

Yo Joan on deepening relaxation

*Dear Joan,
How can I make my meditation more than relaxing. How can I deepen it?
Tom*

Dear Tom,
Say a prayer before your meditation practice. Dedicate your meditation practice to this prayer. Keep this prayer consistent with each meditation practice. Watch as your practice deepens. If you can not think of a prayer that you would like to say every day in beginning your meditation practice, Sogyal Rinpoche offers this example of a prayer to use in his beautiful book, "The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying."

"By the power and truth of this practice:

May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness,

May all be free from sorrow, and the causes of sorrow;

May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is sorrowless;

And may all live in equanimity, without too much attachment and too much aversion,

And live believing in the equality of all that lives."

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A beautiful prayer like this, said consistently before each meditation practice, can deepen the experience of your meditation, your insights, your life. May this blessed new year be filled with increasing love and light for you, dear Tom, for all cherished readers of the column, and for all dear lives everywhere.

AUM Shanti/All Peace.
Yours in peace,

Joan

Kundalini yoga and the benefits of fasting

Dear Joan,

Is kundalini yoga mostly breath- and meditation-oriented? Not as active as

Hatha? I went to a class last night and it was nice and relaxing but not as vigorous as I'd like. I just wonder if this was his deal, or a

Kundalini deal.
Suz

Dear Suz,
Kundalini is the energy

along the spine. The yoga that comes from this is highly focused on breath work and lots of upper body movements, too. The poses are often labeled differently than traditional hatha yoga. For example, downward dog is labeled as triangle pose. Depending on the instructor, it can get really far out there ... then again, this can be in any type of class ... even a yoga class! Some would say that a kundalini yoga is more active than a traditional hatha yoga class because of its strong focus on breath work and meditation. It's all perspective. A great teacher makes a great kundalini class ... or any class.

That's the deal.

Dear Joan,

I've noticed that in *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga*, you mention fasting once a week. I was wondering what the benefits are, and also the best way to do it.

Thank you,
Darren

Dear Darren,

There are many variations on fasting. Many cultures and religious traditions support the use of fasting as a way to increase spiritual awareness. Fasting can help one to prioritize differently. If you are not thinking about or planning your meals, you will have more time and ability to focus on spiritual concerns and questions. This does not work for everyone, in fact, I dare say, it does not work for most. Most people are overwhelmed with feelings and sensations for food when they fast. In this way, fasting simply makes them focus on food even more. They just count the minutes until their fast ends, so that they can eat again. Their time fasting is spent dreaming about the delicious next meal. Even so, fasting can help us to become aware of this, and to see how clear our focus or concentration can be. If one is able to focus

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so clearly and strongly on food, imagine the possibilities if the focus could be placed elsewhere!

For this reason, I agree with the many traditions that support fasting one day a week as beneficial on spiritual levels. If a full day is not possible, then one morning, or one evening, or simply eating less that day. I recommend a juice fast, so as not to completely starve the body. I do not recommend a fast for people with health concerns or those who are taking medications of any sort.

My fast recommendations are from a spiritual level, not from a physical level. Our bodies need food as physical fuel, so I honestly do not believe fasting can be justified on this level alone. But if we view fasting as fuel for our spiritual growth, I believe there is strong justification to offer a simple fast to the temple that houses our spirit one day a week. In this time, read more spiritual texts, pray more, meditate more. Use the time you would have used eating as a time to reflect on spiritual questions, concerns, or understandings. When you comes out of a fast, do not gorge on all the food you missed. This defeats the fast. Rather, drink some warm water with a pinch of salt or ginger, then an hour later, drink some juice. Then a little later, have something light and healthy to eat. This is the way to come out of a fast.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Letters to Joan can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at <http://www.yoyoga.com>

Lifestyle

Many reasons for vegetarian choice

Dear Joan,

Hi. My name is Caitlyn and I'm 13 years old. My mom studies herbology and a few years ago I started getting an interest in holistic healing and exercise methods. I used some birthday money to buy your Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga, Second Edition, and am part of the way through it (I love it so far!). I'm a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do and I hope that yoga will enhance my practice of the martial art.

I love animals and have always wanted to be a vegetarian. My family almost never has red meat but we do have chicken and fish, and I'm hoping to completely eliminate meat from my diet. I know that I need protein, especially since I'm a growing teen, but I'm willing to eat eggs and milk products to compensate for that.

I'm also trying to be careful to eat healthfully because although I am not particularly overweight, my family has a history of weight problems. Do you know of any sources

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that could help me find a way to keep a healthy, balanced vegetarian diet? I know that not only will vegetarianism be kinder to the animals, but it can also be a big part of yoga and can be very healthy. Please help me!

Thanks,
Caitlyn

Dear Caitlyn,

You make me see that there is a need for vegetarian lifestyles to be taught to families. Perhaps there is a vegetarian nutritionist reading this column who might consider offering classes in this? If so, please contact me and I will gladly post your information on my Web site.

Many parents are very encouraging of their children's interests, as yours apparently are for you, but when it comes to meals, it becomes quite difficult. I applaud all parents for their struggles/joys in the kitchen. It is not easy whipping up regular, healthy meals for a family, yet parents do this on a daily basis.

I applaud you, Caitlyn, for considering vegetarianism at such a young age. You obviously are very sensitive and I want to encourage you to continue growing in this way. One of the best books I have read recently on the transition from a meat to vegetarian diet is called "Transition to Vegetarianism," by Dr. Rudolph Ballentine. I highly recommend it. Share it with your parents, too. It will encourage you to discuss this process together.

It is not easy to become a healthy vegetarian in our society. Many people think that vegetarianism will solve

weight problems, but as you mention in your letter, Caitlyn, it is important not to impede on the growing strength of the body through a lackluster diet. Body image is also not a main reason to turn to vegetarianism.

In yoga, vegetarianism is turned to through a deepening understanding of non-violence and the practice of the principles of non-violence. Your love for animals is to be nurtured. This is the way of yoga. We study animals and how they move. We continually increase our sensitivities to their conditions on this planet.

The first step, Caitlyn, is to be truly thankful to your parents for the meals they are preparing for you ... vegetarian or not. Thank them for the time and love they take in the preparation of your food. When you sit down to eat, vegetarian or not, be thankful for the food that is on your plate. Bless the life that was given to

nourish yours.

You may already be doing this. But sometimes we need reminders of how important this is. We live in a world of fast-food ease, but life is precious in all its many forms. The taking of life of any form should not be done in haste or in waste — or with unawareness.

It may surprise you to know, Caitlyn, that I am not a complete vegetarian. When I go to a function or family gathering where meat is served, I accept it with gratitude. In my personal life I am a vegetarian, but in my public life, I am not a complete vegetarian yet. I have struggles with vegetarianism, too. The transition is still in process. Like you, I hope to someday be a complete healthy vegetarian.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Letters to Joan can be sent to her Yoyoga Website at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Yoga postures can alleviate anxiety

Dear Joan,
First of all thank you for your Web site and your Idiot's guide.

I have been practicing yoga for a year and it has brought me great benefits. The last one (besides other reasons) has been the decision of quitting smoking.

I know that some *asanas* are very efficient to quiet the mind, but I wonder if there are any postures that you would recommend to fight the withdrawal and the anxiety that I am feeling now?

Thank you so much,
Oni

Dear Oni,

These are certainly difficult times for us all. It's amazing how successful many of us are in ineffectively handling stress. Effectively handling stress is a whole other phenomenon.

There are different types of *asanas* (postures) for different body constitutions. An athletic version of yoga postures, also termed *ashtanga*, is quite popular now. It is geared toward those who are athletic and/or in need of high-intensity workouts to reduce stress.

For some of us, this type of high-intensity movement brings on more stress. If you need less of a high-energy impact, the quieter, slower stretches of the Himalayan, Sivananda, Kriya or Iyengar yoga traditions may be more of what you are looking for.

Ask your yoga teacher what tradition his/her training is in. Sit in on one class; most teachers permit this, to see if the right type of style for you is taught.

Withdrawal and anxiety are all very real emotions and/or ways of reacting to stressful times. We may think these ways are instinctual responses, but in fact they are learned ones. A regular practice of yoga can help us build on our understandings of this.

Yoga can help us to simplify our thoughts, and in turn our responses. When depression becomes a response, we need to move to get out of it. The cycle begins when we find it difficult to move, so we sit more in our depression and immerse deeper into its trenches. Remember this little poem:

*Feeling down
move around.
Feeling great
meditate.*

The yoga poses of Triangle, sun salutation, and warrior as well as standing poses of all sorts move us out of depressive states. Once we are out of these depressive states, we can find the more settling and quieting seated poses to work through our anxieties. Meditation is the path to ease anxieties, but one has to move to get there.

I hope you have found this response helpful, Oni.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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Dear Joan,

I just read your book on meditation and I found it very informative. I have just started to meditate and I find that I am "choking up," if that is the term to use when I feel myself going deep into meditation. It feels like I am afraid of losing control or something. This makes it very difficult to keep meditating. I even get nervous thinking about meditation.

Is this just a phase and will I eventually move out of it, or is there something more to it? I would really appreciate a response because I would like to keep going.

Thanks, Dennis

Dear Dennis,

Here is an exercise for you, Dennis. Take out a pen and paper and reflect on the answers to these questions. Write them down.

(1) Visualize yourself "losing control." What would happen to you if you lost control? What does this mean to you?

(2) How would a loss of control scare you? What do you fear happening?

(3) How could you lose control in meditation? What might happen to you if you did? How would this loss of control in meditation affect your meditation, your day, your week, your life, the life of others?

By reflecting on these answers I am asking you to face your fears through the power of your pen.

I would also suggest for you to take a class in meditation, Dennis. A class is where you can explore these questions and concepts openly with others. A teacher is someone who understands and will help guide you in your studies. A class of students affords you numerous opportunities to see that you are not alone in your concerns.

Your fears can be brought up in a loving and supportive environment. The company of others on this path will soften some, if not all, of your fears.

Because you state that

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you have read my book, you know that meditation can be approached from various directions. Whatever direction you approach your meditation studies from, the first step involves developing focus through concentration.

There are many exercises that can be done to develop this focus. Some examples are mantra, hatha yoga, breath awareness, sense withdrawal, candle gazing, etc. These types of exercises develop awareness.

Awareness can bring us into deeper states of meditation.

Meditation is not losing control; meditation is developing awareness. Meditation is not controlling; meditation is freedom.

For me, meditation is like tuning a harp. It takes time to tune a harp. I could play the harp without tuning it, but the sounds will be dissonant. I will not be able to master my playing of the harp this way because I will not be aware of the sound of the strings until I actually strike them. Some notes may sound strange to my inner ear. My mind will hear something different than what I am playing. My harp and my mind will not be in sync.

If I tune the harp before playing it, I can play a melody that can take me into deeper and clearer expressions of the music that I hear within me. With practice and time, this music becomes not only an expression of me, but it becomes me. There is no separation between the music and myself. For me, playing the harp is an exercise in meditation. It is a private experience that I cherish.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Yoga can help bring body into balance

Yo Joan,

Tell me which yoga exercise I can do to help tighten my stomach muscles to get rid of my gut! What page is it in your book? I'm sadly realizing that this may well be the first year that I cannot wear a two-piece swimming suit.

Bye, Sandy

Dear Sandy,

I am really not a personal trainer for your tummy. The size of your stomach has no bearing on the way I teach yoga. I do alter poses for those with large abdomens so that poses can be assumed in ways that are more comfortable and effective.

Yoga poses are available to people of all sizes and shapes. When I worry about my tummy size, which I sometimes do too, I go to the health club and get a physical trainer to help me get back into svelte shape.

Yoga helps to bring the body into balance, but with

our fast-paced life styles and irregular diets, most of us can use some extra help to keep the pounds off. There are wonderful personal trainers out there who can help to counter the negative effects from a sedentary lifestyle of too many French fries and malted milks.

If you had asked me this question a few years ago, I probably would have had an answer in terms of yoga poses. I probably would have said leg lifts will strengthen the back, which strengthens the tummy and boat pose (sitting on the floor, balancing on your tailbone with legs and arms lifted) also strengthens the tummy; however, I have since deepened in my study of yoga and do not apply the postures in this way.

Here is what I will say today: yoga is a lifestyle approach and overall conditioning for the body. It is not a spot reducer. I'll see you at the gym for spot

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reductions and bathing suit concerns. A few more years from now, when bathing suit season rolls around again, we may prefer meeting at an ashram instead.

Joan

Dear Joan,

I have never taken a yoga class, but have heard wonderful things about it. I have always wanted to take a class and I think now is the perfect time for me to start.

I am currently five months pregnant; do you offer prenatal yoga classes? If not, do you know of any place that does?

Sincerely, Doraluz

Dear Doraluz,

Now is the time, Doraluz. This is a beautiful way to bring your baby into our world. To surround your baby with images and feelings of peace as you study yoga is a wonderful gift you can give.

I do not offer prenatal classes. Check your local hospital, which may offer some. Good Samaritan Health and Wellness Center in Downers Grove is offering classes in this. Other yoga centers are beginning

to offer prenatal yoga classes too.

I highly encourage you on this path of yoga, the unity of body mind and spirit. There are lessons of non-harming in the study of yoga to begin teaching your baby in the womb. By reducing your stress, you will be reducing your baby's stress. The new angels coming into this world need all the help they can get. I encourage you to begin teaching your angel now.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Lifestyle

Yoga instructor struggles with issues of patience, peace

Dear Joan,

This is my second letter to you. I wrote to you to compliment you on your *Yoga and Meditation For Idiots* books back in September.

In November, I took the Yoga Fit Training with several friends. Many things I've read tell me that traditional yoga teachers don't think much of this "yoga certification in a weekend" program, but I can tell you it was wonderful. I can also say that I agree, one weekend does NOT make a yoga instructor. It also takes many hours of self-study and practice to supplement that "quick start."

Four of us went to training; two of us are working and studying and continue to grow, two of us are not. There is a glaring difference. My problem is that one of the ones that is not studying is the director of the fitness program that I am connected with. I am the sub, she is the instructor. I'm the one that is prepared. She is the one that is teaching.

She talks about being "too busy" and I want to tell her, "If you are not prepared, somebody else should be teaching," but she thinks she's doing just fine. It's very frustrating for me. What would you do?

The Sub

Dear Sub,

I would try my best to not judge her. I would focus on my practice. I would continue to study and deepen my understanding of the meaning of yoga — bring-

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ing the body/mind/soul into a peaceful harmony and balance.

I would try to work with my competitive thoughts through the practice and study of the yoga philosophy of non-harming. *How are my thoughts or actions toward this instructor harming her? How are my thoughts or actions towards this instructor harming myself? How can my awareness create a more loving and supportive environment for us all to learn?*

If I continued to feel this experience was an injustice, I might speak to her about how I felt. Before I spoke to her, I would reflect on my words. I would reflect again on the yoga philosophy of non-harming so that I approach her in kind ways.

However, I might also simply seek work elsewhere. And if I found similar situations popping up for me in other work environments, I would question my ego. By this I mean, I would look at myself as a student rather than a teacher. What am I learning? What is preventing me from learning? Every experience has a lesson to be learned in it. What has prevented me from learning in this experience? Those are some thoughts, reflections,

on what I might do in this situation. I hope you may find them helpful.

You say that you are the "sub." I remember my years in the arts and how the understudies (subs) were often more prepared than anyone else who appeared

on the stage, yet rarely did they get the chance to perform on the stage.

But when the day came and the understudy got her/his chance to perform, all their study, preparation, and keen observations paid off. For understudies are stu-

dents — and students make the greatest teachers.

Yours in peace,

Joan

Letters to Joan can be sent to her *Yoyoga* Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Letter writer seeks answer through yoga

Dear Joan, I've been practicing yoga for a whole 10 minutes and yet I still have a headache, backache, toothache, stress, worry and halitosis.

Is this here yoga a scam or am I doing something wrong?

Shasta, Mr. Sardonicus

Dear Mr. Sardonicus,

With the right teacher, even one brief moment can make a difference. Don't be discouraged. When the student is ready, the teacher appears.

Yours in peace, Joan

Dear Joan,

I'd like to take it easy with yoga because it's unlocking a lot of old stuff. The breath of fire technique is bringing up all the old,

gooky, toxic shame I grew up with ... it's intense.

I have access to an aerobics room at the gym. I am fortunate to have extra tools in there as well (punching bag and a stick.) The standing postures release a lot of anger just as you have stated in your "Idiot's Guide to Yoga."

Sometimes the feelings are so intense that I have to pick up the stick and whack the bag and verbalize old anger in the middle of my practice. As you probably can notice, I feel very raw with yoga. I feel open and vulnerable. I feel like the old Chris.

Chris

Dear Chris,

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Yoga poses can open up emotional wounds, but they also help direct emotions into constructive modes of expression. Now, I am not saying that punching a bag cannot be an effective way to express rage, but it does not really heal the rage. Instead, it'll exhaust you momentarily and you may think the rage is healed. But the rage is still there.

This move from a yoga

posture to punching a bag is impulsive behavior. If you are in a class with others when this behavior happens, I can say with confidence, it's not helping others in the class focus on yoga, either.

Instead, I would encourage you to increase the intensity of the postures you are working with, and then to hold these postures longer. As you hold the posture, bring your attention to your breath.

When your thoughts become focused on the difficulty of the posture, breathe deeply and focus on the movement of the breath.

As emotions come up, watch them as you would watch a balloon floating by. Let your breath help to guide you on the roller coaster of emotions. If possible, breathe

through the nose, particularly when you inhale. This purifies the air more than breathing through the mouth. It also extends the length of air. After you are through with this intensive yoga posture practice, then turn to the deeper breathing exercises.

You mention the breath of fire — quick exhales out the nose. This can be done in three rounds about one minute duration in each round. And about punching bags, I am concerned that someday you may substitute a person for a bag. In the long run, it will be much more effective for you to learn to work through your anger and your emotions with your breath. My best to you, Chris.

Yours in Peace, Joan

Lifestyle

How to achieve 'successful' pose

Dear Joan,

I have been working on the plough and am pleased to say that I can now actually get into the posture with my feet touching the floor. However, I usually have to cut the posture short because I feel a pressure on my windpipe and breathing is uncomfortable.

Is this because I'm a little overweight or could I do something differently to prevent this gasping feeling?

Alison

Dear Alison,

Irregular and/or uncomfortable breathing is a clear sign to come out of a yoga pose. This is a standard observance to follow in any yoga pose. Plough pose involves lying on one's back and bringing the legs

straight up over one's head as the feet come toward the floor. Knees stay straight. Arms can support the back or rest on the floor.

Alison, it sounds like you are trying too hard to get your feet to the floor when your body is not ready for this to happen. Your feet do not have to touch the floor for the pose to be effective. The body is trying to tell you this. It's speaking very clearly, in fact. Why is it so hard to listen?

It's easy to become goal orientated in our approach to the postures. We live in a society that puts tremendous pressure on physical achievements. When yoga is advertised, it's usually by some gymnastic-looking posture. We think that we have achieved yoga-like sta-

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tus when a posture begins to look like a picture we have seen. As difficult as it may be to transcend this image, I would highly encourage you to try. To do this, explore the pose from the inside out, rather than the outside in.

Instead of viewing the feet touching the floor as success in the pose, ask yourself these three questions: 1) Does the spine feel as if it is lengthening, allowing space for my internal organs? When the

inside or outside feels crushed, you have stretched too far. 2) Does my digestion improve after a regular practice of this pose? This pose rejuvenates the abdominal organs. 3) Do my hands, fingers and shoulders feel less strained, less tight, after a regular practice of this posture? This pose relieves and reduces cramps in these areas.

These are questions to begin exploring. Remember, toes can be touched without awareness or without kindness in one's heart. Let grace govern your movements. Let compassion sing in your heart. When your body speaks to you, listen with loving kindness.

Yours in peace,

Joan

Practice of yoga can help clarify career path

Dear Joan,

I have been practicing yoga for about a year-and-a-half and have noticed that within that time that I have started to reconsider my career path. Would this surprise you?

Also, do you know of any books, tapes or teachers that you would recommend to someone who is practicing yoga and is considering making a career change?

Sincerely, Dan

Dear Dan,

It would not surprise me at all that you are reconsidering your career path as your yoga practice has developed. Yoga is a study of union. It clarifies our life practices. If something is out of sync in our life, it brings it to our attention.

If we look around at our

world, we see that there's much that's out of sync. Our career either supports these imbalances or we can choose careers that bring ourselves and our wacky world into a more balanced existence.

Regarding teachers to help you along the way, if you find yourself becoming more compassionate and successful in this world, you are studying with the right teachers. What does success mean? That's for you to decide.

I would be very interested, Dan, in what you decide that to be as your yoga practice continues to deepen. Please keep in touch and let me know.

Yours in peace, Joan

Dear Joan,
I always turn to your book

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when I am fine-tuning a pose and find so much great information. You address this in your book, but I'm still confused about which way the inner legs are supposed to spiral during Upward Dog and Cobra.

Does inward mean turning the thighs toward the floor beneath you or up toward the ceiling? I never could get that down. It seems all reversed because you could be looking at the thighs from the front or the

back.

I sure appreciate you clarifying it for me. My back is aching from all the experimentation!!

Thanks, Lisa

Dear Lisa,

Do not let the legs roll inward. Lift the inner legs and be on the center of the feet to create balance. The knees and elbows are straight. Open the sides of the chest. This is Mountain pose with a slight backbend. Instead of balancing on your soles, as you do in Mountain, in Upward Dog you are balancing on the tops of your feet. The balance is steady and equally distributed.

In Cobra pose, the focus is on lengthening and strengthening the spine. Upward Dog activates the strength of the

leg and arm muscles more by bringing Cobra pose off the floor. Start in Mountain (standing pose) and establish your balance there. Apply the principles of the Mountain in all the other yoga poses — balance, chest open, spine lengthens, shoulders down. What you learn and apply in Mountain will help you in your study and practice of all the other yoga poses.

Now, I realize that some of you reading this response are trying to figure out how to decode it: Mountain, Cobra, Upward Dog? My advice to you: take an actual yoga class. However eloquent and motivating words can be, actions still do speak louder.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Web site at: www.yoyoga.com

Letter writer offers vegetarian viewpoint

Dear Joan,

I read with great interest the letter in the Feb. 27 *Suburban Life* from 13-year-old Caitlyn, who wants to become a vegetarian. You asked for a vegetarian nutritionist who would offer classes on transitioning to vegetarianism.

I am writing for two reasons: 1. to introduce you via e-mail to Laura Black (NutrSnT@aol.com), a nutritionist, who is highly experienced in vegetarian nutrition, sponsors nutrition show and tells where classes are offered in the Chicago area; and 2. to introduce you to the concept I call conscious eating, which both Laura and I practice, by eating a plant-based diet supplemented occasionally with organic/humanely raised animal products.

The majority of animal food products consumed by people in the United States are raised in factory-style warehouses, routinely fed antibiotics and confined to cages, crates and pens with no sunlight or any concern for the animals' well-being.

The common term for animal food production in this country is called factory farming, and unfortunately many of the products that vegetarians eat, specifically dairy and eggs, are heavily factory farmed.

I am a columnist for a local newspaper and often write of the atrocities in which animals are raised for food. There are many Web sites available to

learn the sad truth of factory farming; www.factoryfarm.org, www.factoryfarming.com and www.hfa.org/factory.html are some.

I often substitute soy-based meat and cheese products for animal-based products. When I eat animal products my goal is to eat only free-range, uncaged, grass-fed or organic, if possible. The new USDA Organic Standards have humane standards outlined for most animal products, so the best way to ensure the most natural life of the animal is to eat certified organic animal products.

The Organic Standards also ensure that no antibiotics or growth hormones are in the feed, and that the resulting food product was not genetically engineered or irradiated. It is sometimes difficult for farmers to be certified organic, so there are other terms for raising animals, such as free-range, uncaged, and grass-fed, and these are applied differently for different animal products.

I have learned that according to animal welfare guidelines, eggs should be cage-free (from a local farmer is best), if not certified organic. Chicken and turkey may be free-range, if not organic. Beef, pork and lamb should grass-fed, free-range, or organic. Dairy should be no-rBGH (recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone), if not organic.

There are two great Web sites to find more humanely

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raised animal products. One is called the New Consumers Guide to Meat Raised without Antibiotics at www.iatp.org (scroll down half-way to find it). The other is called Eat Wild at www.eatwild.com. These Web sites makes it very easy to find local farmers, brand names, grocery stores and restaurants.

I used to struggle thinking the only two options were eating meat and not eating meat. Two years ago I was shocked to find out about factory farming, but I also discovered there is a third option, i.e. eating more humanely raised animal products. This was a lifestyle to which I could commit and for which I have become an advocate.

Vegetarians will say there is no such thing as humane slaughter, and I agree. But conventional dairy and eggs are very cruelly obtained as well. I encourage anyone who consumes animal products to become a conscious eater. Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Janice

Hi Janice,
Thank you for your very

informative letter. You are definitely offering steps in a more humane direction than what currently exists for animals of our meat-based diets.

I understand the argument for cage-free production and that it is more nutritionally sound for humans. It still involves the slaughter of innocent sentient animals, which does not follow the yoga lifestyle of himsa/non-violence.

You mention in your last paragraph that vegetarians will say there is no such thing as humane slaughter, and you agree. Janice, I agree too. I believe the answer is in a soy-based, solely vegetarian menu. Supply and demand. If we do not demand meat, we will not be supplied. Numerous cultures around the globe live on plant-based foods and are solely vegetarian. We live in a culture that accepts the slaughter of animals as necessary for our diets. It is necessary for the industries that have grown from them, but it is not necessary for our healthy diets.

Although the idea of cage-free production of animals for the purpose of eating sounds initially more humane, its purpose is still to raise sentient creatures for slaughter. We have the intelligence and the resources to live in a vegetarian society. It is not easy, and I myself have struggles with vegetarianism and have cravings for meat. I also know my short-comings and lifelong habits create this.

I have the capacity to create

a more peaceful world through my individual choices. My individual diet choices are important to blaze a path of non-harming for the creation of a world of deepening peace. My individual choices matter, as do each one of ours.

If I can truly see all as one (om) than I will see that the life of the cow, pig, chicken or fish is sacred. Fish have been the hardest for me to give up in my personal diet, yet fish have possibly the most sensitive skin of all life forms. The way we gather and kill fish for our consumption is very cruel. I am not proud of the fact that I still eat fish and occasionally eat other meats as well. It is something I am working toward changing.

I very much support your efforts to teach plant-based menus, Janice.

Thank you very much for writing and for all the noteworthy information you supply.

A vegetarian lifestyle is not supported in our society of fast-food burgers. You are helping others by educating us to take steps in the right direction. You are working towards creating a more balanced world, Janice. The struggles are not easy ones.

Thank you very much for sharing your resources, your efforts, your light with us.

Yours in peace
Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent by e-mail to her Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Tips on finding yoga studio

Dear Joan,
Do you teach in the Chicago area? If so, where and when? I recently started working in the Oak Brook area, living in Evanston. Anything to recommend in either place? Thank you.
Handson

Dear Handson,
You live by the most spectacular yoga studio — Satchidananda Yoga Center on Chicago Avenue in the heart of Evanston. Sonia Sumars is the teacher. She recently relocated to Evanston from Brazil.

Sumars is a very experienced and remarkable teacher. She wrote the book, "Yoga for the Special Child." She specializes in classes for special needs children but she also offers general yoga classes for adults. You are blessed to have her so close. Her studio number is (847) 869-8315.

Yoga Among Friends is another wonderful yoga studio in Downers Grove (close to Oak Brook). They offer classes seven days a week, with numerous teachers and

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styles. The phone number is (630) 964-5488.

Yoga Chicago is a free bimonthly newspaper that is distributed around Chicago and the suburbs. In it is a listing of all yoga classes in various areas of the city and surrounding locations. To find out where this newspaper is located in your area, call (773) 989-6767 or contact them on the Web at www.yogachicago.com.

Locally, I'll be teaching Monday, Nov. 11, for the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien. I'll be teaching as part of a women's conference that's held there annually. This year's conference is called, "Time for Me." For more information on this conference, call (630) 969-4141.

Joan

Hi Joan,
I am an old student of yours (when you were thinking of writing the first yoga help book). I asked for a local yoga class and you suggested Garden of Yoga. I find more joy in that class. It seems to even off my week and I feel like a new woman when I leave class, just like I did when I was in yours. I love the class and thank you for your recommendation. It was an excellent one.

Dear Friend,
I'm so glad you're enjoying your classes with Kathleen Wright in La Grange. She is a very experienced and wonderful teacher. Her yoga studio, Garden of Yoga's, phone number is (708) 802-1329. Don't be surprised if you find me as a student next to you in class sometime soon!
Yours in Peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Reader has inquiry about Feng Shui principle

Hello Joan,

First I must tell you how I have enjoyed the "Complete Idiot Guide" series. You have a done a wonderful job with both books and can't wait until you write another book. Any plans?

My question is: in the "Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation," you stated that a dirty stove indicates financial problems. Now Joan, you are a mentor to me, and I am trying to figure out why you have stated this. Is there any reference that you can refer me to or explain why you say this. Maybe I've missed something in that chapter. Can you help me out? I would certainly appreciate it.

Thanks again for all of your wisdom and a great Web site.
Sincerely, Revita

Dear Revita,

Eve Adamson and I are currently working on the third edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" and the second edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation." Both of these new books will be out in bookstores in time for Christmas — fingers, arms and legs crossed. Exhale. Uncross everything, breathing in deeply ...

The dirty stove is in reference to Feng Shui. Feng Shui is the art of balancing the flow of energy in our surroundings to benefit us. It is based on the belief that everything has energy and the placement of objects of energy has a lot to do with whether or not energy is impeded or permitted to expand.

For example, a desk placed facing a door can have a "cut off" feeling to the room. Angle the desk toward the center of

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the room and it opens the feeling one has as one enters the room. Part of this Feng Shui art has to do with releasing clutter from our lives. This includes dirt. So, its natural that a dirty stove would be a part of the Feng Shui philosophy.

I know cleaning a stove can be a drag to think about, particularly for some of us who prefer to never look in the oven unless we have to throw something in it. But think about this a bit more ... could this be reflective of other parts of our lives as well? If we clean that

stove, we might notice that we are also able to deal better with other difficulties in our lives? We might stop avoiding obstacles and choose instead to turn them into opportunities.

This is a thought to reflect on. Om.

Joan

Dear Joan,

I'm not sure which teas would help me relax best. Could you suggest some?

Thank you, Jonathan

Dear Jonathan,

Herbal teas are made from flowers, roots, leaves, berries and seeds of plants that are edible. It is best not to add milk to these teas, though honey or lemon is fine. Herbal teas do not contain caffeine. Even so, some teas, such as ginger, have a natural stimulating effect.

Chamomile tea is very good for relaxation. It's best to drink

this tea at bedtime, for it can make you sleepy. After drinking chamomile tea, lavender bath salts are wonderful to soak in to further relax the muscles.

There is a lovely little book out by Penelope Sach called, "On Tea and Healthy Living." I love it because it's compact yet artfully made. It's loaded with interesting information on teas. According to Penelope, "To treat a tired and strained nervous system you can drink teas made from chamomile, lavender, rosemary and vervain. Less common herbs that will also be effective are St. John's Wort, damiara, skullcap, oats and ginseng."

Teas are so great. Let's all have a cup today!

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

How to be certified in yoga

Dear Joan,

Thanks for a well-written, kind-hearted book ("Yoga for Dummies"). At age 36 and a beginner yogi, I believe I have found my future in teaching yoga. Please advise me of how to become a certified instructor. I have not seen any certification classes in my area.

Be Well, Lisa

Dear Lisa,

It is my blessed karma to have to regularly remind people that I am the author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," and not the "dummies author." As I struggle along on my yoga journey, thanks for yet another opportunity for me to make clarify my noteworthy book title.

Eve Adamson (co-author) and I are now embarking on writing the third edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." We are also at work on the second edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation." And, another one of our books, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Massage," was recently translated into Spanish. All new books should be in bookstores in time for

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Christmas ... fingers crossed, knees bent, elbows twisted, and balancing on one leg (name that pose!).

The first step in becoming a certified yoga instructor is to take some yoga classes and develop your own yoga practice. I would recommend taking a certification program that lasts over an extended period of time. This will help you to incorporate the yoga principles as a lifestyle rather than just a series of poses to learn.

Study with teachers who inspire you. Find teachers who are able to not only extend their spines, but also can extend their hearts. Their example will inspire you to extend your spine, heart and mind. It may take time to find such teachers, but they're out there.

There's another ingredient to finding the right teacher,

too. Find this teacher without judgment. This means to open your own heart in your search for the right teacher. There's really no need to judge someone if he or she is not the right teacher for you. Simply continue your practice and the right teacher will come along to complement and inspire you in your personal practice.

If traveling to a certification program is out of the question for you, the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago is now offering a new home study hatha certification program. Although I have no personal experience with this home study program, I did graduate from the temple's in-house yoga teacher's training program in 1994. It was a 14-month program. I think the new concept of a home study course is a great one. To learn more about either of these programs, you can contact the temple by phone at (773) 342-4600 or on the Web at <http://www.yogakriya.org>.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Yo Joan answers writer's query about reflexology

Dear Joan,
Could you please tell me how I could relieve the tightness in my neck area using your technique of massaging the toe or the soles of the feet?

Gratefully yours, Eva

Dear Eva,
Reflexology (massage of the feet) is based on the theory that there are reflex points in the soles of the feet that correspond to various sections and organs of the body.

If you look at a picture of the human body and draw lines from the organs down to the soles of the feet, you can begin to trace what part of the foot an organ is in line with. The big toe is considered the reflex point of the head. The base of the big toe is considered a reflex to the neck.

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Pulling up on the big toe is a reflexology technique that is utilized for some headaches involving neck tension. You may consider this hogwash, but there are many who see reflexology as a testament to the holistic healing nature of the body. I am one of the latter.

Joan

Dear Joan,
How can I make my meditation more than relaxing?
How can I deepen it?
Sue

Dear Sue,

Say a prayer before your meditation practice. Dedicate your meditation practice to this prayer. Keep this prayer consistent with each meditation practice. Watch as your practice deepens.

If you can't think of a prayer that you'd like to say every day in beginning your practice, here are some words to help you along: Peace, Light, Love and Joy.

These words, said alone or in prayer before each meditation practice, can deepen the experience of your meditation, your insights, your life. May the deepening meanings of these words fill your beautiful life, dear Sue, and all dear lives everywhere.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Yo Joan answers smoker's meditation question

Dear Joan,
Any suggestions for smokers? I was told I was not advanced enough to do pranyama or meditation. What is your take on this?

In my mind, I hear that this would help, but I haven't tried. Would it be wrong for people who do not do yoga to use these methods to quit — is it imperative to follow the eightfold path in its order?

Sincerely, Kathryn

Dear Kathryn,
Who told you that you are not advanced enough? I cannot believe it was anyone advanced who said this.

There are a lot of questions in your question. Smokers can practice pranayama (breath exercises) and meditation. Pranayama will be

difficult because you will be purifying your system then immediately mucking it up again with the smoking ... but you know this. You don't have to practice the yoga postures to do pranayama and meditation.

The eightfold path does not have to be practiced in the order it is presented. So there. Hope I helped, Kathryn.

Joan

**Yo Joan,
Should instructors do poses in which they cannot safely demonstrate or can they cue the class in a pose? Please explain why.**

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Vita

Dear Vita,
It is important for the instructor to instruct safely. The instructor should be aware of the benefits of a pose and also its structural limitations. I don't think it's necessary

for an instructor to be able to demonstrate every pose because there are many reasons to study with an instructor. Hatha poses are just one reason.

If poses are all that a student comes to learn, then a gymnastics class would be just as beneficial. There are many dimensions to a yoga practice, and the hatha poses are one dimension.

Surely, an instructor should have knowledge of what he or she is teaching. If he or she is teaching only the poses, then one better know about what one is teaching. Yoga is a lifestyle. One's life is a demonstration of yoga.

An instructor may excel at the poses, for example, but not in (the principles of) ahimsa, santosha, pranayama, etc. I encourage students to study with a teacher who is also studying, and with a teacher who embodies the principles you want to learn. If all you want is to be adept at the yoga poses, then study with a teacher who is adept in the poses.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Yo Joan addresses forward, backward bends

Dear Joan,
What's the correct way to do a forward bend and backbend and should we do one before the other? How many poses (backbends, forward bends) should one include in a practice?

Vita

Because forward bends calm the body, and backward bends energize the body, it is often best to end practices with a forward bend. The number of poses to include is highly personal to one's practice.

Joan

Dear Vita,

In a forward bend, bend at the hip joint. Extend the spine up and forward. Do not collapse the spine in the movement forward. The same can be said about backbends. Do not collapse the lower back; lift and extend the spine as you move backward. A backward bend should be followed by a forward bend.

Dear Joan,
OK, so I've read the "Idiot's Guide (to Yoga)," looked at all the pictures and yes, I want to try yoga practice. But there's no way my 53-year-old, overweight, nonflexible body can get anywhere near any of those pictures.

So for someone coming to yoga later in life, will it

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help even if I can't get all the way into the poses? And any tips for us "gravitationally challenged" people?
Bill

Dear Bill,
Yoga is about self-acceptance, whether we begin the study at 15, 55 or 85. The problem with pictures in books is that they are static.

People view the picture as the pose, when really the picture cannot capture the inner workings of the pose, which is what yoga is.

For example, you may view the cobra pose and think "my body can not possibly do that!" However, you are more than your body!

Wherever you may be, let me now guide you into cobra pose. Close your eyes. If you are sitting, place your hands on your knees. If you are standing, place your hands down along side you with palms facing in. Bring your chin to your chest — exhale. As you inhale, slowly bring the chin up. Bring your shoulders down and lift the neck up as you continue to

raise your chin. Begin to open your eyes and gaze upward. Open your chest wide. Breathe deeply. Slowly exhale back to your beginning position. Rest.

How do you feel? Do you feel any differently than you did before you did this pose? As you continue to study this pose, you will engage other parts of the body. There is no hurry.

I know young men like yourself are often in a hurry, Bill, but there's really no need to be. Everything, even yoga, in due time.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com

Joan explains use of neti pot

Dear Joan,
Greetings! I came across your Web site while doing a search about yoga, and surprised to find out that I've been reading one of your books: "Idiot's Guide to Yoga" (first edition).

I've got a question about neti pot — a small ceramic pot that is made to fit the nose. I heard that it can cleanse the respiratory passage/nose. However I don't know the proper way of using it. Do I fill it with cold/hot water? How many times a day should I use it, etc.?

I am volunteering in the local hospital's emergency room, and I am very much prone to all airborne germs, such as flu and cold. I hope that by using neti pot I can prevent myself from getting flu naturally.

Thank you, L.V.

Dear L.V.

Particularly considering the type of work you do, you are so lucky to have come across the neti pot. It can help you clear your sinuses and cut down on airborne germs.

The water used should be lukewarm or room temperature. It should not be hot or

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cold. A saline solution is best. A small half-teaspoon of salt stirred in the water is adequate.

The neti pot is a special small pot that has a spout that fits securely over a nostril. The head is tilted slightly forward and to the side. The saline mixture is then poured through one nostril and the water comes out the other nostril.

It will take some adjusting of the head to get the water to run smoothly out the other nostril. Be patient and work slowly, allowing the water to find its way. You will see that with practice and knowledge of your body positioning, it will become quite easy to do.

After pouring the full contents of the pot through the nostril, fill the pot again with fresh saline solution and pour through the other nostril. The water will now come out the opposite nostril.

After completing both sides, remove the pot and do several strong exhales through both nostrils simultaneously. This whole neti cleansing experience (called "shat kriya" in yoga) takes only a few moments a day.

Be sure to mix the solution well before using the neti pot. Use the neti pot once or twice a day — upon waking and upon retiring. If you are exposed to many airborne germs or pollutants a particular day, you may want to use it more often on these days.

Most neti pots have examples on how to use it in the written directions that come with the pot. If not, check out our book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." A new third edition is coming to bookstores this new year. Three times the charm.

Happy sneeze free holidays! Yours in peace, Joan.

P.S. And, this month of December, a new second edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation" has come to bookstores — just in time for the holidays.

Letters to Joan Budilovsky may be sent to her Web site

www.yoyoga.com

Holiday season is a time to honor our inner beauty

Dear Friend,

Why not give someone you care about this holiday season a gift of massage? Have you ever had a hot rock massage? If not, why not give yourself this gift too?

In these cold winter times, the additional warmth of the rocks in this massage can be particularly soothing. This type of massage involves stroking hot rocks on the body. Not burning rocks, but rocks heated enough to warm the muscles and deeply relax them. The special beauty of this massage is its effective ability to combine a natural part of nature

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with the therapeutic aspects of massage. Nature, like massage, has the ability to nurture and heal us — even rocks. So, here's hoping this holiday season for you and yours REALLY rocks!

May you also find this a time to honor and recognize your inner beauty — the profound and truest expression

of who you are. Let this deep and powerful expression be actualized through the example of your life. Within each one of us resides a profound awareness that is not directed by the confused emotions of an inflated ego.

As we see and feel how the death of one person can rock the lives of many, let us also deeply realize that the life of one person can inspire and elevate the lives of many. Let this inspired life be yours. Merry Christmas. Om shanty. All peace.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky may be sent to her Web site at www.yoyoga.com