

Why We Practice...and Practice

By Carolyn Reynolds

A few years ago a woman came to class who was very physically fit and adept at headstand, hand balancing postures, backbends; you know, the hard stuff. She had been taking power yoga classes and had a beautiful body. When we sat for pranayama to practice agni sara, kapalabhati, bhastrika and spinal breath, it was new for her. When we sat for meditation, she could not get comfortable. Her legs and hips were obviously not happy. She did not close her eyes. My wish for her was the realization that there is much more to yoga than being accomplished at difficult postures. I wished for her inner peace and trust enough to be comfortable with closed eyes. Hips open only when you give them the time to soften around the tight places. It may not look like we are doing anything when we hang around in a squat for awhile but we really are. During our hip openers, some of us have heels on the floor and some of us are using a wedge under the heels. But we are all making space in the hips and that is so important for a comfortable seated posture.

We take the time to isolate a muscle just above the pubic bone and practice a rolling motion for agni sara. We move attention just a little higher and find the muscle that can create a forceful exhalation for kapalabhati. And we practice that. Then we learn to use the whole rib cage like a bellows for bhastrika. All this time we are moving the energy up the subtle energy channel just in front of the spine. We practice and we practice.

A musician practices and practices for hours, getting hand positions just right, the breath just right, the notes just right, the timing just right. Then one day he is not doing the practices, he is creating music. A really good musician becomes the music and nothing else exists in that space but music. He and his instrument are one. Together they are the music.

When you practice and practice the instrument that is your body and your breath, you are able to sit so still that the body and breath disappear. Your awareness goes inward but then expands, overflowing the boundaries of your mind. And you become one with All-That-Is.

A well-rounded hatha yoga practice is important. Just as striking a C chord is an important part of the music, hatha yoga is a harmonious part of the path of Yoga. It is a like the supporting base notes in the symphony.