

An Embodied Experience of Self: Yoga from the Inside Out

Francine Kelley, MSW, C-IAYT

Experiential Self-Assessment

You're invited to engage compassionate curiosity during this experience of asana. As much as you can, just allow what is arising without judgement. As Goswami Kriyanda suggested, the mantra "Isn't that interesting?" might be useful.

Pick an asana, any pose that you enjoy doing. Notice what happens in the koshas just as you *think* about doing that pose. How does your body respond? What changes in your breathing or your energy – the movement of prana? Are there emotions that arise as you think about doing that pose? What aspect of the pose comes to mind: moving into it? Being in it? Coming out of it? The aftermath?

Do you immediately want to get to doing it? Is there an impulse or impatience to get moving? Or a sense of pleasant anticipation? Or maybe equanimity? Notice any impulse to move: where does that impulse start and how does it motivate you to begin the asana?

As you get ready to move into the pose, recognize the choice to do so. The pose has now already started. Feel yourself enter the pose – do you stay present with this part of the experience? Or does your mind jump ahead? What is the attitude with which you enter the pose? Are there expectations that are already here – maybe how it should look, what you should be able to do? Maybe some other expectation? Is there a possibility for curiosity about your unique experience today of this asana?

How do you know you are “established in the pose?” Is there a sense of arriving or something else? Contemplate this notion of *sthira sukham asanam* – a steady comfortable pose. What changes in the koshas as you’re “here?”

How is your body? How much physical effort is going into the pose? Does the amount of effort feel appropriate to the position the body is in? Is there struggle? Is there pleasant sensation? Is there an expectation of how the body should be? How do you know what position of the body is right for you? Perhaps you want to work really hard and that feels good—or not. Either way, recognize the choices you’re making.

Is the breath moving freely in your body? Are adjustments needed to allow the free flow of breath? Can you hear what adjustments your body is asking you to make for the prana to flow more freely? Are you controlling the breath (consciously or unconsciously) or is the body free to breathe as it needs? Is there an expectation of how the breath *should* be? Do you choose to control or to allow the breath? What goes into your choice?

What are you *feeling* in the pose? What do you see, hear, smell, touch, even taste? Are there emotions that are arising? How do you know an emotion is arising? Perhaps an expression on your face? Maybe an inner body sensation? If so, there a size or shape to the sensation? Perhaps a temperature or a texture or a color? Does the sensation move or is it still? Can the emotion be allowed? What happens as you allow it?

How do you feel *about yourself* in this pose? Are there thoughts or beliefs that arise? Perhaps about what should or shouldn't be? Can those thoughts be observed without attaching to them? What happens in your body as you become aware of your thoughts?

When you're done with exploring (how did you know you were done?), begin to come out of the pose (this is also part of the asana). Can you stay present as you "exit" the pose? How do you know when it's complete?

Notice the effects of having done the pose on your body, breath, emotions and mind.

Self-Inquiry:

What helps you to be present?

- A. Awareness of my breath
- B. Awareness of my senses (sight, touch, sound, etc)
- C. Awareness of my physical body
- D. All of the above

How often are you feeling your yoga practice?

- A. All of the time
- B. Most of the time
- C. Some of the time
- D. I'm usually thinking rather than feeling