

Yoga Bodies – perspectives on the body-mind and their application in asana

Overall aim

This workshop is a practical exploration of the purpose of yoga asana. It introduces different ways of thinking and speaking about the body-mind under three categories of ‘physical models’, ‘energy models’ and ‘psycho-emotional models’. It includes reference to but goes way beyond the boundaries of western anatomy and physiology.

The aim is to better inform ‘how’ we practice and teach yoga, by clarifying our goals and motivations, and by shaping our perspective of the way that asana ‘works’ on the body-mind in ways that help us to achieve those goals.

Aims of morning

To introduce and explore the goals and outcomes of modern yoga.

To introduce the concept of the body-mind.

To begin to consider a variety of ways of visualising and talking about the body-mind in ways linked to yoga asana practice and teaching.

Objectives

Students will be able to identify a variety of goals and outcomes related to modern yoga teaching under the generic headings of physical, psycho-emotional and spiritual.

Students will be able to define the concept of the body-mind and provide examples of the integrated nature of our physical and mental experience.

Students will be able to give examples of different ‘models’ of the body under the headings physical, energetic and psycho-emotional models.

Aims of afternoon

To continue to consider a variety of ways of visualising and talking about the body-mind in ways linked to yoga asana practice and teaching.

To explore the possibility of using different models of the body mind when practicing and teaching yoga asana.

Objectives

Students will be able to give examples of different ‘models’ of the body under the headings physical, energetic and psycho-emotional models.

Students will be able to give examples of ways to utilise the different models considered in relation to the teaching and practice of a particular asana.

Methods of presenting the subject

The day will be a mix of tutor presentation, group discussion and practical exploration involving individual asana practice and group work. The day promises to

be a day that provokes reflection and provides inspiration and innovation for your practice and/or teaching.

About the tutor

Ade currently works as a Rolfer, Craniosacral therapist, and yoga teacher in Henfield, West Sussex.

His yoga story is centred around a daily ashtanga yoga practice begun in 2000 and involving many months over the years studying with Nancy Gilgoff at her home in Maui. He has also been blessed to study Zen with Sonia Moriceau.

He qualified in the Rolf Method of Structural Integration at the Rolf Guild in Boulder, Colorado in 2010. He graduated from the Karuna Institute in Devon as a Craniosacral Therapist in 2012.

He has been teaching yoga since 2004, mostly from a barn in the Black Mountains of South Wales. His bodywork studies and practice have deeply informed his teaching which continues from his new home in West Sussex and via workshops in other UK venues.

Outline plan for the day

The programme is subject to minor change to enable emphasis on different stories depending on group needs and interests. However, the main themes, aims and objectives remain constant.

10.00-1.00

- The goals of modern yoga
- Introducing the concept of the body-mind
- Overview of the categories of body-mind models
- Exploration of examples of physical models

1.00-2.00 LUNCH

2.00-4.00

- Exploration of examples of energetic models
- Exploration of examples of psycho-emotionals
- Conclusions
 - The role of intention
 - Using different models to prompt new understanding in yoga asana
- Closing meditation.
- Completion of BWY IST feedback forms

Models of asana workshop timings

	1000-1010	10mins	5 minute settle and sahana vavathu chant with 3 oms
1	1010-1045	35mins	<p>Hello and workshop objectives.</p> <p>Purpose of asana –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of panchakosha (& therefore bridge to raja yoga) • 3 distinct areas of ‘modern yoga’ : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physical ○ Psycho-emotional ○ Psycho-spiritual <p>Different perspectives on the bodymind and their relevance to practice.</p>
2	1045-1145	60mins	<p>Bones & myofascial perspectives</p> <p>Short break if needed...</p>
3	1145-1245	60 mins	<p>Energetic perspectives</p> <p>As far as lines of energy...</p>
	1245-1330	45mins	LUNCH
4	1330-1500	90mins	<p>Questions and comments arising???</p> <p>Energetic perspectives continued</p> <p>5 element model</p>
5	1500-1530	30mins	<p>Bodymind stories (especially kleshas)</p> <p>Short break</p>
6	1530-1555	25mins	<p>Summing up, Conclusions & Questions</p> <p>Closing chant – loving kindness mantra plus 3 oms</p>
	1555-1600	5mins	Feedback forms

Session 1 (35 minutes to 1045)

Hello and workshop objectives.

Purpose of asana –

- *Exploration of panchakosha (& therefore bridge to raja yoga)*
- *3 distinct areas of ‘modern yoga’ :*
 - *Physical*
 - *Psycho-emotional*
 - *Psycho-spiritual*

Different perspectives on the bodymind and their relevance to practice.

Overall objective

This workshop is a practical exploration of the purpose of yoga asana. It introduces different ways of thinking about the body-mind broadly grouped under three categories of ‘physical models’, ‘energy models’ and ‘psycho-emotional models’.

The aim is to better inform ‘how’ we practice yoga, by clarifying our goals and motivations, and by shaping our perspective of the way that asana ‘works’ in ways that help us to achieve those goals.

Purpose of asana

Explore the variety of reasons that bring people to their yoga mats and ask ourselves to be clear about our own intentions.

Ask for reasons – encourage speaking from the I.

Provide three headings under which the purpose(s) of asana might be considered.

Physical – anything to do with your body

Psycho-emotional – anything to do with the way you think and feel

Psycho-spiritual – anything to do with the way you think about and relate to the world and your place in it

In some ways this mirrors the panchakosha (5 sheaths of existence) –

Annamaya kosha, the food sheath.

Pranamaya kosha, the energy sheath

Manomaya kosha, the mind sheath

Vijna namaya kosha, the intellect sheath

Anandamaya kosha, the bliss sheath

The spectrum is simplified in the concept of the bodymind –

concept of body mind – all thought and feeling has ‘real time’ physical expression (sometimes this is fixed as somatic memory)

Worth noting also the opening paragraphs of the Hathayogapradipika 15th CE (read chapter 1, verses 1,2 and 12 – the last to illustrate that something is different between ‘traditional’ yoga and ‘modern’ yoga – polarised between transformation and health)

Conclude with observation that such a wide spectrum of asana intentions might clearly encourage variable ways of thinking about the practice.

Session 2 – 60 minutes to 1145 (Bones and Myofascia)

These models use the language of anatomy but apply it in a manner that is more about function and sensation than it is about locational accuracy or specificity.

Bones	
bones as centres of movement	Janu sirsasana A Semi-supine backbend cobra
bones as weight bearing structures	down dog hands and knees tadasana
Joints as fulcrums	Janu sirsasana A Paschimottanasana
Myofascia	
Interconnected form / holistic awareness / functional anatomy	Lie on back – knees to chest 1 at a time Paschimottanasana (Focus – back line superficial and deep) Dhanurasana or salabhasana – (focus – superficial and deep front line)
Expansional balance	ekam and dve mvts star on back from ball parsvakonasana

Session 3 – energetic models (60 mins to 1245)

Energy is a word both overused and misunderstood. Here I will use the term to describe a mixture of **awareness, intention and engagement**.

15 mins per category (take examples from main group to expand each exploration if required)

Push back energy	Hand and knees then down dog
Breath wave (expanding inhale, softening exhale) – consider movement in different phases for different types of movement	Semi supine back bend Seated wide legged forward bend
Lines of energy	Virabhadrasana II, trikonasana, wide legged handstand preparation, standing leg raise to side, ardha chandrasana

LUNCH – 1245-1330 (45 mins)

Session 4 – Energetic models continued then 5-element theory (90 mins to 1500)

Questions arising from morning sessions that can't wait til end of day Q&A.?

15 mins per category (take examples from main group to expand each exploration if required) – to 1415 latest

Reminder energy = awareness, intention and engagement blend

<p>chakras</p> 	<p>Chakra meditation – sahasrara – crown. Ajna – third eye / third ventricle Visuddhi - throat Anahata – heart centre Manipura – navel centre / navi chakra or sometimes solar plexus Swadhistana – coccyx / pubic bone Mooladhara – root chakra – pelvic floor</p> <p>NB do descent after ascent. And warning – if feeling anxious or 'floaty' stop and follow the chakras back down to ground ending with clear grounding</p>
--	---

midline	Lying contra-lateral twist Modified Marichyasana C Reverse parsvakonasana Mention savasana
Prana vidya (balloons and amoeba)	Parsvakonasana, Visvamisrasana

5-element theory (45 mins to 1500)

Earth, water, fire, air, space –

- finding all of them in harmony in any asana
- consider them as expressing physically, energetically and psycho-emotionally

Earth - foundation, groundedness, calm, strength

Water - fluidity

Fire - oomph, engagement

Air - breath movement

Space - expressed from cells to biosphere (link to breath)

Talk through in relation to tree pose.

Then if time allows – split into pairs or groups and divide into watchers and doers.

- One watches and the other does a pose.
- Both consider the 5 element theory and compare their observations.
- Which elements could benefit from a boost and which may need turning down a little?
- Swap over and repeat

Come back by 1445 for group feedback and short break.

Session 5 – Body-mind / psycho-emotional models (30 mins to 1530)

Introduction and examples only – these are deep and individual explorations and therefore harder to generalise and explore in a workshop setting.

Reminder – concept of body mind – all thought and feeling has ‘real time’ physical expression (sometimes this is fixed as somatic memory)

Examples of **ways this shows up in asana** :

The body as emotional instrument	Fear – back bending and the moro or startle reflex – so if strongly present, fear reduction is more useful than any amount of technique or physical attention.
Body as life story	Emergent memories, pain, activation or dissociation patterns – all associated with past experience turning into narrative or belief structures. What stories am I currently expressing?

Ways of working with body-mind patterns (Pattern busting techniques):

What is present? **PIER** – physically, intellectually, emotionally, relationally?

Then - **RAIN** –

Recognition

Acceptance

Inquiry (just observe the pattern details – body, feelings, narrative?)

Non-attachment

This is of course the technique of mindfulness.

Sometimes this is enough and if not.....

- Breath focusing
- Change gear – go faster or slower – try this with ekam / dve mvts or arm raises (how do you feel at the different speeds)

Session 6 – Conclusions (25 minutes to 1555)

Recap – scope of intentions ie reasons to practice asana

1. Highlight potential for change of intention and/or unexpected overlap

eg you may need to explore your psycho-emotional response to backbending in order to learn to do drop backs and fulfil your ambition to ‘be like Kino Macgregor’.

Eg2 the territory of finding your way into handstand might provide rich psychological and emotional lessons that help fulfil your intention to become a calmer person

2. All models of what is happening in asana are just stories (and have pros and cons)

3. The different models may also be viewed as tools in a tool box – different usage and if one doesn’t work try a different one

4. Using a variety of models encourages you to explore for yourself and can help avoid getting stuck in ‘practice patterns’

5. You don’t have to use them all at once but as you become more familiar with them they seem to ‘arise for consideration’ at appropriate times

Questions