

10 steps to *transformation*

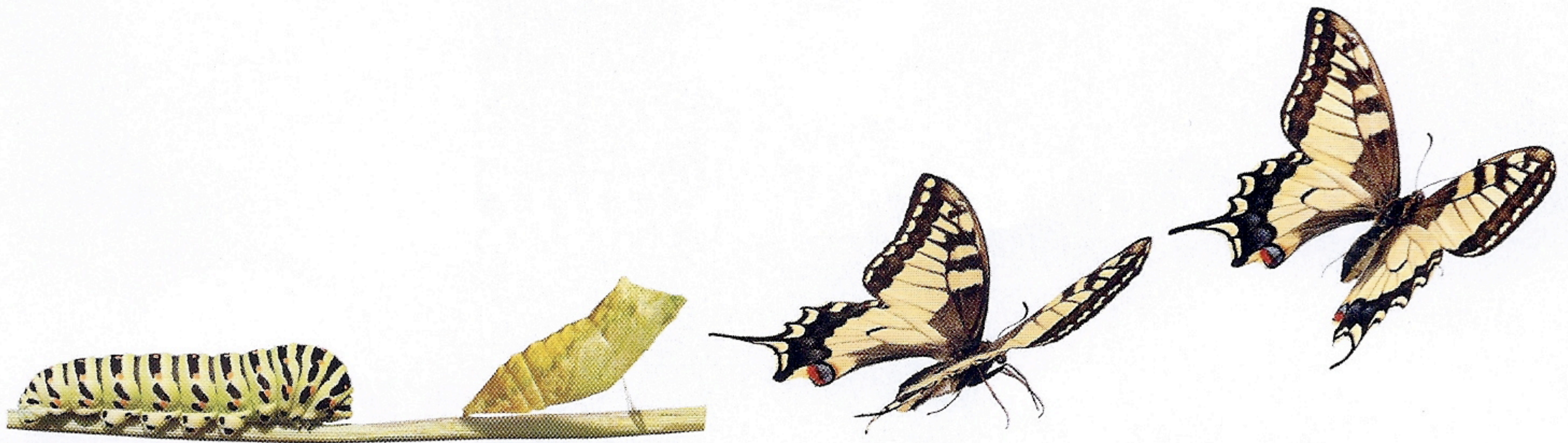
Transform your life with yoga. Just follow these 10 easy steps, by Robert Butera

Yoga is a transformational process. This simple fact is something that has become more and more evident to me during the 20-plus years I have been teaching yoga. While people practise yoga for many reasons, everyone comes to realise its benefits of self-improvement and healing. Over the years, I have seen people join yoga programmes to lose weight, improve their study skills, reduce stress, heal injuries, strengthen their body and mind, find compassion, feel better . . . and the list goes on. We all face challenges in life and struggle to transcend them. Yoga is a great way of doing just that.

In modern yoga, there seems to be an over-emphasis on external form. The argument goes: if you do this pose precisely, get into the position, and then breathe – then you're doing everything just fine. If you aren't flexible enough, then use some props and you can get it close to perfect. However, with little teaching on the psychological and spiritual aspects of yoga, students may struggle with the meaning of yoga, which would otherwise develop and deepen if they were able to commit to it. Thus, they are left on their own to possibly discover higher states of consciousness along the way. This makes learning yoga more difficult, time consuming, and ultimately less effective.

Understanding this inherent flaw in the western approach to yoga, I came to understand that students would benefit from a system. This system needed to be fluid and allow for individual differences, and at the same time offer a template that a broad range of practitioners could work within. Through many years of thinking about my students and their processes, I have developed 10 yogic principles/practices that can work as a foundation for beginners and also serve as an outline to keep advanced practitioners engaged in their practice over a lifetime – a guide for all those interested in transformation via a yoga pose practice. The 10 steps offer you tools to proactively work toward transformation, rather than waiting for it to spontaneously happen in your life.





Step 1: Intention

Setting an intention to practise yoga immediately connects your mind and body in one seamless unit. From beginners to advanced students, practising a yoga pose with a specific intention in mind brings power and focus to both the yoga and your intention.

Step 2: Attitude

Closely aligned with your intention for doing yoga, an awareness of your attitude helps you connect with the non-physical essence of yoga pose practice. Maintaining a positive attitude while you practise will improve your yoga pose experience — and your daily life.

Step 3: Posture

Attention to the correct physical alignment of yoga poses improves the nervous system; the musculoskeletal system; the digestive system; the circulatory, immune, respiratory, endocrine, and cardiovascular systems; mental function; and emotional health. I recommend attending a yoga class when possible to have an experienced yoga teacher further assist you with physical alignment.

Step 4: Breathing

Learning how to breathe very deeply is one of the primary benefits of a yoga practice. Breath control increases oxygen in your blood, instantly reduces stress, brings clarity of thought, and stills the mind. You will find that doing different types of breathing exercises when you practise the poses will change your experience dramatically.

Step 5: Archetypes

Yoga poses are based on things observed in nature and in the human experience. By understanding the story of each yoga pose and where it comes from, you can develop a deeper perspective on yoga by discovering the qualities that are inherent in the pose – and how to apply or internalise these characteristics in your practice and in your life.

Step 6: Energy centres

This step explores the mind-body connection of the chakra system (energy centres), and how different yoga poses stimulate energy flow to these chakras in new and powerful ways. This is a vital component in learning how to deepen your awareness of the relationship between your body and mind. You can use the poses to address specific health conditions or weaknesses in your body.

Step 7: Concentration

This step lets you explore the distractions in your physical environment and mental landscape that are keeping you from achieving a deep meditative state. The better you get at applying concentration techniques, the more profound your yoga experience will be.

Step 8: Energy seals and physical locks

Step 8 delves into the power of symbolic energy seals (*mudras*) and physical locks (*bandhas*) on the body to deepen your awareness of the body's energy. This step will help you understand subtle energy and how to consciously understand the flow of energy throughout your body – and is particularly useful for advanced students to combat “yoga burnout” or “yoga boredom,” as it helps them cultivate a beginner's mind.

Step 9: Psychological blocks

Yoga has the power to help you see aspects of yourself more readily than through thought or self-reflection alone. In this step you explore afflictions of the mind (*klesas*) and identify obstacles in your psychology that may be keeping you from moving ahead in your life and your yoga practice.

Step 10: Emotional transformation

This step teaches you how to transform emotions to master the ego and merge with the infinite. Practise these concepts and you will learn new ways to manage your daily life.

Treat these steps as a gateway to experiencing the richness that yoga has to offer rather than as a strict, methodological programme. It is a template that will grow with you over time as certain steps become more relevant at different times in your life than others. Be careful not to be in a rush to experience all the benefits that these 10 steps have to offer. Enjoy the process and honour your patience, and in doing so, you will notice shifts in your practise in the months and years to come.