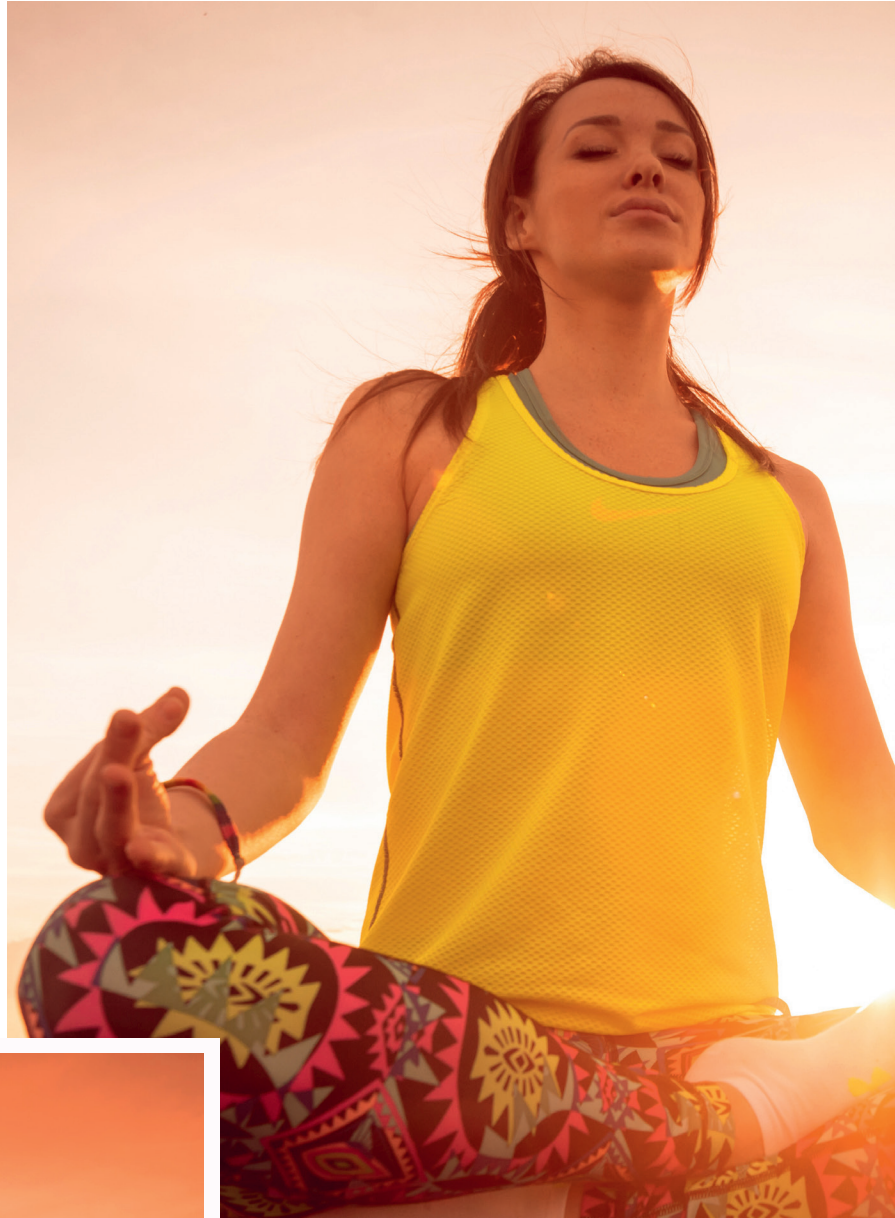


BALANCING

YOUR PRACTICE

HUMANS TEND TO EXIST in states of varying disharmony. We feel the more extreme imbalances in our bodies as injury, discomfort and tension while in the mind they manifest as anger and fear. Even when not in the grip of any apparent physical pain or mental turmoil, we can reach more satisfying states where we are more grounded, energised, clear and content. This is the aim of Ayurveda, the system of health connected to yoga that focuses on balancing our beings. We do this not by following the same prescription but by assessing our characters and nature and counteracting them to bring us towards harmony. This idea of equilibrium can guide our yoga practices as well as our attitudes to these yoga techniques, helping us use the right ones at the right times.



ASANA BALANCING

In life generally, as well as our yoga asana, we often find ourselves drawn to the path of least resistance and that which comes naturally.

When we do a yoga pose we often subconsciously start with our 'easy side'. Here we find the pose most comfortable, ego-inflating and satisfying so it's easy to dwell on and relish this side for longer than the other, where we are naturally more closed and stiff. This stiff side is also where we are more likely to encounter uncomfortable emotions. A good practice, yet sometimes challenging exercise, is to start with



may benefit from trying a more active practice or style to ignite some fire inside. Driving through an energetic practice for a naturally inactive person is difficult; however, in time, the dynamism they need to muster to practise on the mat becomes easier to find when they require it in other places too. Gradually active things in life can then be approached with more joy than trepidation.

Self-study and awareness is important in yoga and vital in determining a balancing, beneficial practice. On any day, what comes naturally often makes you feel great, is easy and is more satisfying in the moment but also has the potential to be feeding an imbalance. For example, you need to honestly assess if you are tired and worn out or simply stagnating. It may be the rest and restorative practice you crave is needed that day rather than driving yourself further into the ground, or it could be that you'd be better with an energising practice to encourage yourself out of the rut.

“Self-study and awareness is important in yoga and vital in determining a balancing, beneficial practice”

TYPE OF PRACTICE

The same applies for the type of practice in a wider sense, taking in, for example, meditation, pranayama (yogic breath management), chanting and asana. If asana and movement come easily but you have an aversion to or find meditation and contemplation hard, it may be time to look into that. Whatever your practice, we are very fond of the old Buddhist adage: *Every so often take a sincere and serious look at your practice. If it's not serving you, try changing your practice or your attitude to it.* Give it a try from time to time – it can take a while for the effects of a practice to become apparent and what served you in the

the 'harder side', try to relax in and enjoy the sensations there. After doing the pose on both sides it's interesting to try returning once more to the tougher side – by doing this twice you increase the chance to bring the stiffer side into balance.

On a more generalised level, balance is important when picking your yoga style. Highly driven characters need to cultivate a calming, gentle yoga and find their peace there or alternatively generating a softer, less intense attitude to their current practice if it is physically unrelenting. People with a tendency to stagnate



Phil & Helen

past may not always do so. Check how you are in yourself and around others. When problems arise, do you handle them more easily with a lighter approach or do they overtake your mind, ever more tying you in bigger knots? Are you more comfortable and balanced in your body, generating good relaxed energy, or are you aggravating injuries or becoming too agitated or slothful? Are you a more joyful person to

be around, more happily supportive of family, friends and those that could do with assistance or do you find yourself more self-consumed and demanding of others? As you look at yourself honestly you'll probably find the motivation and insight to move your practice towards one which is more balancing and beneficial for you now. Good luck!

Viparita karani

An asana that is good for balancing your mood is viparita karani, or 'legs up the wall' pose. It is very simple and can be made comfortable for most people so you can stay there for a while. It is an all-purpose pose; if you are tired it can re-energise you and if

you are hyperactive or stressed it can calm you down. There are a number of variations: see which one looks like it might work for you and then stay there. You could even set a timer for 5, 10 or even 40 minutes. Once you are done, remove any props, squeeze your

knees into your chest and then roll to your right. Wriggle into savasana (relaxation) for as long as you need or press your hands slowly into the floor and push up to sitting. Either way, take your time to return to real life feeling fully refreshed.

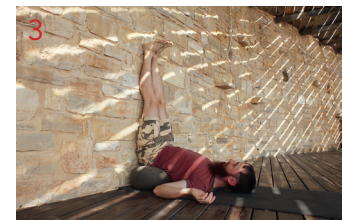
VIPARITA KARANI INSTRUCTIONS

1 This is a simple and relaxing version of viparita karani. Roll in from the side and place your legs comfortably on the wall. If it is too much for your hamstrings you can bend your knees, place something supportive on the floor under your pelvis or just move a little way from the wall so the pose is sustainable. Your arms can relax over your head, elbows soft. If this is a challenging position for your shoulders, bend the elbows and release the arms down until you can stay, or try the next version. Close your eyes, stay here and breathe deeply.

2 Come in the same as the first version. Making sure it feels pleasant and satisfying, place your hands on your belly then turn your attention inwards to your breath. With the weight of your hands on your tummy you can breathe in, swelling your belly into your hands, and breathe out, feeling the breath leaving. Lengthen and deepen the breath, paying particular attention to the turn round of the breath, the change of gear where the inhale changes to an exhale and vice versa. If it feels good you can visualise inhaling positive vibes and exhaling stress and negative emotions.

3 This version uses a bolster to emphasise the curve of the lower back, placing the hamstrings in a great position to stretch them out. Roll in from the side onto the bolster and have a shuffle to try and get your hips slung over the bolster with the curve of your lower back on the bolster. Once you are more or less in you can press your feet against the wall and shift your pelvis into a good position. If you have tight hamstrings, this is a good variation to stretch them without straining the lower back – but be gentle and bend the knees if you have to. The arms in this position allow the chest to release upwards, creating a 'back-bendy' feeling.

4 For more advanced practitioners, try this version without a wall. Lie on the floor, lift your hips and slide two stacked blocks under the back of your pelvis. When it feels comfortable to do so, bend your knees and lift your legs straight up to the sky. Come out the same way you went in and relax. 🐾



Photos: Yoga Rocks

YOGA ROCKS. Helen and Phil lead the team on their idyllic retreat. They celebrate the similarities between yoga styles and the teachers they invite have a wish to spread BIG love, openness and joy, making your yoga retreat an incredible and transformative experience. Visit yogaholidaysgreece.com