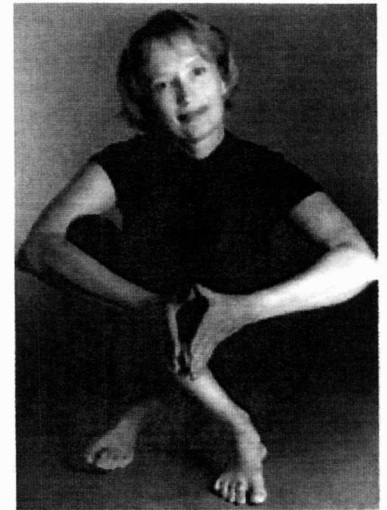


Yo Joan



The New Year has come fast!

Dear Joan,

I've noticed that in *The Complete Idiots Guide to Yoga*, you mention fasting once a week. I was wondering what the benefits are, and also the best way to do it!

Thank you,
Darren

Dear Darren,

There are many variations on fasting. Many cultures and religious traditions support the use of fasting as a way to increase spiritual awareness. A common sense approach, which is the yoyoga way, would say that fasting helps one to prioritize differently. If you are not thinking about or planning your meals, you will have more time and ability to focus on spiritual concerns and questions. This does not work for everyone, in fact, I dare say, it does not work for most. Most people are overwhelmed with feelings and sensations for food when they fast, so fasting really simply makes them focus on food even more. They just count the minutes till their fast ends so that they can eat again. Their time fasting is spent dreaming about the delicious next meal. Even so, fasting can help us to become aware of this, and to see how clear our focus or concentration can be. If one is able to focus so clearly and strongly on food, imagine the possibilities if the focus could be placed elsewhere!

For this reason, I agree with the many traditions that support fasting one day a week as beneficial on spiritual levels. If a full day is not possible, then one morning, or one evening, or simply eating less that day. I recommend a juice fast, so as not to completely starve the body. I do not recommend a fast for people with health concerns or those who are taking medications of any sort.

My fast recommendations are from a spiritual level, not from a physical level. Our bodies need food as physical fuel, so I honestly do not believe fasting can be justified on this level alone. But if we view fasting as fuel for our spiritual growth, I believe there is strong justification to offer a simple fast to the temple that houses our spirit one day a week. In this time, read more spiritual texts, pray more, meditate more, Use the time you would have used eating, as a time to reflect on spiritual questions, concerns, understandings. When you comes out of a fast, do not gorge on all the food you missed. This defeats the fast. Rather, drink some warm water with a pinch of salt or ginger, then an hour later, drink some juice. Then a little later, have something light and healthy to eat. This is the way to come out of a fast.

**Namaste,
Joan**

When I'm 64...

Dear Joan,

I have just read "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga, second edition". To make a long story short, I am nearly 60 years old. Up to 5 or 6 years ago I jogged 5 miles a day, 5 to 7 times a week. I also did some light weight work and a few isometrics. Now I only fast walk 4 miles in about an hour, 4 to 5 times a week. I have some torn cartilage in my right knee and tendentious in both elbows and left shoulder. I am very active as I am chief cook and bottle washer of my own business and work 10 hours or more 5 to 6 days a week. This includes a fair degree of physical activity. I have put on about 8 to 10 pounds and an inch or more on my waist since going from jogging to walking. But more importantly I don't have the energy or feel as good as I used to both physically and mentally.

I would like to use yoga as a means to replace the fast walking and provide higher levels of physical and mental well being. I prefer not to look for an instructor or find the time to take a class. I would like to utilize that 30 minutes to an hour available in the mornings with a yoga program that fits my physical limitations.

Can you help?

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Jon

Dear Jon,

Yoga was traditionally taught not by text, but by direct contact from teacher to student. This is the way I

most recommend that you study. However, many people do not have an appropriate teacher to study with. For this reason, various texts can help us advance on this path of practice. Because of your physical limitations, it is all the more important to have the guidance of a teacher with you. Try picking up a book by Swami Rama, or Goswami Kriyananda or Paramahansa Yogananda. These teachers will inspire you into the deeper meanings of yoga practice. The book, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health," by BKS Iyengar (and in the Yoyoga Bookstore) is also a good book for anyone with physical limitations. This book explores the yoga poses in physical detail and makes recommendations and adjustments for various physical concerns. Yoga can certainly help you into higher levels of physical and mental well being, Jon. Many exercise programs can. Yoga also takes you deeper into the quietude and beauty of your inner soul.

Namaste,
Joan

Buddhalovsky responds...

Dear Joan,

Do you consider buddhism to be in the yoga family? Or are they separate practices that compliment each other (ie hatha yoga and buddhist meditation)? I love your web site and books.

Sincerely,
Dan

Dear Dan,

Yoga stems out of India and the mystical aspects of Hinduism. Yoga can be practiced apart from Hinduism. The practices of yoga can be incorporated into any religion, or apart from any religion. Many buddhists are yogis. In fact, the Buddha himself was considered a Yogi.

Namaste,
Joan

Thanks Mike!

Dear Joan,

I HAVE BEEN TAKING YOGA CLASSES FOR 3 YEARS. I RECENTLY BOUGHT THE IDIOTS GUIDE TO TO YOGA, AND IT HAS HELPED ME WITH MY YOGA CLASS.

THANK YOU!
MICHAEL HAMILTON

Dear Michael,

Thank you for thanking me. Happy new year!

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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[Simple Vegetarian Recipe Contest](#) | [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) | [AboutJoan](#)

Yoyoga, Inc.

Yo Joan



Child Education

Dear Joan,

Aloha and Happy New Year Joan, I just found your website while searching for ideas for teaching yoga to preschoolers. Your site and YOU are special holiday gifts just opened with much delight, and with more to come each month. Thank you.

I live on the island of Kaua'i in Hawaii. I'm a yoga teacher/yoga therapist and have just recently started teaching preschoolers (32 of them) once a week in a preschool setting. I'm creating my own curriculum as I go along, trying to integrate the yoga sessions with the monthly themes of the school. The children are a delight (multicultural), a blessing, and have much to teach. I would appreciate any tips, resources, stories, successes, fun activities, documentation, to keep me going. It's quite a different challenge (and time consuming preparation) to teach yoga using creative, appropriate age activities (music, stories, poetry, etc.) to introduce yoga asanas and sutras. I was involved in early education years ago, so I'm excited about bringing together two of my favorite loves: yoga and children. At that time I had the opportunity to observe and learn a little about the Montessori approach to education. I have great respect for this kinesthetic model and would appreciate your input with these practices in mind.

Namaste,
Donna

Dear Donna,

My best advice would be to read about the Montessori approach from Dr. Montessori's many books, and then incorporate yoga into your understanding of child development. Much of my teachings with children came out of my sincere love for them and my sincere love for yoga. The same that you describe for

yourself. Children love to play, and that is what many of our sessions became. We would play being a tiger, an eagle, a tree. What does it feel like to be a tree? On a windy day? On a quiet day? I did not try teaching children sutras, for they are much more knowledgeable of simple threads of wisdom than I. From my perspective, the sutras were made for the complicated adult mind. Children are way ahead of the understandings that stem from these teachings. They are already there...we are truly the students this. When I broke my knee in October, I took time off from teaching and I gave my montessori yoga classes to another teacher. I felt it was important to have a yoga teacher who could move on the floor with the students.....or a student who could move on the floor with the teachers....we have so much to learn from children. I simply set up stages for their experiences, their expressions and their true yoga...union with life.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Young Vegan

Dear Joan,

Hi. My name is Caitlyn and I'm 13 years old. My mom studies herbology and a few years ago I started getting an interest in holistic healing and exercise methods. I used some birthday money to buy your "Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga, Second Edition", and am part of the way through it (I love it so far!). I'm a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do and hope that yoga will enhance my practice of the martial art. I love animals and have always wanted to be a vegetarian. My family almost never has red meat but we do have chicken and fish, and I'm hoping to completely eliminate meat from my diet. I know that I need protein, especially since I'm a growing teen, but I'm willing to eat eggs and milk products to compensate for that. I'm also trying to be careful to eat healthfully because although I am not particularly overweight, my family has a history of weight problems. Do you know of any sources that could help me find a way to keep a healthy, balanced vegetarian diet? I know that not only will vegetarianism be kinder to the animals but it can also be a big part of yoga and can be very healthy. Please help me!

Caitlyn :-)

Dear Caitlyn,

You make me see that there is a need for vegetarian lifestyles to be taught to families. Perhaps there is a vegetarian nutritionist reading this column who might consider offering classes in this? If so, please contact me and I will gladly post your information on my website. Many parents are very encouraging of their children's interests, as yours apparently are for you, but when it comes to meals, it becomes quite difficult. I applaud all parents for their struggles/joys in the kitchen. It is not easy whipping up regular meals for a family, yet parents do this on a daily basis.

I applaud you, Caitlyn, for considering vegetarianism at such a young age. You obviously are very sensitive and I want to encourage you to continue growing in this way. One of the best books I have read recently on the transition from a meat to vegetarian diet is called "Transition to Vegetarianism" by Dr. Rudolph Ballentine. I highly recommend it. Share it with your parents too. It will encourage you to discuss this process together. It is not easy to become a healthy vegetarian in our society. Many people think that vegetarianism will solve weight problems, but as you mention in your letter, Caitlyn, it is important not to obstruct the growing strength of the body through a lackluster diet. Body image is not the main reason to turn to vegetarianism. In yoga, vegetarianism is turned to through a deepening understanding of non-violence and the practice of the principles of non-violence.

The first step, Caitlyn, is to be truly thankful to your parents for the meals they are preparing for you...vegetarian or not. Thank them for the time and love they take in the preparation. When you sit down to eat, vegetarian or not, be thankful for the food that is on your plate. Bless the life that was given to nourish yours. You may already be doing this. But sometimes we need reminders of how important this is. We live in a world of fast food ease, but life is precious in all its many forms. The taking of life of any form should not be done in haste or in waste....or with unawareness.

It may surprise you to know, Caitlyn, that I am not a complete vegetarian. When I go to a function or family gathering where meat is served, I accept it with gratitude. In my personal life I am a vegetarian, but in my public life, I am not a complete one yet. I have struggles with vegetarianism too. Like you, I hope to someday be a complete vegetarian.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Osteopathic Medicine

Dear Joan,

I am a second year osteopathic medical student at the Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine and I was given 'The Complete Idiot's Guide to Massage' as a gag gift from my brother for Christmas. I am concerned about your description of osteopathic medicine on pg. 126. It states, "Because osteopaths are technically considered physicians, they can prescribe medication on a limited basis." I was hoping you would clarify what was meant by "limited basis", and what the difference is (if any) between being "technically considered a physician" and being recognized as a fully licensed physician by every state in the USA.

I'm not trying to make enemies with this letter, but it is frustrating to me to find these kinds of attitudes in professional areas that should understand what osteopathy is and realize how helpful it is in working as a complete medical team. But unfortunately the prevalent attitude among so many people is that osteopaths are "not quite doctors." Too many people think of them on the same level as chiropractors or napropaths, or even physical therapists. This is simply not true, and these statements in your book only perpetuate these false notions about osteopaths. I am in my second year of medical school, and I can vow that my training is just as rigorous as allopathic schools, and my license will be

every bit as valid as any MD's. I plan to do OMMon practically all my patients, and I know it will help many people. I appreciate your desire to educate and help people understand massage, yoga, and meditation. Rather than being offensive, I hope I have been able raise your awareness about osteopaths and the need for the professions to work as a team. Thanks for taking the time to read my comments, and I hope your Christmas was a good one.

Sincerely,
Brad
MS-II Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine

Dear Brad,

First of all, please accept my apology for writing what appeared as an offensive sentence. I can see how it was taken that way, and I can assure you that it was not meant in any way to be insulting to the osteopathic profession. We only mentioned one brief paragraph in the book regarding osteopathy and considering its interest in the holistic approach to healing, it was deserving of more. Hindsight is often 20/20. I can assure you if a second edition of CIG to Massage comes out, we will certainly address Osteopathy more fully and more eloquently. The Osteopathic philosophy of medicine was founded in the United States and has an emphasis on the interdependency of the body's systems and a holistic approach to disease and injury. It has an appreciation of the body's ability to heal itself.

For readers who are not familiar with Osteopathy, the following is a little background info of the history of its development. I found the following information on the American Osteopathic Association's website:

"In 1892, Dr. Andrew Taylor Still opened the American School of Osteopathy (ASO). The school's original charter, granted on May 10, 1892, gave it the right to confer the doctor of medicine (M.D.) degree, but ASO's governing body chose to award the diploma of osteopathy (D.O.) degree instead.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the AOA pushed for recognition by federal health programs. For example, when in 1935 the U.S. Employees' Compensation Commission strictly defined a physician as the holder of an M.D. degree. The AOA set out to rectify the situation. In 1938, the Federal Compensation Law was amended to include D.O.s as physicians. Throughout the next decades, the AOA continued to apply pressure for equal standing in national health insurance issues. Today, these battles are smaller, but they continue."

According to the Student Doctor Website at: <http://www.studentdoctor.net/do/about.html>

"In the United States, osteopathic medicine is a system of medical care with a philosophy that combines the needs of the patient with the current practice of medicine and surgery. The philosophy has an emphasis on internal relationships of structure and function, with an appreciation of the body's ability to heal itself.

How Does an M.D. Differ from a D.O.?

M.D.s are similar to D.O.s. An M.D. is a physician trained at a standard four year medical school. D.O.s receive the same four year medical school training but with the osteopathic philosophies tied into the basic principles of medicine. D.O.s also receive hundreds of hours of additional training in manipulative

medicine techniques and diagnosis. Upon graduation from medical school, D.O.s continue with residency training in any of the medical specialties, from family practice to neurosurgery.

Otherwise there are few differences; M.D.s and D.O.s have the same practice rights throughout the United States. You can find D.O.s and M.D.s working together in the best hospitals and clinics throughout the nation. D.O.s are also found in all branches of military medicine -- in fact, the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army is an osteopathic physician!"

I hope readers will see the importance of this profession, and consider osteopathy in their healthcare. Thank you for bringing this significant profession, Brad, more fully to my attention. I am glad you did not gag on your gift your brother gave you, but chose instead to write to me. You are exemplifying the traits of a wonderful doctor.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Introductions

Dear Joan,

I received "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga" as a Christmas present from my husband. I did some yoga many years ago and I am very excited about starting it up again! I am especially interested to read about the philosophy behind the postures, breathing and meditation. At the moment I am practicing at home, although I am hoping to find a yoga class in the new year. My daughter (7) had been interested to look at the postures in the book, and we have tried some together. My question is, what is the best way to introduce children to yoga? Just joining in and having fun? Or becoming aware of breathing and posture?

I look forward to learning more!

Thank you,
Anke

Dear Anke,

The best way to introduce children to the study of yoga is through your own daily example. If you teach a child to be sensitive to the breath and movement of a tree in a yoga pose, and then cut down trees with no respect for their greatness, there is a contradiction that must be addressed. If you teach the sensitivities

of cow pose to a child, and then go to Mcdonalds and carelessly eat big macs for lunch, there is a contradiction that needs to be addressed.

Now, your letter focuses on the postures, but I hope you see that postures are a small part of this study. Certainly having children joining along with you and having fun is very wonderful. If you are seriously studying a pose you are in, they will also see this and quietly or openly wonder what you are studying and why. Not everything can be expressed in words, and does not need to be. As you become more aware of your own breathing and postures, your children will become more aware. Continue growing in your studies, and let your children grow with you. You can not prevent them from physically growing, and the world will help shape them on other levels too. It is through your personal stance, your personal struggles, your personal movements that your child will learn the most. This is how your child learns yoga....union with life. You are truly blessed, Anke.

**Namaste,
Joan**

2 in one!

Dear Joan,

I happened to knock on your site while I was surfing the net looking for yoga information. Then, I tried out the Plough posted on the site. In fact that was my first official move to yoga... Is it possible to learn yoga by written instruction, or is the instructor lead session must?

I have one more question. I am 5 and 3 tall and about 127 pounds. I am not flexible though. Is it my gene that determines how flexible I can be? Or, is it matter of training?

Thanks to you.
Su-won Kil

Dear Su-won Kil,

An instructor lead session is best. Of course, I suppose that can depend on the instructor. Let's just say, a class atmosphere will give you the strength and fortitude to continue your studies in between classes. I encourage you Su-won Kil, to take a class. Keep tuning into Yoyoga as a compliment to your growing yoga studies.

regarding heredity or training determining flexibility...It is both. For example, some people can have shorter hamstrings through heredity. Yoga postures will help lengthen the hamstrings and utilize them in

optimal ways, but one's body is still unique and has unique contours. Yoga helps us to love our bodies and work with what we have in the most effective ways.

Namaste,
n

Asthma

Dear Joan,

I had been practicing yoga for a couple months about 5 or 6 times a week. I suddenly came down with a diagnosis of short-term asthma, and I was really wiped out, and I couldn't do anything, including yoga.. Now that I have my energy back, I'm having trouble getting back into yoga. Any suggestions to help me?

Jonathan

Dear Jonathan,

Asthma is a condition of the lungs where the airways are constricted causing feelings of tightness in the chest. This condition is often caused or aggravated by allergies and stress. Yoga is very effective for people with this condition. I would recommend starting your session by resting in child's pose (asana of the week) with your arms extended straight out over you head. Have a friend do light percussive pounding on your back to open up your chest. This should be done very lightly and not if you are currently having an asthma attack. Then lie back on sturdy pillows under your spine. This is supported fish pose. Put an extra pillow under your head so as not to over stress the neck. Relax here. If possible, place the soles of the feet together so that the legs rest in butterfly. This is a wonderful way to begin your practice on a regular basis. Other poses to work into your practice are cow pose, headstand, tadasana (mountain), and downward dog pose. You are on a very healing road...I am glad you got back on the path, Jonathan.

Namaste,
Joan

Body Of Knowledge

Dear Joan,

Bodybuilding is over...I cannot take it anymore. Yoga makes me feel so much better..plus I am nice and skinny....it feels so good! I truly know what it means to be enlightened now. I really feel I am going to live a long life now. I have seen the future. Bodybuilding was not the answer. It's about longevity and bodybuilding would have never given me that. I am so thankful for yoga....I feel free! I feel strong and aware...I feel unified. Now I am preparing for a lighter body that I'll soon get someday as a result and in part of my yoga practice. It's so true..we really are beings of light...not just crude matter! It's great to be awake! It's been a long journey and I have battled with vanity..that's why I've dropped yoga for bodybuilding. Now, I am finally back to the path of yoga and enlightenment..I have dropped transcendental mediation as it has done it's job of bringing me to the path of yoga! God Joan...I am so thankful for your book. It inspired me so much. It was colorful and fun and my inner child fell in love with your book and you. You are my yoga mom by heart, I love you...thankyou so much..namaste!

Have a great day!
Christopher

Dear Christopher,

I am overwhelmed by your gratitude. Thank you for your dear, sweet letter. Now, as most moms know, your children have the capacity to adore you one minute and run away from home the next. So, if you ever feel like running away from home, Christopher...know that your mom will continue to keep the light on at home and you will always be welcomed back.

Namaste,
Joan

Angels on high

Dear Joan,

Hi, my name is Angel. I'm a practice Christian-catholic. And in this christmas my daughter give me a nice present...your book "The Complete Idiot Guide to Meditation"...Tha's was a nice present I learning a lot from that book...It's a great book. Now my praying section have new approach and better understanding and a new meanin. Your book give me a new life on my life... Thanks and keep the good work. I will like to contact you in the near future with more question if you don't mind. Thank and God bless you.

Angel

Dear Angel,

I would never refuse an Angel in my life. You are quite welcome!

Namaste,
Joan

Iowa is North

Dear Joan,

I am new to practicing Yoga. I bought your book and have read it and keep it out as a guide. I am having trouble with shoulderstand. When I get up into the pose my elbows/funny bone part of my arm hurts when I put it in place to support my back. I believe I am ready for this pose as I am not having trouble getting into it and have been practicing Yoga nearly everyday now for the last 9 months(after the birth of my little girl). Please let me know if you have any ideas. Another question is...do you ever go anywhere in say, southern Iowa to teach classes...or do you know of any good instructors in southern Iowa?

Thank You from Nicole in Bussey, Iowa

Dear Nicole,

Your question needs to be addressed by a yoga teacher who can watch you in the pose. It sounds like your balance is off. An Iyengar teacher can supply you with appropriate props that will help your body adjust in this pose. I would not recommend doing the pose if this elbow problem persists. I know of two yoga teachers in Iowa, but they may not be anywhere near you. They may be able to refer you to someone who is though. Here they are: Dagmar Munn 319-369-8161 and Marci Graham 515-274-2733. Best wishes and be kind to your elbow too.

Namaste,
Joan

It's a deal

Dear Joan,

Is Kundalini yoga mostly breath and meditation-oriented? Not as active as Hatha? I went to a class last night and it was nice and relaxing but not as vigorous as I'd like. I just wonder if this was his deal, or a Kundalini deal.

Suz

Dear Suz,

Kundalini is the energy along the spine. The yoga that comes from this is highly focused on breathwork and lots of upper body movements too. The poses are often labeled differently than traditional hatha too, for ex, downward dog is labeled as triangle pose. depending on the instructor, it can get really far out there...then again, this can be in any type of class...including yoga. Some would say that kundalini yoga is even more active than traditional hatha classes because of its strong focus on breathwork and meditation....its all perspective. A great teacher makes a great kundalini class....or any class. That's the deal.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Cushy for tushy

Dear Joan,

I would like to know if there is a specific meditation chair available and if so, as I am from South Africa, where can I find one and what sort of costs will I be looking at? Also, do you have anyone I could contact that does your type of Yoga??

Have a lovely day,
Jackie

Dear Jackie,

I just use a little pillow in my meditation practice. I place it under my tailbone and do not sit fully on it. It is very comfortable. No large expense. Any sturdy pillow will do. Regarding teachers in South Africa, I am sorry to say I do not know of any. But I am sure there are some. You found me, Jackie, so I am sure you will be able to locate someone there. If not, begin your practice on your own. This is how many people practice through svadhyaya or self study.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Oh Canada!

Dear Joan,

Hello, I would like to order Breathworks. Do you accept orders from Canada? Would you recommend others books or tapes about breathing? Thanks for the Idiot's Guide, it is a great book!

Ronan
Port Hood, Nova Scotia, Canada

Dear Ronan,

Ronan is my favorite name! Yes, I send orders to Canada frequently. I do ask for an additional \$5.00 for shipping and handling for all orders that are outside the US. I would recommend books by Swami Rama on breathing. He has written several, and they are all outstanding. They can be purchased through the Himalayan Institute on the web, of which he was the leading guru for many years.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Stress Test

Dear Joan,

I am a busy mom of a toddler & preschooler. For the past 4 months I've been feeling extremely stressed out and frustrated in my everyday role as a mom. often I get so stressed out that my back tenses up, I get knots in my shoulder blade area and I get heartburn for a month straight! I recently bought my first book on yoga and tried doing some of the positions and was amazed by the therapeutic results I felt immediately afterward! I felt so calm, refreshed and my heartburn of several weeks disappeared that very same day! I really want to take a beginners class in yoga so I can learn to relax, learn the many different positions and learn more about the yoga lifestyle. I can easily look in the phone book for a class but how do I know if one class is better than another? What should I look for? What questions should I ask? What is the minimum amount of teaching experience should a yoga instructor have or how much education should they have under their belt, etc. Any advice would be extremely appreciated. Thank you! Peace.

Rosalia
Clarendon Hills, IL

Dear Rosalia,

The best way to know if you want to study with a teacher is to go to one trial class and see. There are all different levels of experience and expertise in teachers. Find a teacher that resonate with you. Experience is not always the key, because we all know teachers who have gotten in a rut of sorts...this happens with yoga teachers too! Find a teacher who is also a student. This is very important. I wish you all the very best.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Oregon Yogi

Dear Joan,

I'm A yogi in Portland Oregon and am practicing with 4 classes of people.(I don't say teaching because it is my pleasure to practice with others and I'm so amazed that I get paid to share the joy of yoga with others. I always feel that I should pay them for coming to class with me and breathing and stretching together). I'm 50 years old and have been practicing since I was 21. Lately a few young students in my classes have complained about arms or legs going to sleep while we are in postures. We never stay longer than a few complete breaths. I talked to some other Yogis about this and they asked if these people smoked and if they were drinking eight classes of water a day. I asked theses people and they don,t smoke and seem to be aware of hydration. I bought your Complete Idiot's guide to yoga and I found no reference to this problem. I'm wondering if maybe it's from other strenuous exercise they have done. What do you think? Have you ever experienced this question? Thank you for your expertise. I love your website and your book!

Peggy

Dear Peggy,

Let's take an example of warrior pose. If we are holding that pose for a significant length of time, the arms extended away from the body will start to get numb. It will happen quickly if we are not focused on the energy movement in the pose. In essence, our body goes to sleep and is sending signs that it is not comfortable and wants to move. One can then choose to work with the mind and open up the energy movement. Feel the heat and blood moving through the arms and out into the finger tips. Concentrate on the movement. This can be done in any pose. This is simply a suggestion to work with. I do not know your students well, so I am not dismissing the idea that there concerns might require medical attention. This is for you to access as their teacher. Thank you for your letter, Peggy. You sound like an interested and interesting teacher!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Lovely Paris

Dear Joan,

Hi,I am trying to get some information about taking a yoga sessions. I don't know even if I am contacting the right place. I really want to get involved in learning yoga and meditation, just me knowing me. Any help you give me, I will be thankful for.

Thank you,
Paris

Dear Paris,

Gee, I am trying my best...just keep tuning in every month, and I will continue...trying my best.

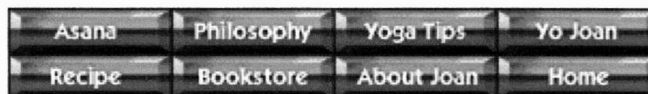
**Namaste,
Joan**

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.



[Faint, illegible handwritten text]

[Faint, illegible handwritten text]



Yo Joan



Onward and Upward

Dear Joan,

I was wondering if it really matters what type of yoga style we study. I have heard that Kundalini yoga and Kriya yoga are the fastest way to GOD realization or are the airplane to GOD. From my reading I am getting that Kundalini yoga is best for mental transformation. I have read they have a Kriya for communication skills, serenity, being lucky, releasing internal anger, charisma and mastering your domain and accomplishing the impossible.



I am thinking Kundalini yoga seems aerobic. The style seems to have its own way of influencing the subconscious. I have heard about Power yoga or Astanga being the fastest way to get stronger. I have taken one class on it. It seems like a good way to increase physicality and get stronger. I have heard if you practice it 6 days a week you will never have dis-ease. I heard with this style it is not meditative. It seems like with Iyengar it is good about using props. It seems to be popular in the Maryland area where I used to live.

Are some styles better for mental improvement and relaxation? Or with any style you can get all the benefits and develop mentally and physically and get confidence and accomplish what you thought you could not accomplish? Are certain styles better for seeking GOD? I am looking to improve my vision, is there a particular yoga style that is best for that?

Sincerely,
Parag Shah

Dear Parag Shah,

Thank you very much for your excellent questions. You are truly looking to yoga as a spiritual practice. I commend you in your researching the various yogas and to interpreting them into the context of your life and beliefs. These are very difficult questions for me to respond to. It would be presumptuous of me to tell you which styles are better for seeing God. Currently, I am seeing God so clearly in the eyes of children, in the snow that falls, in my mother's illness, in my niece's kindness, in my teacher's anger. I could continue this list, but you are asking about yoga style...what yoga style can one see God more ly in? This will all depend on you. If during or after your disciplined practice of a particular hatha you find yourself less offended by past offenses, more understanding of current events, more active to right injustices, more patient and loving to yourself and the world around you - then, Parag, you have found a yoga style that is answering your soulful questions. The answers may not come like a bolt of lightning, they will come in subtle waves of recognition, and lasting internal changes.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Anxiety Free Yogini Be

Dear Joan,

of all thank you for your website and your Idiot's guide.

I have been practicing yoga for a year, and it has brought me great benefits. The last one (besides other reasons) has been the decision of quitting smoking. I know that some asanas are very efficient to quiet the mind, but I wonder if there is any postures that you would recommend to fight the withdraw and the anxiety that I am feeling now?

Thank you so much,
Oni

Dear Oni,

These are certainly difficult times for us all. It's amazing how successful many of us are in our ineffectiveness in handling stress. Effectively handling stress is a whole other phenomena. There are different types of hatha yoga for different body constitutions. An athletic version of hatha, also termed ashtanga, is quite popular now. It is geared toward those who are athletic and/or in need of high intensity work-outs to reduce stress. For some of us, this type of high intensity vinyasa movement brings on more stress. If you need less of a high energy impact, the quieter, slower stretches of the Himalayan, Sivananda, Kriya, or Iyengar traditions, may be more of what you are looking for.

Withdrawal and anxiety are all very real emotions and/or ways of reacting to stressful times. We may think these ways are instinctual responses, but in fact they are learned ones. A regular practice of yoga can help us build on our understandings of this. Yoga can help us to simplify our thoughts, and in turn our responses. When depression becomes a response, we need to move to get out of it. The cycle begins when we find it difficult to move, so we sit more in our depression, and immerse deeper into its trenches. Remember this little poem:

**Feeling down
move around.
Feeling great
meditate.**

Triangle pose, sun salutation, warrior poses, standing poses of all sorts, move us out of depressive states. Once we are out of these depressive states, we can find the more settling and quieting seated poses to work through our anxieties. Meditation is the path to ease anxieties, but one has to move to get there.

I hope you have found this response helpful, Oni.

**Namaste,
Joan**

beginners always welcome

Dear Joan,

I found out about you by searching yoga in the Western suburbs. I have looked at your website, but I'm a bit confused as to whether or not you are teaching classes in Oak Brook. I'm 37, a decorative arts painter, aspiring pool and billiards player, and I'm very stressed and full of aches and pains. A few friends have suggested that I look into yoga as a way to clear and ease my mind and heal my body. I guess what I'm asking is if you are teaching classes and if you accept beginners. Hope to hear from you.

Thanks
Jackson

Dear Jackson,

I am currently teaching adults solely through my website and individual seminars around the country which I will post regularly in the class section of this site. I currently teach preschoolers yoga, write a regular column for Liberty Suburban Newspapers, and am working on my dissertation and a new book. I always accept beginners, Jackson. Locally, I am teaching a women's conference March 9th at the College of Dupage in Glen Ellyn. I do not have any other seminars coming up soon in our area of Oakbrook, but keep checking into Yoyoga, and I'll keep you posted. Welcome to the neighborhood, Jackson!

Tapas

Dear Joan,

This is my second letter to you. I wrote to you to compliment you on your Yoga and Meditation For Idiot's books back in Sept.

In November, I took the Yoga Fit Training with several friends. Many things I've read tell me that traditional yoga teachers don't think much of this "yoga certification in a weekend" program but I can tell you it was wonderful. I can also say that I agree, one weekend does NOT make a yoga instructor, it also takes many hours of self study and practice to supplement that "quick start".

Four of us went to training, two of us are working and studying and continue to grow, two of us are not. There is a glaring difference. My problem is that one of the ones that is not studying is the director of the fitness program that I am connected with. I am the sub, she is the instructor. I'm the one that is prepared. She is the one that is teaching. She talks about being "too busy" and I want to tell her, "If you are not prepared somebody else should be teaching", but she thinks she's doing just fine. It's very frustrating for me. What would you do?

Janet

Dear Janet,

I would try my best to not judge her. I would focus on my practice. I would continue to study and deepen my understanding of yoga. I would try to work with my competitive thoughts through the practice of the yoga philosophy of non-harming. If I continued to feel this was an injustice, I think I would simply seek work elsewhere. If work elsewhere was not to be found, I would start my own studio. That is what I would do. I realize this is easier said than done. But that is what, ideally, I would do. Keep me posted on what you are doing.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Buddhism

Dear Joan,

let me thank you for being such a great inspiration for me. About a year ago I felt a need for some spirituality in my life and begun with your two books "Idiots guide to meditation and to yoga". I love both books and use them almost as if they are my bible. I have begun to find peace and joy and am working on becoming a more compassionate satient being. (that's the tough one)

Your books have perked my interest into Buddhism. I have just read "Ancient Wisdom. Modern World" by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and also "Peace in every step" by Thich Nhat Hanh (how do you pronounce that name anyway?). Once again I received wonderful inspiration to be a better person through reading these books. But I want more.

My question - if I may - are you Buddhist? I ask because I am interested to read more. Are the 8 steps in yoga connected with Buddhism? Is there any reading that you could recommend to me? I would like to know the history of Buddha himself and all that goes along with following the beliefs. From what I understand if all people were to think like Buddhists we sure would have a better world.

I am a Canadian and I lived in the small town of Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo Guerrero Mexico for 13 years. Obviously a predominately Catholic society. I don't know of any meditators or Buddhists that live here (although apparently there are alot of witches!) so that is why I am writing to you. I realize that you are a very, busy woman and I don't want to bother you but I would appreciate any help if you could.

e and Joy
Deborah

Dear Deborah,

I am not a Buddhist. I am not religious. I was raised a Protestant, however, I am not a member of any church. I visit churches, temples, and synagogues of various religious traditions on regular occasions. In your letter you say, "From what I understand if all people were to think like Buddhists we sure would have a better world." I caution you in this understanding, for surely we can look around this world and see that this belief has gotten us in a whole lot of trouble, in a whole lot of continents, and with a whole lot of religions. I have many friends who are Buddhists, including many monks. I believe the beautiful teachings of this tradition hold much for us to benefit from. I also believe that many other religious traditions hold much for us to benefit from as well. Since spirituality is such a personal pursuit, I skeptically question all religious organizations.

This brings me to an exceptional periodical I just received this week from the American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) of which I am a member. According to its literature, it was "Founded in 1883...is the oldest non-profit animal advocacy and educational organization in the United States dedicated to ending experimentation on animals in research, testing, and education. AAVS also opposes and works to end other forms of cruelty to animals." This particular Winter issue of the AAVS magazine deals with theological perspectives of animals. It traces the relationships of many religious traditions, Buddhism,

Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, and Muslim to the animal world. In my view as a yogi, it is important to reflect on the sentient life forms around us. It is important for us to deepen our understanding and kindness of our interactions with all forms of life. In this way, it is important to look at the religious heritage we ascribe to and determine if it correlates with our deepening understanding of ahimsa.

I encourage you, Deborah, to order this Winter 2002 edition of this AAVS magazine. It is well worth ng. The AAVS website is at <http://www.aavs.org>. The email contact is aavsonline@aol.com. My re best wishes to you in your continuing religious and spiritual awakenings.

**Namaste,
Joan**

A sunny day

Dear Joan,

I have a question regarding the Sun Salutation. With most Yoga postures I try to hold the pose for at least a few complete breaths. I am uncertain whether I should aim for the same when doing the Sun Salutation, or whether this should be one flowing movement, i.e. go into one pose on the in breath and into the next pose on the next out th, and so on. I have tried both ways and didn't feel comfortable with either. If I hold the poses, it seems long ooses its flow, if I change posture with each breath it seems way too fast. Perhaps I'm still breathing too quickly and won't be ready for the Sun Salutation until I can lengthen my breath? What do you suggest?

Thank you,
Anke

Dear Anke,

I suggest you use several breaths with each movement until you are able to lengthen your breaths. When your breaths are longer, you will comfortably be able to flow from one posture to the next. When this happens, the sun salutation will not feel rushed. It will feel as one continual movement. The many postures in this vinyasa will become as one.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Master Card Yogi

Joan,

I would like to order "Breathworks" and "Yoga for a new day," but I do not have a visa or a master card. What can I do?

Ann

Dear Ann,

You can send a check or money order of \$22.50 to: Yoyoga, and I will send you the products. Thank you very much for your interest and your order, Ann.

**Namaste,
Joan**

hat's up with credentials?

Dear Joan,

Hello again. The last time I wrote you, I had told you that I was taking a six week yoga class. I really enjoyed it, but now it's over and I'm having problems finding another yoga class in my area that is continuous (I live in Barberton, Ohio). My question is this - what is required to teach a yoga class? What kind of training do you need? I am seriously considering starting one of my own. Thanks for your help.

Jonna

Dear Jonna,

Study with an organization that has been around for awhile. Some examples, The Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago (which now has a hatha home study program that you can take anywhere in the world), The Sivananda Organization, The Himalayan Tradition, The Iyengar Institute, The Kripalu Center, The Self Realization Organization. There are more, but these are some that quickly come to mind. All have websites on the internet. Check them out, and see which you have a leaning towards. Wonderful that you

are wanting to deepen your studies through a certification program.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Certifiably Yogi

Dear Joan,

How do you go about becoming a yoga instructor; is there a class you take, or do you need to find a yoga master to teach you. Are yoga classes licensed by the state? Thanks for your time.

Josh

Dear Josh,

Yoga classes are not licensed. There is a current debate in the yoga community whether or not to make national certification a requirement. As the popularity of yoga continues to increase, I think this is inevitable. This study is no longer a fringe interest, but is a part of mainstream culture. And, we all know mainstream culture is certifiable.

**Namaste,
Joan**

It's a deal

Dear Joan,

Hi, I have seen your book store in the web.could you please tell me whether I can get the props for doing yoga in the book store .(especially the wooden blocks). Expecting your reply. Have a nice day.

Thanks.
Mohan

Dear Mohan,

**I do not sell Iyengar props. Check out the Yoga Circle Iyengar website to order these types of materials
tp://yogacircle.com/props.htm.**

**Namaste,
Joan**

Transplant Yoga

Dear Joan,

I am a recent transplant to the western suburbs of Chicago(from Maine). I am looking for a good studio/instructor in the Hinsdale/Oak brook area. I found your site while doing a web search. I tried a class at a local athletic club and found it to be more like an aerobics class than a yoga class - the room was cold, the instructor wore a headset and acted as cheerleader throughout the class, AND it was really crowded!! I am at the intermediate level, and have experience with both ashtanga and Iyengar(sp) classes. I'd really like to try Bikram, but can't find any classes in the suburbs. HELP!! I really miss my Yoga!! Any suggestions for me?

Sue

Dear Sue,

Contact Yoga Chicago on the web. This is a resource to locate the type of yoga classes you want. Yoga Chicago1s website is <http://www.yogachicago.com>.

**Namaste,
Joan**

A new lease on life...

Dear Joan,

I am new to yoga...about 3 months. I have been taking Bikram yoga here in Denver. I have never felt better in my whole life (I'm 56 years young) and I could hardly wait to get into my yoga each day. I have had a bad back for years, and the Doctors were going to put a rod in my back. I thought I would try one last thing. The yoga did the trick! I was totally pain free and able to play golf again.

However, one day in class I had a heart attack. The doctors tried to perform an angioplasty, but the artery was a small one and it was "too far gone." I am recovering now and missing my yoga SO MUCH. Can I go back to really believe that the yoga helped me become aware of a "fault in my system" and now I will go on to live a healthier life. I am now on cholesterol medication, and watching what I eat even more.

I have loved reading your book "Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." One other question. When you refer to 2500 B.C.E....what does the E mean? I've looked everywhere for that answer. too. I certainly hope you will find the time to answer me. Thanks for a new lease on life.

Susan

Dear Susan,

A heart attack in yoga class and you want to come back to class...now THAT I call dedication! Wishing you an ever increasing healthy heart, Susan. My dear friend, Eileen, reminded me of what "E" stands for. To quote her:

" As you well know, we used to use the abbreviations A.D. ("Anno Domini" -- in the year of the Lord) and B.C. ("Before Christ") to designate historical time as determined from prior to and subsequent to the birth of Christ. In recent times, there have been objections to those usages as being "too Christian." Now, people have employed B.C.E. to mean "before our common era" and "C.E." to mean "common era."

Thanks, Eileen, for helping this old yogini out with this wonderful question from Susan. Have a wonderful day everyone!

**Namaste,
Joan**

A Rebut of a Rebuttal

Dear Joan,

Well, I'm afraid I have to rebut a rebuttal you received from Brad, the osteopathic student. He was insulted that he was put on the same level as chiropractors . . . I am an admissions counselor at one of the most prestigious chiropractic schools in the country and I, too, am tired of chiropractors being viewed as second class doctors! Our doctors study for five academic years and upon graduation from our school are primary care physicians. They receive the same licensing as allopathic and osteopathic and are held to the same standards. Our doctors study

twice as much gross anatomy and physiology as allopathic doctors and four times as much nutrition. They are holistic, gentle healers who have earned the title of doctor - equal to their peers in allopathic and osteopathic medicine.

ie
nal University of Health Sciences

Dear Debbie,

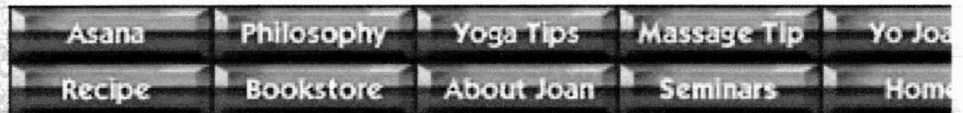
You are so right. Thank you for your rebuttal to the rebuttal. We are all in this together. As for me, yesterday I saw my chiropractor. A few weeks ago I went to a physical therapist. Every week I get at least one full body massage, and every single day I do yoga. Thanks you for bringing the wonderful profession of Chiropractic to our attention, Debbie. You are certainly right. I love my chiropractor, Dr. John Mostrando. He always enlightens me as to holistic avenues that are new to my thinking. I always leave his office feeling better and with new fascinating information to ponder. He is truly a blessing to his profession and to me.

And, may I take this opportunity now to apologize to everyone in advance for everything I may have ever done or will do that offends them, particularly if it is done intentionally. I really want to get this shanti thing down in this lifetime...and I will need your help. Thank you kindly.

**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



Mod Hypertension

Dear Joan,

I read and enjoyed your Idiot's guide. It inspired me to purchase additional books. In one of these publications I found the statement that persons with hypertension should avoid the standing poses. I found no similar statement in your text. This statement didn't make much sense to me and there was no explanation. Would you be so kind as to comment on this.

I have moderate hypertension I'm seriously considering adding yoga as part of my therapy as suggested by my doctor. I've also purchased your Idiot's guide to meditation and plan on incorporating meditation as well. Your response would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Lawrence
Albuquerque, NM



Dear Lawrence,

Standing poses help to strengthen and balance the body. Seated poses are more often associated with increasing flexibility and relaxation. Though neither are exclusive of these claims. If the poses are studied non competitively and with a meditative mind, they all have the potential of reducing stress. Since it takes time to develop a meditative approach, seated poses are often recommended for hypertension. Simple logic, if you are feeling stressed would you prefer to hold a pose standing or sitting? Many might say neither. And so, then there is vinyasa, like sun salutations -poses that form a continual movement. Sun salutations are also to be done non competitively and with a meditative mind. Vinyasa is not always taught this way, and as sun salutations become more demanding, the mind

can turn to its habitual nature, such as competitiveness. more...BKS Iyengar recommends inversions for hypertension: upside down to soothe the brain and expand the chest. He recommends shoulder stand, plough, and bridge poses.



sum this response up for you, Lawrence, if taught and/or studied properly, all yoga poses can be effective in treating hypertension. Yoga is a lifestyle. It is a study of balancing the body/mind/spirit. It is a study that leads one into meditation.

Namaste,
Joan

Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polk Dot Yogini

Dear Joan,

Tell me which Yoga exercise I can do to help tighten my stomach muscles to get rid of my gut! What page is it on in your book? I'm sadly realizing that this may well be the first year that I cannot wear a two piece swimming suit.

Bye-
Sandy

Dear Sandy,

I am really not a personal trainer for your tummy. The size of your stomach has no bearing on the way I teach yoga. I do alter poses for those with large abdomens so that poses can be assumed in ways that are more comfortable and effective. Yoga poses are available to people of all sizes and shapes. When I worry about my tummy size, which I sometimes do too, I go to the health club and get a physical trainer to help me get back into svelte shape. Yoga helps to bring the body into balance, but with our fast paced life styles and irregular diets, most of us can use some extra help to keep the pounds off. There are wonderful personal trainers out there who can help to counter the negative effects from a sedentary lifestyle of too many french fries and malted milks.

If you had asked me this question a few years ago, I probably would have had an answer in terms of yoga poses. I probably would have said leg lifts will strengthen the back which strengthens the tummy, and boat pose strengthens the tummy too. However, I have since deepened in my study of yoga and do not apply the postures in this way. Here is what I'll say today, Yoga is a lifestyle approach and overall conditioning for the body. It is not a spot reducer. I'll see you at the gym for spot reductions and bathing suit concerns. A few more years from now, when bathing suit season rolls around again and our beloved egos hath runneth away instead of

over, we may see each other at the ashram instead.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Reply Mediator

Dear Joan,

I meditate some time I feel sleepy. What can be done to overcome this?

Thanks .
Namaste,
Angel

Dear Angel,

Meditation is increased awareness. You are concentrating and loosing focus in your concentrations. I would recommend finding ways of getting more restful sleep. Deepen your practice of shavasana which will help you to relax your body more and make your sleep more peaceful. This way, when you turn to your meditation practice, your focus and attention will deepen and expand.

Conscious Eating

Dear Joan,

I read with great interest the letter in the Feb. 27th Suburban Life from 13 year old Caitlyn who wants to become a vegetarian. You asked for a vegetarian nutritionist who would offer classes on transitioning to vegetarianism. I am writing for two reasons: 1) to introduce you via e-mail to Laura Black (NutrSnT@aol.com), a nutritionist, who is highly experienced in vegetarian nutrition and sponsors Nutrition Show and Tell where classes are offered in the Chicago land area and 2) to introduce you to the concept I call "Conscious Eating", which both Laura and myself practice, by eating a plant based diet supplemented occasionally with organic/humanely raised animal products.

The majority of animal food products consumed by people in the US are raised in factory style warehouses, routinely fed antibiotics and confined to cages, crates, and pens with no sunlight or any concern for the animals' well-being. The common term for animal food production in this country is called "factory farming" and unfortunately many of the products which vegetarians eat, specifically dairy and eggs, are heavily factory farmed. I am a bi-weekly columnist for the Brookfield-Riverside Landmark paper and often write of the atrocities in which animals are raised for food. There are many websites available to learn the sad truth of factory farming: www.factoryfarm.org, www.factoryfarming.com and www.hfa.org/factory.html are some.

I often substitute soy-based meat and cheese products for animal-based products. When I eat

animal products my goal is to eat only free-range, uncaged, grass-fed or organic, if possible. The new USDA Organic Standards have humane standards outlined for most animal products so the best way to ensure the most natural life of the animal is to eat certified organic animal products. The Organic Standards also ensure that no antibiotics or growth hormones are in the feed and that the resulting food product was not genetically engineered or irradiated. It is sometimes difficult for farmers to be certified organic, so there are other terms for raising animals, such as free-range, uncaged, and grass-fed, and these are applied differently for different animal products. Animal welfare guidelines I have learned is that eggs should be cage-free (from a local farmer is best), if not certified organic. Chicken and Turkey may be free-range, if not organic. Beef, pork and lamb should grass-fed, free-range, or organic. Dairy should be no-rBGH (recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone), if not organic.

There are two great websites to find more humanely-raised animal products. One is called the "New Consumers Guide to Meat Raised without Antibiotics" at www.iatp.org (scroll down half-way to find it). The other is called "Eat Wild" at www.eatwild.com. These websites makes it very easy to find local farmers, brand names, grocery stores, and restaurants.

I used to struggle thinking the only two options were eating meat and not eating meat. Two years ago I was shocked to find out about factory farming, but I also discovered there is a third option, i.e. eating more humanely-raised animal products. This was a lifestyle to which I could commit and for which I have become an advocate. Vegetarians will say there is no such thing as humane slaughter and I agree. But conventional dairy and eggs are very cruelly obtained, as well. I encourage anyone who consumes animal products to become a "Conscious Eater."

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Janice

Dear Janice,

Thank you for your very informative letter. You are definitely offering steps in a more humane direction than what currently exists for animals of our meat based diets. I understand the argument for cage free production, and that it is more nutritionally sound for humans. It still involves the slaughter of innocent sentient animals which does not follow the yoga lifestyle of ahimsa/non-violence. You mention in your last paragraph, "Vegetarians will say there is no such thing as humane slaughter and I agree." Janice, I agree too. I believe the answer is in a soy based, solely vegetarian menu. Supply and Demand. If we do not demand meat, we will not be supplied. Numerous cultures around the globe live on plant based foods and are solely vegetarian. We live in a culture that accepts the slaughter of animals as necessary for our diets. It is necessary for the industries that have grown from them, but it is not necessary for our healthy diets.

Although the idea of cage free production of animals for the purpose of eating sounds initially more humane, it's purpose is still to raise sentient creatures for slaughter. We have the intelligence and the resources to live in a vegetarian society. It is not easy, and I myself have struggles with vegetarianism and have cravings for meat. But, I also know it is my short comings and habits that create this I have the capacity to make this a more peaceful world through my individual

choices. My individual diet choices are important to blaze a path of non-harming for the creation of a world of deepening peace. My individual choices matter, as do each one of ours. If I can truly see all as one (om) than I will see that the life of the cow, pig, chicken, or fish is sacred. Fish has been the hardest for me to give up in my diet, yet fish have possibly the most sensitive skin of all life forms. The way we her and kill fish for our consumption is very cruel. I am not proud of the fact t I still eat fish and occasionally eat other meats. It is something I am working towards changing. The life of all sentient life forms are sacred. All of life is sacred. Your work can help those of us struggling to make the important transition to a full vegetarian diet kinder for all involved - animals and people.

I very much support your efforts to teach plant based menus. I highly encourage you on this path. Our world needs this education. Thank you very much for writing and for all the noteworthy information you supply. You are educating us all as to resources and options available in our struggles for a more peaceful existence - struggles that involve significant self study and self control. A vegetarian lifestyle is not supported in our society of fast food burgers. You are helping others by educating us to take steps in the right direction. You are working towards creating a more balanced world, Janice. The struggles are not easy ones. Thank you very much for sharing your resources, your efforts, your light upon us.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Yo Baby!

ar Joan,

I have never taken a yoga class, but have heard wonderful things about it. I have always wanted to take a class, and I think now is the perfect time for me to start. I am currently five months pregnant, do you offer prenatal yoga classes? If not, do you know of any place that does?

Sincerely,
Doraluz

Dear Doraluz,

Now is the time, Doraluz. Studying yoga is a beautiful way to bring your baby into our world. Yoga study surrounds your baby with images and feelings of peace and harmony. This study is a wonderful gift you can give your forming child. I do not offer prenatal classes. Check your local hospital which may offer some. Global Yoga in Chicago offers this, but it may be too far for you to travel. Other yoga centers are beginning to offer prenatal yoga classes too. Check out Yoga Chicago newspaper on the internet for yoga studios in your area. I highly encourage you on this path of yoga, the unity of body mind and spirit. There are lessons of non-harming in the study of yoga to begin teaching your baby in the womb. By reducing your stress, you will be reducing your baby's stress. The new angels coming into this world need all

the help they can get. I encourage you to begin teaching your angel now.

**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 perfect road

Dear Joan,

Hi Joan. I think of you as a wise friend, though I have never met you. Thank you for taking the time to answer both of my previous letters. I was very much into my ego with the last yoga problem and I knew it was not good but I couldn't seem to get away from it, until I went away with my husband on a Harley Vacation. It may sound strange but sitting on the back of our Harley heading down the perfect road to where is the best way for me to get my head on straight.

Riding on the edge of day...

The sky,
all peach and blue.
One star,
one me, one you.

Riding on the edge of night...

The trees,
just black on blue.
One thought,
just be not do.

When I got back all of the tension and hostility had faded away. I talked to the person, openly expressing my hurt from the situation in a non-judging, non-hostile, non-confrontational way. I felt that a huge weight had been lifted from me. I didn't do it to try and change her but to change myself, my response to the situation. There will always be "situations", learning the right way to deal with them is the lesson.

You mentioned opening my own studio and I'm very much interested in doing just that but I have no idea how to go about it. We have a large family room with a separate entrance but I worry about zoning laws and insurance and the million other details I don't know about yet. Any advice you could give me would be greatly appreciated.



Janet

Dear Janet,

Do not own a yoga studio. It's best to ask someone who does. Now you may not get all the answers you want from them, because business is competitive. We live in a capitalistic society. I would like to think that American business yogis are not competitive, but I don't think this is true. Yogis are people too. Your local Chamber of Commerce or City Hall can be a great help in getting you everything you always wanted to know about the ever changing zoning specifics to your area's businesses.

Regarding insurance, consider joining the Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals. It's an organization that was created originally for Massage Therapists, but has expanded to Yoga Therapists and other body/mind therapies. Their website is at the bottom of the "About Joan" section of this site. This is an organization I have belonged to for years. Membership included insurance. For a yoga studio, you may need additional insurance. The ABMP can help you determine better what you will need. My very best wishes to you, Janet, as you continue riding the yoga road on your Harley (that sounds great!).

**Namaste,
Joan**

That ol' feelin'

Dear Joan,

I've had to take it easy with yoga because it's unlocking a lot of old stuff. The breath of fire technique is bringing up all the old, gooky, toxic shame I grew up with...it's intense, but after, my eyes are almost as bright and beautiful as yours. I have access to an aerobics room at the gym. I am fortunate to have extra tools in there as well (punching bag and a stick.) The standing postures release a lot of anger just as you have stated in your "Idiot's Guide to Yoga". Sometimes...the feelings are so intense that I have to pick up the stick and whack the bag and verbalize old anger in the middle of my practice. As you probably can notice, I feel very raw with yoga. I feel open and vulnerable. I feel like the old Chris.

**Chris
New Jersey**

Dear Chris,

Yoga poses can open up emotional wounds, but they also help direct emotions into constructive modes of expression. Now, I am not saying that punching a bag can not be constructive. In fact I often think primal screaming should be offered as a required college course. Kids naturally scream all the time. Adults hold it in too much and then explode screaming at someone instead of just screaming at the sky for the sake

of screaming. But, that's another subject, regarding your digressions into punching bags during your yoga practice. This is impulsive behavior that may not be helping you to work through your emotions in the most effective way. And if you are in a class with others when this behavior happens, I can say with confidence it's not helping others in the class focus on yoga.

ad, I would encourage you to increase the intensity of the postures you are working with, and then to these postures longer. As you hold the posture, bring your attention to your breath. When your thoughts become focused on the difficulty of the posture, breathe deeply and focus on the movement of the breath. As emotions come up, watch them as you would watch a balloon floating by. Let your breath help to guide you on the roller coaster of emotions. If possible, breathe through the nose, particularly when you inhale. This purifies the air more than breathing through the mouth. It also extends the length of air. Remember, I have nothing against punching bags. I am concerned that someday you may substitute a person for a bag. In the long run, it will be much more effective for you to learn to work through your anger and your emotions with your breath. My best to you, Chris.

Namaste,
Joan

speed limit 55+

I'm looking for yoga classes with gentle postures for ages 55+. Can you tell me a little bit about what postures are on the tape and the pace. I prefer emphasis on breathing and relaxation.

Thank you,
Kathy

Dear Kathy,
I emphasize breathing and relaxation in all my tapes. Sun salutation is the only one that is a vinyasa and faster moving at times. Many of my students were/are 55+, so I think you would be quite happy with tapes. I'm not currently teaching in the area, but do also check your local YMCA.

Namaste,
Joan

Classes

Dear Joan,

I'm interested in taking a beginners yoga course. I found Yoyoga on the internet and was interested in finding out

more information on class schedules and rates. Could you please provide me with that information? I appreciate your help.

— ik you!
Meredith

Dear Meredith,

My classes are free once a month right here. Tune in and I'll give you what I've got. There is a new section of this site that states what seminars I am teaching at various locations around the globe. Click here to find out what's coming up: Seminars If you would like me to come to your area, consider booking me for a seminar. These are my current modes of teaching .

**Namaste,
Joan**

Bikram

I have been curious about starting yoga for a while now and have decided that I need to do so now. I recently read an article in The Reader which discussed a form of yoga that takes place in a room with temperatures up to 105 degrees. I was intrigued by this article and based on what I read feel I would enjoy that practice. I cannot remember the name but it does start with a B. Do you know what I am referring to? And if so, do you offer any courses within that practice? What would you recommend for a beginner? I would like a program that is regimented and consistent in the suburbs. Could you please advise me on what you offer/what you would recommend?

Thank you,
Astrid

Dear Astrid,

You are referring to Bikram Yoga. It is named after a man named Bikram Choudhury in Los Angeles who now runs the 3Bikram Yoga College of India2 in Beverly Hills. I don't have any training in his style of teaching, nor have I gone to any classes in this style. I would suggest contacting him on the web to find out about classes offered by his graduates in the Chicago area. His website is: <http://www.bikramyoga.com/>

**Namaste,
Joan**

50 speed limit again

After hearing my praises of it, my Aunt is interested in starting yoga, but won't go unless the class is for people age 50 and above. I am trying to locate a class for her in your area. Do you teach classes, or know of a place I can recommend?

Thanks
Emily

Dear Emily,

I'm 44. Would that disqualify me? It's not the age of the students, but the quality of the instruction that matters. However, I do understand that the motivations for taking a yoga class can be quite different as one's priorities change in life. Instead of a teacher recommendation, I have two books. First, Vanda Scaravelli's "Awakening the spine." This is a beautifully written book about the nature of yoga. It's presented in an artistic and holistic way. Vanda demonstrates many poses in the book. She was in her 80's at the time and is a beautiful example of a strong hatha practice. She transitioned from this earth plane not too long ago. "Transitioned" is yoga talk for "passed away." Her beautiful spirit is still among us as reflected in this incredible book.

Another book, "The New Yoga for People Over 50: A Comprehensive Guide for Midlife and Older Beginners by Suza Francina. I would like to quote from this book because it's written by an assortment of people in their 50's who practice hatha yoga; however, I loaned the book out to someone and I never got it back. I forgot who I loaned it to, so if it might be you, please return it. It's beautifully photographed and is inspiring to read.

Namaste,
Joan

Mr. Sardonicus is back!

I've been practicing yoga for a whole ten minutes and yet I still have a headache, backache, toothache, stress, worry, and halitosis. Is this here yoga a scam or am I doing something wrong?

Shasta,
Mr. Sardonicus

Dear Mr. Sardonicus,

With the right teacher, even one brief moment can make a difference. Don't be discouraged, when the student is ready, the teacher appears.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Ashtanga in Namibia

I have discovered yoga recently and I am loving it! I am currently living in Namibia (I'm Norwegian) where they don't offer many yoga classes nor are there any experienced yogis. So everything I learn I get from books and videos ordered through the internet (I started off with your Idiot's Guide!). I would love to learn how to meditate and my first question is; can I learn this on my own without anyone there to guide me? Is books enough?

I also have another question. Yoga makes me feel good in many ways, but I must admit I'm ALSO doing it for the fitness side of it. I'm now busy learning the Ashtanga Vinyasa series and it gives me a great, healthy workout. After reading your answer to Sandy who wanted advise on how yoga could flatten her tummy, and you advised her to go to the gym and return to the ashram when her ego was gone, it made me feel I was doing yoga for the wrong reasons. Am I?

Last of all: you speak of our habitual nature of competitiveness. I know I'm not in a contest, but yes I am conscience of how far I can or cannot stretch my head toward the floor. What exactly do you mean by our mind being in a state of competitiveness and how does one rid oneself of it?

— nk you so much for your time,
| regards,

—
Swakopmund, Namibia

Dear Pia,

Yes, you can learn to meditate without anyone there to help you. Books are enough. Good books are more than enough. I would suggest adding to your collection some books by Swami Rama. He worked with the scientific community in his studies of meditation and is often quite explicit in his instructions within his books. One of my favorite books of his is "Yoga and Psychotherapy," (I would love to quote from it now, but it's another book I lent to someone at sometime...you know the story ...)

Your question regarding your motives for studying yoga, You say the ashtanga series gives you a "great, healthy workout." I think that's a great reason to study yoga.

Your last question about the competitive mind - I, too, often think about how far I'm stretching. When I do, it can often turn to judgments like, "I'm not stretching far enough," which can turn into, "I'm not good enough." Or, "I'm stretching farther than this other person," which can change to, "I'm better than this other person." Either scenario is a form of violence. It's an attitude of failure. Yoga is a practice of non-violence, ahimsa. How does one rid oneself of the competitive mind? By becoming aware of the subtleties of its existence and then choosing to transform its energy into one of non-violence.

**Namaste,
Joan**

odified sun salute

Hi Joan. I am a 31 yr. old male, that is new to yoga. I had a question on abnormal spinal curvatures. I have a mild scoliosis in my upper to lower back area, about 15-20 degrees I'm told. I also have herniated disks at levels 3-4 in my neck, 4-5 and 5-6 in my upper back, and 5-sacro. in my lower back. the worser being the ones in my upper back, one is slightly impinging on the spinal canal. I realize your not a medical doctor, but in general though, would a modified sun salutation be helpful for correcting the spinal conditions I mentioned?. I know the sun salutation is supposed to be excellent for bringing back spinal flexibility, and to warm up with. Thanks for any info. you can relay back to me.

sincerely,
Randy

***If the above is not appropriate, then could you recommend anything for my condition.

Dear Randy,

The problem with sun salutations are that they can become unduly fast and awareness can be lost in the quickness of the movements. Cobra and/or upward dog poses are a part of this series. Because of your specific condition, I would recommend that you modify these poses, and alter your sun salutation.

eping the elbows amd lower arms on the floor may help. Also, and lifting the head and chest without hing the neck backwards may help as well. Do not attempt full inversions like headstand or snoulderstand. However, it's important to work directly with a qualified yoga instructor who can see exactly what you are doing and guide you appropriately.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Vegi support group

I am writing to tell you that I appreciate that you write about your struggles with vegetarianism. I, too, have the same struggles. I love being a vegetarian and I feel that it is a very clean, respectful, enlightened way of life, but occasionally I fall off the veggie cart, too. I occasionally eat fish for a low fat protein, but I am trying to transition away from that this year. I run into problems with limited restaurant menus and on social occasions (although I have to say that being a vegetarian has kept me away from some nasty low-fat chicken dishes lately--why eat anything if it's not going to have any flavor--what a waste!) I also occasionally succumb to the almond chicken dish at my favorite Chinese restaurant and pepperoni which is probably the worst of all. Eating at home is not much of a problem. I just recently purchased the new mycoprotein meat analogs by Quorn and have found them to be the best

so far. I wish manufacturers would move beyond the veggie burger and concentrate more on texture and flavor. The more that field advances, the more likely it is that we will find better restaurant choices.

I also have been kept away from yoga due to some health issues, primarily problems with my wrists, feet, and back. I took my first yoga class and it was a disaster. Bad luck of the draw, I had an instructor who seemed to know a lot about yoga postures but nothing about teaching. Certain things like mixing up left and right were almost understandable though at one point I ended up somewhat pinned to the floor), but she would have us in a pose and then stop to talk to someone and leave us there too long. I have since resumed a solitary relaxing practice focusing on breathing and gentle asanas. I will definitely try another class one day, though.

Overall, I have found your books and your website to consistently be the best source of information and inspiration. Your website has a very definite community feel to it. I also appreciate how you gently respond to people who want things really unrelated to yoga such as ab exercises. I admire your sense of peace and diplomacy and your dedication to a peaceful, nonviolent life.

Namaste,
Melinda

Dear Melinda,

Thanks Melinda. I will continue to keep trying my best.

Namaste,
Joan

Stress begone

Dear Joan,

Hi There, I was trying to find out information on taking Yoga. Do you offer classes or is it a one on one session? I'm interested in taking yoga to lose weight and release stress. Please respond with whatever information you have including costs.

Thank You!
Una

Dear Una,

As mentioned in a previous letter, my lessons are now simply offered free on the internet. Releasing stress is a very good reason to study yoga. My thought is that when more stress is released, the weight won't be an issue.

**Namaste,
Joan**

•

I've always had a problem understanding the more humane of motivations of pursuing vegetarianism, that is, the opposition to the slaughter of any animals. granted, it's a bizarre conundrum, but if all life is sacred, what about the fact that all such animals are brought into being solely for the purpose of food production? (i mean, it must have been 50 years ago that any animal product made its way from raised-in-the-wild to a supermarket shelf...)

But also, if all life is sacred, isn't there something to be said for one animal giving its life so that it might strengthen or lengthen another's? I wonder if there are references along these lines in all religions/mythologies... we're all a part of the same mega-system of life, continually feeding into the system. we die and one way or another get re-integrated. consider that the planet works as a closed system: no energy or matter (save sunlight) enters or leaves the system. the amount of matter remains constant.

I would love to know how we evolved, exactly what our diet was 200,000 years ago, and balance that against what we truly KNOW about how nutrition could improve upon that. if a shorter life expectancy 100,000 years ago was the result of diet, not hard living, what improvements can be made, etc., etc., etc....

have a good day-

Dear m,

Thanks for your note, m. I don't know of many, if any, animals that willingly give their life to strengthen or lengthen another's. Their lives are instead taken from them from the one who wants to strengthen or lengthen theirs. And regarding the idea that we live in a closed system save for sunlight, I believe that if the energy of sunlight can enter, it can certainly exit as well. Aum.

**Namaste,
Joan**

55 again!

I saw your lovely website as I was looking for a way to gently exercise and stretch my body. I know nearly nothing 'out yoga. I am diabetic and have osteoarthritic spurs on my neck and spine. I must exercise everyday to keep my

muscles stretched. When I do simple stretching exercises I feel so much better and I am trying to find a simple plan using yoga that I can use everyday. I need to begin slow to start. What is a good simple beginning plan for me? Can you suggest where I can find one? The yoga I have read about would take a far more limber body than I have. I do a morning breathing exercise to open up the chest and lungs which I find very enjoyable. That is all the yoga I know. Can older people utilize yoga? Thank you. Your quote on the home page was lovely.

Cathy
I am 55 years old.

Dear Cathy,

First of all, 55 is not old. Your morning routine sounds like it is shaping up nicely. There are some tapes and books out now that offer seated yoga positions. I would recommend you look into these. I have a tape available in the [Yoyoga Bookstore](#) called, "Breathworks," that may be helpful for you as well. . Also, in the bookstore is BKS Iyengar's, "Yoga the Path to Holistic Health." You may find this book helpful as an introduction to yoga therapy using various props to help the body open up in the asanas. If you have a local Iyengar trained teacher, I would consider exploring a class in this tradition. Yet another new book recommendation is, "Structural Yoga Therapy: Adapting to the Individual" by Mukunda Stiles. It's gentle and educational. It's yoga.

**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.

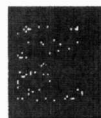
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Yo Joan



Are you listening?

Dear Joan,

I have been working on the plough and am pleased to say that I can now actually get into the posture with my feet touching the floor. However, I usually have to cut the posture short because I feel a pressure on my windpipe and breathing is uncomfortable. Is this because I'm a little overweight or could I do something differently to prevent this gasping feeling?

Alison

Dear Alison,

Irregular and/or uncomfortable breathing is a clear sign to come out of a yoga pose. This is a standard observance to follow in any yoga pose. You may be trying too hard to get your feet to the floor when your body is not ready for this to happen. The body is trying to tell you this. It's speaking very clearly to you. Why is it so hard to listen?

It's easy to become goal orientated in our approach to the postures. We live in a society that puts tremendous pressure on physical achievements. When yoga is advertised, it's usually by some gymnastic looking posture. We think that we have achieved "yoga like status" when a posture begins to look like a picture we have seen. As difficult as it may be to transcend this image, I would highly encourage you to try. To do this, explore the pose from the inside out, rather than the outside in. Instead of viewing the feet touching the floor as success in the pose, ask yourself these three questions:

- 1) Does the spine feel as if it is lengthening, allowing space for my internal organs? When the inside or outside is feeling crushed, you have stretched too far.**
- 2) Does my digestion improve after a regular practice of this pose? This pose rejuvenates the abdominal organs.**



3) Do my hands, fingers, and shoulders feel less strained, less tight, after a regular practice of this posture? This pose relieves and reduces cramps in these areas.

These are questions to begin exploring. Remember, toes can be touched with a cold and calloused heel. Instead, open your heart and let compassion sing. Let grace govern your movements. When your body speaks to you, listen with loving kindness. The divine light is within you and speaks to you with every breath you take and every movement you make.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Two in One

Dear Joan,

I like your website! A question: how can a round body like me get the benefits of the plough and shoulder stand. I used to do those exercises, but anymore it is too much weight on my shoulders. A number of years ago, I sprained my neck doing the head stand, and my shoulders are a bit of a problem.

I have another question too. I have been using a yoga/meditation tape for the last few years to relieve stress and feel better. I do weight lifting regularly (just 8 exercises twice a week), but I practice yoga less frequently, only when I feel more stress. Recently I fell and hurt my right leg and knee, and because of this, I can no longer practice the cat stretch or a balancing exercise where I raise opposite hand and foot while the other hand and knee on the floor keep me balanced. As a result, I have stopped using the tape. What exercises can I substitute for the two I can no longer do? As you know, I am not young and am overweight.

Sue

Dear Sue,

First of all, inverted postures are standing postures turned upside down. Here is an exercise for you to begin with. Remove all your clothing. Look at yourself in a mirror and notice how you are standing. Look at yourself slowly from all angles. Try not to do this critically. If you find yourself focused on one area of your body, angrily criticizing it, take note of your mental talk and then try to replace it with a kind thought. For example, "My arms are so out of shape." change to, "My arms have nurtured myself and others in times of stress. They have held love and will hold more love. These arms are my beautiful expressions of divinity." Take a tour around your body in this way. When a negative thought comes to you, take note of it and alter it. Say the kind thought out loud to reinforce it for you.

You mention that a number of years ago you strained your neck doing headstand. I would encourage you not to try this posture again until you are secure and confident in the standing poses. Standing forward bends are inversions of the body, in that they bring the head below the heart. You may get the benefits of

inversions like headstand and shoulderstand through the development of standing forward bends instead. Hatha yoga is a study of balance. How to bring the body/mind/soul into balance.

Regarding your question about the leg exercise. The movement you mention is not really a yoga pose, so I do not know how to tell you to replace it. However, you do say that your knee bothers you. Again, standing poses are the answers to many knee problems. The pose I would recommend you working on everyday is lightning bolt pose, demonstrated in the [Asana For The Month](#). This pose develops the muscles that support the knee joint. Cat pose too can be done while standing. Place your hands on your thighs, bend slightly forward and arch back up as you exhale. Release spine down as you inhale. Again, if your body is not balanced standing up, it will not be balanced when you try to balance on your delicate knee joint. Strengthen your knee joint and strengthen your overall body balance through the standing poses.

**Namaste,
Joan**

New Career

Dear Joan

I have been practicing yoga for about a year and a half and have noticed that within that time that I have started to reconsider my career path. Would this surprise you? Also, do you know of any books, tapes, or teachers that you would recommend to someone who is practicing yoga and is considering making a career change?

Sincerely,
Dan

Dear Dan,

It would not surprise me at all that you are reconsidering your career path as your yoga practice has developed. Yoga is a study of union. It clarifies our life practices. If something is out of sync in our life, it brings it to our attention. If we look around at our world, we see that there's much that's out of sync. Our career either supports these imbalances or we can choose careers that bring ourselves and our wacky world into a more balanced existence.

Regarding teachers to help you along the way, if you find yourself becoming more compassionate and successful in this world - you are studying with the right teachers. What does success mean? That's for you to decide. I would be very interested, Dan, in what you decide that to be as your yoga practice continues to deepen. Please keep in touch and let me know.

Namaste,

Joan

Go with the Flow

Dear Joan,

I'm currently living in Chicago and will be moving to Glen Ellyn very soon. Do you have any yoga studio recommendations? I mostly enjoy Vinyasa/Flow. Thanks for your time!

Kate

Dear Kate,

Vinyasa/Flow is taught at a Yoga Studio in Downers Grove called, "Yoga Among Friends." They have classes seven days a week. Their phone number is 630-960-5488. Welcome to Glen Ellyn!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Bigger=Better, Smaller=Sensational

Dear Joan,

About two months ago, I was poking around the web and found your website. I noticed you were credited with writing the yoga for idiots book, and then, to my delight, I noted your location...I live in Downers Grove! Anyway...a friend of mine was starting a class at the park district here in Downers, so I decided to just go ahead and start the class with her instead of going to COD and seeing if you still taught there or what. I like yoga, but the class was too large, and there was very little personal attention given at the class. I've been studying Alexander Technique for about four years, so luckily my body has been able to excel toward a new level of awareness despite the lack of teacher help. I go over yoga poses with my Alexander teacher, too.

ANYWAY!!!!!!....The class at the park district no longer fits into my schedule, so I decided it was time to start something new with regard to yoga. I am looking to become more serious, as I have seen what doing yoga once a week for six weeks has done. I plan on practicing every day, but I need some help with vinyasas and general form. I am having trouble finding a class that coincides with my schedule, so I thought I'd ask you...Are you teaching anywhere, or do you teach privately? I'm not sure what the normal private lesson thing is for yoga...I assume once a week is the optimal situation. I'm guessing that your schedule is pretty hectic, with all the things you're involved in, but I would be very grateful if you would be willing to meet with me even just once and offer some specific guidance, even if it's to meet with me and tell me who you feel would be a good teacher for me to contact for consistent lessons!

Get back to me, and let me know what you think!

Thanks!
Daina

Dear Daina,

I think you're on a wonderful road. Yes, if yoga postures can help you when you practiced them once a week, imagine what they might do if you practiced them daily. I am no longer teaching at the College of Dupage. I taught there for eight wonderful years and it was time for me to make a change. I'm traveling this summer. Care to come to Louisiana or Brazil to take classes with me over the summer? I'm not yet sure what my plans are in teaching for the Fall. I may start teaching privately again next year, but I'm not certain. I recently completed a certification with Sonia Sumar in "Yoga for the Special Child," and found her teachings and this work to be quite profound. I'm considering routing my career and research in this direction. I'm spending alot of time in meditation these days. I'll keep you posted on this website. Do keep in touch.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Mind/Body Classes

Dear Joan,

I went through your web site and read some of the material. I am interested in taking yoga classes. I have tried park district classes, but they are too large and too distracting precisely for the reasons that you have described in the Yoga Tips section. It would be nice to find a teacher that addresses both the mind and body aspects of Yoga. You seem to do that. Do you teach somewhere in Oak Brook? Please let me know of your schedule.

Thanks,
Kasu

Dear Kasu,

The college classes I taught were 30+ students per class. I did find it harder to teach as the classes grew in size. That is why I so deeply connected to Sonia's teachings that I mentioned in the letter before you. She teaches one on one, and in small group settings. It was very special for me to experience this again, and it reaffirmed for me how important it is to study in this way. It is possible to find teachers that focus on body and mind in their teachings, regardless of class size. You may simply need to pretend that you are studying with them alone, until you find the teacher that you are able to do so with.

**Namaste,
Joan**

YMCA

Dear Joan,

As a yoga teacher, and YMCA employee, I appreciate your recommendations that students try this venue. I am well aware that most "health club" yoga is rather dry, and most participants are just adding a "stretching" class to their muscle-binding workouts. My particular Y, Central YMCA in Greensboro, NC, has a wonderful selection of "real" yoga classes.

The drawback here is that, in a situation where participants come and go daily, it is very difficult for a teacher to offer what every level of practitioner needs. I tend to adjust my classes to their time. For instance, I teach a slower, gentler class on weekday mornings when retirees are most prolific; and a stronger, more intense class, including Surya Namaskara A from Astanga, in my evening and weekend classes.

For those just embarking on their yoga journey, YMCA's are a good starting point. I also find that many people (especially in the South) are concerned that yoga may conflict with their own spiritual and religious beliefs. Remember what the "C" in YMCA stands for. If yogais the right thing , students will find a way to branch out, a teacherwill come when the time is right to deepen practice.

I teach corporate and private classes, but my time at the Y is my most rewarding. The atmosphere is supportive and generous, just what every yogi needs.

Love and Namaste,
Melissa

Dear Melissa,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, the YMCA is a wonderful place to explore yoga classes. I used to teach at the Y too. Many wonderful yoga teachers I have known have taught, or currently teach at YMCA's. As you say so well, the atmosphere is often quite supportive and generous. I highly support YMCA's (even though I am a "W").

**Namaste,
Joan**

Archives in future?

Dear Joan,

First, allow me to congratulate you on your many contributions to yoga, not the least of which is *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga* which I find to be the best guide not only for beginning yoga students but also for those who have been practicing for some time: it is clear, comprehensive, and captivating. Because I like my copy so much, I bought one for my instructor who appears to be so much like you in her approach and in her philosophical base.

Second, I enjoy your site yoyoga which is, as you naturally have designed it, an immediate expression of your individual approach to hatha yoga.

Third, and lastly, speaking of yoyoga, I wonder if there is any way by which you could add a search to your site so that all your fans, old and new, could bring up all the previous pictures and descriptions of the "Asana for the Month"?

Namaste from
Bob
in Cowichan Bay on beautiful Vancouver Island

Dear Bob,

Thank you for your kind letter. You aren't the first person who has suggested I do this. Perhaps in time I will. I have only been writing the site for seven years now. It doesn't seem long enough to start an archive. Maybe in a few more years.

Namaste,
Joan

Inward or outward downward?

Dear Joan,

I always turn to your book when I am fine-tuning a pose and find so much great info. You address this in your book but I'm still confused about which way the inner legs are supposed to spiral during updog and cobra. Does inward mean turning the thighs toward the floor beneath you, or up towards the ceiling? I never could get that down. It seems all reversed because you could be looking at the thighs from the front or the back. I sure appreciate you clarifying it for me. My back is aching from all the experimentation!!

Thanks,
Lisa

Dear Lisa,

Do not let the legs roll inward. Lift the inner legs and be on the center of the feet to create balance. The

knees and elbows are straight. Open the sides of the chest. This is **tadasana** with a slight backbend. Instead of balancing on your soles, as you do in **tadasana**, in upward dog you are balancing on the tops of your feet. The balance is steady and equally distributed. In **Cobra** pose, the focus is on lengthening and strengthening the spine. **Upward Dog** activates the strength of the leg and arm muscles more by bringing **Cobra** pose off the floor. As I mentioned to Sue, in a previous letter, start in **tadasana** and establish your balance there. Apply the principles of **Tadasana** in all the other yoga poses - balance, lengthen, chest open, spine lengthens, shoulders down. What you learn and apply in **Tadasana** will help you in your study and practice of all the other yoga poses.

Namaste,
Joan

Smiling from Bermuda

I am interested in purchasing yoga props, but I have been unsuccessful finding a website or address/contact numbers in order to do this. It would be a blessing if you could provide me with this information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Peace and Blessings.....Deborah
(all the way from Bermuda...smile)

Dear smiling Deborah,

I don't sell props. I recommend you to do a search on the web of "**Iyengar Yoga**." This is the style of yoga study that utilizes props. There are many such sites on the web to choose from. There is also a listing of recommended **Iyengar** sites and centers in the back of **BKS Iyengar's** latest book. It is called, "**Yoga the Path to Holistic Health**." I was the US Consultant on this book. It is available in the **Yoyoga Bookstore**, or at any major bookstore.

Peace and Blessings coming back to you, Deborah...the law of karma:-)

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.

Yo Joan

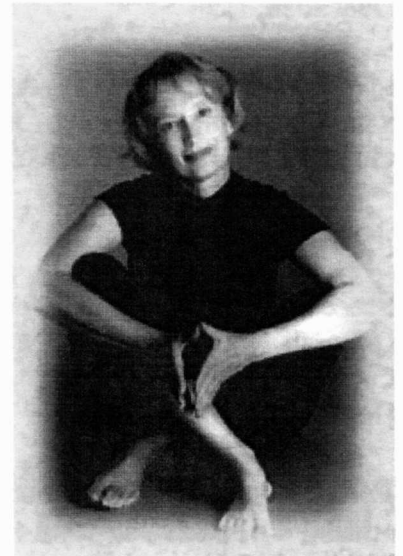


TV YOGI

Dear Joan,

I have been watching and practicing yoga with Steve Ross in the morning. I don't know whether or not you are familiar with him, but he has a television program on Oxygen. I was wondering if you had ever considered doing a yoga program on t.v.? Also, do you have any yoga videos available?

Jonna
Barberton, Ohio



Dear Jonna,

Yes, I have considered doing a yoga program on tv. In fact, several years ago, in 1994, I put a brief demo tape together for a tv program. With my former professional background in television and film, I originally thought that a tv program on yoga was a natural extension of my career. At that time, my focus in teaching yoga was heavily based on an understanding and exploration of the physical postures of yoga; however, since that time, my approaches to yoga have developed and changed. Today, I clearly see, teach, and study the postures as one small part of what is yoga. I no longer aspire to the levels of flexibility that I once did. There are many yogis much more flexible than I am. There are many yogis much more adept at presenting the hatha postures. Television is a visual medium. I wonder how effective I could be in teaching yoga now on television, when my way of exploring the teachings and the studies are based in a lifestyle approach. The postures are one small part of the study. I am not closed to this idea of television. I am just not sure how I could approach this today through this medium and wonder how effective I might be in it.

So, in final response to your question, thank you for your thoughts and encouragement. I continue to wonder. And in regards to the yoga videos. The only video I have on the market for sale now is on massage. I did tape a series of seven yoga videos for the College of Dupage in 1996 that are now

exclusively available for loan in the College of Dupage library system. If you are interested in viewing these tapes, call the College of Dupage at 630-858-2800 and check if it might be possible for you to view the tapes through a loan by your local neighborhood library association. Thanks, Jonna.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Peace and Luv

Dear Joan,

I would love to pay a visit you and everyone else. This yoga vibe is very new to mebut what a breath of fresh air it has bought into my being. I would love to connect with others who are experiencing this wonderful way of life. Let me know how to go from here (smile).

Peace & Luv
Deborah

Dear Deborah,

Take a class. Continue checking the various links on my site in the "About Joan" section. I am also adding a new section soon that will feature links for developing a yoga community of what you may be looking for. Keep tuning in, and I will keep developing this site and helping you in every way I can.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Evanston is Special!

Dear Joan

Do you teach in the Chicago area? If so, where and when? I recently started working in the Oak Brook area, living in Evanston. Anything to recommend in either place? Thank you.

Handson

Dear Handson,

Joan

earless

Dear Joan,

I just read your book on meditation and I found it very informative. I have just started to meditate and I find that I am "choking up", if that is the term to use when I feel myself going deep into meditation. It feels like I am afraid of losing control or something. This makes it very difficult to keep meditating. I even get nervous thinking about meditation. Is this just a phase, and will I eventually move out of it, or is there something more to it? I would really appreciate a response because I would like to keep going.

Thanks.

Dennis

Dear Dennis,

Dear Dennis,

Here is an exercise for you, Dennis. Take out a pen and paper and reflect on the answers to these questions. Write them down.

1) Visualize yourself "loosing control." What would happen to you if you lost control? What does this mean to you?

2) How would a loss of control scare you? What do you fear happening?

3) How could you loose control in meditation? What might happen to you if you did? How would this loss of control in meditation effect your meditation, your day, your week, your life, the life of others?

By reflecting on these answers, I am asking you to face your fears through the power of your pen.

I would also suggest for you to take a class in meditation, Dennis. A class is where you can explore these questions and concepts openly with others. A teacher is someone who understands and will help guide you in your studies. A class of students affords you numerous opportunities to see that you are not alone in your concerns. Your fears can be brought up in a loving and supportive environment. The company of others on this path will soften some, if not all, of your fears.

Since you state that you have read my book, you know that meditation can be approached from various actions. Whatever direction you approach your meditation studies from, the first step involves developing focus through concentration. There are many exercises that can be done to develop this

You live by the most spectacular yoga studio - Satchidananda Yoga Center on Chicago Avenue in the heart of Evanston. Sonia Sumars is the teacher. She recently relocated to Evanston from Brazil. She is a very experienced and remarkable teacher. You are blessed to have her so close. Her studio number is 847-869-8315.

I am not currently teaching locally. I am traveling this summer in conferences.

Namaste,
Joan

New beginnings

Dear Joan,

I have to "share" with you...I have had a long journey in discovering what "poses" were ideal for me. It has been hard. I had to narrow my routine (out of all the "asanas), which ones were appropriate for me. There are 10 that are right for me...otherwise, I become very unstable with the other ones. I currently take medication...I had over meditated in the past, and I have been in the hospital numerous times. This is something that I underestimated, once again, with the power of yoga. I got into a lot of "intense" postures...including: the scorpion, diamond, bow and arrow, etc. I went beyond what was "good" for me...I played with fire and got burned!!! It's amazing how much "ego" can "destroy" you. I am now "stabilizing" with basic posture: such as...TRIANGLE, NAVASANA, my own version of "Half-lotus", STANDING FORWARD BEND (with head looking up), PLOW, SHOULDERSTAND, DOWNWARD FACING DOG, "BOUNDARY POSE", and "SPINAL TWIST". These feel good and I am truly doing yoga now. Otherwise, I was hurting myself and not looking forward to my daily practice of yoga. Kundalini very powerful, but I keep "blowing myself out of the water...plus my back was hurting me and I was losing that "suppleness" that one gets as a result of a healthy yoga practice! I just wanted to share this with you because your book has been an invaluable source and was part of my research in finding "the right yoga practice for me"...THANK YOU!!! I forgot what yoga was about...undoing as opposed to "doing". It's going to take some time before I balance "out" again.

Take care Joan,
Thanks again,
Chris
New Jersey

Dear Chris,

Yoga is union. Hatha is balance. Hatha yoga is the study of union through balance. If your "hatha" practices are causing you to loose balance, then you are not doing hatha. Do not be discouraged, Chris. Sometimes we have to loose our balance in order to find it. And when balance is re-established, there is a clearer sense of what balance is, and all of the inner beauty it involves.

Namaste,

focus...some examples are: mantra, hatha yoga, breath awareness, sense withdrawal, candle gazing, etc. These types of exercises develop awareness. Awareness can bring us into deeper states of meditation.

**Meditation is not losing control.
Meditation is developing awareness.**

**Meditation is not controlling.
Meditation is freedom.**

For me, meditation is like tuning a harp. It takes time to tune a harp. I could play the harp without tuning it, but the sounds will be dissonant. I will not be able to master my playing of the harp this way, because I will not be aware of the sound of the strings until I actually strike them. Some notes may sound strange to my inner ear. My mind will hear something different than what I am playing. My harp and my mind will not be in sync.

If I tune the harp before playing it, I can play a melody that can take me into deeper and clearer expressions of the music that I hear within me. With practice and time, this music becomes not only an expression of me...but, it becomes me. There is no separation between the music and myself. For me, playing the harp is an exercise in meditation. It is a private experience that I cherish. I hope my words will help you to understand that meditation is a part of life and not separate from it. Life is not to be feared. A beautiful, magnificent light of life was given inside of you when you were born. Because of this brilliant light residing inside of you, you need not fear anything or anyone.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Do you have a question for 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



Karma in Stove

Dear Joan,

First I must tell you how I have enjoyed the Complete Idiot Guide Series. You have done a wonderful job with both books and can't wait until you write another book. Any plans?

My question is: in the complete idiot's guide to meditation, you stated that a dirt stove indicates financial problems. Now Joan, you are a mentor to me and I am trying to figure out why you have stated this. Is there any reference that you can refer me to or explain why you say this. Maybe I've missed something in that chapter. Can you help me out? I would certainly appreciate it.

Thanks again for all of your wisdom and a great website.

Sincerely,
Revita

Dear Revita,

The dirty stove is in reference to Feng Shui. Feng Shui is the art of balancing the flow of energy in our surroundings to benefit us. It's based on the belief that everything has energy and the placement of furniture, and other stationary objects, can impede or permit energy to expand. For example, a desk placed facing a door can have a "cut off" feeling to the room. Angle the desk toward the center of the room, and it opens the feeling one has as one enters the room. Part of this Feng Shui art has to do with releasing clutter from our lives. This includes dirt. So, it's natural that a dirty stove would be a part of the Feng Shui clearing philosophy.

I know cleaning a stove can be a drag to think about, particularly for some of us who prefer to never look



in the oven unless we have to throw something in it. But think about this a bit more...could this be reflective of other parts of our lives as well? It's often easier to look away than to deal with the difficulties of life. If we clean that stove, we might notice that we are also able to deal better with other difficulties in our lives. We might stop avoiding obstacles, and choose instead to turn them into opportunities. This is a thought to reflect on. Om.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Tea for Two

Dear Joan,

I have been having trouble keeping up with yoga. Big trouble. after I suffered a shoulder injury, I couldn't practice for 2 weeks. after that it's slipped away from me. Having a teacher and certain times when I meet with him/ her would help me. do you know any good instructors around the Swarthmore/ Springfield PA area? Also, I'm not sure which teas would help me relax best. Could you suggest some?

Thank you.
Jonathan

r Jonathan,

Herbal Teas are made from flowers, roots, leaves, berries, and seeds of other assorted edible plants. It's best not to add milk to these teas, though honey or lemon is fine. Herbal teas do not contain caffeine. Even so, some teas, such as ginger, have a natural stimulating effect. Chamomile Tea is very good for relaxation. It can be most effective at bedtime, as it can make you sleepy. For an even fuller body and mind experience, try taking a lavender bath after drinking the chamomile tea. Lavender Bath Salts are wonderful to soak in to further relax the muscles.

There is a lovely little book out by Penelope Sach called, "On Tea and Healthy Living." I love it because it's compact yet artfully made. It's loaded with interesting information on teas. According to Penelope, "To treat a tired and strained nervous system you can drink teas made from chamomile, lavender, rosemary, and vervain. Less common herbs that will also be effective are St. John's Wort, damiara, skullcap, oats and ginseng."

Teas are so great. Let's all have a cup today! And, regarding teachers in your area, the Himalayan Institute is located in Honesdale, PA. Their phone number is 1800-822-4547. They will be able to inform you of yoga teachers closer to you. They also have a beautiful retreat center in Honesdale that you may want to consider going to at some point. If you have never taken a yoga retreat before, I think the Himalayan Institute would introduce you to this experience beautifully.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Yogol on a Hill

Dear Joan

Thanks for a well written, kind hearted book.(dummies) At age 36 and a beginner yogi, I believe I have found my future in "teaching yoga". Please advise me of how to become a certified instructor. I have not seen any certification classes in my area.

Be Well,
Lisa S.
West Haven CT

Dear Lisa,

It is my blessed karma to have to regularly remind people that I am the "Idiot's Author," and not the "Dummies Author." As I struggle along on my yoga journey, I'm sure glad I didn't write, "The keys to enlightenment," - man, would that be alot to live up to! So, thanks for yet another opportunity for me to make note of my noteworthy book title. Eve Adamson and I are now embarking on writing the third edition of, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." We're also at work on the 2nd edition of, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation." Both new books should be in bookstores in time for istmas...fingers crossed, knees bent, elbows twisted, and balancing on one leg (name that pose!)

The first step in becoming a certified yoga instructor is to take some yoga classes and develop your own yoga practice. I would recommend taking a certification program that lasts over an extended period of time. This will help you to incorporate the yoga principles as a lifestyle rather than just a series of poses to learn. Study with teachers who inspire you. Find teachers who are able to not only extend their spines, but also can extend their hearts. Their example will inspire you to extend your spine, heart, and mind. It may take time to find such teachers, but they are out there.

There is also another ingredient to finding the right teacher. Find this teacher without judgment. This means, to open your own heart in your search for the right teacher. There is really no need to judge someone if he or she is not the right teacher for you. Simply continue your practice and the right teacher will come along to compliment and inspire you in your journey.

If traveling to a certification program is out of the question for you, the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago is now offering a new home study hatha certification program. Although I have no personal experience with this home study program, I did graduate from the Temple's in house yoga teacher's training program in 1994. It was a 14 month program. I still highly regard the quality of instruction I received there. I think the new concept of a home study course is a great one. To learn more about either the in house or at home programs, you can contact the Temple by phone at 773-342-4600 or on the web at <http://www.yogakriya.org>.

**Namaste,
Joan**

.. Yoga Party!

Dear Joan,

I just want to write to you to say what a wonderful, cheerful, and indeed pleasant book I found the "Idiots Guide to Yoga" to be.

I am a 26 year old male Science Graduate, currently residing in Liverpool, England. I know it's a bit mad writing this, but I feel that you are helping me sort my life out and have single handily (along with co-author Eve) put me on the road to living a fine, healthy, existence. I've still got a long way to go and am currently looking for a teacher who will aid me further in the Art and Science of Yoga.

As a young Brit, my life previously existed entirely of working, drinking (we Brits drink loads!!), smoking, and partying very hard. Whilst this is a lot of fun, I've found myself becoming unhappy and my body feeling like it was terminally declining and exhausted. It's still going to be difficult giving up, or at least moderating, all my vices, but I believe now that there is another way.

Your introduction to this wonderful, ancient eastern practice has lit a spark in my life. I feel silly coming across so corny, but you've made a difference to me, Joan, and I'll always regard your work as the thing that started all that is good. I've never written to an author before (and I read loads of all kinds of books) and that's how strongly I feel.

rate, I'll let you go now and finish with a great big THANK YOU! x

Cheers Joan,Chris
Liverpool, England

Dear Chris,

You Brits are the best. Thank you, Chris! Much love, many x's, and shanti's being sent back...

**Namaste,
Joan**

An aspiring yoga teacher

r Joan,

I've been looking for teacher training in the Chicago area. I live in Rogers Park and can't travel very far usually. Your home page shows that you are very deep & well trained. Any advice about facilities/teachers? I was thinking about Kriya's home study program-but it eems weird to study yoga alone without a teacher.

I am a single parent and a teacher of depressed teenagers at a therapeutic day school and would like to learn this skill in order to use it at work/home, etc. to help people. If you have the time,I'd really appreciate any insight you

Thanks a lot.
Lauren

Dear Lauren,

First of all, thank you for the wonderful work you do with teenagers. If it's possible for you to study in a class as compared to home study, this is what I would recommend first. A class will put you in the company of people on a path of joy. The Temple of Kriya Yoga is in Wicker Park and not too far for you to travel to. Please refer to the earlier question from Lisa for more information on the Temple.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Introspection necessary

Dear Joan,

I am an Indian practicing yoga for the past 5 years. But I can't able to introspect and to give away the dirty things. Please mail me the tips which will be helpful to me to success in my life and to achieve my goal.

Thanking you,
k.m.

Dear K.M.,

Hmmmm. I'll try to introspect on what you're asking, because it's not very clear. Yoga is about releasing desire. It's also about balance. It's not harmful to desire. In fact, I think desire can be healthy. The harm comes when the desire rules one's life. We must be able to let go of these types of desires in order to more effectively work with inevitable transitions. The way we handle transitions will help us in life. If we can learn to handle transitions in ways that are peaceful, harmonious, and beautiful, we will not only bless our own life, but we will bless all lives we come in contact with.

Yoga is also about dedication. Dedication to a life of truth and purity. This purity does not come out of

morality. This purity comes out of a developed understanding of the beauty inherent in the winds, the earth, the touch and devotion of a loved one. I hope my answer helps you, K.M. You have my respect and best wishes.

**naste,
n**

Nameless in Flossmoor

Dear Joan,

I have been searching for a beginner's class in meditation and or yoga. My motivation is primarily to relieve stress and to lead a fuller life. I am 53 years old, but when I was 22 I took a weekend seminar that was entitled "Mind Power" which was taught by a man who ran the Mind Power institute. We learned to reach the alpha state and to meditate. I did not keep up with the study (we could attend the institute and "practice" whenever we wanted to), but I never forgot the great peace and awareness I experienced. Do you know of any classes being offered in the south suburbs? I would love to get started . I live in Flossmoor, Illinois. (zip code 60422) but I don't know where to begin. Can you help? Thank you for reading this letter.

Man with no name

— r Man with no name,

Check out the Yoga Chicago Newspaper on the web at <http://www.yogachicago.com>. for class listings across Chicago and the suburbs. Also, check out:

**Mary Addison-Lamb, M.A., I.Y.T.
Director
Namaste Yoga Center
2160 S. 6th Street
Springfield, Il 62703
217/698-8177
e-mail:: mary@namasteyoga.com
web address: namasteyoga.com**

**Namaste,
Joan**

Feelin' Groovy

Dear Joan,

I've been practicing yoga for about 6 months now, and I'm really enjoying the benefits of fitness and relaxation that it's brought to my life. I recently had an accident and severely sprained my back. I've been receiving chiropractic care for my ailment and couldn't help but wonder if the theories of chiropractic are in sync with the practice of yoga (particularly the "do no harm" part, being that chiropractic adjustments don't always necessarily feel good). Any thoughts?

Jen
Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Jen,

I'm into feelin' groovy. If your chiropractic adjustments are not making you feel good, I would question this. I would recommend you read a great book on yoga for the back called, "Back Care Basics," by Mary Pullig Schatz, M.D. It's a great explanation of various back problems and yoga poses that can help them.

**Namaste,
Joan**

1 aspiring yoga teacher

Dear Joan,

I AM A YOGA TEACHER IN WALES, U.K. I HAVE JUST READ YOUR WONDERFUL BOOK - COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO YOGA - AND MUST CONGRATULATE YOU! WHAT AN INSPIRING AND NON-THREATENING INTRODUCTION TO YOGA - I PARTICULARLY LIKE THE CHAPTER ON PHILOSOPHY.....I HAVE BEEN PRACTICING YOGA FOR ABOUT 35 YEARS AND AM STILL LEARNING! IT IS NOT EASY TO FIND LITERATURE THAT DESCRIBES YOGA IN SUCH A FRIENDLY AND INFORMATIVE MANNER - ONCE AGAIN MAY I THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION AND EFFORTS TO 'SPREAD THE WORD'.....BENDEGEDIG ...WELSH FOR WONDERFUL.....OM SHANTI -----

FROM JACKY JAMES,
PORT TALBOT, SOUTH WALES, U.K.

Dear Jacky,

You're great! Thank you. I'm still learning too! Off now to class! Bendedegid!

**Namaste,
Joan**

**P.S.
Dear Hoyett,**

ie quest for certainty blocks the search for meaning. Uncertainty is the very condition to impel man to unfold his powers." - Erich Fromm

**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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The pain of an open heart

Dear Joan,

I have just read some of the letters to you and have to agree that the idiot's guide is indeed 'non-threatening'. How, one has to ask, can yoga be threatening?; but it can want to thank you for your timeless advice on sense and sensitivity. I knew there was a reflective component to the issue. I also appreciated your advice to another that there simply is no point to judging someone or something that isn't right for you. In these past months of grieving (and dealing with lawyers) I have allowed my heart to close, which brings me to my question:

Is it possible to have a 'healing crisis' in yoga as it is say in herbology or homeopathy?, or would you consider it an injury?. the situation was using the ropes to open up the chest. All three positions standing in Tadasan: First, the shoulders, second at bent elbows, third extended arms behind you with a lock at the wrist. the pain across my chest was excruciating, but as I breathed through it I experienced a magnificent opening at each of the three positions. Since then, however, I seem to be tighter than ever and am not inspired to do this again.

The next issue is one of a physical nature. I have repetitive strain in my shoulders and hips. I have two herniated discs in my sacrum, but after five years, I am almost normal. I would like to reverse the anterior rotation in my shoulders, as this hinders poses like shoulder stand, headstand, reverse namaste etc. I know you have a suggestion.

Sincerely,
Kathryn
ada

Dear Kathryn,

Thank you very much for your letter and to reaching out to me during your sensitive time of grieving. Some of us let people in on our bumpy roads, our difficult transitions, some of us don't. I would dare say that the ones who let people in, are able to help others experience more fully their journey as well. My heart is with you as you tread these difficult paths. We are one. Om shanti.

What you experienced in the expansion of your chest in yoga class has many dimensions to it. It could be an over stretch of the chest muscles. The intercostal muscles of the ribcage may need some time to heal from the expansion. There may be tiny tears in these muscles from the pull. Only time can heal this. The chest is also the area of our venus chakra. This area is where we store emotional aspects of our being, like grief. We contract this area to prevent more pain. A sustained opening like you experienced in yoga class is not what the body is conditioned to do while grieving. The body is conditioned to curl up into a ball and hide. You are helping to reeducate your body to open instead. This can be quite painful and emotional. I would encourage you to discuss this with your yoga teacher and to perhaps have a private lesson with him/her as well. In this lesson, you can explore the pain more deeply and see where it may be stemming from. Phoenix Rising Yoga therapy is a type of yoga therapy that explores emotional issues within poses in a non threatening way. You may want to explore finding a yoga therapist in this style of yoga. Either way, I would encourage you to wait some days for healing to occur. Give your body and emotions a rest to reflect on the significance of what happened. If it's purely physical, your body needs time to rest. Your emotions also need time for expression and release. Give your bodymind time to
Bodymind = one word. Respect both as aspects of the other.



Regarding repetitive strain in the shoulders. Don't push yourself into a position. Here is a gentle movement to help loosen the shoulder. Take a small 2 lb. weight in the hand of the shoulder problem. Bend the knees and bend the torso over slightly. Let the arm holding the weight hang down in front of you. Gently, slowly twist the hand back and forth. Do this weight exercise several times between each arm related yoga posture. This slowly and gently opens the shoulder. Although yoga poses can be challenging, movement can help heal us as well. Use this movement as a transition between poses.

**Namaste,
Joan**

STRESSED AND BUSY!

Dear Joan,

I have a very stressful and busy life. Will the time I take practicing yoga help me?
Chuck

Dear Chuck,

Yoga is stress reducing. Yoga works in harmony with the balance of your body and the balance of nature. We spend much of our life fighting nature, trying to control it. For example, gravity is constantly pulling at us. Yoga says: Yes to gravity! Yoga plays with it, befriending it. We don't fight gravity. We say: Welcome! Let's be friends!" So, if you're looking for an oasis of peace in a stressful world, the study of yoga can help to create this serene oasis.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Truthful tootsies

Dear Joan

Could you please tell me how I could relieve the tightness in my neck area using your technique of massaging the toe or the soles of the feet.

Gratefully yours....
Eva

· Eva,

Reflexology (massage of the feet) is based on the theory that there are reflex points in the soles of the feet that correspond to various sections and organs of the body. The big toe is considered the reflex point of the head. The base of the big toe is considered a reflex to the neck. If it is neck tension creating your headache, pulling up on the big toe can ease the neck tension from a reflexive standpoint. You may consider this hogwash, but there are many who see reflexology as a testament to the holistic healing of the body. I am one of the later.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Lean, Mean, Yogi Machine?

Dear Joan,

I want to loose weight quickly, is yoga for me?

Amber

Dear Amber,

a means union - union of bodymindspirit. Yoga isn't a weight loss program. It's a practice and a style approach that can make us more aware of our imbalances. As you study yoga, you will also become more keenly aware of your potential and the beauty that is within you and within all of life. When you begin to see this, you begin to bring your life into balance.

For example, let's say you're focused on one part of your body that you feel is grossly over weight. Let's say it's your stomach. Every time you look at your body in the mirror, your eyes gravitate toward your stomach and you become upset. Yoga helps you to see that you are more than your stomach. No matter how grand your stomach is, you are ever so much grander than that!

And so, you begin to learn ways of helping your stomach, rather than hurting it. You begin to see it as part of you and not as a separate part of you. In this process you begin to learn non-violence. Soon you develop an appreciation for your stomach, and treat it more kindly by what you ingest and also how you move and hold yourself. Soon your eyes begin to love your stomach. When you look in the mirror you begin to see a reflection of health. Your stomach size will change as your view of who you are deepens. This is an example of the study of yoga.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Heathens can't wait!

Dear Joan,

I'm Agog, Reading your thoughts on yogic philosophy filled me with great joy. They were close to poetry. I'm considering the prospect of bringing yoga to the heathens in the capital city of a country which shall for the moment be unnamed.

More later ;-)
Namaste,
Agog

Dear Agog,

Heathens, capital of the city of an unnamed country..sounds like a beautiful mystery ready to unfold!

**Namaste,
Joan**

Man with no name

Joan,

Do you have to give up meat to practice yoga?

Man with no name

Dear Man with no name,

Vegetarianism is practiced by many yogis. Not all yogis are vegetarians. Non-violence (ahimsa) is a principle that is studied in yoga. There are various ways to bring ahimsa more clearly into your life. Some find the path of vegetarianism to be a way. There are also many other ways. Abstaining from negative gossip or negative self talk are some other examples. What area of your life can benefit from the further development of non-violence?

Vegetarianism does not give someone a kind heart, yet a kind heart leads to vegetarianism. This may sound like a koan, so let me explain further: there are many people who are vegetarians who are not kind. They are vegetarians for various reasons. Some can not afford meat, others find it healthier to abstain from eating meat, some don't like the taste of meat, still others don't have access to meat, etc. All of these reasons for being vegetarian can involve a kind heart, but they don't necessitate a kind heart. A heart that encompasses a sincere love for sentient creatures of all forms is a heart that breathes

non-violence - and this, is in deed, a kind heart.

Namaste,

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Yo Joan



Smokin'!

Dear Joan,

Any suggestions for smokers? I was told I was not advanced enough to do pranayama or meditation. What is your take on this? In my mind, I hear that this would help, but I haven't tried. Would it be wrong for people who do not do yoga to use these methods to quit - is it imperative to follow the eightfold path in its order?

Sincerely,
Kathryn

Dear Kathryn,

Who told you that you are not advanced enough? I can not believe it was anyone advanced who said this. There are alot of questions in your question. Smokers can practice pranayama and meditation. Pranayama will be difficult because you will be purifying your system then immediately mucking it up again with the smoking...but you know this. You don't have to practice the yoga postures to do pranayama and meditation. The eightfold path does not have to be practiced in the order it is presented. So there. Hope I helped Kathryn.

Namaste,
Joan

Down Syndrome

Dear Joan,

My daughter has downs syndrome... will yoga help her?

K.M.

Dear K.M.,

Yoga is a study of balance. All of us can benefit from studying balance, no matter what our physical or mental condition. Yoga calms the nerves. It helps us take the time to realize that something as simple as the way one breathes can have a profound influence on one's life. It's not complicated - although some of the poses may appear this way. It's the limitations of the mind that encourages complicated approaches. Some of us don't need advanced poses to derive the benefits of yoga. The benefits come about from a reordering of priorities. A benefit can be as simple as learning to take a slow breath before making an important decision. I would encourage your daughter to take a yoga class, and also for you to. Although the particular struggles we have in life vary person to person, we're all here today intimately connected in this healing journey we call life. According to yoga, we are all one. Om.



amaste,
an

A love affair to remember, to forget

Dear Joan,

My boyfriend and I broke up two months ago, well, really he broke up. We had been seeing each other for a couple of months and he was calling me at least 6 times every day with "beautiful, honey, sweetie-pie" type talk. Then one day he just stopped. After two months of silence and not responding to my calls, he contacted me to say his problems were financial. He said he was in a bind and had to take a break from everything including me.

Joan, I am writing to you in regards to brahmacharya. I have been studying yoga for quite some time and still this is very difficult for me. I am not upset about the break up, because we didn't have anything much in common other than it was fun hanging out with him. Also, I know he lied to me. Do you have any suggestions for me to help me in this time?

Charlene

Dear Charlene,

I'm also wondering whether his financial problems were brunette or blonde...but that's another wonder that doesn't need to be solved. If we follow general society, the answer is to get a new boyfriend! FAST! Yet, we must remember that just as there is more to his story than finances, certainly you are more than your physical body. It may not feel this way sometimes - especially when the body aches for love, for warmth, for health, for all the needs the body has.

^^ At this time, Charlene, I would encourage you to look more deeply into who you really are, or you will end up into the arms of another who is just as dishonest. The casing may be different, but the difficult lesson remain to be learned. Let me help you separate fact from fiction. His reasons for breaking up with you were not completely factual. His actions toward you in "breaking up" were uncaring and dishonest. His previous words in referring to you as "beautiful" were factual. I encourage you to continue to walk with beauty for this is who you truly are. Your deepest self is beautiful beyond what even words can describe. You must see this. It is important. You can't wait for someone else to see this in you...it is yours to see. It is steady and unwavering. It is not dependent upon another's view of you, or on their reactions or actions. This beauty IS you. When you realize this more deeply, you will explore your desires more deeply - what they bring, and what they negate. Your desires will change as you change. A man who is dishonest and uncaring toward you will lose his appeal to you once you deeply see and realize the beauty of satya (truth) within you.

Namaste,
Joan

ticking out your neck

From Joan

Hi Joan, Nicole here in little town in Iowa. Was wondering what poses you would recommend for neck relief/flexibility. I have chronic neck problems...stress knots that build up and cause great pain (pain in the neck...ha ha) My neck gets real stiff and such...I have been doing Fish Pose when I am real stiff and it seems to work on releasing it some...just wondering what you would advise? Thank You much for you knowledge.

Nik

Dear Nik,

I would advise a counter pose to fish pose. A pose like child's pose demonstrated as Asana For The Month. I would also look into poses that open related areas of the body, like the shoulders. Some poses I would recommend to add to your practice are Downward dog, Upward dog, and Revolved Triangle Poses.

Namaste,

Joan

amples anyone?

Joan,

how are u? i am fine, i was surfacing in the net and i decided so check out ur site, so far sounds good. I live in Guyana, it a caribbean country in south america. I use to do yoga but i stop and my mom started last month and she wants some help, she wantsa sample of the yoga excerises and then she will order. Please help us joan. we will appreciate that alot... so send some samplesof it and i will order. thank you

bye
nerissa

Dear Nerissa,

My samples are in this website which are handwritten by me once a month. I hope you come back for more. The samples are all free.

maste,
Joan

Nearby Seminar

Dear Joan,

I have not practiced yoga since shortly after my now 3 yr old son was born. I am in poor shape after the birth of my second son and would like to get back on track. I live very near you in Villa Park/Oakbrook Terrace area. Do you offer classes? I did not see this information on your web site. I am hoping to find something to fit my schedule with my boys.

Thank you. Jami

Dear Jamie,

I am teaching yoga at a conference in early November that is near you. Check out the | [Seminars](#) page for details. Currently, I am not teaching any regular weekly classes in the area .

**Namaste,
Joan**

emonstrations of samples

Dear Joan,

Should instructors do poses in which they can not safely demonstrate or can they cue the class in a pose? Please explain why.

Vita

Dear Vita,

It's important for the instructor to instruct safely. The instructor should be aware of the benefits of a pose and also its structural limitations. I don't think it's necessary for an instructor to be able to demonstrate every pose because there are many reasons to study with an instructor - hatha poses are just one reason. If poses are all that a student comes to learn, then a gymnastics class would be just as beneficial. There are many dimensions to a yoga practice, and the hatha poses are only one dimension. Surely, an instructor should have a knowledge of what he or she is teaching. If he or she is teaching only the poses, then one better know about what one is teaching. Yoga is a lifestyle. One's life is a demonstration of yoga. An instructor may excel at the poses, for example, but not in ahimsa, santosha, pranayama, etc. I encourage students to study with a teacher who is also studying, as well as with a teacher who embodies lifestyle principles you want to learn. If all you want is to be adept at the yoga poses, then study with a teacher who is adept in the poses. Plain and simple.

**Namaste,
Joan**

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Yo Joan



Heave and Puff(2nd edition)

Dear Joan,

I have just begun the practice of yoga. There are many benefits that I wish to seek out through yoga....a better sense of mental and spiritual balance, greater flexibility, a stronger mind/body connection and last but not least, a healthier lifestyle. I have also decided to quit smoking simultaneously with starting up my yoga program. I was wondering if there are any specific postures that I could practice that would assist me in giving up this horrible habit? Just as some background information, I am taking yoga classes a couple times a week but I'm doing the remainder of my yoga day's at home. Any suggestions you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks!
Lynn from Massachusetts

Dear Lynn,

To loose weight and to quit smoking are two of the biggest personal new years resolutions every year. Yet, most people begin the new year with a heave and end with a puff. Grand entrances and exits work best in theatres. Real life changes happen much more subtly.

Here's my suggestion: begin a meditation practice today. Sit down for five minutes before retiring for the evening and simply watch your breath. Turn off the phone. Turn off the tv. Turn off the distractions. Simply watch your breath. This simple observation of observing your breath on a daily basis, will help you make the right decisions in all parts of your life. Smoking is just one part of a much deeper picture. Continue to look deeply, and the beauty within you will soon come out grander than any smoke rings you could possibly make.

namaste,
n

Angel on earth

Dear Joan,

I hope you remember me. My question its about mahamudhra pose. Do you know this pose and if possible, can you send me a picture of that pose. Thanks very much.

with love Angel
Namaste.

K.M.

Dear Angel.,

I never forget an Angel! Mahamudra means "great seal ." It stems out of the the Kagyupa School of Tibetan Buddhism. It involves the process of turning one's daily life into meditation. In essence, one's life becomes one's meditation practice. I don't know the mahamudhra pose in yoga. This doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, just that I don't know of it. I have searched through an assortment of various hatha books here in my library, and have still not come across it. If anyone has more information on it, please write to me. Thanks!

Namaste,
Joan

Back on track

Dear Joan,

I am a yoga teacher who works closely with a chiropractor, integrating yoga with chiropractic care. Many of my students have utilized chiropractic care to treat chronic spinal conditions and injuries in conduction with yoga practice. Combining the two disciplines is a excellent way to regain health and stay well. I just joined yoga.com and while visiting the September column read with interest a question posed by Jen, from Pittsburgh, regarding her experience with chiropractic care in treating her recent injuries. She questioned if chiropractic care was "in sync" with the yoga philosophy of "doing no harm" since she experienced discomfort during treatments and wondered if she should continue the course of care. I would like to contribute some first hand information about the positive effects of integrating chiropractic with yoga and what they have in common. Just as there is diversity in the practice of yoga with many styles one can choose from, chiropractic also offers different techniques.



The chiropractor I work with practices a specialized, gentle technique called Directional Non-Force Technique, (DNFT) which delivers a specific, effective, non force adjustment, given by hand, to the spine and soft tissue to restore function to the nervous system. This technique can be more effective for those folks who may be more sensitive and would feel more comfortable with a lighter touch. Please let me know if you would like more information about this style of chiropractic. I am very interested in sharing it with you and anyone in the yoga community.

Marysia

Dear Marysia,

Thank you for the above information you have shared for all yoyoga readers.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Stop in the name of yoga!

Dear Joan

About 9 months ago I was attempting to do shoulderstands and the plough several times a week and about the same time I developed tinnitus. I had had some pressure in the ears and stopped each time this began but I fear I may have done myself some harm. Have you ever heard of this happening? Are there any exercises to correct this as it hasn't shown any signs of disappearing? I miss the silence.

Jean

Dear Jean,

Stop doing shoulderstands and plough. I suggest you consult your physician regarding this problem. Stop doing any other inversions until you have had a check up with your doctor.

**Namaste,
Joan**

A point well taken

Dear Joan,

help, please. i'm looking to begin yoga classes, but can not seem to find anything legitimate in my area. i'd prefer not to go into the city every time. anything in Wheaton or glen ellyn, or even along the Geneva railway would be fine. i've taken classes before with my mother, but it's been several years. can you help point me in the right direction? thank you so much for your time.

Holly

Dear Holly,

I do hereby point you to <http://www.yogachicago.com>. There is a listing of yoga teachers in your area in the back of this free newspaper distributed to health food stores in the area.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Gravitationally challenged

Dear Joan,

^^ so i've read the idiot's guide, looked at all the pictures and yes i want to try yoga practice. but there's no way a 53 year old, overweight, non-flexible body can get anywhere near any of those pictures.:-) So, for someone wanting to yoga later in life, will it help even if i can't get all the way into the poses? and any tips for us "gravitationally challenged" people?

Bill

Dear Bill,

Yoga is about self acceptance, whether we begin the study at 23, 53, or 83. The problem with pictures in books is that they are static. People view the picture as the pose, when really the picture can not capture the inner workings of the pose, which is what yoga is. For example, you may view cobra pose and think - "my body can not possibly do that!" However, you are more than your body! Wherever you may be, let me now guide you into cobra pose. Close your eyes. If you are sitting, place your hands on your knees. If you are standing, place your hands down along side you with palms facing in. Bring your chin to your chest - exhale. As you inhale, slowly bring the chin up. Bring your shoulders down and lift the neck up as you continue to raise your chin. Begin to open your eyes and gaze upward. Open your chest wide. Breathe deeply. Slowly exhale back to your beginning position. Rest. How do you feel? Do you feel any differently than you did before you did this pose? As you continue to study this pose, you will engage other parts of the body. There is no hurry. I know young men like yourself are often in a hurry, Bill, but there's really no need to be. Everything, even yoga, in due time.

**Namaste,
Joan**

Forward bend

Dear Joan,

What's the correct way to do a forward bend and backbend and should we do one before the other? How many poses (backbends, forward bends, should one include in a practice?

Vita

Dear Vita,

IN a forward bend, bend at the hip joint. Extend the spine up and forward. Do not collapse the spine in the movement forward. The same can be said about backbends. Do not collapse the lower back, lift and extend the spine as you move backward. A backward bend should be followed by a forward bend. Since forward bends calm the body, and backward bends energize the body, it is often best to end practices with a forward bend. The number of poses to include is highly personal to one's practice.

**namaste,
Joan**

Neti

Dear Joan,

Greetings! I came across your website in the internet while doing a search about yoga, and surprised to find out that I've been reading one of your book: Idiot's Guide to Yoga (first edition). I'm a beginner, have been practicing yoga regularly for the past 6 months. Your book certainly helps a lot in explaining all the poses and the alignments. I am lucky enough to have plenty of time to practice yoga about 45 mins - 1 hr. every other day, however I've never formally studied with a teacher.

I've got a question about neti pot - a small ceramic pot that is made to fit the nose. I recently saw it being sold at my local health food store. I heard that it can cleanse the respiratory passage/nose, however I don't know the proper way of using it such as: do I fill it with cold/hot water? how many times a day should I use it? etc. If you have any tips/suggestion I'd appreciate it greatly. I am volunteering in the local hospital's ER and I am very much prone to all air-borne germs, such as flu and cold. I hope that by using neti pot I can prevent myself from getting flu naturally.

**Thank you,
L.V.**

Dear L.V.,

cularly considering the type of work you do, you are so lucky to have come across the Neti Pot. It help you clear your sinuses and cut down on air-borne germs. The water used should be luke warm or room temperature. It should not be hot or cold. A saline solution is best, a small half teaspoon of salt stirred in the water is adequate. The neti pot is a special small pot that has a spout that fits securely over a nostril. The head is tilted slightly forward and to the side. The saline mixture is then poured through one nostril and the water comes out the other nostril. It will take some adjusting of the head to get the water to run smoothly out the other nostril. Be patient and work slowly, allowing the water to find its way. You will see that with practice and knowledge of your body positioning, it'll become quite easy to do. After pouring the full contents of the pot through the nostril, fill the pot again with fresh saline solution and pour through the other nostril. The water will now come out the opposite nostril. After finishing both sides, remove the pot, and do several strong exhales through both nostrils simultaneously. This whole neti cleansing experience (called "shat kriya" in yoga) takes only a few moments a day.

Be sure to mix the solution well before using the neti pot. Use the neti pot once or twice a day - upon waking, and upon retiring. If you are exposed to many air born germs or pollutants, you may want to use it more often on particular days of increased exposure to pollutants. Most neti pots have examples on how to use it in the written directions that come with the pot. If not, check out our book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." A new third edition is coming to bookstores this new year! Three times the charm. Happy sneeze free holidays!

**namaste,
a**

ps. And, this month of December, a new second edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation" has come to bookstores - just in time for the holidays. I, along with my co-author, Eve Adamson, had great fun putting this new edition together. I hope you may enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it. Wishing everyone a blessed holiday season!

**Namaste,
Joan**

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