



# Yoga Threads

Thoughts and Ruminations About Yoga Practice

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## Changes

Lately I have been practicing *Paschimottasana*, sitting in full forward bend. Life situations always bring me back to my practice on the mat. When I sit in *Paschimottasana* I continue to try to stay present, noticing and observing the constant state of discomfort in my hamstrings and back. Observing the discomfort, I notice how my Yoga practice relates to events in my life.

Yoga Haven just had its 5th year anniversary and we are continuing to grow and transform. During this past year the decision to move the studio or renovate the current space has been an ongoing debate for me and my staff. After many conversations I have discovered that many people have definite opinions! Most people like the location, feel we have adequate parking (compared to other studios) and that our studio has a serene tranquil feeling that is very important to their Yoga practice. After looking at other locations I have come to a decision that Yoga Haven should probably stay put.

As for renovation....yes it is desperately needed!!! What I know is that we are planning to put in air-conditioning, hardwood floors in the two studios, new carpeting in the halls and massage rooms, new lights and a paint job. I am currently working through the logistics of offering classes while renovating or having to close the studio. I will keep you posted on plans as they evolve.

Right now this is my Yoga practice, to remain steadfast in the face of necessary changes. As I practice my forward bend, I return to the state of being fully present as I consider the obstacles and strategies for improving Yoga Haven.

Betsy Kase

## Personal Stories

### Yoga on the Road

Searching for a Yoga Class While Traveling

By Jennifer Patel

About nine years ago, I began my Yoga practice. What began as a routine of attending class once a week quickly blossomed into a steady stream of classes. I would look forward to visits to my local Yoga studio, with its warmth, gentle music, sweet-smelling incense, and teacher that I held in such high regard. I found myself organizing my schedule around my Yoga classes – “Yes, we can go away for the weekend, AFTER my Saturday morning Yoga class!” Those close to me recognized my love of Yoga, and respected my need for nurturing my practice.

When I began to travel for my work, I would bring my Yoga mat, CD, candle, strap and other accoutrements along with me in my suitcase, to try and create my own comfortable practice on the road. While this approach worked, I found that I missed the atmosphere and energy of a class. Often, after working all day, and being on my own in the evening in a soul-less hotel room, I found myself lonely and missing my classes.

On a trip to visit family in Boston, my mother mentioned that there was a Yoga studio nearby their home on Beacon Hill. We walked over to the studio together, and picked up information about classes. Later that day, I attended a class as a ‘drop-in’. It was, by coincidence, my first Iyengar-style class, which was much different than my usual *batha* routine. However, it opened my mind to a different way of doing Yoga, and I was intrigued by the use of props – including chairs and ropes – that gave me the ability to experience *asanas* in a way that I never would have been able to do independently. The focus on alignment, and the exacting manner in which one entered, held and came out of a posture intrigued me.

A few months later, I found myself on vacation in Cape Cod. Again, missing my routine Yoga classes, I wandered into a health food store, and saw a sign advertising classes at a nearby Yoga studio. During that

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## Inspirations

*Denise Madden, one of the teachers here at Yoga Haven, has come up with a list of books and music which have inspired her in her life and in her Yoga practice.*

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vacation, I was able to drop in on classes, and to connect with a group of like-minded people.

I continued my pursuit of finding local Yoga classes, wherever my travels took me. I discovered there was a whole, new world of Yoga outside of my own backyard. I began to visit studios all over the country, and across the continents, from San Francisco to Washington, DC, from Cincinnati to Bali—anywhere and everywhere I happened to be.

At a class in Amsterdam, I found myself practicing in a room full of Dutch-speaking Yogis. It was fascinating to me, to see how although I do not speak a word of Dutch, I was able to follow along using the common vocabulary of Yoga *asanas*. In Woodbury, CT, I was struck by the descriptive language that the teacher used. She suggested slow movement, as if "through thick, viscous honey"—that description stayed with me, and has assimilated into my own teaching. While living in London, many of the classes readily available have a strong, *Astanga* focus. The jump-backs, *chatturangas* and *vinyasas* between poses were rigorous at the start, but I've grown to love the flow of movement in these classes, and have developed strength I did not know I had.

It has been a journey, and along the way, I have experienced new ways of practicing Yoga. I find that I can learn something new from each class—and as a result, my own practice continues to change, develop and deepen.☯

*Jennifer Patel completed her Yoga Teacher Training at Yoga Haven in 1999. She lives, practices and teaches yoga in London, England.*

### Books

*The Golden Present: Daily Inspirational Readings*, by Sri Swami Satchidananda  
*Yoga Sutra*, translation by Swami Satchidananda

*Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*, by Stephen Cope

*Peace is Every Step*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

*Call Me By My True Names*, The collected poems of Thich Nhat Hanh

*Everything Starts from Prayer*, by Mother Theresa

*Tao Te Ching*, translation by Stephen Mitchell

*The Parent's Tao Te Ching: A New Interpretation - Ancient Advice for Modern Parents*, by William Martin

### Music

*Hidden in the Name*, by WAH!

*Opium*, by WAH!

*Savasana*, by WAH!

*Deep Peace: Healing Music Improvisation*, by Todd Norian

*Seven Metals: Singing Bowls of Tibet*, by Benjamin Lobst

*A Touch of Grace: Bamboo Flute Meditations*, with Sudhir Jonathan Foust

*Liquid Mind IV: Unity*, by Chuck Wild Records

Most of these titles can be ordered either at our website [www.yogahaven.com](http://www.yogahaven.com) or at the studio.

## Announcements

### Yoga Haven's Yoga Teacher Training for September 2003

Yoga Haven offers an in-depth teacher training curriculum for the 200-hour level that is in full compliance with accreditation standards developed by the Yoga Alliance.

At Yoga Haven, students can expect well-balanced training in a small, supportive environment taught by three highly qualified and supportive instructors who are dedicated to personal attention. Students are equipped with both the technical skills and confidence to teach an eclectic flow style class. Training will start on September 17th. For further information go to our website [www.yogahaven.com](http://www.yogahaven.com) and download the teacher training application, or call Betsy Kase at 914-725-0127.

**Work Exchange:** Do you want to work in exchange for yoga classes? We are looking for students who like to paint. Email Betsy at [betsy@yogahaven.com](mailto:betsy@yogahaven.com).

## Applications

# Foot to Head Pose

Letting Go of Expectations and Discovering the Rewards of Surrender

by **Marybeth Asaro**

The goals I set for myself don't always begin with healthy motives. I decide one day that I will work to get my foot to the back of my head in pigeon pose. I am strong and flexible so I really should be able to do this. I imagine how good it would feel to touch the sole of my foot to the back of my head. I imagine how good it would feel to experience that intense opening in my heart. Not to mention how beautiful it would look.

With my goal established (foot to head) I come to my mat and begin my practice. I start with bound angle pose and some lunges to open my hips. Next I practice cobra and *yoga mudra* to warm up my chest and shoulders. Now I am ready for pigeon. I come into the pose and wrap a strap around my back foot. I use the strap to pull my foot up towards my head. I feel resistance in my chest and shoulders and realize I have a long way to go before my foot will touch my head. Maybe a deep supported back bend will help so I arrange my props and drape my back over a stool.

Maybe it was getting all that blood down into my head that helped me to see more clearly some important things were missing from my practice. I was neglecting the wisdom of the *Niyamas*. First *Saucha*, Iyengar describes this as balance and certainly on this day I was not pursuing a balanced practice. I chose the postures I liked. I was avoiding the postures that I didn't like and ones that I didn't think would help me reach my goal. Next *Santosha* or contentment, it is impossible to be content with where you are if you don't know where you are. I hadn't taken time to practice *Svadyhaya*, inquiring into how I was feeling or asking my body what it needed in "this particular moment". Instead I was trying to get out of my body by focusing on some distant goal. *Tapas* or as Donna Farhi describes it "burning enthusiasm" is best applied to those activities which help us grow stronger in body and spirit. Focusing this enthusiasm on some distant goal or accomplishment took me out of my body and out of the moment. It is only by staying attentive with enthusiasm to the present moment that I can ever accomplish strength in my body and peace in my spirit. Finally I wasn't surrendering the fruits of my labor to God,

*Ishtarapranidhana*. It was my will to accomplish the posture and experience the benefit.

I didn't give up my goal but I questioned my motives and tried to engage the principles of the *Niyamas* in the process. I practiced standing, twisting, and balancing poses to bring balance to my practice. I brought my awareness into my body studying the tightness and looking at feelings that came up. I began to understand where I felt tight, where I felt open and to appreciate both places. I tried to bring enthusiasm to all the postures especially the ones I had tried to avoid. Finally I realized that the process of inquiry unfolding in me was more powerful than reaching the goal. I surrendered whatever was to come to God.

As weeks passed I tried to remember the lessons I learned on that day. I tried to keep my practice balanced and well rounded. I listened to how I was feeling before I decided what to include or leave out from my practice. I tried to be aware of strengths and weaknesses in my whole body and recognize the value of both. I observed my attachment to accomplishing my goal and tried to surrender this yearning. I worked to bring my enthusiasm to the present moment and not some distant goal. And I continued to try to surrender whatever gifts came from my practice to God.

One day months later I was practicing with friends. I was in pigeon and I bent my knee to reach my foot to the sky. One friend noticed that my foot was just about touching my head. She came over to me in the pose, lifted my rib cage up a little bit and then put my foot on my head. Tears began to stream down my face. The goal I had worked so hard to let go of became a gift on that day. I knew it was my attention and effort to bring the wisdom of the *Niyamas* into my practice that had allowed my body to open up and receive the grace of the pose. I was beginning to understand and embrace that it is bringing my attention to the process after all that is my responsibility, my duty. The results, the goals, are mine only to let go of. Reaching them is a gift from God. I had applied my enthusiasm to the process, not the goal, and I thanked God for reassuring me that I was moving in the right direction.☺

*Please Ask Us* Do you have a question for us? We would love to hear from you. Put your question in Betsy's box or email her at [betsy@yogahaven.com](mailto:betsy@yogahaven.com) and one of us will try to give you an answer in an upcoming newsletter.

## Thoughts

### Why Om?

A Teacher Wonders

by Vanessa Spina

It's 7:30 in the morning and I am sitting with a group of NYU students waiting to take a Yoga class at a gym. The teacher takes her seat and without so much as a glance towards us or an acknowledgement of what is about to take place, she begins to "Om".

We all sit quietly. She then stops mid-Om and informs us "this time we will try it again and you will Om too. It's not that hard."

At this point, just like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, I was hoping to click my bare heels and wind up "Om" in my bed!

#### Why do we Om?

When I first started to teach Yoga, I would ask my students to Om with me and almost inevitably after each class a student would come up and ask me: "Why do we Om? What is the Om-ing part about?" At the time, I remember I did it because my teachers did it. I really had not thought about it very much, in other words. I would tell my students, vaguely, "Om is the universal sound". Being great students, they would say "what does that mean"? Stumped again by my students, this is how I have learned.

Since I have come to realize that being a good teacher does not mean I have to know everything or always be right. There are often times when I let my students find the answers and that experience is far more pleasing to them than any response I could give. Most of my students have said that to Om in the start of class helps them connect with their breath. One student said:

"When I Om it dissolves my individualism and I am consumed by the group. It prepares me to do something in a group for the next hour and a half."

An excerpt from an evening of Sound healing states, "Everything in our universe is in a vibratory state. It could be said that vibration with direction is what holds everything in place." When we invoke the sound from within us together as a group we tap in to the universal vibratory state. Hence the term "Universal sound".

It is paramount to our practice of Yoga to ask questions of ourselves and our teachers. I pose this question to you: WHY OM? ❁

*Editor's note:*

A commentary on Om can be found in *The Mantram Handbook* by Eknath Easwaran: "To explain why Om is such a perfect symbol of the impersonal Godhead, it is necessary to refer to a theory in the ancient Hindu scriptures which has much in common with recent discoveries in modern science. According to this theory, the entire phenomenal world consists of vibrations, just as matter, according to modern physics, may be looked at as a concentration of energy...The subtlest of vibrations, according to the ancient sages, is the so-called cosmic sound, the creative Word out of which the entire universe...has evolved....This word, the cosmic sound, is not perceptible to the senses, but can be experienced in very deep meditation...When we utter Om with awareness of its significance, we are to some degree evoking the supreme reality for which it stands...For thousands of years it has stood for the ultimate reality, the transcendental Godhead beyond all names and forms, beyond all sects and denominations."

## Savasana

If I were able to live my life again, first I would try to commit more errors, and I would try not to be so perfect; I would relax more, I would be sillier than I have been. In fact, I would take many small things less seriously, I would take fewer showers.

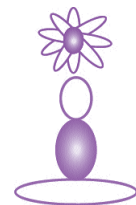
I would take more risks, I would travel more, I would contemplate the sunsets, I would climb more mountains, I would swim more rivers. I would go to more places that I have never been to, I would eat more ice cream and fewer turnips, I would have more real problems and fewer imaginary ones.

Of course I have had moments of happiness, but if I were able to go back, I would try to have only happy moments. For if you don't know it, life is made only of these moments: only this moment, do not lose this moment, now.

I was one of those who never went anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, an umbrella and a parachute. If I were able to live my life again, I would travel more lightly...I would begin to walk barefoot at the first sign of spring and continue until the end of fall.

I would play with more children and I would have more time for the life ahead of me...but now, I am 85 years old and I know that I am dying.

-Jorge Luis Borges,  
translation by Teresa Nicholas



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