

Teaching Plus Size Yoga

Gentle Yoga[®]
with
Naomi

Naomi Judith, M.A., E-RYT



Copyright © 2008 by Naomi Judith . All rights reserved.
Photographs Copyright © 2008 by Naomi Judith.
Published by Judith Enterprises, USA

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher should be addressed to:

Judith Enterprises
17423 Plaza Dolores
San Diego, CA 92128
858-217-6021
naomi@judithenterprises.com

The information contained in this book is not intended to serve as a replacement for professional medical advice. Please consult with your physician before beginning and exercise program.

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Dedication.....	3
Acknowledgments.....	5
Introduction.....	11
The Purpose of Gentle Yoga.....	15
Managing Weight With Gentle Yoga.....	19
Nine Reasons to Practice Gentle Yoga.....	21
Six Keys to Health & Happiness.....	23
The Theory of Gentle Yoga.....	25
Class Structure Overview.....	29
Getting Started.....	31
1. HOW TO SET THE STAGE FOR A GENTLE YOGA CLASS.....	31
2. HOW TO TEACH BREATHING.....	32
3. THE WARM-UPS.....	34
4. LOWER BACK POSES & HIP OPENERS.....	38
A. Knees to the Chest (Spinal Twist).....	39
B. Leg Raises.....	40
C. Knee Circles.....	44
D. Side Leg Raises.....	46
5. SEATED SEQUENCES HEAD & NECK MOVEMENTS.....	48
A. Eye Movements.....	50
B. Face Massage.....	55
C. Neck.....	57
E. Lower Body Massage.....	60

6. THE CAT SERIES	64
7. HIP OPENERS	68
A. Frog Position.....	69
B. The Pigeon Pose or Kamaudi's Pose:	70
8. SEATED SPINAL TWISTS	77
A. The Four Way Spinal Twist	77
B. The Seated Spinal Twist.....	81
C. The Seated Simple Spinal Twist.....	82
9. SEATED FORWARD BEND	84
10. STANDING POSITIONS	87
A. I'm Happy, Healthy, Loving:	87
B. Standing Side Bend	89
C. Standing Forward Bend	91
11. BODY SCAN.....	93
12. COBRA	99
13. THE ANCIENT PRAYER POSITION AND CHILD'S POSE.....	103
14. THE HALF-LOCUST	105
15. THE WALL STAND	109
16. THE YOGA MUDRA (YOGIC SEAL).....	112
17. THE DEEP RELAXATION	114
Teaching Students With Special Challenges	123
Teaching the Mechanics of Getting Up and Down	125
Questions Most Often Asked	127
Teacher's Notes and Hints	133
Some Suggestions for Organizing Your Own Yoga Class	137
Naomi's Brave Stars	147
Product Order Form	149
Resources	150

Introduction

Some years ago, while living in New York City, I was looking for a place to go for a much needed vacation. A friend told me about a Yoga Ashram on Paradise Island in the Bahamas. On a whim, I went. It was called the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center and I hoped no one would ask me to pronounce it! For four days we ate healthy foods, practiced yoga and experienced deep relaxation and meditation, an integral part of the practice of yoga. After those few short days I felt like a new person! I found deep calm and inner peace that I could tap into whenever I felt the need. Yoga was definitely what I needed for my own mental health. As I continued my studies in various Yoga Centers, I learned that yoga was developed thousands of years ago by monks to facilitate and insure harmony in the body and mind. The focus and concentration on spinal flexibility and breathing help create a calm nervous system. No wonder it felt so good!

Having used yoga to stop smoking and not gain any weight, I knew it worked. I determined to make yoga a meaningful part of my life and went on to teach others how to reach a calm, relaxed state of being. Writing and compiling a guide to accompany my teachers' training classes has been only part of my effort to train teachers in Gentle Yoga techniques and to reach as many people as possible with the benefits of yoga.

This manual contains scripts for the various postures and movements, along with notations of helpful hints, explanations and advice to enable you to intelligently and confidently teach your Gentle Yoga students.

Following this introduction is a brief discussion of the purpose of yoga, i.e. what this discipline was actually designed to accomplish. Along with this background information, I have included “Nine Reasons to Practice Gentle Yoga” and “Six Keys to Health and Happiness,” which serve as guidelines to point you and your students to achieving greater physical, mental and spiritual health.

Once you understand *what* and *why* you are teaching (and why people should study Gentle Yoga), I will begin a step-by- step description of a typical Gentle Yoga class, breaking it down posture by posture. When you have completed the *asana* (posture) portion of the class, you will guide your students into and through the Deep Relaxation. Included with the scripts for each movement or posture are comments on why a pose is done a certain way, the benefits derived from each movement, hints on how to better explain the instructions, reminders when to tell your students to *breathe*, and advice on teaching students with special needs.

The Purpose of Gentle Yoga

Gentle Yoga represents an adaptation of the traditional Hatha Yoga poses. It makes a routine available, accessible and doable for **any** size, age and physical condition.

The whole purpose of Gentle Yoga is movement: the more you move, the more you will be able to move. You don't need to hurt yourself in the interim trying to get into a stretch the way it's "supposed" to be done. The premise of Gentle Yoga is that a little is better than nothing, so it really doesn't matter if you have a full range of motion at the outset. Gentle Yoga postures are not only a series of physical positions, but also exercises in mental awareness. The yogi (yoga practitioner) is deliberate in every movement, feeling every muscle. Only through conscious awareness of one's body can tensions be felt. Once felt, they can be eliminated by a systematic yoga program.

The gentle yoga postures are very different from physical exercise. They emphasize relaxation as well as awareness of tension. It is *resting* in the pose with deep breathing that develops the physical health and calms the system. One must never strain or use force to reach the prescribed position.

Physical health, however, also has an effect on the mind and does create certain attitudes. For example, anxiety can induce tense stomach muscles; a bent spine or slumped shoulders may be a sign of resignation or depression. A stubborn attitude may cause one's neck to tighten up while anger or upset may cause the breath to quicken and the heart to race.

Therefore, changing an aspect of the physical can deeply affect the mental state. Yoga postures which emphasize breathing and relaxation improve physical health, help to stabilize the emotions and create positive mental attitudes. The postures also promote the free flow of energy throughout the nervous system. They assist in the elimination of toxins and poisons from the joints and other body parts where these foreign elements tend to settle, sometimes permanently. Yoga postures exert a beneficial pressure on various glands and internal organs, flushing and stimulating them. Even *a little practice* can produce amazing improvements in general health.

The core of Gentle Yoga includes relaxation in between poses. Most importantly, with the completion of a yoga session there is a progressive relaxation in which all parts of the body are tightened and then released, creating the feeling of renewal and rejuvenation in the body/mind/spirit. From this state, a deep healing can begin; this is the basis for refreshing and long-lasting benefits to the entire system.

Class Structure Overview

It is always a good idea to screen new students over the phone to determine if they are large in size or have other special needs. If this is the case, you can politely suggest that they come in for a few private sessions first. This allows you to show them the body mechanics of getting up and down safely and getting gently into the yoga postures, which will help prevent injuries. This will ensure a higher level of comfort, safety and confidence while doing yoga. *You* can also teach them proper breathing in more detail than you can in a regular class. When you have new students in this category, who unexpectedly drop into your class, it is a good idea to go over these mechanics at the beginning of the class. See the section on "Teaching Students With Special Needs" at the back of this manual for more details on teaching these mechanics.

Overall structure of a Gentle Yoga class: The following poses will be expanded upon in the upcoming text. First, warm up the spine by working the lower half of the body; while lying on your back, do the spinal twists and leg raises. Next, come up to a seated position for eye, neck and shoulder exercises as well as face and upper body massage. Continue in a seated position and massage the lower body, one leg at a time. Then, you can go into one of the following:

- Cat Stretches on all fours
- Frog Position
- Kamaudi's Pose

With the body all stretched, the options are the:

- Standing Pose
- Wall Stand
- Seated Spinal Twist.

After the Yoga Mudra, go into the Deep Relaxation and finish with the closing Alternative Serenity Prayer or prayer of your choice.

Getting Started

1. HOW TO SET THE STAGE FOR A GENTLE YOGA CLASS

When you get started, the students won't know enough at first to request specific poses. Giving a good body work-in from top to bottom is built into the whole general structure. Start by asking each student what's going on in their bodies and how they could use support. You can be supportive while maintaining control of the time element. Get people to talk briefly about what their bodies are saying to them and how they are feeling.

Go to the level where you think that MOST people will be able to do the postures and feel CONFIDENT and SUCCESSFUL in doing their yoga. Plan to spend a lot of time with new students on the body mechanics, because this is the foundation of all the rest of the exercises and poses. If a student is hurt, chances are they won't come back.

After you have explained how to get up and down, it's time to teach breathing. After that, the next stage is about the low back and stretching the spine. The Gentle Yoga with Naomi video, can be used as a companion to this manual, and is a good demonstration of the flow and how to go from top to bottom of the body. Viewing it before reading this manual will give you an idea of how to sequence the poses.

One of the beautiful benefits of Gentle Yoga is that you are moving slowly enough to notice differences in the stretches and in how different parts of your body feel in the different stretches. You may notice how one side of the body accepts a stretch easier than the other side. This helps you to support the students in getting in touch with his/her body.

It is always a personal choice as to whether or not to use music. I have always used calming, reflective music (see Resources for my personal choice).



2. HOW TO TEACH BREATHING

Have everyone lie down. This is very calming and helps people focus on their breathing. Before doing any poses, start with lying on the floor, relaxing and breathing. Do that for at least five minutes and then progress to a sitting position.

There are several crucial things you need to understand about explaining the importance of breathing correctly to the students. In Sanskrit, the term for "breath" is *prana*, which actually means "life force". Air contains the life force. When you are breathing, you want to breathe in as much of the life force as you can. The reason you breathe through the nose is that the nose has hair which filters impurities out of the air, and it warms the breath as it comes into the body. The nose has passages that directly connect to the brain, thus bringing life force and oxygen to the brain.

Teacher's script

- **"Please sit in a COMFORTABLE position. Put your right hand on your abdomen and your left hand over your heart."** This allows them to feel the movement and you can see if their abdomens are moving correctly.
- **"Please close your eyes."** (so they are not distracted by what others are doing).
- **"Inhale and exhale."** Repeat as necessary.

Watch to be sure that everyone is sitting up straight. Emphasize comfort. Most students will do *upper body breathing*. Their shoulders will rise and fall and their abdomens will not move. Make general statements without picking on any one student. You can stop the class and demonstrate correct breathing. Ask for a volunteer and see if you can correct the student who is having difficulty without putting them in an embarrassing position. Put a book or pillow on the abdomen and have them practice.

It is well worth it to take the time to explain this method of breathing as often as is needed. Throughout the class emphasize the breath. This is the foundation of all the Gentle Yoga techniques.



3. THE WARM-UPS

While your students are lying on their backs:

- **“Stretch your arms up alongside your ears, then stretch your legs.”** This is a natural way to line up the spine.
- **“Stretch your right arm and right leg. Stretch your left arm and left leg.”**
- **“Stretch your right arm and left leg. Stretch your left arm and right leg.”**
- **“Rotate your ankles and wrists; reverse the rotation direction.”**

This limbers up the joints. It's important to start with some very simple instructions, in order to give the students an early feeling of success.

Next, tell them:

- **“Lower the hands and take a mini-relaxation.”** (visualize and pretend)
- **“Tighten your right toes and raise your right leg up about six inches off the floor.**
- **Slowly, drop your leg.**
- **Tighten your left toes and raise your left leg up.**
- **Lower your leg.**
- **Squeeze your buttocks, lift them off the floor.**
- **Make tight fists with your hands, squeeze your shoulders up to your ears, make a tight prune face and release.**
- **Relax completely.**
- **Open your mouth as wide as you can. Wiggle your jaw and run your tongue around your lips and gums and relax your face and jaw.”**

The last move relaxes the neck and jaw muscles. Don't take it personally if people start yawning. They are simply responding to the extra oxygen they have been taking in. You know by this that the students are breathing correctly and their bodies are doing their jobs and that you are helping them to relax more deeply.

For neck requests:

- **"Interlace your fingers and place them behind the base of your skull.**
- **Point your toes up, inhale, and on the exhale, bring your head up to look at the toes. Then slowly bring your head back down with a slight pressure exerted by the hands on the head."**

This brings the neck completely forward to release tension in the neck and shoulders. Pointing the toes up helps to tone and firm the legs.