

Threads

Thoughts and Ruminations About Yoga Practice

The Yoga Haven Newsletter - January/February/March 2003 - Volume 1 Issue 1

Welcome

Ten years ago, before I became a Yoga Teacher, I had a vision of a community of like minded people (students and teachers) who enjoy practicing yoga, discussing yoga and socializing together. This was my dream and now I am so excited about our newsletter and being able to practice Yoga with all of my students and teachers at Yoga Haven.

Yoga Haven is about sharing our experiences on and off the mat. In these difficult times our challenge is to open lines of communication, study and practice Yoga, cultivate awareness and consciousness and remember that Yoga is about the steady progression toward a happier life.

This is what I see happening at Yoga Haven. I want to thank those who have contributed to this project especially Sarah and Patty, and invite comments and interactions from students as well as teachers.

My greatest pleasure is maintaining a safe and comfortable environment to practice Yoga.

With sincere appreciation
for all of you,

Betsy Kase,
Founder and director of Yoga Haven

Personal Stories

Yoga Haven Teacher Heads South

How I Decided to Change My Life While in Shavasana

By Teresa Nicholas

Shavasana, corpse pose, is one of the most important asanas. You lie flat on your back with your legs about a foot apart, keep your arms by your side, palms up, and close your eyes. While in this relaxed state between waking and sleeping your body and mind are prepared to absorb the benefits of preceding yoga postures, and you may be receptive to ideas. I was in this position during a lunch break from my stressful corporate job when our teacher, Al Bingham, recited a poem called *The Journey* by Mary Oliver.

He turned the lights out in the cramped conference room and began to say the poem from memory. "One day you finally knew what you had to do..." he said, and continued with the poem's thirty-six lines. During his recitation in his lovely, deep voice, I felt Al was speaking directly to me. For a long time I had wanted to write a book. Evidently, I was now ready to receive the message. On a very deep level, I knew what I had to do.

Within the next few months my husband and I decided to sell our house, quit our jobs, and write full time, at least for the next year (as it happens, he harbored similar dreams). We also decided to relocate to Mexico, fulfilling yet another lifelong urge—to live in a foreign country.

Several people have asked me if it has been difficult to "give everything up." After Al recited that poem, the initial soul searching was, in fact, painful: Could I leave my home, my job of twenty-five years, my friends and New York City? After much thought, I decided that I could, in order to gain one thing that I truly wanted: time.

We are about to depart for Mexico this Saturday. So far, I haven't regretted any of our decisions, although I miss my friends (including those at Yoga Haven). However, I look forward to the future, too—and to taking more yoga classes, where I hope I can continue to figure out, with the help of poses like Shavasana, what is next for me. ☺

Inspirations

This is the poem that inspired
Teresa Nicolas to change her life.
We thought you might enjoy it.

The Journey

by **Mary Oliver**

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do--
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Applications

A Personal Practice

The yoga sutras of Patanjali can help in
discovering your own yoga

by **Patricia Meehan**

My personal Yoga practice begins at 4:45 A.M. Waking up is a process. At first I think about how I am feeling, then I consider what I have to do for the day. Am I working, or having a day off? Gradually I become more conscious, I roll onto my side and arise. Then slowly I make my way to the space where I practice asana, pranayama and meditation.

As I prepare for morning practice, I light a candle, light incense and come to *sukasana* (easy sitting pose). A few minutes to collect thoughts and I slip into a meditation followed by a series of postures to get my body moving.

Although, for many, early morning practice is undesirable this is the best time for me. Each of us must be realistic when we choose a time for practice. Available time, a reasonable goal and opportunity will define the success of a daily personal practice.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* are instructive discourses and realistic teachings on developing a personal Yoga practice. The sutras are threads of teachings intended to achieve "attainment of a stable mind in a healthy body" (translation by T. K. V. Desikachar). The teachings are orally passed from teacher to student and committed to memory in the exact form as taught. This system is about two thousand years old and remains effective to this day.

Sutras 1/12 to 1/15 especially address the process of developing a

personal practice. The first steps, *abhyasa*, persevering practice and *vairagya*, detachment, bring the practitioner to a more advanced stage of practice. As I practice without attachment to result I am cultivating the yoga state of mind, total presence.

Abhyasa, persevering practice, and *vairagya*, non attachment, are the primary steps in developing the right attitude for Yoga practice. Continual effort and focus will lead to the freedom of non attachment. In this way we are able to practice with ease and comfort.

Sutra 1/13 advises the student to acquire the appropriate teacher. It is foolish to embark on a lifetime journey without a guide. The student must look at ones self in order to make an informed choice for the best teacher. Self examination is part of the process in Yoga practice.

Personal Yoga practice is established by dedicating oneself to study as well asana practice. Over time the rewards of a Yoga practice are no longer the focus. Practice becomes habit and the thought of not practicing is no longer a conflict.

Finally non attachment is achieved. Practice becomes as much a part of life as the breath. The Yoga mind is established and the practitioner continues the study and practice of Yoga with dedication, discipline and grace. ☸

Patricia Meehan teaches Level 1 on Tuesdays at 6pm, Level 2 on Fridays at 7pm and Open Level on Sundays at 8am.

What Is Viniyoga?

In case you were wondering about the new Viniyoga class on the Yoga Haven schedule

by Sarah Knox

There are many styles of Yoga around today, Iyengar, Ashtanga, Anusara, Integral...the list goes on. This can be confusing for students, so it is important to remember that all these types of Yoga share a common source: the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. They all use the same basic poses and techniques, but each school has its own unique perspective on Yoga practice. In Viniyoga the emphasis is on an awareness of and respect for the needs and abilities of each student when creating a Yoga practice. It is this approach which makes Viniyoga unique.

The Sanskrit word "Viniyoga" translates as "proper application of the tools of Yoga based on the situation". The Viniyoga tradition traces its roots to the world-renowned Yoga master T. Krishnamacharya, who lived in India from 1888 to 1989. Through his study of the ancient texts of Yoga, especially Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, Krishnamacharya developed an approach to Yoga practice which emphasized meeting the individual needs of each student. His son T.K.V. Desikachar says in his book *The Heart of Yoga*: "The essence of my father's teachings is this: it is not that the person needs to accommodate him- or herself to Yoga, but rather the Yoga practice must be tailored to fit each person." Krishnamacharya's legacy is perpetuated by his son T.K.V. Desikachar, who teaches worldwide and who founded the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram in Chennai, India. The leading teacher of Viniyoga in the United States is Gary Kraftsow, who heads the American Viniyoga Institute. He and Mr. Desikachar continue to honor the tradition of Krishnamacharya by emphasizing an individualized approach to Yoga practice in their teachings.

From a student's perspective the main thing that makes a Viniyoga class different is the abiding emphasis on the breath. The way that we breathe as we move has a profound effect on the alignment of the spine, so in a Viniyoga class every movement has a breath intimately connected to it. Each student is encouraged to tune in to the flow of his/her own breath to determine the pace when moving in and out of postures. The focus on the breath creates an inner awareness and

attentiveness which makes injuries less likely and fosters an independence in the students -- they can begin to follow their own breath rather than relying on the teacher for cues.

Another characteristic of a Viniyoga class is the approach to the postures, or asana. Each asana is first done dynamically, moving in and out of the posture with the breath, then the posture is held. Moving in and out of a pose reeducates the body and prepares it for holding the pose, which builds endurance. Adaptation of poses to suit the needs of the individual allows each student to perform the asana comfortably. Poses are presented in a progression which prepares the body for the more difficult poses and then helps it to recover from them. The goal is not to achieve a perfect asana, but to finish the class feeling better than when you started.

A Viniyoga class will often include a brief session of breath work (*pranayama*). *Pranayama* helps to develop the breath, lengthening it and deepening it. It also draws our focus inward, stills the mind and prepares us for meditation.

Viniyoga practice begins and ends with the breath. Each of us has a completely unique breath, so our practice must be unique as well. Viniyoga might be better described not as a "style" of Yoga but rather as an approach to Yoga practice and teaching. The needs of the student come first, and the role of the teacher is to help the student to discover the Yoga practice which best suits those needs. ☺

Yoga Haven offers Level 1 Viniyoga with Sarah Knox, Mondays at 9:30 am.

To learn more, try the following books, available at Yoga Haven or at www.viniyogabooks.com:

The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice, by T.K.V. Desikachar

Health, Healing & Beyond: Yoga and the Living Tradition of Krishnamacharya, by T.K.V. Desikachar with R.H. Cravens

Yoga for Wellness: Healing With the Timeless Traditions of Viniyoga, by Gary Kraftsow

Yoga for Transformation, by Gary Kraftsow

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 yogahaven@cloud9.net and one of us will try to give you an answer in an upcoming newsletter.

Excerpts

Take a Breath

from *The Breathing Book*
by Donna Farhi

The process of breathing is the most accurate metaphor we have for the way that we personally approach life, how we live our lives, and how we react to the inevitable changes that life brings us. We speak about the breath in common, everyday expressions all the time. We say "we need breath of fresh air," "You take my breath away," "I couldn't catch my breath," "I breathed a sigh of relief," and "I need to take a breather." Meanwhile, habitually breathing high into the chest, breathing too fast, and breathing shallowly are epidemic today. A casual glance of any city street will reveal the extent to which tight belts, tight bodies, and tight schedules literally take our breath away.

Breath "therapy" (my quotes) has been found to alleviate (and sometimes cure) migraine headaches, chronic pain conditions, hypertension, epilepsy, asthma, panic attacks and hyperventilation syndrome, as well as a coronary heart disease. A study has shown that slow, deep breathing alone will result in a significant reduction in menopausal hot flashes. Relaxation research shows that breathing techniques can help ward off disease by making people less susceptible to viruses and by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

When we breathe in a relaxed fashion we move from a destructive metabolic state to a constructive one. This shift from operating in a chronic stress mode to a mode of relaxed alertness can affect the synthesis of

protein, fat, and carbohydrates, increase the production of cells for immune system activation, promote bone repair and growth, as well as enhance the cellular, hormonal and psychological processes. By practicing very simple techniques, as the mind becomes clearer and emotions become more balanced through calm and regular breathing, we are creating a life that is conducive to health, well-being, and a sense of inner peace. Not surprisingly, people who do breathing practices act and appear much younger than their chronological age.

To access the essential breath, we must first be able to focus on and perceive our own breathing process; that is, we must make the unconscious conscious. **INQUIRY:** Sitting comfortably in your chair, begin to notice your breathing without trying to alter it or make it in any way different. Just let your breath do what it will. Slowly begin to rest your attention on your exhalation and let your awareness travel down the length of an exhalation. What do you find at the end of the exhalation? Did you feel the momentary pause that follows the end of the exhalation? This pause may be brief, a momentary hesitation, yet something very special happens in that pause. Don't try to make the pause happen or to extend it forcefully. Simply relax and let it happen. As you surrender to the restfulness in the pause you may find that it lengthens on its own accord. Trust that the next breath can arise out of the pause without you "grabbing" for it. Know that at any time you feel tired or confused, hurried or overwhelmed, you can find rest and replenishment simply by entering the pause at the end of the exhalation. ☺

The Breathing Book by Donna Farhi
(New York: Henry Holt, 1996)

Studio News

We have lots of workshops planned to help you start the New Year:

Restorative Yoga Workshop

with Bec Connant

Saturday, January 25, 2:30-4:30pm

Yoga Basics Workshops

with Patty Meehan and Basia Kinglake

Sunday, February, 23, 9:30-11:30am,

Sunday, March 23, 9:30-11:30am

Inversion Workshop

with Jill Ganassi

Thursday, February 6, 6:30-9pm

Partner Yoga

with Bec Connant

Feb. 14, 7-9pm

Restorative Yoga Workshop

with Karen Safire

Sunday, March 2, 3-5pm

Backbend Workshop

with Jill Ganassi

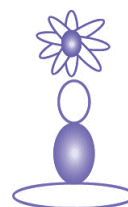
Thursday, March 6, 6:30-9pm

Chakra Yoga

with Ann Casapini

Saturday, March 8, 3-5:30pm

Payment is required upon registration for workshops. The fee is refundable or transferable to another workshop if cancellation is more than 48 hours prior to workshop. Otherwise refunds are only available if there is someone on the waiting list to take your place. Contact Yoga Haven for further information.



YOGA HAVEN

62 Main Street

Tuckahoe, NY 10707

914 337-1437

www.yogahaven.com

email:
yogahaven@cloud9.net