

Yoga Living

Volume XIV, Issue I

Summer 2012 Issue



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Cheryl has a Master's Degree in Public Health, a Master's Level Certificate in Integrative Health, is a Certified Healing Touch Practitioner and has taught healing techniques all over the world for over 30 years.

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Contributors | Inside YogaLiving

Doers | Player | Teacher | Representative | A Voice | Impetus | Reflection | Learning | Imagine



Manorama >>

is a graduate of Columbia University and the author of *Learn to Pronounce Yoga Poses* (2005). She is a world recognized leader in the field of Sanskrit & Yoga who tours the world training students in the Path of Luminous *Shabda*, which brings Sanskrit, Meditation, and Yoga philosophy together to bridge sacred teachings into every day life for the purpose of Self-fulfillment and authentic happiness. Visit www.sanskritstudies.org to learn more.

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Jennifer Busa Littel >>



went to Kripalu to become a yoga teacher and came home realizing that dance was her true love. She studied writing and dance at Rowan University and has found a way to combine her two passions via her blog, where she documents her experiences in movement, mindfulness, and other healing modalities. Learn more at www.flowtationdevices.com.

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Lisa Beth Freedman | MD >>



is a family physician practicing in Villanova and Huntingdown Valley, PA. She is trained in most areas of medicine and offers preventive services to screen for problems, along with counseling to improve health and quality of life. To learn more visit www.lbfmd.com.

New Treatment Considerations for Children with ADHD
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Anthony Michael Rubbo | MHS >>



is a consultant to education and industry, and the author of books on personal leadership and meditation. He is currently writing a novel and collaborating on a production that promotes the spiritual lifestyle. If you have questions or comments, you can contact him at anthonymichael133@gmail.com.

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<< Robert Butera M.Div., Ph.D.

is the director of The YogaLife Institute in Devon, Pennsylvania where he trains Yoga teachers and Yoga therapists. A board member of the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), he is also the author of *The Pure Heart of Yoga* (Llewellyn Worldwide, 2009) and the publisher of Yoga Living Magazine. Learn more at www.yogalifeinstitute.com.

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<< Jayne Stevlingston Tamburello

has an MS in herbal medicine from Tai Sophia and practices herbal medicine, homeopathic medicine and nutrition in Media, PA. Learn more about her practice online at www.providencehealthandhealing.com

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<< Marilyn Moser Waxman

integrates practices and techniques from a variety of holistic health and healing systems from around the world. Her classes and coaching offer a well-rounded education that is applicable to a wide spectrum of dietary needs and health issues. Learn more at www.thenourishingwell.com.

What's that Taste? Umami? Umami!
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<< Kristen Butera E-RYT 500, CYT

is the Editor of Yoga Living Magazine and writer of educational articles on Yoga. She is also the Manager of the YogaLife Institute, where she teaches weekly classes & trains yoga teachers. Contact her at kristen@yogalifeinstitute.com.

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Michael Cheikin | MD >>

is a holistic physician, Board Certified in PM&R ("Physiatry"), Pain Management and licensed in Medical Acupuncture. He has studied alternative healing for over 30 years and designed a multi-dimensional evaluation and treatment process to identify and heal the "root causes" of obscure and chronic problems. Contact him at 610.239.9901 or www.cheikin.com.

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Marney K. Makridakis >>



is the author of *Creating Time*. She founded the Artella online community for creators of all kinds and the print magazine Artella. A popular speaker and workshop leader, she created the ARTbundance approach of self-discovery through art. She lives in Dallas, Texas. Learn more about her online at www.artellaland.com.

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<< Linda Lyng

lives, writes, and teaches in Kimberton, and may be reached at llyng@lunayogapa.com.

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<< Stephanie Knox Cubbon

is a yoga teacher and peace educator based in San Diego, CA. She is passionate about promoting peace and sees yoga as a fundamental way we can cultivate peace in ourselves and in the world. Contact her at stephknox24@gmail.com.

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Michael Reddy | Ph.D. CPC >>

combines Certified Wellness Coaching with Family Constellation Work to reveal and re-align hidden loyalties that block successful living. Previously, he taught shamanic spirituality and healing for two decades. He is an Elder who adds a wealth of knowledge, experience, and love to achieving the health and fulfillment goals of individuals, families, and other wellness professionals. Learn more at www.reddyworks.com.

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Letter From the Editor



We can never really foresee exactly how an issue of *Yoga Living* magazine is going to come together. Of course, there is a process involved, but at the end of the day, it is really up to the writer contributors to tell us what they are thinking about and how that inspiration is going to be relevant to you, the reader. These are typically intelligent, highly sought after healers who are leaders in their field and willing to work extra hard to put themselves and their ideas out there for the betterment of humanity. It's a collaborative process of a high degree. As the editor, I then look to see if the ideas that are being offered are going to form a cohesive whole. More often than not, this happens by divine provenance. Yes, there are tweaks that I need to make here and there, editorial suggestions that get offered for consideration and things that get moved around until they find their proper home. Yet at the end of the day I never feel like magazine comes through me. The process serves as a continual reminder that I am part of a larger whole, and has become a big part of my deeper spiritual practice of Karma Yoga.

I have to admit that the spiritual concept sometimes gets lost in the daily minutia. Yoga Living isn't my only job – I also run a yoga studio, teach classes and train yoga teachers. Deadlines, emails, communication breakdowns and just plain old getting it done energy can take my focus away from the bigger picture. This is true for any job, is it not? Yet every time that delivery truck pulls up and the palates of the final product are unloaded, I am reminded of just how many people came together to make this issue of the magazine a reality. Whenever I crack the wrap on that first bundle, slide out a crisp new issue and open it for the first time, I am a little in awe of how a group of people, some who have never even met each other, can come together with an intention to make the world a better place and actually make it happen.

The theme for this issue came together in it's usual cosmic fashion, and it appears that as collective, people are thinking a lot about creativity, time, food, health and rejuvenation. In total, there are thirteen articles in this issue that offer a variety of perspectives on different healthy lifestyle topics, including Yoga, Meditation, Expressive Dance, Creative Economics, Plant & Food Healing and more. As always, the editorial article content is separate from the advertising content, so that you can read the articles knowing that they are selfless offerings, given from a sincere desire to share the author's insights from their healing traditions and illuminated by years of practice and service.

It is such a gift to be a participant in this process, and I think that I can speak for all of us when I say that we hope you receive the gifts in the same spirit that they have been given. As we share our gifts, we hope that you are inspired to begin or continue to share your gifts with the world as well!

In Loving Service –
Kristen Butera, Editor



Teaching my niece the Handstand balance in Ocean City, NJ

Yoga Living

Your Healthy Lifestyle Guide

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Publisher
ROBERT BUTERA, PhD

Editor
KRISTEN BUTERA

Graphic Artist
MARIE KOZLOWSKI
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Advertising
ANGELA NEVIUS

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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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Visualization: A Creative Meditative Practice

IN THE SAME WAY THAT WE TAKE BREATHING FOR GRANTED, we tend to forget the importance of our visual images and thoughts. It is easy to think that shallow breathing is normal if you are a shallow breather. Likewise, if you secretly think that you are not good enough or smart enough, then you automatically become those things. To understand and be aware of what we visualize each day is vitally important for our long-term health and personal growth.

Each culture of the world has a visual element in its healing and spiritual traditions. Many people in Western culture have heard the term visualization – we hear about athletes visualizing before a big competition, or may have experimented with a form of visual prayer at church or in a healing group. Many of the mind-body movements in the West have used visualization in some form or another as a means to unite mind, body and spirit. The reason people from so many different cultures and backgrounds use these practices is simple - visualization works.

We all form pictures in our mind. If I say to you, “Don’t visualize a white elephant,” what does your mind do? You probably see a white elephant. Think of how this concept plays itself out in daily life. Let’s consider the common human issue of worry. If you are worried about something and hyper-focused on it, you create a picture in your mind of the very thing that you are trying to avoid. If you worry about being late, you create a visual of yourself as the rushed person who arrives late. If you use that energy to create ways to arrange your schedule to ensure being on time, you create a visual of yourself being on time and will find ways to make that vision a reality.

With some practice, just about anyone can learn to focus on positive images instead of negative ones. To start a practice of visualization, one must begin by honestly confronting the visuals that are already in their head. It is a good idea to start by making a list of 3-5 themes that you visualize regularly and probe until you discover an image that you have associated with those thoughts. When you find a weak or negative image, attempt to replace it with a positive one.

Since we all visualize or associate images with thoughts, we already know how to visualize unconsciously. However, at first it may be difficult to place the new images in your mind. In the case that visualization is a practice that doesn’t come naturally to you, give yourself time to learn your personal method of visualization. Once you learn how you visualize, use that method for a period of time. If you find that you master that style in time, then try adding other methods of visualization into your practice repertoire on an as needed basis.

WHAT IS YOUR VISUALIZATION STYLE?

You can answer this question by taking a few minutes to practice a simple visual exercise. Close your eyes and imagine your bedroom. Without any other instructions, observe how you handle this task.

Do you see the room like a photograph? Do you feel the bed and think that the location of your dresser is two steps from the door? Do you visualize in terms of space and feeling? Do you use memory and imagination to visualize your bedroom? Do you think about the room as a means of visualizing? Or do you simply see things as if you were in the room? While there may not be many other possibilities, if you answer no to all the above questions, please consider qualifying your unique method of visualizing.

continued on page 14



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OVERCOMING VISUALIZATION BLOCKS

The psycho-spiritual term block can relate to any aspect of one's personality that acts as an obstacle in the mind. For example, someone who is working on overcoming a life-long issue like low self-esteem and can't seem to get past the negative self-talk or underlying belief that they are not good enough. No matter how hard they try to change, nothing seems to happen. Discipline escapes this person and good intentions do not manifest into a plausible reality.

In this case, blocks usually indicate deep and unresolved emotions that have yet to be acknowledged and processed. Such extreme blocks may require assistance from a professional counselor or good friend. Less difficult negative emotions may cause a similar resistance to meditation or personal growth. These lesser blocks can leave practitioners missing one specific quality, and cause them to find excuses for not furthering their personal growth activities. Ultimately these unresolved issues lead to even bigger problems. In these cases, visualization can be used as a tool to help the practitioner confront the weaknesses.

8 STEPS FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE VISUALIZATION PRACTICE

1. **Accept** negative self-talk without worry. Resistance will only feed it. After you accept it, you can work to change it in the moment.
2. **Affirm** yourself daily with a verbal mantra in tandem with a strong visual image.
3. Write this affirmation with only **positive images**. For example: "I am a caring parent" gives a positive image, "I am not a bad parent" leads to a negative images.
4. Use **present tense**. We live in the moment. The "I will become or I am trying to" statements do not create a sense of immediacy. The present tense affirmation of "I am" creates a positive impact on the mind.
5. Be **short** and **simple**. Create a phrase and supporting visual that can be recalled quickly at any time, regardless of where you are.

6. Choose a visual and a phrase that is **unique** to you!
7. Make the affirmation and visual **fresh** and **alive** by creating it yourself. Relate it directly to an aspect of your life that is immediate and relevant.
8. **Believe in yourself**, your visual and your correlating affirmation. You are what you believe and what you perceive. "I will be the best athlete" affirmation relies on a near impossible perfection where as, "I am reaching my highest potential" is believable.

In the beginning, visual images can remained fixed. Try to imagine things concretely. For example, if your goal is to be relaxed while driving, focus on seeing a deep-breathing, relaxed driver. As you gain more experience, you may want to try being more receptive in your approach. The receptive (sometimes also called passive) mode allows images to form and pass through the mind as they relate to your topic of meditation. This approach may come in helpful when you are processing a specific problem or seeking an insight. If you find that the mind is restless, you can always return to a more concrete image.

Develop a daily visualization practice centered on a goal. If you are an artist, sketch out your image. If drawing isn't your thing, try using a photo. If you can't find a photo that works for you, try writing a description of your image on a piece of paper with the matching affirmation beneath it. Put this creation in a place that you will see it often i.e. the refrigerator door, bedroom or bathroom mirror or next to computer monitor at your workplace. Focus on this image daily and enjoy the process of consciously re-patterning your beliefs. Every few months, change the visual to suit your current personal growth or meditative practice needs. In time, maintaining a positive image becomes a new habit and the effort to practice it becomes less and less. ▲

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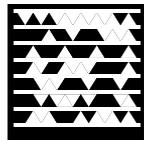
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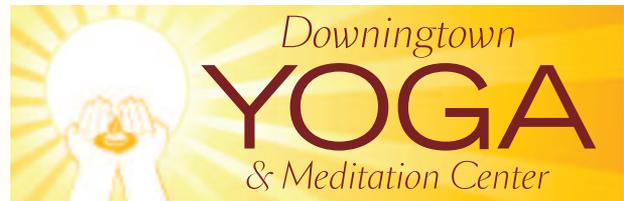
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Playing with Perception: The Benefits of Balancing Poses

“There is no secret to balance. You just have to feel the waves.” – Frank Herbert

DARLENE, MY VERY FIRST (AND MUCH BELOVED) YOGA TEACHER had a wonderful way of explaining balancing - she would always say - “balancing is a practice of falling.” In some classes, she actually focused on teaching us how to fall properly in order to help us face our fear of falling before we even attempted the full pose. These concepts helped her students move away from the need for perfection in a balancing practice and have more fun while we worked on gaining a new skill set.

As a beginner student, I learned from her that a balancing practice is fluid and not rigid and that the body is never completely still. I perceived that every time my heart would beat my center of gravity would shift a bit and my body would naturally re-adjust if I trusted it. In tree pose, I embraced the quality of the tree floating and bending with the wind as a metaphor for my symbiotic relationship with the cosmos. Most importantly, I learned that my ability to laugh at myself was more important than any alignment cue.

Many years later, as I became a yoga teacher, I came to understand the depth of wisdom in Darlene’s approach. Balancing poses are always an interesting portion of the class to observe. The energy in the room changes and it is obvious that practitioners tend to either love balancing poses or hate them - some even have a love/hate relationship. There are so many visceral responses from students while they are practicing. From the vantage point of the front of the room, I observe the whole spectrum of human emotion, from pure bliss to extreme anger, from steady stillness to fumbling frustration and everything in between – sometimes from students practicing next to each other, and other times from the same person over a period of a couple of minutes!

Why such a variety of responses? I think that it’s because balancing is a practice of embracing opposites – serious focus, stable strength and determination need to come into harmony with good humor, levity and fluid ease in the body. It’s also a reflective practice and gives the practitioner immediate feedback of how the mind body connection works. If the mind body complex is disturbed at any level (emotionally, spiritually, physically or energetically), the instability of that disturbance is immediately reflected back to the practitioner in their experience of the pose. At times, it is a mirror that they might not be ready to look into. In this way, the practice of self-inquiry becomes an important component of balancing in order to utilize the information gained

through practice in a way that enhances overall life balance. This is just one of the gifts of cultivating a balancing practice.

Another gift of balancing is increased proprioception, or the ability to sense the orientation of the body in space. This ability doesn't come from any specific organ, but from the nervous system as a whole. Its input comes from sensory receptors - nerves that are on the inside the body rather than on the surface. Balancing poses are an excellent way to train this ability – in order to balance, the nervous system must help the body feel itself in space – it monitors position while processing and directing minor muscular or gravitational positional corrections in the body. It is a complicated dance that can be developed with time and concentration.

The physical benefits of increased proprioception carry themselves over into other life pursuits. Balance is a key element in any sport - you will not perform your sport very well if you fall down all the time! Any martial artist will tell you that balance is the key to generating power. From a functional life perspective, balance in movement (i.e. walking or running) is a process of constantly and consciously losing your balance and regaining it quickly. The quicker you can regain your balance, the safer your movement will be. Given that 70% of accidental deaths for people 75 and older are related to falling the benefits of balance and increased proprioception may actually prolong lifespan along with overall quality of life.

Some of the more abstract benefits of a balancing practice include the development of mental focus and concentration abilities. When we focus on balancing, the mind has no choice but to be still. Balancing poses also provide the opportunity to understand and master the ego in new and interesting ways. From an energetic perspective we are connected to the earth and at the same time reaching for the heavens, experiencing the body as a vessel for all of the subtle energies of the universe in perfect harmony. From an emotional perspective, working out the fear of falling allows us to explore new definitions of trust and faith, not only in ourselves, but also in the larger reality. At a higher level of the nervous system, the impact of attitude towards balancing becomes clear, and the emotional equilibrium that comes through self-observation is illuminated. These types self-awareness that are brought about through a regular balancing practice are invaluable, especially as we become able to translate our understanding of them into daily life experience.

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