Yoga for Emotional Well-Being

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Introduction

My interest to this topic stems from the intersection of my personal yoga practice and my clinical experience. Practicing yoga since 2002, I noticed its gradual very positive effect on my emotional well-being. Over the years, I became more grounded, less irritable, and more capable of coping with stress. I also often use yoga to cope with the ongoing stresses and emotionally difficult situations in my life. Practicing psychotherapy for many years, I noticed that traditional approaches are often limited in that they address my clients’ minds, both thoughts and feelings, but not their bodies, therefore don’t approach a person as a whole.

This limitation of psychotherapy became especially apparent, when I started to work with trauma survivors. According to Bessel Van der Kolk, one of the world’s renowned trauma experts, “our therapy needs to consist of helping people stay in their bodies and understand these bodily sensations. And that is certainly not something that any of the traditional psychotherapies, which we have all been taught, help people to do very well” (as cited in Rothschild, 2000, p.3). When I read this paragraph, it hit me, what approach can help people stay in their bodies and understand bodily sensations better than yoga? When I started thinking about other mental health issues in this same respect, it seemed to me that staying in one’s body may help with many other emotional concerns, including anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. This is how the idea to develop a curriculum for the yoga for emotional well-being class was born.

Yoga and Mental Health

Yogic texts on mental health

Different sacred texts of yoga recorded hundreds and thousands of years ago were mostly concerned with the spiritual path of the seeker and importance of living the right life to obtain unity with the Divine (see for example the Upanishads). Mental health issues were not necessarily of concern unless they related to values and other spiritual matters. For example, in the Bhagavat-Gita Krishna advises Arjuna about feelings in the following way:

Arjuna, you must learn to endure
Fleeting things – they come and go!
When these cannot torment a man,
When suffering and joy are equal
For him and he has courage,
he is fit for immortality. (The Second teaching, 14-15)

Some texts though, such as the Yoga Sutras paid a little more attention to the mental health issues and provided some guidance in respect to mental health. Thus, the Sutras written 1,500 to 2,000 years ago, described physical, emotional, and mental imbalances, their consequences, and ways to deal with them in 1.30 – 1.39 (as cited in Devi, 2007). This text offered breathing practice, meditation, and cultivation of such qualities as kindness, compassion, and equanimity as antidotes for all kinds of psychological ailments.

Contemporary research

In the last 15-20 years western science started catching up to the ancient yogic texts showing multiple benefits that yoga practice has for mental health. Even though research on yoga and mental health is in the very beginning stages right now with many studies being preliminary, pilot or just having very few participants and weak statistic power, the results are very promising and empowering. Below I will review a number of studies looking at the effects of yoga on anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.
**Depression and anxiety**

Uebelacker et al. (2010) showed that after 8 weeks of regular yoga class attendance depression scores significantly decreased and behavioral activation and mindfulness significantly increased for 11 participants in their open trial of vinyasa yoga for persistently depressed.

Simpkins and Simpkins (2011) reviewed five different studies exploring effects of yoga on the treatment of depression. They concluded that different yogic interventions seem to be effective for treatment of depression ranging from mild to severe. They also noted that further investigation is warranted.

In Kozasa et al. (2008) study 22 volunteers with anxiety complaints were assigned to two groups: 14 attended the yoga group, and 8 attended a waiting-list or control group. Yoga group practiced Siddha Samadhi Yoga, a program in which meditation is combined with pranayama. They were evaluated before the intervention and 1 month after it on the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Beck Depression Inventory, Tension Feelings Self-evaluation Scales, and the Well-being Self-evaluation Scales. The results showed a significant reduction in scores on anxiety, depression, and tension scales in yoga group, as well as an increase in well-being scores, in comparison with the control group.

Dermyer (2009) randomly assigned 33 participants diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) to either yoga or waiting list control group. Specific fusion yoga stretch program was implemented. The study showed large and statistically significant reductions in symptoms of GAD for the participants in the yoga group.

Dunn (2010) studied the effects of consistent yoga practice on the symptoms of anxiety and overall psychological well-being of female health care workers with no previous experience in yoga. She found that participants experienced a significant improvement in self-efficacy and anxiety symptoms from baseline to post-treatment. In addition, women with higher baseline symptoms of anxiety experienced the most decrease over time on this variable.

Khalsa et al. (2009) studied the effect of 2 month-long yoga and meditation program on anxiety, mood, and sleep of young professional musicians. They found that yoga groups showed a trend towards less music performance anxiety and significantly less general anxiety, tension, depression, and anger at the end of the program relative to the control group, but showed no changes in levels of stress or quality of sleep.

Telles et al. (2009) studied the effect of theoretical discussion of yoga versus yoga practice on anxiety state. They assigned 300 participants to either theory or practice group and measured their state of anxiety after a 2 hour-long yoga session. It was found that although theoretical session led to some anxiety reduction (3.4% change), the practice session resulted in significant anxiety reduction (14.3% change).

Jadhav & Havalappanavar (2009) studied the impact of yoga on the first-year college students enrolled in Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences Course. They measured their trait and state anxiety and subjective well-being before the beginning of the course and in the end of the academic year. Results revealed a significant decrease in both State and Trait Anxiety levels and positive change in the Subjective Wellbeing of the students.

Brown & Gerbarg (2009) reviewed four different studies focusing on the effects of asana and breathing on PTSD symptoms. They reported that even though asana practice had positive effect on participants with PTSD, addition of yogic breathing practices lead to much more significant reduction in symptoms.

Simpkins & Simpkins (2011) in their review of multiple studies focusing on the use of yoga in the treatment of anxiety concluded that (1) yoga can be effectively used in the treatment of many different types of anxiety problems, such as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, generalized anxiety, and PTSD; (2) yoga is often more effective when combined with conventional therapy, and therefore can be a good addition to the existing treatment programs.
Eating Disorders

Woolley (2010) in her study of three hundred seventy-five college-aged women found that women practicing yoga exhibited lower levels of self-objectification and higher levels of bodily awareness (both important factors in disordered eating) than both physically active women not practicing yoga and physically inactive women. Study also found that yoginis experienced less depressive symptoms than physically inactive women.

Carei et al. (2010) in their study of 54 adolescent boys and girls diagnosed with different types of eating disorders found that an 8-week individualized yoga program was associated with improvement of scores on Eating Disorder Examination (EDE) Scale and Food preoccupation Questionnaire for yoga group. They noted that No yoga group showed initial improvement on EDE scale but then returned to the baseline scores. The researchers concluded that individualized yoga therapy holds promise as an adjunctive therapy to standard care in the treatment of Eating Disorders.

Other mental health issues

Galen (2009) looked at the effects of yoga as an adjunct to traditional psychotherapy in the treatment of adolescents with a variety of psychiatric diagnoses. This study provided evidence that a relatively brief yoga intervention (M=11 classes) was associated with a number of psychological benefits for boys and girls, such as improved frustration tolerance, focus, self-acceptance and awareness, as well as increased patience, tolerance, and acceptance of others.

Forzani (2009) conducted qualitative study of the experiences of 15 adolescent girls enrolled in the high school yoga class. Results showed an increased sense of self, increased self-care practices, improved self-esteem and body image, and a greater ability to regulate emotions. Girls, who reported struggling with clinical issues, such as depression, self-mutilation, and attentional deficits, reported better coping skills for their symptoms and even cessation of symptoms in some cases.

Martin (2010) in her pilot study of Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy effect on psychological well-being of a small sample found that participants from Yoga group showed significant improvement in the measures of emotional and cognitive well-being after 8-week-long program as compared to the participants from control group.

Summary: from ancient texts and contemporary research to the class curriculum

After reviewing ancient writings and contemporary research evidence, I tend to agree with Amy Weintraub (2004) in that even though multiple yoga texts and studies focus on very different yogic approaches and include a variety of different components in their interventions, such as breathing, meditation, asanas, yogic ethics, and/or combination of those, they all seem to show benefits of these different yoga styles in the treatment of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. However, there exists no compelling data at this point suggesting that one yoga program or approach is more effective than another one in treating mental health issues. Moreover, I yet have to see a coherent description of the rationale for using a specific yoga program or its components in treatment of emotional concerns. Practices described and offered in different sources, such as McCall (2007), NurrieSterns & NurrieSterns (2010), Raskin (2003), or Simpkins & Simpkins (2011), lack explanation for why a specific practice may be beneficial for a certain problem it is suggested to help with.

Given the described state of affairs, I attempted to design my own program of Yoga for emotional well-being series using existing research, theory, and my own clinical experience to justify selection and use of certain
practices in my program. I hope to be able to research (or have others test) different components of my program, as well as the program as a whole, in the future to see whether my rationale can sustain an empirical trial.

Yoga for Emotional Well-Being Curriculum

In developing the curriculum for these series I pursued the following two major goals, to teach students a variety of different yogic practices aimed at combating stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia and to provide safe and pleasant environment to experience mind and body in a kind way and with acceptance. In comparison with many other hatha yoga teachers, I was not concerned with giving class participants increasing levels of physical challenge. But I was really interested in helping my students harmonize their mental and physical functioning and heal from pain. So, I approached curriculum development from chakra perspective. I utilized many principles and practices learned in the Subtle Yoga Teacher Training (Weber, 2010), as well as other sources (for example, Swami Ajaya, 2008; Govinda, 2004; Kraftsow, 1999; Swami Saraswati, 2008).

Themes

I decided to use different themes in my classes, which seem to be relevant to people suffering from emotional instability in the form of anxiety, depression, and stress. These themes came from my clinical experience of treating folks with the aforementioned issues in traditional psychotherapy. Listening to my clients for years, I noticed over and over again that perfectionism seems to underlie many emotional struggles. Additionally, multiple studies point to perfectionism as the factor contributing to clinical anxiety, depression, and eating concerns (for example see, Graham et al., 2010; Silgado et al., 2010). Therefore the theme of Good Enough was born. Many of my patients complained on their inability to experience joy in any area of their lives, so the theme of Joy was introduced to the yoga program. Another theme, Letting Go, seemed very relevant for multiple clients with anxiety and stress-related concerns, as many of them reported struggling with letting go off things that are out of their control or past hurts and disappointments. Finally, many clients with emotional concerns identify lack of self-acceptance and increase in self-criticism as sources of pain in their lives. Multiple studies also showed that self-acceptance is an important factor in psychological health (see Jimenez et al., 2010). To address this issue a theme of Self-Acceptance was introduced.

Class structure

I used the class structure offered by Kaoverii Weber (2010) in her Subtle Yoga program. As in her program, my classes start with a short meditation and a pranayama practice. After that, warming up asanas are introduced followed by more complex and vigorous asanas. The class concludes with more subtle asanas focused on chakra balancing, and finally Savasana. Some classes involve self-massage (Weber, 2010) before Savasana.

Choice of practices: meditation, pranayama, & asana

Meditation

I utilize different meditation techniques throughout the classes. They include mantra repetition, white light visualization, mindfulness, and self-compassion. Multiple research on different types of meditation brings back consistent results of increased ability to self-regulate, reduced anxiety, alleviated depression and other mental health benefits (Brown & Gerbarg, 2009; Jimenez et al., 2010; Simpkins & Simpkins, 2011). I use short mantra meditations in the beginning and or end of the class. Some research (see Simpkins & Simpkins, 2011) suggests
that mantra meditation leads to overall psychological health. Traditional mantra meditation involved mantras given away to the students by their Teacher, which were believed to carry teacher’s energy. However, some authors suggest that a person can choose their own mantra and benefit from using it consistently (Weintraub, 2004; Weber, 2010). In the classes I introduce students to mantra meditation by offering key words, such as letting go or peace, as well as encouraging them to identify their own mantra.

I first read about White light visualization in Orloff (2004). I practiced this meditation for several months and found it to be very healing and helpful. Since then I used it in my individual therapeutic work with a variety of clients with consistently positive results. This meditation was mentioned in some other sources (e.g., Raskin, 2003).

Finally, two other practices that I use are mindfulness and self-compassion meditation, both originated in Buddhism. Today, there is plenty of research suggesting that mindfulness meditation has multiple benefits for psychological health (Delgada et al., 2010; Jimenez et al., 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Williams et al., 2007). There is some emerging research on compassion meditation showing its health benefits (Pace et al., 2009).

Pranayama

Pranayama is defined as breath control (Swami S. Saraswati, 2008), which is reached through a variety of different practices. Pranayama is an important part of yoga practice as it was specifically developed by the ancient masters to balance the emotions, clarify the mental processes, and to integrate them for effective functioning (Kraftsow, 1999). Brown and Gerbarg (2009) in their review of multiple studies focused on the effects of yogic breathing hypothesize that pranayama provides a neurophysiological “work-out” that leads to greater flexibility and plasticity in the nervous system. In general, Simpkins & Simpkins (2011) conclude that yoga breathing methods provide powerful interventions for deliberately rebalancing an out-of-balance autonomic nervous system affected by mental or physical problems.

Given important role of breath control, I included one pranayama practice in each class session. I have chosen three different practices. The first, most frequently used one, is Ujayi pranayama. According to Swami S. Saraswati (2008), this tranquilizing pranayama soothes nervous system and calms the mind. In addition, it has profoundly relaxing effect at the psychic level and alleviates insomnia. The next practice that I use is Breath retention (Kumbakha). According to Weintraub (2004), retaining breath briefly for 4 to 6 counts energizes the body, while longer retention (from 6 counts to full capacity) seems to have calming effect. Finally, in one of the classes with the focus on Joy, I use energizing Breath of Joy practice. From my own experience and from the feedback of my students, I know that it is impossible to stay sad and depressed after several rounds of the Breath of Joy.

Asana

I integrated information from many different sources to identify different practices that would help explore a specific class theme and aid in balancing activity of the autonomic nervous system (by increasing activity of parasympathetic and decreasing activity of sympathetic nervous systems).

As a foundation I used Subtle Yoga (Weber, 2010) approach that focuses on working with more subtle levels of prana through balancing activity of major energy centers, chakras. One of the major differences between asanas used in Subtle yoga versus some other hatha yoga approaches is that the poses are repeated several times first (practitioner moves in and out of them) and only then held for a period of time. Kraftsow (1999) provides convincing rationale for this approach. He suggests that most significant neuromuscular transformation occurs
through the repetitive movement. Additionally, this movement prepares body for holding of the posture which follows. Holding the pose after preparation, according to Kraftsow, leads to the most significant inner purification affecting deepest level of spinal musculature, lymph circulation, and activity of the glands. Subtle yoga asanas help release emotionally charged holding patterns lodged in the physical body (Weber, 2010), which is essential when applying asanas to improve emotional health.

Another consideration that I used in the choice of specific asanas for the class was their connection to/effect on specific chakra. It seemed especially important to engage second, third, and fourth chakras, as they play major role in emotional health and healing. Therefore, I used multiple poses offered by Weber (2010) for balancing these specific chakras.

Preliminary results

The aforementioned curriculum was taught for one semester to the students of the University of Tennessee that included clients of the Counseling Center, as well as other students, who wanted to try the class. After each session feedback was solicited from the students through sending out an electronic anonymous survey with seven questions asking students about their level of liking of the class, the effects of the class on their physical and emotional states, as well as the things they most and least appreciated about the class. The last question asked for students’ suggestions.

The feedback provided by students has been overwhelmingly positive. The following general themes in the class’s effects on emotional and physical state were noticed: (1) relaxes the body; (2) clears the mind; (3) reduces anxiety; (4) improves mood. A number of students commented that effect of the class persists throughout the week and spreads to other areas of students’ lives.

Some of the more specific things that students said are exemplified by the following quotes: “I was happy and in an awesome mood afterwards”; “Caused awareness of stuff inside of me”; “started to feel more centered and joyful”; “I had an overall feeling of well-being after leaving the class”; “My thoughts raced less by the end of class. I felt more in touch with the earth and more aware of nature around me after the class. For example, I noticed how green and full the trees were on my way to the car after class”.

Conclusion

This paper reviews possibilities and evidence in favor of using yoga to facilitate emotional healing in people struggling with a variety of mental health concerns, including anxiety disorders, depression, and eating disorders. In the last 15-20 years a lot of western scientific research looked into yoga benefits for mental health. Results provided plenty of positive support for using yoga as an adjunctive treatment to the traditional psychotherapeutic approaches.

The major purpose of the paper, however, is to introduce the Yoga for Emotional Well-Being class curriculum by explaining rationale behind the choices of specific techniques within each class. The curriculum itself is described in the Appendix. Some preliminary results in the form of participants’ feedback are discussed.
References


Appendix: Yoga for emotional well-being class plans

Class 1. Introduction. Peace.

INTRODUCTION: Name, previous experience with yoga, any injuries, hopes re: class
EDUCATION: (1) Setting the ground rules: non-competetive, non-violent, allow yourself to experience what is; (2) discuss structure of each class – a little information in the beginning, then meditation & setting intention, then pranayama, then asana; finishing with a brief reflection/discussion of practice.

MEDITATION: Focus on your breathing, notice present any thoughts, feelings, sensations; now switch focus of your attention to the word “PEACE”. Repeat it on every exhale. When your thoughts drift away, acknowledge this fact and gently bring them back to the word “PEACE”.

PRANAYAMA: Breath retention (kumbakha)– this practice helps you retrain your mind and your body on how to breathe. It gradually slows your breathing down, creating relaxation and stress reduction response. Breathe in as you count to 4, retain your breath as you count to 2, and then exhale as you count to 4. After a few moments, breathe in as you count to 6, retain your breath as you count to 3, and then exhale as you count to 6. Finally, breathe in as you count to 8, retain your breath as you count to 4, and then exhale as you count to 8. Now release your efforts and simply sit and enjoy your natural breathing.

Considerations: this is gentle practice that is NOT intended to increase tension and pressure. At the first sign of distress, go back to breathing as you normally do. You can try again later.

ASANA:

1. **Lateral stretches** (3 times on each side with kumbakha, 4\(^{th}\) time hold for 5 breaths)
2. **Seated gentle twists** (3 times on each side with kumbakha, 4\(^{th}\) time hold for 5 breaths)
3. **Child’s pose** (Balasana) – come in and out of it 2 times; third time hold for 10 breaths [this pose is very soothing and stress relieving; you can come to it any time throughout the class to rest or collect your thoughts]
4. **Downward Facing Dog** (Adho Mukha Svanasana) – come in and out twice, hold for 10 breaths the third time. All meet there in the end
5. **Forward Fold** (transition from Down Dog) – short vinaysa here 3 times (Mountain to Forward Fold to Extended Back to Forward Fold to Mountain); in the last forward fold stay for several breaths, lead them through visualization of junk falling out of the head.
6. **Sun Salutation** (Surya Namaskar) – easy version with lunge, lying on the belly, and tiny Cobra; repeat 4 times.
7. **Tree** (Vrkasana) – hold for 10 breaths – experiment with foot placement and closed eyes, have fun, find your balance after falling out
8. **Bridge pose (with flow, hands above the head)** – repeat 3 times; 4\(^{th}\) time hold for 10 breaths
9. **Spinal twists** – 3 times on each side; 4\(^{th}\) time hold for 5 breaths
10. **Rocking with legs towards chest**
11. **Savasana** – 7-8 minutes with mantra meditation and white light
Class 2. LETTING GO

**MEDITATION:** Focus on your breathing, notice present any thoughts, feelings, sensations; now switch focus of your attention to the phrase “LETTING GO”. Repeat it on every exhale. When your thoughts drift away, acknowledge this fact and gently bring them back to the phrase “LETTING GO”. – while in the legs up the wall

**PRANAYAMA:** Breath of fire (Ujai breath)- constrict your throat when exhaling; Darth Vader breath or ocean breath – calming for the nervous system; slowing the heart rate

**ASANA:**

1. Legs up the wall for 2-3 min. with mantra letting go
2. *Lateral stretches* (3 times on each side with kumbakha, 4th time hold for 5 breaths)
3. *Seated gentle twists* (3 times on each side with kumbakha, 4th time hold for 5 breaths)
4. *Thread the Needle* (2 times on each side, 3rd time hold for 5 breaths)
5. *Child’s pose* (Balasana) – come in and out of it 2 times; third time hold for 10 breaths [this pose is very soothing and stress relieving; you can come to it any time throughout the class to rest or collect your thoughts; continue focusing on mantra “letting go”]
6. *Downward Facing Dog* (Adho Mukha Svanasana) – come in and out twice, hold for 10 breaths the third time. All meet there in the end
7. *Forward Fold* (transition from Down Dog) – *short vinaysa* here 3 times (Mountain to Forward Fold to Extended Back to Forward Fold to Mountain); in the last forward fold stay for several breaths, lead them through visualization of junk falling out of the head – letting go of all stuff they don’t need anymore.
8. *Sun Salutation* (Surya Namaskar) – easy version with lunge, lying on the belly, and tiny Cobra; repeat 4 times.
9. *Tree* (Vrkasana) – hold for 10 breaths – experiment with foot placement and closed eyes, have fun, find your balance after falling out – letting go of expectations & perfectionism ideas
10. *Head-to-knee* (2 times on each side, 3rd time hold for 5 breaths)
11. *Seated Twists* (2 times on each side with kumbakha, 3rd time hold for 5 breaths) - imagery of all tension and stress exiting from the end of their spine; as the spine is twisting, cleansing is happening
12. *Bridge pose* (with flow, hands above the head) – repeat 3 times; 4th time hold for 10 breaths
13. *Half Shoulderstand to Fish* (3 times each, hold for a few breaths) or *Cobra*
14. *Spinal twists* – 3 times on each side; 4th time hold for 5 breaths
15. *Rocking with legs towards chest*
16. *Savasana* – 7-8 minutes with mantra letting go; letting go of final tensions and tightness, of final worries & anxieties
Class 3. JOY

REMINDERS: *Yoga – non-competitive practice, do not compare self to other students in this class, how you look in the pose does not matter at all, what matters is how you feel in the pose and whether you are doing your body any good. **If you feel pain – back out of the pose some or take a break; you can always come to the Child’s pose and breathe there. ***Please, focus on your body’s needs – remember it is your practice, not mine – so, take care of yourself. ****When I come around and suggest that you modify your pose, it is not because you are doing it wrong, but because there is a safer and more effective way to do it.

INTRODUCTION: When we feel sad, down, or blue for a long time, we stop noticing little fun and joyful things around us and in us. Our minds become progressively more negative, and the only thing we can notice then is our own suffering. This is the downward spiral of depression. Whether you are dealing with a sudden mood change to the worst or years of depression, conscious focus on finding joy in your life, may help you get out of the dark spot. Today in our class we will focus on a number of practices that help in the process of finding and keeping joy in your life.

MEDITATION: Sit in a comfortable easy (cross-legged pose). Close your eyes and focus on your breathing, notice any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with which you start this class; now imagine that you are surrounded by white light – a representation of universal joy and love. Every time you breath in, imagine this light of joy entering your body and spreading all over it. Every time you breathe out, imagine that darkness, sadness, and negativity in the form of a black cloud is leaving your body. INHALE: white light and joy. EXHALE: darkness, sadness, and negativity. Keep breathing in this way. (Pause).

As you are focusing on this practice, you may notice that your thoughts drift away, that’s very normal. When this happens, acknowledge distraction and bring your focus back to your practice. INHALE: white light and joy. EXHALE: darkness, sadness, and negativity. Keep breathing in this way.

PRANAYAMA: Breath of Joy. Start in the mountain position, slightly bend your knees. The inhale has three consecutive flowing parts. When we start inhaling through the nose, we will take arms in front of us, as we continue inhaling, we will take them to the sides (in T), and as we finish inhaling, we will take arms above our heads. We will exhale with a loud “Ha” coming into the forward fold with our arms coming down as well. We will do it ten more times. If you start feeling dizzy or light-headed, stop and take few normal breaths.

ASANA:
1. Cat – Cow (5 times)  
2. Uncat-Cow (5 times)  
3. Thread the Needle (2 times on each side, 3rd time hold for 5 breaths)  
4. Child’s pose (Balasana) – come in and out of it 2 times; third time hold for 10 breaths [this pose is very soothing and stress relieving; you can come to it any time throughout the class to rest or collect your thoughts;]  
5. Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana) – come in and out twice, hold for 10 breaths the third time. All meet there in the end  
6. Padahastasana: repeat 4 times; this pose is uplifting and energizing; if there is only one pose you feel like you can do in a day when feeling down, this one is a wonderful choice.
7. Sun Salutation (Surya Namaskar) – easy version with lunge, lying on the belly, and tiny Cobra; repeat 6-8 times increasing pace as we go along. This practice is very energizing and if done in the high pace may help you release any sorrow you are experiencing.

8. Warrior I: with cactus hands & knee bend on inhale; hands to prayer and knee straight on the exhale (move in and out 4 times, 5\textsuperscript{th} time hold for 5 breaths – remember to do both sides). This pose is very powerful. On the one hand it grounds us in reality, as we feel connected to the Earth through our feet. On the other hand, it helps us open our hearts to what is happening around us, including joyful moments. Very often, when we feel sad, we close our hearts so to speak to protect them from pain, which is understandable. As a result, we protect our hearts from joy and love as well.

9. Warrior II to Half Moon: come in and out twice, then hold for 5-10 breaths; being playful, enjoying connection to your body

10. Chair with twist and prayer hands: repeat 5 times as a sequence; smile

11. Downward Dog to Camel: repeat 3 times; emphasize open heart in Camel and stimulating Thyroid in Downward Dog

12. (optional) Laughing and shaking: laugh at yourself, laugh at your past, laugh at your future, laugh at the haven, laugh at the earth

13. Sphinx to Cobra to Upward bow – then Child’s pose; opening heart to joy and pleasure

14. Spinal twists – 3 times on each side; 4\textsuperscript{th} time hold for 5 breaths

15. Rocking with legs towards chest

16. Savasana – 7-8 minutes focus on sending gratitude and experiencing joy associated with each and every part of your body: While lying in Savasana, you can "touch" various parts of your body with your loving attention. For instance, bring attention to your eyes as you inhale, send them an inner smile, and feel gratitude and appreciation for them as you exhale. Spend a few breaths smiling to each part of your body in this manner, especially to those parts you might be less than satisfied with, developing greater joy and deeper appreciation for what is.

17. Meditation on Joy (in cross-legged pose): Repeat after me in your mind

May I learn to appreciate the happiness and joy I experience.
May the joy I experience continue and grow.
May I be filled with joy and gratitude.
May all people learn to appreciate the happiness and joy they experience.
May the joy people experience continue and grow.
May all people be filled with joy and gratitude.
Class 4. GOOD ENOUGH

REMNINDERS: *Yoga – non-competitive practice, do not compare self to other students in this class, how you look in the pose does not matter at all, what matters is how you feel in the pose and whether you are doing your body any good. **If you feel pain – back out of the pose some or take a break; you can always come to the Child’s pose and breathe there. ***Please, focus on your body’s needs – remember it is your practice, not mine – so, take care of yourself. ****When I come around and suggest that you modify your pose, it is not because you are doing it wrong, but because there is a safer and more effective way to do it.

INTRODUCTION: The theme for the class today is “Good enough”. We will explore it on the mat with the hope of being able to apply the lessons learned off the mat. We will start with meditation.

MEDITATION: Sit in a comfortable easy (cross-legged pose). Close your eyes and focus on your breathing, notice any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with which you start this class. Now, consider the following question “What if I am enough? What if I am wonderful just the way I am right now in this very moment?” Contemplate it. Notice what thoughts and feelings arise as you are pondering this question. Don’t rush yourself. There is no right or wrong answer. Just ask these questions several times, and let your answers unfold. (Pause). Keep breathing and noticing your thoughts and feelings as they arise. When your mind wanders away from the questions, acknowledge it and gently bring it back. “What if I am wonderful just the way I am?” (Pause). Take another moment to listen to your responses. And, now let’s set intention for this class. You can repeat after me in your mind: “May this practice awaken my gratitude for my body and mind, in this moment, exactly as it is.” You may choose to come back to this intention throughout practice or you may choose a mantra that you will be repeating to yourself today, such as “I am wonderful just the way I am” or “I am enough” or “My body is comfortable home for my soul” or anything else that affirms your inherent worth. Now open your eyes. Let’s practice Ujai breath.

PRANAYAMA: Breath of fire (Ujai breath)- constrict your throat when exhaling; Darth Vader breath or ocean breath – calming for the nervous system; slowing the heart rate

ASANA: As you are moving through different poses today, focus on what is right or good or enough. Rather than making each pose a checklist of things to do better, make each pose an opportunity to observe the good in your body.
1. Tabletop: extending opposite arm and leg (5 times; hold in the end) – thank your strong core and ability to balance, they make this pose possible for you.
2. Tabletop: a leg with bent knee is held by the opposite arm (5 times; hold in the end) – When you catch yourself mixing up the pose or getting confused or may be getting behind, just remind yourself that it’s OK and the way you are doing it just good enough; identify and stop self-criticism and shift your attention to the fact that you are moving your body and breathing and it’s so good for you that details don’t make any difference.
3. Thread the Needle (2 times on each side, 3rd time hold for 5 breaths)
4. Child’s pose (Balasana) – come in and out of it 2 times; third time hold for 10 breaths [this pose is very soothing and stress relieving; you can come to it any time throughout the class to rest or collect your thoughts; discuss hands-on assistance and ask permission]
5. Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana) – come in and out twice, hold for 10 breaths the third time. All meet there in the end.
6. **Forward Fold** (transition from Down Dog) – *short vinayasa* here 3 times (Mountain to Forward Fold to Extended Back to Forward Fold to Mountain); in the last forward fold stay for several breaths, lead them through visualization of all negative and critical things they ever heard about themselves that are stuck in their brain and all the negative things they ever told themselves falling out of the head – letting go of all that hurtful stuff they don’t need anymore. Watching how these critical messages are piling up on the floor; imagining them as angry microbes that don’t want to leave and applying sanitizer to kill them.

7. **Sun Salutation (Surya Namaskar)** – easy version with lunge, lying on the belly, and tiny Cobra; repeat 6-8 times increasing pace as we go along. This sequence is a good practice for being gentle with yourself and affirming your basic goodness and worthiness. It’s pretty challenging and quick-paced. So, it is likely that you will get out-of-sync, lost, or mixed up. When this happens, tell yourself that it’s OK and stuff like this happens in life all the time and start over. Follow your own pace. Listen to your body and its needs. Do you need a break in the middle? Do you need to stay in the Down Dog for several breaths to rest? Do you need to stop even though everyone else is moving? Respond to your body’s needs once you identify them.

8. **Karmasana (part I)**: From Mountain bring your hands together at your heart. On an inhale, take your hands behind your back, interlock the fingers and clasp them together. Exhale. Inhale. On the exhale, fold to the left and hold your breath out for a few seconds. Inhale back up and then exhale folding forward, raise your arms up towards the ceiling and then forward. Hold your breath out for a few seconds. Then inhale back up and arch your back directing the hands straight down. Hold for a few seconds. Exhale, release your hands and bring them back together at your heart.

9. **Warrior I**: with cactus hands & knee bend on inhale; hands to prayer and knee straight on the exhale (move in and out 4 times, 5<sup>th</sup> time hold for 5 breaths – remember to do both sides). This pose is very powerful. On the one hand it grounds us in reality, as we feel connected to the Earth through our feet. Every time you move into the pose and open your hands, repeat in your mind “I am enough”.

10. **Warrior I to Warrior III**: come in and out twice, then hold for 5-10 breaths; form is not important, how high up your leg goes or how long you balance is not important. You are here on your mat, and it is good enough.

11. **Downward Dog to Camel**: repeat 3 times; emphasize open heart in Camel and stimulating Thyroid in Downward Dog

12. **Sphinx to Cobra to Upward bow** – then Child’s pose; opening heart to joy and pleasure

13. **Spinal twists** – 3 times on each side; 4<sup>th</sup> time hold for 5 breaths

14. **Rocking with legs towards chest**

15. **Savasana** – One of my favorite film directors, Woody Allen once said that 80% of life is just showing up. I tend to agree with it and notice how little credit we give ourselves for just that. You showed up today and you worked through the class. It’s 100%. Give yourself credit for that, pat yourself on the back! You did really well! How about focusing on what is right with your body while you are laying down in Savasana today? Notice which parts of the body feel good. Send gratitude to your heart for pumping blood. Send gratitude to your lungs for breathing. Acknowledge your legs and feet for supporting you. Acknowledge your sensory organs for your ability to perceive. (Pause), Now focus on the area of your heart. You can put your palm there if you would like. Imagine that your heart is the center of love. Notice warmth and energy that it emanates. Imagine this love spreading all over you. And, when the love fills you up completely, just rest in it and enjoy.
Class 5. SELF-ACCEPTANCE

REMINDEERS: *Yoga – non-competitive practice, do not compare self to other students in this class, how you look in the pose does not matter at all, what matters is how you feel in the pose and whether you are doing your body any good. **If you feel pain – back out of the pose some or take a break; you can always come to the Child’s pose and breathe there. ***Please, focus on your body’s needs – remember it is your practice, not mine – so, take care of yourself. ****When I come around and suggest that you modify your pose, it is not because you are doing it wrong, but because there is a safer and more effective way to do it.

INTRODUCTION: Louis L’Amour, famous 20th century American writer said: “I am somebody. I am me. I like being me. And I need nobody to make me somebody”. Wouldn’t it be nice if we all felt this way about ourselves? The theme for the class today is “Self-acceptance”. We will explore it on the mat with the hope of being able to apply the lessons learned off the mat. We will start with meditation.

MEDITATION: Sit in a comfortable easy (cross-legged pose). Close your eyes and focus on your breathing, notice any thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with which you start this class. Now, focus on the area of your heart. Breathe into your heart and breathe out of your heart. Imagine that your heart is the center and source of loving energy that is warm and nurturing. Keep breathing into it and imagine energy ball getting larger and starting to spread to the other parts of your body. Each time you breathe into it, it grows a little more until it encompasses all of your body. Let yourself feel warmth and nurturance that your heart emanates. Just sit with it and enjoy.

PRANAYAMA: Awareness of breath. Ujayi breath.

ASANA: As you are moving through different poses today, focus on your belly and cultivate sense of self-acceptance, the idea that you are a worthy wonderful human being no matter what is happening in your life or practice today.

1. **Tabletop: extending opposite arm and leg** (5 times; hold in the end) – notice energy in your belly
2. **Tabletop: a leg with bent knee is held by the opposite arm** (5 times; hold in the end) – When you catch yourself mixing up the pose or getting confused or may be getting behind, just remind yourself that it’s OK and the way you are doing it just good enough; identify and stop self-criticism and shift your attention to the fact that you are moving your body and breathing and it’s so good for you that details don’t make any difference.
3. **Thread the Needle** (2 times on each side, 3rd time hold for 5 breaths)
4. **Child’s pose** (Balasana) – come in and out of it 2 times; third time hold for 10 breaths [this pose is very soothing and stress relieving; you can come to it any time throughout the class to rest or collect your thoughts; discuss hands-on assistance and ask permission]
5. **Downward Facing Dog** (Adho Mukha Svanasana) – come in and out twice, hold for 10 breaths the third time. All meet there in the end.
6. **Sun Salutation** (Surya Namaskar) – easy version with lunge, lying on the belly, and tiny Cobra; repeat 6-8 times increasing pace as we go along. This sequence is a good practice for being gentle with yourself and affirming your basic goodness and worthiness. It’s pretty challenging and quick-paced. So, it is likely that you will get out-of-sync, lost, or mixed up. When this happens, tell
yourself that it’s OK and stuff like this happens in life all the time and start over. Follow your own pace. Listen to your body and its needs. Do you need a break in the middle? Do you need to stay in the Down Dog for several breaths to rest? Do you need to stop even though everyone else is moving? Respond to your body’s needs once you identify them.

7. **Karmasana (part I)**: From Mountain bring your hands together at your heart. On an inhale, take your hands behind your back, interlock the fingers and clasp them together. Exhale. Inhale. On the exhale, fold to the left and hold your breath out for a few seconds. Inhale back up and then exhale folding forward, raise your arms up towards the ceiling and then forward. Hold your breath out for a few seconds. Then inhale back up and arch your back directing the hands straight down. Hold for a few seconds. Exhale, release your hands and bring them back together at your heart.

8. **Warrior I: with cactus hands & knee bend on inhale; hands to prayer and knee straight on the exhale (move in and out 4 times, 5th time hold for 5 breaths – remember to do both sides)**. This pose is very powerful. On the one hand it grounds us in reality, as we feel connected to the Earth through our feet. On the other hand, it helps us connect to our higher self and sources of love. Every time you move into the pose and open your hands, repeat in your mind “Love”.

9. **Warrior II (hands to lower abdomen variation)** – Stand in the middle of your mat and take a wide stance. Turn your right foot out to 90 degrees and your left foot in to 30-60 degrees. Place your hands over your lower abdomen. On an inhale, bend your right knee and take your hands out to the sides into the full pose. As you exhale, draw your hands and the warrior energy, into your lower chakras, place your hands on your lower belly. Chant the mantra VUNG as you exhale. Repeat 4-6 times. Then hold the full pose for 3-5 breaths. Then exhale the warrior energy and your hands into your lower chakras again. Close your eyes and ideate on bringing that prana into your lower chakras for a few breaths. Repeat on the other side.

10. **Five-Pointed Star to Goddess** – From this wide stance, splay your feet out so that when you bend your knees, your knees go directly over your second and third toes. Take a deep breath as you stretch your arms up and out with the ideation “I am the Universe” as you exhale, bend your knees, stick out your tongue and roll you’re your eyes up. You can make a “haaaaa” sound. Repeat 4-6 times. On the last Goddess, hold the pose for 3-5 breaths.

11. **Prasarita padottanasana (Wide-legged forward fold)** – From this wide stance, fold forward into Prasarita. Bend your knees as much as you like. On an inhale, straighten your legs a little more, as you exhale, bend your knees. Repeat 4-6 times.

12. **Lord of the Dance**

13. **Head-to-knee**

14. Sphinx to Cobra to Upward bow – then Child’s pose; opening heart to love and acceptance

15. Bridge pose – with flowing hands; repeat 5 times; hold for 10 breaths

16. Spinal twists – 3 times on each side; 4th time hold for 5 breaths

17. Rocking with legs towards chest

18. Self-massage with aroma oils (starting with warming up hands; then covering eyes and massaging face; then inner arm going up into the arm pit, around and down the outer arm twisting, then massaging hand; then belly and lower back; then legs and special focus on feet.

19. **Savasana** – focus on the loving energy of the heart and spreading it all over the body and soul