

Yoga Living

Volume XII, Issue IV

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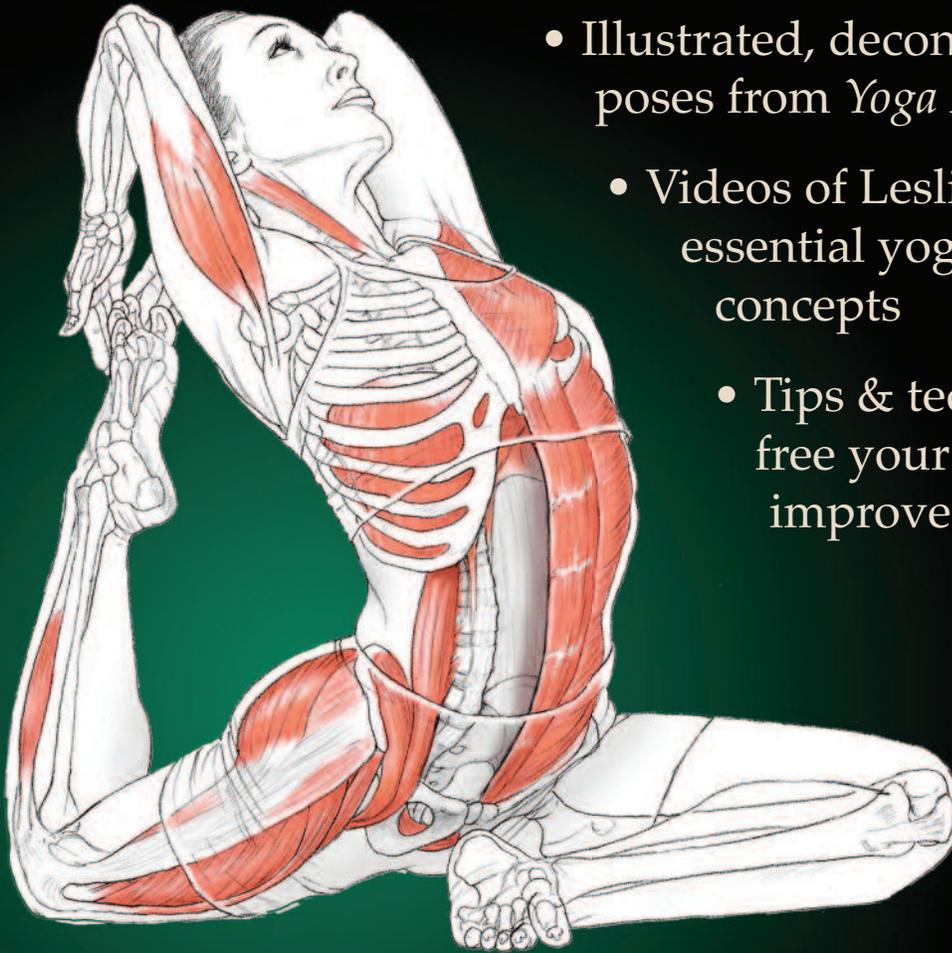
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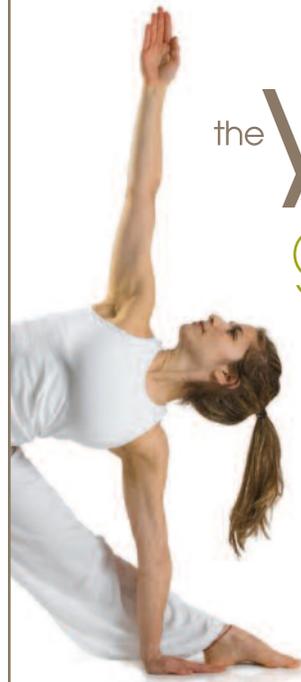
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Letter From the Editor



Honoring Transitions

“Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.”
– Zen Proverb

As the sun returns to us and we shed the layers of heavy winter outerwear, the damp smell of new life begins to gently waft up from the ground and float on the wind, invigorating us in a way that no other scent can. The energies all around slowly shift from the quiet introversion of winter into the exuberant extroversion of spring.

As the days grow longer and the nights grow shorter, the time is ripe for creative projects. This issue features a special Yoga pose practice by opera singer & yoga teacher Mark Moliterno designed to stoke the creative fire through breath and movement.

There is no denying that spring is also a season of change. That which has been dormant and hidden in the earth starts to show potential for growth, and everywhere we look, an abundance of life surrounds. For many of us, the continued warmth from the sun, trees budding and the shooting up of perennial flowers become reminders to reconnect with the earth. We become inspired to spend time outdoors, get our hands dirty planting and infuse new life into our yoga practice. In another article, columnist Teresa Winte considers more traditional meaning of “Eco-Yoga” and offers ways for modern practitioners to green their yoga practice.

The energy of change brings with it a natural urge towards cleansing, and in her article on Space clearing, Stephanie Bennett Vogt offers a fresh take on spring cleaning by delving into the origins of clutter and how acts of momentary awareness can create a more mindful, mess free way of being.

Self-care is also a big part of the Spring cleansing process, and in that spirit, the following pages also offer a variety of articles on topics like Yoga Therapy, Health Spa Culture, Acupuncture, Massage and Healthy Living. We hope that you use the information contained within to find and/or rediscover a holistic modality that supports you this season.

As the actor and comedian Robin Williams once said “spring is nature’s way of saying “Let’s Party”.” Surely, spring celebrations are a time of birth and new beginnings are imbued with a sense of promise as life begins anew. Take some time to get out of your winter routine and honor the shift into the new season in whatever way best resonates with you at this time. And remember, the creative energy of the season is within you, not merely around you. Tune into the outward signs of Spring and seek the answers of their quiet echoes within.

Many blessings during this wonderful time of hope and renewal.

Your Editor,

Kristen Butera



Yoga Living

Your Healthy Lifestyle Guide

Spring 2011
Volume XII, Issue IV



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YOGALIFE INSTITUTE, INC.

111 Lancaster Ave.

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Yoga Living, Your Healthy Lifestyle Guide, promotes the field of Yoga as a healthy lifestyle. The practice of a Traditional Yoga program includes each facet of life. This magazine introduces readers to resources for healthy living. Please share your copy of *Yoga Living* with your friends. Contact us at 610-688-7030 or at info@yogalivingmagazine.com. Advertisers go to www.yogalivingmagazine.com for a media kit.

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What is *Yoga Therapy*?

TWENTY YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS IN THE MIDST OF STUDYING FOR MY PHD, the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) was formed in the San Francisco Bay Area. I was the youngest of the first twenty-five members who paid no dues, but met frequently to discuss Yoga Therapy. The original goal was to define Yoga Therapy and that same question is still being explored by the organization today! These days, IAYT has grown from its humble beginnings of 25 people to 2700 members. Coming full circle, I joined their Board of Directors as an Officer in February 2011. It is now a non-profit organization that brings awareness to the field of Yoga Therapy through multiple efforts. Every year they hold the annual SYTAR conference, with a focus on giving Yoga Therapists access to professional education, an exchange of work with their peers and broad discussions about where the field of Yoga Therapy is going.

In addition to professional and scientific conferences, IAYT publishes an annual scientific research journal called *The International Journal of Yoga Therapy* and *Yoga Therapy Today*; a membership magazine with ongoing case studies and dialogues on the therapeutic applications of yoga. Significant recent efforts include developing industry standards to guide the training of Yoga Therapists.

So, 20 years later, the question still persists “What is *Yoga Therapy*?”

The real irony of this question is that if you were to ask it of each of the 25 founding members of IAYT, many of them who are now leaders in the field, you might get very different answers. There would be some similarities and consistencies on the surface, but the deeper we dive into different schools of yogic thought and the methods that support them, we come to see that the styles of Yoga as we currently understand them can differ quite substantially.

Modern Yoga Therapy is a burgeoning field of study and the roads that our predecessors took were very varied and complex. Historically, many of the famous Indian Yogis were known to have healing powers based on their *siddhis* (superpowers or gifts accrued from years of Yoga practice). Some could heal physical ailments while others were noted spiritual guides or insightful Yoga Psychologists. Others were focused on the physical and taught Yoga Hygiene along with yoga pose practices for preventative health. Due to the unregulated and de-centralized field of Yoga, no universally agreed-upon method of Yoga or Yoga Therapy has ever been developed, and while we might try, there is no one right way to summarize what can occur from learning the simple basics or the deeper inner-workings of Yoga.

Now, this does not mean that the person who might like to learn more about Yoga Therapy need be confused. All that needs to be asked is: “How does this method of Yoga

Therapy work?” or “Where is the method of Yoga Therapy coming from?”

Today, many well established schools of Yoga take Yoga beyond fitness and offer classes, teacher trainings and seminars on topics like nutrition, stress management and meditation. From this perspective, all Yoga practices are, by their nature therapeutic. From simply attending weekly yoga classes, people of all ages and backgrounds experience tremendous physical and emotional healing through the combination of deep breathing, poses, relaxation, visualization and meditation.

In this way, it could be argued that all really good Yoga teachers are in some way Yoga Therapists. Yet anyone who has practiced Yoga in a class setting for an extended period of time knows that the honeymoon phase of Yoga doesn't last. For real healing to occur, the root causes of disease

and negative thoughts must be uncovered and transformed. When we use the introspective practices of Yoga to gain insight into habits and behaviors, and then apply the psychological underpinnings of Yoga Philosophy to the actions of daily life, real healing can occur. Guiding students to this level of healing takes a higher level of skill and this is where the additional training that is required of a Yoga Therapist has the potential to shift the dynamic of the healing process.

Most Yoga Therapy training falls into one of two categories: generalized and specialized. Generalized training programs seek to give broad Yoga Therapy training applying Yoga practices to a wide range of specific conditions.

These can be anywhere from 200 – 1000 hour programs. Specialized forms of Yoga Therapy are certificate programs that focus on training Yoga teachers to deal with one specific condition, like depression, multiple sclerosis or back pain and usually done in a shorter period of time (30 – 70 hours). When you look at the inspiration behind these programs, you have a wide variety of professional backgrounds influencing the point of view of the therapy. Programs have been inspired by Psychology, Physical Therapy, Science/Medicine, Traditional Yoga Philosophy, Ayurveda, Spirituality and/or any combination of these concepts and ideas.

Some generalized Yoga Therapy programs simply train existing Yoga teachers in the art of being a more advanced Yoga pose instructors. They learn to apply practices like breathing, yoga poses, guided relaxation, visualization and meditation based on the individual needs of the client. This type of Yoga Therapist will be able to help a lot of people, but only within the limited scope of the techniques that they have learned. A Yoga Therapy session of this style is more like a private yoga class.

A lesser number of schools train Yoga Therapists to master the practical applications of the psychology of Yoga, and



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then use basic constructs of Yoga philosophy to help clients to understand their personal karmic patterns. This type of Yoga Therapist guides the client to use the basic tenants of Yoga Philosophy as an ongoing process of self-mastery. They are able to apply Yoga practices in a more skillful manner and target deeper issues in a person's psyche to create the potential for transformation.

While all forms of Yoga Therapy have their advantages and disadvantages, the purpose of this article is not to delve into that particular area of discussion, but to simply introduce and illuminate that the learning of any Yoga Therapy client has and always will be limited by the slant and degree of the teacher's expertise. Expertise in the Yoga Therapy field can be defined as a combination of education and what in Yoga is known as *realized knowledge*.

A Vision of Yoga Therapy a Holistic Healing

In the 20+ years working in the field, I have considered many points of view on the definition of Yoga Therapy. My humble roots go all the way back to the individualized training I received in my early 20's at The Yoga Institute of Mumbai India, where they have researched Yoga Therapy since its inception. As part of my studies there, I assisted with all of their Yoga Therapy programs, many of which were open to the general public in the form of Yoga health camps. Upon returning to the states, I earned a PhD in Yoga Therapy in 1998, with a dissertation on *A Yôga Lifestyle Program for People Living with HIV & AIDS*. Since then I have worked with thousands of clients and watched tremendous healing take place when the self-realization practices from the tradition of Yoga are applied in a way that help the practitioner alleviate suffering and create harmony of the different layers of the human experience.

I have come to see Yoga Therapy as an evolving and interactive process, one that can be limited either by client's awareness or by the therapist's experience. The client can only go as far as they are ready to and the skillfulness of the Therapist in understanding and guiding this readiness is crucial.

My vision is one of a Comprehensive Yoga Lifestyle approach – using ancient healing methods to balance the physical, the psychological (for relationships and attitude of work), the mental (via relaxation and meditation), as well as the spiritual (appropriate for the client's personal belief system). The role of the Yoga Therapist is to use Yoga based diagnostic tools to assess and understand the whole person and guide them to embrace the many different and interrelated levels on which healing can occur – energetic, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. While a human being may not always be able to control pain or the outcome of the healing process, Yoga teaches that each individual may overcome the resistance to pain or suffering.

This concept of Yoga Therapy intends to shift the current cultural healthcare perspective from the passive patient model to a more active model where the patient is a student of their own processes and becomes empowered to be a proactive participant in their own healing. It does not intend to make the Yoga Therapist into a Doctor, Psychologist, Physical Therapist or other professional who deals with acute disease conditions. In this model, the Yoga Therapist works with other medical and healing professionals as a supporting expert who offers clients highly personalized lifestyle and stress management plans. Each aspect of the

human experience is seen as having the potential to be a source of healing and inspiration and healing can be explored on the physical, energetic, mental/emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels as needed by the practitioner. Yoga practices are put to use in daily life and, over time, become an integrated part of an overall approach to living a healthy lifestyle.

Yoga Therapy as Education

Most modern health therapies remove the sting from the client but not the stinger. A relaxing yoga class or session of emotional release eases the sting of unhealthy living. But neither completely removes the stinger. The stinger is usually materialistic values or unhealthy attachments that lead to an unbalanced mind. Healing in this context is not strictly understood as freedom from physical disease.

Yoga can teach a healthy lifestyle by understanding the underlying causes of the condition. A terminal cancer patient may be healed, for example, by being at peace with their condition. Conversely, a person with apparent physical well-being may in fact be internally unhealthy on a psychological or spiritual level. Yoga Therapy aims to help the practitioner understand the roots of their suffering, and as a result, patients with the same external condition may be given different courses of action.

For example, a group of women join Yoga as therapy to loose weight. After time assessing the underlying cause of the weight, one emotionally driven woman may be referred to a counselor. Another is found to have a normal life and is very at peace, she is referred to a doctor to check her hormonal balances. A third woman has trouble exercising, so she is set up with a mentor to track her exercise routine and discuss why she resists working out. Another woman never learned how to make healthy food choices, and she is referred to a nutritionist who teaches her grocery shopping and healthy cooking.

Each of the women is given a food log, an exercise routine along with the unique practices or instructions based on their particular weakness. Notice that in each mini-example, the women are asked to be proactive to learn about themselves.

The Potential Role of Yoga Therapy in the Health Care Field

One of the reasons that Yoga is so effective as a therapy is that stress is universal – it plays a tremendous role in healing as well as preventative care. Yoga Therapy, when used in conjunction with modern medicine, can help lessen the impact of stress related illness and/or improve the disease condition. With time and care, Yoga Therapy may be one vehicle to transform the current passive-patient disease-managing model into one that empowers the student to be an active participant in their own health and wellness. In this way, Yoga as form of health education breeds a balanced mind, one that is firmly rooted in the cultivation of higher consciousness and awareness of life's sacred qualities.

Thus, Yoga Therapy as education does not isolate one technique as the cure but emphasizes holistic living as part of taking personal responsibility for the healing. If Yoga Therapy can stay steadfast in the educational orientation, it can join with other healing models to improve the health care field. ▲

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YOGA PRACTICES

to Free the Creative Spirit

“Man and woman, beast and bird, live by breath. Breath is therefore called the true sign of life. It is the vital-force in everyone that determines how long we are to live.”

– Taittiriya Upanishad 3.1

BREATH IS ENERGY. Artistic expression in music is the result of a coordinated effort between a musician’s internal creative intent, breath energy, and physical activity. These elements have a synergistic relationship to one another, and the breath has a vital role: it is the energetic circuit, the “connective tissue,” between the artist’s internal intention and external, physical expression. In other words, when a musical idea is conceived in the heart and mind of an artist, it is the breath that gives it life in the body, animating the physical instrument. If, in this process, the breath is not free to make the connection, the creative-physical gesture will be impeded. The breath is the energy, the vital force that unifies the mind and body in the musical act.

The concept of the breath as the mind-body connector may be somewhat unfamiliar within our culture, yet it is commonly understood in various Eastern philosophical traditions. In Classical Yoga, for instance, breath is viewed as part of the energetic field that lays between the mind and body, and which communicates with both. This relationship is explained in the *Taittiriya-Upanishad* through the paradigm of the *koshas* (lit. “sheaths” or layers).

The *koshas* are understood to represent layers of human personality and individuality that surround a core of absolute consciousness, often referred to as the “true” or “universal” Self. In the broadest sense, according to Yoga philosophy, we each possess, and therefore share, the Self, and we also each possess the sheaths that cover the Self and give us our individual natures. The layers, then, represent all aspects of our human condition: spiritual, intellectual, mental, energetic, and physical. The model of the *koshas* has value for us as musicians if we examine it to gain an understanding of how the mind-breath-body complex interacts when we are involved in the creative activity of music making.

According to the *kosha* paradigm, every human being begins with a spiritual consciousness, a true Self, which is then explained by the intellect, guided by the mind, energized by breath patterns, and expressed in the body. It is the goal of Yoga to balance and harmonize these various aspects of one’s self to fully express the Self.

To visualize the *koshas*, think of them as a set of concentric circles emanating from the central core of spirit/consciousness/creativity in an outward expanse, culminating in the physical manifestation, the human body. Each sheath covers, yet is supported by, the one below (interiorly) and conjoins with the one above (externally). Each layer is dependent upon the other layers for support and information, and there is a natural movement from the subtlest levels of the internal Self to the less subtle external level of the body.

Breath and Prana

The breath inhabits the Energy Sheath and is intimately integrated with *prana*. In fact, there is no authoritative reckoning within Yoga philosophy of a distinction between the two. *Prana* and breath are commonly understood to be so closely related that, for all intents and purposes, within the physical body, they are the same. Yet breath may be viewed as an agent for *prana* because breathing patterns affect *pranic* flow in the body. Breath is able to access, develop, move, and ultimately control one’s life force, and it does so either by one’s conscious control (as in the practice of *pranayama*) or as a less-conscious response to the impulses of the mind.

This relationship between mind, breath, and body is easy to understand if you consider the effects of your thoughts and emotions on your body in a stressful situation, for example, when you experience performance anxiety. In this condition, your state of mind (fear) blocks the natural flow of *prana* by stimulating the sympathetic nervous system. When *prana* is blocked, breathing is also affected, becoming labored and unstable, and there is a resulting manifestation in the body: tension. The sensation of “butterflies in the stomach,” or the inability to access a fluid breath, are the likely physical reflections of the performer’s thoughts and emotions in that moment, and it is for this reason that the commonly prescribed antidote for performance anxiety is deep, steady breathing. Deep breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, reintegrates the flow of *prana*, calms the mind and emotions, and consequently reduces physical tension as well as mental disharmony. If you relate this mind-body phenomenon to the model of the *koshas*, you can understand that the innermost aspects of a person have a direct effect on his or her outermost aspects. The mind influences the breath and, in turn, effects how the body is energized.

People who regularly practice Yoga techniques such as *asana* (postures) and *pranayama* (breath control) develop an awareness of the subtle movements of their minds and how these movements relate to their breath and physical states. They begin to recognize that the breath connects the layers of mind and body, and energizes the deeper intentions of the spirit, intellect, and mind to become physical gesture. On the external level, Yoga practitioners gain conscious mastery over their physical bodies, recognizing tensions when they emerge, and they have specific strategies for releasing those tensions with the conscious use of their breath. They harmonize their minds and bodies with and through the breath. This is the essence of creativity.

Yoga teaches us how the breath makes this mind-body union possible and shows us the potential for its application in the lives and work of artists, musicians and other people looking to connect with deeper creative energies. When a person experiences a sense of simultaneous harmony throughout the various aspects of him or herself, we might say that person is embodying a conscious breath, an *authentic* breath. In fact, without this harmony in the entire system, the deeper aspects of a person will not be

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stable or accessible. For the artist, this means there will be limitations to the full range and depth of one's creativity. However, when a musician has trained herself to embody an authentic breath and to use the power of that breath for connecting the various aspects of the Self, then the potential for creative expression is as limitless as the very life force the breath is carrying.

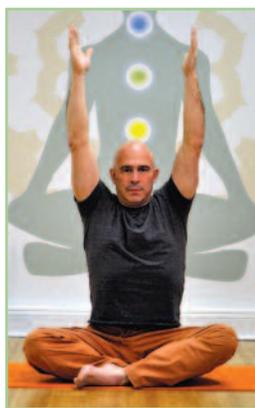
Blockages to the Breath

Creative authenticity is present when breath is free to energize the body to communicate the mental/emotional intention; the spirit, intellect, mind, breath, and the body work together to manifest an artist's full creativity. When any aspect of the person sets conditions that block the breath from making the appropriate connections between the mental and physical *koshas*, the creative gesture is impeded. Blockages to the breath may correspond to imbalances in one or more of the *koshas*: physical (body tension), energetic (improper breath mechanics), mental (fear), intellectual (confusion), or spiritual/creative (conflicted beliefs). Yet, regardless of the cause, breath blockages are most commonly recognized at the level of the physical body by the presence of tension.

Generally speaking, physical blockages to the breath can be located in three areas of the torso: 1) in the chest/shoulders/upper back, 2) the ribs/solar plexus/thoracic spine, and/or 3) the abdominal wall/hips/pelvis and sacrum. Physical tension in one or more of these areas can block creativity. When tension is present, the breath's ability to carry creative energy between the mind and body is impeded. Yoga postures balance and eventually eliminate the physical blocks to a free breath. When blocks are removed, the individual is able to access deeper states of consciousness and creativity through authentic breathing.

Breath and Body Movement

When relating breathing to body movement, one can make some important observations. As a general rule, an inhalation opens the body and creates a sense of expansion, while an exhalation tends to promote a sense of contraction or release in the body. Put another way, you might say that the inhalation opens your consciousness in an outwardly expansive gesture, while the exhalation returns you to your center. Yoga uses the practice of physical postures (asana) to develop the body for authentic breathing and to connect the movements of one's consciousness with the gestures of one's body. The following sequence of Yoga postures is intended to deepen awareness of the mind/breath/body connection and to remove some of the typical breathing blocks that inhibit creative energy.



Seated Mountain Pose

Sit in a simple, cross-legged posture and feel your sitting bones connect to the floor. Lengthen your spine directly upward, without bending backward. As you inhale, raise your arms overhead and lightly touch your palms together. Continue to breathe deeply, beginning and ending every breath from your abdomen. Feel your spine growing upward with each inhalation and settling into its length with each exhalation. Practice for up to 10 complete breaths.

Seated Twist

From Seated Mountain pose, exhale and twist to the right, from the middle of your torso. Lower your arms naturally to the outside of your leg and to the floor behind you. Inhale to lengthen your spine upward, then exhale, contract your abdomen toward your spine, and deepen your twist. Stay for up to 10 complete breaths. Return to center with an inhalation and then repeat the sequence to your left side.



Wide-leg Seated Side-bend

Open your legs into a wide straddle. Twist to your right until you are looking over your right leg. Exhale and side-bend

to your left, bringing the left side of your torso over your extended left leg. Inhale and reach your right arm overhead, toward your left foot. Breathe deeply to open your ribs and chest on your inhalation, and to release your waist on your exhalation. Stay in the posture for up to 10 full breaths. Inhale, return to the starting point and repeat the sequence to the other side.

Flow Sequence: Palm Tree, Wheel, Chair

Come to a standing posture with your feet about a fist-width apart and the insteps of your feet forming parallel lines. Inhale, extend your spine upwards without bending backwards, and lift your arms overhead while rising onto your toes (Palm Tree). Retain your inhalation for a moment to maintain the lift of your spine, then exhale, drop your heels to the ground and begin to fold forward while reaching with your fingertips toward the floor.



Once you are in your forward fold, bring your arms up and back behind you, clasping your hands together and resting them on your low back. For a deeper expression of the pose, raise your clasped hands toward the ceiling (Standing Wheel). Notice where your body expands and contracts with each inhalation and exhalation.



On your next inhalation, release your hands and sweep your arms forward, raising your torso while bending your knees and sitting back into your heels. Exhale to feel your tailbone drop and your spine lengthen (Chair). Inhale upward, returning to Palm Tree, rising again onto your toes. Exhale to your beginning posture. Repeat this sequence 3 times.



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