Sharing the Mat

Three well-known teachers and practitioners of yoga and Buddhist meditation discuss the benefits and pitfalls of bringing both to your mat.

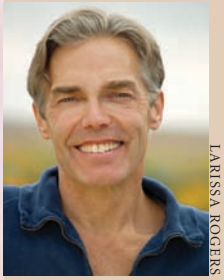
SHAMBHALA SUN: Perhaps each of you could start by giving us a brief description of your yoga and meditation practice.

PHILLIP MOFFITT: My primary practice is Theravada meditation. This includes Vipassana mindfulness meditation, as well as the other concentration meditations that are part of the tradition, known as the *jhana* absorptions. For the last thirty-eight years I have had a hatha yoga practice, and at various times I have done other movement practices, including aikido and awareness-through-movement practices. I encourage everybody I teach to have a movement practice and a sitting practice, because I think they supplement each other so well.

ANNE CUSHMAN: My practice, like Phillip's, has combined movement practices, primarily hatha yoga, with various Buddhist practices. They've gone together for me for about twenty-five years at this point. I am a mother, so that is a big part of my practice as well. I do between forty-five minutes to an hour and a half of asana yoga practice a day and between fifteen minutes to half an hour of sitting practice, depending on the time I have available. Whether I do more sitting practice or more asana practice varies depending on the needs of my body and mind and energy systems on that particular day.

RICHARD FREEMAN: My primary practice is ashtanga yoga. That includes yoga asana and pranayama breath practice, and then I practice with mantra

RICHARD FREEMAN has been a student of yoga for more than thirty-five years. He lives in Boulder, Colorado, where he is the director of the Yoga Workshop.



LARISSA ROGERS

PHILLIP MOFFITT is a member of the teaching council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and the founder and president of the Life Balance Institute.

ANNE CUSHMAN has been practicing yoga and Buddhist meditation for more than twenty-five years. She is the West Coast editor of Tricycle *and a contributing editor to* Yoga Journal.

CYNTHIA SMALLEY

and chants. I practice probably two to three hours a day, and as part of that I do sitting meditation for about ten to fifteen minutes. I do Buddhist retreats throughout the year. Sometimes I teach yoga asana practice at the retreats while a Buddhist co-presenter teaches meditation.

So I am probably weighted on the side of the hatha yoga tradition, with a sprinkling of the buddhadharma to make the context interesting. Actually, my first teacher was a Zen roshi, and ever since then I have looked at hatha yoga practice within the overall view of the dharma. I still look at most of the Hindu disciplines in that context.

SHAMBHALA SUN: We normally think of spiritual practice as working primarily with the mind or soul or spirit. Why is it helpful to have a movement or posture practice as well?

PHILLIP MOFFITT: If you're actually going to take dharma into daily life, awareness of the body is the single most useful thing you can have, because the body is always there. Lots of times you can't remember to do the other practices. You may not remember, "Oh, these are my values, or this is what I want to be paying attention to, or this is how I want to act," because you get caught up in your emotional reactivity. But in my experience, almost everybody can develop a ground of awareness through awareness of the body in this moment. They can get used to coming back and resting in an awareness of the body—whether they're sitting in a meeting or working at their computer, they can still be aware of their body. They don't have to lose themselves.

RICHARD FREEMAN: People who simply do sitting meditation can develop a kind of a crust around themselves, in which they avoid temptation, avoid feeling, and avoid the groundedness of the body. On the other hand, while hatha yoga practice is extremely helpful, it runs the danger of people not practicing it mindfully. So body and mind practices are kind of an antidote for each other. Historically, this has been expressed as the joining of raja yoga, which would be considered contemplative practice, and hatha yoga, which is primarily energy work. When the two come together there's success in practice.

ANNE CUSHMAN: In my experience, the state of my mind and heart is profoundly influenced by and intertwined with the state of my body and energy system. They are a continuum of experience that can't be neatly broken down into units—here is the mind and here is the body. I find that working with the body can be the doorway to a kind of spacious, calm, and steady awareness that is harder for me to access if my body and nervous system are stressed. By doing yoga practice I can dissolve some of the barriers to awareness that might take me a long time to deal with through sitting practice alone.

We live in a time when our bodies and nervous systems are be-

ing battered by a level of stimulation, agitation, speed, and information that is unprecedented in the history of the human organism. The hatha yoga practices of working with the body, breath, and energy system can calm down and rebalance that extra agitation so we can come back to a more natural and balanced state of being. It's a question of undoing, rather than doing. We're doing the yoga practice to return to a more natural and calm state, in which we can rest in seated meditation more easily.

PHILLIP MOFFITT: The most detailed explanation that the Buddha gave of how to practice meditation is the *Satipatthana Sutra*, in which he describes four fundamental ways of developing insight into the true nature of oneself and of the world. They're called the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, and the very first foundation is awareness of body. He describes this as awareness of the body *in* the body. You're not observing the body from some distant place—you're actually feeling all the aspects of the body, whether it's the ouch of the body, the pleasure of the body, or the way the body is always changing.

The Buddha says there are four basic postures in which we develop awareness of the body: sitting, lying down, walking, and standing. This is the kind of awareness of the body that can come through hatha yoga. Also, insight can arise while you're doing yoga. You can watch the mind while you are doing your asana; every asana is an opportunity to watch the mind.

RICHARD FREEMAN: What is the difference between the body and the mind, ultimately? One of the axioms of yoga is that the mind, or *chitta*, and the internal breath of energy, *prana*, are really two ends of the same stick. So all of our sensations, feelings, and thought forms actually correspond to fluctuations of our prana.

PHILLIP MOFFITT: To do hatha yoga without pranayama—without working with the breath—would not be practicing full awareness of the body. The breath and the body are entwined and both are reflected in the mind.

ANNE CUSHMAN: I can observe in my own practice that thoughts have an immediate impact on the body, which is sometimes quite dramatic, and that working with the body has an immediate effect on what we would call the mind. In the traditional yoga model, the body is seen as increasingly subtle layers, or sheets, that interpenetrate each other, so that the mind and the physical body are actually interpenetrating layers of reality rather than separate entities.

SHAMBHALA SUN: We're having this conversation because a lot of Western practitioners want both a body and a mind practice, and they're finding it in the combination of hatha yoga and Buddhist meditation. What are the potential problems in combining different traditions like this?

RICHARD FREEMAN: Today in the West we are being overwhelmed by the variety of lineages and practices we can choose from. Most of these are imported practices, which means we don't have particular obligations in terms of our family or culture to favor one over the other. We are in the position to look at all of them and ask, What does it all mean? Can we legitimately borrow from one and then borrow from another? Can we synthesize them? At what point is that appropriate? That makes it very challenging for practitioners, yet I think it's a fantastic opportunity to really get to the bottom of the practice.

On the other hand, we always run the risk of becoming watered-down eclectics, using the fact that there are alternative practices to avoid going deeply into any one of them. —RICHARD FREEMAN

On the other hand, we always run the risk of becoming watered-down eclectics, using the fact that there are alternative practices and views to avoid going deeply into any one of them. If a practice is legitimate, at a certain point it's going to make us face things as they are. We're going to have to face the fact of impermanence and death, and that's very difficult. Often people will bail out at that moment and jump to a different tradition. Then they'll stay with that one until the same crisis arises, and they'll jump to a different school. That's why we need a lot of communication with a good teacher, so that they can check whether we're avoiding something or actually facing reality. We should never just assume that what we're doing is the right thing.

SHAMBHALA SUN: While yoga is of course an ancient and profound spiritual tradition, it's now being practiced by millions of people in the West with a wide range of motivations. A recent article in *Atlantic Monthly* called American yoga the unlikely joining of gym and church. How would you characterize the spiritual side of American yoga? Overall, is it more gym or more church?

RICHARD FREEMAN: We see everything from utterly materialistic yoga practice, in which people are looking purely to enhance the beauty of their body, all the way across the spectrum to yoga practice as a form of inquiry into reality. It's my perception that the big fad of yoga is probably weighted a little bit toward the materialistic side, where people are simply looking for some kind of pleasure that works. But I'm also sympathetic to that type of practice. I think people find that

unless they follow the practice to its end, it doesn't really work as a permanent source of pleasure. So at least people are getting a good start and going to the right source. Then they have an opportunity to discover what the practice is really about. I'm optimistic about the overall state of affairs in the yoga world.

ANNE CUSHMAN: I find that many people come to yoga with one set of goals or expectations and find those goals shifting and deepening over time. Someone can begin a yoga practice with the most superficial of motivations—wanting to look better in a bathing suit—and then over time their life transforms to the point where they want to seek out deeper teachings.

So even the superficial approach can be a doorway into deeper realizations. Even if people seem to be drawn to yoga for the most superficial of motives, they are actually looking for the relief of suffering, and that is the beginning of the spiritual quest. Then they may find that the more superficial approaches to the practice don't address the roots of their suffering. That's when people want to go deeper.

PHILLIP MOFFIT: When I started doing yoga, nobody talked about coming in to look better, although some people were doing it for health reasons. People at that time were looking for a spiritual path. Then we had this odd experience that as hatha yoga became popular, it became far more materialistic. But what originally attracted people wasn't materialistic, at least in my experience.

SHAMBHALA SUN: It's clear that a lot of people doing yoga want more than just fitness. They're looking for a spiritual practice. Given that yoga itself is an authentic spiritual practice, why should they turn to Buddhism, as many are doing?

RICHARD FREEMAN: On a very practical level, Buddhist communities are well-organized to conduct sitting retreats. In the more traditional yoga lineages, one learns the meditation and then goes off and practices in retreat, but not often with a large group of people. What the Buddhist communities do so well is conduct practical meditation sessions in a way that's very inclusive. The simplicity of the mindfulness-awareness approach is that it doesn't require a theological commitment. It doesn't require a secret mantra; it just puts you face-to-face with your breath and your mind, allowing people to get started right away with the meditation practice. I think that's wonderful. So here in Boulder, which is a great Buddhist center, I try to take full advantage of the local resources, and I encourage all my yoga students to meditate.

PHILLIP MOFFITT: I agree. The mindfulness-awareness practice offers a direct experience for students who want to deepen their understanding. It does not require that they embrace any kind of philosophy or theological system. So that inclusiveness is the first thing that Buddhism offers. Second, Buddhism offers a systematic approach to learning about and working with the mind, and that's empowering. It's not like surrendering to someone else's authority. You're gaining your own understanding, your own techniques. That's very useful.

Third, Buddhism is good at deconstructing experience. Therefore it allows you to see all your life's experiences more clearly, including your practice. Because you deconstruct your experiences, you cease to be hypnotized by what's pleasant and unpleasant about them.

ANNE CUSHMAN: The yogic path is complex and diverse, and one of its beauties is that there are different paths for different people. I would never say that Buddhism is the path that everybody ought to turn to. I think it's a question

Mindfulness of Body

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA says that mindfulness of body—of our real body, not the mental version we usually experience—is what stops our spiritual practice from spinning off into fantasy.

MINDFULNESS OF BODY, the foundation of mindfulness, is connected with the need for a sense of being, a sense of groundedness.

To begin with, there is some problem about what we understand by *body*. We sit on chairs or on the ground; we eat; we sleep; we wear clothes. But the body we relate with in going through these activities is questionable. According to the tradition, the body we think we have is what is known as psychosomatic body. It is largely based on projections and concepts of body. This psychosomatic body contrasts with the enlightened person's sense of body, which might be called "body-body." This sense of body is free from conceptualizations. It is just simple and straightforward. There is a direct relationship with the earth. As for us, we do not actually have a relationship with the earth. We have some relationship with body, but it is very uncertain and erratic. We flicker back and forth between body and something else—fantasies, ideas. That seems to be our basic situation.

The asana of meditation: one of the five lohan (arhat) statues, which Chögyam Trungpa considered outstanding examples of sitting meditation posture.

LUOHAN, CHINESE, (907-1234). THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART, KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI. PURCHASE: NELSON TRUST, 34-6. PHOTO: JAMISON MILLER

Even though the psychosomatic body is constituted by projections of body, it can be quite solid in terms of those projections. We have expectations concerning the existence of this body; therefore we have to refuel it, entertain it, wash it. Through this psychosomatic body we are able to experience a sense of being. For instance, as you listen to this talk, you feel that you are sitting on the ground. But your sitting here at this point is not actually very much a matter of your body per se sitting on the ground; it is far more a matter of your psychosomatic body sitting on the ground. You are somewhat involved in sitting per se, but at the same time you are not. Mind is doing it; concept is doing it. Your mind is shaping the situation in accordance with your body. Your mind is sitting on the ground. Your mind is taking notes. Your mind is wearing glasses. Your mind has such-and-such a hairdo; your mind is wearing such-and-such clothes. Everyone is creating a world according to the body situation, but largely out of contact with it. That is the psychosomatic process.

Mindfulness of body brings this all-pervasive, mind-imitating-body activity into the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation has to take into account that mind continually shapes itself into body*like* attitudes. Consequently, since the time of Buddha, sitting meditation has been recommended and practiced, and it has proved to be the best way of dealing with this situation. Mindfulness of body plays a very important role in this technique. In this case, mindfulness means that when you sit and meditate, you actually do sit. You actually do sit, as far as the psychosomatic body is concerned. You feel the ground, body, breath, temperature. You don't try specifically to watch and keep track of what is going on. You don't try to formalize the sitting situation and make it into some special activity that you are performing. You just sit. And then you begin to feel that there is some sense of groundedness. This is not particularly a product of being deliberate, but it is more the force of the actual fact of being there. So you sit. And you sit. And you breathe. And you sit and you breathe. Sometimes you think, but still you are thinking sitting thoughts. The psychosomatic body is sitting, so your thoughts have a flat bottom.

Mindfulness of body is connected with the earth. It is an openness that has a base, a foundation. A quality of expansive awareness develops through mindfulness of body—a sense of being settled and of therefore being able to afford to open out.

Mindfulness of body means just trying to remain a human being, an ordinary human being. The basic starting point for this is solidness, groundedness. When you sit, you actually sit. Even your floating thoughts begin to sit on their own bottoms. There are no particular problems. You have a sense of solidness and groundedness, and, at the same time, a sense of being.

Without this particular foundation of mindfulness, the rest of your meditation practice could be very airy-fairy—vacillating back and forth, trying this and trying that. You could be constantly tiptoeing on the surface of the universe, not actually getting a foothold anywhere. You could become an eternal hitchhiker. So with this first technique you develop some basic solidness. In mindfulness of body, there is a sense of finding some home ground. ♦

Adapted from "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness," from The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa, Volume Three. *© 2003 by Diana J. Mukpo. Published by Shambhala Publications.*

of temperament and conditioning and the nature of the pain that you are struggling with. For many people, yoga may be better suited to their nature. Of course, there are multiple philosophies and schools within Buddhism, as there are multiple schools within yoga. That's part of the delicious confusion that Richard was talking about earlier, in which there are a lot of different practices offered, many of them lifted out of their cultural context. Practitioners really get to see which ones resonate and serve them at a particular time in their spiritual development. Many people are drawn to a Buddhist tradition because it's the philosophy that makes the most sense to them. They try out the practice, they find it skillful, and they progress. Other people are drawn to different threads of the yogic path.

SHAMBHALA SUN: Turning the question around, Buddhism has its own body practices. Many are advanced practices, but the sitting posture itself is a form of asana. So why are many Buddhists doing hatha yoga?

RICHARD FREEMAN: I think one of the advantages of "importing" hatha yoga into the Buddhist community is that the current state of yoga asana technology arising out of India is very good. It's just a very wonderful practice. I know the Tibetan system usually requires years of sitting practice before students are allowed to study the tantric yoga practices. A lot of those practices are not taught to large numbers of people, whereas millions of people practice hatha yoga.

If they're shopping around for hatha yoga, I think Buddhists should look outside of the Buddhist community for the latest updates, the most efficient information about how to do it. Conversely, the non-Buddhist community—I don't want to use the word "Hindu" because that's too confusing a label—should look to the Buddhist community to see how to present the essence of the Vedanta in a very non-sectarian, compassionate way.

ANNE CUSHMAN: Hatha yoga was always meant to be practiced in conjunction with the path of meditation. If you look at the earliest hatha yoga texts, they all say that this is not designed to be practiced separately; it's designed explicitly to support the practice of meditation. It's designed to stabilize the body and open the energy systems, so that there's more energy and alertness available for meditation.

In terms of my own sitting practice, I've found it's more efficient for me to incorporate movement because I can balance

Yoga Posturers and Dharma Dabblers *Buddhism at a yoga center?*

WITH YOGA AND MEDITATION so popular now, yoga studios and Buddhist centers are popping up that claim to incorporate both practices. But this blending isn't always in the students' best interests. Without proper training, neither meditation instructors who dabble in yoga nor yoga instructors who dabble in meditation can show students the full benefits of the practices. Still worse, the yoga teacher who teaches fuddled meditation can permanently turn students off it, and the meditation instructor who teaches fuddled yoga can land students in physiotherapy. So how can you know if the local yoga instructor has the know-how to teach mediation or if the monk at the weekend retreat really has it to teach asana? Here are some guidelines:

RECOGNIZED QUALIFICATIONS

Find out what kind of meditation you're being taught. There is no regulating body that has devised universal standards for meditation instructors, but many Buddhist lineages have set ways of granting authority to teach. "If someone is presenting themselves as a teacher within a particular tradition, then they should have gone through the training matrix of their lineage and been authorized by an acknowledged lineage holder," says Frank Jude Boccio, the author of *Mindfulness Yoga*. On the other hand, if someone is teaching an eclectic mix of meditation styles, they might not have official transmission to teach; in that case, prospective students will have to judge the instructor's qualifications for themselves. People develop a mature practice at different rates, but that's what students need—an instructor with a mature practice—and it generally takes at least three to five years to develop one. So ask your teacher how long he or she has been sitting on the cushion.

Until recently, yoga was like meditation: there were no national teaching standards. Now, however, the Yoga Alliance has established basic criteria. It maintains a registry of teacher-training programs that require a set number of hours of learning technique, teaching methodology, anatomy, and philosophy. Although there are excellent yoga instructors who began teaching decades before Yoga Alliance was established, if you are choosing a teacher from the younger generation, try finding one who has completed a registered program. And ask prospective teachers over what period of time they did their course. Was it a 200-hour program jammed into a couple of weeks or was it spread out over a period of months? It takes time to assimilate the material and you want a teacher who took that time.

out the energy systems in my body so that I can sit more easily. In the short term this makes my sitting more efficient. In the longer term, the asana and pranayama practices can be skillful means for working with the different hindrances that arise in longer periods of practice, such as lethargy, torpor, agitation, or anxiety. Not as a way of eliminating these, but as a way of balancing out the energy systems so we can look more clearly at the roots of these obstacles without getting stuck in their surface manifestations.

PHILLIP MOFFITT: The Buddha abandoned the path of rejecting the body. For a long time he was an ascetic, but he only gained his profound understanding after he said, "That's not the way; there is a more balanced approach." To me, asana practice adds this kind of balance to sitting practice. It's in keeping with the view that we're not rejecting the body, we're not saying there's something wrong with the body. The body is fine, and it's to be met with compassion and loving-kindness. It's just that we just don't overly identify with it. Asana practice reflects that view of the body, so I think it's a great fit.

SHAMBHALA SUN: Are there issues about the qualifications of yoga instructors teaching Buddhist practice, as well as Buddhist centers offering yoga?

Yoga at a Buddhist center? ANDREA MILLER *on how to make sure they're qualified.*

WALK THE TALK

Recognized qualifications are a good place to start, but, says Janice Gates, an instructor for the Mindfulness Yoga and Meditation Training Program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, "credentials don't mean anything if the person hasn't embodied the teachings." So ask prospective instructors how their practices influence their lives.

If they are serious about yoga and meditation, they'll have a regular practice of both and they'll be continuing to study with their own teachers. They will not just espouse the principles inherent in both Buddhism and yoga but will live them. "Is the teacher compassionate?" asks Gates. "Do they send mixed messages ('Do as I say, not as I do')? Or do they speak negatively about people?" If so, then perhaps you need to find another teacher.

EXPERIENCE

"There are teachers who seem to slide effortlessly into their role, but that's rare," says Gates. "Usually it takes a few years to get a feel for it." Look for teachers who have been teaching for at least two years and who have taught a variety of levels. That way they'll be more likely to know how to deal with whatever stumbling blocks you happen to encounter.

TEACHING WHO'S THERE

"It's important that the instructor teaches who is really there and doesn't just teach to some abstraction," says Boccio. In both yoga and meditation classes, teaching the people who are actually in the class means being a good listener and then having the skills to respond accordingly. Sometimes the necessary skill is just forgetting about the agenda and letting students stay with what they're practicing until they feel comfortable moving on. But sometimes, especially in yoga, the necessary skills are more involved. Yoga instructors, for example, should be able to recognize the physical difficulties students are having and offer solutions through the use of props and effective, non-aggressive assists. Also, keep in mind that yoga is not a one-size-fits-all practice, and instructors who only know one sequence of poses probably don't know how to tailor yoga to individual students' needs.

TRUST YOUR GUT

Is the yoga instructor qualified to teach meditation? Is the meditation instructor qualified to teach yoga? After taking into account all of the rules of thumb, trust your instincts. After all, says Boccio, "The final grantor of all authority is the student." ♦

Generation Y(oga)

For people under thirty-five, says WAYLON LEWIS*, yoga is an important expression of spiritual and social values.*

GO TO SNARF'S, a beach bum's sandwich paradise, any day of the week and you'll see a hip, fit crowd hanging on the sidewalk outside Richard Freeman's legendary Yoga Workshop in Boulder, Colorado. When one class ends, or just before another begins, a momentary social scene arises that any one of the advertisers in this magazine would die to spend five minutes with. We come for the yoga, sure, but we stay (outside, on the sidewalk) for the conversation, the phone numbers, the Friday-night plans.

Generation "Y" yoga buffs congregating between classes at the front door of Richard Freeman's Yoga Workshop in Boulder, Colorado.

I'm a Buddhist. I *call* myself a Buddhist. And I practice yoga. I practice it not at all when I'm really busy, once or twice a week regularly, and other weeks maybe three or four times. But I don't *call* myself a yogi. A yogi, I think, is an emaciated Indian with a painted face and long hair in full lotus doing some sort of rude trick with himself.

But I do consider myself—and proudly—part of the yoga culture. So do my brothers and sisters my age (32) and younger. We like to go out. We like to work hard. We like to wear organic cotton and even hemp (Natural High, that is, not that hippie stuff) and shop at our local Co-op or Whole Foods. We like to drink organic wine at art galleries and check out the other men and women pretending to check out the art.

Yoga is spiritual, sure, in the way Buddhism is spiritual. It's got *niyamas* and *sutras* and all sorts of things. But, by and large, 15.7 million Americans aren't practicing yoga for it's niyamas and sutras—we're practicing yoga for its *asanas* (postures), *vinyasas* (movements), and *calories* (burned). We're practicing it to stay limber, to meet girls, or (futilely) to get away from guys who are just trying to meet girls. We're practicing it to have an hour or two a day when we aren't in the vice of our burgeoning careers, on the treadmill that is our daily life. We're young, we care about the future of the world, we eat organic, live sustainably, and have a host of rationalizations about why we drive an SUV along the way.

So I'm a Buddhist. But if you asked me whether I thought yoga or buddhadharma was more important in the U.S., I'd have to think about it. For about half a second. Buddhism is to enlightened social action as hybrids are to ending global warming. It's a nice thought, but it isn't in and of itself going to reverse the rising tide.

Yoga, on the other hand, is all social action. It's outward facing. If you practice yoga—and I should know, in my line of work—you care not only about yoga but also about organics, sustainability in design and everyday life, meditation, the arts, "eco-fashion," politics, and spending your dollars on independent, local businesses.

And that's a wonderful thing. For we've had three generations in a row—X, Y, and now Z—who haven't made enough of a mark to earn themselves a name. Young people are supposed to be about youthful idealism, even arrogance—"We can do it better than you, old man!"—but all we do is ski and Xbox and drink Red Bull mixed with vodka. So for those youthful idealists who dream of more than MTV *Beach Party*, yoga serves as a linchpin to a life with meaning. Whether you're asking if your sushi is sustainably harvested, drinking "for-here" so as not to waste a to-go cup, buying as much organic as possible when dining or grocery shopping, meditating in the morning, yogaing at lunch, supporting independent businesses over chains—every moment of your day becomes an opportunity to practice mindfulness.

You want to change the world and have a good time doing so? Get thee to a yoga class. ♦

WAYLON H. LEWIS is a "Dharma Brat"—a second-generation Western Buddhist—and the founder of elephant*, a free eco/yoga/dharma magazine based in Boulder.*

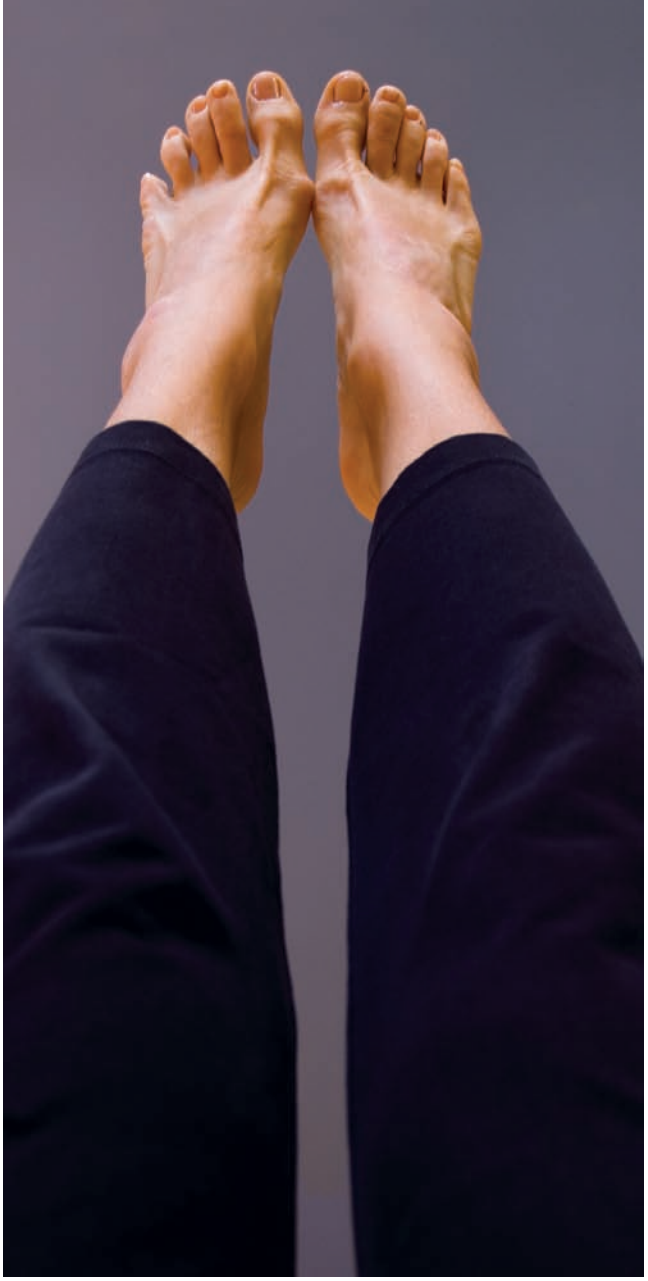
PHILLIP MOFFITT: One of the things that has been of concern to me is that teachers get a little bit of exposure to one of the traditions and then they bring it into the other without really understanding it. That was part of Spirit Rock's motivation in offering, with the Kripalu Center, a mindfulness meditation program for yoga teachers. We know by word of mouth that a lot of yoga teachers are doing short mindfulness meditation periods at the end of their yoga classes, and they are using the language of mindfulness in teaching asana. They may have learned mindfulness practice on a retreat or something, but have not really had any instruction or anyone helping them incorporate it into their yoga teaching. Our idea was to offer the traditions side by side, making the overlaps clear but not mushing the two together.

ANNE CUSHMAN: The Spirit Rock program was designed to offer to the hatha yoga community an opportunity to go deeply into the meditation dimensions of yoga practice in a way that's not normally taught in your average yoga class, or even in your average yoga teacher training. The program offers in-depth training in meditation practice for people coming from the yoga world, and it offers the Buddhist community an opportunity to explore more deeply all of the sophisticated practices of hatha yoga as a support for meditation practice. The program consists of three ten-day retreats over the course of a year and a half, led by teachers from the different schools of the hatha yoga tradition and from the Buddhist tradition. All of the yoga teachers are experienced in Buddhist meditation and all of the meditation teachers have some experience with hatha yoga. In between the retreats, there's a comprehensive curriculum of reading and practice to develop a solid home practice that integrates asana, pranayama, and meditation, while continuing to deepen the practitioner's understanding of the philosophy and history of the two traditions.

SHAMBHALA SUN: Where do you think this exchange between yoga and Buddhism is going to end up? Is it going to be a significant development in Western spirituality or just a fad?

PHILLIP MOFFITT: If we look at the history over the last 2,500 years, there's never an end. It always loops around! At the great Indian university of Nalanda, the scholars were there and the practitioners were there. It all gets meshed together in various ways and it's always changing. So I don't have some big vision of how the meeting of Buddhism and yoga is supposed to be or how it's going to turn out. To me, taking people deeper and with more clarity is the goal, and then we just let it evolve.

ANNE CUSHMAN: I'll go out on a limb and predict that there are going to be more and more Buddhist retreats that incorporate hatha yoga as a significant part of the practice.



I think that's going to happen everywhere in the Buddhist world because these techniques are so powerful in terms of supporting Buddhist meditation practices.

RICHARD FREEMAN: I don't think there's going to be a single synthesis arising in which all of the yoga schools and all of the Buddhist schools understand their essential interpenetration and become one big, monolithic, happy family. But I have a feeling that communication is really opening up, and that people are no longer afraid to consider other traditions, to consider that maybe other schools have a least a couple of good points to make. This more open attitude is going to generate a lot more practice and insight, because in the past people have not wanted to even look at a book from another tradition. But the world is getting smaller as we communicate more and more, and we may find that what we think are fundamental differences aren't that solid and important. I think there's going to be a lot of life coming out of this exchange. ♦