



***Savasana* : Healing and Growth in Yoga**

By Connie Dyer

Resting in stillness and consciously relaxing our bodies and minds is a regular part of asana practice. We might begin lying down, observing our breath and our state, and feeling into our body and limbs. We might enter into stillness briefly between movements or postures to observe what shifts as we release our efforts and intentions. And typically we end our practice with 10 minutes or more in *Savasana* or Corpse Pose.

“But I haven’t worked so hard I need to rest,” some might say. Perhaps like a small child, we resist “taking our nap”. In our performance-oriented culture we want to be busy engaging, learning, accomplishing—not doing “nothing” as it seems – even for a few minutes. But our mothers knew that to grow we needed quiet time and enforced inactivity to absorb and integrate the flood of information our busy young bodies and minds acquired daily. And this is equally true in adulthood and yoga.

[Yielding to the process of transformation](#)

As Swami Chetanananda reminds us, “We are in this world to grow.” And as Swami Rudrananda (Rudi) also taught us, we come into the world with everything we need in order to do just that. EVERYTHING in this body—in this life—is a resource and an opportunity for our growth. It’s how we’re designed.

So in asana practice, we come to understand how simple rest, quiet reflection, and *Savasana* are part of a larger healing, growing process, that refines and re-balances our chemistry, promotes health and well-being, and helps us connect with our potential as human beings.

[Observing the cycle of our changing states](#)

Breathe... In asana practice of that process of transformation begins with the breath. Simply attending to the breath initiates a physiologic shift toward relaxation. Being relaxed during physical activity promotes deep sub-cortical learning in our tissues--learning we are better able integrate. So we start by invoking that state.



*Move...*Next, we make contact with our body's potential for movement and release. Intentional movement, breath, and focused awareness in asana provoke a healthy performance response in the body that starts breaking up the chemistry of stress and tension—that extra chemical baggage that keeps us feeling tired and also prevents us from relaxing more deeply. We return to the breath and stillness often in this active phase to refresh our awareness and rebalance our state.

*Absorb and integrate...*Transitioning into *Savasana* completes this tension release; it typically invokes a physiologic rest cycle that can last 10 to 20 minutes when we honor it. During this phase we rest in stillness, staying out of the way as much as possible while our bodies and minds first release the patterns that helped us move and explore, then shift to a state where useful experiences from our practice can be absorbed deeply. In rest, the imprint of our experiences is transferred from short-term to long-term memory. We do not need to sleep for this process to be accomplished within us, although sometimes that happens. But if we do not honor this simple physiologic imperative, we erect obstacles to our own growth and well-being.

*Meditate...*Finally, if our practice transitions to seated meditation, our chemistry shifts again to a slightly more energized yet ever more deeply relaxed state of expanding awareness, openness, and clarity.

Each cycle of breath a balance; each breath an opportunity for change

This conscious process we undertake in yoga reflects and honors the underlying process of our human physiology—the basic rest-activity cycle that underlies the peaks and valleys of our waking days and the



active dreaming and dreamless states of our nights. Our breath is the key to this process and it also reflects the adaptive, balancing pulse of our larger physiology. Paying close attention we discover the breath is a microcosm of our life—each inhalation subtly wakes us up; each exhale subtly relaxes us; and every cycle moves us toward balance. The earliest yogic texts reflect this understanding.

Breath is an expression of our chemistry; it is also a ready and natural means of changing it. When we can experience the whole body breathing, each breath is a potential shift and reset. Understanding this “tuning” role of the breath helps us not only relax and release tension but also achieve a new, healthier balance. When we connect with this possibility, every breath becomes an opportunity for real change. With each breath we can choose where we want to be, what we want to become – that’s the power of the breath in yoga!

Taking time to absorb change

Whether we are meditating or deeply absorbed in asana practice, as we gradually move out of heightened and specialized physiological states invoked in our practice, our chemistry is changing in ways that must be respected. The process is similar to the chemistry of a muscle permitted to gradually stretch and release in asana practice. Just as tissues “learn” a new set point for muscular tone, the

“normal” physiologic state we return to after yoga and meditation can be qualitatively different. If we exit too suddenly, the process of establishing a strong neural pathway back to that state is impaired or interrupted altogether.

This is why *Savasana* or other resting postures after asana are particularly important. As yoga practitioners, we energize our bodies on all levels and experience shifts in our chemistries. We stimulate greater flow through all systems, break down resistances, and experience releases. The quiet open state of *Savasana*—resting in stillness—facilitates the fullest absorption and integration of all these changes.



A Movement Center meditation practitioner since the early 70s, Connie has pursued a healing yoga movement practice for 25+ years. She received her first teacher training from Mukunda Stiles (Structural Yoga Therapy) in 1987, and later studied with Gary Kraftsow (American Viniyoga Association) and A.G. and Indra Mohan (Svastha Yoga and Ayurveda) — leading students of Sri Krishnamacharya, father of modern yoga. She specializes in healing breath, movement, and visualization practices to address chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and hormonal or other physiologic imbalances such as menopause and diabetes.

Interested in taking a yoga class with Connie? Connie teaches [‘Moving Into the Body’](#) Sundays at 4:30pm and [‘Breath-Body Basics’](#) Wednesdays at 5:45pm at The Movement Center.