

WHY PRACTICE YOGA AT HOME?



Hi there! My name is Olga Kabel; I am a yoga teacher and yoga therapist. I have been practicing yoga since 2000 and teaching since 2001, so it's been a while. In all those years my personal yoga practice had carried me through both mundane and challenging times. Over the years my practice has evolved, expanded and contracted based on the issues I was dealing with, but I always knew that I could come back to it any time to move, breathe and reassess.

The *Personal Yoga Practice Journal* is my effort to support you in developing or reigniting your home yoga practice, so that you, too, have a place to go whenever you need to reconnect to your body, get a clearer picture of what's going on in your life, and correct course when necessary.

As you know, consistency is key when it comes to practicing yoga. According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, "The speed of your progress on the path of change is in direct proportion to your faith and the effort you put into it" (Sutra I-22). If you are only mildly interested in transformation and attend to it occasionally, it will take you a lo-o-ong time to get there. If your interest is strong and your practice consistent, then you will progress faster. And, of course, if you are completely committed to your goal and practice your yoga on and off the mat all the time, the transformation will be rapid.

My teacher Gary Kraftsow often compares regular home yoga practice to flossing. He jokes that you should only floss around the teeth that you want to keep. You floss to both get rid of the waste (food particles) and to keep your teeth and gums healthy. Similarly, regular home practice helps you let go of things you don't need (tension, sluggishness, restlessness, etc.) and keeps you healthy and more content.

What is it about regular home practice that makes it so important? If you are a yoga student, how do you want to feel when you start your day? I have yet to meet a student who PREFERS to feel grumpy, stiff and restless in the morning. You would probably want to start your day feeling comfortable in your body, energized and focused. Even a very simple yoga practice can do that for you.

What if you are dealing with a specific issue, like tension, a health problem, an undesirable pattern of behavior? Then an appropriate regular yoga practice becomes even more important. Remember Einstein's definition of insanity? It's "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." If your previous patterns of movement or behavior got you in trouble, how are you going to replace them with a more desirable pattern if you don't practice?

If you are a yoga teacher, regular home practice becomes more of a necessity. As yoga teachers, we are not only responsible for our own sense of wellbeing, but also for the kind of energy and attitude we bring to our students. Your home yoga practice is an opportunity to, among other things:

- Take care of yourself - physically, energetically and mentally;
- To experiment with tools and techniques that you might eventually teach to your students;
- To inspire you, keeping your teaching fresh, potent and versatile;
- To help you connect to your students;
- To remind you why you are doing this in the first place.

Home yoga practice is not just about “limbering up” for the day ahead, but about setting the tone for the entire day. And your practice doesn’t have to be perfect; in fact, it doesn’t have to be anything. As long as it’s mindful, it matters. We all have different ideas about what our home yoga practice SHOULD look like, and often those ideas can become a hindrance. If you believe that your practice should be at least one hour long, you will be less likely to do it, since it’s not easy to carve out an hour every single day. There is a saying: “Doing nothing changes nothing, doing something changes everything,” which is very true when it comes to a home yoga practice. If you resolve to do something (no matter how small) every day, you are more likely to continue and turn it into a healthy habit.

The *Personal Yoga Practice Journal* will help you build your yoga practice into your day and keep track of your progress. You can plan the direction of your yoga practice for the next month using the 30 DAYS OF YOGA planning pages. It is useful if you are trying to investigate a specific set of practices, test certain techniques or consistently work on a chronic problem. Otherwise you can record your practices day-to-day, attending to the needs that arise.

When you decide on what kind of yoga practices to choose, there are three things to consider:

1. You are a multidimensional human being, which means that your wellbeing is linked to several layers of your system, not just the physical body, and your yoga practice needs to reflect that. The Panchamaya model is an excellent yogic guide that describes five main layers of the human system, what it takes to have balance on each one of those levels, and which tools are most effective for achieving that balance.
2. Your needs depend on your stage of life. Are you in a sunrise, midday or sunset stage? The viniyoga Age model describes each life stage and yoga practices that are the most relevant to each stage.
3. Every yoga practice needs to be purposeful. There are Ten types of practices based on the things that you want to accomplish. Choosing the right one will help you get the best results.

Your yoga practice is not something separate from your daily life; it can become its integral part. It can become the support structure that gives you physical stability, consistent energy and a focused mind to enable you to do whatever it is you want to do with your life. It can also become a safety net that will catch you when life gets rough. There is no better time to begin than now.

THE PANCHAMAYA MODEL

Modern science has been slow to recognize the intimate connection between our physical structure, physiology, mind, emotions and spiritual longings; when health problems arise they are usually treated on one level only. The yoga tradition, on the other hand, recognizes that our systems are multidimensional and interconnected. Therefore, if we are planning to be vibrant, healthy human beings, we need to consider all the components that make up our systems: physical structure, physiological processes, the content of our minds, our ideas and attitudes toward our surroundings and our sense of connection to other people, society and the Universe.

The Panchamaya model (also called the Five Koshas) is a way to organize our thinking when it comes to different layers of our systems. Everything you've ever learned about yoga fits somewhere within the Panchamaya model; it is a yogic view of how things work within our bodies and minds. This model is extremely useful (and even necessary) when we are trying to understand what's happening within ourselves or our students. True knowledge does not lie in mastering difficult postures or complicated techniques. It lies in developing an insightful and intimate knowledge of how our systems function and learning the tools to fine tune them when necessary.

Here is how those five dimensions (or 5 bodies) are described in a yoga classic, *The Taittiriya Upanishad*:

"Human beings consist of a material body build from the food they eat. Those who care for this body are nourished by the universe itself"

"Inside there is another body made of life energy. It fills the physical body and takes its shape. Those who treat this vital force as divine, experience excellent health and longevity because this energy is the source of physical life."

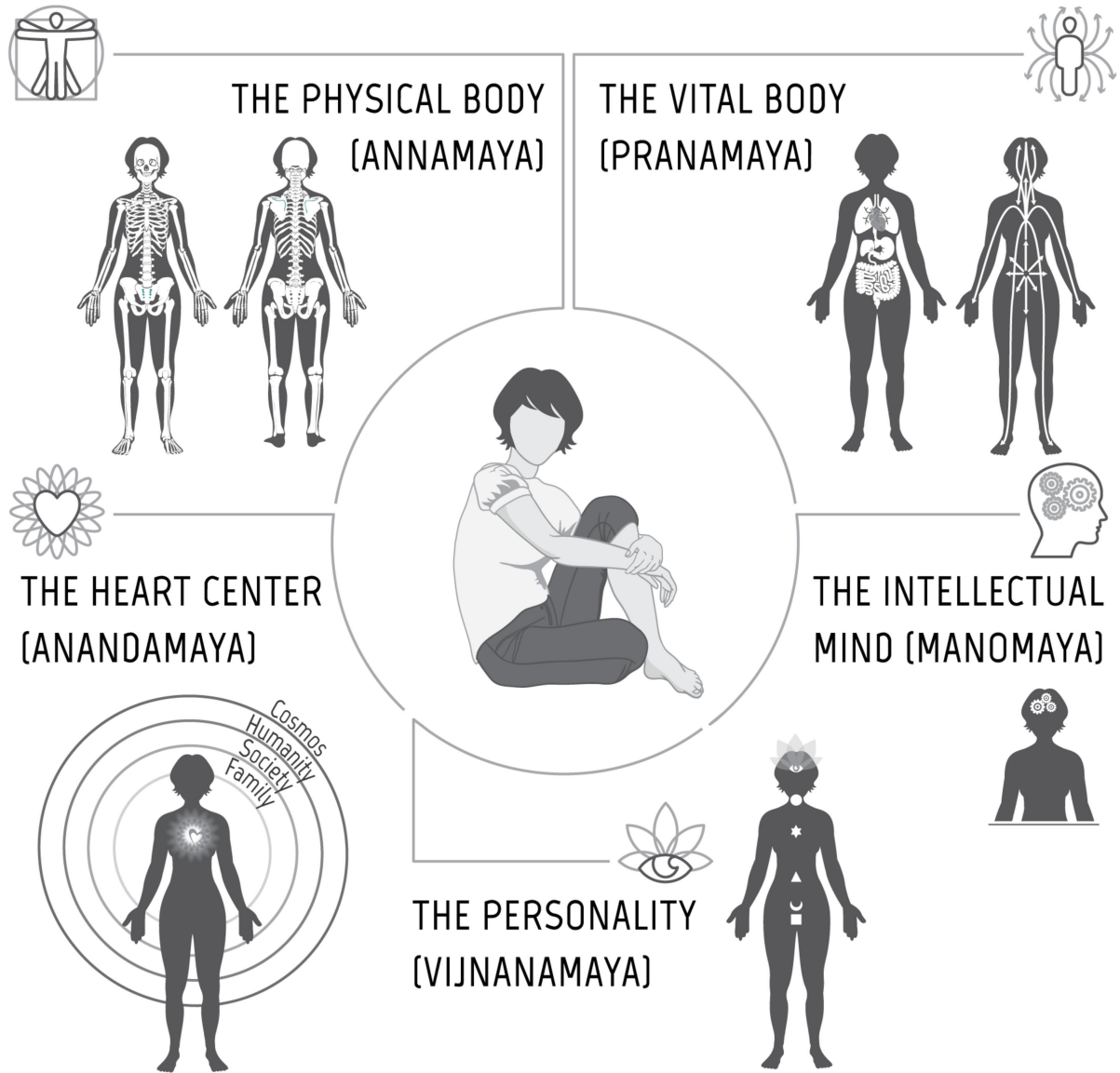
"Within the vital force is yet another body, this one made of thought energy. Those who understand and control the mental body are no longer afflicted by fear."

"Deeper still lies another body comprised of intellect. Those who establish their awareness here free themselves from unhealthy thoughts and actions, and develop the self-control necessary to achieve their goals."

"Hidden inside is yet a subtler body, composed of pure joy. It is experienced as happiness, delight and bliss."

Yoga is a unique discipline that has developed specific tools for addressing imbalances in each one of these dimensions. You don't take Pepto Bismol to treat a headache – in the same way the selection of yogic tools needs to be appropriate for the issue that you are dealing with. Our job as yoga teachers is to continuously refine our skills and our understanding of each one of those five dimensions and apply our knowledge in a way that is appropriate for the student.

THE PANCHAMAYA MODEL



ANNAMAYA (THE PHYSICAL BODY)

All aspects of the physical body must be nourished, taking into account individual needs and limitations. According to the ancients, physical health manifests in:

- No aches and pains;
- Feeling of lightness in the body;
- Ability to withstand change;
- Sense of stability and ease.

MAIN TOOL: ASANA



PRANAMAYA (THE VITAL BODY)

The physiological functioning is affected by the flow of prana along its five major currents: prana, apana, vyana, samana and udana. The balanced flow of prana is reflected in:

- Organ function;
- Sleep patterns;
- Stress management;
- Energy and vitality.

MAIN TOOL: PRANAYAMA, BREATH-CENTERED ASANA



MANOMAYA (THE INTELLECTUAL MIND)

The intellectual mind has tremendous power to influence the entire system; it needs to be educated and developed to be able to:

- Direct and maintain attention;
- Make educated choices;
- Acquire knowledge (Learning);
- Retain information (Memory).

MAIN TOOLS: CHANT, TEXT STUDY

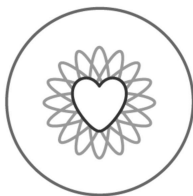


VIJNANAMAYA (THE PERSONALITY)

The personality is formed based on inherent tendencies and is affected by our experience and conditioning. It has great potential for transformation; the chakra model can be used as a road map to help us become more:

- Spiritual
- Intuitive, wise
- Expressive, truthful
- Loving, connected
- Powerful, decisive;
- Vital, creative
- Stable, secure

MAIN TOOLS: MEDITATION, SELF-REFLECTION



ANANDAMAYA (THE HEART CENTER)

The dimension of the heart is the deepest and the most profound. Through the heart we are able to relate to others and find joy and fulfillment. Ultimately, it can become a source of unconditional happiness by connecting to something greater than ourselves.

It reflects how we relate to:

- Family;
- Society;
- Humanity;
- Cosmos.

MAIN TOOLS: RITUAL, PRAYER