

Yoga Catharsis

BY ZACHARY FEDER

Inhale, bring your palms together, and begin by dedicating this practice to all the great yogis and yoginis who are turning in their graves or laughing into their loin-cloths because of the Diet-Pepsi-maxification that Western culture has unleashed all over their sacred path of transcendence. Take a moment to honor the great Patanjali who an entirely new wave of young mat-slingers often confuse with a sweet desert that follows your dhal and rice course. Give reverence to the Rig Veda that is absolutely not the great-grandfather of the Lord Vader. Exhale and release any judgment around the effectiveness of hip-hop yoga, wine and yoga, or products like Water Mat Yoga to accelerate your union with “the god head.” If Western yoga culture is going through its adolescence, then it needs our support, wisdom, and compassion as it navigates through the madness of the modern-day mass media marketplace.

Sun salutation, raise your arms to the sky, and primal scream for every time that a teenybopper’s cellphone with a Taylor Swift ring tone has started playing “Shake It Off” during your Corpse Pose, causing your subtle body to crash into your physical like the meteor that ended the dinosaurs. Extend your neck and stretch out your fingertips as if you were reaching for a playlist that didn’t drag your already tender heart through an emotional roller coaster of breakup songs courtesy of Rhianna, Dido, and Adele. Release any guilt for weeping about the tragedies of your life while simultaneously staring at the hottie in front of you through the tears.

Exhale Downward Dog, and forgive yourself for practicing for years only to find that you

may be single-handedly keeping two chiropractors and a gait specialist in business. Exhale love and appreciation because you eat organic and gluten- and sugar-free while still experiencing body insecurity and after-lunch fatigue. Tenderly acknowledge that most people you know are just doing what they can to keep their hair from catching fire in the perfect storm of their personal and professional lives while not consuming too much alcohol, coffee, cheese, and chocolate over the course of a single day even though it’s the quickest way to Samadhi at a fraction of the price. Be patient and allow everyone to take the journey in their own time. If that journey happens to be better looking than yours, avoid them. Exhale deeply. Plan to eat chocolate later.



Inhale Cobra, and stretch out that lymph system clogged with the smog of a thousand fossil fuel refineries, at peace in the knowledge that you and every single one of those fat-cat ExxonMobil executives are one. Exhale love for all the climate-change deniers, corporate henchmen, lobbyists, and Big Pharma hitmen who are just macro expressions of that irritating newbie who spends the entire class grunting and splashing you with his man boob sweat. As each droplet hits you like acid rain on Mother Nature’s brow, inhale and delight as if being anointed by the savory tears of Lord

Krishna himself.

Warrior 1, reflect without judgment on the predominantly white privilege of Western yoga and how it is often accused of being divorced from the most pressing humanitarian issues of our time. Warrior 2, extend your arms while considering yoga’s place in the Black Lives Matter movement, immigration, environmentalism, as well as the groundbreaking pioneers who are changing it by taking addiction, education, healthcare, prison reform, and a dozen other important issues to the mat. If you’re not already doing so, imagine a future in which you serve the greater good by sticking your neck out in more than just a Fish Pose. If yoga is union with the Divine, then I’m sure we can all agree that this doesn’t mean that place over there, somewhere else, in that non-dual VIP room of emptiness that’s often just escapism dressed up in its Sunday best. On the contrary, it means identifying with everyone and everything, everywhere no matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable it is, indefinitely. You know this.

And exhale into Corpse Pose. Surrender, give up, and die to it all. Die to the people who still claim that yoga is simply “expensive stretching” and to those who still believe that everyone “is constantly farting.” Die to the scandals about teachers sleeping with their students and to the overwhelming surge in trainings that have oversaturated the market. Die to the need to make sense of a spiritual path that has exploded like a \$24 billion money shot into the very face of American culture without balking, or judging it as anything other than evidence that something, ironically, is working.

Above all, bring appreciation to the part of you that serves this very significant movement, and make an intention for the next chapter of its life—young adulthood. Then bring your hands to your heart and release yourself into the heartbreaking preciousness of this moment, knowing that you are not alone, that you are loved beyond measure, and that when the world gets too much to bear, you can always just press play, and *shake it off*. . . . 🐦

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