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Yoga and Dharma

CUSTOMISING YOUR PRACTICE ACCORDING
TO DHARMA TYPE PART 1

In the previous issue we looked at some practical ways to get the most from your dharma type. Now let's talk about how to use it to customise your yoga practice. If you don't know your dharma type yet, go to **spirittype.com** to take the free dharma test.

The yoga tradition you follow as well as your skill level will determine which asanas you can practise. However, knowing how to customise these according to your Ayurvedic dosa and dharma type can help you zero in on which movements best suit the needs of your body, mind and soul. Here are the rules:



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1 First, consider your mind/body constitution. Are you a fiery pitta, a flighty vata, or a phlegmatic kapha? For vatas, the best asanas are standing poses that stabilise 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 vatas (toe touch, Downward Dog), as well as inversions (Head stand) and backbends done on the belly (Bow pose). Prone positions on the ground like Crocodile also help ground vata.

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 practised sparsely with caution.

Finally, kapha types require a vigorous, challenging asana practice that creates heat, moves lymph and induces sweating. This includes holding asanas longer than other types, doing standing versus seated or lying asanas, 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.

2 Once you know which asanas complement your Ayurvedic dosa, it is time to further customise using your dharma type. For Educators, emphasising the head (Headstand, Shoulder Stand) is primary, which includes all standing balance poses that invigorate the nervous system and stimulate proprioception like Eagle or Tree. Educators also evolve when they take on Warrior traits which is why Warrior I, II, and III are excellent.

Warriors should emphasise 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 pose to keep balanced. 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, ab-strengthening postures like Boat, trunk-strengthening movements like Bow or twisting asanas like Fish or Triangle are optimal. Merchants evolve into Labourers, so incorporating forward bends like Child Pose and Downward Dog also helps to keep them humble. Merchants generally do well with seated or lying postures.





DHARMA TYPE	POSTURE TYPE	BODY PART EMPHASIZED	EXAMPLES
Educator	Standing, balance	Head, nervous system	Headstand, Eagle, Warrior 1-3, Cow Face, Tree
Warrior	Standing, strength	Arms	Peacock, Warrior 1-3, Handstand, Crow, Chair, Dancer (Natarajasana), Rooster
Labourer	Squatting, hip-opening, wind-releasing	Hips, legs, lower abdomen	Locust, Child, Downward Dog, Garland, Wind-Releasing postures,
Merchant	Twisting, bending	Midsection, abs, back	Crow, Locust, Fish, Bridge, Triangle
Outsider	Recumbent (lying), unusual	Skin	Corpse, Crocodile, Lotus, Hanuman Pose

Labourers 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 Labourer organ. Squatting poses like Garland are also great.

Finally, Outsiders benefit most from Corpse pose- the recumbent meditation position. Practices like Yoga Nidra, hypnosis or visualisations that can be done in this pose work wonders for the typically anxious Outsider type. Lotus pose is ideal for seated postures, and generally innovative or difficult positions are favoured by the Outsider personality. The Outsider organ is the skin, and postures that promote skin to earth contact are good for them.

This is a taste of the rich buffet presented by your dharma type. Consider your dharma type when selecting your diet and exercise programmes, and you will get even more benefit from them. Note that in cases where the dosa contradicts the dharma type, such poses are to be practised with care. For example, pitta types should not do Headstands, but they are good for Educators. Therefore Educator types should take care to do their Headstands, but not as often or as long as their non-pitta brethren!

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