



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## Yoga for Everyone at the Ruth White Karuna Yoga Residentials

I recently spent a week at the Milelja Yoga Centre on the Greek island of Lesbos. It rained most of the week, which was sad for us but good for the island, as they hadn't had any rain for at least six weeks. I very much enjoyed the yoga classes with my teacher Ruth White, and the senior teachers Dawn, Maxine, Regina and John. It was wonderful to spend time with many of my yoga friends and my sister, Judith. The brunch provided was healthy and nutritious and the food in the tavernas for our evening meals was also excellent. I indulged myself by having a Hot Stone Massage. Only one word to describe it – delicious!

The distance learners with the Ruth White Karuna Yoga School attend yoga residentials in order to attain the 500 - hour requirement for the course, which covers six modules. (The minimum requirement of any reputable yoga course is 250 hours of training). In addition to the three weeks offered in Lesbos every May/June, there are also weekend residentials taking place in the UK throughout the year. Most are held in serene stately homes or mansions in the heart of the countryside where you start to unwind the moment you arrive. The good thing is you don't have to be on the teacher-training course to enjoy these excellent yoga classes with Ruth. She has been teaching yoga for over 30 years and yogis of all abilities, from beginners to experienced teachers, are all welcome at her residential. It is a requirement that once you have qualified as a Karuna Yoga teacher that you attend one residential every year in order to demonstrate to Ruth White that your yoga and teaching skills are up to standard.

If you are interested in becoming a Karuna Yoga Teacher or just want to enjoy a yoga holiday the details are available on the web site at [www.ruthwhiteyoga.com](http://www.ruthwhiteyoga.com)

## The Benefits of Back Arching

I always start my own yoga practice with at least ten minutes back arching over a purpose-built back archer. I was introduced to the back archers quite a few years ago. At first I found it extremely uncomfortable, as my back was very stiff and slightly rounded after years of sitting at a desk in front of a computer. After using the back archer for a few weeks I started to really enjoy the experience. It helped to ease the stiffness and backache I used to have coming home from the office or after a day of gardening. At first I needed five blocks to support my head while I stretched over the arch. Over the years I have managed to reduce the number of blocks supporting my head but it is important not to feel any strain in the neck while back arching. Seek the guidance of an experienced yoga teacher before using a back archer.

Strong wooden back archers are now available from Tim Hallewell at [www.finewoodenfurniture.co.uk](http://www.finewoodenfurniture.co.uk) These are hand made to a very high standard and are light enough to send in the post. Tim is a yoga teacher and carpenter who understands the benefits of back arching. The wooden back archers are 30 plus p&p.

What can it be used for?

- It opens the chest and improves the flexibility of the spine
- It may correct abnormal curvature of the spine such as scoliosis
- It provides more room for the heart and lungs to work efficiently
- It opens the hips and strengthens the legs
- It helps to relieve backache
- It improves posture and so reduces stress on the neck, shoulder and back muscles
- It helps to improve all backbending postures
- It helps to lift the mood and raise energy levels.



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## Posture Of The Month – Utthita Parsvakonasana

In Sanskrit, Utthita means ‘stretch’, parsva means ‘side’ or ‘flank’, while kona is an ‘angle’. This is the extended side stretch posture. In this posture, both sides of your body are stretched intensely, from the toes of one foot to the fingertips of the opposite hand. Remember to keep your body absolutely steady when practising this asana.

1. Stand in Tadasana (mountain posture). Take a breath in and as you breathe out jump or step your legs wide apart. Raise your arms sideways in line with your shoulders, palms facing down.
2. Turn your left foot in and your right foot out keeping the left leg stretched out and tightened at the knee.
3. Breathe in and as you breathe out bend your right knee keeping your knee in line with your foot. Ensure that your knee stays above your ankle. **Beginners** – bend your knee as far as is comfortable taking your thigh as low as possible. **Intermediates** – bend the knee until the thigh and calf form a right angle and the right thigh is parallel to the floor.
4. **Beginners** – rest your right forearm on your right thigh. Place your left hand on your hip. Roll your left shoulder back to open up the front of the body. If your shoulder and neck feel okay, lift your left arm and stretch it straight out over your left ear, keeping your head up. **Intermediates** – place your right palm on the floor by the side of your foot or onto a brick or block. Only go as far as your front body stays open. Lift your left arm and stretch it straight out over your left ear, keeping your head up.
5. Pull up the left thigh and press the outer edge of the left foot onto the floor. The chest, hips and legs should be in a line and you are stretching every part of your body, especially the spine.
6. Stay in this posture for five breaths, breathing deeply and evenly.
7. Pull up the mula bandha, and with a breath in, come out of the posture by lowering the arm and straightening the right leg.
8. Repeat on the opposite side.
9. Breathe out as you jump or step back into Tadasana.
10. Rest in Tadasana for at least five breaths before starting another posture.

### Benefits of this posture

- Tones up the ankles, knees and thighs
- Corrects defects in the calves and thighs
- Enhances lung capacity
- Tones the muscles of the heart
- Reduces fat around the waist and hips
- Relieves sciatic and arthritic pains
- Increases peristaltic activity
- Improves digestion and helps the elimination of waste.



### Book Recommendation

If you are interested in learning more about yoga and the benefits of certain postures I can highly recommend a book by B.K.S. Iyengar called ‘Yoga – The Path To Holistic Health’ – ISBN 0-7513-2167-2.

The following is quoted from the book:

“The primary aim of yoga is to restore the mind to simplicity and peace, to free it from confusion and distress. This sense of calm comes from the practice of yoga asanas and pranayama. Unlike other forms of exercise, which strain muscles and bones, yoga gently rejuvenates the body. Yoga is creating space in the physical body – stretching away from the centre, not contracting the muscles and pulling in but widening and lengthening the body, stretching the arms and legs. By restoring the body, yoga frees the mind from the negative feelings caused by the fast pace of modern life. The practice of yoga helps you to overcome all obstacles on the path to perfect health and spiritual contentment.

Yoga means balance and harmony and is a holistic practice including mind, body and spirit. We, as yoga students, have a precious gift, the gift of being able to practice and bring ourselves back into a natural state of balance and harmony.

Yoga asanas can cure physical ailments and tone the whole body. They strengthen bones and muscles, correct posture, improve breathing and increase energy. Yoga asanas, while appearing to deal with the physical body alone, actually influence the chemical balance of the brain, which in turn improves one’s mental state of being. Yoga is a light which, once lit, will never dim. The better your practice, the brighter the flame”. B.K.S. Iyengar.