

THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS WEEK 7

I. WHAT ARE CHAKRAS

Chakras are organizing centers for the reception, assimilation, and transmission of energy. (Anodea, Judith, Wheels of Life)

Chakra comes from a Sanskrit word meaning *wheel*. Chakras represent psychological centers or planes of consciousness through which spiritual power flows. In other words, as centers of spiritual energy, chakras can be thought of as sites where we receive, absorb, and distribute life energies at various frequencies, corresponding to the colors of the rainbow and each specific to a different area of the body/mind. They are the points at which the world enters your body through energy, and the way you emit energy back to the world. Energy also flows through the chakras along the spine.

The chakras are part of the energy body, *pranamayakosha*. According to yoga philosophy, there are seven chakras aligned along the spine from the base of the tailbone to the crown of the head.

The ascent of energy from the tailbone to the crown of the head represents spiritual growth, from physical survival to spiritual transformation. The Chakras are archetypes of transformation and potential at each level of our being. This latent potential, which has the possibility of unfolding, is represented by the lotus, which is the symbol for the chakras. Each chakra has a symbolic lotus with its own color and a specific number of petals.

All chakras are operating in all of us at all times, however. They are, therefore, tools for encouraging awareness of what exists rather than a means of "transcending" the "less spiritual" aspects of ourselves. In fact, all chakras must be open for optimal health, because each chakra is associated with particular functions within the body and with specific life issues and the way we handle them, both inside ourselves and in our interactions with the world. They can become blocked, for example, by chronic tension and low self-esteem, causing problems in that area of the body/mind related to that chakra. Practicing poses that correspond to each chakra can release these blocks and clear the path to higher consciousness.

II. CHAKRA AWARENESS

We will focus on some of the chakras during our practice tonight.

III. KAPALABHATI PRANAYAMA - SKULL POLISHING BREATH, BREATH OF FIRE

instructions: Sitting with an erect spine, take some deep breaths and relax. Exhale forcefully through the nostrils, contracting the abdominal muscles. Then relax the abdomen

immediately. The inhalation will happen passively. Repeat slowly at first to make sure the belly is relaxing after the contraction. Then, pick up the pace, finding your own rhythm. The breath is in the abdomen, the chest is relaxed.

Start slowly with 10-20 repetitions, over time progressing to 70-100 repetitions per round. If you feel short of breath slow down to allow more time for the inhalation.

general benefits: Kapalabhati strengthens the abdominal muscles, diaphragm and heart. It deeply massages the internal organs, stimulates digestion and elimination. It removes stale air and toxins from the lungs and pumps fresh prana into all cells of the body. It energizes, massages, and cleanses the central nervous system, bringing mental clarity, alertness.

IV. MUDRAS

MANDALA MUDRA: Circle of Wholeness

instructions: Rest the cupped left hand onto your lap. Rest the cupped right fingers onto the left fingers. Join the tips of the thumbs to form an oval. Sense the circuit of energy between the thumbs which expands throughout the circumference of the oval.

benefits: Mandala Mudra invokes a state of mental absorption and the experience of the Self as wholeness.

V. HOMEWORK

- Check your posture when standing, for example, while waiting to check out at the supermarket.
- Scan your body and consciously relax the areas of tension.
- Check your breath. Find one or two things that happen regularly during the day that will remind you to check your breath. Remember to fill your lungs completely with 3 part yogic breathing! Play with the mudras. Take a mudra break, and pause to notice the effects.
- Take a meditation break. (Yoga Journal, August 2011)
- Stretch every day. Then, practice a pose ,,, or two!

 you•go•yoga	<h1>THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS</h1> <h2>week 7 practice</h2>
WARM UPS	<p><i>Nadi Shodhana</i> Seated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sun Breath / Lateral Sun Breath Seagull Breath Shoulder Circles Shoulder rolls <p>Table Top</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 movements of the spine Hip circles <p>Z seat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hip press Gate / Half Circle Pigeon (variation)
ASANA	<p>Prone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bow (tip! Press the feet into the palms. Ground the hips.) <p>Standing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mountain Pose (tip! Ground all four corners of the feet. Connect to the earth.) Tree or Stork (tip! Find your drishti. Keep your hips level.) Mountain → Chair Pose → Forward Fold w/ block (tip! Ground the feet. Engage the legs.) Chair Pose → Revolved Chair → Forward Fold Half Moon Series Sun Salutations (tip! Find the variation that works for you.) Warrior 2 → Side Angle → Triangle (r) (Tip! No floor envy! Keep the shoulders stacked against the "wall".) Wide-legged Forward Fold / Revolved Warrior 2 → Side Angle → Triangle (l) Goddess <p>Seated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seated Forward Fold (tip! Keep the spine straight) Head to Knee Pose Revolved Head to Knee Pose <p>Supine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Half Shoulderstand Fish Bridge
COOLDOWN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knees to chest Thigh Press Knee Down Twist Sacrum Release Reclined Cow Face / or Happy Baby
RELAXATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contraction and release w/ shoulder press <i>Mandala Mudra</i>

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Click on *Student Resources* → *Home Practice*. both spaces: *ygstudent*

POINTS TO PONDER

What has been your biggest success in this class?

What has been your biggest challenge?

What aspect or aspects of yoga do you enjoy the most? Enjoy the least? Why?

- the postures
- the breathing
- the mudras
- meditation

Which pose or poses do you enjoy the most? Enjoy the least? Find the most challenging? Why?

What lingering questions do you have?

What are your goals in pursuing yoga?

How much time do you have to devote to a home practice? What time of day would be best?