

The background features a vibrant blue color with large, flowing, organic shapes in shades of yellow and light orange. These shapes overlap and curve across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and calming.

Mindfulness Yoga

THE AWAKENED UNION OF BREATH, BODY, AND MIND

“This book should be read by *every* aspiring yoga practitioner.”—from the FOREWORD by Georg Feuerstein, author of *The Yoga Tradition*

Frank Jude Boccio

M I N D F U L N E S S Y O G A

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THE AWAKENED UNION OF BREATH, BODY, AND MIND

Frank Jude Boccio

Foreword by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.



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*With breath, body, and mind
I send my heart along with these words.
May all who read them awaken from forgetfulness, and,
realizing the true nature of no separate self,
transcend the path of fear, sorrow, and anxiety.
May all beings be free.*



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FOREWORD



LIKE TO KEEP INFORMED about my various fields of interest, especially the yoga tradition, but few of hundreds of publications that cross my desk each year succeed in holding my attention for long. Now and then, however, the weekly influx of books and manuscripts includes a work that is truly worthwhile and captivates me. Frank Jude Boccio's *Mindfulness Yoga* is such a work.

I am happy about this for two reasons. First, this book addresses a subject matter that is important and timely, and second, I have had the pleasure of Frank Jude's recent participation in the first seven-hundred-hour teacher-training program offered by Yoga Research and Education Center. His quiet presence, unobtrusive service, and thoughtful observations contributed significantly to the quality of our program, and I have since come to value him as a heartfelt Dharma brother. When he asked me to write this foreword, I happily agreed to do so.

It makes sense in a foreword to a book such as this to begin with some personal remarks. When, at the age of fourteen, I discovered the incredibly rich world of yoga, I knew I had found my spiritual home. Three or four years later, it became obvious to me that I should and indeed would dedicate my personal and professional life to exploring yoga's ancient heritage. I wrote my first book—on yoga, of course—at the age of nineteen, and since then have authored many more on this and related subjects. At that time, I also encountered Buddhism for the first time and was impressed with the formidable clarity and perceptiveness of the



Buddha's Dharma and came to hold Buddha and his teaching in the highest esteem. Yet I turned to Hindu yoga for my practice and study, because I felt that it would be more accessible for a budding scholar/writer/practitioner like myself.

In the early 1970s, after having worked intensively with Hindu yoga, I translated a couple of books on Buddhism from English into German and vice versa. It was not until 1994, however, that I encountered more incisively the world of Buddhist yoga—in theory and practice—in the form of Tibetan Vajrayana. From that moment on, I have thought deeply about the relationship between Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, which also is one of the focal points of Frank Jude's work.

In my view, Hinduism and Buddhism are not so much religions as great cultural complexes born on the Indian subcontinent that have yogic (spiritual) practice at their core. Hence it is appropriate to speak of a Hindu yoga and a Buddhist yoga. In fact, Vajrayana Buddhism presents itself openly as a form of yoga and, like Hinduism, occasionally even calls its male adepts *yogins* (or in Tibetan, *naljor*). Thus the contemporary distinction between yoga (generally narrowly understood to be posture practice) and Buddhism is a false and unconstructive dichotomy. Without blurring the differences between Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, it makes sense to apply the label "yoga" to both of them. This has the advantage of emphasizing important common ground between them, not least in the dimension of moral practice but also in the higher stages of the path. I was happy to notice that Frank Jude, a Buddhist yoga practitioner like myself, has adopted a similar viewpoint.

For over thirty-five years, my focus has been on building bridges between India and the West—bridges across which fellow Westerners could travel to gain greater access to India's marvelous wisdom teachings. Few people know that yoga began arriving at our Western shores since the time of the ancient Greeks; and since the epochal presentations by Swami Vivekananda at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the migration of Indian wisdom into Europe, America, and also Australia and New Zealand has been steadily accelerating. Today we have the curious phenomenon of highly skilled Western teachers returning the gift of yoga (at least in the form of the postures of hatha yoga) to India's middle class—one of the signs of a growing coalescence between the global hemispheres.

Buddhist yoga was also represented at the Parliament of Religions, in the noble figures of the fiery Ceylonese Anagarika Dharmapala and Japanese Zen master Soyen Shaku among others. The latter, incidentally, had for his translator the young D. T. Suzuki, who was destined

to become one of the spiritual heroes of the mid-twentieth century. Both masters subsequently succeeded in attracting a sizable American following and in doing so prepared the ground for the open-armed reception in America and other Western countries of Tibetan Buddhism in the aftermath of the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950. Today there are said to be some two to three million Buddhist practitioners and as many as fifteen to twenty million yoga practitioners in the United States alone. As for the latter group, most of its members understand and practice yoga as a health and fitness regimen rather than for inner growth and spiritual upliftment.

There is, however, an encouraging trend to engage yoga more seriously, that is to say, as a lifestyle that embraces the high spiritual ideal of self-transcendence and spiritual awakening. Yoga is a potent transformative discipline and, if practiced authentically and with the requisite dedication, it can bring about inner change even at the entry level of posture practice that is the focus of the majority of its Western practitioners. By activating the parasympathetic nervous system, the hatha yoga postures (*asanas*) can—and have traditionally been intended to—serve as portals to the spiritual aspects of the yogic process. They introduce practitioners to the experience of deep relaxation, especially when combined with conscious breathing, and from there it is but a small step to meditation. The meditative mind, in turn, can effect deep-level changes in a person's self-image, understanding of the world, and relationship to life. Hence meditation is at the heart of almost all yogic paths.

The great yogic traditions of India can be considered as the precious distillate of millennia of meditation and spiritual work. They clearly have much to teach us, and therefore a careful study (*svadhyaya*) of the teachings of yoga in whatever form has always been an integral component of yogic practice. It is of course possible to teach oneself through trial and error over a long period of time, but why run the risk of frustration and ultimate failure when we can benefit from the knowledge and wisdom of earlier practitioners whose efforts bore fruit? We can spare ourselves a great deal of disappointment by appreciating the superlative importance of “right view” from the outset of our spiritual journey. When visiting a new town, it surely helps to have a good road map at hand. At the beginning, we might not even have a clear notion of our destination, as sometimes our deepest feelings and motivations are hidden from us. Conscientious study of the traditional teachings of yoga not only can awaken the spiritual impulse in us but also can point us in the right direction.

Frank Jude's *Mindfulness Yoga* is a valuable road map, a study guide, for those wanting to tap into yoga's full potential and discover all the inner resources necessary to live a





meaningful and happy life. *Mindfulness Yoga* also is an admirable bridge-building effort, which will help bring together the now artificially separated camps of Hindu yoga and Buddhist yoga practitioners East and West. This eminently practical work clearly demonstrates the large area of overlap between these two traditions, though without brushing aside the significant theoretical and practical differences that undoubtedly exist. As such, this book belongs to the most sensitive “interfaith,” “interreligious,” or, as I would put it, “intertraditional” dialogue and contributes to mutual understanding and tolerance between Hinduism and Buddhism. What makes it so valuable is that its author’s perspective is solidly informed by his sincere personal practice of both Buddhist yoga (notably mindfulness practice) and Hindu yoga (notably posture practice and breath control). Whatever conflict people imagine exists between these two great yogic approaches, Frank Jude’s life and his writings show that it is possible to integrate them and benefit from their combined strength.

Mindfulness Yoga dispels a number of misconceptions about both Buddhist and Hindu yoga and contains down-to-earth advice for practitioners of either tradition. By showing that mindfulness can (and should) be applied to all yogic practices, including hatha yoga postures, Frank Jude has succeeded in building a bridge between “heady” meditation practice and “body-driven” hatha yoga. He appreciates that we are neither disembodied spirits hovering above the physical body nor soulless material vehicles, but rather a wondrous dynamic between both levels of reality. Refreshingly he also includes in his consideration the widely misunderstood but vital dimension of feeling. Neither Buddhist yoga nor Hindu yoga seeks, as often mistakenly thought, to eliminate feelings and turn practitioners into hollow robots. Rather both approaches aim at mastery over the mind, including feelings, by awakening the witnessing faculty within us. In his pioneering work on yoga, Mircea Eliade, the great twentieth-century historian of religion, remarked that the notion of the witness was India’s greatest discovery. I agree but would add the yogic teaching of compassion toward all beings as an equally important and essential correlate. The call for compassion is present in both Buddhism and Hinduism.

Throughout Frank Jude’s book, the creative interplay between witnessing (articulated in the practice of mindfulness) and compassion is emphasized or present as a background theme. The witnessing consciousness and the compassionate heart are fundamental features of all integrative forms of genuine yoga. Together they make us whole.

In conclusion, Frank Jude Boccio’s book should be carefully read both by hatha yoga practitioners, especially those overly fond of physical fitness, strength, and beauty, and by Buddhist

yoga practitioners, particularly those who are ill at ease in their bodies and in the material universe. In fact, *Mindfulness Yoga* should be read by *every* aspiring yoga practitioner.

Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.
Manton, CA
Fall 2003



F O R E W O R D

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TRY WRITING A BOOK if you doubt the reality of interbeing! To acknowledge all the causes and conditions for the appearance of this book would be impossible, but I can hope to single out at least some of those who were indispensable through their words of support and advice, their acts of generosity and kindness, and their mere presence in my life.

Just before Christmas, 2001, the phone rang, and a voice on the other end of the line asked me if I had ever thought of writing a book. That voice was the voice of Josh Bartok, who planted the seed, and helped nurture it throughout these two years. Besides the fact that every suggestion he has made has strengthened the text, his calm voice has eased my first-time writer's anxiety, reminding me to "breathe" more than once! I would also like to offer thanks to Gopa and Ted2, and Wisdom's production director Tony Lulek for a beautiful design, to our models, Gabrielle Long and Robbie Gemmel, and Piemonte Photographers, especially David Stotzer, and to Rod Meade Sperry for getting the word out. I never for a moment doubted that the Wisdom team was truly 100 percent behind this book. But Josh would not ever have heard of me if he hadn't found me through my website (only three months old at the time), which was a gift designed by a student who has become a true Dharma friend, Fortune Elkins.

And Fortune happened to drop in on one of my classes at The Energy Center, in Brooklyn, whose director, Joyce Cossett, and the family of teachers and students have been instru-

mental in supporting my practice over almost a decade of teaching there. I especially wish to thank *all* my students who have allowed me to “experiment” on them and who have been extremely generous and good-natured in their feedback throughout the writing of this book, even those whom I had stand in WARRIOR TWO for five minutes! I wish to make special mention of Liza Toft, who read sections of the manuscript, and Emily Timberlake, Mary Flinn, Adrienne Urbanski, and Victoria Langley who offered much time, effort, and material support. As any filmmaker will tell you, the stuff on the cutting room floor is just as instrumental as what makes the cut in any film’s success. Gina Bassinette and Ami Jayaprada Hirscheim, the directors of Jai Ma Yoga Center in New Paltz, New York, and my students there also offered support and invaluable suggestions.

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My most heartfelt gratitude and acknowledgment goes to my parents, Theresa and Louis Boccio, who have consistently offered me unconditional love and support. There have been plenty of times in my life I am sure they had no idea what I was up to, but their love and support never wavered. And also to my daughter, Janah Terese, who has patiently taught me how to be a dad, and who has given me the opportunity to know what it feels like to love unconditionally. And to my wife, Paula Hanke, a phenomenal singer, a wonderful yoga teacher, a great friend, and thanks to her taking over so many of the household chores while I wrote this book, a really good cook! I love you all.

And finally, I was always suspect of the humility on display when authors gave all the credit for the good stuff to others and took upon themselves all blame for the mistakes. Now that I have actually written a book, I see that they have only stated the truth. Whatever is good

and useful in this book comes through the Dharma, which belongs to no one, and for which no one can take credit. Whatever is in error, unskillful, or confused is solely my responsibility.

May whatever merit generated by this work be shared equally with all beings throughout the world.

Om Tat Sat.

Frank Jude Boccio
Tillson, New York
Winter 2004



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

FIRST, WHETHER YOU ALREADY PRACTICE YOGA or mindfulness meditation, please read through the Introduction and all of Parts One and Two.

In Part One I present a bit of the historical and philosophical context within which the Buddha lived and taught, as well as a brief overview of his teachings and how they relate to the classical yoga of Patanjali.

Part Two examines the basic meditation technique taught by the Buddha, most commonly known as mindfulness meditation. Included are some basic instructions as well as suggestions about how to establish a practice (even experienced practitioners may find them useful). Last, I briefly introduce the two *suttas* (the Pali form of the Sanskrit *sutra*), or discourses, that contain the Buddha's teaching on mindfulness practice, one of which, the *Anapanasati Sutta* (Awareness of Breathing Sutra) is the main text that will shape our approach to yoga asana practice in Part Three.

The heart of the Mindfulness Yoga practice is in Part Three, where four chapters offer an analysis of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and asana sequences with which to practice.

The appendices that follow the main body of the text contain an essay on the Seven Factors of Awakening, the whole of the *Anapanasati Sutta* and a description of the Seated Meditation Postures. Finally, the Notes provide references to the sources that have informed this book and my approach. I also supply a list of Suggested Resources for further study and inspiration.

SOME WORDS ABOUT THE ASANAS

THE SEQUENCES PRESENTED in Part Three are all designed as appropriate for mixed-levels practice. Beginners may find some of the individual asanas (postures) challenging. If they encounter real physical limitations, they may either practice the modifications provided or skip particular asanas altogether until they advance in their practice. Experienced practitioners may work at longer holdings or in a more vigorous way, and even practice more advanced asanas, while keeping within the framework of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

In the asana sequences, you will find detailed photographs and instruction, including modifications, for each yoga asana. These are just a few of the thousands of postures that can be practiced, yet they include many of the most basic, foundational postures that yogis and yoginis explore and work with throughout their life. I must have practiced TRIANGLE thousands of times in my life, yet still find so much to learn about myself—my body, my mind, and their relationship—each time I enter into it. One of my first yoga teachers would remind us that each time we do a posture can be like the first time if we are truly practicing yoga—the practice of being present in the moment.

If you want to practice more advanced postures, you may want to look into some of the books or videos recommended in the Suggested Resources list, but I would suggest you attend yoga classes to learn from competent teachers. But remember, the only reasons you may want to do more advanced postures is to give yourself a bit more of a physical challenge, and out



of a sense of exploration and fun! You will find that most of the more advanced postures basically build upon and develop what you will find in the more basic postures included here. And even very experienced and adept yogis have found these basic postures challenging indeed when practiced as meditations according to the instructions offered in the *Anapanasati Sutta*.

While proper alignment is important, this is not a book about the subtleties of alignment, so what you will find are basic descriptions of the fundamental movements within which you can work and explore for yourself. The approach taken here is less about the performance or form of the asana than about the exploration of experience and the contents, quality, and activity of experience. Trust yourself to bring the asana into manifestation, rather than attempting to force yourself into some structural ideal. As you continue to practice, you will discover more and more about the asana and about yourself. Many books and videos address asanas from a more detailed physical approach, and some of them are listed in the Suggested Resources.

Many yoga asanas are asymmetrical. When I instruct to repeat on the other side, just substitute the word left for right and vice versa in the instructions. I usually suggest timing by breaths, but of course we all have different breathing rhythms, so you will note a wide range in the suggestions. The most important thing is to spend about the same time on each side when doing asymmetrical postures and to use the suggestions as a guideline to the relative lengths of holding in the various postures.

I encourage you to work, or perhaps more accurately, *play*, and be *engaged* in, the postures as a curious child explores her surroundings. Sometimes when practicing postures we feel pain. Pain, like other sensations, can be our teacher. Again, approach pain with respect and an attitude of inquiry. Much of our suffering is a result of our avoidance of pain. Our practice is to observe our resistance to feeling pain, and learn ways to soften that resistance. Through this practice we learn that much of our pain is merely discomfort with the way things are. One thing we learn through practice is to more accurately sense what is real pain and what is discomfort.

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Of course, yoga is not an activity of masochism or stoicism, and we need to be mindful of pain that can be injurious. With experience you will become more aware of the distinction between discomfort and the kind of pain that is potentially injurious. Back off whenever in doubt, and then gently explore your edges. Even if you choose to back off in the posture, it will be coming from awareness rather than mere reactivity.

A WORD ABOUT WORDS



THE LANGUAGE OF YOGA is Sanskrit, and the languages of Buddhadharma are primarily Pali and Sanskrit. Pali is an Indian dialect derived from Sanskrit, in which the canonical texts of the Theravada school of Buddhism are written. Some scholars assert that it may have been the dialect of the capital city of Magadha and the language of the Buddha. However, evidence of Magadhi inscriptions show considerable differences from Pali.

Be that as it may, the two suttas that form the basis of this work were originally written in Pali and are core teachings of the Theravada school of Buddhism. The difficulty is that in the West, most Buddhadharma words that are familiar are from the Sanskrit, such as *sutra*, *Dharma*, and *nirvana*, while some are more familiar in Pali, such as *vipassana* and *metta*.

Occasionally, when I introduce a term from either Sanskrit or Pali, I will also give the corresponding word from the other language. Throughout the text I will use whatever word is most commonly known in the West unless it refers to a specific text. No diacritical marks have been used since this is not a scholarly work. But in the Suggested Resources section those of you who wish to pursue this aspect of study and practice will find a list of scholarly works.



INTRODUCTION

IT WAS 1976. I was twenty years old, my daughter was two, and my marriage was already showing signs of distress. I hated my job. Someone I knew suggested I take a yoga class to relax and unwind.

I left my first yoga class feeling more calm, centered, and relaxed than I could ever remember. I felt open, spacious, light. The room had felt somehow womblike. The incense, subdued lighting, shag carpet (this was the 70s, after all), and Indian music conspired to create a space where I could settle down and shed my armor. The yoga teacher was a beautiful hippie woman who emanated an aura comprising equal parts earth mother and sex goddess. I was sure I had found heaven on earth.

I began to take at least two classes a week, and often more than that. Leaving work at four in the afternoon, I'd take the train uptown for class. Afterward, I'd take the Number Seven train to Flushing, Queens, where my family and I lived at the time. After only a few weeks of this routine, I began to notice that while I left the yoga class feeling the divine bliss of heaven, by the time I got off the train in Flushing, I was back in my own private hell. In fact, the bliss I was feeling in yoga class seemed ever more remote and alien to the rest of my life. Even after I had started to practice the postures and breathing exercises at home, I continued to find that whenever I wasn't "doing yoga," the peacefulness I felt while practicing continued to elude me.

Around this time, while browsing in a local bookstore, I came across *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki. I had read a little about Buddhism in high school, mostly in



the works of Alan Watts, D. T. Suzuki, and Christmas Humphreys. Intellectually, I was struck by the directness, the simplicity, and its almost scientific, empiricist perspective.

A student of the natural sciences who considered himself an atheist, I warmed to Buddhism. It presented itself as a religion that was nontheistic, psychologically sophisticated, and refreshingly undogmatic. I was particularly struck by how the Buddha himself told his followers not to simply accept what they may have been told by teachers (including himself), nor to believe what they read in any scriptures, unless they themselves could verify it. Instead, he advised them to practice certain “useful means,” and see for themselves if those tools worked. If what they discovered agreed with what the wise taught, if it led to a more harmonious life free from suffering, then they should accept that truth and live in accord with it. If they found the practices the Buddha taught diminished suffering, they should continue them. And conversely, if they discovered that certain behavior leads to harm and ill, they should abandon that behavior.

But it wasn't until I discovered *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, with Suzuki Roshi's open, frank, and warmly honest visage on the back cover and clear words within, that I was moved to take up Dharma practice. My initial study of the Buddhadharma was in the Japanese Soto tradition. What I learned in the zendo, first through lectures and Dharma talks and later through my zazen practice, began a subtle process of transformation that seems almost miraculous to me now.

And yet, at the time, I was finding myself in an awkward position. My fellow students at the ashram where I studied and practiced yoga were puzzled by my attraction to Buddhism, because “those dour Buddhists only ever talk about suffering,” while my Dharma brothers and sisters looked askance at my yoga practice and referred to yogis and yoginis as bliss addicts, bliss-heads, or similarly derisive terms.

I could see how each group might well perceive the other the way they did, without either view being the complete picture. I saw for myself that they not only complemented each other but, at a more fundamental level, were essentially not that different.

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For thirteen years I was a mere dabbler. Then, as the result of my pain and suffering when yet another relationship came to its devastating end, I renewed and recommitted to my practice and study of yoga and Dharma. After six more years, I was certified in yoga teaching and yoga therapy, and in the same year I formally took refuge and the five precepts with the Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh.



By 1995 I was growing familiar with other Buddhist practitioners who were “doing yoga,” while at the same time many in the yoga world were looking to Buddhism for their meditation teachings and practice. But it seemed to me there was something missing in the way most of them were viewing practice. Rather than seeing how they could be integrated into one comprehensive practice, most people seem to see yoga and Buddhadharma as separate, perhaps with yoga as merely preparatory to the “real work” of meditation, or meditation as somehow just about the mind and not relevant to how we work with the body in yoga.

Of course, the problem here is the very common misunderstanding of what yoga really is. In the West, yoga has become associated with the practice of the postures (*asanas*) taught in yoga classes, yet postures are only a part of the yoga tradition—and ironically, a relatively minor one at that! Even groups that one might imagine should know better foster this misunderstanding. I recently received a brochure from a large and renowned yoga center. Among their offerings are courses called “Yoga and Zen” and “Yoga and Meditation.” While it may be legitimate to call a course “Yoga and Zen” since they are two distinct cultural traditions (although in my interpretation zazen is a form of Buddhist yoga), differentiating between yoga and meditation misstates what yoga is. And when one reads the course description, we see that yoga is described purely as asana practice, “opening and strengthening the body,” while meditative awareness can “enhance your yoga practice.” In my opinion, born of my own direct experience and of my study, if meditative awareness is lacking, you may be exercising the body, but you are not engaging the real practice of yoga. I would hazard that in a very real way, ultimately, one doesn’t “do yoga” at all, but rather one *is* yoga or *is in* yoga—or one is not.

Shortly, in Chapter one, I will present some of the historical context relating to the development of yoga and Buddhadharma, but for now I would like to address two central points. First, my assertion that Buddhist practice itself is a form or cultural tradition of yoga, within the larger Indic yoga tradition. Second, my presentation of a Buddhist meditational approach to yoga-asana practice.

To begin, let’s take a look at the word *yoga*. Like many Sanskrit words, it is rich in connotation and meaning. It comes from the root *yuj*, which means “to yoke or harness.” In fact, the English word *yoke* derives from the Sanskrit, and both connotations of that word can be seen in the way the word *yoga* has been applied. *Yoga* has been used to mean “union,”



“sum,” “conjunction,” and similar terms of joining. By extension, it came to be used to signify spiritual endeavor, especially as regarding the disciplining of the mind and senses. This particular usage dates back as far as the second millennium B.C.E.

From etymology alone we can tentatively state that yoga is both the spiritual endeavor to achieve union, and the state of union itself. This, of course, leads us to the obvious, and perhaps more fundamental question: Union of what and with what? What is it that needs to be united?

According to some of the earliest yogic texts, what are united are the conscious subject and its mental object. This (apparent) merging of subject and object is known in yogic literature (and in Buddhist literature as well) as the state of *samadhi*, which itself literally means “placing or putting together.” Looking deeply into this explanation, we see that what occurs in yoga or *samadhi* is ultimately the transcendence of the (perceived) separation between subject and object. Yoga is thus both the technology and the state of self-transcendence. How transcendence is interpreted, and the choice of technology used for its realization, have led to the multifarious number of schools, lineages, and forms within the larger yoga tradition.

I have placed the words *apparent* and *perceived* in parentheses in the preceding paragraph as a semaphore signaling my particular interpretation of yoga and *samadhi*. Some schools of thought see yoga as the “real” union of an individual self estranged from ultimate reality. Others see the self and all phenomena as *maya*, or illusory. And some assert that there can ultimately be no real union that needs to be attained because the separation is merely delusory, and yoga is the waking up to what has always been our true nature. And of course, what that true nature *is* has been given a variety of names, from the apparently contradictory Atman, understood as the “transcendental Self” beyond the realm of the mind and senses, and Brahman, which means “vast expanse” and came to be understood as “the Absolute” and identical with Atman, to Buddhanature (*buddhata*), the “true, immutable, and eternal” nature of all beings, which is understood to be identical with *shunyata*, the Sanskrit word meaning, challengingly, “emptiness” or “the void.” Interestingly, this Buddhanature is also said to be beyond conception and imagination.

From this extended meaning, we get yoga as a generic term for the enormous body of spiritual teachings and techniques that have developed in India over at least five millennia. It is in this sense that the Buddha’s teachings can legitimately be called yoga. The Buddha taught that the false identification with our perceived self is the source of anguish and pain, and that



through a variety of practices we can transcend this perceived separation and achieve the cessation of suffering, or *nirvana* (*nibbana* in Pali). It might also be noted that the Buddhist traditions historically closest to the Indian sources, such as the Theravada and Tibetan, often refer to their practitioners as *yogis* and *yoginis* (male and female yoga practitioners). But all those who practice Zen or other Buddhist practices can equally and legitimately be seen as yoga practitioners.

Confusion arises when we look at the more restricted use of *yoga* to signify one of the six orthodox traditions or systems of “philosophy.” The Sanskrit word that I translate here as philosophy, *darshana*, actually means “direct vision or sight.” This points to the fact that rather than being a mere intellectual pursuit, the Indian emphasis has always been on a direct apprehension of truth. As orthodox “viewpoints,” these six philosophical systems all base their authority on the ancient Vedic literature of India.

As such, when we speak of *yoga* as one of the *darshanas*, we are speaking of what may formally be called classical *yoga*, propounded by the great sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutra* sometime around the second century C.E. (Some scholars argue for the earlier date of circa 200 B.C.E.) Classical *yoga* may also be referred to as *ashtanga* (eight-limbed) *yoga* or *raja* (royal) *yoga*.

Interestingly, while most forms of *yoga* (preclassical and postclassical) tend toward nondualist thinking, Patanjali’s classical *yoga*, allied as it is with the dualistic school of Samkhya Darshana, is itself dualistic. Patanjali asserts a strict bifurcation between spirit (*purusha*) and nature or matter (*prakriti*). In this system, there seem to be innumerable *purushas*, and the basic thrust of his teaching and practice as found in the *Yoga Sutra* is for the practitioner to cultivate the discernment (*viveka*) between the transcendent *purusha* and all that is “not self” (*anatman*); this includes the entire psychophysical organism, which belongs to the realm of *prakriti*. (It should be noted that Patanjali is using *anatman* slightly differently than Buddhist texts use it.)

So here, ironically, *yoga* becomes the *separation and withdrawal* from phenomenal or relative reality until the *yogini* recovers her true self. In fact, commentaries on the *Yoga Sutra* have said (in what sounds, misleadingly, like a Zen koan) that “*yoga* is *viyoga*”—union is separation!

Whether we choose to adhere to the metaphysics of Patanjali’s system or not, this procedure of discernment, or *viveka*, is used even by nondualist schools of thought in *yoga*,



Vedanta, and in Buddhism. Thus even for nondual Buddhists, study of the dualistic *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali can be richly rewarding. Additionally, many in the Vedantic and tantric traditions claim that Patanjali was offering only a model for practice and teaching rather than a freestanding ontology.

Fluidity of interpretation, and tolerance for contradiction and paradox, are strong factors found in all yoga teaching.

So, after all this, you may be wondering where the postures come into the picture. As I mention above, for the larger part of the history of yoga practice, the postures we know and practice today played little or even no part. Even in the *Yoga Sutra*, only three of its 195 aphorisms relate to asana, and these state that asana is stable and easeful, practiced by relaxing effort and leading to the overcoming of the “pairs of opposites” such as heat/cold and pain/pleasure.

What is clear from this and other early texts is that the asana that is being discussed here is the seated meditation posture. For Patanjali, asana is an aid in developing sense withdrawal and deep concentration leading to meditation. In fact, the word *asana* itself means “seat,” and originally referred to that which the yogin sat upon. So you see, whenever you take your seat in meditation you are, quite literally, practicing yoga!

Over time, and under the influence of tantric teachings—which view the body as the vehicle through which awakening can occur rather than seeing the body as an obstacle to awakening—a form of yoga developed that emphasized working with the body in order to perfect it as a basis for self-realization. This *hatha* yoga (literally, “forceful yoga,” so called because of its emphasis on discipline and its dynamic quality of practice, as well as its concern with awakening *kundalini-shakti*, the divine feminine life force that is said to sleep coiled at the base of the spine) evolved the myriad postures that have become so popular in the West.

Even from the first, however, there were sages who warned against emphasizing the postures at the expense of meditation, for this could lead to even further identification with the physical organism and the development of overweening pride, envy, and frustration. Sadly, even before coming to the West, this tendency to exaggerate asana practice led some sages to warn, as in the *Garuda-Purana* (a tenth-century text whose author is not known), that “the techniques of posture do not promote yoga. Though called essentials, they all retard one’s progress.”

Today, in America and the West, all too frequently yoga has been reduced to mere asanas. Go to most yoga classes, and there is little if any meditation, let alone discussion of the larger context in which to engage asana practice. When I first began my study of yoga, there was no real meditation instruction. Though asana was nominally seen as preparation for meditation, we never seemed to get around to meditating.

The Buddha taught that we should cultivate meditative awareness in each of four positions or “postures” which are meant to represent all the activities of life: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. And how we do this is by maintaining mindful awareness of all we do and of all that arises. It is living in the “eternal now,” keeping what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “our appointment with life,” which is ever in the present moment.

The Buddha gave detailed mindfulness meditation instruction in two major discourses, the *Anapanasati* (Awareness of Breathing) and *Satipatthana* (Establishment of Awareness) sutras. In Chapter Six, I will introduce these sutras and show how they support each other, and how through specific exercises the Buddha has offered us, we can practice asana as mindfulness meditation.

When we approach yoga-asana in this way, as described in Part Three, we can achieve transformative and healing insight, and we can even free ourselves from much of our limiting and destructive patterns of thought and behavior. The Buddha assures us that practicing the awareness of breathing will lead to success in practicing the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, which in turn, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to an abiding within the Seven Factors of Awakening. These factors will in turn give rise to understanding and the full liberation of the mind.

But don't take his word (or mine) for it. Practice and see for yourself!



MANY YOGAS

Yoga's roots can be seen in the *Vedas*, the most ancient of India's texts that are accepted as revealed scripture by devout Hindus. Dating from as early as the fourth millennium B.C.E., the Vedas are considered eternal, uncreated and incontestable—though subject to many various interpretations. From these earliest beginnings, yoga has always had as its aim the practice of disciplined introspection or meditative focusing directed at the transcendence of the egoic self. At first, much of the meditative focusing centered on the performance of sacrificial rituals. With the rise of the Upanishads and the Upanishadic yoga practice that evolved over many centuries, the meditative focus began to turn inward, and the sacrifice became metaphorical and internal rather than explicit and external.

Ironically, for a word that means “union,” the tradition of yoga has never been unified. From the first, there have been many schools and approaches. Views and practices differ even among teachers within a single school. Sometimes the various teachings contradict each other. So when we speak of yoga, we speak of a multitude of yogic paths and orientations—and even apparently different goals, though all say their goal is liberation. And this is as it should be, because there are many different kinds of personalities, proclivities, and stations in life among those who are called to practice yoga. The Buddha himself is reputed to have said that there are 84,000 Dharma gates—practices for attaining liberation.

However, despite the diversity within the yoga tradition, all approaches agree on at least one thing—that the world as it seems is not the world as it is, and that there is a very real need for “self-transcendence,” for going beyond the limited human personality with its reactivity and constricted habit patterns, in order to awaken to the truth of reality as it is. What is different from school to school or tradition to tradition is the way this transcendence or awakening is accomplished and how it is conceptualized.

Within the larger yoga tradition, which from the perspective I take includes the teachings of the Buddha, the Jaina (as practitioners of Jainism are properly called), sage Mahavira, as well as the variety of yoga approaches within the cultural realm of Hinduism, we see several main forms of yoga that have gained prominence: bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga, raja yoga, mantra yoga, and tantra

yoga. Also extant are hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, and laya yoga, which are all closely related, although often mentioned as independent schools; further, the three can be seen as influenced and perhaps even derived from tantra yoga.

Bhakti yoga is often called the path of devotion, and its practitioners most often conceive of the Transcendental Absolute in personal terms. Some practitioners adhere to a dualistic approach and prefer to see the Divine as Other. Others seek to merge the self with the Divine by repeatedly annihilating the illusion of the distinct ego-personality until the Divine is realized as the only reality there is. This is the path, it is said, for those of a more emotional bent, and among their main practices is *kirtan*, the chanting of devotional songs.

Karma yoga is the yoga of action, but specifically the kind of action that is done with a certain inner attitude—the attitude of “selfless service”—that is itself a form of mental action. (The word *karma* means simply “action.”) To act, to do what one’s duty dictates with no regard to the outcome, is the practice of a karma yogin. This egoless action is akin to the “actionless action” taught in Taoism and is highly praised by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In a very real sense, this mental posture is the basic asana practice of the *karma yogin*.

Jnana yoga is the yoga of knowledge, which has become almost a synonym for Vedanta, the Hindu tradition of nondualism that seeks realization through the discernment of the real from the unreal. It is said to use the mind to go beyond the mind. A modern example is the great sage Ramana Maharshi, who taught his students to practice by continually asking, “Who am I?” This technique is similar to the koan practice of Rinzai Zen.

Raja yoga, or royal yoga, refers specifically to the yoga system of Patanjali. It was originally used to distinguish Patanjali’s eightfold path, emphasizing meditation, from the relatively younger hatha yoga. I will have more to say about this form of yoga later in the book.

Mantra yoga is a form of yoga that utilizes the power of sound to affect consciousness. The esoteric meaning of the word *mantra* is “that which protects the mind” from itself by leading to salvation through the concentration of the mind on an empowered sound. In one of this school’s most sacred texts, sixteen “limbs” of practice are mentioned, including devotion, posture, meditation, and samadhi.

Tantra yoga began as a pan-Indian movement, arising as a response to the world-weary or life-denying tendencies that had arisen within the yoga practices of both the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Despite the nondual teachings of the Buddha and of the Upanishads, the habit of dualistic thinking had led to a denigration of this world in favor of the Absolute. The tantric practitioner asked, If there is truly only one Reality, why must there be a struggle to realize it? Why must spiritual practice be





framed as a battle? Why do we need to abandon the pleasure of the body and of this world in order to realize the Absolute?

Hatha yoga arose from this tantric approach as an independent school, focused on perfecting the body in order to more fully enjoy the bliss of transcendent realization. Enlightenment is seen as a whole-body event, and so the practices of *hatha yoga* embody the ideal of tantra: to live in the world out of the fullness of realization rather than to withdraw from the world in order to gain enlightenment. Of course, while its psychospiritual practices of *pranayama* (breath control) and *asana* were to be seen within this context of realization, some practitioners sacrifice their spiritual aspirations and degenerate into ego-driven practice. Because some *hatha yogins* have become caught in the trap of narcissism, *hatha yoga* got a bad reputation with some scholars. Unfortunately, ego-driven practice does indeed seem to be a trap that is all too easy to fall into—especially in our body-conscious society. And yet, the benefits of *hatha yoga* practice are not to be underestimated.

MANY HATHAS

Hatha yoga, the most popular *yoga* in the West, emphasizes the postures that in most people's minds have become synonymous with *yoga*. The esoteric meaning of *hatha* is that *ha* signifies the sun and *tha* the moon. *Hatha yoga* is therefore the *yoga* that unifies the power of the sun and the moon—the male and the female energies within all of us.

Any of the popular *yogas* that utilize postures are a form or style of *hatha yoga*. *Iyengar yoga* is a form of *hatha yoga* that has been inspired by the towering figure of B.K.S. *Iyengar*. *Power yoga*, *Ash-tanga yoga*, *Kripalu yoga*, *Anusara yoga*, *Integral yoga*, *Sivananda yoga*, and all the others are merely different stylistic approaches to *hatha yoga*. A form of *hatha yoga* that emphasizes following the Buddha's teachings of mindfulness can easily be called *mindfulness yoga* or *Buddha yoga*.

The benefits of *hatha yoga* practice are many and have been quite extensively propounded. Briefly, *asanas* work on all levels and systems of the body, strengthening the body while creating greater flexibility and ease of movement. *Asana* practice is said to purify or cleanse the body, promote healthy digestion and elimination, balance hormones, and calm the nerves. With the application of concentrated awareness, deep emotional and mental habits can be seen into, and self-understanding and transformation can be cultivated.





PART ONE

PUTTING IT IN CONTEXT



THE BUDDHA'S YOGA

THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE, we are now beginning to understand that the Indus/Sarasvati civilization, located in the northwest of the subcontinent of what is modern-day India, prospered as far back as 6500 B.C.E. and reached its maturity between 3100 B.C.E. and 1900 B.C.E. It was apparently a complex civilization: technically proficient, using wheeled carts and boats and a decimal-based measurement system which, among other things, has revealed a remarkable ability to accurately measure weights. Further, there were baths in most homes which were connected to a public drainage system having brick-lined sewers fitted with manholes. Only the Romans, over two thousand years later, had a comparable system. It has been conjectured, based upon the ordered geometric plan of the towns (all quite similar to each other although spread out over an area larger than the ancient civilizations of Sumer, Assyria and Egypt combined—over 300,000 square miles) that this Indic civilization was governed by a conservative priestly elite.

Cultural artifacts left behind by this great civilization—including terracotta seals depicting a variety of figures reminiscent of later Hinduism—suggest that they already practiced a rudimentary form of what we now know as yoga. One featuring a male divinity surrounded by animals, has been thought to be an early depiction of Lord Shiva, the archetypal yogin known as the Lord of the Beasts. They also apparently worshipped a Great Mother or earth goddess figure, as indicated by a ceramic depicting a female from whose womb is growing a plant. Other objects depict images relating to the male and female generative symbols still utilized



in tantric practices. Certain trees and animals were sacred to them. One such tree had particular importance: the pipal tree, which many years later would be revered by others as the Bodhi Tree, the tree under which Siddhartha Gautama would sit when he achieved enlightenment, becoming the Buddha.

The religious and philosophical teachings of this civilization were recorded orally as the *Vedas* (which literally means the “knowledges”), which are still considered by devout Hindus as revealed scripture. Recent research suggests that the earliest of the *Vedas* date from between the fifth and fourth millennia B.C.E.

By 1900 B.C.E. the great Sarasvati River had dried up and many of the cities along its banks were abandoned. The center of the Vedic civilization shifted east to the fertile banks of the Ganges. This disruption and dislocation led to great social changes, including the arising of a professional priestly class. These Brahmins and their commentaries on the *Vedas*, which are called the *Brahmanas* (a name also used for the Brahmins themselves), gave rise to a religion referred to as, perhaps not surprisingly, Brahmanism.

In what may have been an attempt to solidify their superior position in society, a caste system evolved with Brahmin priests occupying the top of the social hierarchy, along with senior officials and counselors to kings. Next were the Kshatriyas, the ruling and warrior class, followed below them by the Vaisyas, the emerging merchant class. The lowest class, the Sudras, consisted of common laborers akin to serfs. A group considered so low that they were outside the caste system, or “outcastes,” were the Panchamas.

This caste system, along with the ever more particular and ritualized practice of the Brahmins, had the effect of removing the Brahmanic faith from the lived experience of the majority at the bottom of the social ladder. From as early as 1500 to 1000 B.C.E., others began to expand and develop the ideas of Brahmanism from an outwardly focused ritualized system based upon the fire ceremony, and even animal sacrifice, into a more internalized form of spiritual practice. From this movement arose the earliest of the Upanishads.

The word *upanishad* means “sitting near” (as one does to one’s teacher) and refers to the fact that Upanishadic teachings were delivered directly from teacher to disciple by word of mouth. While they are quite diverse in their teachings, as Georg Feuerstein notes in his wonderful text, *The Yoga Tradition*, we can see the prominence of four closely related themes: (1) that the transcendental core of one’s being, the *Atman*, is identical with the transcendent ground of being itself, *Brahman*; (2) the doctrine of reincarnation, sometimes called

“repeated embodiment” (*punar-janman*) or, in the earlier Upanishads, “repeated death” (*punar-mrityu*); (3) the doctrine of *karma*, which means “action” and refers to the moral force of one’s acts, intentions, and words; it is a doctrine of moral causality that sees causal retribution as akin to what modern science would call a law of nature; and (4) the idea that the law of karma is not fatalistic: karma can be transcended, and reincarnation ended, through spiritual practices such as renunciation and meditation. By the time of the Yoga-Upanishads, written after Patanjali, many of them as late as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the common era, the practical approach to liberation became synonymous with yoga.

By the time of the Buddha’s birth, most often given as 563 B.C.E., the Brahmin priesthood had become a rigid, often quite corrupt, and exclusivist society. For example, while the original castes were not hereditary, by the time of the Buddha’s birth they had acquired a sacred significance and justification. They were seen to mirror the order of the cosmos, and thus had become immutable. No longer was there the possibility of social mobility. Those at the bottom of the social ladder, who no doubt yearned for a spiritual teaching that would speak to them, were denied instruction in Brahmanism and kept apart from the higher castes, and in this way the Brahmanic faith was entirely removed from their lived experience. At the same time, the ideas expressed in the Upanishads were filtering out into the wider intellectual community. A movement of wandering ascetics arose as an alternative to the strict ritualism of the Brahmanas. Some of these wanderers were even of Brahmin origin and were called *paribbajakas*, meaning “wanderers” whether or not their practice was orthodox (based upon the Vedas). But an even larger group, the *shramanas* (*samanas* in Pali) meaning “strivers,” made up of members from the other castes, followed a wide variety of heterodox practices.

Living ascetic lives, these shramanas moved from town to town, village to village, subsisting on alms and free from family ties, in order to practice contemplation, expound their theories, and investigate through questioning and debate among themselves and others. The Jains, a still extant religion in India, originated as a shramana group. Another, even larger and more popular religion worldwide also had its start as a shramana group: Buddhism.

Siddhartha Gautama was born into the Kshatriya class, the son of a raja, a king, and as such, he enjoyed a privileged position. Despite his luxurious lifestyle, the young Siddhartha felt discontented. Knowing that life was ephemeral, that he was subject to old age, sickness, and



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death, he could not rest easy in his mind. Finally, it was the sight of a shramana one day that inspired Siddhartha to pursue the spiritual path. Seeing how calm, quiet, and peaceful the shramana seemed, the young prince thought to himself, “Maybe he knows. Maybe this is the way. Maybe in this way I shall find an answer to the problems that are tormenting me.”

Spurred on by this insight, Siddhartha made what has come to be called the Great Renunciation, leaving behind his family and the luxuries of the palace to enter upon the homeless life. The Bodhisattva (as the Buddha is referred to before his enlightenment), eager to seek liberation, first went to study with the shramana sage Alara Kalama. An eager student, Siddhartha quickly grasped the intellectual doctrine espoused by Alara Kalama, but he was not content with this and so inquired after the meditational state on which the teachings were based. He was told that this was the “sphere of nothingness,” a deep state attained through yogic concentration in which the mind goes beyond any apparent object and dwells in the “thought” of nothingness. Soon enough, Siddhartha learned how to enter into this state, and Alara Kalama offered him joint leadership of his community; but he turned down the offer, feeling that, while he had attained a refined inner calmness, he had not reached the enlightenment he sought, he had not yet brought an end to suffering:

“I thought: ‘This teaching does not lead to dispassion, to fading of lust, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to nibbana, but only to the base consisting of nothingness. I was not satisfied with that teaching. I left to pursue my search.’”

Gautama sought out another teacher, Uddaka Ramaputta, but his experience with this teacher was similarly disappointing, except that from Uddaka he learned the still higher yogic attainment of the “sphere of neither perception nor nonperception.” Of this state, he later said:

Even when one has reached the level of neither perception nor nonperception, although there is then liberation from form and from formlessness, there is still something left over—the thing that has been liberated from them, a watcher of “neither perception nor nonperception.” As long as such a watcher, which some call a soul, remains, though one may momentarily be secluded from the cycle of suffering, the watcher remains as a seed of rebirth. As soon as the situation changes, rebirth easily takes place again. This is just what happens now when I get up from meditating. No matter how profound my absorption, after a short time I get caught

up again in the world of the senses. The basic causes and conditions for rebirth have not been extinguished! Complete liberation has not been achieved. Enlightenment must still be sought!

However elevated and subtle the state of consciousness became as a result of these meditations, these states could not be nirvana for at least two reasons. In coming out of the meditations, Siddhartha found himself still subject to craving, aversion, and delusion. He had not been permanently transformed by the meditative experience and had attained no lasting peace. Nirvana, by definition, was not temporary, but eternal.

He also questioned how any such altered state of consciousness could be equated with nirvana, “the unborn, the unconditioned, the uncreated,” when he was well aware that he had in fact created this experience, this altered state of consciousness, through his yogic prowess.

Reading these words of the Buddha, many have come to the conclusion that as a result of his experiences with these two teachers of what apparently was Samkhya yoga and Upanishadic thought, the Buddha rejected yoga and its means. Yet, in fact, he would incorporate these meditational states as well as other yogic methods into his own teachings, and he would use these yogic techniques for the rest of his life. As we see from the above passage, however, he could not accept his teachers’ metaphysical interpretation of his meditative experience. His integrity and honesty, as well as the skepticism about metaphysical doctrines that characterizes his teaching throughout his life, would not allow him to accept an interpretation not supported by his experience. So while we see that the Buddha may have rejected traditional yogic *metaphysics*, he can be seen as having been one of India’s greatest yoga *practitioners* in his unwavering commitment to direct realization.

When I first read about the Buddha’s dissatisfaction with the teachings he received, I instantly recognized the similarity to my own experience—how wonderfully calm and peaceful I felt after “yoga practice,” and yet how all too soon I fell back into the suffering of craving and aversion—lust and anger. And when I became a yoga teacher, I saw how many students seemed to have similar experiences. They would leave a class blissed out, but as soon as they got “caught up in the world of their senses,” they found themselves back amid their anxious lives—from blissed out to stressed out. So the question arises, How do we stop this apparently ceaseless cycle, this endless emotional and psychological roller coaster? In our very lives



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generally, and in our own practice of yoga specifically, we can see the process of *samsara*, the cyclic process of “birth and death” occur over and over, moment by moment! What to do about it?

Upon leaving Uddaka Ramaputta, Siddhartha set out upon the path of austerities, which some of the forest-dwelling mendicants believed could burn up all negative karma and lead to liberation. After practicing extreme forms of austerities for nearly six years, he found himself close to death but no closer to the liberation he sought. Also, despite the austerities and the mortification he practiced, his body clamored for attention, and he found himself still plagued by craving and aversion. In fact, such austerities seemed to fuel his obsession with the body, much as an anorexic is obsessed with the very body she is seeking to deny.

He began to ask himself if there might not be some other way. And in his pondering, he recalled an incident from his childhood when, as a nine-year-old, he spontaneously entered into meditation. It was during the ritual spring plowing festival, and the young Siddhartha watched how the oxen strained to pull the plow under the hot sun, how the plow, turning the soil, sliced up worms that squirmed and writhed, and how birds swooped down and took the worms in their beaks. With the seed of compassion watered in his heart, the young boy sat in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, and “secluded from sensual desires and from unwholesome things,” entered upon and abode in the first meditation that is accompanied by thinking and exploring, “with the happiness and pleasure born of seclusion.”

All this, years later, Siddhartha recalled, and he thought to himself, “Might this be the way to enlightenment?” And then immediately an answer swelled up from deep inside that said “Yes! This is surely the way to enlightenment!”

This is good news for all of us: we needn’t torture ourselves into liberation, but nirvana is in fact natural to human beings. It is built into the very fabric of our humanity. As a child, untutored in meditation, Siddhartha was able to have intimations of nirvana spontaneously.

Take a moment now to close your eyes and recall the religion you practiced as a child. Not the religion you were tutored in, but the religion *before* religion, when the vast Heaven and the wondrous Earth were truly one. Perhaps it was while lying on your back looking up at the clouds, perhaps it was being enraptured by the waves rushing in and out from the shore, or perhaps it was looking deeply into the veins of a leaf. I can remember times when it rained,

and I'd become absorbed in the wonder of a raindrop making its way down the windowpane. Or another time I observed a beetle make its way around a strawberry plant so intently that the beetle's perspective became my own.

Can you remember what it was like to walk in the midst of a world of miracles? Can you remember ever traveling within a world of pure delight with a joy untainted by craving or aversion? What happened to that world? All yoga, including the Buddha's yoga, is often called "the path of return"—a return to our true home, which we eventually come to see was never really lost.

What the Buddha saw in remembering his childhood experience is that by practicing a yoga of compassion and understanding we can cultivate the innate capacities we all share already, capacities that can lead us to *ceto-vimutti*, a term from the Pali canon meaning the "release of the mind" that is often used as a synonym for enlightenment. We can practice a yoga that leads to the release of the mind from its conditioning and its reactivity, from its leaning away from the moment-to-moment lived experience of our lives.

And furthermore we can and must do this by working *with* our human nature and not by fighting against it or by attempting to suppress it. The practice of the Buddha became one that would cultivate and foster wholesome states of mind such as the equanimous compassion he experienced during his spontaneous meditation under the rose-apple tree. He saw that he needn't be wary of cultivating the pure joy he had experienced as a child, as it had been untainted by any craving, any grasping. He was already beginning to see the necessity for what he would, after his awakening, call the Middle Way between indulgence and asceticism.

The particular technology that he evolved in order to work with his human nature was the cultivation of "mindfulness" (Pali: *sati*; Sanskrit: *smṛiti*), which required the disinterested, nonjudgmental, moment-to-moment observation of behavior, both physical and mental. With mindful awareness, he simply observed his body—its positions, its movements, its various parts, its sensations, and its impermanence; he observed his feelings and emotions, the constant fluctuations of his consciousness, and the way his senses, perceptions, and thoughts related to the external world.

Siddhartha integrated the concentration he had developed with his yoga teachers and applied it to the observation of his body and mind, in order to develop a full awareness of how they worked and how they were conditioned. He did this both to make the fullest positive use of his body and his mind and to free himself entirely from his preconceived notions of how



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his body and mind worked and, more importantly, from his *unawareness* of how their workings conditioned his relationship to the world. He had become convinced that the solutions to the problem of suffering which had propelled him onto his quest lay within himself, or as he said, “within this fathom-long body.” Interestingly, right here at the beginning of the Buddha’s yoga is the seed of the pan-Indic tantric flowering 1,000 years later: for in the interim many practitioners of both Buddhist and Hindu Yoga would become trapped by the perception that the body, rather than being the vehicle of liberation, was in fact an obstacle to freedom.

The practice of mindfulness also allowed him to become ever more acutely aware of the pervasiveness of suffering (Sanskrit: *duhkha*, Pali: *dukkha*) and how the actions of craving, aversion, and ignorance feed suffering. In observing his mental states without identifying with them, without giving into the urgently felt need to express them, but also, just as important, without repressing them—and instead merely getting to know them as they are—it became clear to him that *everything* was impermanent. All was in flux, constantly changing. Nothing lasted—neither the craving for whatever it might be that he craved nor the bliss of meditation itself.

From this description we see that the Buddha’s mindfulness meditation is more “analytic” than some other forms of meditation with which we may be more familiar like mantra or visualization. However, the process the Buddha taught is by no means mere ratiocination. Mindfulness meditation is not discursive thinking but rather, as I will emphasize repeatedly, a form of yoga that allows for a more vivid, immediate *lived* understanding than one would achieve through rational processes.

Along with the practice of mindfulness, the Buddha cultivated the more skillful states of mind as embodied in what he called the Four Immeasurable Minds, which was his reworking of an old yogic teaching called the four *Brahma Viharas* (dwellings of Brahma, or divine abodes). The first is a practice encouraging the cultivation of the expansive feeling of love (Pali: *metta*; Sanskrit: *maitri*) that knows no hatred, and then directing it to all the beings in this world and throughout all worlds, seen and unseen, large and small. The second is the nourishment of a compassion (*karuna*) that contains no sense of separation between the meditator and all who suffer. The third is the cultivation of a joy (*mudita*) that rejoices in the good fortune of others with no thought of oneself. And finally, the fourth is the state of equanimity (Pali: *upekkha*; Sanskrit: *upeksha*) that requires the letting go of the self-centeredness

that looks to other things and people as objects that either benefit or disadvantage oneself. This quality of equanimity is not disinterest or indifference, but instead it is the quality of looking upon all beings equally, favoring none over another.

The enlightenment of the Buddha is described in various discourses and from many different perspectives. The oldest accounts all describe the awakening in fairly sober psychological terms. They most often speak of four meditation states called *jhanas* (Sanskrit: *dhyanas*), culminating in the knowledge of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation.

In the Buddha's words, as recorded in the Pali canon, he "directed, and inclined his mind" to various objects of meditation including the recollection of past lives, the workings of karma, and the understanding of suffering, its causes and how to bring it to an end. The Pali account has his awakening spread out over three "night-watches" (about nine hours), but this could be a more condensed mythic time, and it was more likely spread out over a matter of days or even weeks from the time he gave up his austerities.

And yet, despite the Buddha's own succinct account given to us in the Pali sutras, his awakening has come to be presented as something else altogether, and it has become obfuscated as a mystical experience of transcendent revelation of *the* truth. Unfortunately, many modern writers have described this enlightenment as like a lightning flash. Such flashes of insight happen, but they are not the full awakening described by the Buddha.

The Buddha's awakening took at least nine hours. He himself warned that the "progress is gradual and there is no sudden, spontaneous understanding." Also, the process of awakening was obviously guided by reason, as appears from the literary formula, repeated three times: "I directed my mind to the understanding of..." Siddhartha directed his mind to a deeper understanding of the Upanishadic teachings of reincarnation (which the Buddha would reframe as "rebirth"—*not* the same thing as the traditional Brahmanistic view) and karma. His Four Noble Truths (which I'll address in the next chapter) were based upon the Vedic model of *Ayurveda*, the medical system of ancient India, still practiced today and growing ever more popular in the West.

The Buddha never claimed that his teaching was an original creation. His first three truths would spark no arguments from most of the shramanas of North India, or from the Upanishadic sages. The Fourth Truth, the Path itself, was presented by the Buddha as an ancient path traveled by others in a distant past, that had been forgotten and which he had



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simply rediscovered. He said that his insight was into things “as they really are”: this was not a mere theory or philosophical construct; the path was written into the very structure of reality itself. If there was any “lightning flash,” perhaps it was the sudden intuition of the interconnectedness of these four truths, and that they embodied a method that, *if put into practice*, did indeed lead to liberation.

The answer to how the Buddha’s account may have been transformed into the sheer mysticism of some kind of transcendent revelation of *the* truth may be found in the historical evolution of what the Buddha taught into a religion. The Buddha was not “a Buddhist”—and neither were his original followers. The Buddha discovered Dharma (as opposed to inventing or creating it), and then he taught Dharma. His followers were practitioners of the Dharma. Over time, after his death, religious interpretations overlaid the basic teachings and instructions. Complexity, as so often happens, was reduced to uniformity. Rather than emphasizing the interwoven complex of truths that the Buddha taught as a method of inquiry and practice, emphasis shifted to a single Absolute Truth, perhaps under the influence of Vedantic and Upanishadic teachings. In such a way a soteriological (salvational) teaching and method of practice became a metaphysical epistemology or belief system.

Of course, the Buddha’s awakening was not merely analytic or rational either. It was deeply existential and psychological, as well. Along with the “*Aha!*” experience of the analytical process was the “*Oh!*” experience of intuitive insight. As the modern vipassana teacher S. N. Goenka has pointed out, the Buddha experienced directly what quantum physicists are now realizing about the universe—the insubstantiality (nonself) of matter. The Buddha was liberated by his insight, whereas physicists who merely look outside and quantify reality and stay at the level of intellectual understanding, without internalizing direct realization of what they learn, continue to be miserable.

The Buddha often reiterated that Dharma could not be understood by ratiocination alone, no matter how careful. Dharma revealed its true significance when apprehended directly, and this could only be done through yogic methods and within a moral context. As we shall see, the Four Noble Truths make complete logical sense, but they are not compelling as mere beliefs or propositions of fact. To become really compelling, transformative, and healing, they must be integrated into one’s life. They must be *acted* upon!

To engage the Four Noble Truths, we are asked not to accept them as dogma or doctrine, not to make them into our religion (although there is nothing inherently wrong in hav-

ing Buddhism as your religion), but to internalize and live with them as our Dharma practice—as our *life*. Briefly, in the first Noble Truth, we are asked by the Buddha to *see* dukkha and not turn away from it. We must see for ourselves how we suffer, and rather than try to deny it or distract ourselves from it, open ourselves to experiencing and understanding it.

As for the second truth, the causes of suffering, we need to *see* that the causes and the suffering are ultimately not two. In seeing that the causes and the suffering are not separate, we are challenged to let go of the causes. It is in letting go that we touch the timeless dimension, the “emptiness” so often spoken about, but of which perhaps the less is said the better. The third truth is to *realize* this letting go—this cessation of suffering.

Many of us—perhaps most or even all—at one time or another realize cessation, often spontaneously. Even those who have never heard of the Buddha or of Dharma touch this dimension. It comes as a momentary gap in the clouds, or as an illuminating flash of lightning. And many of us confuse this with total awakening. But the fourth truth—and the whole of the Buddha’s post-enlightenment life—shows us that we need to *cultivate* the Path. Awakening is not something to attain in the far distant future—some future life. Awakening or enlightenment must not be reified into a thing, for it is not a thing but a process; and this process is not other than the Path itself, which is, ultimately, not separate from our very life itself. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, “to be enlightened is to be enlightened about something.”

Debate over whether enlightenment is close or far, sudden or gradual, readily available or only available through supreme effort, has raged for centuries, both within the Buddhist community and among yoga-Vedanta practitioners. For a teaching that epitomizes, in my opinion, the highest and deepest teaching of nonduality, I have often found myself bemused by this dualistic either/or debate. Perhaps, taking a page from Nagarjuna, we can say that it is both/and, neither/nor. We might also ponder this epigrammatic comment of Shunryu Suzuki’s: “Each of you is perfect the way you are...and you can use a little improvement.”



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THE YOGA PRACTICE OF THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

UPON HIS AWAKENING, the Buddha considered not trying to teach what he had realized to others because he felt this Dharma he had discovered was “profound and hard to see, hard to discover...not attainable by mere ratiocination, subtle,” and that it would be difficult for those caught in attachment to see the truth of dependent origination. According to the traditional texts, the god Brahma Sahampati himself beseeched the Buddha to teach the Dharma to humanity. Later texts, however, foregrounded the Buddha’s dilemma as an inner struggle. In the end, the Buddha decided that although teaching the Dharma would indeed be difficult and most people would not understand his teaching, some were troubled enough to search for a resolution to the great matter of birth and death, and among these there would be at least a few who would understand.

The first people he thought he could teach the Dharma to were his two yoga teachers, but they had died. He then resolved to teach the five shramanas in Benares with whom he had practiced austerities for much of his six years on that path. As a group, they had left the Buddha when he began again to eat and take care of his body, thinking he had fallen into indulgence. So when they saw him approaching, they were less than pleased, and they decided among themselves not to pay him any homage.

And yet, as soon as the Buddha arrived, they could not keep themselves from rising and arranging a seat for him, setting out some water, a footstool and a towel, and bowing



to him. They were all moved by the radiance and serenity he exhibited. Despite this, they still found it difficult to believe his pronouncement that he had attained “the Deathless and become fully enlightened” after he had given up his austerity practice and sat under the Bodhi Tree. Finally, in response to their skepticism, he asked them if they had ever known him to lie. The five had to admit that they had not, and consented to listen to what the Buddha had to say.

And what he said has come down to us as one of the most famous of the sutras: *The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma*. In this discourse, the Buddha sets out his teaching as a Middle Way between the extremes of sensual indulgence and asceticism. He called this way the Noble Eightfold Path. It consisted of right view (understanding), right thinking (intention, resolve, aim, aspiration, motive), right speech, right action (conduct), right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness (awareness), and right concentration (meditation, contemplation).

The Buddha then went on to enumerate what could be called his central teaching, upon which all schools of Buddhism, whatever their differences, agree: the Four Noble Truths. And yet, as I mentioned earlier, these truths themselves are based upon the Vedic-based diagnostic model of Ayurveda, namely the four-part formulation consisting of: (1) diagnosis, (2) etiology, (3) prognosis and (4) prescription.

First, there is a diagnosis of an “illness,” which the Buddha called *dukkha*. Then the causes of the illness, *samudaya*, must be determined. Once the diagnosis is complete, the physician has to offer the patient a prognosis, and here the Buddha offered a positive prognosis for the human condition, *nirodha* (cessation). *Dukkha* could be alleviated. Finally, the doctor prescribes a course of treatment, and the Buddha offered the Eightfold Path (Sanskrit: *marga*; Pali: *magga*) as his prescription. Let’s take some time to look a bit deeper into these Noble Truths in order to see their relevance to our yoga practice.

The first Noble Truth is the presence of *dukkha*. This Sanskrit word is most often translated as “suffering,” and when we hear that the Buddha is alleged to have said, “All life is suffering,” we may understandably feel a bit disheartened. But let us look at the original meaning and use of the word at the time of the Buddha. *Dukkha* means “bad” or “wrong space” and was used to describe an axle that was misaligned from the center of a wheel. It was off-center, literally in a bad space. If that wheel were a wheel of a cart, we can imagine the bumpy and disorienting ride we would have. If the wheel were a potter’s wheel, it would be very difficult to give a beautiful and balanced shape to the form we were shaping. Now, when we think of the shape of our own lives and of society, we may feel that the Buddha was onto something!

If we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that for most of us, and for all too much of the time, our lives *do* feel off-center, out of kilter, and at least a bit unsatisfactory. *Suffering* is kind of a heavy word, and for most of us, suffering may not seem so pervasive. But *dukkha*, understood as this sense that our lives are just not in balance—that something is off in the way we live and relate to each other and the environment—well, that would be hard for any of us to deny. And of course, *dukkha* also applies to all that we *do* normally think of as suffering.

Dukkha can take the form of physical imbalance. Everything from a mild bellyache after eating something that just didn't agree with us to a painful toothache or a broken leg, to feeling too cold on a winter's night, to the ravages of cancer or heart disease, is *dukkha*. It can be mental imbalance manifesting as depression, anger, loneliness, or any of the almost countless ways we can be in psychological pain. It can be the simple disappointment of not getting something we were counting on or getting something else we really would rather not have. And it can be that more subtle existential sense of ennui, alienation, angst, or plain boredom and dissatisfaction that seems to arise whenever we're not distracted.

In the Mindfulness Yoga practice I discuss later in this book, *dukkha* can appear as the self-judgment and criticisms we may have about our practice, where we yearn to go farther in a forward bend, or to be able to stay longer in a headstand—like that woman across from us in class! It may take the form of the fear of going into a backbend, or our irritation when we lose our balance in one of the postures. One of the wonderful things about asana practice is that it offers us such opportunities, because the practice of the first noble truth is that we must first recognize *where*—in our bodies, in our relationships, in our behavior, in our lives—we suffer and *how* we in particular suffer. As we work with this truth, we already begin to recognize our conditioning—our habitual patterns of behavior and thinking.

The Buddha said that to have *dukkha* and not recognize it, or be unaware that *dukkha* is present, is an even worse condition, an even worse *dukkha* than *dukkha* alone. Like any good doctor, we need to identify our *dukkha*. We need to know where we are getting caught and pinned. Most of the time, when *dukkha* begins to arise, we try to deny it, or mask it with some form of entertainment and distraction or push it away forcefully. The yogic way is to recognize, identify, and acknowledge it with kindness and nonaggression. We need to be with our *dukkha* and honor it. So often we feel shame at even having *dukkha*—adding yet more *dukkha* to the original *dukkha*—but there is a reason why the Buddha called it the





Noble Truth of dukkha. It is because of our dukkha, and through opening ourselves to it, that we can begin to truly awaken. For once dukkha is recognized, we need to look deeply into its true nature and understand its causes. Once understood, it is already well on the way to being transformed.

The second Noble Truth pertains to the origins of the arising of dukkha. One very common interpretation of the Buddha's teaching is that craving is the cause of all dukkha. Craving was usually placed first on the list of afflictions (Sanskrit: *kleshas*; Pali: *kilesas*) that include anger, fear, arrogance, ignorance, and many others. The second Noble Truth encourages us to be as clear as possible as to just what causes the dukkha in our lived experience. In *the Discourse on Right View (Sammaditthi Sutta)* the Buddha asked us to look deeply into our dukkha in order to see the kinds of nutriment that have helped it come to be and that continue to nourish it.

The first and perhaps most obvious nutriment he describes is edible food. I will have something to say about the yogic diet later on, but for now, let it suffice to say that certain foods are more conducive than others to the maintenance of a healthy body and mental ease, and we need to know which foods they are. The second nutriment includes the various sense impressions. We take in sensory impressions through our six sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind), and these impressions are the food for our consciousness. The third kind of nutriment is volition, intention, or will. This is the ground of all our actions. We need to look into our motivation and volition, even our volition to practice yoga, meditation, or mindfulness, in order to see clearly whether it is pushing us in the direction of freedom and happiness or in the direction of dukkha. For instance, if our motivation for doing asana is to be "the best," we may overwork and injure ourselves, as well as strengthen our pride and egoism.

The fourth kind of nutriment is consciousness. Our consciousness is made up of all our past actions as well as the past actions of our ancestors and society. Our consciousness creates our body, our mind, and our world. As the *Dhammapada* states: "Our life is shaped by our mind; all actions are led by mind, created by mind. Dukkha follows an unskillful thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it. Our life is shaped by our mind; all actions are led by mind, created by mind. Happiness (*sukha*) follows a skillful thought as surely as one's shadow."

The second Noble Truth's challenge is to see clearly that our dukkha is not really different from the nutriment that cause the dukkha. We need to really see for ourselves, and not

merely intellectually, that freedom is available if only we would stop ingesting the nutriments that cause dukkha. In seeing dukkha clearly, and in truly understanding the way out from it, we cultivate the strong intention to *let go* of its causes. When we can see that a particular thought pattern, behavior, or food causes us dukkha as clearly as we can see that grasping a hot iron poker causes pain, we immediately will let go of that thought pattern, behavior, or food quickly—and with as little regret or conflict as we’d have in letting go of the burning iron poker.

With awareness our actions are liberating and creative. When we are unmindful, we become caught in our conditioning and reactivity, and this conditioned reactivity keeps us bound to the cycle of dukkha. In asana practice, we can begin to see how reactive we are. As we go deeper into a stretch, and the sensations become more intense, just because they are different, we may find ourselves tightening up our muscles, holding our breath, and constricting our mind in aversion. Or we may begin to see how quickly we get attached to pleasant sensations, and how we seek to prolong them and struggle to get them back when they are lost. These reactive behaviors are all the cause of dukkha, and in our practice we can learn how to let them go.

The third Noble Truth states that the transcending or ending of dukkha is completely possible. Now obviously, just *believing* this does us no good. To relate to this truth (indeed to any of the Four Noble Truths) as just something to believe is like supposing that it’s enough to put the medicine the doctor gives on the shelf and not actually taking it! The third truth’s challenge for us is to *realize* cessation.

When we begin to work with the third Noble Truth, our first step is to develop the understanding that the cessation or containment of dukkha—well-being (*sukha*)—is available if we know how to see it when it is present, and to enjoy the precious gifts we already have. The third Noble Truth, Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, tells us that suffering is not enough. We must look deeply at our present situation and see the conditions for happiness that are already there, and then nourish those conditions.

Even though the Buddha taught the truth of dukkha as the first Noble Truth, his central teaching is the truth of “dwelling happily in things as they are” (*drishta dharma sukha viharin*), found in the third Noble Truth. Happiness is possible. In touching the things that bring joy and peace, we see that just to sit, to walk, to wash the dishes, and simply breathe is a miracle worth celebrating. This is not to say that we run away from that which is unpleasant in order to embrace that which is pleasant. We must model our practice after the Buddha’s and face our dukkha directly.





This leads us to the deeper practice of the third Noble Truth: in facing our dukkha, we do not discriminate against it. If we try to push it away, the resistance alone intensifies it. Rather, facing and embracing our dukkha, we come to the realization that suffering and happiness are not two. Our joy becomes real joy, and not simply the conditioned reaction to ever-changing circumstances.

In our asana practice, we can taste the liberation of letting go of dukkha and connect with the joy that is present: the joy of simply being alive, breathing in this moment. We can truly know the joy that arises when we finally let go and embrace our dukkha instead of wasting so much energy in trying to suppress, deny, and run away from it. Dwelling happily in things as they are includes dwelling with no resistance while opening to our fears, our sadness, and our judgments, without adding the burden of anguishing over them. We embrace the lived experience of every moment without self-aggression, because resisting any aspect of any moment is ultimately aggression against ourselves. This is a practice of unconditional acceptance and nonrejection.

The fourth Noble Truth is the highly pragmatic and creative response to our dukkha. Once we see that this path is true for us, we *practice* it. Once we touch the joy of freedom from dukkha, we cultivate and nourish this freedom, and this joy. When I think of my Dharma practice, I don't think of the pianist practicing scales. I think of the doctor practicing medicine or the lawyer practicing law. Their practice is a vocation. And our yoga-Dharma practice can be our vocation. The word *vocation* originally meant "to put your voice forth" into the world. What a wonderful way to see our practice. To commit to this practice is to put forth our voice into the world, to truly declare our values and our volition regarding how we relate to life itself. This is what is meant by our practice being our life.

When we look into the four Noble Truths we see, as the Buddha said, that "whoever sees dukkha sees the making of dukkha, the ending of dukkha, and the path that leads to the end of dukkha. Whoever sees the making of dukkha sees dukkha, the end of dukkha, and the path. Whoever sees the ending of dukkha sees dukkha, the making of dukkha, and the path. Whoever sees the path that leads to the end of dukkha sees dukkha, the making of dukkha, and the ending of dukkha."

When we look deep enough into any one of the truths, we see the other three. We need dukkha in order to see the path. If we turn away from our dukkha, we turn away from the very

path that leads out from dukkha. The Buddha said that in the very moment when we know how our dukkha came to be, we are already on the path of release. Awareness and release are intimately connected. In this sense, it has been said, to take one step on the path is to complete the path. And we do this step by step, moment by moment, one breath at a time.



FOUR NOBLE
TRUTHS



THE EIGHTFOLD PATHS

AS HE LAY DYING, the Buddha accepted yet one more student, Subhadda, who arrived at the Buddha's side and asked him if the other teachers of renown within the vicinity were also fully enlightened. The Buddha replied that it was unimportant whether any of the teachers were fully enlightened. "The question is whether *you* want to liberate yourself," replied the Buddha. "If you do," he continued, "practice the Noble Eightfold Path. Wherever the Eightfold Path is practiced, joy, peace and insight are there." From his first Dharma talk to this last, the Buddha offered the Noble Eightfold Path as the way out of dukkha.

Seven hundred years later, Patanjali, in wishing to create a coherent, systematic school and practice out of the variety of yoga teachings, and perhaps under the influence of Buddhism, which was a prominent force in India at the time, wrote the *Yoga Sutra* and codified one main practice as Ashtanga yoga ("eight-limbed yoga"). The other approach to yoga found in the *Yoga Sutra* is Kriya yoga, which involves the three practices of asceticism/discipline (*tapas*), study (*svadhyaya*), and devotion to the Lord (*ishvara-pranidhana*).

For conceptual and teaching purposes, the Buddha's Eightfold Path is said to be a three-part training of *shila* (morality or ethics), *samadhi* (concentration or meditation) and *prajna* (wisdom). It should be noted that these three parts are not like a spiritual ladder where you start with moral and ethical conduct, so that you can develop the concentration and meditative skills that lead to, and unfold into, insight and wisdom. Rather they are like the legs of a three-legged stool, each equally required for the stool to serve its purpose.



Although it might also be argued that the Noble Eightfold Path begins, somewhat unexpectedly for many, with *wisdom*. One of my teachers compared the Path to an eight-lane superhighway. A skillful driver makes use of all the lanes, always keeping them in view and changing lanes when necessary. Also, in keeping with the premise that there is in fact nothing to attain, the transformative movement of this path is to start out and to return to right view. We need “relative right view”—that is to say, the awareness that there are people who have been able to transform their suffering as well as the ability to distinguish wholesome roots from unwholesome roots to even begin this journey—and having tread upon this path, we develop absolute right view, or the understanding that *all views are wrong views*. From the “viewpoint” of ultimate reality, right view is the absence of all views! While it may seem paradoxical, it is truly beautiful in its coherence!

Before we take a quick overview of the eight limbs of the noble path, let me say a word about the word that is usually translated as “right” as in “right view.” *Samma* (Sanskrit: *samyak*) means “same” or “equal” and by extension implies completeness, perfection, and wholeness. So *samma* is not “right” set in antithetical opposition to “wrong,” “bad,” or “evil.”

Another way to think of *samma* is as “skillful” or “that which is appropriate to the situation;” it implies that “this works” or “this is in harmony with reality.” If you want to get from Brooklyn to Manhattan, there may be many ways. Some may be more direct than others, but if they get you to where you want to go, they are “right.” However, if you want to go to Manhattan from Brooklyn, and you travel east—no matter what road you take, you will never get there. The roads to the east aren’t necessarily bad or evil roads (although some New Yorkers would argue with that assessment), but they are not the *right* roads to get you where you want to go.

Thus, we actually need at least a modicum of wisdom to even begin spiritual practice. *Right view* is the first limb because we need to see how things are. We need to be free from a concretized view of reality that merely bolsters our opinions and beliefs and *really* see how things are. right view, which is also called *right understanding*, means to have a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Right view includes seeing how we suffer, how our life is out of kilter, and seeing that we can do something about it. Sometimes right view is referred to as the “Mother of all Buddhas,” as it is that which can free us from all narrow or constricted conceptual views.

The second limb, *right thinking* or right intention (sometimes also translated as right aim or right resolve), is the practice of examination—of our motives, our thoughts, our habits—and the resolve to move in the direction of less suffering and harm for ourselves and all beings. Right thinking arises from and is in accord with right view. Obviously, if you understand the root of your dukkha, you can generate the right intention to extricate yourself from it. If we have the view that we are truly independent monadic selves, then our thinking and our actions will follow from this, and since this view is not in sync with how reality is, we will cause ever more suffering to ourselves and to those around us. Right thinking reflects the understanding of interbeing. Right thinking is in accord with right view.



THE EIGHTFOLD
PATHS

I N T E R L U D E

MINDFULNESS YOGA PRACTICES

There are four practices related to right thinking that we can apply to our yoga-asana practice:

Are You Sure? Misperceptions are a major root cause of dukkha. While practicing, we can ask ourselves if our perceptions are truly accurate, reflecting reality, or if in fact they are based upon misperception, opinion, and unskillful thinking. Is it truly a physical limitation that is keeping us from doing a particular asana, or is it a misperception of our ability? For instance, recently a student of mine, while moving into MARICHYASANA A (a posture that involves binding—clasping the hands behind the back) stopped at one of the modifications that doesn't involve binding, which I teach to those with less range of motion. When I went over to assist her and helped her into the full posture, she laughed. She just did not know she could reach her hands together behind her back so she hadn't even tried!

On the other hand, in almost every class I see students who seem *too sure* of themselves, con-torting themselves into a barely approximate rendition of a posture, pushing and grasping, unaware that they can be putting themselves into a very precarious position—literally!



What Am I Doing? If we stop periodically to ask ourselves this, the question can become a bell of mindfulness, recalling us back to the present moment—the moment at hand. Often during practice, your mind will stray to thoughts about the past or the future—what your friend said last night, or where you are going to lunch after your yoga practice. You may be so caught in an idea about the posture that you are not aware of what it is that you are doing. We can also practice this awareness when we find ourselves pushing into a posture because we are not applying attention to the situation at hand. What am I doing? is the practice of releasing this kind of thinking and connecting to right thinking.

When I see students struggling in a posture and ask them simply, “What are you doing?” I am allowing them some space and time to reexamine just what they are doing and why. With this time-out, they often see that they haven’t been very mindful and have got themselves all caught up in their ideas, notions, expectations, and desires rather than paying attention to what is actually happening in their bodies.

Hello Habit Energy. Our way of acting in our world and how that is reflected in our yoga practice is based on our way of thinking, and our way of thinking is in large part based on our habit energies—the habitual patterns of conditioning that too often dictate how we relate to ourselves and the environment. Our habits are so tenacious they seem to stick to us, even when they make us suffer. Noticing them as they arise, simply acknowledging them and greeting them rather than feeling guilty about them, lessens their power over us. If we are perfectionists and see our hypercritical urge arising in our practice, then Hello Habit Energy can loosen the grip of our compulsiveness.

Often, I note to students that as they roll up from a FORWARD BEND IN A SPINAL ROLL, habitual tension in the shoulders may make them tense their arms and lift from the shoulders. I ask them to keep their eyes open so that they can see the tension in their arms as they stiffen like Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein*. They “let go,” and then a moment or two later, the arms stiffen again. They can get pretty frustrated by this at first. Hello Habit Energy is one way they can learn to accept that this is the way things are now. If they simply see this, the energy can weaken over time.

With this friendlier attitude to our habit energy, the very things about ourselves that we have been unaware of become our teachers. By not rejecting them but instead welcoming them as old friends, they lose some of their sting. They offer us the gift of awareness.

Bodhichitta. This is the deep aspiration to cultivate the understanding in us that inspires us to work for the liberation of all beings. It is the ultimate motivating force for our practice of mindful living. I

make bodhichitta a practice of right thinking every morning. As I prepare for my first SUN SALUTATION, I offer the benefits of my practice to all beings, particularly those who do not have the good fortune and opportunity to practice.

Of course, it would be disingenuous to deny that people take up asana—all yoga practice, really—at first because they want the *benefits* of the practice. Whether those benefits include relaxation, flexibility, better overall health, deeper concentration, patience, stress management, or enlightenment, we first begin practice because we want some benefit. Over time, we see that it ultimately isn't even possible to practice merely for oneself because we really “inter-are” with all beings. So with this practice, we can cultivate that insight and purposefully offer the fruits of our practice to all beings. With the integration of right view and right thinking, we can live fully in the present moment, nourishing the seeds of liberation and healing the wounds of suffering.



The next three limbs of the Eightfold Path relate to *shila*, or the moral practices that make up the five precepts, discussed later. The first of these three is *right speech*, traditionally said to involve not lying, slandering, gossiping, or indulging in any forms of verbal abuse. It also means, more proactively, the healing practice of silence. While the application of this practice as it relates to others should be apparent, that it also relates to our own internal chatter may not be so obvious. When practicing, pay attention to the voices in your head. They offer running commentaries on your practice like sports announcers for a baseball game. At times the inner chatter can seem like a veritable nightclub! How often are the words that run through your head critical and cutting, putting you down, harping on your inflexibility? Or perhaps it is just the opposite. Maybe your commentators are preening over how wonderful you do your headstand! It is still just idle chatter, and the practice of inner silence itself is the definition of yoga that Patanjali gives in his *Yoga Sutra*.

Right action is of course based upon right thinking or intention. Right action is simply that action that prevents or alleviates dukkha. Patanjali says that dukkha yet to arise must be ended. Right action is bodhichitta in full bloom.



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Right livelihood is any way of life that is not involved in harming oneself or any others. This includes all pursuits we may partake in, including entertainment and other leisure activities. Our yoga asana practice itself must be practiced with this teaching in mind.

Right effort (also called right diligence) is in many ways at the core of the actual practice and is the first of the three components of samadhi (concentration). There are four supreme efforts the Buddha suggested we make:

1. Not to let an unwholesome thought arise, which has not yet arisen.
2. Not to let an unwholesome thought continue, which has already arisen.
3. To make a wholesome thought arise, which has not yet arisen.
4. To make a wholesome thought continue, which has already arisen.

These practices are considered “supreme” because they are supremely difficult and also supremely beneficial. To practice these four efforts requires strong resolve or intention, as well as right view. If we practice in such a way as to cause our body and mind to suffer, if we grow distant from those we love, or if we use our practice to run away from our dukkha, we are not practicing right effort.

Allied with right effort is the heart of the Buddha’s teaching, *right mindfulness*. The Sanskrit word *smriti* and the Pali word *sati* that are translated as mindfulness mean “to remember” and “to be aware.” Our effort is to remember to remember! Through the practice of right mindfulness, we continually make ourselves intimate with how we relate to the various states of mind that arise and how we actually engage with the world from moment to moment. It means that you are mindful of all that arises—not just what you prefer to have arise—non-judgmentally, wholeheartedly present to every aspect of your lived experience. A tall order indeed!—and one which we will examine in more detail in coming chapters.

The final aspect of the Eightfold Path is *right samadhi* (*sama* + *dhi*, “perfect/consummate vision”), which is most often translated as “right concentration” and sometimes as “right meditation.” This is the cultivation of a single-pointed mind that is centered and focused, calm and relaxed. There are two kinds of concentration—active and selective. Active concentration dwells upon whatever is happening in the present moment, even as whatever it is changes. It can be seen as a deepening of mindfulness, a carrying over of the

meditative mindfulness into a state of absorption (another meaning of *samadhi*). With selective concentration, we choose one object and focus exclusively upon it. Concentration is the force that allows us to let go of all distractions and keep coming back to the object of attention.

The Buddha refers to the concentrative absorptions that were long practiced within the yoga tradition—four in the realm of form and four within the “formless realms”—supramundane realms beyond all perception of form. While these absorptions can be nourishing, promoting joy and ease, they are not the goals of our practice. One can all too easily get attached to these pleasant states. I have earlier mentioned how in his sojourn with his yoga teachers, the Buddha experienced the seventh and eighth levels of *samadhi* (also called the seventh and eighth *jhana* or *dhyana*), “the realm of nothingness” and “the realm of neither perception nor nonperception” and found that experiencing them still left him short of his goal of complete liberation.

So if it isn't the goal of this practice, what is? Well, as we've seen, a certain right view is the necessary first step because without it, we would never develop the motivation to practice, instead remaining trapped in ignorance and delusion. Right concentration is placed here at the end of the Path because it depends on all the other seven. How can we hope to develop a concentrated mind if we do not live with right action, right effort, and right mindfulness, all of which are based upon the preliminary right view? With the fruition of right concentration, right view arises. This is why the Path is so often called “the path of return.”

However, when we come back to right view, it will be “absolute” Right view—the view from the vantage point of total liberation.

We begin with the right view that suffering and the possibility of the release from suffering exists. We begin with the understanding of the four Noble Truths. And in this practice of looking into the self we arrive at the truth of no separate self, no suffering and no extinction of suffering. As Dogen, the great Zen sage said, “To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by (or intimate with) the ten thousand things.” Here the “ten thousand things” is simply shorthand for all that is.

Now, let's take a look at how this compares to the eightfold path of Patanjali. His model begins with the twin practices of *yama* and *niyama*. These two limbs together make up the ethical and moral underpinnings of classical yoga practice. As such they relate to our rela-





tionships with others as well as our relationship with ourselves. While both words are often translated as “restraints,” the yamas involve harmonizing our social relations, and can be seen as moral disciplines, while the niyamas involve our inner attitudes and spiritual orientation and are “self-restraints” or observances that harmonize our relationship to ultimate reality.

The yamas are the “restrictions” of:

1. *Ahimsa*: nonharming in action, thought, and speech. While extending to all beings, we must remember that it includes us too and be sure that our practice does not lead to our own harm—physically, emotionally, or psychologically.
2. *Satya*: truthfulness, understood to include all the aspects of right speech as taught by the Buddha: not lying, not gossiping, not slandering, and not abusing anyone verbally. In asana practice this also means to be true to our capacities and limitations.
3. *Asteya*: nonstealing, which means not taking anything that is not freely given.
4. *Brahmacarya*: to move with or in *Brahman*, here understood as the “higher” or ultimate reality. This can be seen as living in harmony with Dharma, the Tao, or the Way, or, in Judeo-Christian-Islamic terms, with God’s will. *Brahmacarya* can also mean “brahmic conduct,” which is to say behavior in harmony with the rules laid down for a priest, or behavior that imitates the condition of Brahman, which is asexual. Therefore, *Brahmacarya* has come to be understood as chastity, or sexually responsible behavior, free from exploitation, oppression, and aggression.
5. *Aparigraha*: literally, nongrasping, but often translated as “greedlessness” or “non-covetousness.” While it is often explained as the refusal of gifts, we can say that it is more the acceptance of the gifts of life as they present themselves. It is a kind of equanimity, closely allied with *samtosha* (contentment), one of the niyamas.

The niyamas are the five “observances” expected of a yoga practitioner:

1. *Shaucha*: often translated as “purity,” but literally meaning “to shine, to be bright;” and also “clean.” It includes personal bodily hygiene and inner or mental cleansing through meditative awareness. The four supreme efforts of the Buddha are a practice of inner

shauca.

2. *Samtosha*: the contentment of equanimity, an easeful state of mind under all circumstances. This is the state of mind the Buddha is reputedly to have told a questioner he constantly abided in: free of anger, desire, greed, and frustration.

3. *Tapas*: from *tap*, which means “to burn, glow, or heat.” This word is often translated as “austerity” but is perhaps closer to “self-discipline.” As the Buddha pointed out, *tapas* must be moderate, and not devolve into mere self-abuse or neglect. Yoga seeks to remove suffering and pain, not increase it.

4. *Svadyaya*: derived from *sva* + *adhi* + *aya*, “one’s going into,” and translated as “self-study.” This includes study and recitation of texts, as well as inner self-study and inquiry. Additionally, *svadyaya* embraces the study of the great ideas that are shaping our contemporary civilization in the realms of science, art, and politics.

5. *Ishvara-pranidhana*, “devotion to the Lord.” *Ishvara* literally means “Lord,” and typically for Indian philosophy, it means different things to different schools of thought. It is always a transcendental reality however. Such devotion is perhaps a sticking point for many Buddhists, but there is no real need to interpret this term in a strictly theistic sense. In Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra*, the concept of the Lord is not quite what we generally have in the West. Patanjali doesn’t think of *Ishvara* as a Creator Lord but merely as a special kind of *purusha* (a transcendent self akin to *atman*), free of the ignorance we all have regarding our true nature. One way of understanding *Ishvara-pranidhana* is to see the practice as a radical and total opening up of oneself toward that which is sensed to be greater than oneself. This can be conceptualized as God, Goddess, Dharma, Tao, buddha nature, *dharmakaya* (the unified, true essence of reality) *shunyata* (emptiness), or the cosmos at large. In many ways, this is exactly what Zen Master Dogen was pointing to when he said, “To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be intimate with the ten thousand things.”

The third limb of Patanjali’s eight-limbed path is *asana*. This word, most often translated as “posture,” literally means “seat,” and originally referred to the surface the yogin sat upon. It was to be firm, neither too high nor too low, level, clean, and generally pleasant.

Within the whole of the *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali only has three things to say about *asana*.





He begins by defining asana, saying, “Asana is stable and comfortable (or easeful).” The word translated as ease or comfort is *sukham*, that as we have seen before, is the opposite of *dukkha*. It was used to refer to an axle that is “true,” or centered in the wheel. Patanjali goes on to say in the next aphorism (perhaps confusingly, Patanjali’s aphorisms are individually referred to also as *sutras*) that asana becomes stable and comfortable “through the relaxing of effort,” as well as through *samapatti*, or “cognitive blending,” which can be seen as the balanced observation of the reactions of the body and breath to asana. And then, finally, in the following aphorism, he says that from this process the yogin will experience the “nonaffliction from the pairs of opposites,” such as pleasure and pain, hot and cold, etc. The sense of wellbeing that is so developed can lead the practitioner to the possibility of deeper self-understanding.

From this we see that “asana practice” was the practice of taking a comfortable seat in order to minimize physical obstructions that might impede the practice of meditation. In many of the earliest texts, the asanas described are those that serve as stable postures for prolonged sitting meditation. Over time, they were elaborated into the great variety of postures said to have therapeutic functions, which culminated in hatha yoga.

Once asana is achieved, according to Patanjali’s schema, we can open to the next limb of practice, *pranayama*. Patanjali defines pranayama as “breath regulation,” which involves “the interruption of the motion of inhalation and exhalation.” *Pranayama* literally means “the expansion of *prana*” (life-force or breath). Just by taking a relaxed yet stable seat, we notice a profound change in our breathing patterns. Yoga practice involves uncovering unconscious breathing patterns that limit our energy and cause various blockages, as well as fostering more healthful breathing habits.

In the Buddha’s yoga, pranayama, in the sense of breath manipulation, is not practiced. In fact, many Buddhist teachers actively discourage this practice. Nonetheless, I have found through my own experience that some pranayama practices can be a great aid in calming a very active mind, in centering and focusing my attention, and in clearing my mind if it is dull or heavy. However, pranayama can indeed be misused, and I think the Buddha’s negative experience of breath retention points very strongly to this possibility. And certainly there is no room for breath manipulation in the practice of *anapanasati* (awareness of the in- and out-breath), which is the leading meditation practice the Buddha offered to establish and cultivate mindfulness. Indeed, with breath awareness practice, rather than attempting to forcefully change what is happening or to create a particular experience, we are training ourselves in

seeing just what is, with a mind centered in equanimity.

The fifth limb found in classical yoga is *pratyahara*, which is most often translated as “sense withdrawal.” It is described as the withdrawing of the sense consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin) from their respective objects. Like a turtle retracting its limbs, the yogin is said to “withdraw his senses into himself.” With the senses drawn inwardly, it is said that the mind will also calm down. The fifth-century writer Vyasa, in his *Yoga-Bhashya* (*Discussion on Yoga*), the oldest commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*, says that “as when the queen bee settles down and the bees also settle down, similarly, the senses are controlled when consciousness is controlled.” The major thrust of this argument is that if yoga is the state of union, and if that union is to be experienced through meditation (the essence of yoga practice), then all the potential obstacles to that union must be addressed.

The first five limbs can be seen as all designed to tackle the various obstacles to yoga. The yamas and niyamas address the potential disturbances caused by our conscience. Asana is designed to minimize the obstacles our body can create for us when we choose to sit for long periods of meditation. Pranayama allows us to be full of energy and to breathe freely and with ease, so that our very breath supports a steady mind, and then *pratyahara* keeps our senses from running riot and taking our concentration along with them.

With these preliminaries to practice as our foundation, we can develop the sixth limb, *dharana*, or concentration (from the same root *dhri*, “to hold” or “to retain,” as in *dharma* and *dharani*). This is the cultivation of one-pointedness of mind achieved through the holding of attention to a single object. *Dharana* is a prelude to meditation and can have a wide variety of mental objects of focus, from the breath to an internalized visualization or a sound.

Deepening concentration leads to the seventh limb, *dhyana*, or meditation, which Patanjali defines as “the single directionality of an arising thought that directs mind to a single object of concentration.” This single directionality signifies that the mind is so concentrated on its singular object that no extraneous thoughts intrude.

(As an interesting aside, the Sanskrit word *dhyana* and the corresponding Pali word, *jhana*, are the source of the Chinese word *chan*, the name of the form of Chinese Buddhism that emphasized meditation practice and direct realization over scholarly understanding. When Chan first went to Korea and Vietnam, *chan* was pronounced *son* by the Koreans and *thien* by the Vietnamese. When Chan arrived in Japan, it was pronounced by the Japanese as





zen. So the practice of Zen Buddhism literally means “meditation Buddhism.”)

Finally, the last limb is *samadhi*, which Patanjali describes as the “cognitive absorption of the mind, as if empty of its own form, reflecting the object of meditation alone.” That is to say, it is the state where the perceived separation between the subject and object melts away. Further, since yoga itself is both the spiritual endeavor to achieve union and the state of union itself, *samadhi* is, in fact, yet another definition of yoga. This is emphasized by Vyasa in the opening to his *Yoga-Bhashya*: “Yoga is *samadhi*.”

This is also the state described by the Taoist poet Li Po:

The birds have vanished into the sky,
and now the last cloud drains away.
We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.

Patanjali states that the first five limbs are the “external limbs,” and the last three—which are practiced together as one and are called *sanyama* (literally “constraint” or “self control”), which is most often understood as “the perfect regulation of the mind”—are the “internal limbs.” Many yoga students are under the impression that *samadhi* is the highest attainment of Patanjali’s yoga, but in fact he goes on to say that this inner limb (of *sanyama*) is itself an external limb of *nirbija-samadhi* (“seedless” or objectless *samadhi*), which is a more evolved state than the *samadhi* that takes the form of absorption in an object. Patanjali says of this state, which is ultimately indescribable, “Upon the ending of (even that) the mind is clear of all impressions, completely open, simply transparent, with no seeds.” This state is considered “seedless” because it is empty of the causes of affliction (*klesha*), namely: ignorance (*avidya*), “I-am-ness” (*asmita*), attachment (*raga*), aversion (*dvesha*) and the will to live (*abhinivesha*).

A fuller study of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* will reveal numerous parallels with Buddhist thought. Whether this is due to the synchronous development of yoga with the two major traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism or whether there was truly a direct influence, we cannot know—though many make claims. Nonetheless, if Patanjali in fact did write the *Yoga Sutra* in the second century C.E., when Buddhism’s influence was quite strong, there may well have been some direct influence.

Despite this, there are many distinct differences between Buddha’s yoga and Patan-

jali's. Foremost among these, as I have already mentioned, is the fact that Patanjali's yoga is dualistic. As a result of this dualism, the highest liberation according to Patanjali is *kaivalyam* (aloneness), which only results when the yogin physically dies, dropping the finite body and mind. The yogin severs himself from nature (*prakriti*) and then abides in the transcendental state of pure awareness or self (*purusha*), just one among many other purushas.

Most schools of Vedanta, which tend to be nondual, hold to the ideal of the *jivan-mukti*, "the liberation in life." Another model used to describe liberation or enlightenment, akin to *jivan-mukti*, is *sahaja-samadhi*. *Sahaja* means "natural" or "spontaneous" and the *samadhi* that is *sahaja* is said to be the realization of unbroken transconceptual *samadhi* while being engaged in external everyday activities. This Vedantic concept may have arisen as a result of tantric and Buddhist challenges to the idea of *samadhi* as withdrawal from the body into an inner transcendent consciousness akin to a trance state—the "stone Buddha syndrome." *Sahaja-samadhi* brings the focused awareness of *samadhi* into the body and the world. The awakened sage lives freely in the world while never losing his awareness of the unconditioned realm of reality. Buddha's own accounts of his experience seem to accord with *sahaja-samadhi*.

Living The Precepts

Recently, I was involved in a seminar on "the moral foundation of yoga practice." And as in the many retreats I have attended or led, the discussion of the *yamas*, *niyamas*, and the five moral and ethical precepts generated a lot of reactivity: Many bristle at the mere suggestion that they "should" live in any particular way. But if we look into our resistance to the moral teachings of yoga, we find that we are reacting not to what the yogic trainings are truly saying but to something of our own creation that resembles the precepts and the *yamas*, rather than the actual precepts and *yamas*. What is really being resisted is the tradition of moral injunctions as embedded in the Ten Commandments. The *perceived* absolutism in these teachings arouses a typically modern resistance to authority, especially among those who may have had a bad experience within a tradition that has a morality based on authoritative injunctions and the threat of retribution. Because of this history, there seems to be an "allergy" to precepts. Nonetheless the



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importance of *shila*, morality, in any path to liberation can hardly be overestimated.

Yet the moral aspect of practice is overlooked, even by those who take up yoga as a spiritual practice, perhaps because many confuse what they think of as the “higher” experiences of *samadhi* with truly “deep” transformation. I once heard Georg Feuerstein say that “we wish to climb to the roof (*samadhi*, or even liberation) but we don’t want to take the time to build and use a ladder, much less straighten out the ground for the ladder to stand upon!” He went on to say that “straightening the ground”—laying the foundation—is 80 percent of the spiritual work, and remains so until full awakening, when wisdom arises and all spontaneously generated actions become “right.”

It is the practice of *shila*, as embodied in the *yamas* and the precepts, that allows us to harmonize ourselves and our actions with “things as they are.” “First Dharma, then *moksha*” (liberation) is a wonderful maxim to keep in mind here. Right action and right effort is the “work” of practice. *Abhyasa*, or “practice,” is the practical application of the teachings and must be accompanied and counterbalanced by *vairagya*—“dispassion,” “equanimity,” the practice of “letting go.” If practice is willful and unaccompanied by dispassion, we run the risk of solidifying the illusion of a separate self (or ego) rather than breaking through it, which is the ultimate goal of yoga.

In Mindfulness Yoga, the moral or ethical center of the path, comprised of right speech, right action and right livelihood, is known as *shila*, which is most often translated as “disposition” or “behavior.” Another term used for this aspect of the path is *shiksha*, which has the connotation of “training.” The path requires us to cultivate the right or appropriate effort to develop strong mindfulness and concentration, which collectively make up the aspect of mental development or *bhavana* referred to as *samadhi*. And the insight developed through practice manifests as the right view or understanding and right thinking of *prajna*-wisdom. Of course, when we look at this threefold division of the Path, we can see that it is nothing more than mental categorization at work—perhaps useful for its ease of memorization and for the formulation of teachings—but it is in fact not the way things actually work. The various limbs and divisions of the Path are not mere stages or steps along the way: they are the various limbs that make up the body of the Dharmic path. This may seem to contradict the above idea that the moral teachings are the foundation—“First Dharma, then *moksha*”—but in reality there is no contradiction.

Shila, as embodied in the five *yamas* and the five precepts, are superficial at best if they

are not the fruition of deep understanding (*prajna*) and concentration (*samadhi*). Mindfulness, effort, and concentration directed at studying and living the life of shila develop deep and expansive insight (*prajna*). Those who have achieved any aspect or degree of wisdom and insight manifest this understanding in their demeanor (*shila*).

So, while we need to lay a solid foundation of practice with the moral teachings, we see that “shila practice” is not some mere staging ground we leave behind when *prajna* is achieved. The Dalai Lama has been quoted as saying, “If a teacher teaches that an enlightened person lives beyond the precepts, that his acts are not ‘confined’ by shila, then that teacher has not practiced correctly. An enlightened person’s life manifests as a life of shila.” These trainings are not merely preliminary practices nor descriptions of the goal; they are an essential part of the means.

When people react negatively to hearing about the yamas and the precepts, it is because they think of morality as a rigid code of restrictions. If we habitually think in terms of freedom *to* rather than as freedom *from*, we naturally want to rebel against restriction. We have been trained to think happiness comes from doing what we want, yet if we stop to take a moment and really look at how we have been living, we have to admit that we *have* been doing pretty much what we want for all our lives, and it hasn’t really brought us the lasting happiness we imagined! All true yoga is ultimately the middle way between self-indulgence and rigid restriction.

Those of us who have been inspired by the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh practice what he calls the five mindfulness trainings. Each of the five begins not with the restraining action of the precept but with the commitment to cultivate certain positive qualities.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings

The First Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.



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The Second Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving-kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need.

I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on the earth.

The Third Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile all conflicts, however small.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my

society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.



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These trainings embody the kind of life that helps create ease and stability in our bodies and our minds, individually and collectively. We do not practice shila because we have been told to do so, but because we have tried the other way and it hasn't worked for us. We can see that living according to the trainings and the yamas helps to calm our minds and open our hearts. We do not refrain from harming ourselves or others because we will be punished or because we have been told it is wrong. We refrain from intentionally causing harm because we know that if we do, we cannot help but become agitated—consciously or unconsciously. And as practitioners committed to developing our minds and our insight, it behooves us to do all that we can to aid ourselves in calming our minds. We cannot look deeply if the waters of mind are churning.

Living with the precepts is truly a training process in mindfulness. They are said to serve us as the North Star has served sailors for millennia—they orient us and give direction to our life's journey—but by following the North Star we do not expect to ever actually arrive at it. The precepts and yamas are a map but not the territory itself; the territory is our lived experience, moment by moment, breath by breath.

The more we engage with the precepts, the more we see for ourselves how liberating they are. The purpose of Dharma practice is to become awake, liberated, free. The precepts allow us to awaken to reality and to choose how to respond more fully and creatively to life. The alternative is to merely react mindlessly, conditioned by our body's sensations, feelings, perceptions, and mental formations. Ironically, we then label such reactivity as spontaneous action! In fact, we haven't a prayer of a chance to act spontaneously if we remain unaware of what it is we are reacting to!

MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH THE PRECEPTS

Soon after I formally received the precepts from Thich Nhat Hanh, I was eating at an English pub-restaurant that was serving a “vegetarian pastry.” However, as I took my first bite, I tasted the butter that had been used in the pastry shell. Immediately the thought of the source of the milk that had become the butter arose in my mind. I had known for a long time that the commercial dairy industry was responsible for much animal cruelty, but now this knowledge became internalized in a deeply visceral way. I could actually feel the suffering that went into the production of the butter that I was now taking into myself. I became intimate with the awareness of how implicated I was in the untold suffering of countless beings throughout the world.

At that time in my life, I still ate fish and other animal flesh occasionally. From that moment on, I became a vegetarian. Of course, I had long heard many arguments for a vegetarian diet, from its health value to the environmental benefits and the ethical considerations. I even considered some of them quite worthy. But, with the mindfulness evoked through the precepts, I felt the suffering involved in the consumption of animals, and it just became more painful to eat meat than not to. I claim no special virtue in being a vegetarian. Most schools of yoga encourage vegetarianism—I will return to this topic later—but the point I wish to emphasize now is that those who take the precepts, whether formally or informally, ultimately have to honor their own practice and work on it continually, according to their own insights, conscience, and beliefs. If I allow my vegetarianism to lead me into self-righteousness, in a very real way I will have betrayed my practice.

A last point I would like to make about my experience of having received the precepts and practicing with them is how aware I’ve become of their interdependence. Practicing any one precept deeply is practicing them all. Although practitioners have the option of receiving whatever precepts they choose, I see how truly impossible it is to avoid those that are not chosen.

For instance, if one received just the first precept, one may think it fairly easy to avoid killing and to protect the lives of others. We may know, as I mentioned earlier, that it is impossible to observe this training absolutely, since we kill when we boil water, and the vegetables we eat have also been alive. We may not have been the ones who pulled them from the ground, but we are implicated

nonetheless. Yet, for most of us, we will feel that this is the extent of our killing. But is it? Once we take the precept into ourselves as our practice (and not just some nice ideal), we begin to see that we can kill someone's spirit through mean and vicious speech (the fourth precept), and that we kill parts of ourselves through improper diet (the fifth). And it is also true that we can kill and destroy through sexually irresponsible behavior—quite literally as well as metaphorically. Indeed, if we look deeply into any one precept, we see the spirit of the other four.

A vow is a statement of intent. It is our intentions that generate behavior and karma. The vow gives us energy to persevere in our practice. You can vow to feed one person, or you can vow to feed ten thousand. You may not be able to feed all ten thousand, but the intention is what gives us the energy to try. In this spirit, I have vowed to practice and live by the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Every day of my life, this practice gives me energy to live as honorably—as “nobly”—as I can. The precepts act as bells of mindfulness calling me back from the distortions of a sometimes busy and harried life. They save me from getting completely caught up in thoughtlessness, in forgetfulness and mindlessness. And so I still feel as if receiving the five precepts is the greatest gift I have ever given myself.



Right Consumption

The first of the precepts taught by the Buddha (*ahimsa*, or “nonharm”) is often traditionally worded as “Do not kill” or “Affirm life,” and the fifth precept as “Refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs” or “Avoid clouding the mind with intoxicants.” The fact that precepts are seen as guidelines rather than as commandments has led to a variety of opinions over how to practice these precepts.

Some schools, teachers, or practitioners interpret the first precept to mean that one should hold to a vegetarian diet. Others say that eating animal flesh is allowed as long as one eats mindfully. Some say that to eat animals in moderation is the Middle Way approach to food consumption as opposed to the ascetic approach.

Within the non-Buddhist yoga tradition, there is less dissent from the preference for vegetarianism. In fact, vegetarianism is the much-preferred mode, although some Tantrikas do





eat flesh as part of their ritual practice. In the wider yoga tradition, diet has been given much thought and consideration. The *Bhagavad Gita*, for instance, goes on at great length as to the qualities of various diets. Here, as well as in most yoga texts, food is grouped according to the three *gunas*, or fundamental qualities of nature: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

Sattva, in the context of the *gunas*, refers to the state of tranquility, balance, clarity, and harmony. A metaphor for *sattva* can be the surface of a body of water on a windless day that is clear, fully reflective, and undisturbed by any ripples or waves. *Rajas* is the state of activity and agitation. The image is that same body of water on a very windy day, with its surface disturbed by waves and ripples, causing great distortions in its reflectivity. And *tamas* is the state of inertia, dullness, and heaviness. Imagine that body of water now stagnant, covered in a layer of scum and algae, quite unreflective. Then, imagine our minds to be like that body of water. All true yogic practices are designed to cultivate a more tranquil, calm, clear, and truly reflective mind, over the busy, distorted mind state of *rajas* or the dull heaviness of *tamas*.

The traditional yoga teaching is that since foods have these qualities, to live a yogic lifestyle implies choosing foods (along with all other practices) that lead to ever greater *sattva*. It is taught that food should help the mind to develop tranquility; it should not stiffen or harden the body with toxins; and it should be able to be digested without wasting a lot of energy.

Sattvic foods are natural, ideally organic, not overly processed, refined or excessively spiced, and include whole grains, legumes, fresh nuts and seeds, fresh vegetables, and, when easily digestible, milk and milk products such as *paneer*, the soft, unsalted cheese used in much Indian cooking. They are free of additive colors or chemicals. If *sattvic* foods are prepared with a lot of spices, or are made to be overly sour, hot, or salty, they are said to become *rajasic*, and are thought to produce restlessness in the body and mind. Other *rajasic* foods include the flesh of animals freshly slaughtered. All foods that are old, stale, overcooked, and “left-over” in any sense are seen as *tamasic*. This includes the flesh of animals slaughtered more than a day or two ago.

Besides the quality of the food itself, the tradition states that the ambiance should be pleasant, quiet, tranquil, and well ventilated. Also, the food should be well chewed so as to aid in the digestion and assimilation of the nutrients. Eating slowly and moderately are of such importance that it has been said that it is better to fast than to eat fast! Drinking water should be pure and at room temperature (never iced) and imbibed before or after eating and avoided while eating.

Within the Buddhist yoga tradition, some argue that flesh eating is appropriate because there is scriptural evidence that the Buddha himself ate animal flesh. It has been widely taught that the Buddha's consumption of spoiled boar's flesh led to his death (which is hardly a recommendation for flesh eating!) In fact, most scholars now believe that the phrase usually translated as "hog's meat" should in fact be translated as an objective genitive and so would read as "food loved by pigs," or "pig's joy"; in other words, a tree mushroom or truffle, of which pigs are extremely fond.

Many have long taught that the Buddha said it was acceptable to eat flesh if it was not killed expressly for you, but we have to ask how plausible it is that the Buddha would sanction the eating of animal flesh in all circumstances except when someone had reason to suspect that the animal had been killed specifically for them? If the Buddha had in fact uttered such statements, that would mean that with the exception of the handful of people who were offered flesh from an animal killed just for them, and of course hunters, slaughterers, and fishermen, everyone else could freely eat meat! This flies in the face of the teaching of non-harming, which makes the one who causes another to take life equally culpable and also implies that slaughtering and butchering were approved of by the Buddha, while the Pali canon elsewhere clearly states that these are trades forbidden to Buddhists.

Some Mahayana teachers and practitioners argue that vegetables are sentient beings, so not only is it no more compassionate or virtuous to be a vegetarian, but it also sets up a false hierarchy based upon discrimination to become vegetarian! I would merely argue that the first precept does indeed encourage the cultivation of reverence for *all* life. And, yes, it is true that vegetables are alive. I would go further and admit that I am quite aware that when I boil water for my tea, I am destroying countless beings that live within the water. But to say that because vegetables are also alive, it doesn't make sense to choose to be a vegetarian (so we might as well go ahead and enjoy our hamburgers) is to ultimately make a fatuous argument.

Finally, as regards the argument for vegetarianism, we in the West cannot blindly ignore the horrendous cruelty of factory animal "food" production. Because of their living conditions and the modes of their slaughter, animals live in fear, pain, and suffering. To eat the flesh of their bodies is to be fully implicated in their pain—and in the causes and conditions of their terrible state.





As for the fifth precept, again, some teachers and schools interpret it to mean total abstinence from alcohol or other mind-altering drugs, while others maintain that it allows for limited consumption, as long as one doesn't become inebriated or mentally fuzzy.

By extension, this precept also relates to other forms of mental intoxication, as the phrasing of Thich Nhat Hanh's fifth mindfulness training makes explicit. We can drug ourselves with television, movies, books, computer games, conversations, etc. We can even zone ourselves out with dharma books! The main point is that we should avoid using anything to deaden ourselves to what is happening at any given moment.

Notice that the fifth training doesn't tell us what books or movies or foods are toxic to our body or consciousness. It is up to us to practice awareness in order to see for ourselves the effects of various media and to then choose that which promotes clarity and harmony and to let go of that which dulls the mind or body. We are back to choosing that which is sattvic over that which is rajasic or tamasic.



PART TWO

CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS:
REMEMBERING THE PRESENT



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

THE CULTIVATION and maintenance of mindfulness is such an important—indeed central—aspect of Buddhist practice that the Buddha included it not only as the penultimate limb of the Eightfold Path but also as the first of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, which we will discuss a bit later.

The Sanskrit word *smṛiti* (Pali: *sati*), most often translated as “mindfulness,” literally means “remembering.” I often like to point out to my students that the other meaning of *remember* (and also *recollect*) is synonymous with yoga—to re-member or re-collect is to bring back together all the (seemingly) disparate parts of our experience into an integrated whole.

When we remember, we pay attention to what is happening. Mindfulness always arises in the context of relationship—within ourselves and with other people or things. It is not something like a technique or tool we use but an inherent power or capacity we tend and cultivate. For instance, when we see a friend on the street, we recognize her. We do not use recognition in order to “know” that it is her we see. The recognition arises in the very context of the situation. The Buddha taught that our breathing, our posture, our movements, feelings, thoughts, and the phenomena around us are all parts of the web of relationship within which we can cultivate mindfulness, so that eventually it can arise spontaneously. With practice, mindfulness will be there at all times and in all places.

Two early sutras in which the Buddha gave meditation instructions are the *Anapanasati* (Awareness of Breathing) and the *Satipatthana* (Establishing of Mindfulness) sutras. In the



Southern (Theravada) tradition of Buddhism these sutras are still considered the most important texts on meditation practice. While the spirit of these texts is very much alive and present in the Northern (Mahayana) tradition, the texts are not too well known, and I hope that over time this situation will be rectified. As Thich Nhat Hanh writes: “If we understand the essence of these two sutras, we will have a deeper vision and more comprehensive grasp of the scriptures classified as Mahayana, just as after we see the roots and the trunk of a tree, we can appreciate its leaves and branches more deeply.” It is time for us to restore these teachings to their proper place in the tradition of meditation practice. From my first introduction to these sutras, their incredible value for asana practice has been apparent to me—lifting the physical practice of asana from a mere preparatory role for meditation into a very real and deep meditation practice itself.

Synonyms for mindfulness include “awareness” and “attention.” Books (*many* books!) have been written about mindfulness, awareness, or “bare attention,” and some of them make it sound a lot more complicated than it truly is. In fact, you already know what it is: but the problem is you may not believe you know or that it can be so simple! When I was in seminary, I gave a presentation of basic Buddhist teachings of mindfulness practice. I still remember how one of my fellow seminarians came to me afterward and said, “Tell me the truth. It can’t really be as simple as all that, can it? What are you Buddhists holding back?”

Ironically, the difficulty is that it *is* as simple as that. However, because of our deep desire for something exciting and special in our spiritual life, and our confusion between what’s simple and what’s easy, the whole shebang gets complicated—but it is we ourselves (our minds, specifically) that complicate the issue.

A student is said to have asked the ancient Zen master Ichu, “Please write for me something of great wisdom.” Master Ichu took up his brush and wrote, “Attention.” The student, apparently disappointed, asked, “Is that all?” Ichu wrote, “Attention. Attention.” Now the student became perplexed, even a bit irritated. “That doesn’t seem so deep and profound to me.” In response, Ichu wrote, “Attention. Attention. Attention.” Finally, in frustration, the student asked, “So what does this word *attention* mean?” Master Ichu replied, “*Attention* means attention.”

That is why it is said that attention is not a technique, nor is it something you need to attain. You already have the capacity of mindfulness and you practice it constantly—in one

way or another. According to *abhidharma*, the Buddhist “psychological” teachings, the mental factor of attention (*manaskara*) is universal, which means that we are always giving our attention to *something*. However, our attention may be “appropriate” (*yoniso*), as when we are paying full and “bare” attention to the present moment, or it may be inappropriate (*ayoniso*), as when we are attentive to something that takes us away from being fully present in the here and now.

Why do the teachings emphasize being fully aware of what is in the present moment? *Because that is all that there is!* As a theist might say, “God is in the details.” Or as Zen teacher Taizan Maezumi says, “Details are all there are.” If you miss *this*, you miss it all. Our appointment with life is always in the present moment. If you aren’t here for it, you miss your life. And isn’t that how it feels much of the time? You cannot live in the past. It is gone. You cannot live in the future. It is not yet here. And if you are not paying attention to what is happening right now, you are swept away by the present and lose your life, right here, right now.

In the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* the Buddha taught:

Do not pursue the past.
Do not lose yourself in the future.
The past no longer is.
The future has not yet come.
Looking deeply at life as it is
in the very here and now,
the practitioner dwells
in stability and freedom.
We must be diligent today.
To wait until tomorrow is too late.
Death comes unexpectedly.
How can we bargain with it?
The sage calls a person who knows
how to dwell in mindfulness
night and day
“one who knows the better way to live alone.”





Someone who “lives alone” in this context is not the secluded monk in the woods but the one who can live in society and not get lost in self-centered thoughts, desires, projections, and judgments. And notice the qualities of stability and freedom, which reminds us of Patanjali’s definition of asana as that posture which is stable and easeful.

Mindfulness—the quality of mind that embodies “bare attention”—is the observing of things as they are, without choosing, without comparing and judging, without evaluating, and without laying or adding any of our projections or expectations onto what is happening. It is the ability to see “just this.” One image used to describe this quality of mind is to imagine awareness to be like the sky. All the thoughts, feelings, and sensations—indeed all our experiences, both physical and psychological—are like clouds passing through the sky. We tend to identify with the clouds of thought, projection, craving, and aversion and ignore the sky. Our practice is to cultivate “big sky mind” and to allow all the changing phenomena to pass through awareness, without being swept away or entangled in any of it.

Bhavana (meditation or development) is the cultivation of this innate quality of mind into a strong, stable, easeful, choiceless, and noninterfering awareness. All the techniques and practices usually taught as meditation are actually techniques to aid in the development of this all-inclusive, open, and spacious quality of mind. The “state” of meditation is therefore not actually something you *do* but something you simply *are*. At first, indeed, this “simple” practice is quite difficult. We find ourselves having to continually remind ourselves to remember! It is not easy. But with time, it grows ever more natural and effortless.

In the beginning, great effort is required, and there are many gaps in our awareness. Eventually, just as in learning to become proficient in any skill, such as playing a musical instrument, there is a certain point at which the sense of “me being mindful” disappears and only mindfulness itself is present. Just as with the virtuoso pianist, who knows no separation between himself and his playing—the practice and the playing have become one and the same, and his fingers move with effortless ease and naturalness—we begin to live our lives more simply, easefully, and naturally, because all our actions arise out of this effortless, spacious awareness that just is.

Traditionally, Buddhist meditation or *bhavana* is said to contain two aspects, but it is the second that is emphasized and distinguishes Buddhist meditation from most other forms of meditation. These two components are *shamatha* and *vipashyana* (Pali: *samatha* and *vipassana*).

And because it is the second aspect that is most emphasized, Buddhist meditation is most commonly known in the West as vipassana—insight or mindfulness meditation. However, even Zen practice, embodies this twofold mental bhavana, although the terminology is not utilized (except in the Vietnamese tradition).

Shamatha literally means “dwelling in tranquility” and is sometimes used as a synonym for concentration, since concentration—or single-pointedness of mind—leads to tranquility, calmness, and ease. Thich Nhat Hanh often refers to shamatha as “stopping,” and he relates the following story about a man and a horse: “The horse is galloping quickly, and it appears that the man on the horse is going somewhere important. Another man, standing alongside the road, shouts, ‘Where are you going?’ and the first man replies, ‘I don’t know! Ask the horse!’” Of course, this is *our* situation; constantly “on the go,” our habit energy carries us along from one experience to the next. And so, our first practice is to learn how to *stop!* In order to be able to see clearly, we must first stop and calm our mind—stop the habit energies, stop our forgetfulness and stop our constant running after one thing or another.

Vipashyana, which is most often translated as “special insight” or “clear seeing” into the true nature of things, is the insight that is said to lead to awakening and freedom or liberation. So we see that mindfulness and concentration, the final two limbs of the Buddha’s yogic path, are the two aspects cultivated in Buddhist meditation practice. We might say that our practice is simply to *stop and see*.

In practice, all meditation cultivates both of these qualities, but there is a true difference in the emphasis and ultimate outcome depending on whether one emphasizes concentration or mindfulness. When we meditate, it is mindfulness that is simply aware of the objects that we will pay attention to and concentrate upon. Concentration is the holding of our attention steady on the chosen object of meditation. And mindfulness is also what notices when concentration falters and our attention wanders.

Concentration is exclusive. It excludes all that is not the object of attention and focuses exclusively on the object of meditation, whether it is a mantra, a visual image, or the breath. It has the quality of a highly focused and powerful laser, which is why it is referred to as “single-pointedness of mind.” To develop really deep concentration, it is helpful to create an environment that is as free from possible distractions as possible. Very deep concentrated mental states are the various jhanas or samadhis that are discussed in the various yogic texts (Hindu as well as Buddhist yogic texts).





Yet these highly concentrated states can become problematic, as the Buddha saw, when they are practiced in order to escape from suffering rather than to realize the total liberation that comes from true insight. They are indeed blissful states, but they are conditioned and impermanent. And if we become attached to them, they become a source of dukkha. The Buddha related that when he came out of these highly concentrated states during his early training, the seeds of lust, aversion, and delusion blossomed once again soon after he experienced sensual contact. We can certainly use these concentrated mental states to find rest and calm. But we do so only in order that, once restored, we can return to our dukkha, observe it, and develop the deep insight and understanding needed to realize freedom.

Mindfulness is inclusive. It excludes nothing. It is the quality of choiceless bare attention. Ordinarily, if you were practicing concentration and a car alarm went off outside your window, you would try to block it out and return to your object of meditation. But if you were practicing the bare attention of mindfulness, when the car alarm went off, you would simply notice it—as well as any hint of irritation or annoyance that arose. Mindfulness observes change itself—the variation in pitch of the car alarm, its silencing, and any associated thoughts that arise.

Whereas concentration is like a laser, mindfulness is like a floodlight, illuminating whatever is there to see. Mindfulness is the more difficult of the two qualities to cultivate because it is not reactive or judgmental. Whatever arises is seen and accepted without interpreting, evaluating, judging, or rejecting. Mindfulness is the ultimate practice of nonaggression, for it asks us not to reject any aspect of our lived experience—even the gross, smelly, and distasteful stuff we would rather ignore or deny. It asks us to accept ourselves just as we are. Not to change or justify or rationalize, but simply to see—and without indulging in guilt. For many of us this can be a tall order. But as we continue to practice, we cultivate compassion along with wisdom—*karuna* along with *prajna*—the twin pillars of Buddhism.

As I mentioned above, all meditation uses both concentration and mindfulness. With too much concentration, you may be quite calm and tranquil, but you may as well be made of stone. However, without the calming, centering influence of concentration, too much awareness may result in an overly sensitized state that is akin to that of those individuals who suffer from extreme environmental sensitivities. It can be a severely incapacitating situation, deeply fatiguing. In the realm of meditation, such hypersensitivity would not be terribly conducive to deep penetrating insight.

In all Buddhist traditions, when we first begin to practice meditation, we are instructed in *shamatha* in order to develop concentration and calm the mind. Many beginners often feel that they are “getting worse” after beginning to meditate, because when they start to concentrate on whatever object their teacher suggests (most often the breath) they find that their minds are very active, jumping all over the map.

In both Buddhist teachings and in the Yoga Upanishads, this tendency of the mind to jump around is referred to as “monkey mind”—and it can be very disconcerting to truly notice our own monkey mind for the first time. And yet, just seeing monkey mind as it is can be viewed as the first fruit of practice.

But if we were to attempt to practice mindfulness without first developing some concentration, it would be impossible to see whatever was arising without getting ensnared in thinking. For instance, if you suddenly noticed anger arising, without concentration to ground your mindfulness, you would probably begin to think about *what* you were angry about and *who* you were angry with, and you would actually feed your anger rather than allowing yourself to see it and feel it without getting caught in it, identifying with it and drowning in it. Once you have developed some concentration, then attention and mindfulness can be emphasized. And it is the fruition of mindfulness that leads to a deep insight into reality that is synonymous with liberation: *ceto-vimutti*, “release of the mind.”



W H A T I S
MINDFULNESS

✿ I N T E R L U D E ✿

CAR ALARM DHARMA

It was the concluding evening of an eight-week course in mindfulness meditation, and I had just finished ringing the bell to signal the beginning of our sitting meditation. Before the final reverberation of the bell, just outside the room in which we were sitting, a car alarm went off. Since car alarms are not an unusual occurrence in Brooklyn, I just observed the sound and stayed with the breath.

After a few minutes had passed, however, concern for my students began to arise in my mind. I began to think, “Great! The last class and *this* has to happen.” As the minutes passed, my thoughts



grew more agitated. I worried that the students were having a “disappointing” experience and were probably getting frustrated. We had never sat for longer than twenty minutes in class before, and now, on the last day, we were sitting for thirty-five minutes and this car alarm just wasn’t stopping.

Then, suddenly, I saw what I was doing. I was running all sorts of scenarios in my mind and worrying about what their experience was or might be. And I wasn’t applying attention to what was happening right there and then. I was caught. So I let go of the thinking and sat for the remaining twenty minutes and heard the car alarm’s pitch waver over time as the battery died out. The sound was inconstant, continuously changing in pitch and volume. As I observed this, my mind grew calm and a lightness pervaded my entire being.

About three minutes from the end of the meditation period, the battery gave up the ghost and the alarm stopped. The silence was deafening. With the cessation of the sound, there was a stillness that seemed to pervade the universe. Mind seemed to hover, completely open and receptive, with no content and no form.

After I rang the bell to signal the end of the meditation period, I learned something else from my students. All of them had had similar experiences. When the alarm first went off, they felt minor irritation and annoyance. As the sound continued, some of them began to experience real anger, and they created scenarios of the terrible and obviously obnoxious owner of the car and his social deviance. They were running whole stories about just what kind of man (interestingly enough, they all assumed a *man* was responsible) could be so thoughtless of others. Some of the other students were simply obsessed with their own irritation, fueling their experience with aversion until they found themselves feeling victimized and powerless.

And then all of them, at one point in their sitting, realized what they were doing and were able to simply let it all go. They said they remembered: “Mindfulness requires no conditions. We are simply mindful of whatever arises.” So they began to hear the sound free of their reactivity, and they saw that it wasn’t something that stood outside themselves. They heard what I heard, and they felt the same lightness of spirit, a calm and deep ease in the midst of the “sound and fury,” as one said. They found a taste of freedom. Freedom from their own reactivity and conditioning. They were, for the most part, a bit astonished by their own discovery, as they had all begun the course as complete beginners and had suffered every distraction as a failure on their part. More than one student reported that they would never have believed that such serenity and acceptance was possible. In fact, since the whole experience had seemed to verify what I had been speaking about throughout the

course—that it is possible to let go of our conditioned reactivity and be free where we are—several of them half suspected me of setting it all up!

Let me also add here that there are some yogins who develop such deep states of concentration that they would not have even heard the car alarm. Their awareness would have been so focused and restricted that the sound of the car alarm simply would not exist for them. But such a concentrated state, however impressive it may seem, eventually ends when the yogin has to get up from his seat. Such narrow awareness simply does not move out into the world of daily life. Nor does it help us learn how to be free where we are—with car alarms, noisy trucks, commuting, taxes, bills, and all the rest.



W H A T I S
MINDFULNESS



BEGINNING MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

I HAVE HAD MANY STUDENTS tell me that they've tried meditation and it "didn't work" for them, or they "just couldn't do it." Of course, the real problem is their misunderstanding of what meditation is rather than anything inherently wrong with them.

Many students simply are unaware that there are indeed many various approaches to meditation, along with a multitude of philosophical and religious traditions behind those approaches. They haven't been told this or, what's worse, they're told that the particular tradition or school that they have been exposed to is either the best or the only true teaching.

A lot of confusion arises because many teachers and writers of books about meditation do not take the time to point this out. So statements that refer to specific practices within a given tradition or school are taken to be general statements about meditation. When students hear something different, also stated as a sweeping generality, from a representative of another school or tradition, their confusion mounts. And when they hear so many similar things from representatives of different traditions, and yet are told how unique and specific a particular practice is, they grow even more confused.

One school places attention on the nostrils while observing the breath, another has the attention placed at the abdomen or just below the navel. Some schools teach that one should begin by counting the breaths, while others say you should "note" or "label" your experience. Still others say you should *never* count or note. Some traditions emphasize mantras, while



others eschew them.

I am not selling any particular tradition or school of thought other than the focus of mindfulness—which no tradition has a special claim to. I have practiced in the Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean Zen traditions and sat with Chinese Zen (Chan) teachers as well. I have also practiced in the vipassana tradition as espoused by S. N. Goenka and as taught by the teachers within the Insight Meditation Society. And I have learned quite a lot from a variety of Tibetan Buddhist teachers, although I have not formally practiced in that tradition. I am grateful to all of the teachers I have learned from and practiced with, but the juice of dharma has one taste. I wish to impart a bit of that taste and stay away from partisan posturing as clearly as possible.

The Buddha taught that one can, and should, practice mindfulness when sitting, standing, lying down, and walking. He further taught that one should be fully aware while “stretching one’s limbs” and while “bending over,” so it is clear that the practice of hatha yoga asanas can certainly be the locus of our practice of mindfulness meditation. However, if you do not already have some established form of sitting meditation, it may be a bit more difficult to maintain a solid, stable, and easeful awareness while doing the TRIANGLE or WARRIOR postures (See Part Three for a discussion of these.) So, for those who do not have an established meditation practice, I offer the following basic instruction.

Sitting Meditation

In Buddhist circles, it is not uncommon to hear of “formal practice” as distinguished from informal practice. Formal practice is the time set aside to actually sit, and may include other practices such as chanting, prostrations, bell-ringing and candle-lighting, or the making of various offerings. But the real heart of formal practice is just to sit, to make the commitment to do so every day, with regularity and consistency. We sit so that we can cultivate the quality of mindfulness in order to maintain awareness throughout the day. It might be said that “informal practice” is simply the rest of our lives!

Where Should I Sit?

The first order of business is to determine a good spot within your house to sit. It should be

relatively quiet and secluded. While it would be a great boon if houses were designed with what Thich Nhat Hanh calls a “breathing room,” for most of us it will probably not be possible to have a room devoted to the practice of meditation. Even a corner in your bedroom that is set aside just for this purpose will do nicely. I had a student in the East Village of New York City who lived in a very small studio, and she would sit between her bed and her dresser. From under her bed she would remove a shoe box that contained a small candle, some incense, and an incense holder, and a cloth that she would then drape over the top of the box that became her little altar. The candle and incense helped her to create a warm and inviting environment conducive to her practice.

The most important thing is that you create a specific place that you will return to each day for practice. Eventually, the association of that space with your practice will become so strong that you will find yourself able to move more quickly into your practice. Whether you see this as mere Pavlovian conditioning or as the creation of a specific energetic or sacred space, it does indeed have a beneficial effect on one’s practice to sit in the same place daily.

When Should I Sit?

Experiment at first to see what works best for you. Then set up a schedule and stick to it with determination—but beware of rigidity. If you find yourself not looking forward to your practice and instead begin to see it as a burden or “one more thing to do,” then something is wrong and should be changed. While meditation is a deeply psychological, existential, and experiential practice, and quite a lot of difficult “material” may arise, the overall experience should not feel like a chore or distasteful drudgery.

Through monitoring the experience of many people over many years, I can say that most practitioners find the early morning, just after arising, to be the best time to meditate. It is a time when the mind is relatively calm and not yet caught in the daily whirl of activity. I consider the transition from sleep to daytime activity a great time for meditation. I do some physical practice to work out any stiffness and get respiration and circulation “primed,” and then I sit. If for any reason daily activities intrude in this routine, I know that it may be difficult to sit later in the day, so I make sitting a high priority.

The potential benefit of sitting in the evening is that we can transition from the workday world and unburden our minds of all the stuff we have accumulated during the day. Sitting in the evening can be a real tonic to the soul! However, many people find that if they





schedule their sitting too close to bedtime, they may be struggling to stay awake. So, again, see for yourself. In the beginning, try various times of the day and see what is most conducive to consistent, deep, and relaxed practice.

In the beginning, a once-a-day commitment should be made. Eventually, you may find that you desire to practice more than once a day. Just remember not to force your practice. Let it grow and develop organically. If you over-commit, you run the risk of giving up totally on your practice because it may feel like it drains too much of your time. When practice has seasoned, you may well find yourself wanting to meditate even longer on those days when you're facing more stress than usual.

There's a story about Mahatma Gandhi who, when told he would be meeting with three different world leaders that day, is reported to have said, "Then I had better meditate for twice as long this morning."

How Long Should I Sit?

There is no magic formula. Most beginners begin with twenty to thirty minutes, but for others five or ten minutes can be challenging enough. What is most important to keep in mind here is that this practice of mindfulness is not a practice of masochism. While a certain amount of discomfort—physical and mental—is bound to arise, real physical *pain* is not necessary. Some people make it into an endurance test to see if they can "take it." To me this just seems like a self-aggrandizing activity that has little to do with compassion and wisdom. Two related points are helpful in determining how long you should sit. First, find out what length of time is comfortable for you to sit at this point, and then add a few minutes, perhaps five, to stretch your "comfort zone." This will help you to move gracefully into a different relationship with discomfort but shouldn't be too much of a strain. Second, try to establish a firm minimum and stick to it. But on those days when even that is impossible, try to sit even if for just a few minutes. It is the regularity of going to your cushion (or chair or bench) and sitting every day that is important. And, though I hesitate to add this, one of my earliest teachers of meditation said to me once, "If you miss a day of meditation, just miss it." In other words, don't carry around the burden of having missed it throughout the day and use it to whip yourself into guilt. And then when the next day comes, "just sit."

What you *do* want to avoid is "winging it"—sitting haphazardly when the feeling strikes you for as many minutes as you happen to feel like it. Instead, make a contract with yourself

before you sit that you will be sitting for x amount of time. This can be seen as a minimum. You can sit longer if you wish. But, if you decide to just sit for only as long as you like, you will too easily give into restlessness or boredom and curtail your meditation. This will only serve to strengthen your habitual reactivity to cling to the pleasant and push away out of aversion all that you find unpleasant. As an experiment, and to garner more self-awareness, you might try sitting haphazardly for a week or so—but not as a regular practice.

To time your meditation, you can set a timer or a watch, or simply place a watch where you can glance at it periodically. Be careful not to slip into just watching the clock and counting down the time left to go. Check the time briefly, and then return to your meditation practice. Try not to check too often though.

What Should I Do While Sitting?

Perhaps the most important thing to establish for meditation is a posture that is steady and comfortable. In Appendix C you will find detailed instructions along with photos of various seated meditation postures. Notice that in all of them a straight back is maintained. I should mention that a “straight” back actually has natural curves—moving in at the lower back, out in the upper back, and in again at the neck.

To maintain the integrity of these natural curves, whether you are sitting on the floor or on a chair, I recommend that you use a cushion or pillow to gently tilt the pelvis (the front of the hips) slightly forward and down. The pillow helps to keep your hips higher than your knees, which is important. The shoulders should be completely relaxed, with your shoulder blades flat on your upper back and not rolling forward. This helps keep the heart open and the breath can flow more fully.

The crown of the head lengthens upward as if reaching to the sky. You might think of the gracefulness of African and Asian women who balance heavy loads on their heads. The chin is tucked in just a bit to release strain in the back of the neck and to keep the throat open. Imagine a line of force moving from the perineum up through the center of the torso and out through the top of the head.

Your eyes can be closed or slightly open and gazing down at the floor about eighteen inches to three feet in front of you, or whatever distance you find most comfortable. Do not stare but keep a soft focus, as if you were looking at something either in front of or beyond the floor. Some schools suggest keeping the eyes fully open, but this is usually after working





with them partially open.

Interestingly, the reasons given for keeping your eyes open in some traditions is to encourage you to stay connected to your surroundings and to keep yourself from growing sleepy or daydreaming. The reason given by other traditions for closing your eyes is to keep you from becoming distracted by your surroundings! After years of sitting with my eyes open and not ever really getting distracted, but still occasionally getting sleepy, and sometimes having wild, eyes-open visions or hallucinations, I began to sit in a vipassana tradition that encouraged eyes closed. I didn't find myself getting sleepy any more than I had with my eyes open, and I was not plagued by images arising—but I would occasionally find myself distracted. The moral of this story is that whatever I was told to do, sometimes I'd get sleepy or lost in fantasy and sometimes I'd get distracted. This is the nature of the mind. Try both ways and see what works for you. And then consider trying to challenge yourself occasionally with what doesn't work so easily.

Your hands can be kept on your lap or gently resting on your knees. Or you can use any of the various *mudra* (hand positions) that have been used since time immemorial. Several of them are described in Appendix C, but the one I use most is *dhyani mudra*, also referred to as the *cosmic mudra*. For this, let the fingers of your nondominant hand rest on top of the fingers of the dominant hand, palms turned up and the tips of your thumbs just touching.

Then turn your awareness to your breath.

Anapanasati is the awareness of breathing in and out. Take a few deep and moderately forceful breaths and then settle into your natural rhythm of respiration. This is a practice of simply watching the breath, being with the breath. Doing this practice, we do not imagine it moving into and throughout the body, or as different colors. Instead, we are letting ourselves experience the process of breathing, unmediated by any sense of how we “should be” breathing. Let the breath come and go. See for yourself that sometimes it is short or shallow, sometimes deep, sometimes it is soft and subtle and sometimes it can be rough. Most of all, we see that it changes over time.

Various schools have their opinions as to where in the body to place your attention to the breathing process. Some suggest keeping the awareness focused on the area of the nostrils, not following the breath into the body, but keeping the awareness just at the nostrils like a ticket taker at the movies—“taking” each breath as it comes. Observe the sensations at the nostrils and perhaps just at the top lip.

Other schools recommend placing your awareness at the abdomen or what the Japan-

ese call the *hara*—the area about two fingers width below the navel. “Nostril adherents” say that placing attention on the nostrils develops a more refined and sharp concentration. The belly, they say, is too broad an area for the development of concentration. “Belly adherents” say that focusing here helps get us out of the head and into the body. It develops a more spacious sense of awareness. My opinion: they are both right.

My suggestion is, again, to try both ways for yourself and see what suits you best. But do not mix them up in any one sitting. In fact, try one way for at least a week or two and then try the other way for a week or so, and then make your choice and stick with it. This goes for all my suggestions where there is a choice as to how you can practice. Never try more than one approach in any one sitting. In any inquiry we make, we do not want to have so many variables that it’s not clear what is linked to what.

As an aid to developing concentration most schools, but not all, suggest either counting breaths or noting them. If you choose to try counting, please, *please* remember, the practice is not “to count to ten” (or whatever number you are working with) but to *observe the breath*. There are no gold stars if you get to ten. You simply go back to one. Counting is just a tool to help keep you focused on the breath.

So, as you breathe in, mentally count to yourself “one”; as you breathe out, count “two.” The next in-breath is “three,” the next exhalation “four,” and so on until you reach ten. As it is the nature of mind to want to be quite active, you will find yourself beginning to think as you count. In fact, do not be surprised if you start to think of something else (something better to do, perhaps!) between “one” and “two.” When this happens, *see that that is taking place*, let it go, and return to “one.” So you may, in fact, *never* get to ten for the first few weeks or months. So what? This becomes a problem only if you choose to make it one.

At first, you may find that you have gotten completely caught up in some fabulous story line—a regular *Gone with the Wind* spectacular. When you notice this, let it go and return to “one.” You may find yourself counting way beyond “ten” before you become aware that you have lost your concentration. Other times you will catch the thought way before it can develop. These thoughts are light little flashes of discursiveness that go nowhere.

One of my first meditation instructors put it this way: Imagine you have been given the task of standing at the Port Authority bus terminal in New York City, observing people getting on to the bus to Albany, 140 miles away. Your job is to just stand there and watch people get on and off the bus. But instead of doing that you get caught up in all the activity, you





get on the bus, and you don't realize this until you're just past Kingston, 110 miles away. So you get off and go back to the bus terminal in New York. Over time, your lapses grow less frequent, and you catch yourself ever more quickly. Maybe you realize you've wandered before you've even left Manhattan. Later, after more practice, you catch yourself just as you're about to board the bus. Your concentration has grown stronger, as has your mindfulness, which is the quality of mind that notices that your concentration has lapsed.

This said, don't be upset if you find that after catching yourself quite quickly for some time, you suddenly end up near Albany. This is not a linear process, and progress is determined more by the change in your relationship to your experience than by any particular change in the content of the experience itself.

For instance, years ago when I first began to practice, I found that my mind was sometimes like a nightclub, and sometimes like a monastery. Truthfully, it was more like a nightclub than a monastery; but when practicing, I was clear that I preferred it to be a monastery and felt that if it were a nightclub I was failing. Worse, I felt like *I* was a failure. Now, although I'll admit that while practicing my mind is more often like a monastery than in the old days, it can still be a nightclub often enough. What has really changed is that I don't struggle against the "nightclub mind" and I don't cling desperately to the "monastery mind."

This change in how we relate to our mind in meditation has its parallel with how we relate to the various situations that arise in our life. This growing equanimity is a true feeling of freedom and ease, which I could only dream about when I first set out on this path.

If you choose to note the breath instead of count it, then when you breathe in, mentally say to yourself, "in"; when you breathe out, "out." Again, when your mind wanders into some daydream or thought, as soon as you see that, make the note "thinking," let it go, and return to "in" and "out." *It absolutely does not matter what the thought was, it is simply noted as "thinking."* Here, I encourage you to remember that it is not a "failure" if your mind wanders. In fact, in that very moment when you see that it has wandered, you are being mindful—and that is what we are practicing to cultivate!

Like developing stronger biceps, you wouldn't expect one curl to do it. You need to practice *repetitions*. To develop mindfulness, you need to keep at it. And know that every time you see that the mind has wandered off the breath, you have just woken up. You are awake in that moment. So let go of any irritation or frustration or anger with yourself.

In fact, it may help to listen to the sound of your inner voice when it notes "thinking." Does

it sound like a mental shout: “*thinking! (again!),*” or does it have an impatient and frustrated quality to it? Soften it up. Whatever arises, just note “thinking” in a neutral mental voice. And then “in” and “out.” In many ways we are practicing nonrejection, complete and utter acceptance of ourselves and each moment.

This whole process is sometimes referred to as preliminary practice, but that should not lead you to think that it is purely a “beginner’s” practice and that sometime down the line you will “graduate” to a more “advanced practice.” This kind of thinking can be one of the biggest obstacles to liberation.

In fact, we never leave behind the awareness of breathing. Rather, we continue to go ever deeper with this practice. To take the first step on the path is to fulfill the path. This path, which returns us to our true home, is the greatest journey we can take. Stop now. Return to yourself. Return to your breath.



MINDFULNESS
MEDITATION



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SUTRAS

THE *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing (Anapanasati Sutta)* and the *Sutra on the Establishments of Mindfulness (Satipatthana Sutta)* are two of the most important sutras found in the Pali canon. They contain some of the most detailed information and instruction the Buddha gave regarding the actual practice of meditation.

Mindfulness Yoga is based upon the Four Establishments of Mindfulness as found in the *Anapanasati Sutta*. In this sutra, the Buddha offers sixteen “exercises,” using conscious breathing as a means to awaken and maintain attention in order to look deeply into the true nature of things and to liberate oneself from delusion.

The sixteen exercises offered by the Buddha in the *Anapanasati Sutta* can be divided into four groups, each containing four exercises. Each of the four groups corresponds to one of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. The first group uses the body as the foundation or object of establishing mindfulness; the second uses feelings; the third uses the activities of the mind; and the fourth uses objects of mind, or *dharmas*.

In the *Anapanasati Sutta*, the Four Establishments are only briefly discussed, and so we will consider selected sections from the *Satipatthana Sutta* for further information on how to practice the Four Establishments. You can find resources listed in the back of this book if you desire to read or study the whole sutra. The following is the second section of the *Anapanasati Sutta*, which details the sixteen exercises presented by the Buddha.



Anapanasati Sutta: Section 2

What is the way to develop and practice continuously the method of Full Awareness of Breathing so that the practice will be fruitful and offer great benefit?

It is like this: the yogi or yogini goes into the forest or to the foot of a tree, or to any deserted place, sits stably in the cross-legged position, holding his or her body straight, maintains mindfulness and practices: “Aware of an in-breath as an in-breath, I breathe in. Aware of an out-breath as an out-breath, I breathe out.”

First Group (The Body)

1. “Breathing in a long breath, aware of breathing in a long breath. Breathing out a long breath, aware of breathing out a long breath.” He or she practices like this.
2. “Breathing in a short breath, aware of breathing in a short breath. Breathing out a short breath, aware of breathing out a short breath.” He or she practices like this.
3. “Breathing in, aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.” He or she practices like this.
4. “Breathing in, calming my whole body. Breathing out, calming my whole body.” He or she practices like this.

Second Group (The Feelings)

5. “Breathing in, I am aware of feeling joy. Breathing out, I am aware of feeling joy.” He or she practices like this.
6. “Breathing in, I am aware of feeling happiness. Breathing out, I am aware of feeling happiness.” He or she practices like this.
7. “Breathing in, I am aware of my mental formations. Breathing out, I am aware of my mental formations.” He or she practices like this.
8. “Breathing in, I calm my mental formations. Breathing out, I calm my mental formations.” He or she practices like this.

Third Group (The Mind)

9. “Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Breathing out, I am aware of my mind.” He or she practices like this.

10. “Breathing in, gladdening the mind. Breathing out, gladdening the mind.” He or she practices like this.
11. “Breathing in, concentrating the mind. Breathing out, concentrating the mind.” He or she practices like this.
12. “Breathing in, liberating the mind. Breathing out, liberating the mind.” He or she practices like this.

Fourth Group (The Dharmas)

13. “Breathing in, aware of the impermanent nature of all dharmas. Breathing out, aware of the impermanent nature of all dharmas.” He or she practices like this.
14. “Breathing in, aware of the disappearance of clinging. Breathing out, aware of the disappearance of clinging.” He or she practices like this.
15. “Breathing in, observing cessation. Breathing out, observing cessation.” He or she practices like this.
16. “Breathing in, observing letting go. Breathing out, observing letting go.” He or she practices like this.

The Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously according to these instructions, will be fruitful and of great benefit.

In section 3 of the sutra, the Buddha briefly elucidates the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and tells us how we can practice them:

When the practitioner breathes in or out a long or a short breath, aware of the breath or the whole body, or aware that he or she is making the whole body calm and at peace, the practitioner abides peacefully in the observations of the body in the body, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the first Establishment of Mindfulness, the body.

The Buddha reiterates for each of the remaining twelve exercises included in the three other Establishments of Mindfulness: the practitioner remains peacefully abiding in the observation of the feelings in the feelings; of the mind in the mind; and of the dharmas in the dhar-



mas. The practitioner must persevere in the practice, remaining fully attentive, understanding his or her state, and gone beyond all attachment or aversion to this life.

He tells us in section 3 that “without Full Awareness of Breathing, there can be no development of meditative stability and understanding” and that if developed and practiced continuously, Full Awareness of Breathing will indeed lead to “perfect realization of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.”

Before going further, I would like to make some comments about these unusual phrases “observing the body in the body,” “observing the feelings in the feelings,” “observing the mind in the mind,” and “observing the dharmas in the dharmas.” We are being asked by the Buddha to drop the dividing line between the subject of observation—“I/me”—and the objects of our observation—body, feelings, mind, and dharmas. We do not stand outside our body, or even act as if we were an independent observer, but rather we stand within whatever it is we observe or contemplate as the presumed object of our meditation. We are talking here about samadhi again. In this kind of “observation meditation,” body and mind, the subject and object, are one.

So, technically, even though some translations of this sutra have the phrases “I know,” “I am aware,” “I calm,” “I concentrate,” “I liberate,” and “I observe,” eventually there arises simple awareness, free of the sense of “I” having an experience or doing something. We may at first begin with the thought “I am aware of a long breath,” but we develop over time the simple awareness “breathing,” “calming,” and so forth. There is simply “awareness,” and no separate sense of “self” or “I” that we hang on to.

We are asked to maintain a lucid, full awareness of what is going on in each of the Four Establishments: body, feelings, mind, and all dharmas. And we must drop all our clinging to what we prefer and our resistance to what we dislike, as both of these tendencies limit our awareness. To be fully awake, we must go beyond our conditioned aversion and attachments, not grasping after or rejecting any of “this life.”

In section 4 of the *Anapanasati Sutta*, the Buddha tells us that if the Four Establishments of Mindfulness are developed and continually practiced, they will lead to the “perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening.”

When the practitioner can maintain, without distraction, the practice of observing the body in the body, the feelings in the feelings, the mind in the mind, and the dharmas

in the dharmas, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his or her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life, with unwavering, steadfast, imperturbable meditative stability, the practitioner will attain the first Factor of Awakening, namely mindfulness (*smriti/sati*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

When the practitioner can abide in meditative stability without being distracted, and can investigate every dharma, every object of mind that arises, then the second Factor of Awakening will be born and developed, the factor of investigating dharmas (*dharma-vicara/dhamma-vicaya*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

When the practitioner can observe and investigate every dharma in a sustained, persevering, and steadfast way, without being distracted, the third Factor of Awakening will be born and developed, the factor of energy (*virya/viriya*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

When the practitioner has reached a stable imperturbable abiding in the stream of practice, the fourth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed, the factor of joy (*priti/piti*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

When the practitioner can abide undistracted in the state of joy, she or he will feel the body and mind grow light and at peace. At this point, the fifth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed, the factor of ease (*passaddhi*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

When the body and mind are at ease, the practitioner can easily enter into concentration. At this point, the sixth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed, the factor of concentration (*samadhi*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

When the practitioner is abiding in concentration with deep calm, she or he will cease discriminating and comparing. At this point, the seventh Factor of Awakening is released, born, and developed, the factor of letting go (*upeksha/upekkha*). When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

In Part Three of this book, we will begin to look at how we can use these teachings of the Buddha to inform and guide us in our asana practice. If you do not presently have a sitting meditation practice, I again wholeheartedly encourage you to begin one. Practicing the six-





teen exercises of the *Anapanasati Sutta* is much more difficult when you are moving or maintaining the various asanas that we will be practicing. And yet, if we expect meditation to effect transformation and healing in our lives, we must carry our practice from the sitting cushion and the yoga mat into the world.

Meditation practice allows us to be free of the bonds that cause us fear, sorrow, and unease. Although we will be following the sixteen exercises of the *Anapanasati Sutta* in our asana practice described in Part Three, it is important to keep in mind that all the exercises are intimately interconnected. The order in which they are presented in the sutra is not necessarily a progression from easy to difficult or beginner to advanced practice. Each practice is a total practice in itself—each is both as “easy” and as “difficult” as every other one. At the same time, they can together be seen as a single practice. While preliminary practice emphasizes stopping or calming, and the later practices emphasize insight or looking deeply, the practices of stopping and looking are inseparable. How can one exist without the other? As Thich Nhat Hanh has said, “If there is stopping, looking deeply is already present, more or less; and if there is looking deeply, there is a natural stopping.”

We can practice any one particular exercise for a whole practice session, or even for an extended period of time, or we can practice a progression of exercises in any one practice session. This means we can practice with our attention on just one of the Establishments of Mindfulness, or we can proceed through several or all four in any practice session. For example, we can practice TRIANGLE POSTURE (*Trikonasana*) while observing our breath and how it changes as we maintain the posture, or we can place our attention on the feelings (sensations). This would be practicing the first two Establishments of Mindfulness. We can practice the Third Establishment by shifting our attention to our mental formations, for instance, our aversion to the sensations that arise as we maintain the posture, or our mental commentary on our practice. Finally, we can observe the Fourth Establishment if our concentration is strong enough to allow us to see directly the impermanence and nonself nature of our thoughts, feelings, and body.

If we can cultivate this kind of insight in our asana practice (and here I include all the asanas—from sitting, lying down, standing, and moving) then it will more naturally flow into our lives—while preparing dinner, taking out the garbage, commuting to work, working, and playing. And if we can do this, we will find that we are coming alive to our life, meeting it openheartedly, living in a fully awakened state, with more ease, stability, joy, and happiness. We will be living in freedom.



PART THREE

THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS YOGA



BODY AS BODY

*Aware of an in-breath as an in-breath, I breathe in.
Aware of an out-breath as an out-breath, I breathe out.*

*Breathing in a long breath, I am aware of breathing in a long breath.
Breathing out a long breath, I am aware of breathing out a long breath.*

*Breathing in a short breath, I am aware of breathing in a short breath.
Breathing out a short breath, I am aware of breathing out a short breath.*

*Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body.
Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.*

*Breathing in, I calm my whole body.
Breathing out, I calm my whole body.*

THE FIRST FOUR EXERCISES the Buddha offered in the practice of the Full Awareness of Breathing help us to return to our body so that we may look deeply into it and therefore learn ways to best care for it. The Buddha was adamant that we should never mistreat or abuse our bodies. Remember that *ahimsa*, or the principle of non-harming, is the essence of all yoga practice.

The first three exercises here focus our attention on the breath. “Short” and “long” are shorthand expressions for all the qualities of the breath that we may discover once we begin to pay attention to it. Our breath may be long, or short, even or uneven, rough or smooth, heavy or light. And our practice is simply to see how it is without manipulating it.



In focusing on the breath in this way, we begin to see how the breath and mind are intimately related. Our mind affects our breathing and our breathing affects our mind. In observing our breath we are observing our mind. Also, as our breath is a function of our body, we begin to see that in observing our breath we are observing our body. So in this very simple practice, we are already bringing about the “yoga” or union of body, breath, and mind.

Please do not confuse this practice with the practice of pranayama as it is taught in most yoga classes. Most forms of pranayama involve the control and manipulation of the breath. Anapanasati accomplishes many of the same results of such controlled breathing by simply letting the breath be as it is, but at the same time giving it your *full attention*.

The sheer act of paying attention to the breath will affect the breath. Awareness has an amazingly powerful transformative effect, and this becomes apparent early on in your practice when you simply observe how the breath enters and leaves your body. Remember, this isn't about consciously controlling or attempting to change your breathing patterns. As you pay attention, you will see the quality of your breathing change. Not necessarily in a linear way, but over time, there will be ever greater calmness; the breath grows deeper and slower.

Even while just sitting and observing your breath you will quickly see how the breath is constantly changing. Most obvious is its change in direction. First it comes in, then it goes out. You may become aware that there is a little gap between the in- and out-breaths, and a little gap between the out- and in-breaths. The gaps may or may not be equal in duration, just as the in-and-out flow of the breath may or may not be equal in duration. From one breath to another there may be great changes in depth. The breath may move along shallowly for a while, and then a big, heaving sigh moves through the body. It's much like the waves at the shore, some rush in and break with great movement and drama, while some just trickle in. If you find watching the breath boring, you are simply not paying enough attention!

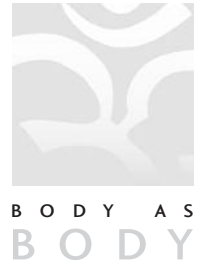
This mere recognition of the breath is really the basis of all the exercises we will be doing. Right from the start we are cultivating a mind free from reactivity and aggression. We are not imposing our will on the breath, but learning how to practice full acceptance of what is.

In the third exercise within this first group, we expand our field of awareness to include the whole body. Many practitioners, teachers, and commentaries, perhaps as a result of placing an overemphasis on the attainment of the concentrative states, the *jhanas*, have denied that

the “whole body” is the whole body of the practitioner. They have asserted instead that “whole body” refers to the whole body of *the breath*. Even many of the most well-known and respected commentaries instruct us to focus on the tip of the nose and not to follow the breath into the body. The reason most often given is that the body is too large an object for us to concentrate on. These commentators interpret the word *kaya* (body) as “breath-body,” and they say that we are not to observe the entire *physical* body and that the word “entire” refers to the beginning, middle, and end of *each breath*. Yet in practicing the first two exercises, the practitioner is already practicing awareness of the “breath-body,” for how else would one know if the breath was long or short if they weren’t paying attention to the whole breath?

The first tetrad of the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* is related to the First Establishment of Mindfulness, which is mindfulness of the body. It is a natural progression to go from the breath to the body as we continue to observe the breath because, if we truly pay attention, we begin to see that *the whole body breathes!* Nowhere in either sutra are we told to concentrate our attention on the tip of the nose, and nowhere in either sutra are we told that we should not concentrate on the whole physical body.

In any event, in practicing asana, it would be foolish not to include the whole body as our object of meditation. And when we do so, we begin to see the true intimacy between the breath and the body. In any forward bend, if we look to our breath, we will see that not just the belly rises, but the whole back rises and falls as the ribs expand and contract with each breath. In COBBLER, we see that inhalations increase the sensations of stretching in the groins, while the exhalations reduce the sensations. Even as we sit in SIMPLE CROSSED-LEG POSE and observe the whole body, we will see that the breath subtly rises up from the pelvis, lifting the shoulders up and back, the head bobbing gently like a cork on the surface of a lake as we inhale, and then how it all drops back down as we exhale. Now, none of this needs to be exaggerated in order for us to feel it. We just pay close attention to what is really happening. And it is subtle, perhaps not anything anyone else would be able to see if they were watching you. But this constant movement is always happening. Life is movement, breath is movement, and one of the first things we can begin to see for ourselves is that there is movement even in stillness. And as our awareness deepens we can also begin to see for ourselves how there is stillness in the midst of movement. In the words of Lao Tsu, “Stillness in stillness is not real stillness. Stillness in activity—that is real stillness.”





Before looking ahead into the fourth exercise, I would like to say a few words about *moving* the body when it is the object of our meditation. In the Theravada tradition—for instance, in walking meditation—we are encouraged to move very slowly. In one lineage, the instruction may be to let the breath set the pace and synchronize the movements of the legs with the breath. As the in-breath arises, you raise first the heel, then the sole, and then the ball of the foot. Move the foot forward as the breath continues. Then, as the exhalation begins, place the foot on the ground and wait for the next inhalation, taking the same kind of step now with the other foot. Alternatively, one may be taught to lift, move, and place one foot on the in-breath, and then lift, move, and place the other foot on the out-breath.

An even slower method is to just raise the heel of the right foot on the in-breath, with the toes still touching the ground. You leave the foot in this position as the exhalation happens. Then, with the next in-breath, the foot is raised and moved forward and placed on the ground. With the exhalation, the body's weight is shifted onto that foot, completing the step.

This last method, much more complex than either of the other methods, really requires strong and steadfast concentration. The whole point is simply to walk, letting each step be an end in itself. Thich Nhat Hanh offers a *gatha* (short verse for recollection) that can be used in walking meditation: “I have arrived,” as you step out with the right foot. “I am home,” as you step with the left foot.

Why do we bother with this? As the Buddha said, a whole cosmos arises and passes away continually within this “fathom-long body.” When we slow down, we can begin to see this process much more clearly.

Now, I have heard several Zen teachers denigrate this style of practice, saying that mindfulness should be able to be maintained while moving naturally. They say that slow movement practice is “self-conscious” and deviates from simple awareness. They say that the recipe for living is simply to do what we're doing: “Don't be self-conscious about it; just do it.”

I would reply, with due respect, that these teachers seem to have missed the whole point and purpose of this particular practice, and what they are saying is only half right, insofar as one should be able to maintain mindfulness at all movement speeds and mindfulness is *never* self-consciousness. While Thich Nhat Hanh is well known for his advocacy of slow walking meditation, I have joined in with several of his monks and nuns in *running* meditation at the Green Mountain Dharma Center in Vermont.

When we move slowly, observing the movements and sensations as they arise, we are no more “self-conscious” than when we “just do it.” In fact, many people have reported that in slow walking meditation, the sense of foot and leg may actually dissolve and all that remains is the movement. To me, this is exactly the “dropping of body and mind” that Zen teaching describes.

I believe teachers who reject slow-movement practice are overreacting. Out of the fear that such practice may become “self-conscious” they miss out on the valuable lessons such practice can offer us, while those who practice slow-movement practice can still, after all, choose to run, hop, skip, and jump as they wish.

Again, don’t take my word for it, or anyone else’s. Try this simple experiment now. Raise your right hand toward the ceiling. Just do it. Then take it back down. What did you see? What did you experience? Now, raise your right hand to the ceiling very slowly. Take at least thirty seconds to do it. Then take it back down again, just as slowly. Don’t think about it, or try to analyze it. “Just do it”—but very slowly.

Now, what did you notice; what did you see this time? Were you able to notice the impulse that precedes the movement? The complex mental/physical twinge that sets the arm in motion? Did you see and feel the weight and volume of the arm? Were there any changes in the quality of your mind or breath as the arm slowly rose or descended? Were there mental formations, perhaps of boredom, irritation, curiosity, pleasure? A whole cosmos arises, changes, and passes away in one simple movement, and generally we are completely blind to all of it. Generally, until there has been a deep and real transformation at the base, when we simply “do what we’re doing,” we are merely doing conditioned, habitual actions. Moving slowly allows us to see this more clearly and leads to *ceto-vimutti*, liberation of the mind. It does this by giving us the time and space to see the constant process of conditioning arising here in this body-mind. And in seeing the conditioning, we can begin the process of freely choosing how to respond, rather than blindly react.

So in our asana practice, we will work both ways; slowly and more quickly, utilizing as wide a palette as possible so that we can truly develop the second Factor of Awakening, the investigation of dharmas. Neither is better or more advanced. Both offer us the opportunity to awaken. We need to see when each practice is appropriate and just do it.

So now we come to the fourth exercise of anapanasati. This exercise, “calming the body,” is actually not something you attempt to do, but something that you just let happen. As you



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practice, you will see that the calming of the body, and of the mind, naturally arises from the practices you have been cultivating—observing the breath and the body. After all, breathing and body are one. Breathing and mind are one. Mind is not something separate that exists independently outside of our body or our breathing. Remember, we are observing “the body in the body.” Mahayana Buddhism puts it this way: subject and object are empty; subject and object are not two. What they are empty *of* is an independent, separate existence.

So, simply by practicing consciousness of the breath over time—a few short minutes if you are not particularly stressed, and maybe ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes or more if you are—you will see calmness arising. While the object of this exercise is to bring calmness to the body, because body, breath, and mind are not separate, calmness will arise in the breath, the body, and the mind.

Sometimes, when we attempt a challenging asana, our breath grows tight and constricted, as does our mind, with fear and resistance. If we are not paying attention, this tightness and constriction creates imbalance and instability. Again, as soon as we notice this we simply place our full attention onto the breath. The breath will become calmer, deeper, and smoother; the body and mind will relax, and the asana will take on a beautiful poetry and life of its own. We may not accomplish the “ideal” form of the asana, but we will have truly practiced yoga.

In the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, the Buddha only offered these four exercises that explicitly relate to the First Establishment of Mindfulness. If we turn to the section of the *Sutra on the Establishments of Mindfulness* relating to the body, we will learn how to further our practice of “observing the body in the body.”

In that sutra, the Buddha tells us to observe the inside of the body as well as the outside. As practitioners, we should be aware of the movements and positions of the body: “In whatever position one’s body happens to be, one is aware of the position.” He goes on to specify that we should apply full awareness to whatever we are doing, “bending down or standing up, walking, sitting, or lying down.” He goes so far as to enumerate eating, drinking, dressing, urinating, and defecating, so we can assume that nothing is to be left out. This is important to keep in mind for our asana practice.

Another way to practice the First Establishment of Mindfulness involves scanning the body, paying attention to every part from the soles of the feet upward and then from the hair

on top of the head downward. Yet another practice, one not generally recommended for beginners, is to contemplate one's own body as a corpse. This is a powerful meditation when one is ready for it, and can be done while lying in the CORPSE POSE (*Shavasana*). For detailed instruction in this meditation, see Interlude: This Fathom-Long Body (page 131).

When we combine awareness of breathing with asana practice, we can look to see how movement affects the breath. As you stretch into a posture, do you hold your breath? Does the breath get deeper? Or perhaps more shallow? Does the breath grow slower or more rapid as you do a backbend? We can also begin to see how the breath moves the body. As we stay in a forward bend, for instance, we can see how an in-breath lifts us slightly out of the posture, while the out-breath releases us deeper into it. Simply and constantly applying full awareness to our breath, we come face to face with habitual patterns, face to face with our aversion and our grasping. The important thing to remember is that when such things do arise—and they will!—we are asked to simply observe them and release them. Come back to the breath. As my Zen teacher, Samu Sunim, often says, “Come back to just this, just now, just here.”

In each asana, we can take the time to scan the body and see where tension is being held, where the body feels strong and stable, and where it feels tenuous. We can observe what parts of the body are active, what parts are passive or receptive. And we can become more aware of the surface of the body as it presses against the floor or another part of your body. In many of the postures, we may even increase our awareness of the inner body as we twist and turn from one side to the other.

Many of my students, when practicing this way, have expressed a greater engagement with their body; they say they feel more present. Allowing the breath to be natural, following its movement through the body, and letting the breath determine the duration of the movement increased their sense of concentration and led to deeper integration and ease in the postures.

Others have noted that they experienced some frustration in the face of the challenge to move slowly and that they “couldn't use the movements or the postures to suppress thoughts.” Until practicing slowly, with the emphasis on natural breathing, they hadn't even realized that they had been using their asana practice to suppress their thoughts. This may be another advantage of slow movement practice. Remember, the practice here is not to suppress, but neither is it to cling to, or lose yourself in identifying with the thoughts.



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Still other students have said that they have learned to see how resistant they can be to being present, how they were able to see where in the body they are blocking and holding, “rejecting” their experience. And once this insight arose, they often found that in accepting and not rejecting, they experienced more calm and peace.

In the words of the Buddha, “Come and see for yourself.”



MINDFULNESS YOGA: SEQUENCE ONE

THIS FIRST SEQUENCE of Mindfulness Yoga follows the first four exercises relating to the First Establishment of Mindfulness, the body, as described in *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*.

I suggest you read through the sequence before doing it the first time so that you can get an understanding about how to work with mindfulness of the body in the body. The photos accompanying the text are designed to aid in familiarizing you with the forms of the asanas. If you are a beginner to the practice of yoga-asana, you may want to skip the asterisked asanas the first time you practice.

The timing and breath suggestions are just that. See how working by carefully counting the breaths is, and how long that takes. Then try approximating. Based on the average of 15 breaths a minute, the entire sequence can take anywhere from 45 minutes to over an hour and a half if you follow the minimum suggested breath repetitions. I teach classes that last 75 minutes, 90 minutes, and 115 minutes, and have been able to get through the whole sequence in an unhurried way in all of them.

If working this way, or if asana practice is new for you, I suggest you work with this sequence until you are familiar and comfortable with the practice. While I recommend that one develop a daily practice, you should at least aspire to doing it two to three times a week.

Please remember that the practice is not the mere “holding” of static postures, but includes the application of effort in the posture (which entails finding the balance between work and relaxation), as well as staying mindful while moving from one posture to another. Let go of any goal, or attainment-minded grasping, and realize that the practice of asana includes the moving into and out of each posture.

While the text most often has instructions on how to move into and out of the asanas, a general rule is that one exhales during any movement that draws the body in on itself, as in moving into a forward bend or twisting, and one inhales when opening the body up, as in reaching your arms overhead or lifting up into a backbend as in LOCUST.

While many may focus on the precise structural form of the asanas and the “ideal” body or shape, I will place less emphasis on the detailed structural aspects of the asanas. Rather, I hope to encourage you, the reader-practitioner, to practice the asanas as tools for self-learning. Your aim should be to let the postures live in your body rather than to force your body into the form of the asana. As I heard David Swenson, a brilliant ashtanga yoga teacher, once say, “Don’t make an asana of yourself.”

1. Corpse Pose

3–5 MINUTES

Begin in CORPSE POSE, with your legs about 12–18 inches apart and your toes turned out. Your arms are at your sides, at least a few inches from the torso, with your palms turned upward.

First, just let your awareness rest wherever in your body you experience the breath. Forget for now all you think you know about your breath or what you’ve been taught about the proper way to breathe and simply notice how the breath is coming and going. Remember, let go of the tendency to control or manipulate and just see for yourself what is happening now.



Some may feel the breath as the rising and falling of the abdomen. Others may feel the breath more in the chest rising and falling or the ribs expanding and contracting. Still others may feel the sensations of the breath at the tips of the nostrils or at the back of the throat. Wherever you feel it, rest your attention there.

Know an in-breath as an in-breath and an out-breath as an out-breath. Notice the specific feeling tone of an in-breath and the specific feeling tone of the out-breath. *Feeling tone* refers to the full sensational presence of the body as experienced, the “tone” of what your body is feeling. When you inhale, there is a subtle sense of expansion and of tension, while the exhalation is normally experienced as a release and contraction. Then begin to see the various other qualities of the breath. Following the entire “breath-body,” know a long breath as a long breath and a short breath as a short breath. Avoid trying to make them even. Just breathe and experience. The breath may be long or short, even or uneven, deep or shallow, rough or smooth. Just note the breath, paying attention, without trying to make the breath any particular quality. As you pay attention to the breath, notice any changes that happen naturally.

Then, still allowing the breath to come and go naturally, expand your awareness to include the whole body. Are you holding tension in the body, perhaps tensing the legs or the buttocks as if you need to still hold yourself up? Now that you are aware, does the tension release? Feel the weight and volume of the body as it presses into the floor. Can you feel the tips of your toes and fingers without wiggling them? How do you know where in space the body is when you remain still and quiet? Do you experience hard and fast boundaries or does the outline of the body seem indistinct?

Trace the back of the body and see what parts of it contact the floor and where there is space between the floor and the body, like behind the knees. Where else is the body not in contact with the floor?

Avoid letting the mind drift into daydreaming and simply remain still and aware of your breath for three to five minutes, and then gently begin to move into the next posture.



2. Knee-to-Chest Pose

45–60 SECONDS EACH SIDE

From observing the breath and the body at rest, we begin to observe the breath and the body during movement. Again, let go of all you think you know about how your body moves. Imagine that you are an alien intelligence that has just entered into this body and you are tentatively making your first movements. Now, slowly slide the right heel along the floor, bending the knee toward the ceiling as you slide the foot toward the buttock. Pay attention to the feeling tone of the leg and the whole body as you do this. Can you feel any changes in your weight distribution or the center of gravity in your pelvis as the foot moves into the buttock? Once there, slowly lift the foot off the floor and bring the knee into your chest while holding it with both hands.

After 6–8 breaths, slowly lower the foot to the floor near the buttock and then slide it out to straight. Notice the discrete point where you know you can fully release the weight of the leg to the earth, and when you do, notice any changes in the breath and the feeling tone throughout the body. Have you been holding the breath or holding tension in the body?

Repeat with the other leg.



3. Simple Cross-Legged Sitting Pose

2–5 MINUTES

Sit with your legs crossed, with your feet underneath your knees. Notice which shin you naturally place over the other. Sit on the forward points of your sitting bones (avoid rolling the pelvis backward and rounding the lower back). With your hands beside your hips, feel the sitting bones pressing down into the ground as the crown of your head rises up, lengthening the spine. Feel where in your body you sense your weight as it presses down into the earth.

Now place your hands on your knees, close your eyes, and open to the feeling tone of



“just sitting.” Then lean as far to the right as you can without falling over and see what happens to the feeling tone. Where do you need to hold tension to keep from falling? What has happened to your center of gravity? How has this affected your breathing? It is unlikely that the breath is deep, full, or relaxed while the body is so precariously balanced.

Then slowly lean over to the left as far as you can, and watch how the feeling tone changes across the range of motion, growing more relaxed as you approach the center, and then again getting more tense and restricted the more off-center you go

to the other side. Then begin to rock side to side in ever smaller movements, letting the quality of your breath show you where center is. The breath will grow more relaxed, smoother, and the feeling tone will be one of ease. You may feel the tension in your upper back and shoulders melt. Without needing any external reference, your body and breath will guide you to your center. Let your breath be the guru.



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4. Cross-Legged Forward Bend

8–12 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Now, extend out over the crossed legs resting your forehead on your arms. As you sit here, notice where the breath is experienced in this forward bend. Do you feel the belly pressing against your thighs? Can you feel the breath in your back? Perhaps you can feel the ribs



expanding and contracting with each breath. Notice if you are holding tension anywhere in the body and see if you can just let go. Do you find that the in-breath lifts you slightly while the out-breath releases you back down into the forward bend? If so, don't exaggerate this movement, but also refrain from inhibiting it. Let the breath move the body freely and release into the experience of the movement.

When coming up from this posture, draw the navel back to the spine and roll the spine up, one vertebra after the other until you come back to SIMPLE CROSS-LEGGED POSTURE.

Repeat with other shin placed on top. Notice how unusual this may feel. You most probably sat first with your legs crossed your habitual way. A simple change such as this can already show how conditioned we are in our behavior.



Modification:

If you find your lower back rounding and your head and forearms do not come to the ground, sit on a blanket or two so that your pelvis is elevated and you can tilt forward from your hips, and rest your torso on a bolster or enough blankets so that you can rest with your spine extended.



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5. Seated Side Stretch

8–12 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Place your right hand beside your hip and stretch the left arm up. Slowly slide the right hand out to the side, placing your forearm on the ground, while bending over to the right. Keep grounding your left sitting bone, while stretching through the fingers of your left hand; bring the left arm as parallel to the floor as possible. If it's comfortable, turn your face to gaze up. If your left arm is blocking your view of the ceiling, try to take the left arm back toward your ear.

Sitting in the posture, feel where the breath is experienced. Notice the difference between the left side of the body and the right side. Come up on an inhalation while stretching the fingers of your left hand up to the ceiling. Exhale as you release the left arm to your side.

Repeat on the other side.



6. Cat/Cow Pose

6–10 REPETITIONS, LINKED WITH YOUR BREATHING CYCLE



Position your hands straight down from your shoulders and your knees straight down from your hips. On the exhalation, round your back like an angry cat, tilting the pelvis backward and tucking the tailbone between your legs. Let your head hang down as you gaze back toward your pelvis. On the inhalation, tilt your pelvis forward, dropping your belly toward the floor as

the crown of your head and your sitting bones reach up toward the ceiling, your back moving into a soft backbend. Here your back takes the line of a cow's back.

Let your natural breath determine the duration and rhythm of your movement. Begin the movement with the tilting of your pelvis, and let the movement generated by this action flow up your back like a wave moving through water. Pay attention to the body of the breath as well as all that arises as you move from one position to the other.



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7. Downward-Facing Dog

10–30 BREATHS

From COW POSE, tuck your toes under and, reaching your sitting bones up and back, straighten your legs into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Keep the sitting bones lifting and let go of the notion that you need to have your heels come to the floor, yet do keep them moving toward the floor, but not at the expense of the elongation of your back.

As you breathe in the posture, shift your weight from limb to limb slowly enough to sense the changes in the body's tension and relaxation. How does the added effort of supporting yourself through one limb over the others affect the breath? Then begin to shift your body weight more and more into center, and notice how the breath again grows more even and easy.





Modification:

With tight hamstrings, the lower back will round and compress. Simply bend your knees until you can feel the back lengthen and the lower back regains its natural (inward-moving) lumbar curve. If the backs of your legs are really tight, in addition to bending your knees, you may want to experiment with stepping your feet a bit wider than hip width.



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8. Lunge

3-6 BREATHS EACH SIDE

From DOWNWARD FACING DOG, step your right foot forward between your hands, keeping the back leg straight and extending out through your back heel. Make sure the bent knee is not coming forward of your toes. The front knee should be bent at a 90-degree angle with



the shin perpendicular and the thigh nearly parallel to the floor. Come up onto your fingertips and roll the shoulders down your back while opening the heart as you gaze forward.

Without straining or becoming rigid, keep making the effort to lengthen out through the back heel while keeping the chest

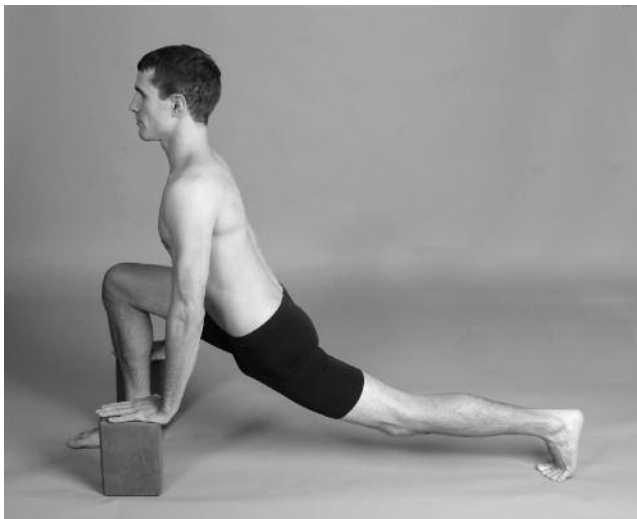


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lifted. Let the breath move freely through the body. If the breath seems constricted, notice if you are straining in the posture and let the breath guide you to a more easeful posture.

Step the right leg back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG and repeat with the left leg. From the LUNGE, step forward into the HANGING FORWARD BEND.



Modification:

With tight hips, you may find it difficult to extend your back leg while keeping your front leg bent 90 degrees at the knee. You can place your hands on blocks and even unbend your front knee until you feel more openness in the hips. Ground the front thigh toward the floor while lifting your back leg up toward the ceiling.

9. Hanging Forward Bend

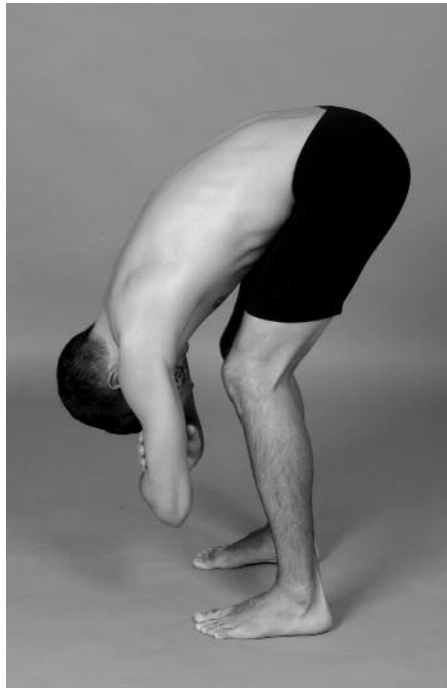
6–12 BREATHS

Have your feet about a fist's width apart (hip width) and lift your sitting bones up as you drape your torso over your legs. If there is tension felt in the lower back, soften and bend the knees. Cross your arms, interlocking them at the elbows, and just hang.

In this, our second forward bend, it may be easier to see the way the breath moves the body. As you inhale, can you feel the torso rise up a bit? And as you exhale, notice how you release back into the forward bend. It is as if your body was bobbing on the surface of a gentle wave. Again, don't exaggerate this movement, but also do not inhibit it. Just let it be and experience it. You may or may not go deeper into the stretch as you continue to hang here. Don't force it.



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Modification:

Those with tight hamstrings will find that they will round in the lower back, eventually causing tension there. Bend your knees to release the back tension and let your torso be supported by your thighs. This action stabilizes the lower back and sacrum and allows you to bend from your hip joint rather than from the back. Keep the sitting bones lifting, while simultaneously pressing down through your feet.

10. Spinal Roll

20–40 SECONDS

Release your arms and let them dangle freely. Don't hold them in any particular place. With your knees softly bent, draw your navel back toward your spine and roll up one vertebra at a time. See how little or how much of your spine you can actually experience as you do this. Let the breath be natural.

Keep your eyes open and if you see your arms coming in toward your legs, or reaching out away from you, see if you can consciously let go and surrender them to gravity. The main function of this pose in Mindfulness Yoga is to help us become more aware of our habit energy. We tend to hold so much tension in our shoulders, neck, and arms that it becomes second nature, and we are not even conscious of it. So see if you can become aware of the tension as it arises by observing the stiffness move into your arms, and each time you see that happening,



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just keep letting it go. Be like a rag doll. Do not lift your shoulders as you roll up. Simply let them roll back into place. Remember that there are seven vertebrae in your neck, so see if you can get a sense of lifting and stacking them right up to the base of your skull.

Modification:

If there is pain in the lower back, even with bent knees, then use your hands on your thighs for added support.

11. Mountain/Balanced Standing Pose

2–5 MINUTES

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel along the midline of the foot (roughly straight back from the second toe). Your big toes will be slightly closer to each other than your heels when lined up along the midline of the foot. Feel the weight of your body descend down through your legs and into the earth just in front of your heels. Let your spine rise up out of the basin of your pelvis, upper chest lifted, and shoulders relaxed and slightly back.

See if you can feel the natural curves of your spine. The neck slightly curves in, while the upper back has a slight roundness and the lower back again curves in gently. Avoid collapsing into the lower back. Keep the front ribs soft.



Now, as we did in the SIMPLE CROSS-LEGGED SEATED POSE, let's experiment to find our center. With your eyes closed, try keeping the body straight and lean forward as far as you can without falling on your face. Notice where you need to maintain tension in order to resist

gravity. Your toes will be literally “holding on.” Notice what happens to the natural curvature of the spine in order to keep from falling. And then notice your breath. I hazard a guess that it will not be deep or slow or very expansive.

From here, lean as far back as you can and feel how unstable this is. Again, notice the body and where you need to hold tension in order to keep from falling. Notice the quality of your breath, and perhaps you can also begin to notice the quality of your mental space. It is probably as constricted and tight as your breath! Lean forward and back, lessening the arc of movement until you can feel the breath grow a bit deeper and more spacious. Notice how you can release all the major muscles in the back and shoulders and be buoyantly straight. Again, let the breath guide you, and accept the feeling tone of the body as your teacher.

Repeat this observation meditation as you lean to the side. Trying to keep your body as straight as possible, lean over as far as you can to the right and see where in your body the tension must be held in order to keep from falling. Notice where you feel the breath and what its quality is. Then, lean over to the left and see here how your weight presses down through the left foot and how unstable the right foot’s contact with the earth is. Can you feel how you need to distort the spine, curving it up toward the ceiling as you lean out to the side? Then shift back and forth from left to right in smaller and smaller arcs, using the feeling tone of ease and stability to guide you to center.



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12. Crescent Moon Pose

3–8 BREATHS EACH SIDE



Inhale as you reach your arms up overhead and press your palms together. As you exhale, bend to your left and move your hips to the right. As you breathe in the posture, see if you can continue to extend through your fingers on the inhalations, and move your hips more to the side as you exhale.

Breathing here, notice the quality of the breath, where you feel it most, and how it differs from the right side to the left side of your body. When ready to come back to straight, inhale and reach up through your fingers to the ceiling.

Repeat on the other side.

Modification:

If there is tightness in the shoulders, you can place a block between your hands and press into the block while pressing up to the ceiling. Let this action maximize the broadness of your open back muscles. Maintain this openness even while bending to the side.



*13. Sail Pose

3–8 BREATHS

From the starting position of CRESCENT MOON, clasp all your fingers except your index fingers, which point upward like a church steeple. Roll your eyes up in your head and then raise your chin only enough to see your pinkies. Don't drop your head all the way back. Then, as you continue to reach up through your index fingers, move your hips forward as your heart opens up to the sky. This is a STANDING BACKBEND, but instead of thinking of dropping back, the action is reaching up and moving forward from the pelvis. This way you avoid dropping into the lower back.

Breathing here, notice the quality of the breath, the quality of your posture and balance, and the quality of your effort. Are you straining at all? If so, back out a bit. It isn't a matter of



how “far” you go into a posture, but how “deeply” you are in whatever depth of the posture you are in. Let go of thinking that you need to attain some abstract idea of perfection. When ready to come out from this posture, inhale as you reach up through your index fingers straight up to the sky. Exhale, releasing your arms to your sides.



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14. Swan Dive into Standing Forward Bend

6–12 BREATHS

Inhale, lifting your arms up overhead. Then, exhaling, roll your thighs in as you fold forward from your hips, and lean into the back of your legs, pouring your torso out over your thighs. Have your arms out to the side at least a 45-degree angle as you do this, minimizing any possible strain in your back.



Breathe in the **STANDING FORWARD BEND** for at least four breaths and then **SPINAL ROLL** up into **MOUNTAIN** when you are ready. Throughout this movement, continue your observation of the breath and how the breath, the body, and the mind condition and interpenetrate each other.





Modification:

If tightness in the hamstrings or hips prevents keeping a flat back in SWAN DIVE, keep your knees bent as much as needed to release the strain in the lower back.



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15. Tree Pose

10–30 BREATHS ON EACH LEG

From MOUNTAIN, shift your weight into the right foot and place the sole of your left foot into your right inner thigh. Press your foot into the thigh as the thigh presses back into your foot. Place your palms together at your heart in *namaste* (*Anjali Mudra*). It helps to gaze at something not moving, such as a spot of the floor about five feet in front of you, or at a spot on the wall at eye level.

If your balance feels challenged, just stay here and keep grounding down through your feet and keep the heart lifted and open. But if



you feel confident in your balancing, reach your arms up over your head. Avoid sinking into your lower back by keeping the kidneys mentally “inflated” and the front ribs soft and not jutting out.

As you stand here, keep the focus on your breath. Notice if there is any tendency to hold the breath, as if that could help in keeping balance. Remember, stability and ease is what defines asana, but this refers to maintaining stability and ease in the *mind*, even when the body feels less than stable (though eventually you will attain more stability and ease of body as well). Notice what movements the breath initiates as you stand like a tree.

When ready to come out of this pose, lower the hands to in front of your heart, and then with full awareness, slowly lower the left foot to the floor, returning you to MOUNTAIN. *Repeat while standing on the other leg.*



Modification 1:

If unsteady, you can try with your foot pressing below your knee on your inner shin, or even have your toes on the floor for some added balance assistance.

Modification 2:

Practice against a wall, with your right hand on the wall. Use the wall to steady yourself. Try to reach your left hand over your head. If this feels okay, try taking your right hand up too.



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16. Bent-Knee Bridge Pose

6–15 BREATHS, 1–3 TIMES

Lying on your back, bend your knees, drawing your feet toward your buttocks, just a bit wider than hip-width apart and toes turned just slightly in. Your knees should be just above your ankles, shins perpendicular to the floor. Keep your arms down by your sides.

Pressing your feet strongly into the ground, let your pelvis lift up toward the ceiling. Try not to “grab” with your back, and let the lift come mainly from your legs. Rock gently side to side, in order to roll your shoulders under, so you can bring your arms behind your back and interlace your fingers. Continue to press your feet into the ground as you also press your arms into the ground in order to lift your chest. Avoid tucking your tailbone between your legs by keeping groins and belly soft. Let your chest rise toward your chin, but don’t drop your chin toward your chest. Rather, very gently keep the back of your head firmly in contact with the ground.

Notice where you feel the breath in the body and how its quality changes as you maintain the posture. Notice that even if there is no further lifting higher into the posture, you must continue to “take action” in the posture, maintaining constant pressure into the ground through your feet and arms. There is, in yoga, a difference between an action and a move-



ment. To stay in this posture, resisting gravity, one needs to continue actively pressing down into the floor although no movement results. So while it may seem like a static holding posture, you can feel for yourself how you must continue to work dynamically in order to create the posture moment by moment.

Coming down, relax your arms from behind you and let the pelvis descend back to the ground. Notice what happens to the breath as soon as you can fully release all effort.

17. Half Locust

The following is a description of the form and movement required to practice HALF LOCUST. Practice according to the instructions given for the three variations.

Start by lying face down on your belly with your legs together and with your arms down along your sides, reaching through your fingertips with the palms facing down on the ground.

As you inhale, lift the right leg straight up and back without bending the knee. Make sure you lift from the buttock and not by grabbing from the lower back. Keep your hips and pubis firmly pressing into the ground. As the leg comes up, draw the shoulders up away from the ground and curl the head and upper chest off the floor. Try not to simply lift the upper chest



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up, but think of how a sardine can open with its lid rolling back without lifting up. Keep reaching out through the crown of your head, and do not drop your head back by jutting out your chin. As you exhale, come back to the starting position. Repeat using the other leg.

Variation 1: Practicing as described above. Inhale up and exhale down, alternating back and forth between legs until you've done each leg six times. Pay attention to the length of the breath. Let the movement and the breath be synchronized, moving along with the breath. Notice any changes in the breath as you continue to alternate back and forth.

Variation 2: Inhale up into the posture, then exhale, inhale, and then exhale back down into the starting posture. Alternate back and forth four times each leg. As you stay up in HALF LOCUST, don't keep yourself rigid, but instead, let the breath freely move through the body and perhaps gently move the body. Don't exaggerate any movement that you experience, but don't inhibit it either. Simply let the breath guide you through the experience.

Variation 3: Inhale up, then exhale, inhale, exhale, inhale, and then exhale back down. Alternate back and forth two times each leg. Please do not strain in this posture. If you let the breath freely move the body, the body can be more at ease and float on the rising and falling of the wave of the breath. If you attempt to stay up as high as you can and remain still, you will almost certainly be straining and create potential problems in the back. Notice how, while in a back-bending posture, the inhalation lifts you deeper into the backbend, while an exhalation drops you back out of it a bit. Of course, this is just the opposite of what we learned happens while breathing in a forward-bending posture.

*18. Locust Pose

4–10 BREATHS, EACH VARIATION

Start by lying on your belly with your legs together and with your arms down along your sides, reaching through your fingertips with the palms facing down on the ground.

Variation 1: As you inhale, lift your legs straight up and back without bending the knees. Make sure you lift from the buttock and not by grabbing from the lower back. Keep your hips and pubis firmly pressing into the ground. As the legs come up, draw the shoulders up away from the ground and curl the head and upper chest off the floor, as in the exercise above. Keep reaching out through the crown of your head, and do not drop your head back by jutting out your chin. Then, reaching out through your fingertips, let your palms rise up off the ground until your arms are parallel to the ground. Breathe here, noticing where you experience the breath, its quality, and any changes in it as you continue to breathe in the posture. Notice too any movement of the body as you breathe. When you are ready to come down, simply exhale back down to the starting position.

Variation 2: Start by lying as above, but reach behind your back and clasp your fingers. Keep pressing your pubis, hips, thighs, and the tops of your feet into the ground, and as you inhale



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curl your head, shoulders, and upper chest up off the ground. Reach back through your clasped hands and, keeping the wrists in toward each other, lift them up off your back. See if this draws more attention to the heart area and if the breath moves to fill the chest. As you continue to breathe in this posture, pay attention to how the breath moves in the body while also moving the body.



Variation 3: Begin as in Variation 2, but after four breaths extend out through your feet and let the legs rise up off the floor. Continue to breathe in this full posture and let the breath guide you in your effort. Notice if you experience the breath in the same areas of the body as in Variation 2, or if you feel the breath in other areas, and how the quality of the breath continues to change.

19. Child Pose

15–30 BREATHS

Begin by sitting on the backs of your calves with your sitting bones dropping into your heels. Your big toes should be touching, and your knees are slightly apart. Lengthen through your spine as if you were lifting up out of your pelvis and then fold forward, releasing your torso onto the tops of your thighs. Place your forehead on the ground and your arms alongside your legs. Make sure that your weight is moving back toward your heels and not on your neck and head by adjusting the distance between your knees. Release yourself fully into the posture and let the breath be natural. Where do you experience the breath? As you stay here, notice any changes in the qualities of the breath. Just letting the breath be cultivates calm as you rest in CHILD. When ready to come out of CHILD, continue to drop the sitting bones down onto your heels and, drawing the navel in and back to your spine, roll up into the starting position.



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Modification:

If your hips do not touch your heels, and you feel most of your weight in your upper body and head, rest your torso on a bolster or some blankets. This will support your torso and allow your head to come to the height of your hips.

20. Staff Pose

6–15 BREATHS

Sit with your legs together straight out in front of you. Press the back of your thighs, calves, and heels evenly into the ground while reaching out through your heels. Press your hands into



the ground beside your hips as you lift the chest. This full-body static contraction will have a profound effect on where the breath is most felt, as well as on the quality of the breath. See for yourself where you feel the breath. Is the breath more expansive or contractive in this deceptively dynamic posture? How does the quality of mind reflect what is happening in the body and breath?



up on a blanket or two. This will allow you to lengthen your spine while grounding your legs. The chest will now feel open and lifted, the mind more alert.

Modification:

People with tight hamstrings will find that their lower backs will round out and they will be sitting onto their tailbone. This reverse curvature leads to a collapsed chest and shallow breathing. To help get onto the sitting bones and allow the back to maintain its natural curvature, try sitting



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21. One-Legged Forward Bend

10–30 BREATHS EACH SIDE

From STAFF POSE, bend your right knee up as you slide your right heel in as close as you can to your right sitting bone. Then open your right leg out to the side. Grounding the back of the thigh, calf, and heel of your straight left leg, reach your arms up, lift up through your spine and fold out over the straight leg. Let your sitting bones spread back and widen away from the heel of the straight leg. Take hold of your shin or your foot and draw your torso further out over the straight leg by bending your arms.

Do you feel the breath in your belly or higher up in your chest? Can you also feel it moving through your back? What effect does the in-breath have on your posture? What about the out-breath? How does the breath change as you stay here in this forward bend? When ready to release, draw the shoulders back and open the heart. Lift up and out as you inhale and, exhaling, release to the starting position. *Repeat on the other side.*





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Modification:

If you are coming into this forward bend primarily from bending in the lower back and not from the hips, sit up on a blanket or two and keep extending the torso out over your straight leg. Stop when you feel the pelvis start to roll backward and round your lower back. You can support yourself here with your hands gently pressing into your shins.



22. Seated Forward Bend

15–45 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, reach out and grasp your feet or your shins. Soften your groins (the little valleys at the juncture of the inner thighs and the pelvis, also known as the *inguinal crease*) as your thighs roll slightly inward, sitting bones moving back and apart. Think more about lifting the torso out and over your legs than about how far you get in the pose. The back will round, but let it round evenly, and not until you've folded from the hips first. Move the chest out over your legs by using the strength of your arms, bending your elbows up and out to the sides. Gaze toward your toes, until the chin comes to rest on the shin. Then turn the gaze within or onto your “third eye.”

As you surrender into the posture, keep your focus on the breath. Here, especially, let yourself find that balance between working in a posture and giving yourself up to it. The Buddha compared it to the proper state of tension necessary in the strings of a lute in order to play in tune: “Not too taut and not too slack, but keyed to the middle pitch.” He states, “Take heed that when effort is too strenuous it leads to strain and when too slack to laziness. So make a firm determination that you will adopt the middle way, not allowing yourself to struggle or to slacken, but recognizing that faith, energy, concentration, and wisdom are the fruits of a calm and equable middle way.”





Modification:

We want to initiate this posture from a position firmly grounded at the sitting bones and folding forward from the hips. If in STAFF POSTURE you cannot maintain the natural curvature of your lower back and feel it rounding out, then sit up on a blanket or other bolster.

Keep the back lengthened and don't worry about getting your head to your leg, but stay at your edge and allow the stretch to come from the back of your legs and your hips.

Coming out of this forward bend, inhale as you lift the heart up and out and then exhale as you release to the starting position.

*23. Reverse Plank

4–8 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, place your hands on the floor behind your hips with the fingers pointing toward or away from your toes (you may want to alternate, as both positions have their merits). Inhaling, lift the pelvis up toward the ceiling as you point the toes toward the floor. Keep the tailbone reaching toward your feet. Make sure your wrists are directly below your shoulders with your arms straight. Either keep your chin on your chest, or let the head release all the way back, supported by your upper back muscles. Noticing where you feel the breath and its quality in this somewhat challenging posture, avoid holding the breath or struggling against the posture. Keeping your focus on the breath, when you're ready, exhale back down into the starting position.



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24. Reclined Spinal Twist

10–20 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Lie on your back with your legs bent and the soles of your feet on the ground. Cross your left thigh over the right thigh snugly. Shift your hips about 4–5 inches to the left. As you exhale, drop your knees to the right. Move to being fully on your outside right hip. Your pelvis and shoulders will be at right angles to each other, and your spine is twisting fully but effortlessly along its entire length. You can weigh your legs down with your right hand and reach out to



the left with your left hand. Keep your left shoulder blade flat on the floor, and let your chest be broad and expansive. As you rest here, you may take your right arm out to the right also, as you gaze either straight up or to your left.

Notice how the twist affects your breath. Can you sense your inner body as you lie here? Twisting like this slightly compresses the internal organs, allowing us to become more aware of the insides of our body. As you inhale and exhale, how do these sensations change? When you're ready to come out of the posture, roll onto your back, uncross your legs, and *repeat on the other side*. Center yourself and then don't forget to shift your hips over to the right.



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25. Corpse Pose

5–10 MINUTES

Let your feet be about 12–18 inches apart and have your toes turned out to the sides. Let the flesh of your buttocks move gently down toward your heels and walk your shoulder blades in and down so that they are flat on the floor. Let the heart be open. Your arms should be at least a few inches away from the torso so that there is a real sense of spaciousness. Turn your palms upward.



Draw your attention to the breath. First notice where you most experience it, and then note its qualities. Know each breath as it comes and goes. When thoughts or feelings, fantasies, daydreams, or images arise, as soon as you become aware of them, simply and without any self-recrimination, let them go and return to your breath.

Just this. Just here. Just now. Let go and just be here.

If you become aware of tension in the body, see if you can release it on an exhalation. See if it's possible to just experience the breath as it comes in and out. Can you really be sure you are the breather? Or is the breath simply breathing itself? Like a wave at the shore, the in-breath rushes into your body, and the out-breath withdraws itself. Where are you in this process?

26. Seated Meditation

5-40 MINUTES



Sit in any of the cross-legged asanas. Find your center and lengthen your torso, including the sides from your hips up into your armpits. This keeps you from just sticking your chest out to lengthen up. It reminds you that your torso is a “cylinder.” Make sure your shoulder blades are firmly supporting your upper back and that your lower back has its natural lumbar curve.

When the yogi breathes in or out a short breath, aware of his breath or his whole body, or aware that he is making his whole body calm and at peace, he abides peacefully in the observation of the body in the body, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the first Establishment of Mindfulness, the body.



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I N T E R L U D E



THIS FATHOM-LONG BODY

It is the conventional wisdom that it was the tantric revolution that brought a new and central importance to the body in spiritual practice. This conventional analysis goes on to state that tantra was the movement that began to see the body not as an obstacle for spiritual practice and liberation but as the primary vehicle for practice and awakening.

While it is true that much mainstream yoga practice in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions had become world-denying and body-negative in its thinking, thus sparking the development of tantra in the sixth and seventh centuries, when we look into some of the oldest recorded teachings of the Buddha, we see that he saw the body not at all as an obstacle, but as a laboratory in which to cultivate love, compassion, and understanding.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya* the Buddha is quoted as saying:



It isn't possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one doesn't take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering and stress without reaching the end of the cosmos. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and intellect, that I declare that there is the cosmos, the origination of the cosmos, the cessation of the cosmos, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the cosmos.

Thus, if we seek the real ending of the cycle of conditioned reactivity we call *samsara*—the cycle of pain and discomfort leading to aversion and reactivity, leading to stress and further imbalance—we need to look within, and not at what we think of as the external causes of our suffering.

The “cosmos” here is the circle of reactivity. “Birth, age, passing away, and reappearing” is what we are doing countless times a second. It is the conventional, historical, or “relative” truth of existence. We do not, and cannot, touch the “ultimate” truth of no birth and no death by attempting to transcend or leave this relative truth; we need to penetrate relative truth. This is because these two truths are two only in a conventional sense. Like right and left or up and down, they are relatively defined. They are not two, not one, but, to quote Thich Nhat Hanh once again, they “inter-are.”

While this understanding became of paramount importance in the Mahayana teachings (specifically those of the ancient Indian master Nagarjuna) as well as in tantra, and is seen in the Zen teaching that “*samsara is nirvana*,” this flower of understanding and insight can only have arisen from the seed and root planted by the Buddha, namely, his teaching as stated in the above quotation.

Besides the meditations on the breath and on the positions and movements of the body, the Buddha taught the following three practices in the *Satipatthana Sutta*.

THE PARTS OF THE BODY

The practitioner meditates on her very own body from the soles of the feet upward and then from the top of the head downward.

Included in this meditation is the awareness of all the parts of the body—external and internal. As you lie in CORPSE POSTURE, with your breath as your anchor, let your awareness move up the body. Really move your awareness into your toes, up through the foot into your shin. Be mindful of the skin, the flesh, the sinew, the muscles and tendons. Be aware of the bone and the bone marrow, the blood, the lymph.

As you move up through the thigh, your awareness enters into the pelvis. Practice awareness of the reproductive organs, the sexual fluids, the anus, the feces, the bowels, the bladder and urine. As you progress up through the torso, maintain awareness and contact with the internal organs, including the stomach, the intestines, the kidneys, and the liver. Include in your awareness the fatty tissue and the mucus, the bile, the digestive juices, the heart, lungs, and the nerves.

As your awareness moves through your arms, don't forget to include your nails, the hairs on your arms as well as the veins and arteries. When your awareness moves through the head, you are aware of your tongue, your teeth, saliva, the nose, and the sinuses, including the mucus, the ears and the earwax, your eyes and tears, your brain, and the hairs on your head.

Just reading through the above inventory, you may have noticed feelings of unpleasantness and even revulsion at certain aspects of the body. This practice, contrary to how some teach it, is not intended to create disgust or revulsion with the body, but rather to become clearer about the full nature of the body. To look at a photo of a beautiful model and reflect on his or her liver, or the digestive juices running in his or her stomach and intestines, is to apply an antidote to our attachment and painful lusting after this ephemeral phenomena, which are after all only the surface reality.

Part of this practice is to see our preferences as conditioned. We may feel some revulsion contemplating our earwax and prefer to contemplate our hair. But even our own hair caught in the bathtub drain can become a source of mild revulsion. The lovely hair of the man or woman we see in a restaurant will repulse us when we discover it in our soup! One benefit of practicing mindfulness of parts of the body is to lessen the pull of the conditioning and learn to see what remains when we free ourselves of that strong distaste or strong grasping.

The other, most simple reason we practice is to simply make contact with the body. Despite, or maybe even because of the materialist thrust of our culture, we are surprisingly alienated from our body. Many people seem to hate their body. Some spiritual traditions even seem to treat the body as a prison or a shackle—a place of punishment. By letting our awareness move through the body and become intimate with it, we become familiar with the body just as it is.

A more subtle realization that can arise as the result of observing the parts of the body is that each part has the potential to become a door of liberation and awakening. You may begin by seeing just the presence of a single part of the body such as your hand. But as you grow in your practice, you will begin to see the interdependent nature of your hand. It isn't just that the hand depends on the rest of your body; it interdepends on the entire universe. I once heard a scientist say that a single grain of sand on a beach implies the universe. This recalls William Blake's "To see the world in a grain



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of sand.” At this level of understanding, the vision of the poet and the knowledge of the scientist are made clear in the wisdom and understanding of awakening.

INTERDEPENDENCE OF BODY AND UNIVERSE

Further, in whichever position his body happens to be, the practitioner passes in review the elements which constitute the body.

This contemplation specifically works with developing the insight that there is no real separation between us and all else. The Buddha specifies that we should be aware that the elements of earth, water, fire, and air are present in us. Earth represents the principle of solidity, substance, and form; water represents the liquid aspects of matter and the principle of cohesion; fire represents heat, radiant energy, and transformation; and air represents movement. Other sutras echo the ancient Vedic teachings of the five great elements and include the element of space, which represents the “etheric” aspects of nature and the principle of vibration and creation.

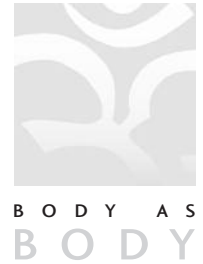
When the practitioner looks deeply into his body and contemplates the water element in himself, he sees the specifics of blood, sweat, saliva, the fluid around the joints (synovial fluid), tears, urine, and the fluid that flows around and through every cell in his body. We know that our body is indeed over 70 percent water. This water is not separate from the water that falls from the clouds formed by the many bodies of water throughout the earth. And the elements that form the water are known to be the same elements that permeate space.

The elements in our body are the same elements found throughout the cosmos. We are literally star dust. This is why in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we vow to protect the “life” of the elements. In protecting the elements from degradation, we protect ourselves. When we think we are “throwing away” our garbage, we can ask, *Where is “away”?*

All the many activities of our life generate heat, and we take in food to release energy in order to maintain our life. And all of this depends on the air around us and within us, in a constant process of exchange. All is in constant movement, and yet, when we observe this movement, do we really ever see or experience a “breather”? Or is it more accurate to say that breathing is happening?

When the practitioner practices in this way, and sees for herself the interdependent nature of her body, she begins to understand that life is not isolated in her own body. With this insight she can transcend the notion that she is just her body. The life that flows within his body is no different from the

life that flows outside his body. With this understanding, the erroneous view of a boundary between self and nonself is transcended. This isn't the transcendence of leaving this body or realm behind for a higher reality. This is the transcendence of an erroneous view, which allows us to go beyond the limiting concepts of birth and death. We enter into the realm of "no birth, no death" without ever going anywhere. Maybe this understanding is part of what lies behind the ambiguity found in the title claimed by the Buddha himself, "Tathagata," which can mean both "Thus come" and "Thus gone."



BODY AS IMPERMANENT: THE NINE CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE DECOMPOSITION OF A CORPSE

At first glance, a meditation on the decay of the body after death may seem to be totally at odds with the understanding of "no birth, no death." But in fact, because of the interdependence of the two truths, the relative and the ultimate, the existential truth that this body is of the nature to die is not in contradiction to the deeper truth that there is neither birth nor death, neither increasing nor decreasing. We just have to remain clear from what perspective we are talking.

The first time you read through this meditation you may find it unpleasant. Its intention is not to make us depressed or weary of life. Rather, its purpose is to make us aware of how precious indeed is this wonderful life we have received. Seeing impermanence, we can be motivated not to waste life in distraction and dispersion. Seeing impermanence, we take nothing for granted, and so honor the absoluteness of each moment. This now is all there is. And it is changing even now.

Ironically, when practiced by those who are ready for it—and that means those who have freed themselves from much of their aversion and craving—the effect of this meditation can be liberating. This makes sense when you realize how much pain and suffering, how much tension and strain, we create by our attempts to deny the only thing we know for certain—that we will die.

This meditation, when practiced appropriately, leads us to living freely, unbound by attachments and aversions. If you choose this practice, be sure you are ready, and discontinue it if you find yourself growing heavy, depressed, or excessively uncomfortable. Essential to mindfulness practice is being mindful of our capacities and honoring them. They, like all things, are impermanent and change over time.

The following meditation instructions offered by the Buddha reflect the way people disposed of bodies at his time. Monks and nuns would go to the charnel house and contemplate the corpses there in the various stages of decomposition. Thich Nhat Hanh has suggested that those of us in the West



may want to use images from our tradition, so that as you lie in CORPSE POSTURE, you can imagine the body lying in a coffin.

The fact that many of us may never have seen a corpse—and if we have, chances are it was dressed and made up as if it were going to a dinner party—and that it may indeed be difficult to imagine the very natural process of decomposition, is just further evidence of how resistant as a culture we are to facing this most obvious truth of nature. When ready, in the proper time and dosage, this is just the medicine we need.

1. The corpse (my corpse) is bloated, blue, and festering.
2. The corpse (my corpse) is crawling with insects and worms. Crows, hawks, vultures and wolves are tearing it apart to eat.
3. All that is left is a skeleton with some flesh clinging to it and some blood remaining.
4. All that is left is a skeleton with some blood stains, but no more flesh.
5. All that is left is a skeleton with no more blood stains.
6. All that is left is a collection of scattered bones—here an arm, here a shin, here a skull, and so forth.
7. All that is left is a collection of bleached bones.
8. All that is left is a collection of dried bones.
9. The bones have decomposed, and only dust is left.





FEELINGS AS FEELINGS

Breathing in, I am aware of feeling joy.

Breathing out, I am aware of feeling joy.

Breathing in, I am aware of feeling happiness.

Breathing out, I am aware of feeling happiness.

Breathing in, I am aware of my mental formations.

Breathing out, I am aware of my mental formations.

Breathing in, I calm my mental formations.

Breathing out, I calm my mental formations.

THE SECOND GROUP of conscious breathing practices helps return us to our feelings, so that we may develop more joy and happiness in our life and transform the suffering that we experience. It is quite obvious that the Buddha considered these states of joy and happiness to be among the natural fruits of meditative awareness, as well as being spurs to motivate us in our exploration. So, in this second group centered on the exploration of feelings, the first two that the Buddha emphasized are joy and happiness.

As a result of the calming of the body (*kaya samskara*) which is the fruit of the fourth practice of anapanasati and mindfulness of the body (the first establishment), joy naturally arises. The fifth practice of anapanasati, which introduces us to mindfulness of feelings (the second establishment), allows us to become even more fully aware of this joy, without getting



carried away by it. To begin to move the body in asana, sloughing off the stresses and difficulties of our day, can be a wonderfully joyful experience. Joy helps us to come alive, to open our hearts. Think of how an exuberant, joyful child reaches his arms up and out to the sky. Take your arms up and keep your fingers together. Then spread them wide. Go back and forth a few times and notice, if you can, the changes you experience physically in the shoulders, upper back, and chest, and psychologically in your heart. This is the openness that joy can nurture. And this heartfelt openness is necessary if we are to be able to stay awake and aware to all that life brings.

But joy, the Buddha taught, is not enough. We need to go beyond joy to happiness, the sixth practice of anapanasati. The word translated as happiness is *sukha*, and as you might have guessed, it is the opposite of *dukkha*. *Sukha* is the “good space,” the axle aligned in the center of the wheel, balanced and harmonious. It is also often translated as “ease” or “comfort.” While joy remains—like the exuberant child, a bit overexcited—happiness, according to the Buddha, is the calmness of satisfaction, satiation.

The example the Buddha used to explain the difference is that of a man dying of thirst in the desert. Suddenly he sees an oasis with a pool of water in the midst of some trees. Joy and excitement arises and he races to the water, throws himself down at the water’s edge, and scoops up the cool refreshing water. Until the very last moment before he actually drinks the water, joy is present. But once he has finally taken in the water and slaked his thirst, he is happy, and the stimulating excitement of joy is gone.

With the arising of the peace of happiness, the next two practices of mindfulness of feelings turn our attention to all feelings that arise, whether produced by the body or the mind. The term *mental formations* includes all feelings, perceptions, and mental phenomena. However, in the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, the mental formations referred to within the Second Establishment are primarily feelings, although perceptions do indeed enter into the equation since perceptions condition many feelings. However, perceptions, along with the remaining mental formations including thinking, imagining, reasoning, and so forth, are in fact the primary subject of the Third Establishment of Mindfulness. As our concentration develops, the ability to remain mindful of even difficult mental formations allows for the calming of the mind and body to arise. At this point, body, breath, and mind become unified in peace and calm.

When we broaden our approach to the Second Establishment of Mindfulness, the mindful observation of feelings, we find that the Buddha meant something quite specific when he referred to feelings. The word translated as “feelings” is the Pali word *vedana*. Another common translation of this word is “sensation,” and this, along with the following quote from the *Satipatthana Sutta*, gives us a clue as to just what is meant by the Buddha when he encouraged us to observe feelings:

Whenever a practitioner has a pleasant feeling, he is aware, “I am experiencing a pleasant feeling.” Whenever he has an unpleasant feeling, he is aware, “I am experiencing an unpleasant feeling.” Whenever he experiences a feeling which is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, he is aware, “I am experiencing a neutral feeling.”

We in the West often use the words *feeling* and *emotion* interchangeably. But in the Buddha’s sense, here we see that feelings or sensations precede emotions. The Second Establishment of Mindfulness concerns itself with sensations, while emotions are more the province of the Third Establishment. Of course, it isn’t that cut-and-dry in our actual experience, and there is a lot of overlap. But the instructions are useful for helping establish what the emphasis in our practice should be at this stage of *anapanasati*.

Feelings or sensations are of three types. They can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. These feelings or sensations are what arise through the contact our senses make with the world. They are extremely important to become aware of, because they condition how we act and how we perceive our relationship to our experience of the world.

The “sense doors” of sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and mind continually make contact with sense objects that stimulate the arising of a feeling or sensation. Our problem is that we are usually completely unaware of this feeling because it arises so quickly. And because we are unaware of it, a whole drama of emotion, action, and reaction can arise—all conditioned by the initial feeling. This is why slowing down is so helpful. This process of reactivity is so quick—nearly instantaneous—that we remain blind to it unless we take the time to slow down and stop.

As the Buddha pointed out, it is these feelings that condition our whole world. We spend huge amounts of energy trying to create and prolong pleasant feelings, we push away and destroy unpleasant feelings, and we become immured within or oblivious to the neutral feel-





ings. This grasping, aversion, and ignorance are the three roots of suffering that can taint the experience we have of life itself (thus they are also called the three poisons). It's important to develop mindfulness of feelings because when we are not mindful, we become slaves or automatons; the feelings give rise to moods, emotions, perceptions, ideas, and addictions that lead to unskillful behavior and suffering.

For instance, I could say that I enjoy chocolate. I might even say on occasion that I *crave* chocolate. But in fact, through practicing mindful chocolate-eating, I have discovered for myself that my craving was actually for the sensation that arose when chocolate made contact with my tongue. This little example may seem obvious or terribly mundane, but in fact it opened up a profound realization for me. The pleasant feeling that arises when chocolate comes into contact with my tongue is actually quite fleeting. By the third or fourth bite, the intensity is greatly reduced. The pleasantness is quickly tinged and often replaced by the unpleasantness of dissatisfaction. And then craving for something else comes up. With this awareness, maybe I decide that it isn't worth as much of my my effort, money, and caloric consequences to acquire and eat chocolate as often as I had in the past.

None of this means, of course, that I will not ever again indulge in chocolate. But what it does mean is that never again will I look to chocolate to provide anything more than a pleasant taste sensation. I can eat less and be more satisfied because I am no longer looking to chocolate (and with continued practice, any impermanent phenomena) for what it cannot provide. This is another taste of the freedom that the practice of mindfulness engenders.

Years ago, there was a popular country and western song called "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places." Without mindfulness, we get caught in looking for freedom from suffering in all the wrong places and ways. And all these unskillful ways through which we attempt to lessen our suffering—drugs, sex, money, power, war—have their root in feelings. So if we can see the feelings at their origination, and if we can see them clearly for what they are, we can free ourselves from blindly reacting to them. We can free ourselves from the suffering caused by greed, hatred, and ignorance. Without awareness of feelings, we merely react. With awareness, we can choose how to respond. We can be free to act with love, compassion, and understanding.

The seventh and eighth practices of anapanasati encourage us to become mindful of our mental formations and, through our mindfulness, calm them. While practicing, this means

becoming aware of a feeling as it arises as well as any reactivity to the feeling. For example, lying on the floor, completely relaxed, you can become mindful of the pleasantness of that experience and of any tendency to try to hold on to or prolong this pleasant feeling. If the feeling as you lie there is neutral—neither particularly pleasant nor unpleasant—you may begin to become aware of how the mind moves away from “nothing happening” and begins to create and get carried away in fantasy and daydream, or maybe even sleepiness! If an itch begins to arise as you lie there, you notice the unpleasantness as well as the strong urge to eliminate the itch. When standing in WARRIOR TWO, you may become aware of an unpleasant sensation in your shoulders. Notice too your resistance and aversion to the sensation. Can you begin to see that this reactivity itself is the cause of much of your discomfort? It becomes ever more clear through practice that while the sensation may be uncomfortable or even painful, most of the anguish and suffering we experience comes from our resistance to feeling the sensation.

In the face of unpleasant feelings, it is all too easy to cut oneself off from the experience, but this in itself creates tension in the body and mind. We make the feeling into an enemy and fight against it. Instead, we can see into the feeling, becoming one with it. This is why the Buddha said we must “observe the feelings in the feelings.” We do not stand outside of them, but rather breathe into them, soften into them. We see that *we are the feelings*. It isn't really a matter of “becoming one with them” because they are who we are—at that moment. And yet, we can learn not to identify with them as “self.” When mindfulness is not present, feelings proliferate and condition a whole chain of mentality that ends in a strong, ironclad sense of self. When mindfulness is there, the feeling is no longer all that there is. Awareness itself changes the whole situation. We can now see the impersonal forces at work. We see that all these states are not truly “us” but simply phenomena arising and constantly changing into something else and passing away. Thich Nhat Hanh refers to the “rivers of feelings.”

In a yoga class, standing in WARRIOR TWO, at this moment I *am* the sensation in my shoulder, the deep breath that continues to flow in and out, the teacher's voice telling me to hold the asana for three more breaths, the slight groan of resistance that slips from my lips, and the music playing in the background. And in the next moment I am something else. “I” am always whatever and all that is happening.

I hope you can see that what is occurring with this second tetrad of practices is merely a deepening of what has gone before. In one sense, it's always the same instruction, and in





another sense it's different. The practice of mindfulness is simply to pay attention to whatever is happening. All of it. Nothing is rejected. The motto, once again, is "Accept everything, hold on to nothing." And conscious breathing (*anapanasati*) is the fertilizer and the vehicle for maintaining mindfulness. So, in the above example from a recent yoga class, there was mindfulness of the sensation as an unpleasant sensation, mindfulness of any tendency to want to turn away, and mindfulness of the breath that enabled me to stay with the feeling and move in even closer. All of this is nonconceptual in the moment. I wasn't thinking of "doing" anything.

But then, of course, I lost the mindfulness for a moment and all sorts of thoughts came in: "This woman is a sadist. How long is she going to keep us here? I can't do this. I *won't* do this." And then mindfulness arises again and all of it subsides. The seventh and eighth practices of *anapanasati*, awareness of mental formations and the calming of the mental formations, intermingle. I do not force the thoughts from my mind. What actually seems to happen is that when I become mindful of the thoughts and my breath, the thoughts simply subside.

When I return to the sensation, I simply pay attention. There is no trying to make it be anything other than it is. As I have mentioned earlier, when we first begin to practice, it may seem to be "I'm paying attention," but with continued practice even that self-consciousness begins to be seen through. "Right Samadhi" means that there is no separation. There is just awareness—but no one who is aware!

Sometimes my students ask me why anyone "would want not to feel." This shows that they haven't really understood the teachings of the Buddha. From my readings of the sutras, it is clear to me that the Buddha was a man of deep feeling. The evocations of him pausing to look at the sunset, expressing his pleasure at its beauty, or turning to look back at a village he knew he would never see again are heart wrenching. But it is also very clear that he wasn't caught up by his feelings. They did not cause him to suffer, because he really, profoundly knew their true nature.

I'd go as far as to say that unless we are mindful of our feelings, we actually do *not* fully experience them. The Buddha's yoga practice encourages us to go ever more deeply into the feelings. Typically, we tend to think that we have two strategies in the face of strong feelings. We can somehow try to suppress them, but we know that this is ultimately not healthy. Or we can express them, and all too often unthinkingly dump and rant and cause all sorts of mis-

chief and pain to others and ourselves. We now know that merely expressing every impulse that arises is also not healthy. The Buddha offered us the third option of simply knowing, just *experiencing* the feeling. Rather than trying to get rid of an unpleasant feeling, we can know it by actually and truly feeling it.

And if we can truly know the feeling, feel it fully, with awareness, we can be free from having it condition our mind and our relationship to the world. It isn't the feelings that we become free from, but the conditioning they create. We are no longer "driven" by them. Otherwise, before we are really even aware of the initial feeling, a whole train of mental activity including ideation, projection, interpretation, and imagination overtakes us and we are drowned or swept away, losing our very life in dispersion and ignorance.

In fact, while I've spent most of my time and words on pleasant and unpleasant feelings, when we begin to seriously examine our experience, we see that most of our feelings are actually quite neutral. We tend to fixate on the "sensational" aspects of pleasant and unpleasant feelings, and remain blind to the vast majority of feelings that are neither. What this means, of course, is that we remain blind or ignorant of the vast majority of our life! If it doesn't clobber us over the head, we remain unaware.

An example of this is a student who tells me her back is "killing her." With questioning and deeper exploration, we discover together that the painful sensation is actually limited to an area of about three square inches in her lower right lumbar. There doesn't seem to be much of anything happening throughout the rest of her back at all. Yet, her fixation on the unpleasant sensation made her lose sight of the reality. And when I encourage her to really go into the pain, she reports that it isn't something solid and unchanging but in fact is in constant flux. Its boundaries are soft and diffuse; the sensations ebb and flow and change in quality almost continuously. This is not to minimize and make light of her pain, but simply to point out how we fixate on a feeling and immediately make the feelings into an "entity" that we then attempt to eliminate or separate off from ourselves. In growing intimate with the sensations, she was able to relax her resistance to the feeling, and her suffering, though not all of the pain, was greatly reduced.

Thich Nhat Hanh points out that the "neutral" feelings can in fact become the seeds of increasing joy and happiness. An example he gives is when we have a toothache, we are very clear that to not have a toothache would be very pleasant. But when we do not have a toothache, we do not touch the joy of having a "nontoothache." This is a gentle reminder that





the conditions for happiness are right here, and what we need to do is simply become mindful of them. Returning to our breath, opening to what is happening, we can be free where we are.

Please remember that any and all asanas can be approached from any or all of the Establishments of Mindfulness. Sequence One above, for instance, can be practiced with the focus on feelings. The following sequence I have created does offer what I hope will be an opportunity to explore more intense feelings, primarily from practicing longer holdings, but there are some more challenging postures included too.

The point of this practice is not to torture yourself. Honor your ability and physical condition, but do challenge yourself, with respect and compassion. Let the sensations be your teacher as you maintain mindfulness of your breath and of the sensations, as well as your reactivity. But there are no points for being macho about it.

We begin practice because we aspire to some goal: a more flexible and relaxed body, a calmer mind, or freedom from suffering. It would be disingenuous not to admit to that. But the best thing we can do with that goal is to shelve it and turn our attention to what is happening now. In this sense, we walk the path, create the path, and complete the path, moment by moment, breath by breath.



MINDFULNESS YOGA: SEQUENCE TWO

THIS SECOND SEQUENCE of Mindfulness Yoga follows the second group of four exercises relating to the Second Establishment of Mindfulness, feelings, as described in *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*.

As in the introduction to the first sequence, I suggest you read through the entire practice first before doing it so that you can get an understanding about how to work with mindfulness of the feelings in the feelings. If you are a beginner to the practice of yoga-asana, or you merely wish to practice a shorter sequence, you may want to skip the asterisked asanas.

Again, the timing and breath suggestions are just that—suggestions. Based on the average of 15 breaths a minute, the entire sequence can take anywhere from 45 minutes to over an hour and a half, depending on your rate of breathing, if you follow the minimum suggested breath repetitions.

Work with this sequence until you are familiar and comfortable with the practice. While I recommend that one develop a daily practice, you should at least aspire to doing it two to three times a week. But let go of any goal- or attainment-minded grasping, and realize that the practice of asana includes the moving into and out of each posture.

1. Corpse Pose

3–5 MINUTES

Begin in CORPSE POSE, with your legs about 12–18 inches apart and your toes turned out to the side. Your arms are at your sides, at least a few inches from the torso with your palms turned upward.

First, just let your awareness rest wherever in your body you experience the breath. Forget for now all you think you know about your breath or what you've been taught about the proper way to breathe and simply notice how the breath is coming and going. Remember, let go of the tendency to control or manipulate and just see for yourself what is happening now.

Some may feel the breath as the rising and falling of the abdomen. Others may feel the breath more in the chest rising and falling or the ribs expanding and contracting. Still others may feel the sensations of the breath at the tips of the nostrils or at the back of the throat. Wherever you feel it, rest your attention there.

Stay with the sensations of the breath, the subtle increase of tension as you inhale, and then the release of the exhalation. See how the physical sensations condition the mind. This is the “feeling tone” that includes the physical and mental aspects of experience. After a while, let your awareness expand to include your whole body. Let yourself open to and embrace all the sensations that may arise as you lie here. Look to see if the feeling is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. And right from the beginning of your practice, notice any tendency to hold on to pleasant experience, reject what may be unpleasant, or “zone out” in the absence of any particularly strong sensations.



2. Knee-to-Chest Pose

45–60 SECONDS EACH SIDE

From observing the breath and the feelings of the body at rest, we begin to observe whatever arises during movement. Now, slowly slide the right heel along the floor, bending the knee toward the ceiling as you slide the foot into the buttock. Pay attention to the feeling tone of the leg and the whole body as you do this. Can you feel any changes in your weight distribution or the center of gravity in your pelvis as the foot moves into the buttock? Once there, slowly lift the foot off the floor and bring the knee into your chest while holding it with both hands.

After 6–8 breaths, slowly lower the foot to the floor near the buttock and then slide it out to straight. Notice the discrete point where you know you can fully release the weight of the leg to the earth, and when you do, notice any changes in the breath and the feeling tone throughout the body. Have you been holding the breath or holding tension in the body?

Repeat with the other leg. If the sensations are different from one leg to the other, see if you can just notice, without adding any commentary.



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3. Lotus Preparation

45–60 SECONDS EACH SIDE

Bring both feet in near the buttocks, hip-width apart. Cross your left leg over your right, placing the outer left shin just above the ankle onto your right thigh. Then bring your right knee into your chest. Reach between your legs with your left hand and around the outside of your right thigh with your right arm and clasp your hands either just below your right knee or behind the knee, whichever feels more comfortable for your shoulders and neck.

Depending on your degree of openness in the hips, you may feel intense stretching sensations in the outer left hip. Keep breathing and notice any tendency to tense your muscles around the sensation of the stretch. See if you can release the tension and breathe into the sensations. Do not force yourself to go deeper, but rather simply let go of the resistance. Notice if the sensations change as you stay here.

Repeat on the other side, and again notice any difference you experience from one side to another. Most of us are not symmetrical and will find imbalances from one side of the body to the other. See if you can just see what is happening without making the more flexible or comfortable side “better” than the other one.



4. Cat/Cow Pose

6–10 REPETITIONS WITH YOUR BREATH



Position your hands straight down from your shoulders and your knees straight down from your hips. On the exhalation, round your back like an angry cat, tilting the pelvis backward and tucking the tailbone between your legs. Let your head hang down as you gaze back toward your pelvis. On the inhalation, tilt your pelvis forward, dropping your belly toward the floor as

the crown of your head and your sitting bones reach up toward the ceiling, your back moving into a soft backbend. Here your back has a gentle backbend, as it takes the line of a cow's back.

Let your natural breath determine the duration and rhythm of your movement. Begin the movement with the tilting of your pelvis, and let the movement generated by this action flow up your back like a wave moving through water. Pay attention to the body of the breath as well as all that arises as you move from one position to the other.

Do you find yourself enjoying one aspect of this movement more than another? How does this condition your experience of the posture? Or perhaps you may find yourself going on “automatic pilot” as you repeat the movement. Stay present throughout the entire movement.



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5. Downward-Facing Dog

15–30 BREATHS

From COW POSE, tuck your toes under and, reaching your sitting bones up and back, straighten your legs into DOWNWARD FACING DOG. Keep the sitting bones lifting and let go of the notion that you need to have your heels come to the floor, yet do keep them moving toward the floor, but not at the expense of the elongation of your back.

As you breathe in the posture, shift your weight from limb to limb slowly enough to sense the changes in the body's tension and relaxation. How does the added effort of supporting yourself through one limb over the others affect the breath? Then begin to shift your body weight more and more into center, and notice how the breath again grows more even and easy. As you stay in the posture, stay alert to any changes in the sensations that arise. More importantly, see if you can stay alert to any reactivity towards or away from the changing sensations.





Modification:

With tight hamstrings, the lower back will round and compress. Simply bend your knees until you can feel the back lengthen and the lower back regains its natural (inward moving) lumbar curve. If the backs of your legs are really tight, besides bending your knees, you may want to experiment with stepping your feet a bit wider than hip width.



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*6. Lunge into Standing Lunge (Warrior One Variation)

10–20 BREATHS EACH SIDE





From DOWNWARD-FACING DOG, step your right foot forward between your hands, keeping the back leg straight and extending out through your back heel. Make sure the bent knee is not coming forward of your toes. The front knee should be bent at a 90-degree angle with the shin perpendicular and the thigh parallel to the floor. Come up onto your fingertips and roll the shoulders down your back while opening the heart as you gaze forward.

Without straining or becoming rigid, can you keep making the effort to lengthen out through the back heel while keeping the chest lifted? Let the breath move freely through the body. From here, come up into the STANDING LUNGE, which is a variant form of WARRIOR ONE. Keep actively reaching out through your back foot and let your tailbone descend away from your lower back as your arms reach up toward the ceiling. Keep the shoulders from creeping up to your ears and stretch up from the side body.

As you breathe here, notice the sensations that arise. Notice how the longer you stay here and the sensations grow more intense, the resistance to the sensations also grows. Notice how the mind may want to “lean forward” away from the posture. Keep connecting with your breath and see if you can smile to the sensations.

Come out of the STANDING LUNGE back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. If you are alert, you may catch yourself grasping for the sensation of relief, but after one or two breaths in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG step forward with the left foot and *repeat the LUNGE and STANDING LUNGE on that side*. Again, notice all that arises as you stand in the LUNGE.

And when you release back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG again, see if that grasping for relief arises again. There’s nothing wrong with enjoying the relief, but what would happen if we now stayed in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG for 20 breaths? You’d probably look forward to getting out of that experience, even if it meant going back into the STANDING LUNGE! This is the apparently endless cycle of “push-me, pull-me” we put ourselves through. But staying with the sensations, we can begin to see the conditioning and begin to release it. From DOWNWARD FACING DOG, step forward into HANGING FORWARD BEND.



Modification:

If it's too challenging presently to raise your arms over your head, keep your hands gently pressing into the thigh of the front leg to help roll the shoulders back and lift and open the chest.



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7. Hanging Forward Bend

8–15 BREATHS



Have your feet about a fist's (hip width) width apart and lift your sitting bones up as you drape your torso over your legs. If there is tension felt in the lower back, soften and bend the knees. Cross your arms, interlocking them at the elbows, and just hang.

Become aware of any sense of relief you may experience. Enjoy the opportunity to rest here a moment, but see if you can keep yourself from getting overly attached or zoning out.



Modification:

Those with tight hamstrings will find that they will round in the lower back, eventually causing tension there. Bend your knees to release the back tension and let your torso be supported by your thighs. This action stabilizes the lower back and sacrum and allows you to bend from your hip joint rather than from the back. Keep the sitting bones lifting, while simultaneously pressing down through your feet.

8. Spinal Roll

20–45 SECONDS

Release your arms and let them dangle freely. Don't try to hold them in any particular place. With your knees softly bent, draw your navel back toward your spine and roll up one vertebra at a time. See how little or how much of your spine you can actually experience as you do this. Let the breath be natural.

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Keep your eyes open, and if you see your arms coming in toward your legs, or reaching out away from you, see if you can consciously let go and surrender them to gravity. As you slowly rise up into MOUNTAIN, notice where in your body feelings predominate. How do they shift and change as you slowly rise up?



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Modification:

If there is pain in the lower back, even with bent knees, then use your hands on your thighs for added support.

9. Mountain/Balanced Standing Pose

2–5 MINUTES

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel along the midline of the foot (roughly straight back from the second toe). Your big toes will be slightly closer to each other than your heels when lined up along the midline of the foot. Feel the weight of your body descend down through your legs and into the earth just in front of your heels. Let your spine rise up out of the basin of your pelvis, upper chest lifted, and shoulders relaxed and slightly back.

See if you can feel the natural curves of your spine. Avoid collapsing into the lower back. Keep the front ribs soft. With your eyes closed, as we did in Sequence One, try keeping the



body straight and lean forward as far as you can without falling on your face. Notice all the sensations in your body that arise as you tense your muscles in order to keep from falling. What is the quality of your breath and your mind as you teeter here? Here is a wonderful example of why the feelings are called body and mind “conditioners.” Intense feelings of contracted tension can immediately be observed to cause tight and constricted breath and mind.

Lean forward and back, lessening the arc of movement until you can feel the breath grow a bit deeper and more spacious. Notice how you can release all the major muscles in the back and shoulders and be buoyantly straight. Again, let the breath guide you, and let the feeling tone of the body be your teacher. You do not need a mirror if

you allow the ease and stability of your breath and body to guide you. If the breath and the body feel at ease and stable, you must be in alignment. Once balanced and centered, stand awhile and notice how the feelings change.



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10. Triangle Pose

5–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE



Reach out to the sides with your arms parallel to the floor and then step your feet out so that they are directly under your fingertips. Turn your left foot in slightly and your right foot out completely (90 degrees from facing front). Pressing down strongly into both legs, extend upward from the base of your spine.

Fold your upper body over your front leg while continuing to move your weight more onto the back leg. Your bottom arm is pressing into the floor, a block, or your shin, while you elongate your spine and open your chest, reaching your top arm toward the ceiling.

Breathing here, keep scanning your body smoothly and evenly, remaining aware of all sensations that arise and letting go of resistance or grasping. As you stay in the posture, different areas of the body will come into your awareness. Notice how your reactivity varies depending on where the sensations arise and what qualities predominate.

When you are ready to come up, press even more into the back leg and lift up through the top arm.

Repeat on the other side. Stay alert to any comparisons the mind leaps to make between one side and the other. This is a clue that you are not fully paying attention to what is happening *now*. Come back to the breath and the present sensations.

*11. Extended Side Angle Stretch

5–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE



Beginning as you did in TRIANGLE, reach out to the sides with your arms parallel to the floor and then step your feet out so that they are directly under your fingertips. Turn your left foot in slightly and your right foot out completely (90 degrees from facing front). Pressing down strongly into both legs, extend upward from the base of your spine.

Now, bend your front leg to a 90-degree angle with your bent

knee directly above your ankle. Your shin should be perpendicular to the ground and your thigh is moving toward parallel. Next, reach your right fingertips to the ground on the outside of your right foot and take your left arm alongside your left ear, extending fully.

As you stay in the posture, keep rolling your knees away from each other in an external rotation. Press your hand into the ground beside your right foot and spiral your torso as if you were going to turn your chest toward the sky. Continue to stay with your experience, not shutting down on any aspect of what you are feeling. See if you can soften and relax your tongue and let the corners of your mouth turn slightly upward.

When you come out from this posture, again press down into the back leg and foot, reach up and back with the top arm, and straighten the front leg.

Repeat on the other side.

Modification:

With tight hips, taking your hand to the floor can create energy congestion. To free your hips and allow integration between your legs and spine, place your elbow on your thigh just above the knee, or use a block.

Please do not let *ego* determine the posture. If taking your hand to the floor creates a bending at the hip or through the spine, do this modification so that you can experience the direction of movement from your strongly rooted feet up through your spine and out through the upper arm.



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12. Warrior One

5–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Extending your arms out to the side, take a wide stance as you did in EXTENDED SIDE ANGLE STRETCH. Then inhale, reaching your arms up over your head and grounding down through both legs.

Then, turn your left foot in about 45 degrees and turn your right foot out to 90 degrees. Turn your pelvis and chest to the right so that you are facing in the direction of your right leg. Keep the left hip moving forward as your right hip goes back.

Now bend your right leg, letting the knee go toward a 90-degree bend. Go no farther than having your bent knee directly over your ankle. Avoid compressing into your lower back by letting your tailbone drop lightly down toward the ground, but do not tuck and clench your buttocks.



Notice the sensations in your body and let them teach you to find the balance between effort and surrender. Avoid thinking of “holding” the posture, but instead see that the posture is created moment by moment as you continue to press down into the floor with both legs, reaching up through your arms and staying aware of the breath and all sensations.

Coming out of this asana, straighten the right leg and pivot back to your starting position

Repeat on the other side.

13. Warrior Two

5–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE

WARRIOR TWO starts from the same foundational stance that begins TRIANGLE, EXTENDED SIDE ANGLE STRETCH, and WARRIOR ONE. Then, turn the left foot in slightly and the right foot out 90 degrees. Keep grounding down through the back (initially, left) leg, especially the outer heel, as you bend the right knee toward 90 degrees. Make sure that the bent knee comes to rest directly over the ankle and keep it from falling in or out of perpendicular to the ground. Keeping your arms horizontal, turn your head to gaze toward your middle right finger. Let your tailbone drop like an anchor, without tucking and holding in the buttocks.

As you stay here, observe the sensations throughout your body. If you feel a burning in the right thigh, you are not grounding down through the back leg strongly enough. It is the



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back leg, more than the front, that is your support here. Soon sensations will arise in your shoulders. As they begin to grow uncomfortable, notice how quickly the mind wants to cut them off. Let go of this tendency toward “psychic amputation.” Our practice is one of “non-surgery.” Soften the muscular and energetic tension and let yourself enter fully into the sensations. The discomfort may or may not decrease or increase, but we can still maintain a stable and easeful mind. It is this ease and stability that sustains this asana practice, not some idealized perfection within the pose.

When you’re ready to come out of this asana, straighten the bent knee leg and pivot your feet back into parallel. You can relax your arms before you *repeat the other side*.

14. Tree Pose

10–30 BREATHS EACH LEG

From MOUNTAIN, place the sole of your left foot into your right inner thigh. Press your foot into the thigh as the thigh presses back into your foot. Place your palms together at your heart in namaste (Anjali Mudra).

If your balance feels challenged, just stay here and keep grounding down through your feet and keep the heart lifted and open. But if you feel confident in your balancing, reach your arms up over your head. Avoid sinking into your lower back by keeping the kidneys “inflated” and the front ribs soft and not jutting out.

As you stand here, keep the focus on your breath. Notice if there is any tendency to hold the breath, as if that could help in keeping balance. Remember, stability and ease is what defines asana, but this refers to main-





taining stability and ease in the mind, even if the body feels less than stable. Notice what movements the breath initiates as you stand like a tree. Maintain your awareness of all the feelings that may arise.

When ready to come out, lower the hands to in front of your heart, and then with full awareness, slowly lower the left foot to the floor, returning you to MOUNTAIN. When you come out of TREE, there may be some strong sensations that arise in the foot that you had been standing on. Notice how the tendency to want to avoid feeling these sensations may quickly follow. Recommit to watching and feeling what arises, using your breath as your base. What happens to the sensations?

Repeat while standing on the other leg.



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Modification 1:

If unsteady, you can try with your foot pressing below your knee on your inner shin, or even have your toes on the floor for some added balance assistance.

Modification 2:

Practice against a wall, with your right hand on the wall. Use the wall to steady yourself. Try to reach your left hand over your head. If this feels okay, try taking your right hand up too.

15. Locust Pose

4–10 BREATHS, EACH VARIATION

Start by lying face down on your belly with your legs together and with your arms down along your sides, reaching through your fingertips with the palms facing down on the ground.

Variation 1: As you inhale, lift your legs straight up and back without bending the knees. Make sure you lift from the buttocks and not by grabbing from the lower back. Keep your hips and pubis firmly pressing into the ground. As the legs come up, draw the shoulders up away from the ground and curl the head and upper chest off the floor. Try not to simply lift the upper chest up, but think of a sardine can and how it opens. Keep reaching out through the crown of your head, and do not drop your head back by jutting out your chin. Then, reaching out through your fingertips, let your palms rise up off the ground until your arms are par-



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allel to the ground. Breathe here, noticing where you experience the breath, its quality, and any changes in it as you continue to breathe in the posture. Notice too any movement of the body as you breathe. Watch whatever feelings arise and how they change, both while working in the posture and when you release. When you are ready to come down, simply exhale back down to the starting position.

**Variation 2:* Start by lying as above, but reach back behind your back and clasp your fingers. Keep pressing your pubis, hips, thighs, and the tops of your feet into the ground, and as you inhale curl your head, shoulders, and upper chest up off the ground. Reach back through your clasped hands and, keeping the wrists in toward each other, lift them up off your back. See if this draws more attention to the heart area and if the breath moves to fill the





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chest. As you continue to breathe in this posture, pay attention to how the breath moves in the body while also moving the body.

**Variation 3:* Begin as in Variation 2, but after four breaths extend out through your feet and let the legs rise up off the floor. Continue to breathe in this full posture and let the breath guide you in your effort. Again, notice any differences you may experience, but with an open, non-judgmental mind. It's okay if you notice preferences, but see if it can be free of attachment.



16. Cobra Pose

6–12 BREATHS, 1–3 REPETITIONS

Start by lying on your belly, with your legs together, lengthening out through your toes. Put your hands at your sides, palms down alongside your middle ribs. Let your shoulders roll back and down, broadening your chest as you press your hands into the ground. Make sure your elbows don't collapse outward or in, but keep them straight back.

As you continue to press your hands into the ground, let your head, shoulders, and chest lift off the ground into a backbend. Rather than pushing yourself up, think of rolling your front torso up and back, to avoid dropping into your lower back.

Go only as far as you can without compressing the spine and with the straightening of your arms supporting the lifting and opening of the spine and chest. If in straightening your arms your shoulders roll forward or up toward your ears, back out of the posture until you can maintain this lift and opening. Keep your legs grounded as you continue to arc back. Breathing here, follow the breath throughout the body and keep yourself open to any and all feelings that arise.

In coming out from here, roll yourself back onto the ground, lengthening the body rather than merely dropping back down. Follow the breath and all sensations as you lie there for a few moments.



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*17. Bow Pose

6-12 BREATHS, 1-3 REPETITIONS

Lying on your belly, bend your knees and take hold of your feet at the ankles, keeping your knees hip-width apart. Stay with the breath and try to avoid leaning forward into the pose. You have already begun to practice BOW.

Let the front of your body be relaxed. Open the lower back as you let the tailbone drop slightly toward the ground.

Then, as you inhale, press the tops of your feet into your hands and lift your thighs from the floor. Let this dual action of your legs assist your head, shoulders, and chest in lifting off from the ground. Try to avoid pulling with your arms. Honor your body and its range. To do



otherwise is to ignore the body's natural intelligence and to let ego decide what's best. If you feel tension in the lower back, don't lift so high and keep some length between your buttocks and your lower back.

As you continue to breathe in the posture, notice any mental formations arising around the sensations and see if your conscious breathing can help to calm them.

When you're ready, exhale down.

18. Child Pose

15–30 BREATHS

From lying on your belly, push yourself up and back so that you are sitting on the backs of your calves with your sitting bones dropping into your heels. Your big toes should be touching, and your knees are slightly apart. Lengthen your spine, letting your torso rest on the tops of your thighs. Place your forehead on the ground and your arms alongside your legs. Make sure that your weight is moving back toward your heels and not on your neck and head by adjusting the distance between your knees. Release yourself fully into the posture and let the breath be natural. Where do you experience the breath?



As you stay here, notice any changes in the qualities of the breath. Just letting the breath be cultivates calm as you rest in CHILD. Let yourself experience the feelings, but notice any tendency of the mind to want to stay here or to wander from the immediate experience. When ready to come out of CHILD, continue to drop the sitting bones down onto your heels and, drawing the navel in and back to your spine, roll up into the next posture.



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Modification:

If your hips do not touch your heels, and you feel most of your weight in your upper body and head, lay your torso on a bolster or some blankets. This will support your torso and allow your head to come to the height of your hips.

*19. Diamond Pose (Variation)

6–20 BREATHS



From CHILD, have your knees together and your ankles pressing in together with your toes tucked under as you sit back on your calves. Work to get your heels within the space between your sitting bones. Let the spine rise up strongly from the basin of the pelvis. Your shoulders are relaxed down your back, and the chest is broad and lifted.

As you sit here, sensations may arise in your knees or ankles, but more likely at the toe joints. Be mindful of the quality of the sensations. Work with discomfort, but honor true pain. Usually pain is of a sharp, acute nature and to avoid the risk of injury should be heeded. But look honestly at what is happening. Most “pain” in this posture is actually discomfort—highly unpleasant, but not likely to cause injury.

Notice reactivity and aversion, and let your breath bring you back to a pure awareness of the sensations. Drop the story line and just see. If you can find even a few breaths free of

the tension of aversion and resistance, do you experience the sensations differently in any way at all?

Release from here by drawing your legs out from under you.

20. Cobbler Pose

6–20 BREATHS

Sit with the soles of your feet together and, holding your ankles, bring your feet within 4–6 inches of your crotch, letting your legs drop open. Don't press your knees down toward the ground, but instead press your heels and the outer edges of your feet together and move your knees away from each other. Use your arms to help lift the torso up from the pelvis and forward onto the front tips of the sitting bones, so that your sacrum deepens in rather than rounds out.



From here, lengthen out over your legs into a forward bend. Maintain the length of the spine, even though there will be some gentle bending in the midback.





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Resting here, observe the feelings arise and change as you stay with your breath.

Coming up from here, lift up and out, keeping the length in the spine, and then release to straight.

*21. Wide-Angle Forward Bend

6–20 BREATHS

Sit with your legs open wide, keeping your knees and toes pointing directly upward. Don't let them drop out or in. Position your hands behind you as you gently deepen your sacrum, avoiding the pelvis tilting back into a posterior tilt. Press the backs of your legs into the ground, keeping your heels on the ground, while reaching out along the length of your leg bones from your sitting bones toward your heels.

Slowly bend forward, keeping your knees and toes pointing directly upward. Bring your hands to the floor or take hold of your big toes. Keep the length in your back as far as you can into the forward bend.



Keep the breath flowing naturally as you observe the sensations. Where do you feel the sensations? What is the quality of the “mind space” in response to the feelings in the body? When coming up, again lengthen up as if you were leading from the heart and release back to the starting posture.



Modification:

Those of us who have tightness in the hamstrings and feel the lower back rounding out, or have tightness in the inner thighs, can do this posture while sitting on a blanket or two. Extending the spine, come forward and rest the torso on a bolster or a stack of blankets. Make sure you keep the entire length of the legs actively pressing down into the ground.



22. One-Legged Forward Bend

10–25 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Starting from STAFF POSE, (pp. 122–23) with your legs straight out in front of you, bend your right knee upward, sliding your right heel in toward your right sitting bone. Then open your right leg out to the side.

Keeping lift in your torso, ease forward and reach out for your left shin or foot. As you ground down through your legs, lift your chest forward and out over the left leg. Tilting the pelvis forward, hinging from the hips, let your sitting bones spread back and apart. Don't pull, but go to your edge—pushing the boundary of your comfort zone—and notice any resistance you may feel in the back of the straight leg. You don't need to get anywhere, but see if you can relax the resistance to being *here*.

When coming up from this forward bend, keep lengthening up and out as you inhale. Then, exhaling, release the posture.

Repeat on the other side.





Modification:

If you are coming into this forward bend primarily from bending in the lower back and not from the hips, sit up on a blanket or two and keep extending the torso out over your straight leg. Stop when you feel the pelvis start to roll backward and round your lower back. You can support yourself here with your hands gently pressing into your shins.



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*23. Lord-of-the-Fishes Pose

10–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Bring your left leg into a simple cross-legged position, sliding your left foot under your right thigh, so that your left heel will come to rest at the outside of your right hip. Then, cross your right foot over your left thigh so that the sole of your right foot is firmly on the ground. Hug your right leg with your left arm just below the knee, and use your right hand to press into the ground behind your back so that you can extend your spine up as you ground your legs. Begin to twist to the right, using your left hand to aid the left side of your body in coming around to the right.

You can take your left arm to the outside of your right leg and press into the leg for added leverage, but let the twist rise naturally from the base of the spine upward. Let your head turn to the right at the end of the torso's movement, and keep the neck relaxed. Don't lead with your chin.

Stay present with your breath guiding you in your exploration of your feelings. How do the feelings change depending on the degree to which you can stay present with your breath? Release as you exhale and gently untwist.

Repeat on the other side.





Modification:

If you have tight hips, you may find that your pelvis and back are collapsed back as you cross your legs to set up for this twist. Try sitting up on several blankets so that you can establish the natural curvature of your spine in the starting position for this posture.

Then keep a sense of lifting up from the pelvis as you twist from the base of your spine upward. Using a block for your back hand will also help you from collapsing in this posture.



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24. Seated Forward Bend

10–20 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, reach out and grasp your feet or your shins. Soften your groins, letting them deepen, as your thighs roll slightly inward, sitting bones moving back and apart. Think more about lifting the torso out and over your legs than about how far you get in the pose. The back will round, but let it round evenly, and not until you've folded from the hips first. Move the chest out over your legs by using the strength of your arms, bending your elbows up and out to the sides. Gaze toward your toes, until the chin comes to rest on the shin. Then turn the gaze within or onto your “third eye.”

As you surrender into the posture, keep your focus on the breath. Let yourself find that balance between working in a posture and giving yourself up to it. Don't strain. Can you stay present with the feelings arising without adding anything by way of interpretation, projection, or identification?



Keep the back lengthened and don't worry about getting your head to your leg, but stay at your edge and allow the stretch to come from the back of your legs and your hips.

Coming out of this forward bend, inhale as you lift the heart up and out and then exhale as you release to the starting position.



Modification:

We want to initiate this posture from being firmly grounded at the sitting bones and folding forward from the hips. If in STAFF POSTURE you cannot maintain the natural curvature of your lower back and feel it rounding out, then sit up on a blanket or two.



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*25. Reverse Plank

4-8 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, place your hands on the floor behind your hips with the fingers pointing toward or away from your toes (you may want to alternate, as both positions have their merits). Inhaling, lift the pelvis up toward the ceiling as you point the toes toward the floor. Keep the tailbone reaching toward your feet. Make sure your wrists are directly below your shoulders with your arms straight. Either keep your chin on your chest, or let the head release all the way back, supported by your upper back muscles. This posture can often be the cause of





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much resistance because of its unusual demands. Also, as it exposes the whole front of the body which we tend to protect, many people find themselves feeling vulnerable in this posture. Keep your focus on the breath, and when you're ready, exhale back down into the starting position.

26. Knees-to-Chest Pose

6–12 BREATHS

Slide both heels in toward your hips and then take the knees into your chest as you wrap your arms around your shins or behind the knees on the thighs. As you hug the knees into your chest, gently press the lower back and sacrum into the ground.

This can be a relaxing posture to release any tension that may be in the lower back. As you breath here, notice how orru buttocks, hip width apart.



27. Reclined Spinal Twist

10–20 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Lie on your back with your legs bent and the soles of your feet on the ground. Cross your left thigh over the right thigh snugly. Shift your hips about 4–5 inches to the left. As you exhale, release your knees to the right. Move to being fully on your outside right hip. Your pelvis and



shoulders will be at right angles to each other, and your spine is twisting fully but effortlessly along its entire length. You can weigh your legs down with your right hand and reach out to the left with your left hand. Keep your left shoulder blade flat on the floor, and let your chest be broad and expansive. As you rest here, you may take your right arm out to the right also, as you gaze either straight up or to your left.

Notice how the twist affects your breath and where in the body you feel the sensations of the twist. Be alert to the subtle (and not-so-subtle) reactions you may have to these sensations, some of which may be unfamiliar deep body sensations. When you're ready to come out of the posture, roll onto your back, uncross your legs, and *repeat on the other side*. Center yourself and then don't forget to shift your hips over to the right.



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28. Corpse Pose

5–15 MINUTES

Lie on your back, with your legs about 12–18 inches apart and your toes turned out. Your arms are at your sides, at least a few inches from the torso with your palms turned upward. First, just let your awareness rest wherever in your body you experience the breath. This may or may not be where you felt the breath when you began to practice. Remember, let go of the tendency to control or manipulate and just see for yourself what is happening now.

Stay with the sensations of the breath, the subtle increase of tension as you inhale, and then the release of the exhale. After awhile, let your awareness expand to include your whole body. Let yourself open to and embrace all the sensations that may arise as you lie here. Look to see if the feeling tone is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Notice any tendency to hold on to pleasant experience, reject what may be unpleasant, or “zone out” in the absence of any particularly strong sensations.



29. Seated Meditation

5–40 MINUTES

Sit in any of the crossed-leg asanas. Find your center by rocking side to side briefly, and lengthen the sides of your body from your hips up into your armpits. Make sure your shoulder blades are firmly supporting your upper back and that your lower back has its natural lumbar curve.

When the yogini breathes in or out aware of joy or happiness, of the mental formations, or to make the mental formations peaceful, she abides peacefully in the observations of the feelings in the feelings, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the second establishment of Mindfulness, the feelings.



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STANDING LIKE A MOUNTAIN

MOUNTAIN POSE is often said to be the fundamental and foundational posture for all standing postures. Mr. Iyengar is quoted as saying, “What is the point of standing on your head if you cannot stand on your own two feet?” We could do worse than simply practice standing in MOUNTAIN for ten to twenty minutes. It can be an amazing posture to explore:

Where is the weight distributed in your feet?

Can you feel the midline of your body as you stand still?

Are you able to feel the connection between your legs, pelvis, and spine?

Can you feel the spine ascend upward from the pelvis as the legs remain grounded?

Do your shoulders and arms aid in keeping the heart open and lifted?

Is the head free to rest upon the neck without causing any tension?

Can you find stability and ease in this posture?

In the exercise of swaying from side to side and back and forth, we can see in our own body the literalization of the Buddha’s teaching on dukkha and sukha. Whenever we are not aligned with the vertical pull of gravity, we are offering a larger object for gravity to pull on. To keep from falling, we have to work harder, tensing muscles, deforming our body in order to compensate for the imbalance in our posture. This tension in our body causes a further tensing of the mind and breath, both of which seem to grow constricted and tight. This is the “bad space” of dukkha—the axle misaligned with its hole.

By simply focusing on, and really tuning into the sensations of the body, the body can lead us to the ease and stability of sukha—the good space where the axle is in its proper place and all spins round harmoniously. When aligned with gravity, it feels as if we are supported in standing straight and tall. The major muscle groups can relax and the breath grows calm and deep. The mind opens, becoming expansive and free.

And then everything changes again as some subtle shift is noticed, and even subtler adjustments are made. Nowhere is there stasis. MOUNTAIN may look like a static posture, but with the deeper seeing of practice, we come to see that it is extremely dynamic. Practicing not holding and continu-

ing to let go, we see the truth that we are one with the life force—prana—and not at all separate from it.

Can we find Mountain in other postures such as WARRIOR, TRIANGLE, STAFF POSE, and even in the LUNGE? Can we come down to the ground (or take a chair) and sit like a mountain? The same principles are constantly being addressed in all yoga practice. This is why I sometimes say that perhaps the most “advanced” practice would be to do a thirty-minute MOUNTAIN, thirty minutes in CORPSE, and end with another thirty minutes in a seated posture such as BURMESE or LOTUS (see Appendix C). Try that sequence sometime for yourself.



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MINDFULLY AWARE OF THE MIND

Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Breathing out, I am aware of my mind.

Breathing in, gladdening the mind. Breathing out, gladdening the mind.

Breathing in, concentrating the mind. Breathing out, concentrating the mind.

Breathing in, liberating the mind. Breathing out, liberating the mind.

WITH THIS THIRD GROUP of four contemplations, our practice of fully aware breathing leads us into the realm of the many activities of the mind. Some teachers stress that at this stage of practice, we begin “real vipassana meditation.” And while this is true in some sense, it overstates the picture and lends a reading that places all that we have been practicing as merely preliminary.

But as I have been saying, the practice of anapanasati is a fully integrated one, which involves concentration and insight (*shamatha and vipassana*) at every moment along the way. It is just that at this level, the objects of our observation are perhaps even subtler than the body or feelings.

Above, I use the phrase “the many activities of the mind” because the word we translate as “mind” is the Sanskrit word *chitta*, which means more than the mind as we normally think of it. In fact, some teachers have said that “mindfulness” may as well be called “heartfulness,” because *chitta* does indeed mean something more like “mind/heart.”



The *Dhammapada* begins with the twin verses that epitomize the importance of mind in creating our world:

Our life is shaped by our mind;
all actions are led by mind, created by mind.
Dukkha follows an unskillful thought
as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it.
Our life is shaped by our mind;
all actions are led by mind, created by mind.
Happiness follows a skillful thought as surely as one's shadow.

We in the West tend to focus on action and think that thoughts somehow don't really matter as much as action. Yet the Buddha pointed out that our actions are preceded by volitions, and the volition itself can create wholesome or unwholesome consequences.

Looking deeply into the activity of the mind can be said to be the real heart of the practice. To look deeply at the mind, we need at least a modicum of mental calm, stability, and concentration. And this is what has been developing throughout the practice of the previous eight contemplations. Yet, we have been observing the mind all along. From the first contemplation of just observing the breath, we have become intimately aware of how active the mind is. We have seen for ourselves that the mind leans away from as simple an operation as watching the breath.

When we broadened our observation to include the whole body and feelings, we saw how the body and feelings condition the mind and how, in turn, the mind conditions the body and feelings. Most notably, we saw our conditioned reactivity. When we turn our attention to focus specifically on the mind, we include all psychological phenomena including feelings, perceptions, thoughts, reasoning, discriminating, and imagining—the *chittasamskara*, or mental contents and activities, conscious as well as subconscious. Keep in mind that chitta is itself the totality of these psychological phenomena and is not a single unchanging subject. To observe chitta is to observe the mental formations that are arising in the present moment. It is to observe the variety of mind states as they arise, linger, and then pass away.

This group of contemplations helps us to cultivate the seeds of wholesome, skillful mental formations such as love, compassion, joy, happiness, mindfulness, and the energy and

willingness to overcome craving, aversion, and ignorance. It also helps us to practice full attention of the unwholesome, unskillful mental formations such as aversion, craving, ignorance, despair, forgetfulness, and pride, and transform them with the power of mindfulness. This is itself the embodiment of right effort. To do this we need to identify and embrace the mental formations as they arise and develop throughout their duration, clearly seeing their impermanence in their cessation.

The ninth contemplation is the practice of coming back to our lived experience, again and again, not rejecting any aspect of it, and not clinging to any part of it, but staying open and honest to *experiencing*. We observe in the spirit of nonduality, “mind in the mind.” Otherwise, we set up our mental formations, our feelings, emotions, thoughts, and perceptions as “other,” and if we find them unpleasant, we seek to annihilate them, and so cause ever more struggle and suffering. We have both the pain of the unwholesome formation and the pain of our aversion. If we find the formations pleasant, we tend to cling to them and try to make them last. But since they are all ephemeral, ceaselessly changing, we create suffering through our very clinging and grasping. Finally, if we find our experience relatively neutral—neither pleasant nor unpleasant—the mind tends to wander in forgetfulness. Since so much of our experience is actually of this neutral quality, we end up missing our life.

Many students fear that they will drown in strong mental formations or be swept away by them. But in truth it is their very attempt to escape from the mental formations that sweeps them away. When we embrace and recognize that we are not separate from the formations, what is “doing” the recognizing and embracing is the very energy of mindfulness. When mindfulness is present, at one with the mental formation, the mental formation has already been transformed. The situation is already changed as soon as we are mindful of it, no longer lost in forgetfulness.

In Mindfulness Yoga, we have a wonderful opportunity to observe and recognize our mental formations and how they condition our habits and tendencies. We all have our favorite asanas as well as those we would really rather not attempt. Of course, as every yoga teacher will tell you, it’s those very asanas you find yourself avoiding that can often be your greatest teachers. While practicing, notice which asanas create tension in your mind just by thinking about doing them. This aversive constriction of the mind is not merely a cause of suffering but is itself a form of suffering.



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Conversely, when you move into a posture that feels good, observe the quality of mind that is present. Do you crave to keep that good feeling in your mind? If so, look deeper. You may be surprised to find that the very clinging to the pleasant experience is a mental formation that doesn't feel so good! The clinging *itself* is painful, and so conditions even your enjoyment of what feels good. If we remain unaware of this fact, then we cannot fully enjoy what is pleasant. It remains tainted by the pain of craving. When this is really experienced—not just intellectually—the clinging is released and you can enjoy the whole of the experiencing, including its changing and fading away.

Our nervous system is hardwired to notice only what is intensely pleasant or unpleasant. What is neither pleasant nor unpleasant is simply ignored. When only neutral experience is present, we tend to get bored and look for stimulation. Yet with mindfulness we can remain present with neutral experiences, and perhaps find that mindfulness of the neutral brings us more calm and happiness. Remember Thich Nhat Hanh's example of the happiness of a non-toothache. Ease, joy, and happiness are all part of the Path. I believe Mindfulness Yoga is about preventing suffering that has not yet arisen and ending suffering that has arisen. Becoming aware of the conditions for happiness that are already present is just a part of it all. Attachment is another mental formation added on to the experiencing.

In Mindfulness Yoga, if you find your mind wandering or if you feel bored, remind yourself to pay attention. One of my earliest meditation teachers pointed out that if you are ever bored, it is actually a sign that you are not really paying attention. This bit of wisdom has transformed my life. In high school, my friends and I discussed making T-shirts that identified us as “Bored Teenagers” (the name of our band) and “Bored and Aimless” (the title of one of our songs), but we were too aimless to actually do so. Since practicing seriously, I cannot remember the last time I have felt bored. Life is just too interesting to be bored. This *breath* moving in and out of this body is too interesting to ever become boring. Please, take this to heart. Just pay attention.

This leads us right into the second exercise of the third tetrad, in which we practice gladdening the mind. The Buddha is telling us that we need to nourish ourselves with the joy, happiness, and bliss of meditative concentration. “To suffer is not enough,” says Thich Nhat Hanh. We gladden the mind by dwelling upon beneficial mental formations. For instance, to have faith in our practice, and in our ability to practice, is very helpful. Noticing our increased ability to be mindful nourishes and gladdens the mind.

In fact, we can gladden our mind with Dharma, the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha said that Dharma is the greatest happiness, if also the subtlest. Through our practice of Dharma, our heart/mind is gladdened. Early in my practice, I was envious of the bhakti yogis and of their experience of love and devotion. I didn't relate to deities and worship of them or of a guru, but the palpable sense of love and devotion the bhakti yogis experienced seemed wonderful. But as I continued to practice, a real love, devotion, and gratitude arose in me at the wonderful good fortune to have come to practice Dharma. Over time, continuing in the practice, many people report this growing sense of happiness, which has nothing to do with external conditions. It is the joy of Dharma.

The paradox is that this happiness is the happiness that can see the impermanence of all states—including a gladdened mind! Joy, happiness, and blissful meditative states are all impermanent. If we cling to them, we will suffer. If by seeing this we can let go of our clinging, we taste a gladdening that comes from seeing things as they are. Mindfulness Yoga practice is not about seeking out and trying to abide in some peaceful, blissful state. That would mean being caught in aversion and clinging. It is about learning to open up and stay open to what actually is.

In the *Sutta on the Establishments of Mindfulness*, the Buddha tells us to be aware not only when anger or greed (or any of the unwholesome mental formations) is arising in the mind but also when anger and greed are *not* arising. And in both cases, we are being asked by the Buddha to simply shine the lamp of awareness on what is present in our mind. We do not repress what we find unpleasant nor do we desperately cling to hold on to what we find pleasant. Opening to *what is* is itself happiness.

The third contemplation in the fourth tetrad is the development and maintenance of such a concentrated mind that it is referred to as single-pointedness or *ekagatta* in Pali (*ekagrata* in Sanskrit). So while we bring our attention to one object, what is really emphasized is not just the object of concentration so much as the quality or degree of concentration itself. In the *Sutta on the Establishments of Mindfulness*, the Buddha points this out by telling us that we should be aware of when single-pointedness is there as well as when that level of concentration is not present in the mind. But if we have been truly practicing, then this level of concentration is not all that difficult to cultivate. We have, after all, been cultivating it from the beginning, most notably in the exercises of calming the body and calming the mental formations (the fourth and eighth of the sixteen contemplations of anapanasati). This is the practice of right samadhi.



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Many people make the mistaken assumption that to be “in samadhi” one must be perfectly still and that this means you cannot be in samadhi and also be doing anything. Some think of samadhi as if it were some kind of trance, and that there should be no awareness of sensations. So they assume samadhi cannot really be cultivated while moving—in asana, for instance. While this may be true for some states of samadhi, these states are not necessary for the work of developing insight. In fact, nowhere in either the *Anapanasati* or the *Satipatthana Suttas* does the Buddha recommend or suggest that these kinds of states are necessary for liberation.

As Buddhadasa Bhikkhu points out in *Mindfulness with Breathing*, if correct samadhi has been developed, three qualities of mind will be present. There will be *stability*. The mind will be collected, firm, steady, and undistracted. Such a mind will abide in a state of *purity*, clear of defilement. And a steady, pure mind will be in an alert state of *activeness* or readiness to perform the work of the mind. And the work of the mind is to “grow in knowledge and understanding from moment to moment.” Obviously, such a mind is a boon for all activities—not just for formal meditation practice.

When these three qualities are present, the practitioner is said to be *samahitata*—“one who has samadhi and is able to perform every kind of duty.” It is said that if one is walking while these three qualities are present, then that is “divine walking.” If we can have this kind of a concentrated mind while doing asana, then it will surely be “divine asana.” And the Buddha added, “When the mind is concentrated, it knows all dhammas as they truly are.”

An experience that often arises during asana practice that single-pointedness of mind helps us learn from is pain or discomfort. Please note this is not to say that you should just grit your teeth through excruciating pain or ignore the signs of injury—but most of the pain that arises in asana practice is intense discomfort and not injurious and thus you can practice with it differently.

If you thoroughly fix your attention on the pain or discomfort, there is no separation between you and it, and so there is no space for reactivity, judgment, or story lines about it to arise. Very often, the intensity of the pain actually decreases when we practice in this way, but the true lesson we can learn is that even when the pain remains, there is a difference between pain and *suffering*—the misery or torment that we add to the experience because of our reactivity, aversion, and stories. An old Buddhist saying is that “pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn explores this point in his book *Full Catastrophe Living*, which is based on the program he founded at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Through research it has been shown that attentional strategies for dealing with pain—what we are doing when we are mindful and moving our attention into the experience nonjudgmentally—work better than distractional strategies such as trying to think of something else when feeling pain.

One attentional strategy is to embrace pain and unpleasant mental formations such as aversion, anger, clinging, sadness, or fear. Thich Nhat Hanh has suggested we see our discomfort (whether painful physical sensations or the mental formations) as our “crying baby.” I have found this a useful metaphor, as I am a father. When my daughter was an infant, I did not run from her when she cried. I did not push her away. I went right to her and held her in my arms. To do otherwise would have been dysfunctional. When seen in this light, it becomes clear how dysfunctional we have been in trying to push away or ignore our suffering.

Again, the real benefit of such practice isn't to grow in stoic forbearance but to see that there is indeed a difference between the pain or discomfort and the anguish we create. The Buddha used the image of a man who is struck by an arrow. This is painful, there is no denying that. But then our reactivity is like another arrow adding still more pain and suffering. Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutra* says, “Suffering not yet arisen is to be prevented.” The attentional strategy of simply embracing and moving into our experience of pain is one way that we can prevent the arising of suffering not yet arisen.

We can practice working with the pain that arises while on our yoga mat or our meditation cushion, so that we can remain free from suffering throughout our life. It's certainly true that if we feel pain in our shoulders in WARRIOR TWO, for instance, all we need do is lower our arms. But if we always do this, what will we do when pain arises that we cannot avoid so simply? What if you are injured in an accident? What if you lose your lover? If someone close to you dies? What about when you yourself must confront your own sickness, old age, and death? Whether emotional or physical, pain is inevitable. You have a body with a complex nervous system, so you will feel pain. But if you practice on the mat or cushion, perhaps when the inevitable losses occur, you can just *feel* the pain and not add suffering as well.

My Sanskrit teacher once said that the word *drama* shares its etymology with the word *karma* insofar as “drama” in Greek means literally “action,” as does “karma” in Sanskrit. Thinking of this, we can see that when we dramatize our basic sensory experience, we are creating karma. Everyone knows at least one “drama queen” who always seems to be



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embroiled in complexity and turmoil, but we all do this to some degree. Meditation practice is said to expurgate karma, and this happens when we cease feeding or energizing it with our reactivity. When we let go of our dramatizing, we let go of karma.

When we look deeply at the nature of our mental formations, we do indeed become liberated from them. This is the untying of the mental knots that takes place during the practice of the last anapanasati exercise of the fourth tetrad. With the observation of mind in all its subtlety, the mind becomes free from the mental formations that create the drama—and the karma of suffering.

Here is the cusp of wisdom (*prajna*), because now the Buddha is introducing us explicitly to focusing on liberation, which is the goal of all his teaching. The taste of freedom is the “one taste” that permeates the Buddhadharmā, just as the taste of salt permeates the ocean. And once again I want to point out that the taste of liberation has been in your practice from the beginning, even if you haven’t been consciously aware of it. Yet the liberation that the Buddha is talking about here is still not the liberation that appears at the end of the sutra.

Actually, liberation or “letting go” is less about you letting go of the unwholesome mental formations than the formations themselves letting go of you. When the mind is concentrated, there is no room for them to grow and develop within. Simply observe the mental formations without reacting, and the mental formations will by themselves fall away. This kind of letting go is cultivated by returning to the breath every time the mind is distracted.

In the *Sutta on the Establishments of Mindfulness*, the Buddha tells us to notice the mind when liberation is absent. Really look into what a grasping mind is like. Practicing Mindfulness Yoga is really not an ideology, philosophy, or moral code about the goodness of letting go and the badness of attachment. You cannot “just let go” because you think letting go is a good idea or a better way to live. Remember that the Four Noble Truths serve little good as mere doctrine, but must be engaged with thorough practice.

But now, really experience attachment. When you see that it is unnecessarily painful, letting go just happens. It’s like picking up that red-hot iron poker. You don’t have to think about letting it go or contemplate the reasons why you might let it go. It is spontaneously released. When the attachment becomes experienced as the suffering it is, it too is released spontaneously.

Traditionally, the commentaries state that while there are myriad objects to which we can become attached, they fall into four major types. Perhaps the most obvious objects of attach-

ment are material objects or sensory pleasures. This includes possessions (clothes, money, etc.) and sensual and sexual sensations. In asana practice, the attachment can be to particularly strong feelings of enjoyment when we stretch and move the body, or to excitement, pleasure, or bliss. There is nothing inherently wrong with enjoying physical pleasure, but if we are dominated by our attachment to it we are bound to suffer.

The second category of attachment consists of opinions, beliefs, views, and theories. This is where the “Are You Sure?” practice described in Chapter 3 can be valuable. In observing mental formations while practicing Mindfulness Yoga, we may find that we are attached to ideas about how we should feel, what we should be able to do, and what the correct way to practice an asana is, as well as beliefs that we will never be good enough or that our particular teacher or tradition is the only true and authentic way. Remember, the ideas or opinions themselves are not the problem, but our dogged attachment can certainly create a lot of suffering for ourselves and others. In fact, if we are attached to strong ideas about what we need in order to be happy, the attachment to those ideas can itself become the greatest obstacle to experiencing happiness.

The third category of attachment actually includes Dharma practice itself. The Buddha warned against getting attached to ritual and traditional practices—secular or religious. This is why I suggest to my students that once they have developed some understanding of their body and their capacities that they take some classes with other teachers in other traditions and practices. There are some practitioners who have grown so attached to a particular form that they remain only in their comfort zone, never letting their edges be burnished. The form has become a trap rather than a tool for liberation. To appreciate and be firm in one’s commitment to a particular practice is one thing, but if we become overly attached and obsessive with the form, we can all too easily lose the liberative spirit of the practice, and it is a small step from there to becoming judgmental of others and their practice.

The last, and by far the trickiest category we can attach to, includes everything that we identify as “I,” “me,” and “mine.” Even becoming attached to our identity as a yogi or yogini can become a source of suffering. We can develop a holier-than-thou attitude and see ourselves as separate from the rest of the world. The organization Alcoholics Anonymous teaches of a condition they call “terminal uniqueness,” in which one feels so special in one’s experience of life that no one else could possibly understand one’s pain. When people suffer from this malady, they feel acutely alone and separate. This loneliness feeds their addiction. Along



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with finally recognizing that we have a problem with addiction to our sense of “self,” seeing that we are not so unique creates a softening and a letting go of some of the strategies and belief patterns that keep us locked in our addiction. This is the ultimate human existential addiction.

When practicing asana, we can see for ourselves how we create this sense of self and how we use our reactivity, our belief patterns, and our dramatizing story lines to reinforce the cage of self. The more we harden this sense of self, the more tension and suffering we create, but it is not until we really see this for ourselves that any opening can occur.

In mindfulness practice, look into the mental tendencies that arise throughout your practice. See the pattern of the story lines and the beliefs they embody. What are the strategies that arise to deal with what is happening? Over time you can learn to clearly see how dominated your whole life may have been by beliefs you didn’t even know you had—or were only dimly aware of while creating strategies to deal with them. Notice how quickly the mind looks to categorize and compartmentalize your experience and how it judges ever so swiftly and cruelly. And in seeing this, can you not give in to “believing your own press release” about what’s going on? Notice too if you begin to judge the judging. These patterns can be so ingrained that they find apparently endless ways to replicate themselves. This is why practice must be continuous and patiently practiced over a long time.

Because so many asanas are asymmetrical, what often happens is that you will find one side easier or more flexible than the other. Whenever this happens, notice how without fail the mind will not just stop at seeing the difference. It will almost immediately move on to judging that difference, making one side bad and the other good.

One of my students once had a great deal of tightness and discomfort on one side and joked that this was the “evil twin” of the other side! Her ability to laugh at this pattern points out the importance of humor in the practice. One of my teachers said that to grow enlightened was to quite literally “lighten up.” The ability to smile and even laugh at the mental gymnastics we uncover is an important element of letting go. I find that the classes I lead in which we focus on the mental formations—and even when we focus on pain and our mental reactivity to pain—are often the classes where my students and I share the most laughter and lightness of spirit.

Many people come to find that they react in the same way in their daily life as they react on the mat, and in seeing this, they have noticed a loosening of the habit energy. One stu-

dent found that the image of embracing her mental formations like they were her crying infants helped her to see how dysfunctionally she was relating to many aspects of life. One longtime student said that she has grown in her capacity to really see how she leans away from what's happening as she continually "grasps after the next thing." And yet, a relative beginner in her first class with me said that she found herself able to distinguish between the unpleasant sensations that arose in a particular asana and the suffering she was adding to it through her dramatizing of the situation.



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✿ I N T E R L U D E ✿

WORKING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

In the Introduction, I mentioned how it was the disintegration of my first marriage that first brought me to Dharma-yoga practice, and how it was the devastating breakup of another relationship that brought me to recommit to practice many years later. In between I had been involved in several relationships that ended in a lot of pain, bitterness, and even despair. During the breakup that brought me back to practice, I went through an especially difficult time. After entering therapy, I was diagnosed as clinically depressed, with "free-floating anxiety" that led to periodic panic attacks.

My behavior pattern in response to broken relationships had been to go through periods of feeling utterly betrayed and alienated from everyone and everything around me. I struggled and fought against what was happening, refusing to accept the situation. I would hound my expartners with accusations of betrayal and deceit. I was not a very pleasant person to be around.

After years of practice—and therapy with a woman who offered a model of mindfulness—I became involved in another relationship, which led to an engagement to marry. I remember telling a friend that if things didn't work out, I hoped that I could "just feel sad, and not like the world was ending." Within a year, my partner started to have her own intimacy issues and broke off the engagement. The old and familiar sense of betrayal arose within me.

This time, though, I was determined not to act out my frustration and anger and so I sat down on my zafu with the resolve not to get up until I had penetrated to the base of the anguish I was feel-



ing. As I sat with my anger, I noticed that I felt a heavy knot in my chest. As I stayed with this sensation and my breath, my mind offered up strategies to “get her back.” Discursive arguments to get her to “see my way” played like a running film loop. But I stayed with the breath and the knot began to untie.

I felt a dizzying kind of vertigo and the twisting knot moved into my solar plexus. The sensation was of cold fear and panic. My mind started to generate stories of how I was right back where I started, and my anxiety about that would spin into a panic attack. I was seeing how fear was arising around my fear. “All your time in therapy was wasted. You didn’t change,” the voices in my mind taunted. Images of me dying alone, undiscovered until some neighbor smelled my decomposing corpse floated up into my mind’s eye. This is how crazy the mind can be. All I wanted to do was to spring up from the zafu and do whatever it took to get away from this anxiety. I really felt I couldn’t take it. I wanted to run away, go out to a club or bar, get drunk, pick someone up and get laid, do *anything* but continue to feel this twisting-in-my-guts anxiety.

But I stayed and breathed. I embraced it all, while feeling fearful all the while. And then, finally, all the energy of the anxiety storm seemed to dissolve and I felt myself plummet until I felt I had come to rest in my deepest core. In a physical sense, this seemed to be in the lower abdomen and pelvis. Psychologically, it was warm, and felt soft and welcoming. And it was a deep sadness, which brought tears to my eyes. What I found most amazing was how loving it all felt. Somehow, I felt the spaciousness and lightness of love and happiness in the midst of deep sorrow.



When I share this story with students, they want to hear me say that the sadness went away. But it didn’t. What was liberated was the suffering, the suffering that I later realized I was adding to the pure experience of sadness. The anger and betrayal, even the fear and anxiety, I now know were ways my mind attempted to keep me from feeling the truth of the sadness. And this wasn’t merely the sadness of my breakup. It wasn’t merely “my sadness.” What I felt was an intimate connection with all who suffer and all who have ever felt this sadness—and with those who have not allowed themselves to feel it yet. This was the existential sadness of life, *duhkha*. And in fully opening to it, I found an unconditional love and com-

passion—an unconditional happiness. I could indeed *just feel sad*, and it was liberating. All the energy that went into attempting not to feel what was true was now free, free to flow through me. And this energy was not mine, yet it had something to do with who or what I really am. It was the energy of life.

Now, this most certainly does not mean that I am free from unwholesome mental formations. Frustration, fear, anger, and sadness are all still there and occasionally arise. But ever since that long night on the zafu, mindfulness is also there, and I am no longer dominated and buffeted by these mental formations. I am no longer as enslaved by them as I once was, and so they do not dominate and overwhelm. I have learned—and continue to learn through this practice—to make peace with it all, to become intimate with what is, when it is, and just how it is. Whatever arises in the flow of experiencing, whatever mental states may arise, I no longer see them as the enemy. They are the teachers of liberation. As Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck points out, after years of practice we come to see that what we thought were the sharp and rough rocks on the road of life are actually precious jewels—diamonds—that support and make our life of practice possible.



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MINDFULNESS YOGA: SEQUENCE THREE

IN THIS SEQUENCE, we introduce the remaining postures that together with what we have already practiced, make up the classic *vinyasa* or uninterrupted connecting flow of postures: the SUN SALUTATIONS (*Surya Namaskara*). We build slowly into the *vinyasa*, and then move at a more vigorous clip. When moving quickly, the mind can easily go on vacation as we automatically move through the various postures. Another possibility is that the mind will tend to lean forward into the next posture without being fully present in the posture we are in and completely absent from the connecting movement.

The *vinyasa* is the flowing movement in its entirety. It is every bit as important to stay present throughout the movement as it is to stay present in the individual *asanas*. Notice the mind's tendency to isolate bits from the *vinyasa*, privileging the *asanas* and downplaying the connecting movements, and how it grasps after and clings to what it prefers and pushes away and resists what it doesn't like. Moving with awareness of your breathing will help you to stay present and aware throughout the whole practice. This is moving meditation.

Again, beginners may wish to skip the asterisked sequences until they grow stronger and more familiar with the postures.

1. Simple Cross-Legged Sitting Pose

3–10 MINUTES

Sit with your legs crossed, with your feet underneath your knees. Sit on the forward points of your sitting bones (avoid rolling the pelvis backward and rounding the lower back). With your hands beside your hips, feel the sitting bones grounding down as the crown of your head rises up, lengthening the spine. Feel where in your body you sense your weight as it presses down into the earth.

Now place your hands on your knees, and with your eyes closed, open to the feeling tone of “just sitting.” Then slowly lean over to the left as far as you can, and watch how the feeling tone changes across the range of motion. Then begin to rock side to side in ever smaller movements, letting the quality of your breath show you where center is. The breath will grow more relaxed, smoother, and the feeling tone will be one of ease. You may feel the tension in your upper back and shoulders melt. Without needing any external reference, your body

and breath will guide you to your center. Let your breath teach you.

Spend several minutes simply sitting in awareness of the breath, the sensations throughout your body, and the quality of your mental state. Is the mind active or relatively restful? Is there happiness, sadness, or some other emotion? Remember, awareness does not choose what to be aware of. It remains present and all-inclusive of whatever is there, in the moment. Let go of judging, let go of resisting, and simply stay present with what is.



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2. Cat/Cow Pose

6–10 REPETITIONS WITH YOUR BREATH



Position your hands straight down from your shoulders and your knees straight down from your hips. On the exhalation, round your back like an angry cat, tilting the pelvis backward and tucking the tailbone between your legs. Let your head hang down as you gaze back toward your pelvis. On the inhalation, tilt your pelvis forward, dropping your belly toward the floor as

the crown of your head and your sitting bones reach up toward the ceiling, your back moving into a soft backbend. Here your back has a gentle backbend, as it takes the line of a cow's back.

Let your natural breath determine the duration and rhythm of your movement. Begin the movement with the tilting of your pelvis, and let the movement generated by this action flow up your back like a wave moving through water. Pay attention to the body of the breath as well as *all that arises* as you move from one position to the other.



3. Downward-Facing Dog

10–30 BREATHS

From COW POSE, tuck your toes under and, reaching your sitting bones up and back, straighten your legs into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Keep the sitting bones lifting and let go of the notion that you need to have your heels come to the floor, yet do keep them moving toward the floor, but not at the expense of the elongation of your back. As you stay here breathing, notice if the mind leans away out of boredom or aversion. What happens if you stay five breaths longer than you would prefer?



Modification:

With tight hamstrings, the lower back will round and compress. Simply bend your knees until you can feel the back lengthen and the lower back regains its natural (inward moving) lumbar curve. If the backs of your legs are really tight, besides bending your knees, you may want to experiment with stepping your feet a bit wider than hip width.



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4. Lunge

3–6 BREATHS EACH SIDE

From DOWNWARD-FACING DOG, step your right foot forward between your hands, keeping the back leg straight and extending out through your back heel. Make sure the bent knee is not coming forward of your toes. The front knee should be bent at a 90-degree angle with the shin perpendicular and the thigh parallel to the floor. Come up onto your fingertips and roll the shoulders down your back while opening the heart as you gaze forward.



Without straining or becoming rigid, keep making the effort to lengthen out through the back heel while keeping the chest lifted. Let the breath move freely through the body.

Step the right leg back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG and repeat with the left leg. After doing the LUNGE with the left leg forward, step back again into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.

See if your mind “leans” from where you are to the next place you are going or if you can stay fully present throughout this short vinyasa. You are cultivating the constant practice needed for the later vinyasas.



5. Lunge into Standing Lunge (Warrior One Variation)

10–25 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Step your right foot forward between your hands into LUNGE but this time, from here, come up into the STANDING LUNGE, which is a variant form of WARRIOR ONE. Keep actively reaching out through your back foot and let your tailbone descend away from your lower back as your arms reach up toward the ceiling. Prevent the shoulders from creeping up to your ears and stretch up from the side body.

As you breathe here, notice the sensations that arise. Notice how, the longer you stay here and the more intense the sensations grow, resistance to the sensations also grows. Notice how the mind may want to “lean forward” away from the posture. Keep connecting



with your breath and see if you can smile to the sensations. Notice too how as the sensations arise and perhaps increase, the mind begins to generate a story line; “Why is this damn teacher so mean! How long is he going to keep us here?!” Using the breath as your anchor, see if you can just see the mental activity without having to identify with it.

Come out of the STANDING LUNGE back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. If you are alert, you may catch yourself grasping for the sensation of relief, but after one or two



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breaths in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG step forward with the left foot and *repeat the LUNGE and STANDING LUNGE on that side*. Again, notice all that arises as you stand in the LUNGE.

And when you release back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG again, see if that grasping for relief arises again. There's nothing wrong with enjoying the relief, but what would happen if we now stayed in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG for twenty or thirty or maybe forty breaths? You'd probably look forward to getting out of that experience even if it meant going back into the STANDING LUNGE! Again, this is the apparently endless cycle of "push-me/pull-me" we put ourselves through. But staying with the sensations, staying in the place of awareness and letting the breath be the undercurrent of our awareness, we can begin to see the conditioning and let it go.

From DOWNWARD-FACING DOG, taking small steps and pressing your heels into the floor walk forward into HANGING FORWARD BEND.



Modification:

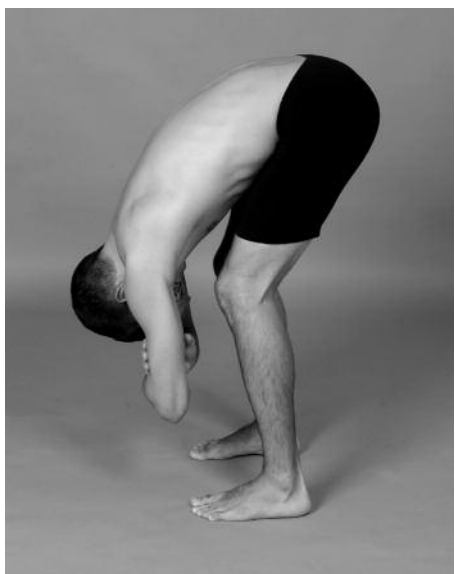
If it's too challenging at this point to raise your arms over your head, keep your hands gently pressing into the thigh of the front leg to help roll the shoulders back and lift and open the chest.

6. Hanging Forward Bend

8–15 BREATHS



Have your feet about a fist-width apart and lift your sitting bones up as you drape your torso over your legs. If there is tension felt in the lower back, soften and bend the knees. Cross your arms, interlocking them at the elbows, and just hang. Breathing naturally, stay awake to what is happening throughout your body and mind.



Modification:

Those with tight hamstrings will find that they will round in the lower back, eventually causing tension there. Bend your knees to release the back tension and let your torso be supported by your thighs. This action stabilizes the lower back and sacrum and allows you to bend from your hip joint rather than from the back. Keep the sitting bones lifting, while simultaneously pressing down through your feet.



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7. Spinal Roll

20–45 SECONDS

Release your arms and let them dangle freely. Don't hold them in any particular place. With your knees softly bent, draw your navel back toward your spine and roll up one vertebra at a time. See how little or how much of your spine you can actually experience as you do this. Let the breath be natural.



Keep your eyes open, and if you see your arms coming in toward your legs, or reaching out away from you, see if you can consciously let go and surrender them to gravity. As you slowly rise up into MOUNTAIN, notice where in your body feelings predominate. How do they shift and change as you slowly rise up? Let yourself be aware of any tendency the mind has to choose, judge, and compare.

Modification:

If there is pain in the lower back, even with bent knees, then use your hands on your thighs for added support.

8. Mountain/Balanced Standing Pose

2–5 MINUTES

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel along the midline of the foot (roughly straight back from the second toe). Your big toes will be slightly closer to each other than your heels when lined up along the midline of the foot. Feel the weight of your body descend down through your legs and into the earth just in front of your heels. Let your spine rise up out of the basin of your pelvis, upper chest lifted, and shoulders relaxed and slightly back.

Often in most classes, MOUNTAIN is practiced as a posture one just passes through on the way to a more interesting posture, so stay here at least for the two minutes suggested and see what mental formations arise. Practice standing meditation and “just stand.”



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9. Crescent Moon Pose

3–8 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Inhale, reaching your arms up overhead, and press your palms together. As you exhale, bend to your left and move your hips to the right. As you breathe in the posture, see if you can continue to extend through your fingers on the inhalations, and move your hips more to the side as you exhale.



Breathing here, notice the quality of the breath, where you feel it most, and how it differs from the right side to the left side of your body. Here, and throughout the practice, when you notice the mind judging and categorizing one side of the body against the other, see if you can let it go and just remain with the experience in the present moment. When ready to come back to straight, inhale up and reach up through your fingers to the ceiling.

Repeat onto the other side.

Modification:

If there is tightness in the shoulders, you can place a block between your hands and press into the block while pressing up to the ceiling. Let this action maximize the broadness of your open back muscles. Maintain this openness even while bending to the side.



10. Sail Pose

3–8 BREATHS

From the starting position of CRESCENT MOON, clasp all but your index fingers, roll your eyes up in your head, and then raise your chin only enough to see your pinkies. Don't drop your head all the way back. Then, as you continue to reach up through your index fingers, move your hips forward as your heart opens up to the sky. This is a standing backbend, but the action is actually up through your arms and forward from your center.

Breathing here, notice the quality of the breath, the quality of your posture and balance, and the quality of your effort. Are you straining at all? If so, back out a bit. Let go of thinking you need to attain some abstract idea of perfection. When ready to come out from this

posture, inhale as you reach up through your index fingers straight up to the sky. Exhale, lowering your arms to your sides.



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11. Swan Dive into Standing Forward Bend

6–12 BREATHS

Inhale, extending your arms up overhead. Then, exhaling, roll your thighs in as you lean into the back of your legs, pouring your torso out over your thighs as you fold from your hips. Hold your arms out at about a 45-degree angle as you do, minimizing any possible strain in your back.





Breathe in the **STANDING FORWARD BEND**. Continue to see if you can stay present throughout the duration of the breath and if there is any subtle choosing and judging going on in the mind.

Modification:

If tightness in the hamstrings or hips prevents keeping a flat back in **SWAN DIVE**, keep your knees bent as much as needed to release the strain in the lower back.



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12. Extended Standing Forward Bend

3-5 BREATHS

Inhale and lift the torso from your thighs, extending and lengthening the back, creating a backbend as you did when you inhaled into the Cow Pose. Lift the chest and open the heart as you gaze toward the horizon. Don't strain in the neck. Simply raise your head, continuing the graceful arc of the backbend and gaze over the tops of your eyes.



You can come up onto your fingertips to increase the opening of the heart by rolling your shoulders back and away from your ears. Keep the sitting bones lifting toward the ceiling and back away from your head as you press your feet into the floor.

From here, exhale and deepen into the **STANDING FORWARD BEND**.

On an inhalation, **REVERSE SWAN DIVE**, reaching up toward the ceiling and keeping the back flat. Then exhale, lowering your arms to your sides, standing in **MOUNTAIN**.



Modification:

If because of tightness in the back of your legs or hips, you are bending your knees in **STANDING FORWARD BEND**, then straighten your legs as you inhale and place your hands on your shins for support. The action in the pelvis is the same as in the **COW'S** portion of **CAT/COW**. Keep the shoulders rolling away from your ears, and your sitting bones spreading back and apart.

Sun Salutation Variations

13. Modified Sun Salutation

1–3 REPETITIONS

In this modification of the classic **SUN SALUTATION**, we utilize all familiar postures that we have been working with up to now. There are no surprises. This is to help guide us through the movements, staying present to our breath, the positions and movements of the body, the ever-changing landscape of feelings, and the stream of emotion and thought as it changes continuously, arising, lingering for awhile, and fading away.

- ◆ MOUNTAIN.
- ◆ Inhale and reach your arms overhead.





◆ Exhale, SWAN DIVE into STANDING FORWARD BEND.

◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND

◆ Exhale and step the right leg back into LUNGE.

◆ Inhale and lengthen out through the back foot as you roll the shoulders away from your ears and lift the heart.



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- ◆ Exhale, stepping the left foot back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Breathe in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG for 3–5 breaths.
- ◆ At the end of the last exhalation in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG, step your right foot forward into LUNGE.
- ◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through the left foot.
- ◆ Exhale, bringing the left foot forward into STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and deepen STANDING FORWARD BEND.



- ◆ Inhale into reverse SWAN DIVE reaching out through your fingertips toward the ceiling.
- ◆ Exhale, lowering your arms to your sides back into MOUNTAIN.

This is one half of the salutation. Now *repeat the salutation*, stepping the left foot back into LUNGE and stepping the left foot forward from DOWNWARD-FACING DOG back into LUNGE.



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14. Sun Salutation A

1-3 REPETITIONS

Here we are introduced to two new postures, PLANK and EIGHT-POINT POSTURE, that together make up the connecting movements giving us the full classic SUN SALUTATION.



- ◆ MOUNTAIN.
- ◆ Inhale and reach your arms overhead.



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- ◆ Exhale SWAN DIVE into STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND
- ◆ Exhale, stepping the right leg back into LUNGE.
- ◆ Inhale and lift the heart, rolling your shoulders away from your ears and reaching out through the back foot.
- ◆ Exhale and step the left foot back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.



◆ Inhale into PLANK. This posture is like the starting position for a push-up. Pressing your hands into the ground—wrists, elbows, and shoulders in one line—soften the area straight back from your heart between your shoulder blades. Press out through your feet as if you were standing in MOUNTAIN. Keep from sinking in the lower back or pelvis by reaching your tailbone toward your heels and drawing your navel area back toward your lower spine.

◆ Exhale into EIGHT-POINT POSTURE. This is called eight-point posture because as you exhale you lower your knees, chest and chin to the floor. The eight points making contact with the ground are your two feet, your two knees, your chest, your chin and your two palms. Make sure that when you bend your elbows back, you keep them in toward your sides and not splayed out. Also, notice that they point up toward the ceiling. Your forearms *do not* come to the ground.

◆ Inhale into COBRA. Press your hips toward the floor as you slide your chest forward between your hands, point your toes, and roll up into COBRA.





◆ Exhale back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Tuck your toes under and press up and back with your sitting bones as you press into the ground straightening your arms. Breathe here for 3–5 breaths.

◆ At the end of the last exhalation in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG, step your right foot forward into LUNGE.



◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through the left foot.

◆ Exhale, bringing your left foot forward into STANDING FORWARD BEND.

◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND





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- ◆ Exhale and deepen STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into reverse SWAN DIVE, arms reaching up to the ceiling.
- ◆ Exhale, lowering the arms to your sides, standing in MOUNTAIN.

Now *repeat the salutation*, stepping the left foot back into LUNGE and stepping the left foot forward from DOWNWARD-FACING DOG back into LUNGE.



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*15. Sun Salutation B

1–3 REPETITIONS

This approach to the SUN SALUTATION is a modification of the SUN SALUTATION B as practiced in the Ashtanga-yoga tradition. It includes WARRIOR ONE as well as one new posture for us: the FIERCE POSTURE.



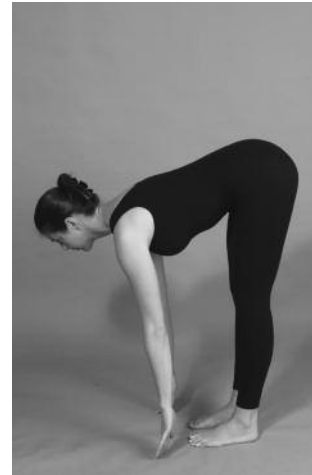
- ◆ MOUNTAIN.
- ◆ Inhale, reaching your arms overhead while bending your knees to 90 degrees into FIERCE POSTURE. Keep your feet pressing into the ground while reaching up through strong straight arms. Avoid overarching your lower back.



Modification:

If this is too much for your lower back, place your hands on your thighs for added support. Lengthen your spine and keep the back broad.

- ◆ Exhale into **STANDING FORWARD BEND**.
- ◆ Inhale into **EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND**
- ◆ Exhale, extending your right leg back into **LUNGE**.



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- ◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through your right heel.
- ◆ Exhale, taking your left foot back into **DOWNWARD-FACING DOG**.
- ◆ Inhale while bringing your right foot forward as you pivot your left foot so that you can come up into **WARRIOR ONE**. Breathe here for 3–5 breaths.



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◆ On your last exhalation, step back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.

◆ Inhale while bringing your left foot forward as you pivot your right foot so that you can come up into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 3–5 breaths.



◆ On your last exhalation, step back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.

◆ Inhale into PLANK.





◆ Exhale into EIGHT-POINT POSTURE.

◆ Inhale, sliding into COBRA.



◆ Exhale into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.
Breathe here in this fourth and final
DOG of the sequence, 3–5 breaths.

◆ On the last exhalation, step your right
foot forward into LUNGE.

◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching
out through the left heel.

◆ Exhale, moving your left foot forward
into STANDING FORWARD BEND.



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- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and deepen FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale, straightening your legs as your arms come to your sides, ending in MOUNTAIN.

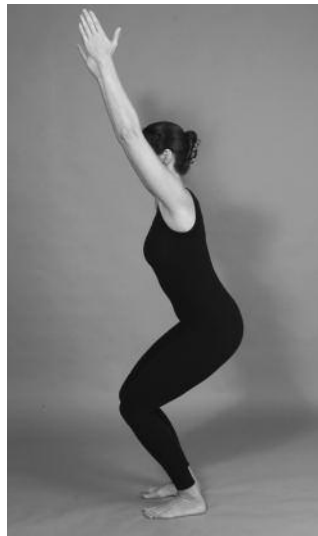


Repeat the entire salutation leading throughout with the left foot.

*16. Warrior Vinyasa

As its name may imply, this is a challenging sequence, including FIERCE POSE, WARRIOR ONE, and WARRIOR TWO, with longer “holdings” in some of the postures. Stay with the breath and ease your mind, letting go of resistances and straining.

- ◆ MOUNTAIN.
- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale into STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.



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- ◆ Exhale, extending the right foot back into LUNGE.
- ◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through the right heel.
- ◆ Exhale, extending the left foot back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.



- ◆ Inhale, bring your right foot forward, and come up into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 10 breaths. Stay aware of all that is happening in your body and mind. See if it is possible to release any resistance to being here.
- ◆ On your tenth inhalation, straighten your right leg and pivot your feet, turning your pelvis and torso 180 degrees to the left, so that you are facing out over your straight left leg.





◆ Exhale, bending your left knee into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 10 breaths. Especially note if the mind jumps to comparing the left side with the right. See if you can just see and experience without having to compare. See that the very act of comparing separates you from the present lived experience.

◆ On your tenth exhalation, open your right hip out as you lower your arms parallel to the ground, coming into WARRIOR TWO. Breathe here for 10–20 breaths. As the sensations in your shoulders (and anywhere else you may feel them) arise, notice how your mind separates from the sensations. From this mental act of pulling away, a whole string of action arises. The mind makes the sensations into a “thing,” an “entity” that is seen as threatening. This very separation is what creates dukkha. The pain and discomfort may continue, but if you can drop your resistance and the stories created by the mind, much misery and anguish can be ended.

◆ On your final inhalation, keeping your arms parallel to the ground, straighten your left leg and pivot your feet to the right.

◆ Exhale into WARRIOR TWO on this side. Breathing here for another 10–20 breaths, continue your meditation on mental formations. See if by staying present and using your breath, not as a distraction from the discom-





fort, but as the vehicle to enter into and stay present with it, you can keep from separating from mere experiencing. Remember that if you are caught in a story, resistance, or judgment, by definition you are removing yourself from the experience. When we are one with our experience, there is no space for judgment or comparisons to arise.

- ◆ On your last exhalation, step back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Notice what happens to the sensations and the quality of mind as you make this transition. Learn from this lesson in impermanence. See how the mind may want to attach to the pleasure of relief from the sensations. See if you can enjoy without getting caught in attachment.
- ◆ Inhale into PLANK.
- ◆ Exhale into EIGHT-POINT POSTURE.





- ◆ Inhale into COBRA.
- ◆ Exhale into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Breathe here for 3–5 breaths.
- ◆ On your last exhalation, step your right foot forward into LUNGE.
- ◆ Inhale, lifting your heart and reaching out through your left heel.



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- ◆ Exhale into STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and deepen STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale into MOUNTAIN. Standing here for 10–20 breaths, stay aware of your whole body, as well as the quality of mind.

Continuing on from the Vinyasa sequences we come to:

17. Locust (Variations 2 and 3)

4 BREATHS EACH VARIATION 1–3 REPETITIONS

Start by lying on your belly with your legs together and with your arms behind your back with your fingers clasped together.



Keep pressing your pubis, hips, thighs, and the tops of your feet into the ground and as you inhale, curl your head, shoulders, and upper chest up off the ground. Reach back through your clasped hands and, keeping the wrists in toward each other, lift them up off your back. As you continue to breathe in this posture, pay attention to how the breath moves in the body while also moving the body. After four breaths, extend out through your feet and let the legs rise up off the floor. Continue to breathe in this full posture and let the breath guide you in your effort.



As you move from one part of the posture to the next, pay attention to the quality of the mind. Does it stay connected throughout the development of the posture or does it drift away?



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18. Bow Pose

6–12 BREATHS 1–3 REPETITIONS

Lying on your belly, bend your knees and take hold of your feet at the ankles, keeping your knees hip-width apart. Let the front of your body be relaxed. Open the lower back as you let the tailbone drop slightly toward the ground.

Then, as you inhale, press the tops of your feet into your hands and lift your thighs from the floor. Let this dual action of your legs assist your head, shoulders, and chest in lifting off from the ground. Try to avoid pulling with your arms. Honor your body and its range. If you feel tension in the lower back, don't lift so high and keep some length between your buttocks and your lower back.



When you're ready, exhale down.

While many find this posture exhilarating, you may begin to face it with some trepidation. If so, how does this condition the breath and the mind and how does it affect the experience of the posture?

19. Crocodile Pose

15–30 BREATHS

Lying on your belly, open your legs so that your feet are about two feet apart and your toes are turned out. Rest your forehead on your crossed forearms.

Lying here you can feel the diaphragmatic movement of the breath. See if you can feel how the breath creates movement in the lower back and buttocks, and trace the subtle movement up through your back into your shoulders and down your legs to your feet.

This is a relaxation posture. Notice the tendency of the mind, after the strenuous practice you have been doing, to drift off into fantasy. Stay present and awake even while resting here.



20. Child Pose

15–30 BREATHS



Press back into CHILD POSE, with your sitting bones dropping into your heels. Your big toes should be touching, and your knees are apart. Release your torso onto the tops of your thighs. Place your forehead on the ground and your arms alongside your legs. Make sure that your weight is moving back toward your

heels and not on your neck and head by adjusting the distance between your knees. Release yourself fully into the posture and let the breath be natural. Where do you experience the breath? As you stay here, notice any changes in the qualities of the breath. Just letting the breath be cultivates calm as you rest in this pose. Notice the quality of the mental state as you rest here. As the level of physical stress remains low, what happens to the mind? Does it stay present and spaciouly aware or does it sink away?



Modification:

If your hips do not touch your heels, and you feel most of your weight in your upper body and head, lay your torso on a bolster or some blankets. This will support your torso and allow your head to come to the height of your hips.



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21. Diamond Pose (Variation)

6–20 BREATHS



Position your knees together and your ankles pressing in together with your toes tucked under as you sit back on your calves. Work to get your heels within the space between your sitting bones. Let the spine rise up strongly from the basin of the pelvis. The crown of the head reaches up. Your shoulders are relaxed down your back, and the chest is broad and lifted.

As you sit here, sensations may arise in your knees or ankles, but more likely at the toe joints. Be mindful of the quality of the sensations. Work with discomfort, but honor true pain. Notice reactivity and aversion, and let your breath bring you back to a pure awareness of the sensations. Drop the story line and just see. If you can find

even a few breaths free of the tension of aversion and resistance, do you experience the sensations differently in any way at all?

Release from here by drawing your legs out from under you.

21. Cobbler Pose

6–20 BREATHS

Sit with the soles of your feet together and, holding your ankles, bring your feet within 4–6 inches of your crotch, letting your legs drop open. Don't press your knees down toward the ground, but instead press your heels and the outer edges of your feet together and move your knees away from each other. Use your arms to help lift the torso up from the pelvis and forward onto the front tips of the sitting bones, so that your sacrum deepens in rather than rounds out.

From here, lengthen out over your legs into a forward bend. Maintain the length of the spine, even though there will be some gentle bending in the midback.

Resting here, staying with the breath, notice the quality of the mind. How does it reflect what is going on in the body? If the sensations of the stretch in the inner thighs feels intense, notice if the mind is quick to label that unpleasant and how that conditions tension in the mind, breath, and body. Yet, if you can use the breath to embrace the sensations and let go of the mental formations, you may find yourself surprised to see that the sensations may not be unpleasant so much as “different.” This is the same habit energy that pulls away from people and situations that the mind perceives as different.

Coming up from here, lift up and out, keeping the length in the spine, and then release to straight.



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23. Wide-Angle Forward Bend

6–20 BREATHS

Sit with your legs open wide, keeping your knees and toes pointing directly upward. Don't let them drop out or in. Put your hands behind you as you gently draw the lower back and sacrum into the torso, avoiding the pelvis tilting back into a posterior tilt. Press the backs of your legs into the ground, keeping your heels on the ground, while reaching out along the length of your leg bones from your sitting bones toward your heels.



Slowly bend forward, bringing your hands to the floor in front of you or taking hold of your big toes, keeping your knees and toes pointing directly upward. Keep the length in your back as far as you can into the forward bend.

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Keep the breath flowing naturally as you observe the sensations. Where do you feel the sensations? What is the quality of the “mind space” in response to the feelings in the body?

When coming up, again lengthen up as if you were leading from the heart and release back to the starting posture.



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Modification:

Those of us who have tightness in the hamstrings and feel the lower back rounding out, or have tightness in the inner thighs, can do this posture while sitting on a blanket or two. Extending the spine, come forward and rest the torso on a bolster or a stack of blankets. Make sure you keep the entire length of the legs actively pressing down into the ground.



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24. One-Legged Forward Bend

10–25 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Starting from STAFF POSE, bend your right knee upward, sliding your right heel in toward your right sitting bone. Then open your right leg out to the side.



Reaching up through your arms and lifting in your torso, ease forward and reach out for your left shin or foot. As you ground down through your legs, lift your chest forward and out over the left leg. Tilting the pelvis forward, hinging from the hips, let your sitting bones spread back and apart. Don't pull, but go to your edge and notice any resistance you may feel in the back of the straight leg. You don't need to get anywhere; relax the resistance to being *here*. As we begin to settle down in the seated forward bends, the mind can either drift off in fantasy or begin to really spin out commentary. Just see what is happening. If you can stay aware, and with the breath as your home base, does the mind just naturally begin to release or let go?

When coming up from this forward bend, keep lengthening up and out as you inhale, then exhaling, release the posture.

Repeat on the other side.



Modification:

If you are coming into this forward bend primarily from bending in the lower back and not from the hips, sit up on a blanket or two and keep extending the torso out over your straight leg. Stop when you feel the pelvis start to roll backward and round your lower back. You can support yourself here with your hands gently pressing into your shins.

25. Lord-of-the-Fishes Pose

10–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Bring your left leg into a simple crossed-leg position, sliding it under your right thigh so that your left heel will come to rest outside your right hip. Then, cross your right foot over your left thigh so that the sole of your right foot is firmly on the ground. Hug your right leg with



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your left arm just below the knee, and use your right hand to press into the ground behind your back so that you can extend your spine up as you ground your legs. Begin to twist to the right, using your left hand to aid the left side of your body in coming around to the right.

You can take your left arm to the outside of your right leg and press into the leg for added leverage, but let the twist rise naturally from the base of the spine upward. Let your head turn to the right at the end of

the torso's movement, and keep the neck relaxed. Don't lead with your chin.

Stay present with your breath guiding you in your exploration of your feelings. What is the mental reflection of the physical experience of the compression of this twist?

Release as you exhale and gently untwist.

Repeat on the other side.



Modification:

If your hips are tight, you may find that your pelvis and back are collapsed back as you cross your legs to set up for this twist. Try sitting up on several blankets so that you can establish the natural curvature of your spine in the starting position for this posture.

Then keep a sense of lifting up from the pelvis as

you twist from the base of your spine upward. Using a block for your back hand will also help you from collapsing in this posture.

26. Seated Forward Bend

10–20 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, reach out and grasp your feet or your shins. Soften your groins as your thighs roll slightly inward, sitting bones moving back and apart. Think more of lifting the torso out and over your legs and not so much about how far you get in the pose. The back will round, but let it round evenly, and not until you’ve folded from the hips first. Move the chest out over your legs by using the strength of your arms, bending your elbows up and out to the sides. Gaze toward your toes, until the chin comes to rest on the shin. Then turn the gaze within or onto your “third eye.”



As you surrender into the posture, keep your focus on the breath. Here, especially, let yourself find that balance between working in a posture and giving yourself up to it. Don’t strain. Stay present with the feelings arising without adding anything by way of interpretation, projection, or identification.



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Coming out of this forward bend, inhale as you lift the heart up and out and then exhale as you release to the starting position.



Modification:

We want to initiate this posture from being firmly grounded at the sitting bones and folding forward from the hips. If in STAFF POSE you cannot maintain the natural curvature of your lower back and feel it rounding out, then sit up on a blanket or two.

Keep the back lengthened and don't worry about getting your head to your leg, but stay at your edge and allow the stretch to come from the back of your legs and your hips.

27. Reverse Plank

4-8 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, place your hands on the floor behind your hips with the fingers pointing toward or away from your toes (alternating, as both positions have their merits). Inhaling, lift



the pelvis up toward the ceiling as you point the toes toward the floor. Keep the tailbone reaching toward your feet. Make sure your wrists are directly below your shoulders with your arms straight. Either keep your chin on your chest, or let the head release all the way back, supported by your upper back muscles. This posture can often be the cause of much resistance. Keep your focus on the breath, while observing any mental resistance to staying in this posture, and when you're ready, exhale back down into the starting position.



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28. Corpse Pose

5–15 MINUTES

Lie in CORPSE POSE, with your legs about 12–18 inches apart and your toes turned out. Your arms are at your sides, at least a few inches from the torso with your palms turned upward.

First, just let your awareness rest wherever in your body you experience the breath. Remember, let go of the tendency to control or manipulate and just see for yourself what is happening now. Wherever you feel it, rest your attention there.

Stay with the sensations of the breath, the subtle increase of tension as you inhale, and then the release of the exhalation. After awhile, let your awareness expand to include your whole body. Let yourself open to and embrace all the sensations that may arise as you lie here. Look to see if the feeling tone is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Notice any tendency to hold



on to pleasant experience, reject what may be unpleasant, or zone out in the absence of any particularly strong sensations.

Then, let awareness turn in upon itself. What mental states are present? Remember that mental formations include what we normally think of as emotions, as well as fantasy, drowsiness, mindfulness, reasoning, judging. Noticing what is there, with no aversion or clinging, is our practice. Looking deeply into the mental formations, they liberate themselves as long as we do not feed them with our clinging and pushing away.

29. Seated Meditation

5–40 MINUTES

Sit in any of the crossed-leg asanas. Find your center and extend your torso from your hips up into your armpits. Make sure your shoulder blades are firmly supporting your upper back and that your lower back has its natural lumbar curve.



When the yogi breathes in or out with the awareness of the mind, or to make the mind happy, to collect the mind in concentration, or to free and liberate the mind, he abides peacefully in the observation of the mind in the mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the third establishment of mindfulness, the mind. Without Full Awareness of Breathing, there can be no development of meditative stability and understanding.



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✿ I N T E R L U D E ✿

LEARNING DHARMA FROM A TREE

There are a great number of balancing postures. Some have you balancing on one leg while twisting and turning and wrapping your body into a huge variety of shapes. With others, you balance on your arms or head, and then add variations by twisting and turning and wrapping your body into all sorts of shapes.

But I have chosen to include just this one simple, basic balancing posture because it has an elegance that allows us to look deeply into our mind. Its simplicity of line can also allow us to stay in it with somewhat less effort than more elaborate balancing postures.

When we stand in TREE POSE and practice mindfully, we may see the subtle tendency to hold the breath—as if our very breath may topple us over. With this holding of the breath, we may see that we are holding a lot of tension in the body, resisting swaying. And yet, trees sway! This physical tension—clenching the jaw, sticking our tongues up into the roof of our mouth, holding the ribs tight and oftentimes scowling—is all reflected in the corresponding restriction of the mind. The inner monologue is literally written on one's face: Shit! I'm gonna fall! Why can't I keep my balance? I did it okay yesterday? I just can't do this! I'm not good at balancing! *Focus!*



In every class I teach, I remind my students to keep breathing and curl the corners of their mouths up. Not just to make them look better, but because it frees up a lot of facial tension. When the face is relaxed, the mind also softens. One lightens up. I also encourage them to remember that if they lose their balance, they can just begin again. Patanjali defines *asana* as “that posture that is stable and easeful.” But for me, the deepest import of that definition refers to the quality of our mind. So you lose your (physical) balance in TREE and you wobble and your leg comes down. Can your mind be stable and at ease? Then you’re practicing yoga.

Much of the drama around balancing postures is that rather than opening to reality, we attempt to live out some ideal. Most of us think of balance as some state of being. We think it is something static; once we achieve it, we have it and all will be well. This manifests in thoughts such as “Once I get that degree, then I’ll feel authenticated,” “Once I get that job/raise, then I’ll be able to do what I want,” “Once I get married/partnered, then I’ll live happily ever after,” “Once I’m enlightened, then I’ll be free.”

I am only being a little facetious here. This concept of balance as a state of being is one of our most destructive myths. And practicing TREE is the antidote. Balance is a process. No matter how long and how still you can be in TREE, perhaps with no wobbling of your upper body at all, just look at how much work your standing foot (and the muscles of your leg) is doing! Your foot is constantly making micro-adjustments in order to maintain your balance. And yet we use the mental concept of balance to judge against our lived experience, and then find our lived experience (our life) not up to par!

Another lesson is provided when we release from TREE back into MOUNTAIN. Invariably, when I teach a new group of students, almost all of them will wiggle their toes and rotate their ankles of what had been the standing (balancing) foot. This is because, after standing with all our weight supported on one foot, when we release, sensations arise. These sensations can best be described as a kind of pins and needles.

But most beginners don’t allow themselves to feel these sensations, and immediately attempt to “get rid of them.” This is a barely conscious act. In fact, it is often a purely unconscious reaction. So I point this out to them as an example of how automatic our aversion is. When we do the other leg, I encourage them to simply observe the sensations that arise when we release and see what happens.

Many are surprised to see how strong the tendency is to move away from the sensations. They are even more surprised to see that often they do not really find the sensations painful or all that uncomfortable. One student realized that she was shaking out her foot simply because the feelings were unfamiliar, strange. This habit energy to move away from the unfamiliar and different sensations is ulti-

mately no different from the tendency to move away from people, emotions, relationships, and environments simply because they are different or unfamiliar. By working with these patterns on our mats, our very lives are opened, becoming more spacious and welcoming.

TREE is one of my favorite meditative asanas. It has taught me so much about myself. May it help you to stay with your experiencing, accepting what is, and holding on to nothing.



MINDFULLY
AWARE
OF THE MIND



AWARENESS OF OBJECTS OF MIND: DHARMAS IN THE DHARMAS

*Breathing in, aware of the impermanent nature of all dharmas.
Breathing out, aware of the impermanent nature of all dharmas.*

*Breathing in, aware of the disappearance of clinging.
Breathing out, aware of the disappearance of clinging*

*Breathing in, observing cessation.
Breathing out, observing cessation.*

*Breathing in, observing letting go.
Breathing out, observing letting go.*

AS WE HAVE SEEN ALL ALONG, none of these exercises is the culmination of any others because we have in fact been practicing them all from the beginning. This mind cannot be separated from its object. As we saw with the Third Establishment of Mindfulness, mind is consciousness, feeling, and mental formations (such as aversion and attachment). If we are feeling, we are feeling *something*, and this something is the object of mind. Mind and its object “inter-are.” In the practice of mindfulness we come to see that mind itself is both the subject and the object of consciousness. When subject and object are one, this is samadhi. This is yoga.



All physiological phenomena (the body and all its processes, including the breath), all psychological phenomena (the mind and all its processes, including feelings, thoughts, and consciousness), and all physical phenomena (the earth itself, including the elements and natural phenomena) are objects of mind. They are all mind, they are all body, and they are all dharmas. And as you can see, we have been working with these “objects” from the very first exercise, when we began to deeply observe the breath coming in and coming out.

When we come to the first exercise of the fourth tetrad, all that really shifts is our emphasis. Now when we observe the breath, for instance, we reflect on its impermanent nature. We can go through each of the previous twelve exercises and rest our attention on the impermanent nature of its object. We can contemplate and see the impermanence of the body, the impermanence and constant flux of our feelings and our thoughts. We can see the impermanence and constant changing nature of the mental formations.

This exercise of conscious breathing sheds light on the constantly changing, impermanent nature of all that exists. This isn't meant to be just some philosophical reflection, but a genuine seeing and experiencing. We have to *practice* with impermanence. Deep seeing, or insight (*prajna*) into impermanence is one dharma gate into the understanding of the interdependent, conditioned, and selfless nature of all that exists. In practicing the thirteenth exercise, we come to see that it contains within it the final three exercises found in this last group of four. In fact, just as from the beginning there has been a natural evolution in our practice, each exercise developing out of the preceding one, here in the last group there can ultimately be no true “letting go” without the deep insight into impermanence. This is why I will be emphasizing this aspect of the Fourth Establishment of Mindfulness.

Anyone who has practiced yoga-asana for any period of time will tell you that asana practice is a great way to practice reflecting on the change and aging of the body. From one day to the next we can sometimes see great changes. Of course at first, the changes may be quite “positive,” as we find improvement in our range of motion, our strength and stamina. But at other times, we may find that what we were able to do just yesterday comes with some difficulty today. It is always changing, and if we remain attached to any one way, we are setting ourselves up for dukkha. And no matter how consistently you practice, the aging process will still continue. Even the great yogi B.K.S. Iyengar, who in his eighties is able to do what most yogis half his age cannot, is not able to do what he had been able to do twenty or thirty years ago.

Many people, upon hearing the emphasis on contemplating impermanence, think this is a “downer” of a practice. But sometimes medicine must be bitter. Yet it isn’t a downer if we can see how ignoring change and the truth of impermanence perpetuates so very much of our misery and anguish, and how truly seeing it is liberating. If we go beyond just the mere intellectual contemplation of impermanence and truly see it, then we also begin to see how our attachment to that which by its very nature is impermanent is simply foolish and not pragmatic. It dooms us to suffering. Trying to turn a blind eye to reality takes a lot of energy and ultimately is destined to fail. Another reason I value the practice of asana is that by working with the body and becoming intimate with it, we learn how to remain fully present, with our eyes open to life as it is, moment by moment, and breath by breath. This is the practice of the spiritual warrior—to never turn away—and every yoga teacher, in one way or another, is continually reminding students of this, because we all need to keep hearing it.

The Buddha emphasizes developing insight into impermanence in his yoga teachings because it serves so well as a door into his central teaching: the truth of dukkha, its causes, and its cessation; insight into *anatta*, or nonself; the realization of *shunyata*, or emptiness of a separate self; and *tathata*, the understanding of the “thusness” of all dharmas. All authentic teachings of the Buddha are said to bear the “Dharma seals” of impermanence, suffering, nonself, and nirvana or extinction. Through the practice of impermanence we also come to penetrate the Three Doors of Liberation: emptiness (*shunyata*), signlessness (*animitta/alaksana*), and aimlessness (*apranihita*).

As S. N. Goenka writes, the clear seeing of impermanence can be said to be the heart of vipassana meditation. In his approach, meditators observe the constantly changing sensations throughout the body. In practicing Mindfulness Yoga, we can observe the constant changing of all experienced phenomena. Again, we begin with the breath and notice how it is ever-changing—no two breaths are the same. As we move on to the body, we notice constant change, some of it subtle and some readily apparent, in the beating of the heart, in sensations, and in the changing position of the body in space.

We can see how our emotions and thoughts are in constant motion. One object follows another, and even when we seem to be caught in one particular emotion, if we look deeply we will see that it is constantly varying in intensity and tone. We can see how the mind jumps from one thought to another, often in a seemingly bizarre and random process. We can even





see that the states of deep calm, ease, joy, and happiness that we may experience in our practice are impermanent. This is not merely philosophical reflection, visualization, or deduction that we are engaged in, but a deep and unrelenting seeing into the reality of our lived experience. What we realize eventually is that what we are seeing is that we *are* impermanence.

The Buddha talked about two kinds of impermanence: the kind of change that is occurring in every instant and the kind that involves the whole cycle of arising, persisting, and ceasing that results in a marked change. While heating water for tea, in each instant the water is changing by getting hotter. With the sudden appearance of steam, we see the cyclic impermanence of the water. In our practice, we observe both kinds of change.

Often it is said that because of change or impermanence (*anicca*) there is dukkha. A classic formula presenting the Three Dharma Doors is “Impermanent, therefore suffering, therefore nonself.” But suffering is not the result of impermanence and is not inextricably tied to it. The root cause of our suffering is our attachment to what is by nature impermanent. It is our attachment, not the reality of impermanence, that is the cause of our dukkha. If we wish to affirm and celebrate life, we must be able to affirm and celebrate impermanence.

If we only look at impermanence superficially, we may assume that it is a negative aspect of life. All that we love changes, and sooner or later we are parted from it all. But with the clear seeing of vipassana, we can see that impermanence is neither negative nor positive. It just is what it is, the “thusness” of things as they are. And it is not merely an aspect of life but its core: without impermanence life itself would not even be possible. Life without change is merely a concept, devoid of any true reality. And besides, without change, how could we hope to transform our suffering?

If we take the self to be understood as some entity that persists over time, then the deep seeing that all dharmas are in constant transformation leads inevitably to the clear view that all things lack such an unchanging self. This is a central observation made by the Buddha regarding all phenomena.

This is not to say that you and I do not exist, but rather that you and I do not exist in the way that we normally imagine we do. You and I (and all things) are without an enduring, independent, essential core. Even the consciousness of self that we take such pains to protect and bolster is not an independent and separate entity or thing; it is a process that is in constant flux and is itself conditioned by everything else that is in constant change. This

insight into nonself is what is meant when we speak of emptiness (*shunyata*). Emptiness itself is not some “thing” that is our essence. Emptiness means that we, and all phenomena, are empty of a separately existing, enduring self. Impermanence is just *thus*. It’s just that!

Because we are *empty* of a separate self, we may say that we are *full* of everything that is. To be empty of a separate self means to inter-be with everything else. When we look into our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, and our consciousness, we see that none of them can be by itself. They all can only inter-be with everything. So, to borrow Thich Nhat Hanh’s wonderful example, as you read these words in this page, can you see the tree from which this paper comes? And what of the tree? It depended on its ancestors, the earth, the nutrient elements, the rain, and the sun. This paper, and the words written upon it, also inter-are with the trees, the rain, the earth, and the sun. In order to be here, there has been the interbeing of the loggers, the paper processors, the truckers, and the printers and publisher. And then there is my mind and consciousness that has written these words, and your mind and consciousness that reads them. Emptiness and impermanence are not two.

Impermanence also leads us through the Dharma door of signlessness. The reality of thusness—of all that exists—is beyond all concepts and verbal expression. The categories of thought and perception are signs. Signs are wonderful instruments—they are models and maps that we can use, but they become cages when we misperceive them for absolute truth. An example often used to help us see the signless nature of reality is that of wave and water. A wave can be great or small, it can arise and it can disappear. Great, small, arising, and disappearing are all “signs”—specific traits of a specific phenomenon. If we identify with a particular wave, then we will feel happy or sad according to the sign. But if we can touch the nature of the wave—if we can touch the water, then we are going beyond the signs. If we can touch the signless, we go beyond fear and all dukkha.

When we look deeply into the impermanent and selfless nature of reality, we touch the signless, which is another word for nirvana. Nirvana is not a place we go to, but can perhaps best be understood as the extinction of all our notions and ideas about reality and how it should be, so that we may perceive reality as it truly is. And the truth of the matter is that there is nowhere to go in order to touch the signless other than right here in the world of signs. In penetrating the wave you touch the water. To penetrate the suchness of the water, you must penetrate the signs of water and see its true nature of interbeing. Thich Nhat Hanh puts it





this way: “The reality of everything that exists is its signlessness, since it is a reality that cannot be grasped by concepts and words. Because it cannot be grasped, it is called empty. Emptiness here does not mean nonexistent as opposed to existent. It means signless, free from all imprisonment by concepts—birth/death, existent/nonexistent, increasing/decreasing, pure/impure.”

Finally, since all dharmas are empty and their reality is beyond concepts, through insight into impermanence we enter the door of aimlessness (*apranihita*). The wave does not “attain” the suchness of water by adding water to itself. We cannot add on or take away from the true nature of all that is. We do not seek liberation outside of what is. For within the very dharmas, the awakened nature is already fully present. The tenth-century Vietnamese master Thang Hoi was asked by a student, “Where can we touch the world of no-birth and no-death?” He responded, “Right here, in the world of birth and death.”

For our practice of Mindfulness Yoga, this can come down to the very practical and concrete practice of seeing impermanence and change in our experience of the asanas. Don’t get caught up in impermanence as some philosophical concept or thing in itself that we are looking for and into, but simply see the reality of change in your body-mind, just here, just now, just this. We can observe how change is happening in every moment when we practice longer holdings of the asanas and when moving slowly. For instance, in WARRIOR TWO (can you tell this is one of my favorites?), we can see how the sensations increase from moment to moment and how our reactivity grows and changes, conditioned by the ever-increasing sensations.

At first, as the sensations arise, we jump to the notion that this pain is a thing. We identify with the pain and may say, “My shoulders are killing me.” A fantasy may arise in the mind about how much we hate this posture and our teacher for having us stay in the posture too long—at least, too long for our taste. Instead, we can commit to really paying close attention to what is happening. Really observe the sensations. What we see, if we stick with it, is that the sensations are not personal. The sense of self grows less hard and solid. There is just sensation and it is constantly changing. The discomfort and pain is seen to be empty. It is not you and it is not a separate entity with which we should do battle. It is a natural conditioned process. It is no different with feelings, mental formations, or consciousness.

When we finally release from the posture, we can see the cyclic change in the cessation of the sensations and the beginning of a new cycle of sensations and reactivity as we grasp

after the feeling of relief. Clinging to this feeling and attempting to make it last is additional dukkha. And yet, if we can let sensations and thoughts just be, the impermanence we experience will help us keep from clinging to the sense of relief, and we can simply enjoy it and let it pass as we move into the next asana. In faster vinyasa practice, the cyclic pattern of change can be observed in this way, for instance, throughout the entire SUN SALUTATION.

Whether we are moving strenuously, maintaining a challenging posture, or sitting or lying still, we can rest in the awareness of the breath as it constantly changes. Richard Rosen, author of *The Yoga of Breath*, asks the somatic koan “Who is the breather?” As we observe we may arrive at the seemingly paradoxical realization that while there is undoubtedly breathing going on, no breather can be found. The thought “I am the breather” is seen to be just that, a thought added on to the bare experiencing and the simple reality. Lying in CORPSE POSE, you may begin to feel that the breath is moving into and out of the body, breathing you—but even that too is just a thought.

If throughout the practice of anapanasati, there has remained this idea of a “breather” or a “witness,” then through deep realization of impermanence, this last vestige of self-consciousness can be dissolved and no longer do you have the sense that “I am paying attention” or “I am observing.” At first, we may have had to utilize the witness in order to break through our identification with the constantly changing sensory and mental experiencing, but now the witness itself is seen to be nothing more than a mental formation.

Many beginning practitioners find this potentially frightening and disturbing: “You mean I will cease to exist?” But this question itself is based on the false assumption that an “I” ever exists at all, even now. The Buddha’s teaching is not that we must *destroy* the self or the ego, but that this idea of a self is based on ignorance of reality, and when our ignorance ceases, so too does our misperception of self. When that has been clarified, there is no basis for fear. Through continual practice we get to taste “drops of emptiness.” Either through many such tastes, or through an intense and deep draught, one’s life may be transformed.

Through deep penetration into the reality of impermanence, we begin to let go of our attachments to those ephemeral phenomena we for so long had clung to. We see that the attachment is not only a cause of suffering, but a form of suffering itself. The second contemplation of the fourth tetrad is the growing awareness of this disappearance or fading away of clinging and grasping. Whenever we have such thoughts as, “*If only* I could have that (whatever





“that” is), I would be happy,” we are experiencing attachment, grasping, and clinging. This comes up often in asana practice when we believe that *if only* we could do a particular posture, or do it better, we’d be a better yogi. Be very wary of any “if only”!

If we grow in our understanding that any object we may desire is by nature constantly changing and bound to dissolution, our desire for it to be what it is not (permanent), and to give us what it cannot (ultimate happiness), will also begin to lessen and fade away. In the exercise above, we observe the process of fading away of attachment. In Mindfulness Yoga, when we see the impermanence of our experience—physically and mentally—we grow less attached to a particular outcome. We remain open to what is happening and do not use some idea of what should be happening to flog ourselves. A classical analogy is that watching attachment or clinging dissolve is like watching the stains in a white cloth fade away as it is bleached by the bright light of the sun. Awareness is the bright light that dissolves attachments of the mind.

For many, the *idea* of nonattachment or dispassion sounds cold and unappealing, but this is mistaking nonattachment for indifference—and these two are not at all the same. For me it is the experience of attachment that is lifeless, in that when we are attached (whether to a relationship, an emotion, a concept, or some physical object), we want the object of our attachment to not change and to last longer. This narrow, tunnel-visioned view drains the vitality and juice from life and attempts to freeze-dry and package the moment. Imagine being so attached to a particular note in a piece of music that you attempt to hold on to it and make it last. In the process you destroy the beauty and integrity of the composition. It is nonattachment—the *practice* of it—that allows us to let the music play so that we can enjoy it fully in its very passing.

We create mind-forged manacles with our attachments, binding us to the limited view that life is *my* life, *my* body, *my* lover, *my* family, *my* possessions. When we see the truth of inter-being, through the insight into impermanence and nonself, we extend beyond every limit we have created for ourselves, and see that our life is not really ours but all of life itself. The impermanence and dissolution of any particular phenomena (including our body-mind) do not touch the suchness of life, just as the arising and the dissolution of the waves don’t affect the existence of the water.

The Sanskrit and Pali word translated as “fading away” is *viraga* (or *vairagya*), which is also said to mean “without attachment” or “dispassion.” In the *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali states

that practice and dispassion are the twin poles of yogic discipline. Practice includes all the “techniques” utilized by yogis to cultivate understanding, and dispassion or nonattachment is the attitude the practitioner must maintain throughout practice. Of course, it is only through the deepening of one’s practice that nonattachment can be cultivated.

From the deep penetration of impermanence comes the fading away of clinging found in the fourteenth contemplation and the unfolding of the cessation that is realized in the fifteenth exercise. The word translated as “cessation” is the Pali and Sanskrit word *nirodha*. This is a difficult word to translate, and yet is central to all yoga practice. In the *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali says, “Yoga is the *nirodha* of the fluctuations in the field of consciousness.” While some translate this as “cessation,” many others agree on “restriction” as more appropriate. There are apparently four levels of *nirodha* culminating in the complete restriction that coincides with the realization of the “cloud of dharma ecstasy” (*dharma megha samadhi*).

In the teachings of the Buddha, *nirodha* is the word used to summarize the Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering, and thus it has often been used as a synonym for nirvana. Besides cessation, its meaning has been given as “unbinding,” “quenching,” and “extinguishing.” It might help us to clarify the meaning by looking into the action being described.

What is unbound? One could say that the mind is unbound from attachment, from all activities of mind that catch us in *dukkha*. What is quenched? Our suffering is quenched, like a fire that is put out with water. The fire of our suffering is extinguished. What ceases? All our erroneous ideas, our notions that keep us from experiencing reality as it is. This means particularly the cessation of ideas regarding birth and death, permanence and annihilation, being and nonbeing, and coming and going—traditionally known as the *eight concepts*. As it is these concepts or notions that form the foundation of our suffering, expressed through our clinging and aversion, these notions must be gone beyond. We see that reality is beyond *all* ideas.

There are levels of cessation, and *nirodha* is a process. As we practice our asanas, we may notice many small cessations. For instance, we may have the experience of an unpleasant sensation and a mental formation of aversion. With mindfulness, our attachment to feeling good is seen, and based upon our awareness of impermanence, the attachment fades away. Over time, whenever that kind of experience arises, the fading away continues until that particular attachment ceases. This is a small but potentially profound taste of liberation. One





meaning of the word *nirvana* is coolness. So, to draw out the metaphor: the fire of our attachment and the heat of *dukkha* are extinguished in the coolness of *nirvana*.

Finally, with the last exercise of the fourth tetrad, there is letting go. But *you* are not letting go; it is not something that you endeavor to do, but it happens because there is nothing to hold on to. As I mentioned before, the final thing that is let go of is the idea of a separate, enduring self. Throughout the previous contemplations, there was still that final vestige of self-consciousness that could take credit or possession of the insight into impermanence, fading away, and cessation. The irony is that this is a letting go of what was never there!

The Pali term used for this contemplation can be translated as “throwing back” or “giving back.” We give back or return everything to which we were attached. We have attempted to hoard and take for ourselves what belongs to life—to nature. The Buddha tells us that the highest understanding is to take nothing as self or belonging to self. With the sixteenth contemplation, we give back all that we have claimed as self or belonging to self.

We do not let go of reality. We let go of our wrong perceptions and misconceived notions about reality. As Shariputra says to the dying Anathapindika, a laystudent of the Buddha, in the *Sutra on Teachings to Be Given to the Sick*, we need to see that “These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes.” This understanding must include the whole body-mind process, including all the senses, the objects of mind, and consciousness. “All these things are not me. I am not caught by any of them.” The sutra goes on to say that all things arise because of causes and conditions. When these causes and conditions change and cease, then these “things” cease to manifest. The true nature of things is not to be born and not to die. Our practice is to see that we are not enclosed in this small and ever changing “skin bag,” but that we are life without boundaries, free of all imprisoning divisions, beyond space and time. This is why it can be said that we do not practice for ourselves. When we practice to liberate our minds, we practice to liberate all beings.

In this we are letting go of our burdens—the same burdens we have created over and over again through our misperception of reality. Problems are not so much solved as cease to be problems. What weighed us down is dropped and we are enlightened, “lightened up.” Over the years, enlightenment has become concretized and reified into a state of being. When thought of in this way, it becomes something that happens once, way off in the future.

But enlightenment is a process of continually cultivating letting go, nonclinging. The Buddha had his great insight and then cultivated that insight, and lived from that insight, moment by moment for the rest of his life. Awakening is not something that is to be attained in some far-off distant future. In any moment we can see how we have become caught in our notions and by our attachments. We can see how this is dukkha. And if we see it deeply enough, the clinging fades away and ceases, and liberation—lightening up—happens.

As Thich Nhat Hanh cautions us, “Letting go does not mean abandoning one thing in order to seek something else.” Letting go means to see through all that keeps us (falsely) separated from reality as it is. From this perspective, as I stated in the Introduction, the boundary between us and ultimate reality, between us and others, is seen as not real. There is nothing that ultimately needs to be removed or added or joined together. We find enlightenment not in turning away from our human condition but within our existential human condition, and as its fulfillment. Through this practice we finally can see for ourselves that it is indeed possible to drop our burdens—to let go of the heavy weight that has held us down for so long. As the Sufi poet Rumi writes: “How long will we fill our pockets like children with dirt and stones? Let the world go. Holding it, we never know ourselves, never are airborne.”

The letting go of enlightenment is to be with whatever it is that is happening, free of personal agendas. When the desire arises that something be other than it is, we see through it to its fading away and ceasing.

The sixteen exercises or contemplations found in the *Anapanasati Sutta* are like the stages of a training program, and they are like the layers of an onion. As a training program, we can go step-by-step and review them again and again, with ever increasing subtlety and refinement. Or we can peel away the layers of the onion, while continuing to be steeped in its flavor from the surface to its empty core. In any event, we arrive at a time when we let go of any attachment to the formal practice. Of course, we may still sit in meditation and practice asana, but it is the awareness and the insight that has been internalized that makes all of life the field of practice, a “formless field of benefaction,” as the Zen tradition puts it.

While I was writing this chapter, I received a letter from one of my students, who had lost her fiancé in a terrible accident several months earlier. She wrote, “Yoga practice and the Buddha’s teachings have had a profound effect on my life. Experiencing yoga and the





mindfulness approach to living during this time of transformation has had a huge impact...it has guided me through some really trying and exhausting moments.”

Many students who have practiced with consistency over the long haul have expressed similar observations. Many began to practice in periods of great strife and turmoil. And many began seeking a life free from problems. They were looking for life to be other than what it is. What they have found is that “shit still happens,” but it doesn’t seem to stick to them so tenaciously. They experience greater ease and stability in whatever shape they find life takes through them, and after all, this is the very definition of asana.



MINDFULNESS YOGA: SEQUENCE FOUR

THIS FINAL SEQUENCE, like the final tetrad of contemplations, utilizes all we have been working with already, but works with the more subtle aspects of experience of impermanence, non-self, cessation, and letting go. Elements from the first three sequences, such as slow movement and vinyasa, allow us to look into both impermanence in every instant as well as cyclic impermanence.

Of course, remember that any sequence of postures can be approached as Mindfulness Yoga, and once you are familiar with this way of practicing, you may want to explore other sequences of your own and of other teachers. Beginners may want to skip Warrior Vinyasa or any other postures that seem too challenging.

1. Corpse Pose

3–5 MINUTES

Begin in CORPSE POSE, with your legs about 12–18 inches apart and your toes turned out. Position your arms at your sides, at least a few inches from the torso, with your palms turned upward.

First, just let your awareness rest wherever in your body you experience the breath. Simply notice how the breath is coming and going. Remember, let go of the tendency to control or manipulate and just see for yourself what is happening now.

The first thing you notice is that the breath has direction. It goes into the body and then it goes out. Know an in-breath as an in-breath and an out-breath as an out-breath. Notice the specific feeling tone of an in-breath and the specific feeling tone of the out-breath. Observing ever deeper, see how each breath is impermanent. It arises, has duration, and then ceases.



See the process of breathing.

Then begin to see the various other qualities of the breath. Following the entire “breath-body,” know a long breath as a long breath and a short breath as a short breath. Avoid trying to make them even. Just breathe and see. The breath may be long or short, even or



uneven, deep or shallow, rough or smooth. Just note the breath, paying attention, without trying to make the breath any particular quality. As you pay attention to the breath, notice any changes that happen naturally. Whatever quality predominates, notice how it varies over time and how the predominance of one quality may change to another quality.

Then, still allowing the breath to come and go naturally, begin to expand your awareness to include the whole body. Are you holding tension in the body, perhaps tensing the legs or the buttocks as if you need to still hold yourself up? Without forcing it, once in your awareness, does the tension release? Feel the weight and volume of the body as it presses into the floor. Can you feel the tips of your toes and fingers without wiggling them? How do you know where in space the body is when you remain still and quiet? Do you experience hard and fast boundaries or is the outline of the body indistinct?

As you focus on the breath moving throughout the body, ask yourself, “Who is the breather?” Let go of any answer. And keep questioning.

2. Knee-to-Chest Pose

45–60 SECONDS EACH SIDE

Slowly slide the right heel along the floor, bending the knee toward the ceiling as you slide the foot into the buttock. Pay attention to the feeling tone of the leg and the whole body as you do this. Can you feel any changes in your weight distribution or the center of gravity in your pelvis as the foot moves into the buttock? Once there, slowly lift the foot off the floor and bring the knee into your chest while holding it with both hands. Pay attention to the subtle changes you may experience at the level of sensations, breath, and mental formations. With awareness, can you see the lived truth of impermanence?

After 6–8 breaths, slowly lower the foot to the floor near the buttock and then slide it out to straight. Notice the discrete point where you know you can fully release the weight of the leg to the earth, and when you do, notice any changes in the breath and the feeling tone throughout the body. Have you been holding the breath or holding tension in the body? This whole process includes the awareness of cyclic change and seeing how that awareness can change the cycle of reactivity—of aversion and grasping.

Repeat with the other leg.



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3. Simple Crossed-Leg Sitting Posture

2–5 MINUTES

Sit with your legs crossed, with your feet underneath your knees. Sit on the forward points of your sitting bones (avoid rolling the pelvis backward and rounding the lower back). With your hands beside your hips, feel the sitting bones grounding down as the crown of your head rises up, lengthening the spine. Feel where in your body you sense your weight as it presses down into the earth.



Now place your hands on your knees, and with your eyes closed, open to the feeling tone of “just sitting.” Notice how over time various sensations may arise: itching, twinges of discomfort, throbbing, dullness, sharpness. Observe them and see how they are constantly varying. Can you see that as soon as you begin to react to them, either with aversion or with grasping, judging, or comparing, the sense of self grows ever stronger? Can you see how, when you reconnect to just what is happening, the experiencing grows more spacious and lighter, even if the sensation remains?

4. Cross-Legged Forward Bend

8–12 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Now, extend out over the crossed legs resting your forehead on your arms. As you sit here, notice where the breath is experienced in this forward bend. Do you feel the belly pressing against your thighs? Can you feel the breath in your back body? Perhaps you can feel the ribs



expanding and contracting with each breath. Notice if you are holding tension anywhere in the body and see if you can just let go. Do you find that the in-breath lifts you slightly while the out-breath releases you back down into the forward bend? If so, don't exaggerate this movement, but also refrain from inhibiting it. Let the breath move the body freely and release into the experience of the movement. Again, notice any changes in the body and mind as you stay here in this posture.



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When coming up from this posture, draw the navel back to the spine and roll the spine up, one vertebra after the other, until you come back to Simple Crossed-Leg Posture.

Repeat with other shin placed on top.



Modification:

If you find your lower back rounding and your head and forearms do not come to the ground, sit on a blanket or two so that your pelvis is elevated and you can tilt forward from your hips, and rest your torso on a bolster or enough blankets so that you can rest with your spine extended.

5. Seated Side Stretch

8–12 BREATHS EACH SIDE



Place your right hand beside your hip and stretch the left arm up. Slowly slide the right hand out to the side, onto your forearm if you can, while bending over to the right. Keep grounding your left sitting bone, while stretching through the fingers of your left hand; bring the arm as parallel to the floor as possible. If it's comfortable enough, turn your face to gaze up. If your left arm is blocking your view of the ceiling, try to take the left arm back toward your ear.

Sitting in the posture, feel where the

breath is experienced. Notice the difference between the left side of the body and the right side. Notice how quickly the mind may move into attainment mode and grasp for that “extra stretch.” What happens if you let that go and use the breath to determine where you should be? Come up on an inhalation while stretching the fingers of your left hand up toward the ceiling. Exhale as you release the left arm to your side.

A whole cyclic process arises and passes away as we move to the side, breathe there and then rise up to straight. How much of this process were you truly aware of and how much did you just not notice? See what happens as you move to the other side.

Repeat on the other side.



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6. Cat/Cow Pose

6–10 REPETITIONS WITH YOUR BREATH

Have your hands straight down from your shoulders and your knees straight down from your hips. On the exhalation, round your back like an angry cat, tilting the pelvis backward and tucking the tailbone between your legs. Let your head hang down as you gaze back toward your pelvis. On the inhalation, tilt your pelvis forward, dropping your belly toward the floor as the crown of your head and your sitting bones reach up toward the ceiling, your back



moving into a soft backbend. Here your back has a gentle backbend, as it takes the line of a cow's back.

Let your natural breath determine the duration and rhythm of your movement. Begin the movement with the tilting of your pelvis, and let the movement generated by this action flow up your back like a wave moving through water. Pay attention to the body of the breath



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as well as all that arises as you move from one position to the other. See and feel how this constant movement conditions the breath, the body, and the mind. Notice too if there is any tendency for the mind to drift off and the body to go on “automatic pilot.”

7. Downward-Facing Dog

10–30 BREATHS

From COW POSE, tuck your toes under and, reaching your sitting bones up and back, straighten your legs into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Keep the sitting bones lifting and let go



of the notion that you need to have your heels come to the floor, yet do keep them moving toward the floor, but not at the expense of the elongation of your back.

As you continue to stay in the posture, notice how your experience of it changes. Does resistance arise in the form of boredom, anger, or discomfort? When noticing if you are

caught in any particular reaction, see if the noticing changes that. Be alert to any subtle (or not-so-subtle) judgments that may arise, and how quickly awareness of judging can escalate to judging the judging. Keep coming back to your breath and what is happening in this moment and let the whole process of judging go.



Modification:

With tight hamstrings, the lower back will round and compress. Simply bend your knees until you can feel the back lengthen and the lower back regains its natural (inward-moving) lumbar curve. If the backs of your legs are really tight, besides bending your knees, you may want to experiment with stepping your feet a bit wider than hip width.

8. Lunge

3–6 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Step your right foot forward between your hands, keeping the back leg straight and extending out through your back heel. Make sure the bent knee is not coming forward of your toes. The front knee should be bent at a 90-degree angle with the shin perpendicular and the thigh parallel to the floor. Come up onto your fingertips and roll the shoulders down your back while opening the heart as you gaze forward.

Without straining or becoming rigid, can you keep making the effort to lengthen out through the back heel while keeping the chest lifted? Let the breath move freely through the body.



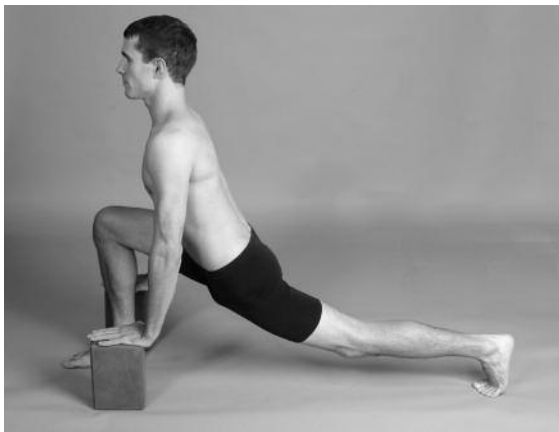
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Step the right leg back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG and *repeat with the left leg.*



Modification:

With tight hips, you may find it difficult to extend your back leg while keeping your front leg bent 90 degrees at the knee. You can place your hands on blocks and even unbend your front knee until you feel more openness in the hips. Ground the front thigh toward the floor while lifting your back leg up toward the ceiling.

9. Hanging Forward Bend

6–12 BREATHS



From the LUNGE, step forward into the HANGING FORWARD BEND. Have your feet about fist-width apart (hip width) and lift your sitting bones up as you drape your torso over your legs. If there is tension felt in the lower back, soften and bend the knees. Cross your arms, interlocking them at the elbows, and just hang.

In this, our second forward bend, it may be easier to see the way the breath moves the body. As you inhale, can you feel the torso rise up a bit? And as you exhale, notice how you release back into the forward bend. It is as if your body was bobbing on the surface of a gentle wave. Again, don't exaggerate this

movement, but also do not inhibit it. Just let it be and experience it. You may or may not go deeper as you continue to hang here. Don't force it. Hold on to nothing and accept everything. Simply see.

Modification:

Those with tight hamstrings will find that they will round in the lower back, eventually causing tension there. Bend your knees to release the back tension and let your torso be supported by your thighs. This action stabilizes the lower back and sacrum and allows you to bend from your hip joint rather than from the back. Keep the sitting bones lifting, while simultaneously pressing down through your feet.



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10. Spinal Roll

20–40 SECONDS

Release your arms and let them dangle freely. Don't hold them in any particular place. With your knees softly bent, draw your navel back toward your spine and roll up one vertebra at a time. See how little or how much of your spine you can actually experience as you do this. Let the breath be natural.

Keep your eyes open, and if you see your arms coming in to your legs, or reaching out away from you, see if you can consciously let go and surrender them to gravity. We hold so much tension in our shoulders, neck, and arms, so see if you can see the tension as it arises and keep letting it go. Do not lift your shoulders as you roll up. Simply let them roll back into place. Remember that there are seven vertebrae in your neck, so see if you can get a sense of lifting and stacking them right up to the base of your skull.





Modification:

If there is pain in the lower back, even with bent knees, then use your hands on your thighs for added support.



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11. Mountain/Balanced Standing

2–5 MINUTES

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel along the midline of the foot (roughly straight back from the second toe). Your big toes will be slightly closer to each other than your heels when lined up along the midline of the foot. Feel the weight of your body descend down through your legs and into the earth just in front of your heels. Let your spine rise up out of the basin of your pelvis, upper chest lifted, and shoulders relaxed and slightly back.

See if you can feel the natural curves of your spine. The neck slightly curves in, while the upper back has a slight roundness and the lower back again curves in gently. Avoid collapsing into the lower back. Keep the front ribs soft. With your eyes closed, as we did in Sequence One, try keeping the body straight and lean forward as far as you can without falling on your face. Notice all the sensations in your body that arise as you tense your muscles in order to keep from falling. What is the quality of your breath and your mind as you teeter here?

Lean forward and back lessening the arc of movement until you can feel the breath grow



a bit deeper and more spacious. Notice how you can release all the major muscles in the back and shoulders and be buoyantly straight. Again, let the breath guide you and the feeling tone of the body be your teacher. Once balanced and centered, stand awhile and notice how the feelings change. Notice how the mental formations change. Notice the process of change itself.

12. Triangle Pose

5–15 BREATHS, EACH SIDE

Reach out to the sides with your arms parallel to the floor and then step your feet out so that they are directly under your fingertips. Turn your left foot in slightly and your right foot out completely (90 degrees from facing front). Pressing down strongly into both legs, extend upward from the base of your spine.

Fold over your front leg while continuously pressing your weight more into the back leg. Your bottom arm is pressing into the floor (or into a block or your shin) while you elongate your spine and open your chest, reaching your top arm toward the ceiling.



Breathing here, keep your awareness spaciously moving through the body, remaining aware of all sensations and thoughts that arise and continuing to let them go. As you stay in the posture, different sensations and different areas of the body will come into your awareness. See if you can drop out of your reactivity and simply observe the moment-to-moment changes of the phenomena themselves. See, if you can, their very nature of and as impermanence.

When you are ready to come out of the posture, press even more into the back leg and lift up through the top arm.

Repeat on the other side. Stay

alert to the changing sensations as you move from one side into the other and note any “comparing mind” that may arise. Can you see the difference without having to categorize and make one side “good” and the other “bad”?

Keep coming back to your breath as your anchor in the present moment.

13. Extended Side Angle Stretch

5–15 BREATHS, EACH SIDE

Beginning as you did in TRIANGLE, reach out to the sides with your arms parallel to the floor and then step your feet out so that they are directly under your fingertips. Turn your left foot in slightly and your right foot out completely (90 degrees from facing front). Pressing down strongly into both legs, extend upward from the base of your spine.



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Now, bend your front knee to a right angle so that the knee rests directly above your ankle. Your shin should be perpendicular to the ground and your thigh is moving toward parallel. Next, reach your left arm alongside your left ear, extending fully into the stretch.

As you stay in the posture, keep rolling your knees away from each other in an external rotation. Press your hand into the



ground beside your right foot and spiral your torso as if you were going to turn your chest toward the sky. Continue to stay with your moment-to-moment experience. Can you see how it changes? Notice any mental commentary and see if you can drop “below” it and rest in the spaciousness of bare attention.

When you come out from this posture, again press down into the back leg and foot, reach up and back with the top arm, and straighten the front leg.

Repeat on the other side.



Modification:

With tight hips, taking your hand to the floor can create energy congestion and muscular tension. To free your hips and allow integration between your legs and spine, place your elbow on your thigh just above the knee or press your hand into a block.

Sun Salutations

14. Sun Salutation A

1-4 REPITITIONS



◆ MOUNTAIN

◆ Inhale, lifting the arms overhead

◆ Exhale, SWAN DIVE into STANDING FORWARD BEND.

◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.



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◆ Exhale, stepping the right leg back into LUNGE.

◆ Inhale and lift the heart, rolling your shoulders away from your ears and reaching out through the back foot.

◆ Exhale and step the left foot back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.



◆ Inhale into PLANK.

◆ Exhale into EIGHT-POINT POSTURE.





◆ Inhale into COBRA.

◆ Exhale back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Breathe here for 3–5 breaths.

◆ At the end of the last exhalation in DOWNWARD-FACING DOG, step your right foot forward into LUNGE.



◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through the left foot.

◆ Exhale and bring your left foot forward into STANDING FORWARD BEND.



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- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and deepen STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into reverse SWAN DIVE, arms reaching up to the ceiling.
- ◆ Exhale and lower your arms to your sides, standing in MOUNTAIN.

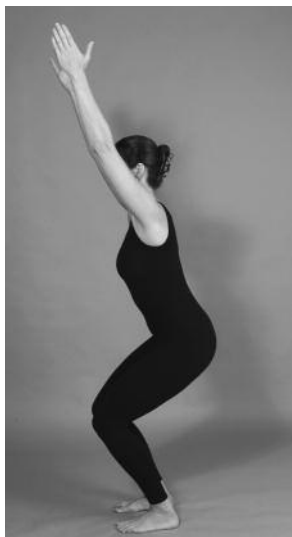


Now *repeat the salutation*, stepping the left foot back into Lunge and stepping the left foot forward from DOWNWARD-FACING DOG back into LUNGE.



15. Sun Salutation B

1-4 REPETITIONS



- ◆ MOUNTAIN
- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale into STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and step your right leg back into LUNGE.



- ◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through your right heel.
- ◆ Exhale and step your left foot back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.



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◆ Inhale and bring your right foot forward as you pivot your left foot so that you can come up into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 5 breaths.

◆ On your last exhalation, step back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.

◆ Inhale and bring your left foot forward as you pivot your right foot so that you can come up into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 5 breaths.





◆ On your last exhalation, step back into
DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.

◆ Inhale into PLANK.

◆ Exhale into EIGHT-POINT POSTURE.

◆ Inhale, sliding into COBRA.



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◆ Exhale into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Breathe here in this fourth and final DOG of the sequence for 5 breaths.

◆ On the last exhalation, step your right foot forward into LUNGE.

◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through the left heel.



◆ Exhale and step your left foot forward into STANDING FORWARD BEND.

◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND

◆ Exhale and deepen FORWARD BEND.





- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale, straightening your legs as your arms come to your sides, ending in MOUNTAIN.

Repeat the entire salutation leading throughout with the left foot.



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16. Warrior Vinyasa

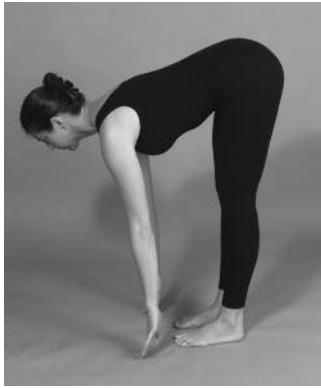


- ◆ MOUNTAIN.
- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale into STANDING FORWARD BEND.





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- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and step your right foot back into LUNGE.
- ◆ Inhale, lifting the heart and reaching out through the right heel.
- ◆ Exhale and step your left foot back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.



- ◆ Inhale, bring your right foot forward, and come up into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 10–15 breaths. Stay aware of all that is happening in your body and mind. See if it is possible to release any resistance to being here.



- ◆ On your tenth inhalation, straighten your right leg and pivot your feet, turning your pelvis and torso 180 degrees to the left so that you are facing out over your straight left leg.
- ◆ Exhale, bending your left knee into WARRIOR ONE. Breathe here for 10–15 breaths. Especially note if the mind jumps to comparing the left side with the right. See if you can just see and experience without having to compare. See that the very act of comparing separates you from the present lived experience. See if it's possible to let go of the running commentary in your head.
- ◆ On your tenth exhalation, open your right hip out as you lower your arms parallel to the ground, coming into WARRIOR TWO. Breathe here for 10–20 breaths.

As the sensations in your shoulders (and anywhere else you may feel them) arise, notice how your mind separates from the sensations. From this mental act of pulling away, a whole string of action arises. The mind makes the sensations into a “thing,” an “entity” that is seen as threatening. This very separation is what creates dukkha. The pain and discomfort may continue, but if you can drop your resistance and the stories created by the mind, much misery and anguish can be ended. You can cultivate this by really entering into the sensations and seeing how they are conditioned, empty of a separate “self.” Through awareness of the constantly changing nature of the sensations, they no longer are perceived as a “thing” to resist. You no longer see yourself as a “self” that must resist. All is seen to be just as it is.



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- ◆ On your final inhalation, keeping your arms parallel to the ground, straighten your left leg and pivot your feet to the right.
- ◆ Exhale into WARRIOR TWO on this side. Breathing here for another 10–20 breaths, continue your meditation on impermanence. See if by staying present and using your breath, not as a distraction from the discomfort, but as the vehicle to enter into and stay present with it, you can keep from separating from mere experiencing. Remember that if you are caught in a story, resistance, or judgment, by definition you are removing yourself from the experience. When we are one with our experience, there is no space for judgment or comparisons to arise.
- ◆ On your last exhalation, step back into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG. Notice what happens to the sensations and the quality of mind as you make this transition. Learn from this lesson in impermanence. See how the mind may want to attach to the pleasure of relief from the sensations. See if you can enjoy without getting caught in attachment.
- ◆ Inhale into PLANK.



◆ Exhale into EIGHT-POINT POSTURE.

◆ Inhale into COBRA.

◆ Exhale into DOWNWARD-FACING DOG.
Breathe here for 5 breaths.

◆ On your last exhalation, step your right
foot forward into LUNGE.



◆ Inhale, lifting your heart and reaching
out through your left heel.

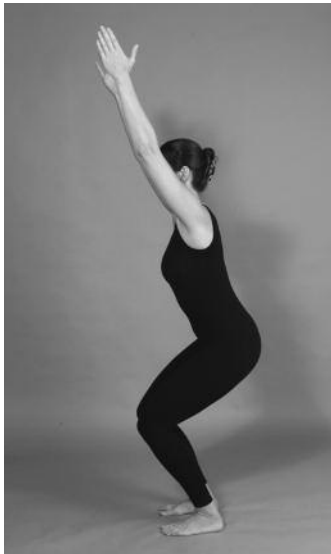
◆ Exhale into STANDING FORWARD BEND.



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- ◆ Inhale into EXTENDED STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Exhale and deepen STANDING FORWARD BEND.
- ◆ Inhale into FIERCE POSTURE.
- ◆ Exhale into MOUNTAIN. Standing here for 10–20 breaths, stay aware of your whole body, as well as the quality of mind. Where now are all the sensations you may have been finding yourself “struggling” against?

17. Tree Posture

10–30 BREATHS EACH LEG

From MOUNTAIN, place the sole of your left foot into your right inner thigh. Press your foot into the thigh as the thigh presses back into your foot. Place your palms together at your heart in namaste (Anjali Mudra).

If your balance feels challenged here, just stay here and keep grounding down through your feet and keep the heart lifted and open. But if you feel confident in your balancing, reach your arms up over your head. Avoid sinking into your lower back by keeping the kidneys “inflated” and the front ribs “soft” and not jutting out.



As you stand here, keep the focus on your breath. Notice if there is any tendency to hold the breath as if that could help in keeping balance. Remember, stability and ease is what defines asana, but this refers to maintaining stability and ease in the mind even if the body feels less than stable! Notice what movements the breath initiates as you stand like a tree. Maintain your awareness of all the feelings

that may arise. Can you see that all the constant adjustments your standing foot is making are the dynamic process of balance, and that balance is not other than this?

When ready to come out, lower the hands to in front of your heart, and then with full awareness, slowly lower the left foot to the floor, returning you to MOUNTAIN. When you come out of TREE, there may be some strong sensations that arise in the foot that you had been standing on. Notice how the tendency to want to avoid feeling these sensations may quickly



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follow. Recommit to watching and feeling what arises, using your breath as your base. What happens to the sensations? Like all conditioned phenomena, they are impermanent.

Repeat while standing on the other leg.



Modification 1:

If unsteady, you can try with your foot pressing below your knee on your inner shin, or even have your toes on the floor for some added balance assistance.

Modification 2:

Practice against a wall, with your right hand on the wall. Use the wall to steady yourself. Try to reach your left hand over your head. If this feels okay, try taking your right hand up too.

18. Locust Pose (Variations 2 and 3)

6–10 BREATHS, 1–3 REPETITIONS

Start by lying face down on your belly with your legs together and with your arms behind your back with your fingers clasped together.

Keep pressing your pubis, hips, thighs, and the tops of your feet into the ground and as you inhale, curl your head, shoulders, and upper chest up off the ground. Reach back through your clasped hands and, keeping the wrists in toward each other, lift them up off your back. As you continue to breathe in this posture, pay attention to how the breath moves in the body while also moving the body. After four breaths, extend out through your feet and let the legs rise up off the floor. Continue to breathe in this full posture and let the breath guide you in your



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effort. See how the varied sensations and thoughts are conditioned by the body and the breath. See how they change when the position of the body and the quality of the breath changes.

19. Bow Pose

6–12 BREATHS, 1–3 REPETITIONS.

Lying on your belly, bend your knees and take hold of your feet at the ankles, keeping your knees hip-width apart. Let the front of your body be relaxed. Open the lower back as you let the tailbone drop slightly toward the ground.

Then, as you inhale, press the tops of your feet into your hands and lift your thighs from



the floor. Let this dual action of your legs assist your head, shoulders, and chest in lifting off from the ground. Try to avoid pulling with your arms. Honor your body and its range. If you feel tension in the lower back, don't lift so high and keep some length between your buttocks and your lower back. How does the experience of this posture change over time?

When you're ready, exhale down.

20. Child Pose

15–30 BREATHS



Press back into CHILD, with your sitting bones dropping into your heels. Your big toes should be touching, and your knees are slightly apart. Release your torso onto the tops of your thighs. Place your forehead on the ground and your arms alongside your legs. Make sure that your

weight is moving back toward your heels and not on your neck and head by adjusting the distance between your knees. Release yourself fully into the posture and let the breath be natural. Where do you experience the breath? As you stay here, notice any changes in the qualities

of the breath. Just letting the breath be cultivates calm as you rest in CHILD. Notice the quality of the mental state as you rest here.



Modification:

If your hips do not touch your heels, and you feel most of your weight in your upper body and head, lay your torso on a bolster or some blankets. This will support your torso and allow your head to come to the height of your hips.



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21. Diamond Pose (Variation)

6–20 BREATHS



From CHILD, have your knees together and your ankles pressing in together with your toes tucked under as you sit back on your calves. Work to get your heels within the space between your sitting bones. Let the spine rise up strongly from the basin of the pelvis. The crown of the head reaches up. Your shoulders are relaxed down your back, and the chest is broad and lifted.

As you sit here, sensations may arise in your knees or ankles, but more likely at the toe joints. Be mindful of the quality of the sensations. Work with discomfort, but honor true pain. Notice reactivity and aversion, and let

your breath bring you back to a pure awareness of the sensations. Drop the story line and just see. If you can find even a few breaths free of the tension of aversion and resistance, do you experience the sensations differently in any way at all?

Again, let your emphasis be on seeing how the sensations do not remain constant, but in fact continually change. What happens if you can really let go of personalizing the experience and just see the sensations as conditioned? Can you keep a sense of wonder and inquiry as you observe just what is actually happening, free from your mental constructions about the experience?

Release from here by drawing your legs out from under you.

22. Staff Pose

6–15 BREATHS

Sit with your legs together straight out in front of you. Press the back of your thighs, calves, and heels evenly into the ground while reaching out through your heels. Press your hands into



the ground beside your hips as you lift the chest. This full-body static contraction will have a profound effect on where the breath is felt most as well as on the quality of the breath. See for yourself where you feel the breath. Is the breath more expansive or contractive in this deceptively dynamic posture?

What changes occur as you stay here?

23. One-Legged Forward Bend

10–25 BREATHS EACH SIDE

Starting from STAFF POSE, bend your right knee upward, sliding your right heel in toward your right sitting bone. Then open your right leg out to the side.

Reaching up through your arms and keeping lifted in your torso, ease forward and reach out for your left shin or foot. As you ground down through your legs, lift your chest forward and out over the left leg. Tilting the pelvis forward, hinging from the hips, let your sitting bones spread back and apart. Don't pull, but go to your edge and notice any resistance you



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may feel in the back of the straight leg. You don't need to get anywhere, but see if you can relax the resistance to being here. As we begin to settle down in the seated forward bends, the mind can either drift off in fantasy or begin to really spin out commentary. Just see what is happening. If you can stay aware, and with the breath as your home base, does the mind just naturally begin to release or let go?

When coming up from this forward bend, keep lengthening up and out as you inhale; then, exhaling, release the posture.

Repeat on the other side.



Modification:

If you are coming into this forward bend primarily from bending in the lower back and not from the hips, sit up on a blanket or two and keep extending the torso out over your straight leg. Stop when you feel the pelvis start to roll backward and round your lower back. You can support yourself here with your hands gently pressing into your shins.

24. Lord-of-the-Fishes Pose

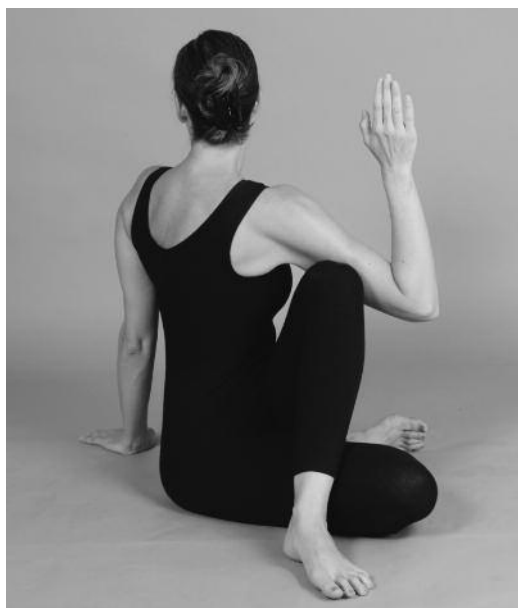
10–15 BREATHS EACH SIDE



You can take your left arm to the outside of your right leg and press into the leg for added leverage, but let the twist rise naturally from the base of the spine upward. Let your head turn to the right at the end of the torso's movement, and keep the neck relaxed. Don't lead with your chin.

Stay present with your breath guiding you in your exploration of impermanence. For instance, you may find that after a few exhalations, you can move a bit deeper into the twist. Conversely, you may begin to feel the sensations grow stronger, coaxing you into backing out a bit. Remember that

Bring your left leg into a simple cross-legged position, sliding it under your right thigh, so that your left heel comes to rest at the outside of your right hip. Then, cross your right foot over your left knee so that the sole of your right foot is firmly on the ground. Hug your right leg with your left arm just below the knee, and use your right hand to press into the ground behind your back so that you can extend your spine up as you ground your legs. Begin to twist to the right, using your left hand to aid the left side of your body in coming around to the right.



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“holding” a posture is just a concept. In fact, there is nothing to hold and all is process. From moment to moment, you are recreating the posture.

Release as you exhale and gently untwist.

Repeat on the other side.



Modification:

If your hips are tight, you may find that your pelvis and back are collapsed back as you cross your legs to set up for this twist. Try sitting up on several blankets so that you can establish the natural curvature of your spine in the starting position for this posture.

Then keep a sense of lifting up from the pelvis as you twist from the base of your spine upward. Using a block for your back hand will also help you from collapsing in this posture.

25. Seated Forward Bend

10–20 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, reach out and grasp your feet or your shins. Soften your groins as your thighs roll slightly inward, sitting bones moving back and apart. Think more of lifting the torso out and over your legs and not so much about how far you get in the pose. Yes, the back will round, but let it round evenly, and not until you’ve folded from the hips first. Move the chest out over your legs by using the strength of your arms, bending your elbows up and out to the sides. Gaze toward your toes, until the chin comes to rest on the shin. Then turn the gaze within or onto your “third eye.”

As you surrender into the posture, keep your focus on the breath. Find that balance between working in a posture and giving yourself up to it. Don’t strain. What really happens as you stay here in the posture? Perhaps in getting familiar with the posture you may notice



the mind sinking away into daydreaming. Or you may find yourself leaning into the future, looking forward to releasing from the forward bend and looking for the next thing. Keep coming back to just this, just here, and just now and see if ease and stability can be found where you are.

When coming out of this forward bend, inhale as you lift the heart up and out and then exhale as you release to the starting position



Modification:

We want to initiate this posture from being firmly grounded at the sitting bones and folding forward from the hips. If in STAFF POSTURE you cannot maintain the natural curvature of your lower back and feel it rounding out, then sit up on a blanket or two.

Keep the back lengthened and don't worry about getting your head to your leg, but stay at your edge and allow the stretch to come from the back of your legs and your hips.

26. Reverse Plank

4–8 BREATHS

From STAFF POSE, place your hands on the floor behind your hips with the fingers pointing toward or away from your toes (you may want to alternate, as both positions have their merits). Inhaling, lift the pelvis up to the ceiling as you point the toes toward the floor. Keep the tailbone reaching toward your feet. Make sure your wrists are directly below your shoulders with your arms straight. Either keep your chin on your chest, or let the head release all the way back, supported by your upper back muscles.

This posture can often be the cause of much resistance. If this is so for you, place your attention on just what it is you are resisting and see if it isn't also changing, impermanent, and not really a thing with which to struggle. Can you see the ceasing and letting go of the resistance? Keep your focus on the breath, and when you're ready, exhale back down into the starting position.



27. Corpse Pose

5–15 MINUTES

Lie in CORPSE POSE, with your legs about 12–18 inches apart and your toes turned out. Your arms are at your sides, at least a few inches from the torso with your palms turned upward. First, just let your awareness rest wherever in your body you experience the breath. Remember, let go of the tendency to control or manipulate and just see for yourself what is happening now. Wherever you feel it, rest your attention there.

Stay with the sensations of the breath, the subtle increase of tension as you inhale, and then the release of the exhalation. After awhile, let your awareness expand to include your whole body. Let yourself open to and embrace all the sensations that may arise as you lie here. Look to see if the feeling tone is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Notice any tendency to hold on to pleasant experience, reject what may be unpleasant, or “zone out” in the absence of any particularly strong sensations.

Then, let awareness itself turn upon itself. What mental states are present? Remember that mental formations include what we normally think of as emotions, as well as fantasy, drowsiness, mindfulness, reasoning, judging. Noticing what is there, with no aversion or clinging, is our practice. Looking deeply into the mental formations, they liberate themselves as long as we do not feed them with our clinging and pushing away.

See how all is an endless stream of changing phenomena. With the body and mind dropping away, what remains?



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28. Seated Meditation

5–40 MINUTES

Sit in any of the cross-legged asanas. Find your center by rocking side to side, and then lengthen the sides of your body from your hips up into your armpits. Make sure your shoulder blades are firmly supporting your upper back and that your lower back has its natural lumbar curve.

Beginning with the breath, let the mind rest with the arising and falling of the breath in the body. Once the mind is at least a little calmed, open the field of awareness to include all that arises, simply seeing the impermanent, ceaselessly changing nature of all phenomena: sensations, thoughts, feelings, emotions, images. Simply abide in the mindfulness.



When the yogini breathes in or breathes out and contemplates the essential impermanence or the essential fading away of clinging or cessation or letting go, she abides peacefully in the observations of the objects of mind in the objects of mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the fourth establishment of mindfulness, the objects of mind.



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APPENDIX A: THE SEVEN FACTORS OF AWAKENING

THE SEVEN FACTORS OF AWAKENING, known in Pali as *sambhojjhanga* and in Sanskrit as *sapta-bodhyanga*, are mindfulness, investigation of dharmas, energy, joy, ease, concentration, and letting go. The word *bodhyanga* (*bhojjhanga*) is a compound word. *Bodhi* means “awakening” or “enlightenment” and comes from the root *buddh-*, which means, “to wake up,” and is the same root from which *Buddha* comes. *Anga* literally means “limb.” So the Seven Factors of Awakening can also be called the Seven Limbs of Awakening.

The Buddha discovered, as he realized awakening under the bodhi tree, that the potentialities of these seven factors are already present in each and every one of us, but we simply do not see it yet. The seven factors of awakening are not only a description of the characteristics or attributes of awakening but also describe the process of awakening. Thinking of the limbs of a tree, the tree of yoga, we see how each limb grows longer, stronger, and sends out new branches continuously. Each of the Factors of Awakening are growing all the time and are not to be thought of as static conditions of being. Enlightenment itself then is not something that happens once and for all, but it too is a process that develops and evolves over time.

The first and core limb of the tree of yoga is mindfulness. This is the practice of continuously remembering to stay present, not losing ourselves in forgetfulness of where we are, what we are doing, and whom we are with. Mindfulness is always arising *in relationship*—to ourselves, including our breath, body movements, and feelings, and to our surroundings and all that we experience physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Our whole practice as discussed in this book is to cultivate the potentiality of mindfulness through our asana practice, through Mindfulness Yoga. Using the Full Awareness of Breathing as the vehicle for our mindfulness, we practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in order to cultivate the other Factors of Awakening.

Investigation of dharmas (Sanskrit: *dharma-pravichaya*; Pali: *dhamma-vicaya*) is the second factor. The word *dharmas* in this instance means all phenomena. *All phenomena* in



turn, means every aspect of our lived experience. Absolutely nothing is rejected. This is especially important for those of us who may have acquired the notion that only certain subjects are spiritual, and so if we are feeling lust or anger or anxiety—or any other such states—we must somehow suppress that as ignoble or unworthy. With steadfast mindfulness, we turn our attention to whatever is there so that we can cultivate the deep penetrative understanding of its true nature, its causes and conditions.

In our Mindfulness Yoga, this means we observe the phenomena of the body—from the breath to the parts and function of the body. We observe its movements and position in space. We deeply investigate the sensations and how they condition our experience of the world. We continue to investigate the mental phenomena—our thoughts, emotions, fantasies, opinions, imaginations, etc. All dharmas—all things or phenomena—are looked into, and what is necessary is to remain open and not look at phenomena prejudicially. We need to honestly keep “don’t know mind,” and allow things to reveal themselves just as they are.

The third factor, energy (Sanskrit: *virya*; Pali: *viriya*) implies effort, diligence, or perseverance. Right effort is one of the eight limbs of the Noble Eightfold Path. In our practice, energy is developed through mindfulness and investigation and at least the modicum of faith required for us to take up the practice. Having a sense of purpose or meaning in life is a great source of energy, and this is why the practice of taking vows is so strong in Buddhism. To take a vow is to put forth our voice into the world.

Bo Lozoff has written a wonderful book with the title *It’s a Meaningful Life: It Just Takes Practice*. The bodhisattva vow to practice in order to awaken for the sake of all beings is a tremendous source of energy, encouraging us to go on in the face of resistance.

The practice of asana cultivates balanced energy. The word *hatha* itself symbolically implies the unified inner balance of the energy of the sun and moon. Hatha yoga is—ideally—the practice of unifying and balancing the hot and cold, active and receptive energies so that our energy is not dissipated or stagnated through excessive emphasis on one or the other. The right use of our energy is an important element of our practice, and techniques such as the Five Mindfulness Trainings that Thich Nhat Hanh teaches are profound tools to nourish and utilize our energy beneficially for ourselves and for all of society.

The fourth factor or limb of awakening is joy (Sanskrit: *priti*; Pali: *piti*). This is explicitly stated as the nonsensual joy of the Dharma. Joy can be cultivated and developed even when there is illness or pain in the body. We do this by touching what is refreshing and beautiful

within and outside of ourselves. Often in a yoga class, I see how students seem to only focus on what they think is *wrong* with their practice. It's as if they have tunnel vision. They see others whose range of motion or physical strength is greater than theirs and use that to put themselves down. Cultivating joy is the practice of expanding our vision to include all that is "right" (*samyak*), as in balanced, skillful, and wholesome. This more spacious and inclusive vision is what helps bring joy to our practice.

Ease (Sanskrit: *prashrabdhih*; Pali: *passaddhi*), the fifth factor, is also known as calmness or tranquility. Patanjali includes contentment (*samtosha*) as one of the niyamas because at all times in history people have known stress. Our society seems to have cultivated stress to an inordinate degree. Almost every yoga practitioner will vouch for the stress relief provided by his or her practice. No matter how physically demanding or relaxed our Mindfulness Yoga practice might be, I often recommend to my students a regular practice of deep relaxation or restorative yoga as part of a well-rounded practice. This aspect of awakening is perhaps the central one that develops the lightening-up characteristic of enlightenment.

Concentration (*samadhi* in both Sanskrit and Pali) is the sixth factor of awakening. It is the recollection of the energy of our mind and the directing of that energy toward an object. The cultivation of concentration leads to single-pointedness of mind. Mindfulness and concentration work synergistically, so that mindfulness lets our vision expand while concentration strengthens our mindfulness and keeps it from dissipating in forgetfulness. Concentration in and of itself is neutral. A safecracker needs strong concentration, too. What makes concentration a factor of awakening is its *object*. Even many meditators use their meditative concentration to turn away from reality and deny or hide away from their suffering. This is the kind of meditative concentration that the Buddha found did not transform his unwholesome seeds of suffering. It only repressed them for the limited time of his meditation.

Right concentration is the use of meditative concentration in order to shine light upon our suffering and the causes of suffering. This use of concentration allows for an even deeper penetration in our investigation of reality. It is a way to go deeper into life so that we can develop compassion and liberating insight.

The seventh factor is equanimity (Sanskrit: *upeksha*; Pali: *upekkha*), the quality of "letting go." Equanimity is not indifference, for we must also practice *metta*, or loving-kindness. When I first heard the following lines of the *Metta Sutta* chanted, I felt chills up and down my arms:





Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upward to the skies,
And downward to the depths:
Outward and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

With true equanimity we are not indifferent to others, but are concerned equally for all. We let go of our attachment, not our love and compassion. As a parent of an only child, when I heard how we should cultivate a love of all beings equal to the love a parent (mother) has for an only child, I felt the poignancy in my bones. Is this even possible? The Buddha certainly seems to be saying that it is, and I find myself shuddering at the very prospect that this kind of love is truly possible. I make no claims for having such a love in my heart presently, but this teaching energizes and nurtures our most noble intention while helping us see and transform the habit energies and formations that keep us from realizing such love. And I can vouch for the truth that practice moves us in this direction. The reverence I feel for life has indeed grown as the result of practice. And for this I am deeply grateful.

The Buddha did give some advice on how we can cultivate equanimity. We can practice in the face of harsh words, as well as in the face of words of praise. Not to feel dejected when condemned, nor to feel overly elated when praised, is a teaching of both the Buddha and of Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. We can look deeply into our irritation, annoyance, bitterness, and dejection to see the nonself nature of it all.

In Mindfulness Yoga, we can notice how quickly and harshly we may criticize ourselves for our perceived failures, and we can note when we get carried away in pride in our success. In all our relationships we can remind ourselves that ultimately everyone is the heir of their own karma. We can do all that we can, based upon our situation, and that is all anyone can ever do.

These seven factors are one body of practice—one tree. If right mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, and dharmas is cultivated and maintained with consistency over time, the inves-

tigation of phenomena will go to the very depths of reality. Our balanced, energetic right effort will nourish joy in the beauty and mystery of life, and the ease and contentment of a stable, harmonious mind. From such a stable base of support, right concentration gives rise to right understanding. With right understanding, we go beyond all our notions that divide, compare, judge, and give rise to reactivity, including our notions of what “going beyond” might be or entail, and so realize perfect letting go.



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APPENDIX B: TEXT OF SUTRA ON THE FULL AWARENESS OF BREATHING

Section One

I HEARD THESE WORDS of the Buddha one time when he was staying in Savatthi, the capital of the Kosala kingdom, in the Eastern Park, with many well-known and accomplished disciples, including Sariputta, Mahamoggallana, Mahakassapa, Mahakaccayana, Mahakotthita, Mahakappina, Mahacunda, Anuruddha, Rewata, and Ananda. The senior practitioners in the community were instructing beginners new to the practice—some instructing ten students, some twenty, some thirty, and some forty; and in this way the beginner students gradually made great strides in their practice.

On that full moon night, the Pavarana ceremony was held to mark the end of the rainy-season retreat. Lord Buddha, the Awakened One, was sitting in the open air, and his disciples were gathered around him. After looking over the calm and silent assembly, he began to speak:

“I am pleased to observe the fruit you all have attained in your practice. Yet I know you can summon up even more energy so that what you have not yet attained, you can attain, what you have not yet realized, you can realize perfectly. To encourage you in your efforts, I will stay here, extending the retreat until the next full moon day.”

When they heard that the Buddha was going to stay at Savatthi for another month, practitioners from throughout the country began traveling there to study with him. The senior practitioners continued teaching those new to the practice even more ardently. With this help, the newer practitioners were able, little by little, to continue their progress in insight and understanding.

When the next full moon day arrived, the Buddha, seated under the open sky, looked over the practitioners gathered to hear him speak and he said:

“Our community is good. At its heart, it is without useless and conceited talk, estab-

lished in the pure essence of Dharma. Therefore it deserves to receive offerings and be considered a field of merit. Such a community is rare, and any pilgrim who seeks it, no matter how far he or she must travel, will find it worthy.

“There are practitioners in this assembly who have realized Arahatsip, the highest realization, transformed every root of affliction, laid aside every burden, and attained right understanding and liberation. They have done what is to be done. There are also those who have transcended the first five internal formations of being caught in the wrong view of self, hesitation, superstition, craving, and hatred, and who will realize the coolness of nirvana in this very life realizing the fruit of never returning to the cycle of birth and death.

There are those who have thrown back the first three internal formations and realized the fruit of returning once more. They have transformed the roots of greed, hatred, and ignorance, and will only need to return to the cycle of birth and death one more time. Others in this community have thrown back the three internal formations and attained the fruit of stream-enterer, coursing steadily to the awakened state. There are those who practice the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and others who practice the Four Right Efforts. There are those who practice the Four Bases of Success: diligence, energy, full awareness, and penetrative insight. There are those who practice the Five Faculties or capacities of confidence, energy, meditative stability, concentration, and right understanding, and there are those who practice these same five as the Five Powers or strengths. There are those who practice the Seven Factors of Awakening, and those who practice the Eightfold Path. There are those who practice the Four Immeasurable Meditations of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. There are those who practice the Nine Contemplations of a Corpse, and those who practice the Observation of Impermanence. There are also those who are practicing devotedly the Full Awareness of Breathing.”

Section Two

“The method of being fully aware of breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will indeed have great rewards and bring great benefit. It will lead to success in practicing the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. If the Four Establishments of Mindfulness are developed and practiced continuously, they will lead to success in the practice of the Seven Factors of Awak-



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ening. The Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, will give rise to understanding and liberation of the mind.

“How is the practitioner to develop and practice continuously the method of Full Awareness of Breathing so that the practice will be rewarding and offer great benefit?

“It is like this: the practitioner goes into the forest or to the base of a tree, or to any secluded place, maintains asana with stability and ease, body in alignment, and practices ever mindfully: ‘Aware of an in-breath as an in-breath, I breathe in. Aware of an out-breath as an out-breath, I breathe out.’

[First Group: The Body]

1. “Breathing in a long breath, I am aware of breathing in a long breath. Breathing out a long breath, I am aware of breathing out a long breath.’
2. “Breathing in a short breath, I am aware of breathing in a short breath. Breathing out a short breath, I am aware of breathing out a short breath.’
3. “Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.’ He or she practices like this.
4. “Breathing in, I calm my whole body. Breathing out, I calm my whole body.’ He or she practices like this.

[Second Group: The Feelings]

5. “Breathing in, I am aware of feeling joy. Breathing out, I am aware of feeling joy.’ He or she practices like this.
6. “Breathing in, I am aware of feeling happiness. Breathing out, I am aware of feeling happiness.’ He or she practices like this.
7. “Breathing in, I am aware of my mental formations. Breathing out, I am aware of my mental formations.’ He or she practices like this.
8. “Breathing in, I calm my mental formations. Breathing out, I calm my mental formations.’ He or she practices like this.

[Third Group: The Mind]

9. “‘Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Breathing out, I am aware of my mind.’ He or she practices like this.
10. “‘Breathing in, gladdening the mind. Breathing out, gladdening the mind.’ He or she practices like this.
11. “‘Breathing in, concentrating the mind. Breathing out, concentrating the mind.’ He or she practices like this.
12. “‘Breathing in, liberating the mind. Breathing out, liberating the mind.’ He or she practices like this.

[Fourth Group: The Dharmas]

13. “‘Breathing in, aware of the impermanent nature of all dharmas. Breathing out, aware of the impermanent nature of all dharmas.’ He or she practices like this.
14. “‘Breathing in, aware of the disappearance of clinging. Breathing out, aware of the disappearance of clinging.’ He or she practices like this.
15. “‘Breathing in, observing cessation. Breathing out, observing cessation.’ He or she practices like this.
16. “‘Breathing in, observing letting go. Breathing out, observing letting go.’ He or she practices like this.

“The Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously according to these instructions, will be fruitful and of great benefit.”

Section Three

“In what way does one develop and continuously practice the Full Awareness of Breathing, in order to perfect the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness?”





“When the practitioner breathes in or out a long or a short breath, aware of his breath or his whole body, or aware that he is making his whole body calm and at peace, he abides peacefully observing the body in the body, diligent, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the first Establishment of Mindfulness, the body.

“When the practitioner breathes in or out aware of the presence of joy or happiness, of the mental formations, or to make the mental formations peaceful, she abides peacefully observing the feelings in the feelings, diligent, fully awake, clearly understanding her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the second Establishment of Mindfulness, the feelings.

“When the practitioner breathes in or out aware of the mind, or to make the mind happy, to concentrate the mind, or to free and liberate the mind, he abides peacefully observing the mind in the mind, diligent, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the third Establishment of Mindfulness, the mind. Without Full Awareness of Breathing, there can be no development of meditative stability and understanding.

“When the practitioner breathes in or breathes out contemplating the essential impermanence or the essential disappearance of craving or cessation or letting go, she abides peacefully observing the dharmas in the dharmas, diligent, fully awake, clearly understanding her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the fourth Establishment of Mindfulness, the dharmas.

“The practice of Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to the perfect realization of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.”

Section Four

“If they are developed and continuously practiced, the Four Establishments of Mindfulness will lead to perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening. How is this so?

“When the practitioner can constantly maintain the practice of observing the body in the body, the feelings in the feelings, the mind in the mind, and the dharmas in the dharmas, with diligence, fully awake, clearly understanding his or her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life, with unwavering, steadfast, imperturbable meditative stability, he or she

will attain the first Factor of Awakening, namely mindfulness. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner can abide in meditative stability without being distracted and can investigate every dharma, every object of mind that arises, then the second Factor of Awakening will be engaged and developed in him or her, the factor of investigating dharmas. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner can observe and investigate every dharma in a sustained, steadfast way, without being distracted, the third Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him or her, the factor of energy. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner has reached a stable, imperturbable abiding in the stream of practice, the fourth Factor of Awakening will be engaged and developed in him or her, the factor of the great nonsensual joy untainted by craving. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner can abide undistracted in the state of the great joy, the practitioner will feel his or her body and mind to be light and at peace. At this point, the fifth Factor of Awakening will be engaged and developed, the factor of ease. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When both body and mind are at ease, the practitioner can enter into concentration. At this point the sixth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him or her, the factor of concentration. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“When the practitioner is abiding in concentration with deep calm, he or she will cease discriminating subject from object and comparing. At this point, the seventh Factor of Awakening is released, engaged, and further developed, the factor of letting go. When this factor is developed, it will come to perfection.

“This is how the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, if developed and continuously practiced, will lead to perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening.”

Section Five

“How will the Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and continuously practiced, lead to the perfect realization of true understanding and complete liberation?”

“If the practitioner follows the path of the Seven Factors of Awakening, living in silent





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seclusion, observing and contemplating the disappearance of craving, he or she will develop the capacity of letting go. This will be a result of following the path of the Seven Factors of Awakening and will lead to the perfect realization of true understanding and complete liberation.”

Section Six

This is what the Buddha, the Awakened One, said; and everyone in the assembly felt gratitude and rejoiced at having heard his teachings.

(Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 118)

APPENDIX C: ESTABLISHING YOUR SEAT

Seated Postures for Meditation

SEATED POSTURES include the classic postures used for sitting meditation. Physically, they help to open up the hips, draw our awareness into our center, and lead to a calmer mind—if we remember the basic principles of asana. To be true asana, we need to establish stability and ease. In order for this to happen, we need to be aligned with gravity, relaxed in our body and mind, and keep letting go of all aversion and craving.

In the classic cross-legged postures of meditation, we are truly grounded, with a much larger base of support than when standing. The first chakra, Muladhara, which means “foundation” or “support,” is located at the perineum, between the anus and the genitals, and relates to the earth element and the energy of stability and solidity. It is the stability of the earth element that we use to help steady our breath and our mind.

Because we usually sit in chairs, many in the West find the seated postures difficult. Yet sitting in chairs has led to a whole host of problems from backaches to constipation. I encourage you to work with these postures at least a little each day. Try to bring them into your daily life, sitting on the floor as much as you are able, and even folding your legs under you when you are sitting in a chair, at least for some of the time. With continued practice, you will find

your hips, knees, and ankles all becoming less stiff, and your back stronger.



Simple Cross-Legged Sitting Posture

Sit with your legs crossed at your ankles, with your feet underneath your knees. Notice which shin you naturally place over the other, and alternate when practicing. Sit on the forward points of your sitting bones

(avoid rolling the pelvis backward and rounding the lower back). With your hands beside your hips, feel the sitting bones grounding down as the crown of your head rises up, lengthening the spine. Feel where in your body you sense your weight as it presses down into the earth.

Now place your hands on your knees, and with your eyes closed, open to the feeling tone of “just sitting.” Then begin to rock side to side, letting the quality of your breath show you where center is. The breath will grow more relaxed, smoother, and the feeling tone will be one of ease in which you may feel the tension in your upper back and shoulders melt. Without needing any external reference, our body and breath will guide us to our center. Let your breath be the guru.

When choosing to sit in this posture for longer periods of time, use a blanket or a cushion to elevate your hips higher than your knees and open your groins. You may even wish to place some support under your knees.

Half-Lotus Posture

In HALF LOTUS, the legs are crossed, but only one foot rests on the opposite thigh while the other foot stays on the floor, under its opposite thigh. This posture is not as steady as FULL LOTUS, since it is asymmetrical. If you use this posture, adjust your cushion to make up for the inherent imbalance of this posture. The mudra pictured here is chin mudra, or the gesture of consciousness.



It is one of the two main mudras used in hatha yoga when seated in meditation. The three extended fingers represent the three gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas, and the closed circle of the thumb and index finger symbolizes the union that is the goal of yogic practice.

Full Lotus Posture

This is the classic sitting meditation posture. There is no need to contort yourself into this if there is pain in the knees or hips. Most Westerners have difficulty with this posture because



we spend so much of our time sitting in chairs. As in SIMPLE CROSS-LEGGED POSTURE, and in all seated meditation postures, the most important thing is to maintain a straight but relaxed spine. In FULL LOTUS the legs are crossed, with each foot resting on the opposite thigh. If both knees are not touching the ground, support the knee that is elevated with a blanket or cushion. It is pictured here with jnana mudra, the gesture of knowledge. It is the other main hatha-yoga meditation mudra, but Buddhist iconography knows it as vitarka mudra, the gesture of discussion when held at the heart. It represents the knowledge of the teachings.



S E A T E D
POSTURES

Burmese

If the hips are open enough to allow for opening the knees out to the side, this may very well be one of the more comfortable seated meditation postures, since there is no crossing of one



leg over another, which is often a major source of discomfort for those trying the cross-legged postures.

In BURMESE, the thighs are spread out so the knees can rest on the floor, with both feet tucked in next to each other on the floor, one inside the other. It is pictured here with dhyani mudra, the gesture of meditation, also known as the cosmic or universal mudra.

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NOTES

Introduction

The books I had read throughout high school were Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen* (New York: Grove Press, 1958); D. T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963); *What is Zen?* (New York: Perennial Library, 1972); D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956); Christmas Humphreys, *The Buddhist Way of Life* (London: Unwin Books, 1969); and Christmas Humphreys, *Concentration and Meditation* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968). What finally got me to the zendo was Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1970).

Georg Feuerstein's *Shambhala Encyclopedia of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000) and his treasure trove of knowledge, *The Yoga Tradition* (Prescott, Az.: Hohm, 1998), are two books every yogi and yogini should have on their library shelf. Their influence on this text is most evident here and throughout Part One.

I quote from Thich Nhat Hanh's *Our Appointment with Life: The Buddha's Teaching on Living in the Present* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1990).

Throughout the text I have utilized *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, edited by Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner (Boston: Shambhala, 1994) for definitions and historical context.

For books and tapes on the various forms of hatha yoga, please see Suggested Resources.

1. The Buddha's Yoga

For my research into the early Indus/Sarasvati civilization, I utilized Georg Feuerstein, Subhash Kak, and David Frawley, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* (Wheaton, IL.: Quest Books, 1995), as well as Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*.

For the life of the Buddha the following sources were all valuable: Thich Nhat Hanh, *Old Path, White Clouds* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1991); H. W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha* (London: Arkana, 1989); John S. Strong, *The Buddha* (Oxford, One World, 2001); Bhikkhu Nanamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, 3rd. ed. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1992). The quotes from the Buddha come from Nanamoli, *Life*, p. 14, and Sherab Chodzin Kohn, *The Awakened One* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000) pp. 24-25.

For further information regarding the possibility that the experience of nirvana is "hard-wired" into our human nature, see Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

The psychological aspects of the Buddha's insights can be pursued in Mark Epstein, *Thoughts Without a Thinker* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), and for the ideas about how we might think about the Buddha's enlightenment experience, besides Schumann's *Historical Buddha*, see Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism With-*

out Beliefs (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).

For S. N. Goenka's quote regarding the difference between the Buddha's direct realization and the scientists' intellectual understanding, see S. N. Goenka, *The Discourse Summaries* (Dhammagiri, Igatpuri, India: Vipassana Research Institute, 1987), p. 14.

For a wonderful study of Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakarika*, see *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, translated by Jay L. Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

And for the quote from Shunryu Suzuki, see *To Shine One Corner of the World: Moments with Shunryu Suzuki* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), p. 3.



2. The Yoga Practice of the Four Noble Truths

The teaching regarding the four kinds of nutriments is influenced by Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1998).

While the rendering from the *Dhammapada*, verses 1-2, is mine, two of my favorite translations are by Thomas Byron (Boston: Shambhala, 1993) and by Balangoda Ananda Maitreya (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1995).

"Suffering Is Not Enough" is the title of chapter 1 of Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987).

3. The Eightfold Paths

The practices of right thinking, as well as insight on the Four Noble Truths as practice, come from Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*.

Insight into Patanjali's classical yoga system comes from Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, as well as his translation and commentary, *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1979), and his *Philosophy of Classical Yoga* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1996).

I came across the Li Po poem in Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (New York: Hyperion, 1994). I failed to note the source of quote from His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

For my treatment of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, Thich Nhat Hanh's *For a Future to Be Possible* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993) proved very helpful; Philip Kapleau's *To Cherish All Life: A Buddhist Case for Becoming Vegetarian* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) provided much food for thought.

4. What Is Mindfulness?

The statement by Thich Nhat Hanh on "the essence of these two sutras" comes from *Breathe! You Are Alive* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996), Thich Nhat Hanh's wonderful translation and commentary on the *Anapanasati Sutta*.



The story of Ichu’s “attention!” is an old Zen teaching story that Charlotte Joko Beck relates in *Nothing Special: Living Zen* (San Francisco: Harpers, 1993).

The gatha presented here from the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* is from Nhat Hanh, *Our Appointment with Life*. And Thay’s sharing of the Zen story about the man on the horse is found in his *Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*.

This chapter also owes much to Henepola Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English* (Boston: Wisdom, 1991).

5. Beginning Mindfulness Meditation

The suggestions for developing a mindfulness meditation practice arise from my own experience and from my study with many teachers. Some of the specifics found in this chapter come from Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, and from Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

The quotation of the Buddha is from Nhat Hanh, *Breathe! You Are Alive*.

6. An Introduction to the Sutras

The three translations and commentaries on the *Anapanasati Sutta*, to which I refer here and in the rest of this book, are Nhat Hanh, *Breathe! You Are Alive*; Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Mindfulness with Breathing* (Boston: Wisdom, 1988); and Larry Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998).

The two translations and commentaries on the *Satipatthana Sutta* that I referred to in writing this book are Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990), and U Shilananda, *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness* (Boston: Wisdom, 1990).

7. Body as Body

The observation that the practitioner’s whole body—not merely the “breath body”— is to be observed in exercises 3 and 4 comes from Nhat Hanh, *Breathe! You Are Alive*.

There are many lovely translations and renderings of Lao Tsu’s *Tao Te Ching*. Jerry O. Dalton’s *Backward Down the Path* (New York: Avon Books, 1994) is one of my favorites.

Thich Nhat Hanh’s walking meditation gatha can be found in *The Long Road Turns to Joy* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996).

For an example of one Zen teacher’s criticism of slow-movement practice, see Beck, *Nothing Special*.

All quotations of the Buddha from *Satipatthana Sutta* come from Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing*.

8. Feelings as Feelings

Quotations from *Satipatthana Sutta* are from Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing*.

In discussing the five skandhas (form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness), Thich Nhat Hanh compares them to rivers in *Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*.

Thich Nhat Hanh's discussion of touching the joy of a "nontoothache" comes from *Being Peace*.

9. Mindfully Aware of the Mind

Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living* (New York: Delta, 1990) contains his program for using mindfulness meditation for pain and stress management.

To see our pain and discomfort as our "crying baby" is suggested by Thich Nhat Hanh in *Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*.

The discussion on the four kinds of attachment owes much to Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath*.

Charlotte Joko Beck's insight into the sharp stones being jewels can be found in *Nothing Special*.

10. Dharmas in the Dharmas

S. N. Goenka emphasizes observing impermanence in *Discourse Summaries*.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains the two kinds of change in *Breathe! You Are Alive*.

Nirvana as the extinction of notions is found in Nhat Hanh, *Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, as is the quotation from Tang Hoi.

Richard Rosen, the pranayama teacher in the teacher training program of the Yoga Research and Education Center (YREC), asks, "Who is the breather?" in *The Yoga of Breath* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002).

The four levels of restriction (*nirodha*) are explained in Feuerstein, *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga*.

The *Discourse on the Teachings to Be Given to the Sick* is found in *Plum Village Chanting Book* compiled by Thich Nhat Hanh and the Monks and Nuns of Plum Village (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2000).

The Rumi quote is from *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks with John Moyne (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

Appendix A. The Seven Factors of Awakening

I mention Bo Lozoff, *It's a Meaningful Life: It Just Takes Practice* (New York: Viking, 2000) in regard to the interdependence of practice and meaning in life.

The excerpt from the *Metta Sutta* is from Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

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Books:

- Batchelor, Stephen. *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. New York: Riverhead, 1997.
- Birch, Beryl Bender. *Power Yoga*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
- Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu. *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha's Teaching on Voidness*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1994.
- Buddhadasa, Bhikkhu. *Mindfulness with Breathing*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997.
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CDs/Audio Tapes:

- Feuerstein, Georg. *The Lost Teachings of Yoga*. Boulder: Sounds True, 2003.
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- . *Yoga Journal's Yoga Practice for Strength*. Broomfield, Colorado, Living Arts, 1992.

Web Sites:

- www.yrec.org The web site for The Yoga Research and Education Center, chock-full with articles (many by Georg Feuerstein) on history, philosophy and practice, as well as news and great links.
- www.yogajournal.com *Yoga Journal's* web site has articles and a directory of Yoga teachers and schools, as well as access to yoga props, videos, etc.
- www.yimag.org The web site of The Himalayan Institute's magazine, *Yoga International*, which also has a directory and wonderful articles and links.
- www.ascentmagazine.com *Ascent* is Canada's premier yoga magazine, presenting unique perspectives on yoga and spirituality.
- www.shambhalasun.com *The Shambhala Sun's* web site features articles by Buddhist teachers from all traditions.
- www.tricycle.org *Tricycle's* web site also has a wide variety of Buddhist teachers on various aspects of Dharma and many helpful links.
- www.iamhome.org The Community Of Mindful Living, with information about Thich Nhat Hanh and The Order of Interbeing. This site also has some invaluable links.



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RESOURCES



www.plumvillage.org The web site for Thich Nhat Hanh's community in France offers transcriptions of Thay's Dharma talks and features information on his work and the work of the Unified Buddhist Church.

www.mindfulnessyoga.net This is my web site where you can read Karuna Notes on Yoga, Dharma and Ayurveda. Information on workshops, courses and retreats can also be found here.

www.theenergycenter.com The Energy Center, Brooklyn's oasis for yoga, healing and spiritual growth is my home base in NYC.

www.jmyoga.com Jai Ma Yoga Center in New Palta, NY is my home base in the beautiful Hudson Valley.

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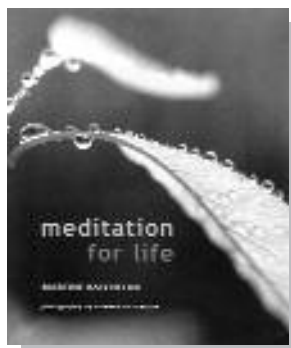
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