

# Yoga Living

Volume XIII, Issue IV

Spring 2012 Issue

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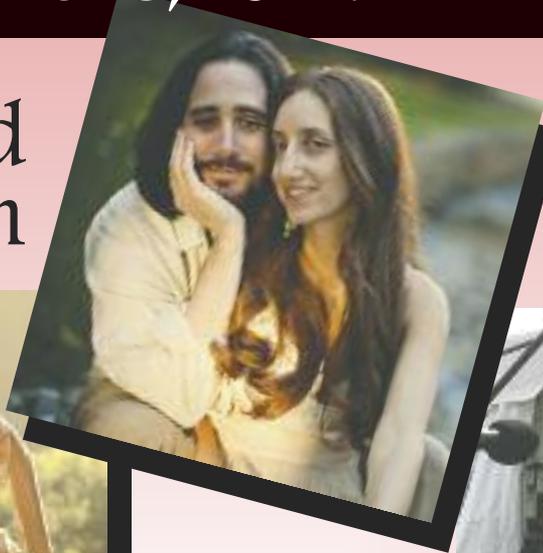


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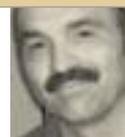
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# Letter From the Editor



**T**here's no denying it. 2012 has been a tough year for yoga. It started with a controversial article in the New York Times about the potential dangers of yoga practice and segued into a yoga fitness video that started an intense debate in the online world about the over-sexualization of yoga. If that wasn't enough, a few weeks later a famous yoga teacher was placed in the middle of a sex and pension scandal that created a frenzy of commentary about the commercialization of yoga in the US. As a result, another ill-informed article about the origins of modern hatha yoga practices was published in the Times.

I have no intention of dwelling on the details of those stories here. There is plenty of information out there to be considered if you are so inclined. Yoga has been around for a long time, and it will transcend the current climate. While the media has overplayed things to a certain degree, there are some interesting dialogues to be had and some good life lessons that can come out of it all. As I see it, here are some of the net take-aways.

## **Never Give Your Power Away**

This applies to your chiropractor, doctor, massage therapist, yoga teacher, mental health counselor, life-coach and more! Just because someone tells you that something is good for you doesn't always make it true. If you are getting clear feedback that a path of healing isn't working, take heed of those messages! A good health practitioner or teacher will evaluate and adjust things according to your feedback. While they might seem to be imbued with healing super powers, they are just human beings after all. They make mistakes and often have agendas and/or limitations that they are unaware of. It is not necessary to argue with or continually challenge them, just to remain aware that you may or may not fit into their mode of healing, or find their agenda to be in line with your own.

Often when someone is in pain, they feel confused or desperate and are tempted to believe a potential solution on surface value. Our society supports the notion that we are "broken" and need to be "fixed" by someone or something else. This is not true. While you might need help at times, good health does require your active participation! Do the research, get second opinions and don't discount your instincts in the process. Be empowered to make informed choices and create a plan of wellness that works for your unique needs. It may be frustrating or scary, but you will reap the rewards of your efforts throughout the process.

## **Working with the Shadow**

This is particularly true for spiritual seekers. There is an over-emphasis on positive thinking, light, manifestation and other concepts that tend to override or ignore the darker side of human experience. This creates a psychic split between what happens during spiritual practice and what happens in daily life. As a beginner yoga student, I saw this play out in my own life. There would be times where I would leave yoga class feeling euphoric and 10 minutes later find myself overcome with anger or some other strong negative emotion. After these disconnects happened several times, I realized that something was missing. For me, the missing element was the application of yoga philosophy to my life off the mat. It was at that point that the real growth started. Which leads me to my next point.

## **If it Sounds too Good to be True, It is**

As the healthy living marketplace grows in popularity, there are people out there poised to take advantage of it for financial gain. They will promise wealth, health, a new relationship or the perfect body, often with the implication that little or no effort will be required on your part. They will tell you that what they do is the "best," "most effective," or "deepest" form of \_\_\_\_\_. Be wary of clever marketing tactics! The charlatans of the world are banking on you not taking personal responsibility. This is akin to going to the grocery store – do you trust that something is good for you just because it says "whole grain" or "natural" on the box? Or do you read the label to see what the ingredients are? I hope you that you are reading the ingredients, because most of those food companies are interested in one thing, and it's not your health. It's selling products.

Personal growth isn't sexy or easy. It takes a willingness to face your pain and change the way you think and behave. Awareness is the first step, and finding a structure around doing the work is the second step. Doing the work is a lifelong process, and it takes time and commitment. Within that, it may also take experimenting with several methods to find the things that support your process. What works in one phase of your life might not work in another. There are so many options available for exploration. Find the ones that speak to you, take what resonates with you and leave what doesn't behind.

We here at Yoga Living are committed to bringing you as much information as possible on the subjects of personal growth and healthy living. We trust in your discernment, and it is our sincere hope that you find something in these pages to inspire you on the journey.

Your Editor,  
**Kristen Butera**

# Yoga Living

Your Healthy Lifestyle Guide

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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](mailto:info@yogalivingmagazine.com). Advertisers go to [www.yogalivingmagazine.com](http://www.yogalivingmagazine.com) for a media kit.

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# Establishing A Home Yoga Practice

**ONE OF THE MANY BLESSINGS OF YOGA ASANA IS THAT IT CAN BE PRACTICED ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.** Once a firm foundation of understanding is established within a group class setting, a yoga practitioner can use what they have learned to develop a yoga practice at home. Though the transition from studio to home might appear on the surface to be natural or easy, many students struggle with establishing a home practice.

Over the years we have encouraged students to practice at home and helped them to identify the obstacles that might be keeping them from doing it. Most cited reasons for not practicing at home are: a fear of being “safe”, lack of personal discipline, not knowing how to string a series of postures together or not knowing when, where or how to practice. This article hopes to address some of these concerns for the community at large and help guide practitioners who are looking to incorporate a yoga practice into their daily personal routine.

## LET'S START WITH THE BASICS:

**Where to practice:** A space that is large enough to lie in corpse pose. If possible the space should be well ventilated and the temperature moderate and comfortable. Create some distance between your mat and any sharp edges or large objects in the room, in the event that you fall out of a standing or balance pose. Choose a space that can be distraction free during your practice time. Examples of such a space might include the middle of the living room floor early in the morning before family members arise or the floor of an office (with the electronics turned off). If you live in a small space that has to serve multiple purposes, consider purchasing a tapestry or using an old sheet to cover up a desk, TV or computer that might provide distraction. Once you decide on a place to practice, it can be helpful to place some items in that space to create a sense of sacredness. These items could be anything from spiritual texts to statues or images that create a sense of peace or positive inspiration when you look at them.

**When to practice:** Choose a time of day when you have an empty stomach, aren't overly tired and are unlikely to have distractions from other household members. For example, if you are a morning person and have young children, you may find early mornings before the children

are awake to be the best time. On the other hand, if you work long office hours, evenings may be a better time to practice to help you unwind after a long day of sitting. Keep in mind that the exact time of day is not as important as being consistent from day to day.

**How long to practice:** Creating a realistic time frame is essential for the beginner home practitioner. A realistic goal for most beginners is 15-20 minutes per day. Even if you feel like you don't have two minutes of spare time per day, they are ways to create that time. Consider where you tend to waste or have non-productive time in the day (i.e. watching TV or social networking) and try to reallocate that time for practice. If necessary get up 15 minutes earlier or go to bed 15 minutes later to create the extra time you want to practice yoga.

**How to sequence a practice:** Start with the poses that are most comfortable and familiar from taking yoga classes. Just being present and breathing while doing the poses one by one will be a good amount of discipline to develop. To develop poses that flow from one to the other, pay attention to particular sequences that you enjoy during group classes and explore them at home. Use the group class dynamic as a source of inspiration what you are doing at home.

As you become more comfortable with an established pattern of practice, start to play with sequencing postures to create different energetic effects. This happens by grouping poses together in different ways to create feelings of being energized, relaxed or a balance of both. As your own process becomes more refined, you will be able create a home practice that honors your body's unique needs from day to day. It is important to note that everyone has a different energetic experience of the impact of a yoga pose - pay attention not only to how you feel while you are in a pose, but what the effect is once you release the pose to understand how the poses effect you personally.

Once you've assessed the subtleties of the particular postures you would like to practice and determined the energetic effects they have on you, you can begin to construct sequences that have either a *relaxing* or *stimulating* effect, and, with this understanding, see and feel how to create *balance*.

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**BASIC CONCEPTS OF ENERGETIC SEQUENCING:**

To have a generally *stimulating* effect on one's energy, design the practice sequence to start and finish with *stimulating* postures, with the *relaxing* postures in the middle of the sequence. To have a *relaxing* effect on one's energy, design the practice sequence to start and finish with *relaxing* postures and have your *stimulating* postures in the middle of the sequence. To have a *balancing* effect on one's energy, design the practice sequence to have equal elements of effort and relaxation. Incorporate twists into the sequence or right after the sequence is complete.

As a general rule of practice, movement is more stimulating than holding. To create more stimulation, flow the sequence in a faster pace. To create less stimulation, flow the sequence in a slower fashion or utilize longer holds and go pose by pose. To create a balanced sensation, try combining movement with holding. In order to achieve *balance* it is important to pay attention to the overall content of the sequences you design and to make sure that they contain a sensible and balanced variety of postures. The options in this approach are limitless.

It is also helpful to view individual yoga poses as part of larger categories. When this happens, the posture's dominant quality can be revealed to you and you can decide how you want to use the pose in a sequence. Different schools of yoga create different categories, but most agree that there are 5 basic movements of the spine: Forward Bending, Backward Bending, Side Bending, Twisting and Upward Reaching. A balanced practice reflects poses from all of these categories.

From attending yoga classes, most practitioners know that poses are only part of the equation. Here are some guidelines for developing a home practice that incorporates more than yoga poses.

**Centering:** A yoga practice can begin with a centering exercise. Centering exercises include: breath awareness, contemplation of a spiritual idea, reading a short inspirational passage, saying a prayer, practicing mantra repetition or affirmations, singing a spiritual song and/or intention setting.

**Deep Breathing:** Practicing some type of breath control, such as diaphragmatic, 3 part or equal parts breathing has many benefits. Awareness of breath also guides the centering process and allows for deeper states of concentration. Most breathing exercises make the mind more alert, and create a dynamic state of awareness that can help the practitioner honor their limits and remain injury free. Regular practice of breathing provides a greater sense of energy flow, improves stamina and promotes an overall sense of well-being.

**Yoga Poses:** The guiding rule of pose practice is that the posture should be steady and comfortable. Follow each posture with a brief pause and take the time to

reflect on the experience and release any residual tension. The pause after the pose can be just as important and interesting as the pose itself.

**Relaxation:** If time allows, follow pose practice with a systematic relaxation technique, with the intent of allowing the body to be completely relaxed. This will allow the body to receive and process the benefits of practice. If possible, spend a few minutes in relaxation. Try to stay aware/alert, as it is not meant to be a nap!

**Meditation:** A yoga pose practice is a great way to release bodily tension and harness the mental capacity necessary to sit in Meditation. Try to cultivate the regular habit of sitting in meditation at the end of practice, even if it is only for a few minutes. You may need to try a variety of meditation techniques before finding one that works for you. Simply sitting quietly on a pillow or in a chair and observing the natural rhythm of the breath is considered meditation.

This outline can offer some guidance for the beginning home practitioner, but it should in no way be viewed as the only way to practice. The most important thing is that the practitioner feels empowered to create a regular yoga practice that feels right for their needs. It is helpful to think of a regular yoga practice as the process of growing a new habit. How the practice looks and feels will be dependent on your family structure, work schedule and basic living habits. Being realistic in your goal setting will be essential to success, so take the pressure off your self! You don't need to create an entire 1 or 1.5-hour routine. That's what a studio yoga class is for. If you are looking to create lasting changes, small gestures of 15 – 20 minutes of practice done daily will make a large impact on your overall life experience. Start small and build from there.

Remember that some days, getting to the mat is the hardest part of all. Try to do the best you can and don't be too hard on yourself if you miss days or have less time to practice than you originally intended. Let your practice be a refuge from negative self-talk and self-deprecating behaviors. Remember that real change happens slowly. Trust in your instincts and your body once you are on the mat, and your personal practice will gain a momentum and energy of it's own that will evolve in time, exactly as it should. ▲

**Note:** *We don't recommend starting a home practice without having had some instruction from an experienced yoga teacher. Taking classes is an invaluable experience for practitioners of all levels, but once a reasonable level of knowledge is achieved, creating a home practice can be a positive next step. You'll know when the time is right to start practicing at home.*

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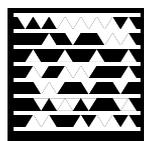
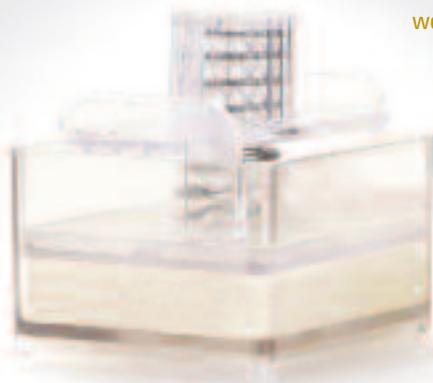
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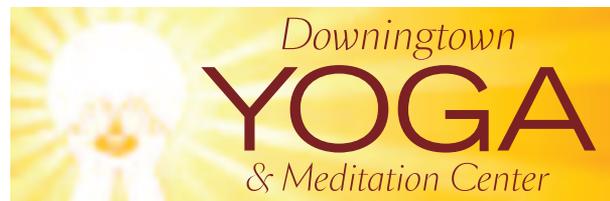
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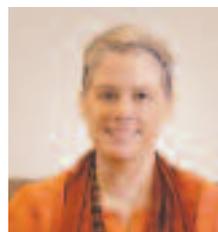
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# Yoga Practices & Styles: A Comparative Study

**YOGA CONTINUES TO EXPAND AND EVOLVE WITHIN AMERICAN AND INDIAN SOCIETY.** There was an article in the New York Times a while ago about a conflict in the Indian school system: whether to allow Sun Salutations in the schools as a form of exercise.

That yoga is more available and cheaper, and being recognized as an important form of “exercise” is wonderful. You can find a class even in small towns in small countries, and on the Internet. However, like all things American and Global, there is a tendency to believe that faster, hotter, bigger is better.

Like all fads, American and Global, there is an initial enthusiasm that evolves into something else. Sometimes, like Pet Rocks or tulips in the Netherlands<sup>1</sup>, the bubble bursts and there is nothing left. Given yoga’s 5000+ year legacy, it is not likely to go away. However, as it evolves in our society, it is important to be selective in choosing how to incorporate yoga into one’s life.

This concern is similar to the “slow food” movement growing in response to the “fast food” movement. Better life through fast food and chemistry was promised in the 50’s, along with bottle-fed babies, margarine and other scientific wonders. However, several decades later, we are realizing the long-term consequences of these innovations, to us as individuals, society and the planet. The tremendous growth of the organic and local food movements, and the continuing collapse of the health care system speak to the consequences of this “modern is better” philosophy. There is a reason that yoga is 5000 years old; and that we are going back to it. Like genetic engineering, before we alter yoga’s methodology, we better know what we’re doing and why.

## Why We Do and Don’t Do Yoga

So, why do we do yoga? Because it’s the thing to do? Because it’s an efficient form of exercise? Because your friend loves it? Because it doesn’t require expensive equipment or a special court? Because we feel better after doing it? Because it sculpts our body? Because we sleep better? Because it enables us to do other sports and activities (singing, dancing, playing instruments, and paying attention in meetings) better? Yes, for all of these reasons, and more.

That yoga can make us feel and operate better, and even heal from chronic and obscure conditions is a testament to its power. But in our scientific, data-driven society, don’t we want to know more? Don’t we want to understand how it works? Like fast food, fast convenient yoga tastes great, but haven’t we learned the lesson that faster and more convenient is not always better?

Evidence of the problem with fad yoga is the fact that most of us know someone who was hurt doing yoga and will not do it ever again. When someone gets hurt doing yoga, taking a math class, a medicine, or going to the dentist, we often extrapolate this single painful experience to all similar future experience. We know people who have phobias to school, math, dentists, and we recognize the risks involved in avoiding these resources for life. It is rare that the right questions are asked: who was the teacher or practitioner, what was their training and experience and what were the circumstances?

Also, just because a Big Mac tastes good, doesn’t mean it is good for us. Sometimes it is the less tasty, less convenient food that gives us the best health benefit. Organic kale costs more than a Big Mac, and is not as available, but multiple sources of quality information tell us that 300 calories of kale is not only great for us and our kids, it can help undo 600 calories or years of Big Macs. Likewise, just because we feel good after yoga, like the teacher and didn’t have to travel to get there, is it the best way?

The challenge is to use all resources—thought, emotion, and science, to determine what is best, even if on the surface it seems inconvenient, more expensive, or even painful. In other words, we must apply yoga philosophy to yoga practice! We must be aware of what we are doing and why, and strive to increase this awareness.

## Styles, Sequencing, Alignment, Warm-Up, Corrections

There are many styles of yoga being taught, and the list keeps growing. In some way they are all hatha, emphasizing the asanas (postures) and pranayama (breathing) in some combination. However, going back to the yoga sutras, yoga is not defined by its physical aspects, but by its mental/spiritual aspects: “Yoga is the stilling of the

*continued on page 18*