GODDESS YOGA

with

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pranayama, asana, and meditation practices
TURN TO THIS PRANAYAMA PRACTICE IN TIMES OF TRANSFORMATION TO FREE YOURSELF FROM ANYTHING HOLDING YOU BACK.

Unexpected events in life can toss you into an irreversible matrix of change. You may feel devoured, stripped, and vulnerable, as you shed an old skin. Your ego holds onto its story, your rational mind tries to explain what is happening, and fear begins to control you. Humans tend to seek creation but not dissolution, do everything to fall in love but run away from heartbreak. And yet the two are forever intertwined in the dance of life and death. Even if you know change is coming, it is often terrifying and all too easy to deny.

MEET KALI, THE GODDESS OF TRANSFORMATION

In the yoga tradition, there is a dark goddess known as Kali who governs time, death, and change. Her fierce form is portrayed with gnashing fangs, a protruding tongue, disheveled hair, dripping blood, a garland of skulls, and a belt of severed arms, wielding weapons in every hand. Kali represents massive transformation, non-conformity, boundary-pushing, life and death cycles, responsibility and accountability for mistakes, karmic mess cleanup, wild and untamable sexuality, total surrender, and the intensity of love and compassion. Kali is the essence of Freedom and she is the force within that transforms fear and sets you free.

HOW TO USE KALI’S TEACHINGS

Kali often arrives in times of crisis, when your perspective is turned upside down: illness, heartbreak, financial loss, career change—anytime a new boundary is pushed. This fearsome goddess comes to devour what is no longer needed. She leads the way to transformation from within, standing for radical honesty and radical freedom from false attachments and delusions. When you resist, she draws out her swift sword to cut off the stubborn head of ego, reminding you what really matters in life. A friend recently said to me about Kali energy: “If a tsunami comes, you don’t care about your wallet and iPhone. You just run!” When Kali comes to you, certain things don’t matter anymore. Listen to the voice inside that is losing patience with the old way of doing things and let her be the initiatory force that begins to set you free.

DEFEAT FEAR WITH KALI’S SWORD BREATH

I learned this pranayama technique from a Himalayan yoga master named Suresh when I was 23 years old. This was one of our first breathing techniques we practiced each morning, barefoot in the mountains. Once I learned about Kali, I started calling this breath: “Kali’s Sword Breath.” Try it now—and in any time of change.
1 Kali’s Sword Breath
To begin, take a wide Goddess Pose stance and visualize you have Kali’s swift sword of freedom and detachment. This dynamic pranayama has three strong inhalations followed by a full exhalation through the mouth—Kali-style, tongue out.

2 First Inhalation
Bring your hands together below your navel, drawing them up the front of the body overhead.

3 Second Inhalation
From overhead position, expand your arms out wide to the sides and up.

4 Third Inhalation
Bring your hands back together below your navel, drawing them up the front of the body overhead again.

5 Full Exhalation
Staying relaxed in your body and grounded through your legs, swiftly pull your hands down the front of your body, leaning forward, and exhaling through your mouth with your tongue out. Visualize yourself cutting away negative habitual patterns and freeing yourself from false concepts that imprison you. Surrender into your heart and call forth the essence of Kali within you to transform fear into love.

Complete 10 rounds of this breath practice to honor the form of Kali with 10 arms.
YOUR INTUITION IS YOUR INNERMOST GPS AND ONE OF YOUR GREATEST ALLIES IN LIFE. SIANNA SHERMAN TEACHES YOU HOW TO CULTIVATE IT.

Intuition. You have it, whether you choose to follow it or ignore it, cultivate it or repress it. It is your innermost GPS and one of your greatest allies when it comes to making choices in your life.

Think of a time when you were at a crossroads. Your rational mind could measure choices and be very practical in assessing the situation, but maybe there was another underlying feeling that you couldn’t ignore. This feeling is beyond the logical mind and often difficult to explain. It is a knowing beyond reasoning or proof. In my own life, I experience this as an inner nudge or tug on my soul – something calling me forth in a new way and it requires tremendous courage to follow it.

I had a tough choice to make 25 years ago: follow my logical mind to medical school or follow my intuition to India. My rational mind was pushing me to do the seemingly “right thing,” and yet my instinctual voice was begging me to leave this path and dive into yoga. I remember one of my most trusted teachers saying to me: “We think the shortest path is from A to B, but the truth is that the shortest path is when you follow your heart.”

MEET SARASWATI, THE GODDESS OF INTUITION

In the yoga tradition, the Goddess Saraswati embodies the essence of intuition, creativity, and wisdom. Her name means “the flowing one.” She is the flash of insight, the instinctual knowing, and the knowledge that’s deeper than words. She is the connection with the cycles of the moon and the feminine rhythm that reveals wisdom from within. Saraswati is the free-flowing creative energy that lives within everyone.

HOW TO USE SARASWATI’S TEACHINGS

Saraswati teaches you to listen within and trust your intuition. Everyone has strong feelings, and it’s a challenge to trust your innermost knowing when it doesn’t make sense to your logical mind. Saraswati teaches you how to distinguish between the inner voice of Self and the unconscious fears and trickeries of a delusional mind. The powerhouse combination is intuition with discernment and we can cultivate this consciously with the practices of yoga.

3-STEP MEDITATION TO INSPIRE YOUR INTUITION

Use this practice to call on Saraswati whenever you need to remember your highest truth from within, when you are standing at a crossroads in life, and when your rational mind is dominating your decision-making. Ask for a balance of receptivity and courage to follow your highest path. Trust your intuition and follow the inner YES of your life.
1 Tratka, Candle Meditation

Sit facing a candle at third-eye level approximately 12 inches away from you. Let your eyes soften and gaze gently to the flame. Bring your awareness to the breath and rest within.

Still seated comfortably, place your hands on your knees. Inhale, rock to the front of your sitting bones and extend your spine forward with an open heart like Cow Pose (Bitilasana). Exhale, rock to the back of your sitting bones to flex your spine and look into your heart in Cat Pose (Marjaryasana). Repeat 10 times with long deep Ujjayi breathing. Come back to neutral and return your gaze to the candle.

2 Hamsa Meditation

Saraswati rides a swan, called hamsa, in Sanksrit. Hamsa is a mantra within the sound of the breath to help you clear your mind and listen within.

Staying seated, tune in to your breath. Softly listen for HAM on inhalation and SA on exhalation. Hamsa means “I AM THAT.” Feel the increasing state of relaxation and clarity as you gaze at the candle while inwardly chanting Ham and Sa. When you feel ready, close your eyes and continue chanting the mantra inside the breath for 10 minutes or longer.

3 Listen Within

Bring to mind any situation that is currently concerning you. Call on your inner GPS to guide you. Ask your intuitive knowing to rise up within you and reveal the most resonant path for your soul to flourish. Spend as long here as you need, allowing ample time for the answers to come. When you are finished, lie down in Savasana to receive and assimilate the effects of your practice.
A creative sequence to help you NAVIGATE TOUGH EMOTIONS

WE ALL KNOW WHAT it’s like to feel knotted up in our hearts because we are holding blame and resentment toward others, shaming ourselves for past actions, or armoring ourselves against the inevitable pain of heartbreak. Humans will go to great extremes to avoid pain, but uncomfortable feelings can be fertile ground for transformation and real growth. This practice invokes the power of Tara, the Hindu goddess of compassion, to help you face the discomfort and reap the rewards. It gently opens the hips, hamstrings, and heart; in so doing, it helps us tap into the elixir of forgiveness and self-compassion that begins to flow unrestricted within as we start to dissolve the walls of hardness and separation caused by our resentment, guilt, and fear. This work can be difficult, but it is worth every bit of our effort. After all, it’s not until we can forgive ourselves and others that we are able to experience true liberation.

1 Indudalasana Seated, with Chin Mudra
Crescent Pose
Sit in a comfortable position, bring your hands to Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal: hands to prayer at the heart), and offer an intention for your practice to help you with forgiveness. Inhale to lengthen your spine. Exhale and lean to the left, placing your left hand to your mat, beside your left hip. Extend your right arm overhead in a graceful way with Chin Mudra (index finger and thumb connected to make the energy seal of consciousness). Inhale back to center, exhale, and repeat on the right side. Follow the rhythm of your breath as you sway side to side for several breaths. Visualize yourself as the flow of forgiveness in the tidal rhythm of Ujjayi Pranayama (Victorious Breath or Ocean Breath).

2 Shakti Waves in Adho Mukha Svanasana
Feminine Energy Waves in Downward-Facing Dog Pose
Step back to Downward-Facing Dog Pose. Create a clear intention to release resentment, blame, and shame. Lift your heels, bend your knees, and move like water through your entire spine, hips, and legs. Visualize Tara as the Ocean of Compassion undulating through your spine. Move the waves in the opposite direction, too. Breathe with Ujjayi. After 1–2 minutes, rest in the stillness of Down Dog while bathing in the inner flow. The wavelike movements help to release stagnant energy that blocks the flow of forgiveness.

3 Balasana and Bhujangasana Waves
Child’s Pose and Cobra Pose Waves
From Down Dog, shift your hips back to Child’s Pose, with your knees together. Stretch your arms gently in front of you. Inhale as you slide forward low to the ground and curl up into Cobra Pose. Anchor your shoulders back and sweep the base of your shoulder blades into the back of your heart. Exhale as you push down into the ground, round your back, and roll through your spine back to Child’s Pose. Continue in this circular way: Inhale forward with spinal extension into Cobra and exhale back with spinal flexion into Child’s Pose. Repeat several times, or for as long as you like. This vinyasa releases places of resistance in the front and back of the heart.
**4 Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana**  
Three-Legged Downward-Facing Dog Pose

Begin in Down Dog. Consider any rigid places in your life and ask to live with greater generosity. Lift your right leg up behind you, squeeze to the midline, and turn the inner thigh up to the sky. Bend your right knee and open up the hip and thigh with external rotation. Imagine you are sending massive amounts of compassion from your heart out into the world as you stretch open. After 5 breaths, step your right leg forward into a Low Lunge.

**5 Parivrtta Eka Pada Raja-kapotasana 2, prep**  
Revolved Monkey Lunge Pose, prep

With your right foot forward in a Low Lunge, lower your left knee to the ground, curl your back toes under, and bring both hands inside the front foot. Turn your right foot out with the knee pointing toward the toes. Bend your left knee and catch your left foot with your right hand, pressing your foot into your hand. To go deeper, lower to your left forearm. Breathe deeply for 5–8 Ujjayi breaths. Step back into Down Dog. Repeat poses 4 and 5 on the second side.

**6 Camatkarasana**  
Wild Thing Pose

From Down Dog, shift your weight onto your right hand, lift your hips high, step your left foot behind your right leg, lift your left heel, press down through the mound of the foot, and bring your left hand over the base of your heart. Tiger-paw your right hand into the ground (claw your hand into the earth for a steady foundation), anchor the right shoulder back, and lift your shoulder blades into the back of your heart; breathe deeply for 5–8 Ujjayi breaths. As you press your left hand into your chest, rise up from inside your heart and expand your power to love.

**7 Utkata Konasana**  
Goddess Pose, with Yoni Mudra

Stand with your feet wide. Turn your feet out and bend your knees over your ankles. Bring your thumbs together at the navel, and your index fingers to your pubic bone. Spread your fingers open with the palms of your hands on your low belly. This mudra represents the loving power of feminine energy for compassion, forgiveness, and creative possibility. Be soft in your belly and breathe for 5–8 Ujjayi breaths.
8 Prasarita Padottanasana
Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend
Stay in a wide stance and turn your feet forward. Bring your hands to your hips. Engage your leg muscles evenly, anchor your inner thighs back, and tone your low belly. Hinge your hips back and fold forward. Hold your big toes with your middle and index fingers and your thumbs. Inhale to lengthen your spine and gaze up. Exhale as you fold in, bend your elbows wide to the sides, and press your shoulder blades into your heart. Breathe deeply for several rounds of breath. Inhale and root down through your leg bones to rise up tall through your spine.

9 Malasana
Garland Pose
Come into a squat with your feet together, knees apart, and hands in Anjali Mudra. To modify, separate your feet wider and turn them out. Keep your knees pointing in the same direction as your toes. If your heels do not reach the ground, place a blanket under them. Rest your forehead into the thumbs of your hands, your third eye into the prayer of your heart. Ask for clarity, discernment, and forgiveness to flow through you.

10 Janu Sirsasana, flow
Head-of-the-Knee Pose, flow
Come to seated. Stretch your left leg forward, bring your right foot to your upper inner left thigh, and bend your right knee back, slightly wider than 90 degrees. Engage your leg muscles, spin your inner thighs to the earth, and tone your belly. Hold your left foot with your right hand (or strap), and lengthen forward to fold in. You can hold your left wrist with your right hand. Relax, taking several breaths, and listen for what is asking to be healed through forgiveness. Inhale to rise up, and tiger-paw your right hand into the earth behind your hips. Sweep your left arm gracefully overhead as you lift your hips into the sky and open through your heart. Stretch your left leg straight, ground the heel, and flex the foot. Stay grounded through your right shin as you breathe in with forgiveness for yourself, and breathe out with forgiveness for others.

11 Upavistha Konasana
Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend
Come into a wide seated position with your legs 90–120 degrees apart. Engage your leg muscles and sit tall through your spine. Spiral your inner thighs to the earth and draw your low back in. If your low back is rounded, sit up on a blanket. Walk your hands out in front of you and extend forward with a long spine. Ground your heels and root your thighbones into the earth. Upon reaching all the way forward, bring your hands together into a prayer above your head. You can modify by supporting your elbows on a block or bolster with as much height as needed. With every inhale, lengthen your spine; with every exhale, soften and deepen into the pose.
12 Hindolasana  Cradle Pose
From a seated position, draw your left leg up to cradle it, and bend your right leg in front of you. Spread the toes of your left foot and equally engage both sides of your left ankle to prevent the foot from sickling. Place your left knee in your left-elbow crease and your left foot in your right-elbow crease. Rest into your breath and gently rock from side to side. The hips and pelvic area often hold tension, fear, and anxiety. Be gentle with yourself as you breathe into the areas of tension. Exhale and release the tension; inhale and nourish yourself.

13 Tarasana  Starlight Pose
Place a block about 20 inches in front of you. Bring both heels to each side of the block and flex your feet. Manually adjust your inner thighs and create an inner spiral of the thighs toward the earth. Place your fingertips behind your hips, elongate your spine, and breathe deeply. Draw your low back in and tone your low belly. Inhale to lengthen your spine; exhale, and with a long spine, extend forward and walk out to your fingertips. Rest your forehead on the block. Breathe here for several breaths. Then place your elbows on the block, bring your hands together, and return to your forgiveness prayer.

14 Seated Tara, with Bhumi Sparsha Mudra  “Touching the Earth” and “Earth Witness” Mudra
Tara is the goddess of compassion, and she is typically pictured with one foot ready to spring into action. Sit with your left leg bent and your foot on the floor. Bend your right knee in a comfortable seated position and relax into your inner wisdom. Touch your right hand to your heart to call upon true forgiveness, and lightly touch the earth with your left hand. Relax in your body and stay as long as you like. Repeat on the other side.

15 Full Danda Pranam, with Anjali Mudra  Staff Offering Pose, with Salutation Seal
Lie on your belly and extend your arms straight alongside your ears, with hands together in prayer. Rest with your third eye, heart, belly, and entire front body down into the earth. Offer up the fruits of your practice and release attachments to any particular outcome in your life. Bring your hands to Anjali Mudra, keeping your elbows down and lifting your prayer hands up to the sky. Allow the elixir of forgiveness to flow through every part of you and give thanks to Tara, the goddess of compassion, for springing into action for all beings.
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