



THE BRITISH WHEEL OF  
YOGA

YOGA WITH LISA

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## What Happens in a Yoga Class?

**Preparation** - British Wheel of Yoga classes begin with a short period of quiet to release, let go and prepare the mind, breath and body, followed by limbering moves and sequences to warm up the muscles and joints in preparation for asana (posture) work.



**Asana - Yoga Postures** strengthen and tone the body and improve the flow of energy, helping to regulate the physical systems of the body and breath, and stilling the mind for meditation. The asanas used in a class will vary from teacher to teacher and depend on the abilities of the students and the style of yoga being practised. The objective in asana work is not how far you can stretch or contort your body, but to combine stability (stira) with ease/relaxation (sukha). BWY teachers are trained to modify asanas to individual ability and to address medical conditions ranging from pregnancy to arthritis. There are also specialist classes such as yoga for pregnant women, yoga for people with MS, or ME or yoga and cancer.



**Working with the breath** - Considering that our life depends upon our breathing it is remarkable that we have as much conscious control over it as we do. Breathing is fundamental to life. Man can live for weeks without food, days without water but only minutes without breathing. Breathing is controlled automatically by a respiratory centre in the brain. A nervous impulse sent from the brain causes us to inhale, breathing in essential oxygen as well as Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). As soon as the CO<sub>2</sub> reaches a certain level in our bodies an automatic reflex causes us to exhale. Human beings are unique in having a degree of control over their breathing. Automatic breathing allows us to be able to sleep; controlled breathing allows us to sing, talk and laugh!

Babies breathe deeply and healthily. The passage of time often brings a deterioration of the efficiency and effectiveness of our respiration. Lack of exercise can result in a loss of mobility and elasticity in the thoracic (chest) muscles and in the diaphragm (large muscle below the ribs which is important in helping to breathe in and out). Poor posture, physical tension, emotional upheaval and unsuitable environments can also impact on our ability to breathe deeply. Shallow and restricted breathing results in less vital oxygen being drawn into the body. The majority of people regularly utilise only 25% of their breathing capacity. Yoga helps us to learn to exercise control over our breath. This not only increases vitality but also improves digestion, tones the nervous system and calms and concentrates the mind.

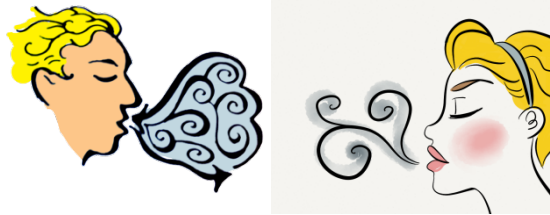
“If you would foster a calm spirit, first regulate your breathing; for when that is under control the heart will be at peace; but when breathing is spasmodic, then it will be troubled. Therefore, before attempting anything else, first regulate your breathing on which your temper will be softened, your spirit calmed.”

Kariba Ekken 17th Century mystic

“The mind is like a chariot, yoked to a team of powerful horses. One of them is breath, one is desire. The chariot

moves in the direction of the more powerful animal. If breath prevails, the desires are controlled, the senses are held in check and the mind is stilled. If desire prevails, breath is in disarray and the mind is agitated and troubled.” Hatha Yoga Pradipika

In a yoga class you will practice breathing techniques to develop awareness and full use of the breath. These techniques are developed into 'pranayama' exercises to help control and move prana (energy) through the breath. Prana means 'vital' or 'life force' energy. Not all exercises are suitable for those with respiratory or circulatory conditions, so be sure to advise your teacher of any such conditions before you start a class.



**History and philosophy** - Most BWY teachers include history and philosophy in their yoga classes by introducing a 'theme'. This will help you understand how the yoga you are doing fits within the original spiritual context and history. Don't hold back in asking your tutor questions - in most yoga classes, discussion and feedback is actively encouraged!



**Meditation** - There are a huge variety of meditation techniques and styles. The ones you're most likely to come across will have the objective of stilling the mind by focussing your awareness on a single object – the movement of the breath, an image or candle, a sound or chant. Not all teachers will include meditation within a class. Yoga classes can be 'meditational' from start to finish. If you have awareness/mindfulness of the breath flowing in and out of your body as you practise the Asanas and you become aware when you are not following the breath, then you are beginning to acknowledge 'meditational' practises.



**Relaxation** - Relaxation is a technique, once learnt will last a lifetime. Practising yoga helps you to 'notice' tension/stress in your mind/body. Regular practise of relaxation techniques helps you to reduce the effects of tension/stress within your mind/body. Relaxation balances activity with stillness. We always finish a Yoga session with some peace and quiet. Every part of you needs time to 'absorb' the benefits of a Yoga Practice.

