

Anusara Yoga Is A Practice In Awareness

By Bo Srey

Over the years of practicing yoga and meditation, one thing I can say that has deepened with true benefit in my life is Awareness. There are many different scriptures, different paths, different teachings that try to lead us to this very special place. There are techniques that focus on the mind, techniques that focus on the body, techniques that focus on the Heart. While no technique is best, pursuing one, or a just a few methods in-depth seems to be the prescription of the Great Ones.

According to John Friend, Anusara Yoga, is a spiritual practice. It is primarily a practice in Awareness. To be aware is to watch everything we do. What are we watching in the Anusara Practice? We watch ourselves create beauty—create form. We watch with rapt attention to the unfolding of the divine through us, as us.

To a beginner, the practice of Anusara may seem very detail-oriented and specific. Why does the teacher have to keep reminding me to line my second toe with the middle of the ankle? Or, why keep the tops of my thighs back? Or, press the finger pads down? There are many reasons, not the least being freedom from pain and injury. Yet, when linked with a heart-oriented theme, the reason is to cultivate Awareness.

In Osho's book, *Awareness, The Key to living in Balance*, he says, "If you just put a watch with a second hand in front of you and keep your eyes on the second hand, you will be surprised—you cannot continue to remember even for one minute completely. You will get lost in some other idea—and then suddenly you will remember that you were trying to remember."

I actually tried to do this after I read his words. To my surprise, I was able to go for about 2 minutes before deciding to stop. I think I could have gone longer. Reflecting on this experience, I attribute a lot of the presence I've learned to the Anusara practice. Here's why.

In every class with John Friend and any great Anusara teacher, there is a heart-oriented theme woven deftly into the class. The true art of teaching Anusara Yoga is to weave the theme into the class in a way that reminds students of the real *Why* for coming to the practice of yoga. In Anusara philosophy, this *Why* is *Chidananda*. *Chit* is Awareness and *Ananda* is usually translated as Bliss. From the individual perspective, we all want to be happy (whether we realize it or not). We search high and low, near and far, within and without for this happiness. For me, this search ultimately led me to the practice of Yoga. In the practice of Anusara Yoga, the highest intention is to align, with *Chidananda*. Practically speaking, then, what does aligning with *Chidananda* look like?

It's all in the details and the feeling. Check out these two different ways teaching Warrior II:

1. Inhale, step the feet four and a half feet apart. Take your arms out to the side shoulder height. Turn your left foot in, right foot out 90 degrees. Exhale and bend your knee over your ankle. Keep the back leg straight and strong... breathe.
2. **Heart theme is: Courage and Contentment.** *Virabhadrasana II.* Inhale, step the feet wide apart. Spread the arms like wings from the center of the heart. Line the ankles up with the wrist creases. Keeping the left foot parallel to the back of the mat, turn your right foot out 90 degrees. With the foundation steady, pause and remember the boundless *courage* of the inner Self. With this Awareness draw the muscles deeply to the bones. Keeping this steady power, bend your front knee over the ankle. With each inhale, hug the muscles deeply to each bone. With each exhale, allow the safety of this embrace to expand the pose from within, bending the front knee a little deeper. With contentment, soften to the skin. Pulse with the power of courage and the ease of contentment.

As Anusara Yoga teachers, we weave each heart-oriented theme into the class, the poses, including our demonstrations, in order to remind students to be more aware of their Highest Self. When we practice with feeling, moving from the heart, the poses become more alive, more expressive. We remember that all our actions emanate from the light of this inner Awareness. This remembrance has a secret sensation: Bliss (*Ananda*).

To illustrate this point, let's say you had to walk across the room balancing a vase on the top of your head without dropping it. Now the vase is big and doesn't stay very well. Let's say the reason for crossing the room and not dropping the vase is to win \$5. Then, let's say the second reason is to receive a cure for a terminal disease your beloved is suffering from.

How will your approach be different from the first example to the next one? How will each step be? How much more Awareness will be behind each and every single movement?

In the same way, how will you move from *Trikonasana* to *Ardha Chandrasana* if you're on the mat just for a workout? How will you move if your teacher reminded that in any moment the depth of your Awareness could lead to an awakening, however brief, however full?

In Anusara philosophy, there are 3 A's. They are Attitude, Alignment and Action. The 3 A's correspond directly to the ideas of *Ichha, Jnana and Kriya* from the tantric metaphysics of Kashmir Shaivism. In Shaivism, there are levels of existence called *Tattvas*. There are 36 in total and they illustrate how Pure Awareness, *Paramashiva* has stepped itself down in vibration to the densest level: the level of matter. At the first two levels in this process of manifestation from subtle to gross, the One Awareness (*Shiva*) seems to become *Shiva and Shakti*, the subtle pulsing potentiality of Consciousness (*Spanda*), poised to burst forth into many forms. The next 3 levels are *Ichha, Jnana and Kriya*. *Ichha* is divine will or desire, the highest intention of the Absolute. *Jnana* is pure knowledge and *Kriya* is the power to act, to create.

In the non-dual view of the *Tantrikas* and of Anusara Yoga, each of us seems like an individual, separate and different, yet we are just different vibrations of the one Awareness. We are just different pixel arrangements of the same light on the HD screen of life. Our Awareness is the watcher of the screen and the screen itself. It is also the individual pixels: non-dual.

How does this relate to the 3 A's: Attitude, Alignment and Action? As 'physical' individuals, we can use the 3 A's to mimic the highest. 'Fake it till you make it' so to speak. In doing so, we begin to remember our very nature is not different than the Divine's nature. In Shaivism, the highest Awareness (*Shiva*), out of it's own Free Will, Desires (*Ichha*) to Know (*Jnana*) itself from the perspective of a limited being, for the sheer Delight of Moving Into Manifestation (*Kriya*). In Anusara Yoga, our *Attitude* fuels our practice. We adopt an attitude that the Divine has manifested as us and we are already perfect. So our Desire to practice is to be fully aware of our true nature. Then, *Alignment* is the Knowledge of how to practice that best reveals our highest Awareness. Finally, we create *Action* simply to delight in the sheer wonder of moving from Pure Awareness into the myriad forms our bodies can assume, we co-create our poses with the intention of Aligning with our True Self.

As our practice of yoga increases our Awareness, the scriptures say that we come to the realization that this very Awareness is our true nature. Our ordinary Awareness is no different than the One Awareness that we all share. May we each cultivate and expand Awareness with each practice.



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