

Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

The Cycle of Vegetarianism

Dear Joan,

I really want to be a Vegetarian, but I have a very difficult time at it. I was raised on meat and potatoes. I know in my heart that Vegetarianism is the path I would like to follow, yet I often have strong cravings for meat. I tell people I am a Vegetarian and then feel crummy when I inevitably stray off my Vegetarian path. It appears I am on some kind of cycle with my eating in an on-again, off-again vegetarian way. Joan, do you have any suggestions that could help me stay on this path of non-violence through vegetarianism?

Sincerely,

Sue Traley
DeKalb, Illinois



Dear Sue:

You are not alone. Many people share your inner conflicts...myself included! I know in my heart and in my mind that Vegetarianism is the way to go...but my body and senses often crave meat. We can look at this karmically and say that patterns are not always broken quickly or even in one lifetime. By becoming aware and eating LESS meat than you did before, you are on the path of change. Just like in the yoga poses, change is very subtle. In weeks, months, or years of practice, we may notice that we are walking taller, or a shoulder is easier to move or our thoughts are more non-judgemental. These changes do not occur immediately. These changes develop over time and with continual practice.

Non-violence comes in many forms, Sue. Vegetarianism does not necessarily give someone a kind heart or a helping hand. If Vegetarianism is an area that you believe you are falling short in, in terms of non-violence, consider all the others areas in your life where you have opportunities to practice non-violence. Seek these areas out and practice non-violence. Practice non-violence confidently "here", and soon it will be easier to practice "there." Your kind heart and helping hand will certainly be appreciated by those you are able to extend it too. Be loving, kind and genuinely patient with your body and mind...and your body and mind will respond accordingly.

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Where do I start?

Dear Joan,

I was wondering what exercises yoga includes. How do I go about them? How do I do yoga period? I really need to get rid of stress and my problems for a while. I really need basic information on yoga. I am very interested in the subject. And I really need direction. Thank you very much, I would appreciate all the help you can give me.

Charles B. Eckert
Stockton



Dear Charles,

Thank you for your letter. Where is Stockton?

I understand your needs. When a person finds something like Yoga and begins to see that it can be of such great benefit, the feeling of wanting to know "everything" about it rushes into our consciousness. Said once a wise unknown author: "Lord grant me patience...but hurry!"

Let's start by taking a **BIG SLOW DEEP BREATH.**

Yoga is a process. Have you read through the Philosophy section of Yoyoga to start with? Have you been slowly developing your asana practice? Have you found a yoga teacher in your area that you can study with? Have you gone into a bookstore (maybe even the Yoyoga Bookstore!) and found a yoga book to read that sparks your interest and keeps it there through to the end of the book? Charles, you have found an important key, the excitement of the Mars Chakra that motivates one to action.□ The "enlightenment" is in the persistence and dedication (the Sun/Moon Chakra) that leads one towards wisdom.

Many blessings, Charles, as you continue on this inspiring and rewarding path...

Namaste,
Joan

YOYOGA Readers take note!

Dear Joan,

I just finished reading your book, it is excellent. I think I am going to read it again because I would like some of these ideas to be with me through out the day. I often read about personal growth and ones own mind and body, but I never take it all the way. I quit smoking two months ago and that has led me into interests of exercise and paying closer attention to my diet. With quitting smoking comes the weight and tons of energy! It has also made me more aware of my surroundings and how much more organized and healthy I feel when they are clean. Where I feel I fall short is in meditation and self-discipline and exercise. I sometimes get that feeling of pure happiness for no reason. But it's something I would like to have more and stop some of the chatter in my head.

An acquaintance of mine follows yoga with strict discipline, it's wonderful. It's something I often think about but never set aside the time. I would be curious to know if you know of any yoga workshops in the Providence, RI area or maybe individuals I could meet and chat with.

I'll be looking forward to your response.

Kevin M. McNally
Swansea, Massachusetts

Dear Kevin,

I AM SO HAPPY THAT YOU LIKE THE BOOK! Since it is BRAND NEW and you are the very first person receiving it from the Yoyoga Bookstore, your review is very special to me.

I do not know of any specific workshops in the Rhode Island area. Maybe some of the YOYOGA READERS do! I will post your letter and see what comes up! HELLO OUT THERE RHODE ISLAND READERS! Many blessings to you, Kevin, for the new year! I

**Namaste,
Joan**

Is there a Yoga video tape series?

Dear Joan,

I have been interested in getting into yoga. Is there a video tape series that you would recommend for an active person ?

Eric Evans
Cleveland, Ohio

Dear Eric,

Yoga Journal Magazine (800) 254-8464 has some great video tapes out. I particularly like the one with Rodney Yee on "Strength".

I just returned from an outstanding seminar with two dynamo yoga instructors: Beryl Bender Birch and her husband Thom Birch. They teach a system of yoga that involves

vinyasa or a steady flow of asanas/postures. It is termed by them "Power Yoga." Since you mention "for an active person," I am assuming you are looking for something that will harbor your athletic interests. They are really wonderful instructors and you will most certainly get the sweat rolling if you take one of their classes. They teach classes based in New York City (212) 661-2895 and they also do seminars across the country. I would highly recommend a class (or many!) with them. If this is not possible, try and find a local teacher who has a Ashtanga based practice. Ashtanga means the 8 limbs of yoga, but it has come to be considered here in the states as the more athletic or challenging version of hatha practice. I enjoy it very much.

Depending on what you meant by "active," you may find a slower style of study like "kundalini", for example, which focuses on breathing techniques, very beneficial in balancing your active lifestyle. When we are used to a "health club□" mentality...looking for "an edge" in our physical work-out, it is sometimes difficult to quiet down and see that the subtleties in our practice can be quiet profound and empowering. These subtleties often happen in gentle, slow movements. You may also want to check out my audio tape "Beginner's Yoga" in the [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) for a gentle hour long workout of yoga stretches and breathing techniques that relaxes the body as it guides you in developing strength and stamina.

There are many wonderful areas of emphasis in yoga. It is important to keep in mind that although the emphasis may be different, it is all yoga. The basic melody is the same although the drum beat may change.

Namaste,
Joan

Is there Sex after Yoga?

Dear Joan,

Thanks a million for the Yoyoga site. I have been visiting this site from the very beginning and I simply love it. Please let me know if I could contribute in some way to this really noble venture of yours.

I am a 28 year old single male and have been practicing yoga asanas for a few months (your site- one of the inspirational sources!). My query is regarding the sexual behavior of human beings. As a Yoga enthusiast, I want to abstain from any kind of sexual indulgence or thoughts. But some times the biological urge is so overpowering that self-control is almost impossible. This leads to momentary pleasure but a lot of guilt later. How can one handle this problem and where do you place sex vis-a-vis Yoga philosophy?

Thanks a lot. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and all the Yoyoga page readers.

Anonymous
Chiangmai, Thailand

Dear Anonymous,

Thank you for your beautiful letter! I do appreciate your offer to contribute to the Yoyoga site, and you are doing exactly that with these interesting questions you submitted.

Sex can be quite a dilemma for us householders (a term used for people who pursue

marriage). It is quite easy to answer it all by saying "be celibate!" But this reminds me of the story of the priest who lived a pure and celibate life and then when he died at an old age and went to heaven he found out that humans left the "R" out of god's translation. It should have been CELEBRATE instead! Alas, he had to come back to earth again...

The questions that come to my mind are...Why do you experience guilt? Are you recognizing the needs of the other person? What are your dreams? In pursuing your dreams, are you recognizing and respecting the dreams of the other person? Are you recognizing that the other person has dreams?

I see that you understand that just because the body controls its urges, this does not mean that the mind controls its urges. The mind is so very difficult to control. A strong practice of Hatha Yoga helps to make the body stronger, and very importantly, helps to make the mind quieter....preparing the way for meditation.

I applaud you for your honest and sincere efforts in coming to terms with a difficult aspect of human existence...brahmacharya.

Namaste,
Joan

A Doctor's view of Yoga.

Dear Joan,

Hi, Joan....just discovered your web site....charming site! So pleased that you have done so much for yoga. I practice Internal Medicine, and (rediscovered) yoga 2 years ago. It has already begun to change my life. I go the whole route..meditation, flow sequence asanas, attitude change..the works!

Raja G. Bhat, M.D
Wilmington, North Carolina
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Dear Raja,

I could not resist posting your letter. It made my heart smile. Thank you and merry Christmas and happy new year to you too!

Namaste,
Joan

Shoulder and neck pain, anyone?

Dear Joan,

I have been using Yoga for several years and enjoy it. I like your site too. I need an exercise to help me with shoulder and neck pain. I was brushing my hair and twisted too much.

Pam Say
Tacoma, Washington

Dear Pam,

Ouch! Many people suffer from neck and shoulder tensions. You are not alone! Is it any wonder with chairs and shoes that don't support our backs properly that our neck and shoulders often take up the burden?

Check out the spinal stretches in the [Asana For The Week](#) to help release some shoulder and neck strain.

Another wonderful stretch is Downward Facing Dog (the asana featured in the last issue of Yoyoga). It helps to release the shoulders, strengthens the arms and legs and releases tensions in the back. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend in it each day and you will see your shoulders opening up to brighter days! Also, Cow pose (Gomukhasan) where the hands are connected behind you is a nice pose for the neck and shoulders. If your palms do not connect use a towel at first, soon the shoulders will be loosening up. Relax. Lower the shoulders whenever you think of it. Open the chest and concentrate on extending or lengthening the back of the neck. Breath deeply. Relax again. Continue.

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Oh, my tired, aching feet...

Dear Joan,

Hi, I really enjoy your web site, and the reason that I sought it out was to get a question answered. When I meditate, I find it easiest to concentrate and sit upright when I am in the lotus posture. In that position, I am comfortable for several minutes, but soon, my ankle (I get into the position by putting my right foot on my left thigh, first. Then, I put up the left foot) begins to hurt, and my legs are often uncomfortable. I was hoping you could tell me of a Hatha Yoga exercise that could prepare me for meditation. I sit, usually, for about thirty minutes.

Thank you,

John Imes
Columbus, Mississippi

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Dear John:

Thank you for your question. I am sure that many people out there share your concerns in trying to meditate in the Lotus Pose. The achievement of getting into that pose (or any pose) can sometimes blind us to the facts of why we are in the pose to begin with. The objective of the poses are to become comfortable in our bodies. A continual practice of the poses can prepare one to sit for longer periods of time in meditation. The Hatha Yoga poses help our bodies to become stronger and more flexible.

Regarding the Lotus Pose you have mentioned. Since meditation is usually done with the spine upright, this is the pose that many people assume (or try to). Sitting cross-legged with both angles on top of the calves or thighs. In order to do this pose, one must have very strong ankles. Strong ankles are developed through continual and steady practice of the standing poses. Check out the [Asana For The Week](#) section for a standing pose (Lightening Bolt) to work with.

The Lotus Pose helps to keep the spine aligned while sitting. Placing a pillow at the base of



your spine and crossing your legs in a more comfortable way can achieve the same alignment without the discomfort of sore ankles. In time, with steady practice of the standing poses, you will be able to sit in Lotus Pose for longer periods of time without discomfort .

Yoga is an internal process. Outward appearances can be deceiving. Although you may observe someone sitting in "serene meditation" in the Lotus Pose, in reality, many people are experiencing inward agony. You are not alone, John! Meditation is a very personal and private experience. Since meditation is also truly effortless, if your ankles (or any part of your body) is in agony, meditation will be very difficult (but not impossible) to achieve.

Best wishes, John, in your continuing and empowering studies...

Namaste,
Joan

Do you have a question for Joan?
Send your questions or thoughts [to:yoyoga@earthlink.net](mailto:yoyoga@earthlink.net)

Joan respectfully gives each letter received her individual and kind attention.

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The Boyfriend Blues

Dear Joan,

I just discovered "Ask Joan" in a search for yoga resources -- thank you for a great page! My question revolves around my relationships with my boyfriend and with yoga -- they seem to be in conflict! I've been practicing yoga steadily for a few years now, and as I progress I find myself drawn more and more into yoga practice and philosophy. I've even been thinking of working for yoga teacher certification. But my boyfriend is becoming very jealous and threatened by my increased "passion" for yoga -- it's to the point now where he seems angry and sullen if I go to a class or try to fit a daily session into my home life. I love him very much, but I don't want to have to choose between the man I love and the practice that is feeding me spiritually and physically. Help! My other question is of a more mundane nature: do you know of a yoga e-mail chat group? I've subscribed to some e-mail groups in the past for vegetarianism and other interests, but have yet to discover one for yoga. Thanks again for a wonderful web page!



Jennifer Andrews
Palo Alto, California

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-
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Dear Jennifer:

Thank you for your letter. I want to encourage you in yoga teacher certification. Whether or not you decide to teach, a teacher certification program will definitely help you progress in your Yoga studies. Being around like-minded people, and being able to ask and explore similar questions is very conducive to growth. I went through a 14-month hatha yoga teacher's training program. At the time I went through it, I was not even sure if teaching Yoga was what I wanted to do. I just loved studying it. And now here I am...still loving it, still studying it, and teaching too! In fact, I am currently looking into Phoenix Rising's Yoga Therapy Program, as I continue to explore hatha yoga programs and my own personal development.

Regarding Yoga chat groups...I do not know of any on the internet. If any readers out there do, please e-mail me about them.

And finally, regarding your boyfriend, I learned a long time ago not to give "love-advice." Ann Landers I am not. Jennifer, in your deepest heart, you know the answer. In yoga we learn that it is not possible to change the outside world, that includes other people. We can only change our perceptions of them. And so, one must learn to accept another's decisions (here is where the study of the Yoga Philosophy of yamas and niyamas can be most helpful), and VERY IMPORTANTLY, one must take full responsibility for one's own decisions and life. No one can make you do anything. Oh sure, they can push an arm or a leg, but the essence of who you are is steady and eternal. Now it is simply a matter of uncovering this essence, this state of total being...this yoga.

Namaste,
Joan

Do you have a question for Joan?

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Please include the city and state you are from.

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The Confidence Factor

Dear Joan,

I have had at least three goals at the beginning of this course: to learn how to meditate; to learn how to focus my thoughts and energy and center them, and to learn some good postures to help strengthen the right side of my back (I have scoliosis and the left side became more dominant because of the curvature). I can honestly say each of these has been learned and applied in the classes I take with you at the college; however, I still feel that I need instruction and someone to walk me through the process - I'm not confident I can do it on my own. Any suggestions, Joan?



Sincerely,

Karen Nielsen
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Dear Karen:

Since yoga is a continual practice in self-study (the fourth Niyama) - You have everything you need in your continuing development!

Most of us are encouraged in our personal growth through teachers. Hatha Yoga has traditionally been handed down through the years from teacher to student. It is wonderful to augment your studies with the many excellent web sites, or books and tapes currently in bookstores; however, it is still considered best to study directly - face to face - with a teacher. Sometimes when I am not able to attend a hatha yoga class in person, I take out a yoga tape and work with the instructions on the tape. I find this process encouraging for my self-discipline.

One of the most beautiful aspects about the study of yoga is based in the first Yama of Non-Violence. Yoga is non-competitive. Often feelings of confidence are tied up in feelings of inadequacy - not feeling that we "measure up." If we explore this further, we find that these feelings are based in "violence" or negative self-talk. Of course we measure up! Whether or not I can do a headstand, whether or not my right foot is angled "correctly," whether or not I have arthritis in my shoulders, whether or not my body is immobile. The study of hatha yoga involves a process of finding the balance in the body... and so in the

world.

As you sit alone reading this...close your eyes for a moment...Karen, you have everything you need.

Om...all is one.

**Namaste,
Joan**

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HI-HO, HI-HO! It's off to work we go!

Dear Joan,

I am always thinking I would like to do Yoga more. Yet I find that I am still lacking the willingness to do it on a regular basis.

Thank you for your site. I will bookmark it and come back again.

Sincerely,

Robert Hansen
Port Charlotte, Florida



Dear Robert:

The study of yoga involves 5 simple Observances or Niyamas. The third Niyama is Tapas or Self-Discipline. As Theodore Roosevelt so aptly said, "I am only an average man, but, by George, I work harder at it than the average man." Acquiring self-discipline can be quite a struggle. Even when we KNOW what is best for us, the struggle with consistency can still be quite difficult.

The fourth Niyama/Observance is called Svadyaya or Self-Study . This involves surrounding oneself and one's thoughts with sacred literature which inspires. I would like to suggest picking up a little yoga book or a book of some sacred text, from a religion or philosophy of your choosing, to further your self-study.

As a Yoga teacher, I struggle with these Niyamas (and many more!) in my life too. Discussing these principles on a daily basis with students helps me to further develop in my personal practice. It helps me with my self-discipline. Robert, placing a "bookmark" on this web site is a great way to support your thoughts. Taking a yoga class in your area may also help you to further "bookmark" these studies. "Satsang" is finding the joy of study with like-minded souls (like in a yoga class!). It can truly be a blessing in encouraging one's self-discipline.

A wonderful Yoga Teacher/Author, Beryl Bender Birch has said at the end of a yoga

**class..."Your true yoga practice begins, when this practice is over." How beautifully said!
Do keep in touch, Robert, and let me know how you are doing! .**

Namaste,

Joan

Denver Digs...

Dear Joan

I've been unable to find an institute or organization in my area where I could go to study yoga. Today I thought I'd use the net to find something. I found your site and said "Eureka!"

Unfortunately, you are in a far distant place. Might it be possible that you could recommend a person or school in my area? I'm sure you have networked mightily in your years as an instructor and know someone I could contact.

I live in northwest Denver, Colorado.

Thank you,

Tom Coolidge
Denver, Colorado

Dear Tom:

Here are two Denver-based teachers. I hope these names will be helpful to other Denver yogis too. If they are not near enough to you, I believe they will be able to refer you to some yoga teachers who are.

Susan Flanders at Day Star Method of Yoga (303) 934-6309

and

Claudia Kuhns at Yoga For Health (303) 744-3407

My best wishes to you, Tom, in your continuing successes. Keep in touch!

Ask Joan Thoughtful
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Here, Hear!

Dear Joan,

I read some of your web site and really enjoyed it and I hoped that if you do a mail out you could put me on the list. Actually what I am really looking for is a detailed set of instructions of the main asanas as given by an instructor to a class. I want to read these onto a cassette and play them back for us here at our house to follow. We can no longer make it to the class we used to go to because, since December we have a very new baby to look after...

Thanks & All the best,

James



Dear James

I am not currently doing a mail-out, but perhaps in the future.

Do check out the Yoyoga Bookstore for tapes and books that may aid your studies. I recorded the tapes with students in mind who are unable to make it to a yoga class.

Thank you for your letter, James, and all the best to you and your beautiful new family!

Namaste,

Joan

Ain't no mountain high enough.

Dear Joan

I suspect there is a subtle, mysterious place the mind and heart can go, and that there are a few well hidden but known pathways there. I'm convinced that one path is through the study of Yoga. Am I right?

Namaste,

Tom Coolidge
Denver, Colorado

Dear Tom:

Have you heard the story of the mountain climber that worked so hard to blaze the first path up a mountain? In order to get to the top his focus and dedication needed to be very clear. He was proud to think he would be the first to discover the path to reach the top. When he got to the top he found people coming to the top from all different directions!

And so is the study of Yoga. It is a path that requires discipline, continual self-study, and dedication. There are so many excellent books and teachers out there, that I tend to think that it is not that the path is "well hidden", but rather that the discipline and endurance required to get to the top of the mountain is difficult to come by and so often lacking. Karma or personality gets in the way.

I hope that you will find the study of yoga to be of continuing inspiration. Maybe someday I will meet you at the top of the mountain, Tom, for now I am trying my best to simply blaze a path...

**Namaste,
Joan**

And here was Tom's response back...

Dear Joan,

In order to reach the top of the mountain, it will INDEED require a lot of discipline and close monitoring of the self. It would be easy to ignore the struggles of others in attaining the same results.

I hope that when I get there, I am not surprised to see others. More importantly, I hope that my victory would not have detracted from the accomplishment of my fellow climbers. Better yet, I would hope that my having lent a hand would have eased my own ascent.

The climb itself is challenge enough. I wonder if I actually do want to plant my flag at the summit, and know

that the thing is over.

I am happy to have met you on the way up.

Namaste,
Tom

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YAMA-DABA-DO!!!!

Dear Joan,

Great page I must say! I am especially interested in Hatha-yoga and I know some of the exercises (the ones where you stand on your head), could you please direct me to a place of more information about this? Also, I am wondering if you know some helpful exercises, whether mental or physical, for brahmacharya/celebrity. As for yoga, I already do some Hatha-yoga, power-yoga and osjas-yoga. Still It is as if this is not enough to keep up celibacy. Many say that one has to find other ways to express the stored energy, through writing, martial arts et cetera, but what I am wondering about is if there are any other yoga-techniques I should study?



Love and light,

Akasha

Norway, Stavanger

Dear Akasha

First regarding your question about where to find more information...the best way to study Hatha Yoga is directly, face-to-face with a teacher. A teacher will be able to help you adjust postures to make them the most beneficial for you. For example, it is not beneficial for everyone to go up into headstands. Some people are not strong enough yet to adequately support the neck, or some with high blood pressure should be cautious, etc. Regarding books and tapes, there are numerous excellent books on the subject. I suggest going to a bookstore or library and find one that appeals to you. Or, check out the Yoyoga Bookstore. I have written several books with specific instructions to numerous asanas.

Now regarding brahmacharya/celebrity...in the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient sacred text from India, the main character, Arjuna, asks Krishna "what possesses a soul to act foolishly, even against its own will, even illogically?". Krishna answers "...brahmacharya..." How to successfully work with the "desires" of life has been a struggle then, now, and most assuredly will be in the future too.

The Hatha yoga postures help to make the body stronger and more flexible. Interestingly though. It is through "detachment" from this body and the senses that the path of brahmacharya becomes clearer. So, the question arises, "would not a stronger and more flexible body make one even more entrenched and attached to the body and all its accompanying desires." I think the answer is "yes, it could!" And this is why the study of the yamas and niyamas are essential to the hatha yoga practice. Yoga is a practice of body and mind.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson so beautifully said "Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not." I would like to be so bold as to ask you to consider changing the "with" in this sentence to "within." See how this feels to you.

Know, Akasha, that the struggles you are having are shared by many, if not all, of mankind. Continual study in yoga, and all its many aspects, can serve to make this struggle easier.

Namaste,

Joan

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Namaste.

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your wonderful yoga website. Hatha yoga is the path that I have finally chosen to make it to the top of the mountain. Nothing gives to me as much peace and the feeling of rightness, goodness, wholeness as a good yoga workout.

I have especially appreciated the headstand week as I have just begun standing on my head and am amazed at how good I feel about it. Apart from the many physical benefits I also feel mentally good about myself. I feel that my life is worthwhile after a headstand. More importantly the headstand brings home to me the recognition of body, mind, soul connection.

I check out your homepage regularly.

Thank you, Joan

Love,

Diane Fiddler
Melbourne, Australia

Dear Diane:

Thank you for your beautiful message. It inspires me. I am going to go do a headstand right now!

Namaste,

Joan



Ask Joan

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Shhhhh....

Dear Joan,

I attended my first class with you today and I have a quick question for you. I recall that you mentioned that one of the most important aspects of yoga is the ability to still the mind. I'm concerned that on the exercise (savasana, which you said is the most important one), you instructed us to repeat (to ourselves) three affirmations for each body part. These repetitions only served to engage my mind. I found this to be very distracting when I instinctively felt the desire to listen to my body instead. Repeating these affirmations only caused my mind to become more active than I'd like it to be during this process and it had the opposite effect of causing the relaxed, receptive state that I thought yoga helped one achieve. Is this normally the way yoga is done?

Sincerely,

Russell Stern
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Dear Russell:

I truly understand your interest and concern in quieting the mind. My words are meant simply as a guidance for those students who are looking for a path to start the process of relaxation. As one becomes more adept in the various poses, the body and mind start to release and clear. Eventually, Savasana, the final relaxation pose, is done with no words...anytime...and anywhere.

The class you are taking involves verbal and physical instruction in working with the process of yoga and in understanding some of the key philosophical aspects. If you find my verbal instructions disturbing in your process of quieting the mind, may I suggest you use this experience as a tool to release yourself from outside distractions. Let go of my voice as you let go of your body. For in the truest sense, Savasana could be practiced in the midst of total chaos. The essence of peace does come from within, not from without.

Thank you, Russell, for your sincerity. I encourage you to continue on this important and wonderful path you are on, and please keep your questions coming. When it is time for savasana, release and follow your inner self...and the quietude and beauty that is within you.





Christian Yoga.

Dear Joan

Sometime perhaps we can talk about how the Eastern mysticism and thought can live in harmony with Christianity. I suppose that I am thinking of the admonitions of my Southern Christian upbringing that didn't allow for multiple paths to God. Please don't be offended by my questions about yoga thought, I have some of the same questions about Native American spirituality as well.

I need to reconcile the approach with my own understanding of my Christian faith's tenets. Regardless of the direction I go, it will be a fun journey and I will be wiser for it.



Namaste, love and shanti (am I redundant?),

Kim Doughert
Barrington, Illinois

Dear Kim,

Your questions and concerns about your Christian beliefs are valid and shared by many. Yoga is based in India and sometimes confused with Hinduism. Yoga is not a religion, although the distinctions are not always clear. Yoga, in its true essence supports and encourages whatever religious faith you have. Svadhyaya is a sanscrit term and principle in yoga that means self-study. This means quiet intropsection within the poses, and within sacred texts. The reading of sacred literature is highly encouraged as it lifts the thought processes.

As you are a Christian, applying and discovering the yogic principles of non-violence, contentment, truthfulness, etc. to your studies of the Bible can serve to deepen your understanding and applications of this rich text. Sacred texts from the Hindu perspective, such as the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads, can also serve to deepen your appreciation of the spiritual essence and truth that is inherent in all great sacred literature. Studying different texts of different religious faiths, in the yogic sense, is not meant to persuade one to change religions, but to deepen one's respect for divinity in all its many forms and paths.

Concentration is another important aspect of yoga. For you, this may involve continuing your deep exploration of the Bible, without exploring other religious texts. All great sacred texts have so many rich dimensions within them, that surely a lifetime can be spent on bringing the foundation of its meanings into one's life.

Yoga is about unity. It means uniting. Om.

Namaste means recognizing and respecting the divinity within all. So, you are not redundant, you are all encompassing.....

Namaste,

Joan

Yoyoga?

Dear Joan

What does "yoyoga" mean?

Yours in Yoga,
Georg Feurstein, PH.D.
[Yoga Research Center](#)

Dear Georg:

In the beginning, there was yoga; however, the name "yoga" was already taken on the internet when I applied for the name. The operator on the internet service put me on hold when I was pondering over what name to apply for next. When she came back on-line, I said "Yo!" (the 'Rocky' version of hello) And so it goes...YOYOGA! Thank you for asking.

It is truly a joy hearing from you, Dr. Feurstein. Your book, "The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali," is my favorite translation of the Sutras. And I have just purchased your latest, "The Shambhala Encyclopedia of Yoga." It is such an incredible collection of yoga information. I highly encourage YOYOGA! readers to go to the library or bookstore and read some of your many books. You are a true source of inspiration...

**Namaste,
Joan**

Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

Uncovering the veils...

Dear Joan

I never realized until now that yoga has a lot to do with science. When I say science I mean medical. Yoga can help people with muscle strains, and bad backs, and so on. Like on the pages that you have given us, practicing Yoga can help you be more grounded, mentally and physically. Yoga can help ease your mind with thoughts that are racing through it, and can help strengthen your muscles so later in life you will have less medical problems.

Also, I need to understand how Yoga can make one achieve total control over your body. I understand that breathing helps people in many different ways, but I do not understand how this austerity or tapa, when perfected gives total control. In my opinion, total control over ones body is being able to understand your thinking, thinking positively, strength, and understanding of others so that you can understand your own thought. Even as I read the Niyamas, I still do not understand how this can be achieved through Tapas.

I have a big comment that deals with Niyama 4 (self-study). I understand that we write our own life story and we can revise it, but I don't think enough people look at their own life book. I think we just take for granted what comes to us. However, about the Svadhyaya, I really don't think people will love and respect each other like they are suppose to. If everyone has feelings like me, I do not necessarily trust everyone until I know them. That means that the mutual love is not there. The mutual respect will be there because everyone respects each other as they meet otherwise people might fight. However, I believe it will take a long time before that love comes in so I do not understand how that works. If you have time, please explain it to me. .

Patricia O'Meara
College of DuPage, Hatha Yoga 1 Student

Dear Patricia,

Svadhyaya (self-study) is the Fourth Niyama/Observance in Yoga. The first Five Yamas/Abstentions are Non-Violence, Truthfulness, Non-Stealing, Chastity, Non-Greed, and the first Three Niyamas are : Purity, Contentment, and Tapas/Self-Discipline. All these Yamas and Niyamas help to prepare the way for Svadhyaya.



Regarding 'not trusting someone till they are known,' let us examine this through the Yamas and Niyamas...

Acts of Violence in thought, word, or deed, create layers of veils that inhibit full realization or awareness of the blissful state (the truth- 2nd yama) For example, if one thinks of oneself as ugly, then this layer of violence covers the 'true' beauty of oneself. It does not take this beauty away...it simply covers it. The beauty patiently waits to be uncovered. So then when one does not see clearly this truth, one looks outward and turns to stealing (3rd yama - stealing). Perhaps someone else has it. Perhaps cosmetics is the answer (for we can cover our lips with store bought make-up, but our lips are still there)! Or big muscles! (If I have the body of Arnold, I will be happy) Or gossip! (thinking that by attempting to steal someone's dignity, one's own is strengthened - Not!) When one steals, one becomes enveloped in the senses or desire (4th Yama - desire/lust). When one becomes enveloped in the senses, one wants more and more (5th yama -greed)...And so the cycle goes...

Now, if one is in this cycle of experience, how would it be possible to realize Purity, the First Niyama? Without Purity, how could one be content? Without contentment, of what use is discipline? Without discipline, how could one study? And without uncovering all these veils, how could one find and experience the center of divinity?

Finally, regarding your question about how Yoga can make one achieve "control over your body." Hatha Yoga studies the body with the inherent understanding that one is more than one's body. If I have two legs, and my friend next to me has none, does that make me superior? No. Hatha Yoga helps us to find comfort and peace in the body, so that we can move beyond it to cosmic consciousness. To "om."

Thank you for your thoughtful questions, my dear student and teacher, Patricia.

Namaste,

Joan

Shanti

Dear Joan

Does "shanti" have something to do with female energy?

Love and Blessings.

Christine Pederson
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Dear Christine,

I think so. It means "peace."

Ask Jean

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

Back to Basics...

Thanks once again for the great Yoyoga site! I love coming here every fortnight. Do let me know if I can contribute to its enhancement from here.

For now, I have a more operational query. I practice the Uddiyana Bandha (abdominal lifts), the sun salutation cycle, the shoulder stand (sarvangasana cycle), the plough, the fish, the locust, the bow and the head stand every day. I have been having some occasional pains in my upper-middle back. It is difficult to find a Yoga teacher in this part of the world. Can you please tell me whether this could be due to improper practice of any of the above asanas or whether I need to do some other asanas to possibly counter this problem...



much thanks
and peace to all

Kamal Kishore
Thailand

Dear Kamal,

How wonderful to hear from you! (I am sorry though that it is with a back problem.) It sounds like your practice, Kamal, is thorough and regular. And because it is so regular you are beginning to see where the imbalanced and strained areas of your body are. The real question is..."Are my imbalanced areas becoming clearer through my steady practice?" or "Is my steady practice creating imbalances?"

The first thing to do is to stop and reflect. Did your back problems start with your practice or did you have this problem before and now you are more keenly aware of it? If the problem is recent, then I would definitely explore the way you are holding the poses. This is why it is essential to find a teacher, or even a friend, who can observe you and help you see what you cannot see.

The first thing I would suggest is to stop doing headstand until you get some professional guidance. Inversions are tricky. Many people do them for better health and end up with neck and shoulder problems. It is important that you balance on the top of the head. If you balance slightly off the top it will put undo strain on your neck and the areas that you state are bothering you. How is your Mountain Pose? (Tadasana). Explore this in front of a mirror. If your body is imbalanced standing up on two feet...you can rest assured it will be

off when you stand on your head. If your stomach arches out...your upper back will pick up the pressure.

I was just at an Iyengar workshop by Lois Steinberg this past weekend. She is a certified Iyengar Instructor and just got back from one of her many trips to India where she studies with B.K.S. and Geeta Iyengar. Anyway, we worked with inversions. We stood on our heads, tied our upper legs together with a strap and placed a block between our legs (upside down!)! Also, we balanced on a small folded blanket besides. Sound complicated? It was. Yet, through this I learned that my balance was slightly off. When Lois adjusted me in headstand it felt freeing. When I got out of the posture and stood on my feet, my neck felt better than it ever felt after doing a headstand! I realized that the slight imbalance that I had developed would, over time, give me exactly the problem you are describing you have! I will be working on bringing my balance slightly more forward. This is the kind of thing a teacher can help you discover.

I do not know if the imbalance in your headstand is what is causing this upper back discomfort for you. I would not be able to help you further, Kamal, unless I saw you in the poses. If you would like to send me some pictures, I would be happy to do what I can to make some suggestions!

In the meantime, Kamal, do find a teacher to personally study with. If you can not find a teacher, find a friend to study the postures with. Organize a group of students and you may even start teaching! Ask your students to help you. Students make excellent teachers. Do keep in touch, Kamal. It is always a joy to hear from you! And, hopefully next time you will be telling me how much better your neck is feeling...

Namaste,
Joan

Only Joan nose for sure...

Dear Joan

Can you REALLY breathe through one nostril at a time without using your hands?

Sincerely,

Chuck Reiter
Rockford, Illinois

Dear Chuck,

Yes, and you REALLY can too! "What the mind can conceive, man can achieve." Not to be

discouraged, Chuck, for as of this date, it does appear women have an easier time at conceiving.

Namaste,
Joan

Do you have a question for Joan?
Send your questions or mail to yoyoga@earthlink.net
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Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

An Iyengar Yoga Beginner...

Dear Joan:

I am a 28 y.o American woman living in Japan. I have just begun taking yoga lessons from 2 months ago. I am enjoying my lessons very much, and yoga has become a very important part of my life.

Since I have been doing yoga, I have gained weight (6 LBS). I haven't changed my eating habits, so I am wondering if yoga is causing my weight gain(?)

Also, is it okay to do yoga when I am on my period? What effects does menstruating have on doing particular asanas's?

One more question: My body is STILL very hard. Do you recommend that I drink vinegar?

Thank you in advance for your time and any information you can give me!

Karen
Saitama. JAPAN



Dear Karen,

It is not unusual to change weight when we change our physical work-outs. Six pounds does not seem like a lot of weight to me. Perhaps your body is re-adjusting to a weight that is more comfortable for it? Sometimes we have a false image of what our body's weight should be, this is further fueled by standard weight charts which do not always reflect our highly personal differences. Different times of the day or month can also change the readings on weight scales.

Karen, it's been a LONG time since I have weighed myself. I used to check my weight every morning and I would let this silly reading reflect my choices for the day! Now I am at a point where I listen closely and internally to my body and I let it tell me when I need to eat more and when I need to eat less. I wear clothes that are comfortable and can easily adjust to 5 pounds more or less. The hatha yoga practice you are doing is a mighty fine way to continue to develop a keener sense of what the body needs and is.

Regarding your question about doing yoga during menstruation. It is advised not to do inversions at this time. Other postures can be thoroughly practiced and enjoyed. I just went

to a weekend seminar with Lois Steinberg on this subject 2 weeks ago. She is a direct student of B.K.S Iyengar and one of his Certified Instructors. She has recently returned from Iyengar's International Women's Intensive in India and is formulating a book from this Intensive that sounds like it is exactly what you are looking for! For further information contact Lois Steinberg, PH.D. at lsteinbe@uiuc.edu or fax her at (217) 344-4224. She is an excellent teacher and very interested to share her findings on this noteworthy subject.

Now, regarding drinking vinegar to soften your body. Hmmmm. It sounds yucky to me! (My body has become the kind of temple where there is a lot of laughter inside.) I am sure there is some school of yogic thought out there that will support this drink. I talked to my body recently about this though, and it won't let me do it, unless I sprinkle the vinegar over some tasty fresh salad and eat it this way. So, I suppose your body will be your best advisor on this subject. If you decide to drink the vinegar, do it with love, kindness, and gratitude toward your body. Yummy....vinegar....(if you can really do this, you are quite a woman al right!).

Namaste,
Joan

Movin'and Shakin'

Dear Joan:

I came across your homepage on the net and thought that I'd ask you a question (if it's okay).

Ever since I have been doing Iyengar yoga, my body has been shaking during lessons and a little even after lessons. I feel relaxed after lessons in the sense that I just want to lay down for an hour, but I feel a mental and physical restlessness after lessons and I don't know why. I used to smoke, but I just quit 3 months ago. Do you think that this has anything to do with the way I feel? I am 29 years old.

I was born with an innocent heart murmur, I am about 35 LBS overweight, and suffering from anxiety. I am taking tranquilizers (xanax) for the anxiety until I am able to meditate well enough so that I can get off the medication.

Thank you for your patience with this long message. I do look forward to your responce.

Lynn DiBenidetto
Miami, Florida

Dear Lynn,

Yes, Lynn. Quitting smoking can have a definite effect on the way you are feeling. However, you may also want to explore other systems/styles of yoga that may ease your transition to meditation in a simpler way. Have you ever taken a Kundalini class (major

focus on breathwork), or a gentle hatha class that is not necessarily based in Iyengar's style of teaching? I understand your feelings after an Iyengar class because....I often feel that way too! Whew...sums it up pretty well! I am not an Iyengar teacher, although I have a great respect for the many teachers who teach this way. I also occasionally go to Iyengar based seminars.

I would suggest finding a hatha yoga teacher who has a strong influence of meditation in her/his approach to the postures. By this I mean, soft lights, soft music perhaps, lots of eyes that are encouraged to close instead of studying a muscle movement. You may want to add this type of class to your existing classes, or simply take a break from your existing classes. The purpose of Hatha Yoga is to prepare the body for meditation.

The mental and physical restlessness you feel after yoga classes may very well stem from your lifestyle changes; however, I do not dismiss the fact that it also may stem from the style of yoga you are studying. I say this with great respect - different strokes for different folks. In an attitude of non-judgement, find the class that fans your meditative fires. This does not always come from challenging the body it can also come from simple loving acceptance.

Namaste,
Joan

New classes?

Dear Joan

I took your class through COD last year. Are you offering any classes in/near Lombard this summer or fall?

Thanks,
Tina Kirstukas
Lombard, Illinois

Dear Tina,

How wonderful to hear from you! I remember you well, and your husband too! New class registration for Fall for College of Dupage (COD) is going on now. I am teaching 3 morning P.E. Credit Hatha 1 classes, Mon and Wed, 7-8, 8-9, and 9-10. Also, Tues evenings for 6 weeks 7-8:30 thru COD Adult Ed at the Downers Grove North High School campus. For 10 weeks I will be offering a class on yoga deep breathing at the same location from 6-7 Tues evenings, listed under healthlink in Adult Ed. Can you imagine a class where all you have to do is breathe for an hour? My father said this is the secret to his long life "keep breathing!"

I also teach at the Spectrum Center in OakBrook. Small classes, maximum of 8 students per class. New classes starting in mid-Sept. This is in an office near Oakbrook Shopping Center. In addition, I will be doing a special one class seminar about yoga at Whole Foods Market in Wheaton, Sept. 9, 6:30-8 (Maximum of 15 - so sign up quick!). And of course, new classes are always popping up here and there. Do keep in touch and continue checking in occasionally to my website to find out new class locations.

Thank you for keeping in touch, Tina. Hope you and Steve are having a beautiful summer!

Namaste,
Joan

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Please include the city and state you are from.

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Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

On Ahimsa, the observance of non-violence...

Dear Joan:

Humans are extremely complex and in the majority of people emotions run rampant. This enmeshed with today's hostile society, I find it very unlikely that anyone can go for even a day completely without any act of violence. So why they attempt to rid instead of embrace it through the acknowledgement that it is a necessary and eternal power? Do those of the yoga way feel that they can and should attempt to spiritually transport to a realm where it is not such the case? It seem almost religious that they believe that an inherent and fundamental characteristic of humans can be striped while that individual continues to live out the mortal days of their life. This is not in anyway an attempt to disrespect Yoga for I have great respect for the discipline, these are just my humble thoughts.



Michael Thornberry
Hatha Yoga 1 Student, College of Dupage

Dear Michael,

Thank you very much for your insightful questions. They certainly give me much food for thought. I think these questions are ones that can continue for quite sometime and most definitely beyond the few words I am able to share with you here.

Your first question "So why they attempt to rid instead of embrace it through the acknowledgement that it is a necessary and eternal power?"

From the yogic viewpoint, violence is "embraced" in the essence that as one becomes more and more aware, one sees more and more clearly how violence creeps into numerous facets of life. From killing a vegetable to sustain one's own life...to killing a bug for annoyance. How can anyone live completely non-violently? Yes! How?

There are monks in India, of a religious sect, that adhere to strict non-violence in all aspects of life. They wear no clothes and carefully watch the ground they walk on to avoid stepping on any life. They spend their lives walking from town to town where they are welcomed and greeted with great respect. They are humble and only eat food that is offered them. Most people could not live this way. The villagers know this, and are thankful to these monks for the non-violent presence they offer into their lives. I can't imagine monks

like this living in our society, can you? First of all, they would be immediately imprisoned for indecent exposure!

Your next question, "Do those of the yoga way feel that they can and should attempt to spiritually transport to a realm where it is not such the case?"

In the yogic view, the "transport" is not to another planet somewhere, the "realm" is deep within one's own consciousness. It is a process of removing layers that cover the inner blissful state. These layers come in the forms of violence, non-truthfulness, stealing, lust, and greed. The process of deepening awareness enables one to remove these layers or veils which cover the true inner bliss. These veils are not removed through a sense of guilt or religious morality, they are removed through the process of detaching from the senses. The study of yoga is one path in helping one in this process of awareness.

Karma is the law of cause and effect. In the yogic view, one builds karma over many lifetimes along with this very lifetime. Every step we take and every move we make in this life involves "karma." The key is in softening its presence. This is not done through manipulation. This is done through loving wisdom. As karma softens, we come to see more clearly the fluctuations of the mind...and so the process goes...

Thank you, Michael. It is obvious from your thoughtful questions that you have great respect. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my humble response...

Namaste,
Joan

Handy or Randy?

Dear Joan:

A friend of mine went to see her palmist who told her that she had blocked sexual energy and recommended Kundalini yoga. What about that?

Namaste,
Christine Peterson
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Dear Christine,

Kundalini Yoga is a path of yoga that works heavily with breathwork. Some of the postures are named differently than in traditional hatha yoga...for example, in Kundalini, the Downward Dog pose is usually referred to as the Triangle pose. Regarding the specific aspect of unblocking sexual energy, bodywork, of which hatha yoga is one form, has the potential of doing this. However, the objective of hatha yoga is to ultimately detach from the senses. Many people choose to submerge themselves in their senses, needing more and more to satiate their desires. Only to find the desires increasing instead of quelling! One

has only to look at the many "Alcohol," "Sex", "Narcotics," "Overeaters," Anonymous groups around to see the evidence of this. In a hatha yoga perspective, in order to get past the physical desires.... one has to know the body! This is where it gets tricky, for many people start out wanting to quell desires only to get lost in them. I think I am beginning to go in circles here. So more appropriately, I would like to end this response with a verse from the Bhagavad Gita: .

"While Contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises.

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."

Namaste,
Joan

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Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

What are YOU thinking?

Dear Joan:

Let me start off with thanking you for such a spectacular web page. I visit often, especially when I really need some enlightenment.

I've been practicing yoga for about a year and half. I absolutely love it! In fact, it's helped me get through some difficult times, when I wonder if I'd have the strength w/out yoga & meditation. I have a fantastic teacher... she's a great LIFE teacher, really. But, I'm too scared to ask her this question, so I thought I'd ask you....

What do 'yogis' think of gay and lesbian lifestyles?? I've never heard it mentioned, nor talked about. I know most people who practice yoga or anything similar, have open minds... but what it's REALLY thought of, is what I'm searching for.



Thank you for your time,
Corky

Dear Corky,

Thank you for your sincere question. I have read conflicting views on this subject in yoga literature. The teachers who I study with have open minds and are accepting of the differences among people, knowing that each of us has our own personal karma to work thru. When I read literature (yoga or other) that is negative toward life, I take into account the source, and try my best to do this non-judgementally. After all, yoga and all literature is written by people with karma.

What I would like to say to you, Corky, is to let go of what other people are "thinking." After all, people's thoughts and words do not always match. Rather, bring the focus back to your internal study (yoga). Are you loving? Are you compassionate? (This includes to oneself as well as toward others) Are you respecting your dream? Are you respecting the dream of the other person? What are your thoughts? Continue to guide your thoughts in a way that is loving and kind. And know that there are many people out there, myself among them, who support you and your loving choices.

Namaste,
Joan

Grant me patience...but hurry!

Dear Joan:

Thank you for your previous response to my yoga question. I have another one. I want to learn the head-stand as soon as I can, but I read in a book that I would need to master the shoulder(neck?)-stand first. No matter what, I cannot seem to master the shoulder-stand, so what do you advise me to do to prepare my body for making the shoulder-stand easier for me to do. I feel I need to do prep-work.

Secondly, I am still unable to do a complete uttanasana, putting the palms of my hands flat on the floor while keeping my knees not bent and straight. Does this have anything to do with my arms being too short?

Thank you in advance,
Karen Wildner
Saitama JAPAN

Dear Karen,

Thank you for writing back. First of all, keep in mind that yoga is a process. It is not about "touching the toes," rather it is a process of how to keep the body open and expanding while moving toward the toes. With this in mind, let us look at your first question about the shoulder stand...

Not all the postures are for everyone. Since I can not see you, I do not know what your body is doing or trying to do in shoulder stand. I can only ask some questions and see if they may lead you in a more fulfilling direction regarding this posture. *Have you ever practiced this pose with blankets? Placing the blankets folded under the shoulders so that the neck extends off of the blankets when you lift your legs. This takes strain off of the neck. *Have you tried keeping your upper back flat on the floor and lifting your legs so that they are straight and the knees positioned resting back over the chest. This is a half-shoulderstand and prepares the body for the full inversion. *Have you ever rested your legs straight up against a wall with the full rest of the torso resting back against the ground? This is also a nice preparation for shoulderstand.

Above all, check with a local qualified instructor. Someone who has a steady and thorough personal hatha yoga practice. This person will be able to see what you are doing and guide you appropriately. I hope my suggestions will give you some helpful ideas on exploring this posture further.

Regarding uttanasana or standing forward bend,, when you say you are not able to do it completely, what do you mean? Touching the ground with knees straight does not necessarily make for a "complete" pose. Are your thoughts racing while in the pose? How is your breath? Do you feel the full stretch in your whole back side or is the focus in the knees? Can you balance the stretch so that your body is evenly feeling it (hatha)? Are your

feet firmly grounded? Is your spine extended and lengthening? Are you finding peace in the pose?

Work at finding peace in the pose. With each extension find the peace before moving further into it. Soon you will find that you can move further, calmer, and with more compassion....whether this move is a foot or fraction of an inch.

**Namaste,
Joan**

A Yoga Poem for Joan

Dear Joan:

Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya and Brahmacharya,
These disciplines Joan preaches with hurrah

Saucha, Svadhyaya, Santosha and Tapas,
These Niyamas would help mammas and poppas

Eagles, Dogs, Cats, Cows and Fish,
Watching Joan master these positions, you think "I wish"

Saturn, Venus, Jupiter, Mercury and Mars,
Being around Joan, you see stars

Ambitious, Kind, Beautiful and Smart,
All describe Joan and her heart.

If you should meet her, you would agree,
You have been blessed... just ask me.

seewriter97@aol.com
Rockford, Illinois

Dear seewriter97,

Gee, I am speechless. Thank you.

**Namaste,
Joan**



Canadians CAN breathe deeper too!

Dear Joan:

... found your great site (obviously) and I have a couple of questions:

I've noticed that my breathing is quite shallow. There are times when I've noticed that I haven't inhaled for some time and I actually have to remind myself to breathe. Its as if breathing has to be a conscious effort on my part. Note that I do meditate frequently and while my breathing is very deep and controlled in the beginning once I am relaxed my breathing does taper off and become very shallow, again.

1) will the 'Breathworks' tape that you have help get my breathing back into a proper rhythm? Can you suggest any other techniques that might help?

2) since I'll be ordering from Canada (I assume that you can\will deliver to Canada) are there any special instructions that you would like me to follow?

Tks,
Cliff Burke
Canada

Dear Cliff,

Sorry for my delay in responding to you. Just got back from a wonderful Kripalu Yoga Retreat in Mass. Back to work here now...

Yes, I do think you will find the Breathworks tape helpful. It will depend tho on the continual effort you place in working with it. What's 30 minutes a day for a deeper breath/life experience anyway? Certainly worth the time and effort, I think!

Regarding your breath becoming more shallow when you are not aware of it...this is quite natural. This is not negative, it is often simply a change in our perceptions from gross to subtle. In fact, I often instruct students coming out of a deep Shavasana (Final Relaxation Pose) to begin to bring their breath deeper. The more you work with improving the quality of your breathing process, the more the quality of your breathing will improve, and the less conscious effort it will take.



And yes, I do mail to Canada. No special instructions other than to please send me your complete mailing address. In fact, one of your fellow Canadians won a Vegetarian Recipe Contest recently!

Namaste,
Joan

An Iyengar Yoga Beginner.....

Dear Joan:

May I ask a couple more questions?

(1) What is the difference between Iyengar yoga and Astanga yoga? Can I take both those kinds of yoga in the same week or should I choose one or the other? .

(2) I am about 35 LBS overweight and about 34 of those LBS are in my stomach area. Compared to the thin people who do yoga, (as far as the asana`s are concerned) how would I be at a disadvantage? I find the abdominal twists and back bends totally impossible.....

Thank you ,
Karen Wildner
Saitama JAPAN

Dear Karen,

Iyengar Yoga, named after B.K.S Iyengar - a current well known yoga teacher and author (Light on Yoga), is a system of hatha yoga study that precisely explores body positioning. Minute details are studied and explored upon. This system of study has become very popular in the United States. I tend to think the reason is that it relates closely to Western Medicine's approach to health , which is to study the physical body intimately for answers. Quadriceps, deltoid, scapula, femur, are parts of the body people in the U.S. know exist (not necessarily where or how), so this system of hatha yoga gets you intimately physically connected on this level. You will definitely hear these names mentioned in an Iyengar class, and many more you probably never knew you had or even existed! It is educational and very physical... and very here and now. Mr. Iyengar has also written some wonderful books on the more esoteric explorations of yoga studies, (The Tree of Yoga, Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali). However, the Iyengar classes are usually taught from a specific body alignment perspective . For example, "Let's spend class today looking at the femur! Yahoo....let's go!!!!!!!" (I added the 'Yahoo..let's go!!!!...I really haven't heard that in the Iyengar classes I have gone to - they tend to be much more serious.)

Now Ashtanga (meaning '8 limbs'), is viewed in the U.S. as a system of strenuous flowing yoga postures. This style has become a recent addition to my personal practice. I have been studying with Beryl Bender Birch, who has a terrific book out called "Power Yoga." I suggest getting it! I find this physical work-out to be challenging ,interesting, and fun too. I really like fun. Since I have been studying yoga for awhile, I enjoy taking classes in

various styles of study. I would recommend tho, that a beginning student stay with one style of study for some time and acquire the needed ingredient to any field of study..."discipline." The number of classes you take is a highly personal decision.

Regarding your second question: "(2) I am about 35 LBS overweight and about 34 of those LBS are in my stomach area. Compared to the thin people who do yoga, (as far as the asana's are concerned) how would I be at a disadvantage? I find the abdominal twists and back bends totally impossible....."

My answer...you are at ABSOLUTELY NO disadvantage. If you are in a yoga class that is starting to make you feel that way, I suggest finding another class. Yoga is ultimately an inner study. It is not a study "to get" something (a pose, beauty, weight loss), it is a study "of release." The idea is that we must intimately get acquainted with our physical body so that ultimately we can say "by...by!"

Since I do not personally know you, Karen, I can only respond to your weight issue at a global level. I developed as a Feminist before I developed as a Yogini. I find that most women, and many men too, are troubled with weight issues. I suggest turning the TV off, cutting down on "glamour type" magazines (not that you read these , but the general population is so addicted), and be discerning of the type of movies you watch and literature you read. I realize that advertisers will get you anyway with billboards, phone-calls, etc., but your discerning actions will help put you back in the drivers seat as to what is important. Many women as they beautifully mature (myself included!) become heavier in the hips and tummy area. This is a loving act of nature to help us in child birth. Let us join each other and rejoice, and be careful not to get caught in acts of mental violence...towards ourselves or others. I realize there are people that would benefit from weight loss; however some people are truly healthy heavier that what the media projects as healthy.

Keep in mind too, the two type of poses you mentioned - abdominal twists and backbends, have varying degrees of study. Perhaps you do not have to go into it as far as you are going to receive the many benifits they offer. The first step is to visualize your body doing what you want it to do...the feeling it gives you. Then go into the pose with this feeling. If the feeling starts to change into one of agony, you are no longer doing yoga. Yoga is grounded in non-violence. Be gentle, patient, and loving toward your body and your body will respond in kind.

Just some...food for thought. Thank you for your kind letter, Karen. I hope I have been of some help.

Namaste,
Joan

Do you have a question for Joan?
Send your questions or mail to yoyoga@earthlink.net
Please include the city and state you are from.



Updates?

Dear Joan:

Hi I truly enjoy your page and asana of the week (month?). Can't wait for the update !

Anne K. Alfandre



Dear Anne,

Thank you for your letter, and thank you to all the Yoyoga Readers who wrote inquiring about my Yoyoga updates. There was only one update last month because I have been in the process of changing my site over to a new address. It is now official - my domain name is set...yoyoga.com. (It used to be one of those confusing loooooong addresses.) Hope this simplifies things for everyone (including me). From now on, the updates will continue on the first and fifteenth of every month. So do set your calendars....I sincerely do look forward to your visits.

Namaste,
Joan

That Old Black Magic

Dear Joan:

I love coffee. I know it does not fit with the yoga lifestyle. How do I fall out of love with it?

Thank you ,
Sue Kocieski
Cicero, Illinois

Dear Sue,

Your question is great. People write to Ann Landers on "how to fall in love", and to me "how to fall out of love." I knew I would eventually find my niche (ha, ha).

Your question is simply one about "balance." Is coffee controlling you? Can life be lived happily without coffee (or with coffee, for that matter). The old saying "you can't live with him, you can't live without him," appears to fit here. Since coffee has stimulating drug like effects, drinking a large quantity of it can certainly effect one's health, and throw off the body's balance.

For me, I have found one cup of Starbucks quite a jolt to my system. And I do occasionally enjoy this jolting cup of coffee....caffeinated I might add. (I have not yet found a decaffeinated coffee that I enjoy.) I usually feel the effects of the drink a couple of hours after I drink it. I can actually feel the blood in my veins vibrating! I know that may sound weird. It is definitely a "rush" type of feeling. I know that if I drink more than one cup, I am jittery and jumpy. Those are days when my students experience hyper-elevated levels of "power yoga." Luckily for everyone, they are not very often.

Back to basics...who's controlling who....is it the coffee or you?"

For now, I will go back to my yummy herbal raspberry tea. A tea that that takes time to simmer and does not pull at my reins, but waits quietly...shanti.

Namaste,
Joan

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Please include the city and state you are from.

Joan respectfully gives each letter received her individual and kind attention.

"ASK JOAN" will now be appearing in the Yoga Community Newsletter. This is a wonderful bi-monthly newsletter than can be delivered right to your door. For those times when you need to get away from the computer and outside into the beautiful fresh air with some good reading material. To subscribe or for more information, check out the YOGA COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER.website on the internet.



Yoga and the Immune System

Dear Joan:

Hi Joan, and warmest greetings from "Down-Under".

This is my first internet experience, so please excuse ignorance about exactly what you do. However, I am interested in yoga therapy, and specifically any ideas you might have about an approach to help someone who suffers from Multiple Chemical Sensitivity.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is basically a "disease" where a person reacts to a number of chemicals. However, instead of an allergy to one or two substances, a person with MCS reacts to a broader and generally increasing number of chemicals. So for example, I have a client with MCS who has dairy and wheat allergies, as well as reactions to exposure to petrochemicals and even electromagnetic fields. The symptoms are many and varied - ranging from chronic fatigue to headaches, to flu-like symptoms, to confusion and dizziness, nausea etc.

A recent article wondered if MCS was like at the opposite end of a spectrum to AIDS - in AIDS, it is effectively like the immune system gives up and no longer protects the body. In MSC, the effect is like the immune system goes berserk - and treats everything like it is a toxin. And in the end, one of the most difficult aspects is finding an uncontaminated environment.

I hope that gives you a better idea of the condition. I know of instances of it in America - I think some of the Gulf war veterans have shown a similar condition following chemical exposure in Iraq. Plus there are stories of individuals who have developed the symptoms. But I don't know if it has a different name or is widely known.

Anyway, my thoughts recently were about how to approach this condition through yoga therapy. I'm coming down more and more on the side of using long exhalation and very gentle movements that would promote this. Also anything that gently stimulates endocrine glands and the immune system, and visualizations that inspire a sense of cleansing/refreshment/well-being.

Given all that info, I would still love to hear your thoughts on it, if you felt so inclined. Is this something you have come across and been able to help through yoga?

Also, seeing as you are fortunate enough to actually be in the US, an excellent decaf coffee, available only in the US, is "Gevalia". We used to get it sent to us over here - it's THAT good.

Regards,



Clare Fleming
Melbourne, Australia

Dear Clare,

High down there! Thank you for your questions and your thorough description of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). It sounds like you already have some understanding of the yoga processes of relaxation, visualization and breathing techniques. All these processes can help to strengthen the immune system. Although MCS and AIDS have different responses, I see them, in essence, as two sides of the same coin, in that they both involve immune systems that are out of balance.

I have a new book coming out in November at all major bookstores (do you have Borders or Barnes and Noble in Australia?). It is called "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." My co-author is Eve Adamson. In this book we address specific chronic illnesses and how yoga can help. Some of the specific illnesses addressed are AIDS, Diabetes, Asthma, Cancer, Cardiovascular Disease. Since I would consider MCS related to AIDS by the nature of immune system disorder, pranayama (breath) techniques can increase oxygen to the system, and thus help to strengthen and balance the immune system. Check out some yoga books or classes to learn some specific breathing techniques. I have listed one in the Asana For The Week for you. This technique of Alternate Nostril Breathing helps to balance the body energetically and physically.

The important thing to remember in practicing these techniques is to gradually build, not to force and over stress the system. Sometimes, when a supposed "answer" is found, one can get over zealous and think that one has to make up for lost time and , in essence, get out of breath in the process of learning to breathe! Ahimsa, or non-violence, is a core principle that yoga is based in. All techniques and postures, practiced in this way, can expand one's life and/or the enjoyment of it.

I am currently exploring obtaining a grant in research on yoga and cancer. I have found studies that directly relate the sub-optimal oxygenation of tissue with chronic illnesses...specifically cancer. Dr. Warburg won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1931 for this discovery. Perhaps this link can be addressed within most chronic illnesses? I teach free yoga classes to cancer patients and believe that breath work combined with slow movements or held postures (as in yoga) can be most beneficial to an improved quality of life.

I hope you have found some of this information helpful, Clare. If you have more questions or answers please feel free to share them with me and readers so that we may all grow in the process...

Namaste,
Joan

And thank you for the "Gevalia" decaf coffee tip...I will look for it up here!

Restart Yoga??

Dear Joan:

I'm 75 and used to do Yoga years ago, but have lapsed. Know it does wonders, but right now, don't know how to get motivated to restart, and a program to follow. I live in Wichita KS and have a 79 year old husband who is on oxygen 24 hrs per day (Emphysema), so am tied down to a certain extent. Would appreciate your input.

Jane Smith
Wichita, Kansas

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your letter. How wonderful that your are looking into yoga again! And perhaps your husband may find some of the gentle movements and visualizations helpful in his healing as well. I recently returned from hearing a lecture by Becky Love, a well-known and loved Chicago Yoga Teacher who is over 80 and a shining example of the many benefits a regular practice of yoga can bring at any age.

I have found two yoga teachers in your area. I located them the through Yoga International Teacher's Guide: Renee Detar Kaylor, M.A. of "Yoga Practice of Wichita" #316-721-2654 and Tippi Magid of "Manhattan Yoga School" at #913-537-YOGA. I hope these ladies may be helpful in your area yoga search. It is quite important to find an instructor you can personally study with, if possible. Of course, there are also tapes and books on the market that will help to encourage your at home studies. Check with your local bookstore or the Yoyoga Bookstore for various options. You are at a beautiful age, Jane, to be able to bring your wisdom and experience into your yoga studies. Do keep in touch and let me know how you and your husband are doing.

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Send your questions or mail to joan@yoyoga.com
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Yoga and Down Syndrome

Dear Joan:

Your web page is a treat and has been our home page for some time as a great way to enter the electronic kingdom - with humor and balance. While union of body, life and mind has been a fundamental aspiration for the last thirty years, practice of asanas is fairly recent as the possibilities of the middle years become evident. In youth, it seems, the creative faculty provides a generally protective shield which can be refined and made permanent by conscious application of knowledge, as experience and understanding become increasingly comprehensive.

We have a daughter of nine with down syndrome who has a natural inclination toward dance and yoga, and we have recently have come to know of a Brazilian lady, Sonia Kumar, who began teaching yoga to her own daughter with DS some twenty five years ago. Sadly her daughter died at age ten, but she has translated the experience into a school and general approach for children with a variety of physical and mental anomalies. You may well know of her work, and if not, enjoy having a look at her web site [www. specialyoga.com](http://www.specialyoga.com).

Again, thanks for the wonderful introduction to one asana after another happily anticipated twice a month, a comfortable tempo ----definitely looking forward to more from your pen.

Sincerely,

Caroline Grey Ganz
Rochester, New York

Dear Caroline,

Thank you very much for this info. I have looked up Sonia's site and will be ordering her book when it comes out this December.

Working in the public school system, I have been blessed in teaching yoga to students with various disabilities, including down syndrome. I have found these students to be so incredibly loving and eager to learn, that I say with my whole heart, that I feel most blessed in the opportunities of working with these special students. These students have been so established in ahimsa/non-violence, that their lives stand as wonderful examples of joy and non-judgement - the essence of yoga. Certainly I have learned so much from these



students....they have been such wonderful teachers. I hope to learn so much more.

My best wishes to you Caroline, and your beautiful daughter too. I hope to meet you both someday!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Is there really a Superman?

Dear Joan:

I would like to know how you knew dolphins have x-ray vision? I think you are confused--dolphins use radiowaves much like bats do for communication--they do not have x-ray vision--Superman does! Which is a figment of our imagination. X-rays are very high potent rays that can give cancer and even kill--no living creature can create such things and in order for them to work, you need a film that the x-rays can hit in order for you to see inside the human body (a representative picture)

Just to let you know!

Sincerely,
An observer of your website

Dear Observer of my website,

Thank you very much for this observation. Because of your input, I have re-worded this bit of information in the philosophy section of yoyoga. I certainly want to be as technically accurate as possible. I found this info in the "Wellness WorkBook" by John W. Travis, MD and Regina Sara Ryan. They state that dolphins see "like" xray vision. Since my understanding of xrays has been more on the "superman level," I appreciate your grounded and educational input. Certainly, all of us can grow by your clarification as to what exactly xray vision is. Thank you for your insight, and for being an interactive observer. (and anonymous like Superman!) .

**Namaste,
Joan**

Where is a yoga class in Holland?

Dear Joan:

I saw your web-site, and I feel enriched, it was a very informative and wellwritten set of pages! I wonder if you know of any place that practise your aproach to Yoga in Amsterdam, Holland? Please let me know if you do.

Thank you for your time.

Ingunn Dahle
Amsterdam, Holland

Dear Ingunn,

I am sorry to say I do not know of any yoga teachers in your specific area. Have you tried the phone book for starters? Do any Yoyoga readers out there know of any classes in Holland? If so, write me and let me know. The closest instructors I could find for you are in Sweden. The Scandanavian Yoga and Meditation School at 001-46-372-55063, and B.K.S. Iyengar Yoga Institute at 011-46-901-98290. These two schools may be able to help you locate a teacher in your area.

My best wishes are with you, Ingunn!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Ashtanga Anyone?

Dear Joan:

My current teacher at Central Park Athletic Club is Laura Jane Mellencamp. She does a great job and I'm very pleased with her teaching style. She also teaches at her yoga studio at a Martial Arts center in Downers Grove -- but again the problem is the time the classes are scheduled.

I think I'm most interested in studying Ashtanga Yoga. My limited experience so far has been both Iyengar and Ashtanga. Do you offer instruction in either Ashtanga or Inyengar?

Again, thanks for the reply and I look forward to any suggestions you can offer.

Craig A. Summers
Naperville, Illinois

Dear Craig,

are interested in adding to these classes and learning more about the philosophical aspects of yoga study, I suggest my PE classes at the College of Dupage. In the Hatha 1 classes we study some basic yoga philosophy, and intimately study the basic postures. In Hatha 2 we begin to study the chakras/energy system and explore how to activate these within the basic poses. Both classes involve discussion, so they are not geared toward the type of study you say are looking for.

I do not currently teach Ashtanga...but I will be starting a Hatha Yoga 3 class in JANUARY at the College Of Dupage which will be an Ashtanga / Power Yoga class. This will be offered thru the Physical Education Dept. and will be college credited. It will be offered Friday mornings from 7 - 8:50 for one college credit of Physical Education. Registration for these classes is currently beginning. You can call the college at 630-858-2800 for more registration information.

This class offering will require completion of Hatha Yoga 1, Hatha Yoga 2 will be optional. The majority of Hatha Yoga 3 will be on developing one's personal Ashtanga practice and this course will be quite physically challenging. I will love teaching this course. My current personal practice has been of an Ashtanga nature. I study with Beryl Bender Birch (when she is in town) who wrote the book "Power Yoga," which you can pick up at any bookstore. And my book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," will be coming out Thanksgiving...hope you check it out. It is my first nationally released book, so I am quite excited about it.

Best wishes, Craig. Maybe I will see you in class soon? Hope so! And do give my fond regards to Laura!

Namaste,
Joan

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And for more terrific yoga research, check out Georg Feurstein's Yoga Research Center

Ask Joan

Thoughtful
Responses To
Your Yoga Questions

Dear YOYOGA Readers:

It is Thanksgiving. A time to give thanks to all those whose lives have touched us. Thank you to all you YOYOGA readers who have shared your insightful questions with me and have filled my life and those around you with renewed appreciation and joy. And, thank you to those who perhaps have not shared a question, but whose energy I have still felt and appreciated. AND, a very special thank you to Kathie Huddleston, my dear friend and Webmaster. Thank you, Kathie, for so beautifully designing this YOYOGA Website.



My heart-felt gratitude,
Joan

What about barbeque?

Dear Joan:

I practice yoga and try to follow a regiment. However, I do have a suspect diet. I eat mostly meats, and the occasional microwavable burrito. I hunt and fish as well. I consider hunting and fishing a form of meditation. However, how much is my diet effecting my karma and yoga?

Sincerely,
Anonymous

Dear ?,

From a yoga perspective, I do not understand how hunting and fishing could be a form of meditation. The yoga tradition is grounded in ahimsa. This is the practice of non-violence. This practice of non-violence in thought, word, and deed, is carried into the meditation practice.

The diet is important to yoga studies; however, one must come to this realization through a

personal practice of ahimsa. Guilt or judgements do not play into this. It is a simple process of self-realization. Perhaps you may want to do some reading on the principles of yoga through your local library or bookstore to help you in your yoga journeys. My best wishes to you...

**Namaste,
Joan**

Bikrams Yoga

Dear Joan:

Are you familiar with Bikram style Yoga? I've been doing some more reading on different yoga styles and am a bit intrigued by this style of "hot" yoga and its emphasis on a set sequence of 26 asanas. Do you have any ideas of the pros and cons for this style? Any personal likes or dislikes?

On a different note.....Can you sell me an autographed copy of your new "Complete Idiot's...." book? I know it's probably a little soon, but the Borders by me doesn't carry it yet, and besides I'd like a signed copy from the famous author.

Sincerely,
Craig Summers
Naperville, Illinois

Dear Craig,

I have Bikrams book..the one with Juliet Prowse on the cover. I think it is an EXCELLENT book. If you do not have it, I highly recommend getting it. It is fun and thorough. I would love to take a class with him, perhaps someday. What I most appreciate about his book is his sense of humor. I think it would have to take a good sense of humor to do hatha yoga in 100 degree temps, which is what I understand many of his teachers teach. I have never taken such a class, but would be interested. If you find one in this area...let me know! .

And, I would be most honored to sign a copy for you of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," Craig. The book should be available in bookstores around Thanksgiving (and I am so thankful!). I will also post a link to my publisher, MacMillan, NYC, in the Yoyoga Bookstore for those who want to purchase it through the internet.. I will be doing a booksigning at Borders OakBrook, Sunday, January 18 at 3pm, and at Whole Foods in Wheaton, Saturday, March 14 (Gee, doesn't that seem so far away?) Hope to see you there!

**Namaste,
Joan**

3 times the charm...

Dear Joan:

I have begun a journey of discovery into myself and my surroundings. In my efforts to become "more spiritual" I have started to practice being "good" not only to others but also to myself. I have come a long way (I believe) on sheer intuition. I have given up smoking, alcohol, caffeine, red meat and even casual sex. I also have a digestive problem that has reinforced some of my lifestyle changes. I have begun to consider Yoga as a form of exercise for myself, and have begun to research the subject. Your website is the first site that I have visited. I was shocked to find that the Yamas and Niyamas, are the same as the philosophies that I came upon in my "self search". I view this to be a huge sign that I am on my right path. Anyway now for the questions.

1. Can you recommend a good beginners tape for the yoga "stances" (is this the right word). I would like to try this out at home before I make a larger financial investment into classes.
2. I believe that there are different kinds of yoga. How do I decide which I should pursue, or are there steps?
3. Can you recommend mentors in the Boston, MA area?

Thank you so much for Being (and having a web site)

Hayden Reynolds
Boston, Massachussets

Dear Hayden,

Thank you, Hayden, for your questions. I will try and answer them in the order given...

1) **The Yoyoga Bookstore has quite a variety of tapes that may interest you. These are tapes I have written and produced. Also, your local bookstore will have tapes available by other authors as well. I advise beginning with audio tapes so as to reinforce your self-study, and not to get too absorbed in external visuals.**

2) **Decide which style of yoga to pursue by what interests you. For example, Hatha Yoga for strengthening the physical body as a tool to self-realization; Karma Yoga - selfless service to others as a tool to self-realization; Bhakti Yoga - Devotion to a chosen ideal as a tool to self-realization.**

Within Hatha Yoga (the most popular form of yoga in the west), there are numerous schools with different styles of approach (Iyengar, Ashtanga, Power, Yoyoga (ha), etc.) It is important to remember that all these approaches are Hatha Yoga, it is the approach to the study of Hatha that often differs. Find a teacher or style that you enjoy and discipline yourself to stick with it. I suggest staying with a certain style for a significant period of time. This is not to say that one style is better than an other. But approaches can vary so very much that discipline of study for new students can become more difficult by combining various styles. I often have students come up to me and say that they study Iyengar, and ask what kind of yoga I do. I say "Hatha." They say "what's that?" I say "Iyengar, Ashtanga, Bikram's, etc."...hello Yoyoga.

3) **I have looked up some schools/teachers for you in the Boston Area...
Dynamic Yoga Studios -617-983-8353**

Hatha Yoga Center -617-451-0732

The Yoga Studio - 617-523-7138

Yoga Bodies 617-437-6757

I hope you find the teachers here helpful. The financial investment for yoga studies is usually not too great. I highly encourage this investment. The yoga tradition is best studied directly from teacher to student.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Yamas and Niyamas

Dear Joan:

I want to thank you for posting the Yoga Philosophy, YAMAS AND NIYAMAS. They are very thought provoking and centering.

Much appreciated,
A beginning Yoga student growing to be teacher,

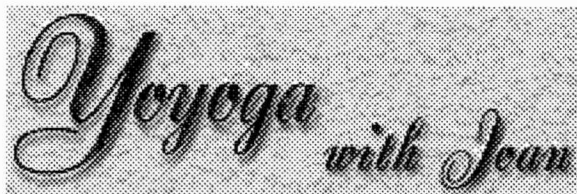
Marie Gould
Cape Cod, MA

Dear Marie,

Your kind words are most appreciated too.

**Namaste,
A Teacher who is always growing as a Student,
Joan**

**Do you have a question for Joan?
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Asana	Philosophy	Yoga Tips	Yo Joan
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Georgia on my mind

Dear Joan:

I would like to start practicing yoga and would like to know if I should start with a video, book or classes. Unfortunately there are no classes offered near where I live. What is the best method of learning yoga?

My wife and I just recently moved to Bremen, Georgia from Athens, Georgia (home of the University of Georgia). There were a few places that taught Yoga in Athens but none that I can find in this area (at least none I can find in the phone book.) From all that I've heard and read about Yoga, it seems like the ideal exercise for flexibility, stress relief and overall health. Can you recommend any audio tapes? My fear is doing the forms wrong because I can't see what it should look like. My last question is what does "Namaste" mean?

Thanks Again,
Jeffrey Stone
Bremen, Georgia

Dear Jeffrey,

I started my hatha yoga studies through direct teacher/student instructions. Since I was not able to attend as many classes as I would have liked to, I purchased a couple of audio tapes from my instructor. When I needed the



extra encouragement at home, I would put on her tape and be guided through an hour of hatha yoga. I still have this tape, and still often use it. I purchased the tapes through the Sivananda Yoga Center in Los Angeles.

I understand that many people prefer video tapes. This was not an option for me when I started studying because there were no home VCRs! However, I still think audio tapes have an advantage in that they take away some of the competitive edge that video tapes can inspire. The teachers on tapes have usually (and hopefully) been studying yoga for years, so going into a pose in the way their body is going into it may not be appropriate or healthy for your body. That is why the best way to begin your studies is with a teacher face to face, and then, I would recommend complementing your practice with audio tapes. This system continues to work for me. One of the teachers I currently study with is Beryl Bender Birch. She resides in New York. I take her seminars when she comes to Chicago; unfortunately, dog-gone it, she does not come to town often enough. In the meantime, I often work with her audio tapes.

I could not find any yoga teachers in Athens, but I will list some teachers in Atlanta that may be able to refer you to teachers in your area:

Atlanta Yoga (404) 264-9642
Lotus Blossum Studio (770)455-8577
The Pierce Program (404)875-7110
Kathleen Pringle (404)874-5082

Thank you for writing, Jeffrey. Hope this helps!

Namaste (honoring the light within),
Joan

Vegis in Oregon Unite!

Dear Joan:

I am looking for classes and also some literature. Anything to help a beginner. I live in Oregon, in the Portland Metro area. Any info would be much appreciated. Also, I have been looking into Ahimsa for a while as an extension of my Veganism. I was wondering if you could suggest a starting place for me.

Thank you.
Maradyth Davis

Portland, Oregon

Dear Maradyth,

Do you have a vegetarian society in your area? In Chicago we have "The Chicago Vegetarian Society" which is an organization of vegetarians who inspire each other on this vegetarian path through meetings and various social events. Another suggestion, reading Mahatma Gandhi's life story. This is a story of a man who approached vegetarianism through the practice of non-violence/Ahimsa. His is an inspiring and thought provoking life story. .

Regarding classes in Portland, Oregon. Here are some options I gathered from the magazine "Yoga International."

Holiday Johnson (503)224-8611

Kathleen Perkins (503)292-3653

Julie Lawrence (503)227-5524

The Movement Center (503)231-0994

Sharon Ward (503)231-0994

I hope you will find these teachers helpful, Maradyth.

**Namaste,
Joan**

South of the border

Dear Joan:

Hello, I am a 24 year old man living in Colombia South America. I am very interested in learning about YOGA and the different techniques for relaxation and inner growth. I have never had any contact with instructors and I have not been able to contact one here in my country that interests me. The big problem is that I work in a bank and I do not have any time to go to an academy and practice, so I have to do it on my own. I would like to know if you can recommend to me any bibliography or written material in the internet that I can follow in my journey.

I would appreciate your attention and guidance.

Andres Ferrer P.
Columbia, South America

Dear Andres,

At the bottom of this page you will find some connections to additional yoga sites on the internet you may find helpful in your studies and travels. My best wishes to you, Andres! You are on in incredible journey of self-discoveries...

**Namaste,
Joan**

Do you have a question for Joan?

Send your questions or mail to joan@yoyoga.com

Please include the city and state you are from.

Joan respectfully gives each letter received her individual and kind attention.

"YO JOAN" will now be appearing in the Yoga Community Newsletter. This is a wonderful bi-monthly newsletter than can be delivered right to your door. For those times when you need to get away from the computer and outside into the beautiful fresh air with some good reading material. To subscribe or for more information, check out the [YOGA COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER](#).website on the internet.

And for more terrific yoga research, check out Georg Feurstein's [Yoga Research Center](#)

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Yoyoga, Inc.

Yoyoga with Joan

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Yo Joan



And baby makes 3!

Dear Joan:

We just recently found out that my wife is pregnant. We have read your books and have been practicing yoga for some time. We are curious about what specific postures she can perform early in her pregnancy and which postures should she (we) gradually reduce from her program. Also, we want to bring this baby into a world that has already been holistically "yoga-fied."

What are some other things she (and me) can do to make this pregnancy holistically yoga grounded and mindful (physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, and spiritually)?



Thank you,
Eli Botdorf
Ft. Wayne, Indiana

Dear Jeffrey,

Thank you for your letter. I can not tell by your letter exactly how long you and your wife have been practicing yoga. Your questions incorporate a whole lifestyle, so I really don't think a brief response from me is enough, but I will gladly offer a few suggestions.

Regarding the mental/spiritual sphere, now is a wonderful time to study the yamas and niyamas. Incorporating these principles into your life (actions, words, and very importantly thoughts) will certainly get your baby off to a beautiful loving start. Starting from the inside - out!

Financially, simplifying your life in small ways and using wisdom to help plan for your life and your baby's. Are you happy with the way you are currently making money (some have referred to this as the "prana/life force" of this world)? If so, your baby will feel this. If not, your baby will feel this too. Your happiness is important to your baby.

Physically, continue your asana practice. If your wife is currently doing upside down postures, she may want to ease up on these. I have known many yoginis (female yogis) who have had an extensive hatha yoga practice and continued inversions almost up to the birth; however, unless your practice has been extensive and disciplined, I would not advise this. On a dietary basis, incorporating a few more organic fruits and vegetables into you and your baby's life would be quite nice too.

Finally, this is a great time to practice more Shavasana/Relaxation Pose together. Certainly your baby will appreciate its effects when it moves from the womb to our hectic world. And I am quite sure that mommy and daddy will too!

What a wonderful feeling to know that your entire being is effecting the new life of another's. I so respect your wish and plan to "holistically" help in your baby's development into this world. I am sending many shantis and blessings your way!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Research papers...

Dear Joan:

I have been gathering research from the Internet on Yoga over the last month for my Girlfriend. She is currently attending a Health and Beauty course and part of the course requires her to produce a thesis on a subject of her choice (no points for guessing her choice).

The problem is, although there is an abundance of textual information, I cannot seem to

find any sites which contain a list of various asanas and pictures or diagrams to accompany them.

I'm hoping that perhaps you could e-mail me one or more addresses of sites which contain the information I seek.

I would gladly purchase a book but as we're both financially challenged students this alternative is not feasible at present.

I sincerely hope you can help.

Thanking you in advance.

Regards,

Brian Conway

Dundalk, County Louth, Ireland

Dear Brian,

I believe you and your girlfriend will be helped by the Sivananda Yoga Center. They offer displays of a wide variety of asanas. I have enjoyed many of their wonderful yoga retreats. My disciplined efforts in Hatha increased through the inspirations of many of the teachers I studied with at their center in Los Angeles, and so I hold this organization dear to my heart.

You are being very helpful for your girlfriend, Brian, and you sound like a great boyfriend!

Namaste,

Joan

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