

Coming From the Heart

A letter from Mehtab, Founder of Yoga Yoga

Dear Yoga Yoga Students, Teachers, and Staff:

With the arrival of each New Year, we come together in our resolve to become a little better than we were the year before. We remind ourselves that all of life is about evolving, transforming, reforming, and elevating ourselves as we move forward through the year ahead.

When we begin a yoga practice, whether from hope, desperation, or a New Year's resolution, we sometimes set goals for ourselves, a way to mark our progress and to insure our commitments. We have a destination in mind – to become fit, to relax, to elevate our mood, to achieve a full-standing backbend, to sit quietly with ourselves for 11 minutes, to go to class three times a week, or simply remember who we are.

The important part of your yoga practice, however, is not your goals but your intention. Why are you doing yoga? Most people will say, "Well, to get healthy." Some people say, "To be happy." A few folks say, "To become holy." All see yoga as a means to an end, to reach a goal. In reality, yoga has no ending. It is a journey, not a destination, and the reward comes not from achieving an expected outcome but from becoming who you are meant to be. So in Yoga, your intention does not come from your goals. It comes from your heart.

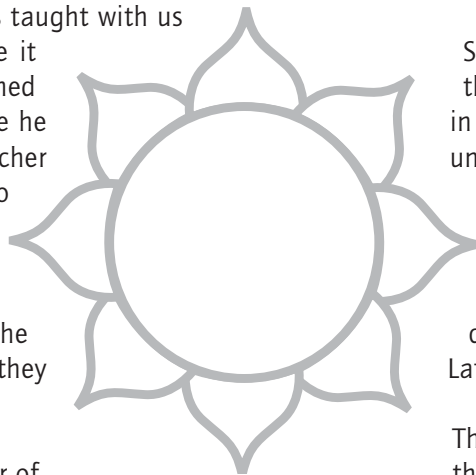
One of my most respected yoga teachers has taught with us for years at Yoga Yoga, actually even before it began. On one visit after we had just opened our second location, he took me aside before he went in to teach a packed room of new teacher training students. "Mehtab," he asked me, "do you think all these people come here for the yoga?" I pointed out that the sign over the door did say Yoga Yoga – we didn't offer anything else. "Well, yes, you are right," he told me. "They may come for the yoga – but they stay for the heart."

Yoga Yoga first came into vision in the winter of 1997. I knew it was time to take the home studio practice my wife and I had built over the previous two years to a larger space. The yoga room at our house held 8 people with some squeezing. Over the last three months, we had 15 Kundalini Yoga teacher training students in the room on the weekends. The energy was high but the tiny closet bathroom that opened directly into the room would soon have to be equipped with swinging doors to accommodate the traffic flow. If we were to have a new place, we needed a new name. For many evenings I sat in meditation and kept asking, "What do we call it?"



Lotus Yoga? YogaAustin? Yoga Works?" I knew it had to be called Yoga Something or Something Yoga, and finally I realized it was not Something – it was Yoga – only Yoga, always Yoga, purely Yoga. It was Yoga Yoga.

The name sounded silly but it was perfect. At the time, my wife and I were teaching Hatha Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga and Yoga Therapy. The only name that could describe all the types of yoga we offered was, well, Yoga Yoga. The only problem was that when you wrote the name as a logo, it looked like a misprint or a stutter. "It needs something between the two Yogas," my wife said. "Something yogic, like a chakra, or some yoga symbol to go between the words," she said.



The Sarvasankshobana Chakra

Some of the oldest yogic symbols in yoga are the Yantras. They are used in meditation to aid in concentration, visualization, and eventually in understanding the nature of consciousness. Most of them are composed of circles, triangles, and petals. The Yantra selected for the Yoga Yoga logo was the Eight-Petaled Lotus. I simply liked the way it looked – a circle and eight points – simple and sun-like. Later I found out what it meant.

The Yantra used in the Yoga Yoga logo is called the Sarvasankshobana Chakra (chakra means circle). The circle was the oldest representation of Unity and Connection. No ending, no beginning, all encompassing, all containing. The eight petals around the circle represented the eight points of the compass – all the directions of the physical world. You could reach Unity through any direction. It was like a house with doors on every side – many ways to enter.

For Yoga Yoga, it represented the many styles and practices of yoga that we offered and honored. It reached out to everyone,

in all directions. Come on in -- it does not matter where you come from or what yoga you practice because it all leads to the same place.

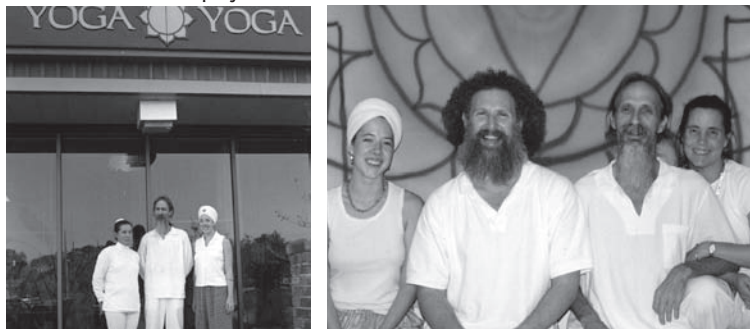
I also discovered that the Yoga Yoga yantra symbol is used in meditation to govern the third chakra and the ability to manifest – to make visions become reality. It was the energy that made the spiritual into material. It was a perfect symbol for an earthly yoga studio whose purpose was to serve the spirit.

The Yoga Yoga yantra also gives the meditator the ability to master the three attitudes of rejection, acceptance, and non-judgment. When these attitudes are mastered, you begin to live with acceptance and service, in compassion and with passion. You come from the heart chakra. The importance of this became more obvious to me with the passing of last year.

In 2005, the big moment for Yoga Yoga was the opening of a new center, Yoga Yoga Northwest (one of the eight directional compass points on the yantra). As we moved forward with the new center, I thought I should check the roadmap to see where we were and where we were going. In the practice of yoga, the chakra system is the master roadmap for working with the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of our being.

The charkas are seven major energy centers that contain a specific transformational energy. Each chakra fulfills a definite purpose in our evolution and well-being. The first chakra is about survival and building foundation, the second chakra is about relationships, the third chakra is manifestation, the fourth chakra is service and compassion, the fifth chakra is self-expression, the sixth is intuition and the seventh is connection with the infinite.

I realized that Yoga Yoga had been following the same chakra roadmap that governs all the paths for spiritual growth. When we opened the first Yoga Yoga on South Lamar in 1998, it was all about survival – just like the energy of the first chakra. I remember three months after we had opened the center that we still had 57 more months to go on a lease that obligated us to more money than I ever had in my life. At the time I had no idea if we could even pay that month's bills.



The happy founders/partners open Yoga Yoga South in 1998 and Yoga Yoga North in 2000.

If Yoga Yoga was to survive, we had to build a foundation, a structure, and for the first three years we struggled to do just that. I realize now that we did survive not because of

any brilliant knowledge of running a yoga center (since we had never done that before) but because we put our focus on serving the students who came to us. And they did come and Yoga Yoga South did survive and that energy of the first chakra manifested.

From our students, we found our future teachers, our staff, and our business partners. We were creating relationships based on a mutual love of yoga with those around us. And it was from these relationships that we were able to open Yoga Yoga North in 2001. The energy of the second yoga center came from the energy of the second chakra – the ability to relate to others and to create healthy relationships.



Yoga Yoga Teachers, many of whom are Teacher Training grads and staff, say cheese!

There is a saying in Yogic Astrology that once is an accident, twice is a coincidence, and three times is destiny. With a newly expanded Teacher Training Program at Yoga Yoga North, and all the energy that came from these new teachers, the time seemed right to channel that energy into a third location. In 2003, Yoga Yoga Westgate opened in all of its third chakra manifesting glory. It was big, it was beautiful, and it was right out there for everyone to see – spirit becoming matter just a few doors down from Central Market.



The first, second, and third chakras, respectively.

The first three chakras in yoga are about the integration of the spirit into the material world. Survival, reproduction, and energy are the concerns of these charkas. From here, the journey moves to the realms of heart and spirit.

As 2005 began, it made little sense to open a fourth location. With three yoga centers, we could pay our bills and our teachers but there was nothing extra to grow on. There were no investors, no large corporate bank account, no shareholders. My wife, myself, and our business partner, Raghurai, had put pretty much all we had into keeping Yoga Yoga going. It was a business built on one yoga class at a time.

If we were to open a fourth Yoga Yoga according to our roadmap, it had to come from the energy of the fourth chakra. It had to come from the people who come for the yoga but stay for the heart. It had to come from the people who love what they find here. It could only happen if we had their help.

So we signed a lease on what we were to call Yoga Yoga Northwest, and then pushed ahead on faith. We asked students who wanted to help us with the new center to consider becoming a Yoga Yoga Founder and commit to an unlimited two year pass.

Within a month enough students responded and we began construction on the new Yoga Yoga. Like the other Yoga Yoga locations, it came into being because of a belief that more yoga makes a better world for everybody. More so than any of the other centers, Yoga Yoga Northwest was truly built for and by the students it serves. The energy of the fourth chakra, service and compassion, brought it into being and immediately this same energy was called upon.

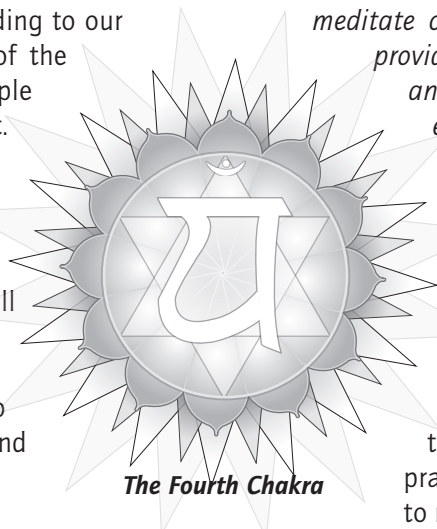


Students sign up for free Yoga while others make Katrina donations at the Northwest Grand Opening Celebration.

As the hurricane evacuees came to Austin, we reached out to them with what we knew would serve them best – peace of mind through yoga. Anyone who came here from the disaster received unlimited yoga at Yoga Yoga. Yoga students from the Gulf Coast had lost their yoga studios, their places to practice, and even the ability to have a personal yoga practice with the disruption in their lives. Some of the evacuees became familiar faces around Yoga Yoga as they got their lives back together.

As they returned to their homes, we heard from them, like the person who wrote us: *"I've only been a dabbler in yoga. But in the storm's aftermath, I was too exhausted to do high-impact exercise like running. I was also too emotionally drained to*

meditate or spend much time with my thoughts. Yoga provided me the perfect balance of physical activity and mindfulness practice, so I went to Yoga Yoga every day. It would be impossible for me to overstate how much this practice meant to me. After the hurricane, I was frequently humbled by spontaneous acts of generosity, and none meant more to me than yours. Thank you."



The Fourth Chakra

Opening the fourth Yoga Yoga under these circumstances taught me that there is no separation between you and the person next to you. There is no separation from your yoga practice and your actions. To pretend otherwise is to miss the real purpose of yoga. Yoga is not about achieving Union or unity. It is about realizing you are already in Union, connected to every one in every possible way.



Yoga Yoga is honored to be a part of this thriving community.

The more we do yoga, the more yoga does us. The transformations that occur in your body, your mind, and your relationships show us in every way that all life is yoga. We all live within that circle that opens to all directions, to everyone, to the world around us.

And so now where are we going this year? It ultimately does not matter as long as we know from where we are coming -- from all over, from everywhere, and from the heart.

In the Spirit of Yoga,

Mehtab
Founder of Yoga Yoga