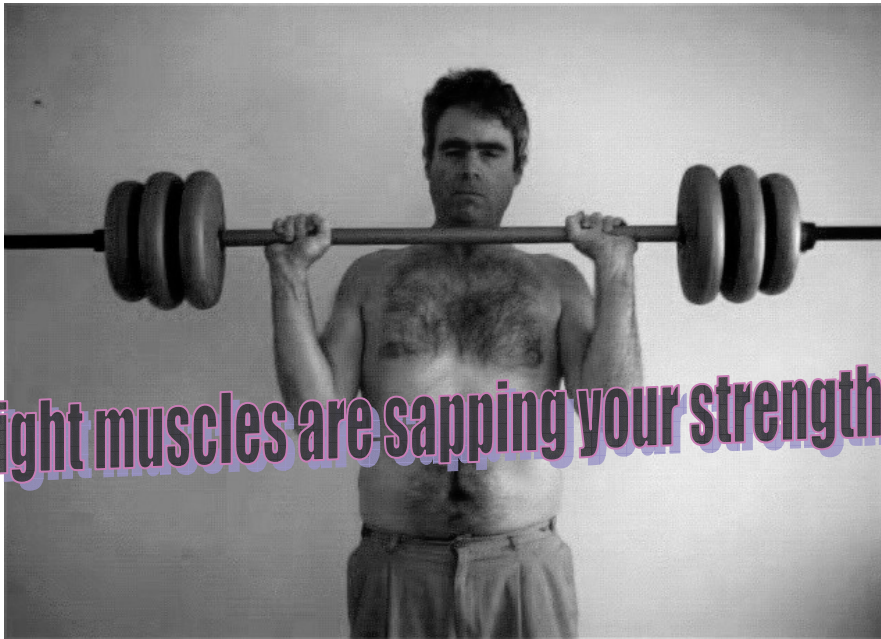




Awareness with Yoga

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Inside this issue:

<i>Tight muscles are sapping your strength!</i>	1,2
<i>Music for Yoga: Odds and Ends</i>	2
<i>Theme for the Month: Space</i>	2
<i>Bones: Living Architecture</i>	3
<i>Bio and Contact Information</i>	4
<i>Chant Night and Teaching Schedule</i>	4

READING,PA- The title of this piece leapt out at me as I was looking through my yoga notebooks one afternoon. I had written it in bold letters across the top of one page. Visions of the sensational newspapers that you see at the check out counter in the grocery store danced through my head.

And yet it's true! Tight muscles are sapping our strength. It takes a lot of energy to hold muscles partially contracted all the time. There is a false idea out there that these partially contracted muscles, those bulging biceps and washboard abs, represent strength. The strength of a muscle is measured by how much a muscle can contract, not by how beefy it looks.

The image which always comes to my mind is a cat. Think of a cat lazing on a sunny spot on the carpet, the picture of floppiness and relaxation. Insouciance personified and yet, BAM! , a mouse will run by and the cat will leap to action more quickly than most living creatures. Cats epitomize this natural state. I aspire to be like a cat!

Not only do tight muscles sap our strength but they indicate a weak area of our body. If we have an area in our body that is weak, or prone to injury, what we discover there is tight muscles. Again, strength is measured by how much a muscle can contract. If the muscle already holds chronic tension (partial contraction) it won't be able to contract as much as

it is capable of in situations calling for our muscular strength. Think of a sponge that has some moistness but most of it is dry and stiff and compare it to a sponge that is full and expanded with water. If the water we are able to wring out of the sponge is a measure of the sponges' strength, you can see how much more water (strength) will come from the full sponge (a fully expanded and relaxed muscle).

Another major drawback of a chronically tight muscle is the way it leeches calcium from the bone it lies closest to. A muscle needs calcium to contract and if the contraction is chronic, where will it continue to get it?

Many of our physical prob-

(Continued on page 2)



Tight Muscles are sapping your strength!

Continued from page 1

lems could be eased considerably if we just learned to soften up. Here's another example. The lymph in a body chronically bound with tension can't move freely. Toxins can't drain and fatigue becomes something we think we have to live with. Many of the complaints of aging are related to this escalating state of chronic tension. I love to teach Svaroopa® yoga because I feel like I am handing people a basic manual on how to inhabit a human body. It was and continues to be the same for me. Our body does not have to end

up a stiff cage in our older age. This is not inevitable. I've been speaking mostly about the physical aspects, but we can discover softness in our mental and emotional life as well. As we ask ourselves "How could this be softer?" when we do a pose, perhaps we can begin to ask ourselves the same question when we are irritated, rushed or angry. Tight muscles, be they physical, mental or emotional are sapping our strength! Yoga helps us begin to regain it.

Music for Yoga: Odds and Ends

I had planned on making this a monthly column but I'm starting to come to the end of the music I use regularly in class. So from now on it will only make an appearance when something worthwhile comes to my attention.

Here are a few odds and ends that I like to use.

You can pick any of these up at your local music store and if they don't have it in stock they would be happy to order it for you.

Brian Eno: Music for Airports. Ambient synthesizer music. Haunting melodies.

Deva Premal: The Essence Beautiful Sanskrit chants.

David Darling: Cello Blue Wonderful mellow cello.

Lifescapes: Music for Yoga. One of a series of soft music (they have a whole display at Target). I love this one and use it a lot. There is another in the series (I think it's for massage and relaxation) which I haven't heard but am tempted to try.

Sheila Chandra: A Bone Crone Drone.

Gorgeous vocalizing. This is another of my favorites.

Enjoy!!

Theme for the Month: Space

One of the things that happens in yoga practice is the creation of internal space. There is more space for the breath to come into, more space for the organs to occupy, more space between the vertebrae and all our joints. Sometimes we can even feel a bit 'spacey' after class because of the unaccustomed space in our bodies. Space can be a little disorienting but only because we're not used to it. The temptation is to

contract or tighten to go back to the familiar but what we want to do instead is expand to fill this new-found space.

As we grow accustomed to the space in our bodies we will find parallel space in our thoughts and our ideas about things. We will see that there are many more possibilities than we previously imagined.

Inner space! A new universe to map and explore!

Space n. [ME.; OFr. *espace*; L. *spatium*], 1. distance extending without limit in all directions; that which is thought of as a boundless, continuous expanse extending in all directions or in three dimensions, within which all material things are contained. 2. distance, interval, or area between or within things; extent; room. 3. interval or length or time. 4. the universe outside the earth's atmosphere.



Bones: Living Architecture

Bones are interesting material. Our bones are stronger than cement, more bendable than steel (and can leap over tall buildings in a single bounce!). As in most cases our attempts to replicate these qualities in man-made materials falls far short of what we are given naturally.

We need certain amounts of vitamins and minerals in general to stay healthy. A well-known component of a strong bone is calcium. Often, because of tight muscles, the calcium we do have is leached away from the bone to fuel the contraction of the muscles lying nearest to it. This obviously weakens the bone. Our yogic practice of softening our muscles allows the calcium to go back to its rightful place.

Muscles move our body, our bones support us. Bones become strong by bearing weight. For example, in Tadasana or mountain pose, it is possible to let our muscles soften or stop working (contracting) as we stand at rest. Our bones will

then bear our full weight and grow strong. This is how we prevent something like osteoporosis, a particular concern for aging women.

Now what I find really interesting about all this is the fact that we can actually change the shape of our bones. Bowlegs are a perfect example. Tensions in the lower spine are preventing the body weight from resting evenly down through the legs into the feet. More weight is going down the outside of the bone so it beefs up or bows in that direction. As a student begins to soften these chronic tensions, the weight begins to land more evenly in the feet and travel down the bone differently. The inside of the bone, which is now bearing more weight, will begin to beef up and the other side will slowly diminish. Eventually, Rama says in two years of dedicated practice, the bone will straighten.

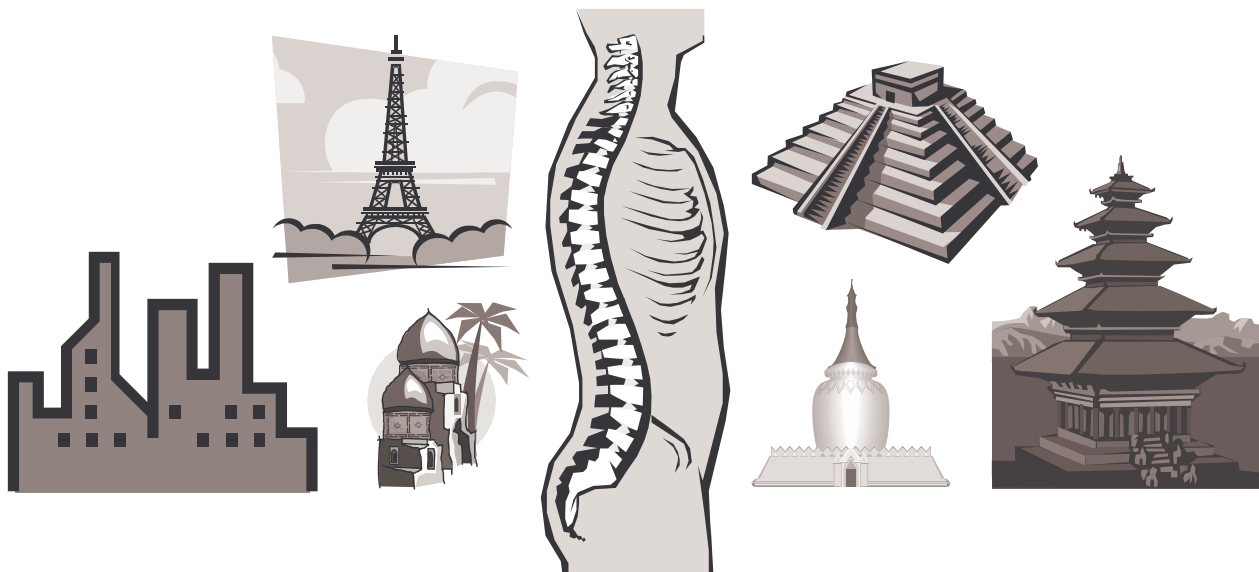
When you lean into your bones, your muscles will let go. This is the principle behind the adjustments we give in class except in

this case, it is the adjuster's weight, not your own, that is leaning into the bone.

Let's use the sacrum press in half frog as an example. As the adjuster leans their weight into your sacrum it helps the muscles attached to your sacrum to let go more deeply—definitely one of the perks of being in a classroom situation!

Also, in half frog, as you rest on the front of your body, the front of the rib cage and the front of the hip have a chance to bear weight and become strong.

Start to have a conscious awareness of your bones as you practice yoga. You will see more clearly and deeply where you are tensing as you do a pose. You will be able to soften and let go more fully. Your bones will become strong as you allow them to do what they do best, support you.



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Yoga: the natural way to awareness
and health.



JoAnn Morrell has been practicing yoga since 1981 and teaching since 1995.

She is a registered teacher in the national Yoga Alliance and teaches yoga in the Svaroop® style.

She trained at Master Yoga Institute in La Jolla, CA and is a mentor for new students in their teacher training program. She has also completed teacher training with Erich Schiffmann.

She has taken advanced courses in deeper Svaroop®, including Yoga Therapy and EmbodimentSM. EmbodimentSM is the Svaroop® approach to bodywork. Private sessions help to greatly accelerate and deepen the benefits of the Svaroop® practice. JoAnn is available for private Yoga Therapy and EmbodimentSM sessions.

CHANT NIGHT
Friday April 11th
The Studio
120 S. 3rd Avenue West Reading
610-376-2881

Current Teaching Schedule

<u>MONDAY</u>	<u>TUESDAY</u>	<u>WEDNESDAY</u>
12 Noon Kutztown University Multicultural Center Contact: Women's Center 610-683-4655	9 AM & 6 PM Indigo Natural Healing Center Kutztown, PA 610-683-9363	12 Noon Kutztown University Multicultural Center Contact: Women's Center 610-683-4655
6 PM Indigo Natural Healing Ctr. 610-683-9363		5:30 PM Rdg. Jewish Comm. Ctr. 610-921-0624