

Strong. Exceptional. Enlightened. Yoga

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Description:

This dynamic vinyasa-style class will journey through fundamental and innovative yoga postures to build a solid practice based on strength and spirit. Through logical sequencing, anatomical considerations, and appropriate modifications and variations, this class will focus on core strength, balance and flow, allowing you to challenge your body and open your mind.

Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this session, you will be able to:

- ❖ Explain the general guidelines and structure of a vinyasa-style yoga class.
- ❖ Categorize postures appropriately in order to develop flow.
- ❖ Apply three different methods for sequencing a vinyasa-style yoga class.
- ❖ Offer asana modifications and variations to cater to all ability levels.

What is vinyasa yoga?

***Yoga-** *By definition yoga means union (union of mind, body and spirit)*

Two of the primary objectives of the physical practice of yoga are to 1.) create balance in the body through the development of strength and flexibility, while also 2.) establishing a deep connection between breath and movement.

The word vinyasa is somewhat of a general term that can be used to describe a number of different things related to yoga, from a series of postures to a certain style of yoga class. However, when broken down to its Sanskrit roots the term **vinyasa** means “to place” (**nyasa**) “in a special way” (**vi**). Typically when we speak of vinyasa we are referring to breath-synchronized movement throughout a yoga class, in which poses are linked together using the breath in order to create continuous flow.

With a deeper understanding of the purpose and benefits of each asana, we may then begin to focus our attention to the fundamental concept of **vinyasa krama**, which is expressed in the *Yoga Sutras* as the action taken to correctly organize and construct a gradual and intelligent course for yoga practice [in Sanskrit, this is “the step” (**krama**) used “to place” (**nyasa**) “in a special way” (**vi**)]. The reality is there is not one best way to sequence a yoga practice, as there are a number of factors to consider such as the individual or class needs, lifestyle and long-term goals, what activities will follow the practice (for example, a series of asanas designed to prepare a tennis player for his/her sport will likely be much different from someone who suffers from insomnia and is seeking a relaxing practice to perform late in the evening), energy level, experience, etc.

Principles of asana practice

- ❖ **Breath-** The breath is imperative to yoga practice, as it serves as the link between the inner and the outer body (it is the union between body, breath and mind allows us to realize the true quality of an asana). Understanding and controlling the breath (the art of breath control is often referred to as **pranayama**, which broken down into its Sanskrit roots, **prana** means “life force” or “breath” and **ayama** means “to suspend” or “to restrain”) is especially important in a vinyasa style class where breath is joined with movement, and essentially acts as a guide from one asana to the next.
- ❖ **Asana-** While there are an abundance of **asanas** (commonly referred to as postures or poses) in yoga, ***the foundation for a physical practice should focus on practicing postures progressively in order to enhance steadiness, alertness and overall comfort***, qualities referred to as **sthira** and **sukha** in the *Yoga Sutras*. In order to realize the qualities of sthira and sukha, it is imperative that we first understand the steps necessary to prepare one’s breath, body and attention for the asanas selected for the given practice. To do so, it is important to explore and understand a variety of postures (which are often grouped into categories, such as seated, standing, etc) and the associated physiological, emotional and spiritual benefits of each.

Constructing a yoga practice

Typically most sequences in yoga (although not all) are linear, in that one posture follows another in a logical step-by-step direction, the progression of which begins with less challenging asanas, moves to more challenging asanas, and then concludes with less challenging asanas. This notion is exemplified in a practice by beginning a sequence with simple warm-up poses that set the tone (and prepare the body) for the practice, moving to more challenging postures which add intensity to the practice before ultimately slowing the practice down through the incorporation of cooling postures, before ending in savasana.

****Sample general class structure-***

- ❖ **Centering postures-** Beginning class in a posture such as balasana or standing or sitting quietly allows students the opportunity to become grounded and to begin to observe the body and the breath, focusing their attention towards cultivating pranayama, often described as the art of breath control.
- ❖ **Standing poses-** In an effort to effectively prepare the body for the practice and ultimately develop the connection between breath and movement, standing postures, including Surya Namaskar (sun salutation), are frequently utilized as a warm-up. Standing poses also serve as good preparation for many balancing poses to follow.
- ❖ **Seated, Kneeling or Supine poses-** Postures performed in a variety of positions (e.g. seated, kneeling, supine, etc) are often included in a practice in preparation for inversions and arm balances. This may include postures that may be performed in order to open or stretch an area

of the body, such as supported virasana, or perhaps to strengthen the body, such as vasisthasana.

- ❖ **Inversions and Arm Balances-** Inverted postures, such as salamba sirsasana, allow students the opportunity to explore and discover unknown aspects of themselves by moving into positions that for the most part are opposite from that of our daily positioning.
- ❖ **Prone poses-** Many prone poses, such as bhujangasana and salambhasana, are backbends which can serve as great counterposes for many inverted poses while also strengthening the body.
- ❖ **Seated poses-** Seated postures can provide numerous benefits towards the end of a practice, and often work well as a transition into the supine postures to follow. It is important to be mindful however not to place two intense, opposing postures back to back without incorporating an appropriate period of rest and transition postures in between (this applies to any point in the class sequence). For example, if you've finished your series of prone poses with an intense backbend such as dhanurasana incorporate a few resting, transitional postures into your sequence before moving to a powerful forward bend you may be visiting in the seated series to follow, such as paschimottanasana.
- ❖ **Resting poses-** Concluding practice with resting poses, which are often performed in a supine position, allows the body the opportunity to restore while once again allowing students to practice pranayama before moving into the completely relaxed state of savasana.

Ideas for sequencing

- ❖ **Teaching to an apex pose-** Apex (also referred to as peak) poses are those which are more challenging and require multiple areas of the body to be opened and/or strengthened before moving into. If opting to sequence to an apex pose, begin by first selecting a pose is that challenging yet appropriate for the format and level of class that you are teaching. From there, be sure to identify what areas of the body will need to be opened and/or strengthened before reaching the apex poses, and then identify preparatory poses which will allow your students to achieve that.
- ❖ **Teaching to an area of the body-** Structuring a class sequence to focus on an area of the body can have many benefits and may help to better serve your students depending on their needs. For example, a class sequence which focuses on opening the hips could be a great option if teaching a class to students who spend the majority of their day in a seated position (such as at an office). Creating a class sequence that focuses on the hamstrings can be a good option if leading a yoga class for athletes (since many athletes tend to lack a great deal of flexibility in the hamstrings), while a sequence focused on the back may appeal to varied class of students, as back pain is the second most common complaint cited in doctor's offices in the U.S.
- ❖ **Teaching with a theme-** Teaching with a theme can help to develop a deeper connection with your students in which the focus extends beyond simply practicing yoga and instead encourages students to truly embrace and "live yoga." It is important that the theme you select is relevant to your students, so ask yourself what your students need and where you would like to take them in order to identify a theme that would best resonate them. Examples of theming options

include concepts or qualities, such as gratitude or awareness, as well events in nature, such as a full moon or summer solstice. To best serve your students, ensure that the theme is carried throughout the entire class, from the postures selected, to the music played, to the phrases and quotes spoken.

****Always practice what you teach!** This helps to ensure the sequence you've developed and the postures you've selected convey what you want it to, both physically and emotionally.*

Namaste ☺

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