

Yoyoga with Joan

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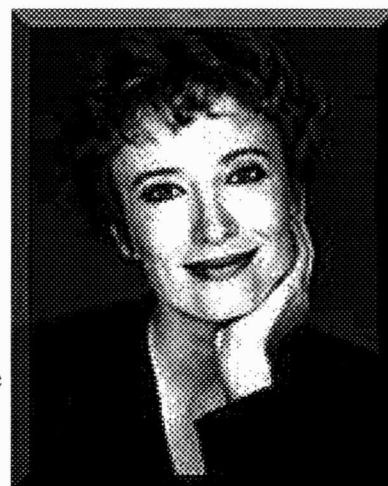
Yo Joan



Welcome 2000!

Dear Joan,

I just wanted you to know that I have become a recent fan. Throughout the years, I have read books on yoga and the martial arts (much to my mother's dismay, as she thinks you have to change your religion to participate in these things - she is an avid Methodist!). Anyway, during the 70's I became fascinated with the t.v. show "Kung Fu". I am still a David Carradine fan. I have all his tapes on Kung Fu, Tai Chi and Chi Kung. In the course of this study for me, I ran across your book on meditation in the local library. I took it out and was so fascinated with it that I renewed it twice. I then called my local book store and ordered it. I think you have hit on the road to inner peace. I am also a fan of the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and I believe that through his writings and yours, one can obtain self satisfaction. Anyway, enough philosophy, I just wanted you to know that I think your book is excellent and I am recommending it to all my friends. I try to put some of your suggestions into practice and, along with my practice of tai chi, I believe I'm in excellent shape for a 53 year old grandma! Keep up the good work, Joan.



Jonna Reed
Barberton, Ohio

Dear Jonna,

Thank you, young lady, for starting the year 2000 off to such a beautiful start. Eve Adamson (my co-author) and I worked hard on the book and your comments are deeply and sincerely appreciated. I think Dr. Peale is cool too. I have read his books. I have never seen a Kung Fu movie tho. Obviously, David Carradine packs quite a punch!

||| 2000

**Namaste,
Joan**

A delicate balance

Dear Joan,

Hi! I found you on the net while trying to find an answer. Can you tell me about "The Scales Posture" I cannot find a picture or written description of how to do this asana anywhere, wonder if you can help,

Namaste Kevin

Dear Kevin,

Tolasana strengthens the wrists, hands and stomach. Sit with legs crossed, palms on floor besides hips. If possible, sit in lotus position where ankles are on thighs. If the lotus position is impossible, simply cross legs. Exhale as you lift feet and hips off floor balancing on hands. Hold as long as you can. Come down, release, and then cross legs with other foot on top.

Repeat. Lift. Breathe. Release.

"Tola" is Sanskrit for "pair of scales."

**Namaste,
Joan**

Illuminations on elimination

Dear Joan,

I was wondering if you could clear something up for me. Yesterday, I had a massage that involved some deep tissue work and pressure points. That night and to a much more severe extent this morning, I felt intensely nauseated and have felt that way all day. (Relaxed, but nauseated). Could the two be related? My mother-in-law went with me, and the massage therapist told her to drink a lot of water to flush out toxins. I tried to drink water but it made me feel worse.

I also have a yoga question. During the massage, I discussed my chronic neck pain with the therapist who told me that the muscle I was having trouble with was my levator scapula. She stretched it out by having me put my arm behind my back and pushing against her hand as she pushed down. The stretch felt amazing and lasted for quite a few hours. Is there any yoga pose that would help relieve this tightness? Are there any yoga poses I should avoid?

Your web site is a blessing.

Thank you,
Chloe

Dear Chloe,

In response to the first part of your letter, yes, massage can loosen toxins in the body that get into the blood stream. If the bodily systems are functioning smoothly, the toxins are quickly and efficiently flushed out of the system through the blood and the magnificent cleansing and purifying processes of the body. This process begins working immediately and the results are usually felt immediately, causing one to feel relaxed and refreshed. If the toxins stay in the system longer, they can have the opposite effect which you described. Drinking water (water at room temperature) is a very effective way in helping the toxins move along. Then, after the massage, simply spend some extra time in the bathroom. Just sit on the bathroom throne for awhile, and wait for your elimination reflexes to kick in. Be patient. Take some slow deep breaths.

If drinking water is unsettling, your stomach may also need some special massage attention. Ask your massage therapist to include an abdominal (stomach) massage into your full body massage session. For some reason, many massage therapists avoid massaging the stomach. Perhaps because it is such a vulnerable place. And this vulnerability is exactly the reason why the abdomen needs to be regularly massaged by caring and sensitive hands. What is the first area you tighten in defense? You curl up and protect your internal organs - your stomach - where your action turns to passion. The abdomen is the energy center of action. It is right below the heart. It is the seat of our compassion. It is very important to our healing process. If the stomach is weak, the rest of the system is deeply effected. Build the strength of your stomach through massages and yoga asana practice.

The way you breathe during a massage can also aid the purification process. Slow deep exhales help the body to release tensions and toxins. Consciously try and bring more of these slow deep exhales into your massage. It may feel strange at first, but soon it will feel natural. It is a natural way for your body to release. If the nausea continues for a day or more, then I would recommend seeing a doctor to rule out any more serious condition. The condition you describe above tho, is not uncommon. Some of the suggestions I have offered to you, you may find quite helpful. The massage experience is meant to be enjoyable as well as health building.

Regarding a yoga pose/exercise, (in sanskrit terminology, the word is "asana") I would recommend cow pose. Position one hand, palm facing down on top of your head. Position the other hand palm facing out on the center of your back. Keep your spine straight and head facing forward. Take a deep breath. On the exhale, bring the hands toward each other. They do not have to touch. Continue breathing deeply as you hold this stretch for a few slow, deep breaths. Then, switch hands so that the other hand is now on top of head and the other at the center of the back. Repeat on this side. The arm positioning involves the upper part of the pose. The lower part of the pose involves crossing your legs. Seated, the knees eventually cross on top of each other and the heels come along side the body...in due time.

I hope these suggestions are helpful to you, Chloe. My best wishes are with you along with my hopes that you will continue to be in touch.

Joan Budilovsky

**Namaste,
Joan**

Higher and higher

Dear Joan,

Hi! I like very much your homepage. I found it very nice, well done, clear and easy to follow. I will recommend this page to my friends. I also practice Yoga, since 1979 and teach since 1984. I would like to know more about the courses that you teach, specially at the university level, do you have any information about the requirements? I am a Phy, ed. teacher, I would like to take some extra courses to incorporate Yoga in the schools.

Bye 4 now
Oscar Calix B.Ed. B.A

Dear Oscar,

The requirements are different at every university. Some require advanced educational degrees, some require advanced experience in your practice. Most require both. This is a reason why the national certification process for yoga teachers is having a tough time. The national certification for massage therapists also took some time. Now the massage requirements are that you need a certain number of hours in approved training at a certified massage school. How does one certify a spiritually based yoga school? Enlightenment 101? Some of the very best yoga teachers I have known, are not on the pages of "Yoga Journal" magazine. Then again, a few occasionally are. The courses I teach are structured around the asanas, the yoga sutra, and the chakra energy system. I encourage much discussion on philosophy in my classes, as well as asana practice. I try and offer a work-out for the body and mind. I learn a lot from my students, they are also my teachers.

I would suggest to you, Oscar, that you explore the national certification process of yoga teachers by contacting a local yoga organization in your area. This is where you can explore options of bringing yoga into schools in your area. "Think globally, act locally." Whoever made that quote, I like it!

**Namaste,
Joan**

To intermediate...and beyond

Dear Joan,

1/15/00

Dear Joan,

First, please allow me to thank you for your continued work with bringing the peaceful practice of yoga to the masses. it was your book that gave me the "push" to begin my own daily yoga practice. i have felt for years that yoga would be the method to bring a sense of wholeness to myself but i didn't know where to begin. i have since begun a regular practice at home and take classes at a yoga center here in new york city. thanks for the encouragement.

I am writing because a friend of mine has perpetually cold hands and feet. I know that this must be a medical condition, stemming from lack of sufficient circulation? I recommended that she have a physical with blood work (my grandparents suffered from that condition and it was attributed to the fact that they were diabetic.) I was wondering if there was a series of asanas that may be able to help her. she knows that I practice yoga and has witnessed the change within me--I think she wants to do the same and this was her cry for help. could you recommend some poses that may help her?

Thanks again for all that you do! you are truly a gentle lighthouse in this world.

namaste,
jason

Dear Jason,

This gentle warrior has the same problem as your friend! My feet and hands get incredibly cold sometimes. I attribute it to the fact that my heart chakra is so large and warm that it takes away some of the heat from my outer limbs. Many massage therapists have this same problem. After a few massage strokes though, the hands start to warm. And in a similar way, yoga poses that involve movements of the limbs, like vinyasas (sun salutations) are ways of warming the limbs. Downward Dog is a great heat producing pose for the limbs. Massaging the limbs is also effective. Rub your hands together. Notice this friction movement begins to warm the hands like two sticks starting a fire. Rub your hands this way regularly. Rub your feet this way regularly. Or, since it is the month of love, find a honey to rub your hands and feet this way. Some yogis can actually focus visually on the hands or feet and their intense concentration alone can warm these areas. I have tried this, but when my feet are cold, I find intense physical movement and friction more effective.

Namaste,
Joan

Burning Up

Dear Joan,

Growing up in a Catholic family, I wasn't allowed to express my anger. I learned to keep it all inside. I read in the "Idiot's Guide to Yoga" that you recommend several poses to release anger: "side angle pose" and "Warrior 1, 2, and 3". Does it release it for good, or is it just like meditation where it doesn't really get rid of it, but just brings it back into balance? Looking to lower my burner..hope you can help.

I have been doing yoga at home for the past two years. I have a busy schedule and I like to workout late, (10:30p). I am looking for a video or book that will take me from beginner to intermediate. Do you have any suggestions?

PG

Dear PG,

Hmmmmmm. Tough question for me to answer since I still consider myself a beginner. I rarely ever watch videos, so I have no comparisons to state. But one, and only one, video I did watch recently was, "Yoga for Meditation" by Rodney Yee, and I thought it was truly excellent and beautiful to watch. I highly recommend it. I do not know what your yoga book reading has consisted of up to this point, but here are a few suggestions as you move along... "Autobiography of a Yogi" by Paramahansa Yogananda (the first yoga book I ever read, and continually turn to), "The Spiritual Science of Kriya Yoga" by Goswami Kriyananda (the main text used in the teacher's training course I attended in 1994, and a book I continually turn to), "Light on Yoga" by BKS Iyengar (for asana details), "The Bhagavad Gita" (an ancient sacred text with numerous translations, I read many different ones). Gee, I hope this helps, PG.

With my deepest respect and joy, wishing a happy, blessed new year to you, and every beginner, intermediate, and advanced yoga student reading this.....and even those not reading this...and even those who are not yoga students.....much love.

**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.

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.

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

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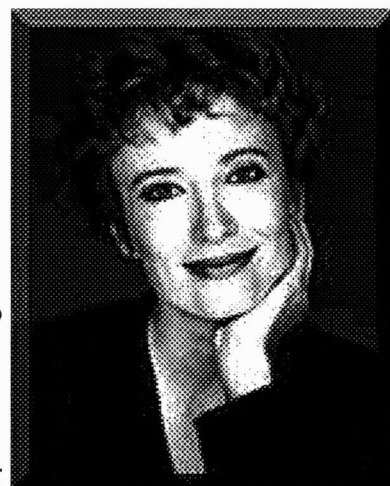
Yo Joan



Leavin' on a jet plane...

Dear Joan,

I have been practicing the transcendental meditation technique for several years. About 5 months ago I began yoga. My program is quite lengthy. I do approximately an hour and a half of yoga, followed by 15 minutes of savasana. After I'm done with the yoga, I do my 20 minute transcendental meditation program. I'd like to shorten my program as time is scarce. Do you think the savasana is more than enough after my yoga? The transcendental meditation organization says that the T.M. technique is by far the fastest technique to bring you to unity consciousness. In fact, a T.M.er had told me that yoga is like taking a bus to god realization, whereas T.M. is like taking a jet plane. I'd like to hear your opinion. I know yoga is about releasing desires, but I wouldn't want to give up a technique that helps you evolve faster. I really enjoy the yoga more so than the Transcendental meditation. If I had to pick one over the other, it would be hatha yoga. I'm confused because I don't want to let go of a "jet plane to god" technique. Please let me know what you think.



Namaste,
Chris Gonzales
Hamburg, N.J.

Dear Chris,

What's it with men and jets? As a woman, traveling at the speed of light does not interest me, it even scares me! Anyway, humor inside, Hatha Yoga leads one to meditation. An hour of hatha yoga, followed by shavasana is an excellent way to begin a seated meditative practice. I am not a student of TM meditation. I do know there are various paths to a meditative state. One path may work for one person, a different path for another person. I would not presume to say which path helps one to evolve faster, for

we all have different wheels of karma to burn. Whatever meditative practice you follow, it is important to be persistent in your practice.

As for me, I continue to prefer bus rides to jets. And, I enjoy bike rides even more.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Manga Mia

Dear Joan,

Happy New Year, Joan! I was wondering if you could help modify a posture. I am fairly new to yoga and generally practice ISHTA (Integrated Science of Hatha Tantra and Ayurveda) yoga postures. Since I do not know its name, allow me to explain the posture I am having problems with. You begin in Dandasana. You bend your right leg up; place the right foot on the outside of the left knee; move into a spinal twist; come forward; bring the right foot to the outside of the left hip; place both hands behind you and slowly begin to lean forward keeping your chest lifted; bring both hands to the front and stretch as far as you are able. Repeat on other side.

Now, I am having only one difficulty with this posture. I am overweight and I am unable to place my foot on the outside of the opposite hip. How could I best modify this posture? It is part of a video that I really love doing, but I don't know what to do with myself when they are doing this stretch.

Also, a quick question, do you know the English translation for the Sanskrit Mang? I was told to use it for a mantra and would like to know the meaning. I've been unable to find it's meaning in the dictionaries I have access to.

Thank you and Namaste,
Theresa

Dear Theresa,

Sharon Steffenson, the editor of "Yoga Chicago" newspaper, once said that when she started her study of yoga some 20+ years ago, it was all just called 'yoga.'" I totally relate! It was all so simple then. Now there are so many different names for different styles, it is confusing to this little 'ol yogini's mind! Every day I hear a new name... "ISHTA" is the new name of the day for me!

Regarding your question on the pose, it sounds like a version of Ardha Matsyendrasana or Half Spinal Twist. The classical posture does not involve both hands behind you. The hand opposite the straight leg reaches out towards the toes of the straight leg. The other arm wraps behind the body and reaches toward the toes of the bent leg that eventually rests in half lotus. If you check out, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," I demonstrate versions of this pose and other spinal twists. The important thing to keep in mind, is that your body type or my body type, or another's body type might not fit into identical poses. In fact, we most probably will not. Ask your yoga teacher for adjustments that will keep your energy system open and healing. We all need to open and

heal.

Now, regarding the mantra, I asked Katie Lahiff about this. She is my dear friend and also the Tech Editor of my book (with Eve Adamson), "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation." Here's what Katie said...

"As far as Mang goes. This is what I found in my dictionary: **Mang - to go, to move**
Manga - the head of a boat, a mast or side of a ship, Mane of a country in Saka-dvipa
inhabited chiefly by Brahams.

Mangala - (for which mang is the root) happiness, felicity, welfare, bliss, anything
auspicious or pertaining to a lucky issue (e.g. a good omen , a prayer, benediction,
auspicious ornament or amulet, a festival or any solemn ceremony on important
occasions, a good old custom, a good work.

I've also seen mangala translated in a mantra as tranquility."

Thanks, Katie, for looking that up for us. And thank you, Theresa, for your wonderful questions.

Namaste,
Joan

Are you Vedic?

Dear Joan,

I recently picked up your book the Idiot's guide to yoga and found it chock-full of information. My Ayurvedic doctor told me I should practice yoga, I went to a class and enjoyed it. My questions are what poses can I do that would help to alleviate hypertension? What breathing exercises should I do? How long should I try and hold the poses and how will I know if I'm doing them correctly? Thank you.

Anthony

Dear Anthony,

All of your questions can be answered by the qualified yoga teacher that you are studying with. You need personal guidance in the poses, one-on-one, face to face. All the yoga poses can alleviate hypertension if practiced with the necessary adjustments for your body type. Extending the exhales to inhales is a specific pranayama technique that helps to relax the body. This is a simple breathing exercise that can be done at any time. Of course, there are so many pranayama techniques to choose from, and that is why your questions require the personal guidance of your personal yoga teacher.

Namaste,
Joan

Bloomin' in Bloomingdale

Dear Joan,

I have been interested in yoga for awhile, however have not had any luck finding a class in the area in which I live. I am living in Bloomingdale currently. I would need a class that begins after 4:00 on the weekdays or anytime on weekends. Do you know of any that are available? I appreciate any help you could offer.

Thanks so much,
Brenda
Bloomingdale, Illinois

Dear Brenda,

Check out College of Dupage Cont. Ed. depart for yoga classes near you. Classes start right now.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Yo Partner!

Dear Joan,

Hi, Recently I bought a copy of the 'Idiots Guide to Yoga' and have found it to be an excellent reference point for many positions, as well as being full of useful information and points for thought. I particularly like the section at the end, detailing positions for 2 people. I am trying to find some more positions for 2 to try, but haven't found any other books that even look at this side of yoga - any recommendations??

Thank you!
Gail

Dear Gail,

Hunt down "Nateshvar" on the internet. He offers a program combining dance and partner yoga movements called "DansKinetics." I have heard rave reviews!

**Namaste,
Joan**



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Yo Joan



Sexual healing

Dear Joan,

Just cruisin' thru the site once again. Sort of my Oasis on the Net. Anyhow, read your Yoga Philosophy page. There seems to be a lot of emphasis re: controlling sexual urges. Is the philosophy advocating celibacy in favor of or as a prereq to spiritual growth OR is intent the issue (by intent mean is sexual just fulfilling a need vs.. sharing positive energy)? Or, have I missed the point entirely?



Thanks again.
Adonai,
Cliff

Dear Cliff,

Different schools of yoga approach this subject differently. Some advocate celibacy as a means to enlightenment. But most, if not all, see the role of the "householder" to be a valued and honored path on the road to enlightenment. A householder is one who is married with children. All schools of yoga see the relevancy in the control of the sexual nature. Brahmacharya (control of the sexual desire) is a thread, a sutra, that is a connecting thread to full realization of the other yamas of the yoga philosophy. Each yama and niyama are significant independently, yet together they create the full path to self-realization which is yoga. I can not possibly explain this better than a spiritual text used in yoga studies called "The Bhagavad Gita." Reflect on the following words from the Gita for awhile. See what happens in your understanding of this yama of brahmacharya.

"When contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them,

**and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger.
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**

Ticklish Tootsies

Dear Joan,

My name is Tim, I emailed you sometime back about reflexology and ticklishness. I was wondering if you were considering a reflexology video tape like the "my massage with Joan" tape? That would be great..I also have another question...What does extremely ticklish/sensitive feet say about ones well-being or personality. Is it connected the way the reflexes correspond to other parts of the body etc?

thanks
Tim

ps I am still ticklish but have learned to let go(with laughter) and absolutely love reflexology.

Dear Tim,

Ticklishness says you are a very dear and sensitive person. Obviously, your ticklishness does not prevent you from receiving reflexology treatments (foot massage), and loving them as well.

If ticklishness prevented you from experiencing massage, then I would explore various massage pressures to find a pressure that makes you less ticklish. Or, I would suggest seeking a professional counseling therapist to see if there are some issues regarding touch that need to be explored and resolved through psychotherapy. Or, I would suggest consulting a medical doctor to see if there is a medical condition that would prevent an enjoyable swedish type massage. Or, I would experiment with other massage modalities that do not require a stroking touch, like Reiki, Ortho-Bionomy, or Shiatsu. But, I really answered this question with suggestions for those who are not able to receive reflexology treatments. You are able to receive them and you love these treatments to boot! Keep doing what you are doing. Keep laughing and loving life. From what I can tell, the relationship to your ticklishness and the reflexes simply states that you are sensitive, kind, and candid. Stay in touch, Tim.

**Namaste,
Joan**

P.S. I do have a reflexology audio tape, "Foot Massage for Body Mind and Sole," but, great idea about the reflexology video tape. Perhaps one day in the Yoyoga bookstore future...

Yoga for 2

Dear Joan,

Regarding Gail, who asked for information (in last Yo Joan issue) about "yoga for 2", I recently saw an ad for a new video detailing yoga with partners. It is put out by Kripalu, and I believe you can reach them at www.kripalu.org.

Cheryl

Dear Cheryl,

Thank you, Cheryl! Yo partners, unite!

Namaste,
Joan

Jet Planes revisited

This letter is a response to my letter reply to a question in the last issue of Yo Joan...got that?

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your response. I agree, we all have our own baggage to burn. What works for Chris may not work for Joan. Recently, I met with my spiritual counselor. She told me that both meditation and yoga were important. It was "my" answer. She said meditation generally works from the heart chakra up, whereas yoga works mostly from the first three chakras (Yoga helps surface the "garbage energy" and meditation takes it to the crown). With that in mind, it seems perfectly logical to begin with the yoga, then meditate at the end of your practice. I've also learned that yoga really grounds you..I tend to get a tiny bit spacy when I meditate without my yoga. Anyhow, whenever I get there is fine...Life is for living!

Be Well,
Chris Gonzales
Hamburg, N.J.

Dear Chris,

Sounds like you have a wonderful spiritual counselor, Chris! Meditation is part of the 8 limb study of yoga. The hatha yoga postures lead one to meditation. As you stated in your last letter, an hour of hatha followed by seated meditation is an excellent way to study and develop. Hatha leads one into a meditative state of being. Hatha is grounding and meditation can be more difficult without this grounding - it is not impossible, just more difficult. This is not meant to say that hatha is easy, for it is not. Both hatha and

2/1/00

meditation require tremendous discipline to fully realize the holistic effects. Thank you for your response, and Bravo to Life!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Nighty night, sleep relaxed

Dear Joan,

Hi Joan..I just came across your site while surfing the net for information on yoga and saw the email address, so I grabbed the chance. I was hoping you could recommend a nice evening yoga sequence, position, and/or mediation I can practice each night before I go to bed, to prepare for a nice restful sleep. I have suffered with sleep disorder for years. The problem isn't falling asleep, really. It's mainly STAYING asleep. I fall asleep fast, but then wake up usually during the hours of 3 - 4am, at which time I can't get back to sleep. Of course, the more I toss and turn, the more frustrating it gets. I appreciate your taking the time to read my email.

Thank you. I look forward to any tips or suggestions you could offer me.

Most sincerely,
Beth
Los Angeles, CA

Dear Beth,

A general hatha yoga tip is that forward bends quite the body and backbends energize the body. When you want to go to sleep, do some quieting, unstressful forward bends. If your spine is limber, Halasana, the Asana For The Week is one pose to include as well. Fish pose is a backbend that can help you balance the forward bends. Hold fish pose for a shorter amount of time than the forward bends. Also, many people do not find forward bends comforting because of the competitive mind. They think that if they are not touching their toes they are not really doing a forward bend. I say, 'Hogwash!' Bend your knees, bend forward, keeping your back straight. The forward movement comes at the hip joint. It does not matter if you are moving forward an inch or a few feet. The benefits of the movement are not reliant upon the flexibility of your body. An open heart that moves forward one inch is more benevolent than a closed heart that moves forward two feet.

If after a series of forward bends, followed by shavasana, you still are not able to go into a restful sleep at 3-4am, perhaps you were meant to write books then? I do.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Every day in every way...

Dear Joan,

Would doing Yoga poses periodically throughout the day have the same effect as doing them all at once?

-Rev. John B. Gabel D.D.

Dear Rev. John,

Doing one yoga pose for 5 minutes in full concentration and awareness would have a stronger effect than doing an hour of yoga poses without mindful concentration and awareness. Mindful concentration means being present in the moment. Watching exactly what is happening now, in the body, in the mind, in the area around you. The mind, in particular, has a tendency to drift to other thoughts and places. This is one reason why I hardly use music in my classes (altho I do use mantras occasionally). Music tends to transport the mind to other places. Certainly, music has its healing effects. I was/am a musician, after all. I love music. However, music can be more of a hinderance than an aid in the development of mindful concentration when studying the yoga postures.

Eventually, the study of yoga postures leads one to a meditative state. This state of being is constant. It is an inner-core development that one lives and breathes. It is with one throughout the day and night.

**I amaste,
Joan**

Zzzzzzzz.....

Dear Joan,

I recently purchased your " Idiot's Guide to Yoga" book. It is very informative. In one section it says that yogis don't need to eat or sleep as much as others, due to pranayamas. You include the " cooling breathe" pranayama for appetite, but what is the pranayama for sleep.

Thank you,
Dan
Cleveland, OH

Dear Dan,

Various pranayama techniques can help one become more restful. One simple technique

would be to increase the exhale to your inhale. For example, inhale for 4 counts, and exhale for 8 counts. Slowly increase, inhale for 6 counts exhale for 12 counts, etc. I would recommend a regular and steady asana practice before more detailed pranayama techniques. Beginning breathwork can calm and quiet the body. A calm and quiet body can have a more restful sleep. Pranayama increases the life force, so ultimately the techniques are purifying and energizing. And so it is also, that the more one studies asana and pranayama, the stronger and clearer the body becomes. The times to rest become clearer and easier to realize. A steady practice of shavasana, the relaxation pose, can also make sleep easier and more fulfilling.

Namaste,
Joan

Skin deep

Good morning, Joan,

I have just enrolled for my first ever yoga class commencing next Wednesday 2nd Feb 2000. I have been told that it is marvelous for stress. I have a very unusual stress symptom - my skin itches all the time and it is driving me mad. I have been prescribed anti-depressants which I don't want to take and I am scared this damn thing won't go away and I won't find the cause.

Joan, do you think that yoga can ease a skin condition? I know this is a difficult one. I got your excellent Idiot's guide from local library here in South Dublin Ireland and although have never done yoga and haven't a notion what its all about - your book would encourage anyone to give it a try. Anyway Joan it was nice to pour my heart out to someone I don't even know. So, next Wednesday - yoga here I come !

Kind regards,
Jean H.
Dublin, Ireland

Dear Jean,

First of all, it is brave and commendable of you to reach out and get help for your condition. I am honored that you reached out to me. Once we face our fears, we can work through them. You are facing yours and reaching out. You are on a very rewarding path that has real possibilities for successfully handling your difficult condition. Your skin condition sounds very much like something called "shingles." I know many people who have been helped through shingles with the external application of aloe vera gel. The aloe vera plant is one worth keeping in your home. The juice in the aloe vera plant has soothing properties for burns and rashes of the skin. If you break off a leaf of the plant, inside the leaf is a gooey substance - the aloe vera gel. Rub this on your skin and let the gel sink in. I do not know your particular skin condition and I am not a doctor; however, I do know, from personal experience, that the gel from the aloe vera plant has been helpful with rashes and burns. Perhaps it will be helpful for your condition too.

Extremely wonderful that you are also starting a yoga class , Jean. Yoga balances the body's immune system through its systematic, slow process of body/breath movements.

There are 8 limbs to the study of yoga. I encourage you to pick up some more yoga books and continue your studies. As noted in the book you have, the 8 limbs are: 1) Yamas (Abstentions) 2) Niyamas (Observances) 3) Asanas (Postures) 4) Pranayama (Breath control)- these first 4 stages strengthen the life force. The next four are: 5) Pratyahara (Detachment), 6) Dharana (Concentration), 7) Dhyana (Meditation), 8) Samadhi (Pure Consciousness) - these last four limbs direct the life force. A steady and consistent practice of the first four limbs will help your body become stronger and healthier.

The fifth limb, Pratyahara, will help you in that it is the process of detaching from your senses. We are ruled by our senses. We live in a world and body that are dominated by our senses. The study of Pratyahara helps one to begin to recognize that outside influences, including our sense of touch, taste, etc., are just that - influences. They do not determine the peaceful existence that is inherent within each of us. The more we truly realize this, through practice and observation, the more this reality becomes a part of our external existence. This may sound very heavy and esoteric, so let me give you a simple exercise to begin your healing journey in pratyahara...

Gently place your little fingers and index fingers over your lips holding them closed, your middle fingers gently close your nostrils, your ring fingers gently close your eyelids, your thumbs close your ears. Open your nostrils, take a slow deep breath. Close off your nostrils and all the other points on the face and head. Do not strain. Only hold for a few seconds. Then release with a full slow exhale, and inhale deeply again. Cover all the points on the head again. Hold for a few seconds, release. As your breath and relaxation becomes more secure, you will be able to comfortably hold your breath for longer periods of time with all the points closed. Altho your skin is wanting to quickly change, bring your focus into the retention of the breath. Watch the internal reaction of your eyes, the nose. Watch the mouth. Watch the ears. Shift your focus from your skin to your breath retention, if only for a few seconds.

I am not a healer. I am someone who practices and teaches yoga, massage, and meditation. You have within your self, Joan, the capacity and ability for full healing. Continue reaching out. Continue your yoga practice. Continue your yoga practice with discipline. Discipline means every day. Yoga is an internal and external massage. Yoga involves meditation. Yoga is a complete system of body/mind health care. The key to its power is in the discipline of the practice. Shanti, om, shanti. Peace, all, peace.

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.

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.

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



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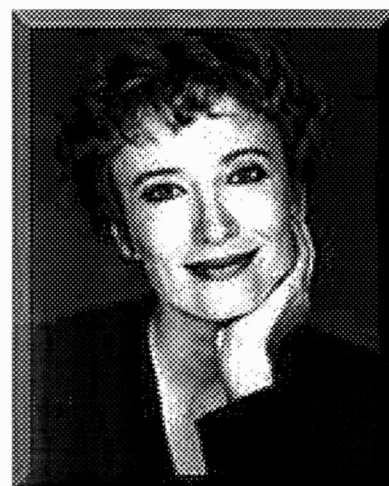
Yo Joan



The tale of the tibia

Dear Joan,

I have just fractured the top of my tibia and have some muscle strain/damage around the knee and am just about to be plastered. Can you please advise of the best strengthening exercises for when the plaster comes off.



Regards,
Yolanda

Dear Yolanda,

I would trust the physical therapist who will be working with you once the cast is removed for her or his expert guidance on the best strengthening exercises for you. Your doctor can guide you to the appropriate physical therapist. You may want to meet with the therapist before the cast is removed. There are exercises that often can be done while the leg is still in the cast. But this is only advisable under the consultation of your doctor and physical therapist. The key is not to rush the healing process. Physical therapists are very aware that this process takes time and a good physical therapist can effectively guide you in the necessary slow repetitions of movements needed for effective healing. Here's to your improving health. You have the motivation, it will happen.

Namaste,
Joan

Village People

Dear Joan,

Where can I get certified to become a yoga instructor? I am currently a certified fitness instructor at our local YMCA.

Thank you
Brenda
Idaho Falls ID

Dear Brenda,

There are numerous places that now offer yoga certification programs. Check out the Yoga Journal and Yoga International Magazines for Yoga organizations that offer these programs. I would recommend getting your certification through an organization that has an established reputation. Organizations like The Himalayan Institute, The Sivananda Center, The Kripalu Center, The Temple of Kriya Yoga, etc. Training programs vary from one month to one year. I tend to like the longer and more intensive programs that will help to establish you into the yoga lifestyle.

I've even seen weekend certifications! The shorter the program, well, you usually get what you pay for. Then again, some of the programs I have seen are so ridiculously expensive, you probably don't get what you pay for. Your motivations and reasons for certification should be completely explored to determine the appropriate school of training for you. Each school has a slightly different focus. Call them. Ask questions. Ask teachers. "Ask and ye shall receive..." although you will probably pay for it.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Upcoming Attractions!

Dear Joan,

I wrote you last month and told you that I had read your book "Idiot's Guide to Meditation" and enjoyed it very much. I recently bought your "Idiot's Guide to Yoga" and am enjoying it also. I intend to get your book on massage next. I would like to know what's in the works next - are you working on any other books? Please keep my informed so I can add to my "Joan Collection". Thanks.

Jonna Reed
Barberton, Ohio

Dear Jonna,

Thank you, Jonna! Yes, I am working on another book. It is a book I am very excited about. It is currently in good hands with my agent. I will let you know as things move along in the publishing world.

Namaste,
Joan

Millennium Milestones

Dear Joan,

What have I learned since the last millennium? I find my awareness of my posture during the day improving, and each time I pay attention to one area a little out of whack, I find another more subtle one. I have found that I can now jog a couple of miles with diaphragm breathing the whole time, and never get a pain in my side like I sometimes used to. My memory has never been great, but the other day I had thought of something while on my lunchtime walk, couldn't remember it when I got back to work, just relaxed and thought about the walk again, and after a minute it came to me! And I can now do the tree pose fairly consistently, something I thought was beyond me.

So, thank you! OK, I'll take some credit also. About the only thing you teach that I don't agree with that sex is OK for having kids and not much else :-)

Happy Valentines Day,
Namaste,
Lyle

Dear Lyle,

You are right, Lyle. I can't take much credit. YOU deserve the credit. Including the credit for your final statement on what I teach? (I never said that, and so I appreciate the smiley face ;-) Your personal ever-expanding experiences are wonderful, Lyle. You so eloquently state how this is a process that sometimes takes us subtly by surprise. Your examples of your increasing awareness is what a personal practice of hatha yoga is all about. Thank YOU!

Namaste,
Joan

Ice cube hands

2/15/02

Namaste,
Chris Gonzales
Lamburg, N.J.

Dear Chris,

Anger is usually associated with the venus and mars chakras. Poses that work the physically related areas of chest and abdomen help to release and balance anger. I have found warrior poses to be very effective for me in helping me to channel my anger into constructive actions. When my anger is not constructive, which it sometimes is not, I could lay a bet that I have not been doing warrior poses for awhile. If anger is a regular problem for you, bring more warrior poses into your hatha practice. Also, poses like triangle, and side angle stretch help to expand and open the heart chakra. When anger is released it needs to express itself. This expression can either be destructive or constructive. An open heart (venus) is the constructive and productive path of peace. Meditation and hatha practice can release anger and can also bring emotional balance. Both balance and/or release are possible.

Namaste,
Joan

Poses for posture

Dear Joan,

Hi Joan! The site continues to be inspiring. Thank you! I think my posture has gotten worse since I became a mother last year. Can you recommend poses to help me improve my posture? Thanks

Dawn
Lombard, IL

Dear Dawn,

Tadasana, Triangle, Warrior, all standing poses will help to improve your posture. Pregnancy can certainly throw off your posture with the little extra bundle you are carrying around your tummy. Once this bundle of joy comes out, it's time to get into a steady practice of standing postures. Lying flat on your back, something you can not do in the final stages of pregnancy, will also remind you of the length and breath of your spine. So, a regular practice of tree pose on the floor will also help to remind you of the balance that is still very much a part of you.

Namaste,

Joan

Back off!

I am writing to you, because I hope it is possible for me to ask a question regarding Yoga Asanas and possible injuries related to their (wrong) practice. I have been practicing Asanas for about 6 months by myself now. I practiced mainly Bhujangasana, Halasana, Sarvangasana and Vipareethakarani for most of the time, and since about 20 days I have incorporated many other asanas by following the well known book : Yoga 28 day exercise plan of Richard Hittleman.

In the beginning I read that it is normal to develop some aches in the body due to the fact that the asanas awake parts of the body that have had no exercise up till then. Unfortunately what I thought was a temporary pain in my back, due to the exercises, has still not gone away after 6 months, and has actually become worse. I have tried to be very careful in not exaggerating the extreme positions, but without any success in getting rid of the pain.

Apart from this ache in the middle of my spine, the regular practice of yoga has brought me many benefits and I do not want to stop.... I dislike the idea but I think I have no choice but to interrupt the asanas for now, until I find out what the problem is. Could you please help and perhaps give me some advice? How can I know if it is just due to the intensification of the asana practice, or whether I'm doing something wrong?

Many thanks,
Andrea Denotti
Amsterdam

Dear Andrea,

You are doing something wrong. It is normal to feel some aches and pains as we adjust our bodies into new poses that the body is not used to. However, you mention that your pain has been increasing. This means that you are definitely doing something wrong. The poses you mention all focus on the area of the back where you have the pain. You need to balance your practice more. If an area of our body gives us pain we must acknowledge this. We must honor the body. Don't fight it. Approach your body with a non-violent mind. Although the back is crying out for attention, do not ignore the quieter areas of the body that may be silently planning a rebellion.

My suggestion to you, Andrea, is to balance your hatha practice more with other poses. Stop doing poses that directly effect the area of your back that troubles you. A good leader surrounds herself with wise council. Your back is very wise. It is surrounded by muscles and tissues to support it. Don't ignore other areas of your body. Reach out for help from this important council within you. Give your back a chance to relax. Everyone and every back needs a vacation now and then.

Namaste,
Joan

Stress busters

I am a high school student who is doing a research paper on stress in today's fast moving life. I was just wondering how yoga could help release this stress?

sincerely
Lindsey

Dear Lindsey,

The Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami has done several scientific studies on yoga's positive effects in reducing and relieving stress. These tests have included three-year follow ups. The tests involve people with anxiety disorders who were instructed in a regular hatha and meditation practice. Significant changes in stress levels have been found in these patients after only 8 weeks of consistent practice. For more details on these studies check out the University of Miami's website.

Namaste,
Joan

Yoga Vacations

We are yoga students at the intermediate level and we would like to participate in a retreat or intensive to take our practice to a higher level. We have time away from work April 15-23, 2000. Do you offer or can you recommend a place? Thank you, Sheryl and Michael <mailto:griffim@rps205.com>

Dear Sheryl and Michael,

Go to your local bookstore and check out the popular national yoga magazines. Retreats and classes around the country are regularly advertised in these magazines.

Namaste,
Joan

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Please include the city and state you are from.

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.

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

3/1/00



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London Fog, Tummy Log

Dear Joan,

I practice everyday at home and at the weekend attend 2 ashtanga classes in London. I keep finding that I get stomach aches and constipation on Monday/Tuesday, it takes until midweek for things to settle down to normal. Are there any asanas or anything else I can do to counteract this problem? Obviously my home practice is not as intense as in the class, even though I try to repeat as much of the class practice as I can. Any suggestions gratefully received.



Kevin
London, England

Dear Kevin,

Interesting that your constipation happens after your ashtanga weekend. Is your home practice similar to your weekend classes? What are the differences? How does your diet differ over the weekend? Obviously something different is happening over the weekend that is throwing your system off at the beginning of the week.

Asanas that particularly help in the elimination process are inversions followed by standing poses. Squat pose is very effective first thing in the morning upon rising from bed. Lightning Bolt pose, a version of squat pose, is illustrated as this week's asana of the week. Depending on the strength of your knees, increase the bend to your level of comfort and hold for at least a few breaths. After this pose, the first thing to put into your digestive system in the morning is a glass of luke-warm water mixed with a quarter teaspoon of salt and honey. This gets the digestive system working in a gentle way and gently wakes the elimination system up too. By eliminating veils of misunderstanding,

3/1/00

continue your study of self-exploration, Kevin, as you move along the path of self-realization.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Advanced Techniques

Dear Joan,

Lately I have been experiencing this "buzz" in my head after I perform my yoga. I have been experiencing mucous build up in my throat and I have been also feeling queasy. I feel it most after my yoga. After I perform the triangle, side angle pose, warrior 1,2, and 3, deep knee bend(crescent moon), and ardha chandrasana, I feel a rush of energy. Do you think I need to modify my approach? It feels like this stuff is "unlocking" in me and really surfacing fast. I experience headaches as well. I know these poses are very good for "releasing anger", but I'm wondering if it is a little too much for somebody who really hasn't been in touch with his anger for years.

Namaste,
Chris Gonzales
Hamburg, N.J.

Dear Chris,

From your past letters to me, I notice you have an intense hatha practice. Most people can not put in the hours of extended study of hatha a day that you have stated previously you do. I would highly recommend reading a particular set of books by Swami Rama called "Path of Fire and Light". The set of books comes in two volumes. It is on advanced yoga practices. It is truly a remarkable and specific set of books about advanced yoga techniques and the resulting experiences possible. Swami Rama was a highly respected yogi who had written many books on yoga and was the scientific subject to numerous experiments on hatha yoga, and very specifically - pranayama, studies. He was unique in that it is quite difficult to find yoga masters who are willing to be subjects to such scientific experiments. By the time one becomes a yoga master, the sense of humility and loss of ego is so profound that experiments hold no interest. I consider Swami Rama's books to be masterpieces in hatha yoga literature. Swami Rama died in recent years. All of us owe a profound depth of gratitude to Swami Rama for putting into words his incredible learning and experiences of hatha yoga practice. He made the study of hatha yoga accessible to the masses while acknowledging that it is a science that requires tremendous dedication, time, and perseverance to master. Along with your extensive daily hatha practice, Chris, can you put in an additional 48 minutes a day in nadi shodhana?

**Namaste,
Joan**

A grin from ear to ear

Dear Joan,

Yogimeister, Is there some reason you yogis don't speak english? Asanas this and keopeke that...Come on, I flunked high school spanish and am intimidated by all these foreign terms...Is there any help for us who wish to put forth little effort?

Sincerely,
Mr. Sardonicus
Rockford, IL

Dear Mr. Sardonicus,

Sir, Sanskrit is the language that is often used in hatha literature. Yoga originated in India. Sanskrit was the original written text of yoga literature.. Sanskrit was also the language related to the "upper" class of the caste system in India. It was considered in the way Latin was considered, in years past, in the Roman Catholic Church. Only priests and the privledged had access to it's meaning. Therefore, only priests could read and interpret the bible. The language of sanskrit was, and is, considered to be a sacred language. In these modern times, finding access to ancient sacred traditions is an honored pursuit. Since the original yoga writings were in Sanskrit, Sanskrit scholars can interpret ancient texts and bring meaning to them. Those that transcribe these texts often put their own life experiences into the interpretations. For those of us who are not adept at Sanskrit, we must trust the honor and depth of knowledge of the interpreter. This is difficult to do. Just as an expert gymnast does not make one a yoga master, neither does a Sanskrit scholar make one a yoga master. Although perhaps some yoga masters are sanskrit scholars and/or gymnasts.

I understand your intimidation. I, too, sometimes feel intimidated in the use of Sanskrit. Especially when it's use stems out of ego or a teacher's motivation to distance or control a student. On the other hand, a student does need to respect the learning of the teacher or no learning will take place. The challenge for you, Mr. Sardonicus, is to find a teacher that garners your respect, trust and honor. Respect and trust develops over time and experience. Honor respects the divinity within. An honored teacher respects and encourages your divinity and is able to express their own openly. When you do find such a teacher, I would recommend that you study with him or her...and study hard. You will be in the company of a lotus who will enable you to blossom. When you find this teacher, keep your eyes and ears open, Mr. Sardonicus. Although your mouth may grin from ear to ear, your heart will surely blossom ever more.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Real Yoga

Dear Joan,

I am new to the yoga world and have to say I enjoy it immensely! I have recently read your idiots guide to yoga and it's a real help to a beginner like myself. I was wondering if by any chance you know of any good yoga classes an the new jersey/new york area. I look forward to reading more of your books!

M Borg

Dear M Borg,

Oh my, there are SO many classes there. I personally like Beryl Bender Birch. Her and her husband, Thom, teach Power Yoga classes in New York City. I have read both of Beryl's Power Yoga books and I think they are excellent. I have been to one of her seminars here in Chicago and consider her to be a wonderful teacher. If I were living in New York City, I would want to study with her more. Just pick up a phone book for more selections. Look up "Yoga" in the yellow pages - there are scores of listings. Go to classes and find a teacher that you relate to and can learn from. Each of us has different karma to burn, and there are numerous ways to burn it.

**Namaste,
Joan**

No time like the present

Dear Joan,

My name is Monphris, I am from Hong Kong. I started Yoga practice last night, yes, yesterday. And I'm feel it is interesting! I found some Yoga Website and go deeply only TWO by intuition. The first one is "The Sivananda Yoga Centre and the second one is yours. I visited amazon bookstore and going to buy 3 books, and there is one "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga". After read "About Joan", I have respect to You. But there is a question that I would like to ask, "Will you compose music for healing since you are a good musician?" Btw, nice to meet you and wish you all the best!!

Best regards,
Mon
Hong Kong

Dear Mon,

That was last night...what about today? Are you still that interested? I hope so. Write me back a few months down the road, and let me know how your interest is going then too. And also a few years down the road, please, Mon. Thank you!

In my life, I hope to work more with healing music. I am not sure yet how it will manifest in my life. My main background in performance was as a jazz singer with a trio

in smokey nightclubs. I can't imagine going back to performing in smokey nightclubs, though truly I loved my work then and the whole jazzy experience. I do miss music not being a more active part of my working life. I also truly love my work now, and hope to someday combine music again into my life on a different level than before. Thank you for your questions, Mon, and your wonderful fuel for my imaginations...

Namaste,
Joan

Crrrrrunch!

Dear Joan,

I have been a student of Astanga Yoga for about three years. I've also read your Idiot's Guide to Yoga and use it for my home practice. My first question is about whether or not I should tighten the buttocks muscles when practicing the Cobra, Upward Facing Dog, or Bridge asanas. Some teachers say to contract these muscles, while others say to leave these muscles soft in order to allow the lower back to stretch further and to increase blood supply to the spine.

Also, is it proper form to allow the head to crunch all the way back in asanas like the Camel, or should leave a little room so I won't crush any vertebrae? I don't have a problem with letting my head fall all the way back when I'm doing neck rolls, but when I add gravity, it seems like I could sustain an injury. Isn't there a major artery that runs down the back of the neck?

Thanks for your time in answering these questions. I look forward to more clarity when in these poses.

Lisa
Dallas, Texa.

Dear Lisa,

Follow your experienced teacher's instructions in the pose. As for me, I instruct students to strengthen the leg muscles and tuck the tailbone under to lengthen the spine. In tucking the tailbone, you are in effect tightening the buttock muscles.

Regarding the head "falling" back in camel, you should have control of your neck muscles in the same way that you tighten the back legs so as not to overstretch the lower back in the earlier poses. If you let the neck fully fall back, there is not awareness in the pose. You could injure your neck. Lift the neck up and with full awareness and concentration, tilt the head back as you lift. The Carotid Arteries run through the neck. The medulla oblongata, the control center of the universe in your body, is located near the fifth vertebrae of the back of your neck. This is the area, in the yoga chakra energy system of study, where energy enters the body. So, you see, it is very important to develop keen awareness of the movements of your neck.

Namaste,

Joan

One and the same

Dear Joan,

I was wondering if it is possible to practice more than one type of yoga type exercising, because since I bought your book, "Idiots Guide to Yoga", I have been practicing it. But, recently, I began taking some classes on Dahnhak , Which is Korean based, but I still very much enjoy the Hatha Yoga of India.I was wondering if it was all right to practice both?

~Kaleena~
Queens NY

Dear Kaleena,

I am not familiar with Dahnhak. To become a master of anything one must be devoted and focused. If you want to dabble here and there, you can be a talented artist. If you are one-pointed in your focus, the artist and the beautiful painting merge into one.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Back off!

i got your idiots guide to yoga and i love it. i'm trying to do yoga every morning after i ride the exercise bike to warm up but i always get light headed. i thought it only happened when i did the sun salutation but it happened today with the lightning bolt. what do i do? also, if i'm trying to lose weight which exercises and how long should i practice every day.

brynne

Dear Brynne,

Your blood pressure may be low. What have you been eating? Cut out the pastry and coffee. Quick highs bring quick lows. Are your movements between postures slow and fluid or quick and shallow? Sudden movements between inversions and upright poses can cause light headedness. However, there may be other reasons for lightheadiness too. Consult your physician if the problem continues.

Regarding weight loss, you'll only hear common sense weight loss approaches from this

yogini. Increase your heart rate by doing more vinyasa (flowing connecting poses). Don't eat between meals. Lighten up your meals. Open up your mind. And, pick up a copy of the book, "Fat is a Feminist Issue" by Susie Orbach.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Details, details...

I am hoping that you can give me some alignment tips on coming into the above posture. I have a hard time mostly when doing this pose although there have been times when I have felt the front to back action dynamic to the posture and this has felt energizing and wonderful. OK this is what I'm doing to come into the pose; let's say the left leg is the supporting leg: press downward through the leg into the foot and ground into the heel and root of big toe. Firm the inner ankle and make sure the foot is square to the front of mat. Contract the quad by lifting the kneecap and firm the inner thigh. Squeeze the left buttock. Take hold of the right leg and bend it behind you - I am holding the inside of my right ankle (?) On an inhale start to suck the navel to the spine, lift the chest to my chin and deepen my shoulderblades down my back - preparing for the backbending action as I take the right foot up and back - towards the back wall and away from my derriere. Exhaling I reach forward through my left fingers and lengthen in both directions. I find it very hard to keep my shoulders square to the front and to have my right thigh parallel to the floor. Do you have any quick pointers or hints. I love the pose and am OK doing other balance work like Virabhadrasana 111 or even Ardha Chandrasana.

Hope to hear from you soon and thanks for this fantastic website and your attention to detail.

Namaste
MEG

Dear MEG,

Since I do not practice this particular pose, I obtained the assistance of Diane Dombeck, a wonderful yoga teacher in the Chicago area, who currently apprentices with Gabriel Halpern at his popular Iyengar based Chicago yoga center called "Yoga Circle."

Here is Diane's response:

"I found that in order for me to keep my shoulders square to the front, I need to really circularize my support leg shin; (move the inside of my support leg shin forward strongly while pressing back strongly through back support leg thigh). Also keep extension in spine by elongating from mid thoracic to crown. I would direct her to look at Light on Yoga for tips. "

Thanks, Diane!

**Namaste,
Joan**

YOYOGADABADOO!!!!

I was in a bookstore buying myself a gift and I happened to find your Idiot's Guide To Yoga. Even though I am the farthest thing from an Idiot, I bought the book anyway. I like the color orange and It was an autographed book. I began reading the book and I couldn't put it down. "This is exactly the way I want to live my life" I said to myself. I want to be at peace with everything, especially myself. What a great inspiration your book has been to me. Thank You very much. A great thing about your book is that it is so very UNbiased. It takes a person with their senses wide open to write these things. I want you to be my model, the person who shows me that something great can be achieved. I will use your words as a tool in my everyday life and try to pass this valuable material on to as many people as I can. What a gift you have given this world! THANK YOU!

Namaste,
Marie

P.S. I am also very thrilled that you teach at COD, I live 15 minutes away! HAH! I always thought that famous writers were so unreachable, so superhuman. But you're real, you're nearby, and I hope to meet you someday!

Dear Marie,

"YAY! YIPEEE! THANK YOU!!! I LOVE YOU, TOO!!!! YOYOGADABADOO!!!!"
(That's my ego talking) "Earth to Joan...Earth to Joan" (that's my saturn chakra). Aside from my truly superhuman qualities (ego, ego), I am really a regular Joan with regular faults (egoing, egoing). If your love for me should ever wain, may you continue to hold the teachings close to your heart; for it is in the teachings that true-love resides and lives forever (egone).

Namaste,
Joan

p.s. Ego aside, Eve wrote the book with me, Saturn established, Venus open, I do love you, too.

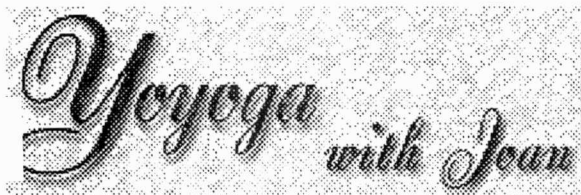
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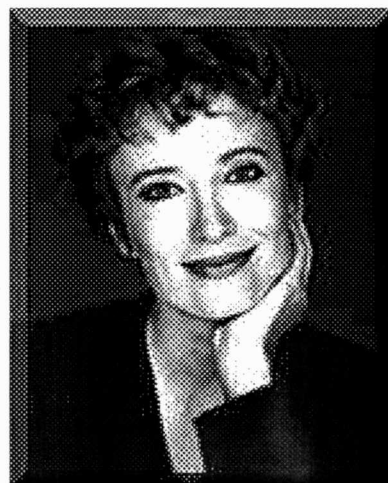
Yo Joan



Up, Down, And All Around!

Dear Joan,

I saw a picture on an Australian yoga website which was captioned "Urdhva Dhanurasana" but it looked like the wheel, I thought Dhanurasana was the "Bow" which you do on your stomach. Is there a difference between the Chakrasana and Urdva dhanurasana postures or is it two names for the same thing?



Namaste,
Kevin
London, England

Dear Kevin,

Urdhva means upward. Dhanura means bow. So, Urdhva Dhanurasana means "upward facing bow." It is the same pose as Chakrasana or wheel pose. This pose activates all the chakras. Chakras are the centers of energy that exist between the base of your spinal column and the crown of your head.

Namaste,
Joan

Balancing Act

Dear Joan,

Today, I realized it was the first of the month when I saw you put the new edition on line. Yes, I'm loving my yoga practice..all sorts of good things coming up. 48 minutes of "nadi shodhana"..do you mean breathing technique..refresh me. Oh! Yeah! Tell me if this is what you are talking about: 2 fingers on the forehead, thumb closes one nostril, inhale through the other, open nostril,close that nostril, open the other nostril, and exhale, then inhale through that nostril and keep alternating. I have been doing this before my meditation for about 5 minutes. I call it "pranayama", but I guess it has a more specific name? Why do you suggest this technique and why so long?

I have a few other questions as well. First off, I would like to shorten my practice a little more. I'm wondering if I am doing some unnecessary "extra" poses. For example, do I really need to do the fish pose (with legs extended out) if I am doing the full-lotus fish? Do I need to do the "straight-leg" peacock if I can do the full-lotus peacock? Do I need to do a full-lotus plow if I do the plow earlier in my routine? Do I need to do the lotus shoulderstand if I do the shoulderstand in the beginning of my routine? Can you "lotus" what I'm trying to say? (smiles) Please let me know.

Aljo,
Chris
Hamburg, NJ

Dear Chris,

First of all, Nadi-Shodhana IS a pranayama technique. The way you describe doing it is fine, except I would close the two center fingers into my closed palm and use the ring finger and thumb of right hand to alternate the nostril breathing. This is a technique for balancing the sun and moon within, in other words, balancing the male and female energies within, in still other words, balancing the physical and emotional aspects within.

Regarding your final questions, Chris, you do not need to do modifications of poses if you are doing the full poses. The modifications are warm-ups to the full poses. As you continue your powerful studies, Chris, reflect on these beautiful words I recently read in the Yoga Chicago Newspaper from a well-known yoga teacher named David Swenson, "Advancement in your practice is not in the asanas. It's in your awareness and in the extent to which you can carry that awareness over into the rest of your life." Continue on in hatha (balance).

Namaste,
Joan

"REVELATION"!!

Dear Joan,

A few weeks ago I had an accident during an Astanga yoga hour. Doing a "spinal twist" my hips went one

way and the muscles supporting the lower spine went another. Ouch! My own stupid fault, certainly not the teachers. I saw the lithe young woman in front of me moving easily in all sorts of extreme angles. Not recognizing that I was at least twenty years older, much more bulky and rigid in body structure yet trying to move that extra ten percent. Listen to my body or to the instructions of the teacher? No way. Do you remember when our mothers used to tell us "look both ways before crossing the street", "wear clean underwear everyday because you don't know when you will be brought to the hospital" (I am sure ambulance drivers would immediately drive the victim back to the scene of the accident upon discovering at the hospital that he/she had dirty underwear on). I am sure this motherly advice goes back to the stone age with stone age mothers warning their stone age children "not to play with stray mastodons". Words of good advice are sort of like "muzak" - you know it's there but really don't pay much attention to it.

My revelation came suddenly (I am a slow learner). As I was semi-prone and not able to move very much without pain I started reading the book you recommended, Swami Rama's "Yoga and Psychotherapy - The Evolution of Consciousness". Already in Chapter 1 ("The Body and Hatha Yoga") I began to realize the interaction between physical movement and mental attitude & tension, for example in his explanation of how "the posture a person takes is a reflection of his state of mind". His explanations of "how" and "why" and "how to" are really very wise, logical and easy to understand. There is no competition in doing asanas, neither with others nor with oneself. It is difficult for me to explain in words but it was sort of like "Hey, that's what yoga is really all about". Although I of course have heard about some of the concepts before, this is the first time it has really started to all come together. It was indeed a revelation. It was certainly worth that little bit of pain. Thanks so much for putting me onto the book!

Namaste, Ed
Norway

Dear Mr. Ed,

Wonderful, wonderful Ed! Not your pain, but that it brought you to deeper understandings of your practice. You mention that the teacher is not responsible...yes, you are the one in your body making the decisions; however, the teacher has an obligation to teach the principles of yoga's non-competitive aspects. This becomes ever more difficult as poses become more difficult, particularly in an Ashtanga yoga practice. This type of practice requires a continual movement from one pose into another. The competitive mind fits so naturally into this style of practice. Perhaps this is one reason why this style of yoga study has taken on such strong appeal in America? It is hard to witness the competitive mind and not get caught up in it. Just as students can be competitive in their studies, so can teachers be. Teachers may consciously or unconsciously encourage competitiveness in students. Your letter is a wonderful testament of growth.

Namaste,
Joan

User-Friendly Gita

Dear Joan,

ello again, joan! hope that all is going well. life moves on at a frenetic pace here in NYC but i am making a

3/15/00

deliberate effort to relax, breathe and stretch! i recently purchased a copy of the yoga sutras of patanjali and found it somewhat difficult to understand. is there a "user-friendly" version/translation that you recommend? any input would be greatly appreciated.

M Borg
NYC, NY

Dear M Borg,

I will recommend to you several translations that I really love. First of all, "'The Heart of Yoga' developing a personal practice," by T.K.V. Desikachar. This is heart felt in its writing, easy to read, and thorough in its explanations. A beautiful literary work of art. Ultimately meditations come from the heart, and certainly Mr. Desikachar exemplifies this in his beautiful, timely thought-provoking book. Next, Alice Christensen's "Yoga of the Heart." This book gives a very current look at the yamas and niyamas. It gives exercises and examples of experiencing these important yoga principles that exist within the sutra. Although this is not a book of the complete sutra, it is an excellent and sensitive interpretation of the yamas and niyamas. Lastly, Georg Feuerstein's "The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali." This is a fine translation from a well known Sanskrit scholar. I must also recommend the Bhagavad Gita translation by Geoffrey Parrinder. I really like this translation...it is simple, clear, and not at all intimidating.

**Namaste,
Joan**

An earful

Dear Joan,

Let me tell you how very much I love your and Eve Adamson's "Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga"! Your uncomplicated and easy approach to yoga is refreshing and encouraging for even people who think yoga has only to do with religion and contortionists! - I thought that for a long time before starting practicing yoga regularly and with great joy since the last three years!

My second reason for writing is to ask you about the effect yoga can have on our ears - I am aware that apart from being "in charge" of our hearing our ears are also our balance organs, but nevertheless, I have a number of books where asanas are described with their effects on the body and mind, but have not come across any asanas or pranayama etc. that would mention any benefits to our ears... can you help?

Thank you for your kind attention,
Marlies
London, UK

Dear Marlies,

According to Yoga Literature, and specifically to Swami Rama's "Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2", everything started with sound. Sound preceded light. Difficult to understand

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when our mind are used to experiencing the opposite. For example, first we see lightning and the sound of thunder follows later. We experience sound as traveling slower than light, yet sound vibrations created light. When we see lightning, we are blinded by its brilliance. It is all that we see. Because of its great power, we can not see the truth that is much deeper. In the same way, in order to see the light within us, we must remove the powerful and often blinding obstacles and distractions. We must move past the external illusions to sense, feel, know the deeper truth. We can not be fooled into thinking power is external. Although it may manifest externally, the source of the power is internal. A deaf person feels the deeper vibrations of sound...more so than most of us with hearing. "Thus in the process of creation of sound a visual form follows, because every sound has a form." - Swami Rama. Vibrations - sound - light, and so the yoga story goes.

Mantra is the yoga study of sound and its ability to uncover layers of illusions. Mantra/sound has been a significant part of my yoga and meditation studies. I worked many years as a professional musician and so mantra was very natural for me to move into. Anyone can do mantra. You do not have to be a musician, or have a perfectly pitched voice. In its deepest essence, mantra is vibration. It is the sound within silence. Ask your yoga teacher for a simple mantra for you to work with. If you do not have a personal yoga teacher, here is a simple mantra for you to repeat everyday... "Om shanti (pronounced "aum shawntee") translation..." All- peace." Repeat this three times upon rising in the morning. Listen to the silence afterwards. Repeat this mantra three times before retiring for the evening. Listen to the silence afterwards. The silence after the mantra is as important as the saying of the mantra. It is within silence that truth is revealed.

Namaste,
Joan

P.S. By the way, I am going into the recording studio this weekend with Kathleen Lahiff (also known as Swami Nandananda, Mahaswami) to record a new mantra album of her's. She was the technical editor of our book (Eve Adamson and I), "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation." She has produced quite a few wonderful mantra albums and I am honored to be working with Kathleen on this new one. There are a number of people involved in the recording and it is a joyous project to work on. Katie's albums can be purchased through the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago or directly from Katie at email: ktlnada@xsite.net . I will also be recording a mantra tape next month with another one of my beautiful teachers, Barbara Linderman. We are currently developing the recording. I am so honored and happy to be recording these mantra projects with these wonderful teachers.

A Raleigh for Teachers!

Dear Joan,

I have truly enjoyed your web site and the "Idiots" book. I've been practicing yoga for seven years and been leading a group of friends for five years. I just moved to Raleigh, NC. I would love to teach here but, imagine I need some certification. How do I go about this? Thank you for your attention.

Shanti,
Jo.
Raleigh, North Carolina

Dear Jo.,

DO check out the Yoga Journal and Yoga International Magazines for advertisements of teacher training programs across the country. There are numerous ones to choose from. Wonderful that you are already on the road with your group of friends, Jo. A merry group, I am sure. Continue on...merrily!

Namaste,
Joan

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

**If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.
Joan respectfully gives each letter received her individual and kind attention.**

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Yoyoga with Joan

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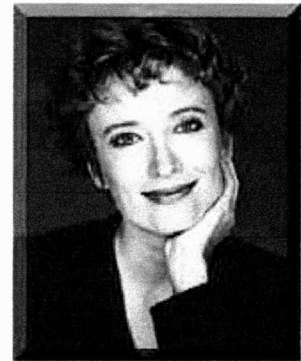
Yo Joan



Eyes wide shut

Dear Joan,

Could you please tell me what exactly meditation is? When I close my eyes and sit and concentrate, nothing happens. What am I doing wrong? How would I know if what I am doing is right? I have heard that meditation has great health results - lowered blood pressure, calmness, peace of mind - but what is the difference between closing your eyes to relax and meditating?



Thanks,
Jill
Downers Grove, IL

Dear Jill,

Relaxation is the first step in meditation. First one must learn how to relax the body at will. One way to do this is to bring your attention to your breath. Slow your breath down. Watch the movement of your abdomen as it moves with your breath. Watch the abdomen for a few long breaths. Do not force your breath. You do not need to even hear your breath. Simply observe. Now bring your attention a little higher to your chest. Watch this area as you breathe. Keep the breath slow. Imagine your worries and troubles leaving with your exhale. Breathe in fresh clear energy and exhale all your troubles and worries. Let your shoulders relax down away from your ears. Let your jaw completely relax. Your lips gently close. Now, try and make the transition between your exhale and your inhale smooth. The exhale smoothly flowing into the next inhale. Continue to watch this flowing movement of your breath.

These are beginning steps into meditation. Don't worry about doing something wrong. Simply follow these simple steps everyday for a few minutes in the morning, and a few minutes in the evening. Persist in this practice of watching the breath a few minutes a day for 40 days. It takes approximately this long to begin to see the health building results of this practice.

Meditation helps one to become aware of deeper states of consciousness. These "states" are not akin to states like Idaho or Missouri. "States of consciousness" involve inner travel within one's self for a deeper and truer sense of reality. This inner travel leads to a deeper understanding and sense of peacefulness that transcends outward influences. One witnesses the movements of consciousness - thoughts that flutter through the mind. Soon one

begins to realize that these thoughts are changeable and mutable. Then one begins to uncover movements of subconscious thought. This takes time and practice. Even deeper states of consciousness exist. Through continued meditation practice these deeper inner states of consciousness can be experienced. It is not a mystery. Access to these deeper states are accessible to everyone who is willing to devote the time and discipline that is needed for this inner journey of self-realization.

Meditation is not complicated, but the 'discipline' of daily meditation practice is quite difficult. And, it is only through the discipline of meditation practice that one can experience meditation. Although relaxation leads to meditation, relaxation is not meditation. Relaxation is simply the 'first step.' The next essential ingredient for a successful meditation practice is 'discipline.'

How does one acquire discipline? Here are some ways to get you started:

***Take a meditation class. The camaraderie of a class will keep you on time and on track.**

*** Keep your daily meditation time specific.
For example, 7AM-7:15AM = Meditation time.**

***Pick a specific place to do your meditating. Preferably an uncluttered place free of obstacles and distractions.**

***Use a timer and set it for the length of time you wish to meditate. This way you will not be distracted by time.**

How will you know when your meditation is working? You will feel more peaceful in times of stress. You will be less reactive and will feel more confident. Numerous scientific studies have been documented showing the positive effects of meditation in lowering blood pressure and reducing hypertension. The benefits of the practice are numerous and varied. You will experience and know these benefits as you persist in practice.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Bloomin' in Bloomindales

Dear Joan,

I would like to inquire if you know where I can get teachers certification near Bloomingdale, IL? I moved here recently and am due to deliver a baby in 4 weeks and would like to eventually teach. I am in DuPage County if you don;t know where Bloomingdale is. Thank you in advance for any information you may give.

Sincerely,
Evangeline
Hamburg, NJ

Dear Evangeline,

There are numerous teacher certification programs in the city of Chicago. Pick up a copy of the local Yoga Chicago newspaper or contact them on the web for more info. regarding various programs. I went through a 14 month teacher certification program at the Temple of Kriya Yoga in 1994. It was an incredible experience.

Many shantis to the new beautiful soul you are bringing into this world right about...now.:)

**Namaste,
Joan**

Retreats

Dear Joan,

I would be interested in your recommendations of yoga retreats.

Namaste, Ed
Bratislava, Slovakia

Dear Ed,

There are numerous retreat centers around the world. The Sivananda Center has retreat centers in various countries. I have been to their "Grass Valley" retreat center in Northern California on numerous occasions. It is truly wonderful. Vegetarian meals, hatha classes morning and afternoon, evening meditation with swamis, clean and simple environment, beautiful people sharing along in this experience. The retreats run year round. You can stay for as long as you like. Numerous other organizations can be found on the internet that also offer yoga retreats. Organizations like: The Himalayan Institute, The Kripalu Center, Integral Yoga, Ananda Center, and The Self-Realization Fellowship.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Blockbusters

Dear Joan,

I enjoyed your "idiot's" guide to Yoga immensely. Is there any way I could purchase your yoga videos? PRETTY PLEASE? I am a beginner and there are no classes available in my area. I think I have found my true calling. ;-) I am going to try an audiotape, but I am nervous about it without seeing someone do the poses.

Sincerely,
Heather Labuda
Cranberry Twp. PA

Dear Heather,

Even with sugar on top, I could not get you copies of the yoga tapes. These yoga tapes are only available through

the College of DuPage library system. Perhaps you can get your library to rent them for you? These are the only video tapes on yoga I have ever made (approximately 5 years ago), and have no immediate plans on making any more. I prefer audio. All the very best!

**Namaste,
Joan**

20/20

Dear Joan,

I'm still fairly new to yoga - only been studying for about a year. I've read the "Idiot's Guide to Yoga," and look forward to reading the "Idiot's Guide to Meditation" as I've just begun to incorporate meditation into my life. I have some questions about my practice schedule for you.

Currently, I practice asanas for 20 minutes every morning followed by 10 minutes of meditation (which is slowly increasing). In the early afternoon, I generally practice asanas another 20 minutes. Two mornings of the week, due to trips to the gym, I have the time to complete 45-60 minutes of asanas. However due to my shower being pushed back, I don't have the time for the afternoon practice on those days. Is this all right, or shouldn't I lump my 40 minutes into one session like that? Should I figure out a way to keep the 20 min afternoon practice regardless of what I do in the morning? I haven't noticed a change in the way I feel when I do this. Other days, I find I have more time in the afternoon, so I do the 20 minutes in the morning and then up to 1 hr in the afternoon. Any reason this would hurt? My basic theory has been to be very consistent about the 20 morning minutes, and 20 minutes at some other time (morning or afternoon). Anything else I can fit in is great. Am I off track?

The reason I'm concerned about my schedule is that for the first 6 months or so of my practice, I wasn't really concentrating on what I was doing. I was being very inconsistent and yoga was kind of a recreational thing for me. I fit it in whenever I could (20 min here, 60 there) . Since then, I've discovered the wonders of practicing consistently and with purpose. In addition, I have several 50 minute videos that I adore. I am trying to figure out a good schedule that will allow for them while allowing me the benefits of regular practice.

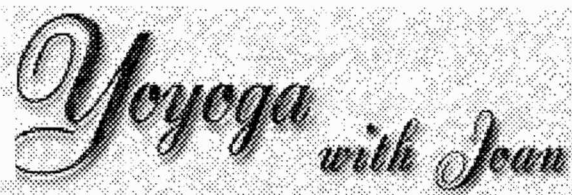
Thank you for your response and all your wisdom. It is greatly appreciated since I don't have access to a local yoga instructor.

Hari Om, Om Tat Sat,
Theresa

Dear Theresa,

Keep the consistent mornings of 20 minutes. Continue doing what you are doing of adding time throughout the day whenever it fits for you. You do not want your practice to become a chore or to be dispensed out in minutes. The twenty minutes in the morning seems to fit easily and steadily into your life. The benefits of a consistent practice are exactly what you proclaim them to be. Eventually the practice continues throughout the day, whether or not you are in a yoga pose.

You are doing beautifully, Theresa!



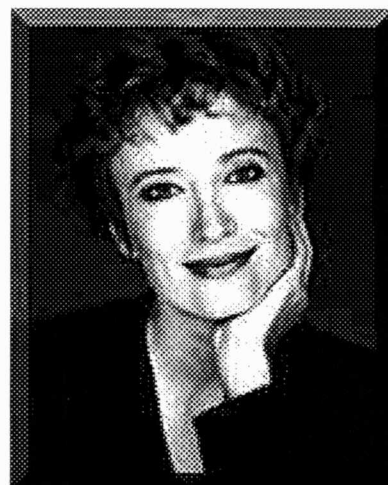
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New Mama/Papa Yoga

Dear Joan,

Just a quick question, my wife and I are expecting our first child, my wife doesn't practice yoga. She has been to one class and I haven't been doing it for some time now. I was wondering if there is any yoga position she can do to keep her flexible and strong? Okay another quick question, is there something the two of us can do together?



Thank you.
New Dad

Dear New Dad,

"The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," we have a chapter on this, but I will narrow a few choices down for you in this brief answer. Depending on the month of pregnancy, the poses change to accommodate the changing body. I would recommend supported poses, as demonstrated beautifully in the book, "Relax and Renew" by Judith Lasater. Stacked blankets help support the body by putting less strain on the body and permitting it to open and release. Many of the standing poses can also be adopted through the use of a chair. All the yoga poses, with the exception of complete inversions, can be adjusted for the pregnant body. As for partner yoga, here's a good one to do together - child and dog. One person do downward dog pose with hands on the hip joint of the person in child's pose. Person in child's pose holds onto the heels of the person in dog. Child's pose knees are separated to support baby. As mother advances in months, downward dog will be the only pose to be done by mother in this partnering. See page 233 in CIG to Yoga for more details on the particular posture just described.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Heart Disease

Dear Joan,

This is a small request for help which I think would be of great help to my mother. Recently she has been diagnosed as having cardiovascular disease. She is very keen to try some asanas, although, as she has been advised not to drive, she is finding it very difficult to get to a class. Although I know that the best thing would be for her to get to a class run by an experienced teacher, at the moment that is not possible. I don't want to show her anything that would aggravate her condition, but I want to help! From your 'Idiot's Guide' we understand that inverted postures may help - but given her age and the fact that this is all new to her my mum is reluctant (and so am I!). Could you (or anyone else reading?) suggest any asanas that could help her?

Thank you...
Gail
Nottingham, UK

Dear Gail,

Inverted positions should only be practiced upon consultation with your doctor. People with high blood pressure should avoid inversions. Simple forward bends followed by back bends exercise the heart area. Sun-salutations, done slowly and with awareness, are terrific ways of gently and efficiently working the heart. Sun-salutations also work other major muscles groups and organs, so the work-out is quite holistic for the body.

As you and your mother probably already know, the diet is also very important. A low-fat vegetarian diet is recommended. Pranayama (breathing techniques) and meditation are highly recommended for those with heart disease. Alternate nostril breathing, as referred to in the last issue of Yoyoga, should be a regular morning practice. Do not retain breath with both nostrils closed, simply open one nostril as you hold the other. Focus on the easy transition from one nostril to the next. If even only for 5 minutes a day, the positive results of this pranayama technique will be noticed in a short time. So that is the "number one" posture I would recommend for your dear mother - alternate nostril breathing.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Starting at square, a really square, one...

Dear Joan,

4/15/00

I am a fairly new yogi. I have been practicing it for about five hours a week but I can not get the balance needed for the headstand. I still use a wall whenever I do this posture. Are there any poses or techniques that you can recommend. Also, how does power yoga differ from normal yoga.

Sincerely,
Dan Karczynski
Orland Park, Illinois

ps. I have thoroughly read through your Idiot's Guide and loved it! Do you know of any other books that are more advanced than the Idiot's Guide but are not too advanced for a yogi of one year?

Dear Dan,

One has to have strong stomach muscles to effectively go up and to stay in headstand. A strong abdominal area will prevent one from unsteadiness in the pose. A strong abdomen strengthens the lower back area so that the muscles there can support the inversion. There is absolutely nothing wrong with using a wall. The important aspect of the pose is the inversion itself. Headstands improve circulation, strengthen the nervous system, emotions, and brain. Inversions should not be attempted if one has high blood pressure.

I understand the desire to be free of the wall. It took me a long time to develop the confidence to go up into headstand. I learned a "dolphin technique" through my studies at the Shivananda Center in Los Angeles that helped me greatly in preparing for headstand. Here it is...

On hands and knees, Interlace your hands together and rest down on your elbows. Keep your elbows directly under your shoulders. Come up into downward dog, but come up on your elbows rather than your hands. Now glide forward so that your chin touches your clasped hands. Then push yourself back up into elbow dog. Continue this movement of moving to your cupped hands and then back into elbow dog. This is difficult to do, but it is very effective in developing arm and abdominal strength for headstand.

I remember watching the Shivananda swamis effortlessly go up into headstand and I used to think, "If I ever will go smoothly into headstand surely I will be more enlightened." Well, here I am now, headstands are a regular part of my life, as are a few extra pounds. Downward Dog It! I am not lighter, I am heavier! But, all kidding aside, headstands do give one a new perspective on life. By turning the world upside down, we begin to clearly see what we face on our feet.

Finally, in regards to your last couple of questions. Power yoga is a new term to a vinyasana or series of poses. The poses become increasingly difficult and the series is very specific. The vinyasana begin with sun salutations and go on from there. Books I would recommend for this are Beryl Bender books on Power Yoga. Also, Swami Rama books for additional hatha and pranayama techniques, and for overall toning, Swami Kriyananda's book "The Spiritual Science of Kriya Yoga."

Namaste,

There's something that has been bothering me for a while and I was wondering if you could shed some light on the subject to maybe ease my worries. I think that the "Shoe " comic today in the Sunday paper kind of says it. The link is http://macnelly.com/shoefolder/shoe_archive.asp (if you look at it today (4/2) since it keeps it updated by day). In your first chapter on yamas (book - "Yoga for a New Day") you say to stay away from words that "slander, degrade, or hurt another person." I find the word "idiot" very insulting. I even find it much harsher than dummy which seems lighter to me. And I want to get your book and probably will but I have a hard time getting past the idiot part. I was hoping you could help me with this.

Thanks,
C.

Dear C,

I understand completely your resistance to this title. I share your resistance. I am not a guru or swami, you see, I am someone just like you! Please read our letter to readers on back of front cover of the CIG book, and you will see clearly that Eve and I were troubled by the title too. I definitely see the contradiction in teaching principles of non-violence in action, thought, and "words," and then to author three "Idiot's Guide" books (which, by the way, I say now with head held high, nose parallel to floor). If you pick up any Idiot's Guide, you will find that the authors go into tremendous detail, and researched expertise about the subject of the book. The books are all written in styles that are non-intimidating and are easy to read. As Dr. Bernie Siegal wrote regarding our CIG to Meditation book, "...read this book, learn from it, and meditate. I guarantee that the revelation that ensues will lead to your transformation. Now don't be an idiot and ignore my advice." (Gee, Dr. Bernie Siegal praised us, my nose seems to be rising...earth to idiot status...nose back parallel to floor.)

Our "CIG to Yoga" (CIG is much easier for me to say) book came out in late 1997. It was the first of this type of "titled" book to come out on the subject of yoga. Since then, many similarly titled books have come out on yoga and on a vast array of esoteric sciences. In fact, the person who wrote the beautiful foreword to our book, Georg Feurstein, surprisingly came out with "Yoga For Dummies" a year later! CIG to Yoga quickly became a very popular book and has helped to introduce many people to yoga philosophy, history, postures, and benefits. It has encouraged people who would not have beforehand picked up ancient books of yoga literature like the Bhagavad Gita or the Yoga Sutra. After the Idiot's Guide, some people are now not only picking these old books up, but actually even reading them! After the extensive research and time Eve and I devoted to the content and quality of the CIG books, here are some lessons I have learned:

- 1. To not judge a book by its cover.**
- 2. To continue to work to release the big ego that defends my non-idiot status.**
- 3. To bless our "competitors," the "Dummies." Yoga is non-competitive.**
- 4. To laugh at the signs of the times. The 70's brought us the Brady Bunch, The 80's brought us Reaganomics, and the 90's brought us the Idiot's Guides?**
- 5. Welcome 2000!**

4/15/00

Namaste,
Joan

P.S. Thank you, Macmillan Publishing, for all the wonderful opportunities you have presented to me. And, thank you, C., for questioning life's absurdities.

Nighty-Night, Sleep-Relaxed

Dear Joan,

I've been having problems sleeping lately. And even though i actually fell asleep somewhat quickly last night i'm not gonna fool myself and think that things are better right away. Are there and yoga poses that i could do before i go to sleep that might help me fall asleep?

Thanks,
Namaste,
Christina

Dear Christina,

Generally, forward bends quiet the body and backward -bends energize. I would recommend a slow, gentle practice of hatha before sleeping. Begin the practice with shavasana, the relaxation pose. Then incorporate some gentle forward bending movements. Add a few spinal twist poses to balance the forward bending poses. End your practice with a longer shavasana. Also, do not eat anything for at least 5 hours before sleeping. It takes approximately that long for the major processes of digestion to quiet. If you must have something before sleeping, try some chamomile herbal tea. Sit quietly before sleeping and let your mind clear. Disengage the mind from the business and emotions of the day. Let the negative judgements, anger, resentments of the day (or perhaps lifetimes) release with the exhales. Realize that you are not in the scenarios of your mind, but are now peaceful and quiet. Sweet dreams.

Namaste,
Joan

Yoga Chicagostyle

Dear Joan,

I've just moved to the Chicagoland area from West Palm Beach, FL. We are living in Palatine. I'm very interested in Yoga, and would like to begin classes (I'd be a true beginner). Is there any place in the Palatine area that you could recommend? Please help the new kid in town.

Thanks!
Gail M. Kleinert

Dear Gail,

Check out the free bi-monthly <http://www.yogachicago.com/> Yoga Chicagonewspaper on the internet or at your local bookstore. In the back of the paper is a large yoga directory of listings for the vast and beautiful Chicagoland area.

Namaste,
Joan

Do you have a question for Joan?

Send your questions or mail tojoan@yoyoga.com

Please include the city and state you are from.

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.

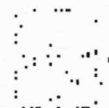
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Yoyoga with Joan

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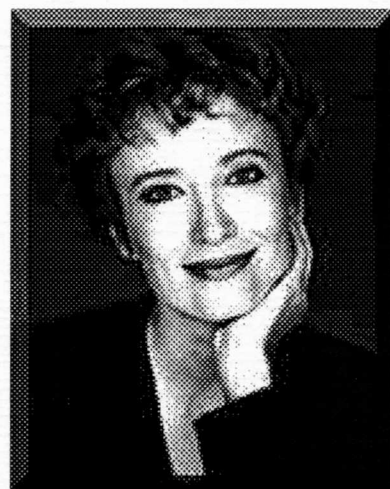
Yo Joan



European Retreat!

Dear Joan,

You may remember I wrote to you last year desperate for help as we'd bought a pub, moved house and two businesses and I'd totally wrecked my back. I got your Yoga with Joan tape fantastically quickly (thank you) and managed to do sporadic practice and crawl my way through Christmas. by February I was figuratively and literally on my knees. I spent ages sending off for brochures and trawling the net looking for somewhere I could go and practice Yoga in the sunshine in a non-intimidating environment. I kept coming back to this one site www.hoho.co.uk, it's a villa in Lanzarote, Canary Islands which has year-round sunshine and is only four hours flight from UK. So I cleared off for a week - with some trepidation because Stuart and Lynne who run it telephoned a couple of days before I left to tell me I would be their only guest that week (this sometimes happens in February) and did I mind? I was so exhausted I would have gone anywhere at this stage so I went anyway.



It is the most wonderful place, and they are the most wonderful people. Their attention to detail is incredible. The villa itself is gorgeous, they've put special non-slip soft covering on the bottom of the swimming pool so it doesn't hurt your feet if you want to do some aqua, the pool is oxygenated rather than chlorinated so it doesn't make your eyes red or give you a tight chest, they even put little candles and full jars of coffee, a little kettle, herbal and regular teas and full bottles of mineral water in your room. While I was there they were encouraging grass to grow (virtually blade by blade) within a "yoga circle" they have made so you can practice outside on grass (no easy task in Lanzarote which is basically one big volcano, no soil just lava). Lynne is a great teacher, she's wonderful fun and highly approachable - our definition of a great class was whether it left you dying to wee and starving. I got back after a week with my spine back in a row again and with enough energy to see me through until I can get back there.

The villa's situated on a cliff overlooking the sea, but five minutes drive away is a typical Med holiday town, so if you want to you can combine a sunny beach holiday with yoga and peace - or not. You guys in the States are spoilt for choice for Yoga retreats, but there are very few in Europe, I can't recommend this one too highly, if you get anyone asking if you know of anywhere in Europe you could tell them to check out this site. What Stuart and Lynne are doing is so great I'm determined to tell everyone I know to go

there!

Best wishes,
Sarah
UK

Dear Sarah,

WOW! I want to pack my bags and leave right now! This definitely sounds like an incredible retreat, with Lynne and Stuart as magnificent hosts. I hope they will be getting many more calls with the posting of your wonderful letter. Thank you!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Kayaking

Dear Joan,

A friend and i are going on an all day kayaking trip in July. My friend asked me if there was anything she could do to strengthen her arms so they won't be sore after the trip. i didn't know what yoga poses were good for the arms. a lot of them seem to focus on the back and the lower body. If you could tell me some then i could pass them on to her.

Thanks again!
Have a great day,
Christina

Dear Christina,

Some good arm strengthening yoga asanas: Tolasana (scales pose), Vashishthasana (Arm balance), Plank Pose, Upward and Downward Facing Dog Poses, Headstand, Cakrasana (Wheel Pose). I would be happy to demonstrate these for you in yoga class.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Getting a head start...

Dear Joan,

Joan

What's up Doc?

Dear Joan,

I practice (Kripalu and Ashtanga yoga) for about one hour a day and can't imagine a day without my practice -- it's amazing how fast it becomes part of your life. Three or so times in the past two months, however, I have experienced eye pain in my left eye, headache around the eyes and general shakiness the day after practice. I'm wondering if practicing the inverted postures could be causing these symptoms. I don't do many inversions(except for downward dog if you count it) and can't remember if I did any the days prior to the onset of symptoms. By the way, I don't wear glasses. I would sure appreciate any information about this....thanks! I love your web site and all the information you give us!

Namaste
Lisa

Dear Lisa,

Stop inversions. Your symptoms are not normal. I am not a doctor. The medical profession is there to serve us in times of need. By getting a full check up, you will assure the safety of your regular astanga practice. If you do not have a regular doctor, ask a friend, or call a local hospital and get a referral. As your website yoga teacher, I insist you have this eye problem immediately checked out by a medical doctor. Pick up the phone, make the doctor appointment, go, and then write me back. I look forward to our next letter, Lisa.

Namaste,
Joan

Yoga Chicagostyle

Dear Joan,

I've just moved to the Chicagoland area from West Palm Beach, FL. We are living in Palatine. I'm very interested in Yoga, and would like to begin classes (I'd be a true beginner). Is there any place in the Palatine area that you could recommend? Please help the new kid in town.

Thanks!
Gail M. Kleinert

Dear Gail,

Check out the free bi-monthly <http://www.yogachicago.com/> Yoga Chicagonewspaper on

the internet or at your local bookstore. In the back of the paper is a large yoga directory of listings for the vast and beautiful Chicagoland area.

namaste,
Joan

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Yo Joan



Tunnel Vision

Dear Joan,

I am working on a research paper regarding Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and the effects of Yoga on this condition. There have been studies showing an improvement in conditions of patients performing certain yoga techniques. I was curious as to whether or not you have any opinion on using yoga in treating such syndromes over the surgery, or other medical solutions. I would be thankful for any thoughts you might have on the subject!



Sincerely,
Jo

Dear Jo,

I have holistic views toward carpal tunnel or any physical injury. Sometimes the pain of carpal tunnel can be relieved by intensive shiatsu massage. This type of massage focuses on pressure points and energy flow in the body. The pressure points for the wrist are not necessarily in, or even near the wrist. For example, you may have a blocked "tsubo" (pressure point) in the levator scapula muscle in the shoulder that travels down to your wrist. Although the problem is felt in the wrist, its origin may very likely be in the shoulder. Until the pressure is relieved at the origin, the problem will keep reoccurring, even after surgery. By holding certain massage points on the body and applying directed pressure via the thumbs, the muscles knots of tensions often release. These knots of tension not only effect the muscles, but also effect the nerves that run through the muscles. "Myofascial Release" is another form of massage that works with pressure points in the muscles to reduce tensions and pain in other parts of the body. It usually takes several sessions of massage for the build up of tensions to let their guards down - for the knots to melt. Once the build up is released, then I would recommend an overall

swedish massage to improve circulation and reduce stress. Many people turn to surgery for help in relieving the severe pain associated with carpal tunnel syndrome. I would recommend discovering first where the pain stems from before contemplating any surgical procedures. I would find a qualified massage practitioner in your area to work with. Obviously, I consider massage to be a prime candidate for aid in carpal tunnel syndrome, but since you did ask specifically about yoga, I will also expand on this. I would recommend shoulder opening poses for people with carpal tunnel syndrome. Poses that involve spinal twists are also very helpful. I will give explain two yoga poses to work with:

Side angle stretch :

Feet separated widely, face one foot out. Bend knee of this foot to right angle. Turn upper body to face this knee. Rest the arm closest to this bent knee on the thigh. Keep back leg strong and straight. Extend the other arm over your head. As you advance in this pose, bring the arm that is resting on the thigh under this bent knee. Bring your other arm around your back. Connect your hands together behind your back. This is an incredible shoulder opener. Breathe deeply for a few long breaths in the pose before releasing it and stretching the other side.

Standing spinal twist - featured in this issue's 'asana of the week':

Feet separated in wide stance, bend forward at the hip with a flat back. Bring one arm toward the floor. Twist toward the other arm and bring this arm straight up toward the sky. Look up toward the sky. Hold the twist for several long, slow breaths. Then switch arms and twist in the other direction.

Do not put too much pressure on wrists in poses that invert the body upside down. Even if everyone in the class is doing a pose that puts pressure on your hands, (like downward dog or headstand) ask your teacher for alterations to the pose that will accommodate your healing wrists. A knowledgeable instructor should be able to direct you into appropriate poses for your condition to heal. It took time for this condition to build, and it will take time for it to resolve itself. Would love to read your finished research paper, Jo. I am in your corner with two thumbs way up!

Namaste,
Joan

One Fore All!

Dear Joan,

My name is Wendy and I'm a golfer. I've been golfing for about 2 years and have managed to get my handicap down to 25. I started yoga in September of 1999 in honor of my 40th birthday. I absolutely love it and feel blessed to have found a wonderful teacher right here in Lagos.

Recently, while my instructor was on holiday, I injured myself and I would like to avoid this in the future. I have been determined to improve my flexibility as in my opinion it is a very weak area. I realize now that I over did it with the poses geared toward improving flexibility. The thing is, I felt absolutely fine until I played a round of golf. At the 18th tee box my left leg just gave out. I didn't step in a hole or on a rock or anything traumatic. I was just walking and all of a sudden, I couldn't. I think the repetitive movement of the golf swing and the inherent asymmetry of the golf swing caused a stretched muscle to become a strained muscle. What do you think? How can I continue to work on improving the flexibility in my hips and play

the sport I've come to enjoy so much.

Wendy Smith

From Monroe, Louisiana currently living in Lagos, Nigeria

P.S. Under the close supervision of my instructor, I continued to do as much as I could since the day after the injury. I'm completely recovered now (after 2 weeks), but have not gone near a golf course. I believe yoga helped speed my recovery from a very painful injury.

Dear Wendy,

Great that you have made such a speedy recovery, Wendy. I understand your initial trepidations on going back to playing golf. I have had many golfers in my yoga classes and I have witnessed their passion for the game. From my experience with these golfers, I would expect that by now you are probably back on the golf course. One can't keep a golfer down! I would highly recommend your getting a complete physical by your physician before resuming any athletic activity. There are numerous explanations for what might have happened, including physical exhaustion. A physician will be able to note vitamin deficiencies, and will probably share some golfing advice too. It is wonderful that you have found a knowledgeable yoga instructor to work with you on this journey. If you are comfortable doing so, bring her with you into the physician consultation too. You may both grow with more ideas on working effectively with golf and yoga. I can not guide you further on this swing. I have confidence though, that with your continuing efforts to reach out for solutions, your game will improve along with your swing.

Namaste,
Joan

Snack Pack

Dear Joan,

Hello, I would like to know if you have any good snack recipes for a Yoga practitioner. I have my meal plans, but I would like some good healthy snacks that you could recommend.

Thank you,
Monique

Dear Monique,

Eat all the raw fruits and veggies you want. One cup of orange juice contains well over 100 calories. One raw orange contains only 60 calories along with fiber and all sorts of nutritional goodies. A full orange takes longer to eat than a cup of juice does to drink.

The time it takes to peel and eat an orange helps you to get more fully in touch with your appetite by naturally letting you slow down. So eat hearty, my dear. Eat as many raw fruits and vegetables as you can and eat them as often as you like. Truly a deprived Dieter's dream!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Fun and games!

Dear Joan,

Greetings, The Yoga Garden Game is finally available for purchase. This letter is being written to you because you have expressed interest in knowing when the game would be ready. Please visit our website at www.theyogagarden.com, where you can purchase the game at our eStore. Please email me for questions about bulk/wholesale orders, shipments out of the US, or any other matter. I am excited about the game and proud of the response it is getting. Thanks for your interest--I look forward to hearing from you.

Cheers,
Jennifer Durand

Dear Jennifer,

I am all for fun and games. My birthday is coming up next week. Maybe I'll treat myself to a Yoga Garden! Remember Yoyoga readers, you do not have to have a birthday to treat yourself. Thank you.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Anywhere near Philly?

Dear Joan,

I started a yoga class at my college here in McCandless, Pennsylvania. Our instructor recommended your book, "The Idiots Guide to Yoga." I have thoroughly enjoyed the book and learning more about Yoga. The practice is getting easier for me as I started my class in January after having arthroscopic surgery on my knee. I have been thrilled to find an exercise that I can do and feel so good afterward. My class is ending and I hope to find a class near to my home. I want to order your tape so that I can practice at home also. Do you know of a class or instructor in my area that you could recommend? Thank you.

Sincerely,
Barb Harris

Dear Barb,

I do not know where "McCandless" is, but call Yoga International at 570-253-4929, and order their latest "Yoga Teachers and Classes Guide." In it are listings of teachers across the country. You will find a teacher near you. Or call the closest yoga teacher to you and get a referral of one that is even closer. All the best to you, Barb!

Namaste,
Joan

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you.
We are all meant to
shine, as
children do.
We are born to make
manifest
the glory of God that is
within
us.
It's not just in some of
us;
It's in everyone.
As we let our light
shine,
We give other people
permission to do the
same;
As we're liberated from
our
own fear,
Our presence
automatically
liberates others."
----Nelson Mandela
"1994 Inaugural Speech"

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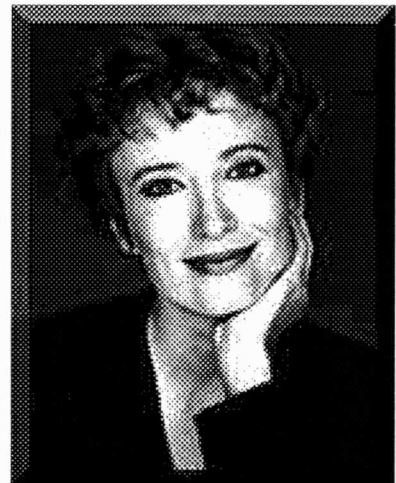
Yo Joan



Merry ol'England

Dear Joan,

I loved your book the idiots guide to yoga. It inspired me to search for a teacher. I now love my classes and practice, how did I manage before? I live in Worcester England. I am a 38 year old mother of two. I work full time as a divorce lawyer in Birmingham in the center of England and am married to a journalist (a yoga skeptic I am sorry to say!) Anyway many thanks, keep spreading the word.



Love,
Nicola Murphy

Dear Nicola,

It is certainly my pleasure, Nicola. Cheerio!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Karma

Dear Joan,

I just had a Laminectomy and Discectomy on L5/S1. There was no other choice, I am trying to find out what type of Yoga I could take to help my back. I live in New York and was hoping you knew of anyone out this way. I use to study Martial Arts in Chicago and have studied Ti-Chi for over 25 yrs. along with Kung-Fu. I find Ti-Chi too stress-full on my body and my energy is being blocked. The operation was on 5/8/00, after suffering from 4/13/00. I work as a Paramedic with the New York Fire Dept. I was injured on the job but am afraid I won't be able to do this type of work anymore. Please can you give me some help. I need it for my spirit also.

Thank You,
Marc Weinstein

Dear Marc,

It is often through the deepest trials in life that we find our deepest spiritual insights. No doubt, these are very difficult times for you, Marc. First the pain regarding the spinal problems, and then the realization that a career change is most likely in order. You have been working in an honorable profession, Marc. You have helped many people. This is extremely important. Although the contemplation of a career change is now upon you, it is important to recognize that the work you have been involved in has been of great service. In yoga, this is the path of karma. Through service to others we can soften our karma. Softening karma is a key element in the path of enlightenment. As you contemplate a career change, Marc, consider the many rewards of your past career and focus on these rewards as you move into another career. Although pain can make us contemplate a total change in our life path, it also can be an opportunity to strengthen our convictions.

I encourage you to read Nelson Mandela's Inaugural Speech I posted on the home page of this issue of Yoyoga. This is a man who spent decades in a prison dungeon. He was regularly tortured. His eyes were permanently injured in prison and he can no longer be in direct sunlight. Yet, his inaugural speech speaks eloquently of light. For although he can no longer face the light of day, the magnificent light within him could not be beaten out. He continues to be a beacon of hope for others. He and his fellow prisoners turned their torture chambers into a school for learning. On the turn of the millennium, he even went back to that very prison, to light candles, pray, and continue the movement forward without dismissing the past. The past is significant. It can help us deepen our spirit in the choices we make in the present and for the future.

Regarding your hatha yoga practice for your condition, I would recommend contacting an Iyengar trained yoga teacher in your area. Iyengar styled yoga uses props to support the positions of the body. This is important for you because hatha yoga postures are held for specific periods of time. This is why it is important after surgery to work with someone who understands your specific limitations and does not lead you into poses that may be more harmful than helpful. Iyengar Yoga is a style of yoga that is extremely beneficial for those of us who have undergone surgery or with specific physical limitations. There are many Iyengar trained teachers in the New York City area. Simply check in the phone book under yoga and start calling yoga studios. Ask specifically for an Iyengar trained teacher. Find out where they studied and for how long. Check out their qualifications. Above all, trust your instincts and go slow with your practice. You can most definitely improve your condition. Although the pain may be great for you now, Marc, the increasing depth of your spirit and the knowledge you will gain through this healing process will be even greater.

**Namaste,
Joan**

CD in Merry ol' England

Dear Joan,

I have your yoga for idiots which I find really interesting and the question I have is do you or anyone else have a CD of yoga as opposed to an audio tape? I live in England and would be very happy to buy one if that's possible. I look forward to hearing from you.

Om Shanti.
Julia Dempster

Dear Julia,

Now I know you have bookstores in England - bookstores that carry CD's! If there is not one nearby, then I know you have a computer. Check out Amazon.com. There are so many CD's out there now, it's amazing! Look in Yoga Journal or Yoga International Magazines. Both these magazines advertise Yoga CD's and videos. I am simply a one woman operation here at Yoyoga, so it is much more affordable for me to produce audio tapes instead of CD's. However, I realize too, that just like the phonographs I love, its only a matter of time before audio cassettes will be right alongside my record collection. On yet the other hand, I still do have a working record player. Good luck, my friend! Maybe I'll see you at a bookstore in merry ol' England sometime soon...I am working on a book now that is being published in England!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Back in touch!

Dear Joan,

Hi. This is lisa emailing you to follow up on my last email . You may remember that I wrote to you about eye pain and other symptoms that I felt after practicing inverted asanas. I appreciated your answer and concern so much that I did go to an Ophthalmologist. Thankfully, my eyes (and eyesight) are perfectly fine. It seems that my symptoms are due to migraine headaches. On the few occasions that I practiced the inversions and felt problems later on, the sun had been shining in my eyes during part of class. Strong light can be a trigger for migraines, as can a variety of other things like noise and strong odors. I have learned to watch out for these kind of triggers and not to practice inversions if I feel any sense of a migraine coming on. My doctor said I could have even have the eye symptoms and visual disturbances without an accompanying headache. Maybe this will help another student. Thanks again for your concern. You are wonderful! Oh--can you recommend any asanas to ward off a migraine or at least help alleviate one?--

Lisa N.

Dear Lisa,

Breathing exercises. They do not have to be very deep at first. Breath that is too deep right now might even aggravate a migraine condition. It is best to gradually increase the breath. In a room free of scents, work with extending your breath. Extend your exhales. Then extend your inhales. Also I would recommend a regular practice of alternate nostril breathing to balance the breath and internal energy. The important thing is to practice these techniques daily to see the positive results.

Thank you for sharing your information, Lisa, so that others may learn from your experience. Whenever you have a physical ailment, it is important to be checked by a physician to assure that your yoga practice is not aggravating your condition. I am very happy that you have checked with your doctor about your condition, Lisa. Now you can move forward with more awareness and confidence in your choices. And, I am most happy to continue to be of help to you too.

Namaste,
Joan

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Yo Joan

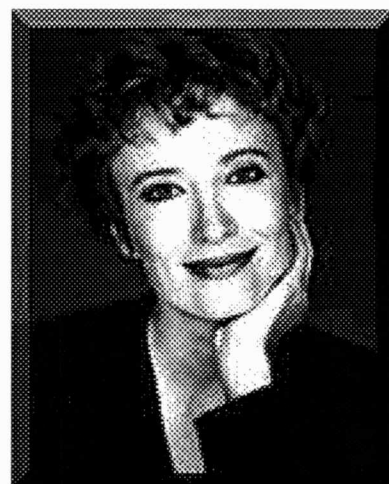


Stand up and be counted!

Dear Joan,

When I stand up my neck tends to lean forward and when I try to correct it by standing straight with my shoulders back I quickly get to uncomfortable to maintain it. Do you know any good yoga postures to correct this?

Anonymous



Dear ?,

Let me start by saying to avoid inversions like headstands. If your body can not maintain a straight posture when standing, imagine the strain the body would experience upside down when all the gravitational weight would be on your head. Here's a posture to help you open up your shoulders to soften some of the strain in your upper back:

Stand facing a wall. Place your hands on the wall with the fingers in line with your shoulders. Now, take a giant step back. Keep your hands flat on the wall and do not let your hands slide down. Bend forward at the hips. Let your upper body hang flat with arms extended against wall. Take some slow breaths here. Hold as long as you comfortably can. Doing this pose every day will help to relieve some of the tensions in your mid back and shoulders.

Another pose is the basic standing pose of Mountain:

Feet together or slightly separated. Arms at your side, palms facing in. Keep your chin in line with the floor. Keeping the feet flat, tilt slightly forward, then tilt slightly

backward. Slowly, continue this tilt until you come to a position that feels balanced. Feel a lift on the back of your neck. Imagine there is a string attached to the top of your head that gently pulls it up, but keep your chin in line with the floor.

A regular yoga practice will make you become more aware of the subtleties in the alignment of your spine. Through this increasing awareness, your posture will improve.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Bone density

Dear Joan,

I live with lupus, and I am sure that my practice of yoga has helped me to maintain my flexibility. Many of my lupus friends are not so fortunate, and have many mobility restrictions, brittle bones due to prednisone, chemo, etc. I am trying to compile some asanas to help all my friends. Those who can exert more energy, and those who cannot. Do you think you can give me some suggestions?

Namaste,
Betty

Dear Betty,

This is a mighty big question for my little Yo Joan column. It could make a great big book! But I will do my mighty best to offer some suggestions here.

For people with brittle bones, avoid inversions and postures that place extra weight on the bones. Many of the yoga poses develop bone density through weight lifting. The weight lifting is of one's own body weight. No additional weights are needed. This is why yoga is particularly good for aging because as we age our bones lose density. Seniors are encouraged to do weight lifting exercises. Yoga is an ideal exercise program because it involves weight lifting and stress reduction.

A regular practice of pranayama can bring healing to the body by building up the immune system. For those of us who have mobility restrictions, I would highly recommend a regular practice of pranayama to strengthen the body. This, along with the personal guidance of an experienced yoga teacher, can guide you into the appropriate postures for your conditions.

All standing poses can be helpful to increase muscular and bone strength without putting too much strain on the bones. Poses like Lightning Bolt, Mountain, and Warrior. It is important to be consistent in your hatha practice to see the results. A practice of pranayama and standing poses for 2 weeks, for just 20 minutes a day, will begin to produce strengthening in the muscular and skeletal system.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Heels over head in England

Dear Joan,

I have just bought your book and I'm half way through and already it has answered many questions. I do have a slight problem when I practice yoga though: my routine is this:

Warm-up
headstand
shoulderstand
plough
fish
forward-bend
cobra
locust
bow
peacock
half-twist
touch toes
and side stretch

I've noticed that although I never push any of the movements and never feel pain during that a short while afterwards I get a dull muscular pain at the side of my left shoulder blade, what is the probable cause and should I change my routine, say miss out the headstand?

Darren
England

Dear Darren,

What does "warm up" mean? I have seen some schools of yoga that do headstand to start the hatha practice. However, I think this pose should come at the end of the practice when your body is fully warmed up and when your alignment is more focused. In fact, looking at your list, I would completely reverse the order of your practice. Your poses are full and varied. You may find that reversing the order...starting with side stretch and ending with head stand gets you off to a better head start.

**Namaste,
Joan**

yoga bigenner

Dear Joan,

I'm a coach potato but, I'm going to do something about it. I just bought the complete idiot's guide to yoga, my question is can I practice yoga and tai chi same time? Or do I learn yoga first then move to tai chi?

thank you;
frank

Dear frank,

First learn how to spell...you can still do this while on the couch. Then when you get off the couch, choose one system to study: Yoga or Tai Chi. Dabbling here and there may make you a fun conversationalist at a party, but will not make you a master. You have already mastered the "coach potato" pose. However, this pose is neither in yoga nor tai chi. So your options on where to go from here remain yours and are completely open.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Peace be with you

Dear Joan,

I really enjoy reading your website twice a month (if not more)! Thanks for offering this space for questions. My question is this - I am unsure how much to "let go" of my belly when I'm breathing. Most books and instructors state to relax the belly for deep breathing and full inhalation/exhalation and allow your belly to expand and contract while breathing. However, when I hold an asana, such as Warrior III (from your book), if I relax my belly I don't feel that I'm supporting my torso and particularly my lower back. When I tighten my stomach muscles, I immediately feel more support and stronger in the asana. I'm unclear how to have deep, full breaths by relaxing the belly and yet still maintain a strong asana. Help!

THANKS JOAN!
Jennifer
Missoula, Montana

Dear Jennifer,

Yoga is a study from the inside - out. Eve Adamson and I are coming out soon with a second edition to the Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga. It will include expanded chapters and also some totally new chapters. I will be sure to refine the chapter on warrior poses. Instead of "relaxing" your muscles, I would put the emphasis on toning them. I used the term "relax" because many people hear the name "warrior" and automatically every

muscle tenses up. So, I suggest relaxing first, and letting the strength build from the inside. As strength builds, there is an internal "lift" that occurs in the center of the body while in Warrior pose. This lift (bandha) strengthens and tones the muscles. It comes from the inside. Imagine an internal lift of the abdomen while in the pose. Continue lifting and imagine lengthening your body while establishing a strong foundation of balance. A warrior pose in peace.

Namaste,
Joan

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Send your questions or mail tojoan@yoyoga.com
Please include the city and state you are from.

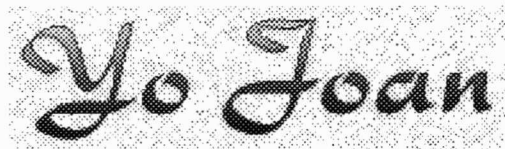
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7/1/00



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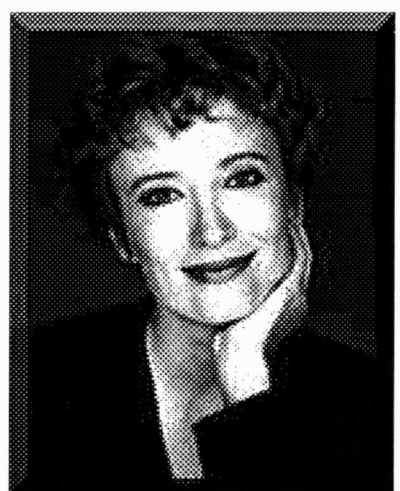


One hand clapping

Dear Joan,

I'd like to know if you could explain to me briefly a few exercises or postures that I could do to stretch my fingers and stimulate blood circulation in my hands.

Thanks
Max
Argentina



Dear Max,

Here are three separate hand stretches:

- 1) Downward Facing Dog Pose- Yoyoga Asana of the week. After you assume the pose, bring the heels of your hands up off the ground and let the stretch go into your fingers.
- 2) Bring your hands together in prayer position. Pull the hands apart but keep the finger tips together. Press the finger tips hard against each other. Hold for three long breaths. Release. Repeat this several times whenever there is strain in your hands.
- 3) Interlace the fingers. Stretch the arms up over your head and turn the back of the hands to face toward your head. Hold for three long breaths. Bring the arms down for three long breaths. Repeat.

I have no doubt that you'll find these stretches very handy, Max.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Whoops!

Dear Joan,

I was really surprised at your response to the "couch potato" question. Sure, the spelling was rough, but you know what they say about people in glass houses (it's spelled *gluten* Joan, not *glutton*- two very different things *grin*).

I would suggest going to a martial arts studio and watching a tai chi class first. Most teachers do allow a potential student one free class to get the feel of the form and to see if it is suitable for them. For some people, tai chi can be rough on the knees since they are constantly bent (I obviously like yoga better - thanks to you, Joan! it has helped me change my life so much for the better :). But it's hard to just pick one without seeing or trying the form first.

Getting up and about is the very first step to overcoming the couch potato posture. :) Choosing a style is the second. Here's to all the former couch potatoes, myself included! I hope this person finds great joy in their quest for greater mobility.

**Namaste,
Linda**

Dear Linda,

Thank you, Linda. You are right. I can be such a glutton with words. Also, Tai Chi is a martial art. Yoga is not a martial art. Tai chi is a martial art. Yoga is not a martial art. Tai chi is a martial art. Yoga is

**Namaste,
Joan**

Headstands for headstarts...

Dear Joan,

I enjoy reading your web page and the very sensible advice you give to people who write to you. I agree with your reply to Jennifer and also with your advice to Darren. Sounds like he is doing what is called the Rishikesh series attributed to Sivananda. One author explains the rationale for commencing the sequence with the headstand as follows:

"All inverted postures powerfully activate the circulation with almost no muscular effort. That is why some masters recommend Sirsasana..." he also discusses the fact that Indian students (unlike Western students) would never dream of questioning the Master's reasoning and that "In any case, the Master himself believes that long explanations to be superfluous, and allows the adept to discover how well founded the instructions are."

I agree with you that students need to work with awareness, to develop an understanding of their own unique bodies and apply Ahimsa to their practice. In the West, teachers have a duty of care to see that students don't harm themselves by practicing postures without fully understanding the risks that may be involved.

For instance, because the headstand has the wonderful benefit of powerfully activating the circulation, Gitananda was of the opinion that the headstand should never be practiced by anyone who smoked, because of the very real risk of stroke, due to atherosclerotic plaque in the arteries, which has the potential to break off and block small blood vessels in the brain.

I look forward to reading your new book, Joan.

Om Shanti
Margo Hutchison - Bodywise Yoga & Health
Brisbane - Australia

Dear Margo,

Thanks for all the additional insights, Margo! Sounds like Yoyoga readers would be wise to check out your book, "Bodywise Yoga & Health," too!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Santosha cliff notes

Dear Joan,

I know almost nothing about Yoga, and I really enjoyed the part of your website where you wrote about "santosha" and what it meant. I'd like to learn some other terms. Maybe that's not your main purpose, but how about changing or adding to the vocabulary once in awhile? (hey, I could get a book, right?) but I do enjoy your site.

Namaste (does that mean peace?)
Barbara

Dear Barbara,

Yes, Namaste means peace. It is a greeting, translated as "honoring the light within you." Yes, you could get a book. Changing or adding vocabulary? I update the "Yoga 'ips," "Index," and "Yo Joan" sections every two weeks. It is summer and I am wimming as fast as I can right now. I will work on my pranayama more though, so that I can attempt to fulfill your request. Please be patient?

There is a real karmic lesson here. Last week I picked on the couch potato for his poor spelling, and this week I get all these letters about my vocabulary...oi vey.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Nelson Mandela

Dear Joan,

One or two issues ago you started the site with a lengthy quote from Nelson Mandela. My printer is not working and I meant to write it down before it changed. Alas, I forgot. Could you possibly e-mail it to me or point me to a source for it?

I really love your web site. I wish you had a log of old issues because I think I missed the one from the beginning of June. Thank you for your time. I am looking forward to seeing the second edition of The 'diots Guide to Yoga.

Namaste,
Melinda
Wyandotte, MI

Dear Melinda,

I will gladly reprint Nelson Mandela's 1994 Inaugural Speech. Here it is:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us; It's in everyone. As we let our light shine, we give other people permission to do the same; as we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

lamaste,

Joan

Wanna start yoga now!

Dear Joan,

I saw your column in the Suburban Life. I am a yoga beginner and want to implement yoga into my day in the AM. I went to a class with a friend in Evanston (too far) and am hooked. Am having trouble finding something locally. I did the 5 day a week workout stuff and just had deep muscle burning. I want flexibility. Who do you know locally that is teaching a class in the LG/Western Springs area?

Thank you.
Linda Peter

Dear Linda,

There are numerous teachers in your area. I know that the Park Districts offer classes. Also Kathleen Wright of "The Yoga Garden" teaches Iyengar Yoga out there in LaGrange. Pick up a copy of "Yoga Chicago" Newspaper or check out the Yoga Chicago site on the web for even more teachers. There is probably a class within walking distance from you!

amaste,
Joan

Sunny California

Dear Joan,

Hello, I am visiting my niece, who lives in San Mateo CA, this summer (August). Whilst in California, I should like to spend 7 - 10 days by the sea, having a relaxing holiday. If possible, I should like to combine this with yoga classes. I am a relative beginner, having started at the beginning of the year. I should be really grateful if you have any suggestions. I am currently reading your book, Yoga for Idiots.

Many thanks,
Patricia Poffet

Dear Patricia,

I am not really sure where San Mateo is, but "Geo" who co-wrote with Eve Adamson, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Power Yoga" teaches in the Calabasas area. I love that rea of California. I used to model at the California Art Institute in Calabasas in the early

1990's. It's in the mountains and absolutely a breathtaking place. You must check it out too! Pick up a copy of "CIG to Power Yoga" to be more familiar with Geo, his teachings, and his location.

studied yoga at the Shivananda Center in Santa Monica while living in California. The center is now located in Venice...right near the beach! Also, The Self-Realization Fellowship is right off the beach on Sunset Drive in the Pacific Palisades....SRF is like home for me. It is where my yoga studies really began.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Meds for Meditation

Dear Joan,

Hello. My name is Russell, and a few months ago I bought your Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation. First off, I want to thank you for writing such a wonderful and beautiful book. I have been meditating just about every day for a month using the tips and techniques you wrote about, and although I know that I am in the extreme novice stage of my meditation practice, I can already tell that it will have a very positive influence in my life in the months and years to come (or maybe a better way to say it is that I have faith that it will :)).

However, I do have a concern regarding my meditation practice, and hopefully you can help me out. About two months ago, I began taking an anti-depressant (zoloft) for a major depression that had been giving me trouble for the past year. I have had trouble with depression my whole life, and although I was reluctant to start medication, I figured it was the best thing to do under the circumstances. My question is this: do you think that the zoloft might be harmful to my meditation practice? I'm worried that it may numb or cancel out the effects of my meditation sessions the longer I stay on it. Meditation is becoming a very important factor in my life, and I would hate to do anything to block its benefits.

Please write me back at whatever is a good time for you. Thank you for your time, and once again, thank you so much for your book.

Sincerely,
Russell

Dear Russell,

I would not attempt to debate your doctor and your prescriptions, Russell. I know how important various medications are for people's health. Each person has a unique body chemistry to contend with. Have you also explored Psychotherapy for your depression? This process can be most helpful in getting to issues you may have difficulty getting to on your own.

Hatha Yoga, and particularly the breathwork of Pranayama, can have significant effects on mood elevation. Once you have established yourself with a steady and consistent pranayama practice, you may want to discuss with your doctor the possibility of

lessening your medication dosage. The point is, you need to be consistent and disciplined in your practice BEFORE you make changes in your tools for decreasing your depression. See how you are doing a month from now with your meditation practice. Be sure to speak to your doctor about your meditation practice. If your doctor does not believe it can help with your depression, perhaps you can run off some of the many studies done that support findings of its ability to help depression. Check out the Office of Alternative Medicine on the web for some studies. More are being done all the time. Hatha Yoga postures can also raise moods. "Feeling down, move around. Feeling Great, Meditate!" That's from CIG to Yoga. You are on a powerful road, Russell. You are reaching out...and uncovering satya.

Namaste,
Joan

Meow!

Dear Joan,

Remember me? I wrote to you one and a half year ago. I'm a male in my thirties... I remember you wrote that you'd be "in my corner" (since I don't have a teacher), and so you've been.

Due to a sport injury I've not been doing so much yoga during this time, but during the last six months I've started again. Although I'm restricted in some asanas sometimes. I'm also seeing a physio therapist for my injury. Anyway: I do yoga at home by myself. I live in a small town and there's no yoga school or yoga teacher here around. Yoga hasn't had that big break-through in my country yet... Sometimes I long for a teacher who could help me, encourage, guide, assist and correct me. I do find practicing on my own okay, but in some balances it would be nice to have some assistance. At least someone to practice together with. I'm curious about the saying that a teacher shows up when I'm ready... So far I feel very content improving asanas by myself. Doing urdva padmasana in sirsasana (upward lotus headstand) without using the wall was a great feeling the other day... I think you would've been proud of me. I was.

I love the feeling of yoga. And I love doing yoga. The peaceful, happy feeling of well-being when you manage the poses. By the way, I usually wear a long legged, long sleeved, (light pink-colored !), lycra catsuit when I do yoga. It's amazing but this special clothing is extra inspiring and helps me feel this is a special time, and I concentrate more. Yoga = union = unitard (catsuit). Strange, but it works so very good for me. Usually when I practice yoga I do it for about one and a half hour or two hours. I don't follow a special routine or program. I just do those asanas I feel for right now, and the asanas I know I like and those I want to work with to make some progresses. It has to be fun. (On the other hand - those asanas are about to be a special routine for me now - and I like that.)

Well, I should ask something too. That's what Yoyoga is all about after all: The warmer you are the more you can "stretch" and go deeper into the asanas, but if you go too deep and work too hard - your muscles and tendons the next day will be strained and tight. So how much should you stretch (how deep should you go) and at what body temperature for the maximum improving lasting effect? That is: How do you best improve flexibility (and strength) if you don't have time to practice every day?

"The Pink Panther" :)))

Dear Pinky,

Some schools of yoga insist that the best way of studying the postures is in a hot room - a room where temperatures will make you sweat even before you start moving. My hatha experiences have been in comfortable rooms at comfortable temperatures. This is not to say, that the other modes of learning are not helpful and more beneficial for some types of people. Whatever the case, it is important that your body is warm as you go more deeply into poses. Try changing the temps in your room on different days and see what works best for you. You may find with the hotter temps you will feel better in pink cotton shorts though. And, I really do like pink, Pinky.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Elmhurst

Dear Joan,

Hi, I have been researching places to go to for yoga and I was thrilled when I saw your site..... big fan of yours from your soap opera days!!! Another World! Anyway, I just moved to Elmhurst and was wondering when you were going to start up classes again and if you have any in Oakbrook?

Thank you!
Lois Gittleson

Dear Lois,

Thanks Lois. I won't be teaching till Fall, and won't know my schedule till August. I will post it in Yoyoga in August. Right now, I am just enjoying the summer in yet another world.

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Please include the city and state you are from.**

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Yeyoga with Joan

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Yo Joan

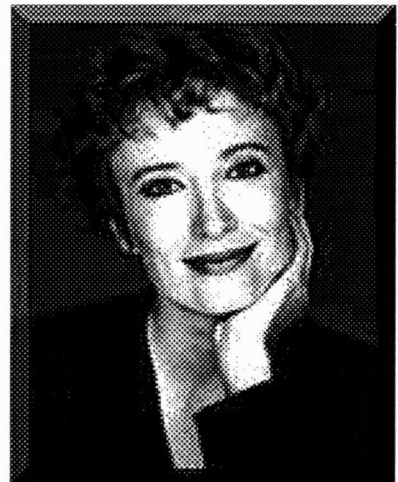


The Return of the Pink Panther

Dear Joan,

What are your personal top-5-favorite-asanas and why?

"Pink Panther"



Dear Pink Panther,

The hatha poses I do most often are downward dog, spinal twists, triangle, forward bends and shavasana. The ones I do less of are backbends and inversions. Does my favorite pose mean that I do the poses more often? Or are my favorite poses ones that do not require me to do as often? Are my favorite poses easy for me or challenging? Tomorrow, I think I will begin doing more backbends and inversions. I hope this answers your questions, Pink Panther!

Namaste,
Joan

bellies to backaches...

Dear Joan,

7/15/00

This is Pratiksha Joshi. I'm from India. I'm 22 years old. I was born in 1977. I want to start doing Yoga on daily basis. I do have a little Knowledge about Yoga. When i was in school(in India). We used to have one subject call "waayaam"(they used to teach us"SURYA NAMSKAR" and other Asanas. I used to learn Indian dance call "BHARATNATYAM"(South indian dance), we had to do Yoga before we starts.I stop earning that after two years.

So! I'm not that new for "Yoga". What i want to ask is how should i decide about my everyday's practice. Which asanas should i do everyday. I don't get time everyday but i do three times in a week.(i just started). I do Masyasan,kamlasan,Suryanamskar and other asanas ,which i don't know the perfect name. I don't know which one should i do first? I want to do yoga for my health but specially, i want to do for my stomach. Can you advise me please??

Thanks
Pratiksha Joshi

Dear Pratiksha,

There are many exercises to do for the stomach. Why choose yoga? Is it because of your heritage? I ask you to look now at your motivations for studying yoga. Yoga practice did not stay with you when you left school. Why do you suppose this is? I am just wondering as to how you have changed since your school days?

I realize there are many people that first approach yoga from the physical perspective and then evolve into other dimensions of the study. Some stay in the physical. What are you looking for, Pratiksha? Each reason is fine. This is not a judgement. At 23, physical concerns are certainly a priority, right? Yet, for many, young or old, physical concerns are still a priority. What I want to try and encourage you to do, Pratiksha, is to consider yoga for more than the physical aspects. There are health clubs and stomach curl type of exercises that can fully meet your current needs. Do not confuse yoga with this type of practice. Yoga is a deepening awareness of how the body, mind, spirit work in harmony with each other. Of course, the poses become challenging and develop the body. The development tho is in the balance between the various parts of the body and the unification of the mind and spirit within this balance. If you approach yoga for stomach firmness, surely you will eventually be disappointed. The external world is ever changing.

So, for your stomach...boat pose, leg lifts, bridge pose, and backbend. For your soul, yoga.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Canada rules!

Dear Joan,

My name is Ben and I'm 17 years old in Ottawa/Canada. My friend and I both learned yoga through your

Yoga for Idiots book. Let me say that it is very well written and informative.

However I'm running into a specific problem while trying to do some asanas. My legs don't stretch out straight sometimes !! For example in the boat pose, my legs don't want to stretch past being parallel with the floor. Or while doing the shoulderstand and posing my feet behind my head (I'd use the specific terms except I lent my book to my friend Natalie) my knees bend almost touching my head. I'm just wondering what I could do so that my legs stretch out straight.

Also I was wondering what specific asanas I could do to work out the abdominal muscles. :)

Thank you muchly for your time :)

Namaste :)

Ben Kaelan

PS : I just mastered the head stand last night and I'm very proud of myself !! Now lets try the reversed lotus pose :))

Dear Ben,

Those stomach muscles again! Obviously, it is swim suit season. You are movin and groovin, Ben! One tip, instead of resisting your body as it speaks to you, listen closely to it. It is telling you that it needs to keep the knees bent to protect your delicate lower back. As your lower back strengthens, your leg muscles along the back side of your body will also lengthen. This gradually happens over time. Some people never straighten their legs completely in the poses you mention. This is no reflection on their ability to do yoga. Straight legs do not a yogi master make! It is oh so much deeper than this that makes one a master.

So, may I suggest, next time your legs bother you because they are not straightening the way your mind is trying to tell them to...change your mind. Instruct your mind to bless your legs that they serve you and protect you from back problems. Bless your legs for supporting you and carrying you through thick and thin. Deeply inhale, and on the exhale gently extend the legs a little more without forcing them to straighten. Blessings. Ahimsa. Peace. Yoga.

Regarding the abdominal area, leg lifts strengthen this area, and also strengthen the lower back. Strong back and abdominal muscles are necessary to make headstands comfortable and safe to do. It is wonderful that you are developing such a beautiful practice with your friend, Ben. You sound like a wonderful young man!

**Namaste,
Joan**

New Classes

Dear Joan,

Where are your classes held? Are they one-on-one or groups? Prices?

Thank you. Brian Racine

Dear Brian,

My new classes all start in September. Monday and Wednesday mornings at the College Of Dupage in the Physical Education Department. Call 630 858-2800. And Saturday mornings Outdoor Yoga and Meditation through York Township. Call 630-629-0886 to register.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Love and Peace

Dear Joan,

Greetings from Thailand! Your website is such a nice place to come back to every 15 days and I have followed it almost since the beginning. I have expressed it before but let me say it again that I am sincerely thankful that this site exists.

I would Like to share a few thoughts on a philosopher called J. Krishnamurti who was born in India in late 19th century and was at first trained to be the World Teacher by the Theosophical Society. But later he dissolved the Order that was set up for him to guide or teach and proclaimed that "truth is a pathless land". I have read a lot about him including his own writings, speeches, biography and later controversies that surrounded him after his death in 1986. At one level is very liberating to read but at another level it is quite paradoxical. About Yoga he said it can lead to enlightenment or self-realization but then he himself was a VERY regular yoga practitioner. As someone has said, "the problem with krishnamurti is that he doesn't believe in belief".

Have you come in contact with this i.e. concept of no-concept idea of no-idea? Do you have any thoughts?

Love and peace,
Kamal (Lotus)

Dear Kamal,

My dear, old friend, Kamal. What a joy to be hearing from you again! The last time I think was in 1997?

I am not familiar with Krishnamurti's teachings. I have taught yoga for the Theosophical Society's International Convention that was held at the Wheaton, Illinois headquarters a few summers ago. At these headquarters is an extensive library in eastern thought. In fact, it is the biggest library I have ever seen on yoga books and ancient eastern texts. An exceptional library for the philosophically inclined.

Most epistemological studies (nature of knowledge, truth, inquiry) are paradoxical. What

is truth? What is knowledge? Yes, I have come in illusive contact with no-idea concepts. Very interesting. I simplify my philosophical studies through yoga structures. And through this structure, I am open to new philosophical inquiries that cause me to pause, question, reflect, and perhaps even momentarily answer. Until the next change, wave, breath occurs...and the question changes... the inquiry ever continuing...

You were one of the first people to write to me on this website, Kamal! I am still working on that archives you had suggested. Funny that you found me all the way out in Thailand before many local Yoyoga readers did! Or was it I that found you? Love and peace...yes, love and peace. Many smiles going out to you, Kamal!

Namaste,
Joan

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Yoyoga with Joan

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Yo Joan

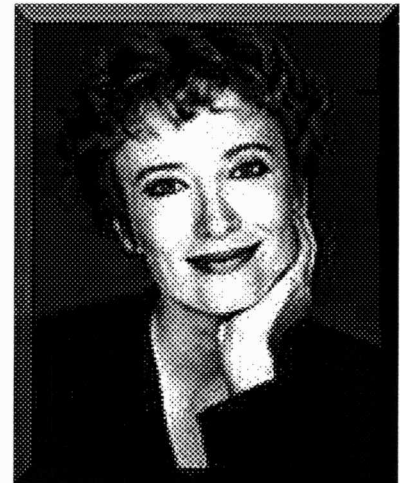


Gee You Are You!

Dear Joan,

What is the difference between a Guru and a Spiritual Teacher? Do you have a Guru?

Sincerely,
Jackie



Dear Jackie,

A Guru is a Spiritual Teacher. Guru translated means "dispeller of darkness." In the Indian tradition, a person can have many spiritual teachers, but only one Guru. One, in essence, spiritually marries the Guru. It is not a physical marriage, but a spiritual one. One does not marry the personality of the Guru, but marries the Guru's lineage and the current Guru's reflection of that lineage. The Guru carries the flame of the lineage he represents.

On a very personal note, I do not have a Guru in the outer world. My feminist consciousness has grown so much over the last couple of decades that I can not fully relate to many of the patriarchal images I see in the popular yogi lineages. I have seen many subtle, and often not too subtle, sexist influences in the lineage structures. This is not to say that I would immediately relate to a matriarchal lineage. I simply am not drawn to the human form of lineage. Apart from the human form of the lineages, the yogi teachings highly inspire me. Currently, I am drawn to the Himalayan teachings and have been immersed in readings from the Himalayan Institute. My quest is for a fuller self-realization of the inner guru that resides within. The inner guru resides within each of us. We each have ways of uncovering this guru. Some find this way through the aid of a personal Guru in the outer world. This is not my way, but I do respect those who

have chosen this way.

Namaste,
Joan

YIELD

Dear Joan,

What is the first good sign I can expect to see in my meditation practice?

Stan

Dear Stan,

"Yield"

Let the emotions walk on by. Watch them as they move through you and past you, without crashing into them. It has been scientifically proven that we each use only a very, very small percentage of the brain...1%, 5%, perhaps Einstein types use a whopping 10%. Most of us are swimming in the sea of our subconscious thought, and effectively drowning there.

Here is a visualization exercise for you:

Envision a large circle. This large circle is your "subconscious." Within this large circle of your subconscious, there exists a very small circle that is your "conscious." A regular practice of yoga and meditation increases the size of your small "conscious circle." The large "subconscious circle" then becomes smaller as the conscious circle expands and begins to fill up the large circle. Your consciousness expands as your subconscious thought becomes realized.

This is what yoga does. Meditation and hatha (the physical postures) are part of the study of yoga. A regular practice of hatha and meditation increases your conscious mind. It expands your consciousness. Hatha and meditation practice uncovers subtleties of your subconscious mind and slowly these subtleties become part of your conscious mind. In this process, you become more aware. This awareness leads one into deeper states of self-realization.

Namaste,
Joan

Planes, trains, and yogimobiles...

Dear Joan,

Any advice for the weary traveler? I really have a bad conscience. Although mentally I know I should continue my yoga practice when I travel, I am not that disciplined. No problem when at home and can join a yoga class (I am perpetually in the "beginners class", but that's where I belong and feel best) but when traveling things sort of fall apart a bit. And I do mean traveling -- numerous long business flights and lots of boring hotels and restaurant meals. It is also taxing physically -- sitting in airports, sitting in airplane seats, sleeping in strange beds and eating food that was not designed for human consumption. So, any advice for doing non-conspicuous yoga exercises in airport lounges and airplanes (you know, the type that will not draw attention and have people pointing at me, and not have the captain plan an unscheduled landing where I am met by two strong gentlemen carrying a straitjacket)? I know self-discipline is a personal matter, but any hints for how to best carry out some simple yoga exercises in hotel rooms? Any hints for improving discipline -- short of using a whip? I have started requesting vegetarian meals on airplanes and this has helped a lot -- much better food, fresher, healthier, and you don't get as sleepy. Have a great rest-of-summer!

All the best,
Ed of Denmark

Dear Ed,

You are probably expecting me to respond with some witty and engaging hatha exercises while in flight. I encourage you to rather practice hatha in a space that is clear and devoted to your physical practice, whether this is in a yoga class or a private space of your own. You have taken enough beginning classes to know some simple pranayama techniques that can be done while on the plane - breathwork, diaphragm breathing, etc. However, I too travel a lot, and I find the most benefit and joy at this time from reading and studying yoga texts and scriptures. Tomorrow I leave for Michigan. I am traveling six hours by train. I am taking with me these two books, "Transition to Vegetarianism" by Rudolph Valentine, and "The Spiritual Life of Children" by Robert Coles, and, of course, The Chicago Sun-Times Newspaper. I will probably read the newspaper first, and then transition over to my books.

May I suggest this book for you for starters, Ed, "Autobiography of a Yogi" by Paramahansa Yogananda. After this book, transitioning over to books by the Sivananda Center or The Himalayan Institute ("Path of Fire and Light" by Swami Rama)... also including the daily Denmark Times along the way. If you are not much of a reader, there are numerous yoga books on audiotape available now. The physical postures are only one small part of the yoga study. The path of Yoga involves eight limbs of study.

These 8 limbs of yoga include:

**Yamas
Niyamas
Asanas (this is where hatha postures fit in)
Pranayama (this includes breathwork)
Pratyahara
Dharana
Dhyana
Samadhi**

The above list of words may look like Greek to you now...close, they are Sanskrit. You have most likely been focused on Asanas and perhaps some Pranayama in your yoga classes. As you see, this is only one part of the yoga study. A significant part, but

incomplete by itself. Yoga is a complete lifestyle approach to physical/mental/spiritual health.

Here is a mental exercise for you while traveling. Look up one of the limbs listed above. "Limbs" is often the term used to describe the different aspects of the yoga study. Pick one of the books I recommended earlier, or find a new one. Find a book from an established author or institution. If magazines are more your style, subscribe to Yoga International Magazine. This magazine is published through the Himalayan Institute and can be found on the web. It is an excellent source and inspiration to all aspects of yoga study. Most yoga magazines focus on the physical, which certainly has its purpose...but this is far from complete. I have found "Yoga International Magazine" to be a continual source of inspiration to my yoga studies in meditation, concentration, discipline...the areas of study that you express interest in. "The Self-Realization Fellowship," also listed on the Web, has weekly newsletters you can subscribe to with teachings/writings from Paramahansa Yogananda. These readings can be delivered to your door every week. They are constant, gentle reminders/inspirations/ideas in realizing the yogic lifestyle. Discover more through your readings, and then let me know how you are doing! A joy to hear from you, Ed...from whatever airport!

**Namaste,
Joan**

New Classes

Dear Joan,

'Where are your classes held? Are they one-on-one or groups? Prices?

Thank you. Brian Racine

Dear Brian,

My new classes all start in September. Monday and Wednesday mornings at the College of Dupage in the Physical Education Department. Call 630 858-2800 to register. And Saturday mornings Outdoor Yoga and Meditation through York Township. Call 630-629-0886 to register. These are all group classes. Prices and registration procedures can be found by calling the numbers above.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Do you have a question for Joan?

Yoyoga with Joan

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Yo Joan

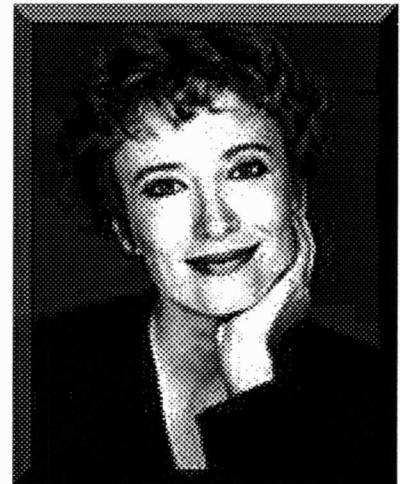


Let's do the ashtanga!

Dear Joan,

I've been practicing Ashtanga yoga for the last 4 months and am really enjoying it. Do you know of any Ashtanga ashrams/retreats? Also, any reference materials/books on the subject? And also, what is your take on Ashtanga practice?

Namaste
Julie



Dear Julie,

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Power Yoga might be a book for you, Julie. My co-author, Eve Adamson, co-authored that book too with a yoga teacher named Geo. He is located in Southern California and has retreats and classes there. You do not mention where you are from. Another wonderful book is "Power Yoga" by Beryl Bender Birch. Beryl and her husband Thom have regular retreats across the country. I really love her book and have referred to it often in my studies. I met her when her book first came out a few years back. I was very impressed by her classes and style of teaching too.

However, Ashtanga, although it has become associated recently with a "Power Yoga" type of hatha work-out, is really the system of yoga that I study. Ashtanga means "8 limbs." You can explore these 8 limbs in the philosophy section of this site. As far as my take on ashtanga, I love it. As far as the "power yoga" hatha routine, I love it too. I have practiced it regularly in my personal practice. Because of its physical difficulty, I think that it can foster a competitive approach to the study of it though. The fluidity and range of postures make it a style of hatha yoga study that requires a strong level of physical fitness. I find it challenging and also challenging to watch my own competitive

nature. Observe. Hope this has answered your questions, Julie.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Snap crackle yoga

Dear Joan,

Ms. yogi, If yoga is so great, why doesn't it have its own breakfast cereal?

Sardonicus

Dear Sardonicus,

Good question. I'll gladly pose for the cereal box.

**Namaste,
Joan**

OOO!

Dear Joan,

I am considering taking Kundalini yoga, however, I am reading a lot of scary things here on the internet - violent shaking, psychosis etc... Is this all in the mind or are the people who write this stuff trying to scare people? Am I safe?

Sincerely,
Brian
Glen Ellyn, IL

Dear Brian,

The world IS a scary place. The world IS an awesome place. The world IS beautiful. All of these descriptions can apply. Yes, everything is in the mind. Every SINGLE thing. Are people out there trying to scare people? Yes! Some definitely are. Take the source into consideration. And Brian, may the beautiful source be with you...

**Namaste,
Joan**

Future Yogi
Kenneth J

Dear Kenneth J,

Thank you dearly, Kenneth. Your body is the temple of your soul on this earth. A temple is a house of worship, a place to give thanks and seek solitude.

When I first wrote the CIG to Yoga book with Eve Adamson in 1997, I was troubled by the title "Complete Idiot's Guide." I have since grown to discover that it's not so bad being an expert idiot after all. Whatever we are given, we can make the most of. Whether it's a body, a book title, a family, a lifetime. Make the most of yours, Kenneth. This is not a dress rehearsal, this is it....until the next lifetime:)

Namaste,
Joan

Texan Refried Beans

Dear Joan,

Hello. I wanted to start yoga as a way to relieve stress. I am only 21 years of age, yet sometimes feel like I'm 80. I wanted to have more energy. I bought one of your books the complete idiots guide to yoga. It has helped quite a bit. Thanks for the 5 min and 15 min sessions in the back. Those are great. I have been a vegetarian for about a year now. I still eat fish occasionally but I'm trying to get out of that. The only thing that kills me is refried beans. I live in San Antonio and if you know what it's like living here, you know that the Mexican food here is the best. But you can't really order beans here without a big slice of bacon floating around in them yucky! So I stick to potato and egg on corn tortillas. Anyway, I just wanted to say that I'll probably order another book and/or a video soon. Thanks for the advice and awesome insights to a wonderful practice like yoga. You've made it so easy for this beginner.

m.

Dear m.,

Thanks, m. A suggestion for you: Refried beans, even without the bacon, is not a healthy choice. They are fried, after all, and fried again!. Mexican Black Bean Soup would be a better choice with a side order of plain rice.

Your priceless letter, keeps me going and makes me feel abundantly wealthy. Thanks again, m.!

**Namaste,
Joan**

URGENT EMAIL!

Dear Joan,

I am 14 and do bodybuilding. I bought your excellent book "THE COMPLETE IDIOTS GUIDE TO YOGA" today. I bought this because i want to learn the practice of Yoga to gain Flexibility and i am also interested in the art of meditation. The question is that I want to be really flexible so i can perform lifts without injury and build better muscle mass and have a better lung capacity. I am not sure what poses and breathing exercises to do. I have plenty of time and am detemined to put in as much effort into yoga as i do into bodybuilding (I go to the gym 6 times a week and i am not trying to brag or show off by saying this.) . So i can do yoga 6 or 7 days a week for as long as possible ! And I can't join a class because there are no places in my town that do that and I can't come to your classes because i live in the UK.

Thank you for your time in reading this long drawn out email !

Adam Watson

Dear Adam,

Gee, it never fails...I am all ready to post the site, and then I get an "URGENT E-MAIL" to respond to. Ai, Ai, Skipper! I am out of breath just reading your letter! Here's the clincher...You can do yoga all day long!!! You can even do it as you lift weights! You can do it when you are walking to the gym! You can do it in all the times in between! Yoga is uniting the body/mind/spirit. The exercises/postures are one way to get closer to this connection. Yoga is a lifestyle. You may find too, that the more you do the postures and begin lifting your own body weight on a regular basis through yoga postures, the less you will need the free weights. Continue reading, continue studying. If you can not find a yoga teacher nearby, I am happy to help you on the net. Read the asana of the week. Use this as a weekly tool to build your hatha yoga practice. Read the Yo Joan column to learn more about the lifestyle. Continue on in strength and stamina.

Now I've got to go take a nap....

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Send your questions or mail to joan@yoyoga.com
Please include the city and state you are from.**

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.



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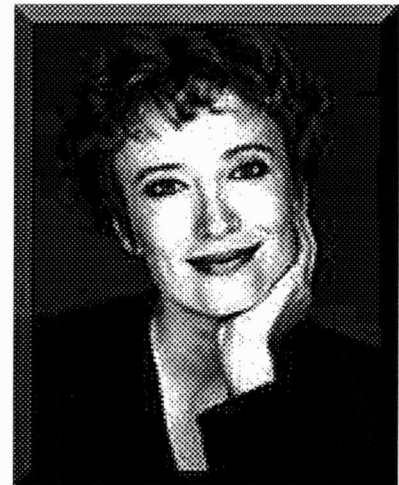
Yo Joan



Book Tip!

Dear Joan,

I just read yoyoga tips, I would like to bring another good astanga book to your attention. Astanga yoga by Liz Lark. This is an excellent book with good explanations and color photographs throughout. I must admit my slight bias as Liz is my teacher, her class is always a challenge but never competitive. At the end we are all physically tired, but feel exhilarated by the practice.



Best wishes
Kevin Brackley

Dear Kevin,

Thank you for the book tip, Kevin! How fortunate you are to have such a wonderful teacher as Liz! Continue on with blessings,...

Namaste,
Joan

Morning Yoga

Dear Joan,

Hello Joan. I love your website. I have a couple of questions. I have recently begun a morning walking routine, but I'm not sure of how to incorporate it into my yoga schedule. I've always done yoga in the morning but I've found that I like to walk in the morning, too. What practice should come first? Should I do yoga first, as usual when I wake up, then take my walk immediately following, or vice versa?

Also, could you suggest any books for Pranayama techniques? I'm looking more specifically for techniques dealing with panic, anxiety and sleeplessness.

Many thanks.

Most Sincerely,

Beth

p/s: I love your Complete Idiots Guide to Meditation...it's written so well...It's made meditation much less complicated for me.

Dear Beth,

I would recommend doing what feels best to your body and sticking with it. See which feels better, to walk first or hatha first. Some find that hatha prepares them for a more enriching walk. Others find that the walk prepares them for more enriching hatha. The two work beautifully together either way. They are a wonderful way to combine nature with your practice. I highly recommend this for a yoga practice. I do this myself too. I usually walk first and then hatha, but I would recommend either way depending on your inclinations.

Regarding books on Pranayama techniques, we do have some in our book, The Complete idiot's Guide to Yoga. I would also recommend books by Swami Rama, "Path of Fire and Light," "Science of Breath," and any of his many other books. I consider him a master in his ability of sharing his powerful hatha practice in the written form. Slow almost any pranayama technique down, and you have a relaxation technique.

Namaste,

Joan

Tantra here, Tantra there, Tantra where?

Dear Joan,

Where can I learn White Tantric or Tantra yoga in or around Glen Ellyn, IL?

Sincerely,

Brian

Glen Ellyn, IL

Dear Brian,

Explore the bi-monthly, free Yoga Chicago Newspaper. It has a listing of teachers of various traditions in it. You can locate it on the web at www.yogachicago.com. Or call 773-989-6767.

Namaste,
Joan

Testamomial

Dear Joan,

I've been practicing yoga at home for this whole summer (getting ready to teach 24 wonderful 1st graders!). Recently I was diagnosed with hearing loss and the doctor wanted to do an MRI on my brain -- scary! My first attempt I felt extreme anxiety and couldn't go through with it. This morning I tried again with the help of a sedative. But I also very carefully practiced Shavasana throughout the hour-long procedure. It very much helped me ignore the machine close about my head, and loud noise going on. I just kept breathing in/out/in/out and relaxing any part of me that tensed up. Focusing on my breath instead of my uncomfortable circumstances helped me a great deal.

Thank you for re-introducing yoga into my life (I practiced maybe 30 years ago for awhile).

Namaste,
Marilyn (in Arizona)

Dear Marilyn,

It's letters like yours, Marilyn, that are a testament to the many benefits of a yoga practice. Thank you for sharing your experience. Please write back and let me know the results of your tests. Many blessings!

Namaste,
Joan

Kind Southern Hospitality

Dear Joan,

Hi, Joan. You taught yoga at the Anthony DeMello retreat I attended four or five weeks ago in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, and I took your classes for the first time. My friend Ann Wakefield, who already took yoga, were delighted, and I was immediately hooked! I have now continued the classes in my hometown of Shreveport, have bought your book so I can do it at home, and have even enlisted my husband to take them as well. We love it!

Thanks so much for giving me the impetus to start and making it so easy.

9/15/00

Wake up and smell the roses

Dear Joan,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to call upon your vast knowledge of yoga! I was hoping you could help me with a problem: I feel very tired in the morning (no surprise there!) but i also feel generally lethargic during the day, and when i get home i just crash in front of the telly. I was wondering if you could recommend some exercises to do first thing in the morning, then some to do on returning home for about twenty minutes to help give me energy and improve my concentration.

Thank you for the help,
Darren Cook
Manchester, England

Dear Darren,

I would recommend Pranayama techniques to help with the lethargy. Press your hands together in a prayer position (namaste) in front of your chest. Inhale lift the arms straight up over your head. Exhale bring the arms back down in front of your chest. Inhale them up, exhale them down. Continue this for 12 forceful inhales and 12 forceful exhales. Pause. Notice how you feel. Do this again. 12 times. Pause. Notice how you feel. One more set of 12. Pause. This simple technique will get you started. There are many more pranayama techniques. Join a yoga class and get some more tips from the teacher. A kundalini class puts a major emphasis on breathwork, so you may want to explore if there is a class like this in your area. Another tip, turn off the telly and take a walk around the block. Count all the different trees, flowers, weeds, etc. Look at the clouds, what pictures do they form? Stand still and notice the wind...how it caresses you, sometimes subtly and sometimes so strong. Close your eyes, be still, and enter the beauty of this world.

Namaste,
Joan

Aw shucks...

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your part in a wonderful book. I am a college student with low expectations of my body and soul. I am only four chapters in (I haven't even tried any asana yet) and I already feel better. I hope that this venture is not like most with a lack of motivation. I Did not know much about Yoga when I began reading it(and I still don't), but it is amazing how you can use yoga with any religion or none at all. I have not paid any attention to my spiritual side in years, but by pursuing Yoga I can already feel a need to do so. well, not much more to say (I don't know enough yet), but for what you have already taught me... I thank you....

Judy Williams

Dear Judy,

You are most welcome, Judy! What a joy to meet you and Ann, and to share the weekend with you both in your lovely state of Louisiana. I sure did experience your wonderful southern hospitality. It was marvelous. Thank you!!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Body Building Hatha

Dear Joan,

I have tried out your training routines in the back of The Complete Idiots Guide to Yoga, but I am finding them too easy. I was wondering if you could make me a routine. I have tried out the balance poses but I am finding them very easy because I used to do Martial Arts before I started Bodybuilding so now I am quite strong and have good balance . (I hope I am not being big headed, there are probably harder balancing poses I can't do !) So, really I am after a Yoga routine which has a lot of flexibility and some strength and balance poses. I hope I am not being rude or anything asking for a routine. Or have you written any more books or do you recommend any.

Thank You
Adam Watson

Dear Adam,

Pick up the book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Power Yoga," or "Power Yoga," for a more strenuous routine of sun-salutations. This might be just what you are looking for. All the best to you on your ever building yoga studies...

**Namaste,
Joan**

Your love is taking me higher...

Dear Joan,

I am somewhere between an athiest and agnostic. It seems the majority of yogis believe in something spiritual. I am looking for something like the yamas and niyamas, and beyond, to help me raise my two 'ittle ones. I have one book on the Yoga Sutras but it is really philosophical and a bit too deep for me. Do you recommend any authors? And are there any other books you recommend that explore how to love and respect the earth and all it creatures without too much reference to a god?

As always, Joan, your advice is greatly appreciated. You are such a beautiful person.

Love to you and Namaste,
Julie
Mesa, AZ.

Dear Julie,

Yoga comes out of India where the predominant religion was/is Hindu. Yoga is associated with many of the Hindu spiritual texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. Yoga is not a religion by itself, but it can be a part of one's religious beliefs. The body/mind/soul connections can be attributed to all religious practices. For those who are not religious, the body/mind/soul connections can still be practiced and developed on their own.

The last Niyama or observance of yoga is something called Ishvara Pranidhana or Centering on the Divine. This focus helps us to relinquish ego and center on a greater force deep within us and around us. Whether the Divine exists within your life as Jesus, Buddha, Nature, it is real and a profoundly deep focus of our attention in this important Niyama.

Life is good. In fact, it is beyond good, it is perfection. In fact, it is beyond perfection, it is bliss. In fact, there are no facts, it is ultimately a feeling state that defies definition and can only be experienced through self-realization. A book on the yamas and niyamas that I would highly recommend which is simply written and beautifully explored is "Yoga of the Heart" by Alice Christensen of the American Yoga Association. It is a new, artfully crafted book, with a modern day look at these ancient yogic principles.

I just returned from teaching yoga, meditation, and massage at a DeMello Spirituality Conference in Elderon, New Jersey. Morning and evening yoga classes were taught overlooking the majestic Atlantic Ocean. The weather was beautiful. Deep, spiritual, loving light radiated from all the participants. I do believe in a higher power, Julie. I saw this power at work this weekend. I see it at work right now. I see it in the beauty of your kind words to me, Julie. Thank you with all my heart.

Namaste,
Joan

Cabin Fever

Dear Joan,

Yo Joan! I just got back from a summer in Maine as a counsellor at a children's camp. As you can imagine, managing a cabin of 14 ten-year-olds can be a stressful operation! While I was there I purchased the CIG to meditation. I immediately began feeling more relaxed and connected to the universe. One of the easiest and most effective meditations in your book, mindfulness, helped me the most. As I walked to the lake everyday to lifeguard, I noticed everything around me... the sunlight poking through the trees, the smell of the fresh plant life carpeting the woods, the wind gently blowing on my face, etc... It really made a difference. By the end of camp, my superior was giving me my performance evaluation, and told me that I was one of the most relaxed and down to earth counsellors he'd ever had!

I just wanted to thank you and encourage everyone to live more mindfully.

Thanks,
Tyler
Durham, CT

Dear Tyler,

And what a beautiful way to end this edition of 'Yo Joan.' I am so happy to have reminded you, so that you could remind all of us, to be more mindful. Many thank yous from all around the world!

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Please include the city and state you are from.

If your letter is directed for Suburban LIFE newspaper column, please state so in letter.

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

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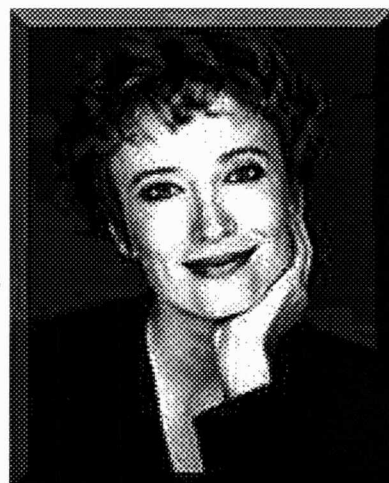
Yo Joan



Yogananda is a founda

Dear Joan,

I want to know what is this self-realization about? I am a christian who talks to God (Jesus) daily. I ask him to solve my problems and thank him for my life. He has never let me down. I was thinking about taking a Yoga class at work for relaxation when a friend of mine warned against it. She said that self-realization is about worshiping myself in place of God. I am smiled on by my savior and don't want to unintentionally do something against him. I have been attempting to find out more about this. Can you help me?



Thank you.
Shawna ;-)

Dear Shawna,

Well, Shawna, no one can say it better than Paramahansa Yogananda of the Self-Realization Fellowship. He was a Yogi who came here from India in the late 1960's. He was the founder of the Self- Realization Fellowship, which is one of the largest yoga organizations in the US, if not the world. It's headquarters are located in Southern California. He believed in the teachings of Christianity and combined these teachings beautifully into the yogic view. His words are eloquent and much more of an explanation than I can currently offer you. He has written scores of books on the subject. I suggest picking up one of his books that are sold in all major bookstores. I believe you will see that there really is no conflict in your deeply held beliefs and what Yogananda says. I understand your hesitations and your questioning. I think it is quite healthy to question. Yoga is not a religion in itself, but it can be combined into your religious beliefs. I think that your heart will smile when you read Paramhansa Yogananda. He believed in Christianity, as he did also in the yoga lifestyle and

teachings. If you choose to follow my suggestion of reading one of his books, let me know what you think. I would be most interested to hear.

 Namaste,
Joan

Say it with Seitan!

Dear Joan,


I have to tell you that when I first read CIG to Yoga (about 2 years ago), I just thought to myself "NO WAY" when I read the part about not drinking caffeine and about vegetarianism. Now I have learned to never say never. After about 3 years of regular hatha yoga practice and classes, I gave up caffeine about a year ago, and became a vegetarian about 10 months ago. I cannot explain how this happened, except to say that the changes came about gradually and naturally and were not difficult at all. Believe me, no one is more surprised than I am! But the point of this e-mail is to ask you if you've ever had a recipe contest for seitan? I just learned how to make seitan, but could use some ideas on how to cook with it. I know that there are other websites for vegetarian recipes, but I just thought I'd ask.

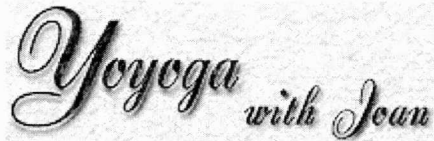
Thanks for your on-line support!
Shanti-
Cheryl

 Dear Cheryl,

Only one seitan recipe was submitted in the last seitan contest that ran a few months ago...so I am trying it again this issue...let's see if your letter will spark more sensational seitan recipe submissions (say that three times fast)! By the way, for those who have no clue as to what seitan is, it is whole wheat gluten that has a thick texture like steak. It can be cooked, broiled, roasted, fried, seasoned, just like any meat product. So, for all you meat eaters who think a vegetarian diet is limiting and not satisfying...this is yet another option for you in your ever expanding vegetarian world.

Namaste,
Joan

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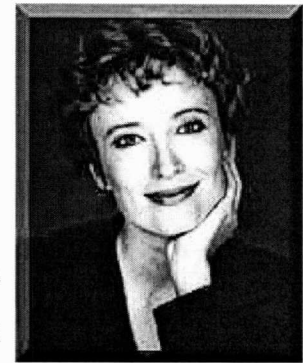
Yo Joan



By the book

Dear Joan,

I want to take a yoga class but am not sure how to find one. Do you teach classes? If not, can you recommend how I can find a good class? I bought a book on yoga but ended up frustrated because I was unsure if I was doing it correctly or not. I think it is something I will benefit most from with live instruction. Thank you for any help you are able to give.



Andrea :)

Dear Andrea,

I don't know where you live. A reminder to all readers, please include the city/state you are from with your letter so that I may be more helpful to you...it gives me even more of an idea of where you are coming from:)

Check out your local community college (that's where I teach), local park districts, health clubs, yellow pages....gee, there are so many options out there these days. Small towns and large cities are offering yoga classes in numerous locations. Also, check out the Yoga International Magazine and Yoga Journal Magazine for advertisements of various yoga centers around the globe. And, yes, you will benefit most from live instruction, Andrea. Books and tapes are aids in your studies, but it is always preferable to study directly, face to face, with a seasoned yoga teacher.

Namaste,
Joan

In the right vein

Dear Joan,

I am only 19 years old and I am already starting to notice spider veins and blue varicose veins on my legs. I am very worried because more and more are becoming visible. I wanted to know if there were some yoga postures I could do to help prevent more from surfacing and maybe it would even help the ones that I have now. Also, I stand on my feet a lot at my job and I think that could be contributing to these factors. Plus, it is actually painful at times on my legs due to these veins especially after I'm done working it hurts. I need your help because I feel I'm too young to be having problems like this already and I want to prevent it from getting worse.

Namaste,
Jeannie

Dear Jeannie,

Believe it or not, Jeannie, many people have these same problems at all different ages. Varicose veins happen when the vein ducts back-up and get clogged. Often spider veins that appear on the legs are not varicose veins, but are broken superficial blood vessels that are more a cosmetic nuisance than anything else. They are not at all painful. However, varicose veins are more serious and should be treated with care in yoga postures and in massage, and other forms of treatment. You mention they hurt you. I would recommend that you get a doctor to examine your legs. Let your physician rule out any blood clots. If your veins are clotting, there are medication possibilities that can reduce and eliminate the clots. Also, a vegetarian diet, along with plenty of water, can help to purify the blood. The following postures I recommend for people with leg circulation problems, however, this would be after consulting with a physician.

The constant pull of gravity can take a toll on our physical bodies and on our circulation. And so, yogis regularly turn the world upside down and into the headstand! The headstand helps the venous blood return to the heart less effortlessly. Inversions of all sorts put less pressure on the venous blood flow. This venous blood flow is very important to the healthy functioning of the body chemistry. Veins carry the blood back to the heart where it is cleaned and purified for re-circulation. We all want blood that is movin' and groovin' to the heart beat. We do not want blood that is stagnating and causing blood traffic congestion. A healthy vegetarian diet combined with a regular practice of inverted postures can encourage a healthier functioning of the continual blood flow inside the body. Inversions befriend gravity instead of struggling against it.

But, if headstand seems a long ways off right now for you, try some of these other inverted postures on a regular basis:

Shoulderstand

Plough

Lying on your back with feet propped up against the wall

Leg lifts

Upside down, and all around, yoga can improve your health.

Namaste,
Joan

A rose is a rose

Dear Joan,

I purchased your book yesterday, "Idiots Guide to Meditation," I love it. I originally had it from my local Library but its to good now to have in my collection. The reason for my letter is this: I have no visualization ability. I close my eyes and see nothing (even though I dream OK) and I would love to be able too see in my minds eye. I do not have a Yoga teacher but choose to walk alone. I use books by the Shivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre, Alice Christensen, Stephen Strurgess and Yogi Ramacharaka. I am 49 years and live in Britain. It's only in the past few years that I have been more committed to my yoga practice and books like yours are a wonderful assistance. I do not know if you can help me solve (a minor) my problem I have tried various exercises without success. Does it really matter?

One more question : Can I practice Shankhaprakshalana on my own? With the Autumn here, I would like to remove years of abuse of my body by smoking drinking etc. In his book on Self Realization, Stephen Strurgess explains the routine: Drinking sea salted water the Asana exercises Tadasana, Triyaka tadasana etc. but that a teacher should be in attendance.

I live in west Wales in the UK in a rural area. Yoga teachers are not plentiful, but more importantly than that, I am very selective who I let into my mind (not meant to sound egotistical). From your web site and reading about your life, and I am sorry to learn of your present difficulties, I feel I wish I lived near to your classes. Very best wishes and thanks to you. I am off to read your book.

Namaste,
Peter Jenkins

Dear Peter,

First of all, Regarding the asana routine your teacher has recommended, I am not familiar with it. It is best to work with your teacher in person for your asana practice. I am also not familiar with the vinyasa you mention "Shankhaprakshalana." I have looked it up and can not find this series in my selection of resource books. This is not to say that it does not exist somewhere, but simply that I do not know of it. Perhaps the spelling is off?

Regarding your meditation practice, I have had the same "problem" you describe. I used to take meditation classes just to find out what I was doing "wrong." It seemed like everyone I knew could experience intricate visualizations in there meditation practice and I saw nothing. I remember admitting to a wonderful meditation teacher named, Eileen Ruffer, that I simply see blackness when I close my eyes. She then instructed our meditation class to close our eyes and visualize a rose. I was openly frustrated. I did not know how to visualize the rose. She asked me if I have any experience of the rose at all when I closed my eyes. I tried very hard...I began to sense a rose. I could sense the rose as a feeling state, tho I could not see it. I could not exactly touch it either, but I could eventually sense the rose within me. She told me that this is the essence of meditation. It is not necessary to see the rose. Not all of us can. The feeling state is a very important part of the meditation process and this is what the visualization process leads to. Her words were very important to me, and obviously still are. They encouraged me to continue my meditation practice. I hope my relating this story to you, Peter, will encourage you to continue yours. Do keep in touch.

Namaste,
Joan

Do you have a question for Joan?

Yo Joan



Dear Yoyoga Readers,

My computer crashed a few weeks ago and with it went my email address book. So here I am creating a new one. If you would like to be on it and receive mailings of Yoyoga updates every two weeks, please email me with your email address. Thank you kindly. Here we go again!

Namaste,
Joan



Baby Bloomers

Dear Joan,

I am just starting out on yoga and find your book "Idiots Guide to Yoga" very informative and fun to read. However, I can't seem to find any reference to pregnancy and yoga. I am going through in vitro fertilization and my doctor's orders are 'no strenuous exercise'. My yoga teacher instructs us in "Yoga for Eternal Happiness", which I believe is an energy yoga. I have been told (by the nurse's) to not participate in yoga. When is it okay to practice yoga again? I pray that I am fortunate enough to be in early pregnancy. Thank you.

Namaste, Josephine

Dear Josephine,

Your nurses are wise. Not all yoga instructors are experienced with or knowledgeable of the special

physical concerns that pregnancy brings. If you already had a regular yoga practice before your pregnancy, it would most likely be quite fine to continue your practice with some simple modifications to positions. However, as a new yoga practitioner, it is important that you study yoga with an instructor experienced in pregnancy yoga. There are some wonderful books on the market now. Why not share one with your nurse and doctor? Ask their opinion in relationship to your special pregnancy. As we are all physically different, so are our pregnancies. Yoga is more than the physical postures. It is also study of non-violence in thought, word, and deed. I can not think of a more beautiful study to bring into your baby's forming life right now. I would suggest you pick up some more yoga books and study the concept of "ahimsa" or non-violence. Surely, your baby will appreciate and feel your studies in peace.

Namaste,
Joan

A warm heart

Dear Joan,

Could you advise me on any asanas or breathing technique that would help me to warm up a bit? It seems that I am freezing cold most of the time while everyone around me is wondering what I'm about. My hand and feet are my biggest complaint but a lot of times I am just cold through and through. Funny enough my blood pressure is ok, I have no iron deficiencies etc. With a bit more than 6 feet I am quite tall for a woman, could that be the problem? Thank you very much in advance for your answer!

Namaste,
Silke

Dear Silke,

Gee, I hear ya, Silke! I totally relate. In fact, sometimes when I walk around the class, guiding people in adjustments in postures, I know that if I touch someone's back it will feel like ice on their back. My hands get so, so cold sometimes! So at those times I whisper an adjustment, or place one finger on the spine to bring an awareness there. A chigung master told me to focus on my hands and imagine them heating up. I guess my concentration has not been strong enough because that has not yet worked for me. My blood pressure is at the low range of average. I am also tall.

When I give massages, if my hands are cold when I start, they warm up very quickly and end up feeling like little furnaces. So, my first suggestion, would be to give more massages. The more I give, the

Joan

School

Dear Joan,

I was looking in the phone book under yoga instruction and saw that you are based in Oak Brook. What commun college do you teach at and what kind of yoga do you teach? I have taken a few power yoga classes at Health Tra in Glenn Ellyn, and would like to find a another power yoga class in the area. I live in Lombard. I would appreciate any suggestions you may have.

Thank You,
Gina LoCascio

Dear Gina,

I teach at the College of DuPage on Monday and Wednesday mornings. New classes begin in January. Registration is just beginning now. I teach beginning hatha yoga, which involves an introduction to basic postures and yoga philosophy. I also teach hatha yoga 2 which explores the chakra energy system in postures. And I teach a meditation class where we explore a variety of different meditation techniques.

**Namaste,
Joan**

School

Dear Joan,

We have followed your web site for some time. We live in Rockford and have practiced yoga with and without instructors for many years. Can you help us find an intensive class or private instruction that might help us advance to a more refined, focused practice? Apparently this is not available to intermediate yogis in our immediate area. All we find is introductory classes here. Do you offer more advanced or private classes? Can you direct us to those who might?

Sheryl and Michael

Dear Sheryl and Michael,

Direct you to a teachers training program. Whether or not you decide to actually teach yoga, a training program will give you the type of study you are looking for. There are numerous ones now in the Chicago area. The Temple of Kriya Yoga offers a correspondence course that can be done by mail and involves meetings with instructors every few months. I have heard great things about this course. My two instructors who guided me through the Temple training program in 1994 are the ones who have put this program together...Kim Schwartz and William Hunt. This type of program might be exactly what you are looking for. Since you live all the way out in Rockford, most of the studying can be done on your own. People from all across the country have started enrolling in this program. The number to call for more information is 773-342-4600

Namaste,
Joan

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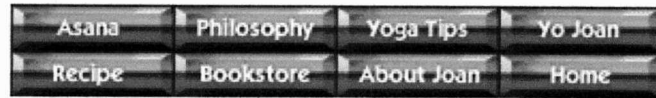
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Yo Joan



Dear Yoyoga Readers,

My computer crashed a few weeks ago and with it went my email address book. So here I am creating a new one. If you would like to be on it and receive mailings of Yoyoga updates every two weeks, please email me with your email address. Thank you kindly. Here we go again!

**Namaste,
Joan**



Wisey Parents, etc.

Dear Joan,

I'm writing from Montreal, I discovered your website by browsing around and I was wondering if you could give some tips to start meditating regularly. I've tried to meditate and seem to get distracted by noises (parents) in my house or on the street, I do not want to wake up sometimes or my mind just keeps on wandering and won't stay still for me to focus!

Helpawaiting
thank you for your time in advance.

Dear Help Awaiting,

The reasons many people turn to meditation are exactly for the reasons you state. The mind is easily

distracted and unfocused. Meditation techniques help to quiet the mind and increase concentration. My first suggestion would be to set aside five minutes a day for a meditation practice. Pick the same five minutes every day. I often suggest to students 5 minutes upon getting up in the morning, and if possible, another five minutes before going to sleep at night. A simple meditation bell can help bring the mind to a focus and soften the outside (and inside) noises. In my shavasana and sun salutation tapes in the Yoyoga Bookstore, I have a bell meditation on one side of each of these tapes. It is a 15-20 long meditation exercise. It is not necessary for you to practice this long for starters. As your practice improves, and you receive the benefits you obtain through regular meditation practice, you will want to practice longer.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Siting sites

Dear Joan,

I was recently looking for some information on yoga because I am interested in studying it further. I found your site interesting and inspiring. I would be very interested if you could send me more information or possibly some other sites that are similar. Thanks and I look forward to learning more about yoga and the philosophies. Kelly Ming

Dear Kelly,

In the "About Joan" section of this site there are web connections to organizations that I have studied and/or participated in. I hope you will find them helpful...

**Namaste,
Joan**

Please release me...

Joan,

Do you have any experience in kriyas I've read about; basti, neti, vastra dhauti, nauli, basti? They seem a bit extreme and strange, but nonetheless it would be fun to try some time. Best wishes and thanks for your wonderful and inspirational website.

k Panther"

Dear Pinky,

Kriya Yoga is the path of spiritual action and is often associated with the study of sacred texts, self study, breathwork, mantras, and meditation. As in kundalini yoga, the essence is to move the kundalini energy up the spine to ever deeper realizations.

Regarding the cleansing techniques you refer to, these are called "shat kriyas" For more detailed explanations on shat kriyas please refer to the book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga."

Sthala Basti (Ground Colon Cleansing) is done through a churning of the intestinal tract. It takes a great deal of sensitivity training to become adept at this. This can start to be practiced through the simple yoga movements in forward bends. I practice mild forms of this in my hatha practice.

"Neti" is a form of nasal wash. A special neti pot filled with saline solution is often used to rinse the nostrils of impurities. The water goes in one nostril and out the other. It is especially helpful for those with allergies. I regularly practice this and find it improves my sense of smell and makes me feel groovy.

stra" I am not familiar with. Perhaps it has a different spelling?

"Agnisara Dhauti" (Fire Stomach Cleansing) is also referred to as "Nauli." This is where the stomach muscles are moved repeatedly in a circular up and down motion. I do not practice this one. But I probably should since I do have a sensitive stomach that could benefit from this. It is not easy.

As strange as these shat kriyas may seem...remember, Pinky, that elimination is the key to illumination.

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Yo Joan



Dear Yoyoga Readers,

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naste,

1

Red Hot Chili Pepper Yoga

Dear Joan,

Say, do you know of a good place to look for "music to yoga to"??? I'm looking at some New Age stuff right now, but it would be good to have a list of CD's that other people think is great for practicing yoga. Although I can do my yoga to everything from Mozart to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, I'm in a mood to have the music flow with my asanas. I have about 5 CD's from Yoga Zone and Living Arts that fit the bill, but am searching for something new.

I hope you are doing well. I LOVE your web site. Keep up the good news!

Lori Erickson
Montana

r Lori,

How great to hear from you, Lori! There are so, so many great tapes out there now. Have you heard any of Krishna Das? Since you mention the Red Hot Chili Peppers, he does beautiful melodic rhythms to ancient mantras, its grooving and transcending. I recently spent a few days in Madison, Wisconsin. Krishna Das had just appeared at the University there and was the talk of the town. I love that city! There are so many vegetarian restaurants and eastern influences. You must visit there!

, Spring Hill Music Recordings by Robert Gaas are some of my all time favorite for reflective and itative mantra recordings. He has beautifully recorded and orchestrated mantras in an assortment of cultural traditions - buddhist, hindu, native american, greek orthodox, etc. I often use his recordings in my classes. I think you will find either of these artists, Lori, a wonderful earful. I use both artists in my yoga classes at different times, depending whether we are feeling mellow or red hot. Let me know how your musical yoga studies continue!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Lets Exercise

Dear Joan,

Exercise.com is a website dedicated to help make exercise & fitness a part of your daily life. Check us out for our list of exercise programs in the Chicagoland area, our "Ask a Fitness Expert" section, exercise videoreviews, and much, much, more!!! Happy Fitness, Diane@LetsExercise.com

Thanks,
Diane M. SpolarLetsExercise.com

Dear Diane,

Very best wishes on your new site, Diane!

**Namaste,
Joan**

A breath of fresh air

Dear Joan,

Regarding the Diaphragmatic breathing technique you mentioned. This is the way I was taught when I began yoga 'way back' in the early '60's but in 1975 I was introduced to Howard Kent and the Yoga for Health Foundation at Ickwell Bury in Bedfordshire, England, have you heard of it?

Howard and his eminent colleagues have done a great deal of research into breathing, especially in relation to people with Multiple Sclerosis using various methods of monitoring their energy levels. On a basic level they use muscle testing but his researchers have also used other more scientific monitoring methods.

Their research proved that abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing actually depleted the subject's energy and when the subject was taught to keep the abdomen relaxed and not expanded and shown how to focus on expanding the lower part of the ribcage - expanding and contracting sideways like a squeeze box - the change in their energy level was dramatic and many were able to leave Ickwell Bury without their wheelchairs and walking sticks. Some have quite remarkable stories.

This was quite a radical change to the way most of us were taught but it is actually similar to the way I was taught to breathe by my first singing and speech teacher back in the early 50's. We were taught that there were no lungs in the abdomen and that the chest needed to expand forward, sideways, and backwards like a barrel for the diaphragm to be able to move up and down in an expanding and contracting way like a piston pump. She taught us that to be able to project our voices and be able to sustain a long, strong breath we had to lift and open the chest and keep the chest comfortably up rather than collapsing down with each exhalation, when you do this you can feel difference in size of the chest and the expansion of the ribcage. You can check it by placing your hands just below the breastbone the longest fingers touching and you will notice how far the fingers separate.

You can also do it with the focus on the abdomen and notice that it is possible to take quite a deep breath and have practically no movement of the ribcage at all - I have had a lot of students over the years who breathed that way. Howard is convinced that this is the cause of many diseases including heart disease. Many teachers all over the world have changed their way of teaching breathing as a result of the research done by Howard and also by Robin Munro at the Yoga Research Centre in the UK.. Andre Van Lysebeth revised his section on breathing in "Pranayama" as a result.

Oh boy, I really didn't intend to go on and on about this and I may be presuming that you are not aware of any of this and you may well be. I offer it in the spirit of Light and Love and benefit to others.

Om Shanti
Margo Hutchison

Dear Margo,

Oh, Margo, you are so dear to write this out so well and so clear. You are very right! It is the lower rib

cage that is the actual focus of extension. The abdomen does not house the lungs, so expanding and contracting the abdomen can bring the focus away from the real point of focus which is the lower part of the lungs. From my experience, as the lungs and the ribs expand, the abdomen will also slightly expand to make room for the lungs. However, as you say, the yoga "diaphragm breathing" technique should place the emphasis on the diaphragm, which is located right under the bottom ribs. I totally agree with you that too much emphasis can be placed on the abdomen. Many people can raise and lower their abdomen and have very shallow breathing. In fact, as you and fellow yoyoga readers are sitting reading this, hold your breath and contract your belly in and out. See! It is possible to not even breath and move your tummy!!! Your observations and studies are keen and right on target. Thank you for sharing this information with readers and in such a precise way.

I do not know of the Yoga For Health Foundation, but I would like to. I would like to know more about their studies and be in touch with them. I have had some wonderful email correspondence with Dr. Munro who had a very impressive health feature last month in Yoga International Magazine. Thank you for spreading your breath of knowledge, Margo. You're fantastic!!

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Yo Joan



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naste,

1

Healthy Perspectives

Dear Joan,

I recently came across your name as I was searching amazon.com for a book on yoga. One of the reviews for your book was quite complimentary and I was compelled to check out your website. I am a 37 year old female mother of 3. I also am a registered nurse and work about 48 hours a week. As you may already know that my profession makes numerous demands on not only my body, but also my psyche. This past year I have experience the normal aging process but I am inflicted with chronic pain that stays with me 24-7. I have plantar fasciitis and have chronic upper and lower back pain which also includes hip pain and knee pain. It is mostly muscle tension in nature. Over the last 1 1/2 years I have lost approximately 40 lbs primarily for my back and foot pain. Although it has helped, I know that I need something more. I used to go to the fitness center 3 times a week and would exercise on the treadmill and weight machines. Then I would plunge into the hot tub to relieve my aching muscles!

As a newby to yoga, I do not know much, but have read a few articles. I am really interested in yoga for the primary

reason of wanting to feel better physically and mentally. Since I take such good care of others in my profession, I feel it is time for me to take good care of myself. I basically don't know where to start and something deep inside of me was telling me that you were my answer to get me going. It is hard to describe myself in such a short letter but these are the basics. I am overall a very healthy person with no major health problems. Just have some annoying symptoms such as chronic back and leg pain, heartburn (gastric reflux disease), hemorrhoids (no wonder since i am on my feet so much), and lack of sleep (due to all listed above).

would love to come to a class of yours, I just live in Kankakee, IL, which is not far from Chicago. But I am not sure which class is for me and where I should begin. If you could assist me with where to start I would truly be indebted to you! I hope to meet you and be able to share with you a beginning of healing for myself as I truly believe that we are brought together with others for a reason. Be it a positive or a negative experience, we all have the ability to choose the outcome of that relationship and create a reflection of our true spirit that will impact others. As we are both in the profession of helping others, I would appreciate any help that you can give me. Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
Mary Keller

Dear Mary,

I am sure you are not the only person reading this who is in the healing profession and in need of some serious healing. I am very glad and honored that you wrote to me. Treadmills and weight machines are all fine and dandy for losing weight, building strength, or staying trim, but if we are looking for an avenue of fitness that incorporates healing, there are much better alternatives to turn to. Yoga being one. Massage being another. Meditation being yet a third. The back pain you mention will make the meditation alternative difficult, not impossible, but difficult. So, I would recommend a regular practice of gentle yoga elements along with regular, weekly massages. Many people do not get massages because they see it as a luxury. I see it as a necessary vitamin for good health. Massage can do wonders for blood circulation and overall healthy conditioning of your internal organs. I see Swedish massage and yoga both as forms of massage. One is passive and one is active. In yoga, you actively massage your body through the movements of the postures. In a standard Swedish massage, you permit another to massage you, and you are the passive receiver. It is necessary to be able to give and also receive; yoga and massage help us to experience both.

You mention, Mary, that you, "Just have some annoying symptoms such as chronic back and leg pain, heartburn, hemorrhoids, and lack of sleep." Any symptom that is "chronic" is certainly more than an "annoyance." A chronic condition is with you night and day. One must learn to live with the chronic condition on a permanent basis or seek to alter the condition. A "disease" is when the body is out of ease and in a state of stress. The postures of yoga help to reduce symptoms of stress. Massage also reduces stress. Diet is yet another healing alternative that can reduce stress. How is your diet? An unhealthy diet can cause heartburn and lack of sleep. Of course, as a nurse, you know this. But sometimes being in a class with fellow students with similar healthy objectives can be a boost for the willpower to living a healthier life. In yoga this is called "satsang" translated as "the gathering of like minded souls."

There are numerous beginning yoga classes available to choose from in the Chicago area. You will only know if one is right for you by trying one. For starters, check your local park district or junior college. I teach at the College of DuPage, in Glen Ellyn. New classes start there in January. Consider finding a class as close to home or work as possible, to reduce the added stress of a long drive. Find a massage

therapist in your area by calling your local massage school or the American Massage Therapy Association in Evanston.

You are right, Mary. It is no coincidence when two people meet. Thank you for reaching out to me. Thank you for all the healing you have done and continue to do...

**Namaste,
Joan**

A class act

Dear Joan,

Namaste Joan: Your web page is glorious. I honor your philosophy and wonder if there are classes that you conduct in the area that are not at the College of Du Page? I currently moved to Burr Ridge. Thank you for your response.

Lora Holton

Dear Lora,

The only classes I am currently teaching are mornings at the College of DuPage. Thank you for your interest, Lora!

**Namaste,
Joan**

An Intuitive Man

Dear Joan,

Let me please start by saying I love your Complete Idiots Guide. You are so present with your love and humor and

wisdom that I feel we are fast friends even though we have only met in the pages of your book. Now my question. I started to reclaim my long Forgotten yoga practice seven weeks ago. I started using the rejuvenative yoga called the "FiveTibetans". After a few weeks of that I decided to add additional asanas, using information from your "CIG", to design a program to increase flexibility and strength and my bodily awareness of Spirit. Is it ok to to combine these two types of practice into one session. I feel great and it intuitively feels right, but some of the things I've read in other books suggests I should seperate them. What would you suggest?

At such time as we may meet or talk or correspond via E-mail, I remain yours in Peace and Joy,

DavidLansing, MI

Dear David,

You feel great and intuitively it feels right. What more can you ask for? Trust your heart and listen to your health. This is what a good yoga books trys to teach you. You are doing it. You go guy!

**Namaste,
Joan**

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