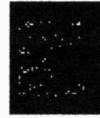


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## Yo Joan



Dear Readers,

In this first issue of 2005, I have reviewed the columns over the past several years and picked out some of my favorites. These questions are also in the latest and third edition of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga." I hope you enjoy this Yo Joan review as we begin this blessed new year.

### Stress Buster

Dear Joan,

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



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. It befriends gravity. It helps us understand we can actually move our bodies in various directions and gravity helps in the movements. 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

### Weighty words

Dear Joan,

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

**Yoga means union - union of bodymindspirit. Yoga isn't a weight loss program. It's a practice and a lifestyle 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

## Downs syndrome

Dear Joan

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

**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.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **. meaty question**

Dear Joan

Do you have to give up meat to practice yoga?

**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,  
Joan**

## **Sex and the Yogi**

Dear Joan

Will yoga improve my sex life?

**Yoga creates a stronger, more flexible, and more balanced body. This balance extends into all of life. How can your bodymindspirit prosper? As one becomes richer in the knowledge of the self, one becomes richer in the knowledge of all of life. Yoga can help you to improve your life, every beautiful aspect of it. And yes, that includes your sex life.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**



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## Yo Joan



### PKD

Dear Joan,

I've been searching over the Internet for some information. I've dabbled in yoga from time to time and have found great benefits from it. I hope to resume some practice in the near future. The reason for my email is to find out some information regarding whether or not yoga would be of benefit to my husband. He has polycystic kidney disease. Information on polycystic kidney disease can be found on the following link.

<http://www.kidney.org/atoz/atozItem.cfm?id=102>

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

Thanks!  
Erin

Dear Erin,

**Thank you for your letter. I have no doubt this disease is trying for your husband and also for you. Yes, yoga can be helpful for both of you in working through this polycystic kidney disease, but first let me inform readers more on what this disease is. The website you refer to is very helpful. According to this website:**

**In PKD, cysts, or fluid-filled pouches, are found primarily in the kidney but they can also affect other organs, including the liver, pancreas, spleen...."**



**Your husband is not alone; for PKD is the most common life threatening genetic disease. A larger percentage of men suffer from this than women. Although no diet recommendations were made on the bsite you refer to, there have been scientific studies proving that a vegetarian diet can reverse heart ease. Since high blood pressure and heart side effects can be an outcome of PKD, starting a preventative measure by transitioning to vegetarianism might be something to seriously consider now. As you may know, a yoga lifestyle involves a vegetarian diet based on the principle of non-violence. Although many people turn to vegetarianism for health reasons, from a yogic perspective, our health is improved if we live more harmoniously with nature. This would include a vegetarian lifestyle.**

**I recommend two books on this. The first is a book by Dean Ornish, M.D. called, "Reversing Heart Disease." He is Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. This book scientifically documents the changes in heart patients who went through his program of yoga exercises, meditation, support groups, and diets of vegetarianism. This program was based on Swami Satchidananda's Yoga program. The patients studied were able to completely reverse their heart disease. It is a very inspiring book with step-by-step guidelines in their life changing processes. The other book is, "Transition to Vegetarianism, An Evolutionary Step" by Rudolph Ballantine, M.D. It is an excellent book that encourages a process of change in diet that is not unsettling, but rather gradual and effective.**

**Regarding postures, yes, many of the yoga postures put pressure on the abdomen and would not be of benefit to your husband; in fact, some may even aggravate his condition. If you do take classes, which I still encourage you and your husband to do, find classes that are gentle and soothing. As the postures in class will probably include some poses that put pressure on the abdomen, sit out these particular postures and use this time to simply focus on your breath. Return to movements in the class that calm and sooth the abdomen and kidney areas. There will most assuredly be many. Inform your yoga teacher of your concerns as well, so he or she can be more sensitive to the postures presented. Here are some suggested stures:**

#### **Seated Breath work:**

**Alternate Nostril Breathing, where one nostril is closed at a time. This is cleansing and balancing to the breath, which in turn, is cleansing and balancing to the organs of the body.**

#### **Legs up against the wall:**

**The lower part of the body remains on the floor, just the legs are against the wall. Do not hold this position long, just enough to take some pressure of the lower blood circulation in the legs. This can relax some of the other organs in the process and may ease some of the pain in his flanks. In yogic tradition, blood and hormones circulate better when the body is occasionally inverted.**

#### **Seated pose of the Butterfly**

**This is a seated pose where the soles of the feet are brought together. This pose takes pressure off of the lower back and the kidneys. Do not move the knees up and down; just rest quietly here for a few breaths without any sudden or jarring movements.**

#### **Meditation**

**A regular practice of meditation has many healing effects on the body. Scientific studies have documented lowering stress levels, blood sugar, and pain levels. More scientific studies are being conducted. Current studies are just the tip of the iceberg in documenting the many benefits of meditation.**

**ould go on and on but not enough room in this column. Yet, I hope I have demonstrated to you, Erin, ...at yes indeed, yoga can be helpful.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **Mindless meditation?**

Dear Joan,

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

Alice

**Dear Alice,**

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

**Meditation is when the mind is so focused that one actually merges with the object of meditation. This may sound strange, but this is why meditation exercises often are concentration exercises, like focusing on the breath, or a candle, or a sound. These concentration exercises bring the mind to a focused awareness. It is very easy to drift from this awareness and to start dreaming of something else. This is also why it is very important to study the observances (yamas) of yoga, the observances of non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-greed, and non-lust. These observances purify the mind, so that when the mind does merge with its object of meditation, it is in state closer to the essence of one's reality. In yoga, this reality would be considered a blissful state of being. So, when you are feeling down, move around, but when you are feeling great, meditate.**

**Now, I could really write a whole book about this all. . . hey! I did! With Eve Adamson!! "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Meditation." This title may sound mindless, but it is a book that is really quite full with the history, benefits, and instructions on numerous techniques leading to meditation. The latest edition came out in Polish in 2004. The English version came out in 2003. Maybe it's time for yet another edition for 2005. Thank you for your letter of inspiration, Alice!**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

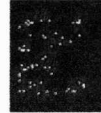
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## Yo Joan



### How do the eyes, kidneys and lumbar relate?

Dear Joan,

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



Sincerely,  
Diana

Dear Diana,

**Pick up Ohashi's book called, "Reading the Body, Ohashi's Book of Oriental Diagnosis." This reading resource I came across in my massage studies. From what you describe you may have a kidney imbalance or weakness. The kidney's purify the blood and remove waste particles. He writes extensively about what can be done to help this condition. Some things to do are:**

**Travel with the sun. Increase the natural foods in your diet as compared to processed foods. You may be drinking too much water. If your diet is balanced and largely natural, you need not drink the 8 glasses we hear about all the time because fruits and vegetables contain lots of water. Do not drink**

**alcohol. Reduce stress. This all sounds yoga healthy to me! Now, how to reduce stress? Following are a couple of yoga postures particularly suited for the health of the kidneys. The kidneys are located in the 1 of the lower back. Strengthen the lower back, strengthen the kidneys. Spinal twists are a good innig. Two versions in particular give a torso stretch with a focus on the lower back.**

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

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

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

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **Cycling Star**

Dear Joan,

I cycle into work every morning (and of course back in the evening). I wondered if you knew a posture that would be good for relaxing those "cycling muscles" as I get very tense in my legs and lower back and would like to give those muscles a little TLC when I get home.

Thank you very much.  
Warmest Regards,  
Silke

**Dear Silke,**

**Butterfly pose where the body is seated and the soles of the feet are together and the knees come out to the side. Do not rock the legs. Sit in this pose for a longer and relaxed period of time. Also, inverted poses like Halasana (plow) or Shoulderstand can be helpful in taking pressure off the legs that have kicked so hard in the circular downward movement of cycling. Find stillness in these poses. They are poses, not movements. Hold them for as long as you can breathe comfortably in them.**



**aste,**

.....n

## **Recording Star**

Dear Joan,

I just found your website when searching for yoga audio CD's. I am a yoga teacher in St. Petersburg, Florida. I am putting together an audio yoga CD after many requests from my students here. I wanted to get some advice from someone who has already done this. I was just wondering if you had any suggestions on using recording studios to record the CD and producing it. I have done all the graphics myself for the covers and booklet but I need the recording to sound professional. Anyway, if you would be so kind to offer any kind of advice I would greatly appreciate it.

Namaste,

**Dear Sue,**

**I recorded my first audiotape over ten years ago at the College recording studio where I was teaching classes. After that, I found a friend who was a musician and had a small professional recording studio in his home. I recorded a number of my tapes and CD's there. Body & Soul Meditation CD, I recorded with my friend Jack Pantaleo in my home with my harps. Foot Massage for Body Mind and Sole, I recorded in my home alone in my massage/healing room. Yoga at the Beach, I recorded alone on the shores of Lake Michigan. I wish you well on this fun journey. It's great that you are making recordings available for your students.**

**Namaste,**

**Joan**

## **Caution! Slippery when wet!!**

Dear Joan,

I am fairly new to yoga, and think that I would enjoy it tremendously, however I have had pretty severe problems doing a couple of poses because I suffer from hyperhydrosis (sweaty hands & feet), so the sticky mat that we all practice on become let's say; not so sticky. Imagine those cartoon characters of a puppy sliding on ice, well thats pretty much me. So my question is what can I do to make a yoga practice less scary and slippery and more enjoyable?

Thank you,  
Erica

**Dear Erica,**

**You are certainly not alone in your experience of the famous yoga "sticky mat". I don't believe this type of yoga mat was intended for the high-energy type of workouts that many yoga classes now consist of. In fact, I once ordered a yoga mat several years back from a very well known yoga school that specializes in "hot yoga." (consisting of strenuous heated workouts) and was sent a small cotton blanket. I was quite surprised by this. Up until then, I had associated yoga mats only with the latex variety. Believe it or not, latex yoga mats are relatively new phenomena. They did not even exist in the 70's when I started studying yoga. Back then, carpeting, or best yet - the green grass was recommended. Now, many of the yoga postures are studied in studios on hard wooden surfaces that require a light padding of rubber for comfort and to prevent injuries from loosing balance in a posture.**

**My suggestion to you is to bring plenty of towels to your classes to constantly wipe you and your yoga mat off. Or, practice as yogis did for thousands of years, out in the fresh air of nature. Use a blanket on the grass. Watch what happens then. Sun-salutation becomes a clear reality. Eagle pose, pigeon pose, crow pose, all become more than simply balance poses for the body. They become connections to the earth and to nature. They bring out the meaning of what yoga (union) really is.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **CIG to Yoga**

Dear Joan,

I happened to stumble across your name while doing research on beginning a yoga practice. The individual who had made a comment and given direction to your website said that you are extremely helpful in giving advice. I live in rural PA and have no ability to attend yoga classes. I am at a loss as where to start. There seems to be a plethora of information and at times seems to be contradictory. Can you point me in the correct direction as to a specific DVD or perhaps a book that I can buy? Thank you so much for your help.

e and light

**Dear Tom**

**May I be so bold as to point you in the direction of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Yoga," sold in the popular Yoyoga Bookstore. Don't let the title discourage you. I was not crazy about the title either, but in this third edition, we tried our best to cover every aspect of yoga study, starting with the philosophical foundation. As you read it, there are also suggestions on where to go for further study. Yoga is a very large subject that comes from an ancient study of rich and varied roots. One book cannot possibly cover everything, but this book will lay a full foundation for your practice; a practice that with the proper watering will continue to blossom and unfold.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **Yoga Track**

Dear Joan,

My name is Beth and I have been experiencing an unusual side effect from what I attribute to yoga. I am 33 years old and am in good health and fitness. I have been practicing yoga inconsistently for about 4 years. After the birth of my daughter, I increased my yoga practice to 3x/week last spring of 2004. I had amazing the amazing benefit of (baby) weight loss, in addition to excellent toning, flexibility, euphoria, etc.

Once I decreased my yoga practice to about 1x/week (due to child care reasons), I experience the following post-yoga symptoms: low grade fever, aches, chills, fatigue, and sore throat that last about 2 days. This occurs only after a yoga session, not after any other exercise (pilates, power walking, NordicTrack). I am still in good shape (5' 7", 123 lbs.). I eat well, drink plenty of water, and get 7-8 hrs. sleep/night. I practice hatha yoga at an intermediate level. This has been on-going from 7/04 to date.

I am getting discouraged by this phenomenon- I feel punished after doing a wonderful thing for my body. It interferes with my ability to function and keep up w/ my toddler daughter. I have tried the following remedies: taking Echinacea for the days around my weekly yoga session (treating it as a cold), gentle stretching to flush-out any extra toxins, drinking extra water. No luck for any of these.

I suspect that I must have a lot of toxins built-up in my system, released by deep and pleasurable stretching during yoga. However, I feel the outcome isn't worth the illness that results. I don't just want to give up yoga without doing everything possible to rectify this situation. Have you heard of this? What else could I do?  
LP!!!

Thank you and Namaste,

**Dear Beth,**

**From your letter, I'm not sure what exactly your yoga practice consists of, but I'm going to take an educated guess. It consists of a strenuous flowing series of yoga poses. Your focus is on the health of your body, but you must remember that yoga is a practice of bodymindspirit. The true health of your body is dependent on other aspects of your being, not just the outward appearance. Obviously, the posture "workout" you are doing now is getting you sick. It's off balance. You need to bring more mind (meditation) work into your practice. And, the way to bring your spirit into this is to study sacred texts and meditate more on these readings. Spend more of your time in quiet contemplation on the Bhagavad-Gita or Yoga Sutras or other literature that speaks to your religious/spiritual beliefs.**

**In my experience, an intermediate yogi is someone who walks in peace more times than not, is comfortable in his or her body, is non judgmental, and is grounded in the principles of yoga, such as non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-desire, non-greed. This is not to say that perfection is necessary in these principles, but instead that the contemplation and practice of these principles is what creates the solid foundation for posture study. If you do not have this contemplation in your study, your foundation is off balance and will eventually crumble. Before heading off to the next Nordic track replacement for asana practice, consider your physical adeptness of the postures as one small part of the picture. I think it is very common in our high stressed materialistic world to begin to think that a successful headstand makes a successful yogi. This is simply not true.**

**Thank you for writing to me, Beth. I hope you found this response helpful. Granted, I did make some assessments of your yoga practice without more specifics from you. My computer only sees so much, which is why a regular yoga class is also important to attend. My sincere best wishes to you,**

**Namaste,  
Joan ---**

**Do you have a question for Joan?  
Send your questions or mail to Joan .**

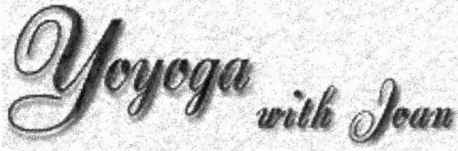
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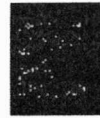


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## Yo Joan



### The Lotus Blossom

ar Joan,

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



Thank you for listening.  
Bye Joan.  
Anonymous

**Dear Anonymous,**

**You are not alone. It's great that you are reaching out. Continue to do so. Life is beautiful, yet sometimes the mud gets in the way of us seeing this. In yogic terms, the lotus blossom symbolizes our life. It works through a lot of mud to finally bloom above the water. It lives grounded in the murky mud that shifts and changes in density and finally reaches the surface where a beautiful flower is born.**

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

**"When doubts haunt me,  
when disappointments stare me in the face,  
and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon,**



**Those who meditate on the Gita will derive  
Fresh joy and new meaning from it every day."  
Mohandas K. Gandhi**

**Gandhi led an inspiring life that consisted of great struggles. The Bhagavad-Gita, which he refers to above, is considered the most famous of all yoga scriptures. It was originally written in Sanskrit approximately 400 BCE. It's a part of a larger book called the Mahabharata. Hundreds of translations of this epic text exist and you'll find a translation in most any bookstore or library. It's not a long story, but it's a very powerful one. Arjuna, the main character in the book, has to go to battle with his family and loved ones. It's a story about how to travel a path toward enlightenment in a difficult world that can seem to be quite unsupportive—in fact, often downright oppressive. It's about ways of getting past the karma (life circumstances) we're born into. This is considered the path of greatest spiritual challenges and one that Arjuna advances on. Reading a story like this can be liberating for the soul trying hard to blossom amidst the mud of life.**

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

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **hearty concern**

Dear Joan,

Why do we roll to the right side to come up from final relaxation pose?

Angel

**Dear Angel,**

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

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **ull Voice**

Dear Joan,

I have a question about singing, seeing you have been a singer you might understand. Are singing and yoga related in the breathing techniques that are used? I find it hard to free my voice and find I'm unable to reach high notes as a result, could it be something to do with blocked energies? Would it help my singing if I started yoga and meditation?

Tunisha

**Dear Tunisha,**

**Yoga helped me in my singing but it wasn't a matter of singing higher notes; it was a matter of finding and expressing my inner voice. The clearer the inner voice is, the clearer the outer voice becomes. Mercury Chakra is in the throat region and is the seat of our communications and expressions. So, certainly poses that can open the throat region, such as shoulderstand and fish pose, can be beneficial to singers. Yoga can help actualize any gift you have.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **A Hot Summer**

Dear Joan,

Can yoga improve my sex life?

Adam

**Dear Adam,**

**Yes. Since self-awareness is a part of yoga practice, the more aware you are, the more you have access to all of your emotions. Your physical bliss will be more blissful and your physical joy will be more joyful.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

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## Yo Joan



## Weird Mantra

Dear Joan,

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

Thanks, Cindy



Dear Cindy,

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

**Mantra use, in its most noble form, is a sacred experience. The repetition of certain sounds creates an inner and outer environment of heightened consciousness. This type of deepening awareness can increase human potential. For example, the mantra that you refer to, "om," is a mantra used regularly in yoga circles. It's reflective of the universal sound the world resonates peacefully around. Meditation on this sound can bring one into a more peaceful and balanced state of being. It can take one past superfluous sounds and into the reality of our peaceful inner-connections with each other.**

**Yet, it's also important to understand that this process of feeling connected may not happen immediately. It's like lifting weights at the gym. If you go to a gym and lift weights, you may not notice any real change in your body for several weeks, maybe even months. This is the same with mantra. Mantra works on the inside. The more you utilize a mantra, the deeper effects it will have on your expanding inner consciousness, so choose your mantras wisely. They're like food for your soul. Feed your soul the best mantras possible so that you can blossom into the best person you can be.**

**Here's a yoga mantra for starters, Repeat "shanti" (pronounced, SHAWN / TEE) three times:**

**Shanti shanti, shanti**

**This means peace, peace, peace.**

**yours in peace,  
Joan**

## **Asthma Relief**

Dear Joan,

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

Phyllis

Dear Phyllis,

**Documented reports have shown that yoga can significantly improve asthmatic conditions. Demonstrate and discuss your yoga posture usage with your medical doctor who monitors your asthma. Part of what a balanced yoga practice does is balance the nervous system. Stress effects the tensions in the muscles, which affects the air going in and out of the lungs. Overly constricted muscles of the airways create difficulty breathing. Acute constrictions of these muscles produce asthma yet even though these conditions can be life threatening there is usually no actual damage to the lung tissue. Since you're finding your condition to be worsening instead of improving, you are right to question what you're doing and to consider changes. Regarding your blocked frustrations: Is the asthma the result of your frustrations OR your frustrations the result of the asthma? Only you can answer these questions, so continue exploring deeply into them. Bodymind connections can become complicated and don't always unravel immediately. You may very well have some deep revelations in this that have yet to be uncovered. A balanced yoga practice increases flexibility to help open these restricted energy channels.**

**Elevated cortisol levels can also create asthmatic conditions. Cortisol is a hormone that is sometimes called the "Stress hormone." It regulates blood pressure and numerous other functions of the body. The pituitary and adrenal glands of the body are responsible for the creation of this hormone. A balanced yoga practice includes a breathing practice that helps to stimulate and activate these glands. When you practice the postures you should simultaneously be practicing breath control, which means for example, inhaling into forward bends and exhaling into backward bends.**



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

**Would your yoga practice be too strenuous? Does it include enough back bending with forward bending postures? There is a natural feeling of accomplishment in doing a posture well, so perhaps your practice of the postures have become off balanced (not enough difficult postures).**

**Yoga also involves healthy diet choices of grains, vegetables and fruits to stimulate and optimize body functions. In order to fully benefit from yoga practice, all of these considerations are involved: diet, exercise and breath. I do hope you found my responses helpful, Phyllis. Feel free to write again.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **Ain't no mountain high enough**

Dear Joan,

I'm a rock climber, and new to yoga. I've heard that meditation helps to clear and focus your mind, and I know a few successful climbers who use it (such as Chris Sharma). However, I'm not sure exactly where to start. What can I do to clear my mind or get in "the mode" while or before I'm climbing besides just visualizing what I have to do?

Thank you, Tara

**Dear Tara,**

**Yes, meditation can help in any aspect of life, and that includes rock climbing. When you are rock climbing, you have to be very focused on what you are doing and your attention has to be crisp and fine-tuned. This is what meditation exercises teach. These exercises build concentration, so you can be more focused in your daily life experiences. An athlete, like you, needs incredible focus and agility. Spending some time every day in quiet meditation will help you to release extraneous thoughts and clear your mind for what is essential. Many people turn to mediation for different reasons, some for spiritual reasons, some for physical, and some for some of both. Whatever your reason, meditation can build a stronger core of who you are.**

**Here is a meditation exercise to get you started:**

**Sit quietly in a place free of clutter. If you cannot find a place in your home, go out to an open park and sit by a tree or in the grass. Sit with the spine straight and the feet in a cross-legged position. Let your hands simply rest in your lap.**

**Now, observe your breath. Breathe through your nose and breathe slowly, don't force it. Let the breath come naturally as it may. Watch as it slowly enters your nostrils and then slowly leaves. Spend a few moments just simply watching this process.**

**Now, notice the difference between the air as it enters and leaves the nostrils. You will notice that it is slightly warmer as you exhale. The difference is ever so slight. See if you can notice this – the every so slight change in temperature between your inhale and exhale. Spend time here simply watching this. Be patient. No rush. Spend time here just noticing the slight change in temperature of the breath.**

**This type of exercise increases our ability to observe. It increases our sensitivity. It can help us all be better mountain climbers too, wherever our mountains are.**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

## **A handy thing to know**

Dear Joan,

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

Thank you so very much for your reply.  
Middy

**Dear Middy,**

**These finger positions are called "mudras." Mudra means seal. Mudras seal the energy flow in the body to preserve it rather than let it escape. The finger position you refer to is called the "Om" Mudra. It involves holding the index finger and thumb together into a circle while the rest of the fingers rest cupped with the palms upward. This keeps the energy circulating in the body (represented by the fingers touching) while also remaining open to the energy around you (the open palm).**

**Namaste,  
Joan**

**Do you have a question for Joan?  
Send your questions or mail to [Joan](mailto:Joan) .  
Please include the city and state you are from.**