



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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Open Your Heart

Opening the heart is one of the most important goals of hatha yoga. The ancient yogis considered the heart to be an energy centre that is the core of the Divine within you. On a physical level, opening the heart centre counterbalances the hunched posture you may have from driving or working at a computer. It can also lift your spirits and help combat depression. To cultivate all these benefits, practise these six heart-opening poses. Hold each for five deep breaths, keeping the sides of your body long, the heads of your upper arm bones back, and the lower tips of your shoulder blades curling in towards your heart.



Bhujangasana - Cobra



Dhanurasana - Bow



Matsyasana - Fish



Setu Bandha - Bridge



Ustrasana - Camel



Urdhva Dhanurasana - Upward Bow

Feel the love

Love is a great healer. Simple visualisation techniques that focus on love can help mend a weak heart – and more.

Start by closing your eyes. Take some deep breaths and picture in great detail someone you love – seeing them smile, hearing them laugh. Then imagine telling the object of your affection how much you love them. After about a minute of the visualisation you will hopefully experience feelings of love, peace and joy, reminding you that these feelings already exist within you but can be triggered by your own mind.

Depression, anxiety and even heart disease may arise from having a ‘closed’ heart, or not fully experiencing your emotions. When you bring love into your consciousness you release that emotional constriction and open your heart centre, resulting in improved mood and an overall sense of well-being.

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The body responds to the sensation of love by secreting endorphins, which counteract stress and lower blood pressure. American cardiologist, Alejandro Junger, who promotes this visualisation technique to his patients says, *'People report feelings of warmth and ease filling their chests while they do the exercise. It's a tool you can use for a more holistic approach to health.'* He adds, *'Our society is in crisis. Is there any doubt that one of the major epidemics today is that people's hearts are closed? Anything that helps to open people's hearts will not only help their blood pressure, but all of life on earth.'*

Both articles have been edited from the February 2008 Issue of *Yoga Journal*.

Posture of the Month – Marichyasana I

This asana is dedicated to the sage, Marichi, the grandfather of Surya (the Sun God)

1. Sit on the floor in Dandasana with your legs stretched straight in front.
2. Bend your right knee; place the sole and heel of your right foot flat on the floor. The shin of your right leg should be perpendicular to the floor and your calf should touch the thigh. The inner side of your right foot should touch the inner side of your outstretched left thigh.
3. Stretch your right arm forward inside your right leg until your right armpit touches your right shin. Turn your right arm around your right shin and thigh, bend your right elbow and throw your right forearm behind your back at the level of your waist. Then move your left hand behind your back and hold your right hand with your left at the wrist or just hold the fingers. **Beginners:** hold a belt in both hands in order to hold your arms around your leg and your back.
4. Now, turn your spine to the right, keeping the outstretched left leg straight. Remain in this position for a few breaths.
5. Keeping the front of your body lifted, turn your body to face over your leg left, exhale and bend forward. **Advanced:** rest your forehead on the left knee. **Intermediates and beginners:** bend forward over your left leg as far as possible. While in this position, keep both shoulders parallel to the floor and breathe normally. Stay in the posture for about 30 seconds making sure that your left leg stays straight and rests on the floor.
6. Inhale and raise your head. Release your hands, straighten your right leg and come back to Dandasana.
7. Repeat the posture on the other side for an equal length of time.

Benefits of this posture

- Increases energy levels
- The fingers gain in strength
- Tones and massages the abdominal organs
- Creates a better circulation of blood around the abdominal organs and keeps them healthy
- Improves the functioning of the liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys and intestines
- Alleviates backache
- Gives the back and legs more elasticity



What is yoga? It is a word with many interpretations and connotations. Patanjali, who wrote the yoga sutras, provides a very clear definition.

'Yoga is the ability to direct the mind exclusively toward an object and sustain that direction without any distractions.'