



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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I hope you enjoyed my first Karuna Yoga Newsletter. Copies of previous newsletters can be found on my website at [www.iremia.net](http://www.iremia.net)

Every newsletter will contain information on different aspects of yoga and how you can benefit from this in your daily life. If you want details on any particular ailment and how yoga can help, I am open to suggestions.

## Yoga for Stress

The practice of the asanas (postures) and yoga breathing techniques is the most effective and natural remedy for stress. If you come to a class feeling stressed and anxious you usually leave the class feeling more relaxed. Yoga generates energy in the body, stimulating the cells and relaxing tense muscles. The practice of yoga harmonises your body and mind and the steady pace of the breath relaxes the body and detaches the mind from the worries of the external world.

The cumulative effects of stress can damage your health and undermine your emotional stability. Emotional tension and muscular tension are closely related. Continuous stress causes habitual muscular contraction, severe muscle and joint pain and tightness in the jaw or facial muscles. If you suffer from stress, you may experience severe indigestion or irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, migraine, a feeling of constriction in the diaphragm, breathlessness or insomnia. Too much stress ultimately leads to disease, premature ageing, or in extreme cases, fatal illness.

To reduce stress, the body and mind cannot be treated as separate components. The tension associated with stress is stored mainly in the muscles, the diaphragm, and the nervous system. If these areas are relaxed, stress is reduced. Yogic methods of deep relaxation have a profound effect on the central nervous system, as well as the circulatory, respiratory and digestive systems. When a part of the body is tense, circulation to that area is decreased, reducing immunity. Yoga works on that area to relieve tension and increase circulation. Blood flow to all parts of the body improves, stabilising the heart rate and blood pressure. Rapid, shallow breathing becomes deep and slow, allowing a higher intake of oxygen, and removing stress from the body and mind.

*'Words cannot convey the value of yoga – it has to be experienced'*. B.K.S. Iyengar.

## Neck Exercises

If you have tension in your neck and shoulders, these exercises will help to reduce the tension.

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Breathe in and as you breathe out, slowly turn your head to the right
- Breathe in and as you breathe out, slowly turn your head to the left
- Repeat this three times
- Keeping the breath flowing, drop your head to your chest and then raise your chin and look up at the ceiling. Repeat three times
- Keeping the breath flowing, drop your head to the right side so that your ear is moving towards your shoulder and repeat on the opposite side
- Now slowly circle your head three times in each direction starting with your chin on your chest and moving your head towards your right shoulder and then looking up and slowly circling down to the left
- Breathe in fully while lifting your shoulders up to your ears. Breathe out through your mouth, completely letting go of the breath and drop your shoulders. Repeat another three times
- Circle your shoulders forward three times and circle them back three times
- Sit comfortably for a further five minutes breathing slowly and deeply.

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## Posture of the Month – Virabhadrasana 2 (Warrior posture 2)

This posture is named after Virabhadra, a legendary warrior. His story is told by the famous Sanskrit playwright, Kalidasa, in the epic, Kumarasambhava. Regular practice of this asana helps to develop your strength and endurance. The posture exercises your limbs and torso vigorously, reducing stiffness in your neck and shoulders. It also makes your knee and hip joints more flexible.

1. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose).
2. Breathe in and as you breathe out, jump or step the legs wide apart. Raise the arms to the sides, in line with your shoulders, palms facing down.
3. Stretch both arms from shoulders to fingertips and keep your shoulders down.
4. Turn the left foot in slightly and the right foot out making sure that the right knee is in line with the right foot.
5. Breathe in and as you breathe out bend the right knee keeping the shin perpendicular to the floor so that the right knee is positioned above the right heel. **Beginners** – make sure you are not leaning forward over the right leg but keep your torso in the centre. **Intermediates** – ensure that your right thigh is parallel to the floor.
6. Press the outer edges of the feet and the base of the big toes into the mat.
7. Keep the back leg straight and stretch the muscles of the leg fully.
8. Turn the face to the right and look along the fingers of the right hand.
9. Stay in this posture for 3 breaths (Beginners) or 5 breaths (Intermediates).
10. Breathe in and as you breathe out, straighten the right leg and turn the feet to the front.
11. Repeat on the other side.

### Benefits of this posture

- Improves breathing capacity by expanding the chest
- Helps in the treatment of a prolapsed or slipped disc
- Alleviates the condition of a broken, fused or deviated tailbone
- Reduces fat around the hips
- Relieves lower backache
- The leg muscles become shapely and stronger
- Brings elasticity to the leg and back muscles
- Tones the abdominal organs.



## Force vs. Feeling

The survival of the fittest. Looking out for number one. Achieving a goal. Winning and being the best. These are the ways of the world. In schools and workplaces we are encouraged to dominate our peers and to climb the corporate ladder. Our leaders invade and occupy other countries while multi-national corporations do whatever they like to win the market share. This approach to life is supposed to make us feel successful and happy, yet it seldom does.

The survival of the most sensitive. Looking *in* for number one. Living the journey. Growing along the way. This is the way of yoga. Neither acquisition nor denial, neither ego-inflation nor meekness, neither domination nor submission. Yoga is the middle way, but how do we find it in our yoga practice and in our lives?

In yoga it is best to feel the postures rather than force our way into them. We must try to become sensitive to our own body, to make decisions from within. Whatever life throws at us we must learn to find fulfilment through exploration rather than through forcing an end result. Feeling takes us into ourselves, forcing takes us away. How many times have we tried to force an end result that we think would make us happy? This forcing in fact has a negative effect on our nervous system and prevents us from feeling. Forcing and feeling are on opposite ends of the scale. Forcing raises blood pressure, makes a person angry, and creates heart problems. Feeling makes a person reflective, calm, and able to understand life.

When you are in your yoga class, do you ever have the urge to be the best? This common urge is indoctrinated into our hearts by an insecure society. And this urge to be the best leads to force, and force leads to injury. In yoga, the victory is in the ability to feel more than we felt before. Eventually, feeling will become a way of life and force, like a stone dropped into the ocean, sinks into oblivion. True yoga is not a competition with anyone else, not even with one's self. We don't get a prize for doing a posture well. It is far better to feel and create a small movement than to force and create a big movement.

Try to work intensely yet without force. And be aware of your breath as you do your postures for this helps reduce forcing and invites you to feel the body – with an inner smile! Be aware of how each part of the body feels when in a posture – the feet, the thighs, even the fingertips. In yoga we strive to become more aware of ourselves – our bodies, minds, feelings, emotions, our very nature. Be patient and you will reap the rewards – a healthy, more flexible body, and a quiet and calm mind.

*Edited from an article in Yoga Journal written by one of the world's top yoga teachers, Aadil Palkhivala, who is also a Naturopath, Ayurvedic Practitioner, clinical hypnotherapist, Shiatsu and Swedish bodywork therapist, lawyer and international public speaker on the mind-body-energy connection.*