



October 2019

40 Days to Personal Revolution:

Our 40 Days to Personal Revolution programme is running well. We are into week four and the 34 participants will this week participate in a fruit fast to cleanse their systems and restore a natural state free of toxins to bring clarity to their minds and vitality to their bodies.

Our participants are developing great daily practices of meditation and asana. They are bringing awareness to their nutrition and what serves them best. They are making weekly inquiry into their way of being to shed disempowering thought patterns and negative self-perceptions and they are gaining insight into how they can be fulfilled in their lives.

This is a rewarding process to be part of and Margo and I commend everyone involved for their commitment and willingness to grow.

Apollo Power Yoga on Demand:

For those of you who cannot make it in to our studios for classes or who are travelling and want to maintain your power yoga practice, we offer an online service where you can either rent access to a collection of video-recorded classes or you may purchase and download to use indefinitely

at your leisure a class or classes from the collection.



Now you can have access to some of our classes through an online service. Check out our website: <https://apollopoweryoga.com/apollo-power-yoga-on-demand/> or go direct to the on demand page: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/apollopower-yoga>

Practice with all the joy, power, strength, mobility and inspiration that you know and love from classes at Apollo Power Yoga anytime!

Step into your Power – January 2020:

Apollo Power Yoga's next 8-day intensive, **STEP into your POWER**, begins on Monday 27 January 2020 and runs to and including Monday 3 February 2020 at the

YMCA Park Camp at Wainui on Banks Peninsula.

This course features:

- meditation,
- asana,
- personal inquiry,
- yoga history and philosophy,
- anatomy related to yoga practice,
- practice teaching.

As one participant from September put it, "I have left with a whole new outlook on life. It was a hard week but so worth it. Words cannot describe how valuable I found this experience."



All the teachers at Apollo Power Yoga have been through our Step into your Power course. Our programme is effective in training teachers to deliver a consistent style of practice with a consistent methodology. It is also effective in empowering our trainees to address those things that block them in their lives and to make progress to a more contented and powerful way of being.

Book now to secure your place for January 2020. Email hamish@apollopoweryoga.com or download and complete the application form from our website (<https://apollopoweryoga.com/step-into-your-power-yoga-teacher-training/>) and forward it to Hamish. We would love to have you join us in 2020.

Africa Yoga Project – Eye Pillows:

Two of our students, Eunju Nam and Junghee Kim, have been working with Margo and they have made lavender scented eye pillows. These are on sale for \$20 with the proceeds to go to Africa Yoga Project. You may purchase these from either of our studios.



They are a great accompaniment to savasana and a great way to settle your mind, calm your nervous system and create a relaxed state of being before you go to bed in the evening.

These are good for yourself as a treat and make a great present too.

Samadhi, Heaven or Nirvana:

There are some concepts encountered in yoga and, more generally in life, which offer hope of some blissful state of existence. These states are typically depicted as ones where the individual exists in a disembodied state or, at least, a state where one's conscious awareness is free of any suffering caused by having a body.

In this piece I shall discuss the terms identified in the heading, samadhi, nirvana and heaven to identify my understanding of what they have in common and how they are different from one another.

I came to consider this because of a sudden weather change one evening recently. After a pleasant, warm day a narrow southerly front swept through in the evening bringing strong winds. I was struck by the contrast between the turmoil outside and the relative stillness inside the yoga studio. That contrast pointed my attention to a definition of “nirvana” that I once read by a scholar named Parama Devi, founder and director at Jagannatha Vallabha Vedic Research Centre.

Parama Devi, a woman with a considerable history of study of ancient texts and cultural practices, states that nirvana means “without wind”. It is a “state of consciousness that is firmly radiant and undisturbed like a flame sheltered from the wind.”

This is a state capable of being attained in one’s mortal lifetime but nirvana also contemplates a state of the soul/spirit/atman that survives after the death of one’s mortal body. Nirvana is not a state happened upon accidentally nor by simply asking or paying for it with a transaction of goods, services or money. Nirvana is a state achieved by the individual’s application of their way of being to practices of contemplation, selflessness and right action.



The eight-fold path of Buddhist tradition sets out a way of being with nirvana as the ultimate reward. That eight-fold path (the last of the four noble truths of Buddhism) is:

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought

3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

By pursuit of these elements of life the individual’s suffering will cease and they will exist in a state of ease and contentment – nirvana. There is reward for the individual in the extinguishing of suffering. However, the community benefits too as someone following the eight-fold path will be a trustworthy and valuable contributor to society.

Heaven is somewhat different. We might say that a delicious meal is heaven or a blissful holiday is heaven but “heaven” is a place of the afterlife.

St Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century Catholic priest, Dominican monk and philosopher, addressed the need for heaven. He perceived that some people behaved badly yet prospered and did not get their just desserts in life. He also perceived that some good people suffered and experienced great misfortune during their lives without reward. He reasoned, from a belief in God and Christ, that there needed to be an existence beyond our mortal lives where there would be a reckoning based upon the way in which we lived our lives.

That reckoning involved the states of heaven, hell and purgatory. Those who lived decently would be admitted to heaven. Those who sinned grievously would be condemned to hell. Those who sinned but less seriously would serve time in the discomfort of purgatory as punishment for their wrongs before being admitted to heaven.

Heaven itself was a place for one’s soul to exist, after the decease of one’s mortal

body, in the presence of God for eternity. In heaven there is no suffering. The traditional religious foundation for admission to heaven is a good life and an acknowledgment of God (though the current leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, has suggested that the acknowledgement of God may not be a prerequisite for admission to heaven. He is said to have told the son of a deceased atheist that the boy's father would reside in heaven because "he had a good heart").

In the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches at least, the administering of the last rites is said to ensure the admission to heaven of a dying person who confesses their sins and humbles themselves to God. For those from a tradition that sees one's way of being throughout life as being the essential determinant of whether one achieves a state of bliss in one's life and/or for eternity, this last minute repentance may seem somewhat trite. For those who believe in it, however, it is entirely consistent with a merciful and loving God with a true capacity for forgiveness.



So far as a sceptic and someone who does not believe in an existence after the death of my body, such as me, is concerned, the existence of heaven is a matter of hearsay. Who has met anyone who has been to heaven? What is their first-hand account of this state? That is, of course, of no matter.

For those who do have faith and belief in a god and a heaven that faith may be a motivating force for their conduct on this earth and that can be a good thing to direct them to good works and good conduct. We all benefit from that.

The concept of heaven can also be a great solace. To those suffering it can offer the hope that a better existence, free from suffering, awaits them. For those living who have had their loved ones die it can be a comfort to believe that they are not extinct but still exist in some ethereal form and that they are happy and a re-uniting in an afterlife is possible.

Samadhi is a different concept from both nirvana and heaven. Samadhi is the eighth and final limb of the classical rendering of yoga (most essentially described in the *Yoga Sutras*).

Samadhi is a state for this lifetime. It is not an afterlife but is a blissful state of consciousness to be experienced in our mortal lives. Samadhi is said to be a state of awareness in which one's true self resides within itself. It is a state of simplicity and self-containment, unaffected by external circumstances.

Samadhi is an experience enjoyed by those who eradicate from their consciousness the distractions caused by:

- The pangs of conscience that come from violence, dishonesty, theft, betrayal, abusiveness, exploitation and selfishness.
- A failure to pursue good practices of living that respect oneself and all others and that acknowledge one's place in the whole of existence.
- Physical discomfort through weakness, immobility and a lack of health and vitality.
- A lack of presence to and vitality in one's breath and essential energy.

- A tendency to look outwards and judge and be judged by external norms.
- A failure to be present, to concentrate and be grounded.

Like nirvana, as the result of living the eight-fold path, and heaven, as the result of having a good heart, samadhi is a state earned by consistent practice and adherence to a certain way of being. Unlike heaven and nirvana it is a state to be experienced in this life rather than to be hoped for in a future existence beyond this life.

Samadhi strikes me as being a state that has been experienced by the devotees of yoga practices and about which they have given direct testimony. I seek to share in their experience.

I have lied, I have taken what has not been given to me, I have been violent and I have been selfish and disrespectful of others. Having all those experiences I know they make me feel unhappy, discontented and in revulsion of myself. I have also, at times, been honest, even to my detriment, caring, generous, and of service to others without any demand for reward. Those experiences leave me feeling worthwhile and cultivate rather than erode my self-esteem.

I have real-life feedback on a daily basis of what it is to live according to ethical and moral virtue and I can contrast that with when those virtues have been absent in me. The more I observe the practices of yoga, the more settled and contented I am within myself.

In asana I can enjoy the experience of moving freely with balance, strength and open ranges of action. I can breathe and observe a sensation of energy, prana, infusing my entire body. In meditation I gain glimpses of a state without the torment of my thinking.

I am realistic enough to know that I have too many attachments, to pleasures and comforts in food and belongings and income, and that I am too attached to ways of thinking, to believe that samadhi is close at hand. But I have enough of the experience of benefits from the practices of yoga to see that if I were to dedicate myself to them with full commitment a state such as samadhi is possible.

What I take from the notions of nirvana, heaven and samadhi is that there is every reason to live your life well, not from scarcity, selfishness and lack, but from connection, community and service.

Asana Spotlight:

Tripod headstand (*mukta hasta sirsasana*) is the focus pose this month. This pose is for experienced practitioners who have done the work developing balance, core strength, and a proper foundation based on the integrity of your hands, arms and shoulders in low plank pose.

- Start on your hands and knees. Set your hands just wider than shoulder width as if to take plank or downward facing dog.
- Visualise a point in front of your hands and the same distance from each of your hands as your hands are from one another. Bring the crown of your head to the floor at this point.
- Lift your knees and hips upward from the floor and walk your feet towards your hands until you feel the weight of your body grounded evenly between your two hands and the crown of your head
- The crown of your head approximates to the point of your fontanelle. One way to locate this point is to set the tip of one thumb at the bridge of your nose and then reach the index finger of that same hand as high towards the top of your skull as you can. The point where your index finger touches your skull is

approximately the point of your head which you should rest to the floor in headstand.

- The tendency for many students is to bring a point closer to their forehead to the floor. This misalignment resonates through the length of the pose and either results in a strain at your neck to try to assume a vertical alignment of your joints or inhibits your ability to stack your joints and means the pose is a struggle rather than a balance.
- At this point there are different options as to how to get up.



- Option 1: Hug your knees in towards your chest and tuck your heels towards your buttocks. In so doing lift your two feet from the floor and rock your hips even more to an upright position straight over your head. Pull the pit of your belly in strongly towards your spine.
- Activate your low back muscles and hip muscles and extend your bent legs over your hips towards the ceiling. Stack your knees upright towards the ceiling.

- Finally, contract your quadriceps at the front of your thighs and extend your lower legs upwards to the ceiling.
- Option 2: Extend one leg strongly as high to the sky as you can. Squeeze the thigh muscles of your extended leg strongly to the bone and press the mounds of your extended leg purposefully straight up.
- Draw the knee of your grounded leg into towards your chest. In so doing lift your grounded foot from the floor. Pause to establish and assert balance, then with no rush, extend that leg to the sky alongside your already raised leg.
- In both Options 1 and 2, beware any sway in your back or collapse of strength at your core and abdomen. Draw your lower belly in towards your spine. Reach your tailbone upwards towards the sky.
- Contract your inner thighs and draw your two legs in towards one another to create lift, balance and stability.
- Be awake to the balance of your weight in your hands and head. This pose is a headstand. Use your hands to steady yourself like training wheels on a bicycle and rest as much weight as you can manage on the crown of your head.
- Maintain the integrity of chaturanga dandasana in your arms. Do not let your hands turn inwards and/or your elbows bow outwards. Engage the triceps on the backs of your upper arms and the trapezius and latissimus dorsi muscles of your back to draw your elbows in to the width of your hands and your shoulders in towards your trunk.
- To come down try option 1: bend your knees and tuck your heels towards your buttocks, then draw your knees towards your chest and touch your feet down to the floor.
- Or, try option 2, gently lower one of your extended legs towards the floor (not

over your back behind you but to the front side of your body in the direction you are looking). This will shift your balance away from your head and you will drop, more or less gracefully, back to your feet.

- Here is a third option to get into tripod headstand: From the same set-up already described, at the point where you go to lift your feet from the floor, do not bend your legs. Instead, extend your legs very strong and straight. From the strength of your hip extensors, in your hips, in your low back especially and your back more generally, raise your legs slowly, with control, from the floor to the sky. Move smoothly and gradually from a pike position to full extension. To come down, reverse the process.
- In both going up and coming down in this variation I find I need to shift my hips further to the front of my mat, slightly beyond the back of my head, to maintain balance. On the way up, I correct my hips to stack straight over my head once in full extension.



- Option 4: From the same set-up already described, lift your right knee onto the back of your right elbow/upper arm and then your left knee to the back of your left upper arm. This will allow you to

raise your hips higher and balance more weight onto the crown of your head.

- Then follow the steps for either Option 1 or Option 2 described earlier to ascend into tripod headstand.
- There are also alternative variations of the set-up for the pose. A second variation is to come into tripod headstand from straddle legged forward bend.
- Take a wide stance with your feet and fold forward. Set your hands just wider than shoulder width and the crown of your head to the floor, again at a point the same distance from each of your hands as your hands are from one another.
- You may then work your feet together and take any of the three options already described to lift into tripod headstand.
- Or, you may extend your legs straight, lift onto your tiptoes and then raise your legs, simultaneously, outwards and upwards into tripod headstand.



- A final variation is to take crow pose as your set-up. This is an advanced variation and it is essential you have good control so as not to land heavily on the crown of your head and injure your head or neck.
- From crow, gently ease your weight forward and reach the crown of your head towards your mat. Look towards the floor as long as you can in this

transition and be very intentional in grounding the crown of your head to your mat – NOT the rear portion of your head nor your forehead.

- Once your head is safely at your mat you may take any of the first three options described earlier to lift your legs, together or one at a time, to the sky.

When in low plank pose have the vision to conceive of the possibility of the foundation of your arms as being the foundation to support you in a vertical column in tripod headstand. As Mohammed Ali said, “If your mind can conceive it and your heart can believe it then you can achieve it”.

From Baron Baptiste:



Stop trying to fix yourself and start being yourself.

Namaste

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