

## YOGA IN ITALY LISTENING TO THE BODY (Yoga and Health magazine 2005)

I am a yoga teacher in Lucca, Tuscany, organising yoga workshops and retreats at Il Borghino. Following the urge to change and deepen my practise, I have been working with Rossella Baroncini, who was a student of Vanda Scaravelli, at her studio in Florence. At my last yoga retreat, I invited Rossella to lead a class, introducing three basic principals. 'Three friends in one' - the breath, gravity and the wavelike releasing of the spine, as there is nothing 'to be done', but only 'to go with'.

Rossella began the practise by opening the body's spaces to the BREATH, focusing on the breathing out. With the out breath, you let go, as you allow your self to be pulled into the ground. You sense the movement of the breath down your vital core, the spine, and the back of the waist opens. Sensing the inner pulse, the rhythm, opening the rib cage, relaxing the diaphragm, and following the breath as it travels down along the spine, into the tailbone and pelvic floor, and then the breathing in is to receive a gift, which allows you to open and expand. With Bhramari pranayama ( the Bumble Bee breath), partners felt the humming sound, as it vibrated down the spine, cleansing it. Always this inner listening to the breath.

The spine releases with the rebound force of GRAVITY, from the heels to the top of the head. In standing balance Mountain pose, as in all the poses, you 'undo' says Rossella. Follow your breath and then connect yourself to the centre of gravity, in the middle of the spine, at the level where the spine moves in two opposite directions, growing roots in the earth, and releasing upwards towards the sky, like a tree. Often yawning and sighing with relief, as the wide shoulders and upper body relax, and tension drops away, as you realise there is always more to let go.

Once you have allowed gravity to rest your body, the spine can RELEASE and grow with the outbreath. The wave like movement of the breath, meets the wave like movement of the curved spine. Your attitude is lightly attentive, interested and playful. Attention is always on the wholeness of the movement. In Wheel backarch from the ground, you take infinite time, and wait for the moment in the outbreath, when there's a natural impulse for you to release up into the pose, while feeling that the feet and hands are being held by something way deep down in the earth. Preparing, creating the conditions, the poses all unfold, or not, in the same, simple, natural way.

Yoga becomes yours when it nourishes you, when it's creative and playful, working from the inside out, exploring new ways to begin again, learning from your own practise so that you may be your own best teacher. There is a magic that happens when in yoga, and in life, you go with instead of against. You let go of becoming, and surrender to the moment. You are. Once you get that, it's yours.

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