



December
2013

Christmas/New Year: We are truly grateful to everyone who has supported us in our first months of operation. We are open over the Christmas/New Year period. The timetable from 24 December to 5 January is available on the website and in hard copy from the studio.

Typhoon Haiyan Class: A big thank you to those who joined us for our charity class on 14 December to support the victims of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and neighbouring countries. If you missed the class but wish to donate drop in to Apollo's studio by Friday 20 December with your donation and we will group it with the funds from the class itself before sending all the money raised to the Red Cross Emergency Fund.

Wanderlust: Tickets are available. Visit the website to check them out:
www.akl.wanderlustfestival.com.

Workshops: We shall be running two workshops early in 2014. The first is called **Baddhas and Bandhas** and will explore stability through muscular toning as well as binding of arms and legs through spinal rotation, shoulder mobility correct alignment of the limbs. **Breathing for Life** will be a workshop exploring different breathing techniques and forms of pranayama within the context of a vinyasa practice. This workshop will address a variety of different breathing skills for a range of benefits for mind, body and spirit. Watch for notices with dates and further details. We are also looking at a workshop on the **pelvic floor** with a guest presenter, Marina Locke and hope to secure a workshop with Wanderlust presenter

Cameron Shayne highlighting his Budokon style of yoga.

Showers at Apollo: Work to install showers in the changing rooms at Apollo has begun. The rooms leading off the practice room are being used as changing rooms temporarily. Fully operational shower facilities should be available from the start of next year – if not before Christmas. Woo hoo.

Grab One Vouchers: Take care yogis. These vouchers expire. You must use all five classes within 45 days after taking the first class under the voucher. Also, if you have not started using your voucher yet, the vouchers will expire unless the first class is taken by 31 December 2013. Finally, only one voucher per person please. These were the terms and conditions from the outset and we are sticking by them. Please do not ask for extensions of time.

Debunking Power Vinyasa Myths: There are some misconceptions about power vinyasa that are perpetuated by people for a variety of reasons. In this edition of Apollo's newsletter I shall address some of these misconceptions.

Power Vinyasa Yoga is not based on alignment – this is a myth or lie sometimes asserted alleging that power vinyasa yoga is more a sport than yoga and that it is taught too loosely.

At Apollo we teach with very clear alignment cues. We work from the base of a pose up the body. We detail only a few points in each pose so as not to overwhelm or bewilder with

instructions. We look to see what is in the bodies of the practitioners in the room and we teach to what we see rather than reciting the text book. We seek to teach into possibility. What is a student doing in a pose? What can we do to bring them into the next step for their body?

But we avoid the adherence to alignment becoming dogma. We speak not only to bio-mechanics but we speak into body, mind and spirit. This is a distinguishing feature of Baptiste power vinyasa yoga – taught only at Apollo. I have had teachers who work elsewhere tell me they feel bored teaching. Such teachers become bored because they are boring. They recite the same cues over and over. They lack the spark to lift the energy in the room. They lack the connection with their students that we at Apollo cultivate.

Power vinyasa yoga is only for really fit, strong people – This myth arises because many people who practice power vinyasa yoga get fit and strong doing so. The practitioners of this style of yoga are the best advertisement for it. But that does not mean you have to be that way to begin with. I have seen people substantially out of shape work this practice and make it their own. They rest often in child's pose, they modify many of the poses with a knee at the floor or a forearm or by simplifying their twists. Little by little they gain strength and mobility and they come into their inner resources of power.

“Power” in power vinyasa yoga hints at physical power but is more aligned with Aristotle's definition of power: the ability to be and to let be.

Power vinyasa is not real yoga – Power vinyasa yoga is very real. Following the Baptiste methodology – and Apollo is the only studio in the country that does – there is real body, mind and spirit connection. Oms are sounds rather than pretty pictures on walls. Meditation is taught and practiced in our workshops. We teach yoga practice as a way

of being. We do not seek to be people pleasers by teaching fancy variations but neglecting the essentials such as core stability. If you practice power vinyasa yoga at Apollo you will feel the truth and authenticity of the practice. You will not be told you are in a torture chamber. You will not be invited to bend backwards until it hurts like hell. You will not be allowed to stay in your weaknesses. You will be guided through a fun but transformative practice taught against a background of timeless principle that has the strength and gravitas of truth behind it.

Yoga has evolved over the millennia in many ways. It serves many different purposes. Baptiste power vinyasa yoga is the result of a very broad-based study by Baron Baptiste of many different traditions of yoga. It has been developed and adapted to meet the needs of the times – a dynamic, fluid practice to strengthen and align bodies and to bring its practitioners into an awareness of timeless truths that speak to them at a fundamental level.

Hitting a plateau means the practice has stopped working – Our desire for immediate gratification often means we lack the perseverance to see through the challenges in practice. When we begin power vinyasa there is a honeymoon period. We are initially impressed by the physicality of the practice and its demands cause us to grow quickly. Inevitably, however, a plateau comes and we feel we are getting nowhere. Just as any pose really begins when we want to come out of it, so our practice truly begins when the resistance to it emerges.

Stay to the course. Have the courage to keep working through the days when it feels like nothing is happening. New vistas will open up but like any journey there are valleys and dark areas as well as soaring peaks and bright sunny places.

Yoga Clothing

One of our goals in yoga is to regain and retain our bodies' full range of motion. So it's important that we practice yoga in clothing that allows full movement. Yoga clothes need to be as flexible as we'd like our bodies to be.

Men quite often show up to yoga in the same shorts they'd wear for rugby, tramping, running or going to the beach. Most of these shorts are not stretchy enough through the groin to let us move freely into a deep lunge, such as warrior pose. Long, floppy shorts, such as board shorts, often bind at the knee, so you have to stop and hitch them up halfway through a movement. And fabrics that trap sweat on the skin, rather than "wicking" it away from the skin can make us feel uncomfortably hot.

For women, the main issue seems to be finding a top and a bra that will stay in place while we're moving. Traditional bra straps tend to fall off the shoulder during some yoga movements, so a bra with straps that cross over, or a "racer-back", generally works better. Tops need to be loose enough to move freely in, but not so loose and baggy that they bunch up under the armpits in down dog.

The height of yoga pants at the hip can be an issue too. You do not want to have to be continually hitching up pants that are too low-riding. But our bodies are all different and some prefer a lower waist and others a higher waisted garment. When trying on yoga clothing do not just look in the mirror – bend right over or do some squats and twists to see how the garment performs on your body.

Lululemon Athletica in the Re:Start mall has a great range of clothes for both men and women, perfect for a power vinyasa yoga practice. We especially like the Surge III Short for men – it's stretchy and just the right length. For women, Lululemon has an enormous range of sports bras and tops, with something suitable for all kinds of different body shapes and sizes. Just ask their

wonderful staff for assistance, to find the style best suited for you.

Yogi Footcare

One of the great things about a yoga practice is the opportunity to get our feet out of our shoes. And with our increased flexibility, we can have a good look at those feet, and AAGGHH! Sometimes they look like they're in need of a bit of TLC. Thick, hardened, yellowy bits, and scary heel cracks – what to do?

It's not just a cosmetic issue. The natural process of dead skin cells sloughing off to allow the new skin underneath to come to the surface sometimes needs a bit of a helping hand, especially when it comes to our feet. When cracks appear, they can become sore and even infected.

To keep our feet in top nick, we recommend the wonderful Foot Scrub and Foot Massage Cream from the Linden Leaves range. Made here in Christchurch from pure and natural ingredients, these products do an excellent job of keeping feet looking as fit and healthy as the rest of a yogi's body.

Asana Spotlight: *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (downward facing dog) flows from *urdhva mukha svanasana* in the *vinyasa*. Transition from one to the other is profound but can be done with more or less or no modification depending upon the student and the energy.

Adho Mukha Svanasana involves an upward lift led by the thighs and core taking the body from spinal extension into a forward fold. Depending upon the body of the practitioner the spine may remain in slight extension or may come slightly into flexion or may be neutral.

- In upward facing dog the tops of the feet are flat to the floor for most people (though some who cannot achieve plantar flexion of their feet the toes will remain

tucked). To initiate the lift to downward facing dog press the tops of the feet (or the toes as the case may be) strongly into the floor.

- Contract the muscles of the thighs, especially the quadriceps and turn the inner thighs inwards and upwards towards the ceiling.
- Keep lifting the thighs and hips, engaging *uddiyana bandha* as you do so.
- Driving down into the earth with your feet and hands and lifting up to the sky with your thighs, hips and core come up to downward facing dog.
- For advanced practitioners whose feet and toes are strong and mobile you will keep the toes pointed and lift all the up onto the points of the toes before rolling over the tops of the toes as the balls of the feet come to the floor.
- If it is not in your body to lift over the tops of the toes in this way either tuck the toes under to begin the transition to downward facing dog or lift the feet slightly, first one foot then the other, to tuck the toes part way through the transition.
- If you take upward facing dog with your hips at the floor you may lack the mobility or strength to lift to downward facing dog with straight legs. If that is the case then begin the transition by tucking your toes under.
- Then, with your knees at the floor, lift your hips up and press your hips towards the wall behind you.
- Finally, brace through your hands and arms and push away from the floor with your hands and feet, lifting your hips to the sky.
- In downward facing dog your hands are at shoulder width distance and your feet at hip width distance.
- Most newer practitioners need to work with their index fingers pointing straight forward. Some cues ask students to have

their middle fingers pointing straight forward but this is quite advanced.

- Bear weight forward into the knuckles of the fingers and especially into the inner triad of thumb and index finger. Heaviness at the wrist or to the pink finger side of the hand can lead to injury.
- Activating your hands in this way will also firm and tone the backs of your forearms and your upper arms.
- Turn the pits of your elbows towards one another and lift you upper arm bones to the sky.
- In your feet, press the inner ball and the big toe and second toe into the floor. Your heels do not need to be at the floor but reach your heels backwards towards the floor as if trying to make them touch earth.
- Your legs do not need to be straight. Feel free to dip your knees towards the floor in order not to pull your tailbone down towards the earth.
- Keep your pelvis mobile and tilt your tail up towards the ceiling. Create a beautiful inverted “V” at your hips.
- Suspend your spine from your uplifted hips. This is where some people with mobile lower backs will come into extension while other people will have a slight bubble in their back and others will have a neutral line in their spine with the natural primary and secondary curves in place.
- Lifting your upper arm bones to the sky with perhaps a slight external rotation of the arm bones at the shoulders will allow you to lift the shoulder blades flat onto your back.
- Allow your shoulder blades to draw towards one another and the base of your shoulder blades to slide towards your hips. These actions are very evident in the picture.



- Melt your heart towards the floor. Again, the picture shows this effect. The length of the base of my downward facing dog and the openness of my shoulders have let me bring me forehead to lightly touch the floor.
- Let there be no tension in your neck or jaw. There is no need to look forwards nor to drop your head so as to look backwards. Be relaxed in your neck with your eyes resting at the floor.
- Breathe powerful *ujjayi* breath and enjoy the vitality of the energy in downward facing dog but also the calming, centring quality of the pose. As a mild inversion there is peace to be had here if you can only stop fighting with the pose.

Chakra Theory: Having finished our series on the eight limbs of yoga enunciated by Patanjali in the *Sutras* we can now look at another aspect of yoga theory and philosophy that we hear a bit about but do not necessarily understand.

Chakra theory is not something I speak to in my teaching. That is because I do not favour teaching from head knowledge or from rote learning. In teaching I prefer to speak from what is in my whole being and a deep understanding of chakra theory is not there. However, the rudiments of a bodily awareness of chakra theory are present. In tree pose when I hug in muscularly towards the midline of my body I feel energy rise up through me from the earth through my legs, up my spine and I express that forth through my heart and my hands as I reach upwards to the sky.

Similarly, in backbends I feel a powerful energetic awakening, invigorating my entire being. These experiences are, for me, the awakening of *kundalini* – a powerful energy running through the body from the base of the spine to the crown of the head that lies at the very essence of chakra theory.

This month we will give a brief overview of chakra theory and in subsequent issues we shall discuss the individual chakras in a little more detail. The notion behind chakras is that there are streams of energy in our bodies called *nadis*. The three principal streams are the *sushumna*, the *ida* and the *pingala*. The *sushumna* corresponds with the spine and the *ida* (feminine) and *pingala* (masculine) spiral around the spine like a helix.

The chakras are the points at which the three principal *nadis* originate and terminate and the points where the two spiralling *nadis* meet and twine around the central *nadi*.

These points of intersection correspond with the major plexuses of arteries, veins and nerves in our bodies. There is an anatomical foundation for and connection with the notion of these energetic centres.

Chakras were alluded to in the earliest Upanishads. The Upanishads consist of over 200 texts written between several centuries BCE and around 1600 CE that are the foundation of the Hindu religion. It was around the eighth century CE that a classification of different levels of chakra was written of in Buddhist Tantra texts.

The notion of coils of energy around a central staff is not confined just to Hindu traditions. In Greek and Roman mythology Hermes (Mercury) carries a staff with two snakes twining around it called a caduceus. In Christian theology Moses had a staff with a fiery serpent wrapped around it. Buddha spoke of the middle path by which nirvana

may be achieved with the channelling of the subtle winds through the middle path (the *sushumna*).

For our purposes we will discuss the seven principally recognised chakras rising from the base of the spine to the very top of the head. We will also discuss in this context the notion of *kundalini*. *Kundalini* is feminine energy, represented by a serpent, said to originate at the base of the spine where it lies dormant, coiled around the sacrum, but which can be awakened to rise powerfully up the spine with tremendous energetic, sexual and spiritual awakening.

Namaste

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