**Yoga Practice**

This program of gentle yoga stretching is an invitation to

enter more deeply into the life of the body… to experience

the mind and body as one, as a unity… to bring them

together, as the meaning of the word yoga — to yoke or

join — suggests. And as with all mindfulness practices,

this yoga is about paying attention, moment to moment, to

the sensations, thoughts, and feelings that arise in your

awareness…

The movements in this program are designed to be done

on the floor, where a yoga mat or a blanket may make you

comfortable… If you are unable to get down on the floor,

you may wish to use a bed — preferably one with a firm

mattress…

As you go through this program, entering into the

experience of the body as deeply as you can, and without

judging… this is not about performing, about doing the

movements in some ideal way for some critical audience…

Rather, it’s about doing them to help connect more

closely to, and better understand, the body… So, not forcing

any movement, rather, relaxing into it… not taking on

any part of the program that seems inappropriate for you,

instead, using your knowledge of your own body and its

limits to guide you and to override the instructions, adapting

the movements in a way that works for you… or skipping

them entirely and perhaps imagining yourself doing

the movements, feeling them in stillness, which is a valuable

practice in itself…

Let’s begin in rest pose…lying on the back… allowing as

much of the body to contact the ground as you are able,

from head to heels… If you have any problems with the

lower back, bending the knees instead, and placing the

soles of the feet on the ground as if standing… aligning the

shoulders, hips, and feet, so that the spine is straight… if

you care to, gently lifting the head, tucking the chin in

slightly and setting the head back down…noticing the

sense of a straight spine from the base of the head all the

way down to the pelvis… legs a bit apart, feet falling

slightly outward… arms lying alongside the body, and if

it’s comfortable, turning the hands to face palm up…

Noticing how the ground accepts you, how gravity

works so you don’t have to… and bringing your attention

to the sensations of the breath in the body… aware of sensations

of rising and falling, expanding and contracting, on

in-breath and out-breath… and with each breath, allowing

the ground to receive more of your weight… working less,

trusting and accepting more…

Breathing in and out… and when you’re ready, breathing

in, lifting the arms gently and allowing them to travel

in an arc upwards to vertical — noticing the sensations as

they move through the air — and then allowing them to

descend to rest on the floor outstretched above the head…

…pointing your fingers towards the wall behind you

and, at the same time, pressing the heels in the opposite

direction… stretching the entire body… relaxing the

stretch and breathing out, allowing your arms to travel back

through the arc — slowly; aware of the sensations of movement

— without anticipating their return to the floor;

allowing an element of freshness of experience as they

come to rest again at your side… and as you lie still now

noticing how you feel in your body after having completed

one mindful stretch…

Once again, breathing in and allowing the arms to travel

through an arc… feeling the changes in effort as gravity pulls

and assists… until the arms come to rest on the floor above

the head… and pointing the fingers in one direction and the

heels in another, feeling the stretch wherever it can be noticed

in the body… noticing any thoughts or feelings that may

enter awareness, and as much as possible, allowing them to

simply come and go like clouds in the sky…keeping attention

centered on the sensations of the body…

Now releasing the right side of the body from the stretch

while maintaining it in the left side… noticing the stretch

in the left side… and noticing the sensations in the right

side as well…

And releasing the left side and stretching the right side,

noticing the sensations in both the right and left… then,

breathing out, allowing the arms to return through their arc

to rest by your side…

Aware of how you feel, lying in rest pose again… aware

of thoughts and emotions, and as much as possible letting

them go as you focus on bodily sensations right now… in

this moment…

Moving the arms out from the sides to rest outstretched

as a “T”… and if the knees are not already bent, bending

the knees and bringing the soles of the feet to rest on the

floor … aware of the sensations in the body in this position,

aware of breathing… and on an out-breath contracting the

lower abdomen and moving the lower back down towards

the ground, lifting the tailbone slightly and making as

much contact with the back to the ground as is comfortable…

feeling this stretch… and on the in-breath, then,

relaxing the abdominal muscles and pressing the tailbone

down to raise the lower back, noticing the sensations associated

with this arch… On an out-breath, again contracting

the abdomen and lifting the tailbone… and on the in-breath

releasing the abdomen and pressing the tailbone down…

and in your own time, following your breath, rocking the

pelvis… noticing thoughts and feelings arising and allowing

them to pass as clouds in the sky as you focus on the

sensations in the body…

Pausing… aware now of stillness and sensation… …

Then drawing the knees up towards the chest and embracing

them with the arms… interlacing the fingers, perhaps…

breathing like this… and on an out-breath, seeing if you

can draw the knees a bit closer to the chest… finding the

limit where you are comfortable, and not passing it … then

beginning with small movements, rocking gently from side

to side, massaging the back… how much effort does it take

to get started?… When does gravity take hold and begin to

pull the body too far? ….aware of the sensations in the

back… and if it’s comfortable for you, bringing the head

towards the knees; again not passing your limit of comfort…

learning to accept the limitations of the moment, and

knowing that limits change one way and another from

moment to moment and over longer periods of time…

lowering the head to the ground… and coming to

stillness…

Then letting go of the right leg and extending it along

the ground, while continuing to hold the left knee to the

chest… stretching the right heel towards the wall and at

the same time drawing the left leg closer… … noticing

how much of the body is involved in this stretch… investigating

the face perhaps… is there tension generated

there? And investigating the need for that tension… how

does the stretch in the right leg feel without it? Is it possible

to work with just the legs and arms in this posture?

…then releasing the left leg and allowing it to stretch out

along the floor, while simultaneously bringing the right

leg up towards the chest and embracing it with the arms…

extending, stretching the left leg… what tension and

looseness is required? And, when you’re ready, releasing

the right leg, placing it back next to the left…. Aware of

the sensations in the resting body…

In your own time now, rolling over onto your belly and

coming to hands and knees, with the back parallel to the ceiling

— like a table… …then moving the knees outward a bit

and the feet inwards, perhaps with the big toes touching…

and lowering your buttocks back and down into this open

triangle… the head and trunk moving downwards as you do

this, and the arms can be outstretched with the forehead

touching the ground between, or if it is more comfortable,

you can fold the hands on top of the other, and rest the forehead

there…this is child’s pose, a rest pose for when we are

working in this orientation on the ground… adjusting your

body for comfort and rest… breathing into this pose and

experiencing the sensations in the body in this moment…

Pressing down with the hands and raising the buttocks to

return to hands and knees, like a table… as you breathe in,

arching the back so the abdomen moves towards the ground,

and lifting the head up, looking up and out in front of you…

breathing in and out in this cow pose… and on an out-breath

contracting the abdomen and moving into cat pose, by arching

the back towards the ceiling and drawing the head down

in between the arms…And moving back into cow pose,

relaxing the abdomen and arching the back, so the abdomen

moves toward the ground, and bringing the head up to look

outward… And when you are ready, moving back into cat

pose, abdomen contracted, back arching toward the ceiling,

and head to chest. Moving back and forth now, at your own

pace, between cat and cow, following your breathing… If

you need to rest at any point, in this or the next set of movements,

feel free return to child’s pose…

…Coming back to a table position, aware of sensations

— the breath and the heartbeat, perhaps… how far can you

feel them in the body?… Now, while focusing your visual

attention on a point ahead of you to steady yourself, releasing

the weight from the right knee and extending the right

leg out behind you, holding it out parallel to the ground, with

the toe pointing back… then, shifting weight to the right

hand, lifting the left arm to shoulder height, parallel with the

ground, pointing it forward, the fingers pointing forward,

and balancing… noticing what is required to achieve this…

what tiny motions? what shifts and adjustments? Feeling

free to touch down as often as needed to remain steady —

relatively! (said with humor) — and now drawing the arm

and leg in under you to resume the table pose… …now shifting

weight to the right knee and lifting and stretching the left

leg back while at the same time weighting the left hand and

stretching out the right arm… stretching… holding… adjusting…

aware of the whole body’s involvement at this moment… now

drawing the arm and leg back and coming to stillness…noticing

the breath and perhaps the heartbeat in this moment, perhaps

a sense of warmth from exertion…

Then coming down to the ground and resting on your

belly… aware of your relationship with gravity and the

breath… aware of sensations, thoughts, feelings in this

moment… letting thoughts and feelings go by without following,

without attaching to them…

And in your own time, rolling over onto your back…

Bending the knees and bringing the soles of the feet to the

floor as if standing, with the feet close together… bringing

the arms out in a “T” position… and letting both knees very

slowly fall over to the right… letting gravity work… keeping

the shoulders on the ground, and turning the head look

out to the left… looking out over the left arm and hand…

sensing this spinal twist throughout the body… how far

does your awareness extend?… and bringing the knees

slowly back to center… and allowing them to fall slowly to

the left, while turning the head to face right, to look out over

the right arm and hand… at your own pace, doing a few of

these spinal twists… aware of the sensations along the back,

and throughout the body… and bringing the knees to center

and to stillness… and on an out-breath, extending the legs

along the ground…

Assuming rest pose… and resting now, at the end of this

session… if it feels right, acknowledging the effort, the

care, and the caring-for-yourself that you bring to this

practice…