

Ebook Excerpt



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# An inside look at meditation

Experiences for healing, support, and transformation

Carrie Heeter, PhD, RYS200

Forewords by Chase Bossart, MA, C-IAYT, E-RYT500  
and Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT

# Foreword by Chase Bossart

Scientific explanations of first-person experiences are fraught with difficulty. For example, discussions of how olfaction uses chemoreceptors to create signals processed by the brain utterly fail to capture the exquisite delicacy of smelling a freshly blooming rose blossom. Neither can descriptions of force and its conversion into movement describe the joy of riding a bicycle.

Studies of such things end up falling into one camp or the other—either presenting dry, informational structures from a third-person perspective or else over-describing the intimate, experiential aspects of the first-person experience.

And that is what makes this book unique and absolutely important. It accurately captures both the informational and the experiential elements of the practice of meditation. It explains key elements of how meditation works intertwined with wonderful examples of what the process looks like from the inside.

Having been the guide for several of the stories presented in this book, I am struck by how effective they are in demonstrating and explaining the principles underlying meditation and how it works.

In this way this book breaks new ground in presenting an age-old science of mind and personal transformation. Whether you are a practitioner or a researcher or merely interested in meditation I highly recommend reading, and rereading, this book.

It will make a difference in who you are and how you relate to the world.

**Chase Bossart, MA, C-IAYT, E-RYT500**  
Yoga Well Institute  
yogawell.com



Introduction  
**Why meditate?**

We all have our reasons.

yoga



stories

“ ”



# We all have our reasons

People who meditate have their own reasons why they meditate and their own sense of what makes a meditation satisfying.

You've gotten through life figuring out how to be in this body and in this world.


You have your routines that work for you:

- things you do to heal and be healthy,
- things you do to relax and relieve stress,
- ways you practice self-care,
- things you do to learn and grow.

Come with me on this voyage of possibility. Behold what meditation can be.

Perhaps you will discover something that resonates for you.





My experience of meditation  
is part of everything I do. -CH

yoga



## Meditation is

- a way of knowing
- a way of becoming
- a way of life

## Functions of meditation in yoga



### Healing

to alleviate physical  
or mental health  
challenges



### Support

to maintain balance  
in daily life



### Discovery

to nurture  
insight and  
transformation

One way of thinking about the goals of a yoga meditation is whether a meditation is primarily intended to heal, to maintain balance in the midst of life events and activities, or to cultivate insights and transformation.

# Why do you meditate?



Meditation is central to how I operate. I meditate in the mornings as part of my daily yoga practice. I feel like what happens is an opportunity for me to see what's really happening. There's quiet. The external world is not requiring my attention. I can put my attention on what's within me. And then I see things about what is going on within me when I'm upset or unsettled.

Meditation is also the means to work with whatever needs attention in my life. It is the main mode I use to navigate my internal experience.



*Amanda Green, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, Innermost Yoga*



Meditation for me is about altered states. My meditations can be shallow or very deep. I'm primarily visual, but I'm also auditory – I hear information through the meditation that offers me wisdom and guidance.

The experiences of meditation are powerful for me. As a therapist I did years of training and then practicing the use of music and imagery personally and with my therapy clients. The imagery can take many different forms: physical sensations, memories, visual, and on and on.



*Carol Jones, MA, C-IAYT, The Infertility Counselor*



Meditation is central to Amanda's and Carol's lives and their work. Both have had a personal daily practice for more than a decade. They have studied viniyoga. Amanda is a yoga therapist, yoga, and meditation teacher. Carol is a yoga therapist and an infertility counselor.

You'll hear more about their meditation experiences throughout this book.

In my experience, meditation  
is really fun and really cool. –CH

yoga



## Meditation can be

- profoundly playful
- incredibly interesting
- transformational



# What makes meditation satisfying for you?

The experience of meditation is exquisitely personal. Even doing the same meditation, each person's experiences are unique.

I am fascinated by the differences in what Grazia, Robyn, and Marcel enjoy the most about a meditation experience. All three are highly trained in viniyoga and have a personal daily practice.

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A great meditation is when I am able to see a new pattern of my behavior or thinking, or to see an existing pattern from a different perspective.

*Grazia Jaroff, Yoga philosophy, yoga, and meditation teacher*

”

“



A satisfying meditation is when I can connect to the quiet vastness. Then it is easier to remember: perfect, whole and complete, lacking nothing. That ever-deepening line in my forehead between my eyes gets a little softer.

*Robyn Love, C-IAYT, E-RYT500, Atha Yoga School*

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A successful meditation is when I feel a kind of energetic shift in how my human system is operating. That's how I know a meditation is working.

*Marcel Allbritton, PhD, C-IAYT, Yoga for Practitioners*

”

Grazia loves the insights that can arise in meditation.

Robyn is a deep student and practitioner of Buddhism, a certified yoga therapist, a yoga and meditation teacher, and an artist. She loves how meditation connects her to a deep sense of wholeness.

Marcel is a yoga therapist, my teacher, and my mentor. He loves the energetic feeling—the shift that happens for him in meditation.

# Why my students do weekly meditations

The quotes on this page are some of the reasons students in my meditation adventure class say they come to my meditations.

I teach a half-hour meditation experience that combines yoga-based movement and breathing with a meditation object. Then we discuss what went on for each person.

Every week there is a new meditation object to focus on. Some relate to healing, or support, or discovery.

These students know I am trying out new ideas. That's part of what makes it an adventure for all of us.

I always gain new understandings of how and how not to design meditations. My students teach me so much.



To appreciate who I am at a level I've forgotten about. To remember who I am. I can't access myself in the same way outside of meditation.



To experience wild inner adventures that are consistently surprising, fun, and healing.



I have a lot going on in my head and in my body. It is so helpful to shift into a different way of being during the meditation.



Doing the meditations feels creative. Each time aspects of me show up and my mind makes new connections.



Section 1  
**Yoga, meditation, and you**

**Chapters**



# Section 1: Yoga, meditation, and you

Here I establish what is meant by meditation in the context of this book. I describe the process of meditation from a yoga perspective and explain a little of how and why meditation works.

**Chapter 1.** Yoga is a meditation tradition. This book is about meditation from the perspectives and traditions of viniyoga.

**Chapter 2.** How you feel—the state of your human system—influences your thoughts and behavior. How you feel also influences your meditation experience.


**Chapter 3.** Meditation helps open a window to your internal world. Meditation helps you connect with feelings, emotions, and other bodily sensations. Interoception unites mind and body.

**Chapter 4.** In meditation, you learn to pay attention to your attention. In meditation, you direct and observe your attention. Your thoughts become more contained.

**Chapter 5.** To prepare your mind to be directable for meditation, movement, breathing, and attention help your mind and body transition toward a state of balance. When you are in a state of balance, your human system operates differently.

**Chapter 6.** Science shows that meditating regularly changes you. Meditating regularly enhances well-being and results in measurable, positive changes in how your mind and body function.





Chapter 1

# Yoga meditation

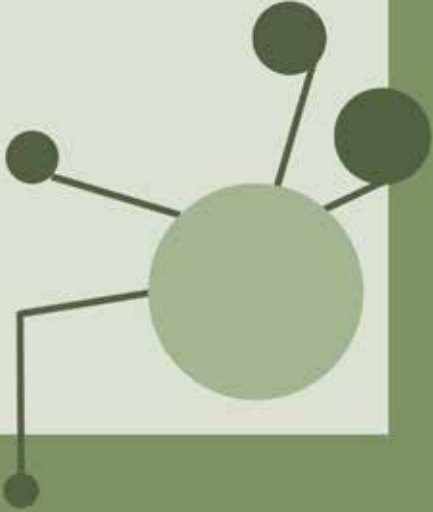
Yoga is a meditation tradition.

yoga



stories

“ ”



When I consider what to teach  
in a meditation I connect, with appreciation  
and reverence, to thousands of years of those  
who have come before me. –CH

yoga



It's important to acknowledge  
that what we have received  
(about yoga and meditation)  
is the result of a great amount of care and love  
across thousands of years,  
the vast majority of Indian origins.

We are caretakers,  
maintaining and passing on  
what we have received.

**Chase Bossart**  
Yoga Well Institute

# Yoga resides in an ocean of mind-body practices

Imagine that yoga and every form of meditation dwell in a giant ocean of ways of using attention, mind, and body.

The ocean of mind-body practices encompasses mindfulness meditation, guided imagery, mantra meditation, transcendental meditation, progressive relaxation, spiritual meditation, and more as well as meditation that is part of yoga, tai chi, qi-gong, and other practices with a physical component.

Because mind-body practices all involve ways of using the human system—your mind, body, and attention—it is not surprising that we find commonalities along with unique practices and outcomes.

We can label a region of this ocean yoga, rooted in a strong ancient tradition. As with water in an ocean, boundaries of defined regions are porous. A related ancient tradition is Buddhism. Secularized western “mindfulness” overlaps with yoga and Buddhism.

This book is about yoga.

*locating yoga in the ocean of mind-body practices*



# This book is about viniyoga meditation

Zooming in on yoga reveals a diverse patch of mind-body yoga practices.

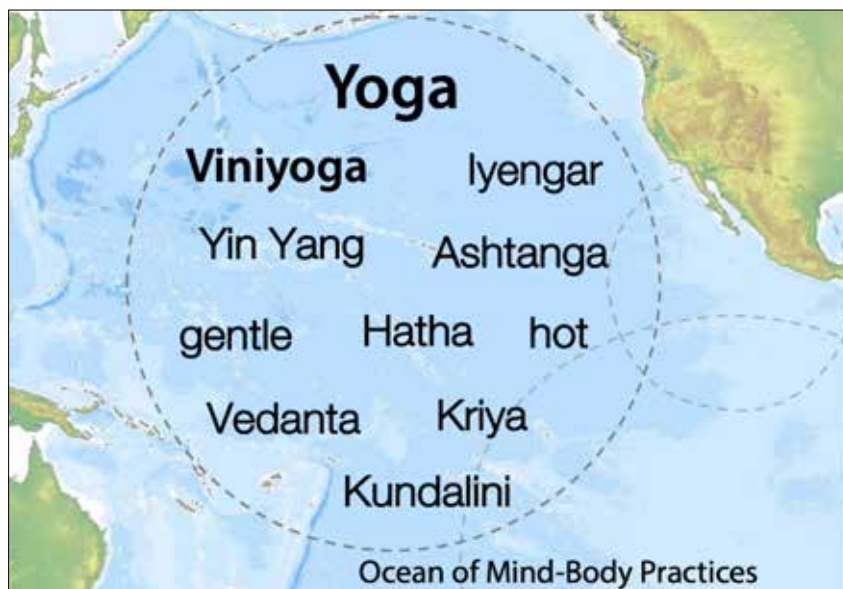
Some of the forms of yoga popular in the west include Iyengar yoga, Ashtanga yoga, hot yoga, Kundalini yoga, gentle yoga, Yin Yang yoga, Kriya yoga, Vedanta yoga, and Hatha yoga.

My training and experiences are in viniyoga.

Traditionally a student studied yoga with a guru—a teacher—someone deeply practiced and knowledgeable who themselves studied yoga with their guru. For example, Iyengar yoga was founded by B.K.S. Iyengar, who studied with Sri Krishnamacharya. Ashtanga yoga was founded by K. Pattabhi Jois, who was a student of Sri Krishnamacharya.

Viniyoga was developed by Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar, the son and long-time student of Sri Krishnamacharya.

some of the many yoga traditions





# My teacher's teachers

## Yoga lineage and community

I'm on a lifetime journey of exploration and personal transformation. Though I started my journey late in life, stopping is unimaginable.

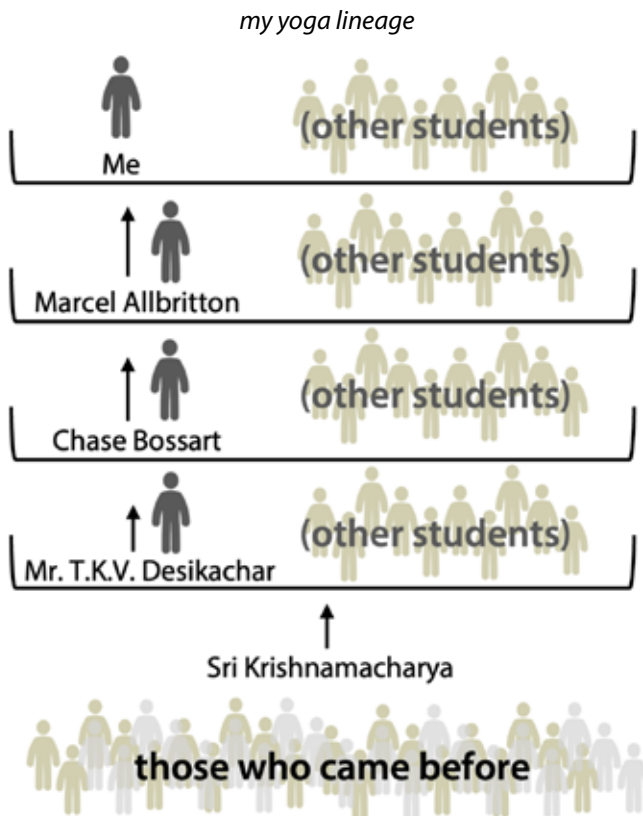
I'm part of an informal community of learners who I have met through Yoga Well Institute classes, each of us on our own journey.

I study one-on-one with my mentor, Marcel Allbritton.

I have continuously participated in formal programs and courses offered by Marcel's mentor, Chase Bossart.

Chase was a long-time student of Mr. T.K.V. Desikachar, who studied with his father, Sri Krishnamacharya.

The lineage of yogi and student extends back thousands of years.



In viniyoga, we adapt the yoga to the person.  
-CH

yoga



Viniyoga is intimately personal  
and deeply experiential.

Viniyoga is giving what is appropriate  
to each person.

It is specific and highly individualized.

**N. Chandrasekaran**

*Principles and Practice of Yoga Therapy*



## The process of meditation

We enter meditation  
from whatever state we are in.

### ENTER sacred space

#### PREPARATION

moving the system toward balance,  
so the mind becomes directable

#### LINK TO MEDITATION OBJECT

**CONCENTRATION**  
directing attention  
toward the meditation  
object



**2-WAY FLOW**  
shift to allowing rather  
than trying to direct  
the experience



### LEAVE sacred space

# Meditation is a process

When you begin a meditation session, you transition from outward focus on the external world to inward focus on the world inside. This can be an abrupt shift!

Usually you will need to slow down, to calm down, to de-scatter. You need to quiet your mind before it is possible to connect with a meditation object.

1) As preparation, tools of yoga—such as movement and breathing or chanting—are used to help bring your human system toward a state of balance, so that your quality of attention improves and your mind becomes directable.

2) Next, you direct your attention toward the meditation object. You maintain your attention there. You filter out other thoughts or sensations that would pull your attention away. If your attention wanders, you bring it back.

3) When your connection with the object is stable, a shift may happen. Something else takes over and you shift from directing your mind to allowing the meditation experience to unfold.

You can't make these steps happen. They do not happen every time.

As a meditation designer I try to create experiences that increase the likelihood that these three steps occur.

Even if the only outcome of a meditation session is moving your system in the direction of balance, there are health and well-being benefits that arise from focusing inward and quieting your mind.

This quote from a busy professional who was one of my meditation circle participants illustrates some of the value of moving mind and body toward a state of balance.

“

I have been very busy and this meditation brought me away from the busy feeling. I didn't want to leave the meditation so I just stayed in my chair with a gentle joyful feeling. My body is much calmer. There is a space for my self. I will get up and take this feeling with me.

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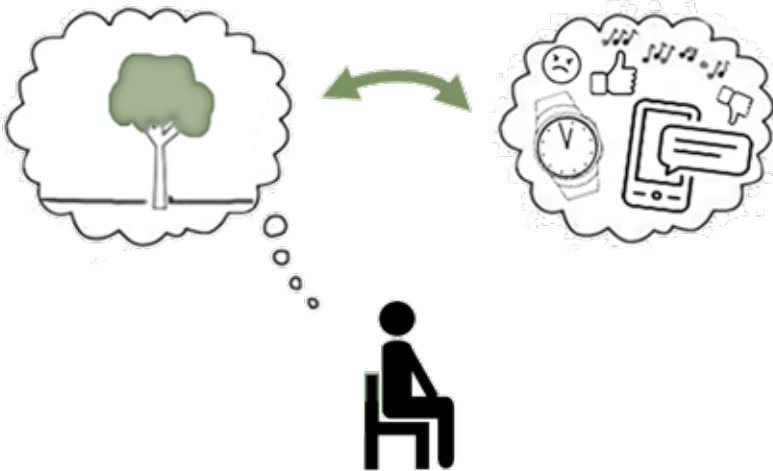
# Conscious effort keeps attention focused on the meditation object

In this phase of meditation there is conscious effort to keep attention focused on the meditation object.

Throughout a meditation there will be times when your attention is focused on the meditation object and times when thoughts, external events, or bodily sensations distract your attention away from the meditation object.

The illustration below shows a meditating person trying to focus attention on the meditation object (a tree). They are able to concentrate on the tree some of the time. Other times their mind wanders to other thoughts, activities, and upcoming tasks.

*attention fluctuating between the meditation object and distractions*



When your connection with the meditation object becomes stable less effort is needed to stay focused. There is less self-talk and more listening. You shift from being the driver of what happens to more of a passenger. You experience rather than try to direct what shows up.

## Curiosity and openness to self-observation

It is helpful to approach meditation with a sense of curiosity about yourself—an openness to self-reflection—and a positive attitude.

One of the benefits of meditation is increased capacity for discerning self-observation. So you are not only experiencing what happens in the meditation, you are also observing yourself having the experience.

Every time you meditate, there is an opportunity to notice how your mind and body and breath are doing today—right now—during the meditation. You can observe when and why you get distracted. You notice whether you get annoyed with yourself when you realize your attention has wandered.

There is so much to see during a meditation that reveals your patterns—ways you typically act and respond—and how your mind and body are functioning in that moment.

“

Recently in a meditation we were guided to feel the support of the ground. We were doing breath and movement lying down, feeling the support of the ground. And I did not feel supported at all. What I felt instead was gravity pulling me down.

I realized I must have a burden of some sort in my life right now that's pulling me down. That insight gave me something new to explore, relating it to my current circumstances.

Those kinds of insights are really satisfying.

Something I didn't expect shows up, or a thought that I've had before, but somehow didn't register at the time and I understand it in a different way.



*Grazia Jaroff, Yoga philosophy, yoga, and meditation teacher*

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Appropriate effort means trying just hard enough. And then being OK with whether or not meditating works. –CH

yoga



Perfect attention is not possible.

Getting annoyed at yourself  
for losing focus backfires.  
Trying really hard usually backfires.

The secret is to be curious  
and compassionate about yourself.

Just notice how your attention is today.

## Going down the slide

The third phase of meditation that can occur happens outside of your control. When your attention on the object of meditation is stable, your mind may shift from concentration—trying to control the direction of your thoughts—to instead becoming an engaged observer watching, allowing, and experiencing what happens in the meditation.

In yoga, that shift is sometimes described as feeling like going down a slide—letting go of control—allowing an experience with the meditation object to unfold.

One moment you are telling your mind to focus on the meditation object, and then you are watching what happens in your meditation. Something takes over, and part of you becomes an observer—a witness—along for the ride.

It is here that a special quality of insights and experiences can arise.

For example, Amanda describes being surprised by what happened during her meditations.

“

It was remarkable to me that I could have somebody suggest a golden bed of light in a meditation and then I could really experience it. The warmth was there. The color was there. The sensation was so real.

I remember another meditation where we were connecting with the sky. I remember the feeling of the sky, sort of creeping down underneath my body and threatening to take me off the earth. I didn't want that experience. It just showed up and it was so visceral, so tangible.

It felt as real as if I were doing it with my eyes open. Those two early experiences stood out because it felt like those things were physically happening.

I was curious after that. I was really hooked. How can this progression of movement and breathing allow for those experiences?



*Amanda Green, Innermost Yoga*

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## Chapter 2

# The state of your human system

How you feel—the state of your human system—influences your thoughts and behavior.



You can use a dial that goes from green to red to describe the state of your system



*green to red stress meter*

One general way to characterize the state of your system is using a dial that goes from green (calm and stable) to red (stressed out and anxious).

In civil defense warnings, red alert is the most serious stage, indicating imminent danger. Yellow alert indicates that danger is near. Green indicates absence of danger.

# Symptoms of the green zone

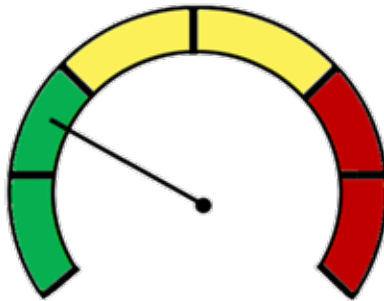
Here are some symptoms of being in the green zone.

You feel calm, stable, able to focus. You feel a general sense of ease. You feel balanced.

Being in the green zone makes it easier to see clearly. You are able to notice more. There is more space inside. You can be more open to possibilities. You are comfortable. Your choices will reflect that orientation.

When you are in the green zone your perceptions and your choices are colored by how you feel.

*symptoms of the green zone*



- **Calm**
- **Stable**
- **Able to focus**
- **A sense of ease**

# Symptoms of the red zone

Where you are on the dial changes all the time.

Something upsetting can instantly push you into the red zone.

Often your attention is on what you are doing or what you are worrying about. You may not even be aware of the state of your system.

Here are some symptoms of being in the red zone:

You feel stressed out, overwhelmed, anxious, upset. You experience a general sense of dis-ease. You feel out of balance.

Being in the red zone makes it difficult to see clearly. Your perception and your choices will be colored by how you feel.



# Why subtle differences in level of stress matter

The six-step stress meter graphics in this book represent the way Marcel talks about stress with his clients.

I just wanted to be in the green zone. It took me a long time to accept that yellow is a realistic and valuable goal. Now I love noticing differences in how low and high yellow feel.



“

When I work with clients, I use a dial with six steps to talk about subtle differences in level of stress—

- two steps for green,
- two for yellow,
- and two for red.

Most of the time, yellow is a realistic goal. Green is often not possible. You want to stay out of the red.

Being in upper yellow is very different from being in lower yellow, because if you're in upper yellow and you get activated, you go into red.

If you're in lower yellow and get activated, you're still in yellow.

Identifying how you are doing using this six-step gauge helps you understand and develop your capacity to cope with stressful events.



*Marcel Allbritton, Yoga for Practitioners*

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# The state of your system is always somewhere on the green-to-red dial

Bringing attention to how you are feeling gives you important information.

Your body evolved to react to stress by going on high alert to help you respond to a threat.

Once the threat is dealt with, things calm down.

Chronic stress is when you stay stuck in the red zone.

Stress hormones, muscle tightness and tension, inflammation and impaired immune response are among the many effects of chronic stress on the body.

Bringing attention to the state of your system lets you know how you are doing, giving you a chance to take actions to change your state.

The mind and body are natural partners. Modern minds have become habituated to ignoring the body. Meditation helps rebuild that partnership.



In yoga and meditation, you check in  
with your mind and body. -CH

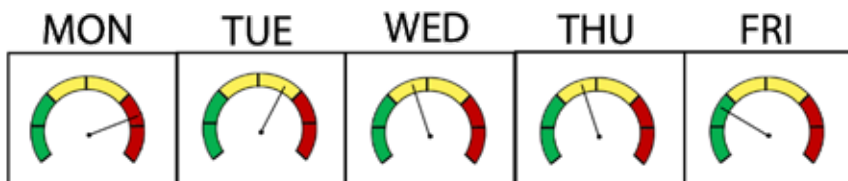
yoga



Practicing yoga and meditation  
changes how you feel.

Doing a daily practice  
shows you how you are doing  
compared to other days.

## Good days and bad days impact my meditations



Doing my personal yoga meditation practice every day teaches me about my life and my patterns.

In addition to preparation steps and meditation, my daily practice involves checking in with my body and mind.

I have lived with multiple sclerosis for 46 years. Because of MS, how well my body functions changes a lot from day to day. On different days some movements work fine and I need to adapt or skip other movements, depending on how my body is doing.

I get up early enough every morning to have time to do my practice before starting other obligations of the day. That way I'm not up against time pressure. I'm showing up—meditating regularly and faithfully.

Meditation will work perfectly. Right?

Even on bad days I feel better after doing my practice. But I discovered that the quality of my attention and my experience of meditation are diminished the morning after a night of working late.

I almost wish I didn't know my daily yoga meditation practice is affected by how much sleep I get. How well my brain and body function throughout the day are likely also affected.

Who has time to sleep? Do I practice meditation so my life will be better? Or do I structure my life so that my practice will be better?



*Carrie Heeter, Yoga Mind Tools*





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