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Yoga teacher
Skadi van Paasschen

Ode to the light

Yoga teacher Skadi van Paasschen drew her inspiration for this series of yoga poses from the age-old Gayatri mantra, which connects you to the outer light and the light within yourself. The following five exercises from yin yoga have a similar effect.



ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्

*Om bhūrbhuvah svah
tatsaviturvareṇyam
bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt*

'We meditate to the holy light of the radiant source, it is in the heart of the earth, in the life of the air and in the soul of man, animal and nature. May it enlighten our thoughts'

Gayatri mantra, the oldest prayer

Not a moment of the day goes by that the Gayatri mantra is not recited somewhere in the world. The age-old words of this mantra cover the earth like a warm blanket. Some people say them out loud, others whisper or speak them to themselves. It's a text that can also be sung; it's probably Deva Premal and Miten who perform the bestknown renditions. Even if you have no idea what the mantra is about at its profoundest level, you're sure to feel some of the magic, of the grand, sacred, powerful things of which these two sing of. Could this be an explanation why the Gayatri is regarded as the sacred and most powerful of all mandalas? The sounds have most likely been uttered for thousands of years. The first time they were written on paper was in the Rig Veda, a Vedic scripture from ancient India written between 1800 and 1500 BC. The mantra is also mentioned in the Bhagavad-Gita, another sacred scripture from the Indian tradition. 'The Poem of the Divine' is what it's called there, a poem that was initially accessible to only a very few. The sacred words in Sanskrit were intended only for priests; they were said to be too powerful for the uninitiated. These days, the Gayatri mantra is for everyone. It is all-encompassing that it transcends all religions and spiritual movements. You might see it as a universal prayer that comes to

our lips naturally. A craving for light within ourselves as well as from outside. There's a good reason why the sun god Savitur is called upon in the second line. This mantra is a hymn to him - to the sun that brings life to earth, that cares for us and warms us with his energy. When you say the Gayatri out loud, you reflect on this infinite light. You may experience feelings of gratitude, veneration, or maybe even humility. However, Savitur does not only reside high up in the heavens. According to the Vedic philosophy, this light is in everything that lives, including ourselves. It is our inner sun, also called the divine, unconditional love, the Source, etc. Saying the Gayatri mantra, silently to yourself or out loud, helps you get connected to it. It helps you dissolve the veil of cloud, the jumble of thoughts in your head, and bring out the sun inside yourself. This is how you light your own path, and that of others' too. It means you can interpret the Gayatri mantra as the wish that all creatures on earth be enlightened. The more often you repeat the mantra, the more powerful is its effect - 108 times in a row is said to be the sublime number. But even if you take the words to your heart only a few times, you are bound to shine.

A wonderful rendition of the Gayatri mantra by Deva Premal can be found on www.happinez.nl/gayatri



GOMUKHĀSANA (COW'S HEAD)

गोमुखासन

In yin yoga, each separate pose is held for a number of minutes. This is how you get in touch with your deepest inner self and how you learn to surrender to whatever happens. It may feel uncomfortable sometimes, but that's alright. That is also a valid feeling. If a pose causes you physical pain, use the suggestions given to adapt the exercise.

Sit on your yoga mat or on a cushion. Place your right leg across your left leg and bend your lower legs backwards. Point your toes backwards so your ankle is stretched. Bend your other leg backwards as well, so your toes point to the space behind you. Try to keep one knee on top of the other. Sit up straight so that you feel your sitting bones on the floor. You can press your thumb on the middle point of your foot, on the sole - an important acupuncture point for the kidneys is situated there. Hold this pose for 3 to 5 minutes. Visualise breathing in energy through your crown, letting it flow down your spine to your coccyx, and letting it flow back up again when you exhale, up to your third eye between your eyebrows. In this way you clean the so-called *Sushumna nadi*, the central line of energy going through your body and connecting the chakras. Since your legs are crossed, you will also feel the stretch on the side of your hips, in the muscle called *tensor fascia latae*. The gallbladder meridian goes through this muscle. You will also feel pressure on the inside of your hips, stimulating the pressure points in your liver meridian and kidney meridian. By stimulating the meridians, you will enhance the cleansing effect of the Gayatri mantra.

Note: If this pose makes your knees hurt after a while, sit on a higher cushion and allow your knees to point outward a bit more.





ARDHA MATSYENDRĀSANA (SITTING TWIST)

अर्ध मत्स्येन्द्रासन

Sit down and put your right foot flat on the floor next to your left leg, so your right knee points upwards. Then, place your right hand behind you. Breathe in deeply, stretch your left arm. Breathe out deeply while twisting your upper body to the right, then put your left arm around your right knee, or put your elbow against the outside of your knee. Make your back nice and straight and look over your right shoulder. This pose deepens the cleansing of the gallbladder meridian and the central energy line. Hold the pose for 3 to 5 minutes and do the same visualisation as in the previous exercise, the Cow's Head. **Note:** If your left knee hurts, sit on a higher cushion or stretch your left leg forward. Now repeat the Cow's Head and the Sitting Twist in reverse.

INTERMEDIATE POSE: ADHO MUKHA SVANĀSANA (DOWNWARD DOG)

अधो मुख स्वानासन

Get up from the last pose by putting your hands down in front of you and stepping back with your feet. Push your bottom up and your heels into the ground. You can move a little in this position. Stretch and bend your legs, make cycling movements. Then bend your knees and settle into the next pose.



PRĀRTHANĀSAN BĀLĀSANA (PRAYER POSE)

प्रार्थनासन बालासन

Put your knees on the floor and place your elbows about 10 cm forward, next to each other. Push the palms of your hands together as in prayer. Now push your weight back and let your upper back and shoulders hang down; your elbows should stay in the same place. In this pose, you stretch the main chest muscle and the top half of your back. You literally make room for your heart. You also stretch the muscles in your arms. The heart meridian and the lung meridian are on the inside of your arms. This exercise focuses on them as they help you fortify and purify your heart energy. Keep the pose for 3 to 5 minutes. Try to surrender completely to

your heart, dare to 'hang'. With every inhale, visualise a small green bubble in your heart and feel unconditional love for yourself. With every exhale, imagine the green bubble grow into infinite space all around you and let yourself feel unconditional love for everything there is.

If feeling unconditional love for yourself is hard for you, think of the small things about yourself that you're happy with. Forgive all your 'mistakes'. Don't judge in terms of good or bad, just let everything be. Let it flow in your heart. **Note:** If your shoulders get too sore, place your elbows wider apart or put your forearms on the floor. Push your weight further back.





BĀLĀSANA (CHILD POSE)

बालासन

Push your bottom down onto your heels, put your forehead on the floor, and let your arms rest beside your body. Keep this pose for 3 to 5 minutes. You can massage your forehead by moving your head calmly from left to right. This way you stimulate your third eye. You can also place your hands underneath your shoulders and carefully roll your head on the floor, backwards and forwards, across your crown. This is how you stimulate the crown chakra, the point where you make contact with the universe. Make

sure your neck doesn't hurt and keep the motions very small and gentle. If your knees start to hurt, place a cushion between your heels and your bottom. To end the Child Pose, place your hands in front of you on the floor, put your feet on the floor, and step backwards to make a Downward Dog. You can move about a little in this pose, play with the dog ... Next, walk your feet forwards to your hands. You are now in a Standing Forward Bend, your head hanging down relaxed. Keep this up for a few breaths, then sit down.





YIN YOGA WITH SKADI VAN PAASSCHEN

Yoga teacher Skadi van Paasschen will bring a good helping of yin to your life. She inspires you to have a moment of peace in your everyday hustle and bustle. "The exercises help you turn inwards and create room in your head, your heart and your body. It's a kind of meditation," says Skadi. The poses are easy to do at home, even if it's your first time on a yoga mat. Yin yoga is about stretching your connective tissue and joints in a gentle but powerful way, which creates a wonderfully liberating feeling.



SUPTA BADDHA KONĀSANA (RECLINING BOUND ANGLE POSE)

सुप्तबद्धकोणासन

Lie down on your back, pull up your knees, keep your feet together and let your knees sink down. Place your right hand on your heart and your left hand on your stomach. Keep this pose for 3 to 5 minutes.

Note: If your hips start to hurt, put some cushions under your knees or sit up cross-legged. This pose affects the meridians of your liver, kidneys and spleen. With your left hand, you connect to your foundation,

from where the energy can flow up. With your right hand, you make contact with your heart, your divine core. This is where you give and receive love. Visualise breathing in the energy all around you through your crown and your feet. Feel it flow to your heart and your belly. When you breathe out, feel the energy shining in and across your whole body, like a light. Feel yourself radiating and passing on all that light. 🌸

TEXT SKADI VAN PAASSCHEN STYLING NICOLE DE WERK MAKE-UP CARMEN ZOMERS PHOTOGRAPHS CHANTAL ARIENS WITH THE COOPERATION OF HANS UBBINK, LE PAPILLON, REEBOK AND 10DAYS (CLOTHES), ROZENKELIM (RUGS), FARROW AND BALL (INDIAN YELLOW PAINT), GEM KINGDOM (JEWELLERY), SEE PAGE 146