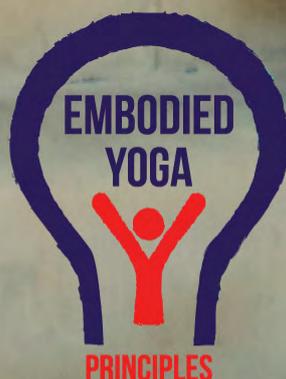


4 SIMPLE STEPS TO RECONNECTING WITH YOUR BODY, IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

by Lucy Sabin



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YOGA AS A LIFE CHANGER

The physical practice of yoga is medicine for our bodies. It can also serve as medicine for our hearts. That's because practicing asanas (yoga poses) helps us to develop positive, transferable qualities such as patience, kindness, tolerance, and the ability to let go.



“Yoga,” meaning “union,” is about reconnecting us with what is important — be it the planet, other human beings, or ourselves. Yoga certainly needn’t remain an isolated activity that ends when we roll up our yoga mats. On the contrary, we take yoga with us on our journey through life as an amulet for the challenges we face along the way.

DISEMBODIMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES



In *Eastern Body, Western Mind* (1996), author Anodea Judith diagnoses our modern culture, “so proud of its mind-over-matter philosophy”, as one that “cuts us off from our bodily experience, and from the earth itself”, be it through our sedentary lifestyles or complicity in mass consumerism. She claims that this state of affairs “produces dangerously disconnected actions.” Judith argues that if our sensations and feelings are numbed, we resemble mere robots capable of being manipulated and of objectifying others. In extreme situations, she says, bodily disconnect can be a root cause of mindless killings, sexual objectification, addiction, or abuse.

In this severance, our sexuality is negated, our senses assaulted, our environment abused, and our power manipulated. Our ground is our form, and without it we lose our individuality.

— Judith, EBWM.

Historically speaking, institutionalised bodily disconnection or the politicisation of others' bodies has led to dehumanisation of ourselves and others. There's a whole body of literature to support this, particularly post-rationalisations of atrocities such as World War Two (see *Primo Levi's Narratives of Embodiment...*, by Charlotte Ross, 2010).

HOW CAN YOGA ENCOURAGE EMBODIMENT?

Our bodies can recover memories our minds have forgotten.

— Judith, EBWM.

There is hope. In order to heal the wounds of disembodiment, we in the yoga community can turn to *embodied* styles of yoga—by which I mean any style that encourages union of the body with the world.



It is important to clarify here that not everything labeled as yoga promotes union (or reconnection). In fact, some types of yoga are taught in a way that actively discourages embodiment. I'm talking about the practices that are primarily obsessed with conformity (e.g. extreme hierarchies or one-size-fits all, gender binary approach) and/or aestheticism (sexy yoga butts, etc.). After all, what kind of union is possible with an overruled or overworked body? For more about yoga as a *disembodying* influence, see my article on the "6 Red Flags to Watch Out for in the Era of Yoga Consumerism" in *Yoga International*, 2016.

EMBODIED YOGA PRINCIPLES

Embodied Yoga Principles aims to put the embodiment back into yoga. EYP is a set of techniques, drawing on aspects of life coaching, body therapy, dance, bodywork, improv, and martial arts to emphasise psychological self-awareness and transfer of skills to daily life. It can be explored individually or as part of a group, as pure EYP or applied as a framework to another practise ("EYP lite").



EYP champions a pragmatic approach to yoga. Where others speak of “riding the waves of life”, becoming “a light to the world”, and “just relaxing or allowing” when life gives you lemons, EYP is actionable and makes tangible sense.

TECHNIQUES FOR TAKING YOGA INTO LIFE

1. Set an intention on the mat that corresponds to your life

You may have experienced a yoga class where the teacher invites you to set an intention at the beginning of the session, which you then revisit in the final meditation. This intention may be linked to some aspect of your life to which you’d like to devote attention. But why restrict this intention to just the beginning and end of the session? Try to see a yoga class as an ongoing enquiry, rather than a meditation sandwich. In each pose you can explore the qualities of the pose and visualise or imagine yourself embodying these qualities in the real world.

To give an example, the intention you set during your practice may be as ordinary as becoming more visible in the workplace. In your practice, then, it would make sense to focus on expansive poses such as triangle or warrior variations, helping you become more accustomed to the feeling of occupying space. At the other end of the spectrum, you may be in need of some gentle self-care and a little alone time. In this case, you could set an intention to show up for yourself to a greater degree. Resting in child’s pose while you concentrate on this intention would be a powerful way to reconnect with your own need to be nurtured now and then.



To quote Michelle Finerty in her recent blog post for Gaiam: “If you truly pay attention to what you’re doing in class, you’ll probably find a connection to something you’re working on in your life off the mat.” Once you recognize these connections, make the poses that feel most relevant to your current life situation part of your regular practice.

TECHNIQUES FOR TAKING YOGA INTO LIFE

2. Micro-postures

Micro-postures are an Embodied Yoga Principles speciality. Here, instead of practicing a complete posture, we incorporate discrete aspects of it in our daily body language. An ambition-enhancing micro-warrior could manifest itself in life as a fixed forward gaze, the front leg slightly bent, and hands in a straight line with the arms. The great thing about micro-postures is that they're adaptable and imperceptible to the untrained eye—allowing them to be done anywhere, anytime: mid-commute, in the shower, or on a date. When you need to demonstrate authority, you can "make a stand" by adopting mountain pose. Or you can curl your fingers into chin mudra to remind yourself to remain calm in stressful situations. The possibilities are endless; it's about discovering what works best for you, in a state of complete bodily awareness.



TECHNIQUES FOR TAKING YOGA INTO LIFE

3. Centring with mindful breathing

When you're not cocooned within the four sacred walls of your yoga mat, it's easy to forget how to centre yourself. Without getting too abstract here, centring yourself is about finding the calm amidst the chaos, which allows you to react to potential stressors in a level-headed manner. Centring tends to be matched by the physical sensations of muscle relaxation, a slower heart rate, and deeper breathing.



Breathing mindfully is a foolproof body hack to help you gain some stability when you're feeling under pressure. Drawing a conscious deep breath while allowing the diaphragm to fully contract on the inhale (and then relaxing on the exhale) has an instant calming effect, which in turn transforms your state of mind.



TECHNIQUES FOR TAKING YOGA INTO LIFE

4. Body scan, as in corpse pose

Some yoga teachers encourage students to relax parts of their body, one at a time, during final relaxation. They may run through a checklist that travels up the body: “Relax your feet, relax your calves, relax your thighs, your buttocks, belly, chest, upper back and shoulders...” Suddenly, you realise that you were carrying habitual tension in particular parts of your body without being aware of it. Personally, I’m often surprised by the amount of tension I carry in a clenched jaw and furrowed brow.

Of course, this body scan needn’t take place only on the mat. You can use it to relieve tension in any situation. Body scanning while stuck in a traffic jam, for instance, can transform your attitude and dispel unhelpful anxiety about being late. That way, you’ll arrive at your destination at your best.



CONCLUSION: PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE

The older a philosopher gets, the wiser they become. We are all embodied philosophers, practising the art of meaningfully connecting with the world through the necessary medium of our body.

The four techniques discussed in this book — set an intention, micro-postures, centring and body scan — are basic ways to exercise the mind-body muscle, no matter where you are. Why not try picking one a day to focus on and see what difference it makes?

Let us know how you get on — search for Embodied Yoga Principles online and on social media. We are an international community of teachers, providing trainings, workshops, and support.

I wish you all the best on your embodied adventures!

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ABOUT LUCY



Lucy is a certified EYP teacher, and studied embodiment philosophies at Durham University. She works as a writer, designer, and hatha / vinyasa flow instructor in London

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Content adapted from Lucy's article, originally published in *Yoga International*: "The Ultimate Guide to Taking Yoga Off the Mat" (2017).

For more information, videos and resources about Embodied Yoga Principles see: www.eypyoga.com

For further reading see **MAKING YOGA MORE MEANINGFUL - EMBODIED YOGA PRINCIPLES**. A practical guide to deepening asana psychologically and getting yoga off the mat and into your life. For Yoga teachers and experienced practitioners, or people looking to make a deeper link between yoga and life by Mark Walsh.

