

# Finding peace amid tragedy

"How to be happy in a sad world ..." the guru's words trailed off into the breeze that was drifting through the nearby trees.

It was hard to bring my attention to sadness when I was feeling so incredibly well. Yet I knew deeply, as so many of us do, that no matter how happy my breath was in that moment, it can change in a blink as it did for so many thousands of people encountering the tsunami.

Devastation, trauma or death can envelop a life in an instant. In the instance of the tsunami, it was not an act of man that caused this suffering but an act of nature.

The guru's words trailed back ... "It is like a spiral. The world is evolving. You are evolving."

My thoughts drifted. How could evolution permit such a tragedy to happen? What is it that is "evolving"? Humankind has built fortresses, dams and varying degrees of anchors to this world. Yet no matter how strong we build these fortresses, a tsunami can destroy it all in a moment's breath.

The breath is important to a yogi. It is reflective of much more than an air-

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way system that sustains the body. It is reflective of the life force that sustains the world.

Learning to control this breath, this life force, is an important aspect of consciousness raising. Learning to manage this breath in times of peace can bring a deep inner calmness to the body — even if this calmness is experienced only briefly, its memory can linger into a moment when one's world may not be quite as happy.

The breeze caressed the words ...  
"Only that yogi whose joy is inward,

Inward his peace, inward his vision  
Goes to that paradise sun."

Wishing you and yours a new year of inner happiness — a kind of happiness that transcends our continually changing external world and deepens our compassion for others.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

*Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to  
[www.yoyoga.com](http://www.yoyoga.com)*

# Yoga encourages nonviolent world

Dear Joan,

In a world where there is much violence, how nice to know that yoga teaches non-violence.

If my nephews were young, I'd recommend they take yoga classes from a young age. Their lives were filled with violent skirmishes.

For one of them, it's too late. He died last year at the age of 33 of a violent act directed toward him. He was shot, for reasons that are still unclear, by someone he knew. He was shot by someone who never learned the lessons of nonviolence.

Violence ruins so many lives. It's like a spreading disease for which no one knows the cure. We all think that our lives will never be touched by violence, but odds are increasing that it will happen.

What would happen if by the age of 5 we started teaching nonviolence to children? It could be a required subject from kindergarten to high school. In 10 years, we would need fewer police officers and more teachers to teach non-violence through yoga. It's time for a philosophy of nonviolence in the United States.

Thanks,  
Monrie

Dear Monrie,

Thank you for your heartfelt letter. My sincere condolences to you and your family for the tragic death of your nephew.

Violence is a part of this world; some would say an inevitable part. Yet, it is important to reflect upon which came first, the violence within our minds or the violence within our fists. As the world around us continually changes, yoga teaches us that the inner world of our thoughts and emotions reflects the outer world of our experiences.

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The question then comes up, "How can one create a more peaceful inner world amidst the stress and strains of the external one?"

Through yoga, it is simply one breath at a time. Release a negative thought or a violent tendency though the

process of your exhale.

Something so seemingly simple can really be quite difficult to do. This is why regular practice is necessary, and the support of a yoga class can be encouraging to the process.

Concerning children, yes, it would be wonderful to offer yoga classes for children at young ages. Many schools are doing this.

Check with your school system about the possibility of offering yoga classes in the school curriculum. If I can be of help to you in getting these classes started, please contact me.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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## Little things can make all the difference

This is a true story. Once upon a time, a yogi went to a teacher complaining about a chronic neck problem he had. He was doing the yoga postures as instructed and could not figure out what was preventing his neck from relaxing.

The teacher looked over the yogi's body with a glance and said, "It is your right great toe."

The yogi was stunned. He laughed inwardly at this remark.

The class got busy, and he could not ask more questions. He did not know what to ask anyway.

Nevertheless, he started to pay more attention to this toe. He would wiggle it more often and laugh at what the teacher saw as the basis for his neck problem.

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When his neck started getting tight, instead of his usual massage to his neck, sometimes he would start playing with his toes. As he did this he thought, "How strange that teacher was, but look at me. I am playing with my toes!"

Through his pain he would begin to chuckle. Soon he noticed that for a brief moment his pain went away. He then thought the chuckle made him forget his pain.

Certainly it could not have been that toe. Nevertheless, he did not forget that moment of relief, so he continued to massage and wiggles his toes. His chronic neck pain eventually went away.

I wonder what became of that yogi. I hope he became a foot doctor.

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Lifestyle

# Some yoga moves could help patients with kidney disease

Dear Joan,  
 I've been searching over the Internet for some information. I've dabbled in yoga from time to time and have found great benefits from it. I hope to resume some practice in the near future. The reason for my e-mail is to find out some information regarding whether or not yoga would be of benefit to my husband. He has polycystic kidney disease. Information on polycystic kidney disease can be found on the following link: [www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org).

The cysts are getting bigger every day and are taking over his kidneys. As this disease progresses, his flank pain gets worse. Do you think a yoga practice would help him? So much of yoga seems to put pressure on the abdomen it makes me question whether or not it would work. Would there be poses that might help him?

Let me know your thoughts. Any advice or direction would be very helpful.

Thanks!  
 Erin

Dear Erin,  
 Thank you for your letter. I have no doubt this disease is trying for your husband and also for you. Yes, yoga can be helpful for both of you in working through this polycystic kidney disease,

but first let me inform readers more on what this disease is. The Web site you refer to is very helpful. According to this Web site "In PKD, cysts, or fluid-filled pouches, are found primarily in the kidney but they can also affect other organs, including the liver, pancreas, spleen..."

Your husband is not alone, for polycystic kidney disease is the most common life threatening genetic disease. A larger percentage of men suffer from this than women.

Although no diet recommendations were made on the Web site you refer to, there have been scientific studies proving that a vegetarian diet can reverse heart disease. Since high blood pressure and heart side effects can be an outcome of PKD, starting a preventative measure by transitioning to vegetarianism might be something to seriously consider now.

As you may know, a yoga lifestyle involves a vegetarian diet based on the principle of non-violence. Although many people turn to vegetarianism for health reasons, from a yogic perspective,

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our health is improved if we live more harmoniously with nature. This would include a vegetarian lifestyle.

I recommend two books on this. The first is a book by Dean Ornish, M.D. called, "Reversing Heart

Disease." He is clinical professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco

This book scientifically documents the changes in heart patients who went through his program of yoga exercises, meditation, support groups and diets of vegetarianism. The other book is "Transition to Vegetarianism, An Evolutionary Step" by Rudolph Ballantine, M.D. It is an excellent book that encourages a process of change in diet that is not unsettling, but rather gradual and effective.

Regarding postures, yes, many of the yoga postures put pressure on the abdomen and would not be of benefit to your husband; in fact, some may even aggravate his condition. If you do take classes, which I still encourage you and your husband to do, find classes that are

gentle and soothing, and refrain from doing postures that put pressure on the abdomen.

As others in class continue, sit out that posture and use that time to simply focus on your breath. Come back to movements that calm and soothe the abdomen and kidney areas. Here are some suggested postures:

- For seated breath work, alternate nostril breathing, where one nostril is closed at a time. This is cleansing and balancing to the breath.
- Legs up against the wall, the lower part of the body remains on the floor, and just the legs are against the wall. Do not hold this position long, just enough to take some pressure of the lower blood circulation in the legs. This can relax some of the other organs in the process and may ease some of the pain in his flanks.
- Meditation also reduces stress and lowers blood pressure.

I could go on and on but there's not enough room in this column. Yet, I hope I have demonstrated to you, Erin, that yes indeed, yoga can be helpful.

Yours in peace,  
 Joan

# Yo Joan explains proper meditation procedures

Dear Joan,  
I'm not quite sure if I am meditating right.  
When I sit quietly and my mind goes blank. Is  
that meditating?

Alice

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Dear Alice,  
Most of us have a hard time getting our mind to go blank. There are usually so many thoughts whirling around in our little ol' minds competing for attention; however, I do think I understand your question: those times, when one seems to zone out. When you're really not thinking of anything in particular, it's all just kind of a foggy blur. Although this may appear as a break from the constant stress of the many whirling thoughts, this is not meditation.

Meditation is when the mind is so focused that one actually merges with the object of meditation. This may sound strange, but this is why meditation exercises often are concentration exercises, such as focusing on the breath or a candle or a sound. These concentration exercises bring the mind to a focused awareness. It is very easy to drift from this awareness and to start dreaming of something else.

This is also why it is very important to study the observances (yamas) of yoga, the observances of non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-greed and non-lust. These observances purify the mind so that when the mind does merge with its object of meditation, it is in a state closer to the essence of one's reality. In yoga, this would be considered a blissful state. So, when you are feeling down, move around, but when you are feeling great, meditate.

For more information on this topic, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation" offers the history, benefits and instructions on numerous techniques leading to meditation.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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# Yo Joan describes the anatomy of a yoga pose

I walk into the classroom with ease and comfort within my body. The room has a glow of things to come. I am early before any students arrive. I spend some time in silent meditation.

As students begin to enter the room, I greet them with joy and full awareness, still very close to an inner core of understanding I have glimpsed in my silence. I observe each person around me, not rushed — each person taking my full attention. I observe their outward expression and then deeper, past their physical appearance. I glimpse the connection to this inner core of understanding. I see a deepening inner beauty radiating from each person before me.

“Can you bend forward in half?”

My body freezes. Where am I? A student is standing directly before me.

“Yes,” I respond. Confounded by my ego. Questioning my confidence. Can I really? This is degrading. I realize I am being judgmental. This person does not know me, does not know where I have just been. Where have I been? A wall here now confronts me.

“Show me,” she says.

I look at her. I realize I must prove my worthiness to teach. What am I teaching? I take a deep breath and bend forward, releasing my ego to her expectations — to my expectations. I feel the puppet master lowering my strings. I bend my knees knowing that this is not the forward bend she was expecting. I rest my nose on my knees.

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My ego fades in and out. As it enters me, I am able to see it fully and not judge it. I easily let it go, realizing that it does not define my existence. I inhale back up and the student has now melted into the background of other students. I take some deep breaths and remind myself of that distant core of understanding. I know it exists, where did it go?

I ask students individually how they are, and when they answer, I listen. I try to

remember their responses so that I may later address their concerns, their troubles, their joys, more fully within the expression of what I am here to teach.

I turn my inner ear to the harp, and from deep within I strike meditative notes — notes that are beginning mantras reflective of the experiences before me. We sit quietly and begin to focus on sound. This sound becomes a wave in the room, stirring our hearts to movement.

I move along each student, privately tutoring each student, resonating the sounds and flowing into postures their individual bodies are comfortable in. I relinquish preconceived ideas of what a pose should be or do. I let the stir of the student's heart guide my instruction and further my understandings.

I observe competitive thoughts and I do not let them guide me. I flow out of these thoughts and bring my mind and body back to this glimpsed core of understanding, this core that guides my deepest being. A being that when I share, becomes one. Om.

# Breathing technique becomes an important part of massage

Yoga and massage have a lot in common. Both are stress reducing. Both are avenues to improving physical health.

Yoga is guided by breath work. Next time you give a massage to someone, consider how breath also can help you in giving a massage.

Try letting your breath guide your movements. Pay close attention to the way the person you are about to give a massage to breathes.

Slowly, let your breath synchronize with theirs. Become closer to the person you are about to touch by breathing in time with their breath. Then, let your touch do the same.

For example, let's say you are about to give someone something as simple as a gentle rub on the back. Slow your rub down ever so slightly to help your friend slow his or her breath down ever so slightly. Yet, do not

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force your breathing pattern upon him or her. Become ever more sensitive to your friend's breathing patterns.

Listen closely. If it is impossible or not healthy to breathe in the way your friend is

breathing, harmonize your breath with hers. See your relationship as a musical one. Let this touch of friendship be a time of new discoveries and expanding melodies between you both.

As massage becomes more and more clinically defined in the media and in schools, never forget that massage also is an art. Learn the art of massage and keep your mind open as an artist does in ever evolving creations and new visions of health, wonder and communications.

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## Lifestyle

# Yoga poses can help the health of kidneys

Dear Joan,

*I have very pronounced dark under-eye circles and this area is also very puffy and edematous. I am viewing this, not merely as a cosmetic problem, but possibly as a symptom of something underlying. Some of my ideas are sluggish circulation, sinus or allergy problems, and mineral or vitamin deficiencies of some sort. I am focused on this right now, interested in which yoga postures or dietary changes might help, and, in looking at this problem as an indication that there is something out of balance in my living patterns instead of seeing it as inevitable part of aging, am attempting to solve this with a pro-active approach. Although this may seem rather trivial, any suggestions would be greatly appreciated.*

Sincerely,  
Diana

Dear Diana,

Pick up Ohashi's book called "Reading the Body, Ohashi's Book of Oriental Diagnosis." This fascinating book I came across in my massage studies. According to this book, what you describe may involve a kidney weakness. The kidneys purify the blood and remove waste particles. Some things Ohashi suggests are:

- Travel with the sun.
- Increase the natural foods in your diet as compared to processed foods.
- You may be drinking too much water. If your diet is balanced and largely natural, you need not drink the eight glasses we hear about all the time because fruits and vegetables

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contain lots of water.

- Do not drink alcohol.
- Reduce stress.

This all sounds yoga healthy to me. Now, how to reduce stress? The following are a couple of yoga postures particularly suited for the health of the

kidneys. The kidneys are located in the area of the lower back. Strengthen the lower back, strengthen the kidneys. Spinal twists are a good place to start. Two versions in particular give a torso stretch with a focus on the lower back.

For the first version, sit back on your ankles with your knees next to each other. Move your body to the floor and bring your feet next to your buttocks. Slowly twist in the opposite direction of your feet. Start the twist at the base of the spine and lengthen as you twist. Keep your eyes relaxed as your shoulder blades draw down. Hold for several long breaths.

With the second version, sit with the legs straight out in front of you. Bend your one knee and bring the heel of the foot as close to your body as possible. Slowly twist in the opposite direction of the bent knee. Bend the elbow of the arm that is the same side as the bent knee. Bring this arm on the inside of the bent knee to help further the stretch. Relax the eyes and neck as you move into this pose. Hold for several long breaths.

From these directions you can begin to see why a picture is worth a thousand words. However, not everyone looks like a picture, in fact, usually just one person does. That is why these poses, or any yoga pose, can be altered slightly to benefit your particular body. It is always helpful to have a yoga teacher watch you and make suggestions to help you in your pose.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

Letters to Joan can be sent to her  
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## Lifestyle

# Sacred literature can provide comfort during difficult times

Dear Joan,

*I try not to be depressed. I am a single parent. I am trying to move forward with my life; it is just things in my past make it hard for me to move on. A lot of family issues. It's like I put everyone first and I am always with the short end. I try to make everyone happy except myself. Sometimes I think about dying. I just need someone to talk to, just listen.*

*Thank you for listening.*

*Bye Joan.*

*Anonymous*

Dear Friend,

You are not alone. It's great that you are reaching out. Continue to do so. Life is beautiful, yet sometimes the mud gets in the way of us seeing this.

In yogic terms, the lotus blossom symbolizes our life. It works through a lot of mud to finally bloom above the water. It lives grounded in the murky mud that

shifts and changes in density and finally reaches the surface where a beautiful flower is born.

In times of sorrow and distress, sacred literature can be of great comfort.

"When doubts haunt me,

when disappointments stare me in the face,

and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon,

I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me:

And I immediately begin to smile

In the midst of overwhelming sorrow.

Those who meditate on the Gita will derive

Fresh joy and new meaning from it

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every day."

Mohandas K. Gandhi

Gandhi led an inspiring life that consisted of great struggles. The Bhagavad-Gita, which he refers to above, is considered the most famous of all yoga scriptures. It was originally

written in Sanskrit approximately 400 B.C. It is a part of a larger book called the Mahabharata. Hundreds of translations of this epic text exist and you will find a translation in most any bookstore or library.

It is not a long story, but it is a very powerful one. Arjuna, the main character in the book, has to go to battle with his family and loved ones. It is a story about how to travel a path toward enlighten-

ment in a difficult world that can seem to be quite unsupportive — in fact, often downright oppressive. It is about ways of getting past the karma (life circumstances) we are born into. This is considered the path of greatest spiritual challenges and one that Arjuna advances on. Reading a story like this can be liberating for the soul trying hard to blossom amidst the mud of life.

You are a lotus blossom, my friend. Right now you see the mud, but soon you will see the light and you will bloom into a magnificent flower. Keep swimming. The surface is not far away. Keep reaching out.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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# Yoga positions can help singers find 'inner voice'

Dear Joan,

*I have a question about singing. Because you have been a singer you might understand.*

*Are singing and yoga related in the breathing techniques that are used? I find it hard to free my voice and find I'm unable to reach high notes as a result; could it be something to do with blocked energies? Would it help my singing if I started yoga and meditation?*

Sincerely,  
Heather

Dear Heather,

Yoga helped me in my singing but it wasn't a matter of singing higher notes; it was a matter of finding and expressing my inner voice. The clearer the inner voice is, the clearer the outer voice becomes.

Mercury Chakra is the energy center of the throat region and is the seat of our communications and expressions. So, certainly poses that can open the throat region, such as shoul-

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Bob

derstand and fish pose, can be beneficial to singers. Yoga can help actualize any gift we have.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

Yo Joan,  
*Why do we roll to the right side to come up from final relaxation pose?*

Dear Bob,

The heart is on the left side of the body. Rolling to the right takes pressure off the heart.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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# Movie fosters thoughts of inner peace

One of the foundational principles in the study of yoga is nonviolence (the practice of ahimsa). Nonviolence may seem pretty apparent, but it's much more than refraining from physical shoves. It's also about the way we speak to each other. It's about how insults and degradations — a trademark in many family-hour television sitcoms — foster a violent attitude of mind.

Speaking with respect is an important process in the creation of nonviolence. There's a new movie out that eloquently portrays these important societal influences.

"Mad Hot Ballroom" is a documentary on a group of street-smart inner-city fifth-graders learning the fine art of ballroom dancing. It's a modern look at an old art form of recreation.

Sixty years ago ballroom dancing was the rage. Its delicate beauty graced the dance floors of many ballrooms; yet even then our world was incredibly troubled. The horrors of World War II and the atom bomb were happening alongside fox trots.

Beautiful movements, courteous speech, and finally, the creation of a gentle mind are what create the full three-dimensional practice of nonviolence. A gentle mind would mean to think compassionately with love instead of judg-

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mentally with hatred. Most of us assume that the ugliness or beauty happening in the privacy of our own individual mind does not really matter to those around us.

For example, smoldering thoughts of contempt seem less violent than a fist in the face so we permit our mind to revel in this type of inner violence. We think that as long as we are not physically lashing

out, we are not really hurting anyone. Yet even though a violent thought may take longer to manifest physically, all physical manifestation ultimately derives from thought. So, in essence, you are what you think and the world is what we make of it.

What is so particularly wonderful about a movie like "Mad Hot Ballroom" is that it reminds us that the dance on the dance floor involves more than graceful footsteps. It also involves courteous speech, and ultimately, with persistent and dedicated practice, the beautiful transformation of one's mind.

• "Mad Hot Ballroom" will be shown by the After Hours Film Society at the Tivoli Theatre in Downers Grove at 7:30 p.m. Monday, July 25. Beginning at 6 p.m., the After Hours Film Society will host a fund-raising event featuring prize drawings. Call (630) 534-4528 for more information.

## Lifestyle

# Joan explains the role of mantras

Dear Joan,

What is a mantra, really? Is it just repeating strange words? I don't get why people would get together and say om. It seems weird.

Thanks,  
Cindy

Dear Cindy,

A mantra is a repetition of sounds, syllables or words. One reason it may sound strange to you is that it's usually spoken in another language. Yoga uses the Sanskrit language in mantras. Sanskrit is an ancient sacred language stemming from India.

Mantra use, in its most noble form, is a sacred experience. The repetition of certain sounds creates an inner and outer environment of heightened consciousness. This type of deepening awareness can increase human potential.

For example, the mantra that you refer to, "om," is a mantra used regularly in yoga circles. It's reflective of the universal sound the world balances peacefully around. Although the world may seem out of control, the earth still manages to orbit steadily and peacefully around the sun. Meditation on this steady sound can bring one into a more peaceful and balanced state of

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being. It can take one past superfluous sounds and into the reality of our peaceful inner-connections with each other.

Yet, it's also important to understand that this process of feeling connected may not happen immediately. It's like lifting weights at the gym. It may take several weeks or even months before you notice any real change in your body. This is the same with mantra but mantra

works on the muscles of your mind. The more you use a mantra, the more developed your inner-consciousness becomes, so choose your mantras wisely. They're like food for your soul. Feed your soul the best mantras possible so that you can blossom into the best person you can be.

Here's a yoga mantra to try for starters.

Repeat "shanti" (pronounced shawn - tee) three times:  
Shanti shanti, shanti

This means: Peace, peace, peace.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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# Yoga can improve asthmatic conditions

Dear Joan,

*I have asthma and although I've practiced yoga and yogic breathing for many years, my asthma continues to worsen. I suspect I have some frustrations that I am blocking and they are literally suffocating me. How can I use yoga to help me uncover and release them?*

Phyllis

Dear Phyllis,

Documented reports have shown that yoga can significantly improve asthmatic conditions. Demonstrate and discuss your yoga posture usage with your medical doctor who monitors your asthma.

Part of what a balanced yoga practice does is balance the nervous system.

Stress effects the tensions in the muscles, which affects the air going in and out of the lungs. Overly constricted muscles of the airways create difficulty breathing. Acute constrictions of these muscles produce asthma yet even though these conditions can be life threatening, there is usually no actual damage to the lung tissue.

Because you're finding your condition to be worsening instead of improving, you are right to question what you're doing and to consider changes.

Regarding your blocked frustrations: Is the asthma the result of your frustrations or your frustrations the result of the asthma?

Continue exploring deeply into these questions. Body/mind connections can become complicated and don't always unravel immediately. You may very well have some deep revelations in this that have yet to be uncovered. A balanced yoga practice increases flexibility to help open these restricted energy channels.

Elevated cortisol levels can also create asthmatic conditions. Cortisol is a hormone that is sometimes called the "stress hormone." It regulates blood pressure and numerous other functions of the body. The pituitary and adrenal glands are responsible for the creation of this hormone. A balanced yoga practice includes a breathing practice that helps to stimulate and activate these glands.

When you practice the postures you should simultaneously be practicing breath control, which means for example,

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inhaling into forward bends and exhaling into backward bends.

A successful yoga practice reduces stress and relaxes muscle tensions. Here are a couple more questions to consider:

- Could your yoga practice be too strenu-

ous?

- Does it include enough back bending with forward bending postures?

There is a natural feeling of accomplishment in doing a posture well, so perhaps your practice of the postures have become off balanced (not enough difficult postures).

Yoga also involves healthy diet choices of grains, vegetables and fruits to stimulate and optimize body functions.

To fully benefit from yoga practice, all of these considerations are involved: diet, exercise and breath. I do hope you found my response helpful, Phyllis. Feel free to write again.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

# Philosophical foundation essential to yoga postures

Dear Joan,  
My name is Trish and my son bought me two yoga videos for Mother's Day 2005. I have been practicing almost everyday since receiving them. Anyway, I bought your book "Complete Idiots Guide" and read it with enthusiasm. There was a term Kundalini that bothered me, so I "Googled" it.

The information that came up bothered me so much, that I have not practiced yoga since. The information on the Internet said that all yoga leads to this Kundalini experience and is dangerous if experienced alone or without a teacher familiar with Kundalini. Also, it said the experience is out of body and uncontrollable.

I was so very concerned about all this. ... I've been practicing to build strength, become more flexible and decrease stress.

Would I experience this "Kundalini" by practicing with my DVDs at home alone? Does this happen spontaneously without my wanting it to happen?

Please help,  
Trish

Dear Trish,  
I understand your concern. I hope I can subdue your fears. The yoga yamas form

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the philosophical foundation to the study of the postures. Without this philosophical foundation, the postures are just another exercise program. These yamas set a pure foundation to posture practice.

The yoga yamas are:

- Non-violence,
- Non-lying,
- Non-stealing,
- Non-lusting, and
- Non-greed.

Perfection in the practice of these yamas are difficult to come by but an awareness of how these processes effect decisions in one's life is essential. By bringing these yamas into ones awareness, and gradually into one's actions, one starts to realize a purer state of existence, a purer energy. This leads to the realization of a more balanced, honest and clear view of reality. For example, I may see the world as a violent mess, but until I curb the violence in my personal actions and in my own mind, the world at large will not change. Real change starts on a very intimate level; this is the yogi's path.

If the observation of these yamas is not present in one's practice, then one's ener-

is not purified and certainly chaos can e. According to yogic thought, the asis of our innate energy (Kundalini) is ure beautiful joy beyond description. Layers of illusions exist that often prevent from seeing or realizing this energy. e yogi's path is to remove these layers f illusions and live the energetic reality f inner peace; this path begins through practice of the yoga yamas.

Trish, our lives are like lotus blossoms, olding one beautiful layer at a time. et, some of us never blossom and

instead remain beneath the surface — in the mud. I propose that the Web site you saw is a muddy mess. Don't get stuck there. Continue your worthy efforts in self-study. For, you are a lotus ready to bloom!

Yours in peace,  
Joan

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at [www.yoyoga.com](http://www.yoyoga.com)

## Lifestyle

# Yo Joan explains meaning of hand positions

*Dear Joan,*

*Can you please tell me the significance of placing our hands and fingers in particular positions during meditation, i.e. joining the index finger and thumb together as we place arms and hands over our knees while sitting in a crossed leg pose?*

*Thank you so very much for your reply.*

*Middy*

*Dear Middy,*

These finger positions are called "mudras." "Mudra" means seal. Mudras seal the energy flow in the body to preserve it rather than let it escape. The finger position you refer to is called

the "Om Mudra." It involves holding the index finger and thumb together into a circle while the rest of the fingers rest cupped with the palms upward. This keeps the energy circulating in the body (represented by the fingers touching) while also remaining open to the energy around you (the open palm).

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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[www.yoyoga.com](http://www.yoyoga.com)*

Yo  
Joan

Joan  
Budilovsky





## Lifestyle

# Exercise, massage can help back muscles

*Dear Joan,  
Can you tell me a fast exercise or massage for the back?*

*Sabrina*

Dear Sabrina,  
Sure! An exercise first: Lie back on several hard cushions so that your back forms a slight arch. Lie here for a while letting your back settle into this supported back bend. A massage: Have a friend thumb-walk down the sides of your spine to your waist and back up to your neck. This massages the spinalis muscles that help keep the spine erect.

Joan

*Dear Joan,  
Do you consider "Power Yoga" to be true yoga or just another form of aerobic exercise?*

*Heather*

Yo  
Joan

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Dear Heather,  
Beryl Bender Birch wrote two books I recommend reading, "Power Yoga" and "Beyond Power Yoga." Certainly the sequence of poses in this type of posture practice are challenging and specific, but the practice also encompasses a heartfelt approach to the principles of yoga study.

Yoga ultimately is an internal study toward realizing inner peace. There are various names for the styles in which the yoga postures are approached. Certain styles of study or certain teachers will inspire people differently. Some people will be turned off by the athletic nature of a power yoga workout; others will be turned on by it. In this incredible world we live in, there is something and someone for everyone.

Joan

*Letters to Joan can be sent to [www.yoyoga.com](http://www.yoyoga.com).*

## Lifestyle

# 'Changing courses' can help with holiday stress

Once upon a yogi time, a yogi was walking down the street and fell into a big pothole. He pulled himself out all dirty and torn and continued on his journey.

The next day he walked down the same street and fell into the same hole. So he pulled himself out and continued on.

The following day, just as he was about to step into the pothole, he remembered it and side stepped it. Whew!

He did this for several days until he realized one day that he could actually walk down a different street. Then, he

was enlightened.

Yet, the story goes further because he was enlightened simply about that particular pothole in that particular street. A whole series of new experiences and conditions awaited him in the new street.

Upon reflection one day he decided to correct the past and improve the future, so he got political and called the Streets and Sanitation Department. The street

Yo  
Joan

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Joan  
Budilovsky



with the old big pothole was cordoned off and everyone, whether they had problems with the old pothole or not, now had the shared problem of not being able to use the street until it was fixed. The more aware he became, the more he was

be able to live amidst the inevitable potholes (particularly in Chicago) and not fall in, at least not on a regular basis, and get political when necessary as well.

I fall into potholes. Sometimes new stresses in life can make me fall into the strangest potholes. But whatever the case,

I keep getting back up, torn and tattered as I may be, and continue along the street, changing courses at times and mapping out new potholes as best I can.

You can, too. Rest assured, holidays are stressful times. So try and be patient with the person next to you who is losing theirs. You may be next. Rest assured.

As a local great sage once said, "Ho-Ho-Ho, Happy Holidays to all!"

Yours in peace,  
Joan

*Write Joan Budilovsky at  
www.yoyoga.com. And, please, be patient  
with her, too.*

## Lifestyle

# Relieving stress is in our power

Dear readers,

Can you relate to any of this?:

- You are looking for something — your glasses, a notebook, etc. — and walk to another room to look, but when you get there you forget what you are looking for.

- You lock your keys in your car.
- Once you hit 30, you seem to be gaining at least 10 pounds per decade.
- You drink more coffee than orange juice.
- A bubble bath sounds more appealing than a workout.

All of the circumstances above are related to stress in some way. Yet not all stresses are bad. In fact, some are actually quite good.

While some stresses create havoc in body and mind, others keep us on our toes and aware. Can you think of a stress in your life that is currently creating havoc in your life? What would your life be like without this stress? Do you think it would be any different?

Most of us simply replace one stress with another. For instance, we may give up smoking but take up drinking. Here's a suggestion on eliminating stress. ...

Yo  
Joan

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Don't! Rather, consider transforming it. Here's how the process begins:

Sit quietly in the comfort of your own mind. The next time you find yourself quietly judging another, see if you can transform this thought into a positive one.

Replace anger with compassion, arrogance with humor, sadness with wonder. Try it for one breath and see what happens. Next time a downer of a thought comes into your busy mind, let a simple breath transform this negative energy into a thought of inner kindness.

It's all in you. It's all up to you. You can do it — you and you alone. Even though we are in this together, your mind can transform the world we live in and make it a better place for all of us. No doubt, we have a lot of work cut out for us on this, but let's keep it simple. Simply transform one breath at a time.

Yours in peace,  
Joan

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