



# Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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## Yang Yoga

In last month's newsletter I wrote about the benefits of a yin yoga practice. I explained about stretching the connective tissue in order to increase flexibility. The hamstrings, for example, are layered with lots of tough connective tissue – the gristly fibres that help hold the muscles' structure together. Most forms of yoga practiced today are yang, emphasising muscular movement and contraction. By contrast yin yoga targets the connective tissue of the hips, pelvis and lower spine and helps to decompress the spine after many hours of sitting at a desk. Yin postures are held three to five to ten minutes at a time.

Yang yoga is the opposite of yin yoga. Yang yoga is when we infuse the muscles with blood, like standing postures, Sun Salutations, or inversions. Yang yoga is an active practice that primarily focuses on movement and muscular contraction. These yang postures are not held for so long as the muscles would become tired.

Yang yoga provides enormous benefits for physical and emotional health, especially for those living a sedentary modern lifestyle. Yang practice removes chi stagnation as it cleanses and strengthens our bodies and our minds. But the practice of yang yoga, by itself, may not adequately prepare the body for a yin activity such as seated meditation. Seated meditation is a yin activity, not just because it is still but also because it depends on the flexibility of the connective tissue.

Standing postures, arm balances, and inversions—postures that require muscular action to protect the structural integrity of the body—is yang yoga. Yang exercise is always accompanied by compression of the joints. Compression is good for joints and stimulates the bones to healthy growth. This is one reason why vigorous yang exercise is prescribed to prevent osteoporosis. But yang exercise doesn't allow the full range of motion. Yang exercise develops strong muscles and bones but can leave the joints contracted and stiff. This is common among athletes.

Yin yoga by itself won't develop the strength and stability a joint needs. Yang yoga by itself will not exercise the full range of motion. This is why different forms of yoga can and should be practiced as supplements to each other. Muscles and blood are yang; connective tissues and joints are yin. Yin and yang tissues do not respond to training in the same way and a student's practice becomes more effective when the difference is understood and when both yin and yang postures are included in a regular yoga practice.

Most of my yoga classes are based on a mixture of yin and yang yoga. Yin postures to stretch the connective tissue in joints and to decompress the spine. Yang yoga to strengthen bones to help prevent osteoporosis, and to strengthen muscles in the legs and spine to give us good structural support.

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## Posture of the Month – Virabhadrasana III (warrior III)

This asana is a warrior posture named after the mythic warrior-sage, Virabhadra.

Virabhadrasana III is a continuation of the posture Virabhadrasana I. For full instructions of how to do Virabhadrasana I, please refer to the September 2007 newsletter - issue number 8. I will teach you both postures in the classes this month.



### Virabhadrasana I

Virabhadrasana I is a vigorous asana, which strengthens your spine and increases the flexibility of your knees and thighs. The arms receive an intense stretch and this expands the muscles of your chest and enhances the capacity of your lungs. Moving into Virabhadrasana III helps to contract and tone the abdominal organs and makes your leg muscles more shapely and sturdy. It is recommended for runners, as it gives vigour and agility.

### Technique

1. Stand in Tadasana. (Mountain posture).
2. Inhale and as you exhale jump or step your legs wide apart.
3. Raise your arms up to shoulder-level, roll your shoulders back and rotate your arms so that your palms face the ceiling.
4. Rotate your body to face over your right foot and raise your arms coming into Virabhadrasana I.
5. Exhale, bend forward and rest your chest on your right thigh. Keep your arms straight and rest in this position for two breaths.
6. Exhale and simultaneously lift your left leg from the floor by swinging your body slightly forward and also straighten your right leg.
7. Keep your hips level and your left leg parallel to the floor.
8. Hold in this posture for 20 or 30 seconds.
9. While balancing, your whole body (except your right leg), is to be kept parallel to the floor. The right leg, which should be fully stretched and straight, should be perpendicular to the floor.
10. Pull up the back of your right thigh and stretch your arms and left leg as if two persons are pulling you from either end.
11. Exhale and come back to Virabhadrasana I.
12. Repeat the posture on the other side.

### Cautions

- Do not raise your arms in the first posture if you have high blood pressure.

### Benefits of this posture

- Brings the body into harmony, balance and poise.
- Contracts and tones the abdominal organs.
- Tones the muscles in the legs making them more shapely and strong.
- Helps us to stand firmly on the soles of the feet.
- Improves spinal elasticity by keeping the weight evenly balanced between toes and heels.
- Keeps the stomach muscles toned.
- Gives agility to the body and mind.

