

Space

Most of us first come in touch with yoga through asana practice. We are attracted to gaining flexibility so that we can either look like our peers in the studio or teachers whom we admire. This may look harmless in the beginning but may end up in detrimental thrive.

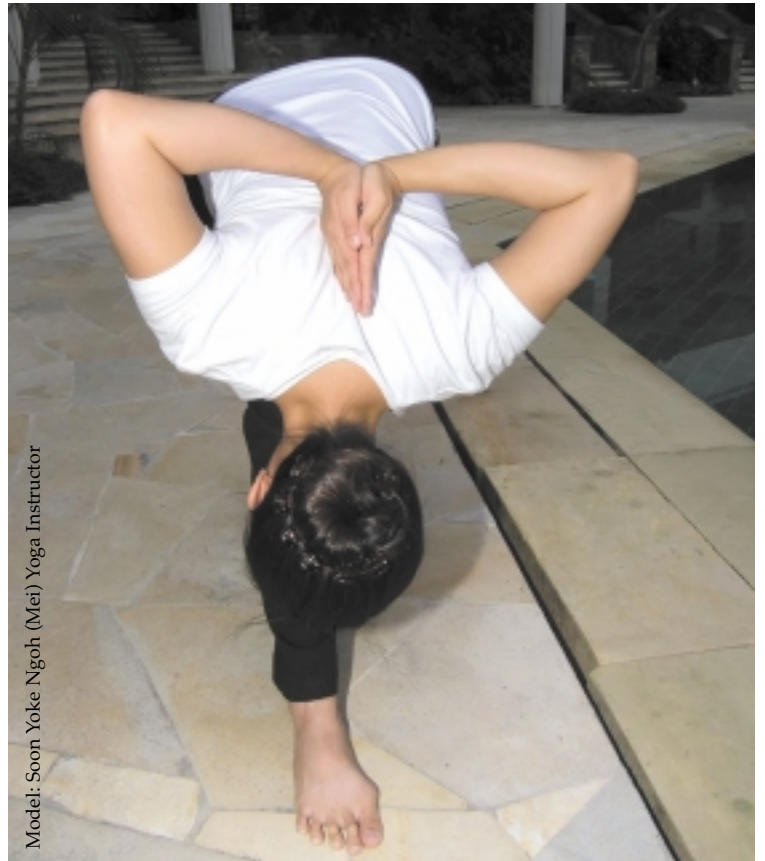
Most yogis ask, "Why can't I do that pose?" This becomes the common question. In most cases, we are told that we are not flexible enough and through more practice, flexibility will come. This advice has specific underlying assumptions which we need to understand. There are only two situations where one cannot perform a pose: Tension or Compression.

Tension assumes that the muscles and connective tissues surrounding the joints do not have enough elasticity to lengthen themselves when stretched. On the other hand, Compression means that the muscles and connective tissues have reached its maximum elasticity and the joints are hinging onto one another due to the structure of the bones.

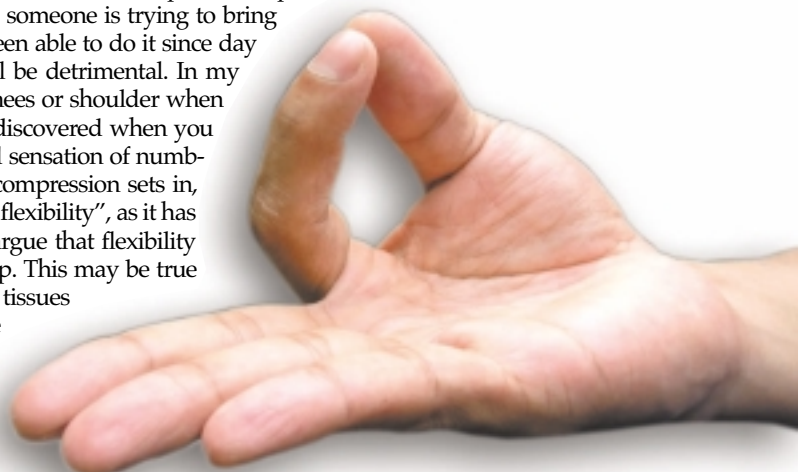
Every joint has a limited range of motion. Every muscle has its limited elasticity. In order to improve on our flexibility, we need to know how to work on our body safely with compassion. Our range of motion is determined 47% by the structure of the joint capsule and ligaments, 41% by fascia, 10% by tendons and 2% by the skin. This clearly states the importance to recognize the structure of our bones and working on connective tissues (i.e. ligaments, tendons and fascia), to effect a greater range of motion or flexibility.

Do we have a choice with our bone structure? People ask me if my legs are internally rotated, will yoga help me to become externally rotated. This is just some wrong views on yoga, thinking that it can change bone structure. Yoga does not promise to change anyone's bone structure. It cannot help you grow a longer hand for you to bind in a pose or to lengthen the neck to help you bring your chin to your chest.

What we can affect is Tension. When someone complains that his shoulder is tight and when we understand that it is due to stiff shoulder-blade, we can help to change the condition. This is because tension is due to poor elasticity of the muscle and fascia. If the person keeps a regular practice, the condition will improve. However, if someone is trying to bring his chin to his chest in a shoulder-stand and has never been able to do it since day one, by violently flexing the neck to reach the chest will be detrimental. In my years of practice, I have also seen people rapture their knees or shoulder when trying to bind their arms together. Compression can be discovered when you feel that one bone is hinging on another bone, a localized sensation of numbness can be felt when compression is too much. When compression sets in, there is nothing else that you can do to improve on your "flexibility", as it has already reached its maximum limit. Some people may argue that flexibility can be tremendously improved through a good warm-up. This may be true of the muscle on the surface, but not for deep connective tissues at the joints. Warm-ups bring more blood fluid to the muscle on the surface but this only makes the muscles more juicy and spongy very quickly. However,



Model: Soon Yoke Ngoh (Mei) Yoga Instructor



is All We Need

Victor Chng (Yin Yoga Teacher)

nothing changes at the joint, ligament, tendon or fascia. These are deep tissues which stabilize the structure when the body is in motion. Therefore, nothing happens through the warm-ups. The warm-up creates a big illusion that the joints have a greater range of motion, while the reality is that the muscle has changed but not the joints. Therefore, many people injure themselves at the ligament or tendon when doing active stretches.

Most of the yoga poses which we know today require us to do active stretches. Only Yin Yoga advocates staying in a pose in a passive way. Passive stretch brings the stretch much deeper into the connective tissues. Through relaxing the external body, the stretch penetrates from the external muscle to the fascia at the joint. In this way, flexibility is developed from an inside out approach. When this is achieved, you will find that the flexibility stays in the body longer and only little warm-up is required each time for you to perform.

When the muscles are actively stretched and relaxed, we actually bring more strength to the muscles. On the other hand, if we target the fascia surrounding a joint through passive holding, we bring flexibility to the joints. The former is a Yang way while the latter is a Yin way. Both are equally needed in the body.

Paul Grilley, (author of both a book and a DVD entitled Yin Yoga and also the creator of the Anatomy for Yoga DVD) says, "Yang tissues should be trained in the yang way and Yin tissues should be trained in the yin way". However, by mixing one with the other will not achieve the best results.

Flexibility of the joints is needed for us to feel the freedom of the body. When the body has more space, its spaciousness also transcends our emotions and mind. We begin to bring more love to the people around us; we become more accommodating, and more forgiving. We also find that we have greater capacity to cope with our daily live.

Earth, water, fire, air and space – the space element is that which brings us closer to "atman", the realization of our true nature. Thus space is all that we need. YL



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