

Yoga

FOR BEGINNERS

The Philosophy of Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Secret
of Sleep Meditation and Deep Relaxation with Yoga Nidra.
Includes Teaching of Yoga Poses



AURORA COOPER



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Introduction

I'm sure that a lot of you think that since yoga is an old set of beliefs that not only was it first conceived in India, but the history of yoga also must feature significant events where many of the initial founders of yoga came into contact with other Asian inhabitants from territories outside the borders of India. This conviction might also lead some of you to reach the conclusion that perhaps yoga borrowed and, in some cases,, integrated ideas as a direct result of the Indian founders of yoga interacting with spiritual individuals who hailed from other parts of the Eastern hemisphere. Of course, it's understandable that many of you would harbor such thoughts about yoga, especially those who have never even taken a class centered on the teachings of yoga or when conversing with someone you chose to conceptualize your own interpretation of what yoga resembles in your own mind.

For many people, the very idea of starting yoga stems from such imagery because it is these vivid images that are perhaps incredibly enticing to many who wish to give yoga a try while for others, the word yoga is connected to the idea of being a challenge that would aim to push him or her outside the bounds of their own comfort zone. True, the history of yoga might not resemble the kind of history that is linked to the progression of a country such as the United States over a prolonged period of time that measures how various circumstances and factors compelled the country to shift its gears while continuing to develop its identity as a nation as a whole, but that does not mean that the history of yoga should be seen as something that you can just brush off. There are many details that are worth examining because each of the factors that have occurred in the past has determined the present-day fascination and even the obsession with what yoga has to offer. Thus, it is extremely imperative to examine yoga from a much deeper level in terms of analyzing its historical background as this is the best way that a person can develop a much more enriched and nuanced comprehension on how yoga has been able to spread all over the world and become something that many people native to American soil love to partake in.

There is a lot of mystery concerning the origins of yoga because when yoga was first implemented the writings that were correlated to yoga were conducted on palm leaves that were not exactly the sturdiest of materials to write on, thus a lot

of what was written was susceptible to inevitable destruction, either in the form of disappearing, undergoing severe vandalism, or being consequently obliterated. Though there have been roughly 5,000 years of progress with regards to yoga, some people who have conducted studies on this have found that yoga is perhaps even older, stretching back as far as roughly 10,000 years into the past. Due to this fact, it is important that yoga's history is separated into several major periods of time, which are connected to its birth, progress, and the people who would begin to follow its prominent teachings. While it is obvious that it began several years ago, around 5,000-10,000 years to be more precise, the location in which yoga was conceived is also important to keep in mind.

The era in which yoga first emerged is known as the pre-classical period, and while it is true that yoga was developed on the Indian subcontinent, the region in which yoga was first cultivated was within the northern part of India; however, it should be noted that it was founded by a specific ancient civilization that is known as the Indus-Sarasvati. Despite the point mentioned earlier about how yoga was imprinted into the less sturdy material of palm leaves which has contributed to shrouding much of yoga in mystery, yoga has been mentioned in stronger material as well, such as a collection of written work that is considered to be quite old and is known as the Rig Veda. What is the Rig Veda?

Chapter 1.

History of Yoga



Yoga is incredibly and increasingly popular. This is because yoga is amazing. When most Americans hear the word “yoga” they think of the stretches and postures called asana (āsana) that come to us from Hatha Yoga, and a well-rounded asana practice is indeed uniquely healing. In fact, it saved my life, which you can read all about in my first book, *Yoga to Ease Anxiety*.

There is, undeniably, an emphasis on the physical in American yoga culture. Even when the philosophy is taught, it’s usually from the perspective of how we can apply it to our lives today. This approach is super useful, but the teachings themselves are often taken out of context, which can lead to some confusion. What I hope to offer with this book is an introduction to the story of yoga, its history, and its philosophy in a linear way that is accessible to contemporary teachers and students of yoga.

It is not my intention to tell anyone what they have to believe or what they should or should not do in order to be a yogi or yogini (yoginī). I just want to relate the history of yoga and yogic ideas in a casual, relevant way.

It’s taken me a long time to feel like I know enough to share this information. I first became interested in Eastern philosophies as a teenager after reading the Transcendentalists and Beat poets. As an undergrad, I was a Religious Studies major in a department that took a historical approach, and as a grad student I studied mysticism.

When I decided I was going to commit to the practice of yoga, I read everything about it I could find. And when I decided to do a 200-hour teacher training, I simultaneously enrolled in an 800-hour course in the History, Philosophy, and Literature of Yoga with the great yogic scholar Georg Feuerstein. I felt that if I were going to represent the tradition, I'd better understand it.

When yoga began, it was taught from one teacher to one student, both of whom had renounced the world in pursuit of spiritual liberation. I've been fascinated by the question of how yoga went from that intimate and dedicated scenario to hour-long classes at the local Y. As a teacher, I have continued to bump up against questions, situations in modern yoga that make no sense when compared to its austere history. So, I kept reading, researching, and trying to find answers. I've also spent the last few years serving as faculty for teacher trainings, where students often come up with some of the toughest and most interesting questions. Now I believe I have enough of the puzzle together to share it with others.

It's important to me to present an accurate picture of the yoga tradition. It's also important to me to present the information in a way that is relatable. That's how it goes with yoga: its history is so vast and compelling that when you walk through one door you enter another room full of doors. I make no claim to being comprehensive; that would be impossible.

I also make no claim to objectivity. This is the product of my investigation into the spiritual path I practice and teach. I weave the history of asana throughout the book because it's of interest to American yoga. And the texts I examine are the ones American yoga culture deems important. The translations I use are those that are accessible, as in both easily acquired and easily understood, or at least easier to understand than some of the more academically oriented translations.

My intentions and hopes are to provide a general history, to relate the fundamental philosophies of the yoga tradition, to tell the story of how yoga became what it is and made its way to America, and to spark interest and further investigation into this awesome, kaleidoscopic subject.

Our Map

The history of yoga gets wily in spots. In the beginning there are long stretches of homogeneity and then there are flurries of new ideas and cultural experiments. In the last three hundred years, yoga has been shaped in part by

cross-cultural influences and interconnections. And more recently, dozens of individual personalities have grafted their own particular styles onto the tree of yoga.

To better organize our journey, we'll need a map. What follows is one of several possible approaches to categorizing the main events in the history of yoga. I find it to be the one that makes the story the most intelligible.

Upanishadic Age (1500 – 1000 BCE). The Upanishads are early texts that provide the ideological roots of yoga.

Epic Age (1000 – 100 BCE): In “Great Warriors and the Age of Epics,” we'll enter the stories of larger-than-life heroes and avatars. We'll examine the two illustrious epics of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, for their contributions to yoga.

Because this is a book about the history of yoga, we will pay a lot more attention to the past than to the present. While we'll take a minute at the end to look at the issues and potential of modern-day American yoga, only time will give us the perspective to tell what trends will have a lasting influence.

Throughout the book, we will be covering more horizontal ground than vertical. That is to say, we won't be diving very deep into any one subject. Again, my intention is to provide an overview, an understanding of the big picture of yoga, and hopefully pique your interest in delving further into one area or another.

Along the way, we just might find that there is both a lot more and a lot less that historically falls under the umbrella of yoga than what is represented as doing so today. To show respect for the tradition and to avoid cultural misappropriation means first knowing what is and is not original to it.

Furthermore, for practitioners, having a clear understanding of yoga's history helps us to see our own experiences in context. As Feuerstein put it, “To learn about the historical evolution of Yoga is more than an academic exercise; it actually furthers our self-understanding and hence our efforts to swim free of the boundaries of the ego-personality.”

A Word about Words

Yoga comes to us from Sanskrit, which is the sacred language of the Hindu tradition. Sanskrit is an ancient language that derives from the same Indo-European family of languages as English, which is why we come across

cognates every once in a while. “Yoga” is one of them. It means the same as the English word “yoke.”

There’s a lot of Sanskrit in this book. The first time we see a new Sanskrit word (and sometimes the second if they are far apart from one another) it will be italicized. And the first time we see a word that’s in the glossary it will be in bold. There are a lot of words that are both.

At the moment, there are a few different standards for expressing Sanskrit words in English. One is to use the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST), which has lots of diacritical marks—lines and dots and tildes—on letters to signify how a letter should sound and which syllables should be emphasized. IAST is informative if you know what you’re looking at, but not everybody does.

Another option is to give it our best go using just the plain old Roman alphabet. My compromise between ease of reading and wanting to be as accurate as possible is to list them both, if they are different, on the first usage of the word. I’ve put the IAST version in parentheses, as I’ve already done with (āsana) and (yoginī) above. After that, I use just the naked letters.

I would absolutely recommend spending some time with an online pronunciation guide with audio to learn how the words are supposed to sound. I like the one yoga teacher Tilak Pyle provides,[5] but you may find something that suits you better.

Chapter 2.

What is Yoga?

I bet if you walked into your workplace right now, and asked how many people practice yoga, about one-third of your workplace would raise their hands. Yoga is incredibly popular today and there are many people who practice it. From your grandmother to your dog walker, there are at least two people in your life who practice yoga. If you're reading this book, it's likely that you practice yoga, or you're interested in practicing it. You're not alone. There are roughly 36 million people in the U.S. who practice yoga, and that's a statistic from three years ago (Wei, 2016). Could you imagine how many people practice now? The answer is a lot. I know that's not scientific, but it's a lot. You can't even drive around a city block without seeing a yoga studio.

Yoga is a practice that is enjoyed across the lifespan. Children, teens, adults, and seniors can all enjoy the benefits of yoga and there are classes and practices dedicated to each age group. While we generally see young, thin women in yoga ads, yoga is enjoyed by everyone. In fact, middle-aged adults and seniors practice yoga far more than youths. If you are healthy and fit, or not, you can still benefit from yoga practice.

Despite all the popularity and the endorsements from celebrities about the wonder of yoga, it's hard to know exactly what yoga is exactly. After all, is yoga just stretching? How is it different from other stretches? What makes it so popular?

Yoga is a detailed, beautifully historic practice. When I say, 'meditative exercise,' I use the phrase to show both aspects of yoga. Yoga can be used for mindfulness and meditation, but it's also used for physical exercise. So, there are often two parts to yoga, the physical and the spiritual. Let's look at both parts.

Most of us are aware of yoga as an exercise. When you go to a mainstream yoga class, this is what you typically get. Yoga for exercise is all about moving your muscles and holding stretches to increase your flexibility. It doesn't really matter what type of yoga you do, there is always this element of stretching and some holding, even if it's only for a breath. Whether your practice is slow or fast, you'll have poses that align your body in certain ways to give you relief, or to

cause you to stretch tight muscle groups. By the end of many yoga sessions, you feel loose, light, and often relaxed. If you're doing an active practice, you may even feel worn out.



Yoga works with all muscle groups. For beginners, most of your poses are going to focus on the legs, arms, hips, and some chest poses. Once you move to more advanced poses, you start to work on all parts of your body, stretching your back, shoulders, abdominals, and more. You can even do yoga that focuses on your hands, feet, neck, and head. So, yoga can activate as many muscles as other kinds of physical exercise.

There is a strength component to yoga, though it's more subtle than say lifting weights. This is because it uses your own body weight to increase your strength. People can often add extra parts to yoga for increased strength development, but for the most part, your body weight in specific poses is all there is. The poses help your body to build more strength in each muscle group. They also help to increase your flexibility by reducing muscle stiffness. Of course, just like many other exercises, depending on the type of yoga you do, you may walk away from the session and be sore the next day.

While most of us see yoga as a strength building or flexibility building exercise, it's also a cardio-vascular exercise. Cardio exercises, often called aerobics, help improve your heart health and circulatory health. Running, cycling, and

swimming are all exercises that get your heart racing and in turn help to improve your cardiovascular health. Yoga can also do the same. While there are many slow yoga practices, there are also some very intense ones. There are yoga practices that move very quickly, moving from pose to pose and putting you in strenuous positions. These often cause your heart to race and for you to start sweating as you strain in each position. This cardiovascular benefit is even better if the practice is done for a long duration (think an hour-long class instead of a 15 minute one). So, yoga can also be considered a cardiovascular exercise if it's done with that goal in mind.

The breath also plays a key role in the physical aspects of yoga. You'll often find when you do exercise that you breathe as you like. More often than not, you're breathing shallowly and rapidly if you're doing cardio and sometimes you might even hold your breath when you do other kinds of exercise. In yoga, there is emphasis on the breath, your aim could be to breathe slowly, or sometimes quickly, but always deeply. This helps you to maintain focus as you go through your poses, but also helps connect each movement to a breath. This means that your timing is naturally orientated. It also helps you to truly focus on the 'hows' of your practice. You start to pay more attention to the movement of your shoulders or hips, how your back is positioned, or the angle of your joints. All of this can lead to better, safer, pose positions, but also help strengthen the rest of your body.

So, yoga is a physical exercise that goes beyond just stretching. It offers strength and flexibility training and cardiovascular training. These things are more than just average stretching which most newcomers expect. Incorporating the right breathing also brings you better stability and balance, which are important to most exercises.

Beyond the physical aspects of yoga are the mental and spiritual aspects. Mentally, yoga practice can put you in a 'zone'. You know the zone I'm talking about. It's the zone of perfect focus. Maybe you've experienced the 'zone' at work, when you're working on a perfect project and you are utterly focused on your task. This focus helps you to achieve more. In different circumstances, it can help you engage with others and to quiet the anxiety in your mind. This focus is incredibly beneficial. During a yoga practice, you might find yourself slipping into that perfect 'zone', where your mind is quiet, and you are fully

focused on your body's movement. A lot of people call it a sense of peace when they practice, whether it's a slow yoga practice or a quick one.

Yoga also provides another aspect to that focus. It often provides awareness. Awareness is not just a general awareness of the events in the current day. In combination with focus, awareness means that you are aware of your present moment, what is happening around you and inside of you. This presents a type of clarity. Instead of thinking about what you are going to do later in the day, or stressing about what you did the day before, you are placed in this present moment. A consistent yoga practice can often lead to this moment. So, yoga can increase your focus and awareness inside practice, but these are lessons you can also carry with you.

A key part of achieving awareness and focus during yoga practice is your breathing. By actively choosing to focus on your breathing, you move the function from one that's automatic to one that is consciously thought about. This is very similar to mindfulness, where you focus on the breathing and exclude some of the other thoughts in your mind. Yoga can put you into a mindful state while you are practicing. By focusing on the breath and poses, you move your mind away from emotional stress and focus it instead on the present moment and actions. This results in that feeling of being 'lifted' that many people feel after doing a yoga session. That being said, you don't want to focus on the breath so much that you end up feeling drained at the end of the session. Balance is key.

The mindfulness and meditative aspects of yoga are closely related to spirituality. Spirituality is different from religion, though they do tend to be mistaken for one another. Spirituality is about your connection to the fundamental life questions. Mindfulness and meditation can be a part of spirituality. They can also be a part of religion if you practice a religion where mindfulness and meditation are encouraged. Religions, unlike general spirituality, is about your connection to a fundamental power and usually includes religious texts and rituals. If you are religious, it generally (though not always) affects your spirituality. But if you're spiritual, that doesn't necessarily mean you're religious.

I don't really want to get into the philosophical aspects of religion and spirituality. Suffice it to say that activities that help clear the mind, like yoga, are often considered to be a part of spirituality since they take you beyond yourself and instead help you focus on the moment now. Yoga is only spiritual if that's

how you want it to be. For many people, they only want the physical aspects of yoga, and others practice purely for the spiritual or religious aspects.

Whatever your reasoning for practicing yoga, you can call it an exercise that is both physical and spiritual, which moves it a bit beyond your typical exercise experience.

Chapter 3.

The Eight Limbs Of Yoga

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, an old and solid wellspring of Yoga, alludes to eight limbs of Yoga or Astanga in the Sanskrit dialect. Every last limb is a successive step towards a healthier and even more satisfying life; and asana is only one of these back to back steps. Alternate limbs are the accompanying:

- Yama - this one comprises of rules identified with good conduct towards the group.
- Niyama - this one as well, comprises of rules identified with good conduct towards you as a person.
- Asana - simply like we have as of now seen, Asana is the practice of physical stances and postures.
- Pranayama - this one includes the rehearsing of solid breathing activities.
- Pratyahara - this one includes the withdrawal of all faculties and disposing of any diversions from the outside world.
- Dharana - this one includes focusing and concentrating on something without getting occupied by anything, be it outer or inner.
- Dhyana - this one includes reflection.
- Samadhi - this one expands upon Dharana and it concentrates on the converging of the individual and the universe.

Yoga Is Not a Religion

The vast majority partner yoga with religion, yet in all actuality Yoga is NOT a religion.

This is on the grounds that it doesn't direct or propose a divine being to be worshiped. Religion can be depicted as an association or affiliation where they adore a divinity or gods through conventional ceremonies. This incorporates examining antiquated writings that include an ethical code, which they withstand to under the direction and authority of an appointed person.

The individuals who have practiced Yoga can say that Yoga does to be sure have something in the same manner as religion; for instance, there is the investigation of old writings and the get-togethers to examine under an accomplished pioneer. Notwithstanding this, these two alone, don't make up a religion; regardless of the way that there are some Yoga practices that do advance intercession on an all-inclusive soul, which is at times alluded to as god.

Yoga assigns conventional physical and mental orders beginning in India. Hot yoga is the same teach yet practiced in climes that are no less than 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Bikram's yoga is practiced in hot situations also yet there are particular arrangements of movement's poses numbering 26 aggregate. It centers upon the development of a sound personality and body, and on accomplishing mindfulness. The different practices and controls of yoga are accessible to everybody, regardless of what their way of life or conviction frameworks. Yoga practice likewise includes creating all inclusive mindfulness and individual refinement through the yamas and niyamas, a progression of morals and controls proposed to develop living in amicability with others and in unity with our actual selves.

Yama - Yamas are moral teaches that identify with how we ought to live in a mutual world with peace and respectability. Niyama - These controls identify with the individual and concentrate on living a solid, satisfied and mind-blowing life. Asana - The word asana implies to be', in the feeling of being in a stance. The asanas were produced for the support of a sound personality and body, with every stance influencing the body, brain and feelings in a one of a kind ways and filling in as a pathway to adjust and wellbeing. Pranayama - In the practice of pranayama, we create breathing systems that build oxygen allow and reinforce lung limit while likewise expanding the retention of prana, or life force. In its most straightforward form, pranayama includes profound, full relaxing. With consistent yoga practice of yoga, you will get quality, adaptability and great wellbeing, the advantages of which stream into all parts of life. Expanded vitality levels bring another point of view on life, the incrassated emotions of self-esteem and motivation lead us to find abilities and intrigues we never knew existed and issues that once appeared to be overpowering turn out to be more reasonable.

Yoga is an old profound way. At its embodiment it implies union. There are a wide range of perspectives or limbs inside of the way of yoga. Asana, or the physical part of yoga has increased expanding notoriety in the North America.

Most understudies who practice yoga to do as such at yoga studios, yet regularly enthusiasts fancy a space to practice their yoga at home. On the off chance that you are considering setting up a space for yoga, you don't have to do any significant upgrades that will impact the structure or re-deal estimation of your home. Keep with the straightforward embodiment of yoga and you will make a room that suits your needs and won't oblige real remodels.

Quite a bit of yogic logic is considering adjust, straightforwardness and simplicity of effort. Consider these qualities when drawing closer your new yoga room and its style.

Pick a room in your home that has enough security. A room with an entryway that closes is ideal, so you can enter your space and have relative protection amid your practice. Likewise, consider a room that has a sufficient measure of characteristic light. The biggest redesign, you may need to consider is the establishment of hardwood or stopper floors. Effectively covered floors are additionally adequate.

Preferably, you need to pick a room that gives you enough space to extend on the floor longwise. The roof ought to be sufficiently high to permit you to remain on the tips of your toes with your arms extended as high overhead as you can reach. In the event that there are certain to be a greater number of yogis than yourself in your room, consider that these estimations should be duplicated by the quantity of members.

You will require a wardrobe or a racking unit for capacity of yoga props, for example, mats, reinforces pieces, straps and eye packs. Here, you may need to store yoga writing and maybe a sound framework, if you appreciate honing to music or utilizing guided practice discs.

At the point when painting your yoga room considers shading that inspires quiet. Look to nature to move you shading sense of taste. A decent place to begin is with hues in the delicate green and blue hues. You can then embellish the dividers with sprinkles of shading maybe a most loved yoga notice, a cutting or possibly some request to God banners close to a window. If you do a livelier form of yoga, you may need to look to a more outlandish and energizing sense of taste of reds and purples to move your practice. Imagine a room that reflects you and your practice and that in a perfect world stays consistent with the stylistic theme of your whole home.

Make central focuses. Spot candles, statues, cards and photographs in places that

are significant to you in your practice. Scan for pieces that inspire an inclination of center and cool. At all times, maintain a strategic distance from any jumble in your room.



Chapter 4.

What Yoga Can Bring in Your Life?

The joints are a location, a joining, they are the place in which two bones connect. These joints can be immovable, such as where the bones of your skull connect or like where the six bones that make up your pelvis meet together. However, more frequently we categorize joints as slightly or fully movable. This includes joints such as many joints within the spine, the three in the wrist, or even the larger single joints like your hips, knees, elbows, and shoulders.

First, we need to look at the anatomy of a joint. Just because a joint is two bones connecting doesn't mean there isn't anything else making up your joints. Your joints are not merely two bones poking and prodding each other. Instead, they have components to help connect them, so that your body can work as a fully mobile unit.

Along with the bones, your joints are also made up of tendons connecting the muscle to bone, ligaments to connect the bones together, cartilage to help cushion the bones and prevent them from grinding up on each other, and synovial fluid. The purpose of this fluid is to act as lubrication so that your joints don't create friction, get stuck, or cause damage to any of the components.

When a joint is healthy all of its components work in harmony with a full range of movement. This results in a perfect slide between the adjoining bones in which the pressure is evenly distributed to prevent injury. Usually, there won't be pain, as there isn't excess cartilage fragments and it has the proper amount of synovial fluid.

On the other hand, if a joint is unhealthy it really frequently result in pain. What causes a joint to be unhealthy? If any single component of the joint is not properly working, it is a problem. This means if there is too little synovial fluid, if there are excessive cartilage fragments, if a ligament or tendon develops a tear, or if the bones themselves are damaged.

One of the most common causes of joint damage is osteoarthritis. This is a degenerative disease of the joint where the cartilage in the joints begins to wear and break down, causing the bones to grind together with friction. The result is

pain, inflammation, and a loss of motion.

Contracture.

Even people without osteoarthritis experience damage and pain in their joints. One common example of this is when people experience contracture, which is when the joint loses mobility, it is a shrink wrapping of the joints. There are many potential causes of this condition, such as illness, cartilage or ligament damage, muscle atrophy, and nerve damage. One of the most common causes of contracture is a problem in the ligaments of your joints.

As we go about life, we can develop tiny microscopic tears in your ligaments. These tears are so small that they aren't even visible on the strongest of magnetic imaging scans. All the while, these microscopic tears still cause small wounds that must be healed by adding in new ligament tissue where it is missing, in much the same way that you might add in a missing piece on a puzzle.

It has long been known that your ligaments function by healing in this way. But, it for a long time it was a mystery why your ligaments don't end up too long if they form tears, fill with more ligament tissue, and repeat. After all, if you stretched a piece of saltwater taffy and every time it tore added in more taffy you would have an ever-growing taffy piece. The taffy would simply get longer and longer as it would never stop stretching, tearing, and patching.

In search of an answer to this ever-puzzling question, Professor Laurence Dahners of the University of North Carolina found the answer. What he found resulted in a groundbreaking discovery. It turns out that the body has a function which works as shrink-wrap, which coats your joints and works on removing any extra ligament material so that they don't become too long. There is one part that maintains and creates the material for your ligaments and another part that actively removes excessive material. We see this pattern all over the body, there is a similar aspect that works in your bones in which osteoblasts work to create bone tissue while osteoclasts dissolve bone tissue. It is a give and take, once again Yin and Yang.

You can actively witness the examples of this shrink-wrapping ligaments in your own life. Think back on a time when you were injured, maybe you sprained your arm or broke your foot. You were likely put in either a cast or a sling for a number of weeks or months. When it comes to time to take the sling or cast off you find that your arm or leg don't move as easily as it once did. Now, your joint

is moving more slowly, and it feels stiff; it might even “freeze” in place stuck for a moment. This is because as you were not stretching and using your ligaments the body naturally took away what it saw as excess material that you weren’t using. When it was time to once again resume normal use of your limb you felt the lacking ligament. Thankfully, this is never a problem. Sure, your limb may be stiff for a day or two, but, as you go about usual use of your limb the ligament will stretch and any microscopic tears that form in the process will be filled in until your ligament is back to its usual length.

Of course, some people experience contracture without first developing an injury and having their joints immobilized for a period of weeks. This can happen when you naturally limit your own mobility. For instance, if a person who has practiced yoga daily for years and someone who has never attempted yoga both attempted the same yoga pose or asana, then obviously the person who had never practiced yoga will be much stiffer and less flexible. That person simply will not have the same range as the experienced yoga student.

The good news is that you can easily and naturally treat contracture all by practicing Yin style yoga. While the muscles get their best workout from rapid movements, such as cardio, ligaments get their best workout from still stretching, by applying a traction, which as you know is one of the basic definitions of Yin yoga. In fact, if a person stretches too quickly, as can happen in Yang yoga, it can cause the ligaments to tear too much, resulting in injury, inflammation, and pain.

Because you stretch your ligaments too much, if you quickly move it will disrupt them while they are in a vulnerable state, causing injury. This is why we always stress the importance of slow movements not only entering the pose but exiting the pose, as well.



Fixation.

We all hear a snap, crackle, and pop come from your bodies occasionally when we move. While most people know that these can be caused by friction and the release of gas, many people are unaware of the third cause: fixation.

Sometimes, there will be a bubble of nitrogen that forms in this synovial fluid. When these bubbles release you hear a pop, this is the release of gas that causes popping. Whenever this happens, it will be a while until you can pop the joint again, as there are no more bubbles in it.

Friction happens when two surfaces of the joint rub against each other, and it can happen repeatedly in a row without a break in-between. Just as you may press your finger and thumb together to snap, therefore making a sound with friction, a similar reaction can happen within your joint. This happens when tendons, ligaments, or cartilage temporarily becomes stuck, causing it to press together until it can no longer hold and then firmly releasing with friction, causing the same snapping sound within the joint. A good example of this is when a person cracks their own knuckles or a doctor cracks someone's neck.

The final cause, and greatly unknown by many people, is fixation. But what is fixation? Put simply, it is when two surfaces temporarily become fixed together, it is the temporary joining together of two surfaces. When the two surfaces

become unstuck and release, the resulting sound or popping is the creaks and pops we all hear in your own joints from time to time. Often, the pops you experience when you go into a yoga pose is a result of this fixation. Usually, the resulting pop causes a feel-good pressure release.

There are three conditions that must be met in order for fixation to take place:

First, both surfaces must be smooth. This means that your bones are the perfect material to become fixed to each other, as they are smooth. It wouldn't work if they were textured like sandpaper.

Second, there must be a fluid acting as a lubricant between the two surfaces, just as it happens in our joints.

Thirdly, the two surfaces must be under enough pressure to push them together.

Many of us experience fixation in a variety of ways in your everyday lives, and not just within your bodies. For instance, if you are washing dishes you might find that two pieces of silicone become fixed together. This happens because the silicone is a smooth surface, there is water to act as a lubricant, and as you are handling the material you apply the pressure. The two pieces of silicone then become temporarily fixed and must be separated. The same principle carries out in your joints.

There are very good reasons for caring to break this fixation. Firstly, it feels good as it releases the pressure between the two bones. But, more importantly, it is not healthy for the bones to maintain fixation for long-term periods. If bones become fixed within the joint and we do not remove the fixation, then the two bones can become fused together. The result would be an immovable joint, that would require surgery to gain use of again. Thankfully, we can prevent this from ever happening by releasing the fixations naturally and easily. When you practice Yin yoga you are moving the joints just further than you usually would, which applies just a bit of pressure to the joint, allowing the fixation to dissipate and the pressure to release.

Chapter 5.

Practice

Yin yoga is based upon the Hindu teachings which endorse the idea of a triumvirate of Gods. These three gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are responsible for building, preserving and destroying the world. This process is seen as a necessity to ensure that change is always present, and the world becomes a better place. As such Shiva, the destroyers are seen as both Yin and Yang, a good force and a bad force.

This teaching may seem a little mystical in nature, particularly in comparison with the modern world and the amount of scientific research illustrating the existence or non-existence of gods. However, the principle behind this story is what matters and what is still true today.

As you start to explore Yin yoga and use it to look inward, at your own beliefs, fears and desires you will realize that the negative things which you hold onto need to be released and are actually good things, not bad. Destruction and negative issues are essential to generating a healing environment; confronting these issues will allow you to learn and flourish as an individual. This is one of the core principles of Yin yoga; the ability to know yourself and listen to both your own mind and the world around you. Indeed, through the pain of destruction comes the beauty of healing and new beginnings.

Yin yoga can provide you with the strength to carry on through difficult times and allows you to work through the emotions that come with difficult situations, emerging the other side as a stronger, more balanced person.

The passive exercises which are now known as Yin yoga are a part of ancient Chinese and Indian history. It was originally used to still the mind, allowing meditation and focus for other parts of a training program. These exercises still work in the same way today, this is why Yin yoga should always be practiced alongside Yang yoga, the two are opposing sides of the same coin and both are needed to obtain true balance in your life.

The position should be moved into slowly, it should encourage you to be still and in touch with your inner self and to hold the position for a long period of

time. Finally, you should release the pose slowly to ensure no harm is done to the body or mind.

The ancient Chinese believed that Yin yoga was a method of controlling and connecting with the qi energy that is present in every living being. This energy is present in everything that you do, it comes in and out of the body in the same way as you breathe and is an essential companion to yin and yang. Yin yoga and Yang yoga are both ways in which you can get in touch with the qi energy in your body and, by listening to the stillness learn to understand the needs of your body and direct your energy accordingly. Balance is the key principle of yoga, the rise of Yin yoga can be said to be an effect of too much Yang yoga. The two must be balanced to ensure everything is harmonious. Yoga studios around the western world now generally offer both Yin and Yang yoga classes; it is recommended to study both disciplines.



Yin yoga can, in theory, be practiced anywhere. Certainly, the guiding principle of Yin yoga advocates that there are no absolutes, only what is best for each person. However, to ensure you make the most of the time you have available it is best to follow these guidelines:

- Find a space where you are unlikely to be disturbed. This will mean away from other people and the background noise that comes with them. Of course, the better you become at Yin yoga and focusing your attention inwards the easier it will be to block out external events. You may also find it beneficial, when first starting Yin yoga, to have your back to any window or potential distraction.
- Ideally Yin yoga should be practiced when your muscles are cold; this is to ensure that the exercises work on the connective tissues and not the muscles. Cold muscles will pass on the stress to the connective tissues easier than warm muscles will.
- Your muscles will be colder first thing in the morning as they have not had the opportunity to warm up by completing any exercises. This makes first thing a good time to perform your Yin yoga exercises.
- Last thing at night can also be a good time to do your exercises. This will not provide as much of a benefit to your muscles as they will be warmer from the day's activities. However, Yin yoga is very relaxing, and this can be of great benefit to the mind and body at the end of a stressful day.
- Yin yoga can also be a great way to warm up before a more strenuous Yang yoga session. It will not only warm your muscles and stretch both them and the connecting tissues; it will also ensure you are in the right frame of mind for your Yang exercises.
- Yin yoga is very important in spring and summer as these tend to be much more hectic times of year. As such, it is particularly important to create an exercise regime and stick to it. This will ensure you stay balanced and focused.
- Equally, if you find that your life has become very busy and even more stressful than normal it will be essential to make extra time for your Yin yoga. It is during the busiest times in your life that yoga can often be overlooked, yet this is actually when it is most important; it will prevent you from becoming over stressed.
- You may have noticed that travelling is very tiring, whether walking, driving flying or even using the train. This is because, despite most of the time being spent sat, it is actually a yang activity. Finding the time to do some Yin yoga after a trip will help to rebalance your body and rebuild your

energy levels.

There are also general guidelines which should be considered before you undertake Yin yoga, even though it is less strenuous than Yang yoga or many other exercises:

- Being pregnant does not mean you cannot practice Yin yoga. It does, however, mean that you should check with your doctor to ensure it is safe for you and your unborn baby.
- If you already have a health condition, such as high blood pressure or diabetes it is best to check with a physician before you start any form of yoga.
- Perfume or after-shave should be avoided if you are going to perform yoga. Many of the exercises require deep breathing and it can be potentially harmful breathing in these fumes for an extended period.
- Ideally you should not eat within two hours of the start of your class or exercise routine.
- Yin yoga is still strenuous, and it is advisable not to do it when you are exhausted. If you really feel the need to do so, keep the exercises short and stick to the gentler positions.
- Prolonged exposure to the sun will deplete the body's reserves and may leave you at risk of dehydration. If you have spent a long time in the sun it is better to avoid your Yin yoga practice and allow your body to recover.
- Watches or bracelets can become uncomfortable when you are holding a pose for a long time. It is better to remove them before you start a session; if you wear glasses it is better to remove these as well.
- Loose, comfortable clothing is essential to ensure you can hold your poses for the time intended. Anything restrictive will be an issue!
- As Yin yoga is a passive form of exercise you will not generate much heat internally. It is therefore essential to be prepared for this. You may wish to turn the thermostat up or to add an extra layer or two.
- Equally, you should make sure that the spot your practice in is well away from any drafts or moving cold air; this can quickly lower your body temperature and ruin a good session.

- Cushions and other sorts of padding are essential to ensure you are comfortable in a variety of poses. Equally, it is advisable to have a thick yoga mat. Many of the exercises are completed whilst sitting or lying down so the possibility of losing grip thanks to sweaty hands is not really an option and a thick mat will be adequate; as well as more comfortable.
- Allow yourself enough time. If you know you only have an hour then aim to finish your practice within forty-five minutes. You do not need to be rushed; this will destroy the effects of the exercise and probably stop you from relaxing fully during your session.

Chapter 6.

Yoga Poses

Please note that for each pose, in addition to the props listed, you'll of course need your yoga mat. I also recommend laying a half-fold blanket over your mat for added comfort and keeping another blanket nearby to cover yourself in case you need a little extra warmth. In any of the reclining postures, you may cover your eyes with an eye pillow or small washcloth to help you relax more deeply.

Opening Pose •20 to 30 minutes



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

Blanket roll

Square eighth-fold blanket (or neck pillow)

PRECAUTIONS

- If you are pregnant, substitute Pregnant Goddess or Side Lying Pose.
- If you experience lower back or knee pain, place two blocks under your bolster or roll up three blankets to make a bigger bolster.

BENEFITS

- Maintains and supports the natural curves of your spine.
- Softens your psoas, the deep hip flexor muscles that can become chronically contracted if you spend extended periods sitting, and diaphragm muscle to support a natural, easy breath.
- Relaxes your whole body to aid in stress reduction, slows heart rate, and lowers blood pressure.
- Helps relieve lower back pain.
- Encourages feelings of grounding, belonging, and peace.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. From a sitting position, draw your knees over the bolster and rest your ankles on the blanket roll.
2. Lie back and rest your head on the eighth-fold blanket. Roll up the edge of the blanket so it supports the curve of your neck without forcing your chin toward your chest.
3. Cover yourself with a blanket, cover your eyes, and release your arms alongside your body with your palms facing up.
4. Remain in Basic Relaxation Pose for up to 30 minutes. To exit, draw your knees in toward your chest, roll to one side, and press yourself up to a sitting position.

TIP

Adding weight can help make this pose feel even more grounding. Place a heavy folded blanket or yoga sandbag on your chest or across your lap to help you relax more deeply.

Simple Supported Side Bend

3 to 5 minutes per side



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

Square eighth-fold blanket

PRECAUTIONS

- If you have a spinal injury, replace the bolster with one or two stacked long eighth-fold blankets to reduce the curve in your spine.

BENEFITS

- Gently stretches your obliques, latissimus dorsi, and intercostal muscles.
- Gently decompresses your spine.
- Invites your breath to deepen.
- Supports and maintains your spine in normal, healthy lateral flexion.
- Helps relieve lower back pain.
- Encourages a feeling of flexibility.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sit on your right hip with your knees bent and feet tucked behind you and bring the long edge of the bolster up against your right thigh.
2. Roll up the blanket and place it on the other side of the bolster with a small gap in between.
3. Lay your right side over the bolster, placing your right shoulder in the gap between the bolster and the blanket. Release your right arm out in front of you and rest your head on the blanket.
4. Rest your left arm on your side or draw it up alongside your left ear for a little more length.
5. Remain in the side bend for 3 to 5 minutes. To exit, place your left hand onto the bolster and press yourself up. Leave the props as they are and turn yourself around to sitting on your left hip to repeat the pose on the other side.

TIP

Place a blanket or pillow between your knees for more support or to relieve discomfort in your knees or hips.

Grounding Spinal Twist

Twist • 3 to 5 minutes per side



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

PRECAUTIONS

- If spinal rotation is contraindicated for you (in the case of spinal injury or pregnancy), skip this pose.

BENEFITS

- Supports and maintains your spine in normal, healthy rotation.
- Gently decompresses your spine.
- Gently stretches your lumbar muscles.
- Helps relieve back pain.
- Invites feelings of connection and stability.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sit on your right hip with your knees bent and your feet tucked in behind you and bring the narrow end of the bolster up against your right hip.

2. Place your hands on either side of the bolster. Sit up tall and turn your navel and heart toward the bolster. Slowly lower your torso down and place either cheek on the bolster.
3. Remain in the twist for 3 to 5 minutes. To exit, place your hands on either side of the bolster and press yourself up. Leave the bolster where it is and turn yourself around to sitting on your left hip to repeat the pose on the other side.

TIP

It's common to try to support yourself with your arms in this pose, so make sure to take your elbows a little wider and relax, letting the bolster do the work for you.

Spine Lengthening Pose

Backbend • 5 to 10 minutes



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

Blanket roll

PRECAUTIONS

- If you are pregnant, substitute Pregnant Goddess Pose or Supported Heart Pose with Legs Over a Bolster.

BENEFITS

- Gently decompresses your spine.
- Supports and maintains your spine in normal, healthy extension.
- Gently stretches your chest and shoulders.
- Reverses the effects of long periods spent sitting and slouching.
- Invites your breath to deepen.
- Encourages feelings of spaciousness and receptivity.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. From a sitting position, draw your knees over the bolster and position the end of the blanket roll at the base of your spine.
2. Use your arms for support and lie back so the blanket roll runs along the length of your spine and supports your head.
3. Release your arms alongside you with your palms facing up and relax.
4. Remain in Spine Lengthening Pose for 5 to 10 minutes. To exit, draw your knees in toward your chest, roll to one side, and press yourself up to a sitting position.

TIP

A common error is to sit on the blanket roll before lying down and miss out on the spinal massage in this pose. Make sure your hips are between the bolster and blanket roll before you lie down to create length.

Heart Pose

Backbend • 5 to 10 minutes



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

PRECAUTIONS

- If you are pregnant, substitute Pregnant Goddess Pose.
- If you suffer from lower back pain or sensitivity, substitute Supported Heart Pose with Legs Over a Bolster.

BENEFITS

- Gently decompresses your spine.
- Gently stretches your chest, shoulders, and abdomen.
- Reverses the effects of long periods spent sitting and slouching.
- Invites your breath to deepen.
- Naturally boosts your energy and supports feelings of joy and abundance.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. From a sitting position, extend your legs out in front of you and bring the

narrow end of the bolster up to the base of your spine. Using your arms for support, relax your abdominal muscles and lie back onto the bolster.

2. Remain in Heart Pose for 5 to 10 minutes. To exit, bend your knees, roll to one side, and press yourself up to a sitting position.

TIP

If the bolster feels too high for your spine in this position and the sensation is too intense, move your hips away from the bolster slightly to create some space and lessen the curve in your spine.

Supported Forward Fold

Forward Bend • 5 to 8 minutes



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

Block (or large hardcover book)

Square eighth-fold blanket

PRECAUTIONS

- If forward bending is contraindicated for your spine, substitute Legs Up the Wall or Head to Bolster Pose.

BENEFITS

- Supports and maintains your spine in normal, healthy flexion.
- Gently stretches your back muscles and hamstrings.
- Can help relieve neck and jaw tension and headache.
- Encourages inward contemplation and self-awareness.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sit with your legs stretched out in front of you, with your feet about hip-width apart.
2. Place a block on its tallest setting between your shins. Set the narrow end of the bolster in your lap so that the other end rests on the block. Place the blanket on the bolster and lean forward, resting your abdomen, heart, and cheek on the bolster. Relax your arms by your sides.
3. Halfway through, turn your head and place the opposite cheek down for an equal stretch of your neck.
4. Remain in Supported Forward Fold for 5 to 8 minutes. To exit, press your hands into the bolster and sit up.

TIP

If you can't easily bring your torso to the bolster, add more blankets to bring the bolster to you so you can relax in the pose.

Supported Child's Pose

Forward Bend • 5 to 8 minutes



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

2 blocks (or large hardcover books)

PRECAUTIONS

- If you are unable to bend your knees enough to support this pose, substitute Supported Forward Fold or Supported Half Frog.

BENEFITS

- Supports and maintains your spine in normal, healthy flexion.
- Gently stretches your back muscles, glutes, and quadriceps muscles.
- Helps relieve back pain.
- Helps soothe anxiety and restlessness.
- Fosters a sense of calm and steadiness.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Come to your hands and knees and bring your big toes together. Keep your knees wide. Sit back on your heels and place one block between your

knees and the other block just in front of it.

2. Place the bolster on the blocks so one end is between your knees.
3. Using your arms for support, bow forward onto the bolster and place your abdomen, heart, and either cheek on the bolster. Relax your arms.
4. Halfway through, turn your head and place the opposite cheek down for an equal stretch of your neck.
5. Remain in Supported Child's Pose for 5 to 8 minutes. To exit the pose, place your palms down on either side of the bolster and press down to lift to sitting on your heels. Come onto your seat and stretch out your legs.

TIP

If your hips don't come all the way to your heels or you feel strain in your knees here, place folded blankets in the back of your knees for support.

Reclining Butterfly

Hip Opener • 5 to 8 minutes



PROPS

Long eighth-fold blanket

Blanket roll

PRECAUTIONS

- If you are pregnant, substitute Pregnant Goddess Pose.
- If you experience discomfort in your knees or hips in this pose, use blocks or more blankets to prop up your thighs.

BENEFITS

- Supports and maintains your hips in gentle, healthy external rotation.
- Gently stretches your inner thigh muscles.
- Helps relieve hip pain due to long periods spent sitting.
- Encourages dual sensations of grounding and expansion.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. From a sitting position, place the long eighth-fold blanket behind you with

the narrow end touching the base of your spine.

2. Bend your knees and bring the soles of your feet together, opening your knees wide to make a diamond shape with your legs.
3. Place the middle of the blanket roll on top of your feet, then draw the ends around your ankles to meet behind your heels so your outer shins are supported.
4. Using your hands for support, lie back onto the blanket behind you.
5. Remain in Reclining Butterfly for 5 to 8 minutes. To exit, use your hands to draw your knees together, then roll to one side and press yourself up to a sitting position.

TIP

If you've been feeling down or sitting a lot and want to increase feelings of openness, take your arms out wide. If you've been feeling scattered or anxious and are seeking more grounding, place one hand on your heart and the other on your abdomen.

Elevated Legs Up the Wall

Inversion • 5 to 10 minutes



PROPS

Bolster (or 2 rolled blankets or a large pillow)

Square eighth-fold blanket

PRECAUTIONS

- Inverting is contraindicated for pregnancy, hernia, severe acid reflux, brain injuries, glaucoma, and high blood pressure. In these cases, substitute Legs Up the Bolster.
- If this pose aggravates your lower back, substitute Legs Up the Wall.

BENEFITS

- Supports your body in a gentle inversion, taking gravitational pressure off your legs and feet.
- Improves heart rate variability.
- Can alleviate swollen feet and tired legs.

- Soothes a frayed nervous system and tired mind.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place the long edge of your bolster against the wall.
2. Sit on the bolster with one hip touching the wall; then, using your arms for support, lean back and gently swing your legs up the wall.
3. Lie back and use the blanket to support your head. Release your arms out wide.
4. Remain in Elevated Legs Up the Wall for 5 to 10 minutes. To exit, bend your knees into your chest and carefully roll off the bolster to one side, then press yourself up to a sitting position.

TIP

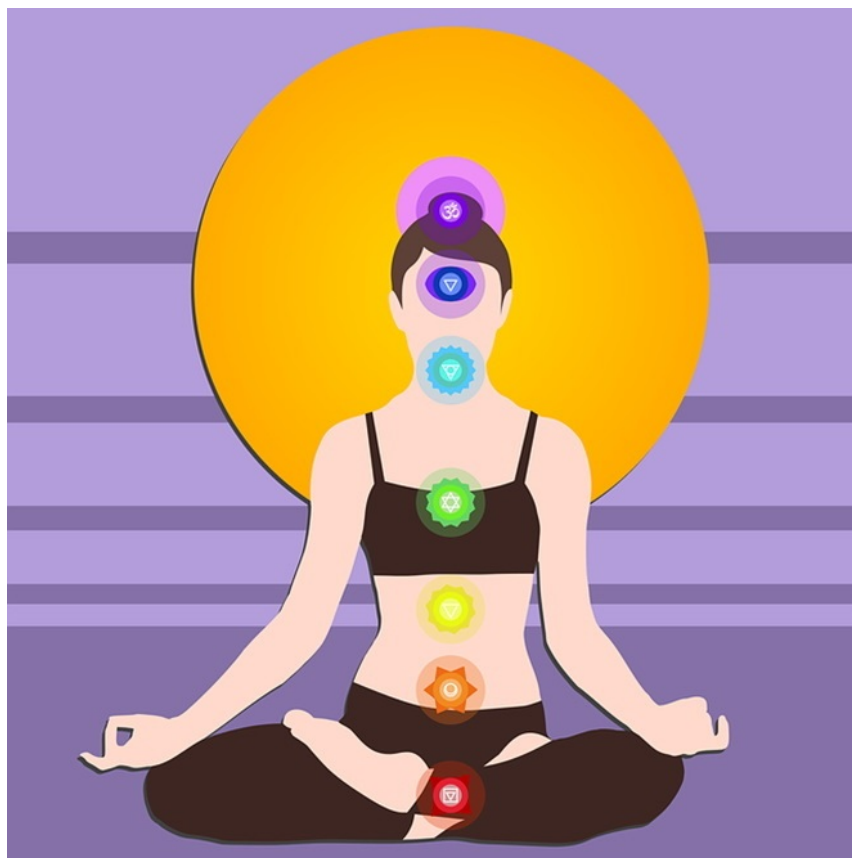
If you've spent a long day on your feet, try this pose right before bed to relieve aches and pains in your legs and feet and calm your mind to prepare for a good night's sleep.

Chapter 7.

Navigating Chakra Yoga

Approach the chakra yoga practice by first discovering where your blockages are, and then learning which poses and sequences balance the chakra that you need to work on. This will help inform your practice and give you a guided and structured approach that will be more effective in healing you faster. Once you have decided what you would like to focus on, put a plan into place that will help you work toward achieving your goals.

Also, be aware that as you become more in touch with your body, you may notice imbalances in multiple chakras. You might want to work on everything at once but be cautious. As with most things, it is best to focus on one thing at a time. You may move through a yoga sequence that addresses different chakras, giving you a full-body experience; however, if you have a specific goal of unlocking your root chakra, for instance, then start with that and focus most of your energy there first.



There are seven major chakras. The root chakra is known as the first major chakra because it is at the bottom of the spine and acts as the foundation for the rest of the chakras. If you are looking to balance more than one of your chakras, it is best to begin at the lowest one. This will create a ripple effect as healing works its way up the system along the spine, building a solid foundation for all the chakras to heal and thrive.

Practice as often as you can, but at least once a week. If you can practice daily, go for it. Start with one session and try to fit more into your schedule as time goes on. You will likely find yourself wanting to increase the frequency of your sessions because of how good you feel afterward.

Creating Your Own Practice

Since you are reading this book, it is likely that you are looking to form an at-home yoga practice and ritual for yourself. Creating a dedicated yoga space in your home is a great way to generate habit and a sense of desire to get onto your mat and practice regularly. This space should be aesthetically pleasing to you and calming for your mind. It should help the flow of creativity and inspire you not only in your yoga practice, but in other areas of your life as well. If you do

not have a designated space in your home where you can keep your yoga props out at all times, store them, and when you take them out for practice, you are creating a ritual—a tradition—that you will ultimately find a regular sense of comfort in.

I will go into the necessary yoga props in a bit more detail later, but first I'll mention that it is really nice to have a dedicated yoga mat that is only yours. This yoga mat is your sacred place, where you can come to heal your mind, body, and spirit. It should be treated well, cleaned, and stored in a protective way. It is also common for people to use the public mats at their studio or gym where they attend classes. While this is a fine option if you are short on space at home, it is not ideal if you are looking to build a personal chakra yoga practice for yourself and your overall healing. I highly encourage you to invest in and take good care of your own yoga mat for your practice.

As you begin to develop your own practice, you will come to find that your yoga mat is your special zone, an area that brings you joy. I have had the same yoga mat for about five years, and it is still going strong. The dusty pink color brings me joy every time I look at it, and the material feels good when it meets my skin. I have great affinity for my mat, and I almost think of it as an old friend who is always there for me no matter what is going on in my life. I believe that everyone should have the same kind of relationship with their yoga mat because it strengthens the special bond you have with your yoga practice.

Speaking of bonding with your practice: It is important to not only set up a designated yoga space, but also to establish a routine for yourself. Consider what you would like to accomplish and use that as motivation to keep coming back to your practice. Goal setting—to have a clear picture in your mind about what you would like to achieve—is so important in all aspects of life, and your yoga practice is no different. Goals will help you establish your practice on your own terms and stay motivated to keep coming back to your mat.

LISTENING TO YOUR BODY

This book will guide you step-by-step through the yoga poses and sequences to take the guesswork out of what you should be doing when practicing the yoga asanas. This will aid your practice, but it is no substitute for an in-person yoga teacher and your knowledge about your own body. If you find yourself struggling, or if something does not feel good, then move out of that pose; do not force yourself. Use modifications and yoga props where needed to help the pose

feel better in your body. Always use your body as a guide and listen to its cues. While it is great to challenge yourself to grow and improve, forcing yourself into a yoga pose that you are not ready for is never the answer. There are ways to work your way up to achieving the full expression of the poses, and you must be patient with yourself.

It is important to recognize the difference between the good type of pain, which is helping you get stronger, and the bad type of pain, which is causing your body harm. If you experience sharp pain in a joint (where two bones are fitted together), then move out of the pose immediately. Dull pain in the middle of the muscles is okay as your muscles stretch and gain flexibility. Your body is very smart, and you can trust its signals. You just have to know how to interpret the messages.

Holding Poses

In this book, I will advise a suggested amount of time to hold each pose within a sequence, but it is also important to listen to your body and make that decision for yourself. As you deepen your practice and get more accustomed to practicing yoga regularly, you will begin to develop an intuition about how long to stay in each pose.

For a hatha or vinyasa yoga class, you should hold the poses for three to five deep and full breaths, in and out through the nose. For a yin or restorative practice, you will hold the poses for much longer, generally three to five minutes each, which translates to 20 to 30 deep and full breaths. But these are not hard-and-fast rules. At times, your teacher or the yoga sequence you are following may advise you to hold a certain pose for a bit longer to emphasize a certain movement, or they may just pass through a pose more quickly. It depends on many different factors, including the class style, the purpose or theme of that class or sequence, and the teacher.

You can also look for signals from your body to let you know when it is time to exit a pose. As I mentioned earlier, you will need to listen to your body and understand which types of pain are good and which are bad. Your body will always want to choose the path of least resistance, so understanding that some types of pain are good is crucial to your growth. When in doubt, if the pain is too intense, come out of it until you have a better grasp on what you should and should not be feeling. This wisdom will come over time, so as always, be patient with yourself and continue to practice regularly and consistently.

LEAVING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Many people in the yoga world speak about finding your “edge” in the pose and taking your body there before coming out of it. You will learn more about where your personal edge is over time as you progress through your yoga practice. A good guideline for finding where that edge is for yourself is understanding when your body’s survival mode tends to kick in. This is the moment when your body generally gets tired and wants to choose the path of least resistance. Once you realize that the pain or discomfort you may be experiencing is not the bad type of pain and you are able to stay in the pose without causing harm to your body, then you can acknowledge and move past your edge.

When you reach and move past your edge, not only does your body improve, get stronger, and gain flexibility, but you also experience the change of energy flow within your chakras. Change must occur in order to achieve balance in your chakras, especially if you have a blockage in a certain area. You will learn this over time through your personal journey, so trust the process and be patient with yourself.

Harnessing Your Breath

The breath is a vital aspect of a yoga practice and moving through the yoga poses, and it can also be used as a tool to support and advance your practice. There are specific breathing techniques and exercises that you can do to feel relaxed, gain energy, feel grounded, and more. However, you can simply incorporate breathing into your asana practice as well to help you feel better in the poses and improve within your body.

The life force of your body is your breath, and therefore “prana,” “breath,” and “energy” can be used interchangeably. While there is a difference between energy and breath in terms of physicality and location within the body, breath is simply the release or intake of energy. When you inhale, you are bringing energy and power in, and that energy continues to flow through the body and the chakras. When you exhale, you are releasing energy out of the body, continuing the pathway of the flow of energy.

Breath can be used as a tool to help you feel more relaxed and slow down your heart rate if you are feeling anxious. It can also be used to deepen a stretch. As you exhale, you can gently ease your body a bit deeper into the stretch, coming to your edge and continuing to breathe through any discomfort. You can also use

your breath to connect to your subconscious during meditation. The act of focusing on your breath brings your attention to what is happening inside your body and allows you to observe how you are feeling on the inside. As you get to know yourself and your body on a deeper level, you will also build a deeper relationship with your breath and gain a greater understanding of it.

GRANTHIS (KNOTS)

Granthi translates to “knot,” and it refers to the concept that blocked energy is restrictive and difficult to untie. If you find that you have blocked chakras, you will likely be dealing with granthis. These restrict the passage of prana throughout the body and can be caused by a variety of happenings in your life. They result in you becoming stuck in your ways, not allowing yourself to be open to new possibilities. These can be general or more specific, depending on the area where the granthi exists and what caused it. There are ways to release your granthis that are detailed later, and you can incorporate them into your chakra yoga practice.

BANDHAS (LOCKS)

Practicing the bandhas (“locks”) can help in releasing your granthis and aid in your quest to unblock your chakras. Bandhas help you shift and move your prana to different areas of the body where your granthis and chakra blocks may be restricting its access. There are four bandhas in the body that you can incorporate into your chakra yoga practice:

1. Mula Bandha. This is the root lock, and to execute it, you must activate and squeeze in the muscles in the perineum area at the first chakra, Muladhara. This is commonly known as a Kegel, and it is often practiced strengthening vaginal muscles before and after childbirth.
2. Uddiyana Bandha. This lock happens in your abdominal area, and it is the act of drawing all the organs in your abdomen upward as you bend forward. You can rest your hands on your legs as you are bringing those muscles and organs up and in.
3. Jalandhara Bandha. This lock takes place in the neck area, and it can be done by sitting up tall in a cross-legged position with your hands on your legs. Draw your sternum up and your chin down to a place where they meet each other halfway.

Practicing these bandhas and holding them for as long as you are able to will make you stronger and aid in the flow of energy throughout the body.

RELEASING YOUR PAST

At times, as we begin to open and balance our chakras, many past traumas and tensions can get brought to the forefront. As humans, we often suppress traumatic and painful experiences that have happened in our past to avoid feeling the pain. As I mentioned before, our minds and bodies usually choose the path of least resistance, and sometimes avoiding emotional pain is a part of that path.

While it may be more comfortable to avoid pain, it is important to lean into it and push through so we can get past it and move on. If this happens to you during your chakra yoga practice, sit with whatever feelings come up for you and observe them. If you need to cry, it is absolutely okay. Do not be afraid to let it out and release whatever you are feeling. You can even incorporate journaling about the experience, which often helps get the thoughts and feelings out.

Once you observe your thoughts and feelings, acknowledge that whatever you're pulling up is not happening now; it is just a memory. Also acknowledge that your thoughts are not you, they do not define you, and you can observe them without judgment before you watch them fade away. It may take a bit of time to feel better, but you must not repress those feelings again once they resurface. Be sure to take the time to release them properly and work through them by way of observation, journaling, and emotional release before moving forward.

Chapter 8.

Yoga Techniques

It is finally time to talk about the four particular techniques I use to personalize individual Yoga practices. Now is the time to progress at a rapid pace!

Once we have chosen a style of Yoga that we feel fits us well, it is time to learn how to get even more out of it. All these techniques can be applied to any Yoga class you attend, whether at a studio learning from a teacher or at home using a DVD or podcast.

The first two techniques are geared toward increasing flexibility, the second two are geared toward increasing strength. It is imperative that you find a synergistic balance between the two. When you feel that you are comfortable with the techniques, you can begin to apply them to other areas of your life as well.

At the end of each technique description, I include a story about one of my actual students, and how that particular technique helped them with his or her unique situation. It is my hope that these anecdotes will shed some light on some of the real-life conundrums we all face.

Technique #1

Breathe and Sink

This involves proper adaptation of Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF).

Yes, I know. Big words!

This is the scientific backing for why it is necessary to practice Yoga at least twice per week. PNF is what triggers a muscle to relax and release. When PNF is properly activated, it lasts for up to 72 hours. Meaning, when you trigger that amount of flexibility in your muscle, it will remain that flexible for up to 72 hours.

When practiced, the results are pretty astonishing. This procedure was taught to me by one of my teachers (whom I respect very much). This teacher is also a physical therapist. It is pretty simple: when you stretch, every time you exhale,

allow your body to sink deeper into the stretch.

This process ‘tricks’ the muscles into relaxing and then, in turn, releasing. If your muscles can relax long enough to allow oxygen to integrate into them and start to flow, then they can safely allow the flexibility to increase every time.

Now, when we practice our physical Yoga postures, we are practicing many forms of PNF using our own body weight. If you have done the math in your head, you now understand why it is important to practice Yoga at least twice per week. The increase in flexibility lasts for 72 hours, so you need to utilize PNF by doing Yoga at least this often. This is how you will rapidly gain and maintain the flexibility in your muscles.

The best way to consciously apply PNF through your Yoga practice is to make sure to sink a little deeper into each pose that requires muscular extension with each exhalation.

For example, if you are in a forward bend, every time you exhale, allow the weight of your body to make your torso sink even closer to your legs. The longer you hold a pose, the closer your torso will get to your legs, and the more you are going to get out of it.

Now, PNF is more difficult to apply to some poses, such as push-up positions or standing postures. But it is possible if you use mindfulness to observe which muscles are actually activated when you do them. But this will only come with practice and observance.

If this seems like too much for you, don't worry. Just use this technique when you do poses that focus on stretching more than strengthening. Like a seated forward fold or a side bend or twist. You want to safely increase your flexibility without over stretching the muscles and causing them to be strained and flimsy.

Hot Yoga can speed up this process quite a bit. But we also need to be careful not to soften up the muscles or the ligaments to the point we can pull them. This is how pregnant women can damage themselves because, during pregnancy, women's ligaments become more malleable. This leads to increased flexibility but also increased risk of injury. Also, warming up the muscles too much can lead to inflammation and deterioration of the tissue if the muscles don't already have a strong foundation of freely flowing oxygen and decent blood flow.

But as long as you mindfully and consciously practice PNF during a hot Yoga class, then you will avoid injury due to over stretching and over warming. We

will talk more about hot Yoga later in this book.

My primary goal as a Yoga instructor is to teach people how to properly take care of their bodies. To help them understand their forms are unique and then help them learn to adjust their attitudes and physical practices accordingly.

Another helpful benefit of PNF is that it breaks up buildups of connective tissue, which we will talk about in the next technique.

Tyler's Story

Tyler wandered into one of my group Yoga classes one day in the summertime when we were practicing outside in the park. The class was entirely donation based, so it was open to anyone who wanted to join us. He arrived late and didn't have a mat, so he just tried to follow along with the others in the grass.

After the class, I approached him to thank him for coming and to ask some questions about what brought him there. He told me he used to see the class practicing in the mornings when he would run by on his way to the gym. He was a 26-year-old Caucasian and quite the athlete. A bodybuilder, rock climber, and runner who also competed in triathlons.

But a few months earlier, he had started having serious pain in his lower back and joints. His athletic lifestyle had begun to turn against him. He kept seeing all these people practicing Yoga in the park together, many of them much older than he was, and he decided they were onto something. So, he came to check it out.

I had watched him struggle through the unfamiliar poses while he tried to keep up with the others. He said it was quite the reality check for him not to be able to keep up with all these people who were double and triple his age. I told him I would be able to help him if he would consider one-on-one classes.

He agreed, and we started working together that week.

Just as I had suspected, Tyler's biggest problem was his lack of flexibility. He spent all his training time on cardio and strength building. His muscles were certainly strong and bulky; so much so, in fact, that everything had tightened up around his nerves, causing nerves and muscles to spasm.

We worked together for about six months, applying all my techniques but focusing heavily on Technique #1. PNF. He was a very shallow breather, which is common in athletes of his stature. But with time, I taught him to breathe deep into his belly rather than shallow breaths in the chest.

Once he became more comfortable with how to perform the postures, and how to use the exhalation to deepen them, I suggested he try Bikram Yoga.

With that, he had found his Yoga-soulmate!

Bikram Yoga proved to be a fantastic compliment to his athletic lifestyle. He told me that applying the Breath and Sink method I had showed him allowed him to relax in the postures enough to let his body surrender to the benefits.

In a short amount of time, his pain subsided completely, and he was competing in triathlons once again. He is still attending Bikram Yoga classes no less than twice a week (as I suggested for full PNF benefits), and recently told me he has convinced many of his friends to join him as well.

Technique #2

Breaking Up the Fuzz

This technique will not be as easy to apply in a group Yoga classroom as it will when you are at home. This is because it will require you to hold the poses longer. If you are at home practicing alone on your mat, or in front of a DVD, you can simply pause in each of the seated or reclining poses. Stay there for a minimum of 10 to 25 breaths. With each exhalation, see if you can stretch a little bit deeper into the pose.

I am now going to share with you the connective tissue story I tell all my students at some point in our time together. The teacher in my Yoga Anatomy training course called a buildup of connective tissue “The Fuzz.”

Every night when you sleep, or whenever your body isn't mobile for that matter, your muscles and joints begin to develop a thin layer of the Fuzz. This is a white, sticky material that does indeed look quite fuzzy. It is really called connective tissue or fascia.

When you wake up in the morning, you stretch yourself out and begin to move around. This breaks up the Fuzz that has built up in your body overnight. The Fuzz is always developing, but if you make a continuous effort to break it apart, all that will remain is a thin layer.

However, if you don't make a continuous effort to break up the Fuzz, it will build up. It will build layer upon layer as if you were adding multiple coats of paint to a surface.

As the layers build up, they become less malleable and begin to calcify. The Fuzz becomes tougher and tougher, and eventually, even hard. Once it reaches this state, it becomes significantly more difficult to break apart.

It is similar to maintaining dental hygiene, where the plaque that builds up on your teeth daily eventually becomes tartar if it is neglected.

If you want to avoid having connective tissue buildup, you need to make sure you are allowing oxygen to flow into your muscles. (Too much connective tissue can suffocate the muscle, leading to muscle atrophy). This is where Yoga comes in.

I had read quite a bit about connective tissue in my other anatomy and Yoga training courses, but I didn't fully understand its significance until I attended an autopsy demonstration on two human cadavers.

The first one was a young and physically fit marathon runner. He had passed away from a head injury, but he had been very active with a good diet and maintained good flexibility and mobility in all his joints.

The second was an elderly woman who had been confined to a wheelchair for the last several decades of her life.

There were several striking differences between their spines (if you are extremely squeamish or uncomfortable with this topic, I recommend you skip the next two paragraphs).

The young man's spine looked exactly the way one would expect a spine to look. There was a little bit of white, fuzzy-looking stuff around his spine and muscles, but when the instructor ran his finger over it, it broke apart and disintegrated.

The woman's spine, however, looked as if she had years and years of spiderweb buildup wrapped around it as well as all the connecting muscles. It created a thick whitish coating that made the individual vertebrae underneath completely indistinguishable from one another. It was also rock hard to the touch. In fact, the only way to break it apart was to cut it apart with a scalpel and pliers!

I realize this is a very extreme example, but the point is, years and years of neglect can cause serious damage to our bodies.

Now the secret to avoiding this is very simple: move!

Moving and stretching breaks up the Fuzz. If you break it up every day, it won't

build up. Therefore, it won't calcify.

But what if this has already started to happen?

Don't worry. It is still reversible. These particular styles are extremely effective in increasing flexibility. This is because you hold the postures for so long. Traditionally, in Yin Yoga, you hold a pose for no less than five minutes, and sometimes as long as 30 minutes!

When you hold a posture for this long, PNF will naturally take place. But it is always a good idea to be conscious of PNF while doing it to help the process along.

The longer you hold a pose, the deeper your body will go into it. The first Yin Yoga class I attended was pretty life changing. I left feeling like a bowl full of wet spaghetti. My whole body was so relaxed it felt as if I was floating on a cloud as I walked out of the studio.

By actively breaking up my connective tissue, I got myself into poses I never would have dreamed were possible, and that was only my first class! I went once per week, and my flexibility didn't dissipate. This, however, was before I found out that one could be too flexible.

Juan's Story

When I met Juan, he was in his late seventies and had been coming to Yoga classes for about a decade. He was an absolutely delightful Hispanic man with a very thick accent. After his wife died 11 years prior, he started coming to Yoga classes because he had read it could be healing.

Because he was a reasonably healthy man who remained pretty active, he certainly looked younger than he was. He attended our donation-based Yoga classes about five times a week.

What initially caught my interest about his practice was his rounded back and tight, hunched shoulders. When he attempted poses that involved chest and shoulder opening, he was unable to perform them in a way that would be beneficial to his body. When I taught, I would try to help him open up in the pose, but he wasn't really getting it.

I tried to work with him after each class as well, but he clearly needed more time. So, I asked if he would consider one-on-one classes. He seemed a little embarrassed, but he agreed. I reassured him that he wasn't actually doing

anything wrong. He was doing a wonderful thing for his body by coming to these Yoga classes so often. The reason I wanted to work with him was because I knew if I could teach him how to open up his upper body, he would get a lot more out of his Yoga practice.

I told him it would take somewhere between three and 12 private lessons to help him get where he needed to be.

Well, he progressed faster than I ever could have imagined!

Once I explained the concept of connective tissue to him and told him the story about the Fuzz, a light bulb seemed to go off above his head.

I spent three lessons showing him how to properly open up his shoulders and chest and sent him back out into the world. I suggested he try some Yin Yoga classes a nearby studio offered, and he reported back to me that he was astonished by how different his body felt.

He had never realized how closed off to the world he felt until he learned how to open himself up. He said that not only did he feel different physically, but he felt emotionally ready to approach the world with an open heart.

He still attends his regular group Yoga classes five times per week, but also, now goes to a Yin Yoga class about once per month in addition. I have literally watched his entire stature evolve since then. He stands up straighter and holds his shoulders back. He even moves with more confidence.

I believe he conquered the Fuzz!



Chapter 9.

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra means “the yoga of sleep,” but don’t let the name fool you. In truth, this ancient practice is more about learning to wake up. Nidra refers to that daydream state between wakefulness and sleep. Think of the paradox of sleeping wakefulness as a bridge between otherwise disparate elements, such as consciousness and unconsciousness, spirit and form, and the ego-self and the True Self.

Yoga Nidra is essentially a guided meditation during which the practitioner usually lies down, closes their eyes, and becomes very relaxed as they are guided by a facilitator into deeper and deeper layers of relaxed Awareness. By recording the scripts in this book and playing them back, you will be both the facilitator and the practitioner.

A Yoga Nidra practice often lasts between 10 and 45 minutes, during which time the facilitator guides the practitioner systematically into a focused but neutral observation of the five koshas (or sheaths, which you can think of as layers over your True Self). These are the objects of the ego as well as physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions. The method’s aim is to help you learn to stop identifying with the ego-self by peeling back the koshas like layers of skin off an onion and instead identify with the core of your True Nature—pure Awareness. It’s like napping your way to enlightenment!

While not everyone emerges from every practice having “seen the light,” it’s incredible how many people report experiencing massive benefits, even after their first session. Rather than tell my students the benefits of the practice, I allow the practice to speak for itself. I typically start a Yoga Nidra class by asking return students how they benefit from the practice. Eager hands shoot into the air as students happily report a wide array of benefits, including lowered stress, being less reactive, greater happiness, better sleep, lowered blood pressure, less anxiety and depression, more energy, accelerated learning, increased creativity, higher performance and productivity, general well-being, better digestion, greater optimism, spiritual insight, confidence, and a grounded sense of purpose, clarity, and optimism.

In more extreme cases, I've personally used Yoga Nidra, often in tandem with a licensed clinical therapist, as a powerful tool to help people who suffer from issues like PTSD, trauma, sexual abuse, chronic anxiety and depression, eating disorders, alcohol and chemical dependency, and chronic and terminal illnesses better cope with their issues. I have also used Yoga Nidra to maximize the performance of world-class artists, including the cast of the Broadway show STOMP, Justin Timberlake's dancers and backup singers, and the dancers of Ballet West. I've trained top-level athletes to use Yoga Nidra to help them perform and win ultramarathons, ultra-cycling events, and Olympic events. I've even trained high school kids to use Yoga Nidra to conquer test anxiety. At one of my recent trainings, I taught a marriage and family lawyer how to use Yoga Nidra with her clients to help them manage divorce proceedings as calmly and civilly as possible.



The benefits of Yoga Nidra have also been tested in clinical studies. Currently, Yoga Nidra teachers, such as clinical psychologist Dr. Richard C. Miller, are conducting scientific studies to show how it can benefit war veterans in prisons and hospitals. A report in the Journal of Caring Sciences shows Yoga Nidra to be a successful therapy to help with anxiety, depression, positive well-being,

general health, and vitality scores as well as hormonal levels associated with menstrual irregularity.

So how can a practice of simply lying down and being guided through something like a body scan or an examination of your thoughts provoke such remarkable benefits? The idea is that when you're aligned with your True Self through—and as—deep Awareness, you experience the part of you that is always perfect. More simply, as you experience yourself as Awareness, you experience wholeness. In such wholeness, there's nothing you can't do or be. Wholeness means healed. All the benefits my students call out in class are merely the by-products of wholeness.

One of the essential truths I love about yoga and Yoga Nidra is the idea that these practices don't give you anything you don't have already. Rather, they help you remove the layers that conceal your fundamental wholeness, a wholeness that has always been and will always be. Experiencing this wholeness boils down to Awareness, and Yoga Nidra is a very relaxing yet powerful way to develop your Awareness.

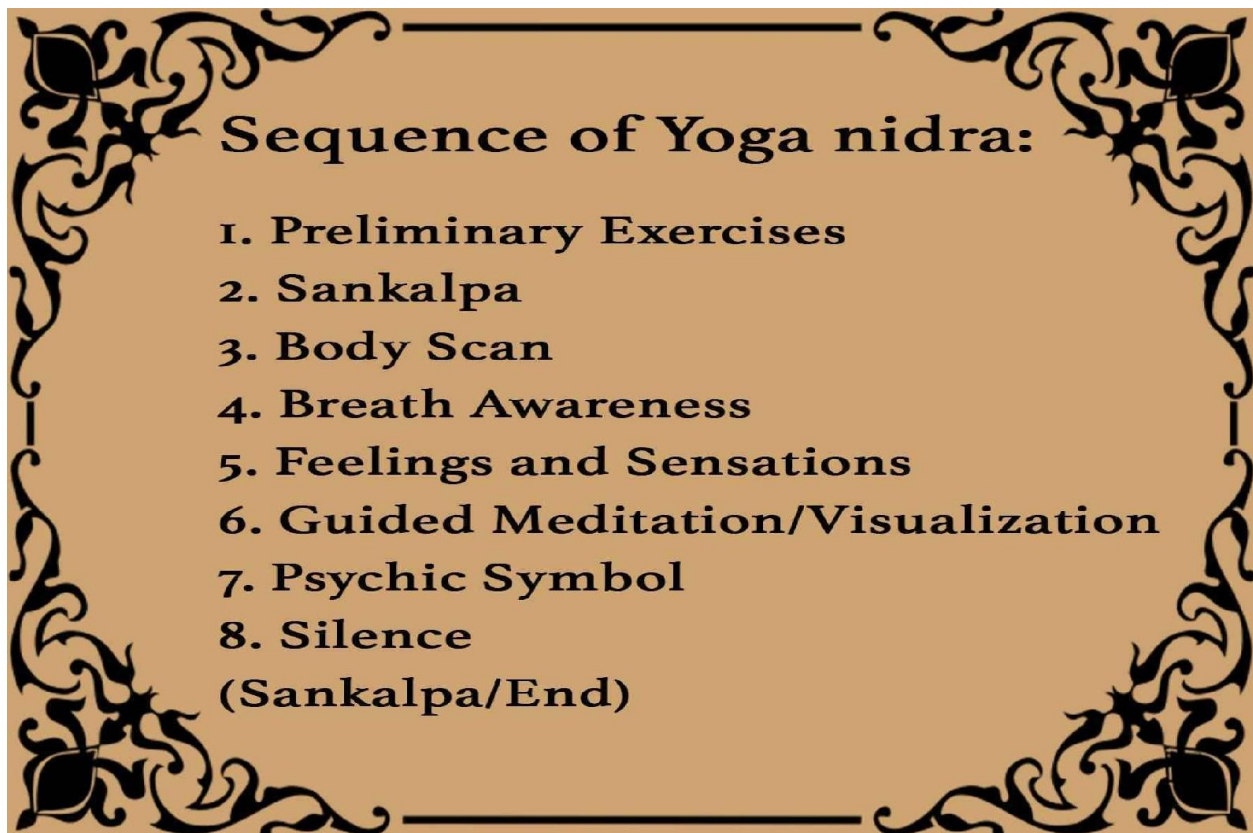
Chapter 10.

Stages Of Yoga Nidra

In yoga nidra we start with the outer grossest levels of our being, and gradually work our way inward.

The Eight Stages of Yoga Nidra

The eight stages of yoga nidra are meant to naturally lead your listeners to a hypnogogic state between sleep and normal wakefulness, where they can illumine the depths of the psyche and reveal any limiting beliefs, Self-defeating habits and tendencies, as well as have a direct experience of their own true inner nature.



By becoming still and silent you are able to receive intuitions from your unconscious mind and find all the answers to your problems within your own Self. Others can always misguide you; even the most well-trained psychotherapists, but the inner revelations you receive from your highest Self

will never lead you astray.

The eight stages of yoga nidra lead your participants deeper and deeper into their own selves where they can encounter their own true nature as totally liberated and perfectly blissful Spirit, thus empowering them to live more meaningful lives in whatever current circumstances they may find themselves in.

The inner peace experienced during yoga nidra transfer over into every other area of our lives, psychologically, emotionally and even for our physical health by eliminating all tension and stress. We subconsciously clench and hold stress in the neuromuscular system of our physical body; yoga nidra begins the process of unwinding and relearning how to release habitual nervous tension and stress.

Your participants come into a state of perfect relaxation combined with total awareness, which allows them to transcend the gross conscious state of mind and explore the subconscious and unconscious dimensions while fully awake.

Ultimately, the purpose behind yoga nidra is to structure the opportunity for your listeners to have their own personal experience. This inner experience is more likely to happen in the silent spaces between each instruction, and each instruction should be spoken in a way to lead your listeners to the next phase of silence where they can have the experiences you are describing for themselves. For this reason, the silence between instructions is just as important as the words you speak.

Preparatory Exercises

A full yoga nida session is typically between twenty and forty minutes, however, there really is no limit. The duration will depend on the setting, context and ability of your participants.

The very first stage of yoga nidra is the preparation exercises. Here you ask your participants to lie down in shavasana, corpse pose, and assume a symmetrical position by spreading their arms and legs a comfortable distance apart. You tell them to adjust and become comfortable one last time before beginning the practice.

The purpose for the preparation exercises are to lead your listeners to become as comfortable as possible, while interrupting the habitual thought patterns so that they are more able to listen to your instructions. One way of interrupting the habitual thought patterns of your listeners is to instruct them to listen to any

various sounds in their environment, ask them to perceive any sound or silence they may perceive outside the building you are in, inside the building and, in advanced stages, within their own bodies.

You ask your listeners to focus on the raw qualities of sounds without any past associations attached to them because this requires them to listen so intently that they must silence all other thoughts to the exclusion of whatever sound they happen to be perceiving.

Encourage them to listen to these sounds as if they have never heard them before, as if they were totally foreign and new. This can be a fun game to play with yourself and makes it easier to listen to the quality of sounds we typically attribute as being mundane, such as the sound of a fan or air conditioner, or the sound of traffic outside.

All sounds are only energy, and energy is neutral; it is the mind that makes it pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad.

After some time of listening to external sounds, the mind becomes disinterested in the outer world and is now ready to withdraw the senses and really begin the process of relaxing and listening to your instructions.

Beginning the Actual Practice

The next stage of yoga nidra, stage two, is when yoga nidra truly begins. Now that your listeners are relaxed both physically and mentally, you can plant the seed of sankalpa. A sankalpa is your determined resolve to achieve something, become something or experience something great. It is more than a desire or intention. It is your firm determined willpower concentrated into a single potent statement. When you know what you want in life without any doubt, and you are working towards that with all your energy and focus every day, the words to your sankalpa will come to you spontaneously. Until then, it is better to choose a positive affirmation.

You may want to consider facilitating an entire yoga nidra session only devoted towards helping your participants discover their own sankalpa.

After the sankalpa, the next stage is body scan, where you will begin rotating the awareness around the various body parts, always in a set definite pattern. Do not change the pattern that you do body scan. Traditionally we start at the right-hand thumb and hit all the major body parts along the right side of the body,

terminating at the right small toe. Then the next circuit begins at the left-hand thumb and progresses in the same pattern to the left small toe. Subsequent circuits proceed from the top of the head, down the facial features, all the way down the front side of the torso to the legs and toes. There is also the backside of the body, the organs and the major groupings of body parts altogether. (Refer to the scripts in the appendixes for a complete description of the body scan technique).

Traditionally the rotation of awareness around the body is done rapidly, however, I have found that a lot of people get anxious when you move at a fast speed, so in my own yoga nidra sessions I have added three to four seconds of silence between each body part to make it more calming and soothing. However, that adds a lot of time to the yoga nidra session, and it will be difficult to end a full session in less than forty-five minutes.

If you want to have shorter sessions you will need to oscillate the awareness around the body at a faster rate, in which case, you can give your listeners a fair warning by saying something such as: 'During body scan you will be asked to rotate your awareness around the body from part to part very quickly and rapidly, do not allow your awareness to spend too much time at one body part, but feel the momentum of energy flowing swiftly with the awareness from body part to body part, starting with... the right hand thumb' and continue.

Next, in stage four we begin breath awareness. At this point the body has effectively been put to sleep and we are working on bringing stillness and tranquility to the energy body, characterized by the breath and emotions. The breath and the emotions are intimately tied to each other, as one goes - so goes the other. In yoga nidra we do not do conscious breathing, we merely become aware of the spontaneous rhythms of each breath; like a surfer riding on the wave of the breath, not trying to change it, or alter it, merely flowing along with it united as one.

In stage six of yoga nidra you introduce a series of visualizations to your listeners. The items you ask them to visualize often have a universal archetypal significance and are meant to stir and awaken the deeper centers of the psyche. Images you will ask your participants to visualize include landscapes, famous monuments such as the pyramids, oceans, mountains, deserts, ancient monolithic temples at dawn, saints and flowers, stories from the Upanishads or Puranas, and

powerful descriptions of psychic symbols such as Aum, or psychic centers such as the chakras and nadis.

The purpose for the visualization stage is to relax the mind fully. The visualizations lead the mind deeper within, where it can become relaxed and single-pointed. This single pointedness is the stage of dharana that naturally leads to meditative states and eventually, Samadhi.

In stage seven, you introduce the final visualization. The final visualization is given as a support for meditation. It is the base of concentration the mind focuses on while becoming more one-pointed and serene. The mind needs an object to focus on, so the final visualization should be something that is pleasant and powerful, such as a vision of an endless vast dark blue Ocean under a cloudy night sky, with rolling waves, rolling on and on endlessly across the surface of the sea.

Finally, you will begin to call your listeners back to this world, this present time and location. Lead them to repeat their sankalpa one more time; this is the perfect time to reap the fruits of sankalpa. Next you guide them to visualize the room they are lying in, and their own body lying on the floor. Tell them to keep their eyes shut and only move one single finger at first. Then another, and finally, to wiggle their fingers and toes, stretch and open their eyes to end the session.

As is traditional, I end all my sessions with a blessing for peace by saying the Sanskrit word for peace, shanti, three times with meaning.

Chapter 11.

The Art Of Relaxation

Inducing Yoga Nidra, or full body relaxation, becomes easy with practice. It's a skill that you must learn if you want to maximize your hidden potentials. It may be difficult at first, but the benefits are tremendous and promising. You can do Yoga Nidra alone, but the best way for beginners is to have a Yoga Nidra teacher who can guide you properly. Should you decide to do it alone, here are some steps that you should follow:

Step #1 – Lie down or sit down comfortably

Lie down comfortably in a supine position (lying down on your back, face up). Use a soft pillow to support your head. You can also use another one to support your knees. Another alternative is to sit on a chair with a back rest. Your back should be supported comfortably. Use a blanket to cover your body if it's cold.

Step #2 – Do some stretches

Perform some basic stretches to help loosen the body. You can do some arm and leg stretches, mentally preparing yourself to relax. For arm stretches, you can stretch your arm over your head several times or stretch them sideways or forward. You can do that similarly with your legs. You need not go into heavy aerobic exercises or strenuous sports for this step.

Step #3 – Focus on your selected object of relaxation

Teachers use different methods to induce relaxation, and they'll guide you through their particular process. But since you're doing it alone, choose a sound that can work well with you. You can play soft music, listen to a ringing bell, or listen to sound waves, whichever is most effective for you. You may opt to hear your voice reciting one or two words repeatedly.

Step #4 – Start focusing on the parts of your head

Close your eyes and focus on the various parts of your head, from the top of your head to your chin. Observe the sensations in your mouth and tongue. Take note of the air passing in and out of your nostrils. Include your eyebrows,

cheekbones and forehead in your observations. What are the sensations you're feeling? Observe yourself as a third party would. Be aware of all the feelings occurring in the different parts of your face.

Step #5 – Focus on your upper torso

Now, mentally go further down to your neck and then off to your fingertips. Focus on each of the parts in your upper torso such as your neck, shoulders, arms, elbows, hands, wrists, fingers and fingertips, all one by one. Feel each sensation in these body parts as an observer. You'll have to observe each of these body parts. Do this several times while inhaling and exhaling. Feel the air and blood going down to your fingertips and then up your hand, wrist, arm, shoulders and neck. Observe how your chest heaves up and down with each breath, imagining the air going through your body parts. End by focusing on your chest.

Step #6 – Focus on your lower torso

You now mentally move your focus down further into your lower torso. This includes your stomach, abdomen, lower back, thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, and toes. Go through the same procedure as the upper torso. Inhale and exhale as you focus on each body part. Imagine the air coursing through each part. As you inhale, think about bringing in pure energy and as you exhale, imagine your body getting rid of all negative energy traits such as anxieties, worries, problems and stress. Continue this process going back and forth for at least a minute until you feel relaxed. Go back to your chest and feel the air leaving and entering your body. Repeat this action until you feel relaxed.

Step #7 – Do it all over again

Focus on the parts of your head again and repeat the same process as step #4. However, this time, observe first your right body parts, followed by your left body parts. The spaces in between these body parts should also be observed. Concentrate on the tiniest detail of your body like the tip of your fingers. Do this while you continue inhaling and exhaling and imagining that new energy is coming in while negative energy is going out. Repeat step #5 and #6 but focus on all the body parts on your right side first before proceeding to the left body parts. Be consciously aware of all the observations.

By this time, your body must be in a calm state. Some may fall asleep at this

stage. If you fall asleep when you do it for the first time, it's okay. Keep doing it until you can fully complete the exercise without falling asleep.

Step #8 – Perform the spinal breath

Now, you will begin to perform spinal breathing by inhaling and feeling the air passing from the top of your head to the base of your spinal cord. Then, exhale as if the air is passing from the base of your spinal cord to the top of your head. Use your inner visualization to imagine your breath as a stream of silver going up and down your spine. Perform this several times as you relax your body.

Step #9 – Enter your Yoga Nidra

Before you enter your Yoga Nidra, ensure that your body is completely relaxed. If not, you have to repeat steps #3 to #8, until you achieve total relaxation. When you're certain you're ready, you can now enter your Yoga Nidra. Some prefer to enter Yoga Nidra in silence. So, if you have a friend nearby, you can ask him to turn off any sound silently when you're about to enter Yoga Nidra. If this is not possible, then try to select relaxation prompts that do not distract you in any way, or ones that will turn themselves off after a certain period.

First, focus on the space between your eyebrows. Concentrate on this space for 5 to 10 minutes. Afterwards, move your focus down to your throat and concentrate on the center of your throat for several minutes, until you find that you can concentrate effortlessly. You can then proceed to focus on the space between your breasts and then to the center of your heart. Get rid of all thoughts, sensations and emotions. Let go of anything in your heart and mind and simply delve deeper into the silence of your inner self. Maintain this state for at least 10 minutes.

As you gain more experience practicing Yoga Nidra, you can lengthen the time of stillness and silence. What's important is that you have truly achieved a total relaxation of mind, body and soul. Through this, you can train your subconscious to be in congruence with your conscious mind. In this way, you greatly increase your ability to fulfill your desires and life goals. This stems from the fact that the subconscious will also have the same goal as your conscious – meaning that your subconscious will find all possible ways and means to manifest itself outwardly.

Step #10 – Return to full consciousness

During your first-time practicing Yoga Nidra, you may have a shorter time span to get back to full consciousness. As soon as thoughts start coming into your mind, acknowledge them and slowly return to your consciousness. You can start this by opening your eyes, wiggling your toes or stretching your arms. There are no contraindications to Yoga Nidra but only health benefits because you're able to reduce your stress and anxiety levels. However, you should take note that various teachers tend to modify some steps depending on their experiences and preferences.

While performing the steps before Yoga Nidra, your focus may be interrupted with other thoughts, so you have to re-focus every time. This takes practice, so don't despair if you can't concentrate during the first time that you perform the exercises. Eventually, you'll come to develop a sharper inner eye and a more focused mind. When you experience a distracting thought, just nip it away as soon as you can, and move back to focusing on your body parts in the sequence described herein.

Chapter 12.

Training The Mind

Meditating is one of the ways which relaxes the mind and shuts out the whole world from it. You only get to focus on only one single thought, and in this case, you should be focusing on positive and beautiful thoughts, filling your mind with them. In meditating, you should be in a relaxed state of mind and in a calm environment away from the hustle and bustle of active life. If you live in the city or in a busy town, it is advisable that you find a calm, quiet and tranquil space from where you can meditate in. The sole purpose of meditating is clearing up the toxic thoughts and images in our heads, and this efficiently achieved when one is in a calm environment. Also, when doing your meditation, ensure that you have ample time with you; that you are not in a rush to work or engagement, so that it will not be in a hurried manner. This might not actually work, for it does not fulfill the purpose of meditating. You can also have your clothes as loose and fitting, to free your physical body as it aids in also freeing your mental state. When you are meditating, block out all the negative thoughts and energy and focus on staying on the positive border of thoughts. Do this consistently, and you'll be having positive and beautiful images in your mind, even when not meditating. On the aspect of yoga, the workouts are a great sport for relieving stress and the negativity from your brain through the physical exercises. Yoga increases the consciousness in an individual, translating you to a higher consciousness in nature. By cultivating such consciousness, positivity is enriched in the brain as you work out. As much as yoga is great for physical wellness, it is also equally nourishing to the brain, instilling positive vibes in an individual. Both yoga and meditation go hand in hand in uplifting your mental state, thus your thoughts being those of positive and beautiful things, helping your mind to focus, as they both demand great time spans of full concentration and attention from a person.

Smile often

Smiling often is a cure to negative thoughts, and a single smile can distill all the negativity you had. Smiling requires no effort, absolutely. You neither have to go to the gym nor do you have to be in a tranquil place, as in meditation to do so.

Feeling low? Turn the frown into a smile. It's just moving the facial muscles, and you are okay again. Smiling has a way of making you happier and lighter and less burdened if you were feeling heavy burdened. Bearing happier results to more positivity in life; therefore, your goal of projecting positive and beautiful images in your mind is achieved. When you smile, you also become more productive, for positive emotions are playing out inside you. They fuel you to work harder and in a more efficient way, staying focused on a task for the required time without being distracted, thus being productive. That's how far a smile can go in changing the direction of your day and uplifting your mood if you were low. Having emotions bordering on the happy side makes you view things on the bright side of life, which streams from having a positive mindset within you. As stated, smiling does away with all the negative and the draining emotions in you, leaving you lighter. It does away with the pain you could be experiencing. When you have not positive images in your mind and feeling less focused, stand before a mirror and will yourself to smile. You will feel the energy shift immediately. You will feel more rejuvenated, more up to the task. Do not just will with your mind of a physical smile on your face for that will not be productive, will it spring forth from within, for from such it will positively impact your mind.

Have positive and focused likeminded people around you

By being surrounded by positive energy all around you from your friends and family, you will surely also have the same positive energy vibe. This will go a long way in projecting positive images to your brain in the long run, that produces positive energy. As a smile is contagious, so can positivity and negativity be. They are vibes that can be transferred to you without really knowing, but you will feel of the effects later. A company of negative minded people will transform you to be always seeing the negative side of things. Conversely, positive people have an impact on you to see the brighter side of life. They smile more, they laugh more and generally take life at a lighter note, which is needed to projector beautiful images in your mind. Surround yourself with such. Determined and strong-willed people are also another category that pushes you to be focused and be the best that you can be. Not being content with the status quo, they strive further to reach the highest attainable standards, without exerting and expending too much of their energy. Being in the company of likeminded people will give you the drive to be focused on whatever activity you undertake to achieve excellent results.

Change your negative thoughts to positive ones

Having a change in your negative thoughts to positive ones have a general effect on your outlook on situations and life in general. Positive thoughts reflect in the images that are projected to your mind. Negative thoughts tend to bring you down and can lead to a state of a near depression, for they just focus on the bad on everything. They do not give the good in life a chance. To have positive and beautiful thoughts, have an actual change from thinking to the negative side and start visualizing and living on the positive side. It is also true that negative minded people do not have the drive to work, the drive for life. With negativity clouding your mind, you will just be a dead man walking, having lost the drive to find your true purpose in life. Being focused cannot be achieved in such a state. You will be just telling yourself to be focused and determined and give your all in whatever you are working at, but you have no will to follow through the plan in your head. The lack of results due to your mindset may discourage you further and push you to fully abandon hope in dreaming and realizing your dreams in life. With a change to the positive mindset camp, things will seem simpler, even though, in reality, they are not. You will be facing the same challenges, but because of the change in attitude, you will come up with better ways to deal with them. More focus on your work will result from positivity.

Take charge of your own life

Be responsible for your own life and the activities that occur in your everyday life. Being responsible in this case means planning for your life, and not living just for the sake of living, but having a purpose of doing so. The accomplishment of your life goals will bring a sense of satisfaction to you. Being satisfied and feeling accomplished will project positivity in your mind and encourage you to be more focused. Start on this by having a journal and a planner. The journal is for entering the daily events of your day, how it rolled out, and whether you were successful in doing what you had planned to accomplish for the day. You write how the activities ensued, your positive and negative moments, and whether generally, the day was a win for you. It is to be done at the close of the day when you are retiring for the night. A journal entry will help you show how you can increase your positivity and in the accomplishment of your goals by staying more focused. A planner, on the other hand, is for you to write down all that you intend to do and achieve for that specific day. You can also set annual, monthly, and weekly goals that you intend to meet. This is one of the ways that you can

take charge of your life. Plan meticulously, engaging your mind in every step of the way, and promising yourself that you are going to get the activities done. In this way, you push yourself to be focused on meeting your set goals. By analyzing your planner, you can see the activities you did and did not do. There is a feeling of happiness and giddiness that one gets when you have accomplished whatever you set out to do for the day. Beautiful projections are therefore made in your mind. Stay positive in this manner, planning and encouraging yourself daily. Taking charge of your life also means not letting bad situations bring you down. As earlier mentioned, fill your mind with positive thoughts. When the wave of negativity threatens to crash, take charge of your life by being focused on having positive images in your mind.

Singing

Singing can be classified into one category as smiling. It has instant relief over a weary soul when the right kind of music is put on. Even when you are not down or low, good music totally applies to project positive and beautiful images in mind. From the lyrics of the song, the mind forms images of whatever scenario is playing out in the song. When a good-spirited song is on, good images will form in the mind of the listener. Not only do you have to listen to music, sing along with it. This is the essence of good lyrics intended to make you better. It is also not necessary for you to sing along with music that you have blasted on, you can also sing from your memory. Singing out aloud is the best way of instilling positive images in mind. Most often than not, you can always relate to whatever the singer has written and more or less had the same experience. With a happy song, you will tend to reminisce of the happy times that you have had, putting a smile on your face in the process and creating beautiful images in your mind. Songs are surely a great tool that moves our minds. Even with the uplifting that good songs have on you, you have to be wary of songs that are depressing and draining. Such kind of songs tends to bring down a person, with their beats and their depressing words. When choosing to sing a song or play music, do choose one with positive vibes. Some people are also unique in such a way that they cannot perform any task without music or singing or humming a tune. If you are one of those people, have music play when you work, inspiring music, to keep you focused and increase your attention on your work.

Be an avid reader of positive quotes

Positive quotes are one of the most favorite places for people to stop by and feel

re-inspired and rejuvenated. There are quotes about everything, and since you are seeking positive and beautiful images in your mind, focus on the ones that offer positivity and focused content. There are lots of them on the internet, and in print form, quotes have been published. You can, therefore, have access to many quotes at the tip of your hands. Many writers have invested in writing quotes that buoy your spirits up, and that feels me good, and you are instantly feeling better, in a better and lighter mood, feeling at the top of the world, like you can conquer anything. Well, those are really good at motivating you to give your best in everything you do, making you stay focused on your activities and feel accomplished at the end of the day. The most common quotes on the internet and the in books are happy quotes. Read them to form beautiful images in your mind. Many of these quotes are always done in a poetic manner that make them appealing to read. They should, therefore, not be boring to go over. You can have a site that you can subscribe to, to be getting daily quotes on happiness and positivity, and staying focused on your work. Most of these sites writing on quotes on the internet are mostly free, and the subscription is only via email or by getting an app. It's pretty an easy way of having happiness and positive lines being given to you every morning when you wake. It sets out your day for a positive mentality. You can also have the settings to make the notifications in a span of several hours in a day, such that in a single day, you will get several quotes to keep you going until the day ends. You need beautiful images in your mind, read quotes on beautiful things, and the images will be translated. Need a dose of positivity in your life, read quotes on staying positive. Simply, in the area that you lack energy in, get yourself a quote to keep you going.

Be grateful

Being grateful is an attribute that improves your outlook in life and prevents you from wallowing in self-pity over whatnots in your life. Being grateful as an individual is acknowledging whatever you have and appreciating its value, from material possessions such as an apartment, a car, to immaterial ones such as friendships, bonds, and family. Being grateful is a choice that you make not to look at the negativities that are going in your life but rather on the good that you already have and being content with it. This does not mean that you are not to deal with problems and challenges because of the reason; being grateful. It, however, means that you acknowledge that there is a challenge, yes, but you choose not to dwell on it too much, letting it suck up your positive energy and drain you emotionally. Instead, it's choosing to focus more on what you've got

right now, than whatever you don't have, or you have lost. Gratitude for things will make you realize how privileged you are and not take things for granted. Coming to the realization of how blessed you are, you will be oozing of positivity. Your mind will be transformed to have a positive outlook on everything, appreciating even the small, minute random things that are done to us or that we have. Being content in your soul over what you have and not being troubled over your challenge's washes over a certain kind of peace in you. Beautiful, kind, and good things will have filled your mind, with no room of negative and sad thoughts. Always take a moment or two to think about the situations that other people go through so that you realize you are not badly off, then you can also sing it off, as a crowning feature of the positivity inside your soul.

Move on after a negative setback

We are all prone to failure, to setbacks, to disappointments. But what is of great importance is the way in which we deal with that kind of heart-wrenching drawbacks and how we move on with our lives, whether a file with negativity or a change to the positive outlook in life. To get positive images in your mind, you have to pick up yourself from the failure you had encountered, dust yourself, as a common quote says, and go on living positively. How you deal with setbacks is the determinant of what your mind projects in you. How you move on after a drawback also determines the kind of output, you'll be having in your work area. Letting the experience scar you to the point of negligence on yourself stems from a place of negativity. Concentrate on building up yourself again with positive thoughts and vibe as the building blocks. As mentioned earlier, read positive, happy, feel-good quotes, play, and sing along to songs that are uplifting, meditate, do yoga, and other activities to get you back on the track. The mind is a result of what you feed it. Feed it beautiful and positive things, and you'll get the same output being reflected by it.

Be kind and helpful

This is one of the aspects of projecting positive and beautiful things in our minds and staying focused that does not deal with yourself only. By making others grow, by helping others, you, in turn, get to be surrounded by positivity and the same in your mind. You can find activities that you can do to help someone. It may not always be a far-fetched idea as feeding the hungry and the poor but also minute actions of kindness in our everyday lives. Well, feeding the poor and

sheltering the homeless is also another great way of helping people who are in need. By giving out a piece of kindness from our hearts to those in need of it, prompts the mind to project love, kindness, and goodness. You will also feel good about yourself about doing these little acts of love and kindness to people who deserve them. You can also go further and offer them hugs as a sign of affection to them. Charity, the greatest form of humanity that the world is need of at the current world, will have been offered to a broken human being, whom you'll have started healing by that simple act. More positivity from you to the world and more positivity from within you. Beautiful images will always be in your mind as a result of your actions.

Chapter 13.

Pratyahara

Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration) and dhyana (meditation) make up the fifth, sixth and seventh limbs of Patanjali's astanga marga, Eight-Limbed Raja Yoga path. The three limbs of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, when practiced correctly, is a seamless transition. Pratyahara naturally leads to dharana, and dharana naturally leads to dhyana. When this is accomplished, it will naturally lead to the state of Samadhi, the eighth limb. We will explore these sadhanas below.

After we are steady in asana and are aligned with the Cosmos, we practice pranayama to purify the nadis so we can guide energy through them. By observing the flow of prana, we come to understand how it moves throughout the body, both nourishing it and also clearing energy obstructions in the nadis. Once we are established thus, in pranayama, it is advised to pursue the sadhana of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. These sadhanas are part of the natural progression in the path of yoga and may initially seem obscure, but they will become clearer as you advance in your yoga practice.

Pratyahara

In Sanskrit, pratyahara generally refers to withdrawal of the senses and is associated with prana shakti and chit shakti, described below. As per the astanga marga of Maharishi Patanjali, he describes pratyahara as a bridge between bahiranga (external) aspects of yoga and the antharanga (internal) yoga. With pratyahara we are moving our consciousness to an internal state away from the external senses. Each of our five external senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch) provide our consciousness with information regarding the external physical world, and they are powered by prana shakti (the power or directing/driving force behind prana) when it is outwardly focused. Pratyahara is the process of recalling the outwardly dispersed prana shakti to return to its abode in the heart to allow us to change our focus to the internal world, which we are often not in tune with. Due to externalization of the senses, we become distracted from our true nature and become lost in the world of duality. By drawing the prana shakti back to the heart, we can dispel the ignorance (the

perception of duality) and understand our true nature.

Patanjali describes prathyahara as the natural occurrence after fruitful practice of pranayama; however, there are other methods, in addition to pranayama, which have been developed for the practice of prathyahara.

Though in many books it is mentioned that there are six major chakras in the human being, viz. muladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, visuddha and ajna before reaching the sahasrara, there are many chakras (points of nadi junctions) all over the body. Through visualization and consistent practice, one can draw the prana, by the aid of chit shakti (power or directing/driving force of consciousness or will), step by step to the chosen point of concentration. When this is accomplished, the senses and sense perceptions are gradually severed from the mind, resulting in a calm and serene mental state. The chit shakti is the tool we use to guide the prana shakti according to our will. We use the practice of dharana to hone this tool to its maximum potential.

Dharana

Directing our consciousness to a place without distraction is dharana. In simple words, dharana is concentration of our chit shakti in one place without distraction of sense perceptions.

Where is this place? It can be anywhere, within or outside our body. In pratyahara, we have drawn our consciousness back to the root by directing our sense perceptions inward. The five senses that distract our consciousness and do not allow us to look inward and concentrate are drawn-back.

Where can we concentrate? We can concentrate on inner light by directing our vision in any place in the body, like between the eyebrows or at the center of the heart. Otherwise we can concentrate on external objects like a flower, a small spot on the wall, the moon, or the stars (especially a small blinking star). We can also concentrate on inner sound, by focusing first on the subtle, then subtler and finally the subtlest sounds of our inner self. Or we can concentrate on our breath or a mantra we utter inwardly.

In other words, the concentration unifies the five sense limbs, five sense perceptions, the mind, the intellect, the will and the ego. To attune your chit shakti you have to practice dharana in the ways mentioned above. Once it is attuned it is easier to draw the prana shakti to a chosen point of concentration.

Dhyana

When we achieve dharana (concentration in one point as explained above), and strive to prolong the concentration, it will result in merging the observer and the observed. In this state duality vanishes into non-duality. This prolonged state of concentration is dhyana, the seventh limb, which brings the chit-shakti and prana shakti together. In this way we can achieve the state of dhyana, which is otherwise known as meditation.

A mere state of temporary calmness, dreaminess or other similar states are often incorrectly defined as meditation. Only the state of dhyana mentioned above can be called meditation in its true sense.

How does one practice prathyahara, dharana and dhyana as a seamless transition? After fruitful practice of pranayama, sit in any meditative asana such as siddhasana, swastikasana or sukhasana. Use the chit shakti as a tool to draw the prana shakti through the nadis. Select either anahata chakra (heart area) or ajna chakra (slightly above and between the eyebrows), or sahasrara (top of head) as your point of concentration. Feel and visualize the entire body pulsating with prana shakti. Now we will begin to pull the prana shakti from the toes of the feet and fingers of the hands to our chosen point of concentration.

First slowly draw back the prana shakti from the toes to the calves and from the fingers to the forearms. Next draw it from the calves to the knees and from the forearms to the elbows. Slowly and steadily keep drawing it step by step closer to the point of concentration.

Along with the prana shakti we will be withdrawing our sense perceptions inward to the point of concentration. Once the prana shakti of our entire body reaches our point of concentration, we are closed to the external world and have internalized our consciousness. Prolong the concentration and try to see whatever is visible internally, hear whatever is audible internally and feel any internal sensations. Initially, we may be able to concentrate only for a few seconds without distraction, but through regular practice we are able to hold the concentration steady for several minutes. At that stage, the observer and the observed merge and become one.

For achieving the state of dhyana, we should be firmly established in asana and all our nadis should be cleansed by the practice of pranayama. This is why pranayama is so important, and why purification is critical to the success of yoga. Without enough purification, the nadis are blocked and prana shakti

cannot be drawn through them.

A Special Note About Samadhi

Samadhi is referred to as the eighth limb and is the natural fruit of successful yoga, if the preceding seven limbs have been achieved with proficiency. There is no one single practice or training for the state of Samadhi. It is a spontaneous state beyond our limited 4-dimensional range of perception of mind and intellect. In this state, one's individual ego merges with Universal Ego; the observer, the observed and the process of observation cease to exist. It can also be thought of as union with God or becoming one with God. Words fail to express this state. The only indication of achieving this state is the bliss one experiences.

Chapter 14.

Yoga Sutras

The founder of the sutras string of knowledge is Maharishi Patanjali, who is equally regarded as the father of yoga. In as much as very little is known about Patanjali, many people are of the belief that he is thought to have existed somewhere in between 200 to 500 B.C. An era when the Ayurveda was the best form of wisdom that people had as the cure or remedy for their illnesses. Maharishi Patanjali brought forth this high-powered knowledge which later came to acquire the name Yoga Sutras.

During those contemporary days, virtually all the teachings were administered orally, and students learned through a process referred to as sutra. Sutra is a word that originates from the same "pot" as the term suture which is usually used in the medical field. It means holding together or creating a connection. Whenever a tutor expounded on a given piece of information, the learners would be presented with a brief phrase that would, later, remind them of the greater material body. This was somewhat similar to the cue cards in the modern world. However, the problem is that in as much as somebody can have knowledge of the sutras, he/she can never comprehend or be certain of its greater understanding.

This probably explains the origin of the goat yoga in the modern-day.

Sankhya is part of the contemporary systems of philosophy in India. Theoretically, it has an understanding that knowledge is the gateway to enlightenment. Maharishi Patanjali's amazing gift to the universe was that he made use of this deep-rooted— and yet completely intelligent philosophy and converted or simplified it in a way that normal spiritual seeker could use and follow. A blueprint for your path to eventual enlightenment.

Taking into consideration that falling sick is not just the illness in the body, but is equally a representation of the ailments in the emotions and mind, the yoga sutras of Patanjali brings forth knowledge that does not merely administer cure to the body but also works on purifying the emotions, the mind as well as the entire existence itself, by using yoga.



The Yoga Sutras

The aims of practicing yoga, how yogic powers develop and lastly, liberation. Just like a tender guiding stick, the yoga sutras caution you of the pitfalls on the spiritual voyage and consequently give you the strategies or ways in which you can vanquish or overpower them.

What Is the Essentiality of Your Spiritual Practices?

Your spiritual activities should aim at looking at your inner self. The real version of yourself is hidden in the tranquility of your thoughts, beyond all obstructions. Nonetheless, the confusion, chaos, and doubts within your thoughts push you to forget your true self.

The main hindrance to spiritual advancement is stress. It causes fatigue, resulting in laziness and doubts which push you to lose the meaning of who you really are. Staying committed to your practices is the perfect recipe to win this battle.

If you wish to achieve peace of mind, you should put into practice friendly attitudes without envying the people who are truly happy. Be merciful to the less fortunate and unhappy people, cherish show support to acts of virtuousness and practice impartiality to get rid of the dramas that the impure brings forth.

The outcome of the wrong action is misery and the outcome of virtuous actions is a joy. You must be responsible for words, actions, and thoughts by choosing to

live consciously. The yoga sutras are the gateway to refinement, surrender, and purification.

Yoga Is Not the Condition of Being Alienated Spiritually

Patanjali gives a description of the flickering operations of these mind field fractures by naming them according to their category and type. In this part, we will bear witness to the controversy that has cropped up between the radical revolutionary academic reductionist school of dualism that follows the first narration or explanation of the Yoga Sutras (Vyasa) elucidation in contradiction to the real words of Patanjali. This is evident all through the sutras. It is the comprehension of these translators that the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali is not a book that talks about philosophy and that instead, it is intended to be entirely a guide book similar to the spirit of the manual of a lab to aid and accompany experimental practices. Therefore, for the novices, this is the toughest part of the whole Yoga Sutras if we chose to do a correlative study.

To clarify verses 1.5 to 11 of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali is giving an address about the citta-vrtti (how our minds tend to dart from one thought to another) as well as how to unshackle our minds from their curtailment. He does not state anywhere that the vrtti are only five, but he categorically says that they can be classified or arranged in a manner that involves positioning them into five feasible categories. The majority of the vrtti are in existence as permutations or combinations of two or probably more of these fundamental categories and therefore the classical papers affirm that the count of vrtti is at 84,000.

This point is compelling for the simple fact that vrtti (though patterns that have been conditioned) can assume various forms. Most of us have had an experience of vrtti, virtually all the time, only excluding the infrequent moments of vision, inspiration, clarity, revelation, beauty, or meditation. However, the repressive problem usually takes place because when citta-vrtti is in a state of dominance, we are usually not aware of its operation and us also not aware of its coloring consequences; that is, we do not have the ability to go outside or beyond it to take note of its effects. Therefore, somebody who is mindful or somebody who meditates begins to take note of the rise and fall of the vrtta. There is no need for focusing on or following the vrtti, instead, you should realize that one is working or operating and make a choice to let it go. Do not give it attention. In the long run, through constant awareness, the vrtta do not have the power to mislead or occlude the midfield. An individual becomes used to in the real

nature of his/her own mind which is basically the truthful nature of every prevalent all-mind.

Therefore, vrtti does not designate some theoretical concept of intellectuality, instead it gives a description of our thought design that possess or occupies our minefields of being attentive- any restricting procedure of patterning that obscures, colors, limits, perverts, corrupts prejudices, restricts, or restrains our experience of our intrinsic truthful nature, infinite mind, or original mind as well as the greatest potential to solve. The main reason why recognizing vrtta is essential because vrtti brings forth emotional and mental afflictions. Both are initially recognized in an orderly manner to get rid of them, however, they are not accorded any focus. Slowly, they undergo attenuation and then they are entirely set free in functional yoga.

Yoga Practices Starting with the Most Important

Patanjali categorically states that the essence behind yoga practices are the vigorous focused on commitment to results. Therefore, yoga is a practice that is process-oriented and not a practice that is goal-oriented. If practicing yoga is deeply rooted in original liveliness that is non-dual, then the view is in the path and in turn, the path shows the fruit. It is not focused on achieving a certain goal, but it simply permits the deepening of innate, non-dual and natural compassion and luminosity to shine, as the fraudulent identifications and barriers are set free. Simply put, in times of process orientation, the fruit is usually in plain sight as it offers guidance to the practice. The conditions are often boundless.

The intensification levels of not being attached to events and objects are revealed and clarified until the highest level of freedom of release is achieved. This is finished with the remarkable surrender of the mindset of egoism and selfish motivation.

Failing this deliverance through remarkable non-attachment to certain objects, then Patanjali insists that somebody should intensify his/her practice. Later, in the book, we will see that yoga sutra fundamentally deals with cutting lose our fetishes and attachments on objects; hard or even extremely soft. This manner of surrendering to the highest of personal luminous love can be used in almost all yogic practices

Putting Patanjali's Yoga Sutra into Practice

In the Yoga Sutra, Patanjali says that if we wish to achieve a powerful foundation, we have to practice for long periods of time without being interrupted, having belief in it as well as anticipating it with the mindset of service. The first ground rule that Patanjali offers is a long time (Digha-Kala). This means that taking note of what you are undertaking is not something that can be achieved overnight. You have to be committed for a long time to get almost permanent results that you will be proud of.

Therefore, any time you do something new, irrespective of whether it is a job or a relationship, Patanjali advises you to be ready to put in some effort.

Chapter 15.

A Different Kind Of Yoga

Like life, yoga is an ongoing quest to find balance. Compared with other forms of yoga and physical activity that strengthen muscles, yin yoga stretches and stimulates what's deeper beneath the surface: the connective tissues in the body. Yin is a slower-paced practice, with an emphasis on spending a long time in postures and cultivating stillness.

Practicing with Yin and Yang

The wisdom of ancient Chinese philosophy states that all things in the universe have opposing energies: yin and yang. The common symbol taijitu illustrates this concept with a black-and-white circle with a spiral pattern inside, representing how these contrasting energies are always intertwined and flowing into each other. The yang, or white side of the symbol, often represents brightness, masculinity, rigidity, and mobility, while the yin, or black side, represents darkness, femininity, softness, and immobility. In applying this context to the physical body, our muscles are considered yang, and the connective tissues that make up our tendons, ligaments, and bones are considered yin.

Our muscles respond well to dynamic, repetitive movements. Think about your last visit to the gym. Though you may have been exhausted after your workout with weights or your run on the treadmill, your muscles were able to withstand the activity. In fact, a big reason why you continue to work out may be because you can see the benefits it has on your body as your muscles grow bigger and become stronger.

On the other hand, the connective tissues do not respond well to being stressed in the same active, repetitive manner. But all too often we engage the entire body in high-intensity, dynamic movements while neglecting to explore the benefits of gentler, passive stretching. This is where yin yoga comes in.

Yin yoga draws on the concepts that yin and yang energies form a whole and that the interaction and coexistence of the opposites are essential to creating a mind and body in balance. It is a highly beneficial practice of long-held passive stretches that intentionally target the deep connective tissues in the body that

other dynamic forms of yoga and exercise do not reach.

THE BENEFITS OF YIN YOGA

Teaches the mind and body to be still: The long holds and contemplative nature of yin yoga are great training for a meditation practice. With stillness and surrender as objectives, you will learn to quiet the chatter in your mind and focus on the sensations in your body while remaining calm.

Reduces stress and anxiety: As a slower practice, yin activates the parasympathetic nervous system—also known as the body’s rest and digest response—which lowers your heart rate, increases circulation, and stabilizes breathing for a more relaxed demeanor.

Strengthens connective tissue and joints: While a more active yoga practice targets the movement and contraction of our muscles (yang), the yin practice gently exercises our joints and surrounding connective tissues. Through the practice of holding postures for a longer time, yin yoga strengthens the connective tissue and increases the flexibility of the joints.

Improves mobility: Yin yoga postures primarily target the hips, low back, and pelvic areas—all areas that become less mobile with age. The gentle stretches of yin yoga help loosen fascia to bring more mobility around the muscles and ligaments in the body.

Promotes healthier organ function: Yin yoga fosters a still body and mindful breath, which enables blood to circulate more easily. Increased circulation nourishes and stimulates the organs.

What's Yoga Got to Do with Taoism?

It’s no secret that yoga’s origins are in India, so it may seem odd that yin yoga is heavily influenced by the Chinese philosophy of Taoism. But, in fact, Taoism and yoga share very similar principles.

Hatha is the type of yoga that is meant to calm your thoughts and align the mind and body (as opposed to vinyasa, which has a faster pace and is designed to build heat and strengthen muscles). In the word “hatha,” ha refers to the energy of the sun while the reflects the energy of the moon. Furthermore, the root of the word “yoga” is yuj, which means “yoke” or “union.” Like the Taoist theory of yin and yang, the practice of hatha yoga is based on the union of the opposing energies of the sun and moon to bring balance. Therefore, the integration of yin

and yang with hatha yoga is spot-on.

The yin yoga shared in this book is based on concepts explored and developed by several master teachers, including Paul Grilley (influenced by Paulie Zink and Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama), Bernie Clark, and Sarah Powers. They fuse elements of Taoism, traditional Chinese medicine, anatomy, and hatha yoga to create a style of yin yoga that is therapeutic, stimulating, and strengthening for the body.

QI THEORY

In yin yoga, poses are held in stillness for a long time in order to stimulate and stretch the deeper connective tissues. This action of holding postures helps move energy through the body. This energy is known as qi (or chi) in the tradition of Chinese medicine and as prana (or “life force”) in the Indian yogic and Ayurvedic traditions, and it moves along a set of pathways in the body called meridians.

There are 12 main meridians that form a network connecting to the body’s major organs. Yin yoga postures stretch the connective tissue along these meridian lines. As a result, the organs they serve are revitalized and rejuvenated by the flow of qi, leading to improved well-being in body, mind, and spirit.

Poses (Asanas)

Yin yoga poses generally aren’t so different from the poses practiced in other forms of yoga, but there are a few special considerations to keep in mind.

Yin postures are generally done seated, while other yoga styles like Power Vinyasa or Bikram involve many standing sequences. Since yin poses often focus on the lower body (mainly the low back, hips, and legs), it’s easier to hold the poses for an extended period while seated.

The alignment of a pose should not cause stress or pain to any area of the body. For example, if the intention of the pose is to stress the connective tissues of the hip joint, and the manner in which you take the pose causes pain in the knee area, you should modify the pose based on your personal anatomy to alleviate any pain.

In order to stress the deep connective tissues around a joint, you must keep those muscles relaxed while you hold a pose. If the muscles are tense, then the stretch won’t target the connective tissues. It’s important to note that the only muscles

you need to relax while in a yin pose are the muscles specific to the focus area. For instance, if the pose focuses on the hips, it's not necessary to engage your arm muscles.

Yin poses involve long hold times. Once you've come into a pose and have arrived at your edge, it's time to become still and settle into the pose. You want to hold each pose for a challenging amount of time; you can hold them for as long as 20 minutes if you'd like. The long hold time not only allows the deep connective tissues (fascia, ligament, and bone) to be stressed and stretched to build deep inner strength but also promotes the therapeutic clearing of injuries, traumas, and repetitive movement patterns (such as sitting a certain way in a chair or always carrying a bag over the same shoulder) stored in the body.

In some cases, holding a yin pose can cause energy (qi) or blood to be restricted in certain areas. A yang pose is then provided as a follow-up to help get things moving again before the next long yin pose.

JOINT, TISSUE, AND LIGAMENT HEALTH

The idea of holding a yoga posture for a long time in order to stretch deep connective tissues may sound intimidating (or even unsafe) at first, but the truth is that yin yoga can improve the health of your joints, ligaments, and bones.

While we hold the posture in stillness, the deep stretching occurs from the stress, or tension, placed on the tissues. Although the most popular styles of exercise are yang-like and train the muscles through quick repetitive movements, yin yoga is often called the "quiet practice" because the results don't happen right away. However, over time the deeper connective tissues do become thicker, longer, and stronger.

Why is this beneficial to our health? As we age, we lose stability and mobility in our joints, and our bodies become stiffer. Cultivating stronger and elongated tissues through yin yoga helps us with mobility and flexibility as we age.

The Breath

As with other styles of yoga, breathing is a vital part of yin practice. The purpose of the breathing is to elicit calm and relaxation and to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which signals to the body that you are okay and not in danger.

When you are in a stressful situation, the sympathetic nervous system (or the

body's fight, flight, or freeze response) automatically kicks in because your body is concerned about keeping you safe. When this system is activated, stress hormones are released, your heart rate increases, your muscles become tense, your blood pressure rises, and your breathing becomes rapid. This is the opposite of what you want to experience when practicing yin yoga. The parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, allows us to be calm and present in body and mind.

A yogic breathing style that is tremendously helpful for relaxation and calmness is the Ujjayi breath. Translated as “victorious breath,” and often called the Ocean Breath, the Ujjayi technique involves guttural breathing during which you contract the glottis in the back of the throat to produce a soft, hissing sound for the exhalation. In more rigorous yang-like yoga practices, the expelling of the breath in Ujjayi can be harsh or loud. In yin, the objective is to keep the breath soft, rhythmic, and quiet. If that is not achievable for you with Ujjayi breathing, you can always use a calm, quiet breath with long inhalations and exhalations instead.

Though they are often linked together, yin yoga is not the same as restorative yoga. The intent of restorative yoga is full relaxation and surrender. To the contrary, the nature of the yin practice is stillness and presence. In yin practice, you are tuning in instead of tuning out.

WHEN TIME SLOWS DOWN

Yin poses are typically held for 3 to 5 minutes, but you can hold them for as long as 20 minutes.

Your experience of time in a pose can vary from day to day depending on how you are feeling physically or emotionally. If you find it hard to stay in a pose once you've found your edge, it's best to come out of it. Stillness—not pain—is what's required.

Try setting a timer so you can stay focused in the practice. If your timer goes off and you want to hold the pose longer, go for it. Just be mindful of not overdoing it. Some signs that may indicate you have pushed your body too far are physical pain, spasms, tightness, or feeling out of alignment. If these appear, try backing off in the poses. Instead of taking a full expression of the pose, try a more moderate version and decrease the hold time. Gradually work your way back to longer holds. If it's altogether too difficult to practice at all, take care of yourself

and give your body a break from practice for as long as is necessary.

The Mind

Tuning in to what is happening in the body during a yin practice will likely trigger a multitude of fluctuations in the mind. You may experience feelings like boredom, discomfort, or even anxiety. Try to stay with those feelings and remember everything's okay. There's no need to chastise yourself for the various thoughts and feelings that arise as you engage in this practice.

Part of maintaining stillness is accepting the impermanent nature of the thoughts that come up during the long holds. To help regulate mind chatter, return to your breath. As you slow down and deepen your breathing, you will likely discover that your mind quiets down as well.

Additionally, your relationship to your thoughts about yourself and how they relate to your yoga practice may change the more you engage in yin. You may learn that you have the fortitude to handle a challenging pose. You may also learn that staying present and listening to the messages your body communicates during the practice leads you to become more in tune with your body off the mat as well. Yin yoga does wonders for opening the body—and it also helps us open up our mind and how we view ourselves.

Conclusion

Yoga is more than mere stretching. It exercises the body, mind, and spirit.

It's probably not news to you that yoga is perfect for your wellbeing; the modern popularity of yoga has spread that message very effectively. But now that you've learned so much about yoga and its many benefits, you have a much better idea of the reasons for that.

The truth is that yoga, and the way we practice it through meditation and the asanas, reflects how one should live life.

Think about all the times we try to rush things, desperately trying to achieve our goals in ever smaller amounts of time because the world has become so fast. That's not inherently wrong; in fact, the intentions are good—but good intentions alone don't shape us.

The only thing that can bring you closer to your goals is constant practice, introspection, and patience. Yoga is about all that.

Practicing yoga is about flexing a little bit every day for months just to break the tightness of our body. It's about regulating our breath and mind to endure extreme bodily poses that defy our sense of balance. Lastly, it's about knowing that the best poses will require a considerable time investment.

No matter how much you rush or how hard you press, some things simply require time and repetition. Simple as that.

This is an invaluable message for most of us today. We can't afford to get carried away by the mentality of instant gratification. We're bound to crash into a stone wall of ineptitude sooner or later if we don't start doing things with care and consistency.

I hope this book has given you more than a handful of bodily poses and sequences to train your body; in truth, I hope you realize these core life precepts. They're far more valuable.

That is not to diminish the impacts of yoga on your health. If you're like me, and you work a lot of hours at the computer, you might be accustomed to the stiff feeling of your body. Some days you don't even want to sit at all. That is one



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perfect reason to start practicing yoga.

With just 20 minutes each day, you can breathe more life and energy into your seemingly spent body. The surge of power will allow you to achieve more, but besides this tangible surge of wellbeing, think about how good it would be to reconnect with your respiration and your thoughts every day.

We've become disconnected from our inner self. In a single span of time we think of so many different and unrelated things that we can't even follow our own train of thought.

Yoga demands you stop for a moment, forcing you to reflect.

Indeed, yoga is truly a wonderful school of philosophy and exercise. Practicing it, and doing it honestly, with an open mind and an open heart, will get you a multitude of benefits that go far beyond stretching both of your legs parallel to the ground.

I hope this book was able to help you get acquainted with the different yoga poses.

The next step is to apply what you have learned in this book to change your life. Yoga has tremendous physical and mental health benefits. It strengthens your mind and your body. Yoga also helps keep your body fit, too. Yoga is fun, light, and challenging at the same time.

Also, it is important to consult your doctor before trying any of the poses featured in this book. If you are a beginner, it is best to start your yoga practice under the supervision of a certified yoga teacher.

Good luck yogi, your ascetic journey has just barely begun!

Thank you so much for downloading and reading Yoga for Beginners.