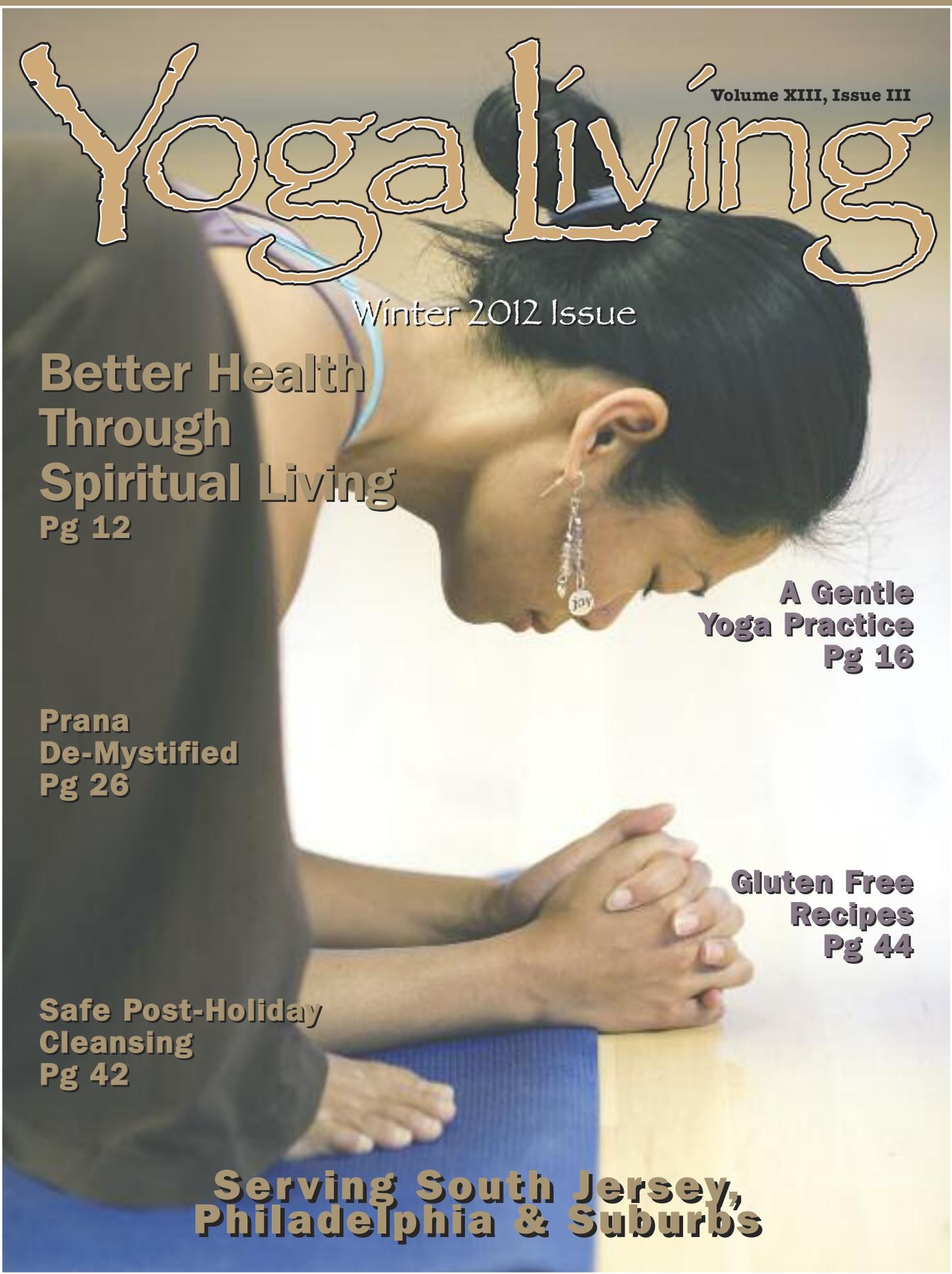


Yoga Living



Volume XIII, Issue III

Winter 2012 Issue

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Living Yoga: Selfless Service

"Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment one attains the Supreme."

- Bhagavad-Gita, 3:13

IN THE BEGINNING, MOST OF US ARE ONE QUICK NAMASTE! FROM THE DAILY GRIND. When class ends we roll up our mat, stack the studio bolsters and on our way out the door hope the parking meter has enough time remaining for a quick run to Starbucks before we go back to work. There's no time to embrace the yoga that is more than skin deep. Forget the philosophy - we're in it for the workout. We want a toned body. Yoga Class is Tuesday from nine to ten in the morning. Everything else is life.

With dedicated practice, however, a subtle shift occurs. The edge between our yoga practice and "real" life blurs. Yoga begins to follow us home. We move deeper into our practice and yoga becomes a part of who we are. When we embrace the notion that yoga has not only strengthened our bodies but has also strengthened our spirit then it's time to ask the question again: How do we live our yoga?

Step Off the Mat

In 2007 Seane Corne decided to move her yoga beyond the mat and confines of the studio walls when, along with Hala Khouri and Suzanne Sterling, she founded Off the Mat and Into the World. This inspiring organization embraces the philosophy of seva, also known as selfless service.

According to their website Off the Mat's mission is "to use the power of yoga to inspire conscious, sustainable activism and ignite grassroots social change." Today, Off the Mat and Into the World has an international scope. It supports humanitarian efforts in Haiti with the Global Seva Challenge. Its Empowered Youth Initiative believes a commitment to the next generation has a profound impact on social justice and environmental issues. This year the initiative has programs focused on assisting urban youth in Los Angeles and disadvantaged populations in other parts of the world.

Think Creatively

One such community initiative is The Art of Yoga Project, located an hour south of San Francisco in leafy Palo Alto, California. Art of Yoga's mission is "to lead teen girls in the California juvenile justice system toward accountability to self, others and community by providing practical tools to effect behavioral change."

The Art of Yoga Project improves the lives of disadvantaged and incarcerated young women by nurturing their creativity while encouraging a daily yoga and mindfulness practice.

Transform Your Practice

The practice of yoga is a transformative experience. But how many of us allow that transformation to move beyond our inner spirit? What happens when we stop clinging to the yoga experience we love and allow it to touch the lives of those around us? Supporting others' lives through yoga will transform your own. Mary Lynn Fitton, founder of The Art of Yoga Project, knows first hand the profound effect of selfless service. "Since starting The Art of Yoga Project my personal practice has deepened considerably," she said. "Teaching the principles of yoga to incarcerated teen girls, who have had very difficult life experiences, has called all of us at the project to a higher standard. For example, since we are teaching the girls about satya (truthfulness), we are looking closer at how we're living in our own truths, watching our speech, avoiding gossip. Teaching the girls yoga principles keeps them alive and fresh in my mind so I have daily reminders of how I want to be in this world. I am thankful to the girls for that. They are such heroes to me as they shine through their tragic pasts. They inspire me to be ever grateful of my circumstances and to do as much as I can to relieve suffering."

The Small Gestures Count

Founded in 1978 by Dr. Larry Brilliant in Berkeley, California, The Seva Foundation has restored eyesight to millions of people in Tibet, Nepal, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Africa. In the process they have reduced the cost of cataract surgery to just \$50.00. As individuals, our small gestures may never match the scope of Off the Mat Into the World or The Art of Yoga Project, but we can still hold in our hearts this simple idea from the Seva Foundation: *To become fully human we must translate our compassion and concern into useful service.*

What is useful service? For most it does not entail forming a non-profit. Most of us will not have the opportunity to restore sight to the blind or teach yoga to groups of incarcerated young women. But in our daily lives we can still bear witness to the power of selfless contribution. Mary Lynn Fitton says, "I am blessed by this work. I wish everyone could experience the joy, connection and fulfillment that come through being a part of positive social change. You don't need to start a non-profit to make a difference... just take the time to discover what really matters to you and carve out space in your life to contribute to that somehow. *Start with having conversations that matter. Then set your intention to serve. The rest will come.*" ▲