

KNOFF YOGA

PRINCIPLES OF YOGA

SIMPLE GUIDELINES FOR CLARITY
IN PRACTICE AND TEACHING



KNOFF
YOGA



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Introduction

Yoga is such a huge topic that you really need a road map to know your way around. This manual contains a clear guide in the form of the Knoff Yoga “Principles”. If you understand these and incorporate them into both your practice and teaching, you will have taken a huge step towards clarity, confidence and authenticity as you will be expressing yourself through application in action.

Yoga is an experiential and subjective science and art. In order to understand it, you need to be able to perform it. An armchair or theoretical understanding is not only insufficient, but potentially harmful. Theory and practice must merge into one cohesive whole.

The Knoff Yoga Principles will give you the theory, you have to supply the practice. It is in the crucible of the heat and heart of practice that you transform the science into an art.

I encourage you to read through this manual once a month for six months. The more time you spend on the mat, the more sense the Principles will make. Your understanding will deepen with continued practice, but for your practice to be fully fruitful, it needs to be viewed through the lens of authentic yoga and this is the goal of this manual.

Besides having a handle on the Principles, every time you step on your mat, your focus needs to include the 5 Pillars of Practice. The ancient yogis viewed all of life through the prism of the natural elements: Earth, Fire, Space, Air and Water. This comprehensive approach assures you address the complexity of the human condition as you learn how to dive deep into your mind, while you are simultaneously engaging in the world of action.

If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well. If you know the what and why of what you are doing, you are in a much better position to do it well.



MISSION STATEMENT

Our passion is to share the physical, mental and spiritual benefits of Yoga.

Our goal is to offer training that is transformational and imparts the techniques and philosophy of Yoga as well as the enthusiasm to make Yoga a life-long choice.

We understand that Knoff Yoga will grow and prosper in direct relationship to the positive impact it has upon the lives of our teachers and students.



~

I honour the place within you
in which the entire universe dwells.

I honour the place within you
which is of love, truth, light and peace.

When you are in that place in you
and I am in that place in me,
we are one.

Namaste.

~



The Chanting of Om

When we chant Om (pronounced *Aum*), there are four parts, the 'A' sound, the 'U' sound, the 'M' sound and the aftersound. Each part should be of equal length.

As we chant Om we want to start the sound deep in the belly and draw the energy up into the chest, into the head to resonate and then release it as we breathe in to prepare for the next one.

The beginning of the Om is the birth, the new activation of energy, then it has a moment of development and stability before it begins to mature and dissipate—the 'M' sound. We need to ensure that we do not become so caught up in the birth, activation and stability of the sound that we forget to leave breath for the 'M'; each part should be of equal length. The 'M' teaches us about the appropriate time to let go—it is a small death—before the aftersound, which you can interpret in whatever way you wish.

The chanting of Om is a bit like entering the forest; when we first walk in we see the abundance of life, the multitude of trees and sounds everywhere. If we look closer however, we see that there is an equal part of death and decay, the one dependent on the other. If we look closer still, we see that even those trees and plants that appear to be dead are not really, different animals and plants live on them and inside of them and so really we begin to realise that it is not death at all, but a transformation in preparation for renewal.

Just as in a forest, all of the trees do not drop down dead at the same time, nor should our Om's all begin and die at the same time. As we chant let's all begin at different times so there is no part where all of the "trees" die, there is no point of silence. As you chant, listen to the sounds around you, let our chanting of Om be like the symphony and wisdom of the forest. Let our Om be a transformation in preparation for renewal.



The symbol for 'Om'



Intention for Practice

~

The practice of Yoga is a special and sacred time
I have created to be with myself, my teachers and
my brother and sister students.

It is a time to journey inwards and discover all of
who I am and realise my greatest capabilities.

This journey begins with my body. My body is a holy temple.

I come to honour and respect myself through my body.

I come to nourish, nurture, strengthen and purify
my body through the practices of Asana and Pranayama,
and still my mind through meditation.

I am not here to beat myself up or force my body into pain.
I am not here to criticise or judge myself or others.

I am here to learn and remember the ways of balance
and harmony through the path of Yoga.

It is my intention to use what I learn to serve myself
and to serve others.

Coming into *beginner's mind*, I am open to receive all
of what this time has to offer me.

With the sound of OM, I let go of all thoughts
—past and future.

~



Student Creed

~

I practice Yoga to develop myself in a positive manner and avoid anything that will reduce my physical health, mental growth, or spiritual progress.

I practice Yoga to develop self-discipline in order to bring out the best in myself and others.

I practice regularly and use what I learn to energise my body, elevate my mind and evolve my spirit.

I practice Yoga to consistently increase my awareness and become a more conscious and compassionate human being.

~



The 8 Limbs of Yoga – Version 1

Ashtanga

Ashta = Eight — Anga = Limbs

VERSION 1:

YAMA	Rules of social conduct
NIYAMA	Rules of personal behaviour
ASANA	The practice of body/mind exercises
PRANAYAMA	The control and expansion of vital energy/life force
PRATYAHARA	Redirecting our sensory organs and their input from the external to the internal
DHARANA	The ability to direct and concentrate our minds
DHYANA	Sustained concentration and meditation
SAMADHI	A profound sense of belonging in the Universe, of oneness with the life force

The 5 YAMA

Rules of social conduct

AHIMSA	Non-Violence
SATYA	Truthfulness
ASTEYA	Non-Stealing
BRAHMACHARYA	Using our Energy Wisely
APARIGRAHA	Non-Attachment

The 5 NIYAMA

Rules of personal behaviour

SAUCHA	Cleanliness
SANTOSA	Contentment
TAPAS	Self-Effort
SVADYAYA	Self Study
ISVARA PRANIDHANA	Celebration of Life



The 8 Limbs of Yoga – Version 2

Ashtanga

Ashta = Eight — Anga = Limbs

VERSION 2:

YAMA	Our attitudes towards the environment
NIYAMA	Our attitudes towards ourselves
ASANA	The practice of body/mind exercises
PRANAYAMA	The control and expansion of vital energy/life force
PRATYAHARA	Withdrawal of the senses
DHARANA	The ability to direct and concentrate our minds
DHYANA	Sustained concentration and meditation
SAMADHI	Self-realisation and super consciousness

The 5 YAMA

To be practiced by everybody

AHIMSA	Kindness
SATYA	Honesty
ASTEYA	Responsibility
BRAHMACHARYA	Unity
APARIGRAHA	Simplicity

The 5 NIYAMA

Extra practices for yogis

SAUCHA	Clarity
SANTOSA	Acceptance
TAPAS	Service
SVADYAYA	Understanding
ISVARA PRANIDHANA	Highest Purpose



The 5 Pillars of Practice

Sadhana – Practice

ASANA	Focusing on the physical structure using the principle of alignment	EARTH
VINYASA	Connecting technique synchronising movement with breath	WATER
BANDHA	Muscular and energetic locks, which transform internal energies, creating heat	FIRE
PRANAYAMA	Controlled expansion of the life force	AIR
DRISHTI	Specific control points for directing the eyes and controlling the mind and correct placement of the body in the pose	SPACE



Knoff Yoga System Overview

The *Knoff Yoga System* of practice and teaching has evolved over 70 years from the combined experiences of Master Teacher, Nicky Knoff and James Bryan.

The foundation of the *Knoff Yoga System* arose from direct study with the Masters of Iyengar Yoga, Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga and Bikram Yoga.

The *Knoff Yoga System* utilises the human body as the guide to correct anatomical alignment, structural balance, and energetic application of Yoga techniques. All techniques honour and recognise the individuality of every student and are adjusted for body shapes and proportions. The *Knoff Yoga System* is based on a unique formula that combines the synergistic effects of the traditional yogic tools:

- Yoga Meditation: non-religious
- Yoga Breathing: breathing exercises for vitality
- Yoga Postures: anatomically aligned, structurally balanced
- Yoga Relaxation: how to effectively deal with stress
- Yoga Philosophy: positive, uplifting and life affirming.

The *Knoff Yoga System* fundamentals:

- 5 Sections Per Class
- Time Percentages for Teaching
- 11 Yoga Posture Groups
- 5 Pillars of Practice
- 5 Week Rotational Theme
- Right and Left Weeks
- 3 Modes of Teaching
- 24 Principles of Practice
- 9 Levels of Professional Development.

It is through this passion for Yoga and continuing refinement that Nicky and James have created the *Knoff Yoga System* for better practice and teaching that offers you:

- Intelligent and balanced practice
- Programs for successful teaching
- Simple effective tools to enable you to reach your full potential
- Ongoing training using the *Knoff Yoga System* with Workshops, Intensives, Retreats and Teacher Training.



The Knoff Yoga System

<p>Rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purpose = experience freedom in the body/ mind• Goal = create strong, flexible, healthy, disciplined and independent individuals• Focus = 24 Principles of Practice and 5 Pillars of Practice• Application = to enhance relationships and become the best person we can be	<p>9 Levels of Teaching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level 1 – Discovery• Level 2 – Chair Yoga• Level 3 – Foundation• Level 4 – Pregnancy Yoga• Level 5 – Holistic Healing A• Level 6 – Holistic Healing B• Level 7 – Intermediate• Level 8 – Advanced• Level 9 – Master																		
<p>5 Segments per Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meditation – non-religious• Pranayama – breathing exercises for vitality• Asana – anatomically aligned, structurally balanced• Relaxation – how to deal effectively with stress• Philosophy – positive, uplifting and life affirming	<p>5 Segments Time Percentage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meditation = 5%• Pranayama = 12%• Asana = 66%• Relaxation = 12%• Philosophy = 5%• 100% Pure Yoga																		
<p>11 Asana Group Sequence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Earth and Sun Salutations• Inverted Poses (heating)• Standing Poses• Arm Balancings• Forward Bends• Sitting Poses• Abdominals• Twists• Backbends• Inverted Poses (cooling)• Relaxation <p>5 Bandhas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mula Bandha• Uddiyana Bandha (minor)• Jalandhara Bandha• Hasta Bandha• Pada Bandha	<p>5 Week Rotational Theme:</p> <table><tr><th></th><th>Asanas</th><th>Pranayama</th></tr><tr><td>1</td><td>Earth & Sun Salutations & Inverted Poses</td><td>Yogic Full Breath & Ujjayi</td></tr><tr><td>2</td><td>Standing Poses, Forward Bends & Sitting Poses</td><td>Viloma 1, 2 & 3</td></tr><tr><td>3</td><td>Arm Balancings & Abdominals</td><td>Surya & Chandra Bhedana & Nadi Sodhana</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>Twists & Backbends</td><td>Kapalabhati or Bhastrika</td></tr><tr><td>5</td><td>Vinyasa/ Consolidation</td><td>Sitali</td></tr></table>		Asanas	Pranayama	1	Earth & Sun Salutations & Inverted Poses	Yogic Full Breath & Ujjayi	2	Standing Poses, Forward Bends & Sitting Poses	Viloma 1, 2 & 3	3	Arm Balancings & Abdominals	Surya & Chandra Bhedana & Nadi Sodhana	4	Twists & Backbends	Kapalabhati or Bhastrika	5	Vinyasa/ Consolidation	Sitali
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<p>Balanced Practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Right and Left weeks – to ensure symmetry of body, breath and mind.	<p>Highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Step-by-step progression• Individuality of every student• Adjusting for body proportions• Education as well as exercise• Positive communication with constructive encouragement																		



Uddiyana and Nauli

Uddiyana and Nauli*

By James Bryan

Uddiyana means flying up. Strictly speaking it is not an asana, but a bandha, that is a restraint.

On a physical level the effects of Uddiyana Bandha and Nauli are they tone the abdominal organs, increase gastric fire, eliminate toxins and strengthen the abdominal muscles. On an energetic level, bandhas regulate the flow of prana (energy). In Uddiyana Bandha the energy is made to move from the lower abdomen towards the head, i.e. upwards.

Nauli means a boat being tossed around on an ocean wave. It is a *kriya* or a cleaning process and not an asana.

The practice of these two techniques provides a powerful massage to the internal organs and helps keep them light and toned. Learn these techniques sequentially:

1. Uddiyana – learn how to connect to and lift up the diaphragm and pull the abdominal organs back towards the spine.
2. Nauli – part one: learn how to isolate the abdominal recti and shift from side to side.
3. Nauli – part two: learn how to connect the center and sides and create a circular (surging) motion.

It is best to practice these techniques in the early morning; on an empty stomach and after evacuating both the bladder and bowels. My personal daily practice consists of:

1. Uddiyana x2 (connect to the internal organs and get them lifted).
2. Nauli – part one: connect to the right side and then the left side. So, 2 more activations.
3. Nauli – part two: Rotate the abdominals and organs to the right x2 and then rotate to the left x2.

That gives me 8 activations in all and takes around 8 minutes.

One of the benefits of practicing Uddiyana (major) and Nauli before the start of Asana is that a strong connection has been established, so that the practice of Uddiyana (minor) during Asana is a breeze.

* To watch our videos on Uddiyana and Nauli, go to the Knoff Yoga YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/knoffyogaschool

KNOFF YOGA **PRINCIPLES**





Principles of Practice

1. FOUNDATION

That part of the body which makes contact with the ground (floor or Yoga mat), which distributes the weight of the body onto the ground—the basis on which the Asana stands. For example, the feet in *Tadasana* (Mountain pose), or the hands in *Adho Mukha Vrksasana* (Handstand), or both the feet and hands in *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (Down Dog). The Foundation is the support for the superstructure of the rest of the body. With a strong Foundation the superstructure is solid and the rebounding energy from the earth will be able to rise effectively.

2. CARDINAL DIRECTIONS

Using the points of a compass—North, South, East and West, to help in directing our actions within a Yoga pose. Once the Foundation has been set, then the body is evenly spread out in the four Cardinal Directions. With this action, the Yoga Asana becomes balanced over the Foundation. For example, in *Tadasana* (Mountain pose) the weight of the body is placed through the feet and spread evenly between the toes, heels, left and right sides of the foot. Then the gravitational line of force is centered through the arches of the feet.

3. CENTERING

Adjusting the Yoga pose so the gravitational line of force is centered in the median plane. The centre of gravity = the point through which the sum of gravitational forces on a body can be considered to act. Think of balancing a 2-metre stick in the palm of your hand. If the stick is completely vertical (median plane), then the gravitational line of force is centered and balancing the stick is easy. However, once it falls out of the median plane, gravity has more to act upon making the stick more difficult to balance. For example, in *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand) if the body is vertical in the median plane, balance is easier than if the legs start to move in any direction, say they fall behind the body. Gravity then has more to pull on and the student is likely to fall over. You would say the student fell because they were out of balance, or the student is not centered.

Every object, including the human body, has a “centre of gravity,” or point where the weight (mass) of the object is centered. On the human body, the centre of gravity is located in the navel area. Generally speaking, the centre of gravity of an adult standing erect lies within the pelvis, just anterior to the second sacral vertebral body.



Principles of Practice

Centering also refers to the 'hub' or 'centre' of a wheel. In Asana, this refers to returning to the 'hub' pose after having explored the rim of the wheel. For example, *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose) is considered the 'hub' for the Standing Poses, i.e. after having completed one or more Standing Poses, you return to *Tadasana* for centering before performing the next pose. In this case, the rim represents Standing Poses.

In Forward Bends and Sitting Poses, *Dandasana* (Staff Pose) is the 'hub', e.g. after completing *Paschimottanasana*, you return to *Dandasana* before performing *Janu Sirsasana I*.

Centering also means establishing *Tadasana* in almost all Yoga poses, e.g. *Salamba Sarvangasana* is simply *Tadasana*, inverted and with the neck flexed forwards into *Jalandhara Bandha*. The Foundation is the shoulders, the back of the head and the triceps muscles right to the point of the elbows. We are making micro adjustments to keep the weight evenly on all these points. Essentially, the pose is the reestablishment of *Tadasana*. *Dandasana* is simply *Tadasana* flexed at the hip joints.

Centering also means keeping centered, i.e. in standing postures, if we need to have the feet wider or narrower, we move both feet and we keep centered.

4. EARTH/HEAVEN EXTENSION

Actively pressing down into the Foundation of the Yoga pose is Earth or Grounding. The upward energy that returns from the Earth is Heaven or Rebounding. Think of bouncing a ball. The stronger you throw the ball down, the higher it bounces up. Also known as Grounding/Rebounding. For example, in *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand) the correct technique is to actively push the head into the mat, which utilises the upward reaction of the bounce, making the pose much lighter and eventually effortless.

Newton's third law of motion states that "for every action there is an equal but opposite reaction". With our example of the ball, it is thrown down with a certain amount of force and it rebounds with the same amount of force. The harder you throw it down the higher it bounces. Therefore, in Yoga poses, the more you push down into the Foundation, the lighter the pose will feel because the exact amount of energy you put into it, is coming back up.



Principles of Practice

5. SCISSORING

Scissoring is an inward (medial) muscular activation (adduction) to create more strength, stability, support, lightness and connection with the core muscles. This principle is used in all Yoga postures to bring two or more body parts energetically towards each other—the body parts may be touching or apart.

For example, in *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose) the legs are activated together and physically touch, whereas in *Parsva Trikonasana* (Side Triangle) the legs are activated towards each other, but are not touching. This adduction greatly lifts the energy of the Asanas upwards. Both use the same amount of activation; just that one is touching and the other is not.

The key focus is the drawing together of the body in Yoga poses to make it energetically lighter and stronger. Scissoring or inward activation is related to Earth/Heaven Extension, Co-contraction and Bandhas, in that it helps to lift and stabilise the body.

In *Advadanta Sirsasana* (Dolphin 1, 2 & 3), the arms are scissored towards each other to create an upward lift, but are not touching (elbows are kept under the shoulders). Scissoring of the arms prevents them from sliding apart and losing height in the pose. Scissoring engages the chest and back muscles. The legs are also scissoring in the Dolphin Poses to maintain lightness. In Standing Poses the legs are scissored inwards as if you are standing on slippery ice. Whether the legs are anterior/posterior (front/back) as in *Virabhadrasana 1* (Warrior 1), or lateral (to the sides) as in *Prasarita Padottanasana 1 & 2* (Wide Leg 1 & 2), we scissor in all Yoga Asanas.

In *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand) the legs are scissored together exactly the same as in Mountain Pose and the elbows are scissored together as in Dolphin Pose. In *Salamba Sarvangasana* (Shoulder Stand), the legs are scissored together and the elbows are scissored towards each other with the hands on the back.

If you observe your body carefully during Asana practice you will see that scissoring forms part of almost all the Yoga poses.

6. BANDHAS

These are domes or arches within the body used to collect, store or transmit energy. The essential aspect of a Bandha is that of lifting energy upwards and their activation makes the Yoga postures lighter—we are drawing up the rebounding energy from the Earth.



Principles of Practice

The effect is felt as if lifting yourself up from the inside. Bandhas are also used to provide structural support and therefore protection, by firming up the body through co-activation of opposing muscle groups crossing a joint complex.

Imagine a tea cup turned upside down and pressed into the Yoga mat. The rim of the cup is actively pressed evenly down or earthed. From the grounding energy of earth, the rebounding energy returns/rises and is further enhanced or turbo-charged by contracting the rim or periphery inwards towards the centre of gravity—the effect being a stronger lifting action. The activation of the bandhas requires sustained muscular contraction, which generates heat. This heat helps to warm the body and contributes towards flexibility.

Compare this action to a cyclone; the periphery is drawn inwards towards the 'eye of the cyclone' and whatever enters it, is drawn vigorously upwards.

Cyclonic energy is strong enough to lift cars and whole houses for hundreds of metres into the air. This is also how hail is created. The upward drawing energy lifts rain to higher altitudes, where it is colder and the water freezes and falls back to the earth.

The tea cup is a dome or arch and in the body we find these structures in the hands, feet, and pelvis, and lower/upper thoracic diaphragms.

In Yoga postures we use five Bandhas: Mula, Uddiyana (minor), Jalandhara, Hasta and Pada:

- **Mula Bandha** – is the contraction of the pelvic floor muscles, initiated from the perineum, but also including the anus and urogenital area. Think of an inverted hammock (a dome). Mula Bandha is activated with the first inhalation of the practice and maintained until lying down in relaxation. It assists in stabilisation of the lower spine and also in elongating the spine.
- **Uddiyana Bandha (minor)** – is the contraction of the lower abdomen, from the top of the pubic bone to approximately three fingers below the navel. This is felt as a scooping in or hollowing of the lower belly. It assists in stabilising the lower back and in elongating the spine. Like Mula, Uddiyana minor is activated at the beginning of practice and maintained until relaxation. In the Kriyas, or cleansing actions, we activate Uddiyana Bandha and draw up the whole abdominal region.
- **Jalandhara Bandha** – flex the neck to place the chin on the jugular notch. It is used in specific Asana and Pranayama, e.g. *Salamba Sarvangasana* (Shoulder Stand), *Dandasana* (Staff), Breath Retention (*Antara* and *Bahya Kumbhaka*).



Principles of Practice

- **Hasta Bandha (major)** – is the spreading of the hand and then contracting inwards to increase the arch in the palm. An arch or dome is stronger than a horizontal plane. Enhancing the natural arch of the palm increases its supporting action for the weight of the body and provides protection to the joints in the hand and arms as well. Used any time the hand is placed on the floor or wall as the foundation, in order to protect the joints in the hand, wrist, elbow and shoulder, or in postures where the hand action supports the energetic action of the Asana, e.g. *Utthita Parsvakonasana* (Extended Side Angle Pose – Beginner Level), *Supta Parivrtta Merudandasana* (Supine Spinal Twist), or *Ardha Jathara Parivartanasana* (Half Cross Pose).
- **Hasta Bandha (minor)** – is the same doming of the arch in the hand, but with closed fingers. It is activated anytime the fingers are sealed together, e.g. *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose), *Urdhva Hastasana* (Upward Hands), and *Virabhadrasana 2* (Warrior 2).
- **Pada Bandha (major)** – is the spreading of the foot and then contracting inwards to increase the 3 arches in the foot (inner, outer and transverse). The same actions apply to Pada as in Hasta and it is used anytime the foot is on the floor or wall as the foundation.
- **Pada Bandha (minor)** – is the same doming of the arch in the foot and is used with Dorsi Flexion or Plantar Flexion of the foot.

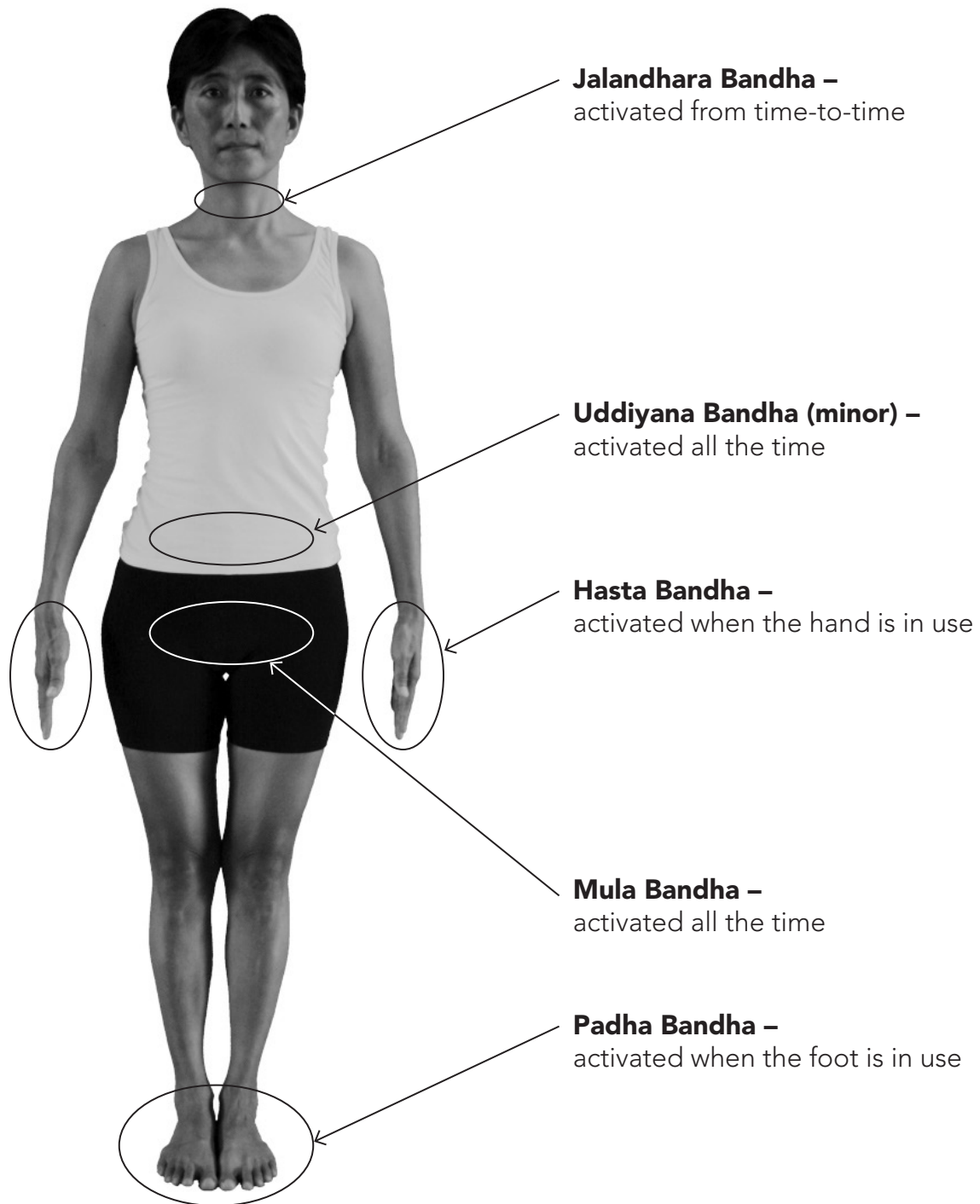
During Pranayama, Mula and Uddiyana (minor) are always activated. Jalandhara needs to be activated anytime there is breath retention, on either the inhalation or exhalation. Hasta and Pada are not utilised in Pranayama.

Uddiyana (major) or the complete contraction of the whole abdominal area can only be activated when the lungs are empty. Therefore it is not used during Asana, but only during breath retentions in Pranayama.



Principles of Practice

The five Bandhas demonstrated





7. CO-CONTRACTION

Contracting both the agonist and antagonist muscles simultaneously which results in a firming up of the target area. For example, in *Adho Mukha Vrksasana* (Handstand) the muscles in both the upper arm and lower arm are squeezed onto the bones making the arm unbendable—great for avoiding a face plant. Imagine trying to balance a loose chain in your hand—it just collapses. Then imagine balancing a stick—much easier because it does not collapse. Another way to think of it is, hugging the muscles onto the bone, making the area firmer with an effect much like putting a plaster cast onto a broken arm.

8. SPIRALIC ACTION

A spiral is a curve on a plane that winds around a fixed point, from which it distances itself at regular intervals. Think of twisting many strands of string into a small rope.

We do this same action with the muscles in the limbs (both arms and legs) in order to make them stronger and less likely to bend. For example, with the arms; the upper arm is rolled externally and the lower arm is rolled internally.

This twisting action provides more intrinsic strength. Exactly the same action takes place in the legs but in the opposite direction, that is, the upper leg is rolled internally and the lower leg is rolled externally. Spiralic Action is easier to see in the arms because the joints involved have a bigger range of movement.

For example, in *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (Downward Dog), you push down to the thumb side of the hands, (lower arms/internal rotation) as you broaden the shoulders, (upper arms/external rotation). You pull back the groins, (upper legs/internal rotation) as you ground the outer heels, (lower legs/external rotation).

9. RECIPROCAL INHIBITION

Whenever one set of muscles (the agonists) contracts, the opposing muscles (the antagonists) release. This is a built-in feature of the autonomic nervous system. To experience reciprocal inhibition firsthand, sit down in front of a table and gently press the edge of your hand, karate-chop style, onto the tabletop. If you touch the back of your upper arm, your triceps muscle, you notice that it is firmly engaged. If you touch the opposing muscles, the biceps, they are relaxed.



Principles of Practice

In *Paschimottanasana* (Western Stretch) the same mechanism is at play. Your hamstrings are released when you engage their opposing muscle group, the quadriceps. In Yoga whenever we want to stretch a muscle (antagonist) we always consciously contract its opposing muscle (agonist).

10. BODY PROPORTIONS

People come in all shapes and sizes and these differences are both external and internal. No two bodies are exactly the same. In Yoga we must allow for anatomical differences. For example, some people can sometimes have a large head and short arms. When doing *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand) they may not be able to reach the floor with their forearms to create a proper Foundation. In this case we simply put two folded mats in place under their forearms to effectively lengthen their upper arms.

Another example; in *Ardha Matsyendrasana* (Seated Twist), where a student has a large ribcage and cannot reach their arms around their body to bind (where the hands are clasped together behind the back), they stay in the first stage with the arm pushing against the opposite leg. It is important to observe the anatomical proportions of students, which indicates their ability to perform Asanas and their challenges. For instance in *Tolasana* (Scales) if the spine is long and the arms are short the student may place a brick under each hand as an interim measure so that they can have space to lift the body off the mat. Eventually all Asanas are performed without props.

11. ALIGNMENT

When the body and its organs are so placed (in a pose) that the energy of the body (Prana) flows most freely and strongly, we say the Asana is properly aligned. This is easy to see in Asana (Yoga postures). Comparing pranic flow to water moving through a garden hose; if we kink the hose, the water flow will be impeded. When doing Asanas we are attempting to place the bones, ligaments, muscles, tendons and organs in such a way that the body feels light and as if it is disappearing—because everything is in balance.

Imagine a gun barrel and a bullet. If the gun barrel is bent in any direction (other than being perfectly straight) then when the bullet is fired there is going to be a problem. With this image in mind, now imagine an arm. If the elbow is hypo extended (not fully flexed) the energy will not flow well and conversely, with a hyper extended elbow (over extended) the energy will also not flow as well. Therefore, we can say there is theoretically a 'perfect pose'. Whether the student can perform it or not depends upon their anatomical structure and training.



Principles of Practice

Alignment is accomplished by the use of precision when we perform the Asana and through the application of various principles and their techniques, e.g. Foundation, Co-contraction and Spiralic Action, etc. Alignment should be accompanied by close observation of this application and the resulting effects of the breath and the mind.

In reality, alignment encompasses our body, breath, senses, mind, intellect and emotions. So although we start with physical alignment, we have to progress to include the whole human being. We never force ourselves into the 'perfect pose' or any pose for that matter—because we always practice mindfully. In reality we need to work with our bodies in a way that allows us to best move the energy and not get stuck mentally on the "perfect pose" because we are all unique in our anatomy. No two human bodies are the same! The benefits of Yoga come from letting the Asana come out from the body like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Yoga is both a process and a goal (union).

12. TIMING

Refers to the length of time one stays in an Asana. In the beginning, this requires the development of will-power, endurance and character.

For beginners, this means holding poses for a minimum of 30 seconds and gradually building up to holding for 60 seconds.

Experienced students may hold for much longer periods of time, e.g. 5 minutes in *Paschimottanasana* (Western Stretch) and 15 minutes in *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand) and *Salamba Sarvangasana* (Shoulderstand). Eventually the student of Yoga learns how to utilise internal energy (see Alignment) instead of exerting mental force—which is very tiring. Then the experienced student stays in the pose as long as he/she is contemplative and observing the flow of energy (prana). Eventually, performing the Asana is like riding a wave; effort is required to catch the wave, but then you surf the energy of the wave itself. All students need to focus upon the quality of the pose instead of the chronological duration or quantity of the pose. Timing is also related to coordination and sequencing, e.g. jumping out to the side from *Tadasana*.

13. CREATING SPACE

We create more space within the body by extending the skeleton to make more space within the joints and body cavities. This is done by contracting the muscles onto the bones and then using that 'grip' to open up.



Principles of Practice

When practicing Asana, you expand yourself from the median plane in all directions, much like a balloon; keeping in mind that one of the properties of gas is that it will expand to the limits of its container. Imagine being inside a large balloon and attempting to expand your body outwards and evenly to touch the inner walls of the balloon. For example, in *Utthita Trikonasana* (Extended Triangle Pose) you are expanding out not only through your arms, but also through the head, ribcage, sitting bones and feet.

At the same time you are contracting inwards through application of the Mula and Uddiyana (minor) Bandha (core contraction) and Co-Contraction of the muscles (peripheral contraction). These two opposing forces result in opening the body, creating more internal space and a feeling of lightness, while at the same time providing greater stability and support.

14. COILING

Is in reference to how the spine is worked in all backbends and some forward bends. Essentially it means creating more space between individual vertebrae before activating and flexing (forward bends) or extending (backbends) the spine so that it does not kink.

To start Coiling we first activate Mula and Uddiyana (minor) Bandhas—in order to stabilise the lower spine. We then activate the erector spinae muscles to lift and lengthen the spine; creating as much space between the vertebrae as possible and then coiling the spine in such a way as to work the vertebrae evenly.

It is easier to move both the cervical (neck) and lumbar (lower back) vertebrae in backbends as they are already concave and do not have the restriction of being connected to ribs (thoracic) or hips (sacrum). But it is also easy to overwork these soft, more flexible areas.

Coiling means getting as much of the spine working together to spread the movement over the greatest length as evenly as possible. If you are getting back pain in Backbends, then you are kinking and not coiling correctly.

It is also important to understand Nutation and Counternutation in relation to flexing (forward bends) or extending (back bends) the spine. What we think of as the hips, consists of 3 separate parts: ilium (hip bones), sacrum and coccyx.

The sacrum and coccyx are connected to the ilia by ligaments and have independent movement separate from the iliums. The sacrum can move approximately 5 degrees anteriorly (forwards) and 5 degrees posteriorly (backwards) within the pelvic bowl. This makes a significant contribution to both comfort and coiling in both forward bends and backbends.



Principles of Practice

In forward bends, we nutate or tilt the sacrum forwards, as the 5 degree extra movement it allows helps us to take the movement out of the spine and into the hips. In backbends, we counternutate and tilt the sacrum backwards for the same reason. Nutation and Counternutation require the activation of both Mula and Uddiyana (minor) bandhas.

If you were to do a backbend, say, *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (Upward Bow) without Counternutation, the top part of the sacrum (promontory) would move anteriorly (forwards) and this would be felt at L5 (lumbar vertebrae # 5) as compression or pinching, i.e. discomfort or pain.

For comfort and safety, we need to actively move the promontory backwards, which tilts the rest of the spine in the direction we are going; reducing compression and increasing coiling.

To visualise this action, imagine two Yoga blocks stacked on top of each other. The bottom block represents the sacrum and the top block represents L5.

In a back bend, you want both blocks moving in the same direction with the bottom brick leading the movement. Better yet, you want the bottom block to move that little bit extra in order to increase the backbend.

What you do not want is the bottom brick moving forwards as the top block moves backwards as you can see this would cause kinking at the juncture of the two blocks.

Because the sacroiliac joints (where the sacrum joins the ilia) are not parallel to one another (approximately 20 degree lateral angle) the effect is that of Nutation (forward bends), the iliac crests (hip bones) move towards each other and the ischiums (sitting bones) move away from each other.

The opposite happens with Counternutation (backbends), the iliac crests move away from each other, while the ischiums move closer together. In forwards bends this is felt as a spreading of the sitting bones and in backbends, this is felt as a widening of the hip bones. This opening and closing of the ilia and ischiums have important ramifications for childbirth.

15. BALANCING HA/THA

Ha = Sun and Tha = Moon, symbolising opposites, e.g. male/female, hot/cold, right/wrong, good/bad, left/right, rich/poor, yes/no, etc.



Principles of Practice

This is the same concept as Yin/Yang in Chinese philosophy. As in Yin/Yang, Ha/Tha is in a constant state of flux, always seeking equilibrium or balance. Within the body we can see this principle in action with Homeostasis—the condition in which the body's internal environment remains relatively constant, within physiological limits.

In Yoga philosophy the human body is seen as a miniature universe and it contains both the Sun (Ha) and Moon (Tha). The solar and the lunar energies flow through two main nadis, *Pingala* and *Ida*, which start from the right and left nostrils respectively and move down to the base of the spine. *Pingala* is the nadi of the sun, while *Ida* is the nadi of the moon. Inbetween them is *Susumna*, the nadi of fire. *Susumna* nadi is the main channel for the flow of both nervous and pranic energies, and it is situated inside the meru-danda, or spinal column. Kundalini or Divine Cosmic Energy can only flow (from the base of the spine—Muladhara chakra, to the crown of the head—Sahasrara Chakra) when the *Pingala* and *Ida* energies are balanced.

In practical terms, whatever we do on the right side of the body we also do on the left, e.g. in *Utthita Trikonasana* we do both the right and left sides. We also attempt to balance the front with the back and the top with the bottom. We follow this principle in Pranayama, e.g. Nadi Sodhana, where we breathe through the right nostril first and the left nostril second in order to balance the breath, the nervous system and ultimately Ha/Tha.

Another aspect of Balancing Ha/Tha is to synchronise bilateral movements, e.g. when jumping back in a Sun Salutation, from *Ardha Uttanasana* into *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, we move both feet at the same time; not one at a time.

When we move from *Adho Mukha Svanasana* into *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*, we roll over both feet at the same time; not one at a time. Another example would be when lifting the feet back into the Squat Sequence from a Forward Bend or Sitting Pose, again we move both feet at the same time. What ever we do on one side of the body we will also do on the other side to create balance.



16. SYNCHRONISING BREATH AND MOVEMENT

Whenever we move in Asana we synchronise it with either an inhalation or an exhalation. As a general rule, inhalation is for expansive movements and exhalation is for contracting movements, e.g. in *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutations) we inhale when taking the arms overhead, *Urdhva Hastasana* (Upward Hands—expanding) and exhale when flexing forward into *Uttanasana* (Stand Forward Bend—contracting). We inhale when we want the posture to be lighter, e.g. lifting up into *Tolasana* (Scales) and exhale when wanting more power, e.g. *Nakrasana* (Crocodile).

Another way to understand the use of the breath is: Going away from gravity—INHALE; going towards gravity—EXHALE. Of course when someone has low blood pressure, we allow them to take an extra breath and inhale to come up to allow the blood pressure to equalise so as to save them from feeling dizzy or disoriented.

When we regulate the breath in our practice with *Ujjayi* Pranayama, our breathing will be smooth, rhythmic and even i.e. the inhalation and exhalation are of the same length, depth and volume. This regulation of breath induces calmness into the nervous system which encourages internalisation. *Ujjayi* Pranayama activates the parasympathetic nervous system and generates the 'Relaxation Response'.

Because the goal is to emerge from our practice with a calm state of mind and balanced Ha/Tha, we respect the rhythm of the breath by harmonising our movements to it. For example, in *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation) each movement is exactly synchronised with the breath. We do not move if we are not breathing and we time each movement to match the breath.

Note that the breath is paramount and the movement secondary. That is, we match the movement to the breath and not the breath to the movement. If we match the breath to the movement, we then lose its rhythmic flow and generate irritability—because irregular breathing activates the Sympathetic nervous system and generates the 'Fight or Flight Response'.

17. MICRO-MOVEMENTS

When you look at a photo of a Yoga Asana, it is static or motionless. Even when you watch a yogi practicing, it looks as if very little movement is taking place. However, there is and always should be continuous small movements because we are attempting to grow within the Asana.



Principles of Practice

Even if you want to keep still, the breath creates movement. In Yoga, on the inhalation we are feeling for the restrictions of our body/mind, attempting to expand our intelligence into every nook and cranny within and looking to create more internal space. On the exhalation, we carefully and cautiously move into that space. If there is no space, we do not move as that would be unintelligent to not work with the natural energy flow of the body/mind.

These micro movements are incredibly powerful and a similar action causes entire mountain ranges to crumble into dust. Water seeps into the small crevices in rocks. At night when the water freezes, it expands and fractures a bit of the rock causing it to slowly disintegrate; the process of weathering.

In our Asana practice, we utilise a technique called the 'Lock and Key Method', which allows us to amplify the power and impact of micro movements. When we come up against a physical/mental restriction, on an inhalation, we direct our mind (insert) into the limitation, e.g. a tight hamstring muscle on the back of the thigh. This is inserting the 'Key' into the 'Lock'.

On the exhalation, we consciously relax the targeted area (hamstrings), which is like turning the key in order to open the lock. We do this with every breath, until the desired result is accomplished.

If I have a 'Lock' and a 'Key', not only do I have to insert the key into the lock to have any effect, I also have to turn the key! The same applies to Asana, i.e. I have to insert my mind into the targeted area. But, in order to have any affect, I also have to release the tension. I can insert a key into a lock, but if I do not turn it, the lock will not open. Because we synchronise our movement to the breath, we insert our minds on the inhalation and turn on the exhalation. The inhalation is a natural time to focus and the exhalation is a natural time to relax.

Another way to look at this is to imagine placing a hard clod of earth into a bucket of water. The water will quickly dissolve the earth, without having to use any physical force, i.e. smash it. Here the water represents our minds and the earth our bodies. It is much more intelligent to use the power of the mind to open our bodies instead of physically forcing a movement and risking an injury. Also, force does not increase the body/mind connection and teach us how to harmonise breath and movement.



Principles of Practice

18. VINYASA

Vinyasa is the connecting or linking of Yoga postures in a smooth and fluid sequence in order to maintain focus, concentration and mindfulness as you move from one position to the next. Mindfulness is greatly enhanced by the application of Vinyasa.

When you look in a Yoga book you see the individual Yoga postures. Vinyasa is the technique used to link them together. If you think of a pearl necklace, the individual pearls represent the postures and the string holding the necklace together represents Vinyasa.

Vinyasa can be any linking movement, e.g. jumping out to the side from *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose) to perform *Utthita Trikonasana* (Extended Triangle Pose), moving from a sitting pose via *Bhumi Namaskar* (Earth Salutation), or performing a half *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation) to link from any Forward Bend to the next—and even between sides.

Vinyasa is a strong additive to an Asana practice and should be gradually introduced as initially it can be tiring. With regular practice you build up strength and stamina and you appreciate the huge contribution Vinyasa makes to your practice.

Benefits:

- Builds strength – both upper body and abdominal
- Generates heat – but can also be cooling, e.g. when doing arm balancing
- Increases focus – so practice becomes a moving meditation
- Irons out kinks – removes discomfort from posture just preformed
- Realigns body, breath, emotions and mind
- Reinforces the use of Bandhas – required for supporting and lifting
- Trims and slims the body
- Creates internal lightness
- Makes the practice graceful
- Enhances relaxation because of the increased body/mind connection.



Principles of Practice

Postures/Asanas can be practiced in four different modes:

1. Performing each Asana separately and holding it for a period of time.
2. Quarter Vinyasa – connecting two or more Asanas by flowing from the current Asana:
Western Stretch (Paschimottanasana) as our example, then ...

Inhale – Ear Ring (Lolasana)

Exhale – Downward Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Inhale – Ear Ring (Lolasana)

Exhale – sitting for next Asana.

3. Half Vinyasa – connecting two or more Asanas by flowing from the current Asana:
Western Stretch (Paschimottanasana) as our example, then ...

Inhale – Ear Ring (Lolasana)

Exhale – Four Limb Staff Pose (Ardha Chaturanga Dandasana)

Inhale – Upward Facing Dog Pose (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana)

Exhale – Downward Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Inhale – Ear Ring (Lolasana)

Exhale – sitting for next Asana.

4. Full Vinyasa – connecting two or more Asanas by flowing from the current Asana:
Western Stretch (Paschimottanasana) as our example, then ...

Inhale – Ear Ring (Lolasana)

Exhale – Four Limb Staff Pose (Ardha Chaturanga Dandasana)

Inhale – Upward Facing Dog Pose (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana)

Exhale – Downward Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Inhale – Half Standing Forward Bend (Ardha Uttanasana)

Exhale – Full Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Inhale – Upward Hands (Urdhva Hastasana)

Exhale – Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

Inhale – Upward Hands (Urdhva Hastasana)

Exhale – Full Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Inhale – Half Standing Forward Bend (Ardha Uttanasana)

Exhale – Four Limb Staff Pose (Chaturanga Dandasana)

Inhale – Upward Facing Dog Pose (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana)

Exhale – Downward Facing Dog Pose (Ardha Uttanasana)

Inhale – Ear Ring (Lolasana)

Exhale – sitting for next Asana.



Principles of Practice

As you can see moving from a quarter to half to full Vinyasa will take time and practice and is best learned from a certificated Knoff Yoga Teacher or you can purchase the DVD or USB 'Sun Salutations and Squat Sequence' by visiting www.knoffyoga.com.

Adding Vinyasa to your practice will lift it to a new level of dynamism, but it should be approached respectfully and introduced gradually—quarter, half and then depending upon the amount of time you have for practice, full Vinyasa. Particularly use the full Vinyasa anytime you are taking a 'short' break, e.g. going to the toilet.

If you watch someone practice Yoga without Vinyasa, you generally tend to see lots of superfluous and distracted movements, e.g. brushing hair away from the face, readjusting clothing, looking around the room, etc. When you include Vinyasa the practice becomes much more focused as these unconscious distractions are replaced with consciously directed movements.

Once you have been practicing Vinyasa for a while and then go back to a non-Vinyasa approach, you will find it feels heavy, dull and dis-connected in comparison. The aim of an Asana practice is to finish feeling calm, clear, light and centered, and of course we take these benefits into our enhanced daily life!

19. BALANCING STRENGTH & FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility without strength is weakness, strength without flexibility is rigidity. As a bird needs two wings to fly, we also need flexibility with strength to make our practice balanced. Keep in mind that wings have to be of the same shape and size, i.e. you cannot have an eagle's wing on the right and a dove's on the left.

Generally, you have a propensity for either flexibility or strength and you will need to consciously include the parts of a Yoga practice you do not like to compensate for the mind's tendency to do only what you do like. This is where a set sequence, e.g. Foundation Level comes into its own and pays dividends. Over a 12-month period the person who sticks with a balanced program is going to make far more progress than someone who wakes up in the morning and decides what to practice depending upon how they feel at that moment—or going with the flow...



20. PROGRESSION

All things have a start; mature and stabilise for a period of time, then die. This is the natural order and the way things should be. In our practice, we look at Asana as also having these three parts:

1. Beginning (going into the pose)
2. Middle (staying in the pose, being the pose)
3. End (coming out of the pose).

All phases are equally important and require your full attention. The tendency of the mind is to jump ahead to the next thing (instability) and we then can fall out of Yoga poses or abandon them. This is exactly the time (being inattentive) when we are most likely to get hurt.

Practicing without mindfulness is not Yoga. When we extend the chronological time of our stay in a pose to such an extent that we have no energy left to thoughtfully come out of the pose, it is like utilising all one's energies and resources while going up the mountain and having nothing left to come down.

In relation to our practice there are also three parts:

- **Warm Up** – Sun and Earth Salutations warm the body, awaken the breath and synchronise the body with the breath.
- **Main Part** – Inversions (heating) and Arm Balancing continue to heat the body. This heat helps to increase flexibility and reduces the chance of injury. Standing Poses awaken cellular intelligence in the legs, pelvis and spine. Forward Bends and Sitting Poses gently warm the spine and mobilise the hips. Abdominals and Twists prepare the spine for stronger movements. Backbends work the spine in its fullness and are the strongest movement of the spine.
- **Cool Down** – Inversions (cooling) and Relaxation cool the body and prepare it for the return to the day's activities. Relaxation is the opportunity to absorb on a cellular level all the input from the Warm Up and Main Part of our practice.



21. MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the state of mind when we are completely open to the present, aware of what we are doing in this moment. With mindfulness, there are no barriers between us and our actions. We are aware of what we are doing, of the effect we are having on ourselves, on others, and on the world. We are plugged in to the now, without the psychological baggage we normally carry.

Mindfulness is the feeling aspect of our practice. It means paying attention and taking care. We turn our minds inwards in order to observe and feel the internal environment. We utilise the practice of sweeping with the mind holographically, that is, three-dimensional and directing our attention to every part of our bodies; starting with the foundation and working upwards.

A danger in Yoga is to only observe the strong sensations and neglect the subtle ones. For example, in *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (Down Dog) the tendency is to push the chest strongly towards the floor in order to feel the BIG stretch.

If you look at someone doing this, you will see they are overworking some parts of the body and under working others—leading to imbalance instead of harmony. When the sun is shining you cannot see the stars, but they are there! We need to expand our minds to include the entire universe, not only the bright objects.

Proprioception (the receipt of information from muscles, tendons, and the labyrinth that enables the brain to determine movements and position of the body and its parts) or knowing where our body is in space is part of Mindfulness. Mindfulness greatly enhances proprioception.

A yogic tool to help develop Mindfulness is *Drishti*. *Drishti* is the directing of the eyes to specific focal points in order to assist with concentration within the mind.

For example, in coming to *Urdhva Svanasana* from *Chaturanga* where we are looking straight down, neck straight, when we come up to *Urdhva Svanasana*, *drishti* leads the way, if we look up over the eyebrows, we open the thoracic spine and we can coil the spine, forward and upward.

Your sight is being directed upwards towards the ceiling or sky—BUT you are not really looking at anything because the point of the technique is to turn the mind inwards. So the *Drishti* is used externally (20%) to direct the eyes and internally (80%) to focus the mind (100%).



Principles of Practice

Imagine you are sitting in *Padmasana* (Lotus Pose) and attempting to bring the mind to a point of stillness AND your eyes are roving around the room looking at anything that catches your attention.

This movement of the eyes leads to a fluctuation or churning of the mind—the opposite of what we had hoped to achieve with our practice. The purpose of Mindfulness is to develop supple mindedness.

The meditative quality of an Asana can be greatly enhanced by simultaneously applying:

- Mula and Uddiyana Bandhas (and Jalandhara if applicable)
- *Ujjayi* Pranayama
- Drishti.

None of these three techniques happens by itself and requires a focused mind and plenty of practice to ensure their concurrent application. When all 3 are applied at the same time it is very easy to turn concentration (*dharana*) into meditation (*dhyana*).

Drishti, or focused looking, follows the energetic flow of the Asana. For example, in Backbends we look over the forehead and backwards. In Forward bends we look forwards (keep the neck long—*Tadasana* spine). In Twists we look to the side (horizontally at eye level).

We are not really looking at anything, but using the focused gaza to help steady the mind. Approximately 20% of the drishti is external and 80% internal. Use this 80% to gain a holographic understanding/appreciation of the body/mind.

The main difference between Yoga and exercise is the conscious involvement of attention to what we are doing. The moment we are inattentive we are no longer doing Yoga. That is why in Knoff Yoga we do not use mirrors, listen to music or burn incense during practice.

These external objects pull the sensory organs/mind away from the internal focus necessary to yoke the body and mind together. This mindfulness can then be taken into daily life and into whatever we are doing—making our lives richer and fuller.



22. EFFORTLESS EFFORT

We strive towards making our practice effortless. This is easy to see in someone who has mastered their discipline, be it, dance, martial arts, swimming, gymnastics, acting, tennis, or whatever...

The paradox is that it takes a tremendous amount of practice to get to the level where the discipline is so skillful it appears effortless. The benefit of Effortless Effort is that the mind and body at this stage have become one. In sports this state of mind is called "Being in the Zone". This unification of mind and body is another way of describing Yoga.

23. FIVE ELEMENTS

The traditional elements of the ancient world are: Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space (Ether). Everything in the phenomenal world is made up of a combination of these elements. Because we are born into the material plane and are intuitively connected with the Elements, it is useful to consider their qualities in relation to our practice.

- **Earth** relates to Asana and focuses on the firm, solid physical structure.
- **Water** relates to Vinyasa and focuses on the connecting techniques synchronising movement with breath.
- **Fire** relates to Bandhas and is the muscular and energetic locks which lift and transform energies.
- **Air** relates to Pranayama with controlled and focused energetic breathing.
- **Space** relates to Drishti which are the specific focal/gaze points for directing and controlling the mind.

The Five Elements can be compared to the spokes of a wheel. Yoga's effectiveness depends upon the presence of them all. If one or more are missing or over emphasised, the wheel will not roll true, and is susceptible to damage. The Principles of Practice can also be looked at through the lens of the Five Elements and categorised as follows:



Principles of Practice

EARTH	WATER	FIRE	AIR	SPACE
Foundation Cardinal Directions Centering Earth/Heaven Extension Body Proportions Alignment Balancing Flexibility and Strength	Alignment Coiling Balancing Ha/Tha Synchronising Breath and Movement Effortless Effort Vinyasa Progression	Co-Contraction Bandhas Spiralic Action Reciprocal Inhibition Balancing Flexibility and Strength	Synchronising Breath and Movement Enjoyment	Creating Space Cardinal Direction Earth/Heaven Extension Mindfulness Enjoyment

24. ENJOYMENT

At the end of the day, if you do not enjoy your practice, you will not maintain it. In Yoga we think in terms of maintaining our practice over a lifetime... not weeks or even months, but years...and without enjoying the process this will not happen.

In Tai Chi the term 'play' is used to describe the approach to practice and it is a very helpful attitude. We play our body during practice just like a musician plays their instrument.

Another helpful attitude comes from the children's fairytale of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. Goldilocks searched for the 'just right' bed—not too hard, nor too soft; for the 'just right' porridge—not too hot, nor too cold. The bed and porridge has to be 'just right' and of course our approach to practice has to be just right as well—not too hard, nor too soft. Not too hot, nor too cold.

It is important to approach our practice with the right attitude, cultivating a mind-set that is firm yet flexible, breath that is strong yet soothing and a body that is powerful yet pliable.

The purpose of Yoga is to enhance life and it is essential for all students to practice slowly and gently, without strain, adjusting day-to-day according to energy levels and not being concerned at all with what you can or cannot do. It is important to work at your own pace and not attempt any comparisons with your fellow students. You are unique and Yoga will help you express your own individuality and enjoy the process!



Principles of Sequencing

The 8 Limbs of Yoga

The 8 Limbs of Yoga as enumerated in the sage Patanjali's classic book, *Yoga Sutra*, are:

- **Yama** – our attitude towards our environment and consists of 5 restraints
- **Niyama** – our attitude towards ourselves and consists of 5 observances
- **Asana** – the practice of body/mind exercises
- **Pranayama** – the control and expansion of vital energy
- **Pratyahara** – the redirecting of our sensory organs and their input from the external to the internal
- **Dharana** – the ability to direct and concentrate our minds
- **Dhyana** – sustained concentration of 2 minutes or more is meditation
- **Samadhi** – seeing the connection of everything as emanating from the one source, called self-realisation or universal consciousness.

This classical Yoga system is a sequence, that is, a following of one thing after another. Philosophically, in Yoga, we crawl before we walk and walk before we run, that is, there is an intelligent and safe sequence in specific stages.

Most people are aware that in Martial Arts there is also a system of progression utilising coloured belts, for example: white, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, brown, black (levels of black as well).

When Yoga is taught properly, it too has a clear system for progressing, but without the external acknowledgment of rank.

The Yamas and Niyamas provide the moral foundation (principles of right and wrong in relation to human action and character) for our practice. Asana and Pranayama develop a strong and flexible body and clear our emotional and energetic blockages.

Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana provide the techniques to attain union (Yoga = union) with universal consciousness or Samadhi.



Principles of Sequencing

Why sequence?

The purpose of sequencing is to develop a practice which works the most effectively. Correct sequencing supports and helps progress your practice systematically. Sequences are constructed from clearly defined and understood concepts.

General thoughts

- Sequencing refers to placing things in a particular order.
- When you are doing more than one thing, sequencing is inevitable.
- Sequencing will be either conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional.
- A conscious or intentional practice is more powerful than an unconscious or unintentional one.
- Doing a regular sequenced practice provides a point of reference for the daily fluctuations in the body, breath, emotions and mind.
- We progress and benefit more.

Some guidelines

- Start with the foundation and build upwards. In Asana, the foundation is that part of the body which contacts the ground.
- From the foundation, work your way upwards from the lowest points of reference to the highest, vis. ankles, knees, hips, shoulders and head. See *Triangulation*.
- The Points of Reference closest to the foundation take precedence over those above it in ascending priority, i.e. in *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose), the feet are first; ankles second; knees third; hips fourth; shoulders fifth; and head sixth. In *Salamba Sirsasana* (Headstand) the head, forearms and hands are first; shoulders second; hips third; knees fourth; and ankles fifth.
- Go from the general to the specific.
- Go from the gross to the subtle.
- Go from external to the internal.
- Go from the internal to the external.
- Go from the parts to the whole.



Principles of Sequencing

Within the practice:

- Start with *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutations) in order to warm the body, awaken the breath and synchronise the body with the breath. Muscles must be warmed up before deep stretches. Joints must be opened gradually and systematically so as not to strain them. Poses that work more deeply into the muscles and joints should follow those that are more superficial.
- Regulated balanced breathing, known as *Ujjayi Pranayama*, is practiced from the moment you get on your Yoga mat until you lie down in relaxation (*Savasana*). *Ujjayi Pranayama* turns on the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) activating the "Relaxation Response", which means reduced stress.
- Continue with Inversions (heating) to heat the body more and awaken the brain. This heat further helps to increase flexibility and together with conscious correct practice prevents injury.
- Continue with Standing Poses to awaken cellular intelligence in the legs, pelvis, and spine and develop vitality. Standing Poses are the safest place to learn the Principles of Practice. Basically the worst thing that can happen to a student is that they fall over. The proprioception and balance developed from Standing Poses is utilised in all other Asana groups.
- Continue with Arm Balancings to continue with heating the body. If Arm Balancings were left to the end of practice, we may not have sufficient strength or energy to do them safely. With regular practice they build strength in the upper body and teach the correct application of Mula and Uddiyana (minor) Bandha.
- Continue with Forward Bends and Sitting Poses to gently warm the spine and mobilise the hips. Poses requiring more energy, effort and balance are performed before poses requiring less. After *Surya Namaskar*, Inversions (heating), Standing Poses, and Arm Balancings, the body may be tired and moving to the floor with Forward Bends and Sitting Poses provides a rest.
- Continue with Abdominals and Twists, which prepare the spine for stronger movements. Note, Abdominals warm the muscles in the waist and once they have been warmed they are better prepared for stretching and twisting.
- Continue with Backbends to work the spine fully, as they are the strongest movement for the spine. The awareness and enhanced proprioception created from the preceding Asana groups assist with safely moving into the generally unfamiliar territory of Backbends, i.e. they teach us how to work correctly.



Principles of Sequencing

- Finish with Inversions (cooling) and Relaxation to cool the body and prepare for returning to the day's activities. Most importantly, Relaxation is the opportunity to absorb on a cellular level all the input from the practice—which is then stored in the body.

Asana Group Sequencing

- Sun and Earth Salutations
- Inverted Poses (heating)
- Standing Poses
- Arm Balancings
- Forward Bends
- Sitting Poses
- Abdominals
- Twists
- Backbends
- Inverted Poses (cooling)
- Relaxation.



Principles of Sequencing

5-Week Rotational Sequence

(WEEKLY THEME)

In a typical class, where all the 8 Limbs of Yoga are taught, there is often insufficient time to cover all Asana groups. In order to properly teach Asanas we ensure that over a month, we cover all Asana groups in a weekly theme:

Week 1. Sun and Earth Salutations and Inverted Poses

Week 2. Standing Poses and Forward Bends/Sitting Poses

Week 3. Arm Balancings and Abdominals

Week 4. Twists & Backbends

Week 5. Consolidation (Vinyasa Flow).

Note: Sun Salutations and Relaxation are included in every class. When Sun Salutations are part of the weekly theme, more time is spent on teaching them—when they are not included, they are used as a warm up. Attempt to balance each class with at least one each of the other Asana groups.



Principles of Sequencing

LEVELS

Level 1 – Discovery

Level 2 – Chair Yoga

Level 3 – Foundation

Level 4 – Pregnancy Yoga

Level 5 – Yoga Holistic Healing A

Level 6 – Yoga Holistic Healing B

Level 7 – Intermediate

Level 8 – Advanced

Level 9 – Master.

- The Levels of practice in Knoff Yoga are designed to take the student from being a Beginner all the way to a Master. The Levels are based on forty years of study with the world's leading Yoga teachers.
- Each Level is properly sequenced in the same way, so the student is prepared for the next level.
- The same sequencing principles and Asana groups are used in all Levels—making it easier to learn and teach. The teacher and student only have to memorise the sequence once. The Levels provide a clear path of progression for students. Students know what is required of them to progress to the next level.
- Following the Levels speeds up the student's progress.
- The Levels provide the Yoga school with a structured syllabus.
- The weekly theme provides the teacher with a systematic program.
- Teaching the Levels provides cohesion within the Yoga school.

In Knoff Yoga, all students are on the same path or continuum and students of all Levels have a shared or common experience, which builds the Yoga community.

ADDITIONAL **PRINCIPLES** FOR TEACHERS





Principles of Demonstration

What to Do

- Name the Asana
 - English only for Level 2 – Chair Yoga, Level 4 – Pregnancy Yoga, Level 5 – Yoga Holistic Healing A, and Level 6 – Yoga Holistic Healing B.
 - English first and Sanskrit second for Level 1 – Discovery, and Level 3 – Foundation.
 - Sanskrit first and English second for Level 7 – Intermediate, Level 8 – Advanced, and Level 9 – Master.
- If you want the students to use props, have them get them and set them up before your demonstration.
- Position yourself where you are clearly visible to all the students. Face the students.
- Demonstrate the mirror image of the Asana.
- Select appropriate viewing angles. You may need to call the students to where you are demonstrating. Make certain every student comes to watch. Make certain every student actually watches.
- Insist on attention and make eye contact.
- Ensure students look at what you demonstrate rather than at your face.
- Demonstrate the way you want them to practice the Asana.
- If using a prop, demonstrate with the prop.
- Demonstrate the Asana in the beginning so the students get a clear image.
- Some students learn visually by watching, some verbally by hearing and some kinesthetically—by doing. Include all three methods in your demonstration.
- Take your time, let there be pauses in your talk.
- Give a maximum of three points per demonstration.
- Present the Asana with dynamic, observable actions.
- Demonstrate precisely and clearly.
- Make sure there is congruence between the verbal instruction and the physical demonstration of the Asana.
- Be consistent in your explanations.
- Keep demonstrations short and relevant.
- Let the students practice the points to your and their satisfaction before moving on.



Principles of Demonstration

- Demonstrate again if necessary.
- Do not demonstrate mistakes until after you have observed them in your students.
- If to make a point by demonstrating what the student is doing (the wrong way), always finish showing the right way. The students retain the last input they are taught.

The Voice of Experience

- Break Asanas down into their component parts.
- New teachers demonstrate too much.
- An experienced teacher will use a student to demonstrate the point needing to be made. This way the teacher maintains eye contact and can observe if the points being made are actually understood.
- When picking a student for demonstrating, choose the one who can best demonstrate the point you wish to make.
- Keep students working while you talk.
- Have students explain something back to you to ensure they have understood.



Principles of Observation

The Teacher's Responsibility

- Set up the class so you can see all the students and they can see you.
- Reposition yourself to teach each Asana from the most advantageous position.
- Observe the student's pose as a whole, looking for harmony and balance or a lack thereof.
- Observe student's posture, eyes, facial expression, skin colour and breathing.
- Look to see if your instruction was carried out.
- Do not move on if it has not.
- Base your instruction on what you observe, not on memorised words.

Helpful Points

- View the student from all angles, but do not walk around aimlessly.
- Look at the median, or midsagittal plane to see if the body is placed correctly on the right and left sides.
- Look at the frontal, or coronal plane to see if the body is placed correctly between the anterior and posterior parts.
- Look at the transverse, or horizontal plane to see if the body is placed correctly in the superior and inferior parts.
- Look at the transverse, or horizontal plane at the level of each joint (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders and ears) to see if they are balanced.
- Relate all observations back to *Tadasana* (Mountain pose) the yogic anatomical position.



Principles of Adjusting

Think About It

- Adjusting is for illumination of the student's understanding. It does not mean putting the student deeper into the pose but helping them find where the body opens and allows a better energy flow.
- You are developing a relationship of trust and care.
- Adjusting is encouraging not forcing.
- Much that needs to be corrected is impossible to correct in completed Asanas. The student may need to come partially out of the Asana and go in again with correction through the right stages, to avoid forcing.

In The Class

- Use the student's name.
- Know what it is you want to adjust before you touch. This comes from your own practice.
- Correct by words first, physical touch/adjustment second.
- Touch ethically and appropriately.
- Touch appropriately so the desired effect is realised.
- Respect boundaries both physical and emotional.
- Give equal attention to all students, both male and female.
- Make sure you touch all students at least once per class.
- Provide physical support to the student, so they will release into your touch.
- Place yourself within their centre of gravity.
- Keep the student within their centre of gravity while adjusting.
- Do not touch unnecessarily as the attention of the student goes to where you touch.
- Observe how your adjustment is received.
- Ensure student has their balance before leaving them.
- Give the student a prop only if necessary.
- Do not over adjust; eventually the student needs to become independent.



Principles of Teaching

60-minute class	Percentage (%)	Time (minutes)	90-minute class	Percentage (%)	Time (minutes)
Meditation	5	3	Meditation	5	4.5
Pranayama	12	7	Pranayama	12	10.5
Asana	66	40	Asana	66	60
Relaxation	12	7	Relaxation	12	10.5
Philosophy	5	3	Philosophy	5	4.5
Total	100	60	Total	100	90

ASANA SEQUENCE

Sun and Earth Salutations
Inverted Poses (heating)
Standing Poses
Arm Balancings
Forward Bends
Sitting Poses
Abdominals
Twists
Backbends
Inverted Poses (cooling)
Relaxation

FIVE-WEEK ROTATIONAL SEQUENCE

(Weekly Theme)
Sun and Earth Salutations & Inverted Poses
Standing Poses & Forward Bends/Sitting Poses
Arm Balancings & Abdominals
Twists & Backbends
Consolidation/Vinyasa

When teaching weekly themes 1 to 4, slow them down and focus on the details but teach the rest of the Asana groups with a Vinyasa focus in order to keep the class energised and leave the students feeling great.



Principles of Teaching

Teacher's Responsibility

If you accept a student into your class/school, you are responsible for them. If they turn out to be difficult, you still have the responsibility to teach them. You cannot and should not ignore them—this is unethical.

If you find for some reason you really cannot relate to a student, or that they are disruptive, then an option is to direct them to another Yoga class/school. If you cannot teach them, then it is more helpful to send them to someone who can.

However, the first option is to speak to the student privately to voice your concerns AND give them the opportunity to explain their version of the situation. You also have the responsibility to consider the long-term affect upon the student. An unskillfully handled situation can negatively impact upon the student, your reputation and the Yoga school for many years.

The teacher sets the example:

- Be early, at least 20 minutes.
- Remember your student's names.
- Be friendly and smile.
- Be clean, neat and tidy.
- Be professional.

In the classroom:

- Use the student's name.
- Take control of your class.
- Teach your students how and where to place their mats.
- Have students fill up all spaces in the front rows first.
- Advise students what props are required before the class starts.



Principles of Teaching

Teaching Tips

- Explain Yoga is a process, not a destination
- Explain that Yoga is a philosophy and not a religion
- Explain meaning of chant
- Explain meaning of Om
- Progress slowly and carefully
- Name the Asana/Pranayama
- For Beginners use English first and Sanskrit second
- For Intermediate use Sanskrit first and English second
- For Advanced use only Sanskrit
- Maintain eye contact with the students
- Be confident in your teaching (not arrogant or aggressive)
- Challenge students at their appropriate levels
- Be encouraging and give positive feedback
- Keep calm
- Keep your voice clear, confident and low—no yelling!
- Give clear verbal instructions. Did they do it? Follow through, you may need to go to the student and adjust as well
- Be consistent in your explanations
- Do not give more than three points at a time—less is better!
- Use constructive language
- Explain the benefits
- Give instructions according to what is actually happening
- If possible, ensure you touch/adjust each student in your class at least once per class.

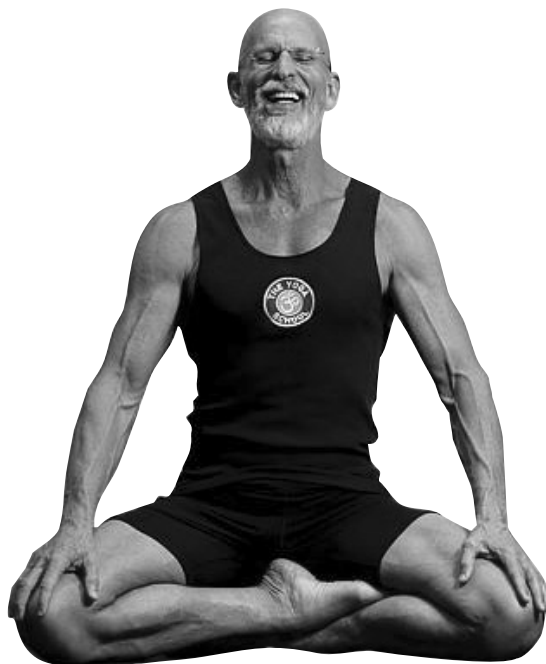


Principles of Teaching

Helpful Points

- Be patient
- Be diplomatic
- Be compassionate
- Teach people first and Asana second
- Emphasise non-competition
- Ensure each student experiences some success
- Recommend homework, both practical and theory
- Make the study of Yoga a lifelong practice
- Thank your students for attending; they could have gone to the movies.

Note: You will make your teaching more effective and help your students learn quicker if you link all Asanas back to Tadasana (Mountain), the yogic anatomical position. This linking makes it much easier for students to absorb new information as they have a base of reference.



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