

# Practice Transforms Us

## Finding Happiness from the Inside Out

Acharya Sundari Jensen

*Practice transforms us....A different life begins and the body expresses a happiness never felt before. These are not just words; it actually happens.*

—Vanda Scaravelli, *Awakening the Spine*

Several years ago while practicing hatha yoga with my teacher, Yogacharya O'Brian, I was struggling with a particular (relatively simple) yoga posture, and I distinctly remember her telling me, *Flexibility in your body comes from first finding flexibility in your mind. When you find this, you will find happiness in your life.* Having been a competitive athlete, college coach, and a personal trainer, I was fairly certain that I knew more about this particular topic than she did. In the days that followed I continued to strive to bend into basic postures—unsuccessfully. Her words stayed with me, but in the beginning they were overshadowed by my habitual outwardly competitive ways. As I continued to practice yoga or sit in meditation I would often quietly hear her words echoing in the background, *“first find flexibility in your mind.”*

Being competitive and striving for perfection brought success as an athlete, but it did not bring success as a yogi. I heeded my teacher's instruction and made a new game plan for practicing from the inside out—on the mat and on the cushion. As I did so, I began to experience my life as holy and meaningful, more flexibility in my body—and had glimpses of unexplainable happiness in my life.

The ultimate aim of yoga is to discover the immortal Self. The practice of yoga teaches us to live fully—physically and spiritually—and it unveils the joy of the soul, from the inside out. Now I practice yoga as an expression of my inner life, rather than a challenge to achieve some physical goal. In all endeavors I remind myself that *true happiness comes from the inside out.*



### PRACTICE

## Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

This simple stretch lengthens the back of the legs. This elementary stretch promotes flexibility and provides some unique benefits for the human body.

### Benefits

- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression.
- Stretches lower back, hamstrings and calf muscles.
- Tones the thighs and strengthens the knees.
- Boosts energy by fighting off fatigue.
- Alleviates headaches and sleeplessness.
- Improves digestion.
- Encourages introspection.

### Steps to Practice

1. Stand with feet parallel and hip-width apart. Stand tall, breathe deeply into the belly, and relax your body and mind.
2. With your hands on your hips, exhale and fold forward from the hips (not the waist) and extend toward the floor as much as your body will allow, without rounding your back or straining. If needed, bend your knees to relieve the lower back if you're feeling some unwanted tension.
3. Let the head hang from the root of the neck (between the shoulder blades). Place your palms or finger tips to the floor slightly in front of your feet. If this isn't possible, cross your forearms and hold your elbows.
4. Press your heels firmly into the floor as you lift the sit bones toward the ceiling. Relax into the posture for 30-60 seconds as you breathe easily and deeply.
5. To return to standing, place your hands on the hips. As you inhale, press your tailbone down and lift to an upright posture keeping a long front torso.
6. Close your eyes and notice what you are experiencing within. Repeat two to three times if you would like. 🙏

Acharya Sundari Jensen serves as a Senior Kriya Teacher at the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment.