

## Keeping Pace with Pain

## January meeting - Yoga for those in pain with Fran Hodgson

When we are in pain we may not move much and our breathing can become very shallow. Also, we may be unable to make the sort of vigorous movements that help move fluids and energy around the body. These things in themselves can make us more subdued and lethargic and may even lead to depression. Constant pain makes life difficult on many levels and saps what energy we have. We may feel that life has become more serious or uncertain and can forget, or be unable, to have fun and play.

The yoga activities I introduced to the meeting were chosen to deepen our breathing, cheer us up, increase the flow of pranic (subtle) energy, stop unwanted thoughts and relax us. I give them here in the order we did them at the meeting. You can choose and use whichever you enjoyed, in any order, and you do not need to do them all.

- **A meditation on Sky, Heartspace & Earth**

Yoga teaches us about our subtle, energetic body that includes 7 major chakras or energy vortices. The Heartspace is the name for Anahata chakra – the centre for love and compassion, not only for others but also for ourselves. This is a grounding meditation. Use it to bring you to the present place and moment.

Sit comfortably upright, with your feet planted firmly on the floor and your eyes gently closed. Be aware of the sky above your head, a vast, infinite expanse of space above the buildings and the towns. Then imagine the roof of the building you are in, the shape and size of the roof. Now, still with your eyes closed, be aware of the ceiling of the room you are in and then begin to consider where the doors and windows are. Now start to draw your awareness down the walls of the room and try to remember what is on the walls. Move your attention now to the top of your own head and then the tops of your shoulders. Feel the head flowing lightly upward - lifting you gently and the shoulders and arms flowing downward. Relax the shoulders and let your attention move into the centre of the chest - your Heartspace. Feel the gentle but powerful energy here, the power of love and compassion. Let this warm, quiet energy support you - easing your sadness and dissolving your fears. When you are ready let your attention move down to your hips and feel the body firmly supported by the chair, then be aware of the floor around you and your feet resting on it. Feel that your feet are connected to the earth beneath the floor, beneath the building. Your feet exchange energy with the earth, drawing what is needed from the earth into the body and releasing what is not needed from the body into the earth. When you feel ready open your eyes and re-awaken with a stretch and a yawn.

- **The Earth Breath**

This is a sequence of 4 movements to encourage deeper breathing and to increase the flow of pranic energy. The four movements can be repeated until you feel you have done enough. This sequence gently strengthens the legs and pelvis and improves posture. It is lovely to do outside in the sunshine.

Stand with your feet about hip distance apart in a nice stable position. Let your arms hang by your sides and then lightly link your fingertips in front of the body with the palms facing upwards.

Inhaling – raise the hands upwards until nearly level with your throat

Pause the breath whilst you slowly turn the hands over so that the palms face downward

Exhaling – let the hands fall slowly back down until the elbows are straight again

Inhaling – push the palms forwards, out and away from the body, and raise the arms as high as you can, keeping the fingers linked

Exhaling – release the fingers and move the arms away from each other. Let them fall all the way back down to the starting position and lightly link the fingers again ready for the next go. Take a deep breath in and out before repeating the sequence.

If your knees are happy to bend then you might like to try letting them bend with the first exhalation and then straighten again with the following inhalation.

- **Not Clapping**

We did this to deepen our breathing and to create movement of the abdomen and chest. Movement of the abdomen stimulates movement of subtle energy and can ease constipation if done regularly. Try doing 10 before breakfast each day.

Sit comfortably upright, with your feet planted firmly on the floor. Hold your arms in front of you with elbows bent and forearms vertical. Your hands should face each other about 6 inches apart.

Inhaling deeply – draw the elbows back squeezing the shoulder blades together and opening the chest

Exhaling quickly – bring the arms back to their starting position and draw the abdomen in firmly with a sharp snap. Don't clap!

- **A Seated Twist**

Most bodies enjoy twisting. It allows the spine to adjust itself naturally and gives the abdominal contents a nice massage. Subtle energy is encouraged to move upward to higher chakras. To work in sympathy with the large intestine we always twist round to face the right first.

Sit comfortably upright on the front edge of the chair so that you have room to twist. Have your feet planted firmly on the floor. Place your palms together in front of your heartspace. Now give your bottom a little wiggle and feel your sitting bones on the chair. From those sitting bones let your body rotate easily and naturally to the right. When the movement stops move the two hands over to the right shoulder and see if the body is able to twist any more to the right – do not force it. Finally move your head and eyes to the right so that you are looking over your shoulder. Hold for one breath and then untwist all in one go back to the front. Repeat to the left side.

- **Making Some Sounds**

When we are unable to move physically we can use sound to bring vibration to the body. In this gentle practice we move our head away from centre and then make a sound as the head comes back.

Sit comfortably with the shoulders relaxed down and the head held naturally upright. Do not thrust forward with the chin or nose. Try to make the movements slow and smooth.

Inhale as you turn your head to the right. Exhale making the sound aaaaa as the head returns to centre

Inhale as you turn your head to the left. Exhale making the sound ooooo as the head returns to centre

Inhale as you look up to the ceiling. Exhale making the sound eeeee as the head returns to centre

Inhale as you look down to the floor. Exhale making the sound mmmmm as the head returns to centre.

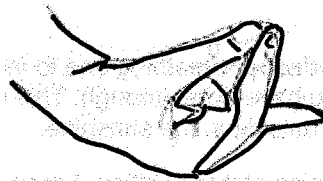
Repeat twice more if you wish.

- **Swiss Roll Mudra**

A mudra is a shape we make with the body. These shapes have an effect on the electromagnetic field that surrounds our bodies. This mudra is calming and comforting. Use whenever you wish to be calmed or comforted. Gently fold your left thumb into its palm and then softly curl your fingers over it. You should still be able to see the knuckle of the left thumb. Now place the pad of your right thumb onto this knuckle and wrap the fingers of the right hand around the left hand. The fingers of your right hand rest on the back of the left hand. Hold the hands close to the body and relax for 5 minutes (or longer if you like) Observe the reaction of your mind to this mudra.

- **Hridaya Mudra**

This mudra diverts the flow of prana from the hands to the heart area, improving the vitality of the physical heart. The middle and ring fingers relate directly to the energy channels connected with the heart, while the thumb closes the pranic circuit and acts as an energiser, diverting the flow of prana from the hands to these energy channels. Use for all heart ailments and also to unburden the heart from excess emotion. Use once a day, just for a few minutes so that it becomes familiar, and then use whenever your heart flutters or your blood pressure rises.



Both hands are placed in this mudra at the same time.

- **Chanting**

I chose Om namah Shiva because it is the most widely used chant in the world. Shiva is one of 3 the Hindu deities and is associated with destruction. Try using this chant to destroy the mind's negativity. Practice often so that the chant becomes part of the background song of your mind.

Om namah Shiva, Om namah Shivaya, Om namah Shiva, Shiva Om namah, Shiva Om namah

- **Withdrawal from the senses meditation**

The senses are always moving outwards and unless we settle them they can make us restless and anxious. This meditation brings the senses to rest, one by one. You can do this sitting or lying down or in bed as you go to sleep. Make yourself comfortable and then gently close your eyes. Feel that there is nothing you need to see right now and you are able to let the eyes rest. The eyelids are light and soft, the space between the eyebrows is open and the forehead is smooth. Release any tightness around the eyes and let go of any frowning or tightness of the scalp. Now be aware of the nostrils and as you inhale identify any smells that are on the air. Then let the sense of smell become quiet. Now be aware of the tongue, explore the mouth with your tongue identifying any tastes. Then let the tongue come to rest with the tip against the lower teeth. Relax the whole mouth and lower jaw, make sure there is no clenching of the teeth or tightening of chin or throat. Now let yourself become aware of your skin, the whole surface of your physical body. Feel all the textures and temperatures of the things that are touching your skin. Even feel the air against your face and hands. Notice that you are breathing and try to let the abdomen move as you breathe. Let your body expand as you inhale and subside as you exhale. Encourage your breathing to be slow, deep and smooth. Notice the natural rhythm of your breath. Now keep this nice breath going and come to the last of the senses – the sense of hearing. Just listen passively to any sounds that come your way. Do not actively search outward for sound but let the sounds that are there come to you. Stay with this meditation as long as you wish and then, unless you intend to sleep, re-awaken slowly and gently. Rub your palms together and then place them gently over your eyes. Let the eyes open behind the palms, adjusting to the light. Finally stretch and yawn and get up and move about again.

If you would like to learn more about yoga I recommend Fiona Ashdown, a very experienced and gentle teacher who lives in Arthur Road, Shirley O23 8063 2881 and The Sanctuary, Thornbury Ave, Shirley O23 8063 1399.