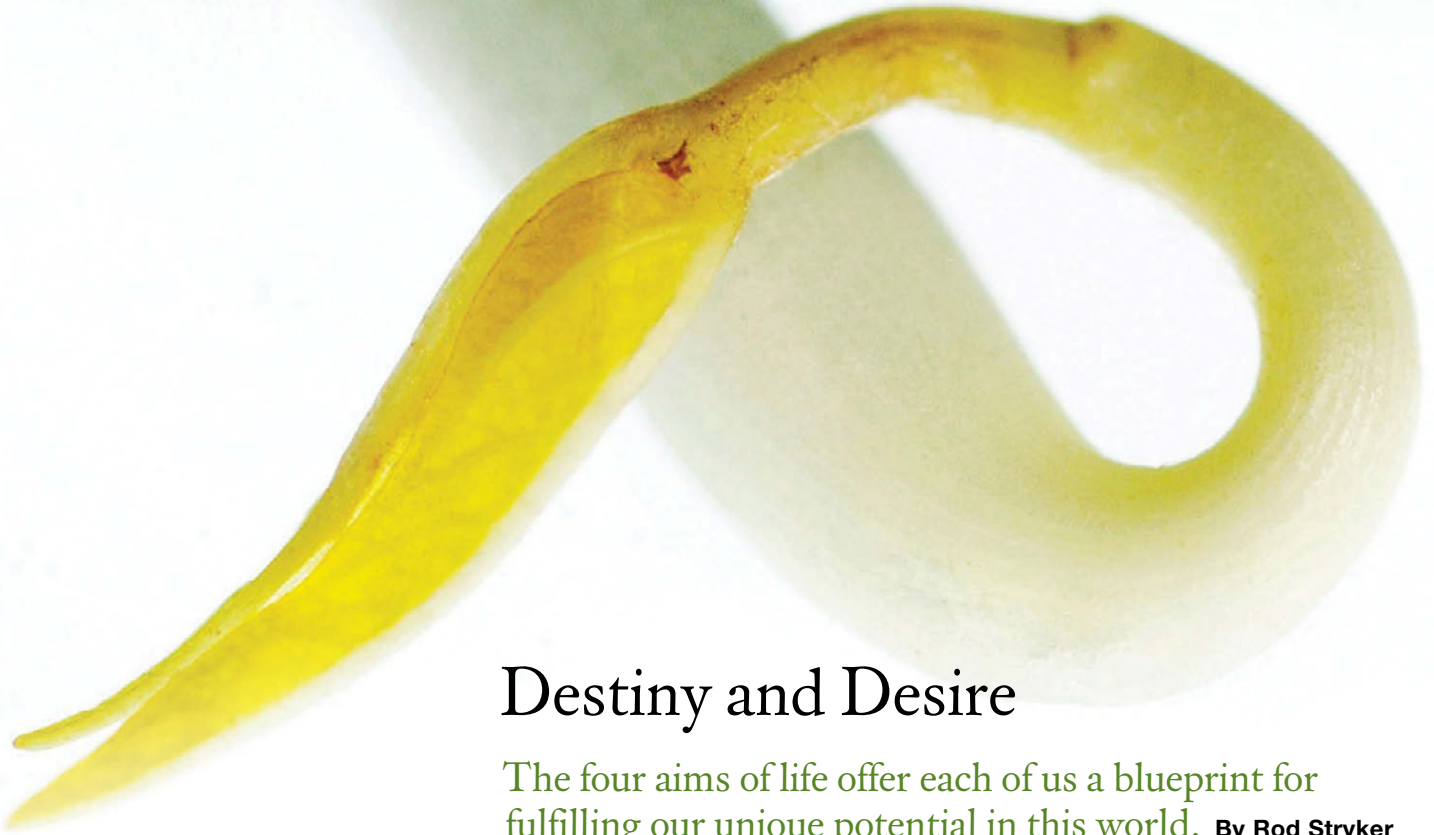


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## Destiny and Desire

The four aims of life offer each of us a blueprint for fulfilling our unique potential in this world. **By Rod Stryker**

**Y**oga's supreme objective is to awaken an exalted state of spiritual realization, yet the tradition also recognizes that this state does not exist in absolute isolation from the world and worldly matters. Thus, the science of yoga teaches us how to live and how to shape our lives with a commanding sense of purpose, capacity, and meaning.

According to the Vedas, our soul has four distinct desires, which collectively are described in the tradition as *purushartha*, “for the purpose of the soul.” The four desires—*dharmā*, *artha*, *kamā*, and *mokṣā*—are inherent aspects of our soul or essence; our soul uses them for the purpose of fulfilling its unique potential. All four kinds of desire, including the desire for material prosperity, if pursued mindfully, can be spiritual because they can pave the way

for our soul to express itself on earth. Learning to honor the four desires allows us to thrive at every level and leads us to a complete and balanced life.

The concept of desire coming from the soul or essence may seem strange since, by definition, the soul is eternal and changeless. But the Vedas explain that the soul has two aspects: it is complete, whole, and eternal, in a permanent state of oneness with the Absolute, and at the same time, it desires to fully express itself and its divine nature in the world. The Vedic term for “soul” is *atman*, which means “essence”—the highest principle, or Self. The two distinct aspects of *atman* are *para* and *jiva*. *Para* means “supreme, highest, or culmination.” *Jiva* means “individual or personal.”

The *paramatman* or higher soul is the infinite and unconditioned essence

that is beyond all limitation, eternal and changeless. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, a sacred text from the seventh century, describes this higher aspect of soul beautifully: “Omnipresent, dwelling in the heart of every living creature...He is the inner Self of all, hidden like a little flame in the heart.... Know Him and all fetters will fall away.” The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, points to this same aspect of soul: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” Your *paramatman* is identical to the Divine; there is no separation or distinction. “*Aham brahma smi*” (I am one with the Absolute), say the Vedas.

*Jivatman*, on the other hand, is the individual soul. Think of it as your spiritual thumbprint, utterly unique for everyone. It is the part of you that,

from the moment you were conceived, determines your uniqueness, your distinct capacities, talents, and challenges, as well as your inclinations and desires. Jivatman is literally where your soul meets your unconscious—the individual aspects of you that make you uniquely who you are.

I first became familiar with the Vedic teaching about the nature of soul many years ago, but it was not until my twin sons were born that I had practical proof of its accuracy, for I saw from the very beginning of their lives how the concept of jivatman applied to them. My boys, Jaden and Theo, were conceived at the same time and gestated in the same womb, where they consumed the same nutrients. They were born only ten minutes apart, yet from the moment they came into the world they have been utterly distinct. Theo, for example, was born with an incredible ear for music. Days after he was born, we noticed that music would completely captivate him. Jaden, on the other hand, showed little response to music; he came into the world with much more tactile awareness. A gentle rub on his back and he would be spellbound. I can also recall him, at just a couple of months old, clenching my shirt and trying to climb upward. A few months later he could work his way up to the top of my head. Ten years later he's still a relentless climber. Theo has turned out to have a pitch-perfect ear and is now an inspired pianist. Now that they are in the world, their environment will undoubtedly affect their inherent qualities in a variety of ways, but what made them, from the beginning of their lives, who they are and who they will potentially become is their jivatman, their individual souls.

The ancient wisdom of the Vedas teaches that each of us is both universal and unique, that the two aspects of the soul, para and jiva, are distinct but not separate. The nature of the paramatman is that it is identical to Infinite Being. Jiva or the individual soul, on the

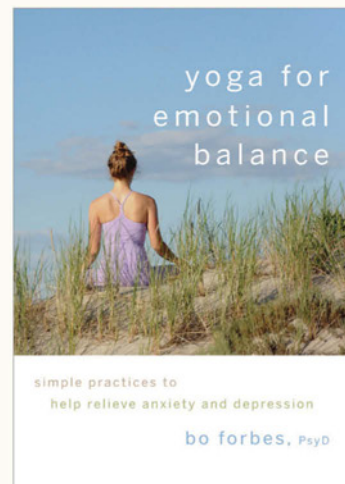
other hand, comes into the world with a specific purpose, which it is compelled to fulfill. In the same way that there are specific genetic traits in a tulip bulb that will determine its color, the shape of its petals, and the time it will most likely bloom, the jiva of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Leonardo da Vinci, and Albert Einstein contained the unique potentialities of their destiny the moment they were conceived.

### Dharma

Your soul, specifically the jiva aspect of your soul, has four desires that it uses to propel you toward your unique destiny. The first and most overriding of the four desires is dharma, the longing for purpose, the drive to be and to become who you are meant to be. Dharma, in simple terms, is the drive to fulfill your potential; it is the inherent drive of every being to thrive. Dharma is also the impulse toward altruism, the inner longing, known or unknown, of every individual to add his or her unique luster to the gem of creation. The term *dharma* has many meanings, including “law,” “path,” “order,” and “virtue.” Each of these definitions helps to define dharma as the one desire that informs the other three desires. In the yoga tradition, dharma is often referred to as duty. Dharma, in the context of the four desires, is usually interpreted to mean career, life path, or work—but dharma specifically places career and work, as well as the other roles we play in the world, within a larger context of serving the universe of which we are a part.

This larger sense of dharma is at the heart of the soul's inherent longing to fulfill its individual potential. Arthur Avalon, one of the world's greatest authorities on tantra, described the drive to fulfill our dharma as “that course of meritorious action by which man fits himself for this world, heaven, and liberation.” In other words, the inherent drive or desire for dharma is to fully realize everything that we are capable of and, in so doing, positively affect the world. >>

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According to the tradition, there is nothing in nature that is not compelled by this same imperative.

The reason dharma is the first of the four desires is twofold. One, the Vedic tradition is founded on the principle that, as individuals, our happiness is completely dependent on us fulfilling our own unique version of duty. The second reason is that everyone's unique dharma determines the scope and specifics of our three other desires.

### Artha

The second desire, artha, is for the means necessary to accomplish our dharma. In the most basic sense, artha refers to material resources, such as money, food, physical well-being, and a roof over our head, without which fulfilling our purpose would be difficult if not impossible. The particulars and the scope of what each of us will need to fulfill our drive for artha will vary from individual to individual, but all of us, even monks, have some material needs. However, artha is not confined to material wealth or abundance. The desire for artha includes all the means necessary to fulfill our soul's destiny. Mahatma Gandhi's artha included fasting, meditation and prayer, passive resistance, vegetarianism, even the clothes he wore, for which he spun the yarn himself. All these elements were unique to his version of artha. Compare him to Jackie Robinson, for example, the first African American baseball player to break the color barrier and play in the major leagues. Aside from a salary, food, and a place to sleep, some of his means included boundless will and an extraordinary capacity to endure prejudice (like Gandhi), as well as being a great baseball player.

### Kama

The third desire, kama, is for pleasure. *Kama* is often interpreted to mean "sensuality" or "lust," but the deeper understanding of it that comes from the ancient tradition speaks of kama as the desire

for pleasure of all kinds, including closeness and intimacy, beauty, family, art, and friendship, as well as sex. For some people there is a temptation to write this desire off as lowly or sinful, but consider

DHARMA IS ALSO THE IMPULSE TOWARD ALTRUISM, THE INNER LONGING, KNOWN OR UNKNOWN, OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO ADD HIS OR HER UNIQUE LUSTER TO THE GEM OF CREATION.

whether any of us would exist if there were no desire for the pleasure of sex.

The truth is that the desire for pleasure is the motivation behind all actions. Anything and everything aspired to and achieved produces a feeling of pleasure. In his book *Virtue, Success, Pleasure, and Liberation*, esteemed Vedic scholar Alain Daniélou cites two quotes from the *Mahabharata* that make this crystal clear: “He who does not desire pleasure will not seek to enrich himself. Without desires, neither does a man desire to fulfill his duty,” and “The merchant, the laborer, the gods themselves act only if their actions are linked to some satisfaction. For pleasure, a courageous man will brave the ocean.” Thus, if it were not for kama, few things of value in this world would exist.

**Moksha**

The fourth and final desire, moksha, is the longing for liberation, true freedom. It is the intrinsic desire to realize a state free from all boundaries, including the limitations of the other three desires. This desire has been the driving force behind the world’s spiritual traditions. It is the longing to know the Eternal, that which is beyond all limitations, beyond the province of the five senses and even death. It is the impulse that compels us to seek out prayer, meditation, contemplation, surrender. The desire for moksha is the longing for lasting peace or to experience the sacred, whether it is

found in a church, a temple, a mosque, contemplative solitude, nature, or self inquiry. In practical terms, moksha is the longing to be free, to experience unfettered awareness, to be completely

unburdened. It is the aspiration to be free of suffering and realize something beyond temporal pleasure. Fulfilling this desire gives us entry into the rarest and most sublime heights—heaven on earth.


It is critical to understand that learning to honor all four desires is key to achieving both worldly and spiritual fulfillment. While dharma is preeminent in that it shapes the particulars of our other three desires, no one of the four is greater or more important than the rest.

At various stages of life, a particular desire often comes to the forefront as the one that needs to be focused on and fulfilled. During a health crisis, for example, artha—our soul’s innate desire for well-being and health—would very likely become our preeminent desire. Once we regained our health, we could expect our soul to move on and place greater emphasis on fulfilling one of the other three desires. Collectively, the four desires are the compelling force that our soul utilizes to lead us to realize our full potential in becoming who we are meant to be. ■






*Rod Stryker is an initiate and teacher in the tradition of the Himalayan masters and the founder of ParaYoga. He has taught tantra, meditation, and batba yoga for more than 25 years. Visit him online at parayoga.com.*

*Adapted from The Four Desires: Creating a Life of Purpose, Happiness, Prosperity, and Freedom by Rod Stryker (Delacorte Press, July 2011).*

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Discover inner grace with a heart-opening sequence that evokes the ancient dance of Shiva. **By Mark Stephens**

# Divine Expression

**Human beings are naturally dynamic.** Even when we opt for stillness, our hearts are beating, our breath is flowing, and all our systems are at work. Yet often times, when we choose movement, our actions are unconscious and feel disconnected from our intention. Hatha yoga invites mindfulness into our actions, whether voluntary or involuntary, so that we become increasingly aware of how we move, breathe,

and, eventually, how we might begin to ease into meditative stillness. In this way, all hatha yoga embraces flow—the conscious dynamism of movement within and between poses.

To flow with integrity we need good form and a stable structure. Like a river flowing from its mountain source toward the sea, the riverbed and objects along the way channel the flow, while the flow itself alters the shape of that which holds it. Sometimes the structure is so rigid that the flow becomes constricted, and sometimes a powerful flow will break the banks, creating a new path. With time and evolution, a careful balance always emerges, and the flow finds its optimal expression.

This dynamic interplay of structure and movement is beautifully embodied in *natarajasana* (king dancer pose), which symbolizes the ancient dance of Shiva. An intermediate/advanced-level asana, *natarajasana* helps to cultivate strength, openness, and an elegance of form and action amid the powerful energy required to balance on one leg while in a deep backbend. It is a glorious heart-opener that asks us to be stable yet at ease, committed yet non-attached, and fully engaged yet at peace. When we remain present to these essential dualities of structure and movement, *natarajasana* invites clear communication with the teacher dancing in our heart.

In his book *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, Heinrich Zimmer points out that Shiva's dance has two principal and antagonistic forms, corresponding to his wrathful and benign manifestations: *tandava* is the fierce, violent dance, signifying the destruction of self-limiting awareness; and *lasya* is the gentle, lyric dance in which Shiva reveals the beautiful, loving, and tender aspects of existence. "Shiva," Zimmer intones, "is the perfect master of the two." Here, on the pathway to *natarajasana*, we will explore the qualities of the *lasya* form by moving through a slow and graceful meditative flow.

## Exploring the Flow

According to tantric lore, Shiva's dance was first performed at Chidambaram, the mystical center of the universe. Within the microcosm of the human being, the center of the universe—the stage for this divine dance—correlates to the heart itself. Thus, the spirit of *natarajasana* inspires a fluid sequence that opens the heart and invites conscious awareness.

To begin, warm up with 15 to 20 minutes of your favorite variation of *surya namaskar* (sun salutation). Include *anjaneyasana* (low lunge) or *virabhadrasana I* (warrior I pose), which are especially helpful for awakening and stretching the iliopsoas muscles crucial to the safe and full expression of *natarajasana*. >>



## 1. Lasya Vinyasa

To more fully open the hips, warm the spine, and awaken the shoulders and arms, play with the spirited and graceful flow of a lasya vinyasa. From *adho mukha shvanasana* (downward-facing dog pose), move very slowly and in synchronization with the breath as follows:

**Inhaling**, extend the right leg back and up (fig. 1a), externally rotating the hip and bending the right knee, while rooting the left heel down.

**Exhaling**, release the right foot to the floor about mat-distance to the left of the left foot, toes pointing backward.

**Inhaling**, sweep the right arm around



in a wide counter-clockwise circular motion toward the sky (fig. 1b).

**Exhaling**, continue the arm movement to bring the right hand back to the mat.

**Inhaling**, extend the right leg back and up to its original elevated position in three-legged downward-facing dog.

**Exhaling**, draw the shoulders over the wrists as you move toward plank pose, while drawing the right knee toward the chest (fig. 1c); then extend the right leg to the left, crossing it underneath the left leg at a 90-degree angle and planting the outer edge of the foot on the floor.

**Inhaling**, root the left heel in and down and the right hand evenly into the floor, while sweeping the left arm up and around in a wide clockwise circular motion toward the sky (fig. 1d).

**Exhaling**, continue the circular motion of the arm to release the left hand back to the mat.

**Inhaling**, extend the right leg back and up, repeating the first movement, and continue for five complete cycles.

Repeat on the other side before resting in *adho mukha shvanasana*, evenly rooting the palms, while externally

rotating the upper arms. Ground down through the legs and feet, and lift up through the arches of the feet; this creates an energetic activation called *pada bandha*, which allows you to more easily access the pelvic floor, while strongly pressing the tops of the thighbones back to further extend the spine.

## 2. Padahasthasana (Hands to Feet Pose)

Every asana and transitional movement works and stretches the body in particular ways that create new needs and possibilities for further exploration. The neutralizing practice of *pratikriyasana* (*prati* means “against,” and *kr* means “action”) integrates prior actions in a way that prepares you to move forward into the next asana or sequence with greater ease and integrity.

Integrate the fluid movement from the lasya vinyasa with a calming forward fold: float forward into *ardha uttanasana* (half standing forward bend pose), slide the hands under the feet, palms face up, and then fold fully down into *padahasthasana*. This will release the wrists, stretch the back of the body, and restore energetic balance.





### 3. Dolphin Pose

Flow through another surya namaskar, finishing in adho mukha shvanasana. Then draw forward into plank pose and place the forearms on the floor with the elbows directly under the shoulders in preparation for dolphin pose. Rooting evenly through the palms, press the shoulders away from the wrists, while stretching the hips up and back. Try to maintain the same external rotation of the upper arms practiced in adho mukha shvanasana. Hold for 5 to 10 breaths before releasing onto the knees and back into adho mukha shvanasana.

### 4. Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)

Come to a seated position for gomukhasana, and cross the right knee over the left, with your heels tucked in close to your hips, and your feet pointing straight back. If you can't get your sitting bones to reach the floor without slumping in the pelvis and low back, sit up on a block. Here you will further stretch the shoulder and arm muscles as well as the hip muscles that must release in full natarajasana. Extend the left arm straight up while drawing your right arm behind and up your back. If you are unable to clasp the fingertips of your left and right hands together, use a strap. Stay for one to two minutes, breathing steadily and deeply, before switching sides.

### 5. Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)

Follow gomukhasana with two or three mindful rounds of surya namaskar before coming to a high kneeling position in preparation for supta virasana. As with

gomukhasana, consider sitting on a block placed between your heels to get the pelvis neutral and to reduce pressure in the knees. Either stay in this position, or to further open the hip flexors and shoulder girdle, gradually recline back onto your hands, elbows, or back, staying attentive to pressure in the knees, low back, and neck. If the knees lift off the floor, come back to a less reclining position. (If sitting on a block, recline only to your elbows or onto a high bolster placed under your back.) Staying with the breath, hold supta virasana for two minutes. After releasing, press into adho mukha shvanasana and play with “walking the dog” by alternatively bending the left and right knees, restoring balance to the knees.

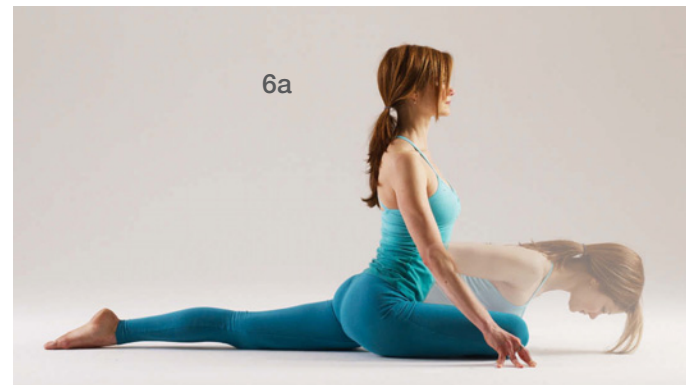
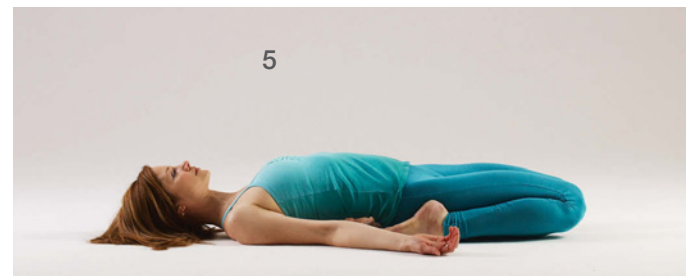
### 6. Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (One-Legged King Pigeon Pose) Variations

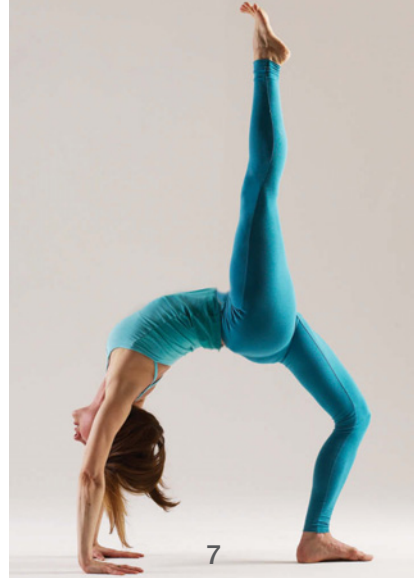
To come into the preparatory position for eka pada rajakapotasana, start in downward-facing dog and extend the right leg up; then bring the right knee forward and place it down slightly wider than the right shoulder, releasing the left leg straight back onto the floor. It is very important to have the right hip firmly placed on the floor or a block level with the left hip in order to (1) protect the inside of the right knee, (2) rotate the left hip forward and even with the right hip, and (3) keep the left leg extended straight

back from the left hip without letting it externally rotate.

With an inhalation, come up high onto the fingertips and open the heart toward the sky. Tapping into the graceful fluidity of lasya, exhale and slowly release the heart toward the horizon and then the earth before undulating back up with the next inhalation (fig. 6a). Repeat this dynamic movement several times, staying grounded and balanced in the pelvis while opening the hips and heart. Then, release the heart back toward the earth, allowing either the chest or the forearms to remain resting on the floor. Hold the pose for two to three minutes. >>

🔊 Download guided audio instruction for this sequence at [yogainternational.com/lasyaflow](http://yogainternational.com/lasyaflow).





Moving slowly and consciously, draw back up onto the hands, reposition the left hip forward in line with the right hip to more easily extend the left leg straight back, with the kneecap pointed straight down. (This will enable the knee to function as the hinge joint it is rather than twisting it and possibly straining the ligaments.) Make a small loop at one end of a strap and hook it around the ball of the left foot; then draw the strap up overhead. With the right hip crease drawing back and the left hip rotated forward, you will establish a relatively symmetrical base in your pelvis for a backbend. Moving with the breath, slowly draw your hands down the strap. Press the tailbone down and keep the gaze forward, focusing the backbend in the mid-spine. Eventually release the crown of the head into the arch of the foot (fig. 6b). Breathing spaciouly through the heart, hold for 5 to 10 breaths. Slowly release, press into adho mukha shvanasana, and switch sides.

### 7. Eka Pada Urdhva Dhanurasana (One-Legged Upward Bow Pose)

Anticipating natarajasana more closely, this is the perfect place in the sequence to explore additional asymmetrical backbends. Lying supine with feet positioned parallel and close to the hips, place the palms on the floor by the shoulders, with the fingertips pointing forward and the elbows pointing straight up. If it is difficult to position your elbows in this

way, play with placing the hands slightly wider apart and turning them slightly out to more easily externally rotate the arms and stabilize the shoulders. Reawaken pada bandha to aid in internally rotating the legs, which reduces pressure in the sacroiliac joint and ultimately deepens the backbend.

With the completion of an exhalation, feel the lower back press into the floor and the tailbone slightly curl up. On an inhalation, use this action to press into *urdhva dhanurasana* (upward bow pose, or wheel). Consider pressing up just to the crown of your head at first to reposition the elbows in line with the shoulders. In order to maintain this alignment when straightening the arms,

play with isometrically spiraling the palms outward (without actually moving them). If stable and comfortable, root more firmly through the left foot, maintain internal rotation of the left thigh, and lift the right knee straight up to the sky; then extend the knee to straighten the right leg. Hold for 5 to 10 breaths on each side. Consider repeating two to three times before releasing slowly down and resting the knees together to release in the low back.

### 8. Eka Pada Viparita Dandasana (One-Legged Inverted Staff Pose)

Repeat eka pada urdhva dhanurasana, or transition to eka pada viparita dandasana. Begin as you would for urdhva



“THE INTERPLAY OF STRUCTURE, RIGIDITY, AND FORM WITH FORMLESSNESS MAKES UP THE MOVEMENT OF LIFE.” —GANGA WHITE

dhanurasana, pressing up to the crown. Then lower your forearms to the floor one at a time and interlace your fingers around your head as though for *shirshasana* (headstand). Rooting down through the forearms, try to lift the head off the floor and keep strongly spiraling the upper arms outward to open the upper back. Staying sensitive to sensation in your lower back, slowly walk the feet out to straighten the legs, with the feet together and firmly rooting down. If stable and comfortable, root more firmly through the left foot, maintain internal rotation of the left thigh, and bend and lift the right knee, eventually straightening the leg. Hold for 5 to 10 breaths on each side before releasing slowly down and resting the knees together. Consider doing a simple supine twist to release tension in the muscles along the spine.

### 9. Virabhadrasana III (Warrior III Pose)

Natarajasana is a glorious heart-opening backbend, but it is first and foremost an asymmetrical standing balance pose. In order to arrive at the pose's graceful dynamism, you'll need the integrity of a strong and stable foundation in the standing foot, leg, and hip.

Virabhadrasana III involves placing the full weight of the extended upper body on one hip joint (which is contraindicated for students with weakness in the supporting musculature, trochanteric bursitis, or other hip issues). To come into the pose, start in crescent pose with the right foot forward and the left heel off the floor. Then hinge at the hips to bring the torso forward to a 45-degree angle; bring the hands on the hips or let the arms come alongside the body to help center the weight over the standing leg. Lightly spring forward to bring the weight of the body fully onto just the right foot. At first keep the right

knee bent, slowly extending it to feel your way into stability without straining in the hamstrings, knee, or hip of the standing leg. Eventually the pelvis rotates forward 90 degrees, the left leg extends straight back with the knee and toes pointing down, and the torso extends forward. Finally bring the arms alongside the ears. Explore on both sides, holding for up to one minute.

### The Peak Pose

#### 10. Natarajasana

Now come to standing in *tadasana*, hook the looped end of a strap around the ball of the left foot and bend the left knee, bringing the heel up next to the hip, while clasping the strap overhead with both hands. Apply all the actions of the standing leg that you explored in *virabhadrasana III*. Begin to slowly rotate the pelvis forward, while moving your hands down along the strap as you did in *eka pada rajakapotasana*. Try to keep the standing leg straight, strong, and stable; if you tend to hyperextend the knee, micro-bend it instead.

You can also play with slightly bending the standing knee to level and square the hips and pelvis, creating a more symmetrical foundation for the backbend, while reducing pressure in the hamstrings and standing hip. Try to keep the sternum lifted as you rotate the pelvis forward and draw the hands closer to the feet, eventually clasping the foot with both hands and releasing the crown of the head into the arch of the foot. Do both sides, repeating two to three times, and eventually holding on each side for 5 to 10 breaths. >>



10

As you open more through the hips, torso, shoulders, and arms, try transitioning from *tadasana* to *natarajasana* without the strap. From *tadasana* you will bend the left knee to draw the left foot up toward the left hip, then clasp the inside of the left foot with the left hand, and rotate the left shoulder to point the elbow straight up. Then draw the right hand overhead to clasp the foot with both hands. To go into a deeper variation, try to straighten the arms and extend the left leg straight up to the sky.

### Integrating

From *natarajasana*, the dance of body, breath, and mind flows more deeply as you progress toward *shavasana*. Lying on your back, start with a gentle *apana-sana* (knees to chest), moving the knees in circles to initiate release in the lower back and pelvis. Then explore the simple twist of *supta parivartanasana* (reclining twist pose) by extending the left leg straight out



onto the floor, the right arm out to the right, and drawing the right knee across the body. Be more interested in keeping the right shoulder on the floor than in getting the right knee to the floor, thereby focusing the twist more in the mid-spine than the low back. Play with bending the left knee, drawing the left foot back to the right hand, and clasping the foot to stretch the thigh and groin muscles. You can also explore straightening the right leg and clasping it with the left hand to stretch the iliotibial band along the outside of the left leg, which shares attachments with several hip and pelvic muscles used in *virabhadrasana III* and *nataraja-*

*sana* (fig. 11). Stay with the breath for one to two minutes, then switch sides.

From here, explore other simple twists, such as *ardha matsyendrasana* (half lord of fish pose) and *bharadvajasana II* (pose of Sage Bharadvaja II), as well as symmetrical forward bends, such as *baddha konasana* (bound angle pose) and *pashchimottanasana* (posterior stretch). Complete your finishing practice with inversions: come into *shirshasana* (headstand), followed by *balasana* (child's pose); then transition onto your back for *salamba sarvangasana* (supported shoulderstand) and *matsyasana* (fish pose). Finally, make your way into a deeply restful *shavasana*, letting the breath flow effortlessly as you slip into blissful awareness of the beauty and grace at your heart center. ■

*Mark Stephens, author of Teaching Yoga: Essential Foundations and Techniques (North Atlantic Books, 2010), has practiced yoga for over 20 years. He lives and teaches in Santa Cruz, California.*

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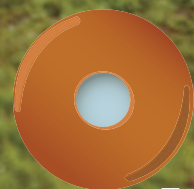
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Before you begin your daily meditation, befriend your mind and connect with your inner teacher through the process of earnest introspection. **By Swami Rama**

# Know Thyself

*The mind is the greatest of all mysteries.* Upon unveiling this mystery, all mysteries are unveiled. The mind is the source of all misery and happiness. It is the source of both bondage and liberation. The more you know about your mind, the greater the mastery you will have over the world around you.

The mind is an energy field. It is the finest manifestation of nature. Nature has deposited its entire bounty—all potentials, capacities, and intelligence—in the mind. The mind is endowed with all creativity, imaginable and unimaginable. It has the capacity to create anything it wishes. It has enormous space to store its unlimited experiences and keep them as long as it likes. >>





*The mind also has the capacity to fool itself.* It can recollect its past deeds at will, or go on living in a state of forgetfulness. It has the capacity to dwell on one single thought, one single idea, and one single object, or it can brood on multiple thoughts and ideas. The mind has the capacity to flow in the external world and go on running from one object to another. It also has the capacity to turn its face away from the external world, and flow inwardly toward the center of consciousness. It can function as the best friend of the body and soul, or behave like their worst enemy. Therefore, nothing in life is more important than understanding your own mind and its relationship to oneself and the outside world.

To learn to know yourself, you need to take a few minutes for yourself every day. Many people think that meditation is the right solution, and I agree, but most people understand only one part of meditation. In meditation, you sit down quietly and repeat your mantra. During that period your mind remains one-pointed, but after that your mind goes back again to its same previous grooves. This is not the full process of meditation; the full process of meditation is a whole-life process. Meditation means to attend. It means paying attention to the

whole of life. It should not be a strenuous act; it should not be forced. Your whole life can be one of meditation. From morning until evening you can meditate, either unconsciously or consciously, and if you do that meditation well, it will bring many benefits.

People often ask how they can do this. My method is to ask myself to consider some question that is on my mind. Once, when I was young, my master asked me to consider where I got my questions. When I told him they came from within, he replied, “Then the

answers are also there. I can give you the answers another way, but the answers are there.” So from wherever the questions arise, there are also the answers.

Early in the morning, right after I get up, I go to the bathroom and prepare for meditation, and then I sit down. This is the calmest period of the day, when my mind is quiet. Everyone’s mind remains calm at this time, because at that hour the mind is not so external in its focus. I ask my mind what I have to do, and then I set up a dialogue with myself.

When all the thoughts have gone through my mind, then I start to remember my mantra. You often try to remember your mantra from the very beginning, but there are thoughts waiting for your consultation and you do not pay attention to them. So the thoughts are coming and going in your mind while you are trying to repeat your mantra, and the more the thoughts come, the more you repeat your mantra. The result is an inner battle. That is not helpful; you need not do that. If you use the technique described here regularly and faithfully, and apply it sincerely, you will be able to really enjoy your meditation.

Meditation is important. But preparation for meditation, the cultivation of an attitude of readiness for meditation, an awareness of what you should do after meditation, and an understanding of how you should continue this meditation during the whole day, are also important. You need to put this teaching into practice in your daily life.

### Self-Dialogue

At the very beginning of your meditation practice, have a gentle dialogue with your mind. Sit down quietly and ask yourself, “What do I want?” You will learn many things when you enter into this kind of self-dialogue. You will come in contact with your inner states. You will learn about the subtle aspects of your mind, your own conscience—and you will see that you are training yourself in the process.



THE GOAL OF INTROSPECTION IS TO SEE THE IMAGES IN THE MIND THROUGH THE LENS OF THE DIVINE—AND THEREBY RESTORE KNOWLEDGE OF ONE’S ESSENTIAL NATURE.

■ Watch Swami Rama video lectures about sankalpa shakti and finding stillness at [yogainternational.com/swamirama](http://yogainternational.com/swamirama).

The aim of your self-dialogue should not be primarily related to the things you have been doing in your life, at your office, or in your family. Your task is to cultivate a positive relationship with your mind—a relationship in which questions about the purpose of life can be fruitfully raised. You must ask yourself what your purpose is. Otherwise, you are killing the inner teacher within you, and this is the greatest of all sins in life.

Let your mind be a friend. When you talk to a friend you accept some things and do not accept others. Establish a relationship with your mind on the same basis, and do not listen to the mind's temptations. Listen to its suggestions, good ideas, and advice, and learn to observe what type of mind you have.

When you do this, you will find that there are two types of desires: the simple daily wants, and the higher desires. The two types of desires are mingled together. When you sit down to meditate, you think, "I need this thing; I need that thing; my car is old; I want a new car." These are mundane things, but do not allow yourself to suppress these desires by reacting: "Oh, what am I thinking? I should not think like that!" That is not helpful; instead, let the thoughts come before you, and become an observer of your own mind. Do not try to escape; do not be afraid of your thinking, no matter what kind of thought arises.

Every time you sit to meditate, first remember the spiritual power of your practice. Recall the strength of the meditative traditions that inspire you. Examine yourself sincerely and ask yourself if you want to meditate, to explore, to know yourself, and to form new habits of living. Then, inspect within to see what is good and what is not good for your practice. Ask yourself if the thought that is coming to you is helpful for your meditation or not. In this way, your



## Revitalize Your Practice

**If you want to develop your mind** and become a serious student of meditation, the first thing that you have to learn is to get out of bed the moment you wake up. If you are awake, but you remain in bed, it is because there is a coloring of *tamas*, laziness or inertia, in your personality. Your mind will say, "Oh, it's Sunday, I don't have to work, let me stay in bed." That's a bad way of training yourself; it's a bad way of teaching your mind. Regardless of whether it's Sunday or Monday, you should get up. Otherwise, you are wasting time and energy, and at the same time you are forming a bad habit that affects you on both the physical and mental levels.

Rise, wash, and finish your morning ablutions—and then do something useful. Do not remain idle and inert. Lethargy and sloth result from not doing things on time, not forming habits which are helpful to you, or not having control over your appetites. Training the physical habits in this way has a direct result in training the mind.

This is an important secret of life: if you remain idle without doing something useful, your mind thinks scattered and random thoughts, and wastes its energy. A thought is like an unripened fruit that is not yet eaten by anyone. Ripening the fruit means bringing a positive thought into action. Those who are great, successful, creative, and dynamic know how to bring all their good thoughts into action, and how to give shape and form to their creative thinking process.

Positive, dynamic people conduct their duties well because they have established coordination between their thoughts, speech, and action. Do not be afraid of the word "discipline," because to make progress you need to train yourself. In this kind of training, books can't help you; nothing external can help you. You have to understand yourself. You need to ask yourself how you think, why you are emotional, and what the problems are with your mind. You need to consider why you often do not do what you really want to do. Put these questions to yourself, and you'll find the answers.

Through such training and self-discipline you can truly understand yourself. And when you apply all your resources, intelligence, and understanding to exploring your interior self—the modifications of your mind and your internal states—it will be a fascinating experience.

*Adapted from The Art of Joyful Living by Swami Rama (Himalayan Institute Press).*

## THIS SO-CALLED UNCONSCIOUS MIND IS LIKE THE BASEMENT OF YOUR HOUSE WHERE YEARS AGO YOU STORED YOUR BELONGINGS, BUT FOR A LONG TIME YOU HAVEN'T HAD A CHANCE TO VISIT.

meditation will be guided by the higher forces within you—and not led off into fantasies and wish-fulfillments.

There are three aspects to a human being: animal, human, and divine. The human being is like an angel that has fallen down. He is distracted by the charms and temptations of the world, and identifies himself with them, thus forgetting his essential nature. The goal of introspection is to see the images in the mind through the lens of the divine—and thereby restore the knowledge of one's essential nature.

### Witnessing

Often, although you start to inspect within, you do not have the capacity to continue. You are swayed by your thoughts and identify yourself with your thought patterns. The wisdom to decide

what is useful in the mind is not there. If you have not cultivated your spiritual resolve, your *sankalpa shakti*, then you will discover that your thoughts control you. You will see that you are far too easily distracted by the images that come into your mind. Your mind will create many fantasies and images, one after another. These images—the objects of imagination—are the result of what you have known, heard, thought, studied, or fantasized about.

When thoughts arise, you either start to worry or start to enjoy your imagination. Both kinds of thoughts are actually the imagination at play. Do not form the habit of merely enjoying your thinking process and indulging in it without bringing it to action; such daydreaming is dangerous. Many people do that; they enjoy and indulge in their imagination,

but that is not the same as creative imagination. Creative imagination is that process by which you imagine something, and then when it is helpful you allow it to be expressed through your actions.

So the first lesson in this practice is to simply allow thoughts to arise and then to go away. The second is to bring back before yourself that which is important. The thoughts that are colored by your interest are those that motivate you to act, and not all thoughts have that power. Not all of your thoughts need external expression, so allow them to arise, decide if they are creative or helpful, and then later express those that are useful.

Your thoughts are not mere thoughts; they are people—identities within you. You are a world in yourself. You are a universe, and all your thoughts are people. Just as people are born and die, so too, thoughts are born and die. Some thoughts create great grooves or imprints in your mind. They live on in the unconscious. Those thoughts are called *samskaras*.

The unconscious mind is the vast reservoir of all of our experiences of the past. The subtle impressions of our every thought, speech, and action are deposited in our unconscious mind. It is nature's most comprehensive database. Nothing in this aspect of the mind is inert and dead, and yet, we call it the unconscious mind. Why? Because people do not normally have conscious access to this part of their own mind, nor are they aware of what lies within it.



This so-called unconscious mind is like the basement of your house where years ago you stored your belongings, but for a long time you haven't had a chance to visit. Over the years, you even forgot what you had stored there. In this long interval, your basement flooded several times, the plumbing and electrical systems became dysfunctional, and mice and other animals took over the space.

Today, you have a hard time entering this dark and musty basement. You have neither the convenience nor the capacity to take an inventory of your long-deposited belongings. For all practical purposes, you have abandoned your basement, but it is still your basement. Long-forgotten belongings sitting in your basement are *your* belongings. When you move to your next house, it is your responsibility to dispose of those belongings or to take them with you.

In either case, you have to enter your basement. You cannot escape your past. You cannot escape the fruits of your past deeds. You must face them. Your lack of awareness regarding the contents in the basement of your mind does not make those contents vanish. In your ignorance, you may go on proclaiming that they don't exist, but sooner or later, reality hits. Then you realize that the vast storehouse of your past, in its own right, is fully conscious, very actively alive. Those impressions exert their influence on you, regardless of whether you are awake or asleep, conscious or unconscious.

You can eliminate those thoughts if you know how. You can obtain freedom from your samskaras, from the impressions that you have stored in the storehouse of merits and demerits, the unconscious mind. You have the power to do that. If you could not, then human endeavor would be of no use.

Quite often, we know what is right and yet we do not feel motivated to do it. We also know what is wrong but we do not know how to stop doing it. This happens because the contents in the

unconscious mind keep influencing our conscious mind—its thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is only when we begin to meditate that we realize how vast our unconscious mind is and how potent are its contents. To understand the mystery of life and bring a lasting transformation within and without, we have to dive deep into the depths of our own unconscious mind. The process that allows you to peek into your unconscious mind is called self-study or introspection.

To understand your unconscious mind, you have to be alert and observant and work with yourself gradually. Do not be harsh with yourself. The mind is like a river; you cannot stop its thinking. If you try to create a kind of dam or reservoir in it for some time, like a beaver trying to stop the flow of the river, eventually there will be a great disaster. So do not try to stop or suppress your thinking. That's a bad way to try to understand or control your mind.

The way to work with intruding thoughts is to let each one come, whether it is good or bad, and become an observer. Start observing your own mind. Simply decide that whatever comes, you will not be disturbed. Realize that this thought, whatever it is, cannot disturb your whole life. To think otherwise means that you believe you are weak and that the thought is powerful. When you become accustomed to witnessing, you can develop the habit of being more balanced, of losing your destructive sensitivity and reactivity to both positive and negative things.

### Grace

To truly witness your thoughts you will need to travel even further toward the source of life and light within you. Your mind is the finest instrument of your personality, and yet you will discover with practice that the mind is not everything; something else gives power to the mind.

There is a source that you cannot see with the mind. At some moment you will learn to leave behind body con-

sciousness, breath consciousness, sense consciousness, mind consciousness—and finally go beyond all of them. At such a moment, you no longer identify yourself with the objects of your mind or the objects of the world. That moment reveals a state of equilibrium, of tranquility. In that state you become the inner witness, not through some internal self-effort, but because that is who you are.

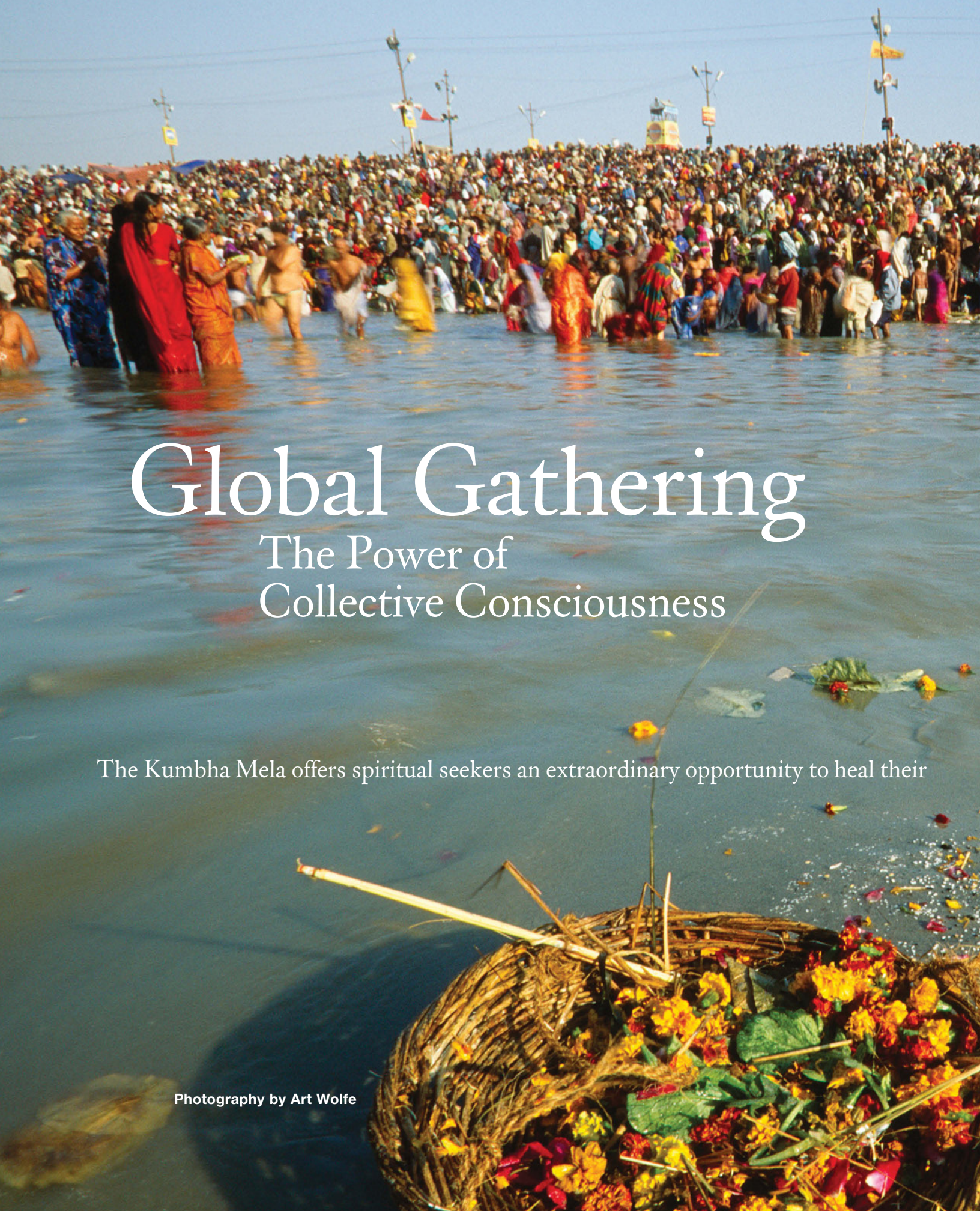
There are four types of grace. The grace of the guru, the grace of the scriptures, and the grace of that which is divine are the first three. But these three help you only if you have your own grace. Now, however, your state of mind is enveloped by dust. If you simply shake off the dust, your mind will be clean, so you should make a sincere effort.

When you have made effort with all your strength and willpower, help comes from above. That is the descending force. When you have used all your own ascending force, then the descending force of grace comes. The grace of the Divine is light. The sun is there, the moon is there, and all the lights of the world are there. The moment you obtain your own grace, this divine grace is there as well.

The path leading to such heights is the path of the inner journey. Embarking on this journey you will learn to know yourself and the unknown levels of your life. It will make you creative and brilliant. It will lead you to the silence from where wisdom flows, that fountain of life and light that flows with all its majesty. If you know how to use the mind you can be successful within and without. Then you can really learn to enjoy life. Then life is complete. ■

*One of the greatest adepts, teachers, writers, and humanitarians of the 20th century, Swami Rama is the founder of the Himalayan Institute and Yoga International. Although he left his body in 1996, his teachings live on in his students and in his writings.*

*Adapted from the teachings and writings of Swami Rama (Himalayan Institute Press).*



# Global Gathering

## The Power of Collective Consciousness

The Kumbha Mela offers spiritual seekers an extraordinary opportunity to heal their

Photography by Art Wolfe



own hearts while restoring harmony to a troubled world. By Pandit Rajmani Tigunait



**D**uring my years as a student at the University of Allahabad, I attended the 1977 and 1989 Kumbha Melas and many of the much smaller melas that take place every year in January and February. These melas were like county fairs, filled with fun and excitement, but they also afforded an opportunity to serve my parents during their ritual practice and to study with the sadhus and yogis who attend these melas in great numbers.

As I related in the last issue, when my mother burned her foot during the 1999 mela and insisted on risking death rather than leave the mela grounds, I saw this event through the eyes of the pilgrims for the first time and experienced it through their hearts.

Then and there I decided that when the Kumbha Mela returned to Allahabad in 2001, I, too, would return, this time as a pilgrim. My original plan was to travel with a few friends and family members, but when the residents of the Himalayan Institute in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, learned of my intention,

many of them asked to accompany me. Within days, as word spread from the residents to our members and friends, 70 people expressed a wish to take part in this pilgrimage. I found their enthusiasm inspiring, but managing such a large group of Westerners at the Kumbha Mela seemed impossible. There would be millions of people, thousands of loudspeakers blaring at all hours, open trenches for bathrooms, and a pall of dust and smoke hanging in the air much of the time. Americans are sincere and generous, but where would I get their mineral water and organic vegetables?

They enjoy adventure, but at the end of the day, they need a hot shower and a clean, private place to sleep. The hotels in Allahabad would be barely livable by American standards, and anyway, they would be full of politicians and government officers during the Kumbha Mela. I also knew that if our list of attendees had grown to 70 in a matter of days, it would grow into the hundreds in the next two years.

In the end, this problem solved itself. Through a series of fortuitous events, the Himalayan Institute was able to purchase a 30-acre parcel of land on the

## HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SADHUS LEFT THE SECLUSION OF THEIR CAVES, MONASTERIES, PRIVATE DWELLINGS, AND ASHRAMS TO JOIN THIS TIME-HONORED PROCESSION.

bank of the Ganga just three kilometers downstream from the *sangam*, the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers—not too close to the heart of the mela site, yet not too far away. We built a boundary wall to enclose our new campus, drilled a well, and built a water tower and a two-story guesthouse. As the date for the Kumbha Mela drew near, we erected an elaborate tent city—complete with lecture and dining halls, a kitchen, gift shops, and over 200 spacious tents—preparing to receive 500 of the Institute’s members and guests. A beautiful old mango orchard on a bluff overlooking the Ganga had been fitted with a *yajna shala* (the *kunda* for performing fire rituals) and transformed into a sacred grove for meditation and self-reflection.

While we were completing preparations on our campus, the 25-square-mile floodplain surrounding the sangam was being transformed into a bustling city. By January 10, it mirrored the legendary description of heaven, which, according to Hindus, is fitted with all the amenities. Brightly lit main roads were interlaced with hundreds of side streets. Allahabad’s three permanent bridges had been augmented by dozens of pontoon bridges spanning the two rivers. There were hospitals, police stations, aid stations, watchtowers, strip malls, exhibition halls, lecture halls, media outlets, elaborate compounds for housing high-ranking holy men, and millions of residences for pilgrims—all made of tents. Twenty thousand loudspeakers connected to a central PA system were constantly broadcasting prayers, with occasional interruptions for announcements. All was in readiness.

As it turned out, the 2001 Kumbha Mela attracted the largest crowd in the history of humankind. In a span of four

weeks, 70 million pilgrims took a ritual bath in the river. Millions of people stayed on the Ganga floodplain for the entire month, observing spiritual practices and doing penance, as prescribed in their 1000-year-old traditions. Although the majority were Hindu, the crowd also included substantial numbers of Buddhists, Jains, Christians, and Sikhs.

The mela began officially on January 12, as the Juna Akhara, the biggest sect of sadhus in India, made a formal procession to the sangam. Hundreds of thousands of sadhus—tens of thousands of *naga* (nude) sadhus among them—had left the seclusion of their caves, monasteries, private dwellings, and ashrams to join this time-honored procession. With the highest-ranking sadhus seated on thrones mounted on the backs of elephants or on motorized chariots, and those lower in the hierarchy on horseback or on foot, the procession began at the ancient monasteries in the heart of the city and wound its way to the mela grounds.

“This procession is not a cultural show nor is it a display of power and glamour,” a high-ranking sadhu told me. “It begins with a long ritual. In the presence of sadhus from all over India, we invoke and propitiate our ancient masters, the presiding deities of our tradition, and the divine forces who guide us and who heal, protect, and nurture all creation. After the rituals are over, we invite these forces to reside at the lotus of our hearts. They are our masters; we are their attendants. This is their procession—we accompany them. They bless this great occasion of the Kumbha Mela, and we witness their blessings.”

In honor of this procession, the streets were festooned with garlands of fresh flowers and streamers of green mango leaves. The crowds lining the route

showered the holy men with flowers and petals. The naga sadhus—smeared from head to toe in ceremonial ash—walked in front and attracted the most attention. Some had sandalwood paste on their forehead, some heads were shaven, and others were adorned with *jata* (long hair). Some walked proudly, with broad chests and massive tummies. Others were a bundle of bones and emitted the graceful energy of austerity. Some carried spears and others tridents or swords. The children regarded the nude sadhus with amusement, the adults with respect and humility, while the people unfamiliar with the practice and values these sadhus embody watched them with confused astonishment. They passed our group as we stood at the main entrance to the mela grounds. In these naga sadhus I saw the spirit of ancient India, which prized inner inquiry, afforded room for diversity, embraced tolerance, and placed inner peace far above the purposeless race of materialism.

### The Mythological Origin of the Kumbha Mela

Every culture has its sacred sites. For Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and the followers of the Bon religion, Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarover are sacred. The sanctity of Mecca is at the heart of Islam. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are united in their faith in the sanctity of Jerusalem. The tradition of pilgrimage to these sites is as ancient as the cultures themselves, yet how these places came to be regarded as sacred is shrouded in mystery. Attempts to unveil such mysteries give rise to the world of mythology with its own complex layers of meaning.

This is the case with the Kumbha Mela. As ancient as the Indian culture itself, the origin and the precise source

of the sanctity of the Kumbha Mela are shrouded in mystery. However, one mythological account, recorded in the *Padma Purana*, has a special resonance for our time.

LONG, LONG AGO, when the Himalayas were still in their infancy, the world was ruled by a terrible demon named Shankhasura. His appetite for power and possession knew no limits. He conquered the human race, plundered the earth and the waters until he possessed everything, leaving nothing for others. Poverty and the pain that accompanies poverty engulfed the planet.

Shankhasura built his capital far out of anyone's reach. From the security of this fortress, the demon delighted in watching the dance of destruction, death, and decay that he and his minions had inflicted on all forms of life. At the height of his reign, mountains crumbled, rivers caught fire, and Mother Earth cried out in despair. Hearing her cries, Lord Vishnu, the god of preservation, intervened and engaged the demon in battle. While Vishnu fought Shankhasura, Mother Nature exhibited her fury. Massive floods, fire, famine, and disease swept across the planet, abating only when Vishnu killed the demon, ending his horrific reign.

But even though the demon had been vanquished, the damage done during his reign was evident everywhere. Nature was out of balance. The soil was infertile. Streams had dried up. The groundwater was contaminated. Trees bore no fruit. Clouds carried no water. Animals gave birth to dissimilar species. Flowers were drab and had not regained their aroma. The climate was extreme and unpredictable. Grains contained no nutrients. Even though the demon was dead, fear still haunted the minds of people everywhere, and their hearts were filled with anger and grief.

Lord Vishnu summoned the sages and asked them to help Mother Nature restore herself to balance and to help

human beings summon the patience and vision to build a new and healthy world. As guided by Vishnu, the sages converged in the area surrounding the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers and began a 12-year group meditation known as *ashwamedha*. High-minded individuals—women and men, old and young, poor and rich, merchants and philosophers—joined the sages in their group meditation, which was centered around 12 altars. The scriptures describe how the sages captured their mind and turned it into a bright horse—a horse which finds its own direction, leads its rider to the right destination, and returns safely to its original home. This horse roamed the land, and the high-minded individuals followed it. Later texts call this ashwamedha *dharmachakra pravartana* (rotating the wheel of dharma).

By the time the ashwamedha practice drew to a close, the ecosystem had come back into balance: the air was pristine, the rivers ran deep and pure, the rains came on time, the soil was fertile, the trees were laden with fruit, crops were healthy, and the harvest plentiful. The health of humans had also returned—they were strong in body and clear in mind. Fear no longer haunted their minds, and anger and grief had been banished from their hearts.

As the sages made their final offering, the sacred fire at all 12 altars illumined the entire *ksbhetra* (the area now known as the Kumbha Mela site), and Lord Vishnu, the presiding force of the group meditation, spontaneously emerged from this light. The sages spoke in gratitude: “It is your guiding grace that restored the balance in creation. The power that illuminates this place has brought harmony out of chaos. We pray that this divine power stays here forever and that until the end of time humanity receives the guiding nurturance of this light, here at this place.”

Lord Vishnu granted their wish. “From now on this spot will be known as *Tirtha Raja* (the lord of all shrines). Every twelve years, during the month of



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MIND AND TURNED IT INTO A BRIGHT HORSE—A HORSE WHICH  
LEADS ITS RIDER TO THE RIGHT DESTINATION.



Magha, which begins in January in the Gregorian calendar, when the sun is in the house of Capricorn, the benevolent forces of creation will convene here. And just as sunrise dispels the darkness, the forces residing at Tirtha Raja will dispel the confusion of mind. I, too, will reside here at all of these altars.”

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This story takes us back to a time when Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, or any of the other forms of “ism” familiar to us today did not exist. But the human mind existed and so did the lust for power, prestige, name, fame, and the unrestrained desire to possess and consume. This story takes us to a place in time when the human race was ruled by fear and greed and our very core was shaken by unrest, both within and without. It takes us to a world where a handful possessed everything, and the rest, nothing. It tells of a society engulfed by strife in all its forms at a time when the collective conscious-

ness of the human race was desperately seeking positive change. Do we need an extra pair of eyes to see how deep we are in the era described by this story?

Our campus is located next to one of the altars where Lord Vishnu appeared and offered the assurance that he will reside here forever, and that the power inherent in this sacred place will dispel the confusion of mind. The sacredness of this place and the area around it is palpable. Here, in the sanctity and security of our well-ordered campus, during the 2001 Kumbha Mela, we spent our time studying, meditating, and enjoying the company of our friends and fellow seekers. From time to time we visited the sangam, where millions came to bathe. We marveled at their faith in the Ganga, at their faith in the Kumbha Mela, and at their belief in the law of karma and the redemption granted by pilgrimage.

In the pre-dawn hours, we could feel the spirit of the planet moving as the throng emerged from their tents and surged toward the bathing ghats to take

a dip in the Ganga. One morning I was crossing a pontoon bridge at sunrise when the dense fog lifted to reveal a sea of humanity standing in the river, facing the rising sun and offering the water of the Ganga to the celestial beings. In that instant, I saw the spirit of the collective consciousness filling the space between the earth and the sun, and I saw myself in all and everyone in me.

In the days that followed, we visited the compounds of sadhus belonging to different traditions, listened to their discourses, attended their ritual ceremonies, and received their blessings. One afternoon I received the privilege of sharing the stage with His Holiness the Dalai Lama while our guests sat at his feet and listened to his enlightening discourse. He summarized his remarks with these words: “The debate whether God exists or does not exist is perennial. Leave this debate to us. Your job is to discover how to live peacefully and happily.”

Sometimes we wandered into the mela without a specific goal in mind



## IN THAT INSTANT, I SAW THE SPIRIT OF THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS FILLING THE SPACE BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SUN, AND I SAW MYSELF IN ALL AND EVERYONE IN ME.

and allowed ourselves to see whatever happened to be there. Such wanderings led us to witness aspects of the Kumbha Mela that were not at all uplifting: Sadhus sitting around their fires smoking marijuana and arguing about politics; priests shouting their self-composed mantras and manipulating pilgrims into making love offerings they could not afford; religious organizations and leaders politicizing their agendas; and non-governmental organizations exploiting the sentiments of the pilgrims to collect donations. Thousands of beggars—lepers, the blind, the crippled, and orphans in tattered clothes—sat along the roads with their begging bowls, but hardly anyone seemed to notice. When we took boats downstream from the sangam to our campus we saw decomposing human corpses floating in the river, crows pecking at their eyes. These corpses, along with untreated sewage from the city, masses of pink and blue plastic bags, and an endless stream of marigold garlands offered by pilgrims had clearly made the Ganga sick. I looked at the sea of humanity crowding her shores and wondered how many in the crowd understood that spiritual aspirations and social responsibilities are not divorced from each other. How many know that personal enlightenment and the enlightenment of society go hand in hand? Clearly something vital is missing from our understanding of life, from our understanding of ourselves and others, and from our understanding of the natural world.

Another story narrated in the scriptures provides a glimpse of these missing elements. This story explains the message of the Kumbha Mela and tells us how to bring a qualitative change in our lives and in the world around us.

ONCE UPON A TIME, the gods and demons waged a war that lasted 10,000 years. Both sides exhausted all their resources, both material and spiritual, only to realize that the power and supremacy earned by subduing and harming others leads nowhere. Searching for peace and lasting happiness, the two warring parties went to the creator. The creator told them that *amrita* (immortal elixir) is the source of true peace and happiness. Like butter in milk, the amrita is hidden in the ocean of life (*Ksbira sagara*). He also told the gods and demons that they had to put aside their differences, become friends with one another, unite their strengths, and churn the ocean together if they wished to collect this amrita. They readily agreed.

The churning began, but as soon as the amrita emerged the two sides started quarreling. “It’s all for me!” they shouted. “It’s mine, and mine alone!” At this, Dhanvantari, the eternal healer, appeared and captured the amrita in his vessel. As he tried to escape, the disputants snatched at the vessel and some of the amrita spilled out. The earth, water, fire, air, and space surrounding the area where the amrita fell swallowed it instantly.

Later, pleased by the austerities, selfless service, and devotion of the sages, Lord Vishnu granted a boon: Every 12 years, the earth, water, fire, air, and space that contained this amrita would make it available to humankind. Thus began the celebration of the Kumbha Mela at 12-year intervals.

Clearly the war between the bright and the dark forces is well under way in our world today. Cries for justice and disputes over what constitutes justice echo across the airwaves. Might has become right. The face of the earth is blan-

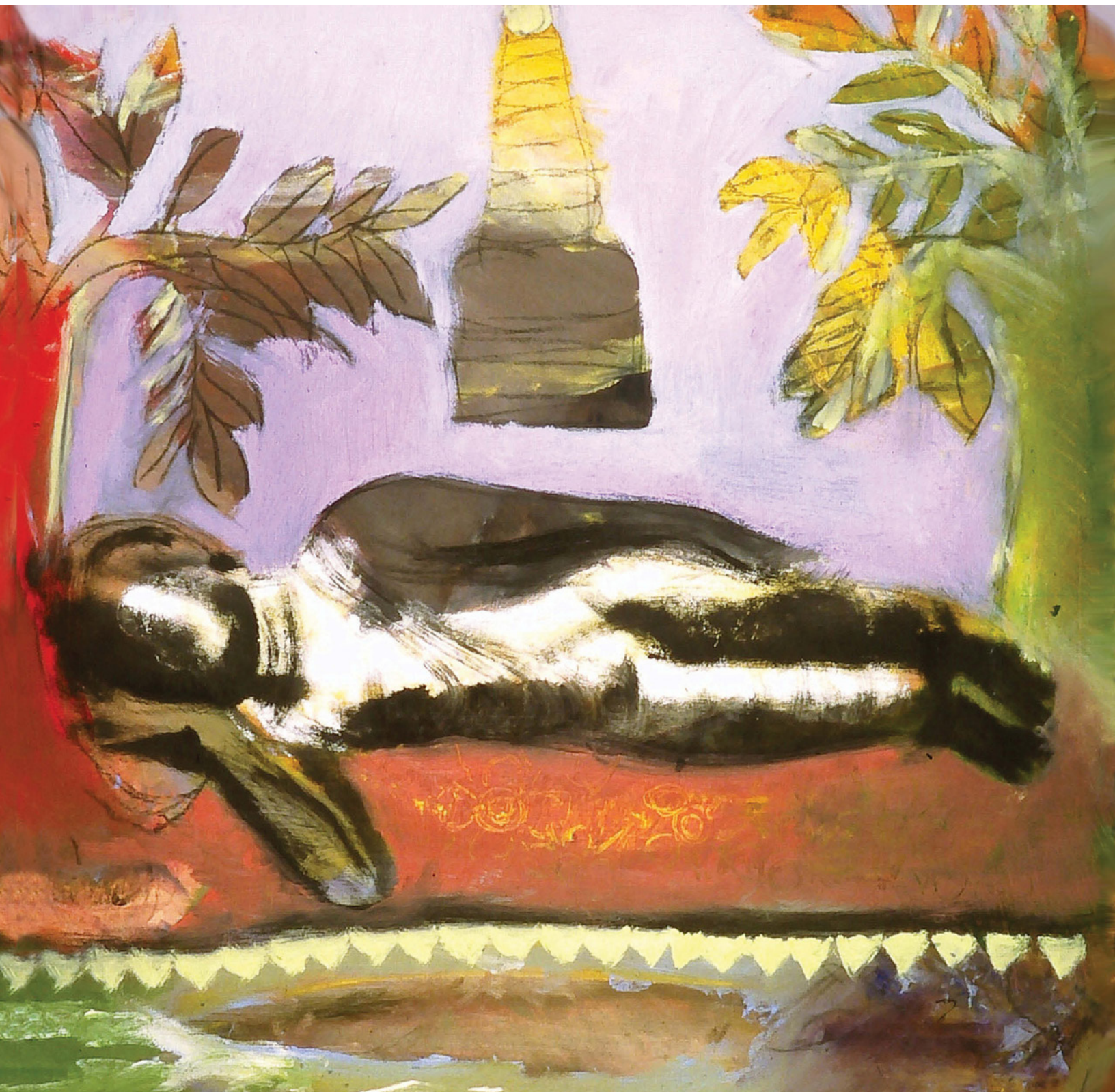
keted with terror. Nations are obsessed with their homeland security. The gap between rich and poor has become an ever-widening chasm. Do we have the stamina to fight for 10,000 years before we look for amrita, the real source of peace and happiness? Can we leave behind our addiction to labeling others, highlighting our differences, forcing others to comply with our values, and claiming everything for ourselves, while at the same time expecting everyone to work together to create a peaceful world? We have creative ideas, but they are contaminated by selfishness. We have brilliant politicians, but most are afflicted with a hunger for power. We have intelligent executives with untiring energy for business, but most are afflicted by greed. We have religious leaders with troves of knowledge, but most are caught in sectarianism. We have well-meaning and passionate activists, but many lack broad vision and consideration for others.

The Kumbha Mela is a time to have a dialogue with the creator, our own conscience. It is a time to churn the ocean of life and capture its very essence. It is a time to rise above the conflicts within and without, to tap into the healing power contained in the vessel of our body, mind, and consciousness. It is a time to renew our commitment to discovering who we are and what we can become; how we can prosper together, heal the damage that has already occurred, and restore peace to this troubled world. This is what we tried to imbibe at the Kumbha Mela in 2001. And this is what will take us back in January 2013. ■

*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.*

Tap into higher inspiration and refine your artistic skills with yogic tools and teachings that empower creative expression. **By Karen Macklin**

# Awakening the Artist





There's an incredible high that comes with being in the flow of artistic expression. Whether you're an amateur photographer, professional filmmaker, summer knitter, or weekend woodworker, art-making can give you the feeling of being completely present, awake, and alive. And while yoga is often thought of as a tool to help us find ease in the body, quiet the mind, and get in touch with our true nature, it can also be a way of helping us tap—and mine—our creative selves. Meditation and yoga grant us access into the deep places of our psyche and consciousness that inspire creative ideas to emerge, while simultaneously offering us tools to work with some of our biggest obstacles as artists. No matter what kind of art you call your own, your yoga practice can more fully connect you with your creative mind, body, and soul. >>



Yoga is essential to the creative process for visual artists Hari Kirin Kaur Khalsa (*Easter Buddha*, opposite page) and Amanda Giacomini (*bottom right*), writer Jeff Davis (*top right*), and musician/performance artist Sean Feit (*top left and middle row*, with company Circo Zero).

## BY MINDFULLY OBSERVING OUR EXPERIENCE ON AND OFF THE MAT, WE PAVE THE WAY TO CREATING MORE AUTHENTIC AND NUANCED ART.

### Dropping into Creative States

Artistic expression can be deeply fulfilling, but accessing creativity isn't always easy. Creativity arises naturally in states of stillness and presence, which can be elusive when we are distracted by daily preoccupations and scattered thoughts. This is why yoga is such a gift for the artist. When we practice awareness in asana, pranayama, and meditation, we learn to see—and let go of—the distractions of the mind. It is from this place of clear seeing that inspiration springs forth.

“The universe expresses itself as spontaneous creative energy,” says Sean Feit, a yoga and meditation teacher who is pursuing a doctorate in Performance Studies at University of California, Davis, with a focus on the intersection between interdisciplinary performance and contemplative practice. “The task of the yogic artist is mostly just to get out of the way.”

The ability to quiet the thinking mind also gives us access to a felt sense. Word, color, or movement choices don't come from practical considerations—they come from intuition and a deeper place of seeing. “When I'm really in the heart of creative practice,” Feit adds, “I am tuning into my aesthetic ear, eye, and mind. The practice of quieting the surface chatter of judgment, planning, and comparing feels completely integral to my ability to tune into that place where inspiration is present, where creative choices are happening.”

Asana and pranayama help fuel the creative process by increasing and directing the flow of prana, the intelligent life force, through the energy conduits in our body. Santa Fe actress, television writer, and yoga teacher Emily Branden says that a regular vinyasa practice is essential to her creative work. “That continuous flow of breath and movement really gets my energy flowing and allows me to

open up to that channel, that connection with the Divine,” she says.

Anne Cushman, a California-based yoga teacher and author of the novel *Enlightenment for Idiots*, explains that yoga practice helps us overcome creative blockages in our mind and body and significantly enhance energy, focus, and originality. “Yoga gets the energy body moving, and the energy body is the source of creativity,” she says. When we take new and expansive shapes with the body, Cushman adds, we are influenced to take new and expansive shapes with the mind. “There's a way in which asana breaks up the habitual patterns of thought that keep that sense of freshness and creativity constricted.... It's as if writing is a crop I am trying to grow, and by doing asana, I open the irrigation gates and all of this water flows into the field. When I sit down to write, I am more available to myself and to that creative flow.”

Asana isn't the only tool yoga offers for opening to inspiration. Senior Kripalu yoga teacher, writer, and classical pianist Stephen Cope practices chanting before undertaking a creative effort. The repetition of sacred syllables, he says, helps boost his energy while simultaneously focusing his mind. His favorite pre-writing chant, *Om namo bhagavate vasudevaya*, honors the divine in all beings. Painter Hari Kirin Kaur Khalsa, meanwhile, starts her day with a meditation from the Kundalini tradition that, she says, con-



**Conscious artists (clockwise from left): actress Emily Branden, writer/musician Stephen Cope, and painter Hari Kirin Kaur Khalsa.**

nects her to the universal creative force (see sidebar).

Of course, inspiration will only get an artist so far. In order for that energy to manifest as a work of sculpture, poetry, or musical composition, artists need to be able to focus intensely on their work for hours at a time. The deeper practices of yoga, including *dharana* (deep concentration) and *dhyana* (experiencing a sense of oneness with the object of our concentration), are particularly powerful for training us to access, and remain in, a focused state of creative flow.

### Refining Artistic Skills

New students of yoga often report that they can suddenly experience a different range of sensations in the body, and that they feel more perceptive and sensitive to their surroundings. Discomfort that once felt like general lower back pain might now be felt specifically in the kidney; sunsets might seem more colorful; heartbreak more complex. According to Cope, this deepening of awareness can help us refine our artistic skills.

“In yoga practice, you’re focusing attention on a more subtle realm than usual,” says Cope, who is also a psychotherapist and author of the popular book *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*. “You’re standing in *trikonasana*, and you’re feeling the lines of energy through your legs and your arms. You’re focusing on the subtle movements of the breath. This is mental training to focus on aspects of awareness that are usually outside our perceptual range.”

As we become more perceptive in our yoga practice—by examining our thoughts, movements, and breath—we become more perceptive in other areas of life, including creating art. Musicians may become more adept at distinguishing between subtle movements of the fingers on their instruments; visual artists may tune into a wider range of shapes, colors, and textures. By mindfully observing and inspecting the full range of our experience on and off the

## Creativity Meditation

Hari Kirin Kaur Khalsa

*One powerful way to tap into authentic inspiration and boundless creative potential is to invoke your higher Self. The following meditation, which Yogi Bhajan taught his students, can help you sharpen concentration, access intuition, and enhance creativity.*

Begin by sitting in any meditation pose, with your eyes focusing on the tip of your nose. Lift your chest and elongate the spine. Lift the crown of the head as your chin relaxes down and in. Let the shoulder blades relax down the back.

Create a connection to the sacred wisdom within by chanting *Ong namo guru dev namo* three times. This chant calls on the creative consciousness and the subtle intelligence of the entire universe. *Ong* is similar to *Om*—the vibrational sound of the universe—but in its active, creative form. While *Om* is beyond time and space, *Ong* connects us to the creative energy embodied in this moment. *Namo* means “to acknowledge or call on respectfully.” *Guru* refers to wisdom or teacher, and *dev* refers to the subtle or divine.

Next, bring your awareness to the breath and silently repeat the syllables *sa ta na ma*, the sacred mantras signifying infinity, birth, death, and rebirth—the cycle of creation. Continue for 11 to 62 minutes. When you feel complete, inhale and retain the breath only for as long as it is comfortable. Exhale and continue to breathe naturally.

Take a moment to say a prayer or set an intention for your creative endeavors. To close, chant *sat nam* (which means “I am truth”) three times.

*Hari Kirin Kaur Khalsa is an artist and teacher dedicated to healing through yoga and art. She is the author of Art & Yoga: Kundalini Awakening in Everyday Life (Kundalini Research Institute, 2011).*

mat, we pave the way to creating more authentic and nuanced art.

### Creating Conscious Art

Yoga does more than sharpen our technical skills as artists; it can also influence the themes we choose to express, the type of work we create, and the intention behind the art. While some find that their spiritual practice leads them to create mandala paintings or poems dedicated to the Divine, the work doesn’t have to contain spiritual imagery or focus on joyful themes in order to express yogic sensibilities. “A piece of art that is about destruction can be infinite and uplifting at the same time, if it contains great awareness and comes from your whole humanity,” says Kaur Khalsa.

Many artists observe that yoga has subtly or significantly shifted how they

approach their craft. Jeffrey Davis, a New York-based writer, yoga teacher, and creativity consultant who authored the book *The Journey from the Center to the Page: Yoga Philosophies and Practice as Muse for Authentic Writing*, says that yoga changed his voice as a writer. “My poetry became less intellectual,” he says, “and my writing became more alive in image, detail, and syntax.”

A pianist, composer, and performance artist, Feit notes that yoga and meditation guided him to be less structured and linear, and more improvisational. These practices, he says, have shown him that inner life is fluid and doesn’t follow traditional narrative lines.

Visual artist and yoga teacher Amanda Giacomini is currently working on a series of paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses. She says (continues on page 88)



As we find the strength to surrender, even the hardened places within us can give way to tender buds of compassion.

Through practice, self-reflection, and letting go, yoga helps us move past old hurts that threaten to derail us. **By Linda Sparrowe**

# Sweet Forgiveness

Several years ago I had a falling out with my close friend Becca, someone I'd known forever. She said some really hurtful things to me, and I vowed never to speak to or see her again. And I didn't. For years. Well, at least not directly. However, she took up permanent residence in my mind, and no matter how hard I tried, she wouldn't leave. I woke up each morning, reliving the conversation we had; I went to bed inventing the conversation we should have had; and during the day the memory of her words knotted my stomach and ruined my appetite. I talked about

it to my family, my friends, pretty much anyone who'd listen. And the more I talked, the hotter the flame of my outrage became. Of course, I focused solely on her role as the perpetrator and my role as the aggrieved, never even entertaining the thought that my actions may have contributed a tiny little bit to the problem.

The only time I could break free of this obsession was on my yoga mat. Trying to practice while carrying on an internal diatribe didn't work too well, so I parked my troubles at the door, and my body and my mind breathed a collective sigh of relief, grateful for the 90-minute respite. Despite the peace I felt during and after each class, however, it took me a few more years to learn how to use the principles of yoga to relieve the hurt I felt and to forgive both Becca and myself.

## Why Forgive?

How can you forgive someone who's hurt you that much? First, don't confuse forgiveness with acceptance. "You don't have to condone someone's behavior to forgive," says John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga. Forgiveness



simply "allows us to let go of the hold that person has on us," he says, "leading us to greater freedom and peace of heart." Second, forgiving is not the same as forgetting. Not forgetting, Friend says, "honors our feelings and helps create proper boundaries," so we don't keep putting ourselves in situations that are out of alignment with our true nature. Not forgiving, however, can make us sick.

According to Alex Lickerman, MD, former director of primary care at the University of Chicago hospitals, 50 percent of all people who have had a heart attack can describe at least one emotional trigger that may have led to their illness. When someone has hurt or angered you, your sympathetic ner-

vous system springs into action to protect you, unloading stress chemicals to prepare you to fight or flee the situation. Unfortunately, the sympathetic nervous system has no way of knowing whether the perceived threat comes from an immediate danger or from something that happened 20 years ago. So every time you relive a painful memory, your autonomic nervous system rises up to fight the oppressor until it finally exhausts itself and gives up.

Stuffing down the hurt or anger only makes things worse. When you vow not to think about your pain, you may be "letting go" of it mentally, but in reality, you're pushing it deeper into your body and heart, both of which constrict around the hurt. Karol Ward, author of *Worried Sick*, says, "Eventually the physical tension becomes so habitual that we don't notice how much we are holding our breath, locking our knees, or clamping down our jaws, until it shows up as physical pain."

These physiological warnings suggest that to withhold forgiveness goes against the first and foremost yoga commandment: do no harm. *Abimsa*



(literally, “non-violence”) means more than promising not to beat up your oppressor, no matter how aggrieved you feel. It also means not hurting yourself. In my case, getting stuck in righteous indignation over Becca’s transgression made me an anxious mess. I turned to the yogic path—from asana and meditation to self-reflection and faith—to find forgiveness and move beyond the past.

#### **Asana: The Gift of Release**

When my nervous system is all a-jangle, the only thing that calms me down is doing physical yoga. I can’t meditate, I can’t do pranayama, until I can somehow ground myself, slow

“Our issues are in our tissues.” The inability to forgive definitely manifests as physical contractions, she says. And the pain can get lodged almost anywhere—in the heart, diaphragm, belly, or, for many women, the hips.

“By focusing on the breath,” Walden says, “we can notice where we’re holding pain. And by releasing tension in our muscles, we can let go of that discomfort.” Backbends, which allow the breath to flow unrestricted, can open up the heart. But sometimes, unsupported backbends are too intense, so poses like *supta baddha konasana* (reclining bound angle pose) with bolsters, blankets, blocks, and an eye pillow, offer a gentler

between poses” and create a practice that contains mostly restorative poses, pranayama, *bandha* work, and chanting. Such a practice, she says, “reaches all the parts of our mind-body network that might be holding the pattern of anger in place.” As the mind-body network heals, the anger simply no longer fits.

On my mat, I almost immediately feel how my emotions affect my body, noticing how I stiffen up when I get frustrated or forget to breathe when my anger resurfaces. As I commit to experiencing the poses more fully, however, my conscious exhalations release my neck, shoulders, and jaw. I feel my hard exterior soften, and, as Forbes predicted, my defensiveness suddenly seems out of place. Chip Hartranft, in his commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*, says that our growing familiarity with these subtle internal experiences in our practice helps us recognize the ways in which our body-mind contracts when we feel hurt. So, off the mat, we can “begin to catch ourselves earlier in the process of tightening viselike around difficulty, disagreement, or frustration,” and perhaps let go a bit sooner. “Loosening the valves,” he says, “seems always to allow things to resolve, and wisdom to enter.”

#### **Meditation: A Direct Route to Forgiveness**

Alisa Bowman, a freelance writer, told me she had decided she wanted a divorce

IN OUR PRACTICE, WHETHER ON THE YOGA MAT OR THE MEDITATION CUSHION, WE LEARN TO SURRENDER AT EVERY MOMENT, DISCOVERING THAT THE MORE WE LET GO, THE MORE FREEDOM WE GAIN.

down a bit, and (let’s be honest) shut up long enough to feel some relief. Moving through my yoga sequence, I become acutely aware of how the pain has impacted my muscles—my neck and shoulders feel stiff, my lower back hurts—and my breathing, which feels labored and shallow. As renowned Iyengar teacher Patricia Walden explains,

alternative: the same heart-opening effect, with the added bonus of making us feel nurtured and loved. Forward bends (standing or seated) can release myriad emotions and yet still allow us to feel protected and safe.

Bo Forbes, author of *Yoga for Emotional Balance*, suggests that we take “slow, mindful transitions

just two years after her baby was born. For a variety of reasons that had been building up for quite a while, she was one angry, resentful woman and didn’t think she could ever forgive her husband for the litany of misdeeds she recounted on an hourly basis. “I despised him,” she said. “I didn’t want to be around him. I soothed myself by planning his funeral

on the off chance he might conveniently drop dead.” A friend of Bowman’s convinced her to give the marriage one last chance, so she embarked on a four-month-long “marriage project.” Nearly every day she would practice loving-kindness meditation (see sidebar for practice). It was really hard at first, she says, “I didn’t want to wish him happiness. I would start to meditate and then get angry all over again.” But she kept at it and slowly her resentment faded. Much to her surprise—and delight—love grew in its place, so much so that she and her husband renewed their marriage vows. She chronicles her path in her memoir, *Project: Happily Ever After*.

Susan Piver, author of *The Wisdom of a Broken Heart*, believes meditation provides “a direct route to forgiveness of all kinds.” What you’re doing on that cushion is softening your heart. However, when you’re angry, as Bowman discovered, it’s not that easy to sit and let your thoughts bubble to the surface and then dissipate. Piver suggests an alternate

approach—notice your feelings. First, get really clear on what your story is—exactly why you feel what you feel—so that it will help you conceptualize what happened. And then drop it. Retelling the story, Piver says, “is a way of *justifying* your feelings rather than forgiving.”

Piver recommends a variation of the traditional Tibetan Buddhist *shamatha* meditation, in which you sit, eyes partially opened, and observe the breath. When a feeling rages to the forefront of your mind, label it as “sensation,” and notice where it shows up in your body. As you experience anger or sadness, for example, does your jaw suddenly tighten or your chest feel like it’s caving in? “Put your attention on the sensation,” Piver says, and begin to soften and release those muscles where you experience the sensation. Don’t focus on the story, but when the story does come up, simply pause, let it go on an exhale, and return to the part of your body where the sensation lives. If you feel your low-back muscles clench, notice the tightness and

breathe there for a while, unwinding the tightness with gentle exhalations.

### Three Steps to Transformation

The ability to bring the mind back to present-moment focus so we don’t fan the flame of indignation takes diligent, persistent practice (*abhyasa*). *Abhyasa* is subtle effort, however, to redirect attention, followed by the ability to let go of our need to hold onto the experience (*vairagya*). *Vairagya* literally means “not getting stirred up,” according to Hartranft, and applies to our willingness to observe something without reacting to it. Yoga and meditation help us in this process by fully engaging the body, mind, and heart in the moment. But in order to forgive completely, we must commit all our energy to the process (*tapas*), engage in self-reflection and introspection (*svadhyaya*), and cultivate a mind that sees the divine essence in all sentient beings (*Iskhvara pranidhana*). Together, these three practices comprise *kriya yoga*, a blueprint for putting *abhyasa* and *vairagya* into action. >>

## Breath of Forgiveness

*If you feel angry, hurt, resentful, or any other heated emotion, try several rounds of sitali or sitkari pranayama. These cooling breathing techniques (sitali means “cool” in Sanskrit) counter the fight-or-flight response your autonomic nervous system may be stuck in right now. They stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which calms the mind, cools the body, and even lowers blood pressure.*

*Caution: If, at any time, either practice makes you feel light-headed, dizzy, or in any way uncomfortable, stop and breathe normally for several rounds. Begin again when you’re ready.*

### Sitali Pranayama

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight, your shoulders away from your ears, and your eyes closed. Inhale and exhale normally for several breaths as you settle into your seat.
2. To start the practice, stick your tongue out, just beyond your lips, and roll it like a tube. Inhale gently through your tongue, raising your chin slightly and feeling your chest and lungs expand with air (taking care to keep your shoulders relaxed). Allow your mind to focus on the cooling sensation.
3. At the top of the inhalation, bring your tongue back into your mouth and rest it just behind your front teeth on your upper palate. As you exhale, slowly bring your head down toward your chest in a gentle chin lock.
4. Stick your tongue out again, roll it, and inhale as you raise your head and chin. Repeat the sequence six to eight times.

### Sitkari Pranayama

For those of us who cannot roll our tongues, sitkari offers a perfect alternative.

1. Assume the same pranayama posture, but instead of rolling your tongue, open the lips and keep your teeth together (as though you were smiling through clenched teeth).
  2. Inhale, raising your chin slightly and create a hissing sound. You should feel the cool air enter the sides of your mouth.
  3. As you exhale through the nose, bring your head down toward your chest, creating a gentle chin lock.
  4. Repeat the sequence six to eight times.
- L.S.

### In the Heat of Practice

All of us have old scars (*samskaras*) we can't seem to heal, hurtful parts of ourselves born of memories we can't let go of. These *samskaras* or psychic impressions deepen through the stories we attach to our aggrieved feelings and create tendencies and habits that affect our daily lives. We get stuck replaying these stagnant old stories over and over again

*Yoga Sutra*, as “deliberately acting in a way that causes positive change in ourselves.” By acting consciously and compassionately toward yourself and others instead of reacting negatively, Bachman suggests we can “build new, helpful, positive *samskaras*” and push the old ones out. The heat generated in practicing day after day with the intention of opening our heart will “incinerate physical, mental,

we burn ourselves out without ever truly understanding what caused us to get so caught up in our pain in the first place. Without *svadhyaya*, self-study, the second element in the *kriya yoga* triad, we can purify our body all we want, but if we don't understand how our actions cause us to suffer, we doubt that we can prevent a repeat performance. Traditionally, *svadhyaya* meant turning to ancient

## HOLDING A GRUDGE GOES AGAINST OUR TRUE NATURE, WHICH IS KIND, COMPASSIONATE, AND PEACEFUL.

in our heads and we need impetus—a fire lit under us—to get unstuck. That fire comes in the form of *tapas*—the heat generated through intense commitment to practice and self-discipline. Committing fully to a daily yoga practice of *asana*, *pranayama*, and meditation, it turns out, can help burn up our *samskaras* and replace them with positive impressions that support us being kinder, gentler, more open people.

Nicolai Bachman, a Sanskrit scholar, defines *tapas*, in his commentary on the

and emotional impurities and refine the body, sensory organs, and heart-mind.” *Pranayama* techniques that emphasize the inhalation—as well as *vinyasa asana* sequences—can generate such heat and energy in the body; poses that restore, and breathing techniques that emphasize exhalation, can create space in the body and heart to receive positive change.

### The Art of Self-Reflection

Of course, we need more than an intense discipline to enact lasting change, lest

scripture for guidance and applying the teachings to our own life. These days, I may reach for Mahatma Gandhi's *Autobiography* or Pema Chodron's *When Things Fall Apart* instead of the *Rig Veda*, but the results are the same.

Reciting a personal mantra (*japa*) is also an integral part of *svadhyaya*. Repeating a syllable or word over and over again can draw our attention inward and keep it there, closing off the outside world and infusing our self-study with purpose and meaning. Bachman says that repetitious sound “has a way of reprogramming the consciousness and dissolving obstacles” like doubt, fear, anger, and disease.

The fewer noisy distractions, the easier we can listen intently to what's going on inside. We can experience the breath and how it changes when we feel agitated, and quiets when we calm down; we can feel our muscles contract around pain, and expand and release in joy. Once our heart is open, we can see that being in emotional pain feels awful. Holding a grudge goes against our true nature, which is kind, compassionate, and peaceful. It suddenly doesn't feel so good to hold back forgiveness from anyone, least of all ourselves.

### The Bliss of Sweet Surrender

Patanjali's yoga prescription doesn't end with *svadhyaya*; otherwise self-reflection could easily move into

## Loving-Kindness Meditation

**The Dalai Lama once said** that anything that is not love is fear. Seeing the primary emotion as fear instead of hatred or anger may help you forgive transgressions a little easier. The following loving-kindness meditation will help with the process of easing your heart.

Sit in a comfortable position. Set the intention to practice this meditation without judgment and with a healthy dose of affection for yourself. Inhaling and exhaling through your heart, visualize a time when you were really happy and experience that feeling now. Recite, silently, the following statements:

May I be filled with loving-kindness;  
May I be peaceful;  
May I be healthy;  
May I be happy.

Repeat the prayer over and over again for several minutes, feeling as though you're swaddled in loving-kindness. When you feel ready, substitute the name of the person you wish to forgive for the word “I.” Set the intention to wrap this person in the love you now hold in your heart. Don't worry if this seems impossible at first. Be patient, and ever so gradually, you'll begin to feel a shift. —L.S.

self-absorption. *Ishvara pranidhana*, surrendering to a higher power or universal consciousness, represents the third aspect of kriya yoga. In our practice, whether on the yoga mat or the meditation cushion, we learn to surrender at every moment, discovering that the more we let go, the more freedom we gain. It is through *Ishvara pranidhana* that we learn to accept our shortcomings with grace, patience, and non-judgment. Hartranft says as we sit in meditation, *pranidhana* allows us “to let nature unfold exactly as it will, without our attachment or aversion.”

One day last spring I lay in *shavasana*, mat-up-against-mat in a crowded yoga class. I allowed myself to play with opening up my heart and silently connecting with the person next to me, and the person next to her, and on and on throughout the room, offering each one joy and contentment. I suddenly understood what yoga’s been trying to teach me all along—that there is no difference between me and the others in this room, between me and my friend Becca. By keeping our rift alive, I was carving deep *samskaric* trenches in my heart and in hers, too. I understood what Mahatma Gandhi meant when he said, “To slight a single human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus harm not only that being but with him, the whole world.”

What really brought Becca and me back together, in the end, came a few months later. I heard through the grapevine of old friends that someone had broken her heart. I simply couldn’t bear hearing that—how’s that for irony? So I took a deep cleansing breath, picked up the phone, dialed her number, and opened my heart. ■

*Linda Sparrow* 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* in Colorado and *Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health* in Massachusetts.

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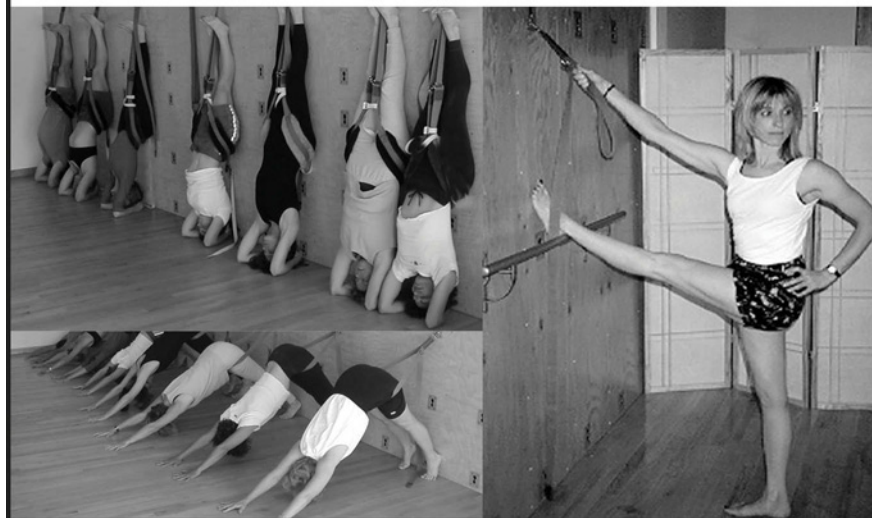
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Sutra 2.20

द्रष्टा दृशिमात्रः शुद्धोऽपि प्रत्ययानुपश्यः ॥

draṣṭā dṛśimātraḥ śuddho'pi pratyayānupaśyaḥ

The power of seeing itself is the seer. It is pure, yet its perception follows what has been perceived by *buddhi*.



# Clear Perception

**Consciousness (the seer)** and its power of seeing are one and the same. In other words, the knower and the power of knowing are identical. Consciousness has the ability to know itself. Furthermore, it has the ability to know everything that is to be known. Self-realization, self-enlightenment, is its intrinsic nature. Essentially, consciousness is pure, unalloyed, and not subject to distortion, yet due to its indiscriminate identification with the objective world (the world made of *avishesha* and *visbesha*), its ability to see and know becomes compromised. As a result, its perceptions are distorted. Its strong identification with the mind makes it feel as though it *is* the mind. Its strong identification with the senses and the body makes it feel as though it *is* the senses and the body.

This is the case with most of us. The scriptures remind us that we are not the body, not the senses, not the mind, and not the ego, but we rarely experience ourselves as different from these four aspects. We are able to perceive only through our body and senses. We are able to think only through our mind and to identify only through our ego.

The seer, *purusha* (pure consciousness), experiences things the way they are presented to it by the body, senses, mind, and ego. Even its experience of itself is colored by the experiences of the body, mind, and senses with which it has identified. In other words, despite its essential purity, *purusha*'s power and process of seeing, knowing, and experiencing are dependent on how and what the body, mind, and senses see, know, and experience. Freeing consciousness from this dependency is called *moksha* (liberation). Empowering consciousness to see itself separate from the body, senses, mind, and ego is called *kaivalya*. According to this sutra, our field of buddhi (described as *lingamatra* in sutra 2.19) contains all the tools and means to enable consciousness to see itself directly, dis-identify with the objective world, and restore its purity.

Expounding on this sutra, the sage Vyasa makes it clear that consciousness caught in the cycle of *samsara* sees only what buddhi sees. For all intents and purposes, its understanding, feelings, and experiences are in exact proportion to the understanding, feelings, and experiences of buddhi—never less, never more. Knowing one's self means knowing one's buddhi. Discovering one's self means discovering one's buddhi.

It is important to remember that *buddhi* means “the field of *prakriti* illuminated by the light of consciousness, and the field of consciousness that has been accepted and embraced by *prakriti*.” As the next sutra makes clear, this buddhi is *jiva*, the individual soul subject to transmigration and in need of freedom from transmigration. This *jiva*, the individual soul, is neither similar to, nor totally dissimilar from, *purusha*, pure consciousness. By the same token, the consciousness that has made buddhi its abode is neither similar to, nor totally dissimilar from, buddhi. Enlightenment simply refers to the enlightenment of buddhi, the *jiva*. In this state of enlightenment, we are able to see ourselves and the rest of the world clearly. We are able to distinguish light from darkness, lasting joy from short-lived pleasures, and ultimately, the immortal Self from fleeting objects and experiences. ■

*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.*

## Sutra 2.20

*draṣṭā* seer

*dṛśi* seeing; the power of seeing

*mātrah* only

*śuddhaḥ* pure; unalloyed

*api* even though; yet

*pratyaya* recognition; perception; understanding

*anupaśyaḥ* = *anu* + *paśyaḥ*

*anu* that which follows; accompanies

*paśyaḥ* that which can be seen; the object of perception; that which is perceived by buddhi

*anupaśyaḥ* is the one whose perception or understanding is dependent on the perception or understanding of buddhi; the one who sees exactly what buddhi sees.

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

# Earth Action

Champion your fundamental human rights by reclaiming a meaningful connection to nature. **By Richard Louv**

**G**enerous future historians may someday write that our generation finally met the environmental challenges of our time—not only climate change but the change of climate in the human heart, our society’s nature-deficit disorder—and, because of these challenges, we purposefully entered one of the most creative periods in human history; that we did more than survive or sustain, that we laid the foundation for a new civilization, and that nature came to our workplaces, our neighborhoods, our homes, and our families.

Few today would question the notion that every person, especially every young person, has a right to access the Internet, whether through a school district, a library, or a city’s public Wi-Fi program. We accept the idea that the “digital divide” between the digital haves and the digital have-nots must be closed.

Recently I began asking friends this question: Do we have a right to a walk in the woods? Several people responded with puzzled ambivalence. Look at what our species is doing to the planet, they said. Based on that evidence alone, isn’t the relationship between human beings and nature inherently oppositional?

That point of view is understandable, given the destructiveness of human beings to nature. But consider the echo from folks who reside at another point on the political/cultural spectrum, where nature is seen as an object under human dominion or as a distraction on the way to Paradise. In practice, these two views of nature are radically different. Yet, there is also a striking similarity: nature remains the “other”; humans are in it, but not of it.

Several years ago, while researching my book *Last Child in the Woods*, I visited Southwood Elementary, the grade school I attended when I was a boy growing up in Raytown, Missouri. There, I asked a classroom of children about their relationship with nature. Many of them offered the now-typical response: they preferred playing video games; they favored indoor activities—and when they were outside, they played soccer or some other adult-organized sport. But one fifth-grader, described by her teacher as “our little poet,” wearing a plain print dress and an intensely serious expression, said, “When I’m in the woods, I feel like I’m in my mother’s shoes.” To her, nature represented beauty, refuge, and something else. “It’s so peaceful out there and the air smells so good. For me, it’s completely different there,” she said. “It’s your own time. Sometimes I go there when I’m mad—and then, just with the peacefulness, I’m better. I can come back home happy, and my mom doesn’t even know why.” She paused. “I had a place. There was a big waterfall and a creek on one side of it. I’d dug a big hole there, and sometimes I’d take a tent back there, or



a blanket, and just lay down in the hole, and look up at the trees and sky. Sometimes I'd fall asleep back in there. I just felt free; it was like my place, and I could do what I wanted, with nobody to stop me. I used to go down there almost every day." The young poet's face flushed. Her voice thickened. "And then they just cut the woods down. It was like they cut down part of me."

I was struck by her last comment: "It was like they cut down part of me." If E. O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis is right—that the human attraction to

In our time, Thomas Berry presented this inseparability most eloquently. Berry incorporated Wilson's biological view within a wider, cosmological context. In his book *The Great Work*, he wrote: "The present urgency is to begin thinking within the context of the whole planet, the integral Earth community with all its human and other-than-human components. When we discuss ethics we must understand it to mean the principles and values that govern that comprehensive community." Berry believed that the

protection from bad stuff"—the toxins too often dumped in economically isolated neighborhoods. He calls for a new emphasis on equal access to the "good stuff"—the green jobs that could lift urban youths and others out of poverty. However, there's another category of "good stuff"—the benefits to physical, psychological, and spiritual health, and to cognitive development, that all of us receive from our experiences in the natural world.

Our society must do more than talk about the importance of nature; it must

## WHETHER WE ARE TALKING ABOUT DEMOCRACY OR NATURE, IF WE FAIL TO SERVE AS CAREFUL STEWARDS, WE WILL DESTROY THE REASON FOR OUR RIGHT, AND THE RIGHT ITSELF.

nature is hardwired—then our young poet's heartfelt statement was more than metaphor. When she referred to her woods as "part of me," she was describing something impossible to quantify: her primal biology, her sense of wonder, an essential part of her self.

To reverse the trends that disconnect human beings from nature, actions must be grounded in science, but also rooted in deeper earth. "When making a moral argument, there are no hard-and-fast rules, and such arguments can always be contended," according to philosophy professor Lawrence Hinman. "But most moral arguments are made based on one or two points. These include a set of consequences and a first principle—for example, respect for human rights." Science sheds light on the measurable consequences of introducing people to nature; studies point to health and cognition benefits that are immediate and concrete. But a "first principle" emerges not only from what science can prove but also from what it cannot fully reveal: A meaningful connection to nature is fundamental to our spirit and survival, as individuals and as a species.

natural world is the physical manifestation of the divine. The survival of both religion and science depends not on one winning (because then both would lose) but on the emergence of what he called a 21st-century story—a reunion between humans and nature.

Speaking of absolutes may make us uncomfortable, but surely this is true: As a society, we need to give nature back to our children and ourselves. To not do so is immoral. It is unethical. "A degraded habitat will produce degraded humans," Berry wrote. "If there is to be any true progress, then the entire life community must progress." In the formation of American ideals, nature was elemental to the idea of human rights, yet inherent in the thinking of the Founding Fathers was this assumption: with every right comes responsibility. Whether we are talking about democracy or nature, if we fail to serve as careful stewards, we will destroy the reason for our right, and the right itself. And if we do not use this right, we will lose it.

Van Jones, founder of Green for All and author of *The Green Collar Economy*, maintains that environmental justice groups are overly focused on "equal

ensure that people in every kind of neighborhood have everyday access to natural spaces, places, and experiences. To make that happen, this truth must become evident: We can truly care for nature and ourselves only if we see ourselves and nature as inseparable, only if we love ourselves as part of nature, only if we believe that human beings have a right to the gifts of nature, undestroyed.

The little girl in Raytown may not have a specific right to that particular tree in her chosen woods, but she does have the inalienable right to be with other life; to liberty, which cannot be realized under protective house arrest; and to the pursuit of happiness, which is made whole by the natural world.

So do you. ■

*Richard Low is a journalist and the author of eight books about the connections between family, nature, and community. Low is also chairman and cofounder of the Children and Nature Network (childrenandnature.org).*

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## Lost in Transformation

A pilgrim journeys to sacred Tibetan land, but falls short of enlightenment. **By Eve M. Tai**



I knew as soon as I arrived here that I couldn't stay. The central room of my Tibetan guide's home—where I am lodging for three days—is dark as tar. The smoke billowing from the hearth fire weakens the single lightbulb's glow. I can just make out an ash-covered kitten huddled next to the coals. A red turban, presumably attached to a body, bobs above the fire. Crossbeams coated in grease hang above me. Five family members, all of them men, huddle in the gloom with me around a small table. They take turns staring at me, chewing on roasted barley seeds and spitting out the hulls. They hand me dirty cups of slippery yellow liquid—yak butter tea. It is like slurping fat.

I am 10,000 feet up in a mountain valley in Yunnan Province in southwest China. The foothills of the Himalayas. Even as the sun sears the glaciated

mountains outside, inside my pupils flare wide yet take in only darkness. I've traveled all the way from Seattle to witness the holy peak of Mount Kawagebo and to experience Tibetan Buddhism in its motherland. But along with my vision, these aspirations have vanished.

One of the men, his black hair fusing into the darkness, leans in to examine my face, as though he is inspecting a circus freak. The whites of his eyes roll wide. He speaks. I shake my head. "I don't understand," I say in Mandarin. I know they don't speak Mandarin,

especially my American-born version, but I don't know what else to say. The man chuckles. He lights a cigarette with hands worn and gnarled.

I don't know how much longer I can stand sitting here. My eyes and lungs are stinging from the smoke and I have to repress the urge to cough for fear of offending my hosts.

Suddenly we hear a scuffle in the doorway. A rooster races in. He snaps his beak and bites my knee.

"Ow!" I yell. I leap up. Propelled by embarrassment and frustration, I stumble toward the door, my arms outstretched like a mummy's in a horror movie. I jerk and prod, kick my feet forward, and then trip on the horizontal beam that lies across the bottom of the doorway. As I scramble to my room, I hear the men laughing behind me.

I seek refuge in my bedroom, a sunless space with a window overlooking the pigsty. Smoke saturates every membrane of my body. I am dying for a shower. I fantasize about a down blanket, dark chocolate, and a reading lamp. I want to clean my contact lenses in the wash basin outside without fishing out specks of dirt. I want to understand Tibetan, or better yet, for everyone else to understand English.

WHAT I NEEDED WAS TO GO WHERE PEOPLE PRACTICED BUDDHISM FOR REAL, LIVED IT, AND NOT BECAUSE IT WAS SOME TRENDY LIFESTYLE PROMOTED BY CELEBRITIES OR THE SPIRITUALLY CORRECT.

**Back home in Seattle** I had dreamt of the Himalayas, their sacred peaks and forests choked with Buddhist shrines and Tibetan prayer flags. The land where the 22,000-foot peak of Mount Kawagebo scraped the sky and yak bells echoed.

I grew up in the Midwest with native Chinese parents. Although they hung paintings of Kuan Yin in the living room, they weren't spiritual types. They didn't assemble altars with plastic light-up Buddhas, burn incense, or chant. Instead, they planted fruit trees in our yard, baked lasagna, and ballroom danced. Once, when I was a girl, I asked my mother about the Buddha. When she told me that he was a wealthy Indian prince who gave up everything he had, I decided that he couldn't be trusted.

In my late 30s, I began to attend a Tibetan meditation center in Seattle. Soon, my sitting practice deepened. I chanted the *Heart Sutra* and I learned that the Buddha was indeed someone I could trust. But impatience hindered my budding practice. No sooner would I fold my legs into lotus pose and relax than I'd begin to fidget or drift off to sleep. When I did manage to stay awake, my mind would chatter away about the dental bill, the beastly project at work, and the benefits of espresso versus chai. Buddhism just didn't seem to fit in with my American lifestyle. I was too busy and too occupied with modern distractions.

I told myself that all I needed was a journey to the motherland and *click*, my meditation practice would activate. What I needed was to go where people practiced Buddhism for real, *lived* it, and not because it was some trendy lifestyle promoted by celebrities or the spiritually correct.

And so here I am. Even as I perch in a mountain valley whose beauty evokes Shangri-la, I can hardly bear the physical hardships of life in a Tibetan village. To get here, I had hiked with my guide for

over five hours at high altitude. When we reached the 12,000-foot pass, I collapsed in a teahouse. Hiking wasn't exactly a recreational activity around these parts.

Now that I've arrived, I discover that I am not spiritual material. I can't sit still. I can't sleep. I can't stop fantasizing about the day I will hike the mountain pass back out. Enlightenment seems like a big joke.

Guilt plagues me. Wasn't my sitting practice supposed to transform here? Instead, I've abandoned it. I've become a Buddhist dropout. As I wander into lime-green pastures after a rain, sunlight falls in wet streams to the earth. I climb on a rock and sit down. The beauty and the serenity of this land brought me here. So why am I so unhappy? I am cranky and wallowing in buyer's remorse. I feel like I've discovered that sea monkeys are really just brine shrimp. When I see grannies hauling barley lashed to their bony backs, their smiles fill me with shame.

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**The next morning**, five Buddhist monks arrive at the house. They flow in a parade from grown men down to boys. I can spot their maroon robes and saffron-yellow scarves all the way across the valley.

The giant house swallows the monks up and they disappear without a sound. I'm hiding out, as usual, in my bedroom. My guide, Zhuo Ma, raps on my door. Nineteen years old, she still bears baby fat in her cheeks. "Come meet the monks." She cajoles me like a mother coaching her toddler to eat strained peas. When I finally rise to join her, Zhuo Ma leads me through a doorway framed by red strips of gold-embossed Tibetan characters.

When I step into the space, I gasp. It is the family's shrine room. *Thangkas*—scroll paintings of sacred and mythological beings—cover the walls, as do posters of the Potala Palace in Lhasa and photos of lamas. The scene is magical. The five monks are seated cross-legged

around a low bench. The table holds a round-bellied teapot, cookies, and tiny tangerines wrapped in plastic. The monks sip yak butter tea and reach with slim fingers for what appear to be sugared popcorn balls.

I sit down on a cushion next to the younger monks. They regard me carefully, the way you might study a scared, twitching animal. Their dark doe eyes and shaved heads remind me of American junior high kids, only instead of soccer silks, they are wearing monks' robes.

I've never sat among Buddhist monks, much less in a Tibetan home. For a moment, I feel joined to the seekers before me, and I convince myself that perhaps I can indeed succeed at this meditation business. I expect these monks to be wise, patient, and otherworldly. I can learn from them.

But then sounds from a construction site next door—men dropping lumber, shovels scraping gravel—grab the boys' attention. They crawl to the window, peer out, and giggle. The eldest monk calls them back sternly. The younger monks sit back down and squirm like a litter of puppies. They rearrange their robes and fold the maroon fabric this way and that. I smile. Before they are monks, they are boys.

The eldest monk smiles at me. He makes me feel jumpy. I can't tell if it is from fear that he will pose a Deeply Profound Question that I can't answer, or if it's from the fact that I find him vaguely attractive. His smile arrests me. It is not like the masks we wear in the West to hide how we feel.

Instead, I see sadness in his eyes. I know this monk has endured snowstorms at high mountain passes, witnessed infants dying at birth, and felt the sharp bite of hunger. Yet his smile is as fresh as morning sunlight.

The monk asks me where I am from. My guide translates between Tibetan and Mandarin.

"America," I reply. >>



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The monks look puzzled. “America?” They lean in and glance at each other. “How can that be? She looks Chinese.”

In all my travels in China, I’d never encountered this reaction. If anything, my response—that I was Chinese American—usually explained why my familiar accent was hitched to my odd grammar.

“My parents were born in China,” I explain. Surely they’d heard this story before. But the monks stare at me, their faces riveted to mine. “But they moved to America. I was born there,” I finish.

### REINCARNATION, CHOOSING TIMES OF DEATH, VISUALIZING UNSEEN BEINGS—THESE ARE STANDARD IN THE TIBETAN BUDDHIST PLAYBOOK.

I might as well have said that I was born on Venus. “But she looks Chinese,” they say again. They discuss this perplexing matter. I look at Zhuo Ma. She shrugs.

“Westerners have blonde hair and large bones,” one monk insists to Zhuo Ma. “Her parents must look very Chinese.”

“My parents *are* Chinese,” I say.

By now I am bursting with laughter. Had these men and boys been ordinary villagers, I might have understood their confusion. But they were monks. Not just any monks but Tibetan Buddhists, a branch known for intensely rich and intricate cosmology. Their spiritual practices are known for transcending the physical world to planes few of us even know exist, much less visit. Reincarnation, choosing times of death, visualizing unseen beings—these are standard in the Tibetan Buddhist playbook. Yet these monks cannot comprehend the mundane fact that this Chinese woman before them is American.

When the eldest monk regards me again, I smile back at him. Never have I felt as lost as I do here in Yunnan. Yet the monks’ baffled questions about my cultural identity suddenly ease my own frustration with my spiritual identity. I realize that I’ve been grasping and striving toward an image of myself as an awakened being, while missing out on just being. Perhaps the question is not whether I’ve flunked or passed Buddhism but whether I’m living it. ■

*Eve M. Tai is a Seattle yoga teacher, a freelance writer, and a mother to Olive, a three-legged pit bull. Her website is [writereve.com](http://writereve.com).*

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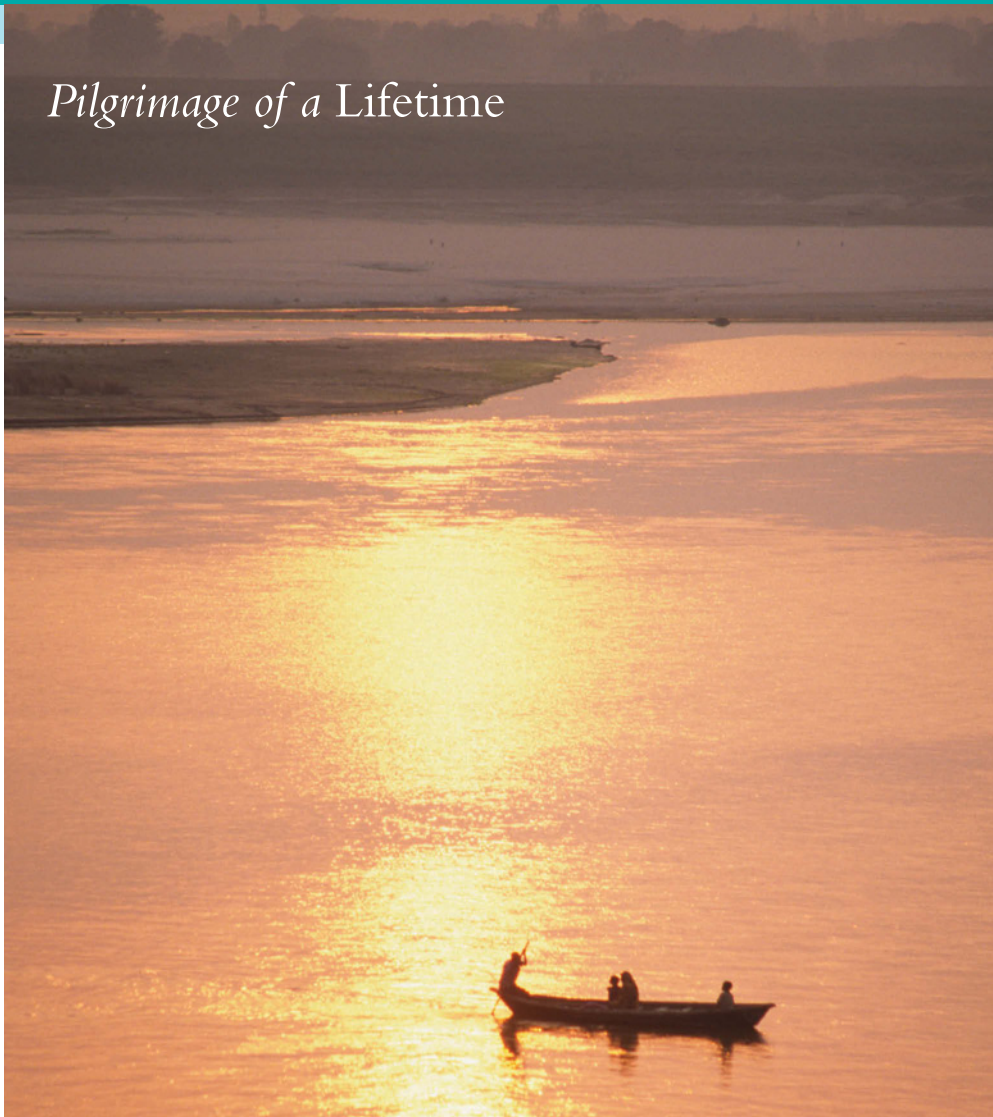


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# What Is Happiness?

The Upanishads show us how to recognize the source of true fulfillment. **By Dhanya Moffitt**



encapsulated in the word *upa-nishad*. The Upanishads convey the very well-ascertained knowledge (*ni*) of that which is most near, the Self (*upa*), which brings about the disintegration of sorrow—along with its cause—when the truth is revealed (*sad*). In other words, it is Self-knowledge that delivers lasting happiness.

The teachings of the Upanishads tell us that the cause of sorrow is taking the ever-present changeless Self (*Atman*) to be one with—and

a product of—the body, mind, and sense organs. Thus we take who we are to be limited, subject to birth, death, and change. Vedanta tells us this is not true. Who we are is not subject to any of these things; rather, we are birthless, deathless, changeless, limitless Atman. Not recognizing the Self as it really is, we suffer.

A student of Vedanta is guided by the teachings to distinguish between that which doesn't change (the Self/

We all want a good and happy life. Most of our pursuits are geared toward that end. What we may not understand is that the happiness gained through changing experiences and actions is fleeting. The only way to gain the lasting happiness we seek is through the recognition that our true nature is happiness itself. This recognition is called *moksha*, Self-knowledge or liberation.

The Vedas are the world's oldest-known scriptures. The essential subject matter of these revered texts is happiness and the nature of your Self. The Vedas are divided into two parts. The first part is by far the longer and contains instructions on how to achieve the best

life possible in the world of changing experience known as *samsara*.

The second part of the Vedas is for those who have discerned that changing circumstances cannot deliver something that lasts. This part of the Vedas contains the Upanishads, the original source books of the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. (*Advaita* means “not two, nondual.” *Vedanta* means “the end of the Vedas.”)

The entire teaching of Vedanta is

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Atman), and that which does (everything else). This is done through a dual process of negation and positive assertion. “Not this, not this” (*neti, neti*) is the negation of the notion that our Self has anything to do with the body, mind, and sense organs, all of which change. At the same time, positive assertion is used to point out that we are “that which is changelessly ever-present, illuminating all of these.”

This is not a conceptual exercise. The teachings are pointing us to recog-

experiences don’t last. In short, no object or situation is, in and of itself, a source of constant happiness at all times, for all people, in all places. How then does the experience of happiness arise?

The mind is composed of thoughts. The Atman is ever-present and illumines the mind. The nature of the Atman is pure happiness. In the instant a desire is fulfilled the mind relaxes, and the ever-present Atman is reflected in the mind in the form of *ananda* (pure happiness). This produces a moment of pleasure.

Self alone. Once we gain this recognition we know the truth of existence. Despite any appearance to the contrary, all is in reality only one, nondual, advaita: one being, one reality, one Self, which—due to the veiling power of *maya*—appears to be many.

This recognition takes place over time and through the teachings. Because the verses of the Upanishads are terse, and their meaning difficult to decipher, we require the guidance of a highly trained teacher who knows how to un-

## RATHER THAN RECOGNIZING THE ATMAN AS THE ACTUAL SOURCE OF HAPPINESS, WE TRY TO GAIN HAPPINESS FROM THE CHANGING WORLD OF OBJECTS, AN ACTIVITY THE SCRIPTURES COMPARE TO TRYING TO DRINK WATER FROM A MIRAGE.

nize directly and without a shadow of a doubt the truth about the Self. People often say, “My body has changed and aged, but I feel as if I never have.” This intuitive feeling is accurate. Although the Self has never changed, it remains undifferentiated from the changing experiences of the body and mind until the teachings clearly point the unchanging nature of the Self out to you.

Guided by the teachings of Vedanta, the student examines the phenomenon of happiness in order to ascertain its source. When we obtain a desired object, for example, we experience a moment of pleasure. A variety of other experiences—such as meditating, listening to music, or watching a sunset—may also produce pleasure.

We naturally assume that the source of our pleasure lies in the situation, experience, or object that appears to have made us happy. Thus we keep trying to gain those objects and replicate those situations that seem to produce this effect. However, the same objects and situations please some people while displeasing others. Also, what once gave pleasure may later become a source of pain. Meditative

In the next instant another thought or desire may arise, replacing the reflected *ananda* of the Atman. Rather than recognizing the Atman as the actual source of happiness, the source of happiness is projected out onto the changing world of objects, and we try to gain happiness from them, an activity the scriptures compare to trying to drink water from a mirage.

Once the Self has been recognized as it truly is—ever-present, limitless, and full—we no longer need to project our well-being onto objects and experiences. We no longer need to pursue happiness; we know our nature *is* happiness and we can rest in that recognition.

There is only one Self, one Atman. This same Self shines in the hearts and minds of all. Step by step, as the teachings progress, using a process of logic and reason, we come to recognize that this same Self is *Brahman*. This very Self, from which the world has come, is the stable being of the entire world of changing experience.

Everything we see, perceive, and experience has for its actual being Atman, which is Brahman, which is the

lock the meaning of the words, and then how to use those words as direct pointers to the Self.

Having acknowledged that the changing world of experience can never be a lasting source of happiness, the Upanishads do not tell us there is something we need to do in order to be happy. The result of any action, being time-bound, will not provide lasting happiness. Once the Atman is recognized as it is—limitless, full, and complete, ever-present, never-sorrowful, and never-changing—we don’t need to look for happiness elsewhere.

The Upanishad is the revealer of truth. Moksha is that which is revealed. The meaning of the revealer and the revealed is the same. When that which is most near and dear (*upa*) is very well ascertained (*ni*), all sorrows disintegrate—along with their cause—in the knowledge that I am Brahman alone (*sad*). This is moksha—the discovery that your true nature is happiness. ■

*Dhanya Moffitt has been a student of traditional Advaita Vedanta for the past eight years. Her writings can be found at [advaita-academy.org](http://advaita-academy.org).*

# Wrist Relief

Stabilize the shoulders and upper back to free your smaller joints from the strain of repetitive movement. **By Marla Apt**

**O**ur hands are one of our primary organs of action—we use them for basic survival, recreation, communication, even creative expression. An injury in the hand or wrist can be debilitating and the healing process elusive. Because many of our interactions with modern conveniences involve repetitive movements—such as typing, texting, or mousing—one of the most prevalent types of wrist ailment today is a repetitive strain/stress injury, or RSI. Many common wrist conditions, such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis of the wrist, fall under this category.

RSIs stem from excessive and continuous stress on the musculoskeletal system, often brought on by poor postural habits, as well as workplace ergonomics. When the shoulders and upper back don't provide a supportive structural base for arm movements, the burden of the activity may fall on the smaller joints. Furthermore, poor alignment in the shoulders and upper back can constrict nerves in the arms, which can manifest as pain, swelling, and numbness in the wrists.

Yoga helps us engage in our daily activities in a less stressful and harmful manner. First, we address the causes of injury by slowing down and observing ourselves and our habitual patterns. Then we can develop new patterns that are healthier and more conscious. Specifically, yoga can assist with healing RSI in the wrists by

working on alignment in the upper body, so that the larger muscles in this region can better support and guide movements of the elbows, wrists, and hands.

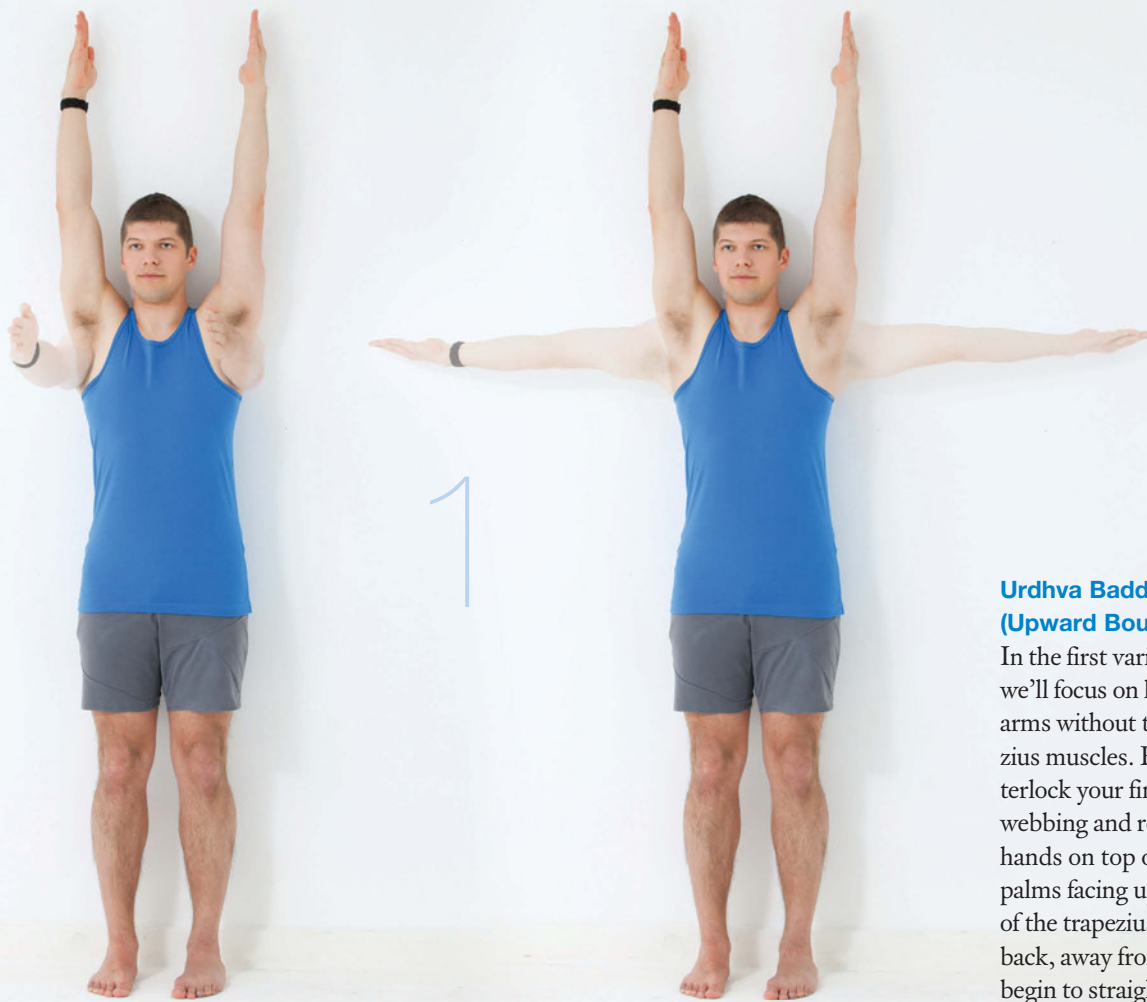
## Asana for RSI

The following asanas will help to develop mobility and strength in the shoulders and upper back to minimize nerve compression and stress on the smaller joints. In all of these poses, the upper trapezius muscles (which attach at the base of the skull and run down the neck to attach at the clavicles) should feel like they are releasing down the back, so that there is no congestion near the base of the neck, and the sides of the neck are free to lengthen. This aids in counteracting the imbalances of the typical slumped forward posture many of us assume in front of the computer, in which the shoulders are pulled forward and down, the tops of the trapezius muscles become hard and creep up toward the skull, and the head projects forward.

We'll begin the sequence with the wrists in a neutral position, and work toward safely bringing the wrists into greater degrees of extension and, eventually, weight-bearing positions. Regular practice of these poses progressively prepares the upper body for asanas that are more challenging to shoulders, elbows, and wrists, such as *chaturanga dandasana* (four-limbed staff pose), or *adho mukha vrikshasana* (handstand). >>

Address the root of your wrist pain, and prepare the upper body for more challenging poses, like *bakasana*, by cultivating good alignment.





### Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Hands Pose)

Stand with your back against a wall in *tadasana*. Separate your feet hip-width apart and parallel to each other, a couple of inches away from the wall. Bring the weight back into the heels of your feet and lengthen the buttocks down the wall so that you don't arch your lower back. Lift the front and sides of your torso and open the chest. Roll the outermost corners of your shoulders back against the wall so that you can feel your chest broaden.

With your arms straight, extend them in front of you, parallel to the floor, with palms facing each other. Pull your shoulders back into the wall to bring the shoulder blades down the back. Then raise your arms overhead; your hands may or may not reach the wall, depending on the range of motion in your shoulders. Keep your arms firm and straight, and as you reach them toward the ceiling, release your shoulders and shoulder blades down the wall. Extend the side ribs up toward the hands without moving your lower back, thighs, and waist away from the wall.

Repeat the pose, this time bringing the arms up from the sides, focusing your attention on the rotation of the upper arms and shoulders. Extend your arms straight out to the sides in line with your shoulders, palms facing down. Extend the inner edges of the arms from the center of your chest until you feel the biceps lengthening toward your wrists. Lift the sides of your chest, rotate your upper arms out from the shoulders, and turn the palms to face the ceiling. This rotation should feel like it is originating from your shoulder blades moving down, in, and forward toward your chest. Raise the arms overhead as you roll the triceps forward away from the wall and the biceps back toward the wall. Lift the outer edges of your armpits toward your fingers, and, without dropping the arms, release the trapezius muscles away from your ears. Exhale and lower your arms down by your sides into *tadasana*.

### Urdhva Baddhanguliyasana (Upward Bound Fingers Pose)

In the first variation of this pose, we'll focus on how to extend the arms without tightening the trapezius muscles. From *tadasana*, interlock your fingers snugly at the webbing and rest the backs of your hands on top of your head with palms facing up. Release the tops of the trapezius muscles down your back, away from your neck, as you begin to straighten your arms toward the ceiling. The moment you find that the top trapezius muscles tighten (even if only on one side), pause and allow them to soften before proceeding further. Rather than tightening the shoulders to straighten the arms, see if you can hug the bones of the upper arms with the triceps. Exhale, unclasp the hands, and release the arms down by your sides.

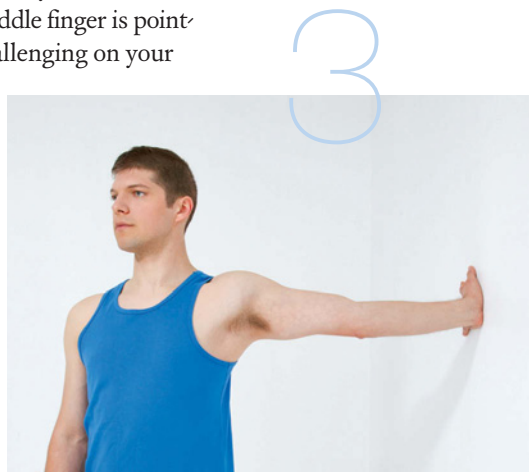
Now repeat the pose, focusing on opening the sides of the chest and stretching the fingers and wrists. Change the interlock of your fingers so that the opposite index finger is on top. (Don't worry if this feels awkward.) Bring the backs of your clasped hands to your chest, and slowly stretch your arms straight out in front of you, parallel to the floor. Push out through the base of the fingers and broaden the heels of the hands.



Make the outer arms firm, and straighten the arms until you feel the inner arms stretch. Keep the arms completely straight, and raise them overhead. As you lift the wrists higher toward the ceiling, raise the sides of your rib cage and open the armpits, spreading and lifting them toward the ceiling. Open the palms of the hands wide and try taking your hands further back, so that the arms come beside or even behind your ears. As you bring the arms further back, move your shoulder blades and upper back forward toward your chest without pushing your bottom ribs and lower back forward. Keep your arms straight and firm, and without lowering the palms, release your trapezius muscles down. Exhale, unclasp the hands, and bring the arms forward and down by your sides back into tadasana.

### Ardha Parshva Hastasana (Half Sideways Hand Pose)

Stand in tadasana, one arm's distance away from a wall, with your left side parallel to the wall. Place the palm of your left hand on the wall in line with your shoulder, and turn the hand out so that the middle finger is pointing behind you. (If you find this challenging on your wrist, you can point your fingers up toward the ceiling.) With your left elbow slightly bent, turn the upper arm out (in the same direction as the hand) from the shoulder socket. Press the entire palm of the hand into the wall, including the bases of your fingers and all your finger pads; be especially aware of maintaining pressure through your index finger. Move your left shoulder blade in, drop the left shoulder back and down away from your ear, and gently straighten your left arm as you turn your chest away from the wall. It should feel as if you are attempting to push the wall away from the center of your chest. Hold the pose for about two minutes, and repeat on the other side. >>



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## Bhujangasana at the Wall (Cobra Pose Variation)

This standing version of bhujangasana gives you the benefits of the prone backbend—strengthening the upper back, relieving pressure in the shoulders and neck, and counteracting the forward bending of daily activities—without any weight on your wrists.

Stand approximately six inches away from a wall and press your pubic bone against the wall; place your fingertips on the wall at shoulder height. With straight legs, lift your heels high off the floor and draw your tailbone toward the wall. Open your chest, and roll your shoulders back away from the wall and down toward your buttocks. Draw the shoulder blades down and forward into the chest. The bottom edges of the shoulder blades should feel like they are coming closer to each other as you lift the sides of the chest up. Lift your lower abdomen toward the top of your sternum and isometrically drag your fingers toward the floor, as if you're trying to pull the wall down with your fingertips. If your chest is open and your neck feels free, you can look upward. Hold the pose for one minute, or for as long as you feel strong and open; then rest and repeat.

## Bharadvajasana I (Pose of Sage Bharadvaja)

Sit on two folded blankets and bring both feet to the outside of your left hip. Place the top of your left foot on the arch of the right foot, with the left toes pointing straight back and the right toes pointing to the left. Keep both knees pointing forward. If this is challenging for your knees, try sitting up on more support.

Drop the left hip down so that the pelvis is level. Bend your right elbow, take your arm behind your back, and clasp your left upper arm with your right hand. Roll the right shoulder back. As you turn to the right, cross your left hand in front of you and place it as close to the outside edge of your right knee as you can reach. Inhale, and lift the sides of the chest; exhale, and turn your chest to the right. Keep rolling the right shoulder back as if the right arm and shoulder were leading the twist. Keeping the chest broad and level, exhale, and turn your head to look to the right. Hold for 30 seconds; then return to center on an exhale, release your legs, and change sides.



## Hands and Knees Pose

Finally, we'll explore proper shoulder and arm alignment in a pose that places weight on the wrists. It is important to practice weight-bearing asanas on a firm surface (soft surfaces can cause the wrists to overextend) and to distribute the weight throughout the hand, so that you don't collapse onto the wrists.

Come onto your hands and knees with your hands under your shoulders and knees under your hips. Press the whole palm and all of the finger pads flat on the floor and lift the forearms up away from the wrist; it should feel like the skin on the palm of the hand is lengthening away from your wrist toward your fingertips. Straighten your arms, and turn your upper arms out. Roll your shoulders back away from your ears, spread the collar bones, and draw the upper arms up into the shoulder sockets.

If you find that this pose bothers your wrists, you can use a yoga wedge or the folded edge of a mat under the heels of the hands. Both of these modifications will elevate your wrists higher than your fingers, allowing you to distribute the weight throughout the hand, so that there is less pressure on the wrist joint.

If you find that your wrists feel strong here, you can deepen your work with shoulder rotation and wrist mobility by trying the pose with your hands turned out, fingers pointing away from each other. To further stretch the inner arms and increase



flexibility in the wrists, repeat the pose with your hands turned all the way out, so that your fingers point toward your knees.

If you don't feel strain in any of these variations, you can apply your newfound awareness of how to integrate the work of the shoulders, arms, and wrists into other weight-bearing asanas that progressively increase the angle of wrist extension and the amount of weight through the arms: for example, *adho mukha shvanasana* (downward-facing dog pose), *chaturanga dandasana*, *bakasana* (crane pose), and *urdhva dhanurasana* (upward bow pose, or wheel). ■

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



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# Soothing the Skin

From eczema to psoriasis, ayurveda reveals how to heal our skin from within. **By Carrie Demers, MD**

As our primary protection from the environmental toxins and pathogens surrounding us, our skin takes a beating every day. Most acute skin problems, like the temporary blisters and swelling associated with contact dermatitis, stem from reactions to external irritants, such as nickel in jewelry, poison ivy sap, or insect bites, or from the swelling and pain of an infected cut. Chronic skin conditions, such as psoriasis, eczema, chronic hives, or acne, on the other hand, have internal causes, which ayurveda attributes to toxins generated by imbalances in the blood, lungs, and liver.

In ayurveda, skin-disrupting toxins arise from excess *rakta dhatu* (blood tissue), which together with *rasa dhatu* (plasma) nourishes the skin. Rakta dhatu becomes imbalanced when we ingest heating foods, imbibe alcohol or other liver irritants, endure intense sun exposure, work excessively, or experience intense negative emotions—anything, in short, that has the attributes of the pitta dosha. Not surprisingly, pitta-dominant individuals experience more skin diseases than vatas or kaphas, if only because pitta tends to overheat the blood. In contrast, when rasa and rakta dhatus are well balanced, the skin is smooth, moist, and glowing.

## Cooling the Fire

Since most cases of contact dermatitis exhibit the effect of too much pitta—red, hot rashes and blisters—they respond well to cooling topical remedies, such as aloe gel and calendula cream, once the source of irritation is removed.

Ayurveda also uses these and other topical remedies to treat the symptoms of chronic skin disorders (see sidebar), but because these conditions stem primarily from excess rakta dhatu, the main focus is on purifying the blood. And since the blood is nourished and cleansed by the lungs and liver, supporting and cleansing

these two organs—by taking expectorants and diaphoretics for the lungs, and alteratives (blood purifiers) and bitter tonics for the liver—can have a dramatic impact on the skin.

Herbal alteratives, which are taken internally, are primarily cooling and have bitter and astringent tastes. Along with cleansing the blood and thus healing the skin, they also kill bacteria and reduce fever. Alteratives common to the West include aloe, burdock, dandelion, echinacea, and red clover; while gotu kola, guduchi, manjistha, neem, and turmeric are their ayurvedic cousins.

Blood-purifying herbs and formulas are best taken in warm weather when pitta is rising or any time heat symptoms worsen. Take alteratives no longer than two to three months at a time, and avoid during pregnancy or when vata is high.

Aloe juice or gel (made from the internal sap only) has both cleansing and rejuvenating qualities and is safe for anyone. As a blood purifier, take two tablespoons one to three times a day for six to eight weeks.

Ayurveda also prescribes bloodletting (*rakta moksha*)—a pancha karma treatment—as a way of lessening rakta dhatu, though this is not approved in the United States in its classic form. Donating blood is a legal alternative, and pitta



types would help their skin stay healthier by donating blood, especially during or following summer.

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

## Ayurvedic Topical Treatments

Though skin conditions are largely pitta in origin, they can be characterized by an imbalance in any of the doshas. In general, any remedy you apply to the skin should counter the dominant qualities of the dosha involved.

**Pitta** skin conditions are distinguished by redness, swelling, and infection. Apply cooling topicals like coconut oil or aloe gel.

**Vata** manifests as dry, scaly, itchy skin. To pacify, choose warming, nourishing oil-herb blends made with sesame or avocado oil and ashwagandha, brahmi, or comfrey.

**Kapha** skin conditions show up as oozing or weepy rashes. Avoid oily topicals in favor of washing with decoctions of burdock root or yarrow.

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

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# Paint Your Plate

Discover a culinary rainbow with simple summer recipes that pack a colorful and nutritious punch. **By Joelle Hann**



The deep purple hues of chilled blueberry mango soup are a telltale indicator of powerful antioxidants.

Summer's abundance presents a tantalizing problem: how do we choose what to eat from this embarrassment of riches? One way to organize your pleasant amblings through the farmers' market is to shop by color. As simple as this sounds, the concept is backed by research. Phytochemicals, the vitamins and minerals found in plants that give them their brilliant hues, have been found to prevent and treat disease, and we require a variety of these nutrients from across the color spectrum to stay healthy.

When you "eat your colors," as Michael Pollan advises in his book *Food*

*Rules* (and maybe your mother also mentioned), you get healthy doses of fiber, potassium, and vitamin C, as well as antioxidants, such as carotenoids and flavonoids. These protect our cells from the effects of environmental toxins and from free radicals, which increase dramatically as we age, and in turn age us. Antioxidants have also been shown to help battle heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Vegan chef and cookbook author Colleen Patrick-Goudreau says shopping and cooking by color actually makes nutrition easier. Simply look at your basket: folate makes kale green, betacyanin makes beets red, lutein makes corn yellow, beta-carotene makes mangos and carrots orange, and so on. Try buying and cooking a different color every week, or assembling the most colorful dishes you can.

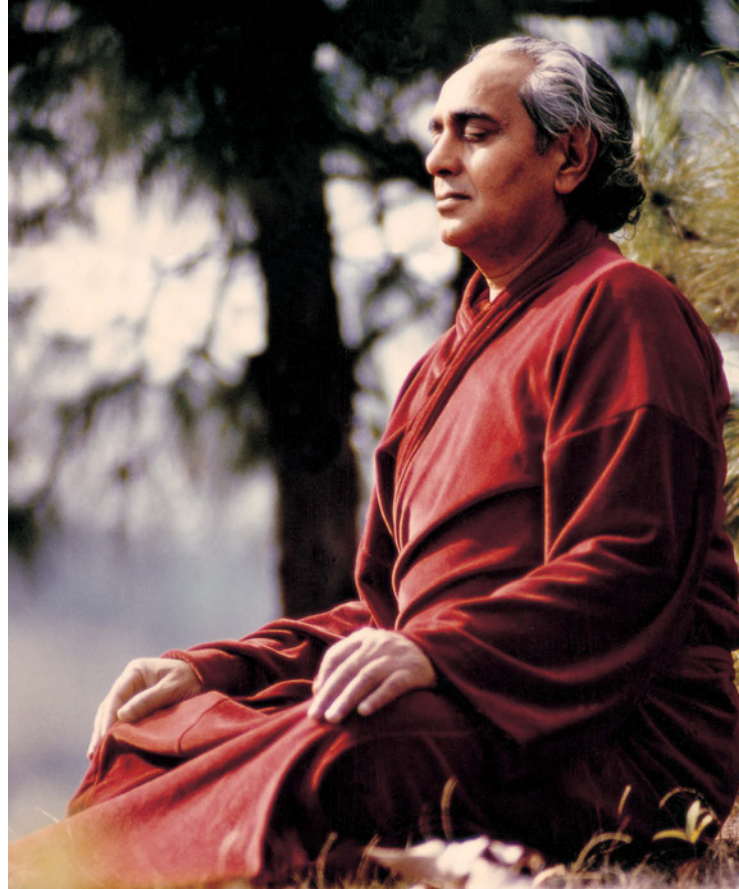
Blueberries, a key ingredient in the chilled blueberry mango soup recipe that follows, are packed with one of the most powerful antioxidants around, anthocyanin. The avocados, peppers, and greens in the accompanying summer salad provide lutein, more antioxidants, folate, vitamins A, C, and K, and manganese.

These refreshing summer recipes are simple to prepare and require the freshest ingredients available (buy organic when possible). They taste as rich as the season, and their appetizing rainbow of colors provides excellent support for overall vitality. >>

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## Chilled Blueberry Mango Soup

### Soup

- ½ cup orange juice
- ¾ cup pineapple juice
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 2 cups fresh blueberries
- ¼ cup mango chunks
- 6 ounces plain or vanilla yogurt  
(or nondairy yogurt)

### Blueberry Croutons

- 1 cup fresh ripe blueberries
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup milk (or almond, soy, rice, or  
hemp milk)
- 1 cup crushed cornflakes
- 2 to 3 tablespoons neutral oil,  
such as canola or grapeseed

Bring the juices and sugar to a boil (if you like it less sweet, reduce the sugar). Stir constantly for 1 minute. Add blueberries and mango and cook for 1 additional minute. Set aside.

When cool, add the fruit mixture and yogurt in a blender and puree. Chill for at least 2 hours or overnight. (The soup will thicken as it cools.)

To make the croutons: Rinse the blueberries. Place the flour, milk, and cornflakes into three separate bowls. Dredge blueberries in small batches: first in the flour (shake off the excess), then in the milk, and finally coat them in the cornflakes.

Heat the oil over medium heat and add the blueberries until the outsides are

crispy (be careful not to let the berries burst). Drain the fruit on a paper towel and let cool.

Pour the chilled soup into bowls and garnish with the blueberry croutons. Add chopped mango or a sprig of mint for additional color contrast.

*Recipe adapted from Color Me Vegan by Colleen Patrick-Goudreau (Fair Winds Press, 2010).*

## Frisée Salad with Avocado and Yellow Peppers

### Dressing

- 1 large shallot
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon orange juice
- 1 jalapeño, minced (discard seeds for  
less heat)
- ¾ cup extra virgin olive oil

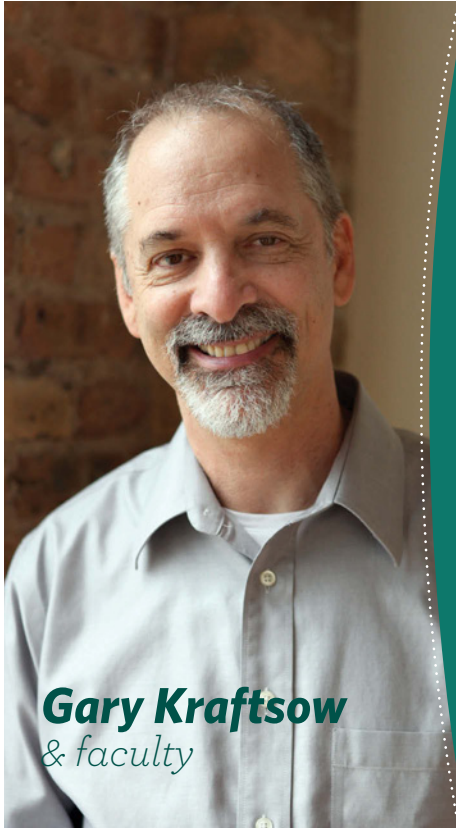
### Salad

- 1 large or 2 medium heads frisée lettuce, depending on size
- 2 ripe avocados, halved, pitted, and  
sliced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, sliced thinly
- Optional toppings: 1 tablespoon  
toasted black sesame seeds, ¼ cup  
toasted walnut halves, or crumbled  
blue cheese

Chop the shallot finely, add the vinegar and salt, and let sit. Add the jalapeño and citrus juices, and whisk in the olive oil.

Wash the lettuce and tear into bite-size pieces. Spin or pat dry and add to a large mixing bowl with the pepper slices. Pour 2/3 of the dressing over the lettuce and peppers. Toss and place in bowls or on plates. Top with avocado slices, sesame seeds, walnuts, or blue cheese. Drizzle on the remaining dressing and add a pinch of salt, if desired. ■

*Joelle Hann is a yoga teacher and journalist based in Brooklyn, New York. She grew up on a farm in Western Canada and has been cooking since the age of 10.*



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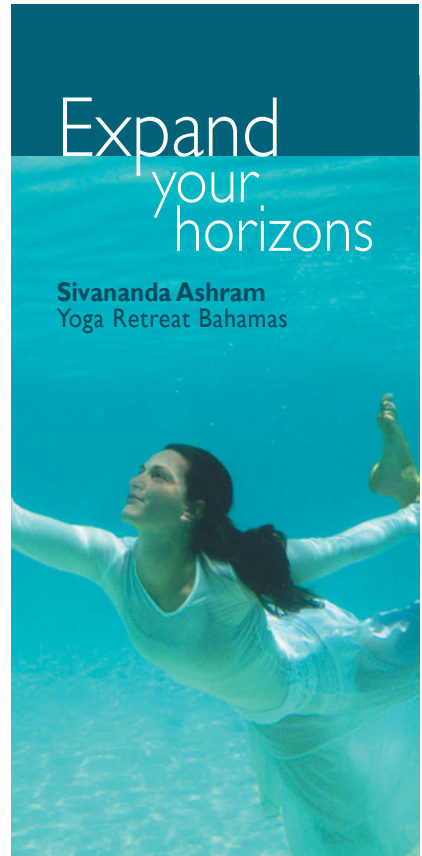
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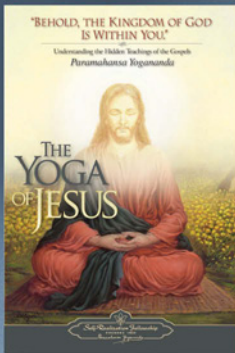
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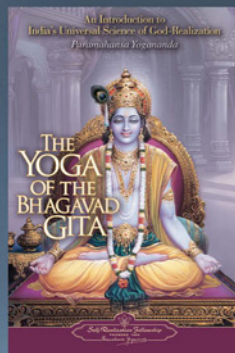
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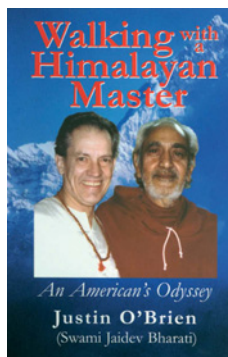


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# Vision Quest

Counteract the effects of daily screen-gazing with four simple eye exercises. **By Claudia Cummins**

**D**o you ever find yourself squinting and rubbing your eyes after a long stretch in front of a computer? If so, you're not alone. Average adult Americans now spend more than eight hours a day staring at screens of one sort or another. And this growth in "screen time" has brought an increase in adults suffering from blurred vision, itchy and watery eyes, headaches, double vision, and other symptoms of eye strain.

Screens—including those on computer monitors, handheld computer games, and smart phones—force users to focus their eyes intently at a single distance near the face. "The eyes were not made to do extensive close work," said Marc Grossman, behavioral optometrist, licensed acupuncturist, and author of five books on natural eye care. "But now, almost all of our processing is happening at a near distance, and that puts extra strain on eye muscles."

Fortunately, simple exercises can help rejuvenate the eyes. Several yoga systems, such as Sivananda, Integral Yoga, and the Himalayan Institute, include them in their repertoires. Eye care professionals and other holistic healers sometimes recommend them as well. When mindfully practiced,

these simple exercises rest overused muscles, reduce tension in the face and eyes, and help strengthen muscles that help the eyes focus. "By making the eyes more flexible and adaptable, you can keep eye problems from getting worse, and can even improve them," said Dr. Grossman.

Aside from the physical benefits, yoga teachers sometimes offer these exercises for another reason: to draw one's attention inward. This, in turn, can help cultivate a keener sense of body awareness, inner presence, and well-being. "By controlling the eyes, you're controlling the mind," says Ananda, a yoga teacher at the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm in Grass Valley, California. "There's a physical benefit, of course, but there's a mental benefit as well."

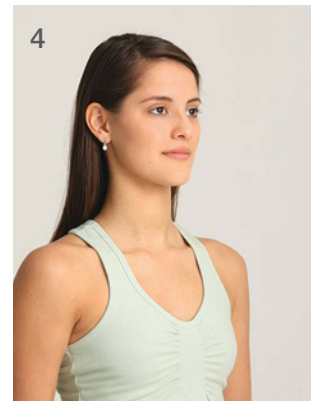
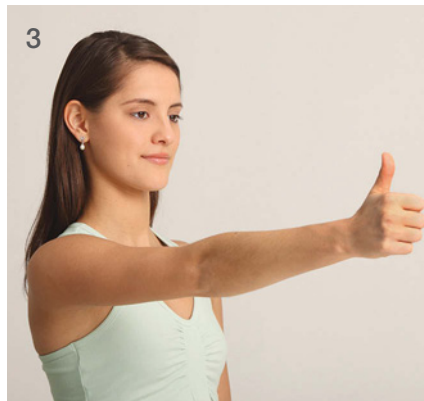
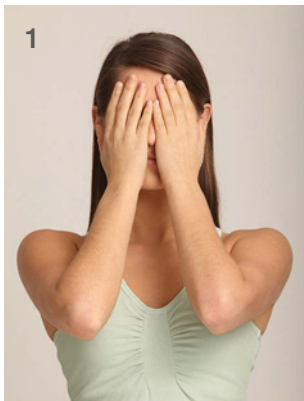
The next time you find yourself rubbing your eyes while staring at a screen, experiment with the following exercises. They can be practiced individually, or as a sequence, and can be repeated throughout the day as needed. Dr. Grossman says they are mild enough for anyone to explore.

## 1. Palming

Rub your hands together for 10 to 15 seconds until they feel warm and energized. Then gently place your hands over your eyes, with the fingertips resting on the forehead, the palms over the eyes, and the heels of the hands resting on the cheeks. Don't touch the eyeballs directly, but hollow the hands slightly and allow them to form a curtain of darkness in front of the eyes. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and relax. Envision the eyes absorbing the darkness like a sponge, while also welcoming healing warmth and energy from the hands. Invite the eyes to grow soft and spacious, and enjoy this break from visual stimulation. Continue this palming action as long as it feels soothing—for just a few seconds or up to five minutes. When you are ready to emerge, gently remove the hands from the face and slowly open the eyes.

This palming technique can also be done after the eye exercises that follow to further rest the eyes.

✚ Find ayurvedic eye care tips and yogic gazing techniques at [yogainternational.com/eyes](http://yogainternational.com/eyes).



## 2. Eye Rolling

Sit upright with a long spine and relaxed breath. Soften your gaze by relaxing the muscles in your eyes and face. Without moving your head, direct your gaze up toward the ceiling. Then slowly circle your eyes in a clockwise direction, tracing as large a circle as possible. Gently focus on the objects in your periphery as you do this, and invite the movement to feel smooth and fluid. Repeat three times, then close the eyes and relax. When you're ready, perform the same eye-rolling movement three times in a counterclockwise direction.

## 3. Focus Shifting

Relax your body and breathe comfortably. Hold one arm straight out in front of you in a loose fist, with the thumb pointing up. Focus on your thumb. While keeping your eyes trained on it, slowly move the thumb toward your nose until you can no longer focus clearly on it. Pause for a breath or two, and then lengthen the arm back to its original outstretched position, while maintaining focus on the thumb. Repeat up to 10 times.

## 4. Distance Gazing

Rest your gaze on a distant object (if you're indoors, look out a window, if you can). Focus on the object as clearly as possible, while staying relaxed in the eyes and face. Take a deep breath, and then slowly shift your gaze to another distant object around you. Imagine your eyes are gently "drinking in" the image you see. Continue letting your eyes drift about the world around you, momentarily pausing at objects at varying distances away from you. As an extra bonus, if you spy something particularly pleasing, smile, enjoy the vision, and give thanks for your strong, healthy eyes. ■

*Claudia Cummins lives, writes, and teaches yoga in Mansfield, Ohio. Learn more about her essays and blog at [claudiacummins.com](http://claudiacummins.com).*

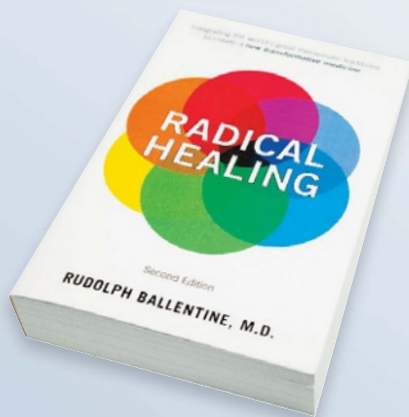
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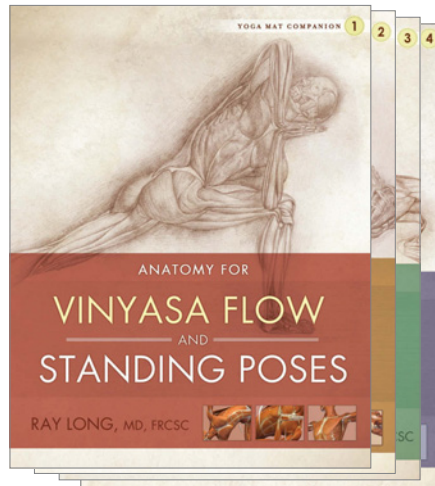
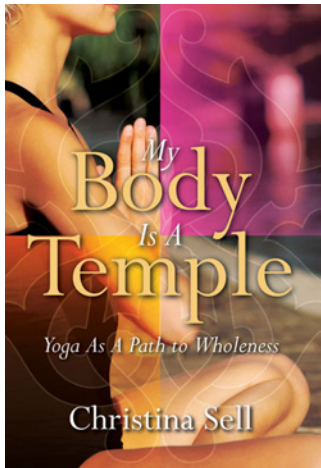
RUDOLPH BALLENTINE, M.D., created and directed the Center for Holistic Medicine for 25 years, with offices in six cities where treatment integrated psychotherapy, homeopathy, Ayurveda, yoga, movement, and meditation. He is now retired and living in the Carolinas.

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**My Body Is a Temple:  
Yoga as a Path to Wholeness**  
By Christina Sell

In 2004, Christina Sell traveled to India and visited the temple of Yogi Ramsuratkumar, her guru's guru, who had passed away three years earlier. While there, she experienced a "supremely happy feeling." She wasn't sure what it was, but she noticed it again during asana, pranayama, chanting, and meditation. She started to wonder if that initial feeling had been Yogi Ramsuratkumar's blessings and, more important, if those blessings could come from within her. "Could a life of practice," she wondered, "help me to abide more constantly at the shrine of my own heart?" *My Body Is a Temple* is her answer.

The book's structure is original: six sections on constructing a yoga practice modeled after six stages of building a temple (the foundation, the scaffolding, the sanctuary, and so on). Sell intended for the book to function as a sort of manual: each subsection is followed by a list of questions for applying the book's concepts to your own path. It turns out that having to reflect on your own practice in the context of the larger goals that Sell lays out is a much more challenging (and valuable) way to read. What was less successful is Sell's inclusion of anecdotes

from the building of Yogi Ramsuratkumar's temple; the connection feels forced in places, and the stories can distract from what is otherwise an insightful and accessible book.

Sell delves into many aspects of practice—from cultivating a healthy diet to understanding the Divine, from the value of a spiritual community to tantric interpretations of practice. The sheer amount of information can make the reading scattered in places, but there are lots—lots—of gems here, and Sell's knack for integrating lofty concepts with everyday realities makes for an inspiring read.

—Amy Karafin

**Yoga Mat Companion**  
**(1) Anatomy for Vinyasa Flow and Standing Poses; (2) Anatomy for Hip Openers and Forward Bends; (3) Anatomy for Backbends and Twists; (4) Anatomy for Arm Balances and Inversions**  
By Ray Long, MD

Anatomy books are valuable resources for teachers and practitioners of all levels, but even texts geared toward hatha enthusiasts can come across as dense, intimidating, or just plain boring. Not so with these elegant new guides from Dr. Ray Long.

Each volume of the *Yoga Mat Companion* series begins with an overview

of key biomechanical and physiological concepts, followed by the Bandha Yoga Codex—Long's five-step process to the optimal pose experience. The pose sections—presented in two complementary categories (e.g., backbends and twists), and comprising the bulk of each book—include in-depth descriptions of alignment and key joint actions for each asana, as well as more subtle refinements.

A recurring theme throughout the four texts is Long's unique yet practical approach to *bandhas*, or locks: beyond the familiar *mula*, *ud-dhiyana*, and *jalandhara* practices, Long explains that a practitioner can create bandhas throughout the body by using the co-activation of muscle groups to enhance stability, increase mobility, and activate motor neurons.

In addition to the detailed yet user-friendly anatomical graphics that have become a trademark of Long's books, the *Yoga Mat Companion* volumes contain artist's mannequin illustrations, which help clarify joint positions and artfully complement the complexity of the anatomical images.

More than mere yoga anatomy textbooks, Dr. Long's guides serve as beautifully illustrated, meticulously researched reminders that yoga is indeed both an art and a science. —Kathryn Heagberg

**Core Strength Vinyasa Yoga**  
**Total Body Sculpt; 30-Minute Total Belly Transformation**  
With Sadie Nardini

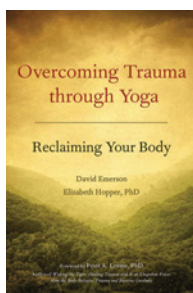
These dynamic new DVDs from Core Strength Vinyasa founder Sadie Nardini are chock-full of innovative flows that fuse traditional asanas with core work designed to target all four abdominal muscles and the deep spine stabilizers. Viewers will find practical anatomy

lessons woven throughout each practice—Nardini reminds us that core strength goes beyond the abdominals, and presents helpful tips for activating the pelvic floor and the psoas in asana. Her alignment cues are direct and easy to understand, and her delivery is playful and inviting. (Nardini clearly knows her stuff, but isn't above the occasional 1980s rock band reference.)

While Nardini's friendly demeanor may put the newbie at ease, her choice of asanas and sequencing may be more appropriate for an intermediate practitioner, who will thoroughly appreciate the well-choreographed flows and "super-adventure poses." Those in the market for ab strengtheners that go beyond the basics will enjoy her unconventional core work, such as "butterfly navasana," a fun and more challenging twist on traditional abdominal curls.

Filmed in Sedona's stunning landscape of burnt-red mountains, Nardini's latest offerings are bound to challenge and inspire—and in the process, they might make you aware of some muscles you didn't know you had.

—Jennifer Lang



**Overcoming Trauma through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body**

**By David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper, PhD**

Trauma impacts every facet of

life—imbalancing emotions, triggering the body's stress response, and straining interpersonal relationships. Yoga instructor David Emerson teams with clinical psychologist Elizabeth Hopper to present a mind-body overview of trauma and lay out a therapeutic approach called "trauma-sensitive yoga." Practiced in clinical environments and supported

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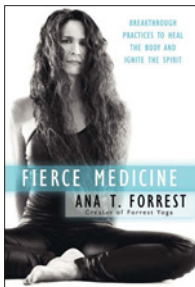
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by a growing body of research, trauma-sensitive yoga focuses on several key concepts: experiencing the present moment, expanding choice-making, taking effective action, and restoring sensitivity to the rhythmic flow of life.

The book sets out to facilitate the creation of healing environments. Clinicians will learn basic yoga skills that can be implemented within individual therapy sessions. Yoga teachers will find helpful advice on how to make assists that won't trigger internal defenses. And trauma survivors will receive edict-free encouragement for using yoga as a tool for self-discovery. Thoughtful and thorough, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga* brings a spirit of optimism to the process of healing past wounds and reclaiming body and mind. —*Rolf Sovik, PsyD*



**Fierce Medicine: Breakthrough Practices to Heal the Body and Ignite the Spirit**  
By Ana T. Forrest

This generous and straight-talking book

showcases Ana Forrest's intelligence and creativity as a healer, while dipping into memoir to detail the extreme abuse she suffered as a child. Born crippled, Forrest (the creator of Forrest Yoga) was imprisoned, drugged, starved, and raped from the age of two, and started drinking alcohol at four. At six, she began working in a nearby stable to escape her sadistic family, and, at 17, while working as a horse trainer, she attempted suicide by jumping off a cliff. As remarkable as her recovery from these soul-crushing experiences is her perspective—rebellious, inquisitive, and clear-eyed.

The exercises in *Fierce Medicine* are drawn from Native American and yogic traditions, and are designed to help readers step up their own healing practices

and step into their intuitive powers. Forrest's uncompromising approach to herself and compassionate approach to others declares that we can all overcome life's trials, whatever they may be, and find radical joy in our existence.

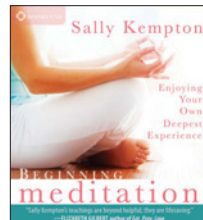
—*Joelle Hann*

**Beginning Meditation: Enjoying Your Own Deepest Experience**

With Sally Kempton

Former Shaivistic swami and experienced meditation teacher Sally Kempton serves up an enlightening "tasting menu" of philosophy and technique in this well-organized two-and-a-half-hour CD set. Working from the assumption that meditation should be entered into in "short bursts," Kempton offers no-nonsense advice and provides multiple basic practices, which include meditating on the space between breaths, on sound, and on compassion. Though Kempton's language does occasionally get a bit esoteric—"the one who lives inside you reveals Herself in so many ways"—the program is mostly free of jargon, preferring practical advice above mystical ramblings, and providing profound, heartfelt insight about the true nature of mind and spirit along the way. Kempton's clear, kind recording is an indispensable resource for those interested in learning how to meditate and get in touch with their deeper selves.

—*Neal Pollack*



**Fasting for Ramadan**

By Kazim Ali

Poet and yoga teacher Kazim Ali writes intimately about his process of returning to his Muslim roots to follow Rama-

dan—the ancient practice of annual communal fasting done as a ritual of purification and prayer. He chronicles two separate 30-day cycles of fasting in this collection of sensitive, soul-searching daily meditations. Reflecting on how no food or water from sunup to sundown affects all aspects of life, Ali touches upon a myriad of topics, including the comparative philosophy of yoga and Islam, the underlying interconnectedness of all religions, the temporal body versus the infinite, the role of community, and the delicate beauty of nature. He interweaves insightful musings and his personal spiritual doubts with the practical considerations and sublime benefits of maintaining a rigorous fast: "I do not drink at the end of a fast because I am thirsty but because I am making a choice to leave paradise and return to the earth." An inspiring and eloquent read. —*Irene Petryszak*

**Soma-Bandhu:  
Friend of the Moon**

**By Carrie Grossman**

Devotional singer Carrie Grossman channels the ancient sages with refreshing takes on traditional mantras. *Soma-Bandhu* presents a variety of soundscapes, from the track “Sarve Bhavantu,” which weaves together voice, guitar, piano, and cello, to “Sri Rudram,” a Vedic chant recitation featuring Rafiq Khan’s haunting *sarangi* playing. Throughout, Grossman’s gentle, nurturing vocals envelop the listener in a veil of comfort and love.

—Rachel Cama



to last year’s *Sweet Surrender*. *Tears of Love* takes the listener on a journey of rich exoticism with expressive vocals set to a backdrop of heartrending instrumentals. Steve Gorn, whose clarinet weaves an ornate tapestry on the track “Seek the Essence (Hare Krishna),” and hip-hop artist SriKala on “Shiva Vibrations” add to the mix of fresh, eclectic sounds infused into more traditional devotional chanting. The resulting interplay is a mesmerizing treat for the soul. —R.C.

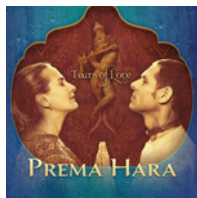
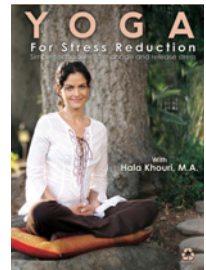
**Yoga for Stress Reduction:  
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**With Hala Khouri**

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elements of yoga, qi gong, free dance, body tapping, and relaxation—offering fresh ideas to help practitioners of all levels discharge stress. The 80-minute program emphasizes relaxed diaphragmatic breathing, present-moment awareness, and connecting to a sense of inner stability. Two closing meditations focus on observing the sensations of stress and then connecting to an internal resource—such as breath awareness or sensing the presence of the earth beneath the body—to ground and prevent the onset of the stress response. The resulting experience of ease and self-regulation will keep this home practice at the top of the list for stressful days.

—Sarah Goddard ■



**Tears of Love**

**By Prema Hara**

Husband-and-wife duo Prema Hara has released a moving follow-up

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## Awakening the Artist

(continued from page 51)

yoga practice and philosophy have not only influenced her subject matter but have enabled her to create more from a place of *bhakti*, or devotion. “I noticed that in art school there was an obsession with the individual’s personal stories,” says Giacomini, who admits that her own work as a young artist did much of the same. She took a semester off from art school to travel to India and learned that the purpose of ancient art there was to evoke a state of bliss in the viewer. “This

### The Art of Non-attachment

The creative journey is one in which we expose our souls to the world. This can be a tremendously rewarding aspect of being an artist—to have the opportunity to connect with others on a deep yet subtle level. But it is also the reason why emotions like doubt, fear, and self-judgment—emotions that can cripple the creative impulse—are all too familiar to artists.

Yoga offers a powerful antidote: the practice of *vairagya*, or non-attachment. This principle teaches us to cultivate dispassion and let go of expectations by diligently observing the mind without

Over the course of three summers, from 2005 to 2007, Stephen Cope and Sat Bir Khalsa, PhD, conducted a study on the effects of yoga training on the performance states of elite musicians. In this study, students from Tanglewood Music Center, a premier postgraduate summer academy located across the street from Kripalu in Lenox, Massachusetts, practiced asana, meditation, and pranayama, and studied yoga philosophy while honing their craft. One of the main things Cope noticed during the study was how very attached to the results the students were. If they had not played a performance as well as they had hoped

## ONCE WE APPROACH CREATIVE EXPRESSION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MINDFULNESS AND DEVOTION, WE BEGIN TO SEE ART-MAKING ITSELF AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE.

was the kind of art that I’d been longing to make,” she says. “To make something that would really uplift people’s spirits.”

Feit also says that he’s become more conscious of the intention behind his work, placing increasing emphasis on crafting a meaningful and illuminating experience for his audience. “I have a desire for the work to provide momentum toward well-being rather than toward distress.” Kaur Khalsa believes that the yogic artist has an opportunity to inspire peace and connection in a world that is currently filled with economic strife, war, and environmental troubles. Her latest collaboration, *Wherever You Are Is the Center of the World*—an installation of eight paintings, each with 40 representations of randomly selected locations in the world—aims to convey a sense of interconnectedness and harmony. “As artists, our expertise is that of imagination, and human imagination needs to take a leap,” she says. “I feel that it is our responsibility *not* to make work out of an individualistic place, but to begin to help people expand their imaginations, and understand that we are all connected.”

reacting to, clinging to, or rejecting anything. With regular practice of *vairagya*, we begin to recognize that our negative emotions are not permanent truths, and we can more easily allow them to dissolve when they come up in the creative process.

“When you experience judgment or perfectionism or self-criticism, it’s just another thing to notice,” says Feit. “If we notice it, it starts to lose its power. That’s one of the things that the yoga practices can teach us as artists: to bypass the judge and just make the thing and let the chips fall as they may.”

True *vairagya*, of course, means resisting attachment, not only to failure and negative emotional states, but also to success and inflated feelings of accomplishment. “Whatever your art is, there are those moments of difficulty when it all just looks like garbage, and moments of delusion when it all looks great,” says Kaur Khalsa. “You need a way to ride those ups and downs, and yoga gives you that.”

By releasing us from both disappointment and excessive pride, yoga’s teachings on non-attachment can help us derive more joy from our artistic work.

(and, he noted, they had impossibly high standards for themselves), they would simply be devastated.

“There is a tremendous amount of clinging to outcome in professional musicians,” says Cope. “They think this is somehow salutary. They don’t realize that grasping creates a restlessness in the mind and actually interferes with their performance.” Cope taught the *Bhagavad Gita* to the young musicians at Tanglewood, and emphasized the central message of surrendering the results of our actions. “Krishna teaches Arjuna to bring everything he’s got, but to let go of the outcome,” says Cope. “It’s the best teaching for artists. It helped the students to feel free to have joy again in their performances.”

The devotional practice of trustful surrender, in which we offer the fruits of our efforts to a higher source, is one of the most profound ways for an artist to work with non-attachment. Emily Branden has found this practice to be essential to her artistic life. In her early 20s, when Branden was making her rounds along the New York City audition circuit, she was so filled with anxiety—obsessing over her

## Yoga and the Artist's Body

**Every artist of every ilk** knows how hard the creative process can be on the body. The musician may spend hours craning her neck while holding her instrument; the visual artist can spend a full day on his feet in an enclosed room inhaling toxic paints; and there's not a writer out there who hasn't suffered from some kind of wrist or back pain from long hours spent typing on a computer. But while a photographer would never toss around his newest Canon L Series lens, and a guitarist would do anything to protect her custom Gibson SG Special, many artists often forget to protect their most irreplaceable instrument—their bodies.

The irony is that, when the physical body suffers, so does the creative process. It's hard to work when you're in pain, and it's hard to feel fluid and available to new ideas when your spine is contracted or your chest is tight. Yoga asana can elongate a compressed spine, free up tight hips, and give our bodies the stamina they need to endure—and even enjoy—the intense demands of the artistic process.

All artists should find an asana practice that best complements their artistic practice. Painters might practice long holds in poses to train for hours spent standing while working on a canvas, while writers might focus on therapeutic work for shoulders and wrists (see page 68 for targeted poses).

The awareness we cultivate in asana not only helps us release existing physical constrictions, but also teaches us to notice the places where we hold tension or utilize poor alignment when we are actually engaged in the creative process, so that we can avoid harming our bodies in the first place. "I had some physical issues in my neck and shoulders from playing," says flutist and Kripalu yoga teacher Mia Olson, who wrote the book *Musician's Yoga*. "With yoga, I developed more of a mind-body connection. I learned to shift the way I was holding the instrument to cause less strain, and take frequent breaks—to listen to my body instead of playing through the pain." —K.M.

lines or about how any given audition might or might not jump-start her career—that she would inevitably blow every audition. When she discovered yoga and the practice of trustful surrender, she found not only greater peace of mind as an actor—but also greater success.

"I got much better at letting go of the outcome," she says. "In the moment, I would just let the creativity flow through me, like an offering, and then leave and say thank you and go home. The more I learned to let go, the more jobs I booked."

That's not to say that, as an artist, you don't tap into your ambition to get your work out into the world, says Kaur Khalsa. "If you want to really change the world with your work, you may have to

make a spectacle with it, and that can be very beautiful. It may be your dharma to be really out there," she says. "There's nothing unspiritual about that. But surrender your outcome to the Infinite."

Once we approach creative expression from the perspective of mindfulness and devotion, we begin to see art-making itself as a spiritual practice. In this way, our art serves a higher purpose: it helps us become more present in our daily lives and offers us an opportunity to connect more deeply with the universal creative force that resides in us all. ■

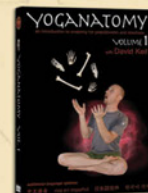
*Karen Macklin is a San Francisco-based writer and yoga teacher. Her plays, poems, journalism, and creative nonfiction have been published and produced both locally and abroad. Visit her online at karenmacklin.com.*

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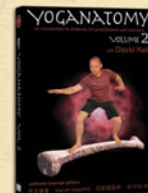
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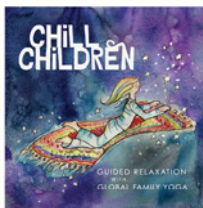
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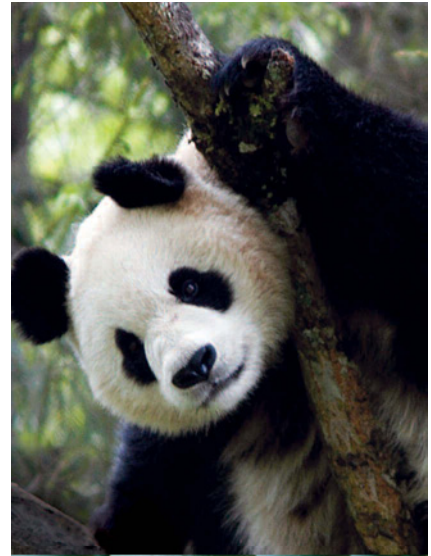
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# Messenger

By Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be  
astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever. ■

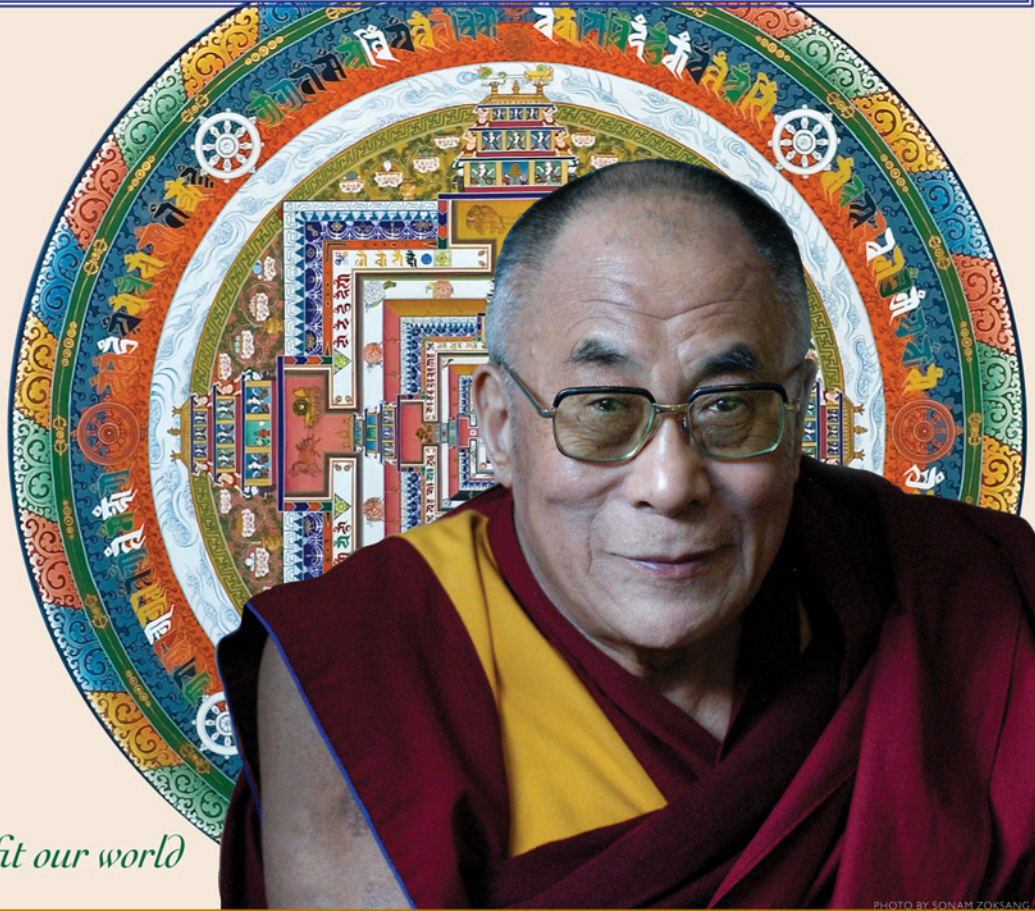
*From Thirst by Mary Oliver.*  
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WITH  
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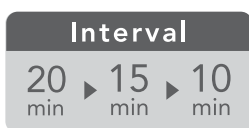
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