

Emotional Balance through Asana & Meditation

We all know the value of meditation in our busy lives and the serenity and peace of mind that comes after turning inward and becoming very still. Ideally we come away from meditation feeling emotionally balanced and quiet. Asanas affect our emotional body as well and when we understand this connection, we know which sets of asanas to practice at certain periods of emotional instability.

The benefit to our emotional body of Standing Poses is that we become more grounded, more centered, less prone to emotional upheavals. The standing poses promote strength and stability in the lower body physically so that the upper body (heart area) can open; this happens emotionally as well. When we are strong and centered, even in times of terrible news or emotional crisis in our lives, somehow we can stay in touch with that source of inner strength.

Headstand, as an inverted pose which brings healthy blood directly to the brain, enlivens us with mental clarity and the ability to make correct decisions in our lives. According to Shri B.K.S. Iyengar, "Regular practice of Sirsasana (Headstand) develops the body, disciplines the mind and widens the horizons of the spirit. One becomes balanced and self-reliant in pain and pleasure, loss and gain, shame and fame, and defeat and victory."

Backbends and chest-opening poses encourage our hearts to open. We may even feel more gregarious, more open and optimistic as a result of the back bending practice. Stimulating backbends are those where we must use muscular strength to push up into a backbend. This physical effort requires will power and produces will power physically, and emotionally in our spirits. Sarvangasana (Shoulder Stand) when held alone is tremendously beneficial to our inner strength, and when done as a restorative pose with the use of props is probably the most emotionally balancing pose of all the asanas (it is also called the "Mother Pose"). Restorative chest opening poses are those where we are supported and therefore not exerting muscular effort to open our chest. With the help of a block or chair, or bolster, etc. the heart area is elevated, and the brain is quieted, and placed in a subservient position. These poses are good to do when we are sad or dealing with loss in our lives.

Twists bring up old anger, according to the ancient Sanskrit scholars. Old anger gets deeply buried in the lumbar spine. Twists, when done correctly, require an elongation of each and every lumbar vertebrae so that the twist can originate from the base of the spine. During the practice of twists, we may remember and feel momentary old anger or sadness as a result of this process.

And finally, Forward Bending poses are inward directed, quieting poses that bring us literally (upper and lower body in contact) in touch with our selves. They are very quieting for the brain, (unlike Backbends, or Headstand which stimulate the brain) and therefore allow us a chance to explore our inner emotional landscape. If we are agitated, the practice of forward bends would be beneficial to create a state of equipoise.

Asana practice is better than a prescription medication for certain emotional ailments and the more we know and understand the effects of asana practice on our

overall well being, the more discriminating we become in choosing which poses to practice at certain times in our lives.

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