

Lifestyle

Yo Joan addresses the use of poses in meditation

Yo Joan,
Years ago I learned TM (transcendental meditation). I have done it on and off for about 15 years, not very successfully until recently when I started meditating in corpse pose instead of seated.

In looking through many books your "Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" included, I cannot find any information on whether it is "good" or "right" to meditate in corpse pose. Or "bad." I certainly like it.

Any opinions?

Thanks,
Chris

Dear Chris,
What a wonderful question to start out the New Year. Thank you! The practice of yoga leads to meditation so it is wonderful to have a question like this come up that helps us explore the ultimate purpose of the study of the yoga postures.

Meditation is most often taught with the spine erect. The main reason being that it is easier to maintain awareness

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when the spine is erect. It is easier to fall asleep when lying down and thus lose consciousness and go into a dream state rather than into a meditative state.

However, you mention that you have studied TM or transcendental meditation. This form of meditation uses mantra, the repetition of sound, as a way of deepening consciousness. You say you have been studying this for approximately 15 years.

You also say that you have been finding success in your meditation practice when in corpse pose. I assume this means you are feeling good about the direction your meditation practice is going while in corpse pose.

Corpse pose, also called savasana, is a pose of relaxation where the body is lying flat on the floor with the palms resting upward. I encourage you to explore further what is happening to you in corpse pose that is making you feel good about your meditation practice.

Here are some questions to help you: Are you remaining conscious in corpse pose? Are you able to relax more in corpse pose than in seated pose? What happens differently for you in corpse pose than in seated pose? Why is medita-

tion practice more effective for you in corpse pose?

If your body is strong, as a regular yoga posture practice inspires, the relaxing qualities you find in corpse pose can be transferred into your seated practice. For example: As you are seated, relax your legs, relax your arms, relax your torso and relax your face. Soften your breathing. Release your thoughts. Focus your mind on a mantra or object of devotion.

All the yoga poses lead to meditation, including corpse pose. It is wonderful that you are finding this process of meditation in this pose.

Meditating while lying on one's back is difficult for many people. Most lose consciousness when lying down and are not able to maintain the awareness needed for meditation. The next step for you, Chris, is to try and find this meditation when the spine is upright and ultimately for your meditation practice to be a part of your regular movements in this world.

Wishing you, Chris, and all who are reading this and even those who are not, a new year filled with ever deepening and expanding moments of peace.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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

Yo Joan offers ways to control breathing

*Dear Joan,
When doing breathing techniques in yoga, what should you do when your breathing starts to get erratic? How do you slow yourself down?*

Annette

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Dear Annette,
When your breathing becomes erratic, it is a sign that you are overextending yourself.

The first step would be to slow your physical movements down and/or the pranayama (breathing) technique

you are doing. Come back to your regular breathing by simply counting your breath. Inhale for four counts and exhale for eight counts. This will calm your body and breath down.

There is no rush in yoga practice. If your breathing becomes erratic, you have lost control. Pranayama is the practice of breath control. Consult your yoga teacher if a particular technique is causing your breath to become erratic. Your teacher will be able to more specifically help you by guiding you into the correct practice of the technique or into a different technique all together so that breath control is not lost, but rather gained.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Change must come from within

Dear Joan,
One thing that I cannot seem to overcome is a situation with my family. During little arguments/nit-picks, etc., I just seem to keep my mouth shut and observe and let others take my cue to relax and just observe. I have two older sisters who seem to be infinitely arguing or talking to each other in tones that are not favored by me. I would like your advice and help in finding how to incorporate the yoga philosophy into dealing with these issues.

Respectfully,
Rebecca

Dear Rebecca,
First, I would like to recommend a book called "Why We Fight" by Pandit Rajmani Tiguenait, Ph.D. It simply and eloquently uncovers the root causes of violence from a yogi's perspective, which is always a journey into self-discovery.

You say that you do not favor the tones of your sisters. You say that you keep your mouth shut and let others take your

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cue. Could it be that they indeed are?

Many of us assume that the thoughts we hold in the privacy of our minds are just that — private. Yet, we must learn to understand that our thoughts transcend the physical. We are actually energy. All those around

us are reading the thoughts we have at energetic levels. Transform your thoughts and you transform the world. Purify your thoughts and you purify the world.

This is not easy to do. In fact, it is quite difficult, but it is the *only* way. Change has to happen from within. If it is impossible for you to observe in nonjudgment, then pack your bags and leave. Here is the key though — leave in kindness. Come back when you are able to participate nonviolently on every level — this includes your thoughts.

So my final suggestion to you, Rebecca, would be to not try and change your family but rather seek inward for change. You can do this and you can do this well.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Lifestyle

Yoga practice may help with pregnancy, delivery

Dear Joan,
Can you use yoga during labor or delivery of a baby?
Lori

Dear Lori,
How apropos to receive this question as I myself am about to deliver a baby boy! In fact, by the time this response appears in the paper, he'll have been delivered and I may very well have an even fuller response for you.

Much of yoga has to do with breath work. Learning to control the breathing in various yoga techniques is called Pranayama. Pranayama techniques strengthen the diaphragm muscle that controls breathing. Early in your pregnancy, diaphragm strengthening can be very helpful. It will serve you well to have strong breath muscles in the actual delivery when you need to push the

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baby out. As your pregnancy develops, many of these diaphragm-strengthening techniques become more difficult to do because the growing baby pushes against the diaphragm muscle. So as your baby grows, diaphragm-strengthening techniques should be replaced with more gentle yoga breathing techniques. These gentle techniques will serve you well through the discomfort of early contractions.

In addition to yoga breath work, yoga

postures can be done throughout the course of pregnancy to keep Mama flexible and fit for labor. Many of the yoga poses are done from seated positions on the floor. As your pregnancy advances, getting up and down off the floor might be too straining for you (it is for me!). Also, many people, myself included, get swollen ankles during pregnancy, which makes deep bends of the ankles extremely uncomfortable. For this reason, yoga postures can be done with the use of a chair, particularly in the final trimester of pregnancy. During labor, some of these poses can aid in the movement of the baby through the birth canal, making the experience more comfortable for both mother and baby.

Lastly, meditation is a part of yoga practice. Imagine bringing a baby into this world who has experienced the internal peace and serenity a daily practice of meditation brings forth. I think this reason

alone is enough to practice yoga during pregnancy. We are certainly in need of more peaceful and serene souls in this world and if there is some small way we can increase this population, let us try.

As this new phase of my life begins with the birth of a baby, an old phase is ending. This is my last Yo Joan column for this wonderful paper. I have been writing for Liberty Suburban Chicago Newspapers for more than nine years and it has truly been a joy. Thank you, dear readers, for all the letters and inspirations. I hope you will keep in touch for I will still be only a click of the keyboard away at www.yoyoga.com.

And, I will remain as always,

Yours in peace,

Joan

Joan Budilovsky has a doctorate in education and wrote her dissertation on yoga education.

Lifestyle

Drowsiness during meditation calls for getting more sleep

Dear Joan,
I fall asleep when I meditate. What am I doing wrong?
Sincerely,
Sue

Dear Sue,
You are not necessarily doing anything wrong. Why do you think the legs are crossed on top of the thighs in the meditation pose of Lotus? It anchors the body down and keeps the monks from falling over when they fall asleep! Many people

get sleepy when they try to meditate. It is important to honor the body. Perhaps if you get drowsy, your body is clearly stating to you that you need more sleep.

Remember this easy slogan: "Feeling down, move around. Feeling great meditate." The time to meditate is when you are feeling great and

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rested. This will give you the chance to fully experience what meditation is or can be.

When you meditate, have a candle or an object of beauty to use as your central focus. Many people use a picture of a form of divinity that is meaningful to them. The important

point to remember is meditation occurs when you merge with your object of

meditation. This is why it is important to have something that you want to merge with.

I wish you well, plenty of rest and sweet dreams so that your meditation practice can be especially meaningful for you.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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Joan offers suggestions for yoga and back pain

Hi Joan!

I have tried a few times to attend yoga classes but find that many poses seem to aggravate my back problems. I've had a weak back most of my life but trying to strengthen my core muscles seems to result in straining my back. A friend suggested that I find a class or a video with instruction on how to modify the poses for people with back problems. Do you know of such a video, or such a class in the west suburban area?

Denise
La Grange

Dear Denise,
Garden of Yoga is located right near you in La Grange. You can contact them at (708) 989-1329. Yes, all of the yoga poses can be modified to help your back problem or any other concern. The poses are meant to open, flex and extend your spine, not strain it. A qualified yoga instructor can be helpful in helping you

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adjust your poses.

It would also be wise of you to find a class that is small enough so that the instructor can address your concerns adequately. I have found in my experiences as an instructor that larger classes are more difficult to teach for this very reason. Ideally, yoga is taught on a one-to-one basis, teacher to student. This allows for the individual attention of the special needs of the student.

There are so many yoga books out there now to explore, as well as videos and DVDs. Find one that interests you by simply browsing the Internet or book-

stores. I would stay away from vinyasa or ashtanga styled teachings if you have a back problem. These are classes that involve swift flowing movements and often quite challenging transitions from posture to posture. If you are not prepared, you might hurt your back in the process of flowing from one posture to the next. Instead, find a yoga class or DVD that explores the postures slowly, gently and with great attention to detail. Interview the instructor ahead of time, if possible, before coming to the class to see how large their classes are and how they structure them. This may save you some time in finding the right fit for your back.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Lifestyle

Nature, yoga combine for an interesting early morning

Ed. note: This column is part one of a three-part series.

"Know that my beloved is hidden from everyone.

Know that she is beyond the belief of all beliefs.

Know that in my heart she is as clear as the moon.

Know that she is the light in my body and in my soul."

I close the book of "Love Poems of Rumi" and breathe in the cool fresh air. I tell the students to keep their eyes closed and simply listen to the sounds around us.

We stand there silently, hearing geese flapping their wings on the distant shore, gentle movements of water in a nearby stream, the soft rustling of grasses in the breeze as the cool early morning dew embraces our skin. Yes, it's a glorious day at the arboretum. I take my classes here at least once every semester, every season.

Each different season offers so many special delights.

We meet at the arboretum at 5:30 a.m. to greet the new day with a silent nature hike and this feels like a particularly special morning; 5:30 a.m. is considered an auspicious time to meditate. Rising before the hustle and bustle of the day is a particularly beautiful experience in the forest, where night meets the day so eloquently.

I ask them to open their eyes and follow me in silence on the foggy path ahead. There are about 25 of us. I try to keep the walk slow and steady so as not to sound like a heard of buffalo and disrupt the beautiful setting around us. A distant drone of early morning traffic in the background reminds us of our time and space. We will soon lose this

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reminder as we get deeper into the forest ahead.

As I lead slowly and steadily, a mosquito lands on my sleeve. I gently push it away. We get deeper into the woods and so do the mosquitoes. In fact, I find myself walking into

packs of them. I breathe deeply and slowly begin waving my arms. This distraction I can certainly deal with. I remember

the passages on mosquitoes in the book "Autobiography of a Yogi" by Paramahansa Yogananda. I reflect on Yogananda's teachings from his book, as the bugs continue to multiply around us.

"One night, when a cloud of mosquitoes surrounded us, Master failed to issue his usual instructions. I listened nervously to the anticipatory hum of the insects. Getting into bed, I threw a propitiatory prayer in their general direction."

Letters to Joan Budilovsky can be sent to www.yoyoga.com.

Lifestyle

Yoga class seeks answers in battling mosquitoes

Editor's note: This column is part two of a three-part series.

Yes! That's it, a prayer! "Please mosquitoes," I say to myself, "we mean you no harm. Leave us be. We are just taking a yoga meditative walk through this forest and will leave you soon and you will have your forest back. Just let me lead, and leave us alone."

The prayer does not work. In fact, I think it even beckons greater hordes of blood-sucking bugs around us. Maybe

it wasn't sincere enough? I reflect on Paramhansa Yogananda's book, "Autobiography of a Yogi." What did Paramahansa do when he was confronted with mosquitoes? These were his words:

"A half hour later, I coughed pretentiously to attract my guru's attention. I thought I would go mad with the bites and especially the singing drone as the mosquitoes celebrated bloodthirsty rites."

Yes! My guru! Where is he? I am he! The itch on my back is excruciating. I

instinctively reach back and swat it. Three huge mosquitoes are now dead on my hands with blood and mosquito parts are all over them. Yuck! Violence! I am teaching nonviolence. I shake the bloody bug body parts into the air and rub the rest on my clothes. Help! Guru, guru ... I spell it out, gee you are you ... I go back to waving my hands, strongly.

There's no turning back now. We're deep in the woods and the path back is longer than the path forward. I must release my desire to kill these bugs, damn it. I then kill several more on my forehead ... AAHHH! I am swearing. I am violent. I desire to kill. I am setting an example for my students, a poor one, but an example nonetheless.

I look behind me and see all the students flailing their arms, just like me.

There is an uneasy look of panic in their eyes, too, just like me. One student has his T-shirt pulled up over his head and the shirt covers his whole body. It's a hysterical sight and I burst out laughing. A mosquito flies into my mouth and I start spitting. It's disgusting. Several students start spitting and coughing. Even the guy with the T-shirt over his head is doing a funny kind of jig that makes me think he's coughing, too.

I continue on faster than ever. No longer a slow meditative walk, but a forceful gallop. I ask myself, what's next? What did Paramahansa do? He turned to his Master for guidance. What did his master say? Think, think...

What would you do?

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Lifestyle

At last, author finds meaning in walk through woods

Editor's note: This column is part three of a three-part series.

"Is the whole world going to change for you? Change yourself: be rid of the mosquito consciousness."

I look down at my feet. I am dressed in shorts and the entire front of my legs are covered with mosquitoes. "Be rid of you!" I scream as I shake my legs and start skipping. I don't think this is quite what the master implied but the bugs must not have been this tough for him over there in India. There are swarms around us here!

Hatha, the physical postures — think, what do the postures teach? Strength and flexibility! "Feets don't fail me now!" I run like the beegesus and briefly look back to see most everyone running too. Some pass me up. Yet, some calm students fade into the distant background.

"Hurry!" I yell back at them. They don't seem to hear. They are busy quietly talking among themselves, walking calmly in the forest, ever so slowly and steadily. The runners and I make it to the parking lot, dripping with perspira-

tion but free of most of the mosquitoes. A few lost relatives continue to bite us for good luck but they're manageable. The slower students gently meet up with us, serene smiles on their faces and no mosquitoes lingering around them. We end with a few yoga stretches in the parking lot.

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"This was hell," I think to myself, as I try to make light of it all and laugh about the lesson for today being "contentment." I end class, go home and throw up.

I open up Paramahansa's book. Surely, I missed something. I read, "Man may be compelled to exterminate harmful creatures. He is not under a similar compulsion to feel anger

or animosity. All forms of life have an equal right to the air of Maya. The saint who uncovers the secret of creation will be in harmony with Nature's countless bewildering expressions. All men may understand this truth by overcoming the passion for destruction."

It took a simple short walk through the forest to see how far I had yet to go and how close some of my students already are.

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Yoga done properly should not cause pain

Dear Joan,

I read your book a couple of years ago and loved it. I've been practicing yoga since then, on and off.

I have a question to ask you: Sometimes after practice I start having low back pains, especially if the practice included the sun salutations or cobra pose. Can you tell me if this is normal?

Thanks a lot,
Ana

step back, re-access and lead it forward in kindness.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Joan Budilovsky, who has a doctorate in education and wrote her dissertation on yoga education, is the author of many books on yoga, meditation and massage. Write to Joan via her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

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Dear Ana,

It's a common occurrence for many people, Ana, but it's not the effect you should be receiving from doing yoga poses. Yoga poses increase the strength and flexibility of the spine. If done correctly, there is no pain. Because you are experiencing pain, the way you are moving into the poses and the way you are holding the pose needs to be re-evaluated.

The first person to ask is your yoga teacher. Your teacher can watch your movements closely and tell you when something is not right. From what you describe to me, I would say that you are not engaging the back of your legs when you go into cobra pose. If you do not engage the back of your legs, you put too much pressure on your lower spine. This overextends your spine. Check your arms, too. In cobra pose, the arms are slightly bent and elbows are kept near the body.

Always remember that when there is pain in a yoga pose, there is no gain. Extend yourself only to the point where you can still feel some movement in the pose. Do not extend yourself to your extreme limit. Yoga develops grace and confidence. A study of the postures can help you to realize that your body can move further but balance is an important part of the study, too. Out of balance comes grace.

Continue on, Ana, slowly, steadily and with respect for your profound body. Listen to it when it says it hurts. Take a

Reader questions tattoos meaning in yoga practice

Dear Joan,
Do tattoos, particularly with a dark nature, conflict with yoga teachings? Your advice is greatly appreciated.
Adam

Dear Adam,
As far as I know, there is nothing stated in the ancient yoga texts referring to tattoos. I think whether or not to get one is a highly personal decision. I do not have a tattoo myself because of my Gemini nature — what appeals to my artistic sense today may be quite different tomorrow. I think that most people see tattoos as a work of art, as if the skin of the body is a canvas to be painted on.

Your body is the temple that

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houses your spirit. Much care should be taken on the tattoo chosen as it will be on your body for the rest of your life. A tattoo of a dark nature will be there as a regular reminder of the dark aspects of what you see. Yoga is a process of unveiling the many layers of illusions of who we think we are. Ultimately, you and I — all of us

— are of a divine nature. Perhaps you may see the dark side now but with regular practice of yoga, your divine nature will become more apparent. As your divine nature becomes clearer, you will most likely relate more to the inspirations of lightness rather than darkness. This is not to deny that darkness exists.

As a great yogi Paramahansa Yogananda said, "Creation is light and shadow both, else no picture is possible." Yet, it is a matter of what images we want to use as guides in our lives. This is your decision. It is certainly a decision well worth meditating on.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Feelings can affect physical being

The body/mind experience is full of new discoveries. The way you feel and think has a profound effect on your physical reality. Look deeply into the questions below and discover new answers to expanding upon your movements.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Which movement is most difficult for you? Pick one and then answer the questions.

- Twists: What is preventing me from seeing the other side of issues? Why do views that are different than mine trouble me? How can I open myself up to new experiences and new ways of looking at things?
- Forward bends: Where is my life

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headed? What is it about the future that troubles me? How can I move forward in peace?

- Backbends: What troubles of my past are not resolved? What prevents me from opening my heart? How can I heal my heart?

- Balance: Who am I? Why are decisions so difficult for me? How can I create peace in the decisions I make?

Joan Budilovsky, who has a doctorate in education and wrote her dissertation on yoga education, has written many books on alternative therapies. Her new book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga, Illustrated Fourth Edition," has just come out in bookstores. Write to Joan via her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Thanksgiving offers time to give thanks to self

Dear Readers,

Yes, Thanksgiving is here. Thanks for giving. We live in a world that could certainly use more of this.

This Thanksgiving as you gather with friends or spend quite time alone, reflect on what you have given this year. Is there a way you could have given more?

In yoga, there is something called Karma Yoga. It's the yoga of giving without any thought of return. Our bodies do this for us on a regular basis. Have you said thank you to your body lately? Many of us are so conflicted about our bodies. We criticize and judge its nuances or we ignore it until it brings us pain and we can no longer do so. When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Here are some suggestions in thankfully giving to your body:

To your face:

Thank you, face, for approaching the world in the best way I can — for subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, expressing my emotions for others to understand me better. Thank you for giving so much to so many people. Thank you for observing, listening and expressing my sincere concerns for others.

To your arms:

Thank you, arms, for allowing me to

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hug and be held. Thank you for reaching out in times of need. Thank you for providing support for others when needed. If it is true that I carry the world on my shoulders, thank you for being strong enough to do so.

To your legs:

Thank you for guiding me through this world, for lifting me up when I feel down and settling me down when I am tired. Thank you for allowing me to see the world as greater than myself.

To your torso:

Thank you for providing me a center to create from. My heart, my stomach, my liver, my intestines and so many of my internal organs are housed in your sanctuary. Thank you for your patience with me in my over or under indulgences. Know that I understand that balance is what creates peace for you, and I will work to bring more balance into my life and create more peace for us all.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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Recognizing gifts around us can lead to happier new year

Have you given any gifts this holiday season that were not acknowledged with words of thanks or perhaps no recognition at all? Have you ever had to sheepishly ask a month or so later if a gift you sent by mail was ever received, only to find out it indeed had?

I've had this happen to me on numerous occasions. Even though I thought I didn't give to receive, my curiosity if the mail got messed up has consistently taken over. Once or twice in my life there was a mail error, but many, many times the gift arrived and was simply not acknowledged. Maybe my older sage friend was right, maybe children now-a-days are spoiled. But, it's not only children that this happens with; it's also their parents.

Maybe some of us are overindulgent in gift giving or maybe we simply are not taking clues that the gifts are not necessary. The kinds of gifts that mean the most, after all, are not wrapped in paper or surrounded by tinsel and often don't arrive by parcel post.

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So, this yoga tip for the new year is not only to remind you how important it is to respond to a thoughtful gift but to also recognize the gifts all around you right now. Take a moment to express your inner gratitude for all that is in your life — the joys, the heartaches, the gifts of the season. I don't think it's possible to spoil a baby but perhaps once the baby starts walking around, it is?

Ask yourself, what have you given lately that has made this world a more beautiful place that wasn't wrapped up in pretty paper? What have you given that you didn't want anything back for, even an acknowledgment? If you can't think of anything, start making a list of ways you can give these kinds of gifts more often.

Together, let's acknowledge and create many deep blessings for the new year whether or not our pockets are deep.

Yours in peace,
Joan

Yoga practice can help in creating balance

Dear Joan,
I've been reading the 1999 edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" and am really enjoying it. Though I've done hatha yoga and meditative yoga for more than 20 years, there is always something more to learn.

Now my question (and it is a serious question). This country, and maybe the world, is very politically polarized. I am very aware of this more than any other time when I go to my yoga meditation group and they talk about liberal political figures as being the saviors of the world. I see things very differently and while I don't make an issue of my conservative views, they aren't a secret either.

One night during a meditation workshop, a high-level teacher (a man teaching at a well-known Chicago area university) made the comment that "You can hate George Bush but you don't have to be attached to that hatred." The second time he said it, I walked. Does hatred of anybody belong in this type of discussion? My question is, why do I have to feel that as a political conservative, I'm some kind of untouchable in these sorts of groups? I think that people doing yoga, of all people on the earth, should be tolerant of the views of others.

Betty

Dear Betty,

What an excellent question to begin our new year. There is no denying what a politically charged world we live in. Our country is at war and the feelings around the politics of this war are often strong, passionate and partisan. Any war, any extreme action, can bring on extreme responses, this is natural. But this kind of response does

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not necessarily create balance. Balance (sattva) is created out of discipline and thoughtful purpose.

I agree that hatred does not belong in yoga studies but its experience cannot be denied either. To push a feeling or emotion under the rug does not relinquish it. An emotion must be faced head on and relinquished. I think this may have been what your teacher was trying to express. If one has hatred, acknowledge it and then let it go. Do not be attached to it

because this feeling, as with any feeling, is transient and does not define who one is. You are much greater than any feeling state.

It is this type of understanding that may help us from going into future wars and may also help us in creating current peace in our turbulent world. Instead of immediately responding to violence of any sort with "an eye for an eye" mentality and blinding ourselves in the process, it would benefit us to step back and see that we are more than an emotional response. It requires deep inner exploration to respond to violence in peace. Something few of us are willing to put the time into, yet something that can change the world if even a few of us do.

Yours in peace,
Joan

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Love can be celebrated every day

Oh, love sounds so wonderful, unless you're someone who's not feeling the love.

Perhaps you just lost your job or just broke up with a boyfriend, girlfriend or spouse. Maybe you recently experienced the death of someone you cared for deeply or a pet of yours is ill or dying. Maybe you're feeling all your attempts at romance are foiled or just never going to happen — you feel alone and isolated.

All these situations are real and they sure don't feel better when one is bombarded by the media telling us that it's the happy month of coupledness and if you aren't a couple you're dumb.

Erich Fromm wrote a beautiful small book on love back in 1957 called the "Art of Loving." You can still find it in many bookstores and libraries. This book questions the American ideal of love. It also classifies and examines various types of love: erotic love, brotherly love, love for mother, love for father, love for self and love for God. This book explores what happens when one or all of these ideals are not met. It also explores how the realizations of some of these loves are sorely lacking in our society; to improve our

society, interpretations of these ideals need to be re-examined in one's personal life.

For example, let's look at motherly love. Many mothers are very concerned with the care and well-being of their own children — as well they should be — but when this concern does not transcend

into concern for the care and well being of other children, then this love for one's own child is wrapped up in ego and is a false love. It is not true love. For, as Fromm sees it, you cannot truly love your child without loving ALL children.

As you reflect on the love in your life, or lack of love, know that it's bigger than all of us. There are many dimensions in love, just as there are many dimensions into each of our individual lives. Perhaps this is why so many songs are written about the ever unfolding and evolving nature of love. It is eloquently expansive. And so, in essence, Valentines Day need not be one day, it can be every day.

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Shoulder stretch gives fresh outlook

Are you carrying the world on your shoulders? The shoulders often end up carrying a majority of our tensions for the day. Many neck and headache problems originate from shoulder pain as well.

Here's a simple yoga stretch that can be done anywhere and anytime to take some of the strain off those well-worn shoulders of yours:

Place your hands on the top of a sturdy chair. Space them about shoulders width apart — if you don't have a chair, place your hands against a wall at about chest level.

Bring your feet a giant step away from the wall or chair and bend forward with a flat back. If your legs feel tight, bend your knees and feel your tailbone lifting up. If your shoulders hurt, bend your elbows. Lengthen your spine and let your head relax down. Your arms, head and back should hang at about a right angle to the floor. Rest in this position for several deep breaths.

Breathe into your shoulders. Exhale and watch as the tensions begin to release.

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After several long breaths, slowly step back up and straighten your body.

Not only does this simple stretch release tensions in the shoulders and neck, it also helps to give you a fresh outlook on life. When you feel overwhelmed or stuck in a problem or way of thinking, try this stretch to help you gain a new perspective. As your day moves along and you find yourself shouldering more and more responsibilities, bring this simple stretch into your day more often.

Letters to Joan Budilovsky, who has a doctorate in education and wrote her dissertation on yoga education, can be sent to her Yoyoga Web site at www.yoyoga.com.

Intense pain should be checked out by doctor

Dear Joan,

Hope you can help me.

I am a woman of 55, good health, a bit overweight. I've been doing yoga for many years and now for two years have been doing an intensive sort. One pose is standing on toes, going down slowly and sitting down for a while.

Lately, I suffer from really strong cramps after doing this pose, at home in the evening or in bed at night. The cramps are so painful that I scream! They are mostly in my feet and calves. Then, when I stretch my calf to get rid of the cramp it goes into my foot. My yoga teacher says just to go on, but that is what they always say. I take magnesium and keep feet and legs warm. Do you have another tip, maybe? Thanks a lot!!!

Best regards,

Liesbeth Perdeck

Dear Liesbeth,

If the pain is so great it's making you scream, I would suggest you definitely check this out with your doctor. This is

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not something to ignore. Discomfort is something to work through, but extreme pain is something to contact your doctor about. He or she might recommend an ultrasound of your leg to assure there are no blockages. I don't want to overly alarm you, but

I do want you to seek medical care for this condition and rule out anything that needs medical treatment before moving forward with these poses.

In ancient times, yogis didn't have the benefit of medical science, but now we do and we should certainly turn to this science when the need presents itself. Liesbeth, the need has presented itself for you.

Let me know what happens.

Yours in peace,

Joan

Joan Budilovsky has a doctorate in education and wrote her dissertation on yoga education.