

# Yoga Journal

For Health and Conscious Living

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## Y O G A D I A R Y

*Robert Epstein, a reader living in El Cerrito, California, learned one of yoga's great lessons early on: It's the thought that counts (and that goes double for the less-than-flexible).*

Nearly 20 years ago, in what seems like another lifetime, two friends and I took a yoga class near the University of Stony Brook on Long Island, New York. We were young, naïve, impatient, and stiff (despite our youth), but we dutifully brought our straw mats and our bodies to class. Our teacher was a vibrant and limber man with a toothy smile who wore a yellow outfit, which is why we came to refer to him affectionately as Yellow Man.

He taught us many of the basic yoga postures, most of which I can't recall now, but I remember struggling to touch my head to my toes while sitting upright with my legs bent and the soles of my feet touching each other. With flagging determination, I tried and tried, certain that willpower alone could break the muscle barrier between head and foot.

It was not to be. In exasperation, I marched up to Yellow Man after one

particularly frustrating class and demanded to know when and how I could achieve this bodily conquest.

With considerable compassion and a hint of amusement, the yoga instructor gave me some sage advice which I have applied in infinite ways to other difficulties in life: "My friend," he said, "it matters not whether you succeed in touching your head to your toes, but simply that it be your intention."

From that day forth, I ceased the impossible mission I pursued with a vengeance, having become slightly more supple mentally. Twenty years later, much to my surprise and delight, I am about one-and-a-half inches from head and toes meeting in bodily communion. Even so, I hasten to summon Yellow Man's smiling image and remind myself: "Intention, not attachment to outcome."

—Robert Epstein

*Do you have a yoga story to share? Write to: Yoga Diary, Yoga Journal, 2054 University Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704. Please keep stories under 300 words. Unprinted letters will be returned with SASE.*

## Yoga for HIV and AIDS

People living with HIV and AIDS are increasingly turning to yoga for stress relief, increased energy, and spiritual insight. The growing number of classes offered to meet this need range in setting from week-long retreats on the beaches of Maui to sessions at the local yoga studio. Yoga therapist, teacher, and Quaker minister Robert Butera has taken the considerations of this student group a step further, creating a comprehensive program called Yoga Lifestyle Education, which addresses all facets of yoga as it applies to this disease.

A former student of the Yoga Institute in Bombay, India, Butera bases his method on the institute's yogic life-style program, which has been treating people with heart disease, asthma, diabetes, and other health conditions for nearly 80 years. He combines yoga postures, breathing, meditation, prayer, diet, stress management, counseling, and community service into a balanced program for well-being. "Each component of the program is equally important," he explains. "What we are doing is based on a health model rather than a disease model. The program is educational, gives complete control to the participants, and cultivates spiritual awareness. The work isn't about destroying a virus but about de-

veloping self-reliance. A self-reliant person will practice a healthy life-style and eliminate every cofactor that weakens the immune system." Because people who are HIV+ are often alienated by mainstream society, the program focuses on bolstering self-worth, which can dwindle with the internalization of negative experiences. Butera works one-on-one with students, suggesting tangible ways to create a peaceful atmosphere of self-love (see below).

Developed with the guidance of Dr. Larry Scherwitz, research director of Dr.

Dean Ornish's Preventative Medicine Research Institute, Butera's program culminated in a doctoral dissertation at the California Institute of Integral Studies. With funding, he hopes to develop it into a formal research project, the first of its kind to study the effects of a yoga program for people with AIDS.

"Our yoga is designed as a complete life-style change, not as some technical tool. With yoga, people have a spiritual awakening, and at that point the physical condition doesn't matter; they are in the moment, and that in itself is healing.

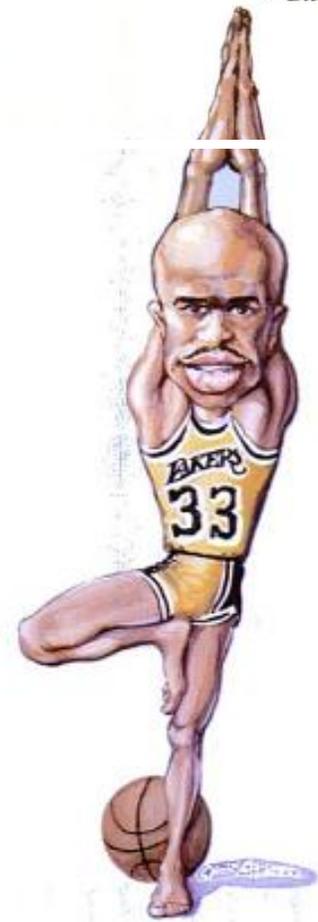
For people with AIDS or anyone else, a yogic life-style is about liberation, and it just so happens that the liberated person is most apt to live longer."

The Yoga Lifestyle Education program has moved from San Francisco to the Philadelphia area. For more information, write Robert Butera at Yoga Lifestyle Education, Westtown School, P.O. Box 1799, Westtown, PA 19395-1799.

—Blake More

## A Well-Being Checklist for HIV/AIDS

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- 1 Write 10 happy events that take place each day in a notebook. Work on finding contentment in small events.
  - 2 Avoid negative media, sitting idle too long, or thinking negative things. Try to transform the negative belief that HIV is fatal by focusing on the positive: Set five-, 10-, and 15-year goals for your life's work.
  - 3 Go outdoors for walks twice daily or do a light cardiovascular workout appropriate for your constitution.
  - 4 Practice yoga stretching, breathing, relaxation, and meditation two times a day. Consult an expert for a balanced program with the appropriate spiritual intentions. Avoid yoga taught solely as physical movements.
  - 5 Cultivate a hobby for an hour a day that is physically involving, such as gardening, artwork, music, or sports. Enjoy laughter throughout the day.
  - 6 Maintain awareness and cheerfulness during work and do it with dedication. Learn the karma yoga philosophy of work as selfless service.
  - 7 Learn the appropriate nutrition (food, rest, herbs) for your body. Favor organic, whole, vegetarian food. Use less or avoid processed foods, refined sugar, white flour, caffeine, junk foods, alcohol, nicotine, and drugs.
  - 8 Develop a support system to discuss and resolve your conflicts, frustrations, and challenges.
  - 9 If time allows, visit religious places and do selfless work there, or support the HIV/AIDS community in situations that strengthen your well-being.
  - 10 Write a daily timetable and check what is not followed. Develop a healthy routine to ensure joyful, productive days.
- Robert Butera



## Kareem Does Yoga

In a recent issue of *Yoga*, a magazine published in Macedonia, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar reports that he practiced yoga throughout his 20-year career as a basketball star. In fact, he says, he owes most of his success to it. "When I played basketball actively, yoga was the best way to keep my elasticity. I used it preventively because it's really effective in that respect. Yoga is an integral part of a well-organized training. If someone includes it in what he does, it will help him achieve what he wants. It doesn't matter whether the techniques are for elasticity, persistence, or something else." ♦

—Jennifer Barrett

Hersch Heman