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The yin & winter yoga

YOU CAN USHER

THE NEW AGE

CONCEPT OF YIN

INTO YOUR OWN

PRACTICE OF

YOGA THIS

WINTER

by Shameem Akthar

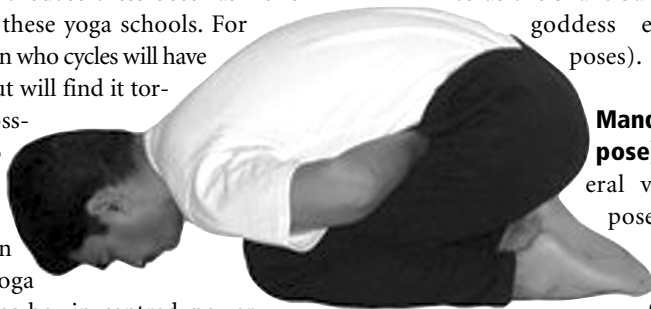
In Taoist yoga, which is very new age, and beginning to find a large following world over, winter is the 'female' time, when the yin energy is at its highest. All our normal activity, including exercise and meditation, must be yin-based if we do not wish to upset our inner balance.

The yoga schools promoting this 'female' brand of yoga are Taoist yoga and Yin yoga. In Yin yoga, the focus shifts to the inner body tone: the connective tissue, unlike yang-yoga (male-centred yoga practices) which focusses on muscle-building. This is a very powerful concept, because power without softness is seen as monodimensional in these yoga schools. For instance, a person who cycles will have powerful legs, but will find it torturous to sit cross-legged due to stiffness of connective tissue.

So, at least in winter, your yoga practice must also be yin-centred, powering the female element in each one of us (including our partners). This means a practice which is powerful, yet slow, steady, thoughtful and meditative. This can be rather tough since all these elements in yoga are advanced principles. Speed is easier than stamina, since the latter needs to be cultivated steadily. We must therefore dedicate the winter months towards creating this powerful base. To create stamina, your mind must be at peace, must learn to tune out outside influences, and become meditative.

Walking meditation, forward bends (like cat stretch or marjariasana, paschimottanasana or seated forward bend are good examples). Sets like the chandra namaskars (moon salutes), prithvi namaskar (earth salute), warrior sequences are also ideal during winter months. Other 'yin' elements would involve increas-

ing duration in pranayama or breathing practices, particularly the calming ones like ujjayi: this practice is soothing emotionally yet is 'heating' physically, so is a super winter practice. Including longer yoga nidra or sleep of yoga meditation where the body and mind are allowed to rejuvenate at the end of every session is also crucial towards channelling the 'yin' energy flow. The most powerful set that works on the entire body's connective tissue comprises the joint-releasing poses or the pawan muktasana series (which also means energy-releasing pose). These poses are also referred to as the shaktibandha series (the goddess energy locking poses).



Mandukasana (Frog pose): There are several versions of this pose. This one is a slightly advanced one, involving a forward bend.

Sit on your heels, in the classic vajrasana (thunderbolt pose), so hips are rested on heels which remain flared, while the big toes touch lightly. Spread out knees, and lower hips to floor. Inhale, raising hands overhead. Exhale, lower head and body forward, to rest chin on ground. Beginners can keep a cushion under hips and under stomach to ease the powerful stretch. They can also place the forehead on the ground, instead of the chin. Stay in the pose, breathing normally. Inhale, raising hands and torso back to starting position.

With regular practice increase time in final pose to one minute or more.

Avoid: If having spinal or ankle problems. ☺

*We welcome your comments and suggestions on this article.
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