

Yoga for the Flexibility-Challenged

by John Farrow

I feel as if I've been run over by a truck. There may be some part of me that isn't sore but it would take a while to find it and I doubt I would be able to reach around and touch that spot anyway.

I am taking my first class in beginning yoga in a never-ending quest for more flexibility. At best, the results are decidedly mixed, if not stretched.

According to the yogi leading the class, the body's natural state is represented by yoga and the exercises we are doing simply reveal where we are resisting our natural state. However, I'm sure he hasn't anticipated my Warrior 1 and Warrior 2 poses getting locked in a fight to the finish.

Linking movement with breathing, yoga is touted as being the healing salve for those wounded by civilization. But it is not immune from its own peculiar form of politically-correct snobbery. Is a handmade fair-trade yoga mat of pure Tibetan yak hair blessed by the Dalai Lama really necessary?

Yoga is 99% practice and 1% knowledge, the yogi had said as we worked on our Mountain pose to quiet the mind and ground the body. (Or was it 90% being half mental, as another Yogi once said?)

"Breathe! Remember to breathe!"

Good point. As we attempt several rather intricate poses, I had come to the proverbial fork in the road, arms and legs in various unnatural, opposing attitudes not easily attained voluntarily. Simply breathing seemed

as good a choice as any. But now my Down Dog won't get up.

We pour ourselves out of our shoulders from one pose for the hamstrings that is close to a headstand and then I am relieved to be back on my feet – or foot as it were. This is the Tree pose to improve balance, hands high above the head pointing heavenward, one leg cocked against the other like a misplaced triangle.

I'm able to hold it for only a few seconds, swaying this way and that as if in a hurricane. The regulars surrounding me are serene in their one-legged stances, lost in meditative bliss, no doubt. I am sweating like a pig.

"It's okay to fall!" the yogi offers helpfully. Thanks, but maybe I'll stay grounded for this one. If the mats were thicker maybe I'd take him up on it, though.

From the sky-reaching Tree, we go into the back-bending Bow followed by a V-shaped Boat and then another backbend for the Bridge. Each of these requires more skeletal flexibility than a salamander on Valium and by this point in the evening my back is providing the snapping and popping soundtrack to the yogi's whispered instructions. It is all I can do to simply keep my shorts from ripping open.

Finally we close out the session with something I can execute perfectly – the Corpse pose. But at least someone else was even more exhausted than I. From a far corner of the room comes the sound of gentle snoring as another tired soul drifts into a deep sleep, the perfect cool-down for a vigorous workout.