



# Balance Point

*FireFly Dance* by Nancy Lankston

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The Chakras

I blink and Summer is over. School has started and my family is settling back into the work day / school day routine. And the weather—Chicago suddenly went from hot and sticky to warm and inviting. Fall has definitely arrived.

I love Chicago in the Fall. The nights are the best. I love nights when it's cool enough to leave the windows open and snuggle under a comforter. The sounds of suburban civilization fade away at night. I can hear cicadas and tree frogs serenading me from secret places hidden in the trees. Moonlight lights up the garden, transforming it into a landscape where fairies and elves might play.

And the fireflies dance. Is there anything more magical than fireflies dancing? Tiny living lights swoop and glide through the night sky. Each firefly does its own unique dance and together they create a magical free-form ballet. My troubles seem to melt away as I watch the nightly firefly performance.

As a child I loved to chase fireflies as they danced under the trees. And captured fire-

flies became fairy lights glowing from the confines of an old peanut butter jar. But I learned early that a captured firefly is not nearly as magical as those that elude capture. Like the fairies of old, fireflies are best kept unconfined and free, lighting up whatever dark corner they choose to bless with their presence.

I believe humans are meant to live like fireflies, to joyfully swoop and glide through life lighting up the dark. Oh, I know, I know. Most people's lives are a far cry from a magical firefly dance. And yes, this world is a mess. There are plenty of dark places positively begging for illumination. And yet I still believe we would do well to live more like fireflies.

I remember something I read once about a dark room. This room was totally dark, pitch black. But when you opened a door to the outside, the light streamed into the room and eliminated the darkness. The darkness did not spread into the light outside, it could not. But the light easily permeated even the darkest space. Just like fireflies dancing in the night can light up even the blackest night. The trick is to

keep your light shining no matter how dark it gets.

In our goodness we are powerful beyond measure. I remember Mother Teresa's life and know that little acts of love reshape our world. The sincere smile of a stranger changes a person's entire day. A kind word washes away many sorrows. A silent prayer heals a deep wound. And a hug – a hug just might change the course of history.

Our light, our goodness can illuminate and heal the world. Just keep dancing and let your light shine. ॐ



*"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, shine, shine. Let it shine."*

*Children's hymn, Author unknown.*

## *The Body Electric* by Nancy Lankston

*"And now I see the ocean, billions of simultaneous motions moving in me"*

*Rumi 13<sup>th</sup> century mystic*

We are electromagnetic clouds of energy dancing and shifting within every moment of life. Our tissues positively pulse and flow with energy. Life itself is a dance of energy.

Spiritual gurus and mystics have claimed for thousands of years that humans are much more than bone and blood and muscle. Every spiritual tradition has a name for the energy that animates the living body; prana, chi, pneuma, qi – by any name it is the essence of life. We are quite literally energetic beings of light.

Quantum physicists now confirm scientifically what ancient mystics said so eloquently; our tissues are actually tiny atomic particles dancing and vibrating in a vast empty space. We are not as solid and substantial as we appear.

### **A Map of the Body Electric**

Eastern traditions have studied this complex energy system known as the human body for thousands of years. Ancient yoga texts describe a series of energy centers spaced out along the spine and skull and interconnected via energy pathways. Ayurvedic Medicine defines a map of more than 70,000 nadis or "streams" within the human body. These streams are pathways for energy movement within the body. Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan medical traditions document the flow of energy within the human body via an array of acupuncture points and me-

ridians or pathways.

The human energy anatomy integrates with the physical tissues of the body in mysterious and complex ways. A lifetime of study related to the form and function of the energetic body is possible for those of us intrigued by such subjects. However, a basic knowledge of the body electric is easily accessible and can be helpful to anyone seeking to understand self or just get healthier.

### **Central Channel**

The eastern traditions describe a central energy channel (or channels) that runs the length of the human body roughly following the path of the spinal cord and bisecting the 2 hemispheres of the brain. Chinese medicine details the pathway of the governing vessel up the midline of the back along with the conception vessel coursing up the front of the body. These meridians define the central electrical axis of the human body and are believed to be present from the moment of conception guiding the development of the human embryo.

Yogis call the central energy channel of the body the Sushumna nadi and describe it entwined by the Ida and Pingala nadis (female & male energies). Tantric yoga traditions depict a Kundalini energy "serpent" that lies coiled at the base of the spine waiting to be called up the Sushumna like a dancing cobra by practices such as meditation, yoga postures or pranayama (breathing techniques). A bit of trivia; the caduceus – the ancient symbol now used to depict

medicine and healing, depicts the path of the Ida and Pingala winding up and around the Sushumna.

### **Chakras**

Most texts describe seven major energy centers in the human body, although a few describe 5, 6 or 10. These energy centers are called chakras in the yogic tradition. Traditional Hawaiians called them Auw and Chinese Taoists named them Dantien. By any name, these energy centers arise from the central energy channel of the body. The term chakra means wheel in Sanskrit and describes the shape of each whirling vortex of energy positioned along the spine. Each vortex is a space where energy meets matter and where the spiral dance of the Ida and Pingala energies is most apparent.

A description of each of the seven major chakras is outlined in the table on page 3. This information is a synthesis from many traditions. The yoga tradition defines a type of yoga for each major chakra. A seed sound used as a mantra to open the chakra is also described as well as an herbal remedy that is tied to each chakra. Linking east to west, the major nerve plexus, Ayurvedic element, and endocrine gland where physical and energetic anatomy meet within each chakra are also listed.

The human chakra system creates the vibrations of a complete musical scale. This is the basis for sound healing. In addition, the color palette is described by the chakras. Both musical note and color are listed for each chakra.

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Chakra	Color	Seed Sound	Sense	Herbal Remedy	Ayurvedic Element	Plane	Yoga Path	Musical Tone	Endocrine Link	Nervous Sys Link
7 Sahasrara	Violet	None	None	Lotus Gotu Kola	None	Truth & Reality	Jnana	B	Pineal Gland	Brain
6 Ajna	Indigo	Om or Aum	None	Mugwort Acacia	Mahat (Pure Essence)	Austerity	Yantra	A	Pituitary Gland	Brain
5 Vishuddha	Blue	Ham or Hang	Hearing	Frankincense	Akasha (Ether, The Void)	Human	Mantra	G	Thyroid	Laryngeal Plexus
4 Anahata	Green	Yam or Yang	Touch	Lavender Jasmine	Air	Balance	Bhakti	F	Thymus	Cardiac Plexus
3 Manipura	Yellow	Ram or Rang	Sight	Musk Ginger	Fire	Celestial	Karma	E	Pancreas	Solar Plexus
2 Svadhishthana	Orange	Vam or Vang	Taste	Gardenia Orris Root	Water	Astral	Tantra	D	Ovaries or Testicles	Sacral Plexus
1 Muladhara	Red	Lam or Lang	Smell	Cedar	Earth	Physical	Hatha	C	Adrenal Glands	Coccygeal Plexus

### **An Eighth Chakra?**

Some spiritual traditions refer to an eighth chakra located outside the physical body yet still within the aura. Other traditions refer to the entire aura as the eighth chakra. In either case, this chakra is believed by many spiritual traditions to carry one's reason for life – e.g. the purpose or mission that a particular person is alive to fulfill.

So, what exactly is a human aura? It is the sum of all the vibrations created by every living cell within the human body. This electromagnetic field can extend from several inches to 10-12 feet beyond the physical structure of the body, depending on the physical and emotional state of a person. The human aura is depicted in most texts with 7 layers. The layers from innermost to outer are linked to chakras one through seven in succession. Every living person, animal and plant creates an aura that is uniquely its own.

### **Energetic Health**

Eastern medical practices such as acupuncture as well as vibrational healing modalities such as Reiki, Hands of Light and Therapeutic Touch are all based on the belief that chronic stress, injury and/or emotional issues lead to blocked or unbalanced energy flow within the body electric. The symptoms of physical illness are linked to this out-of-balance energy state within the body. And balancing the energy flow leads to improved health.

### **River of Life**

*“Here in this body are the sacred rivers, here are the sun and moon, as well as the pilgrimage places. I have not encountered another temple as blissful as my own body.” –Saraha Doha*

From root to crown, the human body contains countless rivers of energy flowing and vibrating in a synchronous dance of life. It is a sacred and magical dance where matter and energy merge. May this article help you to understand and enjoy your body's unique energy dance. ॐ

## *Bridging Mind & Body: Ujjayi Pranayama* by David Robinson

A fundamental principle within all traditional yoga practices is the desire to unite the body and mind. One of the most common ways to link body with mind is through pranayama or breathing techniques. In the very first Yoga Foundation Series class at The BalancePlace we teach a breathing technique called Ujjayi Pranayama or “Throat Breath”. Students are instructed that this technique should be used during all asana practice. In this article I want to explain the rationale behind this teaching.

### **What is Ujjayi Pranayama?**

Ujjayi pranayama is a technique that controls the flow of the breath by establishing a constriction in the throat as you inhale and exhale through the nose. This constriction causes a vibration which is audible to the person who is using the technique, and sometimes to others within earshot. In teacher trainings it often sounds like you’re in a room full of Darth Vader-like heavy breathers. This loud sound is not necessary, but some yogis really get into it. This audible and palpable vibration can be used to monitor the quality of the breath i.e., the smoothness of the breath is obvious because the pitch changes with the speed of the airflow.

### **Why Use Ujjayi Pranayama?**

#### *Prevent Injury*

One of the primary reasons we stress the Ujjayi technique in our teaching at The BalancePlace is to

prevent injury. By focusing on your breath, you establish a feedback mechanism for how your body is handling the work you are doing in asana practice.

The mind has the power to overdrive the body’s capabilities. This is especially prevalent in our western culture where we are obsessed with performance. We tend to ignore the subtle signals our body gives us as we approach a potentially harmful condition. By using the feedback mechanism that we establish with the Ujjayi breathing, we provide another less subtle signal to the mind about the state of our body. In effect we create a bridge between the mind and the body.

Noticing when the smooth and even quality of your breath changes to a jerky, uneven flow indicates something is amiss. You can not mentally push your body into injury without your breath becoming uneven or jerky. When your yoga teacher urges you to keep your breath smooth and even as you do asanas, it is an attempt to keep you within the boundaries established by your own body even as you attempt to “perform” and push yourself. To maintain that smooth even quality, you must back off to the point where your body is less stressed and your breath smoothes out again.

#### *Psychological Benefits*

Another benefit of all pranayama techniques is the mental training

that takes place by focusing the attention on the breath. In yoga we call the process of maintaining concentration *dhâranâ* (single-mindedness). This ability to maintain your attention on one object is a necessary skill to pursue *dhyâna* (single flow of ideas or meditation) and *samâdhi* (merging with the object of meditation to achieve self-realization). It also is the cure for the “monkey mind” state that most of us find ourselves stuck in every day. With monkey mind, the mind is constantly jumping from one thought to the next. Concentration or *dhâranâ* gives you a tool to help you take control of your mind and focus.

So in a subtle way, we start our students’ meditation training by having them focus their attention on their breath as they do asana practice. Constant reminders and instructions from the teacher to; follow the breath, link movement to the breath, and to utilize the Ujjayi technique, help the students focus their mind and refocus their mind when their attention wanders.

#### *Physiological Benefits*

All forms of breath work provide general health benefits as well. Better oxygenation leads to improved perfusion which has a positive effect on all body tissues and ultimately the health of the entire body. Even a partial explanation of the physiological mechanisms underlying breath work would take more space than I have available

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## Bridging Mind & Body (cont.)

here, but my partner Nancy recently wrote a good article on the subject which can be found on her website.

(<http://www.heartofhealing.com/writings/breath.htm>)

Focusing on your breath builds a bridge between your mind and your body. By taking an uncon-

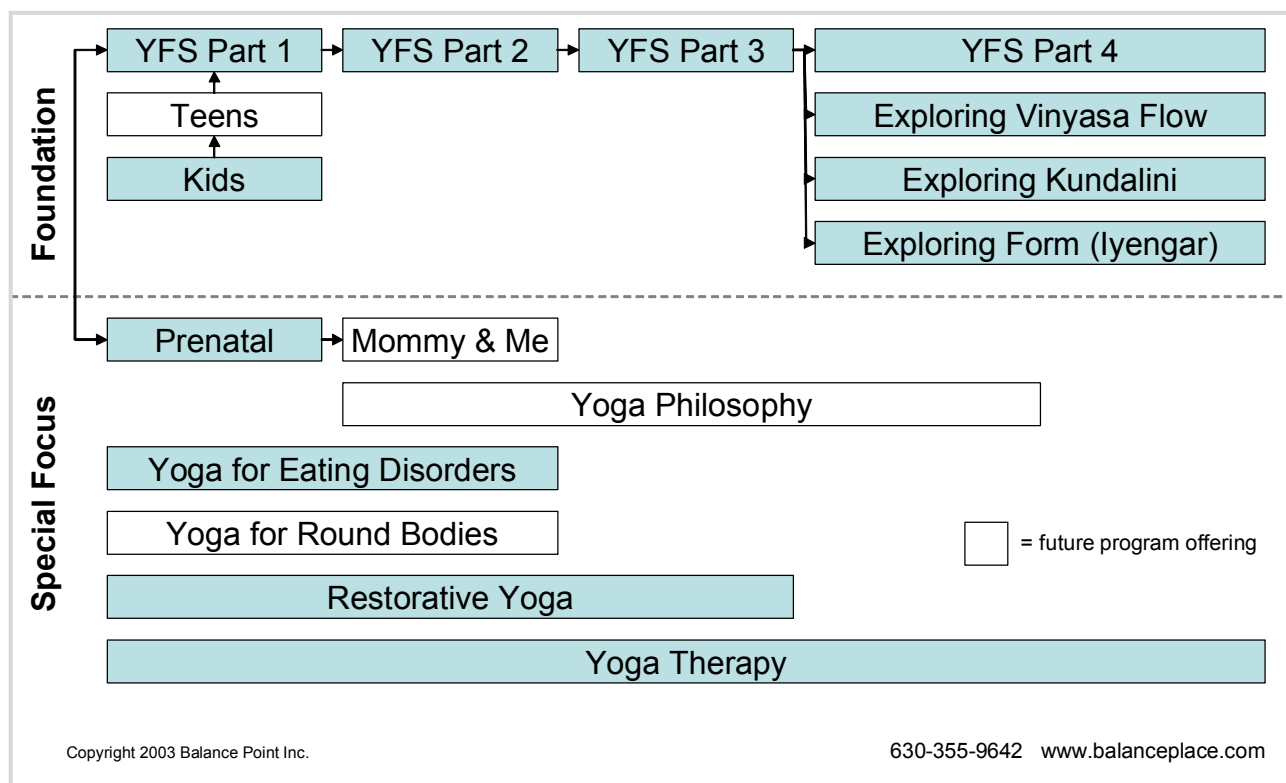
scious activity like breathing, and making it conscious, you can keep your mind focused on what is happening in your body during asana practice rather than on your job, your weekend plans, or some other distraction. Breath focus provides a feedback mechanism that keeps your mind from overdriving your body into an injury. It also helps you to develop the mental disci-

pline to maintain constant attention on something of your choosing.

So there is a lot more to Ujjayi pranayama than making that Darth Vader sound. Hopefully this brief explanation will help you understand why your Yoga teacher keeps reminding you to use Ujjayi breathing during your asana practice. ॐ

## BalancePlace Yoga Program Map

At the BalancePlace we offer a structured program to introduce students to the fundamentals of Yoga. We call this program The Yoga Foundation Series (YFS). For experienced yoga students and YFS graduates we offer classes that provide explorations of specific styles of yoga. The “Exploring Series” classes may be taken ongoing as desired by the student. We also offer an number of classes with special focus for student that have specific needs. Below we have shown a diagram to help illustrate typical paths through the program. Also shown are a couple of classes we intend to add to the program in early 2004. ॐ





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## *New Therapist Malino Khun, L.Ac.*



We are excited to announce that Malino Khun L.Ac. is now offering his services at The Balance-Place.

Malino is a state licensed and Nationally Board Certified Acupuncturist, and a professional herbalist specializing in Chinese and Modern Herbal Medicine. He brings training from the Midwest Center for the Study of Oriental Medicine (now called the Midwest College of Oriental Medicine), Chicago College of Healing Arts, and years of post-graduate study to his healing practice.

How Acupuncture and Herbal Medi-

cine Can Help You:

- Strengthen and improve immune function, without side effect.
- Relieve fatigue, stress, and calm anxiety. Non-addictive, non-habit forming, yet powerful.
- Live a life not burdened by pain. Enjoy life more fully.
- Sleep more restfully, so you can have more energy to start your day.
- Improve digestive function. Alleviate indigestion. Food is to be enjoyed not worried about.
- Promote longer life span and improve aging process, by strengthening organ tone and promoting harmonious nervous system function.
- Compatible with other medical therapies.

Conditions treated include:

- Digestive Disorders
- Low energy

- PMS
- Neurological Disorders
- Fibromyalgia
- Headaches
- Sleep Problems
- Back pain
- Smoking Cessation
- Breathing Problems
- Stress
- Musculo-skeletal Disorders

Malino focuses on using the most effective means to encourage the healing process. He employs the best Chinese, Japanese, American and European techniques to fit your unique condition.

Contact Malino directly at (630) 253-3908 to schedule a complementary consultation. ☸