

the fullness of yoga


by Lila Conway



The science of yoga is vast and what we are able to perceive and practice in one lifetime is but a drop in the ocean. It is only through practice that we evolve and truly experience the joy and fullness of yoga. Whether you are a novice or seasoned practitioner there are times when challenges arise along the path. We may find that our practice becomes mechanical, or that we are unable to move forward and no longer make progress as we did when we first started out on the journey. When we reach this plateau of spiritual complacency, try to recognise that it is the mind mistakenly thinking it can't proceed any further. A butterfly may flutter from blossom to blossom but the nature of a true yogi is firmness and stability. Regardless of surfacing emotions and thoughts, we must continue to maintain our practice and the ground achieved, otherwise we fall backwards.

Patanjali explains that obstacles such as disease, laziness, doubt, or failure to sustain effort or backsliding, result in certain signs that we directly experience in our body and mind. These are pain (duhkha), discontent (daurmanasya), uneven breath (svasa-prasvasa), and unsteadiness of the body (angamejayatva) (Yoga Sutra I.31). We may not know how or why an obstacle has come in our path, but we know its presence when the body shakes, the breath is unsteady, or when the mind is agitated and unhappy.

"The goal is near for those who are supremely vigorous and intense in practice (Yoga Sutra I. 21)." This 'supreme intensity' doesn't mean that we need to be sweating hard and straining every muscle, but refers to the intensity of awareness and the ability to be fully in the present. Expand your practice to include being in the present moment both on and off the mat. Take a moment to observe each step, each breath or simply listen to the waking sounds of nature in the morning. Start to discover what you have been missing through mental distraction and you may find that you don't have to change your practice, just come back to the present moment where the practice can actually change you.

Trust that whatever practice you do, however little, has planted a seed that will yield fruit later in this life or the next. Recognise any frustration as the inner voice of intelligence (buddhi) that yearns to move towards our divine nature – grace, peace and unconditional love. 

"No effort on the path is ever lost" (Bhagavad Gita 2.40)

Setu Bandhasana: The Bridge

In Sanskrit, this posture translates as Setu = bridge, Bandha = lock. Some of the main benefits are that it helps to realign the spine, eliminates round shoulders and backache, improves digestion, rejuvenates and strengthens legs, reduces stress, therapeutic for menstrual disorders, asthma and various bronchial and thyroid conditions.

Step by Step

1. Lie on the floor with your arms by your sides. Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor, hip width apart, heels as close to the sitting bones as possible.
2. Inhale and press your feet and arms into the floor, lift your




tailbone and pelvis up, bringing the lower and upper back off the floor. Arch the back and try to raise the chest and navel as high as possible.

3. Interlock your fingers and extend the arms towards the heels, keeping your arms and hands on the floor. Bring the body weight towards the tops of your shoulders.
4. Keep your knees directly over the heels but push them forward away from the hips. Make sure your thighs and feet remain parallel.
5. Stay in the pose for as long as comfortable. To release, exhale and slowly roll the spine back down to the floor.

Practice Tips

To go deeper in the pose, lift the heels and push your tailbone up. If your lower back needs a release, hug your knees to your chest and roll from side to side.

Caution: Respect your body's limitations and inner wisdom, if something feels wrong, please do not do it. Avoid in last trimester of pregnancy or if you have a serious neck injury. 

The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga by Swami Vishnudevandanda comes highly recommended for deeper study. For details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, go to www.yogaprema.org