

strength * spirit * solace

Newsletter

January 2004

Dear friend...

Happy New Year!

As 2004 unfolds, how will you stay true to your underlying values in what is almost always a time of chaos and uncertainty? Instead of making New Year's Resolutions this year, I challenge you to answer three basic questions: What are your real motives for changing your life? What are the possible effects of change? How will you change your life?

Change is healthy, because metaphorically speaking, our spirits are sort of like houseplants – the outer leaves of ourselves have to fall away or die so that whatever must emerge new in our lives can do so properly. As you reflect and make decisions about your future, never forget that we are constantly changing. In fact, you will not be the same person you are today when one changing process is complete. And, without a doubt, you will change again, and again, and again.

Remember this: you are only here now, in this moment. Be alive in this moment! It is all you have, and the only time when your thoughts and actions can truly benefit you and those you love. May your inner and outer life be of balance and harmony. May the darkness be your light. May your life be peaceful. May the season's ending be a new beginning.

Keep up the great work and let your light shine on!

Namasté,
Sara Delaney

What is Yoga Etiquette?

A friendly reminder about practicing good karma in any yoga room or studio:

- Remove your shoes before entering a room where yoga is practiced.
- Be on time – or show up a little early!
- Turn off cell phones and pagers.
- Please observe silence once class begins.
- Cultivate gratitude towards your instructor, your fellow classmates, and most importantly, toward yourself!

Spiritual Readings

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?” Actually, who are you not to be? Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

~ Reverend Nelson Mandela

Poses You Can Do at Home

Downward-Facing Dog is the quintessential “Power Yoga” posture!



Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)

One of the most widely recognized yoga poses, Downward-Facing Dog is an all-over, rejuvenating stretch.

Benefits

- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Energizes the body
- Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches and hands
- Strengthens the arms and legs
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Relieves menstrual discomfort when done with head supported on a block
- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Improves digestion
- Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain and fatigue
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica and sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions

- Carpal tunnel syndrome: Do not do this pose if you experience severe pain.

- Pregnancy: Do not do this pose late-term.
- Headache: Support your head on a bolster or block.

Step by Step

1. Come onto the floor on your hands and knees. Set your knees directly below your hips and your hands slightly forward of your shoulders. Spread your palms, index fingers parallel or slightly turned out, and turn your toes under.
2. Exhale and lift your knees away from the floor. At first keep the knees slightly bent and the heels lifted away from the floor. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of your pelvis and press it lightly toward the pubis. Against this resistance, lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling, and from your inner ankles draw the inner legs up into the groins.
3. Then with an exhalation, push your top thighs back and stretch your heels onto or down toward the floor. Straighten your knees but be sure not to lock them. Firm the outer thighs and roll the upper thighs inward slightly. Narrow the front of the pelvis.
4. Firm the outer arms and press the bases of the index fingers actively into the floor. From these two points lift along your inner arms from the wrists to the tops of the shoulders. Firm your shoulder blades against your back, then widen them and draw them toward the tailbone.
5. Adho Mukha Svanasana is one of the poses in the traditional Sun Salutation sequence. It's also an excellent yoga asana all on its own. Stay in this pose anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes. Then bend your knees to the floor with an exhalation and rest in Child's Pose.

Beginners Tip

If you have difficulty releasing and opening your shoulders in this pose, raise your hands off the floor on a pair of blocks. It also helps to bend your elbows slightly, relieving pressure in the shoulders, allowing them to open more gently.

Deepen the Pose

To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, lift slightly up onto the balls of your feet, pulling your heels a half-inch or so away from the floor. Then draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis, lifting actively from the inner heels. Finally, from the height of the groins, lengthen the heels back onto the floor.

Nutrition

Eating can be considered a practice in which you seek universal balance. Like yoga, eating is a highly personal activity – you learn to adapt your own needs to the many popular nutritional systems and diets. Developing a mindful eating practice can truly support and nurture your yoga practice. Below is a recipe for Healing Miso Soup that is not only delicious and easy to make, but very nutritious and healing. Recipe ingredients such as dried Shitake mushrooms, seaweed and Miso paste can be found at Whole Foods, Wild Oats, or other natural foods stores. Enjoy!

Healing Miso Soup

4-5 cups water
4-6 dried Shitake mushrooms
2 T seaweed – either wakame, arame, hijiki, kombu
1 small onion
pressed garlic
3-6 T Miso paste

Optional add ins:

Carrot, celery, lotus seeds, kale, chard, cabbage, radishes, green beans, scallions, silk tofu, chicken, egg, potato, cayenne, lemon – etc.!

Start by adding mushrooms, seaweed, and onion to a medium sized saucepan, and adding 4-5 cups of water. If you want to add some other optional ingredients, do it at this point, except for lemon or leafy greens, which you always add toward to end. Let simmer on medium heat for about 30-40 minutes. Add pressed garlic, and stir in miso paste.

Miso paste should never be cooked, so add it when you are done cooking the soup broth. Miso shouldn't be reheated either because that destroys miso's wonderful bacterial enzymes (which rebuild health intestinal flora). If you are going to have leftover soup, ladle the soup broth into your individual bowls and stir miso paste directly in. You can stir miso paste in to taste. Some people like miso soup creamy and salty, while others prefer a mild miso broth. Start with a tablespoon in a bowl, and adjust to taste. You can also try adding a touch of tamari or reduced sodium soy sauce in at the end to improve the taste. Fresh lemon juice is also nice. This soup is great to drink at the onset of a cold, or during the healing process. Perfect for a cold winter day!

Your Questions Answered!

Do you have a question? Email it to me at question@saradelaney.com. Thank you!

➤ **Q:**

My allergies aren't just annoying – they affect my sleep, concentration, and productivity and put me in a bad mood. Is there a certain yoga pose I can do to help control my allergies?

➤ **A:**

In general, allergies are worsened by a stress reaction, which causes physiological responses, including the release of stress hormones and histamine, and triggers inflammation. Relaxation diminishes the fight-or-flight response, and thereby reduces allergic symptoms. Through relaxation, the nervous system basically tells the immune system to hold its fire. Once the immune system backs off, the inflammation and mucus decrease, and symptoms diminish.

I too suffer from many kinds of indoor and outdoor allergies. During an outbreak, I make de-stressing my immune system my top priority. So, I modify my yoga practice to be less vigorous and much more calming. When I suffer from allergies, particularly in the fall season, I try to avoid Bikram yoga in a hot room because it is much more strenuous on the body. Also, standing poses and spine twists are very good for allergies, because they massage the spinal cord and the thoracic cage as well as condition the lungs. Strong lungs help strengthen immune system functioning!

Be Present Yoga Clothes

Be Present, is a Denver-based yoga clothing line carried in yoga studios and boutiques throughout the United States. Be Present brings the philosophy of yoga poses from the mat and into the design. Their clothes are my personal favorite from pants to tops – I can vouch for their comfort, ease of care and great fit! Check out www.bepresent.net for designs and size information.

Contemplate...

Virabhadrasana – or Warrior’s pose – has an amazing history. Born from Shiva, the warrior named “Virabhadra” was said to be created from a lock of the god’s matted hair. This powerful warrior possessed god-like strength, performing heroic feats to overcome obstacles and danger. The variations of the pose Virabhadrasana teach us about the physical and mental support required for stability. Steadfast, the warrior mind confronts fear by relying on inner fortitude and grace. Warrior pose requires balance and stamina and cultivates a focused and clear mind – one of the principal aims of yoga. A calm determination holds this figure in stillness, while the warrior is ready for anything.



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*"When you come to the edge of all that you know, you must believe one of two things:
There will be earth upon which to stand, or you will be given wings to fly."*