

listening to the body

by Melanie Willsher



I am a Yoga teacher in Lucca, Tuscany, organising Yoga breaks and retreats. Following the urge to change and deepen my own practice, I have been working with Rossella Baroncini, who was a direct student of Vanda Scaravelli, at her studio in Florence.

At my last Yoga retreat, I invited Rossella to lead a class, introducing three basic principals, 'three friends in one': the breath, gravity and the wavelike releasing of the spine. There is nothing 'to be done', only 'to go with'.

Rossella began the practise by opening the body's spaces to the breath, focusing on breathing out. With each out-breath, you let go, as you allow yourself to be pulled into the ground. You sense the movement of the breath down your vital core, the spine, while the back of the waist lengthens. Sensing the inner pulse, the rhythm, opening the rib cage, relaxing the diaphragm, and following the breath as it travels down along the spine into the tailbone and pelvic floor, then breathing in, is like receiving a gift which allows you to open and expand.

With *Brahmari Pranayama* (humming bee breath), partners felt the humming sound as it vibrated down the spine as though cleansing it. Always this inner listening to the breath.

The spine lengthened with the rebound force of gravity, from the heels to the top of the head. In *Tadasana* (mountain pose), as in all the poses, you learn to 'undo' says Rossella. Follow your breath and then connect yourself with the centre of gravity in the spine, at the level where the spine moves in two opposite directions - growing roots in the earth while at the same time elongating to the sky, like a tree. Rest and anchor the tailbone and the sacrum down so that the spine can lengthen lightly upwards. We were often yawning and sighing with relief, as the shoulders and upper body relaxed and tension dropped away, as we realised there is always more to let go.

Once you have allowed gravity to rest your body, the spine can release and grow with each out-breath. The wave like movement of the breath meets the wave like movement of extension along the spine. The attitude is attentive, interested and playful. Attention is always on the wholeness of the movement. In *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (Wheel), infinite time is taken, waiting for the moment in the outbreath when there's a natural impulse to release up into the pose, while feeling that the feet and hands are being held by something way deep down in the earth. The poses all unfold, or not, in the same simple, natural, way.

Yoga becomes yours when it nourishes you, when it's creative and playful, working from the inside out, exploring new ways to begin again, learning from your own practice so that you become your own best teacher. There is a magic that happens in Yoga and in life when you go with instead of against. You let go of 'becoming'. You just are.

Melanie is a registered British Wheel of Yoga teacher. Details of retreats at Il Borghino, and Yoga breaks at my Lucca Studio, from www.Yoga-breaks-italy.co.uk or melaniewillsher@onetel.com.

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