

Take time to treat yourself in 2003

Dear Friend,

Why not give someone you care about this new year 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 with the therapeutic aspects of massage. Nature, like massage, has the ability to nurture and heal us even rocks. So, here's hoping the new year for you and yours really rocks!

May you also find time in this new year 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. Happy New Year. Om shanti. All peace.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Yo
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Cancer patient advised about yoga

Dear Joan

I have been reading Yo Joan for more than two years and have never written to you. I wish it is under a better circumstance that I write this message, but I could not turn back the clock.

To make a long story short, I found out that I have breast cancer three weeks ago and decided to have mastectomy of my right breast and the surgeon also removed 17 lymph nodes. I'm quite lucky in a way, because my cancer was found at a very early stage (both mammogram and doctor's palpation did not detect; ultrasound did). The test result showed no lymph node was involved, however, the cancer is the most invasive type (Bloom Richardson grade 3).

I'm also recovering very well from the surgery. I will start chemotherapy in two weeks and after that five weeks of hormone therapy.

What I want to ask you is: Can I do yoga during the chemotherapy? How about after the chemo? What poses can I do? What other thing can I do to make the side effects of chemo less

serious? Any suggestion will be greatly appreciated.

Love, Vicki

Dear Vicki,

Thanks for your honest and exploring letter. You're on an inspired path of self-discovery. You're turning obstacles into opportunities. Some of us let difficult experiences hold us back, others let these experiences take us into deeper aspects of self-realization. I'm glad you're seeing this experience as a way to continue growing and evolving.

Chemotherapy is highly personal in how it affects individuals. Listen to your body and be gentle with it. Approach yoga as a form of stress reduction, rather than as an aerobic or physical routine now.

Read Dr. Bernie Siegal's book, "Love, Medicine, and Miracles" as continuing inspiration in this positive process of recovery. The word "recovery" is really not the most accurate word. You're on a path that'll continue through recovery and beyond, into deeper and more profound understandings of who you are.

I've personally taught

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many cancer patients through the years. After surgery, you must be gentle with the body. Many of the yoga stretches of the chest are not comfortable or even suitable for you at this time, Vicki.

Although yoga can increase flexibility, strength and range of motion, there are even deeper benefits to the study. To experience a oneness, a stillness, a life force that resonates beyond one's own heartbeat — these are some of the benefits a practice of yoga can offer.

Yoga creates an attitude of gratitude for a body that has the capacity to heal on multiple levels. A body that can lead you into deeper and ever more beautiful realizations of who you are.

I'm not recommending a specific yoga posture for you Vicki. I'm recommending you explore the physical pos-

tures of yoga as avenues in stress reduction. This involves studying an assortment of postures in ways that are gentle, noncompetitive and quiet. Find a class that is soothing and inwardly focused — soft lights, slow movements, gentle music or silence.

I'd also encourage you to study mantra yoga. The repetition of mantra (sacred words or sounds) can be incredibly purifying. Look for a teacher who is familiar with mantra and uses this in his or her classes. Take these mantras home with you to work with on your own. Keep in mind — if a pose, a mantra, or an attitude is stressful, release it and enter into an environment of peace.

You don't need to kick a door down to enter. Simply take a calming breath and enter through the exhale. And when you enter, you will find there was no door. It was all right there. It was all right here. It is all right now. All peace. Om shanti. Happy New Year.

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

Lifestyle

Joan addresses query about tight hamstrings

Dear Joan,
I have a question regarding my very tight and inflexible hamstrings. Whenever I do the down-dog pose, I cannot straighten my legs completely, let alone putting my heels on the floor. My hamstring is so tight that I cannot sit with straight legs and straight back at the same time.

Any tips for modification or exercise to loosen my hamstrings? I've been suffering from low back pain, and I suspect that my tight hamstrings have something to do with it.

Thank you very much for your help in advance. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Namaste, Lulu

Dear Lulu,
For readers not familiar with "down-dog pose," it is a yoga pose in which the body forms a triangle with the floor. Hands and feet are on the floor and the tailbone is up in the air as the top part of the triangle. I often do downward dog as part of my morning yoga practice. It feels so good for my spine to stretch this way. I fully bend the knees in the morning. As the day wears on, my hamstrings wake up more. By the time I do my evening yoga practice, my heels will "sometimes" touch the floor.

I say with emphasis, "sometimes." I listen to my body and don't push it into positions it's not ready for. Some days, the heels are

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able and willing to reach the floor, but often they are not.

When I was younger, I felt a great need to prove or demonstrate my physical flexibility. I don't feel this need as greatly anymore. I still do feel the need to develop my practice of the postures. It makes me feel better in every aspect of my life. But I don't judge the heels on the floor as being "more in the pose." Some

people are born with tighter hamstrings and you and I may very well be two of these people!

Don't rush into a yoga pose with purely a physical objective. In "down-dog pose," stretch your legs with love and caring. The stretch feels good. Lift your quadriceps as you stretch and try to bring your focus to the front of the thigh (where the quadricep muscles are) and take some of the mental and physical strain off the hamstrings (the back muscles of the thighs).

You are right to explore various areas of the body in relation to your lower back pain. Although back pain can result from numerous conditions, one very frequent condition is weakness of

opposing muscles. Abdominal muscles are often weak, as well as quadriceps.

So, strengthen the quadriceps. Standing yoga poses where one or both knees are bent, help to do this. These poses will also strengthen the abdominal area. The hamstrings will help the front muscles strengthen by elongating.

You see, the hamstrings help the quadriceps. They help best when the focus is not entirely on them. Just like people help best when they aren't in the spotlight — when the help comes from the inside, from the heart.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Lifestyle

Standing poses can help strengthen knee caps

Dear Joan,
I have not been doing yoga for about a month because of my knee injury. Besides doing yoga, I swim and run frequently.

While I am yet to see a knee specialist, my family doctor told me that my injury is caused by lack of flexibility/stretching of the quadriceps and hamstrings muscles. I hope to ease back to yoga once I see the specialist. Meanwhile, any yoga pose/tips will be greatly appreciated.

And may I say that your reply (in last column) about loving kindness to stretch

my muscles is right on target and very insightful. I realized that my injury may be because of my lack of respect and love for my own body. Thank you once again!!

Namaste, Lulu

Dear Lulu,
Standing poses help to strengthen the kneecaps. Standing poses where the knees are bent at a right angle (such as Warrior) strengthen the muscles of the front thighs that support the knees.

Standing poses where the legs are straight (such as

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Triangle) stretch and strengthen the muscles of the back of the thigh. Work regularly with standing poses to stabilize and strengthen your knees.

Joan

Dear Joan,
Do you teach yoga classes in the Oak Brook area? If so, can you provide me with some information?

Thanks, Chris Arce

Dear Chris,
You're in luck, and I am too! I am teaching new classes in the area beginning in March. They will be offered through the York Center Park District. One class will meet Monday mornings from 9 to 10 a.m. and another class will meet Thursday

evenings from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. You can sign up for both classes or just one. They'll run through May. The focus will be on breathwork, mantra and yoga for stress reduction.

The classes will be small with a limited enrollment of only a few students, so I suggest you call soon if you are interested in attending. The number is (630) 629-0886.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Tips to help breathe easier

Dear Friends,

I receive mail regularly from readers regarding sinus and allergy problems. Many people have problems throughout the year with stuffed noses regardless if it is cold and flu season. There are various simple self-massage techniques that can be done to help ease some of the suffering associated with stuffed-up noses.

I have mentioned previously in this column a yoga-related item called a neti pot to help reduce nasal congestion. Now, I would like to offer a little massage tip that can be done at any time. It involves knowing about a couple of small pressure points that exist alongside the outside of your nostrils.

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Here's a simple massage technique for you to try now. Firmly press with the index fingers along the outside of each of your nostrils. Hold here for at least several breaths. You may have to adjust the index fingers over this small area ever so slightly to find just the right location of the pressure points. You will feel an almost immediate clearing of air in

the nostrils when you press at the right points.

Once you find these points, settle in and hold steady. Try this while you are reading this paper. Try it before bedtime. Try it upon waking in the morning as you rest in bed. Try it anytime you are feeling all stuffed up, whether you are lying down, sitting, or standing. You'll be amazed at how much easier it is to breathe after putting some pressure on these important little pressure points.

Here's to a day of breathing easier!

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Reflexology can help sinuses

This is the time of year when many of us suffer from allergies and congestion in our nasal passages. Nature is beautiful and coming into full swing now. The problem is that it sometimes swings into our sinuses in ways that are not pleasant.

In reflexology (foot massage), there are reflex points in the feet, hands and ears that correspond to other points in the body. The great (big) toes contain the reflex points for the head.

Here is a simple technique to help you explore sinus congestion through reflex points along your great toe. Granted, many of you may think this is very strange, but if you suffer from sinus problems, you'll give it a try. You can do this now as you sit reading this newspaper.

First, remove your shoes.

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It's best to do this technique with your socks off, but if you must keep your socks on, so be it. One foot at a time. Let's start with the right foot.

Cross the right leg over your left to have easy access to your right foot. Securely hold the great toe and gently pull it away from its joint socket. Similar to the way you crack knuckles, but cracking the knuckles is not the objective here. The objective is to give more space and freedom in your

neck reflex, the base of the great toe. If you're laughing right now, that's OK, but sit up straight.

Take your thumb and glide it from the top of the inside of the nail of the big toe down to the base of the big toe. Do this several times, increasing the pressure of the stroke with each movement. This is a simple technique in reflexology to drain the sinus reflexes (remember, stranger things have happened, or have they?). When you become amazed at the effectiveness of this simple technique, credit the ancient art of reflexology.

Now, wiggle your toes and have a wonderful day.

Yours in peace, Joan

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Lifestyle

Yoga, meditation can aid peace in wartime

Dear Joan,
I'm not really the "Dear Abby" type, but I've enjoyed reading your column and the subjects you write about. This is the first time I have ever written a letter like this, but maybe you can help me.

I'm against the war. I feel overwhelmed by all that is going on and I feel such sadness and helplessness for all the horrors that are going on in Iraq. The bombings, the death, I'm just sick whenever I read about it, hear about it. It is all very horrible.

I've heard meditation can create world peace. How is this possible? Do you believe this?

Thanks, Struggling

Dear Struggling,
World Peace. Terrorism. These subjects are so overwhelming. There's no one answer, just as there's no one path up a mountain.

Many paths can be forged

up a mountain, yet there are few mountain climbers. It can be dangerous to climb a mountain. It involves many risks. It involves flexibility and strength. Most importantly, it involves a creative mind to approach the unexpected in ways that are constructive, in ways that continue the climb so that does not "fall down into the material pool." is a quote from the Bhagavad Gita, an sacred text from India. It's text referred to regularly yoga

"When contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment to them, and from such attachment lust develops, and lust anger arise

"From anger, delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost, one falls down again into the material pool" — Bhagavad Gita

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A regular practice of yoga leads one into meditation. Yoga means union. Meditation is the process of calming and quieting the constant fluctuations of the mind. There are physical exercises in the yoga study that help to create a stronger and more flexible body. The objective of these exercises is not to be a contortionist. The objective is to feel more comfortable in one's own skin so that meditation becomes easier. Meditation leads to self-realization.

There are many roads to self-realization, the "self" being a divine expression of reality. Meditation is one

road to self-realization. Various cultures explore meditation differently. Some meditations are intimately connected to the religious traditions of the culture. Although yoga is not a religion, there is still an underlying pretext within the study as to a fundamental force, a light, a presence within everyone, within all that exists, that is deeply and profoundly beautiful. War exists. Does this mean war is beautiful? No. War is yet another veil that prevents the reality of this profound beauty to be experienced.

Meditation is the process of uncovering the veils of illusions that prevent one from seeing this deep profound beauty. Uncovering these veils is not an easy process. It is a continual process of self-study and of increasing self-awareness. This is not an egotistical self. This is a self that is intercon-

nected with all of life. One's life here. One's life in the Middle East. It is the process of uncovering the veils of illusion that prevents us from seeing the intimate connections we have with each other. Once these veils are removed, fear, distrust and hatred subside.

Thank you for your questions. The problems of the world are overwhelming. Your caring and concerns are important. The world needs your caring. One way to simplify something that is overwhelming is to focus on one breath at a time. In my next column, I will give an example of a breathing meditation for caregivers. We are all caregivers. This breathing meditation can help to improve the quality of our caregiving.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Practice of hatha yoga leads to quiet meditation

Dear Joan,
I like the idea of yoga. And in theory, it's something I want to do — but practice? I can pose all day, if they're basic enough, but I can't seem to keep my attention on what I'm doing.

And meditation? I do one of two things: fall asleep within about 30 seconds of sitting there, or get so bored that I have to get up and move, especially if I'm in a silent room. It's like, if I have nothing to do, if I'm not moving, I'm fretting myself to pieces, or I'm thinking of things. Is there a middle ground with this meditation stuff?

I've even tried 'soothing' music, or the mantras ... those had no effect either. The only thing that worked somewhat was listening to Creed, but predictably

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enough I fell asleep anyway, even though they're heavy metal.

All that to say ... help. Please?
Elise

Dear Elise,
My recommendation to you is to put meditation practice aside for now. Study hatha yoga instead. Study the physical postures of yoga. The study of these postures, in a disciplined and thorough manner, leads one into a meditative practice. The study of the yoga pos-

tures helps the mind to calm down. It also strengthens and flexes the body, permitting the body to sit comfortably for longer periods of time in meditation.

After studying the postures, and ending your practice in the relaxation pose of shavasana, try sitting in quiet meditation for several minutes. You'll find that as your body becomes more acclimated to the holding of the postures, it becomes easier to sit in meditation. In fact, it becomes enjoyable to meditate. The steady stillness becomes a natural extension of a hatha yoga practice.

Don't rush it. Just start a hatha yoga practice. Your practice will evolve as a lotus blossom.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan can be sent to yojoan@yoyoga.com.

Yo Joan to have book signing at Borders

Joan Budilovsky, author of the "Yo Joan" column in Suburban Life and Reporter newspapers, and her mother, Leona Budilovsky, will hold a joint book signing at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 25, at Borders Book & Music,

of books, including the newly released, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga, Illustrated third edition" and "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation, 2nd edition."

A new author. Leona Budilovskv has writ-

Joan addresses need for rest and stress of doing too much

Dear Joan,
I am an epileptic and have a weight issue. I am also severely stressed six days a week. Other than the epilepsy, I am in remarkably good health, if that information helps any.

Is there anything you can suggest that wasn't in "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" (an amazing book, by the way) to help alleviate some of my issues?

Also, is there some other suggestions you can give for making time for a regular practice? I work 40 hours a week, as well as going to school four nights a week (that is 24 hours). By Friday I am completely worn out, and I need to recharge.

Any help at all would be amazing.

Thank you, Tricia

Dear Tricia,

First of all, there is absolutely nothing wrong with getting some rest, sleep, relaxation when one is tired. We are in a society that pressures people to "keep moving." We think we aren't productive unless we're "doing" something.

Sleeping can be very productive. Dreaming can answer many of the questions we ponder, if we take the time to listen to our dreams.

You say you are severely stressed, overweight and have epilepsy. These are all separate concerns, yet they

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all involve the nervous system (the extra weight puts a strain on all systems of the body). Pranayama, or yogic breath exercises, can be extremely helpful for the nerves. Shavasana, the relaxation pose, can help to create a more restful sleep. A more restful sleep permits us to have more beautiful and creative dreams. Dreams that can answer the problems that are creating the stress.

We choose the paths we are on, including the work we do. It's important that your work be one of service to yourself and to others. This does not necessarily mean the service industry. This means a job that's making this world a better one. I hope, Tricia, within this response of mine, you've been able to discern some answers.

Yours in peace, Joan

Dear Joan,

A group of girls from my town get together on a Monday evening and practice yoga. ... I 'm sort of the group leader, as I've taken yoga for many years and it seems to be going wonder-

fully. My question to you is ... the majority of the girls are of childbearing age and all complain about their stomachs. Have you got anything that targets the stomach area ... we do a few but I'd like to have more just so the classes don't get stale. I'd appreciate your help ... thank you.

Natalie

Dear, dear Natalie,

This is not the kind of yoga I teach. Targeting the stomach is more for a physical trainer. There are many excellent physical trainers and I would not hesitate to suggest for you contact one regarding this concern.

I teach a holistic way of living and a holistic way of approaching the postures and study of yoga. The yoga I teach is about gaining acceptance for the body and all its many varying parts (including the ever beautiful, varying-sized, stomach). It's about gaining appreciation for the marvelous mind.

It's about developing the tranquil soul. Targeting the tranquil soul can be quite challenging and quite a strenuous workout, and that's where my main focus lies.

Yours in peace, Joan

Joan can be reached at
www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Differences in yoga described

Dear Joan,
Is there a difference
between a stress yoga and I
guess regular strength yoga?
Yours, TC

Hi TC,
Yoga means union —
bringing all the elements of
your life together in harmo-
ny. The teacher is extremely
important in what style of
yoga is being offered. If you
do not connect with a certain
way of teaching, find another
teacher.

Many stress-reducing
classes are also strength
building. One is not neces-
sarily exclusive of the other.
Joan

Hi there,
I read your articles in *The
Downers Grove Reporter*.
I was wondering if you
could give me any advice on
how to improve my posture
and also how to relax so I
can fall asleep at night.
Please let me know if you
can help.
Thanks so much, Marilyn

Dear Marilyn,
I don't know what the
problem with your posture is.
If your back is starting to
curve out, called kyphosis,
this can be caused by weak
back muscles. Yoga exercises

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strengthen the spine and also
strengthen the back muscles
that support the spine. Back
bends can be most helpful
for this.

For example, something as
simple as sitting at a comput-
er all day can create varying
degrees of weak back mus-
cles.

I sit at the computer a lot.
I recently purchased a large
yoga ball. It's an inflatable
rubber ball that's sold at
most department stores.
After a long day at my desk, I
lay back on this ball and it's
similar to getting a chiro-
practic adjustment. I actually
hear all the bones clicking
back into place. I recommend
trying this yourself.

However, this is a passive
form of a backbend. It's a
way to flex the muscles in an
opposing way, but is more for
flexibility development rather
than strength. To strengthen
the back muscles, I recom-
mend a more aggressive

backbend that energizes and
strengthens the surrounding
muscles.

This type of backbend is
done without a ball. You do
the work of pushing yourself
up into this kind of back-
bend. Yet, on those days
when you're just too tired to
push yourself into a full
backbend, simply have a ball
instead!

Backbends energize. They
are great for developing pos-
ture, but for falling asleep at
night, I recommend forward
bends. The last pose in a
series of forward bends
should be a relaxation pose.
In yoga, this is called
shavasana. It's a pose that
works to progressively relax
all the muscles of the body. A
regular practice of forward
bends followed by shavasana
can help to make your sleep
more restful.

Yours in peace, Joan

*Letters to Joan Budilovsky can
be sent to yojoan@yoyoga.com.*

*Budilovsky will sign copies of
her new books, "The Complete
Idiot's Guide to Yoga, Illustrated
third edition," and "The
Complete Idiot's Guide to
Meditation, 2nd edition" at 4
p.m. Sunday, June 22, at
Borders Bookstore in Norridge.*

Lifestyle

Joan explains yoga's guidelines for deeper life

Hi Joan,
My name is Laurie and I live in Oregon. I grew up near you in Indiana but have been living in Oregon for about 11 years now.

My boyfriend had your book "Yoga for Idiots" on his bookshelf and I read some of it this weekend and loved it. I plan on reading the whole book once I finish my other one.

I wanted to write you to let you know that I had no idea that yoga had spiritual guidelines. I thought it was just an exercise system. I read some of the spiritual guidelines (yamas and I forget the other term) and loved it. Although I was

raised Catholic, I found the yoga spiritual principles were ones I could follow.

I started taking a yoga class at my gym because I rock climb with my boyfriend. He said yoga helps with the balance needed for rock climbing so I started taking a yoga class and it does help my climbing. Yoga also helps me with recovering from rock climbing, as well as other life stresses. My boyfriend and I do some yoga together and, like your book said, it does help me feel connected more closely with him than before we did yoga together. Anyway, love your book and will read

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other books you've written.

Thank you and namaste,
Laurie

Dear Laurie,
Yoga is a lifestyle. The principles of the study can fit into any religious framework. Yamas and Niyamas are guidelines for living.

The Yoga Yamas are: Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-

stealing, Non-lusting, and Non-greed. The Yoga Niyamas are: Purity, Contentment, Self-discipline, Studiosness, and Devotion.

This study of yoga thrives in a spirit of non-competition. These are not easy principles to practice in a culture that thrives on competition. That is why studying in a class is important. A class can help us realize that it's possible to rise above difficult conditions presented to us in our lives. It helps us to see our own competitiveness and release the strains this presents in a classroom environment of non-competitiveness.

Even if these strains are

released for only a few moments in class, these few moments form the basis of ever-growing moments of peace. This peacefulness, if experienced on a regular basis, can transcend into the struggles of our lives. A class of yoga students helps us to see that there are others who also appreciate and strive for a life to be lived within deeper qualities of existence rather than a life led by the superficial tidings of success.

Continue to enjoy the journey, Laurie, and all the various mountains along the way.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to yojoan@yoyoga.com

Lifestyle

Joan explains 'vinyasana' yoga

Dear Friend,

I get regular mail asking about the different styles of yoga. Some styles of study involve a very strenuous study of the hatha yoga postures. Some styles are focused more on relaxation. Some studies involve a regular use of what is called "vinyasana." This is a flowing connection between postures where one yoga posture flows into the next.

Below is an excerpt from my new book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," Illustrated third edition, to explain this process of vinyasana study better.

"While many yoga poses imitate animals or structures in nature (mountains, trees and so on), a vinyasana imitates the rhythm and move-

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ment of the natural world, the universe and the cosmos. The human body is like a universe in microcosm, with its own internal rhythms and movements. At the atomic level, the very atoms that make up everything are like tiny universes. Beyond our bodies, the world is full of cycles: the seasons, the years, the moons spinning around the planets, the planets spinning around the sun, the entire galaxy revolving.

"A vinyasana (flowing sequence of yoga postures) helps us feel like a part of this magnificent, intricate, ultimately large, yet ultimately small cycle. The sun, moon and earth all move in concert, and through a vinyasana, we move in concert, too. Everything is moving to a sacred rhythm, ancient and eternal, and the rhythm wouldn't be the same if any one thing did not move with it. We are all part of a wave in the ocean of the universe, and when we move with the tide, we are doing what comes naturally, what makes us a part of the whole."

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to yojoan@yoyoga.com, or through her Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Reduce stress with eye exercises

How does one break out of negative thought patterns? Through the eyes!

Synchronized eye movements with breath movements can help you release old patterns of thought that are no longer serving you. Information that comes into the brain first goes to the thalamus. This transforms into physical waves in the brain. Some of these waves then go to the amygdala and others to the rest of the neocortex.

The pathway to the amygdala is shortest and this is where negative memory is stored. Negative stimuli go there first. It's hard to break out of negative arousal of the amygdala when it is con-

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stantly getting bombarded by negativity of various sorts. Eye and breath movements together exercise the entire brain to release old negative patterns.

Here is an exercise for the closed eyes. Inhale as you look up, keeping the eyelids closed. Exhale as you slowly look down. Do this three times. Relax for several breaths with no eye movement. Then, inhale as you

look left, keeping the eyelids closed. Exhale as you slowly look right. Do this three times. Relax for several breaths before beginning entire sequence again. Try to do this simple exercise for five minutes a day or whenever you are under stress.

Do not strain the eyes. Be comfortable and gentle in your movements. Let your breath guide you. Do not force your breath or eyes. When you are feeling stressed, use this exercise to help you regain composure, strength and peace.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Reader asks whether tattoo contradicts yoga principles

Dear Joan,

I've been an avid yoga practitioner for some time now and would like your opinion about something. I think that the symbol for "om" is absolutely beautiful and would like to have it tattooed on my body. I can't help but wonder, though, if this would be sort of contradictory to my practice of yoga, perhaps almost yogic blasphemy, as "om" has such a deep and peaceful meaning and one of the base principles of yoga is "do no harm" to oneself. Any thoughts?

Thanks and Namaste, Jen

Dear Jen,

My thoughts consider this to be a fascinating topic! It's come up in the college classes I teach. Many college students have tattoos and many are considering getting them. I think it's great that you too are exploring these questions on non-violence.

As you know, the study of yoga involves ahimsa or non-violence. This concept of ahimsa is studied and applied in one's life to bring

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one into deeper experiences of yoga. Yet, each of us must explore this on an individual basis. It's true that a tattoo can be viewed as a form of violence. It also can be viewed as a form of art. To canvas one's body with the om (aum) symbol sounds beautiful to me. The process of painting the tattoo on the body does not; however, this is an individual decision.

Some people don't see the tattooing process as painful. Various parts of the body involve less pain than others. Some do not see the struggles in creating art, in whatever form that takes, as violent. For example, a dancer must work very hard and struggle with the body to perfect certain moves. Some of this intense training may even be seen as violent.

However, the dancer does not see it as violent because the process of creating art leads to incredible beauty.

Another example would be some of the austere poses and practices of yoga. Some see the kriya cleansing techniques as violent. Others see these techniques as leading to incredible purification of the body.

The Yoga Pradipika, considered a sacred text in the principles of hatha yoga, does not consider these kriya practices as violent. And, who am I to question a sacred text? I am Joan Budilovsky. But, who's that? I'm the wind, the air, the earth the water ... am I going too far here?

I question everything, and I think you're also right to question, weigh the options and make a decision based on an educated mind. I don't think there is one answer on this. Let me know what you decide, Jen.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to yojoan@yoyoga.com, or her Website at www.yoyoga.com.

Yo Joan discusses yoga and Parkinson's disease

Dear Joan,
I have searched high and low but have not been able to find anything for Parkinson's and yoga — they almost seem the opposite extremes.

I have a friend of a friend who wants me to chat about yoga to his Parkinson's support group this Saturday. I did look up exercises for Parkinson's on the Internet but am not sure just what I can say about yoga except yoga in a chair, supine, on knees and savasana and breathing. Any suggestions will be passed on if I really am "dumb" at the meeting.
BC

Dear BC,
Parkinson's is still very much a mystery in the medical world. What isn't a mystery is that "dis-ease" happens when the body is "not in ease." Yoga is about bringing the body into balance. It's not a cure. It's about re-alignment of the physical/mental/verbal body.

Each of us is unique in our imbalances. For exam-

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ple, although I may share a lower back pain with you, the experiences of my life and the heredity that created my back pain are unique — just as each person with Parkinson's has a unique history of stresses and concerns.

Yoga is a path of self-awareness. It's not necessarily a cure for Parkinson's disease, although, one person may find it to be. Yoga is stress reducing. Perhaps someday science will find all diseases to have the common denominator of stress. I hope you find these thoughts helpful.

Joan

Dear Joan,
Sometimes when breath-

ing I feel something (my breath?) move all the way down to the base of my spine. Usually I feel my breath hit a wall/stop at the solar plexus in the pit of my stomach.

Can you tell me what it is that I perceive as this wall and how to remove it so that my breathing is always on a deeper level?

I appreciate your time!
Martin

Dear Martin,

It may be as simple as something you ate. I'm not sure by your question if your breath stops at the inhale or the exhale.

Because of the location of where it stops, I'd explore your diet first. Study your eating patterns before your yoga class. It's best to do yoga on an empty stomach. Some foods take longer to digest than others.

Yours in peace, Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to yojoan@yoyoga.com, or her Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Breathing is key element in reducing stress

Dear Joan,
I used to attend yoga classes but stopped for about three years. I intend to continue practicing yoga at home.

I have this condition known as "hives" or the scientific name for it is "urticaria." It is basically an allergy and could be caused by preservatives and additives in food stuff, drugs, internal infections and stress.

I'd appreciate if you could suggest specific yoga asanas that will help in stress man-

agement. Thanks in advance.
Regards, Vijayaraj

Dear Vijayaraj,
Breath is a key element in stress reduction. It is important that you learn how to breathe properly in holding the poses. Only hold a yoga pose for the period of time you can breathe steadily. Once your breath becomes uneven, it is time to come out of the pose.

Go into every pose with full awareness and a clear, steady, relaxed breath. Take time to visualize the pose

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before flowing into it. Slow your breath down.

Any pose can become a stress-reducing pose. It is all a matter of how the yoga postures are studied and approached. Breath is the key that opens the door to yoga.

A beautiful yoga teacher named Julia said it all so well, "Open the breath, open the spine, open the heart, open the mind."

Joan

Dear Joan,
I just saw your "Yoga for Dummies" book 2nd edition, and "Yoga for Dummies" Illustrated-Edition 3. Because I didn't have time to compare, I was hoping you could answer the following.

Is the latter book an updated, bigger, better version of the first book or do

they both contain different information?

Thanks, Kathi

Dear Kathi,
The new edition is expanded and updated. It's almost twice as big as the second edition. By the way, it's "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." The "Dummies" are our competitors. Hahaha ... serves us right!

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Joan addresses benefits of being upside down

Dear Joan,
My question is about the benefits of being upside down. What IS the benefit of being upside down? I can't do headstands very well and a headstand won't "uncompress" the back.

Through my massage therapist I have found a contraption called "The Total Back System," which provides "inversion therapy." What's nice about it is that I can hang upside down and get a good spinal stretch. Have you ever heard of such a machine? What would the yoga benefits be, if any?

Wishing you peace and wellness,
Bonnie

Dear Bonnie,

There are many benefits to a regular practice of inversions. Inversions take pressure off the heart. While the body is upside down, the heart doesn't have to pump as hard to get blood to the extremities. Inversions help to bring blood to the brain as it brings clearer thinking to the mind.

According to BKS Iyengar in his new book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health," the regular practice of a headstand, "builds stamina, helps to cure halitosis, strengthens the lungs, improves the function of the pituitary and pineal glands, increases the hemoglobin content in the blood, and relieves the symptoms of colds, coughs and tonsillitis."

In addition, an inversion helps us to

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befriend gravity. After all, gravity is constantly pulling us down, and for brief moments of time we can reverse this energetic pull. The process is like a fountain of youth.

However, if there are any serious health problems, a doctor should be consulted before doing

inversions. Detached retinas, high blood pressure — these are some of the complications of doing headstands.

Partial inversions can also be of great benefit. For example, lying on your back on the floor and putting the legs straight up against the wall is a way to invert the body that does not affect pressure on the eyes.

Regarding the back system you mention, Bonnie, I haven't seen the specific one you refer to. I have seen other contraptions that help to invert the body. Various aids can be very helpful for those who cannot go up into headstand comfortably on their own.

Headstands performed without any aids have the additional benefit of developing arm and stomach strength. In this way, the body gets a more balanced development from a headstand that is unassisted. Hatha Yoga means "uniting through balance." The body is the only necessary ingredient to the study.

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

Yo Joan offers support sources for healthy eating

Dear Joan,
I am looking to find a yoga facility that makes a special effort to teach students how to eat. I am having a little trouble getting back into the swing of things with my diet. I want to attend a workshop or visit a lodge that could help me get started again. Reading books just isn't working for me. I need to detox!

Thank you for your help,
Deborah

Dear Deborah,
I understand. Our diets are so important and it's very difficult to learn a healthy vegetarian diet in our fast-food culture.

Check out the Chicago Vegetarian Society. It's a support and social group for vegetarians. The group offers many interesting seminars and social gatherings for members to help encourage and support a healthy vegetarian diet.

You may also want to con-

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sider going on a yoga retreat. The latest edition of the national magazine, *Yoga Journal* (which can be found in most major bookstores), includes reviews of many yoga retreats/vacations across the country. Check this out, too!

Joan

Hi Joan!
I am just wondering how you clean your yoga sticky mat — sorry for the silly (but important) question!

Laura

Dear Laura,
For readers not familiar with "sticky mats," this is the term used for a certain type of yoga mat. This type of mat

is made of rubber, slightly cushioned, about 6 feet long and easily curled up into a compact size. The rubber prevents the body from sliding in balance poses.

Basically, these mats are similar to the rubber backing on carpets (which can also be effectively used as a yoga mat). The commercialized yoga mats can now be purchased at most any store that sells yoga supplies. It's rather weird to say "yoga supplies" when yoga is about non-attachment, but, now back to your question.

I ruined one of my sticky mats in a washing machine once. So let me give you some sage advice. Soak your sticky mat in a bathtub with mild soap and water. Do not put it through the cycle of a washing machine unless you have a soak/hand wash cycle.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Where to purchase a headrest

Dear Joan,

I have a question referring to the last edition. You responded to a question about the headstand saying that you use a headrest to take the pressure off your neck. Can you let me know where you can buy/order such a headrest?

Thanks in advance and best, Priya

Dear Priya,

These headrests are advertised in the back of Yoga Journal and Yoga International magazines. You can find these national magazines in major bookstores.

The particular headrest I bought 20 years ago is called BodyLift. It still works well

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today. The cost is \$108. Call 1-888 AGEEASY. Or contact them on the Web at <http://www.ageeasy.com>
Joan

Dear Joan,
Your response to my question about an "om" tattoo was much appreciated. You reminded me what a personal experience yoga is and that was the bottom

line formed. Your dancer analogy hit especially close to home since I happen to be a dancer as well as a yogi!

Just wanted to let you know that my left shoulder is now adorned with some beautiful sanskrit and thank you again.

Namaste, Jen
Gibsonia, Pa.

Dear Jen,

Thanks for the update, Jen! There is no place like om ... with the exception of your shoulder, of course.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Joan gives advice on finding a yoga studio and back pain

Dear Joan,
I just moved here (Downers Grove) from Austin, Texas, and found your studio online. I am so interested, but don't see a class schedule. Do you only hold seminars? If so, are there any particular studios you would recommend that are nearby?

I have practiced yoga for about a year and a half and really love Vinyasa Flow. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Thanks so much!

Namaste, Jennifer

Dear Jennifer,
I would recommend contacting a studio in Downers Grove called Yoga Among Friends. The studio specializes in "Flow Yoga." This is similar to the type of vinyasana yoga you have studied. These styles involve flowing movements from posture to posture. Depending on how these styles are taught, the practice can be quite aerobic. Yoga

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Among Friend's phone number is (630) 960-5488.

I teach at Columbia College in Chicago on Saturday mornings. I also teach weekend seminars around the country through Fordham University's Demello Spirituality Center. The next seminar is in the Bahamas in December. Want to come join me there?

Joan

Dear Joan,
Do you have any suggestions for morning back pain relief? I have your book, if you could suggest some asanas. Would the ball do me any good?

Usually if I get right into the shower with real hot

water that helps but I wonder if I can loosen up prior to that?

Thanks, Barry

Dear Barry,
The Yoga Ball stretches, but does not strengthen the back. Abdominal exercises will strengthen the back. A regular practice of leg lifts can help to strengthen the back muscles by strengthening the abdominal muscles.

Start with bent knees and progress to straight legs. Keep your arms lying straight with palms facing down under your back. This supports the structure of the spine and reduces stress on the spine during leg lifts. Eventually, you'll not need the arms for support. Although after many years of leg lifts, I still use my arms to support my spine. It feels good.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Lifestyle

Joan gives advice on combating thumb pain

Hi Joan, I've been using your book ("Complete Idiots Guide to Yoga") to practice yoga on my own for about three years now. I'm really happy with the way practicing yoga makes me feel!

My question is: I seem to have acquired a bad case of tendinitis in my thumb. Because the muscles that work the thumb originate as far up as the shoulders, can you think of any poses that might help stretch the tendons from my shoulders to my thumbs?

Thanks, Greg

Dear Greg,

Wow! The universe really works in incredible ways. I've had a problem with my thumb these past few months, too! As a musician, my problem was affecting my harp playing.

I went to see my chiropractor in Downers Grove, Dr. John Mostrando. We narrowed the problem down to some trigger points in my biceps and in the tendons of my forearm. Trigger points are built up muscular areas of stress. They can stem out of various conditions, i.e. poor diet, poor posture, repetitive movements or overall stress. If left undetected, trigger points can cause other problems. My trigger points were causing my thumb joint pain.

Mostrando outlined a very effective program that has been helping me significantly. It begins with massage. I now receive regular half-hour, deep-tissue massages to my arm twice a week at the National University of Health Sciences Massage Clinic in Lombard. The trigger points have slowly been releas-

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ing. Because Mostrando is holistic in his work, he also assessed my posture, my diet and my sleep patterns. I became aware that I had formed a habit of sleeping on my right biceps! I believe this is where my problem

originated.

In addition, Mostrando outlined a regular series of simple stretches for me to do:

1. Straightening my arm out in front of me, I pull back on the palm with the other hand. I hold this stretch for several breaths. I stretch once with the outstretched arm's palm facing toward me and another time with the palm facing away.

2. Another stretch involves placing a rubber band between my thumb and forefinger and pulling on it. This stretches my thumb muscles in an opposing way to the repetitive movements I use with my thumb when playing the harp.

I am also practicing the yoga pose of the cow more often. This stretches all the muscles of the arms, with an extra stretch to the triceps (muscles in back of arm), to balance all the bicep therapy I am doing. In cow pose, one elbow faces the sky, and one elbow faces the ground. The hands come together in back. One palm faces out. One palm faces in. This stretch is held for several deep breaths.

Here's to your healing journey, Greg, with two thumbs (comfortably) up! And, wishing all readers a most blessed holiday of Thanksgiving.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Yoga to calm the senses

Dear Readers,

One of the eight limbs of yoga is called Pratyahara, which involves the control of the senses. Our senses bombard us on a regular basis. We eat, talk, think, taste, touch, smell ... and all while driving the car. It's enough to make even the best drivers swerve.

According to yoga philosophy, it's important to take the time to let the senses calm down in order to live a more peaceful life. This practice is Pratyahara.

Below is a simple yoga technique that helps us to bring a deeper awareness to quieting the senses. After doing this exercise recently in class, one of my wonderful students, Megan, told me that an autistic child she knows regularly does the following exercise when he's happy.

Autism involves an overloading of the senses. Although this child never studied yoga, he instinctively knows what to do to help control his senses. It's particularly beautiful to reflect

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on the fact the child turns to this technique when experiencing joy.

Here's the yoga technique:

- Place your thumbs in your ears.
- Place your second fingers over the eyelashes of your closed

eyelids.

- Place the third fingers over your nostrils.
- Place your fourth fingers over the top of your lips.
- Place your little fingers over the bottom of your lips.

Gently hold every opening of your face closed. When you need to breathe, release the nostrils, take a good breath, and then close them up again. Continue this quieting of the senses for as long as you comfortably can. When you are finished, take a slow breath, and go forward in peace.

Yours in peace, Joan

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

Gift giving from the heart

Joy to the world!
The holiday season is here. As media images of material happiness beam forth around us, let's not forget giving involves more than the latest department store sale.

Giving can be a part of our lives at any time of the year and it need not involve money.

Here are some gift-giving ideas. Know you have the power to give these gifts no matter what your material wealth.

- When someone needs a smile, give them yours.
- When someone's lost in tears, give them your steady hand.

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- When someone shares a personal difficulty, give them your trust.

- When someone yells in hurried anger, give them your calmness.

- When someone judges, give them your non-judgment.

- When someone's lonely, give them your companionship.

- When someone's eyes twinkle, give them your twinkles back.

Happy Holidays to all!

Yours in peace, Joan

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