

Mindful Yoga by Jon Kabat-Zinn

For a number of years in the late 1970s, Larry Rosenberg and I taught back-to-back evening classes in a church in Harvard Square. He would teach vipassana meditation (a Buddhist practice of mindfulness), and I followed with mindful hatha yoga. The idea was that everyone would take both classes. But Larry and I were always bemused by the fact that most of the people in the meditation class didn't want to do the hatha yoga, and most of the "yogis" didn't come for the meditation class.

We saw the hatha and meditation as different but complementary doors into what is ultimately the same room--namely, learning how to live wisely. Only the view from the doorways was different. We had a definite sense that the meditators would have benefited from paying more attention to their bodies (they tended to dismiss the body as a low-level preoccupation). And the hatha yogis, we felt, would have benefited from dropping into stillness for longer stretches of time and observing the arising and passing away from moment to moment of mind/body experience in one sitting posture. We didn't push our view of this on either group, and we tried not to be too attached to who showed up for what, especially since we saw the essence of what we were both teaching as identical. Nonetheless, it was an interesting phenomenon.

Over the years, my own experiences of combining mindfulness meditation practices and hatha yoga into a seamless whole prompted me to experiment with different ways of bringing these ancient consciousness disciplines into contemporary mainstream settings. I wanted to explore their effectiveness in transforming health and consciousness. How might they be connected?

For one thing, the hatha yoga had the potential, I thought, to help reverse the huge prevalence of disuse atrophy from our highly sedentary lifestyle, especially for those who have pain and chronic illness. The mind was already known to be a factor in stress and stress-related disorders, and meditation was known to positively affect a range of autonomic physiological processes, such as lowering blood pressure and reducing overall arousal and emotional reactivity. Might not training in mindfulness be an effective way to bring meditation and yoga together so that the virtues of both could be experienced simultaneously as different aspects of one seamless whole? Mindfulness practice seemed ideal for cultivating greater awareness of the unity of mind and body, as well as of the ways the unconscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can undermine emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

This personal exploration led ultimately to developing a clinical service for medical patients in which we used relatively intensive training in mindfulness meditation practices based on the vipassana and Zen traditions, along with mindful hatha yoga, with medical patients suffering with a wide range of chronic disorders and diseases. This program evolved into an 8-week course, now known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

MBSR is now offered in over 200 medical centers, hospitals, and clinics around the world. Many of these programs are taught by physicians, nurses, social workers, and psychologists, as well as other health professionals who are seeking to reclaim and deepen some of the sacred reciprocity inherent in the doctor-caregiver/patient-client relationship. Their work is based on a need for an active partnership in a participatory medicine, one in which patient/clients take on significant responsibility for doing a certain kind of interior work in order to tap into their own deepest inner resources for learning, growing, healing, and transformation.

Hatha yoga has played a large and critical role in this work from the very beginning, and many yoga teachers have been drawn to teach MBSR. Through a seamless integration of mindfulness

meditation and hatha yoga, MBSR taps into the innate potential for healing that we all have. It mobilizes our ability to cultivate embodied wisdom and self-compassion; and by so doing it teaches us to live our life and face whatever arises with integrity, clarity and open-hearted presence.

Mindfulness lies at the very core of Buddhism in all its forms. Yet its essence is universal in that it is about refining attention and awareness. It is a powerful vehicle for cultivating deep insight into the ultimate causes of suffering and the possibility of liberation from that suffering.

The ancient stream of hatha yoga practice is another of the great consciousness disciplines. My first taste came in 1967 at a karate school in Boston, where a young Vietnam veteran named Tex was using it as a warm-up. I quickly fell in love with the yoga. I was training in the Zen tradition at the time, and the two seemed to complement each other perfectly. That conviction has only deepened over time.

The appeal of hatha yoga is nothing less than the lifelong adventure and discipline of working with one's body as a door into freedom and wholeness. Hatha yoga was never about accomplishment or perfection, or even about technique by itself. Nor was it about turning one's body into an elaborate pretzel, although the athleticism that is possible in hatha yoga (if one can manage to steer clear of narcissism) is a truly remarkable art form in its own right. Certainly, we are seeing a marvelous flowering of interest in many different kinds of hatha yoga in mainstream circles now. The question is, how mindful is it, and is this flowering oriented toward self-understanding, wisdom and liberation, or is much of it just physical fitness dressed up in spiritual clothing?

Mindful yoga is a lifetime engagement--not to get somewhere else, but to be where and as we actually are in this very moment, with this very breath, whether the experience is pleasant unpleasant, or neutral. Our body will change a lot as we practice, and so will our minds and our hearts and our views. Hopefully, whether a beginner or an old-timer, we are always reminding ourselves in our practice of the value of keeping this beginner's mind.

Excerpted from the article "Mindful Yoga Movement & Meditation" ©2003 by Jon Kabat-Zinn, first published in Yoga International, Feb/March 2003. Visit www.yimag.org.

Mindful Hatha Yoga practice using CDs

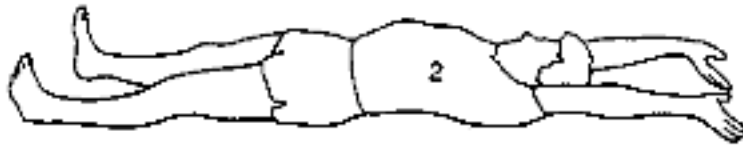
It's a good idea to **begin and end** your yoga sessions with a centering exercise such as sitting meditation for 5 or 10 minutes and/or **Savasana** (Corpse Pose)

Here are Lena Koob-Emunds' instructions for **Savasana**:

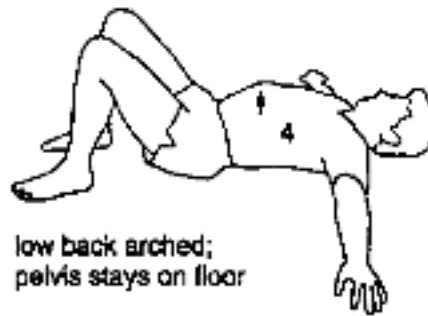
“Lie on your back. Align your body mindfully. Let there be symmetry to the way the feet fall open to the sides, with an even distance from the midline of your body. The arms are gently falling out to the sides, equidistant from the heart, palms facing up. Your fingers are softly curled like flowers going to sleep. Draw the shoulder blades onto the back to support the heart. Close your eyes and turn your awareness inside. With each breath allow yourself to surrender more and more into the spaciousness of the heart.”

Yoga CD 1 tracks

1. Warm-up
2. Pelvic Tilts/Knees to Chest
3. Cat/Cow
4. Leg & Arm Balance
5. Bridge
6. Twist
7. Leg Lifts (back)
8. Leg Lifts (sides)
9. Leg Lifts (belly)
10. Cobra
11. Plow
12. Corpse (no instructions on CD)



low back pressed against floor

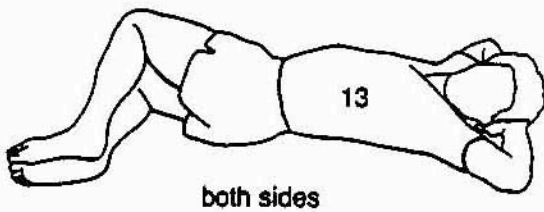
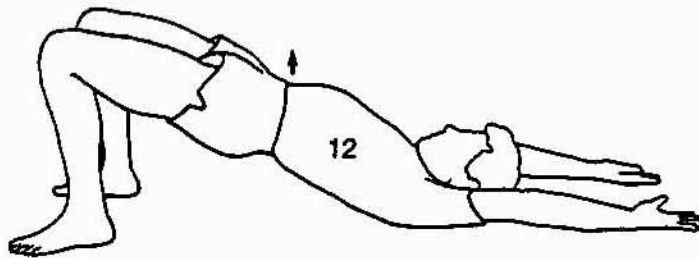
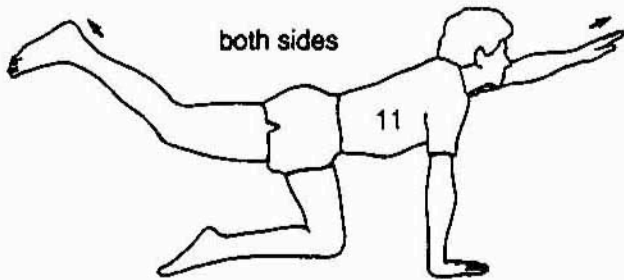
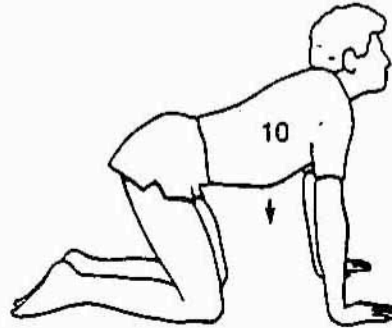
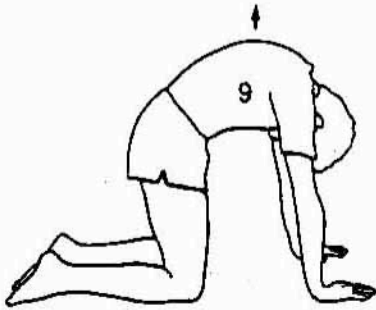
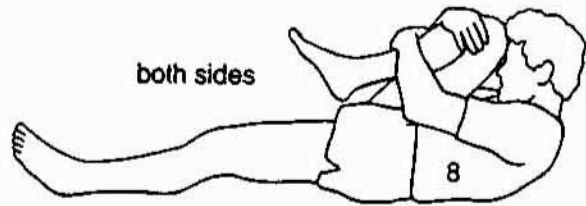


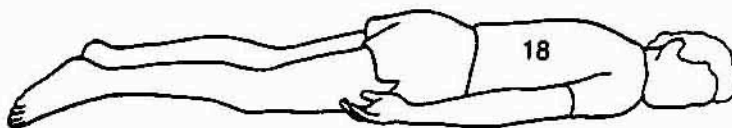
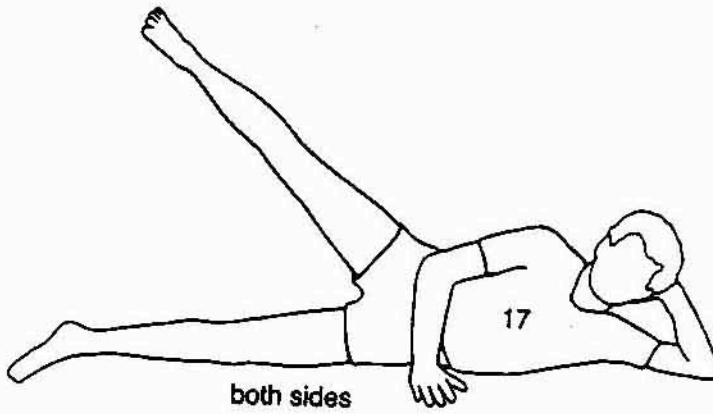
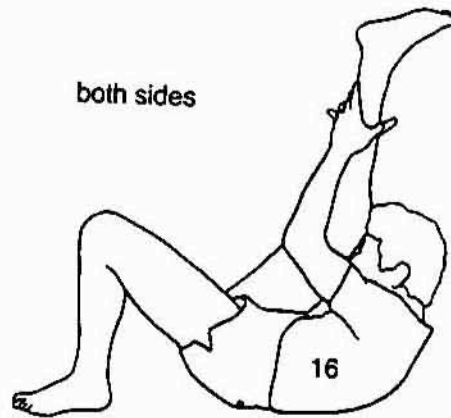
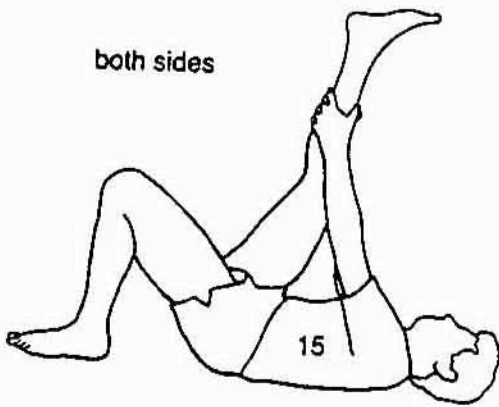
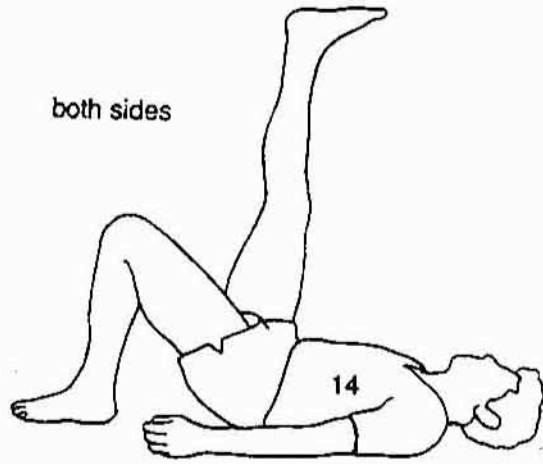
low back arched;
pelvis stays on floor

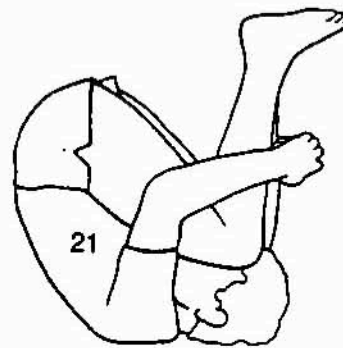
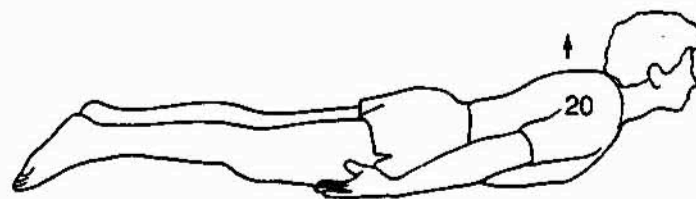
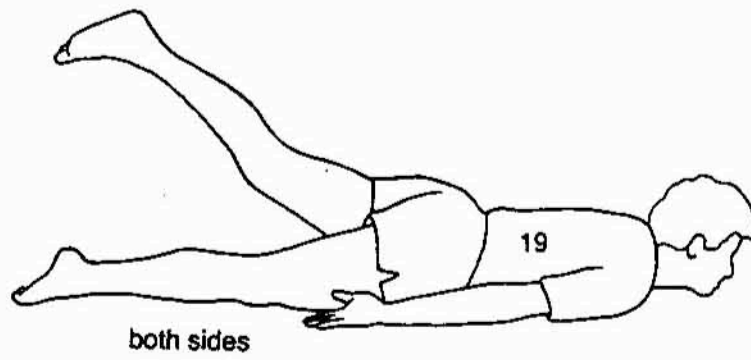


both sides









Working with Resistance

Lately, I've been learning a lot about resistance. My cat, Leo, has an infection, so every day he has to take an antibiotic pill. Cats are picky about what they put in their mouths, and Leo hates the taste of the pills. When he sees one coming, he closes his mouth into a tight slit, and extends his claws in fighting position. Even after we've managed to get the pill in his mouth, he'll often hide it in his cheek, and then spit it out.

Leo's daily fight with the pills has begun to seem like a metaphor for all the ways we resist life--not just life's pills, but also life's sweetness. It's not just that we resist facing, say, a difficult health issue, or the need to leave a relationship or a job. We've also been known to resist a new opportunity, a new friend or lover, an emerging state of inner expansion, even when we sense that something good could happen if we opened up to it. We resist creating space in our overscheduled lives. We resist our own intuitive understandings, and also the inward pull into meditation--often out of an unexamined fear of what we might find if we let ourselves move into our inner spaces. Especially, I've noticed, we resist letting go of our limitations--real or imagined--and stepping into our own largeness, our greater self.

Admittedly, there are times when resistance is an appropriate; if we didn't have the ability to say "No," to resist or filter some of what comes at us, we'd all be overloaded and overwhelmed. The body's immune system is built precisely for this purpose: to resist outside invaders in the form of bugs and bacteria. So is our psychological immune system, which by the time we're grown-up usually consists of a series of energetic boundaries and gateways that we've built to keep out invasive or hostile energies, potentially toxic situations and painful relationships. Obviously, if we didn't have that network of resistances, we'd be vulnerable to every form of suggestion or coercion, subtle and obvious.

The problem arises when we don't know when or how to let down the boundaries. Then our resistance stops being a useful filtering device, and becomes armor. Every one of us has some calcified resistance, and for some of us, resistance can become a rigid of energetic barrier that closes us off from change, from new ideas, from intimacy with people and situations that could take us deeper into our own truth. That's when we stagnate. And we can stagnate in any area of life--in our work, in our relationships, or in our spiritual practice.

What Are You Resisting?

So when I notice myself feeling constricted, or stagnant, or stuck--all words for the same phenomenon-- I usually begin by asking myself what it is that I'm currently resisting. If you try this yourself, you'll probably find that you know the answer. We usually know what we're resisting--often some necessary change, a shift in the nutrition you're giving yourself, a part of your body or psyche that is begging to be stretched.

Once you've determined where the resistance is lodging, you can start to work with it. The classic approach to resistance is to breathe into the feeling and say, on the out breath, "Let go!" However, for me, this doesn't work unless I've first spent some time actually listening to the resistance, getting to know it.

The best way to do this is by asking questions and letting resistance 'talk' to me.

Dialoguing with Your Resistance

The idea of dialoguing with your resistance might sound slightly weird; nonetheless, you might like to try it.

Think about something in your life that you sense would be good for you, but that you're resisting. It might be a change of some kind, or perhaps a shift in diet or in your personal practice, or perhaps in your attitude towards your family life, your relationship (s), or yourself.

Once you've noticed the resistance, let yourself feel the actual sensation of resisting. What are you resisting? What does the resistance feel like in your body?

Once you've touched into the feeling-space of resistance, ask, "What do you have to tell me? What is this resistance about? Why are you there?"

Ask the question, and then just wait to see what arises. It may be a feeling, or a thought, a belief or a fear. It might be a practical sense that maybe now is not the time, or a desire to make the change more familiar before you give into it.

Keep asking until you feel that you've sensed as much about the resistance as possible. Feel that you are actually listening to your resistance.

Then ask, "What would happen if I let go?" Notice what arises. Then ask your resistance, "Would you be willing to let go--just for a moment?" As you ask this question, notice what arises in the wake of the question. There should be a sense of ease, relaxation, perhaps small, perhaps greater than you thought possible.

I've found that as I become present to my resistance in this way, with this questioning attitude, something always does let go. Resistance eases. Sometimes, I also discover that the resistance comes from a deeper intuition that something that seems desirable isn't quite right. But I'd never have found this out if I hadn't asked. Just as people want to be heard, so do our psychological states. Sometimes it's enough just to be willing to listen to what our resistance wants to tell us. That might be all it takes for resistance to be willing to let go.

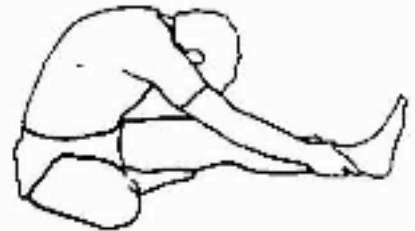
From: Awakened Heart Newsletter, July - August 2006, from Sally Kempton

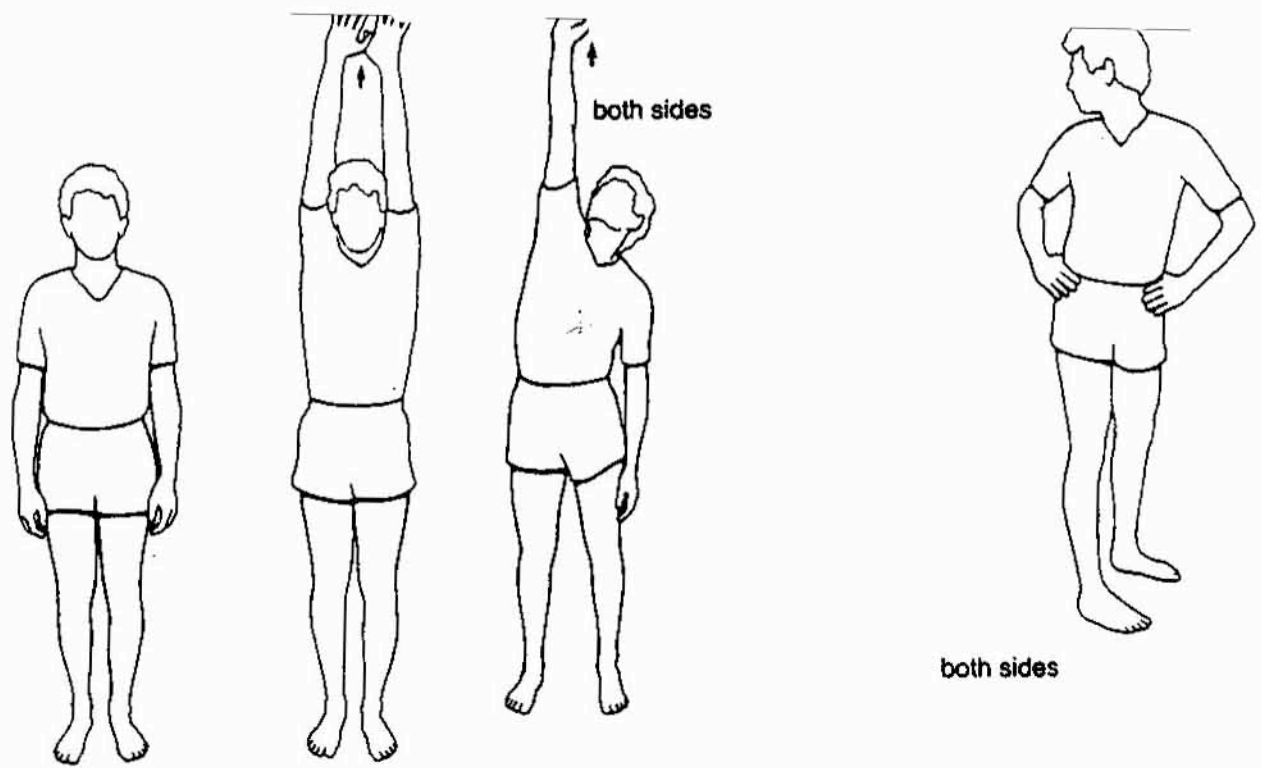
Yoga CD 2 tracks

1. Warm-up
2. Knees to Chest
3. Cobbler's
4. Half Bound Angle
5. Mountain
6. Standing Twist
7. Shoulder Rolls
8. Forward Fold
9. Chair
10. Tree
11. Twist
12. Corpse



both sides





shoulder rolls: do in forward, then backward directions

