

## THE MONTH OF CONTEMPLATION

I am excited about this month's theme. I can't wait to share more of what I love so much. There will be much "food for thought" in this month's materials.

One of the many reasons I love to lead retreats and yoga teacher training is that there is a lot of time to dive into the juice of the yoga practice. There is only so much time in a 75 minute class and I think students wouldn't be so happy if we just sat around and discussed the philosophy and psychology of the practice.

But it's oh so good! I've read stories about Pattabhi Jois, the father of Ashtanga Yoga and times he would sit with his students. I've heard that if a student asked a question pertaining to asana (the poses) Pattabhi Jois would dismiss the question. But when a student asked a question about the parts, the other limbs (which you'll learn more about this month), he would lean in with a twinkle in his eye and talk about what I consider the "juice" of the practice. We all need the yoga juice.

**Where is the yoga juice you might be wondering?** It's found in the Yoga Sutras.

Take enough yoga classes and at some point your teacher will reference the yoga sutras. Patanjali is credited with compiling the sutras and outlining this path in the writings of the "Yoga Sutras". There are 195 sutras. A sutra is the thread of an idea usually expressed as a single statement, although some sutras contain several sentences. It is these sutras, threads, or statements that outline the science of raja (royal) yoga. Before there were books, yoga teachings and sutras were memorized and teachers would further explain them. This was how the student learned. The sutras were written at least 1,700 years ago but the system of yoga is much older, ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 years old.

Patanjali explains yoga as nothing short of total freedom, total liberation from suffering, also referred to as samadhi. Samadhi comes from "sama" meaning balanced and "adhi" meaning to integrate. Samadhi is the integration of one-ness with all things that occurs when the mind is balanced and at peace.

**To fulfill this intention, Patanjali elaborated on the eight limbs of yoga.** Each of these components of yoga help you shift your internal reference point from constricted to expanded consciousness. As consciousness expands the ego transforms into its true nature which is spirit. It is here that we can feel the presence of the divine through a breath, a touch, a sigh, a stretch, a sunrise, a silent gaze.

According to Patanjali whenever we solely identify with our ego, we attach ourselves to things that do not have permanent reality. These attachments might take the form of a job, a relationship, a house, or other material possessions. We also experience attachment to beliefs and ideas about the way things should be. Strongly

attaching to and identifying with “things” outside of ourselves leads to distress, unhappiness and suffering in general. Remembering that the real you is not enclosed into the volume of a body is the key to genuine freedom and joy. Yoga is designed to give you a glimpse of your essential self.

This month I want to introduce the eight limbs of yoga and give you an opportunity to contemplate them in your life, both on and off the yoga mat.

### **The Eight Limbs of Yoga**

**1. Yamas, restraints:** Commonly referred to as the rules for social behavior. Stephen Cope says that the yamas are about restraining behaviors that are motivated by grasping, aversion, hatred and delusion. The yamas are designed to create well being for ourselves and others. Some people associate the yamas as yoga’s Ten Commandments, but they aren’t concerned with right or wrong in an absolute sense. Cope says that there is no thought of heaven or hell. It’s about avoiding behaviors that produce suffering and difficulty and embracing those that lead to states of happiness.

#### **There are five yamas:**

**1. Ahimsa** – non-harming in thought, word and action. Yogi’s say there is no higher value than non-harming. Ahimsa offers the opportunity to let go of hostility and instead make space within the heart for peace. You might find it helpful to apply and observe ahimsa with yourself.

An old Taoist proverb says “If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace between neighbors. If there is to be peace between neighbors, there must be peace in your heart.”

Non-violence is more than the “big” things that first come to mind... killing, hurting another person or animal. Do you view yourself and others in a very critical way, do you make judgments about yourself and others, do you push others down at work in order to work your way up, while practicing yoga are you patient, kind and compassionate to your body, or do you push yourself beyond the limits of your body?

Do you express angry words, do you eat too much? The first step is self awareness. Just noticing the negativity will help you to stop feeding thoughts, words, or actions that create suffering and lead you to greater peace.

When one is acting from the level of the soul, violence cannot arise because the heart and mind are filled with love and compassion for all beings. Gandhi promoted the principle of non-violence in the independence movement of India from Britain. He once said, “If you express your love in such a manner that it impresses itself indelibly

upon your so called enemy, he must return that love, and that requires far greater courage than delivering of blows.”

What are some ways that you can practice ahimsa, non-violence during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice ahimsa in your everyday life this month?

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2. **Satya**, truthfulness. Truthfulness derives from a state of being in which you can distinguish your observations from your interpretations. Patanjali described the truth as integrity of thought, word, and action. We must be careful not to confuse our particular point of view with the truth, knowing that at times the truth may be higher than us. Nischala Devi says that in each moment, you must ask yourself: Am I speaking the truth? Am I just giving my opinion, filtered through my mind and all my prejudices? Recognizing that truth is different for different people, you commit to life supporting and enhancing decisions that are aligned with you on a deep soul level.

Ways to reflect on satya include when you tell lies to yourself, your partner, your children, boss, friends, co-workers, etc. How often do you embellish and exaggerate? Why do you do so? Do you tell yourself you can't do a pose when you've never ever tried? Do you tell yourself you don't feel pain in a pose when you do? Do you tell yourself that you deserve chocolate cake several times a week?

Satya requires that you consider what you say and what you don't say. You don't want to say everything on your mind (especially if it's hurtful) nor do you want to mislead by not communicating. If you consider using words to elevate the listener, you will also elevate yourself at the same time. Spiritual seekers find that spending time in silence and slowing down the internal chatter helps them discern between opinions and reality.

What are some ways that you can practice satya, truthfulness during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice satya in your everyday life this month?

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3. **Asteya**, non-stealing. The Yoga Sutras say that by not stealing, good things will come to you. In terms of stealing usually the first things we think of are on the material plane. We think of taking tangible items... money, clothes, food, etc. However there are many other ways that we steal. If you are constantly late, you are stealing time from someone else. You can steal someone's energy, and you can steal from the environment

Ways we misuse asteya... taking people's ideas, accepting too much change, are there ways that you steal from nature, use too many natural resources, the list goes on. Perhaps we can work to develop a sense of appreciation and gratitude for the things that we do have and work to feel a sense of abundance in our life. Cultivate asteya by taking what you truly need and refrain from letting your desires persuade you to take more.

What are some ways that you can practice asteya, non-stealing during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice asteya in your everyday life this month?

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4. **Brahmacharya**, commonly translated as celibacy. This can be a limited view of brahmacharya. In Vedic society, people traditionally chose one of two paths to enlightenment – the path of the householder or the path of the renunciate. You don't have to become a monk to be a good yogi. For most of us we will choose to think of brahmacharya as ways to moderate our energy, choosing to conserve energy, not waste it.

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What are the ways you use your senses that drain your energy? Anything that causes turbulence in the mind and stirs the emotions might be seen as a violation to this yama. Nischala Devi says that whatever disturbs the mind and body disturbs the spiritual life as its all one energy.

What are ways that you can better manage your energy? What are the things you indulge in? Too much food, alcohol, caffeine, work, play, sleep, exercise, etc. Everything can be taken to an extreme. Remember that old saying “everything in moderation”. In your practice do you indulge by doing only the poses that you enjoy, neglecting those that bring about challenge and discomfort?

What are some ways that you can practice brahmacharya, conservation of energy during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice brahmacharya in your everyday life this month?

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5. **Aparigraha**, non-grasping, nonattachment. From a yogic view, greed never leads to happiness, because material things will not fulfill you in the long run. Do you operate under the premises that more is better? More money, more clothes, more toys and trinkets, more jewelry...how much of it do you need to be happy and healthy; at some point does it become clutter?

You can see how at some point, an attachment to these things might clutter your house and your mind and lead to a false sense of happiness. Before bringing something into your house ask yourself: Do I need this for my role in life? As a parent? A wife? As a spiritual seeker? Am I accumulating stuff out of fear or greed?

Are you attached (and/or possessive) to things you own, to your ideas and ways of doing things, to the way you practice yoga, to your teacher, to attaining the perfect pose, to the way you practice a certain pose? People get so attached to bending over and touching the floor and binding in poses! How can we detach from the posture, the outcome, the stuff? Can letting go of material possessions, old beliefs, careers and anything else that doesn't feed you, free you and your energy up to move in a new and/or different direction?

Established in aparigraha your attachment to material possessions loses its hold. It doesn't mean that you don't enjoy the world, but that you aren't imprisoned by it.

What are some ways that you can practice aparigraha, nonattachment during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice aparigraha in your everyday life this month?

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**2. Niyamas, Observances:** Commonly referred to as the rules for personal behavior.

**There are five:**

1. **Saucha**, purity in thoughts words and actions, cleanliness of body and mind – getting and keeping things clean, inside and out. Yoga tells us that body and mind are constructed from the impressions that we ingest from the environment. Are the choices you're making nourishing the body and mind, or creating toxicity? When you are in good physical health, a clean body and mind, positive energy and light will radiate within you and others feel it to.

For optimal health and balance, both body and mind should be clear. Do you use your yoga practice as a time to plan your weekend thus resulting in a clouded mind; do you practice yoga in a room filled with clutter? Physical orderliness can affect the state of the mind. What are ways to cleanse your body and mind? Asana, healthy eating, getting rid of clutter, scrubbing the floors, and simplifying life in general are all expression of saucha.

What are some ways that you can practice saucha, purity during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice saucha in your everyday life this month?

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2. **Santosha**, contentment (trusting in the “big” picture). Aparigraha taught us that desires create more desires and more cravings. Leaving us with the feeling that we never have enough, never are enough. The yogic viewpoint is acceptance, gratitude and contentment for what life has brought to us, what it has given to us. In most all translations of Yoga Sutras, contentment is interpreted as the greatest happiness, an underlying joy that cannot be shaken by life’s tough moments. Contentment is about accepting life as it is. Judith Lasater says that you can’t run after contentment that it has to find you. All you can do is create the space for it.

What about setting hopes/intentions? This doesn’t mean you can’t have goals, just try not to get so attached to the outcome which can lead to hurt and suffering. When we base our happiness on outcomes it’s like we’re constantly on a roller coaster... up and down, one high to a very low extreme. This throws our body and mind out of sync. Be content with your body, your job, your yoga practice, your life. Make change or accept what is. Contentment, happiness and joy are completely your choice. It’s not always easy, but it’s possible.

However, contentment does not imply submission. Yogis are typically committed in thought, word, and deed to supporting evolutionary change that enhances all sentient creatures on this planet. Contentment implies acceptance without resignation.

What are some ways that you can practice santosha, contentment during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice santosha in your everyday life this month?

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3. **Tapas**, (literally means that which generates heat) discipline and determined effort. “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.” Tapas is the willingness to do what it takes to reach a goal (and still observe yamas and niyamas), which means developing

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discipline, enthusiasm, and a deep desire to learn. It's about sacrifice and discipline. The effort you use when you engage in tapas is directed toward cultivating healthy habits and breaking unhealthy ones.

Apply tapas to anything you want to see happen in your life: learning yoga, getting a new job, learning a new language, playing an instrument. Reflect on tapas by thinking of the places you want to make change in your life. Do you hate your job, but aren't disciplined enough to make the changes necessary to find a new one? Do you want to lose weight but aren't willing to sacrifice your current eating habits? Do you want to achieve hanumanasana (splits pose) but aren't willing to practice more often and at times at a higher intensity?

Tapas refers to the fire that brings forth transformation. We all probably agree that life is a great gift and we want to make the most of it. Tapas, or discipline is a path to happiness by helping you to achieve your desires.

What are some ways that you can practice tapas, discipline your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice tapas in your everyday life this month?

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4. **Svadyaya**, self study. Svadyaha is your effort to get to know your truest self, beyond the surface level that others see. It involves looking within and asking the eternal question, "Who Am I?" The Yoga Sutras suggest that the study of the Self leads towards communion with the divine. By self study and observation we come to know what makes us happy or sad, how we feel about politics, important life decisions, and so on. We tap into our own knowingness, our inner teacher. Observation of a habit or pattern followed by knowledge and insight lead to greater wisdom.

It is also recommended to read and study spiritual texts, writings and poems that inspire you and help you to feel connected to your spirit. Reading and studying these texts with the intention of self study also leads to a new and great understanding. Every day you can use self-observation and self study to learn more about yourself and make changes as needed. After your asana practice you might ask yourself what you learned from your practice. Svadyaha invokes a spirit of exploration within you, which can be very fun and at most times, intriguing.

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What are some ways that you can practice svadhyaya, self-study during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice svadhyaha in your everyday life this month?

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5. **Ishvara pranidhana**, dedication to the highest, honoring a higher ideal or spiritual consciousness in your life, be it God, Buddha, Jesus, Gandhi, or nature. I personally find it comforting and freeing to know that there is a bigger power than me that exists in this universe and it guides me down a path. It can be humbling and reassuring to connect our small lives with the larger whole. There is a universal spirit that exists within us and our human nature is to connect to ourselves and others. In any given situation we can always pause and ask to be shown the way. Seeking the highest essence in any situation, looking to bring forth beauty and goodness, making an offering, are all ways of surrendering to the divine.

What are some ways that you can practice ishvara pranidhana, connecting to source energy during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice or connect with ishvara pranidhana in your everyday life this month?

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3. **Asana**, postures. The word asana means position or seat. When people hear the word “yoga” this is typically what they think of. Patanjali did not outline specific postures in the Yoga Sutras. However, he did emphasize the use of postures to create ease in the body and understand that ease in the body leads to ease in the mind. The postures offer tremendous benefit to the body and mind. They help create flexibility, strength, and balance, all of which are essential qualities for a healthy life.

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I recently worked privately with a student and she experiences anxiety at work. She works in an open space with a lot of people. She can't pop into a downward facing dog during challenging times. Instead we created a little sequence that she does every time she goes into the bathroom. She has privacy and an easy, accessible, and healthy way of dealing with stress.

Asana is too great to only be reserved for your yoga mat. What are some simple poses you can take during life's challenging moments? I have one simple sequence that I do when I'm short on time or need a quick body/mind/spirit pick me up. My simple sequence is down dog, yogic squat, and a standing forward fold. What's your "one simple sequence"? Ponder here:

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**4. Pranayama**, breathing practices. Prana is life force, the essential energy that animates inert matter into living. When prana is flowing freely throughout your body/mind you will feel healthy and vibrant. When prana is blocked, fatigue and disease will follow.

Pranayama means controlling and mastering the life force. If you pay attention you will observe a direct connection between your breath and your mind. When your mind is quiet, calm, and steady, so is your breath. When your mind is chaotic, turbulent, and hurried your breathing becomes distorted. Pranayama can take your awareness from constricted to expanded states of awareness.

Take a few moments to explore. Pay attention to the state of your body, energy, and mind now. Make a few simple observations about each and jot them down here:

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Begin to pay attention to your breath moving in and out through the nostrils. Pause and observe. Try to even out the breath by silently counting from one to four with in the inhalation and reversing the count from four back to one with the exhalation. Allow your breath to stay steady and gentle.

With each inhalation imagine breathing in fresh, new, vital energy. With each exhalation, feel yourself releasing tension and strain. Practice breathing mindfully through the nostrils for a couple minutes.

Makes a few notes about how your body, energy, and mind are feeling now:

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Reports show that slower breathing is calming and soothing to the nervous system. This slow, sweet breath is available to you at all times of the day. Use it during stressful moments at work, late night home work with the kids, busy traffic times, and more. Sometimes sanity, energy, and peace are only a few breaths away.

**5. Pratyahara**, withdrawal or mastery of the senses. Patanjali encourages us to take time to withdraw our senses from the world so that we can hear our inner voice more clearly. It is the process of temporarily withdrawing the senses of the outer world to recognize the sensations of your inner world. In a way, it can be seen as fasting for your senses. If you've ever gone on a fast from food for a while, the next meal you have will be unusually delicious. By withdrawing from the sense of taste you will experience taste on a much more vibrant level. Yoga suggests that the same is true for all your experiences in the world.

Pratyahara means paying attention throughout your day and limiting to the greatest extent possible those sensory impulses that are toxic, and maximizing those that are nurturing for you body, mind, and soul. Choose sounds, sensations, sights, tastes, and smells that inspire you. Be aware of and try to reduce situations, circumstances and people who deplete you of your vitality and general enthusiasm for life.

Have you been giving yourself adequate "me" time? What are the things you do that help you to connect with your inner self? Consider a media/technology fast for a day or a week.

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What are some ways you can practice pratyahara, withdrawal and wise use of the senses during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice or connect with pratyahara in your everyday life this month?

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**6. Dharana**, concentration and practice of focused attention. Deepak Chopra says that dharana is mastery of attention and intention. Whatever you place your attention on flourishes. Whether your attention is on building a business, becoming fit, improving a relationship, or developing your yoga practice, the object of your attention is enlivened by your awareness and becomes a leading force in your life.

In yoga we use the practice of dharana to facilitate healing and transformation by focusing our attention on the breath, sensations in the body, and mantra. All are tools to direct our mind towards meditation.

What are some ways that you can practice dharana, focused attention, during your yoga practice this month? What are some ways you can practice dharana in your everyday life this month? What area(s) do you need to apply focused attention?

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**7. Dhyana**, meditation. Through the practice of meditation we develop what is referred to as the witness. Throughout your life you have experiences that change moment to moment. Your environment changes, your body changes, your relationships change, your thoughts and feelings change. Change is only the perpetual constant. Dhyana is the cultivation of awareness so that in the midst of

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change and challenges you do not lose your center, your self in your experience. Although situations and life in general is constantly changing, the aspect of you that is witnessing these changes is the essence of your being, your soul.

Meditation is the single most important tool to cultivate this state of the witness. During meditation you learn to observe thoughts, feelings, sensations, and sounds that arise in your awareness without needing to react to them. As you develop this skill in meditation, you are able to apply it in your daily life. You learn to stay centered and awake to all possibilities whenever a challenge arises thus taking the best course of action.

Refer back to the materials for “attention”. Have you progressed with your meditation practice, why or why not? Choose one simple meditation practice such as “So Hum” or simple focus on the breath. Why do you want to meditate? When will you meditate? Where and what meditation method will you use?

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**8. Samadhi**, bliss, enlightenment, Self realization. Samadhi is the state of being settled in pure, unbounded awareness. Going beyond time and space, beyond past and future, beyond individuality. This is your essential nature. You perform your actions in the world as an individual while your inner state is one of a universal being. This is a state where fear and anxiety do not arise.

This is the goal of yoga, to know you are a spiritual being disguised as a human being, to be established in union and perform action in harmony with the evolutionary flow of life.

We’ve all experienced moments of bliss. Moments when time stands still and you feel utterly content. Most of the time these moments arises with little effort on our part...staring into a newborn baby’s eye, watching the sunrise over the sea, feeling the wind on your bare skin, etc.

What are some moments that you experienced bliss?

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### **Meditation for Contemplation - Candle Meditation**

Candle meditation is best practiced in a dark room. This will be comfortable for the eyes and help you to focus on the candle flame. Find a place where you can set a candle in front of you at arm's length, and sit comfortably. You could use a low table and sit cross legged on the floor, or you could use a higher table and sit in a chair. One of the benefits of candle meditation is the cleansing of the tear ducts; a few tears, or a welling up of the eyes is common for many people.

Once the candle is lit and you are seated comfortably, start to gaze at the flame. It may be difficult to do at first, but just settle into your breath, and be patient with yourself. The eyes will eventually be able to maintain their gaze on the candle flame. As the eyes continue to rest in a steady, relaxed gaze on the candle flame, maintain slow, even breaths.

Allow thoughts to rise. Try to imagine your thoughts as coming from someone who is talking to you.

Try to be an impartial observer of your own thoughts. After some time, ask yourself:  
What am I thinking about?

Why am I thinking these thoughts, or how are these thoughts serving me?

How do these thoughts make me feel?

Are these thoughts something I want to give my attention to - now, or later?

Compassionately ask yourself each question, and be patient with yourself. Continue to softly gaze at the candle flame, drawing in relaxed breaths.

After some time, you may decide to close your eyes, taking the image of the candle into the body. If you decide to lay down for this part of the meditation, blow out the candle before reclining on your back. Once you are comfortable, notice where the

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candle flame resides in the body. Feel the flickering of the candle flame in the body. Allow yourself a few moments to connect with your inner flame, your inner fire.

End your meditation with hands in prayer at the heart, acknowledging the light within.

### **Mudra for Contemplation - Dhyani Mudra**

Dhyani mudra is a very classical and popular mudra for meditation and contemplation. It is symbolic of an empty bowl, symbolizing the purpose of yoga/meditation - to empty oneself of inner chatter. It represents one's emptiness that is required to receive anything that is available on one's spiritual journey.

Place both of your hands in your lap, your palms facing upwards, the fingers slightly curled upward. Place your left hand gently on top of your right palm and then connect the two thumbs together. Close your eyes, breathe in a relaxed manner and direct your whole awareness and breath flow toward the mudra



Source: [www.NithyaYoga.com](http://www.NithyaYoga.com)

### **Quotes & Readings on Contemplation**

One is not idle because one is absorbed. There is both visible and invisible labor. To contemplate is to toil, to think is to do. The crossed arms work, the clasped hands act. The eyes upturned to Heaven are an act of creation. –Victor Hugo

Look out into the universe and contemplate the glory of God. Observe the stars, millions of them, twinkling in the night sky, all with a message of unity, part of the very nature of God. –Sri Sathva Sai Baba

By getting up early in the morning one also gets more time at his disposal for work as compared to late-risers. Scholar and thinkers get up early in the morning and contemplate. –Rig Veda

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To do the useful thing, to say the courageous thing, to contemplate the beautiful thing: that is enough for one man's life. –T.S. Eliot

In order to improve the mind, we ought less to learn, than to contemplate. –Rene Descartes

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find resources of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. –Rachel Carson

All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant. –Henry David Thoreau

Do not contemplate on death; it is just an incident in life; contemplate on God, who is the master of all life. –Sri Sathva Sai Baba

I have discovered that life doesn't actually knock you down. It does, however, provide you with many opportunities to evaluate your standing in life: what you stand on, what you stand for, how you stand within yourself and for yourself. –Iyanla Vanzant

Investigation is the competency needed when the first inklings arise that change might be warranted . . . you begin to think about, talk about, and explore possibilities. This is a time when you grow your awareness through frequent self-assessment, using these four questions: What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What am I doing? How is it working? –William B. Stewart

By a single thought that comes into mind, in one moment, a hundred worlds are overturned. –Rumi

We can rise above our limitations, only once we recognize them. –B.K.S. Iyengar

Not choice, but habit rules the unreflecting herd. –William Wordsworth

What we plant in the soil of contemplation, we shall reap in the harvest of action. –Meister Eckhart

As is the human body, so is the cosmic body.  
As is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind.  
As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm.  
As is the atom, so is the universe.  
–The Upanishads

If you understand others you are smart.  
If you understand yourself you are illuminated.

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If you overcome others you are powerful.  
If you overcome yourself you have strength.  
If you know how to be satisfied you are rich.  
If you can act with vigor, you have a will.  
If you don't lose your objectives you can be long-lasting.  
If you die without loss, you are eternal.  
–Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

### **This Month's Workshop**

With autumn quickly approaching, our Kentucky days are growing shorter, and we find the nights and days a little cooler. The earth is moving towards a more yin energy, and we may be feeling that shift in our own energy as well.

This workshop invites us to connect with the yin energy of autumn. Starting with a flowing sequence of yoga poses, pausing to rest in yoga nidra, and ending in a seated guided meditation. We'll explore ...how taking an intention through these three different yogic practices will help us connect with our inner wisdom. Come celebrate the Fall Equinox (September 22nd), as we harmonize our intention with the earth's energetic flow.

**Join Sarah Bowker for this 90 minute workshop at Barefoot Works Yoga Studio on Friday, September 23rd at 6:30pm.** No yoga experience required to participate in this workshop. Dress comfortably, and feel free to bring a blanket and eye pillow from home. Cost to participate is \$15 if paid before September 16th, and \$25 if paying after September 16. Space is limited so register early!