

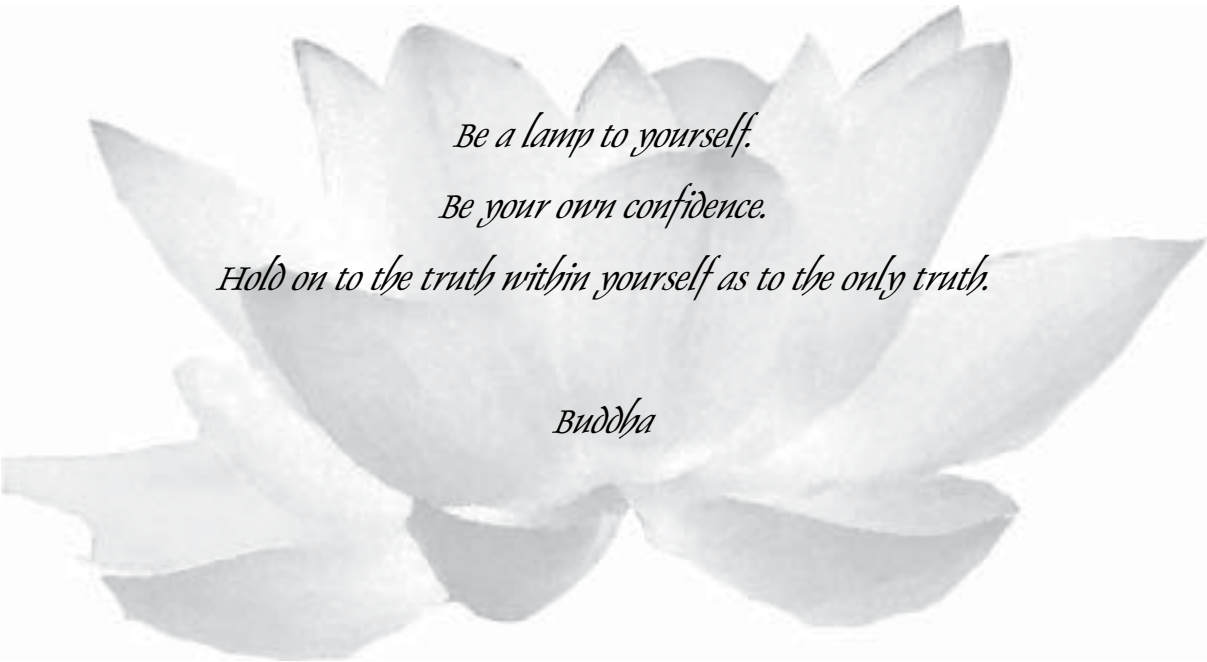
Guiding Yoga's Light

Yoga Lessons for Yoga Teachers



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Be a lamp to yourself.

Be your own confidence.

Hold on to the truth within yourself as to the only truth.

Buddha

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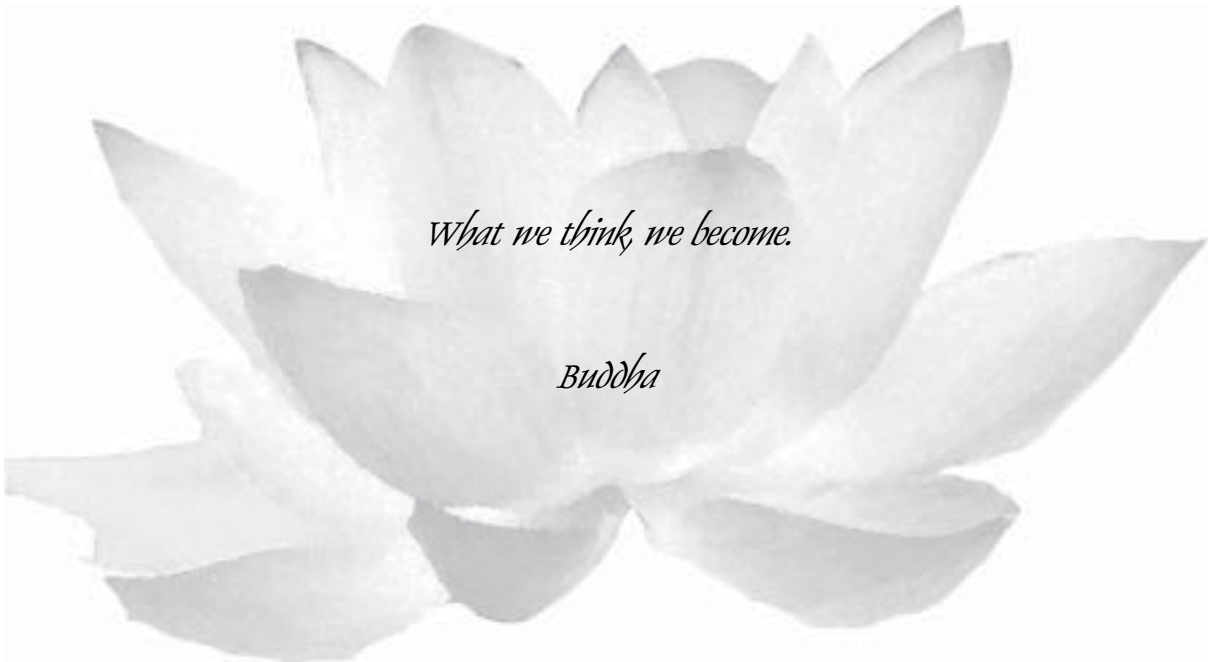
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Chapter Seven

What we think, we become.

Buddha



Emotions

The definition of yoga *asana* is a position that is both steady and comfortable; a place where one can feel completely present. Those who are both present and still learn how agitated the mind states can be. Practice then becomes a purifying method of listening to the inner workings of the mind and emotions.

The lessons that follow will allow you to recognize the emotions that come up during practice so that you can become more aware of them during your day.

Don't criticize yourself if you find that negative emotions seem to lead the way. Just look, listen, and be aware. When we're able to work with the emotional side of yoga *asana*, we become more sensitized, perceptive, and responsive, so that we can make the appropriate changes.

Pay Attention.

Notes

Emotional Effects of *Asana*

Intention: To present yoga's harmonizing effects on emotions.

Approximate Length: 2 minutes

Have you ever noticed the effect your yoga practice has had on your emotions? It's like a welcome sense of spaciousness, as though you've just cleaned a room in your mind and swept away the dirt. You've opened up the curtains and let the sun shine on your inner self so that healing, along with light, can come shining through.

Usually, the positive emotions come to the surface: our sense of humor, patience, concentration. As we surrender and let go of frustrations, fear and worry, we start to feel like our "old selves" again.

The flip side of this, of course, is when the *negative* emotions come up and stay with us. Quite naturally, if we're doing what we're supposed to be doing — cleansing and releasing — feeling our negative emotions are paramount to our whole renewing process.

When this happens, give yourself space to feel what you're feeling. Instead of suppressing these emotions, realize that these feelings came up for a purpose. Then do your best to stay mindful of them, giving them enough space so you can eventually free them from your spirit.

Our poses can highly influence our emotional states. For instance, because of the expansive inhalation and opening of the chest, backbending, traditionally a stimulating practice, can equalize a low mood. Exhale-intensive poses like forward bends tend to calm an agitated mind. In any balanced practice, both inhale-oriented and exhaled-oriented postures are executed to create equilibrium in the body and breath and lend us control of our emotional harmony.

Today's focus is on restoring equipoise, empowering us to release emotionally and make positive changes in our layers of consciousness.

Asanas for Deepening

Sarvangasana/Halāsana (shoulderstand/plow). Helps reverse energy blocks on many levels — inflexible thinking, stuck emotions, feelings of sadness.

Child’s Pose. Sends relaxing signals to both sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

Garudasana (eagle). Offers relief of the scattered mind. Works on balance of external and internal worlds.

Marichyasana (half spinal twist). One of yoga’s greatest harmonizers, as it both calms the mind and releases any sluggishness in the body.

Janu Shirshasana (head-to-knee forward bend pose). Relieves feelings of anxiety, fearfulness and stress. On each exhalation, let the torso sink further toward the legs.

Dhanurasana (bow). Helps stimulate the inhale, arouses adrenal glands.

Woodchopper. Assists in the emotional release of frustration and anger. Stand, lift your imaginary ax on inhale, and with a forceful “HA” on the exhale, chop the imaginary wood between your legs.

Practice off the Mat

Notice the things in your life that cause you to tense up. Are you a tense driver, talker or worker? When you cook or do the dishes, does your back feel strain? Whether it’s in the shoulders, neck, back or navel center, practice every day moment-to-moment body awareness. This will help you cleanse your negative emotions and trapped issues so they don’t find a permanent home in your body.

Notes

Notes

Wise Words

The path of yoga can cut through the roots of suffering.

Hatha Yoga teaches us control of breath and control of body. Through awareness, we learn concentration, control of our thought patterns and emotional control. The serious yoga practitioner will cling less to life's negative matters, permitting the practice to have a leveling effect on the whole emotional body.

Asanas



Sarvangasana
shoulderstand



Halasana
plow



Child's Pose



Garudasana
eagle



Marichyasana
seated twist



Janu Shirshasana
head-to-knee



Woodchopper



Notes

Frustration in the Body

Intention: To bring awareness to how the body manifests frustration.

Approximate Length: 2 minutes

When we feel frustrated, this generally means we're not flowing with the experiences of our lives. Instead we're pushing away or resisting something. Frustration then collects in the body. Many of us feel it in the shoulders, the neck, low back, and the hips.

Problems in the shoulders represent irritability and resistance to change.

Issues in the back can be related to some repression or restriction in your life, or the feeling of carrying the weight of the world.

Repressed anger creates tension in the neck as you force your feelings down your throat instead of saying what you want to say. You can literally experience a *pain in the neck* from something or someone who makes you angry.

The hips are related to general frustration. Notice the person who often stands with her hands on her hips. This is a gesture of feeling frustrated and not in control.

Through a balanced *asana* practice and particularly the postures that work on these specific areas, many of our frustrations can be released. Let's set our intentions for today's practice to work out any frustration that has manifested or threatens to manifest itself in any of these areas.

Please lie in *shavasana*. Breathe deeply into your belly, totally putting all of your awareness into the breath. Feel all the emotions of your respiratory system: the air in the nostrils, throat and chest, and the belly and chest rising. Feel the rib cage expanding out to the front, to the sides beneath the armpits and all the way into the lower back. Gently move your attention from your mental state to your breath, so you can observe and step back from your emotions.

Asanas for Deepening

Reclining Knee Twist. Works on releasing frustration in hips. Lie on the back. Stretch arms out to sides shoulder height, palms down. Inhale and bend left knee to chest. Exhale and twist to your right side, releasing a deep sigh (AHHHH). Inhale, return to the back. Practice 3 times on each side. This twist is also beneficial for sciatica, headaches and low back stiffness.

Cat Stretch. Releases frustration in the back, pelvic floor, abdomen, and back of the neck.

Neck Stretches. There are several variations to practice: ear to shoulder, look over the shoulder, drop chin to chest, neck rolls.

Shoulder Work. Can be done seated or standing.

1) **Arm Circles.** Hold a strap about shoulders' width distance apart. Inhale bring arms forward and up toward the sky; exhale, bring arms behind you, using the full range of motion in the shoulders.

2) **Arm Pulls.** Raise right arm up, bringing the right arm alongside the right ear. Reach the left arm down and outward, stretching through the fingers. Inhale and energize upward through the right arm and exhale as you reach outward through the left arm and hand. Practice several breaths before changing arms.

3) **Collarbone Stretch.** Interlace hands behind you, open the chest, and bring the knuckles to the left side of the waist. Feel the right shoulder blade coming in toward the spine. Roll the shoulders back while squeezing elbows together. Change sides.

Naukasana (reclining boat). Works on the acupressure points related to general body frustration, body aches, digestive problems, and fear. Lie on the abdomen with the chin on floor. Stretch the arms straight out in front of you. Slowly and deeply inhale, lift the arms, chest, head and legs off the ground, arching the back. Hold for 3-6 breaths. Relax in **Child's Pose**.

Notes

Notes

Practice off the Mat

Body language has so much to do with how you express your emotions. Do you hunch your shoulders in an effort to protect or shield yourself? Do you often settle your hands on your hips? Notice your emotional frustration and then recognize how it manifests in your body.

Wise Words

The more we let go and release in all areas of our life, the more life unfolds itself to us.

With daily practice, patience and faith, energy blocks will diminish, inviting health, healing and lifeforce into your being.

Each new breath is a new moment of life. The practice is to find the newness in each moment.

All your issues are in your tissues.

Asanas



Reclining Knee Twist



Cat Stretch



Neck Stretches



Arms Circles



Arm Pulls



Collarbone Stretch



Naukasana
boat



Child's Pose

Notes

Embracing Change

Intention: To welcome change into our lives.

Approximate Length: 2 minutes

Through the practice of yoga, we begin to awaken to how life unfolds moment by moment. Things are constantly changing. The breath, your state of mind, the phases of the moon, the changing of the seasons. This can be both a profound revelation — life is like a flower that blooms continuously — and a harsh reminder that nothing lasts forever. Even your body will let you down in the end.

When we resist change, the ego will try to hold on to the body as it is. Consequently, the body contracts, tenses, and the natural flow of energies slow down or may stop completely, creating blocks in the form of a tight hip or frozen shoulder. That's why, until we willingly accept the changes that occur from day to day, year to year, and surrender to the natural course of existence, very little progress can be made along the path of yoga.

Asana practice shows us how our bodies, our minds, and the world around us are constantly changing. Today, through breath, patience, and a watchful eye, we'll honor our changes from movement to moment and embrace the reality of change.

***Asanas* for Deepening**

From the first stretch of the morning to the more mindful and heated ***Surya Namaskara***, we can feel and sense the immediate transformation it makes in our bodies. Make sure you ground your awareness in the changes in breath, circulation including body temperature, and muscle flexibility.

Inverted Postures (handstand, shoulderstand or plow). Psychologically, inverted yogic practices make us feel that our world is turned upside down. The sages have said if we could get used to that feeling, we could adapt to change when it happens without warning.

Parivrta Trikonasana (revolved triangle). Before taking the completed posture, twist from the waist with arms extending out the sides, coming back to center several times until you sense the opening in the lower back and waist. Then take the full posture.

Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottanasana (1/2 bound lotus posterior stretch). Stop when you feel the slightest resistance. Stay at this place until something changes, until you sense a new edge.

Practice off the Mat

Practice being open and receptive to change. Something as simple as changing your hairstyle or wearing different colored clothing can give you a refreshing perspective to the transitions of living.

Look at all the twists and turns in your life. Recognize how life's stages create new opportunities as well as new challenges.

Celebrate the changes of the seasons with a Labor Day party or a Vernal Equinox (March 21) Tea.

Wise Words

Embracing change creates ease and freedom in your world.

The only constant is change.

Guiding Yoga's Light

Notes

Give yourself room for expansion. Give yourself room to change.

Allow change to happen to you. Don't resist it.

Sunrise and sunset are obvious reminders of change.

May we all learn to accept life's constant changes.

Asanas



Handstand



Shoulderstand



Plow



Revolved Triangle



Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottanasana
half bound lotus posterior stretch

Notes

Fear

Intention: To use the tools of yoga to deal with fear.

Approximate Length: 3 minutes

As terrorism becomes more of a threat to our homeland security, how do we as yogis deal with our own internalized view of fear?

When fear takes over our lives, we are less willing to take risks. This shuts down the third *chakra* — the solar plexus — the center of our will, power and inner strength. When this *chakra* becomes deficient, we tend to close off to life's unlimited potential. Living a fearful existence will most assuredly keep your spirit at bay.

As yogis, we take a very pragmatic view of the world, understanding that fear is recognized as part of human existence. Whether you lived in caves thousands of years ago fearing the attack of a lion, or you live in New York City fearing another 9-11, violence and suffering have always been part of this world.

So what kind of practice should we have if we live in fear of bombings, muggings, or other people? Is there a breathing exercise that helps us through a panic attack? Are there actual tools for this?

Yoga's path itself is the tool for the liberation of suffering. The practice of *asana* and *pranayama* are two of the most powerful tools for releasing the fear, anxiety and the resulting anger that gets locked in the body's tissues.

Our practices today will allow us to reconnect and balance our solar plexus and open the armor that protects the heart center. When these *chakras* are open, we can connect with the priorities of the present moment, of gratitude and of love. Then instead of letting fear lead your day, closing you off from your life, you can fill your heart with life force.

Asanas for Deepening

Gentle Backbends. Depending on levels of fear, it may be best to begin with a series of gentle backbends to release the armor around the solar plexus and heart. Backbends stimulate circulation in the spine to make us feel more vital and alive. Almost any backbend can be tamed to nurture this effort: **Unsupported Cobra (no arms), Bridge, Half Locust, Lunge, Standing Backbend (with hands supporting the lower waist).**

Ustrasana (camel). Focus on opening the solar plexus and heart center. In the final stages, imagine your heart lifting out of its cage to flourish with love, compassion and inner wisdom. Let *prana* circulate and bring energy to all areas. Camel also helps relieve depression caused by anxiety.

Tittibhasana (firefly). Helps balance the third *chakra* and develops courage. Have fun and don't bother with whether you can complete the final pose or not. If you're worried about falling on your face, put a pillow or blanket in front of you.

Practice off the Mat

Anxiety Attacks. Practice 2 to 1 breathing where exhale is approximately twice as long as inhale and follow with 4 to 8 rounds of of *nadi shodhana*.

Imagine that your body is lying on the sands of a warm tropical beach. With your exhalation, feel a wave pass downward through the body, carrying away wastes, fatigue and all worries. With the inhalation, a fresh wave passes upward through the whole body, carrying a feeling of energy and well-being from an ocean of cosmic vitality. Breathe this way 10 times.

Have you been closing off your spirit in an effort to protect it? Meditate on the heart center, where fear can get locked. Imagine that you are holding the key and unlock the gate of the heart, feeling the fear and anxiety escape.

Notes

Notes

By meditating on the heart center, we become attuned to deep-seated emotions and reconnect to life as it really is.

If fear is taking you over, think about the very worst outcome of the situation. What happens? What body sensations do you feel? When you hit rock bottom, you can only go up. By thinking of the worst rather than denying or suppressing the result, we can move through the fear that restricts our lifeforce and keeps us locked in our self-induced prison.

Wise Words

We cannot change the world, only ourselves.

Through mindful practice we develop concentration that leads to strength of mind.

Asanas



Cobra



Bridge



Half Locust



Lunge



Backbend



Ustrasana
camel



Tittibhasana
firefly

Notes

Letting Go

Intention: To identify the importance of giving up emotional baggage.

Approximate Length: 3 minutes

How many of us are carrying emotional baggage from years ago?

Here's a parable:

Two monks were walking down a road toward a river with the intention of crossing it. The monks saw a woman at the riverbank who was waiting for someone to help her get across.

This was centuries ago and in those days, any contact with women was forbidden. The first monk said to the second monk, "That woman needs help. Shall we take her across the river with us?"

The second monk angrily replied, "We can't do that, we'd be breaking our sacred vows!" The first monk thought about what his friend said, then took the woman on his back and carried her across the river.

After crossing the river and walking a long distance, the second monk who was very distraught about his brother monk's contact with the woman, went on and on about how the vows were now broken and what were they to do? How would they explain this at the monastery?

The first monk stopped, looked at the second monk and said, "Brother, I left that woman two miles back. Why are you still carrying her?"

The *Yama aparigraha*, non-possessiveness, can teach us a lot about letting go of baggage. When we hold onto our own ideas, our way of doing things, and negative circumstances, we hold on to so many things we no longer need to carry.

The next time you feel yourself completely attached to an idea of how things should be, notice what effect attachment has on your body. Do your muscles tighten? Does the breath feel stifled? Is your face tense?

Today our intention is the practice of letting go. Think of your yoga mat as a sacred place in which you can bring all of your buried baggage to the surface and give it over to the universe. Only by letting go, forgiving and allowing guilt to fade away can we be in the moment and let life lead us.

Asanas for Deepening

Kurmasana (tortoise). Surrender to the outcome. Let the stretch, breath and open state of mind lead you. Be patient and notice how the mind begins to let go of its clutches.

Baddha Konasana with Brick (bound angle). Sit in *Baddha Konasana* with a brick between your feet and choose the perfect moment to let go. Don't be in a rush to come out of the pose.

Reclining Twist. Practice the willingness to be present and let things happen.

Practice off the Mat

If you have children, pick your battles. Choose the ones that are most important; let go of everything else.

If you always want to be the driver so that you can be in control, try letting someone else do it for a change.

Do you always have to get the last word in? Try letting someone else do it.

Are you still carrying a grudge over a disagreement with a friend, relative or business associate? Is there someone you haven't spoken to in years? Do you still feel the same guilt, heartbreak, or anger you did when it happened? Is there any reason why you need to carry this burden? Let it go, once and for all. This doesn't necessarily mean you're letting this person back in your life. It simply means you're able to move on.

Notes

Wise Words

Surrender is believing that we have done all that we can and trusting that things will work out.

Letting go means accepting your life without resistance.

When we practice releasing the past, we discover what actually exists within us. This is our authentic self.

Stay centered. Centering teaches us how to be compassionate with ourselves and flexible with our thoughts.

Asanas

Kurmasana
tortoise



Baddha Konasana with brick
bound angle



Reclining Twist with Eagle Legs



Notes

Patience

Intention: To practice patience and recognize impatience in our lives and in our yoga practice.

Approximate Length: 4 minutes

It seems that of all the negative emotions we deal with, impatience is the most prominent. We see it in toddlers, business people, parents and seniors. You probably see it in your yoga practice.

Impatience manifests itself in many ways. A friend of mine was waiting at a popular pizza place to pick up her order. It was a very busy Sunday evening with wall-to-wall people waiting for their pizzas. The man next to her was being very impatient. He kept whispering under his breath, "Where's my damn pizza?" Finally, when his name was called, he yelled at the counterman. "This is a disgrace," he shouted, "you said it would be ready by 6 o'clock!" The counterman said apologetically, "I'm sorry you've been waiting so long, sir, but it *is* 6 o'clock." "No it's not!" the man shouted back, "It's 6:05!"

My pizza-less friend laughed at the absurdity of this scenario. Yet, how many of us can honestly say we've *never* been this steamed with impatience?

As a society, we suffer with impatience because our actions are uncontrolled and out of tune with the reality of the now. Our minds are preoccupied with the worries and anxieties of yesterday or tomorrow and it's difficult to involve ourselves in the present. Rather than live in the moment, we find ourselves wanting things to be faster, better, and flow more smoothly. It's as though we're in a cosmic disagreement with how things are really happening. We need to realize that in order to expand our level of patience, we must learn to accommodate the moment.

Our yoga practice provides one of the best and most systematic approaches to regaining our patience. *Asanas* bring us back in touch with

the physical body. We begin to feel again. We begin to notice those body sensations of impatience. We learn how to wait and let our bodies open at their own pace.

During today's practice, when impatience-driven anxiety comes up, rather than push these thoughts away, be mindful that they are part of the moment. And like all moments, they will pass.

Patience is a form of wisdom. It shows us that we must accept the fact that things evolve in their own time.

Asanas for Deepening

Over time the body unfolds. If you honor exploration and patience, you discover how everything changes all the time. This is the basis of learning to live in the moment.

Janu Shirshasana (head-to-knee pose). Don't rush past the early stages of the stretch wanting to be someone you're not organically ready to be. Find your first place of resistance and adapt before going any further. Once you're settled, bring your attention to where you feel the breath in your body. From that place, follow the movement of each inhalation and exhalation. Notice what comes up. Are you calm? Does the mind wander? Is this a place of clarity for you? When feelings of impatience come up, bring yourself back to the movement of the breath.

Vasisthasana (side plank). Take the posture in as many stages as necessary. Try it first with the bottom knee on the floor. Then extend the legs, first practicing balance. Finally, extend the top arm strongly upward.

Child's Pose. Take a deep full breath into the muscles of your back and practice the willingness to be present.

Notes

Practice off the Mat

Next time you're in a restaurant waiting for your order, think about the man and his pizza. Then ask yourself, can I wait five minutes for *my* order?

Do you interrupt others when they're speaking? Do you find your mind moving faster than the speed of light, your words unable to wait? Next time this happens, first become aware of it, then try to pause and really listen to the other person speaking. You may find you're missing half the conversation!

Sometimes the best patience practice is to watch what others do. The man at the pizza place was able to awaken my friend to the impatience in the world. If you have a friend, relative, or co-worker who acts with impatience, spend some time with this person with the intention of looking at his or her impatient characteristics. Without judging or trying to change this person, find out what it is that makes this person impatient. Look at their physical reactions, listen to their tone of voice. Learning to identify others' negative emotions will help you recognize them in yourself. And, if you maintain your sense of the moment with clarity and calm, you'll be setting an excellent example.

The world is full of places to practice patience: traffic jams, the long line at the bank, store, or pizza place, or waiting for someone to e-mail a reply or return your call. As you go through your day, you'll discover dozens of situations in which to practice.

Quick Calm Breath or the Waiting-In-Line Breath. Exhale to a mental count of seven, hold four; inhale to a mental count of four, hold four. Practice four cycles. Adjust your count if breath length feels shallow.

Wise Words

It's said that much of our discontent with life comes from never fully experiencing it exactly as it happens.

Impatience is a defensive response to a situation that isn't going our way.

When we experience the calmness that results from our yoga practices, we become more centered, satisfied and patient.

Our thoughts can overwhelm our perception of the present moment because the mind is too busy in the future or the past. Impatience arises because things are not moving as fast as our thoughts.

Notes

Guiding Yoga's Light

Asanas



Janu Shirshasana
forward bend



Vasisthasana
side plank



Child's Pose