

Dharma Yoga: A Brief Customized Practice

by Simon Chokoisky

THE YOGA TRADITION you follow as well as your skill level typically determine which *āsanas* you can practice. However, knowing how to customize these according to your Ayurvedic *prakruti* (constitution) and *dharma* type can help you zero in on which movements best suit the needs of your body, mind and soul. In this article we will explore how to do that.

YOUR CONSTITUTION

First, consider your mind/body constitution. Are you a fiery *pitta*, a flighty *vāta*, or a phlegmatic *kapha*? For *vātas*, the best *āsanas* are standing poses that stabilize and ground the body through its roots (your legs!). For example, mountain and tree pose. Standing or seated forward bends are also highly beneficial for *vāta* (toe touch, downward dog), as well as inversions (headstand) and backbends done on the belly (bow pose). Prone positions on the ground like crocodile also help ground *vāta*.

For *pitta* types, twisting poses like fish or triangle help to wring out heat from their often overworked livers and spleens. Any backbends that open up the chest and the solar plexus like bridge or cobra also help *pitta* types to open their hearts and relax their usually tense abdomen and trapezius muscles. Inverted poses should be avoided or practiced infrequently with caution.

Finally, *kapha* types require a vigorous, challenging *āsana* practice that creates heat, moves lymph and induces sweating. This includes holding *āsanas* longer, doing standing versus seated or lying *āsanas*, especially with arms raised overhead, and keeping a vigorous flow of these postures. Inverted poses are okay as long as weight is not an issue.

YOUR DHARMA TYPE

Once you know which *āsanas* complement your Ayurvedic *prakruti*, it is time to further customize using your *dharma* type. For Educators, emphasizing the head (headstand, shoulder stand) is primary,

which includes all standing balance poses that wake up the nervous system, like eagle or tree. Educators also evolve when they take on Warrior traits¹ which is why warrior I, II, & III are excellent, especially because these also challenge our proprioception and build the nervous system .

Warriors should emphasize strength poses, especially those involving the arms (peacock, wheel, handstand). Fierce and difficult postures are also par for the course (chair, warrior), but they should also throw in Educator postures like tree or headstand. Warriors evolve when they take on Educator characteristics, because these bring balance to their personalities.

Merchants need to focus on the midsection and its digestive organs. Therefore, abdominal-strengthening postures like boat, trunk-strengthening movements like bow or twisting *āsanas* like fish or triangle are optimal. Merchants evolve into Laborers, so incorporating forward bends like child pose and downward dog also help to keep them humble. Merchants generally do well with seated or lying postures.

Laborers do well with poses in which their feet or calves are stretched, like hero, child, and downward dog. Hip-openers, like bound angle pose and maha mudra, as well as the wind relieving postures also work wonders for them, since the colon is the quintessential Laborer organ. All squatting poses like garland are also great.

Finally, Outsiders benefit most from corpse pose; the recumbent meditation position. Practices like yoga nidra, hypnosis or visualizations that can be done in this pose work wonders for the typically anxious Outsider type. Lotus is ideal for seated postures, and generally innovative or difficult positions are favored by the Outsider personality. The Outsider organ is the skin, and skin-to-earth contact is great for them. The skin is the organ

¹ The evolution and devolution of the types is explained more on the website: www.spirittype.com



Dharma Yoga by S. Chokoisky, Cont. from page 13

that receives love and affection. In fact, babies born without touch and human contact have much higher mortality rates. Anxious Outsiders need to honor their skin with more frequent oil massage, physical touch (such as hugging), and āsanas that promote skin wellness.

In cases where the *dosha* contradicts the dharma type, pay attention to your doshic imbalances first, and practice your dharma poses with care. For example, pitta types should not do headstands, but they are good for Educators. What to do? Educator pittas should take care and do some headstand, but not as often or as long as their non-pitta brethren! This is a taste of the rich buffet presented by your dharma type. Consider yours next time when selecting a diet and exercise program, and you will reap exponential benefits! 🌀

About the Author

Simon teaches Ayurvedic Studies Program, Levels 1 and 2 Sanskrit as well as ASP 2 Medical Jyotish. He was born to Bulgarian immigrant parents in Phoenix, AZ, where he attended Arizona State University. Dissatisfied with a French major, he turned to Ayurveda in 1998 and, with Jyotisha, began his study in the Vedic sciences.

Simon has studied Vastu Shastra, Sanskrit, Jyotisha, and Ayurveda, and worked professionally as a fitness consultant and Ayurvedic massage therapist. He has traveled extensively, and speaks four languages, in addition to studying and teaching Sanskrit.

The author of The Five Dharma Types, you can visit Simon at his website, spirittype.com, to find out more about dharma types.

DHARMA TYPE	POSTURE TYPES	EXAMPLES	
EDUCATOR	Posture Types Standing, balance Body Part Emphasized Head, nervous system	Shīrshāsana (Headstand) Garudāsana (Eagle)	Virabhadrāsana 1, 2, 3 (Warrior 1, 2, 3) Gomukhāsana (Cow-Face) Vrikshāsana (Tree)
WARRIOR	Posture Types Standing, strength Body Part Emphasized Arms, heart	Māyūrāsana (Peacock) Virabhadrāsana 1, 2, 3 (Warrior 1, 2, 3) Adho Mukha Vrikshāsana (Handstand) Kākāsana (Crow) Utkatāsana (Chair)	Natarājāsana (Dancer) Kukkutāsana (Rooster) Chakrāsana (Wheel) and most other challenging poses
LABORER	Posture Types Hip opening, squatting, wind-releasing Body Part Emphasized Legs, feet, lower abdomen	Śhalabhāsana (Locust) Bālāsana (Child) Adho Mukha Shvanāsana (Downward Dog)	Mālāsana (Garland) Pavana Muktāsana group (Wind-Releasing postures)
MERCHANT	Posture Types Bending, twisting Body Part Emphasized Midsection: abdominals and back	Naukāsana (Boat) Kākāsana (Crow) Shalabhāsana (Locust)	Matsyāsana (Fish) Setu Bandhāsana (Bridge) Trikonāsana (Triangle)
OUTSIDER	Posture Types Lying, unusual poses Body Part Emphasized Skin	Shavāsana (Corpse) Makarāsana (Crocodile)	Padmāsana (Lotus) Hanumānāsana (Hanumān pose)