YOGA

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# Table of contents

Yoga - The Basic Concept...............................................................3  
Hatha Yoga - Yogic Kriyas in a Nutshell........................................5  
Finding Yourself through Breathwork and Pranayama......................9  
The Inconsistent Yogi .................................................................11  
Yoga Therapy is Different than Yoga? .........................................14  
3 Effective Yoga Poses for Prenatal Women ..................................16  
3 Yoga Poses to Open the Third Eye Chakra ................................18  
The Hope I Found in Yoga Practice...............................................20  
What Tree Pose Taught Me about Life .........................................22  
Yoga with Intent and Creative Visualization....................................24
Yoga - The Basic Concept

Article by Shailja Kapur

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word “Yuj” which means “to join” or “to unite”. It is a path towards self-realisation as it helps to join the persons Higher Self (Atman) to the Cosmic, Ultimate Reality. It is the union of the self with the Absolute Reality.

To describe the true essence of Yoga in one sentence is not possible, as one has to practice to experience it. The basis of Yoga teachings is based on the scriptures composed by Maharishi Patanjali, as Yoga Sutras. Maharishi Patanjali is known as a father of modern Yoga.

Yoga is meant for everyone and age should not be a barrier. There are so many different types of Yoga to achieve the union to the Supreme. It is always advisable to begin with; learn these practices from a Guru or practitioner, as a Guru or practitioner is the right person to guide you.

The basic five branches of Yoga are:

**Hatha Yoga**: the Yoga of physical purification

**Raj (Ashtanga) Yoga**: The Yoga for Mental Discipline

**Karma Yoga**: The Yoga of Action

**Bhakti Yoga**: The Yoga of Love and Devotion

**Gyana Yoga**: The Yoga of Knowledge and Wisdom

*The Hatha Yoga and Raj Yoga are the most popular ones.*

To get the basic idea about the concept of Yoga please see the classification below:

**Hatha Yoga**

*Yogic Kriyas (Shat Karmas): Neti, Dhouti, Nauli, Basti, Trataka, Kapalbhati*
Yogic Asanas: All the 32 Asanas and Jeevan Tatva, Yovan Tatva, Mudras (yogic hand gestures), Pranayama (mindful breathing exercises), Pratayahar (sensory withdrawal), Dharana (concentration), Dhyaan (meditation), Samadhi (the supreme state of bliss).

Raj Yog (Ashtanga Yoga): Yama (ethical standards), Niyama (self-discipline), Asana (physical postures), Pranayama (mindful breathing practice), Pratayahar (sensory withdrawal), Dharana (concentration), Dhyaan (meditation), Samadhi (the supreme state of bliss).

Karam Yoga: Action without attachment, Renunciation of fruits of action, Perfection in action, Self less action.

Bhakti Yoga: Sewa (services to others), Prapatti (surrender to Absolute), Bhakti (prayers: sravana, kirtana, smarana, Archana, Vandana).

Gyana Yoga: Discrimination between the eternal (Nitya) and the transitory existence (Anitya) and Detachment Control over own actions Desire for liberation Shravana and Manana (Listening and Following) Nididhyasana (The stage of meditation on the Truth).

These paths of Yoga are complimentary with each other but a person has to decide which paths to choose. The goal here is not like attending the class on the daily basis; it is the path you want to follow in life and live with it. It comes from devotion and self-discipline. The Guru or practitioner can guide you towards its true essence but it is entirely up to the person to perceive and achieve. The path which is completely aligned with your True self can lead you towards self-realisation which will eventually make you ONE with the Absolute. To attain the state of eternal bliss one must practice Yoga religiously without any doubts. This article is based as per the teachings of my Sadguru, Shri Chaman Lal Kapurji Maharaj.

“I bow at the lotus feet of my Sadgurujji for his divine guidance and blessings.

Om”
Hatha Yoga - Yogic Kriyas in a Nutshell

Article by Shailja Kapur

Hatha Yoga is the branch of Yoga, which emphasises on the purification of the body by practicing certain physical techniques. The term Yoga has such a depth itself that to understand its true essence one must practice with principles. To my understanding, the art of Hatha yoga can simply be described in two contexts:

In literal context, Hatha is a Sanskrit word which means "force" but here force is not the pressure but effort you put in for physical discipline to practice the techniques that leads to the path to attain the Supreme state of Bliss.

The spiritual meaning, Hatha is derived from the Sanskrit syllables "Ha" and "tha". "Ha" means the “Sun” and “tha” means the “moon”. It is the union of these energies that brings the balance to the energy channels in our body and makes us whole and complete. Hatha Yoga is divided into two segments: Yogic Kriyas and Yogic Asanas.

In this article, I will try to spread the awareness of Yogic Kriyas.

Yogic Kriyas also known as Shatkarma or the six purification techniques in the Hatha yoga. It is derived from the Sanskrit word Shat means six and Karma means process or technique. Shatkarma are powerful techniques, though works in the physical body but ultimately creates great impact on emotional, mental and spiritual bodies.

Yogic Kriyas require precautions therefore it is not meant for everyone or people with certain health conditions. All these practices must be learned after consultation and under guidance from a Yoga Guru, teacher or practitioner. With most of the Yogic Kriyas there are so much hidden benefits which one must realise only by practicing in a disciplined way.

Neti: It is a yogic nasal wash or purification of the nose. It is a yogic practice to cleanse the nasal passage and detoxify the sinuses with warm saline water. This practice helps in removing the dirt from the nostrils and clears the mucous lining. In scientific term it is called Nasal irrigation. It can either be performed by water (Jala Neti) or special thread of cotton or soft rubber catheter (Sutra Neti). There are various modifications to this technique; as it can be performed by milk (known as Dugdha Neti) or Ghee (Ghrita Neti).
Benefits: Beneficial for those with ailments like sinus headache, sinusitis, asthma, bronchitis, hay fever and tinnitus. It moistens the eyes and makes vision clearer by cleaning the tear ducts. This practice brings the free flow of Prana, The Universal Life force energy which helps in improving concentration and memory by balancing the left and right brain hemispheres. It also brings balance to the chakras.

Dhauti: It is one of the yogic practices of purification of the upper digestive tract; the stomach and oesophagus. It is of so many types but the popular ones are Jala Dhauti and Vastra Dhauti. Jala Dhauti (Kunjala Kriya) involves drinking of warm saline water in an empty stomach; water quantity depends on individual’s capacity (litre to two) and then vomiting it out. Vastra (cloth) Dhauti is performed by swallowing finely woven cotton cloth (at least a meter in length and not wider than the tongue) which is dipped in saline water and then pulling it out slowly. It is always advisable to leave a few centimetres of cloth hanging out of the mouth. It MUST be learned and practice under expert guidance.

It is beneficial for those with allergies, asthma and acidity problems but not recommended for those with eye problems or high blood pressure.

Kapalabhati: It is Sanskrit word Kapal means skull or cranium (including all its organs) and Bhati means shining. This technique is also called skull shining breathing. Some classified it as Pranayam but in Yogic terms it is a breathing technique for cleansing. It is practiced on an empty stomach with alternating short and forceful active exhalations and passive inhalations. Inhalations happen naturally. It should also be performed after Neti. But if the nose is blocked try Kapalabhati first.

Benefits: This technique helps in balancing the water element in the body. It helps in weight loss, strengthens the stomach or abdominal muscles, improves blood circulation, calms the mind, treats stress, anxiety and energises the nervous system, cures insomnia and much more. If practiced in a disciplined way may lead to awakening of the Third Eye chakra as it clears the subtle energy channels.

Trataka: It is a Sanskrit word which means "to gaze" or "to look". It is also known as Yogic Gazing or concentrated Gazing. It is one of the Yogic Kriyas (techniques) of meditation where we bring the moment of stillness by focussing on an object without moving or blinking the eyes till the point where we cannot avoid to blink the eyes or they became watery and then visualising the image of the same object in the third eye (Ajna Chakra) by closing the eyes. “Candle flame” is being the best object to visualise.

Benefits: This technique of Hatha Yoga calms the mind that helps in meditation and improves will power and concentration. This leads to the development of intuitive or psychic abilities. It is believed to improve eye health as it purifies the eyes and strengthens eye muscles. To me this technique of meditation greatly helps in a journey towards your inner-self as it greatly helps in disconnecting from the outer world for a while.
**Nauli:** It is one of the powerful techniques of Hatha Yoga. It is derived from the Sanskrit word 'nala' meaning tubular vessel which is related to rectus abdomini (six abs muscles). It is yogic abdominal massage of isolating the rectus abdomini muscles which require turning of the abdominal muscles. It should be learned in stages and Uddiyana Bandha or Agnisara is the first step towards it. The best time to practise is with empty stomach in the morning.

**Benefits:** This technique gives good massage to the abdominal organs, stimulates kidney functions, reduce indigestion and excellent in reducing the belly fat. It activates the Solar Plexus chakra, strengthens the abdominal muscles and overcomes certain Gynaecological problems as well.

**Basti:** In another words it is Yogic enema. It is yogic process of cleaning the colon and lower intestine. It is difficult technique to learn. It should be learned only when the person is able to perform all the other Yogic kriyas as this practice requires excellent control of certain organs and muscles. It is of two types: Jala and Sthala.

**Jala Basti:** It is the process of cleaning the colon by sucking water into the anus and then expelling it. It is easier as compared to Sthala basti.

**Sthal basti:** also called Vata basti or air enema. It is the process of cleaning the colon by sucking air into the anus by contracting the sphincter muscles. To perform Sthala basti one must be perfect in Jala Basti. As this process removes heat from the body it should not be performed in cold days or weather.

**Benefits:** It balances the air element in the body, stimulates the Root chakra, excellent against colic problems, helps in treating Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and makes digestive system better. This technique is not meant for everyone as it involves certain precautions for e.g. those with high blood pressure or serious digestive disorders.

All yogic practices should be performed with hygienically clean water in a clean area. The sole purpose of the article is to raise the awareness and spread the knowledge that gives inspiration to learn depending on the individual need or requirements. All these practices must be learned from Yoga Guru, teacher or practitioner.
“I bow at the lotus feet of my Sadguruji, “Shri Chaman Lal Kapur Ji Maharaj” for his divine guidance and blessings.”
Finding Yourself through Breathwork and Pranayama

Article by Rashna Tjikhoeri

In ancient times the practice of Yoga was taught one on one. In private from teacher to student. The practice of Yoga was treated like something sacred. Not something that was suitable for the public masses. It took a dedicated student to undergo such training with the intention to pass the knowledge further to other dedicated students.

Back in the days *Yoga was seen as a way of life*. A life philosophy consisting of *breathing* (pranayama), *practicing* Yoga poses (asanas), *relaxation* (Shavasana), *meditation* and *positive thinking* (dhyana) and *nutrition*.

Nowadays the practice of Yoga is often taught to large groups of people. There are both positive sides to this development as there are negative sides to it. One of the positive things about this development is that the public gets a chance to learn more about what Yoga truly is and how it can contribute to a more conscious way of living.

For example one of the wonderful things *we can learn from the ancient Yoga philosophy and the practice of Yoga is breath awareness so we can live a more fulfilling and conscious life.*

*Breathing is one of the foundations of Yoga.* It all starts with breathwork through breath training and pranayama. They both complement each other, but it's important to know that breath training is the foundation of pranayama and that one should start with breath training before practicing pranayama.

**Breath training consists of:**

1) being aware of the movement of the breath,

2) learning about good breathing and

3) the connection of the breaths.

*It all starts with the awareness of the movement of the breath.* One can not see the breath. One can only experience the sensation that can be experienced in the body when one takes an inhalation or an exhalation.

The movement is caused by the diaphragm. When we breathe in the diaphragm contracts and the lungs fill themselves with oxygen. The abdomen expands as well as the ribcage which expands along both sides and even in the back.

This creates a sensation within the body that one can be aware of. When we breathe out the diaphragm relaxes, the abdomen contracts and the ribcage moves back. And
finally, the lungs empty themselves with an exhalation. One can become aware of these movements within the body.

The second stage is to learn about good breathing by asking yourself questions about your own way of breathing. Am I breathing well? What is good breathing? What can I do to change the way I breathe (in the case of an improper way of breathing)? What are the benefits of good breathing for me and my health?

And the third stage is about the awareness of the connection between an inhalation and an exhalation. A normal breathing pattern consists of an inhalation, a natural pause, an exhalation and a natural pause.

With awareness, one can recognize these different phases of the breath so that one can work towards a smooth transition between these four phases. When one gains mastery over these 3 stages of breath training, one is ready to practice pranayama.

When practicing pranayama one holds the breath between the inhalation and the exhalation to control the mind and to balance the left and right hemisphere.

Benefits of both breath training and pranayama are the process of cleansing, revitalizing, relaxation and rejuvenation of body and mind, which will ultimately lead to finding yourself.

"Your true self. Namaste"
The Inconsistent Yogi

Article by Stephanie Cornell

My personal yoga journey began more than a dozen years ago. In yoga classes, I set up my space in the farthest recesses of the room, terrified at the possibility of another yogi setting up their space behind me, or, God forbid!, to be reflected in the mirror.

I spent my Savasanas silently sobbing. I would begin a regular practice, rock it, and then fall away. I would berate myself mercilessly and struggle under self-abuse to find the motivation to begin again. I moved through numerous styles of yoga, a variety of instructors, and waffled between attending classes and practicing at home. Eventually, I received my certification to teach. No matter what I have tried, yoga has never brought me daily commitment to the physical asanas.

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However, changing my perspective on my inconsistent practice provided the realization of what an advanced yogi I have become.

Even when we do not physically make it to the mat, we continue through our practice.

Surya Namaskar A is the foundation. Tadasana: connect with the body.

Yoga has helped me find more present focus. Obsession over the past is released. Concern with the future is only tied to the question of what I can be doing at present for healing and forward movement. There is nothing external that needs to occur in order for me to be happy.

Inhale. Raise the hands overhead, connecting with the breath. Inhale. Exhale. Becoming aware of the breath is the most important aspect, and often, the hardest part. I am improving.

If I will get out of my own way…. if I let go and let God….if I hand the problems over to the angels for assistance, I can breathe. The occasional fits of hyperventilation occur, but now I am better at noticing. When I notice, I can choose to adjust.
Exhale, fold: Uttanasana. I am more flexible. I do not have to fight everything. I can bend. My inner strength has developed from my relationship with my angels. Increased spiritual faith and trust in Source Energy provides assurance. I am safe.

Inhale. Straighten the arms; lift the chest. Step back into Plank.

Exhale; lower down. I can do it. I am strong enough. I can support myself. I knew that before. Then, events happened and I forgot this. I learned it again.

Inhale. Straighten the arms; lift the chest. Shine the heart forward in Cobra. Exhale; tuck the toes and lift the hips: Downward Facing Dog.

I am finding the balance between expansion and contraction. I am releasing my self-imposed demands of “time.” I will get it done as I am able. It is ok to take care of me. I do not need to feel guilty about this. Self-care is a requirement, because I cannot give from an empty cup.

Inhale as you step forward; exhale Uttanasana. Rooting down through the feet to come up, we inhale arms overhead. I can no longer dwell in the victim mindset. I AM. I am supported. I am connected.

Exhale, bringing hands to heart center. I AM one with the Divine. Add Warrior poses to the flow, moving through Surya Namaskar B. I am a warrior. I have a mission and a purpose. I have things to offer. I can contribute.

The continued yoga hour brings opportunity to practice any number of asanas that develop strength, balance, and flexibility. Some of these are easy. Some I will achieve if I choose persistent practice. Some are unattainable to me in this vibration. None of this is right or wrong. It simply “is.” I release judgment.

I work with my talents, strengths, and abilities. I respect my limits. I understand that every day is different.

Feel free to use blocks, straps, or other props for any asana, as necessary. I am better at noticing where healing is needed. I can use tools, such as yoga, meditation, crystal therapy, energy sessions, or any other modality to expedite my healing process. I can also choose not to adjust. It is my journey. It is solely my responsibility.
We end with Savasana. Relaxation does not equate to laziness. It is a way to connect with my body, which is a physical expression of my internal state. What hurts? Where is tension? Where do I notice improvement? I have learned to listen to and understand the messages my body sends me.

Yoga has helped me commit to myself. My journey has brought me from weeping in the back corner to leading class in the front of the room. Each day reflects flow or resistance. What asana does today reflect for you? Are you holding the pose with graceful ease? Do you waiver? Or, is today a transition between asanas? Are you inhaling? Are you exhaling? Or, is today the pause in between? Simply notice. Make modifications as necessary, if desired. As you are ready, move into the next asana.

“We are always on the mat.”
Yoga Therapy is Different than Yoga?

Article by Teresa Powers

In a word, yes. Yoga therapy is different than yoga. Relief of suffering, from a purely yoga perspective, comes from achieving a sense of enlightenment, an awareness of the true self. This is the framework upon which yoga practice and modalities have developed for centuries.

The traditional yoga experience is a spiritual journey. Most people seek a yoga therapist to find relief from the suffering of physical and psychological pain. Although this occurs through the practice of yoga in search of enlightenment, for some people, the goal is not to reach enlightenment. The techniques of yoga can still relieve their suffering without achieving enlightenment in the traditional practice of yoga.

The focus of yoga therapy is people, not conditions. What does that mean? Well, everyone is different. What works for one person with anxiety related to trauma will not work for someone else with the same diagnosis. Two people suffering from high blood pressure will need practices designed specifically for them. So guess what?! Your yoga therapy toolbox needs to have a variety of tools to ease suffering:

- Asana
- Pranayama: shift energy
- Chanting
- Philosophy
- Meditation: shift the mind

Yoga therapy is a combination of Eastern and Western approaches to health and wellness. The eastern philosophies of Ayurveda and the yogic sciences are combined with western knowledge of anatomy, pathology and the breath.

Choosing the theory that best fits you as a practitioner will benefit you and your clients. The same applies with yoga therapy models. Choose the one that best fits your belief system but remember to keep an open mind to new information as this is a changing and developing field. For those seeking a yoga therapist, if you find the modality being used is not beneficial for you, it’s okay to seek a different yoga therapist who uses a different modality.
A few choices available to you are:

1) Viniyoga
2) Iyengar
3) Ashtanga/Power Yoga
4) Bikram/Hot Yoga
5) Kripalu
6) Nia
7) Kundalini
8) Anusara
9) Phoenix Rising
10) Integral, Integrative
11) Forrest
12) iRest

This is no different than choosing a doctor or psychotherapist. There are countless ways to achieve healing.

“Keep searching until you find the one that works for you.

Namaste. God bless.”
3 Effective Yoga Poses for Prenatal Women

**Article by Eve Sengkeo**

Prenatal yoga classes are becoming increasingly popular not only at yoga studios, but also at gyms and hospitals. These classes are even being integrated in various corporate wellness programs.

Many women who are expecting can testify that their hips and lower back feel the most tension during pregnancy. Many yoga poses help bring circulation to those tight hips and ease lower back tension. If anything, a well-sequenced asana can bring about an overall sense of well-being on the physical as well as mental level.

On the energetic level, yoga poses and sequences can open and align the chakras. A well-sequenced asana practice can free up energy and stimulate imbalances in the energy centers. This not only enhances the yoga practice, but also provides a sense of balance, grounding, and calmness in life off the yoga mat.

As each stage of the pregnancy is different, certain poses seem to be a favorite depending on the trimester of the prenatal yogi. After having taught a number of prenatal (and Hatha) yoga classes to pregnant women, the following three yoga poses have been an all-time favorite among my prenatal students.

![Image by TawnyNina](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

These poses not only help to open up the hips, ease lower back tension, but also counter all the sitting during the day:

1. **Resting half pigeon**: Resting half pigeon increases the range of motion of the femur bone in the hip socket. It also lengthens the psoas muscle, a primary hip flexor connecting the torso and legs. This pose also helps to ease tension in the lower back. Placing a blanket below the sits bones can help to ease any pressure on the hips while holding this pose.

2. **Runners lunge**: Runners lunge stretches both the hips and glutes. This pose also increases the strength of hamstrings, quads, and legs. Deepen the pose by shifting the weight forward and back. Doing so helps to open up the hip flexors even further.
as well as challenge the balance. Placing a blanket below the knee helps to ease any pressure on the knee that is on the mat.

3. **Butterfly pose**: Butterfly pose, or Baddha Konasana, is also known as bound angle pose. It opens up the hips, stretches the inner thighs and knees. The pose also helps in smooth delivery if practiced regularly during late pregnancy. Placing a blanket under the outer thighs helps to support the knees. Placing a blanket under the sits bones helps to raise the hips and support the lower back.

Through consistent practice, prenatal yogis tend to notice more ease in the lower back when sitting, walking, and standing.

“This in turn creates space for a greater sense of peace and balance in life of the yoga mat.”
3 Yoga Poses to Open the Third Eye Chakra

Article by Eve Sengkeo

Conflicted by an ongoing situation at home or work? Got a major decision coming up? Overwhelmed by how the consequences of your choices may be perceived?

When it comes to applying a holistic approach to get to the root of stress, certain yoga can help to resolve issues at the energetic level of the intuitive, higher self.

The third eye chakra, seat of wisdom, is responsible for our intuition. So how does one open up the 6th chakra?

Most times we are trying to tackle our blocks, we do so on a physical, emotional, and mental level. Rarely do we look at how to take on our challenges on the energetic level.

Yoga can help energetically tackle these blocks by creating energetic flow through the body. Yes, raising your vibrations to gain clarity on your toughest challenge!

A yoga sequence focused on moving energy through the spine and shoulders to recharge the central nervous system can help with grounding and stimulating the third eye chakra. This in turn creates space to connect with your higher self, or intuition. The healing practice is not only energetically clearing, but also energizing.

Say you don’t feel like going to the yoga studio or gym to practice yoga. No problema. The following 3 poses can be done right at home to help you open up the third eye chakra:

1. Child’s pose: Grounding to Earth energy and connecting with Source energy, helps to clear energetic blocks that may be in the way of gaining clarity.

When in child’s pose, roll your forehead on your mat or a block from side to side, as if you are shaking your head to say “no.”
Bring your awareness to your thoughts. Visualize the thoughts that aren’t serving you to fall right into the Earth. Remember, energy flows where the mind goes!

![Image by janeb13](image_url)

2. **Wide-legged forward bend:** Allow your neck to hang heavy in this pose to send the energy all the way through the crown chakra.

As each vertebrae loosens up, this also helps energy flow through each of the chakras. As a result, the energetic flow helps to clear your third eye chakra in order for you to tap into your intuition.

3. **Tadasana:** In mountain pose, focus your gaze towards your third eye chakra. Like child’s pose, this pose helps you to reset in between sun salutations. With your hands at heart center, remember to set an intention for yourself be it to detach from a particular outcome or to let go of any thoughts that do not serve your highest good.

   “May you gain more and more clarity by connecting with your higher self with consistent practice! Namaste.”

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The Hope I Found in Yoga Practice

*Article by Angie Webster*

When I began my yoga practice a decade or so ago, I could barely move or get out of bed. I had to use a cane to get to my mailbox or to get to the end of the block. I was in great pain and had little strength.

On my worst days, getting from my bedroom to the bathroom across the hall was a monumental task. I have heard many reasons for starting a yoga practice, from wanting better abs, to wanting inner peace. I wanted to be able to move at least a little better. I had the hope that I might be able to walk a few blocks in the fresh air again, but I wasn’t sure if that was possible. I don’t wish to make it sound as though yoga was the magic bullet that changed my life. *I don’t actually believe there is one single magic pill that can change anyone’s life.*

There were many factors that began to change in my life around that time. Those changes included having *weekly distant energy healing, changing my diet, getting counseling, strengthening my meditation practice* and having a general desire to improve my *well-being and spiritual health.* But starting yoga was a significant change and I feel it helped to get my body moving again.

I started very gently. I did chair yoga or very easy beginner classes from videos at home, since leaving home was difficult for me. I couldn’t do most of the postures, so I mostly just stretched my body in the general direction of the poses. The movement itself felt good, as long as I was very gentle. It felt good to learn to connect my breathing to my body movements, too. I stopped when I was tired, even if it was only a few minutes into the class.

*Yoga was teaching me already. It was teaching me to be easy and loving with my body.* That not everything needed to be done all at once. I also saw that I *often held my breath and this created mindfulness,* even outside of yoga practice.

Within several weeks of regular practice, I began to notice that the yoga sessions were becoming much easier. I could do some of the postures I had been practicing and I was becoming more flexible. I could often do an entire class session. I also noticed that I moved more freely and with less pain between yoga practice sessions. I held my breath less often. I felt calmer and *more at peace,* even when I was in pain.

Difficult mental and emotional situations began to seem more manageable most of the time and I had *more confidence in myself.* Within a few months of beginning
my practice, I could walk without a cane for a few blocks most days. I could go out and enjoy the fresh air again. I could do simple tasks in my home and I had more freedom. Along with that freedom, I could see my life begin to expand and change. It was exhilarating and sometimes scary.

I can see now that yoga not only opened up the physical space in my body, but released the emotional and energetic binds that I had stored in my muscles and tissues. Today I have a happy life and I am independent. I do some yoga every day, whether for a few minutes or an entire class. Pranayama breath work and meditation are also an important part of my life.

I still have health issues and I often still have pain. I am not cured of all of the health issues I used to have, but my practice makes it easier to move and helps me be more pain-free.

I have freedom thanks to yoga. I don’t spend my days in bed. I haven’t used a cane in years. And I am so grateful that I get outside to enjoy Nature almost every day.

Yoga helped to give me back a life I enjoy. It also helped to feel connected to my body and happy to be living in my own skin. I will always be grateful to the lessons that yoga has taught me and continues to teach me. It has taught me to trust in my body, even when it hurts. It has taught me to look to the energy within me, rather than seek my answers outside myself. It has taught me patience and confidence. Over time, it has taught me to let go of fear and to trust something larger than myself.

“My practice flourishes and never gets old.

The life lessons continue.”
What Tree Pose Taught Me about Life

Article by Angie Webster

Yoga teaches, heals and shapes us in many ways, both on and off our mats. We aren’t simply making shapes with our bodies and working with our breath. When we do yoga, we are learning about our minds, our energy and about life. As each pose opens our energy channels, we become clearer. As we connect to the Earth, we feel her support. As we reach for the sky and pull its power down to us, we feel our own strength renewed.

Sometimes when I practice yoga, I will move into a posture I have done hundreds of times before, and the energy will move through me differently that day. My mind will open and I will connect with the asana in a way I hadn’t before as if the pose is speaking to me through my breath, teaching me life lessons and healing me. Some small version of this seems to happen nearly every time I am on my mat, which is why my practice never gets old. It reacquaints me with my body, the Earth, the sky, the sun, and energy each day.

Tree pose teaches me every single time I move into the posture. When I first began doing yoga many years ago, I was particularly challenged by balance postures and tree pose taught me to persevere—that I could succeed if I was patient and gentle with myself. Even now, on the days when my balance is not so good and I fall, I learn from tree pose. This teaches me to have humor and that there is inner grace even in ungracefulness.

Several years ago, tree pose brought a big moment of insight to me. Though I had gotten better at balance poses, I still often struggled with them mentally. I tried to force them and to hold them rigidly. But on this day, my mind relaxed for just a moment. I felt the Earth beneath my stabilizing foot as my gaze softly settled on the horizon. I felt both connected and free at the same time. As my arms rose to create the branches of my tree, I suddenly understood what it is to be a tree. Steady, yet flowing; rooted, yet flexible.

With that realization, I knew that this lesson was not just about tree pose or about the nature of trees. I knew that this was about life as well. Like a tree, we need to be strong, grounded and stable. Yet, we must also be able to flow and bend with the winds of change and growth. We must be willing and able to adjust and to let go.
As my body softly swayed with my breath, I knew that my movement was not a weakness as I had previously thought. My ability to be rooted without being unyielding was a strength. My capacity to sway and flow with the breath was the same as the tree's ability to move in the breeze—or even the strongest wind—without breaking. I was filled with joy and moved to tears. I knew that I could be more gentle with myself. In that one moment in tree pose, I understood that my world would not end if I practiced more peacefully with myself. Because tree pose allowed me to physically experience the sensations of flow and rootedness at the same time, I understood.

Since then, I have a special appreciation for trees. I love to notice them swaying in the wind or dancing wildly in a storm and thank them for the lesson they offered me through yoga. Each yoga practice is now a reminder to me to return to self-compassion and to release rigidity of mind.

“Yoga and the trees remind me that strength needs the balance of flexibility and gentleness, both on the mat and off”
Yoga with Intent and Creative Visualization

Article by Sinduja Krishnan

Visualization is a process of using the imagination to create and attract what you want in your life. Yoga Nidra (yogic sleep) is a beautiful guided meditation technique that relaxes body and mind.

Here, I write about my experience with yoga nidra and creative visualization – both practices that I have found empowering and emotionally releasing.

My experience with Yoga

For a long time, yoga to me was a sort of escape – from my mundane life, it took me to a place of sublime existence, where I was real and nothing else existed. It offered me a way out of my own restless mind that rejects stillness. My personal practices comprise asanas (physical postures), pranayama (breathing techniques that help to enhance the prana/ life force) and concentration techniques.

The goal of yoga is ultimately to take us towards a one-pointed meditative state. The one preparatory practice for meditation that I love the most is Yoga Nidra - a practice that allows me to withdraw my senses inward. During Yoga Nidra the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch are drawn inwards and the focus draws towards the universe within. This prepares the mind for meditation.

True yoga, I have discovered after many years of sādhanā (practice), is walking the line between worldly reality and escaped reality. It is the bridge between the chaos of the material world and the ordered chaos of the inner world. This may seem to be an over-simplification (or extremely complex, depending on your point of view), but it is my own interpretation of the worlds in which we live. Yoga Nidra offers a way to see both the inner and outer worlds and watch them as a witness.

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra or yogic sleep is a deeply relaxing meditative practice that moves the attention of the mind around the physical body, focuses on the breath and uses powerful symbols as cues for the mind to focus on. For instance, the scenery of a lush, fertile land can stimulate the mind to believe in the fertile womb for a woman.
trying to conceive. Different symbols trigger different experiences – the sun stimulates energy and the moon stimulates calmness and creativity.

The images of natural surroundings like forests, rivers, and mountains can help to release fear, anxiety, worry and stress. If we have deeply positive experiences with water, images of flowing water and oceans can be used for healing and therapy. This relaxing practice teaches the muscles to relax as also the adrenal glands. Tension leaves the muscles and when the physical body is able to be loose and relaxed, the mind starts to relax.

During Yoga Nidra we move from the conscious state of mind into the sub-conscious – the space between waking and sleep. Finally, we move into the realm of the unconscious, a space where potential lies dormant, giving us a glimpse into a world of possibilities.

**The stages of Yoga Nidra:**

- Sankalpa
- Withdrawal of senses (Pratyahārā)
- Rotation of awareness
- Visualization
- Sankalpa (repeat)
- Externalization of senses

**Creating an intent**

The most important part of Yoga Nidra is **Sankalpa**, translated as resolve, resolution or intent. This is the intention that we appoint for ourselves. Here, we use the mind to create a visual image of the very goal that we would like to achieve. “Once the seed of Sankalpa is planted deep in the subconscious, it gathers the vast forces of the mind in order to bring it to fruition.” –Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Yoga Nidra

With the consistent practice of Yoga Nidra, a few things became clearer to me. I did not have to escape into a bubble every time life became too strenuous. I could take charge to change the way I perceived things.

**Creative Visualization Enhances Yoga Nidra Practice**

*I fell in love with Yoga – its exercise on the body, mind, and spirit: I wanted to teach it, be it, and have all of it, yet I had little or no idea how really to “live” it. I had attended classes, I had in-depth discussions, was reading books and articles, more than I had ever done before, but some things did not fall into place. The moment that I read the book Creative Visualization by Shakti Gawain, so many things clicked. It was like a whole series of “eureka” moments, the jigsaw puzzle started to fall into place.*
The principles of creative visualization are the same as many ancient teachings. The four basic principles are:

- The physical universe as energy
- Energy is magnetic
- Form follows idea
- Law of radiation and attraction

We use visualization constantly every day, and especially in yoga classes. We visualize ourselves as calm, as warriors, frogs, cranes, peacocks, and we do all of this without even realizing that we are doing it.

I found that creative visualization was easy to incorporate into my yogic practice. I have used it to create scenes of my future life with a partner. It has helped me understand what my priorities are and make room for these in my schedule. This practice has helped me bring back the spirituality into my worldly life as well. I have been able to forgive past experiences – with friends, lovers, and teachers. I have been able to move on without being affected too deeply.

Some experiences will, of course, create a huge impact on our lives. For instance, the death of someone close to us will have a great effect on us, but when we are ready to heal, we can heal with better perspective and with greater wisdom.

**How to Use Creative Visualization in Yoga**

Setting an intent for oneself is a very important aspect of yogic practice. This gives us the direction – where we want to go, who we want to be, how we want to live. This can start anytime. All it requires is a few minutes to recognize the intent and use words and images to see it coming true. Setting the intent not just for the one hour on your mat, but all of your life will bring you much more satisfaction and wholesome improvement.

*Yoga is more than a series of poses that we repeat over and over. Yoga is a way to evolve. It is a way to become and a way to be.*

Yoga Nidra and creative visualization are techniques that have the same purpose. They help to achieve the same goal.

- The ‘Sankalpa’ or ‘intent’ is a sentence we can repeat in any language. It is a positive statement loaded with good intent and meaning.
• It is short and concise

• It contains words that direct the mind in a positive way. Words like ‘not’, ‘no’, ‘do not’ are negative words that the mind might fixate on. This could take away from the positive implications of the intent.

• It is made in the present tense so that we are ready to start the transformative process immediately. This way the mind knows that we are already living the goal.

By repeating this Sankalpa as soon as we wake up when we are in that state between dream and wakefulness and right before we fall asleep, we are stirring the subconscious into moving towards this positive goal. This gives the mind the direction that it needs. Along the way, when we find that the intent needs re-wording, we can tweak it to allow for changes in our circumstances. It is important to remember to let go of control over the fruits of the intention. It is important to believe that the universe will bring us the best always.

By understanding the principles of creative visualization, we set the intention and allow it to unfold with the power of the universe.

**Simple Examples**

“I am happy”/ “I am healthy”/ “I am radiant and healthy” / “I am stable and grounded”/ “I am the best that I can be in all aspects of my life.”

It takes time to understand what it is that we would like to commit to, but the journey is totally worth it.

**References:**

Creative Visualization by Shakti Gawain
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Links: https://www.facebook.com/Yoga-by-Rashna-627136294133465/?fref=ts

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