



A Practice to Support Change, Intention, and Transformation

By Natasha Sagalovsky

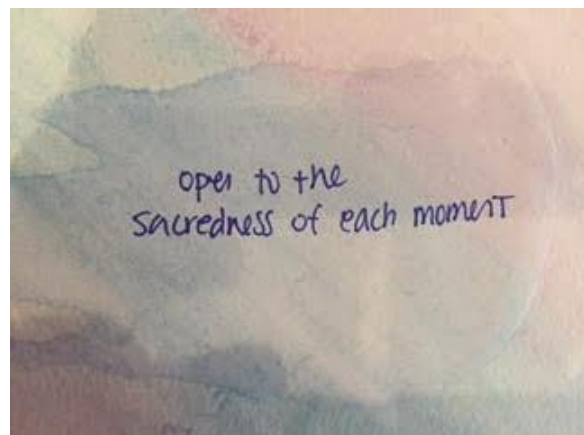
My first yoga teacher had a tattoo along the length of her spine, it was written in Farsi but it read: “from cradle to grave live with intention”. In the mad rush of life, the reality is that it’s a big challenge to effect change in ourselves and stay tethered to our deepest intention. To “live with intention” moment-to-moment is nearly impossible through all the noise, distractions and stress of modern life. Making changes in our ways of being can become an elusive goal unless we consciously take the time each day to deeply program these intentions into our being.

Retreats are powerful times of big shifts and insight. Post-retreat, it is our homework to integrate those insights into our embodied presence so that they become a part of our evolving consciousness. Transmuting insight into a new way of being can be an amorphous and esoteric task. Grounding intention into the body through a conscious daily yoga practice is a great tool to make this happen – it gives you time, it gives you space, to feel, to breathe, and to settle your intention into a deeper place in your nervous system. The following practice is designed with two aims in mind: One is to cultivate the qualities of softness, openness and deep listening – even in the face of challenge. The other is to stoke the qualities of focus, perseverance, and bone-deep strength. We need both sensitivity and focus to stay true to our hearts and effect changes in our being. I hope this practice helps you tune into both and supports you in the changes you are working to make.

A special gratitude to the wonderful Irene Bailey, a yoga student at The Movement Center, for demonstrating the postures of this sequence.

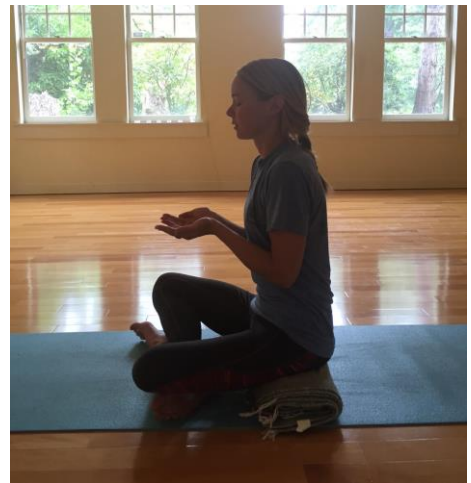
1. **Intention Setting**

Take a deep breath, feel into your heart, pause. Feel for your intention for the day. What would you like to work on today? Write it down on a piece of paper or in your journal to bring it out of the ethers and into the material world.



2. **Seated – palms open, receptive. (2 minutes)**

Take a comfortable cross-legged seat. Depending on your degree of comfort sit on a blanket, a bolster, or a chair. Open your palms in front of your heart in this gesture of giving, and of receiving. Become very quiet, receptive, and open yourself up. Feel yourself transition into a deep embodying your intention. Let your intention become your state.

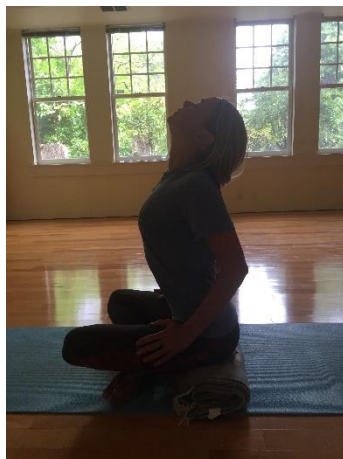


3. **Vessel Breath – (2 minutes)**

Place your hands on your thighs, thumb and index finger touching and begin Vessel Breath. As if your body was a vessel being filled by your breath, feel your chest get full first, then the lower rib-cage area, then the belly, then the hips. Hold the Inhale for a few seconds feeling the fullness, then exhale hips, belly, ribs, chest. Repeat this breath for the length of the 2 minutes.

4. **Seated Cat-Cow (1 minute)**

Begin arching and rounding the spine – inhale while arching, exhale while rounding. If you like, you may constrict the throat slightly practicing ujjaii breath as you do this. Be sure to tilt the pelvis forward and back as you arch and round the spine to release tension in the hips. After completing the minute, sit quietly for a moment feeling the shifts in your system from the exercise and enjoying the stillness it brings about.



5. **Spinal Circles (5 turns in each direction)**

Similar to a “revolving” cat cow, begin to draw circles with your torso, moving with the breath, feeling the shift in weight across the sitting-bones and pelvic floor as you turn. Release tensions along the length of your spine and throughout the whole torso. Enjoy! You can make the circles as big or as small as you like. After you complete both sides, sit quietly for 30 seconds and get sensitized, soft, feel.



6. **Twisting - Midline Clearing (1-2 minutes)**

Switch the cross of your legs if seated cross-legged. This exercise clears stagnation around the mid-section of the body and in the lungs, as well as sluggishness of the mind. Bend your elbows and turn your palms face up, with each inhale and exhale twist side to side moving fairly quickly. The breath can be slightly forceful – as if you are trying to expel the air on the exhale. After you complete the minute extend your arms overhead in a V shape and hold for 20-30 seconds, eyes closed, feeling, clearing, delighting.



7. **Uttanasana – Standing Forward Fold (3-5 breaths)**

Place your feet on the ground, parallel, hips-distance apart, hinge at the waist. Knees can be as bent as needed so that there is no unnecessary pulling in the lower back. Keep working on conscious deep breaths, and embodying your intention.



8. **Top-Toe Balance (3-5 breaths in each pose)**

This is where determination and your inner fire come into play! Bring your feet close to each other, bending your knees deep, coming into a kneeling balance. Place your palms together in front of your heart in Anjali mudra. Lengthen your tailbone down and feel the navel gently pull towards the spine. Keep the spine long, breathe evenly as you find your focus and stillness. After 3-5 slow patient breaths, press through the legs and come to a standing pose on your toes. Hold this standing pose for 3-5 breaths too. Then release the heels down coming to standing, and smile. Shake it out!



9. **One-legged Standing Balance (3-5 breaths in each pose)**

Stand on your left leg and hold your right knee in front of you. You will likely have to draw the hips back so that you're not leaning forward at the hips. When you do this you will feel your weight more evenly on your standing foot and your navel draw towards your spine. Feel your core engage. Stand tall, shoulders back slightly, chest open. Hold this pose for 3- 5 breaths.

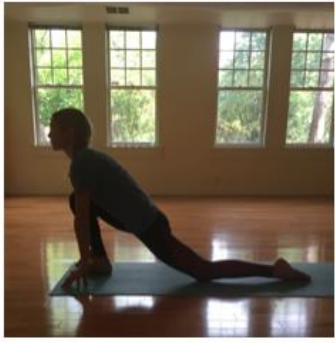
Keep your balance as you turn towards the right, opening the right arm, gazing towards your right hand, continuing to draw the navel towards the spine and to breathe in an even, easeful, respectful way. Hold this pose for 3- 5 breaths. Stay calm, breathing evenly and patiently throughout.

Bring your torso back to center, keep the leg high, and begin to hinge forward at the hips as you stretch your leg and arms towards the wall behind you. Keep the navel hugging towards the spine as you lower the right hip slightly to the ground so that both sides of your hips are even to the ground. Hold this pose for 3- 5 breaths.

Fight for it! Sensitive breath, determined heart. Then come to standing, pat yourself on the back, and repeat from the top on the second side.

To modify, for a (slightly) easier variation, bend the standing leg in Warrior 3 (when the other leg is towards the back wall)





10. **Low Lunge (3-5 breaths each side)**

Bring your hands by your feet, step your left leg back and bring your back knee to the ground. Bend as deep into the front knee as is comfortable for you, working to get a stretch especially along your back thigh. Stay high on your fingertips and patiently practice your vessel breath that we did in the beginning. Connect to your intention for practice deeply and let this be a conscious moment

of connection to a deeper stillness inside. Alternatively, you can bring your hands onto blocks and lift your torso, keeping the navel drawing towards the spine and the chest open.

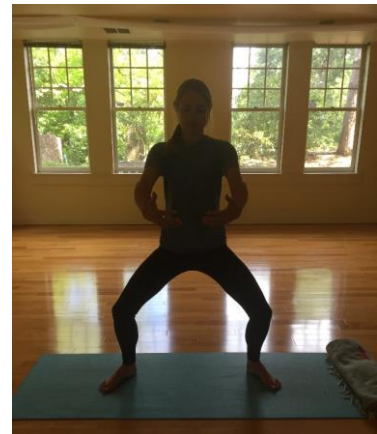


11. **Prasarita Padottanasana, Wide-legged forward fold (3-5 breaths)**

Step your feet wide, placing the feet parallel or slightly pigeon-toed in. Hinge forward at the hips and enjoy the stretch along the backs of the legs. For added stretch, keep the heels of the feet where they are but press them outward evenly, as you rotate the inner-thighs back and apart. You will feel the sitting-bones broaden and the hamstring release further. Return to standing when done.

12. **Goddess pose (1-2 minute)**

Keep the feet wide, turn the toes outwards and bend at the knees. Place your hands in front of you as if you are holding a large beach ball. Keep your gaze at your fingertips as you release the heels into the ground. Keep your body and breath soft even as you invoke the deep inner strength to hold this pose. Equanimity, softness and patience will be key. This kind of softness requires great strength. When done, straighten the legs, parallel the feet and fold forward once more into a wide legged forward fold.



13. **Downward-facing dog or child's pose. (3-5 breaths)**

Place your hands at the front of the mat, walk the feet back, and enjoy this delicious stretch for the spine. Alternatively, find a table-top pose or child's pose.

14. Deep Relaxation. Supported Supta-baddhakonasana (5-7 minutes)

Lay on a stack of pillows or a bolster. Place a blanket or extra pillow under your head for added neck support. If you like, you can bring the soles of the feet together and let the knees open wide. Supporting your thighs with a block on each side is a nice thing to do. Close your eyes, breathe, enjoy. Drink in the delight and gratitude of practice.



15. Closing and Envisioning

Take a moment, after your deep relaxation, to gather your awareness into your intention once more. Really feel it sink in and feel yourself become willing and determined to make this intention the focus of your day. With eyes closed, feel now into the day ahead of you, think of the things you will do, the people you will meet, the interactions you will have, the work time and the down time. Envision what it will be like to go through each of these activities and interactions from the place of your intention. What will it look like? What will it feel like?... and if necessary, how will you roll with the punches?!... is there anything you would like to add to/or subtract from your day to more fully integrate your intention?.

Feel the happiness in your heart for the opportunity to do this work in this life – and off you are launched to your intentional (and very blessed) day!

“From cradle to grave, live with intention”

Namaste,

Natasha



Natasha Sagalovsky is the Yoga Studio Director at The Movement Center. She is a registered teacher with Yoga Alliance at the 500 hr level and is grateful to be sharing, studying, and practicing at The Movement Center