



Photos: John Freeman, www.istockphoto.com/the_flying_dutchman. And www.theflyingdutchman.co.za

The yogic universe is governed by this pranic energy that caused the birth of planet earth, and the rich tapestry of life it supports, to develop. Hence the essence of yoga is found in nature, where this essence resonates in the fabric of every living cell on this planet. This universe within, everything in our bodies and minds, is a microcosm of the universe without, planet earth, its hemisphere, galaxy and the universe itself.

Nature is this energy that allows the universe to expand and contract in constant flux, like the tides of the ocean, its ebb and flow influenced by the moon. All life is cyclical, day follows night, night follows day, action follows inaction, inaction, action. Crops grow according to the seasons, and the course of the planets influence the course of our lives.

Harmonising with these forces is the aim of yoga: the spirit of yoga is to unite and balance its forces in man. When the being – body, mind and spirit – is in harmony with the natural flow of the universe, the Tao of the heavens energises and guides us. Life becomes a journey along the Way, consciousness allows us to stumble without falling, and to fly without losing touch with the earth.

Yoga is rooted in such awareness, symbolised by the practice of a physical discipline that is centered in breath and meditation practices revered as the gateway to the inner cosmos that is a mirror of the outer cosmos. The breath is a direct link to pure life force, a kind of high octane energy source. The meditative mind can grasp that 'it is within as it is in heaven', that God is in every grain of sand.

Because nature 'just is', and a reflection of 'all that is' we can learn so much from it. Ancient Christian mystics communed with nature to gain insight into its mystery, using the senses and intuition, not the intellect as the primary tool for observation. We can do it too, when we swim in the ocean of life and surf the

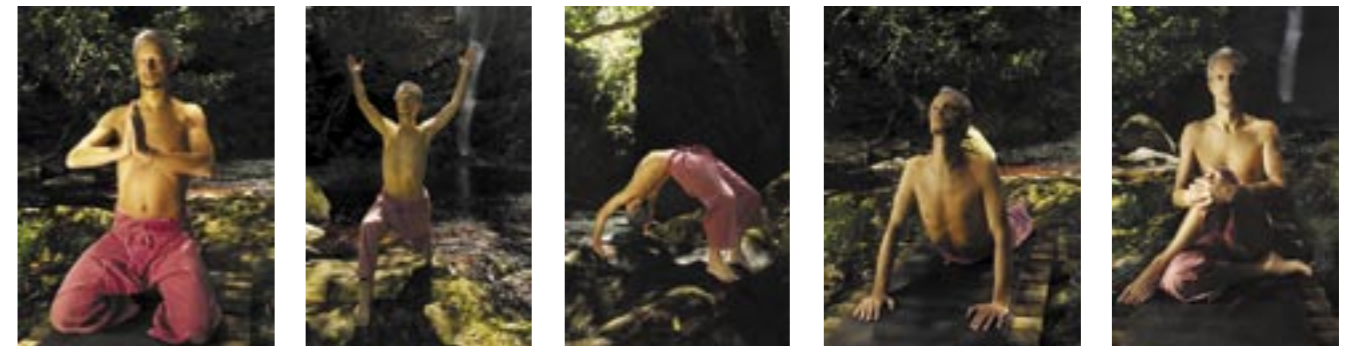
waves of love we hear the roar of the sea, we become one with our nature within. With hearts and minds open to the pull of love we can accept change and chaos and accept uncertainty as the only constant. Then we can celebrate life for all its aches and glory, and live, yearning for greater understanding without knowing it all, because the wisdom is illuminated by nature.

There is great beauty in the monochrome landscape of a tree in the snow. And when the wintry light yields to the sun and colours of spring, when the stark Zen of the silhouetted image of the leafless trunk makes way for the new growth of a new season. Great joy can be found in spring's trumpet call of new beginnings and new life, a celebration of the rhythm of life. As seasons comes to pass, bringing on the decline and eventual passing of the tree, the rhythm of the cyclical nature of the cosmos shows us that 'dust returns to dust', an expression of graceful honour, not a morbid, rusty old cliché of decay.

Bliss, the yogic state of peace on earth, exists within ourselves, in 'our Buddha nature', our real selves. This is the terrain of the inner world wherein the being becomes like a tree, attaining a state of being that is more consciousness and less intellect and doing. A tree grows because trees grow, not because it 'thinks it is a tree and therefore is a tree'. Steeped in deep, conscious connection with Prana, the life force fabric of nature and our being, we can nurture and sustain life. In this universe we can accept challenges as part of the growth process, chaos as part of the order, and the sublime a beacon of love and light. □

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As it is in Heaven

According to the ancient yogic mystics the universe is a mysterious collection of energetic forces that cannot be understood by the rational mind alone. In this tradition 'everything that is' is derived from an original 'source energy' or life force, named Prana, and it is taught that it can be understood in deep meditation only. Yoga practitioner and teacher Johan Kotze (pictured opposite) reports.