



Anywhere,

The moment we pay attention to our breath, we embark on a yoga practice. It is really that simple. Yoga means "to join". It is a practice of joining our mind and body. When we are connected, we become aware of our most basic sensations and the complex landscape deep within. It is not necessary to move from pose to pose until we are sweaty and exhausted. Yoga is not just a quest for a fit body. We don't have to put our ankles behind our heads or twist into a pretzel to qualify our actions as "yoga". All it takes is the subtle awareness of breath that turns our attention inward and this can be done anywhere, any time, by anyone. Once we understand this common denominator, the rest of our practice can take shape. We learn that the mere action of paying attention to ourselves opens the door to possibilities on many levels.

Anytime, For

Yoga for Beginners

Jill Lawson

The following poses are suggestions for beginners. When you are ready, take a deep breath in, exhale and congratulate yourself for taking the first step.

When I go for a walk in the woods or along a mountain stream, I love to practice yoga. I do not worry about taking along a mat, or even watching the time. I just simply stop here or there, take in my breath and let the practice deliver the benefits to my mind and body. I'll often start in Tadasana (mountain pose) to tune in and clear my head of thoughts. At times, this is difficult as my mind races faster than a Nascar driver. So, I stand tall and let my thoughts run on, and eventually they begin to quiet.

When you've found a stable place to stand, root both feet into the earth. Notice the sensations of your feet in contact with the ground. Let your mind settle into these sensations for a few moments. Perhaps you feel the ground chilly or wet. Maybe it is a rough or

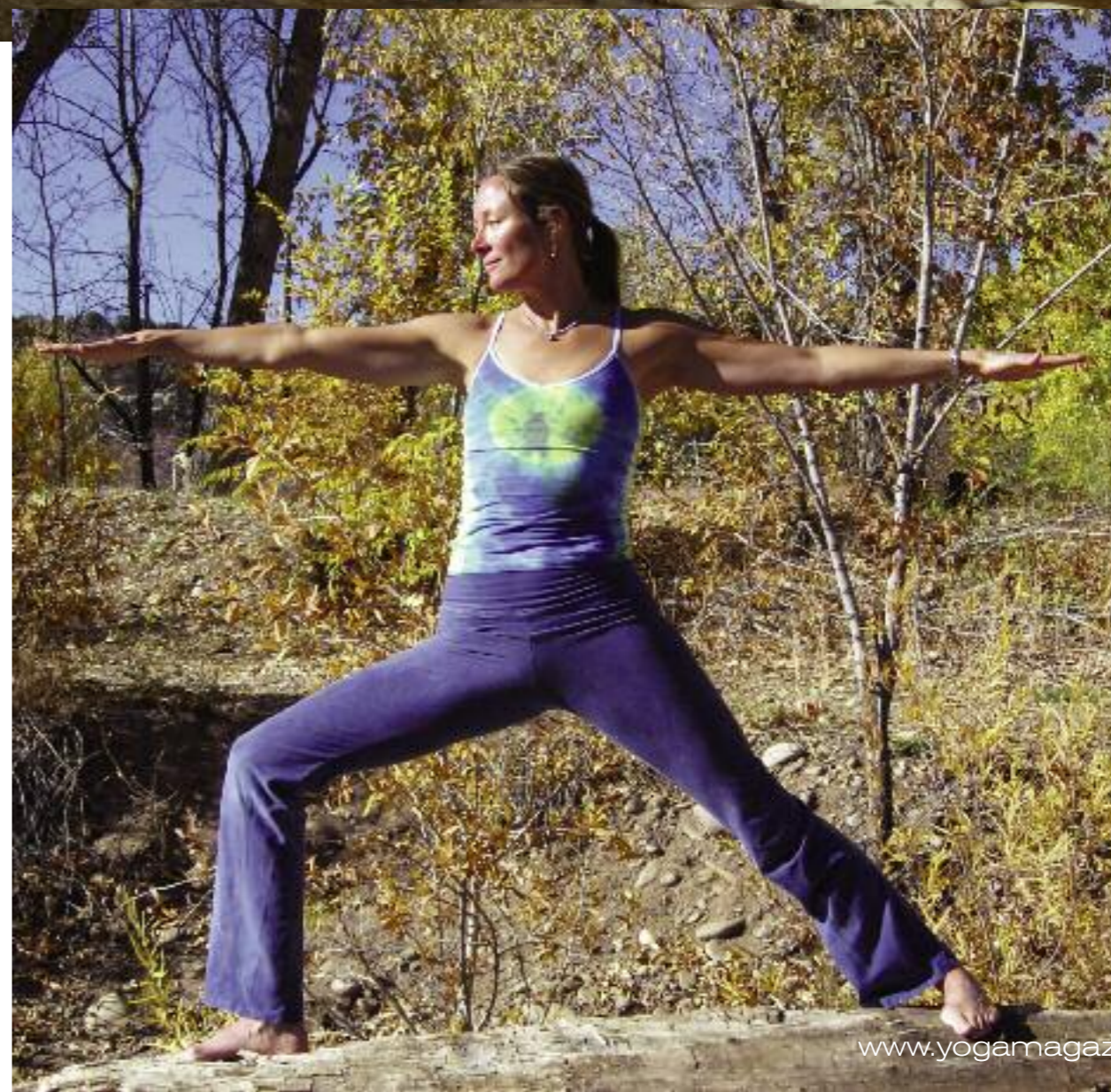
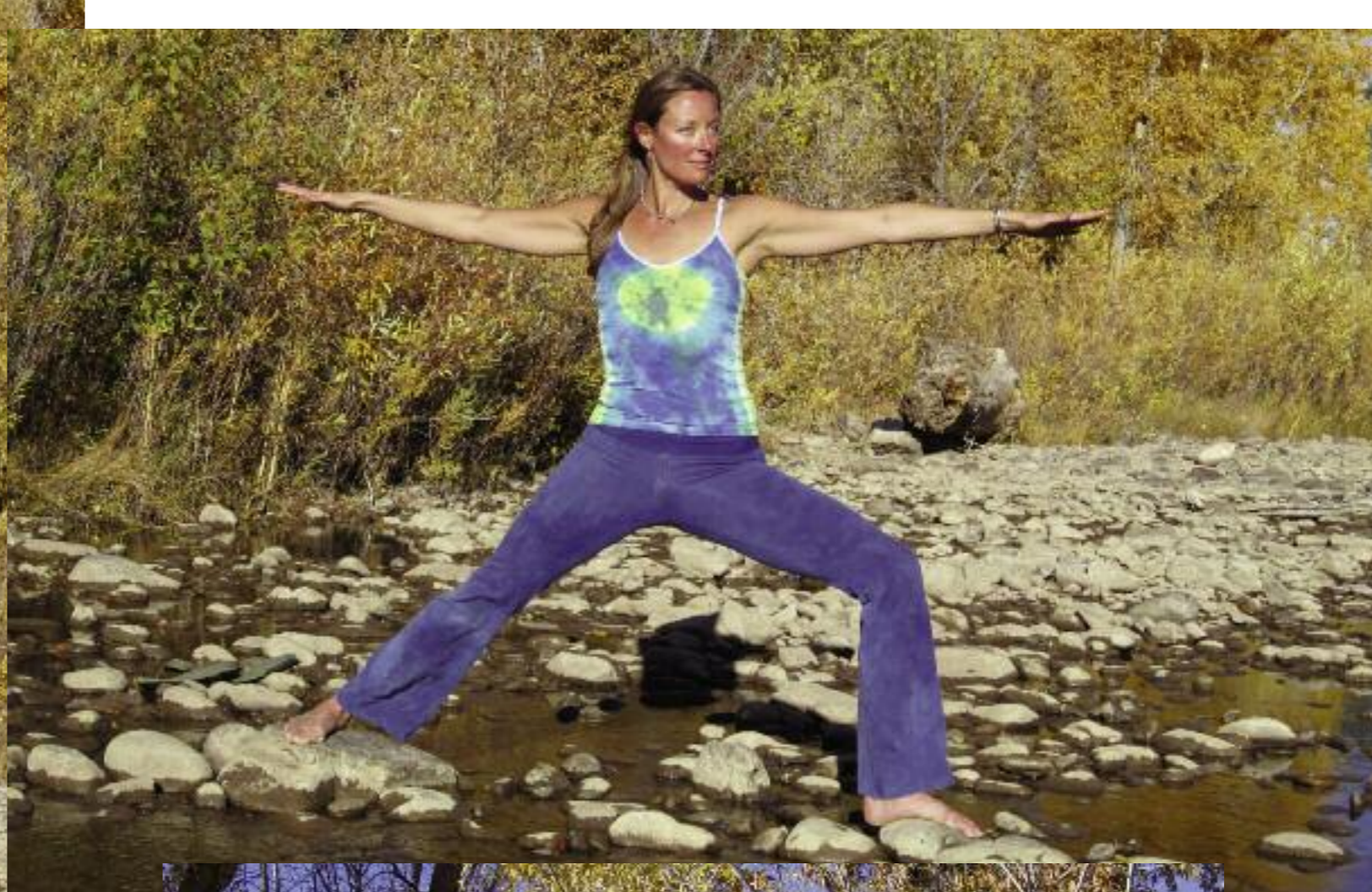
I was asked to join a business meeting in an effort to promote businesses in the area. We introduced ourselves and shared our type of business with each other. After the insurance salesman and the hydraulic pump engineer spoke, all attention was turned towards me. I stood up and told them I was a yoga teacher. As I looked around the room I saw eyes get big, arms and legs shift with unease and then I heard something I absolutely despise hearing. "I can't do yoga," the salesman said with determination. In the next few seconds I thought of a comeback that would forever end my dislike of this comment. I asked him to take a deep breath. As he finished his exhale I asked him what he thought he just did. He said, "I inhaled and then I exhaled." I looked him straight in the eye and said, "Well then, you can do yoga, because if you can breathe, you can do yoga!"

smooth surface. Just notice, without trying to change anything. Begin to breathe deeply and fully. Let the depth of your breath lengthen your spine. Follow your exhale as an invitation to release and let go of anything that does not serve you, be it stress, tension or anxiety. Notice subtle changes happening in your body and mind as you pay attention to your breath. Stay in mountain pose for as long as it takes your mind to relax and your thoughts to quiet.

Let your practice be guided by the moment, discovering just what you need right now. When you are ready for another pose, stand with your feet hip width apart and begin to fold forward. Let your knees bend and release the weight of your head, and all of your thoughts in it. If your fingers can reach, you may choose to wrap your first two fingers and thumb around your big toes, using your arms to draw your chest closer to your legs. However you find yourself in Uttanasana (forward bend), relax and breathe. Listen to the sound of your breath and notice how it merges with the sounds around you. If you are outside try to hear your breath in the wind, or the sound of the birds in your breath. Blending with the natural environment around you instead of trying to shut it out allows you to practise being unaffected by external distractions.



Anyone



The next pose in this sequence offers a lovely side stretch to open up your ribcage and expand your lungs. Stand with your feet about a leg length apart. Reach both arms out to the side. Move your right arm over your right toes, which turn out away from you, and tip sideways into Trikonasana (triangle pose). Rest your right hand on your thigh, shin or ankle. Stretch your left arm straight up to the sky. Discover a sensation of weightlessness in your upper body as your legs and feet root down into the earth. Feel your breath move into your lungs stretching the spaces between each rib.

You can choose to come into Virabhadrasana (warrior pose) from here, or come out of the pose and try it in a few moments. From triangle pose, bend your right leg and bring your knee directly over your ankle. Keep your arms stretched out to the side and lift the crown of your head away from your tailbone creating a plumb-line from your head to your hips. Look over your right fingertips and fix your gaze on an object beyond them. Gazing trains your mind to concentrate and clear it of erroneous thoughts that hinder your focus. This allows you to "feel" more than "think" about yoga.



There is nothing sweeter than practising Vrksasana (tree pose) in the company of trees. For improved balance, bring your weight onto one foot and place the bottom of the other foot to the inside of your ankle or to the inside of your leg, above or below your knee. As a tree grows limbs, stretch your arms overhead or out to the side. Pay attention to your breath, letting it be very slow, as this will help your stability. The challenge in this pose and other balancing poses is to keep your breath flowing and your mind quiet even if you fall out of the pose. It helps us learn to stay calm when things don't go as planned.



Whenever and wherever you sit, you have a wonderful opportunity to practise yoga. Fitting in an occasional spinal twist over time will enhance the mobility of your spine and tone your spinal nerves. The following twist can be done anywhere you decide to take a load off your feet. If you are seated in a chair, keep both feet on the floor, otherwise extend your right leg in front of you and bend the other leg, with your foot close to your hips. Place your left hand behind your hips to support a straight spine. Place your right hand or arm to the outside of your bent knee and look out over your left shoulder; or towards the horizon, gazing at the natural beauty surrounding you. When you breathe in, expand your ribcage, making more room for your lungs to take in fresh oxygen. When you breathe out, relax and enjoy the sensations throughout your spine.





It's no wonder some yoga poses are named after animals or insects. Practicing outside the studio, off of the mat and in nature alongside bugs and critters can give you a different perspective on the poses. Perhaps it enhances the connection to this 5,000-year-old discipline and provides a deeper understanding of yoga; "to join". To emulate a cobra you would have to be a cannibal, as cobras will eat other snakes, so let's not do that. Instead, practise the beginner's version, Ardha Bhujangasana (the "half" cobra). Lie on your belly and place your hands under your shoulders. Without using your arms in any way, lift your chest up as you inhale. Hold this pose by engaging the muscles of your back as you exhale. This is an excellent pose to strengthen your lower back and help you to maintain a healthy posture.

Sometimes our mind talks to us when we are bored or impatient. We hear a voice inside that screams, "I'm done. I want ice cream. Let's watch some TV." Let your body reveal the answer to how you feel by taking your thoughts out of the equation, creating a connection from body to mind. If your mus-

cles quiver in gentle protest for being used when they have been inactive, take a deep breath and practice using your mind to give you strength, making the connection from mind to body. Most importantly, enjoy getting to know yourself in ways you never thought possible. You can do yoga. Breathe, stretch, bend, twist and pay attention to yourself. It's that simple.