

# HEART FLOW YOGA: Poses that Open

*“There is a light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the light that shines in your heart.”*  
— Chandogya Upanishad

**WHEN INTRODUCING THE IDEA OF HEART OPENING INTO A YOGA POSE ROUTINE, MANY PEOPLE THINK FIRST ABOUT ROMANTIC LOVE.**

Yet there are many forms of love, and in many cases the most important is self-love. Finding love for the self at the deepest level is what allows us to give and receive love for and from others. In his book, *The Four Loves*, author CS Lewis distinguishes need-love (*such as the love of a child for its mother*) from gift-love (*epitomized by God's love for humanity*), all the while acknowledging that any attempt to define love is more complicated than it seems. As a result, he divides love into four categories: Affection (*familial love*) Friendship (*love based on common experience*), Eros (*romantic love*) and Charity (*neighborly love*). At any given time we may find ourselves deficient or overflowing in one of these areas, and a yoga practice centered on awareness of the heart can help us to understand and work with these imbalances.

In a heart opening practice, the traditional emphasis is on opening the chest or physical area around the heart, but in this flow I am encouraging you to explore both the front and back of the heart through movement and holding. The front of the heart is where we give love, and the back of the heart is where we receive it. In reality, any pose can be a heart opener, just by bringing the attention to the area and the energetic expansions and contractions in that area. Use this flow to get your awareness centered on the heart and find a way in, and then use your own intuition to take your practice wherever the heart leads.

## GETTING STARTED:



### Meditation on Anahata (Heart Chakra)

Take a few moments to sit in a comfortable meditative seat, noticing your breath and slowing it down into a deep even rhythm. Bring both hands to heart center in Anjali Mudra (Prayer Seal). Visualize a green light in whatever form it comes to you and then allow it to settle deep into the heart space.

With your inhalations let the breath expand the light, and with your exhalations let the muscles in the chest soften and relax. If one of the mantras below resonates with you, repeat silently or out loud if it helps. You can also bring the mantra practice into your poses if you find it to be a helpful tool.

**Mantras:** I allow myself to give and receive love, I trust in the loving heart of the universe, My heart is open, I accept myself as I am, I love myself, I am whole.

## WARM UP SEQUENCE



**Ball Hugging:** Can be done from seated, kneeling or standing position. Bring the arms to shoulder height and bend the elbows out to side (fingertips lightly touching, palms turned towards the chest) to create the sense of hugging a ball. With an inhalation, open the arms and start to draw the shoulder blades together, lift the heart

skyward and open the throat. When opening the throat, try to lengthen the neck out of the shoulders instead of collapsing the back of the neck. With the exhalation start to bring the fingertips back towards each other, slightly rounding the upper back to expand the space in between the shoulder blades, chin falling to chest. Repeat 10 – 20x.



**Cat/Cow:** Come to a table position, hands underneath the shoulders, knees underneath the hips. With the inhalation let the abdomen drop and the tailbone tilt,

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creating a small curve in the lumbar spine. Let the gaze come skyward and the heart open energetically forward. With the exhalation, let the tailbone carve under and bow the upper back, relax the back of the neck and let the crown surrender towards the earth. Repeat 10 – 20x.

**Cobra Undulations:**

Come to lay on the abdomen, bringing the palms to the earth and lining up fingertips with shoulders.



With an inhalation press the palms into the earth bending the elbows and drawing the shoulder blades together, taking the gaze slightly up and shining the heart forward. Exhale slowly lower yourself back to the earth. Repeat 10 – 20x.



**POSE SEQUENCE**

**Anahata (Heart Melting Pose):**

From a table position walk the hands out so that the arms are extended in front of the shoulders. Keeping the buttocks up in the air, start to sink the chest and chin down to the earth. If the chest and chin do not come down easily to the floor, let the forehead rest on the earth instead.



**Standing Yoga Mudra:** Come to standing with feet hips width apart and with the exhalation start to fold forward with a long back, leading with the heart as the upper body surrenders to gravity. Let the arms sweep past the legs and the fingers come to interlace,



resting on the low back. Either stay here with the arms or start to take them overhead, drawing the shoulders towards each other and breathing into the heart space. Modify by holding onto a strap with the hands to create more room for the shoulders. To release, let the

hands come apart and arms extend next to the ears. With the inhalation come up with a long back and return to standing.

*Note: From a symbolic perspective, in this pose thinking mind is surrendered below the feeling heart. Meditate on this concept while in the pose – what does it mean to you?*

**Vrksasana (Tree Pose):** From a standing position, bring your weight over to one foot. Find a firm standing foundation by spreading out the toes and feeling all four corners of the foot on the earth. Draw up on the kneecap with the thigh muscle engaging the entire standing leg. Bring the opposite foot to the calf or thigh, making sure that it is above or below the knee joint. Firmly press leg into foot and the foot back into the leg to create stability. Bring the hands to heart center and let the eyes softly focus on something that is not moving.



*Note: From an archetypal perspective one might see the tree as the essence of giving and receiving. Trees breathe life-giving oxygen into the world and transform everything around them in the exchange of carbon dioxide for oxygen. Try to connect to the essence of the pose while holding it.*



**Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle):**

with sweeping arm variation. From a standing position, open lengthwise on your mat with the feet anywhere from 2 – 4 apart. Bring the left foot to face the side and the right to point towards the end of the mat. Bend the right knee and bring it over the ankle and let the right elbow rest on the right thigh. Ground into the outer edge of the left foot and extend the left arm over the left ear, turning the palm down towards the earth.

Start to bring movement into the extended arm sweeping it in a circular fashion. When the arm comes back focus on spiraling the heart skyward. Repeat arm movement 10 – 20x and then take the pose to other side.



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**Trikonasana**

**(Triangle/Bound Triangle):** From Extended Side Angle, bring up the torso and relax the arms. Extend the bent knee leg. Inhale take the arms up to shoulder height. Exhale hinge from the back hip, lengthen the side body and reach forward. With an exhale let the front hand come to lightly touch on the leg above or below

the knee joint while the back arm reaches up for the sky. Stack the shoulders and square the hips. Turn to look up and the extended hand if it feels ok for the neck. Broaden out the heart space by reaching into the top arm and activating the fingertips. Take the extended arm back and around, letting it rest on the low back or reach for the extended leg thigh. Imagine the heart opening towards the heavens. Hold for a few deep breaths and then repeat on the other side.



**Ustrasana (Camel Pose):** From a table position, come to standing in the knees. Bring the hands to the lower back for support, palms on the back and finger tips pointing towards the earth. Draw the shoulder blades together by bending the elbows and bringing them towards each other. Gently start to press the hips forward

and arch the low back. Let the throat open and the neck lengthen out of the shoulders (try not to collapse the back of the neck). If the low back is tender or tight stay in this version, if it feels right to go deeper start to bring one hand and then the other down to the heels, continuing to press the hips forward and heart skyward. If the arms are too short, turn over onto the balls of the foot and reach for the heels that way.

**Adhomukhasvanasana (Downward Facing Dog):** From a table position walk the hands forward a bit, paying close attention to your hands. Spread the fingers wide, cup the palms and gently bow the fingers. Turn your toes under and bring the



bent knees off the ground. Keeping the knees bent, start to press away from the hands and guide the torso towards the thighs. Start coming into the legs by bending one knee at a time eventually moving into an upside down v-shape. Let your heels sink towards the earth and breathe. To fine tune the pose, let the crown of the end extend towards the earth in line with the arms. Draw up on the inner arm muscles and back and down with the shoulder blades. Slight inward rotation of the thigh muscles if you can isolate them.

*Note: You can repeat Camel Pose and Downward Dog as a pairing several times if it feels right for your body.*

**FINISHING UP**

**Supta Baddha Konasana (Supported Reclining Bound Angle Pose):**

Fold and stack 1-3 blankets firmly. Bring a pillow to the top of the blankets that is 1-2 shorter than the blanket stack. From a seated position, line the blankets up with the sacrum and bring the soles of the feet together and open the knees out to the side (use rolled blankets, pillows or blocks underneath the thighs for support). Lay back onto the stacked blankets with the spine and let the arms open into a T shape to encourage passive heart opening. The throat can open and the head should be supported just below the edge of the blanket stack. Stay in the pose 1 – 5 minutes, focusing on a slow, deep breath expanding the heart space. To come out, bring the knees together and roll slowly over to one side and off of the blanket stack.



**Balasana (Childs Pose):**

From hands and knees, lower the buttocks back towards the heels and the forehead down towards the floor. Let the torso drape over the thighs and the arms come to rest long by the sides. If the forehead does not touch the floor, bring the arms around and stack the fists to let the forehead rest. If the buttocks cannot touch the heels, bring a blanket in between the buttocks and the heels for support. Focus on your breath opening the back of the heart. ▲

**CLOSING OFFERING:**

*I bow to the heart, my inner teacher.*