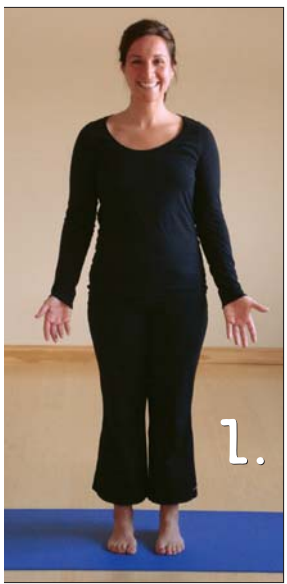


Strike a Pose



Yoga helps us get comfortable with our bodies. None of the poses below should be forced or strained. Hold each pose for five relaxed breaths, or for as long as you are able. Do your best and have fun.

When these positions are done in order, they create the Sun Salutation.

Mountain Pose

Sanskrit: *Tadasana* (tah-DAHS-anna)

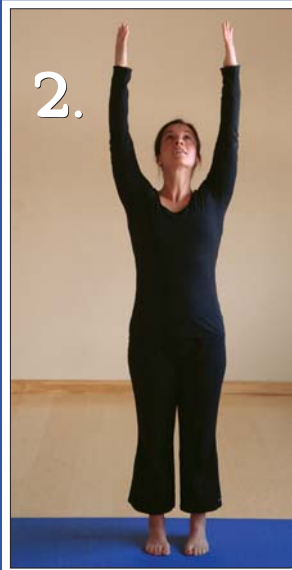
Plant your feet flat about three to five inches apart. Stand straight, but be relaxed. Pull your shoulders back and rest your hands at your sides, palms facing forward. Pick your chin up and face forward.

1.

Upward Hand Pose

Sanskrit: *Urdhva Hastasana* (erd-vah ahs-TAHS-anna)

From Mountain Pose, exhale and let your shoulders and arms relax. As you inhale, raise your arms from your sides in an arc until they are over your head, palms facing forward. Keep your feet flat. Look straight ahead. Reach toward the ceiling, feeling the stretch come not only from your arms and shoulders but also from your back.



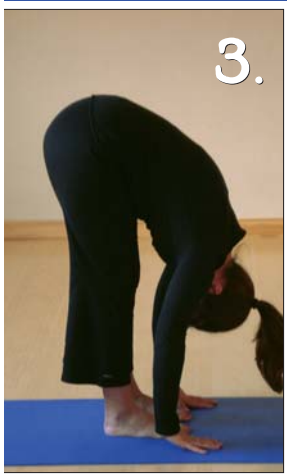
2.

3.

Standing Forward Bend

Sanskrit: *Uttanasana* (OOT-tan-AHS-anna)

From the Upward Hand Pose, exhale and bend from your hips, folding your torso and arms toward the floor. Keep your feet flat and your knees slightly bent. Point your tailbone toward the ceiling, and bring your chest as close to your thighs as you are able. Rest your fingers (or palms if you are able) on the floor. With each exhalation, allow your body to relax deeper into the bend.



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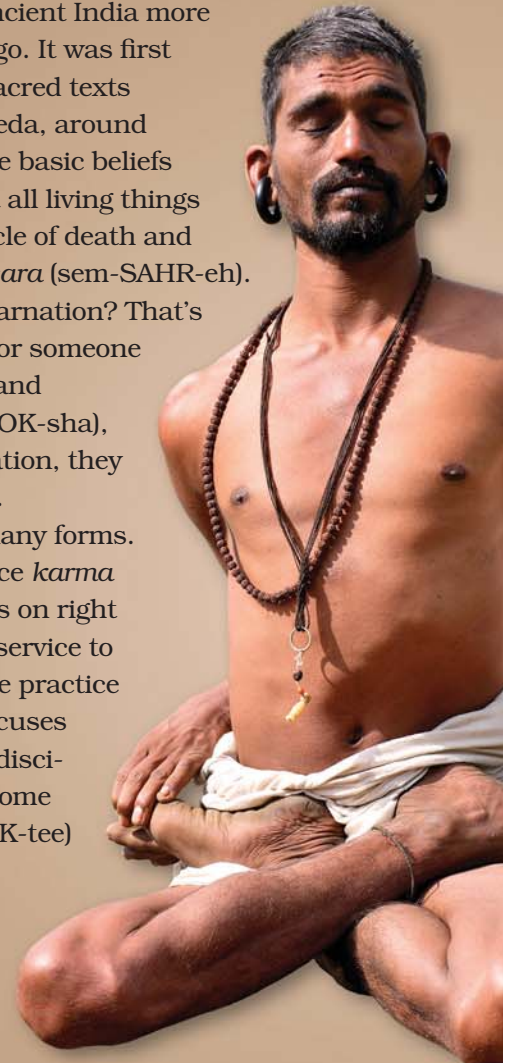
by Jason D. Nemeth

Have you ever wanted to tie your body up like a pretzel? Me neither! Yet that's the first thing many of us think of when we hear the word "yoga." But if that's all it is, why are yoga centers opening across the world — from South Africa to Japan to Cuba to Ireland? Why are schools, fitness centers, and even prisons across America adding yoga to their schedules?

Let's start at the beginning

Yoga began in ancient India more than 3,500 years ago. It was first mentioned in the sacred texts of Hinduism, the Veda, around 1500 B.C. One of the basic beliefs of Hinduism is that all living things are trapped in a cycle of death and rebirth called *samsara* (sem-SAHR-eh). Ever heard of reincarnation? That's *samsara*! In order for someone to break this cycle and achieve *moksha* (MOK-sha), which means liberation, they must practice yoga.

Yoga comes in many forms. Some people practice *karma yoga*, which focuses on right action and a life of service to others. Some people practice *raja yoga*, which focuses on meditating and disciplining the mind. Some practice *bhakti* (BUK-tee) *yoga*, which is the path of devotion or worship, where one tries to make



everything they do honor God. The goals of all these kinds of yoga are the same — to break the cycle of death and rebirth, to achieve *moksha*.

The type of yoga most familiar to us today is *hatha yoga*, which focuses on bodily postures. It was popularized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by teachers who traveled from India to the West. Why did people get so excited about these teachers and start opening yoga schools all over the world? Well, for lots of reasons, but one of the main ones is that yoga is good for you! It increases blood flow throughout the body, tones the muscles, and increases alertness and energy levels.

So, you may be asking, do you need to be a Hindu or believe in reincarnation in order to take up yoga? Not at all! Many people practice hatha yoga for its physical benefits, with spiritual benefits of secondary or no concern. In fact, in India — the very birthplace of yoga — the government recently added yoga to all grade school curriculums in order to combat growing obesity among children.

So, how do you get started? Finding a teacher is usually a good beginning. I spoke with Leah Giovengo who teaches at Schoolhouse Yoga in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to get the inside scoop on yoga's benefits for children and teens. According to Giovengo, "Yoga is a great way to work out and have fun at the same time. It also helps to build muscle strength and flexibility, and improve posture and balance." But that isn't all. Giovengo also told me that the relaxation techniques and breathing exercises learned in yoga can help students deal with stress and anger.

If you are interested in learning more about yoga, try the poses that Giovengo modeled in the Strike a Pose sidebar.

Learn more about yoga

Check out these Web sites:

Find yoga classes anywhere in the world:

www.yogafinder.com

Read all about yoga: www.yogajournal.com

I Love Yoga: A Guide for Kids and Teens
by Ellen Schwartz, Tandem Library, 2003.



Plank

Sanskrit: *Chaturanga Dandasana* (chaht-tour-ANG-ah don-DAHS-anna)

From the Standing Forward Bend, relax and get down on all fours, keeping your knees parallel with your hips and your arms straight beneath your shoulders. Face the floor and hold your head straight so that your head, neck, and back form a straight line all the way to your tailbone. Straighten your legs, tucking your toes under so that they are flat on the floor. Keep your arms straight. Hold this pose steadily but not stiffly.



Cobra

Sanskrit: *Bhujangasana* (boo-jang-GAHS-anna)

From the Plank, exhale and lower your body flat to the floor. Point your toes back. Place your palms flat, parallel with your chest. Your arms should be bent with your elbows pointing back. Keep your feet, legs, hips, and abdomen flat to the floor. Inhale and straighten your arms as much as you are able. This will raise your upper torso from the floor. Widen your shoulders so that your chest is stretched open. Face forward and exhale.

Downward Facing Dog

Sanskrit: *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (AH-doh MOO-kah shvah-NAHS-anna)

From the Cobra, lie flat and then return to all fours. Tuck your toes so that they are flat on the floor. Exhale, keeping your arms straight and palms flat. Straighten your legs and push your tailbone toward the ceiling. Walk your hands forward a little to get a full stretch. Your body should form a triangle. Allow your head to hang loosely.



Finish this Sun Salutation by reversing the order of the postures, starting with Downward Facing Dog and working backward to the Mountain Pose. Remember, pay attention to your body and breathe easily.