



# Yoga to unlock your true nature

*As part of your yoga practice, the ancient practice of Svadhyaya, which can be translated as “self-study” or the importance of getting to know yourself, is a vital tool for unlocking your true nature.*

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**H**ow often in your daily life do you stop and take stock of what’s going on in your mind and physical body? Do you get so caught on the treadmill of the everyday that you don’t realise when you’re feeling a little frazzled, until you’re a lot frazzled and headed for burnout? If you don’t slow down to feel these first negative signs, it could mean you’re not slowing down enough to feel the positive signs either.

A regular yoga practice can help you identify these signals before you hit a wall. It helps you slow down, breathe deeply, move assuredly and think with clarity. It teaches you to get curious about how you move through your everyday life. It asks you to slow down enough to consider:

- How are you feeling today?
- How does your body feel today?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you sad?
- What causes you stress?
- What brings you peace?

The practice of *Svadhyaya* teaches you to stop and allow yourself to consider the answers to questions like these so that you can begin to recognise what happens in these moments for you. As you maintain a sense of curiosity for how you feel physically and emotionally in different areas of your life, you begin to cultivate a relationship with the inner workings of your own body and mind. And with this, a sense of compassion and understanding of your inner world develops. You get to know yourself, as you would a close friend or family member and start to better understand your true nature.

## Yoga for your body and breath

Your physical yoga practice, referred to as *asana*, helps you understand and communicate with your body. It helps you notice how your body is feeling through yoga poses and movement sequences;

some will likely feel easier than others and can differ from day to day, depending on how you’re feeling in yourself.

If someone is in distress, you’ll often remind them to take deep slow breaths because it promotes calm. Through yoga, you also learn to notice how your breath feels. You’ll become obsessed with watching it move in and out, guiding it to fill your lungs, chest and belly. The breath is what gives your whole body the source of energy, or what we call *prana*, that it needs.

*These moments, even if they are brief at first, help you to understand more of how your body and mind are connected; how one almost always affects the other and how the true you is part of that connection.*

As you learn to move your body, and breathe in unison with it, something profound happens. Each time you step onto your mat you become more aware as to how your body is feeling, where your aches and pains are, where you feel tired, sore or strong and where you are able to breathe most deeply. This initial development of self-knowledge and awareness can be challenging, but taking the time in your regular yoga practice to notice can support you and become a useful tool elsewhere in your life.

As you move your body and shift physical energy it’s understandable that emotional energy might be jiggled around too. You might feel frustrated if you can’t move into a certain pose, you could find your breath tighten or your mind could wander to situations that you’re experiencing in your day-to-day life. In the early days of practice this can seem confronting; unexpected

tears in a yoga class are not uncommon, but as you develop and start to understand your own practice, these shifts become magical tools for navigating life outside the studio and off the mat.

## Yoga for your mind

There is peace to be found on the yoga mat, too. That collapse into *savasana* at the end of a yoga class can be the sweetest, most heart-opening feeling. Those times when your inner chatter keeps on rambling, but you finally find some quiet? That’s what keeps you going back for more. If you start to pay attention to what comes up in those moments of quiet, those moments outside the constant hum of daily life, you might discover something new about yourself.

Yoga helps deepen your connection with your body and mind. As you begin your practice and you notice how your body is feeling, take a moment to notice how your mind is feeling, too. You might notice it’s challenging to create a sense of calm if you have a lot going on; if you find a particular *asana* challenging, how does it make you feel? You might feel frustrated, distracted or disconnected from the present moment, but are you able to slowly train yourself to bring your attention back and reconnect?

These moments, even if they are brief at first, help you to understand more of how your body and mind are connected; how one almost always affects the other and how the true *you* is part of that connection. It can help you start to see yourself not as the labels you are given — mother, sister, friend, daughter — and not as the choices you make, the relationships you have or where you live or where you work, but beyond. All of these things you hold as part of your identity, but away from them, when you maintain a sense of curiosity in your practice: connecting with your body, breath and mind, you find the true essence of *you*, your true nature.

Simple seated pranayama





*Understanding your own true nature can help you to move through the world with the consideration and compassion so many wish to embody.*



### Yoga philosophy

The philosophy of yoga teaches you the practice of self-study to develop your self-awareness and understand where your behavioural patterns are. It teaches you the importance of the relationship between your mind, body and breath so that when you catch glimpses of this connection, you can start to feel more clarity and connection not only to yourself but to the world around you.

As you notice more frequently how your mind, body and breath feel in each moment, you learn to also notice how they feel in certain interactions. You might find particular conversations bring tension into your body or shorten your breath, or some days your mind feels particularly busy and chatty. The practice is to notice. Svadyaha won't, and doesn't, teach us to prevent these reactions, but it will help to cultivate the awareness that can help you to be conscious of your behaviour and decision-making in those scenarios. Perhaps bringing in a deeper breath or catching your thoughts will help create calm where it's needed, bringing a sense of ease to a difficult moment.

Your intentions become clearer. As you develop awareness, understanding and compassion for your own patterns, you can start to do the same for others. You can better navigate your physical and emotional reactions in each moment and start to see what lies beneath those reactions. Understanding your own true nature can help you to move through the world with the consideration and compassion so many wish to embody.



Pranayama (Breath work)

### Yoga sequence to unlock your true nature

#### Dandasana (Simple seated pose)

Place your body with purpose. Allow your shoulders to drop and your sit bones to feel heavy on the floor. Tuck your chin in slightly to lengthen the back of your neck, and allow your jaw to soften. Place your hands so that your arms and hands can relax. Close your eyes or softly gaze towards the floor. As you sit here, notice how your body feels. Notice the connection to your seat on the surface beneath you and the feeling of your hands on your legs. Listen to the sounds around you. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back without any judgement. Practice checking in each day and notice how each day may feel different. Stay here for two to three minutes.

#### Pranayama (Breath work)

Your breath is the most important part of your practice. Bring your hands onto your stomach or chest to help feel your breath. Notice how it feels and where you can feel it in your body. Take three conscious deep

breaths to help clear your focus. Gently begin to inhale, filling your upper body with air, and slowly exhale. After a few breaths, slowly lengthen your exhale if it feels comfortable. Breathe in for a count of four and out for a count of six. Repeat 10 times. Take time at the end of this practice to notice how your mind, body and, most importantly, breath feels.

#### Balāsana (Child's pose)

Place your knees as wide as feels comfortable for you, hinge from your hips, laying your torso to rest on your thighs. Allow space for your stomach to relax down. Lengthen your arms overhead, reach your fingers away from your body and allow your hips to feel heavy and fall towards your heels. Use cushions or blankets for additional comfort under your knees if needed. Relax into your breathing. Direct your breath down towards your stomach and allow it to soften. Placing your body in this position creates an inwards focus and allows your body to surrender to the ground beneath you. Notice what thoughts and feelings arise for you here



Balāsana (Child's pose)



Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II)



as you take the time to be introspective. Stay here for two to three minutes, focusing on taking conscious breaths.

**Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II)**

Place your feet wide. Ground both feet down into the floor, your front knee aligned above your ankle and back leg straight. Reach your arms out in line with your shoulders and relax your shoulders away from your ears. Check you are not holding tension in your jaw. Softly gaze over your fingertips. The warrior poses can show us where our challenges and frustrations lie. They require strength and a steady breath. Notice what feelings arise here, merely as an observer without making judgements. Stay here for five to eight conscious breaths.

**Savasana (Corpse pose)**

Lie flat on your back, legs and arms straight, away from your body, palms facing up and feet relaxed, falling out to the side. Tuck your chin slightly to allow your neck to be long. Let your whole body feel heavy and relaxed down into the floor beneath you. Close your eyes and breathe in any way that feels natural to you. This is your final resting pose. Try to allow your senses to draw inwards with just a soft, gentle focus on your body and breath. Stay here for five to eight minutes. 🌿

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Downward Dog



Savasana (Corpse pose)